CRAFTING INDIAN MARKETS: THE ART OF BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES OF PUBLICNESS CASE OF DELHI
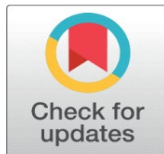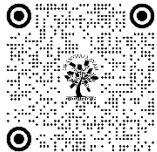
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ABSTRACT

The urban landscape of India is crafted by bustling markets that have long served as vibrant hubs of commerce, social interaction, and cultural exchange. However, the dichotomy between public and private ownership within these markets has become increasingly blurred, as private shopkeepers and vendors encroach upon spaces originally designated for community use. This research paper delves to explore the nuanced dimensions of this phenomenon, shedding light on orchestrating transformation of ostensibly public spaces into privatized domains and the ensuing impact on the public realm.

The central objective of this study is to initiate a meaningful dialogue within the public domain regarding the ever-crafting nature of public spaces in India, particularly in the context of marketplaces. The encroachment by private entities poses critical questions about the essence of publicness in these spaces, challenging traditional notions and raising concerns about the equitable access and shared ownership of urban areas.

The paper employs a multi-disciplinary approach, drawing on urban sociology, anthropology, and urban planning theories to unravel the layers of complexities involved in the art of privatizing these public spaces. Through an extensive review of literature, case studies, and field observations, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play and the various stakeholders involved in this process. Designing the newly-evolved socio-economic system around these community spaces is the real social art.

Key thematic areas explored in this research include the historical evolution of urban markets in India, the socio-economic motivations driving private encroachments, the role of municipal authorities in regulating public spaces, and the impact on the community's right to access and enjoy these spaces. Additionally, the study delves into the legal frameworks governing public spaces and the effectiveness of current regulatory measures in curbing privatization tendencies, but is restricted to examining the administrative changes and market transformations in Delhi, and does not concentrate on socio-cultural changes, which is a detailed area of focus on its own. By fostering a dialogue on the publicness of public spaces, the research aims to stimulate awareness and encourage civic engagement in crafting the future of urban landscapes with delicate artistry. The findings of this study are expected to inform policymakers, urban planners, and community leaders, offering insights into potential interventions to reclaim and preserve public spaces for the collective benefit of society.

In conclusion, this research paper contributes to the growing body of knowledge on urban dynamics in India and serves as a catalyst for reimagining and revitalizing public spaces. The implications of this study extend beyond academia, resonating with citizens, activists, and policymakers alike, and public perceptions to ensure the preservation and enhancement of the publicness of these vital urban spaces, as they collectively strive to strike a balance between the imperatives of commerce and the preservation of shared, inclusive urban spaces.

Keywords: Indian Markets, Public Spaces, Publicness, Privatization, Transformation

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Indian markets have a rich and vibrant history deeply ingrained in the socio-cultural fabric of the nation. From ancient times, markets have served as pivotal nodes of economic activity, social interaction, and cultural exchange. The bustling

bazaars of India, with their kaleidoscope of sights, sounds, and smells, epitomize the essence of public spaces, where people from diverse backgrounds come together to buy, sell, and engage in myriad interactions. The concept of publicness in Indian markets is deeply rooted in the idea of shared spaces where individuals from all walks of life converge, transcending boundaries of caste, class, and religion. These markets have traditionally been open and accessible to all, embodying principles of inclusivity, diversity, and communal ownership. They not only fulfil the basic needs of daily life but also serve as sites for socialization, cultural expression, and community cohesion.

However, over time, the landscape of Indian markets has undergone significant transformations, influenced by various socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. Rapid urbanization, globalization, and changing consumer preferences have led to the emergence of new market forms, characterized by modern retail outlets, shopping malls, and online platforms. In parallel, the traditional markets, often situated in the heart of cities and towns, have faced challenges stemming from encroachments, infrastructure deficiencies, and regulatory constraints.

The publicness of Indian markets, once taken for granted, has come under threat due to the encroachment of private interests into spaces originally designated for public use. Private shopkeepers, vendors, and commercial establishments have increasingly appropriated public spaces for their own benefit, blurring the boundaries between public and private realms. This phenomenon raises critical questions about the equitable access, shared ownership, and democratic governance of urban spaces, challenging the fundamental principles of publicness and urban citizenship.

In this context, understanding the dynamics of privatization in Indian markets becomes imperative. It involves unravelling the complex interplay of economic forces, institutional arrangements, and socio-cultural dynamics shaping the transformation of public spaces into privatized domains. Moreover, it requires a nuanced examination of the implications of such privatization for marginalized communities, informal sector workers, and the broader urban population.

As India grapples with the challenges of urbanization, it is essential to critically engage with the evolving nature of public spaces and reaffirm their role as vital components of inclusive, sustainable, and democratic cities. By delving into the historical evolution, socio-economic dynamics, and regulatory frameworks governing Indian markets, we can gain insights into the complexities of publicness and pave the way for meaningful interventions aimed at reclaiming and revitalizing these crucial urban spaces for the collective benefit of society.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Rapid urbanization, coupled with evolving consumer preferences, has led to a shift in the landscape of traditional marketplaces. Encroachment by private entities, including shopkeepers and commercial establishments, onto spaces originally designated for public use, has become a pervasive issue. This encroachment not only blurs the distinction between public and private realms but also undermines the fundamental principles of publicness, equity, and democratic governance in urban spaces. Moreover, the privatization of public markets raises concerns about access, inclusivity, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Marginalized communities and informal sector workers are disproportionately affected by these changes, facing challenges in livelihoods, access to space, and participation in economic activities. As Indian markets continue to undergo transformation, understanding and

addressing the dynamics of encroachment and privatization emerge as critical imperatives for fostering inclusive, sustainable, and vibrant urban environments

1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The central objective of this study is to initiate a meaningful dialogue within the public domain regarding the evolving nature of public spaces in India, particularly in the context of marketplaces in Delhi. The encroachment by private entities poses critical questions about the essence of publicness in these spaces, challenging traditional notions and raising concerns about equitable access and shared ownership of urban areas. The methodology focuses on generic data analysis on shift in pattern of urban markets and their challenges to more specific legal framework and regulations, and its impact on the community. The study also involves case study of Delhi's oldest market Chandni Chowk and its transformation in the year 2021.

2. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF URBAN MARKETS IN DELHI
2.1. ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICANCE AND SHIFT IN PATTERN OVER TIME

The historical evolution of Indian markets is deeply rooted in the country's rich cultural and economic history, spanning thousands of years. Ancient India was renowned for its bustling marketplaces, where goods from across the subcontinent and beyond were traded. The Harappan civilization, for instance, boasted well-organized market centres in cities like Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, showcasing the early roots of commerce in the region Kenoyer (1998).

During the medieval period, Indian markets flourished under various dynasties and empires, such as the Mauryas, Guptas, and Mughals. These rulers patronized trade and commerce, leading to the establishment of vibrant market towns and bazaars across the subcontinent. The Grand Trunk Road, for instance, facilitated trade between different regions, fostering the growth of markets along its route.

Colonial rule brought significant changes to Indian markets, with the British East India Company exerting control over trade and commerce. The Company established trading posts and monopolies, reshaping traditional market networks and integrating India into the global economy Roy & Mandal (2002). Colonial-era cities like Calcutta (Kolkata) and Bombay (Mumbai) saw the emergence of new marketplaces catering to British colonial interests.

Post-independence, India witnessed rapid urbanization and economic development, leading to the transformation of traditional markets. Delhi, as India's capital and a major urban center, experienced significant changes in its market landscape. The advent of modern retail formats, such as shopping malls and supermarkets, alongside the persistence of traditional bazaars like Chandni Chowk and Sarojini Nagar, reflects the complex evolution of markets in the city Varman & Khare (2017).

Overall, the evolution of markets in Delhi mirrors the broader trajectory of Indian markets, showcasing a blend of tradition and modernity. While traditional bazaars continue to thrive, modern retail formats have also become integral to the city's commercial landscape, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of India's marketplaces in the face of changing times.

Figure 1

Figure 1 A Hustling Day in Chandni Chowk Market
Source Google Images

3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC MOTIVATIONS DRIVING PRIVATE ENCROACHMENTS
3.1. CHALLENGES FACED BY TRADITIONAL VENDORS V/S ECONOMIC INCENTIVES IN PRIVATE ENTITIES AND ITS IMPACT ON OVERALL LIVELIHOOD

The socio-economic motivations driving private encroachments in Indian markets are multifaceted, with both traditional vendors and private entities navigating a complex landscape shaped by various factors.

Figure 2

Figure 2 Crafts Bazaar in Dilli Haat INA
Source Google Images

For traditional vendors, the challenges are manifold. Firstly, rapid urbanization and changing consumer preferences pose significant hurdles. As cities expand and modernize, traditional vendors often find themselves marginalized or displaced due to infrastructural developments or zoning regulations, Additionally, competition from modern retail formats and e-commerce platforms further exacerbates their economic challenges, as they struggle to compete with larger businesses in terms of pricing, marketing, and product diversity Roy & Mandal (2002). Furthermore, lack of access to formal credit, limited bargaining power, and vulnerability to exploitation by middlemen and authorities compound their difficulties Hashmi (n.d.).

On the other hand, private entities are motivated by various economic incentives to encroach upon public spaces in Indian markets. Firstly, the high profitability potential of prime locations in bustling marketplaces drives private businesses to seek control over these spaces Varman & Khare (2017). By establishing their presence in prominent market areas, private entities can attract a larger customer base and capitalize on the foot traffic generated by these locations. Moreover, lax enforcement of regulations and corruption within municipal authorities often incentivize private businesses to encroach upon public spaces with impunity, knowing that legal consequences are minimal. Additionally, the informal nature of many Indian markets, characterized by weak property rights and regulatory oversight, provides fertile ground for private encroachments Chakraborty (2023).

Figure 3

Figure 3 Handicraft Market Inside Red Fort Post Interventions
Source Google Images

Therefore, the socio-economic motivations driving private encroachments in Indian markets are deeply intertwined with the challenges faced by traditional vendors and the economic incentives available to private entities. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that considers the needs and rights of all

stakeholders involved while striving to maintain the vibrancy and inclusivity of public spaces in urban marketplaces.

4. ROLE OF LOCAL/ MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES IN REGULATING PUBLIC SPACES

4.1. LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING PUBLIC SPACES: ANALYSIS OF LAWS AND REGULATIONS

In the Indian context, the role of local municipal authorities in regulating public spaces, particularly in cities like Delhi, is crucial for maintaining order, ensuring public safety, and preserving the integrity of urban spaces. The legal framework governing public spaces in India encompasses various laws, regulations, and policies at the national, state, and local levels.

The primary legislation governing urban planning and development in India is the Town and Country Planning Act, which empowers municipal bodies to regulate land use, zoning, and construction activities within their jurisdictions TCPO. (2020). The context of public spaces, municipal authorities are responsible for enforcing regulations related to encroachments, unauthorized constructions, and street vending. The Delhi Municipal Corporation Act grants powers to municipal bodies in Delhi to regulate street vending activities, issue licenses, and designate vending zones (Government of NCT of Delhi, 1957). However, enforcement of these regulations often faces challenges due to factors such as limited resources, corruption, and political interference Bhowmik (2003).

For example, the unauthorized occupation of pavements and open spaces by street vendors has long been a contentious issue, leading to conflicts between vendors, residents, and authorities. Similarly, the proliferation of illegal encroachments in markets like Chandni Chowk and Karol Bagh underscores the challenges faced by municipal authorities in enforcing regulations and maintaining order (NDMC).

4.2. ENFORCEMENT MECHANISM: MUNICIPAL POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS

In recent years, efforts have been made to streamline regulations and improve enforcement mechanisms. The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, aims to protect the rights of street vendors while regulating their activities in a manner that ensures public order and safety (Government of India, 2014). Additionally, initiatives such as the Delhi Street Vendors Policy and the Smart Cities Mission seek to address the challenges of informal urbanization and improve the management of public spaces in Delhi (Delhi Government, 2019).

However, good governance and top-down approach are proven strategies for on-ground challenges. Best example of the same was seen in the year 2022 in the very same region during G20 events. Initially these approaches might seem harsh, but considering the complexity of the system, they proved to be the best solution in illegal encroachments, enforcing regulations and control. Ideally a balanced step by local Deputy Commissioners (DC) from time-to-time is the key to resolve this scenario.

While municipal authorities play a critical role in regulating public spaces in Indian cities like Delhi, challenges remain in effectively enforcing regulations and balancing competing interests. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated

approach involving stakeholders from government, civil society, and the private sector, aimed at promoting inclusive and sustainable urban development while upholding the rule of law and public welfare.

5. IMPACT ON COMMUNITY'S RIGHT TO ACCESS AND ENJOY PUBLIC SPACES

The impact of privatizing markets on the community's right to access and enjoy public spaces is multidimensional, encompassing social implications, marginalization of certain groups, and community responses.

5.1. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF PRIVATIZATION

Privatizing markets often results in a shift in the social dynamics of public spaces. Traditionally, markets have served as vibrant hubs of social interaction, where people from diverse backgrounds come together to buy, sell, and engage in cultural exchange. However, privatization can lead to the commercialization of these spaces, where profit-driven interests take precedence over community needs and social functions Varman & Khare (2017). One significant social implication of privatizing markets is the restriction or control of access to these spaces. When private entities take ownership or lease public markets, they may impose entry fees, membership requirements, or restrictive policies that limit who can enter and use the space. This can exclude marginalized groups, such as low-income residents or informal vendors, who rely on public markets for their livelihoods and social interactions Lintelo (2017).

Furthermore, privatization can contribute to the homogenization of public spaces. Private developers or businesses may prioritize standardized designs and commercial interests, resulting in the loss of unique cultural elements and local character that define public markets Hashmi (n.d.). This can erode the sense of place and belonging that communities associate with their local markets, leading to a decline in social cohesion and collective identity.
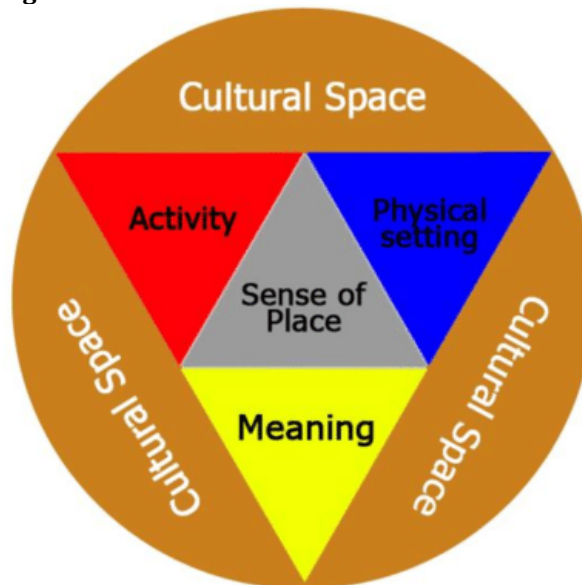
Figure 4

Figure 4 Sense of Place Diagram Proposed by Punter and Montgomery
Source Research paper by Dian Kartika Santoso

5.2. EXCLUSIONARY BEHAVIOUR AND MARGINALIZATION

The privatization of markets often exacerbates existing inequalities and marginalizes vulnerable groups within society. Traditional vendors, street hawkers, and informal traders, who depend on public markets for their livelihoods, are particularly susceptible to displacement and exclusion Mishra et al. (2023). As private entities assert control over public spaces, these marginalized groups may face eviction, harassment, or restrictions on their activities, leading to economic hardship and social marginalization.

Additionally, the privatization of markets can deepen socio-economic disparities within communities. As public spaces become commodified and cater to wealthier consumers, access to affordable goods and services may be restricted for low-income residents Mishra et al. (2023). This can exacerbate poverty and exclusion, perpetuating cycles of inequality and marginalization.

Figure 5

Figure 5 Infographic Representing Marginalization Concept
Source Shuttestock Images

5.3. COMMUNITY RESPONSES

Communities affected by the privatization of markets often mobilize and resist these transformations through collective action and advocacy. Grassroots movements, community organizations, and civil society groups may campaign for the protection of public spaces, the rights of marginalized vendors, and the preservation of cultural heritage Roy & Mandal (2002). These efforts aim to reclaim public spaces as inclusive and democratic environments that serve the needs of all members of the community.

Community responses to privatization may include protests, demonstrations, and legal challenges aimed at challenging the encroachment of private interests on public spaces Bhowmik (2003). In some cases, communities have successfully lobbied for policy changes or municipal interventions to protect public markets and ensure equitable access for all residents Roy & Mandal (2002).

Narratively, the privatization of markets can have profound social implications, including the restriction of access, marginalization of vulnerable groups, and erosion of community cohesion. Recognizing the importance of public spaces as inclusive and democratic environments, it is essential to promote policies and

practices that safeguard their accessibility, diversity, and social functions for the collective benefit of society.

6. CASE STUDY: DELHI

Encroachers of varying sizes and forms are plentiful. Some individuals encroach on small portions of public land, sometimes as minuscule as 10-15sqm. However, larger groups comprising 30-40 or more people simultaneously seize substantial tracts of public land. This pattern of land usurpation is most evident in city markets, undermining the intended public nature of these spaces.

These encroachers are often represented by traders' associations, and this practice is widespread across Delhi, spanning from Khari Baoli, Chandni Chowk, and Sadar Bazar to the upscale neighbourhoods such as Greater Kailash and even the esteemed Khan Market.

Originally, the market areas like Chandni Chowk, Chawri bazaar and Khari Baoli were designed with shopfronts featuring small platforms and no awnings. However, with the introduction of railways in the mid-1860s and the availability of steel girders, the residences above these markets expanded their narrow balconies into terraces supported by cast-iron pillars creating shaded pathways on ground floor.

Figure 6

Figure 6 Encroachment of Footpath in Khari Baoli Market of Delhi
Source Author

Soon, the sidewalks became too congested for pedestrians, forcing them to walk on roads. Over time, landmarks like the Jain Mandir, Gauri Shankar Mandir, and Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib at the entrance of Chandni Chowk market lost their unobstructed pathways. Recently, the Delhi High Court intervened, instructing the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to clear the encroachments during the G20 and U20 events in Delhi. This clearance effort initially showed results, improving traffic and pedestrian movement for a brief period. However, the situation has reverted to its usual crowded state with encroachments. Similar issues persist in markets like Chawri, Bazar Sitaram, and Khari Baoli. Corridors in all markets built in New Delhi from the 1920s to the early 1960s, such as Connaught Place, Sarojini Nagar, Shankar Market, Bhagat Singh Market, Khan Market, and others, have faced similar challenges.

Figure 7

Figure 7 Pedestrian lanes of Sadar Bazaar
Source Google Images

Except for Connaught Place, all the new markets developed in New Delhi followed the longstanding practice of shopkeepers encroaching upon spaces intended for public convenience. The extent of encroachment varies across markets, with places like Shankar Market and Bhagat Singh Market showing lesser degrees of encroachment compared to markets such as Khan Market, various Kailash markets, South Extension, Hauz Khas, Green Park, and numerous others. In Connaught Circus and Shankar Market, some corridor space remains unclaimed, whereas in other markets, virtually none is left untouched.

Example, Khan Market was established in 1951 and for a few years thereafter, there existed a covered veranda—a corridor—that shielded shoppers from the sun. However, today, there's no trace of it. By the mid-1960s, most of the corridor had been occupied by shopkeepers who displayed their merchandise outside their shops, gradually erecting temporary structures that became permanent, thus eliminating the corridor altogether. It's believed that the authorities kept their eyes absorbed systematically flouting the regulations in these markets, especially Khan market.

Khan Market has recently gained recognition as one of the most valuable pieces of real estate globally, but it has long attracted an affluent clientele. Surrounded by the residences of some of Delhi's wealthiest inhabitants in areas like Golf Links, Prithviraj Road, Aurangzeb Road, Mansingh Road, and others, as well as influential figures in what used to be Man Nagar and Shan Nagar, Humayun Road, Shahjahan Road, and Lodi Estate quarters occupied by senior bureaucrats, parliamentarians, and high-ranking military personnel, Khan Market has always been a hub for the elite. Given its prestigious clientele and constant upkeep, including regular cleaning and maintenance, it's implausible that municipal authorities and law enforcement could have overlooked encroachments in such a prominent market frequented by senior diplomats, politicians, and top-tier administrators.

Nevertheless, not only were corridors encroached upon, but the market's first floor, originally designated for residential use only, was gradually and blatantly converted into commercial spaces. This transformation occurred without the

implementation of fire safety measures, without obtaining necessary permissions for land use conversion, and without adhering to the extensive bureaucratic procedures required for establishing eateries or other commercial ventures

Figure 8

Figure 8 Khan Market in Present Day
Source Google Images for 1 and 2, Author for Image 3

It is suspected that this transformation occurred with the active involvement of municipal authorities, given that this market is not an isolated case but rather reflective of a widespread trend across the city. Similar phenomena have been observed throughout Delhi. For instance, the South Extension market, initially a single-story rectangular market divided by the Ring Road, has significantly expanded over time, absorbing numerous residential properties that now house exclusive showrooms for international brands or upscale jewellers. This pattern repeats across almost all markets in the city.

This trend could be described as a massive-scale encroachment or the emergence of a new form of public space utilization in public areas. While population growth and the increasing demand for shops and commercial spaces are

contributing factors, the primary cause of this chaos is the complete absence of comprehensive planning to accommodate the needs of an ever-expanding city that is straining at its seams.

7. CONCLUSION: REIMAGINING PUBLIC SPACES
7.1. STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS AND PLANNERS

In the wake of privatization and encroachment of public spaces in Indian markets, reimagining these vital urban landscapes becomes imperative. Recognizing the multifaceted challenges posed by the transformation of public spaces into privatized domains, it is essential to adopt a holistic approach that promotes inclusivity, community participation, and sustainable urban development. As we envision the future of Indian markets, policymakers, planners, and community stakeholders must collaborate to devise innovative strategies and recommendations that prioritize the publicness of these crucial urban spaces.

One key strategy for reimagining public spaces post-transformation is the promotion of mixed-use development. By integrating commercial, residential, and recreational functions within market areas, planners can create vibrant, multifunctional spaces that cater to diverse needs and preferences. Mixed-use developments encourage pedestrian activity, foster social interaction, and contribute to the vitality of urban neighbourhoods, thereby enhancing the publicness of marketplaces.

Furthermore, policymakers can incentivize the adaptive reuse of existing infrastructure and vacant spaces within markets. By repurposing underutilized buildings and land parcels, cities can revitalize neglected areas and create new opportunities for community engagement and economic activity Mehrotra (2018) Adaptive reuse projects can include initiatives such as pop-up markets, cultural festivals, and art installations, which activate public spaces and celebrate local identity and heritage Chakraborty (2023)

In addition to physical interventions, policymakers can leverage technology to enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of public spaces in Indian markets. Digital platforms and mobile applications can provide real-time information on market events, promotions, and amenities, empowering residents to navigate and engage with their local markets more effectively Varman & Khare (2017). Moreover, smart infrastructure and sensor technologies can optimize the management of public spaces, improving safety, efficiency, and sustainability Roy & Mandal (2002).

7.2. COMMUNITY LED INITIATIVES/ PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

Community-led initiatives also play a crucial role in reimagining public spaces and fostering a sense of ownership and belonging among residents. Participatory planning processes, community design workshops, and grassroots organizing efforts enable local stakeholders to voice their concerns, aspirations, and ideas for improving their neighbourhoods Lintelo (2017). By empowering communities to actively participate in the decision-making process, cities can co-create public spaces that reflect the diverse needs, values, and identities of their inhabitants Mehrotra (2018).

Moreover, policymakers can support community-led initiatives through funding, technical assistance, and capacity-building programs. By investing in local

organizations, cooperatives, and social enterprises, cities can catalyse bottom-up approaches to urban development and promote social innovation and entrepreneurship in Indian markets Lintelo (2017). Collaborative partnerships between government agencies, civil society groups, and private sector actors can harness the collective expertise and resources needed to address complex urban challenges and build resilient, inclusive, and vibrant communities. Sengupta (2008)

In conclusion, we may infer that reimagining public spaces post-transformation requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach that embraces innovation, inclusivity, and community empowerment. By implementing strategies such as mixed-use development, adaptive reuse, technology integration, and community-led initiatives, policymakers and planners can create dynamic and inclusive urban environments that prioritize the publicness of Indian markets. As we navigate the complexities of urbanization and globalization, it is essential to preserve and enhance the social, cultural, and economic significance of public spaces as shared assets that enrich the lives of all residents.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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