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It Pays To Be Smart and Healthy

Guy Perry, President -Cities and Strategy at Essel Infraprojects Limited believes cities must not overlook the health and the political wellbeing of a nation and its citizens



Guy Perry believes that smart cities can be deemed as smart only if they take into account the overall scenario into question which involves health and/or political wellbeing. As a globetrotting architect and developer, he has planned and executed some of the world's largest projects of the last decades on several continents. Prior to coming to India he was based in Hong Kong. Perry believes that gated communities create a divide in the citizens of the urban landscape; an urban populace which is already classified on the basis of numerous parameters he believes can do away with such categorization. More so since these are permanent structures we are dealing with.

In neighboring China, he points out that the country is home to tens of thousands of gated communities. But recently State Council of the People's Republic of China has placed a ban on SVCM developments. In the same directive that called for stricter building standards, the council has also recommended that future residential enclaves be opened to the public.

The phenomena of gated communities is on the rise in India and Pakistan, in India a good deal of money has been pooled in to create state of the art communities targeted at HNW communities and even a good deal of mass consumption units are also following suit. In India the luxury, mid-luxury and integrated townships have become classic examples of this exercise. In a country which defines itself as the world largest

democracy, Perry believes this is a sad state of affairs, because the approach in question is a masses and classes approach towards human assets. And this he believes to quite an extent totalitarian in nature.

Given the limitations on land and monetary resources Perry believes India should not repeat the same mistakes which China has committed. If an extensive article on gated communities in the Herald is to be believed, it reinforces his fears on gated communities, the article points out that Lahore's suburbs are turning into urban islands in the presence of gated communities. Even in gated communities people are not exactly sure if the advertised promises are delivered. The article quotes architect and urban planner Arif Hasan, who says that the gated towns have resulted from decades of bad policies, furthermore there is no non-utilisation penalty or concept of a building period on developed land.

In India and the world gated communities are sold on the premise of a good lifestyle and additional security. Come to think of it, if security has become an USP then it is akin to reprimanding the law and order mechanism of the state and the nation. It is the furtherance of the idea that presence of huge walls and gates secure your future. Politically it becomes a basis for procreating the masses and classes approach and if this idea is being undone in communist China what more can be said.

Apart from gated communities Perry's primary concern is

how emerging trends in real estate is propagating an unhealthy lifestyle giving rise to risk of numerous health issues. He points out that the risk of diabetes in villages is 3% whereas among urban settlers in India's largest cities it stands at almost 20%. Perry believes that the gadgets in our lives should not upset the daily regime which involves taking a walk or cycling; however the ongoing real estate development, a large part of which are high rises makes occupants believe, they are better off playing games or exercising in the virtual world. And he has a lot of angst towards this phenomenon. In Guy's words the gist of good street design means reducing the number of lanes going into the city, and making more room for trams, clean buses, bicycles and sidewalks instead of cars. Without great streets, a great city is not possible. He cites the example of Zurich which is designed like a big village in which it's "really hard" to drive a car. "In Zurich, you have bank presidents taking the trams or the train, or walking or taking a bike. That's just part of life and statistically, yes, that society is quite fit."

The Indian metros are becoming increasingly costly when it comes to the price of real estate and developers end up catering to high end segments. Addressing these concerns Mr Perry points towards Wilanow, a 300ha district in Warsaw, Poland, where he has managed to integrate all the income groups, who are allotted a range of spaces that allow them to find their place in the community. Typical residential buildings in the Wilanow community incorporate units from below 40 sq.m, to over, 200 sq.m. The pricing of the different sized units creates a natural integration, with many less well off, but aspirational families fitting seamlessly into the community. The lower income groups often occupy the lower levels, then comes the mid income levels - who occupy the middle floors and finally the rich at the top have been given a villa kind of apartment with vast terraces and potentially customized amenities.

Initially when this project was designed Mr Perry faced a lot of criticism but the project took off and sustained its success despite the global economic crisis and is thus a case study in its own right. In a timeline when Indian skylines are getting dotted with high rises on the basis of the density per square kilometer, Wilanow achieved a density of 10,000 people per square kilometer with G+4 apartments. The day to day amenities right from shops, offices, schools, playgrounds and entertainment complexes to places of worship and sports facilities all were developed within walking distances. The best rewards from the project Perry believes are highest life expectancy in the city of Warsaw, a very low childhood obesity

Why residents love Wilanow, Warsaw

- Population: 30,000
- Land size: Approximately 300 hectares
- Maximum building height of 14.5 metres
- Parking per residential unit at 1.5 (over 90% underground)
- Sidewalks, including rubberised jogging surfaces, throughout the district
- Shared bicycle stations
- Lowest crime rate in Warsaw
- Longest life expectancy in Warsaw (almost 90 years)
- Lowest or among the lowest childhood obesity and neoplasm rates in Warsaw (depending on year)
- Highest birthrate in Poland (18/1000 v 9.8/1000 nationally)
- Record voter turnout for Poland (74.3 per cent v 48.4 per cent nationally)
- Largest privately-financed urban expansion in Europe this century, involving more than 20 investment partners from nine countries
- Winner ULI Global Award for Excellence 2010, ISOCARP Award of Excellence 2007 and Highly Commended by the International Academy of Design and Health in 2015.



rate, low cancer rates, the best educated female population in Poland coupled with the highest birth rate in that country. Wilanow thus serves as a prime example of intensification in which health and sustainability is not compromised.

In Guy's opinion, the infatuation towards simplifying lives by means of technology or

design should not overlook the maturity of the fact that people need regular exercise to ensure they remain healthy. We have to focus on people's wellbeing in spite of the temptations to facilitate their lives to a fault," he says. "We're not doing people a favour to not make them walk, get out in the neighborhood or take a few flights of stairs."

Guy is currently President Cities and Strategy at Essel Infraprojects Limited - Essel Group. Guy is overseeing numerous projects being executed by Essel Infra under the realm of smart cities, these include new urban districts, enhancement of existing medium sized cities and the creation of smart village. Other projects which have his undivided attention in the infra domain include looking into the next generation of street as well as affordable neighborhoods. *EPCnews*