PART VII

THE HIGH-RISE AND THE SLUM: SPECULATIVE URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN MUMBAI
CHAPTER 34

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INTRODUCTION

There seems to be a prevailing perception that apart from its southernmost colonial quarters, Mumbai is essentially a schizophrenic urbanscape where emergent islands of modernity are surrounded by an endless sea of informal shacks. This image of a city sharply divided between opulence and poverty is used across the political spectrum to justify redevelopment projects in the name of equality. The intuitive but misleading parallels slum = poverty and high-rise = middle-class, coupled with an incapacity to recognize the variety that actually exists in between these extreme categories, has allowed countless acts of injustice to be perpetuated in the name of slum upgrading and redevelopment projects. In the process, the incremental development of many so-called slums in Mumbai has been curtailed, with dramatic consequences for the concerned populations and for the long-term social and urban sustainability of the city. Mainstream conceptions of what a world-class city should look like and a tendency to understand urbanization from the point of view of form rather than process
have given a free ride to the real estate construction industry. In this chapter, we redefine the conceptual fault line that runs through the typologies of the high-rise building and that of the slum and propose a new planning paradigm based on neighborhood life and local economic activities, including the production of habitats themselves.

While this chapter centers on Mumbai, we refer to Tokyo as an example of a city that has blurred many of the categories traditionally used to conceptualize urban space while achieving high levels of urban and economic development. We argue that the potential of many unplanned neighborhoods in Mumbai has been entrapped in old-school urban planning practices and categories that are increasingly detached from the reality they are supposed to improve. These include conceptual shortcomings, the incapacity of integrating planning interventions to existing patterns of development, as well as a predisposition to segregate spatial uses (working, living, leisuring). A more grounded understanding of Mumbai’s habitats and the socioeconomic processes that generate them may help produce viable alternatives to the perpetual loop of slum demolition and reconstruction that preclude inclusive and sustainable urbanization.

We first provide a short overview of the cityscape of Mumbai and its diverse habitats, paying particular attention to the slum and high-rise, seeing them as both actual urban typologies and ideological constructs. We then discuss the relationship between urban form and development processes in the light of relevant urban studies concepts and theories. Subsequently, we describe how a certain narrative of inequality has been used to justify redevelopment projects that feed into the speculative economy. We refer particularly to the case of Dharavi, a large unplanned settlement that is wrongly known as the largest slum in Asia. This leads us to question the hugely problematic label of slum that has been affixed on many of the self-helped neighborhoods of Mumbai, often making it even more difficult for residents and small businesses to improve their conditions. Notions of what constitutes a legitimate type of habitat are central to this argument. We then proceed to analyze the typology, social meaning, and political economy of high-rise apartment blocks, which are systematically presented as the only possible architectural response to slums. This provides the analytical framework necessary to introduce our concepts of the intensive and speculative city, which reflect the conflicting logics determining urban development in Mumbai. We show how the urban extreme typologies of the slum and the high-rise are ultimately produced by the friction between the use value of urban space and its exchange value as a tradable commodity. These concepts also emphasize the importance of not satisfying ourselves with reading the city’s urban forms, but to also understand the generative processes producing these forms. In the last sections of the chapter we describe how deeply these processes are enmeshed and use Tokyo as an example of a city that has successfully integrated intensive uses and production processes of urban spaces to its development. We end with some planning and policy recommendations based on the concrete case of Dharavi. These recommendations address the ongoing urban crisis in Mumbai and beyond, which, we argue, is caused by the refusal to legitimize alternative patterns of development. In the conclusion we stress the need to reconcile the
fields of urban planning and economic development and open new paths toward inclusive and livable cities.

**The Context of Mumbai**

The habitats of Mumbai have traditionally been as diverse and heterogeneous as the city’s migratory flows. Coastal fishing villages, vernacular urban structures, grand colonial monuments, contemporary bungalows, working-class barrack-like enclaves, and modern apartment blocks have jostled for space on this tiny island through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. However, in spite of this diversity, Mumbai is usually reduced to three broad urban archetypes: the historical city, the slum, and the high-rise.

The historical city, dominated by a mash-up of different colonial styles inherited from the British and neighboring coastal cities like Surat, along with an even earlier imperial legacy epitomized by the fast-disappearing Portuguese churches and villages, has been explored in countless photographic and architectural accounts. They are part of a conservation story firmly entrenched in a past that is officially acknowledged as worthy of preservation but is rarely actually protected. Over and above that, from the 1960s in particular, the city’s perception of its habitats has been reduced to a binary, that of the slum and the high-rise apartment block. In fact, Mumbai is often visually represented by the image of low-rise squatter settlements strategically located in front of a multistoried luxury tower, which symbolizes the inequalities inherent to rapidly developing megacities.

In Mumbai, the high-rise building, that ubiquitous symbol of modernization and the ultimate architectural affirmation of middle-class status, is typically presented as the answer to the organically developing, unplanned, low-rise, hyperdense, and slum settlements that are said to house 60 percent of the city’s residents. Anywhere between five and thirty stories high, the height of high-rise buildings is relative to the status of their inhabitants. The high-rise, which is synonymous with the mechanization of habitats (symbolized by the elevator), requires industrial construction methods and regulations. It emerges through globally standardized legal, economic, and technological protocols, which are also its biggest discursive weapon inasmuch as it audits space supposedly in the most efficient way, by absorbing more people vertically.

More pertinently, it produces, almost by default, the even more vague category of the “slum,” which becomes self-referential to nearly everything that falls outside the ambit of the high-rise, modern city. Even though the image of the makeshift hut has become the most popular expression of a slum in Mumbai, in reality, many other structures, including older villages that absorbed poor migrant populations efficiently into their local economies, chawls (tenements that were built for factory workers), and many self-financed middle-class homes, have been absorbed in the “slum” category as well. It is a category that shifts and morphs and today has become
all-encompassing, especially, as we demonstrate later, when the construction indus-
try uses it to release land into the real estate market.

UNDERSTANDING URBAN PROCESSES AND FORMS

The fact that different logics are at work in urban development is no news. Nor is the
fact that these logics are often conflicting. Architect and urban historian Rahul
Mehrotra (2008) has often described India’s brand of urbanism as one where two
worlds are compressed against one another: the “kinetic city,” temporary and in
motion, and the “static city,” monumental and aspiring to permanence. This echoes
Kevin Lynch’s (1990) own theoretical distinctions between the “city machine” that
can be planned and engineered as opposed to the “city as a learning ecology,” which
develops locally and intrinsically rather than extrinsically. In the same vein,
Tokyologist Donald Richie (1999) described Tokyo as a principally “lived city,” in
contrast to the “designed cities” of the United States. Anthropologist Hiroshi Tanabe
(1994) explains how in Japan “the artisan’s city” was being reinvented within the
dominant paradigm of the “architect’s city,” in spite of their seemingly irreconcilable
logics. In addition, many authors, including sociologists Saskia Sassen (1994) and
Manuel Castells (1991) have theorized the relationship between the “formal” and the
“informal” processes within global cities, pointing out the fact that far from merely
coeexisting in distinct universes, these were mutually dependent and supportive.

Much has also been written about “top-down” planning versus “bottom-up”
processes, especially from an activist point of view, with Jane Jacobs as the charis-
matic figurehead of a grassroots, people-centric approach to urban development.
The debate is now often put in terms of participation and exclusion with, on the one
hand, the kinetic, organic, lived, informal, bottom-up city and, on the other hand,
the static, machinelike, designed, formal, and top-down planned city. The former is
the city that is being produced every day, incrementally and in a piecemeal fashion
by the multitude. It is inclusive at one level but also messy, dysfunctional, and sub-
standard, often represented as a sprawling slum. The latter is a city planned by
experts, efficient, rational, modern but also expensive, exclusive, unsustainable, and
potentially alienating. Its icons are the high-rise building, the air-conditioned shop-
ping mall, and the parking lot.

There is indeed a long-lasting schism in urban studies between those theorizing
the city from the point of view of its spatial organization and structure, and those
who are interested in issues of urban justice, economic development, and planning.
This schism also runs through the list of authors we just mentioned. Architects and
urban designers tend to focus on physical form, while sociologists and planners
usually explore the processes at work in urban development.

When Castells and fellow Marxist planners use the word form, they mean it in
the sense of social and economic structures rather than physical urban typologies,
or morphological responses to the context. Thus the observations of those authors interested in social processes and physical urban form often overlap but rarely merge. This has led to a great deal of confusion in the field of urban studies, culminating in the disciplinary split between urban planning focusing on the social, economic, political, and legal aspects of urban development, and urban design that draws from fields of architecture and landscaping. As a result, in spite of a broad-ranging interest in informal habitats, we rarely see theories or design schemes that recognize the validity of the typologies that emerge within them.

The issue of housing for the poor in particular has for long been caught in the fault lines between form and process. While economic deprivation and social exclusion lead to all kinds of creative—even if unsatisfactory—urban solutions in slums, mass-produced housing rehabs are symptomatic of ideologically based political and architectural responses to complex social and economic processes.

An understanding of these processes is crucial to explain why the high-rise is not always a solution to the needs of a highly populated and dense city (as its spatial logic presupposes) but can well become an ideological tool used by a political economy of construction that, at the end of the day, contributes to producing a surplus of empty flats alongside a multitude of dehoused people.

Conversely, once shorn of its extreme manifestation as a civically challenged, violence-prone category, the typology of the “slum” can be seen to hide within it a great variety of built forms (high-rise, low-rise, high-density, and facilitating several creative uses of environment and space), eventually managing to absorb surplus populations better than any mass housing scheme, however counterintuitive such an argument may appear. This is why we see the question of form, typology, and diversity of habitats, rescued from the binary of the slum/high-rise, as crucial to providing practical solutions to the global urban housing crisis.

**Narratives of Inequality and Other Binaries**

Richard Burdett, chief organizer of the Urban Age Conference, which traveled through Mumbai in 2006, opened his presentation with yet another image showing a “world-class” high-rise building, surrounded by a slum. The building stands like an island of modernity in a dark sea of slum, ready to swallow the structure at the next financial crash, or conversely, ready to be redeveloped into a well-ordered mass-produced housing project. Whether this photo was taken in Mumbai, São Paulo, Mexico City, or Istanbul is irrelevant. The same cliché has been used countless times in movies, documentaries, and articles about the “global South.” The

1. www.urban-age.net
inequalities generated by our global economic system seem nowhere as visible as in the megacities of South Asia, Latin America, and Africa, where decades of foreign and domestic investment in real estate have produced globalized cityscapes in parts of the city, while others remain entrenched in supposedly premodern living conditions.

Juxtaposed thus, the slum and the high-rise look as if they belong to different worlds, coexistent but irreconcilable. The slum appears anachronistic: a living ruin from a not-so-distant past, when modernization and urbanization in the national context were stuck in a time lag, enmeshed in “Third World” conditions. The juxtaposition is seen as representing two faces of the same capitalist Janus, simultaneously producing poverty and wealth.

The slum and the high-rise have often been described as deadly enemies, whose mortal combat can potentially bring about the downfall of urban civilization as we know it. The most recent and dramatic exposition of this urban fantasy is provided by urban prophet Mike Davis (2006) in the dark conclusion of his review of slum literature:

Night after night, hornetlike helicopters and gunships stalk enigmatic enemies in the narrow streets of the slum districts, pouring hellfire into shanties or fleeing cars. Every morning the slums reply with suicide bombers and eloquent explosions. If the empire can deploy Orwellian technologies of repression, its outcasts have the gods of chaos on their side. (206)

This imagery was recently brought to cinematic life in the movie District 9, where monstrously alien visitors get stuck in a township of Johannesburg. Filmed with a camcorder in a deserted section of Soweto, District 9 uses the physical reality of slums as well as the politics of spatial control as special effects. Slums, townships, shanties, or favelas indeed make for the most potent backdrop against which one can overlay classic gangster plots, feel-good movies, sci-fi fantasies, and other political commentaries (think City of God and Slumdog Millionaire). While slummy landscapes work as a visual stimulant for the cinematic industry, developers, governments, industrialists, and some architects prefer seeing them as the last frontier of wilderness that needs to be conquered and domesticated.

Expositions of urban misery, and its corollary imperative of bold, urgent action, seem to satisfy everyone—from government officials to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including builders and architects, except maybe a segment of the so-called slum dwellers themselves and a few angry commentators. The sense of urgency and the need to do something has led to countless well-intentioned and less-well-intentioned schemes by government, NGOs, and international institutions to alleviate the condition of slum dwellers. The most grandiose of these is doubtlessly the late UN Millennium Project, which aimed “to achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020,” and proposed a mix of strategies relying mostly on massive government intervention, market-driven

solutions, and the involvement of slum dwellers themselves. On a closer look, however, even socially conscious and seemingly progressive schemes such as the “task-force” on improving the life of slum dwellers have developed severe fault lines, particularly at the interrelated levels of concept and implementation.

**PRODUCING SLUMS**

Questioning the category of *slum* is not simply a matter of responding to rhetoric. It has important consequences for the people concerned by slum alleviation, rehabilitation and redevelopment projects, and beyond, including people indirectly affected by the development of new slums in their cities. Countless redevelopment projects across time and in all parts of the world have been justified by labeling neighborhoods as slums. Here is urban theorist and advocate Jane Jacobs denouncing an urban renewal in the West End of Boston taking place in the 1960s:

I talked to two architects in ’58 who helped justify the destruction of the West End. And one of them told me that he had had to go on his hands and knees with a photographer through utility crawl spaces so that they could get pictures of sufficient dark and noisome spaces to justify that this was a slum—how horrendous it was. Now that was real dishonesty. And they were documenting stuff for it.\(^3\)

The saddest part of the story is that the exact same strategies are used today to justify large-scale real estate projects in cities throughout Asia. The most notorious example of this is probably the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP), conducted by the government of Maharashtra, which has for long pioneered the provision of housing to the poor by private developers. The DRP was denounced by a panel of experts appointed by the government itself as a “sophisticated land grab.” In an open letter to the chief minister of Maharashtra they write:

The residents of Dharavi have established not just homes but thriving businesses and livelihoods…. The residents of Dharavi are being offered free construction and the legalizing of their status, but this is in exchange for (a) shifting into less than half (47%) of their original land area and (b) the destruction of their livelihoods…. the land thus released from occupation will be commercially exploited and significant profits are expected to accrue to both the Government and to the developers entrusted with the project. The project is being driven by personal greed rather than the welfare of the residents of Dharavi.\(^4\)

Jockin Arputham, one of the experts on the panel, who is also the president of the National Slum Federation, was quoted saying the following about the DRP: “There

are so many contradictions and complications. Only 35% of the slum dwellers seem to be eligible for the project and the government has not [surveyed] 35,000 families living on lofts and first floors." To the social and economic destruction that such a redevelopment project implies, one should also add the perverse effect that throwing hundreds of thousands of people out of their homes and work will have on the city as a whole. In which new slum will people go? Which streets will they be sleeping on? Whose jobs will they compete for?

The inability of policy makers to understand Dharavi’s enmeshed residential, productive, trading, and community spaces is proving to be severely detrimental to its planned future. The fact that it emerged incrementally ever since the first economically and culturally marginalized caste groups migrated in the 1930s—from the southern regions of the country—to this unused, marshy, mosquito-infested territory adjoining a centuries-old fishing village, means that it became a huge experimental space for urban habitats to grow. And grow they did, literally creating wealth from nothing, with no basic credit or help from official sources, and eventually created a diverse and dense locality producing billions of dollars worth of goods and services (Sharma, 2001). It also produced habitats of all kinds, urban villages, dense buildings, mixed-use spaces, “tool houses,” (Echanove and Srivastava 2008) and several other forms that satisfied its unique needs and those of the several thousand residents who were part of the city’s massive “informal economy.”

The more than eighty-odd community based enclaves that exist in Dharavi are a testimony to the city’s social diversity manifested in this neighborhood. Bringing in rural memories through the migration histories of different communities, their own skills of construction, and their ability to improvise with new materials, the built forms of Dharavi reveal remarkable innovation, adaptability, and variety—factors that have contributed tremendously to its unique mixed-use patterns. Of course, while Dharavi also emerged as a space with an acute shortage of basic civic amenities, it showed remarkable capacity to provide services on its own too. It never lacked initiative and resources, only support and recognition from the city’s authorities for the fact that, in its own way, Dharavi has been an intrinsic part of the city’s economic and cultural story.

What the official gaze actually did was standardize the entire neighborhood’s experience into a legal argument about invalid citizenship, labeled the settlement as the city’s biggest slum, and in the last ten years started to unleash a process in which real estate interests started to dictate its redevelopment—a process that is bound to eventually evacuate a good percentage of the erstwhile population and reduce the remaining to a service-based economy looking after the needs of the new middle class, just waiting to move in.

This extreme case of urban real estate abuse, denounced by prominent urban planners, social workers, and slum activists in Mumbai, is echoed at a much smaller scale thousands of times over in Slum Rehabilitation Scheme (SRS) projects, which

allow private developers to redevelop slum pockets with the consent of 70 percent of the “eligible slum dwellers” living in that pocket, in exchange for construction rights in more valuable parts of the city. Unlike the DRP, this scheme has the merit of requiring the consent of a part of the concerned population, but it has also generated millions of square feet of housing of the poorest quality that cannot be maintained by its residents over time. Moreover, the rehabs do little to solve infrastructural, amenities, and health issues of the concerned population, as was recently demonstrated in an important study by Amita Bhide (2008) of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Past projects have shown that the poor quality of rehab buildings means that within a few years they start to deteriorate, and in many cases become just as bad as the slum from which dwellers were initially rehabilitated. Finally, it has also been observed that a large percentage of the rehabilitated tenants were quickly forced to sell their new property in exchange for much needed liquidity, and subsequently found themselves with no other option but going back to a slum.

This scheme that lets the private sector produce housing for the poor through incentives by the government has sparked the interest of people around the world. However successful these types of public-private partnerships can be at providing formal housing to the poor, the economic mantra of development (as freedom or otherwise) through market liberalism has not yet propelled the masses to the nirvana of high-rise dwelling. No matter how eager the developers, the demand for housing seems endless, especially as the city grows with each successive wave of immigration from economically or environmentally challenged parts of the Indian subcontinent. Moreover, this scheme relies completely on an economic context of booming real estate prices, where building rights are highly valuable. The incentive would thus disappear at the first economic downturn.

One of the most important problems with the SRS scheme is also one of the least talked about. As the rehab project pretends to improve living conditions, it often disconnects rehabilitated slum dwellers from their means of subsistence, which in India is often completely dependent on access to the street. In Dharavi, for instance, virtually every structure with access to the street doubles as a storefront or a small manufacturing unit. These activities cannot possibly be maintained on the sixth or seventh floor of a high-rise building. Social capital, which is often leveraged by slum dwellers for income generation or subsidy strategies, has long been identified as a collateral damage of rehabilitation schemes (Anderson, 1965 and Gans, 1959). The displacement (even in situ) from low-rise, high-density dwellings to more impersonal high-rise, high-density housing has a negative impact on social networks. This can to some extent be mitigated by intelligent design, but design is unfortunately never a priority of low-cost housing. Thus, the move from slum-type structures to high-rise rehab flats comes at a cost, which is both economic and social. Dharavi resident and social worker Bhau Korde expresses it more clearly than anyone else could:

6. www.sra.gov.in
They say they will redevelop Dharavi, but look at what they’re doing. These high-rise buildings mushrooming all round us. People who move in are selling and leaving their flats already. They need money because they cannot continue with their livelihoods in these buildings. People living in these high-rises don’t know their neighbours anymore. The street life and economic activity will be gone. They say this is development, but it looks just the opposite to me.7

The High-Rise as Symbol

Despite all their reservations, we must acknowledge that many slum dwellers are not opposed to rehabilitation schemes, and it is important to understand why. The most obvious reason is that after having lived in a situation of precariousness, where even the most basic infrastructure and intimacy were missing, the shift to a brand-new high-rise apartment, with running water and doors and windows that can be shut, is a real improvement in living conditions. A less obvious but equally important factor is the desire to obtain a legitimate status as a citizen of the city, and of the country. Slum dwellers are typically called squatters and encroachers by the authorities, indicating that they have no right or status as citizens. Owning a flat means belonging to the city at last. Thus the readiness to move from slum structures to a high-rise often expresses not as much the necessity to fulfill essential needs as it is motivated by the desire to achieve higher status in relative terms. Status is in turn a function of the social gaze (or “regard”), as Adam Smith (1759) observed once. The symbolic value of residing in a building, in a city like Mumbai, where 60 percent of the population is said to be living in slums, is so high that it sometimes prevails over other costs, such as distance from work or the breakdown of social networks.

Officially, though, the argument to move to high-rises is made at a more fundamental level—through the belief that high-rises supposedly absorb more people on a smaller footprint of land, and this tendency is inevitable for a dense, crowded city such as Mumbai. Architect Charles Correa (1989), in his seminal work The New Landscape, has critiqued this point effectively. He points out that the mathematics is not as straightforward as it sounds. The higher you go, the greater proportion of land you need to maintain standards that include open space, the trappings of a higher standard of living (including cars and wider roads), and greater costs of overall maintenance of the structures. Unless the economy and ecology of the whole city are strong enough, the high-rise structure, if presented as a stand-alone solution to solve the problem of low-cost housing, is a deceptive affair. It only releases land that is ultimately filled up by more buildings and infrastructure.

Moreover, the higher the building, the higher the status and the income of its dwellers, hence the more space they will use. This results in the same density levels

7. Personal Communication with Dharavi resident and activist Mr. Bhau Korde.
as can be found in low-rise, high-density clusters of the urban village or slum. The only reason such disproportionate use of land is acceptable is because it yields more short-term gains. There is no justification to use these vertical structures as a standard typology for social housing projects on the common but misguided assumption that they absorb more people per square unit of land. Shorn of a deeper understanding of complex patterns of spatial use by people of different economic needs and backgrounds, such policies only produce the same dystopic urban forms that have already failed in cities such as Chicago, Paris, and many others that have attempted to engineer solutions to their own chronic housing crises.

In Mumbai, there seems to be a necessary trade-off between living in a high-rise and being a legitimate citizen—versus living in a slum and being a squatter. High-rise living implies status and the provision of basic infrastructure, maybe access to capital in the form of owning property and having a clear title. On the other hand low-rise means economic opportunities, social networks and even perhaps some freedom to develop one’s own habitat according to special needs. It is our contention that a trade-off between these two is produced by faulty policies, inadequate regulations, and vested interests that artificially turn housing into a scarce resource, which creates markets for the construction industry and increases real estate value. 8

In the 1970s already Ivan Illich (1973) rightly criticized the regulatory apparatus that makes it nearly impossible for the vast majority of people to build their own homes, making them dependent on a web of industries and financial institutions for the provision of loans needed for the purchase of living and working spaces. Habitats built outside of any regulatory frameworks may seem like a total utopia to most, but this is how most of Mumbai was produced. This is also true of Tokyo after the Pacific War, which had destroyed most of its neighborhoods (Seidensticker, 1990) To imagine the possible future of the slum only in terms of mass-developed high-rises is terribly limiting, both with respect to the possible urban typologies that can function as healthy habitats and in terms of the activities they sustain.

Even without advocating for a world free of regulation, we can see how a place like Dharavi and many slums throughout Mumbai could benefit from an approach that would first recognize the value of what has been built incrementally over generations, including a fantastic network of ad hoc water pipes and sewerage lines. The urban forms produced by a piecemeal development process of many settlements from Mumbai to Tokyo should not be dismissed simply because they have not been master-planned or because they do not conform to established perceptions of how contemporary urban neighborhoods should look. Many localities in Tokyo have much in common with Mumbai’s low-rise, high-density residential clusters, though one may, from a Mumbai vantage point, find it laughable to refer to Tokyo’s neighborhoods as slums. If all that separates one from the other is the presence of civic amenities, infrastructure, and services, then why should Mumbai’s neighborhoods not be provided those instead?

8. For a darker twist to this assertion, but one that is even more accurate, see Weinstein, Liza 2008.
In fact, Tokyo’s low-rise, high-density neighborhoods represent a de facto alternative to the idea that urban development must, or indeed can, be controlled and managed from the top down alone and that habitats must be reengineered to conform to set notions of urban forms. We believe that somewhere in between master-planned habitats and improvised development lie crucial answers to the housing and economic crisis that so many cities face. To understand exactly where in between, we first need to understand the economic forces at work in the production of the iconic and somewhat deceptive forms of the slum and the high-rise typologies.

Use Value versus Exchange Value of Urban Spaces

We observe that in the slum economy, the value of space is maximized by its optimal use as a means of production, which we refer to as intensive use, while in the “formal” economy, the value of space tends to be disconnected from its actual use. Instead, value of space increases with its tradability. We refer to this use of space as speculative. These two modes of valuation have a deep impact on urban forms and their possible uses. Moreover, they appear to be somewhat in competition, with intensive spaces being aggressively preyed upon by promoters and developers for speculative uses.

The typologies of the slum and the high-rise correspond to extreme versions of intensive and speculative spaces. On the one hand, we have a context where a plot of land in a slum cannot be left empty even for a week before being occupied and used; on the other hand, we have an industry that can generate enormous speculative value on property by trading it multiple times while leaving it empty. In the speculative realm, empty space is more valuable than occupied space, since it becomes more easily tradable. The value of such space is abstract to the extent that it relies on uncertain notions of what it may be worth in the future. It is determined by the broader economic and financial context rather than intrinsic values or the activities it permits. Since it is used as a commodity, the value of speculative space is thus contingent on the capacity of traders to precisely define its boundaries. Informal settlements with their fuzzy ownership patterns and disputed boundaries need to be mapped out and audited before they acquire any speculative value. This is precisely what Slum Rehabilitation Schemes do: they transform intensive spaces into speculative spaces.

The impact of Slum Rehabilitation Schemes on urban form but also on ground-level economic activity can hardly be overemphasized. Turning one’s own intensive space into speculative space is the trade-off being offered to slum dwellers who typically accept to move from a ground +1 structure, where they live and run a business, to a new 225-square-foot apartment cell on the fifth floor of a building, which is
completely disconnected from the street economy. They trade the use-value of a means of production for the speculative-value of a real estate asset. At the level of the city, this means that the process of “formalization” comes at the price of “de-intensifying” use of space and creating a clear distinction between living space and working space.

This fragmentation is typically presented as social progress. But in real terms it comes down to buying slum dwellers off their current economic activity and destroying a process of incremental development that has proved its worth by providing employment and housing to hundreds of thousands of migrants to the city. If we are to bring back any meaning to the concept of “development,” it is time we understand the intensive process of urbanization in Mumbai’s slums with its successes and failures.

Unfortunately, government officials, urban planners, and commentators are predisposed to certain notions of land use and urban form: high-rise structures with multiple, standardized units that have to absorb a maximum of residents at the lowest cost, on the smallest piece of land possible. The process is expensive and depends on the government to audit space as well as on the market for subsidising the redevelopment. It is shaped by the pressure not just to absorb surplus populations but also to simultaneously supply more land for the market. This land can then be used with no apology for actual spatial use. It can occupy huge footprints or remain unutilized.

In a classic illustration of what typically precedes such a process the consulting firm McKinsey and Company (2003) published a blueprint on how to transform Mumbai into a world-class city in ten years’ time. Among other things it called for (1) dramatically increasing the supply of low-income housing and (2) moving manufacturing to the countryside and turning Mumbai into a consumption center. The first obvious problem is that low-income housing is typically out of reach of the poorest segments of the population and instead serves the needs of the employed classes. Moreover, moving manufacturing out of the city means depriving millions of dependent self-employed workers of their livelihood and therefore making the provision of low-income housing completely redundant, since there is no way they could afford it. Once again, the intensive use of space—typical of live-work conditions of the poorest—comes under attack in the name of providing affordable housing. “Vision Mumbai,” the McKinsey blueprint, was sharply rejected by Mumbai’s activists and politicians. In fact, it became politically suicidal to mention the “Shanghaization of Mumbai,” a catchword that was widely circulated in the publicity of the report (Tarun, 2007). Interestingly, populist politics came to the rescue of slum dwellers under threat from forced evictions in the most visible and politically active settlements of Mumbai.

When the speculative logic prevails, the real estate and construction industries dominate urban development. This comes at the cost of local economic activities, including neighborhood-based businesses, retails, and services. As Saskia Sassen points out, construction is often mistaken to be a marker of economic health, when in fact the construction industry may be contributing very little to the city.\(^9\) Real
estate development is mainly fueled by a speculative economy, which artificially increases the price of space. Rising costs make it particularly difficult for people who cannot invest but need homes to buy or rent at affordable rates. At the same time this does not stop the mass construction of housing projects that find their markets in the world of investment or luxury. Locked-up homes and empty high-rises next to overcrowded tenements are a common sight in many cities, especially in South Asia, where the speculative city muscles its way through the corridors of urban power.

In fact, the speculative logic is producing empty urban shells around the globe, fed as it is by the same financial markets that collapsed recently under the weight of the bubble they had produced. The skyline of Mumbai is full of spectral constructions waiting to be inhabited by an elusive Indian middle class. In this respect, Mumbai is indeed following Shanghai’s steps, which after years of speculative investment is “full of buildings in search of a city,” as Arjun Appadurai memorably put it.10 The most dramatic example of speculative development is of course Dubai, notoriously competing with itself to hit the sky and producing millions of empty square feet of office space along the way. But this is not happening only in rapidly developing cities. The occupancy of the iconic and ill-fated World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York, was in reality around two-thirds of its capacity for years until the terrorist attack of 2001. The same is expected of the new Freedom Tower under construction in New York at Ground Zero. Because speculative value is tightly related to status, which is measured in terms of height, investors and developers do not care much whether full occupancy is achieved. More floors add value to the building as a whole, irrespective of actual use.

The intensive city, on the other hand, derives value only from actual use. This creates a space that, for better or worse, is optimally occupied around the clock, since it is used as a means of production in a context of economic survival. It is produced out of sheer need by nonprofessional, nonlegal local actors rather than real estate developers, planners, and architects. This generates an environment that may be lacking in many aspects of modern comfort, but which is free from the imposition of any spatial ideology—even that sacred injunction of contemporary cities which declares that living and working spaces must necessarily be segregated. It ultimately produces a vivid variety of forms, structures, and styles in response to means and needs. It is this flexibility that allows for a higher degree of absorption of populations, especially when they are part of the informal economy or belong to the poorer segments.11 Dharavi has produced a typology that we refer to as the “Toolhouse” in response to such a need. Taking off from the artisanal house that typically housed spaces of production and storage along with living needs, the toolhouse is a physical embodiment of the most intensive use of space possible. Storage and sleeping, cooking and producing, manufacture and consumption often happen

11. For an elaboration of this point in terms of a specific built-form see Echanove, Matias and Srivastava, Rahul, 2008.
within the same footprint of use. Such needs are the main principle through which structures in Dharavi emerge and reveal a collapse of zoning in terms of working and living. A typical extension of such a logic also spills over into notions of private and public spaces where streets and homes also mirror each other’s functions and uses. The spirit of exchange connects public and private realms, and the bazaar becomes a default principle of space as a whole. In most cases, street-scale structures that are low-rise and high-density are fertile contexts for a proliferation of toolhouse clusters, being in easy reach of the street as well as each other. If spaces such as Dharavi are seen through this logic, they are understood better. An alternative way to understand how fairly widespread such a logic is by taking a closer look at such typologies in richer cities with more advanced infrastructure. Several neighborhoods in Tokyo are an ideal example.

It is vital to look at agents, processes, and incentives that produce the built environment in such spaces, to understand the respective logic and potential of intensive and speculative habitats and the way they relate to each other. The contrasting examples of Mumbai and Tokyo show how these cities are typically a mix of these two principles, and how historical and cultural factors affect the degree to which the intensive and speculative logics merge or break away from each other. How exactly the interstices and overlaps between these spatial-temporal regimes are negotiated varies greatly, as we demonstrate in the next section. In Mumbai, the legacy of speculative planning ideals has produced a sharply divided cityscape—at least at first sight. In Tokyo, on the other hand, a more ambiguous and syncretistic understanding of habitats has allowed a new model to emerge where combinations of the speculative and intensive cities coexist at various scales in what could be described as a harmonious mess.

**Between the Intensive and Speculative Types**

The landscape of the intensive city typically follows a multidirectional logic. It allows for numerous temporalities to coexist, epitomized in different kinds of economic practices, rural, artisanal, postindustrial, or high-tech. It can tear itself down and build afresh. It does not have fixed templates or business models to follow and therefore is flexible in its approach to construct and rebuild. Its built environment combines residential, productive, and recreational spaces often compressed in the same space-time.

Dharavi is perhaps the best example of a settlement developed through intensive processes. Hundred of thousands of actors over several generations have incrementally developed a fully functioning settlement and a vibrant economy. Yet,

12. For a historical illustration of the unique patterns of urban growth of Mumbai with regard to speculation and intensity see Appadurai, Arjun 2000.
careful observation shows that the intensive and speculative are not necessarily working in opposition to each other, even in Dharavi. In fact, at a micro level, Dharavi is full of speculative investment by its residents, who see in their houses an important asset that can acquire value over time. Entrepreneurs are also investing in their stock, speculating on upcoming sales. The incremental development of Dharavi is contingent on a certain speculative bet on the future by all its residents and entrepreneurs. If anything, the looming redevelopment project backed by the government, for Dharavi, makes it difficult for residents and business owners to invest in their houses and shops. Given the uncertain future, many residents are renouncing improvement projects, focusing instead on the optimal exploitation of existing resources. Thus, in a twisted way, real estate speculation on Dharavi in the form of the Dharavi Redevelopment Project is slowing down another sort of ground-level speculation by the residents themselves.

The reverse is also true, as the speculative economy generates its own slums, which often become permanent and relatively autonomous. For example, countless informal settlements have been triggered directly by the formal construction industry. In Mumbai, makeshift structures where construction workers stay accompany every construction site and become the starting point of a slum housing a population that serves the residents of the new buildings. The development of shelters and spaces, and the presence of services and commerce are conjoined economic activities in their own right. In fact, construction often triggers other economic activity in very direct ways. It generates services and sales of goods for homes and for domestic needs that then become integral to the locality. This process is typical of construction projects in many developing cities. For instance, in his classic study of the urban development of Brasilia, David Epstein observes how construction workers developed the first favela of this perfectly planned city. They had nowhere else to go and were able to find economic opportunities in the new capital (Epstein, 1973). Interestingly, the improvised settlement of Brazila is reportedly much more alive than the master-planned capital can ever hope to be.

Invariably, unplanned settlements appear to be deeply connected to the metropolitan economy around them. Far from being parasites, marginal, or self-sustained, they are constantly servicing the city. This relationship is usually recognized and valued by businesses and private employers, since it constitutes an indirect subsidy of their activities. Such a relationship of mutual dependency between large businesses and the local provider is again not unique to Mumbai nor found only in the context of slums. The speculative city is full of cracks and internal contradictions. Saskia Sassen documented how dependent Wall Street firms were on a deep web of local businesses operating in the shadow of the skyscrapers, providing printing, cleaning, and food services essential to the good functioning of the financial industry (Sassen, 1994).

At the street level also, the integration of the informal and the formal is done through trade and services. In cities with a high level of tolerance for street activity and bazaars, such as Mumbai and Tokyo, local economic operators play a major role in facilitating and supporting the overlap of these spaces and activities in such neighborhoods. Tea stalls, fruit vendors, tailors, and ironers are a fixture of Indian cities and
can be found at every corner of middle-class neighborhoods in Mumbai. They occupy leftover and in-between spaces and cater to the needs of the residents at discounted slum prices. The same relationship exists inside the homes of middle-class households that employ illegal immigrants as domestic help, carpenters, and cooks.

**The Tokyo Model**

A conscious acceptance of the type of mixed-use habitat produced by intensive processes of urban development is a rare occurrence in contemporary cities, mainly because the form it generates is typically seen as messy and irrational within a mainstream urban planning perspective. The case of Tokyo, however, provides an outstanding example of the potential of incrementally developing neighborhoods. Tokyo is at the same time high-tech, futuristic, artisanal, traditional, mixed use, “world-class,” low-rise, high-rise, and high-density.

Tokyo is possibly the most efficient, urbane, and sophisticated city in the world, and definitely the most populated. Yet except for its historical core of Edo, it could well be described as one gigantic, incrementally developed slum. The process of literally carving out space, or making it grow bit by bit, was crucial in the development of postwar Tokyo, just as it is central to the evolution of habitats in informal settlements all over India.

The history of the incremental development of Tokyo after the Pacific War unfolds in the shadow of the skyscrapers that have come to symbolize Japan’s economic miracle. This shadow actually stretches over 100 kilometers around the city’s historical core and largely dominates its landscape just as informal development dominates the landscape of greater Mumbai.

After the war, Tokyo was left almost totally flattened. Residents had to rebuild their lives from scratch. In this process neighborhoods became the fertile grounds from which the Japanese middle class emerged. They built upon a tradition of self-help that the Ministry of City Planning had produced by default in terms of incomplete urban plans since the 1920s. The pressing needs for economic redevelopment and shelter, the lack of financial resources, and the absence of legal mechanisms for land acquisition by the state ensured that the urban plans were never implemented. The government focused instead on industrial and infrastructure development to support the economy, leaving the reconstruction of residential and commercial areas to local actors, who rebuilt the city on its ashes.

13. For a description of the overwhelming preponderance of the informal economic context in Indian cities see, Alter Chen, Martha 2006.

14. The “Web” provides the latest channel through which the informal economy penetrates the homes of the middle class, from the sharing of music and movies to cyber sex and casinos.
What has been overlooked in the story of Japan’s economic success with its egalitarian income distribution is the essential role of incremental development. Incremental urban and economic development processes are completely interconnected in the history of Tokyo—just as they are in Mumbai. Tokyo and Mumbai are similar in the sense that their suburbs have improved gradually over time and many settlements have emerged through village-like histories. They show a high level of economic activities that are sustained by local factors such as family labor, artisanal skills and mixed use of space, interdependence of consumption, and production and exchange practices. Although the persistence of the local economy is arguably under threat in Japan, with the aggressive advances of franchised retail businesses that found ways to penetrate the neighborhoods’ intimate fabric, it is still very much alive. These local activities are facilitated by the typology of housing forms characterized by familial and community inputs in the incremental growth of each structure and its adaptation to specific needs, both social and economic.

There are indeed striking similarities—in terms of the visual landscape—between suburban Tokyo and Mumbai’s many informal settlements. Figure 34.1 presents a photoshopped montage of Dharavi and Tokyo, which brings to life some of these similarities. Far from being anecdotal, the typological similarity between unplanned areas of Tokyo and Mumbai reveals a complex story of economic development—involving the informal sector, mixed use of land and space, the presence of street-level shops, pedestrian path networks, and the use of the house itself as a tool of artisanal production and commerce as mentioned earlier. In Tokyo, the older and traditional pattern of urban organization too reflected a similar experience. The roots of Tokyo’s

Figure 34.1 Photomontage: on the left side Dharavi, Mumbai, and on the right side Shimokitazawa, Tokyo
economic development are the bazaar economy, the informal street markets, the family retails, neighborhood-based services, and the local construction industry. These still are very much part of Tokyo’s economic fabric today, and they are also explain Tokyo’s urban typology: low-rise, high-density, mixed-use, small-scale neighborhoods that constantly changed and evolved to produce what is today incontestably a modern, high-tech city that continues to grow and evolve in newer ways.

In Tokyo, the intensive processes generating such built forms and street patterns were never seen to be illegitimate, irrational, or dysfunctional—quite to the contrary. This was in line with traditional township management strategies and communal organization. In the postwar redevelopment effort, neighborhoods relied heavily on traditional construction and habitat management methods. For a long time “traditional Japanese urban development and management strategies were still widely practiced and quite effective” (Sorensen, 2002, 149). To this day, most neighborhoods in Tokyo have committees of residents overseeing their internal affairs and communication with the authorities.

This explains why Tokyo has both one of the best infrastructures in the world and a housing stock of great variety. What emerges are different forms—a cluster of villages, low-rise, high-density urban settlements connected by transport networks, and a combination of coexisting diverse housing typologies (including high-rise structures). These settlements contribute hugely to the cities of which they are a part. They also benefit the urban systems of the whole region to which they belong. In many cases, especially Tokyo and Mumbai, such cities are connected globally as well. While Tokyo’s architecture has been incrementally upgraded, the urban typology is still very much informal and messy-looking, with extremely narrow and labyrinthine streets and shack-type structures built with metal sheets and wood. What can be mistaken for an urban mess by the casual observer is actually a highly efficient and complex urban organization. Tokyo’s leniency toward mixed use has allowed small-scale, family-type businesses to exist in one of the most advanced economies of the world. Interestingly, it also prevents the high degree of residential segregation along income lines that one finds in the United States.

What distinguishes the urban evolution of these two cities is that in Tokyo the process of incremental evolution of settlements, their contribution to the larger economy, and the presence of mixed-used forms was accepted, allowing for these neighborhoods to become modernized and well-equipped civic spaces. In Mumbai, these processes were considered illegitimate and thus were deprived of any support.

**Reconnecting Forms and Processes**

The relationship between urban and economic development is not simple or one-dimensional. This becomes very obvious when these typologies are celebrated instead of being rejected. Narrow pedestrian streets, low-rise structures, and lively
street activity in village-looking urban contexts are glorified by conservationists and sometimes reproduced artificially and perfected in an urban plan. Medieval European towns and villages have become role models for many “new urbanists.” Unfortunately, they usually end up as gated communities or cute-looking themed neighborhoods devoid of any economic substance. This is because, after all, the impulse and processes that produce new urbanism townships are those of the speculative city. Houses are produced in bulk and sold as commodities. Their value is that of their market price. They neither support much economic activity within nor generate much use value beyond that of being comfortable residential spaces. As hard as they try to imitate the form generated by intensive processes in old European towns and villages, in fact these townships belong to another urban and economic history altogether.

We need to question both the superficial and speculative reproduction of a certain urban typology and the dismissal as backward of neighborhoods that are produced by intensive processes. We cannot accept the form and reject the process. When the copy is preferred to the original, and reproduction is elevated to the status of an art form in itself, the whole point of understanding urbanism as a complex interplay of forces gets lost. There have been many glorious attempts to capture the “nature” of vernacular urban order, including of course the magisterial and lifelong work of Christopher Alexander (2001). However, the processes that energize such orders have often been vastly ignored by architects and theorists of urban form, leading to a soulless “new urbanism,” which is only as “new” as a copy can be.

What would be genuinely new is an urbanism that acknowledges the invaluable contributions of local actors in the developmental process and does not judge the quality of urban space on its appearance alone but also recognizes the social, cultural, and economic dynamics it sustains, and which in turn sustain it. The Tokyo “default” model is here to attest that if these urban processes are recognized and validated, they give rise to environments that can be as developed, functional, and technologically advanced as any modern city can be, and perhaps even more so. The case of Tokyo represents a counterintuitive notion of urbanism that overturns the simplistic categorization of urban habitats in terms of slums and modern cities—the way Richard Burdett presented it at the Urban Age Mumbai conference. It is vital to see that his categorization produces self-serving notions of urban habitats, since they directly feed into the production and sustenance of speculative cities themselves.

An approach based on the legitimization of intensive processes can liberate thousands of urban neighborhoods in Asia, Africa, and Latin America from otherwise being condemned to being referred to and treated as slums. It can break through Mike Davis’s (2006) apocalyptic vision that bends under its own predictions and a weak conceptualization of the category “slum,” which creates a devastatingly circular logic that traps millions of the urban poor into a situation of forced victimization.
CONCLUSION AND PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe that the ongoing growth, development, and transformation of unplanned settlements such as Dharavi can be better achieved by allowing their internal energies, resources, and skills to take over, just as happened in postwar Japan. So far, Dharavi’s own logic was never acknowledged and therefore could never be incorporated into visions of its future. It was invalidated on legal grounds because it was part of the informal sector, because the marshy land on which it grew was government property, making all residents of Dharavi de facto squatters. It was also invalidated on architectural grounds, on the belief that its typologies and structures were dysfunctional urban forms because they did not correspond to a certain idea of what a world-class city should look like.

A cynical eye on the situation would immediately recognize the mark of greed and corruption. After all, Dharavi sits on prime real estate in the center of the Mumbai metropolitan region and a few hundreds meters away from Bandra-Kurla Complex, the new financial center of Mumbai. The government is simply playing the game of real estate investors and builders and calling the residents of Dharavi squatters in order to take over the land and sell it. This land grab is nicely sold to the general public as a social project, which will provide decent housing to eligible dwellers and liberate land for the middle class. The classic image of a kid walking on water pipes over a sea of garbage, which is in fact not at all representative of the general condition of Dharavi, supports the official narrative better than anything else. The master plan is presented as the polar opposite of this dreadful reality: a clean, rational, modern, and middle-class landscape geared to motorways, and shopping malls. In order to respond to this, we must first step back and consider how a noncorrupt government could respond to Dharavi. If it is true that Dharavi’s land belongs to the government, then we can only hope that principles of social justice and democratic governance will prevail and allow its hundred of thousands of residents to keep on improving their lives with the support of the city. However, a misreading of Dharavi’s urban form as inadequate may lead even a well-intentioned government to destroy one of the most impressive living examples of self-developed and self-improving urban ecology anywhere in the world. Therefore, we must understand and explain the natural ecology and find means to intervene within it without destroying its internal dynamics. This implies explaining why it is both inexact and potentially destructive to reduce Dharavi to the sole condition of a slum. Such reduction deprives many settlements of any sense of legitimacy and therefore lessens their access to services and infrastructure granted to other parts of the city. To this effect, we must go beyond an analysis of urban form alone and understand form in the context of the processes that generate it. This means that we have to change our initial assumption and understand the neighborhood not just as a physical space occupied by people (which can be surveyed in a two-dimensional inquiry) but as a multidimensional spatial-temporal experience produced by communities, individual histories, and productive activities.
The challenge is to understand urban forms of certain neighborhoods not as objects in space but as the living expression of productive processes generated by the users themselves. If we could appreciate and communicate this simple idea in our studies, designs, and plans, we would be closer to solving the ongoing urban and economic crisis in Mumbai and many other parts of the world, including perhaps in “First World” cities.

Any study of urban form in incrementally developing neighborhoods from the point of view of generative processes necessarily includes an economic/productive dimension. This is particularly evident in the example of the toolhouse, which is a residential space as much as a tool of production, meaning that upgrading it also improves one’s economic condition. Similarly, any construction activity is always necessarily an economic one inasmuch as it involves productive skills, labor force, purchase of material, land use, and so on. When local actors get involved in the process of construction, the wealth generated by this economic activity is typically recycled in the local economy. In resource-deprived contexts, mutual help often becomes the currency of exchange for the local production of habitats. When this process intensifies, the local exchange and production of resources, skills, labor, and material give rise to the most improbable urban achievements in the form of Dharavi or Tokyo’s suburbs. In order to achieve this, we must make the overlaps between urban planning and economic development more explicit. It is important to understand that cities are variegated spaces with differing economic activities that have evolved in distinct historical contexts. These different economic functions have as many distinct spatial needs that support them. If offices and financial centers that are connected to global markets need segregated office spaces with a high level of connectivity, informal manufacture and local trading need their own special physical expressions and typologies. Mumbai has a large, informal sector that includes manufacturing, trading, hawking, and consumption for a population with a low level of income and expenditure. This informal sector keeps the prices of services in the city globally competitive. The sector can evolve and grow into providing a better support system to the city as a whole only when it has a physical context that can satisfy its needs. If one looks at the economic activities as well as their necessary physical structures as dysfunctional, then whole parts of the city can be destroyed with no particular loss to the official, formal city. However, the truth of the matter is the so-called informal sector is intimately tied to the so-called formal sector. The large labor force that it contains, semiskilled office staff, inexpensive food providers as well as the support it gives to the formal sector by producing goods at subsidized rates, makes the so-called informal economy an integral part of the official urban economy. If this is recognized, then the spatial needs of such an economy too can be recognized. Such recognition will only make way for a productive transformation of a significant sector of the city’s economy into a more dynamic one. Following Tokyo’s experience, at least for the moment of its transformation in the postwar period, will reveal that such dynamism is something that transcends specific cultural and historical explanations of economic growth and may
well show the way to many Asian cities, if not others where the “problem” of informality has become an integral part of a city’s story.

However, to examine these interconnections between spatial forms and economic activities, one needs to follow a kind of city-survey approach that goes beyond mere physicality and instead sees these interconnections as an embodiment of economic forces at work. For such surveys we do not have to move from the space of urban planning to that of anthropology. Instead, we could go back into history and learn again from one of the most farsighted urban planners of the twentieth century, who incidentally happened to spend a part of his life in Mumbai.

Patrick Geddes, who taught at Bombay University from 1919 to 1925, is well known for his defense of what he called regional surveying methods. He believed that good planning relied on good surveys that would incorporate the ecology and social processes. For Mumbai he proposed a planning approach that would preserve and enhance human life and energy and would not try to imitate the aesthetic of European cities. Today, more than sixty years after independence, his recommendations remain as valid as ever, especially in the context of rapid urbanization fostered by speculative development, on the one hand, and intensive urban development by Mumbai’s immigrants, on the other.

The detailed surveying of sites destined to be redeveloped in particular has not been given the importance it deserved. This was clearly demonstrated by the last demographic and physical survey of Dharavi, which ignored everything above the ground floor, excluding tens of thousands of families de facto from the scheme (Bharucha, 2009). A real survey would not simply produce an enumeration and a map of existing structures. The survey as understood by early followers of Geddes, including Lewis Mumford, was much more than an audit of people and space (Law, 2005). It was about understanding how to connect existing topography and milieus with urban development. The same wisdom applied to these parts of the city that have developed through intensive processes, outside of any master plan, processes that could allow the city to capitalize on existing local organization and development patterns instead of clearing them. This would not only ensure a more diverse and vibrant urbanism for the city but also preserve the economic and cultural life enmeshed within these neighborhoods.

The type of survey we are envisioning for Dharavi, one that would enhance its transformative potential, is impossible without the active participation of the concerned population. It involves a deep understanding of the communities, productive activities, social networks, migration patterns, construction methods and materials, ad hoc infrastructure, communication systems, and so on. It is only such a detailed inquiry that would constitute the basis of any meaningful and constructive intervention of the government. This kind of a survey is impossible as long as we do not accept the impossibility of reducing urban complexity without disrupting social networks and economic processes embedded in the urban fabric. This sort of open and inclusive survey, relying on existing local institutions and community organization, would be much more than documentation. It would in fact constitute a real intervention insofar as it would render legible places that have
hitherto been regarded as impossibly messy and dysfunctional. At the same time, it
would identify interlocutors of the government in each part of the city, who would
be best suited to identify needs and means, and follow up with the implementation
of any possible plan.

Another aim of this deep survey would be to make possible a social and eco-
nomic cost-benefit analysis of any redevelopment project. The benefits of selling
the land on which many have settled over the years should be priced against the cost
of destroying that very economic base. Similarly, the cost of in situ infrastructure
upgrading should be evaluated against the benefits of embedded infrastructure into
new housing developments. The benefits of redevelopment for the eligible slum
dwellers should be evaluated against the cost to ineligible dwellers, and to the city as
a whole, which will need to absorb them one way or the other. Only then can a
proper choice be presented to the interested population and the taxpayers, political
parties, and elected representatives.

Such approaches can help provide an alternative way of looking at the ongoing
processes of urban development and take it away from its present tendency—of
seeing it as a question of a physical transformation divorced from a complex and
variegated set of economic activities. This disconnectedness only serves the interests
of a speculative logic that treats built forms as an abstract category, connected to
either aesthetics or simple housing solutions—solutions that are further discon-
nected from economic needs and functions. On the other hand, an understanding
that is forced to negotiate the connections of space and function places the whole
question of housing needs into a different realm—what we refer to as the concerns
of intensiveness. So far the only acceptable choices that have been made have pushed
for the speculative logic in an extreme way. It would be worth trying a more nuanced
and complex interplay that places the intensive city at the center of the process and
then builds up toward a more evolutionary logic combining the two. This way
builders and real estate developers will not be tyrannical leaders of the urban age
but fellow participants, contributing their skills and resources along with other pri-
ivate, institutional, and civil society players.

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