QOC - CALL FOR PAPERS

EXPLORING BUILT ENVIRONMENT IN THE CITY

Exploring Built Environment in the City

In the process of urbanisation currently sweeping across India, the questions of design and development, particularly design of buildings, and their impact on people's lives need closer and multi-dimensional evaluations and reflections. Most cities are witnessing, and people are subjected to, massive changes by way of make-overs and redevelopment of buildings and neighbourhoods. Increasingly, prototypical, standardised and mass-produced buildings dot the skyline.

The built environment impacts urban life---the relationships between people, the relationships between physical spaces, and the relationships between people and buildings or spaces. These tend to be ignored or insufficiently addressed. The built environment is apparently for people but which people remains the question. Its sweeping uniformity, towering scale, and exclusionary nature distances and disenfranchises the marginalised---the poor, working class, informal workers, women, queer people, religious and caste minorities. The political economy of cities is veering towards a uniform set of Development Control Regulations disregarding the varying geographical, social and cultural realities in cities.

How does the built environment affect the way people live and organise in cities? How do the physical aspects of buildings, roads, and other constructions influence people's experience of cities? How do the design of buildings and infrastructure impact neighbourhoods, defined by geographies or communities? What is the relationship between the built environment or city design and gender, from women to queer people? How does the built environment impact the natural ecology, are they really balanced at all? These and related questions are informed by the attributes of scale, density, opacity, transparency among others.

Many designing this built environment---planners, architects, engineers---find themselves responding to specific impulses of promoters, builders and the political class who control land and resources. Can they liberate themselves and create built environments that are inclusive and environmentally-sustainable is a self-reflective question for the profession. These questions and reflections are best done against the backdrop of a rapidly-changing neoliberal form of urban development, drawing out the correlational, if not causal, relationship. As the internationally renowned urbanist Jan Gehl once remarked, "we shape cities, then they shape us".

This open call, the first from Question of Cities https://questionofcities.org/, is for reflective essays, experiential stories, argument-driven pieces from different cities in India that engage with both phrases of Gehl's wise line. Your work can examine the design of buildings and the built environment, the processes that create them, impact on people's lives, and effect on the ecology in a city of your choice, or any one or two of these aspects.

Each essay is expected to be 1,700 to 2,000 words; references and citations are not included in the word limit. The last date for submission is May 31, 2026. If interested, please send your abstract of not more than 300 words to pitches@questionofcities.org by April 25, 2026.

Team QoC