

“In between handshakes”

Open spaces as a link pattern

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research and design.

To understand the connection between both is to talk about the whole thesis process. Personally, during my experience I had several issues with this link. At the beginning it was difficult to manage all the variables in a complex context as India. Also, considering my work experience in my home country, it was difficult to come back to the academic field again and focus more in research aspects than only work with the reality. Architectural projects do not only answer to a specific urban law, but also can be critical and offer a different point of view. The research and design process gave me the chance to challenge the existing conditions and think out of the box again. It was a process in which I missed many times the track and got trap with managerial aspects or similar issues. It is relevant to highlight that our discipline has their limits and one must be clear with the point that will be analysed. One does not have to lose the focus that at the end our answer will be with a design in the built environment.

The design itself is a result of the research process. If the research is too broad considering many different variables, the design will not offer a clear solution and at the end both will not be properly solved or connected. So, one must be clear with the specific aspect to improve, redesign or rethink. It is our role to understand and synthesize the complex connection between diverse variables into a simple design solution.

The project itself work as a conclusion of the research and design balance. After several improvements, now it puts in discussion the outcomes of the housing redevelopment strategy (Fig.1). Instead of offering a different alternative to the existing redevelopment trend, it raises questions about what to do with the old redevelopments proposals. How to deal with the profitable outcomes? Should be the housing solutions considered as a commodity? If the answer is positive, how one should deal with the consequences? The thesis proposal offers a trade-off that more than focus on profit, tries to improve the current living conditions of the redevelopment outcomes.

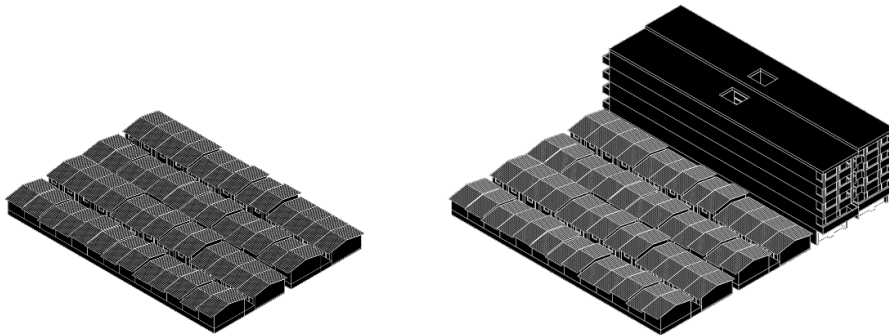


Fig.1 Redevelopment scheme. Baithi Chawl & Chawls in a “handshake” situation

project topic - studio topic - master track - master program

In the global housing studio, the affordable housing topic is a relevant challenge for the architect and the architecture itself. Specially in the Global South, where the resources are not enough for a proper housing solution. Affordability and informal settlements are issues that push our discipline to understand their complexity through an interdisciplinary work with other areas. In this academic exercise, during the process, studies and researches from different areas were studied to have a better overview of affordability. However, to which extend this relevant problem is relate to the architectural design and the Master track? Part of the research consider the analysis of socio - spatial patterns. It was useful to see how families behave in their city. This tool was analyzed in the seminars of the master program. Also, it was complemented with an analysis of a typology transfer which were used to reinterpret study cases into the Indian context. It helps to have a critical position about the role of the architect and the architecture. Here, the architect should be not only an interpreter of the housing and families need, but also offer a critical position about the architectural solution. This academic platform was a chance to criticize the housing system through a design which improves the life condition of the redevelopment areas.

Research method, scientific relevance & approach in relation to the graduation studio methodical line

This housing project focuses in how the collective, public, and private spaces are defined in the street level and connected in a high-rise scheme. The methodology focused on a typological analysis which was complemented by the study of the patterns of inhabitation. It was crucial to understand how families in Mumbai use their space and encroach them. Also, some components of the chawls were useful to consider in a high-rise solution. As Gehl¹ states (Fig.2), the connection with the ground floor exist until the fourth level, so the patterns of inhabitation helped to find possible design solutions to keep the social behavior from the plinth in a high-rise scheme.

The framework of the research process was in the same line of the studio, trying to give an active role to the urban scale, but also considering the housing unit into the process. Some difficulties of the project were the financial scheme. At the end, to be a feasible proposal, it needs more participation from the public entities in both, economic and political field. Municipalities and the central government should have more participation and active role. The project makes a critic to the definition of affordability from the government and how the private builders implement this assessment. Nowadays the market led system change those parameters making the dwelling units for the EWS (Economic weak sector) not affordable. Following this line, the scientific relevance of the work relies on the critic that it can make to the existing housing system. The research method highlights elements that must be part of the densification process of the city. It creates more sense of belonging, include the communities in the process, and offer a proposal that deal with a weak point of the housing system. In other words, it seeks to heal the existing system rather than just continue the densification process.

¹ Gehl, J. *Cities for People*. 2010. (Washington DC: Island Press) 40.

graduation project - the wider social, professional, and scientific framework - transferability of the results.

To pursue a housing project regarding to affordability it is mandatory to consider aspects such as housing policies and a proper approach to the economic system. It is indeed a project imbed in social challenges. It helps to define affordability and to which extent a design should address high densities but at the same time keep the existing social activities. More than just reacting to the circumstances, the proposal functions as a critic on the current housing policies. It poses a position in which the “handshakes” (Fig.3) could be considered as the slum of the future. Consequently, the project addresses the necessity to deal with this problem now instead of waiting more years to face it.

In the scientific and professional framework, the project gives the possibility to rethink the boundaries of the architectural discipline and our role as architects. The market led approach, that is currently dominant in Mumbai, and its consequences, challenge us to rethink the role of the professional. Nowadays, the trade off in affordable housing neglects the public space and urban design. In other words, it considers housing as a mere object to create profit without any connection with the urban fabric. The handshake buildings in my area are a striking example of these consequences.

More than critic the market led approach as positive or negative, it is important to highlight the role of the public realm. The trade off in affordable housing must be thought as part of the city. So, the challenge of creating open spaces should have similar relevance as the making of profit. It is a symbiotic system in which all the strategies are connected.

The project outcomes are based on a different trade off strategy in which the open spaces and the plinth are seen as opportunities to improve and propose solutions for affordable housing. The project is based on an acupunctural intervention (Fig.4) that strives to increase land value, attract more investment and deal with the problems of a place in which the public and private sector are not interested.



Fig.4 Open space Network _ Acupunctural approach

ethical issues and dilemmas in research & the design - potential applications in practice.

The dilemmas and ethical issues are useful to sum up all the process, specially regarded to the link between research and design. In the affordable housing proposals, one must deal with different realities, different laws and ways of doing. Personally, for me it was difficult to consider a full market led approach without a clear urban planning, and in which private builders have too much freedom. Due to a weak regulation, the inhabitants must deal with a poor life condition because of the redevelopment scheme. This strategy faces the housing demands only in a quantitative approach which is also suitable with the profitable one. Considering these aspects, the main challenge was how one could deal with these extreme conditions in order to seek a qualitative approach in which families and their life conditions have more relevance than the economical position of the housing policies. The project it is not only a critic to the existing housing scheme, but also it is a reaction to the unfair condition of the families living in the handshakes. It is a way to think about who should be the responsible and how the public authorities must react towards a housing demand that is increasing every year.

Regarding to the feasibility of the proposal, it is necessary to highlight that in an acupunctural strategy the starting point is the most difficult to do. Is the moment that demands more sacrifice from the entities in the process. In this case, and in opposition to the current profitable scheme, the role of public entities is a must. Nowadays, there are several strategies for public-private partnerships³ which could be useful for the acupunctural scheme. The extra units for the market are not the only way to stimulate them, but also annually payments are part of other strategies.

³ Ministry of Housing and urban affairs of India, Private Public Partnership Models for Affordable Housing. September 2017. p.46-57.