

RETHINKING PUBLIC SPACE: LIVEABILITY AS A STRATEGY FOR SAFE PLACES

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the relationship between safety and livability in public places has clearly illustrated the multi-faceted approaches of crime prevention through urban space design. This includes urban regeneration schemes, community policing, observation programs, educational and social initiatives, and restructuring the physical environment. In the past few years, many public spaces in some cities have experienced a high notable increase spreading of drug corners, unsafe parks, violence, and vandalism, as well as numerous problems that negatively impact residents and a general lack of safety. Also, the problem would refer it to functions and activities surrounding the spaces. In some cities, there were some efforts on crime prevention through awareness campaigns by using large maps of neighborhoods, to highlight problematic areas with regard to crime, fear, incompatible land use, and trash.

As a means of developing a more effective approach to community safety and liveability, this paper aims to investigate the relationship between public space design and crime prevention through successful urban design and revitalization approach. In this context many practices and experiences have addressed policies and strategies to guide the planning and design for safety in public spaces. Those practices mainly focused on identifying and solving issues and pain points, related to unsafe urban spaces by the use of some strategies, such as ownership programs, and adaptive reuse projects. Many other urban renewal projects relied on regenerate the physical environment to transform the unsafe feeling or image of dangerous areas into safe places. This paper will shed light on a number of significant successful experiences on introducing liveability in public places as a way to prevent urban crime. Liveability in this context would contribute to the processes that make a place vibrant, life and attractive, where people want to go on living with the opportunity to participate fully in community and to gain a sense of belonging. The paper will draft lessons learnt from these experiences and will formulate draft strategies for supporting public safety in public spaces.

PUBLIC SPACES

Public spaces are used during different times during the day by different groups as well as a variety of individuals. Public spaces should have safety aspects that make it livable places. As per American planning association (APA), “A public space may be a gathering spot or part of a neighborhood, downtown, special district, waterfront or other area within the public realm that helps promote social interaction and a sense of community”. Public spaces could be outdoor spaces, such as pedestrian areas, plazas, waterfront, etc. It could be also indoor spaces, such as gathering spaces inside shopping malls, or public spaces within public or private buildings. One of the Characteristics of Great Public Spaces is being a safe and welcoming space.

WHAT MAKES THE PUBLIC SPACE SAFE?

Safe cities are connected with stable economy and quality of life. As per Nadel “Public safety and personal security are essential to attracting and retaining businesses, jobs, and residents to communities and urban centers”. Designing safe public spaces is an interactive process between the physical space and its usage pattern including the human behavior of the space users.

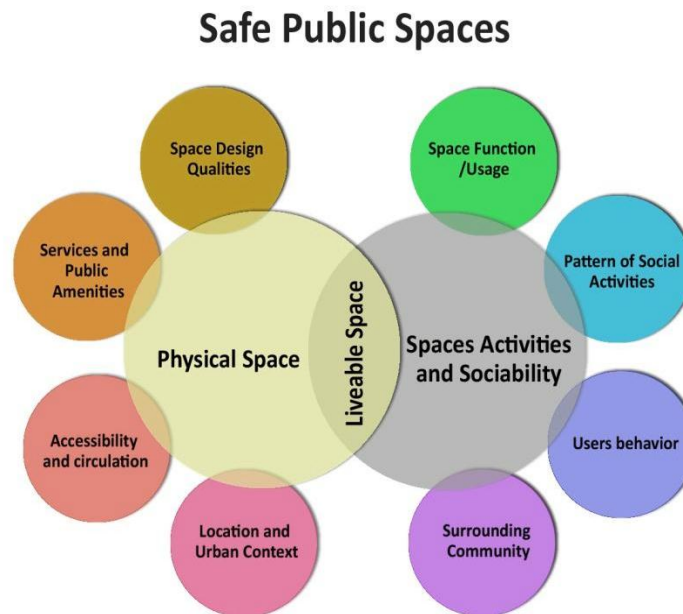
Safety considerations for physical spaces include

- Space design qualities, such as designing safe hard and soft landscape. The space accommodates people with physical disabilities or with special needs. The space design encourages interaction and communication between users.
- Services and public amenities, such as pedestrian and vehicles lighting that enhance visibility and safety and give the sense of being safe and secured even at night. In addition, the space provides a sense of comfort or safety.
- Accessibility and circulation, including safe traffic consideration such as having clear segregation between vehicles and pedestrian, vehicles are slowed down beside areas with high pedestrian activities, etc.
- Location/Urban context. Where is the space located? City center, business district, historic area, etc. Which type of buildings surrounds the space? There is no sign of decay. Buildings are well maintained

Safety considerations for spaces activities and sociability include

- Space function/usage: Single use/multiple uses. Safe spaces should be welcoming, and accommodating for all users
- Pattern of social activities. It fosters social interaction and creates a sense of community.
- Users behavior is friendly
- Surrounding community behavior contributes to a sense of community.

It is argued that Liveability of the space happens when there is a balance between the space physical considerations and the space activities and sociability as per (Fig. 1)



(Fig. 1) Liveable Public Spaces as a strategy for safe places

TOWARDS SAFE PUBLIC SPACES: LEARNING FROM BEST PRACTICE

There are many approaches to develop community safety and liveability. In this context many practices and experiences have addressed policies and strategies to guide the planning and design for safety in public spaces. Some practices mainly focused on ownership programs projects such as Al Darb Al Ahmar development in Cairo, Egypt. Some other practices have focused on urban renewal projects relied on reconstructing the physical environment to transform the unsafe feeling or image of dangerous areas into safe places, such as Al-Ruwais district in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. While other practices focused on adaptive reuse strategy, such as times Square NY, USA.

1. TIME SQUARE, NY, USA

Re-imagining and adaptive reuse as strategies to achieve a Safe and Liveable space

Time Square has a long and significant history in New York. In the 19th century the area had become the center of New York's carriage industry. In 1904, New York Times moved its operations to a new skyscraper on 42nd Street, and a subway station was constructed there. The square tried on its new name "Times Square", where it was the most desirable location in Manhattan in the 1920s. The 1929 stock market crash took its toll on the area, with many businesses moving out of the area to be replaced by seedier forms of entertainment. As the growth in the City continued, Times Square quickly became a cultural hub full of theaters, music halls, and upscale hotels.

In the 1980s, a long-term development plan was proposed to “clean up” the area, increasing security, pressuring undesirables to relocate, and opening more tourist-friendly attractions and upscale establishments was done. Detractors have countered that the changes have homogenized or “Disneyfied” the character of The Square as in (Fig. 2). In 1992, the Times Square Alliance dedicated to improving the quality of commerce and cleanliness in the district. Times Square boasts attractions such as Studios, elaborate stores across the street from each other, as well as restaurants and along with a number of multiplex movie theaters. It has also attracted a number of large financial, publishing, and media firms to set up headquarters in the area.



(Fig. 2) Liveability of Time Square among other disnyfication and adaptive reuse practices

In 2009, traffic lanes along Broadway from 42nd Street to 47th Street would be de-mapped and transformed into pedestrian plazas as a trial. The goal was to ease traffic congestion throughout the Midtown grid. The results were to be closely monitored to determine if the project worked. In 2010, the pedestrian plazas would become permanent.

Designing for safety and security presents another important issue. In an effort to protect visitors from adjacent traffic, planners have surrounded each square with trees, hedges, and walls. As a result, the plazas are visually and physically detached from the pedestrian flow on the sidewalks as in (Fig. 3).



(Fig. 3) Designing for safety and security to protect visitors from adjacent traffic

Conclusion

- The new Times Square is a positive example of a modern and safe vibrant market-place.
- While not always known for its sparkling image, Times Square has seen a real turnaround in recent years. At the turn of the 21st century, it is substantially cleaner and safer than it has been in decades. It is not a place to relax, though. It is place of extreme excitement, designed to overwhelm the senses.
- Visitors actually have a more positive image of the places that they visit than residents, who may be more keenly aware of the negative aspects of the place.

AL-RUWAIS DISTRICT, JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA

Regeneration and Reconstruction as strategies to achieve a safe place

Al-Ruwais district located in central Jeddah is suffering from decay, unsafely, and overall unplanned district with lack of the most basic of services. The unplanned settlement of Al-Ruwais is one of the most rundown areas. It suffers from many social, environmental, and economic problems. See (Fig. 4 a & b)



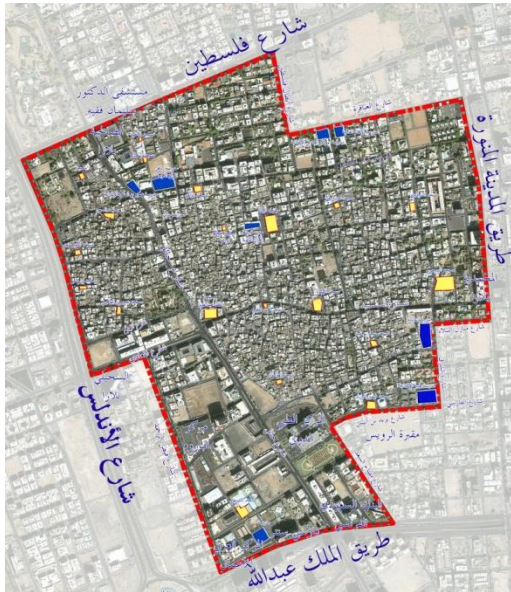
(Fig. 4a) Al-Ruwais underdeveloped settlement
Photos by Zaynab Odunsi



(Fig. 4b) Decay and unsafely in Al-Ruwais

“The regeneration project is an integrated development that will transform an unplanned settlement into a modern and fully serviced urban environment.”, as per JDURC
According to a study of Al-Ruwais Development Project, Al-Ruwais population is made up of 32 percent Saudis, 39 percent non-Saudi Arab speaking nationals, 15 percent Asians, and 14 percent from other nationalities.

The whole district was decided recently to be demolished. A new development massive project will completely replace the existing district as shown in (Fig.5a) and (Fig.5b).



(Fig. 5a) The existing Al-Ruwais underdeveloped district



(Fig. 5b) The planned Al-Ruwais by JDURC

The proposed project by JDURC will develop the built environment, public open spaces, as well as the infrastructure, to turn the unsafe deteriorated settlement into a safe and a modern planned district.



(Fig. 6) The new development of Al-Ruwais by JDURC
Photos as per JDURC website

Conclusion

- Al-Ruwais settlement is an example of a decay, unsafely, and overall unplanned district with lack of the most basic of services.
- The new development of Al-Ruwais settlement will enhance the safety and the quality of life in this quarter.
- The new development of Al-Ruwais settlement will completely reconstruct the settlement, which will cause problems in displacing residents. In addition, it will completely delete the place memory including its original identity.

THE AGA KHAN PROJECT OF DARB AL AHMAR

Renovation, reconstruction, restoration, and rehabilitation as strategies to achieve a safe place

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture project of Darb Al Ahmar was about developing the derelict Darassa site, a 30-hectare unsafe and dirty mound of rubble for over 500 years, adjacent to the Historic City and the neighborhood of Darb al-Ahmar.

The project relied on the renovation, reconstruction, restoration, and rehabilitation the low-income neighborhood of Darb al-Ahmar, which is adjacent to the park. As part of the rehabilitation of the neighborhood and the overall safety of the project area, job training and employment opportunities are being offered in different sectors such as shoemaking, furniture manufacturing and tourist goods production. Hundreds of young men and women in Darb Al Ahmar have found work in the park, in horticulture and on project teams restoring the Ayyubid

wall. Three landmark buildings, from the 13th and 14th Century have been restored. Public spaces such as, Aslam square were restored. Local housing has been renovated and returned to their owners. A housing credit scheme is aiding private individuals in the rehabilitation of their own houses. The construction of the park and the restoration of cultural monuments are meant to be catalysts for social and economic development and the overall improvement of the quality of life in the district. See (Fig. 7)



(Fig. 7) The Aga Khan Trust for Culture project of Darb Al Ahmar

Conclusion

- The Aga Khan Trust for Culture project of Darb Al Ahmar has changed the whole area of the project from underdeveloped and unsafe area to a safe, productive, and restored area.
- The new development of has changed the community behavior into a positive one.
- The public spaces in Darb Al Ahmar development project are liveable as of their physical space considerations as well as their interactive usage.
- Rehabilitation of space users is one of the most successful socio-economic strategies to develop safe and liveable well maintained spaces as a tool of increasing the ownership of the place.

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