

9:00am

Landscapes of Play: Perspectives from the Indian City

Thanks to IPA England, Wales and Northern Ireland for sponsoring this presentation.

India has the world's largest children and youth population. Provisional data from the 2011 census suggests that 35% of a total population of 1.21 billion, or over 423 million, are less than 14 years of age.

This means that at 30% urbanisation, about 127 million children under 14 live in cities across India. This large body of urban children represent diverse socio-economic, caste, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Their living environments are equally varied ranging from illegal squatter settlements and slums to million dollar plus homes on posh streets.

How does a nation responsible for such large numbers of children and different forms of childhood think about and provide for play? The National Policy of Children in India (1974) which provides the framework for assigning priorities to different needs of children, and for responding to them in an integrated manner, not use the word 'play' at all in the entire text. Instead, this policy recommends physical education, games, sports and other types of recreation as well as cultural and scientific activities to be promoted in schools, community centres and other such institutions. Perhaps such activities are seen by the state as more appropriate instruments of child development than the spontaneity of play.

Although children's rights is often an alien concept in the lives of most Indian children, the

only right that seems to be available particularly to the large numbers of children living in inadequate living environments in Indian cities is the right to play and claiming the city on their own terms through play. This presentation will construct the landscapes of play of Indian children living and playing in diverse environments across the city of Delhi by integrating perspectives from planning and provisions for play and the actual experience of play within neighbourhoods.

To understand how the city plans for children to facilitate play, the evolution of play spaces within the urban fabric of Delhi during the course of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century will be explored through review and analysis of planning and policy documents, maps, memoirs, archival pictures, interviews and other records. To understand the specific provisions for children, a mapping of places for children across Delhi and possibilities for play within the public realm of the city from children's perspective will be presented. As the socio-physical environment of neighbourhoods and extended local areas play a critical role in facilitating or limiting children's play, an integrative play resource map of one neighbourhood will be presented that records the provisions and affordances of play and narratives of children's first hand play experiences. The presentation will conclude by discussing possibilities for design and planning of local play spaces based on the empirical evidence of children's play environments in Delhi.

Biography

Sudeshna Chatterjee

Sudeshna Chatterjee is a Delhi-based practicing architect and urban designer and a pioneer in the field of design and planning of children's environments and facilities in India.

Sudeshna is also consulted internationally for formulation of policies on child friendly cities, for assessing impacts of urban interventions and strategies on children, and for addressing the interests and needs of children in planning and design of cities. Sudeshna has a PhD in Design from the North Carolina State University focusing on the design and planning of children's environments.

Sudeshna is a partner in the firm of Kaimal Chatterjee & Associates (New Delhi), which practices architecture, urban design and contributes to design research. Sudeshna has been involved in the design of several schools with both NGO and corporate clients.

Sudeshna had the opportunity to extend the notion of child friendly places which she developed as a concept in her PhD dissertation in her most celebrated work – the urban design for the new capital city of Chhattisgarh, Naya



Raipur which has been envisaged as a green, equitable city where the urban realm, in addition to negotiating the issues of identity and power associated with a capital city, responds to the everyday needs of all citizens, and particularly the needs of women, children, and people with different abilities.

Sudeshna is a research affiliate of the Children, Youth and Environments

Center for Research and Design at the University of Colorado in Boulder, USA, and the News Archive Editor of the international, peer-reviewed journal *Children, Youth and Environments*. Being a firm believer in the cyclic relationship between research, practice and teaching to strengthen each domain, Sudeshna serves as a visiting faculty in the graduate departments of Urban Design and Urban Planning in the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi.