

International Seminar
On
Locating Neighbourhood in the Global South
25th -26th September 2019

Organised by
Department of Sociology
Tezpur University

Neighbourhoods are the essential building blocks of the urban landscape. Yet, these are immensely ignored in urban studies, planning and policy making. In the core, neighbourhood is spatial but it cannot be perceived as merely administrative units bereft of its neighbourliness. Therefore, neighbourhoods in their spatial locationality are embedded in social and historical specificities. Together, these spatial, social and historical characteristics of neighbourhoods, determine the form of the urban, another neglected domain of scholarship.

This seminar is conceptualised to focus on neighbourhoods, their particularities and their role in shaping our understanding of the urban in the global South. In the last couple of decades, the global South in general and India in particular has witnessed massive growth of cities. In India, more than one third of her population lives in cities. Yet, the social dynamics of this urban growth has never been studied in terms of practices and everyday life in spatially grounded manner. It is this spatial rootedness of the urban social life, which draws our attention to neighbourhoods. Urban development, growth and expansion are not merely about infrastructures and enlargement of cityscapes, urban transformations shape subjectivities and experiences of people who live there. These subjectivities and perceptions when contextualised in their specific contextual frames of neighbourhoods, we hope to get a nuanced understanding of location of neighbourhoods in thinking about the urban as well as a rich tapestry of urban life itself.

Although urban neighbourhood has been a subject of discussion in sociology and urban planning for nearly a century, with a considerable influence of Chicago school, the socio spatial complexities and their implications on urban discourse and planning is often ignored in the scholarship. The discussion on neighbourhood in recent decades have either been overshadowed by questions of ethnicity and ghettoisation of specific segments or it is framed in

terms of increased global flow of capital, commodities, practices and forms where the local and the spatial particularities loose significance.

The discussion is mainly centred on the process of neighbourhood formation, recent developments in and the decline of traditional urban neighbourhoods, and solutions to the problems of urban development and change. Neighbourhood has gained renewed interest and significance due to the rapid growth of population in cities. Urban ecological theory, which dominated the sociological studies in the early 1900s, analysed cities through the human ecology lens and saw poor urban neighbourhoods as transitional and functional zones of larger urban metropolises; places where new immigrant groups would pass through for a temporary period of time. The relationship between people and their residential environments is apparently far more complicated. The relationship between the individual and the environment, with an emphasis on how people perceive and experience their residential environments, is a vital theme for research. Presently scholars have emphasised on the socio-spatial in nature of the urban space. Here the everyday social practices, value regimes, housing, religiosity and urban planning come together to enable us to explore various socio-political dimensions of urban life, this in turn help us to design a robust policy and implement it effectively.

The social sciences literature on neighbourhood and its role in urbanization go back to early twentieth century. Later, Henri Lefebvre's *Production of space* and further works of David Harvey, Manuel Castells (space of flow and networks) emphasized different dimensions of space. In the context of Global South, Roy and Ong analyze the aspirational urbanization through the idiom of 'worlding', where each city strives to become 'world class', creating homogeneous infrastructures across cities and a relation of city to capital that scholars like David Harvey, Neil Brenner, Manuel Castells and Saskia Sassen bring out. However, while this transnational network of capital and knowledge gives rise to a specific urban form, replete with malls, metro rails and gated communities, creative engagement with such spaces remain alive and Abdou Maliq Simone talks of this creative potential in terms of 'people as infrastructure' in the context of African cities, while James Holston and Teresa Calderia think of cities as spaces where the everyday processes of citizenship and belonging are marked.

In this backdrop, the proposed seminar attempts raise and understand some of the questions such as

- How to conceptualise neighbourhoods as changing socio-spatial units in their specific regional settings;
- How do value regimes, religiosity and subjectivities give neighbourhoods their social meanings and stereotypes;
- How discourses and knowledge practices i.e. planning, architecture and urban discourses of governance shape the understanding of neighbourhoods;
- How to conceptualise linkages and dis-junctures between the social practices of neighbourhoods and the language and logic of urban planning and governance.
- How to conceptualise particularities of neighbourhoods and neighbourliness in the global South?
- What do these particularities offer us in terms of thinking about contemporary urban landscape?

The seminar welcome papers with focus, but not limited to, on neighbourhoods and associated aspects in non-mega cities, tier II cities and small cities. An edited volume has been planned as a follow up activity. It is intended to be a multi-disciplinary exercise and it looks forward to receive paper which may be rich in ethnographic detail, sophisticated in terms of conceptual exploration or innovative in approach.

The seminar is organised by the Department of Sociology, Tezpur University, Assam, India. The local hospitality including boarding and food along with airport transfer will be taken care of by the host institution. We are currently working towards covering domestic travel expenditure for participants within India. The seminar is open to participants who are at an advance stage of Ph.D. to senior academics and practitioners.

Important Dates

Abstract Submission: **5th June 2019 (Around 400-500 words)**

Acceptance Confirmation: **10th June 2019**

Full Draft Submission: **31st August 2019 (Around 6000-8000 words)**

Seminar Conveners

Amiya Kumar Das, Tezpur University, Assam
Dev Nath Pathak, South Asian University, New Delhi
Sadan Jha, Centre for Social Studies, Surat

Contacts: Email: **sociotezu@gmail.com** Phone no: **+919864565376**