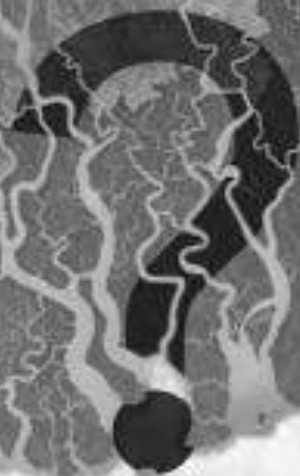


Why a city Should be Co-created





Satellite image of Sundarban forest, Bangladesh and the Bay of Bengal

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Sundarban+Forest,+Bangladesh/@21.9041798,89.5088887,248837m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m5!3m4!1s0x3a004dc6db4e2a8d:0x439f0905dc1f73928m2!3d22.2970845!4d89.5676802>

Why should a city be CO-CREATED ?

“ Life seeks to organise so that more life can flourish.
Systems are friendlier to life. They provide support and stability.
They also provide more freedom for individual experimentation.
Systems emerge as individuals decide how they can live together.
From such relationship, new entity arises with new capacities and increased stability.”

In nature, there is abundant evidence of self-organisation. When an old system no longer serves, new forms of life emerge which co-create a newer, livelier system. These emergent systems are co-created to respond to the changing needs of life.

Cities need to evolve in the same way: as cities grow and our lives become more complex, new systems need to be created to support our needs. These changes cannot be top-down or decided at the government level. Instead, the city has to be co-created by the people who live in it and experience life on a day to day basis.

Co-Creation in Modern Cities

In the 21st century, we strive to make our cities and our lives easier and happier. We should be able to plan, think and dream about our cities differently. We want to co-create our lives and our daily activities to match the city we live in.



The CAN Co-Crete City program has emerged as a system to encourage this path. Through our years of experience working on the ground with grassroots organisations and communities across Asia, the importance of co-creating cities has been raised over and over. In fact, this has been one of the main takeaway lessons from CAN's past experiences : it is now time to emphasise making the City Co-Creation Process a serious alternative for Asian cities. We need to create a mechanism for change for our cities : not only on the short-term to inspire people, but with a long-term effect that keeps on living, and adjusts itself when as needs evolve.



The Process of Co-Creation

As a process, co-creation embraces all possibilities. Chaos is welcomed ; and so is standing still, unmoving. People are encouraged to be playful to discover the edge between what is already known and the unknown. This playfulness leads to innovation and the birth of new and creative ideas. Everyone should have access to the entire system, leading to astounding levels of high quality of communication. Through this process, our consciousness gets lighter; once that is achieved, each individual begins to co-create in the new system.



A view along the Naboganga riverbank where people come for social activities, raising animals, and connecting to nature

The Inclusivity of Co-Creation

When we think of a city, we often focus on our role: us as individuals, our communities, our society. It's easy to forget there are other living elements both visible and invisible who form an integral part of our society. These are things like nature, traditions, beliefs, relationships, feelings, or even energies. These components also need to be well taken care of, meaning that we as human beings need to incorporate, respect and understand that they are fundamental to our well-being, both now and in the future.



Co-create Jhenaidah 2019 in Shatabaria community

How do we Achieve That? The Path Forward

We should start thinking of cities as living organisms. A city is not a lifeless machine we can instruct and input our plans and visions into. Cities are complex and divergent; their complexity makes it difficult to plan but is also a great opportunity for co-creation.

Systems, like cities, create themselves and pursue paths of their own making. Cities are more than the sum of their parts; they are formed of people living their lives every day and shaping their environment as they do so.

If we want to change what is, we need to explore the self that has created what we see. In this way, people are both the self and the soul of the city. All changes both individual and organisational require a change in the meaning that the system is enacting. It requires looking into the system's identity, its values and the self through which it perceives and creates.

CAN Co-Create City places the focus on respecting the values of all individuals, of those who search, dream, struggle, or are just part of their city system. As we all grow, our city grows. This is an important reality yet most of us seem to forget it or not even be aware of it. It's our collective responsibility to think about the future of our cities since it greatly impacts our daily lives.

“ Where do we grow from here? ”

is no longer only a question for people in political or economic power.

It's a question for all of us, irrespective of our background,
our socio - economic situation, our age or living situation.

People across generations can co-create their cities together.

As a parting note, we invite you to feel and experience co-creation.

Let it draw your stories, let it draw your life's experience,
see how it relates to you. Follow that calling in your memory
and feel it guide you to the co-creation potential within you.

The Essential Questions
for Us
as Architects.

Volume 2





Formation of citywide people's network with diverse group of citizens
Co.Creation.Architects

In our role as architects, we started posing some questions...

What are we doing ?

Is it enough ?

Who is architecture for ?

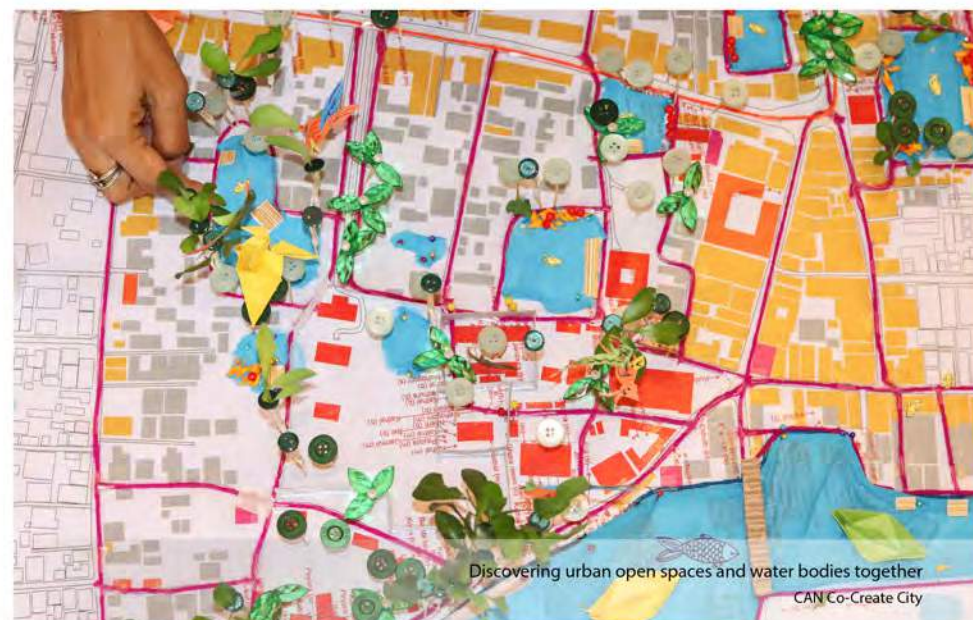
If it is for all, then how can architects reach the remaining 90% of the population ?

How can we achieve the skills and understanding to reach them ?

The existing system of our architectural practice hopelessly fails to provide satisfactory answers to the above questions. In turn, these questions helped us realise the need for a process or system to reach all people. As our society is part of nature and since nature exists and evolves through a complex interconnected system, it's wise to look at natural systems first to seek the answers we want. It is interesting to observe that nature's system does not just create something new: it actually co-creates. It's a collective process with multiple actors through various networks. Nature doesn't evolve only for survival; its goal is bigger, selfless and eternal. We believe that it is worth trying to understand this bigger connection in nature while being a part of it.

Jhenaidah City:

Jhenaidah is a secondary city of 252 thousand people located in the Southwest of Bangladesh, with approximately 80 low-income communities which aspire to improve their living conditions. The city was established on both sides of the river Naboganga which was used for navigation, bathing, swimming, fishing, irrigation and other socio-cultural activities. However, as the drainage system developed in recent years without proper planning, the river is rapidly being polluted. Hundreds of ponds are also being polluted while waiting to be filled up and built over. The best characteristic in Jhenaidah city is that people feel very proud of their city – not just of the city's physical attributes but also its identity and emotional qualities. They inherently believe that it's possible to improve the city.



In this context, the following questions arise:

Can't citizens take initiative to plan their own city ?

Can't professionals join them and facilitate the planning of a better city ?

Can't the process unlock the potential of people's dreams and abilities ?

These questions have given rise to a people's network in the city.

The Jhenaidah Citywide People's Network:

To understand and explore the above questions, the people of Jhenaidah Municipality have joined one another in groups from different backgrounds, with different names, eager to rethink their city. The emerging "Jhenaidah Citywide People's Network" is an apolitical, flexible and organic network based on trust and a desire to improve the city. By using a collective decision-making process, citizens unlock their potential and all groups achieve higher levels of satisfaction.



Mapping together for better community
Co.Creation.Architects

People have discovered how to gather age, gender and ability segregated data which are crucial in planning. Moreover, children, women and the elderly contribute immensely to this process by providing a great amount of details. This is the beauty of designing together with people: the collaboration and empowerment of all those involved. This is the seed of co-creation in Jhenaidah.

“
Being *community architects*,
we have tried to work within this
citizen action network.
”



Knowing each other for co-creating a better city
Nazia Nusrat Shoumi

Co.Creation.Architects:

As in nature, the seed of co-creation needs an appropriate and enabling environment to grow, as well as passionate gardeners to nurture it. As architects, we placed ourselves in this situation and asked ourselves: what can we do and where do we fit in? We felt the need to start a humble architectural practice named Co.Creation.Architects with an intention to work with both human and non-human communities.



Ground needs to be ready before sowing seeds
Co.Creation.Architects



Dreaming big together with a humble start
Co.Creation.Architects

Being local helps our endeavour. Jhenaidah is our home town; we are more than just architects here. We have many other intersecting identities as human beings. Presence with our multiple identities can liberate us and others to build better and stronger relationships. Our starting point was connecting with people: local authorities, local facilitators and collaborators, and similar minded people. We shared our beliefs with them. Simultaneously, through direct action with low-income communities, we appropriated our skills and roles. Our chosen path is not always smooth and without challenges, but we have discovered that finding the right questions is more important than getting all the answers. Identifying what the real problems are is very important.

**“ This process is slower in the beginning
as it takes time to connect and build trust.
It is like nature: in the beginning, it is slow yet steady. ”**

Scaling up and Working with Nature:

Alongside this undertaking, our team was also striving to understand and explore nature. We experimented working with other living things by creating a series of small-scale ecological gardens. We were spontaneously making gardens around us to grow and get to know our food, as well as the aesthetics of wild flowers. Our gardens were a great source of knowledge on co-creation. It's always important to connect with nature physically and working with your hands, to know the soil, to know the smell of the garden, to understand the network that nature develops through time. This is the science of co-creation: it's an approach that focuses on the process as well as the results.



In Jhenaidah, we have explored a better system based on trust, dignity and co-creation. There is a sustained effort to share with different groups like education groups, local governments, policy makers, NGOs and young professionals. We are also connecting with the civil society to shelter this process. Meanwhile, we are always searching for more co-creation stories in other sectors, linking with locals already undertaking good small-scale work.

All these practices are linked and allow us to get inspired and connect on the same platform of co-creation. Interestingly, people who are traditionally hard to reach, like policy makers, have also shown an interest in the process. Now, the challenge for government and other organisations is to trust people and co-create with a community-led process using local resources.





Citywide people's network, policy makers and different professionals find possibilities of the city together
Co.Creation.Architects

Looking to the Future:

Gradually, the city and its inhabitants have prepared themselves to connect with bigger or international networks. In 2019, Jhenaidah city hosted the CAN Co-Create City Workshop. The process of the workshop, coupled with deep listening, valuing the opinions of local communities, feeling their aspiration as well as hands-on actions has helped us understand the different identities and possibilities for the city. Slowly, the architects begin to understand their role and see what is essential.

“ *It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye* ”

- Antoine De Saint-Exupery

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