

REMAKING MUMBAI

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Over the last three decades in Mumbai, planning has been largely concerned with rearguard actions versus the avant-garde approaches that traditionally led planning. Thus today most infrastructure follows city growth rather than facilitating and opening up new growth centres within and outside the city's core. In contemporary Mumbai, planning happens systematically 'posterior', as a recuperative and securing action. Perhaps globalisation and the urgency of integrating with a broader economic system are challenging the priorities of the governing authorities responsible for making the city? The case of the mill lands vividly illustrates the city's runaway physical growth. In the development of the area's 2.37 km², located in the crowded central district of Parel, the economic gain of a select few has driven the conversion of this rare asset into private commercial development. Yet, despite being a vitally important and heavily publicised planning decision, no planning agency in Mumbai prepared a masterplan or strategy to integrate these lands for the benefit of the city; and concerned citizens, environmentalists and planners just reacted too late to salvage whatever could be retrieved through Public Interest Litigation (PIL) within a set of legislative moves to divide this prime land.

In sum, the mill lands demonstrate the state of the profession of urban planning and the culture of architecture in the city. Here, professionals and institutions are seemingly unequipped to grapple with emergent issues in the city. Thus, the profession is chiefly engaged in recuperative action, intervening post-facto to clean up the mess! It is therefore no coincidence that in Mumbai there is an increased celebration of projects involving 'cleaning up' – whether that is the restoration of historic buildings, precincts or districts, waterfronts and pavements, or the relocation of slums to make way for infrastructure. While critical to the functioning of the city, these projects are an indication of the limited role of the architec-

tural and engineering professions as well as all the other agencies involved in making the city.

By default, the private sector is determining the emergent form of Mumbai. This is the result of a fundamental shift in the planning process whereby the government has privatised city development. And although the government has devolved itself of the responsibility of delivering urban amenities within a strategic framework, it has not defined its new role. Will it still be the custodian of the public realm or will it establish the checks and balances required for the unleashing of private enterprise for urban development? Today, there is an incredible disjuncture in the city between existing and allocated land use and the positioning of new infrastructure – a condition where land use, transportation planning and urban form have no relationships with each other in the emergent landscape. How then do growth, planning and vision for the city accommodate the future?

In order to evolve an approach relevant to this emerging scenario, there needs to be greater engagement with city issues by the citizens and professionals in the city. To allow this to happen, planning or decision-making about urban form should be addressed at two levels – the macro (or city) level and the micro or area/neighbourhood level. In this model, akin to the state and concurrent lists at the national policy level, the macro level would concern itself with infrastructure, roads and connections between parts of the city as well as broad policies for the metropolitan area.

At the micro level, issues of urban form – floor space index (FSI) and transfer of development right (TDR) designations, aesthetics as well as health and hygiene – would enable city authorities to take responsibility for orchestrating growth in the region with the local level organisations (i.e. ward offices or citizens'

groups) focused on the tactics for urban governance. This decentralised system would be far more efficient in managing as well as responding to crisis situations – like smaller pixels on a screen, we will get higher resolution in our cities on the ground.

Cities grow and evolve by opening up new land for growth or recycling land within their domains. In both these processes, people affected must necessarily participate in the process if the decisions are to be sustainable. The misappropriation of the mill lands demonstrates that without this engagement, land becomes an abstract entity reduced to blobs of colour on a land use plan – open to change and manipulation. Cities by nature are contested territories. Who commands what and how in a Democracy is determined by who participates or is excluded from the process. It is crucial that a city has an articulated strategy for its growth and builds a consensus reflecting the aspiration of its citizens. In the mill lands, the state government and planning agencies sadly did not engage its citizens in the process of adapting this asset for future growth. In this context, the eastern waterfront is of great relevance to the city and the region, as their connection depends on how the eastern water's edge is recycled for use. In the regional growth scenarios and projections of the Golden Triangle (connecting Mumbai, Nashik and Pune), the eastern waterfront could connect the old centre with the regional triangle's emergent industries, special economic as well as agricultural export zones. This land also offers the potential to connect the peripheral areas of the city with the Metropolitan region as a whole.

The eastern waterfront's approximately 7.3 km² (1,800 acres) are grappling with great transformation as the economy of Mumbai moves into the post-industrial phase. While this area is roughly 3 times larger than the area of the mill lands, interestingly only 6 per cent of this land is under reservation by the BMC for public use with a meagre 0.85 per cent of open space. Thus the area's stretch of 14.5 km of virtually inaccessible waterfront offers the potential for public access while re-orienting the perception of the region with regard to the city's geography and physical form. Similarly, the potential for connectivity using water transport could offer the much-needed transformation of mobility within the region.

Currently only 50 per cent of the land, 3.4 km² (836 acres), is used for port activities. Large, seemingly underused infrastructure, roads and warehouses (often beautifully robust buildings with great reuse potential) create a sense of desolation that is offset by teeming populations, labour pools and a virtual sea of energy and resources creating new forms of employment in the area. Equally daunting is determining the process most appropriate to trigger the conversion of this incredible resource of land, people and infrastructure to improve the city while safeguarding the interest of present users? Indeed, the ecology of the region, defined by the mangroves and flamingos that settle here during half the year, couple with the heritage buildings and treasures such as the Sewri Fort and other fragments to comprise the rich fabric of Mumbai's Eastern Waterfront.

The eastern waterfront is a crucial zone that could transform Mumbai and compensate for the city's many physical deficiencies. The challenge is how to rearrange the landscape to synergize these different components.

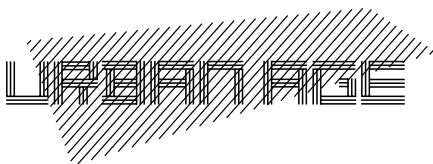
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