




Voices - 2013

Voices 2013**A Summary round-up of the voices we reported in 2013**

As a part of our regular annual exercise we present Voices, a pick of excerpts from interviews conducted during the course of the year.

This year Vaastuyogam spoke to a host of Architects and Town Planners to enquire into the somewhat widely discussed but poorly understood subject of Town Planning.

Ar. Anand Tatu

Urban planning and design regulates uses of space that focus on the physical form, economic functions, and social impacts of the urban environment and on the location of different activities within it. Because urban planning draws upon engineering, architectural, and social and political concerns, it is variously a technical profession, an endeavor

involving political will and public participation, and an academic discipline. Urban planning concerns itself with both the development of open land ("greenfield sites") and the revitalization of existing parts of the city.

Proper town planning is needed to absorb the future growth in vehicle population and expansion of construction industry stemming from the growing requirements of a growing population. To this, I must add that while there is widespread consensus on this general goal, most of the major planning decisions involve trade-offs between subsidiary objectives and thus frequently involve conflict and its resolution...

Representative issues especially concern the recognition of a public interest and how it should be

determined, the physical and social character of the ideal city, the possibility of achieving change in accordance with consciously determined goals, the extent to which consensus on goals is attainable through communication, the role of citizens versus public officials and private investors in shaping the city,

The general idea of town planning (in a radial city like Ahmedabad) is, that in order, that the concentration of human activity, which is the essential feature of the aggregation of human beings in a city, should be of the highest efficiency. It is necessary, therefore, that the lines of intercommunication between the buildings and also between them and the lesser centers of outlying territory, should be the shortest possible, and also the most convenient.

Ar. Niranjan Khopkar

Architecture- Sketching V/s Computerized Designing

Sketching is the basic language for architects. With sketching you start observing, and give shape to your thoughts and ideas. Only if you have observed carefully and correctly can you sketch well. With sketching you get a grip on proportion and details. Through your

sketch you generate concepts and develop your design.

The computer is more of a tool for the extension of a design conceived as a sketch. Software smoothens out the geometric complications with accuracy and speed. The computerized drawings are the preferred source for the execution of the work because of the versatile reproductive, editing, and storage capacity of the software / hardware. It can be said to be a super-draftsman and to that extent it is a boon for all architects.

But the seed of any architectural design is best developed initially and independently of the computer. Though the current trend is resorting to computers with the word 'go', it only leads to producing design alternatives

with no significant or radical variation of generic thought...

Teaching design ingrains in me the ethos that architecture and interior design are sacrosanct and should enrich each other through articulate approach. I strive to protect good architecture from desecration when involved as interior designer.

Interior design is about how one can enhance the interior space being in tune with the – often ambiguously spelt out - client's world-view. Designing interiors can be challenging because it operates within the limitation of an existing built space and must make the best of it. Often interior designers don't take this limitation seriously and end up with disasters with bad choice and use of finishing materials



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Dr. Bimal Patel



(Q)Vaastuyogam: Can you outline three crucial ingredients of town-planning?

(A)Bimal Patel: There are more than three crucial ingredients for town planning. However, to answer your question I will restrict myself to three.

First of all, plans will work only if they are

fair. If planning is to work then the plans will have to be fair. By this I mean that the plans must treat everyone fairly. The transfer of wealth from rich to the poor or vice versa is inevitable. However, the planners must ensure that their plans have a political consensus backing them and are not implemented riding rough shod over this, that and the other. And another thing, plans will work not only if they are fair but are widely perceived to be fair.

Secondly, if we want planning to work, we must understand that planning increases land values. These values must be unlocked to pay the costs. No point asking for money from governments. (This is being achieved in the Sabarmati River-front project. See

first part of this interview in June 2013 issue of Vaastuyogam) So, your plans must not just state their costs but figure out concrete ways of raising those monies by unlocking value from a portion of the development.

Thirdly planners must not plan everything. They should begin by looking at society's requirements and then devise plans to meet those requirements. Plans must respond to demand...

Thus, a good planner is one who learns what the city wants and makes plan to support this rather than making plans that go against what the city wants. Plans must heed to what people want rather than telling them what to do.

Mrs Abhija Dalal



In India, Urban open spaces and Parks are under strong pressure. Due to increasing urbanization, combined with a spatial planning policy of densification, more people face the prospect of living in less green residential environments, especially people from low economic strata.

This may lead to environmental inequality with regard to the distribution of access to public green space

The widespread competition to earn extra money at the cost of environment is a reality today. Development is measured in terms of high-end buildings, concrete structures and roads, and industries – the sources of immediate economy. Priority to environment is sidelined as it does not contribute to the national income or fill state treasuries.

Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar

The tree-loving tradition and the special ambience of Ahmedabad has been under attack for a long time.

All that I can see today is buildings and less greenery. Lots of people come to the Ahmedabad city to settle down for education and various other reasons. Construction is boosted to meet the growing demand. As a result, space in the city is being bargained for crores of rupees.

Hence, the realtors think of constructing additional buildings rather than planting a tree. The few parks that Ahmedabad has, are in a really sorry state. A quick look at some of Ahmedabad's oldest gardens, Victoria Garden, Parimal Garden and Law Garden will confirm what I am saying. In fact, apart from Kankaria Lake and the recently opened Sabarmati River Front all other parks and open spaces (eg. Vastrapur lake) of Ahmedabad have succumbed to the pressure of hawkers and petty traders.

Considering the dry and hot climate of Ahmedabad, there is a genuine problem with maintaining parks and gardens in Ahmedabad. The high cost of watering parks and gardens certainly is a major hurdle. In Europe, this is not the case since it rains after every couple of days.

Swapnil Sharma



What is good furniture?

Good furniture is the end result of meticulous planning, meaningful interaction with the end-user and intensely worked-out design that caters to functionality as spelt out by the client. Most of all it is elegant, durable and comfortable.

I also believe that workmanship is as important as the design; there have been

more than a few cases where designs that looked excellent on paper got lost in transition due to poor workmanship. I am sorry to see the approach and attitude of artisans and craftsmen who do not go beyond making bad copies of the originals.

There is urgent need for re-tooling and skill up gradation here. Moral of the story is that workmanship and detailing is as important as design.



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Chirag Doshi



Defining Design

Design defies definition. Whoever attempts to define design is being very naive. If you ask me – being a teacher – whether I know design I will say No – I can't define design. Designing on the

other hand is the creation of a plan or convention for the construction of an object using aesthetic sensibilities but keeping in mind the function of the object being designed. The output of a designer is the sum total of his knowledge and skills at that moment of design. Rest assured that it keeps advancing with every successive project.

As a corollary to what I have just said, one can also say that every design is incomplete; that it can be improved. Every design project is an attempt at uncluttering the mind. Nevertheless a project must come to a close and therefore it is said, "Art is never

completed; it is abandoned.

"Design is a process of refinement spread over a lifetime and is accompanied by continuous unlearning of what has been learnt and adopted so far.

It is foolhardy to keep criticizing the Vaastu issue or to push it under the carpet. The argument that Vaastu is bad for design has been shot down many times and cannot be used to win over the client against Vaastu. Modern Architecture and Ancient Vaastu will have to co-exist. And I think it is good that this should be so.

Vrushti Mawani



While there can be debates about what characteristics constitute sustainable urban environment and what don't, the one fundamental characteristic irrefutably working towards defining such an urban environment is a socio-economically just, culturally responsive

environment which works in sync with its surrounding physical geography, instead of trying to overpower and transform this physical geography into a manifestation of human capabilities to construct synthetic environments.

A sustainable public urban environment is also one that allows all sections of society to claim the city as their own ; to associate their identity with their environment; to feel strongly towards contributing to the betterment of their environment.

Such in environment necessarily needs to be born and evolved out of a very

detailed understanding of the changing needs of the city's population.

Often urban development is directed largely by economic goals, while the real needs of the city's people get swept aside. Just as often, the physical form of urban environments is a result of an urge to compete with and supersede other models that might have become global symbols of power and wealth.

The urban environments that these agendas produce, in being exclusive, non-specific, and usually environmentally unfriendly, become the exact opposite of what a sustainable urban environment should be.

Jitendra Mistry



We should see to it that our citizens should become a part in every Town - Planning exercise.

We must caution ourselves that we will be unable to solve any of today's

problems if we concentrate on isolated relations, such as between man and nature, man and building, man and networks & man and society. Instead our town planning model should be circulated in various communities of the city to get their comments.

I wonder if it is a big move for us, but this will help to get their involvement and will be a help for planners to remember the issues related to people and their life.

It is not as if our planners are not intelligent or lack vision but we have many factors working against them whilst they do their work. This can only be

remedied by firm and committed governance.

For an environment of better town planning we will require a higher, more intelligent and intimate level of planning than I see available now.

Nevertheless, no matter what it is that has to be achieved, it can be done provided there is involvement of the citizens, a firm and unbiased commitment by the Government, the intelligence and vision of the planners and most critically the realization that you cannot get urban planning right by working in isolation.