

THE PROJECT

Sangam Vihar, located on the southern edge of Delhi, is Asia's largest agglomeration of 'unauthorised colonies'—unplanned and unserviced settlements that have sprung up over time without permission from the Delhi Development Authority. Over one million people live cramped into the five square kilometer area that it covers. The 30 colonies that comprise Sangam Vihar are demarcated as blocks of agricultural land belonging to the surrounding villages. In the face of a massive shortage of affordable public housing in the city, the settlement has been steadily densifying since its inception in

1979, as it absorbs migrants from all across India.

FORGOTTEN PLACES

Although Sangam Vihar applied for regularisation many years ago, it still remains outside of city planning purview. This has two main consequences for the lives of its residents: firstly, it makes the area very vulnerable to land clearance, as residents lack legal rights to the ownership of their properties and assets; secondly, public services such as piped water, sewage and waste collection, available to people living in the city, are not extended to the residents of Sangam Vihar,



Wasted land at the back side of the development

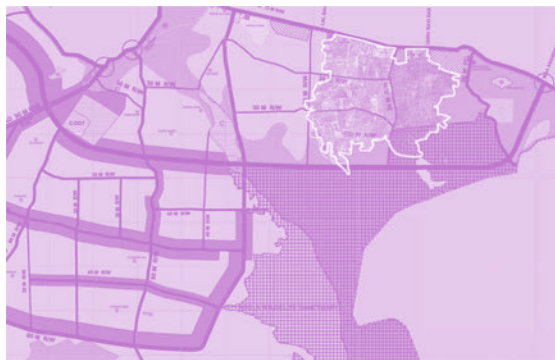
causing a multitude of problems. These include ground water contamination from household septic tanks, seasonal flooding from clogged drains, and the rise of mafias that control the supply of water.

Sangam Vihar is situated between the formal city in the north and the Asola-Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary in the south. As the livelihoods of the residents are dependent on the city where the people work, the forest sanctuary is regarded as the back end of the settlement, with the border of the forest being treated as an urban wasteland. Solid waste is dumped here, leading to the filling up of natural drainage pools and channels, and giving rise to flooding and related health risks.

TWO CHALLENGES

The settlement faces two major challenges at present. The most immediate physical threat is the flooding of parts of Sangam Vihar.

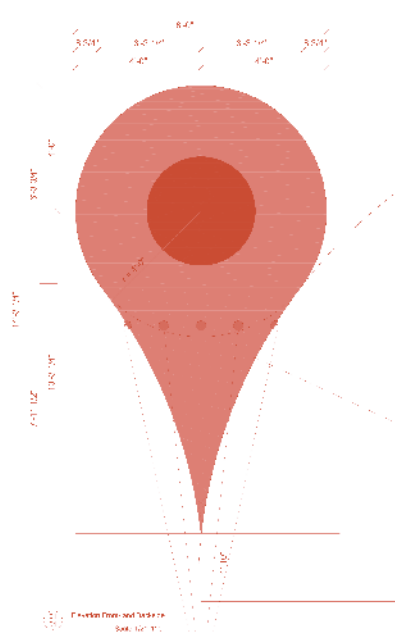
Heavy seasonal monsoon rains are unable to find channels for drainage due to the illegal dumping of waste along the edge of the sanctuary. In addition, the run-off floodwater mixes with toxic chemicals from the garbage dumps, giving rise to health hazards. The current Delhi Master Plan constitutes the second—political, and ultimately also physical—threat to the neighbourhood. The Delhi authorities continue to turn a blind eye to the settlement, demarcating it as agricultural and forestry land, and forcing its legal fate into a state of permanent and precarious limbo. The Master Plan document also indicates a soon-to-be-built third ring road for Delhi, passing by the southern edge of Sangam Vihar, which would result in an increase in development pressures on the corridor adjacent to it.



The new master plan prepared by the municipality showing the future ring road in relationship to Sangam Vihar

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TWO STRATEGIES

Both of the challenges identified point to the important role that the green southern edge can play in finding solutions to the problems that the settlement faces. The project thus proposes two overall strategies. The first strategy seeks to turn the green edge, currently a neglected and abused portion of land, into a well-used space that is linked to the wildlife sanctuary through a series of interventions. The second strategy builds on the first, seeking to implement measures to protect the ecosystem of the sanctuary. If the wildlife sanctuary is recognised as a resource, and is

protected, instead of being destroyed, it may serve as a political deterrent for the development of the future ring road that threatens to encroach on the settlement.

TOOL (SCHIZO-PLAN)

In Sangam Vihar, the edge is not only the interface between nature and the city, but is also a confluence of the different urban stakeholders—the public institutions responsible for the well-being of the sanctuary—and the voiceless communities who inhabit the development. In order to address this unequal balance of power, the architects have employed an innovative planning tool called the Schizo-Plan, which aims to address the power imbalance of Sangam Vihar, bringing the institutions and the community together on an equal footing.

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

The Schizo-Plan identifies a number of critical partners who will help to ensure the longer-term success and implementation of the scheme. These include an eco-task force that is entrusted with the upkeep of the sanctuary. The plan tries to address the problems of flooding and waste management by proposing measures to deal with stormwater runoff, planting of soil-stabilising succulents, and the

restoration of water pools along the edge that are currently contaminated with waste.

COMMUNITY LEVEL

The majority of the waste in Sangam Vihar currently ends up along the green edge of the settlement. At a community level, the action plan to deal with the disposal of solid waste includes the design of interventions and exercises aimed at ritualising the clean-up process, and gamifying waste segregation and disposal.

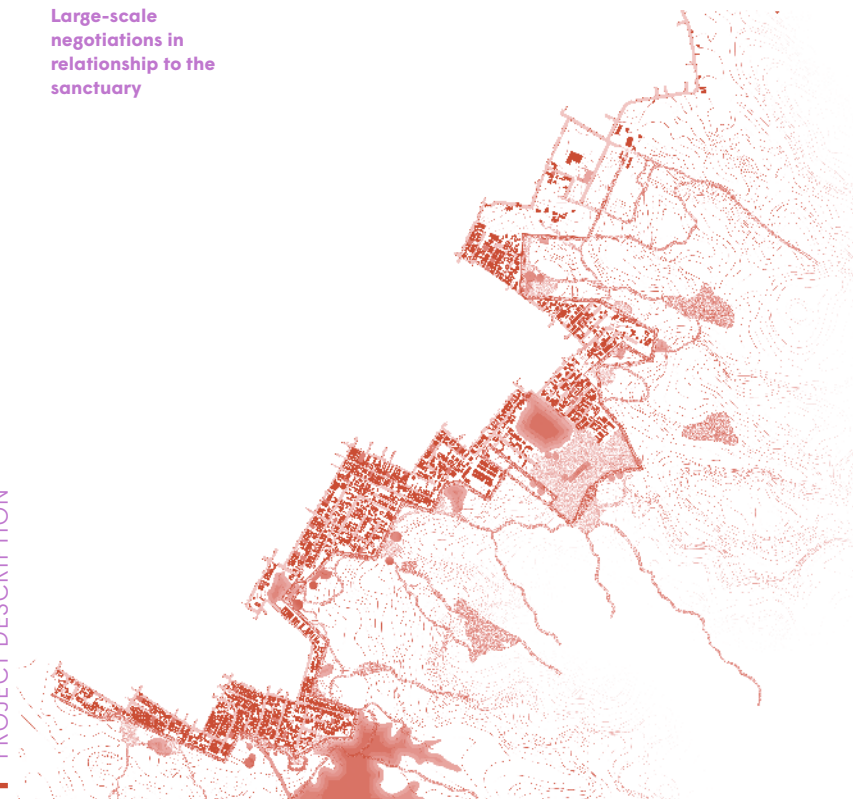
MARKERS

The success of these strategies depends on a change in the community's perception of the area of land along the edge of the sanctuary. While the area is relatively close to many of the homes in Sangam Vihar, it is simply not visible through the urban maze. As a result, the trash 'disappears' into it, out of sight and out of mind of the residents of the settlement. In order to identify critical ecological sites such as

Large-scale negotiations in relationship to the sanctuary

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Renders produced by FAR/Anagram illustrate possible solutions to be developed and built by the community in areas identified as critical within the edge area of Sangam Vihar. Visualisation of the refurbishment of the cesspool which is currently used as a waste dump

pools that have been filled with rubbish, and also to announce events along the edge of the forest, the teams devised a simple geographical marker that would be visible throughout the development and give the edge a crucial presence in the community.

The ubiquitous Google Maps marker that floats over its virtual maps was turned into a physical balloon hovering over the green edge of Sangam Vihar. This marker is easily recognisable, particularly amongst the younger generation who hold the future of the development in their hands. The balloons were used to identify sites and events along the Sangam Vihar edge that were deemed critical to its recoding. These small

interventions constitute one part of the Schizo-Plan that seeks to establish the green edge as Sangam Vihar's new front.

OUTLOOK

The multiplicity of levels at which the Schizo-Plan addresses the green edge of Sangam Vihar reveals a number of possible starting points for its longer-term development, some of which have already been actioned. In the future, in addition to mitigating environmental threats, the edge may also offer new public infrastructure, such as toilets and washrooms, play areas and a medical dispensary—attractive and much-needed facilities, realised together with the residents of Sangam Vihar.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION



The ubiquitous digital Google Maps marker that floats over its virtual maps was turned into a physical balloon hovering over the green edge of Sangam Vihar

Project Credits

PARTNER COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

CURE

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