Placing Landscapes in Public domain
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Thank you all of you for giving me this opportunity to speak before you at the ISOLA Annual Conference 2015 and share some of my experiences and thoughts born out of many engagements in the past thirty to forty years in Mumbai . The topic that I have framed for this talk is 'Placing Landscapes in Public domain'. This has to be understood within the larger context of placing cities and towns in public domain. Landscape of cities & towns is not just about the physical landscape but about entire landscape of people, cultures, societies and off course the physical environment. All of these are very broadly defined as landscapes.

So landscapes of towns and cities have to be placed in Public domain. They have to be freed from the clutches of exclusive enclaves. Cities are being increasingly divided into exclusive gated colonies and marginalize poverty. Due to this state of urban landscapes that there is urgent need to unite these disparate and fragmented parts into an integrated landscape that is based on equity, justice and sustainability.

That really is the essence of my talk. Therefore, it is in fact our collective responsibility to 'popularise' the landscapes. That's a very big word –'popularise' and pose a very difficult job at the same time. They have to be popularised that means they have to be placed in public domain, that means it has to invite public engagement and participation, influencing decisions that our government make, that's essentially my argument.

In this process, it ought to be a resolved and committed by all of us to build sustainable ecology of cities, an idea that we are talking about internationally, since five-seven years. What does this ecology of cities or towns mean? It encompasses the natural environment, people and development demands. All three put together in a sense constitute what we broadly term as ecology of cities or towns or our built environment. But this objective is truly challenging and daunting due to the increasing thrust by our governments for developing markets and commoditising all goods of development. This idea of building markets and market places has really made it much more difficult for us to place urban landscapes in public domain and to develop and build ecology of sustainable cities and towns.

What is this market place that our governments are pledged to facilitate & expand? They have been servants to the market forces in facilitating under the garb of new liberal globalization and privatization thrust, where consumption and colonization of public assets for private interests has been the basis of development. This is something we have to understand, very carefully and evaluate critically. What are these market forces? What are the interests of the market forces that commoditise every need of development including our aspirations and minds, further capturing and colonizing them for furthering private corporate profit? And that has been the basis of the privatization thrust and new liberal globalization that has hugely influenced us. Landscapes of cities and towns are intrinsically connected to urban development trends of today and therefore, we need to understand what this urban development trend is, in order to understand the character and position of these urban landscapes that we want to transform, moreover popularise and democratise them.

As for me, I am constantly disturbed by the fact that growth of urbanization is increasingly dividing our cities into fragments, both in social and spatial terms. Indeed our cities are producing and re-producing backyards of exclusion, discrimination, neglect and abuse,leading to increasing levels of intolerance and social unrest. Even natural habitats are being systematically destroyed leading to threatening climate change consequences.

Sadly, while cities are expanding, public spaces are rapidly shrinking, in both physical and democratic terms. This means space for wider public participation and dialogue are shrinking.This phenomenon is steadily undermining the very idea of cities.

It is in these prevailing conditions, that I am committed to the idea of public spaces being the foundation of city planning. Public spaces ensure physical, social and democratic well-being of the larger population. It is also my commitment to work towards the unification of the disparate fragments and integration of the backyards. For me as an architect, it is planning and design that are incredible democratic tools for achievement of these objectives and importantly in bringing about significant social and environmental change.

In everyday work, I struggle to pursue this idea of unification of cities through my architectural and design endeavors, while engaging closely with social and environmental movements. My priority has been to establish a close relationship between people and architecture, placing strong emphasis on participatory planning. This way,I hope to contribute to larger struggles for democratization of cities and reassert the rights of citizens.

Cities and towns are being increasingly fragmented. They are been broken down into bits and pieces and often into conflicting parts. Increasingly these parts have been colonised and captured. So there has been a very clear polarization of interests, of cultures, of classes of people, of genders. You name it and all of them are being fragmented consciously by design, by a political process under the garb of neo-liberal globalization and privatization. So we start thinking in bits and pieces. We are captured, our minds are captured. Our actions and activities are therefore in bits and pieces. Into those fragments confined to one or the other or many fragments depending on our individual capacities or collective capacities.

Increasingly public resources are being colonised for private profit. I will not elaborate any of these processes or give examples of it. We have a long story. But I will have to necessarily mention some of these phenomena that govern our minds and bodies. Fragmentation is something that constantly and adversely affect human development interests. And that really is the key of our debate. Whether we built palaces, whether we build beautiful gardens or fantastic public transportation systems with high costs and investments, undertake mega projects, the measure of all such endeavours ultimately raises one fundamental question - how do they contribute to the goals of human development for all?

With that as a basis of assessment of our individual and collective efforts, including those of our governments, I would like to present before you a few slides of some of the works that we have carried out in Mumbai. I am confining myself to Mumbai, that's where I am deeply involved and engaged. Many of these examples and issues that I discuss and debate would be relevant to towns and cities across India. But I will focus on certain specific projects which have been, as I call them not projects, but movements in Mumbai. So I would like to present before you some of these movements, which has drawn large numbers of people from various communities and neighbourhood to engage in the process of planning and change of their environment and their neighbourhoods, importantly enabling and inspiring new imaginations of our landscapes.

One of the ideas that we have talked about since many years, about eighteen years now, but we comprehensively presented it in a public exhibition in Mumbai, titled "Open Mumbai" – Expanding Public Spaces. This exhibition was inaugurated then by the Chief Minister of the state. Interestingly, without invitation almost every political party member from across parties visited this exhibition. This exhibition was the culmination of experiences and movements. So it wasn't about putting up a plan to begin with but it was a culmination of the experiences of the movements going on for the past eighteen-twenty years.

The idea really began in a small neighbourhood of *Juhu* in Mumbai, particularly concerning the condition of *Juhu* beach and the larger issue of increasing denial of access to public spaces. Some of the objectives of The Open Mumbai idea are to expand and network public open spaces. Now this is a significant aspect. Networking public spaces is not just a physical activity, it is about social networking. When you start connecting spaces you connect people. Because you engage people in the process of its development and networking and this has been an enriching experience for many of us as activists in Mumbai .

As Mumbai expands, its open spaces are shrinking. The democratic 'space' that ensures accountability and enables dissent is also shrinking, very subtly but surely. The city's shrinking physical open spaces are of course the most visible manifestation as they directly and adversely affect our very quality of life. Open spaces must clearly be the foundation of city planning. An 'Open Mumbai' ensures our physical and democratic well-being. Unfortunately, over the years, open spaces have become 'leftovers' or residual spaces, after construction potential has been exploited. Through this plan, we hope to generate dialogue between people, government, professionals and within movements working for social, cultural and environmental change. It is a plan that redefines land use and development, placing people and community life at the centre of planning – not real estate and construction potential. A plan that redefines the 'notion' of open spaces to go beyond gardens and recreational grounds – to include the vast, diverse natural assets of the city, including rivers, creeks, lakes, ponds, mangroves, wetl;ands, beaches and the incredible seafronts. A plan that aims to create non-barricaded, non-execlusive, non-elitist spaces that provide access to all our citizens for leisure, relaxation, art and cultural life. A plan that ensures open spaces are not only available but are geographically and culturally integral to neighbourhoods and a participatory community life. A plan that we hope will be the beginning of a dialogue to create a truly representative 'Peoples Plan' for the city.

"Open Mumbai" Objectives: Expand and network public open spaces
Conserve natural assets and protect eco-sensitive borders
Prepare a comprehensive waterfronts plan
Establish walking and cycling tracks
Promote social, cultural and recreational opportunities
Create spaces for public art for wider participation and to enhance the aesthetics of the city
Evolve and facilitate participatory governance practices
Democratise public spaces
Undertake necessary amendments in the DP and DCR

Conserve natural assets, I don't need to elaborate on how important this is, we all are very conscious about it and we need to. In Mumbai, you will be amazed to know that close to fifty five percent of the area covered are natural assets hills, creeks, wetlands, mangroves, the watercourses which are now called the *Nallas*, but originally the natural watercourses, forests, etc. In terms of area, they constitute nearly two hundred and forty square kilometres of the total area of four hundred and eighty square kilometre being Mumbai's area. And preparing a comprehensive waterfronts plan, establishing the waterfront city, where we have increasingly turned our backs to the water and have been both physically and metaphorically using the waterfronts as dumping grounds, literally and in many ways. Establishing walking and cycling, that's another big thrust in some of our plans. Promote social, cultural and recreational opportunity, create spaces for art, culture and leisure and enhance the aesthetics of the city. Let's not feel shy about the aesthetics of the city. Cities must look good or habitats must look good, it's not an elite concept but it's a democratic idea. Participation, governance and public spaces have been talked about a lot. But, this leads us to re-envisioning our cities – for achievement of a more sustainable and resilient city .Thus, undertake necessary amendments and legal measures, influence legislation and suggest changes in laws to win rights rather than get them in bits & pieces as concessions.

The map of Mumbai, which was a culmination of fifteen-eighteen different ideas that we have been working on for the past twenty years in various area movements, whether this was in *Juhu*, or *Bandra*, or *Bandstand*, or *Carter* Road, or *Prabhadevi*, *Dadar* or *Colaba*, Versova. All these individual experiences and movements were put together to re-envision Mumbai with an idea that public spaces ought to form the basis of city planning. So city planning and development is not about construction turn over, it's not about FSI enhancement, it's not about volumes of construction which often is reflected in most plans and development programs, as the central thrust, but it is about the quality of life and environment that a city offers in order to enable healthy living and community development.

All the red lines in the map of "Open Mumbai" indicate the proposed networks. We simply tried to connect physically all these natural areas that I talked about, the vast extent of the natural assets of Mumbai, to repeat, whether they were creeks, rivers, *nallas*, wetlands, beaches, hills, forests along with the reserved public open spaces of the city - playgrounds, gardens, etc. and the transportation hubs, the public squares, public buildings, etc; developing an idea of the public realm. By this idea we have been able to suggest over five hundred kilometres of public spaces networks. So those red lines really join up to make five hundred

kilometres. Isn't that amazing? It's equivalent to the distance from Mumbai to Goa, but achieved here in this plan within the city of Mumbai.

For the first time we did the mapping of the open spaces of Mumbai and this has indeed influenced the presently underway Mumbai's D.P. revision process. For the first time we comprehensively presented the fact that the natural areas constitute two hundred and forty square kilometres. Those natural areas were never considered as integral part of the Development Plan of the city. They were excluded they were considered as backyards of the city. But we argue that they have to be a part of the development plan, in order not to build over them but to consciously engage with them as open spaces. And if public get engaged, then these spaces will be protected. Citizen's can only be the guardian; neither laws, nor police forces. Therefore, this is an amazing exercise and physical mapping is a very interesting socio-political process. Mapping is not a physical activity where surveyors with superior tools or equipment or total stations carry out an exercise. It's about engaging people, talking to them, encouraging public dialogue which is otherwise diminishing in this process of fragmentation cities and developments and leading to increasing polarisation of people and communities. So mapping is a very serious process. We must go back to whichever town or city we have come from and start thinking, if not for the entire city but at least for your immediate neighbourhood, building up of a movement for its mapping.

Now, I will very quickly without move those twelve-thirteen aspects of concern. Everyone participated, everyone encouraged and this became a very strong citizens' movement in *Bandra*. Soon after we completed the first kilometre, *Bandra* people got together to celebrate and launch the *Bandra festival held* every year for over ten days. So, people from *Bandra* started celebrating their public spaces, their neighbourhoods and their water fronts. Waterfronts which were the backyards have become the proud forecourt of the communities in *Bandra* and for the people of Mumbai. Spontaneous and planned activity all over the waterfronts in *Bandra* by means of very humble projects with very low cost involved. But talking about plans, I think one of my past speakers, Ranjit, mentioned that 'you must have a plan to begin with'. In fact we have a contrary experience, do not put up a plan in public, plans are alienating, and people don't understand plans. We had the plan in the back of our mind. We conducted public discussions and started laying the tiles. We did that without permission. Government refused permission but we forced our way. When about hundred feet was completed, believe me, with the press coverage and television coverage of the engagement of people, Municipal Corporation came to our houses to give the permission. Such was the political or public pressure influencing decisions that affects our lives and spaces in Mumbai.

We are working for the *Mithi* riverfront, which is an enormous project. We are addressing the creeks of Mumbai. Why can't creeks become neighbourhood parks, as this area in *Malad* that we see here? We don't need to have manicured gardens; we enjoy these natural assets and engage with them. We have wetland and board walks under construction now between *Juhu* and V*ersova*. All these projects that I am showing you are either completed or under implementation. They are not just being discussed as ideas or plans. *Juhu* beach has been restored for a stretch of four kilometres. Hawkers have not been thrown out; they have been relocated with land rights, with legal entitlements. They were illegal, but we went up to the Supreme Court, we were challenged by vested interests. But, the Supreme Court passed orders for the implementation of our plan.

Today we have the beach open to public access. Hawkers carrying out their business and the entire waterfronts of *Bandra* and *Juhu* , which is about ten kilometre , are maintained regularly and monitored by local area residents, not only by the Municipal Corporation.

We have plans for the *Bandra* Lake and other the water bodies of Mumbai and each of these has been documented in detail across the city. The *nallas* run over two hundred kilometres ,these have become *nallas,* we hate to call them *nallas* as these were originally the watercourses of the estuaries flowing down from the hills to the sea. Currently we are re-doing them in *Juhu* in four kilometres stretch. Work is about to be completed in few months, where walking and cycling is the basic thrust along with cultural spaces on both sides of these water courses.

Bandra lands-end and the hill there that has been devastated by a five star hotel with an attempt to take over for their guests, and they had cut the hill and concretized a large part. We reconstructed the hill and today it is the most successful cultural space anywhere on the waterfronts of Mumbai. We did the gateway of India precinct where we removed the enormous garden that was barricaded right in the middle of the precinct and converted into an open plaza on the waterfronts of Mumbai.

Vision Juhu Plan: With expanding cities, neighbourhoods have begun to develop their own identity. Neighbourhoods have come to be defined or identified as district areas or places due to several reasons. Sometimes they are identified by geographic conditions, sometimes by the fact of people who live there and their cultures. Neighbourhoods are sometimes also defined by the fact of roads and infrastructure projects. To give you an example in Mumbai, *Bandra* area is not same as *Parel* or *Parel* area is not similar to *Chembur*, or *Chembur* is not *Juhu*.

Each neighbourhood has its own unique set of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, best understood by the people who live and have an interest in it. Allowing citizens to utilize this awareness of their neighbourhood will result in a vision best suited to hem and to this city. 'Neighbourhood Planning' keeping larger, city issues in mind is the way ahead. It will empower local residents and make them responsible for their area development. This will truly be our Vision, our desired future for our surroundings and our city.

To set a precedent for Mumbai, we initiate Vision Juhu as the pilot project. By involving members of every section of society, government organizations and experts from the urban planning sector, we aim to re-envisage how the neighbourhood of Juhu can be alternatively planned.

 If we can have a movement, which is a neighbourhood based movement towards participatory planning, then we start to influence the ideas of the city and we interconnect them through movements. So this is precisely what we are doing and that whole area of four square kilometres is under implementation. We take pride in taking up the credit of initiating this movement two years back and now in the new Development Plan of the city the authorities have accepted this idea and Mumbai has now been defined to one hundred and

fifty one neighbourhoods planning based on idea of enhancing participatory process.So, we are interconnecting *Juhu*. We brought out public posters, we approached slum dwellers, fishing communities, hotels, commercial spaces, educational institutions and we tried to get them connected, network them. We have this plan. We brought out posters in Hindi & English and we talked about '*Juhugiri – with a bit of love'*. And this work has actually succeeded and people in many parts of the city are now taking similar steps.

Equal Streets Movement: Now one significant movement which I missed talking about is what we call today as 'The equal streets movement' in Mumbai. This has begun exactly four months back. Roads are a significant aspect of city's environment, both in terms of the area they occupy as well as their socio-environmental condition. In Mumbai for example, nearly 2000 kms of roads occupy approximately 40 sq. kms of land area. This is nearly 20% of the developable land area of 240 sq.kms. This is much more than the open spaces reservation of 24 sq. kms. Even then there is continuous effort in expanding them further. The ratio of streets area may not be much different in most cities across the world. For different reasons, most city people spend considerable time on roads everyday. Congestion, noise and air pollution, accidents, forever increasing number of cars, diminishing space for walking and cycling , high street levels and the loss of tree cover, are some of the common road experiences in most cities. How do we deal with this complex web of conflicts and contradictions for the achievement of a more humane and environmentally sustainable streets in place of highly unequal roads in favour of cars causing alarming conditions.

In this context a significant movement presently under way in Mumbai called "Equal Streets", (of which I am an active member), for the achievement of these objectives is noteworthy. Excerpts from the vision statement explains the ideas and objective of this movement is as follows: "Every day , people in Mumbai are being squeezed out of spaces to walk or cycle by the sheer pressure of cars, which are getting bigger than ever? Apart from the omnipresent danger posed by motorized transport on the roads, which are actually public spaces, there is the rising toll of air pollution, that has left the city literally gasping for breath. Contrary to public perception, however, there is no fundamental right for motorists anywhere
to drive or park: it is a privilege for a tiny minority of Mumbaikars, which they are loather to pay for.

"Equal Streets is a public movement which seeks to correct this fundamental imbalance. As things are, the bulk of public expenditure on city transport favours owners of cars. This movement strives to put the people at the centre of usage of major roads, at least on Sunday mornings to begin with. Through this bold experiment, communities will regain control of some major roads and declare them closed to motorized traffic fro a few hours every Sunday morning".

As the title suggests, Equal Streets in Mumbai treads the same path and resonates with the move to usher in greater democracy in accessing roads as public rather than private, spaces. It seeks to rid select roads of an oppressive hierarchy whereby motorists beliver that they have a right to occupy the major space while walkers and cyclists are pushed to the periphery, always in danger of being injured, not to mention the omnipresence of toxic emissions from

vehicles. This movement is being led by local citizens, who have been highly active in preserving open spaces and waterfronts in the city".

"Everyone, irrespective of their class or wealth, will have equal access to these open spaces on Sunday mornings. In that sense, the movement is a great leveller. It does not end at declaring certain stretches free of cars weekly but target being the catalyst for raising much greater public awareness regarding the significance of public spaces. In every corner of Mumbai, there are conventional and non-conventional spaces which deserve to be thrown open for public use. Equal Streets can indeed serve to network such spaces by creating walking and cycling tracks between them as corridors. It promotes healthy activity and seeks to correct the sedentary lifestyle which even children now find themselves engaged in".

Irla Nullah Integration Movement: Turning Backyards into Proud 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 programmes were drawn up through active citizen participation. Meetings were held in several public places and posters and a book, *Vision Juhu*, explaining this movement and the project were published.

Our central objective of this movement was to bring Juhu together. Connecting and networking the various isolated, disparate and fragmented spaces and activities was a means to achieving this objective. These include the various open spaces, the Irla nullah itself, gardens, parks, playgrounds, public institutions like colleges, schools, training centres, music,
dance and art centres, markets, health-care centres, etc. These connected spaces would also be networked with neighbourhood streets for further integration and accessibility. This effort would nourish community life, neighbourhood engagements and participation, truly symbolising our democratic aspirations.

As cities are expanding public spaces are shrinking both physically and democratically. It is our responsibility to demand for conservation and expansion of public spaces. The act of planning, design and landscape are incredible democratic tools of social & environmental change. Let's utilize it for re- envisioning our cities and towns.

Thank you All for your patience & kind attention.