

# **Conflictive urbanism in Dharavi: mega-projects, mega-resistances and the dialectics of “right to the city”**

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## **Abstract**

Dharavi, at the heart of Mumbai, recently became the iconic symbol of slums in Asia and in the world through its intrinsic permanence, multiplicity, dynamism, density and scale. Partially caused by the emergent glamour of informality and fetichisation of poverty and partially because of its strategic location, Dharavi has emerged as the last frontier of oppositional practices confronting neo-liberal futuristic Dubai-style mega-projects. Drawing from the debate around *right to the city*, adopting a Lefebvrian approach to the production of space and a critical regionalist perspective, the paper explores the relevance of the conceptual analytical neologism of “contested urbanism” and namely the politics of density, the spatial tactics and the dialectics emerging in urban transformation driven by neoliberal approaches. At the centre of the analysis processes of urban transformations are embedded in policy discourses and competing visions over the land of Dharavi, its identity and its role in the production of Mumbai.

The paper stems from a three-week studio experience as part of the completion of the MSc of Building and Urban Design for Development run in May 2009 in partnership with Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute For Architecture, the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), and the Development Planning Unit (DPU).

## **Locating the case: a set of competing visions**

Popularly known as Asia’s largest slum, covering almost 239 hectares and an estimated population between 700,000 and 1 million people (BBC, 2006; Sharma, 2000) Dharavi is characterised by its strategic location in the centre of Mumbai, and thus finds itself at the heart of a challenging, highly contested debate over the present and the future of the city. International developers, bureaucrats, state agencies, civil society and social movements are engaged in multiple confrontations over land, density, typology and right to a decent life while futuristic Dubai or Shanghai-style landscapes are developed over, what is now, prime real estate.

Historically evolving from a small fishing village, as Mumbai’s urban development and corresponding squatter settlements pushed northwards - pushed off valuable land in south Mumbai onto this swampy, unhygienic area (Sharma, 2000:24) - Dharavi became the city’s geographical centre located between inner-city districts and the financial centre Bandra-Kurla Complex, near Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport. Such an evolution has transformed the site and consolidated its development, layering generations of slum dwellers in what are

now around 85 *nagars* (neighborhoods), organised in a complex physical layout and built around work-live dwelling forms.

The narrative of Dharavi, presented in this paper, is used to explain the material and discursive production of spatialities highlighting land values and built densities at the core of the argument over Mumbai's future, accentuating inequalities and driving the contest over space. Significant government and market pressures towards becoming a world-class city as expressed through "Vision Mumbai" and thus wiping out 'slums' push against the struggle for a bottom-up and inclusive development process promoted by civil society and heterogeneous citizen groups in Dharavi.

Elaborating on the conceptual analytical neologism of "*contested urbanism*", this paper explores the material-discursive dynamics in the formation, transformation and representation of social civil movement struggles over space. Specifically it aims to spatially depict the confrontational and sometimes oppositional forms of powers that shape people's access to housing and slum redevelopment, as exemplar of a wider struggle over social justice.

Such a situation enlarges the window of opportunity for a Lefebvrian *right to the city* demand, which is not about inclusion in a structurally unequal, exploitative and insecure system, but about democratising cities and their decision-making processes (Meyer 2009). In doing so, it aims to represent multiple forces that shape the politics of Dharavi, the spatial tensions between top-down urban strategies and bottom-up tactics of spatial adaptation and urban activism, offering critical insights and, hopefully, a reinvigorated ethical renewal of the disciplines of architecture and urban design.

### **The Dharavi Redevelopment Project: homogeneity and modernism**

Dharavi and its inhabitants have long played an integral role in the city's urban narrative. The historical area, described as "one of the six great Koliwadās of Bombay", was originally home to the Kolis, a traditional fishing community that lived on the swampy inlet which was fed by the Arabian Sea (Sharma, 2000:xxi). Much changed for the Kolis throughout Bombay's urbanisation process, as they began to face occupational displacement during the development of the city (Vora and Palishikar, 2003:173). The ultimate legacy of the Koliwada was lost to a growing settlement of hutments in the district that came to be known as Dharavi. Commonly referred to as "Asia's largest slum", Dharavi was slowly constructed by its citizens through a growing collection of waste and debris that effectively operated as infill on top of the swamp (Urbanoligy, 2008:12).

Dharavi itself is actually made up of roughly 85 *nagars*, all of which have a distinct character, economic discourse, ethnic mixture and religious narrative (Patel and Arputham, 2007). All elements that, in the words of Kalpana Sharma (2000:xx), make Dharavi popularly known as "a dirty, pest-ridden locality without basic services where thousands of people live in subhuman conditions. It is partly this – but it is much more".

Due to its strategic location, the demographic pressures on the island city and the government and private sector's global transformative goals, the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP) was introduced as integrated special planning area in 2004. Essentially conceived as a state facilitated Public-Private Partnership, orchestrated by Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) and spatialised by the architect Mukesh Mehta, the DRP is in essence a tabula-rasa redevelopment strategy for the entire territory of Dharavi. Mehta proposes several physical alterations for Dharavi, a vision substantiated by its artificial and instrumental division into five sectors to be allocated to five private developers with no reference to existing community boundaries in Dharavi; a maximum increase of Floor Space Index which contributes to higher urban densities; and the adoption of a spatial transformation from horizontal, low-rise 'slums' to a high-rise podium style typology (G+12 and higher), literally, replacing informal settlements with high-rise developments irrespective of the vibrant economy and society, informal and complex constructed over stratifications,

adaptations and subsequent historical modifications.

Announcement of the DRP was issued by MHADA in June 2007 and was received with mixed emotions. The *Times of India* reported the initial site-purchase bidding was to attract international interest from developers of the highest calibre, with an Expression of Interest form (EoI) costing Rs. 1 lakh (£ 1.280), a minimum opening bid of Rs. 1000 crore (£ 125.000.000) and over Rs. 4000 crore (£ 500.000.000) to be expected in profits (TNN, 2007).

National and international developers who fit certain criteria were to be the only applicants invited to purchase the EoI forms (TNN, 2007). The details of the plan itself were left highly secretive, as the initial document was submitted by the architect Mukesh Metha as hired by the state government and whose five-sector, five-developer plan was taken on unanimously without any significant call for citizen input (Patel and Arputham, 2007).

Clear from the start, however, were that residents currently situated in Dharavi, many of whom were unaware of the plan and its implications, would be subject to a 'cut-off date' in order to be eligible for rehabilitation under the DRP, originally set at 1995 (TNN, 2007). From a list of bidders, only one would be chosen to develop each of the five sections (Bharucha, 2009), denying current residents that form part of cooperative housing societies their legal rights as through the Slum Redevelopment Act (SRA) to select, based on 70% approval, their housing developer.

From this massive mega-project, homogenous in its aims and modernistic in its vision, grassroots opposition has emerged. The confrontational environment has boosted the development of different grassroots initiatives and spatial experimentations that challenge the DRP's proposed relocation of residents, the complete lack of an inclusive process and the possible consequences of a government/market-driven process of redevelopment irrespective of the social and spatial multiplicity of Dharavi.

In recent years, alternative critical visions of the DRP from civil society and academics have emerged through an invited space of negotiation offered by the Government of Maharashtra via an Expert Advisory Panel, offering suggestions and options and at the same time maintaining a close and highly strategic relationship with government bodies in order to function as facilitators between various institutional levels.

## **The meta-narrative of transformative urban processes: conflictive urbanism**

As many other contemporary urban scenarios, Dharavi is located in a web of contested visions through the perception of the production of space as an inherently conflictive process, where various forms of injustice are not only manifested, but produced and reproduced. In order to offer a sufficient understanding of how the complexity and dynamism forms and transforms Dharavi, this part of the paper aims to theoretically unpack different discourses of spatial transformations, adopting and elaborating on the concept of "contested urbanism", conceived as methods of inquiry into relationships between space, society, politics and culture (Leach, 1997).

The neologism of "contested urbanism" has thus been found useful in many interconnected ways, in helping to:

- Depict hegemonic, technocratic, hypermodern discourses that shape state authority material interventions in urban areas, always originating in a top-down fashion without meaningful participation;
- Focus attention on the politics of urban transformation that systematically excludes citizens, and in this case, slum dwellers, in the management, adaptation and evolution of their living spaces. Power is thus positioned in a distant bureaucracy, facilitating functional neoliberal alliance with economically powerful developers, architects and urban *intelligenza*:

- Represent the economy of interconnected resistance alliances and materialities of place-based social movements that are able to mobilise alternative and spatial imaginaries;
- Navigate at the frontier of universal civilisation, deploying a bilateral relationship that responds to local demands, copying and critically engaging with the global, and
- Position the core attribute of architecture and design as responsive, dependent and locally grounded activity moving out of the simplified vision of building and architecture as commodified objects.

The following sections of the paper aim to theoretically uncover elements and critical concepts that can sustain, in a building block fashion, the meta-narrative of urban transformations in Dharavi as a case of contested urbanism. Such blocks will be developed around a Foucaultian spatiology, the Lefebvrian approach to the production of space, the debate around “right to the city” and through a critical regionalist perspective.

### *Spaces of transformation: a Foucaultian and Lefebvrian vision of Dharavi*

In order to understand how the spatialities of the contested urbanism are constructed and manifested, as a first step it is fundamental to reinforce a dichotomy vision of space as physical, static metric space with social dynamics. Such a vision is not new but grounded in Heidegger’s (1962:19-21) “human spatiality”, Lefebvre’s (1991) use of “lived space of social and political world”, Bauman’s (1993:195) adoption of complex spatial interaction between “cognitive, moral and aesthetic spaces and products”. Thus, reinforcing the narrative of the specific case of Dharavi there is a need for a better appreciation of the politics of urban transformations that systematically exclude citizens, and in this case, slum dwellers, in the management, adaptation and evolution of their living spaces, positioning power in a distant bureaucracy and facilitating functional neoliberal alliances.

Historically, the most practiced ideology in the planning of urban space is that of the Utopian City, a spatial construct meant to house, reflect and nurture the harmonious civil solidarity of a Utopian society. Spatially it is characterised by adherence to a planned order of the public realm. Lacan (1988) suggests that Utopian ideology has underpinned the practice of urban planning in western cities since the renaissance period. Gunder (2003:21) reaffirms this by stating that ‘urban policy formulation and related planning processes are valued by society because they provide a mechanism for constructing and propagating shared public visions, or dreams, as to what constitutes a harmonious and secure future, at least for the built and related socioeconomic environment.’

Sandercock (2005) states that at this point democratic practice is undermined, as the contradictive ideals of these majority groups are often depoliticised by those in power by meriting their own rationality of what constitutes a ‘good city’. She also posits that within the contemporary era, increasingly being shaped by globally competitive capital, that the ideals that shape urban landscapes are likely to become less locally contextual and more influenced by a range of hegemonic ‘pre-shaped and unquestioned cultural imperatives’, which aim to provide ‘societal guidance’ to a ‘pre-framed dream’ of a sustainable, healthy, attractive and competitive, ‘good city.’

With the space available, such longitudinal and brief accounts depict a broader “spatial turn” in social science and humanities informed by the works of Soja (1989), Amin and Thrift (2002), Elden (2004), Harvey (2006) and Gregory (2004). What seems to be prominent for an elaboration of the case under scrutiny is that “being political is always a matter of becoming in place and through space” and thus, Foucault and Lefebvre’s spatial theories serve as an appropriate foundational building block.

Foucault (1978) starts his discussion on space and power, or, better yet, on the connection between space and power, from two very specific examples: the plague-stricken town and the

Panopticon (Dikec, 2005). These examples are particular forms of spatialisation and partitioning, and both depend on the 'true' identification of individuals and the effective mechanisms of labels. It is on the basis of this spatial organisation that effective government and effective exercise of power becomes possible. Thus the plague-stricken town becomes, in the words of Foucault (1978:198), "the utopia of the perfectly governed city."

Michel Foucault suggested that architecture, although an inherently political act, cannot by itself liberate or oppress. In his mind, liberation and oppression are practices, not objects, and neither practice can ever be guaranteed by artefacts functioning in the "order of objects". He suggests a fundamental central element that supports the concept of contested urbanism and namely Dharavi in its nature, essentially that "space is fundamental in any exercise of power", and it is inconceivable that we "leave people in the slums, thinking that they can simply exercise their rights there". To realise liberation, technicians of space, including architects, must align their "liberating intentions [...] with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom" (Foucault 2003).

Thus, the discovery and appropriation of such discourses in the case of Dharavi has a twofold objective. First, referring to Turner's (1972) contention of "housing as a verb", it drew attention to this 'product or process' dichotomy, opening up the call for more culturally sensitive approaches to home-making or re-making in urban transformations. Such a vision, which incorporates the notion of casual, rhizomatic, fluid and of course incremental production of spaces, as Brillembourg (2004:79) argues, "relates to the realm outside what is prescribed meaning, working with what already exist, materially and socially", as a "collective construction" breaking down the "ever shifting" (Roy, 2009b:80) dichotomy of legal-illegal, legitimate-illegitimate; authorised-unauthorised.

Second, conceiving slums in general and Dharavi in particular, not as an homogenous "global prototype of a population warehouse" (Davis, 2006) but as a city in itself made of impurity, ambivalence and in a state of constant metamorphosis, will help us to understand "slum urbanism" as a response and resistance to state and economic-led utopian and modernistic planning. A vision, centred on power and control over population and space because "the informal explain the practices (social, economic, architectural and urban) and the forms (physical and spatial) that a group of stakeholders (dwellers, developers, planners, landowners and the state) undertake not only to obtain access to land and housing, but also to satisfy their need to engage in urban life" (Brillembourg 2006) developing forms of "deep democracy" (Appadurai, 2001).

In that respect, Foucault (2003) offers readings of the geometric plan of towns, and particularly the utopian schemas (rigid, modernistic), well represented in the holomorphic visions of the DRP where the relation between sovereignty and territory is one where the aim is "to connect the political effectiveness of sovereignty to a spatial distribution". For him, the construction of artificial towns in Northern Europe, on the model of the military camp, with geometric figures and architectural precision, and rationalistic layouts, not so dissimilar from the technocratic hypermodern Dubai or Shanghai-style landscapes imagined in the essence of the DRP, where, for the French philosopher, it is "a question of structuring [*d'architecturer*] a space". Without being explicitly Foucaultian in nature, a recent talk between Rony Bauman and Eyal Weizman titled Planning for Emergency: Urbanism for Displaced recalled multiple writings of modern architecture and planning as the "medicalisation of space" in which concepts like hygenisation, sanitation, clearance and control inform typologies and spaces, de facto recalling a perspective of humanitarian spatialities (Boano, 2009) and slum upgrading process, well documented in the literature, in which interventions are considered an "healing machine".

For Foucault (1978:70) space is not something 'dead, fixed and immobile' but is seen as 'fundamental to every form of public life' and "fundamental to every exercise of power" (1979:253). Every society, according to Fiore (1985:2), has its own spatial grammar and space "is a cultural creation and as such can never be neutral because projected on to it are all

the systems of symbolic classification adopted by society and it reflects the same social system” (Fiore, 1985:3).

In this sense a better understanding of space and its manifestation would help to accomplish the integrative task of linking social and material needs in housing for the urban poor. Thus, rediscovering a Lefebvrian “production of space” helps to reinforce the theoretical understating of contested urbanism especially because, as Till (2009) recently argues “once Lefebvre has said (social) space is a (social) product – one can never again see the world as a place set apart, or reduce architecture to a set of abstract forms”.

The key words ‘production’ and ‘space’ characterise Lefebvre's analytic intentions; for ‘production’, Lefebvre means that humans create the space in which they make their lives; it is a project shaped by interests of classes, experts, the grassroots and other contending forces. Space is not simply inherited from nature, or passed on by the dead hand of the past, or autonomously determined by ‘laws’ of spatial geometry as per conventional location theory. Space is produced and reproduced through human intentions, even if unanticipated consequences also develop, and even as space constrains and influences those producing it.

‘Production’ also implies that space be considered analogous to other economic goods. The produced spatial ensemble - the built environment, the alterations in nature, the signs and symbols of landscape, the relations of particulars in the spatial field - can, among other things, be bought and sold. It makes up an important part of economies. Besides producing goods and services, economies produce spaces. Thus, the production and reproduction of Dharavi literally fills such a vision by locating itself, beyond its geographical location, in an economically-led transformation of space.

For Lefebvre space is not a mere container or milieu, as a kind of neutral setting in which life transpires, or a setting in that it is the obvious base upon which all activity must occur. Architecture, human densities and locational relations are a force in structuring what can be done in space itself. Walls and roads obviously privilege certain kinds of activities and inhibit others, support the projects of one type of actor and deter the goals of others. Beyond such material impediments are the symbols and styles that also influence behaviour: elements of monumental grandeur that disempower, varieties of endogenous architecture falsely imply real choice, monotonous cubes and towers that stultify rewarding forms of sociability. A space is thus neither merely a medium nor a list of ingredients, but an interlinking of geographic form, built environment, symbolic meanings, and routines of life. Ways of being and physical landscapes are of a piece, albeit one filled with tensions and competing versions of what a space should be. People fight not only over a piece of turf, but about the sort of reality that it constitutes. The struggle over Dharavi is exactly as expressed: a battle for survival of a reality. An existence.

A specific adoption in Dharavi of the production of space, in its integral reading, explains how competition over the production of space operates. A sort of master distinction is between those who produce a space for domination versus those who produce space as an appropriation to serve human need. In that respect the DRP envisions a spatial transformation from horizontal, low rise ‘slums’ to a high-rise podium style typology where residential units will be placed on the top floors of the buildings, while the commercial units will be located at the ground and first floor. The parking area will be on the third floor, just below the pedestrian only podium level. An emergent issue from this is how a monolithic typology can accommodate the daily needs of people and their aspirations for future (BUDD, 2009:24).

In domination, space is put to the service of some abstract purpose (hence, Lefebvre's phrase ‘abstract space’ to describe the result). This can be to facilitate state power (e.g., the Napoleonic version of Paris and other "phallic" displays) or, more pervasively, the reproduction of capital for the achievement of a neoliberal “Vision Mumbai”. In the instance of the latter, space is carved into real estate parcels for exchange in the market, cubes and volumes demarcated and partitioned so as to be interchangeable as commodities. The

resultant space represents the “triumph of homogeneity” (Lefebvre, 2003:337) and stands, both in its totality, as well as in its constituent parts as ‘product’. While acknowledging some benign intentions, Lefebvre condemns the modernist movement in general for using the “pretext that he was exposing (people) to open air and sunshine” (337) as a cover for a design arrogance in the service of capital.

Thus, alternatively “there is a politics of space because space is political” (Lefebvre, 1973:59; quoted in Elden, 2002), that is to say that not only do we struggle over space because it can be and is often a pricy commodity, but because a place or lack of place in a certain space has power effects. When we talk about the spatiality of something, anything, we are talking about the political dimensions of space that produced space.

Moreover, Lefebvre (1991:76) infers the risk that ideology contributes to urban spatial planning as a discourse and practice by illustrating how even in a capitalistic democratic society, the ideas and visions that shape spatial change in cities, “are often only reflective of the homogenic desires of conflicting, but dominant, privileged minorities”. These minorities possess access not merely to an economic and technical capacity but also the social networks and cultural influence to carry out spatial transformation, induced by their ideological perception of what the common vision should be. This perception is often in conflict with those of other diverse less empowered groups within society who may often constitute a majority of the urban population.

What is interesting in such spatiology is that the author demonstrates that space is not just produced materially, by political, economic and social forces, but that it is also produced by the ways we represent it, representations that in turn both disclose and conceal the ways in which we live our spatiality. Put more succinctly, space is produced on two registers simultaneously: it is a social product, that is to say, it is the concretion of a particular mode of production, while it is just the same, a mental product (Mendieta 2006).

#### *Spaces of rights: “The right to the city”*

The second theoretical pillar of contested urbanism, the *right to the city*, speaks to a radical shift in current modes of spatial production towards the engagement of all urban inhabitants in the development processes of the city in which they reside. While in recent years the term has become a catchphrase, frequently cited but generally not engaged in depth, at its core Lefebvre’s right to the city is a claim for the recognition of the urban as the (re)producer of social relations of power, and the right of *citadins* (urban inhabitants) to participate in this process of production (Dikeç and Gilbert, 2002: 65). It is less a juridical right, rather an oppositional demand, challenging claims of rich and powerful in their production of the city (Mayer, 2009:367).

Lefebvre’s *right to the city* emerged from critiques of functionalist and technocratic urbanisation processes in France in the 1960s and 1970s and of the welfare capitalist society as the “bureaucratic society of organised consumption” where needs are created and institutionalised (Lefebvre, 2003:337). Instead formulating the city as the right “to urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of...moments and places...” (Lefebvre, 1996: 179 as cited in Mitchell, 2003: 19), the use value of the city for urban inhabitants trumps capitalism’s focus on exchange value (Mitchell, 2003:19). As Harvey notes (2003:939) the right to the city is not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart’s desire, the right to remake ourselves by creating a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality. The production of urban space is thus not only about planning the material space of the city, but rather integrates the production and reproduction all aspects of urban life, including the right of appropriation, as manifested in claimed spaces in the city – such as Dharavi.

Since its formation over half a century ago, Dharavi's residents have appropriated the 239 hectares of urban space and in essence claimed their right to the city, a process that has grown out of struggle, adaptation and resilience, inventing new and innovative modes of living and of inhabiting. Indeed, no master plan, urban design, zoning ordinance or construction law can claim any stake in Dharavi's prosperity as it was built over many decades entirely by successive waves of immigrants fleeing rural poverty, political oppression and natural disasters (Echanove and Srivastava, 2009). Since the early 1990s, within the framework of the Government of Maharashtra's slum redevelopment schemes, many of Dharavi's residents have worked with the non-profit developer wing named NIRMAN of a grassroots and NGO grouping – the Alliance – in the production of their own slum rehabilitation housing. In these precedent-setting activities the Alliance sought to enable a bottom-up approach by directly engaging Dharavi's poor in urban development processes.

In recent years however, facing 'Dubai-fication' in the top-down, technocratic DRP process, Dharavi's designation as a special planning area in 2004 – a status that enables secretive modification of development control regulations – has thrust the reigns of Dharavi's development completely and utterly into the hands of the government and private sector. After subsequent years of bottom-up pressure tactics and struggles, including open letters to the government and to the media and peaceful protests from residents of Dharavi, charismatic leaders of prominent grassroots groups and NGOs and the Concerned Citizens of Dharavi (CCD), a space was made for institutional participation of grassroots groups when the CCD was sanctioned as an Expert Advisory Panel (EAP) in 2008. This Panel, an eleven-member group of activists, professionals, academics and retired civil servants, including members of the Alliance, chaired by the retired Chief Secretary of Maharashtra (Patel et. al., 2009:243), continues to struggle for the meaningful engagement of Dharavi's urban poor in the DRP.

Yet this case of highly contested urbanism is characterised by deeply conflicting visions between and even amidst actors, questioning movement or true engagement in real rights to the city for Dharavi's residents and how claims to this demand are effectively represented. The top-down government vision is clearly and profoundly embedded in a neoliberal trickle-down approach to development, where the DRP authority sees the project's objective as "their [Dharavi residents'] mass economic upliftment by providing better alternatives of living and business opportunities" in the belief that "upgradation can maybe take them (slum dwellers) into a world class city" (Chatterjee, 2009). The parallel claim by the DRP authority that they wish to "treat Dharavi's residents as partners in the project", to "involve people in decision-making" (Chatterjee, 2009) has to date been completely denied in practice, as no consultations or engagement of Dharavi's residents has been attempted – none even sit on the EAP, raising questions around their representation in the process. Furthermore even if engagement does occur it is questionable what will change, as the government has made clear in the past that while the outputs of studies and conversations would be considered, the project will fundamentally proceed as planned (Patel et. al., 2009:244).

The bottom-up vision – as manifested by members of the Alliance and the EAP – is more critical of the DRP, yet at the same time these actors maintain a close and highly strategic relationship with government bodies in order to function as facilitators between different institutional levels. While the EAP has successfully struggled for the adoption of urban design guidelines in the DRP and a socioeconomic baseline survey to be conducted in Dharavi, their vision and desire for an inclusive development process has been relegated towards making the DRP more 'humane' and to guide the developer to make the development more sensitive (Mendes, 2009; Adarkar, 2009). The DRP, with its five sectors, five developer futuristic top-down vision, is fundamentally proceeding as planned, with the EAP tweaking the edges. It can be argued that, since the year it has been in place, the EAP is emerging as a body legitimising a more 'gentle' neoliberal approach to Dharavi's development rather than being truly engaged in the production of space therein, clearly not pursuing a radical Lefebvrian right to the city.

In July 2009, however, the EAP released an open letter to the Government of Maharashtra

calling the DRP a “sophisticated land grab”, stating that “the correct solution to redeveloping Dharavi would be to give up the notion of making a profit out of it, either for the Government or for the builders, and to focus instead on the interests of the residents of Dharavi” (Committee of Experts, 2009). This latter shift in approach illustrates that the EAP as beginning to directly contest and challenge the neoliberal top-down approach, although is not at the level of Lefebvre’s radical conception that rethinks fundamental premises in capitalist social relations, such as ownership over urban space and who gives or how value is given to urban space. This reality is in part due to the outright rejection of several key players in the EAP – members of the Alliance – of a rights-based approach, in the belief that it is more effective to establish commonality of interest with the state in the furtherance of the strategic needs of the urban poor (Mitlin and Patel, 2005:24).

While the realisation of Lefebvre’s right to the city requires a radical restructuring of social, political, and economic relations, both in the city and beyond (Purcell, 2002: 103), the EAP does not challenge the fundamental base of the power of the state, but rather aligns with the way the right to the city is manifested in practice by grassroots groups across the world, in essence modifying the political content and meaning of the contested term (Mayer, 2009). The EAP is thus offering a *development alternative* rather than a form of *alternative development* (McFarlane, 2004:910), where the first provides strategies that seek to change and refine development positions and offer different perspectives within the frame of the DRP, and the latter seeks to redefine development altogether.

What strategies then, in this complex and highly contested case of urbanism, are most effective to claim the right to the city, and can this be achieved through a collaborative approach and/or radical claims towards these rights? As Roy (2009a:176), posits, will demanding rights through ‘rebellious citizenship’ ensure the right to the production of space for the urban poor, or will it leave them without access to the infrastructure of populist mediation and its regulated entitlements? The one issue that is clear movement towards greater equity and justice for the urban poor in Dharavi in this contested urbanism requires persistent and continued struggle.

### *Spaces of Modernisation and Critical Regionalism*

These “triumph of homogeneity” and “space as commodity” concepts, resulting from a certain misdirection of power witnessed, for example, in the DRP vision, is a fundamental threat facing re-development schemes across contexts. Recalling the parallel utopian ideals of the modernist movement, mention has been made of Lefebvre’s condemnation of such abstraction and domination of space for capital gain rather than appropriating for human needs. Famously, Lewis Mumford (1947) too had questioned the sterile, abstract modernism characterised by the so-called “form follows function” slogan (popularised, though never subscribed to by Louis Sullivan). The rigorists, according to Mumford, “placed the mechanical functions of a building above its human person who was to occupy it- instead of regarding engineering as foundation for form, they treated it as an end” (ibid.). In comparison to Le Corbusier’s *Ville Radieuse*, with its uber-rigid grid of tower blocks and network of thoroughfares, the ‘tower block-on plinth’ typology of the current DRP likewise signifies a deafening of evolutionary human driven development. Along these lines, Barthes (1997) has pointed to growing awareness in the functionality of symbols (in this case the tower grid) within urban space and the tendency of simulation among planners.

Stemming from the existence of what Castells (1984) labelled a global “space of flows”, these schemes are essentially relegating “spaces of meanings” to localised ‘micro-territories’- giving people no choice but to surrender or react on the basis of the most immediate source of self-recognition and autonomous organisation, namely their locality (Voisey and O’Riordan, 2001: 72-3), as manifested in claims towards the right to the city. In many cases the failures of progressive social movements to counter economic exploitation, cultural domination, and politically oppressive actions has allowed plans like the DRP to manifest and sustain energy.

However, it would be fair to note that in the case of Mumbai and Dharavi, there have been legitimate degrees of opposition represented in general by the Alliance and perhaps most vocally through rallies by the one of its members, the National Slum Dwellers Federation.

In response to globalisation, Harvey is more pragmatic and optimistic. In acknowledging the global as a top-down, anthropomorphised capital restructuring, he suggests an opposing duality where the local is the site of “place-bound identities and a reactionary politics of aestheticised spatiality” (1989:305). However, referencing a prior allude to Foucault (2003), people in slums are unlikely to have enough capability to exercise liberating power alone and from within the slum. By Ricoeur’s (2007) account, this incapacity is the root of the problem confronting areas rising from underdevelopment. The “apocalyptic thrust of modernisation” associated with a universal commonality of political and man’s own rationale and universal modes of living has ushered a rapacity of development that, although progressive, has stifled the creative and mytho-ethical nucleus of older societies (Ricoeur, 2007; Frampton, 1998). In order to get onto the road toward modernisation, is it necessary to jettison the old cultural past? Herein lies the paradox for Dharavi within the broader context of Mumbai and beyond: “how to become modern and to return to sources: how to revive an old, dormant civilisation and take part in universal civilisation” (ibid:47).

The symbols of “modern” redevelopment are already randomly mushrooming throughout Dharavi in the form of “in-situ” housing blocks. Two examples of these in-situ housing projects essentially became the focus of analysis for the DPU students. Initiated by the Mumbai-based organisation named the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centre (SPARC), a key member of the Alliance, the Rajiv Indira and Bharat Janata Cooperative Housing Societies are pillars of the efforts to take Dharavi vertical, alleviating the organic density and squalor of the low rise hutment dwellings that characterise the area. Formed in 1995 by fifty-four families, Rajiv Indira would combine with two other housing societies by 1999, eventually representing a combined 209 families earmarked for rehabilitation shelter. Partnering with the Suryodaya Society held greater urban significance beyond the added human accountability as this group had access to a private road that connected the Rajiv Indira site to the ‘ring roads’ of Dharavi and the rest of Mumbai. Operated by a leather factory enterprise, the owner argued with much reluctance against newfound unlimited access for vehicular and pedestrian traffic as a result of new development, thus prolonging the progress. However, this society partnership allowed the project to move forward and by 2002, five apartment blocks were built, three of which housed community members in tenements of 225 square feet and two buildings sold back onto the market to recoup costs and generate profits for future projects- a concept referred to as ‘transferable development rights’ (Mukhija, 2003; Nijman, 2008; Homeless International, 2009).

The Bharat Janata project was initiated as far back as 1991, however today only three of the proposed five buildings have been constructed. Two of the buildings are completely rehabilitation housing while a third is composite rehabilitation/market sale. Overall 142 households are due to be re-housed along with 14 ‘project-affected persons’ who have agreed to give up their dwellings for the construction of public toilet blocks and other utility infrastructure. Much can be said about the longevity and timeframe of projects of this experimental nature and scale in an informal area like Dharavi. A major reason for the delay in this case was faulty housing surveys by representatives of the Slum Rehabilitation Act (SRA) and the fact that official documents have to be signed by 70% of considered slum dwellers agreeing to the project for it to commence. Another possibly indirect causal factor is that in terms of urban locale, unlike Rajiv Indira, the Bharat Janata settlement sits in the middle of Dharavi, thus lacking ideal commercial market advantage and accessibility.

Called into question within these new developments, apart from the structural integrity, architectural aesthetic of the buildings, and contextual urban connections, is the impact and ramifications on people’s livelihoods. An innovative feature incorporated into the Rajiv Indira project was that of the 14 foot high loft space which enabled the delineation and privacy of separate space in multiple member households as well as space to facilitate any home-based

business activity. But due to cost-cutting concerns the SRA discontinued the 14 foot loft within its policy.

Alongside certain livelihood implications, further analysis revealed additional issues regarding social networks and the use of communal space in and around the buildings. Physical layouts of the older dwellings were more conducive to socialising as doors and windows faced the street, always open, allowing for spontaneous, frequent, and dynamic interaction. Although quality of life due to the newly built shelter has improved in both projects, relationships between neighbours were weakened as lives became more individualistic, as people prefer convening only on the ground floor rather than utilising generous common corridor spaces throughout the buildings. If preferring to congregate mainly on the ground floor, the residents were gifted with ample exterior space adjacent to the building. Observational analysis and interviews revealed that the space was poorly designed and regulated, if designed at all. Due to lack of directional intent or strategic flexibility, these spaces often become grounds for dumping trash or hazardous areas used for children's play. The overarching concern witnessed at both Rajiv Indira and Bharat Janata is that the diversity of activities and the multiplicity of uses, whether interior or exterior, in terms of functionality, facility, and design, are not recognised by the SRA policies. After all, people and place constitute the primary foci of the event, suggesting the critical point of urban production as being a predominantly human experience within a complementary environment.

Here, the idea of sustaining livelihood and social interaction should be added to the challenge of becoming "modern" while retaining cultural strengths. Despite the grassroots efforts of local citizens and the few organisations that have rallied them, it is the convictions and methods used by authorities and practitioners that can lead to a holistic evolution of the area. One method that can be considered for adoption in negotiations between the top-down neoliberal Mumbai visions, including the DRP, and the needs and aspirations of locals, is the concept of 'Critical Regionalism'.

Under this paradigm, a clear path is cut between the homogenisation of modernist symbolic tendencies and the illusionary recall of culturally irrelevant fantasies of locality (Sorkin, 2004). Coined as a term by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, Critical Regionalism was adopted from the many musings of Lewis Mumford in his rebuttals against absolute modernism. However, just as the vertical nature of 'in-situ' redevelopment in Dharavi does not lack complete impractical merit for appropriately resolving squalor and density issues, modernism, according to Mumford, was not meant to be cast aside. Modernism, in the architectural sense, and globalisation in the broad sense were synonymous with advances in technology. In efforts towards progressive growth, buildings should make use of the latest technology of the day, as long as it is functionally optimal and sustainable (Lefaivre, 2003). In terms of the past, older forms of regionalism leaned more towards historicism and romanticism, conjuring up sentiment for the yesterday through surface ornamentation and naïve detailing. Mumford's convinced version of the concept rejected the absolutism of history and the mimicking of old buildings when producing the new structures. In the case of Dharavi, aside from the intrigue of evolutionary organic constructs of dwellings and space, many of the structures are irrevocably poor in structural sustainability, leaving them vulnerable to monsoons, fire and the random demolition by authority. A critical approach that merges technology, flexible planning and use – themes of a critical regionalism – could be a solution towards appropriate development.

Architecture (and urban form) is not merely a means to shelter people, nor should it be seen as the picturesque notion of life. Rather it is an effort to reflect and enhance the purposes and ideals which characterise a particular age and people (Lefaivre, 2003). According to Mumford (1946), this takes place in meeting the practical demands of an environment modified for human use- but the modifications must serve something more than immediate needs. They should "testify to the degree of order, of co-operation, of intelligence, of sensitiveness, that characterises community" (Mumford as qtd. in Lefaivre, 2003:38). In Dharavi and Mumbai, the new housing built either "in-situ" as in Bharat Janata and Rajiv Indira, or as relocation

environments constitutes mainly rapid solutions *sans* the involvement or appropriation of community need. While the buildings themselves are more substantial structurally, although time will tell the truth of this, the choice of immediate function over sustained value added mechanism is only delivering false commodity to citizens.

So far these projects are the only opposition to the mega-block typology of the DRP. In efforts to turn attention away from such top-down plans and to uphold the individual and local architectonic against more universal and abstract ones, critical methods of modernisation alongside local particulars must emerge. However, no new architecture can emerge without new relationships between designer and user. Despite limitations faced, critical regionalism is a bridge over which any future humanistic architecture future should pass.

## **Dharavi, the heart of Mumbai: spatial tensions**

The spatial tensions between top-down urban strategies and bottom up tactics of spatial adaptations and urban activism were substantiated by the MSc Building and Urban Design in Development (University College of London's Development Planning Unit) students in an intensive three-week field study (May 2009) in collaboration with the Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute For Architecture (KRVA), the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF). Exploring the contested megalopolis that is Mumbai - on one hand India's financial capital, on the other a city in which half the residents live in informal settlements: a "Maximum City" (Mehta, 2005) - urban analysis and numerous interviews specifically focused on, specifically focused on unpacking the complex and multiple nature of the work-live environment of Dharavi, both at the commercial level as well as at the level of the home-based activities. Mapping, spatial analysis, livelihoods profiles and different diagrammatic tools were developed to render the unique nature of Dharavi evident and communicable. At the same time the fieldwork enabled a better understanding of the urban forms present in Dharavi, and of their association with different uses and social interactions especially in relation to multi-functional open spaces, organic clusters and incremental evolution of the built form; adding storey to the ground level to accommodate changing needs at the family and at the community level.

The findings of the study indicate a clear disconnect between the proposed plan for the redevelopment and the current situation of the stakeholders most affected by the process: the citizens of Dharavi. The students' analysis directly informed their recommendations which come in the form of development scenarios, each containing various proposals that reconcile their findings to different visions for Dharavi. In conceding to the guidelines of the DRP, the Scenario 1 highlighted the need for greater transparency and citizen involvement. Asserting critically responsive alternatives, it offers a more plural and adaptive approach to housing provision, enabling people through transformation of social well-being and livelihoods. On the hand Scenario 2, in keeping certain policy provisions, departed dramatically from the DRP. Eschewing the homogeneous podium-tower typology and five-sector zoning, it contains a more complex urban proposal, suggesting a range of architectural, morphological and functional options that highlight specific conditions and emotional attachment of residents as well as established historical quarters. These scenarios were created in recognition of the diversity of stakeholders involved in the DRP process, including the Expert Advisory Panel as the prime civil society representative body, in order to offer new options and perspectives and support continuous and incremental negotiations.

## **Beyond conclusions**

Mumbai and Dharavi have lived under a microscope of analysis and study since the early 1990s. A multitude of institutions, organisations and professionals offering services and producing alternative visions amplifies daily both in academia as well as in the blogosphere. In fact, the exercise marks the fourth consecutive year the Development Planning Unit has

conducted research in the city. It can easily be said that Dharavi is in itself becoming a concept resource model, representing contested urbanism and the general subject of slum upgrading and redevelopment. Just as Los Angeles and Las Vegas have become urban ideologies, through Mike Davis's *City of Quartz* and Venturi's *Learning from Las Vegas*, so too has Mumbai (Dharavi) become an international breeding ground for debate and research. This argument also manifests in the recent release of the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, where a world audience now has a hyper image mechanism and conversation piece to attach with the concept of slum and the city of Mumbai.

Despite Dharavi's fertility in containing the complexities and contradictions that appeal conceptually to professionals and academics alike, we must not forget that it is a living, breathing place- the truth revealed in its extreme situation of conflict. Its nature as a resource parallels the struggles of daily survival, the necessity for attention and solutions that can humanise conditions that are anything but.

The MSc Building and Urban Design in Development student's work clearly illustrates that there is much more to Dharavi than its poverty-stricken imagination, as it flourishes with economic richness, communal and family oriented networks, which breathe and sustain a diversity of life into the area. In this case Dharavi's redevelopment needs to find an appropriate balance to inform both experience and subsequent proposals that will lead to inclusive transformative outcomes for individuals and the city as a whole. As mentioned, a critical regionalist approach to architectural and urban production could ensure a kind of balance between the diverse desires of the people and the need to formally upgrade infrastructures and living conditions while realising the rights of citizens to participate in the production of Mumbai. In engaging the currently marginalised residents of Dharavi in the process, equilibrium and critical awareness needs to be sought between providing a *development alternative* or a form of *alternative development* (McFarlane, 2004:910), consciously working within the system or seeking to radically restructure of social, political, and economic relations in the city and beyond.

While at present there appears to be a disjunction between grand expectations and acknowledged reality, the conceptual analytical neologism of "contested urbanism" has proven to be fundamental in depicting the material-discursive dynamics in the formation, transformation and representation of social civil movement struggles over space. The "redevelopment opportunities" as witnessed through the DRP provide a platform for a productive discourse on informality to emerge – particularly its assets and value to be mapped and appreciated within the canonical theories of architecture and urbanism. This could re-politicise informality to reveal the importance of the futures of Dharavi and other "states of informalities" (Roy, 2009b).

While the by-product of this attention may be increased knowledge of informality, is it in the social struggles of the contested urbanisms that reside an opportunity to create new drivers of knowledge production – new priorities that fuel urban research and professional practice able to make "that crucial passage from protest to project" (Rykwert, 2002:246).

Such "passages" reinforce the idea that design involves satisfying material needs and resolving competing social requirements through a process of active participation by the occupants and the mediation of "professionals" (Boano, 2010). Thus, the design process is simultaneously the production of physical form, the creation of social, cultural and symbolic resources, and also, critically, the outcome of a facilitative process, in which enablement become a central idea. Such an approach fundamentally repositions the role of the architect. They are not, in Roy's (2006:21) pointed phrase, the "innocent professionals", but involved in a process which requires them to reflect upon what they produce through a contested vision of urbanism.

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