

The Revitalization of Farashgonj as a Cultural and Heritage Town

¹Dr. Maher Niger, ²Zishan Fuad Choudhury
Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture
Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology (AUST)

Abstract:- Farashganj, a historically significant neighborhood of Old Dhaka, Bangladesh, is home to numerous architectural structures that date back to the Mughal and British eras. The depiction of the daily activities in this area is characterized by its vibrancy, vigor, and vividness, effectively conveying a narrative that spans from the past to the present. The aim of this paper is to explore the potential for modifications and rejuvenation in order to maintain the integrity of an existing setting and identity within a specific arena. The primary emphasis lies in recognizing the significance and inherent possibilities of urban heritage. Additionally, this highlights the potential of utilizing heritage as a catalyst for socio-economic development. This study first identifies and analyzes the existing heritage components in Farashganj, which require protection and development in different aspects. It highlights the challenges facing the built-up area and the decline of historic places. Additionally, it explores how this approach can contribute to enhancing infrastructure and the overall built environment. The study commenced by conducting site observations, visual assessments, and interviews to identify the potential and limitations of the study area. Secondary data refers to information that is obtained from sources such as literature reviews, briefings from local municipalities, technical reports, and local plans. These sources serve as supportive resources in academic research. Consequently, the utilization of site analysis and synthesis mappings serves as a means to effectively translate and complement the conceptual initiative in order to establish suitable design guidelines.

Keywords:- Revitalization, Connection, Legibility, Cultural and Heritage

I. INTRODUCTION

The urban heritage allows visitors and users to develop an appreciation for the historical significance of the past. This phenomenon offers a potential glimpse into the experiences and emotions of the past, while also fostering a sense of personal identity and belonging within a physical environment that is attuned to human proportions. The historical city center can be characterized as a densely populated region with significant and distinct economic activities, insufficient and substandard urban services, lacking public investment and planning focus, yet abundant in architectural and cultural heritage. The implementation of urban revitalization strategies in city core areas has the potential to significantly enhance the

quality of life for residents and bolster the city's image and economic vitality, particularly in relation to tourism. The implementation of city core revitalization initiatives must be conducted within a context that is sensitive to the various stakeholders' interests and the overarching development objectives. The preservation of historic areas, particularly within the central core of an old city, is a widely recognized and established principle in urban planning worldwide. Nevertheless, in practical terms, it is frequently observed that the provision of adequate care and attention for this issue is disregarded and neglected in numerous urban areas, irrespective of their geographical location, whether they are situated in developed or developing regions. In developing nations, urban areas are experiencing significant challenges due to the prevailing trend of globalization, while possessing limited or negligible knowledge of their historical context. Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, remains within the established system.

The continuous and uncontrolled urbanization of Dhaka city is causing the degradation of its valuable historical assets through the alteration, addition, or modification of the spatial land use pattern based on individual preferences and changes. This study examines the necessity and challenges associated with the preservation of the culture and heritage of Old Dhaka. The present study focuses on the research area of "Farashganj," which is situated in the Old Dhaka region. This particular location has been chosen due to its rich cultural heritage, which is deeply ingrained in the city's architectural structures and the river that has undergone significant transformations over the course of several decades. In the present era, the urban morphology of Farashganj is experiencing an increase in commercial activities and a gradual expansion of development. The recent development prompt has experienced an imbalance in urban land use patterns, building utilization, open spaces, streets, facilities, and landscape elements. The need for revitalization and preservation of heritage prominence and natural resources is evident due to the decline in activities, inadequate services, and inactive conditions. Hence, it is imperative to ensure that the advancement of new developments is effectively incorporated and aligned with the existing urban framework and localities (Partnerships, 2000; Bentley, 1985). This paper aims to elucidate the concept of urban revitalization by examining the conditions necessary for revitalization and exploring the appropriate approaches to enhance the living environment in urban areas. Furthermore, this study aims to examine the impact of the newly built environment on the historical attributes of the locality and analyze the resulting

implications for urban functionality, landscape aesthetics, and the well-being of individuals residing in the area. The primary research inquiry pertains to the establishment of a harmonious equilibrium between contemporary advancements and the preexisting urban framework, with the aim of preserving the historical identity and townscape of the city.

II. THE CONCEPT OF URBAN REVITALIZATION

According to Roberts, Sykes, and Granger (2000), urban revitalization refers to a holistic and coordinated approach aimed at addressing urban challenges and achieving long-term enhancements in the economic, physical, social, and environmental aspects of a specific region. The terms "urban revitalization" and "urban regeneration" are sometimes employed interchangeably in academic literature (Couch, 2003). Urban regeneration is a domain of public policy that pertains to the revitalization of economic activity, restoration of environmental quality, and promotion of social inclusion (Michailidis & Zaire, 2011). Urban conservation and revitalization encompass the overarching concept of urban regeneration, which is understood as a multifaceted process involving the revitalization and integration of entities possessing historical, cultural, and architectural significance, alongside their economic and functional potential. The objective of urban revitalization is to infuse vitality into urban areas and enhance their social and economic functions (Holcomb & Beauregard, 1981). Numerous factors, including geography, regional economic conditions, land use patterns, building design, administrative structures, and tools and methods of interventions, play a crucial role in shaping urban rehabilitation policies (Couch, 2003).

The preservation of the historical segment of the city is commonly acknowledged to be most effectively achieved through its continued utilization. The concept entails revitalizing a region both socially and economically by leveraging its historical identity, which encompasses distinctive attributes that are irreplaceable and warrant safeguarding and preservation. Finding solutions and planning techniques that can be effectively adapted to the new utilization without compromising its inherent character and unique worth is of utmost significance. Urban revitalization encompasses two distinct approaches: people-based and place-based. The former focuses on enhancing the quality of life for residents through various means, such as the creation of new employment opportunities. Conversely, the latter emphasizes local economic development by employing strategies like adaptive reuse and upgrading (Zielenbach, 2000). The enhancement of the physical infrastructure and utilization of space contributes to the development of novel urban landscapes, hence bolstering the local economy through the establishment of new public spaces and contemporary lifestyle activities.

➤ *Objectives and Goals of Urban Regeneration*

The process of urban revitalization involves implementing measures aimed at enhancing the physical infrastructure of the historic city, such as modernization and revalorization. Additionally, it encompasses efforts to enhance the economic and social conditions of the local population

(Lorens, 2008). Various goals and objectives can be delineated in the context of urban regeneration processes.

There are four main dimensions of urban revitalization: architectural, technical, social and economic, and environmental. The architectural dimension focuses on the physical renovation of distressed structures, including both buildings and public infrastructure. The technical dimension involves upgrading the technical state of urban infrastructure, such as roads and sewerage systems. The social and economic dimension aims to revive the economy of declined areas and restructure society, providing better opportunities for social groups that are excluded from regular life. Lastly, the environmental dimension addresses the significant problem of poor environmental conditions in distressed urban areas. Urban regeneration programs contribute to the mitigation of many forms of environmental pollution through the implementation of contemporary technological solutions (Lorens, 2008).

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The historic center embodies a distinctive connection to the past, serving as a tangible representation of the social and cultural heritage that has evolved to shape the contemporary city and society (Steinberg, 1996). The primary aim of this study is to improve and refine the current historical and natural resources in Farashganj, with a focus on promoting economic development and enhancing the livability of the city. This will be achieved through the preservation of urban history in the old city center. The study aims to redefine Farashganj as a site with untapped potential rather than one characterized by deterioration. It proposes the repurposing of this location as a means to revitalize the region and create an appealing communal space.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative data collection method is employed in order to accomplish the research objectives. Two methods of data collection commonly employed in research are visual study techniques and context analysis. The identification and analysis of the current condition and primary heritage components of Farashganj were conducted through a visit to the study region. The context analysis involves the examination and analysis of data, maps, and documents obtained from the Municipality, directory of archaeology, and relevant literature pertaining to the study area. This analysis aims to ascertain the physical development, condition of buildings, and recent alterations to the traditional spatial structure. The revitalization idea is being applied to emphasize the existing heritage buildings in Farashganj that are in need of protection and development in various aspects. The acquired data is subsequently utilized to generate GIS maps, which visually depict the discoveries and outcomes of the investigation.

V. STUDY AREA, FARASHGANJ

Farashganj is situated on the northern bank of the Buriganga River, sometimes known as the Old Ganges, within the historic area of Old Dhaka. The primary roadways inside the area are B K Das Road and Ahsanullah Road, located in the Old Town. This thoroughfare, commonly referred to as one of the oldest roadways in Dhaka, is also recognised in conjunction with Shutrapur. The establishment of this area took place in 1780 within the confines of the Old Town region. During that period, it was frequently referred to as the

French Market due to the presence of French traders and merchants who established themselves in this location for commercial purposes (Dipa, Sazdik, Abu & Naeem, 2017). Farashganj was established through an order issued by Naib Nazim Nawajish Mohammad Khan. The designation "Farashganj" was originally bestowed due to the presence of a French settlement. The term "Farash" is derived from the word "Farashi," which denotes the French language. Additionally, the term "ganj" refers to a market (Dipa, Sazdik, Abu & Naeem, 2017).

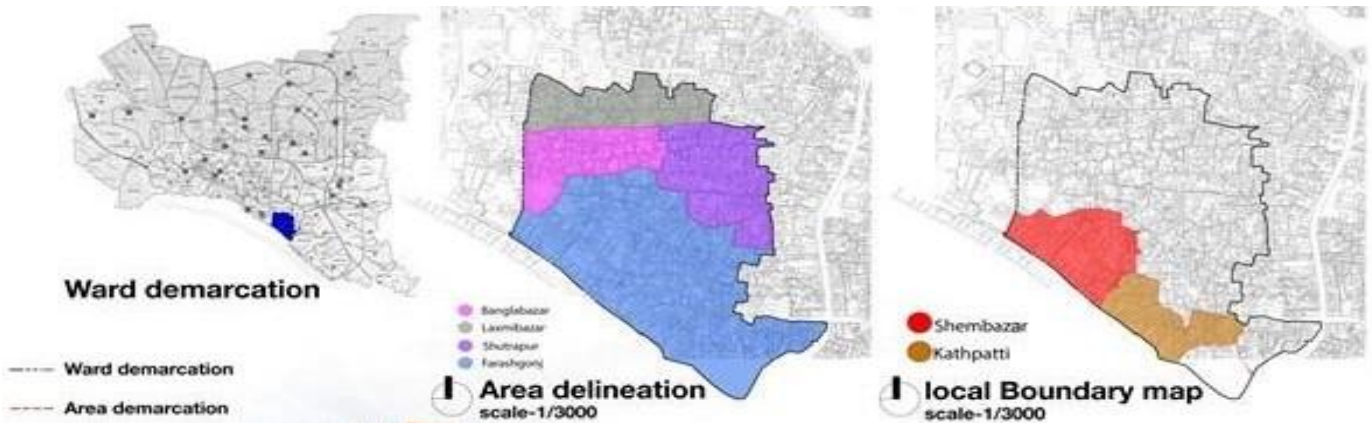


Fig 1 Ward Boundary and Neighborhood of Farashganj

➤ *Historical Structure at Farashganj*

A significant number of individuals who just acquired substantial wealth opted to construct opulent houses along BK Das Road in Farashganj, presently situated in the Old Town of Dhaka. Presently, these architectural structures, constructed approximately one hundred years ago, serve as concrete indicators of an intriguing period in Dhaka's cultural legacy. The multi-court homes in Farashganj are widely recognised as the most prominent architectural structures in the area. The

iron railing and balusters, which were frequently crafted and produced in Kolkata during that era, along with the application of lime plaster on small hand-made bricks and the presence of Greco-Roman columns adorned with intricate capitals, serve as enduring symbols of a distinct period in history (Dipa, Sazdik, Abu & Naeem, 2017; Sadia & Bin, 2017). A number of opulent residences were constructed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by individuals who had recently acquired significant wealth (Iftekhhar, 2007).

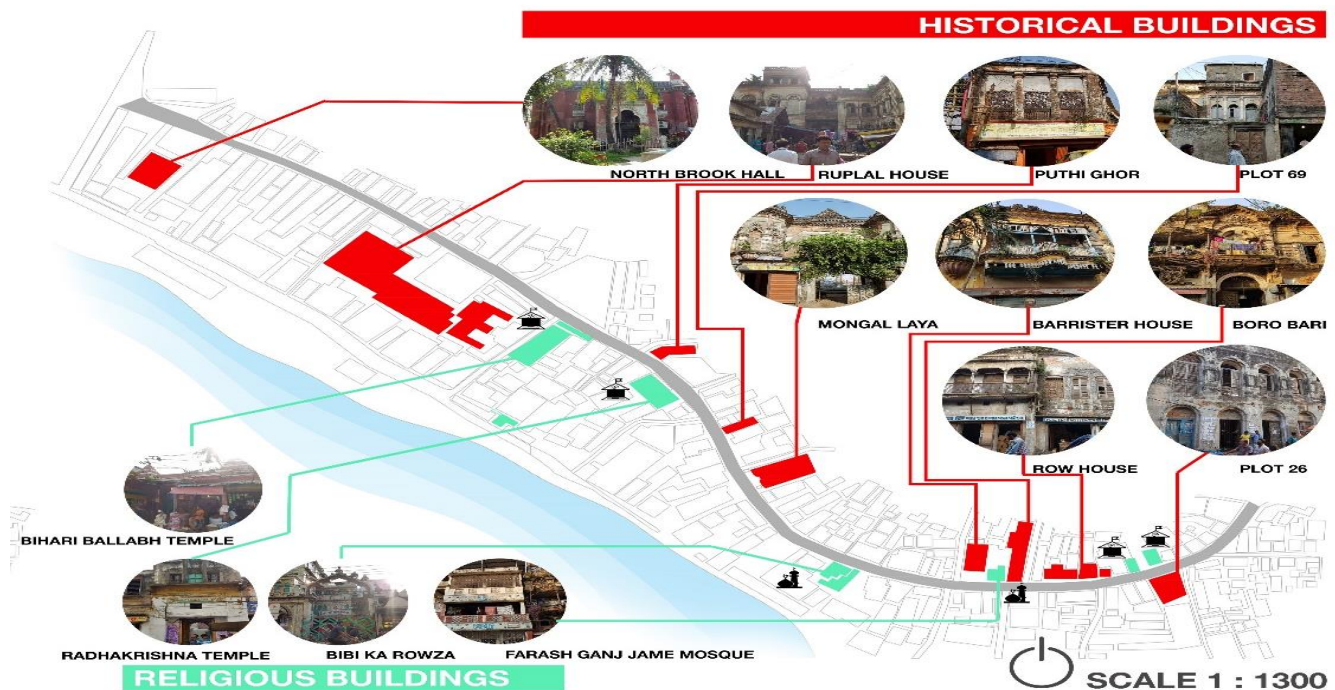


Fig 2 Settlement of Farashganj (B. K. Das Lane) showing the Historical Building

Every phenomenon has a decline or deterioration at some point. The current state of affairs reveals that the government and illegal occupants have gained control over numerous trades, businesses, and historic homes. Regrettably, neither party demonstrates any regret as they proceed to divest these properties of their valuable ornaments and aesthetic appeal. The Archaeology Department has designated only three buildings in Farashganj as protected properties. Notable architectural landmarks in Dhaka encompass the Ruplal house, a grand mansion situated on the northern bank of the Buriganga river, the Mahalla Farashganj featuring a lengthy gateway housing Bibi ka Rauza, the oldest Husaini Dalan in Dhaka, and the Farashganj Nil Kuthi (Indigo House), which holds the distinction of being one of the largest structures of its kind. Presently, the Farashganj Nil Kuthi serves as a popular venue for hosting wedding receptions (Iftekhar, 2007).

• *Northbrook Hall (Lal Kuthi)*

Northbrook Hall is situated in close proximity to the Buriganga River. The hall is situated at 60, BK Das Road, Farashganj. The majority of individuals residing in Old Dhaka are familiar with Northbrook Hall, sometimes referred to as Lal Kuthi, denoting its distinctive red coloration. The edifice in question has been officially designated as a protected site by the government, primarily due to its significant archaeological value. In 1874, the residents of Dhaka constructed Lalkuthi (also known as Northbrook Hall) as a means of commemorating the visit of Lord Northbrook. This architectural masterpiece, characterized by its Indo-Saracen style, was officially inaugurated in 1880 by the Commissioner (Sebastian, 2010). Afterward, the building was used as a town hall, public library, telegraph office, women's college, and numerous administrative spaces, effectively combining Mughal and Renaissance architectural aspects.

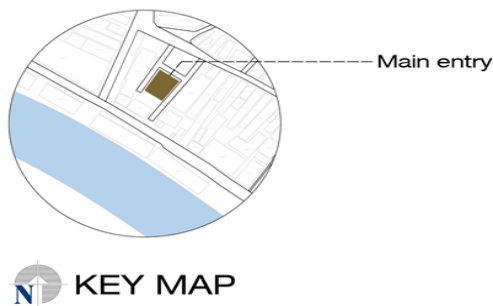


Fig 3 Plan, Elevation and Image of Northbrook Hall, Farashganj



The architectural features that characterized the Mughal parts of the structure included horseshoe arches, a projected bay on the northern entrance including a trefoil arch, four octagonal minarets, an ornate parapet, and towering pinnacles. The magnificent edifice is characterized by a deep red color, complemented by the presence of a modest temple and an amalgamation of architectural styles. According to Dipa, Sazdik, Abu, and Naeem (2017) as well as Sadia and Bin (2017), Johnson Hall, which is currently utilized by a sports club, offers a remarkable vantage point from the river and is prominently depicted in various late-19th century photographs showcasing the city's waterfront. This observation is also supported by Sebastian (2010). In 1998, a government education office was established adjacent to the mentioned location. Presently, a portion of this office is

utilized by a decorator, while a pentagram fountain has been installed, which has unfortunately obstructed the view in a disrespectful manner (Sebastian, 2010).

• *Ruplal House*

The construction of the Ruplal House took place in close proximity to the Buckland Dam, situated on the northern bank of the Buriganga River. The construction of the home in 1825 is attributed to Stephen Aratoon, a renowned Armenian entrepreneur (Sebastian, 2010). According to Sinthia (2010), the acquisition of the property took place in 1840 when it was purchased by Ruplal Das and his brother Raghunath Das, who were both merchants. The structure underwent reconstruction by Martin Company, a renowned architectural firm based in Calcutta. The Ruplal House exemplifies the architectural style

of late Renaissance Europe, which was imported during the era of British colonialism. The building under question is a two-story structure with an "E" shape, consisting of three distinct blocks: the Ruplal Block, the Central Block, and the Raghunath Block (Sinthia, 2010; Niger, 2013). The structure encompasses an estimated total of fifty chambers, beside a centrally located dance hall on the upper level, characterized

by its sophisticated Western-style design and adorned with polished oak flooring. The dancing hall corridor is oriented towards the Buriganga River. The ceilings of the structure were adorned with exquisite embellishments made of glass and wood. Presently, the environs of the Ruplal House, encompassing the Buckland Dam region, are host to one of the largest spice markets in Dhaka.



Fig 4 Ruplal House at Farashganj

- *Boro Bari*

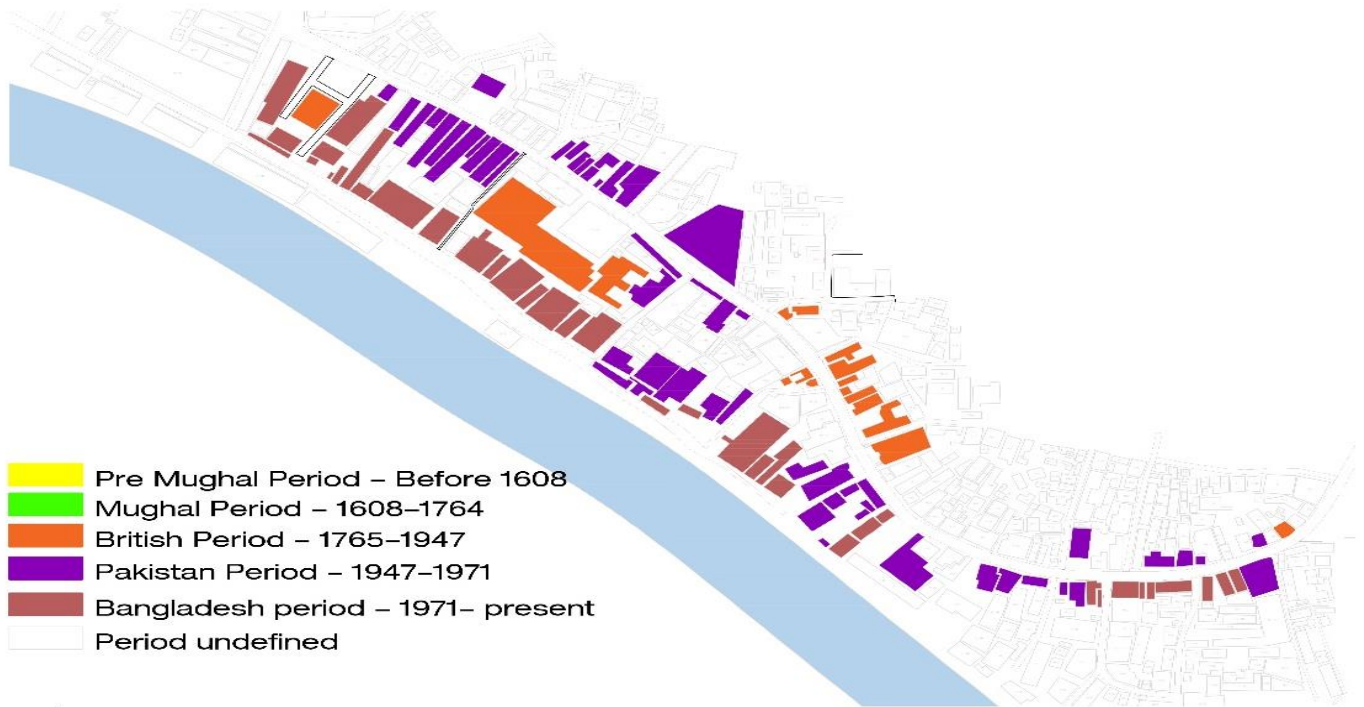
One such illustration is the possession of #45, commonly referred to as Boro Bari. The front block of the building, which functions as a gatehouse and constitutes the visible facade from the street, predates the remainder of the structure and showcases architectural elements inspired by the French Rococo style (Sebastian, 2010). The gatehouse possesses aesthetically pleasing features such as balconies, French windows, and a stylish pediment, rendering it an exquisite architectural building.



Fig 5 The Boro Bari from Farashganj

VI. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Farashganj is often comprised of two distinct components, namely the historical commercial hub and the encompassing residential area. The spatial structure might be conceptualized as an organic form. This architectural formation is through various historical phases, spanning from the Mughal and British eras to the period of Pakistan (Figure 6).



MAP BASED ON BUILDING CONSTRUCTION PERIOD

Fig 6 Heritage Structures of Different Period



1. Northbrook hall – 1868
2. Dhaka Anath Ashram
3. Forashganj Shiv Mandir
4. Ruplal House – 1825
5. Puthi Ghar – around 1870
6. Prio Bollov Jeu Mandir – around 1900
7. Banku Bihari Jeu Mandir – around 1900
8. Plot 69
9. Mongal Laya – 1915
10. Barrister House – 1918
11. Baro Bari – around 1900
12. Row House
13. Plot 26 – 1960
14. Plot 35
15. Plot 30

Fig 7 Construction Year of Heritage Structures

The primary thoroughfares predominantly consist of cul-de-sacs and narrow minor routes, designed to uphold cultural seclusion. According to Choudhury (2016), the spatial distribution of land uses in old Dhaka has been altered due to rapid urban expansion, which is a common phenomenon in emerging cities. Additionally, the economic transformation taking place in the area has also contributed to these changes. The inner-city area experiences an increase in its economic value due to the need for commercial property usage. The traditional buildings undergo a decrease in their economic,

cultural, and social purposes. One of the primary issues faced by the Farashganj area pertains to the inadequate upkeep of its aging infrastructure. The main challenge is the absence of sufficient access. The residents, tourists, and visitors of the city are not adequately comprehending or envisioning the potential offerings and attractions available to them. One of the key issues is the absence of sufficient green spaces within the given area. The lack of awareness among residents on the significance of cultural heritage is evident.



Fig 8 Poor Maintenance of Heritage Structures

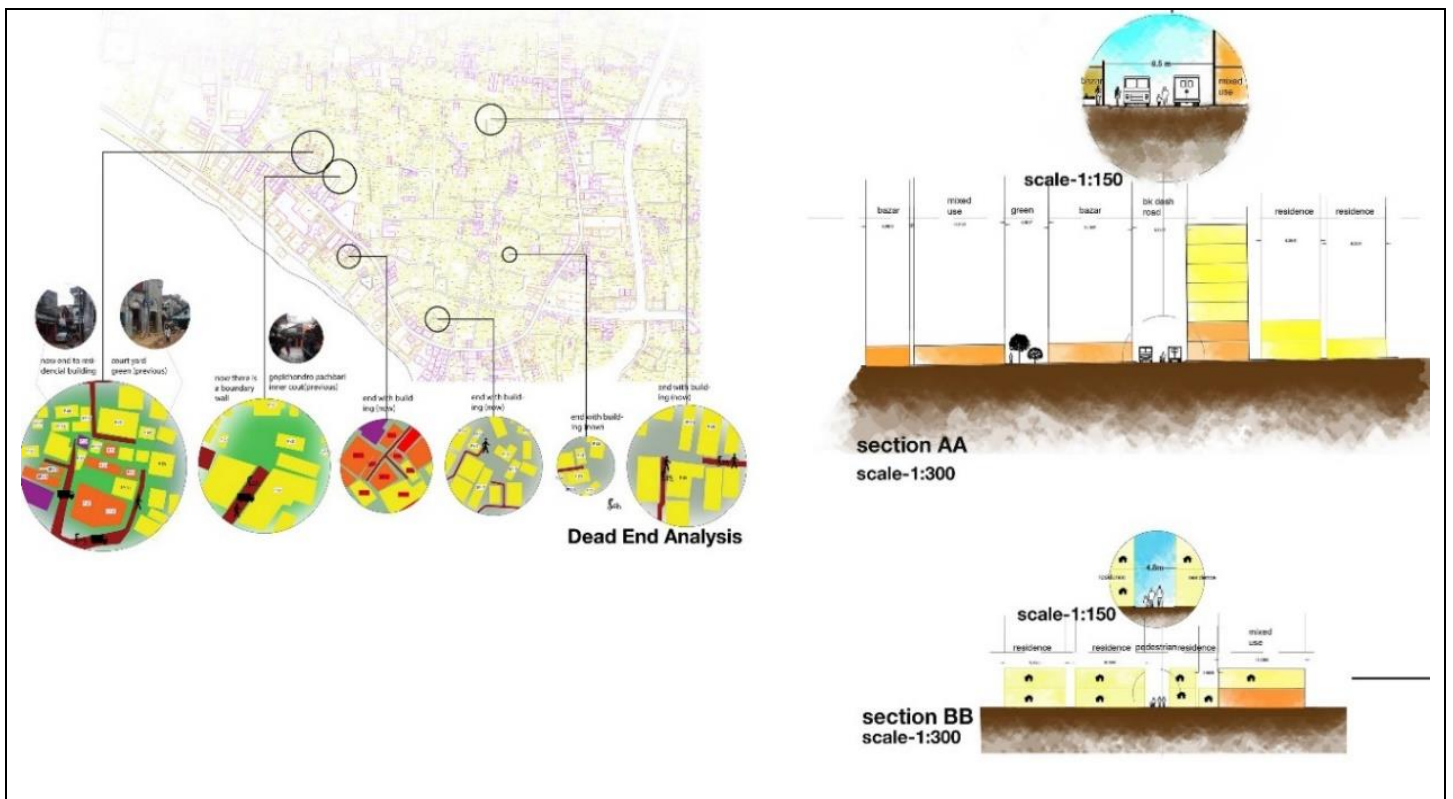


Fig 9 Accessibility Problems of Farashganj Area

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The municipality is a primary stakeholder in promoting, enabling, and coordinating development initiatives within the urban area. The document titled "The Draught Structure Plan of Dhaka City as a Legal Guideline for City Development until 2030" (DSP-2016-2035, 2015) serves as a comprehensive framework for the planned growth and development of Dhaka City during the specified time period. The research recommendation centers around proposing a novel approach to revitalizing historic Dhaka by establishing a visually appealing hub that caters to various cultural and tourist endeavors. This center would aim to preserve the spatial identity and traditional significance of the area. The municipality and local government are urged to take into account the following factors in their development plans:

- A comprehensive survey will be undertaken to assess the condition of the building and identify heritage structures that warrant preservation and maintenance in accordance with established conservation criteria.
- The preservation of the physical environment and quality of the old centre's cultural heritage necessitates the enhancement and upkeep of infrastructure.
- This study examines the incorporation of traditional urban identity in the new development of buildings within the framework of building regulatory law.
- One proposal is to create a heritage fund as part of the municipal framework, with the aim of facilitating the development and administration of the historical heritage.
- The objective is to enhance public awareness and demonstrate the socio-economic advantages of regeneration in order to enhance the quality of life in the region.
- The integration of heritage conservation with the provision of open space or parks inside urban areas.
- One potential strategy for promoting investment in cultural, tourist, and commercial sectors is the establishment of public-private partnerships.
- The utilization of participatory planning and stakeholder engagement is employed to determine conservation objectives and strategies, as well as provide mechanisms for coordinating diverse efforts.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The concept of revitalization encompasses a novel and dynamic approach to the preservation and advancement of historic areas. The notion entails the integration of both the preservation of historical legacy and the enhancement of the physical, socio-economic, and cultural environment. The restoration of Farashganj is crucial in safeguarding cultural assets and improving the living environment for the local community and people. The concept has the potential to serve as a central point for attracting tourism and fostering economic development. The findings of the study indicate a pressing necessity to restore, preserve, and uphold the authentic attributes of the historical urban district. Simultaneously, it is crucial to adapt the physical infrastructure and economic endeavors to align with contemporary lifestyles. This can be achieved by incorporating novel design principles that allow for the modification of traditional structures to meet modern

requirements while safeguarding the distinctive character and significance of the urban landscape. The issues associated with revitalization need the adoption of a novel and dynamic approach that emphasizes the preservation and development of the historical character of the city center, together with its associated socio-economic and cultural features (Temelová, 2009). It is imperative to develop a well-defined vision for the revitalization of the historic region in question. The Old Centre encompasses significant traditional and cultural history that serves as a representation of the city's historical identity. The primary findings of the research indicate that enhancing the appeal of promoting the historical character and utilizing the center as a venue for a diverse range of innovative mixed-use functions and activities are crucial objectives. This phenomenon can be categorized into three distinct levels:

➤ *Planning level*

In order to effectively accomplish the goals and objectives of revitalization, it is imperative to implement an inclusive urban development policy that incorporates urban revitalization. The policy framework ought to undertake a comprehensive examination of the matter pertaining to urban regeneration, encompassing aspects such as finance mechanisms, management strategies, and operational instruments. The integrated plan encompasses interconnected measures aimed at enhancing the physical, socio-economic, and environmental state of the historical area, while simultaneously safeguarding its architectural heritage. The effective formulation and execution of action plans necessitate a methodology that is both sector-specific and inter-departmental, involving many stakeholders from government, civic society, and the private sector. The promotion of public-private partnerships in the implementation of regenerative activities is of utmost importance. This can be achieved through the development of plans that focus on enhancing tourist and commercial operations. The implementation of a follow-up or evaluation/assessment system is crucial in the context of effective regeneration policies or programs, as it aids in the identification of priority areas and the development of urgent action plans for regeneration.

➤ *Urban design level*

The revitalization of aging urban areas necessitates the incorporation of novel functions that cater to the current requirements of both residents and tourists. Simultaneously, it is imperative to augment the allure of the city center through the incorporation of novel land use functions that accentuate the cultural and commercial dimensions. This can be achieved by cultivating areas dedicated to cultural activities, including exhibitions, recreational spaces, and tourist amenities such as hotels, appealing restaurants, and leisure pursuits. The incorporation of a public plaza, green spaces, mobility solutions, pleasant pedestrian infrastructure, and landscaping will contribute to the enhancement of the neighborhood and the overall improvement of the quality of life experienced by its residents. The implementation of cultural and public events within a city contributes to its overall value, rendering it more captivating and distinctive for tourists.

➤ *Detail design*

In order to improve the appeal and habitability of the historic core, it is necessary to introduce new functionalities to select existing structures or modify them to align with contemporary living standards. This must be done while carefully considering the preservation guidelines for the historical buildings and the overall urban context. The determination of the appropriate reuse of the preexisting structure should be predicated upon a comprehensive assessment conducted by conservation specialists, with the involvement of scholars and university professionals. This process should also encompass the facilitation of seminars and workshops, aimed at engaging the residents and other relevant parties, in order to ensure their inclusion in the decision-making process.

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