

Abstract

**REVISIONING MUMBAI:
DEMOCRATISING PUBLIC SPACES**

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1. I was a student with Mumbai's University, studying architecture in Sir. J.J. College of Architecture. One thing that I certainly learnt through my tenure in college is an understanding of what not to learn. That is my relationship with formal education. But I have another mere interesting relationship with the University – Some Professors and me have a mutual admiration society. So I have been invited to speak here. Thank you.
2. _____ of the universities limits with the city.
- BUTUC & students movements example.
3. Power Point presentation – Learnt through my practice so please bear with me a few sexy visuals – won't disclose what these visuals are.

Mumbai is an expanding city with diminishing space.

Democratic space is sharply declining inspite of rapid `growth` and `development` of the city. This decline is manifested and experienced in many ways including the deteriorating state of public-spaces and quality of life that is adversely affecting our lives and relationships at all levels. Recent trends in the development of our city is rather disturbing, the city is being fragmented with exclusive and competing spaces thus restraining the growth of the city and its people.

There is an urgent need to arrest this decline and to democratize public-space. This is to pave-way for participation of all the people to undertake inclusive development of the city and to bring-to surface, the views from below. [**detail – explain influencing voices and class discrimination**]

The growth of Mumbai and the developments here have been significant to the country. Thus, the make-over of Mumbai to a global city has been our P.M's wish along with the entire ruling class. Government's plans and policies since the early 90's has been roofed in privatization , corporatization & globalization have continuously reflected this trend. Transforming Mumbai from a manufacturing hub to an international banking, finance and trading centre has been the mainstream agenda. The phenomenal rise in investments and turn-over in real-estate business in particular is a reflection of this exclusive endeavor.

These developments have been possible due to a major political shift by our Nation State from the commitments of a post-independent socialist state to neo-liberalization. (1) Privatization of all developments including public housing, social amenities, infrastructure has been the thrust with reliance on market-led development.

(2) Our governments and the govt. of Maharashtra in particular have given-up planning for the development of our cities and towns in order to provide un-hindered opportunity to the free market forces. In Mumbai the MMRDA itself has given-up its role as a planning agency and instead turned into a agency broking development and construction deals with private builders and developer. The government is itself engaged in short-term real-estate business at the cost of developing of the city . The governments connivance with the mill-owners in undermining a cohesive and comprehensive plan for the development of mill's land is a good recent example. Slums redevelopment scheme and cessed buildings reconstruction are other examples of this development anarchy. The cessed buildings reconstruction along with slums redevelopment has led to unprecedented levels of displacement and generated a constant state of terror and uncertainty amongst the over 7.5 million people living in the slums and cessed developed buildings.

– explain tenancy and slums land ownership. Conversion of housing reserved sites to commercial use and the most recent take-overs of housing colonies including those (land) in the D.P. of the city owned by the government– explains the extent of unplanned growth that this city is witnessing. Many of us are indeed 'enamored ' and 'pleased ' with such 'exclusive' mega projects in Mumbai – particularly the malls, multiplexes and upper segment housing – the provision of exclusive, self-contained gated communities . **Explain.** New Notions of public-spaces find reflections in the atriums of these malls and multiplexes.

(3) On the other hand our governments have backed out of their responsibility to carry-out social development work and are merely, facilitating private enterprises for their business expansions and profits. Authoritarian and often fascist acts of our democratically elected governments have alienated the majority people from the main stream development programmes and projects. Here let me express my total disagreement with Dr.Gurucharan Das when he insists that the govt. should not carry-out projects themselves but facilitate growth. The question is about 'growth', for whom and for what kind? Marginalization of more and more people from the development benefits leading to poverty and social decadence including violence is growth? This cannot be stopped until he government represents and undertakes social development programmes and projects.

The irrelevance of the present Development Plan (DP) for our city is yet another example of the governments apathy and lack of concern for planning and people-oriented development of the city. Our failure in providing affordable low-priced mass housing and land for it has been primarily due to this lop-sided land-use plan and the government's active conscience with private business interests . As we know slums occupy a mere 8% of the city's land-mass or occupy land area equivalent to 16% of the land reserved for housing. Our D.P. does not have any land reserved exclusively for housing the working class and the poor who constitute over 60% – 70% of the city's population.

Instead of planning for the city's development, the govt. is pre-occupied with the tinkering of the D.C. Regulations. The DP also lacks land for social infrastructure **explain**. Changes and amendments of the DCR benefits the **(4) Real-estate interest**. The influence of the real-estate business over the state government in particular is historical. In fact the politics of this city has been continuously influenced and moulded by the Real-estate business. Even at the cost of social development and people's access to housing, amenities, open-spaces and so-on. I would say that the politics of our government's is rooted in the real-estate agenda.

(5) Public (detail – recent plans for gardens development) assets including open-spaces, are being systematically depleted for private profiteering.

(6) There is rampant destruction of our natural environment, **explain** **(7) the lack of concern for preservation and conservation of heritage buildings and precincts,** **(8) abuse of native fishing communities,** **(9) violent and forced displacements,** etc., are pushing us to a state of uncertainty and instability. Gated developments marketing self-sufficient life-styles are the new trends in real-estate development offering, a get-away from this degeneration and degraded quality of life and environment in the city . The situation arising from these conditions is leading to slow but steady death of human-rights, security, stability , dignity, equality and social justice thus steadily leading us to a state of under-development .

During this systematic and planned onslaught of public-good, there has been a good number of examples of public-action and protracted struggles in the city. The movement of the people of Bandra and Juhu in reclaiming public-space, particularly the water-front, is one important example. **(10) Co-operative effort** – The successful implementation of the water-front projects and their subsequent management and maintenance through collective and co-operative effort stands to challenge the depletion and colonization of public space in the city. To my mind, cities cannot be seen as a situation of competing spaces but has to be understood as an opportunity for co-operation and co-operative action.

(11) Bandra Project details – (11a) The success of the Bandstand and Carter Road projects throws up a number of larger issues pertaining to the promotion of an all inclusive planning and design process with citizens' participation. One must reflect on the role of the architect and other professionals in planning and development for the public interest. **(11 b)** Significantly, professionals from various fields brought their expertise to the Bandra project. Architects, conservationists, engineers, /environmentalists, historians and sociologists have been involved in the planning and the management. One of the reasons for the success of the projects in Bandra can, to a large extent, be attributed to the dialogue and understanding between the professionals and the active community while evolving a dynamic practice for its

Bottom-up approach
implementation. **(11 c)** An initial design prepared by Das was used only to attract the attention and bring together the interested neighbourhood citizens for a discussion of issues concerning public space and the reworking of the waterfront. People then began to understand the different social dimensions of the project and to contribute their views. They were able to comprehend the physicality of the project and the important changes it would bring to their environment and life. Regular discussions of the design and other aspects of its implementation became more and more engaging as more and more people got attracted and involved in this project.

This process whereby a design evolves as a result of peoples' participation, is extremely important. It is also important, in our view, for an architect to realize the significance of strengthening citizens' movements with democratic planning and design ideas and translating their needs and demands to popular forms of spaces and structures. The architect, therefore, needs to undertake a larger responsibility, to play the role of an activist, and to relate design with larger and more important factors of social and political importance. It is only in this way that the initial design ideas, which might be shaped by individual fancies and limited design objectives, get firmly rooted in the social and cultural framework of popular demands. **(11 d)** In the words of Lewis Mumford, who wrote with reference to his own book titled, 'The Highway and the City' that "Perhaps the best reason for bringing out this book now is that it may still further widen the circle of public discussion, and thus prepare the ground for a more humane order of building and living than that which a money-centered and power-intoxicated economy has seen fit to impose." It is this concern with humane architecture and democratic living that underpins our struggle to beautify and humanize the landscape of Mumbai.

Conclusion : Similar and many more movements led by different sections and based on different aspects of our city through successful networking can bring to the surface the views from below. It is necessary to propagate the culture of (12) public dialogues and protests in order to democratize our public spaces. (13) “Public action can play a central role in economic development and in bringing social opportunities within the reach of the people as a whole. (Sen and Dreze, 1998:38). What the government ends up doing can be deeply influenced by the pressures that are put on the government by the public” (Sen and Dreze, 1998: 39). **IMP.** There needs to be a paradigm shift in the governments role (and not back-out or operate as facilitator) for development of social-welfare projects including the conservation and development of public spaces. This coupled with movements – active public dialogues and public action will strengthen and further high democratic values. Bandra and Juhu movements have to some extent achieved some of these ideas and allowed us to revision Mumbai.

