Chapter 43
Post-pandemic Urban World: Rethinking Urban Policies for Selected Indian Cities

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Abstract With ninety percent of COVID-19 reported cases from urban areas, the urban world became an epicenter of the pandemic. A technology-driven approach was followed by Chinese cities had managed to keep the transmission in control. However, in Western countries, a human-driven approach was followed to combat the pandemic. The cities of global south were relatively more challenged in terms of technology as well as human-driven approaches. Likewise Indian cities too faced additional problems like inadequate infrastructure facilities. The pandemic aftermath did lay bare the disparities among different population groups, particularly the vulnerable ones who had been dually hit by low income as well as weak social and economic coverage. Though a multitude of research has been done on the general impact of pandemic, a limited number of research outpourings were observed on the impact of pandemic on the 'third space'. As a critical component of social distancing all the 'communal hangout spots' like park, local markets and gyms were forced to shut down during a pandemic which critically altered the social infrastructure. The study aimed to understand of the impact of pandemics on urban life, with a focus on the 'third spaces', in the selected Indian cities. The methodology was integrated research review which included research output from popularly used database of scientific articles as well as government reports, documents, etc. This chapter questions how these spaces are perceived and how the perception changed during the outbreak.

Keywords Pandemic · Urban policies · Resilience · Global south · Post-pandemic cities · Smart cities

Introduction

Societal developments do manifest in urban spaces and are reflected in the characteristics of urban areas. One such development was the COVID-19 crisis. Even if

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the concrete urban spaces did not change their physical characteristics, their pattern, use and need to be changed following lockdown and other restrictions. Fear of the spread of Contagion made every city impose complete to partial lockdown (Tosepu et al. 2020). Globally, cities had been the epicentres of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the cities of the Global South, pandemic-related lockdown exposed the existing fault lines including wide economic disparity or inadequate access to affordable housing, and inequitable access to core public services. Physical (or as it was called social) distancing was followed and restrictions were imposed on access to urban public spaces to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 (Honey-Rosés et al. 2021). Unfortunately amid the COVID-19 crisis, citizens lost their familiar, vibrant, social and lively public places (Honey-Rosés et al. 2021).

The objective of this article is to focus on the questions that arise at the interface of COVID-19 and planning of urban centres. People form attachments to their neighborhood and are emotionally connected which is described as a 'sense of place' (Tuan 2001). Social isolation policies had called for partial or complete restriction of such activities and hence these places did not offer the vibrancy as Street vendors, tea stalls, parks, gyms were shut down. This study endeavours to summarise preliminary research questions about how the COVID-19 pandemic crisis might change the habits of usage of public space by the citizens. The study takes a case-based approach and focuses on the impact of pandemic-related Indian government's restrictive policies on Indian cities, to make the study more specific. This article also tries to explore beyond the current measures of pandemic-related policies for the city, to consider which changes are likely going to stay with them once the pandemic takes a backseat.

The methodology of this study was to understand what the relevant literature like newspaper articles, research papers, government reports say browsing the popularly used database of scientific articles. The study uses the case of Indian Cities as Indian cities present a complex hub of the population in terms of income, class, religion or caste and where the impact had been profoundly different for different segments of the population.

Objectives

The broad aim of this study is to explore how citizens experienced, navigated and acted upon their changing spaces during the pandemic-related lockdown, specifically in Indian Cities.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows

- To understand how the spaces of social interaction for the citizens transformed with the pandemic-related social isolation policies
- To explore the scope of newer third spaces in the post-pandemic city
- To understand how the relationship with public space can change in the post-pandemic cities in terms of social behaviours, emotional connectedness to that place

- The study also tries to understand if this change would be transformational or short term.

Methodology

The methodology of this study was to comprehend what the relevant literature say browsing the broadly used database of scientific articles. Typically, the review was conducted to examine a certain issue or research problem, namely the 'impact of pandemic on third spaces' in urban areas of 'global south'. The study chooses the case of Indian cities. The case of Indian cities was selected for the study because the initial literature review revealed that Indian cities had followed 'stringent' lockdown policies radically altering the lifestyle and the usage of living space. Google search engine (Google Scholar) was used with keywords like 'urban third space', 'Covid 19 impact' resulting in surfacing of 117,000 reports. The study follows a meta-synthesis of a review of literature, reports and newspaper articles. The technique integrates, evaluates and interprets findings of multiple qualitative research studies following an inductive research approach. The study uses the case of Indian Cities as Indian cities present a complex hub of the population in terms of income, class, religion or caste where the impact had been profoundly different for different segments of the population.

Review of Literature

Spaces are planned with a vision of public life. Geographer Yi-Fu-Tuan (2001) analysed how people 'feel' about space. He also discussed how they form attachments to the neighborhood and the way by which 'space' and 'place' are affected by the sense of time. The concept of space has been developed by several scholars (Soja 1996; Lefebvre 1974). Relevant to this study is the concept of 'third space' and how it transformed due to social isolation policies during the Pandemic. Third space in its original conception emerged as a tool of political resistance and appeared in Bhabha's (1994) analysis of cultural identity and colonisation. He introduced the third space theory to open up the possibilities of hybrid cultures in less hierarchical ways. While discussing third space, one has to refer to the work of Edward Soja who had contributed in the field of cultural geography. He used the work of French Marxist urban sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), author of *The Production of Space* (1974).

Soja (1996) in his theory of third space discusses three urban spaces: first space, second space and third space. The first space is the physical built environment, which can be mapped. The second space is conceptual space. It is that space which is constructed in the minds of the people who inhabit it. It is influenced by economic goals of as well as social norms. The third space is 'imagined' space or the lived

space. It is the way that people live in and experience that urban space. Based on this idea, in 1989, sociologist Ray Oldenberg used a phrase for a social hangout, which was not workplace, nor home-place, but a third place. He described it as a neutral place for leisure and for connecting with friends and the local community.

Thus, the third space is that space frequented by an individual which is neither for work nor home and plays a role in social fostering or community association. However, with the pandemic-induced lockdowns of COVID-19, policies of social isolations changed the morphology of the third space. Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2), was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the 11th of March 2020, leading to some form of lockdown across almost all countries of the world (Onyeaka et al. 2021).

Covid-19 pandemic emergency changed the habits and use of people in places and cities (Sepe 2021). The first reported case in India was from the state of Kerala in January 2020. India's lockdown was an example of the dominant global policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It entailed the observance of physical distancing and social isolation to control transmission (Ray and Subramanian 2020). A population of 1.3 billion people had been restricted to their homes and transport services, schools, factories and business establishments were closed.

According to the news article, *Covid Ruined Our Hangout Spots. Here's How They Come Back* (Bloomberg.com), *globally,* as a critical component of social distancing all the 'communal hangout spots' like a park, local markets and gyms were forced to shut down during a pandemic. However, it critically altered the social infrastructure, and living without third places may have social consequences.

There have been several studies on third places in urban areas in general. However, the lockdown policies altered these 'third places', and not many studies were observed in this area. For, the developing countries, particularly in the Global South with a complex urban population diversity, the need for research is particularly more intense as it is important to know how different the impact for each of the population group-the high income-low income groups, migrant-non migrant workforce groups, gendered groups, geriatric-pediatric age group and so on. Mobility data from Google published on April 11, 2021, showed that in India, compared to the baseline, there had been a 52% drop in visits to parks, plazas and public gardens in India, and a 69% decrease in visits to public transport hubs such as bus and train stations. In this backdrop, the study has the potential to address the much-needed focus on 'third space'.

Pandemic and Third Places in Indian Cities

While urban areas have always been vulnerable to disease outbreaks, global south cities like Indian cities faced additional problems like inadequate housing and infrastructure facilities, and inequitable access to education and health facilities. For these cities, the pandemic aftermath did lay bare the disparities among different population

groups, particularly the vulnerable ones who had been dually hit by low income as well as weak social and economic coverage.

According to Maniktala and Jain (2021), India had quickly responded to the pandemic imposed a very strict lockdown. University of Oxford had prepared a stringency index to measure government response to COVID-19. As per the index, India had been rated as 100 on a 0–100 scale (from 31st March to 19 April 2020). Saha et al. (2020) prepared a report of *Lockdown for COVID-19 and its impact on community mobility in India: An Analysis of the COVID-19 Community Mobility Reports, 2020.* The report informed that in India, retail and recreation dropped by 73.4%, grocery and pharmacy dropped by 51.2% while visits to parks by 46.3%. However, visits to residential places mobility increased by 23.8%. This was because people mostly stayed home during the lockdown.

With effects on community mobility, the morphology of 'Third Places' in Indian Cities changed. In an interview, noted architect L. P. Rajendran (April 2021) pointed out that these third spaces have always taken a backspace in Indian city planning and even the Smart City Mission does not focus on it. However, author Oldenberg (1999) gave the criteria for third space in his book. These spaces should be free or inexpensive, food nearby, highly accessible, people can congregate there, neutral ground, low profile, playful mood and conversation is the main activity. Based on these criteria, the study selects a few urban spaces from Indian Cities and how these spaces were affected by the lockdown-informal arrangement on sidewalks, tea stalls, local markets, shopping malls and parks.

Findings on the Impact of Social Distancing Policies on Some of the Third Spaces in Indian Cities

Historically, the Third Place was a place where people could vent their steam, rejuvenate and socialise. And so, in the past few years, we have seen various combinations of the 'Places' as they evolved. For example, a combination of first and second places is now called coliving, a combination of second and third places is called coworking and a combination of first and third places is called comingling places.

Informal Arrangement on Sidewalks

In India, the trend is that of rapid urbanisation. However, without adequate employment opportunities in the organised sector, there has been an emergence of informal spatial units on the sidewalk. One can observe that the formal and informal economies both emerged side by side on distinct spatial terms.

Informal street trading here defined as the temporary and insecure street occupancy (Bhowmik 2016), provides a living for many of India's city dwellers while supplying

the population with essential day-to-day services. Partha Chatterjee, in his work 'Politics of the Governed' (2004) had explained this phenomenon. The population belonging to the urban informal sector comes under the protection of the organised political unit as 'survival politics of the poor'. In contemporary Indian cities, there is a dynamic relationship between abstract formal cities and informal city bazaars shaped by local politics. Sometimes it's antagonistic while sometimes it's cooperative. Street vending is an age-old profession and is the livelihood of a large proportion of India's population. According to Deore and Lathvi (2019), street vendors make street life 'vibrant" through the diversity of activity and merchandise, footfall, and canopy cover.

According to Bhowmik (2016), street vendors in urban areas have low-level skills and have migrated to the urban areas from rural areas or small towns in search of employment. They take up street vending when they do not find other means of livelihood. In India, the National Policy of 2009 introduced three zonal categories, namely, 'Restriction-free Vending Zones,' 'Restricted Vending Zones,' and 'No-Vending Zones'. This was done so that a clear demarcation could be established between the usage of space by vendors and the space needed traffic, public health and environment (Balbuena and Skinner 2020).

During Lockdown

According to Diego, 2022, since 24 March 2020, lockdown came down heavily on the informal sectors of the economy. Empty city meant an immediate loss of their source of income. Some vendors (fruit and vegetable sellers) began venturing out after a few days without explicit permission and immediately faced police harassment. However, a few weeks later, the government eased restrictions and essential vendors were being permitted to vend partly because of the advocacy of vendor organisations and activist networks. But the interim loss was deeper. According to an article in BBC by Apeksha Bhateja (2020), daily wage-workers such as street vendors, most of whom migrated from rural areas of India found that their jobs in the cities were not there. Many were forced to travel several hundred kilometres on foot to get to their hometowns as there was no public transport and some died on the way.

Tea Stalls

According to Islam and Sharif (2021), tea stalls are vibrant places for friendly hangouts for students and employers alike and are highly preferred for 'adda'—the Bengali term for leisurely, after-work hangouts. Tea stalls are small structures which are found scattered about throughout Indian cities and even rural areas that sell tea and snacks.

Tea is a popular drink that has gone beyond its functional aspects and has become a daily ritual. People enjoy a cup of tea indoors, outdoors, while waiting or talking to friends, during serious discussions, debates and meetings.

According to an article published in BBC by Apeksha Bhateja (2020), on 24 March 2020, India went into a three-month nationwide lockdown as a response

to curb the spread of the pandemic. Similar to other countries, workplaces closed down and working from home became the norm. Because of this, the tea shops and stalls pulled down their shutter. The article also quoted a few interviews where the employees discussed how their informal chats outside of work would happen here. They also admitted that they discussed stress and our bad experiences with our bosses and learn about someone's personal life. The pandemic lockdown had detrimental impact on India's street vendors. While apparently, it may look like being a loss of everyday 'chai break', the loss was deeper. The tea stall owners like other street vendors suffered livelihood losses. According to an interview of a certain Kishore Chaudhary, a 'chai' seller in Gurugram, the tea stalls were not allowed to open during the lockdowns. This was the reason that most of his fellow shop owners went back to their villages. He was unable to sustain his business too as before the lockdown, and he used to get an influx of around 500 customers a day. However when the first phase of lifting lockdown began, there were only two or three customers.

Local Market

According to Mohanty (2007), the scene of the Bazaar as a public space added a new dimension to the European perception of natives. Congested shabby shops, sellers selling products of various colours, fruits, vegetables, stray animals, etc. offered a new visual dimension to the Europeans in Colonial India. Bazaars since history have offered a critical public encounter domain for cultural intermingling.

During Lockdown

The city dwellers had limited public transport and spent much of their time in their homes. This led them use the shopping facilities of essential needs from the neighborhood. This convenience and greater sense of security were encouraged buying in local stores.

Shopping Mall

The Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary defines shopping as 'the activity of going to shops and buying things'. In doing the shopping activity, shoppers interact with the elements surrounding them which affect their degree of entertainment shopping experience. Thus in simple terms, the shopping mall is a large retail complex containing a variety of stores including restaurants and other business establishments housed in a series of connected or adjacent buildings or a single large building. Shopping malls with their infrastructure like parking, ambiance, security, hygiene, avenues for entertainment, food and shopping all fit into the 'third place' definition.

During Lockdown

The impact of COVID-19 on shopping malls was negative. They opened in restricted timings, and there were restrictions on restaurants, entertainment services, etc.

Coupled with this was the fear of contagion. The COVID-19 pandemic had detrimentally impacted trade and leisure. It had also changed the behaviour of city dwellers. According to a news article in Hindustan Times (8 July 2020), the malls in Kolkata received a 'mixed reaction' when the facilities reopened after being closed for 45 days. In an interview, the manager of Acropolis Mall 'about 90 percent of the stores opened and 'vibes' were positive but footfall was not very high due to lack of public transport. South City mall management said they received a better response'.

Park

As integral parts of city life, park is known to attract a diverse community. As an entity, the park contains elements of Ray Oldenburg's idea of a third place (Oldenberg 1999). A public park is defined as an area of land, usually in a mostly natural state, for the enjoyment of the public. The shortage of 'for-mal' public spaces makes neighborhood parks such as this vital for the community's social, mental and physical wellbeing. Public parks have always served a critical function as free recreational spaces.

During Lockdown

Saha et al. (2020) had published a report *Lockdown for COVID-19 and its impact on community mobility in India: An analysis of the COVID-19 Community Mobility Reports, 2020.* Across India, the visits to park dropped by 46.3% (up to 30th April). The states which had the highest drop (up to 30th April) were Chandigarh (− 90.3%) and Delhi (− 80.3). Some of the states which had the lowest drop were Manipur (− 17.3%), Arunachal Pradesh (17.3%), Lakshadweep (− 7.7%). This may be due to stringent lockdown measures as well as the general fear of transmission of the disease.

Revisiting Theories

For Moje et al. (2011), the third space has three objectives—to build bridges between marginalised and dominants, to enable members to navigate across different discourses and to create conversational spaces. The above section had taken up specific third spaces of Indian cities and how they were used in the pre-lockdown and lockdown phases. However, the question arises if they are transformed forever or if these changing uses are temporary phases. This section in general tends to summarise how the relationship with these spaces in the cities changed and how will these changes impact the post-pandemic utilisation of the third space. For these, the following points are discussed.

- **Changes in the use and perceptions of third spaces in the post Covid era**

Studies on public life often count people in streets or parks to evaluate how the site functions (Gehl 2013). As discussed above, for Indian cities the pattern had already changed. However, a class differential was observed as a majority of the population using public spaces belonged to the low-income group like the vendors, delivery boys and wage labourers who did not have the facility of working from home like the higher income group belonging to the skilled group like IT sectors, banking or teaching.

- **Will the changes be transformational?**

The two main activities of public space include shopping and socialising. With the advent of Covid 19, there had been a drop in pedestrian traffic. This drop pedestrian traffic affected the commercial activities like the street vendors and tea stalls. Further, the habit of online shopping may also transform shopping malls. But there may be another argument. COVID-19 had prompted the Indian Municipal authorities to restrict access to large shopping areas and malls. This in turn can force a change in consumption habits, and high-income group may now venture into local markets.

Urban designers create city spaces that are comfortable, safe and welcome table. The stay-at-home restrictions may change how both children and youth would develop a sense of emotional attachment or connectedness with public places like parks, clubs, gyms, etc. As a result of the prolonged absences, they might grow accustomed to online isolation.

- **Infringements in civil liberty by lockdown measures**

Complete or partial lockdown,work from home options, night curfews, etc. were strategies that allowed governments to slow down the outbreak (WHO 2020). These strategies had been implemented via control measures such as restricted entries, barricades, police checks, permit systems, etc. The Government of India, under the Disaster Management Act 2005, declared a countrywide lockdown, to pause the spread of COVID-19 which was a blow to the livelihood of the daily labourers and street vendors under the right to life conferred by Article 21 under Indian Constitution. Janta Curfew and later Night curfew restricted mobility. Restricting movement may have been a strategy to reduce COVID-19 transmission, but it could also have been used to deny mass gatherings and suppress political opposition.

- **Need for a new typology of urban space**

The pandemic could force urban planners to create a new typology to describe places in terms of social density, distances, and crowding. Options of better maintenance of public spaces-temporary green spaces, temporary hospitals where clubhouses and schools were overnight transformed into COVID centres have prompted out-of-box thinking for post-pandemic city designs.

Limitation of the Study

Constraint of time was the main limitation of the study followed by lack of previous published research material.

Conclusion

The change in perception and usage of spaces, particularly third spaces during and after the Covid-19 outbreak in Indian cities, was chosen as the study area. The findings were related to the effects of the pandemic process on the perception of these spaces which were used for fostering social association. In the analyses made, how these spaces are perceived and how the perception changed during the outbreak were questioned. It was concluded that the pandemic did transform the spaces of social interaction for the citizens with the pandemic-related social isolation policies, This prompts the need to explore the scope of newer third spaces in the post-pandemic city. These newer third spaces may also take the shape of virtual places. As discussed above, public space can change in post-pandemic cities in terms of social behavior and emotional connectedness to that place. But whether the change would be transformational or short-term is yet under the scanner.

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