How are the commons rediscovered by today's urbanised communities?

Jayaraj Sundaresan   Amogh Arakali

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Case No 1-0019

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Reframing Urban Inclusion

The opening set of cases produced by IIHS represents a focus central to our institutional mission, its teaching and its practice: urban inclusion. Through an on-going collaborative, multi-year research project titled 'Reframing Urban Inclusion', the 30 cases available on the website, www.cases.iihs.co.in include original teaching and learning cases commissioned and produced at IIHS through support from the Ford Foundation.

The cases were curated to address a particular set of challenges. The first is pedagogical. IIHS' stated aim is to be part of a global moment to re-think urban theory and practice from India, South Asia and the Global South. These cases are a key curricular and pedagogical intervention within that effort. Distributed through open access modes to encourage widespread, public and diverse forms of use, the cases seek to give scholars and educators in the Global South a new canon to teach with, that begins from and is responsive to place.

The second is more outward facing. India is at a critical moment in its urbanisation. The urban agenda has begun to emerge strongly on the national political register, and questions of how to shape policy agendas from housing to employment, planning to service delivery, are more pressing than ever before. It is our hope that these cases will therefore equally be used by and inform an evidence-based, empirically rich, conceptually grounded and reflexive practice and interface with policy.

Since 2013, the project has brought together leading academics and practitioners from different disciplines to identify and contextualise social and economic realities of Indian cities through the case method. We hope that they will provide new evidence of the possible opportunities and mechanisms for urban integration as well as build a conceptual and empirical foundation for politically, socially, and economically inclusive cities.

The project has three thematic foci:

1. Conceptualising Pro-Poor Planning

    Urban planning processes determine access to basic resources such as land, shelter and housing, livelihoods, mobility, and security. Inclusive urban planning is aimed at serving all the citizens of the city, reducing vulnerability and addressing exclusion from access to these basic resources.

    Cases in this theme (1) untangle the current state of urban planning and its effects on vulnerability and exclusion, (2) explore how meaningful participation can be more effective in pro-poor planning, and (3) highlight opportunities for, and instances of successful integration across agencies and organisations involved in urban planning.

2. Re-visiting Settlement Upgrading

This theme seeks to expand and re-articulate debates on slums in India. The 'slum' is a form of an urban settlement that is situated at the intersection of land markets, new urban political economies, the efficacy of the state as a provider of housing to the poor, differentiated state-citizen relations, splintered urban infrastructure, questions of law, legality and planning, as well as conceptions of urban citizenship.

Cases in this theme (1) explore the processes of settlement and resettlement, paying attention to the market and political forces that shape the outcomes, (2) broaden the scope of settlement transformation from spatial upgradation to impacts on other sites of transformation such as livelihoods and employment, and (3) explore alternative imaginations of 'property rights' and tenure regimes.

3. Re-drawing the Picture: Metrics of Urban Inclusion

The dynamics of urban poverty and vulnerability are poorly understood. We know that the security of tenure, spatial coherence of urban infrastructure and service delivery, transit distances between livelihoods and living spaces, socio- cultural identities and social networks play important roles in inclusive cities. However, we have limited statistical data and information on the locational and distribution patterns of urban India.

Cases in this theme (1) examine the use of data in urban decision making and identify potential sites for intervention, (2) provide a more contextual and holistic analysis of urban dynamics, moving beyond sector-wise administrative data collection methods, and (3) emphasise improvements in information and learning from experience for local decision making.

IIHS Case Method

The IIHS case is a work-in-progress that represents experiments in different forms of creating interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral cases, as well as a diversity of pedagogical environments to learn and teach with these cases. The opening set of cases is, thus, also in a sense, an experiment in form and teaching modes. Given this, we do not claim a singular 'IIHS Case Method' or any one form or definition of a case. Indeed, one of the explicit aims of case development at IIHS is to challenge conventional ideas of what case-based learning is.

How then does a user know how to use cases? Pedagogical transactions will differ from case to case and indeed multiple options will be open within each case. Therefore, in order to aid users, all IIHS cases come with a set of consistent elements that help users navigate through the diversity of form and content. These are:

- **Preface:** Every case begins with an introduction by the case writer that describes their own approach to the case. How did the case writer frame the case? Why did they choose to structure it as they have? What were their intentions in writing the case?
- **Teaching Note:** The second shared case element is the Teaching Note. Here, the case writer lays out their imagination of how they would teach with the case in its current form. They suggest learning outcomes, pedagogical modes, learning environments and assessment frames. True to the diversity of the cases, each of these is particular to the case.
- **The Main Case:** This is the main body of the case—its core empirics, arguments, discourse and data. Across the cases, these come in different forms: PowerPoint presentations, audio-visual material, web interfaces, written text, and data visualisations.
- **Pedagogical Possibilities:** The next element lays out the case writer's suggestions on other ways in which the case could be taught, including in other disciplines or learning environments. These are not as detailed as the Teaching Note but offer a set of possibilities to the user to imagine other uses of the case than those laid out.
- **Case Archive:** The final element of the case is a library of documents—reports to interview transcripts, unedited footage to visual photo libraries—that act as an archive for the case. This repository allows users to also access a host of background and additional information necessary to navigate the larger contexts in which the case is situated.

Each IIHS case—regardless of the diversity of its form—comes structured with these elements. It is our hope that this recognisable framework will enable users to navigate easily across cases with very diverse elements and forms.

Case Note

Hundreds of acres of soft white foam flying around joyously, or dancing flames of fire on a very large water body might sound like a dystopic, surrealist or absurdist apocalyptic sci-fi movie set, but we are describing the experience near some of the largest lakes in the city of Bangalore as we write this in October 2015. The toxic inflammable foam is only an outwardly expression of the very deep damage that has happened to the extensively networked regional water harvesting structures in the city over the last fifty years.

This case on Urban Commons is prompted by this specific experience. Through an extensive documentation of the problem of lakes in Bangalore, the material collated here provokes the reader to understand how commons transform during rural urban transition, and the consequent challenges in conceptualising the category of urban commons. We propose through this study that commons and community create each other, and through mapping this relationship, urban commons can be conceptualised and shaped using the notion of 'continuous collective production' rather than 'protection'. Due to the scalar and other complexities involved in such a process, this case demonstrates that urban transformations cannot be understood only premised upon public and private property, rights, access and management; rather there is a significant role for intermediate structures of social institutions that has been little understood in the Indian context.

Historically, intricately interconnected lakes, rivers, seasonal streams and regional drainage valleys—the geography of water harvesting systems—shaped the key ecological infrastructure that supported human habitation in the urbanising agrarian regions of south India. This man-made infrastructure promoted groundwater recharge, drainage, microclimate, water quality, public health, food security and livelihoods, and enabled a diversity of socio-economic and cultural practices. More than 150,000 water 'tanks' are known to exist in South India; about 38,000 in Karnataka.

Since the mid-twentieth century, urbanisation transformed the settlement morphology of the agrarian community and paved the way for new social relations, institutions of management, aspirations, and associations with the landscape resulting in devastating consequences for the wetlands infrastructure. Bangalore has gone from having 400 to 600 tanks in the 1980's to about 200 today. Innumerable water bodies and wetlands have been encroached or reclaimed and converted into infrastructure projects such as bus stands, roads, housing layouts and so on without considering the fact that each water body is located within the logic of drainage ecology of a larger networked system. Further, official and unofficial waste disposal agencies utilise the lakes to dispose of wastewater and sewage. The consequent innumerable impacts on everyday urban life—differentially distributed across social-geography—vary from death in the drains, flooding, to dancing flames and flying foam.

Local activist groups and other collectives work with government officials and institutions to save Bangalore's lakes and this is perhaps currently one of the most significant efforts of mobilisation of public interest groups in urban India.

This case documents this problem from all possible perspective and scales. Our case submission takes the form of a continuously updatable archive divided into specific thematic folders and a diverse range of standalone material, all of which can be utilised for a range of conversations mentioned in the following teaching note. There are maps and drawings, government reports, court case files, journal articles and academic papers and books.

Our case demonstrates that when urban transition introduces new requirements in collective social, political and economic life, new arrangements need to be organised for the sustainable production of commons to sustain that collective life. In the case of Bangalore's lakes, such an extensively networked system of interactions and flows can only be sustained through the involvement of a dense web of diverse actors and processes. These must interact across the socio- political, geographic and hydrological spheres where public and community institutions work together across scales for the production of public commons.

Thematically, even though the wide range of materials generated through this research was for shaping ideas on urban commons, special efforts have been taken to ensure that the content and form of the material generated is diverse and provides opportunities to be utilised across a variety of perspectives. The case archive consists of maps, government reports, court case documents, video interviews, photographs, academic papers, popular articles and doctoral thesis related to a wide range of issues discussed in the preface note.

Thus, this archive offers the opportunity to be used in many courses within graduate and undergraduate programmes on public administration, urban politics and planning, urban ecology, mapping and GIS, law and governance, environmental planning and design, land and housing, community/social work, urban activism, public participation and informality among others. Further, the form of the archive is also designed to enable its utilisation to suit diverse teaching formats such as small group seminars, classroom lectures, design studio programs, mapping exercises, fieldwork, social/community work-related training programs, group exercises, public campaigns and as individual reading materials.

This case can be used effectively for a semester-long full course as well as for short-term professional/senior executive learners or for continuing education programs. Collections from this archive will lend itself to teaching efforts on a wide range of thematic concerns such as the role of public institutions in managing ecological assets, theoretical engagement with the notion of public and the commons, methods of community activism, conflicts and contestation in land use, how complex regional drainage ecology works, urban bio-diversity and ecosystem services, urban water supply and sanitation, politics of water, socio-ecological questions in the age of urbanisation and climate change, legal institutions and ecological governance, public institutional performance, regional water harvesting and urban morphological history, rural-urban transition and decentralised governance among many others based on the creativity of the teacher who would use the collection.

Diversity of formats archived in the collection can be used for a range of purposes. For example, specific video interviews can be used for lectures or quizzes, specific lake stories can be used for the morphological study of settlements, court case documents can be used as supporting material for group exercises, academic papers can be used in compulsory bibliography, maps can be used for field work and mapping exercises, history of specific lake movements can be used for social movement evaluation group exercises, and so on.

Components and Materials

The case consists of two types of primary material - videos and photographs—that are accompanied by a section comprising of secondary material. The videos include interviews with key actors in the lake conservation movements in Bangalore as well as coverage of events such as protests. Exhibits 2 and 3 are detailed bios of two such actors: Harini Nagendra, Professor of Sustainability at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, whose research examines issues of social-ecological sustainability in forests and cities in the global South, with a focus on natural resource commons such as lakes and forests; and M. K. Khan, Principal of K. K. English School in Varthur, Bengaluru, who has been actively engaged with studies of contamination and pollution of Varthur Lake, one of the largest lakes in the Bengaluru Metropolitan Area.

Photographs are primarily of the Kaikondrahalli Lake Festival which took place in January 2015, as well as of other lakes in the city. Exhibit 1 is an image of the wetlands behind Kaikondrahalli Lake.

Secondary material consists of various media including (but not limited to) written articles, news reports, research papers, and links to journal articles which focus on the lakes and lake system in Bangalore. These have been located and archived by the case writers but have not been authored by them. Secondary material with copyright restrictions (such as pay-walled journal articles) are usually archived as links to the relevant sites from where licenses to access the material can be obtained.

Exhibits

Exhibit 1: Wetlands Behind Kaikondrahalli Lake – January 2015

Exhibit 2: Profile: Harini Nagendra

Harini Nagendra's full video interview is available in the main case.

Harini Nagendra is Professor of Sustainability at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. Her research examines issues of social-ecological sustainability in forests and cities in the global South, with a focus on natural resource commons such as lakes and forests.

In this interview, she provides an overview of the lakes in Bengaluru and the social, political, and ecological networks they are embedded in. She talks about the communities whose traditional practices are centred around lakes, the changes which have taken place around lakes in the Bengaluru region and their consequent impacts upon the city.

Exhibit 3: Profile: MK Khan

M. K. Khan's full video interview is available in the main case.

M. K. Khan is the Principal of K. K. English School in Varthur, Bengaluru. A long-time resident of Varthur, he has been actively engaged with studies of contamination and pollution of Varthur Lake, one of the largest lakes in the Bengaluru Metropolitan Area. The faculty and students of K. K. English School have spearheaded several studies and campaigns around the lake system in Varthur and have been actively involved in local conservation efforts. The school has collaborated with other institutes in the city such as the Indian Institute of Science and St. Joseph's College to study the nature of contamination and pollution in Varthur Lake. Students of the school have also presented their work at the bi-annual lakes seminar organised by the Centre for Ecological Studies at the Indian Institute of Science.

In this interview, M. K. Khan talks about the work of K.K. English School around Varthur Lake, the studies they have conducted on pollution in Varthur Lake, and their efforts to spread awareness about environmental issues in the area.

Teaching Note

One possible structure is demonstrated below in the form of an outline for a specific 12-week course on Urban Commons.

Week1

COMMONS: THE HISTORY OF THE IDEA

Lecture: 1 hour

This lecture will introduce the idea of the commons, the framing of its tragedy, the debates and the critical revival of the concept through institutionalist, Marxist and other frameworks.

Key readings

1. The Tragedy of the Commons by Garett Hardin (published 1968, in public domain)

2. The Creation of the Urban Commons by David Harvey (Chapter 3 of Rebel Cities, published 2012)

3. My Rocky Road to the Commons by Jacques Paysan (published as part of an open-source book called "Wealth of the Commons", in public domain)

Group exercise

An introduction based on Bangalore lakes and wetlands – division of groups, discussion on the nature of assignment and tasks, clarify expectations and formats. The group exercise will require students to examine topics in each lecture using specific cases supported by the material in the archive and field work.

Week 2

FRAMING COMMONS: SOCIO-POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF THE WETLAND SYSTEM IN BANGALORE

This lecture will discuss how the settlement pattern is integrally connected with its hydro-geomorphology. It will discuss based on the transforming settlement pattern and the geography of water systems in Bangalore (and south India in general), emphasising the interdependency and the hydro-geomorphology and its connection with the agrarian socio-ecology.

Materials that will be used include a collection of academic articles, newspaper reports, images, maps, photographs and video interviews on the following:

- Bangalore regional landscape and natural valleys

- Lake networks – lakes, rajakaluves, natural rivers etc.

- Lake and land use of village and urban settlements and their connection

- Parts of video interview with KrishnachandranBalakrishnan and HariniNagendra

- Parts of paper by David Mosse

Key Readings

1. Vanishing Lakes – A Study of Bangalore City by P Thippaiah

2. Bangalore Lakes – Issues and Perspectives by Jumbe, Nandini, Tandon and Sunitha

Group presentations: 2 hours

Based on Week 1 lecture, each group will present for 30 minutes (15 minutes per presentation and15 minute discussion) identifying diverse systems of commons and justifications on why those should be framed as commons.

Week 3

REFRAMING COMMONS: RURAL-URBAN TRANSITION AND THE SOCIO-ECOLOGY

Lecture: 1–1.5 hours

This lecture will discuss how specific material or non-material commons transform in time and space retaining partial function while discarding other functions. This could be effectively discussed using the case of Bangalore wetlands—how rural-urban transition has transformed the identity and relationship of key ecological assets and wetlands with the people and city. Examples include employment transitions, change in social-compositional mix, land acquisition, development authority layouts, infrastructure development etc.

Key Readings/Material to be used from the archive

1. Rachenahalli – The Story of a Kere by Rohan D'Souza

2. Greed and Connivance – Report by Karnataka Task Force for Recovery of Public Land and its Protection (Section on Lakes and Water Bodies)

3. Impact of Urbanisation on Interconnectivity of Wetlands by T.V. Ramachandra et al.

4. Video interview with UshaRajagopalan (selected sections)

5. Video interview with M K Khan (selected sections)

6. Video interview with V Balasubramanian (selected sections)

Group work

This exercise is intended to teach the students to map and to learn how to account for socio-ecological assets. This exercise will run through three weeks mapping geography, biodiversity, politico-socio-ecology through selecting specific wetland series in the Bangalore region. The exercise should encourage students to map the complex and intricate interdependencies, productive and competing relationships, and examine what it means to understand these wetlands as commons. How wide and thick would one be able to map from the birds, trees and animals to cultures, geographies, hydrology downstream or upstream.

Week 4

REFRAMING COMMONS: INSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS ON THE PUBLIC, THE PRIVATE AND THE COMMUNITY

Lecture: 1–2 hours

This is based on the transforming institutionsof management—the relationship between socio-political institutional production and management of urban landscape, and ecological commons.

Materials to be used

From the Archive: Collection of academic articles, newspaper reports, images maps, photographs and video interviews that discussed the transformations from traditional institutional system , the land ownership pattern, maintenance responsibility, use pattern, role of village community, post-independent state formation, institutional rearrangement and realignment, public space provision, the presence of fishing rights and rural institutions etc. that will help reveal the institutional changes in rural urban transition.

Key readings/Material from the Archive

1.   Rachenahalli – The Story of a Kere by Rohan D'Souza

2.   Video Interview with Rohan D'Souza (Selected Sections)

3.   Video Interview with HariniNagendra (Selected Sections)

4.   Video Interview with Leo Saldanha (Selected Sections)

Group work

This exercise is intended to teach the students to map and to learn how to account for socio-ecological assets. This exercise will run through three weeks mapping geography, biodiversity, politico-socio-ecology through selecting specific wetland series in the Bangalore region. The exercise should encourage students to map the complex and intricate interdependencies, productive and competing relationships, and examine what it means to understand these wetlands as commons. How wide and thick would one be able to map from the birds, trees and animals to cultures, geographies, hydrology downstream or upstream.

Week 5

Field visits on the wetlands system and specific lakes and villages to discuss transitions and challenges (one day). If possible, the team will comprise bird watchers, landscape ecologists, local community groups and students.

Week 6

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF URBAN COMMONS: CONCEPTUAL, THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

Lecture: 1–2 hours

Possibilities and limitations of an idea of urban commons

Key readings/Material from the Archive

1. Video Interview with VijayanMenon (Selected Sections)

2. Video Interview with HariniNagendra (Selected Sections)

3. Video Interview with Leo Saldanha (Selected Sections)

Group work

This will comprise presentations from field work on key issues in the rural-urban transition of the Bangalore wetlands system. It will also include mapping socio-economic transformations, transformation in institutionalised systems and institutional actors in each case study problem of each group, etc.

Week 7

ESTABLISHING URBAN COMMONS

Lecture: 1–2 hours

This will use extensive empirical material to discuss how transformation of these assets creates city wide impact, and also if it offers an opportunity to establish at what level these assets emerge as commons to whom. The main emphasis will be on the effects of transformation and the changing needs of urban life, and the need for shaping commons as an idea that identifies them as something that is there. This lecture will discuss moving from preservation to continual production of commons.

Material to be used

Collection of academic articles, newspaper reports, images maps, photographs and video interviews on interactions like reclamation for housing, sanitation programs, encroachment, sewage let outs (BWSSB), the forest/local authority/BDA/division of labour, fishing, commercialisation program, of lakes rajakaluves, slums, rich people etc. These have an impact on flooding, mosquitoes, public health, hydrology and microclimate.

Key Readings

1. The Creation of the Urban Commons by David Harvey

2. Introduction to Governing the Commons by ElinorOstrom

3. Managing the Commons by Nicole Garnett

Group work will continue on the specific case studies.

Week 8

FORMING OF URBAN COMMUNITY SHAPING OF URBAN COMMONS

Lecture: 1–2 hours

This lecture will focus on how commons get shaped and formed, discovered by specific spatial, emotional and ideational communities using the specific example of local lake activism in Bangalore.

Material to be used

Collection of academic articles, newspaper reports, images maps, photographs and video interviews on the following:

- Neighborhood unrest—environment-based mobilisations in Bangalore

- Lakshman Rau Committee Report

- Litigation around lakes

- Local actors such as those involved in the conservation of:

    - Mestripalya Lake

    - Kaikondanahalli Lake

    - Sankey Tank

Key Reading list/Materials from Archive

1. Video interview with UshaRajagopalan

2. Video clips from the One Bengaluru for Lakes Conference in September 2014

3. Clips of protests against encroachment at Sankey Tank

4. Several articles saved on the archive documenting various initiatives and incidents on the lake conservation movements in Bangalore

Discussion

1. **Theorisation of the relationship between the commons, community, public and private towards a notion of public commons.**

2. Commons and Community as entities that form each other examining the role of categories like public and private.

   - Communal

   - Inclusion/exclusion

   - Public/private

   - Neo-liberal

Group work

This involves mapping the dynamics of existing or potential local activism, community and issues around the specific case examples.

Week 10

Final presentation and exhibition using drawings, photographs, documentation, narratives, etc.

Accessing the Full Case

The full content of this case is open-access and downloadable at www.cases.iihs.co.in.

The full content of this case includes the following documents:

Folder A: Introduction to the Case

Terms of Use and Agreement

Reframing Urban Inclusion

IIHS Case Method

Preface Note

Teaching Note

Folder B: Main Case

Video Interviews

Vijayan Menon

Usha Rajagopalan

Harini Nagendra

Leo Saldhana

United Way

V Balasubramanian

KK English School

Rohan D'Souza

Krishnachandran Balakrishnan

Sridhar Pabisetty

Users of Puttenahalli Lake

Other Videos

Protests at Sankey Tank

Protests on Public Lands

Photographs

>> Kaikondrahalli Lake Activities (Birdwatching, Cultural Events, Lake Festival, Notices and Descriptions)

>> Sankey Tank Protests

>> Public Lands Protests

Folder C: Supplementary Material

Written Articles, News Reports, Research Papers, and Links to Journal Articles for the Following Lakes:

>> Agara

>> Doddanekundi

>> Hebbal

>> Kaikondrahalli

>> Mestripalya

>> Narsipura

>> Puttenahalli

>> Rachenahalli

>> Sankey Tank

Red Bull Flugtag Event

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About the Author

Jayaraj Sundaresan co-directs the Urban Fellowship Program for 2016 and anchors the development of regional and urban planning domain. He is an urbanist with a background in Human Geography, Urban Sociology, Urban Planning, Urban Design and Architecture. Sundaresan has been a researcher at the London School of Economics and Political Science LSE), Associate at the Development Planning Unit (UCL) and is now with IIHS. His research and practical pursuits inform each other in the field of human settlements, human geography, urban planning and design. He is a qualified architect with an M.Arch in Urban design from the School of Architecture and Planning at CEPT University, Ahmedabad; MSc in City Design and Social science from LSE Cities Program and completed his PhD in Regional and Urban Planning Studies from the LSE Department of Geography. His PhD thesis theorises the relationship between land use planning process and land use violations in Bangalore. He consulted the London local government on policies panning across Planning, Regeneration and Urban Design. His work in India ranges from being a member of municipal commitee and task force in Cochin and Thiruvananthapuram, practicing architect, and conservation & documentation of historic settlements.

Amogh Arakali is Senior Associate, Academics & Research at IIHS. His work focuses on the study of institutions, their structures, behaviour, and evolution within urban political economies. In particular, his work analyses how institutions evolve, adapt, and influence in the face of urbanisation in India.

About IIHS

The Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) is a national education institution committed to the equitable, sustainable and efficient transformation of Indian settlements. IIHS aims to establish an independent funded and managed National University for Research and Innovation focused on the multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional challenges and opportunities of urbanization. The University is intended to be a globally ranked institution. The IIHS is a proposed network of mother and daughter institutions across South Asia, leveraging on the local and regional knowledge and innovation and linking them to global best practices. Its mother campus, based in Bengaluru, will include academic, research and social infrastructure, student and faculty housing. This campus is expected to set international standards for efficient, economic and sustainable design, operations and maintenance.

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