

City gardens and Parks: A tentative solution to deal with the challenges of city pollution

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The highly crowded metropolis, cities and municipalities across the planet are struggling to accommodate free green spaces in their sprawling sea of concrete constructions. However, all latest research indicates that city parks and community gardens constitute beneficial effect on human health, mind, society and helps in improving the local environment. City parks and community gardens are considered precious natural environment with the ability to compensate, improve or restore most human needs that have been restricted considerably due to urbanization. Being an important component of the urban landscapes, they are true symbol of environmental health. Lack of initiatives and funding, global economic recession, instability and lack of political will and interest, lack of awareness and education has been few of the several factors that have been responsible for the shrinking green spaces within city limits.

However, over the past 2-3 decades there has been a global resurgence in the interest for developing and redesigning the existing city parks and gardens, beautification of the river banks, conversion of abandoned railway lines, parks, gardens and water bodies into organized and well designed trails, promoting roof top and balcony gardens, developing community gardens in unused city properties. The trees, bushes, and evergreen plants are principal components of parks, gardens and other green areas in the cities that are severely affected by the urban inclement weather conditions and mostly are exposed to damage caused by high temperature, low air humidity, low soil moisture and industrial pollution. Some of the positive impacts of city parks and community gardens are listed below: 1. Community revitalization, rebuilding & engagement; 2. Building safer neighborhood; 3. Increasing green coverage; 4. Promoting sustainable landscaping; 5. Urban beautification drive; 6. Climate change mitigation; 7. Reducing environmental pollution; 8. Promoting public health; 9. Community awareness & education; 10. Promoting social development & awareness; 11. Economic development and 12. Promoting tourism.



Community gardens could invariably contribute to the growing city need for fresh and health vegetables for the city residents. It is not only an economic opportunity due to the sale of the produce while providing local employment; but also contributes positively by adding green spaces to the crowded city life and environment. It provides food security as well as contributes towards the betterment of the congested and highly polluted city environment. Cuba and Japan have made pioneering progress in these areas and can be considered as global leaders on successfully developing city based community gardens. Several African, Asian and Latin American nations have also found considerable success for their community gardens. Use of locally grown food reduces the dependence of long distance transportation of food and food products. Such a path breaking approach has the potential in considerable reduction on the dependency of fossil fuels thereby reducing the carbon foot prints and enhancing the quality of city life, human health and long term sustenance of the local environment and in preventing further ecological degradation.



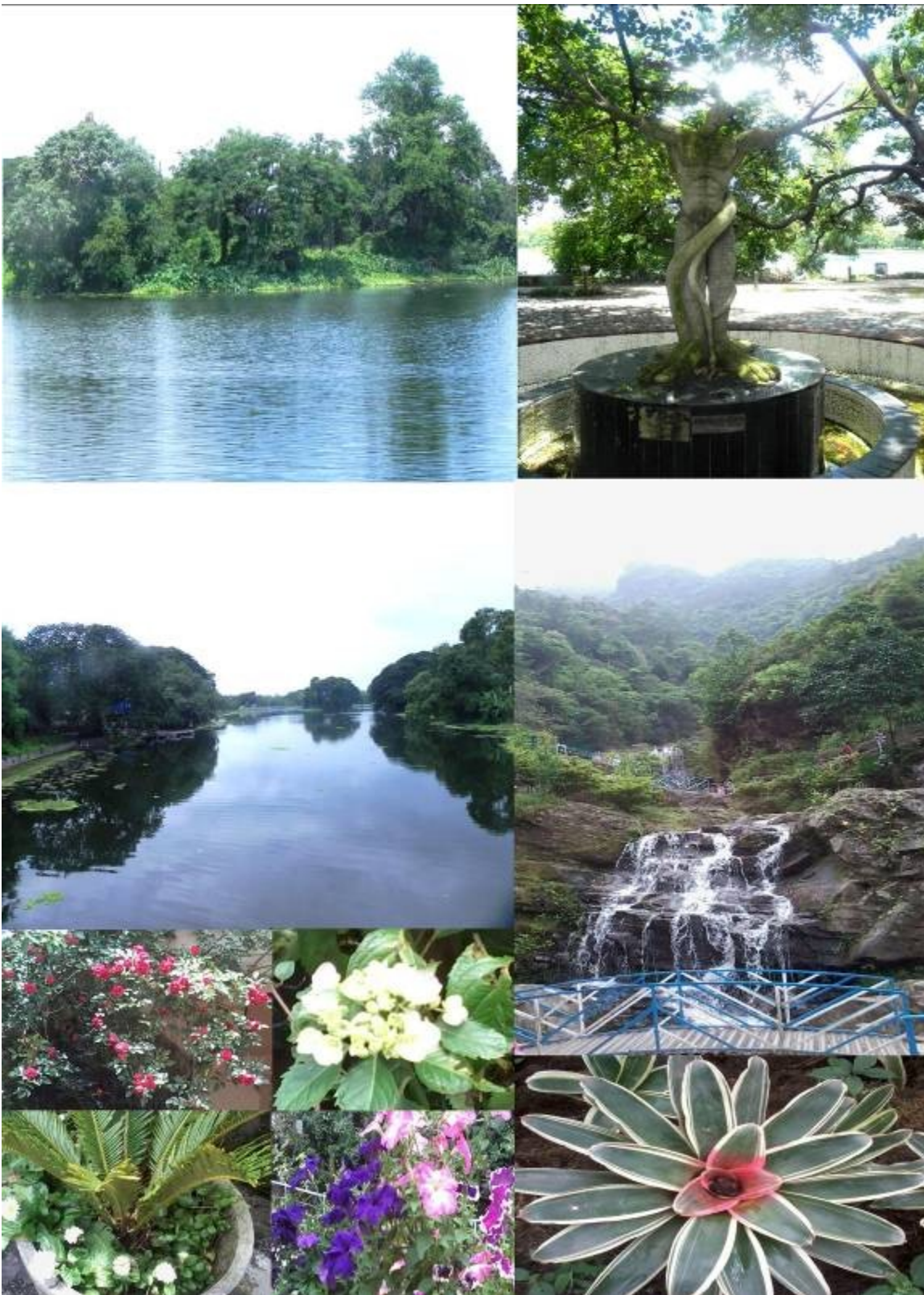
From an environmental perspective city parks and community gardens can reduce impacts of sound and noise pollution, reduce concentration of airborne dust particles, and reduce and/or filter concentration of lead generated via fuel combustion. Green spaces, trees and bushes are active producers of biological oxygen released through photosynthesis and/or photochemical decompositions and are also efficient in absorbing harmful solar radiations, reflecting intensive light and providing cool shade and play an important role in moderating city microclimate, prevent soil erosion and also serve as natural windbreak against cyclonic storms, strong wind and gale. These green centers of cities either in the form of natural or equipped, have substantial role in bringing spiritual tranquility to city people and in providing space for spending leisure time.

Environment friendly landscape designs and open spaces and water bodies within the boundaries of modern cities and towns in both developing as well as under developed nations can promote peaceful neighborhood, better societal engagement, communication and integration and contribute towards the growth of a healthy society. City parks and gardens have been found to promote better health in several research reports by providing open and natural space for walking, recreation and regular physical activities that helps in reducing city based stress and anxiety, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, hypertensions, diabetes and several other metabolic and hormonal disorders among the city communities. Both artificial

and natural lakes and rivers crisscrossing the cities and towns can result in unique natural landscapes within city boundaries if designed and planned carefully. The abundance of city based community gardens and parks open to public can certainly transform the appearance of busy growing towns and cities for tourists helping local businesses to grow and prosper brining in wider economic opportunities in the long run.



Community gardens and environmental landscapes adjoining hospitals, schools, colleges, and offices have significant positive impacts on the mind and health as well as quality of the life of the citizens of the busy global metropolis serving as an oasis of ecological refuge within the bustling and busy city life and environment. In densely populated urban areas, open green space located within affordable distance range is more likely to promote physical activity outside the home for children and senior citizens alike. Community gardens and city gardens have been reported to be contributing small ecological niches within busy cities attracting numerous small amphibians, reptiles and mammalian species as their natural habitats in addition to attracting wide diversity of bird species for foraging, nesting and breeding. They also help in reducing the average city temperatures if managed and maintained properly and could add to drastic beautification in the most natural and organic way.



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