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Book of Abstracts

The Impact of Dhaka's High Density Development on Livability: A Sustainability Perspective

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In recent years there was an emerging debate on dense urban forms as the most proficient ways to reduce energy consumption and pollution and for contributing to sustainability. While high density development remains at the centre of the debate of developing a sustainable city, different countries adopt different density policies and achieve different density patterns. The cities of developing countries already have higher concentration of people than the cities of developed countries owing to rapid population growth. There is very little known about the state of sustainability in relation to urban densities in these countries. Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has been ranked as the most densely populated urban area of the world according to Demographia in 2011. Yet densification process is going on in the city, creating extreme pressure on land, incurring congestion, environmental degradation and strain on infrastructures as well as other facilities. As a first step to investigate how Dhaka as a high density city should be managed to realize the advantages and diminish the disadvantages of its density patterns on livability, this paper aims to address the following two questions: What are the characteristics of the density patterns of Dhaka, and Why Dhaka has this distinctive pattern of high density? And, what is the impact of this density pattern on the livability aspects of Dhaka in urban sustainability terms? This study will conduct the analyses at two levels to answer the questions and both qualitative and quantitative analysis will be undertaken.. First, the unique density patterns of Dhaka will be explored through assessing density and identifying building types. Second, the livability aspect will be examined to find out how it has been affected by the density pattern and characteristics. The major indicators to assess livability will include the provision of public transport, accessibility to community facilities and residential space standard. Data regarding population, area, building type, community facilities and public transport will be collected. Semi-structured interviews with the academics, professionals and concerned officials will be conducted to explore the major factors influencing the density pattern. Case study areas will be selected for the questionnaire survey to know the residents' opinion about the impact of density pattern on livability. This study argues that in a high density city which is featured with contiguous low-rise development, it does not possess most of the sustainability benefits in livability as postulated in the compact city literature.