

Reflection

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This is a reflection describing and reviewing my process of graduating in the studio *Global Housing 2017 – 2018, Mixing Mumbai; Affordable Housing for Inclusive Development*. In its work the studio of *Global Housing* seeks to rethink current systems of affordable housing and to engage with pressing dwelling- and urban issues in developing territories, as well as with the increasing cross-cultural character of contemporary architectural practice. My graduation project forms a part of this venture.

The graduation studio of 2017 – 2018 studies on affordable housing in Mumbai, India. In the past decades Mumbai has experienced a huge increase of citizens who, drawn by the economic opportunities of the big city, come to Mumbai for chances of a better life. The city is struggling with the effects that this has on the city. A big part of its population resides in informal settlements, living under impoverished circumstances. My projects revolves around improving these circumstances through the development of durable, affordable, qualitative social housing that is able to reach high densities while maintaining a qualitative level of living.

The studio *Global Housing* works with a set of research methods. First, the students are encouraged to use historical, theoretical and typological research to gain a broad insight into the subject. Then, through a 10-day fieldtrip in Mumbai, the subject is more thoroughly explored in an qualitative, ethnographic manner using tools as observation, interview, drawing and photography. After this trip an ethnographic study is done on living patterns of studied groups of people.

The focus on ethnographic research coincides with the character of the field of study of the studio. The studio focusses on cross-cultural matters and ethnographic research can help to work concise in contexts that differ so much from our own. By using tools as active observation, in-depth engagement or research on-site, context-rich information can be subtracted. I found the most interesting and enjoyable application of this approach to be a set of interviews that we conducted in the city of Nalasopara. By observing a number of cases through semi-structured interviews that were inductive and open-ended of character me and my fellow students were able to get a better insight into the complex reality of everyday-life in Mumbai.

The use of these specific methods of research has had an influence on the steps that followed after it. With these methods an emphasis is put on the perspective of the user, in my case the perspective of the Mumbaikars that reside in the informal settlements. Through the interaction with the users I can get a better view of their situation with which I can later work on through research and design. My perspective on the situation is in that case not of importance as I have no experience of living in an informal settlement and thereby am not able to point out the exact problems and opportunities. The position that I do take with this research is that I believe that it is problematic that the voices and opinions of these inhabitants of informal settlements are often not heard. This position has had a significant influence on the nature of my problem statement and design hypothesis that both revolve around the perspective of the inhabitant of an informal settlement as well as on my later design that holds this future resident as a central figure for its development.

These parts of research are part of the methodological line of inquiry of the graduation studio, in addition to this individual research has been conducted by me. For this quantitative research and typological research has been carried out that focuses on social housing developed during the past decades by the municipality of Mumbai. Data on the general scope of social housing, data on a number of case studies and typological analyses of social housing projects formed together a useful basis for further development of the project.

The process of graduating has been very informative and I have been able to learn from it as it helped me to further develop my skillset as an architecture student. During the MSc. 1 I have

been part of a project from the Dutch Housing studio which introduced me to the challenges and opportunities that lay within Dutch housing design. With this graduation I have been able to get to know a whole different side of housing. In this project the circumstances are very extreme, like the ever-increasing population density, the striking poverty and the organizational complexity. This forces the student to come up with more extreme ideas, concepts and eventually designs. To work in this context has broadened my view on social housing as it showed me the full scope of aspects that can play a role in the development of such projects. In that sense it was useful that the graduation studio embraces this complexity and pushes the student to constantly take into account aspects as affordability, political complexity, land ownership, climate and more. While it was not always easy to simultaneously work on this different topics, it has in the end led to a layered project that is able to tackle a multitude of problems at the same time and with that adding a more valuable piece of work to the study on this topic.

When reviewing my individual process I can recognize changes in ways of working, which have less to do with the graduation studio specific and more to do with my personal development of work methods and approaches for design.

My P2 evaluation went rather chaotic. Coming up with a set of compelling ideas and concepts I was nevertheless not able to tie them together. This situation has occurred often during my time as a student and I knew I had to think of other ways to structure my process so to be able to come to a better and more wholesome end product that functions as a proper translation of my ideas and concepts.

To get to this point I started working more patiently, I started developing all different aspects more thoroughly and with that the graduation project started to develop more organically and in a durable manner. For me this is an important part of the graduation as to learn how to improve the work and design process makes the work more enjoyable and at the same time improves the level of the end product.

During my graduation process the feedback given by the mentors has played a helpful role in the development of the project. They were able to concisely point out flaws in the project that could be improved as well as at times suggest directions for the further design process. Having had for example some difficulties with making the step from the architectural design to the urban design the feedback helped me to make this step and eventually develop a project that is able to deliver on all different scales.

The final graduation period will take the project to its final and presentable form through the making of an urban and architectural model, further finetuning of the existing drawings, further technical elaboration, the making of a set of compelling perspectives and through the finetuning of the storyline. Helped by the feedback of the P4 I aim to successfully develop these products and come to an end product that embodies all that I have learned throughout this graduation.

This graduation project fits within the bigger scientific work of the studio. The studio's work is focused on the study of affordable housing in the global south. The term global south refers to countries that have experienced histories of colonialism, neo-imperialism and differential economic and social change through which large inequalities in living standards, life expectancy and access to resources are maintained. The countries of South-America, Africa and a part of Asia are seen as the global south. During the past decades these countries have experienced a huge migratory flow from the rural areas to the cities. This flow has put a lot of pressure on the capacity of the cities to house the people, resulting in a lack of affordable housing. The studies of the *Global Housing* studio strives to do research on this process.

My individual project fulfills a part of this as a research through design. My specific project focusses on Mumbai. Within this context it focusses on the challenge of working with very high densities. As the cities in the global south are dealing with extreme growth, which is expected to even increase, I believe that the challenge for future urban planners and architects is to be

able to house people very densely while being able to still offer a certain level of living quality. Because of the way economic activity is centralized in cities, densification of the cities will continue to take place and low-rise housing developments will become less probable to be developed. Within this new reality I believe that a focus should be on the development of types of middle- and high rise housing which are able to incorporate spatial, social and economical qualities that currently are often missing in these developments.

My graduation project strives to, through the development of a mid and high-rise type, get a finer understanding of the possibilities and limitations of vertical housing. By bringing high-rise architecture together with spatial, social and economical qualities that can be found in low-rise housing projects, the extent to which high-rise development can be a solution for the overpopulation of cities in the global south can be researched. Outcomes of this research are, when generalized, transferable to research on cities in the global south in general as these cities deal with the same issues of overpopulation.

The current lack of affordable housing in the city of Mumbai is a result of big economic, social and political changes that overreach the scope of architecture. The reason that problems regarding affordable housing are not being solved has not to do with the local architects and urban planners but more so with the incapability of the governing authorities to solve this and correlating issues. In that context I believe that the value of this graduation project lies not in a potential application but more so in its academic value. Precisely because we operate within an academic context we can handle the issues at stake on a more abstract level and thereby come to new ideas and concepts. This graduation project is not potentially applicable in practice but as an academic work it has the potential to further push the discussion on affordable housing in the global south.