

Urban Age South America Conference, Sao Paulo, Brazil, December 2008

Mumbai Waterfronts Project

(As delivered on 4th Dec. 2008)

Key Aspects:

- The Mumbai Waterfronts project that I am presenting here is a part of a larger movement for re-claiming public spaces.
- As the city is expanding its public space is continuously shrinking.
- Both the movement and the project is a protest or 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- 0.25 ac / 1000 people.
- Mumbai is a city on the water, but the waterfronts have never been considered an integral part of the city's land mass.
- Our objective is to prepare a comprehensive plan for the city's waterfronts, integrate it with the development of the city.
- To begin, we have addressed the western waterfronts – nearly 40 kms, the Bandra project being approx. 4 kms.
- Protection of the environment and conservation of the eco-sensitive borders of the city is also one of the prime objectives.
- The waterfronts project is a precedent for democratic planning and collective action bringing together professionals, neighbourhood citizens, private sponsors and the govt, BVT with the citizens at the helm.
- 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 proposed to turn into provisional social and cultural forecourts.

The Beginning:

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

Environmental & Social Outcomes:

- 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 space
 - Abuse, misuse & degradation
 - Apathy & indifference – both of govt. & people
 - Youth & public behaviour
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- With effective public action and neighbourhood residents determination, the Bandra Waterfronts remains under collective control and are safe and well maintained – Governance Models
 - Funding- the locals of the area commemorate this victory with festivals like the Bandra Festival. Darryl is the President.

Key Lessons/In Conclusion:

- The waterfronts have to be understood as a part of the open space network and the open spaces must be integrated to the larger development plan of cities.
- As a matter of fact can we look at the physical plans and developments within our cities differently, from the present obsession of real estate and construction turnover?
- Can we expand and re-imagine the public-realm by improving quality of life and by not how much more we can build? Eg. - The Juhu Vision Plan
- I believe in Planning & Design being an effective democratic tool for mobilizing public action and for bringing about needed social change.
- Can we consider public space as a metaphor for Democracy?
- The Movement continues.