BReUCom Webinar Series

WEBINAR REPORT

VALUING TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND WISDOM FOR RESILIENCE PLANNING: REMODELLING PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE EDUCATION

11 October 2021
3.00 pm to 4.30 pm (Indian Time)

Organised by

PRIA Knowledge. Voice. Democracy.

B_RE_U_COM. Building Resilient Urban Communities

SRISHTI MANIPAL INSTITUTE OF ART, DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY, BENGALURU
A Constituent Unit of MAHE, Manipal

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

SPEAKER PROFILES

Ms Pooja Sastry is a Faculty at the MAHE-SMI and Co-ordinator UNESCO Chair in Culture, Habitat, and Sustainable Development at MAHE-SMI. Pooja's work experience spans land use and infrastructure planning, affordable housing, regional economic development, environmental management in urban ecosystems, and policy and regulation.

Dr Rajesh Tandon, Founder President, Participatory Research in Asia, India, is currently a UNESCO Co-Chair on Community Based Research and Social Responsibilities in Higher Education. He serves as chairperson of the Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research (GACER) network, which facilitates the sharing of knowledge and information worldwide to further community-based research and has also served as an Advisor to the Commonwealth Foundation, UNDP, and numerous other international agencies.

Prof Neelkanth Chhaya, Adjunct Faculty Member, Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology, is also the Chairman of the Education Working Group of the Hunnarshala Foundation, Bhuj. He is an architect and academic. He has practiced at Ahmedabad since 1987 and taught at Faculty of Architecture at CEPT University from 1987 to 2012, when he retired as Dean of the Faculty. He has also taught earlier at the University of Nairobi and at Institute of Environmental Design, Vallabh Vidyanagar. He edited Harnessing the Intangible: Collected Essays on the Work of Balkrishna Doshi (National Institute of Advanced Studies in Architecture, 2014). Prof. Chhaya has been interested in the value of Indic thought on architecture, urbanism and place-making to contemporary practices.

Dr Barsha Poricha, Technical Head, Centre for Urban and Regional Excellence, is an urban and regional planner from CEPT, Ahmedabad with a Ph.D. in Human Ecology from Ambedkar University, Delhi. Over the last two decades, she has been working on issues of civil society engagement and human development, and her work particularly has been around engaging, developing, and designing inclusive and participatory planning and development mechanisms within governance processes. She also works on issues of gender, youth development, and capacity building to influence and deepen policy discourse and strengthen people's engagement in the urban sector.

Dr Tania Berger is a trained architect and has a PhD in construction and building sciences, entertaining a strong focus on social science. She heads the Cluster "Social sPACe based research in built Environment" (SPACE) at the Department for Building and Environment at Danube University Krems, which works on issues of integration in housing on a national level as well as on global urbanisation processes, and

precarious housing in an international context. Tania also coordinates Erasmus projects in the field of “Capacity Building in Higher Education” with a focus on informal settlements in India and Ethiopia.

Mr Ramesh Kalkur, is a Visual Artist and Dean of the Foundation Studies Program at MAHE-SMI. His teaching practice spans visual literacy, body and context, visualization, and conceptual thinking. He is a recipient of the Inlaks Foundation Scholarship and the John Minton Travel Grant, and his practice spans public art, site-specific works, and outreach. He has displayed and exhibited his work across the country and world.

Mr Vishwesh Viswanathan is a faculty at MAHE-SMI. He has nearly two decades of experience as an architect with Pradeep Sachdeva Design Associates, Delhi working on the studio’s public space design, urban design, master planning, institutional and hospitality projects across India.

Mr Shreyas Srivatsa is a faculty at MAHE-SMI. He has worked across academics, policy and practice which include critical heritage studies, aspects of vulnerability and adaptation to climate change in Indian agriculture, livelihood security, skill development and employability, poverty alleviation and housing, and mobility and transit-oriented development.

Mr Vinay Malge, Co-Founder and Convenor, Team YUVAA, Bidar, has 12 years of experience as a social worker, communication skills trainer, and public pedagogy practitioner across various aspects in Bidar city and the district. He co-founded a Volunteer-based NGO in Bidar, Team YUVAA, that won the prestigious Karnataka Rajyotsava Award in 2016. He has supported the initiation, planning, execution and monitoring of several public works in Bidar, mainly around the issue of water bodies and restoration of the Historically important Karez system in Naubad (Bidar), to mention a few. His engagement as a public pedagogy practitioner has led to collaborations with institutes such as Srishti Institute of Art, Design & Technology (Bangalore), Govt First Grade Degree College (Bidar & Humnabad) and University at Buffalo (New York). His work has helped to establish a strong network that include writers, scholars, researchers, craftsman, folk artists, activists, politicians, journalists, government officials and so on across Bidar District and the surrounding districts in Hyderabad-Karnataka Region.

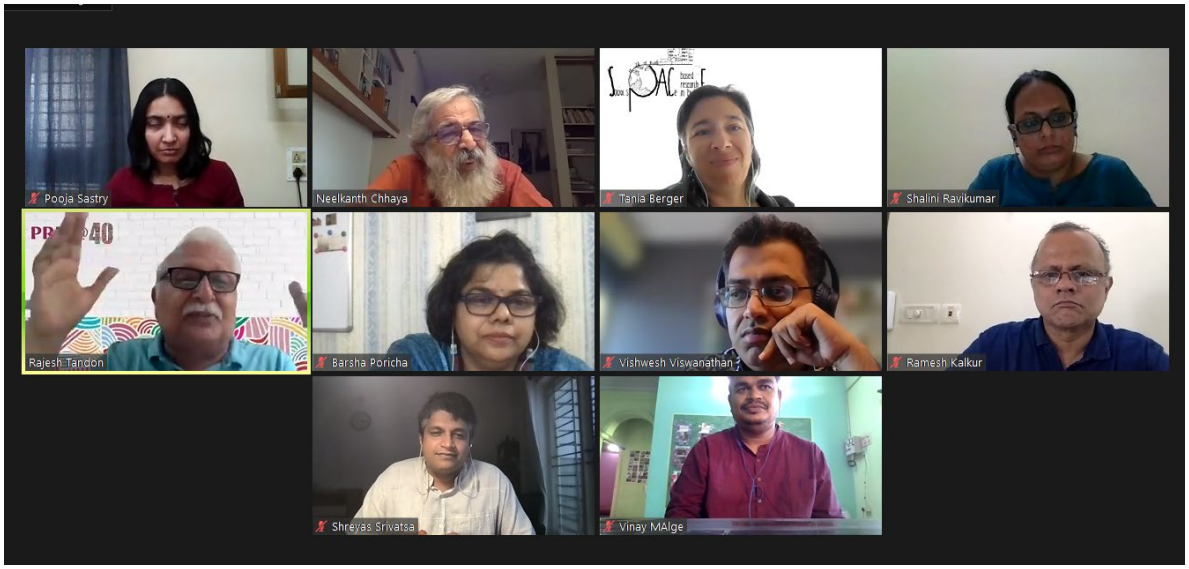
Ms Shalini Ravikumar, Faculty, MAHE-SMI, is a Conservation Architect & Heritage Manager. She has worked in Heritage Conservation and Management, community – based /community-led tourism, sustainable heritage tourism, heritage education and communication, urban conservation, building analysis & heritage documentation, heritage listing, heritage-led urban regeneration, community participation & placemaking, heritage and identity, heritage and conflict , advocacy, policy advice, public history project management, development and coordination, operations

including team management, finance management, marketing & branding, social media management, partnerships, networking, fundraising and resource mobilization, capacity building, and training activities/programs.

THE DISCUSSION

KEY TAKEWAYS

- Traditional culture and wisdom in resilience planning and designing can be made possible through participation in society, and through the involvement of HEI's in the creation of cultural forms, and cultural knowledge, such as pictures, art forms, songs, and theatre.
- It is important to focus on the reversal of financial, economic, managerial, and professional norms that define knowledge as something which is closely held by few, costs money, and is not at the service of society.
- Cities have performed efficiently in the past because the knowledge was distributed and was not held in abstract formats. It was part of the everyday life of the communities in the form of language, songs, rituals, and so on.
- Traditional wisdom can form suggestive guidelines that can be further applied in contemporary buildings in hilly regions for adaptation to climate conditions.
- Materials and design of roofs, walls, openings, floors, and study of plan form, shape, plot layout, the ratio of open-built, and utilization of terrain could be aggregated to frame design guidelines for the region.
- One of the main things is to explore the changes that have taken place over time, aspects of the cities that are still existing, and the reasons behind their existence.
- When the intent is to learn from and with people, places, and practice, on-ground engagement is centred around learning exchange, with different modes of knowledge production.
- There is a need for a more open-ended inquiry when the intent is to build a knowledge network about a place for getting people, place, and practice, together.
- It's not just the planners and architects, but also the economists, civil engineers, and other professionals who must re-engage with what it means to create a technology that is differently designed.



The Tenth Session of the World Urban Forum (2020) affirmed that culture can be considered as the fourth pillar of sustainable development. It emphasised the vital role culture plays regarding local identity, including heritage and diversity, and that urbanisation needs to be planned, designed and managed to enhance this.

Urban resilience practices of local and indigenous communities have traditionally been rooted in inter-relationships between human, nature, and culture. For many of these communities' culture, heritage and livelihood are intertwined inextricably. They have unique logics for sustainable resilience practices, which have proved effective in their survival in harmony with their natural environment and local traditions. Cohesion between society can help build climate resilience within it. BReUCom Project's case study on learning resilience from the Ziro Valley highlights how community, craft and culture exhibit cohesion in cultural forms through a timeless way of life.

Cultural heritage practices, including traditional land and water management practices, and the use of traditional architecture, building materials in planning and design can help urban communities appropriately adapt to a changing climate. Cultural and natural heritage sites can serve as support systems, both physically and psychologically, for urban informal communities during and after climate-related emergencies. They can also become assets for recovery and reconciliation in the wake of intercommunal conflicts linked to climate change. Creativity is key to finding effective solutions to climate risks, and local artists and cultural institutions can prove to be of immense significance for inspiring climate resilience strategies.

In the evolution of community resilience, experts agree that some of the greatest progress has been made in urban planning, bringing together community and resilience in a meaningful way. Traditional practices provide opportunities for enhancing post-disaster rehabilitation and recovery, building back better and for stimulating local economic and social development. In addition knowledge of traditional construction techniques or traditional prevention strategies resulting from subsequent trial and error in the management of known and expected climate risks play a critical role in adaptation and resilience strategies. Cultural heritage promotes resilience "precisely through the way…in which it has been able to adapt and develop in the past".

Over the years with increasing commercialisation, there is large scale erosion of such values, practices, and traditions. Traditional building material is giving way to modern alternatives; tourism

and encroachment is causing upheaval to lives and livelihoods of indigenous and local communities; and the “hierarchy of spaces” between individual, interpersonal and community are under constant pressure for change.

Aspects about traditional values and cultural identities in relation to urban planning and design are largely absent from discussions on climate change today. At the international level, culture is not systematically integrated into the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement, or the Assessment Reports of the IPCC. Going forward, there is an urgent need for decentralised consultations by urban design and planning policy makers, scholars, and practitioners for framing policies about climate adaptation and resilience. Traditional and cultural institutions, as well as individual and community stakeholders must be made actively part of such consultations in their local languages.

Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), Building Resilient Urban Communities (BREUCOM) and SHRISTI Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology hosted a webinar ***“Traditional Culture and Wisdom in Resilience Planning and Designing”*** on 11 October (Monday) from 3.00 pm to 4.30 pm. This webinar explored the interconnections between culture and community, to introspect how these links play a role in promoting sustainable urban resilience. It aimed at examining the role of higher education institutions to build momentum for drawing complementarities between ecology and livelihood interests, by incorporating traditional and cultural practices of local communities in their teaching and pedagogy.

STAGE SETTING BY CO-CHAIRS

The webinar started with a brief overview of the webinar context and agenda by Prof. Pooja Sastry. The webinar tried addressing the following two questions.

- In what ways do traditional values, heritage, cultural identities, social organisation, and collective action play a vital role in preserving and promoting sustainable resilience practices for urban communities?
- In what ways can higher education institutions incorporate traditional and cultural dimensions in their strategies for resilience building?

This was followed by setting the stage by Prof Neelkanth Chhaya and Dr Rajesh Tandon.

Prof Neelkanth Chhaya emphasised the usefulness of mapping out the differences between the traditional forms of knowledge and what is knowledge in contemporary times. Traditional knowledge, especially with settlements, is aimed to adjust to circumstances rather than the controlled circumstances. This knowledge has evolved slowly over a long period and was developed step by step and experienced by experience on the ground. It was not something that evolved in a remote location, in models or abstract form but developed directly in response to conditions. And, therefore, it could absorb things that were learned slowly over a period. The knowledge discovered by the communities was in oral and not textual form, such as songs, rituals, and other forms. This allowed knowledge to become part of the cultural equipment spread throughout the society, rather than held by a few experts. He further stated that there is a strong contrast between contemporary forms of knowledge and the traditional ones because the knowledge is held by few. As practitioners, we have control over the environment, and we develop knowledge forms quickly and discard them quickly, continuously, jumping from mistake to mistake,

rather than learning and building upon the mistake. We are text-based and abstract, and with far lesser connection to ground.

However, one should not think that this traditional knowledge has never succeeded. For example, cities with old city layouts have been successfully responsive with the flood, earthquakes, and other climatic events. Finally, it is also important to understand the impact of the environmental materials that are used. The material which is used is such that creates less impact on the environment. For example, in the city of Jaipur, the main streets were laid out and built within a period of 4 years, and within 20 years the city became completely active and working. This happened because knowledge was distributed and was not held in abstract formats. It was part of the everyday life of the communities in the form of language, songs, rituals, among others.

He concluded by sharing the learnings generated by the Higher Education Institutions and the connections between HEI's and traditional knowledge. 1) To push for adjustment rather than control. 2) To promote on-ground learnings, 3) Through participation in society, and our involvement in the creation of cultural forms, and cultural knowledge, such as pictures, art forms, songs, theatre. 4) Finally, the reversal of financial, economic, managerial, and professional norms define knowledge as something which is closely held by few, and costs money, and is not at the service of society.

Dr. Rajesh Tandon, connecting from Prof Chhaya's perspective, shared his experiences of engaging with communities during earthquakes in Uttar Kashi, Gujarat, and cyclones in Orissa. PRIA initially visited these cities to support the relief work but soon realized that their main job was to prevent large international organisations (who were coming for support) from destroying local culture and knowledge. He thanked Prof.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Remodelling Planning and Architecture Education for Future Urban Resilience

Dr Barsha Poricha introduced BReUCom, that is a project partnership instituted by two European Institutes to build capacities of people living in vulnerable cities to address climate-based challenges that have a direct impact on lives and livelihoods. This project is unique because it wants to bridge the gap between higher education institutions and civil society organisations. By building evidence from the ground, it aims to influence curriculum and pedagogy of planners, architects, and urbanists so that they can address climate challenges most effectively.

The project partners along with Higher Education Institutions have developed case studies which can be the building blocks for curriculums for planning and architecture institutes. Open courseware material has also been created under this project which will be available on the BReUCom website. The purpose behind this endeavour is for HEIs to take on the role of building awareness and local capacities of various stakeholders for an equitable and climate-adaptive city.

Dr Poricha also shared about CURE's initiative in Dharmshala, where they worked with communities to understand how traditional wisdom could be involved in the city planning and built their capacities and understanding around the traditional water resources.

She further shared about the two case studies that were conducted as part of the BREUCOM.

Craft, Culture and Community: Learning Resilience from the Ziro Valley: The objective of this study was to illustrate the resilience principles and systems, grounded in the cultural continuums of Ziro Valley, the case study employed qualitative methods, including the design ethnography and socio-cultural-technical system mapping with field visits and interviews to come up with a rooted and indigenous version of Urban Resilience. The study found out that the unique Human-Nature relationship patterns which have shaped the cultural practices, and the indigenous knowledge systems spans across the scales of design, from designing object to spaces, from cultural rituals to agriculture

Climate-resilient adaptation of built form in hilly region through traditional wisdom and best practices: A case of Himachal Pradesh: The study aimed to explore traditional/vernacular best practices of built-form and its transformation for mitigating climate change impact in hilly region, assess the applicability of key design elements and concepts of traditional structures in contemporary planning and architecture. The study reveals the reasons why the traditional buildings and settlements can survive the impacts of disasters in the long run, that in turn has resulted in their heritage status. Further, the study documented the new and old concepts with respect to planning and design of traditional buildings and settlements that are with traditional patterns, materials, and technologies of past in Dharamshala and Nagar regions of Himachal Pradesh.

Dr. Tania Berger, taking the conversation forward, shared her experience of engaging with Indian and European cities. Though the context of both countries is different, there are similarities regarding the urban issues. She also shared how European cities are much more advanced, but Indian cities are better in terms of accessing basic services. In Europe, people must travel by car to get groceries and other daily items, whereas in India, even in informal settlements, communities can get these items in their localities. So, connecting it with the idea of '15-minute city', India already has these systems in place. In Europe, people are so car-dependent, which generates carbon emissions. This is primarily because this has been infused in the built environment.

Finally, she also stressed the need for understanding the use of building materials in the community. For example, the issue of mud building or clay or similar things which were very common in our places for centuries but there are certain reasons why people gave it up and very willingly. It is important to reflect upon why people are not using these materials anymore, why is it that they have switched concrete, which way this could be turned around.

Prof Ramesh Kalkur shared about the project that was done by Srishti Manipal in collaboration with Bangalore's commercial street, Ibrahim Street, and the crossroads between these two streets. The aspiring practitioners were given a platform to observe and explore this tiny part of Bangalore. Commercial streets and their precincts are an example of how cities exhibit organic behaviour by slowly and continually adapting to changes over a period. Changes are often due to conscious initiative led by civic bodies as well as their inhabitants. However, many of the changes are evolutionary in nature, a result of unseen and unplanned forces. This area has a history of around 400 years as a central hub of commercial activity. It has always been a mixed-use area with both commercial and residential buildings enmeshed. The balance is steadily changing. In recent years the locality seems to have reached a tipping point of order triggered by various factors. A dramatic increase in vehicular traffic, an influx of brands as aspirations fuelled by advertisements seems to be some obvious reasons for this. Ever rising real estate prices have also been one of the primary drivers of transformation. The area has a variety of trades, crafts, and practices which also have evolved through time often influences by larger market trends. To understand this area students from various educational streams like planning, filming, space management, and even technology-

oriented streams were made part of it. One of the many things is to explore the changes which have taken place, and things that have remained the same.

Prof Vishwesh Viswanathan, spoke of the Visualising Change track that he facilitated with his team, through a collaborative effort by four faculty members, who also had a multi-disciplinary student cohort. One question that they wanted to engage with in this particular interlude was to look at what happens when an architect or a planner is not placed at the centre of discourse associated with place. The first thing the team did was develop a framework which defined weekly outcomes of learning and used outcomes as against outputs to view this interlude as initiating a longer-term engagement with the community.

The team had five distinct stages and each week had two goals; the first week was initiate and engage, second week was engaged and learn, third week was learn and connect and forth week had the goal to connect and initiate. The first was initiate, which entailed developing the team's own understanding and to add talking points for engaging with the community. They started with four exercises which could help this process: the first one being 'Finding a Story'. This entailed the aspiring practitioners documenting the community with audio and video recordings, images, with sensory experiences and writing about the place at hand. This created a sensory map of the whole area and mapped these narratives through various lenses. A part of the process was also a preliminary engagement with the community, which involved doing a questionnaire with them focusing on four questions around identity, assets of the community, how they were willing to act in the context of the community and the issues that needed to be addressed. This contributed to a community perspective which the students could start working with.

The next activity was 'Scavenging for Content', which had three lenses- Built-Unbuilt, Loci-Networks, and Blue-Green. This exercise required practitioners to do more in-depth research and on ground liaising with stakeholders including the ground level civic staff, water supply board and so on. Lastly, the team did synthesis of all the material collected and then visualized change, not only future looking but also considering the present and the past, across place and time.

Prof Shreyas Srivatsa spoke about another academia-community place-based collaboration in Karnataka and the learnings that emerged from it. At Srishti-Manipal there is the UNESCO Chair in Culture, Habitat and Sustainable Development India. Prof Srivatsa and Mr Malge mapped the history and geography of the Bidar region in Karnataka, as well as the cultural practices inherent to the place. Mr Malge highlighted the importance of HEIs to contextualise the community-based research in the local parlance and spoke of the value in having academia-community collaborations through a local partner who has knowledge of the history, culture and local issues of the community at hand. Mr Malge's organisation was able to connect students to the local community members, having worked in the region for several years.
The first learning was that when the intent is to learn from and with people, place and practice, on-ground engagement is centred around learning exchange, with different modes of knowledge production. Secondly, creative explorations in multiple ways and different forms gave care-based approach that made them more concerned, and shared ideas about learning and empathy. Learning from below in an ethical and non-exploitative manner required them to reimagine ways of collaborations in a non-project mode, that creates 'in-between' moments. Another lesson was that there are many possibilities that emerge when the intent is to co-learn in and with the place. Finally, they learn that there is a need for a more open-ended enquiry when the intent is to build a knowledge network about a place, for getting people, place, and practice together. Finally, Prof Srivatsa and Mr Malge spoke of another community collaboration for making a horizontal tunnel (Karez) work after cleaning and clearing it with the help of local partners. The water that started

coming after clearing the tunnel is now being used for irrigation of farms and maintaining the ground water table. The plan is also to make this tunnel a learning ecosystem in relation to the conservation activities that are happening there.

Open Discussion

Q: Why do people stay indoors if the house is much hotter?
Prof Chhaya discussed how temperature was one factor for discussing climate adaptation, however hydration, light and getting all these factors together, we often tend to remain indoors in the summer. At night though, we come out on the streets or on our roofs, and therefore there is a cultural paradigm involving food, clothing, and ways of using space which cannot be seen in isolation.

Q: Use of locally available construction material is discouraged in the name of saving the forest and mining activities largely replaced with concrete material and steel.
Prof Chhaya suggested that it is important to map resource flows across the sub-continent and the world. We are using more and more material for mining, such as the sand mafia. We need to think about taking care about the house, seeing work at home as equally a livelihood instead of a lifestyle where we rush to office in the morning and come home in the evening and sleep without the need to care for the space.

Q: The challenge is how do we integrate culture-based practices in creating built environment that is resilient

Prof Chhaya stated that the products that we produce because of knowledge creation need not only be guidelines and textual material, but need to percolate throughout the culture, for which we need the kind of practices that become a part of everyday life in contemporary ways.
Dr. Tandon looked at the Bidar study, to say how it's a classic example of community based participatory research. First was the component of local partnerships with the community. The NGO acts as a network, to connect stakeholders. The educational program with students and faculty goes into the community not to teach, but to learn as well; not to deny their expertise but to welcome the community's expertise as well. The product is new learning for all parties involved in the learning process.

The last 18 months have busted some intellectual models, such as the busting of global supply chain models. Local communities, self-sufficient and reliant on local supplies and mutually sharing resource models were the only ones who could deal with the Pandemic. So, it is not just the planners and architects, but also the economists, civil engineers and other professionals who must re-engage with what it means to create a technology which is differently designed. These case studies that we have heard today are powerful examples of reconstructing the purpose of higher education. Finally, he stated that wisdom is knowledge plus ethics with expertise at its base, expertise which is for public good.

Prof Shalini Ravikumar from MAHE-SMI gave the closing comments by thanking all the speakers and participants for a stimulating discussion.