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Interactions Between Pedestrians and Street Vendors: Experiences From the Global North and South

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Abstract

Street vending evokes contrasting images of urban vibrancy and congestion. This comparative study explores the dynamics between street vendors and pedestrians in the Global North and South through four case studies—two in Brisbane, Australia, representing the North, and two in Nagpur, India, representing the South. Employing Kelum Palipane's sensory rhythms diagram, this research examines the sensory experiences—sight, sound, touch, smell, movement, taste—in urban environments where street vending is present. Findings reveal notable disparities in pedestrian activity. However, street vendors in all contexts influence pedestrian behaviour through common sensory cues. Brisbane represents a case where more street vending is encouraged, albeit under strict regulations. Here, further initiatives are needed to inject vitality into urban spaces. In contrast, Nagpur exemplifies India's rich street vending culture. In this context, street vending is positive in many ways but also presents challenges such as congestion, safety, and accessibility. Despite these differences, street vendors in both cities play a crucial role in enhancing the urban experience. The research highlights the need for balanced planning strategies that promote urban vibrancy while mitigating any adverse impacts of street vending on pedestrians.

Keywords

pedestrian behaviour; sensory rhythms diagram; street vending; urban vibrancy

1. Introduction

Street vending refers to the sale of goods or services in public spaces, such as open markets, streets, plazas, and even public transport stations, typically by informal or small-scale vendors (Etemadi, 2004; Devlin, 2011, as cited in Wungo et al., 2022). This activity evokes at least two contrasting images:

1. An otherwise drab urban environment is transformed into a vibrant hub of activity. Colourful stalls lining the streets offer an array of goods—delectable food, handcrafted jewellery, and unique clothing—enticing passersby to explore, savour, and engage in lively conversations with vendors. Buskers add excitement and charm. Amidst the hustle and bustle, each interaction becomes a mini-adventure, igniting the senses and creating lasting memories that enrich the urban experience. But once the festivities fade, the space falls silent again. Vibrancy only comes in fleeting waves.
2. The scene is chaotic. Sidewalks are cluttered and pathways are obstructed. The proliferation of stalls and merchandise strewn on the ground creates pedestrian congestion, frustrating passersby and potential customers. A lack of proper waste management exacerbates the issues, with discarded packaging and leftover food contributing to unsightly litter and sanitation concerns. This environment not only detracts from the urban experience but also poses safety hazards and impedes accessibility for all residents and visitors.

These descriptions could apply to street vending in various locations around the world—both in the Global North and the Global South. However, street vending—and urban space more broadly—tends to be more tightly regulated and proceeds in a more orderly fashion in the Global North, whereas, in the Global South, it is generally less regulated and more hectic (Hagos & Adnan, 2020; Sun et al., 2020; Torky & Heath, 2021).

There is extensive research on street vendors and their impact on society. However, international comparative literature that systematically evaluates street vending activities in contrasting settings is largely missing. Such literature is necessary to reveal aspects of street vending that have been overlooked in single case study research. To address this gap, this study seeks to answer the following questions empirically: In what ways do street vendors and pedestrians affect one another in (a) unregulated, high-density, and vibrant urban environments, and (b) highly regulated, quieter urban spaces where pedestrian traffic is scarce?

Four case studies are examined: two in Brisbane, Australia, and two in Nagpur, India. While these locations have been selected to represent the Global North and South respectively, it is important to note that similar cases can be found across different geographic contexts. For example, in Southern European cities, street vending is often informal and shares many characteristics with Nagpur. Meanwhile, cities like Cape Town, Singapore, and São Paulo—like Brisbane—have highly regulated street vending systems, with vendors required to register and/or follow zoning laws. In fact, some commentators (e.g., Dados & Connell, 2012) argue that, at this stage, terms like “Global North” and “Global South” are better understood as metaphors referring to certain development levels and regulatory regimes, rather than as contiguous geographic locations.

This study is based on multisensory non-participant observation, following a framework called “sensory rhythms diagram” (Palipane, 2019). This framework involves painstaking fieldwork employing all the senses. The findings contribute to urban studies by deepening our understanding of how street vending shapes perceptions and experiences of urban space. Such an understanding is necessary for formulating planning policies that enhance urban vibrancy while ensuring access, comfort, and safety for everyone. The study also highlights the role of informal economies and/or small businesses in making cities more dynamic—visually and financially.

Before discussing the method and case study settings in detail, a brief overview of key issues related to street vending and vendors is provided below. We define street vending and the context in which it takes place, delineate its benefits and challenges, and discuss the regulatory frameworks that govern it in various settings.

2. Background on Street Vending/Vendors

2.1. Definition and Context

Street vending has been an integral part of urban economies since ancient times. Historical accounts across civilisations describe itinerant merchants selling goods door-to-door thereby connecting neighbouring regions (Recchi, 2020). In the Global South, street vending has long been embedded in the urban fabric; with recent urbanisation trends, it has only expanded further (Sun et al., 2020; Wungo et al., 2022).

However, street vending is also present—and sometimes prominent—in Global North cities, particularly among impoverished and/or migrant communities (Recchi, 2020; Woldeamanuel et al., 2022). For example, in New York, migrants from various ethnic backgrounds make up 51% of street vendors (Carpenter, 2018). Kebab vans introduced by Middle Eastern migrants in Melbourne have become an integral part of the cityscape, despite initial reservations about their aesthetics (Rosmarin & Sintusingha, 2019).

Dovey et al. (2022) categorise street vending into three types: fixed, semi-mobile, and mobile. Fixed vending involves small structures or kiosks that are not easily movable (Dovey et al., 2022). Semi-mobile vendors utilise temporary setups that can be disassembled daily but remain stationary during trading. Mobile vendors engage in trading activities that can be instantly moved. While fixed structures are spatially spread out due to their nature, mobile and semi-mobile structures are commonly found in public areas. These typologies illustrate the diversity of street vending operations in urban environments and the adaptability of vendors to different spatial and regulatory contexts.

The items and services offered by street vendors vary significantly depending on cultural contexts, local needs, and geographical location, with notable differences between the Global North and Global South. In some cases, the goods sold on the street complement those found in stores (Voltolini, 2006).

The indoor lifestyle of the Global North contrasts with popular street food activity in the Global South. In Northern cities, vendors primarily sell food, handmade crafts, jewellery, and artwork (Carpenter, 2018). Traditionally in these contexts, food was served indoors in restaurants or semi-open cafés, but the rise of international migrants has popularised street food vending (Carpenter, 2018). Street vendors often offer unique or culturally significant goods that may not be readily available in larger retail establishments. In contrast, the diversity of street vending in Southern cities extends beyond food, encompassing products such as phone accessories, casual wear, and even fresh meat and fish sold in open-air environments (Hagos & Adnan, 2020). In some places, particularly in East and Southeast Asia, services like haircuts, massages, and ear cleaning, which are considered private in the North, are performed in public spaces.

2.2. Benefits and Challenges

While the scale and nature of street vending varies across countries, this activity offers social and economic benefits everywhere. It stimulates social interaction while providing a range of affordable goods and services in accessible locations. It is also a source of income for the poor, particularly those who lack access to formal employment opportunities in growing cities (Voltolini, 2006; Wungo et al., 2022). Hence its prominence in parts of Africa (Acharya & Jagari, 2023; Warlina et al., 2021), Asia (Acharya & Jagari, 2023), and Latin America (Woldeamanuel et al., 2022).

In North America, Europe, and Australia, street vending is less about economic survival and more about enriching urban life. While in Global South metropolises street vendors cater to the lower socioeconomic class with affordable items, weekly markets in the North are leisure destinations for the upper-middle class. Commentators in New York have noted that vendors activate sidewalks by engaging pedestrians in spontaneous activities such as queuing for food or negotiating prices (Voltolini, 2006).

By being mobile, street vendors can take their business to where customers are located, thus reducing the need for buyers to travel to distant locations. This convenience saves consumers time and money, especially in areas where access to traditional brick-and-mortar stores is limited or where transportation is scarce. Vendors appear to have a remarkable instinct for pedestrian density and foot traffic. Continuously monitoring market dynamics, they quickly identify high-demand zones and strategically cluster in these prime spots (Whyte, 1980). This positioning allows them to capitalize on impulse shopping decisions by passersby (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022a). Vendors' efforts to advertise their products and services—for example, food or cosmetics—also activate urban spaces. Vendors frequently offer samples to capture the interest of passersby (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022b).

While vendors' presence is beneficial in many ways, the dense crowds they attract may also encourage littering or pickpocketing (Woldeamanuel et al., 2022). Issues also arise when vendors install stalls or tents in ways that obstruct pedestrian flow and decrease the pedestrian level of service, a measure of pedestrian comfort and the functionality of pedestrian services (Acharya & Jagari, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2010; Sumabrata & Gurning, 2011). People with disabilities or those pushing prams and shopping carts may find it particularly challenging to navigate crowded streets and sidewalks. Problems are exacerbated by noise pollution, waste accumulation, and, at times, smoke from poorly functioning cooking devices (Hagos & Adnan, 2020; Warlina et al., 2021).

2.3. Regulatory Frameworks

In the Global South, street vendors often (but certainly not always) operate informally, outside established regulatory frameworks, disregarding conventional legal norms (Hagos & Adnan, 2020; Sun et al., 2020; Torky & Heath, 2021). The challenge here is to regulate vending in a way that prevents disorder. However, some cities have taken extreme measures by criminalising, banning, or relocating street vending—albeit with limited success (Torky & Heath, 2021; Woldeamanuel et al., 2022). In cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Mexico City, collective action has pressured authorities to restore vendors' right to conduct business (McGee & Yeung, 1977). However, in places with weaker labour organisations, such as Dhaka, vendors resort to individual tactics, such as illegally reoccupying trade sites and bribing authorities, thus perpetuating exploitation by corrupt local governments (Lata et al., 2019).

While some regulation is beneficial, excessive and overly rigid rules can deter people, resulting in dreary and unsafe public spaces—as many cities in the Global North have learned the hard way (Carpenter, 2018; Voltolini, 2006). Here street vending has been more tightly regulated to manage pedestrian congestion and maintain public order and hygiene standards (Torky & Heath, 2021). However, Northern cities are starting to recognise the value of this activity, and, to encourage it, are loosening some regulations around public space use (Brisbane City Council, 2023).

3. Methodology

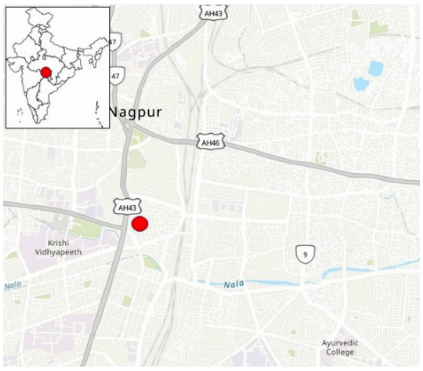
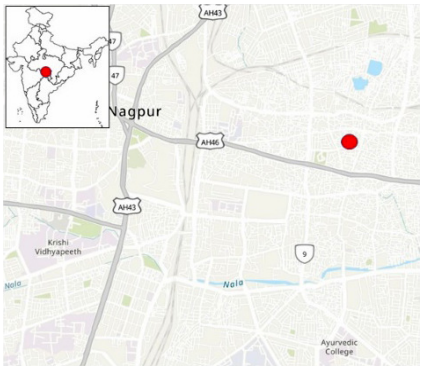
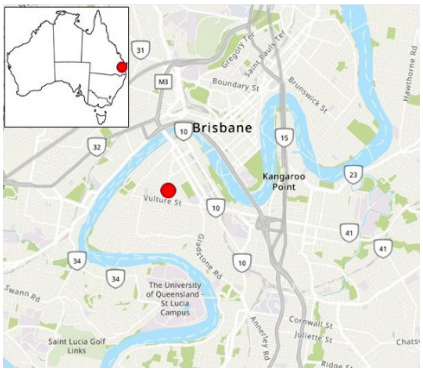
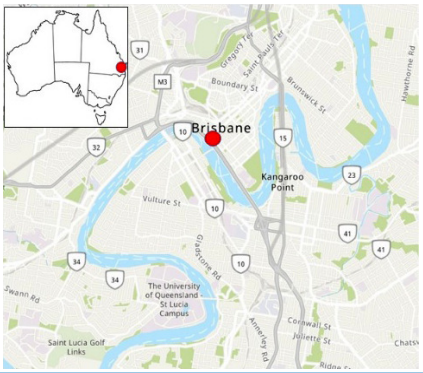
3.1. Case Studies

Australia and India share a common historical background as former British colonies, yet their urban development paths diverge significantly. Since gaining independence, Australia has maintained a strong affinity for Anglo-style planning, which has shaped its urban landscape. The country has traditionally embraced an indoor lifestyle, with social activities primarily taking place within controlled, enclosed environments. Notably, outdoor dining restrictions persisted in Brisbane until the 1980s, despite its mild climate throughout the year. However, with the influx of migrants from diverse backgrounds, there has been a gradual shift in mentality over time. Brisbane, now boasting a population of 2.5 million (Brisbane City Council, 2024), aspires to position itself as "Australia's new world city" (Brisbane City Council, 2019). While many suburban main streets continue to have low urban design quality (Hooi & Pojani, 2020), the City Council is emphasising the creation of vibrant public spaces in the centre (see Parajuli & Pojani, 2018). Spaces here are more conducive to socialising and community events, and some allow street vending for food, crafts, accessories, clothing, and even services such as bodywork or soothsaying (Brisbane City Council, 2023). Street vending is managed through a licensing and permitting system, with most markets located in the central business district and around the inner city.

In contrast, India has preserved its deeply entrenched cultural practices following independence. One of those is a pronounced preference for outdoor living and bustling street markets. Nagpur, situated in the centre of India, has a population of 3 million. The city is renowned for its burgeoning IT industry (Macrotrends, 2023). In addition to white-collar tech employees, the city attracts blue-collar migrants from smaller towns seeking employment opportunities, many of whom engage in small-scale businesses on the streets, contributing to the informal economy. However, a rapid increase in vendors, with approximately 90,000 currently (a fourfold rise over a decade), coupled with limited dedicated vending zones, has led to complaints by residents (Hagos & Adnan, 2020; Nagpur Municipal Corporation, 2023). In response, the Municipal Council has recognised the need to regulate vending activities under the City Development Plan. The aim is to facilitate the registration of vendors utilising public spaces and address illegal encroachments, thereby fostering a more structured and orderly streetscape (Nagpur Municipal Corporation, 2023).

In summary, distinct approaches and preferences regarding street vending are evident in India and Australia. While India has long relied on street markets as a cornerstone of its urban fabric, Australia is only beginning to explore this aspect. Furthermore, in India, street vending is an important source of livelihood that supports the urban poor, whereas in Australia, it primarily catalyses social interaction and urban vibrancy (Brisbane City Council, 2024; Nagpur Municipal Corporation, 2023). Nagpur and Brisbane were selected as contrasting case studies to examine these differences. For the study, four streets were chosen where outdoor vending occurs regularly: two in Nagpur and two in Brisbane (see Table 1). Sitabuldi Market Road (Nagpur) and Suitcase Rummage (Brisbane) share similarities with semi-mobile vendor arrangements, while both Itwari Bazar Road (Nagpur) and Boundary Street (Brisbane) feature fixed structures such as local shops and cafes that utilise sidewalk space for advertising and selling their products.

Table 1. Case studies.

Study area	Location	Description
Sitabuldi Market Road, Nagpur		Sitabuldi is Nagpur's premier street market, having evolved organically over the years. It boasts a mix of semi-mobile and mobile informal vendors, offering a wide array of affordable clothes, accessories, footwear, and more. The street is flanked by shops on both sides, with vendors typically stationed in front of these establishments, adjacent to kerbside parking. Recent developments, including the construction of the World Trade Centre, and ongoing street renovation efforts, have forced vendors to relocate toward the centre of the road.
Itwari Bazar Road, Nagpur		Itwari Bazar Road is one of Nagpur's longstanding activity hubs. This expansive wholesale market comprises numerous parallel shopping lanes catering to diverse merchandise categories. During shopping hours, these lanes cater to pedestrians, with vending structures predominantly fixed in place. The market is renowned for its selection of home décor items, accessories, and cooked food. Parking for private vehicles is centralised on the market's main square during shopping hours. The surroundings blend commercial and residential uses.
Boundary Street, inner-city neighbourhood, Brisbane		Boundary Street functions as the high street of an inner-city suburb called West End. West End's population is wealthier and better educated relative to other suburbs throughout Brisbane (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Boundary Street is one of the oldest thoroughfares in the city and originally served to separate Indigenous populations from British colonisers (hence the name). Given West End's accessible location and its attractive design, Boundary Street attracts visitors from all over the city rather than just the immediate vicinity.
Suitcase Rummage, central business district, Brisbane		Suitcase Rummage occurs bi-monthly on Sundays, always in the same location. This event transforms an open plaza in Brisbane's central business district into a vibrant marketplace. Local sellers showcase their offerings nestled within suitcases. A diverse selection of goods is usually on offer, ranging from vintage clothes to handcrafted jewellery. Most vendors are community members rather than business owners. Occasionally, there are live music performances. Organised and overseen by the Council, this market is usually well-attended.

Sources: Architizer (2023); Brisbane City Council (2023); Hill (2023); Nagpur Municipal Corporation (2023); Suitcase Rummage (n.d.).

3.2. Data Collection

To gather data, this study employed a passive (non-participant) observation method. This method has been used in urban design research since William Whyte's seminal investigation of human behaviour in urban settings (Whyte, 1980) and is still popular today (see, for example, Milne & Pojani, 2023). However, this study goes a step beyond traditional techniques by privileging multi-sensoriality over abstract metrics, maps, or language (see Pink, 2015, on the notion of sensory ethnography). The purpose is to develop an embodied rather than purely logical understanding of the research sites.

The underlying assumption is that vendors and their customers dynamically alter the urban landscape through visual and tactile displays of clothing and crafts (i.e., sight and touch), food preparation (i.e., smell and taste), music and calls (i.e., sound), and other sensory elements, such as movement. Sensory cues affect how people perceive and interact with public spaces—they either attract or deter people. While the smell of handcrafted soap or essential oils can be appealing, excessive noise, refuse odours, or people brushing against one another may lead to discomfort and avoidance.

This study applied the sensory rhythms method, which was first developed by Palipane (2019), based on Lefebvre's (2013) theory of rhythmanalysis. According to Lefebvre, cities are not fixed; they are constantly changing as people interact with their surroundings: "Everywhere there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm" (Lefebvre, 2013, p. 15). Humans perceive urban environments with all the senses, and rhythmanalysis helps to understand how the rhythms of everyday life shape urban spaces. Based on Lefebvre's (2013) theory and Lucas' (2009) empirical approach, Palipane (2019) developed a radar notation system of sensory rhythms. This method focuses on capturing all sensory experiences, including sight, sound, touch, movement, taste, and smell on a radar diagram. Each spoke represents a sensory modality, with the intensity rated on a scale from 1 to 6, with 6 being the highest (Figure 1).

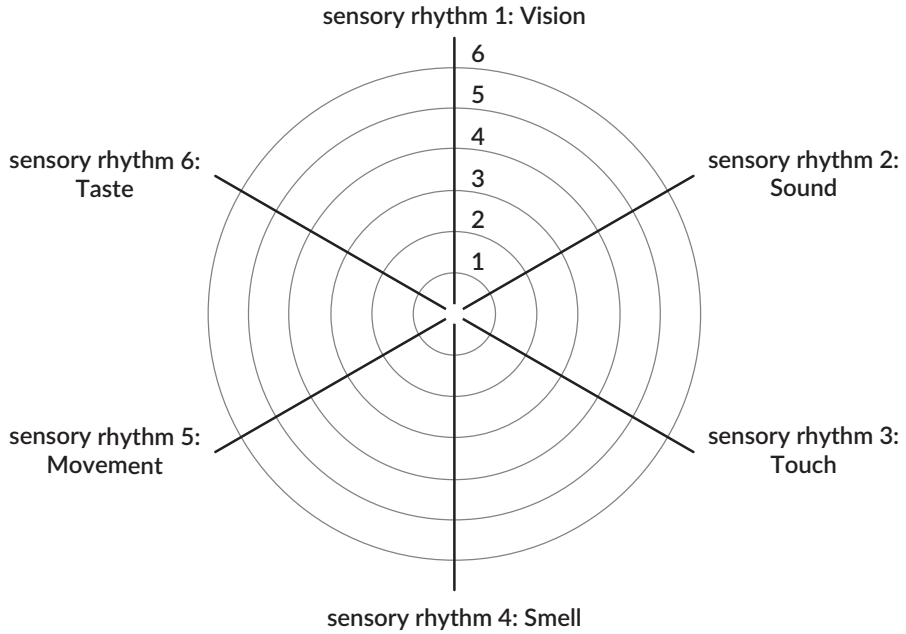


Figure 1. Radar diagram to note sensory rhythms. Each spoke of the radar wheel represents a sensory modality, the intensity of which is rated on a 1–6 Likert scale. Source: Palipane (2019).

This research extends Palipane's (2019) original insights by applying her method to street vending patterns and the interactions between pedestrians and vendors in two different socio-cultural contexts. The authors found that the sensory rhythms method is well suited to the study of street vending because vendors and pedestrians create their rhythms by using the space in different ways. To track the sensory rhythms across each site, the fieldworker traced the spatial journeys on a local map. Hourly notations of rhythms in key locations along the journey were made, observing fluctuations in their intensity over time. These notations were subsequently translated into temporal patterns, and triangulated with other data collected during fieldwork, such as sketches, handwritten notes, food tasting, touching of merchandise, sound recording, photographs, and videos (Figure 2).

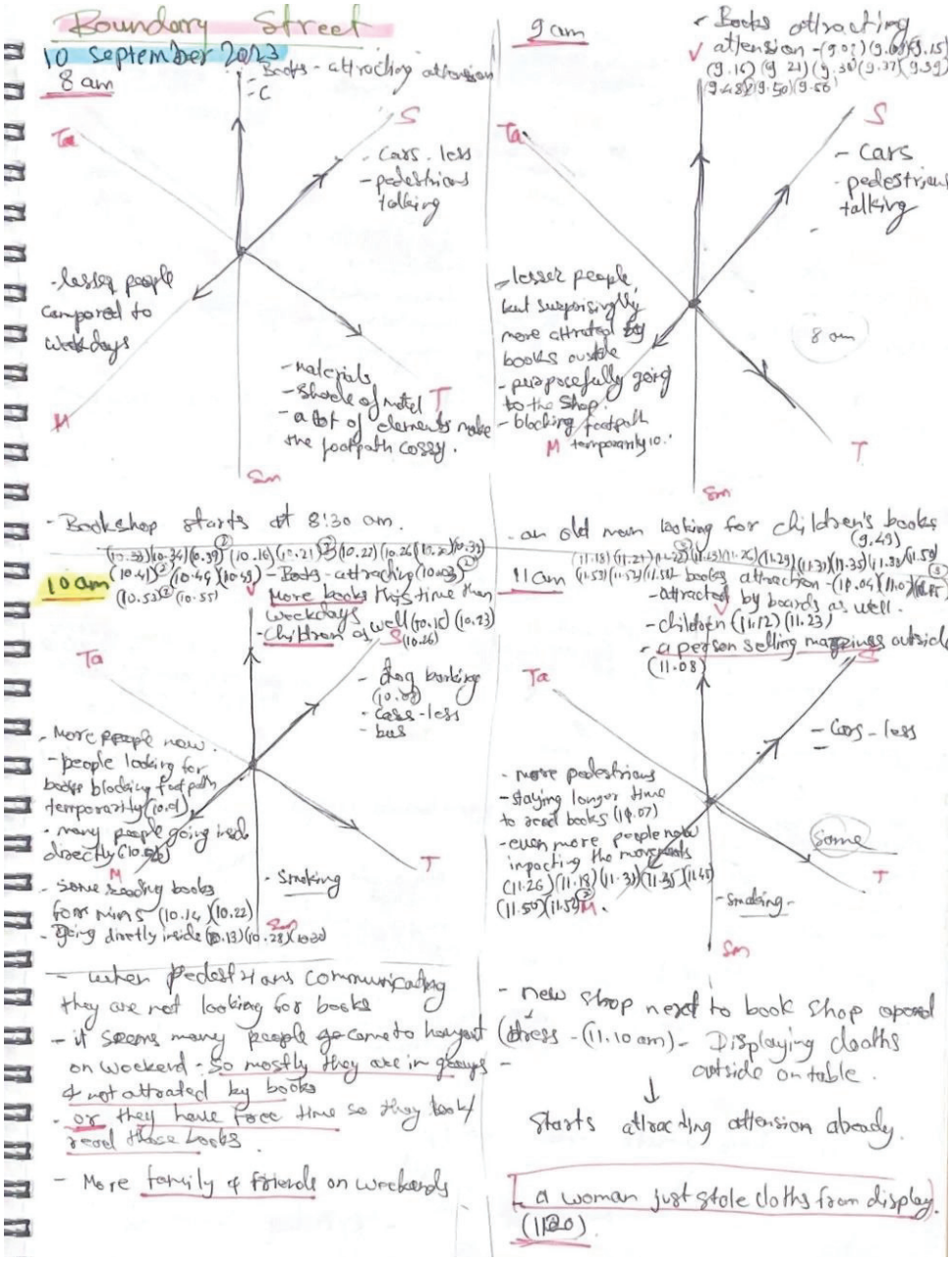


Figure 2. Example of fieldwork journal page with hourly notes. In addition to rating sensory modalities, hourly notes are recorded alongside the radar to explain any fluctuations in intensity.

The fieldwork was conducted in September 2023. In Brisbane, this is the start of the spring and weather conditions are typically warm, dry, and sunny. In Nagpur, September marks the end of the monsoon season, which is characterised by light rain and high humidity. The observations took place for 12 hours (8 am to 8 pm), in 1-hour intervals, on two Wednesdays and two Sundays (except for Suitcase Rummage which was only observed for 5 hours on Sunday). In total, 149 hours of observations were accumulated.

3.3. Data Analysis

Once the fieldwork process was complete, the data were collated into sensory rhythms diagrams for each site (see Figures 3 to 6). The horizontal rows of these diagrams follow the data collection timeline and include:

- Insights: This row depicts written notes and reflections on recorded sounds and videos. These data are meant to complement the rest.
- Body/Space: This row displays photos and drawings of human figures that illustrate the embodied action that helps produce activity and sensory rhythms.
- Sensory Rhythm: This row summarises the data collected through the radar diagrams.
- Timeline: This is universal for all sites.
- Section: This explains the connection between bodies and the built environment.
- Plan: This provides additional information about the density and orientation of bodies in space.
- Spots: This vector indicates the points of interest where the researchers lingered the longest, linking those to the Timeline. The Spots are also noted in the Spatial Trajectory (see below).
- Spatial Trajectory: These maps show the spatial context and illustrate the researchers' trajectory during site visits. Researchers followed the strongest sensory rhythms and focused on areas dominated by vending activities. This journey included stopping at specific points and moving between different locations.

The vertical columns of the sensory rhythms diagrams depict individual Episodes. The data were analysed thematically, by triangulating all the materials gathered through fieldwork. This analytical approach allowed the authors to compare the cases while highlighting their particularities. Four key Episodes were selected (one per site) to discuss in depth in the Findings section.

Figure 3. Sensory rhythms diagram, Sitabuldi Market Road, Nagpur (weekend).

ITWARI MARKET, NAGPUR

Figure 4. Sensory rhythms diagram, Itwari Market, Nagpur (weekday).

BOUNDARY STREET, BRISBANE

Figure 5. Sensory rhythms diagram for Boundary Street, Brisbane (weekday).

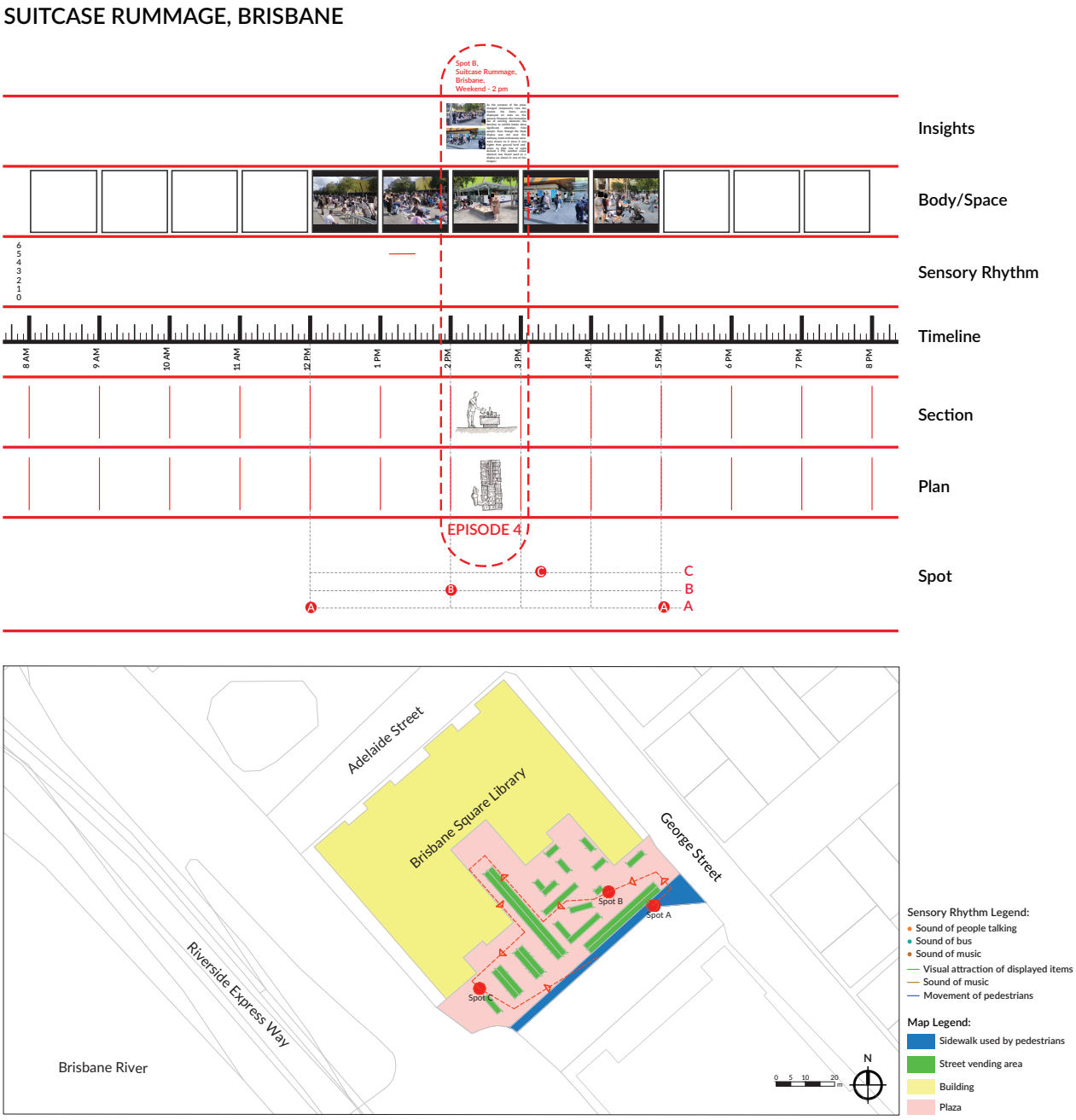


Figure 6. Sensory rhythms diagram, Suitcase Rummage, Brisbane (weekend).

4. Findings

4.1. Episode 1: Sitabuldi Market Road, Nagpur

Figure 7 illustrates the findings of the detailed observation of Spot B at noon. The marketplace was quite dynamic during that time: A video clip in Insights and a photograph in Body/Space show a vendor carrying belts. He approaches passersby while standing on the side of the street to increase the visibility of his goods (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022b; Voltolini, 2006). There are numerous such vendors, stationary or semi-mobile. The visual data suggest that footpaths are too tight for comfortable pedestrian movement. This

bodily discomfort redirects pedestrians onto the road carriageway. Earlier research similarly suggests that, while street vendors add to the city's liveliness, residents also consider them a nuisance (Lata et al., 2019; Woldeamanuel et al., 2022).

The sensory rhythm shows a soundscape in which mixes loud traffic noises, blaring motorcycle horns, and the murmur of people's conversation in both Marathi and Hindi languages. The vendors' enthusiastic sale pitches break through the ambient noise, punctuating the soundscape. Unlike the traffic noise, this sound is loud but not unpleasant. The Section and Plan reveal vendors' tactics to engage with a larger customer base, e.g., personalised conversations during each encounter. The pedestrians' response is mixed. Many stop to interact with vendors even if they do not purchase anything. The vending locations charted in the Spatial

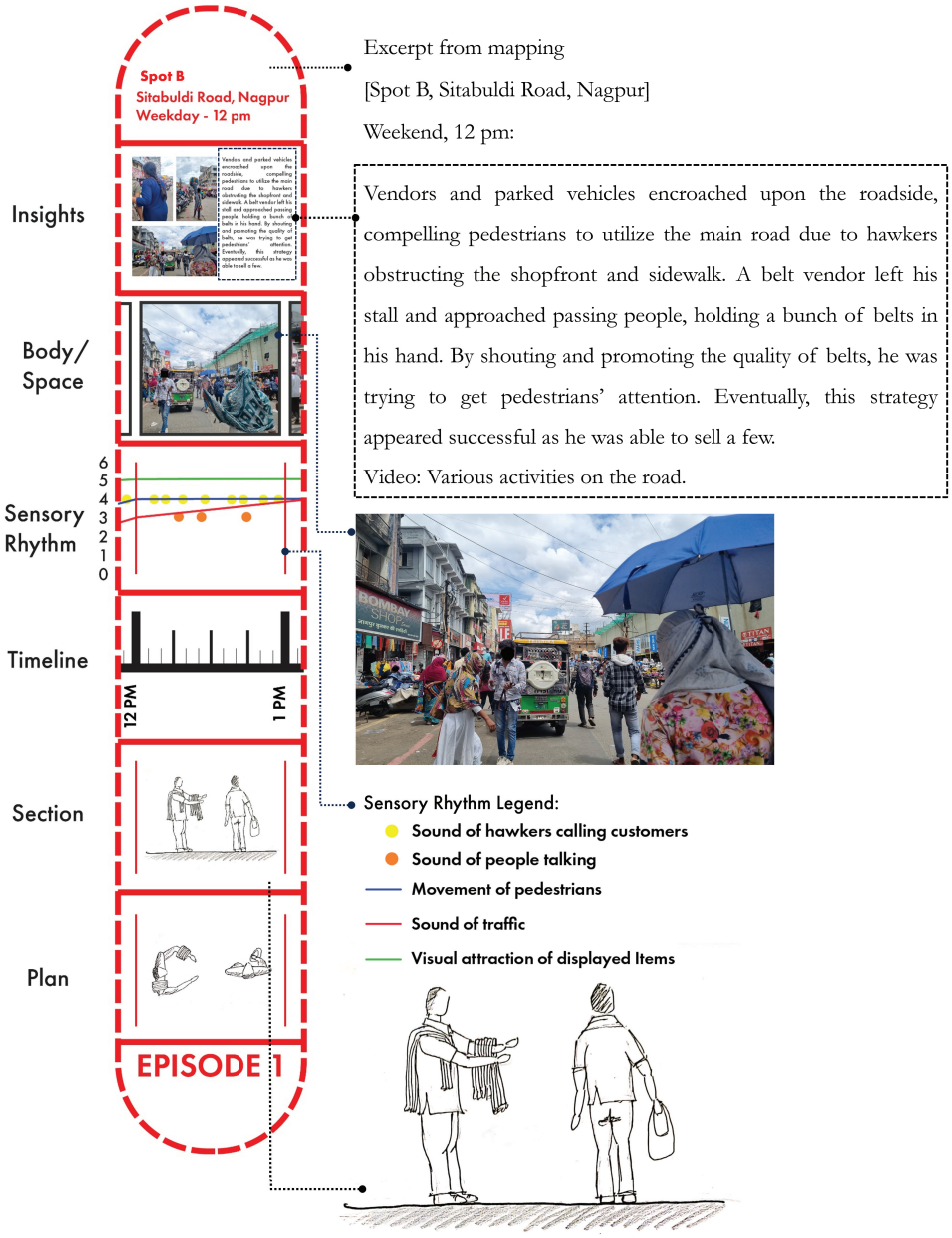


Figure 7. Mapping of Sitabuldi Road, Nagpur (Spot B, noon, weekend, September 2023).

Trajectory (see Figure 3) are populated by older and younger pedestrians of all genders (all adults), whereas vendors are all male, spanning various age groups. No persons with visible disabilities are seen, likely due to limited market accessibility.

4.2. Episode 2: Itwari Market, Nagpur

Figure 8 presents a detailed observation of Spot A at 9 am. The Insights highlight the efficient utilisation of space by shop owners, who stretch their business activity onto the pavements with impermanent objects such as display stands and sunshades. These shop extensions blur the lines between the spaces dedicated to various activities. This is also seen later in the Section. A video clip shows passersby checking out the displays set on the sidewalks while cyclists, motorcyclists, and pedestrians use the same street. A photograph in the

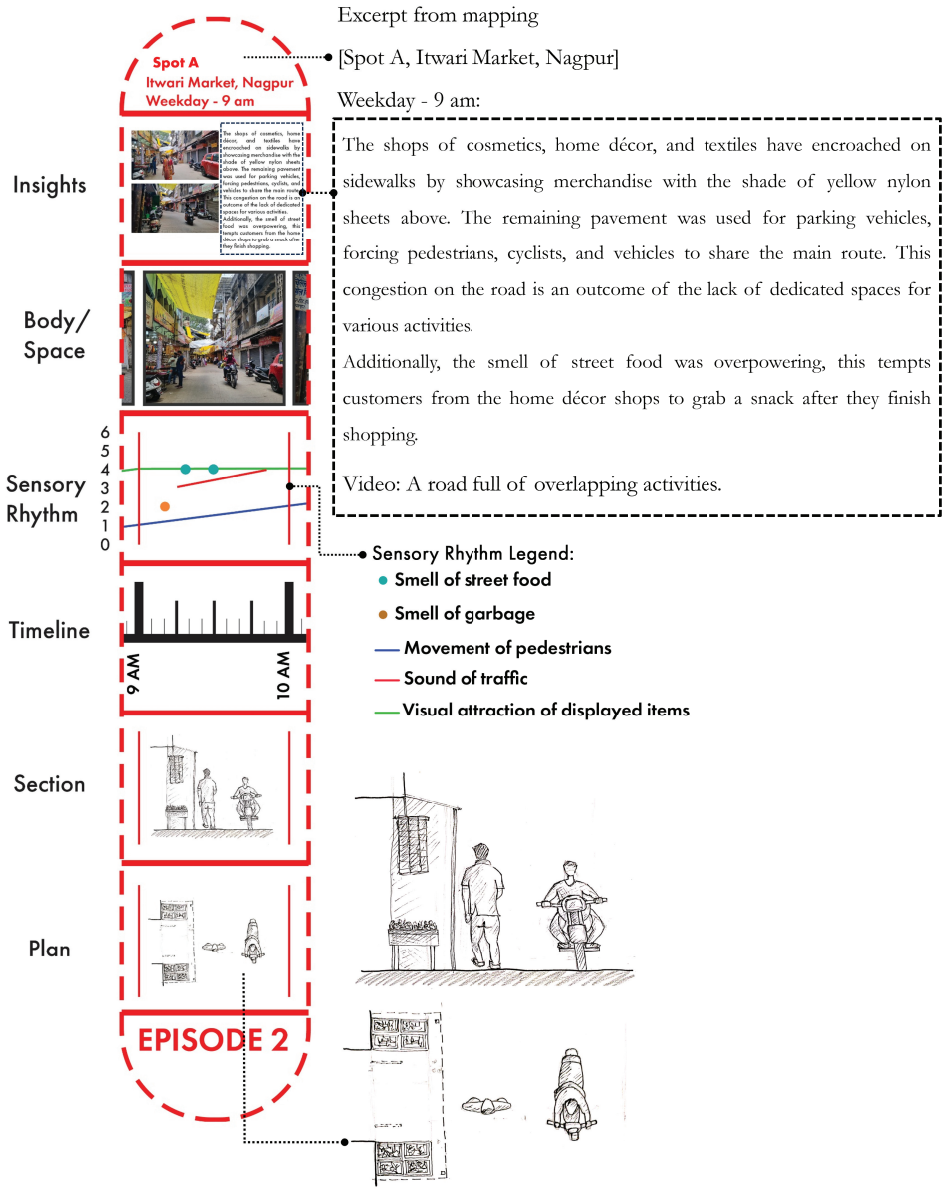


Figure 8. Mapping of Itwari Market, Nagpur (Spot A, 9 am, weekday, September 2023).

Body/Space showcases a somewhat chaotic shared road expanse that accommodates walking, street parking, and riding while vendors approach the sidewalks. This is quite typical in places with a high street vending volume (Acharya & Jagari, 2023; Hagos & Adnan, 2020; Hidayat et al., 2010; Woldeamanuel et al., 2022).

The Sensory Rhythm focuses on the senses of smell and touch. The aroma of street food, which is quite appetising, pervades the market, although food vendors are slightly separated from the main shops. Unfortunately, a noticeable odour of garbage permeates the environment as well, discouraging some people from dining in the area. Regarding touch, the use of yellow nylon sunshades lends a soft feeling to the street. Motorcycle horns are audible, but no one seems bothered by them. The Plan diagram illustrates the density of materials and bodies in the shared space. The day's exhibits are disassembled and brought indoors at night. Visitors and shoppers avoid bringing vehicles onto Itwari Road due to the dense pedestrian crowd. Practically, street vending serves as a motorised traffic calming device. The Spatial Trajectory (see Figure 4) reveals that pedestrians and customers are all adults, comprising all genders. While male vendors dominate, a few female adult vendors are also seen, possibly due to easy access to businesses from upstairs. Again, no people with visible disabilities are observed; like Sitabuldi Market Road, Itwari has limited accessibility.

4.3. Episode 3: Boundary Street, Brisbane

Figure 9 depicts a detailed observation of Spot D at 4 pm. In Insights, a photograph combines textual observations highlighting placemaking and impermanent elements such as a street planter, a bench, and a clothing stand. Body/Space shows a photo of a person walking along a narrow sidewalk space, surrounded by urban design furniture on both sides. The Sensory Rhythm indicates pedestrians' movement and their attraction towards displayed items. The rhythm of movement appears to be relatively slow during this time. Despite obstructions, the clothing display creates an intimate space, appearing to be an extension of the shop. It attracts passersby and reduces traffic noise. A metal shade and colourful signboard offer shelter from the sun, enticing pedestrians to explore.

In Section, individuals are seen engaging closely with the clothing on display. A niche is created where people and the built environment interact closely. Shop owners are known to strategically utilise these tactics to enhance street vibrancy and engage with potential clients (Whyte, 1980). However, occasional congestion hampers pedestrian flow. By 5 pm, shop staff begin to remove the outdoor displays. This increases space on the sidewalk but also reduces vibrancy. Most shops close early in the evening, so the street lacks a permeable, illuminated façade. As evening arrives, the risk of opportunistic theft increases: A woman is spotted stealing displayed clothing. Unhoused people occupy sidewalk spaces, which leads to a feeling of insecurity for some (Carpenter, 2018; Voltolini, 2006). During the day the area is populated by pedestrians of various genders and ages, including children and older adults. The site also accommodates people with disabilities, parents pushing prams, and people riding electric bikes, showcasing inclusivity. The vendors are of various genders as well.

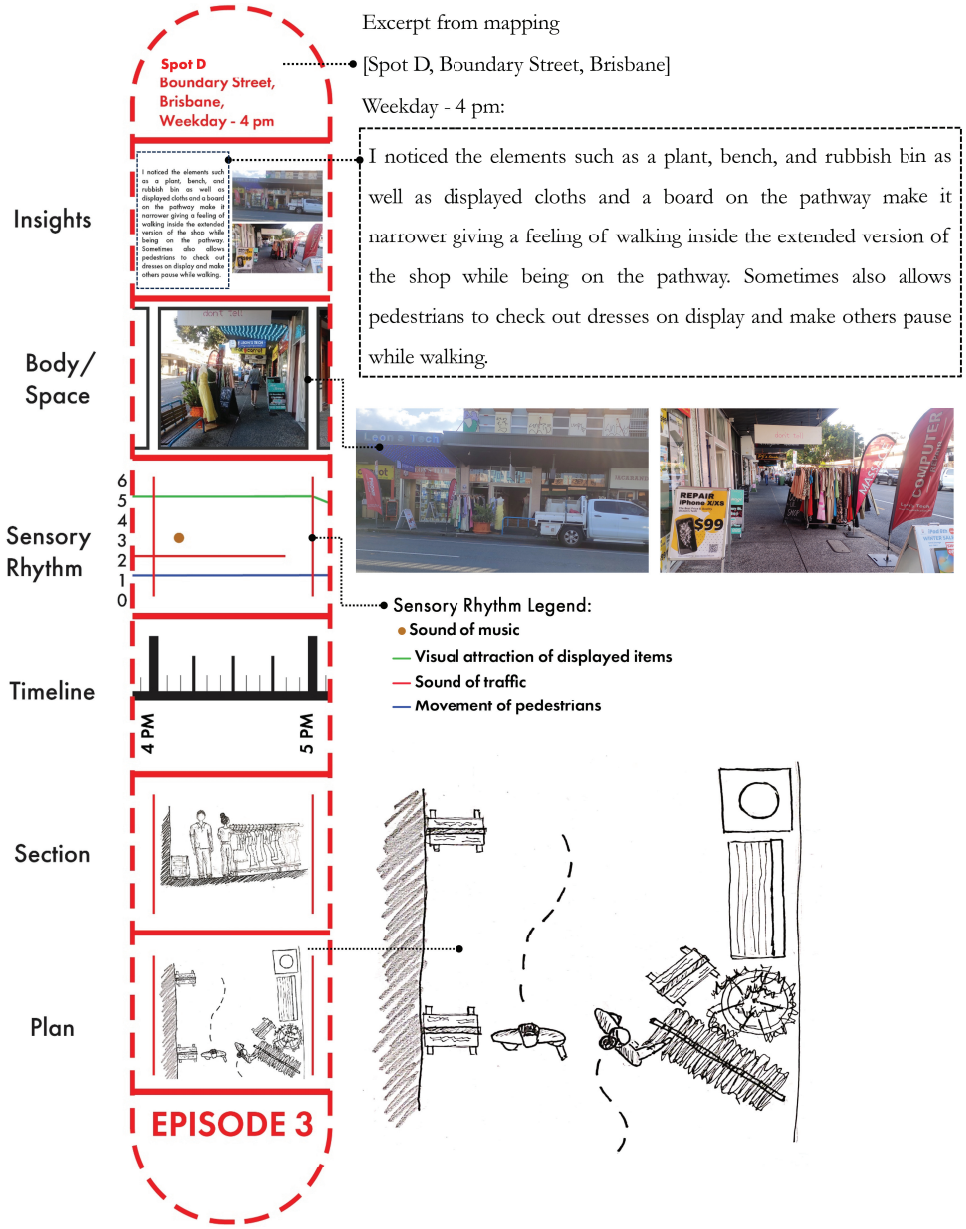


Figure 9. Mapping of Boundary Street, Brisbane (Spot D, 4 pm, weekday, September 2023).

4.4. Episode 4: Suitcase Rummage, Brisbane

Figure 10 shows a detailed observation of Spot B at 2 pm. The Insights highlight the creative use of space during this fortnightly activity. To attract customers, encourage browsing, and capture pedestrian attention even in the more peripheral corners of the market, vendors use clever sit-outs for book displays. This innovative strategy imbues the space with dynamism and purpose. The displays allow for varied usage over time and circumstances. The Sensory Rhythm primarily reflects visual attraction towards book displays, complemented by the sound of conversations in English, Mandarin, and Korean, along with soothing background music. In combination, these pleasant sounds enhance the market's attractiveness. Since no food is served on-site, no distinct smells are captured.

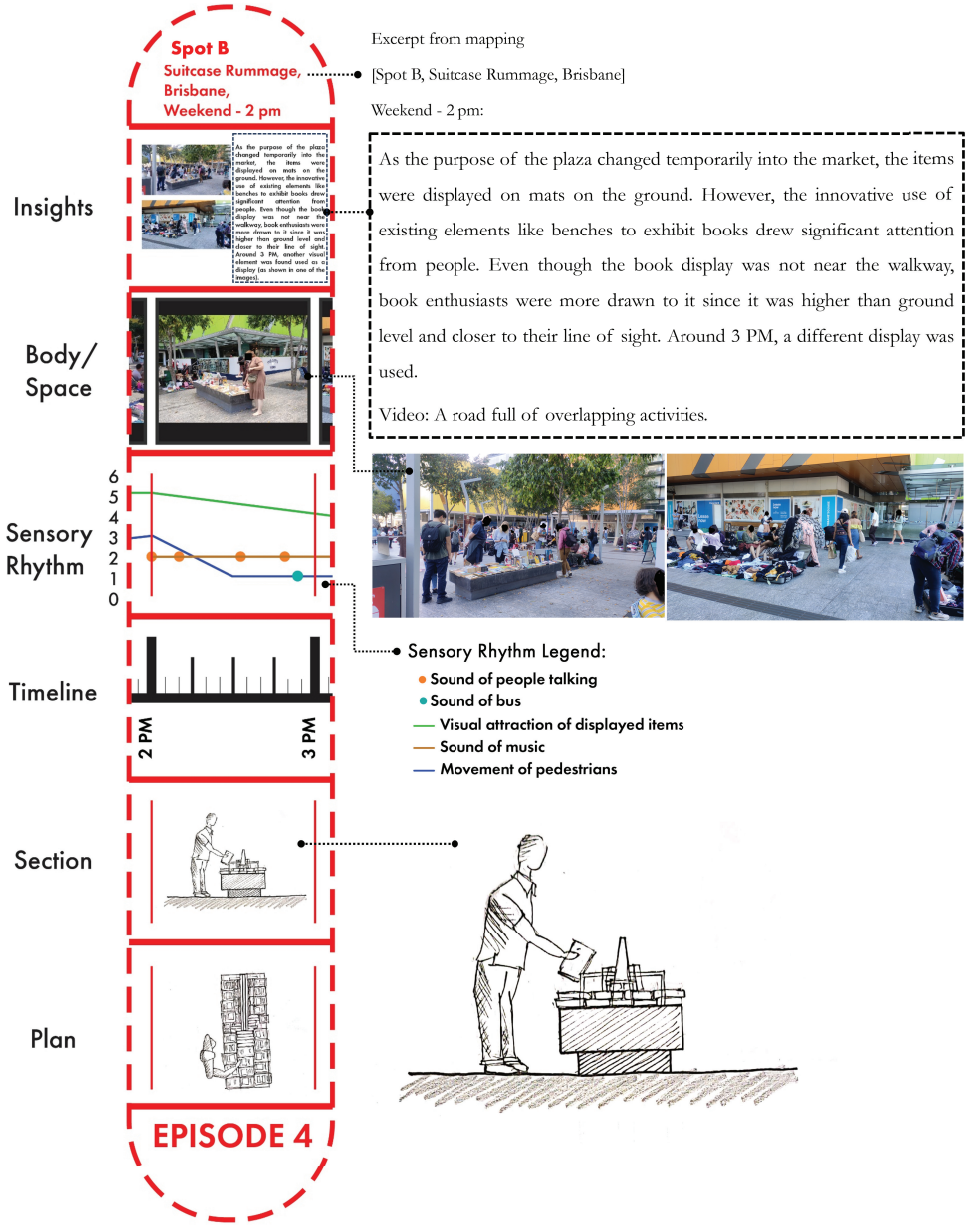


Figure 10. Mapping of Suitcase Rummage, Brisbane (Spot B, 2 pm, weekend, September 2023).

The Section delineates the spatial utilisation of a bench, while the Plan illustrates the density of materials and bodies. Book displays are accessible and readable. The Spatial Trajectory (see Figure 6), which shows the observer's precise location on site, suggests that pedestrians of all ages and genders patronise the market, alongside people with disabilities, adults pushing prams, and people riding electric bikes. The area is quite inclusive. Trendy vendors of all genders add to the vibrant atmosphere. Overall, the vending activities that take place during the Suitcase Rummage contribute to the city's cultural fabric and foster social interactions without harassing passersby (Lakhani, 2021; Torky & Heath, 2021). Because this activity is limited to only two weekends a month, the space appears underutilised and oversized the rest of the time.

5. Discussion

5.1. Comparative Account

This part of the article examines the commonalities and differences in the four sensory rhythms diagrams discussed above. During fieldwork in Brisbane and Nagpur, significant disparities were observed. But in both cases, street vendors influenced pedestrian behaviour through similar cues, including sound, smell, vision, and touch.

In Brisbane, most passersby were drawn to the displays set up by vendors, contributing to the lively atmosphere of the streets. A lively atmosphere, in turn, encouraged passersby to explore, linger, and engage with their surroundings, setting a virtuous cycle in motion. Conversely, in Nagpur, most pedestrians purposefully visited shopping streets to make purchases, often bringing their empty shopping bags. They were observed heading directly to vendors who appeared known to them, rather than walking along the road and browsing. Here, numerous vendors and pedestrians created an impression of extreme congestion. Pedestrians often bumped into one another and had to wait for crowds to thin out before they could access the stalls or stores. Some adjusted their movement patterns or bypassed certain areas altogether due to the high volume of people. A negative aspect was the garbage disposed of in areas too close to the market. This did not deter people from using the space but likely added to their annoyance or posed some health concerns (see Woldeamanuel et al., 2022).

The fieldwork also revealed contrasting pedestrian reactions to the positioning of vendors and the encroachment of the sidewalks by small businesses. In Brisbane's Boundary Street and Suitcase Rummage areas, sidewalk displays occasionally narrowed pedestrian pathways but attracted numerous passersby, thereby enhancing vibrancy. These areas might look drab without the presence of street vending. However, the positive impact of vending activities was limited here by their temporary, highly regulated, and small-scale nature (Voltolini, 2006). The diverse usage of the area indicated a sense of security and inclusivity, but this only lasted during daylight. Accessibility for people with disabilities was generally satisfactory.

In contrast, the pedestrian reactions in Nagpur were more negative. Despite offering convenient access to affordable goods, vendors in Nagpur often caused traffic congestion and reduced pedestrian level of service, resulting in annoyance. This observation is consistent with Woldeamanuel et al.'s (2022) findings in Addis Ababa, which underscore the discomfort experienced by passersby despite the liveliness brought about by vendors. The occupation of sidewalks by vendors not only hindered other street activities and added to foot traffic congestion but also posed challenges for individuals with disabilities (Hidayat et al., 2010). As a result, fewer individuals with walking or vision impairments were present in the Nagpur sites compared to Brisbane, suggesting that the urban environment here is less inclusive. (However, the absence of people with disabilities could also be due to other factors, such as a lower presence in the area or different cultural norms around autonomy.) The absence of female vendors in both Nagpur case studies suggested a gendered environment, potentially limiting safety and further emphasising the need for gender-inclusive urban policies that support equitable participation.

This comparative account suggests that, to enhance its vibrancy, Brisbane needs more locations for street vending activities and more frequent scheduling of activities such as Suitcase Rummage. In contrast, street

vending necessitates better regulation in Nagpur. During the redevelopment of roads, dedicated spaces should be allocated for street vendors (Hagos & Adnan, 2020). Separating some activities such as food and clothes vending might also help alleviate pedestrian congestion and ensure accessibility for all pedestrians.

5.2. Broader Perspective

Empirically, this study corroborates Whyte's (1980) finding that street vending is essential in attracting and retaining people to a public space. In terms of theory, the study supports Lefebvre's notion that people (street vendors, their customers, and passersby in this case) move together in a way that creates a natural rhythm and flow in urban spaces. When strict rules restrict street vending, these natural rhythms are disrupted, and cities are all the poorer as a result (Voltolini, 2006). People indeed experience cities through all their senses; therefore, it is worth researching urban environments through multisensory approaches. A good urban space is enjoyable and balanced in every sense: touch, movement, smell, sound, taste, and sight.

6. Conclusion

This comparative study offers interesting insights. Brisbane, Australia, exemplifying the Global North, illustrates a burgeoning trend toward encouraging street vending, albeit in a highly regulated manner. Here, further initiatives are needed to ensure vibrancy in urban spaces. Conversely, Nagpur, emblematic of the Global South, illustrates India's deeply entrenched and bustling street vending culture. While positive, this also poses challenges such as pedestrian congestion, compromised health and safety, and limited accessibility. Policy interventions should aim to create and sustain dynamic yet comfortable and inclusive urban environments. The following proposals can be adopted in a variety of cities, with necessary adjustments to accommodate specific contexts, street vending cultures, and pedestrian dynamics.

In Global North cities, promoting more street vending activities is recommended, with fewer regulations and less rigid timeframes (Lakhani, 2021; Torky & Heath, 2021). This approach will help maintain vibrancy and ensure safety in urban spaces, especially after business operating hours. While shop displays and café tables might narrow the sidewalks, this trade-off might be acceptable if the result is an increase in street activation and pedestrian volume. This recommendation stems from Jacobs' (1992, as cited in Woldeamanuel et al., 2022) conception of urban sidewalks as hubs of communal exchange rather than mere circulation belts. The installation of noise and visual buffers between sidewalks and carriageways (e.g., tree rows or tall shrubs) is recommended to mitigate the various types of pollution resulting from traffic and to provide a conducive environment for pedestrians to shop and interact with vendors and each other.

In Global South cities, addressing street vending in traffic analyses and establishing dedicated spaces for vendors is paramount (Hagos & Adnan, 2020). Vending zones should be equipped with amenities such as seating areas, waste bins, and restroom facilities, helping to maintain cleanliness and hygiene and enhancing the overall experience for vendors and customers alike. Expanding sidewalk space is also necessary to allow for a more comfortable and accessible environment for both vendors and pedestrians, reducing congestion and ensuring safety (Architizer, 2023). In some places, partial pedestrianisation or banning of private off-street vehicle parking during market hours (with exceptions granted to residents) may be advisable. To make the streets accessible for all, universal design principles should be applied whenever market upgrading works are carried out (Zheng, 2025). Importantly, local planners should actively engage and

collaborate with stakeholders—vendors, shop owners, pedestrians—to better understand and address their needs. To the same end, future research could adopt participatory methods, including interviews and surveys of these stakeholders. The ultimate planning goal is to strike a balance between functionality, vibrancy, and pedestrian accessibility.

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Conflict of Interests

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