

journal of  
**landscape**  
architecture

ISSN 0975-0177

PRICE | ₹125.00

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**LANDSCAPE  
PLANNING** ARTICULATING MORPHOLOGY  
DYNAMICS OF CULTURE & SPACE CREATION

CHANDIGARH

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THE SHAPE OF CITIES  
SENSE OF PLACE  
S K DAS  
RUBANISM  
CHOREOGRAPHY OF VIBRANT OPEN SPACES



**LA! 29**  
MONSOON | 2010

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# THE URBAN OPEN SPACE TEMPLATE



*Below me, there is a village, and looks how quiet and small!  
And yet bubbles o'er like a city, with gossip, scandal and spite.*  
Tennyson, *Maud* <sup>1</sup>

All of us have formed some view on the environmental controversies surrounding the Commonwealth games. Though the games were called the 'green games' with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United Nations Environment Programme to show our intention to host a 'sustainable games' and to take the environment into consideration when constructing and renovating venues, this seems to have been done more on paper than on the ground.

We wish we could say with pride that there is a 'Delhi Way' as a path to be emulated by others, but such is the discredit associated with the games that the idea of pride seems ludicrous.

It is important for us urban planning and design professionals to assess the value of the investment made in the city for the games. In my understanding, there are six aspects related to planning and construction that we must examine.

*I never see what has been done; I only see what remains to be done.*  
Buddha <sup>2</sup>

## Integrated vision

The idea of having an integrated vision for the urban development was so blindingly obvious, that it appears that it was not even attempted. Delhi has been following some version of a Master Plan for nearly half a century. Though this does contain aspects related to the open spaces, an explicit and detailed landscape overlay has been missing since the first draft of 1952. The Master Plan seems to be the obvious place to start when planning for investment of this magnitude.

What this investment in the games infrastructure might have achieved, as a part of a cohesive urban landscape and open space template is mind-boggling. Issues of location of infrastructure projects, of the games village, stadia, connecting roads, cultural cohesiveness, focus on less developed areas, upgradation of the central core needed to be dealt with more transparently.

Let us delve into why it does not happen. Around the world, the political class as well as the bureaucracy is loath to give up its power to take ad-hoc decisions and cannot be trammled by pettifogging planners! In most cases, the planners are equally beholden to the political class, for assignments and promotions. Serious thinking is almost always the first casualty in such a set up.

It is naive to think that there is any possibility of the professional viewpoints being recognized by the powers that be, but in this case, I doubt that they were even raised in an appropriate fashion.

*Maybe we can show government how to operate better as a result of better architecture.*

Frank Lloyd Wright <sup>3</sup>

## Planning template

Where do we look to create this urban and open space template? The academia, the private sector and/or professional bodies or various commissions set up by the government?

It is relevant to note that construction arm of the government CPWD (or local PWD) brings out a series of documents (SOR's, Analysis of rates, specifications etc.) that are adequate in terms of establishing a basis for their activi-

ties. Similarly, BIS specifies codes in fine detail for construction. Even non-governmental agencies like TERI (or LEED) furnish a template relating to their focus area.

The template can possibly define the norms for open space planning, design and construction. In architectural terms, this would be akin to a master urban development plan for any large development. It would define the specifics of the look and feel of the city, and ensure that an appropriate design response is devised for the distinct zones of the city. This template can be audited by experts, in a predefined process, unlike Charles Correa's *post facto* advice on the environmental aspects of the Siri Fort stadium development.<sup>4</sup>

In Delhi, it may be the Delhi Urban Art Commission (DUAC) that takes the onus of making a landscape and urban open space related template. Would it be possible to explore its mission statement to see if this is possible? This suggestion may make sense seeing that the commission currently includes two of the foremost intellectual thinkers in the field of landscape architecture and urban design.

*The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark.*

Michelangelo <sup>5</sup>

## Civil and related construction

Almost all cities around the world have a sense of continuity in their urban aesthetics and design responses. There is a place for the old and the new, but the underlying idea seems to be that of seamlessness.

The Commonwealth games present a completely different picture. In the areas where urban infrastructure has been upgraded, the city looks entirely different. It is obvious that an equitable distribution of resources throughout the city was not possible. The prime areas that would draw visitors are more developed. But consistency in planning and construction across the projects completed for the games is not visible.

A small illustration of this aspect - Singapore appears to have decided on granite as the preferred material for its public urban floorscapes. In the United States, it is predominantly concrete cast in situ. London prefers a clay brick finish for both its floors and urban architecture, while Dubai appears to prefer pre-cast concrete pavers as a walking surface. Based upon parameters of sustainability, availability, durability and cost, can we not also have a broadly defined urban aesthetic?

It was a little embarrassing to see the DUAC squabbling with the shopkeepers of Connaught Place over the choice of granite or sandstone for exterior paving. In contrast, each of the 'streetscaped' roads was paved with such varied and contrasting materials, that Delhi seems more like a showroom for finishes than a cohesive urban experience.

*Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned.*

Congreve, *The Mourning Bride* <sup>6</sup>

## Intellectual gains

The media has highlighted many parts of the construction related to the games. The work was carried out based upon schemes prepared by professionals.

We have since heard repeatedly that the actual execution was very different from what was planned. There must be some wisdom that we can share about transformation of designs to reality through the filter of governmental agencies.

Issues relating to the Games village and at least the Siri Fort stadium are more involved. In my opinion that the site selection in both cases was deeply flawed. Siri Fort was determined as a case of government allowing the cutting down of trees far in excess of the actual land requirement. The river bed should not have been used for such a large construction program on the grounds of expediency. This was brought home in the monsoons just prior to the games, where many construction shortcomings were exposed. It is evident that a comprehensive planning and design effort related to the river needed to be debated by stakeholders before the concerned agencies proceeded hastily into construction.

Another interesting area for learning would be the redevelopment of Lutyen's Delhi – especially of Connaught Place area. A lot seems to have been planned; some was done and then redone.

The way forward appears to be to compile design and planning material from different agencies engaged in the treatment of open spaces. Architectural and landscape architectural practices that had worked on the streetscape projects surely must have some learning to share with their peers.

*What spirit is so empty and blind, that it cannot recognize the fact that the foot is more noble than the shoe, and skin*

*more beautiful than the garment with which it is clothed?*

Michelangelo <sup>7</sup>

## International consultants and knowledge base

Many of the planning and design projects for the games have used the expertise of international agencies. Architects from Australia<sup>8</sup> who had previously worked on the Sydney Games, and their associated Australian project management agencies<sup>9</sup> were involved with the design of two of the stadia. Similarly, it was an international design team that was engaged for the Games Village; and even for the Delhi Airport.

The concern for India is that this nomadic knowledge base results in no net increase in the knowledge capital of the professionals practicing here. It is understood that with greater experience and exposure, international companies appear to be our intellectual superiors, with a high degree of thoroughness, rigour and detail.

If there are local offices established by them, then possibly some of the intellectual property created by them needs to be shared, otherwise it will disappear like the proverbial nomads. It may be wise to study the Chinese experience in this matter.

*The most important thing we learn from history is that we never learn from history.*

Aldous Huxley <sup>10</sup>

## Planting systems and availability

Two other concerns are of specific interest to landscape architects. The games were an ideal opportunity for

organising the planting and nursery trade. At no point in post independent India, was so much investment made in the plant material over such a short period. It is disheartening to see that the money was not spent in creating better systems of classification of planting zones in the country, nor in a comprehensive classification of native and exotic species for each of these zones. These norms, which are now standard for TERI or LEED ratings for individual projects, needed some simple extrapolation.

It appears that the quality of effort in pre-independence planting in the Lutyens Zone in Delhi will not be duplicated today. The inference here is that great planting is not about the money spent but the care with which it is spent.

Then there is the increased dependence on specific plant species, in particular the Ficus species in almost all areas that were developed. Nurseries probably find it easier to carry out mono-culture; but what about the responsible horticulturists employed by the governmental agencies? Surely they must have noticed that the contractors have been planting from a limited palette of plants?

*In a controversy the instant we feel anger we have already ceased striving for the truth, and have begun striving for ourselves.*

Buddha <sup>11</sup>

In conclusion, the overall image we get from the Games is one of disorder and confusion, superficiality and lack of thoroughness, with little thought to a comprehensive vision of planning and design. Maybe the 'Delhi Way' is a warning to other cities attempting to change themselves.

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2010 CWG Village Landscape Master Plan

- |                        |                     |                     |                           |                     |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. MAIN ENTRANCE       | 6. WATER FEATURE    | 11. WATER PLAY AREA | 16. CLUBHOUSE             | 21. SECONDARY ENTRY |
| 2. MAIN ENTRY MONUMENT | 7. TOT LOT          | 12. PAVILION        | 17. LAP POOL              | 22. PARKING         |
| 3. DROP-OFF            | 8. SEATING TERRACES | 13. PLAYGROUND      | 18. POOL DECK             | 23. OPEN TURF       |
| 4. ARRIVAL COURT       | 9. TENNIS COURT     | 14. COURTYARD       | 19. SHELTER               |                     |
| 5. CENTRAL COURTYARD   | 10. MAZE            | 15. DAYCARE         | 20. HALF COURT BASKETBALL |                     |



**Commonwealth Games Village, Delhi**

Client/ Developer **Emaar MGF**  
 Concept Landscape Architects **Peridian Asia (Pte) Ltd.**  
 Executive Architects **Sikka Associates Architects**  
 Concept Architects **Smallwood, Reynolds, Stewart, Stewart**  
 Resident Landscape Architects [Residential Zone] **Integral Designs**  
 Year of Completion **2010**

The 27 acres site on the banks of the Yamuna has heritage landmarks like Humayun's Tomb in its immediate vicinity. It has been planned to host international athletes in the games mode and a gated residential community in the legacy mode with recreational provisions for all age groups.

The project comprised of 27% vegetated area and more than 2,500 trees. TERI guidelines and concepts like preserving the top soil, reducing hard paved, reducing water need and reusing water, rain water harvesting, use of non-conventional energy, recycling of waste, provision of large green areas in form of parks and open spaces with appropriate species of plants, noise reduction barriers along railway line etc. have been considered in designing the village landscape.