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Foreword

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FOREWORD

By 2050, two out of three human beings will live in cities. In other words, over the next three decades, 2.5 billion people will be added to the world's urban population. The rate of urbanization will be particularly dramatic in today's low- and middle-income countries. Indeed, nearly 90 per cent of the increase in the world's urban population will be concentrated in Asia and Africa. A combined phenomenon of rapid urbanization coupled with widespread changing demographics brings with it many challenges to people's livelihoods, to the social ecology of urban communities, to the environment, to the physical and social infrastructure of the world we live in. In the middle- and high-income countries, there are also important societal challenges that should be urgently addressed such as how to keep cities accessible and affordable for all. A key role in all these developments is played by the need for socio-culturally appropriate housing.

To make sense of these challenges we face today, we need to develop critical accounts of experiences and developments from the past. Obviously, many large-scale solutions to address the need for housing, focusing only on production speed and numbers, have failed in the past, and are still failing. For the creation of a successful habitat, many more aspects have to be considered in the search for new answers to face the future. We should as well look further back to see and understand how over centuries of time, before the radical modernization of the last century, people created their living and working environment in a slow process of innovation and adaptation of traditions of building and formation of spaces for everyday life.

This book by Yatin Pandya shows us the strength of one of the oldest patterns of habitation—the courtyard house and its ways of clustering. This study makes us acutely aware of how the courtyard house brings together all the elemental functions of a dwelling—protection from climate and hostile environments; the connection of cultural traditions to patterns of everyday life, and finally, the creation of communities.

As the book shows, the courtyard house can, in many different ways, create simultaneously privacy as well as connectivity. It can promote direct connection to others through the possibility of creating dense patterns of shared in-between spaces, both collective and public. This makes the courtyard house also an urban house form par excellence.

The courtyard house was the dominant house type in all early urban cultures—from India to China, from the Middle East to the Mediterranean—and from there exported to the whole world. It is possibly the most powerful architectural definition of space, creating mass to clearly define open space in and outside the dwelling, making privately inhabitable walls to create a communal open centre.

The courtyard house can be considered as a single elementary house form, but it has developed with an amazing and rich variety, always able to react to specific local aspects of domestic and urban life.

This study by Yatin Pandya is an inspiring and very necessary demonstration of the incredible versatility and adaptability of the courtyard house. The book demonstrates how the different climates, cultures and traditions of the regions of India resulted in very distinctive and equally unique courtyard house forms. The book reads as a survey of very scholarly archaeological expedition, carefully documenting the unearthed treasures in series of drawings that together constitute a piece of art by themselves. The drawings vary from diagrammatic interpretations to detailed documentation of the exact physical presence of the case studies. Colourful projections bring plans, sections and elevations together, on the scale of the city and the individual house.

The dense configurations of townhouses with their ornate wood-carved facades in the cities of Gujarat seem much distanced from the extensive, spread-out houses of Kerala, hiding beneath their cantilevering sloping roofs. The analysis shows however that these different appearances are the result of a quest for identity, answered

in very diverse ways on the basis of the particular conditions of climate and culture in each region.

The consistent analysis of the defining aspects of the house form—categorized as environmental management, socio-cultural responses, material elements and manifestation of arts and crafts—make it possible to study in minute detail the climate-responsiveness; adaptability; combination of working and living under one roof; artistic and cultural representation, and careful customization achieved in all the studied examples. The precise answers of the Indian courtyard houses to all these demands can show us the direction that we so desperately need to answer the urgent questions of today.

The responsiveness of the courtyard house seems lost in today's globalization. The book's introduction traces how in India's colonial period the traditional types started to be affected by the introduction of forms and types that were alien to climate and patterns of life. The courtyard has become a space to move around, instead of a space to come together, a place to look at instead of the centre of activity of the community of residents.

The global introduction of Western house forms, both in the colonial period as in the postcolonial world, often as a political tool, failed to acknowledge the climatic and cultural importance and intelligence of the traditional form. The courtyard house, as so clearly demonstrated in Yatin Pandya's book, should be brought back as the nemesis of the ubiquitous suburban freestanding house, an unfortunate and detrimental import from a very different culture and domestic ideal. One could point here, as just one example of the strength of the courtyard form, to the seminal study of Christopher Alexander and Serge Chermayeff who set out together to find the ideal house form for new residential developments. The conclusion, as given in their book *Community and Privacy*, published in 1963, was a proposal for a courtyard house, creating

both privacy and a sense of community, showing an amazing parallel to the multiple courtyard *havelis* of Rajasthan.

Their conclusion was not only based on the spatial layout of the house itself, but also on the possibilities of clustering them. Exactly here lies an essential quality of the courtyard house. It allows for dense urban structures, whilst maintaining privacy and direct connections to the sky and to the ground, to the urban space. The urban courtyard house is never an isolated object, but always part of a larger structure. The densities that can be created in terms of dwellings per hectare can compete with high-rise solutions that too often only result in disconnecting the dwelling from the city and leaving the in-between open spaces undefined and unused.

Access to social housing has been singled out by the United Nations as one of the most pressing social issues, affecting the lives of people all over the world. Solving this challenge is a key element to address the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and to implement the New Urban Agenda. Architectural and urban design can and should play an important role in this process. We can never address this challenge by isolating the demands for housing from the urgency to create open, accessible cities. This beautiful and thoughtful study of Yatin Pandya challenges us to look beyond the present modes of building cities and dwellings. It opens our eyes to approaches based on a model that has proven over a long period of time its potential to create a dignified human habitat—the courtyard house.

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