



Session 05

A socio-political approach to integrated flood risk management in Colombo

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This paper is based on empirical evidence on actual interventions for urban flood risk management in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Flooding in Colombo, together with being a natural phenomenon (from riverine and rainfall sources), is also an urban development issue where lack of planning, rapid urbanisation, inadequate infrastructure, climate change impacts, lack of financial, technical and human resources and lack of space contribute to urban flood risk. Since the major flood of 2010 that led to the flooding of the Sri Lankan parliament, authorities in Colombo have implemented various interventions, of which one is **a series of blue-green solutions based on the principle of integrated flood risk management (IFRM)**. The most prominent of these solutions is a multi-purpose park, Diyatha Unaya, that serves as water retention, wetland provision, beautification, and as a recreational area. In this paper, we describe **a socio-political approach that was adopted by different authorities in Colombo, leading to the decisions and implementation of Diyatha Uyana**. We use the analytical lens of institutional bricolage where authorities in Colombo improvised a solution, making it fit for the problem at hand. In this process, they assumed multiple goals and logics, invoked multiple identities **and borrowed from other cultures and disciplines to create a new solution**. The principles of IFRM that emphasise decentralisation and coordination through institutional change were overlooked. Rather the case of Colombo presents a unique situation where by a combination of norms of political patronage of government organisations, a unique Singapore-inspired discourse on urban development, and the bio-physical features of Colombo that consist of urban wetlands were mobilised as a result of the political and a natural crisis of flood of 2010. It is argued that integrated management has much room available for manoeuvre in context specific conditions and thus allowing for its more 'organic' implementation. A main goal **is to deepen the understanding on interactions between the principles of integrated urban flood risk management and the socio-political context in which it takes place**. This in turn leads to an understanding of context specific operationalization of integrated urban flood risk management. This paper is also an attempt at legitimising the context-specific solutions to water crisis.