

Title: Public Realm and Planning in Jamaica: The University of Technology, Jamaica Role in Redesigning Public Space in Papine.

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Abstract

Introduction and Justification for Research

The Papine urban center in Kingston, Jamaica is unique in that it is the only urban centre in the English speaking Caribbean with the largest concentration of tertiary institutions, including the University of Technology, Jamaica, which provides training in urban planning and architecture. For many years, Papine and its environs have been plagued by unplanned growth and development.

The Papine Park serves as the central public space and transportation hub for eleven communities; the poor design and lay-out of this public space serve only to exacerbate the burgeoning development. Government's miniscule attempts to address the issues are piecemeal and are often "top-down" which further compound the problems. Furthermore, the lack of coordination and support by major stakeholders has stifled the implementation of solutions for growth and development.

A team of built environment professionals, including planners and architects from the University of Technology, Jamaica took on the task of addressing the design and layout of the public areas in and around Papine Park. They are guided by the view that the economic, social and physical conditions can be renewed and communities can develop a new and distinct identity by using participatory planning tools and urban design techniques.

Objective

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the theoretical and applied approaches used in redesigning the public space in and around the Papine Park. The paper will also examine the impact of key stakeholders in the redesign process, challenges faced in implementing the proposed redesign, and the outcomes of the process.

Methodology

With the support of the wider University, the research and design team engaged the applied research method to address the issues of unplanned development and proposed elements of design of the public space in Papine in keeping with the concept of a “University Town”. The participatory planning processes was used to engage the community residents and other stakeholders.

The team prepared a ten year comprehensive development plan in collaboration with the Papine Area Development Committee (PDAC), a civil society umbrella group representing community-based organizations serving the Papine area. Out of the development plan, the community identified the redesign of the public park and transportation hub as one of the easily achievable tasks to be accomplished within a year.

With financial support from the government, the University was re-engaged to provide conceptual designs of the public space. A team from University of the West Indies, the other university in the vicinity, collected and analysed data using the System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities (SOPARC). This approach used momentary time sampling techniques that were both systematic and periodic to gain observational data on contextual and individual physical activity. Data was collected on conditions such as accessibility, usability, presence of supervision and equipment presence, degree of lighting and classification of organized activities. Questionnaires were administered to 120 park users to solicit their views on how the public space can be improved as well as to ascertain

the best use of the public space. Focus group interviews were conducted with representatives from local businesses and government technical agencies and used to identify the feasibility of the concept design.

Main Results

The analysis of the data from SOPAC, surveys, and focus groups provided understanding of the actual use of the area. The study also highlighted the current state and use of lands immediately adjoining this public space. Also, the creation of interactive 3D virtual and physical models enabled "plugin" by other entities. Using the "appreciative inquiry" process, the concept designs were "re-presented" to the community residents and other stakeholders for input and buy-in and the final design with preliminary budget estimates for implementation was presented to the government for implementation.

Contribution

This is the first applied research on public space in Jamaica utilizing (SOPARC) to inform design imperatives. This study is significant, as it is the first of its kind to document the intersection between participatory planning, urban design, experiential learning, and service in a small island developing state.

References

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