Internet, society and space in Indian cities

Pratyush Shankar

Pratyush Shankar's research on Internet, Society and Space in India, addresses the question that haunts much of the discourse around cyberspaces — the separation of the real and the virtual, or RL (Real Life) and VR (Virtual Reality). Instead of continuing the existing discourse in built environments where technologies are either objects to be housed, or tools in the service of planning, Shankar locates the digital in the context of the IT City, exploring the relationships between physical cities, public planning policies, and plans for urban infrastructure building. His work explores how the digital provides new conceptual frameworks, visualisations and topographies through which the urban is being restructured in India. Simultaneously it also explores how the digital is able to push at the boundaries of traditional understandings of space and the ways in which they can be used.

The monograph deploys a team of students from the field of architecture and urban design to investigate how city spaces — the material as well as the experiential — is changing under the rubric of digital globalisation. Placing his inquiry in the built form, Shankar manoeuvres discourse from architecture, design, cultural studies and urban geography to look at the notions of cyber-publics, digital spaces, and planning policy in India. The findings show that the relationship between cities and cyberspaces need to be seen as located in a dynamic set of negotiations and not as a mere infrastructure question. It dismantles the presumptions that have informed public and city planning in the country by producing alternative futures of users' interaction and mapping of the emerging city spaces.

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Pratyush Shankar is an Associate Professor and Head of the Undergraduate Programme at the Faculty of Architecture, Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology, Ahmedabad, India. His teaching interests include urban history and theory, design studio and Himalayan architecture. Pratyush along with his students are actively looking at the key characteristics of Indian cities from the point of view of their social and cultural relevance. He received the Ford Asia Fellowship in 2008-9 to research on the cities and public places in Nepal Himalayas. He has been instrumental in starting a course titled "Cyberculture and the City" at CEPT University as an outcome of this monograph on "Internet, Society and Space in the Indian City".

Researchers @ work

The Centre for Internet & Society's 'Researcher's At Work' is a series designed to build and explore the intellectual resources for mapping and understanding the complex interactions between the rise of digital and communication technologies and the spheres of living that they influence. The monographs in this series, explore embedded approaches, frameworks and historical trajectories to understand the ways in which new technologies shape the nature, form, and texture of life and living in contemporary times. The (CIS-RAW) series was designed to build local intellectual resources for mapping and understanding the complex interactions between the rise of digital and internal technologies and the spheres of living that they influence.