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# **The Ordinary City and the Extraordinary City: The Challenges of Planning for the Everyday**

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## The Ordinary City and the Extraordinary City: The Challenges of Planning for the Everyday

Kiran Keswani and Suresh Bhagavatula



**Abstract:** Recent work on informal urbanism argues that ‘informality’ is a strong force in determining and shaping how cities in the global south grow, and hence needs to be a part of emergent urban theory. This paper uses this argument as a starting point, drawing upon the work of scholars who suggest that urban informality may have an organizing logic, a system of norms that emerge from the economic conditions and the social needs of people.

Specifically, this paper examines informality in the urban space as an outcome of spatial and economic changes in a market precinct in Bangalore. It finds that activities in the street are temporal in nature. In this paper, the ordinary city encapsulates how people use urban spaces on an everyday basis and the extraordinary city reflects how urban spaces are transformed during a periodic, religious and cultural festival.

The paper makes two key contributions, one, to show through an in-depth spatial ethnographic study how the ‘ordinary–extraordinary’ might help us understand informal urbanism and two, to propose that it may be useful to have intermediate levels of planning that incorporate the conditions of the ‘ordinary’ city as well as the ‘extraordinary’ city, thereby contributing to both theory and practice.

**Keywords:** informal urbanism, urban informality, urban space, spatial ethnography, everyday practices

# The Ordinary City and the Extraordinary City: The Challenges of Planning for the Everyday<sup>1</sup>

Kiran Keswani<sup>2</sup> and Suresh Bhagavatula

## Introduction

In reflecting upon how ‘theory’ might emerge, one learns that the term originated in 1592 from the Greek *theoria*, which means ‘contemplation or a looking at’, and later in 1638 was defined as ‘an explanation based on observation and reasoning’.<sup>3</sup> This paper attempts such an observation of the *everyday* in order to make contributions to both urban theory and practice. The paper suggests that in the global south, the street acts not only as a ‘connector’ for people and cars to move, but also as a ‘container’ that holds the everyday practices of its people. It examines the everyday routines, activities, or practices that are enacted in the street space as a way to theorize about informality using ground-level data. In this study, informality is understood as the use of an urban space for facilitating functions for which it is not officially designated. In the countries of the global south, since there are fewer ‘planned’ public spaces (such as parks, squares, marketplaces, playgrounds, and so on), the street becomes the container of social, cultural, religious, economic, and political practices in addition to being a connector for the movement of people and vehicles, thus becoming the predominant ‘public space’ in the city.

In referring to ‘economic practices’ that contribute to the ‘everyday’, the paper makes a detailed observation of the informal vending activities at the neighbourhood level. These practices are embedded in the informal economy and point to an understanding of the city that is different from the one that regards economic liberalization and changes in formal economic flows and processes

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<sup>3</sup> <https://orgtheory.wordpress.com/2006/07/11/etymology-of-theory/> (accessed on 8 January 2020)

as transforming the local identity and autonomy of urban spaces into the ‘global city’ that Amin & Graham (1997) draw our attention to. They remind us that we need to return to the idea of the urban, as the co-existence of multiple spaces, multiple times, and multiple webs of relations that tie these local sites into globalizing networks of economic, social, and cultural change. Further, they suggest that there cannot be hierarchical relations amongst cities across the world because any city is creative, just and multiplex in nature and contributes equally to a changing global scenario. It is this approach in reading the city that Amin & Graham (1997) term the ‘ordinary city’. In reinforcing and extending this understanding, Robinson (2013) adopts a perspective that views all cities as unique combinations of social, political, and economic configurations, and thus seeing them as ordinary, suggesting that such an approach could strengthen policies that address both economic growth and social inequality.

While these conceptualizations of the ‘ordinary city’ (Amin & Graham, 1997; Robinson, 2013) focus on eliminating the labelling of cities as ‘global’ or ‘world’ cities, or as ‘Third world’ or ‘developing cities’, this paper proposes the idea of a binary, ‘ordinary–extraordinary’, as a lens for understanding how people shape the city through their everyday and periodic activities in public spaces. In this paper, the *ordinary city* encapsulates how people use urban spaces on an everyday basis and the *extraordinary city* reflects how urban spaces are transformed during a periodic, religious and cultural festival. The conceptualization of the ‘ordinary–extraordinary’ binary begins from the need to observe and record the everyday and periodic activities of people, and to understand how these result in changes within the urban space. Here, the ‘everyday’ is seen as being synonymous with the ‘ordinary’ or the mundane, that which is part of our daily routine but which goes unnoticed, both by citizens and planners.

If we were to look at the element of ordinariness in the activities of people going about their daily business as a point of comparison for every city, then we find that no city is different from any other city. But the functioning of some cities is disrupted because of a periodic occurrence related to a social or cultural happening. In Bangalore, it may be the Ramzan or Christmas celebrations that disrupt the everyday functioning of a specific neighbourhood. In Bunol, in eastern Spain, it is La Tomatina festival in which people get involved in a tomato fight on the streets as a yearly tradition. In another city in a different part of the world, the event may be something else. So, the construct of the ‘ordinary’ which seems to have levelled out all cities (Amin & Graham, 1997; Robinson, 2013) doesn’t play out as ‘ordinary’ on an everyday basis. There needs to be a binary term that can be appended to it, a ‘contradiction’ (McFarlane, 2018), in order to suggest that some cities have a certain extraordinariness that emerges in these cities on particular days. And people either from the same neighbourhood or from different neighbourhoods or cities come in and change the characteristics of that everyday (space) in that particular instance (time). In this sense, the ‘ordinary’ examined in this paper may be seen as not being entirely different from that of Ash Amin & Graham and Robinson, but rather as an extension of this idea. There is a need for scholars and practitioners to study both ordinariness and extraordinariness that characterize and belong to the city.

Further, this paper argues that the everyday practices of people must be considered in our planning processes. Of these practices, the economic practices seem to occur everyday and therefore, belong more to the realm of the ‘ordinary’. In contrast, social, cultural, and religious practices occur periodically, and at specific times of the year, and hence are defined as ‘extraordinary’. These two sets of practices occur at different times of the day or year but occur within the same street space. Both share interdependencies, where sometimes one displaces the other for a given period of time. In order to develop a more nuanced plan, one needs to embed a comprehensive understanding of the social and physical fabric of the city into it and hence the ‘ordinary–extraordinary’ binary may be a useful tool in the preparation of a local area plan.

Thus, the paper makes two key contributions: first, it shows through an in-depth ethnographical study how the ‘ordinary–extraordinary’ binary might be able to help us understand informal urbanism and second, it argues that it may be useful to have intermediate levels of planning that can incorporate the conditions of the ‘ordinary’ city as well as the ‘extraordinary’ city.

## Theoretical perspective

To understand the construct of the ‘ordinary city’, we begin with the work of de Certeau (1984) who emphasizes that ordinary people navigate through their environments through their everyday actions and alter urban space in active ways. In defining ‘everyday practices’, he suggests that these comprise the ‘tactics’ of walkers and consumers and the ‘strategies’ of planners and administrators. Based on this notion, the concept of ‘everyday urbanism’ (Chase, Crawford & Kaliski, 1999) was proposed which is an approach to urbanism that looks for meaning in everyday life.

McFarlane & Silver (2017) have argued that everyday urbanism is generated dialectically through a continuing and co-evolving process of contradiction, reinforcement, fragmentation, and reconstitution. This is further extrapolated into the idea of ‘Fragment Urbanism’ by McFarlane (2018), which suggests that this kind of urbanism may result from material fragments or the byproducts of urbanization such as insufficient infrastructure or informal settlements, where the whole from which the part is broken off may not exist anymore or may have become redundant. Here the ‘fragments’ could be seen as the remnants of villages, both physical and social, that have now been enveloped or incorporated by the city. For instance, the city of Bangalore has been absorbing many villages into its urban fabric for centuries. From 1901 to 1971, the area of the city increased from 20.7 sq. miles to 60 sq. miles and approximately 100 villages were absorbed into the city structure (Prakasa Rao & Tewari, 1979). In 2001, the proposed metropolitan area was 124 sq. miles and an additional 218 villages were located within it (Nair, 2005).

Urban researchers have argued that a more global urban theory can emerge if we change the way in which informality is understood through transcending, first, disciplinary boundaries; second, the way it is seen as separate from the formal; and third, the relation between informality and neoliberalism (Acuto, Dinardi & Marx, 2019). This paper is an empirical investigation into the everyday practices that constitute informal urbanism in the global south. It suggests that understanding everyday practices could be one way of knowing our cities better in the contemporary context, both in the

global south and in the global north. The empirical evidence it provides aims to achieve the analytical precision (Marx & Kelling, 2019) required to understand urban dynamics at the neighbourhood level and to further strengthen the broader understanding of urban informality (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004; Dovey, 2012; McFarlane, 2012; Schindler, 2014, 2017; Boudreau & Davis, 2017).

Recent scholarly work on 'informal urbanism' has focused on a creative remapping of the informal in cultural policy (Mbaye & Dinardi, 2019), on challenging the reading of the informal as 'everyday' (Cirolia & Scheba, 2019), on examining how informality operates as a legitimate practice within the system of urban governance (Carrero et al., 2019), and on understanding how informality has become part of an everyday social contract (Canclini, 2019). This paper builds on this work and, in particular, it draws upon the construct of the 'common denominator' proposed by Marx & Kelling (2019), who argue that to distinguish between the formal and the informal as a binary, it is useful to have a mechanism that can allow scholars or policy makers to identify two phenomena as a coherent binary pair that 'makes sense'. They explain this through the example of 'informal settlement', which makes sense in opposition to 'formal settlement', because, they say, it is held together by assumptions about property rights, but it may not make sense in opposition to 'refugee settlement'. This paper identifies everyday practices of people in the street as the 'common denominator' to strengthen the ordinary–extraordinary binary in order to unpack urban informality.

In terms of socio-economic changes, there is a cyclical rhythm in both the ordinary city and extraordinary city with the everyday repetition of vending activities giving way to the periodic repetition of festival-related activities. In his work on Rhythmanalysis, Lefebvre (2004) draws our attention to the rhythm embedded in the repetition and differences of people's movements in space and time. He suggests that time and space, representing the cyclical and the linear respectively, share a reciprocal relationship. Based on this proposition, in terms of spatial changes, both the ordinary city and the extraordinary city work in a linear mode where public space shapes itself in one way, not necessarily repeating the change again in the same way the next time around. Here, there may also be a shifting of boundaries to either expand or contract the territories of different users. The ordinary and the extraordinary thus interlock both in space and time.

Earlier studies have examined the idea of the 'extraordinary city', particularly in the South Asian context, focusing on the role of periodic festivals in shaping the city (Burdett, 2013; Mehrotra, 2008; Mehrotra & Vera, 2015; Quinn, 2013; Sassen, 2005). Although Quinn's work focuses on arts festivals, it provides us a review of the existing literature on urban festivals. He argues that the social value of festivals has been disregarded by city authorities and that there is a need to devise appropriate policies based on more empirical research. Mehrotra (2008) suggests that there are two distinct cities in the developing world, the static city and the kinetic city. He proposes that architecture is the spectacle of the static city whereas festivals, religious processions, and community celebrations make the kinetic city. He considers the static city as being built of permanent material and as being monumental in nature (referring to the formal built environment), while he sees the kinetic city as being built of temporary material and as being a temporal entity (referring to the informal built

environment such as housing settlements or temporary constructions erected during festivals). While the static–kinetic binary reads the city in terms of its *built* spaces, suggesting that the 'static' is the permanent built environment and the 'kinetic' is the temporary built environment, the focus of the ordinary–extraordinary binary is on the *unbuilt* spaces. It represents the spatial configurations and economic changes in the *unbuilt space*, that is, the streets of the city.

In many countries of the global south, the most important instrument of urban planning has been the city master plan, which, however, has not been the most appropriate tool for cities that have social, cultural, and religious practices that continue to be embedded in their urban spaces. In the past, Geddes (1915) has pointed out that planners in India, both imperial city planners and small-town planners, ignored the cultural and structural principles of indigenous organization, instead adopting planning principles devised for English manufacturing towns. More recent scholarship points out that India's urban growth has been so rapid and chaotic that it has not been possible for planners to cope with it (Baviskar, 2003; Benjamin, 2008; Chakrabarti, 2001; Kudva, 2009; Ravindra et al., 2010; Roy, 2009).

This paper argues that the planning process has not been able to account for the everyday and periodic activities on the streets due to their ever-changing nature and because they have not been sufficiently documented or analyzed. The master plan as a tool of urban planning has been a static one and not a dynamic one, being primarily developed and deployed as a land-use plan. It has either not acknowledged the presence of the economic practices situated on the streets, that is, informal vending, or has failed to recognize the changing nature and shifting relevance of these economic practices. For instance, Delhi's master plan of 1990 recorded the presence of street vendors, but the master plan of 2010 did not recognize these spaces (Schindler, 2014). As Kudva (2009) points out, in the cities of the global south, the master plan tends to include spaces that belong more to the imagination of urban planners and policy makers and less to how city dwellers generate spatial practices. Hence it is important to understand these practices in order to, first, develop a theoretical construct, and second, to include this construct in urban planning processes.

Therefore, the key research question this study asks is:

*How do we unpack the ordinary and the extraordinary city in order to derive relational measures that can contribute to both theory and practice?*

### **Research setting: Russell Market precinct**

This study focuses on a market precinct in the city of Bangalore. Today, Bangalore is one of the fastest growing cities in India, with a population estimated in the last census in 2011 at 8.5 million.<sup>4</sup> The Russell Market precinct lies in an inner-city core that was part of the Cantonment during the period of colonial rule. Historically, Bangalore has been a city with two inner cores: the older Pete

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.census2011.co.in/census/city/448-bangalore.html>



area - the traditional fort settlement and the newer Cantonment or civil and military station. In contrast to the old city, the Cantonment had broad, tree-lined avenues forming its central axis that facilitate spectacles of military power as well as spacious European bungalows that changed the relationship between public space and social life in the city (Nair, 2005).

Today, the neighbourhood has a mixed population of Christians, Muslims, and Hindus, with temples, mosques, and churches. Hence the market precinct serves as the site for the celebration of all the festivals of these religious communities. The study examines the 'ordinary' or everyday activities occurring along the stretch of Noronha Road extending from the Russell Market building to St. Mary's Basilica as well as at the three nodes—Russell Market square, Basilica junction, and the Taj Hotel junction (Figure 1). The 'extraordinary' activities are traced through looking at events taking place at the Basilica junction during Christmas and the Taj Hotel junction during the month of Ramzan.

### Spatial ethnography as methodology

Spatial ethnography is a methodology that combines social science research and physical spatial analysis (Kim, 2015; Kawano et al., 2016), and therefore entails the gathering of both visual and

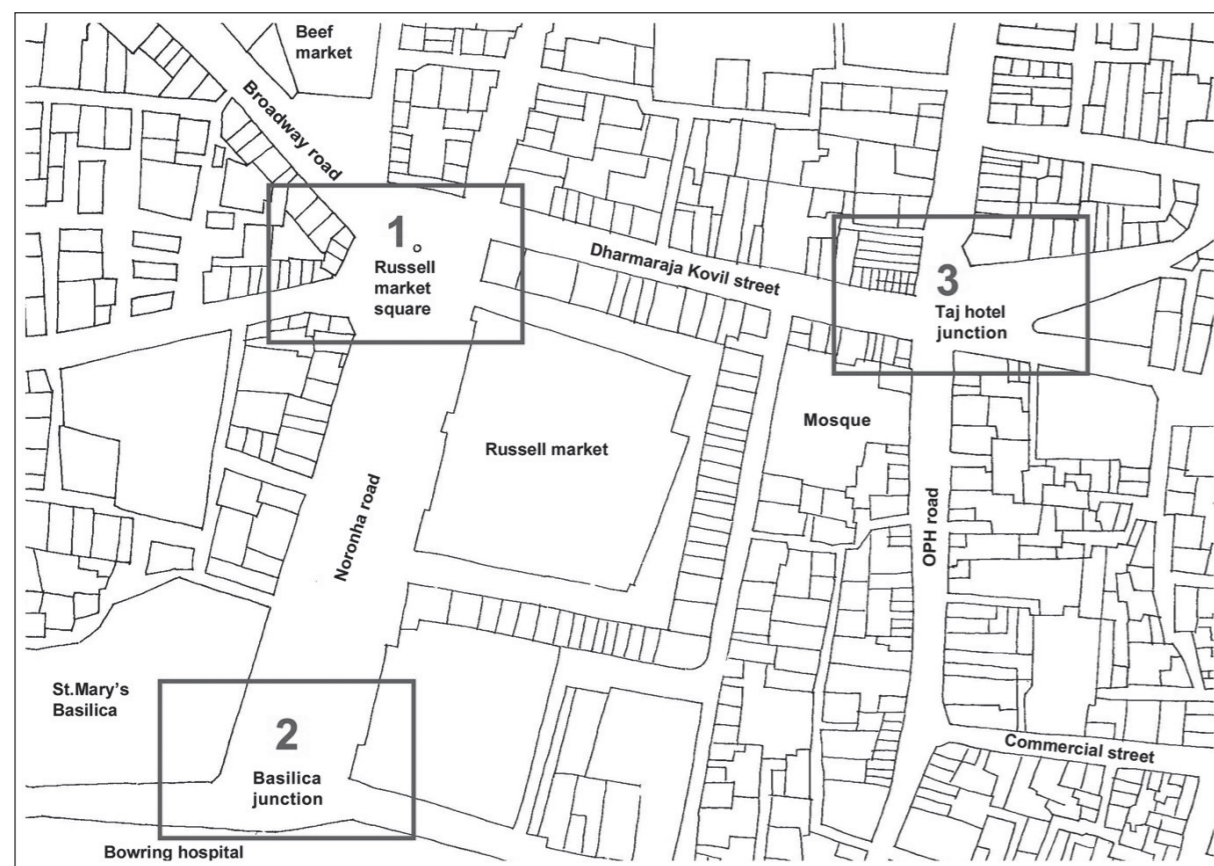


Figure 1: Plan of Shivajinagar neighbourhood showing the sites of ordinary activities (Noronha Road) and extraordinary activities [the Russell Market square (1), Basilica junction (2), and Taj Hotel junction (3), i.e. sites of Ramzan and Christmas celebrations].

interview data. In the past, ethnographies of public space have typically focused on getting to know the actors within the space. Kim (2015) uses spatial ethnography as well as critical cartography to study sidewalks in Ho Chi Minh City while Duneier & Carter (1999) use it to investigate how street life and political economy intersect in New York City.

This paper is an ethnographic investigation that first, gathers visual evidence of the locational dynamics on the normal day and the festival day, and, second, conducts interviews with vendors to understand how they choose these locations, in order to understand the *logic of locational choice* (Keswani, 2019). It supports the notion of urban informality that believes that there is an 'organizing logic' that needs to be understood in greater depth (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004). The focus is on one user group—the informal vendor. The fieldwork took place in two phases: in July 2014 and in December 2018. In the first phase, seventy open-ended interviews were conducted with informal vendors relating to the ordinary activities. In the second phase, forty interviews were conducted with vendors relating to the extraordinary or festival activities. Additionally, a total of ten traffic police personnel and formal shop owners were interviewed.

### Spatial conditions on an 'ordinary day' and an 'extraordinary day'

It is clear that people navigate the city both in space and in time. When this occurs spatially, we term it as the 'ordinary and extraordinary city' and when it occurs temporally, we refer to it as the 'ordinary and extraordinary day'. While informality can be read as being of two kinds, spatial informality and economic informality, where an understanding of antecedents of urban informality is seen as belonging to 'spatial informality' (Keswani, 2018), we propose that it is not possible to separate the two. In this paper, we present work that reflects the interaction between economics and decision-making regarding the occupation of urban space. We find that the informal sector's use of street space is driven by location and by the rent or income that can be derived from leasing out this location.<sup>5</sup> A vendor chooses a space where vehicular traffic is not obstructed, where the formal shop owner is not obstructed, and where pedestrian flow or footfall is high (Keswani, 2019).

The conditions in which the informal vendor operates on an 'ordinary' day, that is, on an everyday basis, are as follows: A = when conditions 1 and 2 are available; B = when conditions 2 and 3 are available; C = when conditions 3 and 1 are available; and Z = Space, which is a combination of 1 + 2 + 3, that is, the ideal location for a vendor (Figure 2). It was found that the ideal location is difficult to find and that condition 'B' is the most preferred—where the shop owner is not obstructed and where the pedestrian traffic is high. On an 'extraordinary' day, when the street is completely pedestrianized for a few days of Ramzan, space 1 does not exist. Thus, the space available for informal vendors increases substantially, as the entire road becomes a site for vending and walking.

<sup>5</sup> We thank Alain Bertaud, a senior research scholar at the NYU Marron Institute for Urban Management, for pointing out that spatial and economic informality cannot be separated and for explaining to us how they are, in fact, the same. This part of the discussion is primarily based on his inputs.



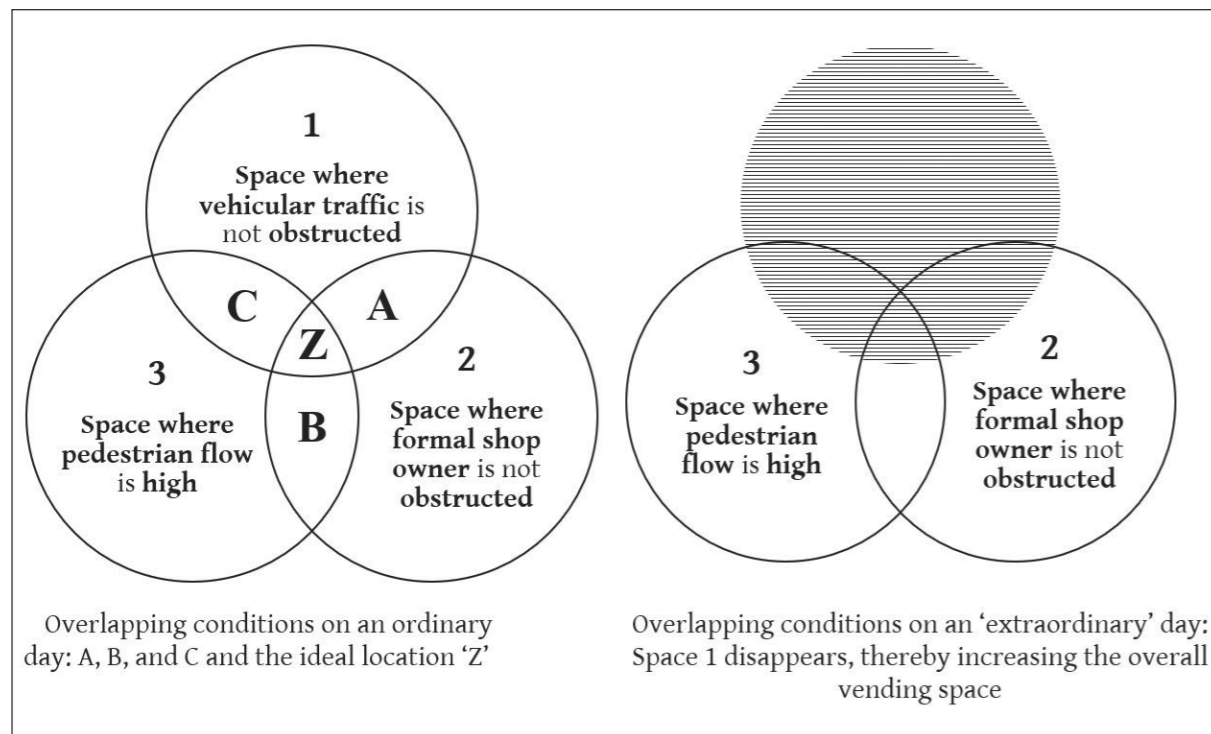


Figure 2: Venn diagram showing spatial conditions on an ordinary day and an extraordinary day.

Scholars investigating street vending and public space have found that the unofficial support by the state or by private actors for informal vending activity is often priced based on the location (Anjaria, 2011; Bromley, 2000; Peña, 1999). Additionally, we find that the vendors often use tactics to move from an existing situation to a preferred situation, termed as *situation satisfaction* or *decision*, and that there is a co-relation between their logic, their decision, and their actions or *tactics* (Keswani, 2019). Many of the preferred situations or decisions of the vendors have a deep economic motivation. Here, every location has a distinct value that can be negotiated. The data is therefore analyzed based on the locational choice, the tactics, and the economics (informal 'cost') of the space. The everyday practices are presented in two parts: first, the practices (economic) on an ordinary day; and second, the practices (economic + religious + social) on an extraordinary day.

### Ordinary day: Economic practices

This study finds that the spatial transformations on an 'ordinary day' (Figure 3) result primarily from the economic practices of the informal vendors. The vendors (who sell clothes, shoes, purses, and household items) choose locations, or move from one location to another, because different locations bring them different incomes. In pursuing these economic practices, the tactics of the vendors change and are mainly a response to the strategies of the traffic police. On an everyday basis, the informal vendors interact minimally with the municipal officials.

### Locational choice

On a normal day, some vendors have fixed locations whereas others occupy any space that is available. At the Basilica junction, the preferred location is at the church entrance, that is, this could be considered as being spatial condition 'Z', while at the Taj Hotel junction, all spaces have equal status. A few spaces, such as the selling space outside the Basilica gate, have been occupied by the same family (flower vendors) for the last 40 years. One vendor said, "Each location has a different footfall and is good for certain businesses, but not for others. I choose accordingly depending on the items I am selling at that time of the year."

### Tactics

Over time, vendors have developed a relationship with others in the locality that helps them to protect their preferred locations. One vendor said, "This shop owner has known me for many years. Besides, all of us who sit in this square are old and we don't let anyone new come here."

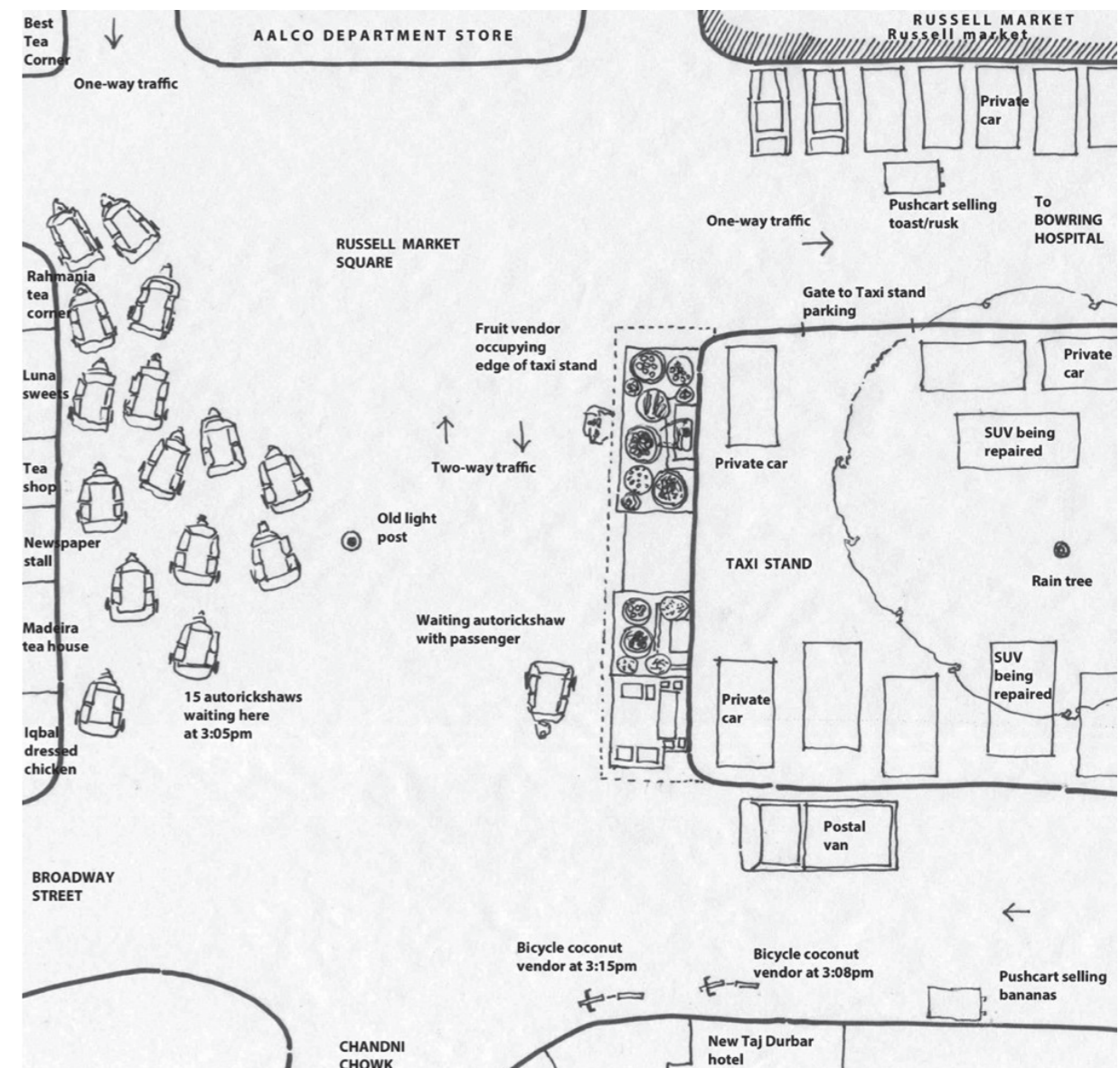


Figure 3: Plan of an ordinary day at the Russell Market square



Another vendor said, “When I came here 13 years back, this space was empty. Back then, you didn’t have to ask anyone.” For others, it has taken some years of changing locations before they settled at their current selling spaces. At the Taj Hotel junction, the owners of footwear stalls have formed an association which often conducts negotiations with the traffic police or with the shop owners’ association.

### *Economics of the space*

Different actors claim a right over the street space and may ask the vendor to pay a price to use this space. These include both state and non-state players such as the traffic police, formal shop owners, and, in this neighbourhood, the taxi stand union. Sometimes, if the amounts asked by the traffic police are too high, the vendor may have to move to a different street or to another neighbourhood. Often, the policeman knows that his demand will not be met, so it is better to reach an agreement, hence a compromise is struck between the amount asked and the amount paid. In the Russell Market precinct, the traffic police usually ask for INR10 per day per vendor. However, he has the chance to collect this every day from, say, 50 vendors who are positioned in different parts of the neighbourhood. So, for the traffic police, this can add up to a large amount of money.

The payment that the informal vendor makes to the traffic police is a small amount compared to what a shop owner whose access is being obstructed is likely to ask for. For the shop owner, there are only one, or two informal vendors who occupy the sidewalk in front of his shop and who he may decide to charge for use of the space, and therefore his demand is usually a larger sum from a single vendor. However, some shop owners do not collect any money from the older, more established, more familiar vendors who have been selling here for many years. At the Basilica junction, a vendor occupying a space inside the taxi stand needs to get permission from the taxi drivers union leader and sometimes has to pay for the use of the space.

### **Extraordinary day: Social, religious, and economic practices**

One of the differences between countries like India from the global south and countries from the global north is that the former is experiencing urbanness for the first time in some parts of the country. Earlier, vast expanses of open space around rural settlements lent them a degree of elasticity, as these spaces could be used for hosting a periodic festival as and when needed. Today, as the city continues to grow as a network of densely integrated parts (some that were earlier villages), there are few such spaces available. However, while the physical fabric of the city has changed rapidly, the social fabric has been slower to change, and people continue to carry out some of their everyday practices as before. Thus, some neighbourhoods have had and continue to have their own extraordinary activities. This sub-section presents the findings from the study of the Russell Market precinct during two festivals, Ramzan and Christmas (Figure 4).

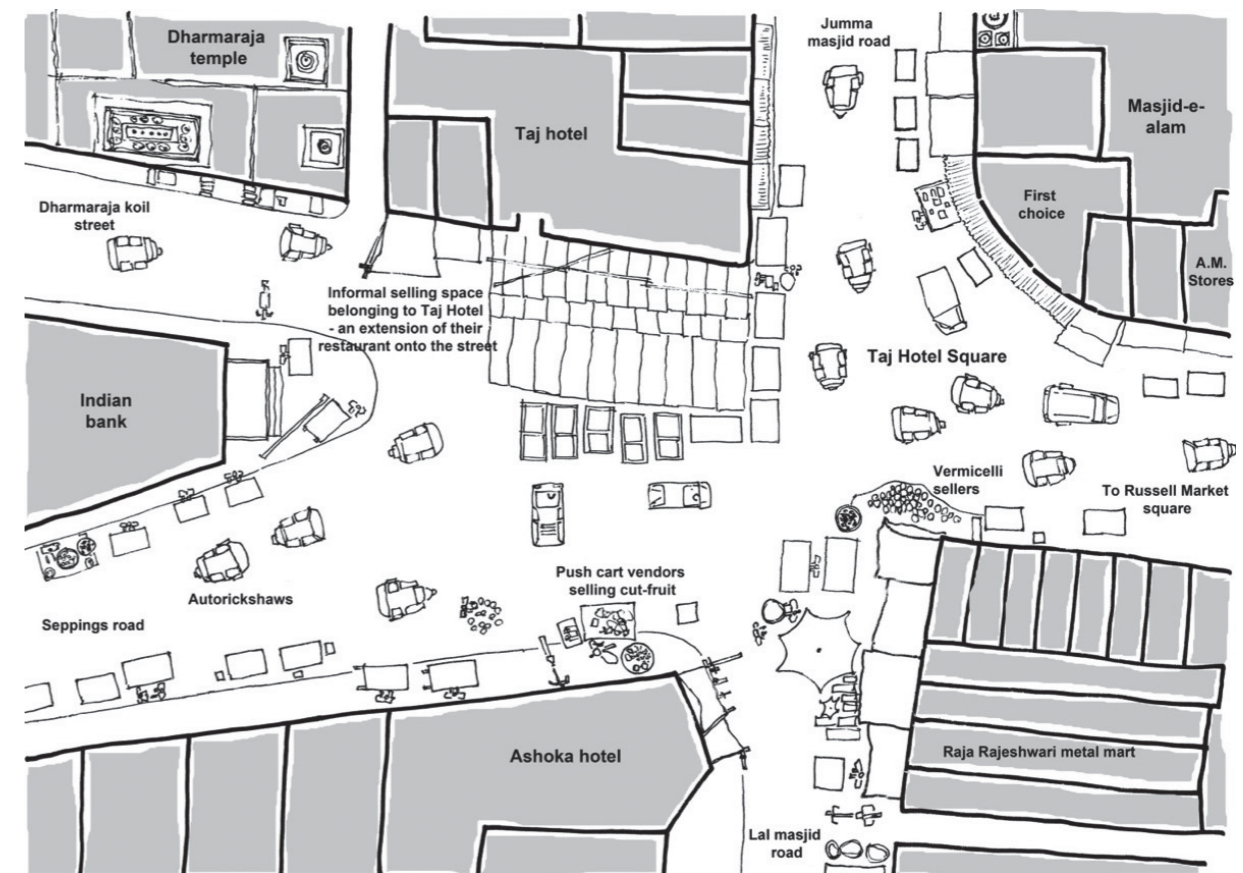


Figure 4: Extraordinary day (Ramzan): Economic practices at the Taj Hotel junction

### **Ramzan as an ‘extraordinary day’**

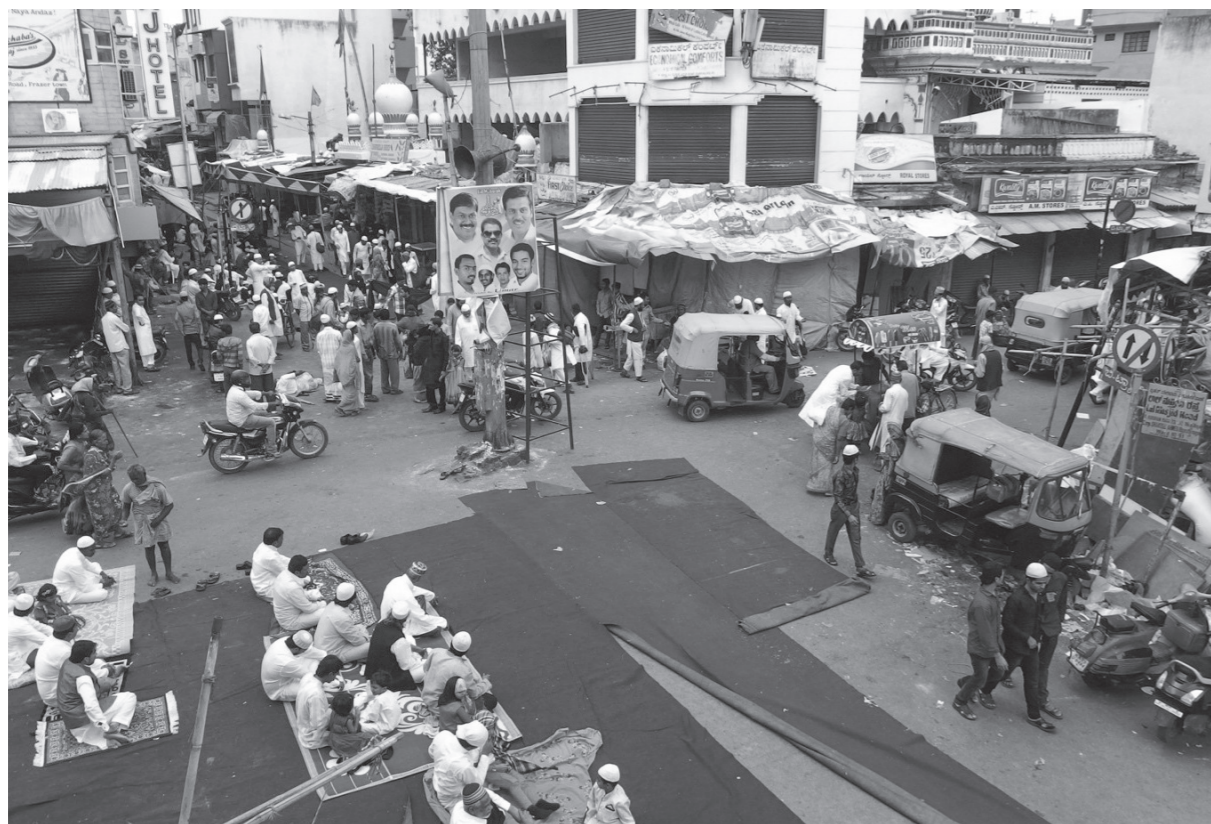
In the month of Ramzan,<sup>6</sup> the streets have primarily food vending activity alongside socio-religious activity, as mosques extend the area for communal praying outside their premises. Many prominent restaurants put up special shamiana (festive tents) on the street for the entire month which are used for the preparation and sale of food items (Figure 5). Informal vendors sometimes change both their location and the products they sell during Ramzan, moving to a space with higher footfalls and selling food items that are related to the festival.

### *Locational choice*

For several vendors, the Taj Hotel junction is the main selling space throughout the year. Some vendors come here only during the month of Ramzan. One vendor said, “We go home and other people put shops here.” Sidewalk space sells at a premium during this time. This part of the neighbourhood becomes the ideal location or space ‘z’. Several vendors try to gravitate closer to the Taj Hotel since it has the maximum footfall.

<sup>6</sup> The holy month in the Islamic lunar calendar when Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. The dates change annually as they are determined by the sighting of a new moon.





**Figure 5: Extraordinary day (Ramzan): Socio-religious practices at the Taj Hotel junction**

### *Tactics*

The allocation of sidewalk space depends on how effectively informal vendors use their social capital, where knowing the local councillor can get a vendor a prime spot with high footfalls. On the other hand, non-state players like formal shop owners exert their authority over sidewalk spaces during Ramzan, often charging rent for it. One informal vendor said, “If Ramzan comes, even my neighbour won’t leave me alone. He will tell me to use only the space I have.” The existing pushcarts make space for the new eateries, especially for the last 15 days of the month.

### *Economics of the space*

The occupation of sidewalks entails unofficial payments to (a) the traffic police; (2) the elected councillors of the local municipality; and (3) the formal shop owner or the taxi stand owner. On an ‘ordinary’ day, a shop owner may not permit informal vendors to occupy the space outside his shop because he does not want his own business to get affected. However, on an ‘extraordinary’ day such as Ramzan, when pedestrian traffic increases substantially, the formal shop owner does not find the informal vendor to be a threat to his business, and in fact, permits him to occupy the sidewalk in front of his shop, charging him up to INR 25,000 per month, which is more than the amount the traffic police would charge during the ‘ordinary day’ period for a whole year.

## **Christmas as an ‘extraordinary day’**

Every year, in the month of December, the Basilica junction and one side of the Noronha Road between the Basilica and the Russell Market square is occupied by temporary stalls selling Christmas items (Figure 6). These include vendors who (1) sell another product range here on an ordinary day; (2) come here from other neighbourhoods; and (3) travel here from outside the city during this time. These vendors are allocated spaces at the junction and on the adjoining sidewalks by the local municipality from 5 to 25 December, as an informal arrangement that is facilitated by the local councillors.

### *Locational choice*

During Christmas, the most preferred location is near the Basilica gate. The vendors point out that each person has his or her designated spot and that there is no interference from others. For some vendors who come here only once a year during this time, location does not matter, since this economic activity only supplements their main income which is earned elsewhere. While several vendors find the Basilica gate an attractive location, there are others who are willing to move away from a zone of high footfalls to a place that is less congested, and therefore allows for better interaction with customers.

### *Tactics*

For vendors who have been coming repeatedly to the Basilica junction for several years now, they do not need to employ any tactics since they have no trouble with fellow vendors, formal shop owners, or the traffic police since they are known to them. In contrast, new vendors have to dodge the traffic police, and so often find it easier to conduct their business using a pushcart so that they



**Figure 6: Extraordinary day (Christmas): Economic practices at the Basilica junction and Noronha Road**



can keep moving more freely. One vendor said that he is ensured a spot here because his mother has been coming to sell here for 30 years. For those who are regulars here, the police do not ask for a bribe. Another vendor added “Here, we are all friendly with each other. I am a volunteer at the church during the 10-day St. Mary’s Feast.” For one of the vendors, familiarity with the family that regularly sells flowers and candles at the Basilica gate has allowed her to settle here more easily. The vendors choose locations and product ranges to sell so as to minimize conflict and reduce competition between themselves.

**Economics of the space**

During Christmas, each vendor pays a lump sum to the taxi stand union for the 20-day period. The vendors can stay until 1 January, but for that they must pay extra. One vendor said, “We pay according to the width of the stall that we occupy, not the depth. This width is in multiples of table size.” However, if a vendor does not reach Bangalore on time, he can lose his space in spite of having paid for it. A new vendor may pay anywhere from INR 4,000 to INR 6,000 to the concerned authority for the total period of the stay.

**Discussion and implications**

In this paper, we unpack urban informality at the neighbourhood level using the relational measures of locational choice, tactics of vendors, and the economics of the space. We propose that these relational measures could constitute one set of measures that could be used to address this urban informality. If the deviations from the norm are understood in the context of different neighbourhoods, and if their relevance for different kinds of extraordinary days is also understood, one may be able to draw out some recurring or common factors that could then be put to work as a control mechanism, as a way of reducing the uncertainty within the urban space.

Marx and Kelling (2019) have deployed the mechanism of the ‘common denominator’ to show how the concept of in/formality can be disentangled using three approaches—urban informality as condition, urban informality as laws, and urban informality as currency. This paper first draws upon the two approaches of ‘urban informality as condition’ and ‘urban informality as laws’ as it finds that the urban space is often controlled not through the formal mechanism of governance, but rather through an informal mechanism, by a different set of ‘non-state’ actors, for example, by the taxi stand union (ordinary day) or by the Taj Hotel owner (extraordinary day). Here, both the ‘governed’ and the ‘governing’ can be termed as informal, where the governing group holds entitlement over the space and its appropriation by others through being a legal entity, either marginally or completely. This comes about through either having a license for using the street space they occupy, or, more often, is the result of social linkage to, or contacts with, a political leader. This seems to give legitimacy to their own occupation of the space as well as grant them the controlling rights to, and the power of negotiation over, an adjoining space that they also lay claim to as their own, although this is public space that legally belongs to the government.

Secondly, the study finds that informality as everyday practice is similar to ‘informality as currency’ where certain ways of doing things may have been codified legally, and therefore have a formal status. In most cases, everyday practices that influence the Indian cities have not been codified yet, and therefore lie within the realm of the informal. These practices are socially organized, with informal or unwritten norms, both on ordinary days and on extraordinary days. In this paper, the ‘nature of an everyday practice’ is the common denominator in the ordinary–extraordinary city binary. This perspective allows us to use the relational approach (Boudreau & Davis, 2017) where economic, social, and religious practices make it possible to distinguish between the ordinary city and the extraordinary city. Although it uses ethnographical accounts of the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘extraordinary’ in a market precinct of Bangalore, the intent of this paper is to go beyond the specificities of a typical city in the global south and instead use the binary that emerges to propose a theoretical framework (Figure 7).

Marx and Kelling (2019) have suggested how common denominators facilitate the construction of the binary formal–informal. They point out that there are three ways in which this happens: first, people actively construct the binary oppositions of formality and informality; second, common denominators conceal latent power relations; and third, to allow movement within the binary pairing, common denominators must remain stable and coherent, that is, their existing power relations need to be accepted. In this study, one can identify the everyday practice of food vending seen during the month of Ramzan or the everyday practice of decorations vending during Christmas. Both practices are related to the needs of the customer and lead to higher footfalls at specific times during the year. The high footfalls lead to an increase in the economic value of the sidewalk space.

We argue that urban planning processes need to allow for a degree of resilience in urban spaces to accommodate the extraordinary. At present, the extraordinary seems to be facilitated by resilience in the governance, or rather, a flexibility in the enforcement, of regulations. Here, regulation becomes then an everyday negotiation between actors in the space and the enforcing authorities, or what Anjaria (2011) has termed as the ‘Ordinary State’. We find that the regulations for an ordinary

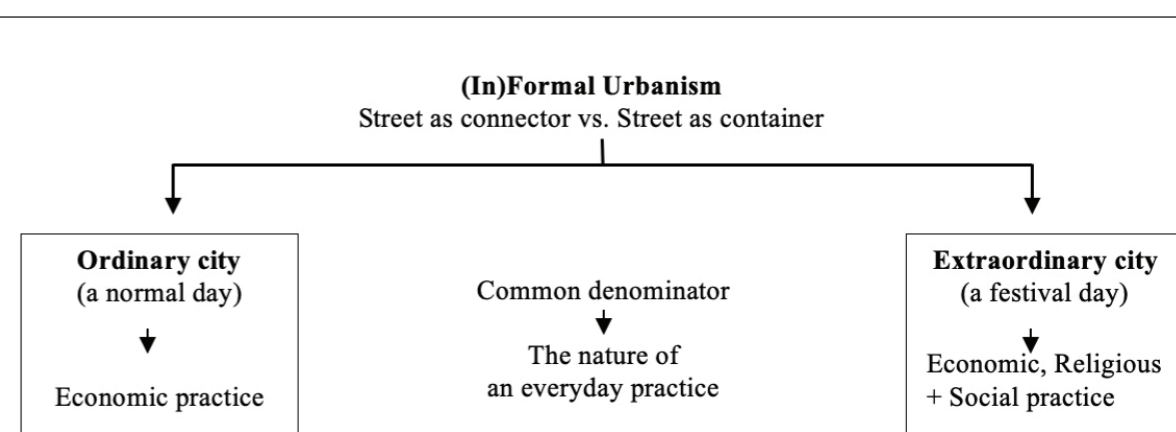


Figure 7: ‘Everyday practice’ as common denominator in the ordinary–extraordinary city binary.



day are different from those for an extraordinary day. While Anjaria discusses this ‘everyday negotiation’ for the ordinary day, we argue that this takes place differently for the extraordinary day. Often, there are no existing regulations, which makes it easier for both the ordinary and the extraordinary to become possible randomly. However, this generates a high amount of uncertainty, which that citizens must cope with on an everyday basis.

The boundaries of the power relations remain blurred, as people engage with each other in different ways, lending either a financial, social, political, or cultural value to the urban space. On the one hand, there is a value that the space holds, and, on the other hand, there are different kinds of capital that are exchanged between various sets of actors within these spaces. There is financial capital (informal vending), social capital (social interactions before, during, and after business hours), political capital (governance of the space and sometimes the informal control of spatial appropriations), and cultural capital (feeding the poor on festival days). There are different groups for each capital exchange, for example, the social capital actor group could consist of (a) vendor; (b) shop owner; and (c) traffic police; or (i) Basilica pastor; (ii) vendor; and (iii) traffic police. Similarly, the political capital actor group could either consist of (a) MLA or Member of Legislative Assembly; (b) local corporator; and (c) taxi stand union leader; or (i) local corporator; (ii) Taj Hotel owner; and (iii) traffic police. With the groups of actors or agents within the public space being multiplex in nature, the relational webs that are created can be quite complex and could lead to multiple possibilities, with spatial transformations occurring on an everyday basis. Hence, it becomes necessary to record the ordinary and extraordinary activities at the neighbourhood level and to collate this data and analyze it to gain an understanding of how the functioning of the city can change through making an intervention at the master-plan level or at the policy-making level.

## Implications of the research

The scholarly work that calls for transcending informal urbanism through the disruption of binary thinking (Acuto, Dinardi and Marx, 2019) also stresses the need to find common ground that can link the parts to the whole. This study uses the idea of a ‘binary’ (ordinary city–extraordinary city) to overcome the limitations and to eliminate the ambiguity that lie in the binary of informal/formal by bringing in the analytical precision offered by an ethnographical account of the urban space, one that dissects urban informality, in attempting to understand it both temporally and spatially, as it looks at both the everyday and periodic activities of people.

On the practice front, this study argues that for people to navigate the city more easily, urban planning processes need to change so that the physical infrastructure and the governance infrastructure can partially, if not wholly, respond to the dynamics of the everyday. There is much that is in a state of flux, as even today villages are being enveloped by the growth of the city. As the physical

boundaries change, many social, cultural, and economic practices of these communities continue to survive within the new configurations of space into which they move into. It may be necessary to include an urban design plan as one of the stages in the planning process that acknowledges the specific needs and characteristics of both the ‘ordinary day’ and the ‘extraordinary day’ at the neighbourhood level and at the city level. In the context of the Indian city, the Urban and Regional Development Plan Formulation and Implementation (URDPFI) Guidelines, provide a framework for the plan preparation and implementation processes. There is a provision in these guidelines for an ‘annual plan’ (scale: 1:1000 or 1:500) in which urban design inputs can be incorporated (Keswani, 2019). We propose that this could be the dynamic plan that reflects the ground reality and that can help develop a people-centric approach to urban design and planning.

## Limitations and future research

Future research could look at whether the *self-organizing* nature of the ordinary city is less complex or more complex than that of the extraordinary city which is facilitated by the government. One could look at the differences between ‘self-organizing’ complexity and ‘facilitated’ complexity within urban spaces that are a function of informality.

In this paper, we have studied the ‘tactics’ of the vendors but have not delved into the nature of the ‘strategies’ of the administrators. The latter could be investigated in future studies in this area. Also, while we have investigated one kind of everyday practice, festival days (religious practice), which are the regular extraordinary days, researchers could examine the irregular extraordinary days, such as wedding processions (cultural practice) and political rallies (political practice) as well, to develop a more nuanced understanding of urban informality.

## List of figures

**Figure 1:** Plan of Shivajinagar neighbourhood showing the sites of ordinary activities (Noronha Road) and extraordinary activities [the Russell Market square (1), Basilica junction (2), and Taj Hotel junction (3), i.e. sites of Ramzan and Christmas celebrations].

**Figure 2:** Venn diagram showing spatial conditions on an ordinary day and an extraordinary day

**Figure 3:** Plan of an ordinary day at the Russell Market square

**Figure 4:** Extraordinary day (Ramzan): Economic practices at the Taj Hotel junction

**Figure 5:** Extraordinary day (Ramzan): Socio-religious practices at the Taj Hotel junction

**Figure 6:** Extraordinary day (Christmas): Economic practices at the Basilica junction and Noronha Road

**Figure 7:** ‘Everyday practice’ as common denominator in the ordinary–extraordinary city binary

Sources of all figures/photographs: Authors

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