

Shweta Gandhi

B.Arch., MSc

Young Talent of the Year
Architecture Leaders Awards 2022

Background and guiding principles

At just 26 years old, Shweta's aptitude and career growth have not gone unnoticed. Throughout her studies, internships, research and professional work, Shweta's passion for architecture is thriving.

Her specialist architectural knowledge, gained from Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Dubai (B.Arch), has allowed her to apply the same principal ideas used in architectural projects to all her work as an urban practitioner. This includes the importance of human-centric design, functionality and resilience. Shweta believes that implementing this three-tiered approach to solving built-environment challenges can result in an improved response to deliver a better quality of life.

With her urban planning knowledge grounded by an MSc in Sustainable Urban Development from the University of Oxford, as well as a deep interest in urban analytics, generative design and sustainability, altogether this is what gives Shweta her USP. Understanding and incorporating these realms leads to a holistic approach and forward-thinking solutions.

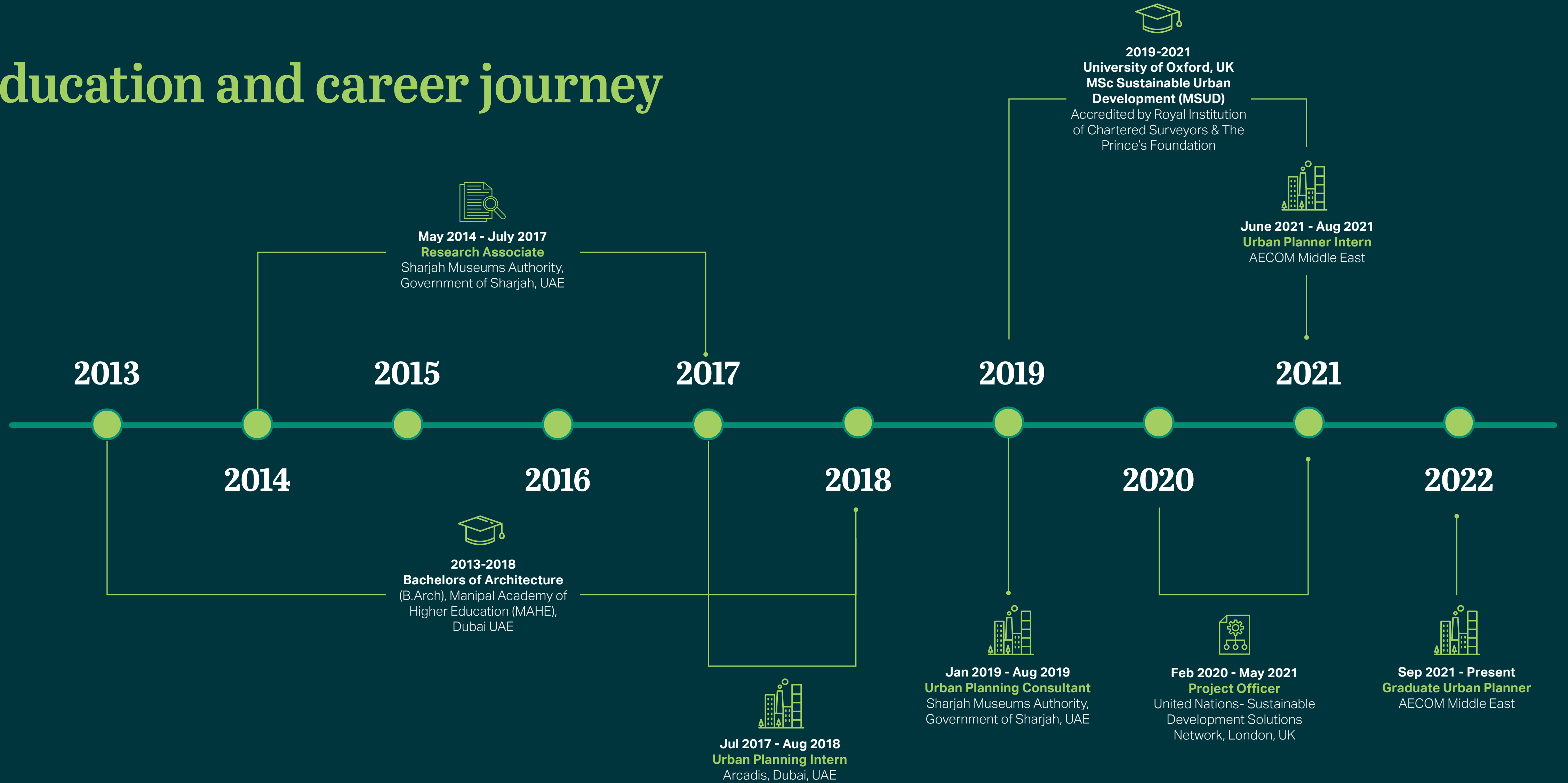
Her upbringing in Dubai, and subsequent studies in the UK, has provided Shweta a unique perspective that adds value to her work. Her education and experiences offer a distinct ability to develop projects on three levels simultaneously: at a micro-scale (buildings), a mesoscale (districts), and macro-scale (cities).



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Education and career journey

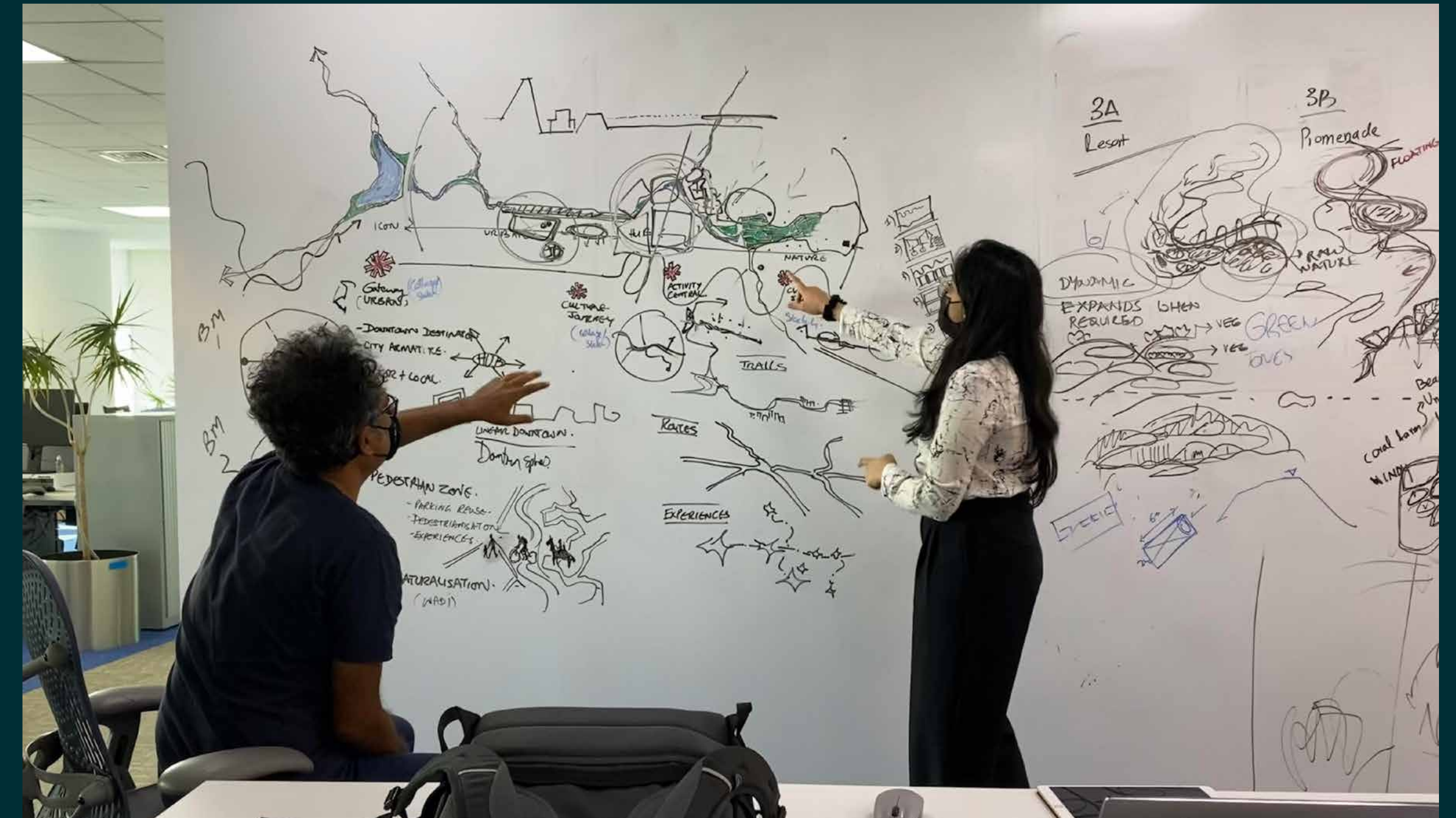


Delivering a better world with AECOM

In her short time as a Graduate Urban Planner, Shweta has been able to implement her know-how to bridge the gap between different sectors, and ultimately between social sustainability and smart city initiatives.

Not only has Shweta benefited from collaborations with various service providers, but these projects have also profited from her multi-faceted competencies. Her proficiency as an architect and planner, and her command over performance-based generative platforms involving defining workflows, identifying KPIs, and setting up smart city frameworks, have provided Shweta the chance to work with a prominent mapping company on a complex platform and digital twin projects – a huge opportunity for someone still at the beginning of their career.

Since working at AECOM, Shweta has valued the variety of projects and the global knowledge exchange. For Shweta, tapping into all available resources, bringing international expertise to the Middle East and contextualizing it, is what will truly allow strides towards improving liveability and future-proofed cities.



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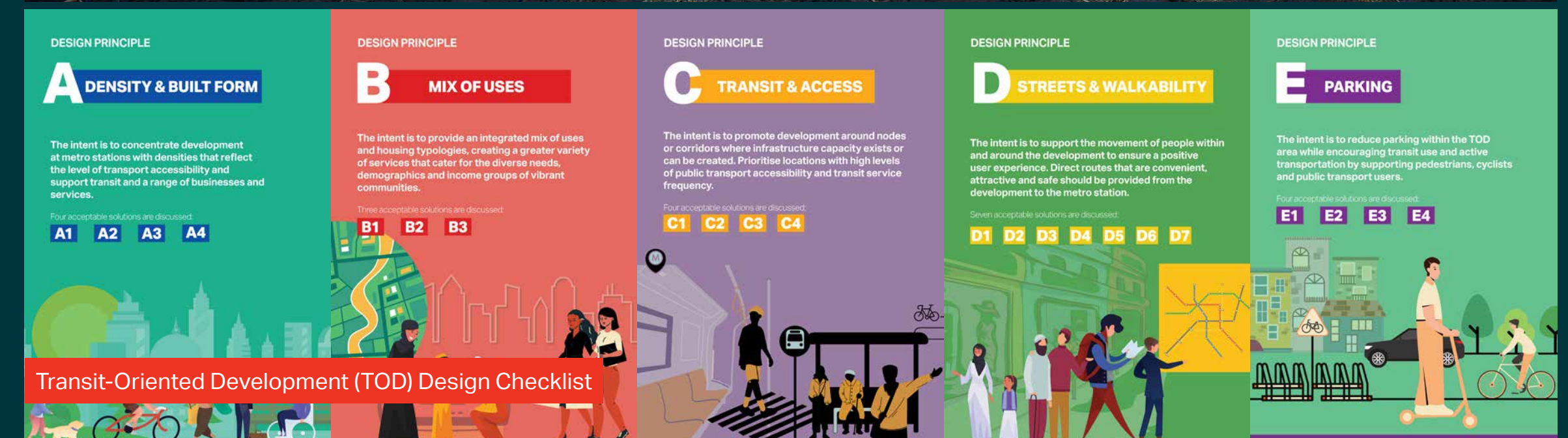
Shweta has a broad scope of work in her portfolio already. Supporting the Riyadh Strategy Vision project, Shweta assists with strategic visioning, defining initiatives, preparing initiative cards, outlining critical regulatory changes and the future activation projects for the Riyadh City of the Future program. She is also currently using her advanced capabilities to contribute to the Riyadh Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) project.

AECOM is creating a planning framework to support the implementation of transit-oriented development to improve the standard of living. More specifically, Shweta is involved in analyzing and communicating existing planning processes, frameworks and systems, as well as developing a planning review process. She also contributed to the development of the Governance Strategy and TOD Design Checklist.

Finally, with her knowledge of delivering sustainable urban developments, Shweta had a hand in preparing the sustainability and environment strategies for the proposed concept master plans for a Saudi Downtown Company project. The overarching objective is to enhance the lifestyles and local economies of Taif and Najran.



Riyadh Strategy Vision Project



Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Design Checklist

Outside of AECOM

Prior to joining AECOM, Shweta honed her research skills with the Sharjah Government and gathered numerous experiences with the Sharjah Museums Authority as an Urban Planning & Design Consultant. What started as an architectural documentation exercise quickly became the Urban Conservation Management Plan for the first airport in the UAE, now known as the Al Mahatta Museum. Shweta and the team's hard work and dedication was rewarded as the project was presented at two exhibitions and has since evolved into a UNESCO World Heritage bid.

Connecting academia and urban development is crucial to achieving sustainability goals and creating an urban realm more suited to everyone's requirements. This is precisely the reason for her research and works co-authoring Sharjah's report Conservation Management Plan: Al Mahatta Museum (2014) and the book titled Architectural & Urban Development of Sharjah: Spatial Analysis of Museum Typology (2017).



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Advocacy

Shweta's 'decade of action' advocacy journey began with a 10-month fellowship on the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network Local Pathways program.

Now a Project Officer, the aim of their work is to find solutions for delivering smarter, fairer and more sustainable cities and urban areas through collaboration, advancing local dialogue and problem-solving with localized solutions. There is no one-size-fits-all answer. Shweta is now particularly focused on networking and collaborating with young professionals globally to achieve SDG11: Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. She launched the Mentorship Programme (2021) and has now progressed to take up the advisory role for the cohort of 2022.



Looking ahead

Shweta hopes that her passion and enthusiasm for learning lives on and that she never stops asking herself, ‘how can we do things differently and how can we improve?’. Looking ahead, Shweta aspires to reach a leadership position where she can inspire young talent to become sustainably-focused architects and urban planners of the future.

Shweta wants to showcase how we can retrofit, rehabilitate and have urban interventions that improve the quality of life in cities. With this, Shweta believes there is further opportunity for designers, planners, architects and the inhabitants of these spaces to ‘look beyond delivery and close the loop’. For instance, using ideation platforms where people provide planners and architects with feedback that can be analyzed, the project reassessed, and improvements made, or considerations noted for future developments.

Currently delivering her best work, and continuing to advocate for more sustainable urban realms, Shweta is not naïve to the fact she cannot achieve these ambitions alone; there needs to be a consensus and commitment. Using architectural knowledge as the foundation, adding her learning and passion for urban analytics and innovative technologies, Shweta is on track to use her platform to aid the architecture sector’s journey to being sustainable, resilient, and innovative, using all resources beyond the realm of design. This inquisitive mind has just got started and is one to watch.



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Testimonials



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As a senior manager within a large organization like AECOM, I believe in and advocate for the young talent in our company. It is absolutely magical when a new creative and ambitious talent is spotted and this is Shweta.

Shweta is one of those talents that has the confidence to innovate and to bring fresh ideas to the table. Her problem-solving skills and intellectual mindset makes her a great asset to any team, project or client she engages with. Although she has just few years' experience, Shweta was immediately recognized through the effort and the time she spends researching critical industry challenges. She has a great mind and is certainly one to keep an eye on in the future.”

Amer Mneimneh, Vice President,
Urbanism + Planning, Middle East & Africa



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It is extremely rare to find individuals that have a combination of innovative thinking, enthusiasm and the perseverance to take ideas through to fruition. Although early in her career, Shweta has already demonstrated the ability to understand and address complex challenges facing our cities, and at the same time the tenacity to achieve practical solutions.

What sets Shweta apart from her peers in the industry is her thorough understanding of not just architecture and urban design, but the various complex layers of the built-environment. This knowledge, combined with her research-based data-driven approach, has helped her get recognised at a global stage within and outside of AECOM.”

Sanjay Tanwani, Director,
U+P Middle East, Master Planning and Concept Architecture

About AECOM

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