

Rethinking Urban Open Spaces

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Abstract—The study looks at the uses and users of the urban open spaces such as parks, gardens, play grounds, streets, boulevards, squares, urban plazas etc. along with the barriers preventing their uses. The wider benefits to quality of life in urban areas and examples of innovative approaches to creation, management and their maintenance. The report focuses on providing reliable identification of different categories of urban open spaces i.e. parks, playgrounds, gardens, streets, boulevards, urban plazas etc and how are they used by people and what should they be used for. This study will define some of the urban open spaces on the basis of their purpose, esthetics, activities performed, social significance and cultural significance. It consists of benefits of urban open spaces, their need in society and how to overcome barriers which are responsible for lack of understanding of such spaces in people and designers.

Index Terms—Architecture, Open green spaces, Open spaces, Public open Spaces, Urban Planning, Urban open spaces.

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of urban green spaces in aggrandizing the urban environment and the quality of urban life has been recognized within urban planners and designers. This report sets out the findings of research carried to inform the work of the urban planners, set up to advice the government on proposals for improving the quality of urban open spaces.

Aim is to study and provide reliable identification of different categories of urban open spaces, their differences on the basis of purpose, users, location, aesthetics, cultural and social significance. Also, how the spaces are used by different age group of people i.e. children, youngsters and the elderly.

A. Objectives

- Find out the foot count and usage of urban open spaces and it's variation in accordance with different types of users and geographical conditions.
- Through questionnaires and interviews, determine what users want from urban green spaces and what their expectations are. Also, what are barriers and how much are they aware of the identity of different urban open spaces.
- Develop a typology of different urban open spaces and users that provides quick and useful reference.
- Study to examine the ways in which different urban open spaces contribute in improving the quality of life for people in urban areas and in particular, which spaces can benefits which group of people.

- Determine the social, economic, environmental and other benefits of urban open spaces and how they can be applied.

II. LITERATURE STUDY

There is an enormous development taking place in urban design and the regeneration of urban areas, but currently thinking of it often concentrates on the built form, forgetting the important role the important role that urban spaces play. Urban open spaces brings plays a vital role in lives of people, mentally, physically, socially and economically. There are numerous urban open spaces with their own identifications on the basis of their purpose of use, users, aesthetics, social and cultural values etc. which needs to be considered in urban development of cities. Different spaces have some of their unique properties and identities, which are bought up through this study.

The report mainly concerns with different types of urban open spaces, their identifications on the basis of their location, purposes, uses, users, aesthetics, social values and cultural values if any. It will also deal with their benefits in lives of people as well as urban development of the city. Some of the urban open spaces are:

Parks: A park is a space with landscape which shall consist of meadows, water bodies, woodlands and open shelters. A park can be semi-natural or planted space mainly for recreation or protection of wildlife or natural habitat. It might consist of softscape and hardscape i.e. grass, rocks, paving, soil, trees and may also contain buildings and other artifacts such as monuments, water fountain, play areas, water body like pond or a lake depending upon what type of park it is.

According to the main functions of the City Park and content, parks can be divided into following categories:

- a) *Comprehensive Park:* These are designed within a distance of 1.5 km from residential areas and provide recreational opportunities with physical, social and cultural activities.
- b) *Community Park:* These are designed within a distance of 1.5 km from residential areas and provide recreational opportunities with physical, social and cultural activities.
- c) *Banding Park:* These parks provide live banding of different birds and animals.
- d) *Theme Park:* These provide a group of entertainment attractions, rides and other events in a location for the

enjoyment of large numbers of people.

It's important to recognize the different purpose and management objectives of the different types of parks. Basically parks can be classified in following types:

- a) National park: Areas of nationwide significance because of their outstanding natural environments, features, scenic landscape and diverse land types.
- b) State park: They have same purpose as of national parks but are generally smaller and make up an area of land containing natural environments and features, scenic landscapes and one or more land types that represents the major land of the state.
- c) Regional Park: Areas of land containing indigenous or non- indigenous vegetation readily accessible from urban centers or major tourist routes. They offer diverse recreational opportunities for large number of people.
- d) Marine national parks and coastal parks: These type of parks protect marine and coastal environment, safeguarding marine habitats for important plants and animals and conserving natural, cultural and aesthetic values.
- e) Metropolitan parks: These parks are managed for intensive recreation and conservation where needed and is appropriate.

Gardens: A garden is a planned outdoor space, set aside for the display, cultivation and enjoyment of plants and other forms of nature. The garden can be incorporated both natural and man-made materials.

- *Residential Gardens:* Residential gardening takes place near the home, in a space referred to as the garden.
- *Xeriscape Gardens:* A landscaping method developed especially for arid and semiarid climates that utilize water-conserving techniques.
- *Zen Gardens:* These are dry gardens with composed arrangement of rocks, water, features, moss, pruned trees and bushes, and uses gravel or sand.
- *Botanical Garden:* This is an establishment where plants are grown for scientific study and display to the public.
- *Zoological Gardens:* It is a place where collection of wild animals is kept for public showing; zoo, also zoological park.

Plaza: An open space available for civic purposes and commercial activities and usually attached to an important building is known as plaza. Plazas are commonly found in the heart of the city and mainly used for community gatherings and civic purposes.

Playground: play grounds are spaces which are designed as per some of the particular sports or activities and can be used for that particular sport or activity. It has less to do with natural ornamentation and informal gatherings like in gardens and parks. Playgrounds have equipment's installed and hence can

be used for that particular recreational activity only.

Streets: Street is space which connects spaces through paved roads. The street is more than simple pathway. It represents a series of connected places, for staying in and not just for moving through. Streets can be following types:

- a) Alley: A narrow passage or way in the city between or behind buildings. Alleys are narrow and without sidewalks.
- b) Walkways: Walkway is pat for walking which can be at ground level, or can be elevated.
- c) Avenue: A straight street with a line of trees planted in an avenue are of the same type for uniformity.
- d) Main Street: Main Street is primary retail street in a city. It is usually a focal point for shops in the central business district.
- e) Sidewalk: A path for pedestrian that is located alongside a road. These are also called as footpaths.
- f) Highways: A main road for traveling between important destinations, such as cities, large towns and states.

Boulevards: Boulevards area wider than a street that not only accommodates vehicles but includes bike lanes, walkways and communal green spaces as well. Boulevards separate very large streets into parallel urban realms, buffering the commercial or residential street edge from the high speed throughway by means of multi-way operations and frontage roads.

III. COMPARISON OF SOME URBAN OPEN SPACES

Following comparisons could be drawn out on the basis of purpose of space, uses, users, social perspective, aesthetic and location:

- *Parks and gardens:* parks are those urban open spaces, which, mainly provides spaces for recreational activities such as walking, jogging, riding, and some sports like baseball, badminton, volleyball, basketball etc. whereas, gardens are designed for adoring nature and art works with no such activities involved.
- *Gardens and plaza:* A garden are designed with focus on landscape and is used for informal recreation by people, whereas, plaza is a space with just some sittings and no focus on ornamentation through landscaping but for civic purposes and gatherings.
- *Road and street:* a road is a space that connects two spaces and is just used for transferring people from one to another, whereas street aims to facilitate public interaction. Street might have sidewalks or parking.
- *Main street and boulevards:* Main street are usual street in the city which has retail shops and is for business purposes whereas, boulevards are wider than a streets and has bikeways, sideways, walkways and communal green spaces as well.
- *Playgrounds and parks:* parks and playgrounds, both provide spaces for recreational activities but main difference between them is that parks have no age limit

and can have convertible space for different activities whereas, in playgrounds, equipment's are installed and age group is defined which is only for children.

IV. BENEFITS OF URBAN OPEN SPACES

All the important benefits of urban open space can be categorized as social which includes health and education benefits, environmental and economic, however a key feature of successful green spaces is their capacity to provide multiple benefits to urban communities.

Social benefits: It has both an existence value, because people know it is there, and a use value for a wide range of different activities. It contributes significantly to social inclusion because it is free and access is available to all; it provides neutral ground available to all sectors of society and can become the focus of community spirit through the many and varied opportunities provided for social interaction; it contributes to child development through scope for outdoor, energetic and imaginative play and also has considerable educational value.

Health benefits: The health benefits of urban open space are also extremely important and stem both from the opportunity to engage in healthy outdoor exercise and from the psychological effects arising from the way that they allow escape to a less stressful, more relaxing environment.

Educational Benefits: Green spaces offer a wide range of both formal and informal educational opportunities to all age groups. The work of learning through landscapes and similar organizations can be inspirational in showing what can be achieved in educational, environmental and social terms through exploitation of the school grounds resource.

Environment Benefits: The environmental benefits of urban open space include: contributions to maintaining biodiversity through the conservation and enhancement of the distinctive range of urban habitats; contributions to landscape and cultural heritage; improvement of the physical urban environment by reducing pollution, moderating the extremes of the urban climate, contributions to cost-effective sustainable urban drainage systems and some influence as sinks for carbon dioxide; and provision of opportunities to demonstrate sustainable management practices.

Economic Benefits: Economic benefits include both on-site benefits, such as direct employment and revenue generation, and less tangible off-site benefits, including effects on nearby property prices, contributions to attracting and retaining businesses in an area and an important role in attracting tourists.

V. SURVEY AND ANALYSIS

How many people actually use urban open spaces and how do they use them? And when and why do they use them. These are some of the questions that this chapter would seek to address. In order to find out answer to these questions, survey through questionnaire and interviews of people who use them have been done.

From the survey, it is observed that the concerns that deter people from using urban green spaces fall into two broad groups. Firstly, there are personal issues which relate to the personal circumstances of the individual and cannot be influenced by those responsible for urban green spaces. They include factors such as not having enough time, poor health or mobility, working unsocial hours and having a personal preference for visiting other places, although this last could of course be influenced to some extent by making urban open spaces more attractive to visit. Secondly, there are issues related to the urban open space resource which relate to the location, accessibility, environmental quality or user experience of urban green spaces and are therefore issues which could be overcome if the planners, designers and managers of these spaces could address them satisfactorily.

A. Barriers to Use Urban Open Spaces

There are five main barriers that deter people from using urban green spaces. They are all resource issues rather than personal concerns, and so could all be addressed by planning, design or management action. They are: lack of facilities, including play opportunities for children; the influence of other green space users; dog mess; safety and other psychological concerns; and concerns about environmental quality including litter, vandalism and graffiti. Other issues such as poor maintenance and not enough to do are linked to these main resource issues. Access issues, including poor public transport, spaces being too far away, and other aspects of accessibility seem to be of lesser importance overall, but were a particular source of concern in focus groups involving the elderly and disabled people and so also need to be considered. Some of the barriers observed are:

- *Facilities:* Lack of or poor condition of facilities was mostly observed. Facilities such as equipments in playgrounds, shade in gardens, dog messes etc. people also expect hygienic food courts and potable water at places such near lake and parks.
- *Access issue:* Access issues are also of concern, mainly to the elderly and especially abled people. They relate to proximity of and ease of access of urban open spaces and moving around safely within them.
- *Hygiene:* hygiene is also one of the major concerns especially near lake or any other water bodies. Infrequent maintenance of the space causes foul smells, calls for harmful insects and mosquitoes and makes the place look aesthetically unattractive.
- *Security:* Security is also concern at some places like parks, gardens and spaces which creates dark spaces. These places need to be kept under security so as to make them safe for family and children as well. Women's and children's security are major concern, so dark passages and poorly lit paths should be avoided.
- *Personal:* Some of the secondary issues are busy

schedule, lack of time, working hours, poor health issues or mobility and other preferences.

- *Lack of interest:* in spaces like parks and gardens, due to lack of interesting activities, people avoid visiting them. Places need to be designed and maintained in an interesting way to attract people.
- *Dog mess:* Dog mess is another concern and is observed at most of the places. Dogs' entry should be restricted in some areas due to safety issues as well to maintain hygiene.

Related psychological issues include not wanting to go alone to urban open spaces. This is not just a matter of fear, but of vulnerability, especially amongst elderly people, the sense of loneliness experienced particularly by those who are widows or widowers and the lack of confidence in some especially abled people and their desire to be accompanied on visits. Other unrelated factors referred to in the discussions included laziness and inertia – some people, and particularly the elderly, admitted that they could not be bothered to go.

B. Overcome Barriers

From the study, survey and observation, barriers have been determined and some possible solutions to overcome those are given below:

- *Lack of facility:* Facilities such as seating, proper parking, food and potable water facility and toilets should be provided at urban open spaces such as gardens, parks, playgrounds, lake side etc. taking in consideration women, elderly and especially abled people.
- *Safety and psychological issues:* Providing staff would not only increase of safety but also provide employment. Staff can include warden, keeper, security guard, gardener etc. according to the type of urban open space.
- *Access issues:* Urban open spaces must be designed, considering the ease of access for especially abled, elderly and children.

VI. OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSION

This research has confirmed the exceptional importance of urban open space to the future of towns and cities. It reaffirms and elaborates on the findings of earlier studies on the role that urban green space plays in the day-to-day life of urban dwellers, by virtue both of its existence – that is people simply knowing that it is there and seeing the contribution that it makes to the urban landscape, as well as its use for recreation and enjoyment. The range of benefits from urban open space covers the spectrum of social, health, environmental, and economic benefits. The research has shown that urban open spaces can act as catalysts for wider community initiatives in ways that no other public facility seems able to achieve in similar circumstances. Again and again, people involved in these initiatives said that if it wasn't for open spaces, nothing would have happened.

This social, community and economic role go well beyond the normal, somewhat blinkered view of the contribution of urban open space to the future of our cities. It needs to be given much greater prominence in promoting a higher profile for urban open spaces and in supporting the case for funding at both local and national levels.

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