

# Re-Imagining Tea Carts in Calicut

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## BACKGROUND

Calicut, situated along the Coast of Malabar in Kerala, India, is known as the “city of spices” due to its significance as a trading port in the 13th century.<sup>1</sup> With the city’s evolution, infrastructure upgrades have left behind void and inactive urban spaces with issues around hygiene, safety and inclusivity in the public realm. In this light, we identified tea carts as a microscale intervention to study and intervene upon.

Tea carts, popularly known as ‘chaaya kadas’ in Kerala, plays a prominent role in the urban supply chain and provides inexpensive and convenient access to goods and services across socioeconomic strata.<sup>2</sup> It opens up new horizons of economic activity by promoting micro-entrepreneurship, which can help with unemployment. ‘In India, street vendors contribute around 7% of the country’s GDP, according to a study by the National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI)’.<sup>3</sup>

However, tea carts have struggled to flourish amongst modern chic cafes as they are exposed to pollution, lack basic sanitation and are dilapidated. Creating a conducive environment around street vending to grow their business will make them critical enablers of economic development.<sup>3</sup> The pilot study aims to revive and redefine the carts rationally for efficient functionality, hygiene and enhancement of the urban realm. Further, it can act as a catalyst and prototype to develop healthy and dynamic third spaces in the city.

## PROJECT METHODOLOGY

1. Public Engagement and Case Identification (Dec 2020 to Jan-2021) -

- Public engagement with 4 Tea cart owners and 15 residents in the neighbourhood.
- Analysis of the structural conditions of the cart and safety and hygiene of the surrounding area.

- Identification of Cart 03 as the potential case for the pilot

- Detailed built and street character study, user behavioural-mapping, functional analysis and stakeholder consultation with owners to identify design challenges and solutions.

2. Design Development (Jan 2021 to Mid-Jan 2021) -

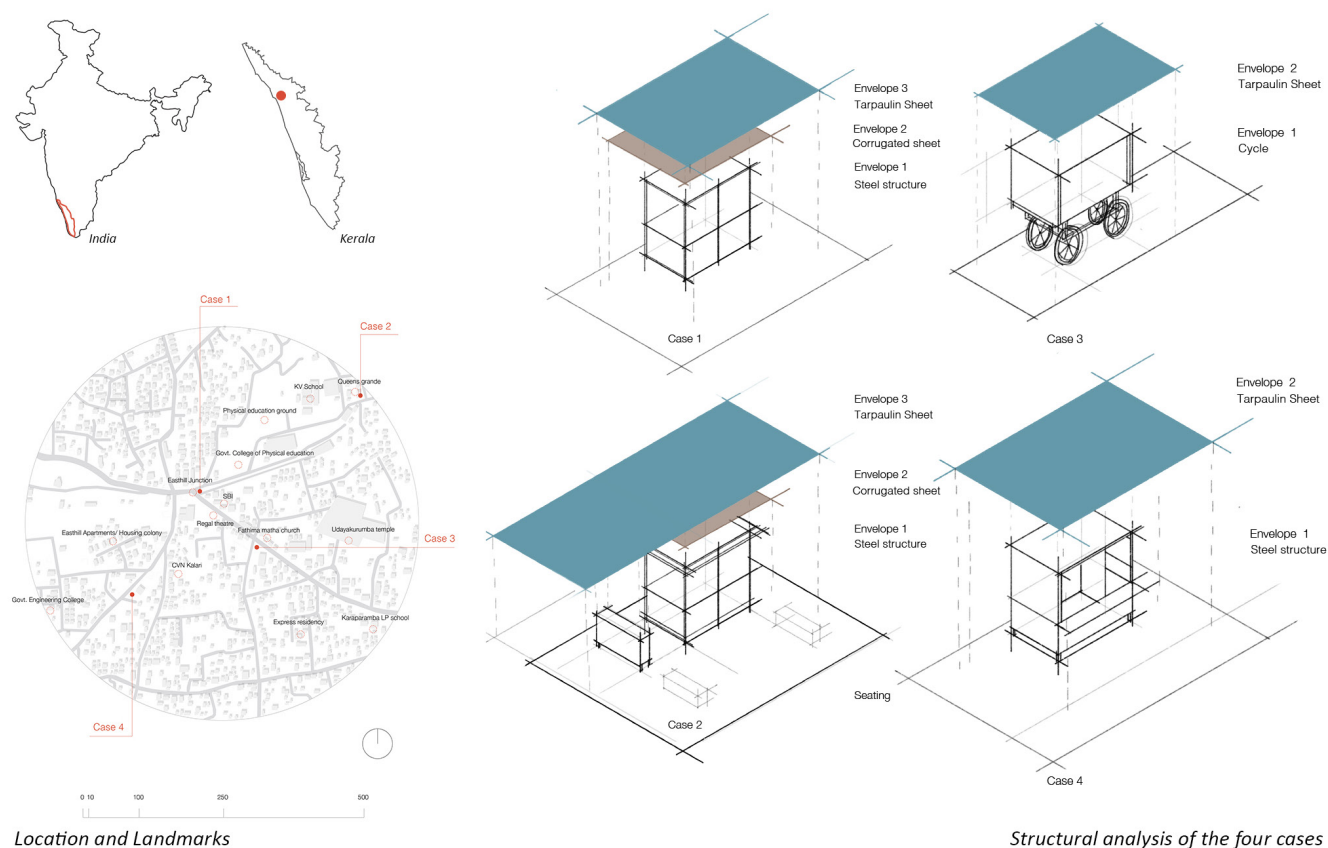
- Concept approach driven by user-road safety, closed food storage, foldable and collapsible design.
- Incorporated owner’s design feedback and developed sketches (plans+elevations), renders, hand-made model and concept presentation for design review with the tea cart owner and health inspector of Calicut.
- 70% concept design for the cart approved - final approval subject to the second set of reviews
- Completion of the detailed design model followed by consultation with the owner, health inspector and structural Fabricator.

3. Project Approvals (Mid-Jan 2021 to Feb 2021) -

- Stakeholder consultation for project execution, including reviews and revisions - First round with local ward Councillor, second round with the District Mayor and health inspector, third round with the Town vending committee and Public health department, fourth round with final revisions with the owner, and the health inspector.
- Project approval granted for implementation

4. Implementation and delivery (Feb 2021 to Mar 2021) -

- Stakeholder consultation with a private steel company for sponsoring the pilot study as a Corporate Social Responsibility.
- The contract was signed with local vendors - structure and solar light fabricator.
- Purchase of utensils from local vendors.



Identified old cart

Figure 1. Site context of the identified cart for pilot project. Credits: Authors.





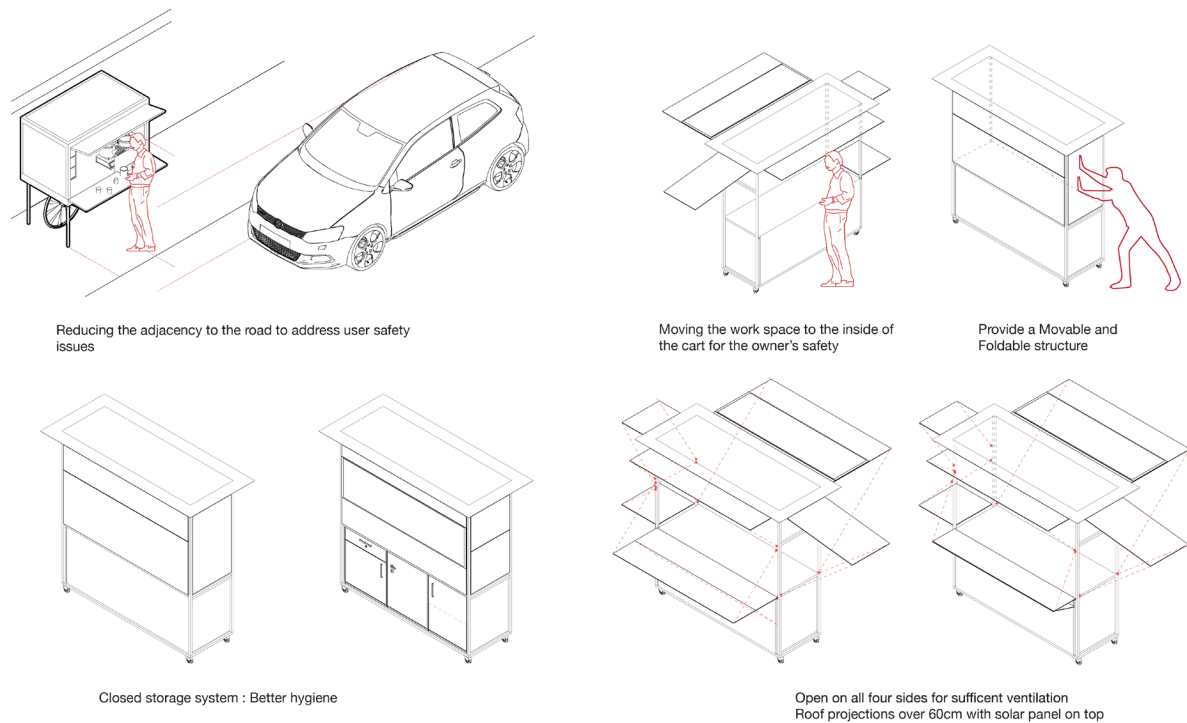


Figure 4. Design approach for the prototype model. Credits: Authors.

### DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR THE PROTOTYPE MODEL

The study identified key issues: safety, mobility, comfort, storage, and waste disposal in redesigning the tea cart as a social hub. To enhance safety, the work area was moved inside, a closed storage system with foldable extension was added, and wheels with a locking mechanism were incorporated for flexibility and security. Weather-appropriate materials and features were implemented, including a roof with awning-like extensions for shade, ventilation openings, and a solar panel for power.

Custom-made stacked stools provided seating and storage solutions were integrated for gas stoves, utensils, and bags. Two large dust bins, including a recycle bin were provided to address littering concerns.

Signboard with Malayalam typography, reading 'Narayanettante Chaya kada' (Narayanan's tea stall) added a sense of identity to the stall.

### WIDER SIGNIFICANCE AND FUTURE VISION

The redesigned tea cart garnered public and media attention, attracting more visitors, including those previously hesitant due to hygiene concerns. It expanded its user base to passersby and tourists. To maintain cleanliness, users have started being more conscious of segregating and using the waste disposal facilities.



Figure 5. Rendered image of the proposed cart. Credits: Authors.

The cart's modern look, flexible structure, shade, and seating contributed to its appeal as a social hub.

The material and structural elements of the cart can be customized depending on the stakeholders' weather, location, or design needs.

Community involvement, including mural art, aimed to promote cleanliness. The project helped revive the Chai culture and economy generation for local small businesses, raising awareness of well-designed outdoor, hygienic, and safe public spaces. It paved the way for more such carts with a replicable prototype model in the city.

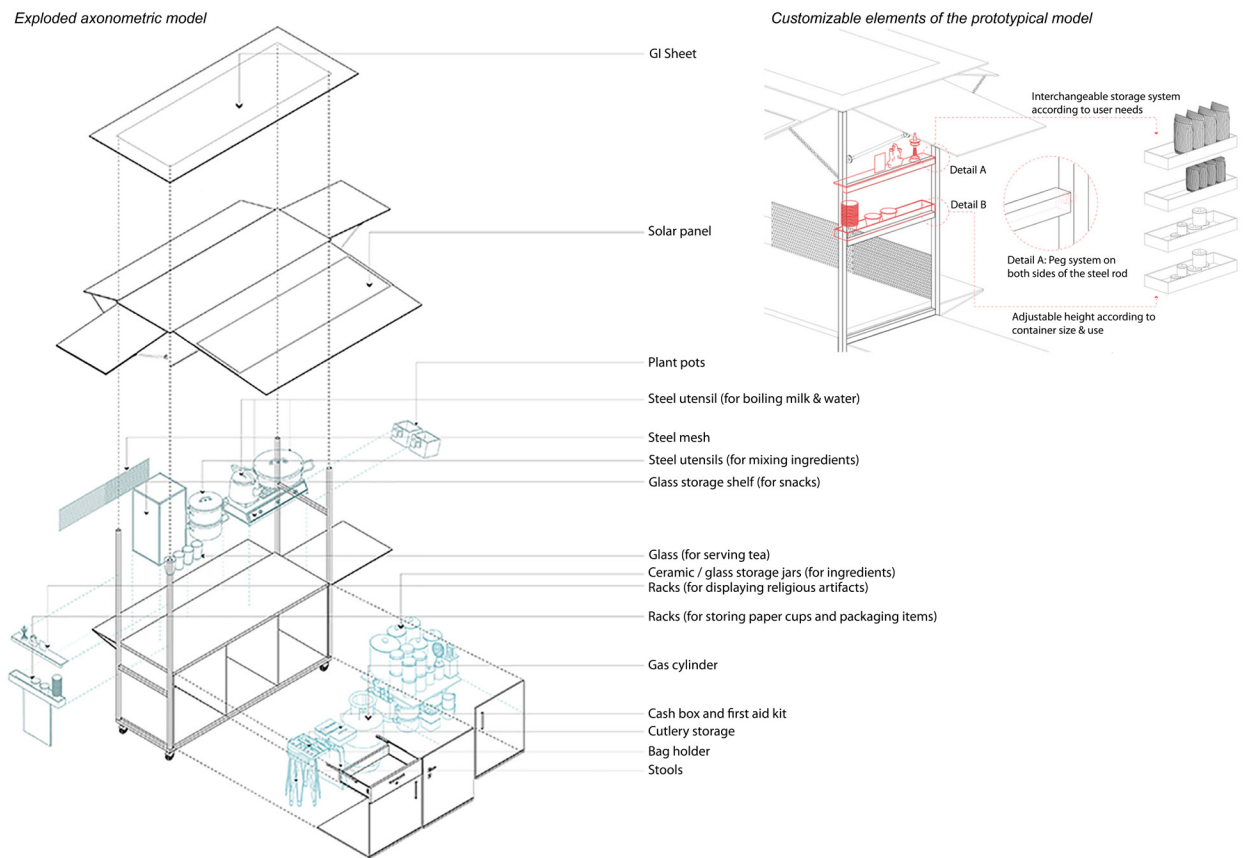


Figure 6. Detailed storage specifications of the proposed model. Credits: Authors.



Figure 7. Redesigned tea cart model. Credits: Authors.



Figure 8. Owner making tea in the new cart. Credits: Authors.





Figure 9. Activated tea cart as a community hub. Credits: Authors

The project has helped bring awareness about the need for the town's rationally designed, safe and hygienic outdoor third spaces. It has succeeded in becoming a catalyst, as the Calicut City corporation recently requested to develop more carts within the city and approached the team for consultation on future projects.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Wikipedia contributors, "Kozhikode," Wikipedia, October 8, 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kozhikode>.
2. "Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs Government of India Support to Urban Street Vendors (Revised Operational Guidelines) Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Urban Livelihoods Mission." n.d. [https://nulm.gov.in/PDF/NULM\\_Mission/NULM-SUSV-Guidelines.pdf](https://nulm.gov.in/PDF/NULM_Mission/NULM-SUSV-Guidelines.pdf).
3. Prabha, Deepa. 2023. "Finding Space in the Urban Squeeze: Promise of Street Vending Zones in Panampilly Nagar." Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR). November 30, 2023. <https://www.cppr.in/articles/street-vending-panampilly>.



Figure 10. Wall mural painting with the residents. Credits: Authors.