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Relating Systems Thinking and Design
(RSD12) Symposium | October 6–20, 2023

A Study of Smart Cities for India

Shreya Ranjan, Sneha Bhuva, Praveen Nahar, and Sahil Thappa

What gives meaning to our life in urban scapes?

In this fast-developing world, our cities need to adapt fast to better technology, connectivity, and growth and somehow enable individual growth, i.e., cities have to be adaptive to their physical challenges and evolving aspirational needs. Today, there is increased migration towards the urban economic life (put migration data); at the same time, urbanisation is also travelling towards the hinterland, creating a loss of accountability and ownership of the ecosystem and its people. Everyone is getting connected faster, and the world is getting smaller, but something is amiss in this new way we live now.

KEYWORDS: connectedness, smart cities, resilience, urbanisation, ownership, sense of belonging, ecosystem

RSD TOPIC(S): Cases & Practice, Society & Culture, Socioecological Design

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What's missing?

Sense of belonging

As the world shifts towards faster and digital, people get more out of touch with their ecosystems. People no longer know where their food comes from or how to build climate-resilient cities. There is gradual loss, even disinterest in knowledge sharing, because of broken trust networks. In the context of India, urbanisation has not taken into consideration contextual needs and knowledges, which has built opaque walls of

development between people and the decision-making process that directly affects them.

Connectedness

Humans seek connectedness and they experience discomfort when they feel isolated from the larger ecosystem that they all are a part of. This includes the physical infrastructure, the natural ecosystem, the social fabric of the society, and how all of this combines to create a sense of belonging, responsibility, ownership, and connectedness. “The double role of living systems as parts and wholes requires the interplay of two opposite tendencies – an integrated tendency to function as part of a larger whole, and a self-assertive, or self-organizing tendency to preserve individual autonomy”.

> How can we then establish this connectedness, and what does it mean in our fast-changing world where aspirations are ever-evolving?

Flow of Exhibition

It starts with questioning our aspirations today and how it leads to ideas of making cities smart and efficient. The understanding of ‘smart’ everywhere includes the common requirements of infrastructure, transport, opportunities for economic growth, and digital connectivity. So, let's take a look at what is happening today.

Growth and Development

Taking the case studies of water bodies in Ahmedabad, we learnt how the walls of development are breaking the meaningful and intangible relationships that people had with their natural ecosystem and with each other. Then, we asked people what added meaning to their day-to-day lives in the city. What we learnt from them helped us understand these intangible relationships.

What are the lost connections?

The invisible/intangible networks that sustain us are now lost within the walls of growth and development. Some of the emergent channels of such connections were our knowledge of the local context. We started then wondering how we can make people want to live in a state of active harmony and engagement with each other and the natural ecosystem.

- How might we make them get together?
- How might we make them want to get together?
- How might we create an interest and curiosity in their surroundings to make them mindful of it?

We observed that in moments of crisis or extremes, we see people collaborate however, for this to continue to happen as a habit, we cannot create crisis. So, we started looking at how to engage people in such a way that they start from the process of thought and reflection. Through play, we felt that people could come together without having an issue to tackle. And through these interventions in the mundane, we seek to start building the lost networks.

Resources

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2. Transition Town Totnes. https://www.transitiontowntotnes.org/
3. Alexander, C., Ishikawa, S., & Silverstein, M. (1977). *A Pattern Language.*
4. Luisi, P.L., & Capra F. (2014). *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision.*

Authors

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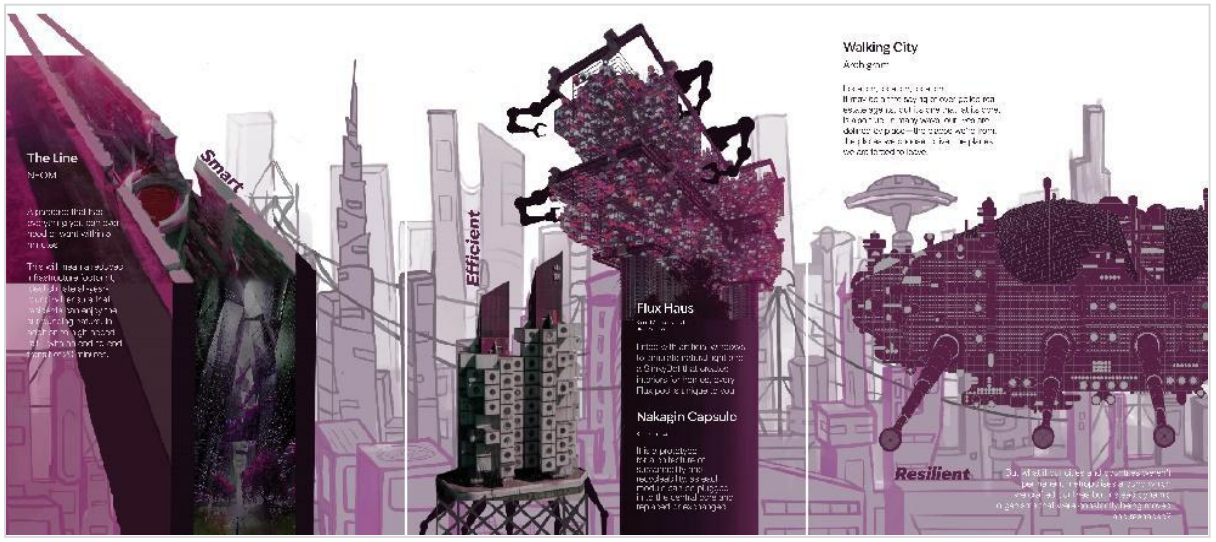
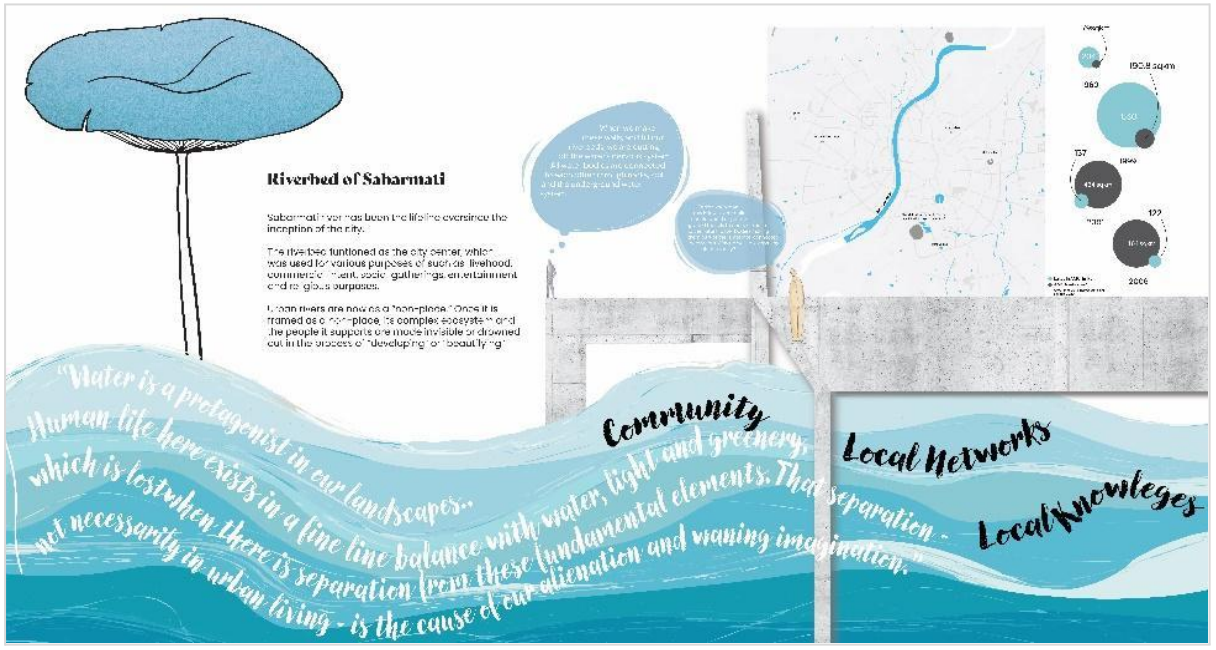
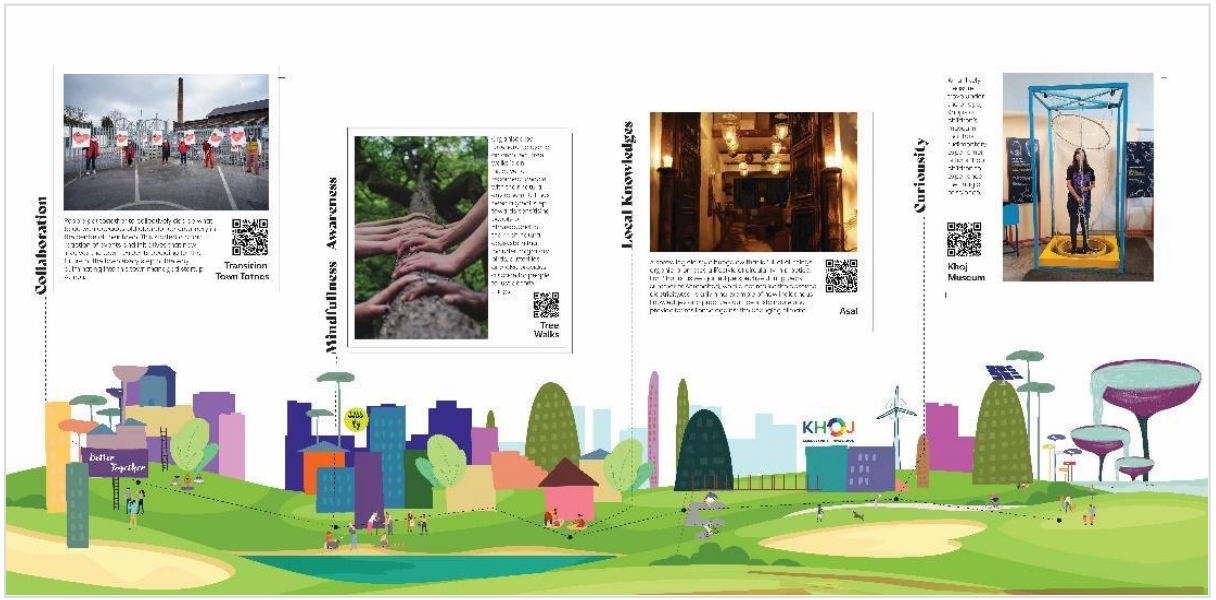
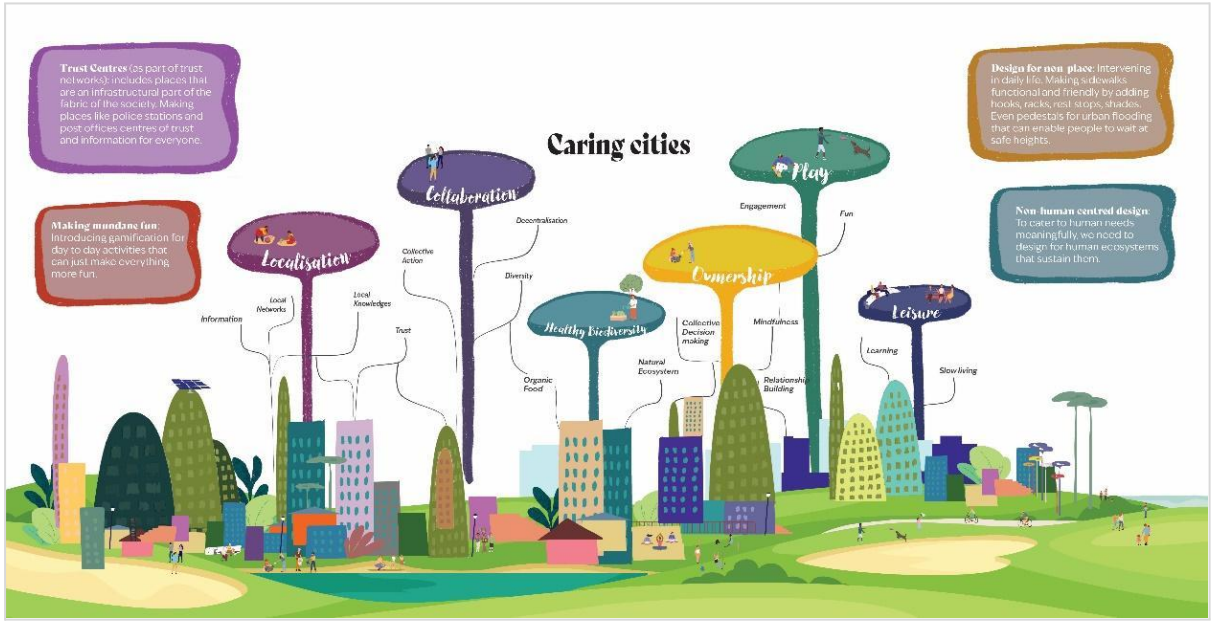

The Line
Smart
Efficient
Flux Haus
Nakagin Capsule
Walking City
Resilient


Riverbed of Sabarmati
"Water is a protagonist in our landscapes..
Human life here exists in a fine line balance with water, light and greenery,
which is lost when there is separation from these fundamental elements. That separation -
not necessarily in urban living - is the cause of our alienation and waning imagination."
Community
Local Networks
Local Knowleges


Collaboration
Transition Town Totnes
Mindfulness Awareness
True Walks
Local Knowledges
Asal
Curiousity
Khoj Museum
Better Together
KHOJ


Trust Centres (as part of trust networks): includes places that are an infrastructural part of the fabric of the society. Making places like police stations and post offices centres of trust and information for everyone.
Caring cities
Design for non_place: Intervening in daily life. Making sidewalks functional and friendly by adding hooks, racks, rest stops, shades. Even pedestals for urban flooding that can enable people to wait at safe heights.
Making mundane fun: Introducing gamification for day to day activities that can just make everything more fun.
Non-human centred design: To cater to human needs meaningfully, we need to design for human ecosystems that sustain them.
Collaboration
Decentralisation
Collective Action
Diversity
Organic Food
Localisation
Local Networks
Local Knowledges
Information
Trust
Healthy Biodiversity
Collective Decision making
Natural Ecosystems
Play
Engagement
Fun
Ownership
Mindfulness
Relationship Building
Leisure
Learning
Slow living