



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Visual perception on the architectural elements of the built heritage of a historic temple town: A case study of Kumbakonam, India



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Received 1 September 2016; received in revised form 22 October 2016; accepted 26 October 2016

KEYWORDS

Visual perception;
Built heritage;
Ordinal regression;
Architectural elements;
Historic town

Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the changes in the virtual perception on the built heritage at the traditional core settlement of Kumbakonam Town at Tamilnadu and to analyze their implications. Specifically, the major objectives of the study are (1) to identify the architectural elements that manifest the built heritage of Kumbakonam Town and (2) to assess the contributions of these elements to the changes in the visual perception of the town. To achieve these objectives, this study adopts an empirical model that analyzes the architectural elements of the buildings in the study area. Direct observations and documentations of 373 buildings are collected to analyze those elements that contribute to the changes in the visual perception on the built heritage of Kumbakonam Town. An ordinary regression model is used to examine the characteristics of the built heritage across the chariot processional route of the town. Several architectural elements, including pilasters, horizontal cornices, arched windows, and ornamental parapets, improve the image of the town. These empirical findings support the policy framework that enhances the visual perception of Kumbakonam Town.

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1. Introduction

Born out of their deep-rooted heritage, historic towns all over the world have evolved into spaces for immortals. Built heritage is more than stone and mortar; these spaces represent the lifestyles, cultures, and traditions that are being passed across generations. Most historic towns exhibit

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Peer review under responsibility of Southeast University.

townscape qualities and a great scope for learning the planning concepts (Gast, 2007). The physical elements of these towns, including their streetscapes and skylines, add to their beauty, their history, and the sense of belonging of their inhabitants (Lynch, 1960). Over the years, the history of these towns has become a symbol of their image, which generally reflects the elements of imperial architecture.

Historical towns have confronted new challenges and changes over the last few decades. Their monuments, sacred precincts, processional streets, and public squares are all endowed with moonstones and have remained in obscurity. Increasing the number of ubiquitous buildings and

insensitively modifying the heritage buildings beyond recognition can make these historic towns look identical. Significantly changing these towns and their heritage only decay their transformation (Feilden and Jokilehto, 1998). The historical town of Kumbakonam is no exception. This town has colorful gopurams that point to the sky and serve as a reminder that Kumbakonam was previously considered a center of medieval South Indian power (Nanda, 1996). The visual perception of this town is reflected in its architectural elements. Silva (2006) argued that given the limited visual perception of historic towns, particularly on their physical elements, special preservation programs must be

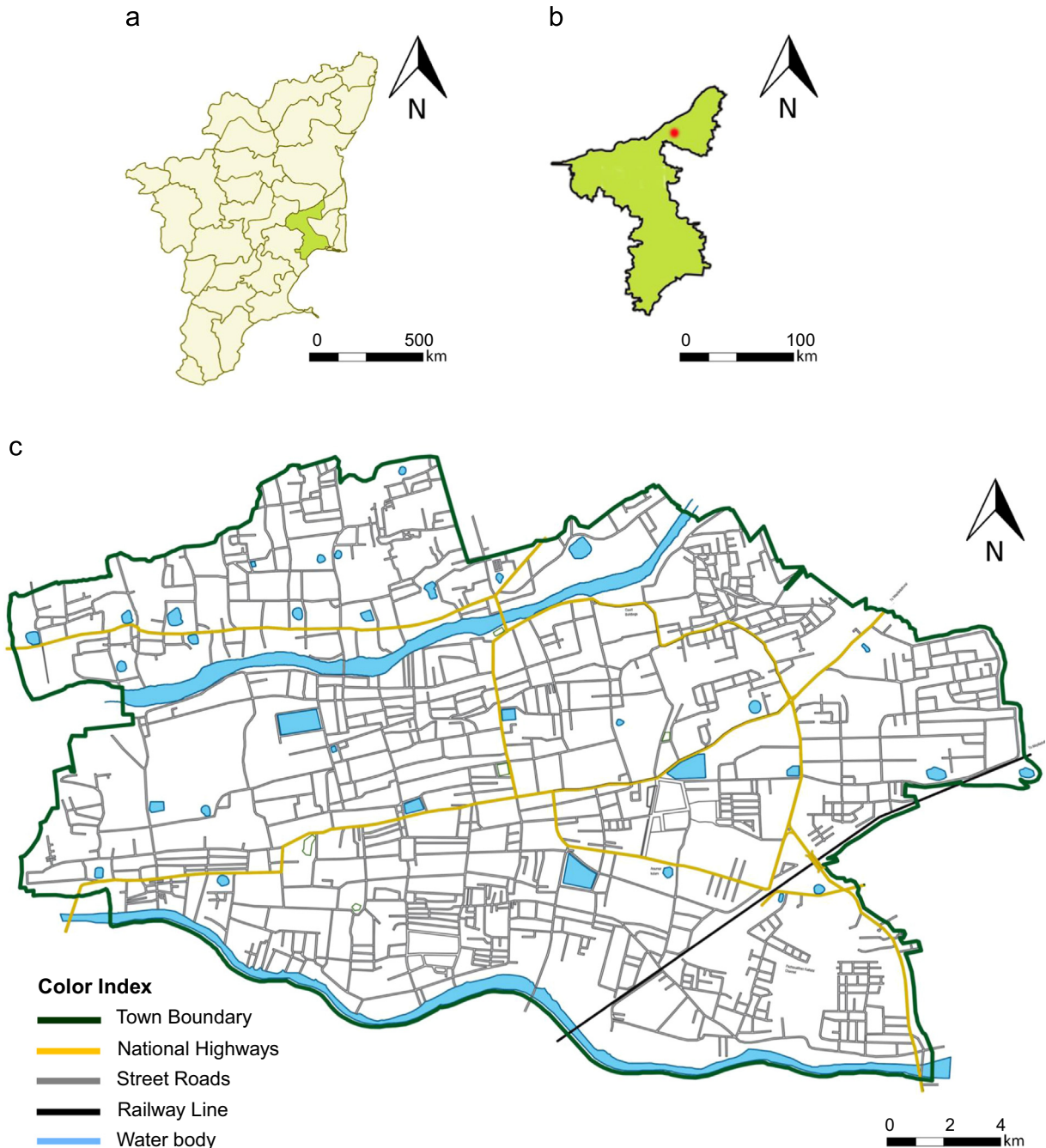


Figure 1 (a) Tamilnadu State map showing Thanjavur District; (b) Thanjavur District map showing Kumbakonam Town; (c) Kumbakonam Town map.

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