

Space and Narratives: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Reading Socio-Spatial Interplays in Rapidly Urbanizing Environments¹

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Abstract

The city is represented not just by its physical fabric, but also by collective representations of various characteristics that contribute to its making- memory, identity, forgetting, transformations, history etc. Understanding diverse representations and systems that exists in cities is critical both in planning and theorizing how urban spaces can be analyzed and studied. To approach various facets of socio-spatial interplays, this paper advocates the combining of structural theorists such as Choay, Lefebvre and Rossi to create an empirical matrix that bridges physical and social attributes of urban environments. The empirical matrix aims to study various phenomena such as evolution and identity of various spaces, memory associated space, place-making, attachment to name a few.

Bangalore, like any of the many large urban centers (or mega regions) is living under the umbrella of economic and cultural changes that has now become synonymous with modern India. When the developed matrix was applied to the city of Bangalore, India it enabled the identification of sites that were meaningful locations that people made, inhabited, visited and participated inherently linked to the production of memory, identity and attachment. This paper highlights new approaches to identifying spaces of importance in rapidly urbanizing environments that are beneficial to long term urban renewal plans and, identifying and protecting spaces of local importance.

One of the primary aims of this paper is to highlight the importance of creative research methodologies particularly in dynamic urban environments, the matrix encouraged the study to deal with observable patterns, various historicity's, political, economic and social productions. The interdisciplinary approach of combining various theories, empirical data and qualitative methodology brought out nuances in an urban environment that is currently striving to find a balance between globalized and local expression of urban space.

1. Introduction

Bangalore (India) like many urban centers around the world is under constant threat of transformation- political, social, cultural and architectural. Living through various transformations over the last two hundred years, the city has had to both imagine itself and re-imagine itself many times over. Under this context of constant flux, first subject to the British rule (late nineteenth to mid twentieth century) followed by liberalization of the markets (late twentieth century) and the IT boom (last twenty five years), historical process within the city have left many an indicator on the urban form. Within the Indian subcontinent, Bangalore is an example where the changes that the city has faced in terms of urban transformation can be traced with relative ease mainly due to the presence of the past in various distinct and distinguishable layers. These sites or markers from regimes of yesteryears play dichotomous roles as of sites of memory and sites of urban transition.

Discerning how various regimes that the city experienced and its many forms affected the production of heterogeneous urban space, this paper explores open ended narratives on the role of architecture, identity and place-making. Investigating a landscape of chequered

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architectural history to trace and analyze how rapidly urbanizing environments accommodate for spaces of everyday importance in globalizing climates, this paper develops a strategy of study that bridges the physical and social parameters of urban form. The analysis is approached through the structural, semiotic and representative nature of urban form (or architecture).

Urban environments can be considered as inherently complex, dynamic and transformative in nature (Eco, Lynch, Rossi, Lefebvre, Halbwachs, Harvey, Boyer et.al.); to accommodate for these characteristics the paper formulates a qualitative matrix that balances these various attributes. Though a number of theories have been put forward to connect diverse narratives and physical form, in this paper the works of Aldo Rossi, Henri Lefebvre and Françoise Choay were seminal in informing the matrix construction. Each of the above stated theoreticians developed various parameters through which dynamic urban spaces can be studied, while highlighting the need to understand space as more than a physical construct.

The first section focuses on the primary aim of the paper, to develop a methodology that connects and expands on the various roles that urban environments play. In building the said matrix and using various interdisciplinary qualitative methodologies, the paper contributes to finding a way to traverse and connect myriad socio-spatial narratives, expanded in the latter half of the paper. Applied to the urban environment of Bangalore, the study encouraged the identification of sites of local importance from various strata's of urban development, existence of local heritage sites and commemorative acts that (re) connected space and inhabitants were brought forward.

This paper highlights that in reading narratives in space, urban form moves from its purely physical semblance to the realm of the symbolic and commemorative, connected to identity production and attachment or place making. In order to study urban environments that are complex and inherently transformative, the paper illustrates the heightened need for innovative interdisciplinary methodologies that can accommodate variances and be shaped depending on context of study. The study concludes that urban form when read and observed as a mnemonic and commemorative platform, acts as a marker and material witness contributing to notions of representation, individual and social identity; thereby not just expanding upon traditional definitions of urban environments, but also highlighting the role that local sites (or architecture) play in globalizing climates.

2. Constructing the theoretical framework and matrix

Based on the technique developed by Françoise Choay (1969) in *Urbanism and Semiology* with the aim to bridge the empirical analysis of architecture with certain rhythms in the city that are spatial in their orientation, this section develops a theoretical framework that can be adapted and used as an analytical guide in various urban environments. By expanding upon Choay's work on differentiating architectural analysis into various layers to include the theories of Rossi, Lefebvre, Halbwachs and Connerton, the framework moves to encompass elements needed to observe various narratives that lend itself to spatial expressions.

Choay's work can be interpreted as a strategy to connect the analysis of urban form with narratives in the city that are spatial in their rhythm. Through her work one understands that spatial rhythms in a city can be read through: (1) architectural systems or spatial organizations, (2) auxiliary systems in usage (symbolism, rituals etc.) and (3) syntagms; patterns and elements that are defined in relation to each other – and in relation to the whole structure. Parallels can be drawn between her work and Aldo Rossi's presentation of reading a city and patterns. In *Architecture of the City*, Rossi advocates using evolution of space as a toolkit to study patterns and developments of architectural space or systems. For Rossi studying the evolution of a spatial system helps in identifying sites of permanence or urban artifacts in the city that provide a framework for understanding the forces that shaped form. Rossi (1984, p.21-22) states 'the theory of urban artifacts, stems from the identification of the city itself as an artifact and from its

division into individual buildings and dwelling areas'. He also introduces the concept of 'primary elements' that expands on the role that certain elements exhibit heightened sense of meanings given their roles in urban landscapes (Rossi 1984, p.22). This concept is seminal in identifying spaces of importance in a given environment.

Though Rossi is emphatic upon the production of architecture and its relation to society, he does not expand on how these sites are socially produced or represented. Through the readings of Henri Lefèbvre, the production of social space and socio-spatial practices with respect to architecture can be expanded upon. In *The Production of Space*, Lefèbvre (1991, p.18) stresses that architectural space is not space itself, but only a way of look at space, which is a space of social practices. Lefèbvre (1996) describes the city and its urban life as a dynamic dialectic process of possibilities and encounters. Complimentary to Rossi, he describes the development of society and the city as dialectics between different kinds of human interactions and practices acted out in space. Lefebvre (1991, p.38) proposes a spatial triad that he labels as 'the three moments of social space' (the perceived-conceived-lived) to distinguish various characteristics of spatial production to aide the argumentation between actual space and mental space.

Between Choay's and Rossi's urban form production and patterns, and Lefèbvre's social space, approaching the question of studying urban space gets a framework that is rooted in both architecture and social practices. By combining theories that are structural in root urban environments can be studied and analyzed as morphological systems that are related inherently to social production and practices.

Constructing the empirical matrix

In the act of threading various theories together the aim is to build a matrix that bridges commonalities that exists between the various theoreticians. Through the brief theoretical introduction above, it can be concluded that the city can be studied and represented not just by its physical fabric and form, but also by collective representations of various characteristics that contribute to its making- like history, identity, transformations, memory etc. Understanding of forms and morphological systems arises from the study through the observation of various actions, social practices that both produce and transform the spaces and the forms it contains.

The aim of the framework is to help identify sites wherein spatial narratives can be experienced and observed in a dynamic urban environment. Building on Choay's initial strategy, to accommodate Rossi, Lefebvre, Halbwachs and Connerton, the following process of development can be diagrammatically represented:

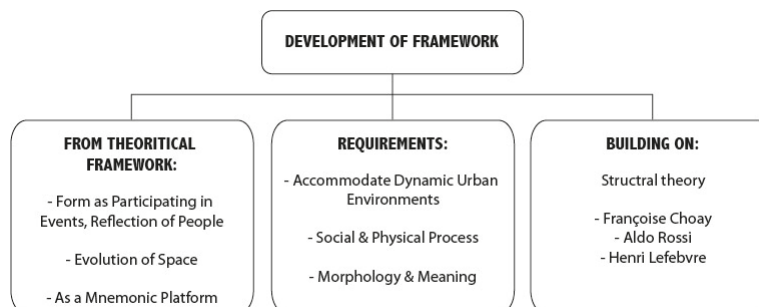


Fig 1. Process of framework development

The process of developing the framework contained three distinct steps as highlighted in Fig. 1 and was based on the works of the theorists briefly outlined in the previous section. To accommodate the dynamic and transformative nature of urban environments, it was necessary that the developed matrix had the potential to address simultaneously the social and physical

production of space and behaviors. Following through on rigorous questioning and critique of the motives behind the creation of such frameworks in various discussions, the resultant empirical matrix expanded as a network diagram (Fig. 2) was used to discern possible sites on socio-spatial interplay within an urban environment.

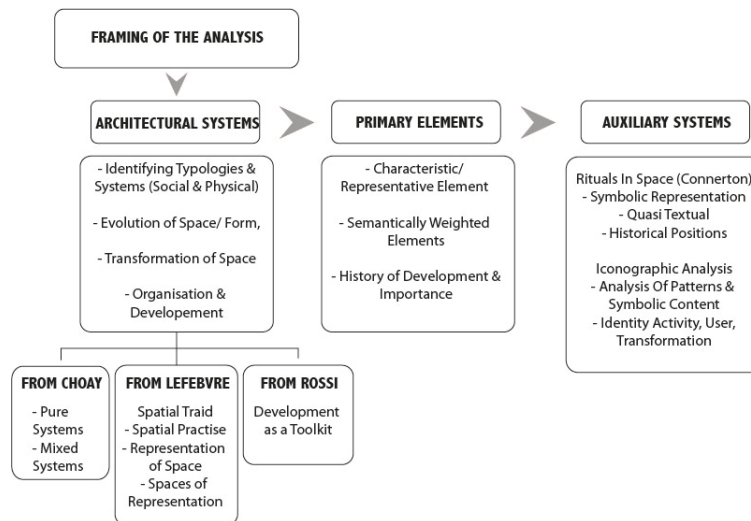


Fig 2. Empirical matrix derived and developed from various theories

The matrix expands on first establishing predominant architectural systems that exist in the selected urban environment. This helps in identifying evolution of space and recognizing the patterns or strata's of development (from the theories of Choay, Rossi and Lefebvre), before progressing towards positioning sites of importance and primary elements. The matrix also takes into account auxiliary systems of communications such as iconography and rituals that provides a holistic picture of various narratives that can be observed. Each of the three distinct steps though identified independently as process to undertake when applied to an urban environment go almost in parallel. It is important to note that each step offers observations and evaluations that lead to identifying diverse narratives in urban space and described in detail through the empirical study of Bangalore, India.

3. Application of the empirical matrix: Bangalore, India

For a city that can trace it's living and built history² to mid sixteenth century, the urban landscapes went through various stages of development from that of a small village hamlet to a cantonment of the British times and is featured on the list of fastest growing cities of the world.³

These belts of development through the last centuries have had distinct observable characteristics in lieu with various period's of economics and social practices the city experienced. Using this as a keystone for commencement for the empirical work on the city, this

² Though traces of various regimes (from fourth century AD onwards) can be discerned within the genealogy of the city this was considered out of the scope of this work. The reference year for the birth of an urban settlement described in the next sections is early sixteenth century. Refer Hasan 1970, Nair 2005, Mathur and Cunha 2006 for more details.

³ According to the international independent think tank City Mayors Foundation cities in the India, China, Africa and South America's are among the top 100 featured cities as the fastest growing cities in the world. City Mayors Statistics, 'The world's fastest growing cities and urban areas from 2006 to 2020', http://www.citymayors.com/statistics/urban_growth1.html [21 July 2012].

section describes the climate that produced various forms, behaviors and attachments. Elaborating on the development of the urban landscape both in terms of form and the processes through which certain elements of architecture developed in conjunction with prevalent practices of the given period, leading to zones with distinct characteristics where various forms of socio-spatial interplay can be recorded.

A diachronic approach to the investigation gave access to study areas and the contrasts between various stages of development i.e. studying not just the system of development but also how the production of meaning and function developed. The biggest challenge with the urban study was the problem of scale and selecting of the various methods for collecting and collating available data and forming an analysis of the same. The identifying of a specific zone helped with narrowing down the process through which certain elements are ascribed with meaning leading to attachment and narratives in urban space. This line of investigating encouraged the study of various layers within the urban space and helped trace sites of importance in parallel.

The following sections expand on the implementation of developed matrix that lead to the identification of the history of forms and settlement patterns within the city (that lead to its amalgamated identity and structure) and the discerning of various primary elements.

3.1. Step 1: Identifying Architectural Systems

Tracing predominant architectural systems, regimes and patterns of development is the first step in the developed framework. As with other cities in the Indian sub continent, Bangalore's history of urbanization can be characterized into four main economic, political and architectural paradigms: Kingdoms, Colonization, Post-Colonization and Globalized Spaces. During each of the four periods, a specific typology of urban space can be identified along with development of important or primary spaces within each of these development zones. Based on Chakravorty's (2000) classification of periods of paradigms in Calcutta, a similar paradigm can be drawn for Bangalore.

Time Period	Political Regime	Economic Climate	Planning
Pre 1537	Various Kingdoms	Trade, business	Organic
1537-1790	Kingdom	Regional trading, shop keeping, regional production	Organic
1790-1937	Colonialism	International market distribution, exploitation, segregation	Colonial
1947-1991	Post-Colonial Democracy	State lead import, substitution industrialization	Start of modernist planning
1991-present	Post-Colonial Democracy	Liberalisation of markets	Global developments

Table 1: Various planning paradigms in the city of Bangalore and the division of the four zones. Based on Chakravorty (2000) and Stallmeyer (2006).

The organic city, which is one of the models of pre-colonial south Indian planning between the sixteenth and eighteenth century, contained a fort (*kote*), settlement/ market area (*pete or pettah*) and large artificially constructed body of water or tank (*kere*). The growth of the city is attributed to its geographical location in the South Indian peninsula, its relatively central position meant that the city was in the crossroads of routes going north-south and east. The

agglomeration of various settlements around the ample tanks in the region, growth of local markets and growing population were the markings of a region facing potential growth.

Bangalore attracted the attention of the British in late eighteenth century, who saw the geographical location and climate as favorable conditions to establish a cantonment (or Civil

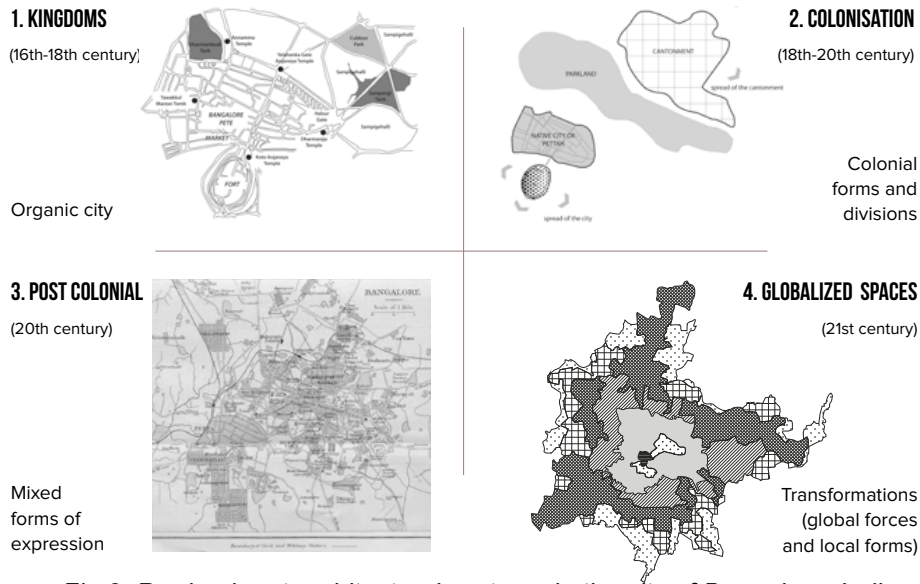


Fig 3. Predominant architectural systems in the city of Bangalore, India

and Military Station) in the city. As with other colonial cities, the period of colonization saw division of urban form between the colonizers and the natives. The introduction of new planning methods such as blocks, squares and grids differentiated the organic city from the colonial one. The contemporary city still retains the swathe of parkland that once divided the two cities as a remnant from colonial times. Following the fall of the British in the mid twentieth century, post-colonial Bangalore faced with the uphill task of combining two cities to create a unified identity. Urban form remained divided well into the seventies and eighties

Lastly, the global spaces within the city are responses to new pressures that the city faces. Bangalore, as hypothesized in the *Informational City* by Manuel Castell (1991) can be defined as a space/ site of global production and consumption practices. The liberalization of the Indian economy and growth of the information technology industry and the effects on urban space has been the topic of many an academic debate. The culminating effects of a small town grown into a metropolis of nearly nine million inhabitants is situated within the confines of small town dreams and contrasted by the need to compete with other cities on a global front.

By studying these processes individually what came to the forefront was the complexity of the situation within the city and the type of methodological direction that could facilitate the understanding of socio-spatial narratives within the city through various architectural systems. By going through the process of identifying systems and regimes, the process yielded a direction towards identifying zones of importance.

Through the first step of the matrix, four broad architectural systems in the city were identified where each of the systems developed under the influence of various regimes differing in planning, economics, political and social norms. Within each regime, patterns and structures in the city developed in almost disjunction with existing forms and independent of planning strategies that existed at the given time, these varied approaches to planning contributed to the resultant form in the city today.

Given that the four architectural systems spread over an urban area of more than seven hundred square kilometers with nearly nine million in population it was necessary to identify a

zone that could behave as a background to study specific socio-spatial narratives, i.e. create an empirical boundary of study. To fulfill this requirement from the four systems, the organic city or the oldest section of the city that remained a fixed point of historic reference was selected as a zone wherein to explore the concepts of socio-spatial narration. This selection was based on a mix of morphological and iconographical characteristics, existence of various urban rituals, and myriad spaces of transformation in a singular zone. An important factor that contributed to its identification was the repeated emphasis that the organic city was given in various discourses during the time of case study visits.

3.2. Step 2: Identifying Primary Elements

The system developed by Aldo Rossi (1984, p.22) provides an approach for studying relations between 'semantically weighted elements'⁴ and other urban elements within the development of the urban fabric. A primary element is a space of local importance and represents a definitive phase in the development of a layer in a given or selected zone. These elements are not necessarily historical in nature, but elements or spaces that play either major or minor roles of importance within a certain regional or local contexts. They go beyond a level of physical importance and can be read as a concept developed through the relationships that these elements have within their surroundings.

Founded in sixteenth century the area of the Pettah and the Fort has remained the historic core of the city for the last five hundred years. Studying this form and the practices within this space speaks of the connections to the past and the coming of different waves of transformation. Though the area has changed demographically, spatially it retains the forms from yesteryears, the narrow roads, divisions based on professions, narrow houses with mixed business and living quarters remains the characteristic of the space (see Fig. 4).

Identifying primary elements within the organic city was done through a number of qualitative steps starting with observation and focus groups (5-7 people), before moving on to targeted interviews, videographies and go-alongs. Focus groups provided a broad base of ideas to work on ranging from historical sites in the old city or Pettah to traditional spaces of occupation that were fast disappearing. Through a series of interviews and discussions, archival material analysis and various focus groups⁵ possible locations of primary elements were collected. Within the old city the following quantifiers were identified⁶:

- 1) Historic Sites: Fort, Pettah and Tanks
- 2) Religious institutions
- 3) Markets and squares
- 4) Traditional living quarters and occupations

One of the first exercises conducted was the mapping of main pettah zone, showcasing its inherent organic shape, highlighting spaces or zones that were extinct but retained attachments to both the inhabitants of the space and general public, and lastly identifying where primary elements were positioned. Fig. 4 highlights primary elements identified in the pettah that are explored in detail through the following sections. Predominantly the mapping of primary

⁴ Françoise Choay introduces the concept of 'semantically weighted elements', to show the relationship between minor elements and those elements related to the concept of power. The relationship between these various elements helps both the reading of the urban space and an indication of how the urban setting evolved.

⁵ The focus was to get a cross section of people who were both familiar and unfamiliar with the area. To get diverse unbiased opinions focus groups were held in various places in the city (including the Pettah). Focus group 1: Inhabitants of the Pettah and general public; Focus group 2: Planners, researchers, architects and university students; Focus group 3: General public and school students.

⁶ Through the exercise a number of sites were identified (more than a hundred locations) and what is highlighted here are the sites that were common or repeated in various conversations.

elements were along the main roads that divided the pettah into various sections, highlighting importance of visual interaction of everyday spaces and degree of local importance.

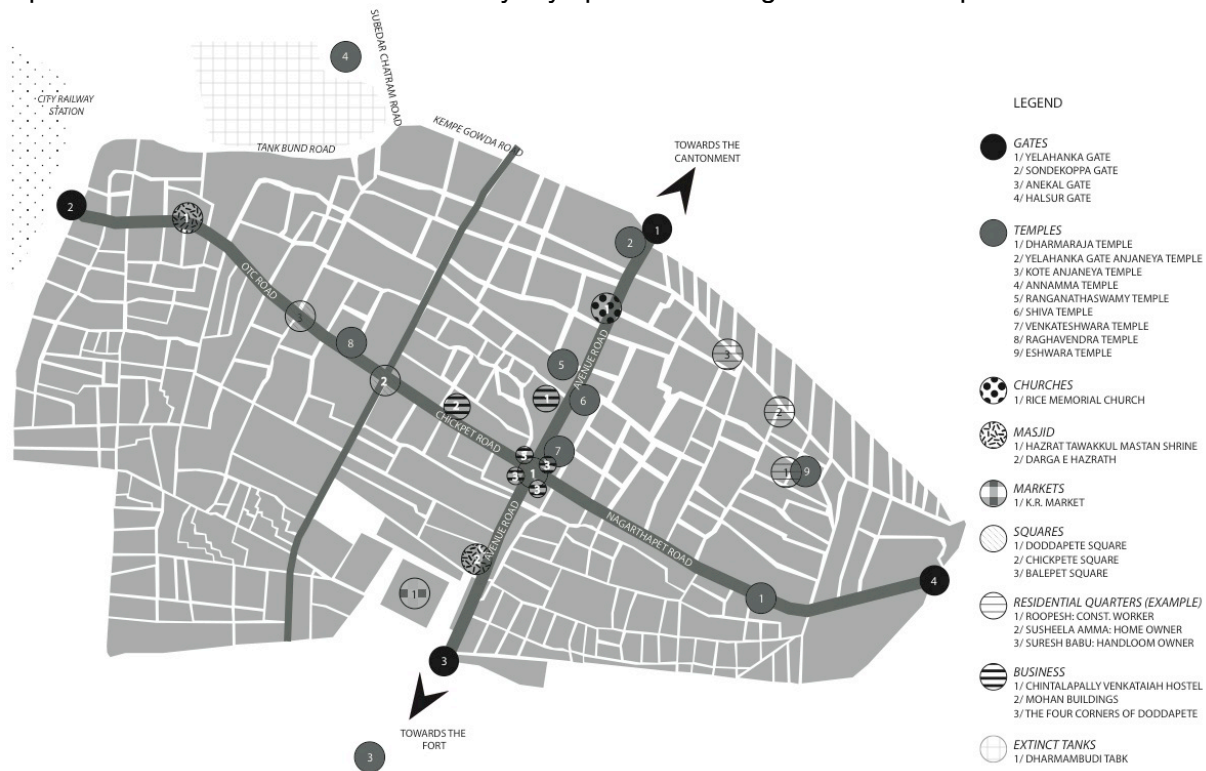


Fig 4. Primary elements identified in the organic city or pettah. The map also highlights the organic growth of the city with narrow roads in the city of Bangalore, India

Historic Sites: Fort, Pettah and Tanks

Though none of the former grandeur remains, a partial remnant of the sixteenth century fort draws to it a constant stream of visitors. This site is slowly regaining emphasis within the city's landscape through interventions from city based NGO's, tourist and conservation groups. The 're-appearance' of the Fort within the urban landscape of the city lays emphasis on the making of new mental images with the inhabitants, an aspect that has so far been neglected.

We studied this in school when I was much-much younger, responds Anand when asked about his visit to the fort wall and the markets. It didn't even occur to me that this historic site still exists in the city until a friend of mine visited this place a few months back. Today we have come as a big group to be tourists in the city we live in (and laughs).⁷

In relation to the disappearing fort, the Pettah area plays a more significant role in tracing narratives within urban space. Through the presence of certain social characteristics and urban form retention, the Pettah forms a zone charged with various stories and behaviors. The area was once a predominantly market and residential areas has slowly transformed into what is now referred to as 'the city'. By using Kevin Lynch (1992, p. 2) and his theories on mental images '... one particular visual quality: the apparent clarity of legibility of the cityscape. By this we mean the ease with which its parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern',

⁷ Interview with tourists on site, Anand Balasubramaniam, Software Engineer. May 2011

this zone can be analyzed as one that has retained recognizable patterns. The marked divisions in space based on business or function drives the notion of legibility here, as years of settlement based on certain patterns are recognizable and is also communicated through behaviors in the space.

For the Pettah, an area that acts as an artifact to the city (through its presence of a historical core, function and form) constitutes to 'containing' the historical and collective memory of the city provided a necessary link to the past of the city as Eisenman (1992, p.10) expands 'For Rossi, the city is a theatre of human events. This theatre is no longer just a representation: it is a reality. It absorbs events and feelings and every new event contains within it a memory of the past and a potential memory for the future'. The entire Pettah area exists as a zone that contains history, memory and place attachment that has grown through various stages and centuries, it is important to see the zone in its entirety before studying the elements that contribute to its characteristics. In a city of constant transformation it serves to bring the past into the present, providing a past that can still be experienced (Eisenman 1992).

Similarly the role of tanks (small bodies of water) cannot be overlooked, given that the pettah evolved due to its close proximity to two tanks north and south of its boundaries. Though extinct (land-filled), the functions that revolved around these tanks continue, economic and religious continue.

Religious institutions

Religious institutions within the South Asian context play the role of the community's focal point in terms of not just centers of worship but also the institution around which communal and in the past educational activities took place. Though the relevance of these institutions are fast changing in a landscape of modernization and technology, within the Pettah area some institutions continue to hold on to strong traditions and attachments to form and associated practices.

The existence of various religious institutions⁸ within a small area speaks of not just the diversity of religions but stands testimony to the various regimes and demographical shifts whose introduction brought in new forms of religious practices within the pettah. Apart from the economic division that can be easily perceived from the urban form, the existence of various social groups in terms of religious affiliations can also be discerned. The common urban space that these various intuitions act upon and occupy, attests to various faiths, rituals and myths.

Markets and squares

Historically the Pettah area developed as a mix between residential quarters and entrepreneurial spaces. In the last centuries, though the demography has undergone various shifts, the mixed character has remained constant. Markets within the Pettah areas, both permanent and temporary have always played a role as an important node for exchange of goods, and continue to attract residents of the pettah and the city.⁹

The city's oldest square is at the junction of the two main roads in the Pettah (see Fig. 4), and is also the site where the founder of the city decided the urban boundary in sixteenth century. Though there is no evidence of this event on site, city lore and myth have strong references to the role that this site played in establishing the kings' regime (Hassan 1970 p.14)

⁸ Within the Pettah area there are Hindu Temples, Churches and Mosques, each with a distinct patronage populace.

⁹ For more details on interviews, maps and data on markets please refer Krishnamurthy 2012.

Traditional living quarters and occupations

As the urban environment is home to a myriad number of communities (weavers, oil extractors, textile manufactures etc.), form reflected function and individual community's identity. Divided by profession and communities, the urban environment was identified by occupation that lent itself to the naming of a particular zone.

Over the last decades this identification through communal identity has been disappearing, divisions within the family and escalating land value has dictated and forced new forms of residential quarters in the Pettah (apartment style living). The pettah though has small pockets of traditional living quarters (see Fig 4), When the case study of this area was carried out in 2011, the distinction between residential spaces and business activities were hard to discern given the rate of transformation.

3.3 Step 3: Auxiliary systems: Rituals in space

Karaga

The Karaga and Bangalore city are conjoined by a complex web of relationships, associations and themes. It is the ultimate grand spectacle, a ritual and social performance that converts the urban landscape and its inhabitants from being just a backdrop, to dynamic, living participants. In its subtext lie the dominant themes of dualities/transformation that co-exist on various meta-physical and spatial levels.

Aliyeh Rizvi, City Blogger¹⁰

The Karaga festivals, is one of the oldest festivals celebrated in the city, though driven by the community of Tigala's, it now brings together thousands of people from the city for a week long celebration. In the act of all these people agglomerating in one place, sites in the Pettah that are generally lost in everyday are reignited.¹¹

Karaga is an annual religious performance/ritual that takes place through the lanes and at specific sites within the Pettah. Connerton (1989: 44) defines the word 'ritual' as rule governed activity of a symbolic character, which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance. He continues that rituals 'are formalized acts, and tend to be stylized, stereotyped and repetitive... they are not performed under inner momentary compulsion but are deliberately observed to denote feelings'. The event of the Karaga is a historic ritual that continues to play out yearly and is attended by a large segment of the population of the old city and from other parts of the city as well.

The Karaga is described here due to its relevance and attachment to urban form, sustaining group memory and the process through which it is conveyed. Studied as a commemorative event, one that supports the conveying the traditions of the past to the present. The Karaga is a performance dedicated to the goddess Draupadi and is a festival celebrated by the community of the Tigalas. The Tigala community were a group of horticulturalists (gardeners) who settled near tanks across the city and developed the tradition of this performance that continues till today.

The locus of the performance is the Dharmaraja Temple in the city (marked as No. 1 in the Fig. 5) that traditionally belonged to the group of the Tigalas. The event is spread over eleven-day duration (during the months of March-April) with the last day of the festival culminating with the carrying of the sacred pot through the streets of the Pettah. The movement

¹⁰ "The Bangalore Karaga – The Sons of Draupadi". <https://aturquoisecloud.wordpress.com/2011/04/25/the-bangalore-karaga-sons-of-draupadi/> (accessed November 15, 2011).

¹¹ Interview with Karaga participant, April 2011.

of the Karaga through the Pettah reconnects various parts of the area and its religious institutions and also visits what was once the fort area (as one of the temples visited by the Karaga lies outside the boundaries of the Pettah area) and a symbolic visit to the extinct tank of the area.

The route map is depicted in Fig. 5 highlights the sites of the Karaga in relation to other spaces in the Pettah area. The movement of the Karaga from one site to another marks what was once the boundary of the Pettah or City area. Slicing through various historical and religious periods, the Karaga marks a commemorative mnemonic to the past. With the Karaga visiting the four corners of the Pettah area and the shrine that marks the coming of a large Muslim population (during the time of Haider Ali and Tippu Sultan), underlines these periods and also highlights the axes that run through the Pettah area.

The movement and agglomeration of over twenty thousand to fifty thousand people within this space marks the performance as a powerful mnemonic for the city, its form and urban memory. In the process of this performance the participating population brings out spaces that have been long forgotten and rekindling of connection between body, memory and architecture takes place. Within the Pettah area, the working of architecture as a platform to experience various socio-spatial narratives is evident through the attachment to form. The rate of transformation¹² of the Pettah area, though fast, has left untouched certain spaces and behaviors that remain iconic of the space. The historic sites, the organic form of the Pettah and commemorative rituals in space reflect sites of the everyday where complex relations and interconnections between place, people and matter can be experienced. Echoing Arendt (1958: 96), who argues that the reality and reliability of the human world rests primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they were produced.

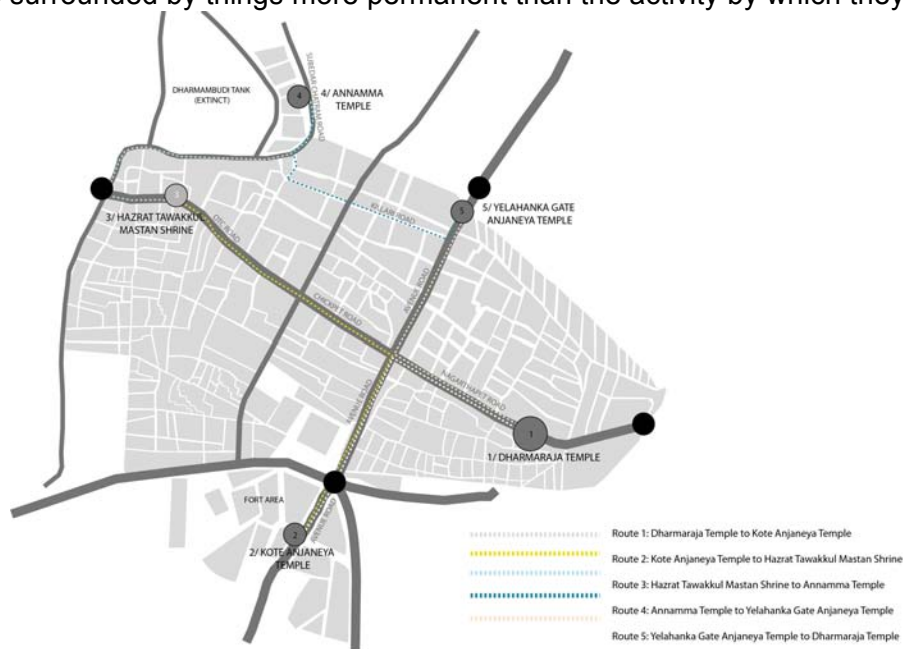


Fig. 5: Tracing the root of Karaga festival through the pettah. The exercise was carried out as a go along coupled with videography and extensive photography.

¹² There are plans for expanding roads, changing layouts to accommodate parking structures, etc. which raised objections throughout the city. Writes Chandrashekar Balachandran, Cultural Geographer and Founder of Dharani Trust in the city 'Change is inevitable, but history should not be lost. The cultural plurality and diversity can be seen in these areas. The Rice Memorial Church, Moinuddinn Darga and many ancient Hindu temples should remain untouched... if we lose our historical landscape, we lose the reminders of collected memory.'

The characteristics of the Pettah area are buried deep within the historic and commemorative mnemonics of space that aid the making of urban memory with the zone (and also contributing to the memory of the city in general). Continuing along the lines of Rossi's (1994) 'permanence's' within the city, the Pettah area contains 'this relationship between the locus and the citizenry then becomes the city's predominant image, both of architecture and of landscape, and as certain artifacts become part of its memory, new ones emerge'.

4. Conclusions

Various facets contribute to the representative nature of urban environments; history, collective memory, social behaviors and attachments, that go beyond the scope of its purely physical presence. Through the study of forms and morphological systems, observation of various actions and social practices, this paper expands on the need for innovative ways to study spatial narratives in constantly transforming environments.

The constructed empirical framework initiated the identification of potential sites of importance and narratives by studying the city as an evolution of various architectural forms and systems, where each system instituted certain morphological markers and characteristics contributing to the making of a particular site of importance or primary element. Architectural systems, forms and elements were studied as potential sites where in to discern and experience various socio-spatial narratives. By identifying elements and practices in the urban environment, the created framework encouraged the observation of narratives in space in a collective and individual, and institutional level.

The study drew out observations on social practices and lifestyles, place identity and attachment, rituals etc. providing insight into the constantly metamorphosing nature of ascribing symbolic value to a site. Primary elements were sites of important local narratives that were evolutionary rather than fixed and identified based on role, morphological characteristics and function rather than historic relevance alone. The active participation and shaping of urban environments through various social processes and influences, reflects the urgent need to study urban environments through frameworks that are interdisciplinary and qualitative.

The observations also demonstrate the role that everyday spaces play in globalizing environments. In a climate of rapid growth and constant change, spaces that accentuate identity, place-making and social representation need to be further analyzed, protected and studied.

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