



Interdisciplinary Action Research: Conversations with Emerging Leaders

A collaborative initiative of Centre for Financial Accountability (Delhi) and Environment Support Group (Bangalore)

In this climate of despair induced by COVID-19, various young researchers and activists have been working on emerging trends in Interdisciplinary Action Research which address some of the most pressing issues of our times, and that from various sectors: urban planning, public health, sociology, ecology and environment, digital commons, public education, migration studies, entrepreneurship, informal economy, and more. CFA and ESG collaborate to bring to focus various exciting explorations by such young researchers, who conscientiously draw attention to some of society's biggest challenges through their interdisciplinary efforts.

Webinar 1: The Curious Case of India's Smart Cities, held on 20th August 2020 via Zoom/Facebook

Discussants

1. **Mr. Gaurav Dwivedi**, who is associated with the Center for Financial Accountability. He is a researcher who studies the financial aspects of infrastructure projects like smart cities and industrial corridors in India.
2. **Mr. Chinmay Mishra**, a senior journalist who has been associated with the Narmada Bachao Andolan. He has been the editor of Sarvodaya Press Service and heads the Sarvodaya Mandal in Madhya Pradesh.



Bhargavi Rao, moderating the session, set the tone for the conversation by raising a series of pertinent questions: Why smart cities? What exactly do we mean by smart? Who is financing these smart city programs? For who is it being designed? Who manages them? What is the role of government agencies and elected bodies? How accessible is this technology? Are local people involved in the planning? How resilient are 'smart cities' in preparing for and in handling a disaster situation, like the one we are currently challenged with?

Mr. Chinmay Mishra, a resident of Indore, began his intervention by explaining how the Smart City Project has destroyed the heritage of his city while simultaneously causing great human suffering. "The oldest and most densely populated settlement was the first to be destroyed. In the name of development, the very identity of Indore was shattered", he complained. Despite the destruction of hundreds of houses and shops for the purpose of the project, turning to rubble the heritage character of this old city, no compensation whatsoever was paid to the affected people, he said.





Mr. Gaurav Dwivedi, threw light on the role international finance plays in Smart City Projects. Not only were International Financial Institutions and corporate investors pumping money into these projects, they were also using their financial clout to influence policy recommendations. He brought attention to utter lack of information in the public domain about these projects. “Even the people who get displaced receive hardly any information about just what the Smart City Project is”, he asserted.

To a question from the audience, whether there had been any resistance to the displacement and destruction caused by Smart City Projects, Mr. Chinmay Mishra responded by saying that there were several large-scale protests in Indore, but they were all brutally crushed. “Women protesters were beaten. People were jailed. Buildings were torn down overnight. In the end the pressure from the administration was so much that people realised there was nothing they could do anymore”, he sighed.

Both speakers agreed that the entire process of promoting ‘smart cities’ was highly undemocratic, and particularly unconstitutional - as the Constitutional 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts were violated. Decision-making powers had been taken away from the people’s representatives and elected bodies, and placed in the hands of the Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) - parastatals that respond to a centralised command structure. Gaurav Dwivedi mentioned that in several cases the Board of the SPVs includes individuals who also serve on the Boards of corporations investing in the projects. This left the audience wondering whose interest these glamorous Smart City Projects really serve: Is it that of the people? Or is that of financial capital?

For more information on Mr. Gaurav Dwivedi’s Smart City Research, please visit the following webpages:

1. <https://www.cenfa.org/publications/smart-city-in-indore-a-case-study/>
2. <https://www.cenfa.org/publications/booklet-smart-cities-mission-in-india-footprints-of-ifis/>

Additional Suggested reading

1. <https://www.cenfa.org/infrastructure-finance/the-curious-case-of-indian-smart-cities/>

ESG and CFA continue the **“Interdisciplinary Action Research: Conversations with Emerging Leaders”** series next Thursday, 27th August 2020 (5:00 - 6:30 pm on Zoom and Facebook) addressing the theme: **“Interdisciplinary interventions to protest urban lakes and wetlands - Cases from Bengaluru and Kolkata”**. More details on this webinar series can be accessed on www.esgindia.org and www.cenfa.org. Recording of the webinar is accessible at: <https://tinyurl.com/vyx7brnb>.

[This report has been prepared by Ashwin Lobo, Research Associate at ESG with Malvika, Sneha and Shreya interning with ESG. Leo Saldanha, Coordinator, ESG provided inputs.]

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INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTION RESEARCH Conversations with Emerging Leaders



TOPIC: THE CURIOUS CASE OF INDIAN SMART CITIES.

Speakers: Gaurav Dwivedi and Chinmay Mishra

August 20, 2020 5-6.30 pm IST

Zoom ID: PW: 927 1498 1442

Registration: 491526

For more details: <http://www.cenfa.org/iar>

Register: shorturl.at/cJMQR

