

An Urban Design Intervention into the Development Paradigm of Mysore City

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Abstract- The cities are in constant flux trying to cope up with the urbanization and globalization and result of this is many Indian cities are going through transformation in their physical setting. It is very important to retain the quality of life within the cities which were established through the planned strategies by the forefathers over the years. These cities are to be understood in their geographical setting and contextual influences. The present and future development of these cities need to be channelized to retain the old or existing established character and make provision for newer development but keeping in mind the overall character of the city. Urban design helps in understanding the cities in totality of the factors from macro to micro level encompassing natural environment, transportation, streetscape and people along with their activities. Mysore is one such city which was developed as a princely state but now being in transition it is losing its identity. The discussion in the paper is the recommended broad urban design interventions at city level into development paradigms of Mysore city to retain its character.

Keywords – Urban Design, Intervention, character, transformation, transition

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian cities and towns not only are growing in size, gaining new influence and at the same time it is evident that cities are engines of economic growth. Globalization has further triggered increased employment opportunities in cities and towns in India. Therefore, population growth in cities and towns in India is phenomenal as compared to rural areas; therefore, it is universal that “transition” is not uncommon in cities and towns. In India many cities have developed organically or in a planned manner over 100s of years with different determining factors like religious, trading, agricultural, administrative capital etc. Mysore is one such city which was developed as a princely state by the kings of Mysore for the last 500 years of its existence. The language of the city plan was very modern in its approach with broad roadways accentuated with statues and fountains at the nodes, tree lined avenues, shaded footpaths, landmarks at strategic locations, public squares, equally distributed gardens and parks which were purely reflecting the modern elements in princely state.

Mysore is finding it difficult to retain the old fabric, as it is in its transition to adapt to the new development. If the continuity was maintained along with the transformation to suit the periodical changes and demands, the present situation would be in cohesion with the demand. The integration of the old and the new development needs to go hand in hand, appreciating each other and at the same time making their own identity. This calls for implementing a set of urban design framework, which would help retaining its image and character of Mysore city, as it is distinctive from the other cities.

II. MYSORE – A CITY CONTINUES TO BE IN TRANSITION

Mysore city is not an exception to the growth due to globalization and urbanisation. Mysore has been regulating its growth and development through master plans, prepared time to time. The city improvement trust board (CITB) was set up in the 1900 to oversee the physical development in the city. Under the CITB, Mysore got a distinctive quality which is not seen in other cities. The language of the city plan was very modern in its approach. The architecture of individual buildings or a group of buildings was majestic; this was achieved by setting the building with broad foreground matching the proportion of the building. Such precincts and streetscape were so well planned that it created a royal aura in the whole process of urban design. The same can be visually and qualitatively experienced in the total urban fabric of Mysore.

Furthermore, Mysore city was selected for the redevelopment scheme under JnNURM; however, the developmental projects undertaken were mainly focused on improvement and up gradation of civic services including water supply, sewerage, drainage, solid waste management and public transport which aimed at improving the living condition of resident population of the city. Besides, under the same program, the city center was identified as a place of celebration of the past glory. Many researches have recommended adopting comprehensive approach and large scale modification of existing city central area for serving the present and future generations by proposing planned and overall effort to change the urban built environment.

III. NEED FOR URBAN DESIGN INTERVENTION

Therefore, it is evident from the above discussion that the city is in transition and continues to be in the future years too. It is also evident that identity has been changing with time and such changes have failed to retain its past original city image, form and character which the city of Mysore has always enjoyed and had been recognized so far. Further, city master plans and government policies implemented so far have also failed to comprehensively address the issues of “retaining the city image and character”. Therefore, it is felt necessary to formulate a city level urban design intervention addressing select key themes.

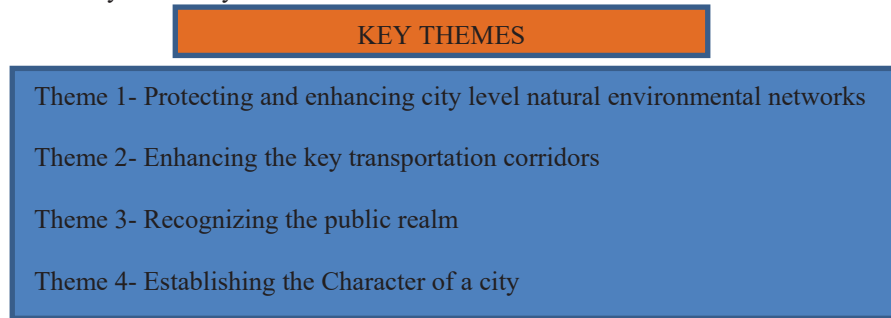
It is therefore, formulation of urban design interventions for Mysore city will be beneficial on the following grounds:

1. It helps to guide physical development of the city toward a desired image that is consistent with the social, economic and aesthetic values;
2. Physical character of the city has evolved over more than 100 years with a variety of buildings that reflect the architectural styles of their own time. The greatest impact to the physical development came in the 80s and 90s with the boom in economy and building industry. The era responded to the rapid growth for the demand of commercial activities. The buildings responded to the need of the day where focus remained on profit. However the buildings were designed without affiliation to the architecture of the past; the result is a city with a collage of unrelated architectural style that reflects the rich history of the city but lack a certain visual unity and very little cohesion between the old and the new.
3. Urban design helps to establish and retain the character of the city as a whole. Opportunity need to be established to implement the city’s vision and comprehensive plan policies for encouraging redevelopment, preserving historic resources, conserving natural resources in enhancing the environment and imposing order, compatibility in land use;
4. Urban design intervention also plays an important role in the economic well-being of a community. The positive attributes of the city is recognized through urban design intervention to enhance and conserve those attributes, and to improve the built environment where it is less than satisfactory. Issues of architectural scale, density, and aesthetic character has been continued to be considered to ensure that new developments supports and enhances the overall character of the city along with its neighbourhood;
5. Urban design policies will help to support and implement the decisions, encourage economic revitalization and improve the quality of life in Mysore; and
6. The inventory of heritage buildings prepared by the Heritage Commission for Mysore city, list about 175 buildings of historic and architectural value. They make up as one of the important aspect in retaining the character of the city, which is in transition. However, during the field survey it was found that there exist substantial number of old and new buildings, which complement or accentuates the image and character of the city. It is also found that too many buildings have come up with the commercial advent which neither respect the character nor do they fit into the city image. Urban design policy framework will help to build on the core strategy which includes more detailed local urban design intervention for the management of development.

IV. URBAN DESIGN INTERVENTION AT CITY LEVEL - KEY THEMES

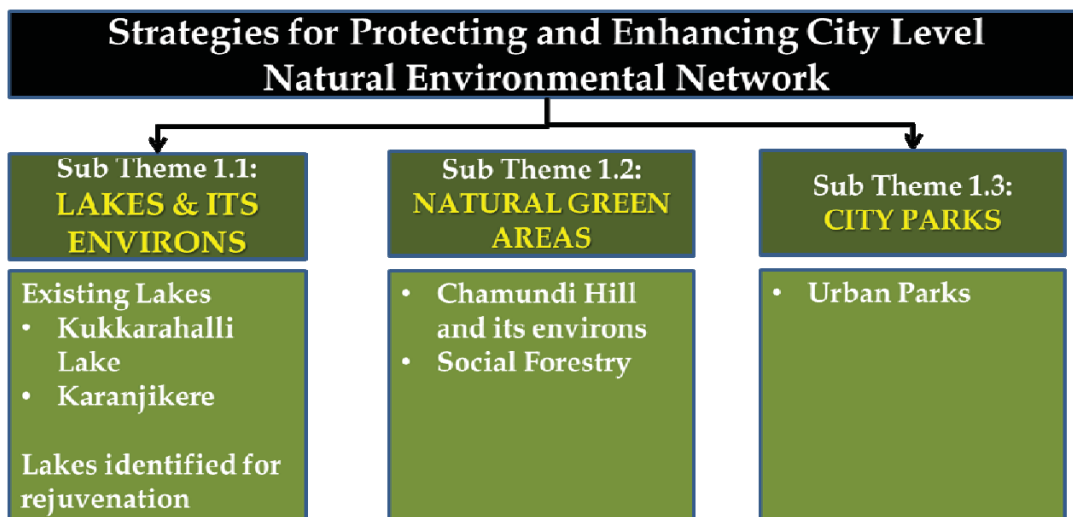
The city of Mysore is a medium sized developing city which is in transition remembered by all for its peaceful and visually invigorating urban setting. The existing urban fabric and the new developments are facing the

developmental pressure in different parameters. To guide this transformation a set of four key themes have been defined to drive the delivery of the city wide framework.



V. THEME 1: NATURAL ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORKS

Mysore has many natural features including chamundi hill, lakes, and urban parks associated with the identity of the city. Though there has been attempt to improve and maintain the same, the approach towards the same has not been structured effectively. Networking the lakes, natural features, green spaces throughout the city and finally with the central core of the city would add up to the public realm of the city; The lakes to be included within the landscape of the city to accentuate the character of the city. The study recommends the following three areas of intervention which shall help in enhancing the ecological aspect and in creating an added public realm within the city (see Figure below).



SUB THEME 1.1: LAKES AND ITS ENVIRONS

The lakes along its natural drain play a very important role in enhancing the overall identity of the city and helps in improving the microclimate of the surrounding environ. Mysore has few existing lakes like Kukkarahalli Lake, Karanji Lake forming an integral part of Mysore city as they are within the city; the Lingambudi Lake on the south west of the city is part of residential neighbourhood. The Dalvoy Lake and Shetty Lake, which abut the Nanjanagud road, carry treated water away from the city to be used for irrigation on the south side of the city. Furthermore, there exist many lakes around the city, which require to be restored to its original status like Devarakere at Hinkal, Hebbal Lake, Bogadi Lake, Kamakerehundi Lake, Uttanahalli Lake, Devanur Lake, Prasunayakana Lake. 'Comprehensive mission plan' for lakes at Mysore to be prepared; which will help in an overall improvement of the environment of the city.

The following interventions are suggested to safeguard the existing lakes and it's environ and to enhance the character of the city:

- i. The immediate surroundings of the lake to be made passively active. The lake edge to be opened up visually to the road with proper treatment to enhance the overall landscape.
- ii. The developments around the natural features to follow a guideline to retain and enhance the character of the existing features

- iii. The existing lakes to be cleaned, sillage and storm water to be diverted or treated, before it enters the water body as it is found that most of the lakes are polluted.
- iv. The water edges are to be protected and vegetation to be added with local species; attracts local and migratory birds; developed with ecologically sensitive strategies.
- v. Passive activities are to be provided to increase the usage of lake and its surroundings; awareness of ecological and environmental advantages leading to self-awareness of protection of natural environment.
- vi. The accessibility to the natural features to be increased keeping in mind the security and safety of the users and the living natural habitats.
- vii. The character to be pronounced by providing physical entities within the premises of the lake.

SUB THEME 1.2: NATURAL GREEN AREAS

A. Chamundi hill and its environ

The Nehru Loka green belt around the chamundi hill to come under statutory approval as it helps in strictly protecting it from encroachment and illegal construction. [The total area demarcated for parks, open spaces and Nehru Loka has reduced from 3060 hectares (2001) to 2690 hectares (2011) within a span of 10years] (Source: MUDA)

- i. The Nehru loka adds to the ecological balance of the nature and enhances Chamundi hill's natural identity/ environment and in turn of Mysore
- ii. The vegetation to be added ecologically and aesthetically to invigorate the environment.
- iii. The developments within and around the natural features to follow a guideline to retain and enhance the character of the existing features
- iv. Passive activities like walking trails, picnic spots (to avoid people moving around throughout the forest area) are to be provided to increase the usage of natural environ and its surroundings; awareness of ecological and environmental advantages leading to self-awareness of protection of natural environment.
- v. The human activities to be restricted to certain areas only to protect the natural habitat and to reduce noise pollution
- vi. The natural features are to be interconnected wherever it is possible through green spaces and parks so as to establish continuity through them.

B. Social forestry

- i. The existing forest to be expanded in its boundary or new places to be identified for social forestry.
- ii. The natural features to be earmarked with its boundary so as not to lead to encroachment.
- iii. Road side trees of tall medium growth to be added to give shade and to cut down the glare; increase in green cover within the city and reduction in air pollution
- iv. The open spaces, natural features to be provided with more trees

SUB THEME 1.3: URBAN PARKS

- i. Green spaces to be opened up for public usage by introducing active like tot-lot, jogging track, play area for children and passive activities like seating area.
- ii. Clear cut demarcation of usable and non-usable areas within park
- iii. The edges of the open spaces to be made more visually open for people to feel safe in using the parks and to attract more people.
- iv. The physical link between the natural settings to be reestablished wherever it is possible. The connecting link could take in the commercial activities to keep it active.
- v. Large extents of unutilized open area are within private properties which are not accessible; the linking of natural features could be established through the edges of institutional public and private properties.

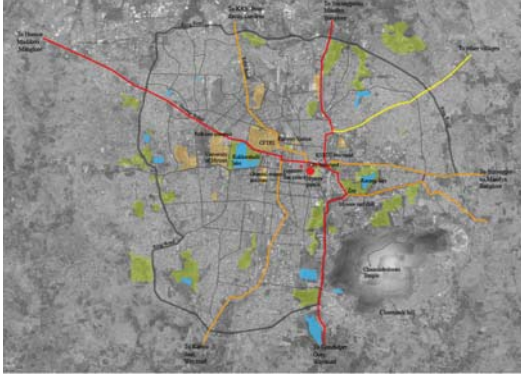


Figure 1: Natural features interconnected within Mysore City

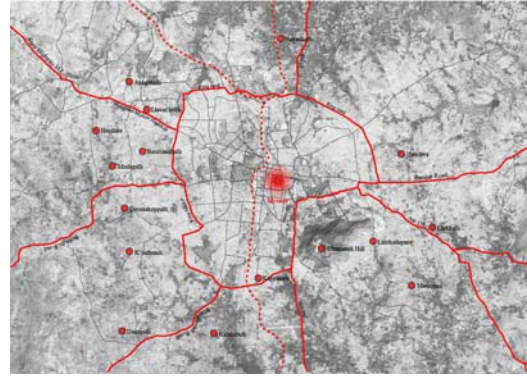


Figure 2: Major transport corridors in Mysore

VI. THEME 2: ENHANCING THE KEY TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS

The city is connected with different cities and states by intercity radial corridors (transportation corridors) Mangalore highway, Bangalore Highway, Ooty Road, Chamaraj Nagar Road, Manandavadi Road, Bannur Road and T N pur Road. The city is also served with an Outer Ring Road (ORR) to help facilitate such through-traffic. However substantial traffic still continues to ply on radial corridors. These radial corridors carry the substantial through-traffic traversing across the city adding to the traffic congestion and increasing environmental issues. The ring road needs to be completed in all respect so as to encourage through traffic to divert from entering the city.

Being the life line corridors of Mysore city, the city master plan (2031) has recognized their importance and recommended for widening to cater to the needs of increasing traffic levels with time. The widening and improvement of pavement conditions and geometric improvement of these corridors are important. However, as these corridors act as entry and exit points to the city of Mysore, their potentiality can be tapped to refurbish the identity of Mysore city.

The research study recommends integration of following urban design elements with the road designs for an overall improvement of the corridors. Such interventions would help achieving the identity of city of Mysore.

- i. The entry gates depicting the historical images of Mysore, to be designed at the Ring road junction
- ii. The nodes to have roundabouts (wherever possible) provided with historical element
- iii. The trees, other required hard and soft landscape which will enhance the identity of Mysore to be provided
- iv. The design of light post along the corridors to portray the character of the city.
- v. The signage to be designed specifically considering the image of the Mysore city to be achieved.
- vi. The linear green stretch to separate the corridor from its abutting areas to be provided at selected stretch to keep the local traffic away and to ensure safety to the neighbouring population.
- vii. Grade separator to be provided where necessary to connect the two sides of the corridor
- viii. To avoid commercial or any other activities occurring on the corridor if it cannot be avoided, to be provided with service lane
- ix. Appropriate road side amenities to be provided at regular intervals where it is necessary; Limiting the number of entries from the side roads to the main corridor
- x. The tall shady trees on the road side along the approach road will add to the enhancement of the character of the city. (Mysore is known for its trees but being cut to widen the Roads) it also reduces the glare and help in reducing the pollution.
- xi. The natural features along the approach road to be opened up towards the edge. (without affecting the environmental aspects)
- xii. The buildings to follow building byelaws prepared specially for approach roads keeping in mind the overall character of the building
- xiii. Careful design of junctions by providing roundabouts , via roads, signals, traffic calming etc, as required
- xiv. Parking to be avoided on the corridors which will affect the flow of the traffic

VII. THEME 3: RECOGNIZING THE PUBLIC REALM

A congregational space for people in the midst of the built area throughout the city facilitates various activities adding to the socio-cultural aspect of the city. It is an opportunity for people to meet for religious, political, cultural and even casually to be part of the bigger celebration. Chikka gadiyara in front of Devaraja Market, north gate of the palace, Dasara exhibition grounds are the most recognized public spaces within the city center. Chikka Gadiyara is the only formal public space which has been incorporated into the city from its inspection.

North gate of the palace, JK Grounds, Scouts & guides ground, Maharaja Grounds act as public space of temporary nature as they have the capacity to hold the activities and the crowd. The opportunity lies in the green park and other open space around the town hall to be integrated along with other public spaces to become a network of spaces. This enhances the city core and opens up to vibrant life; accommodates more number of activities and facilities in these spaces. The opportunity in terms of public spaces across the city has been identified and networked where possible for an effective usage of space at neighbourhood level to city scale.

Besides, around the city, there are couples of spaces as in Mariyamma temple frontage at Vontikoppal and at other temples, neighbourhood parks of significant size, Vivekananda circle to name a few. Every locality has created its own niches to be utilized as public space. The street becomes an extended space for activities especially in Indian Context; the same is experienced in Mysore too depending on the location and surrounding functional activities. Enhancing the natural environment to add to the quality of space within the city; the network of open spaces and public spaces will further add to the character within its context. In the new developments, a careful consideration of grouping the open spaces is required, compared to the unscientific way of providing the open spaces of various sizes (parks of size 6m x 50m as Neighbourhood Park).

The existing activities in an area play a pivotal role in keeping the vibrancy of a place. These could vary in terms of span of time depending on the location and function; temple activities in the morning and evening, activities during working time near office spaces, roadside eating during late evening till mid night, commercial activities during the day time etc., it becomes very important to recognize and understand the potentiality of these activity generators to enhance and incorporate them in strengthening the vitality of the city.

To enhance the surrounding area to retain and refurbish the character of the city, the following strategies are recommended to improve the quality of the public realm within Mysore city.

- i. Further to the existing public realm within the city core, the city has to identify second and third tiers of public spaces considering demand of the residential community and the market forces.
- ii. The city has to re-recognise many incidental public spaces currently functioning as precincts of religious and commercial activities as one of the parameter of identifying as public realm areas
- iii. The city should incorporate the appropriate amendments in developmental control regulations to recognize them as “special areas”.
- iv. The city should formulate a ‘Public realm action plan’ incorporating the level of physical transformation to be achieved, improvements to existing infrastructure and development of new infrastructure development for each tier of public realm areas identified.
- v. Special emphasis may be provided for within the action plan for Lighting, seating, vegetation, hard and soft scape, material, texture to be decided and designed keeping in mind the character of the city.
- vi. Special emphasis may be provided within the action plan to protect the edges of these open spaces with safety measures of the users from moving traffic and the building edges (if any) should respond to the public space in terms of its functional usage and scale; the same need to acts as an envelope and help in accentuating the quality of public space
- vii. The city should identify adequate sites for parking of vehicles of the users of public realm. The site should be provided at a walkable distance.
- viii. Identify the activity generators in the given context throughout the city; accentuating the physical environment after understanding the importance and impact of the activity; Combining 2-3 activities in the nearby vicinity to form a public space which makes the space to be used to its fullest extent.

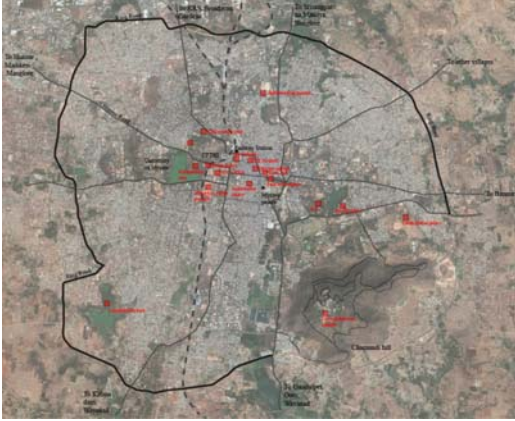


Figure 3: Main public area along with linkages in Mysore

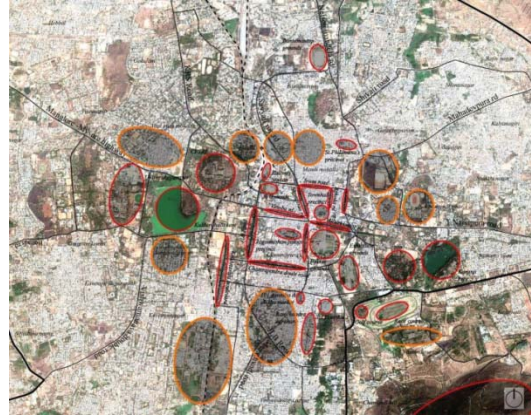


Figure 4: Mysore the important character areas within Mysore

VIII. THEME 4: ESTABLISHING CHARACTER OF A CITY

Envisaged third dimensional development of the city to be strategically worked out and demonstrated through images and models before implementing. The urban form in the area developed during 1900-1970 portrays the character of Mysore and a unified design approach is followed within a permissible framework. The block sizes/property sizes were kept at a bigger scale along the main roads establishing an urban fabric which is uniform. The Mysore city is rich with certain areas which are of heritage; vernacular, natural value and these together bring in identity to the city as a whole.

The following interventions are recommended to retain the character of a city in transitions:

- i. The already established urban form for different streets or area which gives identity to the city to be followed for the new buildings which are coming up in the same context
- ii. At the city core, the palace is kept as the reference point for the other development is to be continued. (Reference point not only in terms of height but also in terms of its spatial and elemental design)
- iii. The area of horizontal, medium height and high rise to be earmarked throughout the city for acceptable urban form and skyline.
- iv. The three dimensional urban form of the city to refurbish the character of the city is established but to be flexible enough to adapt to the individual designers creativity and function which it is going to house within it.
- v. Special policies to protect the character- The publicly owned areas could be easily brought under the policy but privately owned areas should come under the same policy wherein the owners be given incentives in terms of TDR, reduction in tax, etc (The premises to be kept in its original form with minimum changes)
- vi. The buildings to be identified for its importance and put to use which gives revenue to the owner for maintenance and profit. Modifications to suit the new function but keeping in mind the original design.
- vii. The elements-clock towers, statues, pavilions, parapets, domes etc which are associated with Mysore city to be used to accentuate the image of the city. The proportion and setting of the elements to be modified according to the purpose and its context
- viii. A strategic locations of landmarks and other important element to be earmarked and incorporated into the developmental plan
- ix. Reinforce the scale of buildings adjacent to the palace - Opportunities to further develop the city core to reinforce the existing model developed during 1930s.
- x. Enhance the cultural identity of the area - The architectural identity of the existing public buildings should be reinforced, when opportunities arise, through refurbished façades and bold designs. Associated activities should be further encouraged with similar activities around the Civic Centre.
- xi. New buildings should be designed in conjunction with the form of key public spaces and provide comfortable and attractive pedestrian routes on their periphery.
- xii. New developments should draw on contemporary styles (which are in line with the already established heritage character) architecture to project a confident and vibrant identity for the wider character area.



Figure 5: Existing scenario in terms of character at Mysore

These help in creating an overall cohesion through the city in its continuation of establishing the character of a city in transition.

IX.CONCLUSION

The Urban Design intervention addresses urban form and design through recommendations aimed at respecting natural environment, public realm, and targeting new growth into a channelized one. Urban form and the way it functions become increasingly important as an increase is anticipated in density and intensity of activities. Through the urban design principles established in this paper, it is expected to achieve an identity for the city as a whole while encompassing its physical, social and cultural diversity. Though urban design applies at all levels of the city; the discussion in this paper is done at city level only. The Urban Design intervention is expected to help improve the quality of life in Mysore city. It is proposed therefore to reinforce the urban design strategies into the Development Paradigm of Mysore City to improve the overall character of the city.

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