

**Celebrating 50 years of BIP (Bangladesh Institute of Planners).**

Invitation for abstract submissions for an international workshop to be held in Dhaka in December 2024.

# South Asian Megacities in Transition: Examining the Changing Built Environment

Although the origins of South Asian cities can be traced back to ancient towns in the Indus Valley Civilization (around 3000 BCE), however, the important cities like Lahore and Delhi emerged between the 12th and 16th centuries. While these cities initially developed with military significance, serving as strategic outposts and centers of power, during the Mughal period (16th to 18th centuries), cities such as Lahore, Delhi, and Dhaka flourished as political centers. With the arrival of European traders, starting in the late 15th and early 16th centuries and continuing through the 20th century, many other cities such as Mumbai, Karachi, and Kolkata emerged, transitioning into modern administrative and trading hubs. With the arrival of European traders, South Asian cities underwent both significant growth and periods of decline. While cities like Lahore experienced declines, the ports of Madras (Chennai) and Kolkata (Calcutta) rose in prominence.

Building on this historical context, the present status of these cities is reflected in the UN World Urbanization Prospects in 2020, which lists the megacities (with more than 10 million population) in South Asia, including Delhi, ranked 2nd; Dhaka, ranked 6th; Mumbai, ranked 9th; Karachi, ranked 12th; Kolkata, ranked 16th; Lahore, ranked 23rd; Bangalore, ranked 27th; and Chennai, ranked 30th among the top 30 megacities worldwide. This workshop will explore the changing fortunes of these South Asian megacities, examining their historical transformations and contemporary challenges.

While describing the transformation of Mumbai as a Megacity, Halsall and Siddiqi suggested an emergence of a higher rate of population growth and volume of slums. The authors argue that housing and land policies implemented to solve the problem of slums in Mumbai have actually provided momentum to the undercurrents that fuel further proliferation of informality (Shakur and Ghafur, 2024). Compared to Delhi and Dhaka, adding a new variable of Liveability, Yasmin Ara suggested that external interventions or top-down policies do not solely determine liveability but are profoundly influenced by the dynamic interplay of various actors in multiple classes (ibid). In a Dhaka case study, Syeda Jafrina Nancy found that due to the absence of any density guidelines aligned with the sustainability agenda, densification of the residential areas started in the mid-90s and is still ongoing without any consideration to the urban and environmental context, which are adversely affecting the liveability and spatial quality of the built environment.

Turning to environmental challenges, Delhi, according to the 2023 air quality life index, has exceeded about 100 times the preferred breathable unit suggested by the WHO. A research compiled by the University of Chicago's energy policy institute reveals that the people of Delhi could have their lives shortened by 11.9 years due to the poor air they breathed (The Guardian, 2023). A comparative study of air quality in Delhi, Kolkata, and Chennai from 2017 to 2020 reveals that Delhi and Kolkata suffer the highest pollution levels, particularly in winter, due to major pollutants, highlighting the urgent need for targeted environmental policies to address these challenges (Alex Tickell, 2023). Whereas, in November, 2023, CNN reported that Lahore had become the latest megacity to shut down as pollution choked swathes of South Asia, where nearly 50 million people have been breathing toxic air for nearly a week. Finally, on the first day of the year 2024, Dhaka topped the list of megacities worldwide with the worst air quality with an AQI score of 244 (Dhaka Tribune, 2024).

Furthermore, a study under review finds that poor access to transportation has left a large proportion of the population of South Asian megacities without access to basic services, facilities, and amenities, thereby leading to a greater incidence of poverty among the region's large populations.

The forthcoming workshop intends to explore the challenges for the transforming South Asian megacities, focusing on transport, environmental pollution, housing, urban services, changing built-environment and relevant urban dynamics.

Please send your abstract to the following Conveners:

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DECEMBER  
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DHAKA



## CALL FOR AN INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON MEGACITIES OF SOUTH ASIA

Abstracts between 350-500 words are invited from planners, architects, environmentalists, urban designers, engineers, social scientists and related experts on the following themes as specified below or any other pertinent issues relating to the main theme of the workshop:

1. Sustainable Urban transport
2. Challenges on urban services, facilities and amenities
3. Pollution and environmental issues
4. Transportation and densification-led urban development and impact on infrastructures and economic services
5. Impacts of Urbanization on public health
6. Historical transformation of South Asian megacities from Mughal to modern times
7. New phenomena in informal settlements
8. Urban protests, social movements, gentrification, gender and cultural aspects of urbanization
9. Housing challenges and affordable housing

*Important Notes:*

**Submission of abstracts:** 30 September, 2024.

**Confirmation of abstracts:** 15 October, 2024.

**Date & Venue of the Workshop:** December 2024. Hybrid mode: Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP), Dhaka and online.

*Photo: Aerial view of the Victoria Memorial and its surroundings in megacity Kolkata. Courtesy: Internet.*



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