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P4 Reflection

Aspect 1: Relationship between research and design.

My research led me to understand that Mumbai rapidly developed due to the liberalisation of its economy and its competitiveness within the global real estate market. Consequently, Navi Mumbai, delineated from its original conception as a satellite city and is competing itself to attract foreign investment. Two grand infrastructure works are planned, the Trans Harbour Link which will connect Mumbai to Navi Mumbai and a new international airport. Following the book *Landscapes of Accumulation: Real Estate and the Neoliberal Imagination in Contemporary India* written by Llerena Guiu Searle, I understood that capital flow between states does not happen magically but needs mediators. In order for Indian local businessmen to attract foreign investors, housing is commodified, it is organised based on marketing rather than the needs of the locals. The aspirations of the foreign investors are translated into aspirations for the local people as well. That means high-rise residential blocks become the leading model for housing everyone and I tried to question this. In general, the commodified house considers all people producers and consumers of the formal economy. However, there are people who work outside the formal economy such as the Koli fishermen at Moha Koliwada, the urbanising village I chose as a site. My response focuses on the community, partly imagined, that exists in Moha Koliwada. Highlighting the history and the culture of local people, focusing on the accommodation of fishing related activities, attempting to tackle the environmental problems that will ensue due to the construction of the nearby Navi Mumbai airport and working towards strengthening the community to urbanise in a healthier manner became my design approach. Focusing on the community of the village directed me to develop first a contextual 'urban' plan. Individual buildings and blocks follow from the urban strategy at the relevant architectural strategy. Studio research into different densities, their layouts and relationship to health have helped shape my design strategy. Furthermore, housing research of the Indian Modernist movement has helped me consider housing as a resource for more vibrant urban and street conditions.

Aspect 2: Relationship between graduation topic, the studio topic, your master track, and your master programme.

My graduation project focuses on housing for urbanising villages within the notions of the affordable and equitable city as described by the studio assignment. These villages have existing communities which come under threat in terms of the environmental quality, their ability to continue working/ fishing, the eradication of their culture and the destruction or dispossession of the communities itself. Urbanising villages provide essential affordable housing for the urban poor of Navi Mumbai. I find that intervening specifically in these villages is responsible and touches upon greater problems of the way urbanisation takes place. Regarding the Architecture track, I believe my graduation project attempts to deal with the social and spatial challenges facing many rapidly developing cities around the world and especially in the global south. The main goal of the master programme is to explore sustainable development and at first hand social sustainability is at the core of my graduation project. The project mediates between social and environmental sustainability, admittedly more on the urban scale. However, research has been carried out for the use of appropriate materials that find the right balance on cost, environmental impact and implement ability. Finally, I draw on theoretical aspects of urbanism that became important for my project in accordance with the multi-disciplinary tradition of the programme.

Aspect 3: Elaboration on research method and approach chosen by the student in relation to the graduation studio methodical line of inquiry, reflecting thereby upon the scientific relevance of the work.

To analyse and understand the context we were designing for, we carried extensive research as a class in the first semester of the year. This gave me a strong basis to identify and situate the problem of urbanising villages in order to develop my thesis in an individual manner. A very important aspect we researched and I brought forward in my thesis project is the density of dwellings in a given area and the way this density is arranged. I attempted to compete with high-rise buildings in terms of density but with a different arrangement that suits an urban village. To understand the community I am designing for, I read academic papers and online articles, studied relevant student work and sketched from online images of similar communities. This has been my personal response to the fact that we could not travel to India to see the site. Regarding technology and the environment, I have used various online sources to first understand the climatic conditions, find appropriate material solutions (with the help of my classmates' research too) and experiment for solutions.

The most fascinating piece of research I have done, almost accidentally, is by 'following' Rohan Shivkumar, an architect/ teacher/ filmmaker from Mumbai on Instagram. I followed Rohan after he lectured us online and the purpose was to ask him, and I admit to slightly tease him, on his conscious choice to call Navi Mumbai and Mumbai, 'New Bombay' and 'Bombay'. The following months I sometimes watched his 'stories' where he showed the vibrant life of Mumbai found in informal spaces, sometimes in rural settings, of small gatherings and various festivals. I was inspired to take this seriously due to the encouragement by our second research mentor, Rachel Lee, to follow people and groups on Instagram as part of our research. Looking at the life of a Bombaykar, who infiltrated in a sense my daily life, guided me to understand better the informal city as described by Rahul Mehrotra and further elaborate on the importance of community.

Aspect 4: Elaboration on the relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional, and scientific framework, touching upon the transferability of the project results.

I hope my project highlights that the way urbanisation takes place can be challenged by emphasizing community, local culture, and informal methods of production. To understand why these aspects are important we need to move past the binary notions of the rural/ urban and consider citizenship and participation. Through my research on partly understanding the informal, the importance of coming together to celebrate secular and non-secular events, and the ensued autoethnographic analysis... I understood that 'strong' communities collectivise fear, partly and simplify our everyday stress, and then eliminate it... 'We will get fish to feed our families this year too'.

Taking into consideration the existing community and their needs is not enough in the professional world. The project attempts to illustrate how the local community with their official body of Moha Koliwada can mediate between landowners and contractors to coordinate the urbanisation of the village. However, in real life, their needs to be support for the development of these villages, rather than their erasure, through other official bodies such as CIDCO (City and Industrial Development Corporation) in our case to name one. Furthermore, for my thesis project I proposed three typologies that result in three urban conditions. In real life, there is probably going to be different kinds and versions of these buildings implemented in a village, possibly designed by various architects. This is where a community of architects could help to achieve a better urbanisation of the villages in question. Big architecture offices design urban plans for the formal city, as is the case for Navi Mumbai. Many architects are involved in the later process where architecture on a

smaller scale happens. Similarly, smaller architecture offices can pick up work for the urbanising villages afterwards too. This process considers larger architecture offices with greater agency empowering smaller architecture offices without anyone at a loss.

Aspect 5 Discuss the ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered in (i) doing the research, (ii, if applicable) elaborating the design and (iii) potential applications of the results in practice.

- (i) There were minimal ethical dilemmas during my research. That is partly thanks to the fact that Covid-19 did not allow my class to travel to India to meet any locals, or for me to see my site in person. As a result, my research became entirely digital and somewhat ethical at the same time and in a strange way. I am aware that there are ethical problems when it comes to ethnographical studies. My belief is that research carried out by studios such as Global Housing do contribute to our field. These projects can become more ethical through openness to criticism and reflection. We should not be expected to understand how our privileged position distorts our perspective, without attempting to dive in into research and design. I believe there are benefits in outsiders working in alien contexts and besides that, we do live in a globalised world where economies, problems and the climate emergency are shared. Labelling these studios as colonial and disregarding their research and output because of that is simply wrong. Overall, we can only learn from projects such as the Global Housing studio because I consider the alternative as a loss.
- (ii) There is a great dilemma when it comes to designing small apartments that should be more affordable. I aimed at tackling this issue by focusing more on the empowerment of the existing community. That is, the collective wellbeing of the Moha Koliwada village was put first with a rather elaborate urban scheme. Furthermore, I feel very strongly that in order to provide adequate housing for the urban poor, poor people such as those that live in informal settlements such as shanty towns, you have to consider very small living spaces. Another ethical dilemma occurs when I try to question the aspirations of the local people. I questioned the high-rise towers as the ideal residential model for the locals and maybe I am wrong for that but it was vital for me to imagine a different

alternative. Therefore, even if I am wrong for that and this should be said, my thesis project has a valid design hypothesis.

- (iii) The project touches upon elements that are already relevant in architecture and the Global Housing graduation studio experiments with. The challenge lies with the willingness of bodies and authorities outside the realm of the residents of these villages. I do believe similar urban studies and proposals can be implemented for urbanising villages. Furthermore, the three typologies proposed can be implemented as they are elaborated in the graduation project or with changes and adjustments for specific plots and contexts.