Urban Transformation in Leftover Spaces: A case study of Dilli Haat

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Abstract
Urban transformation is a fairly complex, large and a continuous phenomenon. However, transforming left over spaces within contemporary urban environments into better, safer and valuable public spaces remains a continuous challenge (Bentley, 2004). This paper presents the case of Dilli Haat, as a unique example of urban transformation of a left over space in New Delhi, the capital city of India. Evolved from an open left over space with storm water drain, garbage dump and a line of some vegetation, Dilli Haat has emerged as an active and engaging public space with an over growing demand and high footfalls. Its urban precinct and spatial configuration further become the defining criteria of how it works and how people use it. This paper employs space syntax tools to analyse the spatial framework of Dilli Haat along with in situ observations. It further correlates the findings based on discussions conducted with the project architects, on site observations and Space syntax tools. It brings out generic conclusions about the spatial typology of Dilli Haat as a learning for urban transformations with positive social impact in Indian context.

Keywords
Urban transformation, Leftover Spaces, Public Space, Space Syntax

Dilli Haat: Origin & Evolution
Located on a leftover site opposite to an informal market on a highly active road, Aurobindo Marg (Fig. 1), the journey of its transformation began from an experimental Crafts Bazaar in 1990 at another location in New Delhi. The chosen site of 100 x 300m comprised of a 23m wide storm water drain (‘Nallah’ in local language) (Fig.2), a garbage dumping ground often used for outdoor defecation and sanitation purposes. Along the site were number of trees lining both sides of the drain, giving it a linear flowing character but with an identity of a left over space. An initiative led by an NGO (Dastakari Haat Samiti), architects Pradeep Sachdeva and Delhi Tourism department led to the proposal of a unique concept of a Crafts bazaar where the local artisans could display and sell their crafts and people could shop and experience the place. The whole proposal was conceptualized on a site allotted by the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) during the 1990’s. Reclamation of this site for a transformational purpose of a public activity was a novel idea. Discussions with the architect reveal that it was envisioned as a public space for an average urban Delhi resident, who otherwise did not have enough choices for urban recreation. Dilli Haat, designed by architect Pradeep Sachdeva, was conceived as an Urban Haat, the permanent urban equivalent for the weekly village market (Mohsini, 2011).

Program Zoning : How it works?
In response to the given site and a participatory design brief, that emerged through discussions with craft persons, probable users and other stakeholders, it was resolved in to a spatial sequence and configuration (Fig.3) making the Haat a feasible urban public space experience.

As a result the spatial program includes an entrance plaza, raised to block vehicular access and bring a new spatial identity for pedestrian circulation and ticketing services for entry to Dilli Haat. It is followed by a linear spine of movement flanked by stalls on both sides in cluster patterns showcasing the local and the regional crafts and food of India. To transform Dilli Haat into a successful public experience, the food plazas and a with an over growing demand and high footfalls, its urban precinct and spatial configuration further become the defining criteria of how it works and how people use it. This paper employs space syntax tools to analyse the spatial framework of Dilli Haat along with in situ observations. It further correlates the findings based on discussions conducted with the project architects, on site observations and Space syntax tools. It brings out generic conclusions about the spatial typology of Dilli Haat as a learning for urban transformations with positive social impact in Indian context.

Space Syntax Analysis: How people use it?
The connectivity analysis of the axial map of Dilli Haat shows that the street corresponding to the first half of central spine from entrance has the highest values of connectivity but comparatively smaller values of integration to the overall system. This is by virtue of its linear character which supports its function as a shopping street. In comparison, the latter half of the central spine with a nearer value in connectivity has very high value of integration as it is well integrated into the network of food zones on both sides.

The food zones that flank as networks on both sides of the spine after the round about has a medium level of visual connectivity and integration. The lower most portion of the site has lesser integration levels due to its visual discontinuity. This is visible through in-situ observation by the authors also.

The above analysis is validated through the facts that while Dilli Haat was conceptualized for 1000 to 2000 people per day. It however witnesses up to 7000 people on weekends or holidays and about 3000 on weekdays. (Kakar, 2015) The growing numbers of visitors is a strong indicator of the successful transformation of a dead and unattended leftover space into a valuable urban space demonstrating a rich public experience. Figure 6 shows the increasing growth pressure the haat is facing from within the creation of unplanned informal stalls.

Conclusion
Dilli Haat is a true example of a complete transformation of an urban leftover space into a unique public space through a food and crafts bazaar program. Its spatial typology supported by a subdued architectural character induces a strong sense of connectedness and visibility as also evidenced by the space syntax. Space syntax tools further reveals the underlying properties of the spatial configuration of Dilli Haat. It has a strong potential to illustrate how urban spaces and their configurations can translate into positive public value.

References:

Acknowledgements:
The authors acknowledge the valuable contribution of data, images, discussion and support rendered by Ar, Pradeep Sachdeva and Ar. Vishwesh Viswanathan from Pradeep Sachdeva Design Associates, New Delhi.