

Transforming a ‘Non-Place’ Through ‘Architecture as Landscape’

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Dhaka, because of its alarming population density, limited land area and unplanned developments, faces challenge to posit an alternative approach towards designing urban space, which may eventually manifest into a resilient city. Through the design of ‘Architecture as Landscape’ an effort was made to transform a leftover open space situated within a zone of historic, cultural and political significance into a ‘place’ for the ‘people’ where the ‘Genius Loci’ itself directed the design elements. The approach that integrates nature and the urbanites will be discussed focusing on the architectural interventions to offer interactive public space. The project dealt with design ideas, considerations and strategies intertwined with challenges due to constrained budget. The ‘site’ itself being located at the heart of Dhaka city, witnessed the major movements in course of the history of Bangladesh. The project unified not only the surrounding disintegrated built forms but also the tangible and intangible aspects of the people. The approach as mentioned is based on two basic principles; Recollecting the Spirit of the Place and Revisiting the Spirit of the People. Focus has been given on enhancing the latent possibilities of the ‘non-place’ itself by a deliberate design strategy of evolving the ultimate landscape formation from on-site design decisions responding to its immediate surrounding structures of cultural, historic and programmatic significance as well as existing trees.

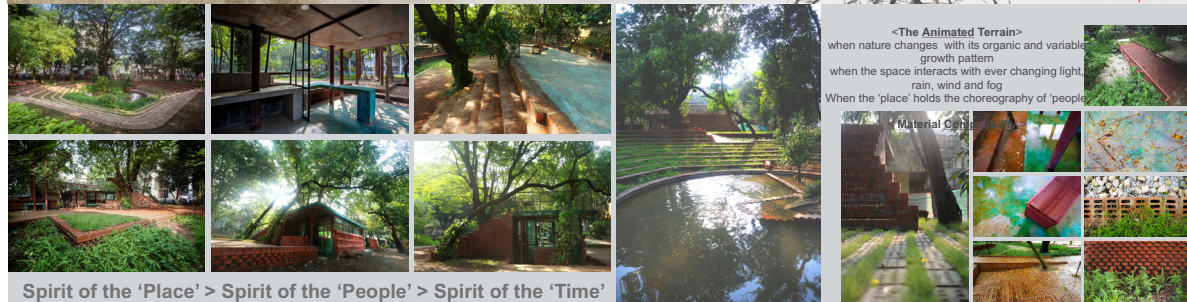
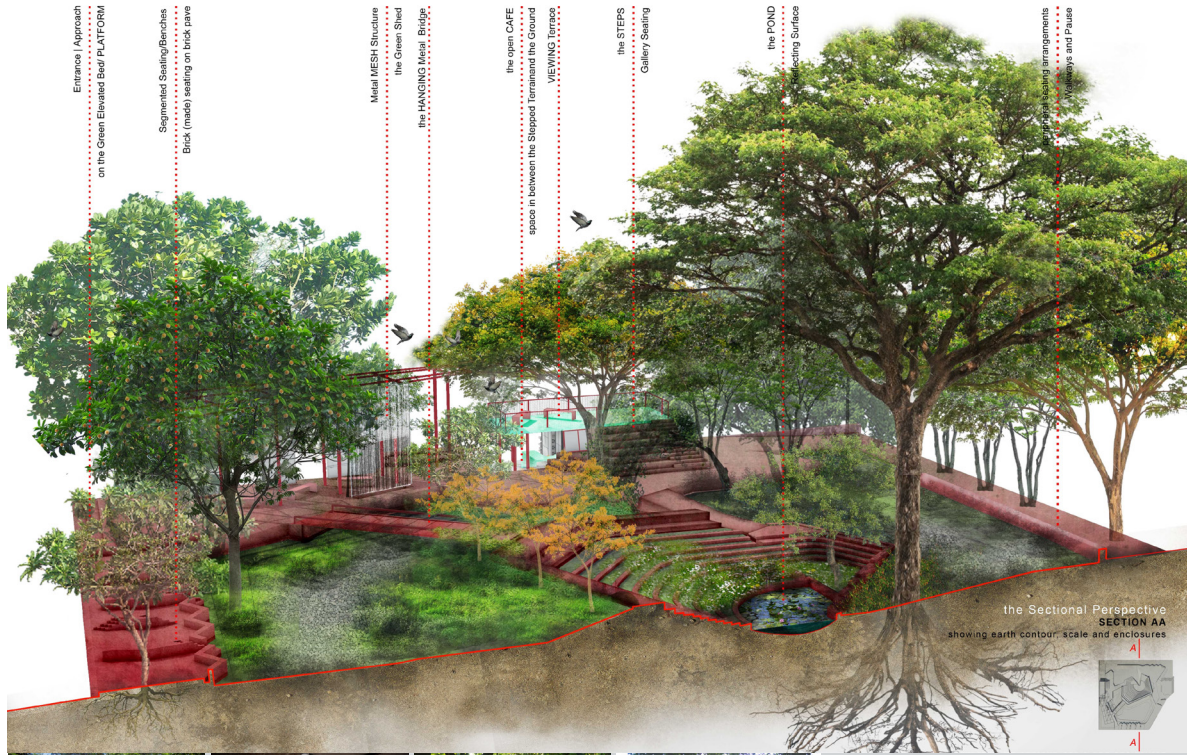
Before commissioning the architects, the initial intention of client was to ‘beautify’ the unused site by conventional means of adding flower bearing plants, lights and paved pedestrian pathway(s). Later a more holistic idea was thought out to convert the site through an approach of place-making with the intention of creating a public place to promote healthy environment to the users. Infusion of utilitarian features and functions were new introduction to the place which demanded speculations and analysis on user profile, activity pattern and scale of usage. A combination of Semiotics and Technical approach ensures a sustainable scenario both in aesthetic and usability. The site was devoid of definition, lacking in pattern of usability and apparently absent as an urban space inspite of its

accessibility and permeability. The constraints had manifolds which were to be dealt with two definitions Semiological and Technical. Semiological definition described about the ‘idea’ of that space to be transformed and the conception behind the phenomenological experiences of that space will contain. Technical aspects were about the material selection, sustainability of the aesthetic, providing service facilities, all those criteria for an urban space.

Addressing Culture, Climate and Ecology, the approach emerges from the efforts of establishing positive feedbacks to the city fabric rather than just to fit into the existing unplanned growth. Ever since the project has been opened for public the once unattended and insignificant open space started catering as a meeting place for the students, faculties and other users of the University Campus. By transforming a ‘non-place’ into a ‘place’ for contemplation, this project offers the citizen of Dhaka City the much needed existential experience.

Keywords: Landscape, Place, Non-Place, Existential Experience

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Spirit of the 'Place' > Spirit of the 'People' > Spirit of the 'Time'

