Exploring built environment

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Today the built environment of the world is facing unprecedented challenges. According to the recent report released by the World Economic Forum in 2016, the current trend of urbanization which started in the previous century and continuing to increase in our present one is largely unsustainable. Our cities where over 50% of the world’s population now reside are the largest contributors to the degradation of the environment. Indeed, greenhouse gas emissions from our cities are at an all-time high.

The crisis is not only environmental. Cities, now home to 55 per cent of the global population, account for 70 per cent of global GDP. But they also responsible for an increasing share of greenhouse gas emissions and widening levels of inequality.

The current models of design that undergirds our built environment is largely untenable. They favour low-density arrangements and their over-reliance on industrialized forms of transport is contributing to pollution and sprawl. Taken together, these sensibilities have had a tremendously negative impact.

A recent study by the UN-Habitat shows that the absolute number of the world’s slum population has actually been rising over the past 25 years, from 650 million in 1990 to nearly 1 billion today. In Africa, for example, which has one of the highest rates of urbanization in the world, over the 60% of people in cities live in slums without access to clean water, sanitation and other basic human needs.

Closer to home, in India, we are only too familiar with these problems plaguing our built environment. We only have to reflect upon our own experiences of our cities and our built environments to see the extent to which they are unsustainable and on the brink of catastrophe. Rarely does a day go by where we do not read and experience of the how the infrastructure of our cities are being stretched to their limits, often breaking down under immense stress. Rarely does a day go by when we do not encounter rising levels of crime, poverty, social inequality and a collective sense of despair and anger that is gripping its inhabitants.

Yet, even as this pace of unsustainable development continues unabated and brings numerous challenges, it also presents immense opportunities to re-imagine the social, economic, environmental and formal fabric of our built environment. It affords us chances to rethink up innovative solutions to these problems and rethink at the role of public as well as private sectors in the development of our cities, towns and habitat. But more than this these challenges to our built environment presents us with opportunities in which new kinds of experts have to be developed.

Experts who work at the intersections of different and often divergent knowledge systems. Experts who have to navigate terrains which are so complex that a single set of skills is no longer adequate.

Through courses in this area you learn about the fundamental of design as well as about law, policy, environmental issues, question of economics, technology, sustainability, urbanism all of which prepare you for joining the built environment sector of the 21st century.

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