



HOW TO BECOME A SMART CITY

Applying Urban Design Principles That Make Sense

The fact that India is faced with an urbanization challenge of epic proportions was brought back to everybody's attention last year, when Prime Minister Modi unfolded the Government's ambitious plan for 100 Smart Cities. While the high tech 'smart' component of the urbanization challenge attracts all the headlines, the implementation of urban design concepts of an international standard which will increase the quality of life for all citizens actually requires the most immediate priority. With the private sector largely driving the development of India's urban future, it's time for planners to advocate how planning principles like 'New Urbanism' can not only make for a more sustainable environment, but make good business sense as well.

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Time for Change

It's safe to say that recent urban redevelopment and suburbanization in and around Indian cities, has not been particularly well planned and has led to 'patchwork cities' of endless enclaves of ubiquitous gated residential communities and business parks intersected with anonymous strips of malls along busy arteries. In these suburbs like Thane, Gurgaon or Noida the growing distance and spatial separation between one's home, office

and place for shopping and relaxation, has made cars indispensable for efficient transportation and led to the emergence of an American style culture of car dependency. The almost complete absence of well defined, attractive public spaces with a human scale is another issue that needs to be addressed. The lack of properly designed streets, parks or squares reinforces a lack of civic pride in the shared public realm, and makes them prone to becoming uncared for,

empty and unsafe spaces that will deter residents from walking anywhere outside of their compound. However, with the large scale urbanization of the Indian sub-continent still in its infancy, it's not too late for its urban developments to be steered in a more sustainable direction.

New Urbanism

As a counter movement based on the haphazard urban development of mono-functional estates where the car

is king, the Town Planning paradigm called 'New Urbanism' began to emerge in the United States in the early 1980s. Since then, New Urbanism has gradually informed many aspects of real estate development, urban planning, and municipal land-use strategies in the Americas, Europe and major cities around Asia. Instead of mono-functional gated communities, New Urbanism promotes the creation and restoration of compact, pedestrian oriented, vibrant, mixed-use communities composed of the same components as conventional developments, but assembled in a more integrated fashion, taking shape as complete communities. They contain housing, work places, shops, entertainment, schools, parks, and civic facilities essential to the daily lives of the residents, all within easy walking distance of each other. Every public open space is designed as a spatial entity and not treated as just a residue between buildings or neighborhoods. Masdar City in the UAE and New Songdo in South Korea are two Smart Cities currently under construction that are among the best examples in Asia of implementation of the New Urbanism Principles on a city wide scale.

Short Term Gains and Long Term Solutions

More and more, large scale urban (re) development projects that are currently in the pipeline, initiated either by the Indian government or the private sector, reflect a growing consensus that India can do better when it comes



to planning its cities. Detailed Master Planning and Urban Design Guidelines are no longer an alien planning format, but are slowly becoming household planning tools that the new generation of Indian cities can't do without. Since the private sector is playing such a pivotal role in driving the development of India's cities, it's important to underline that incorporating the New Urbanism design principles, which focus on mixed use neighborhoods and pedestrian orientation, not just creates a higher quality lifestyle environment, but is a smart business move as well. Outlined below are four examples that explain the powerful incentive behind implementation of New Urbanism style planning.

A Transit and Pedestrian Oriented Development

Focusing on high density commercial development around nodes of Public

Transportation has shown to be the best model to create the highest property prices instantly. With the arrival of metro and international standard train services, the return of the middle class to public transportation will almost guarantee the commercial success of nearby developments. Planning a pedestrian friendly environment around stations, with high streets shops in comparatively small units has shown to bring a much higher return per leasable square foot than planning for car based big box retail.

More compact, walkable developments means less land area needs to be acquired, that less land needs to be set aside for roads and a reduction in costs for development of utilities and other infrastructure. Walkability also means significant cost savings can be made in the lower demand for parking facilities. Moreover, in mixed-use properties even sharing





Historic Zhujiajiao, China



New Town Zhujiajiao, China

A Memorable Identity: inspired by local building traditions



Historic Souk Middle East



New Souk Masdar



'Post Card Image' of Lavasa

of parking spaces is possible between complementary users. For example between residents that use the parking spaces during the evening and on weekends and office goers during the day, results in less duplication in providing parking space.

A Memorable Identity

In an ever increasingly globalized world with an exponentially growing middle class, where people's lifestyles and their urban environment have started to look the same the World over, the concept of cherishing one's own culture and identity is becoming increasingly important. The universal significance for residents to be able to identify with their city or town as a unique place on earth should not be underestimated. One could draw a parallel with Maslov's Pyramid: the hierarchy of man's fundamental needs. As more and more people reach higher levels of self-actualization, to live in what is a just a 'livable' city no longer suffices: the importance shifts for people's immediate environment to be more stimulating, interesting and memorable. This memorable identity can actually be sold with one successful image and become a unique selling point in the Developer's marketing strategy. The importance is having a 'Post Card Image': a tool in creating a differentiating Identity that doesn't need to apply to major cities

alone trying to draw in tourists. It can similarly be applied to green-field developments like Townships. By using specific local natural or cultural aspects as inspiration, new site specific Icons and Landmarks can be created in the first stage of a development that will make a Township immediately a memorable place for residents, business owners and visitors alike. The use of local urban design traditions and, or a reference to indigenous architectural styles as an Identity Marker can be an especially appealing way to achieve this.

Community Instead of Exclusivity

People are inherently adverse to changes they can't control. This attitude towards changes in one's own neighborhood has become known as NIMBY: Not In My Backyard. If a Township is solely sold on the attributes of green space and exclusivity, then every new adjacent development that will be built next is a degradation of the amenity and the current residents will object. However, if one sells 'Community', then every new house can be perceived as an enhancement of the asset. With a proper Master Plan in place and a more efficient New Urbanism inspired compact development it is possible to sustainably plan for and retain more of the green, open spaces that attracted the residents to the area in the first place.

The use of Social Media has become an important tool for Developers that want to sell their Township as a Community. It creates bonds between the Developer or City Management and the residents and strengthens the mutual relationship between residents. The Township of Lavasa in Pune, India, has for example a very active Facebook page and is involved in the public debate about Urbanization and Sustainable Development, by actively organizing regularly well publicized events around these themes. Word of caution: using Social Media to one's



Vibrant Pedestrian Oriented Mixed Use Center : Bhartiya City, Bangalore

Smart Planning: Flexible Buildings and Public Spaces that can adapt over time to changes in social and economic dynamics: e.g. change from offices and civic facilities to retail and apartments



advantage means one can never make any promises one can't keep, so marketing needs to be truthful or otherwise people will let the Developer (and the rest of the world) know about it.

Attracting the Younger Generation

In the last ten years, office jobs have started moving out of the city centers following the middle-class towards the suburbs. In the modern areas of Indian cities, offices are almost exclusively concentrated in large scale mono functional business parks. This strict spatial separation however doesn't reflect the shifting social dynamics of India's urban middle classes. With more and more women in the work-force, and with flexible office hours and busy social lives, it's especially the younger generation who prefers the work environment of compact mixed use urban centers. World-wide, the trend

is for modern (suburban) workplaces to reflect the spirit of city centers, with a lively mix of commercial, civic, cultural, social and residential uses, all on offer within walking distance. The master plans for high density mixed use developments like Bhartiya City (Bangalore), Wave City Centre (Noida) and Wadala Commercial Centre (Mumbai) reflect this shift. Each of these suburban 'City Centers' will have a strong pedestrian orientation, with open space networks of publically accessible plazas, parks and mixed use high streets. Whilst for now most Townships are being sold as a quiet residential family oriented lifestyle choice, in the years to come the increasing scale of urban agglomerations means there is a growing opportunity to develop contemporary mixed use urban environments that really live up to the slogan of a modern 'Work, Live and Play' Lifestyle.