

Mini Parks Increasing Physical Activities in Urban Settlement

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Abstract

In the fast developing cities today, the land availability is scarce for allocating it as a park. One of a solution to this situation is to convert the left-over (vacant) spaces into a park. It will increase the physical as well as recreation activities in the urban settlement. One of the primary criteria for the parks is to have them within a walk able distance. Such parks can be of two kinds: playgrounds and community gardens. These also can be named as mini-parks and for developing such parks serving a common interest, an active support is required from within the Commonwealth and the Government. These small places or mini parks can serve a dual purpose such as recreation as well as the generation of economic activity to a smaller extent. The paper discusses over health aspects in an urban area for the citizens followed by basics of and some of the cases related to novel efforts in developing mini-parks. The cases discussed are of (A) Paley Park, NY-USA, (B) Mini-park in Higashi-Ikebukuro of Tokyo and (C) Ghost train park of Lima. Authors attempt for a comparative analysis of these three parks. Discussion follows a proposal of developing a recently closed down project of Sky-bus in Goa as a mini-park. The authority acquired land for the Sky-bus corridor, wherein the spaces at different interval can serve for creating mini-parks.

Keyword- Mini parks, Physical activity, Recreation activity, urban settlement

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to the urbanization, there are increasing challenges for the limited amount of available parks in the urban settlement. To meet these growing needs of parks, there can be a conversion of the unused space for creating mini parks also known as pocket parks. These parks are created on vacant land and an unused area. These parks are designed on a small scale that provides a recreational space for surrounding community and meet a variety of needs and functions like social gathering, play area for children, space for a lunch break, space for relaxing and so on. Though mini parks are varied according to their purpose, ideally the user should not have to walk more than 5-10 minutes to reach these mini-parks.

II. BACKGROUND

The notion of small sized environments as restorative ‘pockets’ in dense city areas began at an exhibit in 1963 entitled New Parks for New York. Robert Zion proposed the idea of a network of mini parks (pocket parks) within the then New York. The first of a kind, ‘Paley Park’ brought to existence in 1967 and has since then it is serving as a blueprint for mini parks around the world. In 1969, he stated a vision: ‘For such parks to contribute effectively to city life, they must be readily available (Carroll, 1967).

III. HEALTH OF CITIZENS IN AN URBAN AREA

Cities are expanding in the today's world. Due to urban expansion, the land values are rising. Most of the expansion is due to demands of residential and commercial use. This in specific is resulting in the loss of land for qualitative and large parks in areas surrounding the residences. Referring to the report of Erica Gies and as seen in the Figure-1, the health of citizens living in an urban area is generally affected by lack of physical activities that leads to obesity and in turn results in poor health (Gies, 2006). In addition to that, limited and unequal accesses to parks result in decreased frequency of exercise. At many place, a complete absence of parks in near-by area also affect the health of citizens.

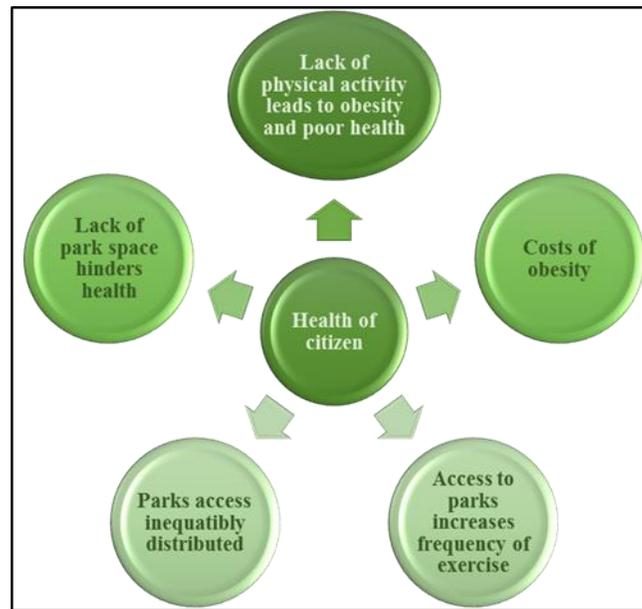


Fig. 1: Parameters influencing health of citizens (Gies, 2006)

To discuss issues related to the health of urban citizens, an alternative of mini-parks can serve to increase the physical activities. In addition, such places will increase the social interaction among citizens. Further, it will put the irregularly shaped, but highly valuable urban space to an apt usage of public purpose.

IV. BASICS ABOUT MINI PARKS

A smaller version of park in or around a residential locality is known as a mini-park, also known as parkette or pocket parks. Generally, it is developed in an irregular shape (and on forgotten spaces) of urban land. Not necessarily, the scale of urban area is affecting the size and numbers of these parks, mini-parks are needed at each of urban area. These type of parks are accessible mainly in forms of,

- Playground, and
- Community Gardens (or tot-lots)

The gardens are more popular form of mini parks. These are generally located in urban as well as suburban neighbourhoods. Playgrounds cater to the youth and provide an opportunity for physical growth. A recreation of ground with a wide variety of activities is vital to a child's emotional, cognitive, social and physical development. Community gardens are also a popular choice when creating a mini park. It serves a variety of purposes for the people who utilize them. It unites all ages of residents of community in different outdoor activities. It also contributes in growth of community solidarity and neighbourhood revitalization.

There are many benefits of mini parks. Some of them are:

- It supports overall ecology of the surrounding environment;
- It helps in protecting and conserving landscape, local wildlife, and heritage;
- It allows the residents to make decisions that affect their community;
- To an extent, it also makes the communities safer and more sociable;
- It directly impacts in improving the health and fitness of citizens;
- It helps in reinforcing relationships between local authorities and communities; and
- Indirectly it also reduces traffic, pollution, and consumption of resources, such as fuel, oil and so on.

V. CASE STUDIES OF MINI PARKS

A. Paley Park, New York, USA

It is the successful example among mini parks across the globe. It is located in the Midtown district of New York, surrounded by high rise buildings. The location is adjacent to a street that attracts people who pass by as they can directly enter this space. There is a waterfall in this mini park. It is providing aesthetically, a pleasing view. There are movable chairs and tables so that people can freely choose their spot to sit and meet their colleagues and friends. This park is owned by William S. Paley Foundation. This type of mini-park concept in existence proves that creating space for relaxation in a limited space is important and invited among citizens.



Fig. 2: Paley Park (Project for Public Spaces, Paley Park, 2013)

B. Mini Park in Higashi-Ikebukuro, Tokyo

Ikebukuro is located in the neighbourhood of Tokyo in Japan. There are about 11 mini parks within the city of Tokyo. These are, Mo-Mo Park, Sun-Sun Park, Sawayaka Park, Hoshifuru Park, GataGata Park, Namazu Park, Shiki-No-Hana Park, Chinju-No-Mori Park, Fujisan Park, Nikko Park, and Higasa Park. The Purpose of these parks is to make a provision of an escape during an earthquake and at times of emergencies. These parks uniquely also serve for underground water tanks and allied infrastructure. Apart from emergency rescue spaces, these parks are serving as a meeting point for the community and space for realization.



Fig. 3: Mini parks in Higashi-Ikebukuro (Snow, 2007)

C. Ghost Train Park, Lima

In earlier days, the structure was existing in the space where the park is established now. A project of electric train was under construction here but, with some of adverse circumstances the project was mid-way scrapped-off. Since then, instead demolishing the construction was left out. With a consideration to increase the physical activities the space is converted into a mini park and given a name as “Ghost Train Park”. It has lot of equipment of games that are made up using recycled materials such as car-tyres and other car parts. The location of this park is in the mid of Lima city that is bustling with traffic. However, it does not reduce the enthusiasm of park users. The park, uniquely creates opportunities for interactions among people.



Fig. 4: Ghost Train Park (Basurama, USW Lima Ghost Train Park, 2011)

VI. COMPARISON OF DIFFERENT PARKS

The section deals with some basic comparison of these parks. Basic parameter among discussion include the information about the location, area of park, population of city, available facilities within the park, management related aspect and so on. Below table show the collation of mini-parks.

Name of park	<i>Paley Park, New York, USA</i>	<i>Higashi-Ikebukuro, Tokyo, Japan</i>	<i>Ghost train park, Basurama, Lima, Spain</i>
Location	<i>In business area on vacant land</i>	<i>Neighborhood park in left space</i>	<i>Unused railroad tracks</i>
Space using for park	<i>0.00039 km²</i>	<i>0.94 km²</i>	<i>10 km²</i>
Population	<i>8.406 million</i>	<i>13.35 million</i>	<i>8.85 million</i>
Maintenance	<i>Private</i>	<i>By neighborhood members</i>	<i>Local Government</i>
Facilities	<i>Movable chairs and tables</i>	<i>Sitting area</i>	<i>Games for children and also for adults</i>
Initiatives of project	<i>Private</i>	<i>By community members</i>	<i>By community members</i>
Type	<i>Community Gardens</i>	<i>Community Gardens</i>	<i>Playgrounds</i>

Table 1: Comparison analysis of different parks

From the above, it is revealed that some are community Gardens and some are playgrounds which are basically, the type of mini parks. Private organizations as well as the community members along with local Government are taking initiatives for creation of these parks. Results of such parks are focussed mainly to increase the physical activity in the urban settlement. And, most importantly, these parks are within a walkable distance to community and provide space for interaction among citizens.

VII. RELEVANCE OF MINI-PARKS IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Prior to discuss over a proposal in relevancy to create parks on the concept of mini-parks, authors attempted to explore the scenario in the developed cities in India. It has been observed that the cities, despite having issued a development plan – URDPFI guidelines (with a mention of parks having a land use of maximum of 10%). However, by the time urban areas are transformed in to overwhelming economic activities and evolve as a metropolitan, the land allocation for the purpose of parks/gardens reduces. Below table show a land use percentage for some of the major cities in India, where the share of parks/garden spaces are observed to be reduced.

Major city	Land use/land cover	percentage
<i>Bangalore(2011)</i>	<i>Parks/garden/public-semi public</i>	<i>3.01</i>
<i>Jaipur (1991)</i>	<i>Waste land</i>	<i>4.10</i>
<i>Hydrabad (2001)</i>	<i>Parks/garden/public-semi public</i>	<i>7.07</i>
<i>Surat (2015)</i>	<i>Open space</i>	<i>2.54</i>
<i>Ahemdabad (2011)</i>	<i>Agricultural/recreational/open space/ gardens</i>	<i>8.61</i>

Table 2: Parks/ Garden spaces in Major cities of India (Nidhi & M, 2014)

Such a verdict on parks/gardens in major cities, depicts a prime need to identify pockets within a city where mini-parks can be developed. This activity shall be performed prior the city observe development at larger extent. The abandoned space of projects can be best utilized for the purpose of mini-park. Herewith, a proposal of such idea is discussed in further section.

VIII. PROPOSAL EXPLORATION FOR MINI PARKS IN GOA

Sky-bus metro was proposed for Hyderabad route in Goa state. It was tested initially for a track in 2005 within the city of Marmugao (also famous as Margao), Goa. However, with occurrence of an accidental event in which three employees working on the project, died. Based on this ill-event, further considering the safety of citizens, the State Government of Andhra Pradesh scrapped-off the project and the constructed remains were left as it were. Partially some parts of the tracks were constructed and was used for local transit within the city (Quora, 2011). Till date, the remains and ruins of the elevated corridor of the sky-bus metro tracks that are passing from within the city, are exiting with no use. The track can be well-utilized for creating relaxing spaces in form of mini-parks following an example of Ghost Train Park. It also can serve a purpose of a memorial for an ambitious state-of-art project undertaken that was left half-done in memory of the dyed workers.



Fig. 5: Sky-bus metro ruins in Margao, Goa
(Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/joegoauk73/9452162214/in/photostream/>)

IX. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As a crux of the review of diverse literature based conceptual proposal exploration, following important remarks are conclusive:

- Based on the discussions above, it can be noted that the provision of mini-parks is possible within a limited space. It can provide a green space for community and also a boosting reason to increase the physical activity of urban citizens along with recreation and social interaction.
- Creation and maintenance of mini-parks is possible with exploiting private as well as public resources. In that terms such parks offer a very flexible option.
- Looking to indian context, there lies a scope for introducing the informal economic activities to an extent that can also add in the economic upliftment of the citizens.

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