Negotiating Thresholds

From the entry of a house to the edges where the city meets its rivers, thresholds are a constant in the built fabric of Dhaka. The thresholds described above separate binaries such as the private property and the public street, the formal and informal, and the built and unbuilt to name a few. Interestingly, these divides, while defined by solid tangible lines, accommodate a plethora of pluralities in terms of ownership, usage and occupation over time.

It is along these blurred lines that various stakeholders co-exist. They meet at their shared thresholds, sometimes resulting in harmony, and often dissonance. The private dwelling and its public street find grounds of interaction herein. Informal vendors negotiate spatial occupation along thresholds of commercial districts with their formal counterparts. Thresholds in public places are also crucial in both allowing and restricting intended and unintended uses of the cities precious open spaces. This thesis explores such situations along three major scales of Dhaka.

The process undertaken throughout the course of this exploration does not claim to provide absolute solutions to the issues discovered along each threshold. Instead, notional interventions are suggested as appropriate in each of the three situations in order to initiate the long overdue discourse on Dhaka and its many spatial thresholds.
NEIGHBORHOOD
hypothetical site

The iconic depiction of Dhaka’s old town illustrates neighborhoods where the houses pour onto the street in a diverse range of communal, commercial and cultural activities. The threshold between the street and the plot; its boundary often disappears into the blur of activities that paint a vibrant streetscape, owing to low height walls, shopfronts and open plinths. Unfortunately, such activities against thresholds remain largely absent in newer neighborhoods. Their inert boundary walls create an equally inert and alienated neighborhood.

analysis of the thresholds of old dhaka on the basis of geometry

can the thresholds of old dhaka inform interventions in thresholds of the new?
prototypical sectional interventions

the consolidation of services and amenities can allow for the reduction of individual boundary walls. This allows more cumulative ground space shared by multiple buildings as well as a more performative interface where they meet the street.

proposed neighborhood

landscape and sitter

communal facilities

interactive shopfronts
Informal vendors constitute an inevitable component of the thresholds of commercial districts. It is here that they negotiate scopes of spatial occupation with their formal counterparts and the city.

It was imperative to identify the types of hawkers against the thresholds of bazaars and see if the issue of finding a place for them in the city can be accommodated in the very thresholds they now illegally occupy.

BAZAAR

Vendor typologies found on site

Threshold typologies found on site

Hawker occupation along thresholds

Street elevation outlining hawker occupation

Policy interventions

Buildings without setback

Additional buildings that do have a setback can also set aside space for hawkers to occupy against their facades such acts can be further incentivized by awarding additional buildable space upon future expansion schemes.
The Martyred Intellectuals’ Monument and its adjacent cemetery in Rayer Bazar are distinguished by a 3 km long boundary wall enveloping the cemetery. On its exterior, informal shops find a back wall. On its interior are places where people gather inside the cemetery, for recreation. At the same time, both the monument and cemetery have become park-like open spaces in the evenings, with no regard for the solemn nature of both sites. The city envisions the introduction of a museum and library to better preserve the sanctity of the monument. This study addresses this opportunity, but explores whether the built form alone can help negotiate spaces for the many stakeholders against this wall?

**PUBLIC PLACE**

**martyred intellectuals’ monument**

**program generation**

**proposals by PWD**

**additional interventions**

**STATEMENT**

**structure**

**landscape**

**intended and actual uses**

**built form as volumetric threshold**

**situation analysis in and around site surroundings**

**conceptualization**

**design considerations**

- relocating recreational activities to the lake away from monument and cemetery
- introducing water to prevent crossing from monument to cemetery
- volume as a threshold that sensitizes visitors to the solemn nature of the site
- rearranging existing informal nurseries in place of site boundary wall
- expanding capacity of existing mosque
- the parapet of the museum as threshold at ground level
Studies of the area reveal the dominance of the 3 km long boundary wall shrouding both the cemetery and monument. The vision of the city authorities to complement the spirit of the monument and retain the sanctity of the cemetery are in direct conflict with people's need for recreational space. These considerations informed a design intervention that caters to both the intended and actual uses of this space. The built environment employs a museum and library in remembrance of the martyred intellectuals. At the same time, ancillary interventions facilitate informal nurseries as well as recreational activities without giving rise to conflict between these somewhat incoherent yet co-existing functions.
The only constant along the ever-shifting, plural thresholds of Dhaka are the daily negotiations which allow for co-existence of its multiple stakeholders, sometimes in harmony but often in dissonance. The policies, schemes and designs exercised in this thesis are not to be seen as absolute solutions. After all, the process by which this thesis evolved was one of constant rationalization often leading up to adaptations, modifications or even outright rejections of diverse strategies to address the many thresholds of Dhaka.

In the end it is the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate one of many notional designs that may be pursued in order to better facilitate the many actors who thrive and in turn give life to the thresholds of this city.