

## Design experimentation in a context of cultural division: the case of Ahmedabad

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**Abstract:** The essay “Design experimentation in a context of cultural division” aims at investigating the context of social segregation visible in the city of Ahmedabad (capital of Gujarat, India), caused by the violent strife between Muslim and Hindu communities culminated in the riots of 2002. Social segregation within a city requires a reflection on possible places where design solutions could help in creating meeting spaces. The article tries to understand the reasons for these social frictions, wondering whether urban space has changed as a result of these tensions by answering the need for privacy of the two communities. After studying three areas in different border conditions between Muslims and Hindus, the study identifies in the ‘disputed areas’ places suitable to investigate social and architectural strategies. The work suggests a strategic solution with the aim to transform the contact points from barriers to spaces of relationship between the two communities. Starting from the fragile relationships and issues in the areas of intervention, this project firstly tries to meet the basic needs of the population with an infrastructural proposal. In a second communitarian layer, it suggests to foster the exchange of craft traditions through the construction of meeting spaces such as workshops and cultural centers.

**Keywords:** religious conflict, disputed borders, meeting spaces

### **The cultural background: Ahmedabad and the reasons for a disputed territory.**

The concept of *border*, as well as the processes and issues related to the political and social divisions of cities, represents an increasingly central theme in the contemporary debate. We live in places that change rapidly, mutate in the form of urban fabric and in the uses that the inhabitants make of public spaces (Zanini, 1997). In particular, some developing country show how processes and forms of integration between different cultures and traditions undermine the paradigms of urban space. The story tells of many *divided cities* (disputed) in which the separation has assumed an emblematic role in the lives of the inhabitants and in the forms of construction (or destruction) of the urban contexts (Calame, Charlesworth, 2012). This text is about a city, Ahmedabad, located in the heart of India, in the state of Gujarat, and latent tensions (Cerruti, et al, 2017), which marked its identity and urban tissue. Faces, at the same time, a decisive question for the urban project: How architecture can intervene in disputed places, in areas marked by tensions linked to religious beliefs and to the different established ethnicities and traditions that often collide?

The journey to discover the Indian Territory and, in particular the context of Ahmedabad, commenced at CEPT University<sup>1</sup>; thanks to some exchanges between teachers and students over the last few years, research and project exercises have been carried out to reflect on the conditions of these places and on the answers that architecture can and must provide.

The critical reflection on the nature of the border in the heart of the traditional city of Ahmedabad was born downstream of a research conducted by the author<sup>2</sup> on the opposition and tensions generated by the coexistence of Hindu and Muslim communities in the city. A complex coexistence, marked by violent riots and tensions, is still readable today in the construction process and in the architectural language of the city (Naipaul,1978). In particular, the objective of the research is to seize the link between the uses of the urban space and the architectural expressions connected to it. It is an innovative look that no longer puts the conflict in the center of the architecture project but defines and proposes places of sharing, such as flexible pavilions and cultural spaces, devoted to welcome and foster cultural, social and human integration of the involved communities. The innovative challenge of this work focuses on two fundamental aspects: on one side, the profound knowledge of the Indian context, through a precise detection of the reasons that have fueled the conflict and the clash over the years; on the other side, the possibility of using the architectural project as an operative *site-specific* intervention tool. Through punctual projects and flexible organization are proposed fluid spaces, able to adapt to the needs of different cults, traditions and customs. The designed pavilions constitute *simple* spatial devices, from the point of view of materials and involved architectonic forms, but strategically *complex* because they are hosting specific activities, mixing Hindu and Muslim traditions to construct spaces where to rebuilt community relations. The described scenario can be considered an emblematic case study for the definition of a methodology of intervention “sensitive to the territory”, in particular in developing countries, marked by rapid social and urban changes, where the space, abandoning the common rules of the project, is transformed in a flexible design tool, capable to adapt its form to different wishes and able to respect the cyclicity of the time and uses.

### **Ahmedabad: A politically emblematic city**

The city of Ahmedabad appears emblematic for the cyclical tensions that have been generated by the opposition of the Muslim and Hindu communities. From its origins this capital attracted communities of different backgrounds, fascinated by the commercial importance of Ahmedabad within important merchant routes. The possible tensions, which could arise from the contrasts of different cultures, were mitigated by a flexible administrative structure that ensured the individual communities of traders and craftsmen to define their own internal rules, having to respect a few collective norms (Doshi, 2003). The governmental structure of Ahmedabad delineated on an urban scale a federal system within which the different cultures could take part.<sup>3</sup>

The economic and cultural blossoming of the city coincided with the Mughal Dominion (1573-1758), which went into crisis due to a series of famines and attacks, flowing into the Marathas domain,

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<sup>1</sup>The context of Ahmedabad is particularly prolific for urban studies because of the location of the CEPT School of Architecture founded in 1962 by B. V. Doshi (graduated Prikzer Price 2018), center of Excellence in teaching and training of architects and urban planners.

<sup>2</sup> The present contribution originates from the research work carried out by the author in the master thesis entitled: "Sewing Ahmedabad's Wounds: Design experimentation in a Context of cultural Division", Supervisor: Prof. Giulia Setti (Politecnico di Milano), Co-Supervisor: Prof. Sachin Soni (CEPT University). The thesis discussed in July 2018 describes and interprets the religious and political divisions present in the context of Ahmedabad, both through a historical reconstruction of the main events that have marked its identity, and through a project experimentation that will be summarized below.

<sup>3</sup> This administrative system was defined only during the Moghul domain, in which Ahmedabad reached its maximum splendor. It was only during this period that the Hindu community was able to enter the city, gaining an important role at the commercial level.

opening up to an uncertain period characterized by continual looting and crises <sup>4</sup> (Yagnik, Sheth, 2011). From 1817, under British rule, Ahmedabad developed a thriving industrial production focused on cotton processing. If in major centres, such as Delhi and Mumbai, this economy was promoted by the British rule, in Ahmedabad the industry was born by investments of wealthy local Indian families, highlighting the independence of individual communities from the central power<sup>5</sup> (Tripathi, Mehta, 1978).

The independence from the English domain, that enjoyed the entrepreneurs, defined a fertile ground for the first independence movements. Gandhi, who arrived in Ahmedabad in 1915, tried to unify the Indian population against colonial rule, putting in direct relationship entrepreneurial families and working families. The first steps of the nationalist movement focused on some policies aimed at improving the housing and educational conditions of workers' families (Bremar, Shah, 2004).

These initiatives proved successful even after the independence of 1947. The bloody conflicts, following the formation of Pakistan, had much more content outcomes in Ahmedabad, thanks to policies in favor of lower classes mitigating tensions. In the years following independence, the Nehru government focused its policies on the industrialization of the country with the aim to create a modern nation free from the caste divisions of the society (Torri, 2007). With the death of Nehru (1964), many of the secular and socialist ideals of the Congress came into crisis by reaffirming the political role of religious divisions, which were further highlighted by the failure of the government's social policies<sup>6</sup>. The lack of funds for the new non-specialised working masses and the failure of the industries led to the flowing of the majority of workers into the informal market. The breakup of social policies and the rise in unemployment also led to the complete breakdown of the integration processes presented up to that time. Social policies, in fact, ensured a systematic entry into the world of work, allowing a gradual transition from the communitarian original condition to the identification in their working class (Bremar, 2002). In the informal economy, the original community became the only social factor guaranteeing the possibility of employment and, therefore, of livelihood (Weiner, 1978). The socio-economic context led to the decline of secular Nehru's thought, opening up to Hindu nationalism. The Muslim community became the scapegoat, believed to be guilty of the economic and social crisis. This led to the facing of Muslim and Hindu communities in the riots of 1969, 1985, 1992 and, in the most bloody of 2002 (Spodek, 2011).

During these conflicts in Ahmedabad there was a complete crystallization of the social panorama that saw the gradual disappearance of areas in which there was a strong cultural mix, growing up more and more monocultural quarters. If Ahmedabad, in the years following independence, had an urban fabric divided into macro-areas in which resided social classes with different beliefs, following the conclusion of the conflicts, the city was divided sharply into two parts: on one side, the Muslim city consists of four small ghetto towns (Juhapura, Shah Alam, Ramol and Vatva), on the other a large portion of urban fabric is inhabited with a Hindu majority (Mahadevia, Desai, Vyas, 2014).

### **Types of border in the urban fabric of Ahmedabad**

The research carried out in this fragmented and conflictual context focused on the nature of urban forms, to understand whether they reflected the condition of "divided identity" like the ones of Ahmedabad.

In the urban tissue of Ahmedabad, three border areas between Muslim and Hindu communities were chosen to represent emblematic conditions that were different and capable of constituting useful

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<sup>4</sup>The passage from the Moghul domain to that Marathas coincided with the transformation of the urban planning. If up to the Moghul domain the Ahmedabad plant was planned according to large radial axes that allowed a rational expansion of the city, during Marathas domination the urban structure underwent an informal drift, leading to an unregulated thickening of the fortified nucleus.

<sup>5</sup> The Division of labor in the industries followed the social structure, where the different tasks were organized according to the caste of provenance; in addition, the organisation of work did not follow Western taylorization but defined non-competitive rules encouraging individual industries to cooperate.

<sup>6</sup>The return to community ideals was due to the many failures of policies promoted by the Nehru government, such as the failure to eliminate illiteracy or the failure in the redistribution of agricultural and industrial wealth, still in the hands of noble families who were part of the conservative fringe of Congress.

samples to investigate the structure of the conflict along the border. It should be pointed out that the border is not always determined in a physical way, but it often appears more like a mental construction of the inhabitants. These points of passage mark a state of danger that leads inhabitants to avoid boundaries, abandoning these spaces. It is important to understand the nature of the boundary and its identity, based not only on the physical structure of these remarkable points, but also on the use that the inhabitants make of these places and their social composition (Jaffrelot, Gayer, 2012). The three areas chosen for the design experimentation are represented by different characters: one is placed within the new expansion areas on the west of Ahmedabad, a second within the industrial areas and a third within the historical walled nucleus (the so-called Old City).



Figure. 1 Shrinand Nagar Road: A contested border in the areas of new urban sprawl, Ahmedabad. Image by Giovanni Gualdrini.

Among the newly expanding areas, Shrinand Nagar Road was chosen, a road along which there is a clear passage from the Muslim ghetto, the district of Juhapura, to a district – Vejalpur – with predominant Hindu dominance. Juhapura accommodates about 240,000 Muslims, representing about three quarters of the total population of Islamic origin of Ahmedabad<sup>7</sup>. Because of this social conformation this neighborhood has grown as an autonomous city itself (Desai, 2008). The boundaries of these two quarters clearly show a stark division not only by a religious point of view but, above all, present a different economic status of the inhabitants.

These conditions appear clearly in the different residential typologies, in fact, the area with a richer Hindu majority, has high walls of enclosure to protect the gated communities, whilst the Muslim quarter has a more informal structure and recovers traditional forms by placing commercial activities on the front to safeguard the residential areas behind them. (Figure. 1)

The second focus is on the industrial area east to the railway line that has been the scene of the bloodiest riots between the two communities, as inhabited by a heterogeneous working population who has been severely affected by the failure of the cotton mills (Das, Agarwal, Joshi, 2003). This area was chosen to study a neighborhood between Saragpur Bridge and Anil Sarch Road presenting a *Hindu enclave* within a Muslim quarter. The Hindu community strongly shows the need to protect itself from the other through a high enclosure wall and relates to the rest of the city through a single entrance. In correspondence to the main entrance, and along the road axis, there are mainly butcher's shops and commercial activities belonging to the Muslim community. The Hindu community, which traditionally does not consume meat, avoids going along this path preferring alternative routes. (Figure. 2)

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<sup>7</sup> The total population of Ahmedabad is around 7 million inhabitants. (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, Census 2011)



Figure. 2 Saragpur Bridge and Anil Sarch Road: A boundary in industrial areas, Ahmedabad. Image by Giovanni Gualdrini.

### **The historical nucleus of Ahmedabad: a sedimented system of cultural cohesion**

It seemed fundamental, to understand the reasons of separation and conflict, to start from the heart of the Old City of Ahmedabad, specifically from the study of a road axis, Dariyapur Rd, in the fortified historical nucleus. Here in addition to the characters described in the previous two cases, the transition point between the two communities is controlled by a police station. The district of Dariyapur was chosen as the key place of the research and design experimentation because, since the times of independence, it was one of the areas mostly affected by the riots, housing Hindu and Muslim communities both employed in cotton Mills (Varshney, 2002). (Figure 3)

In addition to these aspects, Ahmedabad's historical nucleus, unlike the other areas of the city, is emblematic as it encompasses urban forms and settlement strategies that are useful for two different communities to coexist. The high density<sup>8</sup> and heterogeneous population have led to the definition of a complex settlement organization that can show different urban layouts taken in more recent urban extensions.

The original structure of the walled nucleus of the city was organized according to a radial road system useful for the gradual settlement of new communities.

The structure of the urban tissue followed a clear hierarchical order passing from wide streets to increasingly narrow roads, where there were placed separate activities. This simple criterion has been instrumental in setting up a heterogeneous population.

From market areas there was access to residential areas showing a gradual transition between public spaces and private areas. Looking at the distribution of the commercial and religious activities of the two communities within the district of Dariyapur, it is possible to catch a clear separation of the two groups and different modalities of aggregation of the corresponding public spaces. If the collective areas in the Muslim quarter orbit around the mosque, the Hindu communities, differently, clearly divide the intercommunity meeting places (the markets) from those belonging to the individual communities. Unlike the mosque, the Hindu temple is closely linked to the inhabitants of the single *enclave* (Jain, 1975), not constituting an institutional collective center<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Within the historical nucleus one reaches a population density of 800 inhabitants per square hectare. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ministry of Urban Development and Indian French Embassy, 2001)

<sup>9</sup> Inside, the mosque hosts more complex functions, such as Koranic schools, and plays an important role at the urban scale.



Fig. 3 The Dariyapur Road police station: a controlled border, Ahmedabad. Image by Giovanni Gualdrini.

On the contrary, the main mosque stands in the middle of the Muslim ward at the intersection of the road axes. The *enclaves* of the individual Muslim communities, unlike the Hindu settlements, do not have a mosque inside and are distributed along the axes without defining a clear distinction between residential and commercial areas<sup>10</sup>.

Analyzing the individual neighborhoods (Hindu and Muslim) it is visible how the places of worship are able to build the urban form of the settlement. (Figure 4)

Studying the structure of the road network there is a different organization of the two neighborhoods: the wards with a Hindu dominance usually have the main route placed along the perimeter of the settlement, while, on the contrary, areas with Muslim majority gravitate around a center connected with radial axes to the outer perimeter. This organization is further underlined by the different positioning of the commercial areas. If the perimeter of Hindu settlements was further marked by the presence of commercial activities, differently Muslim quarters have shops in the central area and near the entrances. Hindu settlements then concentrate the public activities along the perimeter protecting within the *enclaves* the single communities (Raman, 2012).

The visible differences in the Muslim and Hindu quarters are motivated by the historical-political development of the city. Muslim wards originally formed a self-standing area belonging to prominent personalities of which the sultan was surrounded. These areas, called *Puras*, constituted independent settlements, presenting an orthogonal urban organization according to two central axes, at which intersection were placed institutional buildings as mosques and noble palaces. The Hindu community settled, within the walled nucleus of Ahmedabad, only during the Mughal domination. Because of the constant tensions with the Islamic community (Theodore, 1866), Hindu neighborhoods were structured according to more introvert systems trying to protect the residential areas.

Enclaves belonging to individual communities, called *Pol* in *Gujarati*, constitute the basic element of the urban structure. The organization of these residential units appears common in both the Muslim and Hindu communities showing the same joints. The *Pol* has a dense perimeter defined by blind facades or commercial activities. Within it, the road network follows a hierarchical order by gradually giving access to more intimate places. Through a sequence of interior spaces to the pole, it is possible to access the temple and the common square, called *Chowk*, around which the community life orbits.

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<sup>10</sup> The different locations of commercial establishments within the neighbourhood can be justified by the activities traditionally linked to the different communities; the Muslim ones were specialised in handicraft activities, which allowed a mixed use of the neighborhood where the shop was often associated with the dwelling. On the contrary, the Hindu communities were specialized in the sale and for this reason they preferred a clearest separation between store and dwelling.

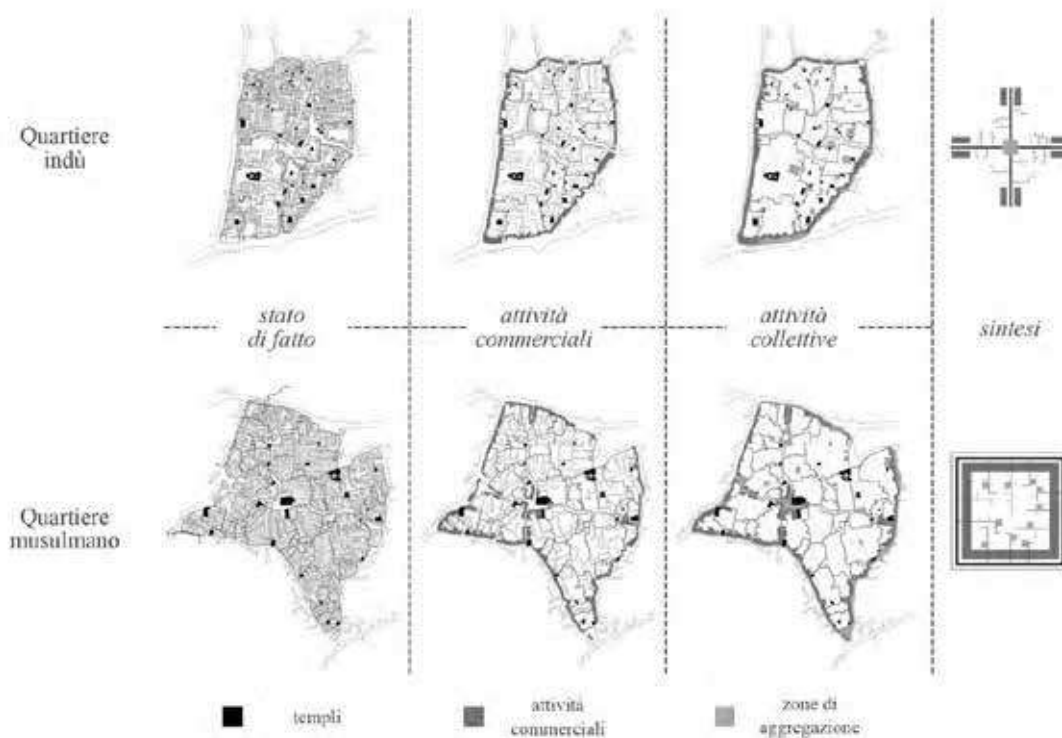


Figure. 4 differences in the structure of the Muslim and Hindu quarters. Image by Giovanni Gualdrini.

### The structure of the border: the example of Dariyapur Road

Observing the crossing point present on *Dariyapur Road*, the activities are repeated on both road fronts; the points for *rickshaw's* drivers are at a short distance on both sides of the border and drivers follow specific routes to avoid crossing areas belonging to the other religious community.

An interesting feature in the border of *Dariyapur Road* is the specialization of the two communities in separate activities. In Ahmedabad, as in other Indian contexts, it is common to find ways in which same goods are produced and sold. This condition shows the specialization of the communities in the same profession (Davis, 2006). The Hindu community of *Dariyapur* owns most of the shops and laboratories specializing in the sale and production of drums such as *Dhol* and *Tabla*, percussion instruments used in both Muslim and Hindu religious processions. On the other hand in the Muslim ward there is a strong specialization in weaving and sewing of fabrics and clothes. Until 90s, *Dariyapur* constituted an important production center for *Khol* and *Chindi*. These fabrics, produced from the waste of cotton mills, represented a cheap product, also accessible by poor classes.

The present specialization allows to define a channel within which the two communities manage to interact. In fact, the Community division of labour allows Hindu groups to frequent the Muslim quarter to buy colorful fabrics and prints, crafts in which the Islamic communities are specialized. In turn, the Muslim communities go to the Hindu quarters to buy drums to be used during the religious anniversaries (Jain, 2011).

In addition to these relationships of pure commercial interdependence, the growing process of urbanization that the Indian metropolises are experiencing contributes to the creation of new places in which communities of different origins and religions interact. Public transport stops and some infrastructures, such as drinking water delivery points, become a meeting point for communities, constituting fundamental urban nodes (Krishna, et al 2014).

### Experimental strategies in Cultural division contexts: A flexible approach

The design in disputed areas underlines a basic question: what design tools can operate in a context of such strong social segregation as that represented in Indian society? The different types of relationships in the area under study have been chosen as key elements on which to define a possible project strategy capable to lead to the integration between the two communities.

Five areas located at different points along the border have been identified along the *Dariyapur* Road. In the Muslim area, east of the police station, which defines its margin, lies the Islamic elementary School of *Daryapur* characterized by a large void and a courtyard now used as a playground. The other four areas consist in residual spaces, urban vacuums, of small dimensions, mainly occupied by buildings in a state of ruin. Thanks to the presence of these empty spaces, which are inserted on both sides of the boundary, the project proposes a unitary system, able to establish reciprocal relations between these places through the presence of activities of support to the school and the population of the two communities.

The project promotes and studies the possibility to define places of encounter and sharing capable of intercepting collective interests, favoring the creation of a dialogue and integration process. The research proposes an approach defined in different strategic levels with the aim to define a sequence of relation spaces similar to those observed and described in Ahmedabad. The design strategy work on different layers like an infrastructural level and another more connected with the local community activities. This last one, in turn, is divided in different temporal phases to better interact with the different users of the place. (Figure 5)

From an infrastructural point of view, the project develops a system able to offer essential water resources for the daily life of the two communities. With the aim of responding to the arid climate and the difficulty to access public drinkable water<sup>11</sup>, the five pavilions include the function to filter and make the rain water drinkable<sup>12</sup>. The project ideally recovers the traditional place of the *Puyau* 'Water hall'<sup>13</sup> (*parab* in Gujarati), imagining a system that makes drinkable water usable in the two pavilions adjacent to the border in order to define a new collective centrality.

On the basis of the commercial and functional relationships, caused by the division of work by the caste of belonging, the pavilions welcome open craft laboratories in which they will be taught and promoted activities typical of both Islamic and Hindus community, defining new cultural exchange points.

The design scenario foresees that the new introduced facilities interact with the elementary School of *Daryapur*, offering laboratorial spaces linked to the context and to the different needs of the children. In particular, in the Muslim ward, the proposed pavilion hosts a workshop for music activities, while in the Hindu dominance area are located dyeing laboratories and fabrics weaving. Inside the pavilion, which stands as the terminal of the system in the Hindu ward, is designed a Theatre as main space of relation for the communities. The proposed theatrical activity wants to resume the idea behind the places created in the industrial quarters during the Gandhian independence riots, which sought to unify the entire working population without distinction of creed or caste.

(Self Employed Woman Association)<sup>14</sup> which played an essential role in offering professional alternatives based on crafts to workers affected by the crisis of industrial production (Bhatt, 2006).

The program foreseen in the project combines different activities adapting to the needs of the inhabitants that are changing during the day: the school laboratories, linked to the handicraft, are

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<sup>11</sup>Only 30% of the population has direct access, from home, to sources of drinking water, while the rest of the inhabitants often have to cover, on foot, distances higher than the kilometer for the water supply (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, Census 2011).

<sup>12</sup> The infrastructural character of the pavilions is evident in the recycling of meteoric waters. This system was taken over by the project of the Mass Design Group for the Gheskio Coleric Centre (<https://massdesigngroup.org/work/design/gheskio-cholera-treatment-center>).

<sup>13</sup> The ' *Puyau* water hall ', *parab* in Gujarati, were sources of drinking water built by traders to offer refreshment to travellers. The same fountains had an important value in the city and were built in memory of the ancestors of the family.

<sup>14</sup> One of the few associations that tried to define common lines between the different communities was the Self Employed Association Women Association (SEWA). This group formed by the detachment of some members from the Textile Labour Association (TLA), focused its efforts on improving women's working conditions.

The SEWA brought together communities of different religions and castes, such as the Muslim and Hindu, trying to provide tools to the different communities to be more palatable in the world of work. These initiatives indirectly created the pretext for bringing about inter-community relations.

transformed into places of vocational training, while the pavilions, like the Theatre and the musical one, become studio classrooms and neighborhood libraries.

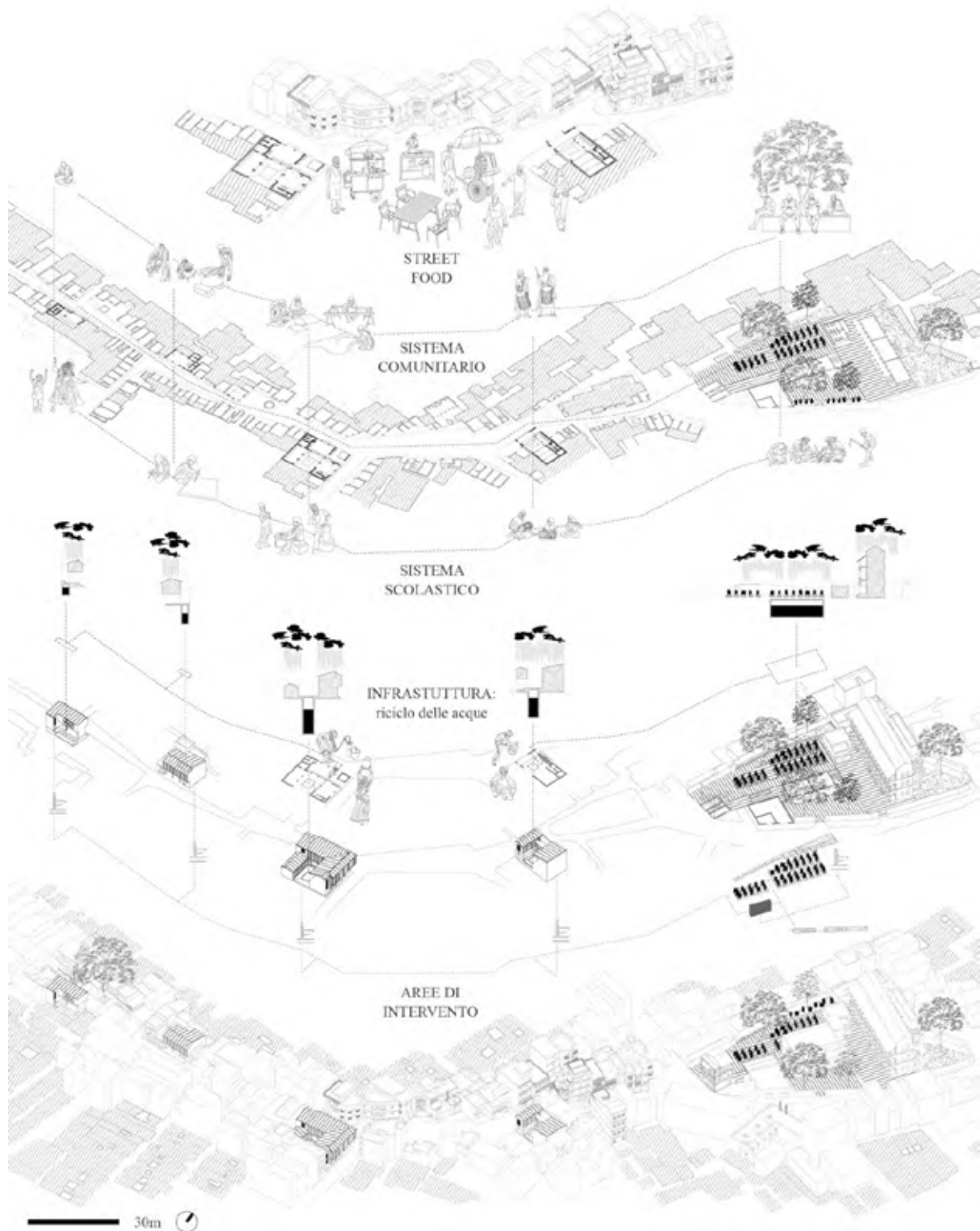


Figure. 5 Social strategies and architectural choices to transform the disputed boundaries into meeting places. Image by Giovanni Gualdrini.

The stratification of several activities within a single architectural and urban space, as envisaged in this design experimentation, is a typical characteristic of traditional Indian public spaces changing their scopes during the day. For these reasons the project works on different temporal phases: at different times, correspond different activities and uses.

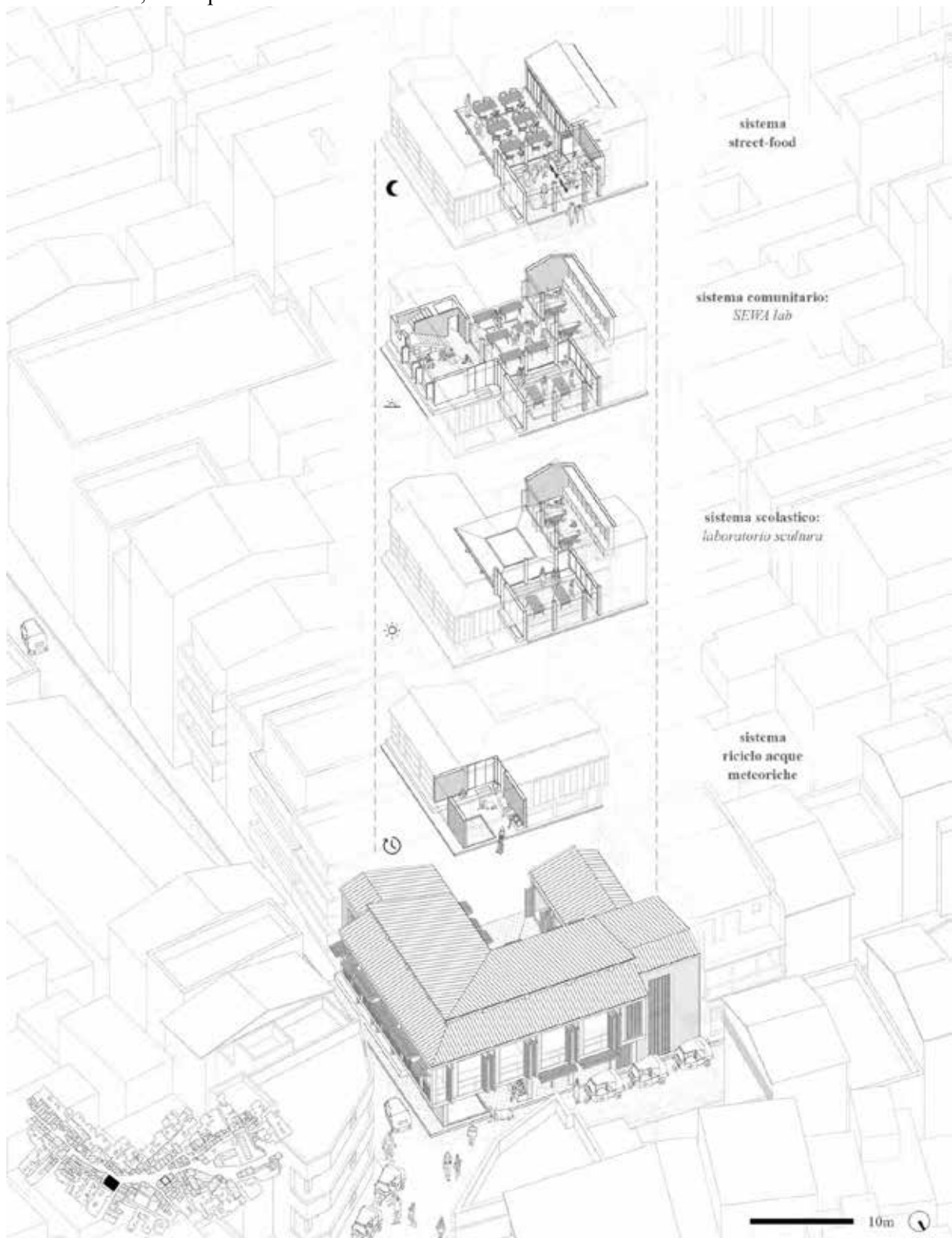


Figure. 6 Design scenarios: The Weaving pavilion and its transformations during the course of the day. Image by Giovanni Gualdrini.

When the elementary school close the project enters in the living of its function, the pavilions are open to the whole community offering spaces for the vocational and cultural training. The introduction of training spaces is inspired by the Gandhian Association SEWA.

As a matter of fact, observing *Maneck Chowk* during the course of the day, the commercial and religious heart of the historical nucleus of Ahmedabad, are visible several changes of use over a single day. During the early hours of the morning this space is a place of pasture and foraging of the sacred cows of the city. With the passing of the day, business activities gradually open and the central area welcomes parking spaces. The clearest and fascinating change takes place during the evening hours: on the fronts bordering of the square there are restaurants that transform the central area into an open-air restaurant in the mode of a street-food. Overuse is a fundamental feature of the Indian public space, managing to intercept the most diverse categories of users. Similarly to *Maneck Chowk*, the pavilions designed along the *Dariyapur* border open on the street front, welcoming informal dining spaces, to define places of sharing for the two communities.

### **Starting from the boundary and the relations present in the Territory: functional flexibility and transformation of the architectural structure**

The continuous change of activity within the pavilions corresponds to a transformation of the planimetric organization, made possible thanks to the use of mobile panels. The flexibility of public (and private) space has been revived by traditional merchant houses, called *haveli*, which have an internal organization capable of adapting to different functions.

The traditional houses are articulated around a central patio, called *Chowk* (which can be traced back to the idea of a common patio), which overlook ' functional ' spaces such as the kitchen, the votive chapel and the water room. Depending on the needs, the main domestic activities can expand within the *chowk*, which can become a place of prayer, a dining room or a reception space (Ray, 2008).

The project of the five pavilions incorporates this solution, articulating the ground floor in a central patio around which are overlooking the main spaces that can expand their activities in the same *chowk* or in the street space, virtual extension of domestic Indian public space. (Figure 6)

The extension on the road extremes the concept of flexibility presented in the traditional house, in fact, the traditional central patio, in fact, divides the house into two blocks presenting a more private and a more public area adjacent to the road, consisting of a portico called *otla*. The adjoining domestic spaces to this portico are places of representation, filter spaces to better protect the innermost parts of the house. As has emerged in the description of the structure of the city, the urban fabric, to better accommodate populations of different origins, determines net transitions defining areas clearly belonging to the individual communities.

The dwelling, placed in a semi-public context, is the only element in antithesis compared to this unwritten rule by defining a labile transition with the road where the public and domestic space merge. The structure of the pavilions incorporates the relationship between the atrium and the public space, presenting a threshold-diaphragm adjacent to the road able to completely transform the relationship between the patio itself and the exterior. Thanks to this device the pavilion can open completely to the community guaranteeing a complete use of the inner court. (Figure 7)

The project strategies described in this text are the result of a thorough research on the territory of Ahmedabad, aimed at understanding the wounds and imbalances that led to the conflict between the Muslim and Hindu communities (Howe, 2011). A careful study of the conflict must include in itself both the general causes that have led at national level to the escalation of tensions, and the local motivations that have moved the individual city communities. Only through the knowledge of these factors the project can be addressed to such a divided context, giving up the ambition to immediately resolve a problem, but opening up to a process destined to take time and breath.

The design proposal – albeit partially utopian – wishes to indicate a possible vision of the architectural project which is able to emphasize the need to operate for minute interventions in the disputed places of the city of Ahmedabad. If in large Asian metropolises we often see extensive and impose urban interventions, which cause the displacement of many inhabitants (Desai, 2011), the proposed intervention strategy shows how punctual interventions on the territory are the most careful way towards the birth of an interreligious identity, by grabbing how a pavilion or the construction of a simple infrastructure can give a new birth to forgotten places.





Figure. 7 Design scenarios: The Weaving pavilion, the diaphragm and the different architectural relations with the street front. Image by Giovanni Gualdrini.

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