

Open spaces overscaled: expert

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The open spaces around Corbusier's capitol complex appear loose and unarticulated. Most roadsides in Chandigarh do not present an articulated treescape.

These observations were made by Prof Ravindra Bhan, eminent landscape architect and ecological planner of the country. Commenting on the open spaces of Chandigarh's city center Sector 17 he felt that they were over-scaled and devoid of trees; creating problems of providing shade for vehicles.

Professor Bhan was here to deliver a memorial lecture on "Open space planning of cities — a comparative analysis of Lutyen's New Delhi And Le Corbusier's Chandigarh" as part of the Chandigarh College of Architecture annual Le Corbusier Day.

In an audio-visual talk he traced the history of open-space planning from historical examples like Mughal Gardens, Fatehpur Sikri and Mandu in India and cities like Venice in Europe. He emphasised that for open-space planning to be a meaningful spatial and human experience it must have three major aspects, scale relation-

ship; diversity and articulation of elements and fillers. All open spaces remained as bland, meaningless, unstructured areas without any visual or human interest elements, Dr Bhan stressed.

Open spaces in cities must be planned bearing in mind their maintenance problems. For instance, the current trend to have large expanses of grassy areas was not climactically suitable in the semi-hot and arid climates in North India which had hot summers. He recalled that the Mughals understood this principle well; and instead filled up their gardens with water features, and dense orchard trees.

He stressed that open spaces in cities like parks, piazzas and roads needed to have articulated elements to form coherent city spaces. Especially the plant material chosen should be of correct scale, species and adapted to the area, to grow well. For instance, avenue plantation of trees along roads needed to have long term planning so that when a new species lived out its life span another row was ready. He cited the example of Lutyen's New Delhi, where tree plantation was taken up as early as 1930's and there were still beautiful avenues — that provide shade and form vistas as elements of

structured urban design.

Making a comparison between the landscaping of Lutyen's New Delhi and Corbusier's Chandigarh — he felt that whereas the central vista of New Delhi was a very beautiful and articulated corridor of space with majestic rows of trees along water canals.

Finally, he exhorted the city planners and landscape architects to do meaningful landscaping — instead 'landscraping', as was happening in most places.

Earlier, while welcoming Prof Ravindra Bhan, Prof Rajnish Wattas, Principal, Chandigarh College of Architecture, said that the college celebrates Le Corbusier's birth anniversary every year as a sacred and solemn occasion.

He further said that while pay-

ing tribute to "Corbusier - it was also a moment to reflect and debate on the way the city had shaped up after more than five decades of its inception". He quoted Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime mover of the Chandigarh project who had said, "Whether one likes Chandigarh or not - you can't ignore it. It strikes you on your head!" So, it was a sort of wake-up call for the, almost, decadent profession of architecture and planning, then, in India. Some adrenaline was required - and Corbusier injected that!

It was for these reasons that lecture on the topic of "Open space planning of cities - a comparative analysis of Lutyen's New Delhi and Le Corbusier's Chandigarh" was planned instead of the usual architectural topics only.