CREATIVE URBAN INTERFACE AS A FUTURE GROWTH DIRECTION FOR FINANCIAL DISTRICTS

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Abstract: The turn of the millennium, came forth along with drastic changes in the way we work, live and socialize. These changes have redefined our concept of city and urban center. The central business district, which often is the economic core of the city, has shifted from the central activities zone to the financial district, that hosts the service sector and soft industries, often located in the city's periphery. This definition is further changing at a considerable pace. The future of the cities would require the existing financial districts to restructure to accommodate this change. This paper tries to envision the future growth direction of financial districts and investigates into the possibility of transforming them into a creative corridor, where innovation becomes the crux of the economy. The design attempts a physical manifestation of the concepts of "Creative Urban space".

Keywords: Financial Districts, Creative City, Creative Urban Space, Campus Organism.

The Big Picture – Globalization: The end of the 20th Century, saw a major pole shift in communication due to the internet, while the world started to spell out globalization. Globalization was the result of this substantially important advancement in communication and this impacted cities and city life majorly. Morphology of cities changed drastically and the social life took a new face altogether. Thus urban life and setting was greatly altered.

Financial Districts are the physical manifestations of an economic core in a global city. They, unlike the conventional Central Business Districts of the past, have different specifications and morphological characteristics.

TABLE 1DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONVENTIONAL CBD AND FINANCIAL DISTRICTS

S.No	Central Business Districts	Financial Districts
1.	Geographic Center	Geographically far from the city core
2.	Historic Center	High Rise, modernist, motor dependent development
3.	Physically Well connected	Virtually Connected
4.	Small Residential Population	Facilitates Suburbia
5.	High Dense Development	Low dense development and huge land parcels
6.	Market Precinct, Administrative Center	Information enabled financial services
7.	Co-location, reduced barriers	Integrated buildings, disintegrated environment

But, nevertheless, these financial districts though became the cradle of economic growth and Infrastructure, generally   by these factors, also caused issues such as:

- Dissociated spaces of functional aggregation
- Culture of Security and claustrophobia
- Privatization of public spaces
- Fragmented urban form
- No sense of belonging
- Simulacra of socialization
- No-Place
- Insecurity and Exploitation
- Shows inadequacy of Connection to local social context and soft condition

Saskia Sassen, in her book – The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo puts forth a seven step hypothesis of socio-economic transformations that are to happen when a city becomes a global city. Based on which a set of impacts and spatial implications can be arrived upon. The six (of the seven) steps and its corresponding analytic derivatives of spatiality are mentioned in the table below. [5]

Table 1: Seven Step Hypothesis Of Global City

| S.No	HYPOTHESIS	IMPACT	GLOBAL	MACRO	MICRO
01	Geographic Dispersal of Economic Activities	More Number of cities – Global Cities	Virtually connected, physically dissociated cities	Culturally inert spaces, lack of identity.	Artificially conditioned environment and vertically enabled building systems.
02	Central Functions become complex. Support functions get outsourced.	Migration of Single professional individuals. Interdependent Cities	Special economic zones are created to accommodate functions of similar nature.	Residential and commercial typologies change.	Building systems to accommodate the machine.
03	Specialized Service firms leads to agglomerations of Economy	City corridor strengthens. Improvement in Infrastructure and facilities	Infrastructure availability causes urban growth to happen along the corridor	City corridor strengthens. Improvement in Infrastructure and facilities leads to development along the same.	Formal Hierarchy of spaces and function
04	Location of Headquarters became unimportant	Highly Specialized Network, services sector, focus of developments shift to these sectors	Boundaries and edges disappear. Agglomeration of cities leads to urban sprawl.	CBD becomes less congested. Requires more work spaces, shifts to the outskirts.	Self Sufficient building complexes.

05	Growth of Global Markets	Reduced role of government in the regulation of international economic activities	Redefined CBDs and growth direction	Privatization of development. Individual organizations, Disintegrated development.	Exclusive public spaces and well-maintained ambience
06	Growing Numbers of High level professionals	Spatial and socio-economic inequality	Spatial segregation due to economic function along with resources.	Gentrification, Islandisation of activities. Undesired Boundaries.	Levels of Security and scrutiny.

Concerns in Globalization: Globalization undoubtedly has been a phenomena that had greatly influenced the 20th Century. It redefined our notions of spaces, culture and relationships. While we would unanimously agree upon the context that, globalization has brought the world economy to a wider scale of operation, while creating more jobs and also making life easier with better speed, communication and choices; what globalization has resulted in doing to our culture is to slowly monotone it.

This was a gradual branding process, where any other global city would look similar in its look, feel and livability. This encourages people to shift their location of residence from place to place, depending on their need in the industry. And in spite of geographically shifting locations, an employee still feels at home, because, the new place is just as same as the old one, making him efficient in his work, as he does not feel homesick. For this purpose of economic efficiency, we have erased the personal identities of people, cities and nations. Anonymity has become the basis of this millennial culture. While it has its own set of advantages to its credit, as we have entered the 21st century, I believe it is high time to question its relevance and reliability to render our environment hence forth.

People have started realizing these impacts of globalization and cities have started to react. While globalization was the phenomena of the 20th century, the 21st century, seems to be driven by nationalism. While, at the present state of events, the word nationalism may spur unrest in the mind, it is only agreeable, that beyond all the hate, crime and violence, nationalism is only a cry for identity and belonging. While in some places around the world, the approach for this has been on the negative spectrum, some nations and cities, have focused their energy in creating an identity for themselves through various levels of branding exercises. Bringing back the distinctiveness of the city as intended by them, is not to completely wipe off the advantages that globalization posed, but to integrate, this cultural identity as an integral part of the healthy well-being of the citizens.

Chennai:

Figure 1 IT Corridor in Chennai *(Master plan 2026)*

FIGURE 1 Intensity of Financial Districts in Chennai
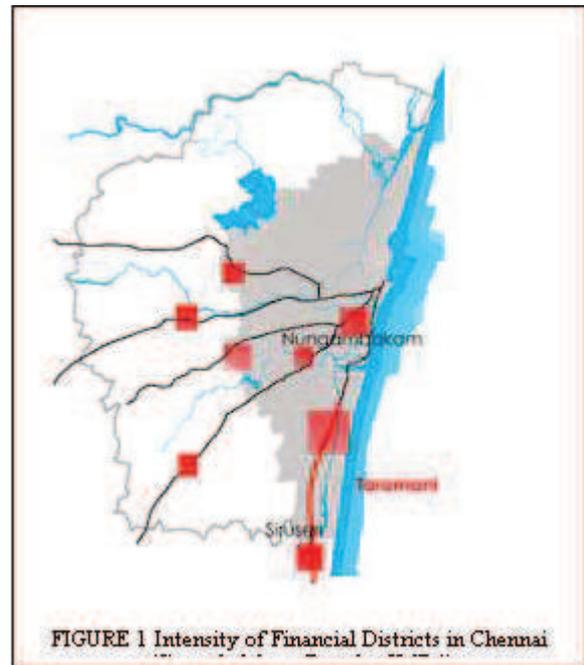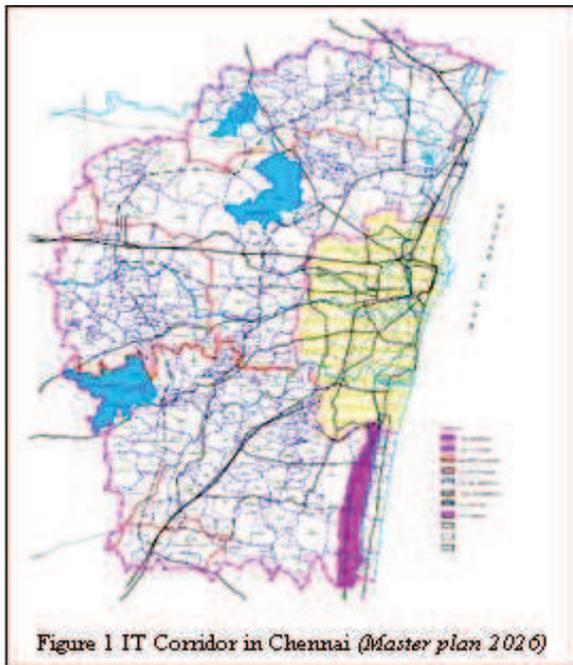
Chennai, one of the four metro cities in India, is the third in rank in terms of GDP per capita. Some of the most significant contributors of Chennai's economy are financial and software services, medical services, automobile, tourism, textiles and petrochemical industries. Chennai's IT industry is expanding its base along the East coast. Old Mahabalipuram Road (OMR) or Rajiv Gandhi Salai, is better known as the IT Expressway of Chennai. [1]

TABLE 3 Distribution Of It Parks In And Around Chennai City

| Sl.No	Location of I.T.Parks	No of IT Parks	%
1	Chennai City	45	13.46
2	Guindy Industrial Estate	12	3.89
3	Along OMR (within CMA Limit)	51	18.80
4	Off OMR (within CMA Limit)	25	21.18
5	Along OMR (outside CMA limit)	20	12.35
6	Off OMR (Beyond CMA)	1	0.13
7	Ambattur Industrial Estate	11	7.01
8	Mt.Poonamalee- Porur Road	7	7.91
9	Along GST Road	7	7.55
10	Mahindra City	1	0.64
11	Along P road and others	6	2.80
12	In Tier II cities	5	4.28
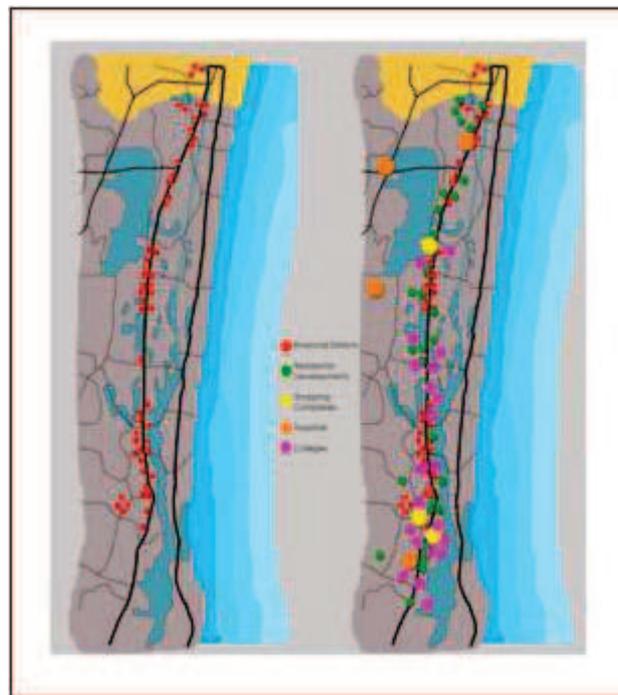
**Figure 3:** Developments in OMR(Compiled from Data by CMDA)

The six lane road, is lined with a number of techno-centric developments. This contributes to about 53% of the total techno-centric developments of Chennai. [2]. Apart from this, OMR is home to a number of technical institutions and campuses and residential townships. Recently the growth of IT industries in this Metropolis has been attracting a mix of people from other states as well as from abroad. Chennai is one of the major educational centers in India with a number of colleges and research institutions. Recently it has also been emerging as an important health center with a large number of super specialty hospitals.

Chennai is thus emerging as an important metropolis in the South Asian region. Most of these developments are gated and function as separate physical entities. The growth pattern is similar to that portended by Saskia Sassen. Some of the socio-spatial issues pertaining to OMR are:

Spatially Dissociated:

This character gets carried along the OMR, with most of the establishments in the corridor becoming independent entities that are functionally aggregated but totally dissociated spatially from one another. They seem to have inadequate connection to the local social context and soft conditions, leading to the fruition of fragmented urban forms.

Social Segregation :
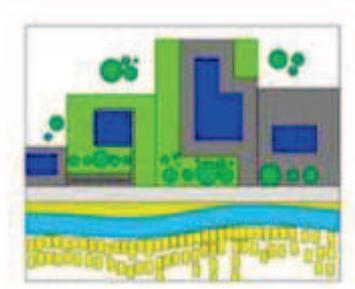
These islanded developments contribute to the haphazardly agglomerated residential pockets in the vicinity, leading to the development of unplanned neighborhoods, unintentionally segregated, socially. The IT Boom has already caused a major set-back to the locals, as they become irrelevant and unimportant to the advancements happening in their immediate neighborhood. This instills a feeling of insecurity and exploitation and leads to a culture of security and claustrophilia.
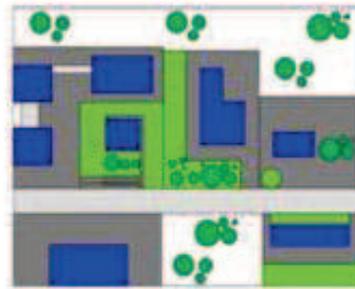
Privatization:

Another factor which has been a major player to this urban condition is Privatization. Private bodies hold responsibility to the development of their piece of land and their corresponding infrastructure in the case of financial districts. The employees, who are temporary entities in the picture, do not hold any sense of belonging to the place. This state of mind is relevant in the residential neighborhoods as well. The residents have a sense of ownership towards their private residential spaces and are not willing to contribute to the development of the neighborhood or city.

Concern:
The current trend of development would not lead to a healthy social life. Even Public spaces have become privatized and manifested with distinct activity for each space, creating simulacra of socialization, that cultural stimulation becomes almost inert. Therefore would let evolve irresponsible and isolated individuals. Development further ahead should be such that it contributes to the economic growth while propagating a healthy social life.

Research Question
While globalization's morphological reflections are seen in OMR's development, in this fast changing world, what would it become in the future? Can its future direction be such that it could solve the issues of that are presently existing?

Seventh Step of Global City Hypothesis
According to Sassen, the seventh step or the next step that the cities are going to undergo is "informalisation" where, the formal hierarchy and order existing in the huge network of these service sectors would make it difficult to generate ideas and innovation would become impossible. Hence, these

huge organizations would try to "outsource" ideas from smaller enterprises that have new and fresh minds working towards innovative development. [5]

This would in turn dissolve the concept of a geographic location of business districts. Focus would shift to the development of better public realms as that is where business would happen and economy generated. Better public spaces would mean better economy. Start-up incubators, spaces and forums of interaction would become the physical manifestation of economy. It would greatly alter work-live relationships, as they would slowly merge into one another and it would be indispensable to create spaces that would inadvertently facilitate all the activities. [6]

The Creative City Concept: This hypothesis is further acknowledged by urbanist Prof. Charles Landry, in his idea that he put forth in the book "The Creative City". In an interview with Indian Express, Charles Landry claims that, soon in the future, people are going to meet at clubs, hotels, bars and parks to discuss business. Public spaces will be places where work happens and that nobody would be willing to pay rent for a formal office space, when interaction would be facilitated by an efficient Wi-Fi connection and one could meet up people across the table at a coffee house.

According to Landry, a "creative economy" is going to be the future of cities. Some observers take the view that creativity is the defining characteristic of developed 21st century economies, just as manufacturing typified the 19th century and information characterized the 20th century. [7]
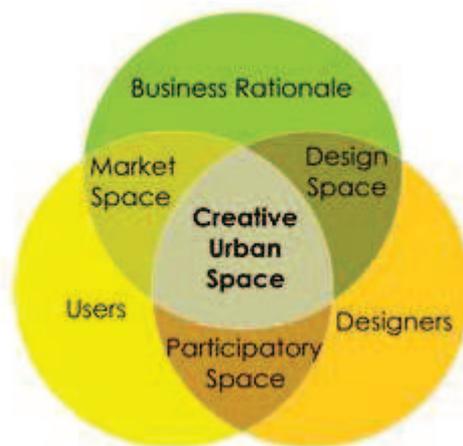
Figure 4: Creative Urban Space
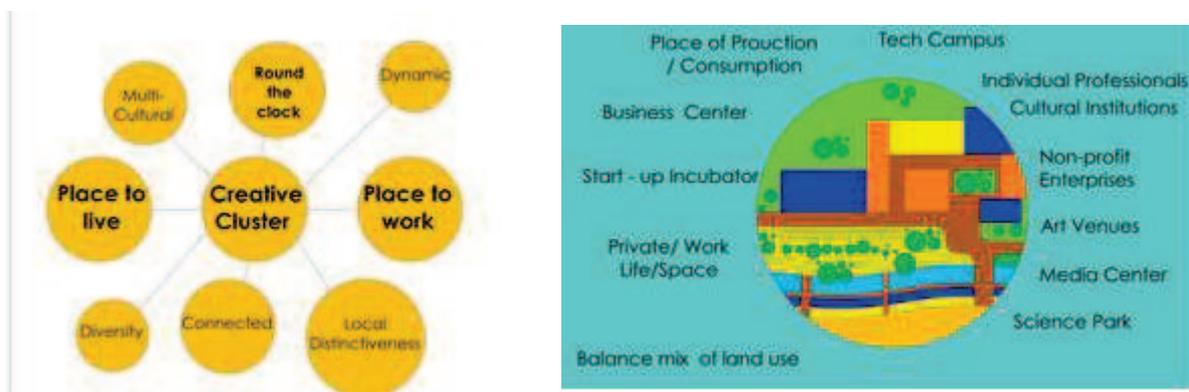
Characteristics of Creative Urban Space: According to John Hawkins, in "The Creative Economy", a creative urban space is a niche where diverse individuals express themselves in a systemic and adaptive way. These energy- expressive relationships are found in both physical places and intangible communities. A creative urban space in our context is a place where business rationale, users and designers' confluence and thus the tangible spaces would include a collaboration of Design space, market space and participatory space. [8]

A creative urban space would thus be characterized by the co-existence in perfect harmony with each other of entities like, business center, start-up incubator, tech campus, cultural institutions, non-profit enterprises, art venues, media center and science park. It is rather impossible to provide solid parameters for the development of a creative urban space, as it would differ from place to place and context to context, but it is possible to consolidate certain components that would contribute to the same.

Community: Creativity is a phenomenon whereby something new and somehow valuable is formed. The created item may be intangible or a physical object. A creative industry consists of activities that have their origin in individual creativity, which have the potential for an economic system through generation and exploitation of intellectual property. Thus a new set of socioeconomic community whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or creative content comes into presence. This community is extremely diverse, dynamic and ever –changing and consists of highly skilled professionals, who are not geographically static. They move where their profession takes them to. But since the crux of their skill lies in innovation, it is important for them to have a flexible, comfortable and healthy living environment that is equipped with technology and embraces nature within its realm.

Fabric: The creative realm is a geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, service providers and associated institutions in particular fields that compete but also co-operate. It is a niche where diverse individuals express themselves in a systemic and adaptive way. These energy-expressive relationships are found in both physical places and intangible communities.

Network: A creative realm requires efficient Public Transportation System and other infrastructure that supports the dynamic stature of the professionals and economy. It is important for the economy to be well connected physically and virtually. [9] [10]

Financial District To Creative Corridor: While exploring the possibility of conceiving OMR, from being an IT Expressway to a creative corridor, it has immense potential in terms of this transformation, especially because of the co-existence of IT Parks, educational and research institutions, in close proximity, it can positively be developed into a creative corridor, that would thus serve as a fore-runner for similar developments in Chennai. .
By facilitating an interface, between the business rationale, the users and the creative professionals, better collaboration would bring about innovative ideas that could effectively get implemented. It creates a bridge between these groups that are currently functioning discretely.

Spaces for Interfaces: The shift that is expected to happen in the financial district precinct, to a creative urban space, would require transition of certain spaces from being rigid spaces to more informal spaces. This blurring can only be achieved by creating "semi" spaces, that would serve as interfaces between two interacting functions. In order to envisage the precinct as a creative corridor, creative urban spaces should be developed as an interface between the existing fundamental components like industries and institutions to make the precinct to function as one organism functionally, spatially and socially co-existential. Fundamental functions (Work, live and play spaces) would have to accommodate along with it the Interfaces (Work-live interface, work-play interface & Live-Play interface).Thus in a creative city, these "Semi" become the most significant spaces in the fabric.

The typological manifestations of these interfaces would be
- **Incubators (Work-Live interface)**

- **Forums (Work-Play interface)**
- **Neighborhood niches (Live-Play interface)**

A creative corridor is a place that contains the necessary requirements in terms of hard and soft infrastructure to generate a flow of ideas and inventions. A milieu can be a building, a street an area, a city or a region. The Creative city identifies, nurtures, attracts, and sustains talent so it is able to mobilize ideas, talents and creative organizations. The built environment - the stage and the setting - is crucial for establishing the milieu.

Modern building typologies often have an agrandised scale, which gives the buildings the formal quality to the spaces, that as discussed above contributes to a formal hierarchy of spaces. So morphologically, these interfaces should be of a more intimate and relatable scale for a pedestrian user, which could be allowed its own freedom of style and design. But on a general perview, these typolgies are correspondingly expected to hold these functions:

- **Incubators (work-live interface)**

This will fucntion as alternatives for office spaces.
Building units that will include functions like
- working spaces that are flexible spatially, that can accommodate spaces where people work with their mobile- systems individually or as teams. Also spaces that can accommodate start-up offices.
- Spaces for training and aquiring knowledge and skillsets.
- E-Library which will work as a resource point for accessing the internet and various books.

- **Forums (Live-Play interface)**

This will function as alternatives for malls and urban centers.
Building units that will include functions like
- Spaces for public addressing and interaction.
- Places of exhibition and demonstration
- Meeting cafes which will include tables for physical meetings that can happen over a cup of coffee.

- **Neighborhood niches (Live-Play interface):** The formal residential set-up of apartment housing and gated living, should be alternated with residential layouts that are more inter-related and interactive. Common amentity concepts like, shared kitchens (like agraharams), common courtyard(like havelis) etc will be brought in to the lifestyle of people. Private ownership of housing should take a different meaning. Tangible concepts like ownership of land will be alternated with intangible concepts of right to usage of amenties, so that these rights could simply be shifted from one geographical location to another, supporting the dynamic lifestyle of the creative realm.

Conclusion: The quality and character of the public realm determines the social nature of the locality. Financial districts are presently one urban typology that is highly formal in its set-up. Breaking down the rigidity of the precinct, in order to accommodate the requirements of a creative urban space, while still retaining the gravity of the economic tension that exists in the district is the challenge that is managed to be tackled in this thesis.

The area is expected to function as a single organism encompassing a single objective: Creativity. The organism will be inclusive and symbiotic, thus providing a favorable environment for innovation to happen. This paper attempts at creating a new direction to the Financial District in the upcoming global scenario, where economies are set to thrive in engaging public spaces and a creative atmosphere, by making innovation the main theme of the financial districts, rather than just being service sectors.
The co-existence of a number creative professionals in a creative space, that supports a creative economy, would animate the presence of a creative ecology, in which creativity would effectively thrive. The ecology would be one that is, dynamic, flexible and ever-growing.

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