"An Alternative Plan for the Re-development of the Kathputli Colony, New Delhi"

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AN ALTERNATIVE URBAN PLAN
FOR THE RE-DEVELOPMENT OF
THE KATHPUTLI COLONY, NEW DELHI

"THE ENTIRE REHABILITATION PARADIGM IS PREMISED ON AN AESTHETIC IMPROVEMENT OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND SPACES OF THE POOR, INSTEAD OF PEOPLES CAPACITIES OR LIVELIHOODS, WHICH FURTHER EXACERBATES SOCIOECONOMIC INEQUALITIES THAT ALREADY EXIST. RELOCATING THE POOR HAVE NOT IMPROVED THEIR SITUATION BUT RATHER EXACERBATED PREVALENT URBAN PROBLEMS."

Chalana, Manish & Hou, Jeffrey
"Making Sense of the Order in the Disorder of the Kathputli Colony" (2016) Messy Urbanism, Hong Kong University Press

"THE PROPOSED IN SITU REHABILITATION PROJECT FOCUSES ALMOST ENTIRELY ON SHELTER AND PAYS LITTLE ATTENTION TO HOW LIVED SPACES ALSO SERVE AS SPACES OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES, DISREGARDS LIVELIHOOD AS PART OF LIVED SPACES AND UNDERVALUES EXISTING KINDSHIP AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS AND THEIR OVERALL BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY."

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This project is an alternative urban design scheme for the re-development of the Kathputli Colony in New Delhi, India. The Colony, approximately half the size of Gamla Stan, is located 30 minutes west of the City Centre and consist of a myriad of improvised dwellings. The residents of the colony are primarily artists, performers, artisans and puppeteers and have lived on the land since the 1970s.

Now the land is set to be re-developed, directed jointly by the Delhi Municipality and a private developer, Rajeva, as part of the political initiative to turn Delhi into a “World-Class City”. The new scheme consists of two gated communities, a block of high-rises and a luxury skyscraper.

The residents of the colony have been promised accommodation in the high-rise block, but have protested the proposal, and received a lot of media and scholarly attention. They argue that the new buildings with their small and isolated apartments do not cater to their needs. The existing landscape of dwellings which they themselves have constructed contain a number of different spatial qualities on which they depend to be able to continue they’re subsistence - Bazaar streets to sell their wares, courtyards to congregate with their families, squares on which to perform, roofs on which to sleep as during the hot summer months.

I visited the colony twice on my two months journey around the country last semester. On the second visit, all of the dwellings had been demolished.

The brief I have set for myself is to design a more flexible and faceted alternative plan with new building stock that will able to cater both the needs of the ex-residents and the Indian middle class.
THE KATHPUTLI COLONY

The Kathputli Colony is an informal settlement – slums – west of the centre of New Delhi. Its history stretches back to the 1950's when a collective of Kathputli puppets and artists immigrated to the city, created the swamped lands and built their own dwellings.

As the decades rolled by, India entered a phase of rapid urbanisation. The subsequent growth of the capital city, its infrastructural improvements in terms of highways, railways and metro – markedly changed the situation for the slum dwellers. The grounds on which they reside went from being peripheral to central, and are now coveted by the private entrepreneurial forces of the city.

Through the shift in politics from socialist to neo-liberal, the municipality’s approach to urban improvement has changed and has in its most recent agenda – to turn New Delhi into a “World-Class City” – sided with private enterprises to rid the city of slums and turn the precious land into new development.

Although the shift to improve the situation for the impoverished population is not new, or generally unwarranted, the terms on which it is being made has changed. Large numbers of people are being displaced for the sake of the city’s development – which is increasingly catered to the desires of the new middle-class and the bourgeoisie. This process has been criticised for being a strive for beautification rather than social improvement.

In the case of the Kathputli Colony, the development plans made by the municipality in collaboration with Rajeva Developers is to demolish the informal settlements in favour of a scheme consisting of two gated communities – a set of connected high-rises and a luxury skyscraper. The residents of the colony are being offered small apartments in the new high-rises, if they can prove that they have inhabited the grounds for a certain number of years.

Despite the fact that the new scheme promises greatly improved sanitary conditions and legal tenure, a majority of the colony’s inhabitants have collectively protested the plans for years as they feel that the project does not cater to their needs.

The inhabitants of the colony support themselves on a day to day basis as part of the informal economy, primarily through producing goods and crafts, trade, performances and other small services. In order to be able to continue their existence, they are dependent on the spatial configurations that exist within the slums, which they themselves have produced – courtyards to congregate, eat, sleep during the summer months, spaces to store their goods and crafts, bazaar streets to sell their wares and squares on which to perform.

ARCHITECTURE AS A TOOL TO PRESERVE CULTURE

The interest for experiencing India sprung out of having spent time in Brazil to study the work and legacy of architect Lina Bo Bardi. Although Hallerborn and steeped in the modernist design doctrines of that time, she would come to use her knowledge to create architecture meant to elevate and protect indigenous Brazilian culture.

The notion of viewing architecture as a tool that inevitably bears an impact on all is how modern culture is as important today as it was for Bo Bardi during the 1960's in Brazil. Although it, through the cultural movement of Tropicália, has managed to rid itself of its Portuguese enforced legacy, it is now battling a similar struggle as its culture is being pushed aside in favor of products and values from the West, most visibly during the World Cup and Olympics Games of 2014 and 2016.

The same kind of struggle is occurring in India, a nation which like Brazil is so young, and although it has loosened itself from the shackles of the British, it too is now rapidly being transformed in accordance with Western ideas and values. In its rush to become Modern, fueled by the increased economical flux of neo-liberalism, inequality increases, whilst individuals ability of have their voices heard do the opposite.

The Kathputli Colony in New Delhi is one such place where the voices of its impoverished inhabitants are not being heard.

The question is not whether the quality of the built fabric in the informal settlement need to be improved, but how it is to be improved, and to who’s wishes such improvement or re-development are to cater to. In the case of the Kathputli Colony in New Delhi, it is apparent that the redevelopment does not cater to its former inhabitants, but to the growing bourgeoisie.

The task I have set myself, as an architect within an academic context, is to elaborate and illustrate the shift in the kinds of spaces that existed within the informal settlement before it was demolished, the spaces that are to exist with the new development, and the kind of spaces that could potentially exist if one were to also cater to the spatial needs of the residents.

With that being said I feel it is important to emphasize that the project do not intend to solve the vastly greater problem of how to deal with impoverished dwellings or slums as the whole. It is a visual depiction of proposed spaces, which intentionally do not engage with Indian politics, economics or how to redistribute wealth.

NEW DELHI’S THREE MODERNISMS

According to theorist Anthony D. King (The Bartlett, UK), there are three different types of struggles that run concurrently in the city in its strive to become Modern. These types of struggles which are all products of the city’s different roles throughout history.

First off, there is the Indigenous Modernity which is manifested in New Delhi, the signature of Imperial England, the large vistas drawn by Edward Lutyens, which house all of the administrative buildings, the courts, the archives, the assembly, and which used to be sided by series of large and lofty bungalows for the British rulers and administrators.

Second is the Colonial Modernity which is manifested in New Delhi, the signature of Imperial England, the large vistas drawn by Edward Lutyens, which house all of the administrative buildings, the courts, the archives, the assembly, and which used to be sided by series of large and lofty bungalows for the British rulers and administrators.

Finally is the Postcolonial Modernity, which are the large urban development schemes initiated by the ladies state post independence. These tend to be new gated communities on the peripheries of the city, strictly modernist and catered primarily to the car-driven middle-class, these neighbourhoods are conceived as the premise that its inhabitants live according to the dogma of Modernism – isolated in apartments, drive to their work, acquire what they need in the shopping mall, and then drive back through their guarded gates to recall their private spheres again.

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KATHPUTLI COLONY, IN NEW DELHI, INDIA
SQUARE IN DIFFERENT LEVELS LEADING DOWN TO THE HOLY LAKE IN PUSHKAR.

Haveli Qamr al-Din Khan c. 1850 showing pavilions and units connected by courtyards. The haveli included a grand gateway with guards and musicians, an audience hall to receive visitors, women’s quarters, a mosque. The street was named after the great personage as Kuchah Qamr ad-Din Khan. (1.) Kuchah Mir Khan; (2.) Haveli Qamr ad-Din Khan; (3.) Kuchah Qamr ad-Din Khan; (4.) Mosque; (5.) Women’s quarters; (6.) Staff quarters.

THE HISTORY OF THE KATHPUTLI COLONY STRETCHES BACK TO THE 1950s, WHEN TRAVELLING PUPPETEERS FROM RAJASTHAN DECIDED TO PERMANENTLY SETTLE ON THE LANDS. THEY DRAINED THE SWAMPED GROUNDS AND SET THEIR TENT DWELLINGS, WHICH WOULD LATER BE REPLACED BY BRICK AND STONE HUTS WITH THE SAME APPEARANCE AS THEY WERE UNTIL THEY GOT DEMOLISHED IN OCTOBER OF 2017.

THROUGH THE DECADES, OTHER PEOPLE FROM OTHER PARTS OF INDIA WITH OTHER TRADERS AND SKILLS WOULD COME IN AND SETTLE ON THE LANDS - CRAFTSMEN, PERFORMERS, TRADERS, ARTISTS, MUSICIANS.

THEY COEXISTED AS DISTINCT COMMUNITIES, THE ONES CLOSEST TO THE RAILWAY LINE BEING THE NEWEST AND POOREST. ALL OF THEM HAVE IN COMMON THAT THEY RELY ON THE PROXIMITY BETWEEN THEIR DWELLINGS AND THE STREETSCAPE TO CARRY ON THEIR SUBSISTENCE, THE COURTYARDS TO CONGREGATE WITH FAMILY AND COOK, AND THE ROOFTOPS TO SLEEP DURING THE HOT SUMMER MONTHS.

AS THE RESIDENTS SQUAT THE LAND AND DO NOT POSSESS LEGAL TENURE, THEY HAVE HAD TO FIGHT FOR THEIR EXISTENCE AND AGAINST STATE BEURACRACY AND POLICY. DURING THE EMERGENCY YEARS, 1975 - 1977 THE ENTIRE COLONY WAS DEMOLISED, ONLY FOR THE RESIDENTS TO RETURN AND REBUILD THEIR DWELLINGS A FEW YEARS LATER.

SCENOGRAPHER RAJEEV SETHI ENCOURAGED THE DIFFERENT ARTISTS TO FORM A COOPERATIVE TO JOIN HANDS IN THE JOINT EFFORT OF DEFENDING THEIR RIGHTS, AND TOGETHER THEY WOULD ARTICULATE THE WISH TO GET LEGAL TENURE AND EVENTUALLY BE ABLE TO TURN THEIR LANDS INTO A PERMANENT ARTIST VILLAGE, THE ANANDGRAM.

AS THE RESIDENTS OF THE COLONY HAVE HAD TO GROUP TOGETHER IN ORDER TO DEFEND THEIR RIGHTS AND PROTEST THE DEVELOPMENT PLANS AS ONE COHERENT VOICE, THEY HAVE SUCCESSFULLY MANAGED TO TRANSCEND THEIR ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND CASTE DIVISION IN ORDER TO BECOME A COMMUNITY IN THE STRIVE TO PRESERVE THEIR WAY OF LIFE.

AREA SIZE...    75,000 m²
RESIDENTS...    15,000 approx.
TYPOLOGY...     IMPROVISED DWELLINGS
LEVELS...       1 - 2 FLOORS
MATERIALS...    BRICK, MUD, CONCRETE, SHEET METAL, WOOD, PLASTIC, DIRT, FABRIC
INFRASTRUCTURE... PRIVATE ELECTRICAL WIRING
LIMITED RUNNING WATER
MOTORIZED TRAFFIC ONLY ON BAZAAR STREET
PUBLIC SPACE...  COURTYARDS, ALLEYS, BAZAAR, ROOFTOPS
INSTITUTIONS...  SHRINES, TEMPLE, MOSQUE, SCHOOL, WORKSHOP, ARTIST TRUST

IMAGES FROM DOCUMENTARY "TOMORROW WE DISAPPEAR"

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THERE ARE THREE MAJOR PARAMETERS THAT SUBDIVIDE THE LANDSCAPE OF THE COLONY. COMMUNITIES, LANDMARKS AND THE NETWORK OF ROADS AND PATHS.

THE SOUTHERN END OF THE BAZAAR AND ENTRANCE TO THE COLONY IS THE PRIMARY CONGLOMERATE OF SEMI-PUBLIC SPACES. SET ACROSS FROM THE PARK IS THE ARTIST TRUST AND WORKSHOPS.

THE COLONY ALSO Expands past its borders to the east with its connection to the Municipal School.

THE NORTHERN ENTRANCE TO THE COLONY IS MARKED with a Temple.

THE HIGHWAY AND METRO TO THE NORTH, AND THE RAILWAY TO THE WEST CREATE STRONG BORDER CONDITIONS, BUT ALSO MAKE SURE THE COLONY IS WELL CONNECTED TO THE REST OF THE CITY.

THE BAZAAR running through the colony is by far the most important street, and also the only one wide enough to carry cars.

Apart from the bazaar there are also a number of paths and alleyways that leads to the other neighbourhoods.
The colony consists of a variety of communities, spread out through the colony. These are primarily divided according to the inhabitants' origins.

The eastern parts of the colony were settled first and tend to be more prosperous, but also denser than those closer to the rails. The settlements closest to the rail is in the worst shape.

Through the struggle against the development plans, the community has managed to come together as a united group, transcending both religious belief, class and ethnicity.

The new structure designed for the colony is based on the idea of using the existing program to create subdivision, rather than as it were - based on ethnicity.

The landmarks - school, temple, mosque, theatre etc. are also used for their spatial qualities in the woven fabric of the new colony.

Sequences of courtyards and squares connect the different neighbourhoods to each other.
The New Proposal for development as put forward by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and private enterprise, Raheja Developers, is the product of a particular mindset in the strive to turn New Delhi into a “World Class City.”

As the great socialist vision of the new nation slowly ran aground after the passing of Gandhi and Nehru, and as the divide between the rich and the poor were rampantly increasing with the advent of neoliberalism, the new policy toward urban development seem to be essentially about image and displacement rather than about social improvement.

Although the proposal consist of two similar modernist components, the high-rise block and the skyscraper, they are nonetheless distinctly separate from one another.

The skyscraper, named the Phoenix, is a signature building which is explicitly catered for the growing bourgeoisie, complete with luxurious interior detailing and services.

The high-rises are meant to cater to the colony’s original residents, although not all of them have been promised contracts as they have to be able to prove that they have resided within the colony for a certain amount of years, something that seem hard to prove legally. The block consist mainly of 30 m² apartments, and is the developers’ pledge in favor of getting the precious land at a nominal price from the state.

Both of the building complexes are to be gated communities, and thereby clearly separated from one another.

Apart from demanding of its future residents to conform their lives according modernist dogmas, whether they believe that to be possible or not, the proposal is also a manifest for separation, isolation and class distinction.
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The alternative proposal for the Kathputli Colony is routed in Anthony D. King's theory that there exist three concurrent movements within the city in its strive to become modern.

If the proposal that has been put forward by the DDA and Rajve developers is rooted in postcolonial modernity, characterized by its vertical disposition, separation from the rest of the city, isolated apartment units, and reliance upon the motorized vehicle, the alternative proposal is rooted in what Jyoti Hosagrahar coined indigenous modernity.

Indigenous modernity can still be seen in some parts of the city that were never demolished by the British and have in recent years become protected for the sake of their historical value. Old Delhi is the most prominent example.

Old Delhi or Shahjahanabad, consisted of havelis, large courtyard buildings owned by the aristocracy. These could cover an entire block of the urban structure and contained all the services the courtly family could need, including soldiers, traders and performers.

As the power structure changed with the advent of the British, the aristocracy would lose their money and influence and the large havelis would over time be subdivided into smaller and smaller units.

Although the politics and structure of the city radically changed over time, the built fabric of the old city remained and adapted, and so life in it could adapt in the same pace and in its own way.

The alternative proposal aims to provide new building stock to the old colony. Buildings flexible enough to cater both to the middle class and to former residents of the colony, with the same spatial qualities that existed in both the colony and the old parts of the great city.

Alternative Proposal Routed in Traditional Ideas of the City

2018

Area Size... 15,000 m²
Residents... 15,000 approx.
Levels... 4-6 stories
Materials... Brick, plaster, in-situ concrete
Infrastructure... Electricity, sewers and water
Limited motorized vehicle access
Shared public and semi-private space
Community focus
Public space... Courtyards, alleys, extended bazaar, rooftops, parks
Institutions... Temple & shrines, school, community cultural centre, theatre and workshop
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Plan 1:2000

- Area Size: 75,000 m² (including land yet to be exploited)
- Residents: 15,000 approx.
- Typology: Low height, high density mix-use
- Levels: 4-6 stories
- Materials: Brick, plaster, in-situ concrete
- Infrastructure: Electricity, sewers and water
- Limited motorized vehicle access
- Shared public and semi-private space
- Community focus
- Public space: Courtyards, alleys, extended bazaar, rooftops, parks
- Institutions: Temple & shrines, school, community cultural centre, theatre and workshop
ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL
Routed in traditional ideas of the city

Setting up structure for a new urban fabric

Rather than setting out to produce new urban fabric based on solitary building blocks, this proposal aims at starting out by implementing social space first. Starting out with the larger ones—the bazaar, square and maidan (park). In the between of the larger social areas will come smaller squares and courtyards, connected by alleys and roads.

In connection to the courtyards there will be sets of stairs to connect to new building stock that is to come.

Buildings with key programmatic features are inserted and spread out so that they interact with the social spaces and other buildings.

I. Shrine
II. Mosque
III. Community Centre
IV. Bazaar
V. Temple
VI. Theatre
VII. Workshop
VIII. School

LARGE PUBLIC SPACE
THE BAZAAR, THE SQUARE & THE MAIDAN

MEDIUM PUBLIC SPACE
SQUARES

SMALL PUBLIC SPACE
COURTYARDS

CONNECTIVE SPACE
ALLEYS

CONNECTIVE SPACE
ARTERY ROADS

CONNECTIVE SPACE
STAIRCASES

LANDMARKS
PROGRAMATIC FUNCTIONS

NEW BUILDING STOCK
SECTIONAL SEQUENCES
CUT THROUGH KEY SPACES
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BUILDING AND STREET

COMMERCIAL 
SHRINES 
EDUCATION

DIAGRAMATIC SECTIONS
ORIGINAL SCALE 1:500
MODEL OF COURTYARD BUILDING
ORIGINALLY A FOLD-OVER COLLAGE
ORIGINAL SCALE 1:100
Diagram showing the use of spaces depending on weather & season
Original scale 1:100