

**IFLA 2016**  
53<sup>RD</sup> IFLA WORLD CONGRESS  
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS  
TORINO, ITALY  
APRIL 20<sup>TH</sup> TO 22<sup>ND</sup> , 2016-09-22

**Unification of the fragmented landscapes**  
**For**  
**Achievement of Just & Equal Cities**

Broadly 3 parts:

- (A) The fragmented landscapes
- (B) Achievement of Just & Equal Cities
- (C) Unification by Design

The fragmented landscapes:

1. What concerns me most today is discrimination and exclusion that is leading to the deepening of social fissures across city landscapes. Also, Intolerance is today the hallmark of social and political condition across cities and nations.

Such discord and disharmony is evident in land-use and planning of cities too. Spaces are increasingly being colonized and barricaded in order to achieve exclusivity. Cities are being constantly divided and fragmented into conflicting and contesting spaces.

2. Such, rapidly growing level of intolerance and continuing fragmentation of cities are matters of socio-environmental concern. The current urbanization trend and city making efforts by government's are leading to the production & reproduction of more backyards of filth, neglect, discrimination, inequality and injustice, thus undermining the very idea of cities.
3. As cities are fast expanding, we find public spaces rapidly shrinking, both in physical and democratic terms. This means that space for wider public participation, interaction and dialogue are becoming harder. As a result, there is a phenomenal rise in social and environmental abuse and discontent, wide destruction of natural areas and marginalization of vast populations, thus leading to further slummification of city landscapes.

### **(B1.) Achievement of Just & Equal Cities**

The impact of urban spaces on our lives are so enormous that it becomes necessary to focus on planning & design that shapes and reshapes spaces continuously through multiple plans and projects that are undertaken from time to time by governments and various private agencies.

Moreover, cities are built not merely with physical structures- buildings and infrastructure, but with social and civic capital, for which building inclusive cities is a priority.

As a matter of fact, planning & design are effective democratic tools of social change and therefore must be put to public domain and popularized in order to free it from the shackles of manifold control and exclusivity.

### **(B2.) Popularizing design:**

Designs have to be evolved and put to test. However, in spite of the many contradictions and discrimination rooted in social, cultural, political, religious, caste and gender differences, it is necessary to spear head movements and undertake specific plans and projects that are or have the potential of being effective means for the achievement of equality and justice.

It is only through collective endeavours and social movements that the differences can be discussed and got over or reduced. Open public dialogue and opportunity for all to participate are significant steps towards the deepening of democracy.

(B3.) It is important for people to not merely respond to change but envision change. By claiming participation in planning and design, people would have opportunities to engage in decision making right from inception of plans, deciding the objectives and intent of proposals.

(B4.) It is in this context that I believe that Urban Planning and Design should be considered a 'right' and brought to public dialogue. The democratization of urban planning and design would be a significant step towards the achievement of just and equal cities.

(B5.) Urban planning & design can be oppressive. But on the other hand it can be progressive and liberating. It is our challenge to use planning & design tools to network the disparate spaces and people into a cohesive and accessible city.

(B6.) Claiming 'urban planning and design rights' has to be understood as part of larger movement for claiming "right to the city", as much as other democratic rights movements, enshrined in law. To claim urban planning and design rights is to assert peoples' power over the ways in which our cities are created, with a determination to build socially and environmentally just and democratic cities.

### **(C) Unification by Design:**

A few Examples:

#### (C1) Neighbourhood based development

Considering neighbourhoods as the base for organizing movements facilitates local people's active participation in matters concerning their area, which they know best, while influencing the city's planning and development decisions.

Through a neighbourhood-based development approach it would be possible to decentralize and localize projects and their designs, breaking away from mega monolithic planning & design ideas with enormous investments that impose unbearable burdens on the lives of most people. Neighbourhood based urban planning and design approaches would also facilitate closer interaction between people and their elected representatives.

Importantly, neighbourhood work creates a more collaborative approach to city and place making. The various reclaiming public spaces movements in Mumbai have amply demonstrated the gains of neighbourhood based approach to city development. For citizens, these projects have allowed the immediate reclamation, redesign and re-programming of public space.

Our experience of neighbourhood actions in Mumbai has come to confirm that such initiatives can influence long-term change in ways cities development is understood. As a fact, interventions by citizens of Mumbai, would have never been anticipated by a "master plan" for the city.

#### (C2.) Networking cities within: Irla Nullah Integration Movement

Our central objective of this movement was to bring Juhu together, connecting and networking the various isolated, disparate and fragmented spaces and activities. These include the various open spaces, the Irla nullah itself, gardens, parks, playgrounds, public institutions like colleges, schools, training centres, music, dance and art centres, markets, health-care centres, etc. These connected spaces would also be networked with neighbourhood streets for further integration and accessibility. This effort would nourish community life, neighbourhood engagements and participation, truly symbolizing our democratic aspirations.

#### (C3) Re-envisioning cities – Open Mumbai example

Can we re-envision our cities with a stream of linear open spaces, defining a new geography of cities? Could we break away from large monolithic spaces and geometric structures into fluid stream of linear open spaces, meandering, modulating and negotiating varying city terrains, akin to rives and watercourses? This way the new structure of public spaces would relate to and integrate with many more areas and people across neighbourhoods and the city. Though such an endeavour it would be possible to not only recognize the backyards but also integrate them with the city and turn them into important social and environmental forecourts, thus redefining city landscapes.

### **Conclusion: Democratizing Designs & Cities:**

Every city evolves by itself and has typical challenges. Each neighbourhood has its own unique set of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, best understood by the people who live and have an interest in it. Allowing citizens to utilize this awareness of their neighbourhood will result in a vision best suited to them and to this city. Neighbourhood planning keeping larger, city issues in mind is the way ahead. It will empower local residents and make them responsible for their area development. This will truly be our vision, our desired future for our surroundings and our city.