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Urban Voids - Reclaiming Urban Space

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Abstract— Existences of public spaces in cities are essentials for social interactions to take place, fostering creation of sustainable, safe and livable cities. Although public spaces are often designed for certain activities, existence of unplanned spaces and urban voids throughout the city offers abundance of opportunities. This paper attempts to focus on the concept of urban voids (leftover spaces), identifying and analysing the type of void have a great potential for turning into public spaces through placemaking process. Space beneath the flyovers or bridges, the dead parking lots or nonreciprocal street edges are the spaces which are neglected and invisible to the citizens and therefore take away city experimental qualities, thus the attempt is to unearth the potentials of these spaces in context to built environment and surroundings at urban scale and prepare placemaking toolkit for using these spaces as a strategy to increase the public realm.

Keywords— Urban Void; Public Spaces; Reclaiming Lost Spaces; Flyovers; Spaces;

I. INTRODUCTION

Open and green spaces have become increasingly contested grounds in the context of urban scale, public space have become scarce in dense cities where land is very expensive. There is an another problem where cities are often being designed and planned isolated during the process creating used public spaces all around the cities which in fact reflects on negligence and bad perceptions of the place. Since there is no use attached to these spaces people tend to ignore these places and perceive these spaces as dead, underused, unused spaces in the cities. These urban voids are the result of inefficient decision making, poor land management, poor coordination among decision makers and designers for urban voids which have huge potential of improving the place and creating a stronger urban fabric of the city.

Reclaiming the dead spaces by intervening could solve the perception of these spaces and there by create better shared spaces by increasing the imagination and comfort. These spaces can be seen as great potential in this expensive world and exploited as urban public spaces such as public gathering spaces, public pockets, parks, plazas, or just a place for activities which make people get engaged and enhance the public realm. Research is needed to locate study and find solution to increase the public spaces in these dense contemporary cities. Spaces are designed by planners on a two dimensional plan without being considering for the citizens experience and the quality of life in the city, what people really want and also without deep knowledge of citizens requirements. But the users perceive these spaces completely different from what designers perceive and hence many hidden potentials are missed out which contribute to the creation of voids

WHAT IF WE BUILT YOUR COMMUNITIES AROUND PLACES?

As both an overarching idea and a hands-on approach for improving a neighbourhood, city, or region, Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagining and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, Placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, Placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its

ongoing evolution. Placemaking plans will ensure the people's perception and needs which in a way helps to transform these dead, underused and unused spaces into great public spaces.

OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF STUDY

The goal of the study is to define the Theoretical or Scientific research on the urban public spaces, urban voids in context of Indian cities, evaluate the public spaces, urban voids that need to be strategically regenerate and study the type of voids, and propose alternative ways to reclaim urban voids, leftover spaces.



Fig.1 Public Space and Life, Lost Spaces

PUBLIC SPACE AND LIFE

It is estimated 50 percent of the world’s population are living in urban areas, by 2050 this will rise up to 70 percent and already many cities across the world are struggling to cope the pressure from rapidly increasing population. These are the challenges like poverty, housing supply, population and poor infrastructure. (Fig. 1)

The cities are currently facing problems that are affecting the life in these cities. Public rapid growth in these developing countries is a major issue and a great challenge now days.

Cities like India with 32 percent of rate of urbanization are constantly dealing with various social-economic problems this is a very little attention on addressing the quality of life in the cities. These crowded cities in India deal with limited urban spaces and resources and to increase public space is very difficult and complicated. The same pattern appears everywhere that we have been seriously neglecting the human dimension in connection with urban development in developed cities that owes largely to planning ideologies, rapid motorization and difficulties in substituting from a model where city life needs the active support of careful planning.

II. URBAN VOIDS

These are the spaces which rupture the urban fabric of the city. These are spaces which are often neglected or either forgotten spaces in eyes of people. They are often the result of designing out of context with the surroundings. They are the result of treating planning sites isolation regardless of urban fabric and poor designing. “Urban voids are undesirable urban areas that are in need of redesign making no positive contribution to the surroundings they are ill-defined, without measurable boundaries and fail to connect elements in coherent wat.”(Trancik, 1986)

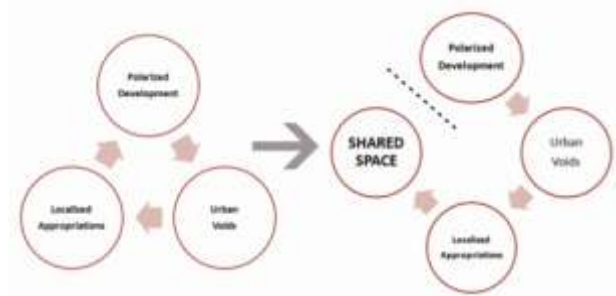


Fig 2. Void Space -Shared Space Analysis

CATEGORIES OF URBAN VOIDS

- **Planning Voids:** Voids created due to inefficient and improper planning processes. These are created due to planning in isolation without understanding the fabric of the city. These are most visible in our cities also can be perceived using figure ground theory.
- **Functional Voids:** These are dead vacant spaces in the cities. When a space is not used like it was designed to use the space becomes defunct. These occupy precious land in the city and make the environment unpleasant.
- **Geographical Voids:** These area existing geographical features in the city. When the city planners and designers do not respond to these geographical features voids are created around them making the space unusable. E.g. river, nuallh, etc.

III. CHALLENGES

- **Lack of public spaces:** In informal old city the public spaces were vital part of the public realm, we are living in a planned city where there is lack of planning of public spaces.
- **Lack of public participation:** There is lack of public participation at both ends on government as well as the people side. Building cities is an organic process and not all techniques or recipe fits every city. Hence key to building better cities, public spaces and communities is engaging community in the process should be a concern on public participation.
- **Poor design of public spaces:** There is a gap between people's need and design in the public spaces that is been present in the city. Poorly designed public spaces. Local needs are often neglected and planners and designers are hired to design the public realm. As a result it ends up as a design intervention.



Fig 3. Economical, Social, Environmental values.

IV. APPROACH TOWARDS URBAN SPACES - NEED

1. FIRST WE SHAPE THE CITIES, AND THEN THEY SHAPE US (GHEL, 2010)

“If we look at the history of the cities we can clearly see that urban structures and planning influence human behaviour and the ways in which cities operate” Functioned as the center of trade and craftsmanship. There was a mutual influence between city and people finding new ways to use the space should be concern for us as in cities modern urban planning which is used as problem solving exercise without understanding core problem. Physical planning can greatly influence the activities and usage of city space(fig.4). Chandigarh city based on sector-grid planning with greatest architecture creations showing planned urbanism in India creates a great impact in Indian context.



Fig 4. Chandigarh master plan

“IF BETTER CITY SPACE IS PROVIDED, USE WILL INCREASE” the better the quality of spaces in cities the better will be the quality of life.

2. THE SOCIAL OF SMALL URBAN SPACES (WHYTE, 1980)

“City abundant small spaces have key impact on the quality of life. If those spaces are unattractive and left unattended people will respond and retreat from the city streets and eventually have an adverse effect on city in all aspects”

Indian cities have now been approaching the same way as US cities where the monotonous roadside clutter including highways dividing the cities has resulted in increasing unsafe spaces and cities (fig-5)

When we think about cities we always think about people. People like public spaces, these places contribute to happiness, and public spaces can bring out smile. we lack in spaces while our cities are spreading like wildfire, with its highways taking our cities. This can't be stopped without creative development to provide housing and meeting other demands of growing population, what describes that how small urban spaces work and don't work. Places that attract tend to be relatively free from problems.

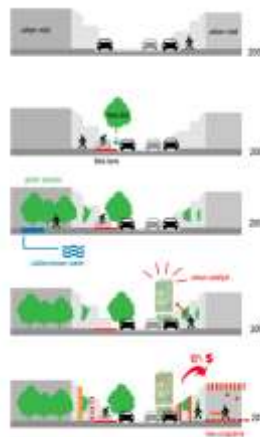


Fig 5. Yearly Analysis Of Ashram Road Street, Gujarat.

“IF WE LEARN TO TAKE ADVANTAGES OF OUR SMALL URBAN SPACES, IF WE DESIGN NEW ONES AND REPAIR OLD ONES WE WILL IMPROVE THE STREETS AND QUALITY OF LIFE”

3. LIFE, SPACE AND BUILDING (GHEL, 2010)

If we want to create better city, spaces working with scale is the most difficult and most sensitive urban planning discipline. If this is neglected or fails, city will decline in its quality of life.

“The widespread practice of planning from above and outside must be replaced with new planning procedures from below and inside, following the principle: first life, then space, then buildings. Instead of reverse order in the planning process that prioritizes

buildings then spaces and (perhaps) a little life working with the human dimension requires life and space to be treated before buildings.”

This method involves introductory work that determines the character and scope of the projected life in the development. Then the agendas are prepared for the city spaces and city structure and then buildings can be placed or positioned to ensure the best possible coexistence between life, spaces and buildings. This work expands into large developments and larger districts but is always rooted in the requirements for a well-functioning public life.(fig-6)



Fig 6-Life, Space and Buildings, Ghel, 2010.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Considering Presence of Public Life, Community involvement, proper management, Stakeholders, Availability of Space, Flexible Setting are a basic need of a public space; some of the projects are being reviewed on the basis of need and flexibility of space to be reclaimed.

A Under-Flyover Spaces-

The flyover itself is a proposed necessary civic infrastructure. Why can't this idea be extended of further reuse of space what better place to open up a little room for the citizens of the city? With a few small interventions and amenities, we believe that this patch of land could be completely transformed and that if given the chance, these slender patches of space would find a host of uses that would be constantly changing over time, responsive to collective need, present aspirations and seasonal calendar instead of parking,



Fig 7.-a- Utilization of Spaces under Flyovers.

The JJ flyover Mumbai, (fig-8)

Runs from the Crawford Market area all the way to Byculla, jumping over some of the densest and most frantic neighbourhoods of Mumbai. It is a mess of traffic above and a mess of traffic below. All accommodations are made for the car and truck. We see the space under the flyover as having wonderful potential. It is sheltered from the rain and from the heat of the sun. Amazingly, it is also free of much of the politics. Proposal for spaces to play, move, for shelter, for community building, for worship and for celebration.



Fig 8-A- Existing and Proposed Details of Jj Flyover Mumbai

B - Favela Painting Project-

(Use/Purpose: (fig -9) affect the aesthetics of negative looking favelas and a community art project /Places: Favelas of Rio de Janeiro) Community involvement and collaborations with local people in turn helping to improve the living environment in the neighbourhood. Promoting local artists and people will help to create more successful projects.



Fig 9 -B- Favela Painting Project-Community Art

C- Rebuilding Detroit-

(Use/Purpose: (fig-10)To attract visitors of all kind to the heart of the city./Place: Campus Martius.)A strong vision by local government, placemaking project and proper management creates successful public spaces to activate the heart of the city. This resulted into dead spaces around the public space to grow and generate more activities attracting more public life.



Fig 10 -C- Favela Painting Project-Community Art

D- Redesigning streets-

reimagining our streets as places: from transit routes to community roots, can help to make way for these transformations. taking an integrative approach to the planning, design, and management of our shared public spaces, the growing *streets as places* movement is helping people begin to see streets in their *entirety*: not just their function in transporting people and goods, but the vital role they play in animating the social and economic life of communities.



Fig 11-D- Redesigning Streets

“If you plan cities for car and traffic you get cars and traffic, if you plan for people and places, you get people and places” – FRED KENT

VI. ISSUES

- **Access and linkages:** The spaces beneath the flyover are cut-off from public that creates an unpleasing environment under flyover.

- **Comfort and image:** The spaces beneath the flyover are unattractive, but at some places the presence of informal activity are creating public activity which there in makes that place somewhat attractive and a sense of comfort.
- **Activities and uses:** There are a lot of opportunities in the area, with the presence of informal activity around the flyover the area is full of potential to be developed as a public space. The space beneath the flyover is vacant most of the time and potential activities could be expanded.
- **Sociability:** The presence of people in group is less due to the lack of activities in the area. Though the people show evidence of volunteerism and area helpful this is a positive point which can be used as an advantage.

VII. ANALYSIS

HOW CAN THESE LEFT OVER SPACES BE PUT TO USE?

Anti-space, Border Zones are usually chaotic, since they are comprised of the remnants of other uses. But these could be used to knit together the fabric of a city at a crucial border zone. Residual areas, buffer zones, vacant land do separate one zone of building from the other, but they also connect the enclaves and afford opportunities of a range of actions. These interstitial spaces can act as potential spaces for urban restructuring. They can act as public spaces which today occupy crucial components of the city, both in terms of the physical as well as social function they serve. Edges, while generally separating and isolating areas, could conversely be seen uniting space between two areas. The space could be designed to give a sense of ownership of it to the community; it could be designed to reunify areas of the city that have been severed by urban renewal. Any flyover must not present a significant visual obstruction that effectively cuts the community and similarly must eliminate undesirable residual spaces. There are numerous examples that celebrate design and engineering, creating contemporary urban sculptures that add positivity to sense of place, rather than detract from it.

IDEAL SPACE UNDER FLYOVER

- An ideal flyover, reclaiming a space under flyover Instead of parking, we propose spaces for play, for shelter, for community building, for worship and for celebration.
- Create well-lit, cohesive public spaces such as pocket parks, shaded seating areas, food courts, gathering spaces, plazas and play areas.
- Provide vending opportunities in dense neighbourhoods through kiosks, markets and vending zones to attract the public.
- Improve overall pedestrian connectivity.
- Insert public facilities such as auto rickshaw stands, public toilets and strategic parking.
- Facilitate use of these spaces by lighting, signage and waste collection.
- Improve linkages across the bridge under-spaces by redesigning road intersections under the bridge.

CONCLUSION

Urban Voids have huge potential of improving the place and creating a stronger urban fabric of the city. Reclaiming the dead spaces by intervening could solve the perception of these spaces and thereby create better shared spaces by increasing the imagination and comfort. These spaces can be seen as great potential in this expensive world and exploited as urban public spaces such as public gathering spaces, pocket parks or plazas or just place for activities which make people get engaged and enhance the public realm. Efforts are needed to locate study and find solutions to increase the public spaces in these dense contemporary cities.

1- Catalyst for public space (Community, govt., leaders, NGO'S) a strong local leadership is required to encourage the importance of public space.

2 -The process (Strong vision, Desire to change) Vision is very important since the willingness to change the area in context can help in creating great neighbourhood.

3-Identifying the opportunities identifying the dead spaces in the area and using the full potential of that place using community in the process helps a lot.

4-Enjoy great public spaces key to great public spaces is people, if people are involved in creating public spaces, we get great public spaces.

5-Transform underused spaces into exciting laboratories that citizens can start using right away and see evidence that changes can happen.

6-Represent an "Action planning process" that builds a shared understanding of a place that goes far beyond the short term changes that are made.

7- Leverage local partnerships that have greater involvement by a community and results in more authentic places.

- 8- Encourage an interactive approach and an opportunity to experiment, assesses, and evolves a community's vision before launching into major construction and a long term process
- 9-Employ a place-by-place strategy that, over time, can transform an entire city. With community buy-in, the LQC (lighter, quicker, cheaper) approach can be implemented across multiple scales to transform under-performing spaces throughout an entire city.

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