



CALL FOR PAPERS

ICSSR Sponsored Three-Day International Conference

URBAN METAMORPHOSES: UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS AND DIVERSITY OF SOUTH ASIAN CITIES

27 February – 01 March 2025

The Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

IISER Bhopal

What is a city? What constitutes its structure and who belongs to its system? Questions like these have permeated human thought and action through the ages. The social and spatial fabric of the city has been re-conceptualised, built, and rebuilt in myriad ways responding to the necessities of time. The urban form exhibits contradictory traits of cohesiveness and radical openness to incommensurable, fragmentary, chaotic and contingent cultural exchanges as charged “contact zones” where identities are repeatedly forged and dismantled. Ascribing a single premise to the concept of a city is, thus, never possible as the nature, structure, and functioning of South Asian cities are diverse and dissimilar. Thus, defining the city has a scope that is widely spread across a cluster of disciplines, like planning and architecture, history, anthropology, heritage studies, sociology, visual arts, literature and cultural studies, innovation and policy research, and others, under the rubric of “urban”.

With the growing population in South Asian cities, academic inquiries focus on new settlement agglomerations, migration, precarity and climate crisis, community-based provisions and equitable distribution of public and private resources. The dynamics of political democracy and other economic and cultural trajectories serve as windows to explore the “polysensorial” and multilayered reality of the metropolitan landscape. The conference invokes heterogeneous communities, neighbourhoods and practices that stretch across as well as transition through multiple thresholds and rapidly shifting contours which define the urban experience.

Urban affairs mirror the intrinsic complexities of the global South in terms of the evolving ethos and emergent challenges that reciprocally inform the dominant modes of representation and planning in writing the city. The conference, thus, seeks to ask: How are cities both real and imagined understood to be zones of heterotopias? How has the city sustained its cultural past notwithstanding the influence of neoliberal capitalism? What unique characteristics differentiate modern cities from each other amidst the prevailing tendency of homogenisation? How can the contemporary global dialogues in social sciences and humanities address the socio-spatial transformations and enable policies that break down rigid hierarchies? How does the city produce and reproduce disproportionate affects ensuing from entrenched social inequalities and exclusionary urban management practices that divide the city?

A key intervention in the neoliberal urban transformation of Indian cities in the age of climate action, for instance, urges for an ecologically sensitive mode of urban dwelling. Human-non-human interactions become crucial in understanding inherent sustainability issues if the goal of equity and mutual development is to be met. Formal and informal ways of grasping the evolving nature of cities engage with new conceptual, economic and infrastructural realignments initiated by projects such as the Smart City Mission (SCM). Bringing these dialogues together, the conference seeks to push the boundaries of traditional scholarship to re-imagine evolving urban spaces and the stories they tell by invoking diverse conceptual and artistic apparatuses. It explores urban heritage and its representations not merely through a collection of “built structures” but through people, their perceptions, lived experiences and everyday sensory encounters in their intersecting worlds chequered with histories of movement, as well as the variegated cultural practices, conversations, food and friendship that foster new identities and mobilities across the world. Thus, by engaging with international perspectives and scholarships across the board, we aim to gather multifaceted visions on contemporary South Asian cities which reflect the changing impulse of the region and its “local” contexts in relation to the Global South and North.

We welcome submissions on themes including, but not limited to the following:

Ecology, Sustainability and the City-Space

- The non-humans in the city
- The cities and rivers/ghats of the city
- Waste and the city
- Eco-friendly/green urban development

Cultural Dynamics of Cities

- Impact of globalisation on local cultures
- Festivals, rituals, and religion in cities
- Urban socialities - addas/sports/clubs
- The nocturnal city and urban nightlife

Smart cities and Technological Advancements

- Digital urban governance and IoT
- Urban infrastructure and economic growth
- Changing suburbs and urban development
- Cities of the New Millennium

Inclusivity, Diversity and Alienation

- Migration, mobility and urban diversity
- Gender dynamics in urban spaces
- Urban isolation and the neo-liberal city
- The urban poor and social inclusion

History, Heritage, and Archive

- Monuments, architecture and preservation
- Sustainable heritage
- Tangible and intangible heritage
- Urban ruinscapes and endangered histories
- Dark heritage and histories of trauma

Sensory Encounters in the City

- The anti-ocular turn in urban studies
- Sensory regulation/censorship in the city
- Affect and the senses
- Sensory historiography

Urban Gastronomies

- Foodways and migration
- Eateries, coffee houses and urban public sphere
- Caste, class and culinary practices
- Public culture of eating in cities

Neighbourhoods, Space and Contestations

- Belonging, citizenry, and activism
- The subaltern and public space
- Urban neighbourhoods and communities
- Cultural history of neighbourhoods

The City (Re)imagined

- Cities in global/local literary imaginations
- (Post)colonial cities and its discontents
- Provincial cities
- The uncanny in the city
- Cities in visual arts/performative traditions/folk art forms
- Cities in modernist/avant-garde narratives
- Urban flaneur
- Urban nostalgia
- Urban heterotopias/dystopias
- Cosmopolitanism in the global city

Important Dates and Information:

Interested participants should submit an **abstract of approximately 300 words to cityconference2025@gmail.com by December 5, 2024**. Each submission must include a title and a brief biographical statement of no more than 100 words.

Selected presenters will be notified by December 15, 2024.

Those chosen to present are required to submit a **preliminary draft of their paper (1,000-1,200 words) by January 15, 2025**, for inclusion in the conference proceedings. Participants are also encouraged to provide a one-minute video presentation summarising the crux of their paper by January 15, 2025. Selected presenters will be invited to contribute to a curated volume of essays from the conference, which will be submitted to a reputable international journal or publisher.

A guided immersive city walk of Bhopal will be conducted on the final day of the conference.

Venue: Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

Registration (National/International):

- Full-time Academics and Professionals: ₹4500 (includes hostel accommodation, plus breakfast and lunch for three days)
- Students and Researchers: ₹3500 (includes hostel accommodation, plus breakfast and lunch for three days)
- Un-affiliated Researchers: ₹1500 (includes hostel accommodation, plus breakfast and lunch for three days)
- Registered Participants (non-presenters): ₹1500 for three days (accommodation not included)

All participants and presenters must register for the conference. Information regarding the registration process will be provided after the final selection of papers.

Invited Resource Persons for the Conference:

- Amit Chaudhuri, Novelist, Creative Writer, Professor of Creative Writing, Ashoka University
- Anasua Chatterjee, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, RKSMVV, West Bengal State University
- Arko Datto, Photographer, Artist Curator and Educator
- Arunima Bhattacharya, Lecturer in English, Edinburgh Napier University
- Kama Maclean, Chair of History, South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg
- Manish K. Jha, Professor of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai
- Mythri Prasad-Aleyamma, Critical Geographer, Former Post Doctoral Fellow, Centre for Place, Culture and Politics, Graduate Center, City University of New York
- Rajarshi Mitra, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Guwahati
- Rashmi Varma, Professor of Postcolonial Studies, University of Warwick
- Stuti Khanna, Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Delhi

For enquiries, please write to us at: cityconference2025@gmail.com

Visit us at: www.cityconference2025.com

Dr. Anuparna Mukherjee
(Conference Convener, HSS, IISER Bhopal)
anuparna@iiserb.ac.in

Nakshatra Chatterjee
(Student Convener, HSS, IISER Bhopal)
nakshatra21@iiserb.ac.in