

Urban Revitalisation through Place making: A Case in Khulna City

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Abstract

The lack of open spaces has become the common problem for most of the organically developed urban areas in the world. The encroachment of urban land areas is squeezing of the existing urban open spaces. Open urban spaces are considered essential to make an urban environment live. Khulna, the third largest city in Bangladesh is also facing the same problem and which is moving towards a critical condition. But there exist some open spaces scattered in different parts of the inner city area. A big number of them are water bodies that were used for meeting the demands for household needs. Currently, the lack of maintenance and care has turned these water bodies and other open spaces into dilapidated places in the community. But there is also the scope to revitalize the existing water bodies in the inner city to resolve the scarcity of urban open spaces. Empirical studies have been conducted in some portion of Khulna city as a case. Dilapidated water bodies with open spaces have been identified and by physical survey and on the basis of the situation development proposal is proposed. This paper focuses on the scope of developing these dilapidated open spaces for the revitalization of urban environment for public interests.

Key words

urban revitalization, place making, community development

Introduction

Providing Open spaces for the urban dwellers is one of the basic factors for improving living environment. A good balance between built and open spaces is considered as one of the essential aspects for a sustainable urban environment. The Achievement of such an environment depends upon several factors. *"The elements other than dwelling in a neighborhood are schools, open spaces, large establishments, shops and similar uses, places of assembly of modest scope..."* (Kebel, 1969). These elements are serving different purposes for the community where open space is one of the major amenities for improving living environment. In the field of urban design, open space does not refer to simply a piece of vacant land. *"Open space is frequently associated with outdoor recreation, it has also significance as a land reserve to introduce relief from what might otherwise become interrupted development"* (Chapin, 1965). Spreiregen (1965) also spoke for "planned open spaces" as one of the basic elements in neighborhood design. *"An open space has always been an essential element of urban design and is, indeed, a crucial area of consideration... open space should be considered as an integral part of urban design"* (Appleyard, 1982).

Urban spaces can be generated in different ways and for different purposes. Historically urban gathering places have been originated from religious architecture (Kostof, 1992). Examples can be drawn from atrium of Christian Basilica or Shan of a Muslim Mosque. In addition to the religious factor, open places were provided for other purposes also such as, trading. Whatever the case is, all the time the need and demand for open spaces for general people for their regular activities transformed open spaces into community places.

The current environmental condition and the status of open spaces in Khulna city

Khulna is facing the problem with lack of open spaces for its peoples. The total identified open spaces including water bodies is 25.31 ha (6.52 acre). This allocation gives only 0.07 acre per 1000 persons (KDA, 1999). This is a far below standard of providing open space if compared internationally. Considering its population this amount is quite insufficient which can be compared with the following standards (Table 1).

Facility	Standards by Chapin	Standards by Keeble
Play ground	1 acre/800 population	2.5 acre/1000 population
Local Parks	1 acre/1000 population	0.5 acre/1000 population
Recreation center or play fields	1 acre/800 population	0.5 acre/1000 children

Table 1. General estimating standards for local recreation areas.

Source: (Chapin, 1965) and (Keeble, 1969)

As being a divisional city, the scopes for business and job facilities are attracting more people to come to the city. Nowadays, the urban development authority is getting pressure for increasing its infrastructure capacity for commercial and residential accommodation specially in the city center. The pressure is forcing the urban authority to extend the city boundary to meet up the needs for housing, commercials, public spaces etc. This extension is the matter of investing a huge budget for providing the necessary infrastructures and land.

Historically in Khulna city there were some water bodies with open spaces, which were excavated for different purposes. Currently these open spaces and water bodies have become unutilized and dilapidated. In most of the cases these open spaces are causing social nuisance like vandalism, settling of unauthorized squatters etc. Spread of unauthorized/illegal settlement has become a common phenomenon in those areas. Crime is one of the negative outcomes from the sites. Most often these unauthorized/overlooked settlements act as the shelter for the criminals and mugging is a common event around those areas. In some cases people has turned these spaces into waste dumping areas. Some times water bodies in these open areas are directly connected with the sewerages from the surrounding residential and commercial buildings.

The water bodies with their surrounding areas have become dilapidated due to the presence of some factors. One of the major factors has been identified as the lack of proper vision and awareness to revitalize or reuse the areas. Developments of these sites are also subject to invest huge amount of money, which is unbearable for the owners. Thus the economic weakness of the owners is acting as another major barrier for the development.

Multi-ownership is also causing obstruction to take any development initiative. Some sites are subject to face critical problems with undisputed factors between the owners. Undisputed problems are also prevailing between government and public for a long time. Lack of properly identified owner, regular maintenance and prop-

er waste disposal facilities has initiated those areas as the waste dumping ground. Most of these open spaces have the connection with urban infrastructures like roads, electricity, drainage etc but it is observed that the current infrastructural facilities are not being properly utilized. Due to this underutilization, City corporation is not getting the proper money back in return of its investments for the infrastructure.

Statement of the problem

Urban living is much more than just to use a small room or spaces but to live in a system of spaces where theses rooms are parts. A sustainable urban environment means to have not only some spaces for different purposes but there should be hierarchy within spaces (Correa, 1985)¹. It has been observed that the hierarchy of spaces is missing in the study area with the absence of smaller community gathering place. Along with the hierarchy, proximity to open space is another major element in a sustainable neighborhood. According to Keeble (1969) "*...some open spaces accessible to public should be within a few minutes walks of every home*". Recent researches support that close proximity to green encourages people to come and visit regularly (Maat and De Vries, 2003). Open spaces can act as a point of social inclusion with its capability to bring together the community peoples closer. The absence of open spaces for gathering people of different ages for recreation and sharing, the social bondage is losing. People specially the younger groups have to go nearby spaces for their social gathering. Children are not getting enough open spaces even for play, older are not getting space for their walks. As a result a relational gap between different age groups is increasing rapidly. This situation is indicating some definite problems which are stated below.

Lack of open public spaces, where 0.07 acre/1000 persons exists. This ratio is far below the standard.

Lack of open spaces is leading to social exclusions of different groups.

Problem with the ownership and that is creating several adverse effects for the healthy urban environment.

Methodology

This study has been conducted through physical survey, photographs, interviewing the community people and resource persons. Higher density of population, closer connection to an important urban node, lack of public open spaces were the criteria in selecting the potential sample study areas. The sample study has been selected randomly from the group of sample areas. Closer connection to city center and a major urban node *The Royal Mor*, higher population density with lack of open spaces made the site potential for the study. The following steps have been followed in this study.

a. The identification of dilapidated water bodies and vacant unused land. b. Road networks (major and secondary) that are connecting those spaces with the nearby node. c. Identify the primary and secondary benefited zones from the proposed development. d. Finally the statement of the proposed revitalization process has been established.

The proposed revitalization process

Present scopes to provide open space and revitalize the inner city

Several development projects have been performed to address different problems of the city like development of road network, electricity, etc. But less effort has been given to solve the problems of livability due to absence of open spaces. Urban development is a subject, which requires integrated approach, but in this case most of the endeavors were targeted to solve pocket/segmental problems which eventually got no integrated solutions.

Urban open spaces are of two types i.e. 'positive open space' and 'negative open space'. *A way of defining the difference between 'positive' and 'negative' outdoor space is by their degree of enclosure and their degree of convexity* (Alexander, 1977). This positive open space is one of essential component for having a sustainable urban community. Most of the open spaces in the study area have the potentiality to become 'positive' as they have enclosure by the surrounding 3-4 storied buildings. For this particular context open spaces can be provided for urban people by any of the following options.

By allowing new open spaces out side the inner city area. But it will not be sustainable in terms of proximity for the inhabitants. Getting an open space in a distance point is

not supportive if sequence of space is considered.

Evacuating some existing buildings in the community can ensure open spaces. This evacuation may subject to face a big protest from the inhabitants whether the buildings are in deteriorated condition or not.

By reusing the existing open spaces; this approaches intend to reuse the existing dilapidated open spaces of urban areas without hampering other functions.

Among the approaches the last one i.e. reusing of open spaces has higher potentiality for the revitalization. This paper proposes an urban revitalization process by reusing the urban open spaces.

The process

The revitalization process will go for the enhancement/develop the inherent qualities of the site so that it can contribute to the whole community. These qualities are for the improvement of urban ecological aspects including provision of enough green for community people. Only the provision is not enough but a safe and secured accessibility to the site should be the prime concern (Nefs, 2006). Accessibility will ensure the next approaches/steps further more. From experiences of different revitalization projects it can be said that no single authority whether public or private can make the whole development alone. Lack of information about ownership is a big problem for any urban development project. Information about the ownerships and control of the land and other necessary aspects are not available to all stakeholders in the development process. So a revitalization process for this particular context needs an associative work of all interested stakeholders. The revitalization process has been proposed as follows.

a. Determination of the dilapidated open spaces and their corresponding catchments areas.

This includes the proper identification of the urban open spaces that are dilapidated or unused. The relative locations and their catchments zones of those areas will be marked (Fig 2.). During this process the possible public accessibility to the site and existing infrastructural facilities will be assessed and marked.

b. Identification the ownership pattern.

With the help of City Corporation and physical survey data will be retrieved from different sources in order to get the real situation of ownership patterns. The illegally encroached land and undisputed problems will also be identified during the survey. A proper government intervention is a must to recover those lands and to take control immediately for the development. Future development plans (if any) will be collected from the owners whether it is privately or government owned land.



Figure 1. Existing land use map.

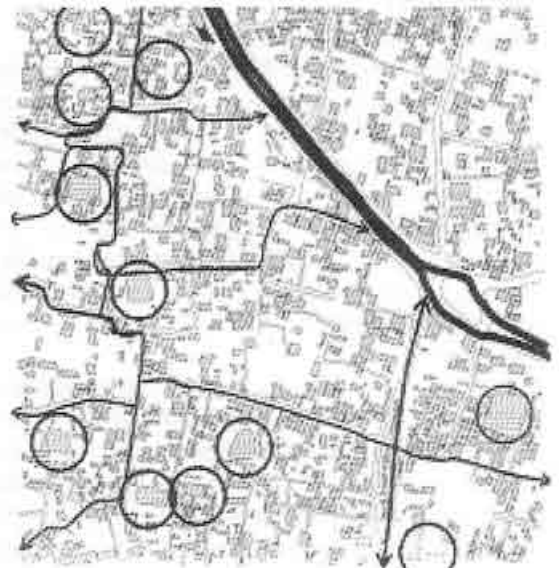


Figure 2. Locations of the dilapidated vacant land and the relative positions with road networks.



Figure 3. Immediate benefited area from the development.

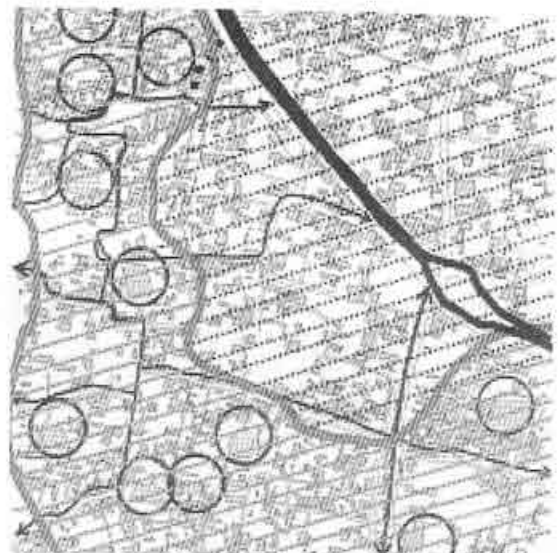


Figure 4. Secondary benefited area from the development



A proper compensation policy will be formulated for acquiring the privately owned open spaces. In the development process primary resistance/protest may come from the owner groups. In policy making; representatives from the owner groups must be included. Compensation will/may vary from site to site depending on their location, accessibility, site condition etc.

A program for increasing public awareness regarding the benefits of urban regeneration must be conducted. For more acceptances; representatives from local people, N.G.Os, government authority will form a body to run the public awareness programme. Information about the scopes and potentialities in revitalizing those underutilized areas will be delivered through this body.

The design team for the development will include different professionals like architects, planners, sociologist, economists and obviously the local representatives. Public participation in the stages of decision making will ensure the acceptability and thus sustainability of the development program.

e. Formation of a maintenance body, clarification distribution of the responsibilities

The implementation, management and maintenance body will be formed jointly by the different development partners like community people, NGOs and City Corporation. Local people will be directly incorporated at the implementation stage for getting a greater social acceptability. For the security purpose 'community policing'² can be adopted in this type of context. Local and the municipality workers can jointly do maintenance work. The best option will be to give priority and incorporation of the local poor people in the maintenance works. Government's responsibility will be to check the further grabbing of the land. Municipality authority may have the right to intervene and check the all programs periodically to avoid further unnecessary delay, mismanagement, illegal encroachments etc.

Local authority may take action to reduce tax for the revitalization program. Initially the development cost may be arranged by NGOs or the City Corporation. Later on the community people will form a common fund for the maintenance where the community people will be charged for a small amount of money. If someone is not at the stage of depositing money for the common fund then they have to do different physical and other official jobs for the community.

Conclusion

This study proposes the development process of urban areas by revitalizing existing dilapidated open spaces that are scattered through out the city. It is expected that if the proposed revitalization program can be implemented then the following outcomes will be ensured. It is also expected that the outcomes will achieve open space for urban dwellers, more security, and thus a strong community bondage that are the key issues of any urban revitalization project.

The expected outcomes

The opportunity of mixing up different groups of people in the developed open spaces will ensure a strong social bondage and a healthy social environment.

Newer developments will provide open spaces that are needed for the sustainable urban environment. This

developed environment will attract people come back for living in the inner city area who intended to leave for the better.

Through the development of dilapidated vacant lands into open green spaces, an integrated network of green within the community will be ensured.

This type of development will ensure more economic return from the existing infrastructures. More income of different authority from the same infrastructure will ensure a better development and maintenance in the inner city area.

Development will not only attract people to come but also some other commercial activities will be interested to come in. These newer provisions of mix mode activities will ultimately turn into a vibrant urban community.

Public participation in every step of decision making will ensure the mass public acceptability which ultimately goes for the sustainable community through urban revitalization.

End Note

¹ According to Charles Correa ..there are four elements of hierarchical spaces in a sustainable urban environment.

1. *Private contacts*(cooking, sleeping etc in the house hold),
2. *Intimate contact* (Chat with neighbours etc)
3. *City neighbourhood meeting places* (Where one can become a part of a city)
4. *The principal Urban area* (for the whole city).

² Community policing is a concept of engaging local people for maintaining security. This system has been proved as fruitful as they know the local people better than others. So an intruder can easily be identified by them.

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