

3rd International Conference on Urban & Regional Planning

Why Innovation and Technological Advancement are not the same in Development Interventions?

Report by: Mansoor Raza, Dr. Saeed ud Din Ahmed and Farida G

“The One constructive idea injected into collective thinking can have a multiplicit stimulative impact”, said by Mr. Javed Jabbar who was addressing the august gathering as Chief Guest at 3rd annual International Conference on Urban & Regional Planning organized by the Department of Architecture & Planning NED University, Karachi on March 15-16, 2019.

This particular annual event has a long legacy of commitment, dedication and continuity of untiring efforts engaging scholars, policy makers, industry, students and other stakeholders in various discourses pertinent to the subjects of Urban and Regional Planning. It is one of its kind platforms in Pakistan to discuss thrilling ideas, to deliberate upon crucial issues and to develop framework shaping our communities and cities at large in the global flux of rapid urbanization.

The theme of the 3rd International CURP-2019; *‘Innovation in Planning and Practice’* drew attention to the courage to do things differently and to revolutionize old practices as innovation bears a tendency to turn the planning disasters into successful case-studies.

The Conference commenced on 15th March 2019 with welcome address by Prof. Dr. Anila Naeem, Chairperson Department of Architecture & Planning. Dr. Anila highlighted the department’s achievements and its continuing efforts in providing such intellectual forums. She informed the audience that responding to the call for papers, over 35 abstracts were received, of which 12 were shortlisted by Scientific Committee for inviting full paper. The conference program included 9 papers and 3 additional presentations by invited guest speakers, she said.



Inaugural Session: (L to R) Prof. Dr. Anila Naeem, Dr. Mansoor Ali, Prof. Dr. Noman Ahmed, Javed Jabbar and Dr. Sarosh Hashmat Lodi



Panel Discussion: (L to R) Makhtar Hameed, Khadija Jamal, Dr. Zaneris Ahmed, Dr. Mansoor Ali and Prof. Dr. Noman Ahmed



Speaking on the occasion as Chief Guest, Javed Jabbar, a prominent Pakistani writer and former Information Minister highlighted the importance of out of box thinking and innovative approach which are mostly emerged at such intellectual forums. Legislation whether in Pakistan or abroad has been the result of interactions outside government as consensus, in general, are developed by the civil society at seminars, conferences and discussions when people are able to present various perspective, he said.

Addressing the audience on the occasion, Dr. Sarosh Hashmat Lodi, Vice Chancellor NED University appreciated the efforts of the Department of Architecture & Planning for organizing such scholarly dialogues on innovative subjects to discuss current issues in the field of urban and regional planning.

At Inaugural Session on first day of the Conference, the theme address was presented by Dr. Mansoor Ali who flew from United Kingdom to participate in the Conference. He discussed at length the

innovative approach in Solid Waste Management (SWM) while exploring the virtual market for recycling. Based on a Bangkok case study, he informed the participants that technological opportunities present in the digital era offer new possibilities for doing business. Devices such as mobile phones are gaining rapid access in both developing and developed countries with an increasing number of connections, he said. Dr. Mansoor emphasized that technological advancement opens a new gateway to potentially improving the SWM systems offering a low cost two way communicating system between the supply and demand sides.

Another presentation of the session was made by Dr. Noman Ahmed and Ar. Fariha Tahseen on the subject of “Examining Mapping as an Innovative Tool for Community Empowerment in the Context of Unplanned Settlements”. Dr. Noman shared his research findings based on a case study in Karachi and said that mapping can be used as a documentation tool to generate factual evidences related to land ownership/ utilization status, state input related to land supply and other related matters. He further emphasized that mapping as a tool of documentation on city wide level especially for peri urban land of unclear status may cease unlawful authorities and land grabbers from land invasions, sub divisions and selling.



Both presentations were further discussed by the panelists Mukhtar Husain and Khadija Jamal whereas the panel was moderated by Dr. Suneela Ahmed.

In addition to Inaugural Session, the 2-day Conference was comprised of three Technical Sessions with three presentations in each session followed by panel discussions and Q-A sessions moderated by senior



faculty at the Department of Architecture & Planning.

A couple of academically robust papers were presented encompassing and revolving around the title of *“Innovation in Planning and Practice”* by nine scholars including:

1. Dr. Mansoor Ali
2. Dr. Noman Ahmed
3. Tahera Hasan
4. Nazeef Pasha
5. Nadeem Rao
6. Shafaat Nawaz
7. Dr. Shabih-ul-Hassan Zaidi
8. Nyoman Gede Putra
9. Dr. Ameen Monassar

Four major themes emerged from the presented papers were summarized by Mansoor Raza and Dr. Saeed ud Din as follows:

1. Traditional methods and processes for the provision of services and urban planning are not capacitated enough to cater to the requirements of the people. This leads to the waste of resources, corruption and political interference. Hence, new methods/innovation is needed to maintain equity in service provision and when it comes to making a vision of planning exercise.
2. Technology emerged as the main driver of innovation to meet the above-mentioned objectives. The flow of logic started with the premise that innovative programs re different from traditional programs for provision of public services. If managed traditionally the principles of innovation which primarily are flexibility, transparency, sustainability and enhanced outreach, are lost. Managing innovation is important and since private sector is efficiency freak hence public-private partnership is necessary with due regulatory mechanisms.



3. Innovation in bottom-up approach is possible through involvement of professionals for participatory action for the benefit of the poor. The conclusion was that if communities can speak the language and can use the vocabulary as understood by line departments and planning agencies, they can be heard for their rights to make history of their successes. Mapping of localities and digital documentation of level of services could be one such language in development interventions.
4. Heritage and tradition is an asset. Those have associated economy and human memories. There is a call for innovation to combine tradition with modernity from planning perspectives. The pitfall however is that, if one goes for globalization then there emerges a desire to preserve local traditions. It is a struggle how to maintain cordiality with globalization driven modernization and yet not to suffocate local identity.

The implicit cross cutting thread in almost all the papers that digitization, being the latest form of technological advancement can conveniently be paired with innovation. If considered from people's perspective that is problematic and actually is killer for indigenous innovation for the following reasons:

1. Technology itself is capital intensive, soulless and by its very nature pro-elite. It usually takes ages, political will and substantial resources to make any new technology capable to serve large number of people.
2. Technology has limitations as well. The user literacy rates, understanding and adaptability of technology determines the capacity of the society to embrace changing technologies.
3. Any new technology, can suffocate indigenous wisdom and methods of production rooted in culture and history.

The challenge that is posed to development practitioners is by the use of the term innovation itself. In the era of neo-liberal economics the term is hijacked by corporate gurus to extract most value out of the human and material resources. Since business discourse is dominated by technological changes it failed to appreciate the other forms of generation of new ideas and the accompanying knowledge. While the indigenous people and the poor have the capacity to produce important knowledge, the scalability and salability imperatives force the capitalists to conveniently ignore those valued versions of innovation. By failing to acknowledge the production of knowledge and information as itself an innovation, the custodians of technology writes off the global poor as lacking innovation. This retrenches the traditional narratives of development of a helpless global poor waiting for saviors to come save them from their deprivations. Loaded with the baggage of this one-dimensional meaning of innovation, it allows powerful to reassert their innovation starved subjects: thus reinforcing the already existing power



structures and power plays.

This conceptual perplexity could be addressed by establishing the aim of innovation. If one sets the aim of the innovation as to solve the issues faced by a commoner in the street, than the prime requirement of innovation is to build on the existing methods by understanding those robustly. If not, the affected academia and the institutional donor agencies will continue to miss the interesting opportunities to address these and other challenges that exist in the minds and practices of the global poor. Will they come out of this politics of semantics and resource grabbing is a question to answer and then how?

Following the Conference summary as presented by Mansoor Raza, Dr. Anila Naeem, Chairperson DAP NED presented vote of thanks. All presenters, panelists and session moderators were presented mementoes; designed by Fariya Nasir, Fareeha Nasir and Unsia Kanwal (5th year students of Architecture) whose design was selected during a competition conducted at 4th year Design Studio for Conference theme.

The 3rd International Conference was convened by Farida Abdul Ghaffar with Saadia Bano as Co-Convener and both days' proceedings were conducted by Sarah Ather Khan and Ambreen Alwani with a team of students from 2nd year Architecture and Development Studies. On this occasion students' work from various batches was also displayed.