

How to Cite:

Pulsay, N. (2022). Reclaiming streets as public spaces: A case in Bengaluru. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S9), 3885–3891. Retrieved from <https://sciencescholar.us/journal/index.php/ijhs/article/view/13504>

Reclaiming streets as public spaces: A case in Bengaluru

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Abstract---Public Spaces traditionally in Indian context were in the form of temple tanks, step wells, religious space, the enclosed space and the extensions of the living space. Streets traditionally been the Public Space for people to celebrate, to engage in civic, social and economic activities. Now, due to rapid urbanization, the streets have lost its civic, social, and economic usability. People centric approach in street design is replaced with the motor vehicle. According to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (11) and the New Urban Agenda (2016) which is giving importance to safe, accessible and quality Public Spaces for all. The objectives of this paper include: (a) Learning from the past examples of the traditional settlements. (b) Parameters & Strategies for promoting streets as Public Space (c) To understand the characteristics of the streets and user perception through the case studies of, Commercial Street, Church Street and Gandhi Bazaar.

Keywords---Live able, Public space, Streets, Urbanization.

Introduction

Streets as public space are clearly marked out open space in the city used for public use. Streets connect the people to various places. Streets enhance social, economic and civic activities. Streets traditionally been the public space for people to celebrate, to engage in civic, social and economic activities. Streets in modern days been designed giving importance only for vehicles. Streets comprises 80% of public space but fail to provide space to walk, bicycle, socialize. Therefore, many cities are taking the initiative to redesign and invest in street design to create a public space for people as well as for vehicular movement.

Definitions of streets

Streets are public urban paths that people use to move, observe, wait, eat, and socialize. A street is a public path in a city that is used by pedestrians and vehicles and is lined by buildings. Streets are not the same as roads, as roads are

solely intended for vehicular movement. Sometimes the term road is used for streets, but they carry different interpretations. "Roads are mobility corridors that connect people". "Streets are "cohabited spaces", "life worlds".

Classification of streets

According to the hierarchy system, streets can be classified depending on their location within the country, city, and local area. Roads in India are classified into National Highways, State Highways, Major District Roads, Other District Roads, and Village Roads by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

On a smaller scale, the Ministry of Urban Development's (UDPFI) guidelines classify roads into four types: arterial (50-60 metres wide), sub arterial (30-40 metres wide), collector streets (20-30 metres wide), and local streets (10-20 metres wide). Based on the land use the streets are classified into residential street, commercial street, industrial street, institutional street etc.

Characteristics of streets

Urban spaces comprise two basic elements: Streets and Squares (Krier, 1979). Streets of any city will have two main functions: movement and place. Streets are three dimensional enclosed spaces with buildings on both the sides and they are different from roads, which is mainly for taking people from one place to other (Tandon & Sehgal, 2017). Squares, if we look at the nature of enclosure have a static character in comparison with streets which are dynamic. Louis I Khan makes a comment about the street. "In a city the street must be supreme, it is the first institution of the city. The street is a room by agreement – a community room – the walls of which belong to the donors, dedicated to city for common use. Its ceiling is the sky."

"Indian streets bring people together socially and provide a physical setting for socioeconomic activities" (Jacobs 1993). Indian streets are used for social interaction, as well as for economic activities. Appadurai (1987) made a comment that, "with the possible exception of the railroad, streets capture more about India. On its streets, India eats, sleeps, works, moves, celebrates and worships. If we look at the streets at religious precincts, it has both tangible and Intangible features to it. Tangible features like the commercial shops lined the streets selling the goods that are essential for temples or dargahs, and the intangible features is the ambient environment created because of physical setting and rituals of the temple or dargahs.

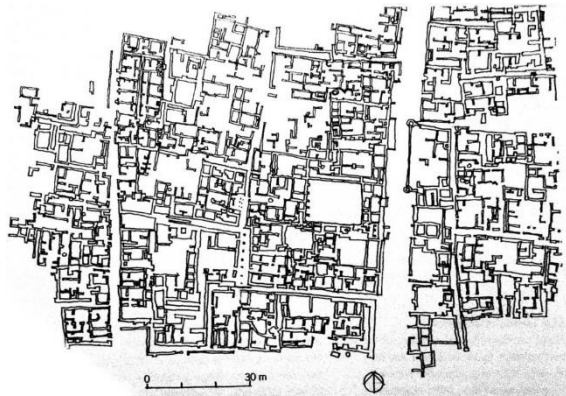
Traditional streets which are narrow, are designed for pedestrians and are perceived as humane, intimate, warm and personal. In addition, having been over the years, they are culture specific. (Rapoport,1990a, Rapoport,1990b). Today streets are replaced with roads. Because of urbanization, widening of roads, gated community, use of motor vehicles, streets edges are replaced to boundary walls. Various activities on these street edges like women gossiping, people engaged in economic activities etc. are all disappearing. Streets were used for multiple activities like political protest, funerals, religious processions and marriage procession.

Learning from the past examples of the traditional settlements

If we look at the traditional settlements, streets originated from the centre of settlement which were usually a place for religious or political activities. Streets determined the form of a city. Traditionally streets were used for civic, social and economic activities. "Streets in ancient cities were the results of a vision of civilisation rather than a function of the economy" (Clos, 2013).

Mohenjo - Daro (2600BC)

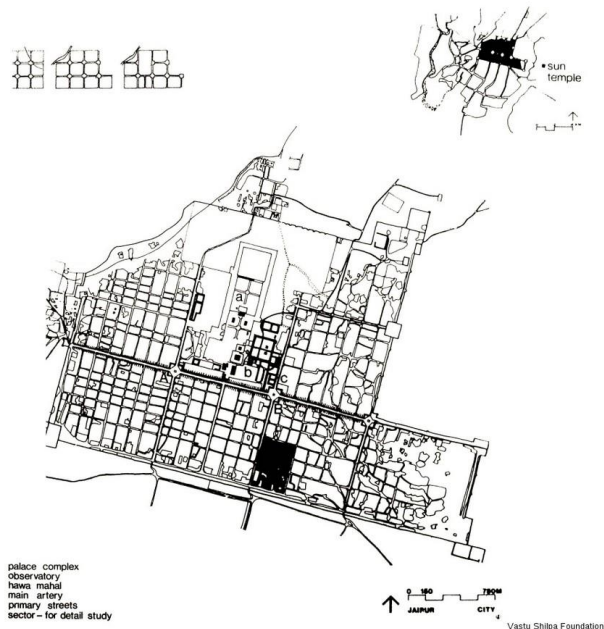
Streets of Mohenjo-Daro were laid according to grid iron pattern, where streets were perpendicular to each other, which promote social interaction and commercial activities. Streets shape the form of city. Streets were brick laid with proper drainage and sanitation. Streets were wider so that wheeled carts can pass through and serve for trade options. Streets were used to connect different places and to serve for movement. Streets were used as a public space where children run and play on streets joyfully with their friends, elders engaged in informal chats with neighbour while crossing their house and also using the front of the house for other activities like drying spices, washing utensils and clothes and to hold functions and rituals.



Source: ancient-civilizations.com

Jaipur, India's pink city

Jaipur was founded in 1727, by Maharaja Jai Sing II. City was designed based on Prastara type of planning, which gave importance to cardinal direction. Grid iron pattern was adopted for the planning of streets. Hierarchy system was used in streets. The sector size is defined by first order streets, whereas the neighbourhood size is defined by second order streets. Internal roads were designed giving importance to access and privacy. Each street was identified by its character. At the intersection of main streets were squares known as Chaupars. One can enter into these chaupars from gates of walled city through the main street. Chaupars were the main social gathering spots where people could sit, walk, socialize, observe, participate and get information on the upcoming events. Therefore streets and interaction of streets (Chaupars, chowks) were the place for social interaction and economic activities.



Source: re-thinkingthefuture.com/pink-city-jaipur

Parameters or qualities for promoting streets as Public Space

Urban design theorists have conducted studies on the parameters or qualities of streets. Theorists concluded and classified the qualities or parameters into three types i-e

Physical parameters, urban design parameters and individual reactions or user perceptions. Sidewalk width, street width, building height, traffic volume, number of people, tree canopy, and climate are the physical parameters. Imageability, enclosure, human scale, transparency, legibility, linkage, coherence, and complexity are all urban design parameters. Sense of safety, sense of comfort, and level of interest are all user perceptions. All of these parameters have an impact on the streetscape.

To be a successful public area, a street must be secure, participatory, sociable, distinctive, accessible, adaptable, and offer a range of activities. Streets should be planned as destinations rather than merely thoroughfares.

Strategies for promoting streets as Public Space

- 1) Interactive and Social: With various activity happening on the streets, streets should provide an opportunity to socialize. Hence streets to be provided with proper space with street furniture, tree canopies for shade and lighting.
- 2) Identity and character: Each street should be given a identity or character to it, so that mental image of place is created which is good for remembrance. Through urban design or architectural features or effective use of trees and plants, identity and character to the streets can be given.

- 3) Accessibility and connectivity: Good street connectivity will lead to high productivity with less commuting time to work places. More intersection of street will lead to more walk able streets and thus will reduce traffic congestion.
- 4) Activity and safety: Streets should be considered for pedestrian and vehicular movement. Activity should be provided for 24 hrs. Different activities on the street will make the street to be live for all the hours of day and night and which will eventually lead to safety i-e eyes on street as asserted by Jane Jacobs.
- 5) Land allocation and diversity: A sufficient amount of area must be set aside for vehicular and pedestrian mobility. Commercial and recreational activity will benefit from adequate land allocation. Multiple activities will be encouraged by the diversity of land use, which will make transit in the neighbourhood easier and safer.

Case Studies

Gandhi Bazaar Street



Source: deccanchronical.com

The northwestern diagonal of the Basavangudi street grid is occupied by Gandhi Bazar road. It's a significant roadway for vehicles and buses, but it's also a busy street all day. It features fenced-in, elevated sidewalks on one side with store frontages and vendor booths on the other. The street is lined with narrow buildings with up to four stories, with mostly commercial uses on the ground floor and offices and residential uses on the upper floors. A buffer between the active motor lane and the sidewalks is created by parked automobiles, huge trees, and, in certain parts, vendors and tyre puncture fixers. The pedestrian walkway is relatively narrow. Fruits, vegetables or flowers vendors are lined along the fences on sidewalks. It is also the site of the KADLEKAI PARISHE, an annual groundnut festival held around December every year when the street is restricted to traffic from Bull temple to the south and is lined with ground nut farmers selling their produce on the street, on the las, and in stalls.

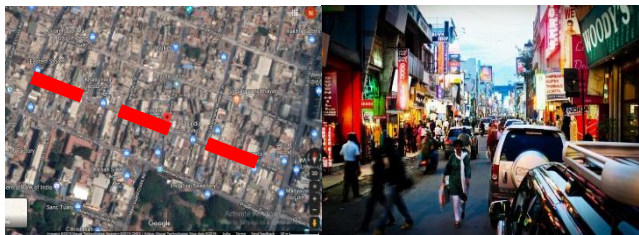
Church Street



Source: deccanchronical.com

Church Street is one of the busiest streets in Bangalore's Central Business District. Church street is between Brigade Road and St.Mark's Road, which runs parallel to M.G Road, and its distance is 750 metre. The street is a "tourist hot point" and one of the city's key revenue generators and prominent New Year's Eve celebration locations. The street is named from the fact that it goes straight to St. Mark's Cathedral.It is a good example of Pedestrian- friendly roads. It has commercial establishments on either side of the streets in the form of shops, restaurants. It has metro station entry. Sidewalks for pedestrian movement and street though meant for pedestrian allows light vehicles. Previously, it was a street for residents; presently, it is a thoroughfare for businesses and party-goers. Church Street was the first street in the city to be paved with granite cobblestones when renovation work began in 2017. Previously, Church Street was only a service road. Back-end infrastructure from MG Road was shifted here, including transformers and sewage pipes, which is why it was breaking apart. The street was renovated and existing infrastructure was removed. Previously, people and businesses were rejecting the street and turning inwards. "Now they are engaging with it".

Commercial Street



Source: deccanchronical.com

Commercial street is considered as shopping paradise by the people of city and visitors.It is frequently visited by visitors and people of city.It is situated in the CBD of Bangalore.Older buildings are replaced with modern buildings.Commercial streets traditionally had all the parameters of public space like children's playing,women chatting and even merchants were playing.Now a day due to cars and other vehicles moving through the commercial street , now there is hardly any space left for pedestrian movement.

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