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### The Essential Youth

There is a **Stuttgart 21** happening in every corner of India in the name of progress. But not a single creative professional has ever marched to protect our falling monuments and to retain the aesthetic and historical values of our cities. The participation of the essential Indian youth is nowhere to be seen. And it will not be seen as long as the corporate blood runs through the veins of our younger generation. Design & People Co-founder **Sethu Das** on Stuttgart 21 and the inertia of our generation.



**"WELCOME** to Stuttgart! These days there is something interesting happening in the streets of white, boring Mercedes Benz city — Stuttgart 21," I was informed by Sandy Kaltenborn, a socially-engaged graphic designer from Germany.

It did not take much time for me to be a part of the massive demonstration by a large number of Germans protesting the Stuttgart 21 project. Many protesters did not know each other, but there were no strangers among them. I too was one among them. Almost everyday thousands of people marched towards Hauptbahnhof, often called Stuttgart Central Station guarded by the constantly-rotating steel Mercedes Benz trademark which replaced the Swastika flag after the fall of the Nazis. On certain days the anti-Stuttgart 21 leadership managed to bring together more than 100,000 people from different parts of the country into the Stuttgart streets protesting the most controversial but the largest urban development project in the country.

Costing not less than 18 billion Euros, mainly from public funds, the Stuttgart 21 rail project has already divided people and land alike. Massive electronic display panels constantly showed impressive 3-dimensional animation at metro stations explaining how the future Stuttgart, once a favorite city of Adolf Hitler for his propaganda would now turn into a favorite destination for Europe's corporate class. While some people gathered around the digital display boards to praise the government initiatives, others continued their debate with fellow passengers and shopkeepers. Every individual had an opinion on the issue. Cops kept a constant vigil on peaceful protesters living in tents in the main square and on the branches of tall trees. On several occasions the protesters were beaten, water-cannoned and pepper sprayed by the police — acts that could only help the protesters to popularise their struggle. The agitations reminded me of the failed attempts of the German people to stop the shipment of radio-active materials being transported to secret storage places some years ago. During the agitation, hundreds of young people chained themselves to the railway tracks to stop the transportation and here at Stuttgart, hundreds of people chained themselves to the trees. Somehow this time the ruling and the corporate class seemed to be united and adamant about constructing the much-debated project that would soon become the 'New Heart of Europe', pumping in financial blood from weaker and poorer European countries.



Music for the Deaf Ears: Every anti-Stuttgart 21 protester carried either a whistle or a drum and every day they walked kilometers to reach their final destination. And for many young people this was their every day routine — giving up their regular work and studies. They did not need introductions to each other as they were united for a common purpose. A photo from the main protest ground near the Stuttgart Central Station. (Photos: Sethu Das)

The city also witnessed massive pro-Stuttgart 21 rallies by people employed with rich German corporate houses. Those who had difficulty understanding the German slogans had no difficulty identifying their marching groups. The pro-Stuttgart 21 marchers appeared different than the marchers who oppose the project. The elegantly-dressed, serious-looking pro-Stuttgart 21 marchers were followed by casually-dressed, cheerful young volunteers of anti-Stuttgart 21 to tie pink ribbons

around bicycles parked in the street. A young anti-Stuttgart 21 volunteer came towards me to apologise for not having reading materials in English. He then distributed posters, stickers and the latest event updates from the main protest venue. As the day turned into night, these young campaigners climbed the massive structures of Schlossplatz Castle Square to paste anti-Stuttgart 21 stickers on state symbols.



Stuttgart Under the Nazis: Adolf Hitler during his visit to Stuttgart in 1938. Behind him is Stuttgart Hauptbahnhof, the Central Railway Station (Photo: From the collection of Geoffrey R Walden). Stuttgart Under the Benz: People march towards Stuttgart Hauptbahnhof to reach the main protest ground. Hauptbahnhof building by Architect Paul Bonatz is considered to be one of the most impressive architectural monuments of Germany (Built: 1913-1927).

Imagine tens of thousands of people blowing their whistles and beating drums announcing their uprising against the corporate takeover of their cities! The well-synchronised music produced by the unknown protesters and the cry of the Golden Deer on top of the Württembergische Kunstverein echoed the entire mountainous valley of Stuttgart warning the inhabitants of a possible ecological and corporate disaster. While anti-riot policemen in helmets and batons roamed the city on their horses, the young volunteers of 'Robin Wood' took their turns to climb 300 ancient trees in the middle of the city to prevent the ignorant authorities from cutting them. "We Are Here To Stay", declared one of the cloth-banners joining two old trees. The young volunteers of Robin Wood seem to be not bothered about the happenings beneath the trees. Every day hundreds of protesters gathered under the trees to show their appreciation to the young army of committed Robin Woods literally living on wooden platforms on top of the trees. The tall trees that look down on a city that might be forced to lead the way to the Heart of Europe project. Every ten minutes a new group of protesters from nearby villages joined the main group with "Stop The Construction Now" placards. Some wanted to protect the trees and their beautiful city while others wanted to prevent the demolition of Paul Bonatz's historical architectural work. The youth of Germany were everywhere and were in control of the entire city.



"We Are Here to Stay": A Robin Wood volunteer on top of an ancient tree. He is stationed on the wooden platform for the last several days and comes down only once or twice a day. The volunteers spend time reading and playing their favorite games on their mobile phones. Rope-operated plastic buckets were used to transport materials from the ground. The selfless acts of the German network of Robin Wood were the biggest hassles to the police than controlling mass protesters on the streets.

Elsewhere similar revolutions were in the making. The dynamics of the latest twitter-controlled uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen and other Arab nations sent out strong signals to military-controlled China, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Myanmar. Everyone wanted to own the latest uprisings. The young revolutionaries and their courageous acts were praised by both Fidel Castro and Barack Obama. The President of Iran stated that the days of similar uprisings in the so-called democratic countries like the United States and UK are not far. Unlike the Solidarity movement of Poland, these movements of the Arab nations had no single leader, but many unknown leaders. Hundreds of courageous and committed young people took themselves to the streets of their capital cities to bring an end to the regimes that ruled them for decades. And in the process many of them had to give up their precious lives. By the time the 'spectators of history' turned on their television sets to watch the latest news headlines, the committed and fearless young people on streets had already achieved the change they wanted to see in their society. Three decades of rule by Hosni Mubarak in Egypt was brought down by people in a matter of just 18 days. Pentagon-backed dictators once again dictated the news headlines but probably for the last time. The Kings and Queens were frightened to see their own subjects marching towards their castles demanding an end to the monarchy. Dictators flew to their divine destinations and sought refuge in their favourite health-resorts and lunatic asylums to spend the rest of their lives. The sweeping changes in the Arab nations reminded us of what Bishop Desmond Tutu said: "Once people decide to be free, there is no force which can stop them."



People Power: "Ludwigsburg Shows Red Card" reads the banner carried by two protesters from the nearby town of Ludwigsburg who walked about 12 kilometers to reach Stuttgart city to join their team members. Behind them an old tree embraced by toys, flowers and handwritten messages.

Some of the most significant social and political changes across Europe and Arab nations were brought in by the youth. Unfortunately in the modern Indian society today, the youth are defined or seen only as a segment of population of a specific age, not as a mindset of a specific age. The inertia of the Indian youth is best understood by Amitava Sanyal, Associate Editor of The Hindustan Times who recently returned to India after being in Egypt during the 18-day turmoil. "The idea of being indignant at scams, lack of infrastructure or even lack of eco-sustainability do not evoke fire in the minds of the people in India. We are simply not indignant enough about our basic rights and, on the other hand, things aren't so bad for the sort of people who can lead such revolts without the support of organised groups or parties," he says.

Probably the only occasion when so much our youth energy was produced and capitalised was during the World Social Forum in January 2004 — at a time when millions of young people from all over the world flew to India, the Mecca of donor-dependent Non-Governmental Organisations. The only achievement of this mega-event other than activists meeting new activists and exchanging their visiting cards was the dramatic display of Indian Communist Party cadres, Greenpeace activists, Tibetan and Burmese refugees and the members of the Indian elite class shouting slogans against their two new common enemies — Globalisation and George Bush! Unfortunately the only winner of this six-day gala affair was the imperialist-funded Ford Foundation. Today the cash-rich foundations and governmental agencies very well know that they are capable of bringing all NGOs under one umbrella with their money power and also use them against any democratic or military regimes anywhere in the world when a political change is necessary.

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**Guarding the Destruction: A policewoman guards the construction site decorated with messages from individuals and organisations united against Stuttgart 21 project. The images of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King were also seen among the thousands of handwritten and printed messages. "Lügenpack" or "Pack of Lies" slogan dominated the walls questioning the Government lies on nation's expenditure. The demolition of the city continues in spite of people's opposition to the urban development project.**

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