

Impact of Covid-19 on Urban Life

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Introduction

The world is witnessing devastating attack from the COVID-19, with the death toll rapidly rising every day. Developed countries equipped with better healthcare facilities are severely affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, while the developing and the densely populated countries like Bangladesh are on the brink of a massive threat. As there is no vaccine for the Coronavirus yet, maintaining WHO prescribed six-point protocols and keeping social distance, are the key methods to be protected from the virus (Karim & Islam, 2020).

As one of the most densely populated countries in the world, Bangladesh is severely vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions on travel have meant that airlines have significantly reduced the number of flights they operate and people have cancelled holidays, thus severely affecting a number of service industries such as aviation, tourism, restaurants and hotels. The ongoing lockdowns and pandemic responses are also having a serious knock-on effect on the job market, causing unprecedented job losses and restrictions on public life in numerous societies. Those that have been made unemployed have lost their income while people are also more generally limiting their expenditure, resulting in less trade and consumption and therefore a lower demand for goods and services, with very few exceptions. Affected governments and their central banks are wasting no time with putting measures in place to deal with the health, welfare, and economic implications of the crisis. Without doubt there will be lasting changes to the economic and political landscapes around the globe as the western world still grapples with the lethal pathogen three months into the outbreak in its own societies. Different western nations are still debating when to bring their respective economies out of the induced coma. When the current crisis will end, or what the future will look like remains uncertain, but one thing is sure, we will not be going back to the world we left on the night of 31 December 2019. Turning to Bangladesh, for the last nine years the country has boasted, on average, growth rates of around 6 percent, and which even reached a peak of 8.2 percent in 2019. Strong export earnings combined with remittance income covered more than 75 percent of Bangladesh's import bill. Improvements in key social development indicators such as education, nutrition, and child and maternal mortality

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made Bangladesh stand out from other countries with comparable levels of income. Mega infrastructure projects like the Padma Bridge, Metro Rail Project, Deep Sea Port, Karnaphuli Tunnel and the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant symbolised the country's route to modernisation. By the end of 2021, the country was set to celebrate its 50 years of independence. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has ended the optimism and euphoria in Bangladesh as well as the rest of the globe which has been pushed into a recession comparable to the Great Depression of the 1930s. The pandemic is expected to fundamentally alter how cities are managed/governed in the future. In this regard, actions taken within the next few years are important and determine whether post-COVID cities will be developed and managed in a more sustainable manner. As cities start to recover, their main priority will probably be economic development. However, it is essential to make sure that, in addition to economic development, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability will also be considered. In fact, the pandemic has provided opportunities that can be capitalized on by planners.

Aim and Objectives

The major aim of this study is to understand impacts of the pandemic on urban life and to highlight major strategies that can be applied for making resilient city and post-COVID urban planning and design.

The first objective describe the overall impact of COVID-19 on city life. Health sector, Industrial sector, Service sector, Banking and Financial service, Education sector, Tourism and hospitality industry all are adversely affected by this pandemic. Public transportation has been severely affected during the pandemic. Great restrictions on public transportation were imposed to reduce the spread of pandemics. The COVID-19 has caused gigantic negative effects on populace wellbeing, society and the economy in Bangladesh.

The second objective discuss about the strategies for combating the adverse impact of COVID-19 on city life and making city resilient & adaptable for any kind of future disaster and pandemics. Recommendation are mainly related to the socio-economic factors, urban management and governance, and transportation and urban design that can be used for post-COVID urban planning and design.

Impact of COVID on Urban Life

COVID-19 has severe impact on urban life and it changed the city life a lot. Due to COVID-19 transportation sector affected a lot initially though the scenario is now become

just like before. Peoples travel behavior also changed a lot. Public transportation has been severely affected during the pandemic, and many people have turned to private vehicles and biking/walking as safer alternatives. Consumer behavior also affected a lot. People are now more interested in Online shopping rather than to go showroom or shops. All types of daily goods and services are now available on online.

Economic Impact

The impact of COVID-19 on the economy of Bangladesh has been transmitting through two main channels and these are depressed domestic demand-supply disruptions in the local economy, and slowdown in global economic activities affecting global trade & international financial flows. The economy is being significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has led to a decline in national and global demand for manufactured goods, particularly in the garment sector. This increases unemployment and deepen poverty. The long-term economic shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic have had very negative impacts on urban economy. The consequences are complex and occur in various ways and on a wide range of scales. The COVID-19 outbreak has already started to affect different sectors of economy. Firstly the immediate impact of the pandemic is temporary shutdown of factories and businesses in an affected country; as a result production is declined (Barua, 2020). Beside these, the three prominent sectors of the economy of Bangladesh that are Agriculture, Industry and service sectors which contributed 18%, 29% and 53% to the GDP of the country respectively are adversely affected by the coronavirus pandemic (BER-2019).

Social Impact

Covid-19 also caused a very severe impact on society, particularly in Bangladesh. During the early period of the Covid-19 outbreak, panic surged in the society. Since lack trustful and official information about the case affected and death, people started to believe the rumors which are spread through social media, mobile phone, word of mouth and many other ways. Experts criticized that not enough tests were conducted in the country that has a population of over 160 million (Dhaka Tribune and news.yahoo.com.30 March, 2020). Newspaper reports and social media continued to report about additional deaths of patients with COVID-19 symptoms. Some of the deceased were treated at COVID-19 isolation centers at hospitals in the districts and others were denied treatment, though no tests were conducted to confirm contagion. Since prevention measures of Covid-19 are wearing a mask, washing hands through soap or sanitizer surprisingly the worth of the hand sanitizer and mask were high by the unethical businessman. On the other hand this pandemic also impact on religion by cancellation of the prayers in mosque, temple and

churches of many affected countries. Similarly in Bangladesh religious mass gathering are discouraged by the government. Most of the people of in Bangladesh are Muslim and the rural religious scholars protest against this government declaration and people started to gather in mosque and pray for recovery from this virus (Rafee, 2020). Not only that the price level also increased dramatically. Since people were panicking about this outbreak and the government of Bangladesh has taken initiatives of lockdown people started to purchase daily necessary abnormally which is the main reason for raising the price of the essential commodities. Prices of hand sanitizers and face masks have increased abnormally. Without giving any explanation retailers hiked the price of masks up to 400%. Though masks were available at high prices on footpaths, most of the drug store was found to be out of stock of masks and sanitizer after the announcement of detecting coronavirus in three persons in the country (Irani, 2020).

Environmental Impact

Among those negative impact of COVID-19 there is one positive impact also. Environment or air quality increased surprisingly a lot during the lockdown. In response to the pandemic, partial and total lockdowns were enforced in many parts of the world. These lockdowns provided an unprecedented opportunity to test how major transportation policy interventions and reforms in production patterns may contribute to enhancing urban air quality and it has been found that travel restrictions have significantly reduced NO₂ and CO that are pollutants directly associated with the transportation sector. Improvements in air and water quality in cities during lockdown periods highlight the significant environmental impacts of anthropogenic activities and provide a wake-up call to adopt environmentally friendly development pathways.

Strategies to Combat impact of COVID

The Coronavirus pandemic is more severe than any form of natural disaster and only getting worse. Keeping this reality in mind the city need to be developed. Following are some strategies to combat adverse impact of corona virus on urban life and to make city resilient for any further disaster or pandemics.

Smart City Development

The pandemic has boosted interest in smart city development by demonstrating the multiple benefits of smart solutions in terms of identifying infected individuals, predicting diffusion dynamics, minimizing human-to-human contact, and enabling enforcement and tracking of social distancing and quarantine rules. These have contributed to designing effective response and recovery measures. Regarding the

implementation, while techno-driven approaches have been more successful, there are concerns about their implications in terms of privacy and enforcement of power relations. Therefore, a combination of techno-driven and human-driven approaches is necessary to not only overcome such concerns, but also enhance adaptation to future events by raising citizen awareness.

Block Based Housing

It is clear to everyone that after this crisis is over, we will not return as before, and one of the most optimistic expectations shows that we are waiting for a new beginning for our lives. It is the beginning of changing values, habits, and our homes. Block based housing can provide space for all types of community facilities within a specific area that's why people don't need to go more distance for getting facilities. So block based housing can be one of the well-planned path to recovery, solutions for healthier and safer urban life, and ensure more resilient responses in future. Better access to amenities and public health infrastructure make high-density areas less vulnerable to pandemics. Considering multiple other benefits of compact urban developments, planners should continue promoting them.

Smart mobility restrictions

Smart mobility restrictions, based on the transmission risk of different transportation modes, is essential for containing the spread of the virus, More attention to minimizing potential public health risks of public transportation is needed, Modal shift to cycling and walking offers a unique opportunity to further promote active transportation.

Public Transit and Safety

Authorities and transport providers should ensure that public transport continues to operate safely and efficiently to meet the demand for essential services during a pandemic, while planning new and reviewing existing strategies that will ensure public transport is sustainable over the long term. This can be challenging financially with ridership reduced. However, it is essential for the health of the public and operators. Safe urban public transport is critical in a crisis. This is an inevitable consequence of a reduction in passenger numbers. Rerouting and rescheduling strategies need to consider adequate coverage to urban areas across different modes, considering peak travel times and directions. A good understanding of population distribution and density in different areas is key to implementing this effectively, which can be aided by the use of GIS mapping and access to centralized data pools on urban mobility factors.

Proper Use of Public spaces

Many public spaces for social interaction are state resources. One of the most important basic measures to confront this pandemic is social distancing policies to limit places of gathering, as part of those policies; Governments encouraged people to stay at home, abolished or postponed large public events, theatres and museums activities, libraries, sports facilities and closed schools, universities, factories, and markets, as well as restricting the presence in public squares. At the time of pandemics the use of public spaces such as stadiums and conference centres can repurpose for emergency hospitals. The most rapid practical approach was to adapt to existing buildings. Public spaces have always been a destination for many individuals, and many were centres of religious and cultural celebrations .Therefore the attention of designers can be directed to rediscovering social and recreational uses and redesigning according to human needs and to be designed as pandemic-resilient and flexible spaces.

Proactive planning and emergency plans

Absence of proactive planning and emergency plans is a major reason for failure to respond effectively and for this long-term visioning and integrated urban governance, economic and social support to vulnerable groups need to be provided. In addition to top-down initiatives, certain levels of local leadership and community engagement are critical for timely response to pandemics.

Management and governance

Top-down and multi-level governance approaches should be combined with strong, democratic, and integrated city-level governance to enable effective and nimble response to pandemics. Such integrated approaches facilitate developing appropriate long-term development visions and emergency plans, help avoid sectoral conflicts, and maximize benefits that can be accrued from stakeholder engagement.

Conclusion

COVID-19 crisis entails an excellent opportunity for planners and policy makers to take transformative actions towards creating cities that are more just, resilient, and sustainable. The issues exposed by the pandemic and recommendations provided to deal with them can inform city planners and policy makers of measures that need to be taken to develop cities that are more resilient to pandemics. Pandemics have always shaped cities and therefore cities after “pandemic of Covid-19” could radically alter the urban life in the cities around the world. Planners and professionals will need to show way forward of well-planned path to recovery, solutions for healthier and safer urban life, and ensure more resilient responses in future.

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