

JANE JACOBS MEDAL – 2016 ACCEPTANCE SPEECH IN QUITO

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I am hugely humbled and deeply honored by the first international Jane Jacobs Medal 2016, being conferred upon me.

Also, I am enormously motivated and at the same time challenged by this recognition, particularly when this award is in commemoration of a very significant urban thinker and activist as Jane Jacobs. Her work, thoughts and writings are monumental. Learnings from them inspire us constantly, providing simple human ways of dealing with complex urban development and city making efforts. She reminds us that cities are made of social and civic capital.

I am indeed grateful to Judith Rodin and the jury comprising of urbanists, architects, activists, artists and academics for considering my work worthy of this honor. I am thankful to the Rockefeller Foundation for instituting this very important international award in memory and honor of the legendary Jane Jacobs. A special thanks to the Municipal Art Society for administering this award process.

I am hugely disturbed by the fact that cities are being constantly divided into disparate fragments, both in social and spatial terms. Indeed our cities are producing and reproducing backyards of exclusion, discrimination, neglect and abuse; even natural habitats are being systematically destroyed. These conditions manifest in multiple forms of inequality- gender, religion, caste, faith, classes and are leading to increasing levels of intolerance and social unrest.

Sadly, while cities are expanding, public spaces are rapidly shrinking, in both physical and democratic terms. This means space for wider public participation and dialogue are shrinking.

In these prevailing conditions, I am committed to the idea of public spaces being the foundation of city planning. It is my resolve to work towards the unification of the disparate fragments and integration of the backyards. For me as an architect, it is planning and design that are incredible democratic tools for achievement of this objective and in bringing about significant social and environmental change for an all inclusive and just development.

I struggle to pursue this idea of unification of cities through my architectural and design endeavors, while engaging closely with social and environmental movements. My priority has been to establish a close relationship between people and architecture. With strong emphasis on participatory planning I hope to contribute to larger struggles for democratization of cities.

Very often we find ourselves absorbed into zones of comfort and complacency, engaging in issues and places that have developed or achieved exclusivity- areas where middle and upper classes live or work, but to get out and engage with situations of instability and discomfort, deal with the invisible yet perceived barriers across city landscapes and their unification is the biggest challenge for the achievement of equality and justice.