

# RETHINKING URBAN SPACES DHAKA AND BEYOND



Shahbag



Bahadur Shah Park



Gulshan Circle 2



Farmgate



Gulshan Circle 2

## Reimagining urban nodes in Dhaka

Students of BRAC Architecture imagine a different city



ADNAN MORSHED

Dhaka is an intense city. If you find yourself in Gulistan or Farmgate, you understand what urban intensity is. These are examples of extreme urban nodes.

What is an urban node? It can be a site of public interaction or an intersection of various urban activities, such as pedestrian and vehicular movements, retail activities, vending, sidewalk marketing, political demonstrations, outdoor performances, and public gathering. Examples of oft-cited urban nodes, among others, include: Las Ramblas in Barcelona, Trafalgar Square in London, and Times Square in New York. Urban nodes can make a city socially vibrant and create what the American urban



Krishi Market

planner Kevin Lynch has called "imageability", the city dweller's mental ability to map the various patterns and spaces of the city. Imageability is the sign of a good city.

Dhaka's imageability is rather low. Extremely fast-paced urbanisation and population surge in Dhaka have radically changed the urban character of the city,

often at the expense of different urban nodes that traditionally helped city inhabitants orient themselves and navigate the city. Today, such urban nodes as Bahadur Shah Park, Farmgate, Mohakhali Mor, or New Market are places of vehicular congestion, chaos, noise pollution, and even neurosis.

In this context, we challenged the fourth

year students of architecture at BRAC University to rethink the urban node as a welcoming public place that could serve multiple urban functions and inspire a broader urban environment of imageability. The nodal space would foster social awareness of public places and their socio-historical significance, while providing uninterrupted circulatory spaces, transportation facilities, pedestrian promenades, retail activities, performance spaces, etc.

Students were asked to thoroughly study an urban node in Dhaka city as a context for preparing alternative ways of converting it into a multilayered public place. In the survey phase, students were expected to document current spatial usage, building footprints, street furniture, surrounding urban fabric, vehicular circulation, pedestrian movement, retail activities, and interface with the broader city. In the next phase, students were assigned the task of studying a number of case studies and then redesign the given urban node as a public space that would facilitate a host of urban functions. This was an evidence- and research-based and process-driven urban design exercise.

The following are the nine urban nodes that the BRAC University Architecture students studied and proposed

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



Krishi Market