

COMPLEX-CITY IN ITS CONTRADICTIONS



It all began on January 7, 2007, in the haze of the San Francisco night lights, when UC Berkeley students checked in at SFO airport for a flight to Delhi, India.

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Left: Meeting with the villagers on the future site of Nano City.

Right: Professor Richard Fernau dressing for dinner.

Who is working for Nano City? Is he? Is she? I thought to myself as I filed into the aircraft—the suspense and excitement building as we funneled into the tight space. I could not begin to fathom what was in store for me or for my fellow classmates. I can now say that the excitement and enthusiasm never curbed, that the surprises and curve balls never ceased, and the characters involved were rich with idiosyncrasies, making the journey a tumultuous, boisterous affair that culminated into one of my most enriching academic experiences.

The majority of our week-long stay in India was spent in transit inside a big red Volvo bus, fusing camaraderie between our client Sabeer Bhatia and his group, the faculty leading and accompanying the studio, and other Berkeley students. As this was my first trip to India, I became mesmerized by the world outside the window. The streets were a continuous spectacle of the hustle and bustle of Indian life. Motor rickshaws, cows, monkeys, bicycles, squatters, villagers, men playing cards,

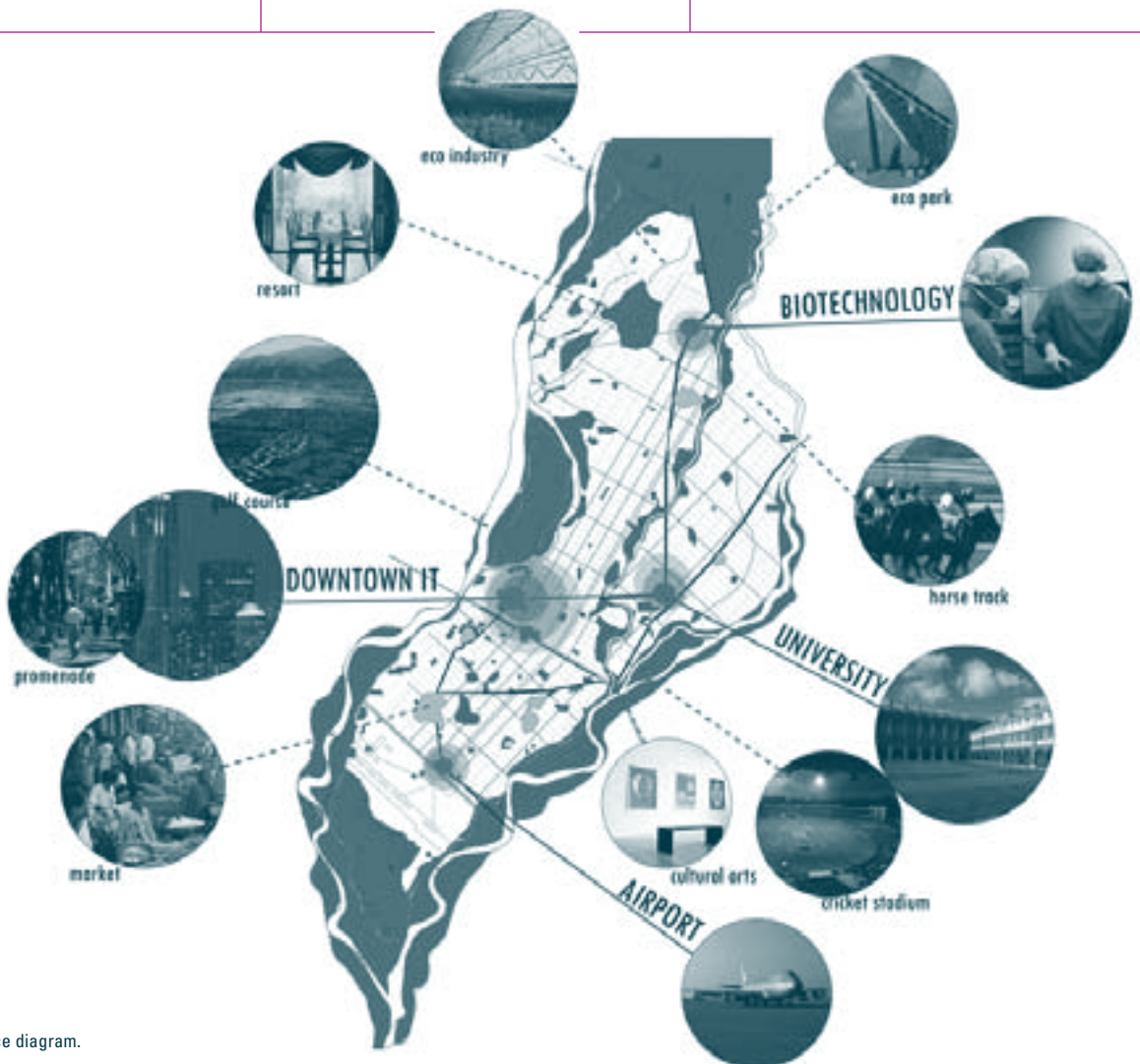
shaving, defecating, cooking, carrying cargo—a bazaar of private life paraded across the stage of the public sphere. The images blasted in front of me like a blaring television screen, consuming my attention and senses even though my physical self remained protected by the now familiar interior of the red Volvo bus. This panorama of sights and sounds was occasionally interrupted with breaks for the restroom and meals, meetings with the Governor of Haryana and its ministers, an intense conversation with the villagers living on the site, and nights spent in the comfort of five star hotels.

On one hand, the trip to India was a complete whirlwind, on the other the perspective we gained was a mere Cliff's notes introduction to our site and its larger context. However, it whetted our appetite for future work and on our return to Berkeley, we immediately began design work for Nano City while simultaneously taking Professor Nezar AlSayyad's course on housing and urbanization in the Third World. And so began the challenge of the semester. As we became increas-

ingly educated about issues of housing in different parts of the world, our design required further development. The contradiction of designing a private city with growing awareness towards issues of informality and housing could not slow us down from every impending deadline. And while theory could not be espoused without a design implication, design could not occur in a vacuum of ignorance. There was a constant tug-of-war between our conceptual knowledge and our practical design solutions.

The complexity of the project did not end there. The studio was composed of two eight-person groups that were each commissioned to design a master plan. Working in groups and for a real client is quite foreign to the traditional architectural studio and also puts us in a scenario that was much closer to professional practice. In the end, the product was much richer than anything we could have done as individuals. By continuously learning from each other,

and building on each other's strengths, the final studio product reached an admirable level of resolution. The Nano City Super Studio pushed and pulled at the boundaries of academic theory and practice, of individuals and teamwork, of disciplinary boundaries such as architecture, city planning, landscape and urban design. Through continuous struggle, friction and contradicting demands, we found our home in the complex beauty of the Nano City project. ^{FW}



Nano City experience diagram.