The concept note

The research on the transformation-led-evolutionary changes on Kankaria Lakefront is a purposeful attempt on conceptualising the contemporary urban condition. Through the lens of classic example of 'urban waterfronts', the effort will be to understand the issues surrounding, often neglected but of significant importance, the 'Urban Waterfront development'. The paper will emphasise on myriad influences of policy formation and implementation, planning decisions, infrastructure building, investment and ownership decision trade-off, public engagement and other factors have on social and ecological process that occur around the urban waterfront. Urban waterfronts are contemporary and complex spatial arena of development which when studied in depth will develop insights on patterns of social entanglement, political-economic configuration in cities, understanding the association of people with the 'commons' in the city, alienation of marginalised people in the due course of development and transformation process on a broader scale.

Ahmedabad city is a suitable place for demonstrating rapid developmental changes, because Gujarat, the state in which Ahmedabad is situated has been designated as the "developed state" of India. The global outlook adopted towards the development is not only inspirational for rest other cities but also has altered the definition of "development" with its rapid and large scale urbanisation. Development conceptualised as per capita growth, investment, greenness of the city, cleanliness of the roads and beauty of "modern landscapes" has unfortunately, materialised caste, class, marginalised and poor people. The case of Sabarmati Riverfront is an iconic example of urban water revitalisation but is also the classic case of urban exploitation. Not the riverfront, not even the lakefront, the focus of the paper will be to find answers to the "whys?" What instigates the need to come up with a developmental project like a waterfront? Why is the understanding of/on the 'participatory process' different amongst different stake holders? Why even after consultation of SIA and EIA practitioners the process often ends up being biased and exploitative? The arguments propelling and promoting the developmental projects like these do not see a problem in the way the water projects are restored or redeveloped. The same spaces are 'commons' and barely do people understand the significance of something meant for the people, shared by the people. Everybody has equal right over the commons. But in India, where there is unequal spatial form of justice, the 'commons' itself emerge to be exclusionary and exploitative. People are denied their rights to access it and ignorant attitude leads to 'common resource' forgone for the sake of development. Riverfront development or lakefront development project, has been a process of severe exclusion and gentrification that leads to alienation of targeted groups. The process of Urbanisation is more like 'someone somewhere must move in order to make place for someone else.' And often, the only people who end up being displaced are the marginalised people. The similar kind of process of gentrification has happened in the City of Bangalore as well. Bangalore, a city of lakes, has also had its lake polluted and intoxicated due to the dumping of industrial wastes and release of heavy chemicals into the same. But never has the real cause of pollution gained attention of people because what mattered was dirt and mosquito spread due to the slums flourished in the form of 'human-settlement' on the banks. The urban elite people could not stand their vision obstructed because of the well spread trail of hutments surrounding the lakes. The concern for the degraded ecological state of the river, believed to be the result of waste dumped by the slum dwellers, was selective, considering riverfront properties and luxury apartments discharging their waste were allowed to come up in place of the slums. In the lakefront sites, many lakes has been restored by constructing fences, landscaping, laying walkways and developing play areas for children. Additionally, in the case of the privatized lake, entry was restricted to those who could pay a charge. These lakes are no longer accessible to traditional users who grazed cattle or collected fodder and leafy vegetables. So what is the conclusion drawn of this?
deHas these projects only been focused around beautifying the city? Are there no any other ambitions when huge amount of capital goes into the making of the riverfront? Are the Developmental projects for the people, by the people subjective to only who can afford to pay the entry fee? Is the 'politics of forgetting' or the 'politics of differential class intentional or it happens in the due course of time?'

To begin with, I am interested in tracing lies the life activities around the lake from 1884 when it got included in the municipal limit till the current time when it is a full-fledged lakefront project. I want to understand the evolution of idea of a lakefront project, involvement of various stake-holders, their approach to planning the same, the process of eviction and eradication and the existing condition of the Kankaria lake. Moreover, I am also aiming to substantiate my empirical understanding with theoretical knowledge on how and why certain process happen. There are 13 lakes in Ahmedabad which got an approval to be reconsidered for the purpose of revitalisation and rejuvenation. By far, Kankaria lakefront Development has been accomplished. I want to dive

into the political understanding of choosing or prioritizing one lake over the other and then draw comparative analysis on life activities (social and economic) happening around different kinds of lakes.

References

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