

'Utsadhara': Rejuvenating the Dead River Edge into an Urban Activity Space along the Banks of River Hooghly

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Abstract : West Bengal has a number of important rivers, each with its distinctive character and a story. Traditionally, cities have 'divulged' to rivers at the river edges and rivers have been an inseparable part of the urban experience. Considering the research aspect, the area is taken in Barrackpore, a small but important outgrowth of Kolkata Municipal Association, West Bengal. Barrackpore, at present, has ample inadequate public open spaces at the neighborhood level where people of different socio-cultural, economic, and religious backgrounds can come together and engage in various leisure activities, but there is no opportunity either, where people can learn about and explore the rich history of the settlement. Pertaining to these issues forms the backdrop of this research paper which has been conceptualized as a place from space that will bring people back to the river and increase community interactions and will also celebrate and commemorate towards the historical importance of the river and its edges. The entire precinct bordering the river represents the transition from pre-independence (Raj era) to Sepoy phase (Swaraj era), finally culminating into the Gandhian philosophy which is being projected into the already existing Gandhi Ghat. The ultimate aim of the paper entitled 'Utsadhara- Rejuvenating the dead river edge into an urban activity space along the banks of river Hooghly' is to create a socio-cultural space keeping the heritage identity intact through judicious use of the water body. Also, a balance is kept between the natural ecosystem and the cosmetic development of the surrounding open spaces. It can be duly achieved by the aforementioned methodology provided in the document, but mainly it would focus into preserving the historic ethnicity of the place by holding its character through various facts and figures as well as features. Most importantly the natural topography of the place is left intact. The second priority is given in terms of hierarchy of well connected public plazas, podiums where people from different socio-economic backgrounds irrespective of age and sex could socialize and reach towards venturing into a cordial relationship with one another. The third priority is to provide a platform for the common mass for showcasing their skills and talent through different art and craft forms which in turn would enhance their individual self and also the community as a whole through economic rise. Apart from this here some spaces are created in accordance to different age groups or class of people. The paper intends to see the river as a major multifunctional public space to attract people for different activities and re-establish the relationship of the river with the settlement. Hence, it is apprehended that the paper is not only intended to a simple riverfront conservation project but unlike others it is a place which is created for the people, by the people and of the people towards a holistic community development through a sustainable approach.

Keywords : holistic community development, public activity space, river-urban precinct, urban dead space

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