



## USER POINT PERSPECTIVE AS A PROCESS FOR URBAN (RE)DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF RIVERFRONT CBD IN KHULNA CITY

Falguni Mallick<sup>1</sup>; Md. Ali Naqi<sup>2</sup>; A. K. M. Kausarul Islam<sup>1\*</sup> and Sheikh Serajul Hakim<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Architecture Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna 9208

<sup>2</sup>Department of Architecture, Stamford University, Dhaka

KUS-07/07-030507

Manuscript received: May 03, 2007; Accepted: June 28, 2008

**Abstract:** Khulna is an industrial city of Bangladesh which experienced the migration of people from surrounding areas for better scope of job and living. Over the years, some parts of the city have become over populated as some others have been left rather under or un-utilized. Current situation indicates that the present development authority has little control over the land use or economic activity in this area. High cost of land, poor institutional management, absence of a clear national land policy and lack of co-ordination between government agencies have made development programs more challenging. So far no legislative decision has been taken to meet the current problems of land ownership. Now it is felt that an integrated participatory program might give some directions towards a sustainable approach to mitigate this crisis. Collaboration between public service providing institutions might bring positive results to the community. This research is an inquiry of the degree of acceptability of local stakeholders towards any redevelopment program of this old CBD, historically situated by the river *Bhairab*. At the same time, it intends to find out the potential target group(s) to be involved in the development program.

**Key words:** Urban redevelopment, riverfront CBD, participatory approach

### Introduction

It is said that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the century of cities. Cities are moving centre stages themselves – both the commercial and cultural worlds are now increasingly characterised by cities rather than by countries. Therefore, it is in cities that the future quality of people's life is determined. The crucial questions are the same everywhere – How urban development (or redevelopment) policies could be outlined and implemented in a way that every stakeholder may share in economic and social progress and how they could contribute in culturally diversified environment and participate democratically in shaping up where they live. Though cities differ significantly from each other, they share one general ambition in the context of sustainable urban development – enhancing their economic competitiveness while at the same time reducing both social exclusion and environmental degradation (Stewart, 2007). Cities of all sizes, locations and conditions face this dilemma and share the need to develop new decision-making processes to reconcile deficiencies.

\* Corresponding author: < riaz\_ku@yahoo.com >  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53808/KUS.2008.9.1.0707-E>

**Overview of the study area:** Khulna is the third largest city in Bangladesh with an estimated population of 1.58 million as of the end of 2006 (Brinkhoff, 2006). Historically, it has grown along the river *Bhairab*<sup>†</sup>. After six hundred years of *Muslim* rule, this region came under the British authority in 1781 and a salt *Chowki* (guard post) was set up by the salt agency at *Koilaghat* of Khulna. With its prosperous move forward during the British, Khulna was declared as a municipality in 1884 (after Calcutta-Jessore railway was extended to Khulna) and a railstation was established near the study area in 1904. Better navigation facilities through the rivers *Bhairab* and *Rupsha* profusely contributed to the rapid growth of the city. During late 50's and early 60's, Khulna became an important centre for industrial activities. Following a communal riot in Kolkata in 1965, many Muslim immigrants from India settled here and Hindus left the city. Apart from them, massive rural migrants came from the adjacent districts in search of jobs to become active participants of the industrial growth of this city.

Because of its location along the rivers *Bhairab* and *Rupsha*, Khulna has always been at an advantageous position for industrialization which made it important and helped to thrive economically. The study area is bordered on the east by the river *Bhairab* (A), on the west by the *K. D. Ghosh* Road and station road (B), on the north by the Power house-Rail Station road (C) and on the south by Sir *Iqbal* road (D) (Fig. 4). This area has been designated by Khulna City Corporation as 'Ward-21' with an area of about 299 acres. It features an unmistakable pattern of mixed-use development with low to medium height structures whose major portion of the ground floor is used as shops, offices, warehouses, etc. while the upper floors as residences, providing refuge to both landowners and tenants. Most of the structures here are old, built on small lots and currently under dilapidated condition. Being served by the river, this has been the busiest commercial area of Khulna city. Narrow roads, absence of footpath, squatting by the vendors on roadsides and numerous vehicles (driven by both man and machine) have rendered the area very connected

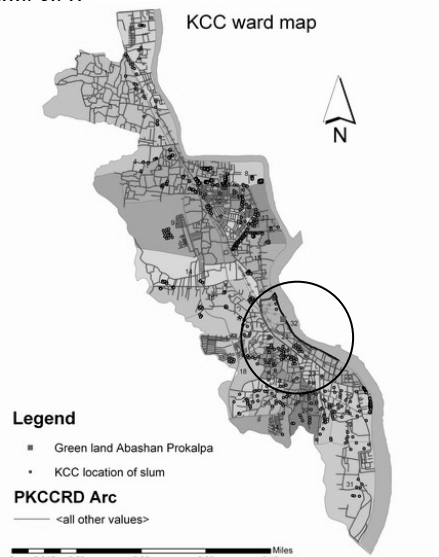


Fig. 1. . Khulna City Master Plan, circle shows the study area. (Source: KDA, 2005)



Fig. 2 Congested road without any footpath is usually swarmed with men and vehicle in the study area. The photograph shows a typical scene at *Borobazar* main street in the afternoon. (Source: Author)

<sup>†</sup> *Bhairab* runs along the length of Khulna city while *Rupsha* is the name of a particular segment of it.

There is almost no tree and no open green space for the inhabitants to breathe or take a stroll. The overall environment has deteriorated to the extent that the area by all means is not suitable for proper human habitation.

**Statement of the problem**

In early days the river used to be the main mode of transport as Khulna city faced the river in a way that the riverbank made up the front. Passengers and goods used to land directly on the bank, which acted as an animated frontage for the buildings and structures on the bank. Now a days a major share of passengers and goods were carried out by roads which are on the other side of these buildings and structures. In addition, goods brought by the river needed to be carried out by roads and vice versa. Concurrently the owners of these buildings hold their possessions on the riverbank and divided it into individual plots. This was actually a division of economy, culture and life-style which gave birth of numerous hazards like unlawful encroachment, corruption, environmental pollution, wastage of resources etc. It also brought about significant changes in the overall environment of this area. Some of the problems are:

- The structures on the riverbank act as barriers, isolating the two transport modes, i.e. the waterway and the roadway.
- The fronts of the structures were changed dramatically where the previous river front turned to the less important rear side.
- Due to this partitioning the riverbank became inaccessible and thus lost attraction.

It is curious to note that the number of land owners in the riverfront area is numerous. They are, e.g. Bangladesh Railway (BR), Khulna Development Authority (KDA), Khulna City Corporation (KCC), Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), private owners, joint owners and numerous societies. Due to the complication of multi ownership, the urban authorities were not successful to execute their planning and development schemes in the area. In this area the owner, user and controller of the land are different persons or organizations and there is lack of integration between them. It has resulted in an absence of attention on its maintenance and organized development.

**Scopes of the study:** Redevelopment of an area is a natural phenomenon, because the needs and aspirations of man changes with time. The master plan prepared by the bureaucratic authorities with their assessed future needs has often been found deviated from the ever-changing need of man. This reality has initiated the concept for the need for participatory program in which the comments, suggestions and active roles of the inhabitants are incorporated in the development program. The old part of Khulna city, which used to be the nucleus and the centre of the entire city, has lost some of its earlier glamour and importance. Historically this area played an important role in developing socio-economic and cultural environment of the city. Present infrastructural development initiatives implemented failed to create a sustainable living condition in the old CBD. The City Mayor admitted that Khulna city is not developing in a planned way. Since buildings and other infrastructures are growing in a chaotic manner and this would finally create insoluble problems. He also feared that if this unplanned development goes on the city would become too congested and unsuitable for living in next decade (Islam, 2006).

In this context, it would be rational to regenerate such a potential area for the betterment of maximum number of people with least expenses and trouble and within the soonest possible time. This study is likely to provide a basis for a feasible and realistic future redevelopment scheme. Prior to that an empirical study concerning on resolving the following elementary quarries is of utmost necessary.

1. Who are the users?
2. What are the existing conditions of the site in relation to the user's perceptions and urban fabric?
3. How can the users get involved in this (re)development process?

**User point perspective: the other name for participatory approach:** Participatory approach towards (re)development can be termed as an intermediate path which allows systematization and technical analysis of existing information, the collection of the unknown information, and incorporation of the views of the public and private sectors in the study area (Mazzucchelli, 1995).

In urban regeneration, a paradigm shift has been observed from a 'top-down' techno-bureaucratic approach to a 'bottom-up' collaborative participatory approach. The last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century have been marked by a worldwide explosion in urban regeneration processes, with the main objective to revitalize inner city areas, especially old historic centres (Fernandez and Pleyan, 2000). Participatory design for community development emerged from research projects by the third world scholars, social organizers and educators and the term 'participatory planning' first appeared in the mid-eighties regarding low-income housing in the third world countries (Lee and Jachna, 2006).

During the preparation and planning phase of this (re)development, it needs to be thorough in order to avoid the possibility of having to introduce expensive alterations at a later stage...this introduces an element of transparency from which mutual trust starts to begin among stakeholders. Involvement of stakeholders helps the process of consensus building and decision making among various actors of society to find solutions that contribute towards economic development and social equity while enhancing people's quality of life (Murayama, 2005). The purpose of this preparatory approach draws together the key physical, social and economic factors to define and develop proposals for the development of the site, which will respond to the needs of the stakeholders and have long-term sustainability. The process for achieving sustainable mixed use development is, therefore, largely based around a participatory approach (DFID, 2000<sub>a</sub>).

Participatory approach is a global phenomenon these days since it sets the (re)development trend among all continents of the world encompassing a range of aspects. This covers notions like preservation of sites and structures that bear identity and continuity of a place (Yuen, 2005), regeneration of historic yet dilapidated areas at city centres (Fernandez and Pleyan, 2000), revitalize squatter settlements (DFID, 2000<sub>b</sub>), the growth of urban forestry (Wilmsen, 2005), redevelopment of brown-field sites (Stewart, 2007) and so on.

This study concentrates on the potentials of participatory (re)development policies by the riverfront CBD with special attention to various groups in the community. Identification of the most potential groups in of the study area is the primary focus of this research. The objectives of this study are:

1. To assess the perspectives and feasibilities of users participation in urban development process.
2. To analyze the character and extent of participatory development and the form of organization in which it should be operated.

### **Materials and Methods**

In the light of previous discussions, the following processes of study<sup>‡</sup> have been followed to achieve the objectives: Literature survey was conducted to bring together initial resources and there after a pilot survey was conducted to evaluate the applicability of the questionnaire for the research. After pilot survey final questionnaire was formulated and conducted amongst 250 respondents in the study area. Stratified random sampling method was adopted to ensure inclusion of different user groups in the survey. A photographic documentation of the selected area has also been accomplished to support the field survey. Finally the collected data was analysed using MS-Excel.

### **Results**

The results presented here have been sourced absolutely according to the questionnaire survey described in the previous section. Endeavours have been made to realize the probable contributions of participatory approach towards solving the problems of current urban environmental crisis of *Boro Bazar* CBD:

**The built environment:** This area is parallel to the *Bhairab* River that runs east-west; and the development here has been linear historically. Squatters characterize this area which seriously lacks in breathing space for its inhabitants. There is vacant land though, not properly interlaced or

---

<sup>‡</sup> A study conducted with assistance from Khulna University Research Cell where the chief researchers were Falguni Mallick and Md.Ali Naqi.

connected with congested areas to act as breathing space. Here the structures are built side by side (like row houses), closely knit, leaving minimum or no gap between them. Most of the newer, non-permanent structures are densely arranged in the presence of a number of old buildings (Fig. 3). Some of the old ones might be considered as important pieces of history associated with the development of this area if the area is to be redeveloped. Pedestrian on the main street of *Boro Bazar* cannot enjoy riverside walking even. Squats along river bank make it impossible to feel that one is so near to the river.



Fig. 3. One of many old and historic structures located in the Boro Bazar area. (Source: Author)

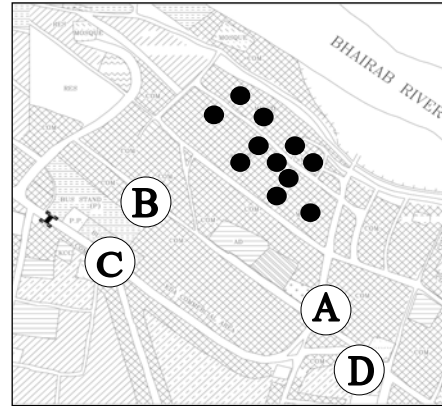


Fig. 4. Part of Khulna City Master Plan, Dots show concentration of mixed-use buildings. (Source: KDA, 2002)

**Land use pattern:** The area is dominated by mixed-use<sup>§</sup> development, a pattern common to any other riverfront cities in the world as Kostof suggests (Kostof, 1992). Shops and warehouses (with accommodations on the higher floors) swarm this area to prove the dominance of mixed-use mode of development (Fig. 6). Characteristics of this area demonstrate its commercial significance.



Fig. 5. Dominant mixed-use development Shops at the ground level and residences at upper levels at middle of the day.

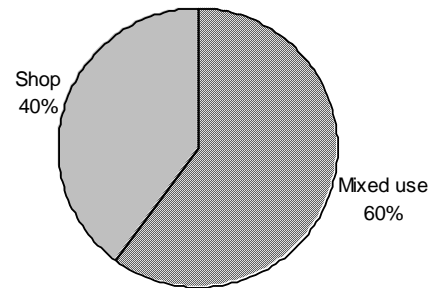


Fig. 6. Current land use pattern around in *Boro Bazar*.

<sup>§</sup> The term *Mixed-use development* is used to describe areas with modest sites and buildings that have grown incrementally or been allowed to develop in city centres with flexibility to meet the changing needs of individual landowners, occupiers and tenants whether commercial or residential (DFID, 2000<sub>b</sub>).

**Land ownership pattern:** Only 24% of the total users here are land owners and remaining 76% are tenants. For some plots, there are still legal complexities regarding ownership. For this area, ownership of land mostly belongs to Khulna City Corporation (KCC), Bangladesh Railway (BR), Khulna Development Authority (KDA) and similar public service rendering authorities.

**Owner, user and controller relationship:** Among the total land owners 88% users are members of different associations like co-operatives, shop/market owners etc. Different regulatory bodies like KCC, KDA and BR are already involved with the so-called development of this area. But there remains a sense of mistrust and insecurity amongst general people about their present and future roles. On the other hand, these agencies are doubtful on any dialogue among them as it is a highly sensitive and political environment.

**Potential partners and degree of involvement in development:** Users of this area have been found very interested to participate in different development (Fig. 14). However, they prefer that the initiator of this program should be local government agencies e.g. KCC.

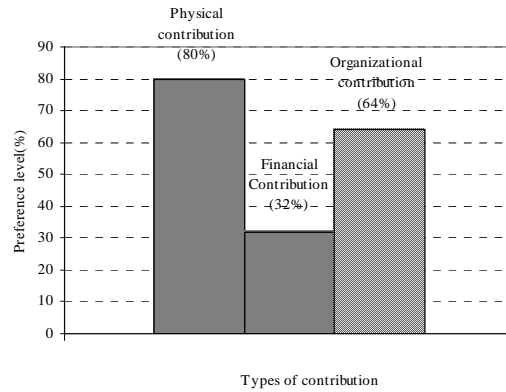


Fig. 7. Extent of preferred participation in development process.

**Infrastructure:** Users are generally satisfied with the supply of electricity but complained about insufficient and polluted water that is usually supplied to the area. The disposal of both storm water and household sewerage (Fig. 10) has been mentioned as other problems as well; the area often gets waterlogged even after a moderately heavy rainfall.

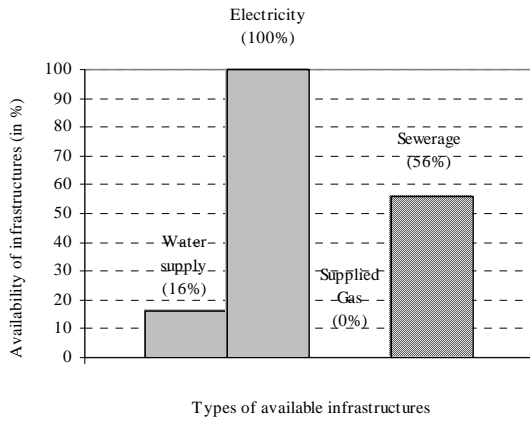


Fig. 8. Users response on satisfaction about infrastructure within Boro Bazar area.



Fig. 9. Sewage dumped into the Bhairab River

**Accessibility:** Narrow width of roads in combination with illegal occupancy on roads and footpaths (by hawkers and adjacent land/shop-owners) is the main reason for poor accessibility which eventually generates sustained traffic congestion in this area. Almost all the respondents were concerned about inaccessibility of this area and argued on its development for better liveability and business.

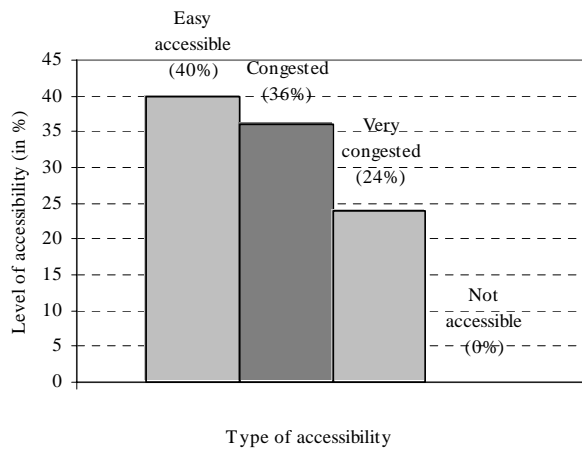


Fig. 10. Accessibility condition in the study area.



Fig. 11. Narrow access road at Boro Bazar.

**Barriers in (re)development:** The respondents identified shortage of fund as most considerable barrier that impede development. Management problems and legal complexities are also acknowledged as other major barriers. There are other local problems which might be resolved

through active participation of the local people in collaboration with various development agencies.

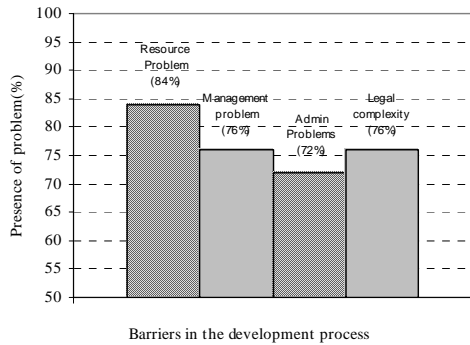


Fig.12. Major barriers against development.



Fig.13. Illegal occupancy along roads.

**Policy guidelines for further initiatives:** Gottdiener (1991) describes, “Policy making is not simply a matter of choosing a reasonable course of action; it is shaped by the composition of the governing coalition, the terms that underlie the cooperation of coalition members with one another, and the resources they are capable of assembling”. On the other hand, development and growth should not be confused with each other as Blowers (1993) suggests. In defining sustainable development, public participation during or prior to design and implementation is one of the most important factors (Moughtin, 1999).

To restore this commercially important area with its past glory, some sustainable redevelopment measures need to be taken and those should not hamper growth and incorporate people’s participation. Considering all these, the following guidelines are suggested for further initiatives:

**Built environment:** The policy framework should be revised in a way that prioritize bringing the river back to life again to impart characteristics to overall built environment. It could be achieved by creating a possible connection between the river and public spaces. New uses could be induced to rivers to rejuvenate the dilapidated frontage into a vibrant and active one.

Now, it is well known to all that the influences of globalization have fostered the rise of heritage (also in form of built environment) conservation as a growing need to preserve the past, both for continued economic growth and for strengthening national cultural identity (Yuen, 2005). It is, for this reason, allowing ordinary people’s interpretations and recommendations during the probable conservation of the historic structures of this study area should ensure long term sustainability for the overall built environment. Again, physical decline and the necessity of redevelopment are never-ending challenges for built communities (Koebel, 1996). For our case, this bottom-up approach would allow people to take decisions on selecting the areas to be redeveloped, revitalized, regenerated or used to what extent according to their own interest. Thus it would help images and meaning of a place to replenish.

**Land use and ownership:** The process for achieving sustainable mixed-use development in core areas is largely based around a participatory approach (DFID, 2000<sub>a</sub>). Our study area being of the same kind and the redevelopment policy should be participatory approach. Involving various stakeholders\*\* ensures that they develop a collective aim. For achieving the goal all the government agencies (KCC, KDA, BR etc) are to be considered since they are the lawful owners

\*\* Typical stakeholders like that of this study area could be - land owner(s), people with other forms of tenure on site, people who live on/near site, potential developers and investors, local leaders of communities, local authorities and urban planning agencies, govt. funding agencies, NGOs (and foreign funding agencies), representatives from political parties, public utility service providers (DFID, 2000<sub>a</sub>).

for most of these lands. On the other hand, tenants (including the smaller percentage of private owners) are also to be consulted with since their attachment to these lands is far greater both socially and economically than the lawful owners. However, the sense of insecurity within the tenants must be resolved as soon as possible by sorting out a realistic solution towards making land allotment within a legal framework. The ownership of land has to be dealt with utmost concern.

**Potential partners' involvement towards overcoming barriers:** Nowadays planning is about efficiency and achieving optimum utility out of the available resources by adopting a more cyclic approach that encourages stakeholders' participation and takes effect largely through the operations of government (Grant, 2002). Government is the foremost promoter for any redevelopment; it could take any form - through public development or through public assistance of private redevelopment (Koebel, 1996). As this survey reveals, people still believe in the governments' capability to play the role of facilitator among people and other interested stakeholders rather the roles of initiator and executor. For redeveloping an unsustainable urban condition, partners from a host of disciplines must also be able to communicate and share knowledge with the people who plan, construct, finance, operate, and live in the neighbourhood. All the stakeholders who are likely to contribute to overcome barriers (resource, management, legal or administrative – as mentioned previously) must act collectively with other stakeholders in the presence of government agencies.

**Owner, user and controller relationship:** Urban renewal processes are politically complex because they typically involve an intricate network of stakeholders striving to achieve their own ambitions and protect their individual interests. The process of planning about how a neighbourhood should be redesigned might draw political events such as disputes within a council or board or the resignation of an executive member of the local council hampering renewal projects to progress. Moreover, issues that seem to be resolved at any one given moment may suddenly resurface for re-examination at a later stage (Mayer *et al.*, 2005). All these must be kept in mind and a defence mechanism can be thought of prior to any initiatives for redevelopment. There must also be an element of trust within the stakeholders. A typical tendency often mentioned by the researchers is to place a considerable burden on local communities, often unrealistic for the communities' interests and for their capacities to take the steps needed to address various cases of urban degradation (Wacker *et al.*, 1999).

**Infrastructure and accessibility:** Infrastructure (services, roads, footpaths) is like the backbone for any kind of development to take place. For *Boro Bazar* CBD, it should not be compromised for anything else since it will directly affect the liveability and economy of this area. On the other hand, proper accessibility must be ensured for the betterment of commerce and river related activities. Better accessibility would ensure people's participation in river related activities and help build an interactive and sustainable community.

### **Conclusion**

Users' point approach is not beyond criticism. It could sometimes originate outside the community and become a neo-orthodoxy that does more to maintain inequalities rather minimize it and leaving the 'real' stakeholders in a dilemma (Wilmsen, 2005). But in particular, a paradigm shift is experienced in cities around the world that promotes agenda 21, stating that urban authorities in combination with researchers and civil society should develop innovative partnerships in urban management issues. But it is not only about implementing agenda 21, it is all about reviving and stimulating people's way of life through their sayings, wishes and desires and above all active participation. For the most part, it should be the users' perspective that should play the part of the actor. For the practical implementation of the mentioned guidelines, the level of participation from the general people should not only be accommodated within the above development guidelines but also in the early planning and design decisions. To ensure public participation, the prime concern

should be to find out the most potential groups from the users as partners for development. In this way this approach could impart qualities to numerous lives of this blighting urban community and lay the foundation for a healthy future generation.

### References

- Blowers, A. (ed.). 1993. *Planning for a Sustainable Future*. Earthscan, London.
- Brinkhoff, T. 2006. The Principal Agglomerations of the World. Retrieved on February 27,2007,URL: <<http://www.citypopulation.de/World.html>>.
- DFID. 2000<sub>a</sub>. Participatory Approach to Core Area Development: A guide to good practice, core area development-a guide to good practice, DFID Research Project R6068, March 2000, pp. 2-16. Retrieved on February 12, 2007,URL: <[www.wmin.ac.uk/builtenv/maxlock/ Core\\_Areas/ Good\\_Practice/guidelines\\_intro.doc](http://www.wmin.ac.uk/builtenv/maxlock/Core_Areas/Good_Practice/guidelines_intro.doc)>.
- DFID, 2000<sub>b</sub>. Participatory Site Planning, Core area development-a guide to good practice, DFID Research Project R6068, March 2000, pp. 1-6. Retrieved on February 12, 2007, URL: <[www.wmin.ac.uk/builtenv/maxlock/Core\\_Areas/Good\\_Practice/factsheet10.doc](http://www.wmin.ac.uk/builtenv/maxlock/Core_Areas/Good_Practice/factsheet10.doc)>.
- Fernandez, N. and Pleyan, C.G. 2000. Regeneration of Old Havana and the role of Value Capture, Land Lines, Havana, Cuba, January 2000, pp. 1.
- Gottdiener, M. (ed.). 1991. *Urban Life in Transition*, Sage Publications Ltd., London.
- Grant, J. 2002. Mixed Use in Theory and Practice: Canadian Experience with Implementing a Planning Principle. *Journal of American Planning Association*, 68 (1):25-30.
- Islam, K. 2006. Our cities, 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Special, The Daily Star (internet addition), February 10. Retrieved on February 07, 2007, URL: <<http://www.thedailystar.net/suppliments/2006/15thanniv/ourcities/index.htm>>.
- Koebel, T.C. 1996. *Urban Redevelopment: Displacement and the Future of the American City*, Center for Housing Research, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, USA.
- Kostof, S. 1992. *The City Assembled*, Thames and Hudson Ltd., London.
- Lee, Y.K. and Jachna, T. 2006. Empowerment Games - Design Tools to Raise Users' Environmental Awareness, Retrieved on February 19, 2007, URL: <[www.eng.cam.ac.uk/cwuaat/04/33%20part-cmc yankilee%20final%20poster.pdf](http://www.eng.cam.ac.uk/cwuaat/04/33%20part-cmc%20yankilee%20final%20poster.pdf)>
- Mayer,I.; Bueren,E.V.; Bots,P.; Voort,H.V. and Seijdel, S. 2005. Collaborative Decision Making for Sustainable Urban Renewal Projects: A Simulation-Gaming Approach, *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*. 32: 403-423
- Mazzucchelli, S. A. 1995. Participatory Methodologies for Rapid Environmental Diagnosis, *Environment and Urbanization*, 7(2):219-226.
- Moughtin, C. 1999. *Urban Design Methods and Techniques*, Architectural Press, Oxford, pp. 3-4.
- Murayama, A. 2005. Governance for Sustainable Urban Regeneration: Cases of Participatory Urban Planning and Machizukuri in Fukaya City, Saitama Prefecture, Japan, IFHP Spring Conference 2005, pp. 1.
- Stewart, D. 2007. 'Smart Development' for Brownfields: A Future Approach using the Prospective through Scenarios Method, The Futures Academy, Dublin Institute of Technology, Faculty of Built Environment, Dublin, Ireland.
- Wacker,C.; Viaro,A. and Wolf,M. 1999. Partnerships for urban environmental management: the roles of urban authorities, researchers and civil society. *Environment and Urbanization*, 11(2):113-125.
- Wilmsen, C. 2005. Perils on the Road to Participatory Research in Community Forestry, In: Zhu, H. Ning and Kamran, K. Abdollahi (eds.), *Urban and Community Forestry: Working Together to Facilitate Change*, Southern University, 2005, pp. 2, 49. Internet Explorer, Retrieved on 29.02.2007, URL: <[www.cnr.berkeley.edu/.../Community/Perils%20on%20the%20road%20to%20participatory%20research%20July%2019.pdf](http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/.../Community/Perils%20on%20the%20road%20to%20participatory%20research%20July%2019.pdf)>.
- Yuen, B. 2005. Strengthening Urban Heritage in Singapore: Building Economic Competitiveness and Civic Identity, *Celebrating our Urban Heritage*, Global Urban Development, Singapore, 1(1):1-2.