

PUNE'S CHARACTERISTICS THAT MAKE IT THE DESIGN HUB OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

This paper traces Pune's journey to become one of the leading manufacturing, educational, IT and now the Design hub of India. This journey of Pune has had far reaching implications on the Design ecosystem of the city. This paper attempts to identify the historical, cultural, economic, geographical and other factors that have shaped up the Design landscape of Pune. The paper takes a case study based approach and discusses the dynamic interplay of these factors is discussed with reference to select Pune-based Design schools. From choosing Pune to be location for the Design school to the pedagogy, context and content of the courses offered, Pune has played an important role in shaping the academics at these Design schools.

Nestled in the scenic Sahyadri mountain range and with a living tradition of more than 1000 years, Pune is one of the fastest growing urban agglomerates in India. Starting off as capital of the Maratha Empire it gained importance as strategic location for defence related activities during the British rule in India. With a large number of educational and R&D institutions and a strong presence of engineering and automotive industries Pune emerged as one of the important manufacturing hubs of India. In past few decades, Pune has become a prominent player in the digital economy and is home to a number of IT/ ITeS companies.

With 8 Universities and 800 institutions, education is one of the important sectors in Pune. Pune has witnessed many "firsts" in education sector, one being the foray of private sector in engineering education spearheaded by MAEER (Maharashtra Academy of Engineering Education & Research). In 1983 MAEER set up the first private engineering institute and has grown to be one of the largest educational groups with 60000 students studying across 10 campuses, 15 disciplines and 75 institutes. Having established in all major disciplines of higher education Design education was identified as new area to enter and it was decided to set up MIT Institute of Design (MIT ID) in Pune.

Pune's rich cultural heritage offers right grounding and value system for MIT ID. Interplay of city's layered socio-cultural fabric and economic developments provide diverse touch-points for Design opportunities and challenges. City's thriving academic culture enabled easy

access to a well-qualified faculty who become the medium to transmit these values in right spirit. Learners imbibe these values from the environment around them and also contribute back through relevant Design solutions. The academic learning supported by a strong presence of industries and design consultancies provides ample professional opportunities for the students. These industries drive and define the economic activity of the city and effect of city reflects in the projects that the students do. Pune now has the largest no of design schools in India and strong presence of design industry leading to emergence of Pune as a design hub – both at an Indian and global level.

Keywords: Pune, Design hub, socio-cultural aspects

1. ABOUT PUNE

This section present the historical development of Pune however goes beyond the obvious and attempts to touch upon a pertinent topic of cultural homogenization. The authors believe that the spirit of place is closely related to mechanisms by which city creates its own identity and hence it is important to understand Pune with this perspective.

1.1 PUNYANAGARI TO PUNE

Pune started an agricultural settlement called 'Punyak' or Punnya-Vishay in the 8th century A.D. Since then Pune has seen various rulers and dynasties that shaped its history and geography. From 9th to 14th century Pune was under Rashtrakuta and Yadava rule. 14th to 17th century was the most defining periods during which Pune established itself as the seat of the Maratha Empire under the leadership of Shivaji Maharaj. (Pune Municipal Corporation, 2006)

In the mid-18th century, Pune came under the administration of the Peshwas and the city expanded considerably. Pune got its heritage structures and the defining cultural traits in this period. Peths (market places) were developed and were occupied by distinct social and ethnic groups. The defeat of the Marathas at the hands of the British in 1818 transferred the power to the British who developed Pune as military and cantonment base.

During the British rule Pune witnessed numerous social and political reformations and contributed to India's freedom struggle leading to independence in 1947. During British rule and after independence some important institutions were established in Pune that enabled it to become a base for engineering, R&D, manufacturing, and defence related activities.

Along with the industrial development, Pune was also gaining importance as a dynamic city of academic and cultural hub. Pune's importance as a knowledge capital grew in mid-19th century. The Deccan College (Est. 1830), the Engineering College (Est. 1854, second oldest in the sub-continent) and other such institutions led to Pune's emergence an educational centre.

Another important development in Pune's journey happened in 1990's. This was the time when India was emerging as the IT destination and Pune become one of the preferred centres for a host of IT companies to set up their base here. Pune witnessed unprecedented

growth and around 1500 companies came up in Pune and changed its socio-economic landscape.

With a population of 5 mn +, Pune now is the 9th largest city in India and 71st largest city in the world. Spread over 700 Sq. Km Pune is now listed in the Smart City plan of Union Government. (Govt. of India - Census Website, 2015)

1.2 A TALE OF ALL CITIES

The journey above might be similar for many other cities. Globalization of past few decades has undoubtedly caused a homogenization of cultures, peoples and cities. Exchange of people, information, business practices and capital combined with technology enabled connectivity has reduced differences between national cultures. High streets with shopping malls carry the same retail stores, fast-food franchises and branded coffee shops play the same music. (Zukin, 2009) The urban landscapes cluttered by high-rise buildings with glass-facades, corporate office towers, luxury brands, shopping malls, and other symbols of economic modernization are just few of the visual manifestation of the of the stifling sense of sameness. (Nicholas , 2007)

For cities it is a challenge to retain its historical background, traditions and customs that have nourished the city for all these years. The growing standardization of cities makes it important to define and identify with places.

Fortunately for Pune's evolution from a small agricultural settlement to a bustling metropolis has been organic, gradual and layered one. The pace of development in Pune has been comparatively slow as compared to other cities. Each phase of its development allowed time for unique characteristics of that age to set in and get well integrated with the socio-cultural and economic fabric of the city. This unhurriedness of Pune is still its defining characteristic.

1.2 MAKING SENSE OF PUNE

The above discussion helps us to identify key characteristics that define the spirit of Pune. Of all the different phases of its development the one which has the most prominent impact on the place value of Pune is its status as “cultural capital”. The fact that it has a 1000+ years of living tradition does contribute a lot retains its status of cultural capital. Equally important is the continuity that is maintained in carrying the legacy and upholding the traditional values. This rootedness in traditions and values and its manifestation in architecture, food, arts, music, literature and overall socio-cultural landscape is one of the main contributors to the sense of place for Pune. It’s also important to note that this rootedness in tradition co-exists with the ability to reinvent itself whenever posed with new paradigm.



Figure 1: Socio-cultural snapshot of Pune

This ability to achieve a fine balance between tradition and modernity, although a characteristics of many of Indian cities, is best evident in Pune. This forms the core of the “sense of place” for Pune. As seen above, between 9th to 17th century, various reforms and political events had led to establishment of reputed academic institutions in Pune. E.g Deccan College was started from an annual grant by the erstwhile rulers Peshwa as a gesture to advance education and scholarship. Similarly, during the British rule, The Poona Engineering College was started with the objective to train the officers for carrying out public works like buildings, dams, canals, railways and bridges.

These institutions and the existing strong socio-cultural foundations led to emergence of Pune as an educational hub.



Figure 2: Educational institutes in Pune

Being an educational hub builds a culture conducive to academic activities and research and also creates the required infrastructure for further development of new institutions and programs. Goods, services and other resources related to education are then easily available to support a rising student population which further helps in scaling up.



Figure 3: Pune as an industrial hub

A stable socio-political environment, availability of talent at various levels, access to markets, connectivity and suitable geographical location were few of the reasons that led to development of the manufacturing and engineering industry in Pune.

In 1945, the Kirloskar Group, India's engineering conglomerate, set up Kirloskar Oil Engines Ltd. which became an important milestone of industrial revolution in Pune. Tata Motors, Mercedes, Bajaj, Bharat Forge, and many others followed in next decades. Various industrial areas flourished and soon Pune became an important destination for automotive and engineering industry. This position of Pune continued till 1990's when yet another wave of technological development gave another fillip to Pune's economy- the IT revolution.

A ready pool of quality engineering graduates and government support to set up the software parks and world class institutions like C-DAC and TRDDC led to a large number of IT and ITeS companies to set up their base in Pune. Pune soon had a good mix of off-shore development centres, captive centres, product companies, software development, BPO and KPO companies which made it the 2nd largest exporter of software services in India after Bangalore. (Centre for Innovation Incubation and Entrepreneurship, 2014)



Figure 4: Pune as the IT destination

This gradual development of the city and the interconnectedness of various phases of the development can be seen as a continuum of three components; socio-cultural environment, educational infrastructure and Industry support.

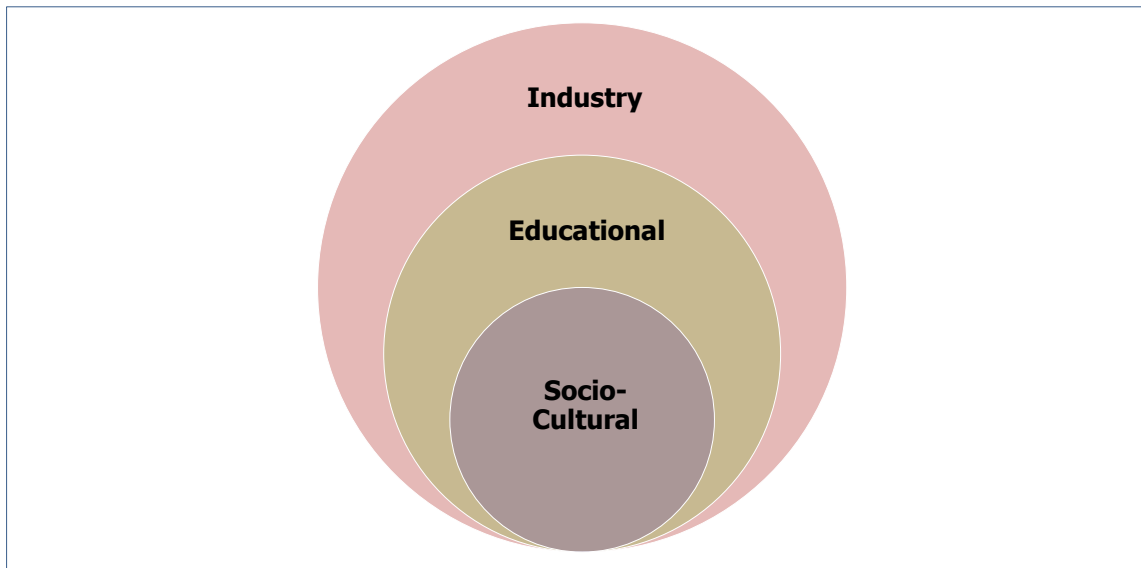


Figure 5: Development continuum of Pune

In this section we attempted to identify the key aspects that define the spirit of Pune. The next section describes the evolution of design education in Pune and discusses the conditions that led to establishment of MIT ID in Pune.

2. DESIGN IN PUNE

India got its first centre for formal Design education when Charles and Ray Eames proposed an Institution for Design learning in their India Report. They extensively toured the country talking to experts and observing centres of crafts and studying the local industry and as a result of their recommendations the National Institute Of Design was set up at Ahmedabad in 1960. (India Design Report, 2011)

This laid the foundation of formal design education in India. Few years later in 1969 Industrial Design Centre (IDC) was started IDC at IIT Bombay which offered post graduate programme in Industrial Design. Following the IIT-IDC model of education other IIT's and the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore started offering post graduate studies in Product Design - IIT Delhi (1985), IISc Bangalore (1990), IIT Kanpur (2004).

(History of Design Education, Institutions, Schools in India, 2010)

So far Pune was not part of the action however there were some parallel developments underway in Pune that proved to be the key drivers to of Pune becoming a design hub. As seen above Pune was already evolving as a cultural, industrial and educational hub. As a part of this development, 1960s saw some prominent fine arts and architecture colleges in Pune. This further enriched the educational ecosystem of Pune and also brought disciplines other than science and engineering to Pune.

One important aspect that brought design to Pune was the establishment of design studios and consultancy services in Pune. Late 1980s saw studios the first design studios and consultancies being established in Pune. Further some of the automotive, engineering and R&D departments also started employing designers in their teams. These were the early days of design in Pune but presence of design got firmly established in Pune. The existing

industries in Pune and proximity to Mumbai did help flourish the design industry. With a growing economy and liberalisation in 1991, Pune's growth accelerated and alongwith this design industry also flourished. More studios, design professionals and design-led industries started considering Pune as a destination.

MIT Group of Institutes, which is pioneering group credited with starting the 1st private engineering institute in Pune was following this development closely. With a robust experience of setting up and running more than 50 educational institutions MIT group had earned strong brand equity in Pune and was prepared to roll out innovative programs in higher education. With Pune's strong socio-cultural foundations, building on the industry support and with an eye on the emerging trends in higher education , it was in 2005 that Pune took a leap in design education and thus was formed MIT Institute of Design.

3. MIT ID – A CENTRE FOR HOLISTIC DESIGN LEARNING

3.1 ABOUT MIT ID

MIT Institute of Design is a premier centre for Design education, practice and research in India and is part of the Maharashtra Academy of Engineering Education and Research (MAEER). MAEER was established in 1983 with the aim of creating and developing professional education facilities to train the aspiring young generation. Since then MAEER has become a renowned name and known for excellence in professional and technical education with over 50000 students studying various programs spread across 70 institutions. In 2005, MAEER realised the need to have an institution which will create professionals who are not only technically sound but also are sensitive to the immediate socio-economic needs and capable of creating culturally relevant solutions for the problems around them. In this context MAEER group approached Prof. H. Kumar Vyas, father of Design education in India. Prof. H Kumar Vyas helped MAEER to put together a core team of design professionals from academia and industry to start MIT ID. MIT ID is located in the Rajbaug farms spread over a vast area of 125 acres on the beautiful banks of the Mula-Mutha River at Loni-Kalbhor, Pune.



Figure 6: MIT ID Campus at Loni Kalbhor, Pune

MIT ID offers fulltime Undergraduate (4 year) and Post Graduate(2 year) programs in three domains of Design- Industrial Design, Communication Design and Fashion Design. (MIT Institute of Design, 2015)

3.2 PUNE AND ACADEMICS AT MIT ID

As seen in section above, evolution of Pune can be described as a gradual development from a cultural, educational and industrial hub with each aspect of these development phases interconnected. This continuum can be taken as a base and the overlap of this continuum with the academics at MIT ID forms a framework that explains the relationship between academics at MIT ID and Pune.

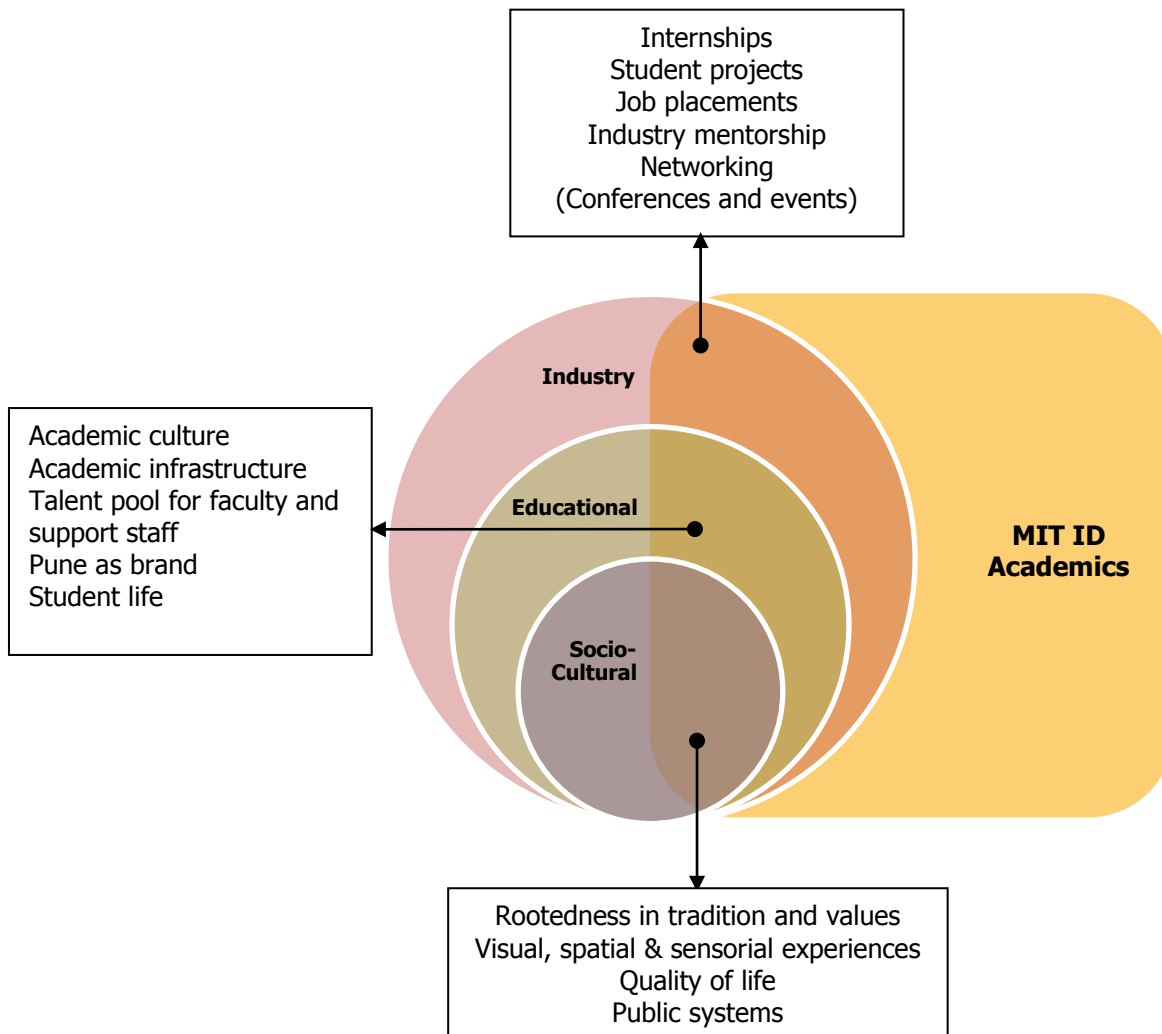


Figure 7: Framework explaining the relationship of Pune and MIT ID academics

Following are the key points that explains the relationship between Pune and MIT ID

- Pune as a cultural capital of Maharashtra provides a host of opportunities for the students to work on interesting design projects. Pune has a substantial presence of traditional crafts, businesses, festivals and arts forms for the students get inspired from and also contribute to the rich heritage of the city by developing appropriate design solutions.

- Pune is home to a diverse set of education professionals. Thus MIT ID draws from a quality pool of full-time and visiting faculty. MIT group is a reputed organization in Pune and is able to attract talent for its design programs.
- Pune has a large no. of national and global companies in automotive, engineering, IT, services, media and communications and healthcare. MIT ID has developed a structured industry interface program that includes internships, classroom projects, industry sponsored final year thesis projects, seminars & guest lectures by industry professionals.
- MIT ID has formed a board of studies that includes industry professionals and experts from relevant domains. The objective is to ensure the quality and rigor of the academics at MITID and have valid and relevant inputs from industry and academia. The board members provide inputs on the course relevance, objectives, content and pedagogy and also contribute in faculty selection, evaluation process, course updation and other related activities. Pune provides an access to a wide range of domain experts for the BOS which ensures that the academics at MIT ID is relevant to industry and societal needs.
- Student life at MIT ID is highly enriched because of the educational infrastructure of Pune city. Students are able to find the required learning resources, references, materials, tools and that makes their learning seamless.
- Pune offers a stimulating and democratic environment conducive to citizen's participation in public, civic and governance related matters. MIT ID students get an opportunity to apply their design skills on a wide variety of issues and come up with design solutions in this space. Many of such solutions also find support from the local bodies, government and non-government agencies to implement these solutions.
- Faculty members who either belong to Pune or have spent substantial years in Pune add value by sharing their knowledge, understanding and interpretation of Pune in developing relevant topics and activities for the courses. This not only brings in a context that the students can relate to and identify with but also enables them to involve various stakeholders at each level and validate their design solutions.
- More than 40% of students at MIT ID come from Pune and nearby places. This translates into a substantial no of students who themselves are rooted in Pune's culture and have been brought upon the values of the city. As the spirit of place is inherently ingrained in the students, there is a deep engagement with the surrounding and it reflects in their approach, attitude and thinking.
- Faculty members and students who carry the spirit with them leads to discovering newer meanings and interpretations of the various aspects of Pune. Hence in a typical design project the influence of Pune is felt in all stages such as problem identification, user research, concept development and design directions, design solution and validation.
- As a design school MIT ID is also part of the various local bodies, industry associations, chambers of commerce and trade, government and private associations. This involvement enables MIT ID to contribute to the policy and strategy related to design education, research, practice and promotion in Pune.

3.3 BRINGING PUNE IN DESIGN EDUCATION

MIT ID has developed certain courses in which Pune as place is a focal point. Given below are few courses and their outputs. (MIT Institute of Design, 2015)

A. Design Overview

The course Design Overview exposes students to design as profession and a field of study. The activities in the course are designed such that it helps students explore Pune city and familiarize them to their surroundings. The students are formed in group of 8-10 students each and assigned a suburb / locality of Pune city. They are expected visit and spend 1-2 days in the assigned area observe various aspects of the city around them with an open mind and record their experiences in form of sketches. They are given pointers to collect information on food, architecture, leisure, public services etc

This is 1-week course and at the end they make a presentation of their observations & experiences as a skit, presentation, installation, exhibition, film or any other relevant media.



Figure 8: Exhibition by students based on study of Pune city

B. Inter Design Studies

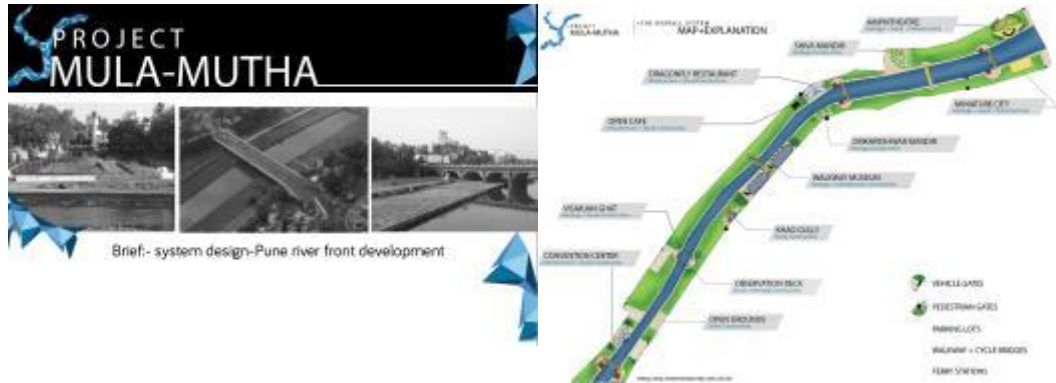
During this course the learners are expected to examine and understand the various constituent's parts and processes in a micro - environment and their interrelationships as manifested in socio-cultural, economic, political, religious and aesthetic realities therein. The course sensitizes students to the necessary tools of perception and analysis in order to "engage" with their immediate environment as well as learn to work in teams and to maximize individual contributions towards attaining depth in the study.



Figure 9: Documentation of Inter-Design Studies course (Coursework by student Ms. Vinita Jakkal-Communication Design)

C. System Design

This course inculcates system thinking in the learners. The students are expected to come up with design solutions that are a combination of products, services, communications and spaces.



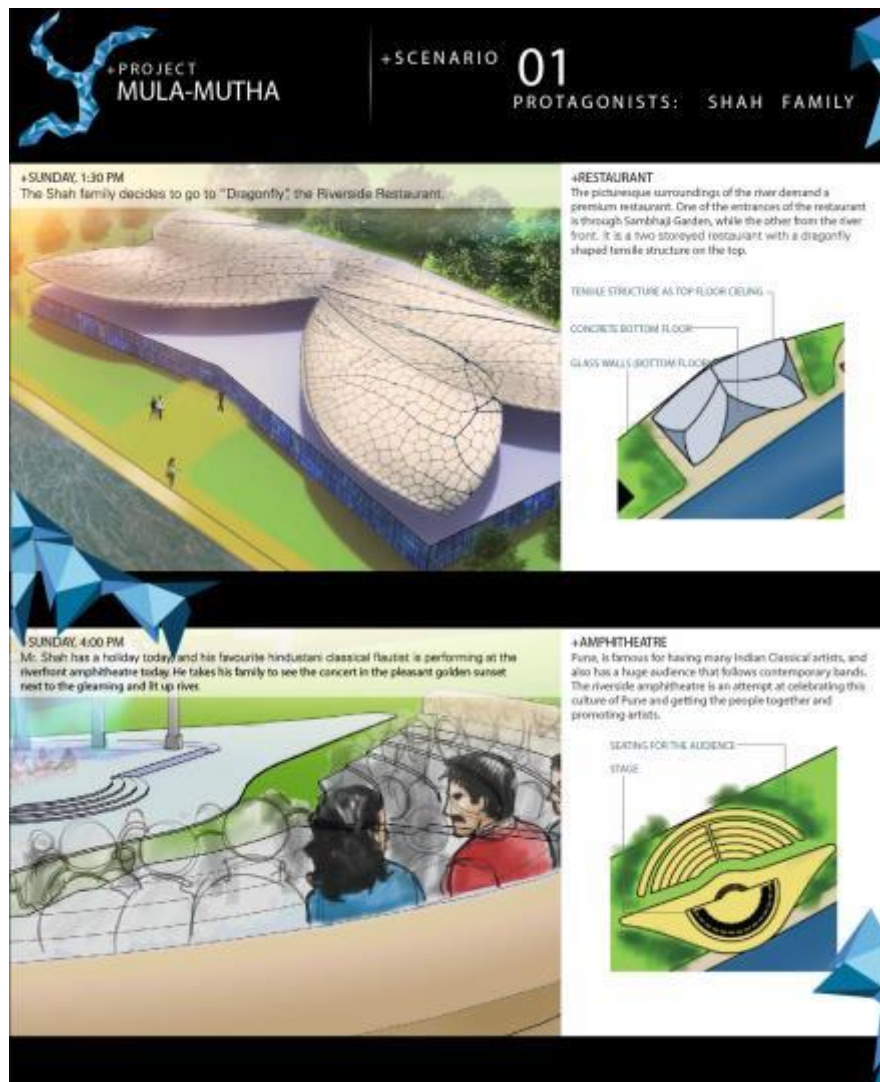


Figure 10: System design proposal for Pune riverfront development(Coursework by students Viraj Joshi & Pranali Linge- Industrial Design)

- D. Design For Brands- The course is offered to the visual communication design students. They have to identify the key and defining elements of a product, service, system, cause or place and translate that into a visual identity and its application in various collateral.



Figure 11: Branding for Pune city(Coursework by student Ms. Neha Bhalerao- Communication Design)

4. CONCLUSION & REFLECTIONS

For a place to establish its identity is ongoing process. Among others historical, political, social and economic factors have a role to play in this process and it's a dynamic interplay of these factors drives this process and leads to creating the spirit of place. While most of the places are affected by these generic factors, it's the interplay of these factors and core DNA of the place that has a far reaching implication of the spirit of place. As fast paced technology driven progress sweeps across the cities, one of the challenges is to maintain and nourish the identities of the places around us. Cultural homogenization, although good to certain extent, has to be proactively kept in check so that it doesn't erode the very foundations on which people progress. Also in the race of development, the need for places is becoming increasingly pronounced. Places that enrich us, places that give us "time to stand and stare", places that define us, places that offer solace, places that enable us to discover ourselves, places that encourage us to realize our potential, places that nudge us to find and follow our passions, places that improve the quality of life, places which we can belong to and places that can belong to us.

Design has now established itself as the force that can improve the quality of life substantially. Thus Design and Place broadly have the same objectives to meet. These objectives will be met effectively if Design rooted in a place is seen beyond the confines of

“local” and “global”. Place essentially is a medium by which design get nourished and manifested and touch all facets of life.

Design education, practice and culture are getting matured in Pune. Design is offering Pune again an opportunity to reinvent itself. As in the past, Pune is poised to take this opportunity to embrace Design and usher itself in its next stage of journey. In this journey, MIT ID will be an important milestone.

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