

4.184

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN WORKSHOP

RURBANISM



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| Instructors: | James Wescoat Lorena Bello |
| Schedule: | MW 9-12 |
| Room: | TBA |
| Units: | 6-3-6 G |

The Rurban Challenge. This design workshop addresses the fascinating and yet somewhat neglected rural frontier of urbanizing regions that are sometimes called “rurban.” In India rurban places have at least three levels of significance. On the one hand, they are regarded as marginal in socio-economic and physical terms. Government of India policies strive to “bring urban amenities to rural areas” (PURA), in part with the hope of slowing down rural to urban migration. On the other hand, they are growing and urbanizing of their own accord, sometimes in ways that are problematic. For example, as rural water supplies increase, so do drainage and wastewater problems. The environmental resource base and livelihoods are depleted and degraded. At the same time, rurban and peri-urban places are better off than remote villages or urban slums. Finally, rurbanizing places challenge the dichotomy between rural and urban. The Census of India classifies them as rural and asserts that two-thirds of India is still rural, which would make it one of the slowest urbanizing countries in the world. But in fact urbanism is widespread in places classified as rural, which calls for new categories, new ways of thinking and designing for small human settlements in the 21st century.

Working with the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat. This workshop addresses these challenges in collaboration with the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat (AKAH) in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat state in western India. AKAH works with about 180 villages in this region, and another 2,000 in Central Asia. They want to know, how can one help such villages plan in integrated physical, spatial, social, and ecological ways. How can place and community-based proposals in one village be conceived in ways that have relevance for scores if not hundreds of others?

The MIT AKPIA program has a strong record of collaboration with the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) agencies over the past three decades, including work in the villages that we will study (see 1996 MIT design studio drawings on our Dropbox folder). AKAH’s mandate has historically focused on: housing, water supply, drainage and sanitation, and disaster risk reduction.

All of which are important in the villages of Saurashtra, which are affected by earthquakes, cyclones, floods, and droughts. The hard rock basalt geology has limited water storage. Black cotton soils are fertile but have high shrink-swell properties. In this region there are the additional challenges of man-animal relationships due to close proximity to the Gir Forest National Park. These include predator-prey, crop damage, habitat management and ecotourism issues. The Gir-Somnath and Junagadh districts where we are working have extraordinary cultural heritage of all of the major religions and historical periods of India.