

Sustainable Integration of Heritage Urban Precincts to Dynamically Transforming City Contexts through Landscape Urbanism: Case of Hogg Market Precinct, Kolkata

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Abstract—As cities grow and change with time, so do their socio-physical contexts with respect to which they are related and understood by people. Having said so, as times change many old urban precincts tend to fall prey to dereliction, owing to rapid advancement in technology, as well as changing meanings and values associated to urban heritage in the society- such a condition generally arises as a result of lack of socio-physical cohesiveness of a heritage precinct to its urban setting, the latter being tremendously influenced by dynamically changing economy, culture, physical morphology and environment. Considering such vulnerability of urban heritage with respect to maintaining their socio-physical importance and meaningful existence in the continually transforming urban landscape, there is an urgent need to integrate these historic precincts with their respective physical settings, through prolonging their contemporary relevance in the society. In such cases, Landscape Urbanism has emerged as an effective tool for establishing contemporary relevance of urban heritage as well as relating the same to the socio-physical fabric of their respective urban landscape. Landscape Urbanism, which emerged in the late 1990s as a design response combining Urban Planning, Landscape and Urban Design strategies, has particularly proved its success in the context of global economic recession, providing socio-economic empowerment and environmental restoration to large urban precincts which were suffering from financial impoverishment and technological obsolescence.

This paper attempts to understand the conflict of heritage precincts with changing socio-cultural values of their respective urban contexts, with respect to the case example of Hogg Market (now known as New Market) in Kolkata- this market was designed as a major urban infrastructure in the city by the British and was a prolific public space of its time. Today, as cultural values have changed the marketing-experience in the city, this urban infrastructure is struggling to find a new meaning and relevance to the urban socio-physical context. This is accompanied by tremendous pressure of urban development which has forced incongruous growth of non-conforming spaces and activities in the old precinct. The paper discusses the appropriate applicability of Landscape Urbanism as a design strategy responding to the above-said context, with special reference to the history and contemporary context of development of Hogg Market precinct. The paper also draws reference of some case studies, for reviewing the possible methods in

which Landscape Urbanism can be engaged as a tool to integrate heritage urban precinct to its contemporary urban setting with best respect to its physical context.

Keywords: Landscape Urbanism, Urban Integration, Urban Design, Heritage Precinct Conservation, Post Postmodernism, Sustainable Development, Urban Transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION: HERITAGE URBAN PRECINCT AS A CONTINUITY OF URBAN LANDSCAPE

The identity of any urban heritage precinct across the world is defined by the physical context and cultural ethos respected by the society in the respective time of its time of development- Having said so, the socio-physical framework, which dynamically changes with time and needs of the people in an urban landscape forms a very crucial factor in determining significance, meaning and value of any heritage precinct. As time changes, so does cultural meanings, practices and technology of a society which affects the physical as well as the socio-cultural fabric of an urbanscape. The precinct under discussion, being a continuity of the urban setting on which it was developed, also gets read by the new set of perspectives emerging with time and hence, the cultural significance of the same gets defined and refined with respect to urban transformations. In such changing trends of time, heritage precincts often face a dilemma of defining their identities amidst past, present and future perspectives of the society, many of which may even lead to extinction of the same.

2. STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE OF HERITAGE PRECINCTS AMIDST RAPIDLY CHANGING SOCIO-PHYSICAL CONTEXTS

Being developed as a continuity of a socio-physical context belonging to a particular chronological era in history, the precinct spontaneously becomes a continuity of the physical and cultural patina of an urban landscape of its time.

Interestingly, the social as well as physical setting dynamically transforms with time, although the heritage precinct set to the urban landscape remains static. Being a product of a set of cultural ethos of a previous time, the precinct is subject to face obsolescence with respect to utility and social viability- such a precinct gradually identifies itself as a “souvenir of nostalgia” in a transformed contemporary urban context, and only serves the purpose of reminding of a particular heritage value. It is hence, extremely significant to note that most heritage precincts in contemporary urban landscape lack a functional and meaningful existence with respect to the contemporary socio-physical context and ethos of the setting concerned- being no more a part of a contemporary social function, such heritage precincts fall prey to misuse, incongruous development and gradually deteriorates physically, thereby losing importance in the society. Much of the historic areas in old cities are today facing this issue and are struggling to define their socio-cultural and functional significance amidst a different socio-cultural setting of a different time. In this entire journey of a heritage element from being a significant ensemble to an insignificant element in an urban setting, what is important to observe is that the precinct on one hand and the setting on the other hand becomes two separate entities as the former behaves as a static element whereas the latter dynamically transforms with time- such a distinction of a precinct with its landscape setting is a threatening factor to the existence of a heritage ensemble as well as the environmental sustainability of historic urban landscapes in contemporary contexts.

3. LANDSCAPE URBANISM AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTEGRATING A HERITAGE PRECINCT TO ITS SOCIO-PHYSICAL SETTING

Landscape Urbanism is a significant revolutionary movement which surfaced in the Urban Design and Planning Fraternities during the late 1990s as a response to Sustainable Holism in analysis and design of urban landscapes across the globe. Unlike previous trends of Urban Design and Planning, Landscape Urbanism advocated collective comprehension and appraisal of the overlying precincts and urban landscape as an inseparable whole- by respecting Urban Architecture of a city as a continuity of the Urban Landscape, it allowed a perspective of development which not only looks at development of the physical landscape setting only, but a holistic meaningful integration of an urban ensemble or precinct existing on that setting. In doing so, Landscape Urbanism allows the much needed geographical and cultural cohesion of any precinct to its socio-physical setting; rather than defining an urban landscape only as a setting existing in the socio-physical framework of a particular time, Landscape Urbanism allows reading of a geographical setting as a collective of multiple patina (i.e. layers of time) of cultural histories and geographies existing in different eras in the history. Landscape Urbanism encourages understanding a historical precinct with respect to different socio-cultural

meanings associated to different periods of time and hence advocates adaptation of a precinct to different functional uses and needs of the society of changing times. Urban Design philosophies like Adaptive Re-use and Cultural Retrofitting are significant tools that have emerged as design responses of Landscape Urbanism specifically with respect to envisioning Sustainable Futures for heritage precincts of historic urban landscapes.

4. INSPIRATIONAL CASE EXAMPLES FROM ABROAD

(a) High Line, New York (USA)



The High Line in New York City in USA is a 1.45 mile stretch of urban park designed on an elevated level and is today used as a pedestrian walkway in the heart of the city. Interestingly, it used to be a disused portion of the West Side Line Railroad in the past, which originally functioned as a freight rail corridor in the 1930s. Owing to development of truck networks on roads for carrying logistics, this freight network gradually fell into disuse and became a heterotopic space in the city. Being reported of unsocial activities, civic crimes and structural endangering of this corridor a non-profit organization called the ‘Friends of High Line’ in collaboration with the New York Development Authority decided to frame an ‘Adaptive Re-use’ strategy for this corridor and designed it as an urban park very much inspired in the lines of Promenade Plantee of Paris. Today the High Line runs as a major elevated pedestrian network in the heart of the old city even through important social infrastructures like hotels, malls and markets thereby becoming a massive thread of public spaces stitching the physical urban setting and defining a new chain of social life in the city.

(b) Schouwburgplein (Dutch: Theatre Square), Rotterdam (Netherlands)



This Theatre Square became an old derelict yard after the rise of digitization in media arts and was a major urban backyard of the city for a long time. West 8 Landscape Architects, a design firm came up with the concept of using Landscape Urbanism as a tool to transform this unused square into a digitized interactive futuristic public plaza. Through creation of interactive landscape features of futuristic design in the square, the development strategy successfully applied Landscape Urbanism to bring back Public Life into the dead urban plaza. Today, this plaza is one of the major public attractions in Rotterdam which has redefined Urban Architecture as a 'Theatre Stage' for social interaction in the city.

5. CASE OF HOGG MARKET- A HERITAGE PRECINCT STRUGGLING FOR URBAN COHESION WITH THE CITYSCAPE OF KOLKATA



Hogg Market in 1905



Current Scenario

Sir Stuart Hogg Market (also known as New Market) in Kolkata was designed by the British as a major market and urban social infrastructure in the city during the colonial rule of the Raj. The market gradually became a major public space in the city during its time. It was a major urban precinct overlooking a plaza surrounded by theatres and cinema and enjoying both pedestrian and carriage access. The Architecture of the market is also very noteworthy as it was envisioned along the lines of Classical British as well as Gothic Styles which is not only evident in its outer elevation, but in the shopping arcades inside. Together it defined a beautiful urban public architecture of the city which almost defined an urban design ethos as far as public spaces in Kolkata are concerned.

The market still exists today, but has unfortunately lost its old glory. This has happened owing to the exceeding footfall and public encroachment in the precinct. The space of the market has not increased whereas the number of uses and demand of sales and public uses have increased many-folds with respect to the original design. Public vending and other informal activities have clogged the access to the plaza as well as the market building itself and uncontrolled growth of shops have further damaged both the exterior and interior architecture of the market. This is further accompanied by huge pressure of development that have introduced incongruous elements to the original design of the market precinct- an unusually high number of vehicles in the access roads forced the development of an underground car-parking which have inadvertently transformed the context. Besides, there have been introduction of many non-conforming uses which is currently degrading the precinct to significant extents.

6. LANDSCAPE URBANISM AS A POSSIBLE TOOL TO RECONNECT HOGG MARKET BACK TO THE CONTEMPORARY URBAN FABRIC OF KOLKATA

In case of New Market, the precinct have not been able to achieve enough urban cohesiveness with the socio-physical

context to respond sufficiently and appropriately to the changing needs of times. In such a situation Landscape Urbanism can help visualizing the Urban Design of this public architecture and accompanying setting as a holistic socio-physical context, treating the entire complex as a public infrastructure in the city. Such a vision suggests an 'integration' of the market precinct to today's urban context of physical pressure of development as well as a changed perspective of 'marketing experience' in the city. Some of the different aspect which can cast light on this new vision of a Landscape Urbanism Revolution in the context of S.S. Hogg Market in contemporary times are enumerated as follows:

- (a) Redefining the Architecture of the Market with respect to new cultures and uses
- (b) Selecting and Removal of non-conforming uses from the precinct
- (c) Demolition of incongruous urban elements disturbing the architecture and urban skyline
- (d) Introduction of new uses devised for enhanced public interaction in the plaza.
- (e) Application of modern infrastructure and services needed for contemporary functioning
- (f) Allowing pedestrianization of the precinct and reducing vehicular access to reduce traffic conflict and respond to the raised footfall in the contemporary context.
- (g) Introduce sharing of spaces for multiple uses for different parts of the day and year thereby becoming a dynamic public space in the city

7. LANDSCAPE URBANISM IN ENVISIONING A COLLECTIVE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR HERITAGE PRECINCTS IN URBAN LANDSCAPES

With the rise of Urban Holism as a Sustainable Approach to Design and Planning of cities across the globe, Landscape Urbanism, today, provides a pragmatic fresh perspective to realizing cities not as separate individual elements but as a holistic whole which is to be collectively read through its Landscape, Architecture, Urban Design and Urban Planning. This is especially true when it comes to reading a city against its historical development, where time becomes an important protagonist of both urban architecture and space- Landscape Urbanism encourages the freedom of reading a city as a collective of different time-scapes rather than a static entity frozen in time. It supports the right of each era to exist simultaneously in harmony with each other in the form of different precincts in the city. In doing so, Landscape Urbanism is today accepted as one of the pillars of Sustainable Development which celebrates the meeting of the 'old' and 'new' through a continuum in urban landscape.

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