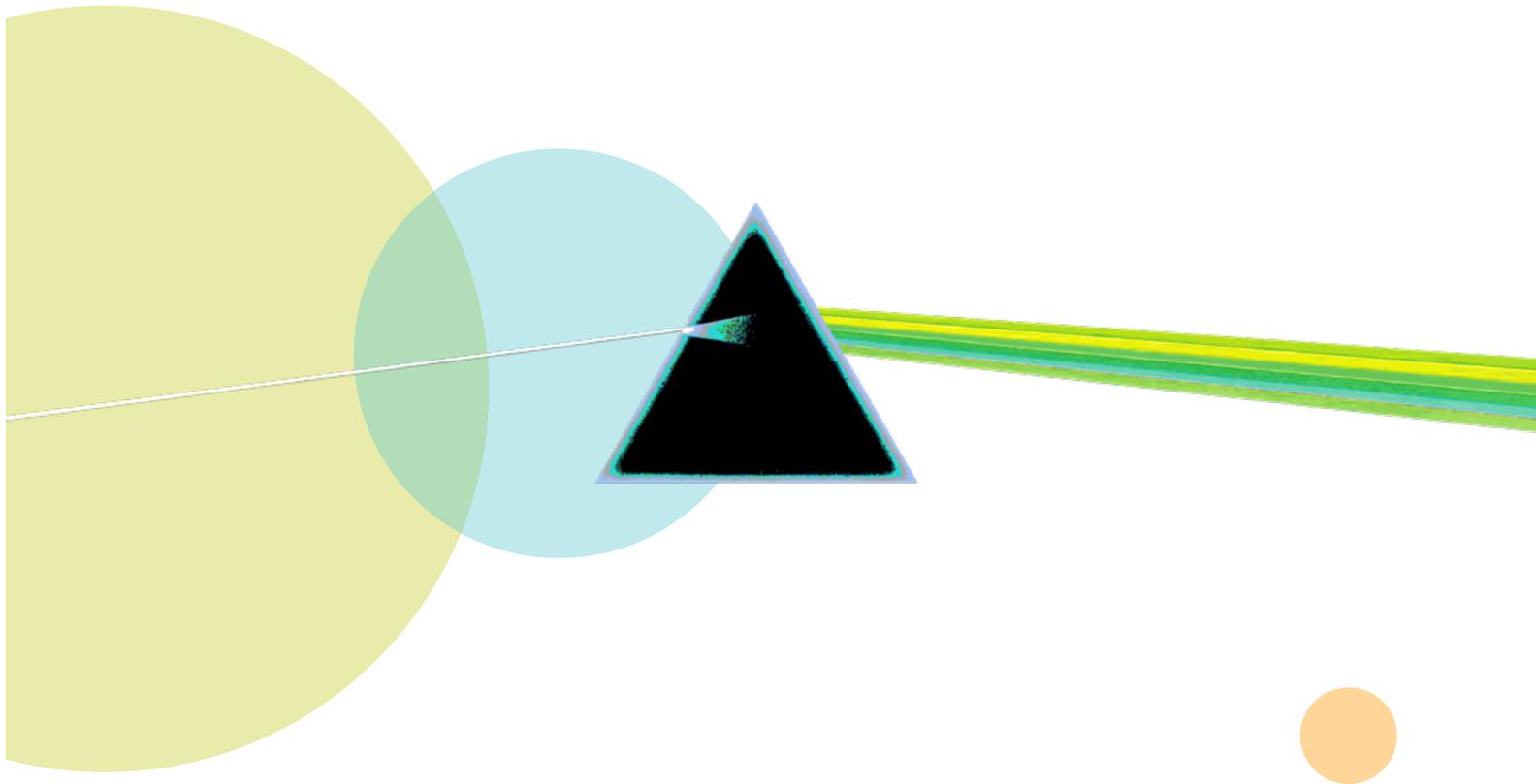


landscape
education
introspection
reflection
application



editorial

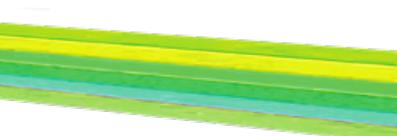
Curated by *Nikhil Dhar*, landscape architect based in New Delhi who has been associated with academics for a long time, this special issue on the theme of *Landscape Education* showcases various inter and intra engagements of landscape academics in the country. While sharing the vision and experiences of educators who have remained involved with various programs, the issue profiles some of the studio endeavours mentored by them, at times in collaboration with other cultures, both at introductory and higher education levels. A few of the articles in the issue share views and experiences of teaching the subject at various levels. It will be interesting to look at these works and views expressed in context of the past discourse on the subject, discussed in some of the earlier issues of the Journal and at other professional forums, all pointing to an evolving and rapidly-expanding profession in the country.

We hope you enjoy going through it.

Wishing all a safe and healthy times ahead.



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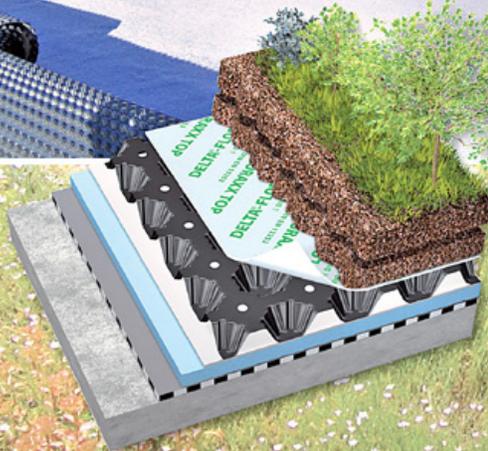
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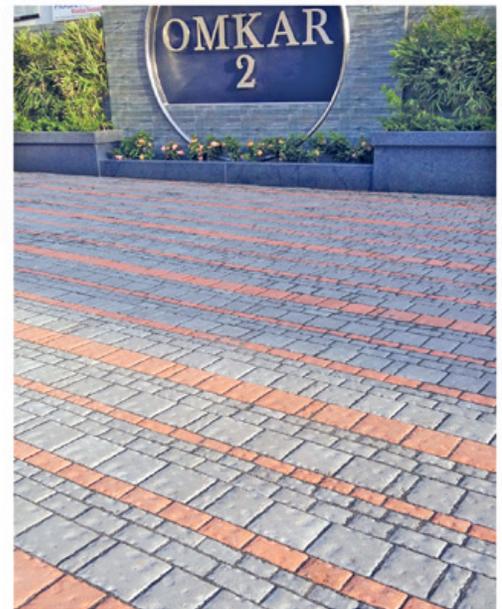
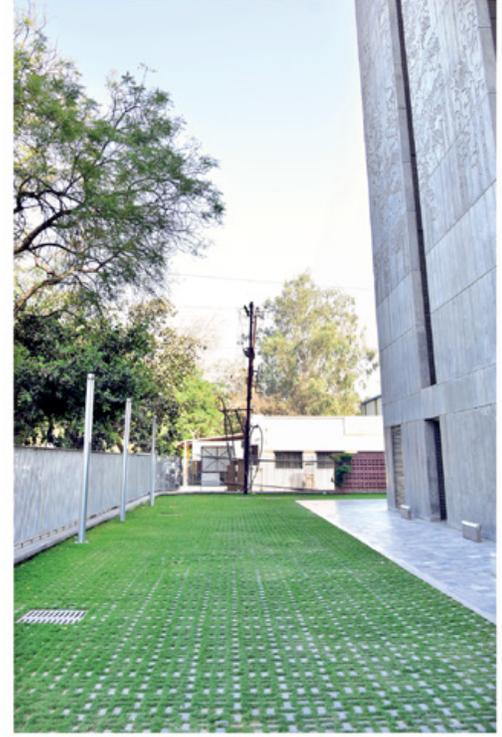


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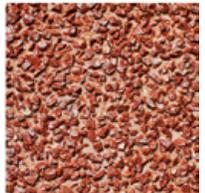
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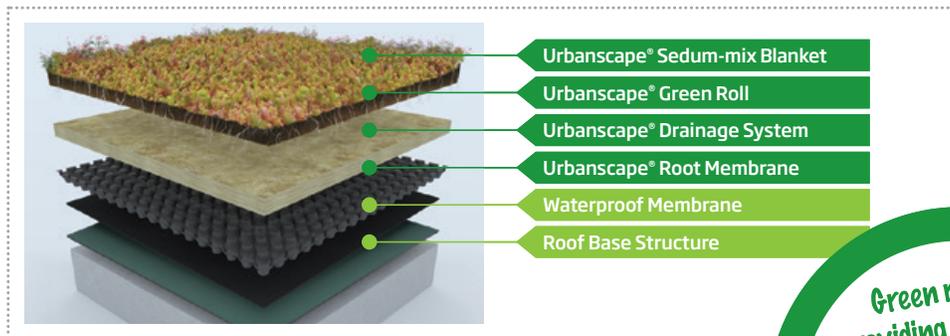
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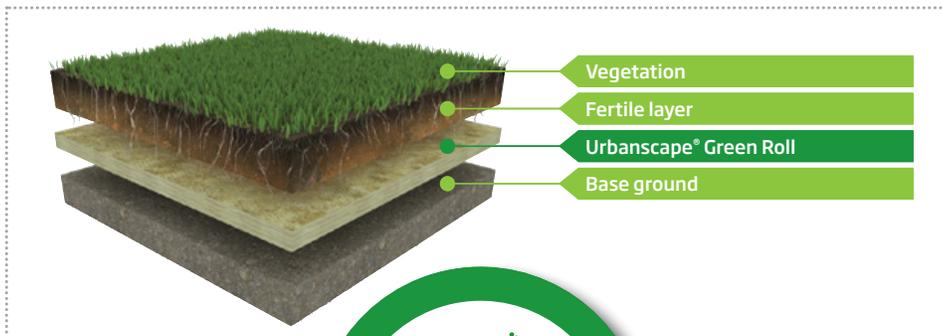
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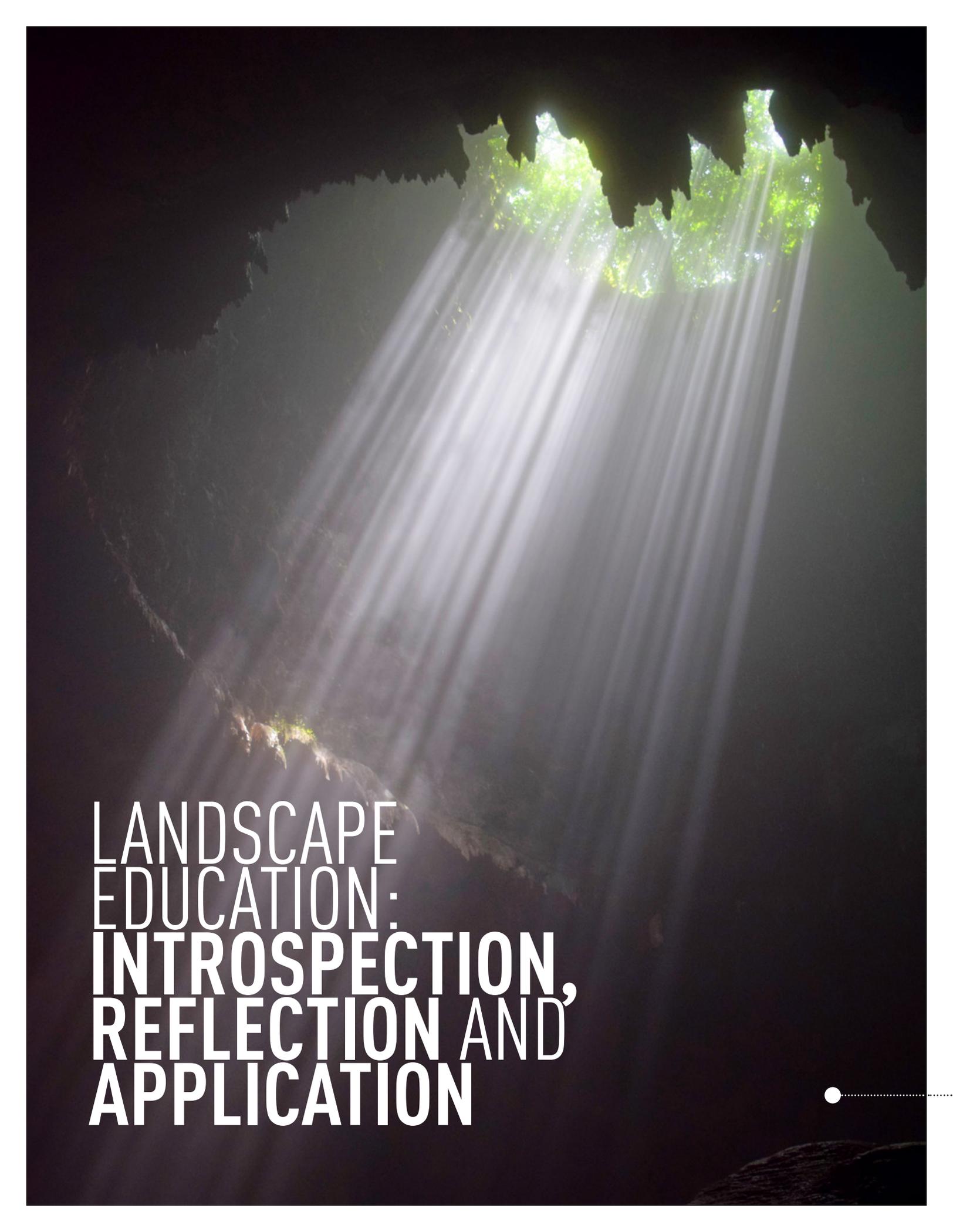


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LANDSCAPE
EDUCATION:
**INTROSPECTION,
REFLECTION AND
APPLICATION**



Nikhil Dhar, Landscape Architect & Academician
| artemisia.nikhil@gmail.com

RIGHT HERE & NOW!

Almost everyone has an opinion on education; many of us think we know what it should not be, even if we do not know exactly what it should be. There is no denying that there are multiple issues that affect education in our country in general, and design and LA education, in particular. The need for constant evaluation, growth and evolution in our educational systems/programs is a facet that has been discussed often; what we plan to actually do about it is really the point. Discussions have been held about inculcating the best of the West with the wisdom of our cultural systems, as well as the lack of conversation on the ethics of our interventions in the environment, in both our education and practice. Climate change and related extreme weather events often dominate the headlines today, clearly showing us the consequences of decades of heedless development. The lack of theoretical connections on design and environmental psychology also affect both our education systems and our practices, as do the weaknesses in the connections between research, teaching and practice.

LA education has an importance in our lives. We cannot afford to leave it ‘out there’, as one of our contributors has written, only affecting us indirectly. It needs to be ‘right here’, front-and-centre in our awareness. LA education affects many of us, directly and indirectly. It directly affects the many types of LAs who run practices, who may seek industry-ready employees for efficient production of working drawings, or creative designers, with flair and imagination. A research-oriented practice may look for qualities of scholarship and skills in writing; a practice with an ecological approach may look for like-minded graduates.

The ways in which we teach also have an effect on the types of students who want to join LA courses. This in turn has an effect on what kinds of teaching can connect effectively with students, and the kinds of LAs that will themselves eventually become engaged in teaching the subject. I had a few ideas on what I would like to build into the studio process, which I experimented with in the Spring 2021 Community Open Space studio at CEPT University. I was assisted by a dedicated and highly skilled Teaching Associate [*thank you, Raakesh!*] and a set of enthusiastic and gifted second and fourth semester students. Among the facets that were included in the studio were:

under the raintree sits the woman
who strolled through
the bright sunny streets



A HAIKU ON KOCHI WATERFRONT SITE
CREDIT: *Ann Saji*

PREVIOUS PAGE |

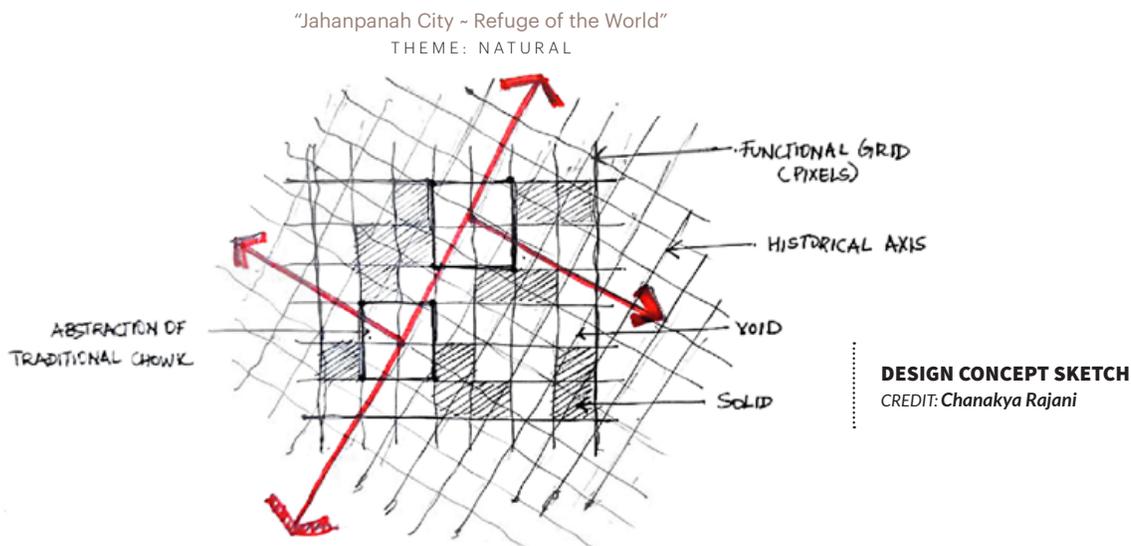
“LET THERE BE LIGHT”

Morning sun rays pouring into a limestone sinkhole at Goa Jamblang, Indonesia

PHOTO CREDIT: *Mike Barthelmeh*

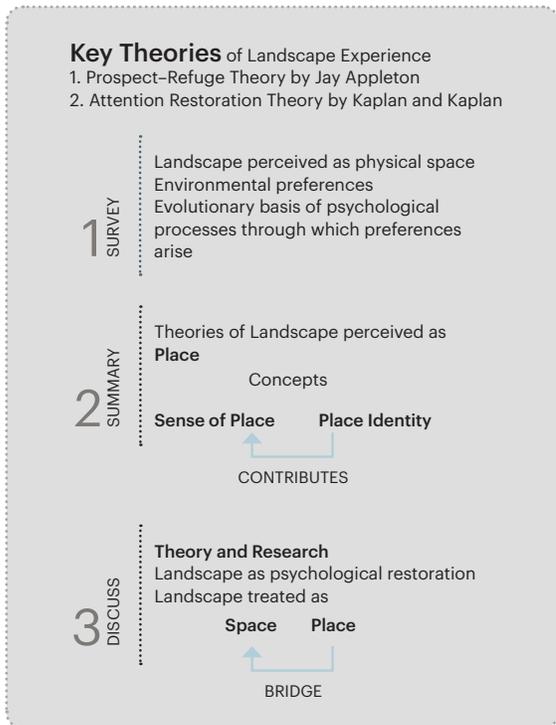
- A study of the culture and traditions of the communities connected to the space
- A detailed study of all stakeholder groups, using participatory techniques [including an acknowledgement and study of the poorest and most marginalized stakeholders]
- Connections to certain theories of open space through class readings and discussions [including theories of space and place, prospect-refuge, coherence and legibility, mental mapping, proxemic and distemic spaces, place-making processes etc.]
- An exploration of techniques of creative and critical thinking
- A study of certain modes of abstraction in design forms
- Regular writing assignments [including writings on cultural traditions, physical context, stakeholder engagement, and a Haiku that tried to capture the essence of each site]
- An attempt by each student to understand and engage with the different sites and contexts of all the selected sites [set as they were in regions all around the country], through student-to-student critiques
- The culmination of the site plan [through a somewhat flexible studio framework] as a logical and reasoned result of the integration of natural and human systems with planning processes

Apart from the usual class critiques, learning and discovery for each of us happened through readings, films and discussions [one spirited debate conducted entirely by the students was, for me, one of the high points of the semester], and an explicit emphasis of process over product. Within the limitations of a 4-month online studio, we touched on many things as introductions, including ways of perception, thinking techniques, socio-cultural issues and writing. I felt that it was important to introduce students to the varied facets that are related to landscape architecture, as a starting point to a deeper connection with these as they move through academics, practice and perhaps research. The receptivity and involved engagement of the students to the different things we tried, was exciting, invigorating and very enjoyable for me as a teacher.





LANDSCAPE VISION GRAPHIC
CREDIT: *Abinaya Ravichandran*



SPACE AND PLACE THEORY STUDY
CREDIT: *Group Work*

This issue covers many facets of LA education, but is also a modest attempt to engage and interest people who would normally stay at arms-length from it. I hope that the material in this issue will find resonance with many readers, not only those who are interested [in the conventional sense] in landscape architectural education. Herein lies a mixed bag of articles arranged, broadly speaking, from the ‘macro’ to the ‘micro’ in scale. From larger, sometimes philosophical questions, to specific studio processes; from descriptions of cross-continental collaborations to the first uncertain steps of new departments; from gender issues to how we teach both potential and actual MLA students, I believe readers of many types will find something of interest here, including academicians, teachers and researchers, students and possibly, potential LA students. I trust there will be parts of this issue that will resonate with LAs with both sociological and theoretical bents of mind as well as with LAs who think that our ways of teaching need to develop and change.

The first part of the issue looks at some larger concerns, with philosophical questions and broad brush-strokes of ideas connected to LA education being explored. Shishir issues a call to go beyond ‘training’ and ‘teaching’ students of LA, and to strive for ways to encourage self-learning and discovery by the students. He emphasizes that this will require a considerable amount of introspection, debate and discussion on the part of the people who define what to teach, as well as those who actually teach, and goes on to describe definite ways in which this process can begin. A strongly connected piece by Suneet expresses the need to understand and engage LA through multiple lenses, held together by method and logic. He emphasizes that LA too often short-changes its core principles of design and conception, often because of its preoccupation with environmental engineering and social cause. He underlines the importance of design in addition to the ‘new’ roles of ecological and social saviour, and the inadequacy of our efforts so far in the landscape architecture design discourse. Elinor Scarth writes that LAs need to show to recognize and address the gender skew in the profession, and that we must begin to discuss topics that relate to ingrained assumptions and attitudes. An extremely topical look at a neglected issue, Elinor’s article connects to studio work by her students at the University of Edinburgh.

Sridevi talks about the hallmarks of ‘gentle academics’ and how many of us in academia, as also the learning environments around us, would benefit by the imbibing of some of these traits. I personally believe strongly that academics should strive towards this mindset of honesty, humility, generosity and collaboration. The openness of discussion and debate in the classroom and the honesty to admit ignorance and look for answers together, for example, can create a strong bond between teacher and student.



**deadline approaching?
Don't have any ideas?**

Brainstorming involves a multi-disciplinary group meeting together to propose and generate ideas to solve a stated problem. The emphasis is on **quantity** rather than quality of ideas.

why Creativity tools

- FLUENCY: the quantity of responses
- FLEXIBILITY: ideas that are distinct from each other
- ORIGINALITY: the level of uniqueness of the ideas generated

Alphabet Brainstorming in Action
Eureka! Eureka!

Participants are invited to work through the alphabet letter by letter. With one set parameter, it inspires a wide range of ideas derived from each letter. It also encourages the creative use of the letter to form a sentence or phrase, rather than an idea that is one or two words

here is the trick!

The aim of this tool is not to produce ideas, instead, it is used to assist with the generation of ideas. This can be done at any stage of the problem-solving process but tends to focus on problem exploration, idea generation, and concept evaluation.



Maximum 10 people



Introduce the brief clearly



No criticism



Define set time

6 tools of brainstorming



Flipchart



Grid



Post-its



Alphabet



Brain writing



Circle

and some tips!

1. Include you boss depending upon the aims of the session and the willingness of people to open up in front of a manager
2. You may choose not to include people who have an intimidating personality
3. Including skeptics only if they moderate their critical approach for the duration of a brainstorming session
4. Better not to include people who are not willing to engage

Alphabet Brainstorming in Action

1. Introduction of the brief by the manager
2. Starting the letter A, come up with several ideas
3. Suggesting a few ideas for each letter, till Z, that are relevant to its potential suggestion
4. Rating the ideas across a wide range of possibilities for future consideration

Mike Barthelmeh describes the systems adopted by IFLA to standardize some facets of LA education, with the specific example of the processes of recognition and accreditation of an institute in Indonesia undertaken by IFLA-APR. This process has great significance for ISOLA, since it is, at this time, a body that recognizes the eligibility of LA departments in the country, but will probably be required to move into accreditation procedures at some point in the future. The article emphasises the importance of providing a framework for LA departments to measure themselves against, a kind of minimum-standards template.

TYPES OF BRAINSTORMING STUDY
CREDIT: Group Work

Keith and Prashanta give the example of Utah State University to describe how the active involvement of the alumni of a LA department can create connections on multiple fronts, greatly enriching each stakeholder group, in both tangible and intangible terms. There are learnings here for all of us as landscape alumni and for the departments that we graduated from.

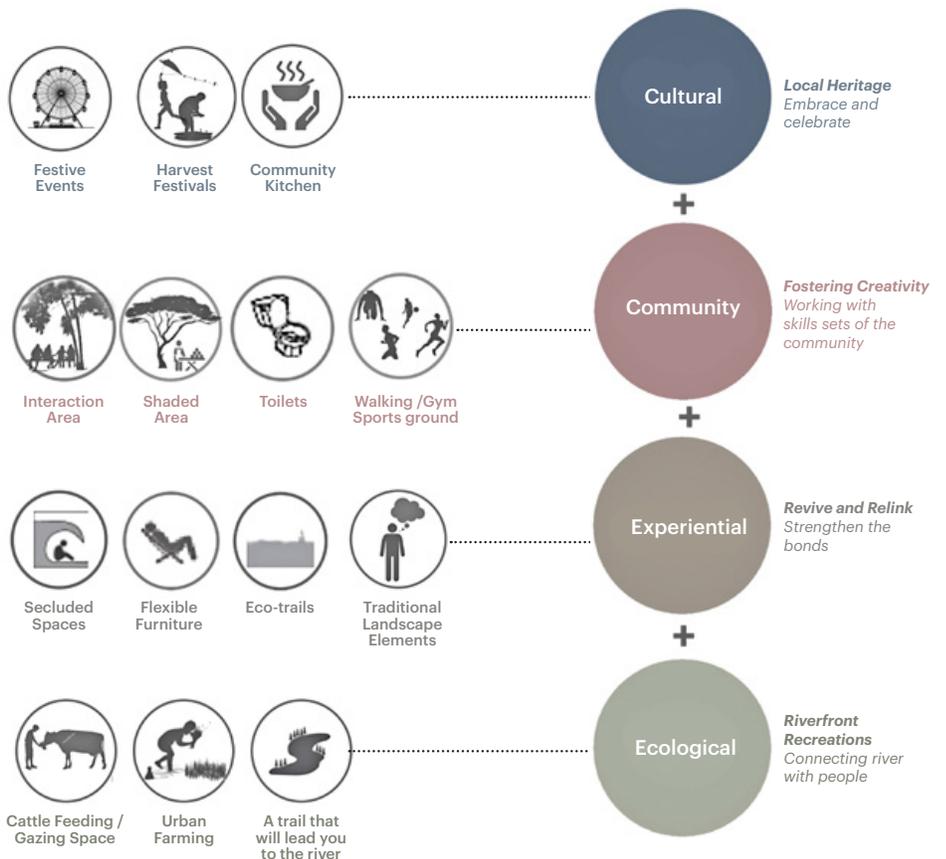
Ekta seeks clarity on a mission statement for an LA graduate. Dialogue and discussion, the linkage of larger issues with real-life projects, inclusivity, collaboration and an emotional connect are essential, she feels, to create well-rounded LA graduates with an outlook both local and global.

Urmila and Pragya describe the journeys of the first part-time MLA course and the first Bachelor's program in LA respectively, in the country, through program conception and initial steps. The L.S. Raheja program, which has achieved recognition through student awards in recent years, seeks to reach a place where it will be recognized as being at par with any other program in the country. Pragya describes the challenges that the Navrachana University BLA course faces, and talks about some of the advantages that it possesses as it navigates onward.

The next section of the issue moves into specifics, with studio structures and processes being looked at in detail. Aarti talks about the first LA department in India, SPA Delhi and the way it structures the sequence of the LA course as students move through the studios over the semesters. Sandip describes a studio process that has been developed and refined by him at CEPT University, that involves an interesting combination of sequential convergent and divergent thinking, which facilitates student self-learning and can be applied across many types of studio and real-life projects.

Caroline & Swati have contributed a description of a joint studio between USU and BNCA, which led to the creation of a collaborative learning model and innovative, cross-cultural learning techniques. The article describes some of the challenges and advantages of online learning, and how the studio opened up inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural interactions and learning. Divya from CEPT University describes a studio process that sought to understand indigenous cultures and landscapes of rural India, through the fascinating metaphor of a palimpsest. This studio included an attempt to understand the collective memories of these communities and their ways of life, through techniques old and new; a fascinating look at the underlying social and cultural connections of places over time.

REQUIREMENTS AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE COMMUNITY



**STAKEHOLDERS
ACTIVITY STUDY**
CREDIT: Tanya Jairath

The joys and tribulations of teaching LA to B.Arch students form the final section of our issue. Shilpa describes her issues teaching LA to B Arch students where the ‘architectural’ view usually sees LA as only an added amenity attached to buildings. She also documents the difficulties of trying to ‘fit in’ concepts and ideas that require deep and detailed study, into a few lectures. Arjun takes an interesting look at the idea of going beyond the usual studio and technical skill exercises while teaching B Arch students about landscape architecture, and how conveying one’s enthusiasm and love for the subject is important to effectively engage students. A Pink Floyd song takes one of the lead roles in this description of how his classes attempted to awaken a landscape vision and imagination through out-of-the-box exercises.

We round off the issue with Swati, Prashanta and myself attempting to answer a question that we have heard quite often: “What exactly does the Education Board do?” We hope that this short description will help to provide some clarity on its activities over the years and its vision for the future, including its aim to strengthen connections between research, teaching and practice.

I do hope that you enjoy this issue and find reasons to re-read parts of it over time. I also do hope that previously disengaged people will find a few reasons to engage with, discuss and debate, or at least think about, LA education. To paraphrase Charles de Gaulle’s quote on politics, “Education is too important a matter to be left only to educators.”



INTEREST

Local and traditional concern
Leadership role
Empower and invest to provide opportunities for growth

1



ROLE

Socio-economic impacts of landuse
Maintainance of a sanitised environment
Culture inclusive

2



IMPACT

Collaborate and advocate decision making
Conceptual and initiate movements
Community-based design hiring team of expertise

3

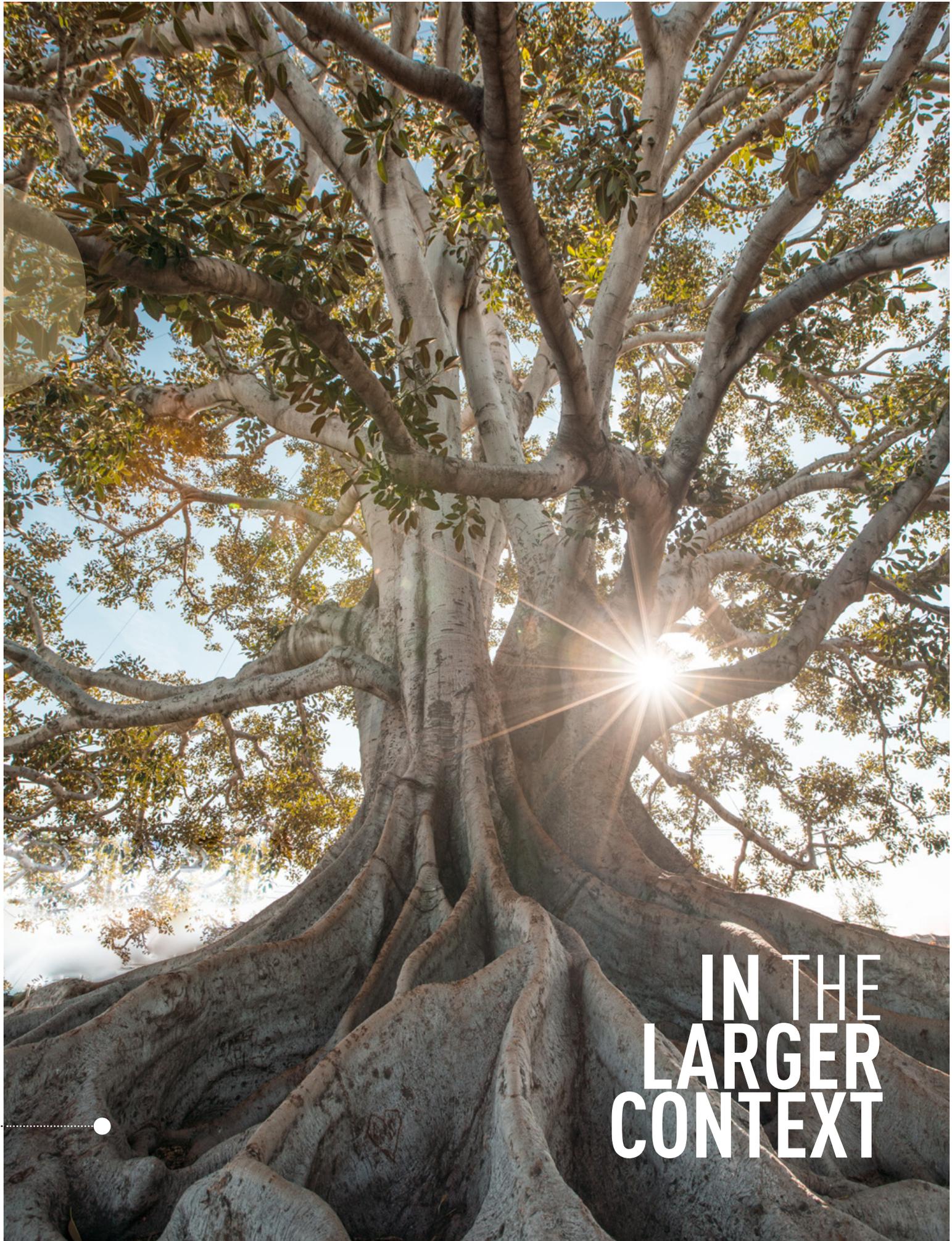


STAKEHOLDERS IDENTIFICATION STUDY
CREDIT: Sanjana Monappa



All graphics are from CEPT University Spring 2021
Community Open Space Studio student works

FOLLOWING PAGE |
PHOTO CREDIT:
Jeremy-Bishop on Unsplash



**IN THE
LARGER
CONTEXT**

Shishir R. Raval, Landscape Architect & Academician
| saadesign@gmail.com

ON EDUCATION AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

While elaborating on the meaning and role of education in a larger environmental and social context, in both formal and informal formats, **Shishir R. Raval** calls for a holistic approach in “purposes, influences, values, processes, and methods” that adopts the relevant, ever changing and sheds the stagnant and outdated.

Isn't it so?

Education is everyone's favorite orphan.

It is out 'there'. Sporadically it grabs our attention and we itch to change it. After attending to it, like a political election or this special issue, we return 'here'.

We sacrifice its core nature, purpose, and truthful practice at the altars of the system in place, economic rationality, petty politics, whatever is in vogue, and the whims of the concerned people.

Education's well-being and adeptness to evolve and adapt depend on the legacy, members, values, rules, vision of its family [institutions], and broader context. We need to recognize and address these deeper traits with a proactive stance, positive attitude, participatory approach, and radical honesty.

What has preceded and what follows is based on years of observation, reading, discussion, writing, and personal experience as an educator and practitioner in Landscape Architecture [LA] and its allied fields. All of this is open for debate and further deliberations^[1].



Formalized Education is largely about compartmentalization, material success of individuals, and competition. Non-formal Education in its varied forms, has a range of examples from communities of indigenous peoples across the globe where teaching, learning, and life are intertwined, to relatively recent models of no-school school, un-schooling, group schooling, home-schooling, etc. based on various philosophies and approaches. Holism, community of life, and cooperation are innate to it.

Where does one look for these traits?

Discourses and writings on Education and LA Education are aplenty in print and on the Internet^[2]. Exploring some key ones, reading between and beyond the lines, and critically observing what we [ought to] do and don't do when we 'educate', may help reveal and, perhaps, deal with these traits.

Let us begin with the types of Formalized Education [FE] and Non-formal Education [NfE]. FE and NfE both have their ardent believers and practitioners. A wide range of sages, philosophers, entrepreneurs, and social reformers have contributed to various models of both these types.

FE is the most accepted, sought after, and practiced type of education. Its examples range from the Vedic ashrams and monasteries to the recent proliferation of 'World Class' schools. FE is largely about compartmentalization, material success of individuals, and competition. With all its pith and paraphernalia, we forget that it is a result of our cultural evolution, only several thousand years old.

NfE, in its varied forms, has been around since our evolution and existence as a species 2.5 million years ago. The NfE too has a range of examples from communities of [pre-Neolithic] indigenous peoples across the globe where teaching, learning, and life are intertwined, to relatively recent models of no-school school, un-schooling, group schooling, home-schooling, etc. based on various philosophies and approaches. Holism, community of life, and cooperation are innate to it.

Waves of proponents and models of FE and the recent NfE have been responding to some perceived and real needs of their times while also critiquing prevalent models of the time. This trait can be traced to the agriculture [Neolithic age] and industrialization cultural conditioning of the civilizational, as opposed to indigenous, peoples^[3]. The former separates work-leisure-life and attempts to straitjacket and standardize almost everything to serve the prevalent feudal, capitalist, or socialist agenda and political expediencies. FE and NfE have different standards and measures of 'success' and 'good'. The current FE models in the Environmental Design disciplines including LA are no exception.

What is ailing?

More comprehensive research is necessary to unravel this. However, a cursory content analysis of published descriptions of the programs in the Environmental Design] Field, including LA and years of engagement experience in many of these programs in India reveal the following patterns:

- A focus on "training" and "building or producing professionals" and human and city centrism is palpable. Research and new frontiers are mentioned in passing. Finding words like imagination, inquiry, and ethics is a jarring rarity.

- We tend to treat learners as empty vessels to be filled in with some expert knowledge. There's a reason it's called 'educ-ation'—as in *educe*—rather than 'insert-ation.'^[4] Though we believe that we can actually teach someone, the purpose of education is not teaching, but learning how to learn.
- Our culturally rooted attitude to conform to the authority, from KG to higher education, does not facilitate learners to think through, trust their inner voices and values, ask questions, risk wrong answers or 'failures', read-write-discuss-reflect, and [how to] negotiate or leverage challenges of the emerging world. This is coupled with lack of rigor and scientific attitude, lack of clarity on what research is and isn't, and how to conduct high quality research and writing. We tend to blindly accept and teach concepts like sustainability or resilience without debate or questioning.
- Finally, focusing far too much on what to teach or cram in, and not enough on why and how to facilitate and evaluate learning, betrays our ignorance about how humans learn and how to engage with multiple intelligences.

Innocuous as all this may appear, do we see any insidious traits that these patterns reveal? Do we see the stronghold of FE's values, processes, and outcomes together with its disadvantages? Are there effective pedagogical innovations beyond the usual inherited mix of project and site specific studios, supporting subjects, assignments, field work, documentation, and sometimes, research? Are there transparent and verifiable ways to regularly measure and account for what is professed, actually practiced, and how effectively? Are there serious attempts to explore NfE values and processes and to question what education is or ought to be about, in the 21st century's multifaceted and wicked realities?

At least partly, this explains what is ailing education in general and in LA in particular. The hard and vital work of redressing the above points and of facilitating a learner to be a better person and native/student at the community, eco-region, and Planet Earth levels awaits our attention.

What can/ ought/ should to be done?

I have attempted here to organize relevant ideas in the following two sub-themes^[5]:

[1] Philosophical / Process / Context-oriented

- Read, debate, and share what kinds of students and teachers, with what values and motivations, we want to see graduating and practicing in our multifaceted society and dynamic times [of population explosion, climate crises, loss of diversities, socio-economic inequalities, geo-political instabilities, and resulting ugliness].

Do we see the stronghold of Formalized Education's values, processes, and outcomes together with its disadvantages? Are there effective pedagogical innovations beyond the usual inherited mix of project and site specific studios, supporting subjects, assignments, field work, documentation, and sometimes, research? Are there serious attempts to explore Non-formal Education values and processes and to question what education is or ought to be about, in the 21st century's multifaceted and wicked realities?



Discover ways to engage all senses and sensibilities of both teachers and students. Experience makes it evident that both should mutually engage with this 'drawing out' and learning process.

- Discuss fundamental purpose and philosophical questions about education. Identify and address what teachers, students, and administrators need to learn and unlearn.
- Experiment and evaluate the various purposes, influences, values, processes, and methods of un/learning that are necessary to be a better learner, person, and professional. It would help to not be teacher-centric or student-centric, but be discipline-centric and learn how to define design problems comprehensively before trying to solve them.
- Explore and apply ways to practice with humility, empathy, and inner strength in the face of worldly hurdles and temptations. For this, trusting the students to explore and express their own values and instincts, letting them make mistakes, and encouraging cooperation rather than competition, become critical, especially in interdisciplinary studios, Master's level theses, community engagement/outreach, and research.
- Discover ways to engage all senses and sensibilities of both teachers and students. Experience makes it evident that both should mutually engage with this 'drawing out' and learning process.

[2] Practical / Content-oriented

- Focus on and integrate the much neglected subject areas of Environmental Psychology, Ecological Sciences^[6], multi-scale connections issues with possible responses, international and local-regional precedents, multi-faceted communication and collaboration, and Ethics^[7]. These should be treated as threads passing through all subjects across semesters with an increasing degree of depth and quality standards.
- Engage with the nested hierarchies of various landscapes across their interrelated abiotic, biotic and experiential variables. Integrating sciences, humanities, the arts, technology, and indigenous [NfE] know-how is especially vital here.
- Learn from and about craft persons, experts, and scholars; folklore and myths; systematic research and scholarship^[8] and indigenous skills, knowledge, and wisdom. Incorporating measures like Dialectical Method, Inquiry Guided Learning and Service Learning, the quality and outcomes of education will immensely improve.
- Conduct comprehensive research projects to learn from FE and NfE models and from summative and formative evaluations of different LA curricula and pedagogies. Integrate reading-writing-discussing-documenting-reflecting modules in all subjects and especially the studios.

Shall we commit?

Concerted and committed efforts by teachers, students, administration, and alumni to put the above ideas into practice are essential to test and learn from, without fear of failure or criticism. A learning community values sustained, open, and honest discussion and make required course corrections. It needs to re-commit to learning and make it relevant and rewarding. I suggest that concerned programs, educators, and learners should begin with small steps and test one or two of the ideas presented here at a time.

Gradually, collective wisdom, care, and effectiveness will enhance and pay off. This is our collective responsibility as well as a privilege. Otherwise, Education will continue to remain everyone's favorite orphan. We wouldn't want that to happen, would we?



Endnotes

- [1] One may refer my earlier writings on this subject: *Landscape Architecture Education: Report and Reflections*, 2006 Conference, Bangalore, India [Version 2], published in the "Summary of Proceedings" document of the ISOLA Conference [*Navigating the Crossroads*] held in Bangalore in February 2006; *Trends in and Lessons from Landscape Architecture [LA] Education in the US and Canada*, Session VIII – Lessons from Elsewhere, Sub-theme: Trends in Landscape Architecture Education and the Place of Research for the Workshop on Landscape Architecture Education organized by and at School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi, India, October 2009.
- [2] Just as indicators, Google gave about 5,67,00,00,000 results in 1.06 seconds for Education and about 36,70,00,000 results in 0.80 seconds. Similarly, Google Scholar gave about 62,20,000 results in 0.03 seconds for Education and about 15,90,000 results in 0.07 seconds for Landscape Architecture Education. [Accessed on July 1, 2021]. Of course, discretion is necessary as per one's purpose of searching for information.
- [3] These two stories, worldviews, are exquisitely explained in the seminal books *Ishmael* and *Beyond Civilization* by Daniel Quinn.
- [4] Etymologically, from its Latin root, "e-ducere", the word education means leading out or drawing out the latent powers of an individual. [www.polyarchy.org/education.html. Accessed again on June 27, 2021.] This echoes a quote by Gandhi: *By education, I mean an all-round drawing of the best in child and man in body, mind and spirit.* [https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/g_edu.htm accessed on June 27, 2021]. He also believed that education is essential to meet the goal of peace. Are we doing this? Should we? How?
- [5] This section is partly adapted from the paper I had presented at the one-day ISOLA Workshop: *Teaching of Landscape Architecture at Undergraduate Level in Architecture* at Rachana Sansad Academy of Architecture, Mumbai, India on 19 November 2011.
- [6] Along with Environmental Psychology and Ethics, Ecological Sciences ["Ecologies"] need critical attention and application in our curriculum and methods of learning. These include population ecology, community ecology, ecosystem ecology, landscape and eco-regional ecology [very important for designing of large landscapes], conservation biology, restoration ecology, social ecology, and human ecology and their inter-relationships for design decision making, implementation, and evaluation at different embedded scales.
- [7] Ethics is a field that we can neglect at our own perils. Understanding Normative and Applied Ethics [<https://iep.utm.edu/ethics/>] is vital for us to be scrupulous, address conflicts, build consensus, and make better institutions and design decisions on stronger grounds.
- [8] Theory, Research, and Scholarship [as in sharing publicly what one has learned] are much misunderstood concepts and misused activities in design disciplines. Some loath and fear it. Some look down upon these as being not hands-on enough or unnecessary. This ought to change. It is high time we know what constitutes these terms, their types, issues and potentials, and the best practices to conduct them purposefully and effectively.



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TREADING THROUGH... LANDSCAPE PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE

Suneet Mohindru brings to forefront various intellectual conflicts being caused by the differences in the understanding, perception and interpretation of the meaning and value of landscape architecture and scope of the discipline, in both theory and practice. He further calls for a more nuanced and robust landscape studio culture that enlightens as well as inspires.



Education, along with Practice of Landscape Architecture, is a key partner to define the contours of the discipline, while constantly regulating, updating, intensifying and safeguarding its orthodoxy. Theory embedded deeply in the principles of education and practice safeguards its own heritage with purity of intent. This writing explores the peculiarity of landscape architecture education in terms of pedagogy, considering its multiple constituents and interfaces, spanning the realm of natural sciences, engineering, art, philosophy and ontology. These myriad aspects have been probed through the lens of personal experience spanning teaching and practice. Ideas, beliefs and convictions expressed here highlight timelessness and sanctified nature of imparting knowledge.

Landscape Architecture - Definitions and Premise

History is replete with philosophical abstractions and idealized constructs of life in relation to the universe. Though the recognized discipline of landscape architecture is nascent, traditions of spatial organization and garden design date back to times immemorial. 'Gardens' could be viewed as productive and artistic patterns inscribed on the contours of land, much like two-dimensional paintings framed into their physical and symbolic context, weaving together leisure, utility and sustenance. 'Nature' represents complex processes, relationships and resulting patterns that in themselves constitute the phenomenal realm.



‘Landscape’ on the other hand refers to the art of sculpting land, shifting earth, crafting an experiential space and organizing an aesthetic scene. Within this composition lie engrained the multiple values of function and ecology. This awareness is quintessential to poise the significance of landscape architecture against the gravity of pattern-making and environmental-mending! Herein lie the basis and roots of meaningful education discourse.

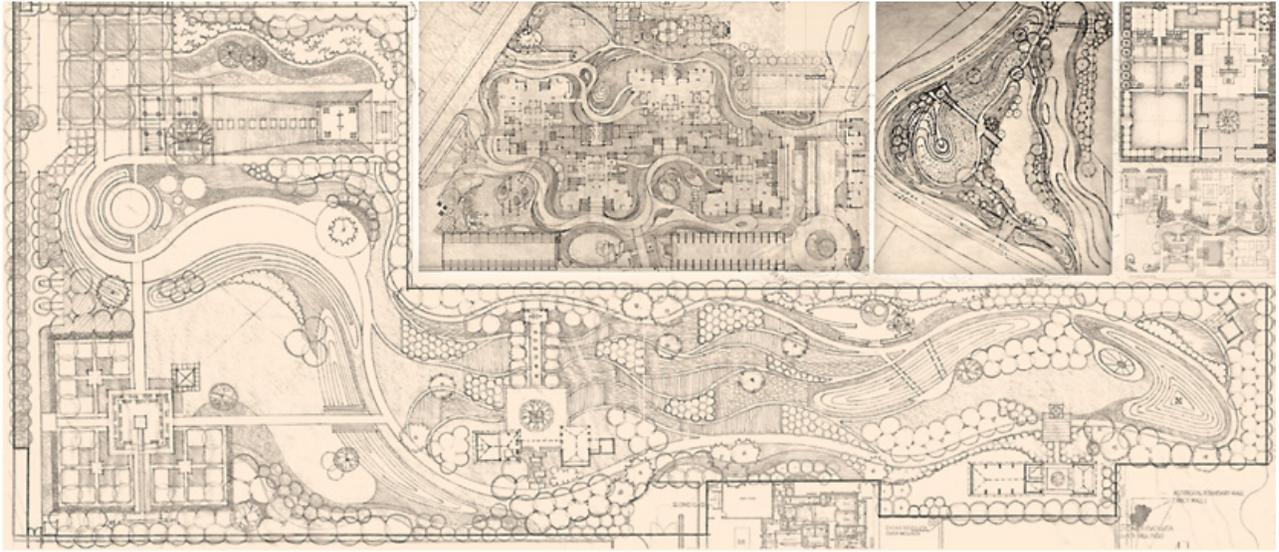
Loosely, ‘landscape’ may refer to land and its features, a scenery, an expanse. ‘Architecture’ connotes an act of putting together, organization or design. ‘Landscape’ in ‘Landscape Architecture’ thus includes regional settings, habitation and networks: the joint effort of nature and man.

Landscape Architecture Education

A foray into meanings of landscape architecture illuminates the following three realities:

- It alludes to an all-encompassing, multi-disciplinary, integrative quality, shedding light on the inter-connectedness of phenomena inherent in life and its environment.
- Pursuing it broadens phenomenological understanding and design thinking. Offering a potential paradigm shift to enhance architectural practice, it is also a field in itself, outside the umbrella of architecture; embracing a wider array of sub-disciplines.
- Its practice and study delve into art, science, technology and sociology; engaging in perception, comprehension and conception of ideas and spaces.
- This highlights the complexity, yet simplicity of landscape architecture education.

Garden, Landscape and Nature are nuanced terms signifying unique entities. If ‘landscape’ is a scene, ‘architecture’ could refer to the skill of perception and organisation that composes the scene.



Landscape architecture sits at the intersection of art and science. Nature, its processes and patterns become resources, material, inspiration and settings; organised artistically into a spatial reality. Education begins from this recognition.

It is complex because of multiple constituents and interfaces, leading to a multitude of attitudes, pedagogies and methods. It is complex because this engagement of nature and mankind manifests in all human endeavors such as art, craft, poetry, literature, music as well as devotion or worship. It is also complex considering the fickleness of the human mind and the myriad workings of nature, the latter being too multi-dimensional to be fully comprehended by the former. Yet it is simple because nothing can be simpler and humbler than the first principles that form the basis of the primordial relationship of man and nature. There is hence little space for the complicated jargon that has become fashionable in contemporary educational discourses.

Educational methods hover around techniques of appreciation and observation; simulation and analysis; formal teaching and immersive learning; testing and experimentation; questioning and critical thinking; ideas and their translation. Since the lenses to look at landscape are multiple, the methods to engage in education too would derive something unique from each of these. If methods are many, then something of rudimentary essence must hold this process together: and that is methodical thinking, clarity of expression and logic!

Beliefs and Convictions

American educator John Dewey stated: “If we teach today’s students as we taught yesterday’s, we rob them of tomorrow.” He also said: “The goal of education is to enable individuals to continue their education.” This truly applies to teachers! We need to constantly rack our brains to find an entry into the hearts of those we converse with. To what degree am I aware of my profound responsibility? How do I teach this today? What has my experience taught me through the year that just passed? Such thinking is indispensable to joyously continuing the endeavor of education, bringing in freshness and inspiration. Self-transformation, or rather an ‘educators’ revolution’ is something that is the need of the hour.

Structured thinking and articulation are vital to a discipline that embraces multiple scales and scope, sits at the intersection of fields and represents an intra disciplinary discourse. Landscape architecture education must lead to developing a culture of organizing narratives which would then culminate into design! Because 'thoughts lead to spaces', education is a means to develop 'critical thinking' and generate theoretically sound responses to myriad situations.

Experiences of Pedagogy

Initiation

Most landscape architecture students in India are architecture graduates moving on to pursue landscape as a masters' program. At the onset, their myopic world-view needs to be sensitively molded from perceiving landscape as a site to build; into that of being a situation to appreciate and intervene in nature, hinterland or urbanity. It is vital to strengthen the wings of their core as architects too, without disorienting them into esoteric environmental research. Herein lies the ingenuity of an educator to articulate the language of form, space and order; facilitating students to perceive points, lines, planes and volumes in outdoors.

Looking at landscape as a composite of points, lines and masses bridges the divide and connects the discipline to skills and sensibilities of an architect beginning his journey into the intense and profound realm of landscape.



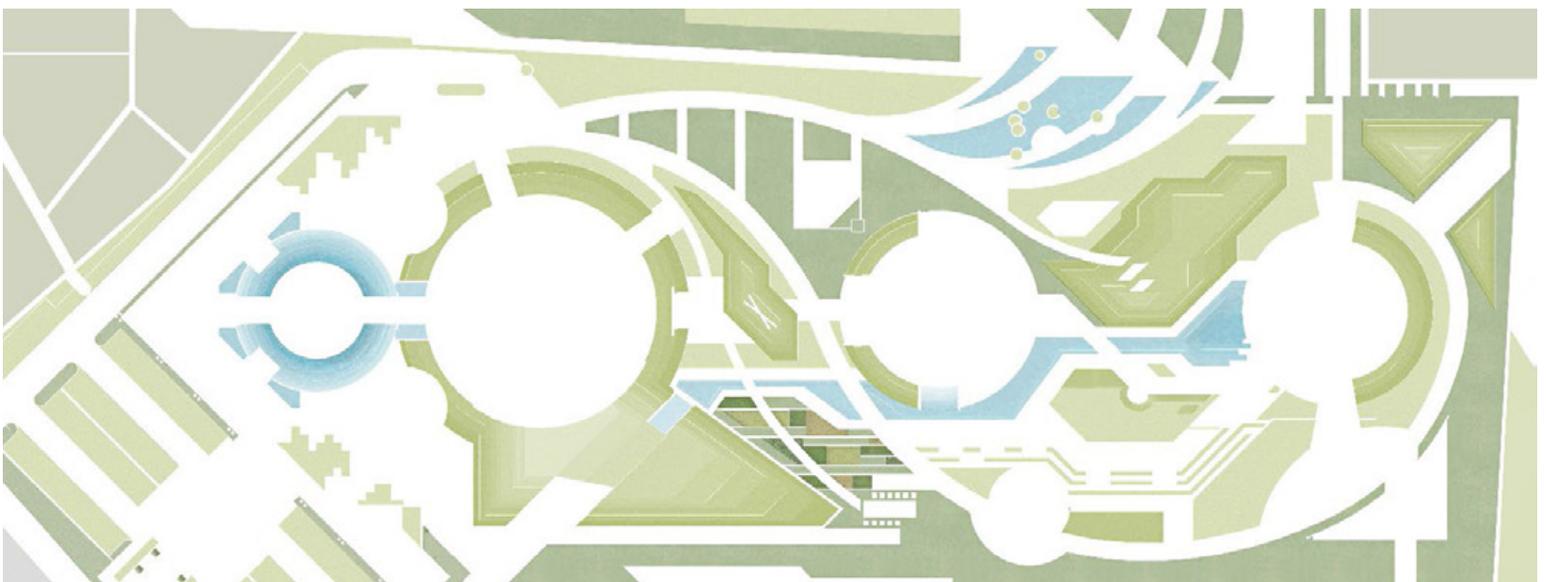
Sensitive initiation would gradually cause empathy for nature and intrigue into its constituents, experiences and processes. This would enable sensing space and form in the landscape and imagining land, water and vegetation as 'material' to constitute spatial entity and experience. Idea of time and ephemerality, notions of passivity and substantiality, role of processes in patterns; all foster an understanding of landscape as a medium and a setting.

Focus

A problem with landscape education is often caused by the confusion between its core and attendant principles. In academics, and concurrently in practice, landscape architecture is becoming solely a lens to view, and an instrument to solve, a plethora of environmental and socio-economic dichotomies afflicting contemporary society. Is this an escape from having to develop and continuously hone the artful skills of organizing and creating space? Does this point to a lack of educators' ability to engage in meaningful design discourses, given the fractured relationship between practice and teaching?

This is worrisome; an alarming reality! It illuminates a profession, shining glamorously on its disability to fulfil its original motivation; landscape architecture squealing in the guise of environmental engineering and social cause! Environment and sustainability surely present contemporary challenges. Education needs to demonstrate the inclusion of this agenda in methods of creation and conception, without losing grip over its core.

Landscape education needs to uphold the inclusive agenda of landscape architecture, without compromising its core.



Design Reviews

Methods of teaching design and conducting studios are crucial. Reviews need to be demonstrative. A fine balance of instructive drawing-board demonstration along with jury-like critique is central to nurturing abilities and skills. For consistency in direction of thought, continuity between one interaction and the next is a crucial, yet often ignored aspect of critique. Further, reviews held by large groups of teachers pose a difficulty to control the consistency of discourse. Faculty merely reacting to what's on a student's board rather than serving to open their eyes and teach them how to contemplate and demonstrate design thinking is a problem to worry about. This points to the mediocrity of teachers more than anything else. Promptly upon reading the subject matter or title of a proposition, a teacher's mind should be alive to mentally structure scenarios and directions that investigation into such a phenomenon could take. Listening to and responding, should be aimed at offering an overarching view from an elevated plane. Further, it is imperative to gauge how a project or research being undertaken would fit into and guide the world-view on a subject; while also contributing chronologically to similar studies across institutions and real-life situations.



Talks, engaging dialogue, hand-holding and demonstrative critique are indispensable to meaningful teaching.

Field Studies

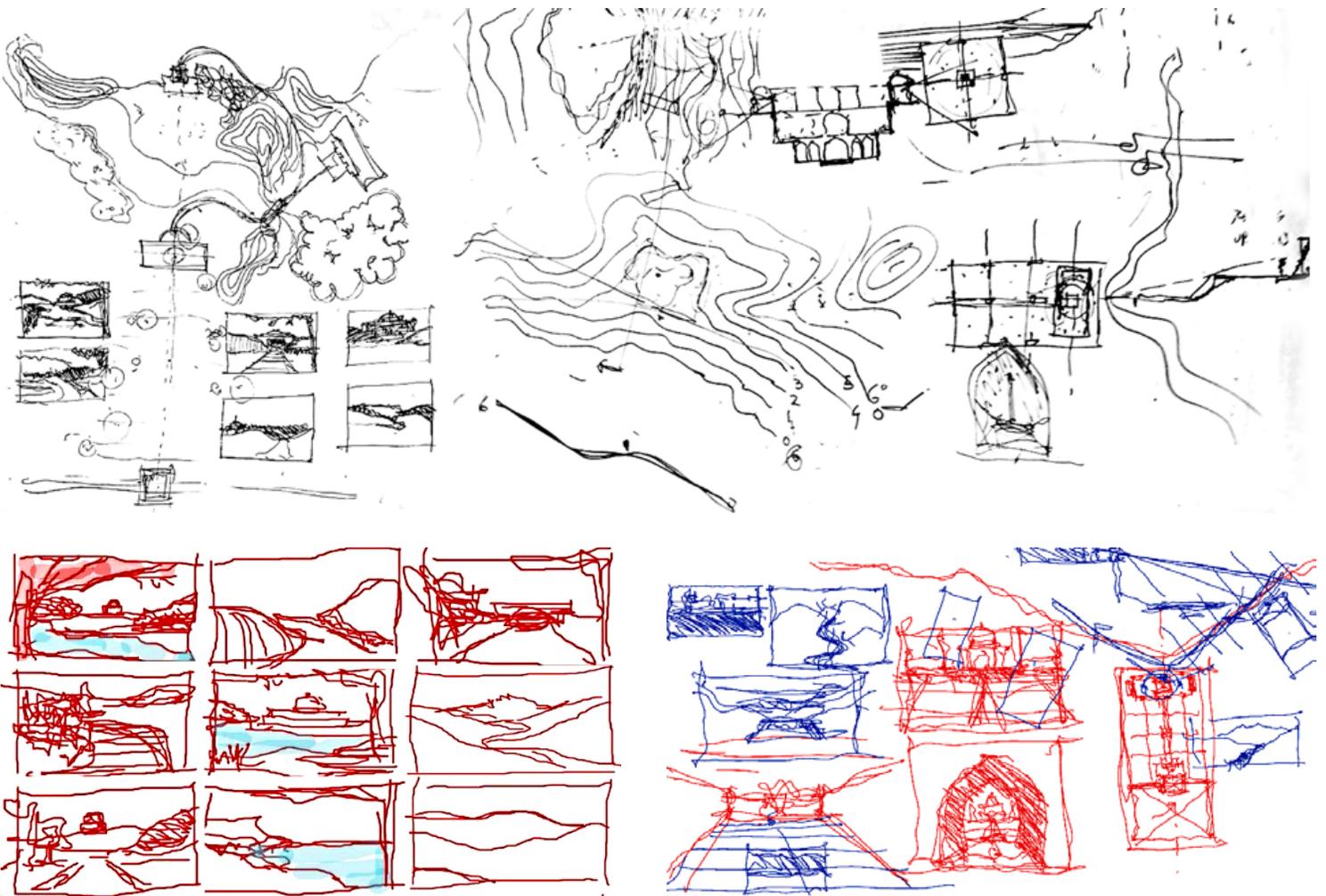
Travel exposure and real-time engagement is as enlightening, if not more, than theoretical learning. Field visits are unique opportunities to fathom the integrated whole that is called landscape. Natural settings as spatial and ecological units, cultural landscape as responses, history of development as precedents encompassing perceptions and attitudes, settlements synonymous with sustainable geographies, occupational and activity patterns, physical linkages and intangible connections; all come together in narrating the story of regional landscape.

Field studies equip students with tools that can help bridge the gap between the disciplinary confines. Earth and life sciences, art, history, planning and design, each studied theoretically as components, processes and terminology become alive as 'phenomena' to be discerned and 'expressions' to be perceived. Their physical occurrence and methodical observation serve to create indelible impressions becoming 'inspirations' to form attitudes, philosophy and design vocabulary. The unparalleled contribution of case-studies lies in mentally integrating core and attendant subjects into a cohesive whole, outlining the import of each component into the existential rigor and design process.

Lectures and Presentations

Ecology is a science. In addition, for a landscape architect, it is the ground of intervention, toolkit and material palette, as well as the embodiment of time, decay and management. Likewise, landscape engineering is not merely about site planning and construction. It is an eye-opener to the realm of possibility encapsulated in shaping land and comprehending transformative processes as agents of design. Knowing history enables to build a repository of concepts and responses.

Illustrative drawing speaks a thousand words. The power of a diagram is far greater than a finished picture.



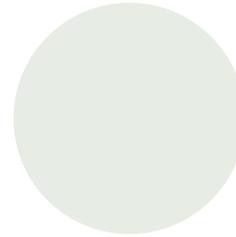
Teaching of the support subjects would be incomplete unless core design faculty partakes responsibility of delivering a part of these lectures in the framework of spatial and visual understanding, alongside relevant specialists. This would be essential to develop an instinctive approach hand-in-hand with analytical methods in perception, assimilation and conceptual response.

In addition, it must be mentioned that pre-prepared presentations as teaching aids are limiting in their outreach. A diagram drawn on a board is far more powerful and communicative than detailed plans and sections. Diagrams illustrate and highlight operative principles while detailed drawings are an embodiment of the principles. As a result, the latter cannot explicitly display or outline the implicit meaning and profundity that underlies design thought.

Conclusion

Education is a sacred endeavor to raise future successors. Educators who grow through their encounters and experiences remain youthful and excel as practitioners.

Educators... rise up. Be the common folk yet larger than life. Be trailblazers. Several seekers will tread on the paths created by you. It is the passion, joy and glint-in-the-eye of the teachers that inspires. Become one who strives to foster happy generations. Happiness lies in imparting wisdom, hope and joy; a feeling of looking forward to what lies ahead!



All images and drawings courtesy of the Author

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THE FOUNDATIONS OF ACADEMIC MORALITY

In education and academia, we engage with diverse set of contexts from two different positions, of an educator and a learner. **Sridevi Rao** shares a few of thoughts in the realm of being morally upright while being an educator and a student.

It is often said that excellence lies in the 'little things'. Academic excellence, on the other hand, appears to blossom when the murky waters of arrogance, competition and plagiarism are cleared. These are not 'little things' by any measure.

The reference to the '*Gentle Academic*' in the title of an inspirational poster refers to academic arrogance and duplicity at a personal level and cautions us through 11 aspects:

'Towards a Gentle Academic'

1. Be upfront and honest about the things you do not know.
2. Acknowledge the intrinsic value of others' knowledge bases, even if they do not seem important to you from your institutional context.
3. Do not feign mastery where you have none.
4. Respect the gaps in others' knowledge bases.
5. Be generous, not only with others;
6. But also, with yourself.
7. You overwork yourself at the risk of legitimizing a culture of overwork.
8. Privilege voices and perspectives that have historically been left out of the academy.
9. Nothing is ever neutral or apolitical.
10. Support the progress of other scholars.
11. Collaboration over competition

[Original source: <https://candybanshee.tumblr.com/post/101302866694/towards-a-gentle-academic>]

It is evident that introspecting about the 'Gentle Academic' would lead to an understanding and offer an explanation of quite a few aspects of our professional and academic journeys.

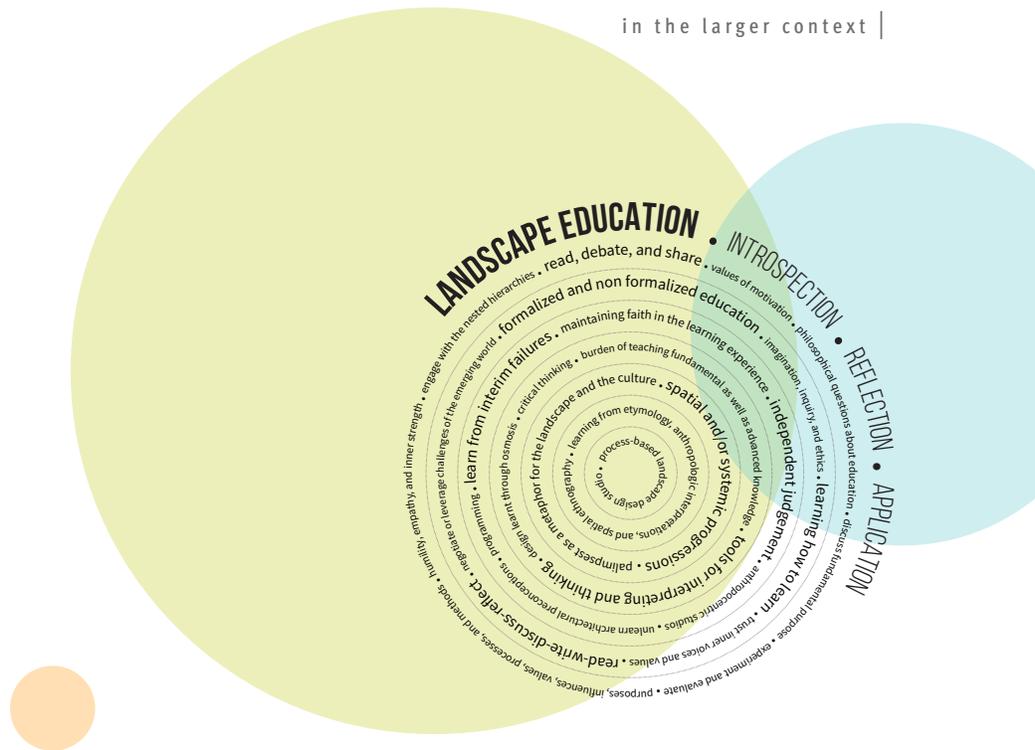
Acknowledging lack of knowledge is a sign of eagerness to learn. Related queries often expand networks and open new doors of advancement. To illustrate with an example, I recall when there was a spate of projects under the Defence Ministry of the Government of India which I handled, I found that all of them had vastly different objectives and functions. These were reflected in design decisions but not before learning about the vast variety of operations that went on in Institutions related to Defence. Trees as I understood it, were the lifeline of landscape design and being told that trees could not be a part of any aspect of the design was at the least, a speed breaker in the thought process. It was then that water as an agent of cool breeze, as a visual stimulant, as a directional resource and as a reflective light enhancer was focused upon. The scarcity of water in the site, however, was another break that brought this flight of thought to rest. That is when discussions led to the large volumes of water that were used for cooling the buildings and their processes. The cooling processes were exploited in the design to provide the design manifestations of water with its containment and circulation.

Curiosity also invites conversation and broadens linkages at every level. Often a new world of knowledge gets connected and self-imposed thresholds of knowledge can be crossed.

It is also imperative that one holds back from pontificating, with limited exposure to unfamiliar fields of study. This self-imposed caution is often the way forward in sharing one's own expertise as much as possible in every way to avoid creating barriers with others.

The generosity in being transparent about sources is often reciprocal in most cases. Knowledge-sharing and knowledge-seeking are rewards in themselves, especially in Doctoral research, while celebrating the prefix of Dr. before one's name, is a well-deserved perk in a sense. During the process of achieving this 'perk', the tendency to be despondent, rejected and excluded is often a stepping stone to 'eureka' moments. Seeking knowledge for knowledge's sake does reveal hitherto unexplored vistas leading to exhilaration! However, useless as knowledge is to many, and useful only as a road to penury for others, it's contribution to one's thoughts often leads only to dismay... it is then that hitherto unheard voices start to become relevant. The arrogance of dismissing voices that do not fit in a box, is now softened, when out-of-the-box pathways begin to be clearly visible. The betterment of mankind is scaled down to be fulfilled practically through ones' profession. Meandering through the obstacles of agendas requires maybe, stumbling along and sometimes falling, but always getting up and moving on.

Acknowledging lack of knowledge is a sign of eagerness to learn. Related queries often expand networks and open new doors of advancement. It is imperative that one holds back from pontificating, with limited exposure to unfamiliar fields of study. This self-imposed caution is often the way forward in sharing one's own expertise as much as possible in every way to avoid creating barriers with other.



It is through lifting others who stumble that one's own strength is often tested. Exclusion of others to the point of selfishness for accolades and recognition, will only become an ornament that cannot be worn and is only seen by those similarly inclined. This cannot be called an 'exclusive' club. The ability to experience the joy in sharing knowledge is an inclusion of knowledge seekers.

Around four decades of teaching students of Architecture often raises questions on how the back-entry into the mind of the student relies significantly on clearing preconceptions of landscape architecture. Students reflecting the economic divide in their understanding and communication, provide a challenge to the teacher and it is a humbling process when the attempt to share design as an objective tool to fulfill subjective desires is a limitation. Seemingly unrelated issues such as family, early marriage, motherhood, empathy for nature, everyday rituals, become important as conversations turn into friendship even, despite the age divide, leading to a mutual sharing of aspirations and experiences.

It is through lifting others who stumble that one's own strength is often tested. Exclusion of others to the point of selfishness for accolades and recognition, will only become an ornament that cannot be worn and is only seen by those similarly inclined. This cannot be called an 'exclusive' club. The ability to experience the joy in sharing knowledge is an inclusion of knowledge seekers. Rarely is one privileged to be a member of such a 'party' unless the entry is the written word. Communication in Academia is not supported by lazy solutions as in media, but in the trial by fire and the honing of skills with precision. Reading, writing, sharing and seeking, are like sailing into the sunset and the dark beyond, disappearing only to become a sunrise while continuing to sail along.

Then, why is there a strong temptation to add that the 'Gentle Academic' is an optimist in every sense?



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A VISION TOWARD STRENGTHENING LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE EDUCATION IN INDIA

THE ISOLA EDUCATION BOARD

The article describes the role of Education Board of ISOLA [constituted during Executive Committee's term of 2008-2010] in addressing its objectives of ensuring quality standards for institutions imparting landscape education in the country, broadening the areas of research in academia, strengthening connections between practice and research while expanding the board's interactions with various educational institutions in India and abroad.

Landscape Architecture [LA] education in India today: Challenges, Opportunities and the need for a Participatory Framework

Landscape architecture education in India today is greatly influenced by the professional context within which it dwells. The challenges and opportunities of landscape architecture practice and academia need to be in tune with each other. Academia has a great potential to evolve a forward-looking vision and percolate the essence of it into the practice, as a continuum of education.

As the landscape architecture [LA] profession expands in India, a large number of professionals are setting up their individual practices and the work opportunities for fresh post-graduates are increasing. A significant, parallel rise

is also seen in the number of post-graduate courses in LA in various cities and states across India. However, many of these programs are still in nascent stages and are evolving with respect to their focus areas, content and the skill-set of their faculty. This rapid mushrooming of new courses [approved by various universities and/or statutory frameworks by the Government of India] poses a challenge in terms of ensuring the quality of education and the associated competency of their graduates.

The intent of education towards serving the profession of LA, creating opportunities in academia for research, and establishing strong connections between practice and research, are some key issues to be addressed by the Indian Society of Landscape Architects [ISOLA]. LA education in India also needs to be dovetailed into the broader statutory national frameworks such as the National Education Policy 2020 [NEP2020] of India. Connections, dialogues and knowledge-resource exchanges amongst institutes at local, regional and national scales are very crucial in shaping a strong, holistic and forward-looking approach for LA education in India. The vision of the ISOLA Education Board [EB] has evolved, keeping in mind these opportunities and challenges and the dynamic nature of education and practice in landscape architecture.

Vision and Working of ISOLA EB

The EB was set up by ISOLA with the intent to build, enhance and strengthen landscape architectural education in India. The various academic institutions in India that offer degrees in landscape architecture owe allegiance to different universities, and hence each program's role in the education of the subject is influenced by the goals of these numerous educational establishments. The Education Board was conceived to ensure that all institutes offering education in LA would maintain certain benchmarks. The EB's intent was also to assist in the larger interest of networking the various institutions with similar high standards with respect to quality of education.

One of the aims of the EB is to serve as a connector between ISOLA and the world of landscape architectural academia and research, as well as a binding thread between the institutes teaching landscape architecture in India and abroad, which often exist in isolated silos, with very little interaction between them. It is hoped that this inter-institute connect will help to create a self-sustaining momentum in collaborations and activities over the near future.

The EB working structure [consisting of a Steering Committee, Advisory Circle and Working Group, which includes representatives from all PG courses recognized by ISOLA as stakeholders] offers a great opportunity for collaboration between academicians and experts across India. The EB structure encourages interactions within the institutes in India through the execution of MoUs, joint workshops, seminars, etc. The ISOLA regional chapters will have a key role to play to establish this connect with the institutes in their regions.

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ISOLA-Education Board a 'Mentor'

[EB's Role as a Reviewer, Advisor, Motivator, Facilitator, Collaborator]
for

Building, Enhancing and Advancing Landscape Architecture Education in India

					
EB's Role as a	Reviewer	Advisor	Motivator	Facilitator	Collaborator
For	Quality and Competency [Core and Shell Concept]	Content	Skill Advancement	Capacity building of stakeholders	Connect
With respect to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of institutes • Accreditation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus • Publications • Thrust areas • Pedagogy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutes • Faculty • Students • Professionals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutes • Faculty • Students • Professionals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National & International Organizations • IFLA
EB's Local connect through	ISOLA REGIONAL Chapters	ISOLA REGIONAL Chapters	ISOLA REGIONAL Chapters	ISOLA REGIONAL Chapters	ISOLA REGIONAL Chapters
Initiatives	Recognition and Review [RR]	Advisory Services [AS]	Skill Advancement Program [SAP]	Capacity Building Program [CBP] Research Hub [RH]	Collaboration and Networking [CN]

Activities

Administrative issues and tasks

These tasks have included the finalization of eligibility criteria for institutes to ISOLA Student membership, and the definition and finalization of the EB Constitution document, including the structure and responsibilities of the Education Board and its various sub-groups. The Education Board undertook review processes for the eligibility of institutions for ISOLA student membership in the period between 2016 to 2020. It also created a draft Action Plan/ Vision document in 2019-2020 to define the future focus areas and activities that the EB shall concentrate on over the next few years.

Programs or workshops

These include the creation, dissemination and analysis of responses to a questionnaire sent to all postgraduate courses recognized by ISOLA. A Teacher Training Workshop that brought together resource people and young teachers from many states in the country was held in Pune with the collaboration of the Council of Architecture, India and BNCA, Pune in February, 2018. The EB is also working on a framework for Landscape Research Symposium at this time.

International outreach

In June 2021, the EB connected with the head of the Education and Academic Affairs Committee at IFLA-APR, and with members of the Education, Standards and Engagement Committee at the Landscape Institute in the UK, with a view to further collaborations and joint activities.

The interactive dialogue held in June 2020, with all institutes recognized by ISOLA was the first significant step towards fulfilling the objectives and formation of the ISOLA Working Group for the year 2021. The contribution by the EB in the formulation of the definition of Landscape Architect and Landscape Architecture for India was a meaningful move [May-July 2020]. The Education Board thus far has worked on various documents to establish itself as a significant partner of landscape architecture education in India. The proposed *Guidelines* document [prepared in 2020] will lay the ground rules/ protocols for the smooth continuation of the EB's programs and intent, regardless of changes in personnel over time.

Initiatives

Many aspects were discussed, debated and reflected upon before deciding the kind of verticals that could be initiated by ISOLA EB, which were termed as "*Initiatives by ISOLA EB*". A questionnaire survey was also undertaken [in September 2020 to February 2021], to know the overall scenario in the field of LA education. Finally, it emerged that ISOLA can serve towards holistic and long-term goals as a mentor to the profession.

As a first step towards manifesting this vision, EB has started to work on the following six initiatives:

1. Capacity Building Program [CBP]

The CBP is an initiative, which intends to facilitate capacity building of faculty, teaching at the post graduate institutes in India and help toward developing pedagogical and research capacities in the field of landscape architecture. It also intends to strengthen the creative and critical thinking capacities of people involved in the teaching-learning process.

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2. Skill Advancement Program [SAP]

The SAP is an initiative, which intends to provide opportunities to LA professionals to enhance their technical and practical skills with respect to the latest advancements in landscape architecture and allied fields.

3. Advisory Services [AS]

The AS initiative intends to expand the advisory services which are provided by ISOLA EB and EC members to ISOLA regional chapters and institutes across India. These expanded services will range from providing guidance on content development, publications, syllabus development, guidance with respect to competitions, educational activities such as guidance for conducting thesis for PG students, etc.

4. Recognition and Review [RR]

The RR is an initiative, already in place, with review and recognition cycles set up towards ensuring parity with respect to quality education across India. This initiative needs to further work at dovetailing itself into the NEP2020 and the IFLA accreditation process, ensuring a two-fold approach of quality and core competency in education.

5. Collaboration and Networking [CN]

The CN initiative focuses on establishing a network of professional, educators, researchers and service providers in the field of landscape architecture, creating opportunities for collaborative endeavours and outreach.

Post-graduate courses in India recognized by ISOLA for ISOLA Student Membership

School of Planning and Architecture [SPA], New Delhi

Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology [CEPT], Ahmedabad

Dr. Bhanuben Nanavati College of Architecture for Women [BNCA], MKSSS, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune

School of Architecture and Planning [SAP], Anna University, Chennai

School of Planning & Architecture [SPA], Bhopal

L.S. Raheja School of Architecture, Mumbai

VIT's PVP College of Architecture, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune

Dr. M.G.R Educational and Research Institute University, Chennai

Sushant School of Art and Architecture [SSAA], Gurugram

6. Research Hub [RH]

The RH initiative intends to encourage activities related to research in the field and fostering interactions between researchers in academia and from practice. This initiative intends to provide a guided path for ISOLA members who are keen to be researchers and also existing researchers who wish to seek further guidance.

All these initiatives are envisioned to follow a collaborative and collective path towards fulfilling the broad vision of ISOLA.

Challenges

With 41% of India's population being under 18 years of age^[1], many of whom will seek higher education, some institutions see an opportunity to offer new courses. Landscape Architecture is one of them. However, unlike just any other academic degree, the education of LA needs qualified teachers, a carefully evaluated course syllabus and requisite funding for an independent department. While the EB would like to encourage the education of LA, it has become a challenge to establish the genuineness of these new programs. Also, some of the programs, due to their independent status based on their institutions' autonomous standing, do not wish to engage with the EB. Many foreign institutions have intentions to collaborate with Indian partners and offer a diploma [which helps to by-pass many of the requirements that a degree course warrants]. Some agriculture universities have their own 'landscape' emphasis programs. Changing the perception of such institutions and being a voice for LA departments within their institutions is a challenge that is also part of the ongoing work of the EB.

Looking forward

The ISOLA EB intends to achieve its vision to build, enhance and advance landscape architecture education in India, by taking on different roles at various levels. As a **reviewer**, the EB intends to ensure quality and competency with the various programs teaching landscape architecture today. As an **advisor**, the EB will contribute and guide academic syllabus, content, publications, etc. The EB also plans to take on the role of **motivator**, where it will mentor ISOLA Regional Chapters in conducting workshops and programs for skill enhancement. The Board also proposes to be a **facilitator** by organizing capacity building programs for the recognized institutions. As a **collaborator**, the EB aims to be a connector between institutions and other organizations such as IFLA or Landscape Institute. As a whole, the ISOLA EB is looking forward to strengthen the roots of LA education in India as a **mentor**, within a collaborative and participatory framework.

Reference

[1] https://censusindia.gov.in/census_and_you/age_structure_and_marital_status.aspx



Graphics courtesy of the Authors

review
advise
motivate
facilitate
collaborate

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ASSESSMENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE PROGRAMMES

PERSPECTIVES FROM OUR REGION

Mike Barthelmeh, Chair of the IFLA APR Accreditation Panel, describes the systems and procedures adopted by the IFLA-APR to standardize some facets of LA education, with the specific example of the accreditation of a landscape programme in Indonesia.

The education of landscape architects is a key concern for the profession globally and regionally, as well as at national levels. Practicing landscape architects want to employ graduates who have the necessary skills and knowledge to actively contribute to expanding practice capabilities and those in academia want to see the outcomes of their research incorporated into contemporary landscape practice.

At a global level, the International Federation of Landscape Architects [IFLA]^[1] which represents the profession through its council of delegates from five different regions [Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East], expresses its interests in education through an Education and Academic Affairs [EAA] standing committee. The EAA committee has a focus on advancing the quality of education in landscape architecture, particularly in developing countries, through educational development and the review of existing landscape programmes through member association's assessment policies. The committee is currently piloting a process to build on these policies and enable the recognition of landscape architecture programmes at a global level, based upon a process developed by the European Region, as phase one of an overall strategy. The aim is to eventually achieve parity in curriculum content and delivery for all IFLA member's programmes across the world.

At a regional level, the Asia-Pacific Region [APR] has developed a separate education policy and assessment procedure with which to consider landscape architecture programmes where requested in the region. This process of programme accreditation is aimed particularly at nations where a national programme assessment system is yet to be developed, in support of the education goals of the relevant national association. The APR formulated this regional approach by developing Education Policy, Standards and an Accreditation Process based upon processes undertaken by both the Australian and New Zealand Institutes of Landscape Architecture [AILA and NZILA], which in turn were informed by the 2012 IFLA/UNESCO Charter for Landscape Architectural Education and the IFLA Guidance Document for Recognition or Accreditation.

The IFLA World Council, at its meeting in Montreal in November 2017, approved a proposal for the APR to conduct a pilot accreditation review of the landscape programme at Institut Pertanian Bogor [IPB] in Indonesia. It should be noted that the Indonesian Society of Landscape Architects agreed to the external review, since it is not the intention of the APR accreditation process to replace any national systems which may be in place. The pilot review using this regional approach was successfully conducted by a three-person panel at IPB in 2018 and the IFLA World Council approved the final version of the APR policy at their meeting in Singapore the same year. The pilot review at IPB reinforced the distinctions between programme recognition and programme accreditation discussed in Montreal at the World Council meeting.

IFLA and the APR are keen to ensure that member associations are clear about the differences between programme recognition, and programme accreditation. These two terms have been used somewhat interchangeably in the past, but now IFLA is piloting a global programme recognition system as phase one of a two-phase system, and plans to develop a global programme accreditation system as phase two [to be based upon the APR accreditation process].

IFLA and the APR are keen to ensure that member associations are clear about the differences between programme recognition, and programme accreditation. These two terms have been used somewhat interchangeably in the past, but now that IFLA is piloting a global programme recognition system as phase one of a two-phase system, and plans to develop a global programme accreditation system as phase two [to be based upon the APR accreditation process], it is timely to review those differences. The table [on the following page] notes the key differences between recognition and accreditation, against global benchmark standards for both.

One of the key differences between programme recognition and programme accreditation can be seen in the first row of the table, 'Curriculum'. To achieve recognition, an institution or school delivering the programme needs to demonstrate that their students have had an opportunity to be taught all of the required standards through appropriate resources and staffing. To achieve accreditation, the institution or school needs to demonstrate that not only all of the required standards have been delivered, but that students have been assessed on their achievement of all of those standards against explicit performance criteria.

A Global Model for Landscape Architecture Education Programme Quality		
	PHASE ONE: RECOGNITION [INPUT DRIVEN]	PHASE TWO: ACCREDITATION [OUTPUT DRIVEN]
Curriculum	Delivery of the Standards	Achievement of the Standards against performance criteria
Project work	Enables delivery of the curriculum	Meets expected standards of competence
Students	Meet programme entry criteria	Interviewed regarding strengths and weaknesses of the programme
Staff	Sufficient staff with qualifications to deliver the curriculum	Interviewed regarding strengths and weaknesses of the programme
Resources	Adequate to enable delivery of the curriculum	Adequate to allow expected graduate competencies to be met
National Organizations	Approve the curriculum	Graduates meet expected professional standards
Employers	Approve the curriculum	Graduates meet expected professional standards
IFLA	Short Confirmation visit by reviewer	Longer assessment visit by panel

TABLE | Differences between Programme Recognition and Programme Accreditation

In another example from the table, ‘**National Organisations**’, recognition can be supported if the national organisation representing landscape architects in that country approves the material which is to be delivered during the programme. To achieve accreditation, graduates from that programme must also be able to meet the professional standards expected by the national organisation for a new graduate, beginning their journey to become practicing landscape architects through work experience and completing any further requirements for full professional membership status.

Our common goal is to facilitate the constant improvement of landscape architecture programmes to enable the profession to better contribute to IFLA's mission: "To create globally sustainable and balanced living environments for the benefit of humanity worldwide".

In summary, recognition is concerned with programme inputs, i.e. the curriculum, and an institution's capacity to deliver that curriculum. Accreditation on the other hand is concerned with both inputs, and outputs, i.e. the skills and knowledge of graduates and their ability to practice as emergent landscape architects, as well as the curriculum, resources and staffing. It is clear that the higher threshold of accreditation status will provide more confidence in the quality of an assessed education programme in the APR as well as providing better preparation for graduates to enter the profession of landscape architecture.

The outcomes of the pilot review at IPB showed that the programme had real strengths in many areas, but also had some areas for improvement to meet the required standards to achieve programme accreditation. Thus the programme received provisional accreditation status for a five year period, subject to satisfactory self-evaluation through an annual APR reporting process. This provisional status is able to be upgraded to full accreditation during the five years following from the panel review, subject to the achievement of, or substantial and satisfactory progress towards meeting, the conditions noted by the panel. There was an expectation that the programme would be actively working towards achieving full accreditation and would keep its students informed as to progress in achieving this goal. To date, IPB has made good progress during each annual reporting cycle since the accreditation visit and the APR expectation is that they will be able to reach full accreditation status in due course.

The IFLA APR is happy to discuss any aspects of its accreditation system with national organisations in the region, or indeed to answer any questions that schools or institutions may have in regard to regional accreditation standards. Our common goal is to facilitate the constant improvement of landscape architecture programmes to enable the profession to better contribute to IFLA's mission: "To create globally sustainable and balanced living environments for the benefit of humanity worldwide".

Reference

- [1] IFLA was established with 15 members in 1948, growing to now include members from 77 national organisations. IFLA's mission is to "Create globally sustainable and balanced living environments for the benefit of humanity worldwide" [<https://www.iflaworld.com/who-we-are>], with its core objectives referencing the promotion of the education of landscape architects.



The teaching team at IPB, with the author



Photograph courtesy of the Author

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LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: FERTILE GROUND FOR FEMINISTS?

In India, gender studies in spatial disciplines, both in theory and practice, have not received considerable attention. It is an important concern, especially if one looks at the character of the workforce in these disciplines, where women, with their strength in numbers and thinking are playing a very crucial role in shaping them. *Elinor Scarth* while questioning the “ingrained gender constructs” calls for the need to have a more gender-informed and inclusive professional world of landscape architecture.

A growing interest in feminist research in landscape design has been detected in the work of landscape architecture students at Edinburgh College of Art [ECA]. In recent years students at ECA have been critically questioning the position of women in the landscape architecture profession, the prevalence of masculinist methodologies and discourses in the field alongside the role and experiences of women in landscape contexts^[1]. These interrogations include an examination of the tools and technologies inherent to landscape architecture, such as maps, master plans, aerial views, drones, and GIS applications, in addition to an attention to the language, vocabulary, and voices foregrounded in professional discourses. In the current global context whereby awareness of compound and intersecting inequalities is growing, students are drawing our attention to the necessity of questioning landscape architecture and the teaching and learning practices of landscape design and theory through inclusive and intersectional feminist lenses.

Jennifer Bloomer's 1995 article *'The matter of the cutting edge'*^[2], concludes that *"in the garden, the field and the game are indistinguishable, and the cutting edge is not a metaphor, but a material tool of the imagination"*. Bloomer explores gendered practices in the context of enduring and well documented 'gender – architecture' binds. Bloomer's critique considers binaries that have edified Western architectural discourses: *"mind/body, form/matter, structure/ornament, exterior/interior, hard/soft, public/private, culture/nature"*; and reflects upon the gendered relations of these oppositions. The *"body is nature, always female"* is set in contrast to *"heroic"* architectural *"visions of exploration, discovery, conquest, appropriation, and colonization"*. Bloomer invites us to think with the entangled qualities of the garden, *"grounded in the messy, dark, nurturing decay of its own production"*. We too might think with metaphors and materials inherent to the garden and the work of the gardener as we tentatively consider some fertile grounds for feminist thought in landscape architecture.

Digging

Would a wise gardener seeking abundance place less emphasis on the tally and begin to question the ground that any prized equality is being constructed upon? On whose terms and with what values is equality in landscape architecture being claimed and cultivated? Perhaps a whole-hearted radical and inclusive effort is required to inspire a collective excavation of the substrates of this disciplinary field?

In my experience, unearthing openly feminist work in the field of landscape architecture design is not easy digging. Sources concerning gender and landscape architecture, and in particular those on the subject of women and landscape architecture, appear to trace a familiar path. Firstly the counting begins, surveys and interviews are undertaken, 'Her-stories' are revealed and published, statistics are collected, collated, and presented, equality is demanded and pragmatic toolkits are published^[5]. As H el ene Frichot reminds us in the 2016 user's guide *'How to make yourself a Feminist Design Power Tool'*^[4], the *"count"* is *"necessary and political [who is counted, who is not?]"*. Frichot encourages us to acknowledge feminist work that has gone before, and furthermore proposes that as designers beside the data crunching we might equip ourselves with *"creative and critical tools and practices"*. Would a wise gardener seeking abundance place less emphasis on the tally and begin to question the ground that any prized equality is being constructed upon? On whose terms and with what values is equality in landscape architecture being claimed and cultivated? Perhaps a whole-hearted radical and inclusive effort is required to inspire a collective excavation of the substrates of this disciplinary field? According to Frichot's treatise, you don't recognise the oppression *"right up until the point you are stopped dead in your tracks and realise you can proceed no further"*. The founders of WxLA in North America resonate this observation, describing the feeling of being stopped dead in one's tracks as *"gut-wrenching"*^[5]. Digging into the foundations of our discipline we could perhaps learn from the diverse activist practices described by Penny Weiss,^[6] encouraging us to get *"beyond the surface"* and *"to the root"* of systemic inequalities. Weiss inspires feminists to engage in work that acknowledges complexities and recognises intersecting systems of oppression, to identify structures of power that like plants, engage *"covert", "underground, hidden, and protected"* strategies to sustain their domination.





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TOP |

EXHIBITION SPACE

The glasshouse of the Johnstone Terrace Wildlife Garden in Edinburgh became a workshop and exhibition space for a two day symposium 'A Landscape of One's Own?', June 2019. The workshops prototyped a myriad of ways in which imaginative and creative feminist research in landscape architecture design could materialise. The workshops embraced the premise articulated by feminist writer and researcher Lola Olufemi that theory "can be lived, held, shared", and that feminist work can be "a breathing, changeable thing", "infused in many political and artistic forms". The collection of images and descriptions presented here document just some of the collective work that took place

BOTTOM |

WORD & WEFT

Weaving alternative narratives into the landscape. This workshop with Clara Elliot and Emma Herbert explored writing and weaving to unpick and rework perceptions of expression of power and control in the urban landscape

THIS PAGE |

TOP ROW |

DIP, DUNK, DRENCH: PAPER MAKING WITH HYDROFEMINISM

Yue Qin and Alix Villanueva engaged this workshop in which the paper pulp is composed through the dissolution of discarded landscape architecture project masterplans. The plans are pulped into an amorphous substance, putty for new configurations. The process can be repeated again, and again, the sheets can be returned to the gestational body and infinitely re-composed

WALKING ON BROKEN GLASS

Performativity and landscape's glass ceiling workshop with Leonie Mhari and Molly Gordon. All tools are created to alter and impact upon their environments. They break, tear, strike, cut under the human hand. Is this a gendered response to an environment? Make up is smeared, smudged, blended on to the face. A former glass ceiling from Edinburgh College of Art's main building has been transformed into an alternative landscape. A dance floor?

Can't see the wood for the trees?

Landscape Architecture is widely recognised as a relatively juvenile professional discipline, yet it is profoundly permeated by long established deeply gendered cultural and conceptual frameworks such as the concepts of 'nature' and 'landscape'. Intuitively we sense the ingrained gender constructs that condition the field, however these gendered perspectives are not often openly discussed from within the discipline. Acknowledging feminisms as an available means for diversifying our thinking^[7]; are there both practice based and theoretical aspects of landscape architecture that we will be unable to acknowledge, understand or even begin to untangle without engaging inclusive, diverse and intersectional feminist thinking? Associated fields continue to grow acknowledged bodies of diverse feminist discourse and published literature. Yet, despite the current dynamics in relation to women in landscape architecture^[8], discussion with ECA students and a summary literature review contributes to the impression that the 'f' word may be somewhat taboo for landscape architects. This prompts the question — Without feminisms, where is the power to resist patriarchal and masculinist tropes inherited through the lineage of art and architecture? As the Greek theatrical comedy *'Ecclesiazusae'* [*The Assembly Women*]^[9] plays out, the assumption that equality can be attained by achieving increasing numbers of women in more powerful professional positions is a myth that has been exposed time and again. In Ann Bergen's interpretation, the allegory of *'The Assembly Women'* asks "What will a woman build if left to her own devices?", and concludes "she will build as we taught her"^[10]. Bergen's demonstration reiterates to an audience of architectural theorists through the Classical Greek theatrical device the mantra announced by Audre Lorde in 1979 — *'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House'*^[11].

Strengthening the current

Perhaps feminism is avoided in the field of landscape architecture because it is perceived to be contentious treacherous ground. Lola Olufemi acknowledges the conflicts present in this social and political ideology^[12], yet finds optimism in this "certain bundle of ways of thinking", "ways of seeing, ways of hoping"^[13]. I find myself asking whether overt feminism is evaded in landscape architecture because it holds the potential to cut right to the heartwood of the discipline. Would it expose ingrained cultural constructs that structure landscape architecture theory and practice? Does feminist thinking threaten concepts too enmeshed to root out without whole-heartedly uprooting the entire field? As Ahmed sets out in *'Living a Feminist Life'*^[14], critical feminist work can be painful and painstaking. Nevertheless, given the scale of the current and future challenges that landscape architects face in an unstable climate changing world, and in a disciplinary field caught up in a dense and overgrown tangle of prevailing inequalities, there appears a growing call to embrace contemporary feminist enquiry led by student voices.

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As we slowly attempt to navigate beyond the present global pandemic we are increasingly prompted to reconsider how our lives and our work might be different in the future. We optimistically anticipate that the enforced planetary pause of the past year is the opportunity for a major change of tack through which we can begin to address myriad tenacious inequalities that are increasingly evidenced within the landscapes we study and for which we design. While simplistic waves of feminism have been discredited we acknowledge today a gathering current bringing to the fore diverse positions and perspectives founded in feminist thinking. It seems a pertinent time to pick up that cutting edge that Jennifer Bloomer holds out and examine it closely again. Calling to mind H el ene Frichot's contemporary feminist power tools — If “*the cutting edge is not a metaphor, but a material tool of the imagination*” let's work beyond hero stories to embrace diverse thinking-through-making as a way to reconsider the tools, materials and methodologies that will shape landscape architecture design practices of the future.

Endnotes

- 1 'A Landscape of One's Own?' 7th and 8th June 2019. Student led symposium event and workshops. Edinburgh.
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- 11 Lorde, Audre. *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. 1979. in Lorde, Audre. 2017 *Your Silence Will Not Protect You: Essays and Poems*. Silver Press. pp. 89-93.
- 12 Olufemi, Lola. 2020. *Feminism Interrupted : Disrupting Power*. London: Pluto Press.
- 13 Olufemi, Lola. quoting Vikki Bell. *Feminism Interrupted: Disrupting Power*. p.1.
- 14 Ahmed, Sarah. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press.

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All photographs courtesy of the Author



FOUNDATION LEVEL



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With an idea to introduce a new way of communicating the meaning and value of the subject of landscape to young minds, *Arjun Sharma* and *Juhi Prasad*, adopt ways of music and memories to make connections and encourage students' engagement with the subject.

Context

I have had the interesting fortune of being involved in teaching landscape to Architecture Undergraduates in Mumbai for the past nine or ten years. Here, I met many passionate landscape architects / teachers who had diverse experiences and different outlooks on landscape and teaching. Despite the fulfilment, I have had a few misgivings about how my students and I engage with the landscape.

Firstly, we teach students who are studying to be architects. So, conversations on the landscape tend to exist only in the service of deeper architectural understanding. This is not a bad thing, but is limiting. Why? Because, tailoring our syllabus to the architectural discourse limits us to exploring the landscape, only where it extends the architectural intent. For example, think of our standard landscape studio exercises we run in class. These exercises can be said to have two important agendas – to provide a technical skill set upgrade for the students attending the class, and to discuss the deeper and wider concerns at the heart of landscape and environment.

PREVIOUS PAGE |
'My Grandfather's Garden'
CREDIT: Juhi Prasad



Even when we did not want it, our studios ended up focusing more on the first agenda [*skill development*], while the second agenda [call it the *landscape subjective* – discussing what excited us about the landscape] received incidental, skin-deep lip service. I have to admit that one of the first reasons for my frustration with the current status quo, was that I was getting bored. This may at first seem self-centred, but such feelings are in themselves a red flag. Emotions in the class room are contagious, and it is always a good idea to have your antennae out to make some sense of the chaos that is the collective mind of the class. One could also make the case that an architecture student who finds landscape boring, is an absentee landscape student.

So, in the spirit of making landscape classes, less about knowledge distribution, and more about sharing our love for the subject matter, some course correction was required that allowed for subjective discussions on landscape, to come front and centre.

The Premise

Around this time Juhi Prasad, current permanent faculty member at AOA, Mumbai and Landscape architect, and myself decided that we needed to expand the class discussion on landscape beyond architecture and beyond design. There were a couple of motives attached to this.

1. Off topic subjects, we hoped, would make the atmosphere in the class more relaxed and conducive to spontaneous interaction.
2. It allowed us to talk about the things that we were interested in, passionate about, or just the things we enjoyed sharing with others.
3. There was a good chance these conversations would play a role in piquing the student's interest in the landscape architecture profession. [Not an insignificant intent, given that almost all future landscape architects have to graduate as architects first].

Quite intuitively, we hit upon two hallmarks of these lectures. Firstly, the lectures had to stray as far away from the discourse of the current studios as possible. Secondly, there would be a sharing of the personal. i.e. the lectures were allowed to digress, have no central theme or aim, as long as they conveyed a deep preoccupation with the subject. Although the lecture was usually underpinned with some academic citations or other people's works, the core of the sharing lecture was personal and exploratory.

The Lectures

Grantchester Meadows by Pink Floyd

The song plays in the background as I dissect how the song is structured and lyrics as well. There is a small talk about nostalgia. Lecture ends with screening of the music video.

—Arjun



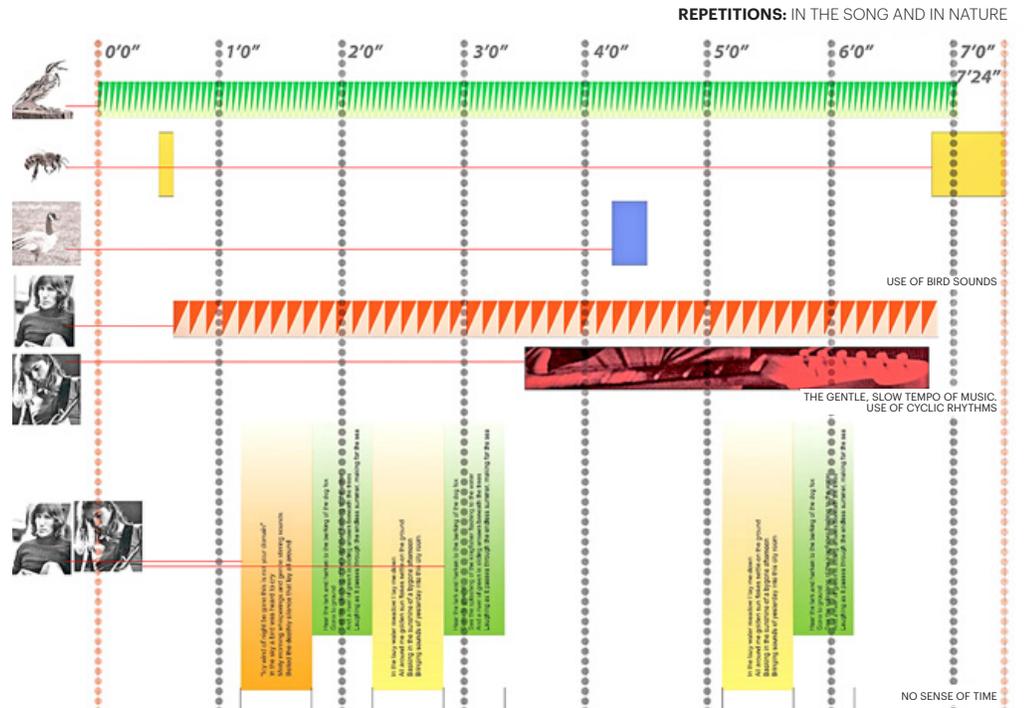
GRANTCHESTER MEADOWS



ROGER WATERS



DAVID GILMOUR



[VESRE 1]

"Icy wind of nights be gone this is not your domain"

In the sky a bird is heard to cry

Misty morning whisperings and gentle stirring sounds

Belied the deathly silence that lay all around

[HOOK]

Hear the lark and harken to the barking of the dog fox

Gone to ground

See the splashing of the kingfisher flashing to the water

And a river of green is sliding unseen beneath the trees

Laughing as it passes through the endless summer, making for the sea

[VESRS 2]

In the lazy water meadow | lay me down

All around me golden sun flakes covering the ground

Basking in the sunshine of a bygone afternoon

Bringing sounds of yesterday into this city room

[HOOK]

Hear the lark and harken to the barking of the dog fox

Gone to ground

See the splashing of the kingfisher flashing to the water

And a river of green is sliding unseen beneath the trees

Laughing as it passes through the endless summer, making for the sea

[VESRS 3]

In the lazy water meadow | lay me down

All around me golden sun flakes covering the ground

Basking in the sunshine of a bygone afternoon

Bringing sounds of yesterday into this city room

[HOOK]

Hear the lark and harken to the barking of the dog fox

Gone to ground

See the splashing of the kingfisher flashing to the water

And a river of green is sliding unseen beneath the trees

Laughing as it passes through the endless summer, making for the sea

LYRICS: **DESCRIPTIONS**

Vegetation

Fauna

Environment

Sounds

Nostalgia

a sentimental longing or wishful affection for a period in the past.

"I was overcome with acute nostalgia for my days at the university

???"

CREDIT: Arjun Sharma



My Grandfather's Garden

A short presentation on personal fond memories and notes about my grandfather's backyard garden and experiences as a child.

—Juhi

"A garden was a space that had a circumscribed territory, its limits notional or clearly marked, but at all times discernible and finite; the very marking of this territory could happen by an act of active making or even ideas claiming one already marked and within this would exist a certain prescribed or evolved ritual that allowed the many ideas of nature to be experienced in an articulated manner."

—Tracing Narratives - Indian Landscape Design by LEAF [Aniket Bhagwat]

A Bouquet
from
My Grandfather's Garden
— July 1, 2020

My Grandfather's Garden,
Lucknow.

... CREDIT: Juhi Prasad

Thinking about the landscape

I ask the class and muse about "when does 'the landscape become part of our conscious thinking?'" or "At what point do we become aware of the landscape?"

Slides show a variety of references. Seen here are, seeds sticking to my jeans, Yugantha by Irawati Karve, Eisher's Puddle and Liebiskind's Berlin Jewish Memorial.

—Arjun

ASPECT 2: Occupying land: Burning of the khandhav forest



Since the time of the Mahabharata, we have been acutely conscious of this pre-existing ecosystem. We knew how to live off it, how to leave it alone, how to interact with it and how to destroy it.

At what point do we become aware of the "landscape"? Looking at the sky



ESCHER'S PUDDLE

... CREDIT: Arjun Sharma



At what point do we become aware of the "landscape"?
Seeds of dead grass stuck to my pants.



..... CREDIT: Arjun Sharma

“So, what is Landscape?”

A quick run through various references, examining the origin of the word, its usage across other fields, and how one may think about the landscape as not being bound to architecture and design only.

—Juhi

SO WHAT IS LANDSCAPE?

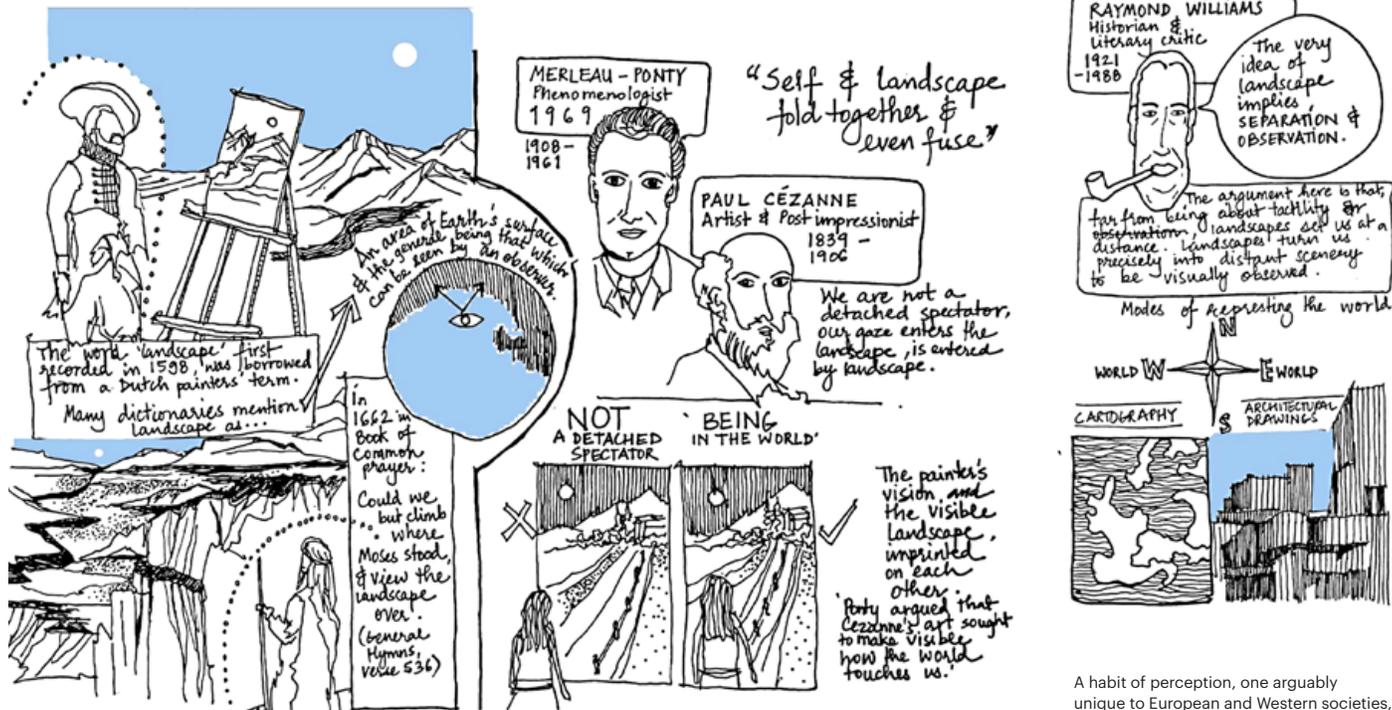


..... CREDIT: Juhi Prasad



Land [a word from Germanic origin] may be taken in its sense of something to which people belong [as in England being the land of the English]. The suffix *-scape* is equivalent to the more common English suffix *-ship*. The roots of *-ship* are etymologically akin to Old English *sceppan* or *scyppan*, meaning to shape.

SO WHAT IS LANDSCAPE?



The popular conception of the landscape that is reflected in dictionaries conveys both a particular and a general meaning, the particular referring to an area of the Earth's surface and general being that which can be seen by an observer.

Cezanne's perception of landscape was exemplary. It became the visual expression of his own argument that observer and observed, self and landscape, are essentially enlaced and intertwined, in a 'being-in-the-world' that precedes and preconditions rationality and objectivity.

A habit of perception, one arguably unique to European and Western societies, landscape is a particular way of seeing and representing the world from an elevated, detached and even vantage points, represented as cartography, architectural drawings etc, in which the world is conceptualized as an external reality.

..... CREDIT: Juhi Prasad

End Note

These lectures for the most part were fun to deliver. More often than not, it tended to take the students a little by surprise. I have to say that the lecture itself did not produce any immediate effects. That being said, the impact of these lectures tended to be cumulative. The students became a little more relaxed, a little more receptive and a little more open to offer observations and comments towards the end of the year. I would also like to think that when these lectures were given, we were seen as sharers of personal experiences, rather than professors who were handing down notes and knowledge.

Objectively, the subjective lectures on the landscape expanded the frame of discussion, allowed for a more nuanced dialogue, and circumvented, for a short while, the vicissitudes of the alive-by-deadline college life.



Shilpa Bakshi Chandawarkar, Landscape Architect & Academician
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UNDERSTANDING LANDSCAPE EDUCATION IN ARCHITECTURE

BECAUSE ARCHITECTURE NEEDS THE LANDSCAPE...
AND NOT THE OTHER WAY ROUND

Shilpa Bakshi Chandawarkar, who has been associated with the teaching of the subject at undergraduate level, discusses various concerns of perception of the subject amongst students, curriculum that addresses it as an “allied subject”, and at the same time also notices growing interest of the students to integrate environmental values in their work.

India is perhaps one of the few nations where Landscape Architecture education is available only as a post-graduate degree program, open in the main, only to architecture graduates. In the majority of the architecture schools across the country, Landscape Architecture is taught as an allied subject for a semester or two midway through the course, sometimes, purely as an elective subject, which a student may or may not study. Since the knowledge imparted in the B.Arch program is the only exposure that architecture students have of the subject, it becomes imperative that the course content, duration and teaching methodology are developed to ensure that architects are sensitised towards the role and impact of landscape design and landscape architecture in their profession. It is equally important for the profession of landscape architecture in the country that the new entrants are made aware of the scope, responsibilities, and challenges of this field.

This essay, reflecting on Landscape Architecture Education in Undergraduate Architecture studies, is an ongoing dialogue with myself. The small narratives are personal experiences recorded over the past three decades, as a student and then as faculty for the undergraduate program in Architecture. The course structure, syllabus and curriculum mentioned herein pertains to the one practised by the University of Mumbai. The structure of the write-up echoes my often-confused, ever-changing and evolving thoughts on the role of landscape architecture in architectural education.

My introduction to the subject of landscape architecture as a student

30 years ago, my seniors in Architecture school introduced me to the subject of Landscape Architecture in the fourth year of the 5-year B.Arch program thus: *“It is easy, basically nothing more than making a site plan with a few rubber stamps of tree blocks and lots of green, blue and brown colour pencils. Only issue is you have to learn botanical names of trees!”*

As the weeks went by, there were conversations amongst us as students: *“The landscape portfolio is a cakewalk if you have worked on the Louis Kahn trophy for NASA. It would be good to get this portfolio done by the juniors – it is a good way to know if they can help with rendering our thesis sheets next year.”*

A few days into the semester, the teachers gave us an introduction to the subject: *“Landscape Architecture is the art and science of designing open spaces. The syllabus includes planting, hardscape elements, designing children’s play areas, highway landscaping and historic styles of landscape design. There is a written exam and design exam at the end of the year. For studio work, develop the outdoor spaces of your semester 6 design portfolio. The submission will include a site plan, two site sections and one detailed area layout.”*

The following year, I remember telling some of my juniors: *“I loved the subject... it is a hundred times better than designing buildings!”*

Whether it was due to the course content, the way it was taught, the fact that it was included in the penultimate year of the study course, or the way students perceived it, *Landscape Architecture was largely known to be a subject where one had to know the names of a few trees and learn some good rendering techniques to make a good-looking site plan.* However, despite this perception, there was something about this subject that struck a chord, deep inside me [as with many other architects who have been drawn to this subject] as I opted to pursue my post-graduate studies and make the subject my chosen profession in the years to come.

My engagement with landscape architecture as a teacher

I started my foray into the field of academics armed with a master’s degree in landscape architecture and an unshakeable belief that landscape is all-encompassing and includes a holistic understanding of ecology, natural sciences, society, culture, tradition, and technology. I believed that as architects, we needed to be made acutely aware of the natural systems that we are intervening in, when we build. Wanting to share whatever little I had learnt, I prepared lectures on the landscape analysis of a site [geology, topography, hydrology, vegetation, regional landscape character and setting], understanding landscapes as compositions of land, water and vegetation, traditional and cultural connections in a landscape, and the principles of *‘Design with Nature’*.

Whether it was due to the course content, the way it was taught, the fact that it was included in the penultimate year of the study course, or the way students perceived it, Landscape Architecture was largely known to be a subject where one had to know the names of a few trees and learn some good rendering techniques to make a good-looking site plan.

To my surprise and dismay, I found students approaching me to discuss their final site plans, which trees to use such that the built forms are not hidden, details of swimming pools and water bodies in arid regions and large flat swathes of green on contoured sites; I often heard the words “*everything is done, just landscape is pending*”! What bothered me was that the perception of the subject even 10 years later was not too different from what I had experienced as a student.

Why are we unable to convey to students that landscape and architecture are not different entities but a single integrated one? Why does landscape remain an added amenity to a project in the minds of architects?

Many a debate with colleagues in the faculty room led me to believe that if this bothered me so much, I would have to find ways to teach contextual understanding, reading contours, inserting plinths, and aligning circulation networks on contoured sites, modulating the landscape as a setting for architecture, open and built space relationships, surface hydrology and grading in landscape classes. It would have been a pleasure to teach all of this, but it felt like a bit too much and a bit too late to achieve this in a subject that is awarded only 108 lectures of 45 minutes each [as opposed to Architecture Design and Building Technology which have 288 lectures each] in the fourth year of a five-year program. One also wondered why, if all of this is the premise of landscape architecture alone, is it then taught for a few hours, and a couple of semesters in a 5-year long course?

Given the scope and role of the field, can landscape architecture really be taught in 2 semesters? Would it not function better as a full bachelor’s degree program?

It may be worth mentioning here that my initial years of teaching also coincided with the number of architecture schools in my city growing from 3 to 15 [currently there are 27], resulting in a serious dearth of landscape architects to teach in these schools. A few of my fellow landscape architects and architects who shared a similar angst did come together to prepare a common framework to teach the subject across the various architecture schools in the region. The framework was exhaustive and attempted to address the intangible and tangible aspects of landscape across all scales and typologies. Many of us have been using this framework jointly and separately, modifying it over the years as we oscillate between being teachers and students of landscape architecture.

We were fortunate that a revision in the syllabus moved landscape architecture to the third year of the course, which helped students incorporate the learnings from this subject into their last 2 years of study, especially the design thesis. As per the last syllabus revision, it is now recognised as an Allied Design subject and individual colleges have the freedom to conduct it in any year of their choice. The subject is titled Allied Design and the syllabus no longer calls it

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UNDERGRADUATE LANDSCAPE PROGRAM

NAVRACHANA UNIVERSITY | VADODARA

Heading the country's first undergraduate program in landscape architecture, *Pragya Shankar* shares her views on introducing the subject at the beginning of design education.

Landscape professionals have a unique way of thinking, guided by their sensitive understanding of nature and environment. Their knowledge of natural processes and sciences, like geology, hydrology, ecology and botany helps them approach a problem in a way that is very different from other design professionals. Landscape professionals are committed to the idea of ecological design, which is the ethical underpinning of the profession. It is in their very DNA.

The question is whether this landscape approach to design can be introduced right from the beginning of one's design education. If students begin to engage with these questions in their formative years, these may not only become the foundational ideas of their design responses, but the students would also get the opportunity to explore and test their ideology in the academic environment over a broad range of problems.

Architectural education has its own challenges. It deals with diverse ideologies and approaches to design, as the very core of architectural education. Very few, if any, architecture courses can be expected to convey the landscape approach as the key ideology. But, an undergraduate course purely in landscape has a potential to do justice to the idea.

An undergraduate course in Landscape can create design professionals with ecology and environment as their foundation, who have attempted to look at problems through the lens of landscape over an array of projects in the academic environment. It can help to create graduates who are passionate about the profession and have complete faith in the landscape approach. And with this belief, the undergraduate course in School of Environmental Design and Architecture was established in 2017.

The School of Environmental Design and Architecture [SEDA], Navrachana University, Vadodara is a decade-old school that offers courses in architecture, interior design and landscape design. In a short duration, the school has established itself as one of the leading institutes for architecture and design. The Landscape program of 4 years duration offers a degree in Bachelor of Design [Landscape].

The undergraduate course in Landscape allows students to have an eight-semester long engagement with landscape design. It consists of eight studios, along with five courses in Earth Science, five practical workshops, and three courses each in Landscape Technology and Landscape History [theory]. Several courses with architecture and interior design on Architectural History, Construction and Furniture Design are also available as electives. These shared courses and cross-disciplinary electives not only help students develop an understanding of allied fields, but also allow them to design their degree based on individual interest areas. We believe that students should have options to delve deeper into their interest areas, such as Earth Science, Regional landscape, Technology, Writing or Object Design. The focus is to train professionals who are sensitive to the core values of landscape, but also have diverse trajectory options upon graduation.

The program concludes with a Thesis as the final-semester capstone project. We look at the Thesis as a formal inquiry into the questions of landscape, either through research or design.

The course duration of four years also allows for experiential learning and practical exposure to students in the areas of design, planting and gardening, soils, water and environmental technologies related to landscape. The students are also encouraged to gain practical experience by collaborating with professionals outside or participating in in-house professional and research projects. One such project, recently launched by the landscape program is '*Vad of Vadodara*'. This is a research initiative towards understanding the cultural and environmental value of Banyan trees in Vadodara. The first phase of the project culminated in a website for public participation in mapping of these trees.



LANDSCAPE HISTORY



5TH SEMESTER STUDIO
Community Space Design

The city of Vadodara is our laboratory. The environs of the city include lake and river systems, plains, hill ranges, forests, historical settings and cultural landscape settings. This not only allows students to have a very intimate understanding of the context and issues but has also opened up possibilities of converting studios into active engagement with the city. We hope to make a positive contribution to the city by creating awareness and creating collaborations with academic and public bodies.

Being an undergraduate program also allows for more opportunities for documentative projects by students that could contribute to the landscape knowledge base in country. "Related Study Program" at Navrachana is one such course where students have been documenting natural and cultural landscape heritage in the country. These documentations have helped students in developing an understanding of landscape space, elements and related cultural meanings and values.

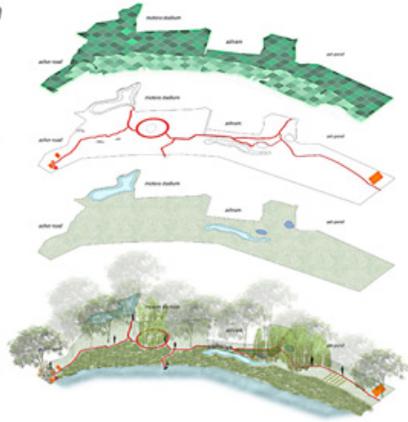
Conceptual Diagram

Urban forest / Riparian
 • imagining the darker green patch as an urban forest.
 • lighter patch as riparian edge / corridor.

Landmarks / Circulation
 • routes created by clearing out vegetation.
 • playing with the levels and creating experiential pace points.
 • connecting 3 temple.

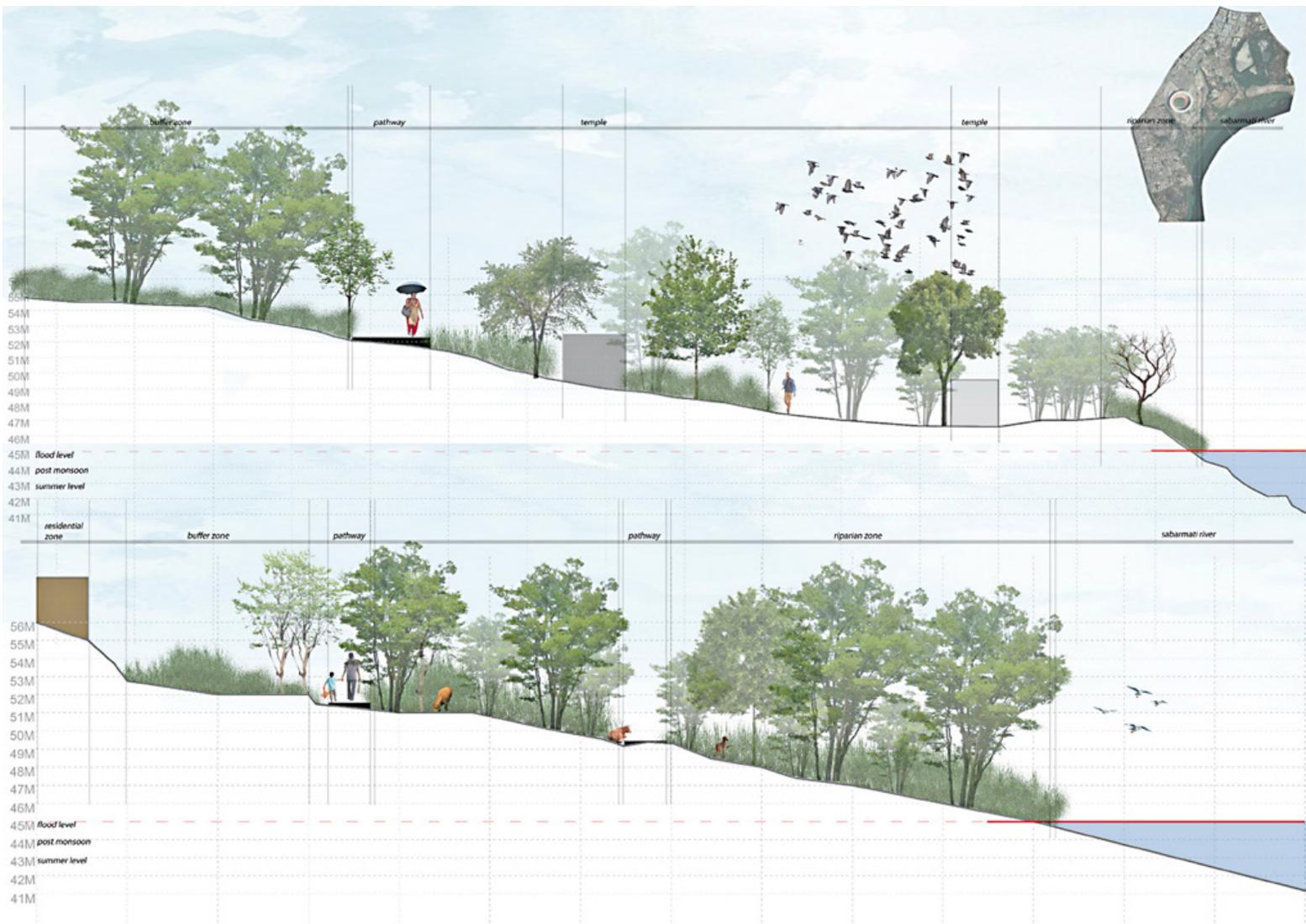
Waterbodies
 • fit two waterbodies treat the polluted water which is directly flowing into the river.
 • the water coming from ash pond passes through 2nd waterbody.
 • old is the older ash pond.

Final Layer
 • connecting 3 temples through boardwalk and trails.
 • experiential walkways, patches of grass, viewing decks.
 • urban farming area and a flower garden which attracts bees and butterflies.



DESIGN THESIS

Designed Ecologies: Reinvigorating the Riverscapes



The biggest challenge the program is facing is awareness of its existence. It is still not a known degree in the country, where people are just beginning to understand the landscape profession. The other challenge is that at the undergraduate level, students are usually not looking for super-specialization but different career options after graduation. This is one of the reasons that it is a B. Design degree, which widens the possibilities for these students for further studies. The course is inherently designed to be inter-disciplinary, that will prepare them for their future decisions and diverse trajectories.

When we started this program, the entire academic board, including landscape architects and architects, expressed their belief in the relevance and need of these graduates in practice. When our first batch graduated recently, their belief was proven right. All the graduates were placed in landscape and architecture practices immediately, including some who secured placement while still completing their Thesis. This has given us immense confidence and further strengthened our belief in the program.

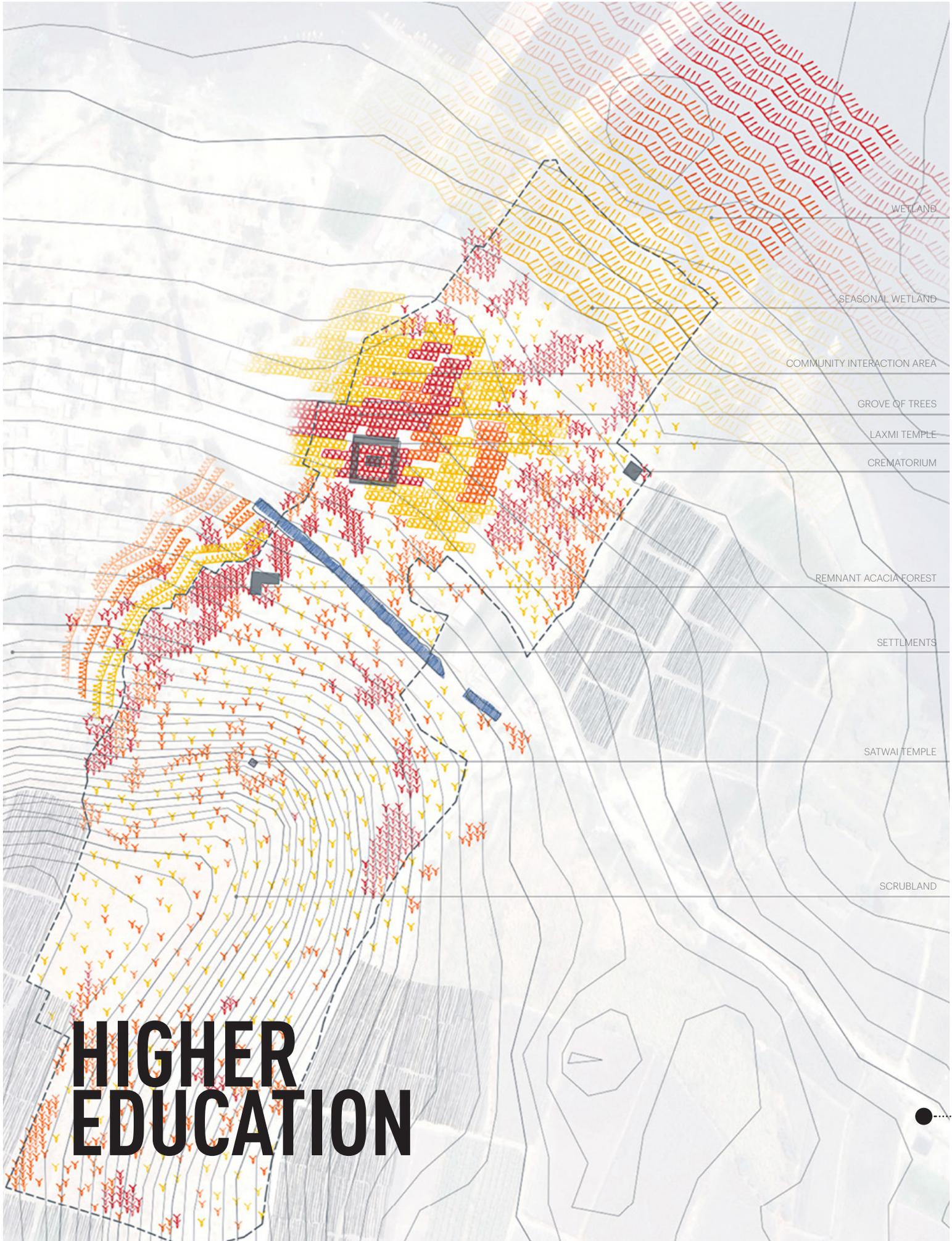
We have recently established an exchange program with the landscape program at North Dakota State University, Fargo, USA. The experience of interacting with landscape professionals and students from another country will expose these young designers to the international practices and will further enrich the understanding of the profession.

We believe in creating critical thinkers who are lifelong learners and can adapt to the changing challenges of the profession. Along with the other landscape architects in the country, we believe that these landscape graduates will positively contribute to the profession.

RESEARCH THESIS
*Significance and experiential
 qualities of Urban Wilderness*



All drawings by students of Bachelor of Design [Landscape] at the School of Environmental Design and Architecture, Navrachana University, Vadodara



HIGHER EDUCATION

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TRAVERSING LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE EDUCATION IN MUMBAI

Urmila Rajadhyaksha profiles the journey of the city's first landscape architecture program and its achievements in the field of academics, the accolades it received, and its engagement with the profession and the city at various levels.

Having completed my Master of Landscape Architecture from SPA Delhi in 1990, I began my tryst with Landscape Architecture Education as a core competency once more in 2016 [26 years later] by becoming the founding head of the three year part-time Master of Architecture in Landscape course which had been approved for implementation by the University of Mumbai in 2008. We at the L.S. Raheja School of Architecture, Mumbai were the first college to successfully apply for implementation of this program in 2015. Eventually we got the program going in 2016 after navigating the mandatory regulatory environment. It was and is, the only such program in the country.

This interesting journey of the past 5 years has been path-breaking in several ways, both expected and unexpected. With seven students ranging in age from their 20s to their 50s [all architects as mandated by the Program ordinances], with a minimum work experience of 2 years and almost an equal number of teachers, also ranging in age from their 20s to their 50s [all landscape architects], ranging from those fresh out of college to those with 20 to 25 years of experience, it was a close relationship from the word go.

PREVIOUS PAGE |

PEOPLE, PLACE, AND PALIMPSEST

Tracing Lines: Spring 2021 Studio

Palimpsest Plan: Site grains and

associations interpretation

DRAWING CREDIT: *Sanika Kalantre*

In any Master's Program, learning is never confined to what is taught and peer learning from interaction, as well as from seniors and juniors, plays a very important role. For the first batch, they had no seniors and for an entire year, no juniors. Teachers were thus both mentors and peers. To a large extent this continued with subsequent batches as well; due to limits of space and time all three batches were on campus only once a week on Saturdays.

Being the first University-approved Landscape Architecture Master's program in the city of Mumbai, we were fortunate to garner a tremendous amount of support from the professional community of Landscape Architects in Mumbai and elsewhere. Kishore Pradhan, the founder of the oldest landscape architecture practice in Mumbai, honoured us with his presence at the orientation for the first batch. We also had guests who called me up and told me they wanted to conduct free workshops for my students.

Sameera Rao's introductory workshop on the use of GIS was one such. Rohan Sinha from Edinburgh spoke on Landscape Character Assessment. Stalwarts like Aniket Bhagwat and Shilpa Chandawarkar and many more came in at our request as end-semester jurors. Our students soon learnt to ensure that all our guests who came in as strangers, left as one among our own, carrying with them memories of the day spent. Did this help the students to develop networking skills? Perhaps.

Mid-project reviews were an additional feature where we invited guest reviewers to enrich the work in our studios. This was a way to connect the program with professionals who were at various stages of their careers. These reviews had the additional advantage of contributing to ongoing student work, when such discussions could develop the ability to review one's own and one's peer's work. Very early, we used this to tackle the student's possessiveness of their work

THESIS JURY

*Thesis jury of the first batch
[2016-2019]*



and their resistance to accept change. It also prevented students from working primarily for their grades, by gauging what the faculty could be looking for, and helped them to develop independent thought processes.

While conducting a predominantly ‘Taught’ Master’s program as opposed to a research-based one, it was our efforts ‘Beyond Taught’ that added value to the program. Our students are encouraged to avail of all opportunities available; adopting a flexible attitude towards our working schedules in order to enable this, has contributed greatly towards honing our student’s abilities. Participating in the Landscape Foundation India’s Student Competitions has won our students awards and much more. Translating theory to site was key in the competitions, and during the three years they ran after our program began, awards came our student’s way every single year.

Attending events together was also something we emphasised right from day one and this began in right earnest with our very first batch [barely weeks into the program] attending the Lokmat Infrastructure Conclave. When our students questioned us as to how this could be ‘Landscape’, we set them on the path to answer their own questions. Cut across to the ISOLA Goa Conference in 2017 when our second semester students found a whole community they belonged to and worked in teams to maximise and share their knowledge gain.

With the advent of the next Academic Year 2017-2018, we grew in numbers and some of our students chose to participate in a joint site studio at Ayodhya conducted by Dr. Amita Sinha, which also saw participation by BNCA Pune and the Government College of Architecture, Lucknow. This was a great learning experience on the job as it ranged from site visits to nights working together in the bitter cold, ending with presentations to the authorities. Providing these opportunities as a choice was a conscious decision on our part. Our working students with their hectic schedules, needed plenty of support from the Department in order to avail of such opportunities. Being flexible enough to manage this, has been a cornerstone of our policy. Even if it meant much behind-the-scenes work, the student experience was always prioritised.



SIKKIM REGIONAL STUDIO
World Cafe Brainstorming
Session in studio

Managing hectic academic schedules within the limited days at our disposal is not easy but I'm sure many of our students who participated look back at these learnings with happiness. A point we have always stressed is that a Master's program, ours included, is more about the transformation of individual students. Earning accolades at various levels from local to global are no doubt important, but we work equally hard with each and every student of ours to help them make that transition. With the hectic lives they lead, managing homes, work-places and a demanding program, the extra support is sometimes more important than the efficient delivery of interesting content, though we do that too.

From participating to organizing, we moved on to establish the Landscape Legacy Project at our department when we were a few months short of turning three. Our first-year students had already demonstrated their organizational skills by organizing 'Abhivyahti', an event held in collaboration with ISOLA Mumbai, involving invited presentations from MLA theses. They also collaborated with the second-year students for the one-day symposium 'Land Legend Place', an event where we created new formats for presentation and our students presented their work, sharing a platform with international experts.

Our publication based on this event is under process. Collaborations and outreach have been a hallmark of our functioning. In the third year of our existence we integrated faculty from the Botany and Geology Department of the renowned St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. We also encourage our students to reach out; in between their second and third years, our first batch voluntarily worked for fifteen days with government and non-profit organizations, as well as with interdisciplinary professional organizations. All these organizations did not normally work with landscape architects and the core idea was to evaluate the difference it would make to them to have a landscape architect on board. With our fourth batch, we introduced a 'Vertical Studio' where four teams across three batches studied the mangrove habitat and interacted virtually with a game designer. Our students, with members of Godrej Mangroves and people from the toy industry, developed four beautiful, enjoyable and informative board games.



..... **VERTICAL STUDIO**
..... Godrej Mangroves visit

VERTICAL STUDIO
Board games review at
Aakar College festival



The events of 2020 with the onslaught of COVID-19 drove us, like everybody else across the globe, out of our classrooms and into the world of remote working. Used as we were to reinventing ourselves, we used the opportunity to participate in an International Super-studio woven around the Green New Deal. We were honoured to have as our reviewer Dianne Jones Allen, founder of Design Jones, Vice-President of Education and Director of the Landscape Architecture Foundation. Representing the University of Mumbai, we were also invited to participate in the Annual DAIDA Awards and were probably the youngest institution invited. Much to our excitement, our student Noopur Sejal made it to the shortlist.

In our new remotely working world we have carried ahead our Landscape Legacy project by soft-launching our YouTube channel with nine stories of Jalkatha, which are stories of landscape-based infrastructures of water from the Indian subcontinent, and we plan on following up with much more. Directed by our authorities in 2020, our faculty team worked energetically and enthusiastically on a brand new two-year full-time Master of Architecture in Landscape course.. This was approved but in the confusion of the pandemic, missed the opportunity for new admissions. Ideally we would have loved to offer options of both full-time and part-time courses, but the University of Mumbai is not ready for this flexibility yet.

A large majority of our students are teachers in architecture schools across Mumbai and we really see this as an additional responsibility, as they groom young architects. In the confused scenario of education all across the country, we do hope that the presence of landscape architecture education would grow in our city of Mumbai and seed a larger community... the Community of Landscape.



| All photographs courtesy of the Author

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PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH OF LANDSCAPE STUDIOS

SCHOOL OF PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE | NEW DELHI

Aarti Grover expands on the various frameworks adopted for curating the design studios of the country's first landscape program to empower young architects with the knowledge and skills to address real-time concerns.

Landscape Architecture education is a complex teaching-learning process entailing the acquisition of subject knowledge and the application of disciplinary values. Landscape Design forms the most crucial component of this course and requires the design studio to be centralised in the field of perception and reflection, making it a place for a meaningful and fulfilling learning experience. This essay provides a descriptive account of the pedagogical approach specific to design studios of Landscape Architecture [LA] at the School of Planning and Architecture [SPA], Delhi, a school of National importance under an Act of Parliament. The Department of Landscape Architecture at SPA is one of the leading programs in the discipline in India. Since the introduction of the course in 1972, the department has contributed substantially and uniquely to the nascent profession. This contribution has been towards the development of academic content as well as the grooming of graduates to take up Landscape Architecture as a full-time profession.

Aspiring to pursue a professional career in Landscape Architecture, hundreds of students from around the country apply in the PG program every year at SPA Delhi. Out of these, only around 28 meritorious ones secure admission into the course which is very carefully organised as four semesters of sequential learning. The central subject in each semester is Landscape Design in which the students undertake a project and through the semester, work towards designing it under the supervision of an experienced faculty panel.

A well-structured approach is adopted, where 'process' is considered more important than the 'product'. Reflective thinking and experiential learning remain the core of education at the department of LA at SPA. The course ensures

that the inherent interdisciplinary nature of landscape architecture is addressed by the inclusion of projects of varying scales relating to environmental aspects, urban design and the conservation of landscapes and heritage. The department works towards providing the students with a strong academic base for them to undertake professional responsibilities in the future.

Learning at SPA is streamlined and scaled by incorporating the principles of horizontal and vertical integration. The theme-based studios in each semester are directly linked to and heavily fed from the theory subjects which form a part of the curriculum allowing horizontal integration at all levels. With each passing semester, the scale and complexity of the design assignments is increased carefully to nurture the students gradually and systematically. The studio briefs in each semester are formulated to require the development and application of at least one technical skill along with its required software and programmes.

The beginning of the journey in the first semester is marked by an **Introductory Studio** where the students get acquainted with the subject by reading about the various constituents of landscape and analysing examples of works by noted landscape professionals around the world. The semester focuses on preparing the students to be able to undertake small scale design exercises which are informed from strong contextual and analytical studies. By the end of this semester, the students are well equipped and thorough in making site inventories, data visualization, analysis, assessment and design of landscape projects of small to medium scale. The major theory subjects in this semester are Natural Processes and Landscape Engineering. The studio problem is so formed that the application of the learnings from these courses is mandatory for the design solutions.

The second-semester studio focuses on the **application of ecological principles** in a wide range of situations and is directed towards understanding and proposing design possibilities in urban open space systems, rural landscapes and heritage and cultural landscapes. The students acquire the knowledge of ecology, plants and planting design through the first and second semester and showcase their understanding of the same in this specific design studio along with fulfilling the other requirements related to the specific exercise.

The third semester comprises of **larger multi-disciplinary problems** seeking solutions from the knowledge and application of overlapping disciplines such as Environmental Planning, Urban Design and Urban Planning. This semester helps the students to learn working as members and leaders of teams in large and multi-disciplinary design teams. Another major pursuit in this semester is the Dissertation, where the students are exposed to the concepts and methods of academic research. This includes the application of tools and techniques like data collection, observational techniques, field surveys, social surveys etc., which are also expected to be applied in the studio exercise.

Learning at SPA is streamlined and scaled by incorporating the principles of horizontal and vertical integration. The theme-based studios in each semester are directly linked to and heavily fed from the theory subjects which form a part of the curriculum allowing horizontal integration at all levels. With each passing semester, the scale and complexity of the design assignments is increased carefully to nurture the students gradually and systematically.

The fourth semester studio work consists of the **Landscape Thesis**, during which the students are expected to choose projects that help them to display their knowledge of all the subjects like natural sciences, socio-cultural aspects, technical know-how, presentation and communication skills acquired through the previous three semesters. In a way, this is the culmination of the course, which showcases the eligibility and preparedness of the students for the professional world.

Children's Park, Aastha Kunj, Delhi

Nestled between the iconic Lotus Temple and the Iskon Temple in Delhi, a part of the Aastha Kunj Park was taken up to create a Children's Park as a part of the Design Studio I. The key objective was to create experiential spaces of play for children of various ages using the technique of earth modulation.

The design was integrated with the existing slopes of the site being used to create interesting play 'equipments'. The unifying concept is Aastha- a space where spirituality and faith meet play. The layout experimented with concepts of the development of spirituality in children as they grow up. The zoning of the design accorded different experiences for each age group and their instincts.



Integrated landscape development of temples in Kottiyoor, Kerala

The vision is to explore the idea of 'landscape in motion', and thereby deriving a resilient scheme for an ephemeral urban scape that will become the eco-cultural marker to the city.

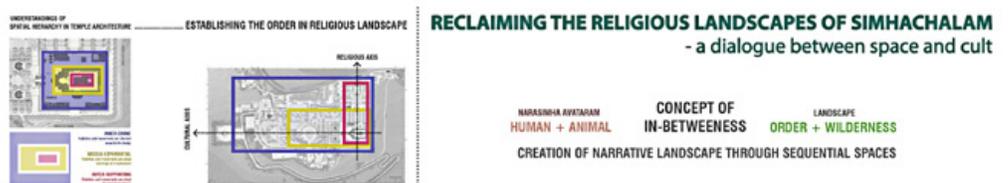
Focus is given in taking forward the idea of two different manifestations of Shiva in Kottiyoor, [a. Swayambhu - describing a self-manifested image of deity which was not made by human hands, but naturally arisen or generated by nature, b. Sthalpita - those that area consecrated by human hands]to enrich the pilgrim journey from realization towards revelation



DESIGN EXERCISES
A composition representative of the Design exercises taken up in the Introductory Studio of the first semester [Arunima Chakravarty] and Landscape Thesis [Akshaya K.] in the fourth semester by 2018-20 batch at Department of LA, SPA Delhi.

ACADEMIC WORK:
SPA Delhi Landscape Design Studio 4
Student: Akshaya Karungadam
(Batch 2018-2020)

The design studios at LA, SPA Delhi are developed encompassing four important aspects namely **framework, fundamentals, facilitation and flexibility**. The most crucial decision in an educational set-up is the designing of appropriate content that ensures the students are exposed to varied theories, philosophies and practices related to the profession. At SPA, the overall syllabus along with the studio exercises is very carefully framed considering the latest developments in the professional environment at the global, national and local levels. Design assignments based on real ongoing projects in public and private sectors are framed as studio



DESIGN THESIS

Captures two of the thesis projects undertaken by Bala Nagendran M. and Kattoju Preethi Vinutnaat the Department in 2020. These thesis works were sent to Young Talent Architecture Award [YTAA] in 2020. They were well-appreciated and have been published in the YTAA website.



exercises and students are provided with opportunities to interact with the stakeholders and officials to understand the requirements and issues of their projects, consequently leading to most appropriate and applicable solutions.

The fact that SPA offers twelve different courses provides ample opportunity to connect and learn from allied disciplines in the school itself while focusing on the specificities of Landscape Architecture. Integrated studios involving other design disciplines at the school, including Landscape, Urban Design, Architectural Conservation and Industrial Design are organised which bring in an element of novelty and the understanding of other epistemological approaches for the same design exercise. Students learn from peers and teachers of other disciplines.

The idea is expanded and manifested at a larger scale as SPA Landscape students share and exchange knowledge by carrying out common studios with many other schools in the country and abroad. These shared studios are a great platform to reach out to other schools and learn from each other's ways of working. Owing to a lustrous legacy of the school, SPA enjoys a prestigious reputation globally. SPA has MoUs with many international universities that provide an opportunity to students to study abroad during the two-year program at the school under student exchange programmes. This has been an enriching experience for the students, helping them to gain international exposure.

Teaching is at its best when optimally buttressed with practical and professional input. The departmental faculty at SPA is involved in Institutional Consultancy where we provide advisory and consultancy services to industry and government. The practical ground experience gained here becomes instrumental in fertilising studio teaching and provides a great possibility for tangible and intangible learning by the students, while engaging with real-life situations.

The **fundamentals** of the subjects taught as theory courses inform the studios, making them application-based, solution-oriented and essentially rooted in research. Core subjects like Natural Sciences, Geology, Planting Design and Theory of Landscape Architecture are taught as combinations of lectures and outdoor visits to encourage experiential learning. The systemic thinking approach which helps in the questioning of existing and possible systems, which may be instrumental in making regions, cities and neighbourhoods better places to live in, is explored.

Over the years, the role of the **faculty** in design courses has been widely discussed and many paradigms have been prevalent in this specific area. At SPA, the studios are coordinated by a studio director who is generally a

The fundamentals of the subjects taught as theory courses inform the studios, making them application-based, solution-oriented and essentially rooted in research. Core subjects like Natural Sciences, Geology, Planting Design and Theory of Landscape Architecture are taught as combinations of lectures and outdoor visits to encourage experiential learning. The systemic thinking approach which helps in the questioning of existing and possible systems, which may be instrumental in making regions, cities and neighbourhoods better places to live in, is explored.

Landscape Education in India is facing a profound transformation in contemporary times. This widespread transition should ideally combine and balance the age-old philosophies and the newer dimensions in the discipline, to address the dichotomies of real and virtual, manual and technological and tangible and intangible. An innovative approach and systemic thinking should pave way for future learning, ensuring the training of sensitive and creative professionals with the desire and capability to create a liveable, sustainable and inclusive built environment.

member of the permanent faculty and is primarily responsible for the efficient and smooth functioning of the studio. This includes organizing the semester's schedule, the assignments, the deliverables and the larger course of activities including site visits, special lectures and interactions with professionals, thereby encouraging lateral learning. Along with the studio director, other internal faculty and a team of experts from the profession engage with the students throughout the semester. The faculty panel constitutes of a balanced mix of academics and practitioners of varied breadths and kinds of experience to facilitate holistic learning for the students.

An ideal design studio sequence provides the connective tissue that brings together, progressively, the many elements of architecture education [Boyer & Mitgang, 1996]. In this space, students spend most of their working time, at times discussing together, but mostly engaged in private, parallel pursuits of the common design task [Schon, 1983]. SPA studios are engrained with a similar ethos enabling an environment which provides enough flexibility within the broader framework of schedules, outputs and deliverables, resulting in out-of-the-box design solutions. The studios are dynamic making room for intense peer reviews and engaging discussions between the students and members of the faculty. These interactions help in honing the technical, social and communication skills of the students.

With changing times and practices, one important domain where SPA has been experimenting is the use of multiple modes of assessment, other than the conventional studio juries. These flexible options of interaction help to create healthy environment for discussion. The mode of assessment is chosen specifically to suit the nature and output of the exercise ranging from presentations, critiques, one-on-one discussions, group discussions, reviews and work sessions. At various stages of a project, students are provided with the opportunity to select the most suitable evaluation method. This pluralistic and inclusive approach brings in a sense of responsibility and has proved to be very effective in the studios.

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All drawings by students of M. Arch. [Landscape Architecture] at School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi

Sandip Patil, Program Chair, Master of Landscape Architecture, CEPT University
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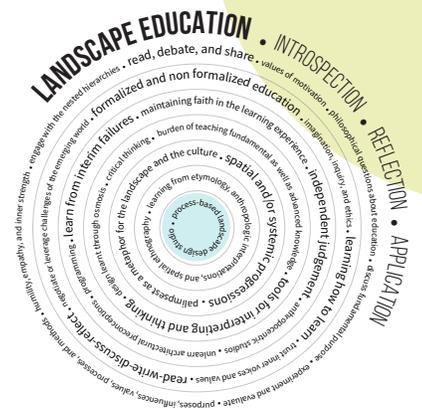
A HERMENEUTIC FRAMEWORK FOR LANDSCAPE STUDIOS

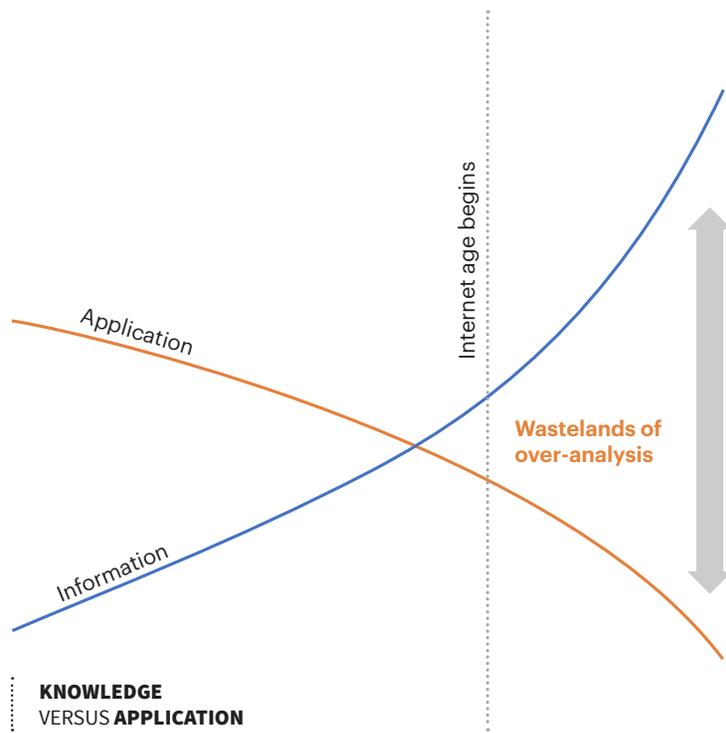
Sandip Patil reflects on some of the significant aspects of landscape education in the country including, a need for robust and dynamic studios based on critical thinking and insightful reflections rather than problem solving exercise, and well thought out frameworks for various studies to take forward these objectives.

Indian landscape education has three handicaps: limiting eligibility to architects in most programs, prejudicing the dialogue in a spatial construct; offering post-graduate degrees, thus carrying the burden of teaching fundamental as well as advanced knowledge; and lastly mimicking a professional studio environment, thereby restricting the thought process to established methods. The first handicap requires a dialogue in another forum, but one can attempt to address the remaining two, empowering future landscape professionals with tools for interpreting and thinking, beyond mundane problem solving.

Charles Correa, in his seminal essay *'Learning from Eklavya'*^[1], questions whether design can be taught, or only learnt through osmosis. He also remarks that encouraging independent judgement while maintaining faith in the learning experience, is difficult to navigate in design studios. Lastly, he critically inquires how many students will design in their practicing life? Hence, should studios aim for objective problem solving or hermeneutic self-learning?

All Indian landscape programs are professional degree programs by intent^[2], prioritizing immediate profession readiness over critical thinking. Studio education must clearly differentiate between apprenticeship based and systematic learning.





Even in the information age, a complete understanding of natural processes eludes us. It is overambitious to expect that students will be able to interpret nature and design with it holistically. It only leads to over-analysis, stifling the space for creative thinking. I believe that no amount of profession-ready design problems can prepare graduates for the real world, but an ability to think and reflect will foster dynamic future-ready professionals.

A few studios aspire to be eco-centric, introducing large scale planning problems based on McHarg’s ecological planning based analytical approach. This process, as applied today, has been seen by some as clinical and deterministic^[5], devaluing human engagement and severely limiting possibilities of a symbiotic relationship between people and place^[4]. I firmly believe that equally relevant, yet symbiotic, design processes can be extracted from the work of Spirn^[5] and Halprin^[6].

On the other hand, most anthropocentric studios devise a fixed ‘problem’ and a ‘site’ each semester, encompassing current projects that Indian landscape architects practice. The design process is simply extracted from architectural education models that are themselves outdated, adding ecological layers from McHarg’s analysis. The process of design may or may not be curated. Usual stages include a zoning, master plan and area design.

In my experience, landscape studios need to address the following through their framework:

Do’s

- Unlearn architectural preconceptions
- Programming
- Learn from interim failures
- Learn the process

Don’ts

- Over analyse
- Synthesise endless data
- Hesitate to design
- Demonstrate an outcome

Most importantly, the studio must facilitate a hermeneutic cycle for self-realization. As David Kelly famously says: a good design process will boil down to a structured approach for synthesizing information, navigating ambiguity, studying apt cases, rapid simulation and iteration, as well as communicating the outcomes^[7]. To achieve this, it is imperative that design studios have a transparent framework.

While Halprin's^[6] intuitive approach seems best suited for infinite dimensional problems of the environment, there remains the need for a system that can help students hone their intuition through a set process. A summary search of the internet on design and thinking will show that our sister design fields have been able to devise a structured approach^[8]. The first step is to accept the presence of wicked problems^[9] that cannot be overtly simplified, and that require innovative experimental approaches^[10]. Architectural design may be space-centric, but landscape design needs to be system-centric, space being only one of the parameters.

Two pertinent models can be applied to a landscape design framework: 'design thinking' which relates to anthropocentric processes; and 'systems thinking' that expands the perspective, with a possibility to include ecological processes^[8]. The double diamond approach in Design Thinking is extremely relevant to anthropocentric landscape design^[11]. Its four stages alternately diverge and converge:

Discover [divergent] > Define [convergent] > Develop [divergent] > Deliver [convergent]

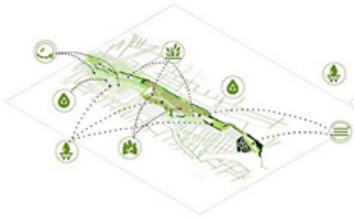
Divergent stages provide several directions and approaches, while convergent stages assimilate through the lens of the primary inquiry. These stages also follow basic guiding principles of Design Thinking:

Empathize > Define > Ideate > Iterate > Simulate

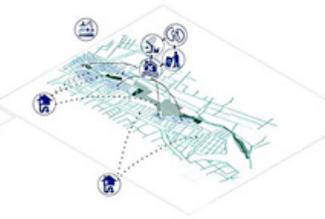
I have experimented with the above toolkit since 2018, resulting in a studio framework that I will now describe. The framework expands design process methodically to inculcate structured exploration and development. It also begins with the 'why', rather than the 'how'; and while its eventual outcome may 'solve' an inquiry, the outcome is that of learning the process by doing. Each stage has a set deliverable that dovetails into the next stage, but also encourages backtracking, reflection, and iteration.

It is necessary to generate curiosity to ignite a passion for the problem. The studio process starts with an inquiry supported by readings that question, reflect as well as oppose the premise. This provides crucial orientation for the student to postpone the 'how' of the project and mull over the 'why'. It cultivates a critical eye that can self-correct moving forward, as well as develop an individual set of questions for the premise. These reflections help generate a vision for the studio inquiry. Study-analysis-application-study form a cycle that allows the student to articulate the study. Guided by the vision and critical eye, the cyclic process strengthens the quality, depth and specificity of design.

Green Sponge Infrastructure



Water Collection & Treatment



Accessibility & Community Development



Intervention: Built & Unbuilt Treatment

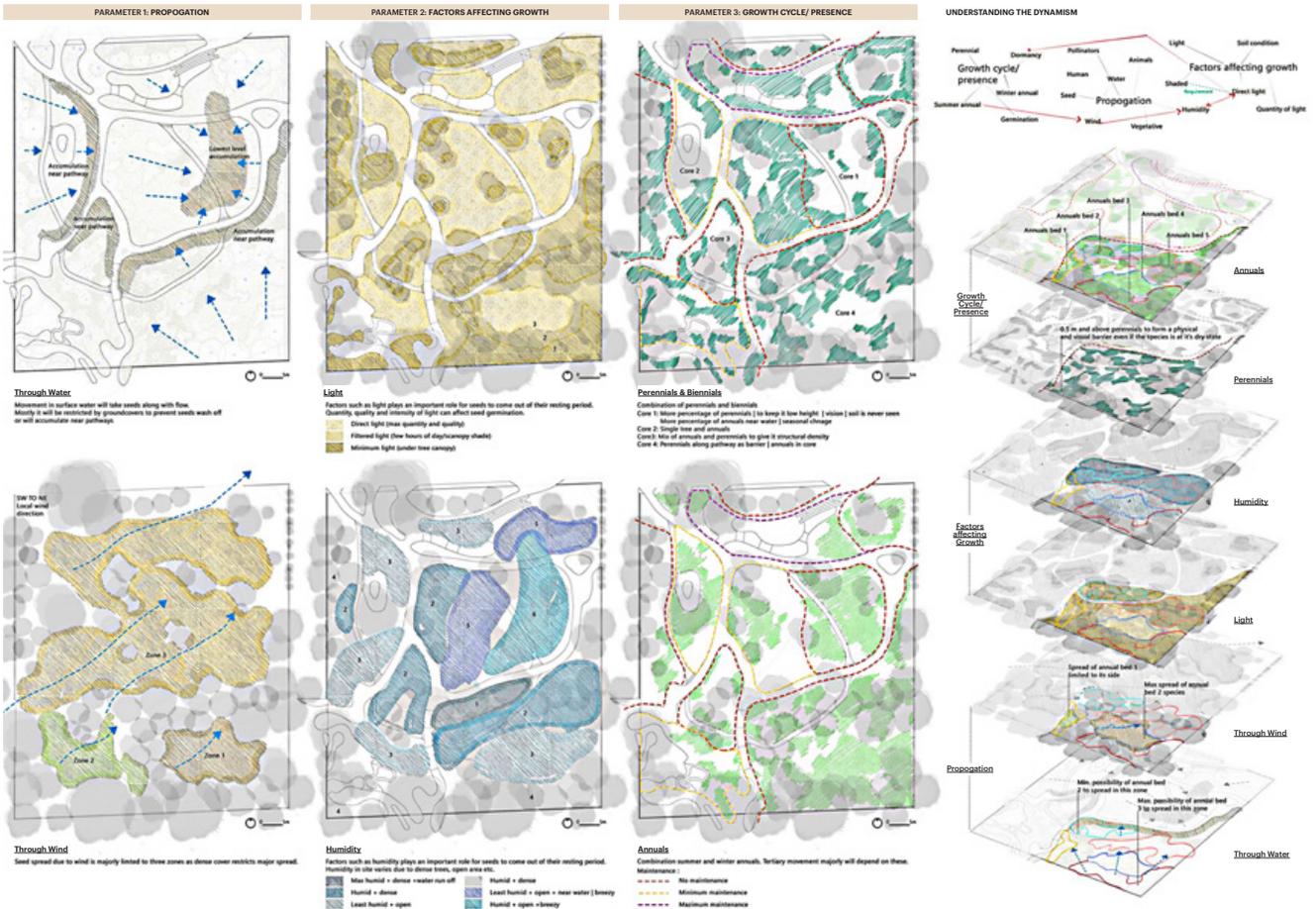


The processes and their components that together help measure the quality of life of the community living on site



SHAPE
DESIGN FRAMEWORK

SIMULATE
PLANT COMPOSITION





The implementation framework includes setting a consistent [usually weekly] pace, designed dynamism that mandates review of previous stages, testing the vision and design against each other periodically and self-correcting as required; as well as frequent external inputs by practitioners from other fields for an inclusive approach and broader outcome. Repeated over consecutive studios, the framework makes students adept at thinking laterally, devising their own approaches to real-life wicked problems. Eventually, this self-created and self-tested framework will help them through their professional life.

IMAGINE
EIDETIC
PHOTOMONTAGE

The success of this framework largely hinges on its structure and transparency, that allows students to observe, modify and personalize. Over the last three years, this process has been applied to a variety of inquiries and ‘projects’, anthropocentric as well as ecology-centric. Student feedback has been encouraging, and it is observed that several students have actively used the framework in studios where it was not applied, thus confirming its self-learning potential.

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- [6] <https://tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/halprinlegacy/sea-ranch.html>
- [7] <https://www.ideo.com/blogs/inspiration/david-kelley-on-the-8-design-abilities-of-creative-problem-solvers>
- [8] <https://uxdesign.cc/why-designers-should-find-the-balance-between-systems-thinking-and-design-thinking-efdb57b9949f>
- [9] http://web.mit.edu/jrankin/www/engin_as_lib_art/Design_thinking.pdf
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- [11] <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/what-framework-innovation-design-councils-evolved-double-diamond>



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PEOPLE PLACE PALIMPSEST

A special research and design studio brings to forefront, much ignored but highly valuable discourse of learning lessons from Indian rural contexts [while studying 11 Indian villages located across different geographical locations] in the realm of the idea of nature conservation through diverse set of cultural values.

Palimpsest “*palin*” + “*psaio*” [“*again I scrape*”]

“A manuscript or piece of writing material on which the original writing has been effaced to make room for later writing but of which traces remain.”

The traditions, cultures and identity of the indigenous landscapes of India are wrapped in many layers through time, place and people. It speaks in many voices, and this polyphony articulates the reciprocity which culture has to its native landscape. An evocative metaphor often employed to capture the spirit of the tradition and this sense of identity is that of a palimpsest, an ancient parchment upon which generation after generation inscribe their messages layer upon layer, and yet no succeeding layer completely erases or hides what was previously written becoming the part of a whole. In this study, we attempted to understand our rural landscapes as palimpsests created by indigenous people, cultures and their traces on land.

Tracing Lines, a process-based landscape design studio, considers the premise of rural Indian contexts and their current complexity through readings of place, people, and their existence and recognizes indigenous rural areas as distinctive cultural landscapes that are deeply connected to their natural processes. Native landscapes hold cultural stories, systems of knowledge, and collective memories that create a strong sense of belonging, pride, and identity in the people. These lands are primarily homes to numerous indigenous people, including forest dwellers, semi-nomadic shepherds, fishermen, and farmers. The way of life of these communities have a direct dependency on the natural setting and its biological diversity.

The approach takes its learning from etymology, anthropologic interpretations, and spatial ethnography and relates it to readings of the layers of landscape, spatial aspects of human settlements, and confirmations that the culture has imprinted on and from the landscape. The study looked at a spatial procedure to read, record, and interpret the relationships people have to their homelands. The process was then advanced to develop landscape visions with strong empathy towards ecology, culture, and community. The resultant landscape inserts knitted within it traditional practices and systems that are unique to the rural contexts studied.

The studio learnings are inspired and supported by the works of Yi-Fu-Tuan and Tim Ingold, but nothing has influenced us like this book titled *Everybody Loves a Good Drought* by P. Sainath. It introduced us to real issues of health, education, displacement, rural debt, litigation, land ownership, identity, water, and drought. Each story depicted a different dimension of struggle that the people in our villages go through. Real and true, the sadness and pain that prevails in these rural areas have disturbed us. These stories opened up a new empathy in us for these people and their fights for sustenance.

Process

The title, *Tracing Lines* is inspired by the definition of traces and lines by British Anthropologist Tim Ingold as mentioned in his book, *Lines - A Brief History*. Tracing here represents the act of recording. Lines represent paths imagined between two points – whether tangible and intangible, finished and unfinished, or of facts and fiction.

The specific title – *People, Place, and Palimpsest* represented the particular process that was followed in the Spring 2021 studio. People indicated the indigenous rural communities, place, homelands, and palimpsest, both as a metaphor and as a tool that analysed landscapes as indispensable backgrounds that bore traces of on-going life experiences and their manifestations on and within them. The studio process was based on the idea of reading and reinterpreting a landscape palimpsest. The sites consisted of 11 villages with very distinct human geographies located across India. The model of palimpsest considered the inevitable multiplicity of these places. Based on this, a visual progression that represented nature-culture associations through horizontal and vertical layers of space and time was derived.

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The studio followed a linear structure, broadly divided into two parts. The first part looked at palimpsest as a metaphor for the landscape and the culture studied and the second part considered the idea of palimpsest as a tool for design thinking.

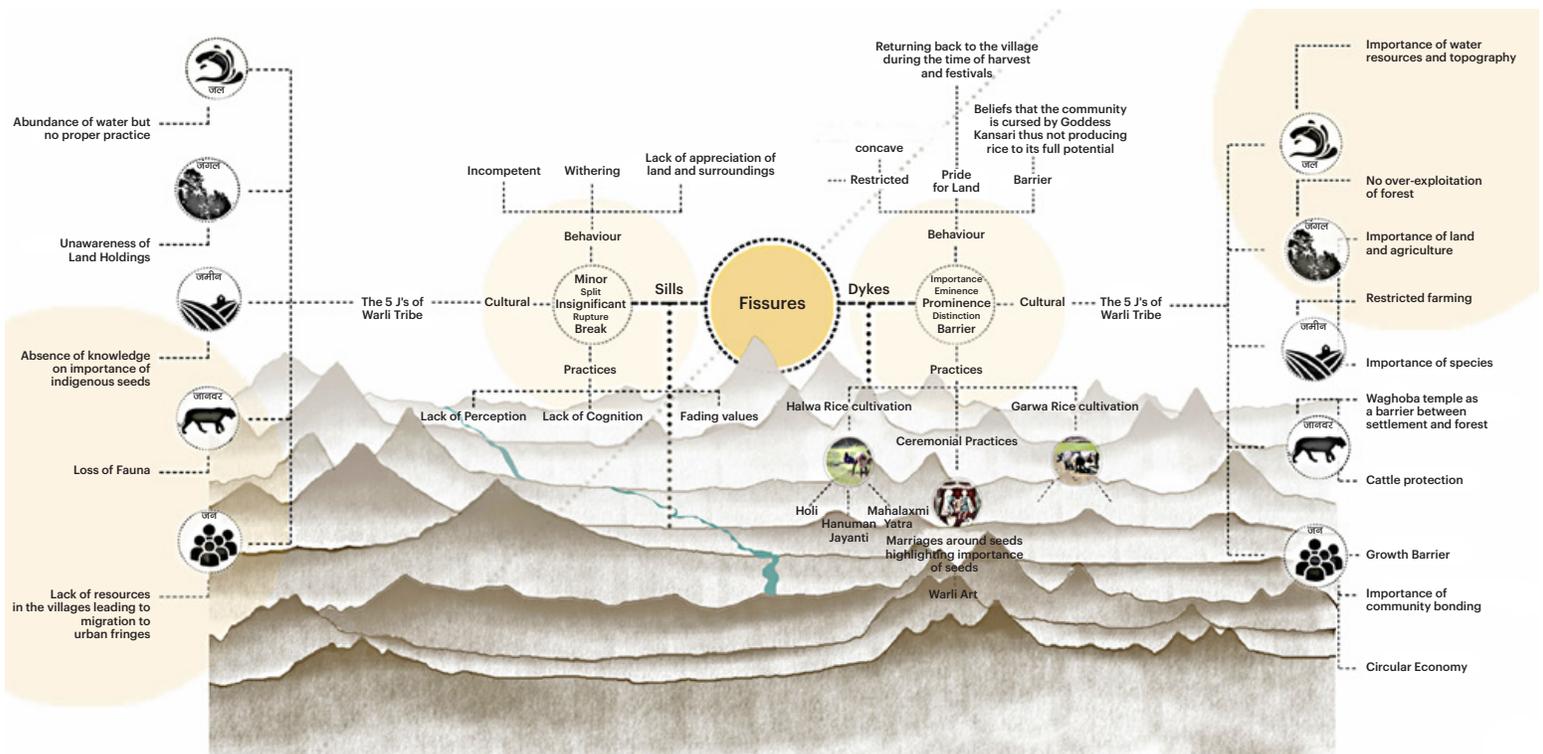
In the first part, a method by cultural geographers of reading a landscape palimpsest as vertical layers of traces, accretions, erasures, anomalies, and re-materialization of newer layers was followed. Traces documented the integral quality of the parental landscape and expressed it through sectional montages, and thematic and interpretative landscape maps. Accretions mapped the embedded connections that culture and its intangible layers have to landscape and tried to identify the erasures in these layers that led to present-day anomalies. This was represented through system diagrams and written narratives. Anomalies identified a change and the missing links associated, the resultant interpretation through an individual narrative led to a motif that helped conceive a conjectural stand for the landscape project. The stage concluded with a vision to re-materialize a new link, catalyst, or surface that retraced people-place associations.

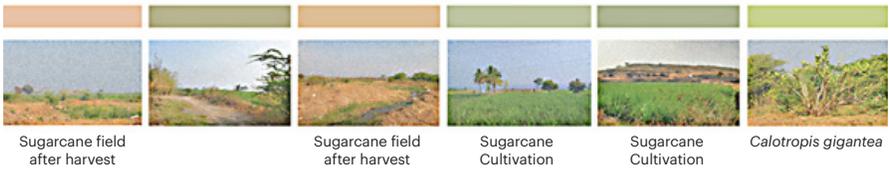
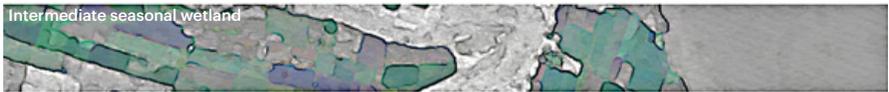
ACCRETIONS AND CULTURAL FISSURES

Accretions and Cultural fissures embedded in a landscape of dykes and sills.

Location: Gethipada, North-Western Ghats [Maharashtra]

DRAWING CREDIT: Drishti Ghosh





TEMPORALNESS AND VARIATIONS
 Tracing the temporalness and variations of a dry-wet landscape.
 Location: Kumbhargaoon, Bhima Basin [Maharashtra]
 DRAWING CREDIT: Sanika Kalantre

**BHURI
AND VARIATIONS**

A story and illustration from the workshop on building a narrative of one's own.

Location: Kathotiya, Valleys of the Vindhyan range [Madhya Pradesh]

DRAWING CREDIT: Sakshi Rashinkar

To look into one's interpretations and to commit to the meanings and concerns that emerge out of it was an important milestone in the studio's learning outcomes. Dr. Gauri Raje, an anthropologist, and an avid storyteller helped us with this. She took us through the process of creating our own story about the place we visited. The spontaneity of the method allowed one to see beyond the obvious and to search one's unthinking mind. This process of writing a story thus created a certain sense of ownership and attachment to the place by making one a partaker in the process. Raw yet genuine, these stories held certain 'motifs' which were vital hints to the next stage. We derived our metaphors from these motifs.



Bhuri

Year 1930

Can we just sit? I've been prowling the whole night. It's not like I am tired, but ! just had my dinner. It's very difficult to get hands on food nowadays you know", ranted out Sher Singh while resting his paws on the forest floor.



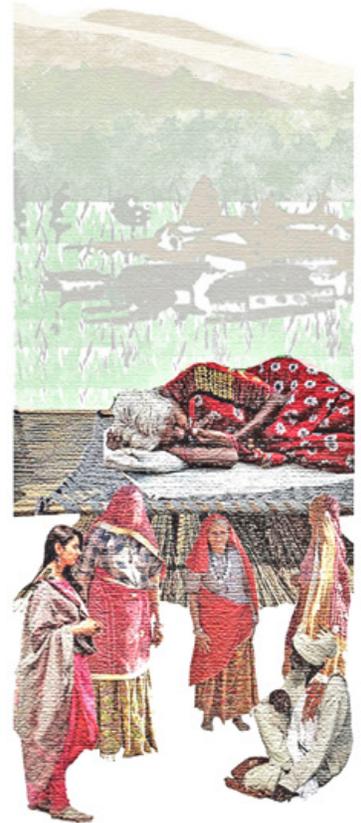
Year 1960

"My children don't know what a bachnag does. My children don't know what a bachnag does", Bhuri just cried uttering these words in front of that broken house.



Year 1990

"Namaste Kaki. Can you please tell me where those ancient rock shelters are? We have come all the way from Bhopal to see those", questioned the man.



Year 2021

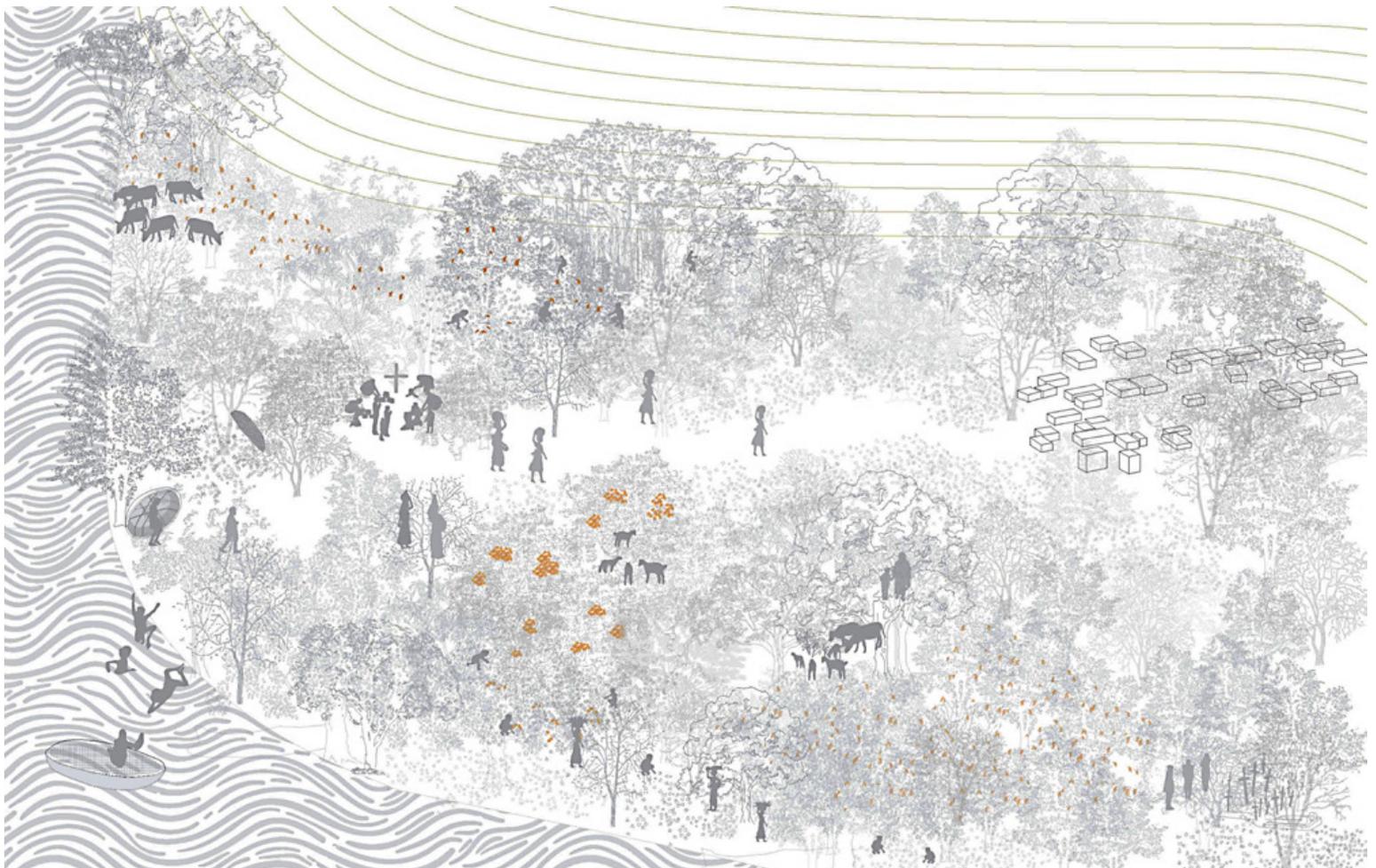
Once again Bhuri went deep into thoughts and uttered these words in her mind, "Maybe I'll come back to the village and live in those dhabas because there is a well life after death. I'll live in the world of ancestors."

To understand the idea of palimpsest as a tool, we referred to the categorization of palimpsests as true, accumulative, spatial, and temporal, and palimpsests of meaning as defined by Geoff Bailey. We took guidance from Dr. Seema Khanwalkar, a social scientist, anthropologist, and expert in cultural semiotics. Her workshop helped us understand the nature of the palimpsest and how we can use it as a tool to think. It decoded the landscapes and the motifs we derived as existing and rewritten scripts that retained traces of time and space. A palimpsest drawing was used to represent this.

A TRUE PALIMPEST

A true palimpsest consisting of the last existing memories of the present generation of people. Location: Billigundala, Foothills of Eastern-Western Ghats [Tamil Nadu]

DRAWING CREDIT: Jegan Muralitharan



**MAPPING
INTERPRETING
IMAGINING**

A progression from mapping landscape grains, interpreting a metaphor and palimpsest and imagining a new landscape grain, Palimpsest – True, Metaphor – Stitches
DRAWING CREDIT: Sanika Kalantre

Based on the metaphor and the palimpsest classification the studio proceeded to develop a plausible program that helped achieve the vision. A series of spatial and/or systemic progressions derived then led to physical landscape inserts.



EXISTING SITE GRAIN

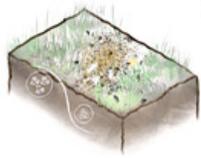


PALIMPEST PLAN
Site grains and associations interpreted as stitches in various layers



IMAGINED LANDSCAPE GRAIN PLAN

TYPES OF NICHES AT VARIOUS SCALE IN VEGETATION



Smallest Scale:
Ground cover, Open Scrub Lands

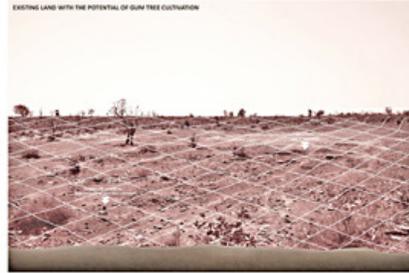


Intermediate Scale:
Transition from ground cover to thick understory

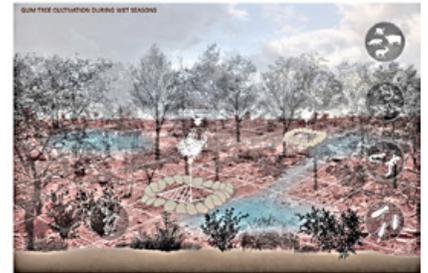
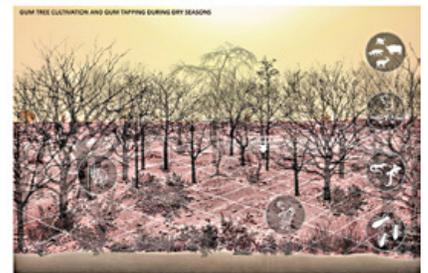


Larger Scale:
Gradient showing ground cover, understory and dense forest in the valleys

EXISTING CONDITIONS



The seasonal variations shown in the cultivated forest areas and associated ecological and cultural activities



TYPES OF NICHES AT VARIOUS SCALE IN TOPOGRAPHY



Smallest Scale:
Contour Trenches, Bunds and Retention walls preventing soil erosion



Intermediate Scale:
Contour Trenches, Bunds and Retention Walls working as firebreaks



Larger Scale:
Levelling land at parcels affected by soil dunes and sedimentation

EXISTING CONDITIONS



The seasonal variations shown in the bunding areas and associated ecological and cultural activities. The strategy to utilize the bunding as live fence is shown.



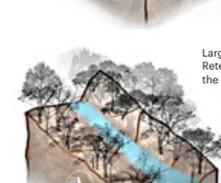
TYPES OF NICHES AT VARIOUS SCALE IN WATER BANK



Smallest Scale:
Natural Run off strips, Moisture capturing areas of forest



Intermediate Scale:
Contour Trenches and Bunds on slopes

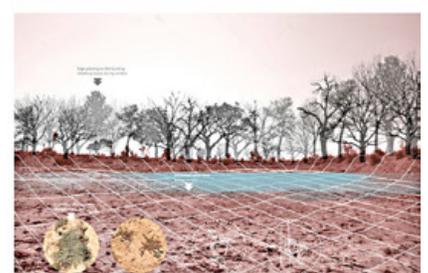


Larger Scale:
Retention Ponds and Check Dams in the valleys

EXISTING CONDITIONS



The seasonal variations happening in the retention ponds and associated ecological and cultural activities



RE-MATERIALIZING
*Re-materializing a new layer,
 Palimpsest – Spatial/ Temporal
 and Metaphor – Niches.*
 Location: Madkheda, Central Highlands
 [Madhya Pradesh]
 DRAWING CREDIT: Selvee Pandoriya

The comfort and quality of life that the home imparts are unparalleled to any materialistic needs. Acknowledging oneself as part of a community is important for one's existence and pride. Hence, approaches to native lands need to be re-examined, reinforced, and imbued with notions of belonging and adequateness of many kinds. Also, the idea of one's belongingness to a place is pertinent to every realm of our existence and within every context that we trace.

Observations

The stories from our sites reminded us of *Malgudi Days* by R.K. Narayan – of lives that seem to have remained the same in nearly all places, of smaller men and means touched at times by the cares of a larger world. They stand at a threshold, facing the raging storms of 'inadequateness' yet holding on to their roots, eventually to either remain or withdraw. We learned that we need to consider both the remaining and the withdrawn.

We questioned the ideas of the rural, as primitive places that are timeless and isolated, seen almost as an antithesis to a constantly changing and heterogeneous urbanity. Though economically and socially overlooked compared to their urban counterparts, the rural is the realm of most rapid and radical change and is an apt testing-bed for the future of the country.

In this search, we also understood the reciprocity between language and landscape, which is hidden in local dialects, place names, prayers to the protective gods, folk songs, and stories. They held a great deal of traditional knowledge and awareness. These language-landscape connections formalized the life of the culture within them and mapped deep time.

The comfort and quality of life that the home imparts are unparalleled to any materialistic needs. Acknowledging oneself as part of a community is important for one's existence and pride. Hence, approaches to native lands need to be re-examined, reinforced, and imbued with notions of belonging and adequateness of many kinds. Also, the idea of one's belongingness to a place is pertinent to every realm of our existence and within every context that we trace.

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All drawings by students of Master's in Landscape Architecture,
CEPT University, Ahmedabad

In contrast to the comparatively self-absorbed field of architecture, landscape architecture is an inclusive profession that looks beyond its immediate site or footprint of intervention. Landscape architects are uniquely grounded in both the natural and social sciences. Our profession may not have all the solutions to the complex and wide-ranging issues facing us, but it can work in a committed manner to coordinate responses and to create a unity-of-purpose. Our world-view of 'betterment for the greater good', where the greater good is both the environment and the people, is compelling and legitimate, and we need to be heard and included.

As a profession, we need to expand our horizons, and make strides in ways to empower citizens to make the right choices and understand their collective responsibility towards our environment. It is our belief that if we can spread this approach, engage in activism and speak this language through young emerging landscape professionals, we can prove a relevance that has long eluded us.

What is the 'mission statement' for our profession?

"Landscape Architecture aims to achieve the well-being of humans as well as other species along with their associated communities, structures, and functions...decisions in Landscape Architecture are taken to integrate and enhance natural and human interactions within the designed and built environments, to positively affect the quality of land, water and air."
[from the ISOLA definition of Landscape Architecture]

The world, as we definitely know now, is full of uncertainties. What remain steadfast and constant, are the doctrines and footprints laid out by the stalwarts of our profession, who have been decrying the state of obliviousness towards our natural environment for the past half-century. Is the education of our young professionals a weak link, hampering their effectiveness in the roles that they must play?

Landscape Architecture Curricula – are we asking the relevant questions, and are we empowering emerging professionals to achieve this list of compelling tasks that are needed to fully embrace our professional mandate?

Knowing is not enough, we must apply; willingness is not enough, we must do.
[Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 18th-century German writer]

As we look at existing LA curricula critically, it may be useful to work backwards and find what our 2-year MLA graduate needs to be equipped with. If our graduates can be called a 'final products', how can we provide them with a more holistic training that is rooted in the tenets of both pedagogy and current relevance?

As a profession, we need to expand our horizons, and make strides in ways to empower citizens to make the right choices and understand their collective responsibility towards our environment. It is our belief that if we can spread this approach, engage in activism and speak this language through young emerging landscape professionals, we can prove a relevance that has long eluded us.

What are we looking at, as our final product/ graduate:

1. ‘The industry-ready product’ view: individuals ready to join the industry, prepared for the job-market for every scale and complexity of intervention?
2. The ‘*Vasudhaiva kutumbukam*’ view: individuals who see the world as a community of living things, connected to each other through natural systems and cultural ties, including synergies with the other professions that intersect with ours?
3. The best of both worlds: industry-ready post-graduates with a world view of culture and ecology, who can help to bring changes in the organizations that they join and interact with, by leaving discernible footprints through their creative work and critical thinking?

This ‘tool-kit’ of these young emerging landscape architects must include real issues to grapple with, and a curriculum rooted in both the here and the now, with an eye to the future and to global-scale issues, problems and opportunities. If the metaphor is to provide “complete nourishment to be able to be healthy and strong to change the world” for our MLA graduate, then this needs to include both “everyday staples” that provide a balanced meal, as well as holistic “complete nourishment”. We can distinguish the intent of our profession and the content of our curricula as:

a. The Intent

The “Big Picture” or the Program Learning Outcomes: the complete nourishment that has noble ideals of intent and overarching values, such as:

- Social justice and democratic ideals, both in design and community building
- Environmental ethics
- Collaborations, partnerships and interdependencies [ecological, professional and social]

b. The Content

The “Details” or the minimum standards: the everyday staples that we must impart, such as:

- **Environmental Factors** – concerning the well-being of our ecosystem/ planet by understanding the natural sciences
- **Social Factors** – concerning the well-being of all users, engaging sociological and psychological concerns
- **Theory and Method** – the nuts and bolts of the profession, including ideals of art and aesthetics
- **Details of Design** – the how-to-put-it-together for integration into the larger whole
- **Design** – exploring the pedagogical potential of the design studio as a site of research, visionary speculation and critical inquiry that synthesizes the rest of our everyday staples for a wholesome platter

A DECLARATION OF CONCERN

In June, 1966, a group of landscape architects who shared a concern for the quality of the American environment and its future were assembled in Philadelphia by the Landscape Architecture Foundation. This was their declaration.

We urge a new, collaborative effort to improve the American environment and to train a new generation of Americans equipped by education, inspiring example and improved organizations to help create that environment.

A sense of crisis has brought us together. What is merely offensive or disturbing today threatens life itself tomorrow. We are concerned over misuse of the environment and development which has lost all contact with the basic processes of nature. Lake Erie is becoming septic, New York City is short of water, the Delaware River is infused with salt, the Potomac River with sewage and silt. Air is polluted in major cities and their citizens breathe and see with difficulty. Most urban Americans are being separated from visual and physical contact with nature in any form. All too soon life in such polluted environments will be the national human experience.

There is no “single solution” but groups of solutions carefully related one to another. There is no one-shot cure, nor single-purpose panacea, but the need for collaborative solutions. A key to solving the environmental crisis comes from the field of landscape architecture, a profession dealing with the interdependence of environmental processes.

Man is not free of nature’s demands, but becomes more dependent upon nature. Natural resources are where they are — not where we wish them to be. Those who plan for the future must understand natural resources and processes. These are the basis of life and the prerequisite for planning the good life. They must know geology, physiography, climatology, ecology to know why the world’s physical features are where they are; and why plants, animals and man flourish in some places and not in others. Once they understand landscape capabilities — the “where” and “why” of environment, the determinants of change — they can then interpret the landscape correctly. Only then are they qualified to plan and design the environment.

Like the architect, the landscape architect practices an historic art. However, the landscape architect is uniquely rooted in the natural sciences. He is essential in maintaining the vital connection between man and nature.

The demand for better resource planning and design is expanding... Today’s demands require far more landscape architects than are available. Schools are expanding, as are the ranks of practitioners, but they are stretched thin. The gap between demand and supply widens. The environment is being built hastily and too often without such professional advice or help. In the process, far too much is damaged beyond recall.

The solution of the environmental crisis demands the skills of many professions. So that the landscape architects may make their vital contribution, we propose a four-point program to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice: [1] **recruitment**, [2] **education**, [3] **research** and [4] **a nationwide system for communicating the results of research, example and good practice**. Its purpose is to multiply the effectiveness of the limited number of landscape architects, while producing more trained people to cope with the future environment.

We pledge our services. We seek help from those who share our concern.

Campbell Miller
Grady Clay
Ian L. McHarg
Charles R. Hammond
George E. Patton
John O. Simonds

CREDIT: Landscape Architecture Foundation
<https://www.lafoundation.org/>

Some areas of attention are essential while working on this ‘complete’ landscape architecture graduate’s education:

- a. A focus on the quality of design problems, rather than the quantity. Slow design is emerging as a valuable design paradigm where we are forced to transparently and diligently study, reflect on and extrapolate every design decision/ choice/ alternative on how the project will impact every stakeholder, where efficiency does not mean speed or lack of consideration. Slow design can be alternatively be termed as sustainable design where the ethics of space, place, culture, exploitation, consumption, life-cycles, all become values to uphold or dismiss.
- b. Dialogue, debate and discussion between faculty and students [the ‘*guide on the side*’ rather than the ‘*sage on the stage*’]. The diversity of students and the knowledge and experiences they bring to the class room enrich us all with sensibilities that are very personal and help a more holistic world-view, and must be encouraged.
- c. Larger issues of society, anthropology and psychology, emotional quotients [softer values of design], philosophy and ethics, fine arts, poetry and literature need to be studied/included for students to understand that they are functioning with and not oblivious to, the existing body of knowledge of our history of habitation, culture and thought.
- d. Immersive learning happens when larger issues are truly connected with real issues, actual sites and real people; When disparate subjects fail to come together to solve a real issue, learning is weakened, because it remains theoretical or at best, indicative of one point of view.
- e. Curriculum needs to be student driven – not teacher-centric. There seem to be distinct typology of thesis subjects the students of MLA choose to take on as their culminating studio work in the two-year graduate degree programs – some of the common themes are–water ecology, degraded landscapes [needing restoration and remediation], urban landscapes, cultural [historical] landscapes – our interests needs to be expansive enough to prove our relevance beyond the ‘paving’ and ‘planting’.
- f. Inclusivity, cooperation and connections to larger groups in academia and society need to be the touchstone of all curricula. Involving the client and every stakeholder in the design process is gaining momentum, but it often ignores those without with the greatest need, but without a voice or reach.
- g. We must engage our students’ hearts and minds for them to feel invested and bring the magic! Without personal convictions, the profession stagnates, becomes insular and self-absorbed.

The mandate for our profession and the education of our emerging young professionals can not be any clearer. Expanding our horizons from where we have been “boxed-in” or limited is crucial in our noble profession, to showcase our worth. We need to embrace the precept of solving issues beyond our geographical sites and our paying clients, and this needs to start during our two year graduate degree. Our graduate LA students need to be “complete” professionals with value-sets that include care, commitment and purpose to improve the experience of all of our Earths’ inhabitants; every human, every creature, every plant and animal.

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ADVANCEMENT THROUGH ALUMNI COLLABORATION

Alumni have a great role to play in nurturing the academic tradition of an institution. An invaluable asset, the alumni play an important role in carrying forward and disseminating the institution's core mission principles and bringing in new opportunities to promote engagement between institution and rest of the world. **Prashanta Bhat** and **Keith Christensen** share their experience of being members of the Advancement Board of landscape architecture department at Utah State University.

The Advancement Board for the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning [LAEP] at Utah State University [USU] was first proposed in 1973 by Prof. Richard Toth, then the LAEP Department Head, as an outside advisory group known as the LAEP Council “to give greater exposure of the department’s activity to various related individuals and agencies within the inter mountain area” of the United States and “act as a sounding board for future areas of content and development which the department wishes to work toward.” He envisaged a team numbering eight individuals – mostly alumni practitioners and non-alumni agency representatives that would share the department’s vision and help it achieve its goals. LAEP Council positions were honorary and by invitation, the Council’s role was advisory only, and the Council met for half a day each year. Engagement of the Council varied over the years and lapsed into inactivity during the late 1980s.

The Council was reconstituted under the leadership of Department Head Karen Hanna in 2000 as the LAEP Advisory Board. The stated purpose of the Advisory Board was to give advice, to listen to the concerns of the program faculty, and to help the program address issues and needs. The size of the board was significantly increased from eight to forty, with two-day meetings originally scheduled twice per year. Membership was expanded nationally and internationally, and was comprised of influential alumni, professionals and academics who had been nominated by peers. The Board members were organized in individual committees and worked throughout the year toward specific goals and priorities for advancing LAEP.

PREVIOUS PAGE |

TEAMWORK

A collaborative studio exercise at the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning [LAEP] at Utah State University [USU]



The members of this revitalized Advisory Board were honoured to be invited to ‘advise’ the department and felt it would be their way to give back to the department that had given them so much. Many a times, under the large umbrella of a university, departments have had to wait for their turn to be heard. But, at Utah State University, when the Advisory Board spoke, the university officials were receptive to suggestions from alumni for improvement of the department.

The Board was then divided into various committees that looked at Education, Technology, Finances, Student Employment, etc. Initially, I [*Prashanta Bhat*] was in the Technology Committee which discussed how to improve the technological aspects. Topics on our meeting agenda ranged from wiring the studios for internet, to when to introduce computers to students.

Board members would arrive on a Thursday evening for a social get together, and the actual meetings would be Friday and Saturday. After an initial group meeting to discuss overall issues, the board would then break into their individual working groups. We would then all reconvene to meet students in the studio. The culmination would be a group meeting again to discuss the way forward.

CAMPUS

Aerial view of Utah State University campus, Logan, Utah. Originally founded in 1888 as the Agricultural College of Utah as the state’s land-grant institution, it became Utah State University in 1957.

The board meetings were also a way to visit the department again – filled with the nostalgia of walking the corridors and visiting the studios where we had spent many an ‘all-nighter’. Talking to the students would be energizing – and discussing the latest projects in the studios would be inspiring. The students too, would take the opportunity of organizing a talk as part of the LAEP Speaker Series during this time. Sometimes it would be a Board member who would be the speaker, at other times it would be some other distinguished speaker. The Advancement Board meeting weekends were always something we looked forward to.

In 2010, the name of the Board was changed from Advisory Board to Advancement Board, reflecting the broader charge of the group to assist the department in moving forward to meet the numerous challenges that they help to identify. Board members provide substantial support to the department through personal donations, resources they garner from private and corporate support, and by providing professional expertise in the studio during critiques or special projects. The generous support of the LAEP Advancement Board has led to numerous significant improvements in LAEP facilities and student’s opportunities. In addition, presently LAEP Advancement Board members, who continue to be nominated by their peers currently serving on the Board, contribute membership dues that are used to support the advancement of LAEP initiatives.

to advise the program on matters related to trends in the profession, alumni relations, curriculum, enrollment, recruiting, graduates, placement, professional registration, research, outreach, and other areas as needed.

to assist the department in securing additional resources, such as donations toward endowments and scholarships.

to serve as a voice representing the program before the university, public, and practice.

The purpose of the Advancement Board has continued to evolve to meet the current needs of the LAEP department, but remain very similar to the original 1973 intentions:

1. to advise the program on matters related to trends in the profession, alumni relations, curriculum, enrollment, recruiting, graduates, placement, professional registration, research, outreach, and other areas as needed.
2. to assist the department in securing additional resources, such as donations toward endowments and scholarships.
3. to serve as a voice representing the program before the university, public, and practice.

The Board operates under adopted by-laws which may be found at <https://laep.usu.edu/alumni/advancement-board/index>, and is overseen by an elected chair and vice-chair. The Board meets one or two times each year and continued to do so virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are currently three standing committees in the Board:

1. The Development committee focuses on securing the resources necessary to support the objectives and goals of both the LAEP department and the Board.
2. The Recruitment committee pursues initiatives to recruit students into LAEP’s degree programs, as well as identifying and inviting new Board members.
3. The Placement committee is focused on connecting students with internship opportunities during their studies and professional positions after they graduate.



The Board has been instrumental in securing the Don Ensign Design Excellence endowment among others, supporting the remodeling of LAEP studio spaces with the latest technologies and practice-type work spaces, engaging with students in the process of securing internships and permanent employment, and advising LAEP regarding the latest trends in professional practice.

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STUDIOS
*Studios at LAEP at
 Utah State University*

To give further perspective to the Board’s success, it is rare for departments at USU to have alumni boards. Moreover, the Advancement Board is one of the few such entities at USU to consistently infuse substantial private funds into an academic unit. It is also likely that the Board is among the most long-standing at the university.

[*Prashanta Bhat*]: Personally for me, it has been rewarding to be in the Board. On an emotional level, I have enjoyed being ‘back home’ in Logan, Utah where I spent my formative years, and which was really a home to me. Spending time with similar minded faculty and other board members too has been a learning experience: in the past year and a half, the Board meetings have started with understanding how the members’ offices have been coping and dealing with Covid, and the dynamics of the pandemic on our profession. My visits to Board meetings have allowed me to interact with students, and many students have been interested to intern in my office. Over the years my firm has hosted several interns whose presence is appreciated by my colleagues as well. Apart from the cultural exchange, the students bring a fresh perspective to the office — their approach to design, presentation techniques and their communication abilities have had positive influences on the younger teammates in my office.

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All photographs credits: LAEP, USU

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EDUCATION BEYOND BOUNDARIES

CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES
for COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The article presents a case study of a joint studio between two landscape programs located thousands of miles apart in two completely different cultural contexts. Collaborative learnings for the students of anew set of knowledge about local nature and culture and related aspects, resource sharing and skill-building, point to other possibilities of adopting these methods in the future for education with a global outlook.

“**R**edesigning an education system is a relatively easy exercise. Changing one’s own method of teaching, especially when it has been acclaimed as successful by all the old standards, is very much harder.”

— Kenneth A. Bruffee, 1984

Unique global circumstances in the history of human civilization were created by Covid-19, impacting everyone’s well-being. As professionals, the pandemic limited us to our immediate surroundings for more than a year, affected our thinking for space-making, made us long for connections, and had us reflecting on how we can inhabit a world in the post-Covid environment.

As learners and educators, we visit libraries and classrooms to gain knowledge. We travel to project sites to visually and emotionally connect with them. With the pandemic, we shifted to the online education mode, using existing learning platforms and exploring the newly evolving creative-interactive virtual learning tools such as *Zoom*, *Google Meet*, *MS Teams*, *White Board*, and *Concept Board*. Students and faculty became collaborators in this innovative process of learning.

While there is no replacement for face-to-face interactions, these exploratory journeys opened anew path to collaborations with institutions across the globe, for academic interactions and learning, beyond the physical boundaries of institutes. This concept of *'education beyond boundaries'* provided the best learning opportunity to dive into. In mid-2020, two institutions, Utah State University, Logan, USA and BNCA, Pune, India, came together online, with students of architecture, landscape architecture and allied architecture disciplines, collaborating on the theme of *'Health and Well-being of Cities,'* focusing on the city of Pune.

New ways of learning: A collaborative approach

From philosophy to computer science to design practice and education, there has recently been a greater acknowledgement of the benefits of collaborative learning. For example, Roberts [2005] deliberates on the multi-fold benefits of online collaborative learning approach, promoting critical thinking skills and active learning in students. He highlights the social benefits such as developing a social support system for students, establishing an atmosphere of co-operation, and building diversity for understanding others. Furthermore, he underscores the psychological benefits such as an increase in students' self-esteem and developing positive attitudes towards teachers.

A 2020 urban design studio at Utah State University, USA embraced international collaboration with Dr. B.N. College of Architecture for Women, Pune. This real-time collaboration was facilitated by relationships established and groundwork prepared by Caroline Lavoie, Professor at USU, and Swati Sahasrabudhe, Department Head at BNCA. 55 Indian students from 4 different departments [Digital Architecture, Environmental Architecture, and Landscape Architecture and Architecture - B.Arch] joined forces with 27 students from USU to focus on a project inventory and an analysis of nine districts encompassing 1,000 acres at the core of the city. The collaborative spirit between two vastly different cultures focused on the shared human need for connecting people to the functions and rhythms of their surrounding natural systems.

We evolved a four-fold collaborative learning approach, calling it as the **“WITS Collaborative Learning Approach”** emphasizing the following:

1. **Widening the possibilities of educative interaction** through involvement of students and faculty from geographically and culturally distant countries
2. **Interdisciplinary Interaction** between faculty, experts and students from across departments and around the world
3. **Team Interactions** amongst teams [9 teams] through constant real-time communication [over 11.5 hours of time zone difference]
4. **Sharing of knowledge resources and skill building** through exchange of expertise by the faculty and guidance from international mentors, building software skills with *Rhino* and *Grasshopper* training, and enhancing creative and critical thinking skills

The ‘WITS Collaborative Learning Approach’ led to innovative working strategies of learning from peers, from experts belonging to various disciplines and from the cross-cultural contexts within hybrid teams from both institutions. We first created a comprehensive online database prior to the collaborative workshop and developed a detailed time-schedule with steps for efficiently working together, given the limitations of available technology and the difference in time zones. Careful use of virtual tools helped its success: *Zoom* as a virtual meeting platform with breakout rooms and multiple accounts for presentations, discussions; *Concept Board* for collaborative designing and critiques/reviews with both asynchronous and synchronous sessions; and *Google Drive* for sharing data, faculty presentations, files, base maps, and images.

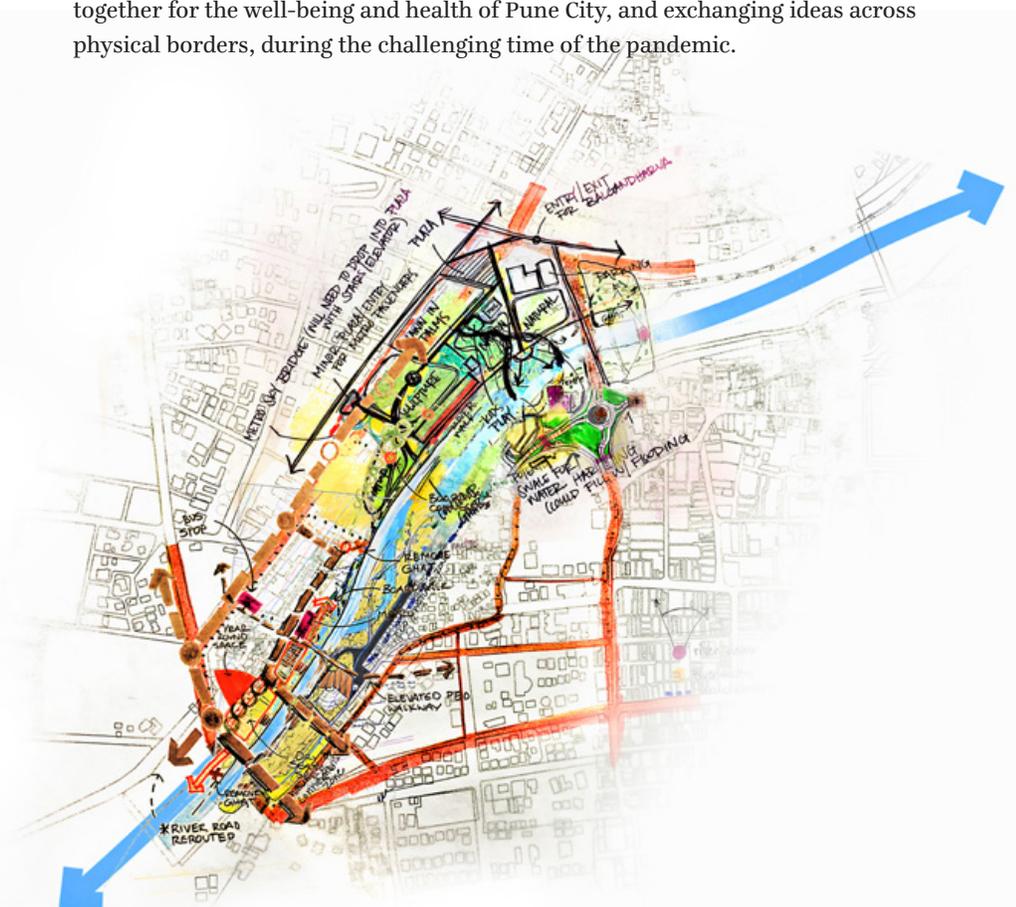
For USU students, this was a semester-long process, while BNCA students collaborated for a month, including an intense two-week workshop. This collaboration allowed Utah students to better understand urban design in another culture. They learned of the place and its history, and the ways of living and approaching design in India. For BNCA students, faculty, and mentors, the project provided an opportunity for a fresh look at the essential issues affecting their beloved city. The result was an urban design vision for eight sub-districts in the selected urban zone along the river, embracing growth and transportation upgrades and re-establishing the connections of the River Mutha to the dynamic city of Pune, India.

This interdisciplinary workshop was one of the first of its kind, with a large numbers of students and mentors of varied disciplines, thinking and designing together for the well-being and health of Pune City, and exchanging ideas across physical borders, during the challenging time of the pandemic.

COLLECTIVE DESIGN DECISIONS

Using *Concept Board* platform for the ‘collaborative process sketch,’ collective design decisions revolve around the river, transportation corridors, and crossings as a basis to connect all the sub-districts

IMAGE CREDIT: Danyel Mezzanatto



Health, well-being and urbanscapes as a theme

Located on the eastern edge of the Western Ghats Mountains, between the mountains and the out-wash plain, Pune is known both for the beauty of its mountains, hills, and rivers, and for its academies and universities. Climate change and a history of flooding mandated that students view the river as a low-functioning natural system. Some of the main issues discovered through the process of analyses were the increased pollution and flooding of the River Mutha, the loss of biodiversity and habitat, the crumbling infrastructure surrounding the river, and the pressure of the extension of the new metro line along the floodplain of the river.

The workshop entitled *'Embracing the River Mutha - An Urban Design Study for Sustainable Futures'* evolved a structure "Health Wheel of the City" which dovetailed nine aspects of the health of the River with the health of the city. The workshop demonstrated how design professionals and academicians from various disciplines come together and use design as a very effective tool to rejuvenate and positively transform a city, respecting old assets of a neighbourhood, while proposing new inserts in the old urban morphologies. Each team defined how those nine attributes of the 'City's Health Wheel' [framework derived by the authors as part of the methodology for the project] related to their specific sub-district: **1. People/Stakeholders, 2. Transports/Connections, 3. History & Culture, 4. Architecture/Built, 5. Natural Environment, 6. Urban Parks, 7. Land Use Pattern, 8. Economy, and 9. River.**

The students explored the possibilities of accommodating transformations in the district, visualizing a healthy city using those attributes. The studio culminated in design proposals for the Mutha Riverfront, a pedestrian-friendly, safe environment for people and their movement across the river, connecting old and new sub-districts. The proposals emphasized the creation of educative environments for children, energy efficient strategies for liveable architecture, the efficient use of available incidental spaces, streets and parks; they also promoted mixed land use and better connections with metro corridors and other modes of transportation. Furthermore, they introduced the revitalization of the cultural identity of Pune and the ecological identity of the River Mutha.

This collaboration was meaningful with respect to the future health of Pune city and was successful in generating hope in many young minds while overcoming the challenges of the pandemic. Students and faculty noted the advantages and inclusivity of the new virtual tools for interaction, *"Experiencing the ever-expanding possibilities for collaborative learning crossing the physical and national borders! New virtual tools for learning and interaction, possibility of incorporating digital tools as a skill-set and continued learning for all."*

Perhaps one student sums up the experience the best: *"Working together with people from the other side of the world and collaboration, though difficult, was very rewarding."*

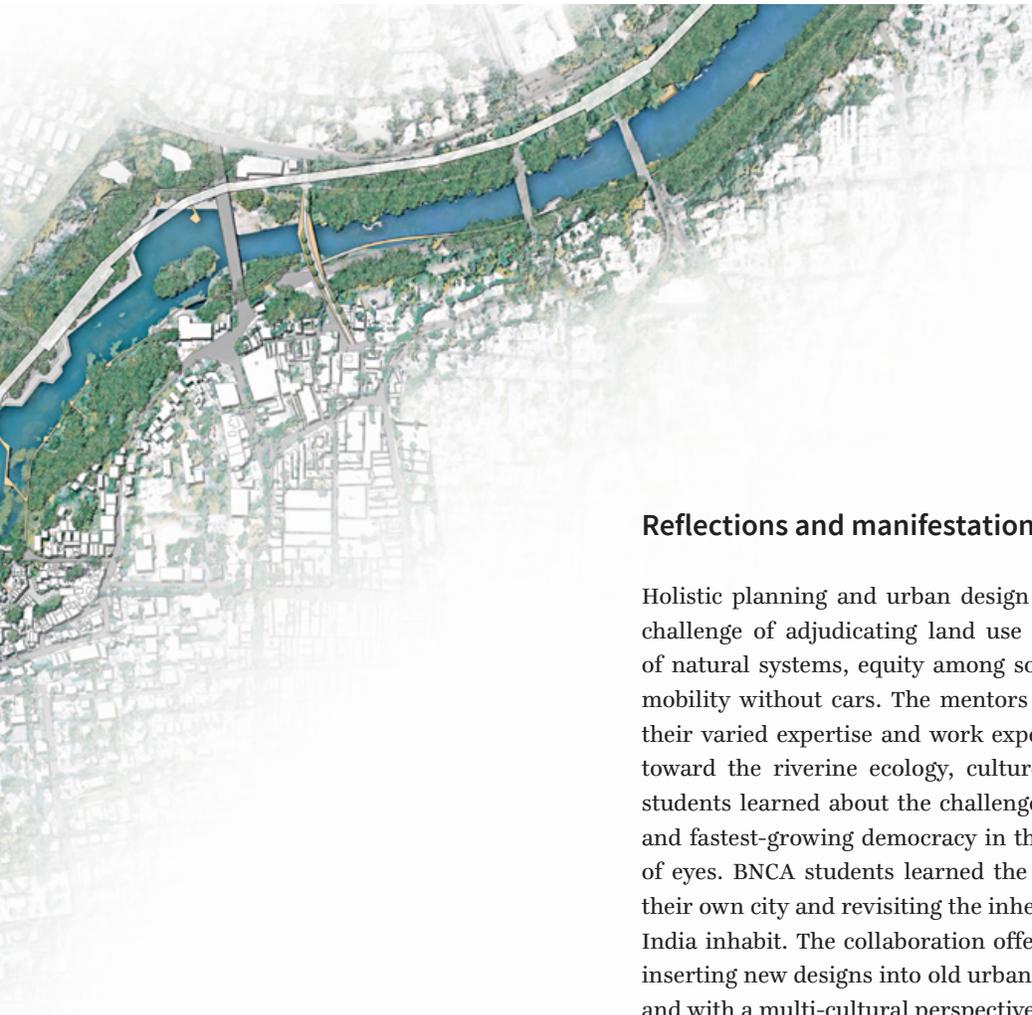
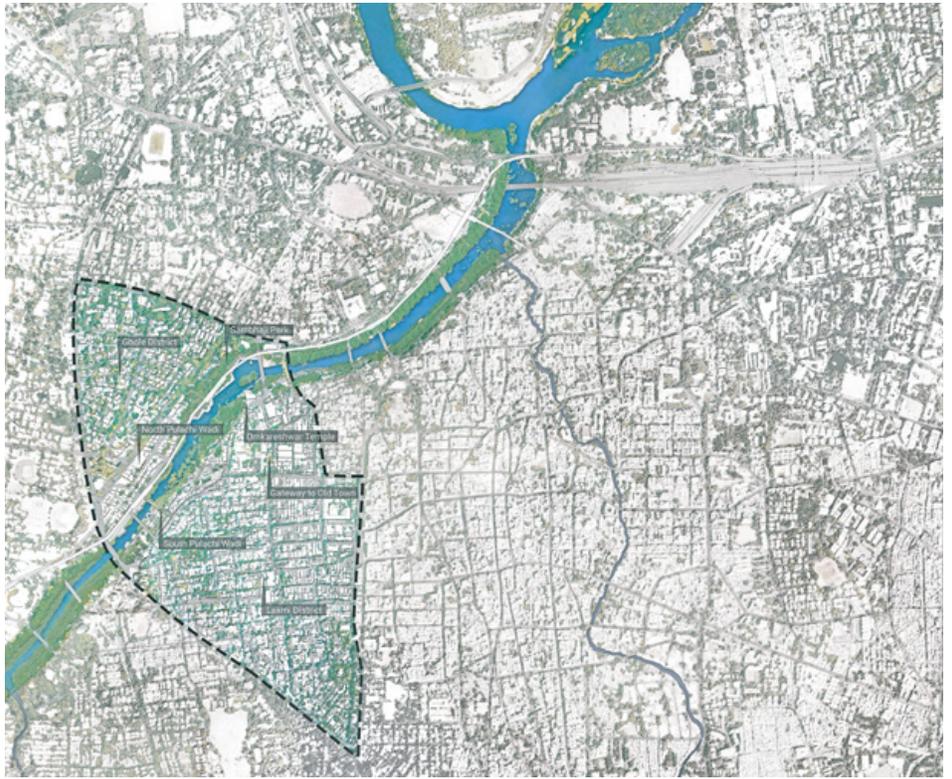


**THE RIVER MUTHA
AND THE SUB-DISTRICTS**

*RIGHT: The master plan illustrates
the seamless connections between
each team's design.*

*BELOW: Proposed connections
along and across the River Mutha*

IMAGES CREDIT: Danyel Mezzanatto



Reflections and manifestations

Holistic planning and urban design in contemporary India offer the unique challenge of adjudicating land use and growth in balance with restoration of natural systems, equity among society, preservation of sacred places, and mobility without cars. The mentors exchanged their wisdom with respect to their varied expertise and work experiences, guiding students to be sensitive toward the riverine ecology, culture and toward the urban challenges. US students learned about the challenges and opportunities in India, the largest and fastest-growing democracy in the world. In turn, they offered a fresh set of eyes. BNCA students learned the cross-cultural perspectives of looking at their own city and revisiting the inherent values that the urban open spaces in India inhabit. The collaboration offered new insights to them with respect to inserting new designs into old urban morphologies in a more justified manner and with a multi-cultural perspective.



THE RIVER CONNECTIONS
Proposed connections and public access from community life to the River
 IMAGE CREDIT: Josh Quigley

One might consider meaningful ‘place-making’ in the context of India. The USU students could not help but be impressed by the special and intense experience of this place, even without setting foot in Pune. The essence of Indian place-making is unmistakably born of the enormity and challenge of everyday life for everyday Indians. Stewardship gives way to practical common-sense. Spirituality abounds within the intensity of these places; the students from the U.S. learned that spirituality is an essential part of place-making in India. The students from India learned how one can embed a sense of order and discipline without losing the essence of the social layers of culture and spirituality of these urban riverine open spaces, going beyond ecological and functional sustenance.

Embracing the ‘WITS Collaborative Learning Approach’ for design education and ‘place-making,’ while challenging accepted teaching-learning practices, allows for the exploration of new paths to enrich those practices.

Education is not a process of assimilating ‘the truth’ but a process of learning to ‘take a hand in what is going on’ by joining ‘the conversation of mankind.’
 — Kenneth A. Bruffee, 1984



Acknowledgements

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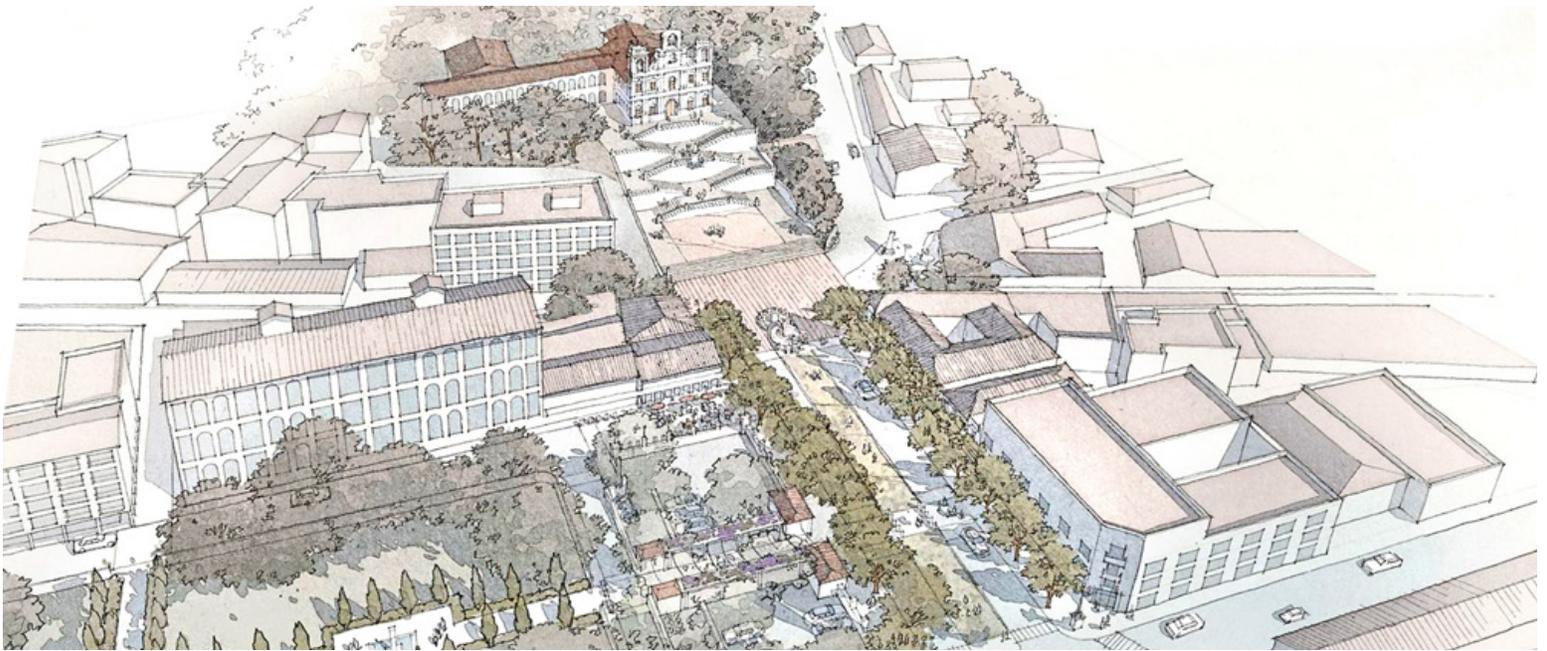
Note

The work received two awards: an ‘Honour Award’ and an ‘Award of Excellence’ by State of Utah ASLA [American Society of Landscape Architects] in the category – Student Collaboration and Urban Design 2021

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FOLLOWING PAGE |
PANAJI CHURCH SQUARE
UPGRADATION, PANAJI, GOA
 DESIGN: *Vinayak Bharme*
 & *Siddha Sardessai*



URBANISM

TALKING URBANISM

IN CONVERSATION WITH **VINAYAK BHARNE**

Urban design and city planning practitioner *Vinayak Bharne* is also an inter-disciplinary faculty member at the University of South California, teaching simultaneously in the graduate architecture, landscape architecture, and heritage conservation programs. He is the Principal and Director of Design of the noted Los Angeles firm, *Moule & Polyzoides*, Director of the India-Netherlands-based knowledge platform, *My Liveable City*, and the author/ editor of numerous books including the forthcoming *Urbanism Beyond 2020*. In a conversation, Vinayak shares his experiences and thoughts on some aspects of urbanism.



The Journey

My career path as an urbanist was defined through by presence of four individuals. In my third year of architecture school in Goa, I met the eminent architect Bruno Dias Souza, a former student of Josep Lluís Sert at Harvard in the 50s, who had worked as a UNESCO consultant in Africa and Europe. I worked in his office for three years, and he was the first person who encouraged me to understand the link between architecture and urban design. Then, in graduate school in the US, one of my professors was Robert Harris, former Dean of the architecture school at the University of Oregon Eugene, where he had collaborated with Christopher Alexander on the famous Oregon Experiment project. He solidified my intellectual foundations on urbanism and later invited me to teach. Another of my professors, Tridib Banerjee, a protégé of Kevin Lynch at MIT, encouraged me to take on research and writing on non-Western cities. And finally, yet another professor, the noted urbanist Stefanos Polyzoides, one of the founders of the New Urbanism movement, invited me to join his influential firm, where I am Principal today. Through these four very different mentors, my aspirations of becoming an architect focused on buildings, morphed into those of an urbanist focused on cities. Just being in their presence helped me realize that designing, teaching, lecturing, writing were different facets of the same thing.

A Global Practitioner

I have learnt that “practice” is a multi-faceted engagement. You can practice by having clients – and meeting their deadlines and budgets. By being a professor – creating propositions. By being a researcher – excavating issues, or by being an activist – advocating for ideas and actions. And because administrative, economic and cultural dimensions vary across nations, the means through which cities are made are by themselves very different.

For example, in the US, two widely recognized projects I was involved in with Moule & Polyzoïdes – “The Boulevard” and Del Mar Station – both happened as collaborations between the municipality and private entities. The Boulevard in Lancaster, California, was a modest-budget enhancement of a disinvested street that resulted in a socio-economic renaissance for the city in as less as three years. Del Mar Station in Pasadena, California, was the first transit-oriented development in the region that brought high-density housing next to a train station. By contrast, in the Republic of Panama, where we designed the 75-acre La Fontana District by saving a rain forest and extending the flora into its streets and parks, it was not municipal initiatives but influential, young developers who were helping seed progressive ideas. So, while the noble intentions behind projects overlap across nations, the specific entities and processes that shape them are different.

By extension, how you fit in as an “outsider” also changes from place to place. In China, for instance, I collaborated in my capacity as a professor from the US, with local faculty colleagues from South China Agricultural University to create a plan for reclaiming the abandoned historic waterways of Guangzhou. Last year, in Los Angeles, my students and I collaborated with a local non-profit, Union Station Homeless Services, to generate strategies for mitigating homelessness in the region. In India, some years back, I led the Monsoon Studio Workshop with staff from the Directorate of Urban Land Transport – an agency set up by the Government of Karnataka under the Urban Development Department – and through the agency’s follow-through, it led to the implementation of India’s first Public Bicycle Share Plan in Mysuru.

Practicing globally is about knowing your role and recognizing that you may not have all the answers. It means finding the conduits and collaborators that will help you to find the answers, within the social, political and economic realities of the place.

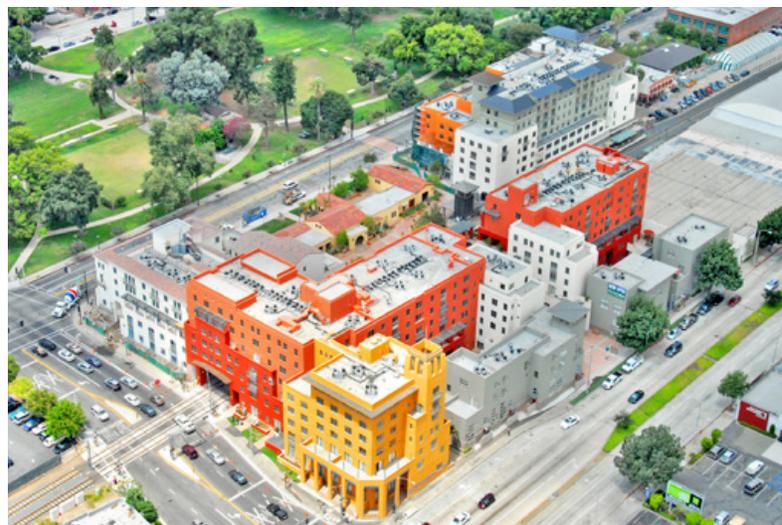
BELOW |

DEL MAR STATION

PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

Designed 350 residential units around a plaza next to a light-rail station

DESIGN & PHOTO COURTESY: *Moule & Polyzoïdes*



ABOVE |

LA FONTANA DISTRICT MASTER PLAN

COLON, PANAMA

Conserves an existing rain forest and extends the flora into the streets and parks of the mixed-use development. The project received the 2018 National Charter Award from the Congress for the New Urbanism

DESIGN & PHOTO COURTESY: *Moule & Polyzoïdes*

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“THE BOULEVARD”

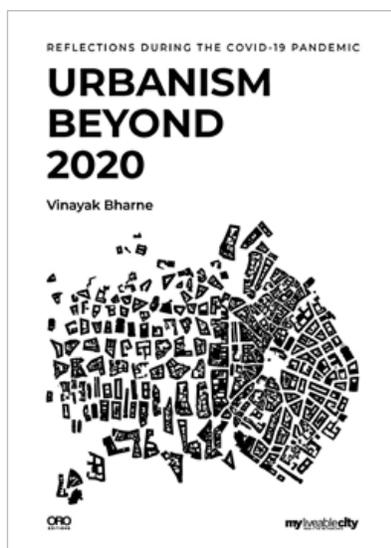
LANCASTER, CALIFORNIA

Transformation of a mile-long dilapidated street into a thriving mixed-use place. The project was awarded the 2013 National Award for Smart Growth Overall Excellence by the United States Environmental Protection Agency

DESIGN & PHOTO COURTESY: Moule & Polyzoides

PHOTO CREDIT: Tamara Heimlich, TLP Architectural





URBANISM BEYOND 2020
REFLECTIONS DURING THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC

"Exploring numerous questions triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic: Why is city making a health project? How are ecological and human wellbeing interrelated? How can leadership and governance help bridge gaps in our unjust cities? How might we renew our relationship with dwellings and neighbourhoods? How resilient and adaptable are our cities during uncertain times? Amidst climate change and global warming, is the pandemic a prelude to the challenges to come?"

ORO Editions, 2021
ISBN 9781954081079

As an Author

I did not create these books because I am authority on these subjects. Quite the contrary, I created them because I did not know enough, and the act of making them was a way of educating myself on subjects I consider important.

The Emerging Asian City brought together 24 scholars to explore how and why Asian cities are treading a different path to their future compared to European and North American ones. *Rediscovering the Hindu Temple* examined how sacred entities – from anonymous wayside shrines to colossal temple complexes – exert an indelible influence on the Indian city. *Zen Spaces & Neon Places* collected my twenty years of writing on Japan – a place I consider my third home. *Affordable Housing, Inclusive Cities* collected 36 essays and case studies on how cities across the world are mitigating economic polarization and social injustice. *Routledge Companion to Global Heritage Conservation* brought together 30 scholars to discuss how heritage and conservation intersects with the most pressing issues of our time.

Two new books are coming out later this year. *Urbanism Beyond 2020* is a collection of lectures I gave during the COVID-19 lockdowns, discussing questions raised by the pandemic. And *Streets for All* is an edited anthology on designing inclusive and sustainable public spaces.

The Banaras Initiative

Banaras is a complex city I return to again and again. It challenges my preconceptions of what cities are and reminds me that there are numerous ways of charting an urban future, beyond mainstream methods alone – FSI, master plans, bylaws etc. – which are essentially imports from the West. In Banaras, there are numerous other forces already at work – from pilgrims to priests to rikshawallas – who know their city better than any of us would.

In 2018, I launched a research project called “The Banaras Initiative” to examine how indigenous forces could shape the city’s future. Our numerous conversations with hermits, pilgrims, professors, citizens, administrators have led us to a number of ideas. For example, the municipality of Banaras is unable to keep the city core clean, and spaces around some of the most famous temples remain outright filthy. Could we regulate temple vicinities as legal “Trusts” giving the temples authority to clean their surrounds themselves? Our conversations with local stakeholders revealed that such initiatives would be welcomed. Working with eminent scholars such as Rana P. B. Singh, we also made a proposition to focus on the five halting spots of the famous Panchakroshi Yatra pilgrimage that attracts thousands of pilgrims each year. Can the design of these nodes with public transportation, affordable housing and other uses, chart a new way to regulate the city’s growth? Along the ghats, we argued for minimal design intervention and greater upkeep, like locating toilets and drinking water facilities, without doing much to the existing ritualscape.



We are also looking at the “mundane” city, to figure out how to mitigate its terrible grid locks and housing shortage. The future of a city like Banaras will never emerge from top-down design solutions by experts alone. Numerous grassroots efforts by locals and NGO’s are already generating social and cultural upliftment – and they need to be brought to the forefront of planning discussions. There are “many Banarases,” depending on who you talk to, and they all need to be part of any discussion on its future.

Integration of urban design and heritage conservation

Urban design and heritage conservation will always be inseparable. Every place has a past, and moment we ask - What is it about this place that is worth keeping? – we have obliterated the false boundary between the two. But why invest in heritage if it cannot reduce socio-economic gaps or mitigate climate change? The discipline of heritage conservation is therefore shifting from its former monument-centric approach, to a much deeper scope, mainly through its intersection with urbanism and other social and environmental sciences.

MANY BANARASES
 Diagrams showing mappings
 of the city by priests and
 pilgrims [ROW-1],
 Versus architects and
 planners [ROW-2]

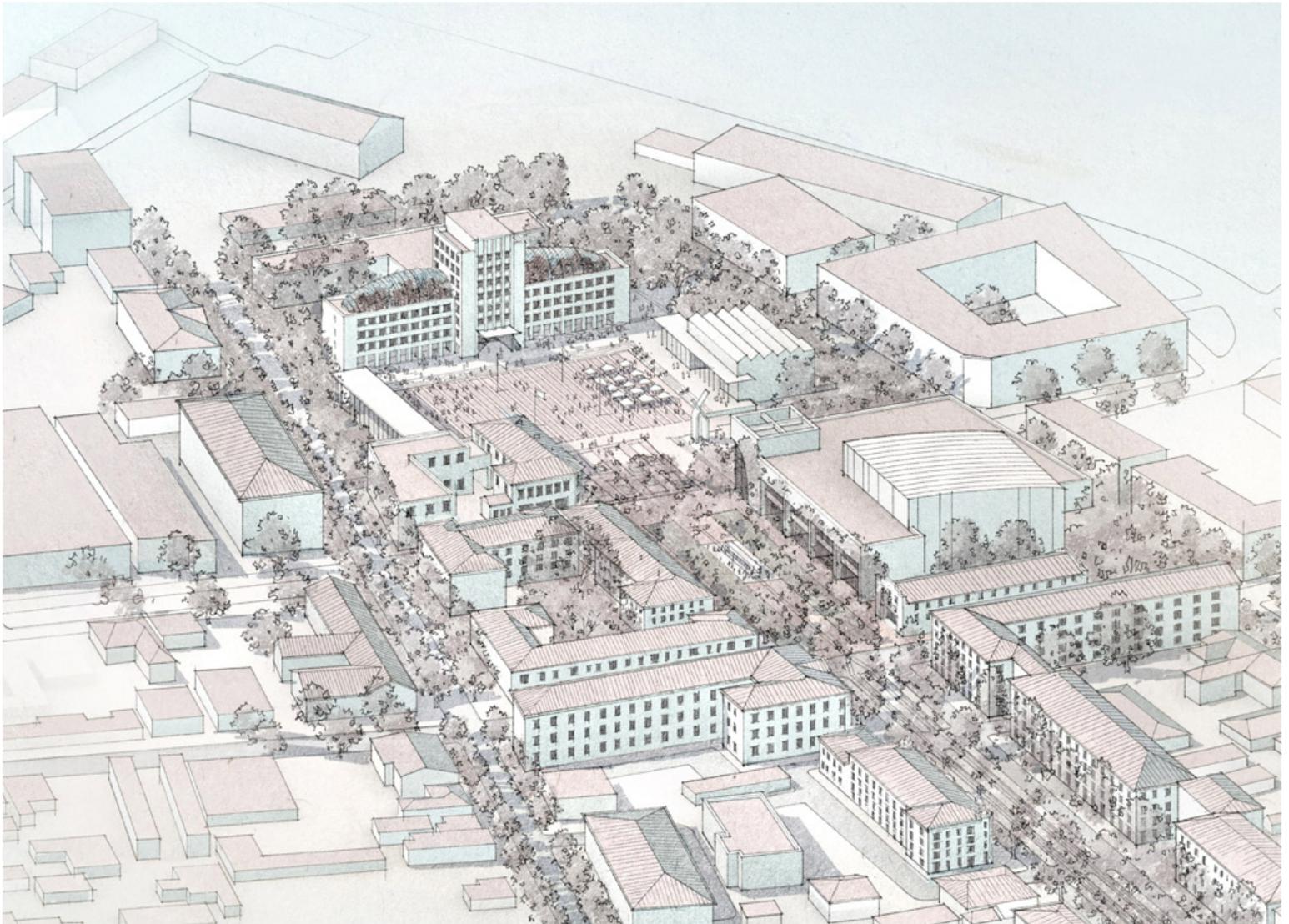
There are “many Banarases,” depending on who you talk to, and they all need to be part of any discussion on its future.

**INTEGRATING URBAN DESIGN
AND HERITAGE CONSERVATION**

*Proposal for the redesign of
Vyzvolennia Square and Mira Avenue,
along with the reuse of the 1923
DASU building, Ukraine*

*DESIGN: Vinayak Bharne and
Dutton Architects*

I have spoken about this in the context of Chandigarh. Instead of celebrating the city as Modern heritage alone, intelligent urban design initiatives can help resolve a lot of its current problems. Chandigarh retirees today cannot afford to live in the city due to rising housing costs. Can the city's wastefully wide avenues be redesigned as narrower tree-lined thoroughfares with the extra land given to affordable housing? It could accommodate so many people and stop the city from sprawling outward. Chandigarh has a water shortage. Can its green spaces be redesigned as de-centralized water-harvesting areas? The point is that the "Heritage" potential of an Indian city should not take away its ability to evolve and grow sustainably and intelligently. This is where urban design and heritage conservation must work in tandem.



Indian Cities – The way forward

In India, millions of people earn their livelihoods in the informal economy—that is, commercial activities occurring outside the governing body’s regulation. This informal economy supplies Indian cities with a vast labour pool—from housemaids to vegetable sellers to rag pickers—for the many “unpleasant” jobs that organized labour evades. Because these denizens need to work on a daily basis to earn their livelihood, lockdowns and other containment measures are exacerbating their vulnerabilities. They should become our number one priority in any urbanism effort.

Thanks to these entities, Indian cities are polycentric, albeit in an unplanned way. Vendors, street hawkers, and wayside shops that situate themselves at the fringes of neighbourhoods, despite being illegal, create innumerable centres that formal city planning does not account for. The result is strangely magical: one’s daily needs are available within walking distance of one’s house, something North American car-centric cities are desperately trying to achieve. How do we make a place for these entities and give them the same rights as other citizens? Because policy and regulation alone does not work as effectively in India as other nations, simultaneous modest, inexpensive, incremental steps to redesign public spaces comes to the forefront.

I just completed a proposition with a Goan friend to upgrade the Panaji Church Square. For the short-term, we simply relocated its haphazard parking into a proximate vacant lot and closed a street fragment to create a zone for vendors. In the long term, the sidewalks could be widened, and the square could be enhanced – but this cannot be the starting point, because it is expensive and will take time. In other words, long-term goals should not stop us from taking small immediate steps right now towards making space for people that need it the most.

Role of Landscape Architecture

Landscape architecture is at the cutting-edge of urbanism today, and this is particularly true for Indian cities. As I said before, urban transformation in India will be much more socially effective through public improvement projects such as street and open space enhancements, versus private development. India is blessed with monsoons, and indigenous methods of water harvesting – lakes, reservoirs, wells all designed as beautiful places – are now beginning to come to the forefront. Then there is the whole subject of urban ecology – conserving wetlands, mangroves, and rivers as both public places and wildlife habitats. There is now increasing evidence to suggest that deforestation is directly related to epidemics due to increasing contact between humans with animals and the viruses they carry. So, nature conservation at a regional scale is very important. In light of all this, it has been heartening to see some wonderful initiatives from academic programs in India, and organizations such as ISOLA – conferences, competitions, lectures – that are bringing these important and urgent subjects to the forefront and disseminating knowledge about them. Landscape architects–repositioned as urbanists – can be at the forefront of transforming India’s urban future for all the right reasons.

Indian cities are polycentric, albeit in an unplanned way. Vendors, street hawkers, and wayside shops that situate themselves at the fringes of neighbourhoods, despite being illegal, create innumerable centres that formal city planning does not account for. The result is strangely magical: one’s daily needs are available within walking distance of one’s house, something North American car-centric cities are desperately trying to achieve.

Pandemic and the future of cities

This is the subject of my forthcoming book, *Urbanism Beyond 2020*. The pandemic has reminded us why city making is a “health project.” It has reinforced the inextricable relationship between ecological and human well being and highlighted the insurmountable damage we have inflicted on our natural environment. It has revealed how unjust and unfair our cities are, how a sudden crisis affects us all differently, and how leadership, governance, and administration play a crucial role in difficult circumstances.

For us professionals shaping the built environment, the pandemic has been a reminder of our self-imposed disciplinary limitations. Isn't it tragic that architecture, landscape architecture, city planning—disciplines that share the same larger goal—have segregated ourselves into super-specialized silos? If architects were engaged in reforming zoning codes, if planners took interest in the physical places we build, if civil engineers were trained in ecological issues, if landscape architects did not preoccupy themselves exclusively with spaces between buildings, and if we all involved our citizens as essential participants in the design process, our cities would be treading a very different path to their future.

The fact is that we designers, for all we bring to the table, really do have much power in making crucial decisions in the wake of such a crisis. So, if the pandemic teaches us anything, it is to transform the processes through which we are shaping our cities. We must engage in strategic multi-disciplinary efforts – with politicians, citizens, NGO's, humanitarian organizations, developers – because they have a lot of skills and abilities to get things done that we designers simply do not.

MONTCLAIR PLACE SPECIFIC PLAN

MONTCLAIR, CALIFORNIA, USA

*Transforming a suburban
mega-mall site into a walkable
pedestrian-friendly new
downtown for the city*

DESIGN & IMAGE COURTESY:

Moule & Polyzoides



Drawings and images courtesy of Vinayak Bharne
EMAIL: vbharne@gmail.com

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REMEMBERING RAJAPRAKASH PURUSHOTHAMAN 1965-2021

On the 15th of May, 2021, Dr. Rajaprakash Purushothaman [popularly known as RP], an Associate Professor at the Department of Landscape Architecture, SPA left for the heavenly abode. Trained as an architect and a landscape architect, RP was a multi-talented professional. On the personal level he was humble, approachable and always ready to help.

In my association with RP of around ten years as a colleague, I found him as a happy-go-lucky person who was ever smiling. During our conversations, I remember his curiosity and his completely unapologetic, child-like innocence. These rare attributes are something which shall be missed for sure. His approach to life was very philosophical. Whatever be the situation, he responded in his own calm way.

He was a free-spirited soul, who was open minded and not afraid to step out of the preconceived norms. He had a 'larger than life' presence and he brought a lot of laughter and cheer with his light hearted banter, always being very sure not to hurt anyone even slightly. Excellent in networking skills, he was fond of talking to people and making friends wherever he went. Being at the Department of Architecture, SPA for around two decades, RP was one of the sought-after teachers during fests and college functions. He was an avid traveller, always ready to accompany students on tours and educational trips. I remember the stories he shared about his trips to Europe with the students of Architecture. His love of music was undeniable. He started his music journey as a drummer and later went on to master the guitar. In any function, he would bounce on to the stage with no inhibitions and would lose himself to the music as if it was a spiritual cocoon for him.

His free spirit, his different perspective on various issues and his inclination to share knowledge and spread positivity, makes him a colleague who will never be forgotten. His sense of humor, and his willingness to give a helping hand to anyone who was struggling was there as everyone was so fond of him. He was a dedicated friend and a committed family person as evident from our conversations with his wife and daughter.

We have lost a good soul and the fraternity has lost a great teacher. We miss him a lot. He amused and amazed us with his music, friendliness, compassion, simplicity, sincerity and genuineness as a good friend.

We will always remember him for his affable and encouraging personality and his zest for life. May his soul rest in peace.



Photograph courtesy of the Author



B.Arch. 1989 [Anna University, Chennai]

M.L.Arch. 1992 [SPA New Delhi]

Ph.D 2013 [SAP Anna University, Chennai]

Joined Department of Architecture,
SPA, New Delhi in 1992

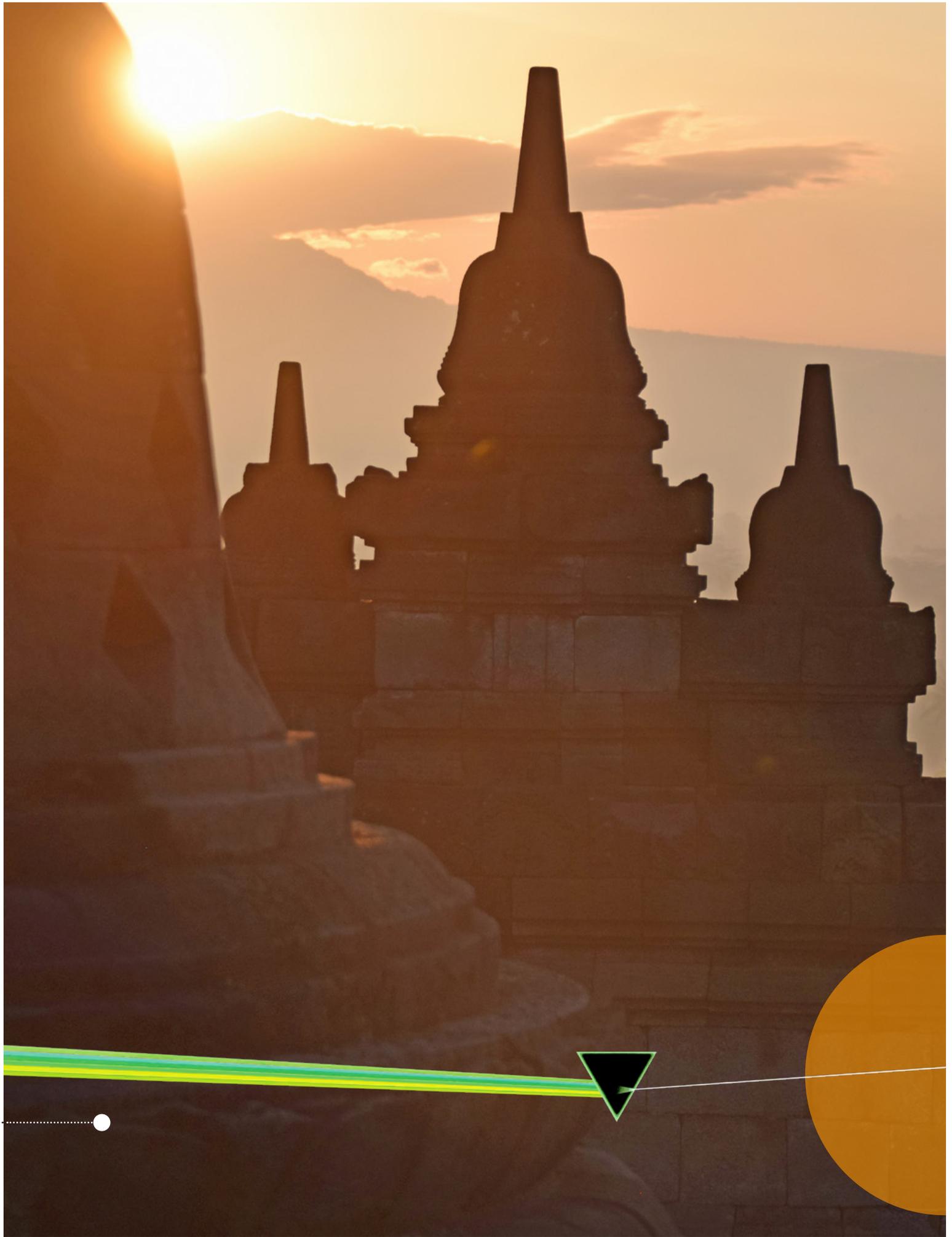
Joined Department of Landscape Architecture,
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“FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT”

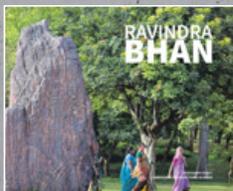
*A sunrise at the Buddhist monument at
Borobudur in Yogyakarta, Indonesia*

PHOTO CREDIT: *Mike Barthelmeh*



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LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE IN INDIA: MONOGRAPH SERIES



RAVINDRA BHAN

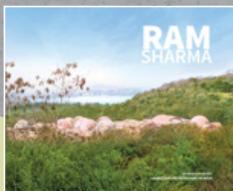
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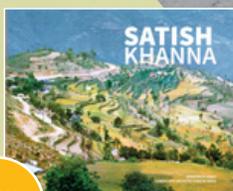
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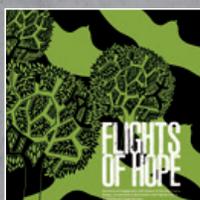


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