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Topic of Research: Delhi Metro, Urban Mobility and Cultural Production of Space

Findings

The major findings of the study are based on mobile ethnography that explored Delhi Metro space. In this research I have explored the Delhi Metro space through the lens of the New Mobilities Paradigm.

The research highlights how the access to Metro is uneven and the commute experience is differential and therefore, Delhi metro reinforces the categories of the "kinetic elite" and the "mobile poor". The pilot study revealed that lower-income groups are less likely to use the Metro as their primary mode of commute, while middle- and upper-income groups often use it in conjunction with private vehicles or cabs. This data shaped and was triangulated by the research which explored accessibility and differential mobility experiences. Employing mobile ethnography which included participant observation and unstructured interviews, the research explored how dwell time of the commuters. While the Metro attempts to produce an ordered, automated technoscape through surveillance, signage, design, and announcements, commuters engage in spatial practices that both conform to and subvert this order. The Metro's design discourages sociability which is done through announcements and is also a result of high frequency, short commuting duration, and constant surveillance; yet sociability and solidarity emerges, especially at the time of crisis. Commuters also subvert spatial norms by engaging in prohibited activities such as photography, sitting on the floor, or eating, none of which always attract penalties. The presence of the ladies-only coach acts as 'portable homes' but also generates gendered conflicts over entitlement to space. Metro commute is also perceived by many as a space of respite or a "gift of time" a pause from their routines where they are supposed to be productive and yet at other times metro becomes an extension of work place where they complete their left over work. During dwell time, commuters are directed toward consumption, including artworks, advertisements, and kiosks, and also carry out cultural production on their own. For instance, "Books on the Delhi Metro," a voluntary initiative, uses the Metro space for book sharing. The Metro's built form, though standardized and disconnected from its surrounding areas, incorporates art and heritage displays that reintroduce placeness into the space, supporting DMRC's place-branding efforts. Cultural production is thus both top-down and bottom-up. Sites like the Mandi House exit also emerge as informal cultural hubs where young people gather to perform, draw, or skateboard. Moreover, the Metro connects commuters to sanitized zones of cultural and surplus consumption such as malls and food courts. The study

also highlights how Delhi Metro became an important marker of the vision to transform Delhi into a 'world-class city,' particularly in the wake of preparing for 2010 Commonwealth Games. It traces how the Metro was enmeshed in the politics of urban development.