Good Policies Make an Eco-friendly Urban Space

By:
Ashna Cherian (M.A Politics and International Relations) & **Jerry Mathew Abraham** (M.A Politics with Public Policy and Governance), School of International Relations and Politics, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala.

Keywords : **Urban Ecological Planning**, used as UEP in this write-up.

Urbanism, urbanization, urban etc. are the terms which we hear in our present world from a common man's perspective. When it comes to a scientific and a curricular means, Urban Studies and Urban Planning paves a great opportunity to study the above terms, its matters and importance. It is meant for people of all backgrounds irrespective of education, locality etc. and for those who wish for the development of their premises, either locally or globally. This write-up will be based on our visit and analysis through the streets and localities of Cochin in relation with the site analysis and our interactions with the faculties and students of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim on 1st November 2022, and deals with the Urban Ecological Planning.

The common factors that can be seen irrespective of market place, residential area and the public spaces in and around the entirety of Ernakulam, one of the oldest and prominent districts of Kerala, India might be different from that of another place whether its rural or urban, but they share equal interests. Those factors can be divided into various aspects like ecological, physical, social, environmental, regional, political etc. but can be put collectively under the umbrella term 'Urban Ecological Planning' as it is closely interconnected with each other.

The findings at a glance

- **Isolated livelihood** is a major factor that the people face a lot especially in this post-covid period. Many of them lost their jobs and some of them are dependent upon one family member and some are compelled to do jobs in order to get at least the minimum wage as to meet the needs of the present. On the other hand, this is an alarm towards unemployment and could be rectified through various measures.
- **Housing related risks** and the **rise of sea level** in Cochin are major facts which have to be solved urgently. These problems are encountered in the entire area irrespective of being urban or rural, as it is located near to the water bodies including river and sea. Whenever it rains, the level of water has a tendency to rise and it badly affects the areas including the town. Another factor is that, there are a lot of houses and shopping complexes in and around this place and there is no space to build a house, apartment or a shopping complex. This, along with the drainage blocks and the low availability of space for the water to seep into the soil, leads to the rise in the water level in the area.
- **Waste Management** is another issue faced in most of the areas of Cochin irrespective of market and residential places. All these places are adjacent to each other and as a result it creates the problem of Waste Management. The wastes here are being collected by the corporation authorities or agencies like Kudumbasree units or Haritha Karma Sena as per

their schedule. Even though the wastes are being collected within weeks by separating them as biodegradable, non-biodegradable, e-waste etc., and transported to places like Brahmapuram and other waste dumping yards or units, the inefficient working may also affect the process of waste management. Another issue is that biowaste, non-bio wastes like e-waste, sanitary wastes in these areas are increasing day by day and these create conditions for the spread of various contagious diseases, proliferation of mosquitoes, pollution and issues related to drainage. Due to the lack of space to dump the waste and to dispose it, out of compulsion, people try to dump or throw it in the spaces like rivers, canals, public spaces like parks, roads etc. As a result, there must be proper waste management plants and systems in order to control the problem of waste through solid waste management by following the 3 R's principles like Reuse, Reduce and Recycle as well as through wastewater treatment plants and waste bins with RFID chips in every residential area, markets and towns. It is much easier to sell the old items that are useful to the needy through the idea of 'recycle, pay less'. It is advisable to mobilize the existing waste management schemes while proceeding to the next step.

- **Issues related to road and traffic** are significant facets when we undertake an analysis. Even though Kochi has developed into an urban mode, it still faces the problems related to proper roads and traffic system. A major fact is that except the main roads, there is no such space for two-way roads to drive smoothly and this creates traffic blocks. The main roads in the city too are very congested as there is less space for parking and so on. The traffic block in these roads is too great a fact.

  These problems can be solved in many ways like: by constructing specific paths for cycles, bikes, walking, cars and heavy-duty vehicles along with an integrated traffic management program and parking facilities as it is a long-term process. Another way to prevent this in short-term is by promoting the use of public transport like bus, railway, metro and boats etc. Constructing a flyover would also be a solution so that problems like pollution, traffic block will be solved through its proper mobilization. On the other hand, it creates more job opportunities for people and some of the money from public transport is very much useful in the urban development of the particular areas. A notable point is that it enables people to meet and discuss by engaging in talks while they travel. Thus, there will be people's participation and a sense of creative engagement.

To regain the pride of Kochi

To regain Kochi, by re-establishing its pride, is not actually a risky task but the major challenges are the mindset of the people and their attitude towards their premises. In order to make it true, there isa lot to work and which would be very much simple through the ways of UEP.

The first and the foremost aspect is to create awareness among the people so that they may be self-conscious and make their maximum effort to protect nature and by adopting an urban perspective. From the problems mentioned above (refer The Findings at a Glance), it

is a fact that nowadays people are not at all connected with their nature and surroundings especially water bodies which makes them throw away the waste. So, in order to reconnect these areas and to increase the biodiversity, there must be an
eco-friendly urban public space in these areas where people interact with each other and join various discussions by sitting and walking around these areas. A notable point is that this may make them able to reclaim their past and to preserve their heritage through UEP. Thus, they may become aware about their premises and be self-conscious to protect it.

Shifting the present market to a new market is one of the solutions for the present problems that we see in and around Kochi. In our city walk, we understood and saw a new building in progress, which is the new market building under the initiative of Kochi Corporation. In our view, the new market will merge the entire markets in the present street and make them under one umbrella. Of course, this could be a big solution to many problems in the city and later there is a chance for a mall or a major trade center in this place without losing its legacy. This will be a great success if there will be an integrated parking system and proper waste management in the premises. It is advisable that when the present markets get shifted to the new market building, the old place can be converted to an urban space or become a solution to the present problems related to road and traffic mentioned above.

Last but not the least, for all these to get into action, the collective participation of the people and the authorities is a must along with the need for a policy which reclaims the heritage in the light of UEP. As an initial step, it is advisable to make changes in the current governance system by giving importance to policy, spatiality and a socio-fabric atmosphere where policy must define the spatiality and by establishing the codependence between them by constant learning. Here, the policy should be made out of people's active participation along with the authorities in a decentralized manner. The policy must be changed according to the situation. At the same time, the policy must act as the trigger for the change and evolution of society and spatiality through mutual accountability to the society and current governance system. Just like the last line of Robert Frost’s famous poem “Mending Wall which states: “good fences make good neighbors”, good and healthy policies make a good and eco-friendly urban space. Let's hope and work for that future.