

# PHOTOWALK

*An urban exploration of the fishing villages  
of Kuruchikuppam-Vaithikuppam*

Date: Sunday 7 February 2021



## INFORMATION BOOKLET



## Context

The Urban Exploration Photowalk of the fishing villages of Kuruchikuppam-Vaithikuppam is conceptualised as a community engagement activity under the project RUSE (Urban and Socio-Ecological Resilience of Pondicherry Bioregion, IFP/AFD) currently ongoing within the Social Sciences Department of the French Institute of Pondicherry.

One component of this project aims to study how, along with climatic and morphological processes which erodes the seashore, both speculative urban development and government policies are rapidly transforming the physical, ecological, and social character of coastal communities in Pondicherry. Our study is driven by the understanding that fisher communities that have long been the primary inhabitants of the coast and depend on it for their livelihoods will be most affected by these transformations.

Amidst decades of government policies, most recently Smart City Pondicherry intends to extend the existing Beach Promenade north from the Old Distillery through Kuruchikuppam and Vaithikuppam (approx. 1km), and south from the Old Port through the fishing village of Dubrayapet (approx. 0.9km). What impact will these projects have on the existing urban fabric, residents, and ability of the fisher community to pursue their livelihood?

The objective of our Urban Exploration Photowalk is to record and document the existing but fast changing social, economic, and physical character of this community and neighbourhood.

## Facilitators

**Alessandra Silver**, Photographer, Inlight Media Auroville

**Devangi Ramakrishnan**, Urban Designer, IFP

**Ignatius Prabhakar**, Anthropologist, IFP

**Nicolas Bautès**, Urban Geographer, IFP

**Local elders from the community**, Kuruchikuppam - Vaithikuppam

## Who should participate?

The ongoing Pondicherry Heritage Festival 2021 provides an opportunity to bring together photographers of all backgrounds and skills, local residents and visitors, wanting to express their viewpoint and sense of engagement towards the city and its changes, and who would like to experiment and share insights of the present and future of the vibrant and thriving neighbourhood of the fisher communities of Kuruchikuppam and Vaithikuppam.

We particularly encourage young and elder people from these neighbourhoods and from within and around the city to participate with their own skills and backgrounds, and researchers and practitioners in social and political sciences, urban studies or art and architecture.

*“Once we begin observing city life and its interaction with physical surroundings, even the most ordinary street corner can provide interesting knowledge about the interplay of city life and form – anywhere in the world. We can systemise our observations by asking basic questions like who, what and where.”*

*- Jan Gehl*

## What this walk is not

This is not a guided tour or heritage walk. Participants will be equal parts explorers, observers, discoverers and recorders of the urban environment.

*“...Please look closely at real cities. While you are looking, you might as well also listen, linger and think about what you see.”*

*- Jane Jacobs*

## Walk Themes

### 1. People at Work

*Fishermen mending their gear, women cooking or vending, itinerant tradesmen, construction workers, tailors...*

Men and women of all ages use the street and public spaces to ply their trades. What are all the instances of work you observe?

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### 2. People at Leisure & Play

*Women engrossed in board games, children playing in the street, fishermen playing cards, people relaxing, napping or chatting...*

Children, women, men of all ages find moments of leisure and play through the day. What are all the instances of leisure and play you observe?

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### 3. Transforming Urban Space

*Thatched huts, imposing mansions, temples, churches and cemeteries, community toilets, housing quarters and apartment buildings...*

A variety of urban forms line the edges of the main road of the neighbourhood. These portray a continuous story of decay and destruction or perseverance and adaptation to the rapid ongoing transformation of the neighbourhood.

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### 4. Private and Public Space

*The **thinnai**, the threshold between the public street and the private home is the hub of social life in the community.*

What are the many ways the thinnai is used in the neighbourhood?

What forms does it take?

Who occupies the thinnai and what stories do they have to tell?

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### 5. Follow the colour BLUE

*Street signs, street art, house colours, flags and symbols, fishing equipment, blue tarp, clothing...*

'Blue' manifests itself in multiple forms and textures in coastal lives. Identify instances where it appears, and find the stories signifying the use of the colour.

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### 6. Identify your own theme

- *Rituals and daily practices*
- *A-Z of Kuruchikuppam – Vaithikuppam*
- *Life at the therumunai (street corner)*
- *Local flora and fauna*
- *Serial Vision - revelation of views while walking along the streets at a uniform pace*

These are some additional themes that can be explored during the walk

## The Urban Exploration is organised in 3 STAGES

*Read through each stage carefully. You can choose to participate in either one or all three stages*

**All participants (STAGE 1 & 2)** are requested to curate a set of minimum 10 photos, sketches, or other visual medium of their choice such as photomontages, mixed media collages etc., along with accompanying text and share with us latest by **SATURDAY 13 FEBRUARY**.

### STAGE 1: Exploratory PHOTOWALK

**SUNDAY 7 FEBRUARY 2021 | TIME: 3:45PM – 6:00PM**

**3:45 PM**

Gather at Old Distillery

Introduction among participants

Introduction to neighbourhood, photography themes & methods

**4:00 PM onwards**

Participants explore the neighbourhood at their own pace to identify and document their chosen themes. Facilitators from IFP and community members will move among the participants to assist with language translation and orientation to the neighbourhood.

Participants should aim to build a visual story of their chosen theme using any of their chosen media and techniques

- **Photography / Photomontages / Collages**
- **Videography**
- **Sketching/ Painting** (*street sections, facades, architectural details, portraits, street scenes*)
- **Mapping** (*such as activity mapping, tracing movement of people, plant types*)
- **Interviews** (*memories of the neighbourhood, local stories, short biographies*)

## STAGE 2: IN-DEPTH DOCUMENTATION

### SUNDAY 7 – SATURDAY 13 FEBRUARY

Participants are welcome to return to the neighbourhood through the week at different times of the day to complete their thematic collections and conduct further interviews. This will help create a comprehensive story of daily life within the fishing communities through the entire day and night.

IFP facilitators will be available on request throughout this period to help participants curate and further develop their ideas and collections.

## STAGE 3: PUBLIC EXHIBITION

### MONDAY 15 – WEDNESDAY 17 FEBRUARY

We will use this period to organise, print and install a visual display of the outputs from the walk in a local exhibition at a site within the Kuruchikuppam-Vaithikuppam neighbourhood. If you would like to volunteer assistance to enable this event, please let us know.

### THURSDAY 18 FEBRUARY | ALL DAY

18 February is celebrated annually among the fisher community in honour of Malayapuram Singaravelu (18 Feb 1860 – 11 Feb 1946), who was born into a fisherman family in Madras and became a prominent leader of the early labour rights and working class movement in India. On this occasion we have been invited by the community to create an exhibition of the outputs from the photo walk for the neighbourhood to view and engage with during their celebrations. All participants are welcome to join.

## Expected Outcomes

The community mapping and documentation begun during this event will continue under the RUSE project. This project expected to last over the upcoming six months hopes to produce a comprehensive understanding of the coastal fisher communities of Pondicherry and their relation to a fast changing urban space and economy. The outputs of the event and the long-term study are envisaged to be handed over as a document for use by the community.

Let us know if you would like to volunteer in future community-led mapping and interventions that may be organised.

## Tips for participants:

1. Wear comfortable shoes and carry drinking water
2. Do not pay anybody in exchange for taking their photo. If such a situation arises, contact the facilitators for help
3. Keep your photos as candid as possible. Request permission to enter and photograph private spaces
4. Download the 'Smart Recorder' app or similar to your phone, for ease of recording interviews
5. If using smart phones for photography, keep 'Location ON' so that photos can be geo-tagged i.e. located on a map of the neighbourhood

## How to submit photos & other material after the walk?

1. After the walk, email your selection of photos to [devangi.r@ifpindia.org](mailto:devangi.r@ifpindia.org)
2. Photos need to be renamed in the format: **Theme\_Last Name\_First Name**
3. Please include a short description for each photo, including name and details of interviewee where applicable.
4. Please do not watermark photos. Any photos used in the exhibition or after will be properly credited. All material will be used for academic and research purposes only

**For further enquiries, contact**

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**Register for the walk by clicking on the link below**

**[PHF 2021: Photowalk](#)**