DEMOCRATIZING THE CITY THROUGH PUBLIC SPACE

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Abstract. A city may have billions of investments for its infrastructural developments but without a functional public space, the city can never be as enthusiastic as it can be. The history of mankind shows that all the great public buildings in antiquity had a vital and functional use of public spaces for community life which is missing now. In Bangladesh many groups-women, racial minorities, the homeless and street people have all suffered literal, physical marginalization. The people of Bangladesh are struggling to retain their rights against many odds, for example, the journey of 'Ganajagoron Mancha' (a platform made by mass people where they can raise their voice against injustice & for their rights) began at the busy Shahbag road intersection in Dhaka which eventually resulted in the serious traffic congestion. Despite the odds, this movement triggered the creation of more platforms in different districts of Bangladesh. This shows there is no settled position from which to make public awareness and protest, therefore the public spaces has to be invented again and again. There is no set formula but there are limitations. To increase overall individual well-being and freedom, it is necessary to assure free and unstigmatized access to the public spaces.

Keywords. *Democracy; public space; protest; public street; unstigmatized access.*

1. Introduction

The public sphere, that domain of political talk and activity between the state and society, burst out of the market and the cafe long prior, however lately even the pages of daily papers and the communicate media have been superseded. Presently, general society circle is virtual, advanced, and scattered crosswise over billions of desktops, portable workstations and cell phones. Subsequently, now the public sphere isn't only a middle class liberality however a global phenomenon.

It begins from the premise that while a growing extent of political communication uses digital means, the things that are communicated involve real people who take up, occupy, share, and challenge physical space. Often,

the individuals who deny the significance of physical space by concentrating on the methods of communication, they overlook what is communicated.
Democracy depends to a surprising degree on the physical accessibility to open space, even in our professedly computerized world. It additionally contends that in many regards the availability of space for democratic performance is under threat, and that by ignoring the requirement for such space – or contending against that need – we run the risk of undermining some essential states of democracy in the cutting edge world.

The possibility, that democracy relies upon physical space in different ways, runs counter to the present conventionality in majority rule hypothesis and more extensive political science. It is a useful prerequisite of democracy that coupling aggregate basic leadership happens in a solitary, obvious, and open scene; and it is a necessity of democracy that open cases be made in places that are helpful for being seen and considered important by whatever remains of the demos.

2. Background

Public spaces can be used as a tool for guaranteeing the right to the city and democratizing social, economic, political and cultural relationships in urban areas. At the local level, liberalization has resulted in increased surveillance and regulation of public space. Certain points for public space within the city connecting the important buildings or places which carry administrative importance can ensure democratic practice in the city.

Bangladesh is a democratic country which earned their independence through 9 month long liberation war against Pakistan in 1971. The people of Bangladesh are still continuing their struggle to retain their rights against many odds & in this process the major issue they are facing is the lack of public place as a democratic space. There are plenty of parks & open spaces in Dhaka but still those spaces are missing the whole point of democracy, which is to ensure mass accessibility without any constraint & to let people speak their rights on a platform. As a result people created some platforms within the city on important traffic street nodes to make themselves heard. This shows that if the people feel on edge of being unheard, they can literally burst into protest & the places for protest can be generated spontaneously based on the accessibility of those places which can either be a square or major street nodes. Public spaces represent a response to the problems of a modern, partly democratized linguistic world. The apparent spontaneous force of the public square implies it as something that should either be accepted or rejected in full.
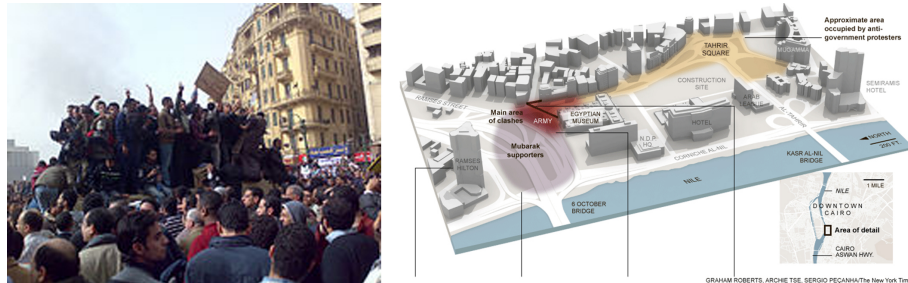
Figure 1, Demonstrators in Tahrir Square, 2011 (*Source: Photo by Ramy Raoof, Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.*)

3. Objectives

The objective of this paper is to identify the necessity of public open space for democratic performance & how public sphere has to be invented to make public awareness. The necessity of public space for democracy is discussed here through some designed implementation of public space in the context of Dhaka city to minimize the failure of Dhaka city as a representative of democratic city.

4. Methodology

The study was conducted through content analysis which included relevant research works, books and literature that were reviewed to get a general overview how Public spaces represent a response to the problems of a modern, partly democratized linguistic world and also site survey which covered the survey of some particular areas of Dhaka city (such as: Shahbag Node, Osmani Udyan, Tejgaon Old Airport). We identified & aimed to develop the impact of these public spaces over the democracy of Bangladesh. All of these spaces represent the symbols of nation and authority.

5. Democracy and Public Space

The discussions of democracy can be started by picking apart the word etymology, 'rule by the people'. Democracy is primarily a way of making collective decisions and that those decisions are primarily about three things: how to distribute scarce resources or, in Laswell's famous phrase (1958), 'who gets what, when and how'; the interests and power relations that structure that distribution; and the normative issues of who should get what, and how to structure society so that they get it. 'Resources' on this account might include familiar things like time, money, and various physical goods, but it can also include information and information technology; welfare-

related goods like health and happiness; or other abstract goods like ability, opportunity, autonomy, and liberty.

As the political definition diverges from the urban, some negotiation over the use of space is essential, because space is itself a resource that needs to be shared.

5.1. PERFORMING DEMOCRACY

We can consider the settings for making public claims in direct and indirect ways. In small scale groups where every individuals of the relevant demos can physically assemble in one place, public claims can be made directly in front of the assembled masses, as in the Athenian ecclesia or the Swiss Landsgemeinden. In large scale societies, the demos essentially won't fit into the discussion any longer, so claim makers either require interceded methods for making the whole public aware of their claims, in cases where the entire public still is the final decision-making authority or require ways of making representatives aware, in cases where leadership control is with a representative body of some sort. The stages for such action are not boundless. In any of these cases, simply 'talking among yourselves' in off the beaten path spots won't do – getting noticed and considered seriously is what matters, which means that cases should be made in freely noticeable and accessible places.

This paper will motivate us to look at public space from the point of view of the demands of democratic roles. This is important because it helps us understand why public space matters to democracy and why political theorists are wrong when they dismiss the value of the physical, giving all their attention to the virtual realms of public engagement.

5.2. DEFINING PHYSICAL PUBLIC SPACE

As John R. Parkinson (2011) has illustrated, physical space can be 'public' if it offers an idea of a four-fold definition confirming that space
    1. is openly accessible; and/or
    2. uses common resources; and/or
    3. has common effects; and/or
    4. is used for the performance of public roles.

5.3. FORM AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR

For what reason may we think that physical form matters to politics? There are some extremely evident cases that assistance enlightens the issues. First, there are walls: unless they are merely relics, pierced by openings like the walls around. Avignon or York, walls can avert access to administrations, fellow citizens, and political forum. Such walls constitute a un-freedom in an

essential liberal sense, and the wall building in Israel– Palestine is a prime example, with many Palestinian Israelis deprived of the ability to work, access administrations, or contact or engage with other fellow-citizens and representatives, constraining their capacity to work in significant ways as free members of the society. Notice that it is not the mere presence of a wall that is important here: they should be protected in some way or another, whether directly by people or indirectly by electronic means.

In any case, the fact of the matter is that such physical structures matter for legislative issues when they display hindrances to the statement of rights and freedoms. Examples are harder to find, but we might think of roads in this way: while it is physically possible to sit down in the middle of the road, the fact that it is dedicated to traffic means that it is most unwise without stopping the traffic first. Even when roads are used for political purposes – a walk, a demonstration – the norm is that people move down the road. Generally, we stand still for marshalling or speeches in parks and squares at the ends of roads, rarely in the middle of them.

6. Protest and the Plaza: Engaging the Formal Public Sphere

In Zócalo in Mexico and Washington's National Mall, for example, there are plenty of other examples from Bucharest to Buenos Aires, Bangkok to Beijing. All these spaces are full of the symbols of nation and authority. Standing in them, one is encompassed by the facades of presidential palaces and town halls; there are national flags flying from enormous focal flagpoles or from the roofs and balconies of the surrounding buildings. In some of them like Mexico– traffic circulates so that, standing in the middle of the square, one is at the centre of attraction. The traffic helps define these squares as the hub around which the nation revolves. They are not so much a 'still point of the turning world' but bustling places with no restrictions on access, full of tourists sometimes, but plenty of locals too, and are used as centres of protest so that people can cloak themselves and their claims with the same symbols and dignity that the powerful do when claiming the symbols and status of high office. In London, Parliament Square is small and almost completely cut off for pedestrians: there are no crossings to it, and no easy ways past the safety barriers. Even more restricted are Hong Kong's Chater Gardens and Statue Square, so small and so full of seats and tables, arcades and planters, and fountains and pools that only around 5,000 people can use the pair of them at any one time.

Thus, size matters – the number of people we can get into a square has an impact on the degree to which organizers can show the scale of popular displeasure with a government, and in London's Parliament Square that scale can only ever be relatively small, making it easier to dismiss even those demonstrations that manage to pack the square as unrepresentative of

popular opinion. In Hong Kong, one could pack Chater Gardens to the gunwales yet the crowd would barely be noticed through the thickets of vegetation and covered seating. By contrast, filling the Zócalo in Mexico is a much, much more impressive achievement. In several cities, there is a single traditional space for protest that is somehow divorced from the sites of the public sphere. In London, most protests gather not at Parliament Square but a mile eastwards in the larger and more accessible Trafalgar Square. Many very large protests in London occupy Hyde Park rather than the much smaller inner- Westminster spaces. This is because the buildings of the formal public sphere and the symbols of national significance are not all gathered together in one central location.

7. Historical Background of Democracy of Bangladesh

The Bengali nation had struggled for democracy, secular values and national rights for years. Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation in 1971 after breaking away and achieving independence from Pakistan in the Bangladesh liberation war. After independence, the new state endured famine, natural disasters and widespread poverty, as well as political turmoil and military coups. The restoration of democracy in 1991 has been followed by relative calm and economic progress.

We have passed around forty five years since independence yet our accomplishments in the spheres of democracy and development are not significant. Where we started our independence day at 26th March, 1971 in Ramna Race course with the famous speech by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib which was very vital step towards democracy, now every political leader or party, civil or military, popular or unpopular, big or small, in or out of power, talk about democratic incessantly. Even so the nation has failed to recognize the importance of accessible public open spaces for democratic purpose. Parties voted into power to strengthen democracy have all failed to encourage its values. Taking advantage of this situation, military leaders intervened to practice their own version of democracy, which only exacerbated the crisis. The country today is riddled with numerous issues threatening the develop-ment of democracy. Our society with an immature political culture and poverty ridden illiterate and incompetent masses is lacking democratic political organizations, institutions and practices.

Figure 2, Political movement in open spaces for democracy in 1952, 1971 (*Source: website)*

8. Dhaka City as a Democratic City

There is a great deal more that could be said about the way that democracy plays out in cities. Dhaka city needs to provide facilities for the performance not just of narrations of the demos, but of other public claims, other narrations, and even space for getting away from each other and persistent public claim-making. The degree to which different members of the demos can enjoy that space, depends very much on the background structures of social stratification of Dhaka city. Even different park configurations can have an important impact on people's ability to perform different roles. Indeed, space that is good for escape is not good for encounter or some kinds of play. Every public space ought to have a certain set of characteristics that encourage democratically valuable pursuits.

The following are the initiatives for making Dhaka a democratic city;

- An extensive and low-cost public transport system.
- The public provision of meeting rooms for citizens, fitted out with IT networks and projection equipment, perhaps at libraries, council buildings, colleges, and universities.
- Variety of parks and plazas such that the Dhaka city as a whole can meet all the different uses of parks without expecting each and every space to meet all of them. Where the Dhaka city's built heritage does not allow this, otherwise private space should be designated for public claim-making purposes.
- Direct accessibility from open spaces towards landmarks which at present is being interrupted by vehicular streets.
- Footpaths and streets designated as public space, not to be controlled by private security guards, business associations, or residents' associations, regardless of ownership.
- Identifying & segregating vehicular & pedestrian streets to ensure uninterrupted physical connection towards open spaces.

9. Democratic Protest in Dhaka

On February 5, 2013, public protests began in Shahbag, Dhaka demanding death penalties for the war criminals of Liberation war of Bangladesh . On

that day, the International Crimes Tribunal had sentenced Abdul kader Mollah, a war criminal, to life in prison after he was sentenced on five of six counts of war crimes. Later demands included boycotting the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami party from politics including election and a boycott of institutions supporting the party.

Protesters considered Mollah's sentence excessively tolerant, given his crimes. Bloggers and online activists called for additional protests at Shahbag Square in Dhaka. Ten thousands of people joined the demonstration & created 'Gonojagoron Moncho', which blocked the traffic system of Shahbag node. Later this movement triggered several more protest points in the different districts of Bangladesh.

All of those protest points had one thing in common which was they were located on major vehicular roads. This shows the failure of the existing open spaces in Bangladesh to act as active democratic spaces.

Figure 3, Demonstrators in Gonojagoron moncho, Shahbag in February 2013 (*Source: Wikipedia*)

10. Architecture of Democracy

Frank Lloyd Wright thought, it is possible that there is 'architecture of democracy', a building and planning style that embodies and embeds democratic values (Wright, 1939).

Not only is it the case that democracy requires physical space for its performance, the fact is that only certain kinds of spatial arrangements will do, or that certain arrangements intensify or mute particular behaviours that democrats discover significant.

10.1 STREETS AS PART OF DEMOCRATIC OPEN SPACE

Democratic street: Emphasizes on the social & economic diversity of large neighbourhood & city as well as the history while not excluding the automobiles but providing friendly space for pedestrians & residents. Street democracy recognizes the concept of 'publicness' through ensuring free & unlimited access to public places. If we look into the history, it shows that good streets are democratic streets that ensure the space for common people giving meaning & access to them while encouraging use & participation.

Through the urbanization process, in Bangladesh, streets started to become only usable for vehicles with the help of traffic engineering that restrained the people to use it as their very own, people started to see streets as 'only part of the city'. This resulted in unattractiveness & undesirability of urban streets. But history shows us that, in 1960s streets were used as a stage for political & social change. Public space merged with street can play a major role in a democratic way to shape public culture.

Kevin lynch in his 'A Theory of good city (1981)' argues that we have five basic public space rights: presence, use & action, appropriation, modification and disposition. These rights, simply stated, are that the people should not only have access to public space but also freedom to use & even claim the space as well as to transfer their rights of use & modification to other individuals. For ensuring democratic space in streets, we need a healthy balance of freedom & control while bringing walking, talking, eating & sports back to the streets again. People need to feel a sense of ownness over the street to make any street democratic. This can include linking the ground floor of the buildings to the adjacent street space. The street has to be comfortable for the users along with ensuring healthy balance between public & semi public spaces.

10.2. OSMANI UDYAN AS A DEMOCRATIC OPEN SPACE

Osmani Udyan is century old park of Dhaka City which is located in a very positive place for democratic purpose as the 'Nagar Bhaban' (Dhaka City Corporation) confronts it. It was a railway property since the British period. Later it was given to PWD and they handed over the Osmani Udyan to Dhaka City Corporation Authority in 1998. Since that time the Osmani Udyan has been under threats from different government Departments and encroachers. Now a big portion of Osmani Udyan is being used for different purpose, sometimes for bus parking, sometimes for shops.

Based on site survey and theoretical analysis we took some design approach in our design studio to refurbish this open space and to develop this open space as an active democratic space.

Figure 4, studying present social & spatial dimension of Usmani Udyan (*Source: Author)*

In the figure we can clearly see that the present condition of Usmani Udyan to act as an active open space is almost impossible due to the encroachment of vendors, illigal structures & a boundary surrounding it. The primary objective of an open space to act as a public space is 'visibility' & direct access which is missing here. In our design studio, we surveyed the site & analyzed the social & spatial aspect of Usmani Udyan.

Figure 5, site analysis of Usmani Udyan and development process of desired conceptual section (*Source: Author*)

Here the concept of connecting the ground floor of public buildings with adjacent streets has come into focus as an inspiration for developing a democratic space. We tried to create physical engagement in the open spacefor democracy in four major ways. First, the narrative and deliberative phases of democracy work best when conducted face to face and allows all the non-verbal cues to be transmitted and received. Second, when it comes to making public claims, it is important that claim-makers be seen in dignified, symbolically rich public space so that their claim-making is made obvious to other citizens; to demonstrate to decision-makers the scale of public

displeasure; and so that claim-makers themselves get the efficacy benefits that come with being seen to share views with others. Third, a sense of inclusion and membership of the demos is enhanced when one sees one's narratives anchored in symbolic, physical form. Even the presence of the marginal in public places is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for them to feel and be recognized by other members of the demos. Fourth, the physical performance of decision-making helps attentive publics perform their scrutiny role – virtual decision-making can too easily become hidden, back-room decision-making.

11. Conclusions

The availability of active democratic space within the city can inspire people to engage physically in democratic activities which is very much obvious to help democracy flourish. Dhaka city has been missing the whole concept of developing as an enthusiastic democratic city even after liberation war in 1971 that started by practising democratic performances to ensure the rights of people. Throughout the paper we focused on finding the reasons that are causing the open spaces of Dhaka city to fail as proper public spaces & look for the key aspects that can eventually transform those existing open spaces into active democratic spaces.

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