

## TOWN-PLANNING AND URBAN DESIGN STUDIES

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**Pocket park: a new idea for creating qualified social green open space in an extremely dense area of Dhaka, Bangladesh****Monty K M I<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Saint-Petersburg State University of Architecture and Civil Engineering (SPbGASU), Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation<sup>1</sup>monty.uap@gmail.com

**Abstract.** Macro-scale communal spaces or large green-infrastructure projects are implemented as urban parks whereas pocket parks define the micro-scale communal spaces to utilize abandoned and ill-used urban voids. A pocket park is a potential frame for transforming a highly dense city into a sustainable urban area with a qualified social green open space. So this is a challenge for a highly dense city like Dhaka where the population is increasing rapidly and the city is environmentally impacted by rapid urbanization, all the planned and unplanned new settlements, housing developments and slum areas with no public or communal open spaces and green parks as well. The hypothesis of this study shows that pocket parks can be a sustainable solution for the tight housing area where there is a lack of green open space and breathing space for the community. This paper used a literature review and several international case studies to show the solution as well as opportunities for creating pocket parks in the dense housing area of Lalbagh, Dhaka.

**Keywords:** Green open space, dense housing area, pocket park, mini-park, Dhaka City (Bangladesh)

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## ГРАДОСТРОИТЕЛЬСТВО И УРБАНИСТИКА

Научная статья

**«Карманный парк» – новая концепция создания качественного социального зеленого открытого пространства в густонаселенном районе Дакки (Бангладеш)****Монти К М И<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Санкт-Петербургский государственный архитектурно-строительный университет (СПбГАСУ), Санкт-Петербург, Россия<sup>1</sup>monty.uap@gmail.com

**Аннотация.** Макромасштабные общественные пространства или крупные проекты зеленой инфраструктуры реализуются как городские парки, в то время как карманные парки определяют микромасштабные общественные пространства для использования заброшенных и плохо используемых городских пустот. «Карманный парк» – это потенциальная основа для преобразования города с высокой плотностью населения в устойчивую городскую зону с качественным социальным зеленым открытым

пространством. Эта проблема важна для такого густонаселенного города, как Дакка, где население быстро растет, а на окружающую среду города оказывает влияние стремительная урбанизация и крупномасштабная жилая застройка без общественных открытых пространств и зеленых парков. Гипотеза исследования показывает, что карманные парки могут быть эффективным решением для жилого района, где не хватает озелененных территорий и рекреаций для жителей. В статье сделан широкий обзор исследований и проектов с целью найти оптимальные решения возможности создания «карманных парков», на примере густонаселенного жилого района Лалбаг города Дакка.

**Ключевые слова:** Зеленое открытое пространство, район плотной застройки, карманный парк, мини-парк, город Дакка (Бангладеш)

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## Introduction

Green open public space becomes a significant issue for its lackings in such a densely populated city like Dhaka. For the lack of a green healthy environment, Dhaka had ranked 137<sup>th</sup> position among 140 cities in Economist Intelligence Unit's annual global survey [8]. Culturally and historically people of Bangladesh prefer to live in a community and neighbourhood satisfaction is an important part of a residential area. For the rapid growth of urban development, there left almost no breathing space in the maximum residential area of Dhaka city (fig. 1). According to the Regional Development Planning (RDP) survey, less than 0.30 per cent of the land is used for communal spaces in all of Dhaka city [17]. Research by The Daily Star in 2016 showed that 10 out of the 54 parks in Dhaka city are exchanged for various functions such as community centres, kitchen markets, mosques, rickshaw garages or truck parking lots etc. In 2018 Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) reported that the optimal allocation is 0.16 acres of open space for every 1000 people and 0.7 acres of open place for every 1000 residents [9].



Fig. 1. Rapid urbanization in Dhaka city

In these circumstances, for Dhaka city, this is important to take proper steps for making the neighbourhoods lively with communal open green spaces. The first step solution can be creating pocket parks or mini-parks in small urban voids as large open space is a rare case in this city.

Many studies have shown the incredible advantages of creating urban green spaces which play an important role in building relationships with public health in highly dense urban areas [14]. There is an analysis gap in understanding the importance of green pocket spaces such as city parks, green buffer zones, boulevards, small parks or pocket parks, green corridors and roof gardens [14]. Pocket park not only revitalizes an abandoned location but also encourages residents to care for their surroundings. They can employ repurposed items found on the streets or in the community to transform what was once considered trash into something useful and precious [1]. So, Dhaka can be transformed into a green city with many small gardens and parks utilizing the unutilized grey spaces and the spaces which are used by illegal settlements and arbitrary dustbins [23]. Dhaka is climatically capable of creating a garden city; with a proper design and direction, Dhaka may create some openness from this complicated urban situation with green, light and air [10].

In this study, a specific dense area has been chosen to discuss briefly how the situation can be designed by green pocket ideas. Old Dhaka is mostly unplanned and dense in the whole Dhaka Metropolitan area. An area called Lalbagh from Old Dhaka City has been selected for the case study where the area is filled with all unplanned residential buildings with mixed-use functions. The study will show the possibilities of creating pocket parks in the tightest situation of the neighbourhood of Lalbagh, Old Dhaka.

### Literature review

In 1969, Seymour stated about the pocket park that such parks must be easily accessible in order to positively impact city life; on the way to work, on the way to home, and even at lunch, their presence should be felt all around the neighbourhood [12]. Sergey Kapkov, Head of the Center for Research on the Economics of Culture, Urban Development, and Creative Industries at Moscow State University, stated that the coronavirus pandemic has caused people to prefer short-distance parks over longer ones, which have made pocket parks the new trend in Moscow. According to Kapkov, pocket parks have the potential to act as a connection between the city, the government, and the public as well as a space for Muscovites to unwind. This will improve communication between all three groups [18]. While discussing the mini park or pocket parks in the structure of the residential quarter Zajkova E. Yu., Bahman S. said that natural mini-parks or pocket parks provide a fresh take on the neighbourhood surrounding, which can be reached by foot in three to five minutes. According to their statement, the basic idea behind these constructions is the inclusion of unused or deserted places with natural elements to give residents a variety of activities [25].

In a write-up about the new trend of Moscow's pocket parks in 2020, Author Ekaterina Golovina stated that pocket parks serve a variety of crucial purposes, such as transforming unpleasant, arid areas into lush green islands and places for residents to unwind, enhancing the environment and quality of life in cities, enhancing the mental health of those who live in the stone jungle, and so forth. Pocket parks or mini-parks are also seen as the sole alternative for developing new public spaces without undertaking an extensive renovation, and in many nations, they are listed as a distinct need in urban greening schemes [6]. The authors Tanjina Khan and Richard Hyde had a write-up titled "Transformation of 'urban grey pocket' to 'urban green pocket' in Dhaka, Bangladesh" where they gave statements about pocket parks that the ecology of the city will be directly improved by the conversion of the grey spaces to green spaces. By creating pocket parks, a considerable decrease in social crimes and more work possibilities will be developed [23]. According to Atenistas, not only does it restore the vacant land, but pocket park also gives the locals the tools they need to care for their area. They can employ recycled materials found on the streets or in the community to turn what would otherwise be trash into something useful and precious [1].

While researching on small urban parks in the context of Dhaka city the author S Tabassum said that an efficient model of small parks and open space is inherently more advantageous than establishing large parks for a congested metropolis when it is not possible to include large parks around the city. She added that the relevance of "Small Park" for the urban environment must be

made known to the public, and designers must modify their plans to provide better environmental performance for the populace [22]. The authors Ksenia Zolotukhina, Daria Zolotukhina and Anastasia Sheshukova gave an idea for creating the pocket park in Russia and said that in Russian cities, where it is hard to create fully developed green spaces, the pocket parks might serve as a connection between bigger green landscapes [13].

Author Armato Francisco named pocket park as an 'urban interior product' that is beneficial to society. This is a product of urban interior design that includes wide courtyards and rooms without roofs that are intended to enhance daily living, promote community, and increase understanding of one another's cultures [7]. The authors Mennatallah Hamdy and Rovenia Plaku named pocket park an 'Urban living room'. While discussing the features of pocket parks they said that the social impression of these unused micro spaces and their use as gathering places for people can be positively influenced by a pocket park with natural features, protection from urban noise, and adaptable seating. Accessibility and visibility from neighbouring streets are also essential [16]. A potent strategy for reviving public life in urbanized areas is the incorporation of pocket parks or small parks into the design of residential structures that make sure a small, cosy outdoor leisure space is built, which enhances a person's physical and mental health, stated by the author Kubarenko Irina [11].

### **Research purpose and methodology**

This study summarizes the new idea of creating pocket parks as a solution for making a sustainable neighbourhood in a highly dense city. The main objective of this research paper is to show the possibilities and advantages of creating pocket parks in such locations where it is quite a challenge; also, the paper will express how or why this new idea can be a great way to make qualified social green spaces in a highly dense city. A highly dense area of Old Dhaka has been chosen to analyse the opportunity to create the idea of the pocket park and the paper also shows examples of international practices with similar context to the chosen area.

So, this solution was analyzed by the methods of theoretical analysis, analytical study, practical observations and some interviews with locals. Theoretical analysis is needed to brief the background and importance of public green open space and to summarize the scopes people make within their neighbourhoods. Analytical study shows the international practices which are chosen as examples of solving the problem by creating pocket parks and analyzing the possibilities for public green open space. Practical observations were an important part of this research to evaluate the study area. The characteristics and problems of the study area summarize the situation and the research ultimately showed how the idea of the pocket park was implemented in that context. Some questions were prepared for the locals to understand the community and their requirements. Lastly, the paper recommends the strategy of implementing new ideas to create a quality lifestyle within the neighbourhoods.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Case study area: Lalbagh, Old Dhaka. Location and characteristics**

Lalbagh is a densely populated area located in Old Dhaka with an area of 2.04 sq km (fig. 2) [15]. After the construction of the Lalbagh fort, the area was developed by the Mughals. When the business persons of British, Dutch, Portuguese and Armenia started increasing, the traders started to stay there permanently and the settlements have rapidly grown up [5]. Now the area is full of a crowd with a large population, mixed-use buildings and many illegal developments (fig. 3).



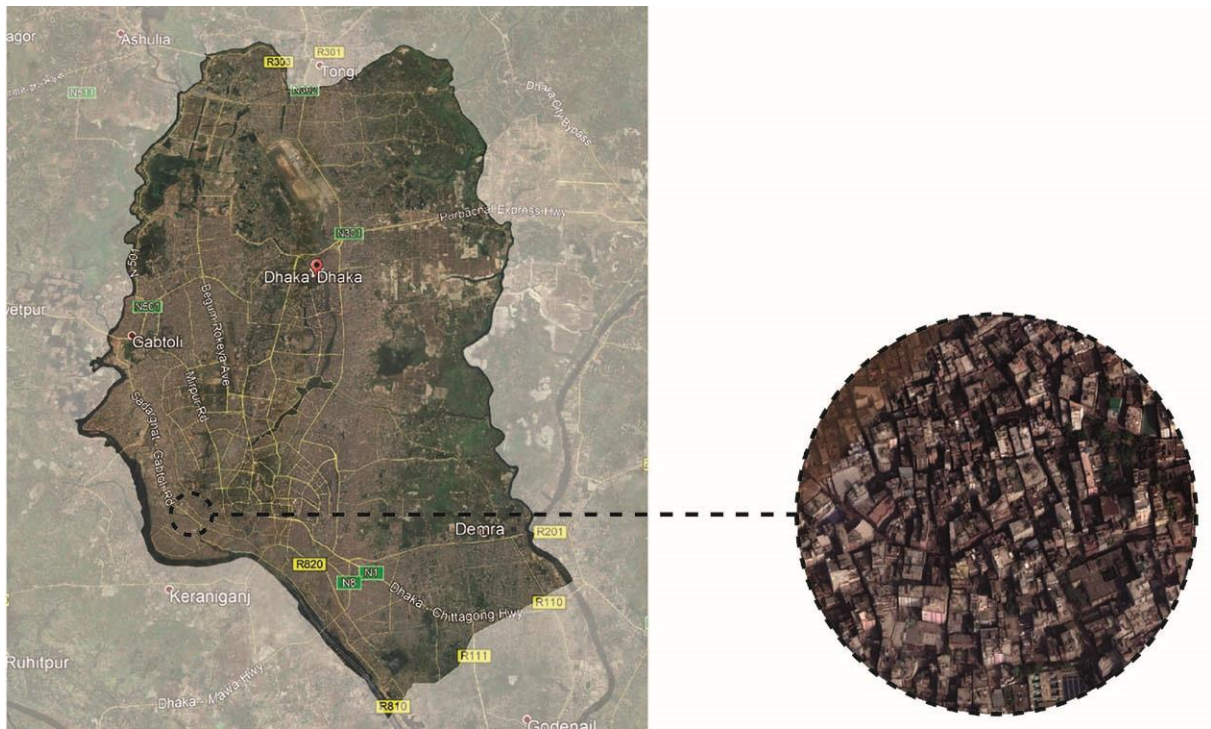


Fig. 2. The map is showing Dhaka, the marked area is Lalbagh, Old Dhaka



Fig. 3. Mixed-use buildings in Lalbagh

### Problems and challenges

Old Dhaka has the minimum quantity of open area or green space all over Dhaka. In the Lalbagh area, the only open space that appears is in the historical Fort Lalbagh Kella. Many influential people in that area have constructed more than 30 buildings on the land of the fort by violating the laws [19]. A large number of residential buildings are constructed very close to the fort's

boundary wall. Different buildings have different facades which creates an ugly background for the Lalbagh fort.

There are very few open spaces that are filled with garbage, used as rickshaws and car parking, illegal shops and vendors (fig. 5). Public spaces are squeezed between the tall buildings and arbitrary shops with oddly shaped corners of the land (fig. 4). Although this is a challenging task to make little spaces green in such a messy place to create an environment healthy and liveable the challenge should be taken as soon as possible.



Fig. 4. Southwest edge of Lalbagh Fort

RAJUK (Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha), the Capital Development Authority of Bangladesh doesn't give the importance of sustainable development to the factors of land and public development [23]. This is a very common case in Dhaka city where areas were planned for residential uses now the area becomes industrial or commercial with all mixed-use and multipurpose developments. These developments keep going with their own choices, no consultancy with the urban specialists creates grey areas without any kind of green spaces.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 5. The images of (a) and (b) are showing the chaotic situation of a mixed-use area of Lalbagh

Lawless behaviour is prominent in people's activities all over the city. People are using heritage buildings very frequently for their business purposes. People even don't use the walkway to walk; they use it for their business and walk on the roads with vehicles! The figures below are showing how people use the ground level of a residential building and how messed up the walkways and roads are (fig. 7). Dumping wastes here and there is another very common scenario in the city.



People are using the spaces as dumping sites for different kinds of waste, even though all kinds of waste are being dumped in one space (fig. 6). Statistics showed that only 50% which is about 1,800 tons of waste is dumped at its indicated zone for the waste. Other wastes are dumped in building setbacks, roadside open spaces, in water bodies etc. The city council does their job regarding waste management by dumping them in other open space by creating an unhygienic environment which creates air pollution.



Fig. 6. Random waste dumping zone



Fig. 7. Arbitrary vendors on the road

### Concept of Pocket Park

The idea of a pocket park, also known as a vest-pocket or mini park, was born out of the need to increase urban life's connectivity to public places, particularly green spaces [14.] The pocket park is an idle concept to break the monotonous grey environment of the neighbourhood in a highly densely populated city. Mainly the unused and neglected pocket spaces of the cities when turned into a usable space for social interaction with gardens and greeneries it is called pocket park [12]. In a pocket park natural features work against the urban noise and gatherings. Flexible walkways, seating arrangements under the trees and, small flower plants welcoming the butterflies and other organs create a good ecosystem in the neighbourhood.

In the 1960s, pocket parks first arose in the United States, as did the name "pocket park." The authorities' answer to the widespread urban crises that were followed by riots at that point was the introduction of small public spaces. Leading designers and artists soon became interested in the layout of the little areas and learnt how to transform the empty spaces left by destroyed structures into chic outdoor spaces. Paley Park (390 m<sup>2</sup>), which debuted in 1967 on the site of a destroyed nightclub, is the first official pocket park in the USA. With good reason, the park is regarded as one of the nicest public spaces in the USA [3]. Being one of the first and most well-

known pocket parks, it serves as a model for how pocket parks may be modified to fit in with a commercial district. The pocket park idea offered low-cost construction to create a good environment after the war events in Europe cities [16].

Smaller green spaces that provide a respite from city bustle just a short distance from a busy street often have a surface area of barely more than an acre, or 4000 square meters, which is roughly equivalent to a square with a side length of 63 meters. Despite their small size, these mini-parks serve a variety of purposes. They are excellent for both private and informally held corporate meetings, and they frequently contain a playground for kids as well as other urban amenities like art pieces [3].

Now for Dhaka city, is high time of creating a pocket park in the tight grey areas. For the Lalbagh area, although there are many misused small spaces to create the green pocket, it's quite a challenge because the implementation needs local support. Pocket parks can play the role of an 'urban living room' for the neighbourhood of Lalbagh.

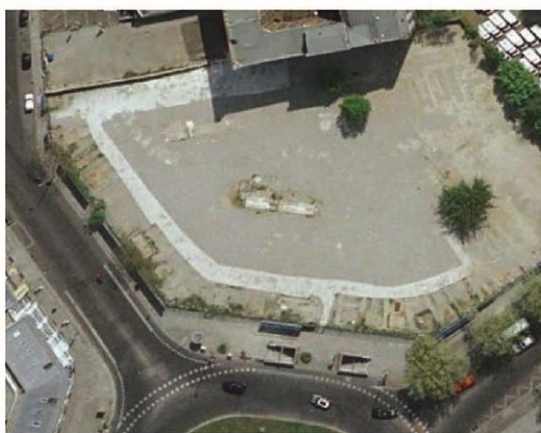
A qualified social green space can welcome different age people with their cultures, knowledge and needs. The parks' idea should come from the community, with the help of local community organizations and the local government. The location, on the other hand, should have a distinct local identity, be unique, and have a positive social role. Otherwise, the location will revert to its previous state as a forgotten spot [1].

### **Pocket parks from global practice**

To understand the successful implementation of pocket parks some selected case studies are shown below. The selected projects are Prinzessinnengarten in Berlin, Greenacre Park in the USA, Pocket Park in Novosibirsk, Russia and Green wall in Shanghai Yichang road, China. These projects are selected by their contextual similarities with Dhaka's Lalbagh area.

#### **i. Prinzessinnengarten in Berlin, Germany**

Nomadic Green Moritzplatz in Berlin Kreuzberg designed Prinzessinnengärten (Princess Gardens) in 2009 (fig. 8). This project was chosen because the location is similar to the waste zone scenario of Dhaka city. For more than half a century, this location was a wasteland. Locals and activists cleaned up the area and built paths with organic vegetable gardens. The Princess Gardens is an example of a new urban space for exchanging knowledge, where neighbours gather to experiment with and learn about more natural and organic food production [16].



(a)



(b)

Fig. 8. Before (a) and after (b) the situation of constructing the pocket park Prinzessingarten in Berlin



## ii. Greenacre Park, USA

Greenacre Park is in a center of all the tall buildings of midtown Manhattan (fig. 9) [24]. This project is chosen to show as a case study because of its similar context to Dhaka where tall buildings have erased all the open spaces. This example of Greenacre Park can be beneficial for taking the idea as it was created in an unused void surrounded by tall buildings.

The space area is 6000 square feet surrounded by a hectic city. This park was designed by Hideo Sasaki with Harmon Goldstone. There is a 25 feet tall waterfall that cools the air and reduces the noise of the surrounding traffic. An amazing feature of this park is its three different levels of environmental choices for the users. Greenacre is a beautiful example of a pocket park in such a chaotic place like New York. It is also a biophilic urban acupuncture. This space is used for a small socio-intervention in a large urban context [24].



Fig. 9. Before (a) and after (b) situation of Greenacre park in the USA

This park is enclosed from the surrounding environment by three walls which cover full greenery, water, and grey stones. The space is a few feet upper from the ground level which keeps it away from the noise and chaos of the street. People come and gather here from their stressful life to enjoy the green environment with fresh air. This project can help to reimagine a central pocket space filled with green trees and water among all the tall buildings [20].

## iii. Pocket park in Novosibirsk, Russia

A pocket park was built in Novosibirsk, Russia in 2021 close to the V.V. Kuibyshev model library. This area used to be a wasteland [2]. Natalya Goncharova, the head of the Kolkhidsky-Zabaluyeva TOS, said that locals were very much interested in this type of small community or neighbourhood park [4]. And at the end, the wasteland became a recreational space as a pocket park or mini park (fig. 10). So, this is the similarity to Dhaka's many waste zones which can be created like this kind of pocket park.

What should be put on the property was decided by members of TOS and neighbours of nearby homes. They organized things by taking away the trash, tidying, painting, and hand-planting flowers. The park was little as it turned out, earning it the appellation "pocket" [2]. The location was in front of the library's entrance on the street. The space was landscaped, including the installation of seating for rest and conversation. The space was designed with the organization of a seasonal bookcrossing with the assistance of the library, the planting of decorative shrubs, the sowing of the lawn, the updating of the stairs and fence, and the laying of paving slabs [4].



Fig. 10. Showing the images (a) and (b) of the pocket park in Novosibirsk, Russia

#### iv. Living walls at Yichang Road, Shanghai, China

Ten meters of green facades have been implemented by Sempergreen China at the Yichang Road in Shanghai (fig. 11). Here, the green plants are applied as a green frame around the historical patterns in the wall which creates both a historic and green appearance [21]. This is also a great example of a green pocket in an urban area. This is how the boundary walls and building walls of Dhaka city can be designed.



Fig. 11. Showing the images (a) and (b) of the green pocket installation at Yichang road, Shanghai

#### Recommendations

After analysing the case studies the recommendation will be to use the neglected and misused spaces to be used for breathing space. An initiative of creating such kind of pocket green or mini green spaces can be taken for the Lalbagh area as well as the whole of Dhaka city where ever the misused space can be found. The unorganized and unhealthy spaces which are used by arbitrary vendors and illegal businessmen can be transferred into a healthy environment by making it green. The green pockets will be beneficial for the whole urban community by establishing safer and cleaner environment. Also, the vendors can be replaced by an organized zone inside the pocket park which will be more flexible for the people.

There is an unused space beside the entrance of the Lalbagh fort. This space can be utilized for visitors by creating pocket green space (fig. 12). Also, the wall can be a green wall with plants. It will change the environment. When a grey space transforms into a green space it recreates the whole environment. The difference can be seen in an imaginary illustration below where the grey space used for illegal car parking turned into a pocket park.





Fig. 12. Showing an existing illegal parking space (a) and a proposed illustration of the pocket park (b) in this place

There are many places surrounded by tall buildings which are unused or there is no such activity (fig. 13). This type of void in the middle of the buildings is quite common in the Lalbagh area. So those spaces can be turned into a pocket park where children can play and adults can enjoy their communication with each other (fig. 13).

The example of Greenacre Park in the USA shows how these types of spaces can be reformed and how interestingly these spaces keep active the neighbourhood. An imaginary illustration has been given below for such kind of space in Lalbagh.



Fig. 13. Showing an existing situation (a) and a proposed Pocket park illustration (b) in the middle of the tall buildings

There are many spaces where people randomly dump waste and make the space dirty which is already discussed (fig. 14). So the random waste zones can be pocket parks such as Russia's pocket park with bookcrossing in Novosibirsk. The zones where people can't take a breath properly for bad smells can be turned into a breathing space by creating such a green pocket



(fig. 14). An imaginary illustration is showing how the waste zone would be by constructing a pocket park.



Fig. 14. Showing an existing waste zone (a) and a proposed communal space by creating a pocket park (b) in that space

Design decisions and activities depend on the local users. The space relationship with people has to be acknowledged such as who and how they will use the space and what will be the benefits. Pocket parks can play an important role in making dense and tight areas lively.

## Conclusion

Though the concept of the pocket park or mini-park is not new for increasing green communal space in the urban design sector, addressing it for making Dhaka city sustainable the idea is pretty much new. This idea came from the need of the locals, the need of improving the environment, and improving the lifestyle. It is an interesting concept that can take place in any type of tiny shaped spaces or even offers pocket green in boundary walls beside the streets. It will create biodiversity and also introduce the function of wildlife into the recreational spaces. Following the examples of international practices, there can be installed water bodies with green and seating arrangements in a large unused void. Last but not the least, to achieve the sustainable city goal and to increase the percentage of green in Dhaka city this pocket park should be the first initiative with the right implementation.

## Источники иллюстраций

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<https://archive.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/2018/10/14/dhaka-remains-the-world-s-most-densely-populated-city>

Fig. 2, 5–7. Created by the author

Fig. 3, 4. Based on the materials of the site. Available at:

<http://dhakadailyphoto.blogspot.com/2007/01/lalbagh-area-and-fort-incident.html>

Fig. 8. Based on the materials of the site. Available at:

<https://prinzessinnengarten.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/prinzessinnengarten2009-2012l.jpg>

Fig. 9. Based on the materials of the site. Available at:

<https://www.bluezones.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/GreenacreparkNYC.jpg>

Fig. 10. Based on the materials of the site. Available at:

Image (a):

[https://nsknews.info/upload/resize\\_cache/iblock/0cf/dsswyo6exl8fb6mtpeszohvqo7gpamkk/835\\_557\\_0/MG\\_0722.JPG](https://nsknews.info/upload/resize_cache/iblock/0cf/dsswyo6exl8fb6mtpeszohvqo7gpamkk/835_557_0/MG_0722.JPG)

Image (b):

[https://nsknews.info/upload/resize\\_cache/iblock/9a8/2b79dg5a085z0ymnwd3ql0jr9y2fp9wo/835\\_557\\_0/MG\\_0804.JPG](https://nsknews.info/upload/resize_cache/iblock/9a8/2b79dg5a085z0ymnwd3ql0jr9y2fp9wo/835_557_0/MG_0804.JPG)

Fig. 11. Based on the materials of the site. Available at:

Image (a):

[https://www.sempergreen.com/uploads/projects/CHN\\_Shanghai\\_Yichang\\_Road/CHN\\_Shanghai\\_Yichang\\_Road\\_curved\\_outdoor\\_green\\_wall\\_with\\_pattern\\_1.jpg](https://www.sempergreen.com/uploads/projects/CHN_Shanghai_Yichang_Road/CHN_Shanghai_Yichang_Road_curved_outdoor_green_wall_with_pattern_1.jpg)

Image (b):

[https://www.sempergreen.com/uploads/projects/CHN\\_Shanghai\\_Yichang\\_Road/CHN\\_Shanghai\\_Yichang\\_Road\\_curved\\_outdoor\\_living\\_wall\\_with\\_pattern\\_6.jpg](https://www.sempergreen.com/uploads/projects/CHN_Shanghai_Yichang_Road/CHN_Shanghai_Yichang_Road_curved_outdoor_living_wall_with_pattern_6.jpg)

Fig. 12–14. Photograph and illustration created by the author

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