

Cholo bodlai

A space to reflect as a community.

Humans are social animals. We grow when we share, and when we collectively care. The journey of humankind is not a single leap which happens overnight. But it's a series of small steps in the right direction. Steps which influence and encourage others to evolve and change. Change is the only constant.

Chittranjan Park, like many urban settlements; has gone through its fair share of transformations over the years. From being a close knit community settlement which evolved during the turbulent times of partition, to a rich residential neighbourhood, where the definition of "community" is slowly getting transformed in the fast paced contemporary world.

CR park today needs infrastructural and physical interventions, to prepare for the future which seems rather challenging, the community is going to be an important tool of growth and sustenance.

Thus the crux of our development is to enable change; change which brings the people closer than ever(keeping social distancing), and a resilient, development oriented neighbourhood. So together 'Cholo bodlai'.

Netaji Park :

The disused park can be opened up towards the market to create a new edge for the people to habit the plaza and the park. Community activities and social interactions in the park need to be promoted through community participation. We have proposed a food trail in front of the park. This not only reduces the encroachment of eateries in the market plaza but provides a food trail which is organic in nature but in a controlled environment. Street vendors and food outlets on the ground floor of the market shall also be used as an important anchor towards creating the local addas around the plaza. Food becomes a marker of culture. This also invites people to the park and its boundaries which automatically increases the safety factor in these spaces and reduces the dead spaces which host unsocial activities.

Market Plaza :

The idea of an Adda and the scale of one is integral to the life of people in the community. It's time the market place becomes a true adda space for the neighbourhood. An urban space that is used as a public living room. Urban art and public participation can be a prominent part of the place making initiatives. The market which had been previously encroached by the car parking and food vendors is being reclaimed and being made pedestrian friendly. This space can now be multi functional, a beautiful plaza for the residents of CR Park to hangout in. A place for adda, street plays, movie screening, music events and so on. It can transform into a cultural hotspot for the space. The central plaza also hosts free WiFi zones under the Delhi Government's initiative, which will invite more people to activate the space.

Fish market :

The fish market in essence anchors the market's functionality and its popularity as an urban food court. Thereby the problems/issues of the fish market need to be addressed. The current steel structure is prone to rust and corrosion due to high moisture content and salt present in the atmosphere. We propose bamboo as a material that can be utilised as a structural member and also as a new aesthetic for the market, and by extension the urban spaces. Bamboo, apart from being an exceptionally sustainable material, is also a building material that can be maintained and constructed by skilled workers and labourers who come from Bengal every year for the Pujo pandals. Inculcating skilled workers who work on the pandals during Pujo, into the annual maintenance and upkeep as well as construction of the fish markets and structures in the landscape. Next time they say this place looks like a fish market, it will be a compliment in CR park.

Plug and play urbanism :

The beauty of Indian urban spaces is how it grows organically, but it is also one of the biggest threats to planned development, which is clearly evident in the present condition of CR Park. The idea of plug

and play urbanism is to let the spaces transform organically but with a set framework. The plug and play grids create a framework for everyone and anyone to habit the place and make it their own. An urban framework that acts like a public game of “tetris”, where all ancillary public functions and activities can plug themselves into the volume and activate the edges of the urban plaza, the mela ground boundary and the Netaji park boundary. The framework can become an eatery stall or a bench or a table to play chess on. The framework can accommodate an amplifier for an electrical guitar while also allowing the possibility of having a see-saw for the kids to play. It can be the only public furniture that can become what it needs to be depending upon the requirement. Ephemeral functions for permanent urban spaces. It attempts to keep the growth organic but not out of control.

Disused urban infrastructure needs to be reused :

The disused public convenience building needs to be reused and made a part of the urban infrastructure. Social self help groups and organisations have been a backbone of change in the urban fabric of the settlement. The disused public convenience building can be re-purposed in a second phase of the project to create workshops and public discussion forums for all stakeholders of the community including but not limited to the residents, shopkeepers, visitors, self help groups, NGOs and other groups of people who want to be a part of the commune. Facade of the existing market place to be improved and considered as a canvas for public art and expressions. While this can also be spilled over to the façades of the disused building’s facade and the facade of the fish market. Utilising the locally housed social organisations and self help groups to be used to re-brand and create a locally sustainable ecosystem of waste management, human resource uplifting, maintenance and upkeep for the interventions proposed. The local organisations need to be an integral part of the interventions that we proposed.

The construction, and maintenance of the interventions needs to be phased and planned in multiple layers on a time based and long term basis. Preferences need to be given to interventions that are needed at an immediate time frame with a long term place making strategy in mind. While the interventions that can wait should be phased at a later stage. These decisions should be taken with considerate opinions of the community.

The Street as a Place:

Designing streets as incident spaces outside buildings shouldn’t be the approach to public place making. We want to acknowledge Indian streets as reclaimed spaces for the public and enable as much gain out of them as built infrastructure. Indian streets in their existing forms are complex, existing and intended functions have been designed to work together: through introduction of street furniture, pedestrian pathways etc. A majority of the problem solving can be done by simple demarcation of different layers of the street, a consistent carriage way for vehicle movement, tucked in parking to avoid bottlenecks on the street, raised and streamlined pedestrian paths with ramps and tactile tiles. These interventions can start with simple tactics like painting lines to bigger interventions like creating level differences over time.

We understand that design cannot be the single enabler, and prioritizing place making over designing solutions in silos works better, especially in the Indian context; for example, there are three steps to solving parking: marking and designing space for it, enabling policy through the local community for management of the parking and then enabling smooth maintenance and operations through simple design solutions.

Our approach to re imagining park has been three fold, keeping it simple, practical and for the long term. There is an intent to create an identity that the community will take ownership of, the interventions can be broken down in parts by scale or over time in phases. We hand over this imagination to the residents of CR Park in the pursuit of continuously wanting to evolve and create better public spaces in India.