

Lost City

How Gentrification
Transforms Cities
and What We Can
Do to Counteract It



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Introduction

Today, the richest eighty-five people have more wealth than the poorest 3.5 billion people in the world combined. In the United States alone, the richest 1 percent take home more than 20 percent of all income in what is one of the wealthiest nations on the planet.¹ The world is becoming more and more unequal, with a highly uneven and inequitable distribution of access to resources and opportunities. This is evident not only at a global level among the different nations, but also at a provincial and local level. Social inequality occurs when the resources and opportunities in a society are *unevenly* distributed. Social inequity occurs when the resources and opportunities are *unfairly* distributed.

In cities across the world, one phenomenon contributing to social inequity is gentrification — which is what happens when a neighborhood becomes so expensive that it prices out its original residents — the locals — and brings in a massive influx of capital, along with wealthy outsiders. According to Peter Moskowitz, gentrification, at its deepest level, is really about re-orienting the purpose of cities away from being spaces that provide for the poor and middle classes and toward spaces that generate capital for the rich.² One common sign of gentrification is luxury condos and hipster cafés filled with yuppies. But as Moskowitz writes in *How to Kill a City*, these are the mere outward signs of gentrification and not its causes.³ As more people move into cities that are denser than ever before, the initial question of this study becomes apparent:

How can people benefit *equitably* from urban development?

To answer this question, we need to look deeper into the processes of urban development and gentrification, and how they affect social inequity. Gentrification results in a complete change of character and loss of sense of belonging in the areas it affects. We also need to look at how we can bring back the lost sense of belonging, and analyze the challenges asso-

¹ Payne, K., *The Broken Ladder: How Inequality Changes the Way We Think*, Wiedenfield & Nicolson, 2017, p. 8

² Moskowitz, P., *How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood*, Nation Books, 2017, p. 20

³ *Ibidem*.

ciated with social equity and cohesion.

Among the material studied and referenced in this work, three key publications influence the understanding of the subject matter. The first is *The Broken Ladder: How Inequality Changes the Way We Think, Live and Die* by Keith B. Payne⁴, a book that analyzes how inequality affects human behavior, social cohesion and well-being in a society. The second is *Smart Cities: Big Data, Civic Hackers, and the Quest for a New Utopia* by Anthony M. Townsend⁵, which discusses the challenges faced by cities across the world and the emerging prominence of sensors, big data, and urban tech, while analyzing the role civic hackers, entrepreneurs, mayors, and community activists play with community-driven grassroots projects. The third is *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class — And What We Can Do About It* by Richard Florida⁶, which looks at social inequities in megacities and the rise of what Florida calls “superstar cities” and a “winner-take-all urbanism” with clusters of high privilege and of disadvantage as a result of socioeconomic segregation, and proposes solutions mayors and planners could implement to tackle this spatial inequality.

This thesis is divided into three sections:

Section 1: The Role of Gentrification in Social Inequity analyzes how gentrification contributes to social inequity, the general process of gentrification, and the rising tensions that arise between the gentrifiers and the gentrified. It looks at how gentrification changes the character of the city and alienates residents, making them strangers in their own cities with a lack of a sense of belonging.

Section 2: Bringing Back a Sense of Belonging explores how we can preserve the identity of the city and retain or bring back the sense of belonging. It explores the concepts of sense of place and sense of community. It looks into the numerous aspects of a community, such as the shared sense of purpose, the urban social networks, and how we can engage and involve

the community. It also looks at how we can build sustainable and resilient communities with a strong reason to be.

Section 3: The Challenges of Social Equity and Cohesion explores the challenges we face with social equity, community engagement, and social cohesion, especially when the political landscape is so polarizing and divided today. A more divided world makes social cohesion and integrity extremely hard. We look at the limitations of crowdsourcing and the difficulties community-driven projects face, and how money plays a key role in social inequity and division.

⁴ Payne, K., *Op. cit.*

⁵ Townsend, A., *Smart Cities: Big Data, Civic Hackers, and the Quest for a New Utopia*, W. W. Norton & Company, Oct 2013

⁶ Florida, R., *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class — And What We Can Do About It*, Basic Books, May 2018



SECTION 1

The Role of Gentrification in Social Inequity

In this section, we look at how gentrification affects social inequity — the *unfair* distribution of resources and opportunities in a society. We take a deeper look into the process of gentrification, the different stages, and how it segregates the community spatially and socially by income and race, and causes tensions and rifts in the community.

In its current sense, the term gentrification was first used by British sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964⁷ to describe the influx of the middle-class gentry replacing the lower working classes from urban London in the 1960s. The word comes from “gentry”, which is derived from the Old French *genterise*, or “of gentle birth”. Defined more simply, it is the process of changing the character of a neighborhood through the influx of more affluent residents and businesses.⁸

Prominent urban theorist and MIT professor Phillip L. Clay first outlined the four phases of gentrification in his 1979 book *Neighborhood Renewal: Middle-class Resettlement and Incumbent Upgrading in American Neighborhoods*.⁹ In the first, the “pioneers” — the bohemians and the artists — move to dilapidated or abandoned areas in search of cheaper rents. In the second, the middle classes follow. In the third, their numbers displace the original population, the erstwhile locals. In the fourth and final phase, the neighborhood is fully turned over to the banks, the developers, and the wealthy.¹⁰ By this point, the artists, the bohemians, the mom-and-pop store owners are priced out and forced to move to the suburbs, exurbs, or a nearby city. The locals feel like strangers in their own city, as it changes in character.

The first sub-section, *Phase Zero: Ready for Gentrification*, explores what Peter Moskowitz suggests is the “phase zero” of gentrification — the phase when a low-income and neglected urban neighborhood is ripe for gentrification, when it is deemed “gentrifiable”. The second sub-section, *Urban Renaissance: The Influx of Money and Social Mutation*, explores Clay’s first

⁷ Glass, Ruth, *London: Aspects of Change*, MacGibbon & Kee, 1964

⁸ Harper, D., *Online Etymology Dictionary*, gentrification (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/gentrification>) and gentry (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/gentry>), accessed Oct 6, 2019

⁹ Staley, W., *The New York Times Magazine*, When ‘Gentrification’ Isn’t About Housing, published Jan 23, 2018, accessed Sep 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/magazine/when-gentrification-isnt-about-housing.html>

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

three phases of gentrification — the arrival of the pioneers and the middle classes into the dilapidated and abandoned low-income neighborhoods, and the transformation of the neighborhood and its character physically, culturally, and emotionally. The third sub-section, *Rising Tensions: How Inequality Shapes Human Behavior*, explores the rising tensions between the gentrifiers and the gentrified, the impact of social inequity and how it affects human behavior. The fourth sub-section, *Stranger in My Own City*, explores how the fourth (and fifth) phase of gentrification, how locals feel like strangers in their own city, and how the city has lost its soul and identity as it enters its fourth and final phase of gentrification, when it starts becoming almost unrecognizable, and a new city is born in its place.

1.1 Phase Zero: Ready for Gentrification

To understand why or how the first phase of gentrification even happens, we need to look farther, at what would be the *zeroth* phase, or Phase Zero — when the conditions which facilitate this first stage start taking shape, and start making a neighborhood gentrifiable, attracting the new migrants and subsequently developers and investors, bringing in new capital.

The rent-gap theory, developed by geographer Neil Smith in 1979, gives an economic explanation for gentrification, and is a measure of the difference in a site's actual value and its potential value at "best use".¹¹ Peter Moskowitz writes, "If you wanted to find the neighborhood that would gentrify next, all you had to do was figure out where the biggest potential for profit was in a city — the place where buildings could be bought cheap and made more expensive in a short period of time."¹² Moskowitz continues, "The rent gap was the disparity between how much a property was worth in its current state and how much the property would be worth gentrified. The larger the gap in a neighborhood, the higher the chance it would gentrify."

Urban decay, or urban blight or rot, is a process which some functioning parts of a city undergo and become dysfunctional and fall in disrepair and neglect, which also exacerbates the social inequities that are already prevailing in the area. It may be caused by deindustrialization, depopulation, among other factors, and signs of blight include abandoned buildings, neglected infrastructure, general decrepitude, increased violence and crime. Neighborhoods which undergo the process of urban decay have much reduced use-value because of their now significantly undesirable physical properties and immediate usefulness. However, among such neighborhoods, those which are closer to the downtown or central business district (CBD) of a city, or to businesses, and have a low crime rate, would tend to have a much higher exchange-value — or potential usability that one can extract from it — and thus would be the most gentrifiable areas within the urban agglomeration.

¹¹ Simon Fraser University, Rent Gap, accessed Sep 30, 2019, www.sfu.ca/geog452spring00/project3/m_rent.html

¹² Moskowitz, P., *op. cit.*, p. 30

In Marxian economics, use-value is defined as the “usefulness of a commodity”, which is “inextricably tied to the physical properties of the commodity”, or the human needs it fulfills, while exchange-value is defined as the exchange relation of the commodity to other objects on the market with regards to a universal equivalent — the measure by which all commodities are exchanged or traded in a market, whose role in capitalism is played by money.¹³ This means that, if we are to contain the social inequity and reduce inequality, we need to pay attention to those low-income neighborhoods — the slums, the ghettos, and the squalid, overcrowded urban districts inhabited by the marginalized poor sections of the society — that have fallen into urban blight and disrepair, and that are closer to downtown or CBD of a city, have a low crime rate, and are as a consequence just at the cusp of getting gentrified because of the massive disparity between their very low current or use value and their high perceived potential or exchange value.

Case Study: Deindustrialization and Gentrification in Girangaon, Mumbai



India United Mills No 1, Parel, Mumbai, in 2006¹⁴

¹³ Felluga, D., “Terms Used by Marxism”, *Introductory Guide to Clinical Theory*, Purdue University, last updated Jan 31, 2011, accessed Oct 5, 2019, <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/theory/marxism/terms/termsmainframe.html>

¹⁴ Image by Rohidas Gaonkar on Wikimedia Commons. Retrieved and cropped from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:India_United_Mill_1.jpg. Used under CC BY license <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>.

One example of this phenomenon of industrial neighborhoods undergoing the process of deindustrialization, urban decay, and a subsequent renaissance and gentrification due to a use-value-exchange-value disparity can be seen in the neighborhoods of central Mumbai, the financial capital and a sprawling megacity in the southwest of India. Before its transition to knowledge and service sector industries like healthcare, engineering, information technology, and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), Mumbai’s prosperity was heavily reliant on its seaport and cotton mills, established circa 1854 in an area known as Girangaon, literally meaning “mill village”, spanning the neighborhoods of Prabhadevi, Worli, Lower Parel, Naigaon, Parel, Lalbaug, Wadala, Sewri, Chinchpokli, Tardeo, Byculla, Reay Road, and Mazagaon.^{15 16} Following the Great Bombay Textile Strike of 1982, the textile industry in Mumbai was in a decline due to management failures, lack of modernization and profitability, from the mid-eighties through the early noughties, and went from more than 65 mills employing 300,000 workers in the early eighties to only a few mills employing a paltry 25,000 workers by 2007.¹⁷

The Girangaon area was filled with a dense network of mills and *chawls* — buildings with densely packed single-room tenements for the mill workers, and sprawling low-income working-class communities. Following the deindustrialization, these areas underwent a major redevelopment and gentrification.¹⁸ As the textile industry declined and became unprofitable, the use-value of the mill land declined while its exchange-value went up. One of the mills, the Phoenix Mills compound, was turned into what became one of the largest

¹⁵ Thomas, M., *Quartz India*, Mythologies of Mumbai: Tracing Mumbai’s Evolution From a City of Mills to a Metropolis, published Nov 23, 2017, accessed Oct 19, 2019, <https://qz.com/india/1134734/mythologies-of-mumbai-tracing-the-citys-evolution-from-a-city-of-mills-to-a-metropolis/>

¹⁶ Khedkar, R., *International Journal of Current Research Volume 10 Issue 8 pp. 72641–72648*, Closing Down of Textile Mills: A Breakthrough in the Real Estate or a Curse to Mumbai, published Aug 2018, accessed Oct 19, 2019, <https://www.journalcra.com/sites/default/files/issue-pdf/31724.pdf>

¹⁷ Rediff News, The Great Mumbai Textile Strike... 25 Years On, published Jan 18, 2007, accessed Oct 19, 2019, <https://www.rediff.com/news/2007/jan/18sld3.htm>

¹⁸ Chatterjee, D., Parthasarathy, D., *Economic and Political Weekly Vol 53 Issue No 16*, Kamala Mills Fire and the Perilous Gentrification of Mumbai, published Apr 21, 2018, accessed Oct 19, 2019, <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/perilous-and-chaotic-gentrification-revisiting-kamala-mills-fire>

shopping malls in India, with a high-street luxury shopping, a five-star hotel, and a luxury residential tower, and renamed as High Street Phoenix, reflecting its new status and identity, and increasing the land value in the area even further. This process rendered hundreds of thousands of workers jobless, and destroyed the social fabric of a once-thriving neighborhood, making it “a landscape of despair and resentment”¹⁹, and paving the way for luxury apartments, shopping malls, bars, night clubs, fancy restaurants, high-end shops, and art galleries, creating massive new social and economic inequities and furthering the divide between the haves and the have-nots in the area.

¹⁹ Prakash, G., *The New York Times*, Tragic Fable of Mumbai Mills, published Aug 28, 2013, accessed Oct 19, 2019, <https://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/28/tragic-fable-of-mumbai-mills/>

1.2 Urban Renaissance: The Influx of Money and Social Mutation

Once a neighborhood develops a high disparity between its use-value and exchange-value, developers and migrants in need of cheap urban housing start taking notice. The first phase of gentrification according to Clay is when the bohemians and the artists, the “pioneers” and “renegades” start moving in to poorer neighborhoods in the city in search of cheaper rents, and start renovating old and abandoned homes. This is the phase before the arrival of the ultra-rich, and the start of the urban renaissance and regeneration. As these bohemian migrants start renovating old and abandoned homes and moving into them, their presence make these torn-down neighborhoods more vibrant and attractive over time. This process is, however, on a more individual scale and relatively low-key, with little attention received from the media and the broader public.

The second phase is when those moving in start buying real estate. The city starts to become profitable to gentrify, with rising yet still affordable rents. This is when the media starts to pay attention, and the displacement and social mutation process begins. Detroit’s transition from urban decay and bankruptcy to urban regeneration and regrowth is a worthy case study for the second and third phases of gentrification. It is a city that is “collapsing and gentrifying at the same time”, wherein the downtown core has begun a thriving regeneration and gentrification process, yet parts of the city just blocks away are still in ruins, and are getting worse.²⁰

Home to the Big Three — Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler — Detroit was a major force in the automobile sector in the United States, with a thriving automobile and manufacturing, with a sizable finance and information technology industry.²¹ With the decline in the automobile sector and the 2008 economic crash which created a major shockwave after the subprime mortgage crisis and the bursting of the housing bubble, major parts of the city fell into disrepair and urban decay after the city went

²⁰ Moskowitz, P., *The Guardian*, The Two Detroits: A City Both Collapsing and Gentrifying at the Same Time, published Feb 5, 2015, accessed Oct 19, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/feb/05/detroit-city-collapsing-gentrifying>

²¹ *Ibid.* Also see Interview 3 with Ami Sardesai, Appendix p. A20

bankrupt in 2013. The major organizations operating in the city like Ford and GM failed to revive the city. Dan Gilbert, a billionaire and owner of Quicken Loans, seized the opportunity and bought more than 60 buildings in downtown Detroit at very low prices, moving his operations downtown, slowly investing money into the city. Now, he owns most of the gentrified downtown Detroit — over a 100 buildings — and is leading the urban renaissance of Detroit, labelled as a “missionary” and a “superhero”. Billionaires like him have used their money and influence to build billions of dollars of infrastructure and transform the city, spurring a real estate boom.²²

However, with rents that are as yet cheap and affordable but on the rise, Detroit still attracts artists and young middle-class workers to its downtown, with businesses moving back. The city administration is using grants and tax credits for developers to build and preserve a good amount of affordable housing “to promote social cohesion and inclusive growth”.²³

Jason Hackworth, a professor of planning and geography at the University of Toronto, writes, “Gentrification is much more than the physical renovation of residential and commercial spaces. It marks the replacement of the publicly regulated Keynesian inner city with the privately regulated neoliberalized spaces of exclusion — replete with physical and institutional remnants of a system designed to ameliorate the inequality of capitalism — with privately regulated neoliberalized spaces of exclusion.”²⁴ On the impact of gentrification on social inequity, Peter Moskowitz writes, “There are few winners in gentrification. As Ruth Idakula put it, if the city is a ladder, gentrification pushes everyone down one rung: the most disenfranchised get pushed off completely, the middle class ends up on the bottom rung, and even the rich feel pressure from the top.”²⁵

The third phase is when the middle class gentrifiers start taking a more prominent role in the city, culturally and otherwise. This is when the direct and trickle-down or indirect displacement process of the now erstwhile locals is in full steam. By this phase, a perceivable amount of inequality

²² See Interview 2 with Sagar Kamat, Appendix p. A17

²³ Murray, S., *The Financial Times*, Detroit Juggles Gentrification and Regeneration, published Sep 12, 2018, accessed Oct 19, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/11d45cc8-89e5-11e8-affd-da9960227309>

²⁴ Hackworth, J., *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*, p. 120

²⁵ Moskowitz, P., *op cit.*, p. 49

and socioeconomic segregation within the city — along with rising tensions and fissures among the social classes — become visible. As Richard Florida writes,

*Longtime residents have a strong sense of attachment to the places in which they live; even if they're not forced to leave, they are understandably upset when newcomers who are very different and much more well-to-do change their neighborhood in ways that make it feel unfamiliar. We all care deeply about where we live and want others to respect our right to be there. When they do not, anger and anxiety mount, and tensions flare.*²⁶

As the city neighborhood starts becoming expensive and unaffordable, people start looking elsewhere. First they move to the nearest neighborhoods that are somewhat cheaper. As the effect starts trickling down and nearby areas also become expensive, they move to the outer periphery of the city, first to the exurbs and inner suburbs, then into the outer suburbia. An American idiom, “Drive till you qualify”, helps us put this into some perspective. What it means is that as you search for a home, you keep driving away from the city and into the suburbs, farther and farther until the prices become affordable. This, however, may not always be the case, as is evident in gentrified Detroit, and many American cities, where parts of the city might actually be *cheaper* than the suburbia.²⁷ This can be exacerbated by urban blight and long-term decay, deindustrialization and decline in industrial neighborhoods.

The migration of lower-income people away from the gentrified neighborhood is also accompanied by the closure of local small businesses which cannot afford rising rents. Some of these businesses might be small scale mom-and-pop operations like the corner grocery store or a restaurant, or the bar frequented by the local men and women. What were once safe spaces of camaraderie and dialog, with business owners watching out for petty crime with their watchful eyes, turn into luxury boutiques and mere outlets for faceless corporations.

This displacement of people may be direct, affecting the residents of the gentrifying neighborhood, or it may be indirect, a trickle-down effect affecting the residents of surrounding neighborhoods, who are displaced as a result of rising land value. It mainly affects people in the lower paying

²⁶ Florida, R., *op. cit.*, p. 61

²⁷ See Interview 3 with Ami Sardesai, Appendix p. A20

service class sector, and majorly benefits the rentier class and the upper strata of the society. The influx of wealthy upper class and upper-middle class residents brings in a fresh infusion of money by creating a new, wealthy tax base and a real estate boom created by increased land exchange-value.

In *How to Kill a City*, Peter Moskowitz narrates a story of a clash between a San Francisco native and some of its tech industry gentrifiers at a local soccer field which perfectly captures the rising tensions between the gentrifiers and the gentrified.

I met Hugo Vargas, a sixteen-year-old who grew up in the Mission, when I was wandering around the neighborhood one day... In the fall of 2014, Hugo and some friends were playing soccer at a local city-owned field when a group of white men came over and started explaining to the kids, who like Hugo were all Latino, that they'd paid \$27 an hour to reserve the field via a city website. They asked the kids to leave, arguing that the field should go to whoever followed the rules and paid the fee. One of the older kids asked the men how long they had lived in the community. "Who gives a shit?" the man responded. "Who cares about the neighborhood?" ... the men mostly were employees of Dropbox, a web storage company, and Airbnb... A video taken of the incident... showcased the sense of entitlement among many gentrifiers, and it encapsulated the mounting tension between the new and old San Francisco — the community on one side and the tech sector on the other. It also highlighted a huge philosophical gap that's at the crux of gentrification: the kids believed that because they were on the field first, they had a right to play soccer there. The tech workers believed that because they'd purchased a ticket to the field, it was theirs. This mentality is what New York-based writer and activist Sarah Schulman has called "the gentrification of the mind".²⁸

These rising tensions can affect human behavior profoundly, mostly in a negative manner, as we shall see in the next sub-section.

²⁸ Moskowitz, P., *op. cit.*, p. 112

1.3 Rising Tensions: How Inequality Shapes Human Behavior

One of the contributors to the rising tensions between the gentrifiers and the gentrified, and between the different social strata is social inequity and inequality. In *The Broken Ladder*, Keith B. Payne poses an intriguing question: "How are the gains of the super-rich having harmful effects on the health and well-being of the rest of us?"²⁹ Social inequality has a profound impact on how humans behave, at both individual and societal levels. At the individual level, Payne writes, it "makes us shortsighted and prone to risky behavior, willing to sacrifice a secure future for immediate gratification," and "more inclined to make self-defeating decisions."³⁰

At the societal level, inequality divides us not only by income, but also by ideology and race, eroding our trust in one another. As Payne explains, "it generates stress and makes us all less healthy and less happy, and makes people *feel* and *act* poor, even when they are not."³¹ When people consider their own social class, they seem to think within the parameters of a bell curve. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center asked Americans to identify their class. "A classic bell curve emerged, with an astounding 89 percent of respondents describing themselves as middle class. Only 7 percent viewed themselves as members of the lower class, and only 2 percent placed themselves in the upper class. In the view of Americans, [they] are nearly all middle class."³²

To measure the income inequality in a society, we can use what is known as the Gini coefficient or Gini index, which was developed by Corrado Gini, an Italian statistician, demographer, and sociologist and a proponent of organicism, the doctrine that everything in nature is part of an organic whole. The Gini index measures how the income or wealth in a society is distributed among its people, and is the go-to tool for economists to measure inequality. A Gini index of zero indicates perfect equality, which never exists in reality, and one indicates maximal inequality. The index is

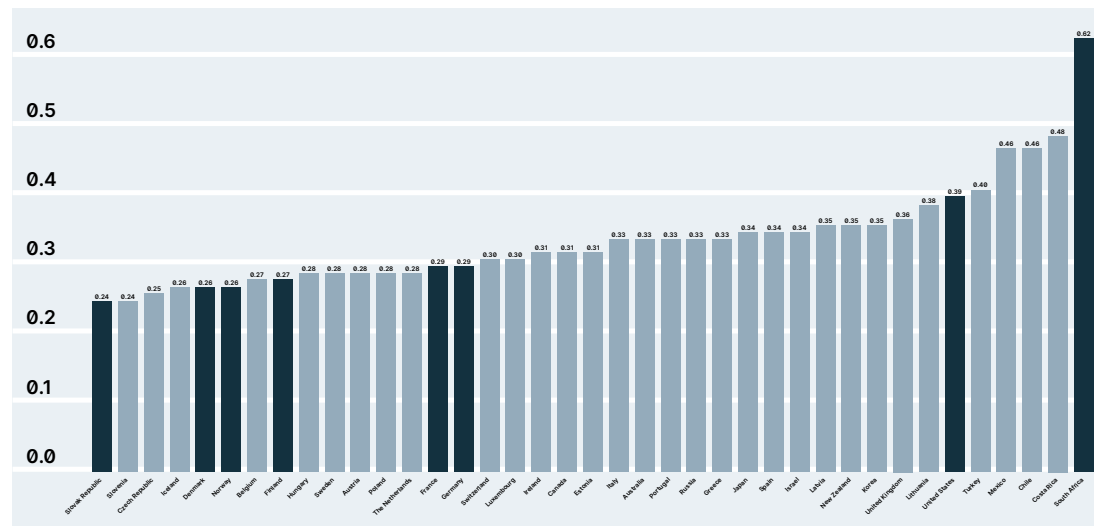
²⁹ Payne, K., *op. cit.*, p. 59

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8

³² *Ibid.*, p. 9

represented as a fraction between 0 and 1, as the integer extremities are purely theoretical, and most countries would hover somewhere along the spectrum between 0 and 1.³³ For example, the Gini index for France and Germany, two highly advanced European nations, was 0.29 in 2016, and that for the United States, which is one of the most unequal of the advanced developed countries in the world, was 0.39 in 2017, according to the OECD's latest available income inequality data. The most equal country on the list was the Slovak Republic with a Gini index of 0.241, with the highly advanced Scandinavian countries of Norway, Denmark, and Finland being among the most equal countries with a Gini index of 0.26. The most unequal country on the list was South Africa, with a Gini index of 0.62, followed by Costa Rica, Chile, Mexico, and Turkey, with Gini indices of 0.479, 0.460, 0.458, and 0.404 respectively, followed by the United States.³⁴



OECD income inequality data³⁵

A higher inequality can also be associated with shorter life expectancy, a higher crime rate, greater risk of stress-related illnesses, and increased polarization and partisan politics. This degrades the quality of life across

³³ Nadella, S., *Hit Refresh: The Quest to Rediscover Microsoft's Soul and Imagine a Better Future for Everyone*, Harper Business, Nov 2017, p. 122

³⁴ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Data, Income Inequality, accessed Oct 13, 2019, <https://data.oecd.org/inequality/income-inequality.htm>. Latest available data between 2014 and 2018.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

social classes, and as Payne writes, “this may be why people are happier in more equal places even after adjusting for their individual incomes”.³⁶

However, poverty and wealth are relativistic, and human beings always tend to compare among themselves. As Payne writes, “The concepts of poverty and wealth are not absolute but relative. What one may consider poverty in a developed advanced nation can be very different from that in an under-developed and developing nation. Poverty and wealth are always relative to what other people have in a particular time and place.”³⁷ He says that humans have a bias toward comparing with those who have more than themselves, and rarely with those who have less than themselves.³⁸

The relationship between happiness and income inequality is not so straightforward. An interesting phenomenon was observed by Richard Easterlin, an economist and professor of economics at the University of Southern California, best known for the eponymous economic theory called the Easterlin paradox. He found that wealthier people tend to be happier within a country, up to a certain tipping point, somewhere around \$75,000. Once you cross that amount, the impact of money on happiness reduces. As Payne writes, “People quickly adapt to their higher economic status, as each rise in income becomes the set point for the new normal. As a result, average happiness is entirely unrelated to economic growth over time.” This phenomenon is what we call the Easterlin paradox.³⁹

The relationship between happiness and income inequality is also explained by “perceived fairness and general trust”, as observed by the social psychologist and psychology professor Shigehiro Oishi and his team in a study published in 2011 using American survey data from 1972 and 2008.⁴⁰ They found that “Americans [are] on average happier in the years with less income inequality than in the years with more national income inequality”, that is, happiness rises and falls inversely with fluctuating income inequality, and that this inverse relationship was explained more strongly by perceived

³⁶ Payne, K., *op. cit.*, p. 94, p. 167

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31

³⁸ Vedantam, S., Guest: Payne, K., *Hidden Brain*, KUOW, Why No One Feels Rich: The Psychology of Inequality, published Apr 22, 2019, accessed Oct 13, 2019, <https://www.kuow.org/stories/why-no-one-feels-rich-the-psychology-of-inequality>

³⁹ Payne, K., *op. cit.*, p. 159

⁴⁰ Oishi, S., Kesebir, S., Diener, E., *Psychological Science*, Income Inequality and Happiness, published Aug 12, 2011, accessed Oct 13, 2019, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797611417262?journalCode=pssa>

fairness and general trust than household income or social class. Payne writes, “In times when inequality was higher, people tended to believe that others could not be trusted, and would try to take advantage of you if they could. That distrust, in turn, predicted happiness.”⁴¹

Rising tensions and inequality between social strata, accompanied by a complete change in the character and identity of an urban agglomeration can also make local residents feel unwelcome and uneasy, like strangers in their own town. In the next sub-section, we look at the fourth and fifth phases of gentrification — when this phenomenon becomes apparent — and the aftermath of gentrification.

⁴¹ Payne, K., *op. cit.*, p. 160

1.4 Stranger in My Own City

As we saw in preceding sections, when an area within an urban agglomeration undergoes urban blight, it may under certain conditions create a disparity between its use-value and exchange-value, making it attractive for gentrification. This can be called the zeroth phase, or Phase Zero. As the now lucrative land value attracts new migrants, this starts a chain of events we call gentrification, whereby new, wealthy immigrants start moving in, land prices get inflated, pricing out existing residents and changing the social dynamic of the city. We saw how in the second and third phases of this process, the new middle class takes a more prominent role, and the displacement of locals starts creating fissures among the social strata, affecting their behavior and wellbeing.

In the fourth phase of gentrification, the neighborhood is fully dominated by the new urban elite, developers, and the wealthy bankers, but it is still livable, not as much by its former displaced residents as by the wealthy newcomers. The city is strongly segregated by income — and in most cases race. The elite gentrifier class largely lives in exclusionary and gated communities filled with luxury apartments and facilities. By this phase, the city is almost unrecognizable from its pre-gentrification past, and if a displaced native were to relocate, they would feel out of place in this new gentrified avatar of the city, like a stranger in what was their own home not so long ago. The once thriving communities in the lower-income neighborhoods are now displaced by a high-income but disconnected elite. Gone is the old ghetto in decay, and a new cityscape is taking shape.

In *How to Kill a City*, Peter Moskowitz argues for a fifth and final phase to be added to Clay’s list, when “neighborhoods aren’t just more friendly to capital than to people but cease being places to live a normal life”.⁴² This is the phase when the city simply ceases to be a livable place, and can be characterized by what Richard Florida calls “a new phase of plutocratization or oligarchification”⁴³ or the takeover of highly gentrified cities like London, New York, and Paris “by an invasion of the global super-rich”⁴⁴.

⁴² Moskowitz, P., *op. cit.*, p. 28

⁴³ Florida, R., *op. cit.*, p. 39

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

He writes, “According to a 2016 London School of Economics study⁴⁵, it is no longer just the poor and the working class who are being pushed out of the city’s upscale neighborhoods, but long-established elites and old-money families who are losing out and in some cases being driven out by much wealthier foreign buyers.”⁴⁶

The global super-rich who buy real estate in such cities do not do so to extract any utility out of the property but as a safe haven to park their wealth. These rentier class buyers are often foreigners and out-of-towners who have no real connection with the city. A noticeable example of this phenomenon would be Billionaires’ Row, a series of super-tall skyscrapers in Manhattan, New York, which are filled with mostly vacant ultra-luxury apartments owned by the super-rich. We can observe these final phases of gentrification in different parts of what are some of the densest and biggest global megacities in advanced nations — which include, inter alia, New York, Los Angeles, Boston, London, and Paris.

We need to introspect and bring back the lost sense of belonging and bring these disconnected social classes together in a tighter social cohesion in the gentrified areas to create better harmony. The next section discusses the methods and opportunities that can be used to achieve that.



SECTION 2

Bringing Back a Sense of Belonging

⁴⁵ See Glucksburg, L., *Is This Displacement? Pushing the Boundaries of Super-rich*, paper presented to the Royal Geographical Society Annual International Conference in London, Aug 31, 2016. Also see www.lse.ac.uk/website-archive/newsAndMedia/newsArchives/2016/08/Londons-wealthiest-families-feel-they-are-being-pushed-out-of-elite-neighbourhoods.aspx.

⁴⁶ Florida, R., *op. cit.*, p. 39

This section explores how we can bring back the lost sense of belonging in a gentrified and unequal neighborhood. It explores the numerous aspects of community-building — such as a shared *raison d'être* or sense of purpose — and the different ways in which we can engage and involve the community. It looks into how we can make communities sustainable and resilient, so that it creates a sense of belonging and contains social inequity by bringing people together.

The first sub-section, *Finding A Shared Raison d'Être*, looks at how people relate and connect with their neighborhoods and local communities, and what gives a particular place its “sense of place” or identity. It also looks at the sense of purpose, what keeps a city going and gives the community a shared “*raison d'être*”.

The second sub-section, *Taking Charge: Reinforcing Membership and Belonging*, looks at citizen engagement and the concept of civic hacking. It explores how the residents can be involved in building the community and fostering innovation through what is known as civic hacking. It looks at crowdsourced and community-driven urban projects and how we can engage and involve the residents to give them a shared sense of community.

The third sub-section, *Hacking the Commons: Public Domain and a Shared Identity*, looks at the role of public art in creating shared spaces for the community, and how art forms like graffiti unite and bring communities together, either acting as identifiers, or as signs of protest, as signs of freedom and expression.

The fourth sub-section, *Urban Social Networks*, looks at urban social networks in the highly dense superstar cities with socially segregated clusters of privilege and of disadvantage. We look at how the inequity of dense urban agglomerations can be converted into equity and shared prosperity.

The fifth sub-section, *Building Resilient Communities: What Makes Them Endure*, looks at how we can make our local communities more resilient and sustainable, so that they can deal with the challenges of the rapidly urbanizing future.

2.1 Finding a Shared Raison d'Être

If we are to understand what connects someone to a place or region and gives them a “sense of belonging” and a *raison d'être* or reason to be, we need to understand first what constitutes the “soul” or “sense of place” of that particular place or region, and what gives it a “sense of community”. We also need to understand how the person perceives this place and what essence they capture.

In an article in CityLab, Edward McMahon, the Charles E. Fraser Chair and Senior Fellow on Sustainable Development at the Urban Land Institute, writes, “A sense of place is a unique collection of qualities and characteristics — visual, cultural, social, and environmental — that provide meaning to a location. A community’s unique identity and reason to be also adds economic and social value. To foster distinctiveness, cities must plan for built environments and settlement patterns that are both uplifting and memorable and that foster a sense of belonging and stewardship by residents.”⁴⁷

Scott Lucas writes in an article in CityLab that cities don’t have souls. “Typically, whatever a person claims the soul of a city is, it coincides with that person’s political or aesthetic preferences. It’s a synecdoche that picks out some element of urban life, something of emotional importance that is seen as under threat, and inflates it to become the city as a whole. *This is important to me, therefore it is the soul.*”⁴⁸ When a city undergoes gentrification, this emotional connection and perception of a soul can get skewed or lost completely, as we saw in Section 1.

A three-year study conducted by Gallup of 26 John S. and James L. Knight Foundation communities across the United States found that openness, social offerings, and aesthetics are most related to community attachment in all the 26 communities studied.⁴⁹ They studied 10 domains driving

⁴⁷ McMahon, E., *CityLab*, Character Is Key to an Economically Vibrant City, published Apr 11, 2012, accessed Aug 25, 2019, <https://www.citylab.com/life/2012/04/why-character-key-economically-vibrant-city/1729/>

⁴⁸ Lucas, S., *CityLab*, Cities Don’t Have Souls. Why Do We Battle for Them?, published Apr 17, 2019, accessed Sep 29, 2019, <https://www.citylab.com/life/2019/04/soul-of-the-city-san-francisco-gentrification-urban-planning/587173/>

⁴⁹ The Knight Foundation, Knight Soul of the Community (SOTC) study, accessed Sep

community attachment at various levels — basic services like community infrastructure; local economy; safety; leadership and elected officials; aesthetics, including physical beauty and green spaces; education systems; social offerings, including opportunities for social interaction and citizen caring; openness or welcomeness, or how welcoming the community is to different people; civic involvement, or the residents' commitment to their community through voting or volunteerism; and social capital, or social networks between residents.⁵⁰

The number one trait identified is openness or welcomeness of the city. This includes how welcoming the city is to different groups and classes of people in a society — the elderly, the disabled, ethnic and racial minorities, migrants, families with kids or single college graduates, gays and lesbians and the transgender community, and so on. The second is the social offerings, which include the opportunities the city offers for social interaction and caring for citizens. It is about how vibrant and diverse life in the city is, and how it facilitates interactions between people in their everyday life, and the ease of pedestrian movement. The third is the aesthetics. This includes the availability of green spaces and an element of physical beauty. It is, after all, the first thing that we see when we enter a city and get attracted to, like the iconic High Line in New York, or the Kennedy Greenway in Boston, or Paris' beautiful and historic buildings and layout.

When asked about what gives a city its flavor and identity, Vishvesh Kandolkar said that aesthetics are merely a supporting layer, and the most important aspect of urban design is the people that live in the place, and that we need to consider the history, traditions, and culture of the place, along with the historic ties that connect the people to the land, which may include race, religion, language, or a myriad of other parameters.⁵¹ If we are to restore or preserve a city's sense of place and a person's sense of belonging, we need to preserve these historic ties between the land and its people.

McMillan and Chavis define *sense of community* as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through

30, 2019, <https://knightfoundation.org/sotc/>

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ See Interview 1 with Vishvesh Kandolkar, Appendix p. A10

their commitment to be together."⁵² Their proposed definition constitutes four elements which help us better understand the concept of sense of community — membership, or sense of belonging; influence, or sense of mattering; reinforcement, or integration and fulfillment of needs; and a shared emotional connection. The first element, *membership*, is the feeling that one belongs to or personally relates to something. The second, *influence*, is the sense that you matter to a group, and that the group matters to its members. The third, *reinforcement*, is the feeling that one's needs will be met by their membership of a group. The fourth and last element, *shared emotional connection*, is the common and shared *raison d'être* of the group, the shared history, time together, common places and similar experiences, and belief system that the group as a whole shares, forming a long-term emotional connection.⁵³

While we can attribute the sense of place to a physical space that a person inhabits, as a property of the space itself, a feeling or sense that the space evokes in its inhabitants, a sense of community is a feeling that a shared existence evokes within a community of people, through time spent together, sharing a common history with similar lived experiences and a common belief system.

A shared *raison d'être* or reason to be can go a long way in uniting a community, through a shared belief system, shared experiences, a shared history of time spent together, and a shared purpose, or even a common figurehead or leader. This kind of a uniting factor can be observed in religious movements — whether they are traditional theistic religions, or modern movements and cults. The *raison d'être* acts like a glue that holds the community together.

Sometimes, brand identity and tourism campaigns for cities can be superficial and wannabe representations of what the city is, trying to be what it is not. But if done right, a strong slogan and brand campaign can actually unite and bring a city together, giving residents a sense of pride and connection to their city and exemplifying the spirit of the city, the same way the I ♥ NY campaign united the city's populace following the devastating attacks of September 11, 2001. In fact, the slogan and campaign

⁵² McMillan, D., Chavis, D., *Journal of Community Psychology* Volume 14, Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory, p. 9, published Jan 1986, accessed Oct 7, 2019, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e5fb/8ece108aec36714ee413876e61b0510e7c80.pdf>
⁵³ *Ibid.*

became so popular that it became a pop culture icon and inspired many imitations across the world. After Detroit's urban renewal and renaissance, "Detroit vs Everybody" became a popular slogan for city pride tee shirts and merchandise⁵⁴, and inspired imitations by other cities.⁵⁵ Daniel A. Bell and Avner de-Shalit write, describing city ethos and urban pride, and the impact such campaigns have on them:

*It is no coincidence that the slogan "I love New York" is perhaps the most famous marketing slogan of the modern era. Cities around the world are copying this slogan. "I love Beijing" — in English — is commonly seen on T-shirts in the Chinese capital. It's easy to be cynical, to say the whole thing is driven by money, but the slogan does tap into a real emotion. People really do love their cities. The New York ethos is famously individualistic (what we call "ambition"), but its underlying sense of community and urban pride emerges with full force in times of crisis, such as 9/11. And part of that civicism comes from the sense that New York is different from the rest of the country (including other American cities). New Yorkers often say they feel more attached to their city than to their nation. Other American cities, for their part, seek to distinguish themselves from New Yorkers. When he was elected as Chicago's mayor in 2011, Rahm Emanuel addressed Chicago's residents saying "we are different from New Yorkers". While New York takes pride in being a magnet for migrants, Chicago takes pride in the fact it has the least emigration among large United States cities: people who are born or migrate to Chicago tend to stay for life. So we see that cities that seem to express a particular identity, or ethos, typically generate the most intense forms of urban pride.*⁵⁶

A shared history and time spent together also goes a long way in uniting a people, like the founding myths of the United States, the American frontier myths, and American exceptionalism, which unites the country, or the shared colonial heritage and the stories of the freedom struggle that unites Indian⁵⁷ citizens. As cities evolve through time, its residents develop a shared past and emotional connection with the city. This can help residents endure and be resilient as a community, surviving through thick and thin. A shared ethos and collective dogma can provide a sense of purpose, and attract and retain people within a region. A good example of this is the American Dream, a national ethos and set of ideals that proclaims that "all men are created equal", that they have the right to pursue happiness and

can make it large in America's capitalist society with grit and hard work. Originating in the aura of the Frontier Thesis, the American Dream propagates a perception of high social mobility and easier access to opportunities, even though the U.S. actually might have less social mobility and access to opportunity than other developed and advanced economies. It is what attracts immigrants and unites residents.

⁵⁴ See Interview 2 with Sagar Kamat, Appendix p. A17

⁵⁵ Nosowitz, D., *Racked*, How Detroit vs. Everybody Conquered the World, published Mar 28, 2018, accessed Oct 19, 2019, <https://www.racked.com/2018/3/28/17144402/detroit-vs-everybody-tommey-walker>

⁵⁶ Bell, D., de-Shalit, A., *The Spirit of Cities: Why the Identity of a City Matters in a Global Age*, Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 10

⁵⁷ Donym for the Republic of India, not to be confused with American Indians.

2.2 Taking Charge: Reinforcing Membership and Belonging

In order to reinforce the sense of membership and belonging to a community and inculcate a strong sense of community, taking charge by getting involved and engaging with the community becomes very important. Creating more opportunities for increased dialog and exchange among diverse people to foster acceptance and understanding can go a long way in reducing barriers to social cohesion, which can help inculcate a sense of belonging among displaced communities, but with which we are facing some challenges.⁵⁸

One way we can facilitate the citizens to get involved is by consulting them on key decisions in public policy and urban planning, such as urban rapid transit, the design and management of shared public space, and involving them in the governance and development process of the city. Transit agencies like the Île-de-France Mobilités (IDFM) in Greater Paris, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) or the T in the Boston metropolitan area, and the Transport for London (TfL) system in Greater London, for example, routinely have public consultations for transit projects, and provide a sense of membership and ownership to the transit riders by letting them have a say in the location of stations, the color and aesthetic design of the transit rolling stock, inter alia.

The Smart Cities Mission is a national-level urban renewal and retrofitting initiative by the Government of India to develop 100 smart cities in the country and make them citizen friendly and sustainable.⁵⁹ The initiative involves cities competing in a national challenge for funds and projects to ameliorate civic life. As part of the initiative, each city participating in the challenge set up a local body and made their own pitch.⁶⁰ Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Ltd is one such local government body in the City

⁵⁸ The challenges of social cohesion are discussed in greater detail in Section 3.

⁵⁹ Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India, Smart City Mission Transform-Nation: Mission Statement and Guidelines, published Jun 2015, accessed Nov 17, 2019. Also see Smart Cities Mission website: smartcities.gov.in/content/spvdatanew.php.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

of Panaji, Goa, charged with creating a dialog in the city and engaging local people in decision-making. Its website hosts events and allows people to submit ideas and exchange solutions to local problems, some of which, like the Hop-in Hop-off tourist bus service, get implemented.⁶¹

Case Study: City of Boston's Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics (MONUM) and citizen engagement



Governments could actively partner with the private sector, and engage with students, researchers, technologists and innovators in the region to generate ideas and democratize the planning and urban development process using the principles of design thinking. The City of Boston Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics (MONUM) was formed in 2010 by Chris Osgood and Nigel Jacob under Mayor Thomas Menino to encourage greater civic engagement⁶² and use private sector innovation for efficient and effective governance. Its core mission is "to increase the influence that citizens have over their government through the power of collaboration and technology".⁶³ The MONUM actively works with students, researchers, academia, private companies, across the various departments within Boston City Hall, and with other cities. It uses learnings from projects and

⁶¹ See Imagine Panaji website for public consultation initiatives. <https://imaginepanaji.com/notices/>

⁶² Jordan, E., *BCG Center for Public Impact*, Boston's Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, published Mar 25, 2019, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/bostons-mayors-office-new-urban-mechanics/>

⁶³ Hellauer, M., *Harvard Business School Digital Initiative*, Boston's Office of New Urban Mechanics: Innovation for the Public Good, last updated Dec 8, 2015, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://digital.hbs.edu/platform-rctom/submission/bostons-office-of-new-urban-mechanics-innovation-for-the-public-good/#>

experiments to improve decision-making and enhance the impact and effectiveness of its future projects.

A case study of the city's municipal app is an excellent example of how the MONUM partners with local companies and uses design thinking to solve local governance and civic engagement problems, and provide better city services. In 2009, the Boston City Hall found that the majority of residents were not using their 24-hour hotline meant for reporting non-emergency municipal issues as smartphones were becoming increasingly popular. In a bid to engage more users, the MONUM decided to partner with a local technology company and launch the BOS:311 app, called Citizens Connect at the time. The app allowed residents to report these issues directly from the app, which got sent directly to the City of Boston's work order management system, and attracted a timely response. These were issues like potholed streets, a broken streetlight, clogged drain, flooded pathway, or damaged street furniture. The app went on to inspire several 311 apps and similar projects in other cities across the United States.⁶⁴

Community PlanIt — another project by MONUM in partnership with the Engagement Game Lab at Emerson College — tried to gamify the planning experience and make it playful. A civic media experiment trying to create greater empathy and positive behavior, it is an online social network that turns the process of designing standards for gauging school performance into a game.⁶⁵ In a pilot of the project, participants were given seven missions, asking for feedback on how the city was gauging school and student performance. The participants had to answer multiple-choice questions, interact with other users with comments, and earn points in the system. This project helped foster community dialog and involve them actively in the city's decision-making in a gamified and engaging experience.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ City of Boston, BOS:311 App, last updated Dec 4, 2017, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.boston.gov/departments/new-urban-mechanics/bos311-app>

⁶⁵ Phelps, A., *NiemanLab*, Community PlanIt Turns Civic Engagement Into a Game — And the Prize is Better Discourse, published Sep 15, 2011, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.niemanlab.org/2011/09/community-planit-turns-civic-engagement-into-a-game-and-the-prize-is-better-discourse/>

⁶⁶ City of Boston, Community PlanIt, last updated Apr 3, 2017, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.boston.gov/departments/new-urban-mechanics/community-planit>

Such use of crowdsourcing techniques by government to involve citizens in the design and execution of government services is known as citizen sourcing.

Another way to take charge is to get proactively involved in building your city, whether through pro-bono activity, or through activism and community organization. Civic hackers are “technologists, civil servants, designers, entrepreneurs, engineers”, data scientists, civic organizers, or “anybody who is willing to collaborate with others to create, build, and invent to address [the] challenges relevant to our neighborhoods, our cities, our states, and our country.”⁶⁷ They could be independent professionals, government employees, or employed by innovative for-profit companies and nonprofit organizations. In fact, civic hacking is “a creative and often technological approach to solving civic problems.”⁶⁸

City governments across the world are also collecting and publishing openly datasets — like France's data.gouv.fr portal — about citizen activity and public utilities that civic hackers and enthusiasts can use to build services, apps, and utilities upon and solve problems. Wikipedia is a good case study at the macro scale on how enthusiasts passionate about a cause can build collectively a resource or service for the greater good. As Sarah Gumski writes in a *Scientific American* article,

*“With over 38 million articles in more than 250 different languages, [Wikipedia] is an undeniably useful global asset. This free-access, free-content, user-edited Internet encyclopedia is so culturally influential that the Wikipedia page for any given topic is usually one of the first search results on Google. To keep up with their reputation, the editorial staff actively monitors attempts to corrupt a page and corrects inconsistencies within a matter of seconds.”*⁶⁹

It is a free and open-source online encyclopedia project that is crowd-sourced, run by enthusiasts and volunteer contributors across the world, contributing their time, knowledge, and expanding the encyclopedia to

⁶⁷ Skytland, N., *openNASA*, What is a Civic Hacker?, published May 8, 2013, accessed Sep 30, 2019, <https://open.nasa.gov/blog/what-is-a-civic-hacker/>

⁶⁸ Tauberer, J., *Open Government Data: The Book*, Civic Hacking, published Aug 2014, accessed Sep 30, 2019, <https://opengovdata.io/2014/civic-hacking/#fn:1>

⁶⁹ Gumski, S., *Scientific American*, What Makes Wikipedia's Volunteer Editors Volunteer?, published May 12, 2016, accessed Nov 24, 2019, <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/what-makes-wikipedia-s-volunteer-editors-volunteer/>

different languages and making it more accessible and resourceful every day. Another example is OpenStreetMap (OSM), a free and collaborative editable map of the world with volunteered geographic information. Inspired by Wikipedia, it was created by Steve Coast in the U.K. in 2004. Both projects are managed and run by non-profit foundations, coordinating efforts by millions of contributors across the globe.

On the city scale, we can look at projects like OneBusAway, a mobile app that uses open data and volunteer input to display real-time transit information to daily commuters in the Puget Sound region of Washington state. The project originated as a graduate student project by Brian Ferris and Kari Watkins at the University of Washington⁷⁰ as part of their PhD dissertations. The project has since become a major open source project with a worldwide community of volunteer contributors, and has helped researchers understand the impact of delivering real-time transit information to commuters, and to study their attitudes and behavior. Such projects represent what we can call “civic tech” — the tools that we use to create and support a better quality of life in society by working together for the public good.⁷¹ It is “technology that enables greater participation in government or otherwise assists government in delivering citizen services and strengthening ties with the public.”⁷²

Being involved in this manner as part of a broader community of enthusiasts and pro bono contributors trying to build services and contribute in their own way towards the design and development of the city can strengthen the sense of membership and the emotional connection one has with the place and community they are a part of. It is about empowering the members of the community so that they can take charge and be proactive in the decision-making, whether it is by being involved in consultations on the city hall’s projects, in public transit, or by directly using open and public tools to contribute and build services for the society.

⁷⁰ Open Transit Software Foundation, History, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://opentransitsoftwarefoundation.org/overview/history/>

⁷¹ McCann, L., *Civic Hall*, But What is “Civic”? published May 1, 2015, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://civichall.org/civicist/what-is-civic/>

⁷² Wood, C., *Government Technology*, What is Civic Tech?, published Aug 16, 2016, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.govtech.com/civic/What-is-Civic-Tech.html>

2.3 Hacking the Commons: Public Domain and a Shared Identity

In order to bring together people that are displaced or disconnected from their community, either as a result of gentrification, urbanization, natural disasters, war, or other circumstances, and inculcate a sense of belonging in them, we can look towards the public domain, and how people express a shared and collective identity, or a collective opinion and voice. The public domain, or the commons, is the shared physical or digital space and collective resources that belong to the local community. The public domain acts as a blank canvas and a safe space where the community can not just interact, share, express, and mingle, but also express a collective voice and a shared identity. David Lange argues in his work *Recognizing the Public Domain* that “[the public domain] should be a place of sanctuary for individual creative expression, a sanctuary conferring affirmative protection against the forces of private appropriation that threatened such expression”, as quoted by Ronan Deazley.⁷³

Public art, that is, artistic expression in the shared public domain, can be an effective way of bringing people together, and unifying a community. Art and artistic expression can be the medium through which the community can provide itself a shared identity and visual language, or it can be a means to voice protest or engage in a dialog through art.

Serendipity Arts Festival is an annual arts festival organized in Goa every December. When the festival was organized for the first time in 2016, a series of murals and sculptures were commissioned across the City of Panaji. One of them was a mural of an old lady drinking coconut water from a bright green Goan tender coconut, painted on the wall of Junta House, a historic building in the heart of the city, prominently visible along the 18 June Road, a prime touristic and shopping street running through the city. The image of the old Goan lady drinking coconut water from a tender coconut exudes *Goanness*, and gives the public space around it an air of vibrance and liveliness, with its colors and local vibe — the tender coconut,

⁷³ Deazley, R., *Rethinking Copyright: History, Theory, Language*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2006, p. 104

the floral print on the lady's outfit, and the lady's posture and *sushegād* (laissez faire, relaxed) attitude.



Mural of a lady drinking coconut water at Junta House, Panaji, Goa⁷⁴

Another example of public expression of identity through art is that of truck drivers in India decorating their trucks by commissioning bespoke artwork and typography on the exterior, with unique motifs, phrases and quotes that make them stand apart. Although trucks are private property, with the inside being a private safe space, the exterior of the truck serves as a means of expression, where the truck driver can express their identity and communicate with the public through art. It isn't public art per se, but art in the public space. As VICE staff write in an article about Indian truck art profiling an Indian truck artist,

*Trucks in India carry a kaleidoscope of colors, art, slogans and symbols almost as a celebration of the beast that rolls down the highways, traveling across far-flung geographies. With close to 8.5 million trucks plying on Indian roads, the trucking industry is India's backbone when it comes to the supply of essential services. Indian trucks are also known for another thing—their fantastical art! For truckers in India, having a riotous display of colors and art they resonate with is almost a rite of passage. The bulky body of the truck then becomes a mode of expression, not only for them but also for many truck artists in the country.*⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Image by Joegoauk Goa on Flickr. Retrieved and cropped from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/joegoauk73/30452423288>. Used under CC BY license <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>.

⁷⁵ VICE Staff, *VICE*, Inside the World of Indian Truck Art, published Jul 5, 2019, accessed Nov 24, 2019, [https://www.vice.com/en_in/article/a3xpk5/inside-the-world-](https://www.vice.com/en_in/article/a3xpk5/inside-the-world-of-india-truck-art)



Graffiti in Paris⁷⁶

One interesting but controversial means of artistic expression in the public domain is graffiti. On the one hand, it can be seen as a simple act of artistic expression and a marker of identity, which democratizes artistic expression with simple tools, while on the other hand, it is also seen as an act of vandalism, or as an act of marking one's territory, as done by street gangs, thus indicating gang activity and crime in the neighborhood.



Perception, eL Seed, Cairo⁷⁷

[of-india-truck-art](https://www.vice.com/en_in/article/a3xpk5/inside-the-world-of-india-truck-art)

⁷⁶ Image by self

⁷⁷ Image courtesy elseed-art.com

Graffiti can also be used as a means of public expression, either as a call-to-action promoting or supporting a cause, or as a sign of protest. eL Seed, a French–Tunisian street artist, uses traditional Arabic calligraphy in a style he calls *calligraffiti* — an art form combining calligraphy, typography, and graffiti — as a tool for political expression. He uses his art to express political dissent and give communities a voice. In a project called *Perception* (pictured above) in the Manshiyat Nasr neighborhood of Cairo, eL Seed created an anamorphic artwork across 50 buildings, which can only be seen from a certain point on the Mukattam Mountain. It reads, “Anyone who wants to see the sunlight clearly needs to wipe his eye first,” using words from a 3rd century Coptic Bishop. The artwork aims to bring to light the Coptic community of Zaraqeb, which has been collecting the trash of the city for decades in a highly efficient and profitable manner, yet with the place being perceived as dirty, marginalized and segregated, and the Zaraqeb being called the Zabaleen, or the garbage people.⁷⁸

Graffiti was a prominent element in the rise of art activism during the 2011 Egyptian revolution, and had a major influence on the political movement. One example of this is the Mohamed Mahmoud graffiti in the area surrounding the eponymous street near Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt. Artists explored different styles, mixing Egyptian style with Arabic calligraphy, and themes such as Egypt’s Pharaonic glory and illustrious past.

Festivals are one way the community uses the urban commons to intermingle and express itself through a shared tradition and belief system, whether it is traditional religious festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi, Diwali, the Carnival, Thanksgiving, or contemporary public art and culture festivals like the Nuit Blanche, South by Southwest (SXSW), ComicCon, or the Sundance Film Festival. The streets of Mumbai are filled with people of all genders, age groups, and unite across caste and religious lines to celebrate the *sarvajanik* (public) festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi, the birth of Lord Ganesh, or Holi, the festival of color. A common attraction in Goa is the annual Carnival, a Christian festival celebrated in February that brings the Goan Catholic and Goan Hindu communities together out on the streets in downtown Panaji to celebrate with pomp and enthusiasm, followed by the somewhat similar Hindu festival of Shigmo, celebrated according to the Hindu calendar, sometime in March, which unites both communities once again in the public domain.

⁷⁸ Seed, E., *eL Seed Art, Perception*, accessed Oct 14, 2019, <https://elseed-art.com/projects/perception-cairo/>

Analogous to the use of the physical urban commons as a public resource, digital and virtual space also includes the public domain — the *digital commons*. Felix Stadler defines the digital commons as “informational resources created and shared within voluntary communities of varying size and interests. These resources are typically held *de facto* as communal, rather than private or public (i.e. state) property.”⁷⁹ He writes,

*Although many political, legal, and economic questions remain to be solved, the digital commons represents a paradigm change, whereby new technological, social and economic frameworks have already generated an informational order in outline that is socially more just, economically more productive, and politically more democratic than the current regime of informational monopolies.*⁸⁰

As Stadler asserts, the digital commons can help us bring about a paradigm shift in how we use our resources and a new framework that is more socially equitable, just, and democratic. We have seen this happen with the rise of the Internet and the open-source community, and new public tools for collaboration and collective information exchange — for example, Wikipedia, a free and crowd-edited encyclopedia, has decentralized and democratized knowledge and information sharing; the Creative Commons movement has facilitated sharing and attributing one another’s work digitally in a convenient manner. Having a healthy pool of resources and contributors to the digital and physical commons with communal governance of such resources, and using the public domain for collective expression can strengthen the ties between the community and its members.

While we discussed using the physical space to express a personal or shared identity, the virtual or digital space can also be used likewise, and the rise of modern digital platforms and new media, and digital social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat present us with novel ways of expressing our identities and opinions, whether individual or collective, with tools such as digital avatars, motion graphics, hashtags, inter alia. As Murray Summerville writes in a paper about hashtags,

From its beginnings as a searchable piece of metadata, hashtags help others find others beyond their own circle of friends to discover a collective of similar ideas from an audience which now existed beyond their friends list. Following a political debate with the addition of a hashtag can signify to others your personal views on

⁷⁹ Stadler, F., Digital Commons in Hart, K., Laville, J. L., Cattani, A. D. (eds), *The Human Economy: A Citizen’s Guide*, Polity Press, 2010, pp. 313–324

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

*current events and signify to others your desire to be involved in the conversation. A hashtag can be used to express an individual experience and generate feelings of solidarity between users. A hashtag can perform the role of impression management through self-presentation. Hashtags, when taken collectively, add cultural value to a conversation. For contemporary social media users, hashtags are multidimensional and have evolved into ways of building both strong and weak ties with others, signifying a desire to be part of and belong to the community.*⁸¹

Another approach to community-building and reducing social inequity is to look at how the people in a community are connected to one another, the networks they form, and what keeps them together, as we will see in the next sub-section.

⁸¹ Summerville, M., *Debating Communities and Social Networks 2018 OUA Conference*, #community, Hashtags Generate a Sense of Belonging, published Apr 23, 2018, accessed Nov 24, 2019, networkconference.netstudies.org/2018OUA/2018/04/23/community-hashtags-generate-a-sense-of-belonging/

2.4 Urban Social Networks

Cities across the world — from the rapidly developing megacities in India, China, Latin America, and Africa, to the developed ones in advanced economies across Europe, Asia, and North America — are becoming more dense and tight-knit. As cities expand and we see unprecedented economic growth in some parts of the world, we see the emergence of what Richard Florida calls “superstar cities”, a select group of highly developed global megacities and urban agglomerations that are the epicenters of high-tech innovation and have very advanced economies. These superstar cities attract top talent with world-class universities, have healthy startup ecosystems, a highly advanced economy, and a massive influx of capital. However, these megacities are not utopias, and the irony here is that the very fact that causes them to be magnets of talent and capital also causes them to be highly unequal.

What these cities also have as a result of the clustering force that causes them to be such magnets of talent are what Kandolkar calls “urban social networks”, which are networks of people in an urban agglomeration which facilitate a flow of social interactions and opportunities, like jobs, interpersonal relationships, and have a strong sense of community.⁸² One type of urban social network can be found in the system of *chawls* of Mumbai, which are densely packed urban tenements with communities of diverse and low-income working-class people. With such high density and overcrowding, the chawl residents had very little privacy and formed a very close relationship, almost like a family, and spent more time on the streets and common areas than in their tenements in their daily life, and especially during public festivities. Communal festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi, Gokulashtami and Moharram are times when communities unite across religious lines and come together to celebrate festivals in the public domain — the streets. The high density and low income segregation within the *chawl* meant increased solidarity and camaraderie among its residents.

Another type of urban social network, a knowledge network⁸³, can be found

⁸² See Interview 1 with Vishvesh Kandolkar, Appendix p. A10

⁸³ Breschi, S., Lenzi, C., *LSE US Centre*, How Urban Social Networks Help to Inspire Creativity in American Cities, published Sep 21, 2016, accessed Nov 24, 2019, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2016/09/21/how-urban-social-networks-help-to-inspire->

in the dense research and high-tech innovation clusters found in certain megacities that fuel collaboration and innovation, such as the Silicon Valley, the Boston metropolitan area, or the Paris–Saclay plateau. These clusters have high-quality universities with strong networks of talented people collaborating with highly innovative companies at the cusp of cutting-edge innovation, thus reinforcing and strengthening their innovative capacity by feeding and growing the network.⁸⁴

With rapid urbanization and a massive rural exodus occurring in recent years as we move from an economy dominated by manufacturing and production, with more working-class jobs, to one dominated by knowledge and service sector jobs and increased automation, we will see our cities become increasingly dense, and in order to facilitate a healthy civic life with strong communities, we need to preserve and enrich this type of urban social networks, which are diverse, multicultural, have a high capacity of human interactions, and a greater sense of community. However, not all types of communities and social networks can be conducive to the well-being of the society. For an example, we can look towards the favelas of Rio-de-Janeiro in Brazil.

A *favela* is a type of unregulated low and middle-income neighborhood in Brazil that has been historically neglected by the government. Getting recognized and accounted for is the most fundamental aspect of equity and equality, and in that sense, the favelas are severely disadvantaged. The favelas grew to prominence during the 1940s housing crisis of Rio, when rapid urbanization and industrialization brought in migrants who couldn't afford urban housing and formed shantytowns in the city's suburbs. Neglected by the government and largely unregulated, the favelas became the center of drug trafficking, violence, and police repression during the 1980s. Many of the roughly 1,000 favelas are plagued with "poor sanitation, inadequate housing, and violence" to this day.⁸⁵ The neighborhoods vary, and while many are diverse and "vibrant communities with productive economies and homes of concrete and brick"⁸⁶, around 37% of the favelas

creativity-in-american-cities/

84 *Ibid.*

85 Savchuk, K., *The Guardian*, No More 'Rat Kids': Fighting the Way We Think About the Residents of Rio's Favelas, published Dec 5, 2016, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/dec/05/local-journalists-changing-way-media-reports-rios-favelas-brazil>

86 *Ibid.*

are controlled by drug gangs⁸⁷. It is these networks of crime that are often plaguing the low-income and unregulated or neglected neighborhoods that we need to look at and re-orient.

Similarly, when the textile industry of Mumbai collapsed after the 1982 textile strike, the chawls were filled with newly unemployed men and women with a bleak future, and the homicide and crime rate in these mill worker communities in Girangaon went up, and eventually produced some of the most violent gangsters and crime syndicates in the country. What were once mill unions turned into violent gangs, and the vibrant communities of the chawls disintegrated as the mill owners and real estate developers started turning these mills and chawls into fancy shopping malls, thus displacing and rendering jobless a once vibrant community, a part of which turned to crime and violence.⁸⁸

Deindustrialization of a thriving urban industrial neighborhood can have severe consequences if not handled with caution and diligence, as we see with the example of Mumbai's textile industry. Government negligence and bias against shantytowns and slum communities can also have similar consequences, and we can see thriving and lively communities devolve into criminal activity and hopelessness. If we are to build resilient communities, we need to look at what makes them endure and survive the ups and downs of urban life, as we see in the next sub-section.

87 *Ibid.*

88 See *City of Gold* (Marathi: Lalbaug Parel), a 2010 Bollywood film in Hindi and Marathi that explores the life of Mumbai's mill workers during and after the 1982 strike

2.5 Building Resilient Communities: What Makes Them Endure

Tracking the health of 268 Harvard sophomores, the Harvard Study of Adult Development is one of the world's longest studies of adult life. After studying the Crimson men and inner-city Boston residents for almost 80 years, the researchers found that embracing community and having healthier interpersonal relationships helps us live longer and happier lives. "The surprising finding is that our relationships and how happy we are in our relationships has a powerful influence on our health," said Robert Waldinger, director of the study, a psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital and a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. "Taking care of your body is important, but tending to your relationships is a form of self-care too. That, I think, is the revelation."⁸⁹

This study plays a very important role in understanding how we can live healthy lives, and build more resilient communities. One way we can build resilient and unified yet very diverse communities is through team-based or group-based communal activity such as sports or festivals, where voluntary enrollment and membership to a certain team or group provide a sense of belonging and a common goal.⁹⁰ This also contributes towards personal growth in individuals, helping them meet new people in the community and foster stronger interpersonal relationships with other members of the community, thereby making the community as a whole more resilient and enduring.

Team-based sport presents an opportunity for oneself to be a part of something greater than themselves, have a shared goal and mission, a common purpose that brings together people of different race, size, color, faith, and sometimes even nationality, with a strong emotional connection and collective spirit. The sense of membership and belonging is enhanced

⁸⁹ Mineo, L., *The Harvard Gazette*, Good Genes are Nice, But Joy is Better, published Apr 11, 2017, accessed Sep 30, 2019, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/04/over-nearly-80-years-harvard-study-has-been-showing-how-to-live-a-healthy-and-happy-life/>

⁹⁰ See Interview 3 with Ami Sardesai, Appendix p. A20

with participation in such a diverse yet unified group.⁹¹

As part of the social offering of a place, a city or region also needs to facilitate greater opportunities for interaction and cooperation among its communities. Creating opportunities for dialog and exchange, and interaction with people who don't look, talk, or act like oneself can go a long way in bringing in bridging the gaps between communities by bringing in fresh perspectives and developing increased compassion and empathy for one another.⁹² Communal events like public celebration of religious festivals, contemporary arts festivals, public sporting events like city-wide marathons, can help achieve this.

Another approach to enhance social offering and building enduring and resilient communities is to augment the design and layout of the living and public space to maximize human interaction and dialog, by increasing walkability, building mixed-use paths prioritizing pedestrians and cyclists, adding more public parks and green spaces, and scrambling and mixing up the layout of the neighborhoods to include a diverse and multicultural community but also a good mix of residential, commercial, and open space, and focusing on people and communities rather than corporate interests and political agendas. This approach is what we call placemaking. According to the Project for Public Spaces (PPS), a New York-based nonprofit dedicated to building sustainable public places and communities, placemaking is "community-driven, visionary, function before form, adaptable, inclusive, focused on creating destination, context-specific, dynamic, trans-disciplinary, transformative, flexible, collaborative, and sociable".⁹³ It is "a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution."⁹⁴ Although PPS popularized the concept, it gained traction and was inspired by the ideas of urbanists and thinkers like Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte in the 1960s.⁹⁵

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² See Interview 2 with Sagar Kamat, Appendix p. A17

⁹³ Project for Public Spaces, What is Placemaking?, published 2007, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking>

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

However, it is easier said than done, and developing and preserving strong and resilient communities — with powerful urban social networks, sense of belonging, and *raison d'être* — involves multiple challenges and obstacles, some of which we will look at in the following section.



SECTION 3

The Challenges of Social Equity and Cohesion

This section explores the challenges we face with social cohesion and community engagement, especially when the world is so divided today. A more divided world makes social cohesion and integrity extremely hard. We look at the limitations of crowdsourcing and the difficulties community-driven projects face, and the role of money and the financial industry in fueling inequality and posing challenges to social cohesion and equity.

The first sub-section, *Us vs Them: An Increasingly Divided Society*, explores the rise of social tensions and partisanship across the world, the fissures and divisions among social classes, and the social segregation of the different social groups due to clustering in urban areas. We look at how the rise in xenophobia and the historic ties of racism create tensions in societies with high migration and change.

The second sub-section, *Limitations of the Community-Driven Approach*, explores the limitations and difficulties of civic engagement and community-driven projects at the grassroots level.

The third sub-section, *It's All About the Bottom Line*, looks at the role money and the financial industry plays in fueling inequality and posing challenges to civic integrity and social cohesion. After all, it seems, it's all about the bottom line.

3.1 Us vs Them: An Increasingly Divided Society

With a rising anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiment, a spike in terrorist attacks, hate crime, and myopic and selfish nationalistic politics, the world has become increasingly divided, with populist politicians and demagogues like Trump rallying crowds of discontented and racist voters in frenzied anti-immigrant and nationalistic rhetoric.

On November 13, 2015, beginning at around 9 pm, the city of Paris was paralyzed by a series of devastating coordinated terror attacks in the city center and the northern suburb of Saint-Denis, with several mass shootings and multiple suicide bombings at Parisian cafés and restaurants, the Bataclan theater in the 11th arrondissement, and the Stade de France in Saint-Denis. This was less than a year after the January 2015 attacks at the offices of Charlie Hebdo, a French satirical weekly. Eventually, the Islamic State (IS, formerly also known as ISIS or ISIL) took responsibility⁹⁶ for the coordinated attacks on the city, as retaliation for French involvement in the Syrian Civil War.

The fallout from the long, convoluted and multi-sided — and still ongoing — Syrian Civil War included not just terrorist attacks like the one in Paris, but a massive influx of refugees and asylum seekers into continental Europe and beyond. At its peak, the European migrant crisis dominated news cycles, with jaw-dropping images of destitute and hopeless refugees using boats to cross unsafe international waters to enter continental Europe with the hope of seeking asylum, or stranded in refugee camps like the Calais Jungle migrant camp near Calais, France, waiting for due process, and some even entering countries illegally out of desperation.

This massive influx of migrants led to cultural clashes in some cases, overwhelmed the bureaucratic systems, made social integration challenging⁹⁷,

⁹⁶ Callimachi, R. *The New York Times*, ISIS Claims Responsibility, Calling Paris Attacks 'First of the Storm', published Nov 14, 2015, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/15/world/europe/isis-claims-responsibility-for-paris-attacks-calling-them-miracles.html>

⁹⁷ Amaral, E., Woldetsadik, M., Armenta, G., *The RAND Blog*, Europe's Great Challenge:

and empowered the right-wing and conservative factions and populist politicians in some European countries like Germany and France.⁹⁸ It was one of the biggest such refugee waves since World War II, with over 1 million fleeing migrants, and unsettled the European Union, reigniting Euroskeptical thinking.⁹⁹ It provided fodder for divisive elements to target minority communities and immigrants with a xenophobic “us vs them” rhetoric. In a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in spring 2016 called the Global Attitudes Survey, in 8 out of the 10 nations that were surveyed, 50% or more people believe that the influx of refugees would increase the likelihood of terrorism, and in 5 out of 10 nations, 50% or more people believe that refugees would burden their economies and “take away [their] jobs and social benefits.”¹⁰⁰

As a result of rising political pressure, the United Kingdom held a referendum in 2016 on whether to leave or remain in the European Union, known as the Brexit referendum. Influenced by a misleading¹⁰¹ and politically motivated campaign to leave, residents of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union by a slim majority at 51.9% of the vote. The outcome of the referendum was contentious and polarizing, and although it was legally non-binding, the government decided to uphold the outcome of the Brexit referendum. The outcome also created instability and chaos in British politics and industry, and global financial markets reacted negatively to it almost immediately after the vote. The divisive and misleading Leave campaign and outcome of the Brexit vote ignited xenophobic sentiment in the British populace, and led to hate crimes and racist attacks against minorities and European immigrants.¹⁰²

Integrating Syrian Refugees, published Apr 20, 2018, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2018/04/europes-great-challenge-integrating-syrian-refugees.html>

98 Abdalla, J., *CUNY Academic Works*, Europe’s Refugee Crisis: Right-Wing Populism and Mainstream Co-option in Germany and France, published Apr 25, 2017, https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cc_etds_theses/731/

99 *Ibid.*

100 Wike, R., Stokes, B., Simmons, K., *Pew Research Center*, Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs, published Jul 11, 2016, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/07/11/europeans-fear-wave-of-refugees-will-mean-more-terrorism-fewer-jobs/>

101 Quinn, B., *The Guardian*, Boris Johnson Lied During EU Referendum Campaign, Court Told, published May 23, 2019, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/may/23/boris-johnson-lied-during-eu-referendum-campaign-court-told>

102 BBC News, Brexit ‘Major Influence’ in Racism and Hate Crime Rise, published Jun

On January 27, 2017, only seven days after assuming office of the President of the United States, one of the most powerful and influential political positions in the world, President Donald Trump signed the controversial Executive Order 13769, better known to the world as the Muslim ban, an immigration legislation that was unfair and eventually struck down by U.S. courts, forcing Trump to revise it multiple times, until the Supreme Court of the United States finally upheld the third version, which was much narrower in scope. The Muslim ban was a legislation that unfairly banned travelers and immigrants from Muslim-majority countries, even affecting permanent residents, and creating chaos and confusion. It led to widespread protests in the United States against the legislation.¹⁰³

Trump is notorious for his frenzied rallies with xenophobic rhetoric and wild chants against his political opponents, but he is not alone. Recent events — some of which are highlighted above — have led to other demagogues and populist politicians like France’s Marine Le Pen and their dangerous rhetoric to enter the mainstream. Such a divisive rhetoric and political climate poses multiple challenges to social cohesion and integration. As is evident, it leads to deep fissures within the society and creates a us-vs-them attitude among people, wherein the majority sees the minorities and immigrants as “outsiders” and “other”. This leads to conflict and tensions in civic life, and is dangerous for the long-term health of the community. When such discrimination and prejudice becomes institutional — for example, the systemic discrimination of black people during the Jim Crow era in the United States — the refugees, migrants, and other minorities may have “reduced access to public services and healthcare entitlements based on race or ethnicity”¹⁰⁴, thus deepening the social inequity.

Another factor influencing this sentiment is the paradigm shift in the global economy, as artificial intelligence and automation revolutionizes not just the manufacturing sector but also industries like transportation and logistics, and we move from fossil fuels to electrification in mobility, leading to

20, 2019, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-48692863>

103 Lind, D., *Vox*, Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Trump’s Travel Ban, published Jun 26, 2018, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/2018/6/26/17492410/travel-muslim-ban-supreme-court-ruling>

104 Ocock, N., Chan, C., *United Nations University*, Refugees, Racism and Xenophobia: What Works to Reduce Discrimination?, published Jun 20, 2018, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/refugees-racism-and-xenophobia-what-works-to-reduce-discrimination>

massive job losses, especially in low-paying and low-skilled sectors. This leads to discontentment and anger in large swaths of the population, and in some cases, the false but prevailing belief that the migrants and outsiders are “stealing our jobs”¹⁰⁵, whereas in reality, immigrants often take up the jobs locals don’t want or can’t fulfill, and immigration is linked to innovation and economic growth.¹⁰⁶

If our aim is to tackle social inequity and make people feel a greater sense of belonging in their communities so that they can live in harmony and solidarity, then such division and conflict in society and a combative mindset pose a big challenge that we need to tackle. While we can use a bottom-up community-driven approach to solve this problem, it does have its own limitations, and in some cases, legislation and a top-down approach might be necessary for long-term and enduring solutions.

¹⁰⁵ Hoban, B., *Brookings*, Do Immigrants “Steal” Jobs from American Workers?, published Aug 24, 2017, accessed Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2017/08/24/do-immigrants-steal-jobs-from-american-workers/>

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

3.2 Limitations of the Community-Driven Approach

While crowdsourcing and getting involved in community-driven projects is a great way to reinforce community membership and fill in the gaps in local governance, it has its limitations and shortcomings. A community-driven approach alone cannot solve the problems created by gentrification and social inequity. It requires a multifaceted approach, involving regulation, societal transformation, and rethinking economic and political models. In this sub-section, we will discuss some of the limitations of the community-driven approach.

While governments and corporations typically employ a largely top-down focused approach with a vision and strategic planning, the citizen-driven initiatives are flexible, agile, and bottom-up, but they lack a singular focus and organization, and tend to fall apart if not managed diligently.¹⁰⁷ Governments and public entities also have massive budgets and access to the kind of resources that grassroots initiatives lack. The latter have to rely on grants, philanthropy and charitable donations from private donors, government funding, or investments by venture capital firms if the idea is profitable. On the flip side, while governments and public sector firms are plagued with bureaucracy and archaic hierarchical organization structure, which makes them slow and inefficient, bottom-up citizen-driven initiatives benefit from their flatter and flexible structure, and agile workflows aided by technology.

While crowdsourced tools and services could serve those needs of the people left unserved or underserved by government, there is a fear that when forced to prioritize, governments might simply choose to withdraw services where citizen-driven alternatives are available.¹⁰⁸ This may create new inequities and disadvantage certain sections of the society. In areas where the needs weren’t already met by government, the crowdsourced alternatives might allow the government to shirk the responsibility to create equity.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Townsend, A., *op. cit.*, p. 112

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 129

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

To reduce the social inequities in housing that are exacerbated by gentrification, we need better housing regulation, and more investment in affordable rental housing. As Florida writes in *The New Urban Crisis*, “renting is more closely aligned with the needs of the urbanized knowledge-based economy than homeownership.”¹¹⁰ A shift towards providing more affordable rental housing as opposed to facilitating homeownership will provide more flexibility of human movement, and support the agile knowledge-economy and gig-economy workers of the future. To do that, we need housing policy reform and government action.

With increasing automation, we will see the elimination of many low-skilled and uncreative, mundane jobs that can easily be automated. For the foreseeable future, jobs that are highly skilled, creative, complex, and involve care, compassion, and empathy will be hard if not impossible to automate. This will create new social inequities, which can be tackled by bottom-up citizen-driven initiatives as well as regulation, but without a significant reform of the economic system, community-driven initiatives can only go so far in reducing these inequities. Progressive governments across the world are actively searching for solutions, and debating and testing new models of social welfare like universal basic income (UBI) to curb the inequities of the future. However, crowdsourced and community-driven initiatives aimed at re-skilling and re-training the displaced workforce can go a long way in equalizing the economic environment.

¹¹⁰ Florida, R., *op. cit.*, p. 152

3.3 It's All About the Bottom Line

The financial industry plays a major role in the gentrification process, and money not only poses a challenge to reducing the social inequities, but it creates the spatial inequality and social inequity in the first place. The *financialization* of money and the convoluted financial system with a greedy and deceptive financial industry only makes it worse. The financial industry, with its predatory lending practices, was responsible for the 2008 global financial crisis. When the governments of advanced and developed countries like the U.S. decided to bail out the already-wealthy bankers, the poor suffered the most, furthering the divide, and worsening the social inequity.¹¹¹ In the end, it's all about the bottom line.

Rising housing prices and land value are at the core of the gentrification process. The bottom line of real estate developers and the rentier class is what drives the residents out and displaces disproportionately the poor and marginalized sections of the society. While gentrification creates social inequity, it also creates a new wealthy tax base and brings about an urban renewal to a formerly ignored area, bringing in residents, industry, and thus new citizen services. This is what makes it lucrative to city administrations — more money. While it displaces and makes life worse for the displaced poor, it enriches life for the new residents and helps the administration, especially in a country like the United States where cities rely more heavily on taxes and local revenue as opposed to federal funding. In *How to Kill a City*, Peter Moskowitz writes,

Gentrification is also the inevitable result of a political system focused more on the creation and expansion of business opportunity than on the well-being of its citizens (what I refer to as neoliberalism). With little federal funding for housing, transportation, or anything else, American cities are now forced to rely completely on their tax base to pay for basic services, and the richer a city's tax base, the easier those services are to fund. That can mean attracting the wealthy to cities, actively pushing out the poor (who are a drain on taxes), or both. The latter seems

¹¹¹ Tomaskovic-Devey, D., Lin, K.-H., *UNC School of Law, North Carolina Banking Institute Vol 18 Issue 1 Article 17*, Financialization: Causes, Inequality Consequences, and Policy Implications, published 2013, accessed Nov 25, 2019, <https://scholarship.law.unc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1365&context=ncbi>

*to be the preferred one in most cities these days.*¹¹²

In unequal societies, the income of one's parents plays a bigger role in determining their access to opportunities, social mobility, quality of life, and future prospects, as these societies are segregated by income. It takes decades if not generations for families to achieve upward social mobility in marginalized neighborhoods. On the other hand, socioeconomic segregation creates clusters of privilege, where money creates money, and the rich keep getting richer with lesser effort. This is because when people get segregated into clusters of extreme privilege and extreme disadvantage by income, the social networks of the privileged are dominated by other privileged and wealthy people — thus giving them a disproportionately greater access to opportunities to better education, more lucrative jobs and business opportunities, and significantly better career trajectories — whereas those of the disadvantaged are similarly dominated by other disadvantaged people, significantly reducing their access to opportunities and upward mobility, and often leading them along the rough path.¹¹³

Another manner in which money threatens social equity and destroys the social fabric is through corruption, especially when it is systemic and interferes with the functioning of the government. When governments are plagued with high levels of corruption, the wealthier sections of the society benefit from the bias this creates towards anyone with money, and the poor sections of the society get left behind, and may have reduced or no access to essential citizen services and welfare programs. In some cases, programs and services *designed* to benefit the poor and reduce inequities may never reach the intended audience because of the extreme corruption, thus deepening the inequities instead of reducing them.

One way to tackle the disproportionate impact of money and the financial industry in creating social inequity is by regulating the financial industry and reforming the banking and housing industries. In order to reduce the inequity, we need to also rethink the design and layout of urban environments, and the delivery of urban services to citizens in a bid to eliminate socioeconomic segregation and provide a more equal access to opportunities.

¹¹² Moskowitz, P., *op. cit.*, p. 11

¹¹³ The idea of clusters of privilege and depravity and reduced social mobility is discussed in multiple publications cited in the introduction.

Conclusion

The primary focus of this thesis is the role gentrification plays in social inequity, the loss of sense of belonging in gentrified neighborhoods, and how we can engage the community to create social equity and sense of belonging in such cities. There occurs a disparity between the use-value and exchange-value of neighborhoods that have been in neglect and blight, and may be closer to businesses, the city's downtown, or to key areas of value, which makes the land value go up. This imbalance between the use-value and exchange-value makes the area lucrative for artists and urban migrants in search of cheap housing, and for developers who can renovate the existing houses or redevelop on the land and sell at very high rates. This is the beginning of the gentrification process. As middle-class and upper-class migrants start moving in, and developers take up more property, the land and housing prices start rising as new infrastructure and urban services are developed with new money. This increase in rents and mortgages prices out existing residents, who are forced to move to nearby suburbs and exurbs of the city, increasing the inequity. As the process approaches the final phases, an almost unrecognizable new avatar of the city is born, dominated by a new elite, displacing the traditional elite, and in some cases, gentrification reaches an extra phase dominated by vacant housing hoarded by outsiders as investment. This is when the neighborhood becomes unlivable, and the social inequity reaches its peak.

Gentrification creates and deepens socioeconomic segregation, and changes the character of a city. The residents lose their sense of belonging, and feel like strangers in their city. To regain the sense of belonging, the residents need to have a sense of place, and a sense of community, and a reason to be. The sense of place of a neighborhood are the visual, cultural, social, and environmental qualities that give it meaning and character. Openness, social offering, and aesthetics were the attributes most associated with community attachment to a place. The openness refers to how welcoming the place is, the social offering refers to the opportunities the place offers for social interaction and caring, and the aesthetics refers to the availability of green space and an element of physical beauty. The sense of community comprises four elements — membership, or feeling like you're a part of a group; influence, or feeling like you matter to a group; reinforcement, or the feeling that your needs are met by a group; and a

shared emotional connection. In order to reinforce the sense of community, citizens need to take charge and be involved. Governments and public firms must enlist and consult citizens in the decision-making process, and actively collaborate with students, researchers, and enthusiasts in finding solutions to civic problems.

The public domain can serve as a medium for expression and provide a shared identity and safe space for a community. It can be through public art, graffiti, or communal events like the celebration of festivals or contemporary art and culture festivals in the public spaces. This can bring a community together and foster a stronger sense of community. Another way this can be done is by building and retaining urban social networks, which are networks of people in an urban agglomeration which facilitate a flow of social interactions and opportunities, like jobs, interpersonal relationships, and have a strong sense of community. In order to build resilient communities, we need to facilitate more social interaction, and foster a sense of understanding and compassion among the diverse people in a community. One approach is to involve them in more team-based activities like sports, or in multicultural public festivals. Another approach is by redesigning our cities and making them more walkable, with more open spaces for social interaction, such as public parks and mixed-use pathways prioritizing pedestrians and cyclists instead of vehicular traffic, and having mixed-use buildings. However, there are some key challenges to social equity and cohesion.

We live in an increasingly divided society, with rising xenophobic sentiment and right-wing rhetoric. This poses a challenge to social integration and cohesion. There are limitations to a purely community-driven approach, and we need to look towards increased regulation and policy reform and transforming economic and political models to truly solve the problems with social inequity. Money poses the biggest challenge to social equity, as money and the financial industry create and worsen the problem in the first place.

Designer's Questions

In 2015, we saw one of the biggest migrant refugee waves since World War II, with over 1 million fleeing migrants, sending Europe into a refugee crisis, overwhelming its governance systems and democratic mechanisms, and reviving instability and Euroskeptic sentiment. The refugee crisis was

a fallout of the then ongoing Syrian Civil War. Another fallout of the war was terrorist attacks, and the rise of xenophobic sentiment and anti-immigrant hate crime in the European continent, notoriously the 2015 Paris attacks. Toxic and hateful political rhetoric has a clear correlation with the rise of hate crimes. Malicious and deceptive campaigns such as the 2016 Brexit campaign led to the rise of hate crimes in the U.K, while Trump's hateful rallies and rhetoric has empowered the right-wing nationalists and extremists in the United States, leading to a surge in partisan hate, both in the digital as well as the physical realm. Amidst this background, I may ask:

How can I, as a designer, facilitate social cohesion in a city amidst toxic political rhetoric that fuels hate and anti-immigrant violence?

When a city undergoes gentrification, it alienates a section of the population who lose their sense of belonging and begin to feel like strangers in their own city, as the city itself changes in character, with the influx of wealthy migrants and capital. The public domain, or the commons — whether it is physical or virtual — presents a blank canvas for expression. In the physical space, people can gather, mingle, and express their voice and opinion through protest, or their identity through art in the urban commons. In the virtual space, new and emerging platforms and tools such as hashtags give us a sense of belonging, and allow us to express ourselves, and use the digital commons for knowledge sharing and creative collaboration. Amidst this background, I may ask:

How can I, as a designer, use the public domain to provide citizens a sense of belonging in a shared space?

Gentrification segregates a city socially, racially, and economically. It creates clusters of high privilege, wealth and opportunity, and of depravity and neglect. This creates massive social inequality and inequity in the city. When people can no longer afford to live in an area due to rising rents and cost of living, they are forced to move farther away from the city in search of a more affordable neighborhood, often reducing their quality of life and disconnecting them from their communities and networks, as a result of which, they tend to lose their sense of belonging in their new home. Amidst this background, I may ask:

How can I, as a designer, inculcate a sense of belonging among displaced people in a socially segregated and gentrified city?

Afterword

The crux of this thesis is to look into how gentrification affects a city, and how it exacerbates the social inequity and inequality in the city, and what we can do to counteract the effects of this urban phenomenon. We look at community-building and how we can re-inculcate a sense of belonging among the displaced people and broken urban communities, and the challenges we face towards building social equity and cohesion. The world is rapidly urbanizing, and as the population continues to grow, cities will continue to face challenges with urban planning and development such as, inter alia, climate change, overpopulation, gentrification, social cohesion, migration, globalization, industrial shift and deindustrialization due to automation and a shift towards a knowledge economy, and a toxic political environment. Some of these problems and challenges need to be dealt with using strong and effective legislation, and in some cases such as climate change, through effective collaborative global action, while others can be tackled with good planning and foresight, but none are inevitable. A central tenet to dealing with these challenges is to strengthen communities and create social cohesion, and to unite the people to collaborate to solve these problems together.



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Interview 1

Vishvesh Kandolkar

Associate Professor, Goa College of Architecture
Panaji, Goa, India

Vishvesh Kandolkar is an Associate Professor at Goa College of Architecture, and a doctoral student at Manipal University through the Srishti Institute of Art, Design, and Technology, Bangalore. A writer of op-ed columns as well as art and architectural criticism, his writings can be found at wishvesh.blogspot.com.

This interview was conducted on-site on Aug 27, 2019 at Goa College of Architecture, Panaji, Goa, India, and has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Interview Objective: To understand the role of gentrification in social inequity

Interview Type: Expert opinion

Interview Medium: In-person, 30 min

Sahil Sardessai: When there is extreme inequality or a perception of it, especially in a city like New York or South Mumbai, the inequality facilitates very risky and self-defeating behavior, and affects the human psyche in a negative way. How can we make people feel equal, even though they may not be equal?

Vishvesh Kandolkar: There is a difference between equality and equity. And sometimes, equality tends to blind the way we look at resources, for instance. While equality means that everything should be shared equally, it also presumes that everybody has the same background and access to resources, which may not be the case. In India, for example, we already have inequity because of caste and other issues. People don't even have the resources to get the basics. The Constitution of India wanted to ensure that there is an equitable sharing of resources, but which didn't happen. In any kind of capitalist society, it is very difficult to reach any form of equitable resource sharing. The problem lies in the very way in which we distribute property rights. If there is no ceiling to property ownership, then

very clearly there will be the same kind of problems we have encountered earlier. So, firstly, it is not possible to grant total equality. Then, you can say that there will be no resources which will be private, and everything will be under the public domain, including housing, and if you do that, perhaps there will be a reversal, which might not necessarily be immediate. Maybe it will compromise the current way in which India or any other place is positioned economically. It is very important that we rethink urbanism from the point of view of property itself.

SS: So, with respect to cities, would that be in the form of social — or affordable — housing?

VK: Yes, because what has happened over time is that the government has taken its hands off from providing housing, and let the private developers do it by giving subsidies and loans. I think that essentially they're moving away from their basic responsibilities. And these are again policies which are under the new liberal economic reforms. I think one has to go back to saying that the providers will be responsible for social housing and the other components of urban living, including schools, etc. If you look at schools, the best ones are the most expensive ones. So, even if the poor want to have a good education, they'll never get it because it will be expensive, so it will be divided based on class. Therefore, people going to elite schools and colleges always come from wealthy families. You'll always have the stories of heroes who made it from rags to riches by studying under the streetlight, and it will always be the sons of rickshaw drivers and the extreme poor as opposed to the rich, because that is not the norm.

SS: In unequal neighborhoods, people lose the sense of community and connection. How can we bring the sense of connection and bring people together in a diverse neighborhood? Let's say, in an extremely gentrified neighborhood like South Mumbai, where one is a celebrity, and another who can't even afford a decent home to live in. How do you bridge that gap?

VK: I do not think it is possible to build a sense of community in this case because it is not something that can be solved simply by the idea of space, because here, when the space itself has become a commodity, you cannot start getting an intermediate commodity, because obviously, either the owner of the elite house will move across in an air conditioned cubicle, the car, and move out of the space. In Mumbai, why do we have a big celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi? The people are taking over the street and

the space, and who are they taking away from? Who is finding it difficult to move? The people driving cars. They are the ones who complain that the traffic will be congested during that time. So, on one hand, the diversity led by the urban space is exceedingly contested, where the car owners want to use it as a space for moving from one place to another, whereas those who don't own cars — the urban poor — are trying to reclaim the space during festivals and other occasions, like public protests, etc. And this contrast is coming in sharp focus because of the extremely inequitable and unequal sharing of resources, which in this case is space. It would not have been possible in a more socialistic space.

SS: Are you saying that public space could be one opportunity?

VK: Yes, it is an opportunity, but I think it is the last opportunity already, because you would not be solving the problem in the same way. Modernism tried to do it by proposing extreme solutions, by saying, let's do all public, social housing, and that was one way of going about it, and I think it failed because the super-rich wanted to have their own, exclusive bungalows, which is why they claimed that the social housing project failed, and that it created criminals within it, which is not the case. It was not producing criminals but providing affordable housing. So, it is not a failure of modernism in that respect, that it has given rise to good urban design, and a city which has diversity. I think one can go to a boring city at the cost of providing urban equitable social housing for all.

SS: When gentrification occurs in a city, it alienates existing residents, and they get priced out because they can no longer afford to live there. They start moving to the suburbs, exurbs and the cheaper areas. Only the rich can afford to live in the city, and you see an influx of wealthy outsiders. Over time the whole character and demographics of the city changes, and the civic life is now lost. The mom-and-pop stores are gone, and we see hipster cafés, luxury housing, and rich yuppies. How can we facilitate urban development and urban renewal while preserving the flavor and character of the city?

VK: By not doing any urban renewal projects at all. Urban renewal and beautification projects have shown that the moment you beautify or redevelop, then it leads to gentrification. So, somewhere, there is a problem. When you look at inner-city projects, the uplifting projects or public space projects have led to gentrification. If that is the case, then one has to rethink

urban renewal not from the point of view of projects and development but from the point of view of conservation, and by prioritizing the people, not the looks and aesthetics of the city. If people are important, then perhaps we'll find a new way of entering the domain of design which might not have anything to do with urban space and form.

SS: Let's say, you're bringing public transport to the city, for example, the Mumbai Metro. What you'll see is that wherever the Metro goes, the surrounding areas start becoming very expensive, and over a period of time, they become gentrified because of the Metro. While urban transit is a good thing, in the end you end up gentrifying parts of the city.

VK: If your aim is concern for the people, then I would say the Metro is not a good thing. You cannot choose both. You cannot have development that doesn't prioritize the needs of the urban poor who do not have access to these things, and at the same time say I want to improve social housing. This is a very capitalist way of doing things. Similarly, if you want to improve a lot, by the time you bring in the improvement, you don't really need it. You are driving them further away from it. And, there are people who talk about conservation of what they call urban social networks, or urban public networks, and the way these operate. So, you're no longer trying to improve the infrastructure, but trying to save and strengthen the social networks of people. That requires a complete rethink of the way in which urbanism or urban development operates. I don't think today there is an effort to maintain them. Sometimes it could be dangerous to maintain them, because if you have, say, a very conservative and communal housing society, like the Jain societies in Mumbai, some of them are completely bizarre in the way they wouldn't allow in any other communities, like Muslims, or people who eat fish. I am not in favor of saying that communities like these need to be saved. But genuine cases where there is inequality and the urban poor, and which are largely slums, they need to be rethought not as slums, because it is just another form of housing, but rethought purely from the point of view of networks of, say, economics, or jobs.

SS: We think of slums as something to be destroyed. What happens is that the land is given to a developer, who will build houses for the rich. Instead, you need to build it in such a way that the goal should be to rehabilitate these slum dwellers.

VK: But no, rehabilitation is also a problem, because you think you are re-

habilitating, but what you are doing is gentrification. It has become such that the slum ecosystem is seen as a undesirable housing type, and trying to turn this into another housing type needs to be rethought as well. I don't think it is undesirable at all. Maybe we actually need to *slumify* Mumbai, and make the entire city like a slum ecosystem rather than the other way around.

SS: *There are three parameters that connect a person to a city. One is the openness of the city, the second is the social offering — what a city is offering you in a social context — and the third is aesthetics. What is it that makes citizens feel at home in a city like Panaji, like that's your city?*

VK: There is a nice book by Victor Ferrao called *Being a Goan Christian*, and it points out a few things. It points to religious faith on one hand, and how difficult it is to be a Christian. For example, in Goa, it will definitely be about its long Portuguese history which makes you a part of this area. The historical layer of the city will make no sense if people move out from that space. So, it is linked to the people, and most importantly, to accept the people's history and culture, and you maintain those elements, and people will automatically reproduce the kind of space and culture that is required. So it is the people themselves, and diversity, because you don't want to have one single class dominating.

SS: *There is rising partisanship and division among communities globally, a right-wing "us vs them" or "locals vs outsiders" rhetoric and mentality. But you can't really stop migration, which is good at some level, but not too much of it. There is friction between the locals and the migrants, causing social unrest in places with high influx of refugees and migrants. How do you get rid of this mindset and integrate communities cohesively?*

VK: In his book, Kancha Ilaiah speaks about the social unrest in India, and he says that when you put two urban poor people together, they will always be fighting each other, but not with the person in the airplane, as he is not on the ground. Conflicts always happen with people on the ground. The moment you increase extreme property ownership and wealth, you are invariably going to land into problems of conflict. The conflicts manifest when two poor communities tend to fight with each other, never with the rich. You must understand that conflicts are the symptoms of a bigger systemic problem, and not just a local problem. For example, in Goa, you have the rhetoric of Goans vs outsiders. It is because there are rich people that

have bought into this place, and there are no policies trying to preserve and conserve the people that are already here.

SS: *I think you have already partly answered this question. What is it that gives a city its flavor and identity? How would you define the "soul" or "character" of a city? For example, what gives a Panaji resident the Panjekar identity or a Goan the Goenkar identity, transcending the language, religion, and color of skin? How would you distill down the strong identities of New Yorkers and Mumbaikars (demonym for Mumbai residents), for example, into words?*

VK: It is a dangerous question to be asked, and I will tell you why. It is because the search for an identity has always been something that you externally apply to somebody. If I want to know how to become a *Panjekar* (demonym for Panaji residents), and let's say I am emigrating from Delhi, and if there was a set template to follow, then I would do that and become one easily. I don't think there is a template. This is where *Goenkarponn* (Konkani for Goanness), a term coined by the politician Vijai Sardesai comes into play. If there were a *Goenkarponn* which can be defined very precisely, then, by definition, you could easily assimilate and become a Goan. I don't think such concepts really exist. It is problematic because it involves one to behave and act in a particular way. I say this is dangerous because the moment you have a template to do that, it is easily replicable. So I do not think there is one. Having said that, without forgetting people's history, the long historical associations, whether it is caste or religion or other means of associating with the land, cannot be dismissed. There is this image of a *Goenkar* (Konkani for Goan), that if you know how to be *su-shegād* (Konkani for laissez-faire or tranquil), then you're a *Goenkar*. That's the stereotype. Giving an identity is stereotyping, and there are people who like to operate in stereotypes to make themselves feel like they're local. If it means that I have to go to a certain café and have a coffee, I would still do it, because then it allows me to become a part of the community. It is a kind of stereotyping you want to be involved in because you want to feel part of a certain identity.

SS: *Nowadays cities are crafting brands out of themselves, for tourism, marketing, or to bring in capital. A brand is basically how a city sees itself. But cities are trying to be something else, something they're not, when they do these brand exercises. This trend inspired my next question. How do you identify the right elements that set a place or person or people apart?*

A follow-up question which is similar but about aesthetics. Cities across the world are starting to look the same. You have the same glass-and-steel aesthetic, high rise buildings, typical shopping malls with the same multinational brands (Zara, H&M, Starbucks), and cookie-cutter designs across the city, and everything starts to look the same at some point. How do you stand apart and make cities more unique and distinctive, with their own identity?

VK: I do not have a problem with this. If your basic premise is to give opportunities, making sure people are employed, and having a good use of resources, then it doesn't matter. The external aesthetics are just a small part. But it has to be done well, not half-way. You cannot really retain the original culture of Venice when the Venetians are no longer there. It just becomes another museum. You don't want to make your city into a museum, in the hope of making it into what I would call a global identity, because that gives preference to the physical artifacts of the city and not its people. If the people are okay with the change, then let the change be.

SS: So would you say that the city should adapt and evolve with the change?

VK: It is not adaptation as such. We confuse urban development with a city's aesthetics. We think that the moment you have high-rise towers, there are opportunities, which might not be the case. So if you really have high towers and a different kind of urbanization happening, and the people are still getting gentrified, then you have a problem. The model of development doesn't matter as long as the people are part of the plan. Aesthetics only play a supporting role to the main concern, which is the people and their diversity. Having said that, people cannot take the city for granted. If I belong to a different caste, I cannot assume that the person next to me is not my equal. I think a certain sense of equity and equality is required in a city, without which you'll have ghettos of communal people claiming their clusters, which is happening in Mumbai. So there is a balance that needs to exist.

Interview 2

Sagar Kamat

Short-term Detroit resident

Detroit, Michigan, United States

Sagar Kamat is an engineer at the Ford Motor Company, and a resident of the Detroit metropolitan area. He is a recent migrant to the area.

This interview was conducted via text messaging on Oct 9, 2019, and has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Interview Objective: To understand the process and impact of gentrification on existing residents in gentrified urban areas.

Interview Type: Testimony

Interview Medium: Text messaging, 30 min

Sahil Sardessai: How would you synthesize your city in one word or phrase? What gives your city its identity or character? Let's say, what gives Detroit its flavor and the feeling it evokes in you as a resident?

Sagar Kamat: Well, I would characterize Detroit as a "hopeful" or "optimistic" city. Detroit has been punched in the face again and again. Somehow, they have fought back every time. It hasn't worked for most of the time but it manages to survive. So there is this essence of resilience built into it. It's this underdog feeling, like the city is meant to be better than it actually is. The best way I can explain this is, there's this company in Detroit that sells T-shirts with the slogan "Detroit vs Everybody". To me, that tells you more about the spirit of Detroit than any other statement.

SS: Are you aware of the gentrification in parts of downtown Detroit? How does that affect you?

SK: Yes, I am very much aware of it. The disparity is stark, and it is very evident.

SS: How did the bankruptcy and subsequent urban blight affect the city?

What happened to those neighborhoods?

SK: I moved to the Detroit metropolitan area very recently, in 2016, but even in the last three years, the change has been rapid. Driving through Detroit, you can very much feel like you are driving through the shell of what was once a great city. Everything is bigger and emptier than it should be — a remnant of its once bustling history. You drive through entire neighborhoods where the houses are in various states of decay. Once you drive outside the few square miles of downtown Detroit, which is lately thriving, the scenery is bleak.

SS: How do you think the city has changed in character and appearance over time, with the bankruptcy, gentrification, and other major societal changes? Can you recount your experience in the city?

SK: When I moved here as recently as 2016, most of my friends and colleagues who live in the suburbs did not venture out to Detroit, especially after dark. The only time most of them went to Detroit was once a year for the auto show. Even mentioning it, I would be told anecdotes of how cars get jacked and people get shot. However, even over the last three years, this has changed dramatically. Most of the city is still run down, but the revival has begun in earnest in the downtown area, and is spreading out.

SS: How can we engage the local community and bring people together in a segregated and stratified city like Detroit, segregated based on income and race?

SK: This is a hard one. For starters, helicoptering in solutions from outside seldom works. There are a lot of Detroiters trying hard to make things better for themselves. They are taking up urban farming in the vacant lots, building businesses in the city, and doing their best. Helping them would do much better than trying to get outside help.

SS: As the society gets polarized and divided with xenophobia and racism, how can we facilitate social cohesion and community-building against this challenge?

SK: I would say, fostering dialog and interaction among the different communities, striking conversations and increasing interaction among people would help. Exposure to people who don't look and talk like themselves

is a good way to start. Food is another great way to facilitate this. People come for the experience and stay for the interaction.

SS: Money is the biggest motivator that facilitates gentrification and urban segregation in the first place. How can we rethink the funding model for urban areas to prevent segregation and build resilient communities?

SK: Okay, here's my honest take on this. Gentrification as a problem is not so black and white. If we take Detroit, is it gentrified? Yes. But I don't know what the alternative was. Detroit was very much dying as a city. Entire skyscrapers were abandoned, and nobody wanted to invest in Detroit. Many had tried and failed, including the big corporations like General Motors and Ford. Then, Dan Gilbert of Quicken Loans decided to take a chance, and started buying up buildings in Detroit, moving the HQ of his company downtown, and slowly started investing money into it. Now, he's at a stage where he pretty much owns downtown Detroit — over a 100 buildings. Roughly speaking, he bought buildings for like \$5 million each and then spent 100s of millions of dollars renovating them. Over the years, he convinced other companies to move with him, it took hold, and today the downtown is much, much better. So, yes, while it is gentrified, most Detroiters would also agree they'd rather prefer today's Detroit to the one in 2008.

Having said that, I think Gilbert's companies do a good attempt at not being for the elite only. They have to recover their investment but they also fund a lot of small businesses and a lot of their buildings offer low cost housing for the poor. But when a man owns a city, things are always gray.

SS: Dense cities and innovation clusters have strong social networks of people. How can we retain and foster these networks of people as inequality and divisions among different social classes rise?

SK: Again, no easy answers here. Community building is hard. Walkable city planning, architecture that promotes placemaking, events that foster exposure to other cultures, all help. One cool thing about the U.S. is that you get to attend events organized by so many different communities. Nothing dispels misconceptions like talking to someone with beliefs other than yours.

Interview 3

Ami Sardessai

Detroit metropolitan area native and long-term resident
Livonia (Detroit metropolitan area), Michigan, United States

Ami Sardessai is a financial analyst, and a native and long-term resident of the Detroit metropolitan area. Growing up in Southfield, a Detroit suburb, he is a resident of Livonia, another suburb in the west.

This interview was conducted via telephone and text messaging on Oct 5, 2019, and has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Interview Objective: To understand the impact of gentrification on residents, and what constitutes a sense of place in urban agglomerations with gentrification.

Interview Type: Testimony

Interview Medium: Text messaging and phone call, 15 min

Sahil Sardessai: How would you synthesize your city in one word or phrase? What gives your city its identity or character?

Ami Sardessai: Well, I would say that the city is quite laid-back. The people are very grounded and nice here. There's a sense of loyalty in the community. And if you look at the suburbs, especially, it's a great place to raise a family, have kids, and live a good life. There's a lot of open space, yards, and quite honestly, there's a lot to do here.

SS: What brings people to the Detroit metropolitan area? If you didn't have family or economic ties to the city, for example, what would make you want to move there?

AS: I would say, it is the amount of opportunities and the quality of life here.

SS: What kind of opportunities?

AS: The manufacturing jobs and the automobile industry, which is still pretty big here. It's not such a monopoly of the Big Three any more, but

the industry has picked up since the financial crisis of 2008, and is still big here. We also have foreign companies, and the software sector, which is not as big as Silicon Valley, but sizable, with companies like HP and IBM having offices. We also have some mortgage and financial companies.

SS: Are you aware of the ongoing gentrification process in the downtown area? If yes, how has it affected the city, and how has it affected you and your life?

AS: Yes, the city is getting gentrified in some areas. But the downtown is still poor, and the suburbs are more expensive and wealthier. The suburbs are getting expensive, and the farther one lives from the city, the wealthier they tend to be, and the more expensive things tend to be.

SS: How did the bankruptcy and subsequent urban blight affect the city? Are those neighborhoods still in blight, or did they get gentrified? What happened to them?

AS: A majority of the neighborhoods, I would say, are still in urban decay. Some of them got gentrified.

SS: How do you think the city has changed in character or appearance over time? Can you recount your experience with the city?

AS: I would say, today new houses seem much bigger and are more expensive than, say, back in the 60s. Today the city has become more economically and racially segregated. Growing up in Southfield, a suburb of Detroit, I feel, the area was more diverse back then, and now it has become stratified and segregated. The wealthier people live farther from the city in more expensive areas, and there is also a racial aspect, wherein the wealthier neighborhoods tend to be more white and Asian, and the city has more African Americans, whereas the non-African Americans live more in the suburbs. In terms of architecture, some of the newer developments are more uniform, and all the single and double story homes have similar layouts, whereas back in the 60s they were more diverse.

SS: If we were to look for signs in a neighborhood to identify if it is gentrifiable, that is, to predict a gentrification in the near future, what would they be, and how can we look for them, according to you?

AS: I would look for the location of the neighborhood, whether it is in or near a high crime area, whether it is near a business district or highly commercial area, whether it is closer to downtown. Typically, a safer neighborhood that is closer to businesses, to the downtown area, and one which is cheap now but shows potential, would be the one most likely to be gentrified.

SS: How can we engage the local community and bring people together in a stratified society like Detroit, segregated based on income and race?

AS: I think, from my experience, this can be achieved through team-based programs and activities like sports. While playing sports, the race and the income don't matter. Unfortunately though, once people get back to their day-to-day life, the camaraderie ends, and it's back to the same. But sports can help bridge the gap.

SS: As the society is getting increasingly polarized and divided with things like xenophobia and racism, how can we facilitate social cohesion and community-building against such challenges?

AS: Again, I would say, through sports. As people get together with those who are of different backgrounds in a common activity where those walls are non-existent, they get to see each other as humans who are working together for the same goals.

SS: Money is one of the biggest motivators that facilitates gentrification and urban segregation in the first place. How can we rethink funding models for urban areas to prevent such segregation and build more resilient communities?

AS: New development should be more mixed in order to accommodate those from different economic classes and backgrounds.

SS: Dense cities and innovation clusters have strong social networks of people. How can we retain and foster these networks of people as inequality and divisions among different classes arise?

AS: By encouraging team-based activities that different groups have in common.

Lost City: How Gentrification Transforms Cities, and What We Can Do to Counteract It



Sahil Sardessai
Diplômes 2020

Today, the richest eighty-five people have more wealth than the poorest 3.5 billion people in the world combined. The world is becoming more and more unequal, with a highly uneven and inequitable distribution of access to resources and opportunities. In cities across the world, one phenomenon contributing to social inequity is gentrification. Amidst rapid urbanization and gentrification, how can people benefit equitably from urban development? The primary focus of this thesis is to study the role gentrification plays in social inequity, the loss of sense of belonging in gentrified neighborhoods, and how we can engage the community to create social equity and sense of belonging in such cities, against numerous challenges, such as rising social divisions, hatred, xenophobia, a toxic political discourse, and a complex and predatory financial system.