

“Re-Visioning Cities” :
The Integration of Urban Planning & Democracy

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Slide No. The city of Amsterdam is marking the 150th birth anniversary of its illustrious alderman, F.M. Wibaut (1859-1936) with a series of events that includes this Morgen / Tomorrow conference. Let me therefore start with a quote from the mission statement of this conference.

“Wibaut was a headstrong city father who regarded the city as the basis of democracy and as the ideal terrain for the emancipation of the working class to gain a foothold. He was the founding father of social housing and was a champion of modern town planning”.

- 1** I am extremely happy that the city of Amsterdam values what Wibaut said and stood for particularly, important at a time when we are at a critical moment of neo-liberal globalization contradictions and shortcomings.

For me as an architect and deeply engaged in issues relating to cities, the integration of planning and democracy is a significant and challenging objective.

Thus the central idea of my talk is to suggest that planning for our cities must be understood and practiced as a popular democratic function. Planning in all its aspects therefore must be carried out with full knowledge and participation of all the people and simultaneously evolve a process by which this is possible. Thus city planning must be a part of popular public dialogue and interaction at all levels and must be included in the agenda of social and political movements. We must accept planning as an effective democratic tool of social change and an instrument for mobilizing social movements for equality and development justice.

As the chosen perspective of this conference is local practices with inspiring examples of innovative approaches in cities for us to be familiar with successes and failures in everyday practices, I am starting my presentation with one such local example – the movement to reclaim Mumbai’s Waterfronts, a humble beginning but a big step.

A. RECLAIMING MUMBAI’S WATERFRONTS :

- 2 - 5** In the years 2000-2003 a popular citizen’s movement led to a major transformation of nearly 3 kms of Mumbai’s western waterfronts in Bandra. Both the movement and the project are a protest against the abuse, neglect and misuse of public spaces and the waterfronts in particular, also demonstrating ways by which we can expand public spaces through democratic planning and collective governance.

This is also an example to explain how democratic planning and architecture have contributed substantially to social changes. The waterfronts project is an important example in the understanding of our cities’ development models, particularly in the context of privatization of developments under the neo-liberal globalization framework.

The Beginning:

- 5 - 6** The waterfronts project has been a bottom-up process – relying on views from below and active participation of the public.
- 7** The initial plans for the 40 kms of the Western Waterfronts prepared voluntarily by me was widely discussed, popularized and accepted by different neighbourhood residents groups who stood up to own the plan and implement the project.
- The residents filed several Public Interest Litigations too for its implementation.
 - Subsequently the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai & the Govt. accorded recognition.
- 8** Bandra Waterfront's successful implementation popularized the need for protecting the waterfronts of the city and generated a movement for reclaiming public spaces.

Key Aspects of the movement:

- 9** The Mumbai Waterfronts project that I am presenting here is a part of a larger movement for re-claiming public spaces.
- 10** As the city is expanding its public spaces are continuously shrinking.
- 11 - 12** Both the movement and the project is a protest & an intervention against the abuse, neglect and misuse of public spaces and the waterfronts in particular. The movement aims to restore and expand the meager open space- 1.1 sq.mt. per person In comparison London has 31.68 sq.mt/person and New York has 26.4 sq.mt/person.
- 13** Mumbai is a city on the water, but tragically the waterfronts have never been considered an integral part of the city's land mass.
- 14** Our objective is to prepare a comprehensive plan for the city's waterfronts and integrate it with the development of the city.
- 15** Protection of the environment and conservation of the eco-sensitive borders of the city – mangroves, mud-flats, rock- beds, beaches, etc., is also one of the prime objectives.
- 16** The waterfronts project is a precedent for democratic planning and collective action bringing together professionals, neighbourhood citizens, private sponsors and the govt, but with the citizens at the helm.
- 17** Through succinct struggle and collective action, the waterfronts treated as a backyard of and a dumping ground of the city, both physically and metamorphically, are turned into social and cultural forecourts.

Environmental & Social Outcomes:

- 18-34** The project has no grandiose ideas in terms of major constructions allowed on these waterfronts.
- They remain unbarricaded, open & clear forever.
 - We believe that Democracy thrives in the open public spaces where body and mind can be exercised.

What excites me most is that the project stands to challenge:

- The destruction of mangroves
 - Land filling and dumping
 - Pollution of the coast and the waters
 - Encroachments and colonization of public spaces
 - Abuse, misuse & degradation
- 35-38** Apathy & indifference – both of govt. & people
- Youth & public abuse and misbehavior
 - The movement for reclaiming public spaces continues in other areas.
 - Open-spaces is a metaphor for democracy

(B) DEMOCRATIZING PLANNING :

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slide A just and equal city can be developed through larger public participation and the engagement of people's organizations in the development process. Democracy and democratic movements are the means to achieve this objective. Therefore, it is necessary to not only democratize planning and subject it to public reasoning but also to integrate it with other democratic rights movements. This way, we can assess the social worth of our development works and indeed strengthen planning as a significant tool of social change.

I have thus raised a significant number of issues and objectives pertaining to the idea of democratic planning and ways to achieving the same :

1. Popularizing planning and undertaking campaigns for it.
2. Understanding Planning as a movement and a part of larger democratic rights movements.
3. Putting planning in the domain of public knowledge.
4. Promoting planning as a subject of public dialogue
5. Evolving planning decisions through public reasoning.
6. Planners must evolve new languages and democratic practices and function as activists for initiating as well as ensuring the implementation of projects that promotes larger public good.

The understanding of planning in the background of the above issues and objectives is necessary for combating the various adverse situations and crises that our cities are increasingly facing - exclusivity, inequality, injustices and divisive and discriminatory social conditions. The mission document of this conference says "Cities are rolling towards us like tumbling waves. This present problems of-course, but it also offers unique opportunities". My intent is to pursue with democratic planning as an unique opportunity for mobilizing social and political movements and for strengthening the struggles for equality and development justice.

Today planning is highly restricted to technical considerations. At the most it dwells upon statistics of social , economic, geographic and other conditions. Also transportation, services and other infrastructure considerations influence planning decisions. But most of these considerations and objectives are guided by a development idea that is rooted in the market economy of turn-overs and profits primarily for private self- interest.

Today, I am reiterating the significance of democratic planning in order to combat the crises that are increasingly counter-productive to human development and detrimental to the very idea of urbanization and an understanding of cities as being zones of liberation. The crises in cities are. manifest in the following phenomenon :

Expanding cities – Shrinking public spaces :

What we are deeply concerned about is the rapidly shrinking public space in spite of significant expansions and growth of our cities. Democratic space for public participation and dialogue is being deliberately downsized and legitimized by enactment of new laws under the garb of privatization and neo-liberal globalization. Simultaneously we see a fall-out of majority people from the fruits of development. The separation of development from the lives that majority people lead is truly our major concern..

Here I would like to quote Amartya Sen from his book 'Ideas of Justice' – *“The assessment of development cannot be divorced from the lives that people can lead and the real freedom that they enjoy. Development can scarcely be seen merely in terms of enhancement of inanimate objects of convenience, such as a rise in the GNP (or in personal incomes), or industrialization – important as they may be as means to the real ends. Their value must depend on that they do to the lives and freedom of the people involved, which must be central to the idea of development.”*

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“If development is understood in a broader way, with a focus on human lives, then it becomes immediately clear that the relation between development and democracy has to be seen partly in terms of their constitutive connection, rather than only through their external links. Even though the question has often been asked whether political freedom is ‘conducive to development’, we must not miss the crucial recognition that political liberties and democratic rights are among the ‘constituent components’ of development”.

Exclusivity, growing alienation & a state of underdevelopment :

In Mumbai today over 65% - 70% of the city’s population are employed in the informal sector. This means more and more people are excluded from minimum wage standards, job guarantee, insurance cover and so-on This is a reversal of the employment pattern upto the late 80’s wherein nearly 70% were employed in the formal sector.

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Along with high financial turnover and the growth of the city in many ways & where property values are among the highest in the world, the shortfall in housing, amenities and all other social needs have not surprisingly, only increased in Mumbai. Over 50% of the city’s population live in slums, 5% on pavements, 20% in old dilapidated buildings thus adversely impacting human development and quality of life. Simultaneously, lack of comprehensive planning for the city’s growth coupled with self-interest is leading to the lack of social amenities for the majority people.

I would like to reinforce my views by again quoting Amartya Sen again from his book – ‘The ideas of Justice’ - *“Furthermore, we have to go beyond economic growth to understand the fuller demands of development and of the pursuit of social welfare. Attention must be paid to the extensive evidence that democracy and political and civil rights tend to enhance freedoms of other kinds (such as human security) through giving a voice, at least in many circumstances, to the deprived and the vulnerable. that is an important issue, and closely linked with democracy’s role in public reasoning and in fostering ‘government by discussion”.*

Simultaneously, “The relative weakness of Indian social policies on school education, basic healthcare, child nutrition, essential land reform and gender equity reflects deficiencies of politically engaged public reasoning and social pressure (including pressure from the opposition), not just inadequacies in the official thinking of the government”.

47 Since 1990 Government of India has withdrawn from its commitment to socialism and
48 has instead embraced liberalization with the state having backed-out of undertaking
direct responsibility for the promotion of social welfare projects, thereby leading to a
severe short-fall in affordable social welfare services. While investments in health and
education are high. The point is that more and more people are losing opportunity and
access to these high-cost developments thereby, being pushed into a state of under-
development.

49 Similarly, in the housing sector, the private developers and builders are promoting
exclusive high cost housing and promoting the idea of gated communities. In this
process the majority of the city's population clearly do not have access to these projects
and thereby alienated from the development process.

50 Extreme commercialization and domination by the Real-Estate lobby has also lead to the
take-over of open-spaces meant for public use. The Atriums in the malls and multiplexes
are our new public spaces.

Home to 16 million people today, Mumbai with an area of 437 sq.km is unquestionably a victim of unaffordable housing, high-cost transport, domination by real-estate interests and land grab, resulting in lack of open space and absence of comprehensive planning coupled with arbitrary decisions in urban development. This has led to disparate and anarchic growth of the entire city making it an arduous city to live in. There is hardly any need to conclude that Mumbai is in need of urgent socio-economic and physical restructuring.

Ruling Real-Estate threat :

51 Presently, cities world over are considered by the ruling class as an opportunity to build
more to merely increase real estate turnover thus, promoting property driven
development. Real estate development is and has been one of the best means for fast
multiplication and growth of capital. In this situation the understanding of urbanization
is mis-represented and most often limited to the idea of building cities and cities as an
opportunity to build more in order to increase real-estate business. Thus, urbanization
has been the buzz word under the present trend of neo-liberal globalization programmes
and the motto of corporate finance and banking organizations world-over. That
urbanization is a way for achieving better quality life and for the liberation from
oppressive social and economic relations, lack of freedom, oppression and injustices is
consciously avoided by the promoters of the present trend of 'development.'

In Mumbai, in response to crises and adversities, the government and development agencies have only looked at ways to exploit the real estate potential of the city. Real estate turnover, in fact, has been the single largest thrust of Mumbai's development too even at the cost of social amenities, basic infrastructure appraisal and loss of open spaces. Historically too, the politics of the city has been influenced and even controlled by real estate agenda, for example, the Backbay Reclamation, destruction of mangroves, land filling of creeks and mud-flats, dumping along the coastline and unruly changes in land- use and Development Control (D.C.) regulations which go against public good.

This over-whelming real-estate thrust coupled with governments abdicating their responsibility in promoting social welfare is tragically leading to the under-development of social amenities for the majority people thus adversely impacting human development and the deterioration in the quality of life and environment.

Even though today more than 60% of the city's population live on just 8% of the land area and that too illegally in slums the development plan of the city does not have any land reserved for housing of the poor. Significant education and health amenities are given up for the construction and development of real-estate – malls, multiplexes, clubs and high-end gated housing. Instead, we want to Re-Vision our city with expanding, public spaces as the prime focus and reposition the concept of creating more open spaces, affordable housing, access to education and health-care and public transportation into the heart of planning in Mumbai. We want to see the city upside-down, the city not as an opportunity for real-estate turn-over but as a basis for expansion of public spaces.

Reactionary Development plans :

Several attempts at redevelopment, unfortunately, have frequently been fragmented, disparate, contradictory and almost always reactionary. Even though huge investments for better-city infrastructure are now being contemplated, citizens remain spectators to the occurrence around them and are often at the receiving end of such projects. Clearly, this is no way ahead in our efforts to improving the quality of life and environment in the city.

In Mumbai the government has given-up planning for the city in order to not only encourage free market-led development but with an understanding that plans and land-use policies would impose restrictions on private investors and developers. In this situation where the city's growth is un-regulated and public assets including land is taken-over for the promotion of high-return projects thus, displacing social amenities and open-spaces. Instead the government and its various agencies are acting merely as facilities to private agencies and or as contractors when they have to implement certain infrastructure projects directly. This is leading to a in-coherent and anarchic development of the city.

One of the significant aspects of Mumbai' development is densification. Old and dilapidated buildings, entire precincts are now being permitted for redevelopment with 3 to 4 times the present 'Floor Area Ratio' (FAR). This increase in FSI and thereby densification is being permitted due to the pressure by private developers. But in this process there is no planning by the government towards the expansion of services and infrastructure. The private sector in any case is not interested nor involved in investments to up-grade infrastructure back-up for their individual projects. As a result, the entire development is counter-productive. In these densification schemes the provision of adequate open-spaces and improvement of environmental conditions are given a go.

Even while mega-opportunity in real-estate business is available under the densification programme, attempts to land-fill coast-lines, creeks, rivers and ponds, destruction of mangroves, mud-flats, etc., is carried-out continuously for further development. Due to these activities there has been rampant destruction of natural assets and deterioration of environmental condition of the city.

Interestingly, development projects are being announced with great fan-fair, but without their integration and comprehensive planning for city's growth. As a result most often projects are competing and contrary to one and other. This is particularly evident in the case of transportation plans. The recent introduction of under-ground and over-ground metro for different areas is being arbitrarily forced upon the people of Mumbai without its integration with rail, road and motor transportation, thereby furthering congestion, adding to pollution and causing security risk. People across the suburbs are now agitating against the elevated metro proposal in their areas and demanding under-ground instead..

While high cost transportation project are proposed, there is no thought to walking and cycling as an alternate mode of transportation. This is particularly surprising in a situation where more than 40% of travel trips in Mumbai today is by walking.

Proliferating Slums – The Housing question :

53 Housing Debacle – Slums are proliferating, as there isn't enough supply of affordable
54 Housing for the poor. Builders do not target the urban poor as clients, as they do not get the profit they would get from high-income housing. Therefore the gap in housing demand and supply is increasing. Sadly, people have found a solution to their housing problem by living in slums.

'Recognition of slum dwellers' - "Another major factor, which is continuously being refused recognition, is the ability of the people to positively contribute to housing development. In most cities or at least in the poorer areas of cities, the annual investment made by low-income households who are de facto owners of their homes is many times the average investment per house-hold made by city and municipal authorities. This is especially so if a realistic monetary value is given to the labour time they put into improving or extending and reconstructing their homes." (Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1997:267). But governments do not recognize these people as city builders. They usually refuse to recognize their capability and that they are citizens with legitimate rights. The key issue is therefore the question of recognition of the slum-dweller's capabilities and rights and their placing as an integral part of the development process.

Unavailability of Land – The Urban Land Ceiling Act was recently repealed. The government is thus pauperized and cannot carry out projects in public interest and social welfare programmes. The ULC Act, 1976 was passed during the emergency to prevent concentration of urban property in the hands of few and speculation and profit therein, to subserve the common good by ensuring equitable distribution of urban land, to discourage construction of luxury houses leading to conspicuous consumption of scarce building materials, and to secure orderly urbanization. In order to achieve these objectives, a ceiling was placed on ownership and possession of vacant land in urban areas, and the excess land was to be acquired by the government for a nominal payment. `In Mumbai, 1360 hectares of land were identified a surplus under the ULCA, out of which only 213 hectares was acquired by the government. Also, most of the acquired land was not put under effective use and was encroached upon in due course'. Instead of implementing ULCA more stringently, the National government decided to repeal, saying that the repeal would release large tracts of land and depress the inflated property prices. But they failed to mention that the repeal would lead to consequences contrary to the very objectives of framing the Act i.e., ownership in the hands of few, and therefore, speculation.

Skewed SRA Policy – The slum rehabilitation policy is biased towards developers. Often there are forced displacement programmes and trading in slums land. The Shiv Sena – BJP Government in Maharashtra came into power in March 1995. One of the promises given was that of providing free houses to 40 lakh slum-dwellers in Greater Mumbai.

55-56 This was the greatest bluff ever perpetrated on the city’s poor. The scheme depended on private investments and increased the role of developers and builders in providing housing to the poor, the method generally being to allow ‘Incentive FSI’ to the developers who could then make profit by selling the surplus FSI as tenements or in the form of Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) in the open market. A part of this profit could thus be utilized to cover the cost of housing for the slum-dwellers. While a small section of the slum-dwellers, mostly the slum-lords, a large number of elected representatives and the highly opportunistic self-styled leaders were excited by the offer, the majority realized from the very beginning that this was merely a political gimmick. Mr. Bal Thackeray, founder and leader of the Shiv Sena who was also the architect of this scheme of free houses to the slum-dwellers, could not elaborate or how this target would be achieved, nor did he have any definite program to do so. After coming to power, the program was pursued by the Government for implementation. But it failed miserably and as expected, led to serious violations of land and housing rights, including the abuse of human rights. The slum-dwellers have been subject to greater abuse and threat of displacement..

This policy is being proudly continued by the present government led by the Congress and Nationalist Congress coalition. This government has further introduced a host of new concessions to facilitate and appease the developers and reinforce the earlier governments’ oppressive plans and programmes. These clearly do not benefit the slum-dwellers nor the larger interest of the city’s development

Forced Displacements – There are sections of population, which do not come under the SRA scheme. They are sufferers of forced displacements with no rehabilitation policy.

57-62 “The state itself has also come to threaten its own citizens, often as a direct consequence of its commitment to the project of development, which has regularly placed enormous burdens on those people least able to defend themselves,” Sunil Khilnani

57-62 **Alternatives :** The Chandivali Rehabilitation example involving over 20,000 families originally residing in slums in the Borivali National Park.

(C) **DEMOCRATIC PLANNING PRACTICES - The ‘Vision Juhu’ movement :**

Let me present yet another significant movement in Mumbai by which an entire neighbourhood planning through collective initiative and citizen’s participation has been possible. The “Vision Juhu” plan reinforces the idea of expanding public spaces through comprehensive democratic planning; thus providing directions for evolving a vision plan for the entire city.

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Hence the Juhu example is a significant step. From the waterfronts’ project, we have learnt that networking public spaces means networking of the social and cultural life of the city in which all the people have equal access. From the waterfronts we move forward to neighbourhoods and the entire city with an objective of expanding and democratizing public spaces.

Highlights of this movement and the plan are summarized as follows:

- 1 The understanding of “Planning together” as a popular democratic function.
- 2 Integration of planning with other democratic rights movements.
- 3 Evolving models for effective public participation & dialogue amongst all the people.
- 4 Relate planning with daily life experiences and problems in order to influence social changes and promote human development.
- 5 Campaign to popularize planning – leaflets, exhibitions, talks, conferences, meetings.
- 6 Using Plans as an instruments for the mobilization of collective movements.
- 7 Neighbourhood planning as a basis for city development.
- 8 Include planning in the agenda of social, political and environmental movements including in election manifestoes & campaigns.
- 9 Evolving new urban planning practices

(D) RE-VISIONING CITIES – EXPANDING PUBLIC SPACES :

There is a need for comprehensive planning with the thrust being on protecting and expanding public spaces. We need to integrate open spaces for leisure, recreation, social and cultural activity. We need to include and improve several amenities like education, health, markets, roadside stalls, hawkers and public transportation thus, expanding our notion of the public realm. This expansion of the public realm will help enrich the quality of life and environmental conditions in both our natural and built surroundings and contribute to human development.

In terms of physical planning, our aim is to develop contiguous open spaces by interconnecting various areas open to the public. This would promote conditions for neighborhood engagements and participation. With public space being the main planning criteria, we aim to bring about a social change i.e., promote collective culture and root out alienation and a false sense of freedom and individual gratification promoted by the free-market. By achieving intensive levels of citizens’ participation we wish to influence governments to devise comprehensive plans and integrate disparate developments truly symbolizing our democratic aspirations. This is a significant way to rebuild our cities as humane and environmentally sustainable places thus, enhancing the quality and dignity of public life.

Our passive approach towards mega expansion plans and ‘city up-gradation’ based on real-estate agenda clearly needs to change. It is time to work proactively building strong social forces and working along with the various government organizations to find solutions to daily problems relating to the city’s amenities and infrastructure. Mumbai as much as many cities across the world, has evolved by itself and every area has typical challenges. Each neighborhood 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 neighborhood will result in a vision best suited to them and to the city. ‘Neighborhood Planning’ keeping larger, city issues and urbanization trend in view is the way ahead.

Ideas of ‘Wibaut’, Geddes and others – likes of Lewis Mumford are significant and must be pursued with deeper analysis for understanding their application in today’s complex geo-political conditions. Geddes pioneered the idea of a sociological approach towards urbanization. Wibaut saw cities as the basis for democracy.

Thus our challenge is to democratize planning and its integration with other democratic rights movements in pursuit of social welfare and city development, social processes and spatial form being intimately related. “It is hard to escape the general conclusion that economic performance, social opportunity, political voice and public reasoning are all deeply interrelated”. We planners have to invest our time and thoughts in developing ideas about planning as an effective democratic tool for achieving social and development justice and as an instrument for mobilizing public-action.

75 Planning and architecture are an effective democratic tool of social change and
76 instrument for mobilizing collective movements. Cities are not spaces for competition or
77 for individual, disparate efforts. To me they are a fantastic opportunity for forging
collective and co-operative effort. Larger public participation and engagement of
people’s organizations in the development process truly helps develop a city and
planning and architecture should integrate with it for enabling social changes and
achieving development justice.

Thus, ‘Together we plan’ to expand our public spaces, set a model for an integrated development plan and democratic practices to achieve equality and justice. This is truly our vision, our desired future for our surroundings and our cities.

78 **Thank you** : I would like to thank the people of Amsterdam and the organizers of this
conference in particular, to have given me this opportunity to share some of my thoughts
and experiences.

