

Role and benefits of Healing Landscape Urban Spaces

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Abstract

Beautiful landscapes in urban spaces are very important for the public health. The urban spaces are incomplete without landscapes. The spaces can be stressful, if are not designed well. The landscapes are necessary as they can help people, through mental, physical and emotional wellbeing. They can calm, give energy and connect people to each other. This paper gives the importance of having landscape in urban spaces where stress can be reduced, mood can be improved. Through a review of literature study, relationship in landscape and urban spaces can be justified giving major priority to health and wellbeing. Through literature review and analysis of successful healing garden, this paper shares that urban spaces and landscaping can shape the environment and support our health and wellbeing.

The study helps to understand how landscapes are important and vital part for the urban space.

Keywords:

Healing landscapes; landscape design; urban spaces; green spaces; health; wellbeing.

Introduction

Rapid urbanization has significantly altered the physical and social fabric of cities, often resulting in increased stress levels, reduced access to natural environments, and declining quality of life. Urban residents are increasingly exposed to dense built environments, traffic congestion, noise, and environmental pollution, all of which negatively impact mental and physical well-being. According to Kaplan and Kaplan (1989), the function of urban open spaces has broadened beyond recreation and includes psychological rehabilitation and health promotion.¹

The therapeutic potential of natural surroundings has been extensively recognized. This knowledge gives rise to the idea of healing landscapes, which emphasize the intentional incorporation of natural, cultural, and sensory elements into planned or conserved settings to promote overall well-being (Cooper Marcus & Barnes, 1999).²

Urban space is an important part of the city or the town. They are the connecting areas in the town. Urban spaces need to breathe, relax, have social interactions, need to have community activities, community bonding pleasant, friendly, environment to have a healthy peaceful living.

Environments that have a favourable impact on human health through interaction with nature, spatial design, and cultural significance are known as healing landscapes. The idea has expanded to include urban parks, gardens, riverfronts, holy landscapes, and natural ecosystems integrated inside cities, although it was first connected with hospital settings (Thompson, 2011).³

The biophilia hypothesis suggests that humans possess an affinity for natural systems, making interaction with nature essential for well-being (Wilson, 1984).⁴

Healing landscapes act as everyday therapeutic environments that reduce stress, restore attention, encourage physical activity, and foster social interaction.

Healing landscapes are landscapes where nature is used intentionally as an integral part of the landscapes to improve the overall wellness, reduce stress and enhance recovery.

It can thus, reduce stress, recover and improve overall wellness.

Healing landscapes can be applied/ used in urban spaces, workplaces, residential areas, townships, conservations and heritages areas, wellness areas and parks.

Through this research paper we shall see how the landscapes are an important aspect in urban spaces and what role they play in enhancing the urban spaces.

The scope of this research paper

1. Focus on urban public landscapes such as gardens, riverfronts, sacred landscapes, and natural ecosystems.
2. Emphasis on Indian, Pune-based case studies
3. Integration of well-being, urban design, and landscape planning perspectives

Aim of the research

To understand or study the role of healing landscape in urban spaces and derive design guidelines/ recommendation that enhances holistic well-being in Indian cities. –

Objectives

- To review theoretical and empirical literature on healing landscapes and urban well-being
- To analyse selected Indian urban healing landscapes through case studies
- To identify key landscape attributes that support mental, physical, social, and spiritual well-being
- To formulate design guidelines for healing landscapes in urban environments

Literature review

The term “healing landscape” refers to environments that contribute positively to human health through spatial experience, natural elements, and sensory engagement. Cooper Marcus and Barnes (1999) describe healing landscapes as spaces that reduce stress, improve mood, and support emotional recovery. 5

William Gesler first used the phrase "therapeutic landscape" in 1992 to describe a location "where physical and built environments, social conditions, and human perceptions combine to produce an atmosphere which is conducive to healing." The idea of a "therapeutic landscape" was created by Gesler in 1992 to investigate the healing aspects of particular locations. 6

The idea highlights the relationship between location and well-being. Accordingly, therapeutic landscapes are characterized as distinct areas of healing, especially when the natural and social environments come together (Gesler 2003).7

Also, green and blue spaces reduce stress, helps mental restoration and social engagement is possible through healing landscapes.

Some of the theories related to healing landscapes –

According to **Attention Restoration Theory**, by providing curiosity and mental respite, nature settings replenish spent cognitive resources (Kaplan, 1995). Through vegetation, water, and organic shapes, urban healing landscapes offer chances for these healing encounter.8

Ulrich (1984) showed that visual exposure to nature enhances physiological reactions and lowers stress. According to this notion, adding areas rich in nature to urban settings can improve mental health. 9

According to the biophilia hypothesis, humans are biologically connected to nature (Wilson, 1984). 4

This relationship is utilized by healing landscapes to enhance psychological health in urban environments. Access to vegetation, water, and sensory environments improves emotional wellbeing and encourages physical activity, this is discussed through cases study.

Urban Open Spaces and Healing Landscapes

Because they provide chances for leisure, rest, and social connection, urban parks and green areas are essential for improving quality of life (Chiesura, 2004). 10

In the context of urban planning, Thompson (2011) emphasizes the increasing acknowledgement of landscapes as assets for public health.³

Healing Environments in the Indian Setting

Indian urban environments have profound cultural, spiritual, and ecological significance. Gardens, riverfronts, and sacred landscapes serve as regular healing spaces that foster communal identity and emotional attachment (Norberg-Schulz, 1980; Sinha, 2015). 11,12 Urban green spaces have been shown to improve mental health outcomes in Indian cities, especially in densely populated areas (Sharma & Ghosh, 2020)¹³

This paper discusses the research gap in the Indian context, related to Pune. Healing landscapes are often discussed in foreign literature, but little is known about their function in Indian urban and cultural contexts. Theory, case studies, and design approaches unique to Indian cities must be combined.

Research Methodology

In order to comprehend the function of healing landscapes in urban settings, this study uses a qualitative research methodology. Spatial features, user experience, and contextual significance are investigated using a case-study approach.

Case studies were selected based on:

- Urban location and public accessibility
- Presence of natural and cultural elements
- Relevance to mental, physical, social, or spiritual well-being
- Representation of diverse landscape typologies

The analysis focuses on:

- Landscape attributes (greenery, water, terrain)
- Healing processes (restoration, social interaction, spirituality)
- Urban outcomes (well-being, inclusivity, resilience)

Overview of Case Study Analysis

In order to comprehend how healing principles are applied in their spatial organization, environmental characteristics, and user experiences, this research looks at a few Pune urban environments.

The chosen case studies show a variety of urban healing landscape typologies, such as riverfronts, formal gardens, meditation gardens, heritage landscapes, and urban hills. Table 5.1 provides a comparative summary of the case studies.

Urban landscapes, as Healing gardens of Pune.

Case Study 1: Pune's OSHO Teerth Garden

OSHO Teerth Garden, which is close to Koregaon Park, is a prime example of an urban

meditation setting. The garden, which was intended to be a contemplative area, combines water features, thick foliage, and winding walkways to create a soothing, sensory-rich setting. Silence, confinement, and subtle spatial transitions are highlighted in the landscape design. According to Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989), natural features like flowing water, shaded walks, and textured surfaces improve sensory engagement and promote stress reduction and mental restoration. This garden serves as an example of how, in densely populated urban settings, healing landscapes can serve as regular therapeutic settings. Table 5.1 evaluates its therapeutic properties and results, and Table 5.3 maps them to design criteria.

Case Study 2: Pune-Okayama Friendship Garden, or P. L. Deshpande Garden

The P. L. Deshpande Garden offers a thoughtfully designed natural setting that emphasizes harmony, balance, and controlled visual experiences. It was inspired by Japanese landscape ideas. Bridges, manicured topography, water elements, and framed views all encourage meditative participation. The garden promotes both passive observation and active activity, allowing for emotional and cognitive recovery. Its well-organized spatial hierarchy serves as an example of how formal architecture, when in harmony with natural processes, may promote healing. The Design Inference Matrix (Table 5.2)

Case Study 3: Pune's Empress Garden

Empress Garden is a historic urban garden with social, ecological, and recreational purposes. One of Pune's oldest public gardens, it offers open meadows, shaded walkways, and a variety of plants in a historic environment. By fostering community contact and providing peaceful areas for personal relaxation, the garden promotes social well-being. Its long-term public use emphasizes how crucial familiarity, accessibility, and cultural continuity are to healing environments. The importance of urban gardens as inclusive healing spaces is reinforced by observations from this instance, which are compiled in Table 5.1 and converted into inclusivity-based instructions in Table 5.3.

Case Study 4: Tekdi Durga

Durga Tekdi is an example of a naturally occurring urban hill ecology that serves as a setting for unofficial healing. Walking routes, panoramic views, native vegetation, and natural terrain all promote physical activity and psychological healing. Durga Tekdi provides a raw, unstructured therapeutic experience based on exposure to nature and cultural symbolism, in contrast to artificial gardens. This highlights the benefits to ecology and mental health of maintaining natural landscapes inside urban bounds. The ecological resilience metrics in Table 5.2 reflect the lessons learned from this scenario.

Case Study 5: Riverfront Scenery at Morya Gosavi, (Jijau Paryatan Kendra, Chinchwad)

Along a river, the Morya Gosavi Riverfront scenery combines natural, cultural, and religious aspects. By encouraging rituals, social gatherings, and contact with water, the landscape serves as a setting for spiritual healing.

The riverside serves as an example of how culturally significant landscapes may both fulfill urban ecological needs and promote emotional and spiritual well-being. The cultural-spiritual design principles listed in Table 5.3 are greatly enhanced by this scenario.

Together, the case studies show how Pune's healing landscapes support mental, physical, social, and spiritual well-being across formal and informal typologies.

Design inference and comparative analysis:

Comparative Analysis of Healing Landscape Case Studies in Urban Spaces

Table 5.1 compares the selected Pune-based landscapes across parameters such as landscape typology, healing attributes, user engagement, and well-being outcomes. The comparison reveals that while each landscape differs in form and function, the healing principles such as use of nature, sensory engagement, and accessibility remain consistent.

Sr No	Case Study	Landscape Type	Key Healing Attributes	Primary Well-being Dimension
1	OSHO Teerth Garden	Meditative Garden	Water elements, dense vegetation, silence	Mental & Emotional
2	P. L. Deshpande Garden	Formal / Thematic Garden	Water bodies, terrain variation, framed views	Mental & Physical
3	Empress Garden	Historic Public Garden	Extensive green cover, social gathering spaces	Social & Mental
4	Durga Tekdi	Natural Urban Hill	Natural terrain, panoramic views, walking trails	Physical & Mental
5	Morya Gosavi Riverfront (Jijau Paryatan Kendra, Chinchwad)	Cultural Riverfront Landscape	Water edge, spirituality, ritual spaces	Spiritual & Social

Table 5.1 - Comparative summary of all case studies

Table 5.2 -The design inference matrix analyses the spatial attributes and healing outcomes observed across the case studies. Key inferences include:

- Water elements contribute significantly to stress reduction and sensory engagement
- Shaded pathways and terrain variation encourage physical activity
- Cultural and spiritual associations enhance emotional attachment and place identity

These inferences directly inform the formulation of urban healing landscape design guidelines.

Sr No	Observed Landscape Attribute	Healing Effect	Design Inference
1	Water elements	Stress reduction	Integrate ponds, streams, and reflective water bodies
2	Dense vegetation	Mental restoration	Use native and layered planting systems
3	Walking trails	Physical fitness	Provide continuous, shaded pedestrian pathways
4	Cultural / spiritual features	Emotional bonding	Respect and integrate local cultural identity
5	Open social spaces	Social interaction	Design inclusive and flexible gathering areas

Table 5.2: Design Inference Matrix Derived from Case Study Analysis

Table 5.3 establishes a direct relationship between observed case study features and proposed design guidelines. Each guideline is grounded in empirical observation, ensuring contextual relevance and practical applicability.

This mapping strengthens the research validity by demonstrating a clear progression from observation to inference to design recommendation.

No	Case Study	Derived Design Guideline
1	OSHO Teerth Garden	Provision of quiet, contemplative zones
2	P. L. Deshpande Garden	Sequential and experiential spatial planning
3	Empress Garden	Universal accessibility and social inclusivity
4	Durga Tekdi	Preservation of natural terrain and ecology
5	Morya Gosavi Riverfront	Integration of cultural, spiritual, and ecological elements

Table 5.3: Mapping of Case Study Insights to Urban Healing Landscape Design Guidelines

Conclusion

With an emphasis on case studies from Pune, this study defines the function of healing landscapes in urban settings. According to the study, healing landscapes serve as essential urban systems that integrate social, cultural, and environmental elements to improve overall well-being.

The study shows through a review of the literature, an examination of case studies, and through comparative analysis that healing landscapes:

- Minimize mental strain and improve cognitive recovery
- Promote social interaction and physical exercise
- Strengthen emotional attachment and cultural identity
- Encourage ecological equilibrium in urban environments

Following are some of the recommendations

1. Necessary to Include lots of greenery, water features, and organic landforms in metropolitan areas. (Water elements are important sensory and psychological healers. & greenery and natural features greatly improves mental repair and stress reduction,)
2. Use a variety of textures, planting colors, and water flow to create landscapes that appeal to the senses of sight, sound, touch, and smell. (The Attention Restoration Theory is supported by tactile surfaces, flowing water, shaded walkways, and scented plants that promote deeper engagement.
3. Make sure that all age groups and physical abilities have access to spaces that are inclusive and free of barriers.
4. Establish a hierarchy of areas, from contemplative to active. enclosed spaces for reflection and open lawns for social interaction. Zoning improves user comfort and choice.
5. Include local context-based cultural, spiritual, and symbolic components. design can demonstrate how spiritual connections and cultural identities support place attachment and emotional healing. In Indian cities' healing landscapes need to adapt to local customs and beliefs.
6. Include wide corridors, gradual slopes, and walking pathways. Natural terrains and trails, promote physical health and mental restoration.

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