Redesigning public open spaces as ecological & cultural infrastructure: From Vancouver to Lahore
Presentation & discussion for the concerned citizens of Lahore and organized by Quaid College, Lahore

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Much of my work has involved developing cooperative frameworks for planning, design, and management of outdoor areas with competing claims often involving tribal groups.
Belly-Rising-Up aboriginal food gathering landscape, Vancouver Island
Much of this work in Pakistan has been linked to landscape planning for forest biodiversity conservation & local development.

The Salt Range, Punjab
NDVI aggregate map showing major forest fragments
SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF REMAINING FORESTS

- **forest**
- **govt. forest boundary**

West

East

Scale: 1:784587
Today’s workshop is more concerned with nature, art, architecture and culture in the city.

Shrine near Delhi Gate
Just like urban infrastructure for drinking water or electricity, networks of parks and other forms of open space support functions that are necessary for social and economic development.
The central idea that I have for you today is that expanding and reconnecting public (and private) open space is crucial for making more liveable and prosperous cities (such as Lahore).
The second most important idea for you today is that networks of public open space as essential forms of ecological and cultural infrastructure.
Thirdly, just like the standards for road, bridges, housing, ecological and cultural infrastructure require careful planning, design, construction and maintenance.
My fourth concern is that planning, design, construction and restoration of ecological and cultural infrastructure is both an art and a science and in fact is largely an art that sometimes relies on science.
The Fort, Lahore
Open space as ecological and (outdoor) cultural infrastructure has been key to the development of just about every city.

Part of The Emerald Necklace designed by Frederik Law Olmsted (1822 - 1903) for Boston.
Phoenix, Arizona has a kind of semi-arid open space network sometimes called an ‘amber necklace’.
The open spaces of Lahore are best known for spectacular kinds of outdoor (and built) cultural sites including Mughal Gardens and marvellously designed sites (with water).
Jahangir’s Quadrangle, Lahore Fort
And just as buildings along with indoor sites and art are being restored, we can rebuild other aspects of both cultural spaces and ecological infrastructure.
Shish Mahal restoration during January 2004
And as illustrated with this satellite image of Islamabad and Rawalpindi taken a few months ago, the form of Lahore embodies competing urban patterns rooted in ecological & historical relationships.
Realizing the cultural significance of Lahore in the world, there are specific imperatives for rebuilding and restoring the city’s cultural, recreational and ecological infrastructure.
Compared to cities with similar socio-economic levels, Lahore has some of the highest ratios of public open space (much green space) to (relatively low) median income levels.
In a city with as much income disparities as this, public open spaces often provide key amenities for the survival of marginalized groups.
In contrast, Lahore is also a city with a concentration of affluence combined with relatively large areas of outdoor spaces accessible to a wide range of social groups.
But as in all cities, many public open spaces in Lahore are often only partially accessible to and enjoyed by certain social groups. There are effective barriers.
In considering how to rebuild the network of open spaces of Lahore, let’s have some questions on issues which I want to explore with you in today’s discussion.
the Lahore region, February 1997
1. How relevant are the benefits of improved, expanded & better connected networks of public open space to economic, social and cultural development in Lahore for the coming years?
Aikratwali Masjid, The Old City, Lahore
2. How could redesigning and better connecting networks of open space for ecological functions support cultural infrastructure?
3. How could redesigning and better connecting networks of open space for protection, restoration and expansion of cultural sites support ecological infrastructure?
In exploring answers with you, I hope to initiate a conversation with a very different city but one with some historical and contemporary links to the Punjab: Vancouver, Canada.
RENEE VAN HALM - 2002 -
Contemporary Art Gallery,
Vancouver
In Vancouver, ‘open space’ is both a metaphor and a set of functions for ecological and cultural infrastructure, and this ‘space’ has become integral to a hard-fought social contract.
Paul Kane, circa 1845-46 Scene from the Northwest (Canada)
Why is a conversation between Lahore and Vancouver on public open space worthwhile at this point in history?

outside Masjid Wazir Khan
Lahore and Vancouver will be increasingly dependent on their cultural and ecological infrastructure for (re)building social contracts and attracting investment and tourism.
As with most cities, both Lahore and Vancouver have contentious relationships with their histories with some aspects of open space preserved and other aspects obliterated.
The balance of social resources has yet to be set for 1. ecological management and restoration, 2. preservation of heritage and 3. contemporary culture has yet to be set.
Lahore Open Space Charette
Step 1
Identification of open space in each of the 4 'quarters' of Lahore
Four groups each work together for 10 minutes.

Take a quarter (north-west, north-east, south-east, south-west) of Lahore and map the open space on a sheet of paper.
Based on your combined knowledge, outline in *pencil* the major areas of un-built ‘open’ space (hard-edged, soft, un-designed, carefully designed gardens, wide areas, narrow corridors).
Outline outdoor space that you know about that is
1. formally public and dedicated,
2. institutional and corporate and
3. private.