

**BREAKING BARRIERS AND MAKING BETTER PLACES  
– URBAN DESIGN APPROACH FOR INTEGRATED URBAN  
DEVELOPMENT**

– The experience of Gampaha District Integrated Urban Development Programme

The urban design approach to Gampaha district development was adopted by UDA, as an effective mechanism to stimulate urban development covering identified areas within the District. The Design was identified by the following constraints and needs as well as obligations on the part of UDA to undertake integrated planning exercises.

- (1) The non-availability of comprehensive structure plan for the District.
- (2) The non-availability of resources for direct government investment in providing public amenities and the need to cultivate private sector investment opportunities.
- (3) The need to promote public participation in the planning process.
- (4) The need to stimulate urban actions covering the entire District.

UDA is of the view that the programme was adequately broadbased to achieve

these objectives. Some of the seminars and public affairs forums conducted during the initial stages of the programme as a means of cultivating public participation were very effective. The structure of the programme is indicated in Table 1.

Unfortunately most of our Architects are not familiar with encouraging wider public involvement in the process of design, which requires greater flexibility on their part.

Adopting an urban design approach to the integrated urban planning actions has many advantages both in terms of planning as well as implementation. It allows one to incorporate visual and physical experiences into the planning process, which has been mainly two dimensional and lacked the third dimension to create built forms and their settings.

In Sri Lanka the main obstacle for implementing urban design proposals is the existence of strong property boundaries, where access and permeability is restricted or made

exclusive. We often experience closed arcades, blocking of private access roads, restricted entry to popular public areas and even murders related to overstepping of the boundaries. By defining potential areas for detailed urban design action, the formulated concept for urban design consultancy seeks to weed out these constraints by introducing a public space network improving access and permeability within an identified area.

The design exercises done for Mirigama and Negombo were somewhat successful in creating such networks where the public could move freely patronizing the many activities united by the lively public spaces created. This will also ensure the economic sustainability of the development. However it must be admitted that lot of persuading is necessary to adopt such principles where public spaces are created as integrated urban developments. Most of the consultants too fail to recognise the merits of creating such spaces in the interest of the public at large and the quality of the urban environment.

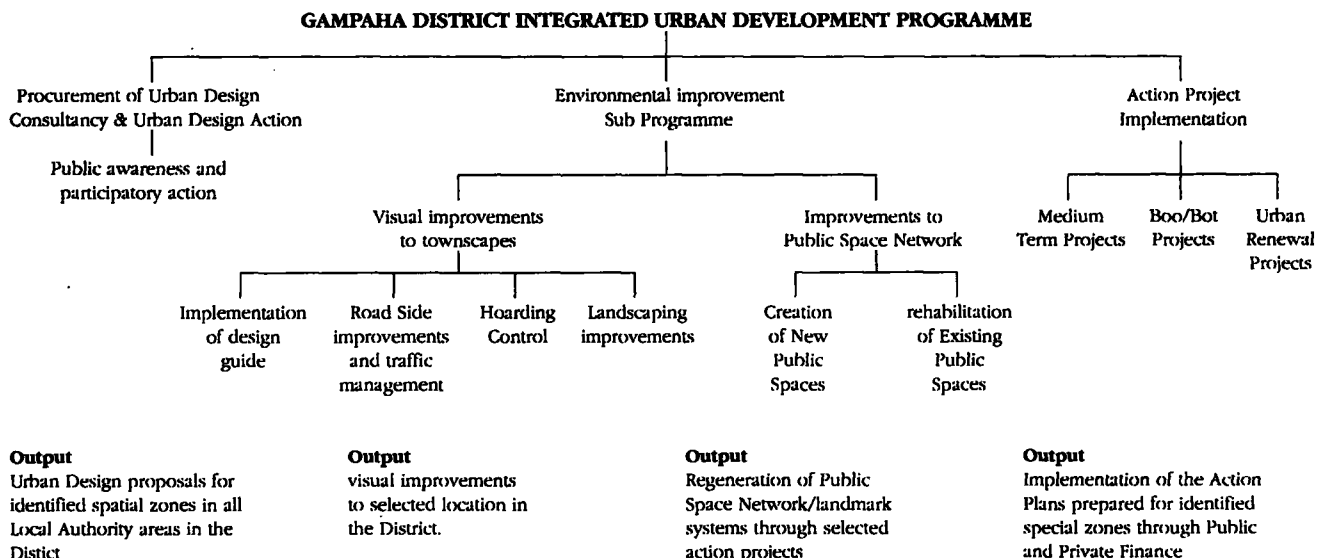


Table 1

The time has come for the Architects to accept the challenge to step out of their property boundaries and create Community Architecture that could be experienced and enjoyed by many in addition to his or her clients. Regrettably we have a long way to go to experience such spatial qualities.

The urban design process is incomplete, if the proposals are not packaged for implementation. Therefore the investment promotion and attracting developers for

implementing these projects is equally important to designing better places. This is not an easy task to perform since the investments often require creating public spaces which may not bring direct economic returns to the investors. We are yet to realise some of the projects designed under the programme promoted with active private sector participation.

UDA is confident that with the very little progress we have made so far we could convince the government to

accelerate the programme where private sector experiences are harnessed and investments promoted to create interesting urban spaces within the urban environment. In fact we have made considerable progress in this direction. But we need the support and commitment of all the consultants to realise these expectations within the shortest possible time.

**Arch. Piyal Silva**

*Design & Project Management Division/UDA*

*"The city must be experienced to be appreciated, preferably the experience should be on foot and at a leisurely pace. The city is not simply an artefact to be viewed. The viewer is part of the city.*

*He or she experiences the noise of distant bells, the babble of fellow pedestrians, the delicious smell of roasting coffee beans, the reflected heat from hot pavements. He or she explores dark alleyways and experiences the sudden brightness of the market square and the bustle of business. The module for this experience is the footstep, distances are measured in paces, this is the module that gives proportion to the city."*

**Diana I. A. Grest**

*Architecture from without  
MIT Press – England.*