

**[RE] CONNECTING
M U M B A I**

*A response to the increasing
spatial and social polarization
within the city of Mumbai*

R E F L E C T I O N



First Impressions

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For a student to go to India (or Asia) for the first time in my life it was quite the shock at first. Even after researching how Mumbai has grown over the centuries and researching how the people live there, it was really interesting to see such a different approach to living compared to the western world. Nevertheless there were some similarities to be found. Especially in the way we make our home our own.

The first impression I had of Mumbai (and Nalasopara) was the great divide between areas in the city. India is known for its caste system in which there are different caste where you are born into. Someone from the lowest caste won't ever make it to a higher standard as they will always be seen as a lower caste member. This divide is striking and very visible after only one hour of walking through the city. Large skyscrapers tower next to low to the ground, cramped buildings.

I realized that it is not just a spatial disparity but a social one as well. A social polarization is happening in the city which is bad for the functioning of the city and its inhabitants. Not only is there this polarization but another aspect of this city is its buildings which are just 'copied and pasted'. They are so similar but still everybody tries to make it their own place.

Something should and can be done to reduce the amount of social and spatial polarization

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The Project

Nalasopara East is can be viewed as an area with two kinds of dwelling types. The single story Baithi Chawls as well as the “handshake” chawls that have replaced some of them.

These handshake chawls have the same footprint which in turn make the buildings close to each other. Some less than 30 cm away from each other. Rarely do you see well ventilated ‘open to sky’ spaces which can be found a lot in gated communities on the other side of the railway track. In Nalasopara West you can find more dwellings for the MIG and HIG income groups. But only people who live there can enjoy these spaces. A little boy or girl from the baithi chawls will never have the same chances as a child from Nalasopara West.

In Nalasopara, many of the original single-storey Baithi chawls were replaced by four to five storey “handshake chawls” on the exact same footprint, and the distance between buildings are minimized, in some extreme cases, to less than 10 cm. This creates dark, long, and poorly

Gated communities and the ghettoization of the marginalized people creates rigid borders, harsh contrasts and unfairness on many facets.

The increasing social polarization and with it the widening income gap leads to social and spatial inequalities in Mumbai, Nalasopara and other parts of the Global South.

This creates unfairness between the different income groups whereby the lower income groups are the ones who can’t make use of the city as they should. Other problems that arise are ghettoization, hard boundaries between groups/ areas, unfairness in use of amenities and limited to no upward mobility.

The project therefore aims to create as system of buildings where the identity of the area can be seen as a whole but whereby every income group still can have their own qualities of life, their way of life isn’t what they want to have. It also should provide affordable housing for all groups, provide opportunities for income generation, opportunities for participation, opportunities to show individuality in this concrete jungle while maintaining appropriate borders which will be activated by the design. All the while encouraging diversity and reducing the amount of segregation while maintaining a certain balance to reconnect the city.

By using an empty plot of land in Nalasopara West as a starting point I want to propose a new development with an overarching architectural expression while creating a sense of diversity within the development, By creating four different typologies for four different income groups each group gets to have their own qualities which support their way of life. This projects aims to be an example from which people in other parts of the city could choose which typologies they would like to use in their area.

In the end, the project hopes to propose an alternative development, which should show that other possibilities are at hand to rethink the current situation of social polarization and exclusion of the poor. Creating borders instead of boundaries where these different groups could interact as zones of exchange, while still having their own place in the city.



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Research Methods and Approaches

The research done for this project consisted of three types. A background study was conducted with the whole group before we visited the site. During our field trip this study was followed by a micro ethnography study and after the trip extra literary study was conducted individually.

Background Study

During the first few weeks before visiting the site we conducted a background study with the entire group. This study would give us insights into Mumbai and India from the 1500's to the current city. This study included a typological and morphological analysis. But it also included hard and soft data such as the number of inhabitants, demography, climate, economy et cetera. But we also studied the spatial information of different projects that have been built in Mumbai and the surrounding area. This research was compiled into a collective research booklet. The books "Arrival City" and "Building and Dwelling" were important to understand how these cities act as a whole and which areas are important to look at. These books made me curious about the social struggles and the social developments inside the city.

Site Survey

The site survey was done in a combination of writing and visual ethnography. By being in the place we observed, identified, experienced and recorded our experiences and findings. This research was made into the patterns of inhabitation. These patterns are key points of how these people live, work, interact and make use of their space. All these different patterns make up our Book of patterns. Together with an essay in which we compared these patterns to the patterns of the Netherlands I reflected upon the different patterns and I could identify similarities such as the individualising of your home. We have to have mass housing but people just want their own place. This was something which I was really intrigued by because you need to design for this individuality of people.

Literary Study

After the site survey I kept reading on the problems of social polarization in India and the problems which come from this polarization. Together these different stages compliment each other very well. I got to experience the life of an average Indian which I used in my design process while the bigger overall study helped me whenever I got stuck. This brings together an approach which makes sure that the problems and issues are addressed from every angle.

Research & Design

When we arrived back in the Netherlands we had to formulate our own problem statement and with that a research question. My main research question was:

How can a mixed-use, mixed-income housing development in Nalasopara stimulate the development of socially unpolarized sustainable urban settlements?

Throughout the design process my sub-questions changed as sometimes they didn't quite fit the main problem anymore or they were going off track. But the main research question can be divided into these sub-questions.

What are the needs and aspirations of each different income group?

What are the dwelling qualities for each income group and which housing configuration fits these needs.

What are the strategies for mixed income housing?

What operational model could be used?

In what way do the Authority, sponsor and end-user participate in this scheme?

The research formed the knowledge needed to answer these questions. These questions formed my requirements for the design. Especially the needs and aspirations of the different income groups was essential to designing the different typologies which are in the new development. This did take me a long time to come to the right design solution. Parts of this were to my lack of knowledge other parts were due to other personal circumstances which inhibited me from continuing with my research and my design process. But whenever I got stuck in my design process I would get back to my research. This would help me in the design while the design sometimes helped with the research as well as a random intuitive design example would question or strengthen my research.

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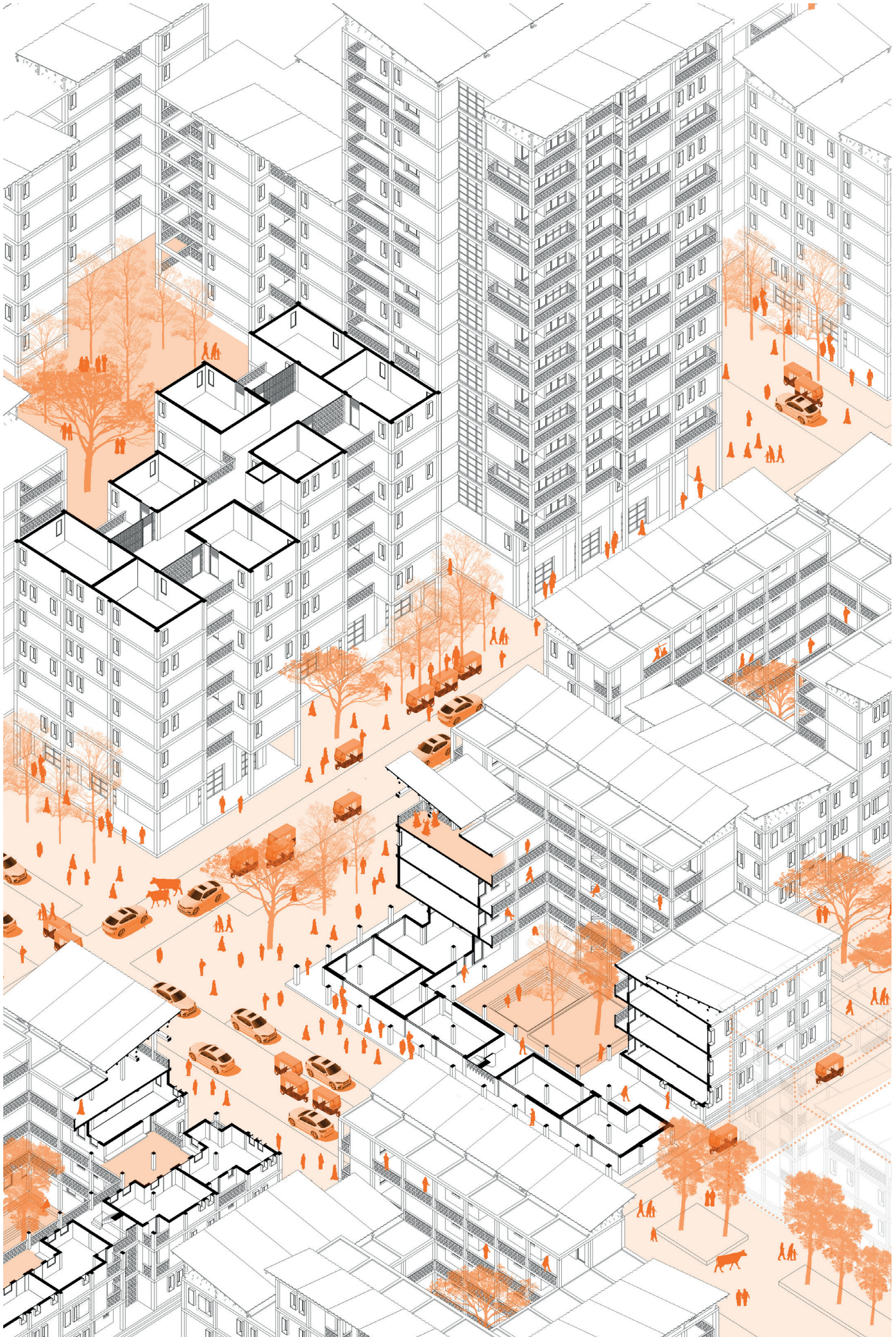
*Global Housing Graduation Studio &
Master of Architecture, Urbanism, and Building Sciences*

The global housing studio was a fresh new way of looking at how people live. I have always been used to designing project for Dutch people and you don't really consider anything else. To design something in Mumbai, a place where i have never been, was really challenging. There are many aspects to take into consideration. Not just the typological and morphological but also the way they design and built in this part of the world as well as certain issues considering density and affordability. The studio required me to address many different problems which were quite new to me.

The patterns of inhabitation was an example of aspects of the studio of which I never really thought about. Especially with the patterns of Dutch housing you would expect that you know them but it was very interesting once you really get into them and see how we live and what we do to make our homes our own. To be able to compare this to the Indian patterns was really interesting. It really makes you look at who you are designing for a little different. A new fresh look which only adds more to your design. It is this perspective of the way people live that I think is very important in designing (mass)housing. It isn't just a building that people use but a dwelling is something where people spend a large part of their life in. I think this changed my perspective as an architect.

To achieve this large project I had to keep zooming in and out on various scales. It was odd but also very refreshing to design on a much smaller scale for the building technology early on in the process. It offers a new way of thinking. Instead of designing something and figuring out how you are going to build it you start to think about the way they build before most of the design was thought out.

I think that this studio requires a discussion on how we as architects design for the ever changing need of people. Our lives today are radically different from how they would have been had we lived 100 years ago. As an architect you need to find the right balance between top down and bottom up approaches to keep your design relevant. The idea that I have brought up is a system, a framework, which is very efficient. The more you go down to the level of the end-user you start to see more bottom up approaches where the architect can give an idea of how you would design/build but not necessarily the way it has to be. It is not harshly defined. It is open for change. This discussion has to be ongoing for ever. Otherwise you end up with building projects which get demolished 30 years after because they don't comply to the current rules and guidelines.



Ethical Issues and Dilemmas

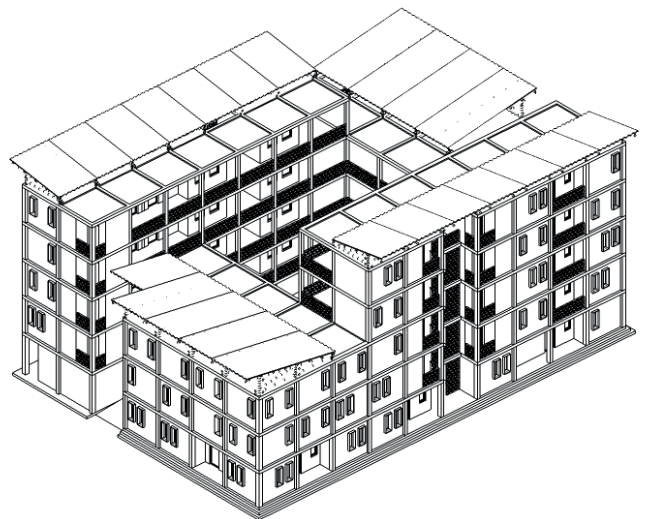
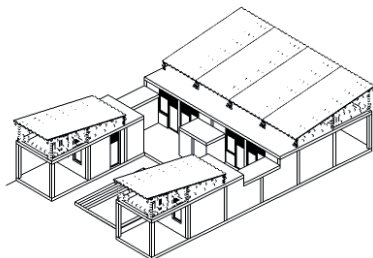
As stated before, it was the first time for me to be in a country in Asia. Although I have been to Tunisia which is not western I still had to adapt.

For the Indian people it was different to see us as well. Just some people (students) who 'invade' their homes for the sake of their journey towards their degree. That might be something that could have effected our research on site.

We only had a short amount of time on site to take pictures, talk to people and record and observe everything going on in our area. Sometimes it seemed as we just barged into a home and left as soon as we had our information. Though it never felt that way. Most of the people we talked to were very welcoming and open to our questions.

Even though, It might have been better for me to go back to Mumbai at least once to discuss my findings with them and to see if they are correct as they would see. For example the aspirations and needs is something I have observed in a small period of time.

Another ethical issue was the quality of living. For me it was quite shocking to see how many people lived in a dwelling of only 22 square meters. In the Netherlands we think 38 square meters for 2 people is already quite small. At some point you have to question if you need to use these Dutch perspectives in your design but at the same time, these ideas/design might now work because their society is so drastically different. It was really interesting to with a different view to these problems.



One of the main issues I had during this design process was the year 2019 in itself as well as my mental health. A lot has happened this year which took my mind off of my design and I can see that I never fully recovered. Although I think I could have done better if all those awful things did not happen, I do think I delivered a graduation project to be proud of.

