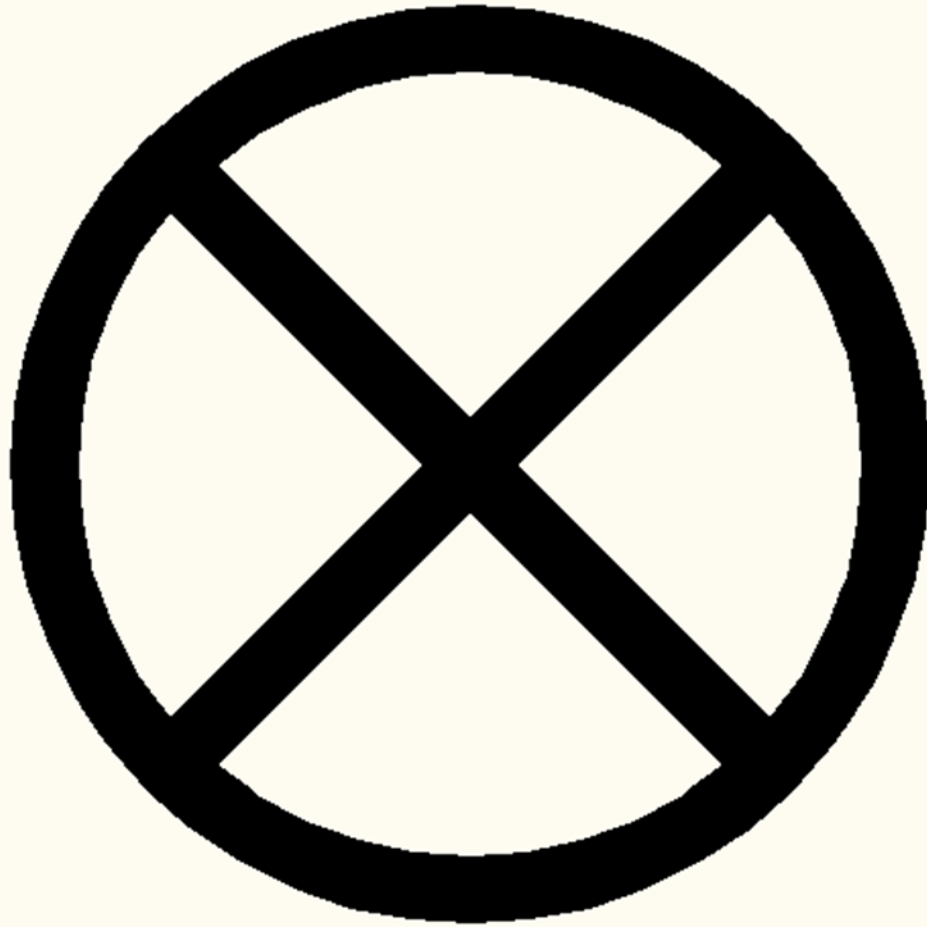Characteristics and Challenges
of

Public Spaces of Kathmandu Valley Towns

A Socio-cultural Perspective

Civilizations Locate Towns At Crossings

Of

Thoughts

Ideas

Cultures

Traditions

Societies

Economic Activities

…

And, of course

ROADS

Three Characteristics

Coming together * Assimilation * Generating diversities * Civilizing cycles

Urban Living demands management of

- Heterogeneity — extent of the mix of different elements

- Diversity - socio-economic distance between elements

- Density — physical proximity of elements

  for comfort… socio-cultural comfort

URBAN SPACES ARE OPEN SPACES FRAMED BY BUILDINGS

THE COMPLEXITY OF URBAN LIVING IS EXPRESSED HERE

Space for Socio-cultural Play - Cognition and Expression of symbols, meanings and rules of play

Public Space and Urbanism

- Realm of interaction of family – private space
- Socially distant ones interact in public space
- Group – a homogeneous pocket of social comfort
  - Culture of open spaces: rules of coming and living life together in public spaces
  - Symbols, values and processes seek coherence
- Differing sense of ownership, belongingness and usage – index of public-ness of a urban space.
- define and express urbanism.

Newar Urbanism is

derived from three organizing systems

- Society

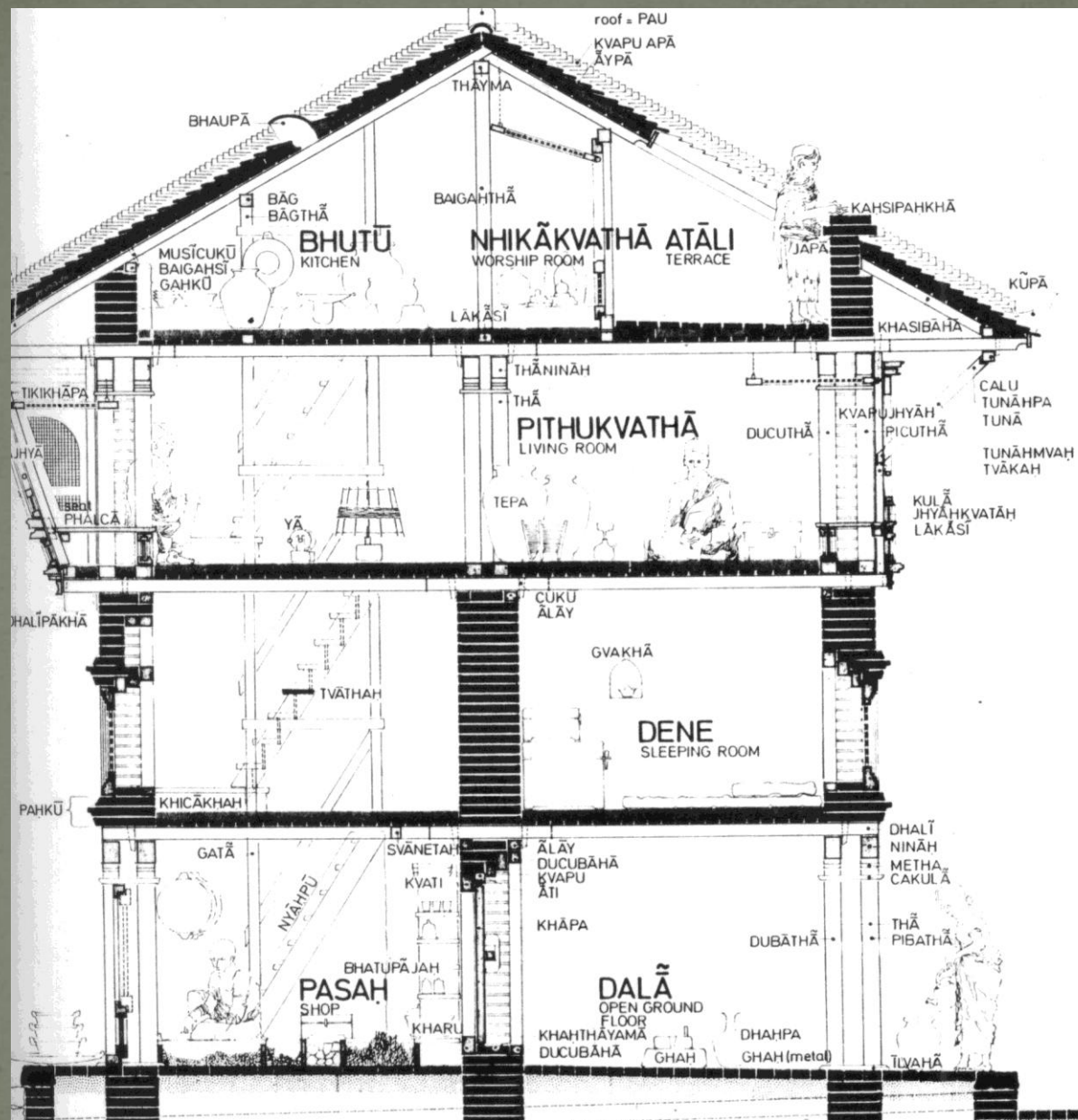- Land and Space

- Festive Activities

Society for Community Living

- Joint Family (' bhochhi')
- Mono-caste situation – Progressive scale of clan (bhochhi, thahpin/syapin, fuki)
  - Scale of neighborhood and beyond
  - Guthi for managing activities
- Multi-caste and multi-religious situation – in the scale of market, city, nation and the valley
  - Interactive interrelations between the mono-caste socio-cultural groups.
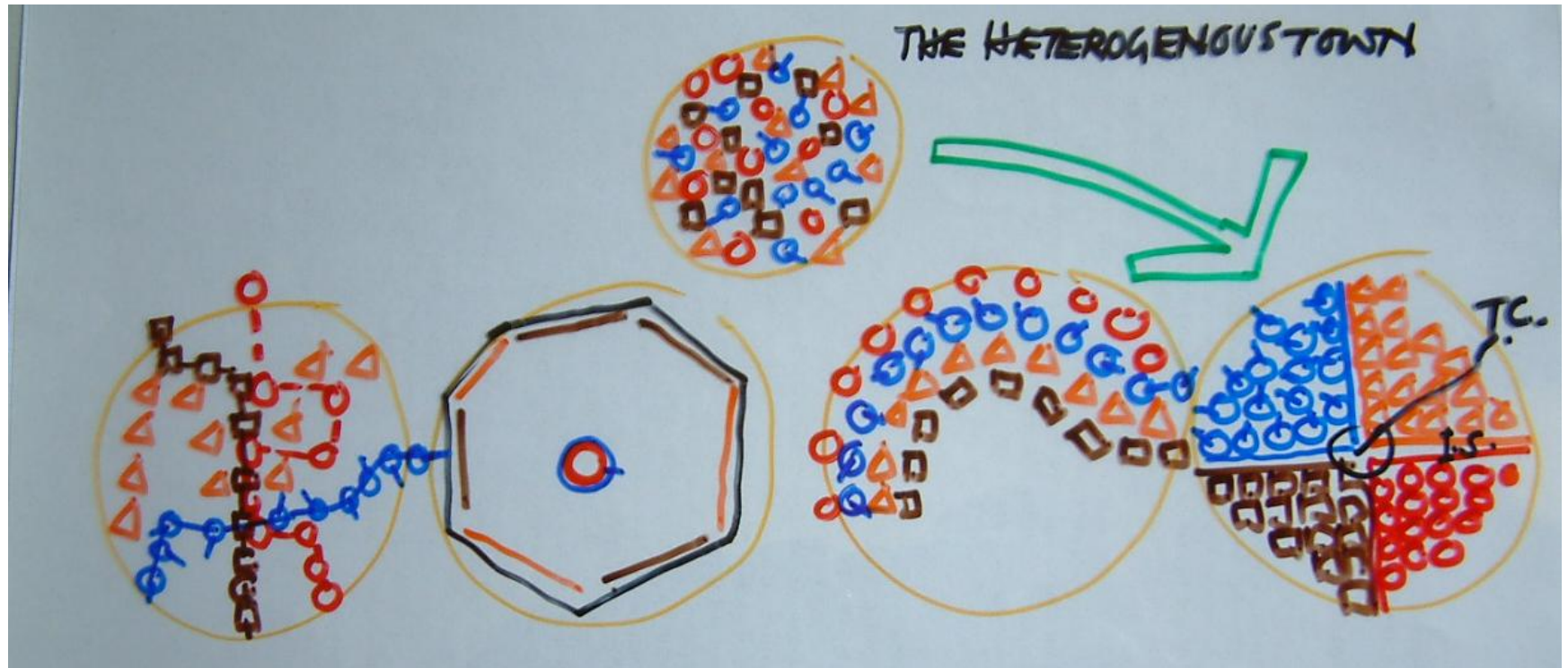
Space, Family and the Society

- Social organization and matching chain of hierarchical urban spaces, streets and squares
- *The living space overlooking the street and the court, the semi-open Dalan and the court, the street and the Pikhalakhu stone*
  - *linking the family to its immediate neighborhood*
  - *Homogenizing through the Pikhalakhu*
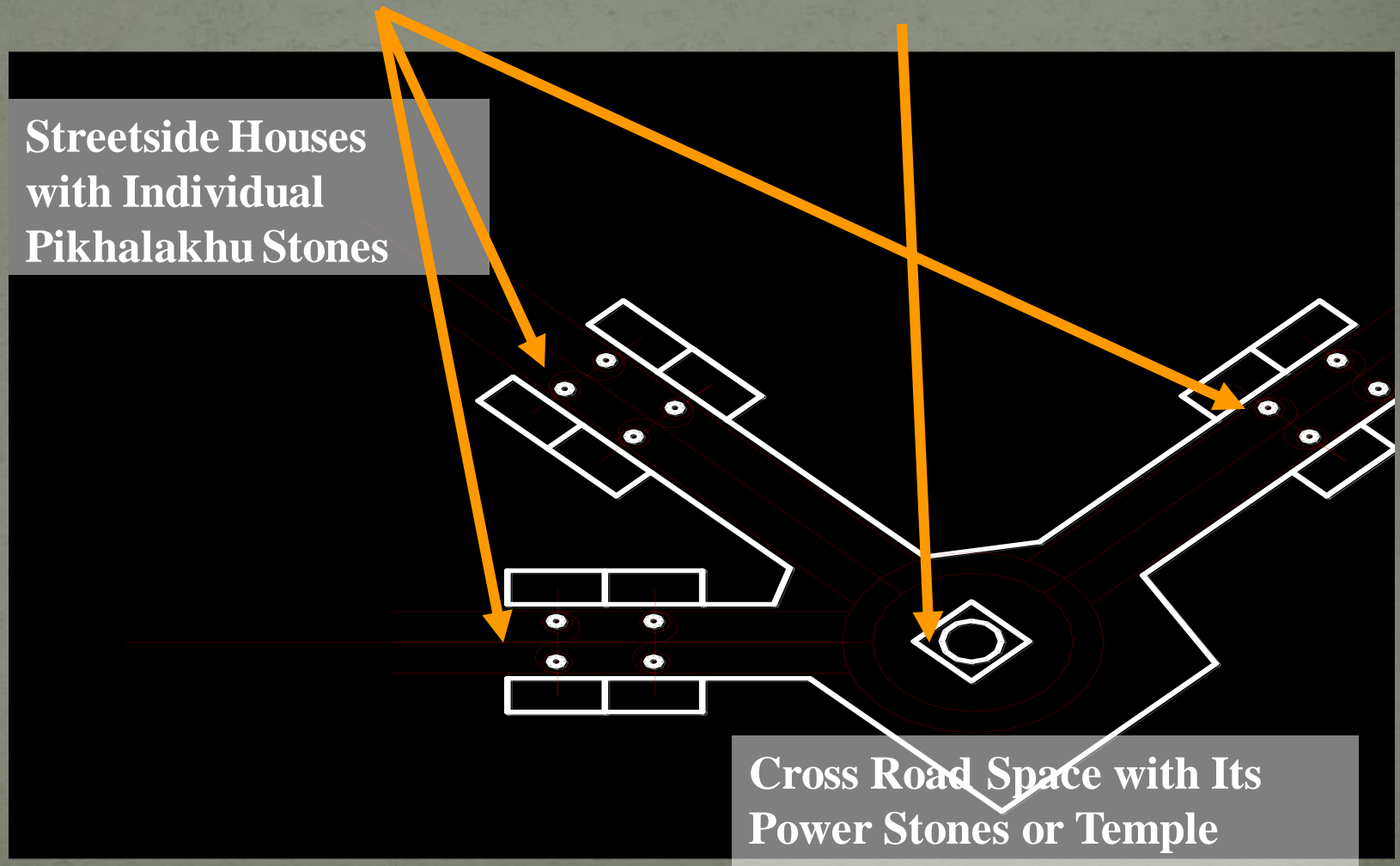- Graded public-ness and territorial identity, ownership and patronage

roof = PAU
KVAPU APÃ
ÃYPÃ
THÃYMA
BHAUPÃ
BAIGAHTHÃ
BÃG
BÃGTHÃ
KAHSIPAHKHÃ

BHUTŪ
KITCHEN
MUSĨCUKŨ
BAIGAHSĨ
GAHKŨ

NHIKÃKVATHÃ
WORSHIP ROOM
JAPÃ
ATĀLI
TERRACE
KŨPÃ

LÃKÃSĨ
KHASIBÃHÃ

THÃNINÃH
TIKIKHÃPA
THÃ
CALU
TUNÃHPA
TUNÃ

...JHYÃ
PITHUKVATHÃ
LIVING ROOM
DUCUTHÃ
KVAPUJHYÃH
PICUTHÃ
TUNÃHMVAH
TVÃKAH

PHALCÃ
TEPA
YÃ
KULÃ
JHYÃHKVATÃH
LÃKÃSĨ

DHALĨPÃKHÃ
CUKŨ
ÃLÃY

GVAKHÃ

TVÃTHAH

DENE
SLEEPING ROOM

PAHKŨ
KHICÃKHAH

GATÃ
SVÃNETAH
ÃLÃY
DUCUBÃHÃ
KVAPU
ÃTI
DHALĨ
NINÃH
METHA
CAKULÃ

KVATI
KHÃPA
THÃ
PIBATHÃ

NYÃHPŨ
DUBÃTHÃ

BHATUPÃJAH
PASAH
SHOP
DALÃ
OPEN GROUND
FLOOR
KHARU
KHAHTHÃYAMÃ
DUCUBÃHÃ
GHAH
DHAHPA
GHAH (metal)
TĨLVAHÃ

Neighborhoods

- Jayasthiti Malla's reorganization
  - Managable size and economic specialization
  - 64/82 jaats
  - 2000-5000 persons at that time (cf. current ward population of 100000?)
  - Individual identity derived from group characteristics
- 24 Toles - homogeneous neighborhoods
  - Tied to space
  - Little or no mobility
  - Nursing and development of the socio-cultural space

Homogenizing into Neighborhoods – Planning for a heterogeneous society

Stones on the Street: Homogenizing Movements

Streetside Houses with Individual Pikhalakhu Stones

Cross Road Space with Its Power Stones or Temple

Land and Space Organization

- **Social linkage to Land and Space**
  - Individual and the house and the land
    - Foot on the ground approach - vertical divisions
    - Family's outdoor activities, public spaces
  - Clan and Neighborhood, Neighborhood commons, community ownership and territoriality
  - Land tied to festivities in space
    - Agricultural land in trust

Land and Space Organization

- **Guthi system**
  - Institutionalizes social formation
  - Bonds society to land, spaces and acts of assembly and socialization.
  - Nature based with a self-generating and self-coordinating agenda
  - "*Swajana guthi*" and Guthis working together
- Dominant role of the farming community in framing and guiding the religious life and festivities
  - Connection with agricultural land
  - Sharing in crops for socio-cultural activities

Symbols and Values in Cultural Organization

- Overlapping social neighborhoods (associated with other kins, castes, guthis or musical troupes) and complexity of socio-cultural space
  - Seek appropriate cognizance from its citizen.
  - Symbolic markers in community spaces define group boundaries – Chhwasah, Neighbourhood Ganesh, Digudyo
- Lack of cognizance
  - self-exclusion
  - slow assimilation with cultural owners'
  - inhibit inter-culturation

A Symbol

Activities and Festivals in Cultural Organization

- **Festivals (jatra) in urban life**
  - actively bringing together individuals, families and community groups, of an area, a neighborhood, a node, a courtyard and a house
  - Using network of gods and goddesses, small and big, to socialize and remain socialized.
  - Network of Guthis
    - Number of Guthis come together to get a string of things and rituals done so that the festival as a whole is celebrated
    - Guthi, small or large, entrusted with one activity in a cycle, built out of one family or clan and so are 'mono-clan and mono-activity driven'.
  - Festival totals as a multi-clan and multi-activity chain
    - multi-cultural traits.

Cultural Mediation of Time and Space

- Activities and Festivities
- Spaces and Symbols
  - Daily cycle of family activities
  - Fortnightly cycle
  - Monthly cycle
  - Yearly cycle
  - Four yearly cycle
  - Twelve yearly cycle

Heirarchy of Public spaces in the Town

- Family courtyard > street > pati, well > neighborhood space
- The Node > high street linking neighborhoods > market squares
- The Main street > Durbar square
- Symbolic markers and physical facility
  - Pikhalakhu > Chhwasa > Ganesh > Digudyo > Vishnu?
  - Pati > Chapad > Sattal > Tavachapad
  - Tu > Hiti > Pukhu > Ghat

Spatial Order and Cultural Groups: Mono-culture

- Mono-cultural Space
  - First Order
    - Family and Clan space, the courtyard (Bhochi/Thapin)
    - The Pikhalakhu (point of departure), the first street (of similar thoughts)
  - Second Order
    - Well, Pati and the second crossing, the chhwasa
    - The Neighborhood square, the Ganesh, the third crossing

Spatial Order and Cultural Groups: Multi-culture

- Multi-cultural Space
  - First Order
    - The crossing of the four dissimilar thoughts, the temple, the conduit pit, the dabali and the plaza
  - Second Order
    - The Market square and the High Street
  - Third Order
    - The Durbar square, the convergence of (24?) streams of thoughts, sectioned large space

Itum Bahal: A Religious Space?

Itum Bahal: A Religious Space?

Itum Bahal: A Religious Space?

Young Renters and Aged Residents

Multi-cultural Space: 3ʳᵈ order: Patan

Changes and Challenges

- Cyber space, indoor life and public urban space
- Growing heterogeneity, diversity and density
  - Multiplicity of ethnicities, cultures, religions
  - 75% migrants traversed medium to large social distances
  - 21000 persons per Km^2
- No new open public spaces added, loss of traditional spaces
  - Socio-cultural deserts
- Urban Poverty and Public spaces
  - Encroachment of streets and squares
  - Overcrowding of public spaces - reflection of lack of access to private spaces for leisure?

Changes and Challenges

- Breakdown of traditional organization and structure of the society
  - Unmanaged privatization of public spaces
  - Mono-cultural spaces have survived somewhat
- Wanton Commercialization
  - Plazas, High streets and Squares
  - Loss of cultural symbols and values - no framework for integration
  - Extracting minimum environmental values
- Pace and Scale of diversity build-up
  - Socio-cultural possibilities wiped out
  - No time and space for integration or assimilation