



Transformation in Open Spaces: Past, Present and Future.

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ABSTRACT: Urban spaces are the heart/core of our physical environment. Yet, the inflating urban sprawl has led to restrained decline in the percentage of open spaces, preferably in city core. In the name of modernization trend, urban planners have compromised with the living standards of the residents, dismantling the cultural and the traditional significance of open spaces. Therefore, rational environmental and urban planning is of outmost necessity for long term sustainability and systematic hierarchy of cityscape. The paper aims to comprehend the threats in the traditional city core posed by haphazard expansion. It is perspicacious of how open spaces were imperative to our daily activities, but are now on the brink of susceptibility. However, it's also incredible how exquisitely they have customized with time and remodeled themselves for capricious and varied needs of living organisms. Spatial transformation has occurred as a result of change in utilization of spaces. This paper is an exploration of how tradition, culture, economic status and religion are marginally responsible for change in urban morphology of a city. To draw to a close, what seems clear in looking to the future is that flexible spaces will be harnessed to satisfy not only conventional needs but, also, new cultural understandings. Ultimately, open spaces are likely to stay with transforming forms to change the spatial pattern. In many aspect, repudiating overspecialization can enable us towards finding answers enabled in deep cultural roots.

Keywords: Traditional open spaces, Spatial transformation, Haphazard expansion.

I. INTRODUCTION

The ever increasing demand for buildings and paving in the urban area has impaired physical environment to the extent that the spatial pattern has become more fragmented and confusing, making the city less humane in nature (Edward and Matson, 2000) cited in (Gandhi, 2014). Consequential to the reckless expansion are the threats posed in the area. To make our historically designed cities livable and vibrant again, holistic planning of old and new urban fabric is requisite (Fig. 1).

II. PERSPECTIVE ON URBAN LANDSCAPE: PAST AND PRESENT

Open Spaces in the past

Open spaces earlier were seen as vast, far-reaching, non-specialized land allowing for a great variety of activities on market days, Sundays and holidays along with the routine of working days. These spaces were

used by the community as temporary markets, temporary playing grounds, temporary ceremonial areas, occasional political meetings and, of course, as permanent gathering places; not only serving the social, religious, or civic life of the community, but also its meagre economic life (Pozo, 1979).

The Jami Mosque of Bhopal was erected during 1833-56 CE during Qudsia Begum's reign, with its golden minarets visible from all points of the city (Dass, 2011). The walled city was planned in an orthogonal grid pattern centered on Jami mosque indicating the religious proclivity at that time. The Islamic culture harboring the 'purdah' system gave way to this typical planning with no open spaces and narrower streets at residential level. The above two contradictory ideologies manifest the idea that climate, culture and social structure played an important part in the urban morphology of a city during those times.

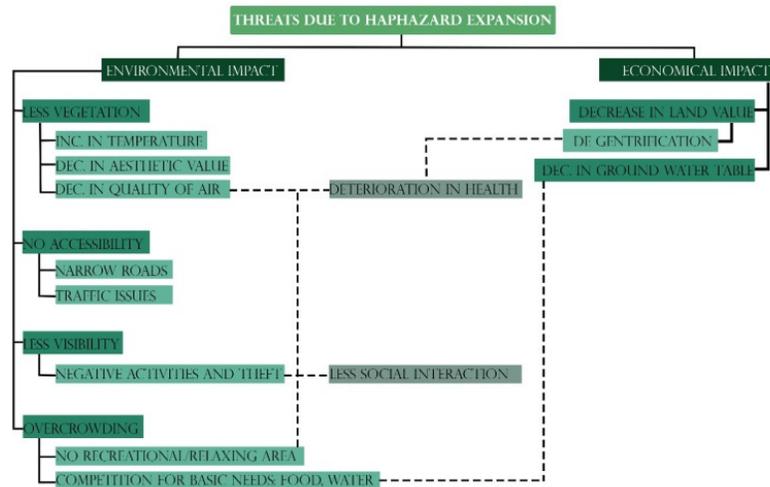


Fig. 1. Threats posed in the domain due to haphazard expansion (Source: Author).

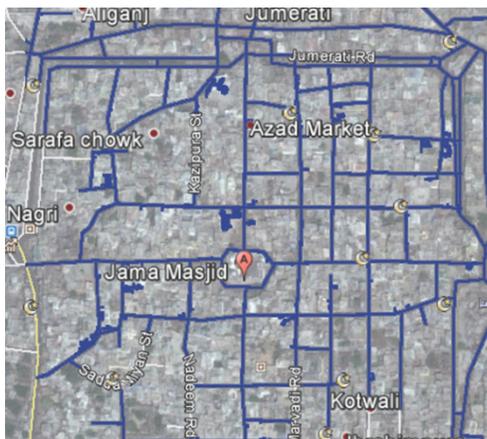


Fig. 2 Google image (2016). However, the street structure is still intact of 19th century

The present condition:

Alleyway act as a sort of transition zone between the private sphere of the household and the public sphere of the street, where neighborhood interactions can occur on a more intimate social scale and access is dictated by informal social norms (Madanipour, 2003). The main activity nodes (mosques, bazaars etc.) executed for open spaces are placed on streets with high integration level, i.e., the global network (Choudhary & Adane, 2012). The streets of Bhopal’s core area have shriveled to an extent that they are now alleyways fulfilling both purposes, public as well as private. The street pattern in the planned city is intelligible (the urban system is clear to users) and therefore is permeable. This easy memorization has led to transportation shortcuts and is the major cause of traffic today. Informal settlements in modern developing countries, representing much of the world’s newly created urban space, have with the lack of planned open space forced transportation to share

streets with a wide variety of social, recreational, and economic activities (Habitat, 1982) cited in (Stanley, *et al.*, 2012).

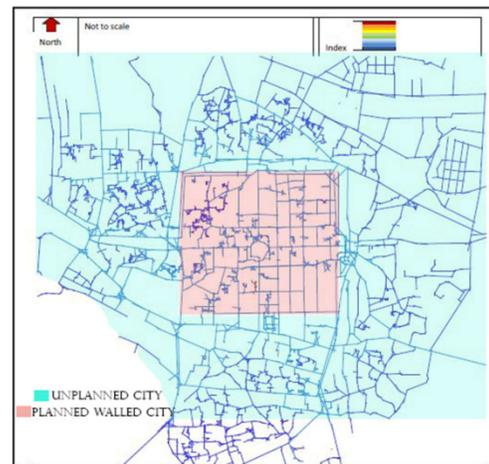


Fig. 3 Integration map of traditional urban core of Bhopal. (Source: Choudhary & Adane, 2012, Edited by the author.)

DECLINE IN OPEN SPACES

It is estimated that by the year 2030, sixty percent of the world’s population will live in cities (Gandhi, 2014). The city development agencies, at different points in time, have persistently concentrated in developing new areas at the city periphery to accommodate population, moving the city boundaries further outward from the core. However, with every outward movement of the city boundary, the neglect of the core becomes more acute through lack of funding for augmentation of infrastructure, social and physical and indiscriminate building development permits, with no relevance to the context.

As a result, large parts of the core city become progressively 'de-gentrified' and degenerated and eventually cause economic losses to the city by losing out on appropriate development opportunities at prime central city locations (Mitra & Mitra, 2015).

Negligence has led to decline in the land value of city core, making it affordable by majority of the poorer section leading to further overcrowding with additional loss in open space.

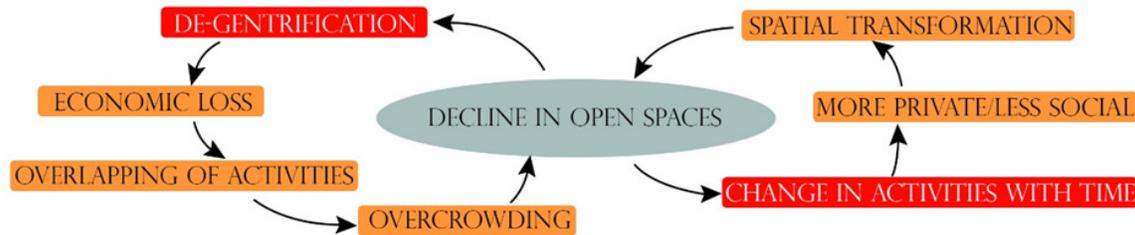


Fig. 4 Reasons for decline in open spaces.

Need of flexible open spaces for the future.

This section is a cognizance of what outlook should we have for the future of urban spaces, as a matter of choice for densely populated regions like the city core of traditional cities. Designers of public open spaces do not pay enough attention to the alternatives between specialized and flexible spaces. In fact, influenced by the 'functional attitude' of our century, designers tend to specialize, even overspecialize these spaces. In developing countries this is more noticeable since most of them still enjoy the heritage of flexible, multipurpose public open spaces. There has been a shift towards modern, efficient and productive land uses; towards activities that generate a high amount of car traffic. (Poza, 1979)

While designing a public open space for a region like the traditional city core of Bhopal, where there is already dearth of space, flexible urban spaces encouraging multitudinous uses can be an easy remedy for releasing social, economic, environmental pressure from a region. Open spaces can act as urban acupuncture (originally coined by Barcelonan architect and urbanist, Manuel de Sola Morales), releasing the stress for a given region. Innumerable activities like political, cultural, religious, recreational, touristic, commercial, social, ornamental, microclimate etc. can be habituated for one open space in the best interest of its users. The existence of many farmers that act as half-time merchants, artisans, barbers, musicians, photographers and firework experts depends heavily on the flexibility these spaces. Accordingly, public parks

or open spaces play a vital role in the creation of urban identity and revival of cultural significance.

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