

INCLUSIVE PLANNING/ NANDITA SHAH

'Developing Inclusive Public Spaces and the Neighbourhoods'

What's been most heartening for me is to see people cutting across class, caste, religion and gender actively engaging with the public open spaces that have been developed through collective and collaborative effort in various neighborhoods of Mumbai, in which I have participated.

These spaces are active political spaces, including being places of public protest against injustice, sexual abuse, violation of rights and various decisions that governments have taken. These places have been spaces where individuals and groups meet, network and express their solidarity against the rapidly shrinking public spaces, in both physical and democratic terms, where space for public dialogue and engagement are rapidly declining.

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Developing public open spaces is indeed a political act. Therefore, I consider public spaces development plans and programs not merely as projects but as movements for bringing about transformative change in the relationships between people and collectively with shared spaces.

What excites me most is the fact that movements for the protection and development of public spaces is an incredible means for building people's organizations and for forging unity, particularly on questions relating to inclusiveness, participation and the achievement of equality in their access to common assets.

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It is through such movements that people, particularly the marginalized and excluded communities would find space and opportunity for their empowerment and organize collective actions against the ongoing process of colonization of public resources, including public spaces that are being actively pursued by the State under the guise of privatization.

After 27 long years of my engagement, in over 30 projects, I have more questions to ask than provide answers, due to the complexity of the present political order.

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I am deeply concerned about the constant division and fragmentation of our cities into disparate spaces and extreme conditions of inequalities—increasing polarisation of people and communities in terms of their religion, race, caste, class, faith, gender, nationality is leading to social instability and tension. Indeed, our cities are producing and reproducing backyards of exclusion, discrimination, hatred, neglect and abuse; In our struggle for the achievement of inclusive spaces, our collective intervention in the excluded, discriminated and much abused backyards of people and places that are, in most instances, situated in the borders, edges, peripheries and margins, is of utmost importance.

It is in these circumstances that our collective intervention is of utmost significance in order to bring about the desired change.

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Planning & design-

For me, planning and design have been effective democratic tools of social change and instruments for mobilizing public movements.

Urban planning & Design as a right-

Democratic Planning and design provide incredible power for forging unification of people and places. It is for this reason that I have been arguing that participation in planning and design ought to be considered a Right.

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Therefore, it is imperative that planners and architects do not work in silos but join people's movements. As a matter of fact, design ideas and programs must evolve through their engagement with movements

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As I said earlier, design process is an effective tool for mobilizing participation and for the achievement of inclusive planning.

Now, I would like to present issues pertaining to Participation, Inclusiveness and Public Dialogue, but through the lens of Planning and Design--

1. Participation and inclusiveness—

For me planning & design has been a Bottom-up process.

Explain -

Participation & Inclusiveness are pre-requisites to any democratic endeavor. But it is often limited due to the imagined and perceived barriers. Gender discrimination too is amongst the multiple forms of exclusion.

Participation alone does not mean much. It is inclusive participation that is important. Participation is often successful within the various divided and polarized communities but not across the divided groups.

Nature of Funding is yet another tool of the achievement of exclusiveness, directly defining the extent of inclusiveness.

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Some of the projects that I have associated with, in fact all of them, are promoted with public funds and executed by public agencies, but with active leadership provided by neighborhood-based citizens movements. Bandra, Carter road, Land's End, Juhu beach, Irla Nullah re-invigoration etc. are funded by several eminent personalities and Members of Parliament, Shabana Azmi, Javed Akhtar, Hema Malini, Dilip Kumar, Priya Dutt, through their MPLad funds.

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CARTER ROAD PROMENADE, BANDRA



These projects are executed by public agencies too. With the active leadership and engagement of neighborhood based organizations, these practices have set-out a higher standard of ethics and transparency. Importantly, demonstrating the need and importance of governments undertaking the responsibility of owning, governing, funding and managing public spaces, along with people's participation.

With localised projects, the planning of cities will hopefully become a bottom-up process with participation of all people. Importantly, neighbourhood-scale work is a more collaborative approach to the city and place-making. For citizens, such projects allow the immediate reclamation, redesign and re-programming of public spaces within their localities.

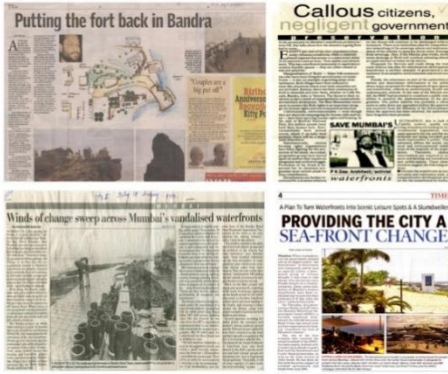
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Interestingly, none of these public space projects would have been possible nor conceived through the formal planning mechanism. Such is the power of any inclusive and participatory process.

2. Second, is an understanding of Public Dialogue and Campaign - Slide 10



The shrinking public spaces, both in physical and democratic terms, has led to curtailment, including absence in most instances, of wider public dialogue. This is alarming.

The larger concern is the politics of hatred and majoritarianism that is commonly perpetuated by exclusive and dominant individuals and groups through these participatory and dialogue processes. Such influences are evident in all public spaces projects, resulting in further polarization of people and places.

Similarly, public dialogue must include the engagement of women too in shaping gender relations and for evolving gender planning and design principles and practice. But, their engagement is often limited, as experienced in all such projects. The few who engage may represent ideas that are contrary to larger democratic principles of equality. Such situations Can be dealt only through wider democratic processes.

Opportunity for adding, changing and modifying the plans and designs are essential for enabling a continuous participation process rather than the production of a well packaged product that calls for an end to participation. A relevant design program ought to account for such development or redevelopment process in the interest of the evolution of an equal, inclusive and gendered space.

Scope for change in the planning and design of public spaces has to be understood as a continuous process if participation has to be sustained. Public spaces development plans and programs must reflect opportunity for continuous dialogue.

Often Architects desire to fill-up the open space that is available, be prescriptive, defining how spaces ought to be habited and used. Such design and development approach impose mental and physical restriction in the realization of freedom of space and their use by different people differently. The liberty to choose is restricted.

The form of plans & design proposals for public spaces, to my mind, ought to be conceived as sets of dialogues—like story-telling and an evolving script. Not an edifice etched in stone, in order to facilitate the participation of larger numbers of people on a continuous basis.

In Conclusion,

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The Key objective is to Re-envision our cities and bring about a transformative Change in the ways by which inclusive, participatory and collective endeavors in city planning and design are pursued, particularly in the development of public spaces. Public spaces planning ought to form the basis of city planning.

Networking open spaces and people across borders is an effective means for the achievement of the objective of de-barricading public spaces and the democratization of the city.

Open and clear for-ever public spaces along with the integration of the much abused and discriminated backyards of people and places will, hopefully, influence socially constructed relations through collective actions in order to-

1. Promote neighborhood-based planning as a basis for city planning.
2. Evolving a non-prescriptive, incomplete and for-ever evolving inclusive public space planning and design program and a participatory implementation model
3. Bringing about gender transformations and the achievement of gendered space.
4. Intervene in order to Challenge the prevailing conditions of inequalities and exclusions towards the achievement of equal, inclusive and gendered cities.
5. Importantly, networking reclaiming public spaces movements with other democratic rights movements across sectors, in order to strengthen each movement and movements beyond borders.