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Defining Social Sustainability for urban neighborhood with consideration of its 'unbuilt' as a Social Space and identity Case -Thane city

Sub Theme: Goal 11- Sustainable Cities and Communities

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Abstract

The change in urban areas is always very complex and impactful- environmentally as well as socio-culturally. The current research will further enquire into the aspect of social sustainability in the current changing urban scenarios and the possibility of how the unbuilt can contribute in social cohesion of the neighbourhoods with mixed communities through the “ Unbuilt” as Social space. It will look into the socio-cultural processes which will catalyze Urban sustainability through unbuilt spaces which qualify themselves as “social spaces” of the neighborhood. The current research will attempt to understand how Social sustainability can be utilized as a tool for achieving sustainable communities in urban areas, in which the policy level approach towards planning social spaces needs to look at factors which are deeply embedded on the socio-cultural processes which give the much needed access and ownership to the city.

Through social surveys and interviews qualitative –quantitative mixed methods to arrive at influencing factors and attributes of Social spaces within a given mixed culture neighborhood area. The aim of this research will be to study how social-cohesion and exchanges can ensure that the “Unbuilt” which can give a social identity and sense of belonging becomes eligible to perform as “Social space”

Keywords

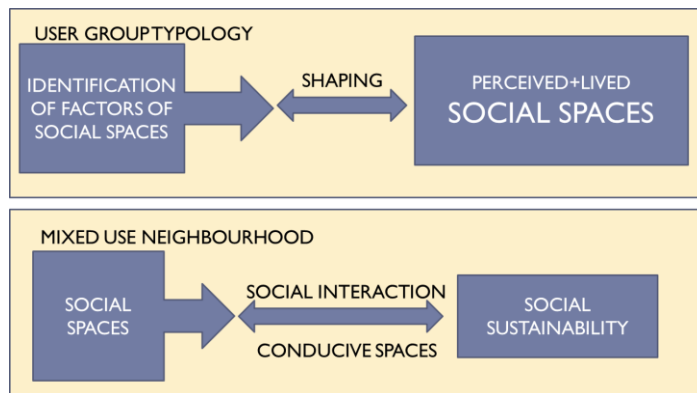
Social sustainability, mixed use neighbourhood , social spaces, unbuilt

1. Introduction

Sustainable development is defined as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Hence, It is essential to improve the quality of life of communities. At the operational level, the concept of sustainable urban development becomes important as emphasized in the 11th objective of the MDG's requires alignment in planning, design, and its implementation. The current paper looks at the role of "unbuilt" in empowering the neighbourhoods in maintaining its sustainability.

The process of urbanization in cities has allowed the "Built" to rise gradually from less to dense. The figure ground percentage helps in understanding the proportion of unbuilt with Built, however whether this Unbuilt is lived, perceived and experienced as "Social Space" and hence what factors will feed into making it a Social space is the research objective of the current paper. This Review paper focuses on the theories which have been proposed till now to understand the concept of Social Space.

1.1 Research Structure



Source: Author. Role of unbuilt as social space in achieving social sustainability in Urban Neighborhoods

1.2 Descriptive definitions

- **Social sustainability-** Polèse and Stren (2000, p. 15 16) provide a definition of social sustainability with a special focus on urban environments as “development that is compatible with harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population”. Their definition emphasises the physical environment (e.g. public spaces, urban design and housing) within the sustainability. It is the capacity of societies and social groups to inclusively navigate social change—while enhancing group and individual freedoms. As a process social sustainability is defined as ‘A process of urban development, supported by policies and institutions that ensure harmonious social relations, enhance social integration and improve living conditions for all groups.’ (Ghahramanpouri et al. 2013)
- **Mixed use neighborhood-** A neighbourhood with a proportionate distribution of variety of landuses and building uses layered to give a vibrant activity pattern which encourages potential and meaningful social exchanges
- **Social spaces-** It includes informal recreational spaces and green spaces in and around (mixed use) neighbourhood, with a primary purpose of providing opportunities for informal activities close to home or work. Space itself does not exist but objects in space create spatial relationships amongst themselves and these interactions and exchanges further identify and help define what can be called as social spaces which should be accessible, safe and functional

1.3 Material and methods:

A study conducted by Khemri, Caputo, and Melis (2020), unveiled the failures of applying a global concept of sustainable neighborhood design in developing countries. The study reveals how globalisation and determinism led to loss of locality and degradation of community, social and spatial segregation, and loss of local identity and sense of place. Jacobs (1961) argued that everyday life of residents creates lively and well-functioning neighborhoods through numerous and improvised activities, while Gehl (2010) considers social urban practices a showcase of residents’

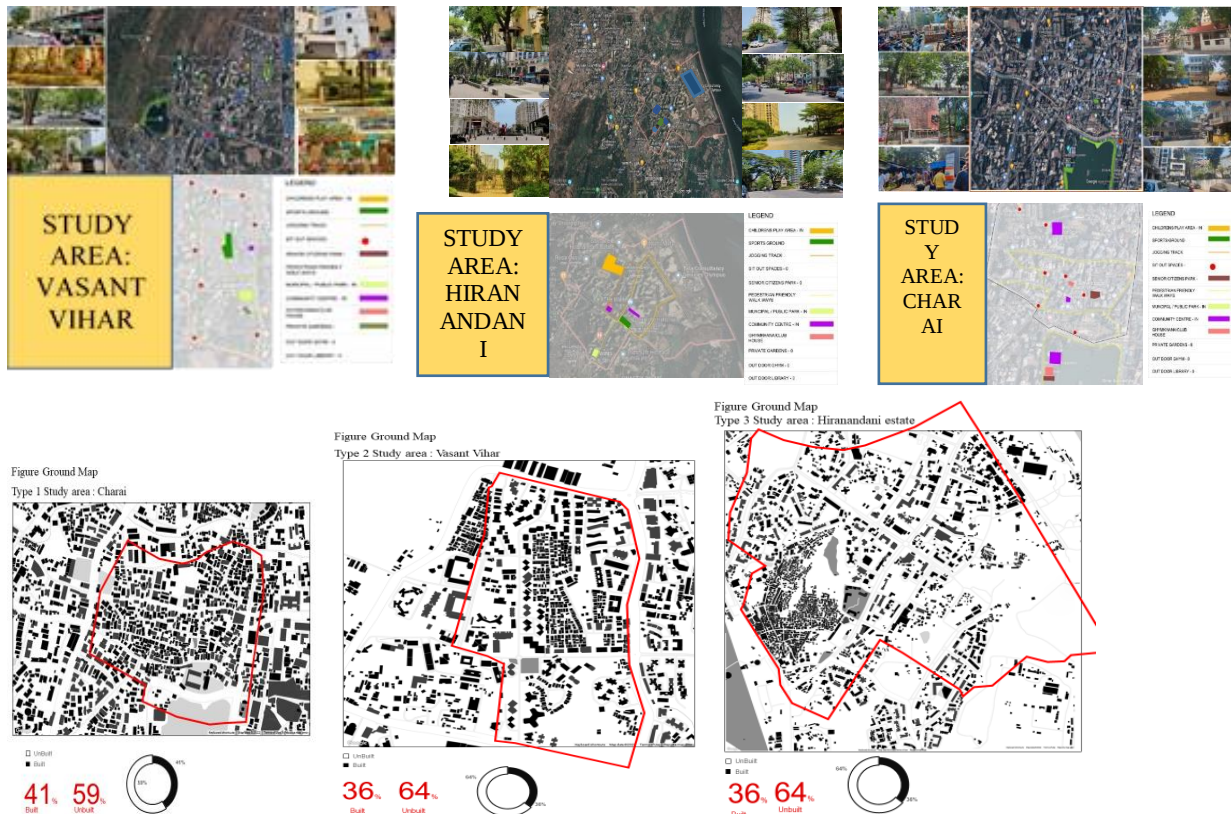
lifestyle. Similarly, Lefebvre (1991, p. 26) argues that '*(Social) space is a (social) product*' and advocates for the association of space with everyday life and social practices. The consistent use of space not only enhances the quality of the built environment (Dempsey 2006), but also promotes sense of place or '*Genius Loci*' as Norberg-Schulz termed it. A term that refers to meaningful spaces that reflect the culture and history of an area and provide appropriate physical setting for a frequent and enduring human interaction (Norberg-Schulz, 1979) all of which fosters a sense of community.

The research methodology looks at identifying the factors responsible for socially sustainable mixed use neighborhoods through a pilot study of Thane city. The shortlisted 3 neighborhoods as case studies to identify and analyze the factors influencing social sustainability represent the 3 different planning models viz a viz original organic settlement, model neighborhood plan and township that shaped Thane city from pre independence to modern times. This research methods applied aim to investigate the relationship between urban forms and social use of urban spaces based on user typology, space usage typology and inclusivity.

1.4 Study objectives for Field Survey

- To investigate the potential and opportunities of unbuilt contributing positively in social sustainability
- To identify the factors and parameters of Unbuilt in playing a crucial role in social sustainability of parts of city which are under transformation
- To study the unbuilt considering its locational aspect, its relational placement with surrounding landuses in a mixed use development,
- To analyse the accessibility to unbuilt spaces and the connectivity network between unbuilt spaces to establish continuity in social spaces

2.0 Introduction to study area



About the study areas of Thane city :

Thane is one of the historic and multi-layered cities, it presents an opportunity to study the liveability of neighborhoods to arrive at its value of social sustainability today in neighborhoods belonging to different parts and context of the socio-

cultural timeline of Thane. Its strategic position as a crossroad of rich history and culture has granted it a diverse mix of cultures and social ideologies. We can see an adaptive concept of neighbourhood that has recreated itself in different urban forms in these 3 different localities; since it can be perceived and measured in various neighborhoods spread along different phases in the evolution timeline of Thane city. The mixed use developments of different time periods in Thane offer a varied play of dynamix of social sustainability factors with outcomes of varied degrees of placemaking, sometimes achieving and sometimes defeating the purpose of social sustainability.

“In the approach to the Smart Cities Mission, the focus is on sustainable and **inclusive development** and the idea is to look at compact areas, create a replicable model which will act like a light house to other aspiring cities.” (source: Thane Smart city report –Ford foundation sponsored research(2016-18)by TISS. This current approach under “Smart city – Thane” with focus on the factor of “inclusivity” needs a check on the current status of “social sustainability” at neighbourhood level through its Social spaces.

The current research intends to identify role of Social Spaces in Social sustainability and to explore the parameters which impact social sustainability of neighbourhoods in Thane.

This paper provides an overview of three of the most influential planning models that have shaped Thane and contributed to its social sustainability ;the Original settlement of Thane-Charai being under “Retrofitting “,the current research is most relevant to explore implications of this study for reformulation and restructuring of future residential development or redevelopment in the old (core)city of Thane; which has lost its aesthetic and locational value due to the current deficiency of amenities, limitations of the street widths and dense congested morphology offering an extremely weak ratio of built to unbuilt(social spaces).

The study areas of the chosen neighbourhoods in Thane-Charai, Vasant Vihar and Hiranandani estate that represent the three mixed use neighbourhood models with different social space typologies which were giving the locality not only its social sustainability quotient but also the identity or sense of place.

Type 1 Study area :Charai :original settlement with Organic pattern of development:

Masunda lake-the center of social activities of this neighborhood, knows frequent social interaction and diverse activities, The neighborhood of Charai is very densely populated, so children used to occupy residential streets to play as a result of feeling safe in their locality. With growing traffic and increased car ownership,the inner roads of this dense locality are no more safe and available for the kids. A Small public park and couple of private corner gardens exist inside residential areas away from the hustle of public areas and they are used by children to play but are clearly inadequate; yet these spaces contribute highly to promote social relations between children, which creates sense of belonging to their own locality.

The temporal pattern of activities in the neighborhood is constant throughout the day, except early morning where few activities are performed, such as cleaning and gardening. On the other hand, on the weekend, and particularly on Friday, the number of activities increases significantly to reach its peak; one can see a great number of street vendors and the overcrowded square on Masunda lake. In the evenings, khao galli near St.John School and a part of the Masunda lake square (chintamani jewellers corner to thane market-kharkarali street corner) are most lively buzzing with commercial and recreational activity continued along the edge of the lake; thanks to the availability of lighting which sends signs of safety and security, unlike inner road spaces that are dark and empty. The Masunda lake is the epicenter of social activity of this neighbourhood ; with boating club, Nana-nani park and the Gadkari katta give the socio-cultural gravity to this neighbourhood and hence the residents grant themselves the right to occupy streets informally for informal vending, which not only contributes to urban socio-cultural-economic lifestyle but also encourages social cohesion.

Type 2 Study area :Vasant vihar,Pokhran 2 : built on neighbourhood planning principles :

The Vasant vihar neighbourhood is fuelled by strong sense of community, sense of belonging and solidarity that emerged from frequent long term enduring association and social use of space. It gets culturally ingrained and becomes the identity of the place.

The post TMC corporation led development in the 90s attempts at well planned neighbourhoods along the Pokhran road 2 area which further nestles in the microclimate of the Upvan lake and Yeour hills as the backdrop, displaying great urban form features that stimulate urban life through planted avenues and boulevards and many public spaces with vegetation and outdoor gyms and libraries ,art installations ,sit outs and walking/jogging/tracks encouraging fitness and health by exercising outdoor rather than a AC gym, with host of various activities, making neighbourhoods safe, lively and inclusive for varied age groups and sometimes even sensitive to women, elders, toddlers. The neighbourhood selected as study area under this phase of Thane’s time line is Vasant Vihar.

Vasant vihar neighbourhood with its periphery thriving on the Pokhran road leading towards the Upvan lake, the pedestrian friendly walkways and open spaces connectivities and the popular Upvan lake precinct. Hence the residents

of this locality feel greater sense of community. The scale of the urban forms provides shade and promotes walkability, which in turn, result in intense social interaction and social cohesion among community members.

Type 3 Study area : Hiranandani Estate ,Ghodbunder road : built on township concept :

The observations carried out in Hiranandani estate ,Ghodbunder road around the turn of the century entering Y2K showed low number of active zones inspite of planned amenities provided in a township setting. The landuse distribution and the zoning strategy defeats the purpose of spontaneous organic social spaces causing spaces to be lifeless and empty. This is due to lack of appropriate placement of spaces and their transitions for social interaction and forming social relations, which are the strengths of organic neighbourhoods. The gated community with podiums disconnected with Mother earth and hence the inactive edges of built form can be held responsible for causing placelessness.

The zoning of Hiranandani township takes a heavy toll on placemaking by creating independent silos of built forms which stand tall over individual podium gardens with complete disconnect to each other and hence render the place lifeless.

The peak pedestrian movement is seen during early morning walks and evening walks and seasonal festive activities and events planned in the central open space of the Township (cultural events like Durga puja, Navratri Garba dandia nights etc)

Table2.1: Unbuilt Typologies of Study area and parameters of Study Area
(Source: Author)

PARAMETER OF STUDY	UNBUILT Typologies	Type 1 Study area :Cherai	Type2 study area :Vasant Vihar	Type 3 Study area: Hiranandani estate
1.	Type of development	Organic	Planned	Township
2.	Phase of development in timeline of the city	Origin of Residential settlements-19 th century development-pre Independance	Post Thane Corporation TMC approved-Pokhran road development 1990s onwards	Post 2000-Ghodbunder road development ,as township gated community
3	Built form typology	High Density ,lowrise, mixed building use	High density ,Mid and High Rise, mixed neighbourhood	High density,Tall buildings, mixed landuse
4	Percentage Unbuilt	Open space deficit, unbuilt 20 percent	Open space adequate ,unbuilt 30-35 percent	Open space adequate, unbuilt 40-45percent
5	Affordability	Affordable (since congested areas with difficulty in redevelopment and deficit of amenities)	Moderately affordable (well planned with amenities and recreation)	Mix of Moderately affordable and high end (well planned streets with gated community)
6	Availability of unbuilt as Social space	Low to moderate	Moderate to high	Moderate to high
7	Accessibility to Unbuilt spaces by locals	Low in private residential, high in public areas	High in Private as well as Public areas	Moderate in Private as well as in Public areas
8	Sense of ownership	High	Moderate	Extremely low
9	Permeability of Unbuilt to have Socio-cultural exchanges	Moderate to High (visible drop seen)	High(visible rise seen)	Low to moderate
10	Unbuilt with Socio-political value	High	Moderate	Low
11	Unbuilt with intensity of Commercial activity	High	Moderate	Moderate
12	Availability of Unbuilt with Recreational value	Low-Centralized and limited at lakefront	High-Decentralized and well distributed at neighborhood level	Moderate-Centralized to central open ground
13	Quality of unbuilt as social spaces	Moderate-limited to lake front	High- Private as well as public open spaces	Moderate
14	Aesthetic value of Unbuilt as social spaces	Low	Moderate to High	High
15	Community network within the unbuilt	High since routine social exchanges and interactions being oldest neighborhood	High since good social mix of people and events	Low since rigid division in land use and separate plots of residential
16	Potential of Unbuilt for	High since oldest	High since good social	Low since rigid

	Social cohesion	neighborhood	mix of people and events	division in land use and separate plots of residential
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2. 2 Table showing comparative analysis of Space typologies of Study areas considered.

Space typology	Type 1 Study area :Cherai	Type2 Study area :Vasant Vihar	Type 3 Study area: Hiranandani estate	PARAMETER OF STUDY	Neighborhood model	Type 1 Study area :Cherai	Type2 study area :Vasant Vihar	Type 3 Study area: Hiranandani estate
	Active / Inactive/absent	Adequate / Inadequate/absent	Active/ inactive					
				1.	Type of development	Organic	Planned	Township
				2.	Phase of development in timeline of the city	Origin of Residential settlements-19 th century development-pre Independence	Post Thane CorporationTMC approved-Pokhran road development 1990s onwards	Post 2000-Ghodbunder road development, as township gated community
Children's play area	Absent	inadequate	Active	3	Built form typology	High Density ,lowrise, mixed building use	High density ,Mid and High Rise, mixed neighbourhood	High density,Tall buildings, mixed landuse
Sports /play ground	Absent	inadequate	Active	4	Space(unbuilt) typology	Open space deficit, unbuilt 20 percent	Open space adequate, unbuilt 30-35 percent	Open space adequate, unbuilt 40-45percent
Jogging tracks	Absent	absent	Active	5	Affordability	Affordable (since congested areas with difficulty in redevelopment and deficit of amenities)	Moderately affordable(well planned with amenities and recreation)	Mix of Moderately affordable and high end(well planned streets with gated community)
Sit out spaces	active	inadequate	Active	6	Social space Availability	Low to moderate	Moderate to high	Moderate to high
Senior citizen parks	active	inadequate	Active	7	Social space accessibility to locals	Low in private residential,high in public areas	High in Private as well as Public areas	Moderate in Private as well as in Public areas
Promenade/pedestrian friendly walkways	Active	adequate	Active	8	Sense of ownership	High	Moderate	Extremely low
				9	Socio-cultural exchanges	Moderate to High (visible drop seen)	High(visible rise seen)	Low to moderate
				10	Socio-political value	High	Moderate	Low
				11	Commercial activity	High	Moderate	Moderate
Public /municipal park	Active	inadequate	Active	12	Recreational value of open spaces	Low-Centralized and limited at lakefront	High-Decentralized and well distributed at neighbourhood level	Moderate-Centralized to central open ground
Community centre	Absent	inadequate	Active	13	Quality of social spaces	Moderate-limited to lake front	High- Private as well as public open spaces	Moderate
Gymkhana/club house	Active	inadequate	Active	14	Aesthetic value of social spaces	Low	Moderate to High	High
Private gardens	Inactive	inadequate	Active	15	Community network	High since routine social exchanges and interactions being oldest neighbourhood	High since good social mix of people and events	Low since rigid division in land use and separate plots of residential
Outdoor gyms	absent	NA	Active	16	Social cohesion	High since oldest neighbourhood	High since good social mix of people and events	Low since rigid division in land use and separate plots of residential
Outdoor libraries	absent	NA	Active					

2,2 Findings : Arriving at factors for Social Cohesion

The current comparative case study of Unbuilt in the selected neighborhoods, helps to arrive at the Influencing factors or attributes contributing for Social Cohesion and exchanges which can qualify the “unbuilt” (Amenities and social infrastructure) to behave and perform as Social spaces. The following Intangible values contributes to the sense of place and Social cohesion in the mixed use neighborhoods

- Accessibility and participation
- Connectivity
- Legibility
- Adaptability
- Flexibility
- Permeability
- Sense of ownership
- Cultural environment
- Economic and commercial activities
- Quality of place

The place attachment is significant in sustaining the bonding between the local community in a given neighbourhood and the Social spaces thrive on the primary factor of how well the cultural value has contributed in retaining and strengthening the sense of place of the neighbourhood

Table 2.3: User Age group Analysis to understand social cohesion user pattern

	Neighbourhood Social space USER type	Type 1 Study area :Charai	Score as per Likert scale	Type2 study area :Vasant Vihar	Score as per Likert scale	Type 3 Study area: Hiranandani estate	Score as per Likert scale
SPATIALLY DEPENDANT PEOPLE	Under 5 years (toddler)	Absent	0	Present, Adequate, safe, functional	4	absent	0
	Under 10 years	absent	0	Inadequate	1	inadequate	1
TRANS SPATIAL PEOPLE(High School, College going and employed age group)	11-20 years	inadequate	1	Adequate, safe, functional	4	Adequate, safe, functional	4
	20 to 40 years	Present and adequate	2	Adequate		Adequate, safe ,functional	4
	40-60 years	inadequate	1	Adequate, safe, functional	4	Adequate, safe, functional	4
SPATIALLY DEPENDANT PEOPLE	Above 60 years /retired	absent	0	Adequate, safe, functional	4	absent	0
	Disable /universal design category	absent	0	Inadequate	1	absent	0
	Women -homemaker caregivers	absent	0	Inadequate	1	inadequate	1
	Economically weak	absent	0	Inadequate	1	absent	0
Social sustainability	TOTAL SCORE		4		20		14

Above findings indicate that residents of different age group (social mix based on age group) are grouped by local culture, common identity and shared values and rely on the quality of social exchanges that happen in a given typology of space. The typology of space is in turn further dependant on how the urban built form is allowing this exchange to happen and has major influence on social use of space, quality of social life and thus is the main driver for the sustainability of urban neighbourhoods. This research helps conclude that cities live in their neighborhoods since it is at the scale of the neighborhood that the actual dynamix of social use, interaction and exchanges are executed in urban space.

The built form decides the left over-the figure ground ratio defines the usability of the unbuilt .The unbuilt left overs either are capable of taking the onus of building social sustainability within the neighbourhood depending on the scale that has been established by the built form.

2.3 Discussion: The strategy of builtform placement contributes whether the unbuilt will have its narrative of social spaces on the basis of how adaptable ,flexible, accommodative and permeable the space is and hence does it actually qualify to become what we call as “social space”.

It is only if the spatial factors and parameters support it to become a” social space “ by relative positioning of the built form and the place making strategy implemented, if any.

The landuse and building use also plays a crucial role in either building or breaking the synergy of the front open spaces or the spaces between two building blocks or between the street and the building line.

The neighborhood built form along with its mixed use typology creates an activity pattern which can further intensify the social exchanges meaningfully or can break the narrative creating a complete disconnect between the people and the so called potential social space comes in the making which plays the most crucial role in defining the social sustainability of the community and hence the city.

3. Conclusions

This paper helps understand the current status of unbuilt spaces in the shortlisted neighborhood case studies of Thane city, such that the relationship between user age groups and spaces having potential of contributing to Social Sustainability for given neighborhood, can be understood in terms of factors and patterns of social cohesion.

Such unbuilt social spaces further get identified either as adequate and potentially utilized with a high value ranking as “social space” or deficit and unutilized spaces which lack the capacity to build meaningful social interaction and hence low on performance as a social space.

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