

Reimagining Pause Points as Everyday Urban Infrastructure: A Case of Palayam, Thiruvananthapuram

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Abstract

Cities are usually designed around movement, efficiency, and circulation, while the act of pausing is treated as incidental or leftover. Yet everyday urban life depends equally on the places where people stop briefly or linger longer: at a tea stall, under a tree, beside a wall, outside a place of worship, or at the edge of a market. This research argues that such moments of pause are not marginal to urbanism but central to it, because they support social exchange, informal economy, ritual life, waiting, observation, and civic presence.

The study is situated in Palayam, a 1.3 km corridor in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, where commerce, governance, religion, education, and transit overlap at unusually high intensity. Palayam contains the second-hand bookshop belt, the ZamZam food cluster, the mosque-temple-church religious confluence, the Secretariat edge, major transit stops, markets, and institutional campuses, making it an ideal case through which to examine how public pause is already produced informally and why it remains structurally unsupported.

This research defines a pause point as any location or spatial condition in the urban public realm where forward movement is voluntarily or involuntarily interrupted, and where social interaction, commercial transaction, rest, waiting, ritual observance, sensory engagement, or civic presence occurs. This definition moves beyond the narrow understanding of pause as a bench or designated seating area. A pause point may be a vendor cart that attracts conversation, a wall ledge used after Friday prayer, a shaded threshold, a market edge, or a junction where people gather around a public event. The study further introduces the term pauseability to describe the inherent or designed capacity of a site to invite and sustain dwelling time.

This research develops an analytical framework around four parameters: morphology, ecology, socio-culture, and infrastructure. Morphology addresses street geometry, block structure, edge conditions, frontage activity, and permeability. Ecology addresses thermal comfort, shade, vegetation, drainage, and environmental quality in a hot-humid climate. Socio-culture addresses user diversity, temporal rhythms, territoriality, informal economy, ritual events, and identity. Infrastructure addresses footpaths, crossings, seating, lighting, vendor support, drainage, and the systems that determine whether public life is enabled or suppressed.

Methodologically, the thesis combines literature review, comparative case studies, systematic field observation, behavioural mapping, photographic documentation, and spatial measurement. Six primary pause points and two non-pause samples were selected across the corridor, including Palayam Junction, the second-hand bookshop belt, the religious confluence node, the Zam Zam cluster, the Secretariat edge, and comparison sites such as the University enclave and a residential interior pocket. Each site was assessed through indicators such as footpath width, edge quality, canopy cover, user diversity, activity patterns, and infrastructure provision. The analysis reveals a fundamental contradiction. The places in Palayam with the highest social intensity and strongest civic identity are also the most deficient in formal pause infrastructure. Along the highest-footfall stretches, usable footpath width drops to as little as 0.8 metres, with no continuous shade, no formal seating, weak pedestrian crossings, and little vendor support. At Palayam Junction, thousands of commuters, worshippers, workers, and vendors are compressed into narrow transit edges without shelter or dignity. At the religious confluence, one of the city's most symbolically inclusive nodes is fragmented by traffic and governance gaps even though it regularly hosts ritual overflow, festival crowds, and intercommunal interaction. Across the corridor, informal actors compensate for the absence of civic provision: vendors create micro economies around waiting, trees become standing clusters, railings become leaning edges, and compound walls become improvised seating.

This research also finds that pause in Palayam forms in recurring typologies: infrastructural pause points such as bus stops and thresholds, commercial pause points such as vendor clusters and shopfronts, social-cultural pause points such as ritual spillovers and protest spaces, and ecological-sensory pause points such as shaded edges and aroma-led food zones. The corridor already contains a functioning pause network, but one that is fragmented, improvised, and unsupported by policy or design.

In response, this research proposes a Pause Infrastructure Framework for the full corridor. Rather than relying on demolition or clearance, it recommends context-sensitive interventions: continuous footpaths, shaded pause corridors, vendor plinths and serviced bays, raised crossings, shared forecourts, seating edges, opened institutional boundaries, and linked pause nodes along MG Road and its side streets. The design objective is to strengthen existing patterns of use without displacing the informal social ecologies that already sustain the place.

The central contribution of this research is to reframe pause as an infrastructural right rather than a luxury amenity. Palayam demonstrates that the right to pause, linger, gather, and belong is inseparable from the right to the city. Designing for pause, therefore, is not a minor urban-design gesture but a foundational act of spatial justice.

Keywords

Pause Infrastructure, Everyday Urbanism, Public Space, Pedestrian Design, Informal Vendors, Civic Space.