Urban Sociology

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Lecture 4

Urban Infrastructure and Governance

Hello, everyone. I welcome you back to this course, Urban Sociology. As you can see that today's lecture mark the end of module one, that is, urbanization as a process. And today we would be discussing about urban infrastructure and governance which is the last topic of module one.

Now, because of the interest of time, since we would not be able to cover each and every aspect of urban infrastructure and governance, I have certain selected topics under this particular theme and all of these topics I felt would be extremely relevant towards the comprehensive understanding of contemporary urbanization. So, we will start our lecture on urban infrastructure by talking first about affordable housing.

As we all know that housing is one of the most integral and I would say fundamental infrastructure of the current urban centres, the current cities. We would then move on to the concept of social infrastructure in the cities which breathes life into our built environment because most of the times when we talk about infrastructure, we focus a lot on the physical built infrastructures of the city like the roadways, the bridges, the different kinds of buildings, the different structures in the city, all examples from physical built structures.

But very interestingly, there is also a very, very dense sociality. The idea of social is very intensely connected to this physical infrastructure that we see around us. And I feel that being students of sociology, scholars of sociology, all of us along with knowing about urban physical infrastructure, we should also have a bit of understanding about what urban social infrastructure is.

After talking about social infrastructure, we will briefly talk about green infrastructure. Again, a topic which is left out from most of the discourses of urban infrastructure most of the lessons of urban infrastructure but again, something that is very integral to our existence. And this importance, the importance of green infrastructure, I feel must not be overlooked,

especially, during an age where we are experiencing extremities of climate change and different kinds of environmental hazards.

Finally, we will talk about placemaking and some examples of placemaking efforts in the global south. I know that for many of you, placemaking is a new concept, so I will try to explain to the extent possible. And this would lead us finally to the topic of urban governance by which local groups and individual citizens are able to control and manage the phenomenon and the different events of the city.

So, let us begin. Now, what do we mean by urban infrastructure? By infrastructure, we generally, as I was telling you, that we generally refer to physical built environment. This may include different kinds of things like buildings, like electricity, like transportation, like different tangible facilities that we have in the cities like sanitation facilities, sewerage, roads, bridges and all of us know that these are very essential elements within our entire urban fabric. These are very essential elements within the comprehensive urban infrastructure.

But for our lecture today, we will focus on something that is known as affordable housing which as I was telling you, that housing is the most fundamental infrastructure that a city provides us with and I feel that affordable housing is something that is a basic need for all human beings. And also, at the same time as we know that housing is one of the biggest challenges that urban India is facing today, particularly, considering the issue of population influx, population growth.

According to a study by Gopalan and Venkataraman, there is an estimated shortage of about 18 million houses in India. Governments at every level are now trying to find ways and means to provide access to housing for the people. We should remember that the role and function of housing is multifaceted in the sense that affordable housing provides better access to health care, to education. It has linkages, very, very larger and strong linkages to human wellbeing.

But how can we define affordability of housing? What actually is affordable housing? What is affordable in the sector of housing, in the comprehensive sector of housing? How do we define affordability within the sector of housing? Especially, when the concept of affordability is different for everyone in a country like India. One of the most commonly accepted definitions and one which had also been accepted by the government of India is the one where housing affordability is taken as a measure of expenditure on housing to income of the household.

The demand drivers for affordable housing in India are first its progressive urbanization going hand in hand with a growing urban population. Then as we know that rising incomes

have led to the expansion of the middle class and the real estate sector equally contributes very, very significantly to the Indian economy but we have to remember that affordable housing is integral to national economic competitiveness.

This was very neatly captured in the statement by Rakesh Mohan, deputy Governor of Reserve Bank of India in 2007 where he said that, "housing is where jobs go to sleep at night..the quantity, the quality, availability and affordability of housing becomes a key component in national economic competitiveness."

We now come to some critical issues in the affordable housing sector. What are these issues? As listed here, the first and the most pressing issue is scarcity of land. The high population density, rapid urbanization poor regulations have created a shortage in land capable of development in countries like ours. Scarcity of marketable land parcels. As we all know, large tracts of centrally located urban lands are owned by public authorities such as the railways, the ports, the airports, etc. and all these are ultimately non-marketable pockets.

A very critical issue associated with affordable housing in countries like ours is the issue of titling. In India, there is a lack of a robust system that protects land rights. Formal recognition of property rights by the state through systems of titles and facilitation by the state of efficient trade in rights through the process of registration exist but in an incomplete form where the system is failing to do what it is supposed to do.

Another very critical issue in the context of affordable housing is rising costs. The price of land and construction costs have exponentially increased and this makes financing affordable housing quite difficult. There are also several regulatory constraints that can be talked about in this respect. Project sanctions, as we all know, can take several years as it needs to be verified and cleared by several departments across the national and the subnational levels. Example the environment, the fire, the water departments, etc.

We need affordable housing more than ever. 99 percent of those who need affordable housing are in the economically weaker sections and the state must create an enabling environment for the affordable housing developers by fast tracking approval process, making better land laws, etc. At the end of the day, it is a promising solution to the proliferation of slums, unplanned growth and transit congestion.

With this we come to a very contemporary and related aspect that needs to be discussed while we are talking about urban physical infrastructure. And this is something that we sociologists have called social infrastructure. And now that we have spoken about housing, let us think about some of the other spaces in the city maybe libraries, maybe sidewalks, maybe schools.

Now, all of these are also examples of built spaces and all of these contribute a lot to the network of urban infrastructure. They are all also very critical parts of the urban infrastructure. But when thinking infrastructurally, we often forget about the other functions or the other dimensions that these spaces may have that go unseen in our everyday life.

Of course, these spaces have modern infrastructure and architecture and they may be spaces of activity of different kinds of activity, academic activity, economic activity but these are also spaces where people make meaningful connections with each other. If you remember in the last lecture on globalization we were actually talking about this aspect, that how the urban centres, the cities, as physical spaces with the rapid pace of globalization are facilitating the flow of connection and interaction within people from different parts of the world. How people are coming together with the use of ICT, with the use of technology, internet these are actually bringing people together in diverse kinds of communication, be it professional, be it nonprofessional.

But similarly, many of these infrastructures that we talk about are also spaces which afford the urban community an avenue of different kinds of interaction and communication. Many of these are also sites which enhance the public and the social life of the cities. So, let us take the example of other physical spaces which I think are found right now found in abundance in many of our cities. Public places like parks, like cafes, like community centres definitely make a city a good life in the city. But what is often overlooked is that they make the social life of the cities as well.

We can see that people, regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality come together in these same spaces. It is where strangers may meet other people like two people or a community of people who are otherwise not known to each other might come to interact. These spaces in one sense, we can also then see that they address the issue of social isolation which is one of the most pressing and important concerns of urban life, something that we had earlier discussed for instance, in different classical theories of urban sociology. The city from this angle is experienced as inclusive and welcoming and this is why these spaces are also known as social infrastructures.

It was sociologist Eric Klingenberg who coined the term social infrastructure who believed that these spaces nurtured the social life of the cities. There are many different kinds of social infrastructure like public institutions. These may be libraries, museums, universities, spaces for commerce like market, shops, cafes for recreational activities like gym, sports club, cinema, religious places like the church, mosque or temples and transits like bus stops or subways, sidewalks, etc.

In fact, he also adds that social infrastructure can be an important resource for the economically or the socially marginalized community. Commercial spaces designed for particular social groups like the LGBTQ communities, for instance, the gay bars or clubs may be very important locations for community life and wellbeing.

Another important writer that highlighted how built spaces like the sidewalks have more dimensions to it than just carrying pedestrians was Jane Jacobs. She outlines what makes a neighbourhood a community. If you remember the work of Ferdinand Tonnies, where he makes this distinction between the community and the society, that how they are different from each other.

So, what makes a neighbourhood a community is a very important question. And what makes a city livable? She believed that safety, mostly for women and children comes from the eyes of the street. She writes that keeping the city safe is a fundamental task of the city's sidewalks. For example, the shopkeepers on the street are aware about who are the visitors and who are the common faces in that locality. She said that we are the lucky possessors of city order because there are plenty of eyes on the street.

So, as you can see that the connect between the physical and the social is so fascinating. On the one hand, while we talk about the physical, when we talk about the physical infrastructure, we are focusing on the build aspects of it, the technology, the pace of growth. While using these theories of Jane Jacobs and Eric Klingenberg actually allows us to look very minutely and have a very in-depth observation on the social facets of the physical infrastructure that we talk about and how many of these social cultural facets of the physical infrastructure makes up the social life of the city itself.

Now, let us look at another kind of infrastructure in the city which is I would say again, fundamental to our existence in an environment that is right now challenged by so many hazards, climate change being the most critical within them. And as we can see that again when we talk about infrastructure as just as social infrastructure is not very frequently been spoken about, green infrastructure is also something that we actually do not talk about much. But in this age of climate change and environmental hazards, green infrastructures are extremely important for our physical and mental wellbeing in the cities.

Green infrastructure is equally important, I would say, as the other kinds of infrastructures, physical infrastructures in the city. It effectively coordinates environmental, social and economic development and has become one of the most important strategies for achieving sustainable development towards which all of us are committed. It has many important environmental functions, like alleviating the heat island effect, reducing pollution, improving storm water management capacity.

In terms of social aspect, green infrastructure can improve the built environment by providing people the opportunity of getting close to nature, promoting social wellbeing and human health. In addition to this, green infrastructure can attract tourists, consumers, investors and thus, contributing to the comprehensive economic development of the city as well.

Now, let us look into another kind of infrastructure in the cities and as I was telling you in the beginning of the lecture that just as we do not usually talk about things like social infrastructure, green infrastructure is also something that frequently gets missed out in the comprehensive academic discussions on physical infrastructure.

But considering the growing environmental challenges in many of the cities, conserving the green infrastructure, thinking about restoration strategies of the green infrastructure has become an imperative for the urban community, for people like us, who are the residents of the city.

Green infrastructure, as we can see, effectively coordinates environmental, social and economic development and has become one of the most important strategies towards the achievement of sustainable development something towards which all of us are equally committed to. It has many important environmental functions like alleviating the heat island effect, reducing pollution, improving stormwater management capacity. In terms of the social aspects, green infrastructure can improve the built environment by providing people the opportunity of getting close to nature, promoting social wellbeing and human health.

In addition to this, green infrastructure can attract tourists, investors, consumers to the city thus contributing to the overall economic development. There are different types of green infrastructures that all have different functions like parks, gardens, woodlands, city farms, churchyards, etc. And all of this perform very critical ecosystem functions which helps to reduce many of the drastic environmental challenges that we are currently confronted with.

With this and providing the context of green infrastructure, I would like to introduce to all of you a concept that I have myself researched on for quite a bit of time and I would here like to also mention that green spaces, so why we started to research on the idea of placemaking or more accurately to say environmental placemaking is because we found that green spaces, water bodies and most of the urban ecological commons in the city are often neglected. They are not protected, they often become sewage pits or dump sites because of the lack of maintenance and awareness.

But now we can see that towards the conservation of many of these green infrastructures and because many people in the cities have realized the importance of conserving these infrastructures, we find that city residents are actually coming forward, they are forming

groups, they are taking care of these places in an attempt to restore them. This is why talking about environmental placemaking is very important in this context.

Placemaking is an intentional effort to design, improve and manage good public spaces in the city. As you can see here that there are two terms place-making how we as a community make, restore or construct a significant place. In a recent work, Murphy, Enqvist and Tengo believed that a sense of place or a kind of place attachment becomes a very huge motivating factor when it comes to placemaking practices. When we talk about nature, we do not pay attention to the human-nature relationships which is vital to bring together people and motivate them for managing or restoring these landscapes. Thus, speaking about environmental placemaking is very vital here.

According to our recent work published in one journal, the Journal of Land Use Science, we say or we try to define environmental placemaking as a concept that helps us to understand the emergent dynamic processes by which diverse social communities build meanings and attachments to places of nature, shaping stewardship and collective action for conservation. Considering the crisis of global environmental challenges, we need to understand in greater depth environmental and conservation consciousness which is commonly referred to as environmentalism.

And it is also very important to mention here that what environmental placemaking does is that it helps us to move beyond the different kinds of dichotomies that we usually see in the comprehensive literature on environmental conservation. And it tries to understand that there must be more dynamic processes where different kinds of social practices and ecological practices that are harnessed by very, very different communities in a city can be pooled in together in an attempt to conserve the very critical urban infrastructures.

In this regard, discussing a few cases or a few efforts would give us better clarity. Let us look at a few examples which will help us to understand placemaking efforts better. One example of placemaking is again from a recent study that is conducted by Murphy, Enqvist and Tengo who talk about how place making through stewardship of urban lakes in Bangalore has actually helped to restore the urban ecological infrastructure.

Particularly distressed on the fact that there are strong links between stewardship behaviour and sense of place. Until and unless we as a community connect to a particular space, it is very difficult to draw in conservation attempts, conservation efforts towards the restoration of that particular place. So, in this context they talk about five lake groups who comanage their local lakes together along with Bangalore's municipal authorities.

These lakes were in a state of despair and perceived as polluted, inaccessible and unsafe. Initially, they wanted to clean up the polluted ecosystem and as their engagement continued, they became more aware of the history behind the lake's decline, how they were originally designed and maintained and used as channels for irrigation. Through storytelling sessions, birdwatching tools, yoga classes, National Day celebrations, they created awareness about the lake in the growing middle- and upper-class community.

As this programming and engagement continues, the perception of lake changes in the eyes of the individuals and people have a broader sense of place meaning when they first started. This highlights how lakes are a mix of ecological and social functions. From wanting to improve and recreate now they wish to enhance and protect. Further, this sense of place or place making and its role in conservation and restoration can also be understood from the example of the Ethiopian church forests.

If you see a forest in Ethiopia, you know it is very likely to be a church in the middle. These are some of the last remaining scraps of the tall, lush natural forests that once covered Ethiopia. Much of the nation's forest lands had been sacrificed to agriculture to feed the country's mushrooming population.

The church to which more than half of the Ethiopians belong, view the natural forest as a symbol of heaven on the earth, where every creator is a gift from God and needs its habitat. It's a remote part of the world where the natural environment has become a part of the spiritual environment, says Christoph Mock, the director of the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society at the University of Munich in Germany. In this case, these spiritual place meanings have motivated the community to protect these forests. These forests are proof of the power of spiritual ideas to create sustainable landscapes. In Ethiopia, each church forest is seen by its guardians as a miniature Garden of Eden.

Now, that we have spoken about local engagements and co-management partnerships, we are in a better place to talk about or open up a discussion about the new ways of thinking about the process of governance, democracy, and also about urban politics.

According to Raco, urban governance is primarily concerned with the process through which the government is organized and delivered in towns and cities and the relationship between state agencies and civil society. By civil society we mean citizens, communities, voluntary organizations, residents welfare organizations.

When thinking about urban governance, we try to ask how decisions are being made, who controls agendas and how? Which institutions have the power and resources to shape

policies? What control do local people and individual citizens have over the way that their cities are governed?

When we talk about urban governance, we thus shift our attention to relations of power of different groups in the city. In a nutshell, governance is not about technical or bureaucratic procedure but it involves a set of processes that shape and constitute broader relations of power, domination and authority. It reveals ultimately whose voices are heard and whose voices are not heard.

Urban Governance, a lot of urban governance is also thus about urban politics, about the different sections of urban society and their interests. It is concerned with the changing modes of democratic representation. It is concerned with citizenship where there is a shift to participate in governance. Governance is also one of the key pillars of sustainability agendas promoted by the national government and the NGOs. Often a times the dominant sections of the society may seek to regulate the movement of the urban poor in the city as will be discussed in the example of Delhi's streets in the next slide.

In an overarching work by Amita Baviskar, we find that the streets of Delhi have become sites of contention and local governance. The middle-class concerns about creating social and spatial order have marked the emergence of public sphere on Delhi's streets. The urban elite wished to live in a world class city without the nuisance of the poor. So, every element be it the cows who wander into the streets or the old shabby cycle rickshaws that do not fit into that image and are embarrassing sites must be removed.

Through the mission of cleaning up the streets, urban marginals, like the vendors, beggars performers, are targeted for eviction towards this purpose. The middle-class residents want green spaces in the city which must look orderly and should not take the form of wild. They tried to remove the poor by justifying their removal through environmental discourses, yet they are fine with the phenomenal growth of automobiles and vehicular pollution in the city.

This contradiction is the heart of what Baviskar calls Bourgeois environmentalism, the municipal Corporation, the Resident Welfare associations and through public interest litigation in the court, the middle-class is able to carry out acts of urban governance that are beneficial for them but ultimately are exclusionary urban practices which keep certain population out of the city.

Ultimately, the middle classes draw on the discourse of public interest and citizenship to articulate civic concerns in a manner that result in the form of a public that does not include the city's poorer sections. This example can be looked at as a form of urban governance that is trying to shape India's recent urban transformation.

To sum up briefly, these are the points that we discussed in today's class. Providing affordable housing is right now one of the biggest challenges that is faced by urban India. We must not overlook the social dimensions of urban infrastructure that contribute to the public life of the cities. The importance of green infrastructure for achieving sustainable development of cities is integral and must be pursued.

Placemaking as an intentional and voluntary effort by pooling in ideologies of environmental conservation from different sections of the society is a very, very contemporary and effective effort in making cities better, more liveable and ensuring wellbeing for the entire range of the urban community. Finally, we spoke about urban governance and how the civil society is able to shape the urban setting by numerous forms of formal and informal governance patterns.

These are the references that we would be providing to you that would shed more light on all the topics that have been discussed in today's lecture.

Thank you for joining and we will start module two in the next lecture.