Ilha is a small island that can be traveled by foot from North to South within minutes. The urban structure thus has been developed to accommodate the pedestrian. Consequently, the largest distance between two public spaces is a five minute walk. It is only recently that the island has started to become modified for automobile traffic.

Historically, the island had been divided into two; A Stone Town that housed Portugese and Europeans, and Macuti town for slaves including Swahilis, Indians, and Chinese. Though the ethnicity make up has changed, especially since the revolution in 1974, this urban form has largely remained. Macuti remains the denser part of the island housing about 75% of the population, while the Stone Town is less dense, more affluent, and where tourists tend to reside.

During July 2011 the University of Minnesota Center for World Heritage Studies, Gabinete de Conservação da Ilha de Moçambique (GACIM), and the Nacional do Património Cultural of the Republic of Moçambique conducted a workshop on Historic Urban Landscapes and preliminary studies of public space in Macuti and Stone Town of Ilha, Mozambique. Inscribed as a site of cultural significance to the World Heritage List of UNESCO in 1991, the fortified city of Mozambique is located on this island, a former Portuguese trading-post on the route to India. Its remarkable architectural unity is due to the consistent use, since the 16th century, of the same building techniques, building materials (stone or macuti) and decorative principles.

The urban structure of the island has been developed to accommodate the pedestrian. Extensive inventory and analysis revealed organization along a "spine" network of public spaces, circulation paths, and urban form. This "spine" organizes spaces for residency, informal markets, drainage systems, and way-finding views to the coast. Studies concluded in recommending that any strategy of conserving, preserving, or strengthening the public spaces in this Historic Urban Landscape should prioritize spaces linked to this "spine", thereby strengthening a very clear urban framework as Ilha develops and grows.