

‘Public Space’ – An important aspect of Urban areas

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Abstract - Public Spaces serve to extend small living spaces and providing areas for social interaction and economic activities, which improves the development and desirability of a community. Streets, squares and parks are places for protesting, socializing and encountering difference. They contribute to the reputation of cities for vibrancy and livability and to the well-being of urban residents. This increases productivity and attracts human capital while providing an improved quality of life. Despite their importance, public spaces are often poorly integrated or neglected in planning and urban development. The lack of provisions for public spaces hampers economic activities, pollutes the environment, and reduces social stability and security. Public spaces should be considered a basic service, with the same priority as transport, water and sanitation which communities often primarily focus their resources on. Public areas shape community ties in neighbourhoods. They are places of encounter and can facilitate political mobilization, stimulate actions and help prevent crime. They are environments for interaction and exchange of ideas that impact the quality of the urban environment. A good public space is one that reflects diversity and encourages people to live together effortlessly, creating the necessary conditions for permanence, which invites people to be on the street. It is the vitality of spaces that attracts people. The culture of a place, its structure and social hierarchy reflect the way common spaces are planned, controlled and used.

Index Terms - Public, Activities, Space, Environment, Evolution, Transformation, Green spaces, Globalization, Socialize, Interaction, social.

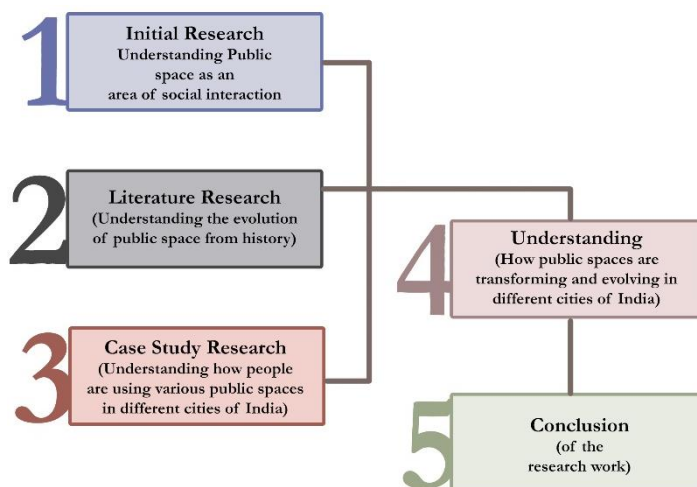
1. AIM

To understand the meaning and importance of public space as an area for social interaction and how lack of it has a poor impact on people’s life and interpreting through various examples from history and current scenarios that how it is an important aspect of Urban areas.

II. OBJECTIVES

- i) The main objective is to understand what are public spaces and how it forms an important space for social interaction.
- ii) To study how public spaces has evolved throughout the history and how people had interpret or used it.
- iii) To understand through various case studies of public spaces of different cities and how people use them.
- iv) To understand the current scenario of how public spaces are evolving and how it will shape our urban areas.

III. METHODOLOGY



IV. INTRODUCTION

What do you mean by a public space

A public space is a place that is open and accessible to the general public. Streets, public squares, parks, plazas and beaches are typically considered public space. To a limited extent, government buildings which are open to the public, such as public libraries are public spaces, although they tend to have restricted areas and greater limits upon use. Although not considered public space, privately owned buildings or property visible from sidewalks and public thoroughfares may affect the public visual landscape, for example, by

outdoor advertising. Recently, the concept of shared space has been advanced to enhance the experience of pedestrians in public space jointly used by automobiles and other vehicles. Public space has also become something of a touchstone for critical theory in relation to philosophy, urban geography, visual art, cultural studies, social studies and urban design. The term 'public space' is also often misconstrued to mean other things such as 'gathering place', which is an element of the larger concept of social space. Public spaces have often been valued as democratic spaces of congregation and political participation, where groups can vocalize their rights.

Generally, however, public space is defined as space to which people normally have unrestricted access and right of way. In other words, public spaces are public because anyone is entitled to be physically present in them. Focusing on the way of engagement in places, public space is open, publicly accessible space where people go for group or individual activities. Public space is thus a place outside the boundaries of individual or small-group control, used for a variety of often-overlapping functional and symbolic purposes. Accordingly, people have access to spaces, access to activities, access to information, and access to resources. Public spaces, therefore, are usually multipurpose spaces distinguishable from completely green, partly green, or non-green to soft or hard areas between built structures that are accessible to the public in the same way. To sum up, public space is an inseparable entity of a two-way process between both the components: public (people) and space (place). Public space is then not just a spatial frame, a waiting scene where an event will occur; it is more – it is *public space*.

V. INSTANCES OF EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC SPACES THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Public spaces cannot be categorized as homogeneous spaces as they depend on different functions like social, cultural, economic as well as symbolic and also on the meanings which are given by the different public. Hence, the meaning and form of public space are not fixed as they change with the dynamics of society. Moreover, public spaces are the spaces that lead to the making of a city, admirable public space defines the character of the city. Likewise, it also represents the evolution and development of the urban fabric.

Following history, planned settlement was on the priority for humans which kept getting better and better. As a matter of fact, the evolution of living situations led up to the public spaces. Before the thought of space serving the public, it was more towards politics, environment, cultural things, and the multipurpose quality of space.

Public space is something accessible for the users and creates harmonious and socially inclusive communities. The public and private space are segregated by the activities they carry. In the past, open spaces like these were viewed as far-reaching, huge, nothing special in a particular area that is open to a wide range of activities. These spaces were utilized by neighbouring communities as festival activities, market place, occasional playing fields, religious activities and many more. The beginning of public spaces takes place in 'Greece'.

The Greek Agora

The Greek Agora was the beginning of the public space which was located in the center of the polis and was also the focal point of the town which functioned as a market as well as gathering space for the political assembly. It also acted as a formal and informal meeting space for the citizens. In the beginning, the Agora was surrounded by private houses but temples and sanctuaries were later built bordering it along with the Stoas, porticoes, and covered walkway.

The Roman Forum

The functions of the Greek acropolis and agora were brought together in "forum" during the Roman Empire. It was a contained, semi-enclosed, and open space where commerce, religious and political activities, athletics, and informal meetings were carried out. Forums were rectangular in shape, in the proportion of 2 to 3, which was surrounded by Porticoes. The forums contained temples, basilicas, shops, and markets which resulted in the blend of civic as well as religious fabric. It also housed other significant recreational areas like the theatre, public baths. Also, it was home to curia as well as comitium, meaning the city council meetings and political meetings respectively.

The Medieval Market Plaza

The marketplace was first evolved around the 11th century and became a crucial public space during medieval times. It was mainly located in the center of the town, in front of the castle or cathedral, and also at the intersection of the two main roads. The work activities like workshop and storage facilities as well as business places like inns, taverns were situated. Inhabitants of the city often came together along with the visitors which were attracted to the place.

The Renaissance Plaza

The Renaissance Plaza contained important buildings like the cathedral, the town hall, etc. It was a place where people gathered and public celebrations took place. Also, plays and stage proceedings were carried out in Plazas. The local social order where ethnic, religious, and political identities were revealed in the renaissance plaza. It was mostly planned in a symmetrical geometry. The buildings surrounding the Plaza and squares had a uniform facade that showcased the importance of proportion and harmony in the design.

Public Space in Modern Era

The modern era witnessed a drastic evolution since the renaissance Plazas. The priority being the fast movement in the urban space guided the planning of the city and developed a close relationship between open space and the surrounding build area. But, there was also an increase in the new public spaces for leisure and public entertainment. Also, during the 19th century, new consumption places emerged which were considered important social as well as public spaces, like shopping arcade, shopping street, bazaar, and

department store. Generally, the shopping arcades had linear planning with multiple floors, and the exclusively pedestrian spaces were weather protected with glazed roofs.

Contemporary Public Spaces

Due to globalization, a lot of changes happened around the world resulting in a different characteristic and definition of public space. Also, due to privatization and the pressure of capital along with technological advancements have a greater impact on the form, use, and control of the public spaces. Thus, a new form of public space emerged, i.e., the shopping malls which we see today. These shopping malls are privately owned and managed. Furthermore, they are fully enclosed as well as totally pedestrian in a controlled environment with adequate parking facilities and multi-functions. It helps in providing a secure shopping and leisure environment separated from the rest of the busy world. So we can say that the arcades and department stores of the 19th century evolved in a more user-friendly way to become the shopping malls of today.

VI. WHAT ARE GOOD URBAN SPACES

Public spaces, which fill the urban gaps with life, are directly associated with the construction of what we call a city and influence the relationships that are created within them. When we often refer to the streets and other public spaces of the city, we are actually talking about the city own identity. It is in these spaces that human exchanges and relationships, the diversity of use and the vocation of each place and the conflicts and contradictions of society are manifested.

Public areas shapes community ties in an neighbourhood. They are places of encounter and facilitate political mobilization, stimulate actions and help prevent crime. They are environments for interaction and exchange of ideas that impact the quality of the urban environment. While not considered “public spaces,” cafes, bookstores and bars have similar impacts. Public spaces also present health benefits, both physical and mental: people feel better and tend to be more active in attractive, public spaces.

It is possible to go even deeper and relate the presence and planning of public spaces with democratic values. The culture of a place, its structure and social hierarchy reflect the way common spaces are planned, controlled and used. The more diverse and lively urban spaces are, the more equal, prosperous and democratic society becomes. A good public place is the one which reflects diversity and encourages people to live together effortlessly, creating the necessary conditions for permanence, which invites people to be on the street. It is the vitality of spaces that attracts people. What guarantees this vitality is the possibility of enjoying urban spaces in various ways.

VII. TYPES AND VARIETIES OF PUBLIC SPACES IN VARIOUS CITIES

Case study I – Kolkata

A public space is not just a meeting spot, it is a place where people connect with each other. Public spaces reflect the citizen’s daily life rituals, as well as tourist fascinations and their nature denotes the values which the city holds close to its heart as well as shape the impression and perceptions of the city. Kolkata’s public spaces apart from colonial ideals were inspired by the neighborhood or para culture of frequent literally get together and community football games among others, later on serving the cause of nationalistic movements. Post-independent Kolkata continues to derive comfort from its past evident by the continuance of public space heritage while at the same time aspires to equal the romp and pomp of global cities amidst its penury through borrowed concepts of sleazy attractions and lifestyle. Kolkata also has plenty of well-maintained scenic parks and green spaces if you are looking for a quick getaway from the city. There are some very famous parks, squares and gardens, which can act as an interaction zone between people.

Maidan

The largest urban park in Kolkata, this vast green space is dotted with various historical monuments including the iconic Shaheed Minar, as well as many sports grounds, such as Eden Gardens, the world’s second-largest cricket stadium. The ground of the Maidan have also hosted several historic political rallies and meetings in the past, particularly during India’s independence struggle against colonial Britain. Today it is one of the city’s most integral and popular recreational and cultural spaces.

Millenium park

Running parallel to the Hooghly River for a stretch of about 2.5 kilometers, this popular park provides a stunning view of the Howrah Bridge. With plenty of trees, well-maintained lawns, and seating by the waters, this much needed meditative space is a huge hit among Calcuttans of all ages. The park also has play areas and rides for children.

New town Eco park

This lush green park spans across 480 acres with a large water body surrounding it in New Town, Kolkata. Offering a range of sports activities including rowing and kayaking, Eco Park has undoubtedly earned its spot as one of Kolkata’s prime recreational spots. The park also happens to be among Kolkata’s newest—having only opened in 2012. The park is divided into sub-areas, including an “Active Zone” which houses restaurants and food courts while separate zones are dedicated to various sports and Eco-tourism.

Mohor kunja

Earlier known as Citizen’s Park, this park on Cathedral Road by the historic Victoria Memorial is a popular spot to host open-air cultural events in the city. Its stunning musical fountains and well-maintained greenery has made it one of Central Kolkata’s top spots to head to if you’re looking to detach from the city and unwind.

Central park

The second-largest open space in the city, Kolkata's Central Park is built around a large lake in Bidhannagar. With vast green lawns, plenty of flora and fauna, and uninterrupted open skies, this park is among the most popular in Kolkata. The park houses various gardens, including a stunning rose garden and a vibrant butterfly garden that remain among its key highlights.

Nandan

It is a very famous meeting spot for every age group of people especially the college going students, where every day after their college they sat together and share their heart with each other. Also, Nandan has been a cultural hub of Kolkata for a long time. Memorial lectures and special programs are organized here on regular basis.

Prinsep Ghat

Prinsep Ghat is one of the oldest recreational spot of Kolkata. People visit it in the evening on weekends to go boating on the river, stroll along the bank and purchase food from stalls there. A 2-kilometre (1.2 mi) stretch of the beautified riverfront from Prinsep Ghat to Babughat was inaugurated on 24 May 2012. It has illuminated and landscaped gardens and pathways, fountains and renovated Ghats.

Case Study II – Delhi

Public spaces are great when celebrations are held, social and economic exchange occurs, friends meet each other and cultures mix. New Delhi is considered the heart of India, designed and developed after 1911 when the country's capital was shifted for the last time. Exploration of popular public spaces in this area can be started with the India Gate (open for public since 1931), that draws people from the city and nearby towns every day, irrespective of weather conditions.

India Gate

It is one of the favourite picnic hangouts of Delhi, with bringing their own food or choosing from a variety of street food or enjoying the greenery. The India Gate hexagon complex leads directly onto the Rajpath (earlier known as the King's Way, a ceremonial boulevard lined with lawns, ornamental pools and rows of trees). At the other end of the Rajpath is the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the official residence of India's President. The Rajpath and India gate witness the ceremonial Republic Day parade and many protests every year.

The old and new hangouts at the Bengali

It is a small market around a circle, and is famous for two prominent sweet shops that sit across each other — the Bengali Sweet House and Nathu's Sweets, which are almost always teeming with people salivating for a delicious serving of *chhole*.

Lodhi art district colony

Lodhi Art District Colony is adorned with mesmerizing wall art, graffiti and murals that are a treat to the sore eyes and a delight for all the shutterbugs out there. Take a stroll through the spacious by lanes and witness spectacular Indian art that is painted with the utmost perfection.

Lodhi Gardens

A spot away from the hustle and bustle of the city life, Lodhi Gardens is where you can connect with nature and bask in the beauty of the various historical structures like The Bada Gumbad, Sikander Lodi's Tomb, Shisha Gumbad and more that lie here.

Connaught Place

Connaught Place is also a favoured Delhi spot for group fun. There are many casual restaurants and cafes where you can dig into some old favourites and spend an evening of socialization. Indian Coffee House is one of the older institutions, famous for its South Indian snacks. Connaught Place's very own Starbucks and Tamasha are other magnets for socialization in the big city.

Haus Khas

Hauz Khas is an enigma – a symbol of Delhi's sophistication. The city loves its good times and it has a lot of history, so why not blend the two. This trendy locality is home to some of the city's best drinking and eating spots and pubs where you can watch the day go by as you sip on a tall glass of cocktail or a bottle of beer. That's about the fun part; the history part of this area goes back hundreds of years. Take a walk around and you might stumble into remnants from the days of the Khilji Dynasty.

Garden of five senses

The Garden of Five Senses is a sprawling space of well-manicured lawns, impeccable hedges, and pretty flower beds – a space where you can spend all day and still remain rejuvenated at the end of it. The park hosts a large food court, another perfect venue to spend some hours chatting and planning with your best mates.

Malls

Delhi is full of malls, and it is not just about the shopping. With expansive lawns and diverse food courts, these are the best hangout places in Delhi for students and adults alike. Select City walk and DLF Place are our top recommendations because they are adjacent and complement each other in terms of brands and recreational activities.

Case Study III – Mumbai

Mumbai, the city where dreams are made and fulfilled. From jam-packed railway platforms to the famous ‘Dabbawalas’, multi-millionaires to suburban slums, the dazzling Bollywood to the quintessential ‘vada pav’, ‘bhel puri’, and ‘sev puri’, the uniqueness of Mumbai is beyond words. The city that arose from the sea is still nibbling at it while gulping down mangroves, mudflats, creeks, and salt pans. Its roads swallow footpaths, towers swallow roads, so much so that we have to build a road in the sea. The balconies, the open space in an apartment, have been swallowed by the drawing rooms. Mumbai’s only open space is under flyovers because gardens and playgrounds have been swallowed on the drawing board itself. Having been deprived of open space for so long, Mumbaikars have adjusted to cramped places and feel uneasy if they can’t locate another human at an arm’s length. But still in this hustle and bustle of city, there are spaces where Mumbaikars like to visit when they want a break from their chaotic life.

Gateway of India

Gateway of India, the best place to visit in Mumbai, was built in 1924 by George Willet. Visit this place in the early morning or late evening hours to enjoy the cool breeze of the sea with your family sans the crowd. Located next to the iconic Taj Mahal Palace and facing the vast Arabian Sea, the Gateway of India leaves us spellbound in every way possible.

Girgaon Chowpatty

This public beach that lies along the Queen’s Necklace is the answer to your prayers. This beach is famous for grand Ganesh Visarjan celebrations, where countless people flock to witness Lord Ganesha’s immersion. This beach is known for its 10-day Ram Leela performance too, at the end of which, Ravan’s effigy is set afire. Also, if you want to admire the Nariman Point skyline in all its glory, Girgaon Chowpatty is where you should be.

Juhu Beach

Nothing can be more romantic than watching the crimson sun and the luminous orange sky on a breezy beach, with your loved one. Juhu Beach is one such spectacular place in Mumbai, often visited by couples who need a little romantic escape from the humdrum of city life. You can also plan a romantic date night at one of the amazing beachside restaurants available at Juhu.

Marine Drive

It is an ideal place to relax and spend some moments on a beautiful evening with friends and family. This is also one of the popular places to visit in Mumbai at night. Don’t forget to satiate your hunger with some delicious street food available here.

Hanging Garden

Every person deserves a break from monotonous daily routines. Take your significant other to this amazing Hanging Garden and unwind and you can slacken yourself amidst the flower beds, spectacular water fountains, and lush green animal shaped hedges.

Colaba Causeway

Do you have friends who think shopping is the best form of therapy? Then the Colaba Causeway would be a shopping paradise for them forever. With shops after shops piled up with goodies, you are sure to have a great time shopping everything from inexpensive clothes to sophisticated designer wears, home décor items to jewellery, and everything in between. For food fanatics, the place has a lot of restaurants, cafés, and patisseries.

VIII. PUBLIC SPACE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF URBAN TRANSFORMATION IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

We have seen an increase in demand from client cities to enhance urban spaces as a part of their urban projects. Some of these requests have been included as a part of several operations across South Asian countries, and incorporated in recent World Bank projects in cities including Colombo, Kandy and Galle in Sri Lanka as well as Chennai in India. Fortunately, there are notable examples of success from South Asia and beyond. The World Bank-assisted project of the Lahore Walled City restored centuries-old streets and homes within the historic Walled City while improving infrastructure and streets. Families now enjoy a better quality of life, businesses generate increased profits, and the community has a greater sense of participation in improving their lives.

Another project under preparation for riverfronts along the Ganga in India will see their revitalization into vibrant public spaces, to improve local economic and cultural development. In Sri Lanka, the Strategic Cities Development Project seeks to make Kandy and Galle more pedestrian-oriented through public spaces after decades of car-oriented planning.

There are many sound examples outside of South Asia that the region can learn from. In Medellin, Colombia, the city has successfully upgraded the urban environment of poor communities through the creating public spaces and promoting connectivity through the innovative use of cable cars to provide mobility for residents residing in slum areas. In Mostar, Botswana, the city redesigned war-torn urban areas into vibrant public spaces to remind the public of the devastation left by conflict and to promote reconciliation. This can potentially serve as examples for post-conflict environments in South Asia. In Cape Town, South Africa, the government has recently implemented a public space strategy to provide urban public space in and around the city on a larger scale. The bottom-up regeneration of Shanghai’s Tianzifang, neighborhood has rejuvenated a historic alley, acting as a catalyst for city-wide urban

regeneration to transform the city and increase its cultural and economic vibrancy while increasing livability. Despite the numerous successful examples, the need for public spaces has not been given the attention that it deserves, in terms of policy and action in developing countries. Cities must recognize the role that quality public spaces can play in meeting the challenges of our rapidly urbanizing world.

IX. CONCLUSION

A public space is a social space that is generally accessible and open to people. In a broader sense, it is a space in which people can choose to be at, regardless of their ethnicity, age, ideologies and gender. It is a space that allows and facilitates a coexistence of different categories of people. Public spaces provide a platform or space in which people can come in contact with the social world outside and experience the opportunity of being with, seeing and hearing others which instills stimulation. It is a space that gives people a chance to see something new, to feel differently, to learn and to be inspired. The public realm can be perceived as not only a place but also an experience. Public spaces play a vital role in the social development of people on various levels, from small neighborhood parks to large city center squares. They are places of great value where people of different backgrounds come together and pick up new ideas by merely being spectators. Public spaces are spaces which allows culture to thrive. It can be looked at as a gateway to cultural development in a society. It gives an opportunity for people of varied cultures, backgrounds and races to come together and showcase their culture and at the same time experience new cultures unfamiliar to them. Public spaces not only play a vital role in cultural development but is also important in the personal development of an individual. It helps in developing personal ideals and values of a particular individual and realizing one's own character and beliefs. Participation of an individual in the larger urban culture creates an opportunity for one's own personal reflection and reassures the uniqueness of one's personality in society. Like how adults cannot live without social interaction, the personality of children cannot thrive without being exposed to the social environment. Public spaces play an important role in the social development of children. Therefore, public spaces are an important aspect of Urban Areas.

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