

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC SPACES IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF GREAT CITIES: A CASE STUDY OF DHAKA CITY, BANGLADESH

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Abstract - Public spaces are often non-statutory provisions and constituents of policy decision making within urban centres. As a result, the physical aspects of public space is perceived as the product of the absence of a viable alternative, rather than the finality of decision making by municipalities. This is why their availability and use changes across time and space, and their appropriation directed towards the activities that generate the highest revenues or require the lowest costs. The objective of this study was to examine the public space which is defined as a location that is accessible to all people, due to its openness and the use of those spaces. The aim of the study is to determine the impact of public spaces on economic development in great cities, and based on the data, to determine how the public spaces in Bangladesh, impact the economic development in the city.

Index Terms - Public space, economic development, great cities, Bangladesh.

I. INTRODUCTION

A public space is defined as a location that is accessible to all people, due to its openness. The residents in this location vary according to demographics (gender, age, cultures and race) and psychographics (education, socio-economic and professional) characteristics (Carmona, 2010a). In most urban locations, these public spaces include connecting spaces (streets, sidewalks and squares) as well as segregated and specialised locations such as plazas, parks and squares. Public spaces can be viewed as authentic civic centres, whose contemporary purpose was to sustain the vitality of urban locations and promote economic development. The report by UN Habitat (2011), based on case studies of ten public spaces across the globe, indicates that public spaces can either be intentionally created or emerge spontaneously. However, the widely-shared perception that public spaces are reserved for the downtown cores is challenged by the projects in Chicago at the Millennium Park (Daley, 2003) and in New York, at the Hanley Court House Plaza (Schmidt, et al, 2011), which are at the heart of the urban centres. With the example of Favelas in Brazil, it is apparent that good practices can avert the adverse effects of public spaces for the benefit of the city dwellers and the city itself. The concept of public spaces has metamorphosed over time and space (Mehta, 2014). Public space can also be defined from a philosophical perspective. Gaffikin and Sterrett, (2010) indicated that under urban sociology, public spaces are contextualised in the social dynamics. Under political science and geography, public spaces are defined by the civil society context, based on the allotment of the rights and freedoms of individuals and groups within a community (Pugalis, 2009). Under the urban design, landscape architecture and planning perspective, Schmidt and Nemeth

(2010) indicated that public space is the physical construct, which entails the interaction between humans and space. These definitions represent a pluralisation of the concept, which has a self-replicating effect on a city (Aubin, 2014). However, regardless of the philosophical foundation employed in defining public spaces, Carmona (2015) indicates that this construct remains a pervasive constituent of urban policy frameworks, whether it is from a leisure, civic or functional perspective. Public spaces have thus become part of the economic development agenda.

According to Das et al (2015), economic development refers to the efforts designed to enhance the quality of life and economic success with reference to a specific community, through the creation and maintenance of income generating activities and jobs, while supporting the growth of the tax base. As a result, Schumpeter (2011) indicated that economic development can either occur through reduction of certain deadweight costs, or introduction of new revenue-generation activities. A number of local and central governments in Europe and the Americas have pegged their economic development goals on public spaces, and by so doing, they have allocated extensive resources on development and improvement of public spaces. In the traditional sense, public spaces were confined to urban centres, driven, by the growth in populations and the competition for resources (Rekhviashvili, 2015). Nowadays, although this reality exists, public spaces exist in suburban areas, with new domains emerging, such as 'private public spaces' and online public spaces.

However, the romanticisation of public spaces as part of the contemporary urban design has been used in the anti-privatisation discourse (Carmona, 2015). The opponents of the establishment of public spaces, who base their argument on urban capitalism bemoan the

loss, or sense thereof, linked to the progressive decline in public spaces in urban areas to the high opportunity cost (Hampton, et al., 2015). However, it is imperative to appreciate the fact changes in socio-economic and cultural norms provide novel opportunities and challenges that necessitate a reallocation of public spaces for other uses, from the perspective of maximisation of urban resources.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Any discourse on public space evokes a multiplicity of sentiments. On one hand, public spaces are associated with optimistic human concomitance, extending beyond egalitarian deliberations and inclusiveness in a pluralist society.

The benefits of co-existence and participation in governance, especially in urban locations is essential, considering that the dwellers have diverse and heterogeneous interests. On the other hand, the stark reality of devaluation of such discourse in the achievement of urbanisation goals, and the increased privatisation agenda has elevated the narrative of loss and efficiency in the allocation of the resources in the public spaces.

This is due to the fact that zoning of urban centres, as well as rural and suburban locations, is dependent on the most pressing needs. The justification for such zoning is due to the centrality of economic benefits as a determinant for the allotment of the scarce resources (Schmidt, et al, 2011). In addition to the tangible resources, such as land and infrastructure, there are the intangible resources, including the freedoms and time for engaging in the traditional public space activities as defined by Beck (2009), Carmona (2015), Mitchell (1995) and Ujang, et al (2018). However, public spaces are often non-statutory provisions and constituents of policy decision making within urban centres.

As a result, the physical aspects of public space is perceived as the product of the absence of a viable alternative, rather than the finality of decision making by municipalities. This is why their availability and use changes across time and space, and their appropriation directed towards the activities that generate the highest revenues or require the lowest costs. Similarly, as indicated by Zhang and Lawson (2009), the benefits are dependent on the characteristics of the public spaces, and the extent to which they are oriented towards the needs and expectations of the potential users.

III. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study is to determine the impact of public spaces on economic development in great cities, and based on the data, to determine how the public spaces in Bangladesh, impact the economic development in the city. In order to fulfil this aim, the study will target the following objectives.

- Determine how public spaces impact economic development in great cities from the existing literature
- Identify the existing public spaces in Bangladesh, based on location, size, characteristics and their purpose
- Determine how these public spaces impact the economic development of the city,
- Provide propositions on how the city can increase the effects of the public spaces in terms of economic development in Bangladesh

IV. BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Porta (1999), the idea and existence of public spaces is an indicator of the alignment between the interests, capabilities and objectives of all members within a society, including specialists, intellectual, citizens and administrators. The idea of public spaces dates back to the 17th century and furthers the concept of community and the re-appropriation of resources. Right from the classical model, which is premised on the fact that prices, economic affairs and rent are determined by the natural order (Das, et al, 2015 and Schumpeter, 2011), to the new endogenous growth theory, whereby technology and innovations guide the allocation of resources and profits under temporary monopolistic systems (Das, et al, 2015), it is apparent that public spaces influence economic development. According to Das, et al, (2015), economic development is a continuous process of improvement, and most cities are mandated to ensure optimality and continuity in economic development. This is why the concerns of whether public spaces have an impact on economic development arises. From past literature, the following benefits and impacts are identified. First, there are a number of health-related benefits from public spaces. The study by Ujang, et al (2018) indicated that public spaces have a significant influence on human needs, including attachment and social integration. As multi-functional ingredients of interactions in busy urban centres, public spaces are linked to the quality of life by Beck (2009), as well as the general wellbeing of societies (Pojani and Maci, 2015). Health is a complex construct, which is the product of a diversity of factors. However, in urban centres, the social dimensions, which extend to the physical and mental health (Pugalis, 2009), as well as creating a positive outlook within the urban centres thereby offering an escape from the challenges in life (Porta, 1999). The health-related benefits include the nondescript 'feel good buzz' (Pojani and Maci, 2015) to the specific health benefits from increased physical activity (Gaffikin and Sterrett, 2010). Banerjee (2007) likened the shrinking availability of public space to the dwindling of the public real and increased preference for the cyberspace. The entirety of the change is captured in the emergence of sedentary lifestyles, whereby cyberspace is perceived as a

perfect substitute for public space. From the perspective of health, such perceptions have dangerous connotations in the form of lifestyle ailments (Schmidt, et al, 2011), and change in the socio-cultural norms in society. According to Mehta (2013, 2) "...while modern societies no longer depend on the town square or the piazza for basic needs, good public space is required for the social and psychological health of modern communities". Secondly, there are a number of social benefits from public spaces. Public spaces play an essential symbolic role since they demonstrate the accessibility of freedom, democracy and the commitment of the government to the well-being of communities. In urban locations, public spaces are hosts to civil events, enhance the beautification agenda, represent key landmarks and promote urban revitalisation. Heffernan, et al., (2014), who referred to public spaces as 'active frontages' questioned their actual benefits against the benefits. The study combined elements of public perception based on 152 questionnaire responses, and a critical review of literature specifically oriented towards behavioural tendencies. The results indicate that the quality of active frontage influences perceptions of the members of the public. The perceptions are dependent on liveliness, comfort, safety and sociability. These findings reiterate the conclusion by Gaffikin and Sterrett (2010) and Pojani and Maci (2015) that the quality of public spaces influences the value that can be extracted from the location. One of the most prominent tendency within urban centres is for land value to be based on the utilisation of public spaces. Third, there are a number of ecological benefits from public spaces. McCord, et al (2014), whose study is set in Belfast, concluded stakeholders and planners in land uses perceive public spaces as valuable ecological resources that have a favourable effect on the value of the property, and eventually, the quality of life. The study concluded that by 'greening' the public spaces in Belfast, a 49% increase in the value of the properties was achieved in 2011 alone. However, the study is cognisant of the fact that public spaces are auxiliary factors in the growth in property value since, in exclusion, their effects are limited. A different perspective is provided by Akkar (2005) and Carmona (2014) who argues that public spaces are robust marketing tools since corporations are attracted by excellently managed gardens, squares, parks and plazas, since they are preferred by customers, employees and other stakeholders in the value creation process. Heffernan, et al., (2014) argued that public spaces promote ecological benefits and environmental protection since they can be designed around this objective. The philosophical foundation of public spaces as defined by Gaffikin and Sterrett (2010) is that urban centres are more than just built economies that focus on optimising the economic benefits but are charged with the duty to ensure balance from a sustainability perspective.

Fourth, there are a diversity of cultural benefits from public spaces. Carmona (2015) argues that historical antecedents have led most theorists and researchers to assume that the value and importance of public space are predicated on the openness and inclusion for socio-cultural exchanges, interactions and political action. However, there is limited evidence that such utopian and hypothetical outcomes have been achieved. This is because the 'public' in these locations is rarely a unified or coherent group, but is rather a mostly fragmented collection of individuals with different socio-cultural and economic objectives. Pugalis (2009) indicated that public spaces offer cultural integration in a manner that is free from constraints. Such vibrancy amplifies the emergence of leisure and cultural experiences, which include a collection of attractions and activities whose value transcends the tangible or visible benefits. The cultural perspective can be exemplified by events such as the Beach Canteen Fair in Dubai, which has turned into an event with the global appeal but has not lost its identity. Although not all cultural outcomes morph into such impactful outcomes, Pojani and Maci (2015) and Schmidt and Nemeth (2010) concur on the fact that the localised benefits have far-reaching effects on uniting societies. Geertman, et al (2016), whose study focused on Hanoi, indicated that public spaces alleviate crimes in urban centres, by offering youth who would turn delinquent an opportunity to engage in peaceful activities.

A number of economic benefits have also been identified in past research. Although most of the benefits and impacts of urban strategies are assessed from an economic perspective, Carmona (2014) and Zhang and Lawson (2009) argue that public spaces offer direct financial benefits, through the taxes and rates that the city generates from the economic activities. Other indirect outcomes are found to relate to the stimulation of consumption, improved security and the enhanced perceptions of the city dwellers and visitors about the region. The study by Hudak (2015), focused on digital public spaces, which are fundamentally designed to provide a diversity of services and support for the nearby communities, as well as internet connectivity. Data from 59 locations within the EU was analysed, with focus on sustainability. Three key determinants of sustainability were identified, including community, budgeting and services. As indicated by Ng (2016), since these public spaces rely on public funding, with limited opportunities for diversification in the financing, there is a high risk for sustainability if the primary funding is withdrawn. Similarly, these public spaces rely on the community to co-create products and services that amplify the value of the primary service. The study proposes that in order for digital public spaces to remain sustainable, they have to integrate a diversity of sources of value while reducing the dependency on public funding. A

summary of the benefits is provided in the table hereunder.

Category	Examples	Economic Development benefits
Cultural benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased space for cultural activities • Establishment of new and significant activities for specific groups and individuals that leads to the emergence of new cultures • Providing and enhancing new identified within a specific location, city or locality • Interactions between different cultures, thereby leading to increased tolerance and emergence of new cultures 	Cultural artefacts bring people together and represent similarities in attitudes, beliefs, actions and thoughts, which can be monetised due to the homogeneity of the value
Health benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved personal health by increasing activity levels of each individual • Reduction of stress due to increased interactions • Improvement in mental and physical health through social exchanges 	Improved health results in increased productivity of the city dwellers, and also reduces the burden of healthcare costs, such as the absence of lifestyle conditions
Environmental benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in environmental degradation • Reduction in energy consumption • Potential for sustainability in urban development • Reduction in overreliance of built environments for economic activity 	Improved environment introduces cost efficiency in living and existence, while reducing health challenges while creating an ambient environment that is highly valuable
Economic benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catalysing the revitalisation of neighbourhoods, especially the inward investment • Increased rental, land and property value • The attraction of higher number of people to specific areas, thus benefiting the local businesses • The emergence of new forms of trade and economic activities • Reduction in the maintenance and running costs • Increase in the output due to the multiplicity of activity occurring within a specific location 	The diversity of economic activities provide an urban area with increased media incomes and reduces the poverty levels, thus improving the standards of living.
Social benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in pollution and improved health through increased mobility • Reduction in stress • Improved civic pride • Inclusivity in the environments • Provision of forums for interaction • Empowerment of individuals and groups • Improved quality of life • Increased cooperation among people from different backgrounds 	Increased integration results to uniformity in interests and improved representation of the needs of the people, thus reducing the possibility of discord, which in turn leads to amicable living, devoid of ills such as crime.

Source: Adapted from Heffernan et al (2014).

These benefits influence economic development, owing to their ability to generate quantifiable satisfaction and consume resources. As a result, they influence economic development in that through changes in the policies,

the resources they consume as well as the benefits to various parties can be adjusted to new equilibriums and states of optimality.

V. RESEARCH GAP

Economic development is a continuous process, which the product of optimisation of either costs, revenues or both. Within an urban setting, public spaces are traditionally considered as locations that are available since they have not been appropriated for other uses. However, from an urban planning and strategy perspective, public spaces can be the product of deliberate planning processes. As a result, it is possible to integrate this planning into the overall economic development agenda. Based on the existing literature, the five categories of benefits has an effect on the economic development of a city. However, since each city has a unique set of economic development goals, as well as having unique public spaces (both the physical and philosophical aspects), the overall impacts are unique for each city. As a result, since there is no past research on the impacts of public spaces on economic development within cities, and specifically Bangladesh, this study will seek to bridge this gap.

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