

The Social Logic of Spontaneous Retail Development in Dhaka

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Abstract : This paper concentrates on the socio-spatial structure of 'spontaneous' retail development of Dhaka city that has experienced tremendous growth of shopping developments since the last five decades. Within a complex process of rapid urban growth, this particular building type, either planned or unplanned, is undergoing constant changes. This change raises questions not only of the relationship between specialization and evolution of socio-economic structures, but also of their spatial organization in the surrounding urban context. This paper identifies the role of space as means of producing the interface between retail activities and their social meaning. It investigates behavioral attributes of different consumer and retailer groups from two view points: first, the socio-economic structure of the consumer and retailer groups and their consequent buying and selling behavior; secondly, the spatial patterns of the retail developments generated through these socio economic attributes. The study findings show that the patterns of space and use in the spontaneous retail developments have developed within a cumulative growth process arising out of the needs and aspirations of different user groups, where space is ordered by a strong social logic rather than guided by the norms and theories of retail architecture.

Key Words: Socio-spatial, Spontaneous, Retail, Consumer, Spatial behavior

Introduction

There is a continuous two-way process in a socio-spatial dialectic — in which people create and modify urban spaces and at the same time their spatial behavior is also conditioned by the spaces they are using (Knox, 1995). From this perspective, geographers and economists argue that the spatial patterns of urban retail developments arise from buyer seller interaction in a specific urban context. In developed countries, shopping patterns have changed to keep abreast of rapidly changing socio-economic conditions. Rising personal earnings and increases in private car ownership -- all have led to the development of suburban shopping centres in developed cities. On the contrary, different social and economic conditions in the developing cities still accommodate the formal and informal retailing activities in the same developments (Paddison et al., 1990). Consequently, varying groups of retailers and consumers behavioral dynamics shape the retail developments in a rapidly urbanizing context (Kinsey, 1988). Thus, from a spatial viewpoint the understanding of retailing in developing countries necessitates an appreciation of the economic and social environment in which it is located.

In the developed context, the modern planned layouts of shopping centres are a hierarchical aggregation of

mall spaces and magnet stores (Maitland, 1990) (Figure 1a). The malls punctuate movement along a route through accommodating and linking stores with different degrees of attraction. These only give a holistic view of the overall building structure by means of an orderly spatial nature of attraction and movement. The salient characteristics, which distinguish the spontaneous retail developments from the planned schemes, are their apparent complexity and disorderly arrangement of space (Figure 1b) and function (Hossain, 2001).

However, previous studies (Paddison et al., 1990) suggest that the spontaneous retail centres seem to grow from a set of hidden spatial and socio-economic rules, which are very different to those of the designed centres. From this perspective, Dhaka, a rapidly urbanizing South Asian developing city, is taken as the study area. Within a process of rapid and uncontrolled urbanization (Islam, 1996), the majority of the retail centres in Dhaka are growing spontaneously (Sayeed, 1986) in response to the demand of the growing consumer and retailer groups. It presents a wide range of unplanned 'spontaneous' retail developments, which have grown and changed very rapidly in the last five decades.

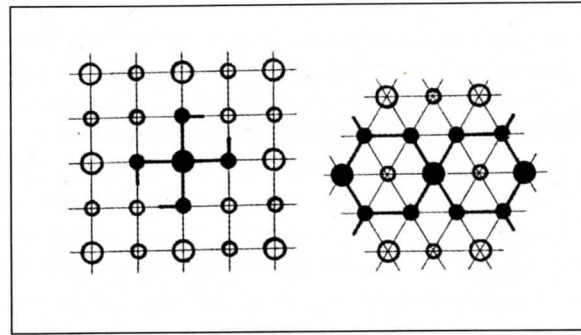


Figure 1a: Node structure in mall organization
Source: Maitland, (1990)

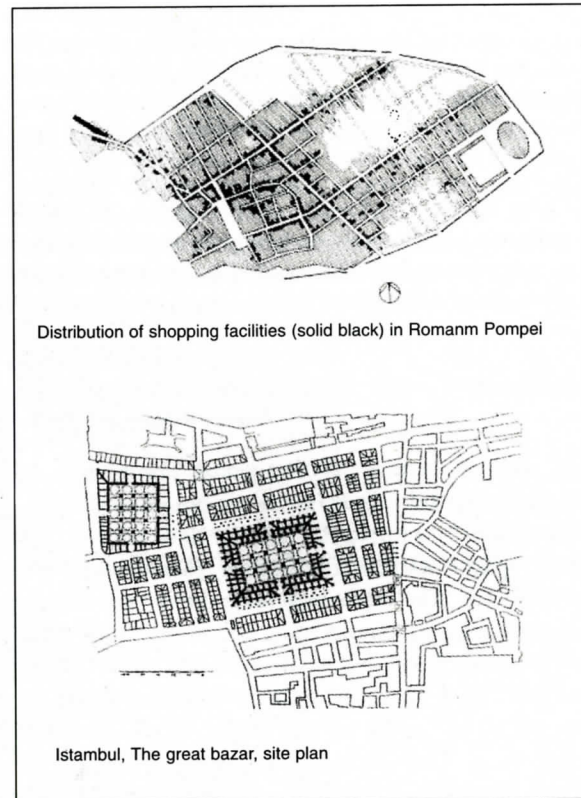


Figure 1b: Shopping buildings as an integral part of the city
Source: Maitland, (1985)

In the absence of any retail planning theories, these 'spontaneous' retail structures have been generated through a gradually evolving process within a complex socio-economic urbanizing context. These retail

¹ The retail environment in Dhaka is characterized by both the planned and unplanned retail developments, developed through private or government initiative. The government retail developments are physically planned but they do not have any control over tenant mix policy, location and clustering of different retail functions. The private developments do not follow any planning regulations in terms of their physical layout or any other aspects of retail planning theories. From these view points, the retail centres

developments have emerged through a bit-by-bit natural process rather than guided by any formal planning ideas. The unlimited growth of shops, different grid patterns of the circulation spaces and their morphological variations, spatial link between centres and their articulation within the surrounding urban context constantly reshapes the built forms and the ultimate landscape of the city. In Dhaka, these spontaneous retail developments take the form of shopping centres and ribbon developments. Moreover, the presence of uncontrolled hawking has created an 'informal' bazaar type area around these shopping areas. It is observed that this phenomenon is more vivid in the 'naturally grown' central retail area of New Dhaka (Hossain, 2001). Here, a variety of spatial structures accommodate multifarious retail activities within the same precincts. All these represent an apparently cluttered urban scene, both in their internal spatial organization and their overall structuring in their larger urban context. Therefore, by studying retail in this context, the paper hopes to develop a clearer understanding of the role of space in retail architecture, governed by the dynamic relationship between various retailer and consumer groups.

Methodology

On the basis of the data collected through a structured questionnaire survey, this study summarizes the behavioral attributes of the three user groups, namely consumers, retailers and the hawkers. The survey conducted as part of a broader research (Hossain, 2001) in 1998, covered a sample population of 600 (240 consumers, 240 retailers and 120 hawkers) from six retail developments. This survey obtained detailed data on the socio-economic and spatial behavior patterns of the different user groups. This paper attempts to ascertain the socio-economic relations of the spatial patterns from three viewpoint: first, the consumers' behavioral dynamics and space preference; second, the retailers' profit motivated selling attitude and location strategies in the generation of attraction to different retail functions; and lastly, the hawkers' relationship to the formal retailing environment.

developed either through government or private initiative could not be defined as planned shopping developments. In fact, these so-called planned and unplanned retail developments have grown and chanced within a natural growth process with the growing needs of the various retailer and consumer groups. Therefore, this research defines these publicly or privately planned (so-called) and unplanned centres as 'Spontaneous' retail development.

Study Area and the Spatial Character of the Spontaneous Retail Developments

The study area for this research is locally known as New Market area (Figure 2a) and has been considered one of the central retail area in New Dhaka (Ahsan, 1991). It is an extreme example of spontaneous retail growth. This area exhibits a mix of the so-called planned and unplanned shopping centres and ribbon developments. It grew and changed during the period of fifty years of the city's growth. Here, the planned developments have even transformed into unplanned ones within a spontaneous growth process. Moreover, the presence of illegal and uncontrolled hawking has generated an informal bazaar type activity around these formal shopping precincts.

The shopping centres in Dhaka could be defined as the nucleation or a cluster of shopping facilities, located either in the street intersection (Figure 2b) or

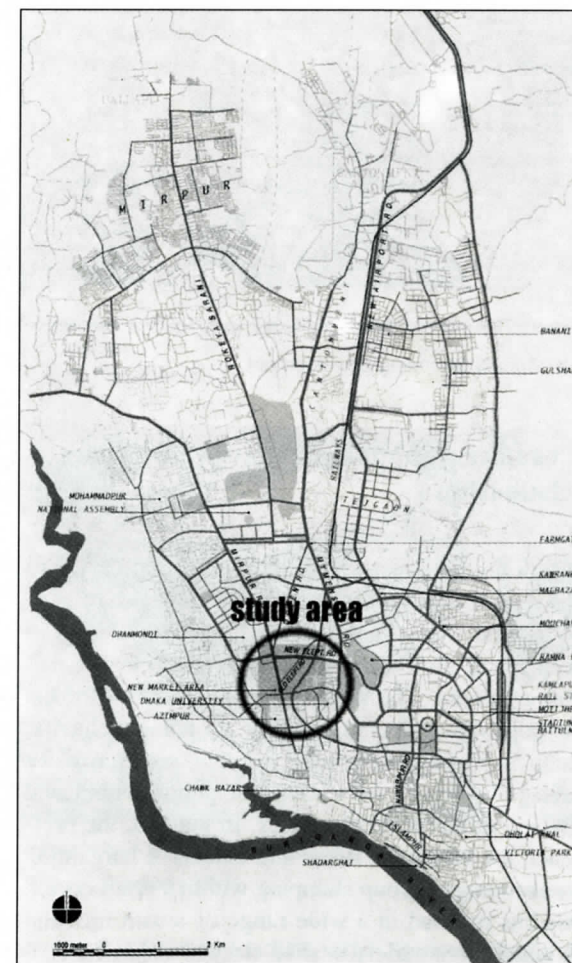


Figure 2a: Dhaka City Metropolitan Area Map - 1997 and the study area in the context
Source: Hossain (2001)

along the streets in the form of enclaves which may be planned or unplanned (Mollah, 1976). Only a few planned shopping centres have been developed by the public sector to serve the newly developed residential areas in Dhaka. On the other hand, a huge growth of retail centres throughout different part of the city have been developed by the private sector, and these are most often unplanned in nature. These unplanned developments are growing without any concern for *tenant mix policy*² or any of the other factors considered in retail planning theories and regulations found in the planned centres in the developed countries such as, site selection and location of a center, store location within a center, shop number and shop size for different retail functions, concept of magnet store etc. Their growth pattern is extremely flexible, i.e. growing or declining with the changing trade area and competition. Their physical form takes a regular or irregular shape following the site configurations (Figure 3.a.b). The planned retail centres undertaken by different government organizations, are concerned with site selection and follow a geometric shape in

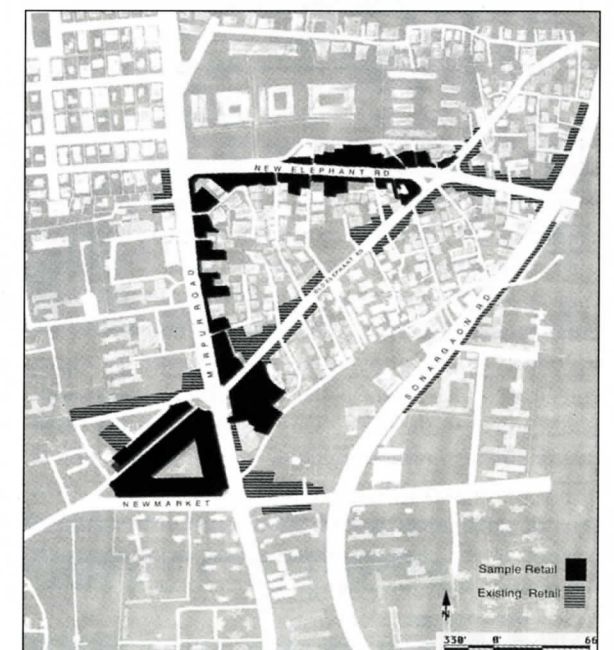
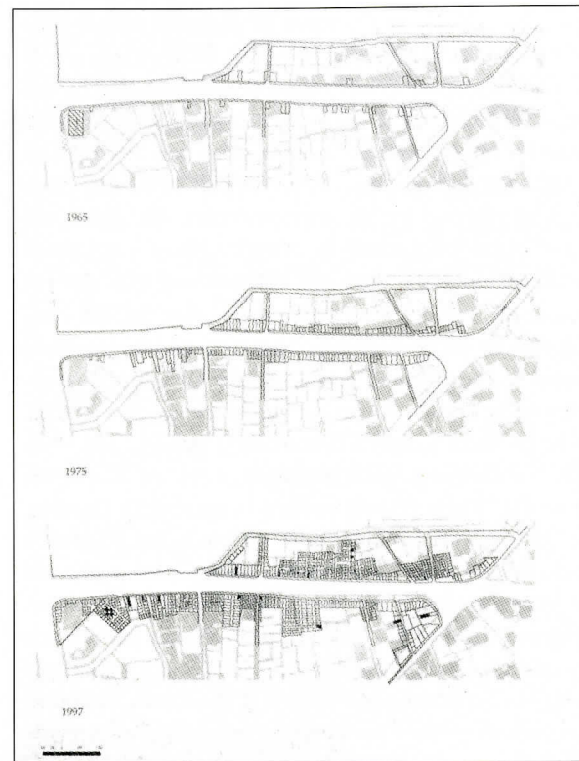


Figure 2b: Retail growth in the study area and the sample retail developments under study, 1998
Source: Hossain (2001)

² Recent studies related to store location have developed theories in terms of rent policy of a center known as a - 'tenant mix policy'. In retail geographer Dawson's (1991) view, each shopping center should have different tenant mix according to its type and many other variables. He identified some of these variables while describing 'tenant mix' as being: "the relationship of tenants to each other in the center as measured by: i) the proportion of floor space and / or number of units of each retail and service type, ii) the relative locations within the center of units of different retail and service groups"



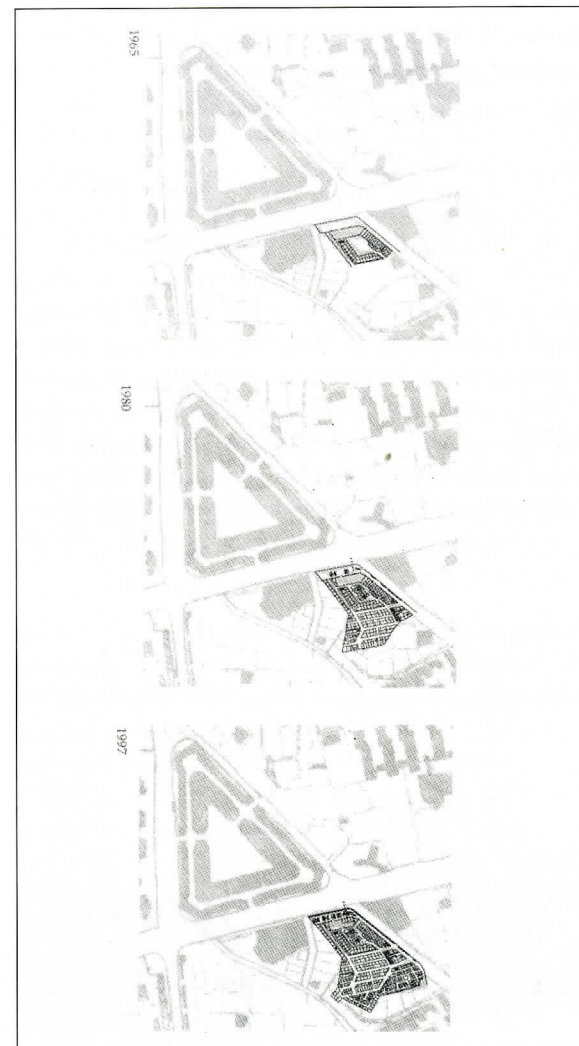
3.a New Elephant Road Ribbon Development

Figure 3 a.b : Changing Physical form of retail developments in the surrounding urban context
Source: Hossain (2001)

their physical form. These developments are square or rectangular in shape and organized in a rigid grid-iron arrangement of individual shop units. However, they appear to ignore all other aspects of retail planning mentioned earlier. Their spatial structures are not dependent on the sitting of the magnet stores to attract consumer's movement pattern like the planned shopping centres in the west. This study selects six retail developments in the study area from different periods of the city's growth between 1947 and 1997. This will provide a broader view of retail space structuring in relation to the changing socio-economic variables of the retailer and consumer groups, as described in the following sections.

Socio Economic Relation to Spatial Patterns

The section ascertains the socio-economic relations embedded in the spatial patterns from three view points: first, the consumers' behavioral dynamics and space preference, second, the retailers' profit motivated selling attitude and location strategies in the generation of attraction to different retail functions, and third, the hawkers' relationship to the formal retailing environment. The three viewpoints are outlined in the following sub-sections.



3.b Gausia Shopping Development

Consumers' Shopping Behavior and Space Relationship

The survey findings suggest that in general the shopping centres are characterized by the presence of middle-income consumers, where shopping does not mean much more than profit motivated buying and selling activity. The lower disposable income of the consumers is reflected in their shopping behavior, which is mainly influenced by their preference for variety and lower price range of goods within and between different retail centres. In general, the preference for variety of items and extensive bargaining has encouraged group shopping within a retail center. This has resulted in a wide range of tenant mix and the consequent variety in shop sizes in a specific center. This has also encouraged mass display at the shop front corridors to attract customers by displaying the variety inside the shops (Figure 4.a and 4.b).

The homogeneity of the upper-middle and high-class consumers in the ribbons show their preference for quality of products along with small shops offering variety and different price ranges. A percentage of high-income group retailers offer decorative display within large shop units in the planned centres and the Ribbon Development (Figure 5.a and 5.b). The duality of the spatial patterns is spontaneously growing to meet the shopping demand of the various socio economic classes of retailer and consumer groups in Dhaka. This preference level with the easy drop-off facilities of the rickshaw and other public transport facilities has influenced the tenant-mix pattern of the ribbons. Here, individual small-scale markets offer different retail types with different price ranges and qualities. Hence, variety is offered within the whole ribbon rather than in individual markets. Therefore, it can be concluded that the ribbon developments in Dhaka work functionally and spatially like a linear

inance of female consumers, has affected consumers' shopping behavior in the shopping centres and ribbon developments. Due to the 'purdah' of the Muslims, the female consumers are less visible in the ribbon developments - which have a more open layout (Figure 5.b).



Figure 5.a : Fashionable display in Ribbon developments
Source: Hossain (2001)



Figure 4.a : Display at the shop front corridors in Dhaka New Market
Source: Hossain (2001)

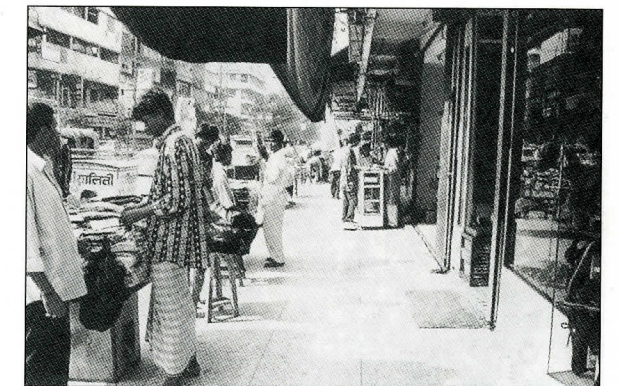


Figure 5.b : The street hawkers on the footpath in the Ribbon developments
Source: Hossain (2001)

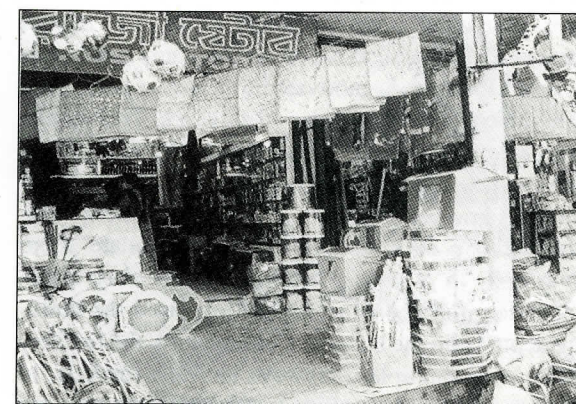


Figure 4.b : Small shop units and mass display
Source: Hossain (2001)

cluster of individual markets rather than encouraging street shopping among general shoppers. The religious and cultural homogeneity, along with the dom-

Retailers' Socio-Economic Concerns to Different Retail Attraction

The profit oriented buying and selling behavior of middle and lower income retailers have generated a specific pattern of retail clusters. Thus three business categories appear to follow Retail Geographer Nelson's definitions of 'generative', 'shared' and 'suspicious' business types. Figure 6 shows the spatial organization of these three types of retail clusters. A natural demand growth of a specific generative business type is arranged in a strong cluster, where their location is dependent on the dominant sex group of the consumers. For example, the 'purdah' of the Muslims has increased the spatial segregation of the male and female dominated generative business types

through creating different clusters in different locations within a center. Moreover, the routinized responsive shopping behavior of the female consumers has influenced the ladies apparel shops to cluster deeper inside of the shopping centres (Figure 7). whereas, men's apparel shops prefer outward and accessible locations (Figure 5.a). in the ribbon developments. The susceptible retail functions are taking advantage of impulse buying of the various consumer groups by their dispersed distribution in different accessible locations within a center. The shared business types arranged in small clusters in segregated locations within a development, to increase people's flow in less accessible locations through the supportive nature of attraction.

Consumer's specific demand for the generative business (clothing shops for example) types has encouraged the retailers to accommodate shared business (tailoring shops for example) types within and between different shopping developments in the same precinct. This functional linkage has enhanced the

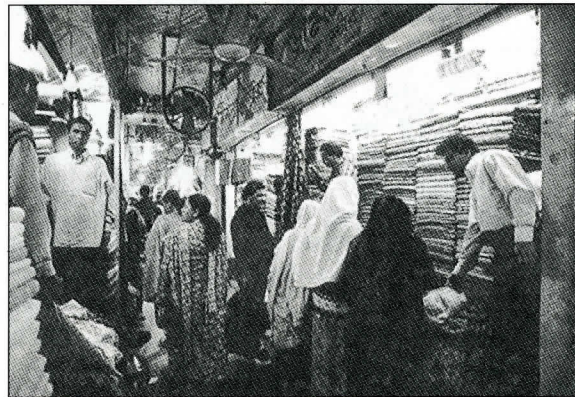


Figure 7 : Ladies clothing shops in Gausia Market
Source: Hossain (2001)

spatial linkage between different shopping centres in the same vicinity (Figure 8). Hence the retail centres show a nucleated cluster in a close proximity and create spatial linkages through common entrances and shortcut circulation routes between them. Moreover, the cheaper mode rickshaw ride has enhanced a cluster growth of shopping centres in the residential areas where consumer-shopping trips are also very frequent. The variety in tenant mix show no fixed module in shop size and extensive growth of shops are further enhanced by the various retailers' rent paying

³ As a whole the 'generative' business sells by its natural demand or attraction, the 'shared' business secures customers through their supportive nature of business in relation to the generative business and the 'susceptive' functions secure coincidental attraction.

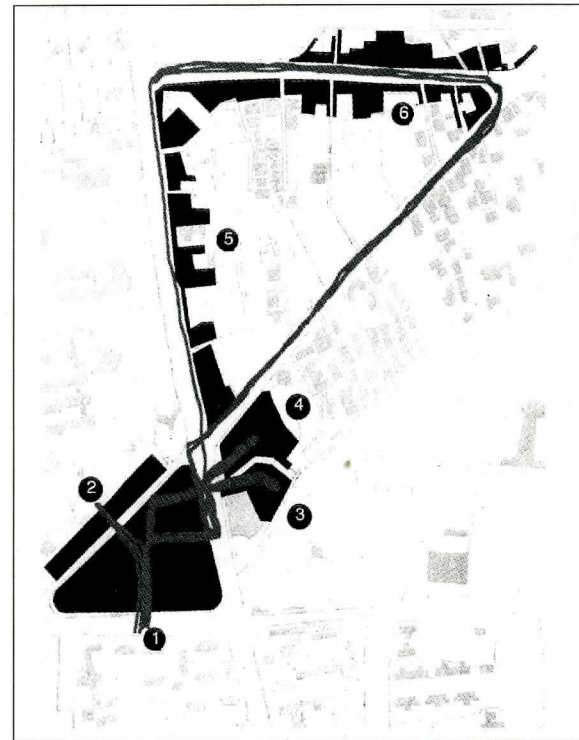


Figure 8 : Linkage among shopping centres and ribbons per consumer's movement pattern
Source: Hossain (2001)

ability to possess a shop within a shopping development.

However, like the planned shopping centres in the developed countries the location and organization of different retail clusters are not dependent on the type (in terms of different retail functions) of retailer. Moreover, their ability to acquire a shop depends on their individual financial status. Thus, the market owners renting system based on shop area is generated from their profit-motivated attitude to accommodate different income group of retailers. This results in an extensive growth of individual shop units with a varying size range. This has ultimately resulted in a compact grid pattern of internal layout of the spontaneous retail developments to accommodate more shop units in a smaller built area (75% shop area). Ultimately the phenomenon has increased the building depth from the outside. Consequently the retailers incorporate multiple entryways between markets, to offer multiple accessibility to the shoppers to overcome the problem of depth (Figure 9).

⁴ It has been illustrated in the retail location studies that the rent paying ability of different retailers' groups (in terms of functional variations within a center) affects the location and distribution of different retail functions in a planned shopping center.

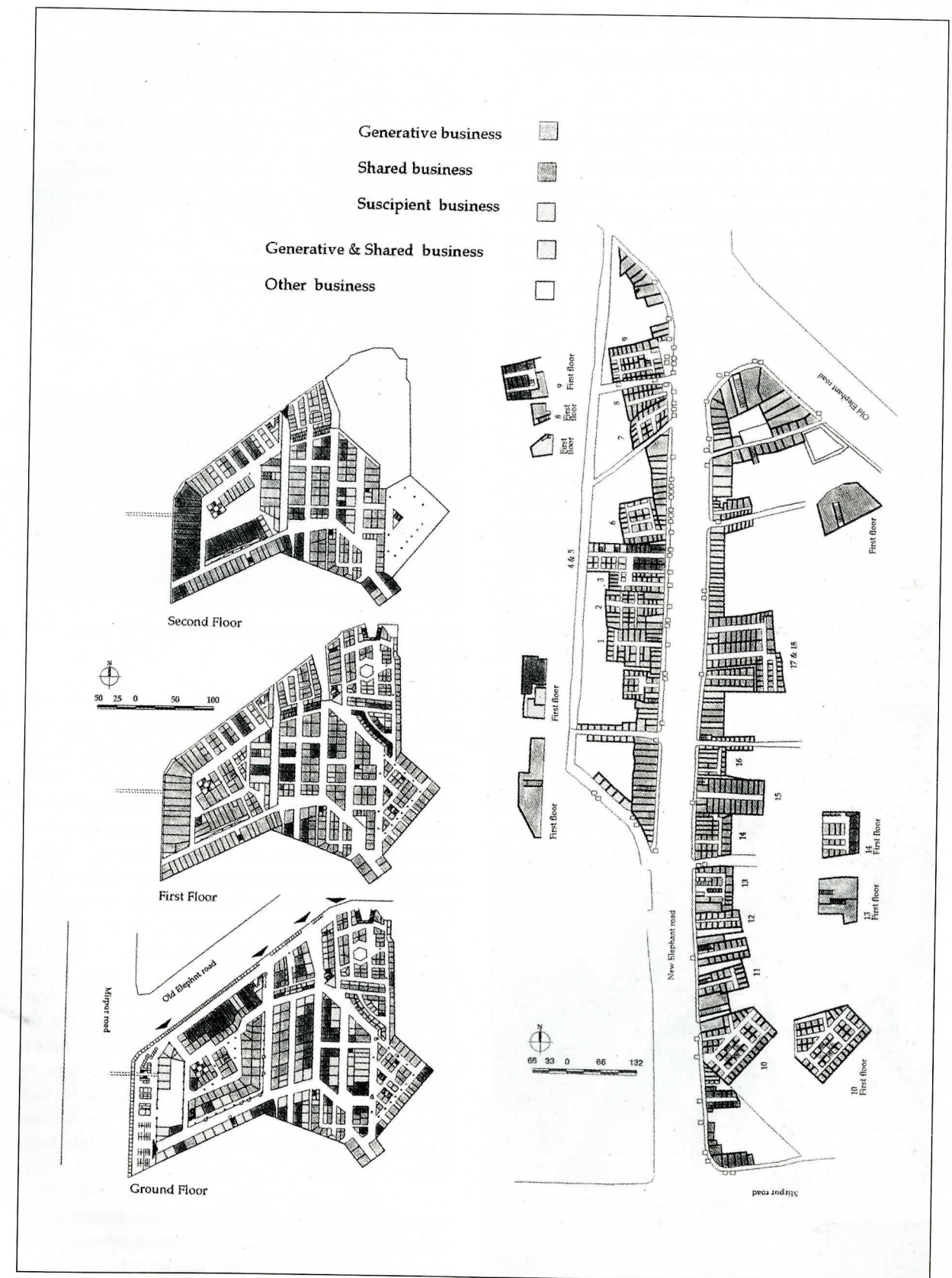


Figure 6 : Clustering pattern of three categories of retail functions
Source : Hossain (2001)

Hawkers' Socio-Spatial Relationship with the Formal Retail Environment

Following the retailers, varied socio-economic classes of hawkers also characterize the spontaneous shopping centres in Dhaka. On the contrary, the planned organization of the hawkers in the so-called planned and government shopping centres represents a more homogeneous socio-economic structure. The ribbons show a homogeneous economic status of different age groups of hawkers. However, irrespective of their different socio-economic groups, 80% of the hawkers in general have migrated to Dhaka to secure a job in the informal sector. These migrant hawkers with lower capital investment and financial ability prefer to locate themselves within and around the shopping centres where they can get easy reach to the general shoppers of all socio-economic classes. It is evident from the study that there is a socio-cultural demand for hawkers by the middle and high class consumers, which remains the main reason for the illegal and legal hawking activity within and around the shopping developments.

Hawkers' employment category strongly influences their space preference within a retail development. Three types of hawkers have been identified based on

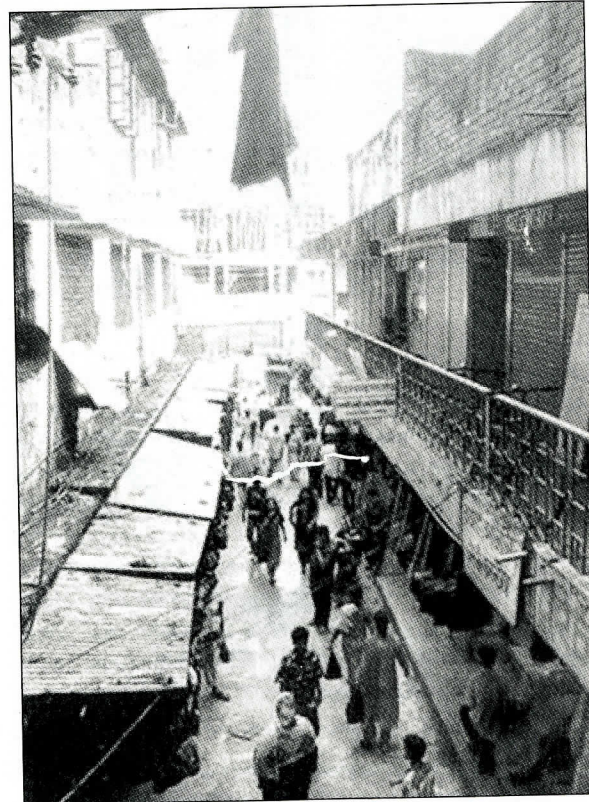


Figure 9 : Common entries between markets
Source: Hossain (2001)

employment pattern, they are: self-employed hawkers, hawkers employed by the local factory owners and the hawkers employed by the retailers. The self-employed hawkers prefer to locate at the entry points and the streets facing the market front shops (Figure 10.a) to attract general shoppers, people moving rickshaw pullers waiting for the shoppers. These accessible locations also permit them easy escape during police raids against illegal hawking. These hawkers sell tea cigarettes, dry food, fruit, along the

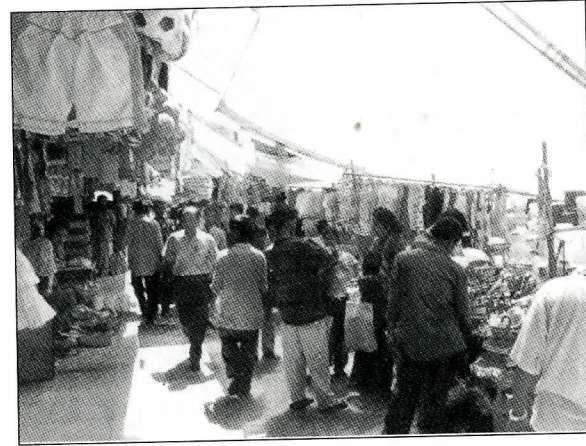


Figure 10.a : Self employed Hawkers at the market front footpath in Gausia Market
Source: Hossain (2001)

streets and the large crowd of the magazines and accessories. In contrast the hawkers employed by factory owners secure hawking opportunities without any capital investment. They occupy larger open spaces near the entryfronts, which accommodate a cluster of a minimum of 10 to 20 hawkers (Figure 10.b). Their selling strategies are based on a pseudo-competition within the group and require a fixed and accessible location to increase 'demand buying' among the general shoppers. Lastly, the hawkers employed by retailers, who acquire shops in the extreme deeper parts of a building, prefer to be located near the shops at the entry points and near the shops facing the market-front footpaths where people flows are maximum. They compete these shops by offering lower prices for similar products. In fact, these hawkers are a great benefit to the low-income retailers by selling their goods in accessible locations.

It is evident that the middle and lower-income retailers are taking spatial and locational advantage by employing hawkers and the hawker's benefit financially by securing a job with a low capital investment. In this way, there exists a benign dependency relationship between the formal and informal retailing

sectors from a socio-economic viewpoint. This phenomenon is strongly reflected through a co-operative space mechanism within and around the shopping



Figure 10.b : Group of Hawkers on the entry yards of Gausia Market
Source: Hossain (2001)

developments in Dhaka, where different retail functions-formal and informal, are organizing themselves within the same shopping precincts.

Conclusion

The paper reveals the fact that the specialization process and pattern of retail space organization in Dhaka are strongly affected by the socio-economic variables and the consequent behavioral limitations of the various consumers, retailer, and hawker groups. In general, the findings suggest that the spontaneous shopping development in Dhaka is characterized by the presence of small producers and retailers with low capital investment, where retailing does not mean much more than selling. This fact is aided by the existence of a large middle-income consumer group, who with their limited purchasing power experience shopping mostly as a buying activity rather than viewing 'shopping as a pleasure'.

The transformation from regular grid morphology to an unplanned spatial structure is obvious in case of the spontaneous retail centres in Dhaka. Their geometric regularity seems lost with the increased num-

⁵ The low-class retailers acquire deeper shops with low rent as the shop rent and possession is also dependent on their location within a centre.

⁶ According to retail geographer (Paddison, et.al. 1990:4) the study of retailing in developing countries relates principally to the importance of local socio-economic, often culturally embedded factors. Moreover, the modernizing effect shapes and changes the urban

ber of shop units, especially in the unplanned developments. Besides, the apparently chaotic physical layout of the spontaneous retail developments, their exist greater spatial order in the structuring of various retail functions in space. Rather than generating through any theories, rules and regulations of retail architecture, these complex physical structures are growing out of some hidden socio-economic rules associated with the needs and wants of the various user groups. However, the transformation from the so-called planned to the more spontaneous structure suggests that there is no logic in imitating the detailed spatial character of the spontaneous retail structures in planned ones, as time and society make radical changes within a process of rapid urbanization. An understanding of the spatial logic with respect to the social logic of space seems essential. Therefore, the new designs should have their appropriate scale in time, but continuity between the social and spatial seems essential. A contiguous relationship amongst different degrees of attraction of retail functions, coupled with internal and external spatial order, seems necessary to bring an order out of the apparent chaos in the spontaneous retail developments in the rapidly urbanizing cities such as Dhaka.

To date, the architects and urban planners have overlooked 'place specific' socio-economic issues in designing retail centres. The modern planned shopping center is an outcome of the changing shopping patterns of societies that have undergone modernization. The changes in retail center design and planning of commercial areas in the developing countries is the result. By contrast, this study investigated the spatial structure of the spontaneous retail developments in relation to the multifarious socio-economic variables of a specific context. It is hoped that this paper has generated an understanding of the 'place specific' role of space in retailing in a rapidly developing context. The generating ideas from the spontaneous shopping developments could be also set against the modern planning practices imported from the western world. These would help retail center designs relate to people's shopping experience in a specific developing context.

retail environment through incorporating ideas of western retail developments. However, local cultural and socio-economic forces have interpreted these 'modernizing' processes in different ways in different regions of the developing world. Therefore, the understanding of retailing in developing countries from a spatial point of view necessitates an appreciation of the specific place or context of its social environment.

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