Course Name: An Introduction To Urban Ecological Heritage: Theories and Applications
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EKW as Heritage – Lessons from a Practical Empirical Implementation Project - I

Hello everyone. Welcome to this lecture on Practical Empirical Implementation Project part 1. In this lecture, we will be discussing about this PEIP project which is which explores the ethnography on the East Kolkata wetlands through a historically enriched relevant intervention using the toolkit aided grass, grassroots engagement also known as the heritage method. In this particular lecture, we will be discussing these two concepts the SMUS action network and the agendas and possibilities provided by this network and the context of the PEIP project in East Kolkata wetlands. So, what is this SMUS project or PEIP project? So, SMUS is actually a global center of spatial methods for urban sustainability and it is one of the 12 excellence centers for exchange and development that is cofunded by the German academic exchange service know also known as DAAD and the TU Berlin. So, this particular network of this SMUS network actually aims to collaborate global south researchers in advancing academic education across multiple spatial disciplines because they believe that the difference in understanding the methodologies across disciplines such as sociology, geography, urban planning etcetera.

It is important to form a common path to understand transdisciplinary ways of actions and this can actually bridge the gap between research and planning practices. On the right side of the screen, you see a map. This map is actually shows the various SMUS centers across the globe and you will see that it is concentrated around mostly the global south because that is part of their sustainable development agenda goal 11 that is to develop sustainable cities and communities as part of the 2030 agenda of the UN to bring together the various these nations of global south who actually face various unjust practices and equations regarding the attainment of their SDG goals. So, the SMUS network actually consists of 5 main   actions.

The first action is to educate. So, in the first action of education, the SMUS network actually plans to hold various international conferences and collaborations because it is believed that while as seen especially during the time of COVID that it was difficult for the researchers from global south and global north to access their particular research

spaces. And besides the COVID perspective as well, there are differences of regional of regionality, community understanding, social understanding which makes it difficult for these two particular you know agendas of the global south and global north to come together. So, it is the only way they can actually understand how the practices among communities, among academia works in their respective places. It is important to hold conferences, to hold workshops and seminars and that is the first agenda or the first action of the SMUS network that is to educate each other where the global north and the global south will be exchanging their understanding, their academic experiences through these conferences.

In the second part of the action is experience. So, experience is about combining teaching and research courses. So, it is believed that the main agenda of SMUS is to understand this different spatial methods and that can only be done by actuating this courses and teaching on this different spatial methods that people from different disciplines of academia can actually access. Because this is another issue that the global south you know faces because of various unjust understandings or inequal practices that happens in the global south. Now, they always do not have that privilege of understanding this advanced technical courses and methods that are being taught in the global north.

At the same time when the global north they are teaching about this courses they would require grass root or context specific engagements as well that can be achieved through the second action of experience. The third action is of evaluation. So, the third action of evaluation looks at you know fostering doctoral and postdoctoral research across global south and global north where it not only helps in providing a better understanding of you know how this UN development goals can be fitted into career agenda, but at the same time it can also help in actuating this academic understandings and theoretical knowledge into practice space applications which leads us to the fourth action that is of exchange where this practical and practical empirical implementations are the main focus of the SMUS network. That whatever the students, the researchers, the collaborators have learned over the years through the past actions now need to be implemented in the field in the global south. So, that how so that they can notice how this various understandings and academic practices and theories are can actually be implemented into the field by engaging the local people and the stakeholders there which will be leading into action 5 that is enhancing the relation between urbanity and nature bridging the gap between research and practice.

In this particular research we will be looking into action 4 specifically that is exchange where the PEIP project is part of this action 4 exchange curriculum. So, if we are to discuss about action 4 in you know more detail it talks about the collaboration between academics and practitioners by the use of the spatial research methods or the application of the SMUS toolkit or SMUS glasses. So, what is this about? So, it is believed in you know in the

academic field that because of the differences of disciplinary traditions it is often difficult to get so many people from different academic disciplines to come together and form you know and form action based researchers. So, imagine how difficult it becomes to teach this theoretical you know methods to the people who are part of the space of the community because they are not academics is all. So, the action 4 actually looks into under making sure that these methods are understood by the people of the space that we are researching because they are the inhabitants, they are the custodians of the space.

So, even if the researchers the academics have a very good theoretical understanding these theories cannot be brought into application without making the local community the people who are part of the space in understanding how they can actually safeguard their heritage their natural ecological heritages. So, the SMUS have developed a toolkit or which something they call the SMUS glasses where they have decided upon a set of particular methods that can be used a set of special methods that can be used to teach the inhabitants of the space on how to perceive their own you know the space that they are living in from a news perspective and how they can actually use those toolkit those glasses to teach their future generations and other people in the community they are engaging with. So, this particular image that you see here is of the this particular you know SMUS glasses where it is perceived that by wearing by that when the academy academic people actually teach the local stakeholders the practitioners in wearing the glasses or understanding this methods after wearing this glass they will have a very alternative view of the space that they have already been living in and by using that alternative view they can actually also teach the researchers again back that how their knowledge can also be improved and how it can be further used in safeguarding that place as well. So, this is the SMUS toolkit or the glass that we are talking about. So, the SMUS toolkit actually comprises of two main components first the ethnographic observation and two the visualization technique.

So, as you see the ethnographic observation is actually a qualitative methodology that is used by various researchers of qualitative discipline such as sociology, geography, history etcetera. So, ethnography basically means of integrating different qualitative tools of research of in field work which includes participant observation, key informant interviews, focus group discussion, concept works etcetera where these researchers use this particular methods to study a community in a very you know enriched and deep manner where they study the everyday specialties of a space. So, this term everyday specialties also very interesting thing that you know the SMUS network has come up with. They believe that because we are living in a space we are constantly you know looking at it sometimes what we see as a very ordinary or mundane thing might be very you know a integral part of that regions you know identity or characteristic. And that can only be identified when we start wearing the SMUS glasses you know looking into the deeper realities you know deeper meanings   of   the   space.

So, in this part of this SMUS toolkit it is important to use this ethnographic observation to understand this everyday specialties through participant observations, interviews etcetera that will lead us to the second part of this toolkit that is the application of visualization techniques. So, why is this visualization technique important? Because at the end of the day if we are trying to teach or you know a train the local people the local community in understanding this methods the mode of dissemination should also be a little bit easy to comprehend. It should be deeply rooted in empirical knowledge, but the method of understanding should be you know a very you know open ended way. So, that when the practitioners will be teaching the local community it is easier for them to you know make them understand to teach. So, the best possible you know method here are the visualization techniques which can be you know a mapping the space through drawings, sketches, photographs, videography etcetera.

So, the SMUS class SMUS network believe that the SMUS class is an important component in integrating this empirical knowledge with this visualization technique. So, that when we combine this two methods we develop you know a synergy between the scientific knowledge and the practical knowledge that is developed by the local indigenous people. And this is something of this is very interesting code that SMUS talks about is when we apply this toolkit it makes the familiar what is strange and the strange what is familiar which basically refers to that the thing that we find very common will become very strange to us because we have never perceived it before in that way. And what we found to be strange beforehand we did not consider to be an important part at all it soon becomes a very important component of that region of that case study itself. And this actually helps us in actuating the 11.4 agenda of the sustainable development goals that is protecting the worlds cultural and natural heritage to understand heritage beyond the normative understandings. So, this is where we get into the for a of the east Kolkata wetlands which is an urban ecological heritage. So, why was this PEIP applied here this PEIP project was applied here this practical empirical implementation project. Because we consider Kolkata's history the normative understanding of Kolkata's history and heritage is often associated with you know with strong and build structures such as like buildings you know monuments streets and all those things. But should you know a heritage the understanding of heritage be confined to such terms only what about the ecology of the city that is being constantly sustained for hundreds of years.

How is Kolkata surviving? Kolkata is one of the few cities in the world that has a completely you know free of cost naturally natural based wastewater recycling facility that is the east Kolkata wetlands. As you have learned in the you know previous lectures that how the entire waste from the city of Kolkata is being drained into the wetlands. How they act as a carbon sink they filter the entire pollution of the city they provide livelihoods

you know to so many people from the wetlands to the city they are keeping the you know cost of living for Kolkata so low. So, shouldn't this particular you know ecosystem that is maintaining the city preserving the city considered a heritage and also should we consider shouldn't we consider you know the sustenance of the wetland itself how is the wetland surviving can the wetland survive without this connection of wastewater from the city. So, this inherent and deep embedded relationship between city and nature is something that we should safeguard and that is why the PEIP project we were part of we decided to focus on the east Kolkata wetlands.

The already you know the wetlands are part a very important part of the sustainable development goals as you see here it there are so many components from SDG 1 to 17 that can be found in you know the wetlands and the east Kolkata wetlands because of its diversity in livelihoods diversity in you know habitation from ranging from human to flora and fauna and its very equal important ecological component it is considered as a wetland of international importance by the Ramsar you know by the Ramsar in 2002. So, this actually shows that we cannot always restrict the understanding of heritage as only tangible and built features the understanding of heritage should always go beyond you know this textbook definitions and should be seen and perceived through what we are seeing around us what we are learning about our environment about nature around us and understanding how this urban and nature connection always works. So, with this understanding I will be going to this part of the lecture which is the understanding of PEIP or practical empirical implementation project in the east Kolkata wetlands. So, this was part of the action 4 agenda of the SMUS network where we decided to explore this everyday spatialities of you know the wetlands through the application of ethno hyphen graphy methodology. So, ethno hyphen graphy is a little bit different than the conventional ethno graphy methodology here the hyphen between ethno and graphy holds a very important you know meaning.

So, before coming to that let me talk about this picture the illustration that we have made this illustration actually showcases the different partners of this PEIP project in EKW. So, in here you will see as where the picture of the hat showcases the role of academia and in and on the other side on the extreme you know right side of the picture you will see the position of the practitioner of the EKW and in between on the bottom side you will see image of a student you know holding a bag. So, they are the custodians of the place that we had selected to work this you know project on. The idea was that if we are to teach the people of the wetlands the spatial methods. So, that they can use it later you know to see their own space in a very different manner who should be the one who should be this practitioners who should be taught about it.

So, we decided that we would be engaging the local young students school students from

the East Kolkata Wetlands schools students from class 8 and 9 you know and because they are the custodians of the place they are the you know ones who will be inheriting the place they are the ones who should have this kind of awareness of this place and how these important methods can actually help in protecting this place they live in. So, we in the partners of this project were basically IIT Kharagpur and the you know local creative collective known as the Disappearing Dialogue who we called we will call DD here. And so, this academic IIT and creative collective DD they came together to actually you know select the students from the schools to teach them this you know different methods. And then we decided that these students after learning this methods after applying this methods of you know SMUS glasses on the field they would be selecting the practitioners of the place of the of the wetlands whom they can further teach the use of the glasses and how it can be used in you know future practices. So, we selected three types of bheris or sewage fed fisheries from the East Kolkata Wetlands a government bheri a private bheri and a cooperative bheri where the students will be teaching the you know the authorities about how about how they have applied this methods in EKW about what they have learned from   applied   this   methods.

 And why what their new learnings should be learned by these practitioners as well and that they would do by the use of this ethno hyphen graphy method. Because ethno hyphen graphy method it aligns with that SMUS toolkit concept. So, in this particular method what we do is we combine the traditional or conventional ethnographic methods of you know interviews of you know transit works of participant observation and discussions. And after integrating those knowledge into one place we try to you know explain that knowledge through a very participatory agency induced ethnovisual tool that can be done through you know cartography, videography, photography, sketches, illustrations etcetera.   So, it actually opens up you know avenues for you know the practitioner to learn and then to teach you know the people about what you know the new knowledge that they have gained and the you know whether they have learned or unlearn new things or whether they can provide critical feedback to the academic practitioners as well on this particular matter.

 So, here we will be concluding this particular lecture and the next part of the PEIP will be discussed in the section 2 of the PEIP lecture. Thank you.