Mumbai: Planning Challenges for the Compact City

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This paper is an attempt to capture the lessons which the particular condition of Mumbai offers to the thinking on urbanism generally. More particularly, it builds a case to argue that the compact city in the case of Mumbai goes beyond its formal or informal manifestations and can be understood as a hybrid condition: the Kinetic City. A condition which transgresses economic exchange as the sole criteria for discussing if a city and its urban form are sustainable. The paper suggests equity, density and democracy could be simultaneously considered – if a city like Mumbai, has to be imagined as a sustainable entity.

1 Informal city: compact and economically efficient

Informality is a state of being that is outside the formal or often implied legal system. This term perhaps originated in its use in economics and was extended to the physical manifestation of this fringe condition in the form of the informal city; a response to what the formal system could not deliver. Historically and largely starting in the 1950’s as the critical mass of the “informal city” globally increased, it was sharply juxtaposed in the form of a binary with the formal city. While these were totally interdependent in their evolving relationship, the economic and physical characteristics of each of these worlds were well-identified and tied in space and physical manifestation. The cast of characters that engaged in the informal economy were imagined to most often reside in the informal city and vice versa. In the messy, mutinous democratic condition of Mumbai, and most parts of India, this is not such a neat relationship. In Mumbai often people employed in the formal sector reside in the informal city and vice versa.

But while the densities of the informal and formal cities are similar, the informal city has come to epitomize the dense and compact city and is celebrated for its economic efficiency as well as humanity in the face of the extreme conditions of the challenges of sanitation and other infrastructural needs. It is for this reason that Mumbai has been at the centre of the world’s imaginations in the last few years for all the wrong reasons! While its economic energy has been celebrated, what has not been adequately articulated is its failure to cope with infrastructure, housing and governance. The manifestations of these failures in the form of slums, the informal city, garbage on the streets, squeezed space; bizarre adjacencies have in a strange way become the new mythical images through which the city is celebrated globally! Interestingly, architects and designers are pandering to this abject failure through its representation in different media – installations, writing, photography and of course films! The fetishizing of this condition has shifted the gaze in recent years to planning strategies of incremental growth and improvement and upgrading of the present conditions in the existing built environment rather than speculating about the opening up of land or other urban centres to disperse growth.

Over the last three decades in Mumbai, planning has largely been about rear-guard actions versus the avant-garde approaches that have traditionally led planning. Thus today most infrastructure follows city growth rather than leading development by facilitating and opening up new growth centres within and outside the city. Planning in contemporary Mumbai is systematically “posterior” as a recuperative and securing action. And like the narratives that developed around the preservation debate that froze architects and planners into inaction, these new descriptions and re-descriptions of the informal city are creating a similar paralysis! Of course the critical question becomes – how do we spatially and physically covert this supposedly wonderful energy and innovation that the informal city produces into a just, equitable and humane environment?

Mumbai (as it is now referred to), in the post-industrial scenario, like several cities in India, has become a critical site for negotiation between elite and subaltern cultures. The fragmentation of service and production locations has resulted in a new, bazaar-like urbanism, which has woven its presence through the entire urban landscape. This is an urbanism created by those outside the elite domains of the formal modernity of the state. It is a “pirate” modernity that slips under the laws of the city to simply survive, without any conscious attempt at constructing a counterculture.

This phenomenon is critical to the city being connected to the global economy. However, the spaces it creates have been largely excluded from the cultural discourses on globalization, which focus on elite domains of production in the city. It is not the regular models of the formal and informal and other such binaries (often used to explain cities developing in South and Central America, Asia and Africa) but it
is a Kinetic space, a space where these models collapse into singular entities, where meanings are ever shifting and blurred.

This is a hybrid form of urbanism where the “images” of the formal (represented in permanent structure and infrastructure) coalesce in the same space with the temporal landscapes of the informal. But critically these don’t define mutually exclusive economic classes. The rich, poor and middle class all use both of these landscapes simultaneously – to live, celebrate and most importantly for economic exchange.

2 Kinetic city: hybrid urban space

Today, Mumbai and most Indian cities are not the static and stable entities that we have always imagined cities to be – physical constructs where stable meanings are contained in architecture that then becomes the spectacle of the city – where the memory of the city is encoded and contained. Instead, Mumbai should more appropriately be described as a Kinetic City, a bazaar city. A city not perceived by architecture or cohesive urban design gestures, but by spaces, which hold associative values and are supportive of lives. Patterns of occupation determine its form and perception. It is an indigenous urbanism that has its particular “local” logic. It is not necessarily the city of the poor, as most images might suggest; rather it is a temporal articulation and occupation of space which not only creates a richer sensibility of spatial occupation, but also suggests how spatial limits are expanded to include formally unimagined uses in dense urban conditions.

The Kinetic City presents a compelling vision that potentially allows us to better understand the blurred lines of contemporary urbanism and the changing roles of people and spaces in urban society. The increasing concentrations of global flows have heightened the inequalities and spatial divisions of social classes. In this context, an architecture or urbanism of equality in an increasingly inequitable economic condition requires looking deeper to find a wide range of places to mark and commemorate the cultures of those excluded from the spaces of global flows. These don’t necessarily lie in the formal production of architecture, but often challenge it. Here the idea of a city is an elastic urban condition, not a grand vision, but a “grand adjustment”.

So, the Kinetic City, bazaar-like in form, can be seen as the symbolic image of the emerging urban Indian condition. The processions, weddings, festivals, hawkers, street vendors and slum dwellers create an ever-transforming streetscape – a city in constant motion where the very physical fabric is characterized by the kinetic. The Static City, on the other hand, dependent on architecture for its representation is no longer the single image by which the city is read. Thus architecture is not the “spectacle” of the city nor does it even comprise the single dominant image of the city. In contrast, festivals such as Diwali, Dussera, Navrathri, Muhharam, Durga Puja, Ganesh Chathurthi and many more, have emerged as the spectacles of the Kinetic City. Their presence on the everyday landscape pervades and dominates the popular visual culture of Indian cities.

Festivals create a forum through which the fantasies of the subalterns are articulated and even organized into political action.
In Mumbai for example, the popularity and growth of the Ganesh festival has been phenomenal. During the festival, which occurs in August or September, numerous neighbourhoods transform temporarily with lights and decoration. New spaces are created to house the idol of Ganesh for ten days. During this festival period, the entire city at all scales (family, neighbourhood and city events) marks the celebrations. On the last day a large part of the city’s population carries the idol in long processions ultimately to be immersed in the sea.
Immersion becomes a metaphor for the spectacle of the city. As the clay idol dissolves in the water of the bay, the spectacle comes to a close. There are no static or permanent mechanisms to encode this spectacle. Here the memory of the city is an “enacted” process – a temporal moment as opposed to buildings that contain the public memory as a static or permanent entity.

The city and its architecture are not synonymous and cannot contain a single meaning. Within the Kinetic City, meanings are not stable; spaces get consumed, reinterpreted and recycled. The Kinetic City recycles the Static City to create a new spectacle.

2.1 Economy

Clearly the Static and Kinetic Cities go beyond their obvious differences to establish a much richer relationship both spatially and metaphorically than their physical manifestations would suggest. The dabbawalas (literally translated as “tiffin men”) are an example of this relationship between the formal and informal that blur in the landscape of the Kinetic City. The tiffin delivery service, which relies on the train system for transportation, costs approx Rs 200 (four dollars) per month. A dabbawala picks up a lunch tiffin from a house anywhere in the city; he then delivers the tiffin through a complex system to one’s place of work by lunchtime and returns it to the house later in the day.

The dabbawalas deliver hundreds of thousands of lunch boxes every day. The efficiency of Mumbai’s train system, the spine of the linear city, enables the complex informal system to work. The dabbawalas have innovatively set up a network that facilitates an informal system to take advantage of a formal infrastructure. The network involves the dabba or tiffin being exchanged up to four or five times between its pickup and return to the house in the evening. The average box travels about 30 kms each way. It is estimated that around 200,000 boxes are delivered around the city per day involving approx 4500 dabbawalas. In economic terms, the annual turnover amounts to roughly 50 million rupees or about one million US dollars.

Entrepreneurship in the Kinetic City is an autonomous and oral process that demonstrates the ability to fold the formal and informal into a symbiotic relationship. The dabbawala, like several other informal services that range from banking, money transfer, courier, to electronic bazaars, leverage community relationships and networks and deftly use the Static City and its infrastructure beyond its intended margins. These networks create a synergy that depends on mutual integration without the obsession of formalized structures.
2.2 Housing
For some issues, such as housing, the relationship between the formal and informal is not so seamlessly integrated – while it operates efficiently its physical manifestations are more disruptive. In fact the issue of housing most vividly demonstrates the reordering process of the informal city by the formal or Static City. In Mumbai, for example, approximately 60% of the city’s population does not have access to formal housing. This population lives on approximately 10% of the city’s land in settlements that are locally referred to as slums. It is believed that about 70% of the city’s population works in the informal sector. This number has risen with the new liberal economy that curtails bargaining capacity through fragmenting labour in the cities. Despite its informal nature, this population’s productivity allows Mumbai to be somewhat competitive on a global scale.
Besides, the lack of access to basic infrastructure (like water, sewage etc.) flow, instability and indeterminacy are basic to the informal city. Regular demolitions heighten the tenuous occupation of land by the inhabitants of these settlements. The demolitions inhibit any investment the occupants might make in their physical living conditions. Thus the informal city is a fluid and dynamic city that is mobile and temporal (often as a strategy to defeat eviction) and leaves no ruins. It constantly recycles its resources leveraging great effect and presence with very little means.

This only heightens the growing contradictions in the islands of increasing concentration of wealth manifest physically in the gated communities throughout the city and the edge city suburbs. The popular metaphorical reference to “making Mumbai Shanghai, or Dubai or Singapore” is emblematic of the one-dimensional imagination that planners and politicians bring to bear on decisions about the city’s development and more importantly physical form. Of creating a brittle urban form that does not facilitate social resolution but rather separation. An obvious extension of the Shanghai metaphor is the notion of remaking the city in a singular image and using architecture as the spectacle to represent a global aspiration. Such global implications also raise political questions that challenge the democratic processes of city governance.10

2.3 Governance
This question is directly linked to the processes by which the city is made. The making of the city is perhaps most critical when negotiating in the hybrid urbanism of the Kinetic City; for it is also an effective point of intervention. Through the city-making process, globalization and its particular transgressions in the
urban landscape are realized, but it is also how the Kinetic City can simultaneously resist or participate in processes as well as an economy of globalization as well as reconfigure itself socially, culturally and spatially.

The growing movement of slum associations and networks in Mumbai is a potent illustration of these points of effective intervention. These associations engage with the formal world of the Static City while mediating the inherent contradictions of issues of legality, informality and the mobile and temporal strategies of the Kinetic City. The most celebrated of these movements is the alliance between an NGO, The Society for the Promotion of Area Resources (SPAARC), a CBO, The National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF), and the Mahila Milan, an organization of poor women. This alliance is essentially united on its concerns for securing land and access to urban infrastructure. It has successfully negotiated between the formal and informal worlds in the city and across national boundaries with a network of other alliances working with slum dwellers around the world.

Besides representing efforts to reconstitute citizenship in cities, these efforts form a model that produces communities able to engage in partnership with more powerful agencies – urban, regional, national and multilateral. It is through this restructuring of the city-making process that the formal and the informal cities can begin to engage with the questions of physical adjacencies and better engage the inhabitants of the city at large.11

2.4 Density

What really makes this condition of extreme urbanism in the Kinetic City unique in some ways is that it is characterized by acute density and inequity in its spatial form and set in a democracy. Inequity often dissolves in a condition of high density. People make space elastic and the difference between the rich and poor dissipate as the porosity between territories is heightened and exaggerated. Of course rules exist for the interpenetration and the times when this can happen are predetermined.

Density and inequity as a combination, force us to re-imagine the idea of a sustainable city in the context of its efficiency for economic exchange and who benefits from this condition. Are the poor really upwardly mobile in this condition of density and inequity? Essentially in a condition of density people are known to be more accommodating.

The interdependency of people in space they share throws up many forms of what in India is referred to as “adjustments” in Mumbai parlance.12 This culture of accommodation then naturally creates forms of efficiencies that make the urban system productive. But the down side of this internal complexity is that the mechanism also becomes more and more susceptible to malfunction and irresolvable conflict and thus not sustainable.

Thus this raises the question of the advantages and disadvantages of the compact or dense city and what might be the appropriate densities for cities to be productive? This however is a difficult if not impossible question to answer given the shifting nature of the urban landscape or kinetic urbanism. The more interesting and perhaps the more difficult challenge is to deal with density and democracy and the question of equity simultaneously in compact cities. The failure of the delivery of the access to land, infrastructure and the impulse to go soft on city orchestration questions has resulted in an urbanism in cities like Mumbai that is referred to as the informal city or slums - compact settlements no doubt. This is essentially an emblematic manifestation of severe inequalities and in the process challenges the sustainable dimension of compact cities where equity cannot become effective.

Density is also something for which we don’t have the appropriate metrics. Density of urban form (measured in terms of floor area ratio) often has nothing to do with intensity of use. Thus the illusion of density and that of equity are often red herring in our discussions about the compact city and its failure to provide equitable access to infrastructure (sanitation, water and mobility) to most of its population.13

Furthermore today, especially in the global south or “majority world”14 we must judge a city by the way the poor live or how the city treats its poor. It is a fundamental criterion for applying any global standards of sustainability or efficiency. Again we don’t seem to have the appropriate metrics for these measures except by sometimes celebrating “best practices” – a usually un-useful category of the declarative mode.15 Pluralism of demography, urban form and their coexistence is inevitable in a democracy – and probably the collisions between these differing forms of urbanism in close adjacency also inevitable. Thus dissipating these polarities and softening thresholds between these disparate forms of urbanism is the real design challenge! Facilitating the connections and networks between disparate forms is one way to facilitate these synergetic dependencies. And it is here that infrastructure related to mobility, water, sanitation becomes the form of intervention, which can be seen as a common denominator!

3 Post Planning

How then does the city like Mumbai position itself to grapple with this condition especially during a period of India’s economic liberalisation?16 A phase in which commercial gains and obsessions about the economy of the city are not only taking precedence over everything else, but, in fact, are also challenging and actually erasing all traditional planning processes. The term “post-planning”, coined by Chinese art critic, Hou Hanru, seems appropriate in describing the condition of Mumbai. This is a situation where any
planning is systematically “posterior” – as a recuperative and securing action. In this post-planning condition, economies and profits are the central players. They have clearly replaced traditional ideological, social, environmental, historical and aesthetic elements as the main driving forces behind the creation and expansion of cities. In this condition then, citizens have to confront urgent questions of instability, indecision, changeability and survival, while established social and urban fabrics are continuously being deconstructed and reorganised at an alarming rate. In the process, major urban interventions have often resulted in dramatic, chaotic and unexpected visual arrangements – a new emergent landscape.

As a result of this shift in Mumbai over the last four decades, planning has largely been about rear-guard actions versus the avant-garde actions that have traditionally led planning. The city has become internally more complex, dense without diversifying into more robust modes both physically as well economically. What then are the challenges facing Mumbai today? Perhaps the effects of globalisation and the urgency of integrating with a broader economic system, have completely changed the priorities of the governing authorities that are responsible for making the city? Their mandate (encouraged by commercial interests such as the Chambers of Commerce, Bombay First, etc.) is about the need for this integration to very quickly become part of a global urban economic order!

The Singapore architect, William Lim, describes this phenomenon that has swept several Asian cities, and refers to these cities as being “Shanghaied”! Here, the metaphor of Shanghai (in India it used to be Singapore in the 1990’s) as a city that has effectively and with great speed transformed its urban landscape to embrace a global economy is one that politicians in Mumbai use as their benchmark for progress. Ironically, the use of this metaphor is blind to the crucial fact that it grows out of a political system that is far removed from the democracy that India is fundamentally steeped in.17

In any case, it is useful to look at the patterns that characterise this process of being “Shanghaied”. The first critical move is the radical transformation in the city’s physical arrangement, to make it viable for exchange and flow of capital. The usual pattern (in the global context) is the introduction of new highways, airports, stations, corporate hotels, convention centres and malls as part of the necessary kit for a territory to be integrated in the global order. Once this phase is completed, the next wave usually comprises of infrastructure which is deployed to remain competitive: progressive urban regulations with inclusive protection of historic buildings, creation or refurbishment of parks, promenades and museums, are all kicked into place to demonstrate further compliance with culture and international standards.

Planners, Architects and NGOs get involved in this process in a variety of ways and generally in three phases with various forms of overlap. First, to be partners in a clean-up operation, to relocate slums, fix up sidewalks, street furniture and restore heritage buildings. Once some infrastructure is in place, politicians demonstrate that the city is ripe for foreign investment. Planning agencies, which have by now devolved their planning powers and responsibilities, float global tenders and call in multinational consultants as well as some international architects to demonstrate their concern for sophistication. These agencies essentially become middlemen in this process of privatising the delivery system for urban amenities.

The third phase is generally driven by a group of relatively young entrepreneurs, who are able to integrate global practices with local specificities. These agents are well educated, curate an extensive international network and engage with contemporary debates and technologies. They have access to capital in the global market and are in demand to represent foreign investments in the locale. This is a sort of cyclic motion with all phases reinforcing each other.18 All these moves unfortunately are rear-garde actions – responding to conditions and opportunities that are usually propelled by the impatience of global capital.

The result of rear-garde action in the planning culture of a city is that it also very quickly spirals into a process of what could be called incursion – a process where more happens on limited space and the urban mechanism becomes internally more complex. Economically, this urban condition is usually more efficient but also highly susceptible to malfunction in terms of the breakdown of basic urban services. Mumbai’s present state is characterized by this condition. The densification of population and infrastructure in the same physical space has resulted in uncomfortable adjacencies. Similarly the much celebrated slum called Dharavi in Mumbai as a physical plant is emblematic of this evolutionary process. A dense and compact physical plant; one that is efficient and a crucible for economic activity especially for the poor and the middle class. But one where the physical state of the city is in a dystrophic condition with poor sanitation and access to infrastructure together with a fuzziness of land ownership titles and dysfunctional land markets – clearly not a sustainable condition.19

On other end of this spectrum in the imagination of the city is the idea of the evolutionary or avant-garde planning gestures. Here the imagination of the city is not limited in physical space but encompasses the metropolitan region, the hinterland and even the territory of the nation state, an imagination that has become more and more distant in the culture of planning in Mumbai. Cities grow and evolve either by opening up new land for growth or recycling land within their domains. This is a condition that cannot be denied as is crucial to the city diversifying into more dynamic modes both in terms of its economy but also its urban form. By opening up serviced urban land, like the Idea of Navi Mumbai and resultant creation of a metropolitan region20, many more opportunities open up for housing as well as new modes of governance. It is with this new imagination or potential to plan that it is even possible to address
the questions of density, equity, democracy and economy simultaneously. One such example is the project for housing in Belapur by Charles Correa. Most importantly it demonstrates the possibilities of compact urban form set in the boarder metropolitan imagination!

This housing project, designed for CIDCO (the planning authority for Navi Mumbai) in 1985, picks up on both the questions of equity and density in a design proposition. Here equity is treated as a fundamental parameter for potentially neutralizing the polarity that exists in cities like Mumbai. More importantly the project shifts its emphasis on site planning and to creating the spaces for negotiations, porous separation as well as hierarchies that can help form neighbourhoods. It squarely addresses the question of the unsettled nature of our cities and anticipates change in our shifting demographic condition. In the words of the designer Charles Correa: “a policy of Equity Plots would have the added advantage of not pre-determining social and economic mix in the neighbourhood, or across the city. Most planning today, no matter how liberated its intentions ends up with a rigid caste system of residential areas – as witness Chandigarh. The reason for this is simple. Since the plots are of vastly different sizes, the planners have to decide about their positioning within a sector, ahead of time. In such a situation, there is no way a planner can place the clerks’ houses cheek-by-jowl with the Ministers; and once the plan is implemented on site, the pattern cannot be changed. So we get cities which are rigid and inflexible, and do not respond to the social forces which are constantly at work, and which make older “un-designed” urban centres such an organic mix of income groups and communities.”

The project achieves a density of approximately 500 people per hectare or 100 families. On a 6 hectares site approximately 600 units are accommodated. Each cluster permits the emergence of a hyper-local community feeling, while integrating each house to the whole settlement at different levels; the hierarchy itself is very organic. The project was produced with the idea that the residents were going to alter it in various ways, making it truly their own, therefore homes are freestanding, so residents can add on to them as their families grow; and differently priced plans appeal to a wide variety of income levels. In the process of its incremental nature the project has also produced a fair amount of jobs in the construction sector with small scale artisans participating in the process of the construction work.
The most important take away from the project however is twofold. Firstly it allows for a demographic mix and homes to grow based on income – incrementally. A mix such as this make for more sustainable communities and introduces the social as a critical factor in any determination of what might be a sustainable city. Secondly, the project shows the rich possibilities for design when there is a shift in the frame or scale of our gaze and the “compact” can also find a place in the broader regional planning dimension. Here the location and access to public transportation also demonstrates the crucial role that it can play in determining urban form. In fact, as illustrated by this project, public transportation is probably the best form of indirect subsidy on housing. For, it opens up affordable land in the region and in the process opening up new possibilities for an array of housing types. Thus resituating and giving architecture agency in the planning of the city.

4 Learning from Mumbai

The particular urbanism of Mumbai makes it an ever shifting landscape and not a static entity. In spite of these many evident disjunctures, what this reading of the city does is celebrate the dynamic and pluralist processes that are intrinsic to the urban culture of a place like Mumbai. Within this urbanism, the formal and the informal cities necessarily coexist and blur into an integral entity – the Kinetic City, even if momentarily, to create the margins for adjustment that their simultaneous existences demand. In fact the urbanism of Mumbai represents a fascinating intersection where the informal city – physically incoherent, and yet a symbol of optimism – challenges the formal city – encoded in architecture – to re-position and remake the city as a whole. The informal city forces the formal city to re-engage itself in present conditions by dissolving its utopian project to fabricate multiple dialogues with its context.

The critical question however is how this plays itself out in terms of form. Is the dense and compact city the only configuration in which this synergy can survive? Or will this condition of urbanism
inspire and inform other modes of spatial imagination? An imagination that includes the metropolitan as a metric for the creation of sustainable urban conditions with infrastructure acting proactively as the mediating instrument for creating equity in a democracy? But most importantly it points us to think about how this simultaneity of engagement at both scales is critical for the discussion of sustainability – it is not a matter of choosing between the compact or non-compact city or between their ability to sustain just the economy or their existence. Rather, the aspiration to be sustainable must engage several domains and aspirations simultaneously. In conclusion – compact cities such as Mumbai sustain the economy and do this remarkable well and intensely. However they will be sustainable only if they can continue to be a unit in a networked metropolitan region where they can create equitable opportunities and mobility for the poor – in terms of housing and other forms of access to infrastructure. Any discussion of the sustainable dimension of compact cities must necessarily use broader parameter beyond the physical and economic and include the question of the social, political and ecological dimensions. This will truly allow us to make a more nuanced evaluation of their future relevance and sustainability in the future.

References


Patel Shirish (2012), Street Crowding ( Unpublished paper)


Shetty, Prasad (2005) one of the interesting observations of the study had to do with the changing patterns of mobility along public transportation and particularly the trains. It was observed that while the city’s population between 1991 and 2001 grew by 22.4% the train travel increased by 42.37% (from 4.95 million to 6.4 million). This is largely due to the work and production patterns that are changing significantly. Small-scale operations and the growth of agents are now connecting nodes of manufacturing that are fragmented all over the landscape of the city.


Footnotes

1 This aspect has been dealt with in great detail by SP Shorey, (2012), Housing for the Urban Poor in India: Densities, Amenities and the Built Form. Unpublished paper. Here he has shown that the densities on the housing for the poor and rich do not vary as much as is believed in the Indian urban context. What varies greatly however is their access to amenities.

2 Perpetuated through films like Slum Dog Millionaire and the attention numerous international universities have paid it through research projects located in the city. These projects are invariably located in places like Dharavi (now an internationally known slum) and the discussion amount to fetishizing this condition and not projective thinking about the new narratives by which planner could imagine new solutions to these problems.


4 The fragmented nature of the new economy in Mumbai was well documented by Prasad Shetty (Shetty 2005) one of the interesting observations of the study had to do with the changing patterns of mobility along public transportation and particularly the trains. It was observed that while the city’s population between 1991 and 2001 grew by 22.4% the train travel increased by 42.37% (from 4.95 million to 6.4 million). This is largely due to the work and production patterns that are changing significantly. Small-scale operations and the growth of agents are now connecting nodes of manufacturing that are fragmented all over the landscape of the city.

13 Shirish Patel (2012) argues in his paper on street crowding that density needs to be a more nuanced metric when applied to cities and must be weighed using land use as an important factor. The paper essentially critiques the present use of density as a particular historical bias.

14 This term ‘Majority World’ is a perhaps more encompassing definition of the conditions in which a majority of the world’s populations live. It is more productive perhaps than Third World, the Global South and many such terms which have very particular historical bias.

15 This notion of the inherent determinism in the idea of best ‘practices’ was discussed in detail by Richard Sennett in a series of lectures he delivered in the spring of 2012 at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University.

16 In this new Era starting 1992 Narasimha Rao was the Prime minister and Man Mohan Singh the Finance Minister who introduced the new economic policy. This marked the end of the era of self-sufficiency – a sort of self-embargo that India had placed on itself and opened the door for foreign investments and a connecting to the world for trade. However, India did not take its investment in infrastructure seriously enough like China had before opening the doors on its economic policies. Thus the process of investment as well development was much slower in India and it took the decades of the 1990s before any palpable difference was even noticed on the India landscape.

17 This is a political question because the two countries India and China have extremely different political systems. One an autocracy and the other a democracy. Big Infrastructure projects or generally big moves in a city are difficult and slow in a democracy. And therefore the use of Singapore or Shanghai as a metaphor for the physical expression of Mumbai’s aspiration is naïve, as it does not factor in the political system behind the expression.

18 Alejandro Zaera-Polo, former Dean Berlage Institute - in an email dated 19 December 2005 to the author discussing emergent issues and patterns of physical transformation in Global Cities.

19 Charles Correa, the eminent Indian Architect has described Mumbai as “a Great City, Terrible Place”. In this expression, Utopia is the cultural and economic landscape of the city and dystopia the physical landscape.

20 The idea of New Bombay or Navi Mumbai as it is now referred to was first mooted in 1964 by Shirish Patel, Pravina Mehta and Charles Correa. The idea got official sanction in the 1970’s and a government agency CIDCO was established to implement the idea. The project was premised on opening up serviced land for the city and thus creating a market for affordable land for housing. Unfortunately the Government was slow in establishing adequate infrastructure resulting in a further densification of the existing island city of Mumbai.

21 This project is presented in some detail in the book titled – The New Landscape, Charles Correa (1985).

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* Weddings are an example of how the rich too are engaged in the making of the Kinetic City. The lack of formal spaces for weddings as the cultural outlet for ostentation have resulted in public open space being colonized temporarily for consumption by the rich as spaces for the spectacle of elaborate weddings. Often very complex wedding sets are constructed and removed within12 hours – here a temporary spectacle is set up by the rich in the public domain for private consumption – again the margins of the urban system is expanded momentarily.

* The Ganeshotsava (as it is referred to locally) in its present form was reinvented in the late 19th century by Lokamanya Tilak, as a symbol of resistance to the British colonial regime. Tilak took a domestic and private idiom of worship and translated it into a collective and public rite of self-assertion.

* This data is discerned from many reports in various newspapers between 2000 and 2010. The accuracy of these numbers while hard to ascertain are the generally excepted volumes of turnover with which this sector of the informal economy is engaged. Some of this was also published in 2005 in DOMUS, Venkatraman, Vinay and Mirti, Stefano (2005) Venkatraman, Vinay and Mirti, Stefano (2005).

* Before Shanghai, till the late 1990, Singapore was the metaphor for a successful city – and the questions politicians asked – “why can’t Mumbai become like Singapore?” The levels of hygiene, the cleanliness, the efficient functioning all set in a tropical landscape was something Mumbai and its citizens could easily imagine happening to the city.


* Adjust – is a commonly Mumbai parlance when people want themselves to be accommodated in public space. A common usage is when on a train a bench is crowded and someone requests for an adjustment it results in people shuffling around to make that additional space for one more person to be accommodated.

* Shirish Patel (2012) argues in his paper on street crowding that density needs to be a more nuanced metric when applied to cities and must be weighed using land use as an important factor. The paper essentially critiques the present use of density as a bias towards built form and not the intensity of use. He suggests that the category of street crowding as a more encompassing category where both the density of form and that of use are collapsed.

* This era of liberalized economic policies was also marked with a shift in coalition politics from the former almost two party system. This shifted the power balance for the first time to the southern states that were also economically now emerging as the power houses. Thus the period of economic liberalization also resulted in a more mutinous form of democracy for India and an assertion by the states regarding their own identities. One of the many fallouts of this was the renaming of the cities using references to their names in regional languages – eg: Bombay to Mumbai, Bangalore to Bengaluru, Madras to Chennai etc.