

A Review of Urban Renewal in High Density Cities

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Abstract - Actually, the urban problems like space-scarcity, explosive population growth etc. of city is generally well-known to each and every regional planner of India. Fortunately, the challenges have been accepted by the State and Central Governments and today a satisfactory number of projects are being implemented to upgrade city's overall infrastructure (Ghosh, 1987). Urban renewal or urban regeneration is a process of land redevelopment in areas of prior, moderately to high, dense urban land use (Bapat, 1996). It has a mammoth impact on the urban panorama and morphology of different cities. And transformation is the single most consistent factor in the life of city. In India there is an amazing amalgamation of infrastructure from several centuries in the form of haphazardly built layers of urban fabric under which the common urbanite of India feels suffocated and crushed. Unlike their western counterparts the India urban settlements never had the fortune of being reduced as ruins of war and thereby necessitating the need for the fresh development and renewal. This paper attempts to highlight the understanding of the concept of urban renewal.

Key Words: Urban Renewal, Urban Redevelopment, Transformation of land use, Slum clearance, Transformation and Urban, Urban regeneration, Redevelopment and neighbourhood intervention.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban renewal can be traced back to the earliest days of urban development, and was noted by those who witnessed the overcrowded condition of 19th century in London, New York, Paris and other major cities of the developed world affected by the industrial revolution (Holcomb and Beauregard, 1981). This is a programmed of land use and has both successes and failures (Nelson, 1988). It involves the relocation of businesses, the demolition of structures, the relocation of people, and the use of eminent domain as a legal instrument to take private property for city-initiated development projects. This process when carried out in rural areas is referred to as village renewal, though may not be exactly the same in practice.

Urban renewal is a process that rehabilitate the urban areas through physical change and other comprehensive plans in order to cope with urban decay and achieve varied socioeconomic goals (Adams & Hastings, 2001; Couch, 1990; Lee & Chan, 2008). Nowadays, urban renewal plays a more and more critical role in our urban life, including improving physical quality and living environment, meeting housing demands, ensuring energy conservation and emission reduction, promoting regional economic development, enhancing existing community social network, providing more

employment and education opportunities (Bäing & Wong, 2012; E. Chan & Lee, 2008; Ng, 2005; Winston, 2010).

Indian experience of urban renewal is fairly recent, though several cities, particularly metropolises, have been attempting to tackle the problem of decline and dilapidation through ad-hoc initiatives. In diverse and complex nature of Indian society, problems are different, contexts differ, needs change, and therefore, policies and programme to deal with each city and town would also differ. For example, urban renewal of Jaipur city would be conservation and restoration of its cultural heritage of being a pink city while in Delhi it would be of effective use of traditional core areas or in Calcutta it would revolve around the phenomenon of bastis as providing ameliorative measures. Basically, it can be at macro level like redevelopment of inner-city core or at micro scale like traffic operation plan, conservation of old buildings and up gradation of services, depending upon the character or issues of town or a city.

The recent launching of Jawaharlal Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) is a landmark in the history of post independent urban planning scenario as it has brought in a paradigm shift in the role of government from provider to facilitator.

The JNNURM has two sub missions first the urban infrastructure and second the basic services for urban poor. Under such circumstances it is really important to identify appropriate intervention. The inner city seems to be suitable cases of renewal. The present research aims to identify and prioritize the areas for Urban Renewal and develop a logical framework to support and reinforce the conventional instinct based decisions for the appropriation of desired method i.e. renewal, redevelopment, renewal and redevelopment both or none for given neighbourhood unit. The focus is on understanding the urbanization system and its impact on urban areas for consideration under the Urban Renewal. It also tries to understand how the factors (Physical, social and economic) and determinants (housing, road, water supply, sewage, storm water drainage, social infrastructure transport, solid waste management environmental condition, residential satisfaction, sense of community, willingness to improve living condition) play a prominent role in renewal or redevelopment.

1.1 Negative Impacts Generated from High Density

A commercial development mainly concentrates around, whereas residential developments are scattered over the territory. Hence, citizen commuting between home and work is a common phenomenon. Traffic congestion can easily be observed when the transportation network is overloaded,

especially during the peak hours. The air pollution and noise pollution are direct results of additional traffic and heavy transportation load. That explains why the air pollutant index always stands at high level/extremely high level in cities and the residents living next to busy roads or railways are exposed to noise levels over 75 db throughout the day. Apart from air and noise pollution, urban areas with intensive commercial and residential development are also heavily polluted by light. Heat island effect is another common feature of high-density development that adversely affects local citizens' health and the natural environment.

Urban areas can easily be heated up by emissions from the combustion of carbon-based fossil fuels for the generation of energy, hydration process of building materials, and various human activities, e.g., cooking, and operation of automobiles and air conditioning units. In addition, such form of development can significantly change the microclimate of urban areas, which greatly influence the human comfort of the occupants. The recent high-rise and high-density residential developments in the territory form barriers to wind flow that inhibit natural cooling by convection, worsen heat island effect, and cause contamination of pollutants like dust and car exhaust between buildings and wind-tunnel effects on streets and in public spaces. Dense development of buildings also reduces the penetration of natural lighting into the roads, streets, pedestrian walkways, and other common areas; therefore, public places at lower and ground level are usually darker.

Although the Government attempted to adopt urban renewal to rectify the negative impacts of high-density development on the built environment, the effectiveness of the renewal programs previously conducted was not noticeable as many of them were uncoordinated, sporadic, and profit based. Those practices not only worsened the existing built environment, but also adversely affected the way of life of the citizens. To ensure that urban renewal projects can effectively improve the built environment, researchers and the Government highly recommend integrating sustainability concepts into urban renewal process.

1.2 Dimension of Urban Renewal

Different definitions given by planners, academicians and researchers aim at sustainability by integrating the different dimensions of urban renewal. These are:

- Physical renewal leads to improvement of urban fabric;
- Social renewal leads to improvement of community and housing;
- Cultural renewal promotes enhancement of culture and traditions;
- Economic renewal leads to new generation of employment and revenue; and
- Environmental renewal leads to minimizing ecological imbalances in urban environment.

Urban renewal is a dynamic term, which is evolved with reference to transformations of city and its economy. It refers to the various attempts to reverse the decline in cities that have been worst hit by the capitalist urbanization. Most of the cities have large blighted areas, with severe stress on the existing, aged infrastructure and services. Many of them have lost businesses, and are functioning at sub-optimal productivity levels. Notwithstanding the valuable land on which such areas stand, they contribute little to city finances. Maintaining them in their present state without any returns has become a liability. It is important also to recognize that renewal embraces more holistic perspectives such as economic and social improvement. Urban renewal

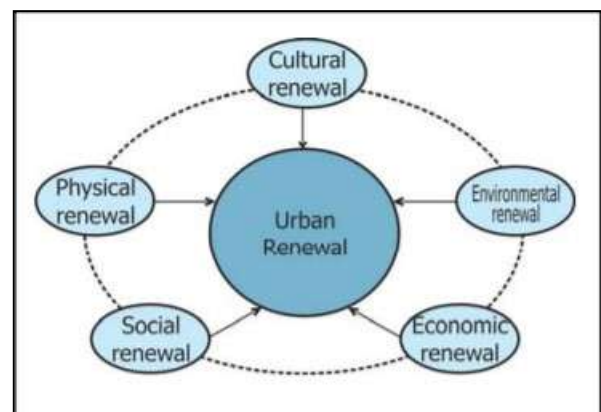


Figure: 1 Dimension of Urban Renewal

Seeks ways to improve disadvantaged places and the lives of people who live and work there. Regeneration and renewal activities are varied and may reflect joined-up holistic or relatively less integrated programmes of physical, social and economic change.

Aims of urban renewal

The aims of urban renewal in Nigeria are as listed below:

- Improvements of urban environment and infrastructure by the provision of more open space, community and other facilities.
- Improvements of urban layouts, road networks and other infrastructure.
- The replacement or renovation of obsolete buildings.
- Thinning out of development and population densities to reduce the strain on overburdened transport and other infrastructure.
- Making land available to meet various uses such as housing, industrial, commercial, tourism and transportation.
- Redeveloping a particular area in order to act as a catalyst for the redevelopment of neighbouring areas by private developers.

2. Principles/Methods of Urban Renewal

According to Miller (1959) three principles/methods of urban renewal are:

Redevelopment

This consists of the removal of existing buildings and the re-use of cleared land for the implementation of new projects. Redevelopment leads to the destruction of badly needed housing units and it does not prevent slums from reappearing in other parts of the city. It also contributes to the impoverishment of the original residents by reduction of job opportunities, as resettlement areas are usually located outside of the city proper (Mirbod, 1984). This approach is applicable to areas in which buildings are in seriously deteriorated condition and have no preservation value, or in which the arrangement of buildings is such that the area cannot provide satisfactory living conditions. In such cases, demolition and reconstruction, of whole blocks or of small sections, is often thought to be the only solution to ensure future comfort and safety of the residents.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation, often termed conservation or preservation, is based on preserving, repairing, and restoring the natural and man-made environments of existing neighborhoods. It is applicable to areas where buildings are generally in structurally sound condition but have deteriorated because of neglected maintenance. It takes advantage of the existing housing stock as a valuable resource and adapts old houses to present day life and acceptable standards by providing modern facilities (Zhu, 1989). Rehabilitation recognizes that the limited availability of funds for new construction and the serious housing shortage make the option of destroying already-existing housing appear both unaffordable and imprudent. It recognizes the value of old neighborhoods and, by preserving what is unique, ancient, and specifically local, it can also contribute to the development of the tourism, industry and stimulate the economy. However, many people do not consider rehabilitation to be a realistic approach because of the technical difficulties and the amount of work and research involved. Rehabilitation is often perceived as a complex and time-consuming process which is more difficult to implement than redevelopment. It requires a high degree of social organization and social responsibility, as well as a total reorganization of the housing process.

Integration

The method of urban renewal referred to as integration, views rehabilitation and redevelopment as complementary forces and combines the best aspects of both approaches. It consists of rehabilitation of what can realistically be saved, combined with reconstruction of new buildings in place of those beyond the reach of feasible rehabilitation (Yu, 1988). Integration is considered today to be the most acceptable way to regenerate old neighborhoods. It allows for flexible project implementation which can preserve the traditional urban

environment and its human scale while achieving respectable densities. It respects the social order of the community by rehousing the majority of the original residents on the site and invites mass participation. Integration results in the creation of rich environments through the integration of new buildings within the existing neighborhoods and allows for the development of a new form of contemporary architecture with local characteristics, enriching the appearance of the old city while maintaining its identity.

Benefits of Urban Renewal

These are as enumerated below:

- i. It improves quality of life in the city;
- ii. It may increase density and reduce sprawl;
- iii. It improves the global economic competitiveness of a city centre;
- iv. It improves cultural and social amenity and
- v. It may also improve opportunities for safety and surveillance (Olawepo, 2010; Yu, 1988).

3. CONCLUSIONS

Indian cities in history emerged with two primary characteristics first - a high density of population concentrated within a limited space and second a predominantly non-agricultural, particularly noncultivation occupation of these people. Indians by and large have been nature oriented rather than city oriented. The report of the National Commission on Urbanization made commendable proposals to change the paradigm of urban planning to become more responsive to the existing urban condition, but without success.

There is absence of holistic and integrated approach in understanding the term urban renewal. The six dimensions of urban renewal should be integrated focusing at quality of life. The prevailing planning tool, master plan, does not incorporate the integrated concept of renewal.

The concept of renewal was restricted to conservation of heritage sites in early master plan of metro cities. No specific efforts were made for development of heritage zones. Even the present urban renewal mission is more inclined towards provision of infrastructure rather than renewal. The redevelopment is taking place only on the prime locations of the cities occupied by slums without proper social and economic interventions resulting into displacement of slums.

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