

Lost in Translation: Analysing self-built designs within relocation and up-gradation projects.

Thursday, 18 June 2015

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“We know what is in the neighborhood (vasti). We are constantly with them. We only stay in the slums. We know what problems are there, availability of water, electricity, sewage lines, how far the market is, hospitals, schools and colleges. We have been through this, so we know all these things”.

- Savita Sonawane
(Community Leader/
Mahila Milan Pune)



“Small shops were part of the neighborhood (vasti). Some had meat shops, some sold edibles, tobacco, and cigarettes. Such individuals source of income were dependent on these shops. These individuals need a house, but also need a commercial space to help them sustain their families”.

- Dhananjay Sadalapure
(Structural Engineer/ Mahila Milan Pune)



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Life in the slums is one of unique characteristics. These characteristics directly inspire the housing typologies that arise within a slum. The distinct creations that derive from Dharavi and slums around India are solely based on its inhabitants; everyone is an architectural designer. Every settlement has unique social, cultural, and architectural characteristics influenced by the composition, history, and nature of the settlement. Realizing that every settlement is different, we are obliged to visit different locations to understand the particularities that exist in the ecologies of the urban slum. Our visit to Pune, on 15th and 16th June 2015, exposed us to two distinct projects under the **BSUP** (*Basic Services for Urban Poor*) program under **JNNURM** (*Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission*). The Yerawada project illustrated the In Situ up-gradation of the settlement where temporary (*kaccha*) houses were demolished to build permanent (*pakka*) structures, in the same location, as per the guidelines set by the government. The beneficiaries were involved in the designing of the houses from the start; the houses were thus altered to accommodate the needs and aspirations of every dweller. While the Yerawada project exemplified up-gradation of slums, the Warje project exemplified aspects of relocation and rehabilitation. Households displaced as a result of floods, road widening, irrigation and other development projects were relocated to Warje. The beneficiaries in this case did not have any say in the design process whatsoever and houses were allocated through a lottery. The most important aspect of both these projects, we believe, was the extensive socioeconomic survey conducted by Mahila Milan, Pune, which laid the foundation for up-gradation and relocation. While the social composition in the In Situ project stayed intact, the relocation project alters the composition of the neighborhood disrupting the social interactions and weakening the strong bonds established over generations. At the same time it is important to acknowledge the rate at which the lifestyle of the individuals in the relocated settlements changes as compared to the individuals in the In Situ settlements.

Our initial site visits and conversations with the community leaders, Jokin Arputham and Sheela Patel, helped us articulate our project, further emphasizing the need to rethink the way in which settlements are designed for relocation and rehabilitation. Through our project we intend to critically document the architectural details that have evolved over generations, affecting the social structures of the community and the integration of the built form and social characteristics of neighborhoods. We further intend to explore ways in which these architectural details can be incorporated in the relocation schemes in order to curb the disruption of social bonds the strong ties in the process of relocation. But, at the same time being aware of the constraints cost, building codes, and time.



Observation #A: In Situ Yerawada (Existing)

The construction of the mezzanine level, within this structure, utilizes most of the available floorspace for various purposes. This mezzanine serves multiple functions, such as extra storage space which protects their valuables from incoming floods, a second room which offers adequate privacy, and much needed space for a growing family. The mezzanine acts as an incremental space, which may not have been built originally, rather added on during the growth of the family. This mezzanine structure, just like many other interventions, are self-made and built out of necessity. This highlights the slum dwellers optimum usage of space even within small confines.



Observation #B: In Situ Yerawada (Post)

The jutting out balcony within such a tight space is an intervention by one of the slum dwellers. The by-laws regarding such a construction requires a certain amount of width on the ground level alleyway. The initial by-law states that if the street is 10 feet wide, only then balconies of 3 feet were allowed to project out from both sides. But, due to spatial constraints, the government allowed for the alternation of building codes to allow for such a construction to exist with only 8 feet wide streets. Such changes in by law are common in order for slum dwellers to have homes that satisfy their everyday needs and growing families. The changing in by-laws also cater to the ever growing population that are inhabiting the various slums throughout India.



Observation #C: *In Situ Yerawada (Post)*



Observation #D: *Relocation Warje*

Slum dwellers live in unique situations which call for minor to major changes in their lifestyle. Some of these changes, either require substituting comfort for the sake of providing for their immediate families, or simply residents simply opt for the recycling of space. *Observation #C* highlights the converting of a residential structure into mixed use. This is done by modifying the ground level, by replacing the main door with a wide shutter, to be able to function as a commercial space. This commercial space acts as a second form of income, but also highlights the ingenuity of women living in the slums. It is typical that men go out and work while the woman stays home and takes care of the family and housing. This is still done, but now the woman plays a role in generating income, while still playing the motherly role for the family. *Observation #D* highlights a situation where a family has been relocated into one of the new government housing structures. In the government provided buildings, the only concern was housing. There is no consideration for small scale commercial spaces, which residents were able to generate income from in their previous settlement. This shows how a family of four converted the living room of their apartment into commercial space. Thereby using the kitchen as their only private space to dwell. This was done out of necessity in order to provide an adequate life for their family and children.

“Small shops are part of the Vasti (neighbourhood). Some had meat shops, some sold eatable, tobacco and cigarettes. Such individuals especially older women were dependent on these shops as the only source of income. The dwellers need a house, but they also are in need of a commercial space to help sustain themselves, unfortunately the government program (BSUP - In Situ upgradation in Yerawada, Pune) did not acknowledge such needs”.

- *Dhananjay Sadlapure. Structural Engineer, Mahila Milan, Pune.*



Observation #E: Relocation Warje

Public space is one of the main sources of social gatherings. Within the slum settlements, the gathering of many people happens around stairs, which is a staple for social interactions. It is extremely rare to see in the slums a clear street, without congregations of people forming throughout. It is one of more beautiful sights within the slum. But, seen in *Observation #E*, social interactions were lost during the relocation process into new building structures. The ground level becomes vacant during the busiest time of the day, almost locking people within their housing units. Where upwards of ten people used to meet, now has become only two. “Stairs serve as public seating” (*Documenting Informalities: Dharavi*, pg. 140).



Observation #F: Relocation Warje

The most noticeable flaw in the new governmental housing structures is the absence of street life. The vacancy of people, on the street, says little about the people who are living within these very housing units. In the slum settlement, dwellers knew neighbors and their families and the problems they were going through, if any. The simple act of knowing is an essential key to living in the slums. To know, not only create strong bonds between people of different backgrounds, but, more importantly, serves as a support line for the residents going through difficulties. Knowing the people in the neighborhood also provided a sense of security for parents when their children were out of their sight. Friends will keep a watchful eye for children to and from school, or in their travels. In relocation, this simple, yet important, key to living in the slums is lost. The street was the living room. “Open space in Dharavi account for only 2% of the total area”. With all this space, why is everyone not using it, what was lost in translation? (*Documenting Informalities: Dharavi*, page. 146).