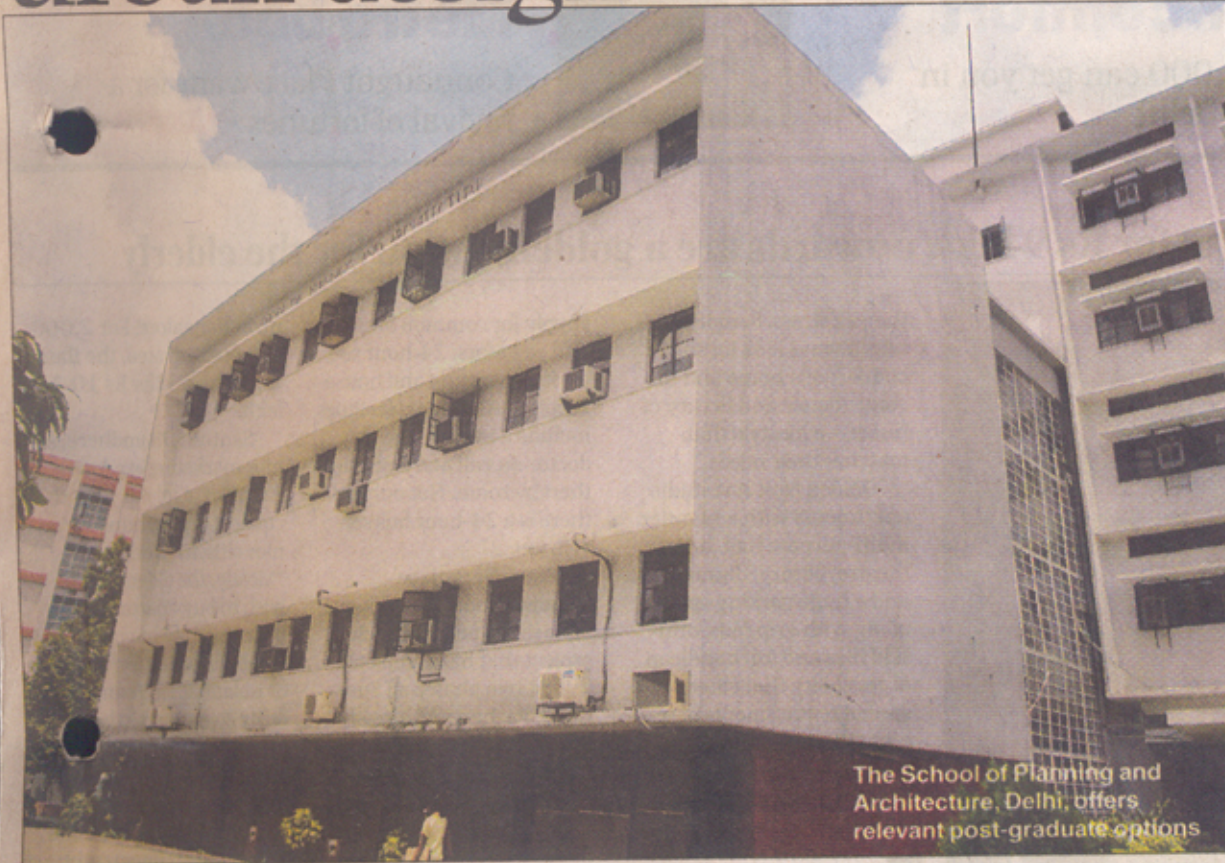


There is an acute shortage of urban designers and town planners, and never has the need for them been greater

End state monopoly on urban design

AMIT MEHRA



The School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi, offers relevant post-graduate options

India has only two colleges of architecture which offer a professional course in urban design as a post-graduate option. These are Delhi's School of Planning and Architecture, and Ahmedabad's CEPT, and they produce only about 50 graduates every year. For a country which has about 6,000 towns and cities, this minuscule number is like a speck in the sand.

The main reason for this is that urban design has traditionally been in the domain of government planning departments. There has been very little effort to let urban design be tackled

by private sector practising architects - only recently has one seen signs, fuzzy and weak, of this changing.

Second, we have — for similar reasons of government monopoly — a very small crew of town planners. The country has about 18 professional colleges

offering a post-graduate degree in town planning. Again, the 300-odd graduates are too few to address the challenges which need tackling if we were to truly implement the mandate of

the 74th amendment to the Constitution, and to bring planning to every district of the country. Out of this small number, more than 50 per cent graduates get absorbed into the economies of the west - where their

skills are appreciated and recognised much faster.

Third, there is no professional regulatory body to set norms for town planners. Strictly speaking, town planning is still not recognised as a profession in India - it is an occupation. One had hoped that the on going

aerial view



Sudhir Vohra

We need professionals to repair the damage we have done over the last 50 years

WTO negotiations would have made the Government of India wake up to the urgent need of setting up regulatory bodies for many professions, which are presently operating without any norms or standards, but this has not happened.

The recent CECA agreement with Singapore also

mentions just three professions - architecture, audit accounting and the medical profession - as those in which their respective regulatory bodies would work towards signing mutual recognition agreements.

The social responsibilities associated with a profession like town planning need very little explanation - the fact that it deeply affects the quality of life of future generations is obvious and needs no debate; yet it is not recognised as a regulated profession in the country.

The fact that physical planning has not been given its due importance in our developing economy - even in the last decade or so when reforms have picked up pace in all sectors - is evident from another sad set of facts. Since 1947, we have designed only four new towns: Chandigarh, Gandhinagar, Bhubaneswar, Navi Mumbai. The others have been either extensions of existing cities; satellites around older towns or strip developments along highways. Designing a new town on virgin land - preferably on land which is not good for agriculture — has not been a tradition in India. The last such attempt was in Chandigarh over 50 years.

All this because physical planning seems to be low on the list of priorities of our government, and therefore town planning and urban design are hazy concepts which are not getting the attention they deserve in the present frenzy of infrastructure development, FDI, etc. But we are now living on the edge. We need adequate trained professionals to repair the damage we have done over the last five decades. ♦

Sudhir Vohra is an architect practising in Delhi, and a member of the team drafting Delhi's building byelaws, and parts of the amended DMC Act