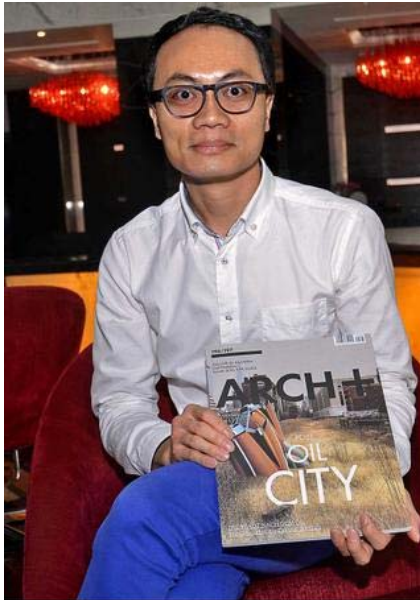


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History of the future

VISHNUPRIYA BHANDARAM

Exhibition 'Post-Oil City' and 'Cyberabad — Landscape of surprise' explain sustainable urban development through technology, sociology and history



Understanding cities Anh-Linh Ngo, the editor of ARCH+ magazine, and an architect PHOTO: NAGARA GOPAL

When Anh-Linh Ngo starts talking about urban planning and systems, the cityscape takes on an interesting colour. Anh-Linh Ngo, is an architecture critic and the editor of Arch+, a German periodical for discourses in architecture, urbanism and related fields. He is in town for the public symposium of *Post-Oil City*, a travelling exhibition and another one on *Cyberabad – Landscape of Surprise: Opportunities for India's Emerging Urbanisms* which is being curated by Peter Gotsch and Susanne Kohte. Anh-Linh Ngo says that the focus of the exhibition is on the material part of urban development, taking stock of all the oil-based elements of urban living.

The exhibition is a history of the city's future. "It's more of an educational project to contextualise the city through economic development that is sustainable. It's about questions for the future that relate to our past. It's important to note that our future is deeply rooted in the history and our relation to the cultural past," he says. He adds that urban development is something universal, it isn't a new concept. "With our changing climate, we have to come back to local and historical expertise," he says.

By contrasting 11 current projects in the field of sustainable urban planning with nine from the past, the exhibition aims to show that many of today's developments have their roots in the urban utopias of mid-20th-century modernism. Anh-Linh says that the exhibition seeks to engage in a discourse on sustainability by underlining its historical continuity. The *Post-Oil City* exhibition hopes to contextualise different urban visions for the Indian urban context. It seeks to overcome the notion that urbanisation is a synonym for Western universalism. The exhibition showcases models of sustainability, urban transit and urban systems. Sustainability includes the kind of energies being used in cities. Urban Transit seeks to explore the public transport system which can be a combination of public and private and urban systems — where systematic issues of urban departments like sewage.

Through a few slides, Anh-Linh takes us through a few model projects like Masdar City in Abu Dhabi which is currently being built using traditional ideas of sustainable living. The city has been planned like at an angle of 45 degrees from the Sun. The concept is that there is more shade in the streets which would be conducive for outdoor movement. "New development can be based on historical, vernacular and cultural knowledge," says Anh-Linh. Like the idea of electro-mobility, it came up in the 1960s where rapid transits would help combine individual movement in a public system. Research stems from Alexander Christopher's works and ideologies. The author in his book *A pattern language: Towns, buildings and construction* published in 1977 talks about medieval cities which are attractive and harmonious. The authors said that this occurs because they were built to local regulations that required specific features, but freed the architect to adapt them to particular situations.

Though different in method and scope, all the projects presented in "Post-Oil City" have something in common: they exemplify the combination of reason, innovation, and flexibility that we'll need to make our cities and planet sustainable for the future.

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