

Editorial

Improvement of liveability: A matter of good governance

The liveability of the built environment in both urban and rural areas is today being increasingly discussed on a global scale. This discussion revolves around the issue of how people 'fit' into their built environment and how the lives of all citizens may be improved. Not only basic needs, but also the locations for pleasure and recreation, have to be secured. For South Asia, liveability - particularly in urban built environments - has declined due to the pressure of the rapid growing population on the available space and infrastructure and the difficulties in coping with these developments at the level of planning and implementation. Furthermore, the gap between rich and poor is widening and violent outbursts have erupted as a consequence (see e.g. UNCHS, 2001). This special issue of GBER will provide the reader with insights into the various initiatives that have been taken to improve the liveability of built environments in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Firstly, this editorial will focus on the creation of national identities for these newly created countries after independence. Here, attention will be paid to the design of new capitals and government buildings and the role that architects play or should play. In practice, the way a specific built environment is used is an outcome of the interaction between the users and the environment. The second part reviews the initiatives that have been taken to create opportunities for recreation. Nowadays, problems of liveability have become increasingly complex in nature, which requires more participants in the process of governance, which is associated with good governance, the dynamics of which will finally be discussed here.



After achieving independence, countries in the South Asian subcontinent had to find a new national identity, which is reflected in the design of new capitals and government buildings. In Bangladesh, for example, a new national assembly had to be built. The question rises of whether the inspirations for designing are in fact western or locally based. Mustafa Ali Faruki offers us more insight into the inspiration for Louis Kahn's assembly in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Apart from the construction of an assembly, complete new cities have also been created; Chandigarh in India and Islamabad in Pakistan. In his conference report, Ayyub Malik reveals how these two cities and the assembly in Dhaka have been designed, created and how symbols of independence, local traditions and its users coincide.

The built environment is created in such a way that people can lead 'good' lives; it should contribute to the well being of people (for a discussion of ethics concerning the built environment see Fox, 2000). The interpretation of what a good life should entail differs among citizens in general and among professionals such as architects and planners. Some emphasise the design and appearance of the buildings and others look at the use value for its target group. However, it is often the middle class that defines its terms and conditions and poorer sections of society are often dependent on decisions taken by them (e.g. Smets, 1999; Turner, 1976). The question rises who has the right to design? Should it be a professional

architect, or can barefoot architects provide better-equipped shelter to specific target groups? (see Rajat Ray in this issue). It is not the architect who creates specific images of liveability, but it is the result of the interaction between the built environment and its users. In this respect cities differ, which will be illustrated especially with respect to Delhi.

In contrast to Mumbai (Bombay) and Kolkata (Calcutta), the Indian capital Delhi is often seen as a metropolitan city of fragmentation, characterised by urban, spatial and architectural ruptures resulting from historical, political and cultural discontinuity. Delhi has alternative images and less predictable perspectives, social dynamics and less conventional life experiences (see Soumyen Bandyopadhyay's book review of *Delhi: Urban Space and Human Destinies* in this issue). This demonstrates that the interaction between citizens and the built environment can create a certain liveability.

In the built environment, increasing population density has led and will lead to tensions between people in different ways. Outlets for stress release can take shape at places of relaxation and amusement. Such places can improve the liveability of the built environment. Examples include the Patiala Heritage Festival in the Indian Punjab, as described by Pritam Singh. Interesting enough, driven by political rivalism, such initiative encourages others to set up other festivals. Indeed, Indian festivals do not necessarily remain within the subcontinent but may also spread over the world. For example, Sumita Sinha-Jordan gives us a taste of the atmosphere of the Indian movie festival in London.

Interventions in the process of creating liveability can take place by different agents. Here, good governance is required to make the built environment a liveable environment for all. 'The concept of urban governance refers to the complex set of values, norms, processes and institutions by which cities are managed. Good governance works towards making cities more efficient, equitable, safer and sustainable' (Taylor 1999: 1). Urban governance involves participatory decision-making, co-production and co-management in which actors take part such as the state, local governments, economic and social actors, community-based organisations (CBOs), and the media (ibid.). To overcome the cost of compliance, states are expected to decentralise and have the capability, effectiveness, and credibility to step into useful partnerships with private enterprises, NGOs and CBOs, and incentives in their institutional arrangements. In addition, direct provision by the public sector has to be reduced (e.g. UNCHS 2001; Wegelin 2002). Good governance requires also an understanding of the socio-economic, political and historical context.

Devas (1999: 2) states that '[u]rban government and management studies tend to assume that the state is in a position to control what actually happens. Studies of the urban poor and NGOs/CBOs tend to see the state (...) as either irrelevant or oppressive. There has been relatively little which explores what actually takes place between (...) the various actors and interests involved.' The development role ascribed to NGOs demands the huge responsibility of these organisations. However, NGOs face problems in, for example, acquiring staff, as shown by Vandana Desai for urban NGOs in Mumbai, but also in finding their role as stakeholder in the development process of the city.

Urban governance has to be decentralised, but little attention has been paid to the risks of contested authority and dominance by some sections of society who try to adjust the governance to their own interests (Pugh 1997: ix-xi). It is remarkable that it is expected that the public sector can be modified easily even though it is dominated by vested interests of specific institutions or individuals. For instance, political alliances make their self-interest

prevail over public interests. Moreover, political manipulation can even lead to a bureaucracy with political-machine-like characteristics, which serves specific labour groups or co-opts opponents (see e.g. Baken 2000; Pugh 1997: vi-vii, iv; Smets 2003). This serving of particular interests could be done more easily due to the scarcity of available public means. Ranvinder Singh Sandhu and Gurwinder Singh discuss this concerning a relatively new poverty eradication programme (Swaran Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojna) in the Indian city of Amritsar. Here, all kind of power manipulations take place to maintain the creation of vote banks. It is not easy to find away out, but the authors suggest - apart from bringing back political influence to the grassroots - watchdog functions for CBOs and NGOs.

The promotion of partnerships and alliances among stakeholders is meant to enable more efficient and effective urban governance. Yet in practice, local governments aim to contract large national and foreign companies, instead of small-scale local enterprises. It is believed that it is easier to employ legal sanctions if large companies do not comply with contracts. Moreover, the government can obtain more prestige from large-scale projects (Baud and Post in this issue; Rakodi 1993). Isa Baud and Johan Post focus on alliances and partnerships concerning solid waste management in Hyderabad, India, which contributes to sustainable development of the human built environment. For fruitful and sustainable co-operation, the state should be a reliable partner, which is much better in Hyderabad as compared with Nairobi. Their comparative study reveals how the Indian state is not as weak as is often suggested (see e.g. Migdal 1988).

In short, this issue of GBER will provide deeper insight into discussions concerning the improvement of built environments in South Asia. I hope that the reader will also be encouraged to keep a critical eye on initiatives and developments concerning liveability and pay special attention to the needs and self-help potential of the weaker sections of society.

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