

## MURCS Cohort 2024 Biographies

**Bleona** holds a Bachelor's degree in Geo-Environmental Engineering and a Master's in Urban Environmental Management. She has interned at the Department of Renewable Energy Sources in Tirana, Albania, where she expanded her knowledge in environmental management and renewable energy initiatives. Following this experience, she worked as a Project Coordinator for two construction companies in the USA—one based in Florida and the other in New York—gaining valuable insights into urban environmental issues and developing practical solutions for sustainable development.

In addition to her professional work, Bleona has been actively volunteering for two years at PPNEA (Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania), a pioneering non-governmental organization focused on nature conservation. This commitment reflects her dedication to environmental protection and sustainable practices. Through her academic background and hands-on experience, Bleona is passionate about addressing urban environmental challenges and enhancing conservation efforts. Her goal is to leverage her expertise in urban environmental management to promote innovative strategies that benefit both urban areas and natural ecosystems, creating a resilient and sustainable future.



**Sarah Hazem Abdelraouf Dekhel** is an environmental engineer with over five years of experience in water management, ESG reporting, wastewater treatment, and the Water-Energy-Food (WEF) Nexus. She previously served as a Senior Research Officer at the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), where she supported environmental governance and water resource management across the MENA region. Her work included guiding SMEs on environmental compliance and conducting water productivity analyses for various sustainability projects, such as the Water and Energy for Food (WE4F) MENA Regional Innovation Hub and the ReWater MENA project.

Throughout her career, Sarah has contributed to initiatives focused on improving water resource management, enhancing climate resilience, and promoting safe wastewater reuse practices in the Central and West Asia and North Africa (CWANA) region. With a strong academic background in Environmental Engineering from the University of Science and Technology at Zewail City, Egypt, she continues to drive impactful research and development in water management, aiming to address the critical challenges posed by climate change and water scarcity.

**U. Cem Yilmaz** is an energy engineer with a master's degree in Science and Technology Policy Studies, and experience in carbon projects and the energy sector. Currently pursuing the MURCS (Master in Urban Climate and Sustainability) program, he is exploring the intersection of energy, climate, and urban sustainability, focusing on how these areas can work together to build sustainable cities for the future. His academic journey spans multiple countries, giving him a global perspective on the complex challenges of creating resilient, low-carbon urban environments.

Driven by long-term thinking and the principle of generational education, Cem believes in the power of passing down knowledge and values to future generations. His greatest goal is to contribute to the education system for life, both as a teacher and a learner, helping shape responsible citizens who will lead the fight against climate change. Rooted in the virtues of integrity, dedication, and service to the common good, Cem views education as a lifelong commitment to building a sustainable and equitable future.



**Natalia Delgadillo** is an Environmental Engineer with a Masters in Environmental Management. With a strong background in environmental consulting and project management, she has supported international climate initiatives and worked on complex environmental projects in Colombia and the U.S in the private and public sectors. Enrolling in the MURCS program reflects her commitment to addressing urban growth and climate change challenges. Natalia aims to integrate scientific knowledge into urban planning and sustainable development, aspiring to transition her career toward climate-related urban growth and adaptation strategies.



**Atiqur** was born and raised in Narsingdi, Bangladesh, a rural town on the outskirts of the capital city, Dhaka. Growing up, he witnessed the rapid disappearance of natural landscapes to meet the demands of a growing population and increased exposure to natural hazards. These experiences inspired him to pursue a bachelor's degree in Environmental Science from Khulna University, the first institution in Bangladesh to offer an undergraduate programme in this subject.



Following his graduation, Atiqur joined CARE Bangladesh, an international NGO, where he played a frontline role in implementing disaster risk reduction projects funded by the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Australian Aid in the world's largest refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. Over his two years with CARE, he developed expertise in disaster risk management, reforestation, solid waste management, and environmental impact assessments. In parallel, Atiqur worked as a Researcher at the Environment and Sustainability Research Initiative (ESRI) in Bangladesh. Here, he honed his research skills by collaborating with local and international experts in the sustainability field. He has co-authored three peer-reviewed articles in prestigious journals such as *The Lancet Planetary Health* and *Environmental Pollution*, with several more publications in the pipeline.

Looking ahead, Atiqur aspires to deepen his expertise in urban sustainability, particularly in addressing the challenges posed by climate change. He believes the intensive training provided by the Master's in Urban Climate and Sustainability (MURCS) programme will be an invaluable resource in his pursuit.



**Methi** holds two master's degrees: one in Urban Design from Bangkok and another in Urban Management and Development from Rotterdam. He is a solution-driven and passionate individual with transdisciplinary knowledge and understanding of urban complexity. However, he still wants to pursue further education with MURCS on scientific and climate change aspects in urban development. In Thailand, Methi completed several major urban comprehensive planning and flood protection projects. This experience earned him an Orange Knowledge Programme scholarship to pursue further studies in Strategic Urban Planning and

Policies in the Netherlands. Later, he worked for the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP Institute) in The Hague, working on three EU Horizon 2020 projects and one Interreg Europe project. His work focused on advancing sustainable urban transitions, just transition, and policy improvements in many cities in Europe. Methi excels at communicating a clear vision, gamification and participatory methods, solving complex socio-spatial challenges, and is motivated by sustainability and equitable processes.

**Adefolahan** holds a first and second degree from the Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria, in Urban and Regional Planning. Her master's degree focused on integrating ecosystem services into spatial planning of coastal areas. Balancing urban development with sustainability has been the basis of her projects in both the private and public sectors, encompassing urban renewal, master planning, and environmental impact assessments to drive responsible growth.



With nearly nine years of experience as a Town Planning Officer in the Nigerian public sector, Adefolahan recognizes the urgent need to update outdated development methods, fearing the consequences if they persist. As a seasoned urban Planner familiar with ecosystem services, she is committed to driving change by promoting climate-conscious and sustainability-focused urban planning, filling knowledge gaps, inspiring action to create resilient and sustainable communities. She is confident that the MURCS programme will equip her with specialized training, enabling her to contribute meaningfully to climate-resilient urban planning initiatives internationally.



**Rahma Sarhan Ali** is a Sudanese architect, urban sustainability professional, and climate entrepreneur with a deep commitment to environmental and social impact. She is a certified LEED® Green Associate™ and Climate Ambassador for the World Bank's Global Youth Climate Network. Her passion for sustainable development was shaped by her upbringing in the vibrant city of Khartoum and was further reinforced after witnessing the devastation caused by floods in her hometown village. This pivotal experience motivated her to explore solutions addressing climate change and urban resilience.



She founded the social enterprise EcoWaste Environmental Solutions, launching Khartoum's first community recycling centre and spearheading the "Street Geniuses" project, empowering youth involved in waste collection. Her work focuses on waste management through a social approach, fostering community engagement and promoting circular economy practices. Through EcoWaste, Rahma has significantly influenced the waste management sector in Khartoum, successfully reducing pressure on landfills by diverting recyclable materials and establishing a circular waste management cycle. Her entrepreneurial efforts have earned her multiple awards and recognition both locally and internationally. Additionally, as a young climate entrepreneur, she collaborated with the local government, offering insights and recommendations for developing an inclusive framework policy for SMEs in the waste management sector, contributing to the review of the Khartoum State Cleaning Corporation's roadmap. Additionally, Rahma has served as Corporate Sustainability & Social Impact Manager at Haggar Co. Ltd., aligning business strategies with sustainability goals. And developing ESG frameworks. She's also an executive board member of Sudan Urban Development Think Tank (SUDTT), contributing to urban policy development and community resilience projects in her country.

The ongoing war in Sudan has intensified her commitment further, as she has seen firsthand the environmental and infrastructural challenges her city faces due to the conflict. Despite these difficulties, Rahma remains dedicated to rebuilding her homeland through sustainable urban practices, with a focus on resilience and long-term environmental restoration. She is determined to play a pivotal role in the post-war rebuilding of Sudan, focusing on creating resilient and sustainable communities that will ensure a brighter future for generations to come.

Holding a BSc in Architecture and Urban Planning from Cambodian Mekong University and a Bachelor of Education in English from the Institute of Foreign Languages, **Panha** aspires to broaden her educational journey to step into the Sustainability, Climate and Urban Environment through MURCS 1.5.

Heretofore, she actively volunteered on several community projects, one of which was a workshop under the topic of "Citywide transformation of Cambodia in a time of transition", organized by University College London (UCL) in a corporation with Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, Community Architects Cambodia, and Community Development Foundation. This workshop focused on urban poor settlement development in Phnom Penh city and enhancing the quality of life within the community, allowing her to undertake the issues of vulnerable communities.



Her determination in urban development drove her to work in the public sector at Phnom Penh municipality for six years. As a member of the city's project study team, she got the opportunity to work with multidisciplinary experts on city and community studies projects, focusing on enhancing the quality of lives of city dwellers and vulnerable communities, which cooperated with the City of Paris, AIMF, GIZ, U.S Department of Transportation (DOT), as well as JICA. As an architect working in the problem-solving sector and living on the city's outskirts, she has witnessed the inequality and struggle of living with high traffic volumes, pollution, a lack of greenery, and public spaces due to the rapid urban sprawl of Phnom Penh. These challenges have motivated her to work towards embedding civic and environmental values in sustainable and inclusive urban development.



**Sabrina De Nicola** earned a B.S. in Bioengineering with a focus in Sustainability Studies from the University of Maryland, College Park. Her coursework provided a foundation in engineering design and environmental biosystems; but in order to secure a greater multidisciplinary perspective, she was determined to find additional unique opportunities. She pursued the Bioengineering Honors Program, where she completed a 2 year research thesis in an environmental engineering laboratory and long term field experiment to investigate soil conditions through the implementation of stormwater filtration systems and pollutant degrading bacteria. She was also the President of UMD's chapter of Engineering World Health, in which she engaged in a collaborative project with

students at Makerere University in Uganda to fabricate a sustainable attachment for donated wheelchairs for handicapped communities and led technical engineering workshops with ProjectCure to repair medical devices for recovering communities sent to clinics in 130+ countries.

By transferring the knowledge and skills she acquired in her undergraduate program, she secured a full-time position in the Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson. Sabrina collaborated with an international team of scientists and engineers to evaluate rising technologies in the field, where she engaged in comprehensive collaborations and gained insight from global to local levels. She understands that innovation in urban transformations requires innovative metropolitan solutions and successfully addresses interlinked issues that span our globe. Sabrina is passionate about uniting environmentally sustainable design and urban development at their intersection with climate change mitigation and community building.



**Manu Nirasha** is a curious and enthusiastic person with a Bachelor's degree in Architecture from the University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka. Coming from a family of architects, she naturally followed this path, excelling throughout her undergraduate studies and graduating at the top of her class with several academic awards. Her early career in Sri Lanka's residential sector gave her a solid grounding in design principles, but she soon realized the need for a new approach to address complex scenarios in the built environment.



Driven by this realization, Manu pursued a Master's in Transdisciplinary Design at the Institute of European Design in Italy. Living and studying in the dynamic cities of Milan and Turin opened her mind to new possibilities, expanding her perspective on the role of architecture and urban planning in shaping sustainable futures. She believes deeply that design has the power to change the world and sees herself as a humanitarian designer committed to creating impactful solutions that address contemporary challenges. She has sought opportunities that go beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries, drawing on her recent transdisciplinary education to adopt a holistic approach to design and system thinking.

Manu's diverse skill set includes fluency in multiple languages, strong analytical abilities, and a refined capacity for systems thinking. Her transdisciplinary education has equipped her with the tools to integrate insights from various disciplines, making her a fast learner and an agile problem-solver. Eager to explore adaptive climate models and policies, she views the current program as a strategic platform to further her expertise and contribute meaningfully to the discourse on sustainable and climate-resilient urban development.



Earning a bachelor's degree in Architecture in the Republic of Korea, **Jinah Park** engaged in an in-depth exploration of sustainability focusing on the energy efficiency in her graduation project and the research of the university laboratory. This laid the foundation for architectural work in India, understanding local conditions and environmental impacts. Also, serving as an Associate Climate Specialist at the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) in Grenada, she participated in governmental

projects across Caribbean countries to address climate change. Furthermore, she built upon six-year careers in the South Korean government - Korean Embassy in Uruguay and Finland, Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Korea Development Institute - comprehending governmental roles in fostering sustainable development. She aims to contribute to sustainable solutions professionally in urban planning and management sectors with consideration for the shared commitment to universal practices.

**Aigesta** holds a degree in Architecture from the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism in Tirana, Albania, where she studied for five years. Over the course of her three-year work experience, she has contributed to several key projects, including the Urban Requalification in Dhërmi, Albania, a project executed by the Albanian Development Fund with funding from the Albanian government and the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB). In this project, she was involved in the restoration of housing, preserving the architectural integrity while making the structures more sustainable. Additionally, she was involved in the Reconstruction of internal roads of the Ali Pasha Tepelena Castle, focusing on preserving cultural heritage while integrating the surrounding areas with the historical site. Her participation in the Erasmus Exchange Program in Turin, Italy, offered her transformative academic and professional experiences, broadening her perspective on global urban challenges. Moreover, her involvement in the KARAVASTA 1st Edition workshop by Polimi enhanced her knowledge of sustainable urban development, particularly in the circular design and reuse of existing structures. In this workshop, she focused on environmentally conscious approaches, using innovative materials and sustainable methods to minimize the environmental impact of urban projects.



**Nisa** was born and raised in Mersin, Turkey, where she developed a deep connection to nature and a passionate interest in environmental issues affecting her city. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Engineering from Mersin University. However, she has a strong focus on foreign affairs and project management. Currently, she is pursuing an Erasmus Mundus Master's degree in Urban Climate and Sustainability to gain a broader understanding of local challenges.



In her role at the Foreign Relations and Project Department of Mersin Metropolitan Municipality, Nisa has dedicated her career to sustainable development, particularly within urban environments. She has coordinated projects funded by the EU, UN, and GIZ that aim to advance climate adaptation, youth employment, sustainable transportation, and food security initiatives in Mersin.

With several years of experience in managing EU-funded projects, Nisa has written project proposals primarily for Horizon Europe and IPA III InterregNext. These proposals focus on local climate actions such as coastal protection and a zero-waste approach, leveraging interregional partnerships to achieve these goals. Her roles have enabled her to drive meaningful progress in environmental and community-based initiatives.

Proficient in Turkish, English, and Spanish, Nisa is eager to promote sustainable solutions that reflect her commitment to shared global practices on an urban scale.

**Leonardo Segovia** is a graduate of the Technological University of Honduras (UTH) with a degree in Industrial Engineering. After completing his studies, he embarked on a successful career at FICOHSA Bank, where he spent over a decade gaining extensive experience in the insurance sector. During this time, he built a strong foundation in contract renewal, business development, and strategic sales management. He also excelled in policy analysis, client relationship management, and sales strategy, with a proven ability to adapt, assess risks, and make effective decisions under pressure. His work was characterized by combining these skills with innovative approaches to drive growth and optimize processes.



Driven by a desire to make a greater impact on people's lives, Leonardo decided to shift his career focus to Urban Climate and Sustainability. This decision led him to pursue the prestigious Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Urban Climate and Sustainability (MURCS) program, for which he was awarded a full Erasmus Mundus scholarship. This program provides him with the ideal platform to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to become an expert in climate change and sustainability, with a focus on urban areas.

Post-graduation, Leonardo plans to apply his expertise in urban climate and sustainability to develop impactful solutions for cities facing environmental challenges. His goal is to help design resilient, sustainable urban environments that enhance residents' quality of life while addressing the pressing issues posed by climate change. By leveraging his background in business strategy alongside his new specialization in sustainability, Leonardo is committed to contributing to a more sustainable future, working at the intersection of technology, urban planning, and environmental stewardship.



**Tesicca Truong 張慈櫻 Trương Từ Anh** (she/her) is an award-winning community engagement innovator and sustainability policy strategist. Her passions lie at the intersection of youth empowerment, citizen engagement and resilience building. She co-founded CityHive, a non-profit on a mission to transform the way young people shape their cities and the civic processes that engage them. She also co-created the inaugural Vancouver School Board Sustainability Conference, currently in its twelfth year and kick-started the Vancouver Youth4Tap Coalition, a city-wide campaign which led to the installation of new water fountains in every public high school in

Vancouver. More recently, she has worked both for federal and provincial Canadian ministers and worked in environmental philanthropy.

Tesicca was appointed to Vancouver Mayor's Engaged City Task Force, BC's Climate Solutions and Clean Growth Advisory Council, and SFU Senate. For her work, she was awarded the SFU President's Leadership in Sustainability Award and Vancouver's Greenest City Leadership Award. Tesicca has also been named on Top 30 under 30 and Top 25 under 25 lists by Corporate Knights, North American Association for Environmental Education, and Starfish Canada. In her spare time, you can find her longboarding and biking through the city, swimming and kayaking in the ocean, rock climbing in the mountains, and exploring the woods.

**Shanika** has an academic background in Town and Country Planning from the University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka, where she developed a strong foundation in sustainable urban planning. She was recognized for her academic excellence, earning Dean's List awards during her bachelor's studies. She successfully completed the Professional Practice Examination of the Institute of Town Planners, Sri Lanka, in 2021. Her professional experience spans various roles. Throughout her two-year tenure as a teaching assistant at the University of Moratuwa, she developed a deep understanding of the interdisciplinary aspects of urban planning and knowledge dissemination skills. Her academic and research interests focus on critical areas such as environmental planning, urban regeneration, participatory planning,





climate resilience, and sustainable development, reflecting her commitment to addressing complex urban challenges through a multifaceted approach. Shanika has been actively involved with the project team developing tourism development master plans for Sri Lanka, leveraging her urban planning expertise to formulate sustainable and inclusive strategies. Her experience extends to social and environmental impact assessments for large-scale infrastructure projects, where she honed her skills in stakeholder collaboration and ensured alignment with local community needs and national development goals. In 2022, Shanika transitioned to the private sector to gain further practical experience in her field, beginning her role as an Assistant Manager in Environment and Feasibility at a leading real estate company in Sri Lanka. This position enabled her to effectively integrate sustainability principles into private sector development projects, consistently contributing to environmentally responsible urban planning practices. Her motivation for joining the MURCS program is to deepen her knowledge of urban sustainability while gaining valuable international postgraduate experience. She is confident that this program will advance her career as a researcher and consultant in the field of environment and sustainability.



Even as a curious student of architecture, **Aditi** believed that the design of any built form needed to carefully integrate surrounding contexts and social themes. This curiosity about the "bigger picture" led Aditi to pursue a career focused on urban development, where she has been able to combine architectural structures with public spaces, keeping people at the centre of urban development processes. Aditi's career in urban development began with her undergraduate thesis, "Enterprising Abandoned Stations: The Case of the MRTS", where she proposed the conversion of the abandoned stations into integrated public spaces, with which the neglected

women of the communities living along the stations able to access civic amenities, prioritising safety and inclusivity.

Over the past four years, Aditi's professional experience has deepened her understanding of city-making, rooted in the on-ground realities of India. At the Centre for Urbanism, she contributed to the creation of a Manual for the Design of Inclusive Intersections in Chennai. As the city's infrastructure became more car-centric, Aditi's project proposed pedestrian-friendly intersections to improve safety and accessibility. Later, at Jana Urban Space Foundation, she was part of a team implementing such pedestrian-friendly measures through various street design projects across the country. This practical experience has taught her that lasting change requires ongoing dialogue with government agencies, capacity-building, and sustained advocacy for behavioural change.

Aditi's desire to pursue a Master's degree stems from her interest in bridging the gap between planning, policy, and practice in urban development. Through the MURCS programme, she aims to gain interdisciplinary skills in sustainable urban development, combining data analysis and evidence-based research with design. She plans to apply these insights to create holistic urban interventions in collaboration with local government bodies, with the goal of eventually establishing her own integrated practice in her hometown, Kochi.

**Razieh Rafiei** is an Iranian urban planner with several years of professional experience in developing urban projects across different scales, from local to regional. After earning a bachelor's degree in Urban Development Engineering and a master's degree in Urban Planning, Razieh has worked on projects mainly focused on promoting sustainable development in urban regions, developing master plans for urban areas, and community engagement plans for underprivileged neighborhoods.



Due to her passion for climate adaptation and mitigation, Razieh participated in the "Global Youth Climate Training", and she was exposed to innovative concepts, including energy transition partnerships and nature-based climate solutions. This experience inspired her to integrate new aspects of sustainable development into her planning perspective.

Razieh aims to develop critical and strategic thinking and enhance her understanding of climate-sensitive planning by participating in the MURCS program. She believes that this experience will enable her to contribute to creating sustainable habitats. She is eager to participate in projects in collaboration with experts in the field and apply her knowledge to real-world sustainability challenges.



**Nurzhan** is a media management and advocacy professional in urban sustainability and climate from Bishkek, the Kyrgyz Republic. Her scope of expertise comprises air quality, urban mobility, greenery, energy efficiency and waste management. She studied Environmental Management and Sustainable Development at the American University in Central Asia for her bachelor's degree. And have 6 years of working experience in urban and environmental public sector, research and policy-making in Central Asian region. Nurzhan effectively applies communication

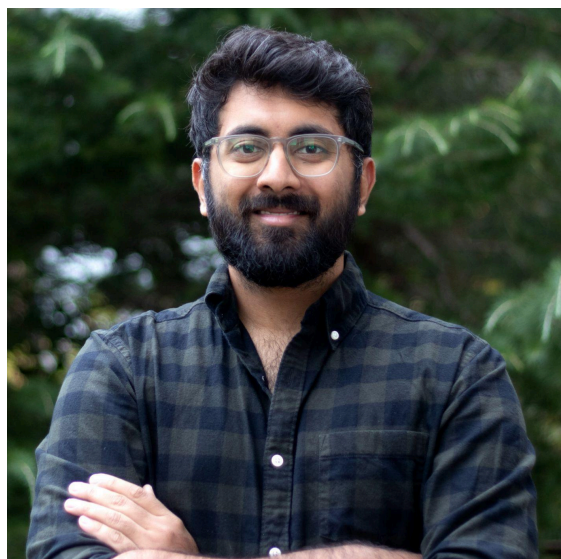


tools to engage the mass media, influencers and decision makers. She also collaborated as an expert with a bunch of international organizations and institutions. Last year, Nurzhan developed a Stakeholder Map on urban development in Bishkek and also successfully realized an urban climate project locally. She gives lectures on urban development and civic engagement for parliamentarians, citizens and students. She was a delegate of her country on international and regional climate conferences as COP 27. In 2023 Nurzhan was awarded by the Central Asian Environmental Award and also awarded by the Bishkek City Council for her urban activities.

**Guilherme** is a professional with a background in Forest Engineering and an MBA in Sustainable Projects and Environmental Innovations. Growing up in a small city in Brazil, he developed an appreciation for nature and its importance to society. This connection to the environment inspired him to pursue a career in the environmental field. He has worked on a variety of projects, including environmental licensing and conservation efforts. He has worked mainly on the native forest inventories planning and execution, and utilizing data analysis to assess ecosystem services across different land uses. His experience also includes conducting other studies related to forestry within environmental licensing processes, such as Degraded Areas Recovery and Environmental Compensation. In these roles, Guilherme has collaborated with public environmental agencies, ensuring that projects met regulatory standards.



Currently, Guilherme is expanding his knowledge through a master's in Urban Climate and Sustainability. This program is broadening his understanding of the challenges and opportunities in urban environments, and he is eager to combine his expertise in forests with urban sustainability practices. His academic and professional journey continues to fuel his passion for contributing to a sustainable future.



**Keshav Suryanarayanan** is an architect with over five years of experience in sustainable development focussed on research, communications, and fundraising. He previously worked at the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP India), an international non-profit that works with cities worldwide to promote sustainable urban transport and create liveable and sustainable cities. His work included conducting research, developing project proposals

and reports for funders, and creating communications strategies and outreach materials.

Keshav was also instrumental in operationalising the Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability (3CS), a unique multidisciplinary research and advocacy centre at Ashoka University. He worked closely with the director and members of the Centre to establish the Centre's focus areas, launch its first set of ambitious research projects, and an inaugural media fellowship aimed at providing financial support to journalists from marginalised communities reporting on the impact of climate change on their communities.

Keshav has a bachelors in architecture from the School of Architecture and Planning, Anna University, Chennai and a post graduate diploma in liberal arts from Ashoka University as part of the prestigious Young India Fellowship programme.