

## ACTIVATING PUBLIC SPACES THROUGH PLACEMAKING: CASE OF CHANDIGARH

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**Abstract.** In the global trend of urbanization, our communities, people and places have been encroached by communication technologies, thereby weakening the liveability and quality of urban life. This causes urban environments to expand, creating lifestyle changes and, as a result, the use of public spaces. Friendly quality of streets began to disappear and the essence of community got lost in the hustle of traffic. The implications of rapidly changing economic and social circumstances have become profoundly important in shaping how people use and form their societies. Placemaking is a method to enhance the comfort, safety, attraction, and vitality of public spaces in order to encourage people to engage in social activities. This concept is used to improve public spaces and to transform a space into a place. This research paper investigates the inactive public spaces and why these spaces fail in making into a great place. The research has been done to find out the simple solutions for activating public spaces so that they can foster social life and also how can space be transformed into a place. Surveys have been done on various public spaces in Chandigarh Sec 22 and 35 to find out where they lack, the negative and positive points. The design solutions discussed can be used as guidelines for future public spaces encouraging more and more use of that place and encourage social interaction.

**Keywords:** Placemaking, Urban design, Sense of place, Sociability, Community, Public place

### Introduction

Human beings need to interact and connect with each other in order to feel authentically themselves. They seek to connect with the neighbourhood where they live in order to have a sense of belonging. Placemaking as a concept is not brand-new. Placemaking is the process of establishing a place that defines a community. It motivates individuals to redesign public areas as the hub of a neighbourhood. Placemaking is a term used to describe a common method of creating our public realm in order to maximise shared value by fostering a closer bond between people and the spaces they occupy. Placemaking relies on a community's resources and abilities rather than relying entirely on experts in their field. It takes a place to create a community and a community to create a place. (1)

### 1. Understanding Placemaking

Placemaking is defined as a multi-faceted approach to planning, design and management of public spaces. It capitalizes on left over spaces or tot-a-lots areas in markets, near bus stops, traffic junctions etc., which can be termed as assets, and realise their potential with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people's health, happiness and wellbeing. (2) It inspires people to collectively re imagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, Placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. (3)

More than just promoting better urban design, this facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a space and support its evolution over time.

Chandigarh strives to emerge as a city with quality urban life where aspirational elements including high quality urban realm are available. (4) The city aims to offer choices to the residents of the city for equitable and quality urban spaces for which the city can take the pride in. With this, Chandigarh Smart City Limited (CSCL) intends to improve upon the liveability and enhance the image of leftover open spaces, and tot-a-lots through minimalistic interventions. The project titled 'Placemaking in ABD areas' is to be developed by Chandigarh Smart City Limited through its own fund and project site has been identified in areas of Sec 22 and Sec 35

### 1.2. From Space to Place

Space is a characterless, unattractive object that all human settlement types must contend with due to its location. Although it is an empty thing, space can take on a place-like quality when it is given a purpose. In essence, a place only becomes a place when it has meaning, and people connect and engage in social activities in order to impart meaning to a space.

Filling the available space with people is not the only solution. This is how a place is made out of a space—by bringing people together. The location is significant for a number of reasons, including the fact that everyone wants

to belong to a community that extends beyond themselves and cannot be found in a physical location alone. Connecting to our communities through place making can be successful. Additionally, it might aid our reaction to environmental elements like climate change or safety. Which alley—a bustling, well-lit one or a dim one—will you pick? There aren't many instances where place making has changed things. We also desire to stay and spend time in areas that make us feel certain things. (5)

Public space is where we negotiate the boundaries between our places of residence, businesses, and institutions, and the rest of the world. We commute to work, complete errands and journey back home using public transportation. The majority of violent crimes take place in public areas. Some people are protected in public settings by enforcement, but not everyone. In addition to socializing, playing, and stumbling into one another, public spaces are also used for buying and selling. The most mundane utilities and infrastructure, as well as our wrath and loftiest dreams, are built in public areas. Additionally, if we permit it, public space might serve as a venue for expression, experimentation, and new ideas. (6)

### 1.3. Environmental and Social Impact

The major impact placemaking shall make is on Liveability enhancement. It is determined by quality of life in the city and this quality of life is further dependent on the quality of its public spaces. The quality of public spaces is hence the primary requirement to achieve successful public spaces in a city. While the arts and creative expression play a substantial part in establishing a sense of place and economic growth; amenities must also play an equally large role in creating a successful place. These two factors are not mutually exclusive. Placemaking directly affects the following:

- Integrity of parks and open spaces
- Inclusivity of social places
- Identity and Image ability of the areas
- Design of pause points that have benches and seating attracts the users thereby enhancing the overall experience and local economy of the places.

Incorporating the placemaking principles, not only affects the above said factors, but also impacts the overall environmental and social impression to the public spaces. Therefore, this triggers the magnitude of impact on society and environment.

As part of the proposal, a successful placemaking will be based on following principles:

- Community Involvement: Accounting the inputs of people who will be using the space.
- Places, not Designs: Placemaking is not just about designing a park or plaza, but considering the inter-relationships with the surrounding amenities, informalities and activities.
- Triangulate: Triangulation is strategic placement of amenities, such that they encourage social interaction and are used more frequently.
- Form supports the function: Public space's form factor should be formulated with its possible functions in mind.
- Placemaking is 'ongoing process': It is about evolution of space that adapts itself according to people, place and time. Its evolution can never come to an end and should not be restricted.

### 1.4. Core Elements of Placemaking

Walkable Sidewalks: Sidewalks are a part of basic infrastructure that encourage people to walk, and engage in associated activities. Also, they act as buffer space between the built form and the carriageway.

1. Pause Points: Public spaces that shall have ample seating arrangements along with basic infrastructure which are more welcoming. Better experiential quality encourages greater citizen involvement.
2. Interactive Social Elements: The spaces should be interactive and flexible. Dynamic spaces engage people with the space and within themselves. Community experiences should be encouraged in isolated spaces.
3. Art and Aesthetics: Vibrancy catches the eye and quickly activates the space. The components such as painted sidewalks, art installations, street/wall art, etc. can elevate the area aesthetics and create more inviting experience.
4. Efficient Lighting: Lighting illuminates the area and will provide a sense of safety to the users. This enriches the experience by facilitating views. In contrast, a dark space, however safe it is, manifests the feeling of danger and insecurity.
5. Landscape Elements: Landscape always adds on to the aesthetic appeal and enhances the overall user

experience. The landscape can be a mix of greenery, plantations, and hardscape elements, like grass, shrubs, planters, pavements of different materials, etc.

6. Last mile Connectivity: A well-connected space, which is easy to access physically and visually, tends to attract more users. The journey has to be given equal design consideration as the site/ destination.
7. Vendors: Vendors are the major point of attraction for people to come and use the place. Incorporating food kiosks, informal vendors, etc. by either providing dedicated hawkers' space or keeping them in proximity to restaurants and shops will be an important concern. Having a mix of choice helps serves people from all walks of life and keeps up the social balance in the designed spaces. (7)

## 2. Chandigarh -Site Identification & Character Analysis

The capital of the states of Punjab and Haryana, Chandigarh is a union territory in northern India. State of Punjab borders Chandigarh to the north, west, and south. State of Haryana borders Chandigarh to the east. (8)

One of India's first planned cities after independence, Chandigarh is renowned around the world for its architecture and urban planning. Le Corbusier, a Swiss-French architect, devised the city's master plan, which was based on earlier designs made by Maciej Nowicki, a Polish architect, and Albert Mayer, an American urban planner. (9)

Since its initial construction, Chandigarh has expanded significantly and has reached its physical development saturation point. This has led to the development of two satellites.

Since its initial construction, Chandigarh has expanded significantly and has reached its physical development saturation point. As a result, the development has spread to two satellite cities in its adjacent states, Mohali and Panchkula. (10)

Chandigarh being a planned city has large pockets for public spaces and as a by-product a great extent of residual pockets are found in and around those public spaces. These pockets are either occupied by vendors or used as parking spaces, or in some places are even used for illegal activities. Retrofitting or redesigning these pockets has to be done considering the pocket context, its location and understanding the desired needs of the people living around. (11)

Apart from these pockets, there is one more kind of spaces that need to be re-looked, i.e. the leftover spaces on both the sides of the V2 and V3 roads in the city. Because of introvert planning of the sectors, the roads get boundary walls on both the sides, which has no footfall after evening hours because of no or minimal illumination, and minimal footfall during days due to disconnected foot paths in high traffic zone and lack of seating spaces. This is a major drawback that hinders promoting safe walkability around the city. The following map represents this variety of typologies via colour coding legend.

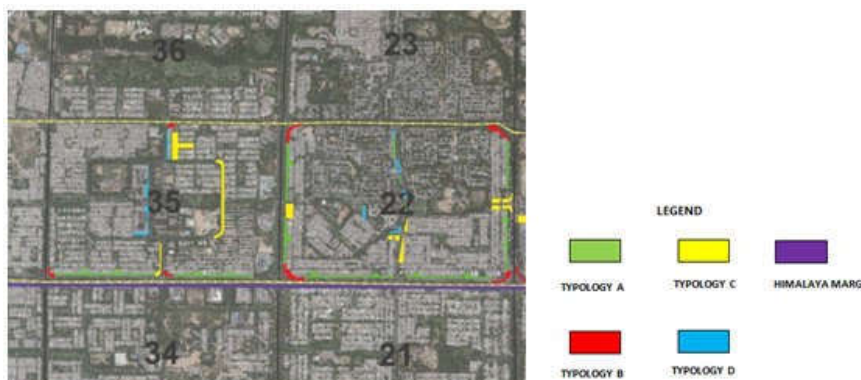


Figure 1. Site context for Placemaking in study areas

- **Typology A:** This typology of pockets is the stretch in front of market area. The markets are secluded from the neighbourhood in terms of their accessibility and pedestrian prioritization. The city designed for cars does not support the humanized scape of the city. Availability of toilets in such pockets invites people here

throughout the day. This typology of spaces is designed as pause points for people to shop and recreate. But it lacks the basic amenities like lighting, night illumination, and proper seating spaces for people to relax over. This creates discomfort for public in general, and elderly and disabled in specific. Lack of illumination is generating the sense of insecurity and threatens the psychology of being alone for all, especially women. Designed as rigid structural entities, these market spaces need little flexibility to adapt the current social needs, to make it more vibrant and viable. Another factor under major consideration is the vendors and food kiosks. A city's functioning is incomplete without them, and hence, they need proper planning and design consideration as a part of holistic design process.

- **Typology B:** This typology of pockets are the leftover corner spaces at junctions which have no designated function, neither are they utilized for any purpose, except as cross-overs or illegal parking. These under-utilized spaces have potential to become urban public spaces with strong social and aesthetic character. This will not only enhance the Imageability of the area but will also, help in illuminating the area, crating pause points for people passing-by. The bland visual character need be turned into vibrant interactive spaces for the people and by the people. Currently, these empty spaces are adding to the dreadful dark spaces in the city.
- **Typology C:** This typology of pockets is the space in front of market /booths that are supported by wide range of informal activities near Shastri market (designed informal market). These pockets are cluttered with kiosks and vendors dealing with food, clothes, variety of articles, etc. They are full of people even till late night, i.e. 8.30-9pm. But have little or no illumination to support the character. Lack of sufficient sitting spaces adds on to the issue. Also, the width of pedestrian path is not sufficient to handle the quality and quality of crowd using these markets. The character of market supports vibrancy and social interaction but the quality of amenities provided does not support that.
- **Typology D:** This typology of pockets is the space in front of market /booths that are supported by wide range of informal activities near Shastri market (designed informal market). These pockets are cluttered with kiosks and vendors dealing with food, clothes, variety of articles, etc. They are full of people even till late night, i.e. 8.30-9pm. But have little or no illumination to support the character. Lack of sufficient sitting spaces adds on to the issue. Also, the width of pedestrian path is not sufficient to handle the quality and quality of crowd using these markets. The character of market supports vibrancy and social interaction but the quality of amenities provided does not support that.





Figure 3. Identified pockets for Placemaking in Sector 35

## 2.1 Pocket wise Existing Character Analysis for Sector 22

### 2.1.1 Typology A

This typology of pockets is the stretch in front of market area. The markets are secluded from the neighbourhood in terms of their accessibility and pedestrian prioritization. The city designed for cars does not support the humanized scape of the city. Availability of toilets in such pockets invites people here throughout the day. This typology of spaces is designed as pause points for people to shop and recreate. But it lacks the basic amenities like lighting, night illumination, and proper seating spaces for people to relax over. This creates discomfort for public in general, and elderly and disabled in specific. Lack of illumination is generating the sense of insecurity and threatens the psychology of being alone for all, especially women. Designed as rigid structural entities, these market spaces need little flexibility to adapt the current social needs, to make it more vibrant and viable. Another factor under major consideration is the vendors and food kiosks. A city's functioning is incomplete without them, and hence, they need proper planning and design consideration as a part of holistic design process.

### 2.1.2 Typology B

This typology of pockets are the leftover corner spaces at junctions which have no designated function, neither are they utilized for any purpose, except as cross-overs or illegal parking. These under-utilized spaces have potential to become urban public spaces with strong social and aesthetic character. This will not only enhance the Imageability of the area but will also, help in illuminating the area, crating pause points for people passing-by. The bland visual character need be turned into vibrant interactive spaces for the people and by the people. Currently, these empty spaces are adding to the dreadful dark spaces in the city. The bland visual character need be turned into vibrant interactive spaces for the people and by the people. Currently, these empty spaces are adding to the dreadful dark spaces in the city.

### **2.1.3 Typology C**

This typology of pockets is the example of underutilization of large chunks of land in the city. The planned city has many leftover pockets that create disconnect in the movement and hence, the Imageability of the city. These spaces could have been designed as holistic part of the surroundings. But, they are now the blank spaces either used as parking lot or by the vendors for setting up their kiosks or sometimes even by labour class for resting/sleeping.

### **2.1.4 Typology D**

This typology of pockets is the space in front of market /booths that are supported by wide range of informal activities near Shastrri market (designed informal market). These pockets are cluttered with kiosks and vendors dealing with food, clothes, variety of articles, etc. They are full of people even till late night, i.e. 8.30-9pm. But have little or no illumination to support the character. Lack of sufficient sitting spaces adds on to the issue. Also, the width of pedestrian path is not sufficient to handle the quantity and quality of crowd using these markets. The character of market supports vibrancy and social interaction but the quality of amenities provided does not support that.

## **2.2 Pocket wise Existing Character Analysis for Sector 35**

### **2.2.1 Typology A**

This typology of pockets is the stretch in front of market area. The markets are secluded from the neighbourhood in terms of their accessibility and pedestrian prioritization. The city designed for cars, has enough space dedicated for vehicular parking (though it is not enough as per current needs). Availability of toilets in such pockets invites people here throughout the day. This typology of spaces is designed as pause points for people to shop and recreate. But it lacks the basic amenities like lighting, night illumination, and proper seating spaces for people to relax over. This creates discomfort for public in general, and elderly and disabled in specific. Lack of illumination is generating the sense of insecurity and threatens the psychology of being alone for all, especially women. Designed as rigid structural entities, these market spaces need little flexibility to adapt the current social needs, to make it more vibrant and viable. Another factor under major consideration is the vendors and food kiosks. A city's functioning is incomplete without them, and hence, they need proper planning and design consideration as a part of holistic design process.

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## 3. Results and Discussions

The proposed solution has been designed keeping in mind the context and possibility of replication hand in hand. The elements proposed have the capability of being multiplied in number of places in the context of Chandigarh; like material for pedestrian pathways, benches, rain water trenches, etc. At the same time, these elements have been developed from the needs and patterns in the public places of Chandigarh. The proposal maps of the design clearly demarcate the positioning of each element proposed. Even beyond the selected pockets taken, the elements are replicable typology-wise.

The figure 4 below gives a clear picture of the holistic locations of the components.



Figure 4. Existing pockets with holistic locations of proposed components throughout the study area

## 4. Conclusion

The project for placemaking is outlined to relook the Corbusier’s plan as ramification to its urban form that will help generate humanized urban spaces in the city. Being a bottom-up approach placemaking empowers and engages people in ways that traditional planning processes do not. It draws on the assets and skills of a community, rather than solely relying on ‘professional’ experts. Each place and each culture is unique. Questions of societal norms, climate and tradition must all be considered. The result will be a holistic urban environment that reflects its distinguished character in terms of elements incorporated, materials used, typology of spaces created, and most importantly enhancing the pedestrian prioritized spaces in the city. The overall “placelessness” in the city of cars because of disconnected pockets will be cured, generating more humanized and susceptible environment that invites people to public places.

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