

## AedesEast

Internationales Forum für

Zeitgenössische Architektur e.V.

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Press information on the exhibition project

# What Makes India Urban?

## Challenges towards mobility, infrastructure, energy, and perpetual change

**Organizer:** Aedes East: International Forum for Contemporary Architecture e.V.

**Exhibition location:** Aedes am Pfefferberg, Christinenstr. 18-19, 10119 Berlin

**Exhibition dates:** October 9 - November 26, 2009

**Opening:** Friday, October 9, 2009, 6.30pm

**Curators:** Anand Patel (architect), Ahmedabad / Ulla Giesler (cultural studies), Berlin

**Conceptual collaboration:** Christopher Dell, Institute for Improvisation Technology

**Catalog:** an Aedes catalog will be published in conjunction with the exhibition

**Symposium:** Saturday, October 10, 2009

This exhibition takes place in the framework of the Asia-Pacific Weeks 2009. This year's thematic focus is "Mobility and Energy."

India continues to develop at breakneck speed, and is not suffering excessively from the current global financial crisis, at least not in the field of architecture. In India as a whole, the same number of architects and urban planners are active as in Berlin alone. They are never short of work, and young architects and architectural students from Europe are in demand! In many cities, the visitor's first impression is of new expressways (often with multilingual signage), new railway tracks, and countless construction sites for new water mains: all evidence of the gigantic upheavals prevailing here. Half of New Delhi is being excavated for new metro lines. Why do we see nothing of this in the German media? A mystery! Deemed worthy of the occasional newspaper article is at most the construction of a new museum containing spectacular collections of contemporary Indian art, or a socially critical view of life in the slums.

At a recent Congress of Berlin entitled "Beyond Multiculturalism," Indian anthropologist Arjun Appadurai observed that we are often simultaneously too close and yet too far away from events occurring around the world: "Although in the fall we watched the terrorist attacks in Bombay on television virtually in real time, no one seems interested in the positive changes occurring in India over the past few years."

The exhibition project "**What Makes India Urban?**" **Challenges Towards Mobility, Infrastructure, Energy and Perpetual Change**" – initiated by Aedes and currently being implemented in India – will provide insights into the new urban India and into the complex utilizations of the new spaces being engendered there. The programmatic upbeat to the project was a symposium held in Ahmedabad in early May, a forum for architects, city planners, artists, filmmakers, lawyers, and theoreticians to discuss the question: What really constitutes contemporary urban India?

Investigated in the first exhibition gallery under the title "**Screened and Narrated Urbanism**" will be links between urbanization and cultural change. Audiovisual installations will generate images, sounds, and voices relating to various urban situations, for example Gurgaon, the special economic zone set directly at the threshold of New Delhi. By means of 20 different projects, visitors to the exhibition will be offered views into a variety of inhabited environments – from Indian streets to new highways, from emerging satellite cities to impressive skylines – and hence a sense of the unique spaces and locations offered by urban India.

In "**The Story of Gurgaon: As Told by Its People**," freelance broadcaster **Arti Jaiman** and photographer **Ajay Jaiman** interview and portray the population, with its formerly agrarian orientation, and its attempts to find a place for itself in a restructured Gurgaon.

Musician and theoretician **Christopher Dell** intervenes in the urban spaces of Calcutta with a borrowed vibraphone. The project thematized in the film "**Kolkata Monodosis**" and in the publication "**Tacit Urbanism**" is the transformation of urban space in Calcutta brought about by the street vendors and by others active in the informal sector. ("Kolkata Monodosis" was produced in 2008 in the framework of the Artist in Residence Project of the Goethe Institute in Calcutta.)

In "**Gender Game: Urban Space and Women**," artist **Shilpa Ranade** explores the question of why, although Mumbai is regarded as a relatively safe city, women are not yet in a position to utilize public space there without prejudice. Public space continues to be male-dominated. Her video game plays ironically with the impossibility of spending time there as a woman. Her work poses questions about the risks and potential forms of enjoyment of public space, about civil rights, inviting exhibition visitors to hang out in the streets of Mumbai on the virtual level.

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The first part of the exhibition guides visitors into the everyday world, the dimensions and cultural specifics of various Indian cities, while the second part, entitled **“Demystified Urbanism,”** focuses on efforts by architects and urban planners to reshape India's cities and to fashion appropriate methods for doing so. The challenge facing architects and planners is to recognize preexisting cultural inscriptions and to construct spaces based on these. The selected architectural and planning projects call attention to the infrastructural challenges currently confronting India's cities. The spectrum extends from the preservation of historic monuments all the way to large-scale projects, special enterprise zones, and new infrastructural initiatives. Among the projects featured by this exhibition are:

**“The Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project”** by HCPDPM, **Bimal Patel** (architects and urban planners from Ahmedabad)

The Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project is currently India's largest urban redevelopment project. Along a stretch measuring 24 km, the banks of the Sabarmati River in Ahmedabad are being made publicly accessible. The project will make available 180 ha of reappropriated territory for urgently needed public space, pedestrian zones, cultural facilities, as well as residential space for slum dwellers. This newly created riverbank zone will also provide recreational space and also regulate water levels in cases of flooding.

**“Ownership of the City”** by **Naresh Narasimhan** of Ventkataraman Associates, (architects from Bangalore)

In his projects, Naresh Narasimhan pursues questions concerning relations of ownership in the city of Bangalore, and the question of how participation in the city can be returned to the hands of its inhabitants. Over the past 50 years, the state has passed through many hands, from Kempe Gowda, to Hayder Ali, and all the way to the English and present-day officials and politicians. Current residents, including an enormous group of immigrants, should be allowed to determine contemporary relations of ownership in the future.

**“Urbanism and New Communities,”** a project of **SK Das** (architect from New Delhi)

Crossings Township is a residential area measuring 160 ha, with public squares and public spaces for strolling and cycling, leisure and work. It has emerged through an exchange between municipal agencies and surrounding low-income residents. The project was implemented in collaboration with Sasaki of Boston. Meanwhile, the overall plan has received approval, and construction activities are in full swing. The area lies in Ghaziabad, a city on the outskirts of New Delhi.

Diverse textual material drawn from Indian and German publications and from contemporary Indian literature can be accessed on location at the exhibition. These textual extracts serve as correctives to the collective images stored in our memories, exposing clichés. These literary examples are often characterized by the turn back to the local tradition, to the microcosm of one's personal lifeworld, to stories about the city and about social milieus which may ultimately vanish in the wake of India's globalization and homogenization. Aravind Agida's Booker Prize winning novel *“The White Tiger,”* for example, is set in the world of the call center, in the emerging satellite cities with their gigantic malls and gated communities, and their Indian solutions to traffic problems.

The exhibition is curated by Anand Patel, Ahmedabad, and Ulla Giesler, Berlin. Our thanks goes to all participating architects, artists, and theoreticians for their tireless input and generous contributions, without which this exhibition project could not have been realized.

**Analyses, images, textual extracts, as well as brief videos are available from Ulla Giesler at [ug@aedes-arc.de](mailto:ug@aedes-arc.de), phone: 0049-30-2827015.**

On the evening of the **exhibition opening**, we span a wide bridge from tradition to modernity via appearances by young classical Kuchipudi dancer Arunima Kumar and urban DJ/VJ Avinask Kumar from New Delhi. Taking place on at the Aedes Network Campus Berlin on Saturday October 10, 2009 is an accompanying **symposium** under the title *“What Makes India Urban?”* Also scheduled for the period of the exhibition is a multifaceted program.

The project has received financial support from the Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin (DKLB), The Alfred Herrhausen Society/The International Forum of Deutsche Bank, as well as Zumtobel, ArcelorMittal, Carpet Concept, Busch Jaeger, and AXOR hansgrohe.

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