



*Feedback: Vasudha Mehta  
Volunteers Manager, Delhi Greens  
48°C Public·Art·Ecology Festival*

48°C Public·Art·Ecology Festival for me was all about communicating ecological messages to the masses and sensitizing them towards the perils of damages that have been inflicted upon our fragile ecology. The Festival required a Volunteer Team that was able to communicate and interpret the ecological messages of individual Art Installation to the general public. The task of finding suitable volunteers was a challenging experience. The search for volunteers began by making visits to the various colleges in Delhi, interacting with their Eco-Clubs and Environmental Society representatives and making the Call for Volunteer well in advance. The bulk of the applications started pouring as the month of December started and by the time the festival started we had volunteer representation from many colleges, including Hansraj, IP College for Women, Hindu College, Daulat Ram College, Khalsa College, School of Environmental Studies, Department of Anthropology, Miranda House, Kirori Mal College, St. Stephens College and also from JNU, Jamia University, College of Art and TVB School of Habitat Studies.

Once the Festival started, it was yet another challenge to keep the volunteers enthused and motivated as the first day caught us all by surprise. Few sites were not installed in time and a few were far different from what we had imagined. Each volunteer was provided a Feedback Register, for citizens to share their experience and understanding of individual art installation. Based on overall feedback from all the volunteers, the installation that attracted the maximum number of public was the Wish Machine! In terms of seriousness of the issue being conveyed, Amar Kanwar's site at Jantar Mantar was the best of the lot while the most eye-catching one was Krishnaraj Chonat's Crane and Tree Installation at Barakhamba Road! Sheba Chachi's projects were beautiful and they got the *aam janta* to think creatively and be innovative! Sanjeev Shankar's site at Ramlila Ground titled 'Jugaad' got a lot of people thinking on utilitarian aspects of things we may consider mundane.

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Prayas Abhinav's Pet Puja project at Chandni Chowk caught much attention. Most of the artists were deeply appreciated of the dedication of the Delhi Greens Volunteer Team. The enthusiastic, morale-boosting and enjoyable presence of the Volunteers on a regular basis was of much relevance to artists like Amar Kanwar, Sanjeev Shankar, Prayas Abhinav, Atul Bhalla, Asim Waqf, Sheba Chachi and the Motornama team of Ashok and Shaina. Ashok also helped in tackling the police when the situation was about to go out of control one evening when the police stopped the Motornama Rikshaw and asked our Volunteer on site for the permission papers.

An interesting observation made by many Volunteers perhaps was a learning experience for all of them. The Indian artists stuck mainly to their own Art Installation and even slammed the volunteers when they were asked to give feedback about the work of other participating artists. Most of the Indian artists were only seen by volunteers in the presence of media crews and foreign delegates and showed little interest in interacting with the Volunteers. Artists from other countries were mostly interested in visiting the other project sites rather than being continually present at their project sites. They also showed a deep interest in interacting with the volunteers.

The Da Motus performances were quite a crowd puller at all three sites of Palika Bazaar, Chandni Chowk and Roshanara Bagh. The little kids at Roshanara Bagh exclaimed that 'they were aliens' or rather 'this is what the aliens would do when they land on earth!'. The others were majorly of the opinion that this is a performance being organized to gather and entertain the crowds, with no one actually being able to interpret what was going on. However, the LG's visit the day before and the wonderful Motornama Rikshaw rides plus all the pink festivities and colour associated with this festival were enough for a RWA member at Roshanara Bagh to exclaim that, **"Roshanara Bagh has never looked so roshan (bright) before"**.

The LG's and Mayor's visit to Chnadni Chowk installations on 13 December, 2008 were memorable and exciting for us all. When our volunteers from College of Art explained him the project by Ichi Ikeda titled Waterpolis - Missing or Promising, LG Khanna tried to find a parallel in it by comparing it to our



politician's habit of making promises during the elections and the promises going missing shortly after the election results are out! What was however sad was that when the Da Motus performance reached the Town Hall gardens, the security did prevent a lot of ordinary-looking Chandni Chowk residents outside the premises, a fact that was also pointed out to me by Renuka, a resident of Defence Colony in Delhi when I met her at Ramlila Ground. She said, "People like us who are art enthusiasts would go to galleries and even come to places like Chandni Chowk and Ramlila Grounds to see the art pieces and performances. But since this event was more about Public, the public should have been encouraged to see the performance and such distinction should not have been made by the security personnel".

What she also pointed out were the lack of crowds at Ramlila Grounds, which was a very visible fact as the security staff had restricted entry through the gates in the fear that controlling them would be a pain in their neck. The only time the gates were opened and the crowds were let in was on 17 December, 2008 - the Ramlila Park day in the festival when Delhi Greens held a Theatre Workshop by *Aajao Aajao* followed by a Street Play by *Jamghat*. The School workshop held at Palika Bazaar by Navdanya was successful, being attended by around 30 students from D.A.V. Public School, East of Loni Road on 15 December, 2008. The workshop taught the kids how to make their own quick and healthy breakfast using fresh cereals and dry fruits rather than resorting to ready-made cornflakes as a breakfast food. Though the Navdanya team wasn't quite at ease answering questions thrown at them by the NDMC Horticulture Team. We agree that not many enjoy answering and dealing with bureaucrats and government people but Navdanya would have done well had they just tried to treat them as normal public and tried to peacefully answer their queries.

The Mandi House day, 18 December received groups of students from NDMC Schools in the vicinity of the National Museum of Natural History. Kids listened intently to the story of the Indian Vulture getting locally extinct from Delhi, a fact being blamed on the irresponsible usage of the veterinary Drug Diclofenac.



The importance of scavengers and the impending health hazards that humans can face if these scavenger birds disappear were conveyed to the kids leaving them shocked and wondering as to why they hadn't been taught about this in their school science lessons yet. The Delhi Greens Team also took the Festival to Sanskriti School at Chanakyaपुरi on 16 December, 2008. A gathering of Eco Clubs from prominent Delhi Schools was hosted in an event called Sanskriti 350! Sanskriti 350 was an inter-school event inviting eco-clubs from over 30 schools. The event saw good participation and was inaugurated by the Secretary, Environment in the Government of Delhi Mr. J.K. Dadoo.

The Volunteers tried to hammer the ecological aspects of the Festival in the best possible way to the masses but a lot of work remains to be done if such issues are to be engrained in the minds of the people. The Festival was a nice attempt but a lot of work remains, hope it is carried forward in some way by all the people who were part of the Festival and even those who participated in its various events. The Festival certainly raised awareness in the general public that got immensely inspired by seeing the art installations and also by interacting with enthusiastic young students, who were part of the Delhi Greens Volunteer Team.

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*48°C Public.Art.Ecology, a combined initiative of Goethe-Institut/ Max Mueller Bhavan and GTZ, was an experiment set within the capital metropolitan city of Delhi in December 2008. The ambition of the project was to interrogate the teetering ecology of the city through the prism of contemporary art. Through a number of art interventions in various public spaces around Delhi, the festival attempted to draw a diverse public into the world of this critical imaginary. Delhi Greens provided outreach support to the Project.*