



# PUBLIC SPACES IN THE MPD-2041



Over 50% of Delhi's urban area is regarded as 'open', whereas over 20% of the total area is regarded as 'green'. Yet, we are far from meeting our commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals that underpin the current global urban agenda, which clearly call to *"provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces"* (SDG Goal 11, Target 11.7). To transform Delhi's public spaces, we must radically change the way we think about them.

In Delhi, Covid-19 has kept us locked down for roughly 6 months. While restrictions are being eased, with private malls and cinemas opening up in phases, we've questioned the gap in the access of multiple outdoor activities re-occurring in public spaces. The outside environment established as a safer alternative by the WHO, it is important to promote adequate safe, inclusive, green public spaces that are evenly distributed spatially.

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**MBD** is a people's campaign aiming to envision and enable a more inclusive city. It is a collective of civil society organisations, activists, researchers and others who work on diverse issues of housing, livelihood, gender and other rights.

# PUBLIC SPACES IN THE CITY

First, it is imperative to distinguish between **unactivated 'open spaces'** and **'public spaces' that enable 'public life'**. In the city, public spaces are not limited to parks and playgrounds, but include **all 'commonly owned spaces'** - streets, pavements, markets, bus-stops, waterfronts, parking lots, and spaces under flyovers and metro-stations. These are urban spaces where everyday activities of commerce, habitation, transit, socialisation and recreation are carried out, making them an intrinsic part of our urban environment. They are also 'urban equalisers', providing common areas for the diverse residents of a city to interact. **If we view these spaces as a collective capital asset, we can begin to reap long-term social and economic benefits that can emerge by investing in them strategically, with all stakeholders taken into consideration.**

Second, **the spatial inequalities of Delhi make it difficult to accurately gauge how 'open, green and public' our city really is.** For instance, the greenery and density observed in New Delhi (Connaught Place, Lutyens' Zone) contrasts starkly with that of East Delhi (Shahdara, Seelampur, Yamuna Vihar). The stark mismatch of priorities in land-use show that there is in fact more land and services allocated to accommodate vehicular traffic than to accommodate upto 30% of the city's population in affordable, adequate and legal housing in Delhi. Demographics too, vary widely across Delhi, and the call for inclusive public spaces must cover all residents of the city, irrespective of class, gender, religion, caste, age or access. To collect data, engage communities and design valuable public spaces, **we must work at multiple scales simultaneously - city, district, sub-district and neighbourhood.**

Third, **the question of public space ownership, governance and management must be considered to effectively design interventions that can have a long-lasting, positive impact.**

**There are a large number of urban issues that fall under the umbrella of public spaces.** Components of housing, transportation, livelihoods, wellbeing, gender and disability can all be addressed if we focus on designing quality public spaces focussed on safety, equity and environmental health.

## WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS OF PUBLIC SPACE IN DELHI?

### FLOATING POPULATION

all residents of the city, irrespective of income, gender, religion, caste and age who use public spaces for socialisation, transit and recreation



### PERMANENT POPULATION

vendors, homeless and residents dependent on public spaces for commerce, shelter, socialisation, transit and recreation



# PUBLIC SPACES IN THE MPD: MAPPING THE INTERSECTIONS

## HOUSING

- Community space design within housing complexes and land-pooling for creating public spaces (for eg, streets that are safer for walking, common parks that are open for multiple localities)
- Assessing the privatization of public spaces available and sharing resources that are of public interest
- A chance to adaptively use public spaces to provide shelter for the homeless

## LIVELIHOODS

- Nearly 80% of Delhi's population is part of the informal economy (vendors, waste-pickers, construction workers) that operates in public spaces
- Provision of social infrastructure for the urban informal economy
- Street vendors act as eyes on the streets
- The burden of pedestrianisation should not fall on street vendors but on parking spaces": encroachment on public land by parking (vertical / ug parking)

## WELL-BEING

- Designing green, walkable, well-lit, uninterrupted and unpolluted public spaces can positively impact social and environmental health in the city and benefit children and elders alike
- Safer, healthier and advisable to be outdoors than indoors while we live through a pandemic

## TRANSPORT

- Well-designed streets and pavements, bus-stops and metro stations facilitates transit mobility within the city
- Improve last-mile connectivity by connecting pavements and increasing walkability and cyclability

## PUBLIC SPACES

## TRANSPORT

- Design for the safety, comfort and accessibility of persons with disability, including wheelchair-access, sound and visual wayfinding guides, and age responsive interventions

## GENDER

- Design for the safety, comfort and access to gender groups (women and transgender) that consistently face discrimination and violence in public spaces
- Provision of public amenities to encourage participation in public spaces
- Reclaim public spaces by gender-responsive techniques
- Improve access to public spaces by considering safety and affordability.

# PLACEMAKING AS AN APPROACH TO DESIGNING PUBLIC SPACES

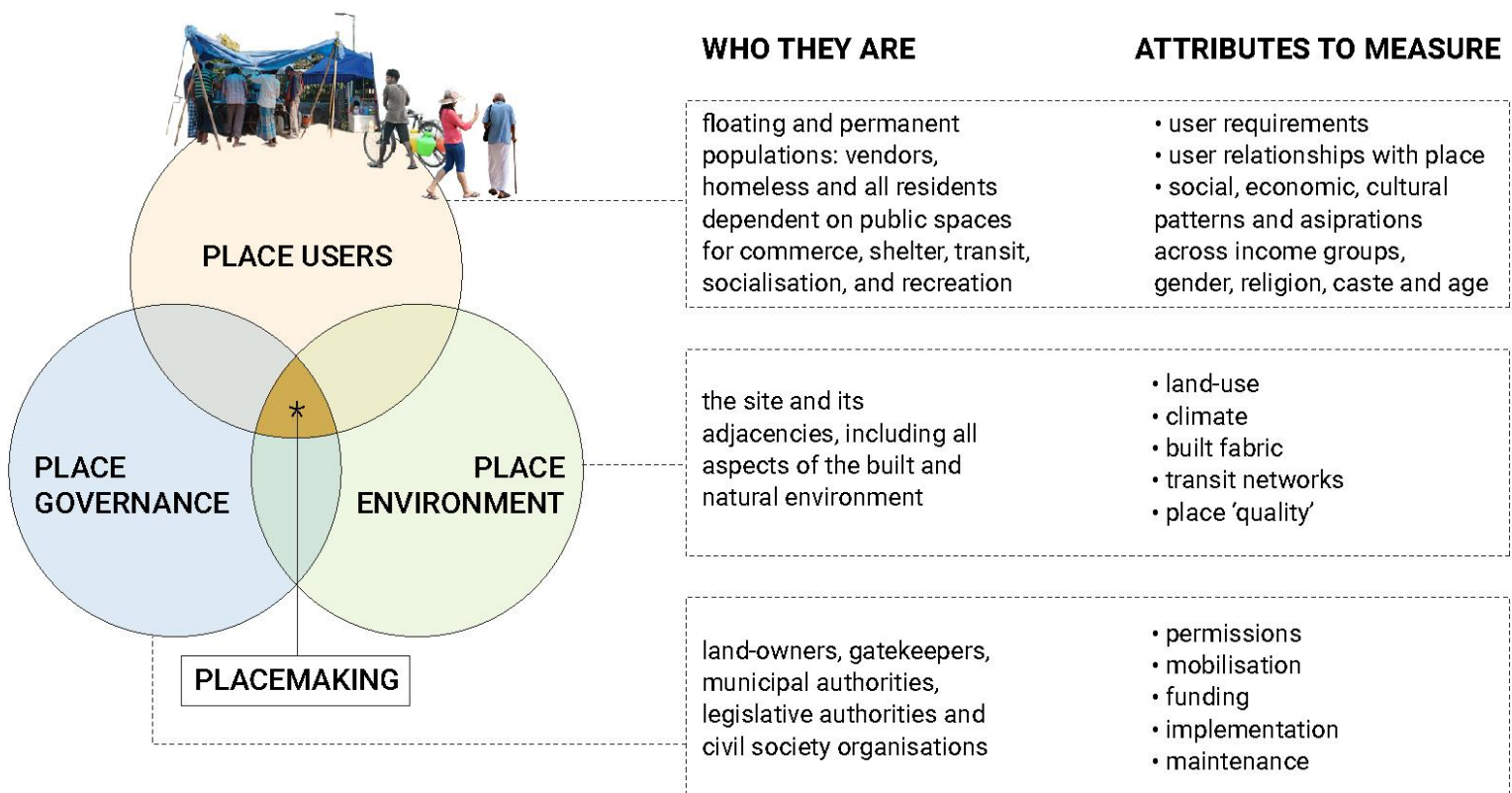
'Placemaking' is a process of revitalising public spaces. It has been tested in different parts of the world, and can be intelligently adapted for Delhi's urban environment.

Although Delhi's public spaces are highly 'activated', the 'making of a place' is rooted in proper management of people-centric strategies and local governance. Placemaking helps communities to re-imagine everyday spaces in the city - to recognize the potential of streets, parks, markets, neighbourhoods and public buildings. As a process, it capitalizes on a local community's assets, needs and imaginations, resulting in the creation of 'productive' public places that contribute to people's health, happiness, and well being. Such projects can act as catalysts to mobilise larger-scale change across the city.

This can work through a stepwise, reiterative process:

1. **Identification:** understanding and comparing ground realities with existing work on 'quality' public space and governance.
2. **Engagement:** dialogue on public spaces through a series of targeted questions and activities with stakeholders.
3. **Proposition:** a cohesive set of solutions, which would be taken back to the stakeholders for modification and improvement
4. **Execution:** building a set of approved interventions
5. **Examination:** monitoring and evaluating intervention impact, incorporating learnings for subsequent projects

## MAPPING THE INTERSECTIONS OF PLACEMAKING



# WHAT CAN THE MPD-2041 DO FOR PUBLIC SPACES?

## 1 RECOGNISE PUBLIC SPACES AS THE 'BUILDING BLOCK' OF THE CITY

- Identify and target unused public sites that can be used to enhance the quality and supply of public urban space
- Structure, follow and implement a set of recommendations for the design and development of public spaces, according to a globally acceptable standard, specific to local conditions

## 2 STRENGTHEN URBAN GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

- Decisions regarding public space are to be regarded as a *right* of urban residents, not as unilateral initiatives of the government
- Create systems of accountability and transparency, for efficient communication and monitoring

## 3 ACTION URBAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Carry out comprehensive surveys and ethnographic studies to bring *people's* requirements to recommendations on public spaces
- Initiatives to increase literacy on urban environments, across ages and socio-economic sectors
- Bring citizens' to the front of designing, planning and maintaining local areas

## 4 ENABLE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY, COLLABORATIVE ACTION PLANS

- Include players in public and private sectors
- Include actors of top-down and grassroots efforts for the city
- Include citizens across ages, gender, religion, caste, and economic background

## 5 PRIORITIZE THE MOST VULNERABLE IN THE CITY

- The voices and requirements of women, children, senior citizens, the urban poor, members of minority communities, and many more, to be given precedence in developing 'inclusive and safe' public places

## 6 FOCUS ON LOCAL AREA PLANNING

- To facilitate data collection, smaller-scale design strategies and ownership

## 7 DEVELOP SYSTEMS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- Post-implementation maintenance, checks on validity and accountable communication
- Maintain a global standard of design and governance, with local area solutions adapted specifically for Delhi

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### References

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- United Nations Charter of Public Space, Rome Biennale 2013
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