

Rethinking URBAN VOIDS

Looking at a growing city and its urban voids, uncomfortable questions arise: What space is for people? Where is breathing space? Where is *my vs our* space? In urban contexts in developed countries, a vicious circle of crippling self-referentiality raises itself. Urbanisms defined by edges of activity within a global context meld irrespective of congestion and density. Developed and planned cities face similar problems as developing ones.

In urban situations, liminality of space becomes the important issue. Urban voids are the spaces in and between built forms, and these 'liminal spaces' play the crucial role accommodating people. Studying such voids and incorporating them to a design solution, while addressing the scarcity of usable and useful urban voids is what this project addresses. I analyzed four cities: Vienna, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Caracas. Dhaka- a highly dense and growing city- is the final main focus for a deeper investigation of utilizing minimal urban voids and respecting the need for urban open spaces.

This project searches opportunities to create public space and activity in the nooks and corners of Dhaka, without demolishing existing built infrastructure. Throughout the design process, the program changes multiple times. Site and Precedent Analyses led the designer to determine a range of problems along Mirpur Road. Assisted by a site analysis by Form.3 Architects of Bangladesh, a map catalogs all positive and negative factors along Mirpur Road. This map helps to determine and design spaces for the array of activities to rejuvenate the urban voids. This also engenders a preliminary idea for a Pattern Language of Public Activities.

Given the scale of the site and time constraint, I chose three subsites after a vigorous analysis and discussion with my thesis committee: 1) the Dhanmondi Govt. School Zone [mixed usage dominated], 2) the Kalabagan Zone [residential usage and open area dominated] and 3) the New Market Zone [commercial usage dominated]. Design interventions in these three subsites are shown in detail. BOTs are designed and placed along the stretch of Mirpur Road in a way that they are imprinted on people's mind through repetition of form, material, and function, from the New Market Zone through the Kalabagan Zone and the Dhanmondi School Zone. This way, a public identity is created through the design so that seeing a BOT or its tensile membranes everyone recognizes an information kiosk, public toilet service, and an interactive social space.

From macro scale [master plan] to micro scale [subsites] and then to a nano scale 'Bot' or the service hub, the design strives for a minimum intervention to create a maximum impact on Dhakaite life. This design avoids unnecessary demolition and removal of existing fabric. It intends to add value to the existing fabric and bring change gradually to city life.