



*The Mayors Challenge
documentation book;
a project to tackle the
housing crisis and
homelessness with the
help of Angelenos.*

contents

Introduction

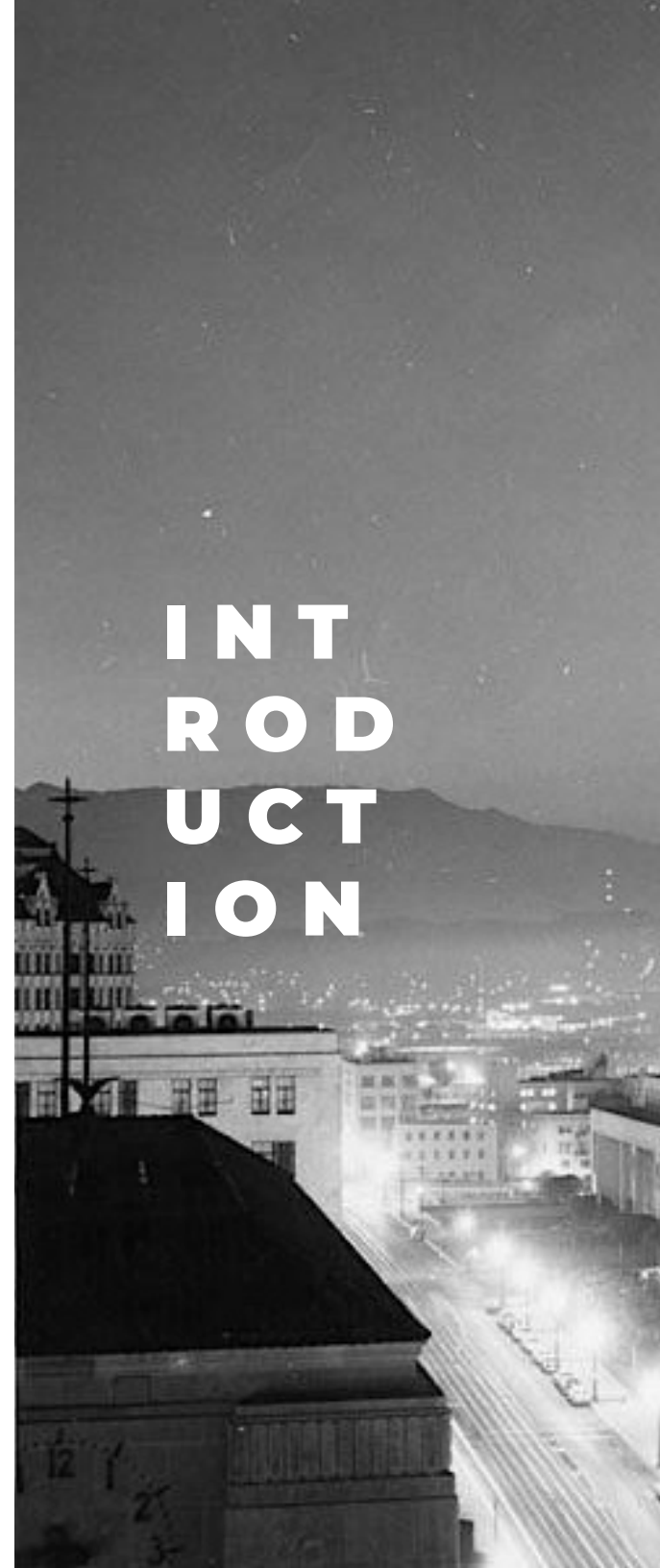
INNOVATION TEAM	05
MAYORS CHALLENGE	06

Design Research

HOMELESS SERVICE PROVIDERS	10
INDIVIDUALS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCES	14
CO CREATION WITH ANGELENOS	20
CANVASSING EXPERIENCE	24
ADU HOMEOWNERS	28

Epilogue

REFLECTIONS	38
MY EXPERIENCE	39
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	40






Los Angeles Mayor's Innovation Team

Funded by the Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Mayor's Innovation Team employs data, analytics, user-centered design, and behavioural science to inform government decision-making. On the 16th floor of City Hall, you meet the highly motivated diverse group of individuals who follow Bloomberg model for civic innovation and community engagement. Mayor's Innovation Team, in Los Angeles, started in 2015, with a startup model through the Bloomberg Innovation Team Grant Program.

ABOUT MAYORS CHALLENGE

In late 2017, the team submitted an idea for research and funds to Mayors Challenge along with the 300 cities.  Mayors Challenge is a countrywide competition between cities, where cities and their partners try to critique the problems citizens encounter everyday and understand how cities could work with their inhabitants to define the future together. In its fourth edition, Mayors Challenge is trying to encourage bold, creative, and impactful ideas that hold the power to solve pressing issues.


The City of LA wanted to tackle two of its biggest issues through this grant. They proposed to use Additional Dwelling Units (ADU) as a tool to alleviate the homelessness  crisis in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles was one of nine winners of the Mayors Challenge, and recieved \$1 Million.

Mayors Challenge awarded \$100,000 grants to 34 cities, to further develop their ideas with field research, agile prototyping, and community engagement. The efforts were directed towards crafting a grant proposal, where the winners would receive \$1 Million by Bloomberg Philanthropies to implement the idea.

“Everyone in L.A. deserves a place to come home to, which is why our new Accessory Dwelling Unit project gives Angelenos the opportunity to help their homeless neighbors get back on their feet.”

*Mayor Eric Garcetti
Los Angeles*



MY FELLOW SHIP EXPECT ATIONS

With my fellowship, I got the opportunity to be part of the core team that defined, researched, and immersed themselves in the topic of interest. I worked with a Project Manager with specialisation in behavioural science, a consultant with specialisation in Additional Dwelling Units and their construction; and I was expected to bring my design research capabilities to the table. Over the period of 14 weeks, my role was to inculcate innovative design methodologies, reflect on our process, and create new avenues through which Angelenos could participate in the creation of the proposal.

As for me, after pushing cubicles for years in corporate offices, I wanted to explore public sector and understand how design may create new avenues for dialogue between the city and its citizens. While juggling these abstract ideas of community engagement, I also wanted to further my interest in alternative research methodologies and find how qualitative data study can redefine the research process.

DES IGN RES EA RCH *Interventions & Activities*

HOME LESS SERVICE PROVID ERS

We conducted two workshops within the same module which gave us more opportunities to learn on the go, and adapt the questions and expectations accordingly. As an introductory session, the workshop was focused on learning from individuals working with homeless individuals. Participated ndividuals worked with young individuals who are going through transitions, and are homeless. The two workshops in this module uncovered the reality that our proposal shouldn't be limited to one sub-population, but should be flexible to cater a larger group of displaced individuals.



What worked for us? What didn't?

Since the number of participants were different in both the workshops, we used the same tools to facilitate the conversation. Apart from keeping us on our toes, it helped us understand how to work with materials at our hands to learn from our participants.

The difference between the two groups was the individuals they worked with; the first group worked with adults(24-years-old to seniors) and the second with youth(children to 24-years-old). The adult group talked about youth being a good fit for a pilot program like ours, which echoed in the other workshops as well. Unfortunately, we couldn't further that discussion as we couldn't bring the two groups together.

METH ODS

UNDERSTANDING BIASES

During the workshop we talked about the visual and social biases, and how they behave as a barrier in house-search of individuals in need.

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

Aforementioned workshops were about building new relationships and starting a cycle of feedback and consultation from providers.

INDIV
IDUALS
WITH
LIVED
EXPERI
ENCE

After we met city employees, service providers, and Angelenos, we wanted to hear from prospective tenants to understand and capture their preferred neighbourhood and landlord. We wanted to refine the details of people and community, in our program, that would be a good fit for our stakeholders. The core aim of the session were: Evaluate their reaction as neighbor, tenant or homeowner to backyard units; Study reactions, to the same situation told in varied ways; Learn residents' preferences in designing a program to house homeless individuals in backyard units.



What worked for us? What didn't?

The session was focused around discussion questions, which were aided with visual materials. These questions gave enough time for participants to speak up and express themselves.

Personally, I feel glad about the fact that after the workshop I could have honest conversations with individuals, and was even hugged.

There were 23 individuals who participated in this activity. Along with the facilitators, organisers, and observers there were approximately 40 individuals. Among all of these people, only a handful talked about their experience.

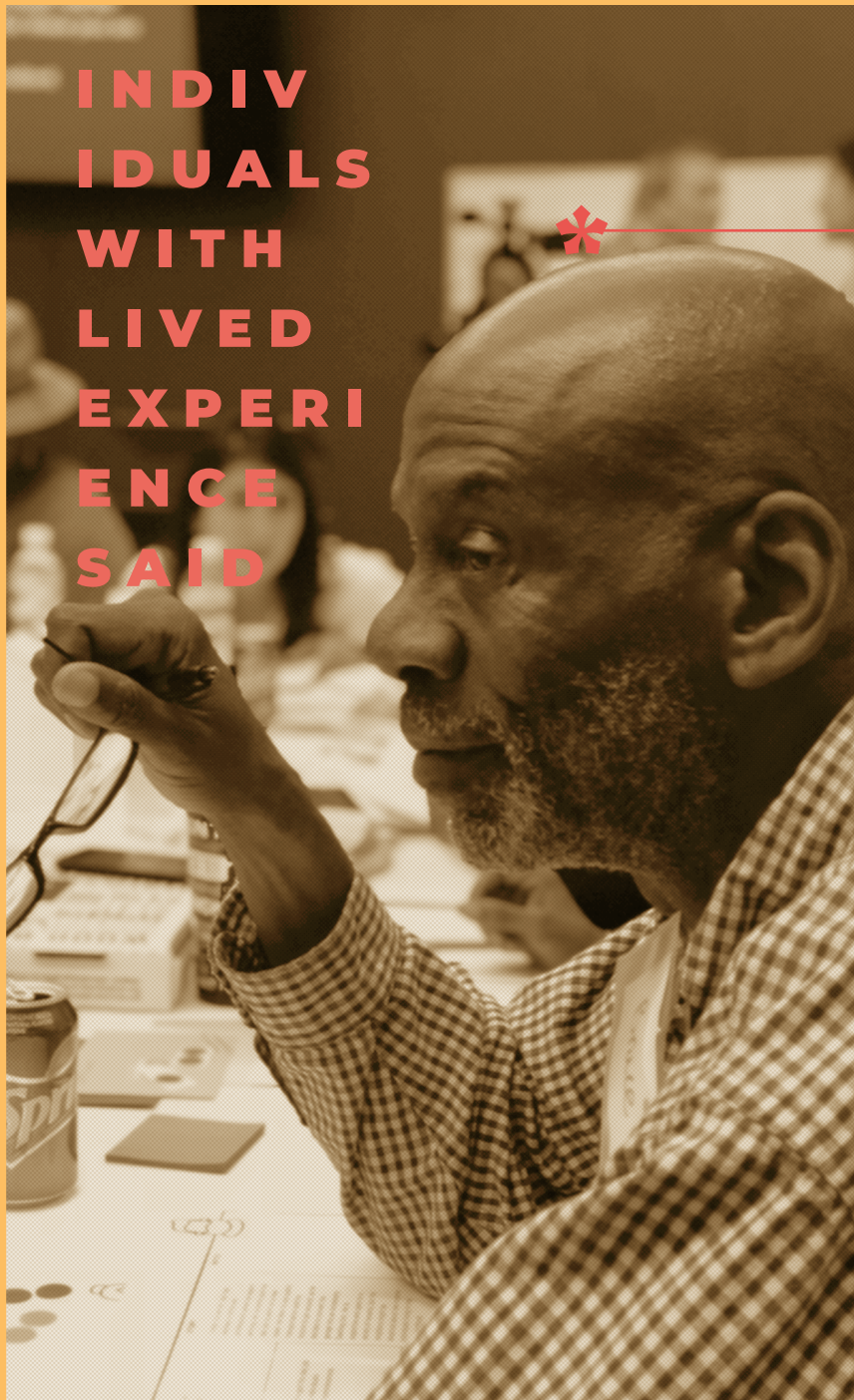
METH ODS

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

The workshop was about building new relationships and starting a cycle of feedback and consultation from providers.

REACTION CARDS

A methodology used to evoke emotions and start a conversation on a desired topic.



INDIVIDUALS
WITH
LIVED
EXPERIENCE
SAID

*“Homelessness
creates horrors”*

*“I don’t want to be where
I am right now, I want
to keep growing.”*

*“You need to decide —for
displaced individuals
— what’s healthy, and
might be unhealthy.”*

*~ All quotes were captured during the workshop
with individuals with lived experiences.*

CO CRE ATION WITH ANGE LENOS

The co-creation workshop was scripted around developing a co-creation activity, where we invited Los Angeles inhabitants through social media. The workshop was open to everyone, whereas the participants in earlier workshops were either selected or called on request. Every interaction/workshop ended with a conversation about how participants would build this program. The aim of this workshop was to do the following: Evaluate if individuals would like to live in backyard unit, and its ideal characteristics; Identify geographic, community, and other features that matter most to a tenant; Identify current and ideal characteristics of landlords for which we should screen.



What worked for us? What didn't?

Everyone who came for the workshop could have been an ideal participant for the program. They were educated individuals that understood the difficulties and issues of homelessness, and were all in favor of helping alleviate these problems.

Because we informed the participants to think in terms of ADU and homelessness, the solutions that came out were more in line with 'validation' than 'innovation'.

METH ODS

REACTION CARDS

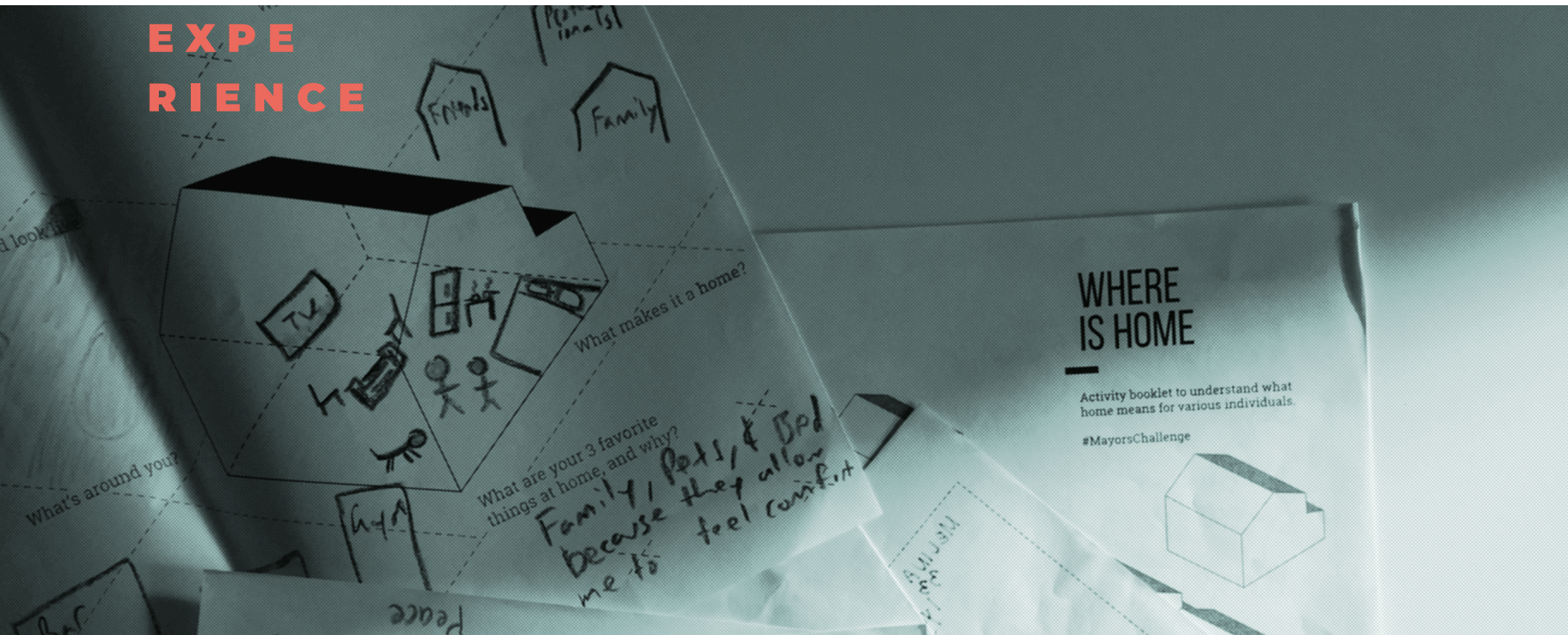
Workshop participants were introduced in 3 groups, then introduced to characters that they had to play and represent during the other exercises.

HACKATHON

The groups were asked to think in a fast-paced style, where they worked together to find out how they can develop a program that would bridge the difference between ADUs and Individuals Experiencing Homelessness.

CANVASSING EXPERIENCE

One part of rapid prototyping, was a one-fold worksheet that investigated objective and subjective aspects of one's feelings and attachments to their home. Using the sheet and crayons, we started building a dialogue with Angelenos as a canvassing project.



What worked for us? What didn't?

We chose to use crayons for these activity sheets, which puts a playful twist to the activity, and encouraged the creator to use a range of colours while expressing themselves.

While I worked in the office while my colleague (Raven) used the worksheets for canvassing across various locations. On one hand I provided a script of questions and directions for the exercise, but I missed a lot of infor because I was not present.

METH ODS

CO-CREATION

The worksheet is based on drawings that we do as kids, where the participants fill in colours and sketch their answers.

STORYTELLING

Each person was asked three subjective and objective questions which prompted them to build their house on the sheet of paper. These questions included things like what's around them and what they think a 'home' is.

Key
Partners

ADU HOME OWNERS

The last focus group was crafted for one of the main stakeholders, who is also a homeowner. We reached out to homeowners through online surveys and started building a conversation. On the day of the focus group we moved through macro to micro questions. The aim of the exercise was to understand the nuances of the ADU building process and its hurdles, the homeowners' preference of individuals living in their ADU, and why Angelenos would be interested in the program.



CONVERSION/
SECTION
ICE

PERMIT FEE WAIVER/
REBATE

...SE?

FREE PERMITTING
ASSISTANCE

What worked for us? What didn't?

The participants believed the focus group was a commendable effort to bridge the gap between the community and city government. They were glad about the city being proactive and careful in developing new programs, and focusing on collaboration.

A large percentage of the participants, shared a perspective that leaned towards financial benefits. A small number were interested in humanitarian approach. Due to the imbalance in representation, the session echoed one perspective rather than developing a dialogue.

METH ODS

REACTION CARDS

We used a set of variables to build a dialogue with participants. The facilitators and participants talked about the individual's choices and their perspective to gain a deeper understanding.

DOT VOTING

A transparent voting system, where users vote and discuss the findings together to reach a consensus on priorities.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

An elaborate review of existing experiences provided by stakeholders to facilitate an organic think-loud.

HOME OWNERS SAID



I want to do it for humanitarian purposes, but it's about business also--- what could be a way to get people off street.

Accessory Dwelling Unit is a positive change.

It's one of the best things City has done in 30 years, but there are barriers.

~ All quotes were captured during the workshop with homeowners.



GRANT APPLI CATION

35 Champion Cities were granted an initial fund of \$100,000 to research and develop their ideas through collaboration, interaction, and prototyping. The effort was directed towards refinement of each city's to prepare for the application of \$5 Million grant. My fellowship lasted for 14 weeks of the research and testing phase, during which I also got the opportunity to help my team brainstorm and work on the final grant application.

Witnessing the transformation of my own research findings in a grant application was the most significant learning experience. At ArtCenter, I have learned research through design. In my internship, I was taught a very important skill; I used the information gathered by the team to propose a plan that is both, pragmatic and humanistic.



EPI LO GUE

REFLECTIONS

This fellowship was an opportunity for me to understand how a public servant and sector enhances the everyday life. Since the governance model in United States is different from India, I had a lot to learn about my new context and its dynamic. Apart from learning and gathering new skills, I also realized the need of changing our contemporary narratives. While working on homelessness, I met individuals who have lived through experiences and been displaced for years. I've seen how providers who work for them, and individuals who work every single day in the City Hall, can make their lives better. Where all aforementioned individuals have a positive outlook on life and their efforts, the ones with skepticism are people who don't want to look at displacement from a different perspective. Everyone with resources and monetary support think that governance has to solve the homelessness crisis. But the reality is the community needs to work together to make our neighbourhoods more welcoming and a better place for all constituents. Through this program, we've tried to do the same and tried to build a platform where Angelenos can come together with the City to create a better tomorrow for everyone.

MY EXPERIENCE

As designers, we work with a variety of individuals, on different problems, and work differently towards the solution. I, for one, approach problem solving through lateral thinking, while working with individuals with linear thinking. Though this experience can be disorienting, my fellowship, taught me the virtue of bringing several thinking styles together to create a meaningful program.

Working in the City Hall for 14 weeks was an enlightening experience because I worked with individuals who are as passionate about social innovation and change as I am. Each day, the Mayors Challenge team came together to work on a program they believe in. As a result, we drafted a program that not only helped Angelenos, but also helped us grow as individuals.

ACK NOW LEDG EME NTS

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Images

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Pg. 03, 04

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Pg 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 28
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Trained as a visual communicator, Nidhi's work explores themes of migration, displacement and cultural hybridisation. She uses visual, digital, and sound media as tools to reflect her perspectives on the relationship of politics and culture. Nidhi explores these topics using alternative research methods, travelling, and engaging in dialogue with people of diverse cultures and experiences. She has used her information and visual design skills in the fields of banking, transportation, health and in the public sector. Currently, she is pursuing an MFA in Media Design Practices at ArtCenter and Editor at Alter Zine.