

‘Making Cities Together’:

Inclusive, Safe and Accessible Public Spaces

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I speak here from my experiences in urban planning and Place making movements in Mumbai. Broadly divided into three areas of activity – Integrating public spaces & natural areas; demanding housing for all including redevelopment of slums; and popularizing urban planning and design practices. Such classification does not in any way suggest that these issues are independent of each other. I am mentioning them separately only to be able to provide easy explanation in short term, in spite of the many limitations such an approach may entail.

I begin by setting out some of the objectives of Place making and then evaluating their impact on social, cultural and environmental development. For this purpose I would like to choose for discussion just **two of the many objectives that this effort entail,**

1. Re-envisioning cities and

2. Public spaces being the basis of city planning

I. RE-ENVISIONING CITIES:

Few important objectives are;

1. STITCHING THE FRAGMENTS

Urban planning and place making in particular has the power if undertaken through democratic movements, to stitch together the disparate city fragments and enable the sharing of resources. **It is in this context place making achieves significance as an instrument for building resistances to the current phenomenon of fragmentation of cities and for bringing about much needed socio-environmental change towards unification & equity.**

Sadly, Current urbanization is producing more backyards than ever before – backyards of neglect, filth, discrimination exclusion and abuse. It is due to this reason that urban planning and place making as a right is critical for the achievement of democratic cities.

2. SHARING LAND AND RESOURCES

Urban planning is a significant aspect of development agenda as it most directly deals with land and various other resources. **While issues relating to equity in land and land use are addressed through urban planning and backed place making, the adverse land-person ratio in most cities demands the consideration and achievement of collective ownership and sharing as an inevitable condition.**

Collective ownership and sharing are therefore important in the larger interest of democratizing cities and the achievement of “Right to the city” objective. Implicit in the demand for collective ownership and sharing of all resources is the achievement of certain key principles of

democracy, liberty i.e. equality and fraternity- implying solidarity of the excluded and discriminated people in particular, mutual respect, trust and support. **Such aspirations can be partially if not fully fulfilled by excercising place making right.**

II. PUBLIC SPACES DESIGN FORMS THE BASIS OF CITY PLANNING

In terms of physical planning, our aim is to develop contiguous open spaces by interconnecting various facets of areas open to the public. This would develop a green spine throughout our city and its various localities, nourishing community life, neighbourhood 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 individual gratification promoted by the market. By achieving intensive levels of citizen's participation we wish to influence governments to devise comprehensive plans and integrate disparate developments. The 'open and clear forever' public space policy will truly symbolize our democratic aspirations. This is a significant way to rebuild cities as being humane and environmentally sustainable, clearly enhancing the quality and dignity of public life.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC SPACES DESIGN :

A. INCLUSIVENESS:

Some key aspects being;

1. POPULARISING PLACE MAKING

It is necessary to carry out extensive campaigns and public dialogue to popularize and democratize place making.

In practice, success of any right ought to be assessed by its ability to constantly encourage, rather instigate questioning and instilling critical thinking of the fast growing authoritarian and sectarian regimes. The people in various neighbourhoods and the city can achieve this objective of critical engagement through a process of participation and collective struggle on matters relating to place making.

2. TURNING BACKYARDS INTO PROUD SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORECOURTS.

In 2012, the citizens of Juhu along with this author launched a significant movement for the conservation and integration of over four kilometres of 'Irla Nullah' in their neighbourhood of Juhu, Mumbai. Municipal authorities wondered why this was of any importance. But the movement continued with determination, backed by substantive survey, data and design details. Comprehensive plans and implementation programs were drawn up through citizen's active participation. Meetings

were held in several public places and posters and a book were published.

Our central objective of this movement was to bring Juhu together- people and places. Connecting and networking the various isolated, disparate and fragmented spaces and activities. In order to nourish community life, neighbourhood engagements and participation, truly symbolizing our democratic aspirations.

B. ACCESSIBILITY:
Few key aspects being;

1. ACTING LOCALLY THINKING GLOBALLY

Neighbourhood based city development:

Through a neighbourhood-based development approach it would be possible to decentralize and localize projects and their designs, breaking away from mega-monolithic planning and 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, it creates a more collaborative approach to city and place making. The various ‘reclaiming public spaces movements’ in Mumbai have allowed the immediate reclamation, redesign and re-programming of public space.

Our experience of neighbourhood actions in Mumbai has come to confirm that interventions by citizens as in Bandra, Juhu and other areas of Mumbai, would never have been anticipated by a master plan for the city.

2. MAPPING URBAN LANDSCAPES

Collective mapping of urban landscapes is crucial for taking stock of our land and resources and achieving open data. Mapping is a socio-political act and must be understood as such in order to enable wider participation.

Such an act would also mandate wider public dialogue into historical evidences and studies, while evolving alternate plans for now and the future.

Maps are an insight into a nation's progress. Not maps that define national boundaries, but maps that define cities and neighbourhoods. Maps that reveal the resources we have and how we share them. And the resources we may have lost.

Open spaces, water bodies, vegetation, and wildlife. Maps that make us vigilant and protective.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion I would like to state that,

DEEPENING DEMOCRACY THROUGH URBAN PLANNING AND PLACE MAKING RIGHT IS OUR SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT OBJECTIVE.

For me, urban planning and place making are incredible democratic tools of socio-political change for the achievement of equality and justice-legal, socio-economic and environmental, above all political towards the achievement of a new democratic order. This is a right that not only has the power to script democratic endeavours, but influence transformations towards a sustainable urban ecology.

No individual democratic right would work and be successful by itself. Every right is inextricably linked with one another. Such intimate relationship between different rights creates conditions in which others strengthen individual rights.

This is true for urban planning and place making right too. Their integration with other rights movements is inevitable rather a mandatory condition.

THANK YOU