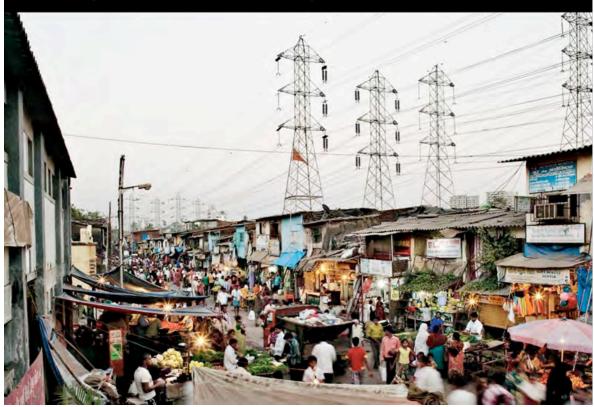January 8 – 10, 2013, Mumbai
January 11 – 13, 2013, Goa

Homegrown Neighbourhoods

A Workshop on Social and Urban Development Processes in Mumbai

Collaborative workshop organized by the Institute of Urbanology, Mumbai/Goa, with Laboratory of Urban Sociology, EPFL, Lausanne.

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Laboratoire de sociologie urbaine

EPFL
ÉCOLE POLYTECHNIQUE
FÉDÉRALE DE LAUSANNE
FACULTE DE L'ENVIONNEMENT NATUREL,
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the workshop is to produce critical concepts that can be used as tools of engagement for a pragmatic yet humane urbanism. For over five years, the Institute of Urbanology has been engaged with discursive and practical aspects of Mumbai's urban development. We have worked with local associations against the forced redevelopment of their neighbourhoods, documented vernacular construction practices and lately, started collaborating with talented local builders. We have taught, published articles and debated our ideas publically.

AIM

We would now like to initiate a focused research project with people who are highly knowledgeable in their respective fields, with whom we can learn and exchange. Our aim is to produce an authoritative account of the development dynamics of parts of the city that have too often been dismissed as belonging to the prehistory of New India, but which have without any doubt, a long and tormented future ahead of them. Participants in this project have established themselves academically in disciplines as varied as anthropology, sociology, art theory, literature, economics, architecture, planning, engineering and biography. We hope that this multidisciplinary discussion will extend beyond the workshop and produce knowledge forms as diverse and potent as those we will observe on the field.

BRIEF

In spite of decades of experimentation and debate on the question of unplanned and locally developed neighbourhoods in India, they remain sites of much social and political tension. The government never accepts their existence and has continuously victimized their residents through forced clearances, top-down rehabilitation schemes, or by simply refusing to grant residents security of tenure or the right to improve their habitats. Yet, given the magnitude of the phenomenon, locally developed, or *homegrown neighbourhoods*, represent a de facto urban condition for the majority of residents in cities like Mumbai.

It is important that researchers and practitioners look at these neighbourhoods beyond the question of land markets and ownership rights. Land use and occupational patterns in Mumbai are perpetually negotiated through paralegal and extra-economic mechanisms, ranging from grassroots politics to wide-ranging community-based networks, to innovative spatial arrangements and construction systems. These mechanisms cannot be reduced to tactical and opportunistic responses from a so-called 'informal sector'. They are, instead, intrinsic and vital to the city's functioning.

Low-wage earners, whose contribution to the city's economy is indispensable, as well as a large portion of the urban middle-class, can simply not find living and working spaces through so-called 'formal' market mechanisms. Conventional housing delivery is dominated by real estate forces that may well move the city closer to what the 'global' is imagined to look-like, but which also make the purchase or rental of homes out of reach for most people. Real estate ambitions are draining Mumbai out of one of its most vital resource: space. The diverse and versatile habitats so characteristic of old Bombay are being aggressively turned over into monolithic housing and office towers. These new structures still look somewhat baffled, standing as they are, in a jumpy, honking and bartering sea of commoners, mobile shops and tiny homes, which claim the city by their sheer presence. Viewed from the heights of a shining tower, the ground-level looks like a never-ending mess. But as always, binary visions and general labels such as 'slums', 'mess' and even the ubiquitous 'informal' are unsatisfactory. The critical observer and engaged practitioner need to go beyond them.

From the 1950s in particular, Mumbai's state apparatus had evolved an ad hoc system in which occupational rights were provided to large populations, mostly on government land, in exchange for political support. The city as a whole benefited from this since these neighbourhoods formed a source of cheap labour. They were, and remain, sites of production, manufacture and exchange of goods, making up a considerable chunk of the city's economy. Under the regime of a welfare system, support to this demographic was not seen as being outside the purview of the state, even though it did involve local levels of bribery and corruption.

In a liberalized economy, where the state bureaucracy is aggressively seeking new revenue sources, land is now seen as an asset that can be leveraged, either through kickbacks from the construction lobby, which feeds on public infrastructure projects, or from direct sales. The most recent response of the government has been to have slum rehabilitation schemes tied into real estate deals, releasing land for the market after absorbing erstwhile 'slum' populations into vertical structures. However, in a context where the price of land is inflated through speculation, both cases eventually see steady evacuation of the neighbourhoods, with a majority of people selling their units to move elsewhere.

 Hundreds of small patches of the city have been transformed through such schemes. Yet, thousands more remain and sometimes actively resist redevelopment. A decade or more after the Slum Redevelopment Scheme was implemented, people are aware that what it produces is more vertical slums that are costly to maintain and start to physically deteriorate the moment they are built.

For all their limitations, homegrown neighbourhoods have many qualities that are getting lost in the translation to globalized urbanism. Firstly, they tend to systematically improve over time, with residents constantly investing in them, and secondly they do not restrict space to any one use, making them highly resourceful, responsive and adaptable. It is urgent to identify

these qualities very clearly, to make for better redevelopment plans and allow their continued existence, with improved infrastructure. Unfortunately, even the most basic ethnography of local construction processes is not yet available.

It does not suffice to just describe their physical appearance and processes of incremental development. A real concerted effort, engaging with their reality in as many ways as possible, is needed too. This is something, which has never been done before in Mumbai.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTEXT

The homegrown neighbourhoods we are describing emerged outside of planning and zoning regulations, allowing residential, economic and social activities to blend and merge. This is not something restricted only to slums. All over Asia, one sees urban formations produced by live-work conditions. "Shop-houses" in Singapore and Malaysia and "home-factories" in Japan or what we call "tool-houses" in India share the same impulse of reducing costs through spatial arrangements and dense clustering.

Dharavi is famous for having incrementally developed. In the process it produced a dense, decentralized but highly integrated network of small factories, shops and homes. Most of these are 'tool-houses' with multiple, overlaid and sometimes merging functions. The deep enmeshing of the built environment and economic activity has generated a particular urban fabric that is at once generic and flexible. Its most striking feature is that it is constantly improving as people reinvest in their tool-houses. Since the house is a tool of production in the hands of its users (whether they own, rent or squat), any investment enhances its productive capacity.

People in neighbourhoods officially notified as 'slum areas' are usually not recognized as the owners of their homes. Yet after living in the neighbourhoods for years, sometimes generations, residents do feel a sense of entitlement, which is reinforced by the presence of political parties that protect the occupancy right of their electoral constituency. Over time, residents invest in their homes and businesses, building higher and better. This way, they gradually improve their living standards. This propensity is encouraged by the fact that those who have managed to find a place to live know that given Mumbai's inflating real estate value, they are unlikely to find any other place to go.

The most striking aspect of locally and incrementally developed neighbourhoods is the fact that they managed to grow and consolidate without any help from the government. Many new comers survive in the city with hardly any access to infrastructure and municipal services, for decades altogether. Without money but not without resource, people use all they have to the maximum. They use the skills and know-how they bring with them from their villages. They use their Gods to build temples, mosques and churches and register these spaces of worship to firm up their claim over territories. They use politicians who use them. They use

community and caste solidarity. They use social networks as trading networks. They use the city's hunger for cheap labour. They use their neighbours as friends, informers, partners, clients and suppliers. They use their homes to generate income by building an extra floor and renting it out, or opening a shop or starting a home-based workshop.

Most of Mumbai's homegrown neighbourhoods are already well established with many third or forth generation residents. While the very first migrants may have relied more extensively on their own labour to build homes, the practice of construction quickly professionalized, with masons working on big projects in other parts of the city taking home-building contracts in the places where they lived. Now local construction is fully professionalized with "contractors" hired by homeowners to supervise the entire process of construction, including the purchase of material and the bribing of municipal officers and policemen. The contractor is from the same area as the client and in general, this is also true of his entire team. Successful contractors in homegrown neighbourhoods can manage up to 6 or 7 home construction projects at once. Over time, some of the workers become contractors themselves.

While houses are developed by a web of local owners, contractors, labourers, carpenters and plumbers, they are also made with industrial products such as bricks, cement, corrugated tin or asbestos sheets, steel pipes, I-beams and so on. These products are bought at market price from hardware stores that can be located in the neighbourhood or anywhere else in the city. Moreover, as any middle-class homeowner would do, homeowners in homegrown neighbourhoods often choose high-quality materials over low-cost ones. An investment in quality is justified if it means enhanced use-value in the form of higher living standards or improved income generating capacity of the structure.

The local construction industry is a pool of civic knowledge and local awareness, while being highly attuned to infrastructure needs and economic and residential lifestyles. The contractors are key social and political agents, working closely with bureaucracies and politicians, walking the thin line between the various contrary impulses that govern their lives. It is the examination of and participation within this industry that leads us to very specific questions about the efficacy (or inefficiency) of bureaucratic regulations and the instrumentalism of state agencies.

The capacity of such neighbourhoods (in the workshop we cover Dharavi, Deonar-Govandi, Ghatkopar-Kurla, Malad West, Bhandup West, and others) to create capital from a combination of social and spatial resources is part of a much wider experience of urban life found in many parts of the world. Familial, caste and clan-based affiliations and the domesticated site of economic practice are all part of India's urban life. Unfortunately, the presence of rigid urban bureaucracies, colonial mindsets and straightforward caste prejudice never allowed this de-facto, ad hoc urbanism to flourish as a legitimate form and social process.

The fact that an overwhelming number of people living in such neighbourhoods are Dalit, poor Muslims and other historically marginalized communities is essential to understand the attitude of the authorities towards them. Instead of developing forms of tenure that could provide stable settings for this population along with generating revenue through systematic rentals or improvement of civic infrastructure, the state chose to encourage unstable tenure systems because it gave room for political negotiation and economic bargaining. Tenure was never allowed to become a serious rights issue for the city at large since India's upper and upper-middle classes are used to subsidized labour costs and a cheap service economy – which are linked to sustained instability.

In the process of settling in Mumbai, low-caste migrants challenged traditional hierarchies. Dalit communities could build temples in the city that they were forbidden to enter into in their villages of origin. They developed their economic reserves and fed it back to their villages, transforming their status along the way. They allowed for a diverse set of identities to emerge through connections with groups from all around the country and made way for a younger generation to strategically use and hide caste identities within the larger hubris of being urban and modern.

The act of building a house, growing one's own business, worshiping Gods that were once out of bounds, all these acts have a special meaning for people that left behind not only economic poverty but also social oppression. The life which first, second or third generation rural migrants are building in the city is not merely reproducing the cultural context they brought with them, but also evolving it in creative ways, generating new contexts and identities. When they go back to their villages (which is a yearly ritual for many lower-and middle-class families in Mumbai), they are not only richer, they have also acquired a new status, which is derived from, and opposed to what they had left behind in the village.

There are interesting connections between the vernacular construction of habitats, the productive use of built spaces and the collective social mobility of communities that have settled in neighbourhoods like Dharavi. In all instances, what is emerging is based on a constantly actualized and dialectical relationship with the village. This relationship is at once a new becoming, and an eternal return to a place that is itself both actual and symbolic. The village is the sacred, mythical container of a community's identity. It is mythical because even there caste identity was always in flux. It is mythical also because from the city (and in the city), the village gets re-imagined and caste histories get rewritten.

The fact that back in the city this emancipation is actually constantly challenged is another matter. In the mouth of Mumbai's bureaucrats and urban planners the terms of *slum-dwellers* and *squatters* sound just like a new caste that broadly encompasses Dalits, OBC, tribal castes and poor Muslims. It does not therefore suffice to move from the village to the city to emancipate oneself. Freedom of movement from one to the other seems to be essential. One escapes one's condition of being a landless Dalit in the village to become a businessman in the

city. One then escapes one's condition of slum dweller in the city to become a landlord in the village. The movement cannot be reduced to a one-way flow from the village to the city.

In appears thus that identity is not confined to the boundaries of the neighbourhood. It spreads as far as its inhabitants' histories go. The vernacular home is not 'native' to any one place, nor is it purely local in any sense of the term. It is itself a mash-up of know-how, materials, and aesthetic sensibilities from all over the country and the world at large. What is unique to Mumbai's homegrown neighbourhoods is the way they allow these influences to come together, in large part thanks to the inability of the authorities to control their development.

This workshop is an opportunity to build on and challenge these ideas. Our perspective will be enriched by the participants' responses. Participants represent a diversity of backgrounds, professional and intellectual trajectories and experiences. The research project emerging from these discussions will be organically collaborative and capable of making genuine breakthroughs in the way we think about, live in, administer and engage with cities. The workshop will be the start of a longer journey, producing a detailed road map for a project during 2013 and 2014.

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Emilie Abrams, Student in political science at Yale University, New Haven

Deborah Baker, Writer, based in Brooklyn, New York and Aldona, Goa

Amita Bhide, Social scientist, Professor at the School of Habitat Studies in the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and advisor at the Institute of Urbanology*

Tobias Bailtsch, Architect and PhD candidate in sociology at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Lausanne

Michele Bonino, Principal architect at Studio Marc and Assistant Professor at the Politecnico di Torino

Matias Echanove, Co-founder of the Institute of Urbanology, Mumbai and PhD Candidate at the University of Tokyo.

Pierre Frey, Art and architecture historian and adjunct professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology of Lausanne

Ajay Gandhi, Anthropologist and post-doctoral researcher at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity at Göttingen

Amitav Ghosh, Novelist, essayist and advisor to the Institute of Urbanology, Aldona

Julien Gregorio, Photographer, Geneva

Vincent Kaufmann, Urban sociologist, mobility expert, director of the Laboratory of Urban Sociology and Professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Lausanne

Anush Kapadia, Anthropologist and lecturer on social studies at Harvard University, Boston

Sytse de Maat, Architect and PhD candidate at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Lausanne

Subhash Mukerjee, Principal architect at Studio Marc, Turin

Luca Pattaroni, Urban sociologist, senior scientist at the Laboratory of Urban Sociology and Senior Lecturer at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Lausanne

Yves Pedrazzini, Urban sociologist, senior scientist at the Laboratory of Urban Sociology and Senior Lecturer at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Lausanne

Andrea Rinaldo, Engineer, Director of the Environment and Engineering Institute and Professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Lausanne*

Yehuda Safran, Architectural theorist, director Potlatch Lab at GSAPP, Columbia University, professor at Columbia University and Harvard University, and adviser at the Institute of Urbanology

Gabriella Santana, Student in architecture at the Escola da Cidade, Sao Paulo

Smita Srinivas, Urban planner and director of the Technological Change Lab (TCLab) and assistant professor of urban planning at Columbia University, New York

Rahul Srivastava, Anthropologist, co-founder of the Institute of Urbanology, Goa

Peter van der Veer: Anthropologist, director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity at Göttingen*

Sandra Walter, Urban planner and scientist at the Laboratory of Urban Sociology, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Lausanne

Sarover Zaidi, Philosopher and PhD candidate at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity at Göttingen

* Not yet confirmed. All the others are confirmed.

SCHEDULE AND LOGISTICS

Mumbai – 7th – 10th January 2013

7th January: Arrival

8th January: Dharavi

9:30   Meet at office: Intro to URBZ/Urbanology and objectives of the workshop
10:30   Field visit in groups of 3-4 people, with local residents
14:00   Discussion at URBZ office followed by fieldwork in small groups
20:00   Dinner in Dharavi Koliwada

9th January: Fieldwork at Shivaji Nagar, Ghatkopar or Bhandup
(*Groups get organized according thematic preferences*)

9:30   Shivaji Nagar: Local constructions including houses, store and Mosque
12:00   Lunch and discussion at Alamgeer restaurant, Shivaji Nagar
14:00   Ghatkopar: temple + neighbourhood
16:30   Bhandup: Amar's projects
20:00   Dinner, location TBA

10th January: Discussions Fieldwork and Drifts

9:30   Meet at URBZ Office
12:00   Noon Lunch at Ramdeo, Dharavi
14:30   Independent fieldwork and drifts in small groups.

Goa – 11th – 14th January 2013

11th January: Departure to Goa

15:40   Fly IndiGo 6E-417 (*book asap on cleartrip.com*)
16:40   Pickup at Goa Airport to Guest-House
19:00   Early Dinner at Mr. Amitav Ghosh s House in Aldona
22:00   Trip to Ingo's Market for drinks and party

12th January

10:00   Presentations and Discussions at Urbanology Institute
13:00   Lunch at Institute
14:30   Presentations and Discussions at Urbanology Institute
17 :30 Break
19:30   Dinner at Avanilaya (*Rs 1000 per head*)

13th January

9:00   Visit of Aldona
10:30   Seminar
13:00   Lunch at Institute
14:00   Open
19:30   Dinner on the Beach

14th January: Leaving for Mumbai

13:55   IndiGo 6E-418   (*book asap on cleartrip.com*)
14:55   After check-in at hotel, optional visits: Bandra walk: Reclamation to Fort, Mazgaon Docks, Banganga Tank Khotachiwadi, Crawford Market.
20:00   Dinner+Drinks: Olympia/Bay View.

15th January: Departure

NOTE

o   Participants are responsible for their own food, travel and accommodation expenses.

o   Please book your hotels and plane tickets early. If you need help contact us.

o   Tell us when you land in Mumbai so we can arrange pick you up the airport.

o   Transportation in Goa will be organized by us and the cost will be shared.

o   Contact us at contact@urbanology.org for any question!

HOTELS IN MUMBAI

	Location	Price	Phone	Email
Shivar Guest House	Dharavi	Rs 1800-2200	0091-22-2403-7919	shivar_guesthouse@rediffmail.com

Cheap, not perfectly clean but good enough. Well located.

	Location	Price	Phone	Email
Le Sutra	Bandra	Rs 5000-6000	0091-2605-5473	info@lesutra.in

Boutique hotel. Located in trendy street near the sea. Service appartments can be shared by up to 3 people for about Rs 3000 per person for this you need to email and confirm now at sales.marketing@lesutra.in

	Location	Price	Phone	Email
Metro Palace Hotel	Bandra	Rs. 3500-4500	0091-22-6774-4555	info@metropalacehotel.com

Decent hotel. Well located but pricey and noisy. Upper rooms are ok.

	Location	Price	Phone	Email
West End Hotel	Marine Lines (South)	Rs. 4800	0091-22-408 39121	mail@westendhotelmumbai.com

Very nice hotel located in the historical part of Mumbai. 1h by train or cab from Dharavi.

	Location	Price	Phone	Email
YMCA Colaba	Colaba	Rs. 2000		central@ymcabombay.com

Decent and clean hotel located in most touristic part of Mumbai. Nice neighbourhood. About 1h by cab or train from Dharavi.

ACCOMMODATION IN ALDONA, GOA

1) Those wanting to stay in luxury - the Avanilaya (avanilaya.com) is a great stay. In Aldona itself. Transport from there to venue will be arranged by us. Participants can directly connect with Charmaine at avanilaya@gmail.com and confirm.

2) Those who dont mind sharing space can stay for Rs. 1800 per night per person at Aldona Guest House. We will arrange for transport from there to Institute and also make their bookings. The Aldona Guest house consists of 4 flats with 3 bedrooms each and mattresses in the living room in addition.