

Social Relevance of Architecture and Convergence

Preface

Architecture mirrors the aspirations and achievements of a society. Every Society is continuously changing. Culture and traditions impart continuity to changing society (1). Architecture provides the spatial envelope for these transitions; it could be rationally correlated to the spatial imprinting of human behavior in a way that persists as a form while allowing for further and more developed interactions.

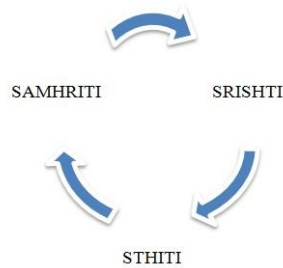


Fig. 1 The Cycle of Universal Correlation (2)

The things that we human beings build or evolve are the result of our endeavors in two directions; on the one end we proclaim accomplishment of a purpose – a built environment to accommodate certain activities and on the other to nurture an expression that could communicate desired response based on the context (3). Such approaches have led to tangible outputs. An in-depth review of urban areas that depicts a sequential growth would definitely help in generating a theoretical, graphical and decisive knowledge of socio – architecture influences on the foot prints of growth and development of a society.

The architecture of an urban environment tells history and frames images. This perceptive generated can be seen as stage set for various episodes and happenings to come about with transition of time. Regions in a town differ according to their evolutionary rationale and functions. It envisage a morphological image of architecture which is relatively permanent, however transition or change is imperative with time. Gradual commoditization of development and changing patterns of social life has brought about a paradigm shift.



Fig. 2 Imageability

Context

The etymological roots of the term “Society” could be traced to Latin word *societas*; sociological domain plays a dominant role in civic architecture. In most cases the legible images of settlement patterns found in this context have evolved with social stratification playing a vital factor. Various other parameters have also played a critical role in the process of evolution of the general imagery of the urban environment. The legibility of the spaces so realized and its cognition is a major aspect for reviewing the quality of built environment and its utility.

Interaction between Spaces and Users; architecture and its surroundings are important aspects which make architecture appropriate for its Place, Time and People (users) (4). Which to an extend communicates the image about the urban fabric as well as social identities of that particular area.

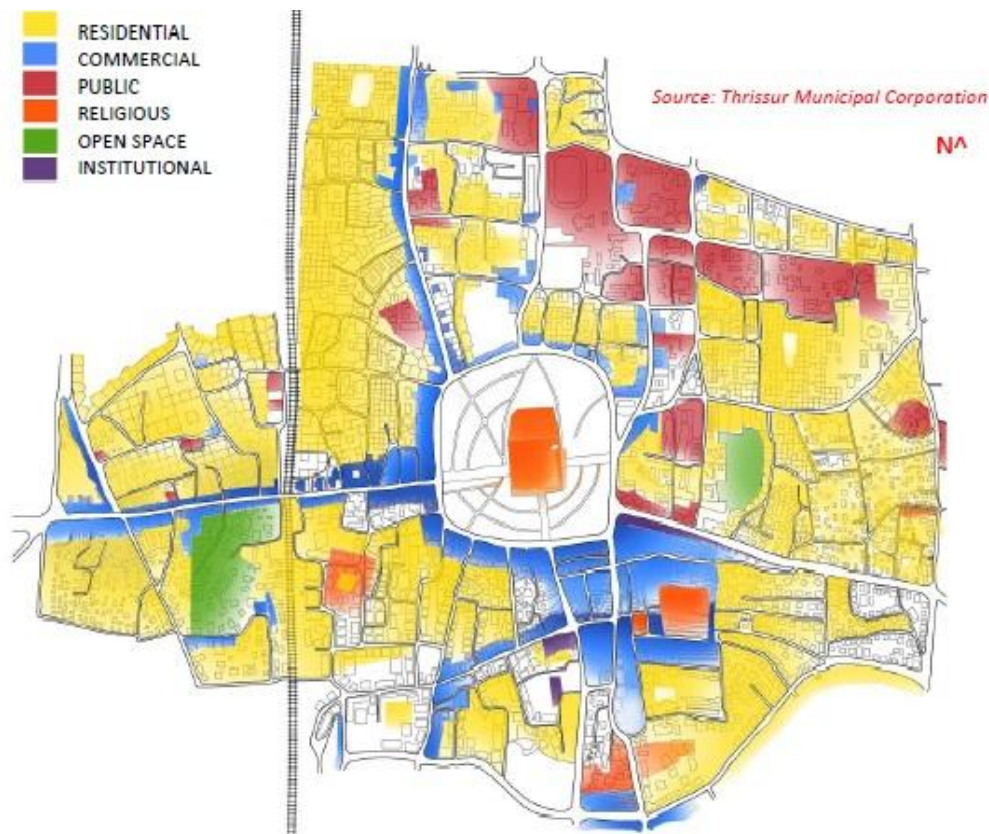


Fig. 3 Landuse Plan (1985) Thrissur City (5)

The settlement patterns that communicate the legibility often accommodate the process whereby society communicates meanings, express its identity, define value systems, and express a way of life. Functional and Spatial elements give rise to Civic Architecture. In the specified context: a historic temple situated on high ground as a focus, a concentration of urban functions that have grown up around it to create a central area. This is emphasized by a focal live center of retail/markets with peripheral zones of administration, business, educational, residential and religion in close spatial proximity defining the edges of the core of the settlement.

Imageability of a City

“Imageability: that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in a given observer. It is that shade, color, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment” (6)



Fig. 4 Place, Time and People

For Lynch, the “imageability” of a city is directly related to the success of its urban plan. Lynch argues that the ease in which one can recognize the patterns and meanings of their environment, the more pleasure and utility they will extract from it (7). However each individual will have a differing perception of their environment. This is natural as everyone experiences the same city differently. The image of a city, however, can be thought of as the sustained composite of all individual notions with a sense of holistic order.

Order in habitat design is taken as a fundamental quality and is seen by most theorists as related to a larger order, that of nature. However Robert Venturi refines the approach and relevance of order by proclaiming an affirmative thought process; ‘A valid order accommodates the circumstantial contradictions of a complex reality. It accommodates as well as imposes. It thereby admits “control *and* spontaneity”, “correctness *and* ease” – improvisation within the whole.’ (8).

Emphasizing the relevance of whole and the interdependence of its part (elements that make up a habitat) in establishing an order of the narrative environment, Jane Jacob states that the look of the things and the way they work are inextricably bound together, and in no place more than in civic architecture (9).

It is certainly apparent that the so-called ‘simple’ act of experiencing structure - environments and planning interventions for present as well as future activities at a macro habitat level involves thorough understanding of various dimensions that aid in the process of shaping the environment.

Urban Morphology

Urbanism is the word used to describe the process that drives people to live in cities (10), in this context the study of the physical form and structure of cities is the study of urban morphology. The term urban structure refers to the pattern or arrangement of development blocks, streets, buildings, open space and landscape which make up urban areas. It is the interrelationship between all these elements, rather than their particular characteristics that bond together to make a place.



Fig. 4 Street Layout

The perception of identity is a latent quality rather than an inherent quality. Urban structure does not imply any particular kind of urbanism: it applies equally to the centre and to the suburb and everything in between; and of course it applies equally to the city, the town and the village (11). At a city level – were various dynamic layers of activity are linked by inter as well as intra dependency on various hemispheres of habitual activity zones. It's only upon identification that architectural expression of civic identity can manifest at this macro level, this phenomenon plays a critical role in cognition.

Focus could be on understanding the urban community model of a city and its influence on built environment. An urban community model reflects on the social characteristics of the urban setting (12). Physical and economic landscapes, land use and ownership, street patterns, planning regulations, and political events may influence the physical design and pattern of a city. Various processes influence the social pattern of the city. These include the ethnic composition of the city, religion, race, migration, and the market.

Different characteristics are drawn from the factors influencing the physical design and cultural aspect of the city. In short it is a synthesis of the spatial relationships of various elements and reflections of the paradigm shifts associated with the transition – progress of a community.

Research Methodology & Process

An onsite intervention at a micro level under the frame work of a legitimate methodology would increase the realization of the study areas value and potential. This could be visualized as a specific study task; a systematic probe into the existing urban fabric of cities – the influence of socio – convergence on architecture would definitely elevate the understanding of affective aspects of the users as well as the direction of transition of built environments and their built morphology.

PROCESS – Approach

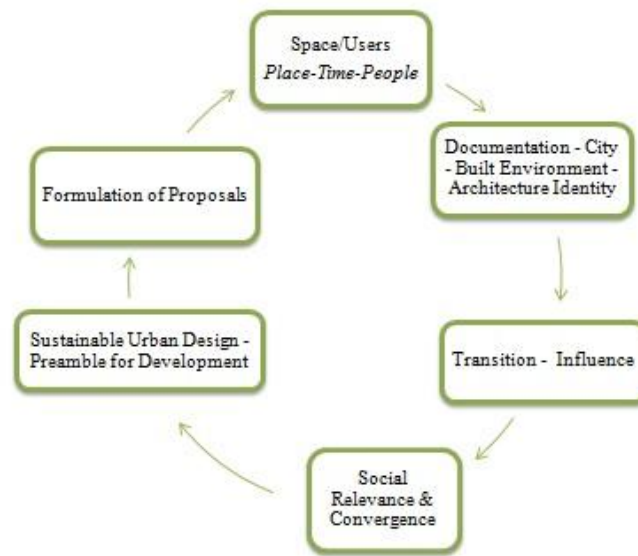


Fig. 5 Research Cycle

A thorough perceptive of the various domains that influence the affective parameters of the users is the critical resource for cognition. Appreciative recognition of the transition through time of a society would help evolve better design solutions that incrementally or significantly improve the inherited situation.

Relevance

- A process to study and reflect on the existing state of affairs – evolve preamble for positive intervention.
- Generation of possible theoretical, graphical and decisive knowledge of socio – architecture influences on the foot prints of growth and development of a society.
- Development of deeper, broader participation and awareness building among the citizens-civil society at large regarding the aspect of Transition and Revival.

Transition has brought about drastic changes in functional requirements, structural possibilities etc – architecture has proliferated far beyond the limits of contemporary approaches. The spatiality's and related approaches have to be properly understood/communicated to the young generation. Therefore such studies have a critical role to play in nation building.

Concluding Remarks

A successful realization of such a broad minded study would lead to enhancement of city image and identity, integration of the same into development of value systems. In short it would help in evolving innovative proposals for the re-use, re-development and regeneration of the built environments as well for successful realization of new development proposals.

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