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“Revitalising a Religious Riverfront in Nashik – A Design Thinking Approach”

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Revitalising Goda Ghat's Riverfront – A Design Thinking Approach

Abstract

This issue brief examines the challenges and opportunities in revitalising Nashik's Goda Ghat through a citizen-centric design thinking approach. It identifies gaps arising from over-concretisation, inadequate flood resilience, poor maintenance, and limited community engagement. The study proposes an incremental, data-driven policy framework integrating ecological preservation, stakeholder participation, and objective-based infrastructure planning. By aligning cultural, environmental, and governance priorities, the paper outlines a sustainable pathway for restoring Goda Ghat as a resilient, accessible, and culturally significant riverfront.

Introduction

Nashik is a religiously, culturally, and economically significant city in Maharashtra. It is widely known as the "wine capital of India." Geographically located along the banks of the Godavari River, Nashik is known for hosting one of India's most prominent religious events, the Kumbh Mela at Goda Ghat. Goda Ghat is an approximately 2 km stretch along the Godavari River with temples surrounding it. It is a pivotal hub for religious rituals like hosting Goda Aarti daily and Kumbh Mela every 12 years. This significance of Goda Ghat is exposed to persistent challenges of frequent monsoon flooding, poor infrastructure, waste management issues, insufficient community engagement, and tradeoffs between cultural preservation and development. This paper uses a Citizen-Centric Approach to Design thinking based on primary research; interviews were conducted with 40 respondents (Residents, vendors, and tourists), and secondary research was conducted using relevant research papers and articles to contribute to revitalising the Goda Ghat Riverfront of Nashik.

Figure 1: Goda Ghat flooding, Source: Deccan Herald

Design Thinking Approach

Stage 1-Framing Design Challenges for Goda Ghat

The study shows that the Goda Ghat riverfront has experienced significant commoditisation. Nashik Municipal Corporation (NMC) created Infrastructure under the schemes of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), and especially the Smart City Mission (SCM). It focused on creating more infrastructure for the upcoming Kumbh Melas. "Project Goda was envisaged to develop the area with cultural and religious importance, with the 'Kumbh Mela' as the backdrop for development and to transform the area into a sociocultural-recreational destination for the city" (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, n.d). Infrastructures like Goda Park, Goda Walk, and Sambhaji Udyan were developed, but hardscaping was used excessively. "According to NMSCDL, Goda Park and Sambhaji Udyan have been developed based on NEERI's guidelines of limiting hardscaping to 15 percent. However, the percentage of total hardscaping observed is around 65 percent against the requirement of 15 percent maximum" (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, n.d). Steps

were added periodically along the ghat. Still, the main focus was only increasing Kumbh footfall in each 12-year cycle. “Under the Goda riverfront beautification project, the steps of the ghat have also been replaced with basalt stone” (School of Planning and Architecture, 2024, p. 28).

These infrastructural developments mainly included concretisation, which didn't account for the monsoon levels and flood lines. “Goda Walk falls within the blue and the red lines that signify the flood level corresponding to 25-year and 100-year return period respectively; thus, the area needs to be flood resilient” (School of Planning and Architecture, 2024, p. 27). Due to this excessive concretisation, the administration restricted the river flow and destroyed several kunds (stepwells) and the river's ecological balance. The spree of concretisation was significant in 2002 before the first Kumbh and subsequently in 2014-15 for the next Kumbh, and it continues to this day. This contributed to irreversible damage in the lives of citizens, local vendors, and tourists because the concretisation still doesn't account for appropriation in accommodation.

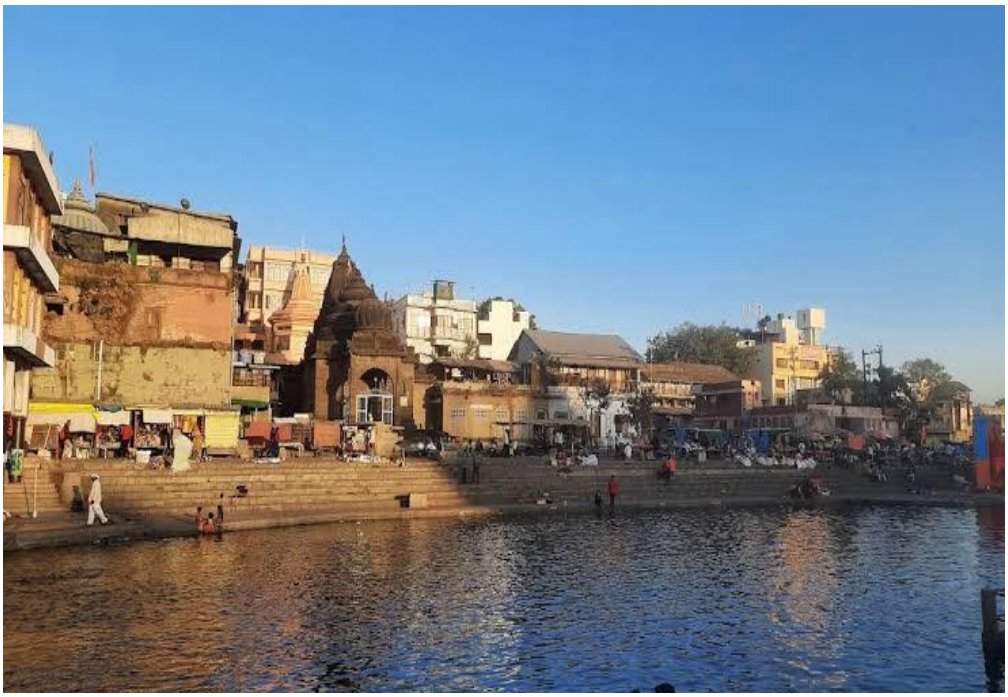

Figure 2: Settlements around Goda Ghat, Source: Urban Archives

Figure 3: Steps constructed along the Goda Ghat, Source: Nashik Ploggers

Significant Design challenges identified during the interviews and secondary research were Flooding and safety risks, maintenance gaps, and Religious, cultural, and ecological preservations.

Stage 2 - Understanding the landscape of the problem.

Survey Findings and Stakeholder Needs

A primary survey was conducted remotely with 40 participants categorised as Residents (n=26), Vendors (n=10), and Tourists (n=4). The findings were insightful. Most respondents

visit Goda Ghat daily or at least weekly for religious activities or business. Half the visitors rate the infrastructure poorly maintained and want more effort, while they favour eco-friendly initiatives. Most residents in the area feel anxious during peak monsoons, and they need proper drainage and advanced communication in calamities. Residents also participate in clean-up drives on weekends. All the businesses would benefit from the events, and significant impacts of flooding and heavy monsoons on their livelihood were reported. At the same time, 80% of them are open to participation in stakeholder engagement. All the tourists interviewed visited Goda Ghat for religious reasons, and they also recommended it. Still, they faced challenges with some infrastructures, such as restrooms, and needed more ecological interventions.

Empathy Mapping

Based on the primary research, empathy mapping is conducted mainly for Local Residents and vendors. Please refer to the figures below for inferences.

Empathy Mapping -Local Residents

Figure 4: Empathy Map-Local Residents, Source: Compiled by the Author

Empathy Mapping – Local Vendors

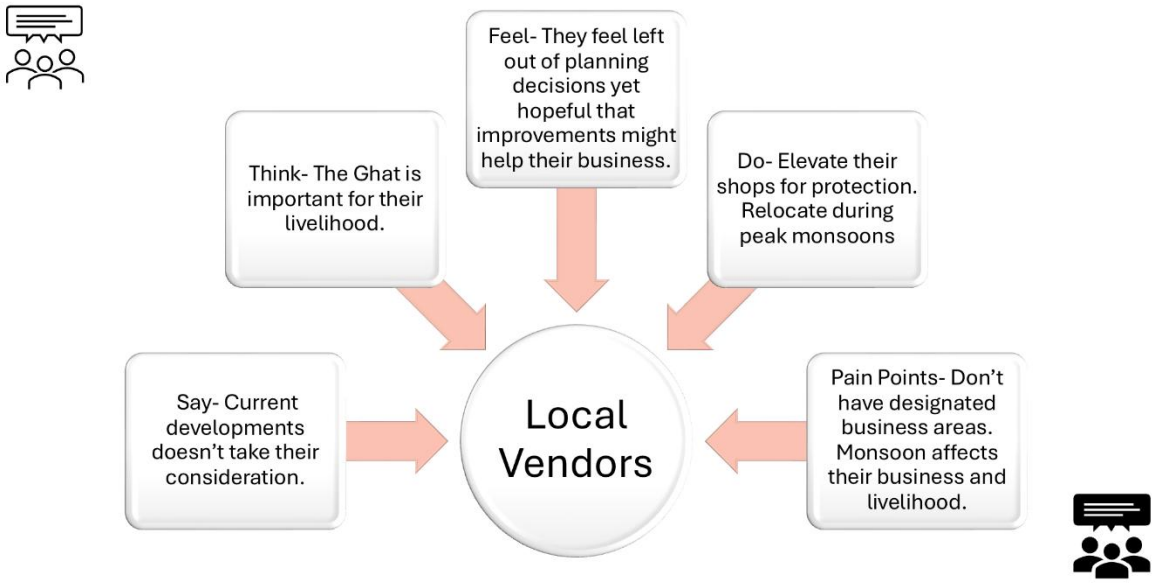

Figure 5: Empathy Map-Local Vendors, Source: Compiled by the Author

Existing Policy Background - Policy Mapping and Regulations

The Nashik Smart City Project promotes the Rejuvenation and Beautification of Nashik's Riverfront under Project Goda mainly through the Official Actors- Nashik Municipal Corporation (NMC), Nashik Municipal Smart City Development Corporation (NMSCDC), and Private partners like KPMG Advisory Services Private Limited as a consultant. Implementing all Infrastructure, such as Goda Park, Goda Walk, Sambhaji Udyan, and steps along the Goda Ghat, was entirely at the discretion of these Institutions. Hence, the Institutional Model of Implementation has been applied. Moreover, the process didn't account for the more significant public interest, but the agenda was centralised majorly to rip the goodwill and benefits of the more considerable footfall of the Kumbh Mela, and the account for ecological order was avoided; therefore, the implementation also follows the Public Choice Model.

The Smart City Project is a distributive policy that distributes better infrastructure to everyone. It is supported under several schemes like Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), and especially Smart City Mission (SCM) (Rajput, 2022). The framework used for implementation currently uses the Garbage Can Model, which represents ambiguity in decision-making where the problem, solution, stakeholders, and choices are all disconnected. When an earlier version of Goda Park failed due to frequent heavy monsoons, a new version was proposed. However, due to inadequate funding, the project was later undertaken by Reliance India Foundation as an Unofficial actor. (South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, 2014)

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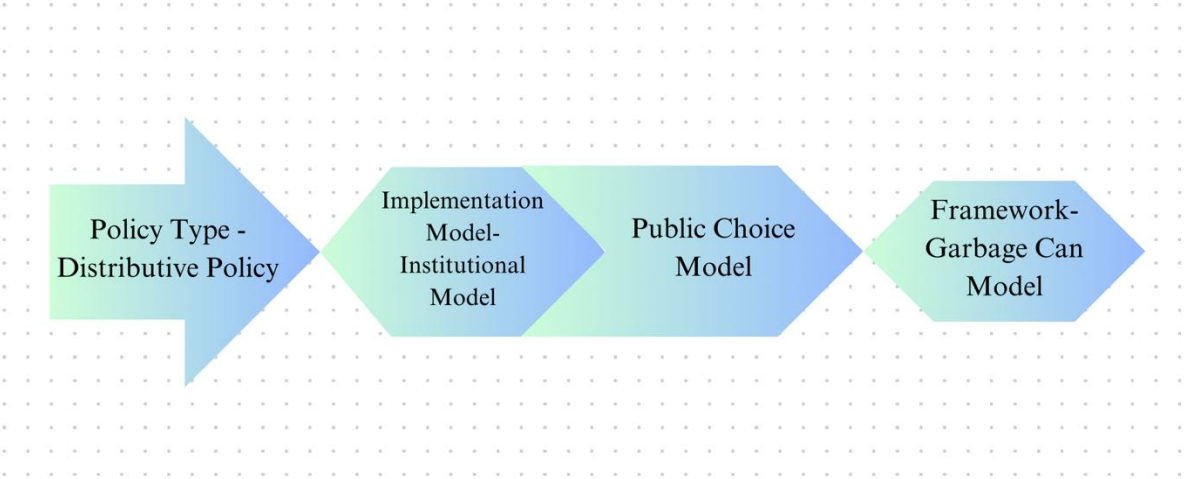

Figure 6: Policy overview, Source-Compiled by the Author

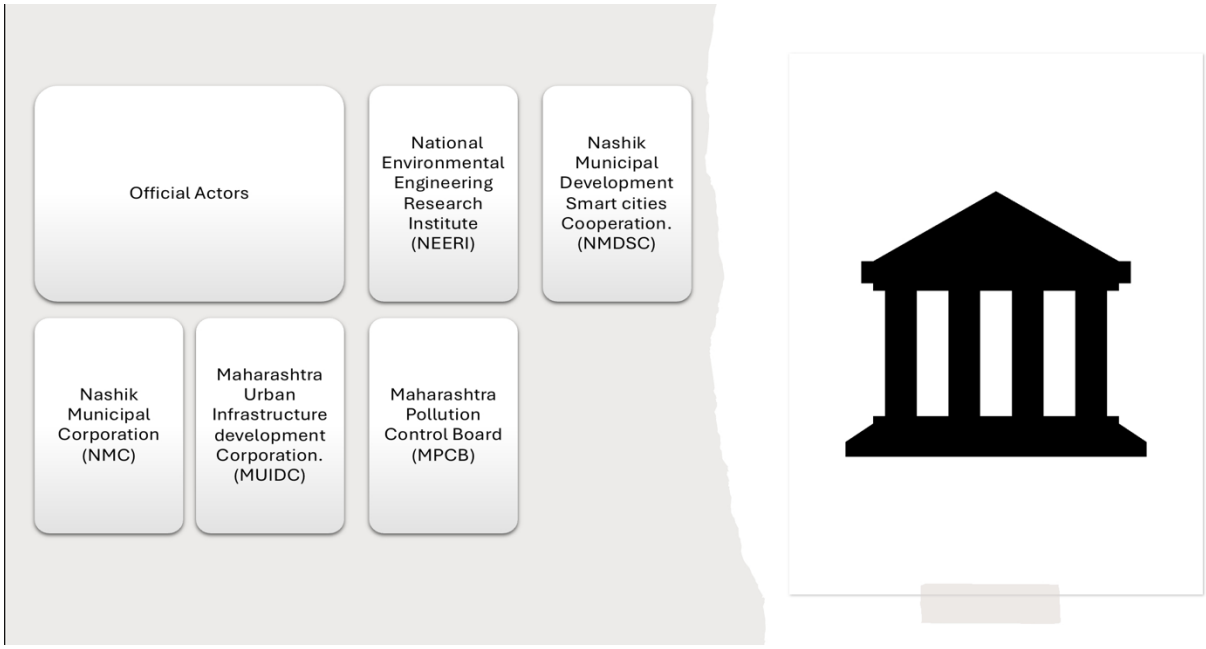

Figure 7: Official Actors, Source-Compiled by the Author

Figure 8: Unofficial Actors, Source-Compiled by the Author

Case Study of Sabarmati Riverfront Project.

One of the projects that we need to account for is the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project in Ahmedabad. It went through a spree of development post-independence with considerable involvement of local professionals, and flood safety was a primary concern along with water retention and irrigation. Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) established a Special Purpose vehicle - the Sabarmati River Front Development Corporation Ltd (SRFDCL); it commissioned the Environmental Planning Collaborative to prepare a feasibility study in 1997, an official inception stage. "SRFDCL's role was on a 'Build, Maintain, Operate and Transfer' (BMOT) basis. SRFDCL then appointed HCP Design Planning and Management Pvt. Ltd. (HCPDPM) to lead the urban design, architectural, and structural aspects of the project" (Joshi (n.d), p.52).

The commendable aspects of the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project were the ecological considerations, some stakeholder involvement, a special governing and maintaining body, and a socio-cultural aspect that improved accessibility to the riverfront. It has clear objectives, which we will explore in figure 9. It is implemented in a holistic approach aiming towards Environmental Improvements, targeting flood safety accompanied by social upliftment and urban infrastructure development.

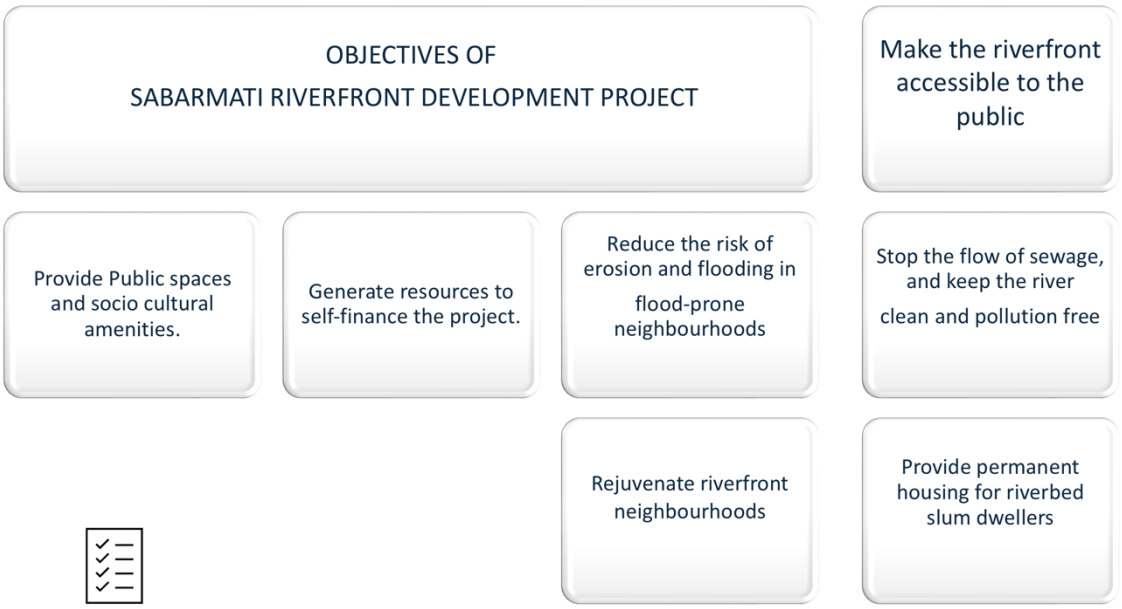

Figure 9: Sabarmati Riverfront and Objectives, Source: Sabarmati Riverfront, ISOCARP &Compiled by the Author.

The Sabarmati Riverfront development model was adopted across the country but with caveats, such as the prohibition on special-purpose vehicles and Ecological assessments. During the research, it was noted that Nashik Municipal Corporation has disregarded the ecological impacts altogether, while there is little to no evaluation of stakeholder needs and demands. Activists filed several petitions during the process, and the "Court appointed the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) to formulate a comprehensive action plan for cleaning the River Godavari and adequately maintaining the river" (SANDRP, 2014). NEERI submitted two reports, but the further constructions didn't follow the guidelines. The concretisation further aggravated the issue, and the services provided remained poorly executed.

Stage 4 – Define point of view Problem

Statement: Construction of Infrastructure along the Goda Ghat without a clear set of

objectives and without accounting for the challenges of over concretisation, flood safety and ecological and cultural preservation of the Goda Ghat.

Stage 4 -Ideation for a better infrastructure

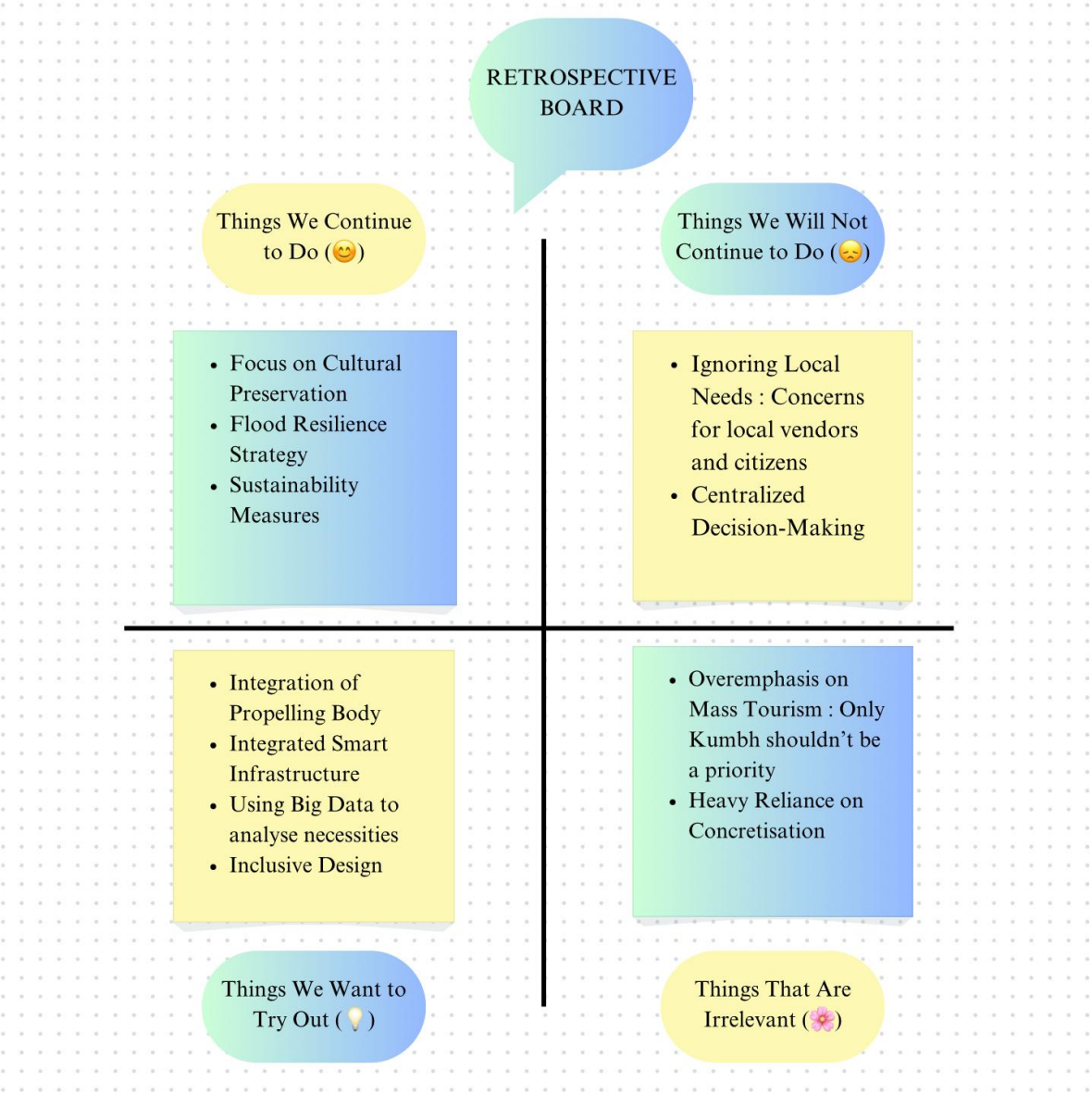

Figure 10: Retrospective Board, Source: Compiled by the Author

The Retrospective board analyses the options, possibilities we would like to explore, and things to eliminate. In addition, setting objectives should be a necessity in implementing infrastructure, like the objective-based implementation of the Sabarmati Riverfront project.

This paper proposes a Big Data Policy Cycle Framework to be used in the implementation process as explained in figure 12. Historical and continuous data about bad monsoons can be utilized to assess the viability of further Infrastructure. Further, stakeholder consultations will improve the feasibility and ease of business in the surrounding area. The Implementation model should be Incremental, as the bounded rationality should be accounted for while making the best possible choice. Ideally, the policy type will remain distributive due to the nature of the infrastructure being accessible to all.

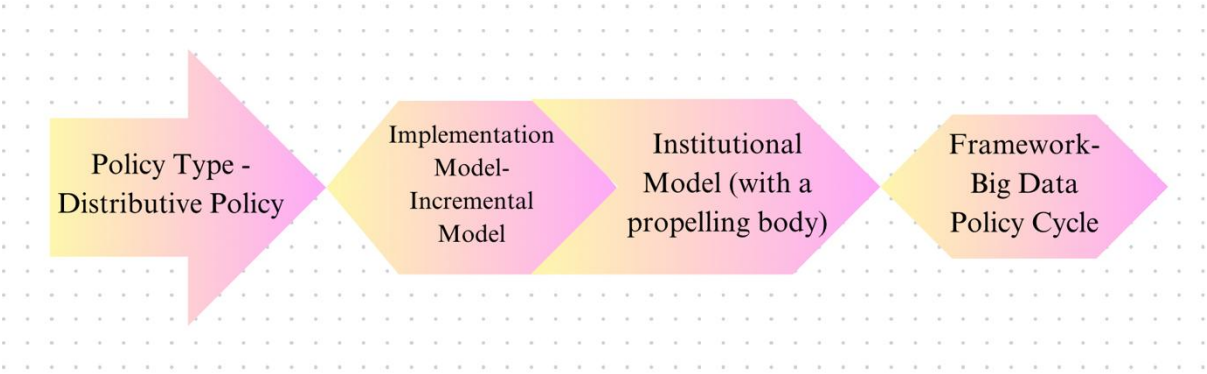

Figure 11: Proposed Policy overview, Source: Compiled by the Author

Big Data Policy Cycle – Proposed framework

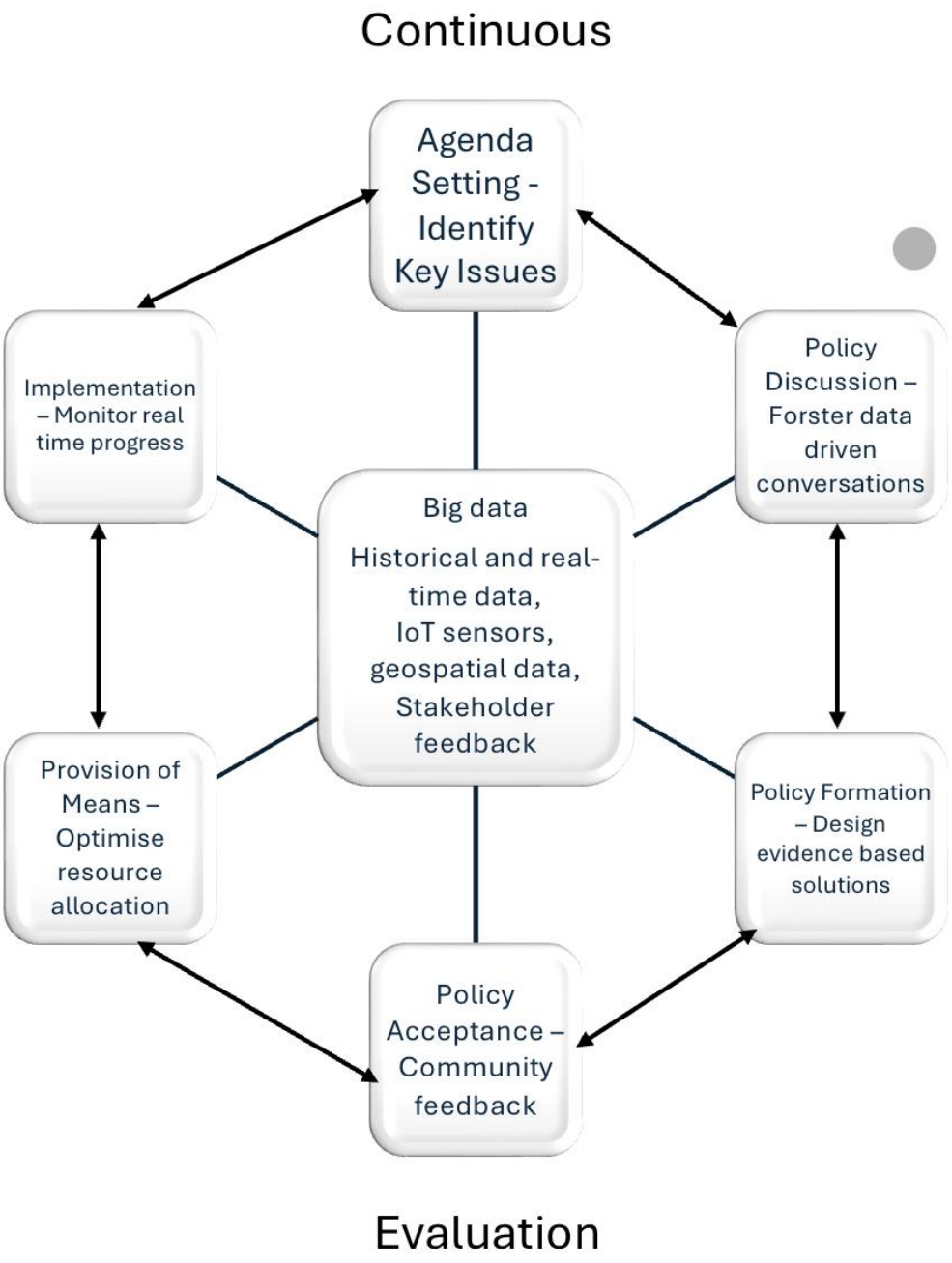

Figure 12: Proposed Policy framework with Specifications for Goda ghat, Source: Compiled by the Author

Stage 5- Process Prototype

The Process prototype analyses data to predict monsoon levels and possible flooding and creates promenades at separate levels with flood-resilient materials. Porous construction materials should be used that don't strictly restrict the flow of water, keeping it near the step wells. The concretisation should not be excessive, and constructions should take into consideration the needs of the stakeholders, especially the settlements surrounding the Goda ghat and local vendors. Create dedicated cultural spaces for events with the full implementation of basic amenities like public restrooms. Most importantly, the creation of a propelling body like the special purpose vehicle will, in turn, create the provision for stakeholder consultations and collaborations and will account for their involvement in the project. Different pilots can be designed to test each process, and based on the feedback, the project can make incremental changes.

Socio-Political and Economic Impact

The revitalisation of Goda Ghat will have a significant socio-political and economic impact on the vendors, the residents along the bank, all the citizens of Nashik and the local government. Economically, the project will provide better infrastructure and incorporate more tourism and footfall in the ghat, which will boost local vendors' businesses. The flood resistance aspect of the infrastructure will ensure the safety of the region, encompassing long-term sustainability to reap economic benefits. Socially, the project will enhance the pride of the citizens while preserving their cultural sentiments and providing more accessibility to the river. The ecological preservation of the river will create more enthusiasm in the citizens to make informed choices regarding keeping the river clean. Politically, the involvement of stakeholders

in feedback and collaborations will demonstrate the effectiveness of participatory governance and, hence, create a positive feedback mechanism over time incorporating social, political and economic Impacts.

Conclusion

Revitalising Goda Ghat riverfront through a design thinking approach identifies the gaps between the stakeholders' needs and the on-ground implementation. By understanding the stakeholders' needs, adopting flood-resilient infrastructure, creating ecological balance and defining clear objectives before implementation, it ensures that Goda Ghat can continue to serve as a vital hub for spiritual and social activities. Creating a propelling body that will take into account stakeholder consultations is a significant step toward participatory governance. The report analysed that all these measures should be incrementally adapted using real-time and historical data through the application of the Big Data Policy Cycle framework of public policy. This aspect of the proposed project is not only a response to the challenges faced today but also a long-term solution for the future, enhancing the quality of life for residents, businesses, and tourists.

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