

LIVING STREETS

Volume 1



Chandni Chowk, Delhi

August 2023

This document is an outcome of 8 weeks of documentation to capture the first impressions of human behaviour patterns across streets in India.



'Urban Design Square' focuses on empirical research to build 'evidence' for a participatory urban practice and advocacy to ensure this 'evidence' reaches the right audience. We are committed towards creating safe, sustainable and harmonious communities; making life happen.

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Ring Road, Delhi

Preface

There has been an encouraging shift in the dynamic urban landscape of India — a shift towards prioritising people in the design of our streets and public spaces. This marks a significant milestone in the trajectory of urban design as a profession in India. This is a critical time to pause, to introspect, and to analyse the impact of the recent street and public space transformations on human behaviour.

There is a notable gap between the conceptualisation of streets and their actual utilisation by people.

It manifests itself into multiple issues; motorists occupying cycle tracks, street vendors occupying the footpaths, pedestrians occupying the carriageway, etc. We firmly believe that aligning urban design practices with the preferences and comfort of the people can not only address the mobility issues but also elevate the overall social, economic, and environmental well-being of our cities.

‘Living Streets’ (Volume 1) aims to compile and analyse the first impressions of the usability of selected streets across three Indian cities—Delhi, Kolkata, and Nagpur. The advantage of documenting first impressions is their freedom from theoretical or personal biases. The observations have been documented in an objective manner, forming the basis for a comprehensive analysis that discerns patterns and deviations in human behaviour across the selected streets. Central to this study is the exploration of the evolving nature of people’s behaviour on streets at different stages of transformation.

This is not an exhaustive document but rather the commencement of a longer journey to adapt the street design approach to better suit the Indian context. We trust that this document will serve as a catalyst, triggering a depth of inquiry that can steer the course of urban design practice in India, aligning it more harmoniously with the unique Indian context.



01

About the
Study

Background

The current street design agenda revolves around objectives related to both road safety and climate change. Yet, recent street transformations reveal persistent issues that undermine the agenda.

The effort to encourage active mobility (walking and cycling) by creating wider footpaths and dedicated cycle tracks faces a significant gap in their actual usability.

Motorcyclists often obstruct the footpaths and cycle tracks, compelling pedestrians and cyclists onto the carriageway. Similarly, parked vehicles obstruct vending zones, pushing street vendors to occupy footpaths; exemplifying the disparity between design and its usability. Hence, enforcement remains a persisting challenge for city authorities, despite substantial investments in street design & implementation. Road safety remains a concern for the users and they continue to prefer private motor vehicles, hindering the goal to promote active mobility.



Aim of the Study

The study aims to provide evidence for creating more contextually appropriate streets in India by gathering evidence on the evolving patterns of usability.

Prioritising people within the design process is imperative as it ensures that the end result aligns with their actual needs, preferences, and behaviours.

Individual preferences often seem unique, yet underlying patterns can be identified.

To decipher these patterns of human behaviour, this study documents first impressions on the streets, ensuring that there are no theoretical or personal biases. Through this approach, the project aims to decipher the gaps that persist between the various stages of design conception, implementation, and management within urban contexts. This approach fosters user-centric solutions that enhance usability, functionality, and overall satisfaction with the designed urban environment.



Currently, street transformations face resistance on three fronts



Social

People reclaiming streets in the form of encroachments



Economic

Persistent enforcement issues despite investment

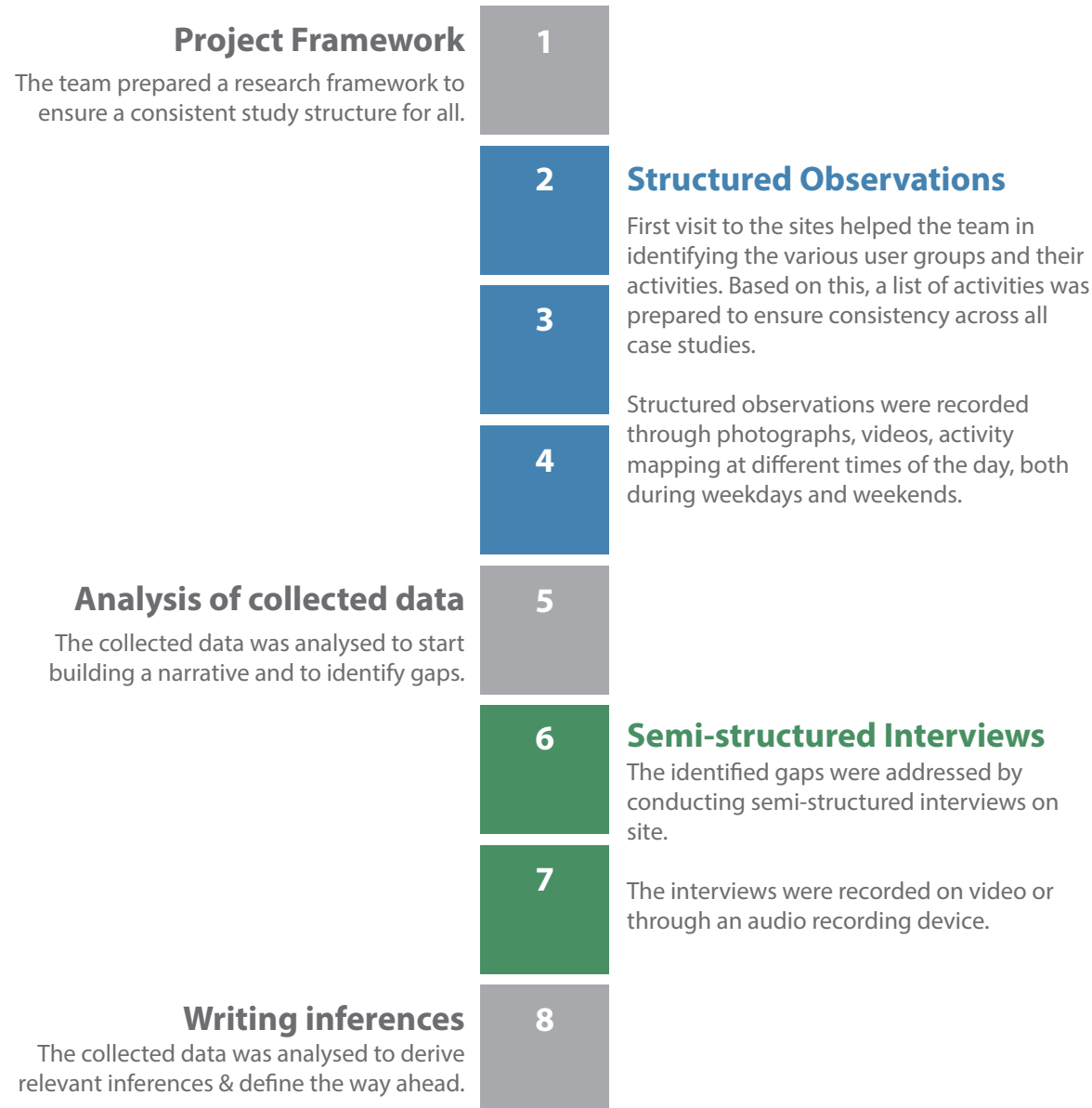


Environmental

Growing pollution due to unchanged mobility patterns

Adapting designs to actual usage patterns will enhance the social, economic and environmental well-being of our cities.

Project Timeline



Case Study Selection Criteria

Stage of transformation

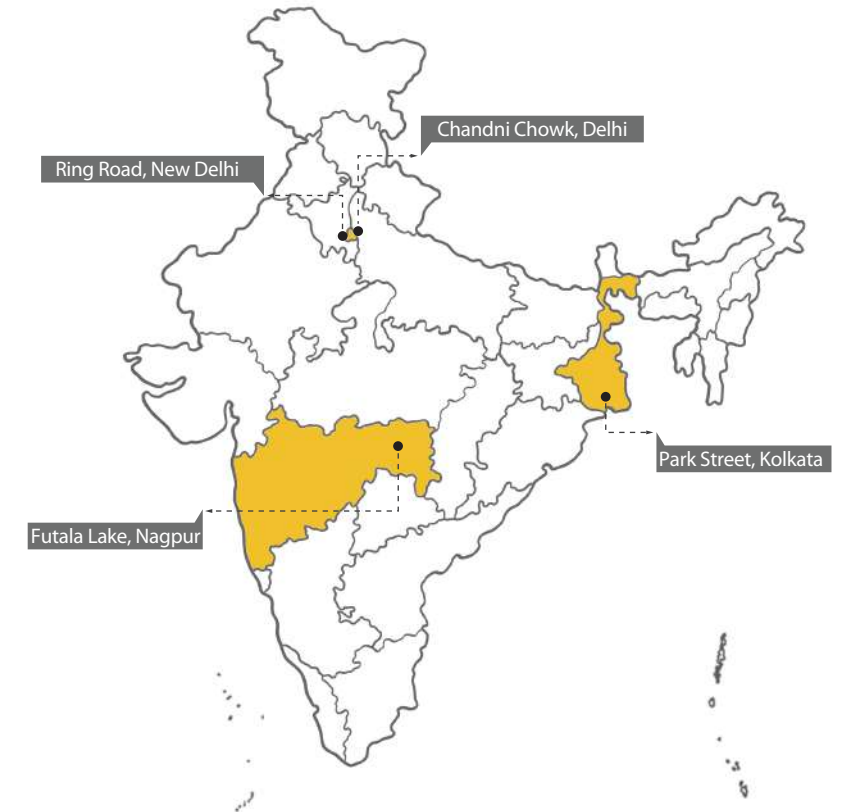
Streets at various stages of transformation are identified to observe people's behaviour with respect to the evolving character of streets in India.

Active public life

Selected streets have an active public life throughout the day. This ensures that there are enough activities to observe and analyse.

Ease of access

Accessibility to the selected streets at various times of the day and on both weekdays and weekends without a hindrance.



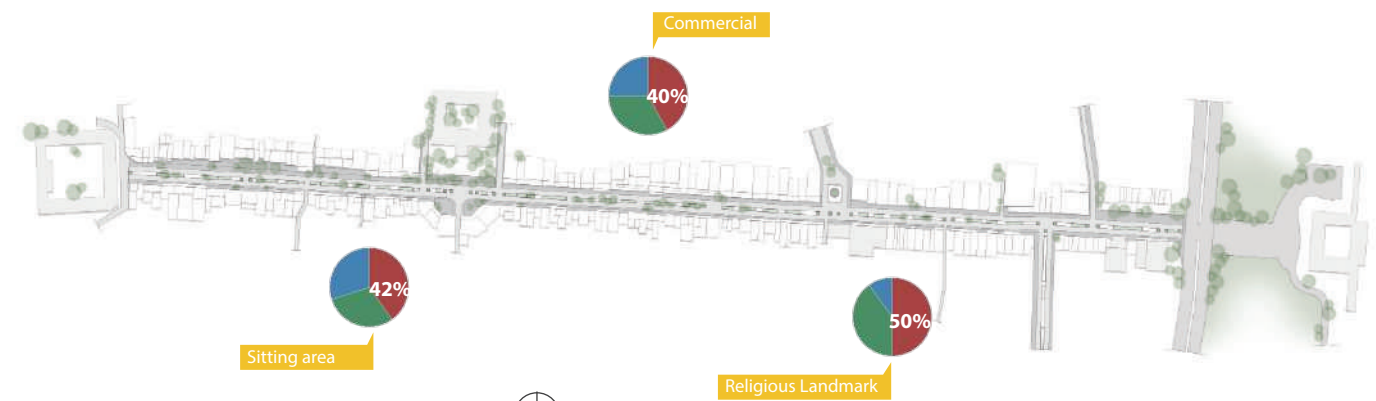
Chandni Chowk, Delhi



Street redevelopment
Completed in September 2021

Street length
1.3 km

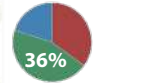
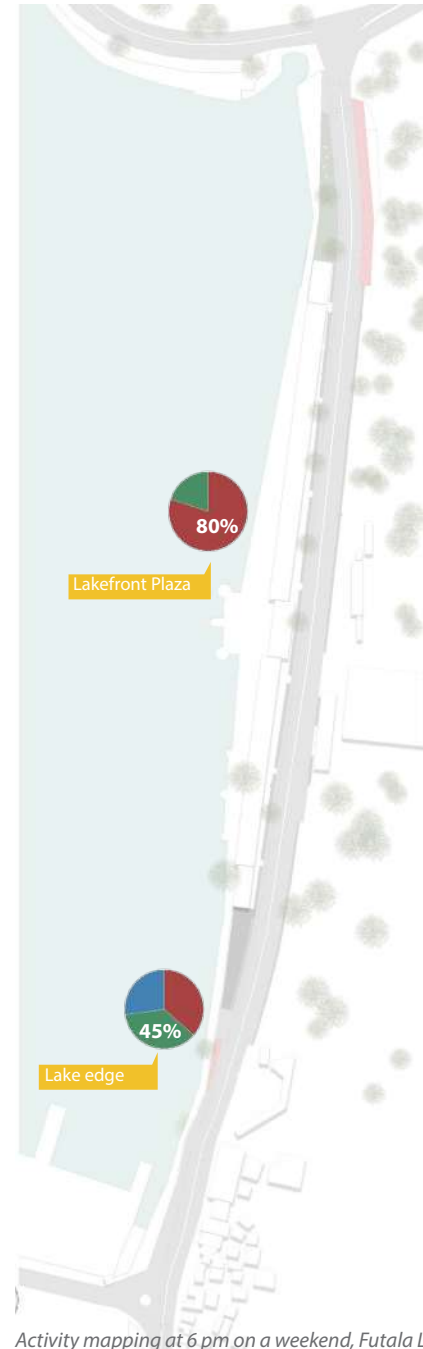
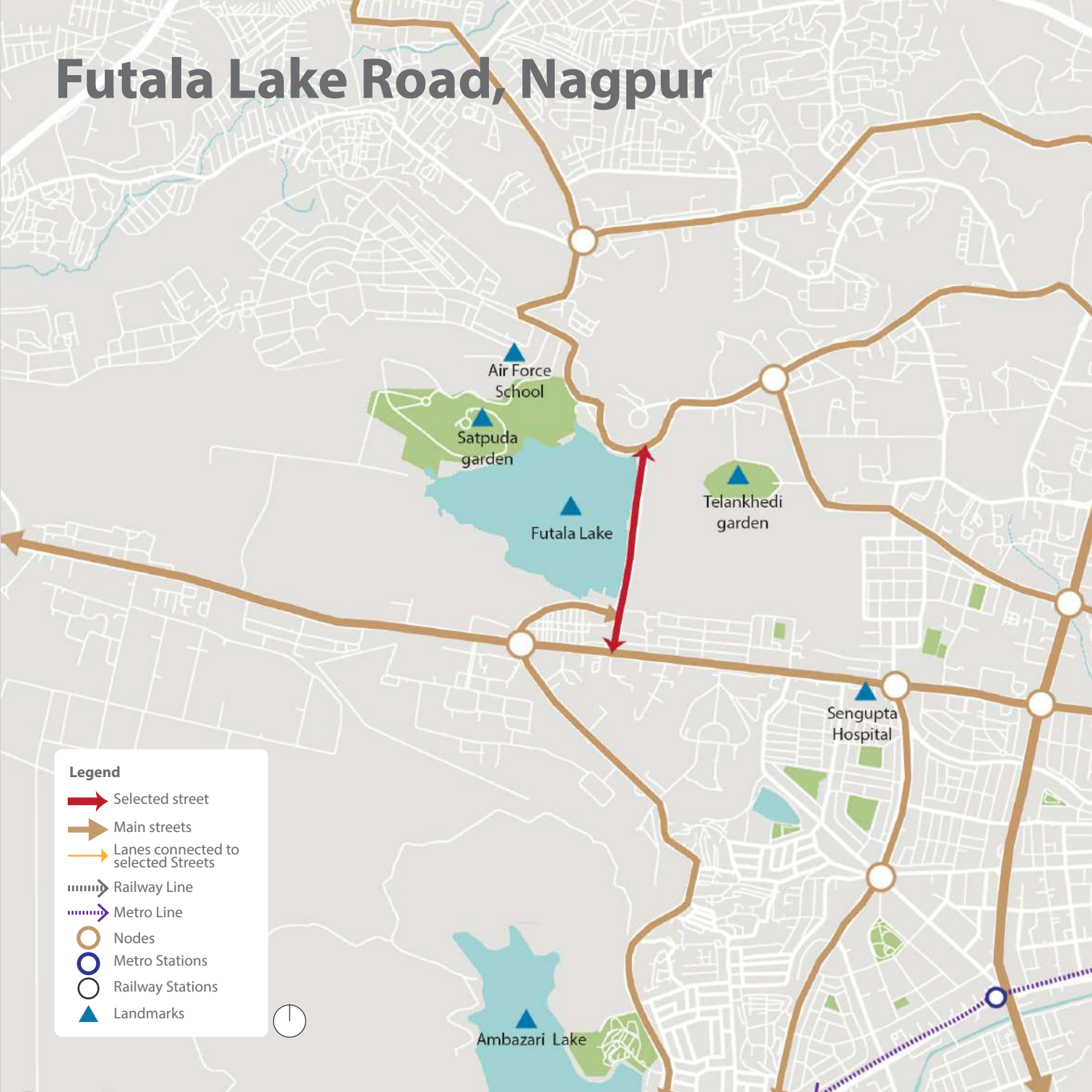
Project focus
The project focus was to alleviate street congestion and enhance pedestrian accessibility by converting the designated area into a traffic-free zone during specified hours (9 am to 9 pm), allowing only non-motorised transportation. The redevelopment includes extensive landscaping, integrated underground utilities, as well as the incorporation of seating areas, bollards, and granite & sandstone paving, collectively aimed at creating a pedestrian-friendly environment.
Source: Live Mint



Activity mapping at 7 pm on a weekend, Chandni Chowk

- Dynamic Activities**
Walking, Cycling, Playing
- Stationary Activities**
Sitting, Standing, Resting
- Business-related Activities**
Vendors, Performers

Futala Lake Road, Nagpur



Street Vendors



Lakefront Plaza



Lake edge

Street redevelopment
Ongoing

Street length
650m

Project focus

The street was redeveloped in 2005 creating a landscape integrated with public space. In 2020, the second renovation of the street got approval with a focus on boosting the water-related activities, to increase the footfall on the street. A commercial building is under construction along the lake edge, and vendor locations are present along the opposite edge of the street. This street is one of the most visited in the city and is a major attraction.

Source: Times of India



- Dynamic Activities**
Walking, Cycling, Playing
- Stationary Activities**
Sitting, Standing, Resting
- Business-related Activities**
Vendors, Performers

Urban Design Square

Park Street, Kolkata

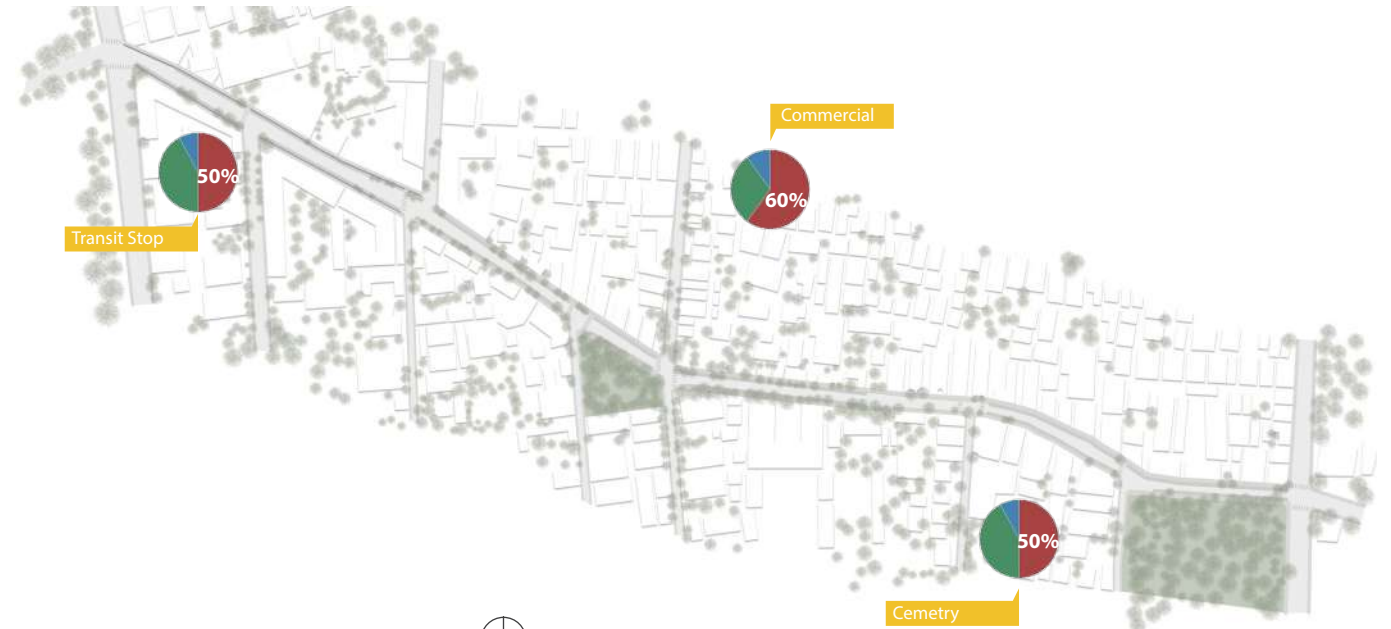


Reviving the street
 SPARK, an NGO, organised the first street festival in 2009 where the street was closed for traffic

Street length
 2.5 km

Project focus
 After the success of the first event in 2009, SPARK got permissions to hold various events like heritage walks, food stalls, street performances, painting shows etc. on the street.
 The event is now institutionalised as an annual Winter Carnival in December, where the street celebrates a heavy footfall as it is closed to traffic for the festival. The event has revived the lost character of the street, attracting diverse age groups.

Source: Architectural Digest



Ring Road, Delhi



Street redevelopment
Completed in 2021

Street length
850m

Project focus
The project focus is to transform transit nodes into public plazas, celebrating the emerging 'transit culture.' Carriageway lanes are optimised to ensure seamless vehicular movement. Segregated space is allocated for pedestrians and cyclists, enhancing their safety and convenience. Stormwater swale, rain gardens, seating areas, and open gym equipment are integrated in the project to foster a safe and vibrant environment.

Source: OASIS Designs Inc.



- Dynamic Activities**
Walking, Cycling, Playing
- Stationary Activities**
Sitting, Standing, Resting
- Business-related Activities**
Vendors, Performers



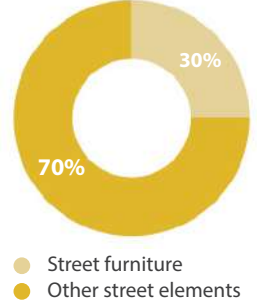
02 First Impressions

Where do people sit?

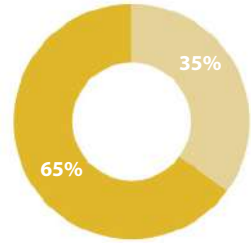


Along the lake to view the scenery
Futala Lake Road, Nagpur

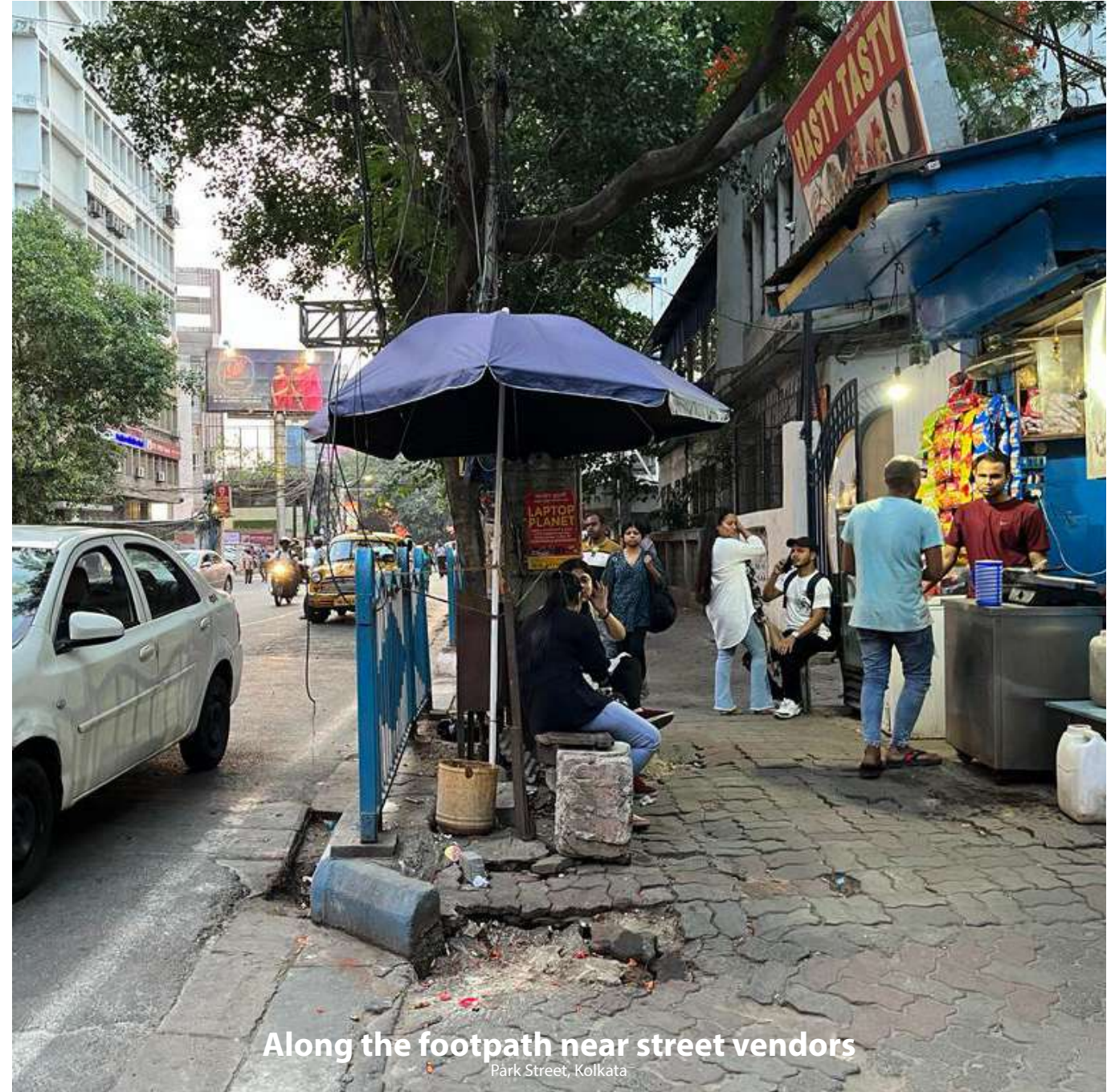
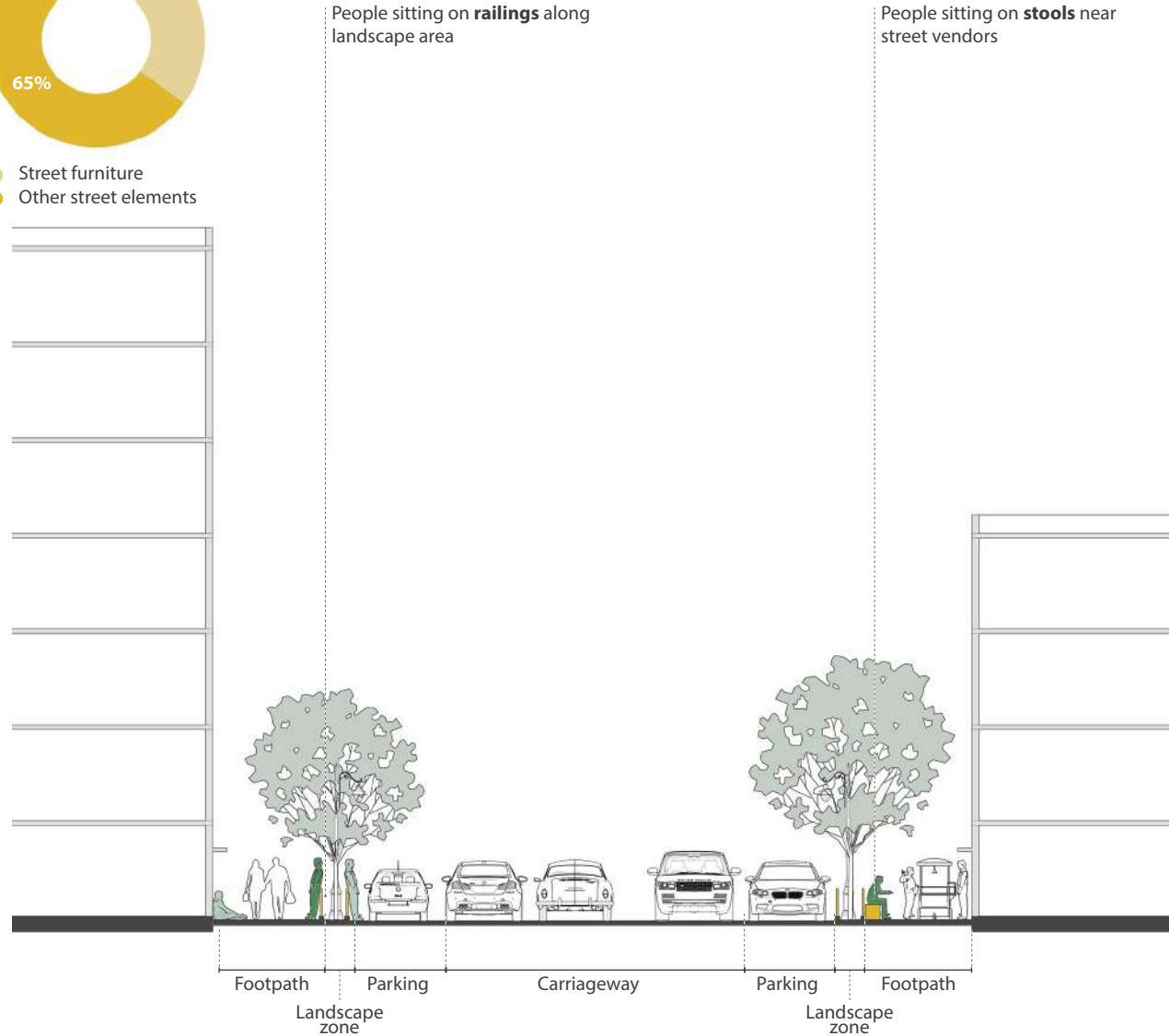
Futala Lake Road, Nagpur



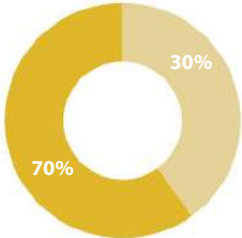
Park Street, Kolkata



- Street furniture
- Other street elements



Chandni Chowk, Delhi



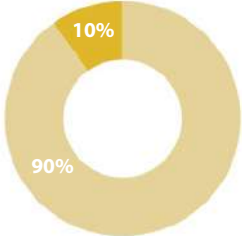
● Street furniture
● Other street elements



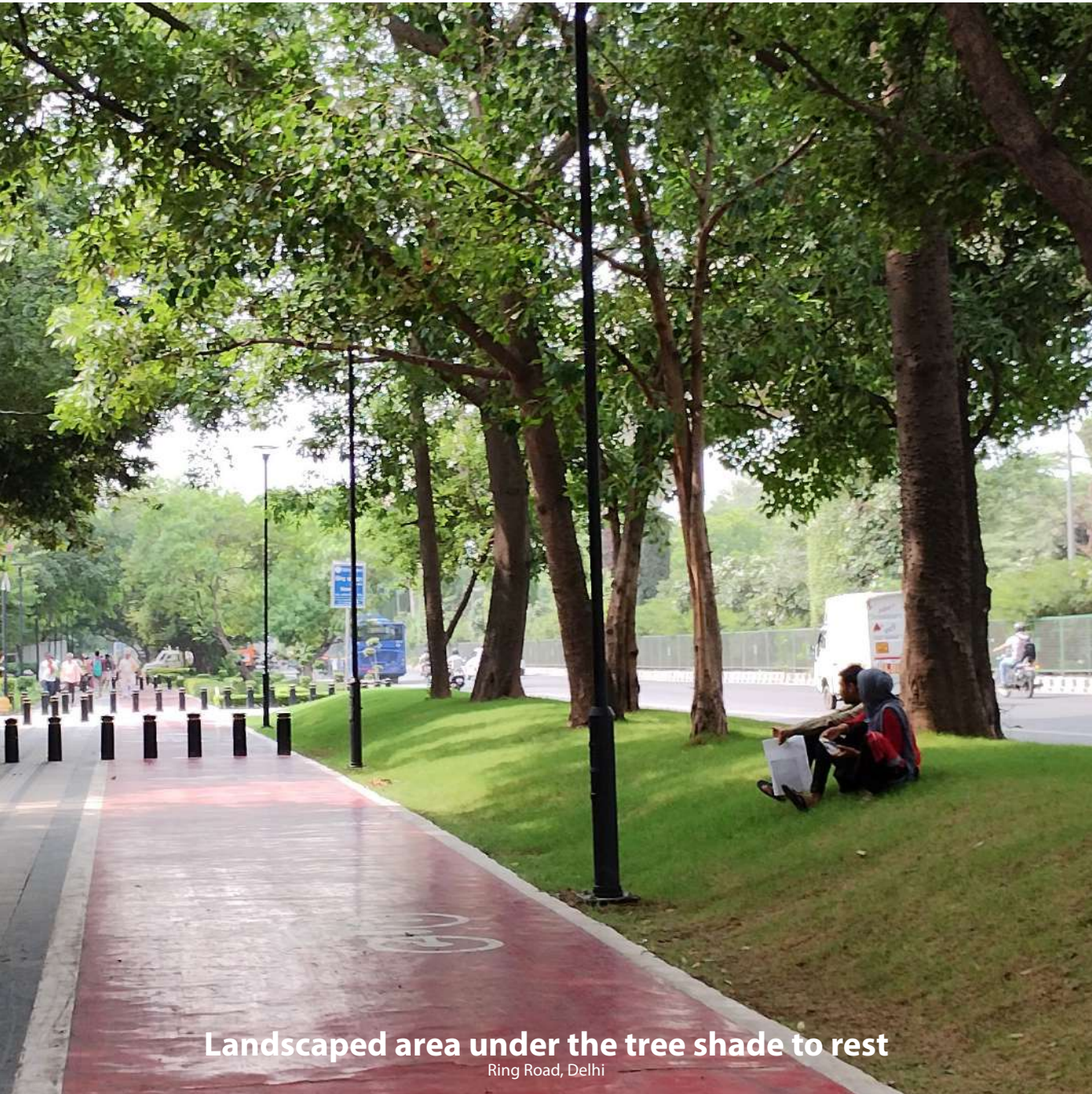
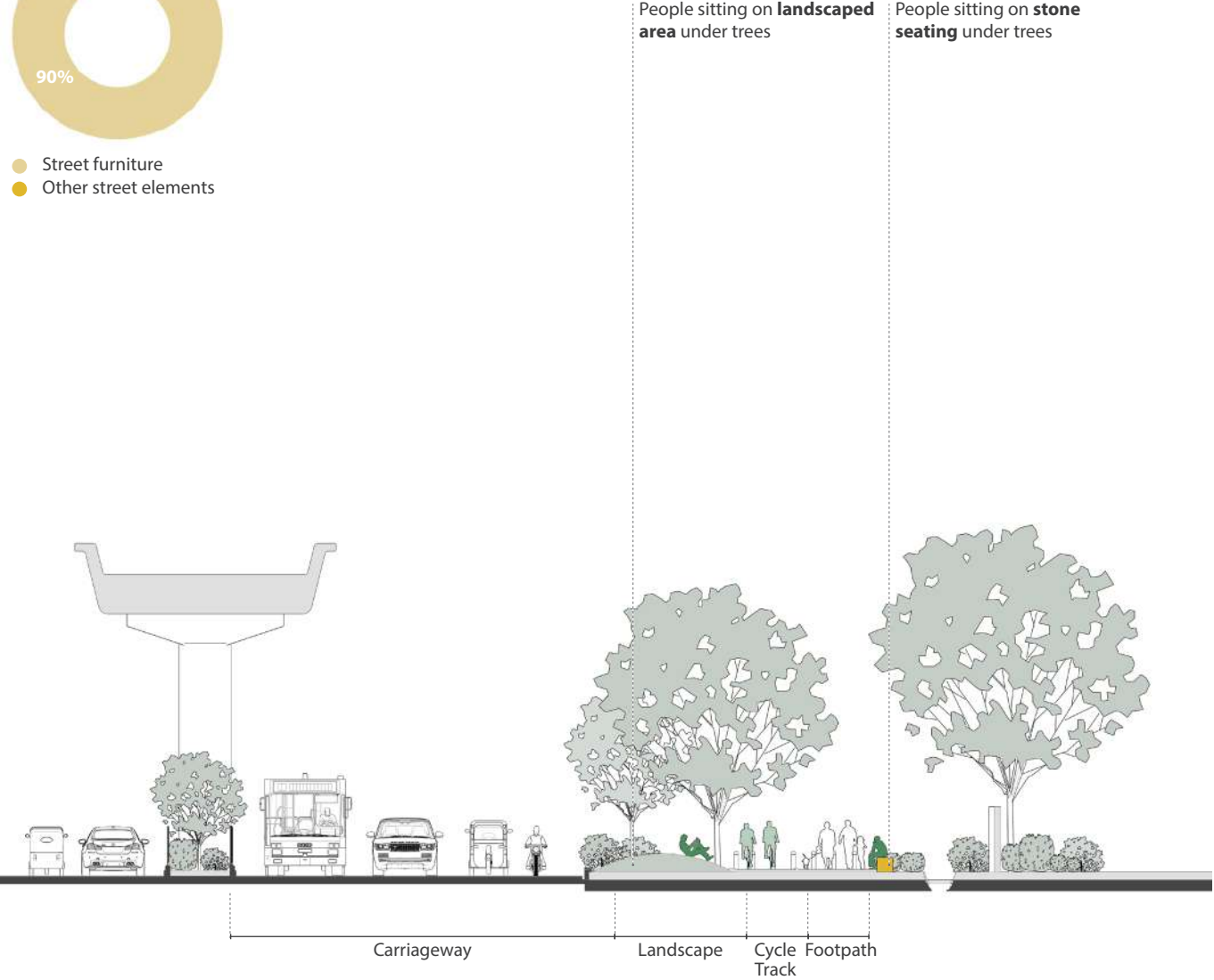
Parapet wall & parked rickshaw under the tree shade to rest

Chandni Chowk, Delhi

Ring Road, Delhi



- Street furniture
- Other street elements



Landscaped area under the tree shade to rest
Ring Road, Delhi

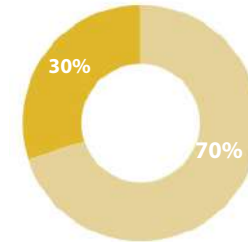
Where do street vendors thrive?



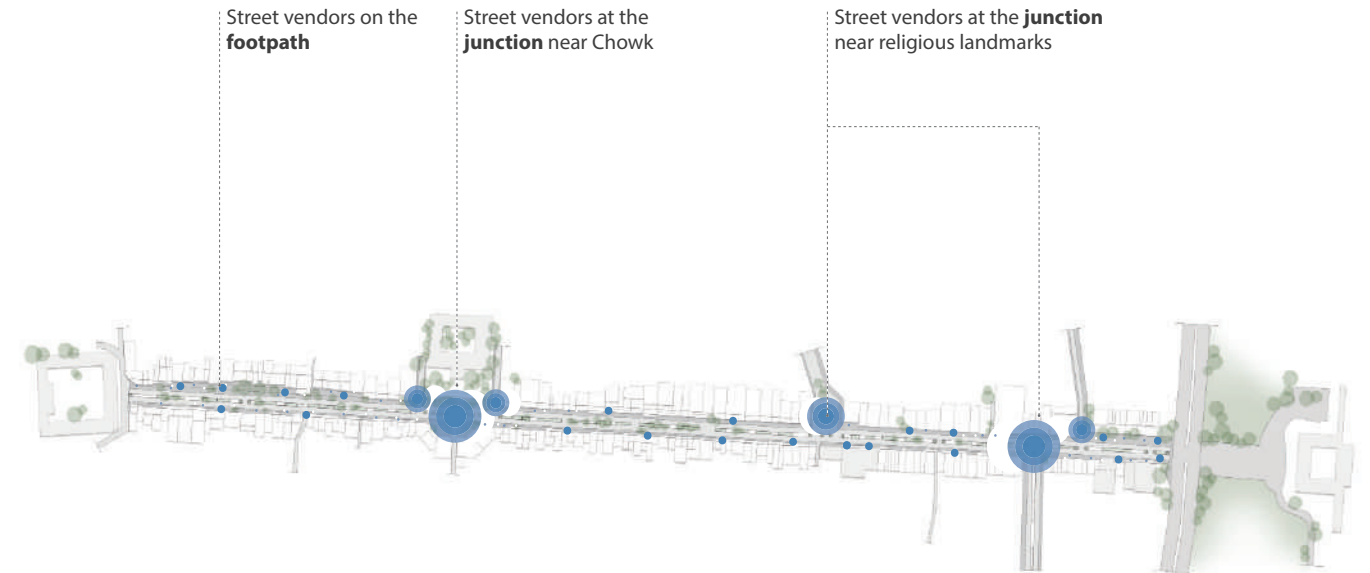
Along the footpath of commercial streets for high visibility

Chandni Chowk, Delhi

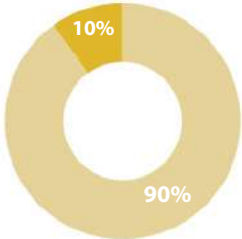
Chandni Chowk, Delhi



- Along footpath near high footfall areas
- Near junctions



Ring Road, Delhi



- On footpath near high footfall areas
- Near junctions



Designated street vendor spaces are empty

Street vendors at the **junction** along the side lane

Street vendors on the **footpath** outside the designed street



Near the junctions to attract footfall from side lanes

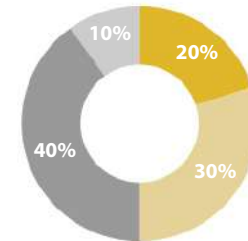
Ring Road, Delhi

Where is the obstruction?



On the footpath due to lack of designated space for street vendors
Chandni Chowk, Delhi

Park Street, Kolkata



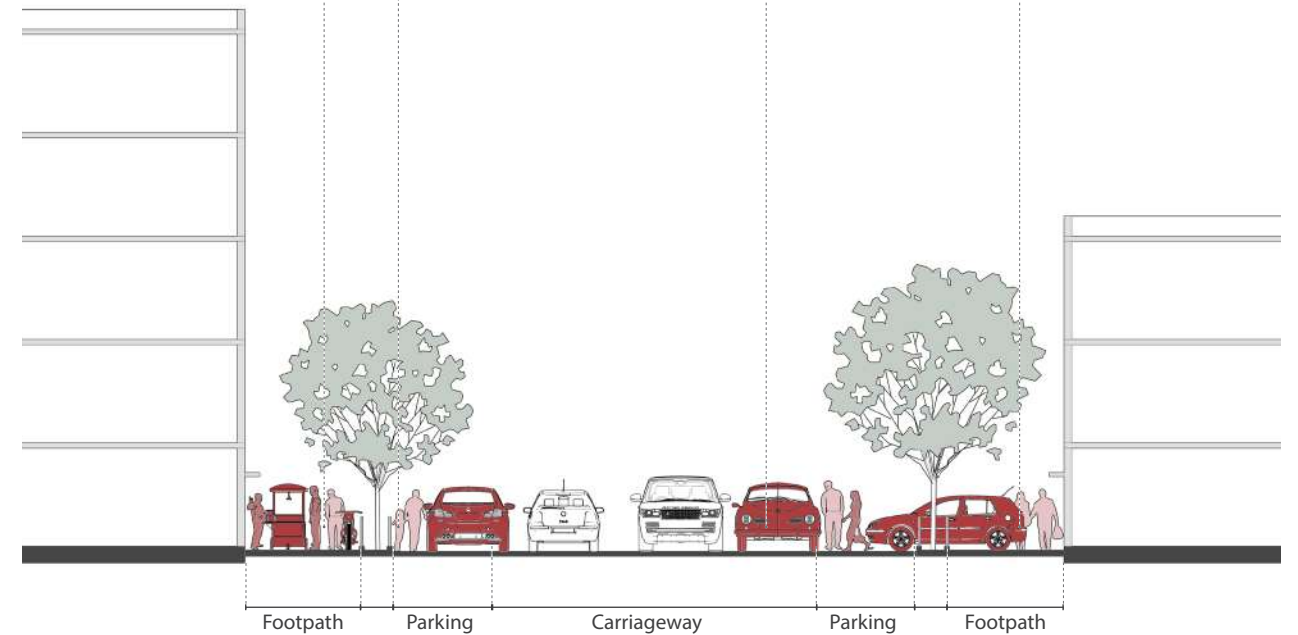
- On footpath**
- Parking
- Street vendors
- On carriageway**
- Pedestrians
- Halting vehicles

Footpath obstructed by street vendors

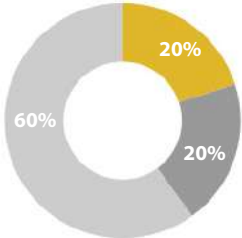
Carriageway obstructed by halting vehicles

Footpath obstructed by parking

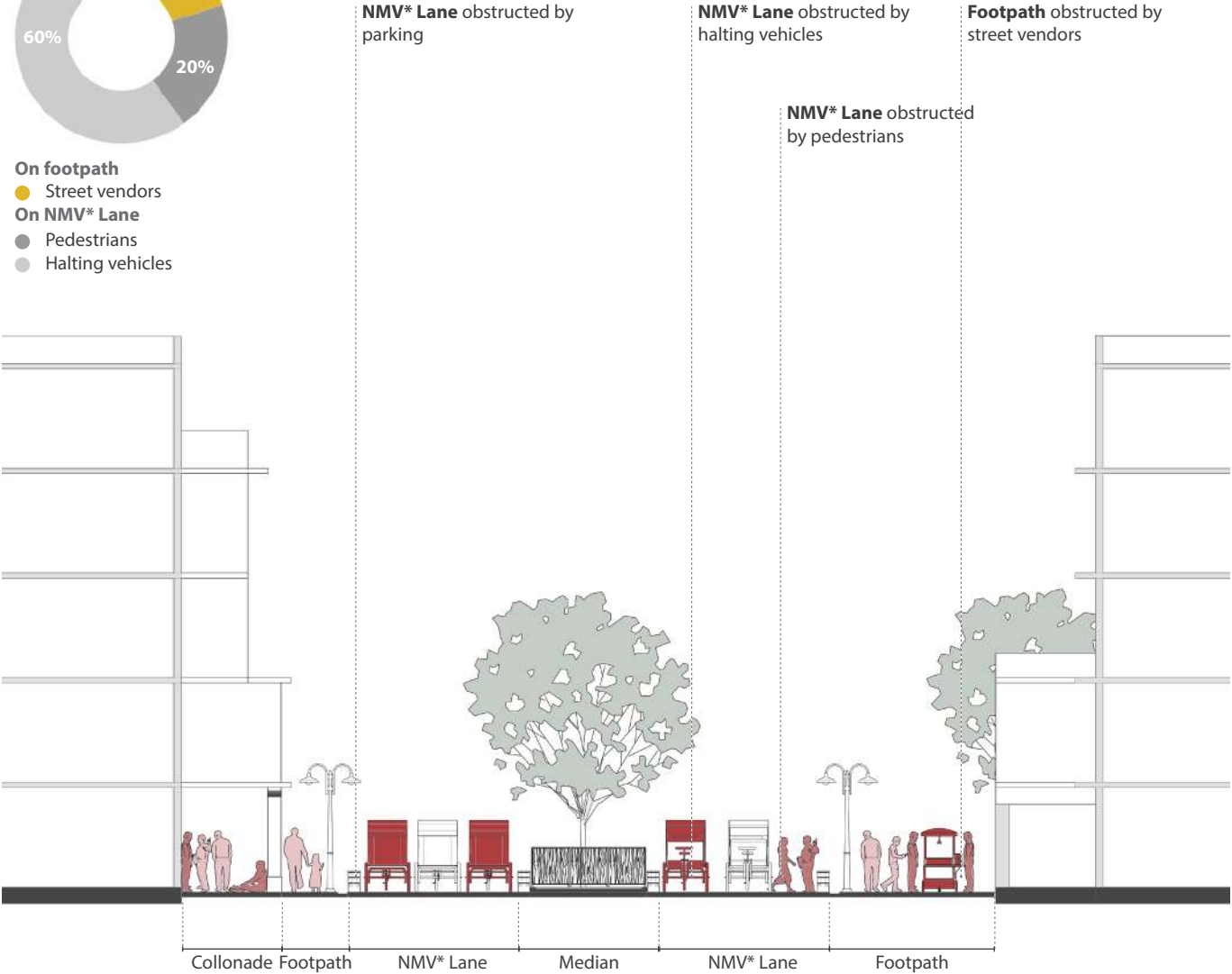
Carriageway obstructed by pedestrians



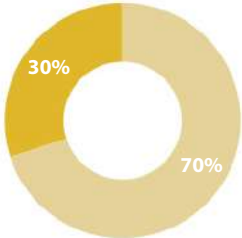
Chandni Chowk, Delhi



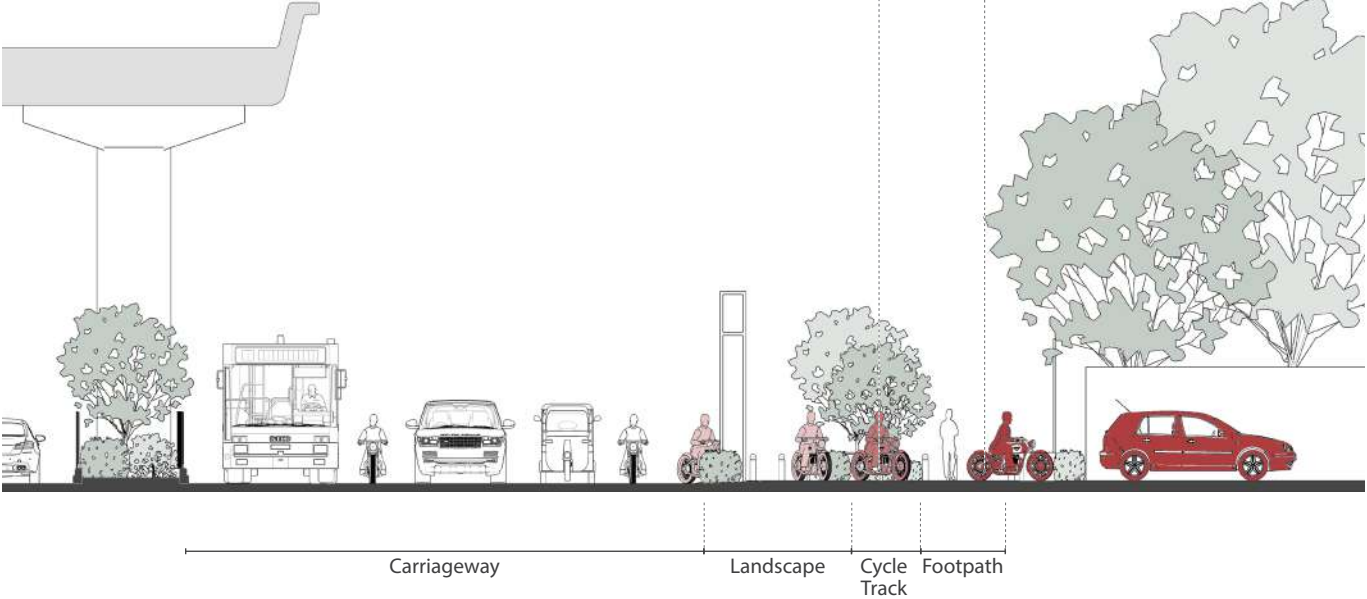
- On footpath**
- Street vendors
- On NMV* Lane**
- Pedestrians
- Halting vehicles



Ring Road, Delhi



On footpath & cycle track
 ● Parking
 ● Moving/halting vehicles



Footpath obstructed by halting vehicles

Cycle track obstructed by moving/halting vehicles



On footpath & cycle track due to unregulated motor vehicle movement

Ring Road, Delhi

03

Way
Ahead

A people-first approach

‘Living Streets’ (Volume 1) marks the first step in our journey to understand the underlying patterns of human behaviour, which might appear distinctive at first sight.

The next phase of our work involves studying similar behaviours in different situations across India to understand the evolving patterns and prepare guidelines for adapting the current street design approach to fit the Indian context effectively.

Identifying the concerns of various stakeholders, we aim to address more such relevant questions that can help in adapting the street design approach for the Indian context.

- What attracts businesses to streets?**
- How are the streets managed?**
- When is a transit stop the most occupied?**
- Who benefits from the street?**

When we tailor our street designs to suit the unique context of a given area, we can reduce not only the costs incurred for its execution and subsequent maintenance, but also its environmental impact, reducing the material usage and integrating existing landscape. The successful realisation of a people-first approach goes beyond the mere physical aspects of street design. It critically depends on educating citizens about the proper ways to interact with and utilise the urban environment.

The journey to learn-adapt-evolve-educate for Living Streets in India has just started!



Park Street, Kolkata

When people find an urban environment that caters to their needs, they are more likely to accept it. Therefore, a people-first approach can drive greater acceptance and optimum usage of the implemented street transformations.



Educate for awareness

Create campaigns to educate citizens on the optimum use of new street designs and their social, economic and environmental benefits.



Learn from the people

Study people’s behaviour across the recently transformed streets in India to analyse patterns of behaviour in the Indian context.



Adapt to the context

Develop solutions for streets in India integrating the needs of the context & ensuring minimal impact on the environment.



Evolve to optimise costs

Evolve the street design approach to minimise the execution and post-implementation operations & maintenance costs.

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