

# Residents' Perceived Image of The City: A Case of Bhairahawa City

Anup Ghimire <sup>a</sup>, Sudha Shrestha <sup>b</sup>

<sup>b</sup> Department of Architecture, Pulchowk Campus, IOE, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

✉ <sup>a</sup> ar.anup07@gmail.com, <sup>b</sup> sudhashrestha@ioe.edu.np

## Abstract

Urbanization in Asian cities, influenced by Western planning, has led to large, homogeneous structures, creating vulnerability to people. Building inclusive and city with a unique image to solve the problem, is possible by using "People First" participatory planning. A city's image and residents' behavior are influenced by individual perceptions. This thesis takes a different approach by stressing how locals' perspectives influence how cities look and feel, it places a higher priority on unique city identities to improve urban quality of life. The primary objective of the research is to identify both the tangible and intangible dimension associated with the residents' perception on image of the city. Lynch's theory aids in understanding tangible aspects, but placemaking and attachment to a place gives the intangible dimensions of the image. With the help of qualitative research techniques; literature reviews and case studies, the paper explores the common identity and priorities of urban residents on sense of place and place attachment. Two methods were used, i) Verbal Method: direct interviews and ii) Visual Method: self-observation and photographs of the identified objects/places to further understand the formation of place attachments. The case area Bhairahawa, in Lumbini Province is a well-known industrial and commercial powerhouse. Its cosmopolitan nature is influenced by the population's diversity, which includes five major castes and others. The study was conducted among respondents and triangulated using Group discussions and KIs. The findings are presented in major 4 categories, Physical Environment, Social and cultural factors, Emotional and experiential factors and Socio-economic and Practical factors, each of them having multiple further indicators to identify the objects to reflect the image of the city. This study deepens our understanding of the identity of the city by highlighting the importance of both tangible and intangible elements in daily life in Bhairahawa.

## Keywords

Image of the city, Perception, Place attachment, Tangible and Intangible aspects,

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Asian cities have experienced rapid urbanization, influenced by Western planning principles [1], which has resulted in the dominance of large buildings and infrastructure, resulting in vulnerability [2] and homogeneity, underscoring the need to switch from Top-Down to Bottom-Up methods and adopt "People First" participatory approaches in urban planning. These urban planning initiatives put into practice have produced inclusive, eco-friendly, and smart cities that have empowered communities while simultaneously creating a sense of separation and lowering citizens' sense of belonging. Future cities should put citizens' welfare first in order to solve this, with the creation of unique cities being viewed as a road to sustainability [2]. Unique cities are characterized by their distinctive image, which is produced by elements such as public areas, architecture, and social interactions. These elements provide identification, well-being, and a sense of belonging [3], and they have an impact on a city's appeal to inhabitants, investors, and tourists [4, 5]. Building on Kevin Lynch's idea in "The Image of the City," this research investigates the city's image through people's subjective experiences, providing an innovative way to examine both intangible and physical aspects of urban life. According to Ahmed [6], taking into account people's perceptions shows both a city's strengths (such as well-kept public areas and effective transit) and shortcomings (such as safety issues and shoddy infrastructure). This provides guidance for policy and

decision-making and aids in the creation of inclusive, livable, and sustainable cities that are in line with community needs and ambitions. Individual values and perceptions [7] have an impact on city image, which in turn affects resident behavior [8]. This has an impact on endorsements and satisfaction. Modern planning that prioritizes efficiency weakens placemaking, lowering connection and clarity regarding the city's distinctive, people-centered character.

### 1.2 Need and Importance

Rapid urbanization affects cities' unique identities and has an adverse effect on their ecosystems, competitiveness, and citizens' well-being [2]. It is crucial to use residents' experiences to develop a unique municipal image. Although international research highlights the significance of place image for inhabitants [7], there are very few studies in Nepal regarding such an idea, which might hinder the development planning and implications. The emphasis on the significance of residents' perceptions in forming a city's image and identity in this thesis is a novel approach to urban planning. Residents' views and preferences play a significant role in creating the general perception of the city because of their frequent encounters with the urban environment. For the purpose of maintaining a city's unique identity and informing policymakers, perception research on people is essential. By transforming residents' ideals into workable policy, encouraging community involvement [1], and fostering a sense of place connection and responsible citizenship, it improves quality of life and citizen happiness [9].

### 1.3 Problem Statement

Previous studies on city planning in Nepal have tended to emphasize rational beliefs rather than inhabitants' views, which has left people with little emotional incentive to participate in the development process [1]. There is now no emotional connection to urban growth in Nepal because of the prevailing homogeneity of identity and placelessness. By focusing on the importance of unique city identities to enhance urban quality of life and address city brand formation, which is crucial for tourism and citizen satisfaction in livability and development progress, this study aims to close this gap [2].

## 2. Research Objective

The primary objective of the research is to identify the tangible and intangible dimensions associated with the residents' perception on the image of the city. This objective can be achieved through the following sub-objectives:

- To identify the places/objects of attachment to the residents in the city.
- To study the underlying meaning attached to the places and its process of formation.

## 3. Literature review

### 3.1 Image, Identity, and Aesthetics of the city

Across academic disciplines, the word "image" has many different connotations, frequently referring to a mental image created by cognitive processes [10]. Through communication mechanisms, these dynamic, cognitive psychology-based images are ingrained in sociocultural situations [11]. A city's perspective is shaped by its distinctive character, which is influenced by geography, history, landmarks, size, aesthetics, socioeconomic attitudes, and more [12, 11]. Cities' image, consisting of tangible and intangible features, is becoming more important in urban and regional development as they play a larger role in innovation and economic success [11]. Cities change with time [13], producing a variety of impressions through modernization and neighborhood activities that are motivated by individual and social memories. Quantitative and existential aspects are both taken into account by urban planners [13]. While Schulz investigates the existential significance of places, Lynch's perceptual image facilitates navigation [13]. The character of a city is reflected in its aesthetics, which connects people to cosmic experiences by creating strong, lasting, and emotional impressions in their surroundings [13].

### 3.2 Kevin Lynch: The Image of the city

In his 1960 book "The Image of the City," Kevin Lynch examines how "mental maps" help individuals find their way around cities [14]. Lynch's theory concentrates on two aspects of the built environment: imageability and legibility. Imageability is the ability of an item to evoke a vivid mental image in the spectator. Legibility is the simplicity with which

pieces can be identified and arranged into a coherent pattern. According to Lynch's research, there are three crucial aspects of a location that affect how people see it: Identity, Structure, and Meaning. In order to explore people's perspectives, Lynch's technique involves having them construct city maps and conduct interviews. He discovered that individuals regularly create mental maps of five components: pathways, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. Lynch's components help people visualize a metropolis that is mostly governed by governmental entities. In order to help city planners with new developments, this paper focuses on urban living experiences and discovers attachments. Objects and locations will be examined for a unique city image.

### 3.3 Place Attachment and Association of Meaning

Recent urban design ideas put a compassionate city viewpoint first, stressing the convenience and leisure options for city dwellers. A place picture is defined as a mental construction created by a person's perceptions of a particular place [7]. The Tripartite Model, which takes into account the Person, Process, and Place components, provides an explanation for place attachment [15], which has multiple dimensions and complicated interconnections. Place attachment is a broad notion that encompasses affect, cognition, and behavior across a range of sizes, places, and social settings [15]. In 1992, Altman and Low investigated into the subject of place meaning and proposed six (6) typologies of socio-cultural place attachment. However, this perspective deviates from the individual experiences focusing instead on socially constructed meanings as the foundation of attachment. Later, building on Low's meaning typologies, sociologist Cross offers a set of typologies for attachment processes. 'Process' and 'meaning' play a comparable causal function in this situation, where cognition results in affect (attachment) [16]. According to Cross (2015), the place meaning and attachment are manifested in individuals and groups based on the following:

- i) Sensory: The embodied and physical attachment.
- ii) Narrative: imaginary and place identity attachment
- iii) Historical: personal or family historical attachment
- iv) Spiritual: deep sense of belonging attachment
- v) Ideological: moral or ethical commitment
- vi) Commodifying: the place is assessed as best able to meet an individual's preferences
- vii) Material Dependence: The reliance on material features.

### 3.4 Placemaking, Sense of belonging and Power of 10+

Place attachment and belonging foster community relationships and identity, necessitating flexible urban planning and social policies catered to various populations [17]. Placemaking, which was promoted in the 1960s by Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte, improves public spaces by taking into account their physical, cultural, and social characteristics, attracting a variety of users and raising their

value. According to the "Power of 10+" principle, places prosper when they provide at least 10 compelling reasons to visit [17]. This transforms cities and promotes resilience and creativity. Imagining the same concept on a city level; a neighborhood or city that has ten exciting places, is capable in making itself extraordinary. Public spaces need to be safe, have amenities, and provide opportunity for social interaction. These uses are influenced by function, environmental quality, socioeconomic factors, and cultural variables [18, 19]. Community relationships and well-being are fostered through amenities like outdoor sitting and green spaces [20, 21]. Moreover, the ideas of Yi-Fu Tuan emphasize the influence of culture and individual experiences on our relationship with places, highlighting the significance of protecting cultural legacy to fight placelessness in cities and foster a sense of community and belonging through distinctive, locally rooted locations.

### 3.5 Residents' Perception

Urban planning decisions are influenced by investigating how locals view the city since it reveals their emotional, social, and cultural ties to the city. For cities to be sustainable and livable, it is essential to include local expertise and viewpoints [22, 23, 24]. Designing user-centered urban settings that improve pleasure and well-being requires an understanding of how inhabitants interact with various components of the city [22]. Urban development shapes and is shaped by residents' subjective perceptions of their urban surroundings in a complex interaction, offering unique insights that statistical and economic models frequently overlook [24]. Through participatory methods, urban planning may use individuals' perspectives to suggest areas for improvement, build community cohesiveness, and advance social fairness. In order to achieve socially equitable urbanization and depart from traditional state-market dynamics, civic engagement is essential [23]. For the built environment to be sustainable and meet people's needs, public engagement in urban planning must be mainstreamed. Monitoring changes and the success of programs, as well as regularly gauging resident happiness and perceptions, enables data-driven modifications to urban planning for ongoing accountability and progress.

### 3.6 Indicators and Variables

A comprehensive understanding of the city's image requires the research to take into account intangible factors as well. Although Kevin Lynch's five dimensions of the city have served as a basis, Yi-Fu Tuan and other academics have emphasized the significance of taking into account intangible elements of location. These non-physical qualities may include factors such as human experiences, feelings, and meanings that influence our relationship to certain places. These intangible qualities go beyond physical characteristics. Based on those, the researcher has created a thorough framework with four main areas.

#### A. Physical Environment

- Landmarks
- Pathways and Connectivity
- Public Spaces

#### B. Social and Cultural Factors

- Neighborhoods and Districts
- Community Identity
- Diversity and Inclusivity

#### C. Emotional and Experiential Factors

- Affective Attachments
- Events and Festival
- Sense of Safety

#### D. Socio-economic and Practical Factors

- Amenities and Services
- Housing and Affordability
- Employment and Economic Opportunities

## 4. Research Methodology

The shared identity and priorities of urban inhabitants are explored via multidisciplinary research on the sense of place and place attachment. It is categorized as a social science study and seeks to reveal the realities that are most probably true underlying these events. The ontological position of the research is that the people form a unique mental image of the city and people's perspectives also trigger the image in return. The epistemological position of the research is that in order to reveal the image, the study requires understanding people's place value through qualitative interpretation of their experience in living in the city. The understanding of the realities produced through qualitative interpretation is subjective in nature. Therefore, this research tends to fit best under the interpretivist /constructivist paradigm. This research tends to understand the people-place relationship in the city that gives the city its identity from the perspective of the local people themselves. It requires a qualitative research method, completely subjective in nature. Mainly two methodologies were used: Literature review and Case Study. For the case study, mainly two methods of data collection were used. One was the Verbal method; which produces data in the form of texts. The traditional written responses from the respondents were substituted for direct interviews, in which the researcher elicited the places of attachment to the respondents using a set of questions. This verbal method assisted in achieving the first objective of the paper, i.e., identifying the places/objects of attachment to the residents in the city. Another was the visual method; Go-Along and Resident Employed Photography (REP). These have been practiced for a couple of decades in international research [25, 26], however, it was not been tested yet in Nepal. After a pre-testing, the Go-Along was substituted by self-reconnaissance, walkthrough through the object/places identified by the respondents, and observe how the place attachments are formed. In a variation of Resident-Employed Photography, the researcher took photographs of the objects/places identified by the respondents and observed how the place attachments are formed.

## 5. Site Context

In the Lumbini Province, the municipality of Siddharthanagar serves as the hub of the Rupandehi District's administration. It



is located 265 kilometers to the west of Kathmandu and only 22 kilometers to the west of Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha. Siddharthanagar, one of Nepal's main entrance ports from India, is a prominent commercial and industrial center. It is crucial to the economy of the nation and, after Birgunj, has the second-highest amount of border commerce with India. The municipality, which spans a 36.03 square kilometer area and has 13 wards, is surrounded by a number of other areas.



**Figure 1:** Lumbini Gate from Buddha Chowk of Bhairahawa  
(Image source: Adobe Stock)

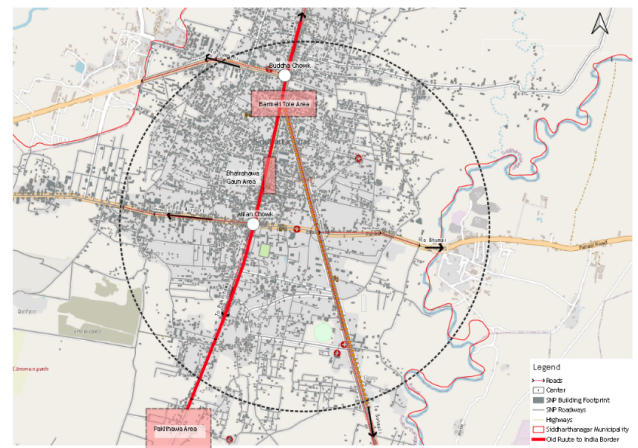
Siddharthanagar Municipality now has 74,436 people living there, up from 63,483 in the 2011 census. There are 37,187 females and 37,249 men, residing in 15,871 houses. There are five main castes represented in Siddharthanagar's population: Brahmin, Muslim, Chhetri, Magar, and Yadav. A variety of religious communities including Hindus, Muslims, Kirat adherents, Buddhists, and others coexist peacefully. The distribution of these groups is seen in Table below [27] with the Brahman (Hill) caste having the biggest share and the Muslim community close behind. The city's diverse population is also influenced by the Kshetri, Magar, and other castes.

Categories	% of population
Brahman - Hill	13.7
Musalman	13.2
Kshetri	8.3
Magar	7
Yadav	5.7
Gurung	4
Brahman - Tarai	3.8
Chamar/Harijan/Ram	3.2
Teli	3.2
Newa: (Newar)	3.2

## 5.1 History and Infrastructural Development

After being established in Nepal in 2024 B.S. and bearing Siddhartha Gautam Buddha's name, Siddharthanagar briefly changed its name to Bhairahawa Municipality in 2047 B.S. but returned to its original name in the 21st century to preserve its historical significance. The 181-kilometer Siddhartha Highway (NH 047), built in 1964 and opened by King Birendra in 1972, connects cities including Butwal, Tansen, Waling, Putalibazar, Syangja, and Pokhara while advancing development and

bringing together regional populations and landscapes. The highway now runs through the center of the city, changing the city's history that was once marked by important Gurung and Magar settlements along the Narayanpath route. As a result, landmarks like Buddha Chowk and Devkota Chowk have emerged, signifying the transformation of Siddharthanagar from a border town to a thriving hub of growth, culture, and connectivity. In addition to maintaining hospitals like Bhim Hospital and the Universal College of Medical Science Hospital as well as five primary healthcare clinics providing easily accessible medical services, the municipality places a high priority on education, claiming an overall literacy rate of 86.1 percent. The Gautam Buddha International Airport in Siddharthanagar aids trade, turning it into a thriving commercial and industrial hub in Nepal's Western Terai. The city also promotes competition and physical fitness through the Siddhartha Rangasala sports facility. The only source of water for Siddharthanagar, which is bounded by the Danda River to the south and the Ghahgar River to the east and west, is groundwater that has been administered by the Nepal Water Supply Corporation (NWSC) since 1981.



**Figure 2:** Map of Bhairahawa with old settlement

## 5.2 Identity and Narrative

Residents of Siddharthanagar take pride in their strong feeling of neighborhood and grassroots initiatives, which include sponsoring events, anti-drug campaigns, and tree-planting initiatives. Organizational diversity is encouraged through groups like women's clubs, Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, and Bhairahawa Toastmasters Clubs. The community came together to keep the peace amid the economic blockade, demonstrating their strong sense of community. Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists dwell peacefully in Siddharthanagar, which adds to the city's extensive religious and cultural variety. The city is adorned with temples, monasteries, and mosques like Narayansthan, Radha Krishna Temple, Shanti Buddha Bihar, Sunni Masjid, and Jama Masjid, serving as spiritual centers that foster connection and solace. Visitors from all over Nepal bring diverse traditions that blend seamlessly with local culture.

The economic powerhouse of Nepal, Siddharthanagar, is home to an increasing number of companies, including small businesses with clientele stretching from Kathmandu to India.



These sectors, which include the production of furniture, food processing, rice mills, and bricks, support the growth of small enterprises, border trade, services, and infrastructure. Siddharthanagar's economy is thriving despite the Special Economic Zone's (SEZ) sluggish expansion. Moreover, the city provides access to historical places including Devedaha, Ramagrama, Kapilvastu, Tribeni Ghat, and Valmiki Ashram, as well as Lumbini, a pilgrimage site associated with Lord Buddha. Visitors may access Chitwan National Park, Palpa, famed for its natural beauty and cultural diversity, and Lumbini Garden, which has temples, monasteries, and ponds. A superior guest experience is guaranteed by Siddharthanagar's hospitality sector, which includes establishments like the Nirvana Hotel, Yeti Hotel, Nansc Hotel, Mourya Hotel, and Pauwa Hotel.

The architecture of Siddharthanagar combines ancient Terai characteristics with contemporary buildings to symbolize the city's transition from an agrarian culture to a cosmopolitan metropolis. The city's architectural development reflects societal transformation and the survival of its unique identity in the face of modernization. In the Terai area, cycling culture, represented by the "elderly man's cycle", has served as a unifying force for decades. The adoption of reasonably priced electric tempos represents both development and environmental responsibility, affording an insight into the region's growing transportation culture. The city has seen a shift from manual rickshaws to electric tempos. Roadways in Siddharthanagar connect the past and present, offering a singular trip between history and modernity.



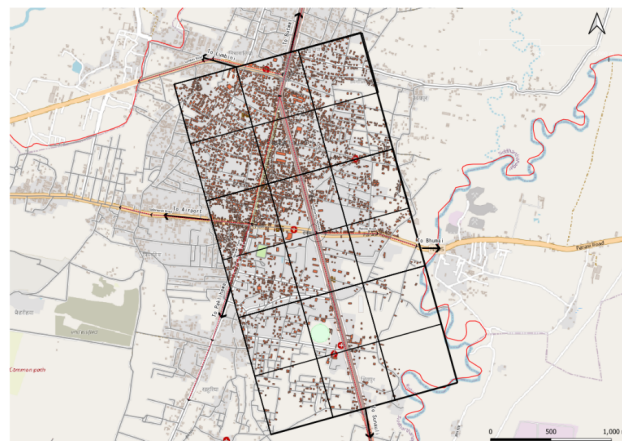
**Figure 3:** Traditional Terai Building  
Image source: alamy



**Figure 4:** Cycling culture in Bhairahawa  
Image Source: [28]

## 6. Study Area and Sampling

The focal point of the site area is Devkota Chowk, adopting a rectangular area with 800m by 800m grids. These are arbitrary lines formed to create small pockets of area to ensure a uniform selection of samples. The dividing line is the highway, and the starting point is Buddha Chowk. In each direction, the square area stretches 800 meters. In order to collect data in this region, a random stratified sampling strategy was used to assure representation. The efficacy of the research is increased by this organized technique, which permits systematic exploration and guarantees that observations are rooted in a distinct geographic context. The sample selection technique includes participants from age 16 to 75, with the biggest participation in the 26 to 35 age group i.e. 23. In total 70 respondents, there were 30 women and 40 men represented in the gender split. 14 percent of respondents said they were Muslims, which is close to the municipality's 13.2 percent Muslim population. The duration of residency displays a variety, from natives to those who have been residents for more than 50 years, giving a full picture of the city's population, comprising opinions and experiences that span age, gender, religion, and duration of residency.



**Figure 5:** Site Map with grids for survey

## 7. Data Discussion and Analysis

In addition to providing visual evidence for artifact links, this section highlights significant inquiry findings.

### 7.1 Category A: Physical Environment

Below is a summary of the most commonly mentioned objects within this category.

#### *Objects/Places of Value*

Indicators	Objects
Landmarks, Nodes, Paths & connectivity, Public Spaces	Airport, Rangasala, Lumbini, Buddha Chowk, Bank road, Buddha Park, Haat bazaar, Narayansthan, Jama Masjid

The phrase "Gateway to Lumbini" is frequently heard across the city and is represented by things like Buddha statues and

walls painted in the Gerua hue. Despite being 20 kilometers away, Lumbini's importance is strongly engrained in the Bhairahawa character. Recognizable landmarks and navigational aids in the city are provided by prominent chowk including Buddha Chowk, Milan Chowk, and Rangasala. The airport's conversion to a regional international airport in Bhairahawa has improved the city's opinion of itself. The sporting venue Siddhartha Rangasala promotes societal harmony. Public meeting places in cities include parks like Buddha Park, Darkachuwa Park, and others. Twice a week, the busy Haat Bazar brings the neighborhood together and improves daily life.

### Meaning Association

The locals use terms like "proud" and "lucky" to communicate their sense of privilege and thanks for Lumbini's close proximity to their metropolis. Convenience is a crucial component of meaning, with a focus on easy access to supermarkets and motorways with good connections. The three main dimensions of residents' affiliations to physical environments are sensory attachment, narrative attachment, and commodifying attachment. Together, these factors

influence how residents engage with their surroundings and extract meaning from them, reflecting the complexity of their interactions. This knowledge highlights the complex nature of attachment and sheds light on the various ways in which people interact with their physical surroundings.

## 7.2 Category B: Social and Cultural Factors

Aspects of the social and cultural nature include numerous components that support inhabitants' relationships with their neighbors, neighborhood dynamics and the diversity of the population.

### Objects/Places of Value

Indicators	Objects
Neighborhood & district, community identity, Diversity & Inclusivity	Annapurna tole, Barmeli tole, Diversity of caste, religion and origin, Social Cohesion

This category focuses on the essential elements of neighborhood characteristics, such as how locals view their streets, how they feel about their communities, and the architectural trends that influence the urban environment. Additionally, it looks at how locals view various city neighborhoods. Notably, responders frequently mention Annapurna Tole as a possible location for relocation within the city. A city's identity is shaped by its distinctive neighborhoods, such as Barmeli Tole, Bank Colony, Paklihawa, and Bhairahawa Gaun. Due to its historical significance and the tale of its citizens who returned from Burma and helped to shape the neighborhood's character, Barmeli Tole stands out in particular. Through community-driven reforms, Bhairahawa Gaun, which was historically infamous for its bad hygiene, has experienced improvements in its reputation. The city's demographic diversity is reflected in its neighborhoods, with a mix of ethnic groups and nationalities coexisting in various areas, such as Barmeli Tole, illustrating the city's inclusive and diverse nature.

### Meaning Association

Modern designs have replaced the city's traditional Terai architectural elements, showing that locals are receptive to adopting new architectural forms to improve their communities. The city's diverse identity is influenced by the distinct histories, personalities, and evolutionary patterns of each of its neighborhoods. The city's multicultural nature fosters social unity and cohesion, transcending personal backgrounds and reinforcing Bhairahawa's reputation as a place of openness and peaceful coexistence. The opinions of the locals reflect a recurrent pattern of ideological, spiritual, and narrative attachments in social and cultural contexts. These elements support place identification and a sense of belonging in the community by building residents' strong affection for their local areas.

## 7.3 Category C: Emotional and Experiential Factors

A person's inner affection for the locations, items, and experiences found in the city can be sparked by the emotional



**Figure 6:** Top to bottom: Buddha Chowk, Siddhartha Rangasala and children enjoying in Darkachuwa Park



and sensory components. The most common elements in the respondents' reported emotional and experience category are,

#### *Objects/Places of Value*

Indicators	Objects
Affective Attachments, Events and festivals, Sense of Belongingness, Safety and Comfort	Affection towards public spaces, association with local groups and clubs, Street market, festivals and programs, unity in difficult times, Local Cuisines, Pawan sweets, hot served Fulki. Reduced/controlled crimes.

The love of public places emphasizes the importance of human-environment connections. Place attachment is developed through relationships and social activities, and the duration of residency affects attachment. Both specific sites created for social functions and memories of encounters that give places meaning are factors that influence place attachment. Street markets and festivals play a significant role in the identity of the city by demonstrating a strong sense of community. Neighborhood clubs and associations play a crucial role in maintaining the city's vitality by spearheading numerous initiatives, such as those addressing social problems and environmental challenges. The emotions of safety and security are strongly associated with the city, and Bhairahawa is renowned for being a sanctuary of safety. The residents' psyche is strongly instilled with this sense of community security. Famous foods like Fulki and Pawan Peda have contributed significantly to the identity of Bhairahawa. Fulki, a distinctive variation of the traditional "panipuri," stands out for its sizzling appearance and is popular among locals and visitors alike. It is served with hot "aaloo-matar" gravy and sour soup. The name Pawan Peda, on the other hand, is synonymous with Bhairahawa and is notably connected to Pawan Mithan Bhandar, a well-known vegetarian restaurant that specializes in traditional desserts. The restaurant is known for its delicious sweets, and The Peda in particular is hailed as its signature dish. Further demonstrating their appeal is the fact that locals frequently take these candies home as gifts.

#### *Meaning Association*

Residents' involvement with their surroundings, social interactions, and shared experiences that fortify their emotional bond with the city define the dynamic character of place attachment in Bhairahawa. Social occasions and get-togethers are especially important because they enrich residents' lives and help them form distinctive memories, strengthening the link between particular places and treasured experiences. Fulki and Pawan Peda, two delectable foods, have become fundamental to Bhairahawa's cultural character. These foods not only provide a special culinary experience but also stand for affection, esteem, and the closeness of family and community ties. The emotional and experiential elements in Bhairahawa reveal a common thread of attachment among residents, characterized by four main types of attachment: narrative attachment, spiritual attachment with a strong sense of belonging, commodifying

attachment, and material dependency. These four attributes serve as the building blocks of inhabitants' affection for the intangible features of the city, producing a strong sense of place identification and a close connection to these experiential qualities. This attachment dynamics is special since it transcends certain areas to include the entire city, making it inclusive and city-wide.

#### **7.4 Category D: Socio-economic and practical Factors**

The data shown below was created based on responses from respondents to give a visual depiction of the most common elements within the socio-economic and practical aspects category.

#### *Objects/Places of Value*

Indicators	Objects
Amenities and services Housing and affordability Employment and economic opportunities	UCMS, Bhim Hospital, Water Supply, Availability of basic infrastructure, Affordability, Accommodation, Job Opportunity

The accessibility of necessary infrastructure is one of Bhairahawa's main draws for immigrants. Locals place great significance on organizations like the Universal College of Medical Sciences (UCMS), Lumbini Eye Hospital, and Bhairahawa Multiple Campus. The city's appeal is also greatly influenced by the availability of plentiful drinking water, government services, and transportation choices both inside Nepal and to India. The level terrain improves accessibility and mobility, making the area more user-friendly. Due to its border location and economic potential, Bhairahawa is a magnet for enterprises and job seekers. The vicinity of Lumbini and the airport benefits the city's lodging sector, which offers a variety of possibilities.

#### *Meaning Association*

People often choose to relocate or stay in Bhairahawa because of its close proximity to important infrastructure and district-level offices. In comparison to car-centric urban environments, walkability and accessibility are significant draws, providing practicality and a greater connection to the environment. The city's advantageous location encourages economic growth, especially in the booming lodging sector, enhancing its reputation as a friendly resort for both locals and visitors. Material dependence, narrative attachment, sensory attachment, and commodifying attachment are four different types of attachment that can be seen in the socioeconomic and practical aspects. These linkages demonstrate how strongly connected residents are to the city due to their basic economic and infrastructure requirements, accessibility to services, possibilities for professional and personal growth, and inexpensive housing options.

#### **7.5 Group Discussions and KIs**

Group discussions (GD) and key informant interviews (KII) validate and extend the understanding garnered through individual surveys, and as a result, offer insightful perspectives





**Figure 7:** Government Hospital, Bhim Hospital

into Bhairahawa's identity. The GD's male senior residents reaffirmed the value of open spaces, accessible infrastructure, and economic development to the character of the city. They also voiced worries about decision-making and governance, emphasizing the need for improved citizen-government contact. The conversation among the female participants stressed the importance of the temples and other religious features in the city, highlighting the female residents' spiritual ties to Bhairahawa. The replies of the young male participants were echoed, highlighting their ties to public spaces, social gatherings, street markets, and regional cuisines. They did, however, voice discontent with several aspects of urban growth that would have an effect on the city's future. The conversations and interviews offer a comprehensive picture of Bhairahawa's identity, taking into account a variety of personal relationships, experiences, and issues that influence the city's identity and reputation. Moreover, there were five KIIs in all, including ones with the mayor, ward representatives, and an inspector. The local representative interview revealed some differences between their choices and justifications and those of the residents. This comparison draws attention to contrasting viewpoints on specific facets of the city's identity. The Inspector's observations during the KIIs corroborated information about crime and safety, giving the research's conclusions in these areas more weight.

## 8. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study has successfully illustrated the significance of both tangible and intangible artifacts in the day-to-day activities of the people of Bhairahawa, providing deeper insights into the city's identity. This research has improved our understanding of Bhairahawa by taking both tangible and intangible factors into account. Beyond their physical presence, the objects have

meaning in inhabitants' lives that emphasizes their intangible contribution to the formation of the city's identity. The tight-knit community of Bhairahawa influences the way people behave there, for instance, the active participation of individuals in events organized by local groups/clubs, the blending of diverse cultures for peaceful co-existence which are reflected in dropped crime rates, verified by the KII: Inspector of Crime Investigation Department. The city's identity is defined by its economic potential, readily available facilities, and high standard of living, which encourages loyalty among its residents. Collaboration between stakeholders and strategic planning are necessary for resolving current issues. The gathered information, which includes texts, images, place meanings, and experiences, can be used by local authorities as a record and resource to advance conversations and city branding initiatives. Examining elements of Bhairahawa's identity helps us understand her better.

This study emphasizes the need of comprehending how people see their city, emphasizing the necessity to safeguard their valued features and enhance urban quality of life. Mahendra Park and Haat Bazaar have recently suffered unintended damage as a result of recent development projects, underscoring the need for smart policy development anchored on maintaining the city's identity. Urban remodeling is essential for improving public areas and infrastructure. Instead of moving social gatherings, it is preferable to encourage them at already popular places. In addition to promoting social cohesion through the equitable distribution of public spaces and maintaining regional cuisine like Fulki and Pawan Peda while supporting informal sector policies and urban design centered around Pawan sweets to draw tourists, improving safety measures, such as installing CCTV cameras and better lighting, is a top priority. Residents' opinions are very essential, but it's also necessary to recognize the contributions of other parties, such as legislators, planners, architects, developers, businesses, and community organizations. An inclusive approach to urban planning and a more thorough grasp of the city's image can be achieved through multi-stakeholder processes. But because of time and financial limitations, this research mainly focuses on residents' perceptions.

Although the results are context-specific, the approach may be used to scenarios with a comparable context. This paper also serves as a template for future study in related fields, encouraging a more thorough approach to urban research that aids citizens, decision-makers, and urban planners in defining and enhancing the character and livability of their cities.

## Acknowledgments

The Siddharthanagar Municipality's valuable informants and key informants are sincerely appreciated for their contributions to this report, for which the author is grateful. The authors are also thankful to the institutions, organizations, and people who helped with the creation of this work, governmental, non-governmental, authors of the article referenced, and image sources.

## References

- [1] Lynne C Manzo and Douglas D Perkins. Finding common ground: The importance of place attachment to community participation and planning. *J. Plan. Lit.*, 20(4):335–350, May 2006.
- [2] O Chepelianskaia. Why should asia build unique cities. In *Beyond the Metropolis, Proceedings of the 55th ISOCARP World Planning Congress 2019, Jakarta, Indonesia, 9–13 September 2019*. ISOCARP: The Hague, The Netherlands, 2019.
- [3] M C Boyer. The two orders of cybernetics in urban form and design. *Companion to urban design*, pages 89–102, 2011.
- [4] Simon Anholt. *Places: Identity, image and reputation*. Springer, 2016.
- [5] A S Dastgerdi and G D Luca. Boosting city image for creation of a certain city brand. *Geographica Pannonica*, 23:23–31, 2019.
- [6] Zafar U Ahmed. Marketing your community: Correcting a negative image. *Cornell Hotel Restaur. Adm. Q.*, 31(4):24–27, February 1991.
- [7] Dimitrios Styliadis. Residents' place image: a cluster analysis and its links to place attachment and support for tourism. *J. Sustain. Tour.*, 26(6):1007–1026, June 2018.
- [8] Shaked Gilboa, Eugene D Jaffe, Donata Vianelli, Alberto Pastore, and Ram Herstein. A summated rating scale for measuring city image. *Cities*, 44:50–59, April 2015.
- [9] R Baratta, F Cassia, V Vigolo, and M Ugolini. City image. comparing residents' and tourists' perceived image of verona. In *Excellence in Services International Conference*. Verona, 2017.
- [10] Theo B C Poiesz. The image concept: Its place in consumer psychology. *J. Econ. Psychol.*, 10(4):457–472, January 1989.
- [11] A A Matuszynska, J Michnik, and G Polok. A systemic approach to city image building. the case of katowice city. *Sustainability*, 11(16), 2019.
- [12] Niklas Luhmann. Membership and motives in social systems. In *Schriften zur Organisation 2*, pages 467–478. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, Wiesbaden, 2019.
- [13] Maria Popczyk et al. The aesthetics of the city–image. *Argument: Biannual Philosophical Journal*, (2):373–386, 2015.
- [14] G Filomena, J A Verstegen, and E Manley. A computational approach to “the image of the city”. *Cities*, pages 14–25, 2019.
- [15] I Altman and S Low. Human behaviour and environment advances in theory and research. pages 139–160, 1992.
- [16] J Cross. Processes of place attachment: An international framework. *Symbolic Interaction*, pages 493–520, 2015.
- [17] <https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking>. Accessed: 2023-9-16.
- [18] Jan Gehl. *Cities for people*. Island press, 2013.
- [19] Somayeh Hatefishojae, Seyed Gholamreza Islami, and Mahmud Rezaei. Role of local and urban textures in promoting social interactions of residents and emphasizing living centers theory of christopher alexander. *Front. Arch. Res.*, 10(1):66–78, March 2021.
- [20] L H Chun. A study of outdoor interactional spaces in high-rise housing. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, pages 193–204, 2006.
- [21] M Ardeshiri, K Hajipoor, and S Hakimi. Role of physical infrastructure in urban neighborhoods on the formation of social capital. In *Residence and Urban Planning*, pages 35–56. 2013.
- [22] M Rashid Bin Embi and N Z N Zainol. The role of residents' perception in urban development and planning. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2014.
- [23] S Ansari. Participatory urban development in india: A tale of two townships. *Environment and Urbanization ASIA*, 12(1):136–147, 2021.
- [24] Liyin Shen, Yi Yang, Haijun Bao, Xiaoyun Du, and Hongman He. Residents' perceptions on the urban resources environment in chinese large cities. *Environ. Impact Assess. Rev.*, 100(107080):107080, May 2023.
- [25] K Korpa and Sustainable Forest Network. Assessing SFM values: A tool for describing attachment to place. *Sustainable Forest Network Research Note Series*, 21, 2006.
- [26] Paul M Van Auken, Svein J Frisvoll, and Susan I Stewart. Visualising community: using participant-driven photo-elicitation for research and application. *Local Environ.*, 15(4):373–388, April 2010.
- [27] <https://censusnepal.cbs.gov.np/results/cast-ethnicity?province=5&district=54&municipality=11>. Accessed: 2023-9-16.
- [28] <https://travelfeed.io/@cave-man/bhairahawa-experience-terai-6507752799c7eest>. Accessed: 2023-9-16.