Urbanisation in India: Creating Places for People

Silver Oak, India Habitat Centre • Wednesday, 23 rd April 2008

~ A RETROSPECTIVE ~

MIRABILIS

URBAN HABITATS FORUM

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Urbanisation in India: Creating Places for People

"URBANISATION IN INDIA: CREATING PLACES FOR PEOPLE" WAS THE THEME THAT ANCHORED THE FIRST OF THE SERIES OF SEMINARS THAT MIRABILIS ADVISORY AND INDIA HABITAT CENTRE LAUNCHED UNDER THE NEWLY FORMED PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO ORGANISATIONS CALLED THE 'URBAN HABITATS FORUM'.

INTRODUCTION

The key objective of the Forum is to influence thinking about the next generation of urbanisation in India. The event held at the India Habitat Centre on April 23rd attracted a diverse audience.

Kiran Karnik, President, India Habitat Centre introduced the agenda with his keynote address. Later a panel of experts that included Ravi Singh, Secretary General & CEO, WWF-India; Ratish Nanda, Project Director, Aga Khan Trust for Culture; Romi Chopra, President, Resident Welfare Association-Vasant Vihar; Leena Srivastava, Executive Director, TERI; Prathibha Prahlad, Director, Delhi International Arts Festival and Arun Kapur, Director, Vasant Valley School made individual presentations.

The session was moderated by Manit Rastogi, Director, Morphogenesis Architecture Studio and was centred around the theme "Next Generation Cities of India" highlighting liveability, environmental footprint and competitiveness.

THE URBAN REALITY

"Today more than half the world lives in urban areas and in India we are close to the one-third mark already and growing rapidly," **Kiran Karnik** stated in his opening address. He also noted that much of the future growth is set to take place in smaller cities and towns where the opportunity to shape the future lies.

"The metropolises of today are already choking. There is a huge infrastructure deficit in all our cities," Karnik said. He also spoke about

From L to R: Arun Kapur, Vasant Valley School; Ratish Nanda, Aga Khan Trust for Culture; Romi Chopra, RWA-Vasant Vihar; Prathibha Prahlad, Delhi International Arts Festival; Manit Rastogi, Morphogenesis (Moderator); Leena Srivastava, TERI; Ravi Singh, WWF

The Mirabilis Matrix: An Analytical Framework for Urban Thinking

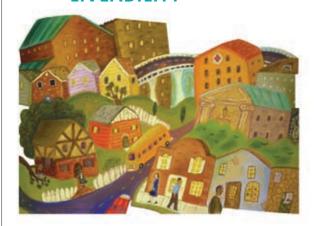|	HARDWARE	SOFTWARE	GOVERNANCE
LIVEABILITY	Good quality housing and amenities like parks, hospitals, clubs and schools	Social networks & interaction. Clustering of amenities to create "urban buzz", a sense of place and history.	Safety and enforcement of Law. Simple and well enforced system of municipal regulation.
COMPETITIVENESS	Transport & communications links. Quality of office/ commercial space.	Clustering of human capital and ability to attract talent, socio-cultural openness.	Reasonable tax rates. Efficient governance structures.
ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT	Public transport, density, green spaces, waste management, etc.	Environmental consciousness, low impact lifestyles.	Air and water quality. Sustainable practices with regard to water supply & usage, etc.

the complete disregard towards pedestrians in our cities. "We plan only for cars and don't consider people". He also urged urban thinkers to learn from values like mixed use planning from traditional towns. The older towns had people from all segments of the socio-economic radar along with neighbourhood markets and parks. The newer towns in contrast are exclusive and have not embraced the values of older cities. *"Liveable cities are not just about fancy roads and fancy buildings. We need to bring the ethos that makes cities truly liveable by focusing on infrastructure that enhances quality of living like parks, playgrounds, social amenities and the pedestrian culture,"* said Karnik. He went on to emphasize the importance of discussing

structural changes that need to be brought about in city governance models to turn visions into reality.

THINKING URBAN

Architect **Manit Rastogi** set the outline for the main session by focusing on the Mirabilis Matrix which is an analytical framework for urban thinking. It encompasses three verticals: Hardware, Software and Governance. The horizontals are: Liveability, Competitiveness and Environmental Footprint. *It provides a way to think about how different elements come together to form a successful and functional city.*

At a fundamental level cities are meant to be lived in. To succeed, they must be pleasant places to live, work, and play for a large cross-section of society.

LIVEABILITY

Ratish Nanda, Project Director, Aga Khan Trust for Culture spoke about the critical role that heritage plays in the aspect of liveability of cities. *"Heritage is a key factor that we need to value, especially since a lot of our cities have been in existence for hundreds of years,"* he said. He added that we need to learn from the more developed economies that protect and leverage heritage as an asset. Nanda also observed the reason behind our failure to create liveable cities. "Most of what is happening in our cities and its matrix, is hardware, which is designed by engineers who have no consideration for what you and I feel."

The aspect of how citizen involvement can be employed to make cities liveable was addressed by **Romi Chopra,** President of the Residents Welfare Association, Vasant Vihar. *"The journey begins with the meeting of people and planners to listen, to learn and to understand. We are partners in orderly change and this is the way to a liveable city,"* he said. He acknowledged that in the current scenario, one could not really focus on planning for tomorrow considering that the city authorities aren't even able to provide for the current needs. Reflecting on the cities of tomorrow, he highlighted that *"people have to live, work and enjoy themselves and move between the three."*

"The environmental footprints of cities are huge and quite varied. The key environmental challenges that cities face centre on solid waste, air pollution, water, sanitation and energy," said **Leena Srivastava,** Executive Director, TERI. She added that in the future, issues like solid waste and pollution will require localised solutions. She said that it was unfortunate that most of our cities imported energy. "We have a lot of locally available energy resources, primarily in the form of solar energy, but also in the form of some of the wastes that we generate. The solid waste can be converted back into energy," she explained.

Ravi Singh, Secretary General & CEO, WWF-India asserted, *"There is a huge connection between the new India that is coming up and the requirements of energy and consumption and what it is going to do to our ecology and ecological systems across India."* He said that urbanisation has altered the behaviour of the ecosystem. "These changes in the habitat are far more than what we have ever known on Earth." He was of the view that urbanisation was going to attack the food security of the country. He placed emphasis on the need to conserve land.
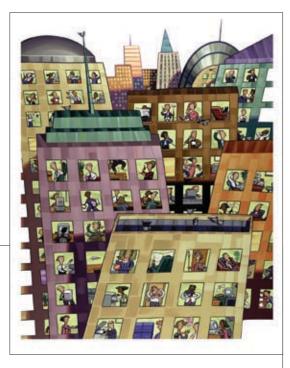
ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

More than half the world's population now lives in urban areas. There is a need to consider the environmental costs and benefits of this shift.

COMPETITIVENESS

The Director of Delhi International Arts Festival, **Prathibha Prahlad** spoke about the aspect of competitiveness as a crucial element of a good city. She recognised that the cities of the 21st century will compete to attract talent and human capital. She added that culture adds significantly to the value of a city. *"These kinds of festivals which are multi-arts and multi-activity bring a global perspective in terms of aesthetic and artistic experience into a city. They involve and sensitise the local community to the multi-dimensional facets of the various art forms from all over the world,"* she explained.

Arun Kapur, Director, Vasant Valley School articulated that *"urban spaces become an enabler for all the inhabitants to be able to actualise their potential."* He stressed on the need for progressive thinking so as to establish cities that create new types of livelihood and a new kind of culture. *"It is just not good to create spaces that make us comfortable. It is very important that these spaces constantly act as catalysts that challenge our minds and make our creativity flow,"* he said. He also underlined the need to create cities that could embrace all segments of the society.

From times immemorial cities have competed for influence, power and commerce. In the 21st century cities will compete to attract talent and human capital.

BUILDING CITIES
FOR TOMORROW

The key ingredient of citizen participation to shape great cities was touched upon by **Anil Shukla,** Deputy Commissioner of Police, Crime, New Delhi. *"We want world-class policing but we are not world-class citizens. There is a lot of need for self- discipline,"* he said.

Raj Liberhan, Director, India Habitat Centre spoke about the need to encourage thinking on urban issues. *"The principle concern at the India Habitat Centre has been to facilitate and build a voice of reason on urban issues.* This is why the centre took this initiative in partnership with Mirabilis Advisory to begin this dialogue from here today. We want to build this into an Annual Habitat Summit which will bring together concerns from across the nation," said Liberhan. Presenting further details on the role that the Urban Habitats Forum will play, **Anupam Yog,** Managing Director of Mirabilis Advisory shared the need to translate ideas into action. *"We have inherited choices that have not been made by us and we are facing the consequences. Most generations talk about dreaming, I think ours will have to be the one that will have to be realists...I think there is a huge task ahead of us."*

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– KIRAN KARNIK
President, India Habitat Centre

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— **Leena Srivastava,** Executive Director, TERI

"Re-defining goals is an essential aspect of our city. Our goal is to live in this city with security, with safety, and a need for self-discipline."
— **Anil Shukla,** Deputy Commissioner of Police, Crime, New Delhi

"The journey begins with the meeting of people and planners to listen, to learn and to understand. We are partners in orderly change and this is the way to a liveable city."
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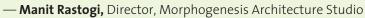— **Pratibha Prahlad,** Director, Delhi International Arts Festival

"It is very important for urban spaces to constantly act as catalysts that challenge our minds and make our creativity flow."
— **Arun Kapur,** Director, Vasant Valley School

"India has enough human capital to address currently existing problems and arrive at new ways of mitigating the impacts of urbanisation."
— **Manit Rastogi,** Director, Morphogenesis Architecture Studio

URBAN HABITATS FORUM

URBAN HABITATS FORUM IS A PUBLIC-PRIVATE
PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN INDIA HABITAT CENTRE
AND MIRABILIS ADVISORY. THE FORUM WILL
SERVE AS A COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM FOR A
NETWORK OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY THINKERS AND
CHANGE-MAKERS TO PUSH FOR INNOVATION IN
SHAPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CITIES IN
INDIA. THE FORUM AIMS TO MOBILISE ACTION BY
BEING A PLATFORM FOR INTELLIGENT DISCOURSE,
IMPACTFUL RESEARCH AND RESULT-DRIVEN
ADVOCACY.