Throughout history, infrastructure played a vital role in enabling urbanisation and facilitating growth and development. It came with the promise of a brighter and healthier future for city dwellers. As our understanding of the complex organism called “city” grows, we begin to realise the often unintended human, environmental, social and economic consequences of an engineering led, single issue focused approach to planning infrastructure. My talk will explore recent thinking and projects that imagine infrastructure as a means to connect places and people in order to create a more sustainable, healthy and resilient future for ourselves in our cities.

Eike is an associate at Arup’s Integrated City Planning unit in London with longstanding experience in leading complex strategic masterplans. He led the design team for Stratford City zones 1 & 2 at the heart of London’s new metropolitan district featured during the Olympic Games in 2012. He also led the masterplanning team for a national food security programme in the Middle East, coordinating multiple disciplines and working closely with government agencies. More recently, he led the development of the Hub Growth and Infrastructure Plan for UK Central which has become the exemplar for new urban development around new Highspeed Stations in the UK. And currently he leads the masterplan for the central area of Ebbsfleet Garden City as well as the masterplanning team for the new Strategic Plan for Sharjah City. Eike believes in a collaborative approach as key to addressing the complex challenges of creating healthy, sustainable and resilient places for people to live, work and enjoy. The title of his talk is “Only Connect”.

Before the first cities came into existence, our ancestors lived in villages. The early cities, such as London, grew out of the conglomerations of villages. Before long, more and more people flocked to the city in the hope for better lives until the city became overcrowded and dirty. Thereby, density became an evil thing, which contributed greatly to the birth of suburbia. Those with the means felt the need to retreat to the countryside so they could have larger houses and have access to larger open spaces.

In recent years, with the advent of the green movement and advancements in almost all aspects of city life, there has been a huge shift whereby people are now leaving suburbia and returning to the city. The future of the city is bright, however, globalization is making most of our major cities looking more and more like one another. Each city must seek a unique identity but how should this identity be achieved? Additionally, as more people make the city their home, the city is becoming dense once again and therefore there will be a need for more open and landscaped spaces that will give people relief from man-made structures. How should we treat our architecture with this in mind?

Prior to founding NAGA ARCHITECTS in 2000, Dr. Naga spent several years in academia, teaching at several universities in the United States and the Middle East; he obtained an architecture license after working with notable architecture offices in the Philadelphia area. Thanks to a well-balanced approach between practice and discipline, NAGA ARCHITECTS has won numerous design awards and has become one of the top A/E firms in the Middle East. The firm has its headquarters in Dubai, and offices in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Riyadh, Doha, and Tripoli. Beyond the Middle East, NAGA has a growing subsidiary in Boston, MA, and has recently opened a branch in Toronto, Canada.” The title of his talk is “Seeking an Identity for the Future City!”