

ICOA1732: REPURPOSING UNBUILT HERITAGE FOR THE COMMUNITY: CREATING EQUITABLE PUBLIC SPACES IN INDIA

Subtheme 01: Integrating Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development by engaging diverse Communities for Heritage Management

Session 1: Sustainable Development and Community Engagement

Location: Gulmohar Hall, India Habitat Centre

Time: December 13, 2017, 10:25 – 10:40

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Nidhi Madan is a landscape architect and architect based in New Delhi, India. Degrees from the School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), Delhi and University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and work experience in India and USA, have honed her interests in the built realm—public places, people and the environment, sustainability and accessibility. She is Director, Samarthyam, National Centre for Accessible Environments; Executive Committee Member, Indian Society of Landscape Architecture (ISOLA) and Visiting Faculty, SPA, Delhi.

Abstract: With growth of Indian towns and cities set to escalate through economic stimulus, educational and employment opportunities and aspirations, migration and development are rapidly changing small towns. As a result, historic precincts, fortified cities and pilgrimage towns are rapidly losing their historic character and sense of place. Particularly in cultural centres of historic towns, such as Bhubaneswar, Bhopal or Lucknow, conservation for authenticity is a much lower priority than critical socio-economic development pressures.

However, in this day and age, creating safe, accessible, approachable and equitable precincts can build on existing cultural precincts, create engagement with the local community and find new stakeholders and modern relevance.

In repurposing these living city-cores, this paper examines strategies to create vibrant, equitable and relevant public spaces for the city. Culturally significant urban centres, with their dynamism and multi-faceted evolution must cater to contemporary uses and also create improved understanding of its people—particularly in Indian culture, wherein diverse populations of gender groups, religious and caste distinctions, persons with disabilities, and differing economic classes have not traditionally mixed. The opportunity to craft shared public spaces as community spaces in urbanized and ghettoised cities using historic precincts as city centres will be investigated, to provide places for non-religious congregation, for engagement between citizens, for commerce and transit, for collective celebration and grief and for staging of disaster relief, if required.

This paper investigates a divergent approach wherein the needs of diverse user groups are the primary concern, yet the heritage value defines the framework within which this approach can succeed. It addresses heritage precincts as places for its people and their contextual needs, within a set of guidelines that preserve tangible and intangible spatial, architectural and cultural values. To succeed it must not impinge on the economic, social and modern aspirations of burgeoning populations.

Key words: equitable public spaces, heritage precincts, diverse populations

Current Context

With growth of Indian towns and cities set to escalate through economic stimulus, educational and employment opportunities and aspirations, migration and development are rapidly changing small towns. As a result, historic precincts, fortified cities and pilgrimage towns are rapidly losing their historic character and sense of place. Particularly in cultural centres of smaller historic town conservation for authenticity is a much lower priority than critical socio-economic development pressures.

Objectives

This paper examines strategies to create vibrant, equitable and relevant public spaces for the city in these living heritage cores. Culturally significant urban centres, with their dynamism and multi-faceted evolution must cater to contemporary uses and also create improved understanding of its people—particularly in Indian culture, wherein diverse populations of gender groups, religious and caste distinctions, persons with disabilities, and differing economic classes have not traditionally mixed. The opportunity to craft shared public spaces as community spaces in urbanized and ghettoised cities using historic precincts as city centres will be investigated, to provide places for non-religious congregation, for engagement between citizens, for commerce and transit, for collective celebration and grief and for staging of disaster relief, if required.

This paper investigates a divergent approach wherein the needs of diverse user groups are the primary concern, yet the heritage value defines the framework within which this approach can succeed. It addresses heritage precincts as places for its people and their contextual needs, within a set of guidelines that preserve tangible and intangible spatial, architectural and cultural values. It does not reflect on a specific city, yet uses learnings from different historic precincts with similar challenges. To succeed it must not impinge on the economic, social and modern aspirations of burgeoning populations.



Fig.1– Public Space around heritage tanks: BindusagarTank,Bhubaneswar (Source:BBPL)

Tangible and Intangible Heritage

There are two classifications of heritage values. Tangible heritage includes buildings and physical elements of architectural and historical significance, e.g., temples, tanks, forts and public buildings, for which there is physical evidence. These can be easily documented (UNESCO 2017).

Intangible heritage includes local crafts, rituals, festive events, visual and performing arts, music, literature, language, dialects, traditional medicine, culinary traditions, spirituality, traditional knowledge, etc. This is harder to quantify and attribute a value to, resulting in its erosion due to rapid urbanization and globalization. It is intimately linked to the built heritage and represents the communities evolving values, beliefs, and attitudes over a period.

Heritage Centres in India

In India, pilgrimage towns evolved as centres of religion, learning and power. Bhubaneshwar and Varanasi are some examples where the sacred geography of the river and the five elements were monumentalized in temples, temple tanks and river ghats (Thakur 2010). These historic cities are centred about temple tanks, central public plazas, forecourts of palaces and forts, processional streets and plazas.

Over the centuries, while the metaphysical association of people with the sacred landscape, terrain, geography and culture changed, they continued to be magnets for floating populations of pilgrims, migrants for jobs and the downtrodden for charity or lack of an alternative.

This is reflected in the skewed population demographics of these areas, with predominantly poorer and marginalized communities, proliferation of slums and spontaneous and unplanned encroachment. With newer developments further away from the congested core, there is a greater need to recognize the living and enduring traditions of the place before they disappear.



Fig.2– Compromised Shahi Jilu Khana Gateway, Hyderabad, India (Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/photo/msid-59857265/59857265.jpg?137114>)



Fig.3– Congested spaces and encroachments in Shahjahanabad, Delhi, India (Source: <http://loc.filmworks.biz/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2015/04/738169138.jpg>)

Conflicting objectives of a multiplicity of agencies complicates any substantiate delineation, planning and coordination of these spaces based on usage patterns and opportunities for sustenance. Yet, both the challenges and opportunities lie in the engagement of these spaces and continuity of its living traditions. This multiplicity allows for a more fluid understanding and response to current needs and diverse users and their need for inclusion to worship, live, work and for sustainable heritage conservation.

Diverse Constituencies

The diverse types of constituents that engage with cultural precincts, include those that are subject to alienation based on the being the ‘other’ - Economically challenged groups or poorer sections of society including migrants, daily wage labourers and other vulnerable groups. Due to the acceptance of historic precincts as spiritual centres, or hubs of activity and diversity, they tend to congregate in these areas, where multiplicity of agencies allows them to fall between the gaps, and the haphazard planning provides room for residency and entrepreneurship. In many cities, slum dwellers are more than 60% of the population but are rarely included in decisions about city development (REF).

Inherited caste distinctions limit the engagement of lower castes in certain precincts, temples and spiritual areas, with alienation from the mainstream a resultant. Their engagement with such spaces is conflicted, based on their location, representation and support present. And further exclusion and lack of emotive association that is at odds with conservation efforts.

Gender, particularly the parity of access, safety and security for women and trans-genders, is inadequately provided for. Particularly based on religion or traditional customs or even the lack of opportunities and independence for women, most urban spaces create unfriendly spaces for women.

Persons with disabilities, reduced mobility, the elderly and temporarily immobile (7-10%), find no room in either urban places, some in development norms, but almost none is enforcement of standards of access and barrier free design.

The disparity of education and/ or literacy (33%) and understanding of local languages create a further divide in access to information and legibility and comprehension of the place, its significance or of any value it has. For example, someone for a village cannot comprehend the relevance of a temple tank to the cosmological relevance and sacred cultural landscapes. Yet the centrality of the space as a public domain is common to all.

These challenges are overlapping. Poverty, disability, gender, caste, religion, literacy and employment are usually not mutually exclusive and the cumulative effect is a disengaged and alienated resident populace.

	Physical Access	Perceptible Access	Safety	Insensitivity	Comprehension	Cost	Lack of Inclusion
Poor/ Economically disadvantaged							
Disabled							
Caste/ Religion							
Gender							
Illiteracy							
Unfamiliarity							

Fig.4– Concerns of different users (Source:Author)

Challenges and concerns

The urban public place creates a sense of alienation for the diverse populace. As a result, the conflict between heritage conservation and development, the politics of conservation of public spaces- an amalgamation of built and unbuilt heritage- leads to fragmentation. Buildings bound by security fences or walls divorce the intermediate urban places from any engagement between and around the built forms. Ghettos are created on the edges, along boundary walls and fences, in parks and interstitial spaces, subject to overcrowding, disease and disaster. As a result, the floating migrant population in the ghettos is disconnected from the heritage value of the place, with no roots or association and no way to create them, thereby negating the experience inherent to creating a sense of place and shared ownership.

This sense of ownership has many more challenges with the 1.3 billion population that India caters for. This changes the dynamic of how and whom to plan for. In contrast with Western cities, it is comparable to China, yet democracy and rights to domain, speech, access and the multiplicity of agencies involved further muddies the waters. This provides the major challenge to all planning, design and conservation efforts.

How do you engage hundreds of thousands of people provide facilities for them and even teach them what to do, how to not touch or damage, conserve and protect, and yet, feel a sense of ownership? How do you integrate a rights-based approach with the perceived elitism of heritage conservation?

Legislation

Guidelines, laws and legislation for universal accessibility (UA) and design have been updated over the past five years in India to address the needs of all persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. The impetus was the 2008 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Last year, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 was passed by the Government of India. The UN Sustainable Goals (SDG) also mandates accessibility for all vulnerable groups including women, children, persons with disabilities and the elderly. In parallel, work has been done to update other national laws and codes as well. Still, the ambiguity of urban public spaces, particularly in heritage precincts, requires a unique approach.

The Way forward

A distinct aspect of the vibrant yet chaotic Indian state in all its diversity is a shared sense of democracy, which is evident in the very significant turnout at elections time (66.5% in 2014 as per Election Commission). Similarly, despite deep distinctions and contradictions, evidence of a shared sense of emotive patriotism and fairness has been seen. In the recent demonetization exercise, wherein currency recall overnight had significant impacts particularly on lower income groups, women, and other disadvantaged and vulnerable groups- the common hardship saw unprecedented levels of acceptance for the greater good; a kinship of shared hardship, across all constituents representing fairness and equality of citizenship.

Shared public benefits and facilities have seen a marked improvement in use and access and given all users a sense of inclusion and equity in public resources, not seen before, and dignity of use, be it in the Delhi Metro and its impeccable use, access to cooking gas or bank accounts and insurance. The access to all that these initiatives have given cannot be overstated- to a large populace that had no sense of self, dignity or equity of access.

Herein lies the potential to deal with this disconnect between heritage values and social imperatives. Creating new associations or strengthening a tenuous connect to the past, through interventions for culture connect can be the way forward.

Comprehensive Planning Approach

There is a need for participatory spaces based on access, mutual respect and dignity for all, where each stakeholder can connect through oral tradition, employment or experiential use without compromising the significant heritage features, everyone must have the right to visit, evaluate, experience and use the cultural heritage in their own unique way (REF), through the environment, information and services.

A direct participatory model alone is not feasible, due to the vast numbers and disparate needs, but also because the immediate need supersedes the greater good. Further, with the lack of exposure or understanding of heritage, its value for the times and perpetuity are intangible, the onus of catering to the needs of the diverse must fall to representative agencies and the government.

There are typically multiple agencies involved with planning, monitoring, implementation and enforcement in a heritage precinct. Agencies include the local municipal corporations, government departments, various central and state ministries, administrative divisions, legal and policing agencies. Contradictory priorities create conflicts with no outcome. Representation of vulnerable groups by NGOs, special interest groups and citizen advocates for women, different disabilities, labour groups, and lower income group etc. lack a cohesive voice.

A comprehensive approach is needed to

Identify-

- heritage value and character for conservation, adaptation and reuse
- constituencies of users across social, economic and cultural milieu
- opportunities for education, entertainment, employment and provision of services
- conflicts and opportunities
- multiplicity of organizations involved

Provide

- conservation masterplan and guidelines for future planning and development
- budget, funding and financial sustainability mechanism
- time lines including short and long term strategies
- advocacy
- capacity building, education and empowerment
- marketing and promotion

Create

- a defined organizational structure that manages these precincts and streamline schemes for tourism, crafts, heritage conservation, urban development and social schemes through it
- is a central forum for redress
- and a cohesive monitoring and enforcement structure

Further

- engage all constituencies
- audit, re-evaluate and reorganize as required

Repurposing Space

The primary goal of the heritage value and the constituents must be to address health, safety, security, accessibility and sustainability along with conservation, adaptation and re-imagination.

For the resident

By enabling and empowering local communities through education, employment and capacity building, one can inculcate a sense of ownership and social responsibility towards their community spaces. An understanding of the aesthetic historic, cultural, social and spiritual value of the place will enhance the use and appreciation of the place.



Identifying opportunities for low impact revenue generation and employment opportunities including heritage restoration and crafts, skill training and capacity building, tour operators, hospitality and related services.

For the visitor

To become an integral part of a city's social and cultural consciousness and a sense of shared histories-
Use heritage resources to enable sustainable development.

Raise awareness of the local heritage through storytelling, oral histories, documentation, social media, advertising, movies and TV.

Highlight key milestones with a calendar of open festivals of music, performance art, dance, food and crafts to connect between the place and the people.

Encourage and monetize new models of use such as photo-shoots and picnicking, leisure activities that require minimal intervention or impact but greater visibility and access.

Create and develop local crafts and souvenirs.

Emphasise a positive and interactive experience of space

For All

Providing the same opportunities for all, including people with disabilities to use, appreciate and enjoy heritage places. Access should be safe and secure, but not prohibitive or intimidating with clear, intuitive way finding and visual, graphic, written and audio tools.

Physical access along common or similar route/ entry, entries at each level and between levels to toilets, to drinking water and other ancillary facilities to be provided as far as possible. Perceptible access where it isn't, using technology, visual connects and symbolism.

Instead of defining and containing a historic precinct, allow its development to expand and integrate into the contemporary built and unbuilt realm, till the distinction is diluted, particularly with the possibility of extending its domain and influence.

Conclusions

The benefit of this approach is to create local resources and engage the traditional knowledge base, help organize the informal small industry and include them in their community, encourage shared ownership and inclusion, build social capital and a sense of belonging, and create better integration and new directions for the contested heritage centres.

Significantly, it will build trust and capacity amongst and of the citizens and long term resilience, equity, inclusiveness and sustainability.

At the same time, it is important to have realistic expectations of the process, and constantly evaluate any symptoms of exclusion and/ or legitimate conflicts.

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List of Figures

Fig.1– Public Space around heritage tanks: Bindusagar Tank, Bhubaneswar (Source: BBPL)

Fig.2– Compromised Shahi Jilukhana Gateway, Hyderabad, India (Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/photo/msid-59857265/59857265.jpg?137114>)

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Fig.4– Concerns of different users (Source: Author)

Fig.5– Seasonal Residential Crafts Festival, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India (Source: Author)

OA1732: REUTILISER LE PATRIMOINE NON CONSTRUIT POUR LA COMMUNAUTE: LIGNES DIRECTRICES POUR LA CONCEPTION D'ESPACES PUBLICS EQUITABLES FACILITANT LA DIVERSITE DES POPULATIONS EN INDE

Sous-thème 01: Intégrer le patrimoine et le développement urbain durable en engageant Diverses communautés pour la gestion du patrimoine

Session 1: Développement durable et engagement communautaire

Lieu: Hall Gulmohur, India Habitat Centre

Date et heure: 13 Décembre, 2017, 10:25 – 10:40

Auteur: Nidhi Madan

Nidhi Madan est architecte-paysagiste et architecte à New Delhi en Inde. Elle est diplômée de l'école d'architecture et d'urbanisme (SPA) de Delhi et de l'université du Massachusetts, Amherst, a exercé sa profession en Inde et aux États-Unis et s'est spécialisée sur les sujets de la construction des espaces publics, du développement durable, de l'accessibilité et du rapport des gens à l'environnement. Nidhi Madan est directrice du Centre National pour l'Accessibilité, membre du Comité exécutif de la société indienne des architectes paysagistes (ISOLA) et professeure invitée de l'Ecole d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme (SPA) de Delhi.

Résumé: Avec la croissance des villes indiennes, avec les agglomérations qui se renforcent du fait du dynamisme économique, avec les opportunités et les aspirations à l'éducation et à l'emploi, l'émigration et le développement, les petites villes changent rapidement. En conséquence les faubourgs historiques, les cités fortifiées et les villes de pèlerinage perdent rapidement leur caractère et leur sens du lieu. Particulièrement, dans les centres historiques monumentaux comme Bhubaneswar, Bhopal ou Lucknow, la préservation de l'authenticité est devenue une priorité beaucoup moins importante que la pression du développement socio-économique.

Toutefois, à ce jour, la création de quartiers sûrs, accessibles, abordables et équitables peut s'appuyer sur une culture urbaine existante et sur l'engagement des habitants et peut trouver de nouveaux porteurs de projet et une pertinence moderne.

Cet article se propose d'examiner des stratégies de création d'espaces publics animés, fonctionnels et harmonieux qui redonnent vie aux cœurs historiques de villes. Des centres urbains culturellement significatifs avec leur dynamisme et leur évolution tous azimuts doivent satisfaire aux usages contemporains et aussi créer une meilleure compréhension entre les gens - particulièrement dans le contexte de la culture indienne, où traditionnellement, les diverses catégories de population, (groupes religieux, castes, personnes handicapées et classes sociales), ne se sont pas mélangées. L'opportunité de travailler à une mise en commun des espaces publics dans des villes denses et cloisonnées utilisant les quartiers historiques comme centres doit être étudiée. Cela permettrait d'offrir des espaces de sociabilité et de citoyenneté, des espaces dédiés au commerce, aux célébrations et aux deuils et même à l'organisation de secours en cas de catastrophe, si nécessaire.

Cet article explore l'approche divergente opposant les besoins des différents groupes d'utilisateurs à la valeur patrimoniale. Il aborde les quartiers patrimoniaux en tant que lieux destinés à leurs habitants et à leurs besoins régulés par un corps de règles destinées à préserver les valeurs architecturales et culturelles,

matérielles et immatérielles. Pour réussir, on ne doit pas empiéter sur les aspirations économiques sociales et modernes des populations en plein essor.

Mots-Clés: *Espaces publics équitables, quartiers patrimoniaux, populations mélangées*