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A case study of Patan

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Summary

Patan is one of three major cities in Kathmandu valley, with roots that go back into the days when it was an independent governed country before the 17th century. Neighborhood public spaces in Patan are hosts to multiple events, festivals, functions, feasts, local spectacles and everyday life activities. With the unplanned urbanization, these spaces have seen a vast transformation. While it is true that places change over time, for optimal urban planning it is important to understand how these changes affect the locals whose lives are so intricately tied to their neighborhood public spaces. In this thesis I take a gendered perspective into this.

This thesis aims to understand how the change in multiple dimensions of neighborhood public spaces affect how local women attach a sense of belonging to their neighborhood. Two neighborhoods public spaces of Patan were analysed within the timeframe of the past three decades, with regards to how these spaces have changed, following Madanipour's (2010) classification of the five dimensions of public space; and how these changes have affected the local women's sense of belonging to the neighborhood. Nagbahal Chowk and Swotha Chowk, located within the heart of Patan, were selected, since both are vibrant neighborhood public spaces closely tied to the Newar community's values, in close vicinity to each other. This research shows how two neighborhoods with similar make-up of material, socio-cultural, symbolic and economic aspects have changed in divergent ways in the past three decades due to small nuances.

The data were collected between July and September 2021 using qualitative research strategies: semi-structured interviews with local women, representatives of socio-cultural organizations and expert, virtual-go alongs with selected local women, and secondary data review. Among the main findings is that, while the changes in multiple dimensions of neighborhood public spaces have been borne out of necessity, a slow gentrification of traditional spaces can be observed. Additionally, this change constantly influences how local women form their bonds with other women in the neighborhood, and experience neighborhood identity and sense of belonging to the neighborhood. However, this influence is highly nuanced: the sense of belonging is highly personal and relates to not only identity within the neighborhood but also to relationship with other inhabitants, especially other women.

Keywords

Neighborhood public space, sense of belonging, gendered perspective, neighborhood identity

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I dedicate this thesis to my late brother, Nirvik. All I do, I do in your name.

Abbreviations

IHS	Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies
NPS	Neighborhood Public Space
TSS	Tole Sudhar Samiti

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Public spaces play a significant role in the social life of communities. From streets to street markets, from shopping districts to community centers, parks and playgrounds to neighborhood spaces, public spaces act as shared resources within a city in which experiences and beliefs are formed (Mean & Tims, 2005). However, urban change is a global phenomenon that has led to change across urban forms and life across multiple geographical regions. Modern cities have seen a massive transformation of urban environments, which is evident in how the public spaces have changed along with them. This thesis explores the change in the neighborhood public spaces of Patan, Nepal, in an examination of the sense of belonging of local women.

1.1. Background Information

Within the last hundred years, industrialization and modernization on a global scale have led to an unprecedented rise in the urban population. This was followed parallelly by a significant transformation of urban regions from compact centralized models to loose urban sprawls, which led to weakening social bonds between individuals of neighborhoods (Madanipour, 2010). Tibbalds (2001) considers the effects of changing physical, social, and economic condition of the modern cities as a decline of the public realm, with a major loss of public spaces as well as the social interactions fostered by such spaces. The author believes public space as the most important part of any town or city, since that is the part of the urban fabric to which the general public has physical as well as visual access. Madanipour (2010) reiterates accessibility as the key feature of public spaces and stresses that these spaces lie beyond the boundary of individual or small group control. Not only do public spaces act as mediating spaces between private spaces but they also perform a multiplicity of functional, socio-cultural as well as symbolic roles in the everyday settings of urban societies. However, Carmona et.al. (2008) underscore how the debate about public space in academic literature is riddled with overlapping and poorly defined terms ranging, from accessibility, quality of public space, quality of life in the space, physical capital, social capital, well-being, to sustainability and urban design. Adding to the complexity, some of these terms are highly subjective and dependent on individual perceptions and experiences, while others are objective and concerned with the physical realities and conditions of public space.

Although much research has been done about the way individuals interact and form social networks in the changing public spaces, Garcia-Ramon et.al. (2004) believe it is imperative to admit the male bias of approaches to urban studies and public space. While public space by definition is supposed to be accessible to all, it is not always the case. Public itself is composed of multiple social echelons with different traits, pursuits and powers and as such not all individuals experience and perceive public spaces the same. “It is argued that the meanings of gender and of distinction between public and private are deeply and inextricably intertwined” (Bondi, 1998, p. 164). Men and women traverse public and private spaces in their everyday lives. Their interactions, activities, relation and perception of those spaces however are highly subjective to their gender (among other characteristics such as age, ethnicity, religion, etc.). This research is concerned with providing a gendered perspective on the change in public spaces of such neighborhoods. For that, I look into the context of the traditional city of Patan, Nepal.

1.2. Problem Statement

Public spaces have been integral part of cities throughout history (Madanipour, 2010) and have served as spaces for displaying cultural activities, traditions, religious gatherings, observations, and celebrations since the time people started forming communities. In Patan, public spaces have always been multi-layered, multifunctional and vibrant, serving not only a physical

purpose, but also a social, cultural, economic and political one in the everyday lives of the original local inhabitants (*Newars¹*), depending on the time of the day, month and year.

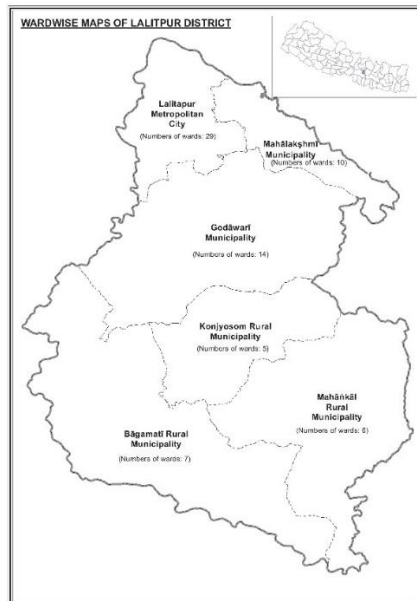


Figure 1 Ward wise map of Lalitpur District(Shrestha, 2021)

Officially Lalitpur Metropolitan City, Patan is the third largest city of Nepal with around 468,132 inhabitants (Census, 2011) in an area of 385 square kilometres and is one of the three major cities within the Kathmandu Valley. Traditionally, towns of Kathmandu Valley not only featured a fine provision of public spaces, the formation of which was a “product of gradual accretion over multiple political/cultural periods” (Tiwari S. R., Tiered Temples of Nepal, 1989), but also offered unique settings to the local urban life. These towns were divided into several residential neighborhoods, which are both spatial as well as socio-cultural units (Pant & Funo, 2007). They had community squares as the main public space element (Chitrakar, 2006; Pant & Funo, 2007; Chitrakar, 2020). For the local women, these spaces were locations for everyday rituals, fostering social connectivity with other women, spaces for idle domestic work and micro-scale economic activities.

Nepal being the fastest urbanizing country (Muzzini & Aparico, 2013), the urban fabric of the compact traditional settlement has seen rapid and uncontrolled transformation since Nepal welcomed the forces of modernization in the 1950s (Tiwari S. R., 2018). This is particularly evident in the changes in the neighborhood public spaces (Pradhan, 2003; Shrestha, 2005; Shah & Pant, 2005). Urban heritage spaces that were listed in UNESCO’s ‘World Heritage’ were deemed as ‘List of Sites in Danger’ due to the massive uncontrolled urban development (Tiwari S. R., 2018). In Patan, Nepal, issues of negligence, lack of maintenance and encroachment of neighborhood public spaces in the city cores have led to incompatible use of those spaces and deteriorating sense of place (Chitrakar, 2006). The transformation of these spaces to parking lots, mismanagement of waste and a general degrading in the urban character have diminished their usability in terms of social and cultural activities.

Additionally, decades of political unrest and upheavals in the country led to a people’s movement in 1990 which ultimately led to a multiparty democracy after centuries of Monarchy. The new constitution that came with it granted the most fundamental rights (individual rights, educational rights, achievements and merit) to the citizens of Nepal. Leichy’s (1996) research

¹ Indigenous community of Kathmandu Valley.

suggests that the freedom that came with democracy was based on growing transnational and global awareness. Local women had a freedom to access not just public spaces but also educational institutions, work spaces and political offices, increasing their presence in the public realm.

A problem central to this research is the effect of these changes on the local women's sense of belonging to the neighborhood in their everyday lives. Multiple studies have indicated that public spaces have a greater impact on women than on men due to women's close relationship, in their daily activities, with their immediate urban environments (Wilson, 1995; Garcia-Ramon, Ortiz, & Prats, 2004). Furthermore, observations indicate the loss of public space in neighborhoods is not only hindering quality of urban life but also dramatically reducing the level of social interaction, leading to a deteriorating sense of community and belonging among women (Chitrakar, Baker, & Guaralda, 2014; Leichty, 1996).

In this light, this research helps to understand the significance of the traditional dimensions of public spaces in the neighborhood for local *Newar* women and how the change in multiple dimensions of such spaces impact the way they experience belonging to the neighborhood itself in their everyday lives. That being said, the topics are highly nuanced and while most literature have been considering a global context, it is important to look into how multiple nuances of modernization and changing gender norms, affect the variables. For this purpose, this research will be looking into two neighborhood public spaces within close vicinity to each other, in the core of the traditional city of Patan: Swotha *Chowk* and Nagbahal *Chowk*². These cases were chosen in consideration of how two neighborhoods that started out with similar social, cultural, religious and economic make-up, have changed in the time frame of three decades, and how that has affected the sense of belonging of local women.

1.3. Relevance of the research topic

Both in theory and in practice, sense of belonging is built upon the foundation of everyday experiences of life and ordinary mundane activities in space (Catella, Dines, Gesler, & Curtis, 2008). But this particular notion is often a challenge for planners as they tend to think of neighborhood public space from the grander scale of the socio-economics and politics, and very rarely from a gendered perspective. Beebeejaun (2017) emphasizes that women are still disproportionately affected by public transportation, walking and accessibility issues. The considerations of the everyday life spaces such as pedestrian walkways, underpasses, minor public spaces are often overlooked by planners in favour of major public squares or other civic locations. As women are highly intertwined with the everyday spaces, it becomes a concern that planners aren't considering a substantial population of users of the city.

This research contributes to academic relevance of the implications on the everyday lives of women by the change in dimensions of the neighborhood public spaces. Moreover, it contributes to more research on sense of belonging in relation to women, and the significance of women's interactions in public spaces to their feelings of well-being and neighborhood identity.

Furthermore, this research contributes to social relevance where it expands the knowledge on Patan's material, socio-cultural, and symbolic dimensions of public spaces in neighborhood and the role of women in the change in those dimensions as well as their position within the neighborhood due to the change. Finally, it also gives concrete data to support local government representatives, planners and urban professionals to work in a more integrative and inclusive way while planning, designing and developing public spaces.

² Local term for enclosed open space.

1.4. Research Objectives

The overarching objective of this thesis is to **analyse the effect of the change in material, socio-cultural and symbolic dimensions of neighborhood public spaces, from 1990 to now, on the way local women experience sense of belonging to these spaces in their everyday lives.**

Other objectives are:

- To understand what has changed in the material, socio-cultural and symbolic attributes of the neighborhood public spaces of Patan and what its current meaning attached to local women is.
- To understand what has influenced the change.

1.5. Main research question

The main question this research aims to answer is:

How does the change in neighborhood public spaces of Patan, Nepal, in the past three decades³ affect women's sense of belonging?

1.5.1. Sub-research questions

- Historically, what have been the material⁴, socio-cultural⁵, and symbolic⁶ dimensions of neighborhood public spaces attached to women?
- Currently, what is the material, socio-cultural, and symbolic dimensions of neighborhood public spaces attached to women?
- Why have the neighborhood public spaces been unable to retain their original dimensions?
- What has influenced the change in the material, socio-cultural, historical and symbolic dimensions of neighborhood public spaces?
- How do women experience the sense of belonging to the neighborhood public spaces and how has it changed?

³ This research is looking into the time frame of 1990s to current considering the massive changes in the socio-political scenario and the public realm.

⁴ Referring to the material dimension of neighborhood public space. (See 2.1.2.)

⁵ Referring to the socio-cultural dimensions of neighborhood public space. (See 2.1.2.)

⁶ Referring to the historical and symbolic dimensions of neighborhood public space (See 2.1.2.)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Public space

Carmona et.al. (2008) define public space as relating to “all those parts of the built and natural environment the public have free access to. It encompasses: all streets, squares and other rights of way, whether predominantly in residential, commercial or community/civic uses; the open spaces and parks; and the ‘public/private’ spaces where public access is unrestricted (at least during daylight hours)”. It can be inferred that public space is a space that is managed and controlled by a public agency and is for the purposes of public interest. It is a “common ground where people carry out the functional and ritual activities that bind a community, whether in normal daily life or in periodic festivals” (Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone, 1992). This attention to the everyday life aspect is quite key in terms of public spaces as it sets the foundation for a substantial amount of human interaction and contact in spaces (Tibbalds, 2001). Across the globe, public spaces have been at the heart of cities throughout known history, so much so that we can hardly imagine human settlements without it.

Madanipour underlines how “public spaces mirrors the complexities of urban societies” (2010, p. 1) and that even though, globally, the socio-spatial composition of cities vary, there are a number of general trends that can be noted. First and foremost is that for cities to work, there is a great need of public spaces; following which is that with the radical changes in modern cities across the globe, the nature as well as the role of public spaces have seen simultaneous changes. And finally, that the development of the public spaces and the change in their use mirrors the organizational system of the society itself and as such is shaped by unequally distributed resources and power, within situations of tension and conflict but also of collaboration and compromise.

2.1.1. Dimensions of public space

Public space is a “multidisciplinary domain of research focus as it concerns not only the physical but also the non-physical dimensions with a significant amount of overlap between them” (Chitrakar, 2015). As such, in order to understand public space, we need to move beyond the basic public-private dichotomy and physical dimensions of places and turn towards other dimensions (Garcia, 2020). In regards to public spaces, Madanipour (2010) identifies five dimensions which are explored with texts from multiple additional authors below:

- I. **Material dimension:** This concerns the physical aspects of the public space and the built environment. It is configured by the architectural elements and conditions of those elements within the public space.
- II. **Social dimension:** This concerns people, their everyday life activities in space, in the creation, use, access and management of public spaces. Sociability among people is based upon the participation of people in a “supportive social system”. It depends on the characteristic of the people, group and the bonds formed between people and space as well as amongst people themselves and can vary depending upon factors of gender, age, class, and so on.
- III. **Symbolic dimension:** This concerns the meanings, beliefs, behavior, attitude towards the public spaces by the people. It is formed through active participation in the social life by the people in communities and helps develop a sense of community or place (Carmona, Magalhaes, & Hammond, 2008).
- IV. **Cultural dimension:** This concerns the public space as being actively situated within a broader cultural context depending on the context or setting of where it is.
- V. **Historical dimension:** This concerns the changing nature of the public spaces during the historical context.

For the purpose of this research, the socio-cultural and symbolic dimensions will be given high priority due to its concern over activities in the public space and people’s attitudes towards the spaces, supported by material dimension.

2.1.2. Relation between dimensions of public space

Gehl (1989) states that the patterns of use and human behavior in public space are largely influenced by its physical design and condition. And in the context of urban neighborhoods, there is a strong connection between sense of belonging and public spaces (Talen, 2000; Francis, Giles-Corti, Wood, & Knuiiman, 2012), specifically due to the extensive social ties and relations that are created by interaction in such spaces.

What is an integral quality of public space is its accessibility; “the more open and unconditional the access, the more public it becomes” (Madanipour, 2010, p. 127). By this the author suggest not only a physical access to the space but also social accessibility. Ercan (2010) determines the “four mutually supporting qualities of access as physical access, social access, access to activities and discussions and access to information”, stressing the deep levels of accessibility in public space. The right to public art and staging of public events and festivals in public spaces is seen as a good practice. Mandeli (2010) suggests that the quality of public spaces within neighborhoods depends on the potential of the spaces to encourage greater attachment from the residents due to being accessible, aesthetically pleasing, sociable and safe.

The following Figure 2 illustrates the definition and relations between the dimensions of public space as referenced Mandeli (2010) and Madanipour’s (2010).

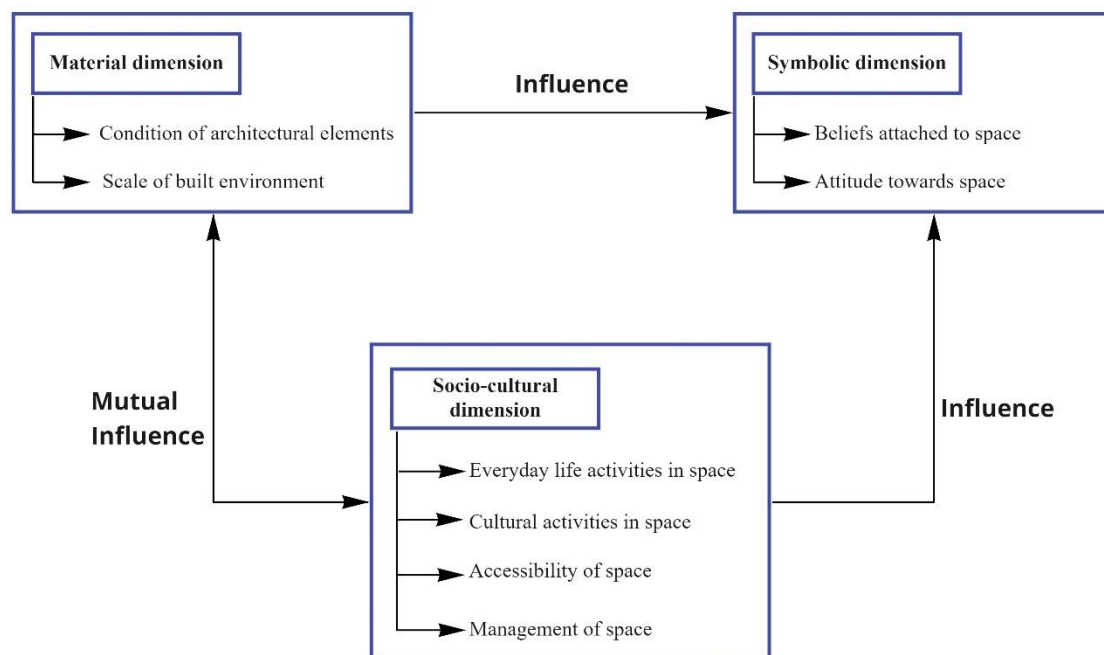


Figure 2 Relationship between dimensions of public space

2.2. Neighborhood Public Space

Public spaces play a vital role in the definition of a neighborhood, which is part and parcel of the idea of community. Public spaces are seen as that part of the neighborhood where the community has the chance to socialize, communicate and grow meaningful relationships. Sendi and Goličnik Marušić (2012, p. 22) clarify that such neighborhood spaces consist of “public

outdoor territory close to home, which, because of frequent shared use as well as the resident's collective responsibility and familiar association, is considered to be their own". Social scientists have emphasized the communal dimensions of neighborhoods and they not only view the neighborhoods as physical spaces but also regard them in terms of their symbolic and socio-cultural aspects, emphasizing shared activities, experiences and values, resulting in the formation or enhancement of social relations (Abu-Ghazzeh, 1996; Lee, 1970; Canter, 1977).

Neighborhood public spaces are spaces that play a range of roles through their multiple possible uses, from recreation, facilitation of social interactions and as such social relations, intergenerational interaction, legibility of residential area and the means of orientation within the area (Sendi & Goličnik Marušić, 2012). Additionally, Sendi and Goličnik Marušić believe that the design aspect of the neighborhood public space also has an impact on the overall image of the neighborhood itself. These spaces have the potential to benefit the neighborhood economically as well as socially as they support socialization of users.

2.2.1. Change in neighborhood public space

Around the world, cities have undergone a significant morphological shift in this era of fast-paced modernization. Daniel and Avner (2011) observe the trend of homogenization of cities, and as cities change, so do the public spaces. While cities are constantly evolving and transforming ever since they started, the industrial revolution in the western world has incited a marked change in the urban form and built environment of cities. For traditional cities, it meant the loss of continuity of traditional urban forms of architecture and space elements in the dense, compact settlements amidst a growing low density urban sprawl. Chitrakar (2015) perceives the change of urban form in Nepal as "the changing concept of urban space design from the traditional notion of 'buildings defining space' to the modern version of 'buildings in space'".

The change in city fabric brought on by the recent development trends in Nepal have disrupted the historic fabric of cities everywhere in the country, with city cores slowly losing their unique character, built form, streetscape and public spaces (Shrestha, 2005). Observations from multiple scholars reveal that the massive fast-paced transformation have led to a loss of public spaces in the neighborhood and a decline of the public realm (Tibbalds, 2001; Baneerjee, 2001; Madanipour, 2010; Carmona, Magalhaes, & Hammond, 2008; Gehl, 1989). Since there is a strong relation between public spaces and aspects of sociability, the loss of public space has a massive impact on the way people socialize in cities. The change in public space stems directly from the changing needs and behavior patterns of people, leading the spaces from being pedestrian focused to auto-mobile focused, displacing the pedestrians to the corners of the urban streets and squares (Gehl & Gemzoe, 2001; Tiwari S. R., n.d.). Gehl and Gemzoe (2001) argue that invaded space is impoverished space, which leads to a gradual loss in social and recreational activities conducted in those spaces.

However, the change hasn't all been negative. With the people acting as passive instigators of change, small interventions have been done on the individual level as a reaction to the change in public spaces. An interesting categorization of public space in the neighborhood was pioneered in the 1970s in the Netherlands: the home zone (Sendi & Goličnik Marušić, 2012), as a way of 'reclaiming' the public spaces from the domination of auto-motive vehicles, through small physical alterations of public space by residents using small items such as benches, trees, flowerbeds, lampposts, etc.

The neighborhood public space is a an enclosed or partially enclosed open public space that serves the neighborhood inhabitants in their everyday lives. The change in the neighborhood public space relates to the change in its material, socio-cultural and symbolic dimensions⁷.

2.3. The issue of gender and gender norms in neighborhood public space

Keleher and Franklin (2008) define gender norms as “powerful, pervasive attitudes about gender-based social roles and behaviors that are deeply embedded in social structures”. These norms operate from the smallest unit of family level to neighborhood level and even wider in the level of the society; and pertain to rights of education, economics, mobility, politic and social justice.

“Women’s access to different spaces in the city, especially public space, is generally more limited than for men” (Chant, 2013, p. 21), on account of multiple impediments, ranging from the unpaid domestic labor, reproductive labor associated with the home to symbolic dimensions of forbidden use of public spaces due to patriarchal relations, religious beliefs and societal norms (Fenster, 2005; Jarvis, Cloke, & Kantor, 2009; Vera-Sanso, 2006). Multiple researches highlight how the direct and indirect care works and social reproductive labor is done disproportionately by women and is more often than not unpaid labor (Budlender, 2007; Fontana & Natali, 2008; UNDP, 1995). At a fundamental level, this gendered division of labor leaves women with little time, energy and access to other services such as education, food, healthcare and restricted access to the public sphere (Bakker, 2007; Unterhalter, 2013). For example, research from India and Nepal suggests that women aged 15-29 followed by 60 and higher do the most amount of care work (Choe, Thapa, & Mishra, 005; Sen & Sen, 1985).

The third wave of feminism and the spatial turn had a significant impact on the way gender and space was approached since the 1980s and gender and urban studies came to be recognized as mutually relational (Kaur, 2020). Kaur’s (2020) article focuses on ‘intersectionality⁸’ as an approach to gender matters, and drew upon the significance that the experiences of men and women of their city are not homogenous but articulated in differences due to age, classes, religion, races, abilities, nationalities, ethnicities, gender and sexual orientations. One of the most used feminist frames to understand the spatial divisions in the city is the binary distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’. The characteristic assumption that women belong mostly in or near their homes, while men have an easy access to places farther from their homes was shared by most societies across the world (Franck & Paxson, 1989). Prior to the modernist urban planning, cities were mostly designed for the pedestrian with easily navigable routes. However, post-industrialization saw a rise in slums and unhealthy living conditions, which the planners tackled through the provision of mono-functionality of land. This made pedestrian mobility difficult and as such women were significantly affected (Kaur, 2020).

Franck and Paxson (1989) highlight that while industrialization and globalization did give rise to a greater diversity of users of public spaces, women’s access of public spaces were still riddled with wading through the waters of harassment and threat, their activities in those spaces still sex segregated and their movement restricted. Similarly, fear associated with the use of public spaces in the neighborhood prevents women from fully inhabiting those spaces. This fear, in addition to the social and religious norms, turn neighborhood public spaces into “forbidden” spaces (Fenster, 1999). This, in turn, leads to the creation of spaces of “belonging and dis-belonging” (Fenster, 2005, p. 246).

⁷ Check Figure 2 for detailed breakdown of dimensions of public space

⁸ First coined in 1989 by Kimberlee Crenshaw, an American law professor, to emphasize how the unique experiences of discrimination faced by Black women could not be compared to those faced by white women or even black men. In the article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex”

2.4. Sense of belonging

Public space contributes to the consolidation of a community. It gives space to the neighborhood residents for participatory, recreational and festive activities and in doing so promotes the gathering of a diverse group of actors. How the members of the communicate in and perceive these spaces, however, are subjective and there are many concepts that have been studied in order to explore it. One such concept that can help understand the different interactions and social relations that predominate neighborhood public spaces is *sense of belonging*. In general, sense of belonging has been defined, described and analyzed concerning a range of fields and areas such as mental health and well-being (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992; Dekel & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2009), community health (Warin, Baum, Kalucy, Murray, & Veale, 2000), employment and information technology (Lim, 2007) and even landscape perception (Jones, Patterson, & Hammitt, 2000). Additionally, it has been examined in multiple groups of different ethnicities (Ahnallen, Suyemoto, & Carter, 2006; La Grange & Ming, 2001), young adults (Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007; Sanchez, Colon, & Esparza, 2005; Liebenberg, Wall, Wood, & Hutt-MacLeod, 2019), elderly (McLaren, Gomez, Bailey, & Van Der Horst, 2007); refugees (Herslund, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2011) and many more.

Sense of belonging is most notably defined as an extension of Maslow's (1954) concept of belongingness in his hierarchical needs theory of motivation. Maslow believed that the need for belonging is universal in humans for their well-being and self-actualization; that sense of belonging comes when and if the physiological and safety needs are met. Salvadó et.al. defined it as the "identification and acceptance of an individual with a group or a specific place. It is related to a person's feelings that are associated with experiences, symbols, daily activities, safety, among others" (Salvadó, Schmitt, & Bustamante, 2020). The authors believe that these very subjective feelings and perceptions of people make spaces more liveable and it becomes stronger as social relations grow and converge on the territory. Sense of belonging develops where human relationships are built and fostered, recognition of other individuals as part of one's social ties is established, and a collective identity is built within a shared existence and everyday life in a space (Salvadó, Schmitt, & Bustamante, 2020). Adding to that, it is stressed that "the community is where the sense of belonging develops" and that with the use of public spaces by a community provides the space with meaning and symbolic connections (Salvadó, Schmitt, & Bustamante, 2020, p. 2).

Fenster (2005a), emphasizes how the significant aspect of everyday belonging develops with the spatial knowledge and connection with spaces; and stresses the gendered dimensions of the everyday ritualized use of spaces. Herslund (2021) examines that in recent literature, everyday life is central to sense of belonging (Seamon, 1980; Feist, Tan, McDougall, & Hugo, 2015), besides the focus on structural and physical characteristics of a specific space that influences the functionality of everyday life (Savage, Bagnali, & Longhurst, 2005). Yuval-Davis (2011) also explored how sense of belonging among migrants is connected to various activities and practices in their daily routine of everyday life. The author further expanded that the migrants formed stronger sense of belonging to places that they felt connected to by continuous use for simple everyday routines.

Tuan (1979) considers the 'landscapes of fear' in the way spaces is implicated in the experience of fear, covering real and perceived threats. The author argues that rootedness, attachment, security and exclusiveness are part of attachment to home and homeland; and as notions of territory and homeland are closely linked up with concepts of space, these elements are also directly linked to the attachment and sense of belonging to spaces (Babacan, 2006). Babacan argues that some spaces, while not arising from lived practice, have element of embodiment

(familiarity, security, comfort, etc) which enables individual encounters within the space to “take place in an automatic mode of being rather than cognitive processing of meaning” (Babacan, 2006, p. 118).

It is clear that sense of belonging is an integral element in an individual developing and maintaining relationships with others in their neighborhood. Additionally, it contributes to the well-being of an individual (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996; McLaren & Challis, 2009; Dekel & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2009; Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992). Furthermore, studies also suggest that a higher sense of belonging in individuals leads to better social and psychological functioning and lower rates of mental health issues (Anant, 1966; McLaren & Challis, 2009; McLaren, Gomez, Bailey, & Van Der Horst, 2007). Multiple researchers believe that in all cultures, regardless of the differences of gender, social class, age, or religion, people have the need for relatedness (Thoits, 1982; Maslow, Motivation and Personality, 1954; Anant, 1966; 1967) so much so that, Markus and Kitayama (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) argued that social relations, rather than individual functioning, is the primary unit of reflection of sense of belonging. Salvado et. al. (2020) highlighted in their paper that the feeling of belonging revolved around daily interactions individuals have with others in their community that takes place in the public spaces. All the concerns associated with everyday life in public spaces are linked to sense of belonging. Human geographers took this approach to place sense of belonging in order to give value to an individual’s emotional attachments and bonds as well as their personal experiences attached to spaces (Relph, 1976).

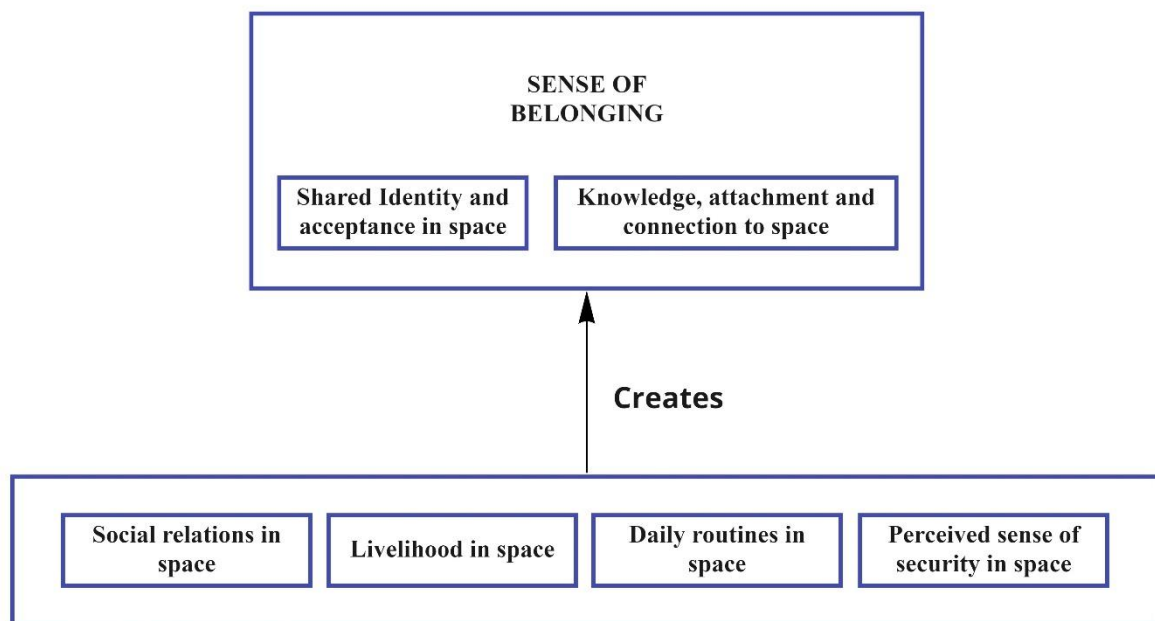


Figure 3 Factors that create sense of belonging

In conclusion, sense of belonging experienced by women is the shared identification and acceptance of women within a group in their immediate neighborhood environment, as part of their everyday life experience of the space relating to attachment, knowledge and connection to space, created through social relations and livelihood in space, daily routines and perceived security in the space.

2.4.1. Sense of belonging and neighborhood public space

The link between sense of belonging and public space is possible to identify as each community have their own diverse type of activities associated to these spaces. Curley (2010) believes that

while our social worlds are less likely to be bound by our neighborhoods, the proximity due to the space may still influence the creation of social relations and ties. The author further addresses that the length of residence of the individuals in the neighborhood also have positive associations with stronger social networks within the neighborhood. However, they also point out that social proximity rather than physical proximity could play a greater role in fostering social relations as people are drawn to others like themselves in terms of values, lifestyle, social status and beliefs. Additionally, the author highlights the role of local institutions in public spaces by suggesting that neighborhood institutions are highly important for not only the stability of the community but also for social control, collective efficacy and democracy in the society.

Hertberger (1991) emphasizes the importance of architectural elements (shape, material, placement) in neighborhood public space in order to foster certain uses. Furthermore, Bergeijk et. al. (Bergeijk, Bolt, & Kempen, 2008) highlight that the use of neighborhood facilities has a positive effect on the social networks and relations within neighborhoods. Adding to that, without the opportunity to build familiarity among inhabitants of a neighborhood, residents are prone to have mistrust. As sense of belonging develops with the daily interaction with other individuals in space, these spaces are crucial in terms of the general well-being and fostering social relations within the neighborhood. Additionally, public spaces helps foster a sense of belonging because people come together to display and legitimize their identities in a public setting (Holland, Clark, Katz, & Peace, 2007).

Smets and Watt (2013) believe that in order to have a pleasant atmosphere in public space, it is important that the users have a common or partly linked sense of belonging to the space. However, neighborhood public spaces have barriers that influence the spatial behaviour pattern of the users: the condition of physical built environment and the perception of (in)security in the spaces (Smets & Watt, 2013), which leads to lower sense of belonging. Catella et.al. (2008) talk about the contradictory nature of relationship of users with neighborhood public space and acknowledge that public spaces are rarely, if ever, without tension. Nevertheless, they also emphasize how routine encounters and mundane activities in space with other individuals can foster a sense of ‘belonging’ in the community as well.

2.5. Gender, neighborhood public space and sense of belonging

“Users, by virtue of their identity and their interaction or their lack of interaction with one another, define the use of the space” (Franck, 1988, p. 289) and when women’s full appropriation of their neighborhood public space is restricted, their spatial and temporal experiences of these spaces in their everyday lives are hindered (Beebeejaun, 2017), affecting the way they attach belonging to the neighborhood. Beebeejaun (2017), emphasizes the undertheorized nature of everyday in space, further emphasized by the fact that within the context of everyday life a complex set of “spaces, feelings of belonging, right to the city” can emerge. Interactions with and within urban public spaces can facilitate or hinder rights to these spaces depending on the power relations and controls. Fenster (2005a) discusses the different formations of gendered belongings as expressed in the daily activities of men and women in the city, focusing not only on the formal or sacred expressions of belonging with regards to citizenship, religion, nationality, but also on the dimension of everyday life. The author believes that the everyday ritualized use of spaces has a clear gendered dimension; and for women, especially, experiences and memories in space relate to their sense of belonging to those spaces. The memory aspect pertaining to sense of belonging is built on short term memory based on intimate knowledge of spaces by continuous use, guided by bodily experiences of space and identity-related based on one’s own identities, or on long term

memory built on an accumulation of events from one's past, personal experience and reflections of places specific to personal history with the space.

Scruton and Watson (1998), in their research of women's perception of leisure spaces in Leeds, found that many women shared gendered experiences relating to financial constraints, safety, sexual division of labor, unpaid domestic labor and how also how they defined leisure around social networks, relationships, shared meaning and community. However, they also put forward that the separation of public and private spaces is complex and diverse and that women do use public spaces in different regards to men, however discouraged they are by threats or harassment.

2.6. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework has been defined as illustrated in Figure 4. It includes the dimensions (material, socio-cultural and symbolic) of neighborhood public space as the independent variable, and the sense of belonging felt by the local women towards the neighborhood as the dependent variable. The changing gender norms not only change local women's access and use of public spaces, but also their relationships with other women in the neighborhood. Additionally, the change in provision of public space influences the change in the use as well as meaning. The change in use further influences the change in meaning and provision. Collectively, change in the neighborhood public spaces effects the sense of belonging of women, which has been divided into variables according to the literature review: social relations, daily routines, livelihood and perceptions of security. Here all four variables jointly devise the sense of belonging of women.

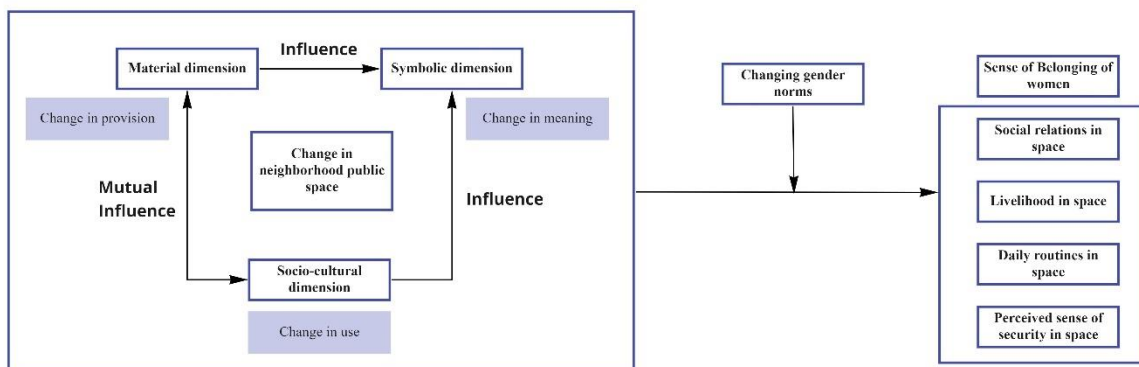


Figure 4 Conceptual framework prepared by author

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Description of research design and methods

This is an inductive research with the aim to explain how the change in different dimensions of neighborhood public spaces affects the sense of belonging of women in the core of traditional city of Patan within a context of changing gender norms. It is an explanatory research where the existing theories of public space, sense of belonging and gender will be applied to identify the effect in question and observe the relationship between the variables noted. The independent variable is the change in neighborhood public space: material, socio-cultural, symbolic and historical dimensions. The dependent variable is sense of belonging of local women. These two variables will be studied in the context of changing gender norms as the moderating variable.

3.1.1. Embedded Case-study and virtual go-alongs

This research will be conducted in the form of embedded case studies in order to analyze the phenomenon in-depth, recognizing the complexities of the subject and understanding it (Thiel, 2014). This research is studying an everyday real-life setting (in this case of neighborhoods of Patan, Nepal) and will be employing case study in order to get rich, detailed and extensive description of the subject and additionally, the case study approach also provides better grounds for qualitative data (Thiel, 2014). As the research concerns perceptions of local women, a case study will help understand not only the changes in public spaces through the lens of secondary data such as photos and news reports but also through the lens of the people directly experiencing the change.

In addition to case study interviews, participant led virtual go-alongs will be employed in order to level any power differences between the author and the participants (Figure 6, Figure 7). Furthermore, movement within the neighborhood public space will help the author understand the participant's relationship with their environment as well as their spatial knowledge. Participants will be asked to walk along their preferred paths within their neighborhood public space and generate stories about their spaces (Jones, Bunce, Evans, Gibbs, & Hein, 2008).

The chosen case study is of Patan, which is one of the major cities of Nepal and is an example of the traditional cities of the global South that are going through this period of change in their urban landscape whilst simultaneously dealing with the changing gender norms. As these changes are highly nuanced, a comparative analysis of the two selected neighborhoods helps in understanding how affects lead to differing results in the neighborhoods.

3.1.2. Area Sampling

Two neighborhoods have been selected through purposive sampling as the embedded cases. The aim of this is to not only understand in depth how different changes on neighborhood public spaces affects the women's experience of sense of belonging but also to compare how the two different types of neighborhood spaces in traditional settlements have changed in the past three decades. There are two variations in the type of neighborhood public space in Patan: large enclosed courtyard surrounded by residences and laid off the street intersection and enclosed only partially by residences. Additionally, by considering two cases, the research will also be able to look into whether the changes in neighborhood public space has the same affect in all neighborhoods. As such, one case of each type has been selected. Selected spaces are both located within the boundary of the core of the traditional city of Patan and have multiple space defining elements of traditional neighborhood public space.

The two neighborhoods selected are: Swotha and Nagbahal . Both of the neighborhoods are located within similar proximity to the Patan Durbar Square (Patan Palace Square), the cultural

and social heart of Patan. However, Swotha is partially surrounded by residences and road network and Nagbahal is completely surrounded by residences to form an enclosed courtyard space. This difference was intended to fully understand how the pedestrian level of design that was present in traditional settlements of Nepal has been changed with the auto-mobile movements. Similarly, considering the social networks and organizations might have changed though the three decades as well, this research can verify the role of these networks within the changing dimensions of neighborhood public space as well as local women's sense of belonging.

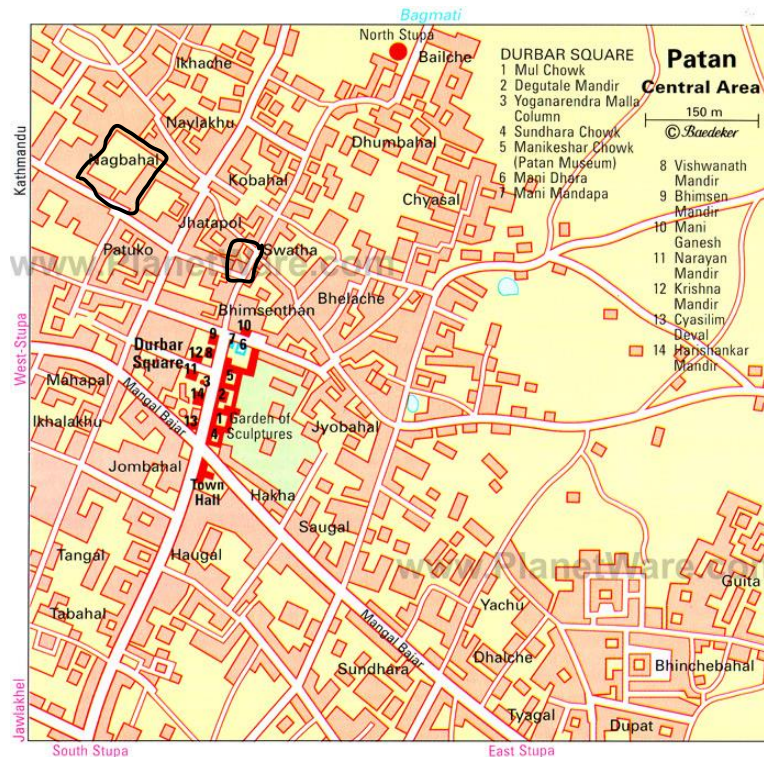


Figure 5 Embedded case study- Choice of neighborhoods: Swotha and Nagbahal. Edited by author- Source:

3.2. Reliability, replicability and validity

In order to ensure **reliability**, the interviews and virtual go-along will be conducted in the local language. The indigenous languages in this case are Newari and/or Nepali. A bilingual survey will be prepared in order to avoid misinterpretations during translation (English and Nepali). The local Newar women are bi-lingual and Nepali, being the country's official language, will be given preference so as to make the data replicable for future researches. However, if Newari is to be used in any case, translations of key terms in the interview guidelines will be done in order to make the data more reliable. Additionally, the interview questions will be tested on a small section of respondents in order to ensure accuracy.

Replicability in research will be addressed through proper documentation of the exact steps taken; indicating how the methodology was designed, the indicators and variables and sources used, in order to standardize the research.

Furthermore, as the case study process is focused on depth, the internal **validity** is high (Thiel, 2014). Finally, triangulation of data will be done by analyzing the data collected from semi-structured interviews, virtual go-along and secondary data such as old photographs, documents and news reports.

3.3. Expected challenges and limitations

3.3.1. Practical limitations

Currently, In Nepal, the second wave of covid-19 pandemic is at large and communities are mostly under strict lockdowns. As such the most pressing limitation will be to arrange time for interview with local women and the other selected key informants as they might have other priorities at this moment. However, this challenge will be overcome by pre-planning.

Another concern might be the willingness of local women to open up fully about certain social contexts such as safety and gender norms in their neighborhood. This is a delicate matter and any subtexts or cultural contexts during interviews will be analyzed by the author's own capacity as being a Newar woman from the same community and having lived experience of such socio-cultural contexts.

Additionally, another pressing concern is the research being conducted from a distance. However, it will be tackled by using participant led virtual go-along as a method to get a more in-depth information from local women about the neighborhood public spaces as well as their relation to the space itself.

3.3.2 External Influences

In regards to the semi-structured interviews, multiple factors can influence the responses of the respondents; as with all disaster cases, the covid-19 pandemic may have affected the value people attach to neighborhood public spaces. Furthermore, virtual go-alongs might not give a 360 degree perspective of the surrounding neighborhood. That being said, the researcher has extensive knowledge about the spatial aspects of both neighborhoods due to having lived there for more than 15 years. Additionally as we are dealing with the perceptions of people, there might be differing ideas due to the local covid-19 preventive measures. However, this will be tackled by the proper formulation of the interview questions, to focus the data collection on the research questions.

3.4. Data collection methods and data sources

The research approach taken is qualitative in order to get rich empirical data. Triangulation will be done on the data sources with secondary data from photographs, documents and news reports, and primary data from semi-structured interviews and virtual go-alongs. The following Figure 6 and Figure 7 depict the routes taken during Virtual go-alongs A and B in the two neighborhoods.



Figure 6 Virtual go-along A, Nagbahal



Figure 7 Virtual go-along B, Swotha

The following table shows the involved stakeholders in the primary data collection.

Table 1 Primary data collection

Data collection method	Stakeholders type	Number of stakeholders	Aim
In depth semi-	Local women Age: 20 years and older	8 (4 per neighborhood)	To understand the perceptions of women regarding sense of belong

structured interviews	Ethnicity: Newar Religion: Any		and neighborhood public space
Virtual go-alongs	Local women	2 (1 per neighborhood; purposive sampling from the group who will be interviewed)	To reframe the past and present relation of women to the neighborhood public space
Semi-structured interviews	Academic expert	1	To understand from an academic standpoint the changes in the neighborhood public space and relation to women
	Socio-cultural group a. <i>Guthi</i> ⁹ b. <i>Tole sudhar samiti</i> ¹⁰ c. <i>Dapha khala</i> ¹¹	4 (2 per neighborhood)	To understand the relation of socio-cultural and symbolic dimension of neighborhood public space to the women

For detailed information on the age, gender, ethnicity, religion, educational background and professional background of interviewees, check **Annex 2**.

3.5. Data Analysis Methods

For the qualitative methods, the semi-structured interviews and virtual go-alongs, it will be analyzed using ATLAS Ti. The qualitative data will be coded as per the indicators of change in neighborhood public space, gender norms and sense of belonging (**Annex 6**). Axial coding will be done in order to identify the relationships between the indicators that can then answer the sub questions of my research.

3.6. Operationalization

The concepts of change in neighborhood public spaces and sense of belonging experienced by local women are measured using multiple indicators. The two concepts are defined specifically in terms of this research as below.

Change in neighborhood public space

The neighborhood public space is a an enclosed or partially enclosed open public space that serves the neighborhood inhabitants in their everyday lives. The change in the neighborhood public space relates to the change in its built environment, the user activities performed in the space and the beliefs and history attached to the space.

Sense of belonging experienced by the local women

Sense of belonging experienced by women is the identification of women within a group in their immediate neighborhood environment, as part of their everyday life experience of the space relating to attachment created through developing and maintaining social relations during the course of their daily routines, livelihood and perceived security in the space.

⁹ A traditional socio-cultural institution of the Newar community in the Kathmandu valley that deals with religious functions and certain social events.

¹⁰ Community development committees

¹¹ Traditional music performance groups

Table 2 Operationalization

Concept	Variables	Indicators	Data Source
1. Change in neighborhood public space (NPS)	1.1. Material dimension	1.1.1. Physical condition of architectural elements within the NPS a) Cleanliness b) Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary data evaluation (photos, painting, written records) • Semi-structured interviews with experts • Semi-structured interviews with local women • Semi-structured interviews with socio-cultural organizations
		1.1.2. Physical change in architectural elements within the NPS in the past 30 years a) Scale b) Material	
		1.1.3. Change in building typology in the past 30 years	
	1.2. Socio-cultural dimension	1.2.1. Everyday activity mapping of inhabitants of the neighborhood in the NPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual go-alongs • Semi-structured interviews • Secondary data evaluation (photos, paintings, written records)
		1.2.2. Major socio-cultural activity mapping in NPS	
		1.2.3. Changes in everyday activities in NPS	
		1.2.4. Changes in socio-cultural activities in NPS	
		1.2.5. Accessibility of NPS	
		1.2.6 Management responsibility of NPS	
	1.3. Symbolic dimension	1.3.1. Stories associated with neighborhood public space (religious beliefs, myths, cultural associations to space)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews with local women • Semi-structured
1.3.2. Change in behavior patterns of different user groups in neighborhood public space			
2. Sense of belonging experienced by the local women	2.1. Social relations	2.1.1. Women's participation in organized socio-cultural groups (Number)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews with local women • Semi-structured
		2.1.2. Women's perception of social relations built within the NPS	

		2.1.3. Women's perception of shared values with other local women	<p>interviews with socio-cultural organizations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual go-alongs 	
		2.1.4. Level of trust among the women of the neighborhood		
	2.2. Daily routines	2.2.1. Women's perception of accessibility of NPS		
		2.2.2. Women's participation in mundane activities in NPS in everyday lives		
		2.2.3. Women's participation in socio-cultural activities in NPS (Jatra ¹² , Puja ¹³ , performance)		
		2.2.4. Frequency of use of NPS by women		
	2.3. Livelihood activities in neighborhood public space	2.3.1. Number of women who own/work in the NPS		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews with local women
		2.3.2. Livelihood aspects that have changed in the past three decades tied to the neighborhood		
		2.3.3. Women's perception of livelihood attached to NPS		
	2.4. Perception of security in the neighborhood public space	2.4.1. Women's perception of risk/vulnerability in the NPS		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews with local women • Virtual go-alongs
2.4.2. women's perception of threats to the NPS				
2.4.3. women's perception of safety within the NPS				
3. Gender	3.1. Change in gender norms	3.1.1. Women's perception of gender norms		
		3.1.2. Women's perception of change in gender norms		

¹² Festivals

¹³ Worship of deity

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Analysis

4.1. Introduction

This section of the research will evaluate the change in neighborhood public spaces in two neighborhoods of Patan (*Swotha Chowk* and *Nagbahal Chowk*), within the time frame of the past three decades, and its effect on the sense of belonging of the local Newar women. It will present the major findings and analyze the data.

This chapter will start with an introduction to Patan and the context of the two NPS, followed by the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and virtual go-alongs in both spaces. The findings from each case will be expanded and compared in the end.

4.2. Background

4.2.1. Patan and its neighborhood public spaces

Traditional Newar towns are characterized by the compactness of their dense settlements with a definitive urban character of the local *Newari* architecture (Chitrakar, 2006; Chitrakar, 2020; Shrestha & Shrestha, 2006). Tiwari (1989) categorizes urban public spaces as the Durbar (palace) square, the market square, the residential neighborhood square and the private residential square. The residential neighborhood square is either in the form of a large enclosed courtyard surrounded by residences used by a homogenous population often belonging to the same clan, or is laid off the street intersection and enclosed only partially by residences (Tiwari S. R., 1989). Traditionally, these spaces are hard landscaped, paved either by stone or brick, and have space defining elements such as a temple, *stupa*¹⁴ and *chaitya*¹⁵, well, *pati*¹⁶, *hiti*¹⁷, *dabali*¹⁸ (Shankar, 2009). The residential neighborhoods are simultaneously social and spatial units that do not exhibit a physical boundary but function as an independent entity (Pant & Funo, 2007; Chitrakar, 2020).

In Patan, the neighborhood public spaces were a venue for everyday life (Hosken, 1974), and people spend much of their time playing traditional games, singing hymns, gossiping, conducting business, resting, drying agricultural harvest and so on. Currently, with an unplanned and rapid urbanization, the urban fabric of the compact traditional settlement of Patan has seen rapid and uncontrolled transformation (Tiwari S. R., 2018), which is evident in the neighborhood public spaces (Pradhan, 2003; Shrestha, 2005; Shah & Pant, 2005). The original role and function of neighborhood public spaces as well as its relation to its inhabitants, particularly the women, are changing as a result. With that, the local women's sense of belonging to the neighborhood in their everyday lives are also being affected, particularly due to their close relationship with their neighborhood *chowks*¹⁹.

4.2.2. Nagbahal Chowk and Swotha Chowk

The two neighborhood public spaces selected for the embedded case study are both located at the heart of the traditional core of Patan city. They are located to the North of the historic center, Patan Durbar Square, which holds the old Malla Palace (now functioning as a museum),

¹⁴ A mound-like structure containing relics or artifacts of a holy person

¹⁵ A structure constructed in the memory of the deceased by their family members, used for public worship by members of the neighborhood

¹⁶ Public rest house that serves as a resting spot for travellers

¹⁷ Traditional Newar stone water spouts

¹⁸ Traditional raised platform for performances

¹⁹ Chowk is a courtyard, neighborhood public space, which can be closed off on all side by residences or semi enclosed with residences and roads. Generally, it can include religious monuments such as temples, stupas, etc as well as pati, dhungedhara, wells and other community structures.

temples and other structures such as a *Hiti* and two *Patis*. Nagbahal and Swotha neighborhoods are both part of Ward 16 and primarily Newar neighborhoods.

Nagbahal houses around 75 households, almost all of whom are Buddhist (interview PD, Nagbahal, 2021). The families from Nagbahal are from Dhakhwa, Shakya, Joshi, Bajracharya, Maharjan and Napit clans. Nagbahal chowk is a rectangular courtyard of around 72.2m x 58.62m with two main entrances to the South and the East. The chowk holds many significant monuments and architectural elements (Figure 8); the Nagbahal Hiti, two Nagbahal Pati/Sattal, Buddhist monastery, grassy park space, Buddha statue, Bull statue, four chaityas and Guthi building.

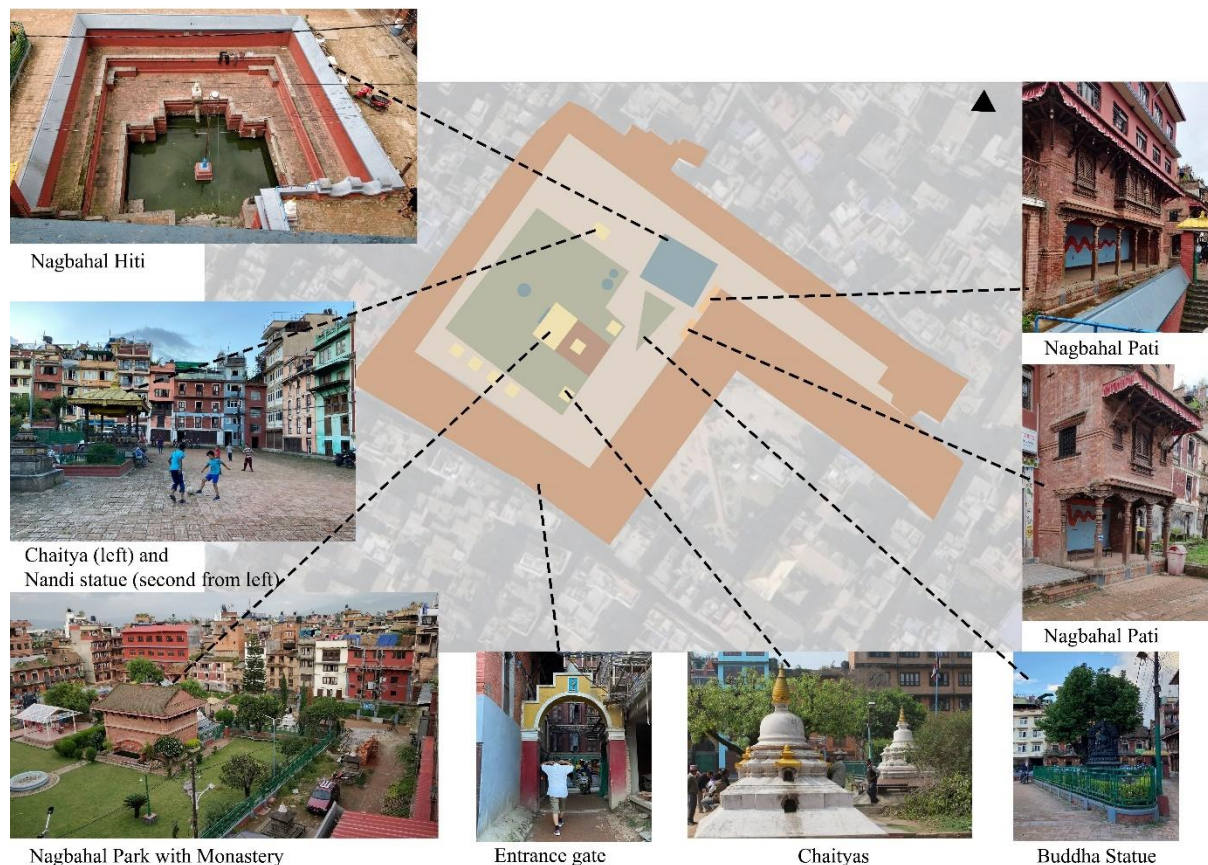


Figure 8 Map of Nagbahal Chowk with important architectural elements

Swotha houses around 40 households, from multiple different ethnicities, majority of whom are Hindus (interview BS, Swotha, 2021). The local²⁰ families are from Shrestha, Amatya, Chitrakar and Joshi clans, while currently there are national and international renters from other castes. It is a bustling neighborhood with two primary roads running North-South and East-West. Two smaller *gallis*²¹ leads to multiple smaller semi-private courtyards in the East and West of the chowk. Swotha chowk, while smaller than Nagbahal chowk, also holds multiple important monuments and architectural elements (Figure 9); The Radha Krishna Temple, Narayan Temple, Krishna Temple, Ganesh temple, Garuda Statue, Nandi statue, Swotha Pati and a well.

²⁰ Local families used as an indication of families with ancestry in the neighborhood (three generations or more having lived in the neighborhood).

²¹ Narrow alleyways that run either along small side streets or under residences through a narrow underpass.

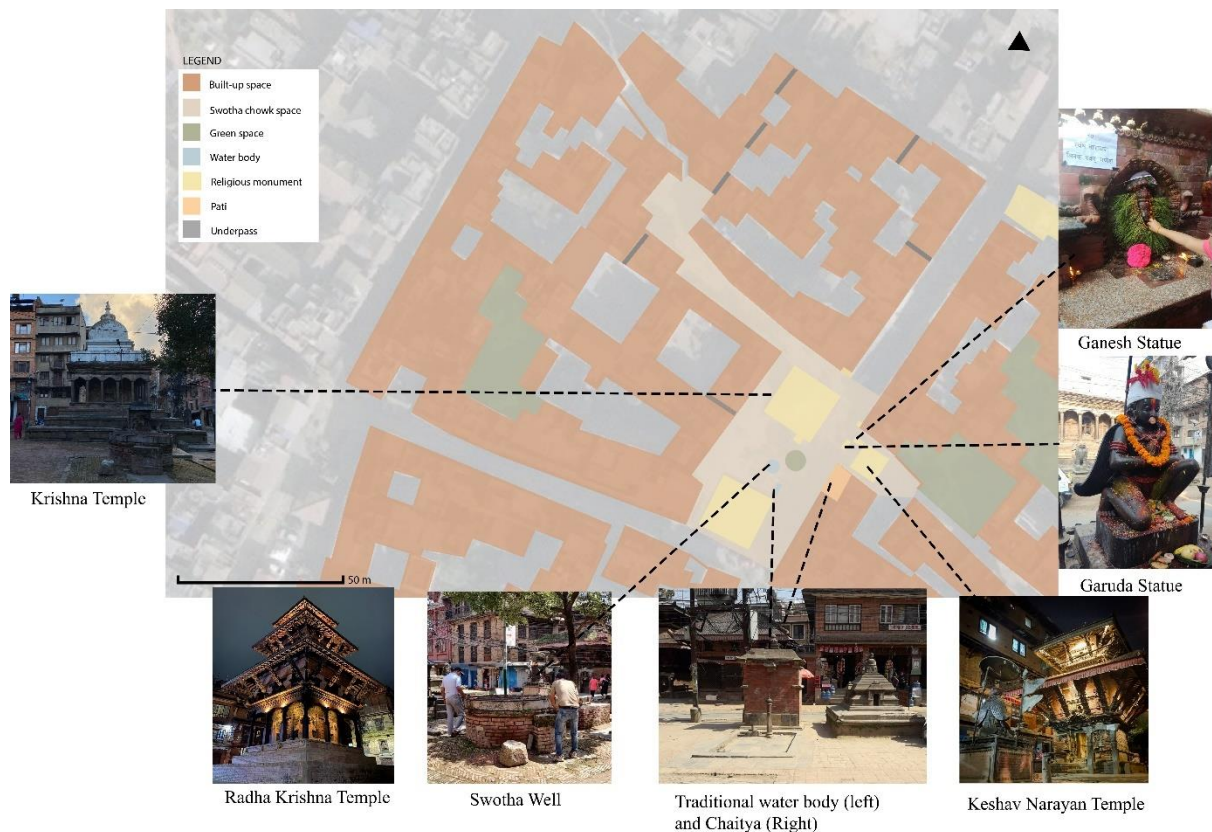


Figure 9 Map of Swotha Chowk with important architectural elements

4.3 Data collection

This part will start with a look into the contexts of the two neighborhoods separately and conclude with a comparison and analysis of key findings from the data collected from both neighborhoods. Note that the indicators will be specified in **bold** and quotes from interviews will be specified in *“Italics”*.

4.3.1. Nagbahal Chowk

4.3.1.1. Material dimension: Change and reasons for change

According to the interview with an expert architect, historically, in terms of the material dimension, Newari chowks have been surrounded by three storied traditional residential houses with pitched, overhanging roofs, constructed in typical Newari style architecture with the primary use of bricks (Dachi appa²² and Ma appa²³), mud mortar and decorative wooden elements (Photograph 1 Traditional Newari Residences, Nagbahal, 1980sPhotograph 1).

²² Traditional wedge shaped veneer bricks fired at high temperatures, dark red in color and smooth glossy finish, Dachi appa was traditionally used for the façade of tiered temples, palaces and some residences. Traditionally, they were made of special mortar called silay, made up of pine resin, mixed with vermilion powder.

²³ Traditional structural bricks used for the inside part of the walls of tiered temples, palaces and residences. These bricks differ to Dachi appa in width and thickness, and in their rough finish.



Photograph 1 Traditional Newari Residences, Nagbahal, 1980s

Source: Representative of Tole Sewak Samiti, Nagbahal



Photograph 2 Same houses as figure 8 in 2021

Interviewees from Nagbahal lament about the change in the residential **building material and typology**, from the traditional Newari architecture to the modern concrete buildings (Photograph 1, Photograph 2). Additionally, they mentioned the **change in the scale** of the residential buildings in the neighborhood, from 3 storey buildings to 4-5 storey ones currently.

“Before, the architecture of the houses were in traditional Newar style. 28 years ago, almost 75 houses were all in traditional Newari style. They had the traditional Akhi-jhyal²⁴. Just looking at it, it reflected “Newaripan”²⁵. Now, almost 75% of houses are modern style.” (2:38 Virtual Go-alongs A, Nagbahal)

Previously, the human scale of the residences helped the women form bonds with neighbor kids during their childhood years.

“When I was young, I could go from one roof terrace to another to play...Now, there are new houses, their heights are different.” (4:24, Local woman, PS, Nagbahal)

While major changes in the material dimensions have been made to the residential buildings, other structures have also been reconstructed and **maintained** in the past three decades. However, these structures, owing to their religious significance and their public nature, were renovated using traditional techniques and design. In Photograph 3, Photograph 4 and Photograph 5, the renovations of the public architectural elements of the Nagbahal park can be observed as being done according to traditional Newari style. In terms of **cleanliness**, interviewees remark the increase in cleanliness and maintenance of the Nagbahal chowk due to the change in the local people’s outlook towards quality of life as well as local government initiatives.

“When we were younger, it wasn’t so clean and well maintained. It was only later that its maintenance took precedence and local government also gave attention to it. Before, when we were kids, there were no toilets inside the house, so people would just defecate in the chowk and the alleyways. It was very difficult.” (26:10, Local woman, BS, Nagbahal)

²⁴ Traditional wooden lattice windows, decorative or simple based on the financial status of the families.

²⁵ Used to denote the spirit of being a Newar



Photograph 3 Two Nagbahal Pati after renovation in Neri architectural style in 2010s

Source: Shrestha, 2021



Photograph 4 Renovated Nagbahal Hiti during cultural music event, 2016

Source: Representative of Tole Sewak Samiti, Nagbahal



Photograph 5 Renovated Nagbahal Park during local event, 2021

Source: Representative of Tole Sewak Samiti, Nagbahal

With regards to the **changes**, the local women believe that while the change in the building typology was to the detriment of the traditional character of Nagbahal chowk, it came about as a necessity. Furthermore, they remarked that the renovations of the other elements of Nagbahal chowk were done due to deterioration of water channels (for Nagbahal Hiti) and changing needs of the community (for Nagbahal Pati and Nagbahal park). While all the residences have provision of tap water, there is still an issue of water scarcity. So, the people in Nagbahal have to rely on the ancient Hiti and an underground water tank for water even to this day.

While these changes have reasons, all interviewees stressed a disjointed sense of identity with the modern buildings. With that being said, this neighborhood has a strong sense of pride regarding the Nagbahal chowk. So much so that even women who have been married away from the neighborhood still consider Nagbahal chowk their space.

“To tell you the truth, I don’t think the architecture reflects our identity now. People have really just made buildings according to their own wishes and there is no cohesion.” (6:50, Local woman, SS, Nagbahal)

“I personally like the typical traditional style buildings. It brought me joy and relief. Now it looks like a foreign place.” (Virtual go-along A, Nagbahal)

4.3.1.2. Socio-cultural dimension: Change and reasons for change

Three decades ago, Nagbahal chowk was used for multiple purposes, from **everyday activities** like morning temple visits, getting water from the Nagbahal Hiti, playing and even defecating in the chowk (no functioning toilets in the residences) to special activities such as religious festivals, performances and feasts. However, the Nagbahal chowk has seen many changes since then, from its use (barring the religious activities) to management.

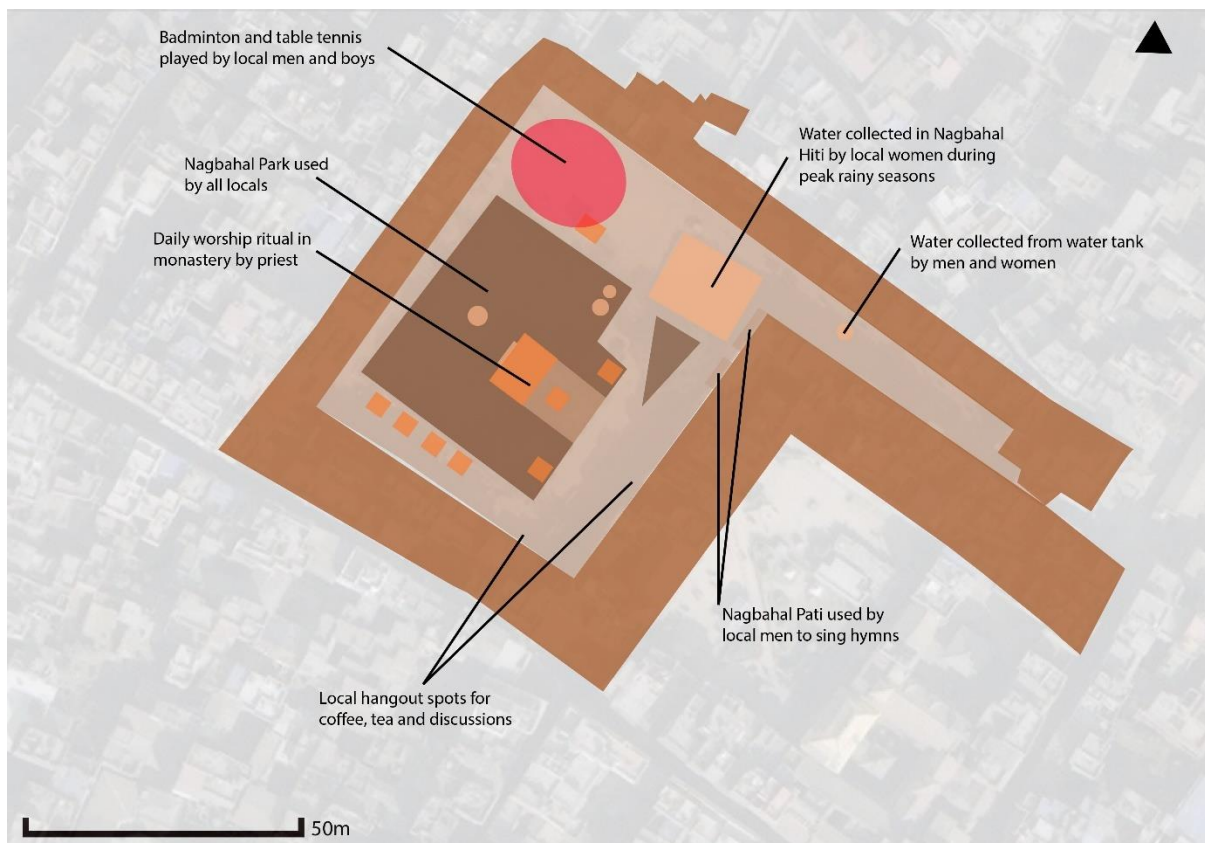


Figure 10 Everyday activity mapping in Nagbahal Chowk

While around 14 years back Nagbahal used to be primarily a residential neighborhood, with the establishment of the Bed and Breakfast place, Dhakhwa House, the use of the chowk started to change to include more commercial activities. Furthermore, new activities for relaxation and recreation have taken over the Nagbahal chowk. The locals, especially women, have taken to going for morning walks around the chowk or in the park. Some of them connect this with their morning grocery shopping for which they visit either Swotha chowk, Patan Durbar Square or Lagankhel market square. Local youths (men) play badminton and table-tennis on the north-west side of the chowk regularly (Photograph 6). There are multiple coffee/tea shops within the Nagbahal chowk now on the ground floors of the residences where locals now congregate to talk about issues within the neighborhood or just gossip.

“People still go to worship in the temples. Now people go for morning walks. They didn’t do that before. There were plenty of activities that would account for the physical exercise. Now people don’t have enough physically strenuous activities to do, so they go on morning walks,

go to the markets, buy vegetables, talk to people and come back.” (20:57, Local woman, SS, Nagbahal)



Photograph 6 Local men playing badminton, Nagbahal Chowk

Source: Representative of Tole Sewak Samiti, Nagbahal

Additionally, locals also make use of Nagbahal Chowk for parking purposes even though it is not open to parking for non-residents (Virtual go-along A, Nagbahal). That being said, during events, parking does take up a lot of space in the chowk as observed in Photograph 7.



Photograph 7 Parking in Nagbahal Chowk, 2021

Source: Representative of Tole Sewak Samiti, Nagbahal

However, with regards to **socio-cultural activities**, while there hasn't been a significant change in religious functions and festivals, more and more of the public space elements are being used as spaces of exhibition and performance in terms of preservation of culture (traditional music, dance, art) as shown in Photograph 4. Spaces that had lost their importance in everyday life activities such as the Nagbahal Hiti and Nagbahal Pati due changes in local's needs, are now being used by the locals in new ways such as music events, art exhibitions and cultural fairs (Photograph 4, Photograph 5 and Photograph 7)

The active areas of the major festivals within Nagbahal chowk as well as the role of women in them are listed in Table 3 (representative, *Tole Sewak Samiti*).

Name of Festival	Frequency	Participation of local women	Active area within Nagbahal Chowk
Samyek	Once every 5 years	Women participate in the worship and not management	Area in front of residences around the Nagbahal Chowk
Matya	Every year	Women participate in the pilgrimage	Alleyways, Nagbahal Monastery, Nagbahal Pati
Dipankha Yatra	Every 18 years or so	Women participate in the pilgrimage	Statue of Bull in Nagbahal chowk

Table 3 Festivals in Nagbahal Chowk

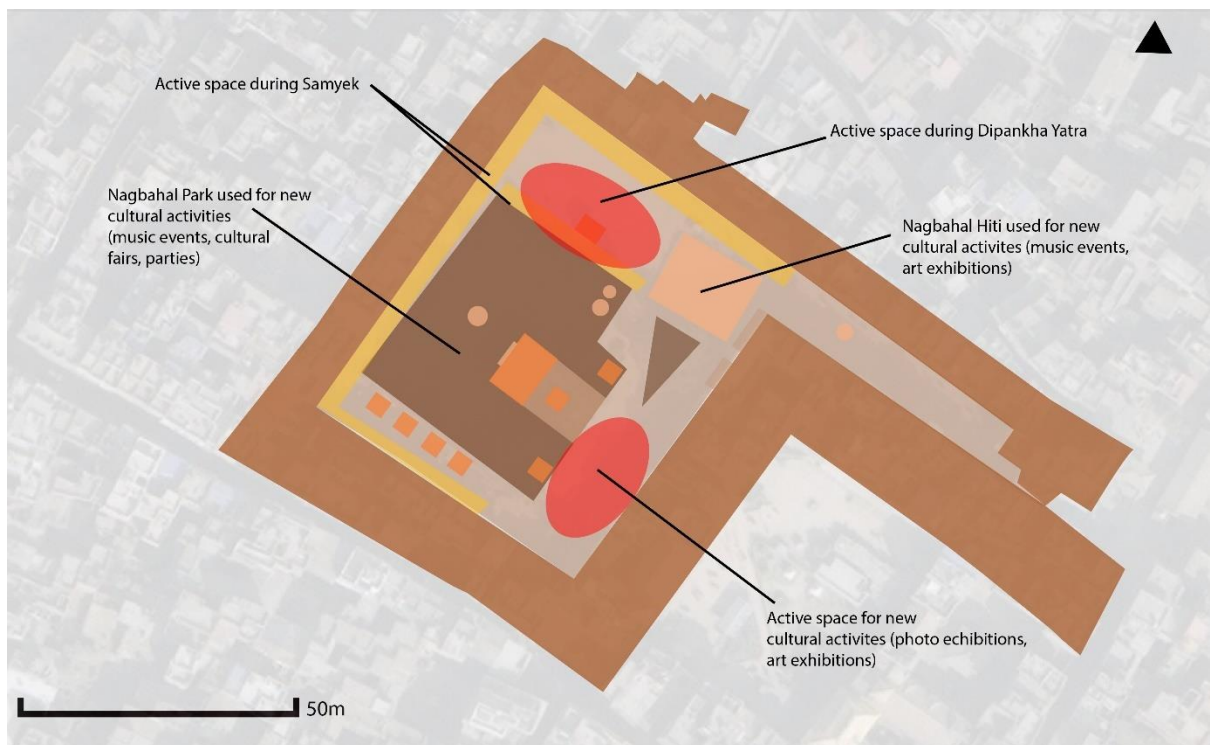


Figure 11 Socio-cultural activity mapping in Nagbahal Chowk

For more detail information about the festivals as well as photographs, check **Annex 4**.

Throughout the past three decades, Nagbahal chowk has been **accessible** to all visitors. However, during 2020-2021 Covid-19 caused increasing suspicion towards non-locals, the local people going so far as to barring the Nagbahal chowk from outside entry by non-locals. The social organizations managed vegetable stalls and necessary everyday utilities to be brought to the neighborhood in order to decrease the amount of interaction with non-locals. However, as soon as the threat of the covid-19 virus decreased, Nagbahal chowk has been accessible to all again.

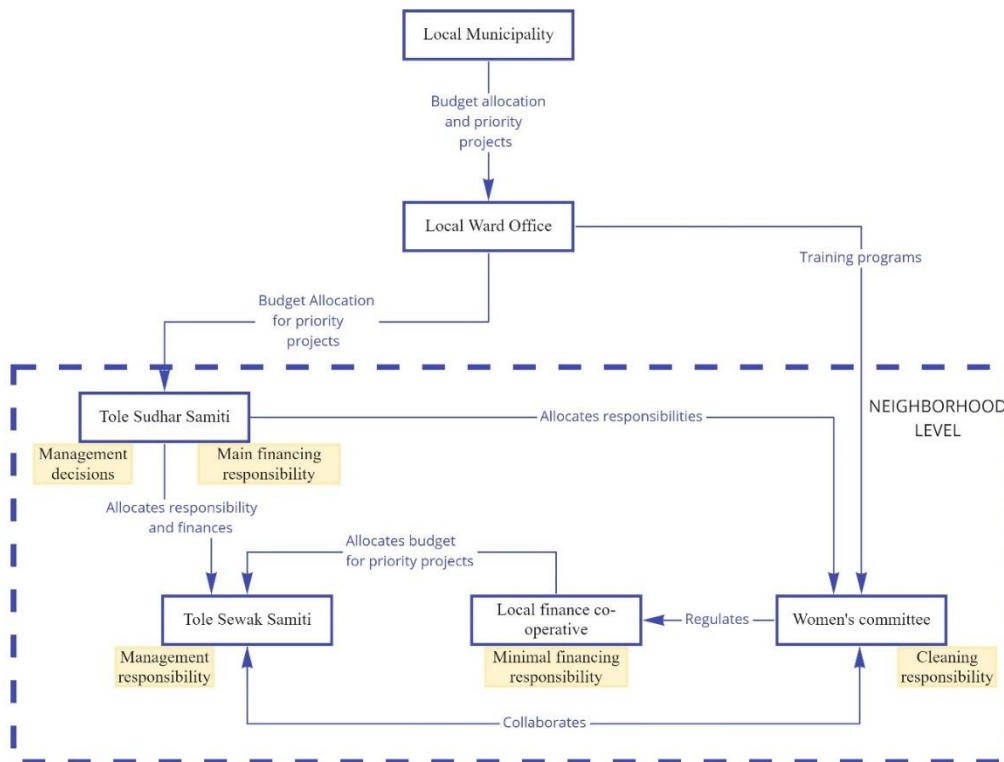


Figure 12 Organizational hierarchy and their relationships, Nagbahal

The **management** of the Nagbahal Hiti, Nagbahal Pati as well as the Nagbahal Park is done collectively by the socio-cultural organizations active in Nagbahal (Figure 12). The Lalitpur Municipality allocates the budget for different projects within Lalitpur, from where the funds go to the Ward Offices. They are then responsible to allocate budgets among the different neighborhoods within their jurisdiction. The Ward no. 16 provides the budget for the Tole Sudhar Samiti in Nagbahal who then allocates the necessary funds and responsibilities of management of the Nagbahal chowk to the Tole Sewak Samiti. While the Tole Sudhar Samiti are not active in the maintenance and management of the Nagbahal chowk, the main decisions lie on their hands. The Tole Sewak Samiti then co-ordinates with the local finance co-operative, that is regulated by the local women’s committee, for any special activities or functions as well as management of the Nagbahal chowk. The role of local socio-cultural organizations have increased in the past decade, with women and youths also starting to take up stronger roles, however, slowly that may be.

4.3.1.3. Symbolic dimension: Change and reasons for change

With regards to symbolic dimension, a major change has been women having the liberty to use the Nagbahal chowk for more activities than just everyday household duties (temple visits, water collection and cleaning). It is clear that people’s **attitudes** towards the Nagbahal chowk and its use have changed. Interviews with the local women and representative of Tole Sewak Samiti show that women now have more financial freedom due to being involved in income generating activities, within or outside the neighborhood, due to which they have to stay out of the house for longer hours and come to the Nagbahal chowk during later hours than before. Additionally, the younger generation have more educational opportunities, for which they have to travel to their schools. Beyond that, local women now have an **active participation** within the Nagbahal chowk for casual gatherings with friends without any household activities involved.

Remarking on the change in gender norms, interviewees observed **behavioral changes** shown by more connections with everyone in the neighborhood, regardless of gender as well as change in men's roles in domestic responsibilities.

"While before men didn't go to get water from the hitis before, now the job of getting water is done mostly by men there." (Virtual go-along A, Nagbahal)

4.3.1.4. Sense of belonging: Perception of local women

Following the previous sub-point, local women have a more active role in the management and maintenance of the Nagbahal chowk through their membership in the women's committee as well as the local finance collective. This has also strengthened the bonds of trust and comradery between women in the neighborhood as well leading to strong **social relations**.

"Before, women couldn't really meet their friends outside as freely. Now there's a lot of freedom to meet your friends here and I make plans to meet friends every month. We have all invested in small financial cooperatives. Before, we wouldn't even go to the market by ourselves! And now we invest together, not to make money but to have an excuse to meet up often." (28:45, Representative of women's committee, PD, Nagbahal)

While this is so, their roles are still not on an equal level with men. Interviews with the local women as well as the representative of the Tole Sewak Samiti makes it clear that while there have been major progress with regards to women's participation in socio-cultural as well as mundane activities in the Nagbahal chowk, their **daily routines** often relate to care/domestic work and not decision making work. The representative of the Tole Sewak Samiti mentioned that in the 20 years that they have been working in the neighborhood, women haven't had a seat on the board.

"The Chaityas²⁶ are painted, maintained by the women's committee every year. Planting flowers and maintaining the park, the women's committee do it too." (Virtual go-along A, Nagbahal)

"The women prepare all the necessary items for the puja²⁷ and then the puja itself is done by the men. Women have to just slave away. Women do all the work but the puja ritual has to be done by the men." (22:35, Local woman, BS, Nagbahal)

During the Virtual go-along A, our interviewee remarked that while evening time is the most active use time of Nagbahal chowk, women are using the space for lesser time than men.

"Hmm there aren't many women. They finish their duties at the office and come home and then they have the duties to do at home like cooking. In the morning they go to the temples, do the morning walk, go shopping for groceries in vegetable markets." (Virtual go-along A, Nagbahal)

However, local women still had a remarkable attachment to the Nagbahal chowk due to its provision of safe space for relaxation for themselves and their children. When asked about why Nagbahal chowk is important to them, interviewees remarked:

"Here our kids can play outside, we can sit outside. Here, our kids meet each other, learn from each other. I also remember my childhood when I used to play there too." (47:22, Local woman, SS, Nagbahal)

²⁶ Buddhist structure used for worship.

²⁷ Worship ritual

“ There are lots of programs and activities conducted in the chowk. So even still people still feel like my own people because of the cultural activities, lifestyle, habits.” (38:22, Local woman, BS, Nagbahal)

In terms of **livelihood** within the Nagbahal chowk, more women in the neighborhood are working due to leaps in education opportunities and lower stigma on office work for women. Out of all interviewed women, all were employed except one who was a student. However, when asked about livelihood aspects within the Nagbahal chowk, 2 interviewees didn't consider women as working in local small businesses but it being run by the family even though during the virtual go-along, women were running the stores. Even now, women working in formal jobs in offices are considered working women while women who contribute to their family businesses aren't.

“Well there can be women working within the neighborhood. I don't think so. Maybe they work at their own homes but not really outside.” (25:47, Local woman, RS, Nagbahal)

“The tea shops and bed and breakfasts aren't run by women. They are run by the family. It is in their own homes, so families run it.” (25:01, Local woman, PD, Nagbahal)

Local women's **perception of security** is high within the neighborhood even during night because of how strong the neighborhood bond is. Additionally, due to additions of street lighting and renovation works in the Nagbahal chowk by the initiative of the local government bodies, local women perceive the space as being safe. Furthermore, as mentioned in the interviews, all except one household have ancestral roots in the neighborhood which makes them feel secure in each other's presence.

“The neighborhood is a good neighborhood. People are good here. If anyone has any problems, people come and help to solve it. Also because our Nagbahal doesn't have any renters living here. In other places, they have renters from outside. So we are very safe. Everyone is our own people so I feel safe. No outsiders. These days in many neighborhoods, people go live in different houses and rent their old house to outsiders. You don't know these people and it's not safe. But in our Nagbahal, everyone is our people so it's safe.” (26:57, Local woman, PD, Nagbahal)

4.3.2. Swotha Chowk

4.3.2.1. Material dimension: Change and reasons for change

Historically, the architecture of Swotha neighborhood was also the same as Nagbahal, with Newari architecture featured prominently in the residences. In Swotha, the traditional **building material** has been preserved (at least in façade) and renovated with modern techniques to fit the functional requirements of the current local's needs (Photograph 8, Photograph 9). Decorative lattice windows that were featured in the residential buildings 30 years ago got replaced by more functional neo-classical style windows to let in more light into the households. In the observations during the virtual go-along B, it was noted that few buildings had retained the traditional **scale** of architecture (Photograph 8).

“Houses are made with concrete now and not with mud mortar and brick. Our three houses are the only remaining old ones. The others have built modern houses but with traditional facade, without using the traditional materials.” (3:39, Local woman, MJ, Swotha)



Photograph 8 Comparison between south of Swotha Chowk, 1990s to 2019
Source: Raghubanshi, 2019



Photograph 9 Traditional facade maintained in Swotha chowk residences
Source: Shrestha, 2021

While the need for functionality was addressed, the locals here kept to the traditional facades in order to preserve the cultural identity of the neighborhood and also for the commercial value of such a preservation as well. According to an interview with the owner of CosyNepal²⁸, the inspiration for the preservation came after a team of architects and conservationists from Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, a local conservation body, approached the neighborhood residents regarding creation of homestays in traditional houses in the Swotha chowk. This started a chain reaction of **changing building typology**, from primarily residential buildings to mixed use and commercial buildings in the past 20 years.

“Now Swotha tole has become very commercial. Most of the houses have homestays or restaurants. Before this used to be a residential neighborhood. There was even a garden/field where people would come and work. The houses were also old and there were no hotels or restaurants. Now there is a huge focus on tourism and the neighborhood has been commercialized.” (7:43, Local woman, MJ, Swotha)

Due to the increase in homestays and bed and breakfasts in Swotha, more and more people started renting out their residences and opening restaurant businesses and different types of shops ranging from handicraft shops to grocery shops (Photograph 10, Photograph 11). This has led to an increase in the land price according to the local women and expert.

“There are many organizations like the UN in Patan so once they started coming in to stay in our homestays, the value of the Swotha neighborhood started growing. Plots that were not attractive to buyers became of high value. Slowly the restaurant businesses started growing.” (14:11, Local woman, SS, Swotha)

²⁸ First bed and breakfast place established in Swotha



Photograph 10 Local small business (right: woman run store)

Source: Shrestha, 2021



Photograph 11 Local handicraft store run by Japanese tenant (woman run store)

Source: Shrestha, 2021

In the last decade, socio-cultural organizations became more active regarding the **maintenance and cleanliness** of Swotha chowk. Regular clean-up drives are done by the women's committee and all interviewees find the space aesthetically pleasing.

"It is accessible by all. Nobody stops anyone. They can come, sit there, have food, take pictures." (12:54, Local woman, LS, Swotha)

That being said, the local women do feel that the Newar identity has been preserved due to the commercialization of this traditional Newar neighborhood.

"Before, the houses used to be of mud mortar and brick construction. Now it is concrete with a traditional facade. That makes a huge difference. The old houses used to have lower ceiling heights, now they are higher. But they've kept the roofs similar, with jhingati²⁹ tiles. But I do think it represents the Newar identity." (3:06, Local woman, LS, Swotha)

4.3.1.2. Socio-cultural dimension: Change and reasons for change

Contrary to Nagbahal chowk, Swotha chowk is a smaller chowk. Having said that, there were still multiple activities conducted within the space three decades, from **everyday activities** such as temple visits, water collection in the well and handpump and hymns singing in the Swotha Sattal³⁰, to special religious activities like festivals and feasts.

While around 20 years back Swotha used to be primarily a residential neighborhood, with the establishment of the homestay, Cozy Nepal, the chowk started becoming more commercialized. While it led to a lot of "development" according to a local woman, it is becoming more uncontrolled to the point that locals can't use the space as they used to before the commercialization. Additionally, the commercialization has attracted informal stall owners to flock to the Swotha Chowk during morning and evening time (Photograph 11, Photograph 12).

"Slowly it has been commercialized but before when we started, we used to live there as well and work there too. It was a very fun place. Now it has become very crowded. Almost uncontrolled. Before, we (the locals) used to be out in the chowk having fun. Now, there are lunch spots, restaurants and all and the space that was used by locals, where kids would play has lost its sense of privacy for the locals." (16:52, Local woman, SS, Swotha)

²⁹ Traditional roof tiles made of clay

³⁰ Similar to a pati, with another extra storage space



Photograph 12 Informal stalls set up by non-locals during morning hours (vegetable sellers), 2021
Source: Shrestha, 2021



Photograph 13 Informal stall set up by non-local during evening hours (vegetable seller), 2021
Source: Shrestha, 2021



Figure 13 Everyday activities mapping in Swotha Chowk

Swotha chowk, currently has become a highly commercialized area which has led to a massive **change in the everyday users** of the space. While previously the space would be used primarily by the locals, now more and more non-local people are seen visiting the many restaurants and cafes in the area (Figure 13), primarily during the evening time (5-8 PM). This has made the space **less accessible to the locals**, especially elderly women (Local woman, SS, Swotha). This boom in commercial activity was in part a result of locals renting their households and going away to live in the sub-urbs. By doing so, the number of elderly people in the area have significantly decreased (women’s committee representative, Swotha).

“The change that I have noticed is that, mostly where we used to see local people have now been open to most outsiders as well. With the change in situation, more outsiders are also visible there, because of the cafes, because of the parking reasons. Before it used to be just people from different tole coming together and someone gathering to collect water. Now, mostly what I see is parking space.” (10:47, Expert architect, Swotha)

Similar to Nagbahal chowk, traditional water sources are not used as they were three decades ago. While previously the well in Swotha chowk used to be a very active space for local women to gather water for everyday lives, now it is not so. According to the interview with local women, the well is now connected to a water pump which distributes water to the residences in the neighborhood (Photograph 14).

“Before, most people used to stay home every day so women would be in the chowk making conversations. But not anymore. Comparatively it's less. In terms of daily activities, there are restaurants and shops that people come to open and use. So the commercial activities go throughout the day. But the old activities such as people coming to the pati to sing Bhajans, women getting water from the well, that's not there anymore.” (10:38, Local woman, MJ, Swotha)



Photograph 14 Traditional well in Swotha Chowk now closed by bars on top, 2010s
Source: Cosy Nepal, 2021



Photograph 15 Swotha Pati closed off to public, 2010s
Source: Shrestha, 2021

Additionally, the Swotha Pati was closed off to public besides on special occasions over a decade ago by the Tole Sudhar Samiti in Swotha (Photograph 15). This was done due to an increase of theft of ancient statues from temples in the area.

“Besides architecture, the community has changed. When I was small, my father used to sit in the pati in the Swotha chowk. When my mother would tell me to go call my father for food, I'd see him with all his friends hanging out at the pati. Now the pati is still there but the people are not there. The pati has been modernized a bit but the gatherings don't happen anymore.” (5:17, Local woman, MJ, Swotha)

There were further issues to the change in the activities in Swotha chowk. Up till 8 years ago, parking was a major issue in Swotha chowk (Photograph 17). According to the interviews with local women, people who would be visiting Patan Durbar Square area would come to park their vehicles in Swotha chowk. It got to a point where the locals had to band together and seal off the area and make it a no-parking zone (Photograph 16). This, however, was a contested decision as almost half of the inhabitants were against it. Another issue that divided the neighborhood was the issue of informal stalls run by non-local people. While one can still observe these informal stalls in the Swotha chowk, it is better regulated by the Tole Sudhar Samiti now.

“Before there used to be people parking their bikes and cars there to the point that there would be no open space. It affected everyone, the businesses, shops, and locals. Locals wouldn’t be able to take out their bikes either. No space for them. Random people would just park there and then head away for the whole day so now that’s not allowed. Now they’re not allowed to do that. They’d occupy the whole space.” (19:14, Local woman, LS, Swotha)



Photograph 16 No Parking sign instalment in Swotha Chowk, 2018

Source: Swotha Tole, 2021



Photograph 17 Parking of motorcycles in Swotha chowk, 2021 (left) and 2017 (right)

Source: Shrestha and Amatya, 2021

Similar to Nagbahal chowk, **socio-cultural activities** haven’t seen significant change and new activities are being developed within the space such as art exhibitions, music events and cultural fairs (Photograph 18). With these new activities, connecting spaces such as the underpasses and narrow alleyways have received different purposes (Photograph 18).



Photograph 18 Cultural exhibition, 2019
Source: Representative of Women's Committee

According to the representative of the local *Women's committee*, there are multiple religious festivals that take place within the Swotha chowk as listed in Table 4.

Name of Festival	Frequency	Participation of local women	Active area within Nagbahal Chowk
Narayan Puja	Once every year	Women participate in the worship and also in ritual carrying of palanquin with Lord Narayan's statue	Area in front of Narayan temple, Swotha Pati
Ganesh Puja	Once every year	Women participate in the pilgrimage	Alleyways, Narayan Temple
Krishna Puja	Once every year	Women participate in the pilgrimage	Krishna temple and Radha Krishna temple

Table 4 Festivals in Swotha chowk

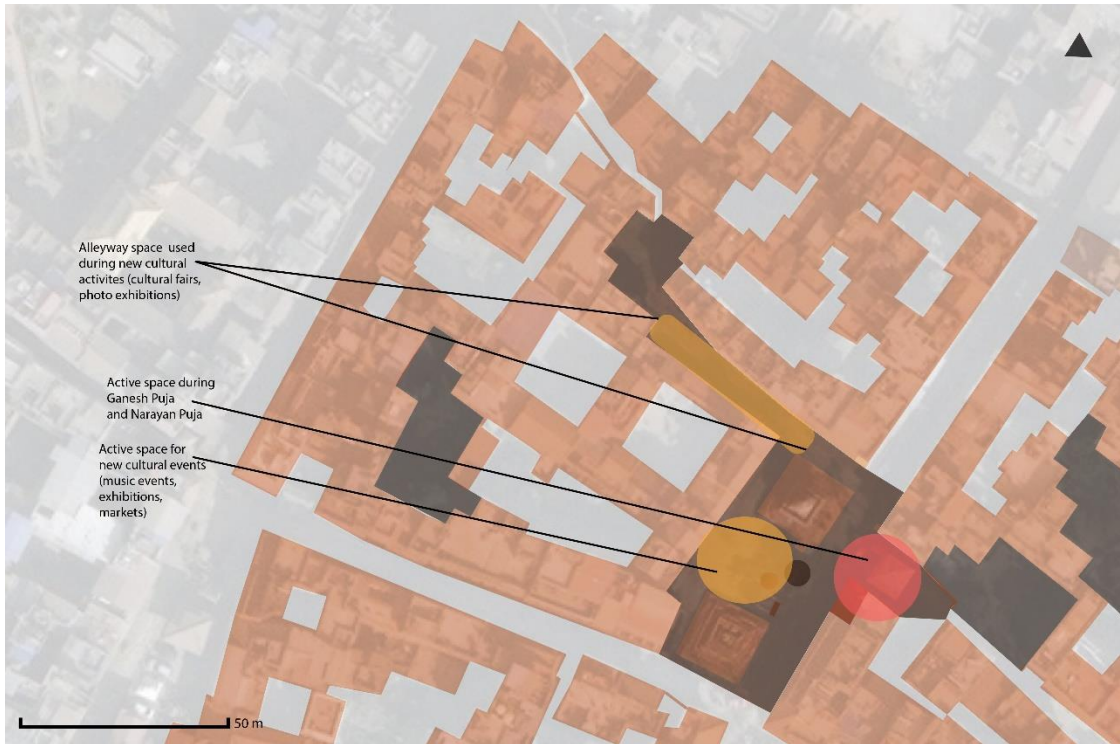


Figure 14 Socio-cultural activities mapping in Swotha Chowk

For more detailed information and photographs of festivals see **Annex 5**

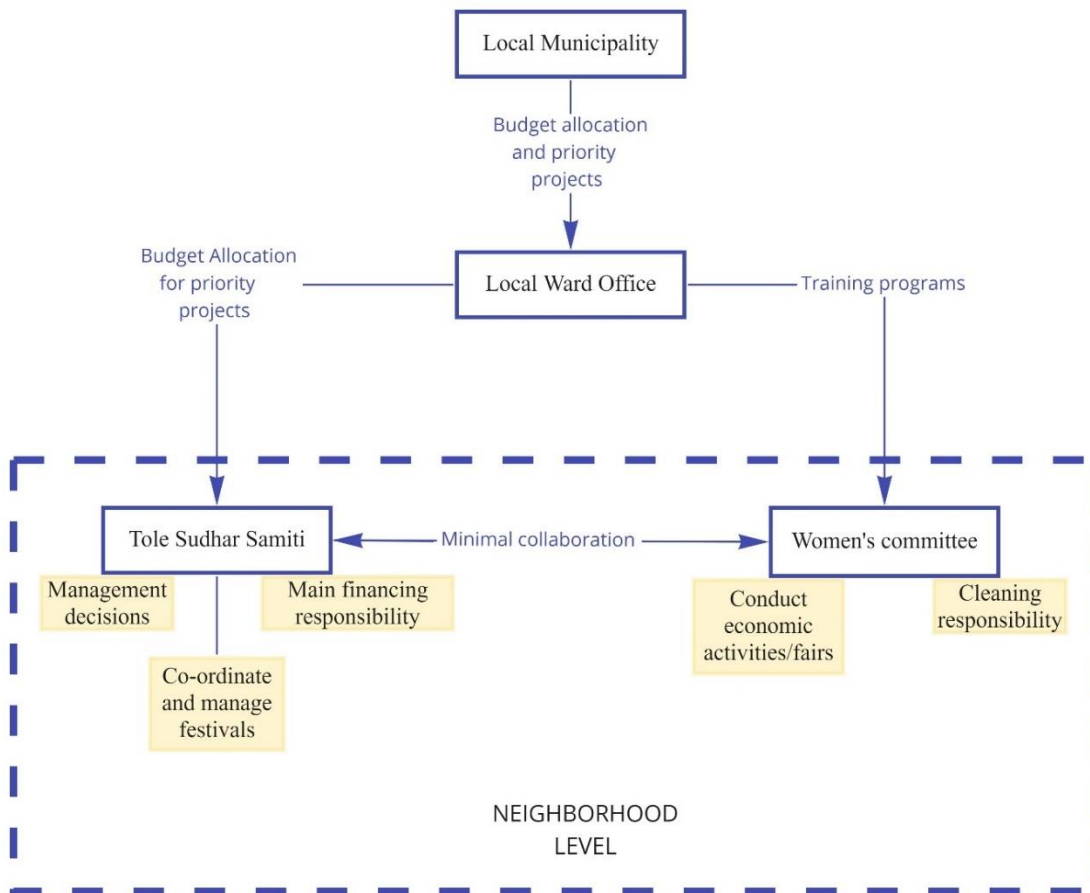


Figure 15 Organizational hierarchy and relationships, Swotha

In terms of **management**, Swotha doesn't have as much of a unified approach and socio-cultural organizations within Swotha have minimal coordination. The organizational hierarchy in Swotha is slightly different to Nagbahal, owing to less number of active socio-cultural organizations (Figure 15). Lalitpur Municipality allocates the budget for different projects within Lalitpur, from where the funds go to the Ward Offices. They are then responsible to allocate budgets among the different neighborhoods within their jurisdiction. The Ward no 16 provides the budget for the Tole Sudhar Samiti in Swotha who then decide on priority issues in the neighborhood such as keeping the Swotha chowk clean, cleaning of temples and maintenance of temples. The main decision making role is with the Tole Sudhar Samiti, run by local men. However, according to the interviews with the local women and representative of the women's committee, the Tole Sudhar Samiti is not as active in the major issues such as parking and informal food stalls. The women's committee receives training, mostly related to economic development (sewing, weaving, cooking, baking, knitting, etc.), from the Ward office. That being said, there is more of a disconnect between the general public and the socio-cultural organizations, as all activities are focused highly on economics.

4.3.1.3. Symbolic dimension: Change and reasons for change

With regards to symbolic dimension, a major change has been women having the financial freedom and livelihood opportunities within the Swotha chowk. This came about mostly due to the commercialization of the Swotha chowk and the increased education levels among the neighborhood women. According to the interviewed local women, most women up to their 40s now are educated and work. That being said, the local women's **attitudes** towards the Swotha chowk and the meaning they attach to it has changed.

"The thing is, I am quite overwhelmed by all the homestays that had has been growing here because how many can you make? Can't you do something different?" (3:52, Local woman, SA, Swotha)

"Sometimes it feels like a familiarly unfamiliar space with all the activities going on around there. And all the ins and all the modern adaptation of Newari facade. Sometimes I question what is going on here." (Virtual go-along B, Swotha)

Additionally, due to the multiple restaurants and café businesses in the chowk, youngsters of Swotha use it to hang out with their friends in those spaces. Swotha chowk has now become more of a hang out spot for hundreds of people who come to Patan Durbar Square and later disperse to other neighborhoods as well. So for younger generation the Swotha chowk has a more recreational **meaning** than religious (which is for older generation of 50 years and above).

4.3.1.4. Sense of belonging: Perception of local women

Similar to Nagbahal chowk, local women in Swotha have a more active role in the maintenance (especially cleanliness) of the chowk. Members of the women's committee support each other in their many financial endeavors (Photograph 19) and have strong **social relations** according to interviewees.

"Even now when they (women's committee) generally go for a meeting, my mother brings something around saying that her friend made this Nimki (Newari sweet) so she bought it. So like I said more or less when they gather even for a meeting, even if there is no event and if somebody made something, they'll buy it for their friend out of courtesy." (33:48, Local woman, SA, Swotha)

On the other hand, one interviewee had qualms about how the women's committee and even the Tole Sudhar Samiti focused only on financial issues of their members and not about the bigger collective issues of the neighborhood. They argued it was because of their unattachment to the neighborhood.

“But there is one small organization called *KunJhya Misa Pucha* (women’s committee of Swotha). But they meet up sometimes to do business and are active during times for business but they’re not active in the issues of the neighborhood. For example: during *Yomari Punhi*³¹, they set up a stall to sell *Yo: mari*³², they earn from it but at the end of the day they don’t know how to manage the crowd caused by their stall, they don’t know how to clean up after their day is done. They’ve developed in terms of the income and economics but they don’t consider any of the core issues of the neighborhood. It’s because the people are renters. They think only about money because they don’t feel attached to the space.” (48:18, Local woman, SS, Swotha)



Photograph 19 Local woman selling yo:mari during Craft and Culture festival, 2019
Source: Amatya, 2021



Photograph 20 Local woman selling handmade products during Craft and Culture festival, 2019
Source: Amatya, 2021

Multiple interviewees noted that while the space has been more active, local women’s **daily routine** have been affected by the commercial boom in Swotha.

“It used to be so fun! During evening we would hang out together and gossip. It was so refreshing.” (51:01, Local woman, SS, Swotha)

During the virtual go-along B, the interviewee noted that:

“There aren’t as many people sitting outdoors much. Before, people used to stay outdoor in the Chowk during evenings. These days people come around to do puja in the mornings and you get to talk to them. But people don’t sit idle on the chowk these days.”

However, the local women interviewed did feel attachment to the Swotha chowk but more so in the sense of **livelihood** opportunities and development of their neighborhood. When asked about why Nagbahal chowk is important to them, one interviewee remarked:

“Oh yes, very important. All our programs happen here. Everything we do, we do in the chowk. So it is very important for each and every work.” (22:41, Representative of women’s committee, GS, Swotha)

Another interviewee finds the chowk important because of old memories attached to the space.

“For me, when I was younger we used to play inside in our private courtyard but my mother used to be in the public chowk. That space would feel so welcoming. That was my best space. We could meet everyone there.” (53:12, Local woman, SS, Swotha)

Local women’s **perception of security** is high during day time but low during night within the neighborhood due to the presence of “shady characters”.

³¹ Newar festival

³² Newar sweet

“Right outside my house itself there used to be numerous vehicles and we kind of felt unsafe because everyone used to hang out around our house.” (11:40, Local woman, SA, Swotha)

“ In the old days, we only had locals who’d use the spaces so there’d be no need to feel fear. But when the chowk started being used by outsiders, while there were no lights there’d be the threat of theft and other such activities.” (18:21, Virtual go-along B, Swotha)

4.3.3. Key findings and comparative analysis

Figure 16 and Figure 17 summarize the key findings from Nagbahal Chowk and Swotha Chowk respectively, as well as the relationships between the multiple indicators used during data collection.

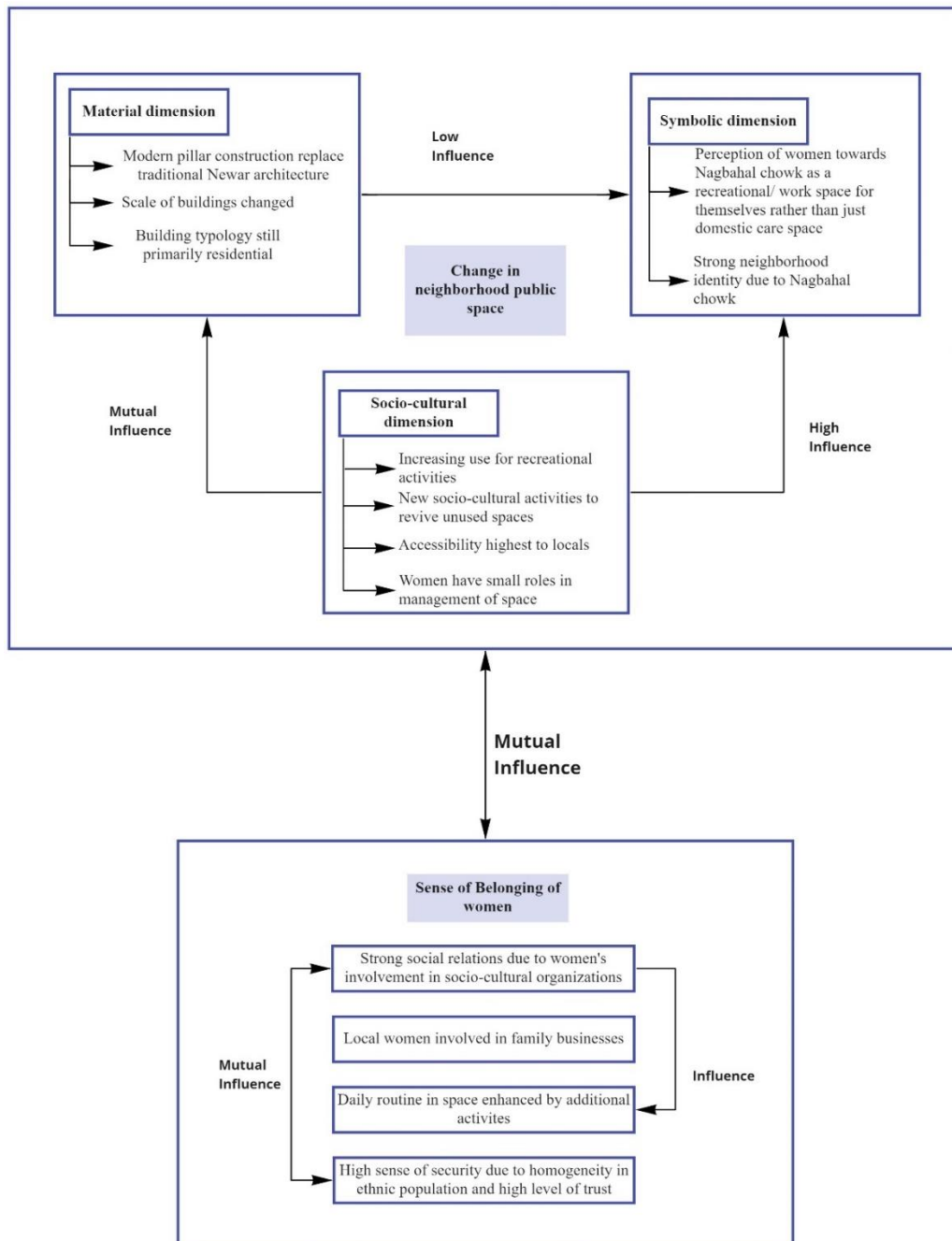


Figure 16 Key Findings from Nagbahal Chowk

In Nagbahal chowk, while there have been big changes in the material dimension of the NPS, its influence on the symbolic dimension has remained low. This can indicate a stronger influence of socio-cultural dimension on the symbolic dimension. Even while losing the traditional architecture of the residences, the local people have preserved the homogeneity of the ethnicity within the neighborhood which has helped preserve the neighborhood identity. Furthermore, local women's role within the public realm has increased steadily. Even though the decision making power falls on the hands of the men, women's sense of belonging to the neighborhood has strengthened due to their association of the Nagbahal chowk as a space for their recreation, relaxation and development as well as their involvement in its management and maintenance. Local women in Nagbahal associate with their neighborhood spaces in their short-term as well as long term memories, due to their continuous use of the spaces in their everyday lives and their association to their identity as locals of the space.

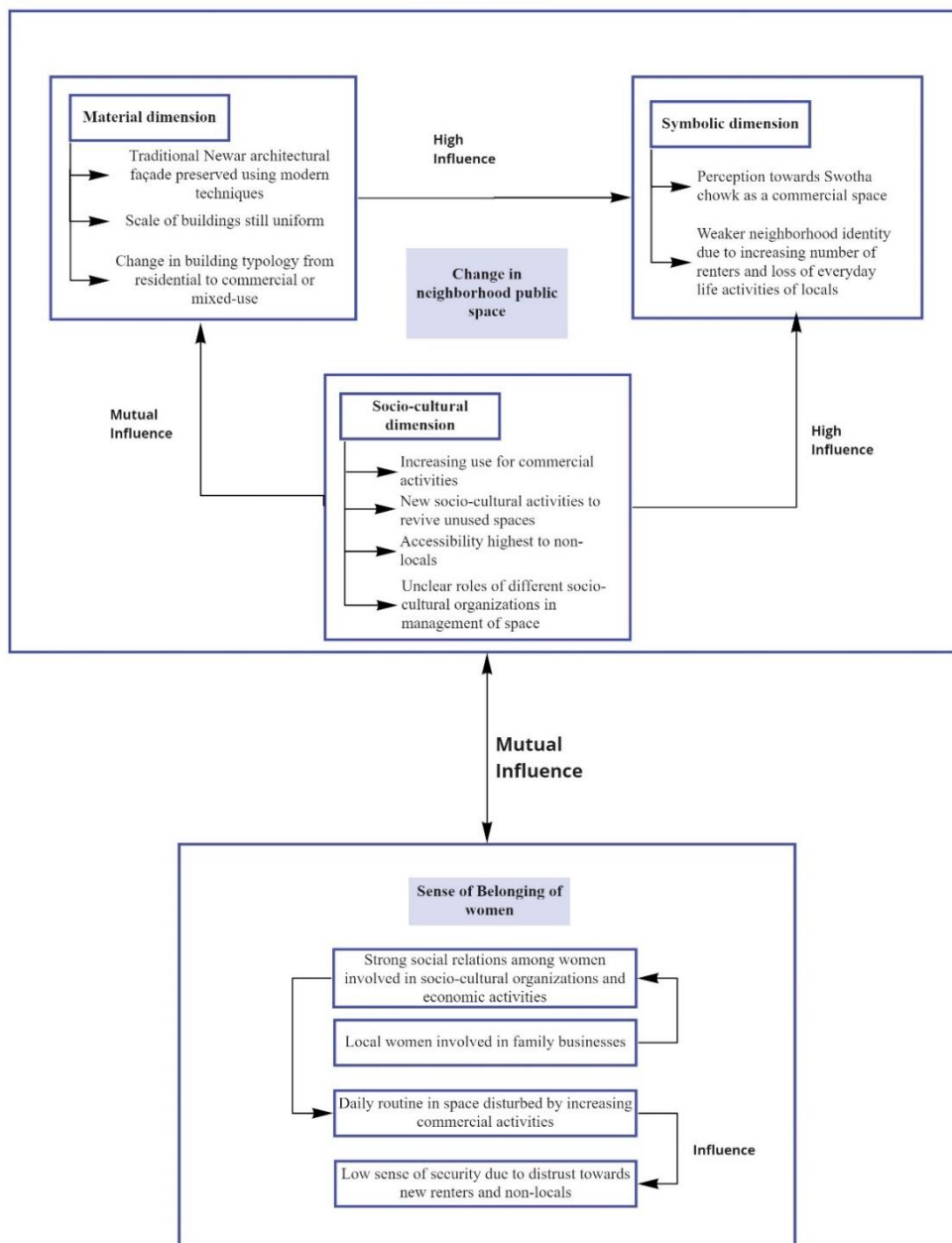


Figure 17 Key findings from Swotha Chowk

In Swotha Chowk, while the buildings have retained the traditional Newar architecture, the building typology has changed massively from primarily residential to highly commercial and mixed-use. With the invasion of space by non-locals, the space has become impoverished in the sense that more and more activities of locals of their everyday lives are being lost. While local women have benefited from the commercial boom in Swotha chowk, it has also restricted the use of the Chowk beyond commercial activities for the same women. Elderly women and young children especially have been affected due to the issue of safety within the space that is being constantly occupied by non-locals. This in turn has led to a weaker sense of neighborhood identity and creation of dis-belonging to their own neighborhood spaces. In Swotha, women associate more to the long-term memory of their spaces that is more based on their identity as a local living in the space for generations. This is an important distinction as it relates to how the sense of belonging to the neighborhood is lower in Swotha chowk than in Nagbahal chowk.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

This research attempts to understand how the change in the multiple dimensions of neighborhood public space in Patan, in the last three decades, affects the sense of belonging of local women. The data collected from two neighborhood public spaces, Nagbahal Chowk and Swotha Chowk, both of which are diverse in scale and type, while still holding similar Newar community values and traditional use of space, helps to infer some first impressions. First and foremost, the linear one-way relationship between the change in neighborhood public space and sense of belonging of local women in the conceptual framework is actually a two-way mutually influencing relationship. The change in neighborhood public space affects how local women experience sense of belong to the neighborhood in their everyday lives, and these women take an active role in the change in the neighborhood public space as well. While their roles might not be decision-making roles, but their active participation within the space and a stronger feeling of responsibility towards the space counts for the change in the socio-cultural dimension as well as symbolic dimension of neighborhood public space.

There are aspects of the change in dimensions of neighborhood public space that affected the local women's sense of belonging differently in Nagbahal Chowk and Swotha Chowk. Additionally, the relationships between the local women of the neighborhoods have different meaning to them. With both Nagbahal Chowk and Swotha Chowk, the change in the material dimensions of the space came about as a reaction to existing physical condition of deterioration in structures, redundancy of the purpose of certain structures (case: water bodies less used because of availability of tap water) as well as changing lifestyles of the local inhabitants and the younger generation. However, while in Nagbahal chowk, the change in building style from traditional Newar architecture to modern architecture came about by a desire of the local inhabitants to aspire for a modern lifestyle and amenities, in Swotha chowk, the preservation of a traditional Newar architecture came about by a desire of local inhabitants to profit from a marketable opportunity.

Simultaneously, this change in material dimension has influenced the change in socio-cultural dimensions of both spaces. In Nagbahal chowk, locals are highly focused in preserving the sanctity of their traditional neighborhood, going so far as to frowning on tenancy in order to keep the demographic within the neighborhood amongst the local Newar population. Local women take pride in this and feel much safer within their neighborhood owing to this as well. Additionally, the locals are more hands on about their neighborhood public space and volunteer their time, money and skills for the management and development of Nagbahal chowk. The locals, from men to women, elderly to youth and children, all take part in multiple different activities within the Nagbahal chowk. On the other hand, in Swotha chowk, locals took advantage of the commercial boom within the neighborhood by moving to the sub-urbs while renting out their houses to tenants. This has led to a diverse range of commercial activities and businesses within the neighborhood, with multiple international and national businessowners starting businesses in Swotha chowk. One crucial thing to note is a gradual gentrification of the Swotha chowk where locals are slowly being pushed to their private spaces unless it is for special activities within the neighborhood public space. Due to this very reason, the Swotha chowk is now seeing more non-locals using the space everyday than locals. Locals who have remained in Swotha chowk, retreat to their own personal spaces for gatherings and activities, and feel more cautious and unsafe within the chowk, especially during night time.

Additionally, local women's role in maintenance and management of the neighborhood public spaces in both Nagbahal and Swotha Chowk has seen significant change. Their role's in the respective women's committee makes them more involved within the public realm and this involvement builds a stronger sense of neighborhood identity and sense of belonging to the

neighborhood itself. However, while Nagbahal chowk has stayed mostly residential over the past three decades, Swotha chowk has become more commercialized, which in turn has impacted how women's committees in both neighborhood prioritizes projects. One thing in common though is that these socio-cultural organizations are a sisterhood pact amongst the members who share resources, ideas, household worries and troubles. This has a direct influence in their sense of belonging.

That being said, the younger generation of women in their 20s don't actively partake in the women's committees and nor are they members of these committees. As such their roles within the public space becomes that of participation and observation. While these women have more access to education, work and life outside of household duties, their relationship with the neighborhood public spaces are different to women who are married and have household responsibilities. In both neighborhoods, women in their 20s, while feeling like a part of the neighborhood, associate themselves more to the city than to just the neighborhood, unlike the older women.

In conclusion, sense of belonging of local women, while highly nuanced and individual, depends on the bonds that women make within their neighborhood public space, neighborhood identity as well as participation in multiple different activities within the neighborhood public space. As such changes in the different dimensions of neighborhood public space does have a significant effect on the sense of belonging of local women. That being said, as both cases are of traditionally Newar communities, it might not be generalizable to every neighborhood public space. However, it does give a sense about how changes within the public spaces impacts all demographics in different ways and as such considerations need to be taken while planning for development works within the neighborhood public spaces.

5.2. Policy recommendations

- **WOMEN ON THE BOARD:** This research has highlighted the role of women within the neighborhood public spaces, their potential and their current position. It is clear that while there has been strides in the matter of representation of women in the neighborhood, it is imperative for there to be bigger steps forward. While the local governments are collaborating well with the women's committees in providing them training programs for financial upliftment, it needs to go beyond that. Women's standing in the organizational hierarchy in the neighborhood public space needs to on equal standing with the men in the neighborhood. The age old tradition of only including men in the socio-cultural organizations that take major decisions regarding the public space needs to be amended.
- **MANAGEMENT/ CONTROL GENTRIFICATION:** As mentioned in the conclusions, Swotha chowk has been seeing a slow gentrification in the area in the last two decades. While economic development of the neighborhood is a positive aspect, proper management needs to be done so as to control any unplanned and irreversible gentrification. This economic development should not come at a price for the local residents of the neighborhood who have not only generational ties, but religious and cultural ties to the neighborhood public space.
- **STORYTELLING FOR CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND CONNECTING GENERATIONS:** This research has pointed out the need for bridging the gap between the old generation and the new generation (be it from the same Newar ethnicity or new members of the neighborhood of other ethnicities). Using storytelling sessions as a means to verbally transfer knowledge of the space, the culture and the festivals from the older generation to the new generation not only helps in preservation of the culture but also invites a dialogue with the previously less involved members of the neighborhood. It

would also help rectify the feeling of divide between the old Newar residents and the new residents of the neighborhood.

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Annex 1: Interview question guidelines 1

Interview question guidelines with local women of the neighborhood

Questions/Issues for Semi-Structured Interviews

(with local women in case study neighborhoods and key informants)

Name of the participant:..... **Date:**.....

Location:..... **Start time:**..... **End time:**.....

Fact sheet of an interview participant

Name: **Gender:**

Age: **Occupation:**

Ethnicity: **Education level:**

Residential status:

Length of residence in the neighborhood:

A: On material dimension of neighborhood public space (questions for all participants)

1. What is your opinion on the provision and design of your neighborhood public space?
2. What is your opinion on the condition of the built environment of your neighborhood public space?
3. What is your opinion of the building types surrounding the neighborhood public space? (Residential, mixed-use, commercial)
4. What is your opinion of the parking and traffic in your neighborhood public space?
5. Do you know who is responsible to manage your neighborhood public space?
6. Please make a brief comparison between how the neighborhood public space was in the past and in the present in terms of the physical aspects.

B: On socio-cultural dimension of neighborhood public space (questions for all participants)

1. What are the everyday activities conducted in your neighborhood public space? Who are the actors performing those activities?
2. What special religious or socio-cultural activities are conducted in your neighborhood public space? Who are the actors performing those activities?
3. How often is your neighborhood public space used? What time of the day is it most frequently used? What time of the year is it most frequently used? And for what?
4. What area of your neighborhood public space is least used? Why do you think that is?
5. Please make a brief comparison between how the neighborhood public space was in the past and in the present in terms of the socio-cultural aspects.

C: On spiritual dimension of neighborhood public space (questions for all participants)

1. What kind of stories or myths are associated with your neighborhood public space?
2. Are there any activities that people do that are specific to those stories/myths?

D: On social relations of women

1. Are you a member of any socio-cultural groups?
2. Do local women have any organized groups that they are members of? What do these groups do?
3. How would you describe your relation with other women in your neighborhood?
4. Do you have social interactions with other women in your neighborhood public space?
5. Do you think your neighborhood public space is important to maintain your relationship with other local women? Do you think it has changed in the last three decades?

E: Daily routines

1. What kind of activities do you perform in your neighborhood public space?
2. Do you take part in special religious or socio-cultural activities in your neighborhood public space? What are they?
3. Where in your neighborhood public space do you like to be in most in your daily life? Why?
4. Do you think the neighborhood public space is important in your daily life? Why so?

F: Livelihood activities

1. Do you have conduct any economic activities in your neighborhood and/or its public space?
2. Are there other women who conduct any economic activities in your neighborhood and/or its public space?

G: Perceptions of (in)security

1. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood public space? Why so?
2. What times of the day/month/year do you feel most unsafe in your neighborhood public space?
3. In your opinion, what are the threats to safety within the neighborhood public space?

H: Change in gender norms

1. Do you think that there are specific gender norms in society? What are they?
2. Do you think there has been a change in gender norms in the past three decades (specifically for women)?

Annex 2: Interview question guidelines 2

Interview question guidelines with representatives of socio-cultural organizations

Questions/Issues for Semi-Structured Interviews

(with representatives of socio-cultural organizations)

Name of the participant:..... **Date:**.....

Location:..... **Start time:**..... **End time:**.....

Fact sheet of an interview participant

Name: **Gender:**

Age: **Occupation:**

Ethnicity: **Education level:**

Residential status:

Length of residence in the neighborhood:

1. When was your organization established?
2. What is the role of your organization in the neighborhood?
3. What is your role in your organization?
4. What is the role of women in your organization?
5. In your opinion, what is the role of local women in your neighborhood public space?
6. In your opinion, in what way do local women contribute to the neighborhood?
7. In your opinion, how do local women relate to each other?
8. What kind of activities do you conduct in your neighborhood public space?
9. Have there been change in the type of activities conducted in the past 30 years?
10. Who has the lead role in the management of your neighborhood public space?
11. How do you collaborate with other socio-cultural organizations in the neighborhood?
12. How do you collaborate with the local government in the neighborhood?

Annex 3: Interviewee's profile

Interviewee's profile

Neighborhood	Code	Age (in years)	Gender	Ethnicity	Education	Profession
Nagbahal	01_PD	51	Woman	Buddhist Newar	High School	Co-owner of bed and breakfast
	03_RS	51	Woman	Buddhist Newar	Bachelors	Housewife
	04_PS	22	Woman	Buddhist Newar	Bachelors	Student
	05_BS	53	Woman	Buddhist Newar	Masters	Teacher
	06_SS	57	Woman	Buddhist Newar	Masters	Government Official
	07_PD	56	Man	Buddhist Newar	Bachelors	Businessman/Representative of Tole Sewak Samiti
	13_RJ	48	Woman	Hindu Newar	Masters	Women's Committee Representative
Swotha	02_RC	22	Woman	Atheist Newar	Bachelors	Student
	08_SS	47	Woman	Hindu Newar	Bachelors	Sanitation Engineer
	09_LS	44	Woman	Hindu Newar	High School	Businesswoman
	10_MJ	40	Woman	Hindu Newar	Masters	Banker and Lawyer
	11_SA	27	Woman	Hindu Newar	Bachelors	Architect/ Expert
	12_GS	64	Woman	Hindu Newar	Not disclosed	Chairperson of Women's Committee
	14_RJA	Not disclosed (late 30s)	Woman	Hindu Newar	PHD	Government Official

Annex 4: Festivals of Nagbahal Chowk

Festivals of Nagbahal Chowk

- **Samyek-** A festival that happens every five years when statues of Lord Buddha are brought to the Nagbahal chowk from around 240 different monasteries around Kathmandu valley and placed around the chowk in front of the residences. Thousands of devotees come to Nagbahal chowk to give offerings to the Buddha statues. The next day, all statues are taken back to their respective monasteries. This festival has remained untouched in the past three decades.
- **Matya-** A festival that happens every year when Buddhists across Patan walk to different Buddhist monasteries to give offerings and worship. During this festival, the alleyways and underpasses that are generally not used by people become very active spaces as the devotees are walking from one neighborhood to another through these old alleyways and walkways. A major change that has happened within this festival is the inclusion of people from Hindu ethnicity in the festival.

“ Before, the Joshis wouldn’t get involved in the Matya festivals. That is normally a Buddhist festival. Joshis are Hindu. Now, it is not like that. In our Krishna Puja, the Shakyas also come and in their Matya, we also go. There isn’t the caste issue now. There is a feeling of religious unity.” (Virtual go-along A, Nagbahal)

This indicates that there is a stronger connection within the neighborhood now, even between people of different caste groups.

- **Dipankha Yatra-** A major festival that happens once every 18 years or so, depending on the astrological calculations, Dipankha Yatra is a big “walkathon” as per the representative to Tole Sewa Samuha. According to interviewee for virtual go-along A, legend says that if the Bull statue in the Nagbahal chowk moos, then you have to plan the Dipankha yatra, regardless of whether it is scheduled by priests or not. This massive walkathon starts from the Nagbahal chowk, from where over 100,000 devotees walk for 66km around the Kathmandu Valley to visit hundreds of religious monuments. The Nagbahal Tole Sewa Samuha plays a role in the management, research as well as coordination of it, coordinating with socio-cultural organization of multiple different neighborhoods across Kathmandu Valley.



Figure 18 Samyek, Nagbahal

Source: Representative of Tole Sewak Samiti, Nagbahal



Figure 19 Traditional music in Samyek, Nagbahal

Source: Representative of Tole Sewak Samiti, Nagbahal



Figure 20 Matya festival procession with youth wearing costumes, Patan

Source: Representative of Tole Sewak Samiti, Nagbahal



Figure 21 Statue of bull being worshipped for Dipankha Festival, Nagbahal

Source: Maharjan 2013, Nagbahal



Figure 22 Dipankha Festival procession, 2013

Source: Maharjan 2013, Nagbahal

Annex 5: Festivals of Swotha Chowk

Festivals of Swotha chowk

- **Narayan Puja-** A festival for the Lord Narayan held in the Swotha chowk in front of the Narayan temple. For the purpose of the festival, the statue of the God within the temple is brought outside and placed there for devotee's to worship. After the worship ritual, inhabitants of the neighborhood partake in a big traditional feast.
- **Ganesh Puja-** A festival for the Lord Ganesh where devotees visit multiple Ganesh temples across Patan. They also come to Swotha chowk to pay respect to the Gansh temple and statue there.
- **Krishna Puja-** Another festival where devotees visit multiple temples of Lord Krishna, among which falls the temples in Swotha as well.



Figure 23 Narayan Puja, 2019
Source: Representative of Women's Committee, Swotha



Figure 24 Local women carrying palanquin of Narayan during Narayan Puja, 2019
Source: Representative of Women's Committee, Swotha



Figure 25 Feast after Narayan Puja in Swotha chowk, 2018
Source: Cosy Nepal, Swotha



Figure 26 Offering for Ganesh Puja, 2018
Source: Cosy Nepal, Swotha



Figure 27 Statue of Ganesh being worshipped during Ganesh Puja, Swotha
Source: Representative of Women's Committee, Swotha



Figure 28 Women in procession during Ganesh Puja
Source: Representative of Women's Committee, Swotha

Annex 6: List of codes from Atlas.Ti

Codes	
1	C: Change in neighborhood public space
1.1	V: CN_Material Dimension
1.1.1	I: CN_MD_Cleanliness of space
1.1.2	I: CN_MD_Maintenance of space
1.1.3	I: CN_MD_Building scale
1.1.4	I: CN_MD_Building material
1.1.5	I: CN_MD_Building typology
1.2	V: CN_Socio-cultural Dimension
1.2.1	I: CN_SCD_Everday activities
1.2.2	I: CN_SCD_Socio-cultural activities
1.2.3	I: CN_SCD_Accessibility of neighborhood public space
1.2.4	I: CN_SCD_Management of neighborhood public space
1.3	V: CN_Symbolic Dimension
1.3.1	I: CN_SD_Stories and myths
1.3.2	I: CN_SD_Behaviour and attitudes
2	C: Sense of belonging experienced by local women
2.1	V: SoB_Social Relations
2.1.1	I: SoB_SR_Women's participation in socio-cultural organization
2.1.2	I: SoB_SR_Women's perception of social relations
2.1.3	I: SoB_SR_Women's perception of shared values
2.1.4	I: SoB_SR_Level of trust among women
2.2	V: SoB_Daily Routines
2.2.1	I: SoB_DR_Women's perception of accessibility of neighborhood public space
2.2.2	I: SoB_DR_Women's participation in everyday life activities
2.2.3	I: SoB_DR_Women's participation in socio-cultural activities
2.2.4	I: SoB_DR_Frequency of use by women
2.3	V: SoB_Livelihood Activities
2.3.1	I: SoB_LA_Women who work within the neighborhood public space
2.3.2	I: SoB_LA_Women's perception of livelihood activities
2.4	V: SoB_Perception of Security
2.4.1	I: SoB_PoS_Women's perception of threat
2.4.2	I: SoB_PoS_Women's perception of safety
2.4.3	I: SoB_PoS_Women's perception of traffic issues
3	C: Gender
3.1	V: G_Change in gender norms
3.1.1	I: G_CG_Women's perception of gender norms

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