

Creative Cities: A Case of Mumbai

Minaz Ansari^{a*}

^aArchitect, Department of Architecture, Rizvi College of Architecture, Mumbai, India

Received 21 February 2021; revised 21 April 2021; accepted 09 May 2021

Abstract

Civilisations and cities have always been a cradle for nurturing art and culture. From cave paintings to digital art and folk tales to cinema, a varied form of arts have shaped people and civilisations and sustained creative economies.

Today, however, we are moving towards an urban development which does not taken into cognizance, the significance of art and culture in its built form, leading to a growing void in the cultural understanding of the city and distancing people from the arts. Recreation and social life is moving away from places and activities that stimulate our senses and incite our curiosity leading to an experiential starvation.

A cultural study of the city of Mumbai and its evolution over the past few centuries, leads us to various layers at which culture exists. It also leads us to understand the lack of access to cultural spaces in Mumbai, which can lead to a mental disconnect with the history of the city and its neighbourhoods, especially for its youth and children. Therefore, the study raises the need for an impetus on art and culture whilst drawing out development guidelines for cities. It attempts to envision a city that uses urban design as a tool and the arts as a medium to connect people and influence appropriate urban transformation.

Keywords: Art; Culture; Community; Creative City; Creative Economy; Mumbai

1. Introduction

Civilisations and cities have always been a cradle for nurturing art and culture. From cave paintings to digital art and folk tales to cinema, a varied form of arts have shaped people and

* Corresponding author. Tel: +91-9820066910.

E-mail address: minaz.urbandesign@gmail.com.

civilisations and sustained creative economies. As Richard Florida has rightly put it, “Human creativity is the ultimate economic resource.”

Art is defined as the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination. The arts (visual, performing, literary and other forms) play an important role in shaping our minds. History has shown us time and again the ability of the arts to mirror its environment, to make a critique on society and even to bring about a renaissance. As writer Jhumpa Lahiri quotes, “I think the power of art is to wake us up, strike us to our depths and change us.”

2. The Impact of Art on Society

Interaction with the arts has a huge impact on the human consciousness. From building imagination to sharpening sensory perception, from provoking lateral thinking to inciting innovation, the arts show us new ways to see the world. Engaging with art brings people together to share an experience in radically different ways, to agree or disagree about their opinions on a piece of art – a movie, a play, a piece of music or a book. This makes us more tolerant as a society and shapes the culture of a place and its people (Eliasson, 2016).

Street artists like Julian Beaver and Banksy have contributed to making art accessible to everyone by using the city as a canvas to express their thoughts and participate in creating the image of the city. St+ art India, an urban art group used art to highlight the identity of the fishing community of Mumbai in the Sassoon Dock Festival. French photographer JR has started a global movement Inside Out which uses photography as a social and political rhetoric. He calls the city the best art gallery one can imagine. He poses an interesting question – ‘Can art change the world?’ and after his hugely successful experiments with urban art, answers the question himself stating “Art can change the way people see the world” (JR 2011).

The arts play an important role in bringing in the freethinking and lateral thinking to design. These helps balance the pragmatic and scientific approach often used. They hold power to spread joy, cheer and awareness to a wide spectrum of people. If appropriately used as an urban design tool, art and culture has the potential to change cities, to transform the aesthetic of a space and give it a visual identity. The urban installation ‘The Cloud’ by Anish Kapoor is an example of use of art to activate the public realm.

3. Methodology

3.1. Creative Cities

Jane Jacobs noted the ability of cities to attract creative people and thus spur economic growth (Jacobs, 1969). This theory was resonated later by others and the idea of a creative city was born. According to studies, there are certain environments that trigger the growth of creative cities, and it is therefore important to understand the complexity of a city through the various lenses that shape the economic growth, build social constructs and influence urban form.

Creative cities are those which foster -

- An environment of opportunity and entrepreneurship
- Individuality, innovation and creativity (in social, cultural, economic, political and technological aspects)
- Supports local and international artistic activity
- Enjoys differences, variety and diversity
- Strives for an identity and distinctiveness (Landry, 2000)

3.2. Creative Economies

When we consider the economic growth of our cities, the arts are often not considered as mainstream avenues of economy. However, before industrialisation began and standardised production took over, the market relied on local craftsmen for production. From food to weapons, production of commodities was a craft. Monarchs and religious institutes patronised artists to produce paintings, murals, sculptures and architecture. Creative economies have historically been the lifeblood of cities as a means of unleashing their capacity to survive and adapt (Florida, 2003). The terrible plague or Black Death that killed millions in Europe and beyond during the 14th century, was followed up by the period of Renaissance which was spearheaded by artists including Leonardo Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rafael and Botticelli to name a few (Renaissance, 2019).

In the Indian context, artisans have historically been a part of our trade and economy through hand crafted textiles, jewellery, utensils, weaponry and other utility items. Art forms such as music, dance, painting, sculpture were patronised by royalty and saw their manifestation in the form of religious expressions, royal art and architecture. Access to public art through museums, art galleries and such platforms are a relatively recent phenomenon and are therefore restricted to a small informed section of society. For the populace, interface with art has been through everyday art and craft linked to rituals, festivals and seasons. Music and storytelling in the form of *kirtankars*, *daastangois*, *katputli* and *kathakali* to name a few, have reached out to people of all ages, genders and layers of society.

3.3. Mumbai as a Creative Economy

If we look at the history and rapid evolution of Mumbai over the last five centuries, it reveals many layers of change. Known as the financial capital of India today, Mumbai used to be a much neglected archipelago of seven islands separated by marshy land. However, with its natural harbour and a strategic location on the western coast, Mumbai became known a port city in the 17th century, attracting traders, voyagers and explorers from various parts of the world into a cultural potpourri.

After India gained independence in 1947, Mumbai spread its extents to merge other islands and part of the mainland around it, including older ports such as Sopara and other places of cultural significance. Even today, Mumbai boasts of a cultural and economic diversity like no other, a city that embraces anyone that comes into its fold (Fernandes, City Adrift, 2013).

The last few decades have seen a rapid change in economic trends in cities with the changing global economy, the advent of artificial intelligence and global connectivity. This leads us to the question that **while we look at global solutions for economic growth, can Mumbai look at its potential to harness its creativity and power of innovation to develop a creative economy as well?**

4. Findings

4.1. Art and the City of Mumbai

In the last two centuries, the city of Mumbai has witnessed a surge in the power of the arts, with luminaries in the field of music, painting, sculpture, theatre, cinema and more finding home in the city. The precinct around the Royal Opera House supported various painters, sculptors and other artists in the late 18th century leading to a vibrant culture of interaction and debate between different genres of art. Louis Rousselet, a French traveller, writer and photographer even compared

it to Rue Breda of Montmartre, a historic art district in Paris. Pandit Paluskar started the first ticketed musical concert here, bringing music to the masses and making it democratic. B V Talim founded the Talim Art Studio which continues to thrive and produce public art even today. Renowned sculptor G K Mhatre, Bharat Natyam dancer Rukmini Devi, musician Alladiya Khan and his student Kesarbai Kerkar, painters Sawlaram Haldankar and Raja Ravi Varma, writer Sadat Hassan Manto, film maker Ardeshir Irani and many more were associated with this art district during that time. The print media contributed to creative publications through calendar art, prints of Raja Ravi Varma's works and iconic graphic novel characters such as 'Faster Fene' were born in this city. In addition to these, tamasha troupes and acrobats, snake charmers, rope dancers, European circus troupes and opera companies, American minstrelsy performers all added music and rhythm to the streets of Mumbai. With princely states crumbling down all over the country, performers of the royal courts found their way into the city, for instance, the Khans who formed the Bhendi Bazaar gharana. The Parsi community contributed to theatre in a big way through the group Parsi Gayan Uttejak Mandali who also engaged with western bands for performances leading to a medley of cultures coming together. The Play House established by K N Kabraji (which still exists as Pila House) was a popular venue for Parsi theatre (Fernandes, City Adrift, 2013).



Fig 1 Parsi Theatre Group (Source: iwmbuzz.com)



Fig 2 Watsons Hotel, Kala Ghoda (Source: Wiki Commons)

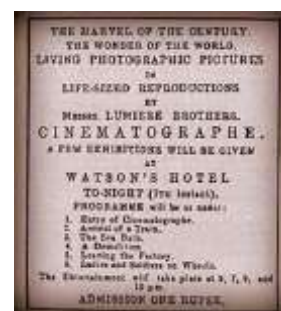


Fig 3 First movie screening (Source: Wiki Commons)

The first screening of the motion picture in the Watson Hotel in 1896 and the subsequent birth of the Indian Cinema were both witnessed by the city. Prominent street corners became sites for majestic Art Deco cinema halls from Capitol, Eros, Regal, Metro, Liberty and many more. The city soon became a magnet for stalwarts in cinema from Dadasaheb Phalke, Prithviraj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, Bimal Roy, A R Kardar, Kamal Amrohi and Mehboob Khan to the likes of Kishori Amonkar and Lata Mangeshkar and many more in the associated music industry. The movie industry grew with multiple film studios and production houses that dot the city, and went on to play a significant role in shaping the cultural fabric of the city and a significant contributor to its creative economy. Mumbai has also been declared the 'Creative City for Film' by the UNESCO Creative City Network in 2019 (Creative Cities Network, 2019).

The Royal Opera House, built in 1911, is the only surviving opera house in India till date. The theatre movement thrived in the early 20th century through stalwarts such as Pu La Deshpande, Vijay Tendulkar and Alyque Padamsee. Venues such as Shanmukhananda Hall and Shivaji Rang Mandir and flexible use spaces such as Walchand Terrace and Chabildas Hall for practice sessions emerged around the city. Theatre found more prominent locations at NCPA and later Prithvi

Theatre and Nehru Centre to name a few. The National Gallery for Modern Art, (erstwhile) Prince of Wales Museum and Jehangir Art Gallery went on to serve as anchor points to spur on the emergence of many small art galleries and studios around it, eventually coming together as the Kala Ghoda Art District.



Fig 4 Prince of Wales Museum built 1915 (Source: Wiki Commons)



Fig 5 Jehangir Art Gallery built in 1952 (Source: jahangirartgallery.com)

The Art Street outside the museum created opportunity for people to engage with everyday art and the precinct hosts an annual art festival. Mumbai (or then Bombay) was the birthplace of the legendary Progressive Artists Movement, the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) and The Bombay Art Society and the Artists' colony or Kala Nagar. Time progressed and the extents of Mumbai spread to encompass the suburbs and beyond. However, **as urban development shaped these growing extents of the city, it failed to take into account the impetus on art and culture as an important guiding tool in its land use and built form.**

5. Significance of Art and Culture in City Planning

A mapping of art venues in Mumbai was carried out recently by the Godrej India Culture Lab covering museums, art galleries, libraries, performance venues, flexible venues and art residencies (mumbaiculturemap, n.d.).



Fig 6 Culture Mapping of Mumbai (Source: Godrej India Culture Lab)

Though the population of the city has been growing exponentially making it the fifth most populated city in the world, the social infrastructure to support the arts continues to rely on that built in the past. A comparative study of museums with other global cities in Asia and other parts of the world reveals a great lacuna in this area. It also clearly reveals the concentration of the art district towards the southern end of the island city. However, given the geographical extents of Greater Mumbai and the linear configuration of the city and its transport system, the need for more creative nodes across the city is critical. We are moving towards a development which does not seem to take into cognizance the significance of art and culture in the planning of the city.

Groups such as the Godrej India Culture Lab, Mumbai Midtown Arts Collective, Mumbai Arts Walk, Carpe Arte are striving to keep the power of art in the city alive. Artists like Sai Paranjpe, Sudhir Patwardhan, Anand Patwardhan, Sam Kulavoor and many more have documented the city through their works. But, with fewer numbers of museums and art galleries in our cities, public life is being defined by malls, indoor play spaces, multiplexes and restaurants as places to meet and recreate. However, these experiences do not offer much in terms of inciting curiosity or stimulating our senses and in the long term, shaping our minds towards creativity and learning. Also, the lack of infusion of arts and art events into freely accessible public space has distanced the common man from everyday art. As Kevin Lynch writes in his book, *Growing up in Cities*, “Children seem to suffer from experiential starvation. There is a hunger for activity and stimulus” (Lynch, 1977). The same sentiment can be applied to people of other age groups. **The history of art and its contemporary interpretations play a vital role in inspiring the younger generation to understand their past and present and the lack of access to this can lead to a mental disconnect with the history of Mumbai and its neighbourhoods.**

A study done in 2012, in the context of Mumbai, throws light on the role of the arts in the future of the city’s economy. A city which already has cinema as a large creative industry can look at more opportunities to build on its diversity and entrepreneurial spirit. It projects an economic restructuring of Mumbai city by 2030 where older generators of commerce will decline and new enterprise related to culture, environment and old age will emerge. The city could transform into a city of cultural industry, an important sector to provide entrepreneurial opportunities. It also talks about Mumbai being a city of large-scale dilapidation, hence raising the question about the creative economy helping revitalise the degraded parts of the city (CRIT, 2012).

6. City as an Artefact

As Edmund Bacon puts it, “A city is people’s art, a shared experience, the place where the artist meets the maximum number of potential appreciators” (Bacon, 1967). Cities are experienced by millions of people every day through the sensory perception of sight- a sense of scale, direction, patterns and design elements at a conscious and subconscious level. Architectural landmarks, skylines, perspectives and serial vision play a role in the impression that the city makes on one’s psyche and visual memory. These impressions play an important role in the image of a cultural city at a local and global level.

According to Charles Landry, 2000, the image of a place attracts international investment especially for companies that seek a vibrant cultural life for their company’s employees. Museums, galleries exude presence and power. Live events give opportunities to first explore and then invest. The city, in his opinion is an artefact and the people make it a living organism. Potential users often flock to these modern iconic sites attracted by the visual impressions and magnetism that they generate. This in turn brings in related commerce adding to the economic impact of the original activity/ set of activities.



Fig 7 The Municipality Building and the Victoria Terminus (Source: townmumbai.com)



Fig 8 Gateway of India (Source: Wiki Commons)



Fig 9 Bombay High Court Building (Source: Wiki Commons)

The city of Mumbai is often seen as a living museum. It can be seen to exist at two levels – the static and the kinetic. The static layer of the city shows distinct identities of building typologies and city planning methods with the older parts of the city designed during the British rule serving as a museum of architectural styles to inhabit, admire and preserve. The newer development however is hinged largely on factors such as Floor Space Index, Transfer of Development Rights and Saleability of the space leaving no space for an aesthetic sensibility and response to climatic and cultural needs.

A lack of a holistic approach to urban form in the emerging Mumbai, leads to a disjointed morphology. The urban landscape of a city has a strong connect with its users. Gordon Collen considers urban landscape as the art of proportion. Comfort, diversity, identity and legibility are factors that help people identify with a place and its architectural character (Ali Ghahramanpoura, 2020). The understanding of Mumbai city as an evolving artefact is hence a vital aspect of its creative identity.

While the static built form is more organised and permanent in nature, the kinetic layer is ever changing, morphing as per time of day or year (Mehrotra, 2008). This transformative ability of the city makes it a live piece of art that one can engage with, participate in and alter. The trains in Mumbai, informal commerce, wedding *pandals*, and *Ganpati* immersions are all a part of the culture and identity of the city that thrives in its kinetic layer.

7. Conclusion

The culture of a city is its way of life; customs and beliefs, festivals and rituals and music, theatre, literature and other arts (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary>). **Distancing its people from the arts, leads to a huge void in the cultural understanding of the city, with culture then largely associated only with religious or community practices and beliefs.**

Whilst festivals and rituals provide platforms for people to meet and celebrate, we see a lack of public spaces to enjoy, discuss, debate and question art, theatre, literature. **Can the city of Mumbai, which has the zest to come together in huge numbers to celebrate religious festivals with great gusto, also be brought together to celebrate art?**

As Jini Dinshaw, founder of the oldest and longest running orchestra in Mumbai, The Bombay Chamber Orchestra says. “The revulsion amongst different religions, communities that exists, can be overcome with love of the arts. Let us dedicate ourselves to the true spirit of music. In this sad

world, let us music makers, renew faith and understanding that we can all live in peace and harmony irrespective of faith.”

Mumbai inherently has all the characteristics of a creative city. Its diversity, availability of entrepreneurial opportunities and unique identity serve as a magnet for creative individuals from around the country. The flexibility of working in the city at the static and kinetic levels is its inherent strength. The art & culture of the indigenous communities of Mumbai has its own place in shaping the city. From clothing and decor to food and music, the cultural flavours of these groups also need to find its place in the new narrative that the city has to offer.

However, **there is a need to harness this creative energy by generating opportunities for different art disciplines to work and interact and spaces to produce, preserve and celebrate art.** The R and R centre at Mankhurd by CAMP, Khanabadosh and Rupali Gupte & Prasad Shetty is an example of how art can bring a community together and contribute to critical public debates. The new forms of creative industries that exist in Mumbai (experimental theatre, graphic design, media art, digital art, architecture, robotics and virtual reality) are scattered across its geography. Physical proximity and inter-disciplinary critique and interaction will help tap the potential and create a strong identity for the industry. There is a need to form creative clusters and public spaces to support the same. The city, known for its open and accepting spirit, needs to wake up to the realisation of this potential and shape itself into a creative city through its urban development.

An impetus on art and culture needs to be a major consideration whilst drawing out our development guidelines, not just to make arts accessible to all but also create a social and cultural awakening and improve our economy through a revival of art across the city.

As a lover of the city once said, “*Har zameen ki ek barkat hoti hai.*” (Every place has its inherent fertility to offer). **How can we channelise this artistically fertile city into the birthplace of a new renaissance?** How can we attach a tangible and visible value to our arts through urban design policies and guidelines? How can we shape an urban development that focuses on art and culture thus influencing social change? The answers to these questions could lead us to a transforming this *mayanagari* into a robust creative economy and an undeniably Creative City.

References

- Ali Ghahramanpoura, H. K. (2020). Expressing Effective Criteria on the Physical Identity of the Urban Street Walls (Case Study: Hafez Street, Shiraz). *International Journal of Applied Arts Studies*, 7-18.
- Bacon, E. (1967). *Design of Cities*. Thames & Hudson.
- Baniotopoulou, E. (2001). Art for Whose Sake? *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies*.
- CRIT. (2012). Retrieved from <https://crit.in/initiatives/emerging-urbanism/being-nicely-messy/>
- Creative Cities Network*. (2019). Retrieved from www.unesco.org: <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/mumbai>
- Eliasson, O. (2016). *why-art-has-the-power-to-change-the-world*. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org>.
- Fernandes, N. (2013). *City Adrift*. New Delhi: Aleph Book Company.
- Fleming, T. (2013). *The Brazilian Creative Economy*. British Council.
- Florida, R. (2003). *Cities and the Creative Class*. Sage.
- <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary>. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>.
- Irani, S. (2020, December 05). From Tent Shows to the Lost Cinemas - The Story of Bombay's Early Film Culture. Mumbai.
- Jacobs, J. (1969). *The Economy of Cities*.
- JR (Performer). (2011). *Use art to turn the world inside out*. Ted Talks.

- Landry, C. (2000). *Creative City*. Routledge.
- Lynch, K. (1977). *Growing up in Cities*. The MIT Press.
- Lynch, K. (1977). *Managing the sense of a region*. MIT Press.
- Lexico. (n.d.). Retrieved from Lexico: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/art>
- Mehrotra, R. (2008). Negotiating the Static and Kinetic Cities, The Emergent Urbanism of Mumbai. In *Other Cities, Other Worlds*. Duke University Press.
- Mumbaiculturemap. (n.d.). Retrieved from Godrej India Culture Lab: <https://indiaculturelab.org/Renaissance>.
- (2019, July 19). Retrieved from Encyclopedia Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com>
- Rupali Gupte, P. S. (2011). *The Production of Public*. Retrieved from www.bardstudio.in.
- Yencken, D. (2013). Creative Cities. *Space, Place and Culture*.

