In the last decade or so, the notion of piloting public sector projects before full-scale implementation has gained greater acceptance and traction in the country. There is growing belief that a pilot benefits overall infrastructure creation and service delivery across various socio-economic dimensions even as it incorporates greater participation and user-centricity. How are pilots doing this? Can a ‘test-run’ enable a more holistic understanding of the public space and infrastructure development? Can it remove the stigmatisation around failure and also teach us surprising lessons?

In the discourse around creating productive public assets, spaces and interactions, how can elements of spatial, product and service design influence this intersection of infrastructure development and user design?

Synopsis of the discussion

Central to pilot approaches and projects in the country is ‘Tactical urbanism’.

- A planning approach that situates co-creation with the community as its core principle, tactical urbanism is being used more widely as an effective means to resolve the oft-seen gap between design and implementation of urban infrastructure projects.
- Tactical urbanism is essentially a set of low-cost, simple strategies to engage with communities in order to motivate behavioural change. This is done through the deployment of short-term solutions that are designed and tested on the ground.
- The concept of People – Public – Pockets is often used to realise tactical urbanism in urban areas, with the government, citizens and practitioners acting as the ‘Tripod’ for driving this change.
- Projects in Kochi and Bangalore (Rajeev Malagi, https://bit.ly/2IYuz9H, 00:10) prove that these engagements can be led by either the community or the government, be short-term or medium-term initiatives, and be either temporary interventions or ‘quick builds’.

Another important aspect of pilots for urban infrastructure projects is the emphasis laid on spatial planning through user design.

- Understanding that the user is not a homogeneous entity is crucial. The end users of projects are a diverse collection of people, for whom a multifarious style of engagement is a must.
- Various examples, such as those of slum upgrading in Delhi piloted by the Centre for Urban and Regional Excellence in Delhi (Barsha Poricha, https://bit.ly/2IYuz9H, 00:27) lend credence to the fact that an iterative, problem-solving approach centred on the user pays dividends.

A sister planning approach is the concept of product design, driven by the design thinking approach

The mindset in design thinking is to bring empathy back to problem-solving

(Sarang Ganoo, https://bit.ly/2IYuz9H, 00:45)

- Design thinking based on user-centricity is not a linear process. The intention is to iterate as many times as is feasible to identify the right prototype.
- Complexity of urban infrastructure projects often hinders from developing the right prototype. In such cases, a tactic that has been effective is breaking down the development problem into smaller, resolvable units that are then aggregated.

In even the best user-centred design approaches used in public sector projects, one common concern has been the lack of inclusion, especially gender


- Small-scale pilots in France demonstrate that a research-oriented, co-construction approach to analysing gender inequities has worked

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