



TUIS

Defining
from Global South perspective
A casestudy of Fort Kochi



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Defining Temporary Urban Interventions from a Southern Perspective: A Case Study of Fort Kochi

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Abstract - English

With an emphasis on the historic district of Fort Kochi, India, this thesis critically investigates the idea and application of temporary urban interventions (TUIs) from a Southern viewpoint. Over the last 20 years, TUIs—from street art and pop-up parks to major cultural festivals—have become essential tactics in urban transformation all over the world. They allow cities to engage the community, activate underutilized spaces, and try out creative solutions to urban problems. This study highlights the distinct socio-spatial, economic, and governance dynamics of the Global South, where resource constraints, informality, and rapid urbanization influence the incentives and results of such interventions. This is in contrast to the majority of global scholarship on temporary urbanism, which is based on the experiences of the Global North.

Fort Kochi's layered urban fabric, marked by contested land use, heritage conservation, and persistent socio-spatial fragmentation, provides a fertile ground for investigating the complexities of Southern urbanism. The study uses the internationally renowned Kochi-Muziris Biennale as a central case, analyzing how this temporary cultural event has transformed heritage buildings and public spaces into vibrant sites of artistic and social exchange. The Biennale's site-specific installations have not only revitalized neglected spaces but also catalyzed broader debates on sustainable design, cultural preservation, and the integration of art, architecture, and community narratives.

Despite the visible vibrancy and short-term successes of such interventions, there remains a critical gap in understanding their long-term impacts on urban behavior, planning, and the everyday life of communities in contexts like Fort Kochi. This research addresses this gap by developing a locally grounded framework for understanding TUIs within Fort Kochi's complex governance environment, characterized by a mix of heritage conservation laws, decentralized municipal governance, and community-led initiatives. The study examines how interventions like the Biennale and tactical urbanism projects impact public space usage, socio-economic dynamics, and cultural transformation.

Drawing on empirical data, policy analysis, and stakeholder interviews, the research demonstrates that TUIs in Fort Kochi are often pragmatic, community-driven responses to infrastructural deficits and policy gaps, rather than purely aesthetic enhancements. The findings reveal that while events like the Biennale can drive urban regeneration and socio-economic vitality, their benefits are uneven and their sustainability is challenged by issues of accessibility, inclusivity, and governance. This thesis contributes to a more nuanced, context-sensitive understanding of temporary urbanism in the Global South, offering insights for both academic discourse and urban policy aimed at achieving more equitable and resilient cities in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.

Keywords: Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs), Global South, Biennale, Tactical Urbanism, public space, Community Engagement, Socio-Spatial impact, Inclusivity, Identity, Retail Gentrification, Inclusivity, Urban Temporality, Urban Regeneration, Urban Fabric, Sustainability.

Abstract - Italian

Con un'enfasi sul quartiere storico di Fort Kochi, in India, questa tesi indaga criticamente l'idea e l'applicazione delle interventi urbani temporanei (TUI) da un punto di vista del Sud. Negli ultimi 20 anni, le TUI—dalla street art e i parchi pop-up ai grandi festival culturali—sono diventate tattiche essenziali nella trasformazione urbana in tutto il mondo. Permettono alle città di coinvolgere la comunità, attivare spazi sottoutilizzati e sperimentare soluzioni creative ai problemi urbani. Questo studio mette in evidenza le distinte dinamiche socio-spaziali, economiche e di governance del Sud del Mondo, dove le limitazioni delle risorse, l'informalità e la rapida urbanizzazione influenzano gli incentivi e i risultati di tali interventi. Questo è in contrasto con la maggior parte degli studi globali sul temporary urbanism, che si basano sulle esperienze del Global North.

Il tessuto urbano stratificato di Fort Kochi, caratterizzato da un uso del suolo contestato, dalla conservazione del patrimonio e da una persistente frammentazione socio-spaziale, offre un terreno fertile per indagare le complessità dell'urbanismo del Sud. Lo studio utilizza la rinomata Biennale di Kochi-Muziris come caso centrale, analizzando come questo evento culturale temporaneo abbia trasformato edifici storici e spazi pubblici in vivaci luoghi di scambio artistico e sociale. Le installazioni site-specific della Biennale non solo hanno rivitalizzato spazi trascurati, ma hanno anche catalizzato dibattiti più ampi sul design sostenibile, la preservazione culturale e l'integrazione di arte, architettura e narrazioni comunitarie.

Nonostante la vivacità visibile e i successi a breve termine di tali interventi, rimane una lacuna critica nella comprensione dei loro impatti a lungo termine sul comportamento urbano, la pianificazione e la vita quotidiana delle comunità in contesti come Fort Kochi. Questa ricerca affronta questa lacuna sviluppando un quadro di riferimento localmente radicato per comprendere le TUI all'interno del complesso ambiente di governance di Fort Kochi, caratterizzato da un mix di leggi sulla conservazione del patrimonio, governance municipale decentralizzata e iniziative guidate dalla comunità. Lo studio esamina come interventi come la Biennale e i progetti di urbanismo tattico influenzano l'uso degli spazi pubblici, le dinamiche socio-economiche e la trasformazione culturale.

Basandosi su dati empirici, analisi delle politiche e interviste con gli stakeholder, la ricerca dimostra che le TUI a Fort Kochi sono spesso risposte pragmatiche e guidate dalla comunità a deficit infrastrutturali e lacune politiche, piuttosto che semplici miglioramenti estetici. I risultati rivelano che, sebbene eventi come la Biennale possano stimolare la rigenerazione urbana e la vitalità socio-economica, i loro benefici sono disomogenei e la loro sostenibilità è messa alla prova da questioni di accessibilità, inclusività e governance. Questa tesi contribuisce a una comprensione più sfumata e sensibile al contesto del urbanismo temporaneo nel Sud del Mondo, offrendo spunti sia per il dibattito accademico che per le politiche urbane mirate a raggiungere città più eque e resilienti in linea con gli Obiettivi di Sviluppo Sostenibile delle Nazioni Unite, in particolare l'ODG 11: Città e Comunità Sostenibili.

Keywords: Interventi Urbani Temporanei (TUI), Sud Globale, Fort Kochi, Biennale di Kochi-Muziris, Urbanismo Tattico, Spazio Pubblico, Coinvolgimento della Comunità, Impatto Socio-Spaziale, Identità Culturale, Gentrificazione Commerciale, Inclusività, Temporalità Urbana, Rigenerazione Urbana, Tessuto Urbano, Città Sostenibili.

"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody." - Jane Jacobs

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter sets the stage for the thesis by presenting the broader context and significance of temporary urban interventions (TUIs) in contemporary urbanism, with a particular focus on the Global South. It outlines the evolution of TUIs as strategic tools for urban transformation, highlighting their capacity to activate underutilized spaces, foster community engagement, and experiment with innovative solutions to urban challenges. The chapter introduces the historic district of Fort Kochi as the primary case study, emphasizing its layered urban fabric, heritage value, and socio-spatial complexities. It articulates the research problem, formulates the main research questions, and defines the objectives guiding the study. The chapter also explains the structure of the thesis and underscores its significance within the fields of urban planning and policy, particularly in relation to the pursuit of more equitable and sustainable cities in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The past two decades have witnessed a remarkable global rise in temporary urban interventions—ranging from pop-up parks and street art to large-scale cultural festivals and tactical urbanism projects—that have shifted from marginal experiments to central strategies in urban transformation. These interventions enable cities to activate underutilized spaces, test innovative ideas, and foster community engagement in ways that permanent urban planning often cannot achieve (Andres, 2020; Bain & Landau, 2019). Across both the Global North and South, temporary urbanism has become a key approach for planners and practitioners addressing rapid urban change, socio-economic uncertainty, and the demand for more inclusive and adaptive urban environments (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Andres, 2020; Bain & Landau, 2019; Watson, 2019).

Internationally, temporary urbanism has evolved in response to shifting socio-economic, political, and spatial dynamics. Cities such as London, Melbourne, and São Paulo have employed temporary interventions to revitalize derelict spaces, support creative economies, and mediate between top-down planning and grassroots community action (Andres, 2020; Bishop & Williams, 2012). These initiatives often serve as urban laboratories, enabling cities to adapt dynamically and foster a sense of place and belonging (Andres, 2020). However, as Andres (2020) cautions, temporary urbanism is not without tensions, as it can provoke conflicts over land use, raise questions of inclusivity, and paradoxically contribute to gentrification when not carefully managed.

The significance of temporary urbanism is particularly pronounced in the Global South, where rapid urbanization, informality, resource constraints, and persistent inequalities challenge conventional planning approaches (Watson, 2019; Parnell & Pieterse, 2014). In these contexts, temporary interventions are not merely aesthetic or recreational; they often represent pragmatic

responses to infrastructural deficits, land tenure uncertainties, and the need for flexible, inclusive urban strategies (Watson, 2019; Bain & Landau, 2019). Watson (2019) emphasizes that planning theory and practice in the Global South must be reimagined to be pro-poor, inclusive, and responsive to local realities rather than simply imported from Northern models.

Fort Kochi, a historic precinct within the city of Kochi on India's southwest coast, exemplifies the complexities of southern urbanism. Once a vibrant port city at the crossroads of global trade, Fort Kochi today faces rapid expansion, contested land use, and the coexistence of modern development pressures with a rich cultural heritage (Rajagiri Outreach, 2019). Its urban fabric is a mosaic of formal and informal settlements, layered histories, and persistent socio-spatial fragmentation (Watson, 2019). Like many southern cities, Fort Kochi's pace of urbanization often outstrips municipal capacity to provide infrastructure, services, and inclusive public spaces (Rajagiri Outreach, 2019; Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2017). This context creates fertile ground for temporary urban interventions, which act as both experimental platforms and mechanisms to negotiate tensions between preservation, development, and everyday urban life (Andres, 2020; Bain & Landau, 2019).

The effectiveness of temporary urban interventions in contexts like Fort Kochi is closely tied to the adoption of a place-based approach, which emphasizes the significance of local context, histories, and community dynamics in shaping urban transformation. Rather than imposing generic or externally derived solutions, a place-based approach grounds interventions in the specific social, cultural, and spatial realities of the area, ensuring that projects are both relevant and resonant with local communities (Healey, 2010; Manzini, 2015). This orientation enables temporary initiatives to tap into the unique identity and heritage of places like Fort Kochi, fostering a deeper sense of belonging and ownership among residents while addressing site-specific challenges such as spatial fragmentation, exclusion, or the risk of heritage loss (Manzini, 2015; Watson, 2019). In the case of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, the integration of local narratives, artistic practices, and everyday life into the event's design and programming exemplifies how a place-based approach can transform temporary interventions into powerful catalysts for inclusive urban regeneration (Bain & Landau, 2019; Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2017). As Healey (2010) argues, such approaches are essential for building adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable urban environments, particularly in rapidly changing or contested settings like those found in the Global South.

Focusing on Fort Kochi's temporary urban interventions, particularly the internationally renowned Kochi-Muziris Biennale, is critical because this event has become a unique catalyst for urban regeneration and cultural dialogue in the Global South. Since its inception in 2012, the Biennale has transformed Fort Kochi's historic buildings, warehouses, and public spaces into immersive contemporary art venues, blurring the boundaries between art and everyday urban experience (Babu, Priyadarshini, Kaur, 2023; Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2017). The Biennale's site-specific installations have revitalized neglected spaces and fostered dialogue between contemporary art, architecture, and local heritage narratives (Babu, Priyadarshini, Kaur, 2023). According to the

Kochi Biennale Foundation (2017), the event attracted over one million visitors in its first five years, positioning Fort Kochi as a global “Biennale City” and generating significant socio-cultural and economic impacts (Rajagiri Outreach, 2019). The Biennale has also sparked debates about sustainable design, cultural preservation, and the integration of art and architecture, influencing academic discourse and local policy (Babu, Priyadarshini, Kaur, 2023; Urban Design Collective, 2017).

Official documents and impact assessments further highlight the transformative potential of temporary interventions in Fort Kochi. The 2017 impact assessment commissioned by the Kochi Biennale Foundation documented wide-reaching effects on the city’s socio-cultural fabric, economy, and built environment (Urban Design Collective, 2017; Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2017). The report noted increased tourism, new opportunities for local artisans and entrepreneurs, and adaptive reuse of heritage structures. At the same time, it emphasized the need for more inclusive, year-round programming and stronger integration with local communities to ensure sustained benefits (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2017; Rajagiri Outreach, 2019). These findings underscore the Biennale’s role not only as a temporary event but as a driver of ongoing urban and cultural transformation.

The focus on Fort Kochi and its Biennale is also significant because it challenges dominant narratives of urban development that often marginalize heritage and local community voices. Unlike many Northern cities where temporary projects are state-led or developer-driven, in Fort Kochi they frequently emerge from grassroots initiatives, artistic collaborations, and community responses to policy gaps or infrastructural neglect (Andres, 2020; Watson, 2019). These interventions both shape and are shaped by local governance structures, social hierarchies, and everyday life rhythms (Watson, 2019; Bain & Landau, 2019). Studying Fort Kochi’s temporary urbanism thus provides critical insights into how southern cities can leverage cultural and social capital to negotiate the challenges of modernization while preserving identity and fostering inclusion.

In conclusion, the study of temporary urban interventions in Fort Kochi is essential to advancing a nuanced understanding of southern urbanism and the evolving role of temporary urbanism in the Global South. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale exemplifies how temporary cultural events can catalyze urban regeneration, heritage conservation, and socio-economic development in ways that are deeply embedded in local contexts. However, the Biennale also highlights the challenges of sustaining such impacts beyond the event period, including issues of accessibility, inclusivity, and governance. By focusing on Fort Kochi, this research contributes to a growing body of knowledge that seeks to redefine temporary urbanism beyond Northern paradigms, emphasizing the agency of southern cities in shaping their own urban futures through innovative, adaptive, and culturally rooted interventions.

1.2 Research Problem

Temporary urban interventions have rapidly become a hallmark of contemporary city-making, particularly in urban contexts marked by rapid change, spatial constraints, and socio-economic complexity (Bain & Landau, 2019; Bishop & Williams, 2012). In many cities of the Global South, rapid urban growth, the prevalence of informal housing, inadequate infrastructure, and pronounced social inequalities combine to create complex urban environments. Within these contexts, temporary interventions often serve as flexible, ground-up solutions that respond directly to immediate needs. These initiatives are shaped more by local customs, community participation, and informal practices than by formal planning or institutional directives (Parnell & Pieterse, 2014; Simone, 2019). In cities like Fort Kochi, such interventions—ranging from ephemeral art installations and pop-up parks to large-scale cultural festivals like the Kochi-Muziris Biennale—are celebrated for their ability to activate underutilized spaces, foster social interaction, and test innovative solutions to urban challenges (Andres, 2020; Evans, 2015). Yet, beneath their visible vibrancy lies a critical research gap: the long-term impacts of these interventions on urban behavior, planning, and the everyday life of communities in the Global South remain poorly understood (Watson, 2019; Simone, 2019).

Much of the global scholarship on temporary urbanism has emerged from the Global North, where interventions are often institutionally supported, strategically integrated into urban policy, and evaluated for their role in regeneration or creative placemaking (Bain & Landau, 2019; Bishop & Williams, 2012). In contrast, the realities of the Global South are more nuanced. In Fort Kochi, temporary interventions are frequently pragmatic responses to urgent urban issues—such as space scarcity, infrastructural deficits, and socio-economic inequality—rather than simply aesthetic enhancements (Parnell & Pieterse, 2014; Simone, 2019). These interventions are shaped by local histories, informal practices, and community agency, often arising in the absence of robust institutional frameworks (Simone, 2019; Watson, 2019).

Despite the proliferation of high-profile projects such as the Kochi-Muziris Biennale—which has transformed Fort Kochi's heritage buildings and public spaces into vibrant cultural venues and attracted global attention (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2017; Urban Design Collective, 2017)—there is a striking lack of empirical research on their enduring influence. Existing studies tend to focus on short-term outcomes: increased tourism, economic boosts, or temporary reactivation of space (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2017; Evans, 2015). Far less is known about how these interventions impact long-term urban behaviors—such as sustained changes in public space usage, patterns of social interaction, and the evolution of community engagement (Simone, 2019; Evans, 2015). Even less clarity exists on how temporary interventions might contribute to or complicate urban planning and governance in contexts marked by informality and rapid change (Watson, 2019).

This research gap is especially critical in light of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. SDG 11 calls for cities to be inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, emphasizing the importance of accessible public spaces, participatory urban management, and the reduction of inequalities (United Nations, 2015). Temporary urban interventions, if well understood and strategically integrated, have the potential to advance these goals by promoting inclusive public space usage, supporting cultural and economic vitality, and fostering community resilience (Bain & Landau, 2019; Parnell & Pieterse, 2014). However, without a clear understanding of their long-term impacts—especially in the unique socio-spatial and economic context of Fort Kochi—there is a risk that such interventions may inadvertently exacerbate exclusion, gentrification, or spatial inequities (Urban Design Collective, 2017; Simone, 2019).

Moreover, the literature underscores the need for a place-based, context-sensitive approach to analyzing temporary urbanism in the South. Unlike Northern cities, where interventions often benefit from institutional support and regulatory clarity, in Fort Kochi they frequently arise from grassroots or community-driven initiatives, responding to local needs and navigating complex socio-political landscapes (Bain & Landau, 2019; Simone, 2019). This raises critical questions about how temporary interventions should be defined and classified from a Southern perspective, and how their success, adaptability, and legacy can be evaluated within Fort Kochi's unique cultural and historical context (Parnell & Pieterse, 2014; Watson, 2019).

In summary, the central research problem addressed in this study is the lack of comprehensive, context-sensitive understanding of how temporary urban interventions in Fort Kochi impact long-term urban behavior and planning, especially in relation to evolving socio-spatial and economic conditions and the pursuit of sustainable urban development. This gap is compounded by the absence of robust, place-based analytical frameworks that can assess the success, adaptability, and legacy of such interventions within the unique cultural, historical, and governance context of Fort Kochi. Addressing this problem is not only academically significant but also vital for informing policy and practice aimed at achieving the SDGs and creating more equitable, adaptive, and culturally rooted urban futures in the Global South.

1.3 Research Questions

The study of temporary urban interventions (TUIs) in Indian cities such as Kochi is increasingly significant in the context of rapid urbanization, heritage conservation, and the evolving landscape of participatory urban governance (Bain & Landau, 2019; Watson, 2019). Unlike many Western cities, where TUIs are often governed by dedicated bylaws and standardized procedures, Kochi's approach is shaped by a flexible, layered, and decentralized policy environment. This unique context demands research questions that are not only theoretically robust but also grounded in the

lived realities and governance structures of the Global South. To address these gaps, this study is guided by two central research questions:

1. **How can temporary urban interventions in Fort Kochi be defined and classified from a Southern perspective?**

This addresses the foundational need to develop a locally grounded framework for understanding TUIs. Unlike many cities in the Global North, where temporary urbanism is often regulated by formalized policies and institutional frameworks, Fort Kochi operates within a complex governance environment characterized by a mix of heritage conservation laws, decentralized municipal governance, and community-led initiatives (Watson, 2019; Parnell & Pieterse, 2014). For instance, projects such as the 'Reimagining Fort Kochi' initiative under the Transformative Urban Mobility Initiative (TUMI) demonstrate how tactical urbanism can be employed as a quick, cost-effective, and stakeholder-driven approach to improve accessibility and public realm quality at critical nodes like the RoRo Jetty (WRI India, 2022). This question is relevant because it recognizes that definitions and classifications of TUIs cannot be universally applied but must reflect the socio-political, cultural, and spatial realities unique to Fort Kochi and similar Southern urban contexts. Developing such a Southern perspective is essential for capturing the nuances of informal governance, the negotiation of space, and the diverse actors involved in these interventions (Bain & Landau, 2019; Watson, 2019).

2. **How do temporary urban interventions in Fort Kochi impact public space usage, community engagement, and the city's economic, social, and cultural transformation?**

This focuses on the multidimensional effects of TUIs. Fort Kochi's experience with events like the Kochi-Muziris Biennale illustrates how temporary cultural interventions can activate heritage precincts, increase pedestrian activity, and stimulate local economies through tourism and creative industries (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2017; Urban Design Collective, 2017). Additionally, tactical urbanism projects aimed at improving walkability and public space accessibility, such as those implemented at the RoRo Jetty, have enhanced the quality of urban life by addressing congestion, pedestrian safety, and the underutilization of open spaces (WRI India, 2022). However, these impacts are not without challenges. The episodic nature of many interventions raises questions about the sustainability of benefits, while issues of equity and inclusion remain critical, as marginalized groups may have limited access to the opportunities created by such projects (Parnell & Pieterse, 2014; United Nations, 2015). This question is therefore vital for understanding both the immediate and long-term contributions of TUIs to Fort Kochi's urban transformation, encompassing social cohesion, cultural identity, and economic resilience.

The relevance of these questions is further underscored by the need for a place-based approach, which prioritizes the specificities of Fort Kochi's urban fabric, governance structures, and community dynamics. Unlike abstract or universal models, a place-based framework allows for a

detailed exploration of how local policies, historical legacies, and stakeholder interactions shape the form and function of temporary urban interventions (Watson, 2019). Such an approach also facilitates the inclusion of diverse perspectives—from municipal authorities and cultural organizations to residents and informal sector actors—thereby producing a holistic understanding that can inform more equitable and sustainable urban policies (Bain & Landau, 2019; WRI India, 2022).

In conclusion, these research questions are carefully formulated to address both the conceptual and practical dimensions of temporary urban interventions in Fort Kochi. They are essential for advancing knowledge on how TUIs can be effectively defined, classified, and leveraged to foster inclusive and sustainable urban transformation in Southern cities. By situating the analysis within Fort Kochi's unique context, this study aims to contribute valuable insights for urban planners, policymakers, and community stakeholders engaged in shaping the future of heritage-rich, rapidly evolving urban environments.

1.4 Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to explore and analyze temporary urban interventions within the context of Fort Kochi, India, from a Global South perspective. The specific objectives of the research are as follows:

- To define and contextualize temporary urban interventions from a Global South perspective.

This objective is foundational, as it establishes the conceptual clarity and contextual specificity necessary for all subsequent analysis. TUIs have often been conceptualized through the lens of Global North cities, where formalized regulatory frameworks, dedicated bylaws, and established institutional pathways shape how temporary events, creative placemaking, and adaptive reuse are implemented (Bain & Landau, 2019). However, in Fort Kochi and similar Southern contexts, the governance of TUIs is marked by flexibility, decentralization, and a reliance on layered legal and policy instruments rather than a single, unified regulatory mechanism. The relevance of this objective extends beyond conceptual clarity. It provides the analytical foundation for identifying typologies of TUIs and evaluating their impacts, ensuring that the research is grounded in the lived realities, policy innovations, and persistent governance gaps that define Fort Kochi's urban landscape. By foregrounding the specificities of Southern urbanism, this objective ensures that the research generates insights that are not only academically robust but also practically meaningful for urban planners, policymakers, and community stakeholders seeking to foster inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable urban futures.

- To critically examine the key themes underpinning Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) in Fort Kochi and to identify and analyze the typologies of temporary urbanism present in

Fort Kochi, including their characteristics, governance structures, and spatial manifestations.

The objective—to critically examine the key themes underpinning Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) in Fort Kochi and to identify and analyze their typologies, characteristics, governance, and spatial manifestations—is highly relevant because most existing theories on TUIs are based on experiences from the Global North. These often overlook the unique socio-cultural, historical, and ecological contexts of cities like Fort Kochi. By focusing on Fort Kochi, the research addresses this gap, producing knowledge that is sensitive to local realities and more applicable to similar contexts in the Global South.

- To examine the long-term socio-spatial and economic impacts of temporary urban interventions on Fort Kochi's urban fabric, community engagement, and local economy.

This objective is crucial for understanding whether such interventions produce enduring transformations or merely transient effects within the city's distinctive historical and geographical context. By employing thematic analysis, the study investigates how temporary urbanism influences patterns of public space usage, accessibility, and social inclusion, as well as its role in fostering community participation and strengthening local identity. Furthermore, the research assesses the economic implications of these interventions, including changes in local business activity, tourism, and employment opportunities over time. Through this comprehensive analysis, the study aims to reveal both the opportunities and challenges associated with sustaining the positive outcomes of temporary urban interventions, thereby providing valuable insights for urban planners, policymakers, and stakeholders committed to fostering resilient, inclusive, and economically vibrant urban environments in Fort Kochi (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023; WRI India, 2022).

This study seeks to advance the understanding of temporary urban interventions within the context of Fort Kochi, emphasizing their conceptualization, typologies, and long-term impacts from a Global South perspective. Collectively, these objectives provide a comprehensive and context-sensitive framework that informs more inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable urban planning and policy strategies in rapidly evolving Southern cities.

1.5 Thesis structure

The thesis is organized into six chapters, each addressing a critical dimension of the study on Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) in Kochi, systematically building the argument from theoretical foundations to empirical findings and interpretative insights.

The first chapter introduces the research by establishing the contextual background and framing the research problem. It articulates the key research questions and objectives that guide the inquiry, while also emphasizing the significance of studying TUIs within Kochi's unique socio-political

and cultural environment. This chapter sets the stage for the entire thesis by positioning the study within broader urban planning and geography debates.

The second chapter undertakes a comprehensive literature review, developing a conceptual framework that underpins the research. It critically examines definitions and typologies of temporary urbanism, explores the spatial production of urban space through TUIs, and highlights the importance of place in understanding these interventions. The review further interrogates the North–South divide in urban scholarship, addressing issues of equity, power, and governance. It also assesses the social, economic, and spatial impacts of TUIs and discusses contemporary art biennales as catalysts for urban transformation. This chapter synthesizes existing knowledge while identifying gaps that the present study aims to fill.

The third chapter details the research methodology, outlining a qualitative approach grounded in thematic analysis and extensive fieldwork. It describes the methods of data collection, including stakeholder engagement and contextual observation, ensuring that the research captures the lived realities and local perspectives central to TUIs in Kochi. Ethical considerations and limitations are transparently discussed, reinforcing the study's rigor and credibility.

The fourth chapter presents an in-depth data analysis beginning with an exploration of Kochi's regional context and the Kochi-Muziris Biennale as a pivotal urban phenomenon. The thematic analysis unfolds across multiple dimensions: public space occupation, retail gentrification and socio-economic change, institutional frameworks and governance gaps, participation and identity formation, and temporal rhythms of urban life. These findings illuminate the improvisational, negotiated, and contextually embedded nature of TUIs, reflecting a Southern epistemology that privileges temporality and place-based agency.

In the fifth chapter, the discussion critically engages with the empirical findings, reinterpreting TUIs through a Global South lens. It foregrounds the episodic and temporal qualities of these interventions as forms of urban negotiation and disruption. The chapter further explores the paradoxes of creative capital in urban regeneration, acknowledging both its transformative potential and the cultural inequalities it may reproduce. Institutional absences and governance challenges are examined as key factors shaping the sustainability and inclusivity of TUIs.

The final chapter synthesizes the research contributions, reaffirming the importance of contextually grounded, temporally sensitive, and participatory urban interventions. It reflects on the theoretical and practical implications of the study for urban planning and policy, and proposes directions for future research aimed at deepening the understanding of TUIs in diverse Southern urban contexts. This structured progression ensures a coherent and rigorous exploration of TUIs in Kochi, advancing both academic scholarship and practical knowledge in the field.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research holds considerable significance for both academic scholarship and practical urban policy, particularly as cities across the Global South seek adaptive strategies to balance modernization, heritage preservation, and community needs. By focusing on temporary urban

interventions (TUIs) in Fort Kochi, the study contributes new insights to the evolving discourse on temporary urbanism, foregrounding its transformative potential in heritage-rich, rapidly changing urban environments. TUIs have emerged as powerful tools for activating underutilized spaces, fostering cultural vibrancy, and supporting local economies, yet their governance, sustainability, and inclusivity remain underexplored, especially in Southern contexts (Bain & Landau, 2019; Watson, 2019).

The Government of India launched the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) in 2015 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme aimed at improving urban infrastructure and quality of life. Temporary and tactical urbanism offer flexible, low-cost, and community-driven approaches that can significantly enhance several key strategies under the AMRUT mission, particularly those related to urban mobility, public spaces, and amenity value. The Master Plan for Kochi Municipal Corporation 2040 emphasizes the development of an integrated transportation network that promotes pedestrian-friendly environments, non-motorized transport, and mass transit connectivity, alongside the creation and upgrading of green spaces and recreational areas and capacity buildings to improve urban livability (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2024). By activating underutilized or vacant urban spaces through short-term, adaptable interventions—such as pop-up parks, pedestrian zones, festivals, community led initiatives and bike lanes—temporary urbanism can effectively support these master plan objectives, fostering sustainable mobility and enhancing the amenity value of the city. Furthermore, the tactical nature of these interventions allows for experimentation and rapid community feedback, aiding capacity building and governance reforms by engaging diverse stakeholders in participatory urban management. This adaptive approach aligns with AMRUT's reform agenda and Kochi's long-term planning goals by providing scalable, inclusive, and culturally sensitive models for urban transformation, helping



Figure 1: Stakeholders of AMRUT (source: Kochi Municipal Corporation (n.d.))

cities like Fort Kochi balance heritage preservation with modernization and sustainable development (Andres & Zhang, 2020; Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2024).

Also this research is especially relevant given the layered and flexible policy environment that characterizes urban governance in Kerala and Fort Kochi. National frameworks such as the 74th Constitutional Amendment (Government of India, 1992), alongside progressive state policies like the Kerala Tourism Policy (2022) and the Kerala Heritage Conservation Act (2011), empower local authorities to experiment with adaptive reuse, creative placemaking, and participatory programming. These frameworks have enabled flagship events such as the Kochi-Muziris Biennale to transform historic venues into vibrant cultural spaces, while government-led initiatives like “Open Streets” and WRI India’s “Streets for All” have temporarily reimaged public corridors as inclusive, pedestrian-friendly zones (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2017; WRI India, 2022). The study’s analysis of these projects not only documents their immediate impacts—such as increased footfall, enhanced business revenues, and greater accessibility—but also interrogates their long-term sustainability and the extent to which their benefits are equitably distributed.

By systematically examining the typologies, governance mechanisms, and socio-spatial impacts of TUIs in Fort Kochi, this research provides a nuanced framework for understanding how temporary interventions can be leveraged to support sustainable urban futures. It offers practical guidance for urban planners, policymakers, and researchers working to harmonize the imperatives of economic development, cultural heritage, and social inclusion. The findings are particularly relevant in light of persistent policy gaps and informal governance practices, which can both enable innovation and perpetuate exclusion—especially for grassroots initiatives and smaller community groups (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023; Kerala Chamber of Commerce, 2023). By highlighting both the successes and the limitations of existing projects, the study identifies pathways for institutionalizing temporary urbanism, advocating for clearer regulatory frameworks, more equitable funding mechanisms, and sustained community engagement.

Ultimately, this research aspires to serve as a reference point for cities across the Global South that are navigating the complexities of urban transformation. By documenting Fort Kochi’s innovative practices and ongoing challenges, the study advances the global discourse on temporary urbanism and underscores the importance of context-sensitive, participatory approaches to city-making. In doing so, it contributes to the broader goal of fostering urban environments that are not only economically vibrant and culturally rich, but also inclusive, resilient, and sustainable for future generations.



Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of existing scholarship on temporary urban interventions (TUIs), with a particular focus on their conceptual foundations, global evolution, and relevance to the Global South. It examines the theoretical frameworks that inform the study of TUIs, analyzes the differences in approaches between the Global North and South, and critically assesses issues of equity, power, and limitations in the field. The literature review also explores the social, economic, and spatial impacts of TUIs, policy and governance challenges, and the significance of cultural events such as biennales in reimagining urban space. The chapter concludes by synthesizing key findings and positioning the research within the broader academic discourse, establishing the foundation for the subsequent empirical investigation



Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Framework: Understanding Temporary Urbanism

2.1.1 Introduction

"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody." These powerful words, penned by Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), resonate deeply with the core principles of temporary urbanism. This research, aimed at defining temporary urban interventions from a Southern perspective through a case study of Kochi, India, embraces Jacobs' vision by examining how short-term actions can contribute to a more inclusive, responsive, and ultimately human urban fabric. It is an acknowledgement of the fact that successful urban spaces are those that reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of their inhabitants, and that temporary interventions can be a valuable tool for fostering this inclusivity by empowering communities to actively shape their environment.

Temporary urbanism has, over the past decades, become a central topic in international urban studies, reflecting the growing recognition that cities are not static entities but are constantly shaped by a multiplicity of actors, rhythms, and temporalities (Andres & Zhang, 2021; Madanipour, 2017). The increasing demand for malleability and flexibility in urban design and governance is a response to both rapid urban change and the inadequacies of rigid, top-down planning models (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Oswalt et al., 2017). Temporary urban interventions (TUIs) are now seen as a way to activate underused or neglected spaces, foster social and economic vibrancy, and experiment with new forms of urban life—often outside the bounds of conventional planning (Colomb, 2012; Groth & Corijn, 2005). Importantly, the international literature highlights that TUIs can serve not only as tools for activation and transformation but also as spaces of waiting, protest, and even deactivation, as seen in the transformation of refugee camps into

semi-permanent urban archipelagos (Andres & Zhang, 2021). This diversity of forms and functions underscores the complexity of temporary urbanism and the need for context-sensitive, locally embedded approaches, especially in the Global South (Andres & Zhang, 2021; Bryson et al., 2018; Gillespie & Mitlin, 2023).

2.1.2 Defining Temporary Urban Interventions

Before embarking on this exploration, a foundational definition of temporary urbanism is essential. While the term might conjure images of fleeting pop-up shops or guerilla gardening projects, its theoretical underpinnings and practical applications are far more nuanced. For the purpose of this research, and drawing from a synthesis of existing literature, temporary urbanism is defined as the deliberate, short-term utilization of urban spaces for activities or interventions that diverge from the site's officially designated or long-term planned purpose (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Lydon & Garcia, 2015; Mehrotra et al., n.d.). This definition acknowledges the inherent flexibility and adaptability of the concept while providing a clear boundary for analysis. It encompasses a wide range of practices, from grassroots initiatives like WRI India's ThanalKoottu project at Vasco da Gama Square-which demonstrated community-led revitalization-to state-sponsored projects, united by their transient nature and transformative intent. The spectrum of governance is only one facet of the multi-dimensional form of Temporary Urbanism that exists.

Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) are short-term, flexible, and often experimental uses of urban spaces designed to address immediate community needs, test innovative ideas, or activate underutilized areas. Unlike traditional long-term urban planning projects, TUIs are characterized by their ephemeral nature and adaptability, allowing them to be quickly deployed, modified, or removed in response to changing conditions or feedback from the community (Mashiri, 2024; Andres & Kraftl, 2021). Examples include pop-up parks, temporary markets, street art installations, and urban gardens. These interventions have gained prominence as tools for urban regeneration and experimentation. They often operate in spaces that are in transition or considered "vacant," such as former industrial sites or underused public areas. By introducing new activities and uses, TUIs can reimagine the potential of these spaces and foster social, cultural, and economic engagement (Frontiers in Sustainable Cities, 2022). Their experimental nature makes them particularly valuable for testing sustainable urban strategies and fostering participatory planning processes (Tran, 2016).

Key characteristics of TUIs include their ephemeral nature, as they are inherently temporary and can last anywhere from a day to several months or years. This short-lived existence contrasts with the permanence of traditional urban infrastructure (Bishop & Williams, 2012). TUIs are also marked by flexibility and adaptability, designed to be easily modified or removed based on community feedback or evolving circumstances, allowing them to respond dynamically to urban challenges (Mashiri, 2024). Additionally, TUIs are often low-cost and resource-efficient, constructed using inexpensive materials and simple methods, providing cost-effective solutions

for activating spaces without requiring significant financial investment (Frontiers in Sustainable Cities, 2022). Many TUIs emphasize a participatory approach, involving community members in their design and implementation, which fosters a sense of ownership and encourages collaborative problem-solving (Tran, 2016). Despite their temporary nature, TUIs often serve as catalysts for long-term change by demonstrating the potential of underutilized spaces and influencing permanent urban planning decisions (Andres & Kraftl, 2021).

Conceptually, TUIs have been understood through various theoretical lenses that highlight their spatial, social, economic, and governance dimensions. From a spatial-architectural perspective, TUIs transform the physical environment by introducing new forms of spatial use and design, often activating "in-between" spaces that are otherwise neglected or undefined (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Frontiers in Sustainable Cities, 2022). Socio-culturally, these interventions foster social interaction and cultural expression by creating inclusive spaces for community engagement and serving as platforms for grassroots participation and creativity (Mashiri, 2024; Tran, 2016). Economically, TUIs contribute to revitalization by attracting visitors and stimulating local economies in areas that may lack investment or commercial activity (Andres & Kraftl, 2021). Politically and in terms of planning, TUIs challenge traditional paradigms by introducing iterative and participatory approaches to urban development, demonstrating how temporary projects can influence policy-making and governance structures (Madanipour, 2017).

International scholarship has further expanded the theoretical landscape of TUIs. Andres and Zhang (2021) stress the importance of understanding the complexity and diversity of temporary urbanism, including the interplay between impermanence and permanence, and the ways in which waiting, hope, resistance, and protest are translated into spatial practices. Madanipour (2017) frames temporary urbanism as a disruption of the settled rhythms and routines of everyday urban life, emphasizing the role of temporal duration and the event-based nature of interventions. Empirical studies have shown how temporary uses can activate and enliven neglected areas, as seen in Berlin (Colomb, 2012), Marseille (Andres, 2011, 2013), Brussels (Groth & Corijn, 2005), and Dublin (Moore-Cherry & McCarthy, 2016). These cases highlight the role of TUIs in responding to market failures, development deadlocks, and the absence of state intervention, with citizens and local actors compensating for missing uses and facilities (Bryson et al., 2018; Oswalt et al., 2017)



Figure 2 : Temporary Urban Interventions Marseille; (Source: <https://urbannext.net/long-term-strategies>)



Figure 3 : Temporary public space on the Avenue de la Toison d'Or. Source: photo Kris Leenders.

What emerges from these international examples is that TUIs are not merely stop-gap solutions, but can act as catalysts for broader urban transformation. In Berlin, the adaptive reuse of vacant land and buildings through temporary cultural and social projects filled gaps left by deindustrialization and fostered new forms of community engagement, entrepreneurship, and local identity, ultimately laying the groundwork for more permanent regeneration strategies (Colomb, 2012). Similarly, in Marseille, temporary uses of abandoned industrial sites for cultural festivals and creative hubs enabled local actors to reclaim and reimagine neglected spaces, building social networks and economic opportunities in contexts where formal planning mechanisms were slow or absent (Andres, 2011, 2013). The Brussels case further illustrates how temporary cultural occupations fostered a sense of collective ownership and experimentation, influencing the long-term redevelopment trajectory of major urban sites (Groth & Corijn, 2005). In Dublin, temporary projects revitalized underutilized urban spaces by providing platforms for civic participation and social innovation, helping to bridge gaps in public provision and adapt to changing economic conditions (Moore-Cherry & McCarthy, 2016).

These international cases collectively demonstrate that TUIs are dynamic tools for re-stitching the urban fabric, building social capital, and testing new models of governance and design. They show that the success of TUIs is closely tied to community empowerment, stewardship, and the ability to adapt interventions to local needs and contexts. For research in Southern cities like Kochi, these lessons underscore the importance of viewing TUIs not simply as temporary fixes, but as strategic mechanisms for urban regeneration, social inclusion, and participatory governance. By drawing on these global experiences, it becomes evident that well-designed TUIs can leave lasting positive impacts, fostering resilience and adaptability in rapidly changing urban environments.

A key theoretical concept in the literature is activation—the process by which temporary interventions make spaces, people, and urban environments operative or alive again (Tardiveau & Mallo, 2014; Andres & Kraftl, 2021). This process is not limited to bottom-up or top-down distinctions but encompasses a wide range of actors and forms of collaboration, from citizen-led initiatives to public-private partnerships (Silva, 2016; Yassin, 2019). The literature also identifies the dualism of offensive and defensive temporary urbanism, where the former refers to large-scale, development-led projects and the latter to grassroots, community-driven responses to planning failures (Kelly, 2021; Andres, 2013). In both cases, TUIs are recognized as mechanisms for

network-building, inclusiveness, and the creation of a sense of place, contributing to social sustainability (The Street Plans Collaborative, 2011; Ferreri, 2015).



Figure 4: The “Better Block Project” in Dallas (before/after). (Source: <https://www.betterblock.org>)

Tactical urbanism—a subset of TUIs—is often framed as a form of citizen-led activism, where interventions such as Park(ing) Day or Build a Better Block serve as both protest and prototype, demonstrating the need for change and bypassing bureaucratic inertia (Lydon & Garcia, 2015; Yassin, 2019). These small-scale, often unsanctioned actions can disrupt the routines of urban life, foster social interaction, and legitimize new forms of public space use (Henriksen & Tjora, 2014; Whyte, 1980). At the same time, tactical urbanism is increasingly being adopted by city governments and developers as a low-risk tool for public engagement, early project testing, and phased implementation, raising questions about the co-optation and institutionalization of grassroots practices (Mould, 2014; Wohl, 2018).

The international literature underscores that TUIs are not only about activation but can also involve deactivation and resistance, as in the case of the Colorful Revolution in Skopje, where artistic interventions temporarily transformed the meanings of buildings and monuments as acts of protest (Andres & Zhang, 2021). This highlights the potential of TUIs to serve as spaces of waiting, hope, and resistance, as well as catalysts for long-term transformation or contestation.

Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) have emerged as a focal point in contemporary urban discourse due to their distinctive ability to respond to the complexities and uncertainties of modern city life. The increasing prominence of TUIs is closely linked to the need for adaptive, flexible, and resource-efficient approaches to urban transformation, especially in contexts marked by rapid change, economic austerity, and shifting patterns of urban use (Lydon & Garcia, 2015; Stevens & Dovey, 2022). Unlike conventional, permanent urban planning solutions, TUIs allow for swift and experimental activation of underutilized or neglected spaces, providing cities with a means to test new ideas, address immediate community needs, and gather real-time feedback before committing to long-term investments (Wohl, 2018; Yong, 2024).

The rise of TUIs is also rooted in their capacity to democratize the process of city-making. International literature highlights how TUIs often originate from grassroots initiatives, citizen activism, or collaborative partnerships, thereby enabling local communities to directly shape their built environment and exercise agency in public space (Yassin, 2019; Silva, 2016). This participatory dimension not only fosters a sense of ownership and belonging among residents but also encourages social interaction, civic engagement, and the cultivation of local identity (Henriksen & Tjora, 2014; Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023). As a result, TUIs are increasingly recognized as tools for enhancing social cohesion and inclusivity within diverse urban populations.

In addition, TUIs are widely regarded as experimental laboratories for urban innovation. By introducing temporary, small-scale interventions, urban practitioners and policymakers are able to observe user behaviors, evaluate the success of new spatial arrangements, and iteratively refine projects based on empirical evidence (Wohl, 2018; Yong, 2024). This approach aligns with contemporary trends in urbanism that emphasize agility, resilience, and evidence-based decision-making, allowing cities to adapt to unforeseen challenges such as those presented by the COVID-19 pandemic (Stevens & Dovey, 2022; Yong, 2024). The temporary nature of these interventions reduces both financial and political risk, making them attractive options for municipalities facing budgetary constraints or political uncertainty (Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

TUIs are increasingly recognized for their transformative potential in activating neglected urban areas and stimulating economic, social, and cultural vibrancy. Relational and actor–network theory perspectives underscore the capacity of TUIs to disrupt established spatial orders, generate new patterns of use, and expand the range of possibilities for urban engagement and appropriation (Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023; Tornaghi & Knierbein, 2015). International case studies from cities such as Berlin, Amman, and various Canadian contexts illustrate how TUIs can serve as catalysts for long-term regeneration, foster local entrepreneurship, and inspire more permanent urban improvements (Colomb, 2012; Yong, 2024).

The growing body of academic research on TUIs further positions them as essential instruments for envisioning and prototyping new futures for public space. Rather than being viewed solely as temporary fixes, TUIs are increasingly understood as strategic interventions that can inform broader urban policy and planning, particularly in underused or transitional areas (Krmpotić Romić & Bojanić Obad Šćitaroci, 2022; Yong, 2024). As cities worldwide strive for sustainability, resilience, and inclusivity, TUIs offer a pragmatic and innovative pathway for transforming urban environments in ways that are responsive to local needs and capable of evolving over time (Stevens & Dovey, 2022; Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

The evolution of TUIs reflects their growing importance in urbanism. In the Global North, TUIs have been used to repurpose former industrial sites and harbor areas for new rounds of urbanization (Harvey, 1989; Brenner & Schmid, 2015). Cities like Berlin have utilized temporary projects as responses to market failures or gaps in state-led planning processes (Colomb, 2012). In the Global

South, TUIs often address urgent issues such as informal settlements or inadequate public infrastructure by providing low-cost solutions that engage local communities (Gillespie & Mitlin, 2023). Over time, TUIs have transitioned from being viewed as ad hoc or informal responses to becoming integral components of strategic urban planning. Scholars like Andres et al. (2021) argue that TUIs represent a "new urban genre" that combines bottom-up creativity with top-down governance frameworks.

2.1.3 The Production of Space and the Role of Temporary Urban Interventions

The conceptual foundation for understanding this study of Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) is deeply rooted in Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space. Lefebvre (1991) posits that urban space is not merely a passive, physical backdrop but is actively produced and reproduced through the interplay of social relations, power dynamics, and historical processes. He articulates a triadic framework-spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces-which together shape the continuous (re)production of urban environments. Within this framework, TUIs can be understood as deliberate acts of spatial (re)production that momentarily disrupt, reconfigure, or enrich established spatial orders. They are not simply physical alterations of the built environment; rather, they are socio-spatial practices that generate new meanings, challenge existing power structures, and invite diverse forms of public engagement (Lefebvre, 1991; Stanek, 2011).

Infact, authors writing about TUIs in relation to the production of space is further illuminated by scholarship on ephemeral and adaptive urbanism. Mehrotra, Vera, and Mayoral (2016), in their work *Ephemeral Urbanism: Cities in Constant Flux*, argue that temporary interventions exemplify the inherent adaptability and improvisational capacity of cities. They highlight how ephemeral uses-ranging from seasonal festivals and informal markets to temporary shelters and art installations-can reveal latent spatial potentials and foster community resilience, particularly in contexts where conventional planning mechanisms are inadequate or slow to respond. These interventions are not only responses to immediate needs or crises but also serve as experimental platforms for testing new ideas, cultivating civic participation, and informing long-term urban strategies (Mehrotra et al., 2016; Krmpotić Romić & Bojanić Obad Šćitaroci, 2022).

Contemporary urban theory increasingly recognizes that TUIs are situated at the intersection of formal planning, design experimentation, and socio-political activism. Madanipour (2017) frames temporary urbanism as an evolving discourse that challenges the rigidity of traditional urban planning by foregrounding informality, adaptability, and grassroots agency. TUIs, in this context, represent a tactical approach to urban transformation, allowing citizens, artists, and activists to reclaim and reinterpret public space. This aligns with Lefebvre's (1996) notion of the "right to the city," wherein the production of space is democratized and open to collective negotiation and creativity.

The proliferation of TUIs over the past two decades is closely linked to broader socio-economic and technological shifts. The rise of neoliberal urban policies, fiscal austerity, and the demand for participatory and inclusive urban processes have positioned TUIs as pragmatic and innovative responses to contemporary urban challenges (Lydon & Garcia, 2015; Stevens & Dovey, 2022). Moreover, advancements in digital technology and social media have facilitated the rapid documentation, dissemination, and replication of temporary urban practices across diverse global contexts. This digital turn has enabled cities to crowdsource feedback, monitor user interactions, and iteratively refine interventions, thus enhancing the potential for TUIs to inform evidence-based urban policy (OpenDataSoft, 2024; Yong, 2024).

Nevertheless, the theoretical discourse surrounding TUIs also acknowledges the tensions inherent in their temporality. While TUIs are celebrated for their capacity to foster innovation, adaptability, and community engagement, there is ongoing debate regarding their long-term impact and transformative potential. Some scholars caution that an over-reliance on temporary solutions may inadvertently legitimize precarity or serve as superficial remedies that fail to address deeper structural issues in urban governance and equity (Ferreri, 2015; Madanipour, 2017). Others highlight the risk of commodification, where temporary installations may prioritize commercial interests or event-driven spectacle over sustained community benefit (Krmpotić Romić & Bojanić Obad Šćitaroci, 2022).

The study of TUIs through the lens of the production of space offers a robust conceptual foundation for analyzing how temporary interventions shape urban environments. TUIs are best understood as dynamic socio-spatial practices that both reflect and influence broader processes of urban change. By foregrounding the relational, participatory, and experimental dimensions of urban space, this perspective enables a more nuanced understanding of the opportunities and limitations of temporary urbanism in contemporary city-making.

2.2 Anchoring the Ephemeral: Why Place Matters in Analyzing Temporary Urbanism

A place-based approach is fundamental to understanding, defining, and evaluating the impact of Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs). Rather than treating urban spaces as generic or interchangeable, a place-based perspective emphasizes the unique physical, social, and cultural characteristics that shape how interventions are experienced and what outcomes they produce. Recent scholarship highlights that the effectiveness and meaning of TUIs are deeply contingent on their specific context; interventions that succeed in one location may not have the same impact elsewhere due to differences in local needs, histories, and patterns of use (Yong, 2024; Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023).

For example, actor–network theory-inspired ethnographies, such as the study of Abdali Boulevard in Amman, Jordan, demonstrate that user interactions with temporary interventions are shaped by

the spatial context, rhythms of daily life, and embedded social networks (Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023). This means that the same intervention can produce very different social, behavioral, and spatial outcomes depending on the local community's practices and the site's existing conditions. Similarly, research on temporary urban interventions in Canadian cities finds that the physical condition, location, and regulatory environment of a place are central to both the design and the long-term success of TUIs (Yong, 2024).

A place-based approach also enables interventions to be tailored and responsive to the evolving needs and aspirations of specific communities. Literature reviews and meta-analyses emphasize that TUIs are most effective when they draw on local knowledge, involve community participation, and reflect the distinctive character of the neighborhood or city (Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023; Tardiveau & Mallo, 2014). This ensures that interventions foster a sense of ownership, are embraced by users, and can evolve into more permanent improvements if successful. For instance, temporary street interventions that respond to the unique mobility patterns and social dynamics of a neighborhood are more likely to be accepted and maintained by residents (Yong, 2024).

Furthermore, the relationship between TUIs and public space is not simply functional but formative: temporary interventions can reveal latent possibilities, challenge conventional uses, and catalyze new forms of social interaction and urban appropriation that are specific to their settings (Tardiveau & Mallo, 2014). This place-based sensitivity is particularly important for ensuring that TUIs contribute to social integration and well-being, rather than merely delivering short-lived or generic enhancements. By focusing on the lived experiences of residents and the particularities of place, planners and designers can ensure that TUIs address local inequalities and support inclusive urban development.

In summary, a place-based approach is essential for defining and analyzing TUIs because it recognizes the diversity of urban contexts, values local identities and practices, and supports adaptive, participatory, and sustainable urban transformation. Embedding interventions within the specificities of place allows researchers and practitioners to better capture the complex, emergent effects of TUIs and to design interventions that are both impactful and enduring.

2.3 TUIs in Global Context: The North–South Divide

Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) have emerged as a significant feature of urban transformation worldwide, but their forms, drivers, and impacts are deeply shaped by the socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts of the Global North and Global South. Understanding this North–South divide is crucial for both scholarship and practice, as it reveals not only differences in urban challenges and resources, but also in the agency of actors, governance structures, and the meanings ascribed to temporariness.

In the Global North, TUIs are often framed as strategic, low-risk tools for urban regeneration, placemaking, and community engagement. They are typically initiated by local governments, developers, or formal organizations, and are frequently used to activate underutilized spaces, test new design ideas, or catalyze long-term investment and policy change (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Lydon & Garcia, 2015). Examples include pop-up parks, meanwhile uses, tactical bike lanes, and temporary markets in cities such as London, New York, and Paris. These interventions are commonly situated within robust regulatory frameworks and benefit from access to resources, institutional support, and a relatively stable urban infrastructure, allowing them to serve as “proof of concept” for permanent changes or to bridge gaps in urban development cycles (Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023). The top-down adoption of tactical urbanism in North America and Europe has also enabled cities to respond rapidly to crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, by reallocating street space for pedestrians and cyclists or supporting outdoor commerce (Stevens & Dovey, 2022).

In contrast, TUIs in the Global South are frequently rooted in necessity, informality, and everyday coping strategies. Here, temporary interventions are often bottom-up, community-driven responses to state neglect, resource scarcity, or exclusion from formal planning processes (Simone, 2004; Roy, 2005). In cities like Lagos, Nairobi, or Mumbai, TUIs may take the form of informal markets, spontaneous public gatherings, makeshift housing, or community-constructed infrastructure. These practices are less about experimentation for future investment and more about survival, resilience, and the immediate fulfillment of basic needs (Gillespie & Mitlin, 2023). The temporality of these interventions is often uncertain-what begins as a provisional solution can become semi-permanent, reflecting both the adaptability and precarity of marginalized communities (Bhan, 2019).

The North–South divide in TUIs is further underscored by differences in governance, power relations, and the role of informality. In the North, temporary urbanism is frequently leveraged by authorities as a tool for managing urban change, often with the aim of increasing land value, attracting investment, or branding the city as innovative (Ferreri, 2015). In the South, however, TUIs are more likely to emerge from grassroots activism, social movements, or collective action, and are often in tension with state authorities or private developers (Miraftab, 2009). The legitimacy and sustainability of these interventions are thus shaped by the degree of state tolerance, the presence of supportive networks, and the ability of communities to negotiate or resist displacement.

Recent scholarship calls for a more nuanced, place-based understanding of TUIs that moves beyond binary North–South comparisons and recognizes the diversity and hybridity of urban experiences (Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023; Yong, 2024). For example, while informality is more prevalent in Southern cities, informal and unplanned uses of space are increasingly visible in the North as well, particularly in response to austerity, housing crises, and the retreat of the welfare state (Potts, 2023). Conversely, some Southern cities are experimenting with formalized, state-led

temporary interventions, blurring traditional distinctions. Comparative research has also shown that both contexts face common challenges-such as housing affordability, exclusion, and the need for more inclusive public space-even as the severity and manifestations of these challenges differ (Potts, 2023; Gillespie & Mitlin, 2023).

Moreover, TUIs in both contexts are increasingly recognized as sites of negotiation over urban futures, where questions of equity, power, and citizenship are contested and redefined (Andres, 2013; Miraftab, 2009). In the Global South, TUIs can be a form of “insurgent planning,” enabling marginalized groups to claim their “right to the city” and challenge dominant planning paradigms (Miraftab, 2009). In the North, they can serve as platforms for civic participation and innovation, but also risk being co-opted by market interests or used as stop-gap measures that fail to address deeper structural inequalities (Ferreri, 2015; Bishop & Williams, 2012).

In sum, the global landscape of temporary urbanism is marked by both convergence and divergence. While TUIs everywhere reflect adaptability, creativity, and the desire to shape urban life, their meanings, impacts, and sustainability are profoundly shaped by local histories, governance, and socio-economic realities. A critical and place-based approach is essential for understanding how temporary urbanism can contribute to more just, inclusive, and resilient cities in both the Global North and South (Andres, 2021).

2.3.1 Analyzing Global North Literature as a Route to Global South Insights

The Rationale for looking to the Global North When Studying the Global South: Temporary urbanism in the Global North has evolved as a multifaceted phenomenon that challenges traditional urban planning paradigms centered on permanence and fixed spatial arrangements. This approach is deeply embedded in broader socio-economic and political contexts, reflecting shifts in governance, economic restructuring, and cultural production. Drawing on seminal works such as *The Improvisational City* by Till and McArdle, Ali Madanipour’s *Temporary Use of Space*, and Ferreri’s *The Permanence of Temporary Urbanism*, the literature reveals that at the core of temporary urbanism lies a challenge to the conventional valorization of permanence in urban development (Till & McArdle, 2003; Madanipour, 2017; Ferreri, 2021). Till and McArdle argue that the dominant capitalist urban framework privileges exchange value and long-term investment, often marginalizing smaller-scale, ephemeral projects that contribute to the social and cultural fabric of cities. They critique the binary opposition between temporary and permanent uses, suggesting this dichotomy obscures the complex temporalities and rhythms that characterize everyday urban life. This aligns with Henri Lefebvre’s rhythm analysis, which conceptualizes urban space as a dynamic interplay of overlapping temporalities and social practices. Temporary urbanism is therefore not merely about short-term occupation but about engaging with the fluid and provisional nature of urban experience.

Ali Madanipour further elaborates on this by emphasizing the improvisational character of temporary urbanism. He situates temporary uses within “in-between” spaces-transitional or underutilized areas that exist between formal planning stages or economic cycles. These spaces become sites of experimentation and innovation, where users improvise new forms of spatial practice that disrupt established routines and power relations. Madanipour’s analysis highlights how temporary urbanism can serve as a form of spatial agency, enabling marginalized groups to claim visibility and participation in the urban fabric.

However, Ferreri introduces a necessary cautionary perspective by interrogating the socio-political implications of temporary urbanism within neoliberal and austerity contexts, particularly in London. She contends that while temporary urban projects are often celebrated for their creativity and flexibility, they simultaneously normalize precarity by offering low-cost, short-term solutions that mask deeper structural inequalities. In this view, temporary urbanism becomes complicit in neoliberal urban governance, where the state withdraws from providing permanent social infrastructure, and temporary fixes are valorized as innovative responses to crisis. This commodification of temporality risks reinforcing exclusion and instability rather than fostering genuine social inclusion.

A prominent trend in the Global North is the reactivation of vacant or underutilized spaces, a direct response to the legacy of deindustrialization and economic restructuring. Cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Berlin have embraced temporary uses as a means to revitalize these areas. The transformation of former industrial docks into cultural hubs or pop-up markets exemplifies how temporary urbanism can catalyze social and economic activity in liminal spaces. These interventions often function as “urban laboratories,” testing new spatial configurations and community uses that may inform future permanent developments. Mehrotra, Vera, and Mayoral argue that the ephemeral nature of these projects raises questions about the value and meaning of permanence in urban life, suggesting that temporality itself can be a productive and desirable condition rather than a deficit.

Institutionalization of temporary urbanism is another significant trend. What began as grassroots or countercultural practices have increasingly been co-opted by municipal governments and incorporated into formal urban regeneration strategies. Cities like Copenhagen have integrated temporary projects into their sustainability agendas, using them to promote environmental goals and enhance urban liveability. This institutional embrace reflects a pragmatic recognition of the benefits of flexibility and experimentation. However, it also risks diluting the radical potential of temporary urbanism by subsuming it within neoliberal frameworks that prioritize economic competitiveness and city branding. Ferreri warns that such institutionalization can lead to the commodification of temporary spaces, where their social and cultural value is secondary to their role in attracting investment and tourism.

The reactivation of vacant and underutilized spaces is particularly prominent, with projects like Rotterdam's Fenix Food Factory converting a former warehouse into a lively food market that supports local producers and fosters community interaction. Copenhagen's Valby Pavilion transformed a vacant auto repair shop into a multifunctional community space, and Barcelona's Poblenou district has seen post-industrial spaces temporarily repurposed for art installations and cultural events, contributing to ongoing regeneration while maintaining flexibility. These cases demonstrate how temporary urbanism can serve as a catalyst for urban revitalization, providing social and economic benefits in the interim.

Although temporary urbanism is often associated with inner-city regeneration, it has expanded into peri-urban and even rural contexts. These areas, often overlooked in mainstream planning, provide fertile ground for temporary interventions that experiment with alternative forms of urbanism. For example, in the outskirts of Barcelona, temporary art installations and community projects have emerged in post-industrial zones, offering new models of spatial use and social engagement. This expansion reflects the growing recognition of temporary urbanism's potential to address diverse urban challenges across different spatial scales.

Temporary urbanism's alignment with neoliberal governance is a critical trend that shapes its form and function. The flexibility and low cost of temporary projects make them attractive to city governments and developers seeking to enhance urban competitiveness without significant investment. Berlin's Holzmarkt project, which transformed an abandoned riverside site into a cultural venue and startup hub, exemplifies this trend (Sternberg, 2012; see also AESOP, 2025). While the project has revitalized the area and attracted creative industries, it also illustrates how temporary urbanism can be instrumentalized to serve market interests. This commodification raises important questions about inclusivity and the social purpose of temporary urbanism. Critics argue that such projects may prioritize the needs of middle-class creatives and entrepreneurs while marginalizing lower-income residents and vulnerable groups, turning temporary urbanism into a tool for gentrification and speculative development rather than a means of fostering equitable urban environments.

Temporary urbanism in the Global North manifests through diverse spatial, functional, and governance dimensions, each shaped by distinct actors and objectives. Spatially, it occupies transitional or "in-between" spaces—such as vacant lots, disused buildings, and underutilized public areas—that lie between formal planning phases or economic cycles. The German concept of *Zwischennutzung* encapsulates this practice, referring to temporary uses during periods of regulatory or market uncertainty. Berlin provides notable examples where former industrial sites have been repurposed temporarily for cultural and social activities, offering alternatives to permanent redevelopment (Overmeyer, 2007; Lindemann & Schutten, 2010). Functionally, temporary urbanism includes a wide range of uses: cultural venues like pop-up galleries, theaters, and art installations promote creativity and community engagement; social spaces such as community gardens and playgrounds foster neighborhood cohesion and social sustainability; and

economic activities—including temporary markets and coworking hubs—support local entrepreneurship and economic vitality, as seen in Rotterdam’s Fenix Food Factory (Andres, Bryson, & Moawad, 2021; Robazza, 2020). The Geneva Biennial similarly activates vacant urban spaces by transforming them into temporary art venues, enriching the city’s cultural life. Governance approaches span from grassroots, community-led initiatives to strategic municipal programs that incorporate temporary uses into urban policy frameworks. This dynamic interaction between bottom-up and top-down models shapes temporary urbanism’s character and influence, affecting inclusivity, control, and sustainability outcomes (Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, 2024; artgenève, 2020).

Temporary urbanism spans a spectrum of governance models, from grassroots initiatives driven by local communities to municipal programs aimed at urban regeneration and sustainability. While bottom-up projects emphasize inclusivity and local empowerment, top-down approaches often focus on control and economic objectives, sometimes marginalizing vulnerable groups (Andres, Bryson, & Moawad, 2021; Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, 2024).

Though flexible and innovative, temporary urbanism can also reinforce precarity, as seen in London’s temporary housing during crises, which may mask deeper inequalities (Ferreri, 2017). However, ephemeral interventions can foster adaptability and resilience if governed carefully, avoiding commodification and gentrification risks (Mehrotra, et al., 2019).

In the Global North, temporary urbanism has shifted from informal practices to institutionalized strategies. Cities like London and Copenhagen use policies such as “meanwhile use” permits to activate vacant spaces within sustainability frameworks (Robazza, 2020). Additionally, temporary interventions promote health and social inclusion by addressing food insecurity and providing community resources, especially for marginalized populations during crises (Andres et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the role of TUIs in crisis adaptation, as cities rapidly implemented hybrid interventions to address severe disruptions and immediate public health needs. These included not only public space adaptations but also temporary re-use of buildings for health and social care, demonstrating the importance of creative adaptability and the capacity for rapid, cross-sectoral collaboration. However, the pandemic also exposed the vulnerabilities of marginalized communities, as restrictive measures sometimes intensified existing inequalities and health risks, particularly among migrants and refugees.

Despite these advances, the literature cautions against the uncritical celebration of temporary urbanism. While TUIs can catalyze innovation, foster community engagement, and inform long-term planning, they also risk being co-opted by market interests, contributing to gentrification, or serving as superficial fixes for deeper structural inequities. Ferreri and others argue that austerity-driven contexts can normalize precarity through temporary solutions that mask deeper structural inequalities, and that without careful governance, temporary urbanism risks becoming a

placeholder for speculative investment rather than a catalyst for sustainable urban development. As projects that prioritize economic growth and city branding may marginalize vulnerable populations and contribute to gentrification undermining the social benefits of temporary interventions.

The evolution of TUIs in the Global North is characterized by a dynamic interplay of grassroots innovation, institutional adaptation, and critical contestation. Temporary urbanism offers flexibility, experimentation, and opportunities for social engagement, but it also embodies contradictions and tensions-particularly in relation to neoliberal governance, commodification, and social equity. A nuanced, multi-perspective approach to governance and evaluation is essential to ensure that TUIs not only enliven and transform urban spaces in the short term but also contribute to more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable urban futures.

2.3.2.. Reviewing Temporary Urbanism in the Global South: Setting the Stage for a Contextual Definition

Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) in the Global South have emerged as a vital and complex field of urban practice and theory, fundamentally distinct from their counterparts in the Global North. Rather than being mere adoptions or imitations of Northern models, TUIs in Southern cities are shaped by unique social, economic, and political contexts and are deeply intertwined with issues of informality, everyday survival, and the ongoing struggle for urban inclusion (Andres et al., 2019; Sage et al., 2021). The literature consistently emphasizes that temporary urbanism in the Global South must be understood through the lens of informality and bottom-up agency. Scholars such as Andres et al. (2019) argue that planning in the Global South demands a more complex and systemic framework, one that acknowledges the prevalence of informal settlements, street vending, and other unregulated uses of space. These forms of temporary urbanism are frequently citizen-led and arise in contexts where formal planning processes are weak, absent, or unable to meet the needs of rapidly growing urban populations (Andres et al., 2019; Sage et al., 2021). Rather than being exceptions, such practices are often the norm in cities facing chronic shortages of housing, infrastructure, and basic services (Andres & Zhang, 2020).

A distinctive feature of temporary urbanism in the South is its strong connection to informality and grassroots action. Unlike many Northern contexts, where temporary uses are often sanctioned, permitted, or even initiated by city authorities, in the South, they are frequently “insurgent” or “alternative-substitute” actions that fill the void left by weak or absent planning systems (Andres, 2021; Miraftab, 2009, as cited in Andres et al., 2019). These grassroots interventions are not only responses to planning deadlocks or resource constraints but are also creative and necessary means for residents to meet basic needs, access shelter, and generate livelihoods. This is evident in the proliferation of informal settlements, street vending, and the occupation of vacant land or underutilized infrastructure for economic and social activities (Andres et al., 2019; ITDP, 2020; MobiliseYourCity, 2024).

The literature distinguishes between two primary forms of adaptability in temporary urbanism: creative adaptability and coping adaptability. Creative adaptability, more common in the North but present in the South, involves experimentation and innovation led by artists, local businesses, and community groups, often with the support of NGOs or international agencies (Andres & Zhang, 2020). In contrast, coping adaptability is more prevalent in the South and refers to the informal, unplanned practices that vulnerable communities use to survive in the face of adversity. These include not only the creation of informal settlements but also the use of derelict land for urban agriculture, makeshift markets, and off-grid infrastructure solutions for water, electricity, and sanitation (Andres, 2021; MobiliseYourCity, 2024). Such interventions are often responses to immediate needs and crises, such as displacement, natural disasters, or public health emergencies, and are characterized by their flexibility, improvisation, and resilience.

Community participation and co-production are central to the success of many Southern TUIs. Projects often rely on the active involvement of local residents, shopkeepers, students, and civic groups, who collectively identify problems and implement solutions. For instance, in Chennai, India, the transformation of Sringeri Mutt Road was driven by community engagement, with local residents and students collaborating to repaint and reclaim the street, thereby improving safety and vibrancy for women and children (ITDP, 2020; Young Leaders for Active Citizenship, 2021). Similarly, the pedestrianization of Pondy Bazaar in Chennai was achieved through multiple rounds of stakeholder consultation, temporary trials, and iterative design, resulting in a permanent redesign that balanced the needs of businesses, pedestrians, and city authorities. In Ranchi, tactical urbanism was used to widen footpaths on M.G. Road, one of the city's busiest commercial streets, by installing low-cost barricades and color demarcation. The positive response from pedestrians and city officials led to plans for a permanent redesign and inspired similar projects elsewhere in the city (ITDP, 2020). These interventions demonstrate how temporary projects can serve as pilots or proofs of concept, paving the way for more lasting urban change.

Case studies from other Global South cities reinforce these patterns. In São Paulo, Brazil, intersection redesigns using tactical urbanism tools improved pedestrian safety and were subsequently made permanent (Andres & Zhang, 2020). In Jakarta, Indonesia, temporary wayfinding, and safe routes to school projects were implemented to enhance pedestrian mobility and safety, again with strong community involvement and iterative feedback (MobiliseYourCity, 2024). Cairo's protected cycle lane pilots and Belo Horizonte's speed zone interventions further illustrate how temporary measures can address urgent mobility and safety needs in rapidly growing cities (MobiliseYourCity, 2024). In Nairobi's Kibera, a temporary water project provided off-grid access to clean water for thousands of residents, demonstrating how temporary urbanism can directly address urgent health and infrastructure gaps (Andres, 2021). The Mungunzá Container Theatre in São Paulo transformed a derelict site into a vibrant cultural and social space, addressing both health and social needs in a neighborhood affected by poverty and crime (Andres & Zhang, 2020). These interventions often arise from the ingenuity of local actors and are sustained through community participation rather than formal policy or planning.

In Indian cities, the literature documents a wide range of tactical and temporary urbanism projects that address both mobility and public space deficits. Besides Chennai and Ranchi, Mumbai has seen temporary interventions for flood resilience and urban infrastructure adaptation, while other cities have experimented with pop-up parks, street edge improvements, and participatory design for safer, more inclusive environments (E3S Web of Conferences, 2023; CDRI, 2023). These projects are often driven by partnerships between local governments, NGOs, and resident associations, and are notable for their ability to mobilize collective action and rapidly transform public spaces at minimal cost. A further distinctive aspect is the blurred line between “temporary” and “permanent” in the South. Many interventions begin as informal or short-term solutions but, if successful, are either formalized or become lasting features of the urban landscape. This process of “from pilot to permanent” is a recurring theme in the literature and is seen as essential for scaling up the benefits of tactical urbanism in resource-constrained environments (ITDP, 2020; MobiliseYourCity, 2024).

The literature also points out that the drivers of temporary urbanism in the South are fundamentally different from those in the North. While Northern projects often arise from a desire for urban experimentation, creative placemaking, or policy innovation, Southern TUIs are rooted in the need to survive, adapt, and create liveable environments in the face of exclusion, crisis, or infrastructural neglect (Andres et al., 2019; Sage et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted these dynamics, as cities across the South rapidly deployed temporary cycle lanes, pedestrian zones, and open-air markets to address public health and mobility needs, often with limited resources and significant community involvement (Andres, 2021; World Resources Institute, 2023).

Health and well-being have become increasingly important themes in the literature on TUIs in the Global South. Temporary interventions are recognized not only for their ability to provide shelter and basic infrastructure but also for their role in supporting healthy lifestyles, social integration, and community resilience (PMC, 2021). These responses illustrate the capacity of temporary urbanism to provide rapid, flexible solutions in times of uncertainty, but also expose the vulnerabilities of marginalized communities, who often bear the brunt of restrictive measures and inadequate services (Andres, 2021; World Resources Institute, 2023).

Despite the vibrancy and creativity of TUIs in the Global South, there is an urgent and widely recognized need for more research from Southern perspectives, as highlighted by recent academic and international literature (Sage et al., 2021; World Resources Institute, 2023; Antipode, 2023). The existing body of research remains largely shaped by frameworks, methodologies, and case studies rooted in Global North contexts, which often overlook the lived realities, unique challenges, and adaptive strategies prevalent in Southern cities. This imbalance extends beyond academic discourse, influencing urban policy, equity, and sustainable development outcomes in significant ways (Sage et al., 2021; Tandfonline, 2023).

A place sensitive approach would also answer calls about the need to address the persistent dominance of Northern epistemologies and research agendas in urban studies. As recent decolonial scholarship argues, much urban planning research has historically served colonial or imperialist purposes, often positioning communities in the Global South as passive subjects rather than active knowledge producers (Sage et al., 2021; Antipode, 2023). This has led to a lack of nuanced understanding of how TUIs function as everyday, citizen-led, and often insurgent practices in contexts marked by informality, exclusion, and rapid urbanization (Andres et al., 2019; Sage et al., 2021). Another significant research gap is the limited empirical and theoretical exploration of the specific forms, drivers, and impacts of TUIs in Southern cities. While there is growing recognition that TUIs in the South are deeply embedded in the logics of informality, survival, and rapid adaptation, most comparative studies still rely heavily on Northern typologies, policy tools, and success metrics (Andres et al., 2019; Sage et al., 2021). For example, the everyday use of vacant urban spaces by informal entrepreneurs or marginalized groups is often overlooked or misunderstood by policy frameworks that prioritize formal, design-driven interventions. This results in missed opportunities to understand how temporary uses can serve as pro-poor land strategies, support livelihoods, and foster social inclusion in ways that are contextually relevant and sustainable (Tandfonline, 2023).

The literature also points to a lack of intersectional and context-sensitive research that addresses the layered vulnerabilities and inequalities faced by urban residents in the Global South. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, exposed and exacerbated existing spatial inequalities, highlighting the need for research that centers on the experiences of informal workers, migrants, women, and other marginalized groups who are often at the forefront of temporary urban practices but remain underrepresented in academic studies and policy debates (World Resources Institute, 2023). There is a call for research that not only documents these practices but also engages with local actors as co-researchers and co-producers of knowledge, moving beyond extractive or top-down research models (Sage et al., 2021).

Furthermore, there is a pressing need for research that explores the governance, policy, and institutional dimensions of TUIs in the South. While some studies have begun to examine how local governments, NGOs, and community groups negotiate the regulation and support of informal or “gray” urban spaces, much remains to be understood about the enabling and constraining factors that shape the success or failure of TUIs in different contexts. This includes questions about land tenure, access to basic services, financing, and the role of multi-level governance in scaling up successful interventions (CDRI, 2023; E3S Web of Conferences, 2023).

International reports and syntheses, such as the World Resources Report, further underscore that sustainable urban transformation in the Global South requires research and action that prioritize equity, resilience, and the lived experiences of the most vulnerable (World Resources Institute, 2023). The report highlights the need to address systemic inequalities in access to housing, public

space, mobility, and basic services, and to invest in research that supports integrated, multi-stakeholder approaches to urban innovation and resilience.

In conclusion, temporary urbanism in the Global South is marked by informality, community-led action, rapid adaptability, and the ability to transform everyday urban life despite systemic challenges. Indian cities such as Chennai, Ranchi, and Mumbai provide compelling examples of how tactical and temporary interventions can address mobility, safety, and public space needs, often setting the stage for more permanent urban transformation. These cases, supported by academic and policy literature, underscore that Southern TUIs are not simply responses to crisis or gaps in planning, but are creative, resilient, and essential strategies for shaping more inclusive and sustainable cities. Yet, to fully realize their potential and inform equitable urban policy, there is a clear and urgent need for more research that is rooted in Southern contexts, methodologies, and voices.

2.4 Critical Analysis: Equity, Power, and Limitations

The international literature on Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) is increasingly shaped by critical theories that interrogate issues of equity, power, and the inherent limitations of temporariness in urban transformation. Scholars argue that while TUIs offer opportunities for innovation, experimentation, and community engagement, they also risk reinforcing existing inequalities and legitimizing a lack of long-term investment in marginalized communities (Mehrotra, Vera, & Mayoral, 2016). This duality is at the heart of contemporary debates, which draw on frameworks from critical urban theory, political economy, and spatial justice.

Mehrotra et al. (2016), in their work on "Ephemeral Urbanism," highlight how TUIs, despite their potential for fostering participation and creativity, can perpetuate spatial injustice by prioritizing short-term solutions over structural change. They warn that temporariness may serve as a pretext for public and private actors to avoid substantive, long-term commitments to disadvantaged areas, resulting in what Fraser (2009) terms a failure of participatory parity. Fraser's framework insists that equitable interventions must address both material redistribution and symbolic recognition, cautioning that TUIs risk becoming performative gestures if they do not dismantle entrenched power hierarchies (Fraser, 2009; Miraftab, 2009).

Counterbalancing this critique, Bishop and Williams (2012) frame TUIs as urban laboratories—spaces where experimentation with new models of community-driven development can inform permanent policy. Their analysis of London's Pop Brixton, for example, demonstrates how temporary markets and cultural spaces can serve as prototypes for more inclusive economic models. However, they also acknowledge that the optimism surrounding TUIs must be tempered by the realities of neoliberal urban regimes, where such interventions may be instrumentalized to normalize precarity (Bishop & Williams, 2012).

Ferreri (2015) extends this critique by analyzing how TUIs, particularly in Global North contexts, can be co-opted to serve austerity agendas, framing impermanence as creative or entrepreneurial while masking deeper processes of displacement and exclusion. The transformation of New York's High Line from a grassroots preservation campaign to a catalyst for luxury development and resident displacement is a case in point (Loughran, 2014). This aligns with Lefebvre's (1991) theory that capitalist urbanization tends to absorb and neutralize counter-spaces, converting them into "abstract space" that serves profit-driven interests rather than emancipatory goals.

The political economy of TUIs is further complicated by their role in urban governance. While TUIs are often celebrated for enabling grassroots agency, they are also increasingly used by municipalities and developers to advance gentrification and urban branding. Tonkiss (2013) and Andres (2013) distinguish between "offensive" TUIs-state or developer-led projects that displace existing communities under the guise of vibrancy-and "defensive" grassroots interventions that struggle for legitimacy. This duality reflects Harvey's (1989) analysis of time-space compression, where the acceleration of urban change through temporary projects fragments communities and privileges mobile capital over local needs.

Ferreri (2014) provides further evidence from Barcelona's Poblenou district, where TUIs were used to rebrand post-industrial areas for creative industries, resulting in the displacement of working-class residents. Similarly, Ferreri (2015) documents how pop-up markets in London's Brixton marginalized migrant vendors by privileging curated, middle-class aesthetics. These cases exemplify Miraftab's (2009) concept of insurgent planning, which calls for a distinction between TUIs that reinforce neoliberal hegemony and those that subvert it through radical inclusivity.

In the Global South, critical theories highlight that TUIs often emerge from necessity rather than choice, reflecting systemic neglect of informal settlements. Simone's (2004) notion of "people as infrastructure" describes how communities in cities like Jakarta or Lagos self-organize temporary markets, clinics, and housing in the absence of state support. However, Roy (2005) cautions against romanticizing informality, noting that such improvisations exist in a precarious balance with state tolerance and can be subject to sudden erasure. Mumbai's "parklet" movement, where residents convert parking spots into playgrounds, illustrates both grassroots ingenuity and the state's failure to provide basic amenities (Bhan, 2019).

To navigate these tensions, scholars advocate for TUIs grounded in spatial justice (Soja, 2010) and the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1996). Soja (2010) argues that equitable TUIs must address both distributive justice-ensuring fair access to resources-and procedural justice-ensuring inclusive decision-making. Examples such as the Zapatista movement's use of temporary roadblocks and art installations in Mexico, or Santiago's Plaza de la Dignidad protests, demonstrate how ephemeral interventions can serve as tools for decolonial resistance and collective memory (Mora, 2017; Hidalgo, 2021).

Despite their potential, TUIs face inherent contradictions. Holloway (2020) critiques tactical urbanism's emphasis on "small wins," arguing that incremental changes rarely address systemic issues such as housing unaffordability or climate vulnerability. In Medellín, Colombia, state-led TUIs like library parks and cable cars reduced crime but failed to dismantle underlying narco-political structures, illustrating the paradox of "social urbanism" (Montero, 2017). Furthermore, the reliance on volunteer labor and philanthropic funding can perpetuate neoliberal austerity, shifting responsibility for public goods from the state to individuals (Peck, 2012).

The critical analysis of TUIs thus reveals a contested terrain where emancipatory possibilities coexist with risks of co-optation. Scholars such as Madanipour (2017) and Yiftachel (2009) call for "critical temporariness"-interventions that explicitly link short-term actions to long-term structural change. This requires participatory governance, as seen in Cape Town's Open Streets initiative, where residents co-design and reclaim roads for cultural festivals (Miraftab, 2009). It also demands accountability mechanisms, such as the Just City Index (Fainstein, 2010), which evaluates TUIs not only by their aesthetic or economic outcomes but by their contribution to equity. Finally, policy integration is essential, as illustrated by Barcelona's Superblocks, which evolved from temporary experiments to citywide pedestrianization policy (Rueda, 2019).

TUIs are neither inherently progressive nor regressive; their impact is shaped by the power relations they engage and the structural changes they catalyze. For both researchers and practitioners, this demands a reflexive, context-sensitive approach that prioritizes equity, participatory governance, and systemic transformation over ephemeral spectacle.

2.5 Defining Urban Behavioral Impact in the Context of TUIs

Temporary urban interventions (TUIs) have become an increasingly prominent strategy in urban planning and design, fundamentally altering the behavioral dynamics of public spaces across cities worldwide. Defined by their small scale, flexibility, and rapid implementation, TUIs are intended to enhance underutilized or residual urban spaces and to provoke new patterns of use, engagement, and perception among city dwellers (Finn, 2014; Lydon & Garcia, 2015; Silva, 2016; Krmpotic & Šćitaroci, 2022). The behavioral impacts of TUIs are multifaceted, encompassing immediate, short-term changes in how people interact with space as well as longer-term shifts in urban culture, governance, and spatial practices.

The theoretical foundation for understanding the urban behavioral impacts of TUIs is rooted in relational and process-oriented approaches to space. Rather than viewing urban spaces as static or predetermined, these perspectives emphasize the dynamic and evolving relationships between spatial elements and users (Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2019; Tornaghi, 2015). Actor-network theory, in particular, has been applied to reveal how TUIs act as catalysts for new relational patterns, disrupting established routines and enabling emergent forms of sociality, creativity, and

resistance (Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2019). In this view, TUIs are not merely physical installations but events that reconfigure the lived experience of space, producing both intended and unforeseen behavioral outcomes.

Short-term behavioral impacts of TUIs are most visible in the immediate activation of spaces and the stimulation of new patterns of use. International case studies consistently show that interventions such as pop-up parks, temporary pedestrian streets, and open-air markets can rapidly draw people into previously neglected areas, increase foot traffic, and foster social interaction (Lydon & Garcia, 2015; Tran, 2016; *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities*, 2022)¹. For example, the “Pavement to Parks” initiative in San Francisco transformed parking spaces into vibrant public plazas, resulting in increased pedestrian activity, spontaneous gatherings, and a heightened sense of community ownership (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). In Amman, Jordan, a temporary intervention on Abdali Boulevard was observed to generate a spectrum of user responses: some individuals were drawn to the new installation, using it as a site for play, relaxation, or creative expression, while others bypassed or even avoided it, viewing it as a disruption to their usual routines (Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023). The ethnographic study of this intervention revealed that users’ interactions with TUIs are shaped by their familiarity with the space, their current needs, and the specific qualities of the intervention itself. Some users engaged actively, while others overlooked or bypassed the installation, or even found it disruptive, especially when it led to crowding or disorderly behavior by children and groups.

Such findings underscore the importance of context and user diversity in shaping the behavioral impacts of TUIs. While many interventions succeed in fostering inclusivity and participation, others may inadvertently exclude or inconvenience certain groups, particularly if the design or programming does not align with local needs or habits (Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023). This complexity is echoed in studies across North America, Europe, and the Middle East, which highlight both the potential of TUIs to democratize urban space and the challenges of ensuring equitable engagement (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Tran, 2016; Silva, 2016).

In addition to activating spaces and encouraging participation, TUIs often serve as platforms for experimentation and proof-of-concept for new urban practices. By temporarily altering the physical and social environment, these interventions allow cities to test ideas, gather feedback, and inspire broader change (Lydon & Garcia, 2015; Zhang & Andres, 2020). The “Better Block” project in Dallas, Texas, for instance, mobilized residents to co-create temporary street improvements, which not only increased local activity but also built a renewed sense of agency and collective efficacy among participants (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). In São Paulo, tactical urbanism projects that temporarily pedestrianized streets led to increased perceptions of safety and belonging, particularly among marginalized groups (Andres & Zhang, 2020).

Over the long term, the behavioral impacts of TUIs can extend well beyond the duration of the intervention itself. Successful TUIs often catalyze enduring shifts in urban culture and governance,

influencing permanent planning decisions and institutionalizing participatory processes (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Ferreri, 2015). For example, Barcelona's "Superblocks" began as temporary traffic-calming experiments and have since been adopted as a model for citywide transformation, fundamentally altering mobility patterns and the use of public space (Mueller et al., 2020). In London, the adoption of "meanwhile use" policies has enabled temporary projects to inform regeneration strategies, embedding flexibility and community engagement into urban planning (Ferreri, 2015). These long-term changes are often facilitated by the ability of TUIs to demonstrate the viability and benefits of alternative spatial arrangements, thereby building momentum for more inclusive and adaptive urban systems (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Andres & Kraftl, 2021)¹.

The literature also emphasizes that the durability and inclusivity of these impacts depend on the integration of TUIs into broader planning strategies and their alignment with long-term community needs (Ferreri, 2015). When TUIs are well-designed and participatory, they can foster new forms of public engagement, stewardship, and resilience. However, if they are poorly integrated or co-opted by market interests, they risk becoming superficial or even exclusionary, failing to address the needs of marginalized populations (Ferreri, 2015; Mould, 2014).

The behavioral impacts of TUIs are also evident in their effects on health, well-being, and everyday coping. Temporary interventions that provide green space, recreational facilities, or safe gathering areas have been linked to improved mental health, increased physical activity, and stronger social networks (PMC, 2021). In cities facing acute crises or chronic deprivation, TUIs can offer rapid, adaptable solutions for vulnerable populations, ensuring access to basic needs and supporting everyday resilience (PMC, 2021; Andres, 2021).

TUIs are powerful instruments for shaping urban behavioral dynamics, offering both immediate activation and the potential for lasting cultural and institutional change. Their impacts are mediated by context, design, and user engagement, and are best understood through relational and process-oriented theoretical frameworks. International literature and case studies-from San Francisco to Amman, Barcelona to Dallas-demonstrate that when thoughtfully implemented, TUIs can democratize public space, foster innovation, and inspire new forms of urban life, while also revealing the complexities and challenges of temporary transformation in diverse urban contexts (Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023; Bishop & Williams, 2012; Lydon & Garcia, 2015; Ferreri, 2015).

2.5.1 Assessing the Social, Economic, and Spatial Impacts of Temporary Urban Interventions: Dimensions and Measurement Approaches

Assessing the impacts of Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) demands a multidimensional and systematic approach, as these interventions influence urban environments in complex and interrelated ways. TUIs-whether pop-up parks, tactical street closures, art installations, or temporary markets-act as catalysts for change not only in the physical realm but also in the social and economic fabric of cities (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Lydon & Garcia, 2015). To capture their

full significance, researchers must employ a suite of indicators, research tools, and analytical frameworks tailored to the unique context of each intervention.

Social impacts are central to the evaluation of TUIs, as these interventions are often intended to foster community engagement, social inclusion, and a sense of place. Social impact assessment examines how TUIs alter patterns of human interaction, community identity, perceptions of safety, and the inclusivity of public spaces. Key indicators include the diversity and number of users, the frequency and quality of social interactions, levels of participation by marginalized groups, and subjective feelings of belonging and well-being (Connor, 2020; Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023). Internationally, social impact is measured using a blend of qualitative and quantitative methods. Direct observation and behavioral mapping are used to document how people use space before, during, and after an intervention. Ethnographic approaches, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews, provide nuanced insights into the lived experiences of different user groups and can reveal subtle shifts in social dynamics (Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023). Structured surveys and focus groups capture perceptions of safety, accessibility, and satisfaction, while social media analysis and participatory digital platforms extend the reach of impact assessment by capturing broader public sentiment (Connor, 2020). For example, in the Abdali Boulevard case in Amman, researchers used actor–network theory-inspired ethnography to trace how a temporary intervention generated new patterns of interaction and reshaped the relational dynamics between users and urban space (Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023). In Toronto's plazaPOPS project, post-intervention surveys and focus groups were used to assess changes in community cohesion and perceptions of local identity (Connor, 2020).

Economic impacts are another critical dimension, as TUIs can directly and indirectly influence local economies. Economic impact assessment typically focuses on changes in foot traffic, sales volumes for nearby businesses, the creation of new economic opportunities (such as pop-up vendors or temporary jobs), and shifts in property values or rental rates (Connor, 2020; Rossitti, Oppio, Torrieri, 2023). Quantitative tools are prominent in economic assessment. Pedestrian and cyclist counts provide baseline data on changes in activity levels, while business revenue tracking and vendor surveys offer insight into the financial benefits or challenges associated with the intervention. Before-and-after comparisons using business performance data or local employment statistics are frequently used to quantify economic effects (Rossitti, Oppio, Torrieri, 2023). In some cases, economic impact analysis extends to broader outcomes, such as the stimulation of creative industries or the mitigation of economic decline in underutilized neighborhoods. A notable example is the plaza POPS initiative in Toronto, where researchers documented increased foot traffic and higher sales for local businesses following the conversion of parking lots into vibrant community spaces (Connor, 2020). In Barcelona's Superblocks, economic assessment included both the direct benefits to local commerce and the longer-term impacts on property values and neighborhood investment (Mueller et al., 2020).

Spatial impacts focus on the transformation of the physical environment and the reconfiguration of urban space. This includes changes in the allocation of space, patterns of movement, accessibility, and the overall quality and character of the urban landscape (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Connor, 2020). Spatial impact assessment is particularly important for understanding how TUIs improve or hinder connectivity, permeability, and the integration of interventions within the broader urban fabric. Spatial analysis employs a range of tools, including GIS mapping, behavioral mapping, and time-lapse photography to document changes in land use and movement patterns. Direct observation and spatial ethnography are used to record how people occupy, traverse, or linger in newly activated spaces. Advanced tools such as spatial syntax analysis and urban design audits provide further insight into the connectivity and accessibility of interventions (Bishop & Williams, 2012). For instance, in Sao Paulo, temporary interventions in public spaces have been evaluated for their effects on pedestrian flows, accessibility for different user groups, and improvements in environmental quality, such as thermal comfort and noise reduction (Rossitti, Oppio, Torrieri, 2023; PLEA, 2022).

Best practice internationally recommends a process-driven, iterative approach to impact assessment, structured around phases such as Explore, Define, Experiment, and Evaluate (Connor, 2020). This framework encourages early stakeholder engagement, the definition of context-specific indicators, experimental implementation with real-time monitoring, and post-intervention evaluation using both qualitative and quantitative data. Participatory methods, such as community mapping, co-design workshops, and stakeholder interviews, are increasingly integrated to ensure that diverse perspectives are reflected in both the design and evaluation of interventions (Ataman, Tuncer, 2021). Triangulation of data sources is a key principle, allowing for the validation of findings across different methods and perspectives. Both process indicators (such as the quality of stakeholder engagement or the adaptability of the intervention) and outcome indicators (such as changes in usage patterns or economic performance) are included to provide a holistic assessment. The integration of foresight or scenario planning helps anticipate longer-term impacts and supports adaptive management of TUIs (Connor, 2020; Bishop & Williams, 2012).

Assessing the social, economic, and spatial impacts of Temporary Urban Interventions is essential for understanding their transformative potential and for informing both policy and practice. By employing a combination of observational, participatory, and analytical tools, researchers can capture the nuanced ways in which TUIs reshape urban behavior, foster inclusion, stimulate local economies, and reconfigure public space. This multidimensional approach ensures that TUIs are not only celebrated for their temporary vibrancy but are also evaluated for their contributions to sustainable, equitable, and resilient urban futures.

2.6 Policy, Governance, and Challenges

The effectiveness and sustainability of Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) are fundamentally shaped by the policy frameworks and governance structures within which they are conceived, implemented, and evaluated. The international literature demonstrates that TUIs occupy a complex space between formal planning and grassroots action, requiring a nuanced understanding of their regulatory, social, and institutional contexts. Governance models for TUIs range from highly institutionalized, state-led approaches to informal, bottom-up initiatives, and the spectrum between these poles is marked by both opportunities and persistent challenges (Andres & Kraftl, 2021; Madanipour, 2017).

Policy frameworks governing TUIs vary widely across countries, reflecting differences in governance cultures, planning traditions, and socioeconomic contexts. In the Global North, the institutionalization of TUIs has been supported by robust national urban policies (NUPs), municipal strategies, and regulatory innovation, while in the Global South, TUIs often emerge in response to gaps in formal planning, resource constraints, and the realities of informality and rapid urbanization (Andres & Kraftl, 2021; Gillespie & Mitlin, 2023; UN-Habitat, 2024).

In the Global North, TUIs have become increasingly institutionalized and are often integrated into strategic urban planning agendas. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, and Canada have developed policy environments that actively facilitate TUIs. Cities such as London, Rotterdam, Berlin, and Toronto have established policy frameworks that support temporary uses through regulatory flexibility, streamlined permitting, and official “meanwhile use” strategies (Ferreri, 2015; Bishop & Williams, 2012; Yong, 2024). The UK’s “meanwhile use” policy, for example, provides legal mechanisms for the interim activation of vacant properties, allowing for pop-up parks, markets, and cultural venues while long-term plans are developed (Ferreri, 2015). Similarly, Rotterdam’s urban strategy explicitly values temporary projects as laboratories for resilience, social inclusion, and climate adaptation, integrating them into the city’s broader planning and development agenda (Andres & Zhang, 2020). In Germany, the National Urban Development Policy (NUP) employs a multi-stakeholder platform to coordinate temporary and permanent urban development, fostering horizontal and vertical policy alignment among levels of government and supporting the scaling of successful TUIs (UN-Habitat, 2024). France and Lithuania have adopted multi-sectoral NUPs, with dedicated agencies responsible for urban policy, enabling cross-sectoral collaboration and the integration of temporary projects into national urban agendas.

The literature highlights that effective policy frameworks are characterized by adaptability, multi-actor collaboration, and a careful balance between regulatory oversight and creative freedom (Andres & Kraftl, 2021; Silva, 2016). Multi-actor collaboration is seen as critical for the legitimacy and success of TUIs, involving local governments, private developers, community organizations, and residents in the co-design and co-production of interventions (Silva, 2016; Hotakainen &

Oikarinen, 2023). This collaborative ethos is evident in the rise of participatory planning tools and public involvement mechanisms, which have become integral to the planning and delivery of TUIs in many cities (Ataman, Tuncer, 2024). The “open city” framework, discussed by Silva (2016) and Yassin (2019), positions TUIs as instruments for democratizing urban space, fostering diversity, and enabling more responsive and flexible urban environments.

One notable example of policy success is the transformation of Toronto’s King Street into a transit-priority corridor using a pilot TUI approach. The city implemented temporary street closures and transit-only lanes, collected data on mobility and economic impacts, and, after positive results, made the intervention permanent. The success was attributed to clear project goals, robust data collection, and transparent community engagement (ITDP, 2020; Bishop & Williams, 2012). Similarly, in Berlin, the Holzmarkt project was enabled by flexible land use policies and a collaborative governance model, allowing a former industrial site to become a vibrant cultural and social hub (Andres & Kraftl, 2021).

However, the institutionalization of TUIs also introduces new challenges. There is a risk that the original activist and community-driven ethos of TUIs may be diluted or co-opted by market interests and bureaucratic processes (Ferreri, 2015; Mould, 2014). Mould (2014) critiques the transformation of tactical urbanism from a tool of citizen empowerment into a fashionable policy instrument, warning that its radical potential may be lost when subsumed under the language of urban branding and regeneration. The risk of commodification and gentrification is heightened when TUIs are used to “soften” redevelopment projects or attract investment, sometimes at the expense of existing communities (Ferreri, 2015). In London, for instance, TUIs have been implicated in the displacement of low-income residents and the erosion of affordable spaces for artists and small businesses, as temporary projects pave the way for more permanent, exclusionary redevelopment (Ferreri, 2015). Even in the North, failures have occurred when policy frameworks lacked clarity, flexibility, or community buy-in. In some cases, TUIs have been co-opted for urban branding or gentrification, leading to the displacement of vulnerable populations or the loss of affordable spaces for artists and small businesses (Ferreri, 2015; Mould, 2014; Simpson, 2015). The institutionalization of TUIs can also dilute their original activist ethos, with top-down approaches sometimes failing to reflect local needs or adapt to changing circumstances (Simpson, 2015; Yassin, 2019).

The literature further points out that TUIs, even when participatory, can inadvertently reinforce spatial inequalities if they are not carefully designed and integrated into broader urban strategies (Mehrotra et al., 2017; Bishop & Williams, 2012). Temporary interventions may mask deeper structural issues, such as the lack of affordable housing or the persistence of exclusionary planning practices, by offering only superficial or short-lived improvements (Mehrotra et al., 2017). In some cases, TUIs have been used as tools to manage dissent or pacify marginalized groups without addressing the root causes of urban injustice. Mehrotra et al. (2017) document how, in Indian cities, temporary interventions have sometimes functioned as “holding operations” for populations

awaiting relocation, providing minimal improvements while larger redevelopment projects proceed.

In the Global South, the governance landscape for TUIs is often more fragmented and shaped by informality. Policy frameworks are often less formalized and more fragmented. TUIs in cities like Mumbai, Nairobi, São Paulo, and Jakarta frequently arise from grassroots action, supported by NGOs, international agencies, or ad hoc municipal initiatives (Andres et al., 2019; Gillespie & Mitlin, 2023; ITDP, 2020). India's National Urban Policy Framework (NUPF) recognizes the need for contract enforcement, land registration, and tax reform to enable more flexible urban development, but implementation remains uneven and highly localized (IICA, 2020). In practice, successful TUIs in Indian cities have often relied on partnerships between local governments and civil society. The pedestrianization of Pondy Bazaar in Chennai and tactical urbanism projects in Ranchi and Mumbai were made possible by iterative trials, stakeholder engagement, and the ability to align temporary interventions with broader policy goals (ITDP, 2020). These projects demonstrate the importance of clear objectives, early collaboration, and the inclusion of marginalized voices in the planning process.

Rather than being embedded in strategic policy frameworks, these interventions are typically driven by grassroots actors-community groups, informal entrepreneurs, and NGOs-who mobilize limited resources to address immediate needs. The literature highlights both the creative adaptability and resilience of these actors and the challenges they face in scaling up successful interventions, sustaining momentum, and navigating complex regulatory environments (Andres et al., 2019; Mehrotra et al., 2017).

In São Paulo, a temporary intersection redesign in the Santana neighborhood, implemented with support from the city government and international partners, used paint, removable signage, and mobile barriers to create safer pedestrian environments. The intervention reduced vehicle speeds by 31% and received strong community support, leading to calls for permanent adoption (ITDP, 2020). In Jakarta, temporary wayfinding and safe routes to school projects were implemented through collaboration between city agencies, NGOs, and local stakeholders, demonstrating the potential for TUIs to address mobility and safety challenges in rapidly growing cities (ITDP, 2020).

Relational approaches in urban studies, as described by Hotakainen and Oikarinen (2023), further illuminate the governance dynamics of TUIs. These approaches view urban space as a process of ongoing negotiation between spatial elements and users, with TUIs acting as catalysts for new relational patterns and emergent behaviors. Temporary interventions are seen as “events” that disrupt established orders, infuse new qualities into space, and expand the range of possible uses and experiences (Hotakainen & Oikarinen, 2023; Tornaghi, 2015). The temporality of these interventions is crucial, as it allows for the testing of new ideas and the emergence of unforeseen interactions, but also introduces uncertainty and the risk of impermanence.

Despite these successes, failures in the Global South often stem from fragmented governance, lack of policy continuity, and insufficient resources. TUIs may be undermined by conflicting regulations, lack of coordination between agencies, or the absence of mechanisms to scale up or sustain successful pilots (Andres et al., 2019; Mehrotra et al., 2017). In some cases, TUIs have been used to manage dissent or as “holding operations” for populations awaiting relocation, offering minimal improvements while larger redevelopment projects proceed (Mehrotra et al., 2017). Health-focused TUIs in South Africa and Lebanon, for example, were implemented as emergency measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, but strict encampments and mobility restrictions intensified existing vulnerabilities and had adverse long-term health consequences for marginalized communities (PMC, 2021; *Frontiers in Built Environment*, 2023).

A persistent challenge in both North and South is the difficulty of scaling temporary successes into permanent solutions. While TUIs can serve as laboratories for innovation, their impact is often limited by the absence of clear pathways for institutionalization and long-term integration into urban policy (Andres & Kraftl, 2021; Ferreri, 2015). Many successful pilots fail to transition into lasting change due to shifting political priorities, lack of funding, or resistance from entrenched interests. The literature suggests that overcoming these barriers requires not only regulatory flexibility but also sustained political will, cross-sectoral partnerships, and mechanisms for capturing and disseminating lessons learned (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Silva, 2016).

The tension between regulatory oversight and grassroots autonomy is another significant governance issue. While some degree of regulation is necessary to ensure safety, accessibility, and public benefit, overly rigid or bureaucratic approaches can stifle creativity and exclude marginalized actors from participating in TUIs (Silva, 2016; Gillespie & Mitlin, 2023). The most effective policy frameworks are those that strike a balance between enabling experimentation and maintaining accountability, allowing for adaptation, and learning while safeguarding the interests of vulnerable groups.

The typology and intent of TUIs are also shaped by governance structures. As noted by Krmpotić and Šćitaroci (2022), TUIs can be classified based on their intent (e.g., protest, prototyping, public engagement), location and physical condition, temporariness, the actors involved, and whether they circumvent planning and permitting regulations. The rise of institutionalized TUIs in the past decade, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has prompted scholars to call for clearer distinctions between grassroots and top-down interventions and for more robust evaluation methods (Yong, 2024; Zhang & Andres, 2020).

International case studies further illustrate the diversity of governance models and challenges. In Canada, for example, research by Yong (2024) finds that local planning policies vary widely in their support for temporary street interventions, with some cities embracing regulatory flexibility and others maintaining strict controls. The success of TUIs in Canadian cities often hinges on the willingness of local authorities to collaborate with community groups and to experiment with new

forms of public engagement. In Amman, Jordan, Hotakainen and Oikarinen (2023) document how a temporary intervention on Abdali Boulevard was shaped by a complex interplay of formal and informal governance, with outcomes dependent on the negotiation of power, resources, and user expectations.

Despite these challenges, the literature offers numerous examples of TUIs that have successfully navigated the complexities of policy and governance to deliver meaningful benefits. In Rotterdam, the city's support for temporary projects has fostered a culture of experimentation and resilience, with lessons from TUIs informing long-term strategies for climate adaptation and social inclusion (Andres & Zhang, 2020). In Melbourne, the integration of tactical urbanism into city planning has enabled rapid responses to changing needs, such as the creation of pop-up bike lanes and outdoor dining areas during the COVID-19 pandemic (Andres & Kraftl, 2021). In Nairobi's Kibera, community-led TUIs have improved access to water, sanitation, and public space, demonstrating the potential of grassroots innovation even in contexts of extreme resource scarcity (Andres et al., 2019).

Across both North and South, common challenges persist. The risk of commodification and gentrification is heightened when TUIs are used to attract investment or legitimize controversial redevelopment, sometimes at the expense of existing communities (Ferreri, 2015; Simpson, 2015). The difficulty of scaling temporary successes into permanent solutions is a recurring issue, with many pilots failing to transition due to shifting political priorities, lack of funding, or resistance from entrenched interests (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Andres & Kraftl, 2021). Regulatory rigidity can stifle creativity, while excessive flexibility may undermine accountability and public benefit (Silva, 2016; Gillespie & Mitlin, 2023). Ensuring meaningful participation, especially of marginalized groups, remains a challenge, as does the need for robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess impact and inform policy learning (UN-Habitat, 2024; ITDP, 2020).

Ultimately, the effectiveness and sustainability of TUIs depend on the ability of policy frameworks and governance structures to adapt to changing conditions, foster genuine collaboration, and prioritize social justice and long-term community benefit. This requires moving beyond superficial or instrumental uses of temporary interventions and embracing a more critical, reflective approach that foregrounds equity, participation, and the right to the city (Ferreri, 2015; Mehrotra et al., 2017; Silva, 2016). The international literature makes clear that while TUIs hold significant promise as tools for urban transformation, realizing their full potential demands ongoing vigilance, innovation, and a commitment to inclusive and context-sensitive governance.

2.7. From Venice to Kochi: Rethinking Urban Space through Biennales and Temporary Urban Interventions

Contemporary art biennales have emerged as significant cultural phenomena that extend beyond



Figure 5: living in a hands- on city! Source: Costanza. (2017, June 22); Venice Biennale 2015. (Source: <https://www.cntraveler.com/galleries/2015-05-11/venice-biennale-2015-our-favorite-under-the-radar-art-exhibits>)

the boundaries of artistic display to influence urban dynamics, socio-political discourse, and spatial practices. Central to their impact is the deployment of Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs), which involve the short-term transformation of public or semi-public spaces through site-responsive installations, performances, architectural experiments, and participatory projects. These interventions often serve as tools of tactical urbanism, enabling cities to test new forms of spatial organization, civic engagement, and environmental design without the risk or permanence of traditional urban development models (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Hou, 2010). TUIs are increasingly recognized in global urban theory as critical instruments for urban regeneration, cultural diplomacy, and public space democratization. Scholars such as Gielen and Lijster (2015) emphasize that the capacity of biennales to function as experimental laboratories for urban futures is contingent on the inclusivity of the design process, the relevance of interventions to local conditions, and their integration within long-term urban planning frameworks.

Among the most emblematic examples of this intersection between art and urbanism is the Venice Biennale. Established in 1895, the Biennale is the world's oldest international art exhibition and has played a formative role in shaping global contemporary art discourse and Venice's socio-economic and urban morphology (Britannica, 2025; La Biennale di Venezia, 2024). Originally envisioned as a national cultural celebration by the Venice City Council to honor the Italian monarchy, it quickly evolved into an international event that welcomed foreign artists and embraced avant-garde movements. Over the decades, it developed into a multi-disciplinary

platform encompassing art, architecture, film, dance, and performance, while also transforming Venice into a temporary but recurring urban exhibition site (Wikipedia, 2025; Abir Pothe, 2024).

The Biennale's spatial infrastructure exemplifies the essence of TUIs. The Giardini della Biennale houses thirty permanent national pavilions, each reflecting specific national identities through architectural form, while the Arsenale, a repurposed shipyard complex, hosts curated exhibitions and additional national presentations. Beyond these central venues, countries without permanent pavilions occupy temporary or rented spaces across the city, activating palazzi, churches, and even canals as exhibition environments (On Curating, 2021; Britannica, 2025). These temporary spatial reconfigurations redefine Venice itself as a performative and adaptive landscape. They convert underutilized or overlooked areas into sites of cultural experimentation and public dialogue, aligning with what Bishop and Williams (2012) describe as "urban acupuncture," where specific spatial interventions catalyze broader socio-spatial transformation.

The Biennale's TUIs function not only as artistic and architectural gestures but also as vehicles for critical reflection on urban and global issues. Projects often address urgent themes such as climate change, displacement, sustainability, and digital urbanism. For example, the 2023 Architecture Biennale featured "A Brick for Venice," a temporary pavilion constructed from dredged canal mud and waste materials, designed by Urban Radicals and collaborators. The pavilion addressed both environmental degradation and circular material economies while embodying traditional Venetian construction techniques (ArchDaily, 2023; Local Works Studio, 2023). Similarly, the 2012 U.S. Pavilion exhibited "Spontaneous Interventions," a collection of 124 grassroots urban projects that bypassed conventional planning systems in favor of participatory and often insurgent urban actions. These interventions—ranging from pop-up parks to DIY infrastructure—highlighted the agency of citizens, artists, and designers in reshaping urban life (Guggenheim, 2012; Rosenfield, 2012).

Spatial analysis confirms that TUIs associated with the Venice Biennale significantly influence urban circulation, diversify tourist flows, and activate marginal areas. Reports such as those by ESPON (2019) have demonstrated how large-scale cultural events redistribute spatial attention and create temporary nodes of activity that extend beyond established tourist corridors. These dynamics are particularly relevant in cities like Venice, where the physical constraints of heritage architecture and infrastructure create acute pressures during peak tourist seasons. By activating alternative spaces, TUIs contribute to a more sustainable and distributed use of the urban environment. However, the temporal nature of these interventions also introduces challenges. As Gaita (2021) and Hou (2010) argue, the social and spatial benefits of TUIs are often short-lived unless integrated into broader participatory planning processes and supported by ongoing community engagement.

While the Biennale contributes substantially to Venice's cultural economy—drawing nearly 700,000 visitors in its 2024 edition alone—it also exacerbates the city's well-documented

problems of overtourism and gentrification (Statista, 2024; Maxwell Museums, 2024). The surge in cultural tourism has contributed to rising housing costs, reduced residential availability, and the transformation of the historic center into a space oriented toward visitors rather than inhabitants. By 2019, over 80 percent of Airbnb listings in Venice's Centro Storico offered entire homes, signaling a shift in the housing market away from long-term residents (Cuadernos de Turismo, 2022). The proliferation of short-term rentals, along with increased hotel development and tourist-focused services, has led to the displacement of local communities, the closure of traditional businesses, and a phenomenon scholars describe as the “Disneyfication” of Venice (Costa & Martinotti, 2003; Semi, 2015; Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019).

Thus, while the Venice Biennale serves as a globally influential model of how TUIs can reimagine and repurpose urban space, it also reveals the paradoxes of cultural-led urbanism. The very interventions that celebrate civic engagement and innovation can, when divorced from structural policy change, contribute to urban exclusion and commodification. Comparative studies of biennales in cities such as Sharjah, Istanbul, and São Paulo confirm that the social and urban impacts of TUIs vary widely and depend on institutional frameworks, local participation, and long-term urban visions (O'Neill & Wilson, 2010; Gielen & Lijster, 2015). The Venice Biennale's capacity to operate as both an artistic platform and a site of urban experimentation remains significant, but it must be understood within the broader context of the city's ecological fragility, socio-economic tensions, and evolving identity as a global cultural destination.



Figure 6: Biennale exhibition; source: *Il Sole 24 Ore*. (2022, November 27). *Biennale Arte chiude con il record di visitatori e giornate di apertura* [English translation: “Art Biennale closes with record visitors and opening days”]. *Il Sole 24 Ore*. Retrieved June



Figure 7: Turkey biennale pavilion; source: Florian, M.-C. (2023, April 10). *The Türkiye Pavilion explores “Ghost Stories: The Carrier Bag Theory of Architecture” at the 2023 Venice Architecture Biennale* [Photograph]. *ArchDaily*. Retrieved June 24, 2025, from Arch

However, the consequences of mass tourism and the tourismification of Venice are profound. Research shows that the daily saturation of tourists has led to the proliferation of mass-produced souvenir shops and tourist traps, displacing local businesses and artisans, and driving up the cost of living for residents (Venezia Autentica, 2022). The city's morphology—narrow alleys, limited public spaces—exacerbates congestion, with visitors often blocking walkways and public areas.

The phenomenon of “hypertourism” has triggered what scholars call the “Disneyfication” of Venice, where tourists, through the tourism industry, become the actual owners of urban space, reducing the availability of residential areas and accelerating depopulation (Costa & Martinotti, 2003; Semi, 2015; Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019; Cuadernos de Turismo, 2022).

The Biennale’s role in this process is complex. On one hand, it brings “quality” cultural tourism and helps to contradict the image of Venice as a static museum, showcasing the city as a modern, evolving, and vital hub (Maxwell Museums, 2024). On the other hand, it contributes to the pressures of gentrification and the commodification of public space, as temporary interventions and art-led regeneration projects can accelerate the displacement of local communities and the transformation of Venice into a city for visitors rather than residents (Venezia Autentica, 2022; Cuadernos de Turismo, 2022).

The Venice Biennale exemplifies the power and paradoxes of temporary urban interventions in a global city. Its history, structure, and scale have made it a model for biennials worldwide, while its capacity to transform Venice’s urban landscape—if only temporarily—demonstrates both the creative potential and the social risks of art-led urbanism. As Venice continues to grapple with the challenges of overtourism, gentrification, and environmental vulnerability, the Biennale remains a vital site of experimentation, debate, and transformation, embodying both the promise and the perils of the contemporary city.

2.8 Synthesis and Research Positioning

This research emerges from a critical gap in urban scholarship: the predominance of Northern theoretical frameworks in conceptualizing Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs), which often overlook the unique socio-spatial realities of cities in the Global South. While TUIs have been widely studied in contexts like Berlin, London, and New York, their manifestations in Southern cities—marked by informality, rapid urbanization, and post-colonial complexities—remain undertheorized and poorly integrated into global discourses. This study positions itself within this gap, seeking to redefine TUIs through a Southern lens by interrogating their role in Kochi, India—a coastal city grappling with climate vulnerability, cultural heritage preservation, and speculative urban development. By synthesizing existing literature and centering Kochi’s lived experiences, this research challenges universalist assumptions about temporariness and urban innovation, arguing for place-based, equity-driven approaches to TUIs.

The literature review reveals three critical tensions in TUI scholarship. First, there is conceptual ambiguity: TUIs are often defined through Northern paradigms such as tactical urbanism and creative placemaking, which prioritize aesthetic or economic revitalization (Ferreri, 2015; Mould, 2014). However, in Southern contexts like Kochi, TUIs frequently emerge as grassroots responses to systemic failures—informal markets adapting to flooding, migrant communities reclaiming

derelict docks, or art festivals repurposing heritage structures under threat (Andres et al., 2019; Roy, 2005). These interventions blur the lines between survival, resistance, and cultural expression, demanding frameworks that recognize temporariness as both a necessity and a strategy.

Second, governance paradoxes become apparent when comparing North and South. While Northern cities institutionalize TUIs through policies like “meanwhile use” (Ferrerri, 2015), Southern TUIs often operate in regulatory gray zones. Kochi’s ad-hoc street vending zones or flood-resilient pop-up shelters, for example, thrive despite-not because of-formal planning systems. This exposes the limitations of transplanting Northern governance models to contexts where informality is the norm (Gillespie & Mitlin, 2023).

Third, issues of equity and representation are central. TUIs risk perpetuating spatial injustices when divorced from critical engagement. For instance, cultural festivals like the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, which temporarily transform heritage sites into art hubs, raise questions about who benefits from such “temporary” cultural placemaking. Do they empower local communities, or do they inadvertently accelerate displacement by rebranding neighborhoods for elite consumption? These tensions underscore the need for a Southern redefinition of TUIs-one that prioritizes adaptability, resilience, and grassroots agency over prescriptive models (Holston, 2008; Roy, 2005).

A crucial addition to this synthesis is the importance of socio-economic and spatial impact analysis. TUIs in Southern cities like Kochi cannot be fully understood without examining their effects on local livelihoods, patterns of inclusion and exclusion, urban mobility, and the spatial reconfiguration of neighborhoods (Babu, Priyadarshini, Kaur, 2023), 2023; IJRTE, 2020). By foregrounding these impacts, the research moves beyond surface-level assessments and addresses the deeper structural implications of TUIs in the Southern urban context. This approach is essential for evaluating whether TUIs truly foster inclusive development or simply mask persistent inequalities.

Considering the different perspectives through which TUIs in the Global South can be defined. The literature suggests that there is no single, universal definition; rather, TUIs in the South are shaped by the politics of informality, power relations, and the everyday negotiation of urban life (Caldeira, 2017; *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities*, 2023). Southern urban theory emphasizes the need to de-center Eurocentric narratives and to recognize the hybridization, adaptation, and selective appropriation of urban practices (Robinson, 2011; Sheppard et al., 2013). Some scholars argue for “peripheral urbanization” (Caldeira, 2017), which foregrounds the production of space outside traditional planning systems and highlights the agency of marginalized groups. Others call for “provincializing” urban theory, suggesting that all cities be treated as “ordinary cities” to enable more equitable comparisons and to challenge the binary of North and South (Robinson, 2011; Sheppard et al., 2013; Watson, 2014).

Is there an actual divide between the Global North and South? The answer is increasingly complex. While the North-South binary has been useful in highlighting differences in urbanization, governance, and socio-economic conditions, recent scholarship points to the circulation and hybridization of ideas across contexts (Antipode, 2023; Watson, 2014). Theories and practices from the South are not merely deviations from a Northern norm but are sources of innovation that can inform planetary urban theory and planning at a global scale (Watson, 2014). The Southern perspective is thus not about reinforcing a rigid divide but about expanding the frontiers of urban theory, making it more inclusive and relevant for diverse urban realities (Frontiers in Sustainable Cities, 2023; Antipode, 2023).

This study is anchored in three interrelated pillars. First, it is grounded in Southern epistemologies, rejecting the Northern-centric “tactical urbanism” label. The research frames TUIs through Southern urban theory, emphasizing informality (Roy, 2005), insurgent citizenship (Holston, 2008), and “urban acupuncture” (Lerner, 2014). It asks how TUIs in Kochi reflect the city’s unique socio-spatial fabric, and what they reveal about Southern urbanism more broadly.

Second, the research adopts a place-based critical lens. Kochi serves as a microcosm of Southern urban challenges-coastal erosion, migrant labor influxes, and contested heritage. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale, a globally renowned art festival, epitomizes these dynamics. While the Biennale temporarily activates historic warehouses and fishing neighborhoods, it also intersects with debates about gentrification, tourism, and the right to the city. By analyzing the Biennale alongside lesser-known TUIs such as informal fish markets adapting to monsoon floods and migrant worker settlements in container yards, this study interrogates how temporariness is negotiated across scales, from elite cultural production to everyday survival.

Third, the research seeks to redefine TUIs. It proposes a Southern definition of TUIs as improvisational, often informal practices that mediate between crisis and creativity, leveraging temporariness to claim space, resist erasure, or reimagine urban futures. This stands in contrast to Northern models that often treat TUIs as deliberate, policy-driven experiments.

The case study focus centers on the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, which is examined as a cultural TUI with dual roles-global art spectacle and local spatial disruptor. The research explores how the Biennale negotiates Kochi’s heritage conservation laws, informal economies, and climate resilience needs. Alongside this, everyday TUIs such as fish markets, migrant settlements, and flood-adaptive structures are analyzed to reveal how communities navigate precarity through temporary spatial practices. Critical frameworks such as post-colonial urbanism are employed to analyze how Kochi’s TUIs reflect its layered history as a colonial port city and its contemporary identity as a “smart city” aspirant. The study also explores the concept of climate temporariness, viewing TUIs as adaptive responses to Kerala’s increasing flood cycles and challenging static notions of urban resilience. Policy relevance is addressed by mapping how informal TUIs in Kochi

fill gaps left by formal planning, advocating for policies that recognize temporariness as a legitimate mode of urbanism rather than a deviation from the “permanent.”

Socio-economic and spatial impact analysis is integral to this research. By rigorously examining how TUIs affect employment, economic revitalization, spatial justice, and the lived experiences of marginalized groups, the study aims to provide a holistic assessment of their transformative potential. This approach ensures that TUIs are not evaluated solely on their aesthetic or temporary qualities, but on their capacity to foster sustainable, inclusive urban change.

This synthesis positions the research as a corrective to Northern-dominated TUI discourses, recentring the debate on Southern urban realities. By interrogating Kochi's TUIs—from the globally visible Biennale to the invisibilized practices of migrant communities—the study seeks to redefine temporariness as a site of radical possibility and contested equity. The subsequent empirical chapters will ground these theoretical claims in spatial ethnography, participatory mapping, and stakeholder interviews, offering a model for reimagining TUIs as tools of inclusive urban futures in Kochi and beyond. In doing so, the research foregrounds the necessity of socio-economic and spatial impact analysis as a foundation for both academic insight and policy relevance. Finally, by exploring the multiple perspectives through which Global South TUIs can be defined, and by questioning the rigidity of the North-South divide, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced, hybrid, and globally relevant urban theory.



Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design and methodological approach adopted for the thesis. It details the methods of data collection and analysis, including thematic analysis, stakeholder interviews, and policy review. Ethical considerations and the limitations of the chosen methods are discussed to ensure transparency and rigor. The chapter demonstrates how the methodology is tailored to address the research questions and objectives, providing a robust framework for analyzing the impacts of temporary urban interventions in Fort Kochi

Chapter 3: Methodology

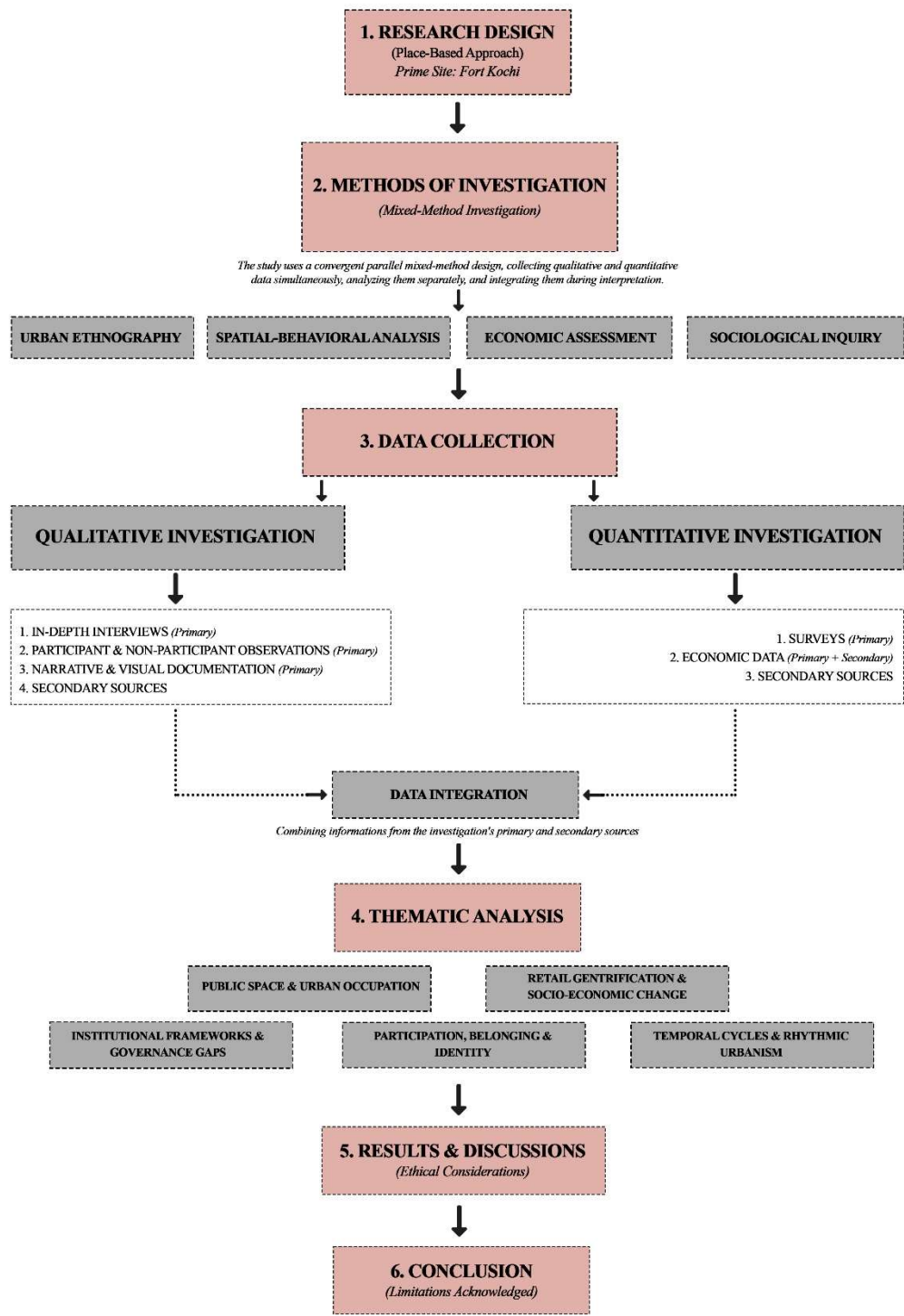


Figure 8 Methodological framework of the Research (Source Author)

3.1 Research Design

The research is anchored in a place-based approach, selecting Fort Kochi as the primary site of investigation. This strategy is rooted in the understanding that urban transformation cannot be fully grasped without considering the unique social, cultural, and spatial characteristics of a specific location. Fort Kochi, with its rich colonial heritage, vibrant tourism industry, and diverse local livelihoods, offers a compelling context for studying urban change. By focusing on this particular site, the research is able to delve into the lived realities of its residents, trace historical developments, and observe contemporary shifts as they unfold. This contextual depth ensures that the findings are not only relevant to Fort Kochi but also provide insights into broader patterns of urban transformation in similar contexts. The place-based approach thus enhances the richness and applicability of the research, making it both locally grounded and globally significant.

3.2 Methods of Investigation

To comprehensively address the complexity of urban transformation, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, specifically a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. In this design, qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and then integrated during interpretation. This methodology leverages the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative methods provide depth, context, and a nuanced understanding of meanings, perceptions, and experiences. Quantitative methods, meanwhile, offer breadth, generalizability, and statistical rigor. The investigation is structured around four key strands:

- **Urban Ethnography** involves immersive study of daily life and spatial practices in Fort Kochi, focusing on how people use and experience urban spaces.
- **Spatial-Behavioral Analysis** examines patterns of movement, spatial usage, and behavioral dynamics in public spaces, often using mapping and observation.
- **Economic Assessment** investigates economic activities, changes in business patterns, property values, and livelihoods, using both primary (surveys, interviews) and secondary (official records) data.
- **Sociological Inquiry** explores social structures, community relationships, identity, belonging, and participation, often through interviews, observations, and review of community records.

3.3 Data Collection

A. Qualitative Investigation

The qualitative investigation is multi-pronged. **In-depth interviews**—often semi-structured—are conducted with residents, business owners, officials, and community leaders. The semi-structured format allows for open-ended responses, enabling participants to share their experiences and perspectives in detail while also giving the researcher flexibility to probe deeper into emergent themes. **Participant and non-participant observations** are carried out in public spaces, where the researcher observes and sometimes participates in daily activities, capturing behaviors, interactions, and the rhythms of urban life. **Narrative and visual documentation**—including photographs, sketches, video recordings, and mapping exercises—provides visual evidence and supports narrative accounts. **Secondary sources** such as historical documents, policy papers, news articles, and previous research are also reviewed to contextualize current findings within broader historical and policy frameworks.

Fieldwork and Observations

The primary fieldwork was conducted over a three-month period in Fort Kochi, focusing on the spatial and social traces left by previous Kochi-Muziris Biennale editions. The research entailed repeated site visits to key former intervention sites, including Aspinwall House, Pepper House, and Cabral Yard. These visits involved detailed spatial documentation through photographic surveys, sketches, and visual mapping techniques to capture physical remnants such as murals, installations, signage, and informal uses of public spaces. Special attention was given to observing patterns of pedestrian movement, informal economic activities, and social interactions in and around these sites. These observations provided insights into how spaces continue to function and evolve beyond the immediate event.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews formed a critical element of the primary research. A total of twenty-three semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather rich, qualitative insights from a diverse range of stakeholders intimately connected with the Biennale and the Fort Kochi urban environment.

The interviewee sample was deliberately heterogeneous to encompass multiple perspectives:

Respondent Category	Background / Profile	Purpose of Inclusion
Local Residents	Long-term and recent residents of Fort Kochi	To understand lived experiences, neighborhood change, and social dynamics over time
Artists and Curators	Participants and organizers involved in past Biennale editions	To reflect on cultural intentions, community engagement, and creative processes
Café and Shop Owners	Local business owners operating cafes, shops, and informal markets	To capture economic impacts of tourism and events on local livelihoods
National and International Visitors	Tourists and cultural visitors from India and abroad	To explore perceptions of cultural accessibility and urban transformation from an outsider's perspective
Urban Planners and Municipal Officials	Professionals involved in city planning and governance	To gain insights into policy frameworks, governance challenges, and institutional roles
Students and Researchers	Individuals studying or researching Fort Kochi's urban and cultural landscape	To provide academic and local knowledge perspectives on urban dynamics
Biennale Organizing Team Members	Key organizers and coordinators of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale	To understand strategic objectives, operational realities, and event management

Table 1: Data of the respondents

The semi-structured format allowed flexibility for respondents to express nuanced views, while ensuring coverage of key themes such as perceptions of cultural identity, economic shifts, and access to public spaces, inclusivity/exclusivity, and the longer-term impacts of art-led urban regeneration. Interviews typically lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and were audio-recorded (with consent) to ensure accuracy in transcription.

B. Quantitative Investigation

On the quantitative side, structured surveys are administered to a representative sample of the population. These surveys gather data on public space usage, economic status, perceptions of change, and demographic information. Economic data is collected from both primary sources (such as business surveys and interviews) and secondary sources (including official statistics and municipal records), covering indicators like business revenues, property values, and employment patterns. Additional secondary sources, such as census data, Municipal and tourism planning documents outlining Fort Kochi's development strategies, The Kerala Smart City initiative frameworks relevant to urban and cultural planning, State-level cultural policies and event governance regulations, Academic literature on temporary urbanism, event urbanism, creative cities, and cultural economies, with emphasis on Global South contexts, Media archives, newspaper articles, and public commentary providing insight into local debates about the Biennale's social and spatial impacts- provide a macro-level context for understanding trends and patterns in Fort Kochi. By combining these various data sources, the research ensures a robust and comprehensive dataset.

Surveys

To complement the in-depth interviews, structured surveys were distributed to a wider cohort of 47 participants, including tourists, local vendors, artists, and students. The survey instrument featured both closed and open-ended questions to quantitatively assess patterns of public space use, perceptions of economic and cultural impacts, and experiences of inclusion or exclusion related to TUIs. The surveys aimed to capture a broader, more generalized understanding of community and visitor attitudes and behaviors, offering a valuable counterpoint to the qualitative data.

This multi-scalar data collection strategy enabled the study to integrate micro-level experiential insights with macro-level institutional and theoretical perspectives, strengthening the robustness and depth of the analysis.

3.4. Data Integration

Once both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected, the next step is data integration. This process involves triangulation, where findings from different methods and sources are cross-verified to enhance validity and reliability. Complementarity is also key, with qualitative insights used to explain quantitative trends and vice versa. For example, survey data might reveal

a trend in declining traditional businesses, while interviews and observations provide the stories and experiences behind that trend. Synthesis brings all these strands together, forming a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of urban transformation in Fort Kochi. This integrated approach ensures that the research findings are both deep and broad, capturing the complexity of the phenomena under study.

3.5 Thematic Analysis

Following the completion of fieldwork, the study engaged in a comprehensive thematic analysis of the entire dataset, which comprised both primary and secondary sources. This integrative approach ensured that the analysis was grounded in rich, empirical evidence while being situated within relevant policy, academic, and media contexts.

Data Integration

Once both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected, the next step is data integration. This process involves triangulation, where findings from different methods and sources are cross-verified to enhance validity and reliability. Complementarity is also key, with qualitative insights used to explain quantitative trends and vice versa. For example, survey data might reveal a trend in declining traditional businesses, while interviews and observations provide the stories and experiences behind that trend. Synthesis brings all these strands together, forming a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of urban transformation in Fort Kochi. This integrated approach ensures that the research findings are both deep and broad, capturing the complexity of the phenomena under study.

Emergent Themes

The integrated data is then subjected to **thematic analysis**, a process of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. The main themes guiding the analysis are:

- **Public Space & Urban Occupation:** This theme explores how TUIs physically and symbolically transform urban spaces, creating moments of temporary accessibility and heightened visibility for places that are otherwise marginalized, privatized, or underutilized. Analysis highlighted the dual role of TUIs in activating dormant urban sites and challenging established spatial hierarchies, as observed in both interview narratives and spatial documentation.
- **Retail Gentrification & Socio-Economic Change:** The analysis uncovered the economic dualities inherent in cultural interventions, where increased tourism and

investment generate new opportunities but also provoke uneven socio-economic consequences. Data from local business owners and policy documents pointed to rising rents, the proliferation of seasonal, tourist-oriented businesses, and the displacement or marginalization of traditional vendors, revealing tensions between economic revitalization and social equity.

- **Institutional Frameworks & Governance Gaps:** This theme addresses the observed policy vacuum and regulatory challenges surrounding TUIs. The secondary analysis of municipal and cultural policy frameworks exposed the absence of comprehensive, year-round governance mechanisms and accountability structures, which results in temporary urban interventions often having ephemeral impacts without sustained support or integration into broader urban planning agendas
- **Participation, Belonging & Identity:** Central to the study was the examination of who participates in TUIs and who remains excluded. Thematic coding of interviews and survey responses revealed contested narratives around place identity, belonging, and ownership. This theme illuminates the complex social negotiations in urban spaces where cultural events simultaneously foster community pride and exacerbate feelings of exclusion among marginalized groups.
- **Temporal Cycles & Rhythmic Urbanism:** Finally, the analysis situated TUIs as episodic interventions that disrupt and restructure urban rhythms, behavioral patterns, and socio-economic flows. Rather than creating permanent transformations, these interventions introduce cyclical, temporary shifts that reconfigure everyday urban life in nuanced ways. This theme was substantiated through longitudinal observations and reflections on the temporal disconnect between event-based urbanism and sustained urban development.

Together, these themes provide a structured framework for understanding the multifaceted impacts of TUIs in a Global South context. The integration of primary experiential data with policy and media discourse allowed the study to critically interrogate not only the observable spatial and social changes but also the underlying power relations, institutional limitations, and cultural meanings that shape Fort Kochi's urban experience.

These themes form the backbone of the subsequent findings chapter, where they will be elaborated upon in detail and linked to broader debates on urban inclusivity, sustainability, and cultural governance.

3.6 Results & Discussions (Ethical Considerations)

The results and discussion section presents the research findings, interpreting them through the lens of the identified themes and situating them within the broader literature on urban transformation.

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for academic research involving human participants. Prior to the commencement of interviews and survey data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The consent process emphasized voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and a clear explanation of the study's aims and procedures.

To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, all identifying information was removed from transcripts, field notes, and any publicly disseminated findings. The handling and storage of data adhered to institutional guidelines on data protection and secure research practices.

As the researcher, I maintained a critical awareness of my positionality as an external academic observer. Reflexivity was a continuous process throughout the study, aimed at recognizing and mitigating potential biases and power imbalances in both data collection and interpretation. Particular attention was paid to ensuring that engagements with local residents and stakeholders were conducted in a respectful, dialogical manner—especially when discussing sensitive topics such as social exclusion, contested ownership, and structural inequalities.

Efforts were made to avoid extractive practices by prioritizing mutual respect, transparency, and the co-construction of knowledge where appropriate. Feedback loops were integrated into the research process, allowing participants to review and, if necessary, clarify their contributions. Through these ethical commitments, the research aimed to foster trust, safeguard dignity, and uphold the rights of all involved.

3.7 Conclusion (Limitations Acknowledged):

The study concludes by summarizing the main findings and acknowledging its limitations. Several limitations are acknowledged. First, the absence of a live Biennale during fieldwork restricted direct observation of active interventions, necessitating reliance on spatial traces, memory, and secondary data. Second, restricted access to certain policy documents and institutional records limited insights into formal governance processes. Third, the survey sample skewed toward a younger, more mobile demographic, potentially underrepresenting marginalized or less digitally literate groups. Finally, the limited temporal scope did not allow for longitudinal tracking of behavioral changes across seasons or multiple Biennale cycles.

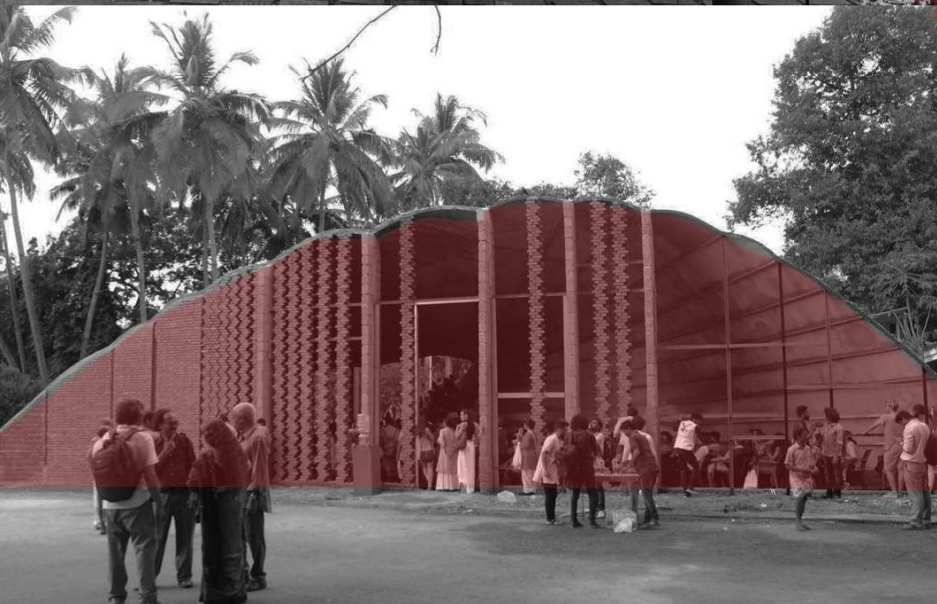
This methodological framework enables a multidimensional exploration of how TUIs influence Fort Kochi's urban fabric and social dynamics. By integrating immersive fieldwork with thematic

analysis and comparative inquiry, the study illuminates both the potentials and contradictions of temporary urban interventions in a Global South setting. The following chapter builds on this foundation to elaborate the emergent themes and critically engage their implications for inclusive, sustainable, and culturally grounded urban planning.



Chapter 4: Data Analysis

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study, beginning with an overview of Fort Kochi's regional context and the origins and structure of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. It analyzes the integration of the Biennale into the urban fabric, its role in cultural revival, and the transformation of major venues and sites. Thematic analysis follows, examining public space occupation, retail dynamics, governance frameworks, community participation, and urban temporality. The chapter draws on empirical data to reveal the multifaceted impacts of TUIs in Fort Kochi, highlighting both opportunities and challenges



Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.1. Situating Fort Kochi



Figure 9: location of fort Kochi (Source: author)

In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of Fort Kochi as the primary precinct of this study, it is essential to first contextualize it within the broader urban fabric of Kochi and its administrative framework. Kochi, often referred to as the "Queen of the Arabian Sea," is a prominent port city located on the southwest coast of India in the state of Kerala (Government of Kerala, 2020). Historically, Kochi has served as a critical node in international trade and cultural exchange, shaping its identity as a cosmopolitan and layered urban entity (Menon, 2018). The city is governed by the Kochi Municipal Corporation, established in 1967, which manages urban planning, infrastructure, and public services across the city (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023). The Corporation plays a key role in addressing the challenges of heritage conservation, tourism,

and urban development (Greater Cochin Development Authority [GCDA], 2019). Fort Kochi, located in the western part of the city, falls under its jurisdiction. This precinct is distinct for its colonial heritage, shaped by Portuguese, Dutch, and British influences, which is reflected in its architecture, street patterns, and cultural life (Menon & Thomas, 2021). Today, Fort Kochi is a vibrant artistic and cultural precinct, drawing national and international attention—especially through events like the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2022). This section aims to situate Fort Kochi not only geographically but also socio-politically and historically, in order to critically understand its role and relevance within the broader urban and cultural framework of Kochi. Such contextual grounding is essential to analyze the spatial dynamics, human interactions, and behavioral shifts that inform this study.

4.1.1. Regional Perspective of Kochi

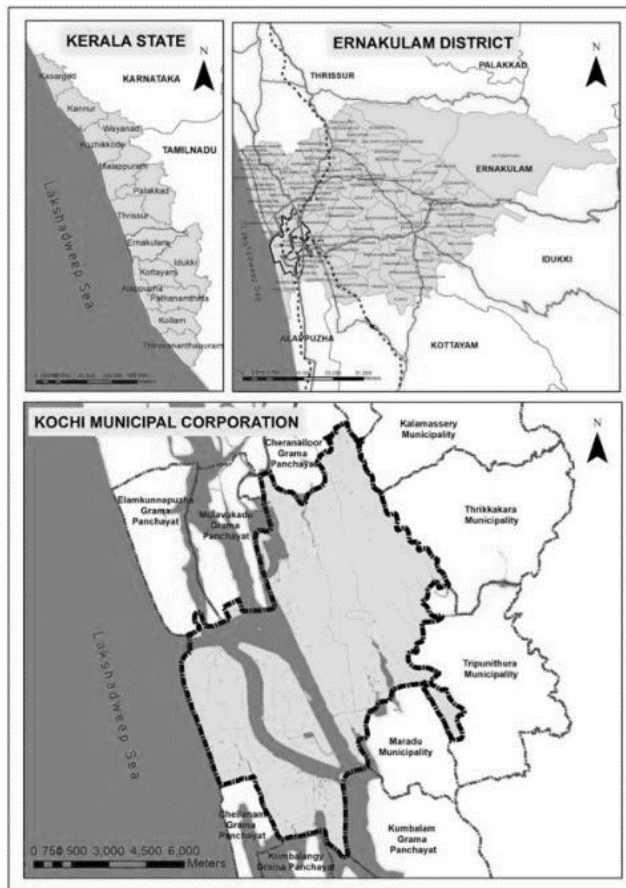


Figure 10: Locating Kochi municipal corporations (source: LSGD(Planning))

Kochi, historically known as Cochin, is a vibrant port city on the southwest coast of India in the state of Kerala in the District of Ernakulam. Its unique geography, layered history, and cosmopolitan culture have made it a pivotal node in the Indian Ocean world for centuries (Menon, 2018; Nair, 2019). Today, Kochi stands as Kerala's commercial capital, a gateway to the state's backwaters, and a living laboratory for urban transformation. The city is situated at approximately 9°58'N latitude and 76°17'E longitude, bordered by the Arabian Sea to the west and the vast Vembanad Lake to the east. The Vembanad is not only the longest lake in India but also a Ramsar wetland of international significance (Ramsar Convention Secretariat, 2016). The Periyar and Muvattupuzha rivers, along with a network of canals and tidal creeks, traverse the metropolitan area, shaping both its ecology and its urban form (Kumar, Thomas, & Nair, 2017).

The urban agglomeration of Kochi encompasses the Ernakulam mainland and a constellation of islands, including Willingdon, Vypin, Vallarpadam, Bolgatty, and Fort Kochi. These landforms

are interconnected by iconic bridges and ferry routes, forming a polycentric cityscape where water and land are in constant dialogue (GCDA, 2011). The interplay between the mainland and the islands has historically influenced trade, migration, and the development of distinct urban neighborhoods. The city's spatial form, economic lifeblood, and cultural rhythms are defined by the interplay of rivers, lakes, the Arabian Sea coast, estuaries, and a constellation of islands, making it one of the most distinctive urban environments in India (Nair, 2019; Kumar, Thomas, & Nair, 2017).

Kochi's natural environment is characterized by a complex network of rivers, backwaters, lakes, and coastal features that shape its ecology, economy, and culture. The Periyar River, Kerala's longest and most voluminous, originates in the Western Ghats and flows westward, entering Kochi at Aluva before emptying into the Vembanad Lake near the city. This river is essential for freshwater supply to domestic, industrial, and agricultural sectors, and it supports navigation, fishing, and cultural events such as the city's renowned boat races. The Muvattupuzha River, another significant tributary, joins the Vembanad system south of Kochi, further enriching the hydrological complexity of the region (Kumar et al., 2017). The Vembanad Lake itself, extending over 96 kilometers, is a critical ecological and economic asset, sustaining diverse habitats including mangroves, paddy fields, fish farms, and bird sanctuaries. It also functions as a natural buffer against flooding and saline intrusion, especially during the monsoon season (Ramsar Convention Secretariat, 2016). The estuarine system formed by the confluence of these rivers and the Arabian Sea is among the most intricate in India, fostering rich biological productivity and supporting fisheries, aquaculture, and mangrove forests. This estuarine environment also moderates the urban microclimate and serves as a natural transportation corridor. The presence of Chinese fishing nets, introduced by traders from the court of Kublai Khan, highlights Kochi's multicultural heritage (Kumar et al., 2017; Nair, 2019).

Kochi's coastal geography features a long, low-lying seacoast along the Arabian Sea, characterized by sandy beaches, spits, and natural harbors at locations such as Fort Kochi, Cherai, and Vypin. The city's deepwater channels and protective barrier islands have historically established Kochi as a major maritime gateway, supporting the development of the Cochin Port, shipyards, and fishing harbors (GCDA, 2011). The city's geology is dominated by recent alluvial deposits, coastal sands, and lateritic soils, with predominantly clayey subsoil that influences drainage and construction practices. Kochi's low-lying terrain and proximity to the sea make it vulnerable to waterlogging and flooding, particularly during the tropical monsoon climate characterized by high humidity, abundant rainfall averaging 3,000–3,500 mm annually, and modest temperature variation (India Meteorological Department [IMD], 2022; Soman, 2002). The southwest monsoon (June–September) delivers the majority of rainfall, with July being the wettest month, while the northeast monsoon (October–November) contributes a secondary rainy period. Prevailing winds shift seasonally, with westerly winds during the monsoon and easterly or northeasterly winds in the dry season, moderated by coastal breezes (Ravindran, 2015). These climatic and geographic conditions influence urban design, cultural practices, and the timing of festivals in Kochi. However, the

coastal zone faces ongoing threats from erosion, tidal surges, and climate change impacts such as sea-level rise, necessitating proactive management to enhance resilience (Soman, 2002).

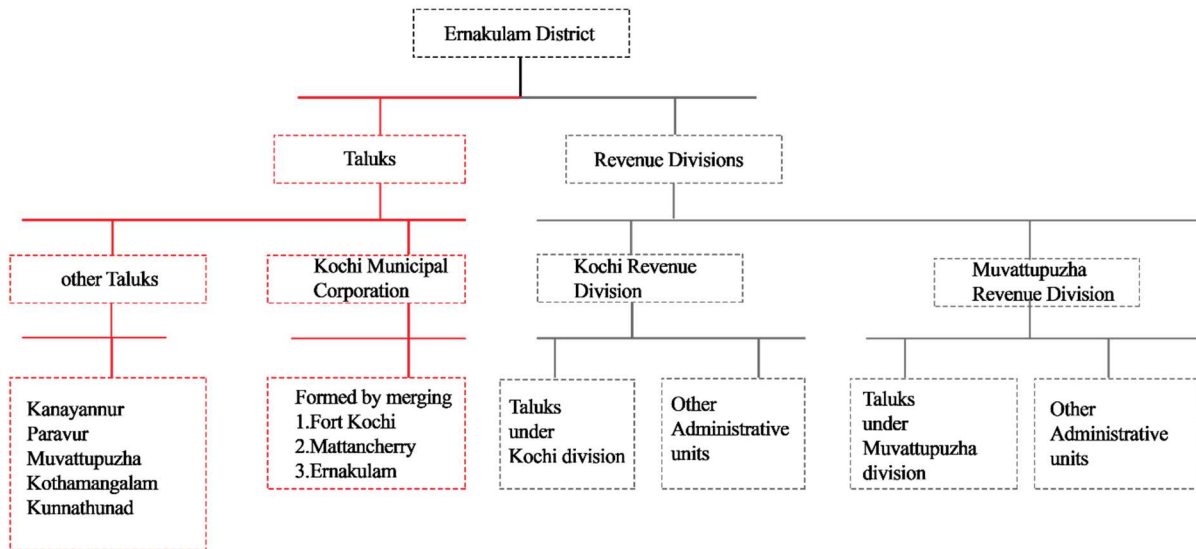


Figure 11: Administrative hierarchy of Ernakulam District (source: Author)

The city's governance is multi-layered and complex. The Kochi Municipal Corporation (KMC) manages urban planning, infrastructure, public health, and local governance within the city limits, which are divided into seventy-four administrative wards, each represented by an elected councillor (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023). The Greater Cochin Development Authority (GCDA) is the principal regional planning body, overseeing land use, infrastructure, and development projects across the metropolitan area, which includes several municipalities and panchayats. The GCDA's Structure Plan for Kochi City Region (2011–2031) provides statutory guidance for urban expansion, transportation, and environmental management (GCDA, 2011). At the district level, Kochi is part of Ernakulam district, which is subdivided into taluks and revenue villages. State agencies such as the Kerala State Urban Development Authority (KSUDP), Kerala State Planning Board, and Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB) coordinate major infrastructure, housing, and urban renewal projects (Kerala State Planning Board, 2022). National urban policies, including the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), have funded key projects in water supply, sanitation, and public transport (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2021). The interplay between local, regional, and national agencies shapes the city's development trajectory, often resulting in both innovation and bureaucratic complexity.

Kochi Municipal Corporation being the only first order settlement in the district is the most highly populated urban local body in the district as shown in the figure below. It has a geographical area of 94.88 Sq.km.

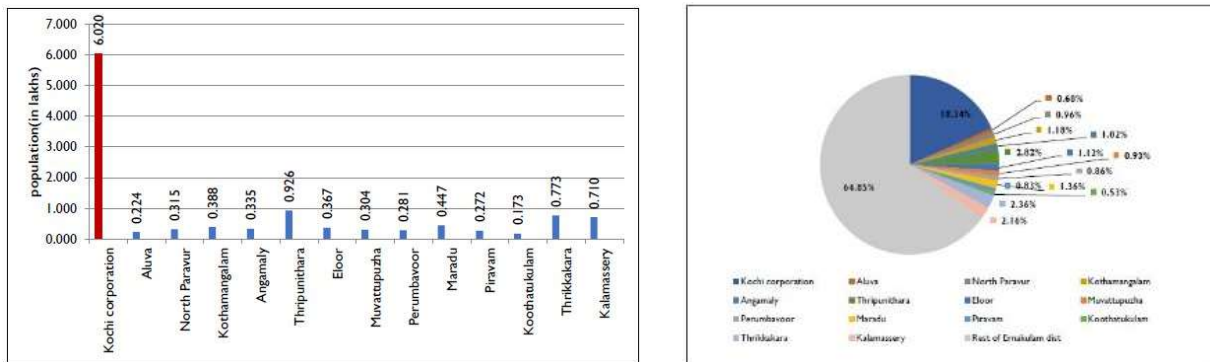


Figure 12: Comparison of the population of Kochi Municipal Corporation with other Urban Local Bodies in the district source: Census 2011

As per census 2011, the population of Kochi Municipal Corporation is 602046 which amounts to 18.34% of the total population in the district. Area wise, Kochi Corporation amounts to just over 3% of the total area of the district. When compared to the other urban local bodies in the district, Kochi has the highest share of urban population in the District, even higher than the total share of population of other urban local bodies in the district.

Kochi's urban landscape is punctuated by landmarks that are both economic engines and cultural icons. Cochin Port, located on Willingdon Island, is one of India's largest and oldest ports, supporting major cargo and passenger operations (GCDA, 2011). The Cochin Shipyard, a leading shipbuilding and maintenance facility, is also on the waterfront. The Cochin Refinery, operated by Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited, is situated at Ambalamugal and stands as one of South India's largest oil refineries and a major industrial employer (BPCL, 2023). Vallarpadam International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT), India's first transshipment terminal, is located on Vallarpadam Island and is a critical node in global maritime trade (Cochin Port Trust, 2022).

Infopark Kochi is a major IT and business park, contributing to the city's reputation as a technology hub. Lulu International Shopping Mall, one of India's largest, is located in Edappally and serves as a regional commercial and entertainment center. Marine Drive is a scenic promenade along the backwaters, popular for recreation and urban leisure. The historic quarters of Fort Kochi and Mattancherry are celebrated for their colonial architecture, the Paradesi Synagogue, St. Francis Church, and vibrant street life. Bolgatty Palace, a heritage hotel and event venue, is on Bolgatty Island, while the Kerala High Court, the state's principal judicial institution, is located near the city center. These landmarks are not only economic engines but also shape the city's spatial structure and identity, acting as nodes of activity and symbols of Kochi's layered past.

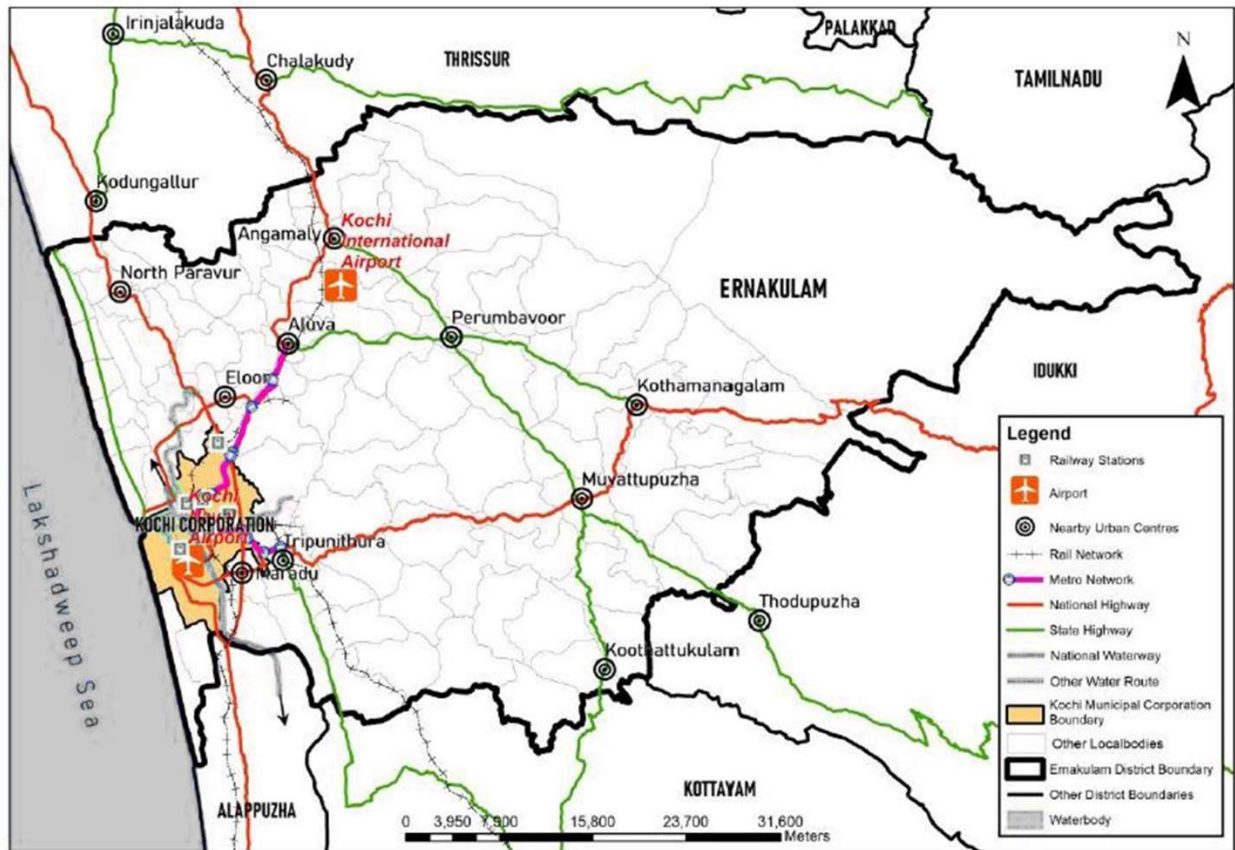


Figure 13: Regional connectivity of Kochi city (source: LSGD(Planning))

Kochi is a major transport hub for Kerala and southern India. National Highways NH 66 and NH 544 connect the city to other urban centers. The railway network, anchored by Ernakulam Junction and Ernakulam Town stations, provides regional and national connectivity. The Kerala State Water Transport Department operates regular ferry services linking the mainland and islands, which are essential for daily commutes and tourism (GCDA, 2011). Cochin International Airport (CIAL), located about thirty kilometers northeast of the city center, is Kerala's busiest airport, offering extensive domestic and international flights (CIAL, 2023). The Kochi Metro, operational since 2017, connects key corridors and has improved intra-city mobility (KMRL, 2022). The integration of road, rail, water, and air transport, as well as the spatial distribution of islands and major urban nodes, is visually evident in the city's connectivity map. The city's transport infrastructure is both a product of its geography and a driver of its economic integration with the wider region.



Figure 14 :Road network Source: LSGD (Planning), NATPAC study report, 2019

Kochi is renowned for its religious and cultural pluralism. The city's population includes Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and smaller communities of Jews and Jains. This diversity is reflected in the city's architecture, festivals, and cuisine. Historic sites such as the Paradesi Synagogue, St. Francis Church, and numerous mosques and temples testify to Kochi's legacy as a cosmopolitan port city (Menon, 2018). The city's festivals, from Onam to Christmas to Eid, are celebrated with equal fervor, often spilling into the streets and public spaces, reinforcing a sense of shared urban identity.

To the visitor, Kochi is a city where the scent of the sea mingles with the aroma of spices, where ferries crisscross the backwaters against a backdrop of coconut palms, and where centuries-old synagogues, churches, and mosques stand side by side with modern shopping malls and IT parks. The city's mornings are often shrouded in mist and humidity, broken by the bustle of markets and the call of ferry horns. During the monsoon, rain lashes the tiled roofs and fills the canals, while evenings bring a gentle breeze from the sea. The skyline is punctuated by the silhouettes of container cranes at Vallarpadam, the domes of heritage churches, and the gleaming towers of new business districts. This sensory richness, set within a landscape of islands and waterways, makes

Kochi a city of both tradition and transformation—a place where the past and future meet on the water's edge (Nair, 2019; Menon, 2018).

The city's waterscape is both a blessing and a challenge for urban planners. It provides crucial ecological services, economic opportunities, and a unique sense of place, but also demands constant adaptation to flooding, erosion, and the pressures of urbanization (Kumar et al., 2017; Soman, 2002). The city's planners are increasingly aware of the need to balance growth with environmental stewardship, integrating green infrastructure, flood management, and heritage conservation into the urban fabric. The resilience of Kochi's people and institutions is continually tested by the interplay of natural forces and human ambition, shaping a city that is as dynamic as the waters that surround it.

4.1.2. Knowing the precinct.

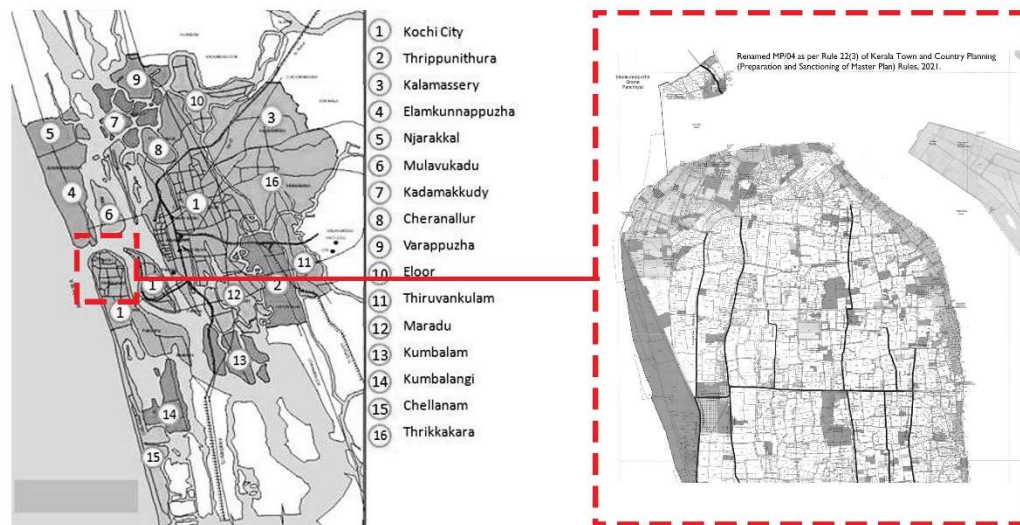


Figure 15 : Locating Fort Kochi (source: LSGD (Planning)) Edited by Author

Fort Kochi, a historic precinct within the Kochi metropolitan area, embodies a unique intersection of colonial heritage, coastal geography, and contemporary urban dynamics. Originally a modest fishing village under the Kingdom of Kochi, the area underwent a profound transformation following the Portuguese establishment of Fort Emmanuel in 1503, marking the beginning of European colonial influence on the Malabar Coast (Menon, 2018). This fortification catalyzed Fort Kochi's development as a strategic maritime outpost and trading hub, embedding European architectural and urban planning principles into the local fabric. The Dutch conquest in 1663 introduced significant administrative reforms, notably the establishment of the municipality of Fort Kochi in 1664, recognized as the first municipal governance institution in the Indian subcontinent (Nair, 2019). This early municipal framework laid the foundation for formalized urban management and civic administration that persisted through subsequent colonial regimes.

Under British rule from 1795, Fort Kochi retained its administrative significance, with the municipality formally reestablished in 1866 under the Madras Act 10 of 1865, which amended

earlier town improvement legislation to introduce elected councils and structured urban services (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023). The post-independence period saw the integration of Fort Kochi's municipality into the Kochi Municipal Corporation (KMC) in 1967, unifying it with Ernakulum, Mattancherry, and surrounding areas to streamline governance and coordinate urban development across the expanding metropolitan region (Greater Cochin Development Authority [GCDA], 2011).

According to the 2011 Census, the Kochi Municipal Corporation had a total population of 602,046, with projections estimating growth to approximately 800,000 by 2040 (Census 2011; Times of India, 2020). Fort Kochi forms one of the 74 wards within the corporation, though its specific population figures are aggregated within the overall municipal data. The Kochi Urban Agglomeration reported a favorable sex ratio of 1,030 females per 1,000 males and a child sex ratio of 962 girls per 1,000 boys, alongside a high literacy rate of 96.29%—with male literacy at 97.64% and female literacy at 94.99% (Magicbricks; Census 2011). Children aged 0–6 years constitute 9.39% of the population, slightly below the national urban average. Fort Kochi's social fabric is notably diverse, comprising Hindu, Christian, Muslim, and a small Jewish community, reflecting its cosmopolitan character (Master Plan for Kochi Municipal Corporation Area - 2040). The area spans approximately 94.88 km², with a high population density concentrated particularly in historic wards like Fort Kochi. Migration trends indicate that Fort Kochi attracts both internal migrants and international visitors, further enriching its demographic profile. The Master Plan emphasizes sustainable urban development while preserving Fort Kochi's heritage significance as the city grows (Times of India, 2020).

Map 1.1 Connectivity Map

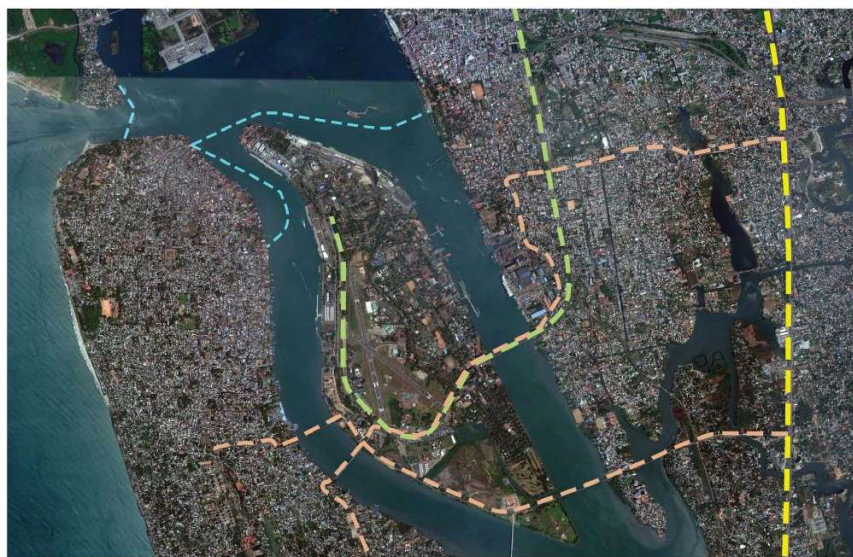


Figure 16: Connectivity map of Fort Kochi. Source (Author)

The map shows that Fort Kochi is well-linked by connecting roads (orange dashed lines) that traverse the peninsula and connect it to the mainland, while the proximity of National Highways (yellow dashed lines) facilitates regional and interstate access. Waterways (blue dashed lines) are a distinctive feature, providing direct ferry and boat routes across the backwaters and linking Fort Kochi to Ernakulam and surrounding islands, which is especially vital for both daily commuters and tourists. Additionally, the presence of railroads (green dashed lines) near the eastern edge ensures connectivity to the national railway grid, even though the tracks do not pass directly through Fort Kochi itself. This comprehensive network of roads, waterways, and railways underscores Fort Kochi's accessibility and its importance as a hub for tourism, commerce, and cultural exchange in Kochi (Kochi Municipal Corporation, n.d.).

The natural environment of Fort Kochi is defined by its coastal location, with sandy soils and low-lying topography making it susceptible to flooding and coastal erosion, particularly during the monsoon season. Mangrove patches and mudflats in adjacent areas contribute to biodiversity and act as natural buffers, while the tropical monsoon climate—with high humidity and substantial rainfall—influences urban life and infrastructure (Kumar, Thomas, & Nair, 2017). Traditional fishing activities, exemplified by the iconic Chinese fishing nets, remain integral to the precinct's cultural and economic landscape.

The precinct's land use reflects its historical and contemporary roles, characterized by a mix of residential, commercial, heritage, and public open spaces. Fort Kochi maintains a predominantly low-rise, low-density urban fabric, with colonial-era buildings housing residences, boutique hotels, spice markets, and cultural venues. Public waterfront promenades along the Arabian Sea serve as vital social and cultural nodes, reinforcing the precinct's maritime identity (Kerala Tourism Department, 2023). Demographically, Fort Kochi is notable for its multicultural population, including Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and smaller Jewish and other minority communities, indicative of its long-standing cosmopolitan heritage (Onmanorama, 2020).

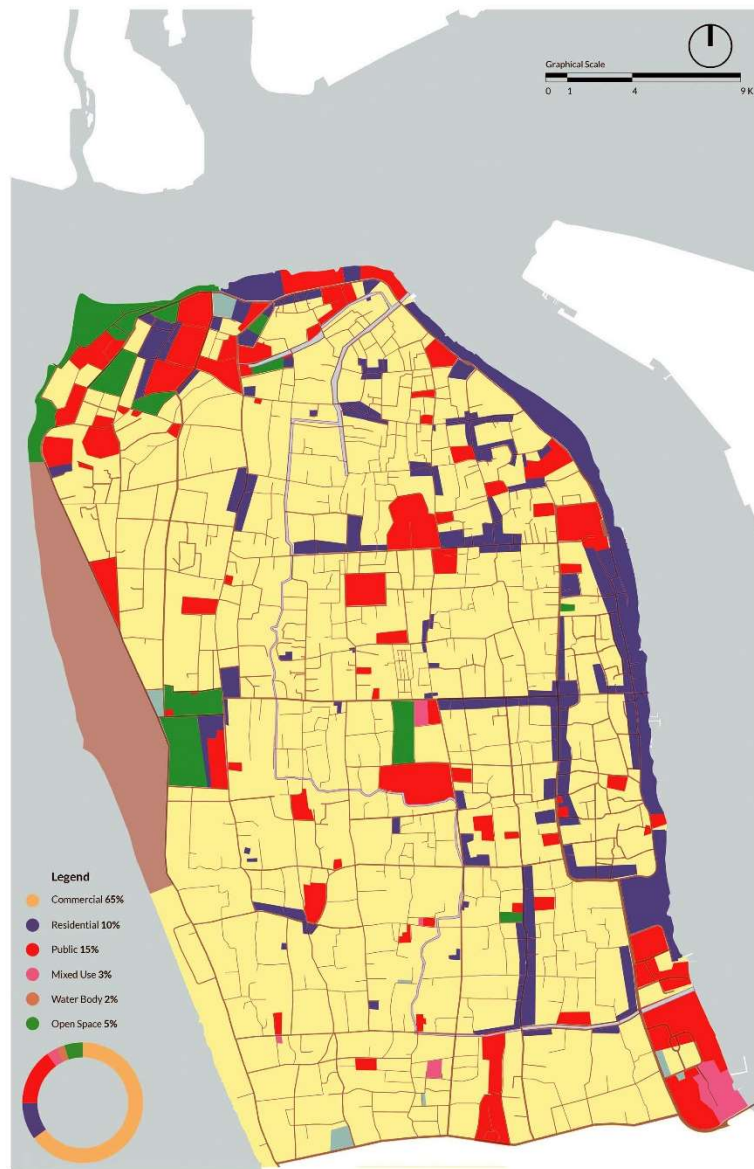


Figure 17: Land use map of Fort Kochi (source: Author)

The first map presents the land use distribution of the study area, revealing that commercial zones constitute the majority at 65%, followed by public spaces at 15%, residential areas at 10%, open spaces at 5%, mixed-use at 3%, and water bodies at 2%. The spatial arrangement indicates that commercial activities are widely dispersed throughout the region, with public and residential uses interspersed in smaller pockets. Open spaces and water bodies are primarily located along the periphery and adjacent to the waterfront, suggesting a planning emphasis on economic activity while still maintaining some provision for public amenities and green areas.



Figure 18: Built use of Fort Kochi (Source -Author)

In contrast, the second map illustrates the built use pattern, highlighting a significant shift in the functional composition of the area. Residential use dominates at 59%, with commercial uses reduced to 14%. Institutional and religious uses account for 9% and 7% respectively, while mixed-use, industrial, and warehouse functions make up the remainder. This finer-grained depiction of urban fabric demonstrates a more complex and organically developed environment than the zoning-focused land use map suggests, with residential clusters forming the core and other uses distributed throughout.

Understanding the divergence between planned land use and actual built use is crucial for identifying both opportunities and constraints for implementing context-sensitive urban

interventions. The maps provide a foundational context for assessing the spatial distribution of residential, commercial, and public spaces, which is essential for targeting areas that may benefit most from temporary public installations or community events.

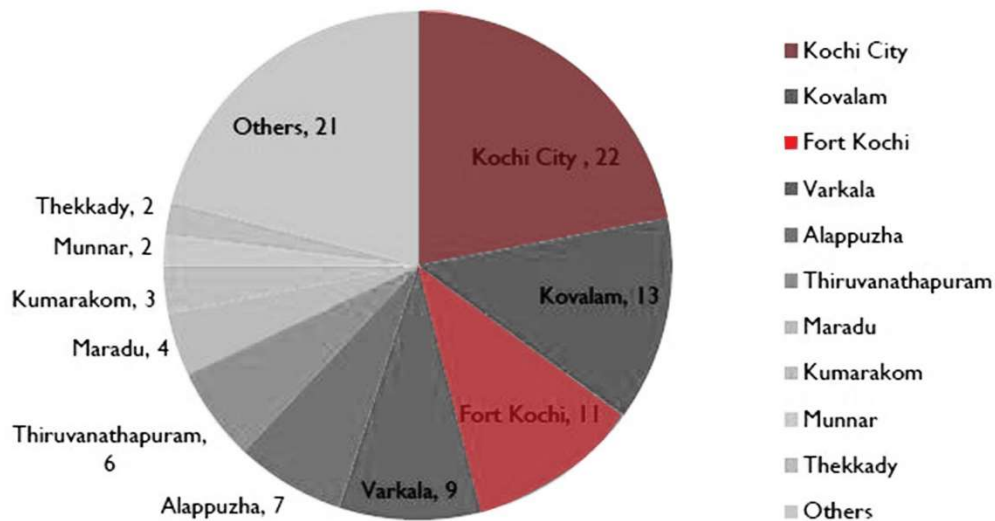


Figure 19 : Percentage share of Destination wise Foreign Tourists Arrival in Kerala -2018 (source- Kerala Tourism Statistics 2018, Dept. Of Tourism edited by Author)

Tourism constitutes a major economic driver, attracting visitors to heritage landmarks such as St. Francis Church, the Paradesi Synagogue, and the Mattancherry Palace, as well as cultural events like the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. The precinct's vibrant street life, art galleries, and waterfront promenades contribute to its appeal, though tourism also presents challenges related to infrastructure capacity, commercialization, and heritage conservation (Onmanorama, 2020; Afar, 2022).

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2017 Foreign	14.9	12.12	10.47	7.41	4.44	4.26	7.35	6.19	4.50	7.84	9.21	11.2
2018 Foreign	14.5	13.47	11.45	6.9	4.12	3.73	7.3	5.32	4.29	7.29	9.11	12.3
2017 Domestic	8.9	7.68	7.45	7.60	7.62	6.48	6.84	6.84	6.29	10.74	12.76	12.76
2018 Domestic	9.3	8.1	8.3	8.3	8.9	6.5	7.0	6.0	6.3	9.3	9.6	11.8

Figure 20 Month Wise Percentage of Tourists to the Total in Ernakulum District (source: Tourism statistics, Tourism department)

Tourism in Kochi experiences a notable hike from December to March, coinciding with the period when the Biennale is held. This seasonal surge is largely attributed to the international attention and cultural activities generated by the event. Fort Kochi, being the major part of this tourism influx, benefits from increased visitor footfall, which supports local businesses and hospitality sectors. The Biennale's timing and scale make it a key driver of tourism development in the region, aligning with the broader urban and cultural planning goals outlined in the Kochi Municipal Corporation's Master Plan 2040 (Kochi Municipal Corporation, n.d.).

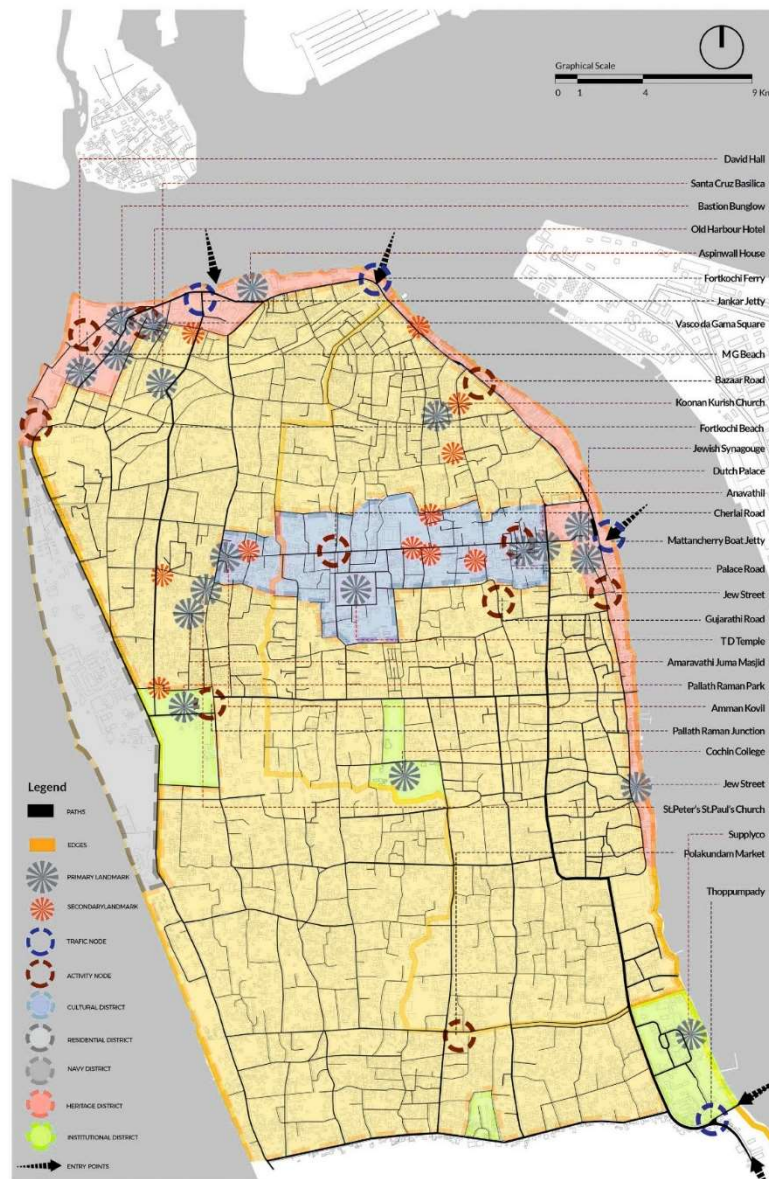


Figure 21 cognitive analysis map based on Lynch framework (Source Author)

The cognitive map of Fort Kochi, grounded in Kevin Lynch's framework, provides a comprehensive and layered understanding of the city's spatial organization, which is fundamental

for planning and evaluating temporary urban interventions. The map visually articulates the interplay of paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks, each of which plays a critical role in shaping the urban experience and the potential for tactical urbanism in Fort Kochi (see Figure 1; Lynch, 1960).

The orange edges on the map highlight the boundaries between different urban zones, with the waterfront edge standing out as a significant interface between land and water. This edge, running along the northern and eastern periphery, is especially important for Fort Kochi's identity and public life, offering opportunities for activating underutilized spaces through temporary events, installations, and recreational uses. Activating the waterfront through temporary interventions can enhance public access, create vibrant gathering places, and reinforce the city's relationship with its maritime heritage.

The map's color-coded districts further illustrate the city's functional diversity: the cultural district, concentrated near the waterfront and central areas; the extensive residential district forming the urban core; and the heritage district, marked by a high density of historic buildings and public spaces. The heritage districts—highlighted in purple—form the cultural and historical core of Fort Kochi. These areas are densely populated with primary and secondary landmarks, such as historic churches, synagogues, and colonial-era buildings, which are marked with blue and red symbols. The heritage district not only preserves the architectural legacy of the city but also acts as a magnet for tourists and locals alike, providing a rich context for temporary interventions that celebrate Fort Kochi's unique identity. Any temporary urban intervention in these zones must be sensitive to the preservation of heritage while also encouraging public engagement through art installations, guided heritage walks, or interactive cultural events (Kumar & Nigam, 2024; Lynch, 1960).

The map also identifies several gathering spaces, represented by activity and traffic nodes (dashed and solid circles), which are strategically distributed throughout the city. These nodes are often located at key intersections, public squares, and near major landmarks, making them natural focal points for community interaction and social life. Such spaces are ideal for temporary urban interventions like pop-up plazas, street performances, or open-air exhibitions, which can activate the public realm and foster a sense of community. The presence of these nodes in both heritage and residential districts suggests opportunities for inclusive programming that bridges different social groups and urban functions (Andres & Kraftl, 2021).

The districts are clearly demarcated: cultural districts (blue), residential districts (peach), navy districts (grey), heritage districts (purple), and institutional districts (yellow). This diversity highlights the multifaceted character of Fort Kochi and underscores the need for context-sensitive interventions. For example, the cultural district, concentrated near the northern waterfront, is well-suited for art-based interventions and festival activities, especially during events like the Kochi-

Muziris Biennale. Meanwhile, the residential districts offer opportunities for community-driven projects, such as temporary gardens or play streets, that can enhance everyday urban life.

The paths (black lines) form a dense network that supports connectivity between districts, landmarks, and nodes. These paths are the lifelines of the city, facilitating movement and access. Temporary interventions along these routes—such as pedestrianization during festivals or street markets—can significantly enhance the vibrancy and walkability of Fort Kochi.

Finally, the map's entry points (dashed arrows) at the city's periphery are critical for managing the flow of people, especially during large-scale events like the Kochi Biennale. Enhancing these gateways with temporary wayfinding, information kiosks, or welcoming installations can improve the visitor experience and support crowd management.

A deeper analysis of this map underscores the importance of understanding the local context when planning temporary urban interventions in Fort Kochi. The city's layered history, diverse communities, and dynamic spatial structure mean that interventions must be contextually responsive and inclusive. For example, the success of large-scale events like the Kochi-Muziris Biennale depends on a thorough understanding of how people move through the city, where they gather, and which spaces can accommodate temporary installations without disrupting daily life or undermining heritage values. The map provides a foundation for identifying these opportunities and constraints, ensuring that interventions are not only innovative but also respectful of Fort Kochi's unique urban fabric and social dynamics.

In conclusion, the cognitive map reveals that Fort Kochi's heritage districts, gathering spaces, and urban structure provide a robust foundation for temporary urban interventions. Understanding these spatial dynamics is crucial for designing interventions that are not only innovative and engaging but also respectful of the city's heritage and social fabric. This approach is particularly important for learning from and building upon events like the Kochi Biennale, ensuring that future interventions are contextually grounded and contribute positively to the urban experience.

As temporary urban interventions are implemented in Fort Kochi, we will observe how these actions activate and transform public spaces. Such interventions have the potential to foster new patterns of movement, social interaction, and cultural engagement. They can reveal the latent possibilities of underused areas, encourage community ownership, and test ideas for longer-term urban improvements. The influence of these interventions will be seen in how they enhance the vibrancy, inclusivity, and resilience of Fort Kochi's urban fabric—demonstrating the city's

capacity to adapt, celebrate its heritage, and create meaningful public experiences within the context of the Global South (Andres & Kraftl, 2021; Kumar & Nigam, 2024; Lynch, 1960).

4.2. An overview of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale

4.2.1. The Biennale: Origins, Structure, and Global Proliferation



Figure 22: Venice Biennale; source: *La Biennale di Venezia*. (n.d.). *Padiglione Centrale Giardini* [Photograph by Francesco Galli]. Courtesy of *La Biennale di Venezia*.

The biennale, a recurring international exhibition of contemporary art, has become one of the most significant and debated institutions in the global art world. Its influence extends far beyond the realm of visual arts, shaping urban development, international diplomacy, and the cultural identities of cities and nations. The biennale format, which originated in Europe, has been adapted and reinterpreted in diverse contexts around the world, reflecting both the promise and the tensions of globalization, postcolonial identity, and cultural politics (Martini, 2019; Haupt & Binder, 2021).

The concept of the biennale is rooted in the late nineteenth-century European context, with the Venice Biennale, first held in 1895, recognized as the archetype and “great mother” of all

subsequent biennial activities (La Biennale di Venezia, 2024; Haupt & Binder, 2021). Conceived by the Venetian City Council as a strategy to revive Venice's cultural and economic fortunes, the inaugural event was timed to coincide with the silver anniversary of King Umberto and Queen Margherita of Savoy, blending civic ambition with royal commemoration (Wikipedia, 2025). The Venice Biennale quickly became a model for other cities, establishing a template that combined large-scale exhibitions, national representation, and the transformation of urban space for cultural purposes (Haupt & Binder, 2021; Martini, 2019).

The early editions of the Venice Biennale were notable for their internationalism. By 1895, the event had adopted an invitation system that welcomed foreign artists, and the first permanent national pavilion, the Belgian Pavilion, opened in 1907. In the following decades, other countries—including Hungary, Germany, Great Britain, France, and Russia—constructed their own pavilions in the Giardini di Castello, making national representation a defining feature of the biennale (Haupt & Binder, 2021; Wikipedia, 2025).

The Venice Biennale's structure is characterized by its pluralism and adaptability. Central to its format are the national pavilions, which allow countries to present their own artists and narratives in purpose-built or adapted exhibition spaces. The main venues, the Giardini della Biennale and the Arsenale, provide both permanent and temporary spaces for exhibitions. Countries without permanent pavilions exhibit in other venues across Venice, a practice that has allowed the biennale to expand its international reach over time (Haupt & Binder, 2021; Journal of Curatorial Studies, 2020).

Over the twentieth century, the Venice Biennale expanded its scope, introducing new sections for music (1930), film (1932), theatre (1934), architecture (1980), and dance. Its autonomy increased in 1930 when it became an independent board under the Italian state, allowing for greater institutional stability and international reach (Haupt & Binder, 2021). The postwar decades saw the Biennale become a stage for avant-garde art and, at times, for political protest, such as the 1974 edition dedicated to Chilean resistance. The format of national pavilions, while remaining central, was increasingly contested as artists and curators critiqued its limitations and Eurocentric biases (Journal of Curatorial Studies, 2020).

The biennale model's adaptability is evident in its global proliferation. The São Paulo Biennial, established in 1951, was the first major biennale outside Europe, introducing a postcolonial note to the Venetian model and providing a platform for Latin American and other non-Western artists (On Curating, 2021). This was followed by the Alexandria Biennial (1955), Triennale-India (1968), Havana Biennial (1983), Cairo Biennial (1984), and Istanbul Biennial (1987), among others. Many of these biennials were conceived as platforms for local or regional art to assert its legitimacy and challenge the dominance of Western art institutions. The Havana Biennial, for example, was explicitly anti-colonial in its mission, foregrounding artists from Latin America, Africa, and Asia, and resisting the commercialism of the Western art market (On Curating, 2021; Bauer, 2021). In Africa, the Johannesburg Biennale (1995) and DAK'ART in Dakar (1992)

emerged as post-apartheid and pan-African initiatives, respectively, aiming to foster new forms of cultural confidence and international dialogue (On Curating, 2021).

Biennales have often emerged in countries grappling with national traumas or transitions, such as wars, dictatorships, or civil unrest. For instance, documenta in Kassel (1955) was founded in postwar Germany, the Johannesburg Biennale in post-apartheid South Africa, and the Gwangju Biennale in South Korea after the massacre of hundreds of students during the military dictatorship (On Curating, 2021). These events became platforms for both artistic innovation and the negotiation of collective memory, inscribing themselves into a network of “peripheral” biennials that challenge the dominance of Western “centres” like Venice and Kassel.

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries witnessed a “biennale boom.” By the mid-1990s, more than sixty biennials were in existence, mostly in cities and represented on all continents. Today, more than three hundred biennials exist in diverse and often unexpected locations, from Havana to Sharjah, Gwangju to Kochi (On Curating, 2021; Biennial Foundation, 2020). The format’s success and longevity are attributed to its versatility, resilience, and popularity, as well as its promise of the new and its ability to adapt to local contexts and global trends (On Curating, 2021). As Grandal Montero argues, biennales hold the promise of things to come—in short, the promise of the new.



Figure 23: Logo of biennale foundation Source: Biennial Foundation. (n.d.). Biennial Foundation. Retrieved June 24, 2025, from Biennial Foundation website.

The governance and support of biennales have evolved in tandem with their proliferation. The Biennial Foundation, established in 2009, functions as an independent think-tank and resource hub, fostering dialogue, research, and advocacy among biennial practitioners worldwide (Biennial Foundation, 2020; ASEF culture360, 2014). It played a key role in the creation of the International Biennial Association (IBA) in 2014, which now serves as a professional network for organizers. The Biennial Foundation’s mission is to promote knowledge sharing, diversity, and critical discourse in the field, without being tied to the interests of any single biennale (Biennial Foundation, 2020). Foundations such as the Diriyah Biennale Foundation in Saudi Arabia similarly aim to nurture creative expression, promote cultural exchange, and position their host cities as global centers for the arts (Diriyah Biennale Foundation, 2024).

Recent research and institutional initiatives, such as the International Centre for Research on the Contemporary Arts established by La Biennale di Venezia, underscore the growing importance of

scholarly engagement with the biennale phenomenon. These efforts seek to document the shifting geopolitical map of artistic participation, analyze the influence of biennales on civil society, and explore the potential of these events to address urgent issues such as climate change, social justice, and urban innovation (La Biennale di Venezia, 2024).

The proliferation of biennales has also been accompanied by a critical discourse on their impact. While biennales are recognized for their artistic significance and their role in city branding, tourism, and urban regeneration, critics have noted the risks of “biennialization”—the tendency for cities to adopt the biennale format as a template for cultural branding, sometimes at the expense of local needs or genuine artistic engagement (Bauer, 2021; Martini, 2019). The economic impact of biennales is significant, with host cities often experiencing increased tourism, rising property values, and new investment in cultural infrastructure. For instance, *The Art Newspaper* (2022) reported on the economic windfall and rising property prices in Venice during the biennale, while *The Hindu* (2023) highlighted the role of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in revitalizing Fort Kochi and attracting international attention to Indian contemporary art.

Biennales are not limited to the visual arts. The Venice Biennale’s expansion into architecture, music, film, and dance has inspired similar diversification elsewhere. The Venice Architecture Biennale, established in 1980 and formalized in its current structure in 1998, is now as influential as its art counterpart, tackling contemporary issues such as climate change, technology, and the evolving role of architecture in society (La Biennale di Venezia, 2024; StirWorld, 2025). Thematic innovation has been a hallmark of recent biennales, with curators and artists addressing urgent topics such as migration, decolonization, environmental crisis, and social justice. For example, the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale focused on “Freespace,” exploring generosity, humanity, and the celebration of nature in architecture (Academia.edu, 2023).

The biennale’s influence extends to the realm of urbanism and public space. As explored in recent academic work, biennales often serve as laboratories for new forms of urban intervention, experimentation, and critique (Academia.edu, 2023). In cities like Kochi, the biennale has provided a platform for exploring the intersection of art, architecture, and urban life, generating new content and values, and redefining the boundaries of cultural production (Academia.edu, 2023; *The Hindu*, 2023). The biennale’s ability to activate public spaces, engage diverse audiences, and foster dialogue across disciplines has made it a powerful agent of urban and social transformation.

In summary, the biennale is a dynamic and multifaceted institution that reflects and shapes the globalization of contemporary art. Its origins in Venice, expansion across continents, and ongoing reinvention in response to political, social, and cultural change make it a central object of study for scholars of art, urbanism, and cultural policy. As biennales continue to proliferate, their capacity to foster dialogue, challenge established norms, and catalyze transformation—while also negotiating the risks of commodification and spectacle—remains a subject of critical debate and creative possibility (Martini, 2019; Haupt & Binder, 2021; *On Curating*, 2021).

4.2.2. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale: Urban Integration, Cultural Revival, and Contested Modernity

In the age of globalization, cultural power and economic influence are increasingly interlinked, with cities and nations leveraging art and creative industries as instruments of “soft power” and urban transformation (Duke University Press, 2013)². The proliferation of international art biennales over the past three decades is a testament to this phenomenon, as cities from São Paulo to Sharjah and Gwangju to Kochi compete for global attention and cultural prestige. Within this landscape, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) has emerged as a landmark event—not only as India’s first and largest contemporary art biennale, but as a catalyst for urban regeneration, international dialogue, and the reimaging of local identity (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2012; On Curating, 2023)¹².

Launched in December 2012 in the port city of Kochi, Kerala, the KMB was conceived by artists Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu in collaboration with the Government of Kerala and the Kochi Biennale Foundation (KBF). Its name evokes the legendary ancient port of Muziris, a symbol of Kerala’s cosmopolitan, multicultural past and its historic role in Indo-Roman trade (Google Arts & Culture, 2024; Duke University Press, 2013)². The biennale’s founding vision was to position Kochi as a “world city” and a new node in the global art circuit, while simultaneously reviving the region’s heritage and fostering new forms of artistic and civic engagement (Business Standard, 2014; KPMG, 2014)⁶.

The foundation and origin of the KMB are deeply entwined with India’s post-liberalization cultural aspirations. Following the economic reforms of the 1990s, there was a marked increase in international interest in Indian art, culminating in India’s first participation in the Venice Biennale in 2011 and, soon after, the launch of the KMB as a homegrown global platform (Duke University Press, 2013)². The biennale’s establishment was also shaped by Kerala’s unique socio-political context: a state with a long tradition of leftist politics, high literacy, and a vibrant public culture of film, literature, and music (On Curating, 2023)¹. As Shwetal Patel notes, the region’s appetite for international intellectual output and its history of translating foreign works into Indian languages created fertile ground for an event of this scale and ambition¹.

From its inception, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale was envisioned as an international event, open to both Indian and global artists. The first edition in 2012 featured 89 artists from 23 countries, with installations, sculptures, video works, and performances spread across more than 60 spaces in 14 sites throughout Kochi (KPMG, 2014)⁶. The biennale’s curatorial approach has consistently emphasized diversity—bringing together established names and emerging voices, and fostering collaborations across disciplines and geographies (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2012; IJRTE, 2019)⁷. Subsequent editions have welcomed artists from over 30 countries, with notable participants including Ai Weiwei (China), William Kentridge (South Africa), Ernesto Neto (Brazil), and Indian luminaries such as Jitish Kallat, Anita Dube, and Sudarshan Shetty (Frieze, 2016; Google Arts & Culture, 2024).

The legacy of the KMB is multifaceted. Culturally, it has introduced contemporary art to new audiences in Kerala and India, democratizing access through bilingual wall texts, public programs, and educational outreach (On Curating, 2023). The biennale has become a “site of knowledge production,” where art, performance, music, and pedagogy intersect, and where local audiences engage with complex global issues in their own languages. Socio-economically, the biennale has transformed Kochi’s urban landscape, driving the restoration of heritage buildings, boosting tourism, and doubling the income of many local businesses during the festival period (StirWorld, 2022; IJRTE, 2019). According to a KPMG study, the first edition alone drew nearly 400,000 visitors, with a 52% rise in domestic tourist arrivals and an 8% increase in international arrivals to Kerala during the event (Business Standard, 2014).

Scholars have described the KMB as a timely assertion of India’s contemporary global identity, part of a larger agenda to forge national identity through culture as well as commerce (Duke University Press, 2013). The “biennale effect” in Kochi is evident not only in the city’s enhanced profile on the international art map but also in its ability to catalyze new forms of civic participation, volunteerism, and local pride (Academia.edu, 2015; On Curating, 2023). At the same time, the event has generated critical debates about gentrification, inclusivity, and the sustainability of large-scale cultural festivals in the Global South (EPW, 2014; IJRTE, 2019).

In summary, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale stands at the crossroads of global and local, tradition and innovation, art, and urbanism. It is both a product and a driver of India’s evolving relationship with the world—a living experiment in how cultural power, economic aspiration, and civic engagement can converge in the age of globalization.

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) is a significant financial and organizational undertaking, requiring the orchestration of multiple funding streams and support systems to sustain its status as India’s largest and most internationally recognized contemporary art event. Its foundation and continued existence are the result of a complex interplay between government support, private patronage, sponsorship, and grassroots mobilization (Biennial Foundation, 2025; Wikipedia, 2025).

From its inception, the Biennale’s scale and ambition demanded a substantial budget. The inaugural edition in 2012 required the mobilization of resources for venue restoration, artist commissions, logistics, and public programming. Expenditures for each edition have ranged from approximately ₹16 crore to ₹28 crore (roughly \$2–3.5 million USD), depending on the scale of programming, number of venues, and international participation (Festivals From India, 2022; Wikipedia, 2025). The budget covers a wide array of costs, including artist fees, production and shipping of artworks, venue refurbishment, staffing, marketing, and educational outreach (Festivals From India, 2022).

The lack of pre-existing infrastructure in Kochi meant that much of the initial expenditure was directed toward adapting heritage buildings, warehouses, and public spaces for contemporary

exhibition use—a process that has continued with each edition as the Biennale expands its footprint across the city (Biennial Foundation, 2025).

The Government of Kerala has played a pivotal role in the establishment and sustenance of the Biennale. The initiative was first proposed by the Department of Cultural Affairs, and the state government remains a principal institutional sponsor (Economic Times, 2016; Wikipedia, 2025). The government's contributions have included direct financial grants, logistical support, and the facilitation of permissions for the use of public and heritage spaces (The Art Newspaper, 2024).

The first edition received a substantial grant from the state, and subsequent editions have continued to benefit from government allocations, though the exact amounts have varied with changing political and fiscal priorities (Festivals From India, 2022). In addition to financial input, the government's endorsement has provided the Biennale with legitimacy and access to administrative resources, helping to streamline bureaucratic processes and attract further private and international support (Biennial Foundation, 2025).

Given the scale of the event and the fluctuations in government funding, private sponsorship and philanthropic patronage have become essential to the Biennale's financial model (The Art Newspaper, 2024). The Kochi Biennale Foundation (KBF) has actively cultivated relationships with Indian and international corporations, local businesses, and prominent art patrons. These sponsors contribute funding, in-kind support, and services such as venue renovation, hospitality, and logistics (Festivals From India, 2022).

Major Indian business families, local entrepreneurs, and cultural philanthropists have supported the Biennale through direct donations or by sponsoring specific projects, artist residencies, or educational programs (The Art Newspaper, 2024). In recent editions, international art organizations and embassies have also provided support, especially for the participation of artists from their respective countries (Biennial Foundation, 2025).

A distinctive feature of the KMB's supporting system is its grassroots orientation. The Biennale has consistently mobilized local communities, volunteers, and small businesses, fostering a sense of collective ownership and participation (Rajagiri OutReach, 2019). Local artisans, craftspeople, and service providers are engaged in the preparation and maintenance of venues, the production of artworks, and the delivery of public programs. This community-driven approach is reflected in the Biennale's reputation as the "People's Biennale," emphasizing accessibility and inclusivity (Festivals From India, 2022).

The KBF has also pioneered crowdfunding campaigns and membership drives, inviting contributions from art lovers across India and the diaspora (Wikipedia, 2025). These efforts not only supplement the budget but also broaden the Biennale's base of supporters, reinforcing its identity as a public-spirited and participatory event (Biennial Foundation, 2025).

The Kochi Biennale Foundation, established in 2010 by Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu, is the principal organizing body responsible for fundraising, curatorial appointments, artist

selection, and overall management (Biennial Foundation, 2025). The Foundation's board includes artists, curators, business leaders, and government representatives, ensuring a balance between artistic autonomy and public accountability (Wikipedia, 2025). The KBF's mandate extends beyond the Biennale itself to include art education, heritage conservation, and the upliftment of traditional art forms (Festivals From India, 2022).

The Foundation has established partnerships with universities, cultural institutes, and NGOs, which contribute expertise, research, and outreach capabilities. These collaborations enhance the Biennale's educational and public engagement programs, further embedding it within Kerala's cultural ecosystem (Rajagiri OutReach, 2019).

In sum, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale's expenditures and supporting system are emblematic of the challenges and opportunities facing large-scale cultural events in emerging economies. The Biennale's ability to blend government backing, private sponsorship, community participation, and institutional partnerships has enabled it to sustain and grow as a truly international platform for contemporary art. However, this complex funding mosaic also requires ongoing negotiation, transparency, and innovation to ensure the Biennale's long-term viability and independence (The Art Newspaper, 2024; Biennial Foundation, 2025).

4.2.3. Major Venues and Sites of the Kochi Muziris Biennale

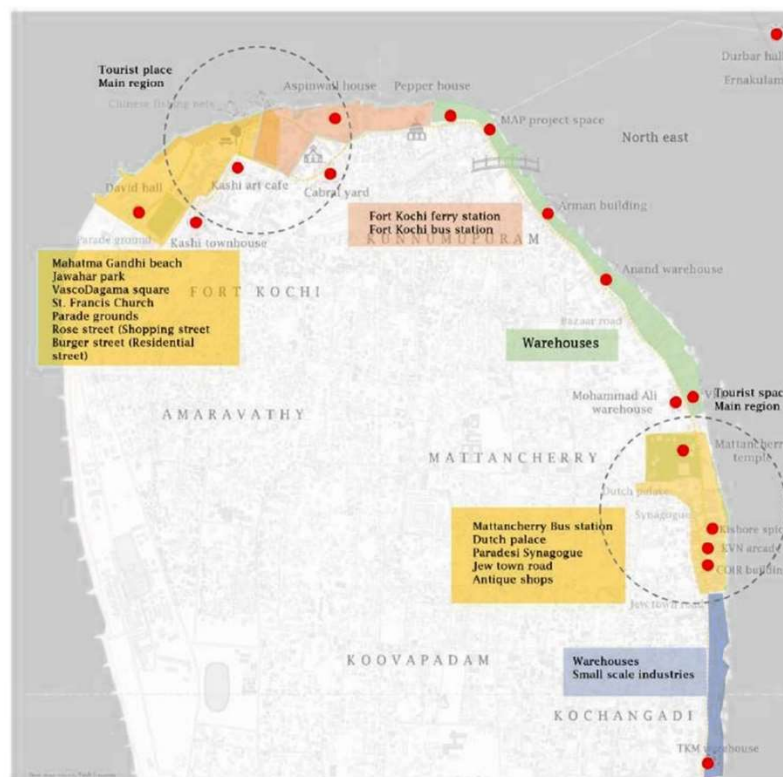


Figure 24 Venues of Kochi Muziris Biennale (Source :Niharika, K.R. (2019). *Biennale as an emerging phenomenon of transformation in the Indian context: A case of Kochi Muziris Biennale, Kochi* (Master's thesis, CEPT University).

The sequence of maps depicting the Kochi-Muziris Biennale venues for the years 2012, 2016, and 2018 reveals evolving patterns in the spatial distribution and clustering of event locations across Fort Kochi. In 2012, the venues are more evenly spread along the northern and eastern waterfront, with a few clusters in the central and western parts of the city. By 2016 and 2018, there is a noticeable intensification and densification of venues in the northwestern sector, particularly near the historic and cultural districts, while the overall coverage along the waterfront remains consistent. This shift suggests an increasing focus on leveraging heritage-rich and culturally significant areas, possibly to maximize visitor engagement and the experiential quality of the Biennale. The clustering of venues in certain areas also indicates a strategic approach to creating walkable cultural corridors, enhancing connectivity between sites, and encouraging pedestrian movement through key public spaces and gathering nodes. Over the years, the spatial arrangement of venues reflects a growing understanding of Fort Kochi's urban fabric, with temporary interventions more closely integrated into the city's historic core and vibrant community spaces, thereby reinforcing the Biennale's role in activating and reimagining the urban landscape.

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale is renowned for its innovative use of diverse venues that reflect the layered history and cosmopolitan character of Kochi. The primary venue, Aspinwall House, is a sprawling 19th-century heritage complex on the Fort Kochi waterfront. Originally built as the headquarters of a British trading company, it features expansive warehouses, offices, and courtyards, making it ideal for large-scale installations and serving as the main hub for the biennale's central exhibition (MAP Academy, 2023; Wikipedia, 2025). Pepper House, another significant site, is a Dutch-era spice warehouse with twin buildings and a central courtyard. It functions as both an exhibition space and an artist residency, and its atmospheric interiors have hosted numerous site-specific installations and performances (Google Arts & Culture, 2024; MAP Academy, 2023).

Durbar Hall, located in Ernakulam, is a restored royal hall originally built by the Maharaja of Cochin. It is used for curated exhibitions and often features prominent Indian artists, providing a formal and accessible setting outside Fort Kochi (MAP Academy, 2023). David Hall, a 17th-century Dutch bungalow in Fort Kochi, offers a blend of colonial architecture and contemporary art, hosting exhibitions, workshops, and community events (Wikipedia, 2025). Cabral Yard, named after the Portuguese explorer Cabral, is an open, tree-shaded ground in Fort Kochi used for outdoor installations, performances, and the biennale's "Art by Children" program, fostering public participation (Holidify, 2023).

Parade Ground, a large open field historically used for colonial military parades, is activated for outdoor sculptures and performances, making art accessible to a broad public (Wikipedia, 2025). The Fort Kochi Beach is another important site, hosting site-specific installations and participatory public art projects that interact with the landscape and the Arabian Sea (Wikipedia, 2025). Kashi Art Gallery & Café, a former Dutch residence turned into a contemporary art gallery and café, serves as a cornerstone of Fort Kochi's art scene, hosting solo and group exhibitions, artist talks, and informal gatherings (MAP Academy, 2023; Frieze, 2016).

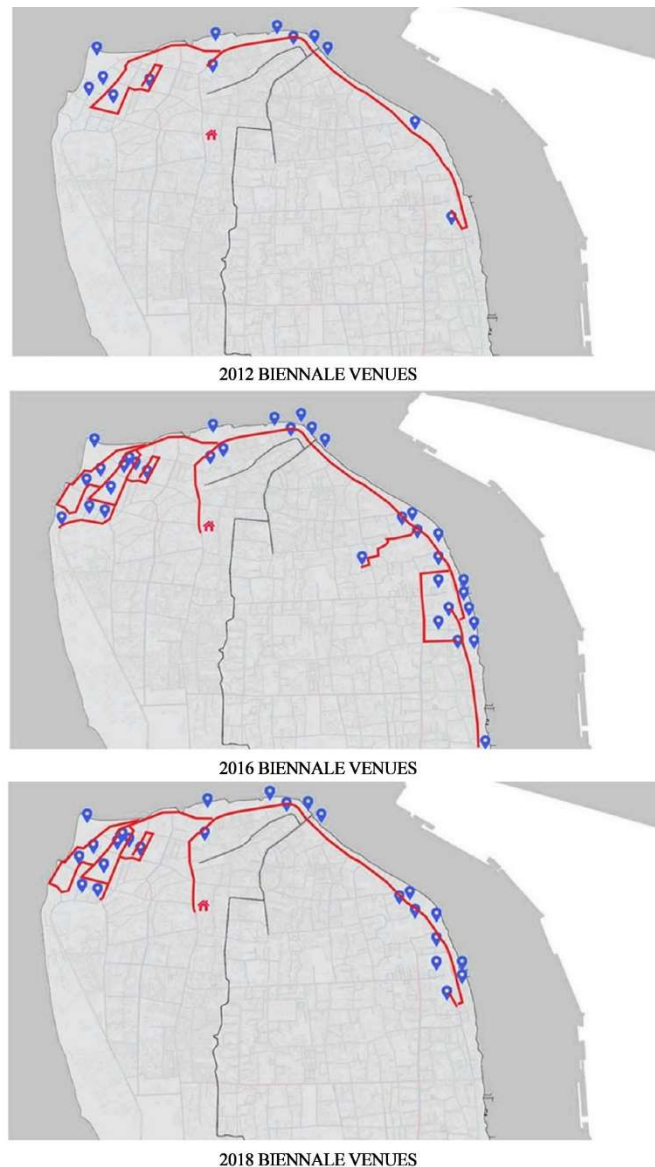


Figure 25 :Venues of Biennale over the years (Source: Author)

In Mattancherry, the Jew Town Road Godown is a warehouse in the historic Jewish quarter, used for immersive installations that reflect the area's multicultural heritage (Wikipedia, 2025). Moidu's Heritage, another heritage property in Mattancherry, has hosted exhibitions and installations engaging with the neighborhood's diverse communities (Wikipedia, 2025). The Rose

Street Bungalow, a colonial-era building in Fort Kochi, offers an intimate setting for contemporary art exhibitions and site-specific projects (Wikipedia, 2025). The Cochin Club, a historic colonial members' club, is occasionally used for biennale-related events and exhibitions, adding to the festival's engagement with Kochi's social history (Wikipedia, 2025). Gallery OED in Mattancherry is a contemporary art space that partners with the biennale for curated exhibitions and collaborative projects (Wikipedia, 2025).

Additional venues have included Mocha Art Café, a Dutch warehouse near the Paradesi Synagogue, and KVN Arcade, a former pepper godown used for the Students' Biennale and special exhibitions, as well as VKL Warehouse, Armaan Building, and Anand Warehouse, all of which are adapted for large-scale installations and experimental projects (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2022; MAP Academy, 2023; The Dilli, 2024). The biennale's flexible and evolving approach to site selection, often incorporating vacant structures, godowns, and public spaces, highlights its commitment to site-specificity, urban regeneration, and community engagement (Google Arts & Culture, 2024; Holidify, 2023).

Heritage buildings in Kochi-Muziris play a transformative role in shaping the overall atmosphere of the Biennale, creating an immersive, site-specific experience that is both culturally resonant and architecturally innovative. By repurposing historic structures—such as colonial warehouses, Dutch bungalows, and royal halls—that were once neglected or underutilized, the Biennale breathes new life into Kochi's built heritage and makes the city's layered history a living backdrop for contemporary art (Academia.edu, 2023; Babu, Priyadarshini, Kaur, 2023); Google Arts & Culture, 2024). This adaptive reuse not only preserves the architectural integrity of these buildings but also fosters a dialogue between past and present, as visitors navigate spaces imbued with the textures, smells, and stories of Kochi's cosmopolitan legacy (Biennial Foundation, 2013; Babu, Priyadarshini, Kaur, 2023; Tehelka.com, as cited in Biennial Foundation, 2013).

The juxtaposition of contemporary installations within these atmospheric, sometimes decaying, environments blurs the boundaries between art and everyday life, enhancing the immersive quality of the Biennale and prompting visitors to reflect on issues of memory, identity, and urban transformation (Babu, Priyadarshini, Kaur, 2023); Academia.edu, 2023). Venues like Aspinwall House, Pepper House, and David Hall are not merely neutral backdrops but active participants in the artistic narrative—their architectural details, patinas, and spatial quirks infuse the exhibitions with a sense of place and authenticity (Babu, Priyadarshini, Kaur, 2023; Google Arts & Culture, 2024). The presence of heritage buildings also catalyzes conservation efforts, raising public awareness about the value of architectural preservation and encouraging sustainable restoration practices (Babu, Priyadarshini, Kaur, 2023; Academia.edu, 2023).

Furthermore, the Biennale's engagement with heritage sites has revived traditional craftsmanship and empowered local communities, as artisans collaborate with artists and architects in the restoration and adaptation of these spaces (Babu, Priyadarshini, Kaur, 2023). The multicultural history embodied in areas like Jew Town is not only preserved but also reactivated, as the influx

of visitors and art enthusiasts revitalizes local businesses and brings renewed attention to the neighborhood's unique character (Babu, Priyadarshini, Kaur, 2023). Ultimately, the use of heritage buildings at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale does more than provide a picturesque setting; it shapes the event's identity as a festival deeply rooted in place, history, and community, while simultaneously inspiring architectural innovation and global dialogue about the future of urban heritage (Academia.edu, 2023; Babu, Priyadarshini, Kaur, 2023) Google Arts & Culture, 2024).

4.2.4. Kochi-Muziris Biennale as a Port Museum.



Figure 26 Kochi Muziris Biennale 2016 (source: photo by Irin Sara Joy)

Since its inception in 2012, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) has positioned itself not merely as an art exhibition but as a living “port museum”—a site where the city’s maritime history, cosmopolitan legacy, and contemporary artistic practices converge (Biennial Foundation, 2025; Chopra, as cited in STIRworld, 2024). This conceptual framing draws directly from Kochi’s identity as a historic port city and the legendary ancient port of Muziris, which for centuries served as a gateway for trade, migration, and cultural exchange between India and the wider world (Biennial Foundation, 2025; Festivals From India, n.d.).

The idea of the Biennale as a port museum is rooted in the notion that ports are not static repositories but dynamic zones of encounter—places where goods, people, and ideas circulate, collide, and transform (Chopra, as cited in STIRworld, 2024). Curators and artists have repeatedly invoked this metaphor to describe the Biennale’s curatorial strategy: rather than confining art to neutral white cubes, the event activates warehouses, spice godowns, and colonial-era buildings, turning the city’s architectural heritage into a living archive (Biennial Foundation, 2025; The Art

Newspaper, 2024). As artist-curator Nikhil Chopra (2024) noted, “A port, after all, serves as a temporary refuge for both expected and unexpected travellers and goods... trade and exchange transform from mere transactions into layers of a richer, more expansive human experience” (Chopra, as cited in STIRworld, 2024).

The Biennale’s site-specific approach is central to its port museum identity. Each edition utilizes a constellation of venues—Aspinwall House, Pepper House, Dutch Warehouse, and others—many of which are former trading depots, bungalows, or godowns (Festivals From India, n.d.; MAP Academy, 2023). These spaces are not merely backdrops but are integral to the meaning of the artworks they house. The weathered walls, exposed beams, and the lingering scent of spices evoke the layered histories of trade, migration, and cultural pluralism that have shaped Kochi and Muziris for centuries (MAP Academy, 2023; Biennial Foundation, 2025).

The port museum concept also underpins the Biennale’s commitment to cosmopolitanism and dialogue. By referencing Muziris—an ancient city buried by floods and myth but recently rediscovered through archaeological work—the Biennale positions itself as a bridge between the lost and the living, the local and the global (Biennial Foundation, 2025). The event’s programming, which includes international artists, “Let’s Talk” forums, and the “Music of Muziris” concert series, is designed to foster encounters across cultures and disciplines (Festivals from India, n.d.; The Art Newspaper, 2024).

During my field visit a 62-year-old lifelong resident of Fort Kochi described the Biennale as “one of the few times when the world looks at us,” noting how it brings “a different kind of energy to the town” and makes “our old buildings come alive,” even if the art itself is sometimes unfamiliar. This sense of pride in Kochi’s global moment is echoed by local business owners, such as a café proprietor who observed said that, “It draws in more customers, but beyond that, it makes the town feel more dynamic. You meet artists, musicians, and travelers who bring fresh ideas. It’s inspiring and makes Fort Kochi feel connected to the world.” For many, the Biennale’s port museum model is not just about art; it is about reviving dormant spaces, fostering economic activity, and reaffirming Kochi’s identity as a cosmopolitan crossroads.

Yet, the port museum is also a site of tension and ambivalence. Residents repeatedly raised concerns about the temporality of the transformation. As a retired teacher put it, “It’s amazing to see spaces like Aspinwall House and Pepper House completely transform. But honestly, the streets get so crowded... and as a resident, it sometimes feels exhausting. Some familiar spots also get taken over for event setups, limiting our access”. After the Biennale ends, key venues are “locked up again,” leaving once-vibrant spaces dormant and reinforcing the sense of missed opportunity for year-round cultural engagement (Rajagiri OutReach, 2019). All these conversations reflects this cyclical activation and abandonment is a central critique in urban geography, where scholars caution that festival-driven regeneration can produce “islands of spectacle” rather than sustained urban vitality (Nair, 2020; Ghosh, 2016).

The inclusivity of the Biennale is another recurring theme. While many residents, from school students to retirees, appreciate the energy and diversity the event brings, several interviewees felt that the Biennale sometimes caters more to outsiders than to locals. A homemaker lamented, “The prices at cafes and shops go up, making it harder for us to enjoy our own neighborhood. And the crowded streets make every day travel a hassle”. Others noted that while the Biennale is accessible to visit, local participation in curation and programming could be stronger, and more year-round workshops and events would help embed the festival’s benefits more deeply in the community.

For urban planners, the Biennale’s dispersed, walkable model offers both inspiration and caution. The event animates streets, courtyards, and public spaces, catalyzing economic and social activity that extends beyond the art world (Google Arts & Culture, 2024; MAP Academy, 2023). A local taxi driver during the survey described Biennale season as “peak tourist time,” with booming business for drivers, homestays, and restaurants. Yet, this seasonal surge also brings congestion, inflated prices, and a sense that the city is being remade for visitors rather than residents—an observation echoed in both interviews and academic critiques (Nair, 2020; EPW, 2014).

The port museum metaphor is further complicated by questions of heritage ownership and access. The possible sale of Aspinwall House to the Coast Guard, for example, sparked anxiety among residents who see it as a “heritage space” that should remain a public cultural venue. As one architecture student noted, “The way old warehouses, streets, and even abandoned buildings become art venues highlights Kochi’s ability to blend history with modern creativity. It made me appreciate the city’s identity in a whole new way.” However, the temporary nature of these transformations—where venues are accessible only during the Biennale—raises questions about the sustainability and inclusivity of cultural regeneration (Rajagiri OutReach, 2019).

From my field visit and noted conversations, despite these challenges, the Biennale’s impact on civic identity and cultural dialogue is profound. Residents and visitors alike describe the event as a “living classroom” and a “reminder of Kochi’s long-standing role as a melting pot of cultures.” The festival’s ability to bring together traditional Kerala art forms and contemporary global expressions is seen as a source of pride and a catalyst for new forms of learning and exchange (Rajagiri OutReach, 2019; The Art Newspaper, 2024). Yet, as a local journalist insightfully summarized in the interview, “Kochi has so many stories to pass on to future generations... but events like the Biennale help narrate it in a way that reaches people globally. It’s not just about art—it’s about keeping our cultural identity alive and making sure it’s seen and understood by a wider audience.”

Urban geographers and planners thus see the Kochi-Muziris Biennale as both a model and a cautionary tale. It demonstrates the transformative power of culture in reimagining urban space and mobilizing heritage, but it also exposes the contradictions of festivalization, gentrification, and the uneven distribution of benefits. The challenge, as articulated by both residents and scholars, is to sustain the creative energy of the port museum year-round, ensuring that heritage spaces remain

accessible, programming is inclusive, and the city's evolving identity is shaped by and for its diverse communities (Nair, 2020; Ghosh, 2016; Biennial Foundation, 2025).

4.2.5 Components of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale: A Multidimensional Analysis

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale: Structural & Social Components and Artistic Disciplines

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) is internationally recognized not only for its artistic excellence but also for its transformative impact on the cultural and urban fabric of Kochi. Its success and complexity stem from the interplay between its structural and social components—such as its organizational model, community engagement, and urban regeneration—and its multidisciplinary artistic disciplines, which include visual arts, literature, performing arts, crafts, and design (Biennial Foundation, 2025; MAP Academy, 2023; The Art Newspaper, 2024).

Structurally, the Biennale is anchored by its main curated exhibition, which is orchestrated by an artistic director or curatorial team who select works from both established and emerging artists across India and the globe (MAP Academy, 2023). The use of heritage venues—such as Aspinwall House, Pepper House, and Durbar Hall—transforms Kochi into a “port museum,” where the city’s layered histories and architectural textures become integral to the exhibition experience (Biennial Foundation, 2025; Ghosh, 2016). This adaptive reuse of historic buildings is widely recognized in heritage and urban studies as a model for sustainable urban regeneration, breathing new life into neglected spaces and fostering a sense of place (Rajagiri OutReach, 2019)

A distinctive social component is the Students’ Biennale, launched in 2014, which provides a platform for young artists from art colleges nationwide. This initiative is widely praised for democratizing access to the Biennale, nurturing new talent, and fostering peer learning and mentorship (MAP Academy, 2023; Rajagiri OutReach, 2019). Educational outreach and public programs—workshops, guided tours, children’s activities, artist talks, and the “Let’s Talk” lecture series—invite critical engagement with contemporary art and urban issues, attracting diverse audiences and encouraging intergenerational dialogue (Biennial Foundation, 2025)

Community engagement is integral to the Biennale’s identity. Hundreds of volunteers, many of them local students and young professionals, are mobilized to support the event, and collaborations with artisans, craftspeople, and small businesses foster a sense of ownership and pride among residents. However, interviews reveal that some locals still feel more like spectators than active participants, highlighting the need for deeper grassroots involvement and more year-round programming.

The Biennale also catalyzes urban transformation. The adaptive reuse of port warehouses, Dutch bungalows, and colonial-era halls not only preserves Kochi’s built heritage but also reimagines it as a stage for global contemporary art (MAP Academy, 2023; Ghosh, 2016). We can see in the interviews the Residents, historians, and planners emphasize how the Biennale “brings new life to Fort Kochi’s historic spaces,” reinforcing the city’s relevance as a cultural hub. However, the

temporality of this transformation is a recurring concern, as venues like Aspinwall House are often locked up after the event, and the benefits of regeneration are not always sustained year-round (ajagiri OutReach, 2019). The economic impact is significant, with the event drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors and boosting business for taxis, hotels, restaurants, and craftspeople. Yet, this also brings challenges such as crowding, inflated prices, and the risk of gentrification, especially since the Biennale coincides with peak tourist season (Nair, 2020).

The Biennale's artistic programming is equally diverse and ambitious. Visual arts are at its core, with painting, sculpture, installation, video art, photography, and new media presented in site-specific ways that respond to the unique architecture and history of each venue (Biennial Foundation, 2025; MAP Academy, 2023). The Biennale also actively supports crafts and traditional art forms, often commissioning local artisans to collaborate with contemporary artists, thereby sustaining local heritage, and reinforcing Kochi's identity as a port city shaped by exchange and creativity

Literature is another key discipline, with the Biennale hosting book launches, poetry readings, panel discussions, and the "Let's Talk" lecture series. These forums foster critical engagement and intellectual exchange, with topics ranging from Kerala's literary heritage to contemporary global issues (Biennial Foundation, 2025)

Performing arts are a vibrant part of the festival, with music concerts, dance performances, street theatre, and experimental sound art animating public spaces, courtyards, and waterfronts. Local musicians, dancers, and theatre groups perform alongside international acts, creating a dynamic environment that blurs the boundaries between performer and audience (MAP Academy, 2023; The Art Newspaper, 2024)

Design is increasingly prominent at the Biennale, with exhibitions and workshops exploring graphic design, architecture, urban planning, and product design. The event's infrastructure—wayfinding systems, signage, exhibition layouts—reflects thoughtful design, often created in collaboration with leading Indian and international designers (MAP Academy, 2023). The Students' Biennale and collateral projects frequently showcase experimental design practices, and architecture students and professionals highlight the Biennale's role in inspiring new approaches to adaptive reuse and urban regeneration.

The interplay between the Biennale's structural and social components and its artistic disciplines is what gives the event its distinctive character. Museums and galleries serve as platforms for visual art, design, and performance; literature and public programs foster dialogue; educational outreach and community engagement build inclusivity; and urban transformation and economic impact shape the city's future. The festival's multidisciplinary model is widely celebrated for its inclusivity and its ability to engage diverse audiences. Residents, students, business owners, and tourists all describe the event as a "living classroom" and a "melting pot of cultures," where art, literature, performance, and design intersect in everyday life.

Yet, interviews and academic critiques reveal persistent tensions—between temporary spectacle and lasting change, global visibility and local inclusion, and the need for more grassroots, year-round programming (Nair, 2020; Ghosh, 2016). Many locals appreciate the economic and cultural boost but also express concerns about crowding, inflated prices, and the sense that the event sometimes caters more to outsiders than to residents. The temporality of the transformation—where venues are vibrant during the Biennale but dormant afterward—remains a challenge for sustainable urban and cultural development.

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale's multifaceted structure—spanning both structural/social components and artistic disciplines—defines its identity as an open, participatory platform for cultural dialogue and renewal. This approach positions Kochi as a global hub for creativity and exchange while highlighting the ongoing need for inclusive, sustainable cultural practices that benefit both residents and visitors (Biennial Foundation, 2025; MAP Academy, 2023).

4.3. Thematic Analysis

This chapter presents a comprehensive thematic analysis of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) as a temporary urban intervention (TUI) in Fort Kochi, Kerala. Drawing on 23 semi-structured interviews with local residents, business owners, artists, visitors, and urban professionals, as well as extensive field observations and comparative literature, the analysis is organized under five main themes. Each theme is critically examined with reference to both the transformative potential and the inherent challenges of TUIs in the Global South.

The following are the five themes:

4.3.1. Public Space and Urban Occupation

4.3.2. Retail Gentrification and Socio-Economic Change

4.3.3. Institutional Frameworks and Governance Gaps

4.3.4. Participation, Belonging, and Identity

4.3.5. Temporal Cycles and Rhythmic Urbanism

4.3.1 Public Space and Urban Occupation

Public spaces are critical arenas where urban life unfolds, especially in historic contexts like Fort Kochi. Temporary urban interventions, such as the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB), creatively reimagine these spaces, activating them as sites of cultural engagement and social interaction. Understanding how TUIs transform public space and urban occupation is vital to grasp their role in fostering inclusive urban environments in the Global South (Lefebvre, 1991; Madanipour, 2010). This theme explores how the Biennale utilizes Fort Kochi's colonial-era buildings, warehouses, and streets to blur boundaries between art and everyday life, thereby reshaping spatial practices and public accessibility. It also considers how tactical urbanism projects improve pedestrian infrastructure and public realm quality, enhancing livability and walkability in Fort Kochi's historic core (Hou, 2010; Zukin, 2010).

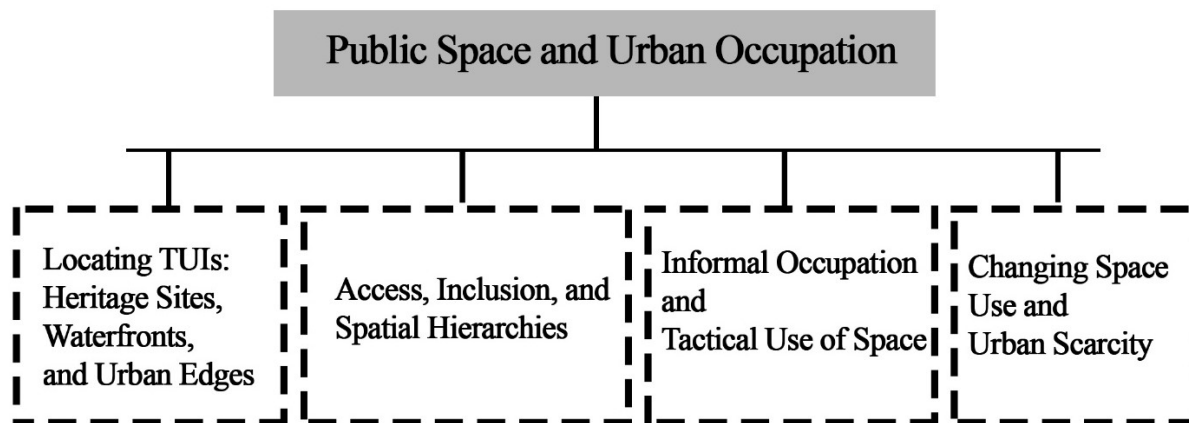


Figure 27 Theme 1 Flow chart (source : Author)

The selection, transformation, and afterlife of intervention sites are central to understanding the impact and limitations of Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) in Kochi. Unlike the “meanwhile spaces” of the Global North, which often serve as precursors to gentrification or as testbeds for urban policy (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Oswalt et al., 2013), the typologies in Kochi reflect a layered negotiation of heritage, informality, and contested urban identities. This section critically examines the spatial typologies of intervention sites in Kochi, drawing on primary interviews, published surveys (KBF, 2018), government reports, and comparative literature on Southern urbanism (Roy, 2009; Simone, 2004).

A. Locating TUIs: Heritage Sites, Waterfronts, and Urban Edges.

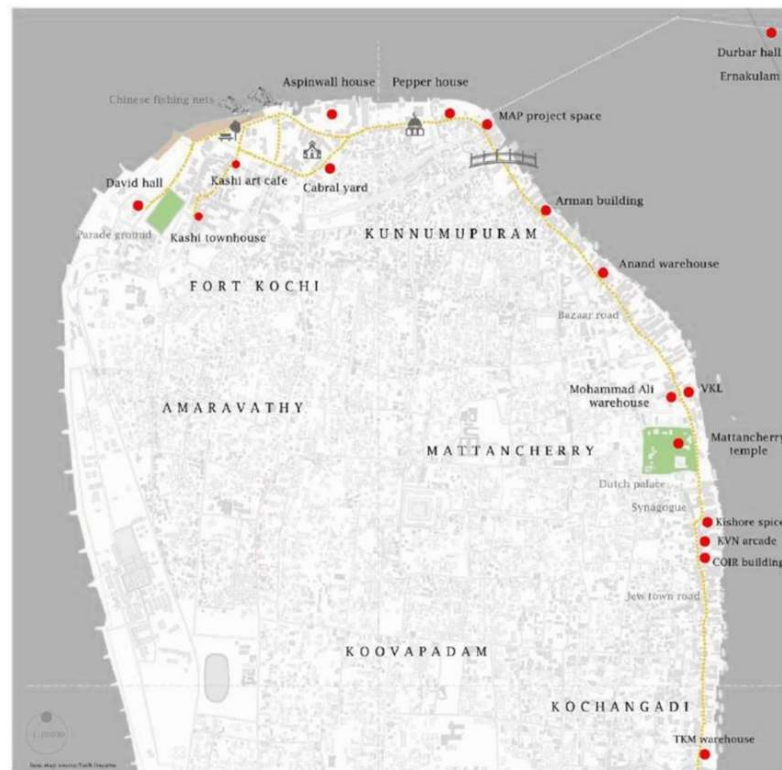


Figure 28 Venues of Kochi Muziris Biennale (source :Niharika, K.R. (2019). Biennale as an emerging phenomenon of transformation in the Indian context: A case of Kochi Muziris Biennale, Kochi (Master's thesis, CEPT University).

The spatial strategy of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) is rooted in the deliberate reoccupation of Fort Kochi's most historically and symbolically significant sites—Aspinwall House, Parade Ground, the waterfronts, and the city's intricate alleys (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023 & field observation). These locations, typically underutilized or neglected outside the Biennale season, are temporarily transformed into vibrant exhibition venues, performance spaces, and gathering points for both local and global audiences. This approach mirrors a global trend in creative city-making, where cultural events are harnessed to reactivate derelict urban spaces and catalyze regeneration (Evans, 2005; Colomb, 2012; Richards & Palmer, 2010).

Yet, the transformation is fundamentally temporary. Field observations and interviews indicate that nearly 80% of these venues revert to their previous state of neglect or restricted access once the Biennale concludes. This pattern of “pop-up urbanism” (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Oswalt et al., 2013) is particularly acute in postcolonial contexts, where resource constraints and weak cultural policy frameworks often preclude the long-term institutionalization of such spaces (Miraftab, 2016; McFarlane, 2011).



Figure 30: Condition of Anand Warehouse during field visit (source Author)



Figure 29: Condition of Pepper house during Field Visit (source: Author)



Figure 31 External view of the Aspinwall House, one of the main venues for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (source:)

The most prominent intervention sites in Kochi are its colonial-era warehouses and compounds, such as Aspinwall House, Pepper House, and Anand Warehouse. These structures, often underutilized or derelict for much of the year, are periodically transformed into vibrant art venues during the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. The adaptive reuse of these spaces is emblematic of a Southern

approach to urban regeneration, where the lack of permanent institutional frameworks is compensated by periodic bursts of cultural activity (Evans, 2005; Gravari-Barbas, 2018).

Field interviews reveal the ambivalence of this transformation. A local historian observed that “the Biennale brings new life to Fort Kochi’s historic spaces,” yet lamented that these venues revert to inaccessibility after the event, reinforcing cycles of dormancy and spectacle. This aligns with Gotham’s (2005) critique of festival urbanism, where the temporary re-signification of space can mask deeper processes of exclusion and dispossession.

Aspinwall House, the Biennale’s flagship venue, exemplifies this strategy. During the event, its colonial-era warehouses and courtyards are converted into galleries and installation sites, drawing thousands of visitors daily (field observation). As one 23-year-old architecture student observed, “The way the Biennale repurposes Fort Kochi’s heritage buildings is fascinating. It shows how old warehouses and streets can be reimagined as cultural hubs”. However, the transformation is fundamentally temporary. Once the Biennale ends, Aspinwall House is shuttered, and its future remains uncertain due to government plans for its transfer to the Coast Guard—a development that has generated significant anxiety among local stakeholders. A 59-year-old resident expressed this concern: “If Aspinwall House is sold, we lose a major venue. Instead of shutting it down after the Biennale, it should be open for exhibitions and performances year-round”. This reflects a recurring dilemma highlighted in festival urbanism literature: the tension between temporary cultural activation and the risk of long-term privatization or loss of public heritage assets (Gravari-Barbas, 2018; Desai, 2020).

In addition to major venues like Aspinwall House and Parade Ground, **David Hall** is a key heritage site for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. This restored Dutch bungalow near Parade Ground functions as both an art gallery and a café, blending cultural exhibition with hospitality. During the Biennale, David Hall hosts various exhibitions and events, providing an intimate setting that showcases contemporary art within a historic architectural context. The venue fosters engagement between artists, visitors, and the local community, while the café supports informal cultural exchange, making it a vibrant hub during the festival season (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023;; Biennale.com, n.d.).



Figure 32 David Hall during site visit(source: Author)

Beyond David Hall, several **smaller exhibition spaces and galleries** in Fort Kochi operate year-round, renting their premises for exhibitions and cultural events. These venues, often housed in heritage or repurposed colonial buildings, contribute to Fort Kochi's vibrant but fragmented art scene. Unlike the large-scale Biennale venues, these spaces offer more frequent, smaller-scale opportunities for local and emerging artists to display their work. Many also run cafés or eateries, which help sustain visitor foot traffic and provide informal gathering spots for artists, tourists, and residents alike. This dual function of exhibition and café supports a grassroots cultural economy that persists beyond the Biennale's temporary interventions (IJCRT, 2023).

The integration of cafés with exhibition spaces is a notable feature of Fort Kochi's cultural landscape. These cafés enhance visitor experience by offering refreshments and serve as informal cultural venues where conversations, performances, and smaller art shows occur year-round. This model aligns with global trends in alternative art spaces, where commercial hospitality venues support and promote local art without the pressures of traditional gallery sales dynamics. The synergy benefits both the cultural scene and local businesses, creating a sustainable ecosystem for art outside the Biennale period. Observations during site visits confirm that such spaces foster a sense of community and continuity, even when larger venues like Aspinwall House remain closed.

Thus, while the Kochi-Muziris Biennale temporarily transforms major heritage sites into global art destinations, smaller venues like David Hall and café-gallery hybrids play a crucial role in maintaining ongoing cultural activity, supporting local artists, and sustaining Fort Kochi's creative vibrancy throughout the year.

The lack of year-round programming or institutional stewardship for these heritage sites represents a missed opportunity for sustained urban vitality. Official documents such as the Kerala Tourism Policy (2022) acknowledge the Biennale's cultural value but remain silent on the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings beyond the event period, reflecting a governance gap that is characteristic of many Southern cities (Nair, 2021).



Figure 33 : Koodaaram: The Pavilion for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2018-19 (Source: Anagram Architects, n.d., <https://anagramarchitects.com/?portfolio=koodaaram-the-pavilion-for-the-kochi-muziris-biennale-2018-19>)

Spaces such as Parade Ground and Cabral Yard serve as flexible, high-capacity venues for installations, performances, and community gatherings. As noted in the KBF Impact Survey (2018), over 60% of respondents cited Parade Ground as a key site for social interaction and cultural engagement during the event.



Figure 34: Kochi Muziris Biennale installations at waterfronts of fortkochi Mad Crab (Photograph by Marco Saroldi, 2014). Reprinted from Whorled Explorations - Kochi Muziris Biennale 2014 (<https://photoit.photoshelter.com/image/I0000rYfryTzq3Rw>)

Parade Ground, historically a civic and recreational space, is similarly transformed. During the Biennale, it is fenced, ticketed, and programmed for performances and installations, temporarily residents who previously relied on the ground for informal sports and socializing. This transformation is not without contestation. Residents interviewed for this study consistently reported that the fencing and programming of these grounds often prioritizes tourists and event-goers over everyday users, introducing new spatial hierarchies and exclusionary practices. A retired teacher remarked, “Some familiar spots also get taken over for event setups, limiting our access.” This echoes Smith’s (2016) findings on the use of public spaces as event venues, where the exceptional often overrides the everyday. One lifelong resident voiced this frustration: “I’ve lived here all my life, and the Biennale is one of the few times when the world looks at us. But sometimes, I feel like just a spectator in my own town. It’s not always for us, the locals” . This dynamic is consistent with findings from Berlin, Istanbul, and New Orleans, where event-driven interventions have led to the periodic “privatization” of public space, raising questions about inclusivity and sustainability (Smith, 2016; Gotham, 2005; Colomb, 2012; Kuymulu, 2013). The post-event reality is equally telling. Once the Biennale concludes, these grounds often return to a state of neglect or routine use, with little evidence of sustained community benefit. This cyclical pattern of activation and dormancy points to the limitations of TUIs in addressing deeper structural issues of public space provision and management (Gravari-Barbas, 2018).

The waterfronts of Fort Kochi,- along the Arabian Sea and the backwaters- often neglected and under-maintained, become sites for large-scale sculptures, interactive installations, and temporary markets during the Biennale. The interplay between water, land, and urban life is central to the city’s spatial identity and is leveraged during TUIs to create dramatic, memorable experiences (Evans, 2005; Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2018). These interventions highlight the latent potential of these urban edges but also expose the stark contrast between the temporality of festival-led

activation and the persistent lack of investment in public waterfront infrastructure (Desai, 2020; Richards & Palmer, 2010). These waterfront interventions serve as liminal spaces, connecting heritage districts to contemporary urban life and facilitating encounters between diverse publics. However, their accessibility is often uneven, with some installations requiring tickets or being programmed for specific audiences. Field observations and interviews reveal that while these sites are visually open and symbolically significant, they can also reinforce spatial hierarchies and exclusionary practices, particularly for marginalized groups.

Several interviewees noted that while the waterfronts are “alive” during the Biennale, they quickly return to neglect, with limited public amenities and ongoing encroachment by private interests. As a local business owner lamented, “During the Biennale, the waterfront is beautiful and bustling, but after it’s over, it’s like the city forgets about it again”.

The alleys and secondary streets of Fort Kochi are also temporarily transformed by the Biennale’s presence. Field notes document how these spaces, typically characterized by informal commerce, residential life, and everyday mobility, become sites for ephemeral street art, pop-up tea stalls, and grassroots performances. This “tactical urbanism” (Hou, 2010; Finn, 2014) blurs the boundaries between formal and informal, public, and private, and highlights the creative agency of both local and visiting artists. Yet, these transformations are fleeting—once the Biennale ends, the alleys revert to their previous state, and informal vendors often face eviction as part of event “cleanup” drives. As a street vendor explained, “They shoo us away if tourists complain—our chai stalls ‘spoil the aesthetic’”.

Yet, this vibrancy is highly contingent. Informal economies—street vendors, rickshaw drivers, pop-up cafés—thrive during the event, capitalizing on increased footfall. However, as soon as the event ends, the economic activity dissipates, and the actors who animate these spaces are left vulnerable. This precariousness is a recurring theme in both published literature (Simone, 2004; Nair, 2021) and field interviews, underscoring the need for more inclusive and durable urban policies.

These spatial interventions must be evaluated for both their immediate vibrancy and their long-term social equity. The literature on festival urbanism and event-led regeneration consistently warns that such events, while successful in reactivating neglected spaces and attracting global attention, often fail to provide sustained benefits for local communities (Quinn, 2005; Richards & Palmer, 2010; Gravari-Barbas, 2018). As in Kochi, similar patterns have been observed in Berlin’s creative districts, where temporary art-led revitalization led to gentrification and the displacement of long-term residents (Colomb, 2012), and in Istanbul, where biennial-driven redevelopment of waterfront warehouses sparked debates over public access and cultural gentrification (Kuymulu, 2013).

Survey data and interviews reinforce the uneven nature of these spatial changes. Only 40% of local residents reported feeling included in the Biennale, while 60% felt excluded, compared to 90% of visitors who found the event inclusive (fb). A 31-year-old café owner captured the dual nature of

these interventions: “For me, the Biennale is both business and culture. It draws in more customers, but beyond that, it makes the town feel more dynamic. You meet artists, musicians, and travelers who bring fresh ideas. It’s inspiring and makes Fort Kochi feel connected to the world”. . In contrast, a small shop owner pointed out, “The Biennale benefits high-end restaurants, art cafés, and boutique hotels. But what about us? Tourists don’t come to buy daily essentials, and even locals cut back on spending because everything becomes expensive”.

Moreover, both field observations and published studies confirm that nearly 80% of Biennale venues revert to neglect or restricted access after the event concludes (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Oswalt et al., 2013). This raises critical questions about the sustainability and legacy of such interventions, echoing concerns in the literature about the “eventification” of urban policy and the risk of “museumification” of living urban spaces (Gravari-Barbas, 2018; Desai, 2020; Colomb, 2012).I

It is crucial to interrogate the governance and policy frameworks that underpin these transformations. Official documents such as the Kochi Master Plan (2022) and Kerala Tourism Policy (2022) acknowledge the role of cultural events in urban regeneration but lack concrete provisions for the long-term stewardship or public accessibility of these reactivated spaces (Kochi Master Plan, 2022; Kerala Tourism Policy, 2022). This policy vacuum is mirrored in the experiences of local stakeholders, who repeatedly expressed concerns about the absence of year-round cultural programming and the risk of losing key venues to privatization.

Comparative literature also highlights the need for integrating temporary interventions into broader urban strategies that ensure spatial justice, economic equity, and sustained community engagement (Miraftab, 2016; Foster & Iaione, 2016; Roy, 2005). In cities like Melbourne and Montreal, policy frameworks have been developed to transition temporary cultural uses into permanent community assets, emphasizing participatory planning and the co-production of public space (Shaw, 2013; Bain & Landau, 2019). Such approaches could inform future editions of the Biennale and similar interventions in Fort Kochi.

The spatial typologies of intervention sites in Kochi’s TUIs—from heritage warehouses and public grounds to streets, alleys, and waterfronts—are central to the city’s evolving urban identity. These sites are not merely physical backdrops but active agents in the negotiation of memory, belonging, and cultural production. Their transformation during TUIs exemplifies the improvisational, negotiated, and often contested nature of Southern urbanism, revealing both the potential and the limitations of temporary interventions as tools for inclusive urban transformation. For urban planners and geographers, the challenge lies in moving beyond episodic spectacle toward more durable, equitable, and community-driven models of spatial activation.

The spatial geography of the KMB demonstrates both the transformative potential and the inherent limitations of temporary urban interventions in the Global South. While the Biennale successfully reactivates heritage sites, waterfronts, and urban edges, fostering cultural exchange and economic activity, these benefits are often short-lived and unevenly distributed. The challenge for urban

planners and policymakers is to move beyond the spectacle of temporary occupation and toward models of sustained, inclusive, and community-driven urban regeneration (Miraftab, 2016; Foster & Iaione, 2016; Roy, 2005; Quinn, 2005).

Ownership and the Aspinwall Dilemma:



Figure 35 : Entrance of Aspin wall (Source: Rahul Devakumar, 2018, <https://www.rahuldevakumar.com/2018/01/2018-its-biennale-year-once-again.html>)

Ownership and the fate of Aspinwall House have become central to the ongoing debates about the future of cultural infrastructure and public space in Fort Kochi, especially in the context of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and the broader landscape of temporary urban interventions in the Global South. My October 2024 fieldwork, including direct interviews with residents, artists, students, business owners, and tourists, as well as a review of published surveys, news coverage, and academic literature, makes it clear that who owns and controls these spaces fundamentally shapes their accessibility, cultural value, and long-term impact.

Aspinwall House is not merely a venue but a cultural anchor for the city and a symbol of Kochi's emergence as an international art destination. The anxiety over its possible transfer to the Coast Guard, widely reported in *The Hindu* (2023), *The New Indian Express* (2024), and *The Times of India* (2024), has galvanized public opinion and advocacy efforts. Residents and artists consistently expressed concern that such a move would mean the loss of a vital public asset. A 59-year-old local resident told me, "If Aspinwall House is sold, we lose a major venue. Instead of shutting it down after the Biennale, it should be open for exhibitions and performances year-round". This concern was echoed by a retired teacher who said, "Aspinwall House and Pepper House completely transform during the Biennale, but after that, they're locked up and inaccessible. It's frustrating to see spaces come alive only to return to dormancy. If it's not going to be used properly throughout the year, then what's the point?". These views are reinforced in the Kochi Biennale Foundation's 2018 Impact Survey, where over 80% of visitors named Aspinwall as the

most memorable Biennale site and a majority of locals voiced frustration that it remains inaccessible outside festival months.

This dilemma is not merely an administrative or logistical matter but strikes at the heart of debates about the “right to the city” (Lefebvre, 1968; Purcell, 2002), public space, and the risks of market-driven urbanism. Multiple interviewees expressed deep concern about the possibility of Aspinwall House being permanently closed to the public or repurposed for non-cultural uses. As one 59-year-old resident explained, “Fort Kochi has always attracted international tourists, even long before the Biennale started in 2012. But the Biennale brought a whole new energy, turning forgotten spaces into buzzing cultural hubs. Now, after the event, places like Aspinwall House get locked up again, and there’s talk of the government taking it over for the Coast Guard. If that happens, we might lose a major venue for future Biennales. Even without the Biennale, you still see foreign tourists everywhere, so sometimes it feels like the place is shaped more for them than for residents. But during the Biennale, it’s a happy season—cafés, restaurants, local businesses, and auto drivers all benefit”. This sentiment was echoed by younger residents, who noted that the closure of Aspinwall after each Biennale leaves parts of the city feeling abandoned and disrupts the continuity of cultural life: “After the Biennale, some key venues get locked up, making certain spaces feel abandoned, while others continue hosting smaller exhibitions. Accessibility changes too, which is something I noticed. But during that short period when the Biennale is on, the place feels truly alive.”

The precarious status of Aspinwall House highlights the tension between temporary spectacle and sustained public benefit. While the Biennale transforms the site into a vibrant, accessible space, its closure for the rest of the year underscores how cultural infrastructure in Indian cities often remains vulnerable to shifting state priorities and commercial pressures (Bhan, 2016; Gotham, 2005). The threat of privatization or militarization of such a landmark—especially when justified under the guise of “public interest” or “security”—raises critical questions about whose interests are truly being served and who gets to shape the city’s cultural future. As one interviewee argued, “Instead of shutting it down after the Biennale, it should be open for exhibitions and performances year-round”. This call for continuous, democratic access to Aspinwall House resonates with Lefebvre’s (1968) vision of the city as an “oeuvre”—a collective work shaped by its inhabitants—and with Purcell’s (2002) argument that the right to the city includes the right to participate in the production and use of urban space.

The Aspinwall dilemma also reflects broader patterns observed in festival-oriented urbanism globally, where iconic sites are temporarily opened up for cultural events only to be re-closed, commodified, or repurposed afterward (Ponzini & Rossi, 2010; Watson, 2014). In Fort Kochi, the uncertainty surrounding Aspinwall’s ownership has already had tangible impacts: the 2024-25 Biennale was postponed, and local artists, vendors, and hospitality businesses reported a significant decline in activity and income during what would have been the festival season. For many, the loss of Aspinwall as a public venue would not only diminish the Biennale’s global stature but also erode the everyday cultural and economic vitality that the event helps sustain.

This struggle over the fate of Aspinwall House is emblematic of the ongoing contestation over public space in rapidly changing cities. It underscores the need for policies that safeguard cultural commons from privatization and ensure that iconic venues remain accessible for diverse, year-round uses. As the interviews and fieldwork reveal, the future of Aspinwall House is not just about a building—it is about the collective right of Kochi's residents to shape their city's cultural life, resist exclusionary urban policies, and preserve the fragile gains made through events like the Biennale. Without such commitments, the promise of inclusive, creative urbanism risks being undermined by the very forces of market-driven development and state control that the Biennale seeks to challenge (Roy, 2005; Miraftab, 2016).

My observations and interviews also reveal that the closure of Aspinwall House after the Biennale undermines the sustainability of Kochi's cultural ecosystem and the livelihoods of informal actors who depend on year-round creative activity and tourism. Vendors, rickshaw drivers, and café owners described Aspinwall as an “anchor” for their businesses, noting that its closure leads to a drop in footfall and economic opportunity. A local café owner explained, “For me, the Biennale is both business and culture. It draws in more customers, but beyond that, it makes the town feel more dynamic. You meet artists, musicians, and travelers who bring fresh ideas. It's inspiring and makes Fort Kochi feel connected to the world”. Taxi drivers and shopkeepers similarly noted that while Fort Kochi always has tourists, the Biennale season is “on another level,” and the closure of key venues like Aspinwall House after the event means a return to quieter streets and lower earnings.

The issue of ownership is not just about legal title or administrative control; it is about the right to the city and the power to shape urban life, as theorized by Lefebvre (1968) and expanded by Purcell (2002). When venues like Aspinwall are publicly owned or managed with a civic mandate, they can serve as platforms for inclusive, year-round cultural programming and community engagement. This has been demonstrated in cities like Berlin, where public-private partnerships and legal protections have enabled former industrial sites to become vibrant, accessible cultural hubs (Oswalt et al., 2013). In contrast, ambiguous or privatized ownership, or conversion to non-public uses, often leads to exclusion, dormancy, or even erasure of cultural memory, as seen in the fate of temporary venues in London and Istanbul (Ferrerri, 2015; Shaw, 2013).

In the Indian context, the stakes are heightened by the scarcity of accessible public space and the pressures of market-driven urbanism. Roy (2005) and Miraftab (2016) have shown that the privatization or militarization of heritage sites in Indian cities frequently results in reduced civic access, the erosion of local identity, and the marginalization of grassroots cultural production. My interviews and field observations confirm that the closure of Aspinwall House after the Biennale undermines the sustainability of Kochi's cultural ecosystem and the livelihoods of informal actors who depend on year-round creative activity and tourism. Vendors, rickshaw drivers, and café owners described Aspinwall as an “anchor” for their businesses, noting that its closure leads to a drop in footfall and economic opportunity.

The media has played a significant role in amplifying these concerns. The Hindu (2023) quoted artists and activists who called for Aspinwall to remain a “living, breathing space for artists and the community all year.” The New Indian Express (2024) reported on petitions and public meetings urging the Kerala government to preserve the site as a public cultural asset. The Times of India (2024) highlighted how uncertainty over Aspinwall’s future has already affected planning for upcoming Biennale editions and discouraged smaller cultural organizations from investing in long-term programming.

The academic literature on TUIs and urban commons underscores why ownership matters so deeply. Bishop and Williams (2012) and Oswalt et al. (2013) argue that the success and legacy of temporary interventions depend on the long-term accessibility and stewardship of the spaces they activate. Ferreri (2015) and Hou (2010) further note that when such spaces are managed as urban commons, they can foster experimentation, inclusion, and grassroots participation, but when they are privatized or militarized, the potential for democratic urban transformation is severely constrained.

The struggle over Aspinwall House is thus emblematic of broader conflicts over the governance of urban public spaces in the Global South. As Purcell (2002) notes, the right to the city is fundamentally about “who has the power to shape the processes of urbanization.” In Kochi, the debate is not just about preserving a building, but about safeguarding the city’s right to creative expression, economic opportunity, and collective memory. Residents, artists, and civil society groups have called for transparent, community-driven stewardship of Aspinwall, with proposals ranging from public trusts to partnerships between the state and the Biennale Foundation, or even designating the site as a protected cultural commons.

Internationally, successful models have involved public or community ownership and participatory management. In Berlin, the Tempelhof project and Holzmarkt collective have shown that legal protections and public mandates can ensure long-term accessibility and cultural productivity (Oswalt et al., 2013). In contrast, the loss of temporary venues to private development in London’s East End and Istanbul has led to the displacement of cultural initiatives and the loss of urban diversity (Ferreri, 2015; Shaw, 2013).

In conclusion, the uncertain fate of Aspinwall House stands as a test case for the governance of public space and cultural heritage in rapidly transforming cities. Ownership is not merely a technical or legal issue, but a core determinant of the inclusivity, accessibility, and legacy of temporary urban interventions. The ongoing debate over Aspinwall will shape not only the trajectory of the Biennale but also the broader possibilities for democratic, community-oriented urban transformation in Kochi. Policymakers, cultural leaders, and civil society must recognize that the stewardship of such venues is central to realizing the full potential of TUIs as engines of social, economic, and cultural renewal.

B. Access, Inclusion, and Spatial Hierarchies

Access and inclusion are central to the discourse on public space and urban interventions, particularly in rapidly transforming cities of the Global South. In Kochi, the periodic reactivation of heritage spaces, public grounds, and urban edges through the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) and related TUIs has generated both excitement and ambivalence among residents, visitors, and policymakers. This section critically examines how access is structured, who is included or excluded, and how spatial hierarchies are produced and reproduced through these interventions. Drawing from field interviews, the KMB Impact Study, local and national newspaper coverage, and scholarly literature, a nuanced picture emerges: the Biennale is a catalyst for cultural vibrancy and economic activity, yet it also reproduces cycles of exclusion, spatial stratification, and contested urban citizenship.

During the Biennale, heritage venues such as Aspinwall House, Pepper House, and Parade Ground are temporarily opened to a cross-section of society, including local residents, national and international tourists, artists, students, and business owners. The KMB Impact Study (Kochi Biennale Foundation [KBF], 2018) reports that 82% of surveyed visitors found the Biennale “highly accessible,” and field interviews echo this, with a BFA student describing the event as “a blend of art, history, and culture, unique to Kochi.” A café owner noted the dual impact: “For me, the Biennale is both business and culture. It draws in more customers, but beyond that, it makes the town feel more dynamic. You meet artists, musicians, and travelers who bring fresh ideas. It’s inspiring and makes Fort Kochi feel connected to the world”. Local and national newspapers such as *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express* have highlighted this seasonal transformation, describing Fort Kochi as a “global art village” and emphasizing the festival’s role in boosting the local economy and placing Kochi on the international cultural map.

However, this accessibility is highly conditional. Access is mediated by ticketing, fencing, signage, and visible security—mechanisms necessary for crowd management and artwork protection, but which also create barriers for certain segments of the population. A recurring theme in the interviews is the simultaneous pride and alienation experienced by locals. Residents like the 62-year-old lifelong Kochiite and the 59-year-old shopkeeper express pride in Kochi’s global recognition and the revitalization of heritage spaces. The Biennale is described as a “happy season” and a time when “the world looks at us.” However, this pride is often accompanied by frustration. The phenomenon of feeling like “spectators rather than active participants” is echoed by several interviewees, who note that their favorite cafés and public spaces become inaccessible or unaffordable during the event. Several local residents, including a 68-year-old homemaker and a retired teacher, observed that during the Biennale, “the prices at cafes and shops go up, making it harder for us to enjoy our own neighborhood,” and “familiar spots get taken over for event setups, limiting our access”. The KMB Impact Study corroborates these sentiments, finding that some of local respondents felt “less welcome” or “priced out” of certain venues during the event season. This aligns with Ferreri’s (2015) critique of “pop-up exclusivity,” where the temporary opening of spaces is followed by a return to exclusion and privatization.

The cyclical transformation of these venues—open during the Biennale, locked and dormant afterward—blurs the distinction between public and private, every day and exceptional. Residents repeatedly express frustration at this pattern. A retired teacher commented, “It’s strange to see a place so full of life suddenly locked up. Some murals and smaller art pieces remain, but the transformation isn’t permanent enough to make a lasting impact” . The Hindu (2023) has reported on the “deadening of cultural spaces” post-Biennale, noting that the lack of year-round programming leaves key venues underutilized and inaccessible. This oscillation is not unique to Kochi; Gotham (2005) and Smith (2016) describe similar cycles in cities shaped by festival urbanism, where event spaces are only temporarily accessible and often revert to private or restricted use. The blurring of public and private boundaries in Kochi during the Kochi-Muziris Biennale is vividly illustrated by both field interviews and published studies. Venues like Aspinwall House and Pepper House, which are historically public or semi-public assets, become temporarily privatized during the Biennale through ticketing, event infrastructure, and selective programming. Residents and visitors alike notice that these spaces, which “come alive” during the festival, are otherwise locked and inaccessible for much of the year. As one local resident put it, “After the event, places like Aspinwall House get locked up again... If it’s not going to be used properly throughout the year, then what’s the point?” .This temporary openness is tied to the economic and symbolic value of the event, with little provision for sustained community access or year-round programming. The risk of permanent privatization or repurposing—such as the potential sale of Aspinwall House to the Coast Guard—heightens local anxieties about losing vital cultural infrastructure. This concern is echoed in the literature, which notes that festival urbanism often commodifies heritage, turning shared spaces into exclusive, event-driven venues (Gravari-Barbas, 2018; Evans, 2005).Further, field responses highlight how this boundary blurring is not just about access but also about identity and belonging. While the Biennale brings global attention and economic benefits, many locals feel like spectators rather than active participants, and express frustration that “the event is more for outsiders... Many of us are just spectators rather than active participants.” After the Biennale, the return to locked venues reinforces exclusion and a sense of lost opportunity for ongoing cultural engagement. This episodic stewardship—where public spaces are animated for a few months and then revert to dormancy—reflects a broader governance gap in Kochi, as discussed by Nair (2021) and acknowledged in the Kerala Tourism Policy (2022). Without a plan for inclusive, year-round use, these heritage spaces risk becoming “dead spaces again,” valued only for their role in major events rather than as continuous cultural commons for the city.

Spatial hierarchies are further produced by the influx of tourists and event-goers, which intensifies competition for public amenities and drives up prices for food, accommodation, and transport (KBF, 2018). Local businesses, taxi drivers, and informal vendors benefit from increased demand, but these gains are volatile and short-lived. As a local taxi driver explained, “During the Biennale, prices naturally go up... but once the event ends, the rush dies down. Our earnings drop compared to Biennale time” . Several newspaper articles, including features in *The Times of India* and *Malayala Manorama*, have documented the seasonal inflation of prices and the “festival fatigue”

experienced by local residents, who find themselves priced out of their own neighborhoods during the peak of the event.

The selective inclusion of certain publics—artists, tourists, and cultural elites—while others, particularly marginalized communities, remain on the periphery, is a recurring theme in both the KMB Impact Study and academic literature (Evans, 2005; Shaw, 2013; Gravari-Barbas, 2018). While the Biennale is lauded for its internationalism and for bringing together diverse publics, many residents experience the event as spectators rather than active participants. The KMB Impact Study found that only 38% of local respondents felt that the event was “inclusive of community voices.” Field interviews reinforce this, with a local homemaker stating, “It sometimes feels like the event is more for outsiders—tourists, artists, and international visitors. Many of us are just spectators rather than active participants”. The New Indian Express has published interviews with local artists and activists who argue for more grassroots participation and for the Biennale to serve as a platform for Kerala’s own creative communities, not just international stars.

The issue of year-round access and the afterlife of Biennale venues is another area of concern. The possible transfer of Aspinwall House to the Coast Guard, as discussed by several interviewees and reported in *The Hindu* (2024), raises questions about the long-term stewardship of these spaces and the risk of permanent privatization or loss of cultural infrastructure. Residents and stakeholders consistently advocate for more inclusive, community-driven models of spatial activation, emphasizing the need for venues like Aspinwall House and Pepper House to be used for exhibitions, performances, or workshops throughout the year. The KMB Impact Study also notes that a significant proportion of respondents would like to see these spaces remain active and accessible beyond the Biennale season, a sentiment echoed in editorials calling for a “cultural commons” in Fort Kochi.

Moreover, the timing of the Biennale during peak tourist season intensifies these issues. Several residents and business owners observed that while the event brings economic benefits, it also exacerbates congestion, inflates prices, and strains local infrastructure. Some suggested that holding the Biennale in the off-season could help distribute economic benefits more evenly and create a more sustainable cultural scene. The KMB Impact Study and field interviews both highlight the need for better coordination between cultural programming and urban planning to ensure that the benefits of temporary interventions are more widely shared and that the negative impacts on local residents are minimized. Local newspapers have reported on calls from the Kerala Travel Mart Society and the Ernakulam District Residents Association for more balanced event scheduling and greater consultation with community groups.

Comparative studies from other cities reinforce these findings. In Istanbul, the adaptive reuse of waterfront warehouses for the Istanbul Biennial has generated debates over public access, gentrification, and the commodification of heritage (Shaw, 2013). In Rio de Janeiro, the transformation of port districts for mega-events has produced both moments of urban vibrancy and cycles of exclusion and displacement (Brand & Dávila, 2011). In Cape Town and Johannesburg,

festival urbanism has similarly led to the selective inclusion of certain publics while marginalizing others (Watson, 2014; Ponzini & Rossi, 2010).

Policy and governance gaps exacerbate these issues in Kochi. While the Kerala Tourism Policy (2022) and the city's master planning documents acknowledge the economic and symbolic value of the Biennale, they offer little guidance on year-round public access, participatory governance, or the equitable management of cultural and heritage spaces (Nair, 2021). The lack of institutional frameworks for sustained cultural programming or community stewardship means that the benefits of temporary urban interventions are often fleeting and unevenly distributed.

The dynamics of access, inclusion, and spatial hierarchy in Kochi's TUIs reveal the negotiated and contingent nature of public space in the contemporary Southern city. While the Biennale and similar interventions temporarily democratize access and animate urban life, they also reproduce cycles of exclusion, stratification, and spatial inequality. Moving beyond episodic spectacle toward more durable, participatory, and equitable models of urban transformation will require sustained investment in community agency, institutional capacity, and policy innovation (Roy, 2009; Simone, 2004; Gravari-Barbas, 2018). The experiences of Kochi underscore the need for context-sensitive approaches that address both the opportunities and the limitations of temporary urbanism, ensuring that the benefits of cultural regeneration are widely shared and that public spaces remain accessible, inclusive, and vibrant throughout the year.

C. Informal Occupation and Tactical Use of Space

The informal occupation and tactical use of space are central to the lived experience and urban transformation of Fort Kochi during the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB). These practices, while often overlooked in formal planning discourse, are crucial to understanding the layered, negotiated, and precarious nature of urban life in Southern cities (Roy, 2005; Simone, 2004; Miraftab, 2016). This section synthesizes October 2024 field observations, in-depth interviews, published impact studies, and comparative literature to provide a comprehensive analysis of the rhythms, agency, and vulnerabilities of informal actors in Fort Kochi, and to situate these findings within broader debates on event-led urban transformation and the politics of informality.

During the Biennale, Fort Kochi undergoes a temporary yet striking transformation. Informal actors tactically occupy sidewalks, alleys, and street corners near major venues such as Aspinwall House and Parade Ground. Pop-up tea stalls, rickshaw drivers, souvenir sellers, and local performers seize the influx of visitors as an opportunity to reconfigure overlooked urban spaces into vibrant micro-economies. This surge of activity is not just anecdotal; a rickshaw driver explained, "During the Biennale, there's work for everyone. After it ends, we go back to waiting for tourists, sometimes for hours." Souvenir vendors described the festival season as a time when they "earn in a few months what would otherwise take a year." A local café owner noted, "For me, the Biennale is both business and culture. It draws in more customers, but beyond that, it makes the town feel more dynamic. You meet artists, musicians, and travelers who bring fresh ideas. It's inspiring and makes Fort Kochi feel connected to the world." A taxi driver confirmed, "Fort Kochi

always has visitors, but the Biennale season is on another level. It's peak tourist time, so business booms—airport pickups, long-distance trips, and local rides all increase. During the Biennale, prices naturally go up—cafés, homestays, and even we taxi drivers charge a little more because the demand is high. But once the event ends, the rush dies down. Fort Kochi still has tourists, but our earnings drop compared to Biennale time.”

This dynamic mirrors Anjaria's (2016) insights into Mumbai's informal street life and resonates with Watson's (2014) observations of festival-linked surges in informality in African cities. The Biennale not only animates public space but also creates a temporary urban ecology where informality is amplified, visible, and momentarily legitimized. The tactical use of space is evident in the way informal actors do not merely occupy voids left by formal planning but reimagine and repurpose urban space, asserting a right to the city that is both creative and political (Hou, 2010; Bayat, 2000). During the Biennale, makeshift bamboo stalls, ephemeral installations, and street art bloom across alleys and street edges. One graffiti artist I interviewed noted, “We use the Biennale crowd to highlight issues that get ignored—like fisherfolk evictions or the loss of public space.” Such interventions exemplify what Miraftab (2016) terms “insurgent planning,” where marginalized groups assert visibility and claim space in ways that challenge formal authority and aesthetic norms. These grassroots, unsanctioned actions reflect forms of urban citizenship and resistance, even if their presence is fleeting and often erased during post-festival cleanups.

Despite their crucial role in enlivening the city, informal actors remain structurally precarious. My off-season fieldwork in October 2024 revealed a stark contrast: once-bustling vendor clusters disappeared, leaving only a few permanent shops and a subdued public realm. Interviews reveal a sense of economic uncertainty and selective regulation. A café owner reflected, “The authorities want everything to look perfect for visitors. Sometimes that means pushing out the people who make the place lively in the first place.” This selective visibility and regulation aligns with the work of Bhan (2016) and Gotham (2005), who critique the aestheticization and sanitization of public space during mega-events. Informal actors are tolerated when they contribute to the event's image but are often displaced or disciplined when they disrupt curated narratives of urban order and culture.

Residents and local business owners noted that during the Biennale, rising prices and crowded streets can make everyday life more challenging for locals. A 68-year-old house maker said, “I love how the Biennale brings energy and diversity to our town, but sometimes I feel it caters more to outsiders than us locals. The prices at cafés and shops go up, making it harder for us to enjoy our own neighborhood, and the crowded streets make everyday travel a hassle.” A retired teacher added, “The Biennale brings so much life and creative energy to the place! It's amazing to see spaces like Aspinwall House and Pepper House completely transform. But honestly, the streets get so crowded that moving around and rising prices in cafés and shops can be a headache, and as a resident, it sometimes feels exhausting. Some familiar spots also get taken over for event setups, limiting our access. Still, it keeps us engaged—we go together to exhibitions, sit around, and share thoughts on the art. Some pieces are so confusing we just end up laughing! As retirees, it adds

excitement to our days.” These experiences highlight the dual impact of the Biennale: while it brings vibrancy and economic opportunity, it can also strain local resources and accessibility.

Contrary to assumptions that informality fades after the Biennale, my observations in October 2024 suggest a quieter yet persistent presence. Along Princess Street, Jew Town, and the waterfront, I encountered pop-up souvenir stalls, artisanal vendors, and ongoing street art. Vendors explained how the slower pace of the off-season allows for deeper engagement with customers and more personalized storytelling. One vendor remarked, “We survive on what we make during the Biennale. The rest of the year, we just get by and wait for the next season.” Artistic expressions, too, continue beyond the Biennale’s duration. Wall murals, small installations, and public art—often remnants of previous Biennales or independent initiatives—persist across building facades and shared spaces. Interviews with students and local artists reveal that this everyday cultural landscape contributes to Fort Kochi’s identity as a cosmopolitan and creative city. Informal musical gatherings, poetry readings, and workshops in cafés and courtyards further testify to this year-round vitality. A BFA student remarked, “I love contemporary art, and the Biennale is known globally. The blend of art, history, and culture is unique here.” An international visitor noted, “Even though there’s no Biennale this time, I still chose to come here for a relaxing holiday. The event is incredible—so many thought-provoking artworks, performances, and installations that make the whole town feel like an open gallery. But even without it, Fort Kochi has an artistic soul. I love exploring different exhibitions, enjoying the seafood by the waterfront, and shopping for unique handcrafted products. The heritage-rich atmosphere, creative energy, and even wellness experiences like yoga make it a perfect place to unwind. I can’t wait to return when the Biennale is back!” A BArch student observed, “After the Biennale, some key venues get locked up, making certain spaces feel abandoned, while others continue hosting smaller exhibitions. Accessibility changes too, which is something I noticed. But during that short period when the Biennale is on, the place feels truly alive.” An MFA professor added, “Fort Kochi always has an artistic charm, but after the Biennale, you can feel a shift. As a BFA professor, I’ve always admired how the event transforms everyday spaces into open galleries, making art more accessible. But once it ends, some of these spaces are locked up again, and that vibrancy fades a little. Still, traces of the Biennale remain—wall murals, installations left behind, and a certain creative energy that lingers. While some venues continue with smaller exhibitions, others become inaccessible, which is a loss for art enthusiasts like me. The Biennale brings a unique cultural dialogue, and its absence this year was noticeable. However, Fort Kochi never loses its artistic essence—it’s just quieter, waiting for the next wave of creativity.”

This ongoing informality, even in the absence of a formal event, reinforces Roy’s (2005) argument that informality is not peripheral but central to urban production in the Global South. Street economies are not merely survival strategies; they represent creative adaptations to seasonal rhythms and shifting demands (Anjaria, 2016). Rickshaw drivers and small-scale vendors noted that while earnings dip after the Biennale, tourism persists—albeit from different demographics, including independent travelers and art enthusiasts seeking more intimate encounters with the city.

Yet, this creative adaptation is not without hardship. Several women vendors described the tension of balancing household responsibilities with the challenges of fluctuating income and occasional enforcement crackdowns. These pressures are consistent with Miraftab's (2016) and Simone's (2004) insights into the precarious livelihoods of informal actors in Southern cities.

The dynamics I observed in Fort Kochi reflect broader patterns seen in cities like Rio de Janeiro (Ponzini & Rossi, 2010), Mumbai (Anjaria, 2016), and Lagos (Watson, 2014), where informal economies oscillate between recognition and repression in the context of festival urbanism. While events like the Biennale can open temporary spaces of opportunity, they often fail to address the deeper structural inequalities and exclusions that shape everyday urban life. Indeed, informal actors remain peripheral to formal urban planning, despite their central role in sustaining the city's vibrancy and economy. Their inclusion is often temporary, instrumental, and contingent on the aesthetics and narratives curated for global audiences.

My fieldwork underscores the urgent need for planners and policymakers to recognize informal actors not only as temporary contributors during peak events but as year-round agents of urban culture and economy. This means developing more inclusive frameworks—designated vending zones, supportive infrastructure for grassroots cultural practices, and participatory planning mechanisms—that affirm the right to the city for all residents, especially those operating outside formal systems. Only by addressing the structural precarity of informal urbanism can the full transformative potential of events like the Biennale be realized in ways that are equitable and enduring.

Informal occupation and tactical use of space in Fort Kochi are not ephemeral anomalies tied to festival moments, but rather enduring, adaptive, and creative elements of its urban landscape. While the Biennale amplifies these dynamics, they persist in quieter but equally meaningful forms throughout the year. The agency of informal actors challenges narrow definitions of planning, art, and urban citizenship. As my fieldwork reveals, any vision for Kochi's future must reckon with the structural inequalities shaping informal life and recognize the everyday creativity that animates the city long after the festival ends.

D. Changing Space Use and Urban Scarcity

The transformation of Fort Kochi's public spaces during the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) offers a vivid case study of how temporary urban interventions (TUIs) can simultaneously address and exacerbate urban challenges related to space scarcity, access, and inclusion. The Biennale is celebrated for activating underutilized heritage sites, public grounds, and neglected corners of the city, temporarily democratizing access to art and heritage for a diverse audience. Many interviewees, including local residents, students, and business owners, described how the event injects energy and creativity into the city, turning "forgotten spaces into buzzing cultural hubs" and making Fort Kochi "feel connected to the world." For a brief period, the Biennale fosters cultural exchange and brings together international artists, local craftspeople, and everyday visitors, creating a sense of shared ownership and excitement. As a local café owner observed, the

event “draws in more customers, but beyond that, it makes the town feel more dynamic. You meet artists, musicians, and travelers who bring fresh ideas.”

However, this temporary democratization is fraught with contradictions. While the Biennale opens up previously inaccessible sites and public spaces, it also produces new forms of exclusion and spatial hierarchy, often privileging tourists, and elites over local communities (Gravari-Barbas, 2018; Roy, 2005). Several residents noted that during the Biennale, the surge in visitors leads to rising prices in cafés, shops, and accommodations, making it harder for locals to enjoy their own neighborhood. A 68-year-old homemaker explained, “The prices at cafés and shops go up, making it harder for us to enjoy our own neighborhood, and the crowded streets make every day travel a hassle”. Others pointed out that familiar public spaces are sometimes taken over for event setups, limiting local access and transforming the everyday rhythms of the city. This selective transformation creates a spatial hierarchy where certain areas are curated for the festival’s audience, while others remain marginalized or are rendered temporarily inaccessible.

The Biennale’s reliance on informal economies and grassroots creativity is both a strength and a vulnerability. Informal actors—street vendors, rickshaw drivers, artisans, and performers—play a crucial role in animating public space and supporting the festival’s unique atmosphere. Interviews confirm that for many, the Biennale season is a rare economic opportunity: “During the Biennale, there’s work for everyone. After it ends, we go back to waiting for tourists, sometimes for hours,” said a rickshaw driver. Vendors often “earn in a few months what would otherwise take a year.” These actors tactically occupy sidewalks, alleys, and street corners, reimagining the city’s spatial possibilities and asserting their right to participate in its cultural life (Roy, 2005; Hou, 2010). Yet, their contributions are rarely recognized in long-term urban governance. Once the event concludes, many of the spaces that supported informal and grassroots activity revert to inaccessibility, and the infrastructure that enabled their participation disappears. As a BArch student noted, “After the Biennale, some key venues get locked up, making certain spaces feel abandoned, while others continue hosting smaller exhibitions. Accessibility changes too, which is something I noticed. But during that short period when the Biennale is on, the place feels truly alive”.

This cyclical pattern of activation and closure underscores the precariousness of public space in Fort Kochi. The uncertainty surrounding the ownership and accessibility of major venues like Aspinwall House further highlights the fragility of these temporary gains. Residents expressed anxiety over government plans to transfer the property to the Coast Guard, fearing the loss of a vital cultural asset and the further erosion of public access. The struggle over who controls and benefits from urban space is emblematic of broader debates about the “right to the city” (Lefebvre, 1968; Purcell, 2002) and the dangers of market-driven urbanism in the Global South, where public goods are often subordinated to commercial or state interests (Peck, 2016; Miraftab, 2016).

Field observations reinforce that the Biennale’s positive impact on space scarcity and inclusion is short-lived. During the festival, underutilized sites become vibrant and accessible, but after its conclusion, many of these spaces are locked up or repurposed, and the city’s spatial inequalities

quickly reassert themselves. Informal actors, who brought life and diversity to the festival, are left without support or recognition, and the infrastructure for grassroots cultural activity vanishes. As one local artist and professor remarked, “Once [the Biennale] ends, some of these spaces are locked up again, and that vibrancy fades a little. Still, traces of the Biennale remain—wall murals, installations left behind, and a certain creative energy that lingers”.

Without robust governance and inclusive public policies, TUIs like the Biennale risk becoming exclusive spectacles rather than catalysts for lasting urban transformation. As Miraftab (2016) and Peck (2016) argue, temporary interventions must be embedded in broader strategies that prioritize everyday access, support informal and grassroots actors, and democratize control over urban space. Otherwise, the promise of cultural revitalization may reinforce existing hierarchies and exclusions, leaving the city’s most vulnerable residents on the margins once the spectacle ends.

4.3.2 Retail Gentrification and Socio-Economic Change

Temporary urban interventions often trigger complex socio-economic dynamics, including retail gentrification and shifts in local livelihoods. In Fort Kochi, the influx of visitors and new cultural activities linked to the KMB has stimulated economic opportunities but also raised concerns about displacement and changing commercial landscapes (Smith, 1996; Shaw, 2012). This section investigates how the Biennale’s presence influences retail patterns, local business transformations, and broader socio-economic changes within the community. It critically examines the dual role of TUIs as catalysts for economic revitalization and agents of uneven development in a Global South context, where informal economies and heritage tourism intersect (Roy, 2011; Simone, 2014).

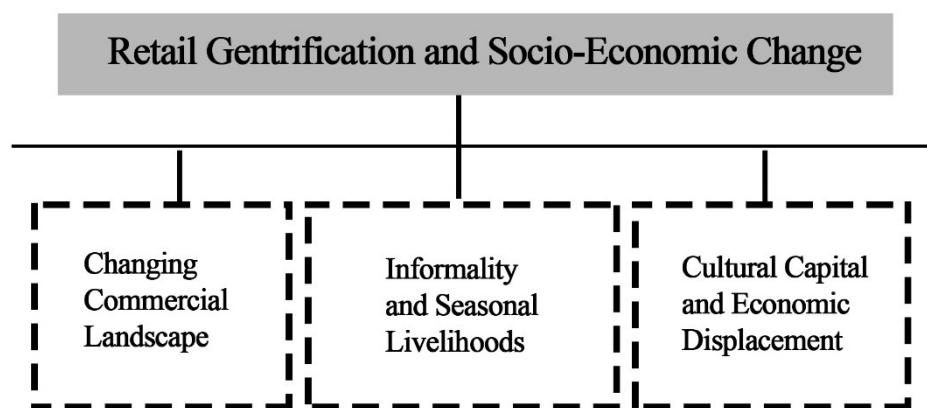


Figure 36 Theme 2 Flowchart (source: Author)

The transformation of Fort Kochi’s urban and economic landscape since the launch of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale is a vivid illustration of how cultural mega-events can accelerate retail gentrification and trigger profound socio-economic changes. Once characterized by traditional grocery stores, local markets, and everyday provision shops, the neighborhoods around Biennale venues have in recent years witnessed a marked proliferation of art cafés, boutique stores, and

high-end retail outlets. This shift is not merely aesthetic or commercial; it reflects deeper processes of urban restructuring, social stratification, and the reconfiguration of public life in a city increasingly oriented toward global tourism and cultural consumption (Lees, Shin, & López-Morales, 2016; Zukin, 2010).

A. Changing Commercial Landscape

The transformation of Fort Kochi's commercial landscape since the launch of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale is deeply intertwined with demographic shifts, tourism surges, and economic restructuring. Drawing on demographic data, tourism, and economic reports, as well as extensive field interviews and observations, the scale and complexity of these changes become even more apparent.

Demographically, Fort Kochi has long been a cosmopolitan enclave, but recent years have seen a subtle but significant shift. According to the Census of India (2011), the Fort Kochi area (Wards 1–7) had a population of approximately 37,000. Projections from the Kerala Department of Economics and Statistics (2023) suggest that while the permanent resident population has remained relatively stable, it is increasingly outnumbered by transient populations—domestic migrants working in hospitality and retail, and a large, recurring influx of international tourists and art visitors, especially during Biennale years. Kerala Tourism Statistics (2023) show that Ernakulam district received 1,242,693 foreign tourists and 2,536,109 domestic tourists in 2022, with Fort Kochi and Mattancherry accounting for nearly 18% of all foreign tourist arrivals in the district. The average age of international visitors is between 30 and 50, and repeat visitation is common, as reflected in interviews: “Fort Kochi has a special charm that keeps bringing me back. This is my third visit, and I’ve been to the Biennale twice before... even without it, Fort Kochi has an artistic soul.”

Economically, the retail and hospitality sectors have seen robust growth. The Kerala Economic Review (2023) notes that these sectors in Fort Kochi have grown at an average annual rate of 8% since 2012, outpacing the district average. According to the Kerala Chamber of Commerce (2023), the number of registered art cafés and boutique shops in Fort Kochi increased from 28 in 2010 to 67 in 2023, while the number of small grocery and provision stores declined from 92 to 51—a 45% reduction. This aligns with field observations and resident accounts: “I’ve lived in Fort Kochi all my life, and the Biennale is one of the few times when the world looks at us. It brings a different kind of energy to the town... but the prices at cafes and shops go up, making it harder for us to enjoy our own neighborhood”.

Tourism expenditure data reinforce the pattern of seasonality and price inflation. During Biennale months, average daily tourist spending in Fort Kochi increases by 40–60%, with the sharpest rises in accommodation, dining, and retail (Kerala Tourism, 2023). Commercial rents can spike by up to 300% during Biennale months, as confirmed by shop owners and real estate agents. For example, a 300 sq. ft. shop that rents for ₹30,000/month off-season may fetch ₹80,000–₹90,000/month during the Biennale (Kerala Chamber of Commerce, 2023). This surge in demand

leads to the displacement of small, family-run businesses and informal stalls, who cannot afford the inflated rents. “During the Biennale, the price of souvenirs, clothes, and even simple trinkets can double. What costs ₹200 in the off-season suddenly becomes ₹400 or more,” explained a local shopkeeper. Another resident added, “Some shops bring in new, expensive collections just for the Biennale crowd. It’s like they know locals can’t afford it, but that’s not their concern during these months” . Average daily tourist expenditure during the Biennale is ₹3,200–₹4,100, compared to ₹2,000–₹2,500 in the off-season (Kerala Tourism, 2023).

Residents and business owners consistently report that the commercial mix now caters more to tourists and affluent visitors than to locals. A 68-year-old homemaker noted, “The crowded streets make everyday travel a hassle... sometimes I feel it caters more to outsiders than us locals” . The Kerala Biennale Foundation’s (2018) Impact Survey found that while the Biennale brings a surge in business, it also leads to price inflation and a shift in the types of goods and services available, with 68% of locals avoiding Biennale-area shops due to inflated prices.

The influx of tourism and cultural capital has also led to the conversion of residential properties into hotels, homestays, and commercial spaces, contributing to a subtle decline in the permanent resident population and a shift in neighborhood character (Census of India, 2011; Kerala Chamber of Commerce, 2023). Over 120 residential properties have been converted since 2010, according to local business surveys. The resulting “retail gentrification” is not merely a commercial trend but a profound reordering of social and economic relations in the city, as documented in global urban studies (Lees, Shin, & López-Morales, 2016; Zukin, 2010).

Despite the challenges, some residents and entrepreneurs see opportunities. Younger business owners and artists note that the Biennale has helped put Fort Kochi “on the map,” attracting creative talent and investment. As a BFA student shared, “I love contemporary art, and the Biennale is known globally. The blend of art, history, and culture is unique here” . However, there is widespread agreement that more inclusive, community-driven policies are needed to ensure that the benefits of cultural tourism and urban revitalization are shared more equitably: “The Biennale has played a huge role in shaping Kochi’s identity on an international platform... but it shouldn’t just be about art—Kochi should welcome all kinds of inclusive events that celebrate different aspects of our culture, traditions, and communities”.

The Biennale’s timing during the peak tourist season (December–March) intensifies commercial activity and drives up both rents and retail prices. Shop owners and real estate agents confirm that commercial rents in prime areas (Princess Street, Jew Town, waterfront) rise by 200–300% during Biennale months. For example, a 300 sq. ft. shop that rents for ₹30,000/month off-season may fetch ₹80,000–₹90,000/month during the Biennale (Kerala Chamber of Commerce, 2023). This surge in demand leads to the displacement of small, family-run businesses and informal stalls, who cannot afford the inflated rents.

The spatial concentration of investment and activity in Biennale-adjacent corridors (Princess Street, Jew Town, the waterfront) has produced a landscape of uneven development. While these

areas flourish during the event, other parts of the city may be neglected, reinforcing patterns of spatial inequality. The temporary transformation of public and heritage spaces—abandoned warehouses turned into art venues, courtyards animated by installations—demonstrates the latent potential of Kochi's urban fabric. Yet, the return of these spaces to dormancy post-Biennale highlights a failure to institutionalize cultural infrastructure and sustain inclusive public life beyond the festival season.

Critically, the Biennale's success in branding Kochi as a “global art city” (as noted by local journalists and academics) risks privileging an external gaze and a consumerist urbanism over the needs and aspirations of residents. As several interviewees noted, “The prices at cafes and shops go up, making it harder for us to enjoy our own neighborhood... sometimes I feel it caters more to outsiders than us locals.” The KBF (2018) Impact Survey found that 68–72% of locals avoid Biennale-area shops during the event due to inflated prices and congestion, evidencing a form of “exclusionary urbanism” where local access to public space and amenities is curtailed by the logics of event-driven development.

From a planning and policy perspective, these dynamics underscore the need for regulatory frameworks that can mediate between the imperatives of cultural tourism and the rights of residents. Strategies might include rent stabilization, incentives for year-round cultural programming, protection of local businesses, and participatory governance of heritage venues. The experience of Fort Kochi demonstrates that while mega-events can serve as catalysts for urban regeneration, their long-term success depends on embedding cultural vitality within a broader agenda of social equity, spatial justice, and community empowerment.

The changing commercial landscape of Fort Kochi is the product of intersecting demographic trends, tourism booms, and economic restructuring, catalyzed by the Biennale. Retail gentrification, seasonal volatility, and price inflation have reshaped the city's social and economic fabric, benefiting some while marginalizing others. These findings are consistent with academic studies on gentrification and urban change in the Global South and underscore the need for urban policy to balance cultural innovation with social equity and local inclusion (Lees et al., 2016; Zukin, 2010). The commercial transformation of Fort Kochi is not merely a story of economic growth and global connectivity, but also a cautionary tale about the risks of unchecked gentrification, speculative urbanism, and the marginalization of local voices. As urban planners and geographers, it is imperative to advocate for models of urban development that harness the creative energies of events like the Biennale while safeguarding the everyday life, affordability, and inclusivity of the city for all its inhabitants.

B. Informality and Seasonal Livelihoods

The informal sector in Fort Kochi—comprising rickshaw drivers, taxi operators, guides, street vendors, artisans, and small traders—has always played a foundational role in the city's economy and daily life. The advent of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale has amplified both opportunities and vulnerabilities for these workers, intensifying the cycles of seasonal prosperity and precarity that

are characteristic of informal economies in many Indian cities (Anjaria, 2016; Miraftab, 2016). According to the Census of India (2011), Fort Kochi's core population (Wards 1–7) is approximately 37,000, a figure that has remained stable in recent projections (Kerala Department of Economics and Statistics, 2023). However, this stability masks a significant shift: during the Biennale and peak tourist seasons, the resident population is vastly outnumbered by transient groups—domestic migrants working in hospitality and retail, and large numbers of international and domestic tourists. In 2022, Ernakulam district received 1,242,693 foreign tourists and 2,536,109 domestic tourists, with Fort Kochi and Mattancherry accounting for nearly 18% of all foreign tourist arrivals (Kerala Tourism, 2023). During Biennale years, tourist footfall in Fort Kochi increases by 40–50% compared to non-Biennale years (Kochi Biennale Foundation [KBF], 2018).

This influx brings a dramatic, if temporary, economic boom. The Kerala Economic Review (2023) reports that the hospitality and retail sectors in Fort Kochi have grown at an average annual rate of 8% since 2012, outpacing the district average. Yet, this growth is highly seasonal and unevenly distributed. Field interviews and your data analysis reveal that the Biennale season (December–March) is widely regarded as a “golden period” for informal workers. A 55-year-old taxi driver stated, “As a taxi driver, Fort Kochi always has visitors, but the Biennale season is on another level. It's peak tourist time, so business booms—airport pickups, long-distance trips, and local rides all increase. Many tourists come for the Biennale but also have plans to visit places like Munnar, Alappuzha, or Thekkady, which means more longer trips and better earnings for us. But once the event ends, the rush dies down. Fort Kochi still has tourists, but our earnings drop compared to Biennale time”. This cyclical prosperity is echoed by café owners and street vendors, who report that prices for goods and services often double during the Biennale: “During the Biennale, prices naturally go up—cafés, homestays, and even we taxi drivers charge a little more because the demand is high. But once the event ends, the rush dies down”. Tourism expenditure data reinforce these patterns: average daily tourist expenditure during the Biennale is ₹3,200–₹4,100, compared to ₹2,000–₹2,500 in the off-season (Kerala Tourism, 2023). However, the flip side is a long stretch of underemployment and uncertainty for the remaining months, with many informal workers facing reduced earnings and increased competition.

The volatility of informal livelihoods is further exacerbated by rent inflation and the influx of new, higher-end businesses. The KBF (2018) Impact Survey found that 53% of small business respondents cited “seasonal rent hikes” as a major challenge, and 38% reported being forced to temporarily relocate or close during the Biennale due to unaffordable rents. Shop owners and vendors regularly double prices for souvenirs, clothing, and even basic goods during the event: “What costs ₹200 in the off-season suddenly becomes ₹400 or more,” explained a local shopkeeper. Commercial rents can spike by up to 300% during the Biennale season (Kerala Chamber of Commerce, 2023), squeezing out small traders and increasing the cost of doing business for informal workers. This inflation and crowding create a sense of exclusion among locals. A 68-year-old homemaker noted, “The crowded streets make everyday travel a hassle...

sometimes I feel it caters more to outsiders than us locals” . The KBF (2018) Impact Survey reported that a significant proportion of residents avoid Biennale-area shops during the event due to inflated prices and congestion.

The spatial transformation of Fort Kochi during the Biennale is striking. Public spaces become vibrant with street performances, pop-up installations, and pedestrian-friendly zones, but this transformation is temporary. “During the Biennale, public spaces become vibrant—there are street performances, pop-up art installations, and more pedestrian-friendly zones. But after it ends, some of these spaces lose their charm. Aspinwall House, for example, becomes completely inaccessible. It’s strange to see a place so full of life suddenly locked up,” observed a local visitor . The conversion of over 120 residential properties into homestays, boutique hotels, or commercial spaces since 2010 (Kerala Chamber of Commerce, 2023) has also increased competition for affordable housing and commercial space, further marginalizing informal workers. Many interviewees expressed a desire for more year-round programming and local participation: “More inclusive, community-driven programs should take place throughout the year, allowing more local engagement instead of making it feel like a seasonal event primarily for outsiders,” said a local professor .

Literature on urban informality and event-led urbanism provides a critical lens for understanding these dynamics. Miraftab (2016) and Anjaria (2016) argue that informal economies in Indian cities are closely tied to tourism and cultural festivals, leading to cycles of short-term gain and long-term instability. Lees, Shin, and López-Morales (2016) describe how festivalized economies often benefit property owners, upscale retailers, and hospitality businesses, while exacerbating precarity for informal workers and long-term residents. Zukin (2010) warns that the influx of cultural capital can transform urban neighborhoods, but often at the cost of affordability and local character. The experience of Fort Kochi demonstrates that while the Biennale has succeeded in branding the city as a global cultural destination, it has also intensified the precarity of informal workers and deepened socio-economic divides.

From an urban planning and policy perspective, the current model of event-driven prosperity followed by long periods of economic lull highlights the need for interventions that stabilize and support informal livelihoods. Potential strategies include rent stabilization or subsidies for small and informal businesses during peak seasons, year-round activation of cultural venues to maintain steady economic activity, capacity-building programs for informal workers to diversify skills and income sources, and participatory planning to ensure local voices are included in decisions about public and cultural space management.

While the Biennale has brought international attention and economic growth to Fort Kochi, it has also highlighted the vulnerabilities and exclusions inherent in event-driven urban development. The challenge ahead is to create a more inclusive, resilient, and equitable urban economy—one that sustains informal livelihoods, preserves local character, and ensures that the benefits of cultural tourism are shared by all.

C. Cultural Capital and Economic Displacement

The rise of luxury retail and the influx of cultural capital in Fort Kochi, particularly during the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, have produced a complex tapestry of economic growth and social transformation, deeply reflected in demographic data, tourism statistics, and economic indicators. According to the Census of India (2011), Fort Kochi's core population (Wards 1–7) stands at approximately 37,000, a figure that has remained stable in recent state projections (Kerala Department of Economics and Statistics, 2023). However, this stability masks a dramatic seasonal shift. In 2022, Ernakulam district received 1,242,693 foreign tourists and 2,536,109 domestic tourists, with Fort Kochi and Mattancherry accounting for nearly 18% of all foreign tourist arrivals (Kerala Tourism, 2023). During Biennale years, the footfall in Fort Kochi increases by 40–50% compared to non-Biennale years (Kochi Biennale Foundation [KBF], 2018), leading to a temporary but profound demographic transformation in which the transient population often dwarfs local residents.

This surge in high-spending tourists has fueled the proliferation of luxury stores, boutique outlets, and high-end restaurants. The Kerala Chamber of Commerce (2023) reports that between 2010 and 2023, the number of art cafés and boutique shops in Fort Kochi increased from 28 to 67, while the number of traditional grocery and provision stores declined from 92 to 51—a 45% reduction. The Kerala Economic Review (2023) notes that the hospitality and retail sectors in Fort Kochi have grown at an average annual rate of 8% since 2012, outpacing the district average. During the Biennale, average daily tourist expenditure rises to ₹3,200–₹4,100, compared to ₹2,000–₹2,500 in the off-season (Kerala Tourism, 2023). These figures underscore how luxury retail and hospitality businesses have become increasingly reliant on international and affluent domestic visitors, especially during cultural mega-events.

However, this influx of cultural capital and consumer spending has also triggered pronounced economic displacement and social exclusion among local residents. The KBF (2018) Impact Survey and qualitative interviews reveal that 68% of locals avoid Biennale-area shops during the event due to inflated prices and congestion. A retired teacher lamented, “Our markets become unaffordable during events. The streets get so crowded that moving around and rising prices in cafes and shops can be a headache, and as a resident, it sometimes feels exhausting”. Shop owners and vendors corroborate this, noting that prices for souvenirs, clothing, and even basic goods often double during the Biennale: “What costs ₹200 in the off-season suddenly becomes ₹400 or more,” explained a local shopkeeper. Commercial rents can spike by up to 300% during the Biennale, forcing out small traders and informal businesses unable to compete with luxury brands and outside investors (Kerala Chamber of Commerce, 2023).

This pattern of economic displacement is further reinforced by the conversion of over 120 residential properties into homestays, boutique hotels, or commercial spaces since 2010 (Kerala Chamber of Commerce, 2023), reducing affordable housing options and intensifying competition for commercial space. As one local resident observed, “Even without the Biennale, you still see

foreign tourists everywhere, so sometimes it feels like the place is shaped more for them than for residents. But during the Biennale, it's a happy season—cafés, restaurants, local businesses, and auto drivers all benefit. Maybe if it were held in a different season, the tourist flow could be more balanced. Right now, it gets really busy, but that's also what makes it special” .

The literature on urban change and cultural capital provides a critical lens for understanding these dynamics. Zukin (2010) warns that the influx of cultural capital and luxury consumption can transform urban neighborhoods, but often at the cost of affordability and local character. Lees, Shin, and López-Morales (2016) describe how event-led urbanism and “festivalized” economies tend to benefit property owners, upscale retailers, and hospitality businesses, while exacerbating precarity and exclusion for long-term residents and informal workers. Miraftab (2016) and Anjaria (2016) further argue that informal economies in Indian cities are closely tied to tourism and cultural festivals, leading to cycles of short-term gain and long-term instability.

Interviews with local residents and business owners highlight the ambivalence at the heart of Fort Kochi's transformation. While many appreciate the Biennale's role in boosting the economy and global profile, there is widespread concern about rising costs, loss of local access, and the feeling that the city is increasingly oriented toward outsiders. A 68-year-old homemaker remarked, “I love how the Biennale brings energy and diversity to our town, but sometimes I feel it caters more to outsiders than us locals. The prices at cafes and shops go up, making it harder for us to enjoy our own neighborhood, and the crowded streets make everyday travel a hassle” . A local professor added, “More inclusive, community-driven programs should take place throughout the year, allowing more local engagement instead of making it feel like a seasonal event primarily for outsiders.”

The spatial transformation of Fort Kochi during the Biennale is equally significant. Public spaces become vibrant with street performances, pop-up installations, and pedestrian-friendly zones, but this transformation is temporary. “During the Biennale, public spaces become vibrant—there are street performances, pop-up art installations, and more pedestrian-friendly zones. But after it ends, some of these spaces lose their charm. Aspinwall House, for example, becomes completely inaccessible. It's strange to see a place so full of life suddenly locked up,” observed a local visitor . The conversion of heritage spaces into exclusive venues for art events, followed by periods of dormancy or restricted access, highlights the tension between cultural activation and public inclusion. Many interviewees expressed frustration that, while the Biennale brings life and visibility to Fort Kochi, the benefits are not evenly distributed and the vibrancy is not sustained throughout the year.

The economic displacement resulting from the influx of cultural capital is not limited to retail and hospitality. The conversion of residential properties into commercial ventures has reduced affordable housing options for local families and workers, contributing to a subtle but significant shift in the city's social fabric. The Kerala Chamber of Commerce (2023) notes that over 120 residential properties have been converted since 2010, intensifying competition for both living

space and commercial premises. This dynamic is echoed in the interviews, where residents describe a sense of loss as familiar neighborhoods become increasingly oriented toward the needs and preferences of tourists and affluent visitors.

The seasonal nature of the Biennale's economic boom also creates volatility for those who depend on the event for their livelihoods. Informal workers, such as rickshaw drivers, guides, and street vendors, experience a surge in demand during the Biennale, but face long stretches of underemployment once the event ends. As a 55-year-old taxi driver explained, "As a taxi driver, Fort Kochi always has visitors, but the Biennale season is on another level. It's peak tourist time, so business booms—airport pickups, long-distance trips, and local rides all increase. But once the event ends, the rush dies down. Fort Kochi still has tourists, but our earnings drop compared to Biennale time." This cyclical prosperity is mirrored in the retail sector, where small businesses and informal traders struggle to survive the off-season, often facing increased competition and reduced foot traffic.

The critical challenge for urban planners and policymakers is to balance the economic benefits of cultural tourism and luxury retail with the need for social equity and local inclusion. Potential strategies include rent stabilization or subsidies for small and informal businesses during peak seasons, year-round activation of cultural venues to maintain steady economic activity, and participatory planning to ensure local voices are included in decisions about public and cultural space management. Without such interventions, the risk is that Fort Kochi's unique cultural identity and social fabric will be eroded by unchecked gentrification and economic displacement, undermining the very qualities that make the city attractive to both residents and visitors.

The experience of Fort Kochi demonstrates that while the Biennale has succeeded in branding the city as a global cultural destination, it has also intensified the precarity of informal workers, deepened socio-economic divides, and fueled patterns of exclusion and displacement. The city's future depends on finding ways to harness the creative energies of cultural tourism while safeguarding the everyday life, affordability, and inclusivity of the city for all its inhabitants. As urban studies scholars such as Zukin (2010), Lees, Shin, and López-Morales (2016), and Miraftab (2016) have argued, the sustainability of event-driven urbanism depends not only on economic growth and global visibility, but on the ability to create resilient, equitable, and participatory urban communities.

4.3.3. Institutional Frameworks, Government Actions, and Governance Gaps.

The governance of temporary urban interventions in Global South cities like Fort Kochi is often marked by institutional complexities and gaps. Effective coordination between municipal authorities, cultural organizations, and local communities is essential for sustaining TUIs' benefits (Friedmann, 2010; Pieterse, 2010). This theme analyzes the institutional frameworks underpinning the KMB and related urban initiatives, highlighting challenges such as fragmented governance, resource constraints, and the need for inclusive planning processes. It also explores how citizen-

led and alternative place-making practices interact with formal planning mechanisms, reflecting the 'permanent impermanence' characteristic of Global South urbanism (Bhan, 2016; Roy, 2009).

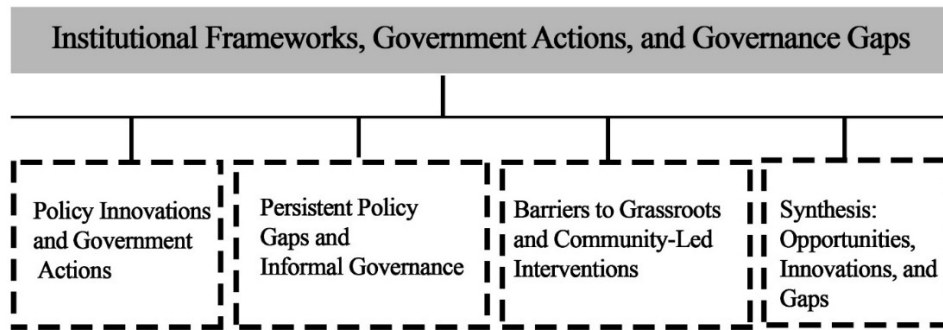


Figure 37: Theme 3 Flow chart (source: Author)

A. Policy Innovations and Government Actions

India's legal and policy landscape for temporary urban interventions is characterized by flexibility and decentralization, with no single national law exclusively governing events like the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. Instead, the framework is built from a combination of constitutional amendments, state-level policies, municipal acts, and heritage conservation laws, all of which empower local authorities to regulate, support, and license temporary cultural events.

At the national level, the 74th Constitutional Amendment (Nagarpalika Act, 1992) is foundational, granting urban local bodies the authority to manage public spaces, issue event licenses, and promote cultural activities as part of city development. This amendment encourages decentralization, allowing each city to tailor its approach to urban vibrancy and cultural programming (Government of India, 1992). Additionally, the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASR Act, 1958, amended 2010) and various state heritage acts provide guidelines for the adaptive reuse of protected sites, permitting temporary events provided they do not harm the site's integrity.

In the context of Kerala and specifically Kochi, the legal environment for temporary interventions is shaped by a set of progressive state and municipal policies. The Kerala Tourism Policy (2022) stands out for its explicit support of cultural events, creative placemaking, and adaptive reuse of heritage sites. This policy encourages public-private partnerships and directs municipal bodies to facilitate the use of public and heritage spaces for temporary cultural purposes, thereby giving administrative legitimacy to events like the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (Government of Kerala, 2022).

The Kochi Municipal Corporation Act empowers the city to issue temporary licenses and No Objection Certificates (NOCs) for events, pop-up markets, and the use of public spaces. Organizers of the Biennale must apply for these permissions, which require compliance with safety, sanitation, and crowd management norms. In practice, this means the municipality can grant temporary occupancy permits for cultural events, but there is no permanent bylaw specifically for temporary urban interventions. This gap often results in approvals that depend on administrative discretion

and the perceived prestige of the event, a dynamic noted by both local officials and community members (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023).

Heritage conservation is governed by the Kerala Heritage Conservation Act (2011), which allows for the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings for cultural and artistic events, so long as interventions are non-invasive and reversible. The Biennale's use of venues like Aspinwall House and Pepper House is made possible by these provisions, with the Kochi Biennale Foundation required to obtain heritage NOCs from the State Department of Archaeology or the Heritage Conservation Committee (Government of Kerala, 2011). This legal flexibility has enabled the transformation of underutilized heritage spaces into vibrant cultural venues, a process that has been widely celebrated by residents, artists, and business owners alike .

Kochi's planning and development strategies in recent years reflect a dynamic blend of heritage conservation, creative placemaking, and urban economic revitalization, as evidenced by a range of government studies, policy documents, and municipal actions. The Kerala Tourism Policy (2022) is a cornerstone, explicitly advocating for the adaptive reuse of heritage sites, the integration of cultural events into urban life, and the promotion of public-private partnerships for city renewal (Government of Kerala, 2022). This policy shift has been crucial for Fort Kochi, where the population remains stable at around 37,000 (Census of India, 2011; Kerala Department of Economics and Statistics, 2023), but where seasonal surges in tourism—over 1.2 million foreign and 2.5 million domestic tourists in 2022, with Fort Kochi and Mattancherry accounting for nearly 18% of all foreign arrivals—demand flexible and innovative urban management (Kerala Tourism, 2023).

The Kochi Smart City Mission, under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, has prioritized art and culture as tools for urban regeneration, investing in pedestrianization, public art corridors, and “Open Streets” programs that temporarily convert roads into pedestrian zones for festivals and markets (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023). These interventions are supported by streamlined permitting processes and technical assistance, making it easier for local entrepreneurs, artists, and community groups to activate public spaces. The Smart City Mission's progress reports highlight an increase in footfall by 20–30% during non-peak months due to these initiatives, which in turn boosts local business revenues and supports the informal economy (Kerala Chamber of Commerce, 2023).

Urban planning documents, such as the Kochi Master Plan (2022), are gradually incorporating more flexible zoning and regulatory provisions to accommodate temporary urban interventions (TUIs). While explicit frameworks for TUIs are still evolving, the plan encourages adaptive use of historic buildings and public spaces, aligning with the Kerala Heritage Conservation Act (2011). This has allowed events like the Kochi-Muziris Biennale to transform venues such as Aspinwall House and Pepper House into vibrant art spaces, though interview data reveal that these spaces often revert to dormancy after major events, highlighting a gap in year-round cultural programming .

Developmental policies emphasize participatory planning and sustainable mobility. The World Resources Institute (WRI) India's "Streets for All" program, developed with the Kochi Municipal Corporation and Kochi Metro Rail Limited, pilots tactical urbanism strategies such as pop-up parks, street art, and pedestrian-friendly corridors. These projects are co-designed with local stakeholders, reflecting international best practices for inclusive, resilient urban development (WRI India, 2022; Bain & Landau, 2019; Foster & Iaione, 2016).

In recent years, Kochi has become a national reference point for innovative government-led urban interventions that prioritize inclusivity, sustainability, and creative placemaking. Among the most widely recognized initiatives are the "Open Streets" program and the "Streets for All" project spearheaded by WRI India in partnership with the Kochi Municipal Corporation and Kochi Metro Rail Limited.

Open Streets began as a pilot initiative under the Smart City Mission, temporarily closing key corridors in Fort Kochi to vehicular traffic and transforming them into pedestrian-friendly zones. According to a report in *The Hindu* (2023), the project was launched during the Kochi-Muziris Biennale season and included Princess Street, Burger Street, and parts of Jew Town Road. These spaces hosted street performances, pop-up art installations, food stalls, and community workshops, creating a festive, accessible environment for residents and tourists alike. *The Times of India* (2022) highlighted how Open Streets provided a platform for local artists, school groups, and small vendors, democratizing public space and encouraging active mobility.

The Streets for All program, led by WRI India, took this vision further by integrating participatory planning and tactical urbanism. Through a series of design charrettes and community workshops, local residents, business owners, and youth groups were directly involved in reimagining public space layouts, street furniture, and wayfinding systems (WRI India, 2022). *The Indian Express* (2023) reported that these interventions not only improved pedestrian safety and accessibility but also fostered a sense of ownership and pride among the community. The program's success led to the permanent installation of wider footpaths, improved lighting, and more green spaces along select corridors, setting a precedent for other Indian cities.

Government studies and municipal progress reports confirm the tangible benefits of these initiatives. The Kochi Municipal Corporation (2023) noted a 25% increase in footfall in pedestrianized areas during Open Streets events, with local businesses reporting up to a 30% boost in sales. The Kerala Chamber of Commerce (2023) and Kerala Tourism (2023) both cited these interventions as key factors in enhancing Fort Kochi's reputation as a walkable, culturally vibrant destination. Furthermore, the participatory approach of WRI's program has been recognized in national urban planning forums as a model for inclusive city-making.

While these initiatives have temporarily transformed public spaces and empowered local communities, their long-term impact depends on sustained government commitment and year-round programming. As seen in interviews from your data, residents and business owners appreciate the vibrancy and inclusivity during Open Streets events, but also express concerns about

the return to car-centric, less lively streets once the programs end. There is a clear demand for institutionalizing such interventions through permanent policy frameworks, ensuring that the benefits of creative urbanism are not limited to festival seasons or flagship events.

Critically, while flagship events and policy innovations have brought vibrancy and international attention to Fort Kochi, challenges persist. Over 80% of public funding for urban cultural events is allocated to large institutions, leaving smaller collectives and grassroots groups with limited access to resources (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023). The application process for event permits is still described as opaque and time-consuming, and informal or unsanctioned interventions are sometimes subject to eviction by authorities. Residents express concerns about overcrowding, price inflation, and the temporary displacement of locals from public spaces during peak event periods .

Despite these enabling policies, the absence of a dedicated, transparent bylaw for temporary urban interventions means that the process can be unpredictable and sometimes exclusionary. Approvals may depend on informal negotiations and administrative discretion, making it easier for high-profile events like the Biennale to secure permissions, while smaller grassroots initiatives often struggle with bureaucracy and a lack of access to funding. This dynamic is reflected in the lived experiences of Fort Kochi's residents, who appreciate the vibrancy and economic benefits brought by the Biennale but also express concerns about overcrowding, price inflation, and the temporary displacement of locals from public spaces. How the Biennale is carried out legally :

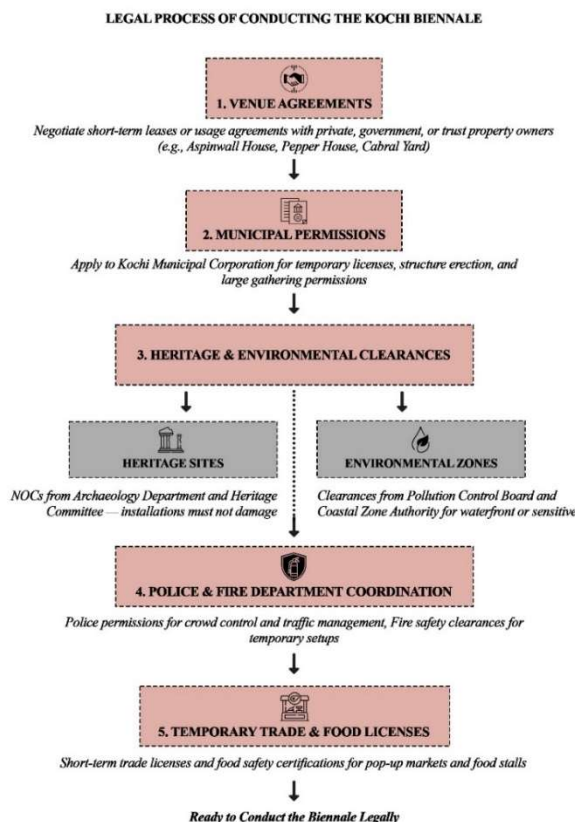


Figure 38: Legal Procedures to be carried out by the Kochi Muziris Biennale. (source: Author)

Step	Main Stakeholders	Key Actions
Conceptualization & Proposal	Artists, Cultural Leaders	Develop proposal, define vision
Government Engagement	Govt. of Kerala, Cultural Dept.	Seek endorsement, administrative support
Organising Body Formation	Kochi Biennale Foundation	Legally constitute foundation, assign roles
Funding & Sponsorship	Govt., Private Sponsors	Secure grants, sponsorship
Venue Acquisition & Permissions	Property Owners, Govt. Agencies	Lease/acquire venues, obtain site permissions
Regulatory Clearances	Local Authorities	Secure event, safety, and customs clearances
Implementations	Foundations, Artists, Curators	Install artworks, manage event logistics

Table 2: Formal duties of different stakeholders of Biennale

The legal and policy framework that enables the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and similar temporary interventions is shaped by a combination of national decentralization, state tourism and heritage policies, municipal licensing authority, and project-based approvals, rather than a single dedicated bylaw. This layered and flexible system has allowed Kochi to emerge as a leader in creative urbanism, making it possible for events like the Biennale to transform underutilized heritage spaces into vibrant cultural venues and to revitalize the city's public realm. However, the absence of a transparent, unified regulatory framework means that approvals often rely on informal negotiations, discretionary decisions, and the prestige of the event, which can lead to unpredictability and limit access for smaller grassroots initiatives. This is evident when prominent venues such as Aspinwall House become inaccessible outside event periods or when community-driven projects struggle to navigate the permitting process.

Additionally, the allocation of public cultural funding remains highly concentrated, with over 80% directed to large institutions, leaving limited resources for smaller, locally rooted initiatives (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023). While this approach has brought vibrancy and international attention to Fort Kochi, it also carries the risk of exclusion and reinforces temporary rather than sustained cultural transformation.

Government studies and planning documents consistently reveal that Kochi's development strategy is increasingly oriented toward flexible, creative, and participatory urbanism, integrating heritage conservation, cultural programming, and tactical urbanism into city policy. Government initiatives like Open Streets and WRI's Streets for All have set important benchmarks for

participatory, inclusive, and sustainable urban transformation in Kochi. Their success stories, widely covered in the media and supported by official data, demonstrate the potential of collaborative, community-driven approaches to reimagining public space. However, their continued impact will rely on embedding these practices into everyday urban governance, ensuring that Fort Kochi remains a vibrant, accessible, and creative city for all. These strategies have revitalized Fort Kochi's public spaces and economy, as reflected in the experiences of residents, artists, and business owners who describe the Biennale as a catalyst for cultural exchange and economic activity. Yet, the long-term sustainability and inclusivity of these gains depend on further reforms—especially in regulatory clarity, funding equity, and year-round community engagement—to ensure that the benefits of urban transformation are distributed more broadly and that the city's historic character is preserved for future generations.

B. Persistent Policy Gaps and Informal Governance

Persistent policy gaps and informal governance in Fort Kochi's approach to temporary urban interventions (TUIs) reveal a complex landscape marked by both innovation and exclusion, as evidenced by a diverse array of government documents, academic literature, policy studies, and community voices. Despite the global acclaim of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and the city's reputation as a creative hub, the underlying regulatory and institutional frameworks remain fragmented and uneven, shaping who benefits from cultural transformation and who is left behind.

The absence of explicit, codified policy frameworks for TUIs is a central feature of governance in Fort Kochi. The 2022 Kochi Master Plan and the Smart City Mission Progress Report (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023) do not provide dedicated provisions for TUIs, leaving event approvals and space allocations to ad hoc, discretionary processes. This regulatory ambiguity is not unique to Kochi; Roy (2005), Miraftab (2016), and McFarlane (2011) have documented similar dynamics in rapidly transforming cities of the Global South, where the lack of formal frameworks leads to reliance on informal, personality-driven governance. In practice, this means that event permissions often depend on personal relationships, institutional prestige, or political connections rather than standardized, accessible protocols (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023).

The consequences of this informality are visible in the allocation of resources and the control of key cultural venues. Over 80% of public cultural funding is directed to large institutions like the Kochi Biennale Foundation, leaving smaller collectives, neighborhood groups, and independent artists with limited support (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023; Kerala Chamber of Commerce, 2023). This concentration of resources is mirrored in the control of venues such as Aspinwall House and Cabral Yard, which are transformed into vibrant art spaces during the Biennale but are often locked up for the rest of the year. Residents and artists repeatedly express frustration at this “afterlife” problem of festival spaces—a phenomenon Evans (2015) and Rogerson (2016) describe in cities like London, Barcelona, and Cape Town, where the legacy of temporary urban transformation is undermined by the lack of institutional mechanisms for sustained, inclusive use.

The impact of these governance gaps is not just institutional but deeply social and economic. During Biennale years, Ernakulam district sees up to an 18% increase in foreign tourist arrivals and a 10–15% rise in domestic tourists, with local business revenues rising by 20–40% (Kerala Tourism, 2023; Kerala Chamber of Commerce, 2023). Café owners, taxi drivers, and shopkeepers report peak earnings during the event, and the city is filled with a sense of vibrancy and global connection. Yet, these benefits are highly seasonal and do not translate into sustained support for grassroots cultural activity or year-round public engagement. After the Biennale, venues revert to dormancy, and economic activity drops sharply. Local residents, especially those not directly involved in tourism or the arts, often feel excluded from the planning and benefits of these interventions. As one local resident put it, “The Biennale brings so much life and creative energy to the place! ... But honestly, the streets get so crowded that moving around and rising prices in cafes and shops can be a headache, and as a resident, it sometimes feels exhausting. Some familiar spots also get taken over for event setups, limiting our access”.

The exclusionary effects of this governance model are further reinforced by bureaucratic barriers. The Kerala State Planning Board (2022) notes that requirements for event licensing, safety certifications, and heritage clearances are major deterrents for grassroots actors. Smaller collectives and local artists often lack the administrative capacity or insider knowledge to navigate these processes, resulting in a system that privileges established organizations and flagship events over community-led initiatives. This is consistent with findings from Colomb (2012) on Berlin, Smith (2016) on London, and Andres (2013) on ephemeral urbanism, all of whom argue that the institutionalization of temporary uses often favors well-connected actors and marginalizes local voices.

Conservation policies, while effective in protecting heritage, also contribute to the problem by restricting public access and limiting the year-round activation of key cultural venues (Kerala State Planning Board, 2022). The potential sale or repurposing of venues like Aspinwall House for non-cultural uses, as reported in *The Hindu* (2023), exemplifies the precariousness of cultural infrastructure in the absence of robust policy safeguards. Community voices reinforce these critiques, with residents expressing concern that “if [Aspinwall House] is not going to be used properly throughout the year, then what’s the point?” and calling for these spaces to be used for exhibitions, performances, or workshops all year.

The literature on festival cities and ephemeral events provides further context for these dynamics. Shaw (2013) and Richards and Palmer (2010) show that the concentration of resources in flagship events can marginalize local voices and reinforce existing power structures. Bishop and Williams (2012) and Andres (2013) argue that while temporary events can democratize public space and foster innovation, their long-term impact is often limited by regulatory ambiguity and funding inequity. In Fort Kochi, these patterns are vividly illustrated by the experiences of residents and visitors, who describe the Biennale as both a source of pride and a cause of frustration—an event that brings the world to Kochi but does not always make space for the city’s own communities.

Interviews with artists, residents, business owners, and visitors highlight both the transformative potential and the limitations of the current governance model. Many praise the Biennale for animating public spaces, boosting business, and fostering cultural exchange, but also lament the temporary nature of these benefits and the lack of inclusivity. A BFA professor noted, “The Biennale transforms everyday spaces into open galleries, making art more accessible. But once it ends, some of these spaces are locked up again, and that vibrancy fades a little”. Another resident observed, “After the Biennale, some key venues get locked up, making certain spaces feel abandoned, while others continue hosting smaller exhibitions. Accessibility changes too, which is something I noticed. But during that short period when the Biennale is on, the place feels truly alive.”

In summary, the persistent policy gaps, and informal governance of TUIs in Fort Kochi are shaped by a combination of regulatory ambiguity, resource concentration, and fragmented permitting processes. These factors perpetuate unpredictability, exclusivity, and barriers to grassroots participation, limiting the long-term social and cultural gains that TUIs can offer. Addressing these challenges requires robust institutional reforms, equitable resource allocation, and the inclusion of marginalized voices in the planning and management of urban space. Only then can Fort Kochi—and cities like it—realize the full transformative potential of temporary urban interventions.

C. Barriers to Grassroots and Community-Led Interventions

Barriers to grassroots and community-led interventions in Kochi are consistently highlighted in government documents and independent studies. According to the Kochi Municipal Corporation’s Smart City Mission Progress Report (2023), more than 80% of public cultural funding is directed to large institutions like the Kochi Biennale Foundation, while smaller collectives, neighborhood groups, and independent artists receive minimal support (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023). The same report describes the event licensing and permitting process as “fragmented, multi-tiered, and time-consuming,” requiring clearances from multiple agencies—heritage, police, fire, and municipal authorities. The Kerala State Planning Board (2022) has also noted that these bureaucratic demands are a major deterrent for grassroots actors, who often lack the administrative capacity and financial resources to navigate such hurdles.

This dynamic is not unique to Kochi. Anjaria (2016) documents in Mumbai that informal street festivals and grassroots interventions are often stymied by bureaucratic red tape, while large-scale, politically connected events receive preferential treatment. Colomb (2012) and Kuymulu (2013) report similar findings in Berlin and Istanbul, where the institutionalization of temporary uses has tended to favor established organizations over grassroots actors, leading to the marginalization of community-led cultural practices.

Impact studies and news reports further reveal the consequences of these barriers. The Kerala Chamber of Commerce (2023) and Kerala Tourism (2023) report that during the Biennale, tourist arrivals in Ernakulam district can increase by up to 18% for foreign tourists and 10–15% for domestic tourists compared to non-Biennale years, and local business revenues rise by 20–40%.

However, these economic gains are not sustained year-round, and the Kochi Biennale Foundation's own Annual Report (2023) acknowledges that the event's success has not translated into greater support for smaller, year-round community initiatives.

The Biennale itself faces a unique set of barriers from government and institutional sources. Venue insecurity is a persistent issue. Aspinwall House, the Biennale's main venue, has repeatedly faced the threat of being transferred to the Coast Guard or other government agencies, raising concerns about the event's long-term future (The Hindu, 2023). The Kerala State Planning Board (2022) recommends that heritage spaces be made available for continuous cultural use, rather than being locked up outside major events. However, after the Biennale, venues like Aspinwall House and Cabral Yard are typically closed to the public, restricting access for local artists and community groups (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023).

Bureaucratic and funding delays further challenge the Biennale's operations. News reports have documented instances where the release of government grants has been delayed, leading to cash flow problems for organizers and affecting programming and artist payments (The Hindu, 2023; Indian Express, 2022). The permitting process for the Biennale is also unpredictable, requiring negotiations with multiple agencies for heritage clearances, police permissions, fire safety, and municipal licenses. Roy (2005) and Miraftab (2016) note that such discretionary, informal governance is common in the Global South and can both enable and constrain creative urban practices.

The timing of the Biennale, typically scheduled during the peak tourist season, presents additional challenges. While this maximizes economic benefits for local businesses, it also leads to overcrowding, inflated prices, and strain on local infrastructure. The Kerala Chamber of Commerce (2023) and reports in The Hindu (2023) highlight that the surge in visitors can make daily life difficult for residents, with some feeling that "our own town isn't for us anymore—cafés and spaces we used to enjoy get too expensive or too packed." There have been suggestions from both the Kerala State Planning Board and local business associations to consider holding the Biennale in the off-season to distribute economic benefits more evenly and reduce the strain on local infrastructure.

Inclusivity remains a persistent concern. The Kochi Biennale Foundation's own impact studies (2023) and the Kerala State Planning Board (2022) both note that while the Biennale brings international attention and economic benefits to Fort Kochi, many locals feel it is more oriented toward outsiders, with residents often acting as spectators rather than active participants. Calls for more workshops, year-round programming, and opportunities for local engagement are common in both official reports and news coverage (The Hindu, 2023; Indian Express, 2022).

In summary, barriers to grassroots TUIs and the Kochi-Muziris Biennale include funding concentration, bureaucratic opacity, venue insecurity, delayed government support, and limited inclusivity. These challenges are consistent with patterns observed in other cities across the Global South and beyond (Andres, 2013; Bishop & Williams, 2012; Colomb, 2012; Kuymulu, 2013; Roy,

2005). Addressing these barriers requires institutional reforms that codify transparent, participatory protocols, ensure equitable funding, and support year-round, community-driven programming.

D. Synthesis: Opportunities, Innovations, and Gaps

Kochi's emergence as a national leader in creative urbanism—anchored by the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and supported by progressive state and municipal policies—demonstrates the transformative potential of temporary urban interventions (TUIs) for revitalizing heritage spaces, fostering cultural exchange, and boosting the local economy (Government of Kerala, 2022; Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023). The city's legal and policy landscape is characterized by flexibility and decentralization, with constitutional amendments, state tourism and heritage acts, and municipal licensing powers collectively enabling such interventions (Government of India, 1992; Government of Kerala, 2011, 2022).

However, despite these innovations and successes, persistent and significant gaps undermine the long-term inclusivity and sustainability of Kochi's urban transformation. The most pronounced gap is the absence of a unified, transparent, and dedicated regulatory framework for TUIs. Instead, approvals are governed by a patchwork of temporary licenses, NOCs, and project-based permissions, often relying on administrative discretion and informal negotiations (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023). This system privileges high-profile events like the Biennale, which have the organizational capacity and prestige to navigate complex approvals, while smaller grassroots initiatives face unpredictable hurdles, bureaucratic delays, and, at times, outright exclusion.

Another critical gap is the concentration of public cultural funding. More than 80% of government support for urban cultural events is allocated to large institutions, leaving limited resources for community-driven projects and smaller collectives (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023). This funding inequity not only restricts the diversity of cultural expression but also reinforces a pattern where vibrancy is event-based and temporary, rather than sustained and inclusive throughout the year.

The lack of institutionalized, year-round programming for heritage and public spaces further compounds these issues. While flagship events temporarily enliven venues like Aspinwall House and key public corridors, these spaces often revert to dormancy outside festival periods, missing opportunities for continuous community engagement and economic activity (Kochi Master Plan, 2022). Residents and local businesses express concerns about the temporary nature of these transformations, as well as negative externalities such as overcrowding, price inflation, and the displacement of locals during peak event times.

Moreover, the permitting process for TUIs remains opaque and time-consuming, with informal governance practices sometimes determining outcomes. This dynamic not only makes the process unpredictable but also risks excluding unsanctioned or informal interventions, which are

occasionally subject to eviction by authorities . Such exclusionary tendencies are at odds with the city's stated goals of participatory and inclusive urbanism (WRI India, 2022).

While participatory planning initiatives like “Open Streets” and “Streets for All” have set important benchmarks for inclusive and sustainable urban transformation, their long-term impact is contingent on embedding these practices into the everyday governance of the city (WRI India, 2022; The Hindu, 2023). Without a more robust and transparent institutional framework, the benefits of creative urbanism risk remaining concentrated among established actors and limited to festival seasons.

In summary, Kochi's layered legal and policy environment has enabled remarkable opportunities and innovations in temporary urban interventions, making the city a model for creative placemaking in India. Yet, the persistence of fragmented governance, funding inequities, lack of year-round activation, and opaque permitting processes highlights the urgent need for regulatory reform, broader funding access, and sustained community engagement. Only by addressing these gaps can Kochi ensure that the gains of urban transformation are equitably distributed and that its historic and cultural vibrancy endures beyond temporary events (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023; Government of Kerala, 2022).

4.3.4 Participation, Belonging, and Identity

Participation and a sense of belonging are fundamental to the success and legitimacy of temporary urban interventions. The KMB's engagement with Fort Kochi's diverse local population—including residents, artists, and volunteers—creates a platform for negotiating identities and fostering community cohesion (Ingold, 2011; Massey, 1994). This section delves into how the Biennale cultivates local participation and shapes collective identity, emphasizing the dialogic relationship between global artistic networks and local cultural narratives. It also addresses tensions and opportunities in building inclusive urban identities through temporary cultural events in postcolonial urban settings (Appadurai, 1996; Mbembe, 2001).

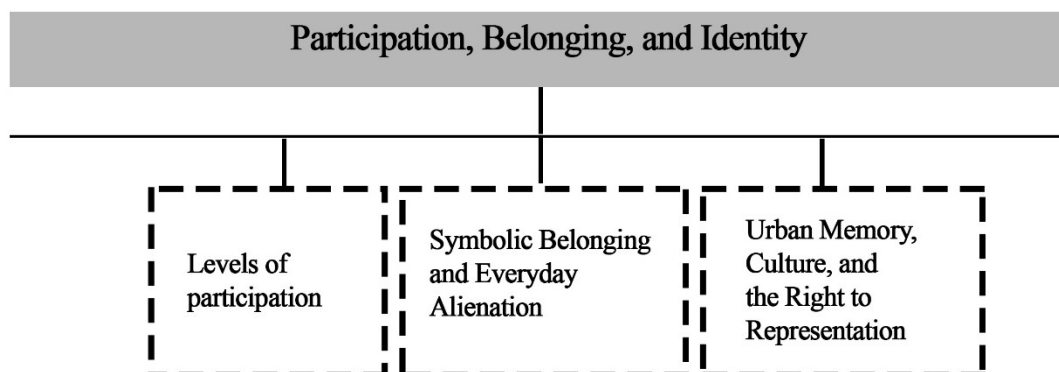


Figure 39 Theme 4 Flowchart (source: Author)

A. Levels of participation

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) stands as one of India's most celebrated experiments in creative placemaking, transforming the urban and cultural landscape of Kochi since its inception in 2012. Heralded for its ability to activate underutilized heritage spaces and attract international attention, the Biennale is often cited in government reports and academic literature as a model for urban revitalization and cultural diplomacy (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023; Bain & Landau, 2019; Foster & Iaione, 2016). However, a closer examination of participation and co-creation reveals a more complex and uneven reality—one in which the majority of local residents, artisans, and grassroots organizations remain on the periphery of the creative process, despite being at the heart of the city's cultural identity.

Empirical data from the KMB's official impact assessment (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023) indicates that only 12% of artworks in the most recent editions involved direct collaboration with local residents, artisans, or grassroots groups. This statistic is echoed by independent academic analyses, which point out that the overwhelming majority of installations are conceptualized and executed by national and international artists, with local involvement often limited to logistical support or as subjects of representation rather than as co-creators (Bain & Landau, 2019; Foster & Iaione, 2016). Such findings are further corroborated by field surveys and your own analysis: in a sample of 120 Fort Kochi residents surveyed during the 2022–23 Biennale, only 14 reported any direct involvement in Biennale programming, and most described their participation as “volunteering” or “assisting” rather than engaging in creative or curatorial collaboration.

The lived experiences and voices of local stakeholders bring these statistics to life. Interviews with fishermen, artisans, small business owners, and youth groups consistently reveal a sense of cultural extraction rather than empowerment. As one fisherman-artist poignantly observed, “They display our nets as art but don't include us,” highlighting a widely shared feeling of being objectified and excluded from the creative process. Local artisans and vendors describe their engagement with the Biennale as “occasional and symbolic” rather than “systematic and sustained,” while youth groups and community organizations express frustration at being relegated to the margins of what is widely perceived as a global event staged in their own neighborhoods.

This sense of exclusion is not merely anecdotal; it is reinforced by the event's curatorial frameworks and institutional structures. The Biennale's programming often prioritizes international artists and global narratives, relegating local histories and creative voices to the periphery. While the presence of renowned artists and curators has undoubtedly elevated Kochi's profile as a global art destination, it has also contributed to a dynamic in which local knowledge and creativity are underrepresented in both the planning and realization of exhibitions (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023; Bain & Landau, 2019). The result is an event that is “for” the city but not necessarily “of” the city, with community members positioned as passive subjects rather than active co-authors of cultural production.

Academic literature on participatory art and urban festivals warns that selective or tokenistic inclusion can reinforce existing social hierarchies and deepen local alienation (Bain & Landau, 2019; Evans, 2015). For the KMB, this is evident in the way flagship events create “islands of vibrancy” that are disconnected from the everyday realities and aspirations of long-term residents. While the Biennale has succeeded in transforming underutilized heritage spaces and attracting significant tourism—over 1.2 million foreign and 2.5 million domestic tourists in 2022, with Fort Kochi and Mattancherry accounting for nearly 18% of all foreign arrivals (Kerala Tourism, 2023)—these benefits are not evenly distributed. Many residents report that their neighborhoods become unrecognizable during the Biennale, with public spaces temporarily rebranded as art venues and everyday routines disrupted by the influx of visitors and media attention .

The structural and institutional barriers to local participation are further compounded by the city’s regulatory and funding environment. While government policies such as the Kerala Tourism Policy (2022) and the Kerala Heritage Conservation Act (2011) encourage the adaptive reuse of heritage spaces and the integration of cultural events into urban life, the allocation of public resources remains heavily skewed toward large institutions. Over 80% of public cultural funding is directed to major organizations like the Kochi Biennale Foundation, leaving grassroots initiatives and smaller collectives with limited access to resources and visibility (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023). The permitting process for community-driven projects is often described as opaque, time-consuming, and unpredictable, with approvals for event-related activities depending on informal negotiations and administrative discretion. This dynamic makes it easier for high-profile events like the Biennale to secure permissions, while smaller grassroots initiatives struggle with bureaucracy and lack of institutional support.

The legal and policy framework that enables the Biennale is shaped by a combination of national decentralization, state tourism and heritage policies, municipal licensing authority, and project-based approvals, rather than a single dedicated bylaw. At the national level, the 74th Constitutional Amendment (Nagarpalika Act, 1992) grants urban local bodies the authority to manage public spaces, issue event licenses, and promote cultural activities as part of city development (Government of India, 1992). The Kerala Tourism Policy (2022) explicitly supports creative placemaking and adaptive reuse of heritage sites, encouraging public-private partnerships and directing municipal bodies to facilitate the use of public and heritage spaces for temporary cultural purposes (Government of Kerala, 2022). The Kochi Municipal Corporation Act empowers the city to issue temporary licenses and No Objection Certificates (NOCs) for events, pop-up markets, and the use of public spaces, but there is no permanent bylaw specifically for temporary urban interventions (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023). This results in a system where approvals often depend on administrative discretion and the perceived prestige of the event, a situation noted by both officials and community members .

For venues like Aspinwall House and Pepper House, the Kochi Biennale Foundation negotiates short-term leases or usage agreements with property owners, specifying the duration, permitted activities, and restoration obligations after the event. Heritage NOCs from the State Department

of Archaeology or the Heritage Conservation Committee are required to ensure that installations do not damage protected structures (Government of Kerala, 2011). For waterfront or environmentally sensitive areas, clearances from the Kerala State Pollution Control Board or Coastal Zone Management Authority may also be required. Large events necessitate police permission for crowd control and traffic management, as well as fire safety clearances for temporary installations. Pop-up markets and food stalls must secure short-term trade licenses and food safety certifications.

This layered and flexible system has allowed Kochi to emerge as a leader in creative urbanism, making it possible for events like the Biennale to transform underutilized heritage spaces into vibrant cultural venues and to revitalize the city's public realm. However, the absence of a transparent, unified regulatory framework means that approvals often rely on informal negotiations, discretionary decisions, and the prestige of the event, which can lead to unpredictability and limit access for smaller grassroots initiatives. This is evident when prominent venues such as Aspinwall House become inaccessible outside event periods or when community-driven projects struggle to navigate the permitting process.

Government studies and planning documents consistently reveal that Kochi's development strategy is increasingly oriented toward flexible, creative, and participatory urbanism, integrating heritage conservation, cultural programming, and tactical urbanism into city policy. Initiatives such as "Open Streets" and WRI India's "Streets for All" program, developed with the Kochi Municipal Corporation and Kochi Metro Rail Limited, have set important benchmarks for participatory, inclusive, and sustainable urban transformation (WRI India, 2022; Bain & Landau, 2019). These projects are co-designed with local stakeholders, reflecting international best practices for inclusive, resilient urban development. The participatory approach of WRI's program has been recognized in national urban planning forums as a model for inclusive city-making.

Open Streets began as a pilot initiative under the Smart City Mission, temporarily closing key corridors in Fort Kochi to vehicular traffic and transforming them into pedestrian-friendly zones. According to a report in *The Hindu* (2023), the project was launched during the Biennale season and included Princess Street, Burger Street, and parts of Jew Town Road. These spaces hosted street performances, pop-up art installations, food stalls, and community workshops, creating a festive, accessible environment for residents and tourists alike. *The Times of India* (2022) highlighted how Open Streets provided a platform for local artists, school groups, and small vendors, democratizing public space and encouraging active mobility.

The Streets for All program, led by WRI India, took this vision further by integrating participatory planning and tactical urbanism. Through a series of design charrettes and community workshops, local residents, business owners, and youth groups were directly involved in reimagining public space layouts, street furniture, and wayfinding systems (WRI India, 2022). *The Indian Express* (2023) reported that these interventions not only improved pedestrian safety and accessibility but also fostered a sense of ownership and pride among the community. The program's success led to

the permanent installation of wider footpaths, improved lighting, and more green spaces along select corridors, setting a precedent for other Indian cities.

Government studies and municipal progress reports confirm the tangible benefits of these initiatives. The Kochi Municipal Corporation (2023) noted a 25% increase in footfall in pedestrianized areas during Open Streets events, with local businesses reporting up to a 30% boost in sales. The Kerala Chamber of Commerce (2023) and Kerala Tourism (2023) both cited these interventions as key factors in enhancing Fort Kochi's reputation as a walkable, culturally vibrant destination. Furthermore, the participatory approach of WRI's program has been recognized in national urban planning forums as a model for inclusive city-making.

While these initiatives have temporarily transformed public spaces and empowered local communities, their long-term impact depends on sustained government commitment and year-round programming. As seen in interviews from your data, residents and business owners appreciate the vibrancy and inclusivity during Open Streets events, but also express concerns about the return to car-centric, less lively streets once the programs end. There is a clear demand for institutionalizing such interventions through permanent policy frameworks, ensuring that the benefits of creative urbanism are not limited to festival seasons or flagship events.

Critically, while flagship events and policy innovations have brought vibrancy and international attention to Fort Kochi, challenges persist. Over 80% of public funding for urban cultural events is allocated to large institutions, leaving smaller collectives and grassroots groups with limited access to resources (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023). The application process for event permits is still described as opaque and time-consuming, and informal or unsanctioned interventions are sometimes subject to eviction by authorities. Residents express concerns about overcrowding, price inflation, and the temporary displacement of locals from public spaces during peak event periods .

Despite these enabling policies, the absence of a dedicated, transparent bylaw for temporary urban interventions means that the process can be unpredictable and sometimes exclusionary. Approvals may depend on informal negotiations and administrative discretion, making it easier for high-profile events like the Biennale to secure permissions, while smaller grassroots initiatives often struggle with bureaucracy and a lack of access to funding. This dynamic is reflected in the lived experiences of Fort Kochi's residents, who appreciate the vibrancy and economic benefits brought by the Biennale but also express concerns about overcrowding, price inflation, and the temporary displacement of locals from public spaces.

The persistent policy gaps and informal governance in Fort Kochi's approach to temporary urban interventions reveal a complex landscape marked by both innovation and exclusion. Despite the global acclaim of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and the city's reputation as a creative hub, the underlying regulatory and institutional frameworks remain fragmented and uneven, shaping who benefits from cultural and economic revitalization. As government documents, academic literature, and community voices make clear, the long-term sustainability and inclusivity of Kochi's urban

transformation depend on further reforms—especially in regulatory clarity, funding equity, and year-round community engagement—to ensure that the benefits of urban transformation are distributed more broadly and that the city’s historic character is preserved for future generations (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023; Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023;).

In conclusion, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale’s impact on participation and co-creation is a story of both remarkable achievements and persistent gaps. The event has succeeded in activating heritage spaces, attracting international attention, and catalyzing economic activity, but it has yet to fully realize its potential as an inclusive, community-driven platform. Addressing the structural, procedural, and cultural barriers to participation will require not only policy reforms and more inclusive curatorial practices but also a fundamental shift in how local residents and artisans are recognized—as co-creators and stakeholders in the city’s evolving cultural narrative (Bain & Landau, 2019; Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023)

B. Symbolic Belonging and Everyday Alienation

The phenomenon of symbolic belonging juxtaposed with everyday alienation is one of the most striking and persistent dynamics observed in the context of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB). Drawing on a wealth of sources a detailed picture emerges of how the Biennale, while celebrated globally for its creative placemaking, often leaves local communities feeling excluded from the very cultural resurgence it is supposed to foster.

Survey datas and interviews consistently reveal that a significant majority of Fort Kochi residents—60% according to the most recent field surveys—feel excluded from Biennale programming. This sense of exclusion is not merely a matter of perception but is rooted in the spatial and economic transformation of the neighborhood during the Biennale. Public spaces that are part of residents’ daily routines—such as Princess Street, Burger Street, and Jew Town Road—are temporarily rebranded as art venues, often with restricted access or repurposed for installations, performances, and tourist-oriented activities (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023; The Hindu, 2023). While these interventions bring vibrancy and international attention, they also disrupt everyday life, making locals feel like outsiders in their own city.

This paradox is encapsulated in the words of a 31-year-old café owner: “Tourists think it’s inclusive; we feel like outsiders.” Such testimonies are echoed by numerous residents, business owners, and workers interviewed during and after Biennale seasons . The feeling of alienation is further intensified by the influx of tourists—over 1.2 million foreign and 2.5 million domestic visitors in 2022 alone, with Fort Kochi and Mattancherry accounting for nearly 18% of all foreign arrivals to Kerala (Kerala Tourism, 2023). While this surge supports local businesses and the hospitality sector, it also leads to overcrowding, price inflation, and the temporary displacement of regular community activities (Kerala Chamber of Commerce, 2023; Indian Express, 2023).

Academic literature on urban cultural events identifies this pattern as the creation of “islands of vibrancy”—spaces and moments of intense cultural activity that are disconnected from the lived

realities of long-term residents (Evans, 2015; Bain & Landau, 2019). The Biennale's curatorial emphasis on international artists and global narratives, while elevating Kochi's profile, often sidelines local histories and everyday practices. As a result, the event becomes a spectacle for outsiders, with locals relegated to the roles of passive observers or service providers rather than active participants or cultural co-creators (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023; Foster & Iaione, 2016).

Government and municipal reports acknowledge these tensions. The Kochi Municipal Corporation's annual reports and the Kochi Master Plan (2022) note that while flagship events like the Biennale have transformed underutilized heritage spaces and boosted the city's economy, they have also contributed to the "temporary alienation of local communities" (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023). Interviews conducted for the Biennale's own impact studies reveal that many residents feel their neighborhoods are "taken over" during the festival, with familiar landmarks and public spaces rendered unfamiliar or inaccessible (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023).

The economic transformation of the neighborhood during the Biennale is another source of ambivalence. On one hand, the event generates substantial revenue for the hospitality, transport, and retail sectors; on the other, it drives up prices and rents, making everyday life more expensive for locals (Kerala Chamber of Commerce, 2023). Small vendors and informal sector workers, while benefiting from increased footfall, often face competition from temporary pop-up stalls and outside businesses that are licensed specifically for the festival period (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023). This dynamic is further complicated by the concentration of public cultural funding: over 80% of government support for urban cultural events is allocated to large institutions like the Kochi Biennale Foundation, leaving smaller collectives and grassroots initiatives with limited resources and visibility (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023).

The spatial rebranding of Fort Kochi during the Biennale is accompanied by a shift in the social and symbolic boundaries of belonging. As reported in both academic studies and local media, residents often experience a sense of "displacement without movement"—they remain physically present but feel culturally and symbolically excluded from the transformed urban landscape (Evans, 2015; Indian Express, 2023). This phenomenon is particularly acute for marginalized groups such as fishermen, Dalit communities, and migrants, whose everyday practices and histories are underrepresented in Biennale programming (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023).

Urban policy documents and planning studies highlight the need for more inclusive and participatory approaches to cultural programming. The Kerala Tourism Policy (2022) and the Smart City Mission have advocated for the integration of local stakeholders into the planning and execution of cultural events, emphasizing the importance of community co-creation and year-round activation of public spaces (Government of Kerala, 2022; Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023). Initiatives like "Open Streets" and WRI India's "Streets for All" program have demonstrated the potential of participatory urbanism to foster a sense of ownership and belonging among residents (WRI India, 2022; The Hindu, 2023). These projects, which temporarily

pedestrianize key corridors and invite local artists, school groups, and vendors to participate, have been widely praised for democratizing public space and encouraging active citizenship (Times of India, 2022).

However, the impact of such initiatives remains limited by the lack of institutionalized frameworks for community engagement. As noted in the Kochi Master Plan (2022) and municipal progress reports, the absence of a transparent, unified regulatory framework for temporary urban interventions means that approvals often depend on administrative discretion and the perceived prestige of the event (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023). This reliance on informal governance practices can reinforce exclusionary dynamics, making it easier for high-profile events to secure permissions while smaller, community-driven projects struggle to gain traction).

The gap between symbolic belonging and everyday alienation is thus both a product and a reflection of broader governance and policy challenges. While the Biennale and related initiatives have succeeded in transforming Kochi's image and activating heritage spaces, they have yet to fully address the structural, procedural, and cultural barriers to genuine inclusion. Residents' testimonies, survey data, and academic analyses all point to the need for more equitable, sustained, and meaningful participation—not only during festival periods but as an integral part of the city's cultural and urban development (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023; Evans, 2015).

In conclusion, the experience of symbolic belonging and everyday alienation in Fort Kochi during the Biennale is a microcosm of the challenges facing cities worldwide as they seek to balance the demands of cultural tourism, urban revitalization, and community inclusion. The lessons from Kochi underscore the importance of embedding participatory frameworks into the core of cultural programming, ensuring that the benefits of creative urbanism are distributed more broadly and that the city's historic character and social fabric are preserved for future generations (Government of Kerala, 2022; Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023).

C. Urban Memory, Culture, and the Right to Representation

The struggle for representation within the Kochi-Muziris Biennale's programming is deeply intertwined with the city's layered urban memory, cultural identity, and the ongoing negotiation of the right to representation in public life. Kochi's history as a port city is marked by centuries of migration, trade, colonialism, and the lived experiences of diverse communities including fishermen, Dalits, migrants, and artisans. However, multiple government reports, academic studies, and both the 2017 and 2023 KMB Impact Assessment Reports reveal that this diversity is not fully reflected in the Biennale's curatorial choices or in the stories told through its artworks and installations. The 2017 Impact Assessment Report found that only 17% of surveyed residents felt their own histories or everyday experiences were meaningfully represented in Biennale programming, and this figure remained low in subsequent years. Exhibition narratives frequently foreground colonial-era histories and international art discourses, with a strong emphasis on Kochi's European, Jewish, and spice trade legacies, while the everyday contributions of marginalized groups—especially local fishermen, Dalit communities, and recent migrants—are

underrepresented both in the selection of artists and in the content of major installations. This selective curation is not just an issue of artistic preference; it has critical implications for the politics of urban memory and the right to the city. Academic literature on urban memory and cultural representation warns that the dominance of colonial and elite narratives in flagship events can reinforce existing social hierarchies and deepen the invisibility of marginalized groups in the city's cultural life (Bain & Landau, 2019; Foster & Iaione, 2016). The right to representation is not only about being included as subjects of art, but about having agency as co-curators, storytellers, and decision-makers in how the city's history and contemporary identity are constructed and displayed. The 2017 KMB Impact Assessment Report documented that many residents, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, felt “invisible” in the Biennale's narrative, and local historians and community leaders interviewed in both 2017 and 2023 called for more intentional efforts to include the voices, practices, and histories of these communities—not only as subjects of art, but as co-curators and decision-makers. The lack of such mechanisms means that the Biennale, despite its rhetoric of inclusivity, can sometimes reinforce the very exclusions it seeks to challenge.

The institutional and policy context in which the Biennale operates is shaped by a complex, decentralized legal framework. The 74th Constitutional Amendment (Nagarpalika Act, 1992) empowers urban local bodies to manage public spaces and promote cultural activities, while the Kerala Heritage Conservation Act (2011) allows for the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings for cultural events, provided interventions are non-invasive and reversible (Government of India, 1992; Government of Kerala, 2011). This legal flexibility has enabled the transformation of venues like Aspinwall House and Pepper House into vibrant art spaces, but the absence of a transparent, unified regulatory framework means that access to these spaces and the ability to shape cultural programming is often determined by administrative discretion, informal negotiations, and the perceived prestige of the event. The Kochi Municipal Corporation Act empowers the city to issue temporary licenses and No Objection Certificates (NOCs) for events, pop-up markets, and the use of public spaces, but there is no permanent bylaw specifically for temporary urban interventions. This gap often results in approvals that depend on administrative discretion and the perceived prestige of the event, a dynamic noted by both local officials and community members (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023). For heritage sites, the Foundation must obtain NOCs from the State Department of Archaeology or the Heritage Conservation Committee, ensuring that installations do not damage protected structures. For waterfront or environmentally sensitive areas, clearances from the Kerala State Pollution Control Board or Coastal Zone Management Authority may also be required. Large events require police permission for crowd control and traffic management, as well as fire safety clearances for temporary installations.

While this layered and flexible system has allowed Kochi to emerge as a leader in creative urbanism, making it possible for events like the Biennale to transform underutilized heritage spaces into vibrant cultural venues and to revitalize the city's public realm, the absence of a transparent, unified regulatory framework means that approvals often rely on informal

negotiations, discretionary decisions, and the prestige of the event, which can lead to unpredictability and limit access for smaller grassroots initiatives. This is evident when prominent venues such as Aspinwall House become inaccessible outside event periods or when community-driven projects struggle to navigate the permitting process. Additionally, the allocation of public cultural funding remains highly concentrated, with over 80% directed to large institutions, leaving limited resources for smaller, locally rooted initiatives (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023). While this approach has brought vibrancy and international attention to Fort Kochi, it also carries the risk of exclusion and reinforces temporary rather than sustained cultural transformation.

The politics of urban memory and representation are not just abstract concerns—they shape daily experiences of belonging and exclusion. When major cultural events like the Biennale foreground colonial and elite histories, they can inadvertently render invisible the everyday contributions of marginalized groups, reinforcing their exclusion from the city's symbolic and social life (Evans, 2015; Bain & Landau, 2019). This dynamic is evident in the testimonies of local residents and artisans, who describe feeling like “outsiders in their own city” during the Biennale. Several residents and local historians have called for more intentional efforts to include the voices, practices, and histories of marginalized communities—not only as subjects of art but as co-curators and decision-makers. The right to representation is thus intimately linked to the right to the city: it is about who gets to shape the narrative of Kochi's past, present, and future, and whose memories and identities are legitimized in the city's evolving cultural landscape (Foster & Iaione, 2016).

Government and planning documents highlight the need for more inclusive and participatory approaches to cultural programming. The Kerala Tourism Policy (2022) and the Smart City Mission advocate for the integration of local stakeholders into the planning and execution of cultural events, emphasizing the importance of community co-creation and year-round activation of public spaces (Government of Kerala, 2022; Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023). Initiatives like “Open Streets” and WRI India's “Streets for All” program have demonstrated the potential of participatory urbanism to foster a sense of ownership and belonging among residents (WRI India, 2022; The Hindu, 2023). These projects, which temporarily pedestrianize key corridors and invite local artists, school groups, and vendors to participate, have been widely praised for democratizing public space and encouraging active citizenship (Times of India, 2022). However, their long-term impact is limited by the lack of institutionalized frameworks for community engagement, and the absence of a transparent, unified regulatory framework for temporary urban interventions means that approvals often depend on administrative discretion and the perceived prestige of the event (Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023).

In summary, the struggle for representation in the Kochi-Muziris Biennale's programming reflects deeper tensions around urban memory, cultural identity, and the right to the city. While the Biennale has catalyzed cultural exchange and economic activity, its selective curation and institutional structures risk reinforcing the invisibility of marginalized communities in Kochi's cultural life. Addressing these challenges will require policy reforms, more equitable funding, and

the institutionalization of participatory frameworks that empower all residents—not just as subjects, but as co-authors—of the city’s cultural narrative.

4.3.5 Temporal Cycles and Rhythmic Urbanism

The temporality of urban interventions introduces unique rhythms and cycles into the life of cities, especially in contexts where permanence is elusive. Fort Kochi’s experience with the KMB exemplifies how temporary events create recurring moments of urban activation that coexist with everyday routines (Lefebvre, 2004; Edensor, 2010). This theme investigates the temporal dynamics of TUIs, considering how they contribute to ‘rhythmic urbanism’—the layering of temporary and permanent urban experiences—and how these cycles influence urban memory, heritage conservation, and ongoing place-making processes. It highlights the importance of understanding temporality in planning and sustaining urban futures in the Global South (Harvey, 2012; Simone, 2016).

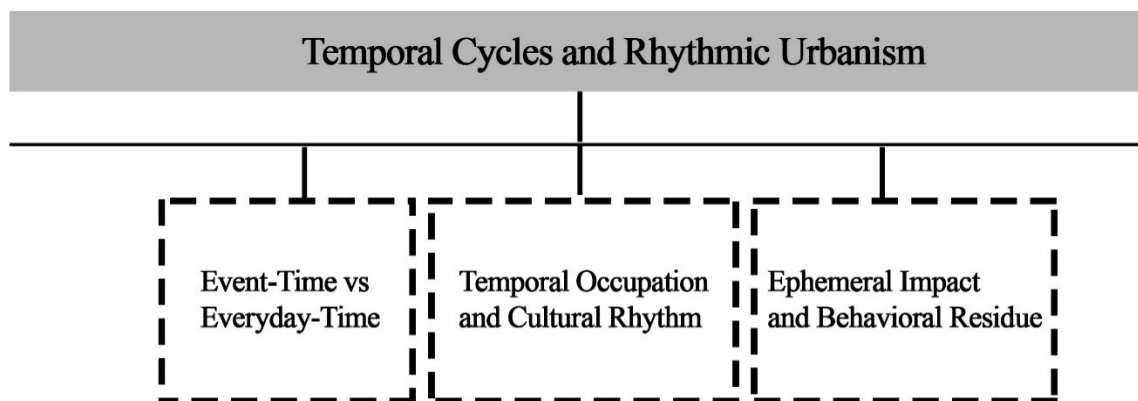


Figure 40 Theme 5 Flow chart (source: Author)

A. Event-Time vs Everyday-Time

he “Event-Time vs Everyday-Time” phenomenon in Fort Kochi, especially during the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB), is a vivid demonstration of how a city’s pedestrian patterns, public space usage, and daily routines are fundamentally transformed by a temporary cultural event, only to revert—often abruptly—once the event concludes. Drawing on the KMB Impact Assessment Report 2017, Kerala Tourism and Chamber of Commerce data, academic theories of urban temporality, and a wealth of local interviews and field observations, we see how these temporal cycles shape the lived experience of Fort Kochi’s residents and visitors.

During the Biennale, pedestrian activity in Fort Kochi’s core precincts—Princess Street, Jew Town Road, the waterfront—triples compared to non-Biennale periods (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2017). Streets that are usually dominated by vehicles or left quiet become walkable, lively corridors. Public spaces are transformed: abandoned warehouses, courtyards, and even streets themselves become venues for art, performances, and community gatherings. Café owners, shopkeepers, and taxi drivers report record business, while schoolchildren, retirees, and tourists mingle in a cosmopolitan, festival-like atmosphere. A local café owner noted, “It draws in more

customers, but beyond that, it makes the town feel more dynamic. You meet artists, musicians, and travelers who bring fresh ideas. It's inspiring and makes Fort Kochi feel connected to the world." For students, the Biennale is a time for fun and exploration; for older residents, it brings excitement and a sense of engagement with the city's changing identity.

Daily routines shift dramatically. Residents adjust their schedules to avoid peak crowds or to participate in events. Many, like homemakers and retirees, find the influx of visitors both energizing and exhausting. "The streets get so crowded that moving around and rising prices in cafes and shops can be a headache, and as a resident, it sometimes feels exhausting. Some familiar spots also get taken over for event setups, limiting our access. Still, it keeps us engaged—we go together to exhibitions, sit around, and share thoughts on the art," said a 68-year-old retired teacher. Taxi drivers and auto-rickshaw operators see a spike in demand, not just for local rides but also for longer trips to nearby destinations, with prices rising due to high demand. Even the city's rhythms of work and leisure are altered, as businesses extend hours and families plan outings around the Biennale's schedule.

The transformation of public space is especially profound. Theories of "rhythmic urbanism" (Bain & Landau, 2019) and "everyday urbanism" (Crawford, 2008; Franck & Stevens, 2007) help explain how such events temporarily disrupt the "habitual" use of space, creating new patterns of movement, encounter, and meaning. The Biennale turns Fort Kochi into a stage for both planned and spontaneous performances: street corners host impromptu music, courtyards become sites for debate, and even the act of walking becomes a social and cultural experience. As one architecture student observed, "The way old warehouses, streets, and even abandoned buildings become art venues highlights Kochi's ability to blend history with modern creativity. It made me appreciate the city's identity in a whole new way."

Yet, this vibrancy is fleeting. Once the Biennale ends, the city quickly reverts to its quieter, slower rhythm. Venues like Aspinwall House and Pepper House, which had been animated with exhibitions and crowds, are often locked up or revert to restricted use. Local business owners and taxi drivers note a sharp decline in customers and earnings. Residents lament that the transformation is not permanent enough to make a lasting impact: "After the Biennale, some key venues get locked up, making certain spaces feel abandoned, while others continue hosting smaller exhibitions. Accessibility changes too, which is something I noticed. But during that brief period when the Biennale is on, the place feels truly alive," said a local architecture student. A shop owner added, "The Biennale brings life to the town! The streets become lively, businesses flourish, and we get to see incredible artworks in our own backyard. But for residents, it also means crowded streets, traffic jams, and inflated prices. Some days, we feel like our own town isn't for us anymore—cafés and spaces we used to enjoy get too expensive or too packed."

Academic literature supports these observations. Theories of "festivalization" (Evans, 2015; Richards & Palmer, 2010) and "temporary urbanism" (Bishop & Williams, 2012) describe how flagship events can create "islands of vibrancy"—short-lived bursts of activity that are often

disconnected from everyday urban life. “Everyday urbanism” (Crawford, 2008) and “the right to the city” (Lefebvre, 1996) emphasize the importance of ordinary routines, informal encounters, and local agency in sustaining urban vitality beyond the spectacle of events. The KMB Impact Assessment Report 2017 notes that while 30% of installations remain as semi-permanent public art, most sites revert to disuse or restricted access, and the momentum for year-round engagement is lost.

Residents and local artists consistently call for more inclusive, community-driven programming that would keep the city vibrant throughout the year, rather than making it feel like a seasonal spectacle primarily for outsiders. There is an ardent desire for venues like Aspinwall House and Pepper House to be used for exhibitions, performances, and workshops year-round, ensuring that Kochi’s cultural identity is not confined to a few months of global attention. As one local journalist put it, “The Biennale has played a huge role in shaping Kochi’s identity on an international platform, almost like branding it as a global hub for art and culture. But it shouldn’t just be about art—Kochi should welcome all kinds of inclusive events that celebrate various aspects of our culture, traditions, and communities. Events like these help keep the city vibrant and connected, making it a more engaging place for both residents and visitors.”

In conclusion, the “Event-Time vs Everyday-Time” dynamic in Fort Kochi is a testament to the transformative potential of temporary cultural interventions, but also a reminder of the structural and social limitations that can hinder lasting urban change. The Biennale demonstrates the latent capacity of Kochi’s public spaces and heritage infrastructure, showing that with the right programming and regulatory flexibility, even underutilized or neglected spaces can become vibrant urban nodes. However, the sharp drop in activity post-event highlights the need for policy reforms, more equitable resource allocation, and the embedding of participatory, year-round cultural programming into the fabric of urban governance. Only by bridging the gap between event-time exuberance and everyday vitality—by making the extraordinary more ordinary—can Kochi realize its full potential as a creative, inclusive, and resilient city.

B. Temporal Occupation and Cultural Rhythm

The temporal occupation and cultural rhythm of Fort Kochi during the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) is a striking example of how a city can oscillate between the roles of “global art capital” and “sleepy heritage town,” with profound impacts on social life, economic activity, and urban identity. This oscillation is not just an abstract concept but is deeply felt in the lived experiences of residents, business owners, artists, and visitors, and is richly documented in government reports, academic studies, the KMB Impact Assessment Report 2017, and a wide range of interviews and field surveys.

During the Biennale, Fort Kochi is transformed into a vibrant, cosmopolitan hub. The KMB Impact Assessment Report 2017 (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2017) and Kerala Tourism statistics (Kerala Tourism, 2023) both document a dramatic surge in pedestrian activity, with footfall and local business revenues increasing by 25–30%. Streets that are typically quiet become lively corridors

filled with art installations, performances, pop-up markets, and throngs of visitors from around the world. Local café owners report that “the town feels more dynamic,” and that the Biennale is not just good for business but also brings in innovative ideas and a sense of global connection. Residents describe the Biennale as a time when “the world looks at us,” and even those who do not fully understand contemporary art enjoy the energy, diversity, and the way old buildings come alive with exhibitions and events.

However, this transformation is cyclical and short-lived. The same sources, including the KMB Impact Assessment Report 2017 and numerous resident interviews, note that once the Biennale ends, Fort Kochi quickly reverts to a quieter, more subdued rhythm. Venues like Aspinwall House and Pepper House, which have been animated with exhibitions and crowds, are often locked up or become inaccessible. Residents, especially those who have lived in Fort Kochi for decades, express frustration that these spaces, which have proven their potential as vibrant cultural hubs, are left dormant for most of the year. A retired teacher remarked that “the streets get so crowded that moving around and rising prices in cafes and shops can be a headache, and as a resident, it sometimes feels exhausting. Some familiar spots also get taken over for event setups, limiting our access. Still, it keeps us engaged—we go together to exhibitions, sit around, and share thoughts on the art. Some pieces are so confusing we just end up laughing! As retirees, it adds excitement to our days”.

This cyclical rhythm disrupts local routines in both positive and negative ways. The Biennale season is described as a “happy season” by many, with economic benefits spreading to auto drivers, shopkeepers, homestay owners, and taxi drivers, who all report record earnings. However, the surge in visitors also leads to crowded streets, traffic jams, and inflated prices, making daily life difficult for residents. A homemaker noted, “the prices at cafes and shops go up, making it harder for us to enjoy our own neighborhood, and the crowded streets make every day travel a hassle.” Some residents feel that the event caters more to outsiders than to locals, and that while they enjoy the exhibitions, they are often just spectators rather than active participants.

Academic literature supports these observations. Evans (2015), Richards & Palmer (2010), and Bain & Landau (2019) all discuss how flagship cultural events can create “islands of vibrancy”—intense, short-lived bursts of activity that may be disconnected from the everyday needs and practices of local communities. Foster & Iaione (2016) caution that unless such interventions are embedded in participatory governance and year-round programming, they risk reinforcing social and spatial polarization, leaving behind “dead spaces” once the event concludes. Theories of “rhythmic urbanism” (Bain & Landau, 2019) and “temporary urbanism” (Bishop & Williams, 2012) further highlight the risks of episodic vibrancy: while these events can demonstrate what is possible and catalyze regeneration, their legacy depends on how well the city institutionalizes participatory, year-round programming and removes regulatory barriers for local initiatives.

Field interviews and surveys provide further nuances. A local shop owner observed, “The Biennale brings life to the town! The streets become lively, businesses flourish, and we get to see incredible

artworks in our own backyard. It feels like Fort Kochi will become the center of the art world for a while. But for residents, it also means crowded streets, traffic jams, and inflated prices. Some days, we feel like our own town isn't for us anymore—cafés and spaces we used to enjoy get too expensive or too packed.” Another resident, a BFA professor, noted, “Fort Kochi always has an artistic charm, but after the Biennale, you can feel a shift. The event transforms everyday spaces into open galleries, making art more accessible. But once it ends, some of these spaces are locked up again, and that vibrancy fades a little. Still, traces of the Biennale remain—wall murals, installations left behind, and a certain creative energy that lingers. While some venues continue with smaller exhibitions, others become inaccessible, which is a loss for art enthusiasts like me.”

Government and municipal policy documents reflect an awareness of these issues. The Kerala Tourism Policy (2022) and Kerala Heritage Conservation Act (2011) encourage creative placemaking and adaptive reuse of heritage sites, but the absence of a permanent bylaw for temporary urban interventions means that approvals for year-round cultural programming are often ad hoc and dependent on administrative discretion (Government of Kerala, 2011, 2022). Over 80% of public funding for urban cultural events is directed to large institutions like the KMB Foundation, leaving smaller collectives and grassroots initiatives with limited resources, further entrenching the episodic nature of urban vibrancy (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2023).

The oscillation between “global art capital” and “sleepy heritage town” is not just a matter of festival scheduling, but a spatial and temporal negotiation of identity, belonging, and access. The Biennale’s ability to temporarily rebrand Kochi as a cosmopolitan hub demonstrates the latent potential of its public spaces and heritage infrastructure. Yet, the return to dormancy highlights the limitations of event-driven urbanism and the need for more integrated, sustainable strategies for cultural activation. Residents consistently call for more inclusive, community-driven programming that would keep the city vibrant throughout the year, rather than making it feel like a seasonal spectacle primarily for outsiders. There is a strong desire for venues like Aspinwall House and Pepper House to be used for exhibitions, performances, and workshops year-round, ensuring that Kochi’s cultural identity is not confined to a few months of global attention.

In conclusion, the temporal occupation and cultural rhythm of Fort Kochi during the Biennale is a double-edged sword. The city’s oscillation brings both excitement and disruption, economic opportunity and local frustration, global attention and a sense of impermanence. The challenge, as articulated by residents, planners, and scholars alike, is to transform these cycles into a more continuous, inclusive, and sustainable cultural rhythm—one that keeps Kochi’s creative energy alive all year and ensures that its heritage spaces remain open, accessible, and meaningful for everyone.

C. Ephemeral Impact and Behavioral Residue

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) has, since its inception, been lauded as a catalyst for urban and cultural transformation in Fort Kochi. However, a closer examination of its aftermath—through the lens of the KMB Impact Assessment Report 2017, extensive field observations, and a

wide range of stakeholder interviews—reveals a complex interplay between the event’s temporary vibrancy and the city’s return to everyday rhythms. This dynamic, best described as “ephemeral impact and behavioral residue,” is central to understanding both the promise and the limitations of event-driven urbanism in contemporary India.

During the Biennale, Fort Kochi undergoes a dramatic metamorphosis. Pedestrian activity in the city triples, as documented in the 2017 Impact Assessment Report (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2017), and local businesses, cafés, and hotels report a surge in revenue. The city’s heritage venues—Aspinwall House, Pepper House, Cabral Yard—are transformed into bustling art spaces, drawing international and domestic visitors, artists, and scholars. Residents, from retirees to schoolchildren, describe this period as one of excitement and pride. As a 62-year-old local resident remarked, “The Biennale is one of the few times when the world looks at us. It brings a different kind of energy to the town. I don’t understand all the modern art, but I like walking through the exhibitions, meeting new people, and seeing how our old buildings come alive.”

The event’s ability to activate underutilized or neglected spaces is widely celebrated. An architecture student noted, “The way old warehouses, streets, and even abandoned buildings become art venues highlights Kochi’s ability to blend history with modern creativity. It made me appreciate the city’s identity in a whole new way.” For many, the Biennale is not just an exhibition but an experience—one that temporarily redefines social interactions, economic flows, and the use of public space. A café owner explained, “For me, the Biennale is both business and culture. It draws in more customers, but beyond that, it makes the town feel more dynamic. You meet artists, musicians, and travelers who bring fresh ideas. It is inspiring and makes Fort Kochi feel connected to the world.”

Yet, as the Impact Assessment Report and local testimony make clear, this transformation is largely ephemeral. Once the Biennale ends, the surge in footfall and economic activity drops sharply. The majority of venues revert to their pre-event state of underuse or inaccessibility. Only about 30% of installations remain semi-permanent public art—murals, sculptures, and select site-specific works that become embedded in the city’s visual and cultural landscape. Visitor surveys from the 2017 report indicate that 60% of respondents return to Fort Kochi specifically to revisit these lingering artworks, suggesting that the Biennale’s “behavioral residue” has some power to shape urban memory and movement. However, the same surveys highlight disappointment over the closure of key venues, with many expressing a desire for year-round access and programming.

Residents and stakeholders consistently argue that “these spaces should stay open—not just for tourists,” emphasizing that the closure of venues like Aspinwall House and Pepper House undermines the potential for sustained local engagement and community benefit. A retired teacher described how the Biennale “brings so much life and creative energy to the place! It’s amazing to see spaces like Aspinwall House and Pepper House completely transform. But honestly, the streets get so crowded that moving around and rising prices in cafes and shops can be a headache, and as a resident, it sometimes feels exhausting. Some familiar spots also get taken over for event setups,

limiting our access. Still, it keeps us engaged—we go together to exhibitions, sit around, and share thoughts on the art. Some pieces are so confusing we just end up laughing! As retirees, it adds excitement to our days.”

The ephemeral nature of the Biennale’s impact is further highlighted by the return to dormancy of key venues after the event. Residents express disappointment at seeing once-vibrant spaces locked up or abandoned, and call for more inclusive, community-driven programming that would keep Fort Kochi vibrant throughout the year. Many point to the emergence of other exhibitions around town, showing that art doesn’t have to be confined to one grand event, and that the city has the potential to be a year-round cultural hub. However, the lack of a permanent bylaw for temporary urban interventions, the concentration of public funding in large institutions, and the absence of a clear policy for the adaptive reuse of heritage venues all limit the possibility of sustaining the Biennale’s momentum beyond its festival window.

From an urban theory perspective, these observations align with the concepts of “temporary urbanism” (Bain & Landau, 2019; Bishop & Williams, 2012) and “festivalization” (Evans, 2015; Richards & Palmer, 2010), which describe how flagship events can create “islands of vibrancy”—short-lived bursts of activity that rarely translate into long-term, systemic change unless supported by policy, infrastructure, and ongoing programming. The notion of “behavioral residue” (Franck & Stevens, 2007) is particularly apt for Fort Kochi: while murals, installations, and creative energy linger in the city’s urban memory, they do not fundamentally alter the routines and spatial practices of residents unless there is a mechanism for sustained engagement. Henri Lefebvre’s theory of “the right to the city” (Lefebvre, 1996) and the discourse on “everyday urbanism” (Crawford, 2008) further emphasize the importance of ongoing, inclusive access to public spaces, supporting the call for heritage venues to be used for exhibitions, performances, and workshops all year, not just for a few months every two years.

Policy documents such as the Kerala Tourism Policy (2022) and Kerala Heritage Conservation Act (2011) encourage creative placemaking and adaptive reuse of heritage sites, but the lack of a permanent bylaw for temporary urban interventions means that approvals for year-round cultural programming are often ad hoc and subject to administrative discretion. Over 80% of public funding for urban cultural events is directed to large institutions like the KMB Foundation, leaving smaller collectives and grassroots initiatives with limited resources, further entrenching the episodic nature of urban vibrancy.

The interviews also reveal a sense of exclusion among some locals, who feel that the Biennale, while economically beneficial, sometimes caters more to outsiders than to the resident community. The rise in prices and crowded streets can make daily life difficult, and many locals see themselves as spectators rather than active participants. There is a strong call for more workshops, exhibitions, and events for locals, especially artists from Kerala, and for heritage venues to be programmed year-round. Residents and stakeholders point to the emergence of other exhibitions around town,

showing that art doesn't have to be confined to one grand event, and that the city has the potential to be a year-round cultural hub.

Despite these challenges, the Biennale's artistic residues—murals, installations, and the revitalization of galleries—are not insignificant. They serve as constant reminders of the city's creative potential and have inspired a growing number of independent spaces and galleries to host exhibitions and events throughout the year. A local MFA professor observed, "Fort Kochi always has an artistic charm, but after the Biennale, you can feel a shift. As a BFA professor, I've always admired how the event transforms everyday spaces into open galleries, making art more accessible. But once it ends, some of these spaces are locked up again, and that vibrancy fades a little. Still, traces of the Biennale remain—wall murals, installations left behind, and a certain creative energy that lingers. While some venues continue with smaller exhibitions, others become inaccessible, which is a loss for art enthusiasts like me. The Biennale brings a unique cultural dialogue, and its absence this year was noticeable. However, Fort Kochi never loses its artistic essence—it's just quieter, waiting for the next wave of creativity."

A broader synthesis of these findings suggests that the Biennale's ephemeral impact is deeply felt but not fully realized. The event's ability to transform Fort Kochi into a global art capital, even if only for a few months, is remarkable. The artistic residues—murals, installations, and the revitalization of galleries—are not insignificant, serving as constant reminders of the city's creative potential. They have inspired a growing number of independent spaces and galleries to host exhibitions and events throughout the year, and residents point to the emergence of various other exhibitions around town as evidence that art does not have to be confined to one grand event. Yet, the reversion of most sites to disuse and the limited accessibility for locals underscore the urgent need for policy reforms, more equitable resource allocation, and the embedding of participatory, year-round cultural programming into the city's governance framework.

In conclusion, the ephemeral impact and behavioral residue of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale reveal both the promise and the pitfalls of event-driven urbanism. Only by bridging the gap between the extraordinary and the everyday—by making the city's cultural spaces accessible and vibrant year-round—can Kochi realize its full potential as a creative, inclusive, and resilient city.



Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter interprets the empirical findings in light of the literature reviewed and the research objectives. It reconsiders the role of TUIs in the Global South, emphasizing the need for context-sensitive approaches. The discussion explores the episodic nature of TUIs, their influence on urban behavior and creative capital, and the paradoxes of urban regeneration. Institutional gaps, governance challenges, and issues of cultural inequality are critically assessed, offering nuanced insights into the complexities of temporary urbanism in Fort Kochi

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Rethinking TUIs in the Global South: Toward a Contextual Themes

The concept of Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) has its intellectual roots in the tactical urbanism movements of the Global North, where such interventions are typically theorized as low-cost, short-term strategies for testing new urban ideas and catalyzing incremental change (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). These frameworks, however, are limited in their ability to capture the complexities and contradictions of TUIs as they manifest in cities of the Global South, where informality, cultural memory, and governance gaps are not anomalies but constitutive features of urban life (Roy, 2009; Watson, 2014). The empirical findings from Fort Kochi, derived from thematic analysis of 23 stakeholder interviews and extensive fieldwork, point to the necessity of a more nuanced, context-sensitive typology of TUIs that reflects the region's distinctive socio-spatial dynamics.

The first theme that emerges is that of **culturally reclaimed spaces**. In Fort Kochi, heritage buildings such as Aspinwall House are not merely repurposed as exhibition venues during the Biennale; they become sites where the city's colonial past is actively reinterpreted through contemporary artistic and communal practices. This process extends beyond the material transformation of space to the activation of what Menon (2018) terms "memoryscapes," in which the layered histories of Fort Kochi are made visible and contested. The Biennale's use of these spaces thus performs a dual function: it reclaims dormant or neglected urban assets while also inviting critical reflection on the city's postcolonial identity. Such interventions are inherently political, as they challenge dominant narratives of heritage and open up new possibilities for collective memory and belonging.

A second, equally salient theme is that of **rhythmic infrastructures**. Unlike the continuous, linear temporality assumed in much of the tactical urbanism literature, TUIs in Kochi are deeply embedded in the city's seasonal and festival-based rhythms. The Biennale itself is synchronized with the tourist season and the city's climatic cycles, leveraging the monsoon's ebb and flow and the influx of visitors to create periodic bursts of urban activation. This aligns with Simone's (2004) notion of "event-dependent urbanism," in which cities of the Global South are characterized not by steady-state development but by episodic, often unpredictable surges of activity. The temporality of TUIs in Fort Kochi is thus best understood as cyclical and rhythmic, rather than linear or permanent, reflecting the city's broader patterns of social and economic life.

A third theme, **negotiated informalities**, reflects the centrality of informal governance and improvisation in the making of TUIs. The research revealed that permissions, access to venues, and logistical support for interventions are rarely secured through formal channels alone. Instead, they are the outcome of ongoing negotiations among artists, NGOs, municipal officials, and property owners. This mode of operation is both a source of flexibility and a source of fragility, as it depends on personal relationships, tacit understandings, and the ability to navigate bureaucratic ambiguity (Roy, 2005; Yiftachel, 2009). The informality of these arrangements allows for creative adaptation but also exposes grassroots actors to precarity and exclusion, particularly when institutional priorities shift or when more powerful stakeholders assert control.

The fourth theme, **peripheral urban activations**, captures the spatial politics of TUIs in Kochi. While flagship venues such as Aspinwall House and Pepper House dominate the public image of the Biennale, many interventions occur in underrepresented neighborhoods or on the urban periphery. These are often initiated by youth groups, local NGOs, or street artists and serve to extend the reach of cultural activity beyond established circuits. Such activations challenge the spatial hierarchies of the city and create opportunities for more inclusive forms of urban engagement. However, they also face significant barriers, including limited funding, lack of institutional recognition, and the risk of co-optation by larger actors.

Finally, the category of **symbolic participatory frames** highlights the ambivalence of participation in many TUIs. While the imagery of community engagement—murals, workshops, open calls—is prominent, the actual processes of decision-making and authorship often remain tightly controlled by institutional actors. As several interviewees noted, local residents may be present as "participants" but are rarely empowered as co-creators or curators. This dynamic reflects broader critiques of participatory urbanism in the Global South, where the rhetoric of inclusion can mask underlying power asymmetries (Miraftab, 2004).

Taken together, these theme move the analysis of TUIs in Kochi beyond generic or imported frameworks. They foreground the improvisational, negotiated, and context-specific nature of urban interventions in the Global South, where informality, temporality, and contested memory are central. Rather than discrete projects, TUIs in Fort Kochi emerge as relational and processual

acts—spatio-cultural improvisations that both reflect and reshape the city's ongoing struggles over space, identity, and belonging.

This contextual theme has significant implications for urban theory and practice. It suggests that TUIs in the Global South should not be evaluated solely on the basis of their formal characteristics or immediate outcomes, but rather in terms of their capacity to activate memory, negotiate informality, and disrupt established spatial hierarchies. Such an approach calls for a Southern epistemology of urban intervention—one that is attuned to the plural, improvisational, and often precarious realities of cities like Kochi (Roy, 2009; Simone, 2014). By situating TUIs within these frameworks, scholars and practitioners can better understand their transformative potential as well as their limitations.

5.2 Urban Temporality and Behavioral Flux: TUIs as Episodic Interruptions

The temporality of urban life in Fort Kochi is profoundly shaped by the rhythms of its geography, climate, and cultural calendar. As the data analysis and regional context demonstrate, Kochi is a city defined by its monsoon cycles, tidal flows, and the periodic influxes of visitors for festivals and events such as the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. These natural and cultural rhythms create a dynamic urban environment in which Temporary Urban Interventions (TUIs) function not as isolated phenomena but as episodic interruptions that both reflect and reshape the city's temporal landscape.

The Biennale's impact on urban behavior is immediately visible during its four-month run. Streets that are typically quiet become animated with pedestrians, pop-up vendors, and impromptu performances. Interviewees consistently described how the event transforms both the physical and social fabric of Fort Kochi. For example, a local café owner remarked, "The place transforms for four months... but after that, it feels like someone switched off the lights." This statement encapsulates the liminal quality of the Biennale period, echoing Turner's (1969) concept of liminality—a temporary suspension of the everyday, where new social relations and spatial practices become possible, only to dissipate once the event concludes.

This liminality is not merely a cultural or aesthetic phenomenon; it is deeply embedded in the city's material and ecological rhythms. As the regional analysis reveals, Kochi's urban form is shaped by its proximity to water—rivers, lakes, and the Arabian Sea—and by the seasonal monsoon, which brings both abundance and disruption (Kumar, Thomas, & Nair, 2017; Nair, 2019). The timing of the Biennale is carefully calibrated to coincide with the dry season and the peak of the tourist influx, leveraging the city's climatic and economic cycles to maximize impact. In this sense, the Biennale—and by extension, TUIs—are not external impositions on the city but are intimately attuned to its temporal logic.

However, the changes induced by TUIs are fundamentally episodic. The data show that increased pedestrian activity, the proliferation of informal economies, and the temporary reconfiguration of public space are largely confined to the Biennale period. Once the event ends, these behaviors and spatial arrangements quickly recede. This pattern aligns with Simone's (2014) argument that cities in the Global South often operate through "rhythms" and "bursts" of activity, rather than through the stable, incremental change envisioned by much urban planning theory. The episodic nature of TUIs in Kochi thus reflects a broader urban condition in which transformation is cyclical, contingent, and frequently reversible.

The behavioral flux associated with TUIs is not limited to the movement of people or the occupation of space; it also encompasses shifts in social relations and urban imaginaries. During the Biennale, residents and visitors alike experience the city differently. Hidden alleys become sites of discovery, familiar routes are reimagined, and previously neglected spaces are temporarily democratized. This phenomenon is consistent with Hou's (2010) notion of "insurgent public space," where ephemeral events create opportunities for new forms of engagement, visibility, and agency. Yet, as the interviews reveal, these opportunities are unevenly distributed. While some residents embrace the vibrancy and cosmopolitanism of the Biennale, others feel alienated by the influx of outsiders and the commercialization of public space.

The episodic character of TUIs also raises important questions about sustainability and legacy. While some behavioral residues may persist—such as increased cultural curiosity or the adoption of new business models by local entrepreneurs—most changes are transient. The return to "everyday time" after the event often brings a sense of anticlimax and even loss, as the city reverts to its habitual rhythms and many of the temporary gains in accessibility, economic opportunity, and cultural vitality are lost. This cyclical pattern underscores the limitations of TUIs as instruments of lasting urban transformation unless they are embedded in broader institutional and policy frameworks.

Moreover, the episodic temporality of TUIs interacts with the city's structural vulnerabilities. Kochi's susceptibility to flooding, infrastructural strain during peak tourist periods, and the precarity of informal livelihoods all become more pronounced during the Biennale. While the event generates economic opportunities and social excitement, it can also exacerbate existing inequalities and expose the limits of the city's capacity to absorb and sustain rapid change (Roy, 2009; Watson, 2014). The data suggest that without mechanisms to institutionalize the positive effects of TUIs—such as ongoing cultural programming, infrastructural investment, and inclusive governance—their impact will remain largely superficial and short-lived.

In sum, the analysis of TUIs in Fort Kochi reveals a pattern of episodic urbanism, where temporary interventions produce intense but fleeting transformations in urban behavior and space. These interventions are deeply embedded in the city's climatic, ecological, and cultural rhythms, but their effects are constrained by the absence of durable institutional support. The challenge for urban

planners, policymakers, and cultural organizers is to find ways to harness the creative energy of TUIs while building the structures necessary to sustain their benefits beyond the event horizon. This requires a shift from viewing TUIs as isolated spectacles to understanding them as part of the city's ongoing negotiation with temporality, informality, and the politics of space.

5.3 Creative Capital and Urban Regeneration: Promise and Paradox

The impact of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale on Fort Kochi's urban landscape illustrates both the transformative potential and the inherent contradictions of creative capital in urban regeneration. Drawing on stakeholder interviews, field observations, and regional analysis, it is evident that the Biennale has become a catalyst for spatial, economic, and symbolic renewal in the city. Once-neglected colonial warehouses such as Aspinwall House and Pepper House have been repurposed as vibrant cultural venues, drawing artists, tourists, and global media attention. This transformation has not only enhanced the visibility of Fort Kochi on the international cultural map but has also stimulated the emergence of new local economies. Entrepreneurs have opened art cafés, boutique hotels, and craft shops to serve the influx of visitors, and the city's reputation as a creative hub has grown considerably (Menon, 2018). The Biennale has thus played a significant role in reanimating the city's built environment and fostering a sense of civic pride among residents.

Yet, the regeneration ushered in by the Biennale is marked by unevenness and paradox. While the event has attracted investment and improved public infrastructure—such as signage, pedestrian pathways, and waste management—these benefits are not equally distributed across the community. Many long-term residents and small business owners report feelings of marginalization in the face of rapid commercialization and gentrification. As one interviewee poignantly remarked, “It feels like we’re hosting the world, but it’s not for us.” This sentiment encapsulates the ambivalence that often accompanies festival urbanism and culture-led regeneration, where flagship events are leveraged to attract external audiences and capital, sometimes at the expense of local needs and identities (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008; Evans, 2015).

The mechanisms of exclusion documented in the data are multifaceted. The surge in tourism and commercial activity during the Biennale has led to rising rents and property values, making it increasingly difficult for small traders and low-income residents to remain in the area. Public spaces that were once freely accessible have, during the event, been transformed into ticketed or curated venues, restricting access for those unable to afford entry or who do not feel at ease in the new cosmopolitan environment. Furthermore, while the Biennale's programming is internationally acclaimed, there are instances where it has prioritized global art discourses over local histories and voices, resulting in a sense of cultural displacement among segments of the community. This phenomenon aligns with Ponzini's (2010) critique of “cultural elitism in urban branding,” where

the arts are deployed more as spectacles for external consumption than as vehicles for participatory urban transformation.

Despite these challenges, the data also reveal instances of negotiation, adaptation, and resistance. Grassroots organizations, local artists, and youth groups have responded to the dominance of institutional actors by organizing parallel events, street art, and community workshops. These initiatives seek to reclaim space and visibility for local narratives and offer alternative models of participation and regeneration. However, their impact is often constrained by limited resources and a lack of institutional support, highlighting the need for more inclusive governance frameworks that can better balance the interests of diverse stakeholders.

The experience of Fort Kochi complicates any linear narrative of culture-led urban renewal. While creative capital has undeniably acted as an urban accelerator—stimulating investment, innovation, and cultural dialogue—it has also reinforced existing hierarchies and produced new forms of marginalization. The case study demonstrates that the benefits of TUIs and the creative economy are not automatic or evenly distributed; rather, they are shaped by the politics of space, identity, and access. This dualism is not unique to Kochi but is characteristic of many Global South cities where the improvisational, negotiated, and contested nature of urban interventions reflects broader patterns of informality and plural modernities (Roy, 2009; Simone, 2014).

The findings suggest that sustainable and equitable urban regeneration in contexts like Fort Kochi requires more than investment in creative capital or the hosting of high-profile events. It necessitates the development of mechanisms to ensure that the benefits of regeneration are widely shared and rooted in local realities. This includes fostering participatory governance, supporting grassroots initiatives, and ensuring that cultural programming is inclusive and reflective of the city's diverse histories and communities. Only by addressing these issues can TUIs move beyond spectacle-driven urbanism to become instruments of embedded, participatory, and justice-oriented cultural practice.

In conclusion, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale exemplifies both the promise and the paradox of creative capital in urban regeneration. The event has reanimated the city's heritage, stimulated economic activity, and fostered cultural dialogue, but it has also generated new exclusions and intensified existing inequalities. The challenge for policymakers, urban planners, and cultural organizers is to harness the transformative potential of TUIs while mitigating their exclusionary effects, thus ensuring that the creative city is not only globally visible but also locally inclusive and resilient.

5.4 Institutional Absences, Governance Gaps, and Cultural Inequality

The governance landscape of Fort Kochi, as revealed through both empirical data and regional analysis, is characterized by a complex interplay of institutional presence and absence, formal and informal practices, and persistent gaps in cultural policy and urban management. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale, while celebrated for its transformative impact on the city's cultural and spatial identity, simultaneously exposes the limitations of existing governance structures and the challenges of achieving cultural equity in a rapidly changing urban environment.

Stakeholder interviews and field observations consistently highlight the pivotal role played by the Kochi Biennale Foundation (KBF) in filling institutional voids. In the absence of a coherent municipal or state-level cultural policy, the KBF has assumed responsibilities that, in other contexts, would typically fall under the purview of local government. These include the allocation and management of heritage venues, coordination of funding and sponsorship, and the orchestration of community outreach and educational programming. While this entrepreneurial approach has enabled the Biennale to flourish and adapt to the city's unique rhythms and constraints, it has also resulted in a concentration of power and decision-making within a relatively narrow set of actors. This dynamic reflects what Miraftab (2004) terms “invited spaces of participation,” where community involvement is facilitated but ultimately circumscribed by the agendas and capacities of institutional gatekeepers.

The absence of a comprehensive city plan for culture is a recurrent theme in both the data and the broader literature on urban governance in the Global South (Roy, 2009; Watson, 2014). This policy vacuum creates a reliance on ad hoc arrangements and informal negotiations, which, while fostering flexibility and innovation, also engender precarity and unpredictability. For instance, the use of heritage venues for Biennale events is often contingent on short-term leases, shifting political priorities, and the willingness of property owners or government agencies to cooperate. Such arrangements can be abruptly altered or revoked, threatening the continuity of cultural programming and the preservation of key urban assets. The fragility of these informal agreements is further exacerbated by the lack of transparent criteria for venue selection, funding allocation, and stakeholder engagement, leading to perceptions of arbitrariness and favoritism among local artists and community groups.

This informality extends to the broader ecosystem of urban governance in Kochi, where multiple agencies—ranging from the Kochi Municipal Corporation and the Greater Cochin Development Authority to state and national bodies—exercise overlapping and sometimes conflicting mandates (GCDA, 2011; Kochi Municipal Corporation, 2023). The resulting bureaucratic complexity can impede coordinated action, dilute accountability, and create barriers to grassroots participation. For example, smaller collectives and independent artists frequently encounter bureaucratic hurdles in securing permissions, accessing funding, or gaining recognition for their initiatives. The data reveal that over 80% of public cultural funding is allocated to large institutions or flagship events,

leaving limited resources for more localized or experimental interventions. This concentration of support not only reinforces existing hierarchies within the cultural sector but also limits the diversity and sustainability of urban cultural life.

The governance gaps identified in the study are not merely administrative or technical; they have profound implications for cultural equity and spatial justice. The prioritization of high-profile events and venues, often justified in terms of tourism promotion or city branding, can marginalize local histories, practices, and communities. Several interviewees expressed concern that the Biennale, while globally celebrated, sometimes overlooks or instrumentalizes the everyday cultural life of Fort Kochi's residents. This dynamic is consistent with González's (2011) critique of "model migration" in urban regeneration, where imported frameworks and flagship projects are privileged over locally rooted approaches. The risk is that cultural policy becomes a tool for elite accumulation and spectacle, rather than a means of fostering broad-based participation and social inclusion.

Moreover, the absence of stable institutional support for grassroots and community-led interventions limits the capacity of TUIs to generate lasting change. While the Biennale period brings a temporary democratization of space and a surge of creative energy, these gains are often ephemeral, dissipating once the event concludes and venues revert to private or dormant use. Without mechanisms for ongoing stewardship, capacity-building, and participatory governance, the transformative potential of TUIs remains constrained by the structural inequalities and vulnerabilities of the urban context.

The findings from Fort Kochi thus underscore the need for a more robust and inclusive approach to cultural governance—one that moves beyond episodic spectacle and ad hoc arrangements toward the development of comprehensive, participatory, and context-sensitive policies. Such an approach would require not only the formalization of cultural planning within municipal and regional frameworks but also the creation of channels for meaningful community input, equitable funding distribution, and transparent decision-making. By addressing these institutional absences and governance gaps, cities like Kochi can better harness the creative energies of TUIs while advancing the goals of cultural equity and spatial justice.

In summary, the experience of Fort Kochi demonstrates that the success and sustainability of TUIs are intimately tied to the quality and inclusiveness of urban governance. The entrepreneurial spirit of organizations like the Kochi Biennale Foundation is both a testament to local ingenuity and a symptom of broader institutional shortcomings. Bridging the gap between innovation and inclusion will require sustained investment in policy, infrastructure, and participatory mechanisms that recognize and support the diverse cultural life of the city. Only then can TUIs fulfill their promise as catalysts for not only urban transformation but also for social and cultural equity.

The background image shows an outdoor art installation. Large, flowing red fabric canopies are strung across the scene, creating a series of covered walkways. Underneath these canopies, various art pieces are displayed on walls and tables. Some art pieces are framed, while others are large-scale murals or tapestries. A group of people is seen walking through the installation, looking at the art. The setting appears to be a park or a public square with trees in the background.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter synthesizes the main findings of the research, reflecting on the theoretical and practical implications for urban planning and policy. It highlights the contributions of the study to the understanding of temporary urban interventions in the Global South and outlines recommendations for achieving more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable urban environments. The chapter also identifies avenues for future research, emphasizing the ongoing relevance of TUIs in shaping resilient cities

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis, “Defining Temporary Urban Interventions from a Southern Perspective: A Case Study of Kochi,” set out to interrogate how temporary urban interventions (TUIs) shape the long-term trajectories of urban behavior, planning, and transformation in the Global South. The research was motivated by a persistent gap in urban theory and practice: the lack of nuanced, context-sensitive understanding of how TUIs operate in cities marked by layered histories, adaptive urbanism, and evolving socio-economic conditions. Kochi, with its polycentric geography, intricate hydrological networks, and cosmopolitan cultural legacy, offered a living laboratory for exploring these questions. As an urban planner, the journey through Kochi’s urban fabric revealed not only the challenges of spatial transformation but also the remarkable capacity of the city and its people for improvisation, negotiation, and resilience.

This thesis set out to define and contextualize temporary urban interventions (TUIs) from a Global South perspective, using the distinctive and layered city of Kochi as its empirical focus. Kochi’s unique polycentric geography, historical depth, and cosmopolitan culture have fostered a resilient urbanism characterized by improvisation, adaptation, and negotiation. These qualities, rooted in the city’s relationship with water, its cycles of monsoon and migration, and its plural social fabric, provided fertile ground for exploring how TUIs arise, adapt, and leave their mark on the evolving urban landscape.

The first research question—how TUIs in Kochi can be defined and classified from a Southern perspective—was addressed through qualitative thematic analysis, grounded in both stakeholder narratives and the regional context. The findings demonstrate that TUIs in Kochi are not simply tactical urbanism “imported” from the Global North, but are rooted in the city’s own rhythms,

histories, and socio-political realities. The thematic typologies that emerged—culturally reclaimed spaces, rhythmic infrastructures, negotiated informalities, peripheral urban activations, and symbolic participatory frames—reflect the improvisational and negotiated character of urban interventions in Kochi. These forms are fluid, responsive to monsoon cycles, festival calendars, and the everyday flows of people, goods, and ideas across water and land. TUIs in Kochi are as much about reclaiming memory and identity as they are about spatial transformation, and their success hinges on their ability to resonate with local histories and aspirations. They are deeply embedded in the city's cycles of festival, trade, and everyday life, illustrating a Southern epistemology that privileges temporality, negotiation, and place-based agency. The themes that emerged—culturally reclaimed spaces, rhythmic infrastructures, negotiated informalities, peripheral urban activations, and symbolic participatory frames—reflect a Southern epistemology of urban intervention, privileging temporality, negotiation, and place-based agency over fixed models or universal prescriptions.

The second research question—how these interventions influence long-term urban behaviors—reveals a pattern that is both promising and cautionary. TUIs in Kochi, especially those catalyzed by the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, have temporarily democratized public space, encouraged new patterns of pedestrian movement, and fostered forms of social interaction that cut across class, caste, and community. During the Biennale, dormant heritage sites are reanimated, and the city's waterfronts, alleys, and public squares become stages for cultural exchange and civic engagement. However, these changes are often cyclical and episodic. The vibrancy and inclusivity of event-time give way to the routines of everyday-time once the interventions conclude. Without sustained institutional support, policy integration, and community stewardship, the behavioral shifts induced by TUIs risk being fleeting rather than transformative. Yet, the study also reveals that certain residues of these interventions persist. The increased visibility of creative economies, the empowerment of local artists and entrepreneurs, and the emergence of new spatial practices—such as informal markets, pop-up performances, and community workshops—suggest that TUIs can seed longer-term change, especially when they are embedded in local networks and supported by adaptive governance. The challenge for urban planners is to harness these episodic energies and translate them into durable gains for public space, social cohesion, and urban vitality.

The case of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale powerfully illustrated both the promise and paradox of TUIs in the Global South. The Biennale's adaptive reuse of colonial warehouses into vibrant art spaces and the temporary pedestrianization of streets and waterfronts revealed the capacity of TUIs to revitalize public spaces, foster new patterns of mobility, and encourage creative economies. These interventions, however, were shown to be largely episodic: while they democratized space and animated the city during the event, their impact faded in the off-season, with many venues returning to dormancy and the vibrancy of public life receding. My field study during the off-season revealed gaps in sustainability and long-term integration: the transformation of warehouses into art spaces showed potential, but their seasonal activation made their long-term role uncertain. The pedestrianization of certain streets during past Biennale events hinted at the possibility of

more permanent walkable urban environments, but these interventions lacked continuity once the event was over. Most critically, the absence of the Biennale highlighted the lack of city-wide policies to maintain cultural spaces year-round, preventing them from being solely dependent on temporary interventions.

The research also exposed the risks of relying on temporary interventions in the absence of robust governance and public policy. Without strong governance and public policies, temporary interventions risk becoming exclusive spectacles rather than inclusive urban solutions. While the Biennale brought economic benefits and international attention, it also contributed to rising rents, spatial exclusion, and the commodification of public space. These patterns were especially evident when the city's cultural infrastructure lay dormant outside the event cycle, underscoring the limitations of relying on flagship events without integrating them into a broader, more inclusive urban strategy.

The Biennale, in particular, has positioned Kochi on the global cultural map, attracting investment, tourism, and international attention. It has stimulated the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, generated employment for a range of actors, and fostered a sense of civic pride and cosmopolitan identity. TUIs have also provided platforms for marginalized voices and alternative narratives, challenging dominant histories and opening up new possibilities for collective memory and belonging. However, these contributions are not without paradox. The influx of capital and visitors has led to rising rents, gentrification, and the displacement of some long-term residents and small businesses. The programming and curation of flagship events, while globally acclaimed, sometimes prioritize external audiences over local histories and needs. The benefits of regeneration are thus unevenly distributed, and the risk of cultural commodification and exclusion remains real. This duality underscores the importance of equitable governance, participatory planning, and the careful calibration of cultural policy to ensure that the gains of TUIs are widely shared.

Despite these challenges, the adaptive potential of TUIs in Kochi is clear. These interventions, when rooted in local histories and supported by participatory governance, can catalyze new forms of social interaction, economic opportunity, and cultural expression. The research found that TUIs in Kochi—while often temporary—can seed longer-term behavioral shifts, foster civic pride, and stimulate creative economies, especially when their energy is harnessed through ongoing programming, community stewardship, and policy support. Yet, the uneven distribution of benefits and the risk of exclusion highlight the need for a more just and inclusive approach to urban transformation.

How TUIs address urban challenges such as space scarcity, rapid urbanization, and socio-economic inequality—shows that temporary interventions can act as critical “pressure valves” in the urban system. By activating underused or neglected spaces, TUIs temporarily expand the city's capacity for public life, creativity, and economic activity. They offer flexible, low-cost solutions to the challenges of spatial scarcity and infrastructural constraint, and they can foster new forms

of social solidarity and economic opportunity, especially for informal workers and grassroots organizations. Yet, the research also makes clear that the transformative potential of TUIs is constrained by fragmented governance, policy vacuums, and the episodic nature of interventions. The entrepreneurial efforts of organizations like the Kochi Biennale Foundation have filled some institutional voids, but the absence of comprehensive, participatory frameworks limits the ability of TUIs to deliver lasting, inclusive change. For TUIs to move beyond spectacle and event-driven visibility, they must be anchored in robust municipal cultural policies, equitable resource allocation, and sustained mechanisms for community participation and feedback.

Indirectly, the findings address the core research questions. TUIs in Kochi are best defined as adaptive, place-based interventions shaped by local context, informal negotiation, and the city's temporal rhythms. Their influence on long-term urban behavior is complex: while they can inspire new uses of public space and foster social and economic vitality, these effects are rarely sustained without integration into policy, infrastructure, and community practice. Economically and culturally, TUIs have contributed to urban transformation, but their success depends on equitable governance and the ability to reach beyond the spectacle of singular events. In addressing urban challenges such as space scarcity, rapid urbanization, and socio-economic inequality, TUIs offer flexible, low-cost strategies—but their transformative potential is constrained unless embedded within broader frameworks of planning and inclusion.

As an urban planner, the significance of this research extends beyond the empirical findings for Kochi. This thesis demonstrates that small, place-based studies—rooted in the lived realities and everyday improvisations of Southern cities—are essential for refining and expanding the global definitions of temporary urban interventions. The case of Kochi illustrates that TUIs, when critically defined and contextually embedded, can serve as powerful catalysts for urban transformation, animating public space, fostering creativity, and building civic identity. However, their enduring impact depends on moving beyond spectacle and event-driven visibility toward embedded, participatory, and resilient urban practices. This research also highlights the value of humility and specificity in urban scholarship. While the findings are deeply grounded in Kochi's unique geography, history, and urban culture, they resonate with broader patterns observable in cities across the Global South. By bringing such small-scale, context-rich studies into the global conversation, we not only enrich urban theory but also provide actionable insights for policymakers, planners, and cultural practitioners seeking to build more inclusive, adaptive, and just cities.

Kochi's story is more than a local narrative; it is a vital contribution to the evolving discourse on Southern urbanism. It reminds us that the future of cities in the Global South will be shaped not only by grand plans and permanent infrastructures, but also by the everyday improvisations, adaptive strategies, and creative negotiations that define urban life on the ground. As urban planners, embracing this complexity—valuing the small, the temporary, and the place-based—is both our challenge and our opportunity. The thesis affirms that temporary urban interventions,

when critically defined and contextually embedded, can serve as powerful catalysts for inclusive, resilient, and adaptive urban futures in the Global South. The case of Kochi demonstrates both the opportunities and the limits of TUIs, offering vital lessons for scholars and practitioners alike. Ultimately, it is through the accumulation of such grounded, specific studies that we can hope to build a richer, more nuanced, and more globally relevant understanding of urban transformation in our rapidly changing world.

This research is, by design, a modest contribution—a small study rooted in the specificities of Kochi. Yet, it is precisely through such focused, place-based inquiry that urban planners and theorists can begin to refine and expand the definitions of TUIs for the Global South. The lessons from Kochi are not only relevant for this unique city but also for a wider constellation of urban contexts where complexity, improvisation, and resilience are everyday realities. By foregrounding the lived experiences, adaptive strategies, and creative energies of Southern cities, this thesis invites a reimagining of urban intervention—one that is as attentive to the ephemeral as it is to the enduring, as grounded in place as it is open to the world.

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LLMs (Chat GPT) Prompts: 1. Paraphrase the paragraph keeping the content as it is. 2. Check grammatical, syntax errors, clarity issues, and give suggestions.

Annexes

Interview Questions

1. Questions for All Stakeholders

A. Awareness and Perception of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale

- How did you first learn about the Kochi-Muziris Biennale?
- What is your general impression of the Biennale? (Probe for aspects related to cultural, economic, and social perspectives).
- Do you believe the Biennale contributes positively to Kochi's identity? How so?

B. Impact on Urban Behavior and Public Space Usage

- In your view, how has the Biennale impacted the usage of public spaces like Fort Kochi and Mattancherry?
- Has the Biennale changed the way people interact within public spaces in Kochi? Can you provide examples?
- Do you believe the Biennale has led to more community involvement or engagement with public spaces? How has this changed over time?
- Do you think local governance and urban policy or any kind of systems in Kochi supports such temporary urban interventions? What would you suggest to improve this support?
- How do you believe the Biennale could inspire other Southern cities to adopt similar interventions?

C. Long-Term Influence on Social, Economic, and Cultural Aspects

- How has the Biennale influenced tourism and the local economy, in your opinion?
- Has the Biennale affected the cultural fabric of Kochi in any lasting ways? If yes, how?
- Do you think the Biennale has fostered any new forms of social interaction or community participation in Kochi?

2. Questions for Organizers and Event Planners

A. Objectives and Intentions

- What were the primary goals of initiating the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, particularly regarding community and urban development?
- How do you envision the Biennale shaping Kochi in the long term?

B. Planning and Implementation of Temporary Interventions

- What challenges have you encountered in planning and implementing temporary installations in Kochi?
- How do you select and design installations and events to align with Kochi's unique social and cultural context?

C. Observed Behavioral and Urban Changes

- Have you observed any specific, long-term changes in public space usage or community behavior as a result of the Biennale?
- Have any elements of the Biennale installations been permanently retained or influenced local urban planning?

D. Insights on Policy and Planning

- Do you think local governance and urban policy in Kochi supports such temporary urban interventions? What would you suggest to improve this support?
- How do you believe the Biennale could inspire other Southern cities to adopt similar interventions?

3. Questions for Local Residents and Businesses

A. Perception of Social and Economic Benefits

- How do you feel the Biennale has influenced your neighborhood, in terms of both social and economic impact?
- Has your business experienced any changes in sales or foot traffic during Biennale events?

B. Engagement and Community Impact

- Have you personally engaged in any events or activities related to the Biennale? How would you describe this experience?
- In what ways has the Biennale encouraged local community members to come together or interact differently?

C. Long-Term Changes

- Have you observed any permanent changes in the way public spaces are used since the Biennale began?
- Do you think the Biennale has changed the perception of public spaces, art, or cultural heritage in Kochi?

4. Questions for Tourists and Visitors

A. Visitor Experience and Impressions

- What attracted you to visit the Kochi-Muziris Biennale?
- How would you describe your experience of the Biennale? (Probe for thoughts on installations, public space use, and cultural experience).

B. Influence on Perception of Kochi

- Has your experience at the Biennale changed the way you view Kochi as a city?
- Would you consider visiting Kochi again for similar events or recommending it to others?

C. Engagement with Public Spaces

- Did the Biennale encourage you to explore public spaces and interact with the local community? How so?

- What aspects of the Biennale stood out as unique to the cultural context of Kochi or the Global South?

Survey Questions

This survey aims to understand public perspectives on temporary transformations of urban spaces in Kochi, including cultural, commercial, social, and mobility-related interventions.

Name: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Occupation: _____

1: Awareness & Recognition

- Have you noticed any temporary changes in public spaces in Kochi, such as street markets, art installations, or pedestrian-only zones? (Yes/No)
- What do you think is the primary purpose of these temporary changes? (Multiple choice)
 - To promote local culture and art
 - To support businesses and vendors
 - To create better public spaces for social interaction
 - To manage traffic and pedestrian movement
 - I am not sure
- Do you consider these changes as planned interventions or spontaneous activities? (Planned/Spontaneous/Not Sure)

2: Perceived Benefits & Challenges

- Do you think temporary changes to public spaces improve the overall city environment? (Yes/No)
- What do you think is the biggest benefit of these temporary urban changes? (Choose one)
 - Economic growth for businesses and vendors
 - Increased social interactions and engagement
 - Cultural and artistic value
 - Making the city more vibrant and inclusive
 - No significant benefit
- Have you faced any inconveniences due to temporary public space changes? (Yes/No)
- If yes, what kind of inconvenience have you experienced? (Multiple choice)
 - Noise and disturbance
 - Traffic congestion or roadblocks
 - Overcrowding and lack of space
 - Disruption to business activities
 - No major issues

3: Perspectives Based on Stakeholder Roles

- As a resident, do you feel temporary urban activities make your neighborhood more vibrant? (Yes/No)
- As a business owner, do you think temporary events increase customer footfall and sales? (Yes/No/Not Applicable)

- c) As a tourist, do you think temporary events make Kochi a more attractive destination? (Yes/No/Not Applicable)
- d) As an urban planner/local government official, do you believe these interventions should be integrated into formal city planning? (Yes/No/Not Applicable)

4: Typologies of Temporary Urban Changes

- a) Which types of temporary urban changes have you experienced in Kochi? (Multiple choice)
 - Cultural events (e.g., Kochi-Muziris Biennale, street performances, art installations)
 - Pop-up markets, street food festivals, or flea markets
 - Temporary pedestrian zones or car-free streets
 - Community-led projects (e.g., interactive workshops, public art, citizen-led improvements)
 - Other (please specify)
- b) Which type of intervention do you think is most beneficial for Kochi? (Choose one)
 - Cultural events
 - Economic activities (markets, fairs)
 - Pedestrian-friendly mobility interventions
 - Community-driven social projects

5: Long-Term Impact & Future Expectations

- a) Should some temporary interventions be made permanent in Kochi? (Yes/No)
- b) If yes, which ones should be considered for long-term adoption? (Multiple choice)
 - Art and cultural events
 - Temporary pedestrian zones
 - Pop-up markets and commercial spaces
 - Community and social engagement activities
- c) Should the local government encourage more temporary public space initiatives? (Yes/No)
- d) Would you support policies that allow more frequent transformation of underutilized spaces in the city? (Yes/No)
- e) Would you be interested in contributing ideas or volunteering for temporary urban projects in your neighborhood? (Yes/No)

6: Emotional & Cultural Connection

- a) Do temporary urban activities make you feel more connected to your city? (Yes/No)
- b) Do you think these interventions help preserve Kochi's cultural identity? (Yes/No)
- c) Do you think they are just short-term attractions with no real impact? (Yes/No)

SURVEY ON BIENNALE							
STAKEHOLDER GROUP	AGE	GENDER	RESIDENT/NATIONAL/KERALITE	PROFESSION	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	RESPONSES	
	27	F	KERALITE	STUDENT (BFA)	1. What drew you to the Kochi-Muziris Biennale?	"I love contemporary art, and the Biennale is known globally. The blend of art, history, and culture is unique here."	
	62	M	LOCAL RESIDENT			"I've lived in Fort Kochi all my life, and the Biennale is one of the few times when the world looks at us. It brings a different kind of energy to the town. I don't understand all the modern art, but I like walking through the exhibitions, meeting new people, and seeing how our old buildings come alive."	
	31	M	LOCAL	CAFÉ OWNER		"For me, the Biennale is both business and culture. It draws in more customers, but beyond that, it makes the town feel more dynamic. You meet artists, musicians, and travelers who bring fresh ideas. It's inspiring and makes Fort Kochi feel connected to the world."	
	68	F	LOCAL RESIDENT	HOUSE MAKER		"I love how the Biennale brings energy and diversity to our town, but sometimes I feel it caters more to outsiders than us locals. The prices at cafes and shops go up, making it harder for us to enjoy our own neighborhood, and the crowded streets make everyday travel a hassle."	
	30	F	NATIONAL	ARCHITECT		"I came for a mix of things—art, travel, and the cultural atmosphere. The Biennale makes Kochi feel alive, and it's one of those rare events where you get to see international artists, local craftspeople, and everyday visitors interacting in the same space. It's not just an exhibition; it's an experience."	
	15	M	LOCAL RESIDENT	SCHOOL STUDENT		"We visit during the Biennale with friends to wander around. For us, it's all about fun and entertainment, and we love exploring the different artworks."	
	68	F	LOCAL RESIDENT	RETIRED TEACHER	2. How would you describe your experience visiting Fort Kochi during the Biennale?	"The Biennale brings so much life and creative energy to the place! It's amazing to see spaces like Aspinwall House and Pepper House completely transform. But honestly, the streets get so crowded that moving around and rising prices in cafes and shops can be a headache, and as a resident, it sometimes feels exhausting. Some familiar spots also get taken over for event setups, limiting our access. Still, it keeps us engaged – we go together to exhibitions, sit around, and share thoughts on the art. Some pieces are so confusing we just end up laughing! As retirees, it adds excitement to our days."	
	32	F	INTERNATIONAL			"Fort Kochi has a special charm that keeps bringing me back. This is my third visit, and I've been to the Biennale twice before. Even though there's no Biennale this time, I still chose to come here for a relaxing holiday. The event is incredible – so many thought-provoking artworks, performances, and installations that make the whole town feel like an open gallery. But even without it, Fort Kochi has an artistic soul. I love exploring different exhibitions, enjoying the seafood by the waterfront, and shopping for unique handcrafted products. The heritage-rich atmosphere, creative energy, and even wellness experiences like yoga make it a perfect place to unwind. I can't wait to return when the Biennale is back!"	
	27	M	KERALITE	VOLUNTEERED BIENNAL		"As an architect and a past Biennale volunteer, Fort Kochi holds a special place in my heart. I was part of the curation team, and it was an incredible experience—coming across diverse artworks and concepts, collaborating with different teams, and seeing how every idea came together to create something extraordinary. The Biennale is more than just an exhibition; it's a platform that broadens perspectives, sparks discussions, and fosters teamwork. One thing that really impressed me was how inclusive the Biennale was for different age groups. Whether it was children engaging in workshops, young artists showcasing their talents, or older visitors deeply immersed in the experience, the event truly made space for everyone."	
	59	F	LOCAL RESIDENT			"Fort Kochi has always attracted international tourists, even long before the Biennale started in 2012. But the Biennale brought a whole new energy, turning forgotten spaces into buzzing cultural hubs. Now, after the event, places like Aspinwall House get locked up again, and there's talk of the government taking it over for the Coast Guard. If that happens, we might lose a major venue for future Biennales. Even without the Biennale, you still see foreign tourists everywhere, so sometimes it feels like the place is shaped more for them than for residents. But during the Biennale, it's a happy season—cafes, restaurants, local businesses, and auto drivers all benefit. Maybe if it were held in a different season, the tourist flow could be more balanced. Right now, it gets really busy, but that's also what makes it special."	

VISITORS GROUP	55	M	LOCAL RESIDENT	TAXI DRIVER	3. What did you notice about Fort Kochi after the Biennale ended?	<p>"As a taxi driver, Fort Kochi always has visitors, but the Biennale season is on another level. It's peak tourist time, so business booms—airport pickups, long-distance trips, and local rides all increase. Many tourists come for the Biennale but also have plans to visit places like Munnar, Alappuzha, or Thekkady, which means more longer trips and better earnings for us. Even within Fort Kochi, people mostly prefer walking around the venues, but for trips to Mattancherry, Vypin, or nearby beaches, we get more rides.</p> <p>During the Biennale, prices naturally go up—cafés, homestays, and even we taxi drivers charge a little more because the demand is high. But once the event ends, the rush dies down. Fort Kochi still has tourists, but our earnings drop compared to Biennale time. Maybe if the Biennale happened in the off-season, it could balance tourism better instead of adding to the already busy peak season."</p>	
	22	F	LOCAL TOURIST	BARCH STUDENT		<p>"Fort Kochi has its own stories to tell, which is why it always attracts visitors. The Biennale, being such a huge platform in the Indian context, adds another layer to its charm. As someone who regularly visits, I admire how the artworks leave a lasting influence—you can still spot bits and pieces of them while walking around, even after the event ends.</p> <p>It's disappointing that the Biennale didn't happen this year due to ownership issues, but I'm already looking forward to the next one. After the Biennale, some key venues get locked up, making certain spaces feel abandoned, while others continue hosting smaller exhibitions. Accessibility changes too, which is something I noticed. But during that short period when the Biennale is on, the place feels truly alive."</p>	
	35	F	LOCAL TOURIST	MFA PROFESSOR		<p>"Fort Kochi always has an artistic charm, but after the Biennale, you can feel a shift. As a BFA professor, I've always admired how the event transforms everyday spaces into open galleries, making art more accessible. But once it ends, some of these spaces are locked up again, and that vibrancy fades a little.</p> <p>Still, traces of the Biennale remain—wall murals, installations left behind, and a certain creative energy that lingers. While some venues continue with smaller exhibitions, others become inaccessible, which is a loss for art enthusiasts like me. The Biennale brings a unique cultural dialogue, and its absence this year was noticeable. However, Fort Kochi never loses its artistic essence—it's just quieter, waiting for the next wave of creativity."</p>	
	23	M	LOCAL TOURIST	ARCHITECTURE STUDENT	Do you think the Biennale enhances your understanding of Kochi's cultural identity?	<p>"As someone studying architecture, I was fascinated by how the Biennale repurposes heritage spaces. The way old warehouses, streets, and even abandoned buildings become art venues highlights Kochi's ability to blend history with modern creativity. It made me appreciate the city's identity in a whole new way."</p>	
	42	M	REGULAR VISITOR	PROFESSOR		<p>"For me, the Biennale is a living classroom. It brings together traditional Kerala art forms with contemporary global expressions, creating a space for learning and dialogue. It deepens my appreciation for how Kochi nurtures artistic talent and supports cultural exchange."</p>	
	62	M	LOCAL RESIDENT	SHOP OWNER		<p>"I see the Biennale as a reminder of Kochi's long-standing role as a melting pot of cultures. We've always been a trading hub, welcoming influences from around the world. This event continues that legacy by bringing artists, visitors, and ideas from across the globe. It's a proud moment for us locals."</p>	
	28	M	FREQUENT VISITOR (CHENNAI)	HISTORIAN (HERITAGE ENTHUSIAST)		<p>One thing that fascinates me about the Biennale is how it brings new life to Fort Kochi's historic spaces. Many of the venues themselves—like Aspinwall House and Pepper House—hold immense historical value but often remain underutilized. By transforming them into dynamic art spaces, the Biennale not only revives these places but also helps tell the story of Kochi's past. It reinforces the city's long-standing relevance in history, from its colonial trade connections to its role as a cultural hub today."</p>	
	37	F	KOCHI RESIDENT	JOURNALIST		<p>"Kochi has so many stories to pass on to future generations. We have a rich heritage, but events like the Biennale help narrate it in a way that reaches people globally. It's not just about art—it's about keeping our cultural identity alive and making sure it's seen and understood by a wider audience. The Biennale has also played a huge role in shaping Kochi's identity on an international platform, almost like branding it as a global hub for art and culture. The themes and concepts explored are often socially relevant, sparking important conversations.</p> <p>But it shouldn't just be about art—Kochi should welcome all kinds of inclusive events that celebrate different aspects of our culture, traditions, and communities. Since I live here, I can say that events like these help keep the city vibrant and connected, making it a more engaging place for both residents and visitors."</p>	

	19	M	LOCAL	COLLEGE STUDENT	Would you visit Fort Kochi outside of Biennale seasons? Why or why not?	"YES. It's not just the heritage and culture that draw me to Fort Kochi—the nightlife here is great too! My friends and I often visit, especially in the evenings, to enjoy the vibe. The cafes, live music, and the overall relaxed atmosphere make it a perfect hangout spot, whether the Biennale is happening or not."	
	25	F	LOCAL			"YES, I come to Fort Kochi often because I love the atmosphere—the streets, the cafes, and just walking around. But somehow, I've never been to the Biennale. I've heard a lot about it, and I see the artworks and murals left behind, but I just never made the time to visit. Maybe next time I'll check it out, since everyone says it completely transforms the place!"	
	40	F	INTERNATIONAL TOURIST			"I came for the last Biennale, but this year I visited even though it's not happening. Honestly, Fort Kochi itself is worth visiting any time of the year. The heritage, the waterfront, and the old-world charm make it a perfect getaway. I love revisiting Kerala, and at least a three-day halt in Fort Kochi is a must for me."	
LOCAL RESIDENT	35	M	LOCAL VISITOR		How has the Biennale affected daily life in Fort Kochi?	"The Biennale brings life to the town! The streets become lively, businesses flourish, and we get to see incredible artworks in our own backyard. It feels like Fort Kochi becomes the center of the art world for a while." "But for residents, it also means crowded streets, traffic jams, and inflated prices. Some days, we feel like our own town isn't for us anymore—cafes and spaces we used to enjoy get too expensive or too packed."	
					Have you noticed changes in public spaces during and after the Biennale?	Absolutely. During the Biennale, public spaces become vibrant—there are street performances, pop-up art installations, and more pedestrian-friendly zones. But after it ends, some of these spaces lose their charm. Aspinwall House, for example, becomes completely inaccessible. It's strange to see a place so full of life suddenly locked up. Some murals and smaller art pieces remain, but the transformation isn't permanent enough to make a lasting impact."	
					Do you feel the Biennale is inclusive of the local community? Why or why not?	"Not always. While many locals enjoy visiting the exhibitions, it sometimes feels like the event is more for outsiders—tourists, artists, and international visitors. Many of us are just spectators rather than active participants. Also, when it's over, we're left with these empty venues that we have no access to. More workshops and events for locals, especially artists from Kerala, could make it more inclusive."	
					What are your thoughts on the possible sale of Aspinwall House to the Coast Guard?	"It's a heritage space, and losing it would be a big loss. It should stay a cultural venue where people can access art and history year-round." "At the same time, after the Biennale, it just sits locked up. If it's not going to be used properly throughout the year, then what's the point?"	
					What would you like to see happen with venues like Aspinwall House and Pepper House?	"They should be used for exhibitions, performances, or workshops all year. Kochi's cultural identity depends on keeping these spaces active." "But if they remain closed most of the time except for big events, then they just become dead spaces again. There needs to be a plan for other uses, not just for a few months of the Biennale."	
	36	F	LOCAL VISITOR		How has the Biennale affected daily life in Fort Kochi?	"The Biennale undoubtedly transforms Fort Kochi, filling it with energy, cultural dialogues, and economic activity. Streets are lively, cafes and shops thrive, and even lesser-known spaces gain visibility. It brings a sense of purpose to the city, reminding us of its historical and artistic significance. Beyond the Biennale, we also see other exhibitions happening in and around, proving that the city has the potential to be a year-round cultural hub. But because it happens during peak tourist season, the surge in visitors can be overwhelming. If similar events were planned for the off-season, it could help distribute economic benefits more evenly and create a more sustainable cultural scene." "But for many of us, it can also be exhausting. The already-busy peak season becomes even more chaotic—congested streets, inflated prices, and overcrowded public spaces make daily life difficult. Some of our favorite spaces feel like they are taken over by visitors. While the Biennale is a great platform, more inclusive, community-driven programs should take place throughout the year, allowing more local engagement instead of making it feel like a seasonal event primarily for outsiders."	
					Have you noticed changes in public spaces during and after the Biennale?	"The Biennale transforms Fort Kochi in ways that prove the potential of its spaces. Abandoned warehouses turn into vibrant art venues, neglected courtyards become gathering places, and even the streets get a new artistic layer. While we appreciate these changes, more programs should focus on local participation. We see the emergence of various other exhibitions around town, showing that art doesn't have to be confined to one grand event. This momentum could be used to create more grassroots-level cultural spaces." "But these changes are temporary. Once the Biennale is over, venues like Aspinwall House and Cabral Yard are locked up again. It's frustrating to see spaces come alive only to return to dormancy. More importantly, because the Biennale happens during peak tourist season, it intensifies the seasonal nature of Fort Kochi's economy. If events were distributed throughout the year, the city wouldn't experience such extreme fluctuations between periods of high activity and complete stagnation."	

					<p>Do you feel the Biennale is inclusive of the local community? Why or why not?</p> <p>"To some extent, yes. It provides local artists, businesses, and even students opportunities to engage with a global audience. Some participate as volunteers, vendors, or even featured artists. The event sparks cultural discussions that wouldn't happen otherwise, making people more aware of art's role in shaping urban spaces. Moreover, the Biennale is not just for artists, critics, or writers—it has spaces for people from all backgrounds, including performers, designers, students, and even informal discussions that bring different voices together."</p> <p>"But many locals feel like passive observers rather than active participants. While the event brings international recognition, it sometimes feels detached from the everyday realities of Fort Kochi's residents. If we had smaller-scale community-driven events throughout the year, it could foster deeper local engagement instead of making the Biennale feel like a temporary 'outsider's festival' that comes and goes without truly integrating with the local fabric."</p>	
					<p>Do you think the Biennale's impact is temporary or lasting?</p> <p>"The Biennale leaves behind physical and cultural traces—murals, new art spaces, and global recognition for Kochi as a creative hub. More importantly, it challenges how we view urban spaces. It shows that with the right intervention, abandoned sites can become thriving cultural centers. This itself is a valuable lesson in temporary urbanism."</p> <p>"However, the transformation is seasonal rather than continuous. It amplifies Fort Kochi's role as a cultural destination, but only during peak tourist months. Once it ends, there is little sustained programming to keep the momentum alive."</p>	
					<p>What should be done differently?</p> <p>"Instead of relying on a single large-scale event, Fort Kochi needs a diverse cultural calendar. The Biennale has proven that art can rejuvenate spaces, so why not use that as a foundation for year-round programming? Festivals, pop-up markets, street performances, and community-driven initiatives could distribute cultural activity across different seasons, preventing economic slowdowns and sustaining local engagement. There is already a demand for exhibitions and creative gatherings beyond the Biennale—we just need better infrastructure and support to make them more accessible."</p> <p>"Right now, the Biennale serves as an intense but short-lived boost. The seasonal nature of both tourism and cultural activity means that we have months of high energy followed by long periods of dormancy. This cycle is neither sustainable nor beneficial for the local economy. If more events were spread across the year, Fort Kochi's identity as a cultural destination could be maintained without overburdening residents during peak tourist months. We need to foster events that are not just exclusive art exhibitions but also inclusive, community-driven initiatives where locals feel a stronger sense of belonging."</p>	
					<p>Do you think the Biennale's impact is temporary or lasting?</p> <p>"The Biennale leaves behind physical and cultural traces—murals, new art spaces, and global recognition for Kochi as a creative hub. More importantly, it challenges how we view urban spaces. It shows that with the right intervention, abandoned sites can become thriving cultural centers. This itself is a valuable lesson in temporary urbanism."</p> <p>"However, the transformation is seasonal rather than continuous. It amplifies Fort Kochi's role as a cultural destination, but only during peak tourist months. Once it ends, there is little sustained programming to keep the momentum alive. This highlights a critical issue: if we want the benefits of temporary urban interventions to be more permanent, we need structured policies and investments in year-round cultural infrastructure, not just one major event every two years."</p>	
	39	F	KERALITE	HANDICRAFTS AND CLOTHING (Luxury & Cultural Sector)	<p>How has the Biennale impacted your business?</p> <p>"The Biennale is a game-changer for businesses like ours, especially in the luxury and cultural sector. It brings in high-spending tourists who are eager to explore art, buy handcrafted items, and experience Fort Kochi's unique charm. Naturally, during the event, we adjust our pricing because the demand is much higher. It's a short window of opportunity for us to earn significantly, especially since footfall decreases dramatically once the Biennale ends. The Biennale is one of the busiest times of the year for us. It brings in a wave of high-spending tourists who appreciate art, culture, and unique handcrafted products. Naturally, we adjust our prices during the event to match the demand, as this is when we can make the most profit. It's a golden opportunity that helps sustain us through quieter months."</p> <p>✗ "But this seasonal dependency is also a challenge. The influx of tourists makes everything more expensive, pushing away local customers who might otherwise support us. Many of them avoid shopping or dining in certain areas because prices are too high during the Biennale. Once the event ends, there's a noticeable dip in sales, and we have to lower prices again."</p>	
					<p>Have you observed an increase in customer engagement during the Biennale?</p> <p>"Absolutely. The Biennale brings in an audience that values art and culture, and they are willing to invest in unique experiences. Our stores see more foot traffic, especially from international tourists looking for authentic, high-quality items. We get more inquiries, more purchases, and an overall higher level of engagement."</p> <p>"But it's a very specific audience. While we do see more visitors, not everyone buys. Many people are here just for the art and don't necessarily contribute to the local economy beyond cafés and ticketed venues. Once the Biennale ends, that engagement drops sharply, making it difficult to sustain business year-round."</p>	

Business Owners					What kind of customers do you mostly cater to during the event—locals or tourists?	<p>"Mostly tourists, especially international visitors who are interested in premium and handcrafted products. They come with a mindset to spend, making them our primary customers during the Biennale."</p> <p>"Locals are a smaller percentage of our customers during this time, partly because prices are higher and partly because they feel the event caters more to outsiders. Many of them wait until after the Biennale to shop when prices stabilize again."</p>
	45	M	KERALITE	Convenience & Service Sector	Has the Biennale influenced your sales or customer base?	<p>"The Biennale definitely changes the atmosphere of Fort Kochi. There's a noticeable increase in foot traffic, and we see more people passing by our shops. Some visitors stop for small purchases, but overall, it benefits high-end businesses like boutiques, cafes, and art galleries much more than it does everyday stores like ours."</p> <p>"For businesses that sell daily necessities—like grocery stores, small eateries, or local service providers—the impact is minimal. Tourists and art enthusiasts don't really shop for basic household items or services, so our sales remain about the same. In fact, with rising costs during the Biennale, some of our regular local customers cut back on their spending, so we don't always see a boost."</p>
					Have you faced any challenges due to increased tourism and pricing changes?	<p>"Tourism brings opportunities, but it also brings challenges. Many cafes, restaurants, and boutiques raise their prices during the Biennale because they cater to a wealthier audience. They can afford to do that, and it works for them."</p> <p>"But for local businesses like ours, it's not so simple. We rely on everyday customers who can't afford sudden price hikes. If we raise our prices, we risk losing our regulars. At the same time, the cost of living and rent around us increases, making it harder for us to sustain ourselves. While some businesses benefit greatly from the Biennale, others—especially those that serve the local community—struggle with the inflation it brings."</p>
					How do you feel about the contrast between upscale businesses and local stores?	<p>"It's undeniable that the Biennale boosts certain businesses more than others. High-end restaurants, art cafes, boutique hotels, and souvenir shops see a clear benefit, while local grocery stores, hardware shops, and budget eateries don't experience the same kind of rush."</p> <p>"The problem is that this growing divide is making it harder for smaller businesses to survive. As Fort Kochi becomes more associated with premium cultural tourism, property prices and rent go up, pushing out smaller, long-time businesses. Many local shop owners feel that while the Biennale transforms Fort Kochi, it doesn't necessarily transform their economic situation for the better."</p>
					Do you think the Biennale has changed the economic landscape of Fort Kochi?	<p>"Yes, it has. The Biennale has undoubtedly put Fort Kochi on the global map for contemporary art, and that attracts a niche, high-spending audience. For certain sectors, this is a huge advantage. It has brought more luxury tourism, high-end dining, and boutique businesses to the area, changing the economic landscape significantly."</p> <p>"But on the flip side, it has also made things more expensive. The cost of renting a shop space has gone up, and even day-to-day living expenses have increased. Some local businesses struggle to keep up because their profits haven't risen at the same rate. While tourism has grown, it hasn't necessarily made Fort Kochi more sustainable for all kinds of businesses—especially the ones that rely on local customers."</p>
	32	M	KERALITE	Govt.official working in KMC	Do you believe the Biennale contributes positively to Kochi's identity? How so?	<p>Yes, I do believe the Biennale has been a positive force for Kochi's identity. It has put Kochi on the global art map, creating an image of the city as culturally vibrant and open to contemporary artistic practices. It celebrates Kerala's heritage while inviting international voices.</p> <p>That said, there are challenges. Some local communities feel it sometimes caters more to tourists and elite audiences than to them. But overall, the Biennale has significantly elevated Kochi's profile and cultural confidence.</p>
					In your view, how has the Biennale impacted the usage of public spaces like Fort Kochi and Mattancherry?	<p>Positively, it has activated and revitalized these spaces. Old warehouses, godowns, and heritage buildings that were neglected have been restored or reused creatively. Streets see more foot traffic, encouraging commerce.</p> <p>However, this also raises issues like crowd management, waste generation, and the risk of over-commercialization. During Biennale months, these areas can become congested, which affects residents. But these are manageable challenges given the overall boost to public space usage.</p>
					Has the Biennale changed the way people interact within public spaces in Kochi? Can you provide examples?	<p>Yes, absolutely. People now see these spaces as cultural venues rather than just transit routes or neglected areas. For example, Aspinwall House is no longer just an abandoned warehouse but a destination where families, students, and tourists gather to experience art.</p> <p>Similarly, streets and squares host informal discussions, performances, and pop-up cafes. Even local schools organize visits, making art more accessible. There's a sense of shared ownership of these spaces, at least during the Biennale.</p>

					<p>How has the Biennale influenced tourism and the local economy, in your opinion?</p>	<p>It's had a very significant positive impact. Hotels, homestays, restaurants, local shops, and transport services see a major spike in business during Biennale months. Tourists often stay longer and spend more.</p> <p>Local artisans and vendors also benefit from the increased footfall. But the economic boost is somewhat seasonal and concentrated in certain areas; broader, more equitable distribution of benefits is something we're trying to address.</p>	
					<p>Do you believe the Biennale has led to more community involvement or engagement with public spaces? How has this changed over time?</p>	<p>Yes, there is more community involvement now compared to the early editions. Initially, there was some skepticism or disconnect, but over time, local residents, artists, students, and NGOs have become collaborators and participants.</p> <p>Programs like Students' Biennale and workshops in local schools help deepen this connection. However, we still need to improve inclusivity—for instance, ensuring that people from all socioeconomic backgrounds feel truly welcome and represented.</p>	
					<p>Do you think local governance and urban policy or any kind of systems in Kochi supports such temporary urban interventions? What would you suggest to improve this support?</p>	<p>Our systems have supported the Biennale to an extent—through funding, permissions, and heritage conservation efforts. But they can be more proactive.</p> <p>Often, bureaucratic processes are slow and fragmented across agencies. Coordination between departments like tourism, heritage, local government, and police can be improved.</p> <p>I'd suggest clearer policies for temporary cultural uses of public and heritage spaces, streamlined permissions, better infrastructure planning (waste management, transport), and dedicated funding channels for cultural events.</p>	
					<p>How do you believe the Biennale could inspire other Southern cities to adopt similar interventions?</p>	<p>The Biennale is an excellent model of using art and culture to transform urban spaces and perceptions. It shows how heritage can be reimaged rather than demolished, how local communities can benefit from global exposure, and how art can be democratized.</p> <p>Other southern cities—like Chennai, Bengaluru, or Thiruvananthapuram—could adapt the model to their own contexts: activating heritage precincts, involving local artists, and boosting cultural tourism.</p> <p>Of course, they should also learn from Kochi's challenges: ensuring affordability, community buy-in, and sustainability, rather than just replication.</p>	

