

# CHENNAI PAVILION & SOUTH INDIAN VEGETARIAN THAALI RESTAURANT

## at the Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism

The Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism is organized by the Seoul Metropolitan Government and Seoul Design Foundation. Titled Imminent Commons, the Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism is co-directed by HyungminPai, acclaimed architectural historian, critic, alumnus of MIT who is currently teaching at the Seoul National University, Korea and Alejandro Zaera-Polo, the award-winning architect and tenured Professor at Princeton University, U.S.A. The Seoul Biennale, as discussed, proposes a set of basic commons - an evolving network of agencies, resources and technologies- as the critical issue in the move towards a sustainable and equitable urbanism.

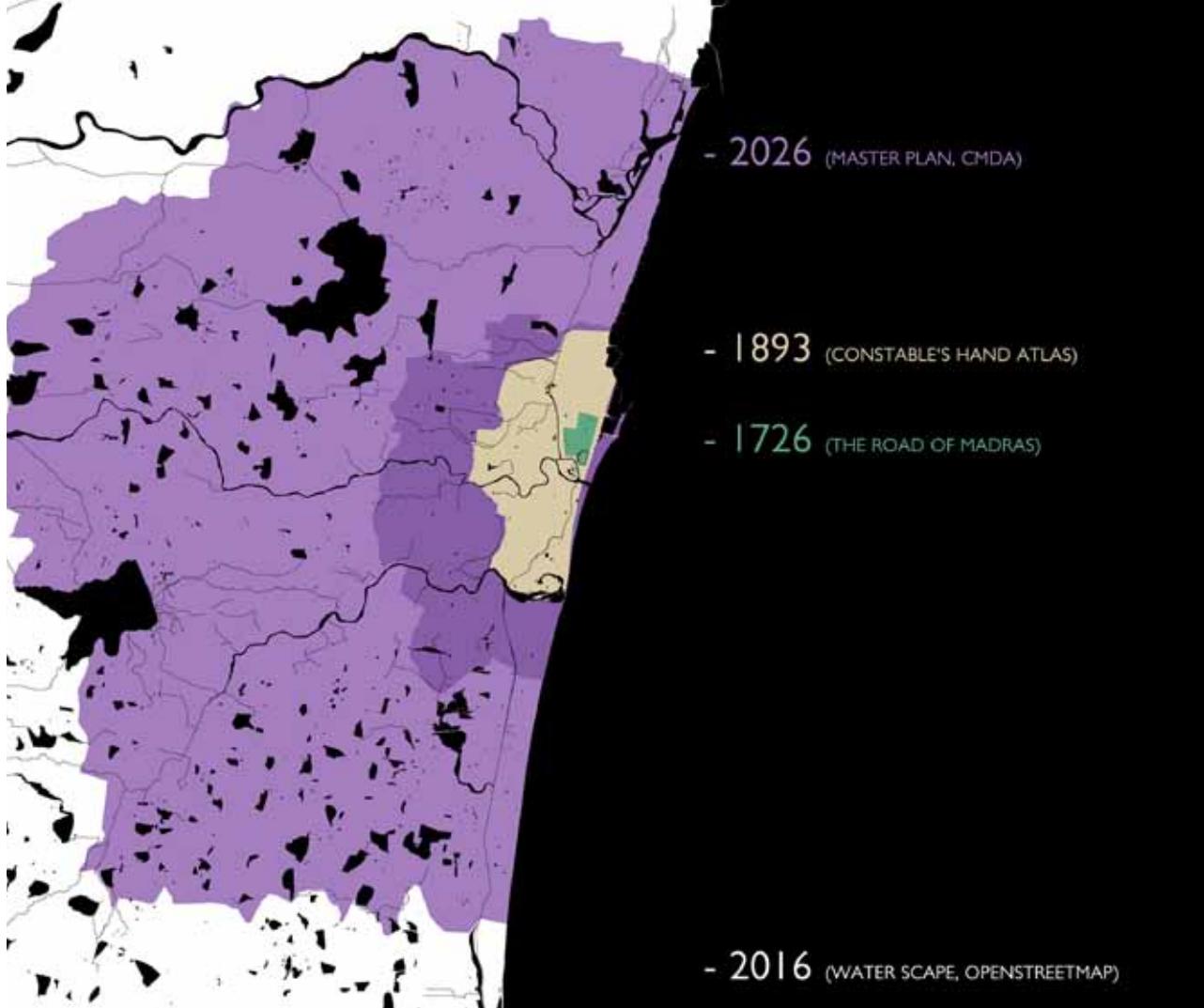
As cities of the world stand at crossroads, the question is, whether amidst radical social, economic and technological transformation, the city will become a driving force of creativity, diversity and sustainability or a mechanism for inequality, despair and environmental decay. The Biennale aims to explore not distant utopias but the existing realities and plans for the immediate future.

The Seoul Biennale proposes 10 Commons - 4 resources - in the way we manage air, water, energy and 6 emerging commonalities in the way we connect, make, move, recycle, sense and share these resources. The three-month long Seoul Biennale is about issues and proposals to identify opportunities and challenges and to

provide a forum for debate to policy makers, experts and citizens at large. Centred on the thematics of 10 Commons, the Biennale is organized along two major sections - Thematic Exhibitions installed during the Biennale and the continuous research and development activities of the Seoul Lab. The Exhibitions, will showcase the most innovative initiatives occurring in cities around the world and the Seoul Lab will manage the Live projects - The Urban Foodshed, The International Design Studio, the Mapping the Commons Project, Film and Video programmes, workshops and other programmes that involve public participation. The outcomes of both the Seoul Lab programmes and the Thematic exhibitions will be collated at the end of the Biennale to measure impact and suggest forward action.

InKo Centre has been officially invited to represent Chennai at the Thematic Cities exhibition. 50 cities from around the world have been invited to this section of the forthcoming Biennale. We will also introduce an authentic South Indian *Thaali* restaurant in association with Eden, Chennai at the Urban Foodshed section of the Biennale. Key elements of the Urban Foodshed vision include organic farming in the urban setting, ways to increase overall food production and awareness of the geography of food production, distribution, and consumption in everyday life.





Chennai's waterscape across various time periods

## The Cities Exhibition

### **At Cross Rivers - Reconnecting Chennai: The Chennai Pavilion**

**AT CROSS RIVERS** - The Chennai Pavilion at the Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism 2017 Chennai has some unique water bodies that have shined and faded over time yet continuously engaging the city with their potential to re-energize the urban environment. The city grew by connecting various villages around the port and key roads . As the road networks spread, infrastructure and real estate developed along these corridors while the water bodies were probably sidelined and forgotten. Yet Chennai's tryst with water reveals magnificent beaches, tanks and lakes, marshlands, canals, the criss-crossing rivers and mystical tanks creating a parallel composite network that pours life into the city everyday. As new settlements emerged, attracting people from all walks of life it made the city more cosmopolitan. The resultant architecture becoming a layered one with multiple styles and interesting diversity but showing very little relation with the water bodies barring few exceptions.

In current times, maintaining sufficient water for consumption, managing the sewage systems and responding to periodic water crisis have always been the challenges to this fourth largest city of India with a population of 8.5 million and growing.

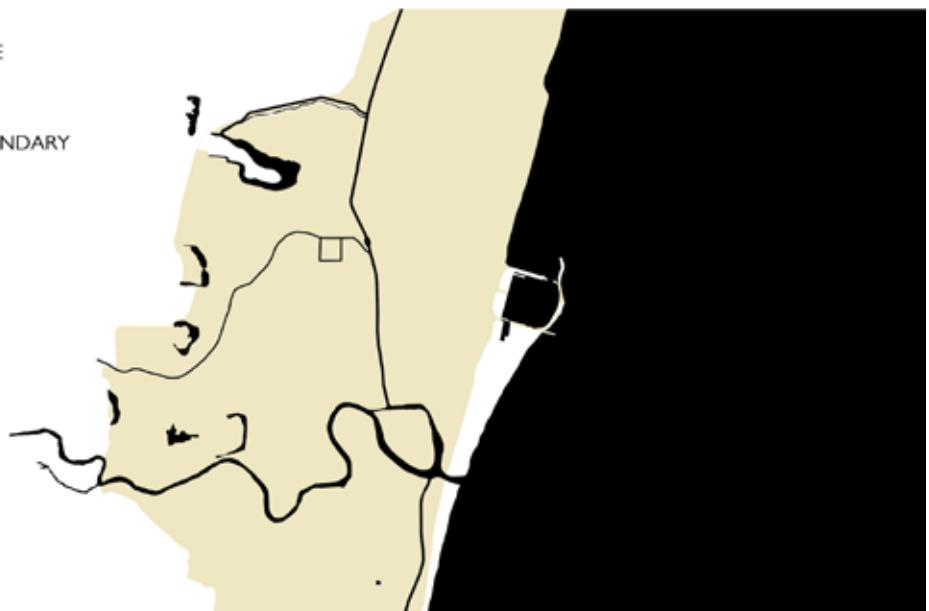
Today we are at the cross roads or should we say cross rivers, as the resurgence in the efforts to restore the rivers, replenish the tanks, reclaim the wetlands and clean up the system, opens up the possibilities of creating new commons that all cities share and establish a reconnection with water in a whole new way that is both new yet linked to the past.

The Chennai Pavilion titled **At Cross Rivers - Reconnecting Chennai**, examines some of the commons that are necessary to reclaim the city in a way that can enrich the social experience and rebuild certain lost characters.

At the very beginning of this project, the need to understand the connections of Chennai with water became paramount. It led to exploring the various typologies of water bodies, the infrastructures for making potable water, the policies and the governing bodies that manage the water resources as well as sensitive issues that brings a whole new

-1955  
WATER SCAPE

-1893  
MADRAS BOUNDARY



Comparative Overlay of the river and the city in 1955.

level of importance to this aspect of our lives that is so precious only after air. A city is not a singular entity like a building that provides shelter but a more complex evolution of space and structures over a great period of time which shapes the current form and aims to develop a sustainable platform for the growing population.

The river Cooum became the focus of this pavilion to link the city with the context of water in a way that can generate a new architectural understanding. Collaborative studies of the city, the analysis of the riverfront, the graphical extractions of the various influencing factors, interviews and group discussions has helped us evolve an alternative way of looking at the urban fabric in direct relation to the water and the river. This has even set the tone for a greater dialogue on water and the city.

The architectural overlays with the proposed restoration of the river and future land use patterns allow us to explore the ideas of moving, sharing

and connecting more intuitively.

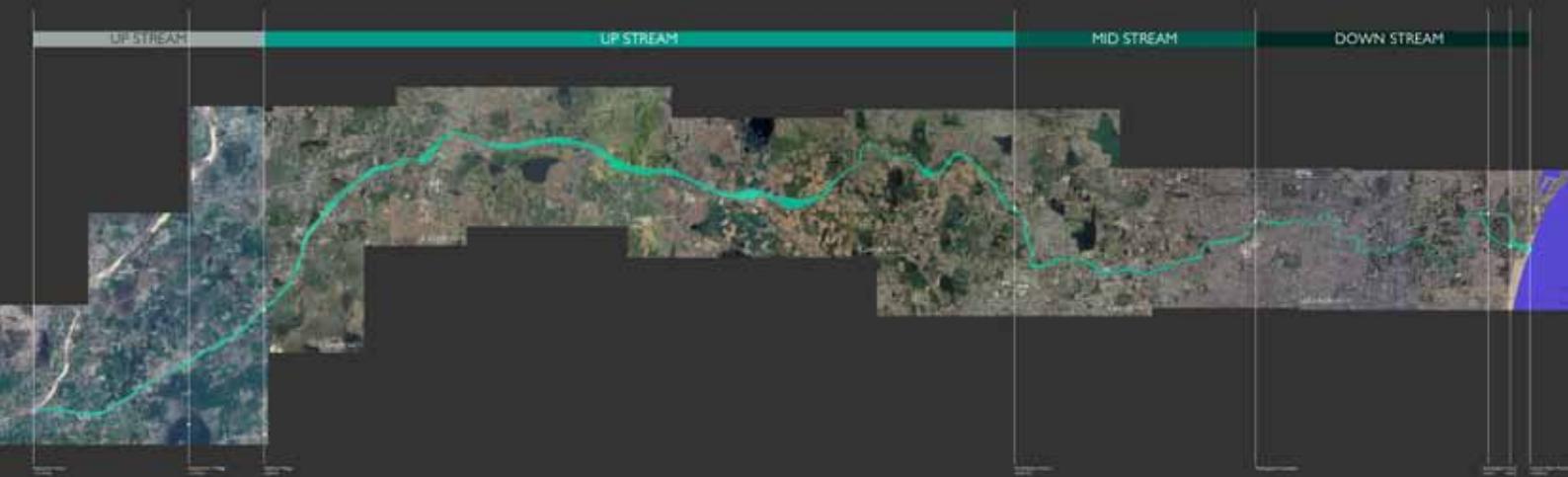
The pavilion explores a larger urban context along the river for developing architectural connections that allow people to use the city better through community participation and social interaction.

Clues from the past, lessons from the present and scenarios for the future will be presented to build a new narrative for the city based on urban design methodologies.

**Raghuram Avula,**

Curator, Chennai Pavilion at the Cities Exhibition, Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism.

The Chennai Pavilion, is presented by InKo Centre in association with the School of Architecture and Planning, Anna University, Chennai at the **Dongdaemun Design Plaza in Seoul** during the Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism from 1 September to 5 November 2017.





## The Urban Foodshed

Since the start of the 21st century, we have witnessed a series of global food security disasters, from worldwide bee colony collapse (2006) to the wheat failure in Eastern Europe (2012), and the most recent bird flu outbreaks in Europe and Asia (2016), which led to 27 million poultry being culled in South Korea alone. We have entered the age of 'peak food' affecting much of the world's staples, with the advent of peak corn (1985), peak rice (1988), peak fish (1988), peak wheat (2004), and peak chicken (2006). Borrowed from the concept of 'peak oil'—which refers to the point in time when the maximum amount of production is reached followed by a plateau or terminal decline - the concept of 'peak food' highlights the high inputs of water and energy that go into agricultural production (over 70% of global water consumption goes to agriculture) as related to the downward inflections of these major food crops. Moreover, as the phenomenon of 'peak food' leads to generalized food insecurity, volatile food markets and food shortages ensue, affecting in particular the poorest populations. At the same time, we have witnessed the rise of new 'water barons' as top multinational investment banks and multibillionaires race to buy up land around important water sources worldwide at an unprecedented pace.

Set against this background, the Urban Foodshed project seeks to provide a vision for an alternative food system for Seoul based on the sustainable use of land, water and energy. A 'foodshed' constitutes the geographical area and the resource flows that produce food for a particular population. Food ecologists and urban geographers have introduced the term (drawn from the term 'watershed' and adapted to the social and economic context of food

production) to "facilitate critical thought on where our food is coming from and how it is getting to us" as well as to restore a sense of place to our food system. Key elements of the Urban Foodshed vision include organic farming in the urban setting, ways to increase overall food production, and awareness of the geography of food production, distribution, and consumption in everyday life.

In an effort to create an urban agro-ecological system based on collective knowledge on sustainable agriculture and food security, this project involves an ensemble of leading actors in the field, including organic farmers and permaculturalists, beekeepers, environmental activists, and a diverse group of scientists—soil biologists, botanists, mycologists, entomologists, ornithologists, oceanographers, meteorologists and toxicologists. The majority of these actors hail not only from Korea, but from India, the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East, and North African regions—areas most affected by prolonged drought, shortage of fresh water and rising sea levels, and vulnerable to changes in world food markets. The Urban Foodshed seeks to bring their invaluable knowledge and expertise to attend to practical and ethical solutions to the worsening food crisis, with particular concern for the deteriorating status of food safety of Seoul. Urban Foodshed consists of the following components: a restaurant, onsite gardens and offsite farms, a water bar, a grocery store, an exhibition, and the EM/MENA Project, a collateral/collaborative venture spotlighting parallel issues from an area of the world already facing the urgency of persistent water stress, uncertain food supply, and acute climate-related problems such as enhanced desertification trends.

## The Thaali Restaurant at the Urban Foodshed

The restaurant forms the heart of the Urban Foodshed, functioning as the main platform in which city dwellers and visitors to the Biennale can interact with this project and share its vision through various events, programmes and exhibitions, as well as discussions of key issues relating to the impending food and resource crises. The three main components are the daily brunch/lunch serving South Indian thali, and a dozen different themed dinners spread throughout the biennial period, as well as a Seed Library.

A team from Eden restaurant, Chennai will set up a southern Indian kitchen and we will serve Thaali meals - a popular rice-based wholesome meal from Tamil Nadu, which closely resembles Korean *Baek-ban*, a set meal featuring a large variety of small side dishes around a bowl of rice. Although there are regional variations across India, we will focus on the thali from the Tamil Nadu region, which is considered to be the birthplace of the elaborate *sappadu* (meal). Like most restaurants in Tamil Nadu, we will offer a vegetarian thaali that makes use of seasonal vegetables, traditional culinary traditions and techniques of the region that are several thousand years old.

We have chosen to serve this one-platter-per-person menu, not only to bring attention to the remarkable intercultural connections and transnational currents that have historically existed between Korea and the south Indian region, but also to accommodate 'honbapjok', a recently coined term for those who eat alone in Korea, and which accurately reflects the latest family demographics of the Korean society: as of 2015, one-person households are the most common family type in the country, accounting for 27.2 percent of the total 19 million households (Statistics Korea).

This *thaali* restaurant will also serve as a venue for discussions on water and food problems in India, as well as providing an environment in which to experience the lesser-known aspects of South Indian culture.

As one third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted worldwide, all the



events within the Restaurant component of the Urban Foodshed will adopt an anti-food waste policy, as part of the project's comprehensive strategy to spread awareness about the connections between food sustainability, consumption habits, the global waste crisis, and today's undue nutrition challenges. Accordingly, any leftover or surplus food will be recycled as compost back into the Restaurant's own food system at the onsite gardens or its offsite farm locations.

The Urban Foodshed will also have an organic cafe, seed library; onsite and off-site farms, food foraging trips and a water bar to engage and educate urban dwellers on the food they consume and the water they drink.

A variety of exhibitions, will present films, interviews, objects and archive materials related to the Urban Foodshed Project.

### HyewonLee

Curator, Urban Foodshed project  
Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism.

The Thaali restaurant, is presented by InKo Centre in association with Eden, Chennai at the Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism from 1 September to 5 November 2017.

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