

NEW PATNA WORLD CITY - A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF UTOPIA

Vriddhi¹, Dr. Pushplata²

ABSTRACT:

The interaction between city and water river has always possessed vast set of opportunities for urban development and renewal - the case of Patna and Ganga is the same. With the ambitions to put a new image of Patna on the world map, the government of Bihar has invited a proposal from Hafeez Contractor - a well known architect. He has proposed New Patna World City on the Diara, a 30 yr fluvial terrace of Patna, which boasts of world class facilities for recreation, community, sports, commercial and residence. The new development proposal draws its inspiration form world class city Dubai. It tries to paint a beautiful picture for the residents, investors, Social activists and environmentalists alike. This paper examines the proposal from a critical perspective.

Keywords: NEW PATNA, CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF UTOPIA, WORLD CITY, Patna And Ganga

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Architecture and Planning, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, India

² Professor, Department of Architecture and Planning, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, India

1. INTRODUCTION

Patna is the capital of Bihar. According to 2011 census the city has 1.9 million population with a density of 1.803 people per sq.km. Historically the city developed on the banks of river Ganges around 300 B.C. It stands at a location where the river (tributary) Gandak meets Ganges. Shifting of river due to siltation started around 1980's, so that presently the river is 2.5 km away from the old riverfront. Due to the above, two major concerns have risen. First being exposure of new landform called as *Diara* in local language or 30 year old flood plain. This land of around 1700 acres is currently being used for vegetable and fruit farming and small patches of residences for poor. Secondly the loss of a 15km stretch of riverfront, which started 30 years before has resulted in disassociation of the city with the river. The edge of the city is under constant change due to the eroding effects of the river. This has resulted in development of city's back towards the river. Chaotic growth on the edge of the city due to the new found land has occurred.

The city faces extreme pressure of growth and expansion due its increasing population. Patna was the fifth fastest growing city of India according to City Mayor's Foundation in the span of 2005-2010. This pressure has led to the decision of development and urbanization of this fluvial terrace. A proposal has been invited from the well known architect Hafeez Contractor by the government of Bihar. New Patna World city is the design which has been presented by him on April 2012. The new development claims to follow the lines of Dubai to achieve a new imagery for Patna, in front of the world.

"Some people see things as they are and say why? I dream things that never were and say why not." The proposal starts off by using the quote of famous political leader John F. Kennedy. It further puts claims in form of shorts sentences on the design sheets. These are mentioned in the paper later.

These claims carve a niche of good condition and better situation in future, for all sections of the society. It does not leave any section of the residential population, investors, government or environmentalists untouched. Further comparisons of the present city development to Dharavi, a slum in Mumbai, paints a condition of dystopia for the masses. The idea appeals to the residents as they can relate to the flooding, unsafe environment, lack of job, health and education opportunities. It also appeals to the emigrants who left for the same.

A utopia is an ideal imaginary situation which emerges out of needs, concerns and aspirations for a present situation. It is an image which helps a person, city, state, country or society to move forward. Given this definition, in terms of planning and design for the city and urban life. A utopian idea emerges out of the onset of a web of interlinked factors out of which the shortcomings of present planning and design of city and urban life is one of the major factors. While the promotion of an urban image of development and growth is another. Hence the paper intends to critically evaluate the Utopian image of the proposal.

2. INTENT AND QUESTIONS

The paper tries to identify the reason for New Patna World City to have acquired the pedestal of Utopia for living situation in Patna, and its appropriateness for the same. Is New Patna World City a Utopia? Does it fulfill the necessary credits to attain that pedestal? Is the image false? Or true?

3. SIGNIFICANCE

The study will uncover the positive and negative aspects of New Patna World City proposal in front of the stakeholders. This will help them in taking an informed and sound decision. The study and its method can also be applied to new proposals all around the country of similar

nature. In the end hopefully the paper instills a questioning nature for new as well as old developments, proposals, and ideas so that un mindful construction and proposals can be replaced by sustainable initiatives all around the country.

4. METHOD

The research will interact with the proposal, New Patna World City from a critical view trying to connect to the present living conditions of Patna and its relationship with the river. Existing literature, grey literature and documentaries will be reviewed for better understanding of the situation. The study will try to analyze the proposed development with only two category of people i.e residents and environmentalists. As the residents are the ones who are directly affected by any change in the built environment. But with the onset globalization and mass media the needs, requirements and aspirations of the common are largely altered, leading to the incorporation of environmentalists and researchers in the study.

The study of the present condition of riverfront and urban condition of Patna will be done. Further with the help of case examples of similar context i.e. degrading, disfunctioning riverfront conditions, pressure of growth and urbanization. The study will try to draw parallels for the new proposal. Finally the various claims of the proposal will be critically evaluated to come to a conclusion.

5. LITERATURE

The nature and size of proposal and the way it has been backed by the government so far puts it under the category of 'Instant cities'. The term has been used by Samer Bagaen for construction in Dubai, where the government wanted to promote real estate development through instant urbanism also called as 'super fast urbanism'. Instant cities are developments

which are not evolutionary but a product of a need built within a short time frame. They can be cities built within cities to attract international economic interests.

He further states that the idea of instant cities so far has always been clubbed with successful branding. It refers to transformation and promotion of urban image that are linked to entrepreneurial governance in the West. Conscious use of images and representations have been used to attract investments and led to competitions. Repetitions of such similar development has now set a development standard for the Asian countries to follow. Singapore and Shanghai are some of the cities that have been able to capture that image of development. Its not a shock that the proposal of Patna is following the same trend even though the governance and the economic system are completely different. Waterfront developments all over the world are also part of this competition between cities to attract investments.

There is no absolute theory for waterfront regeneration and revitalization, however there have been frameworks which have been developed according to the suitability of the place and context. The concept of waterfront revitalization came in the second half of the 20th century when most of the port cities faced a removal of industries from waterfronts. However in the present case the land has been naturally reclaimed by the river, the soil is extremely fertile and there are no brownfields. Also a sizeable number lives and their livelihood comes from this land.

There is an absence of educational literature for the interaction of Patna with Ganges, however mythological, and fictional stories do give an account of how the river was used by the city. The importance of river in the contemporary city has also not been document, even though efforts to beautify and revitalize the remaining

riverfront by the government has been undertaken. The City Development of Patna has devoted a complete chapter for the development

of the riverfront of Patna. The area for New Patna World City (NPWC) in this map has been marked as a recreational area as shown below.

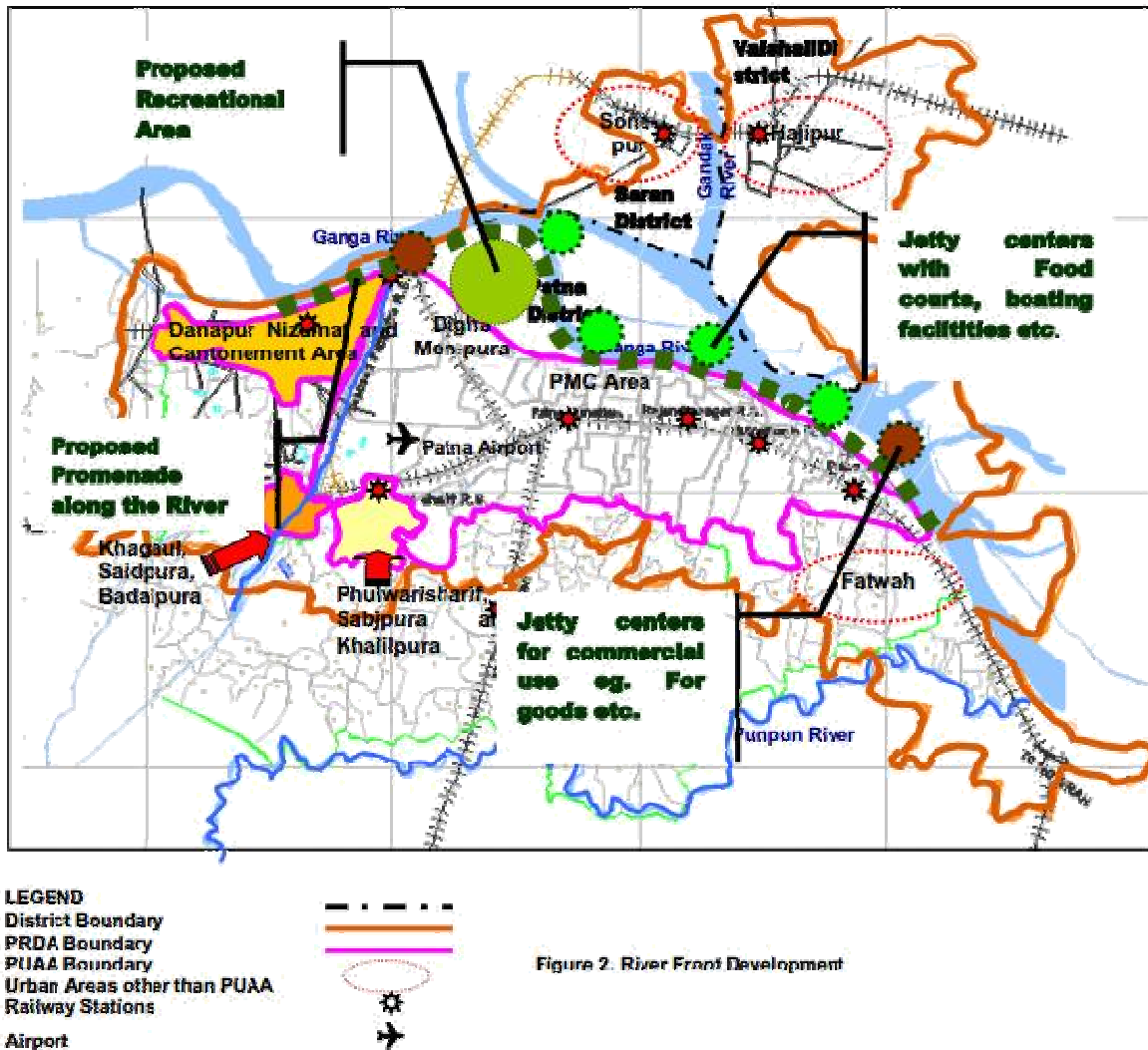


Figure 2. River Front Development

Figure 1: CDP Plan for Diara region

The study of a thesis of a Bachelors student in the year of 2011 shows the present relation between the city and river.



Figure 2: Present relation between river and city

At present there has been a loss of 15 kilometers of riverfront from the old city due to the shifting of river, which has resulted in poor urban image along the edge of the city.

6. CASE EXAMPLES

Construction in **Dubai** has been chosen for study as it is an example of Instant city phenomena, a common facet to New Patna World City so far. In Dubai the speedy development of real estate market was basically done to make the economy less dependent on oil. Despite having the required technical knowledge and more than sufficient financing

the development suffered setbacks in form of, delays due to economic recessions, bad construction, natural forces of soil erosion, degradation of quality of water and marine life in the gulf and a large number of stranded construction workers from different countries. However the image of Dubai on the world as a major real estate investment has been successfully conveyed and most of the properties had been booked even before the construction began.

Sabarmati Riverfront Regeneration

Programme of Ahmadabad is another project worth discussing as it is the pioneer in riverfront development in the country, even though the scale, nature of water body and its interaction with the city is much different. The project proposal of Sabarmati tried to portray the same image of globalised development of riverfront regenerations around the world to its residents. However in the process, 10,000 riverside dwellers were evicted from the site, and only some were completely rehabilitated. The problem of floods even though was tackled in the city yet the outer adjacent development now faces yearly floods owing to quick runoffs. A major failure of the project was the inadequacy of the design process to get feedbacks from the users. The success of the project can only be felt by the elite class of Ahmadabad, even though the project boasts of inclusive development. Yet on the brighter side, the project has been able to provide large number of commercial, recreational, and aesthetic facilities on a stretch of 20 kilometers and will successfully stitch the two parts of the city together, while opening it up for public use.

Waterfront revitalization attempts in Istanbul is another case worth examining as it has already been implemented and it clearly demonstrates the side effects of copying the global image of waterfront revitalization in an old city. Two developments: Revitalization of Haliç's Waterfront and Galata Port Project are the projects which faced a lot of criticism from the residents and critics for completely being unable to cater to the region's and sites unique context.

7. ANALYSIS

Waterfront developments all around the world are done for achieving three main objectives:

Redefinition of waterfront's position in the urban context, remaking the urban image and regeneration of the economy. However in the

case of Instant cities they are done to remake the urban image of the city in front of the world to reap financial benefits in form of investments. However as explained in the case example of Dubai such developments have a large number of problems. Waterfront development plans should bring a positive change at three levels of planning, namely local, regional and global. Omission of any one level will lead to problems as seen in the example of Dubai and Istanbul.

Following are the claims in form of short sentences on the design sheets of New Patna World City.

"New image for Patna to put up on the world map."

"Create job opportunities and create infrastructure for more than 2.5 million people in private and government sector."

"World's biggest Shopping Mall + Multiplex (larger than new south china mall, china)" "One of the biggest wholesale hub in India for rural Bihar."

"Premier and fully flexible international Convention Centre to host large events and one-of-its kind contemporary museum and cultural centre."

"Super specialty medical facilities and world class educational institutions."

"Intense development that promises a lucrative future to its investors and progressive domino effect of land-uses that unlock the true potential of the riverfront."

"6.5 million sqm. residential development for all income groups with High tech public and private transportation facilities."

"India's largest marina for riverfront (marine drivex3), and amusement park with one of the world's tallest ferris wheels"

"Large state-of -the-art stadium of Olympic standards, and world class concert halls (like O2 Arena, London)"

"Large landscaped religious and spiritual centers along the sacred banks of the Gang."

"650 acres of the combined parcels of green open space (larger than London's Hyde Park), accessed within a 5 minute walk from anywhere in site....."



Figure 3: Three dimensional rendering of proposed NPWC

The proposal has tried to capture the eyes of all the stakeholders alike through global images and claims which carves out a promise of better future. However critical analysis of the proposal tells a different story.

The proposal fails to mention the present condition, usage and the dwellers of Diara region. In the process it also escapes away from mentioning anything about the rehabilitation of these population. In the example of Sabarmati riverfront the planners mentioned ,reallocation of such people as their prime objective, but it was not carried out effectively leading to criticisms as “accumulation by dispossession”.

In the case of NPWC even though this is a preliminary proposal yet the absence of mention of such measures, speak a lot about the attitude which might be adopted in the future.

A major driving concept for planning of new

development NPWC could have arisen from the loss of riverfront from the main city leading to unused ghats and decks. The proposal has failed to mention anything on such an important issue, which is a burning topic in the minds of people who now have to walk miles to reach Ganga on Chat Puja (sacred festival of Bihar).

Even though physical connection of the new development with the old has been indicated, it does not show how the integration is being achieved. Open space integration and integration through activities are aspects which are absent in

the proposal. What could have been endless possibilities of urban integration and upgradation has simply been swiped by a stretches of green at the junction between the new and old development as shown in figure.



Figure 4: Connection between NPWC and old Patna

The proposal fails to talk about sustainability, green measures, zero carbon footprints, zero energy etc which have now become an integral part of the developments worldwide. NPWC however indicates its green measures by provision of green spaces and bicycle tracks. Developments of such large magnitude should always incorporate sustainability measures from envisioning stages of the project.

Complete absence of hydrological research is another setback for the proposal. The fluvial terrace being considered for construction is only 30 years old, which makes it unstable from

hydrological point of view. Also the hydrology of the river and site are closely interlinked as the course of Ganga has not been tamed so far. With this new development there will be a loss of flood buffer, which would induce floods in the lower courses. So far there is an absence of study in the behavior of changing river course of Ganga. This means that the river could suddenly come back to the mainland without any forecast.

The new development boasts of high-rise structures which would lead to compact development. But the city needs to upgrade its physical infrastructure multifold incase it wants to add such a development to the existing land.

And finally the topic of public and stakeholders participation in the design process, so that they are not merely informed but can actively participate by giving feedbacks is another facet of this development which has not been introduced so far. I hope that it will done in the future stages. Learning from the mistakes of Sabarmati Riverfront Development. New Patna World City should try to provide the residents of Patna, a development which gels well with the existing, making its mark as socially and environmentally sustainable project.

8. CONCLUSION

The proposal of NPWC was analyzed keeping the present condition of Patna and existing literature case examples in India and around the

world as two measuring and guiding pedestals. The paper has pointed out the holes in the proposal from various aspects: social, sustainable, hydrology, ecology, urban integration, planning etc. Waterfront developments around the world have always led to gentrification, but in the case of Patna which has such a large poor population the effects of gentrification will be devastating on the lives of such people. There is a fear that NPWC will serve only the rich and elite people and will transform into a walled development.

The project will generate a large financial opportunity for the government as well as the residents of Patna. It will surely change the image of Patna and Bihar. But the pressing question is what section of people will actually feel the positive change and benefit from the financial gains. Will contemporary planning, as in the case of Sabarmati, create the same scene of accumulation by dispossession or can some changes be made.

9. REFERENCES:

1. Er.Sarvjeet Sant (2012) New Patna World City Plan. _
http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.435020439861278.115942.424199167610072&ty_pe=3
(01/04/2013)
2. Anejo ()The new waterfront segregated space or urban integration,
<http://tdx.cat/bitstream/handle/10803/6960/19JPTac19de24.pdf> (28/04/2013), 1-2
3. Bas Butuner, Waterfront Revitalization as a Challenging Urban Issue, 42nd ISoCaRP Congress 2006
4. RenuDesai, http://www.indiawaterportal.org/sites/indiawaterportal.org/files/Governing_the_urban_%20po_or_Riverfront_development_slum_resettlement_and_%20the_politics_of_inclusion_in_Ahmedabad_Renu_Desai_EPW_2012.pdf (28/04/2013)
5. Bimal Patel, http://iuc2011.in/sites/default/files/presentations/Sabarmati-Riverfront-Development_comp.pdf (28/04/2013)
6. Sameer Bagaeen (2007)Brand Dubai: The Instant City; or the instantly recognizable city, International planning studies, 12:2, 173-19