

STATIC SPACES, KINETIC PLACES
Public Space in the Mega City of Bombay

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Today Mega cities, especially those in the Developing World comprise of two distinct cities – the static city and the kinetic city. The static city is built of permanent material and monumental in its presence whereas the kinetic city is built in temporary material and located in the interstitial spaces of the static city – two completely different worlds with varied physical manifestation. Architecture is clearly the spectacle of the static city where as for the kinetic city, festivals, religious processions and community celebrations become the emerging spectacles. Public space is the neutral ground on which these spectacles intersect becoming places where the static and kinetic cities blurs into a singular entity.

In this context public spaces go beyond their physical manifestation to serve critical social functions to become ‘places’ where people interact under a collective identity. These spaces then become a celebration of the cities collective identity especially in the context of Mega city where multiple and often extremely disparate identities co-exist. Therefore in Mega cities public spaces are more than streets, parks, maidans, beaches, playgrounds and include waterfronts, stations, markets and other places that serve recreational, political, religious or social gathering functions or sometimes merely movement corridors connecting different parts of the city!

In Bombay (and often other Mega cities) this aspect of movement and expanded logic of public space is compounded by the fact that the process of urban development has placed this suburban house and the downtown workplace at the distant opposite ends of a linear axis. Life then means shifting from work to home with the occupation of public places becoming a temporal phenomena. Here public space

is reduced to a conduit of mobility rather than 'sites' of social experience and expression: people no longer seem to linger in public spaces but regard them instrumentally, passing through them to other venues of pleasure! The image of the city then is defined more accurately, through these spaces, - notions of motions and as a kinetic entity rather than through static conventional notions of space.

Unfortunately, planning policy rarely accept the existence of the kinetic city thereby continually attempting to make and remake the city in the image of the static city - ordered, singular in its physical manifestation and stable and predictable as a physical construct! This continued denial of the kinetic city, often the city of the poor, results in public spaces invariably encroached on with complete detachment from the elite (often the inhibitors of the static city) who naturally retreat into their internal world. This phenomenon perpetuates the decline in the quality and nature of public spaces in most Mega cities.

Furthermore, in city's like (post colonial) Bombay the reconciliation of colonial urban structures with the new cultural patterns of use raises interesting questions about the very definition of the Public Realm where the boundaries between the public and private domains is a more gradual gradient versus the sharp definition in western urban design paradigms. This raises questions not only of ways public space is used but also about how they are conserved and sustained. Public Space where the two cities or worlds meet is tremendously interesting in the new form of the city as it in this space that their physical realities become evident to each other. The following range of cases from Bombay make evident the gamut of issues which emerge in dealing with public space in Mega Cities.

1. **Restoring a Green in the City:** The historic Oval Maidan, which upto 1996, had been under the jurisdiction of the State Government had deteriorated in its physical state on account of a local detachment of its users in the upkeep of the space. Also, this is a city level open space (chiefly used for cricket), there was a general detachment of local residents to the upkeep of the maidan. As a result this open space had deteriorated to such an extent that it was transformed into a spot for drug dealing, prostitution and gross misuse. A citizens' group, OCRA (Oval-Cooperage Residents' Association) comprising mainly of women residents of the area, took it upon themselves to petition the Maharashtra State Government to maintain the Oval maidan. The State Government did not respond, resulting in the citizens' group, taking the State Government to Court. The High Court ruled in their favour directing the State Government to either maintain the space or hand it over to the citizens' group, which subsequently took over this space in 1996. Plans were then drawn up for the area and money was raised to fence the open space, put in signage and introduce a walking track – all within the guidelines stipulated by the Heritage Conservation Committee. In fact, the walking track became the crucial element by which it was made possible to engage the residents of the area to use the space and look after its well being. Besides effectively using the legislative and judiciary system for the conservation of this space, the intervention of a walking track connected the local citizens to the

process, driving the effort closer to a whole new constituency of potential users in this area and engaging them in the conservation process. Thereby by inventing a new significance for the space that gently extended the historic (cultural) significance of this historic *maidan* a successful and sustainable conservation of this public space was made possible.

- 2. Creating an Art District:** Another important area of relevance from the participatory conservation approach is the Kala Ghoda area in South Mumbai. While the area derives its name from the statue of King Edward VII seated on his 'Black Horse', today this icon does not exist in the area. However, the memory of the horse (sans its rider) continues to persist. A group of young architects, with the support of the Urban Design Research Institute carried out detailed surveys of the area. They studied traffic patterns, land uses, etc. and discovered that the sub-precinct contained the largest concentration of contemporary art galleries in the country. This study was followed by the formation of an association (a Public Trust) for the area, with the idea that it would synergize their resources for conservation. The Government was petitioned by the Association to officially designate the area as an Art District and an Art Festival is now planned every year, (the first one was held in Feb 1998), as a way of raising money to physically improve the area as well as bring attention to the conservation of its intrinsic values. This process has been successful both in raising money as also to initiate the conservation and restoration of both the public spaces and buildings in the area – and also a way of reorganizing the

environment for a new global culture and the localization of the phenomena particular to Bombay.

Promoting the area as an Art district was a means of driving the process of its restoration. Historically, Kala Ghoda was never considered an Art District. However, its inherent resources have now been channelised both in financial terms as well as in their vested interest to drive the conservation process. Perhaps this process will successfully take on this new significance in the future to a point where the area will be truly recognised as an Art District. And perhaps the process will evolve to a point where the area will dissipate into yet another transformed identity? In anycase, what this process has done is enrich this historic area with a new significance which has not only driven the conservation process but also restored public space with its use by multiple worlds to express their aspirations.

3. **Bazaars in Victorian Arcades:** While, the kinetic city bring a vibrancy and vitality to the city, it results in urban spaces of temporary and shifting landscapes. This landscape is created by myopic development policies that did not recognize demographic shifts, and are also characterized by political mismanagement and internal colonialism! Thus, Bombay a city of 3 million people in the 1960's today's houses 12 million people - an unprecedented shift in population by 9 million people in 3 decades! This resulting 'kinetic city' of the poor comprises of homeless or near homeless, night labour, hawkers, squatters, prostitution - an underclass that almost invisibly serves the city, latent and manifest needs and provides the flourishing informal section with the bulk of its

personnel. And so, like in many parts of Bombay, in its historic district, when the pedestrian, the commuter and the promenader have gone home, it is this dispossessed and marginal people who take over Bombay's public places turning them into makeshift cities.

The hawker who colonizes the arcade in Bombay's historic Fort Area is emblematic of this co-existence of the static and kinetic landscape where nestled in arcaded Victorian buildings, symbolic of the high point of the static city where architecture was its spectacle, is located a *bazaar*. The *bazaar* a place symbolized by small moves and negotiations is the symbol of the kinetic city's vibrancy and will to survive outside the formal system.

For the average Bombay resident, the hawker provides a wide range of goods at prices considerably lower than those found in local shops. Thus the *bazaars* in the arcades that characterize the Fort Area is a thriving business. For the elites and for conservationists, the Victorian core represents the city center, with icons complete. In fact, as the city sprawls out, dissipating the clarity of its form, these images, places and icons have acquired even greater meaning for these groups as crucial symbols of the city's fast deteriorating image. Consequently, hawking is deemed illegal by city authorities who are constantly attempting to relocate the *bazaars*.

The challenge in Bombay is to cope with the city's transforming nature, not by inducing or polarizing its dualism, but by attempting to reconcile it, to see opposites as being simultaneously valid.

The existence of two worlds in the same space implies that we must accommodate and overlap varying uses, perceptions and physical forms. For example, the arcades in the Fort Area are a special urban component that inherently possesses a capacity for reinterpretation. As an architectural or urban design solution, they display an incredible resilience: they can accommodate new uses while keeping the illusion of their architecture intact.

One design solution might be to re-adapt the functioning of the arcades. They could be restructured to allow for easy pedestrian movement and accommodate hawkers at the same time. They could contain the amorphous *bazaar* encased in the illusion of the disciplined Victorian arcade. With this sort of planning, components and especially public spaces in the city would have a greater ability to survive because they could be more adaptable to changing economic and social conditions. To nestle the kinetic city in the voids and interstitial spaces within the static city would be a way of creating 'spaces' where many worlds coexist, while the illusion of the architecture remains intact. In fact this could become a powerful image of the contemporary Indian city where the compression and co-existence of two worlds in the same space, if managed successfully, could become emblematic of the pluralism of the tolerance as well as the rich humane dimension that cities in the west sometimes so completely lack – the kinetic city! In fact, "**Bazaars** in Victorian Arcades" could potentially become an authentic symbol of this preferred reality - an urban landscape that internalizes the past for a sustainable future.

4. **Waterfronts and Reclaiming Space** – The use of waterfronts and their nature varies dramatically in different cultures and waterfronts like green space in the city have to act as neutral ground where the static and kinetic city intersects. Chowpatty Beach in Bombay is a case where these worlds collide while allowing this public space to retain its anonymity as well neutrality. A beach at most times, it is not the site for sun bathing and water sports as might be imagined in the west. Instead it becomes a vital social space to relieve the density of the inner city it abuts. A space where young people, lovers, the elderly (who often cohabit in exceptionally small space) can slip into anonymity in the evenings, on weekends and during festivals. Eating places, performers all constantly, animate this space with a kinetic quality that makes it more like a public plaza out of Brugel's paintings rather than a static entity or public space by the sea. Festivals, religious processions and political rallies temporarily ascribe specific use in the spaces before it transforms back into anonymity. Infact it really is perhaps the most crucial public space for the kinetic city where its spectacles are played out. The kinetic city's greatest spectacle, the Ganesh immersion where the idol in mud is immersed in the water and it dissolves - symbolic of the very nature of the kinetic city where its memory is temporal!

Through these examples it becomes clear that the success of public space in Mega cities would depend on the following:

- A recognition of emerging realities in the city especially how the poor engage with the use of these spaces – the static and kinetic city.

- An engagement of the elite in the city with the sustenance and conservation of public spaces
- Ensuring that urban design paradigms incorporate in their percepts essential neutral quality that public spaces must embody – a sense of anonymity that encourages the engagement of culturally and economically diverse group.

It is with the combination of these approaches that the public spaces in Mega cities would retain the quality of being the “kinetic places” that are so crucial to the healthy existence of the diverse citizens of these cities.

For, the emerging landscape of South Asian cities is a highly pluralistic entity — an urban artifact where identities are fluid and accommodate disparate aspirations and their pluralistic physical manifestations. This fluid identity will perhaps be its strength, reinforcing the notion that these disparate worlds and dualities are simultaneously valid. Planning for urban futures in post-colonial Bombay and Mega Cities suggests a planning process which seeks to respond to different interests, to dualities, to the entire gamut of different worlds that exist on the same space. This highly pluralistic environment requires planning mechanisms that continually negotiate between these differences — the static city and kinetic city, the state and the market, the empowered and the urban poor — rather than allowing any one entity to prevail, and re-make the city in its image. The need in planning discourse is to create a more textured and complex planning process that recognizes and uses these dualities positively towards a new and imagined future.

City Planning has traditionally been involved with the permanent urban fabric, with little thought for a cyclical layer or temporary landscapes. Before the industrial revolution markets and fairs were an integral part of urban economics and cities always had spaces for them. Incorporating these spaces is critical to recognize and integrate the kinetic city in the broader planning process. What J.B Jackson calls the “The Third Landscape” in his seminal book ‘Discovering the Vernacular Landscape’. He refers to the first landscape as one of mobility, temporal in its existences – the first phases in the history of settlements. The second landscape is about the roots in a place – where settlements and the built landscape become ‘static’ – devoid of the ‘kinetic’ spirit that connected people. The third landscape is, about overlaying on the static, the kinetic landscape – connecting people through the creation of the temporal landscape – a landscape of festivals, markets, cyclic events etc. – rediscovering the ephemeral and mobile!

In the Indian context, the first landscape was that of the traditional Indian Town – vibrant, bazaar like in its quality with housing and commerce (the shop house) interwoven into each other. A landscape that while ordered was accommodative of the temporal, the ephemeral and mobile landscape – festivals, processions, temporary encroachments all created a sense of the ever transforming - a kinetic city. The second landscape arrived with the British intervention – a static, ordered landscape that separated people. Clearly defined

domains and realms left no room for ambiguous use. These landscapes the static and kinetic existed in two different spaces. In post colonial India, the kinetic city and static city slipped into each other with one overlaying the other – creating JB Jacksons third landscape by default! It is recognizing this landscape and working with it will hold the answers to the future of our public places in Bombay and offer critical clues for the creation of this landscape in other Mega cities.

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Suggested Slides:

- 5 Stages of hawking
- Gods on the wall
- Ganesh immersion – cementing the relationship of the city to the water
- Movement at Churchgate Station
- OVAL
- KGA
- Ballard Estate
- Bazaars in Victorian Arcade