Participatory Spatial Planning for Regeneration of Historic Inner City areas

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Introduction
The historic cores of Indian cities, once the driving force of growth and economic, social, cultural and aesthetic development of the city, now face an uncertain future. These areas have started showing a “Ghetto”-isation of the poor, unbearable densities, lack of open spaces, deteriorating living conditions, disintegrating built heritage and difficulties in securing land for public use/housing. The heritage monuments at the heart of the historic core, though officially protected, are usually neglected by the government. Frequently, the structures are occupied by squatters and both the monument and any open land attached to it faces extreme pressure from developers as they are located at the heart of densely populated urban areas.

In a country where a sizeable part of society is still trying to deal with poverty, most people rarely think about cultural heritage and the need to save it. However cultural heritage is potential for tourism and the resultant economic benefits of tourism gives it an importance that supercedes its cultural and historical value. So as more and more monuments and heritage areas start being considered valuable, conservationists and local governments enforce more and more planning and legislative means to protect them.

On the other hand, developers and entrepreneurs see this sort of conservation planning as preventing and inhibiting the natural growth and change of urban areas, considered an essential part of modern life. This is particularly the case where city business centres coincide with historical cores. So, “the conflict becomes one of whether the historic city is a reserve for heritage, or an area of economic vitality, where the potential of sites is exploited for better economic functioning of the city with minimum impediment to inevitable and desirable change” (Dastidar, 2004). However the real value of historic inner city areas lies in neither its tourism potential nor its value as real estate. It lies in the fact that they are a storehouse for the cultural capital of entire countries. “The colonisation of our cultures is being done by the process of globalisation whereby the cultural values of the economically dominant overwhelm all others, producing sameness the world over” (UMP, 2001 p.107-108).

Herein lies the true necessity for protecting cultural heritage even though protection of historical buildings of redundant function is seen as preventing the development of modern facilities required for a ‘world class city’. In this pursuit of the ubiquitous dream of a ‘world class city’, heritage structures are being razed all over India and cities redeveloped to conform to a ‘modern’ global model devoid of cultural identity.

Social Injustice
“Planners have little understanding about how the poor survive. A s a result, urban plans and policies generally have little relevance to the situation which the poor face and may well make it far worse” (Rakodi, 1993). It is precisely this lack of understanding that results in Regeneration/ Revitalization schemes that demolish the squatter settlements of the very poor, considered unsightly and detrimental to both tourism and economic redevelopment. Forced evictions in Indian cities, however, rarely provide for re-location and rehabilitation, and when they do, it is badly planned and sometimes never executed at all. Cities like Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bhopal and Kolkata provide numerous examples of local authorities herding evicted squatters like cattle from the city centre to the edge of the city where they are provided with compensatory land which is too far away from their means of livelihood.

Also, the historic structures in the heart of cities are usually surrounded by street markets, some so old that they have become part of the cultural identity of the city. Growth and development in the historic inner city areas are supposed to be controlled, especially in the vicinity of protected monuments. Thus city beautification and clean-up drives regularly target pavement stalls, street hawkers and other informal services and shops that are an integral part of all Indian cities. So the people running the informal markets and living in the informal settlements of the historic core endure an uncertain existence, constantly vulnerable to forced evictions, living with the perpetual spectre of loss of shelter and livelihood.
There are other kinds of social disruptions for inhabitants of inner city areas. As revitalization and regeneration gradually start making inner city areas expensive to live in, residents find they are unable to pay the increased rents, taxes and services and are then forced to sell-out. This phenomenon has been termed “Gentrification”. This is a commonly observed phenomenon in many European cities undergoing regeneration. However, the gradual forcing out of communities from city centres has now started in India as well, notably in Mumbai. Thus, whether it is for the revitalization of cultural heritage or economic redevelopment – physical planning for historic inner cities may result in traumatic dislocation and changes for local communities, whether they are part of the formal or informal sector.

**Spatial Conflict**

So we see a three way conflict here for physical planning/land use between the conservation/tourism lobby, the commercial developers lobby and the low-income communities who live and/or work in the historic cores of Indian cities. This spatial conflict is directly reflected in the values/attributes of a place as perceived by the conflicting actors.

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**Differing Values of Place**

Mahyar Arefi and Menelaos Triantafillou have discussed the different connotations of place in their article ‘Reflections on the Pedagogy of Place in Planning and Urban Design’. The first ontological construct they present is that of a place being a set of ‘visual attributes’ that is explained through the ‘image’ that its users have of it. The second ontology is of place as a finite artefact or ‘product’ that is explained through its spatial characteristics and ‘physical construct’. The third ontology is of place as an ongoing ‘process’ of inter-related social, economic, political and cultural factors that turns its spatial aspect into a function of changing events in time. The fourth and final construct that Arefi and Triantafillou present is of place as ‘meaning’ or the meaning of a place. The fourth ontology covers all the intangible aspects of a place that are closely related to its user’s experiences, memories and attachments (Dastidar, 2006). The sense of ‘place’ in a historic inner city area can mean different things to different people. However, as far as the immediate spatial conflict is concerned, the predominant values of each actor can be identified.

For the conservationist or organizations promoting tourism the most important values of a historic area is of its ‘visual attributes’, the features that make it instantly recognizable. This aspect is closely tied to the preservation and marketing of that area as a ‘product’ or urban artefact. Both of these are fairly static values that conflict with the commercial interests of those actors most interested in economic regeneration. For this group, the primary value of an urban area (any urban area) lies in its ‘process’, specifically its capacity to keep changing and developing so as to create a climate for new opportunities and investments. For local communities whose security of housing and livelihood are directly connected to inner city areas, ‘meaning’ or sense of place may be most importance. Since their life experiences, feelings of security, territory and well-being are so closely intertwined with these areas, their understanding of the local socio-economic and socio-cultural situation may be beyond that of the physical.

**Common Interests?**

The key problem with assigning motives is that a certain amount of generalization is carried out for actors and issues. Interests of actual individuals are considerably more complex in real life as the groups of actors are not homogenous in composition. The planning outcomes desired by stakeholders in inner city areas may overlap even when their reasons do not. So we see that conservationists may place a lot of importance on the meaning of a place and its cultural heritage, sometimes more than the residents themselves. Local residents may actively welcome economic redevelop-
ment because increased land prices or improved infrastructure benefits them. Similarly developers may find that preserving part of the cultural heritage increases land prices due to its visual attributes.

Like all stakeholders, the street hawkers, pavement dwellers and other actors in the local informal economy also benefit from increased tourism and economic growth i.e. if they are allowed to benefit. As economic disparity is translated into spatial conflict, all the other actors may arrive at a consensus as far as the eviction of the poor is concerned. Eviction is seen as benefiting conservation, tourism, developers and the better-off residents in equal parts - the poor, as always, being the most marginalised and most vulnerable part of society. However, the poor have been able to fight for the right to participate and benefit from local development where they have been able to mobilize themselves.

**Spatial Planning for Historic Urban areas**

So urban cultural heritage can be both source of conflict and common ground simultaneously. It does have the potential to benefit all the stakeholders involved. A substantial benefit of common ground is that it forms the basis for, “compromise and innovation whereby the conflicting needs of individuals and groups, owners and users, regulators and developers have been resolved not just satisfactorily, but also imaginatively. In almost every case, dialogue, discussion and collection action have produced more successful results than projects implemented by force of economic power or even legislative right” (UMP, 2001, p.108). This is why the conventional process of spatial planning has to become more participatory and more inclusive.

Spatial planning for cities has “traditionally been concerned with the allocation of land for various uses, the control of development and the installation of infrastructure” (Rakodi, 1993). Traditional urban planning in India is still a legacy from the British that has become, like in many ex-colonies, a process where “urban residents are objects for policies, they are not active participants in policy formulation” (Rakodi, 1993). However the complex set of problems in cities cannot be resolved by imposing policies formulated externally regardless of context. Spatial planning for the complicated areas of historic urban cores, in particular, have to also consider “the quality of its living spaces, the built form of the city and urban environments that contribute to reducing poverty by improving connectivity, health, livelihood and security” (Dastidar, 2006). Additionally any kind of urban planning has to be socially just to be considered truly successful. “The benefits of public investment should be captured by the urban poor, not by traditional and new private land developers” (Fernandes, 2002). This is why the participatory approach can make important contributions to spatial planning.

**Participatory Spatial Planning - Methodology**

Participatory planning involves a consultative process. In a report of the UNDP/World Bank/UNCHS Urban Management Programme, 1991 (cited in UMP, 2001, p.56), consultations have been defined as a process that brings together all the various actors involved in a particular domain of planning to “discuss, identify and agree on which are the priority issues within this domain, how these issues can be addressed and what type and range of technical assistance may be needed to resolve them.” Since its development as a planning methodology, participatory planning has been carried out for a variety of physical planning issues ranging from urban agriculture (Dubbeling, 2003) to land for housing (Cabannes, 2005) and solid waste management (Matovu, 2002). The most important aspect of participatory planning is the use of country and city consultations to resolve complex issues, complex because planning has to address the conflicting needs of all the actors that will be affected by it.

According to the participatory methodology, consultations enable “a multi-dimensional perspective” in problem analysis that ensures that the problems of each of the actors are addressed. It also defines the potential role of each actor in arriving at a realistic solution. The importance of involving all the actors at a policy and planning level is that it “enhances democratic decision making capacity in a given country, municipality or sector of activity and also promotes the probability of greater effectiveness of implementation” (UMP, 2001 p.57). So the process of consultation starts with “collectively establishing future scenarios, objectives, targets and standards”. Once a consensus has been reached regarding these issues, the modus operandi for action is agreed upon. Then the plans are fleshed out with details keeping the principle issues and objectives in mind. Since these objectives have already been agreed upon by all actors, they are then willing to be closely involved in the implementation of the detailed plans to realise their objectives (UMP, 2001 p.57).
Though the consultative process varies greatly according to the particular context or issue, the following stages are usually followed –

- Preliminary identification of priority problems
- Identification and mobilisation of principal actors
- Logistical organisation of actual consultation process
- First level of consultation among actors leading to a preferred set of likely solutions
- Second level of consultation among policy makers
- Documentation of major conclusions and policy/programme proposals
- Follow-up action

Participatory spatial planning for urban areas also involves arriving at a consensus for how the plan will be managed. This includes agreement on a framework within which the various actors will operate and take decisions, as well as identifying where implementation support for different parts of the plan will come from. A key feature of participatory planning is that it can be used to incorporate capacity-building activities for principal actors who are involved in the sector but do not have the capability to fully participate in the consultation and/or implementation process (from UMP, 2001 p.58).

Participatory Spatial Planning – Potential

The need for a participatory approach to historic urban areas was first stated in the Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas which was adopted by the ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) General Assembly in Washington D.C. held in October 1987. Published by UNESCO-ICOMOS as The Washington Charter (1987), it clearly stated that the “participation and the involvement of the residents are essential for the success of the conservation programme and should be encouraged. The conservation of historic towns and urban areas concerns their residents first of all. The conservation plan should be supported by the residents of the historic area.”

The charter went on to specify that planning in a historic town or urban area required “prudence, a systematic approach and discipline” though the approach needed to be flexible because “individual cases may present specific problems.” The charter also hinted at the notion of capacity building when it mentioned the necessity of an awareness programme for all residents “beginning with children of school age” in order to “encourage their participation and involvement”. Also, for the first time, it related the issue of heritage conservation to the improvement of housing (UNESCO-ICOMOS, 1987). However, the considerations were notional at best and there was no adequate planning methodology that addressed those concerns especially in areas where culture, economic and social issues were in conflict. The potential of the participatory approach to spatial planning lies in its ability to resolve the multiple and frequently conflicting issues involved in historic urban areas. “Local action, diversity and dialogue may yet ensure that a more rational view of our cultural heritage will be taken and that a more thoughtful alternative will prevail” (UMP, 2001, p.108). So it is the consultative approach that can become the primary tool to resolve the spatial conflict in planning for historic inner cities.

Participatory Spatial Planning – Practice

A potential framework for executing participatory spatial planning in historic urban regions can be developed from the existing participatory methodology for urban land use as used in Cienfeugos, Cuba (Cabannes, 2004) and Rosario, Argentina (Dubbelding, 2003). It also incorporates basic principles from the UNESCO draft manual on “Historic Districts for All” (UNESCO, 2007)

Diagnosis and Preparation

Theoretical and methodological framework for planning
- Planning information – existing plans, institutions, policy frameworks (urban land use, heritage legislation, protected areas)
- Legal context and jurisdictions of the area
- Comprehensive Financial assessment and list of possibilities for economic development
- Conservation methodologies for urban heritage
Assessment of situation

- Current planning implementation and impact details (ground reality) through participatory evaluation
- Property Inventory (cultural, residential, commercial etc. including details of overlapping use/value)
- Participatory consultation to collect and organise base-line data including ownership details
- Collection and presentation of base-line information
- Participatory evaluation and maps to depict spatial, economic and social characteristics of area including land use patterns on the ground
- Participatory evaluation of existing infrastructure (details of condition, performance, necessity and desirability)

Action Plan

- Collecting various solutions and strategies from actors based on their needs
- Design workshop for the area to arrive at consensus
- Details of public policy, institutions involved and changes necessary in them
- Detailing financial resources and their administration
- Setting up management system to develop and manage projects

These steps are very much part of a theoretical framework and should be adapted according to context because “Each historical district is unique and no standardized model can replace a locally defined revitalization process undergoing constant readjustments” (UNESCO, 2007). Though basic research and analysis criteria may not vary, the nature of the participatory consultations may have to be greatly modified for each area. The steps detailed here do not occur in a linear fashion as the participatory processes occur simultaneous to the non-participatory ones. Though the purpose of consultations may vary, they will address some common planning issues for all historic urban areas, irrespective of context, like the

- Physical planning for an improved urban environment for local communities who live and work there
- Planning for growth and re-development that takes into consideration the existing local economy and generates benefits for all stakeholders
- Planning for conservation of the city’s heritage so that it acts as a catalyst for revitalization of local neighbourhoods beyond the mere superficial improvements required by tourism

Most importantly the issues of social injustice have to be addressed in every case, evictions (if necessary at all) should be dealt with on a case to case basis and all planning should keep in mind “human rights, human dignity, justice, children’s rights and the preservation of public order” (Cabannes, 2005).

Conclusion

Spatial Planning should contribute towards the sustainable development of both cities and the people who live in them. It should especially aim at development that benefits the urban poor, usually the first to be directly and adversely affected by planning exercises. This is because urban planning in India has focused almost exclusively on the physical aspects of planning without considering its social aspect. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the historic cores of Indian cities which are places of great complexity and great conflict.

As social, cultural and economic interests collide – planning is often carried out to the detriment of one or the other. This results in lop-sided development that does not benefit all the principal stake-holders in these culturally important areas. Planning that results in true development has to resolve both social and spatial conflict by taking into consideration the interests of all the people involved. Therefore, spatial planning for historic inner cities has to become development planning through a participatory and socially inclusive process.

Finally it is important to remember that participation alone is not enough. Planning has to rest on the four pillars of “legal instruments that create effective rights; socially oriented urban planning laws; political-institutional agencies and mechanisms for democratic urban management; and inclusionary macro-economic policies” (Fernandes, 2002).
Bibliography


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