

The spatial transition of a public space during a social movement with reference to ‘Gota – Go – Gama’ in Sri Lanka in 2022

Vithanage S I

Department of Architecture, University of Moratuwa, Katubedda, Sri Lanka

Abstract

This study examined the various phases of transformation that public spaces undergo during social movements, addressing different challenges and scenarios. Specifically, the research explores the logic of zoning and architectural responses to instant movements while also investigating the spatial characteristics and dimensions that contribute to the success of social movements.

Utilizing a case study approach, this study focuses on the 'Gota-Go-Gama' movement that took place at Galle Face Colombo in Sri Lanka in 2022. The study employed meticulous observations, mapping, photographic studies, interviews, and discussions to understand and analyze the movement's dynamics. This research study analyzed the patterns of spatial occupation within protest camps and examined their role in identifying different zones and boundaries. By investigating the evolution of protest camps and the adaptations of spaces and zones within them, this study sheds light on how these adaptations reflect responses to various scenarios. The research findings provide valuable insights into the dynamic nature of protest camp environments and their impact on the organization and functionality of these spaces.

Overall, this research highlights how public spaces can be utilized to assert resistance and empower communities. The research argues that the public space and social movement influence each other in formation and, ultimately serve as a tool to represent societal resistance and power. By unraveling key insights, this study contributes to the understanding of spatial dynamics within social movements and provides a critical evaluation of the 'Gota-Go-Gama' protest camp.

Keywords: Spatial transition, social movement, public space, resistance, adaptation

Introduction

Prominent public spaces have long been recognized as ideal venues for hosting street protests, which play a pivotal role in social movements, whether they arise suddenly or gradually settle. The formation of such spaces must incorporate elements of people's daily lives, fostering their integration into public and political spheres within the city. This architectural response is characterized by its mobility, ephemerality, and high degree of collaboration.

The “Gota – Go – Gama” movement marks the most recent and important occupy movement that unfolded in Sri Lanka in response to the nation's prevailing economic crisis. The movement has been triggered by widespread socio-economic hardships and the urgent need for governmental reform, this movement represents a collective expression of discontent among the populace. As the country's economy deteriorated, citizens experienced severe disruptions in essential services, such as electricity, transportation, and food supplies. In response to these challenges, a series of protests emerged throughout the nation, culminating in a non-violent direct action occupy movement held at Galle Face in Colombo from April 9th, 2022 to July 15th, 2022 until the president resigned. Importantly, this protest was not orchestrated by any political party, highlighting its organic nature and broad-based support. The transformation of Galle Face Green into a protest camp and the subsequent evolution into a protest village, known as "Gota - Go - Gama," signified the resilience and determination of the participants. Demonstrating remarkable solidarity, people from all corners of the country and diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds converged upon the protest village, transcending age and social status differences.

This study examines the spatial transition of a public space into a protest settlement, highlighting its significance as a tool of resistance. The case study of Gota-Go-Gama (GGG), an emblematic protest village that emerged during a socio-political movement in Sri Lanka, provides a unique opportunity to explore the interplay between public spaces, social movements, and cultural dynamics. Studying the spatial transition of a public space into a protest camp offers valuable insights into the evolving nature of resistance movements and the role of public spaces as arenas for political expression. This study reviews theoretical frameworks and concepts related to space and social movements, drawing from disciplines such as urban sociology, geography, and cultural studies. By analyzing the dynamics of spatial transformation, power relations within public spaces, and the socio-cultural dimensions of

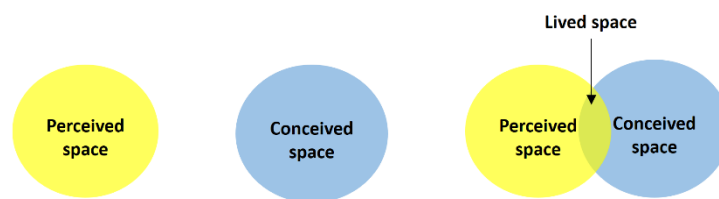
resistance, the study develops a nuanced understanding of how public space catalyzes social change and political mobilization.

Space and social movement

Concepts and theories of spatial arrangements in social movements have not been discussed extensively by different researchers around the world. But recently attention has been increased to spatial research on urban social spaces. This study reviews different ideas and theories on the relationship between space and social movements. Thus, it helps in the understanding of the spatial dimensions of a social movement and its patterns. According to Lefebvre (1991), the social space is a process of social production. Lefebvre (1991) introduces three socially produced spaces.

1. Perceived space
2. Conceived space
3. Lived space

Figure 1: Socially produced spaces / Adapted from Lefebvre (1991)



Source - Author

Perceived space is defined as the tangible form of space where social production and reproduction occurs. The materialization of space represents this space. Conceived space also known as representations of space, refers to the semiotics and meanings of space. Conceived space is “tied to the relations of production [and reproduction] and to the ‘order’ which those relationships impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes...” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33). It relates to the design and planning entity of a space. Lived space also identified as representational space refers to both perceived and conceived space. Lefebvre explains “Space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’... This is the dominated—and hence passively experienced—space that the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use

of its objects” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). The idea of ‘lived space’ is important in understanding the social movement's spatial nature. The idea of ‘representation’ directly coexists with the purpose of a social movement. This also means that there can be multiple spaces within a physical space, which can either be physical or symbolic. As Soja (1996) explains the lived spaces have the potential to be a terrain for spaces of resistance to the dominant order and create spaces with alternative orders of material and symbols. The spatial transition of space in a social movement will not always have a calculated, defined identity. As Lefebvre (1991) argues social space is a social product. So that a transition that relates to a social entity must produce a ‘new space’. Lefebvre (1991) further describes the ‘abstract spaces’, which do not have a defined identity are deeply rooted with the ideas of a new space which is a ‘differential space’. Occupation of space in a social movement will pave the way for a new space, and until a new space is created the revolution or the movement has not identified it’s full potential.

“ A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and space” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 54).

Mass assembling of people, demonstrations, and making settlements is a colossal social production and this creates a new space out of the pervasive abstract space that hosts the activities. The activities and purpose transfer the hosted space to a new, ‘revolutionary’ space. Newman (2011) also argues that these movements create new political, social, and economic spaces and new imaginaries. Moreover, Della Porta & Fabbri (2016) argue that ‘some forms of direct action (such as protest camps, occupations, etc.) are eventful, so far as they affect the daily lives of the participants by creating free spaces. This is the role of a specific public space to transform into the anticipated revolutionary space, which is not the literal creation of a new space, but rather the solidification, adaptation, re-contextualization, and reinterpretation of existing space through the way it has been designed and used.

The Role of public space in a social movement

A social movement that stimulates people to achieve a common goal and make new relationships demands the need for a ‘Public Space’. Social movements are programmed with occupying, demonstrations, assembling, etc. This requires a physical space with certain characteristics to facilitate the need to host these functions, and the message of the movement which depicts a rhetorical aspect is also attached to this place (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011). These public areas are not blank spaces within which social activity takes place, but rather

dynamic, living, and contested elements of the complex social fabric of the neighborhood (Certomà et al., 2012).

The ability to gather/ assemble was a crucial matter to test if the public space supports a social movement's purpose. According to Lefebvre (1991), social public spaces which are designed with no one defined spatial entity are the best place for a social movement to have its spatial identity. Further, most public spaces like squares and parks are designed with, symbolic and political significance. The activists use the built spaces in these public areas to make symbolic statements. It does not necessarily have to be monuments built, but use these spaces as their stage, transforming the meanings to whatever they intended and reclaiming space (Della Porta & Fabbri, 2016; Harvey, 2003). This is the reason for most of the protestors to select public spaces as the location for direct action, claiming that space would emphasize their power over political structures.

Identifying the iconic Galle Face Green, Colombo

Figure 02 People at Galle Face beach, Colombo



Source: Alamy.com

Figure 03 Galle Face context map



Source: Author

Galle Face Green, the dominant and most active public space in Sri Lanka's Colombo, reflects political hegemony and socio-political symbolism in Sri Lanka. Historically significant, it has witnessed numerous protests and influences and features landmarks like the presidential secretariat building and the Bandaranayake statue. Situated near commercial hotels, Galle Face Green serves as a pivotal junction between local and international affairs. It serves as a melting

pot where diverse ethnic and religious groups converge harmoniously. This atmosphere proved advantageous for sustaining the protest occupation, as the space provided an ideal setting for people to establish protest camps and demonstrate their resistance to the government.

Method and data collection

The method of data gathering followed an auto-ethnographic process. First-hand information was gathered by accessing and exploring the campsite throughout various times and stages of the protest. Mapping was the key strategy to understanding the flow of the movement. The gathering of information on the operations that take place in the camp and the change of activities related to spatiality required a flexible method of assessment. The analysis of the spatial arrangement has been recorded through the technique of counter-mapping and photographic studies. The logic of spatial occupations has been then developed and analyzed with observations and discussions.

Counter-Mapping

The counter-mapping allowed for the creation of a comprehensive image of the methods and logic people used to claim spaces. Identifying zones and demarcations of boundaries were key elements generated through the maps. The mapping has been done considering 03 main stages in the protest movement development on an event basis.

1. Stage 01 – Identification of prominent zones and spaces
2. Stage 02 – Identification of sub-zones and settlement pattern
3. Stage 03 – Identification of adaptations of different spaces and zones

Factors like spatial typology, boundaries/territory, and zoning were used to analyze the settlement's spatial architecture. These factors examined different spaces, their typologies, and boundaries, at each stage, revealing patterns of space claiming and the emergence of new spaces.

Timeline of the movement

09TH APR • One day occupation at Galle face Green demanding the president to resign

11TH APR • ‘Gota – Go – Gama’ protest village pops – up
 • Protest camp received basic facilities of food, water, tents and toilets.
 • Opening of Library, GGG school, Medical camps, Community kitchen, mobile toilets.

STAGE 01

13TH APR • Celebration of Sinhala and Tamil new year with new year sports and traditions.

14TH APR • Opening the Legal Aid camp

16TH APR • Opening of International media center
 • Opening of People’s University
 • Musical performances like ‘ 100 voices’ and traditional cultural performances

17TH APR • Opening of the Art gallery, Youth center and Citizens forum etc.
 • Digital projection demonstration on presidential secretariat building
 • Gota – Go – Gama branches pop-up across the country at Galle, Kandy etc.

18TH APR • Opening the protest tent of disabled war heroes

19TH APR • GGG receives solar powered power plant

20TH APR • Opening of mobile Legal Aid office
 • Students from state universities march into the GGG protest camp and protest

21ST APR • Commemoration of Easter attack victims at GGG and a day of mourning

25TH APR • Trade union march into GGG and protest

30TH APR • Different artists in the country come and protest at GGG

07TH MAY • Youth societies movement marches into GGG

STAGE 02

09 TH MAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mob attack to the GGG destroying some of the tents including the Library, Art gallery, First – aid camp and occupation tents and injuring the protestors. • Thousands coming to GGG to demonstrate their resistance and despair towards the government in a tense situation across the country. • Resignation of prime minister of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksha and the government ministers.
10 TH MAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re – building of the damaged tents including Library, Gallery and Medical camps..
12 TH MAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ranil Wickramasinghe sworn as the prime minister of Sri Lanka
13 TH MAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening of ‘Tear Gas Cinema’ for the screening of movies and videos related with revolutionary ideas • Creating statues, sculptures like the ‘Monument to the struggle’ as symbolic resistance.
16 TH MAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vesak celebration at GGG including religious rituals and Digital Vesak screenings etc.
18 TH MAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commemoration of victims of war, marking 13 years of end of war
28 TH MAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebration of 50 days of GGG protest occupation • Thousand marches into GGG and protest • Music concerts in GGG demonstrating revolutionary songs
30 TH MAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionals parade to GGG in cycles
07 TH JUN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening of IT centre at GGG

STAGE 03

20 TH JUN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protests continues with blocking all the entrances of presidential secretariat building
21 ST JUN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GGG activists arrested
24 TH JUN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protest march to GGG demanding to release the activists under custody.
09 TH JUL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thousands storming into president’s house and presidential secretariat building, claiming the buildings and overpowering the state.
15 TH JUL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President Gotabaya Rajapaksha resigns.

Evolution of the spatial arrangement

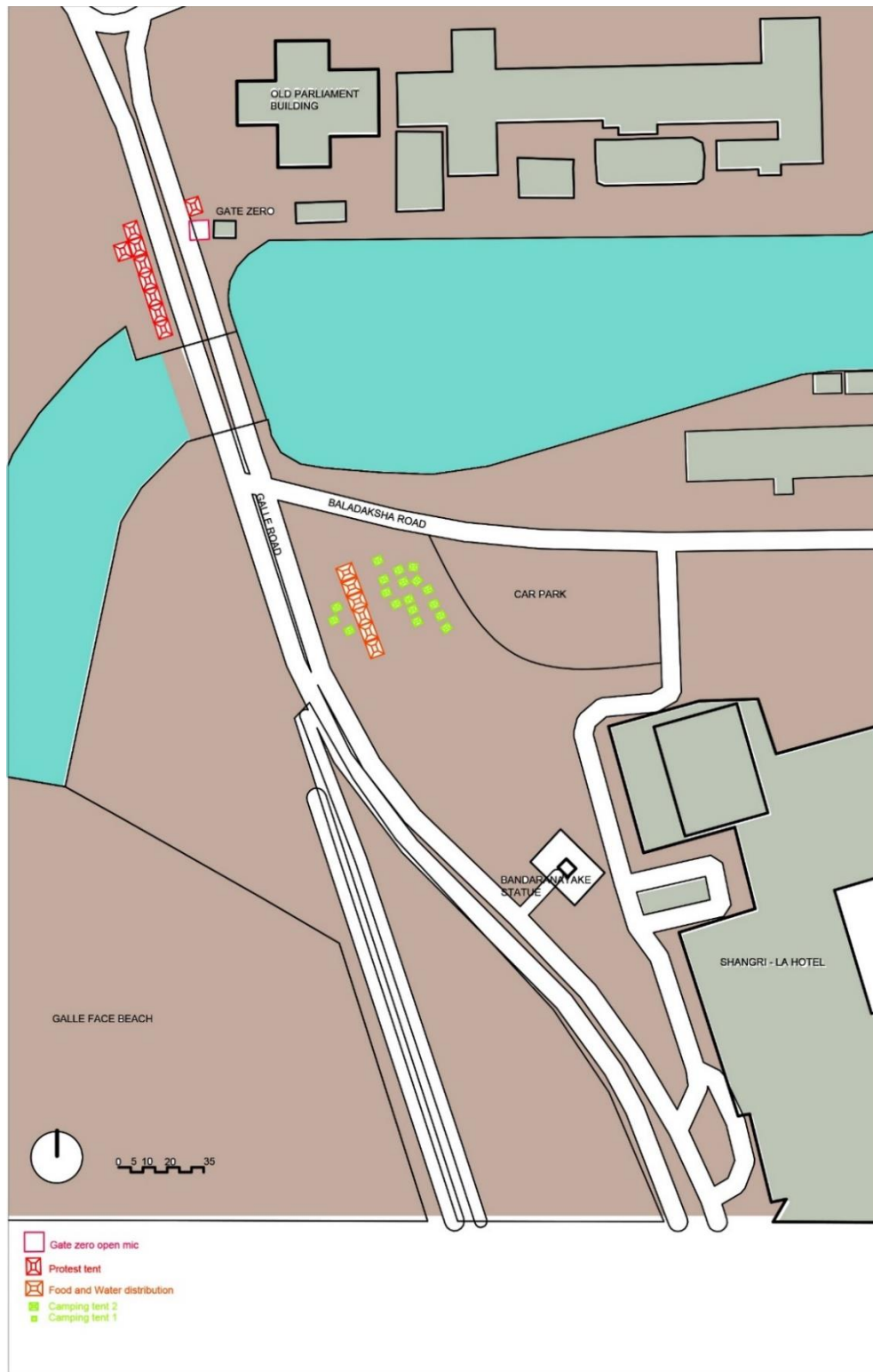


Figure 04 Gota - Go - Gama initial stage map

Source: Author

Stage 01

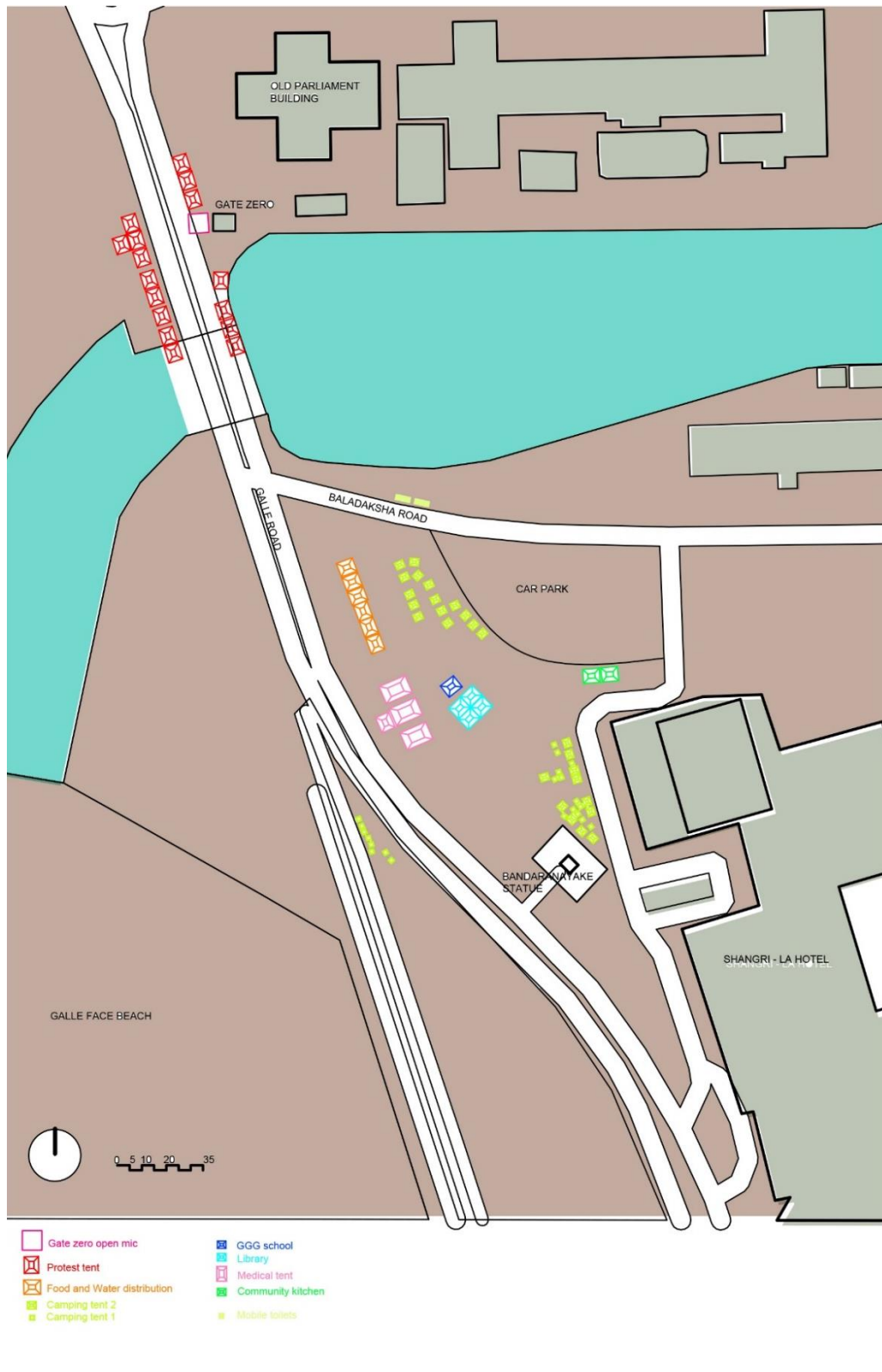


Figure 05 Stage 01 development stage GGG

Source: Author

Stage 02



Figure 06 Stage 02 development stage GGG

Source: Author

Stage 03



Figure 07 Stage 03 development stage GGG

Source: Author

Stage 01

Spatial typology

The settlement's development progressed from initial camping tents to encompass essential facilities such as a Library, a school, medical tents, and toilets. Notably, the Library played a prominent role within the Gota – Go – Gama village. The medical tents were arranged in front of the library space, having direct access from Galle Road. The community kitchen was located at the back of the site next to the car park, where it connects to the camping tents. The camping tents were located at several locations mainly focused on the statue of Banadaranayake and Baladaksha road. A clear distance was maintained from the service areas and other spaces.

Figure 08 Birds eye view of GGG stage 01



Source: Author

Boundaries and zoning



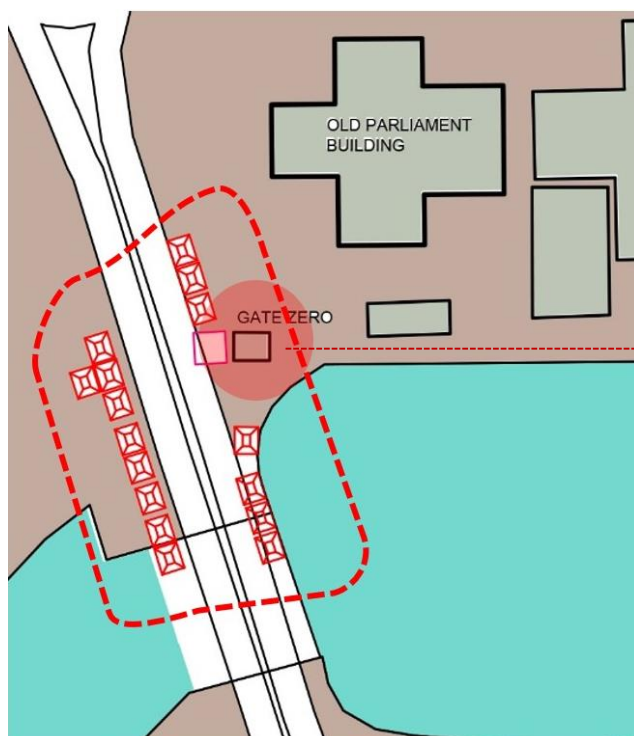
Figure 09 Stage 01 zoning map

Source: Author

The protest village can be distinctly delineated into two zones, providing a comprehensive understanding of its layout. The demonstration zone, situated around the gate zero entrance to the old parliament building, served as the focal point for protests. It held significant symbolism, representing the power of the people and their commitment to democracy. The primary objective of this zone was to convey a strong message to both the security forces and the government. Notably, all protest tents were strategically positioned and oriented towards the old parliament building, reinforcing the collective purpose.

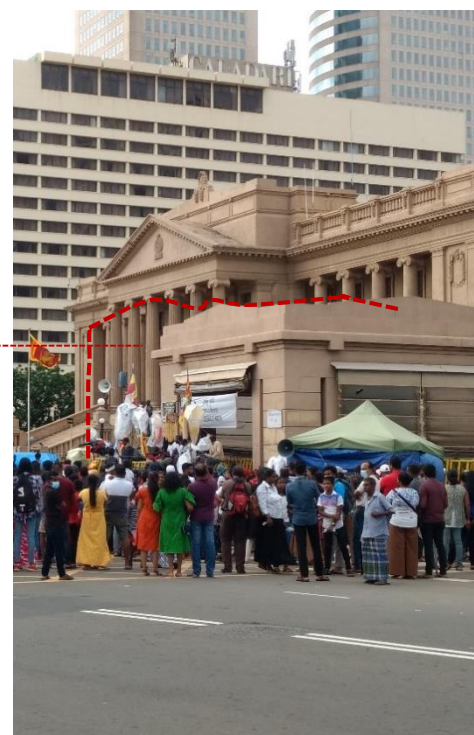
On the other hand, the mobilization area, functioning as the "village," was dispersed within the Galle Face Green vicinity, encircled by roads and the premises of the Shangri-La hotel. The lake and Baladaksha road acted as natural boundaries between these two zones, demarcating their distinct functions and dynamics.

Figure 10 Demonstration zone



Source: Author

Figure 11 Gate zero



Source: Author

Stage 02

Spatial typology

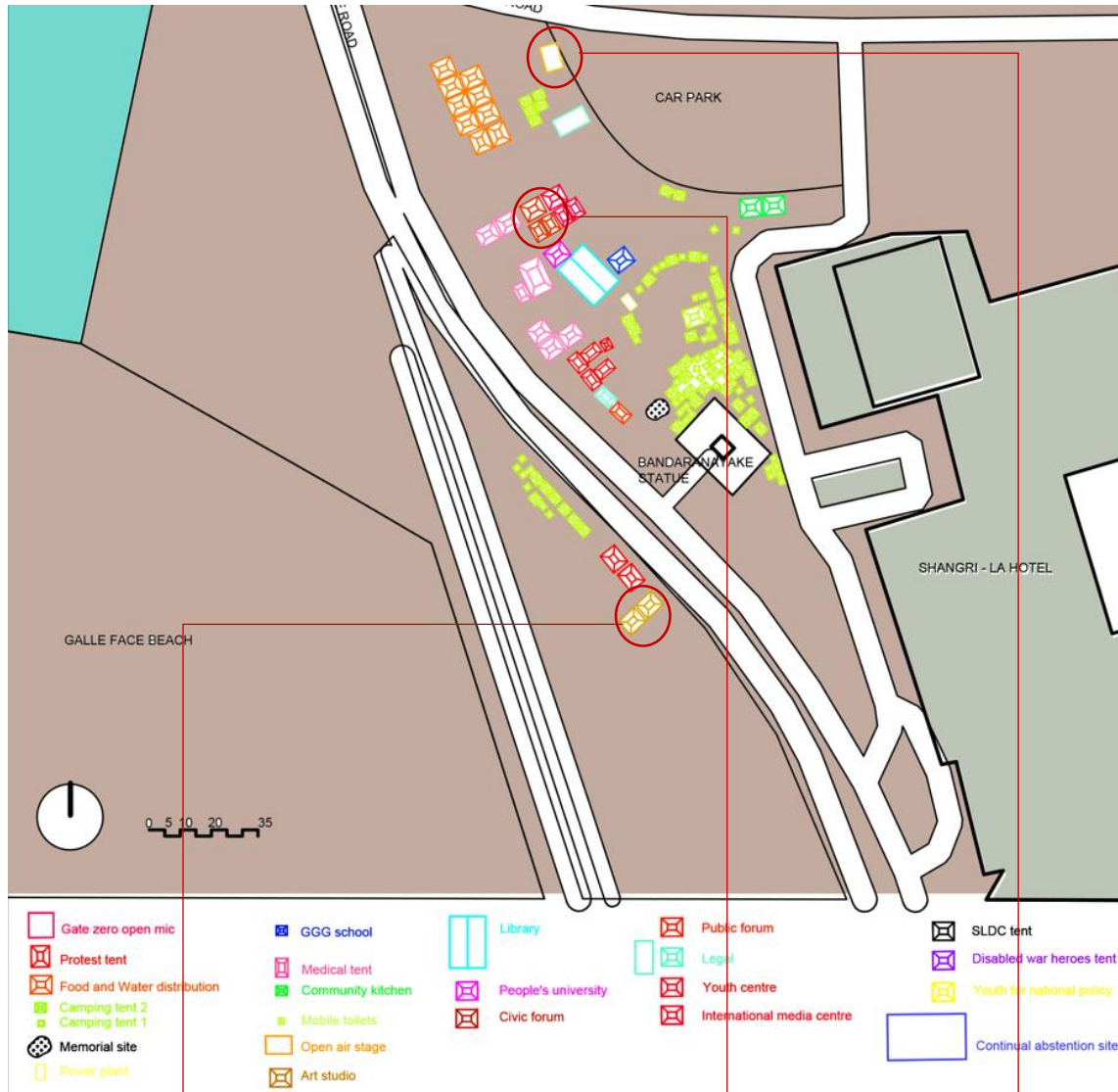


Figure 12 Stage 01 Mobilization zone

Source: Author



Figure 13 Art studio

Source: Author



Figure 14 Civic forum

Source: Author



Figure 15 Open air stage

Source: Author

During stage 02 of the Gota – Go – Gama project, the village underwent notable transformations, resulting in the establishment of various dedicated spaces. These spaces included a youth center, a public forum, an art studio, and additional camping tents. Notably, the Library and medical tents were upgraded with new building typologies and arrangements, enhancing their functionality and efficiency.

A significant shift in the village layout occurred during this stage. The majority of camping tents were relocated near the Bandaranayake statue, resulting in a more clustered pattern. This reorganization of the village allowed for a more site-specific and organized arrangement, accommodating the evolving needs of the community.

Of all the structures, the library exhibited the most adaptability and change throughout the project's progression. At this stage, the library underwent a structural transformation, providing increased capacity to house a larger collection of books and ample space for reading activities.

Figure 16 Extended library structure



Source: Author

Boundaries and zoning

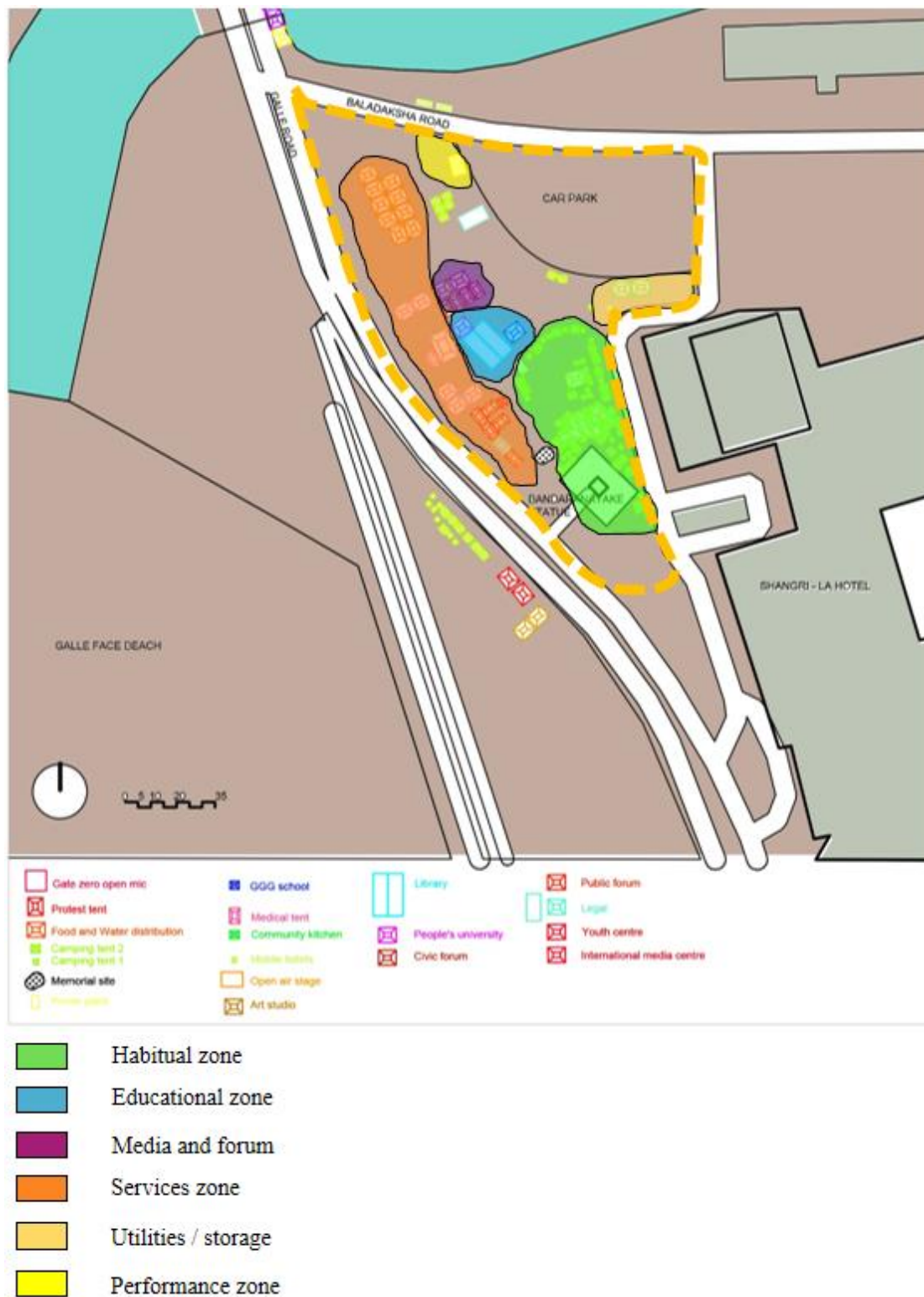


Figure 17 Stage 02 zoning map

Source: Author

At this stage, the mobilization zone within the protest village had progressed into sub-zones, each with its distinct characteristics. A visual representation of the village map clearly illustrates the deliberate arrangement of camping tents, allowing for communal spaces to emerge. These communal areas served as versatile spaces where people actively participated in various events and activities. Additionally, the free spaces also functioned as a dedicated play area, offering an opportunity for recreational engagement within the village environment.

Figure 18 Communal space in habitual zone



Source: Author

Figure 19 Youth playing



Source: Author

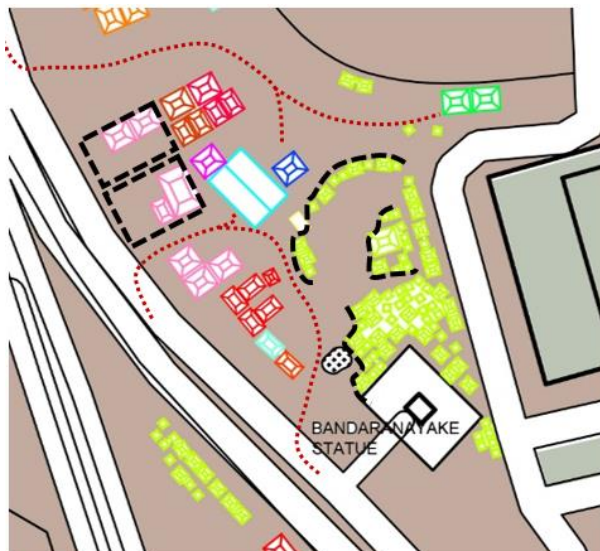
The educational zone, comprising the library, school, and people's university, was strategically developed at the center of the site, serving as a connecting link between other zones and acting as a threshold space. Amongst the various spaces in GGG, the library emerged as one of the most vibrant and functional areas. Its central location proved advantageous for sharing spaces, as the library structure expanded and extended over time.

The performance zone, oriented towards the two roads, primarily thrived during nighttime activities. Positioned between the mobilization zone and the demonstration zone, this location facilitated the attraction of individuals traversing between these two zones, enhancing the vibrancy of the performances.

In the habitual zone, a deliberate arrangement was observed, employing tents themselves as barriers to demarcating territory. This strategy, commonly employed by many protest camps, aimed to restrict access, particularly to counter challenges posed by security forces. Similarly, the medical camps also marked their territory with fences, signifying a clear distinction within

the publicly accessible site. This practice highlighted individuals' inclination to designate spaces as semi-public or private based on their intended purposes.

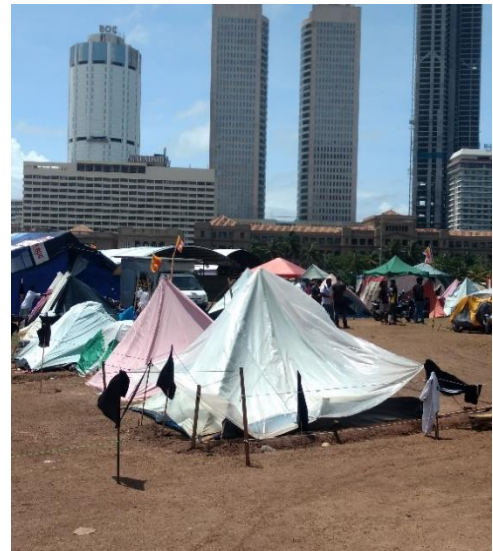
Figure 20 Territory demarcations



..... Circulation
--- Boundary demarcations

Source: Author

Figure 21 Tents used as a tool of demarcation



Source: Author

Figure 22 Birds eye view of attacked GGG



Source: NewsNow.lk

Stage 03

Spatial typology

Figure 23 Stage 03 Mobilization zone

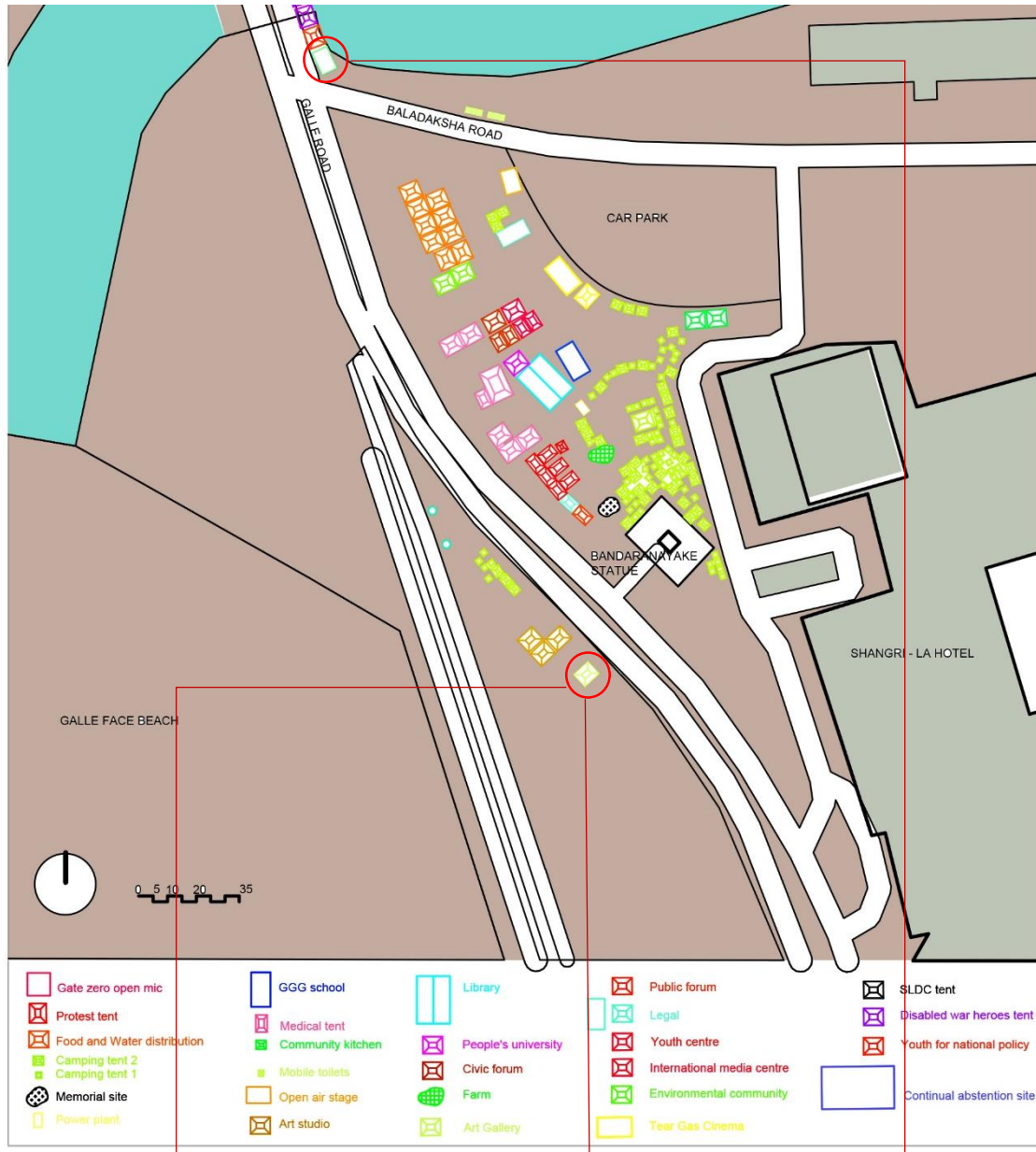


Figure 24 Burnt art studio site
Source: Author



Figure 25 Art gallery built on site
Source: Author



Figure 26 IT center
Source: nonviolentconflict.org

Following the attack on May 9th, GGG demonstrated remarkable resilience by swiftly rebuilding the protest settlement within a matter of days. This event significantly influenced the development of the protest village, particularly impacting the mobilization zone, where structures such as the library and art studio were destroyed. Despite the destruction, the library was reconstructed, incorporating improvements in both size and structure. The rebuilt library featured a larger area and a new structural arrangement while utilizing the same materials. Internally, the space was efficiently zoned to accommodate book storage, reading areas, and a dedicated section for children.

Figure 27 New arrangement of library space



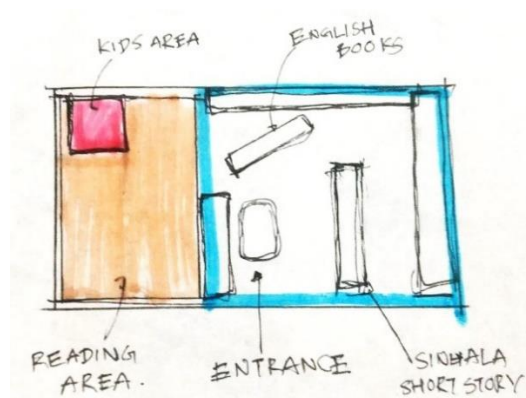
Source: Author

Figure 28 Interior of the library



Source: Author

Figure 29 Interior layout of the library



Source: Author

Boundaries and zoning

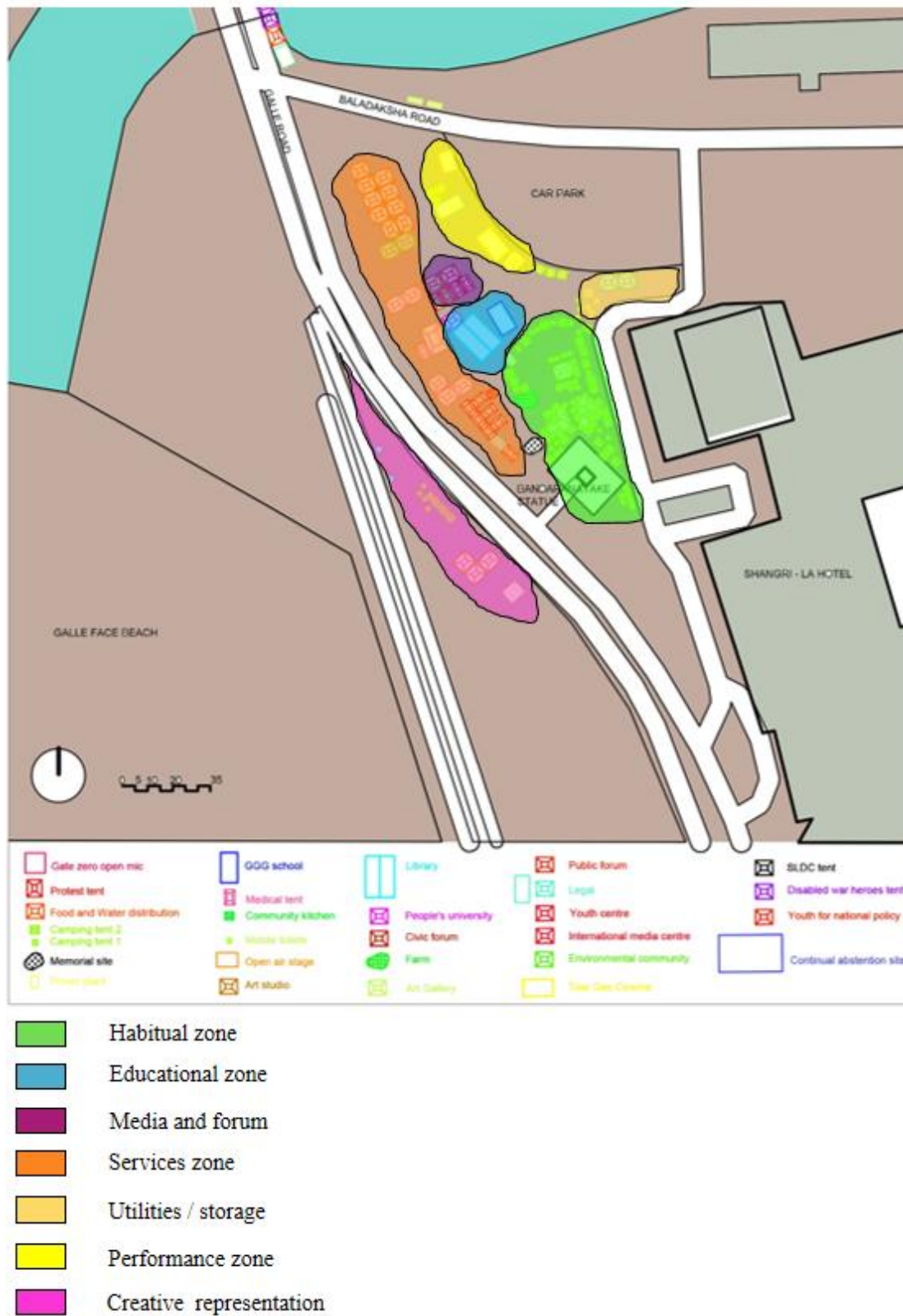
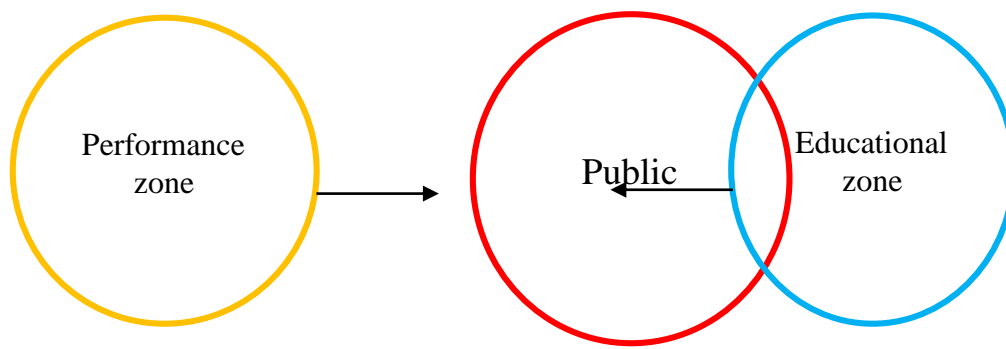


Figure 30 Stage 03 zoning map

Source: Author

The educational zone experienced an expansion of its boundaries through the implementation of new arrangements for the library and school. Furthermore, the introduction of the Tear Gas cinema created a connection between the open-air stage and the performance zone, establishing a cohesive link between these areas. Collectively, the performance zone and educational zone formed a public plaza-like space, facilitating free movement and encouraging interactions through spontaneous events. This stage witnessed the creation of additional spaces within the existing environment, contributing to the overall development and dynamism of the protest settlement.

Figure 31 Public 'place' creation diagram



Source: Author

On the opposite side of the village, an area dedicated to creativity, craftsmanship, and artistic representations emerged. The construction of sculptures, paintings, gallery spaces, and the display of protest slogans contributed to the visual enhancement of the village. These creative endeavors added to the overall aesthetic appeal and character of the settlement.

Within the habitual zone, the establishment of a farm garden served to solidify its presence. This act of reclaiming and recontextualizing spaces exemplified the unintentional process of claiming spaces and allowing them to shape people's identities.

Table 1 Summary of findings

	Spatial typology	Boundaries and zoning
Stage 01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupy tents – temporary camping tents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protest tents • Library • School • Medical tents • Toilets – mobile <p>} Canopy tents</p>	<p>Two main zones.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstration zone – centered around the Gate Zero of the old parliament building 2. Mobilization zone – village settlement in the open space next to Shangri – La hotel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baladaksha Road and the canal act as a boundary between the two zones.

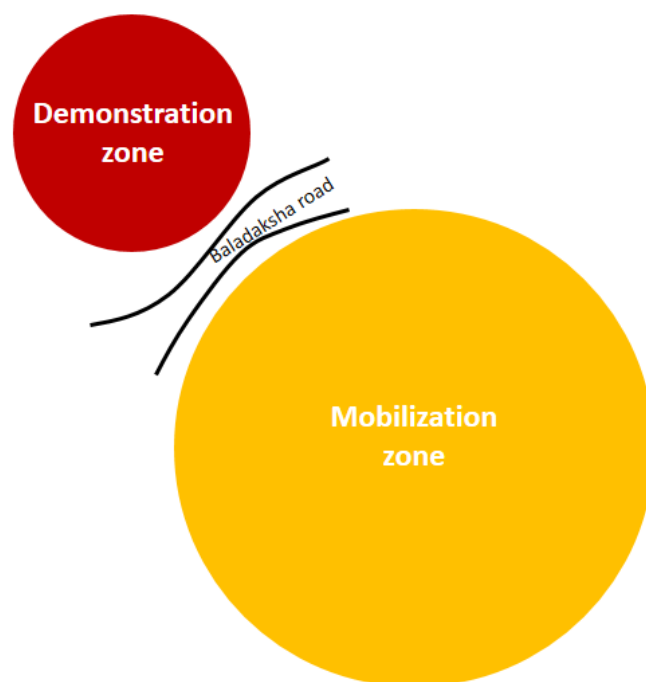


Figure 32 Stage 01 spatial diagram

Source: Author

Stage 02	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupy tent density increased. • Occupy tents are clustered towards the Bandaranayake statue. • Opening of different functional spaces including an art studio, civic forum, open-air stage, etc. • The library structure has been extended with a new arrangement of materials and structure. • Medical tents have been rearranged to create pathways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilization zone has been developed into sub-zones. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Habitual zone 2. Educational zone 3. Media and forum 4. Services zone 5. Utilities/storage 6. Performance zone • Creation of communal spaces. • Tents and fencing have been used as tools for territorial demarcation. • As a result of demarcation public, semi-public, and private areas can be identified.
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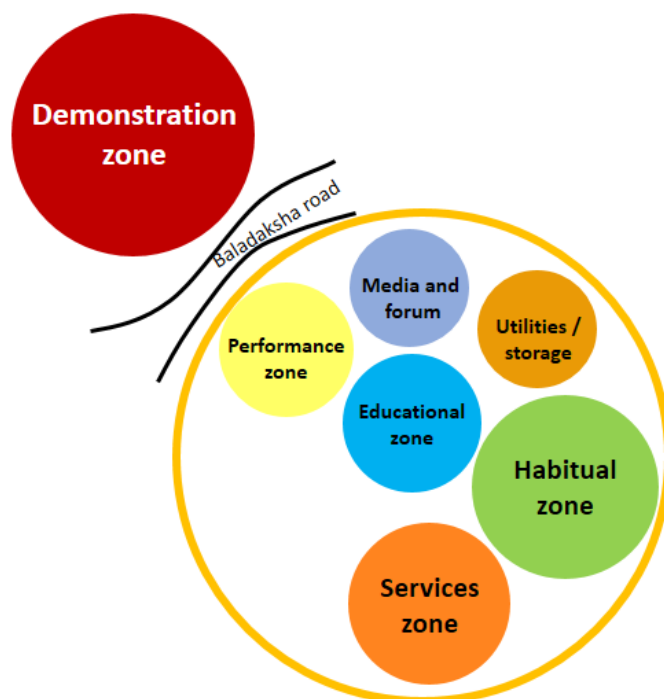


Figure 33 Stage 02 spatial diagram

Source: Author

Stage 03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the attack, damaged spaces have been rebuilt. • Library space has been rebuilt with a new structural arrangement with a more zoned layout. • The burnt art studio site was turned into an art gallery. • Opening of Tear Gas cinema hall and extending the school space with a new tent structure. • Sculptures, paintings, and slogans were displayed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A creative representation zone can be identified. • The educational zone and the performance zone are extended. • Boundaries have been strengthened with strategies like farming and increased tent density. • Links between sub-zones create new spaces for the public.
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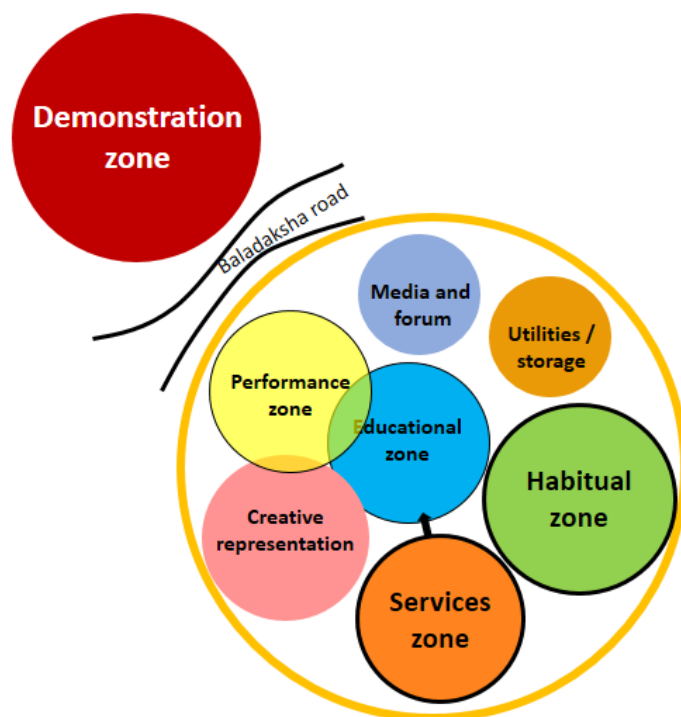
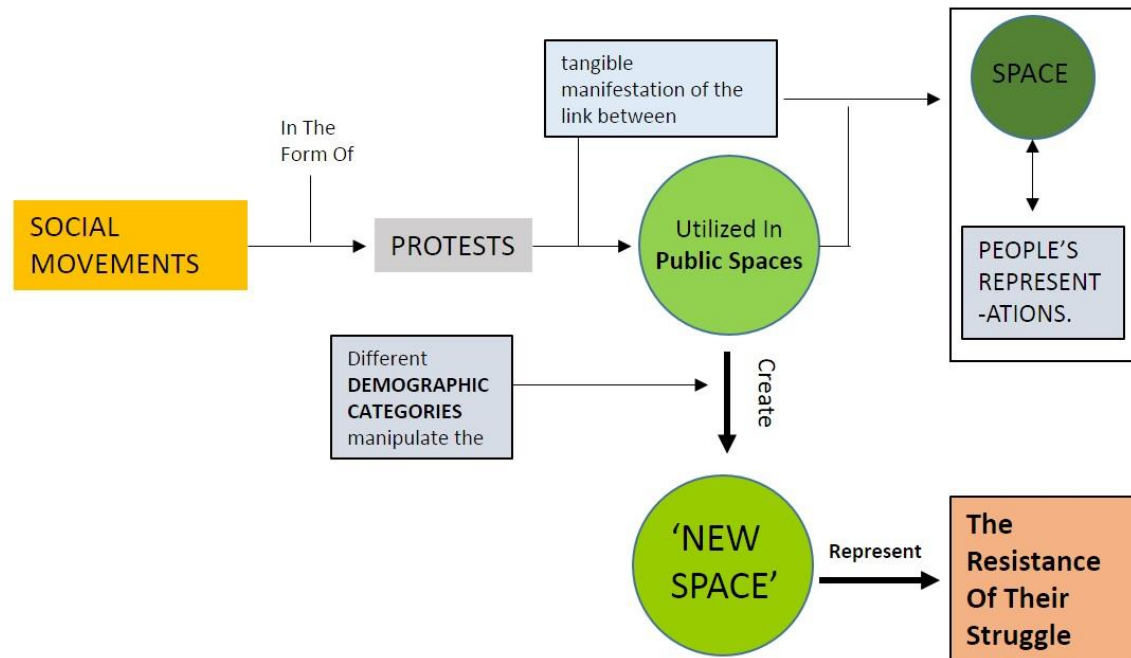


Figure 34 Stage 03 spatial diagram

Source: Author

Discussion

Figure 35 Literature review framework



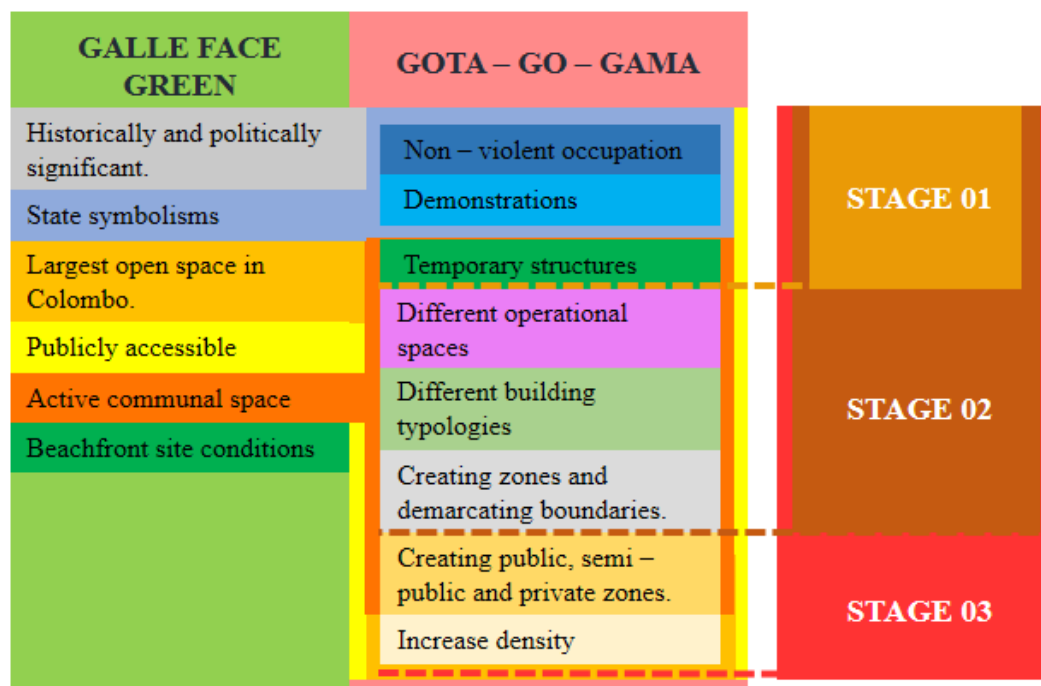
Source: Author

As protest movements face marginalization from dominant structures, the resistance necessitates the employment of strategic spatial tactics. This study delved into the role of public space within social movements, exploring various strategies such as demarcation and the creation of distinct zones. In the case study of the GGG protest village, a key strategy employed was the establishment of common spaces that welcomed diverse ideologies and functions. This approach proved advantageous in attracting and engaging a larger number of individuals in the protest village's representational process.

Throughout each stage, the spatial structure of the village evolved and adapted to address different challenges and operational requirements. The expansion of zones while maintaining their unique characteristics reflected the organic development of GGG as a collective endeavor towards a shared goal. It created a communal space that redefined the concept of public space and showcased how such a space can transform into new forms and purposes.

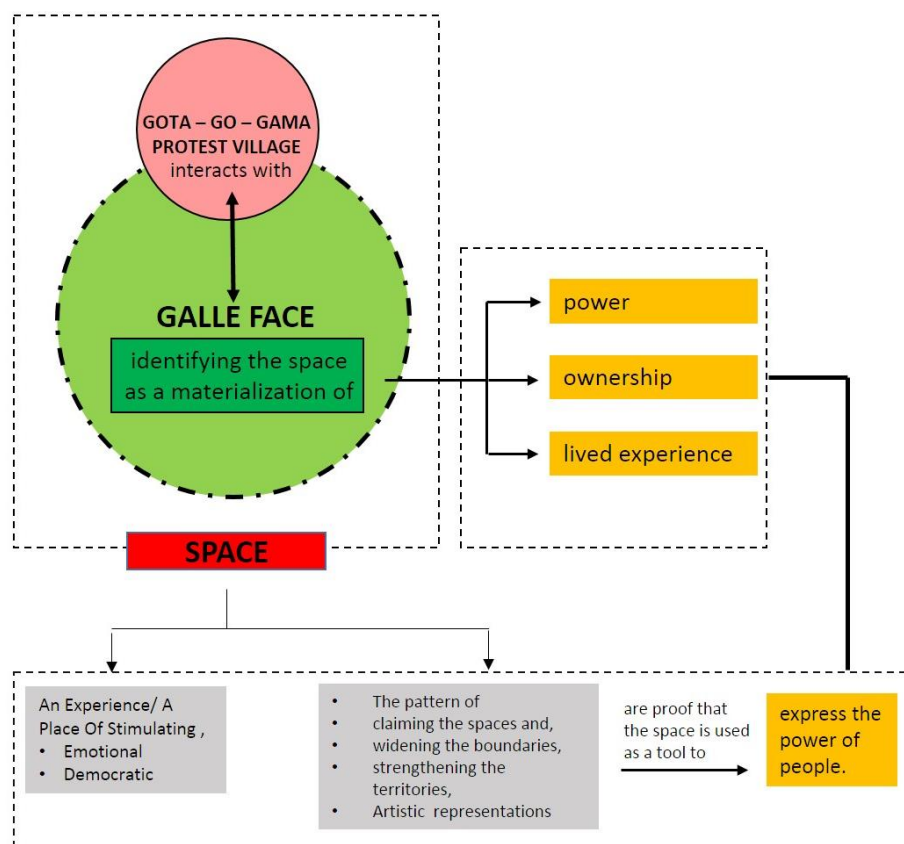
The diagram presented below illustrates how these spatial strategies aligned with the characteristics of public space, ultimately resulting in a potent protest arrangement.

Table 2 GGG Spatial typology relationship with attributes of Galle Face, Colombo



Source: Author

Figure 36 GGG connection to literature review



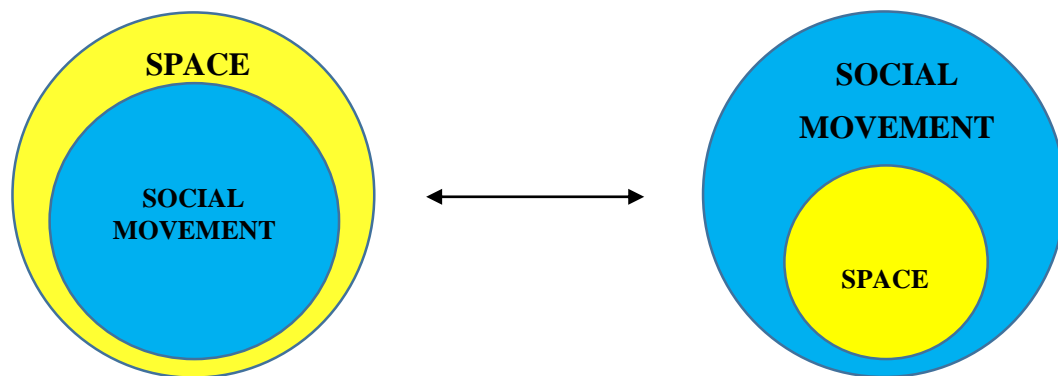
Source: Author

The Gota – Go – Gama protest village established a dynamic interaction with the Galle Face, perceiving the space as a manifestation of power, ownership, and a lived experience. The diverse functions and spatial activities mentioned above illustrate how individuals viewed the space as a 'tool' or, in this context, a 'weapon' against the power structure they opposed. Moreover, the space served as a site for emotional engagement, fostering new connections and collaborative approaches, which contributed to the public and vibrant nature of the protest camp.

Conclusion

The evolution of public space within the context of the social movement can be observed through two stages. Initially, the space functions as a vessel for the social movement, catering to its needs and facilitating networking. Subsequently, the space becomes an integral part of the social movement, transforming into an instrument of struggle. Indeed, the space itself holds tremendous potential as the most effective means for the social movement's expression. The interplay between public space and the social movement influences the formation of both, as the social movement transforms a public space of hegemonic value into a performative space.

Figure 37 Spatial transition n between space and social movement



Source: Author

The research establishes connections with various disciplines, suggesting avenues for further exploration. Key areas for investigation include understanding urban morphology in Sri Lanka influenced by rural roots, viewing space as a versatile object, and exploring the design of public spaces in virtual cities. The significance of studying protest settlements is emphasized, revealing valuable insights and prompting designers to reevaluate their approaches and ideologies.

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