

Chapter 2

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORIC URBAN
SQUARES IN GENERATING CONTEMPORARY
CITY IDENTITY: CASE STUDY OF PATAN
DURBAR SQUARE**

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ABSTRACT

Traditional urban spaces contribute to delivering city's unique ethos that helps to build urban identity and gives character to a place. However, these historic hubs are constantly being challenged by the growing conflict between the modern needs and the traditional values. This chapter presents a case study of Patan Durbar Square, one of the historic palace squares in the Kathmandu Valley built during the Malla period.

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The chapter examines how the palace square strives to exhibit a collective identity and what symbolic messages it conveys against the backdrop of the currently changing urban setting. This research is based on observations of the study area followed by interviews with the key informants and interactions with the general public. The study employs qualitative evaluation of the urban space in question and offers a detailed description of the phenomenon of spatial transformation. Through the discussion of the issues and challenges faced by the current transformation of the Durbar Square area, this research highlights that in developing and managing historic urban squares in old and cultural cities like Kathmandu, undermining its ancient forms to participate in modernization will question its legitimacy, especially when contemporary changes are set within the already existing built environment.

Keywords: public space, historic urban squares, city identity, Patan Durbar Square

INTRODUCTION

In the era of modernization, cities around the world have witnessed the effects of the global way of life. In modern cities, we find a trend of homogenization where we can also note the gesture of competition between the cities to stand out by delivering a sense of uniqueness by means of their history, culture and lifestyle (Daniel & Avner, 2011). However, cities often struggle to make a balance between the modern way of life and the historical values. For a historical place like Kathmandu Valley, the challenge lies in finding a similar coordination between modernization and the very essence of the city as an urban setting with a rich history and tradition (Tiwari, 1999).

According to urbanist Bernardo Secchi, an Italian urban planner, the contemporary city can be understood in terms of a developing trend in the city building process that suggests a continuity with the past. Lynch (2009) suggests that the ambiguity, continuity and the readiness for the change better inform the urban condition of the contemporary city. Correa (1983) refers to the cities as being a product of time, suggesting the existence of

dynamism and complexity within the city. The research presented in this chapter, therefore, acknowledges the complexity of urban dynamics arising out of adopting to the changes due to the modern needs as the main rationale of the study. While recent urbanization has triggered the change dimension in the urban systems of the traditional towns of the Kathmandu Valley, the shifting impact on historical values and identity of an urban place is not so clear. Against the backdrop of urban change and a growing tension between the past and the present urban conditions, this study examines the current transformation of Patan Durbar Square, one of the historic urban squares of the valley in order to reflect on how urban transformation has contributed to redefining city identity.

The study method for this research includes a literature review followed by a case study of the Durbar Square area. The case study approach has focused on the evaluation of the urban square, in which a series of observations, followed by the interviews and discussions with the key informants and the public were employed to gather the data. Philosophically, the research is guided by the paradigm of constructivism, as it deals with descriptive methods and involves qualitative evaluations of the phenomenon of transformation of urban spaces.

PUBLIC SPACE, URBAN SQUARES AND CITY IDENTITY

Public Space

Since the history of city building, public spaces have always been an integral part of the human settlements. Scholars advocate for a need to have public spaces for human interaction, which is the major backbone for the continuity of the cities (Mumford, 1938; Carmona, 2010; Abbasian, 2016; Gehl, 1987). In towns and cities, public spaces have always been the stage of interaction, socialization and representation of a society as well as of a culture (Bravo & Guaralda, 2016). Public space are regarded as a democratic construct because everybody can have access to it for several

reasons. Carr et al. (1992, p. xi) define public space as the “common ground where people carry out the functional and ritual activities that bind a community, whether in the normal routines of daily life or in periodic festivals”.

Lewis Mumford, in his book “The culture of Cities” (1938) inscribes a strong statement that “nothing is permanent, nothing endures, except life”, emphasizing the changing nature of the cities over time. As the cities change, public space does change too. In fact, the role of public spaces has changed throughout the history. Traditionally public spaces used to be the domain of pedestrians, but this traditional domain was later challenged by the mass motorized and industrial city forms, along with the current technological revolutions (Gehl, 2010). In this present era of modern city development, scholars believe that the role of public spaces may be compromised or challenged by the changing notion of public realm. But Foth et al. (2011) point out the new instilling values of public space for which he coined the term “renaissance of social public space”, where public space is still the centre of the contemporary social life. The significance of public realm can be reassured with the fact that the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable development Goals adopted by the United Nations recognize public spaces as an important city element for sustainable urban development.

Urban Squares

Urban squares are a type of public space that focus on public system, providing a forum for performance of activities that takes place in the open air of towns and cities (Krier, 1979). Referring to the history of city development, we can understand that urban squares are probably the initial form of the urban public space that human civilization discovered as being one of the key components of the city fabric. According to Lynch (1981), urban squares are a focus of human activity in the centre of a densely urban area. A quick look into the history of urbanism suggests that urban squares

are the centre of the traditional cities and have been functioning as a public space for people to gather and participate in civic activities. For example, the Greeks built the agoras for people to gather and interact, whereas the Romans had Forums provided for various social, political and religious activities. As an important entity of the cities, historic urban squares serve as an urban heritage and an integral social space, where public events and socializing activities would take place. Different than parks or recreational open spaces or malls, urban squares contribute to the quality of civic life by integrating its multiple dimensions with the urban systems of the city. Zakariya et al. (2014) believe that good urban squares are a sociable place, which can enhance urban social life.

According to Abbasian (2016), urban squares have different uses based on time and place. In the past, urban squares were mostly used for economical, religious, social and governmental activities. But with the passage of time, their functions have changed. In contemporary cities, we observe urban squares being mostly used for various day to day activities like walking, eating, gossiping, watching, seating. Moreover, Mehan (2016) highlights that urban squares are the scenes of urban transformation, suggesting the dynamism of city spaces.

From the above discussion, we can conclude that urban squares are a dynamic physical feature mostly located in the centre of the historic towns. As they are activity focused, they are people centric and the relationship of people with the space gives meaning to the squares. Their importance transforms with time, people's aspirations and the need of an urban place.

City Identity

Research suggests that city identity is prerequisite to building a sense of belonging - it is the means by which people relate themselves as members of urban communities or groups and define their place in the society. The shared collective values associated with culture affects the characters the buildings and places have in common, which distinguish one

urban form from the other. City identity includes a physiological construction of distinctiveness driven by common grounds of community in shaping the city form. Lynch (1960) defines identity as “the extent to which a person can recognize or recall a place as being distinct from other places”. The statement thus highlights the unique features of a city that cannot be replicated or reproduced in other cities. Mumford (1938) voices his opinion on city as being the product of time with its tangible and intangible forms layering in the past with cultural and social activities - humans play the role of actors in setting cities as the stage to showcase dramas related to human life. Correa (1983) defines identity as a process and not as a fixed object.

Larice and Macdonald (2013) argue that the social structure of a place changes every twenty years. But since the physical manifestation is tangible and static, it does not change as the intangible moments of cultural change in accordance with time. Hays (2016) believes that an act of creating architecture is an imaginative process, which produces memories as well as a possible future and suggests the dynamism of cities. This raises complexity in terms of how city identity may be understood and becomes relevant to time dimensions.

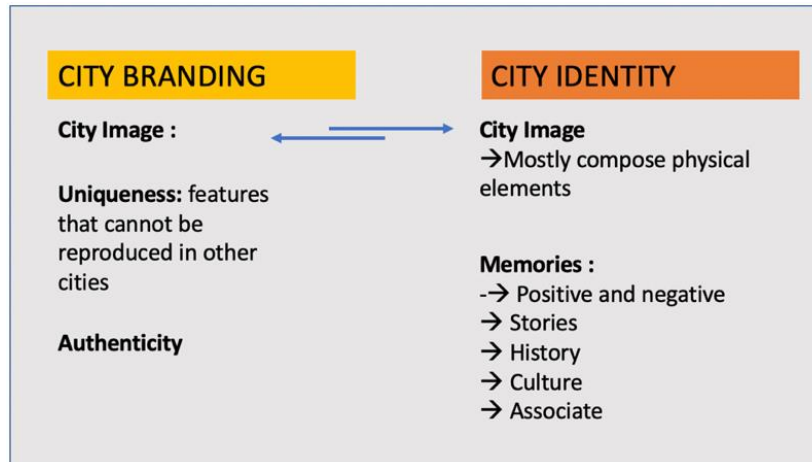
Daniel and Avner (2011) describe the term “civism” as the feeling of pride in relation to the city, where human belongs to. They explain that city identity is more about the abstract and imagined entities. It reflects the abstract imagination of a city that correlates with the dynamics of a place, its physical infrastructures, buildings and the way people live. For instance, design and architecture of the buildings reflect different social and cultural values, whereas historical monuments echo significant periods in time. Moreover, new civic venues such as the cafes, restaurants, malls, etc. reflect the consumerism culture of globalization. Also, the way ordinary people live, interact and travel adds to the wholistic dimension of the city identity.

While people can easily correlate the association between city image and city identity, scholars believe that the identity is the wholistic framework within which city image constitutes a part of the parcel.

According to a study by Riza et al. (2012), city branding and city identity are mostly linked to an approach of promoting tools for cities (Figure 1). However, city branding concepts are mostly delivered and backed by the marketing strategies to promote and market cities as a product, whereas city identity composes of the wholistic spectrum of various attributes such as urban image, social and culture contexts, economy, people's memories and aspirations. The identity of a city is embedded in the layers of sentiments, memories and meanings derived from various symbolic sources, such as built form, culture and history and a meaningful association of all these elements.

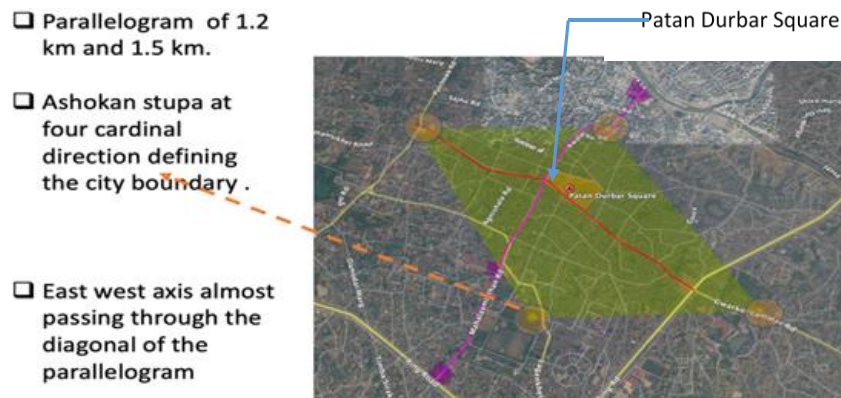
CASE STUDY OF PATAN DURBAR SQUARE

Commonly known as Patan, Lalitpur is one of the ancient towns of the Kathmandu Valley, with a history of some 2300 years. The city is marked by its four stupas placed in the four cardinal directions that are believed to have been built by Emperor Ashoka (Figure 2). The urban form of the city is defined by two major axes running east-west and north-south, with the intersection being the city centre locating the old palace complex. The city thus follows a palace centric urban form. The palace complex or Durbar Square is a heritage site and a major location of the compact urban settlement connected by a network of streets and laneways and various urban squares (Tiwari, 1989).



Source: Author.

Figure 1. Author's interpretation for the relation between city identity and city image as based on Riza et al. (2012).

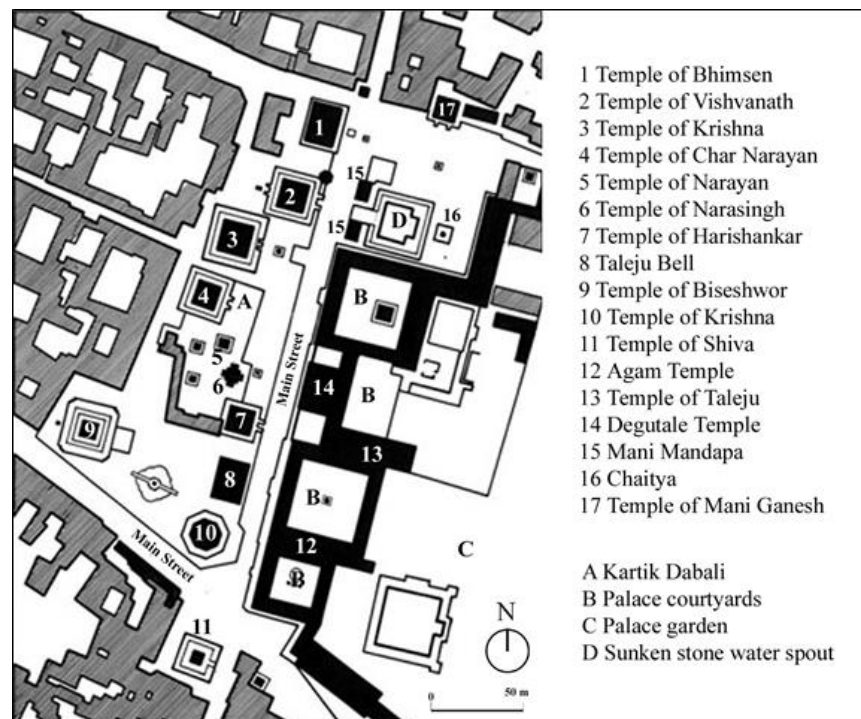


Source: Author.

Figure 2. Authors interpretation for the location of Patan Durbar square and four Ashokan stupas on a Google map.

Patan Durbar Square is one of the three major palace squares in the Kathmandu Valley. The Durbar Square is believed to have been in existence since the Lichchhavi period (Korn, 1977), having expanded and

developed substantially to the present form during the Malla period. The square complex is composed of a defined axis aligned in the form of a main street stretched along the north-south direction. The richly carved and decorated residential palaces are arranged in a series of courtyards on the eastern side, whereas loosely placed temples and other structures are located on the opposite side (Figure 3). The temples are built in both the multi-tiered and Shikara styles, offering a visual appeal to the entire palace complex (Chitrakar, 2006). As many as five entry points (compounded with primary and secondary routes) to the Durbar Square area can be noticed in its spatial arrangements. Unlike the palaces in the West, the built form of the Durbar Square area executes the humanizing scale that synchronizes well with residential built forms and does not exhibit oversized robustic forms.



Source: Patan Museum Report.

Figure 3. Site plan of Patan Durbar Square.

Traditional Urbanism in the Study Area

Historic urban fabric belonging to the Malla period is what is still seen in the city of Lalitpur. The urban form of Patan is characterized by compact and dense built form, courtyard planning and a network of streets and narrow alleys. The design of the buildings and temples follow symmetry and uniformity in the design concept, along with the ornamental approach in the use of brick and wood as both structural and aesthetic elements. The traditional urban form embodies the original spirit of a city that echoes the century old traditions, culture and social coherence.

Existing Urban Condition and the Current Transformation

As previously mentioned, interviews and observations were used to gather information on the existing urban condition and the current transformation of Patan Durbar Square. The following sections will first present findings of the interviews. This includes opinions of both the experts and the general public on the current development trends in the Durbar Square area. This will be followed by findings of the observations to discuss the urban form and physical features of the area and its surroundings as well as the activities taking place in them.

Findings from the Interviews

In order to understand how citizens perceive the Durbar Square area and the current development trends around it, interviews were conducted in the form of the questionnaire surveys with a total of 25 members of the public. The survey questions focused on their perception of the public realm in Durbar Square and what it means to them as users. Most respondents (40%) told that they would like to associate the place with the heritage value and it is the environment or an open space and the

traditional ambience that attract them. However, findings also indicate that the psychological feeling of being unsafe in the space still persists among the users (mostly in women during the night time) as a sense of safety is an important determinant of the use of urban space. Moreover, the majority of the respondents called for a provision of basic public facilities such as a public toilet, drinking water resources and a community library. Citizens were also concerned about the cleanliness of the environment around the complex. While citizens complained about and feared for unmanaged traffic in the Durbar Square area, they also identified vehicular parking, negative social issues such as public nuisance, environmental degradation and an increasing trend of ad-hoc commercial activities as some adverse effects of the lack of proper urban management around the premises. The public believed that increasing tourist facilities and various socially driven urban activities would have a positive impact on the overall place quality.

On the other hand, the views of the experts on the current transformation of the Durbar Square area are highly informative and also complement public opinions. According to an expert in urban conservation, changes in building skyline and functional use of the buildings for economic gains, increasing public activities other than religious and cultural functions and the lack of management to meet the modern infrastructural demands are seen as major concerns of the current transformation around the Durbar Square area. One of the interviewees, an architect and urban planner, highlights that the Durbar Square area resonates history, living heritage and a sense of place and ownership and stands out as the landmark and provide breathing open space in otherwise crowded and congested city. The experts, however, believe modern interventions could be a threatening factor if unregulated changes in the use of the buildings continue to happen. They fear this may result in the loss of heritage value of the place. They also point out at institutional drawbacks in regulating current development citing issues such as the lack of awareness on importance of the heritage value, weak enforcement of policies, conflicting land use patterns, inefficient coordination practice and

untimely implementation of urban regeneration practice and policies as the main concerns.

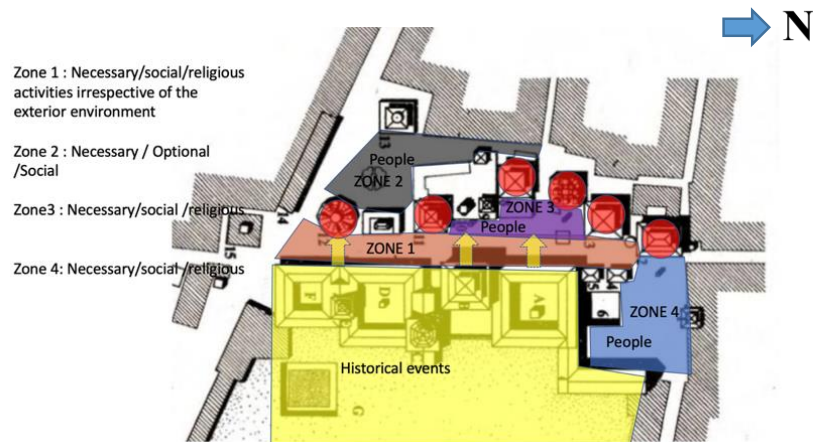
The experts argued that for developing countries like Nepal, timely and periodic update/inventory of a historic place is necessary to understand the ground realities. There is a need for a wholistic planning document to encourage (or discourage) development activities in such areas and the practice of consensus building through involvement of all stakeholders in the planning process should be adopted so that the policies and guidelines get implemented and do not remain merely as printed documents. While the changes are inevitable, these should take place for collective benefit and betterment of the Durbar Square area and not for individual gains.

Findings from Observations

Observations of the study area at different times of the day were made to examine and evaluate various dimensions of public domain and momentum of urban change. Parameters such as user activities, patterns of contemporary domain of change, articulation and characteristics of urban form and streetscape and ground floor use of the buildings surrounding the Durbar Square area were considered during the observation. The first part of this section will discuss different types of activities observed in the area followed by an account of the changing nature of the urban form and streetscape.

Activities in the Durbar Square Area

This discussion of the activities observed in the Durbar Square area will start with an account of the social activities performed by the users on a daily basis. As discussed earlier in the literature review, human interactions and socialization enabled by means of different forms of activities are a predominant feature of any public space. Observations were made to record user activities during different times of the day on both weekdays and weekends. Gehl's (1987) categorization of necessary, optional and social activities were used as a guideline to record the activities (Figure 4).



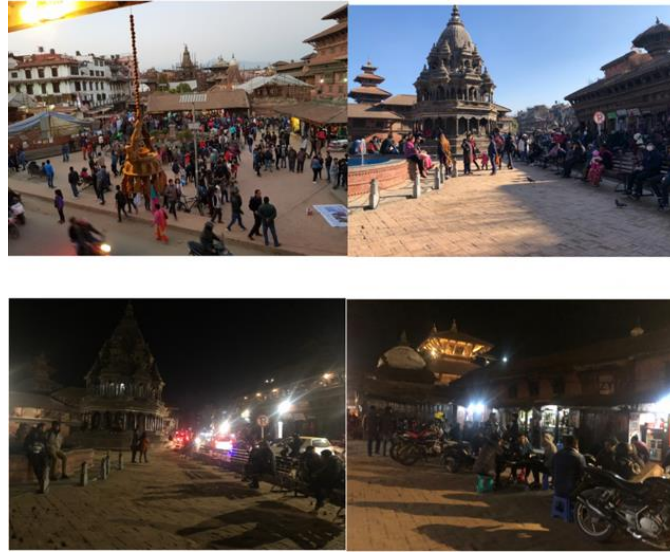
Source: Modified from Korn, 1977.

Figure 4. Map showing activity zones in the study area.



Source: Author.

Figure 5. Different activities observed in Zone 1 and 3.



Source: Author.

Figure 6. Different activities observed in Zone 2 and 4.

For the purpose of convenience of the study, the Durbar Square area is divided into four zones as indicated in Figure 4. Zone 1, 3 and 4 include the urban space that comprises the major axial path running in the north-south direction and the spaces between the temple and the palace buildings. Zone 2 includes the space in the western part of the Durbar Square area.

A range of activities taking place in the Durbar Square area are shown in Figures 5 and 6. The common activity types are identified and presented in a tabulated format with a count of the users performing each activity at three different times of the day i.e., morning (7:45 am), noon (12 pm) and afternoon (5 pm) for both the weekdays and weekends for all activity zones. The number of people in the count is a result of an observation made for 5 minutes at each occasion (see Tables 1 and 2).

A mix of necessary (irrespective of the condition of the exterior environment), social and religious activities has been observed in the open spaces in Zone 1. This zone being the main street area, is highly active as compared to other zones in terms of the number of people using the space.

The zone consists of dedicated morning activities and is highly active during the evening hours on a weekend.

Table 1. Number of people engaging in different activities in Zones 1 and 3

Activity	Weekday (Wednesday)			Weekend (Saturday)		
	Time of observation			Time of observation		
	7:45 am	12 pm	5 pm	7:45 am	12 pm	5 pm
Walking	32	45	11	26	75	150
Children Playing	0	5	5	3	9	4
Old aged people chatting	6	19	4	9	19	8
Religious activities	20	18	0	17	16	20
Different performance (concert, stage programs, etc.)	0	0	2 concerts	0	3	0
people relaxing	25	84	56	23	102	147
Young people chatting	6	62	62	9	62	122
Street hawkers	3	2	3	4	2	4
Others	4	0	0	0	14	23
Total	96	235	141	91	302	478

Table 2. Number of people engaging in different activities in Zones 2 and 4

Activity	Weekday (Wednesday)			Weekend (Saturday)		
	Time of observation			Time of observation		
	7:45 am	12 pm	5 pm	7:45 am	12 pm	5 pm
Walking	4	11	6	5	13	40
Children Playing	0	0	0	0	2	8
Old aged people chatting	0	12	0	0	9	5
Religious activities	0	0	0	0	0	0
Different performance (concert, stage programs, etc.)	0	0	0	0	0	74
people relaxing	10	54	15	15	65	0
Young people chatting	6	10	3	0	12	11
Street hawkers	0	47	15	8	46	63
Others	0	0	0	4	1	8
Total	20	134	39	32	148	209

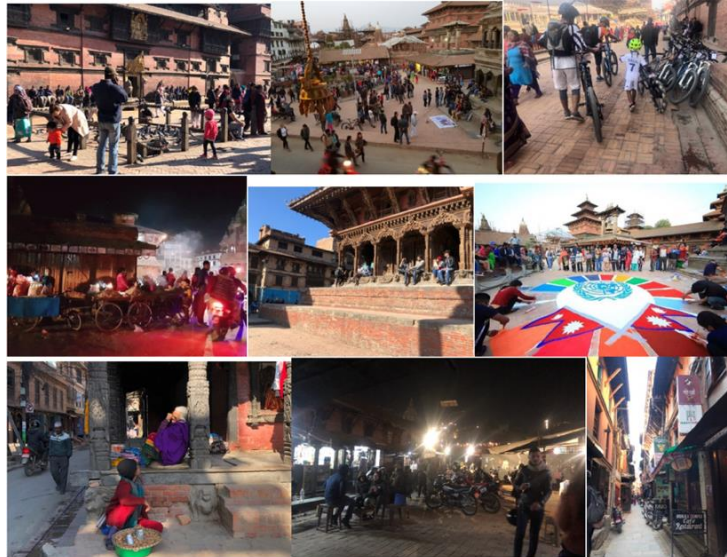
Zone 2 is very active during the noon and the evening time, with a significantly high volume of activities observed in the evening time on a weekend.

In addition to the daily activities, Patan Durbar Square is a venue to perform a host of cultural and religious events too. Till today, many historical festivals and rituals that are associated with mythological and religious beliefs have been an integral part of the activities occurring in the Durbar Square area. Such events draw a huge crowd of the local people participating with full enthusiasm. During these festivals, the urban elements in the area begin to highlight the authenticity of the place and the culture associated with time when it has initiated, which otherwise would have been unnoticed. The integration of the intangible notion of culture and socio-religious beliefs (which are continuously being practiced by the local people) with the physical settings through various communal festivals and rituals of life are still being rejoiced by the local inhabitants. One of the many reasons that the traditional urban form has sustained over time is the application of the socio-cultural practices in the development and continuity of a society (Figure 7).



Source: Author, www.alamy.com and www.welcomenepal.com

Figure 7. Patan Durbar Squares being used for different religious and cultural activities.



Source: Author.

Figure 8. Adaptive contemporary use of the historic urban space in Patan Durbar Square.

It was also observed that an increasing trend of adaptive contemporary uses of the historic urban space is emerging. For example, various new activities (such as social and political awareness campaigns, photoshooting, concerts, informal market activities, etc.) were found to be taking place during the site visit. The self-directed revival of the traditional urban space to support the contemporary need of the people can be noticed in the Durbar Square area (Figure 8).

Characteristic of Urban Form and Streetscape

While strolling around the Durbar Square area, one can easily sense local traditional ethos of the city in the built form and streetscape. The 4-5 storey residential buildings that are arranged as row houses and symmetrical in design concept with brick exposed façades and brick and

wooden ornamental design features can be well observed. However, the impact of modernization is also evident as many historic buildings seem to have been affected by modern societal needs and the ungoing urban transformation trend. Some such observations to reflect on the currently emerging urban condition are discussed below in the following points.

(a) Conversion of Heritage Buildings into Tourist Accommodations

In Patan, the traditional buildings that have survived for centuries have been impacted by the modern needs. Triggered by the division of parental properties, the original outlook of many of these buildings are subject to modification through vertical division. In other cases, the owners prefer to move out of the core leaving the homes vacant and deteriorated. With an aim to integrate an intrinsic linkage between the traditional lifestyle and the modern amenities, some home owners with technical support from organizations such as UNESCO, Patan Tourism Development Organization and Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust have initiated the innovative act of converting the traditional heritage buildings into tourist accommodations. For instance, Mr. Jiten Shrestha, a co-founder of Cozy Nepal, in 2000 initiated the visionary concept of converting the old family home into tourist accommodations through a homestay concept. Till date, he and his team have transformed around fifteen homes into such accommodations. However, there is also a trend of developing touristic accommodations in an ad-hoc basis through owner's own initiatives and interests. In either case, these initiatives have been triggered by the idea of economic gains through tourism. Tourism is, therefore, seen as a tool to foster urban renewal of Patan Durbar Square and the surrounding areas.

(b) Increasing Trend of Café/Restaurant Culture

The opening up of the cafes and restaurants and the increasing trend of the "cafe culture" endorsing opportunity for socialization mostly among the youths as a social lubricant are seen in and around the Durbar Square area. There are more than thirty numbers of cafes/restaurants observed within the immediate vicinity of the Durbar Square area. The significant

increase in the number of these venues are observed in the streets located to the west and north of Durbar Square. Most of the ground floors of the residential buildings in the Mamaru Galli street, the narrow western entry lane to the Durbar Square area, have been converted into the cafes and restaurants as an outcome of the modern needs and the changing lifestyle. These venues also attract international tourists. The growing trend of socializing through having tea and coffee appears to have promoted night-time urban life in the Durbar Square area (Figure 9).

(c) Increasing Trend of Market Activities

Since the Malla period, there is a continuing trend of performing economic exchanges through buying and selling of the goods in and around the Durbar Square area for being the centre of the city. Even today, around 56 shops (owned by the Guthi Sansthan) are found in the area that have been rented to private parties for commercial uses. The shops selling cosmetics, tea, homeopathic items, bangle, etc. are in existence for many years in the surroundings of Durbar Square. Likewise, the major east and west access routes to Durbar Square show a significant mix of commercial development mostly governed by the consumer-based commodity market. It was found that in these areas, the old shops selling medicine, food and grocery items have been operating since many generations. Some of the retail outlets such as money exchanges and ATM counters have been opened targeting at the tourists.

(d) Changing Urban Form and Streetscape

The overall urban form and streetscape of the Durbar Square area and its surroundings still retain the original traditional characteristics with a dominance of the architectural style belonging to the Malla, Shah and Rana periods. However, the influence of modernization and contemporary lifestyles has impacted the physical form, building façade and the use of many buildings (Figure 10). Modern interventions can be well observed in terms of the height of buildings and the use of new construction materials. Although the ground floor of most of the buildings around the area have a

commercial use, the street-level interaction between humans and the built structure seems to be hindered by the intervening effects of motorized traffic.



Source: Author.

Figure 9. Restaurants and Cafes in the western area of Patan Durbar Square.



Source: Author.

Figure 10. Changing urban form and streetscape around Patan Durbar Square.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the case study of Patan Durbar Square indicate that at the present time, the urban condition of the area resonates conflicting yet synchronizing lifestyle of the citizens. Urban change has been a big catalyst to this emerging phenomenon. The final section of this chapter will discuss the research findings to outline the advantages, disadvantages and the challenges of the current transformation of the Durbar Square area as they relate to city identity.

As evident from the findings, the important benefit of contemporizing of the urban environment around the Durbar Square area is that this has played a key role in converging the traditional urban form and space with the modern way of life. The autonomous revival of the traditional urban form to support contemporary uses has shown that social dimensions have always been the key aspects of human civilization that contribute to the success or failure of the built space. The use of the historic urban space by a diverse group of people at different times of the day for other than religious and cultural activities have further rejuvenated the Durbar Square area as an active public space. The diverse use of the urban space has further synchronized the global commitment for inclusive and sustainable development principles. Moreover, the active involvement of economically active age group in the urban space has also helped transform the dynamism of a place by being associated with the concept of a knowledge and innovation hub.

On the other hand, the conversion of the heritage buildings into tourist accommodations has helped conserve our traditional houses from being dilapidated or replaced by new constructions. Economic gain through increasing trend of commodity and tourism-based market activities is also a positive sign brought about by the current change.

However, the changes have also been detrimental to the place identity of Patan Durbar Square in many ways. There is a fear of gentrification, with a negative impact on both the tangible and intangible urban heritage. In the process of transforming private residential buildings for commercial

or touristic purposes, in most cases, the owners or native dwellers are displaced or have to leave the place by choice. During this process, the urban heritage of our local community coupled with intangible cultures, costumes and regulations largely get affected.

It should also be noted that the urban space around the Durbar Square area is already pressurized by external influences and the modern lifestyle of the people. Urban activities around the area may be deduced as society's readiness to accept the capitalist dimension of urban space usage. But if this trend of commodification is continued without regulations, the urban identity of Patan Durbar Square may be exploited by individuals for personal benefit. Similarly, there may be impacts of negative tourism if urban spaces are promoted as a product for economic gains without adequate guidelines and control mechanism. This may eventually be a huge threat to the spirit of the place.

There is, thus, a challenge to upkeep the balanced continuum between the historic urban ambience and the demands of the modern time and yet not compromising with the city's identity. The fact that these urban spaces still are an integral part of the contemporary society has raised a serious concern over endorsement of traditional heritage in regenerating the city cores. The challenge also lies in managing the flow of the tourists and regulating the impacts of negative tourism that may weaken the identity of the heritage area. For developing countries like Nepal, there lies a huge challenge for timely and periodic update of the condition of the place to understand the ground realities.

CONCLUSION

Sweeping modernization as seen in Patan Durbar Square has brought about transitional changes to its physical and social aspects, where the domain of change lies between two imaginations - one that is linked to the traditional ways of public life and the other that is the modern way of life that conceptualizes urbanization with the time dimension, representing heterogeneous, ambiguous and transitional identity of urban change. Patan

Durbar Square represents an emblem of a conjecture between contemporary transformation and the traditional living values, thus creating urban spaces for multidimensional and inclusive public domain in otherwise autonomously developing built environment of the Kathmandu Valley. Despite being the physical manifestation of the continuity of a historical period in time, the traces of public amenities still survive in the physical realm of the Durbar Square area.

Although the domain of public activities has already been changed and is not only limited to the religious or cultural functions, citizens still desire to be associated with the Durbar Square area as a heritage site due to its authenticity and unique identity, and not merely as a public open space or a destination for the tourists to roam around. But we should not consider this historic urban square as a city branding tool for economic gains through tourism. Very different than the concept of a downtown, even today, through its traditional urban form and space, Patan Durbar Square serves as a reference point in shaping the unique image of the city and reflects the historical context of time, people, their relationships with urban space and the way of urban living that has evolved continuously over time to generate city's meaning through "story telling". It is the duty of all stakeholders to safeguard the Durbar Square and preserve the identity of the city.

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