

Summary of the ISOLA Conference 2022

The Indian Society of Landscape Architects ISOLA Conference was held on 11-13 February 2022. It was held in the virtual format.

The Keynote by Kotchakorn Voraakhom elaborately explained the impact of landscapes beyond crafting spaces. Not only did her projects make a case for the ecological balance that the landscape architects has been striving to achieve but also spoke about the culture, community, and land connection. The following discussion between her and Dr Sridevi Rao Hon President ISOLA and a senior landscape practitioner and researcher herself was indeed an extension of exploring the various facets of these connections.

In fact a very interestingly the three presentations on day one by Kotchakron, Mohan Rao, and Dirk Piejpe under the theme balance had another common thread running across their talks.

Water! It was a delight to see the way all of them addressed water in their projects. The variation of scale, the stark contrast of the context in terms of the climatic conditions gave insights into how sensitive intervention can make an impact to balance the unbalanced irrespective of the scale. Be it creating a balanced environment for elephants at Hati Gao in an extremely hot and dry climate of Rajasthan or the public squares which became retention ponds, balancing both the ecology and the public life in the water project for Antwerp designed by Dirk. All the presentations explored the various facets of the theme balance.

The interactive session which was cut short due to the lack of time was equally enriching by the virtue of the quality of questions asked by the participants. The variety of the questions highlighted the fact that the presentations engaged the audience. The q and a session curated by Shilpa Chandavarkar and Prashanta Bhat, brought forth the interesting contrasting climatic conditions explored in the projects of both the presenters.

The workshop curated by Jitendra Pawgi and Aditi Galande deconstructed the complexities of an ecological planting palette. A complex topic was made easy through the way it was presented by Aditi. The success of selecting the right planting palate which eventually results in the creation of a complex web of associations thus resulting in a balanced ecosystem is the goal that we all strive to achieve. The workshop very succinctly touched upon the same.

The presentations on the second day for the theme transformation highlighted the shift of the role of a landscape architect from an allied professional collaborating under the supervision of an architect or an engineer for a project to becoming the leader in the collaboration. Projects presented by Micheal Grove from Sasaki highlighted the multiple considerations by the firm while designing a project creating a robust design intervention. Be it championing for habitat conservation, adapting to climate change, blurring the boundaries, rethinking how we design and build cities, or supporting food agriculture, the presentation touched upon these various concerns through multiple projects. During the discussion with Naveen Panugunti, Micheal also highlighted the very relevant point of

generating ecological awareness in not only the community but the governing body as well for the successful implementation of the projects.

The second workshop on day 2 curated by Ar Yashwant Ramamurthy, Arunima Shankar, and Gopal Bajaj, titled source of water in absence of water explored the stepped wells in and around Hyderabad. Both the process of documentation and the case of restoration of the stepwell I am sure inspired many of the participants to look out for such cultural markers around them. The hands-on exercise of the landscape approach for the well precinct further allowed the participant to immerse in the conservation process.

Moving on to the second presentation of the day under the theme transformation The Landfill project presented by Isreal Alba, showcased the transformation of a degraded landscape into a thriving ecosystem was nothing less than magical. Israel's presentation highlighted a very important aspect of the impact of urbanization on the hinterland. He spoke about TIME being a significant element of design. A major factor is the subsidence of waste dump yards and so the people not being allowed access immediately after landscape interventions enabled many niche ecosystems to thrive which are seen now which have developed over the years. Soil quality as a landscape element is the foundation of the success of such reclamation projects. One of the interesting questions shared by Rajesh George as moderator for the question and answer session was regarding mining reclamation projects for comparison. Israel said those take a shorter time and can be accessed by the public compared to dump yard reclamation.

Moving onto the paper presentation session which included selected papers from multiple applications was indeed a thoroughly invigorating session. Research in India is rigorous on urban renewal and balancing development with nature. This was presented through five Papers at the Conference on the second day of the ISOLA conference, Hyderabad.

Curated by Rukkumany and Kumareswari Rajendran The session commenced with Mrinalini Hambarde's paper is on the theme 'Balance'- City in Nature. Her paper presented the analysis of the effectiveness of the restorative action of ecological landscape planning strategies in the Greenfield development in the Lavasa Hill-City, India. The land mosaics created through the planning and implementation of the landscape master plan were analyzed over four-time phases as Pre-planning (2000-2005), planning (2006-2009), implementation (2010-2014), and establishment (2015-2018). This paper is an excellent example of emerging research in India in the landscape field.

The other four papers were based on the theme 'Renewal'. Souparni Paul's paper focused on establishing linkages through the Urban Landscape in the high-density megacity Kolkotta, for the preservation and renewal of Biodiversity. This paper explored the various options to create ecological corridors by utilizing the unique green and blue network of Kolkatta city. Murugesan's paper took a straightforward design approach to propose solutions for a very pertinent problem of most cities- Dumpsites. His paper effortlessly bridged the technologies and strategies for handling dumpsites with landscape design to create a beautiful space for the surrounding residents. Deva's paper also focused on a very current challenge faced in cities, the rehabilitation of stone

quarries. His paper discussed the various design approaches that can be explored in such projects. Neha Adkar's paper was about perceptions and how they play a vital role in inspiring people to conserve and preserve nature in their midst. Their study of Warje Tekdi hill in Pune, explored how this hill serves as an irreplaceable public space in Pune city and the role it plays in people's lives.

The third day which had the theme Renewal began with the highly informative talk by Ketaki Ghate from Oikos. She in her talk elaborately explained the process of restoration or conservation of a landscape, be it through an integrated or purist approach. Through various examples which included a private property restoration in the ecological hotspot of Sahyadri or restoring and connecting patches of vegetation in villages of Maharashtra Ketaki spoke about the stepwise process of conservation and restoration which included the regional understanding, understanding of mature ecosystems, socio-economic survey as well as current ecological condition.

In the second talk of the day Prof GSV Surya Narayan Murthy spoke about the extremely fragile and unique cultural ecosystem of Majauli island. Taking forward from Ketakis presentation he spoke about the wholistic conservation with a minimalistic approach which was considered while intervening in the ecologically sensitive setting of the Majauli island.

Drawing parallels from Narra Japan Dr Murthy spoke about the concept of reconstruction as a practice of restoring the culture of Mjauli. Stating that The universal values which were initially monument centric and now have been also realized in terms of cultural landscapes, Dr Murthys presentation was nothing short of a mind-boggling summary of the documentation and conservation attempt patiently done over years to revive the cultural landscapes of Majauli.

The q and a following the talk conducted by Prof Narsimham and Kavita Kedavat touched upon how do practices which have a purist approach to conservation and restoration educate the client regarding the same.

The third workshop of the conference which enabled the students across the country to connect. It was a joy to hear the various form of expressions by the students to bring forth the ecological and social issues they believe in. Hearing them passionately speak about spaces, causes and topics close to their heart was indeed heartwarming. I believe we can sit back and relax, for the future of the country is in very good hands

A while ago when the curators of all the three workshops presented the interesting conclusions of the respective session I believe the workshops have been successful in creating an extremely enriching experience for the audience in spite of the virtual format.

The next conference in 2024 will be held in Bhopal, India.