

Livable Cities Newsletter



August 2012 Issue 5

Focusing on Parks and Play Spaces

This newsletter is used to provide updates and information to the Livable Cities Network. The theme for this edition is parks and play spaces. Many thanks to Sridharan Nair, Sandhya Suresh, Manju George, and Rosemary F N. for preparing all the articles for this newsletter.

Please share this newsletter with your partner groups and anyone who might be interested.

Why are parks and play spaces important?

Parks offer opportunities to enrich the quality of life for persons of all ages and abilities. From improving our physical and psychological health, to strengthening our communities and making our cities and neighborhoods more attractive places to live and work, the benefits of parks are endless - to individuals, our communities, the economy and the environment.

For individuals, parks offer opportunities for physical activity. Research shows that people who have access to parks are more physically active. For a community, parks are open to everyone regardless of origin, age or gender, and they act as places for people to meet, talk and rest. Parks act as places for socialization for children and adults in a neighbourhood.

For the environment, parks help lower city temperatures increased by the 'heat island effect'. The increase in hard surfacing and the reduction in green spaces leads to higher temperatures in towns and cities than in the surrounding countryside. This is known as the 'heat island effect'. Parks and green spaces in the city help to balance these effects by cooling the air, providing shade, and absorbing atmospheric pollutants.

Unfortunately, in spite of their importance to us, our parks are often neglected, which makes them unpleasant places for local communities. In addition, parkland is threatened by the influx of people into the cities. As land becomes more precious, unused and unoccupied parks are taken away and converted to residential areas and businesses. But, it is important that we fiercely guard public spaces for future generations! One of the ways to do this is to make parks functional by regularly using the place, organizing community programs in the park, and demanding park services and maintenance. When we do so, we benefit and future generations benefit as well!

Making parks happy, safe places for children in Nagpur

ESAF has embarked on a mission to make Indian cities friendlier for children so that they have more opportunities to play and improve their development and growth. The project called 'Sparrows' is undertaken under the Livable Cities Project by ESAF to increase access to public spaces for children and families, with a particular focus on girls.

Two non-functional parks were selected from among a list of nearly 100 parks managed under the Nagpur Municipal Corporation and Nagpur Improvement Trust. Meetings were organized with the Residents' Association Members in these areas to learn their opinion and their willingness to support the initiative.



Discussions with Park Volunteers

Park volunteers lobbied the ward councillors to make improvement. Some even challenged the men who protested against any developments in the park. The ESAF team held several meetings with government officials to discuss the needed renovations in the park and the need to replace all the non-functioning play equipment. Children organized a public rally demanding a park where they could play and relax. The ward councillor was very supportive and park volunteers regularly met with her to work towards improving the functionality of the park.



Ward Councillor Planting Sapling

The financing for the project came from the councillor's approved budget. Park walls were painted with useful messages for the children, pathways were constructed, new play equipment was installed, and saplings were planted. In the larger of the two parks, underground pipe lines for watering were laid, the ground was levelled, a hand pump was installed, and a separate place for cricket was constructed.

Now the parks are full of life in the evening when children, their parents and senior citizens come to the newly functional park. The park now has safe play equipment, benches and a green space.

"Everything is possible if we want to make positive change", says Kavita a park volunteer who is happy to send her daughter, Anushka, to the park now. Like Kavita, many mothers are sending their daughters to the once deserted and unsafe park now that it is safe. This particular park is located in the midst of a locality where low-income families, who are mostly daily wagers, live. This small public space gives them some breathing space to interact and gives the seniors living in the area some moments of quietness.

Children and the park volunteers are the caretakers of this park. They water the plants daily and help keep the park neat and tidy.



Park for everyone to enjoy

Park Mapping - the Bangalore, India experience

Bangalore city has recently amalgamated with the surrounding regions. While the original city of Bangalore (before amalgamation) valued trees, parks and public space and undertook programs to ensure their preservation, this was not the case in the surrounding zones. Each of the surrounding regions have different policies and practices regarding parks and public spaces. As a result, residents in the newly amalgamated city have different opportunities to access parks and public space depending on where they live. Over time, the hope is that the newly amalgamated zones of the city will reach similar standards as those of original city of Bangalore.



Nallurahalli Lake

In order to increase the number of children who have access to safe, convenient, and appropriate parks and public spaces and to increase the quality of the public spaces that do exist, the Livable Cities team in Bangalore needed a greater understanding of the current situation. They are working on a park assessment project that will identify both the location of the parks and the quality of those parks. This information will then be mapped so that the project team can relay the information to residents and government officials.

Hagadur Ward in Mahadevapura Zone was chosen as the first area for the study. The area is approximately 12.08 km² and has a population of nearly 30,000. In order to conduct the study, the project team divided the ward into blocks of 1 km X 1 km using Google Earth. A hard copy of the Google Earth maps were used while visiting the study area. This has helped the team to cover the area street by street without missing any possible park.

The survey is being carried out wherever a public space is identified. In addition, the project team is working with local children who are helping to identify the non-formal play spaces they use frequently. This strategy has helped the team to understand that park design in India caters only to the needs of children below 12-years. Children older than 12 use either the street as their playground or any open area they find convenient in their neighbourhood. As a result of this



Inner Circle Park

initial pilot, these informal spaces will be assessed as well. In addition, efforts will be made to determine whether the area children are playing is publicly owned or privately owned. The project team expects the results of the first pilot study to be ready in December.



Nallurahalli Park - under development

Partner Profile

Evangelical Social Action Forum (ESAF) was established in 1992 as a response to the social and economic needs of the people in India. ESAF stands for sustainable wholistic transformation of the poor and the marginalized for a just and fair society. ESAF has successfully developed community models in water and sanitation, disaster mitigation and management, health care, education, and livelihood promotion.

Resources of Interest

Project for Public Spaces - www.pps.org - nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people create and sustain public spaces that build stronger communities.

Community Park Audit Tool - www.activelivingresearch.org/node/12700 - a user-friendly and reliable tool designed to evaluate parks.

Next issue...

In the next issue we will be highlighting work that Resource Centre for Primary Health Care (RECPHEC) in Nepal has been doing to divert waste from local land-fills.

Interested in becoming a Livable Cities Network member?

To become part of the Livable Cities Network, e-mail Kristie Daniel, Program Director, Livable Cities at kdaniel@healthbridge.ca.



HealthBridge's Livable Cities program aims to improve health, gender equity, poverty reduction, and the environment in developing countries by focusing on how cities are planned, designed, built, and adapted.

HealthBridge's Livable Cities program works in partnership with local NGOs, academic institutions and governments in developing countries. We help local partners identify needs, develop and implement appropriate solutions, apply innovative and sustainable practices, and promote effective policies through research and action.

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