



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Thesis Title: A socio-spatial approach towards the understanding of Place Identity construction through the study of cultural event spaces: A case of Guwahati, Assam

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SHORT ABSTRACT

Contemporary Indian cities have been in the flux of an emerging cultural resurgence that has greatly impacted its socio-cultural environment. As such there has been a proliferation of festivals, growing interest in the revival of traditions and rituals, celebration of indigenous arts, crafts, and cultural symbols which represent the unique identity markers of each city. This response could be considered as a response to the rapid globalisation and urbanisation, which has led to mass migration of people in urban environments leading to the confluence of ideas, philosophies, and culture, while stretching and challenging the psychological and physical boundaries of cities around the globe. As a result, cities have become the physical manifestations of such paradigm shifts thus becoming hubs of cultural expression which are notably rich in visual culture. In this regard, the city can be viewed as a palimpsest which constantly transforms, evolves and mutates like an organic entity, thus redefining its meanings over time as result of a conglomeration of multiple intermingling discourses. As these cities grapple with the changes brought forth by globalisation, they also provide a sneak peek into their response against the current wave of homogenising forces of globalisation. Cities can no longer be perceived as a static entity; rather, they are morphing into urban spaces which are more fluid and malleable wherein temporality and informality are significant urban characteristics. In the post-industrial scenario, cities in India have become critical sites of negotiation and are expected to become some of the largest urban agglomerations of the twenty-first century. As cities are growing, the built and cultural heritage is fading in the cacophony of modernization. This global phenomenon of identity crisis has been approached by various discourses with varying perspectives, yet an extensive and all-

encompassing comprehension of identity construction lacks in embracing a socio-spatial approach. There is a need for critical analysis of the present context of urbanism in India which focuses on the emerging characteristics that define Indian cities. This requires a particular local thinking approach for global cities in India. The formal domain of studying cities needs to be stretched to include new ideas of urbanism which puts equal emphasis on the intangible cultural, temporal and dynamic aspects of the city. Spectacles such as festivals which form an integral part of the Indian urban scenario require in-depth analysis on their role in shaping place identity. With growing emphasis on the 'cultural economy' as a strategy for urban renewal at both national and global platforms, the subject of inquiry of this research focussed on the spaces in the city where such manifestation of cultural events occurs. This includes cultural event spaces encompassing social practices, rituals and various festive celebrations which are not necessarily religious in nature. This was premised on the belief that cultural manifestations imparts deep-rooted meanings to places and enhance people's association with a place through their recurring nature of occurrence and public demonstration of various ritual and social processes. The research probes into the theoretical underpinnings of 'Place Identity' while exploring ways in which participants' perception of such event spaces could be enhanced. Guwahati, a tier two city and the biggest city of North East India has been considered as the site of study. The study will eventually draw findings to support the hypothesis that "Cultural events may influence the identities of people involved and their construct of Place Identity" through the analysis of the recent resurgence of multicultural festivals in Guwahati and their inherent impact on the changing aspects of identity of the place and the people involved.

This research was designed as an embedded case study type within the domain of mixed methods research that aided in the formation of a Strategic Framework to guide the intervention process that promotes people place associational value and a process-oriented approach towards development in contemporary Indian cities.