

Planum. The Journal of Urbanism n.29 vol II/2014

# WITHIN THE LIMITS OF SCARCITY

RETHINKING SPACE, CITY AND PRACTICES

Edited by

**Barbara Ascher**  
**Isis Nunez Ferrera**  
**Michael Klein**

Special Issue in collaboration with **SCIBE**



**Notes around design politics: design dissensus and the poiesis of scarcity** Camillo Boano | **Negotiating shared spaces in informal peri-urban settlements in India. The role of amenity buildings and the effect of the post-hoc introduction of infrastructure towards the creation of common places** Bo Tang | **Scarcity, post-scarcity and local community: L'Aquila as a case study** Federico Venturini, Ersilia Verlinghieri | **Degrowth urban policy? The contemporary debate on post-growth alternatives and the challenges posed by soil consumption** Piero Sassi | **Scarcity, control and negotiations: an interpretation of form in urban informal settlements** Sheikh Serajul Hakim, Joseph Lim Ee Man | **Territorial compromises: limits of morphological and civic negotiation** Tomaz Pipan | **Voids as modern ruins. The project for the city in the face of the new spatial scarcity** Sante Simone, Mejrema Zatric



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Planum. The Journal of Urbanism n.29 vol II/2014  
in collaboration with **SCIBE** Scarcity and Creativity in the Built Environment  
Peer Reviewed Articles 

## **WITHIN THE LIMITS OF SCARCITY RETHINKING SPACE, CITY AND PRACTICES**

Edited by  
**Barbara Ascher**  
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# CONTENTS

## EDITORIAL

Barbara Ascher, Isis Nunez Ferrera, Michael Klein .....p.7  
**Scarcity - Local responses to “lack”**

Camillo Boano .....p.13  
**Notes around design politics: design dissensus and the poiesis of scarcity**

Bo Tang .....p.29  
**Negotiating shared spaces in informal peri-urban settlements in India. The role of amenity buildings and the effect of the post-hoc introduction of infrastructure towards the creation of common places**

Federico Venturini, Ersilia Verlinghieri .....p.51  
**Scarcity, post-scarcity and local community: L’Aquila as a case study**

Piero Sassi .....p.71  
**Degrowth urban policy? The contemporary debate on post-growth alternatives and the challenges posed by soil consumption**

Sheikh Serajul Hakim, Joseph Lim Ee Man .....p.83  
**Scarcity, control and negotiations: an interpretation of form in urban informal settlements**

Tomaz Pipan .....p.103  
**Territorial Compromises: limits of morphological and civic negotiation**

Sante Simone, Mejrema Zatric .....p.117  
**Voids as modern ruins. The project for the city in the face of the new spatial scarcity**

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## Scarcity – local responses to “lack”

Scarcity – when demand outstrips supply – is regarded as a most natural condition of human life. And though there is a particular timeliness and actuality about raising scarcity as an issue now. Questions of availability of (financial) resources and their distribution have shifted towards the centre of current debates, especially since the economic, financial and sovereign debt crisis. In order to combat losses, attention was shifted to spending cutbacks, affecting basic welfare services such as education, health, unemployment benefits, and access to affordable housing, amongst others. In the face of crisis and austerity cuts, the existing welfare models built on state supply and social redistribution turned out to be fundamentally dependent on economic growth. Ultimately, these austerity policies created new scarcities for large parts of the population<sup>1</sup>.

In the so-called global south, on the other hand, scarcity in cities has been a prevalent constraint, commonly conceived in the form of material deprivation, and the limited financial and institutional capacity of governments to cope with rapid urbanisation and the plethora of political and socio-economic challenges arising from these developments. In both cases, when it comes to the built environment, scarcity is mainly conceived, again, as a material condition – as a lack of, mostly (but not exclusively), financial resources.

Yet the actuality of scarcity is not limited to economic crisis alone. Scarcity has reappeared in the debates about ecology and sustainability, most often embedded in the limits-to-growth<sup>2</sup> narrative. Peak oil, peak soil and many of the related discussions on depleting resources address scarcities arising from the lifestyles of Western consumer societies. The expansion of these consumption levels to the entire global population would further exacerbate this situation, resulting in a fundamental ethical dilemma. Resources are too scarce for the dominant minority of the world's population to continue living as it does today. The sustainability debate's proposed solutions to social and technological problems are ultimately about scarcity while at the same time new “qualitative” forms of scarcity arise: lack of clean air, clean water and commonly accessible land. Is this the onset of a new age of scarcity?

Scarcity – the experience of “not having enough” – has held a central position in the field of economics, the discipline defined by Robbins as “the forms assumed by hu-

1 For a collection of articles on the issue see: Klein M., Rumpfhuber A. (2014 eds.): *Scarcity: Austerity urbanism*, derive 56.

2 Meadows D.H., Meadows D.L., Randers J., Behrens W. (1974), *The limits to growth: A report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind*, London, Pan Books.

man behaviour in disposing of scarce means”<sup>3</sup>. Economic activity, i.e. the allocation of resources in order to satisfy needs and desires, follows from scarcity: it renders every activity in means-ends relationships. Assuming that human wants are endless, infinite, but not so the availability of resources and commodities, scarcity is raised into its position as an a-historic and absolute category. It becomes a natural law to which we must submit.

Scarcity in this understanding of demand outstripping supply is therefore often perceived as a temporary condition that could be overcome with the help of technical fixes and a range of substitutes. It is compensated for through the use of more efficient methods involving technology and innovation, thus relating it to human progress as such.

On the other hand, Malthus, in his famous *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, shaped an approach to scarcity that was rather straightforward yet highly reductive. He viewed scarcity as a consequence of the imbalance between nature’s resources, in his case food, and population growth. The measures to counterbalance this development have included preventive checks, such as moral education, and positive checks, such as war, severe poverty and famine<sup>4</sup>.

Neo-Malthusians expanded this reductive notion into the consideration of a wider range of underlying conditions, such as industrialisation, exponential growth and consumption, suggesting social and technological adaptation as the way to tackle the immanent scarcity of resources<sup>5</sup>.

On the other side of the neoclassical economics scarcity principle lies its role as a source of social progress. The condition of “not having” triggers the experience of lack, or what people think they ought to have but do not. For societies like ours, where the property of commodities determines social status, we find ourselves in a constant state of comparison with our social environment. In order to climb the social ladder, aspiration is focused on overcoming that lack, using all available means. Scarcity, therefore, not only challenges an ideal distribution of resources but is also considered to be the foundation of social progress<sup>6</sup>.

It does not matter whether it is time, land, oil or money – every kind of energy can become scarce if it takes on a social role. It is not the finiteness of a resource that makes it scarce, as oil or time exemplify, but our use of it and the meaning it gets from its mode of production. Scarcity, therefore, is fundamentally a social category<sup>7</sup>.

It is no surprise, then, that the certitude about the natural laws of scarcity has repeatedly been questioned and challenged from various sides, particularly that of social criticism. As history shows, even if there were recurring phases of scarcities, resources are not always scarce per se. More recently, the work of political ecologists

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3 Robbins L. (1932), *The nature and significance of economic science*, London, Macmillan, p. 15.

4 Malthus T.R. (1798), *An essay on the principle of population, as it affects the future improvement of society*, London, pr. for J. Johnson. For a discussion of the essay see: Perelman M. (1979), “Marx, Malthus, and the concept of natural resource scarcity”, in *Antipode*, no. 11, vol. 2, pp. 80-91 and Harvey D. (2001), *Spaces of capital: Towards a critical geography*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, pp. 40ff.

5 For a highly controversial example of neo-Malthusian thought, see: Ehrlich P.R. (1968), *The population bomb*, New York, Ballantine Books.

6 Balla B. (2005), *Knappheit als Ursprung sozialen Handelns*, Hamburg, Krämer.

7 Luhmann N. (1988), *Die Wirtschaft der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp.



has expanded the debate on scarcity by illustrating the relationship between macro systems of allocation and context-specific conditions of insufficiency. Furthermore, political ecology has shed light on the interplay between environmental conditions and political struggles<sup>8</sup>. It has introduced the discursive nature of resources<sup>9</sup>, and it has shed light on the particularities embedded in difference, social movements and the construction of knowledge<sup>10</sup>.

Scarcity, therefore, is not a neutral given fact, a natural law to which we have to submit. Far from it – scarcity is a political concept, made and produced as an argument for unequal distribution<sup>11</sup>: Because there is never enough, access has to be distributed unequally, so the argument goes. In spite of social progress, efficiency thinking and technical advances, scarcity is constantly reproduced to serve as an instrument that reproduces social order.

What does this complex manifold that structures scarcity mean for those dealing with aspects of the spatiality of living together? In the fields of architecture and urbanism, design, planning and geography, scarcity has often played a leading role: Looking for the optimum solution, we have unwittingly become economists in our own discipline. Operating within the general conditions of capitalism, these disciplines make no exceptions: Be it in the architecture of housing schemes, in the research on land use or in planning in postcolonial contexts, we act most often under premises of scarcity. This should be reason enough to reflect on and investigate the causes and effects under which scarcity operates, how it affects the built environment and our forms of cohabitation, and what strategies could be applied to deal with conditions of scarcity.

#### **“Within the limits of scarcity: Rethinking space, city and practices”**

The groundwork for the selected articles published in this special issue of PLANUM, has been presented and discussed at a conference entitled Within the Limits of Scarcity: Rethinking Space, City and Practices that we organised in the course of the research project “Scarcity and Creativity in the Built Environment” (SCIBE)<sup>12</sup>.

From 26 to 28 February 2013, the conference brought together scholars from different fields of human geography, sociology, environmental psychology, architecture and urban planning for a three-day event held at the University of Westminster in London.

Centred on the investigation of, and explanation of, innovation in the city through the lens of scarcity, the conference looked at both historic and current strategies deployed by different actors involved in producing the built environment. The potential of those examinations to inform new ways of thinking and acting around

8 Swyngedouw E. (2004), *Social power and the urbanization of water: Flows of power*, Oxford, University Press.

9 Mehta L. (2010 ed.), *The limits to scarcity: Contesting the politics of allocation*, London, Earthscan.

10 Escobar A. (2006), “Difference and conflict in the struggle over natural resources: A political ecology framework”, in *Development*, vol. 49, no. 3, pp. 6-13.

11 Harvey D. (2009), *Social justice and the city*, London, University of Georgia Press, pp. 113ff.

12 The SCIBE project explores the relationship between scarcity and creativity in the context of the built environment by investigating how conditions of scarcity might affect the creativity of the different actors involved in the production of architecture and urban design and how design-led actions might improve the built environment in the future. The research is based on the analysis of processes in four European cities: London, Oslo, Reykjavik and Vienna. For more information, see: [www.scibe.eu](http://www.scibe.eu)

cities and space were therefore at the core of the discussions. The panels and discussions were complemented by an opening session with a lecture by Jeremy Till from Central Saint Martins in London (UK) and further keynote lectures delivered by Ole Bouman, curator of the “Architecture of Consequence” Exhibition at the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NL), Camillo Boano from the Bartlett Development Planning Unit of University College London (UK), Pier Vittorio Aureli from the Architectural Association (UK), Erik Swyngedouw from the University of Manchester (UK) and Ana Paula Balthazar from the University of Minas Gerais (BR). Together, these contributions highlighted different approaches to scarcity from design, planning and political economy perspectives<sup>13</sup>.

Whereas the overall conference dealt with a broad spectrum of approaches to scarcity, including more theoretical and historical case studies, this special issue takes up alternative ways of investigating, conceptualising and theorising about scarcity in a broad range of geographical locations at a more local scale. The collection of papers consists of the following contributions:

Drawing from his keynote contribution, Camillo Boano elaborates on readings of Jacques Rancière and Giorgio Agamben in relation to issues of scarcity, proposing a new theoretical framework for approaching the discussion of scarcities and their underlying value structure.

Bo Tang’s research and design project investigates, how shared spaces enable the use of cooperative place-making, which in turn becomes a tool to overcome the effects of a lack of resources in peri-urban settlements in India. Drawing on insights of philosopher Murray Bookchin and social ecology, Federico Venturi and Ersilia Verlinghieri have been looking at responses to the economic shock produced by an earthquake on the Italian town of L’Aquila. Pierro Sassi addresses issues of soil scarcity from a post-growth perspective.

In another example from Asia, Sheikh Serajul’s and Joseph Lim Ee Man’s investigation into migrant settlements in Khulna provides us with a more nuanced understanding of the context-specific socio-spatial negotiations that influence the understanding of scarcity.

Tomaz Pipan has been researching the emerging urban topography in the deregulated special economic zones of the Chinese Pearl River Delta and the necessary spatial negotiation between existing and emerging typologies.

Finally, Sante Simone and Mejrema Zatric look at the voids in New Belgrade’s urban spaces using the interpretative frames of Henri Lefebvre’s work to explain the emerging scarcities.

This current issue of *Planum* presents some alternative approaches to the questions around scarcity, highlighting different aspects of the spatial nature of scarcity within respective local contexts that will provide new insights for researchers and practitioners alike.

## References

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<sup>13</sup> Audio recordings of the keynote lectures can be found at: [www.backdoorbroadcasting.net/2013/02/within-the-limits-of-scarcity-rethinking-space-city-and-practices/](http://www.backdoorbroadcasting.net/2013/02/within-the-limits-of-scarcity-rethinking-space-city-and-practices/)



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Contested urbanism in Mumbai, India © Isis Nunez Ferrera

**#Rancière**  
**#informalities**  
**#Agamben**  
**#design politics**  
**#potentialities**  
**#dissensus**

# Notes around design politics: design dissensus and the poiesis of scarcity

## The politics of scarcity in a post-political time

Playing with the limits of scarcity, conceived both a *topos* and a *gesture* of design, the following contribution wish to project a preliminary reflection on the uses of design onto a post-political landscape (Swyngedouw 2007, 2009). As Goodburn, Till and Iossifova (2012: 13) argument, “with architecture so often framed as a technocratic discipline, it is perhaps not surprising that responses to the perceived dangers of scarcity revolve around technical fixes. This is an approach that holds out the promise of escape while leaving the underlying conditions untouched”. As Slavoj Žižek has recently remarked: “today, we are dealing with another form of the degeneration of the political, postmodern post-political, which no longer merely ‘represses’ the political [...], but much more effectively ‘forecloses’ it” (Žižek, 1999: 35) has come to occupy the centre of contemporary political discourse by bracketing off the social from the political, and politics from aesthetics as the technical arrangement and the production of consensus of what Ranciere calls “[...] the annulment of dissensus as the end of politics” (2001: 32).

This paradigm has already entered in architectural discourse under a disguise of a suspicious “discontent with criticality” (Kenzari 2011), abandoning the project of radical critique as a blanket negation of the political (Lahiji 2011) as well as the urban discourse in a broader reflection on democracy and inclusion (Dikeç 2012; 2013, Purcell 2013). As architecture is slowly re-engaging in a new critical project that allows for reclaiming the political and the social natures of the practice, it is pretty much important to broaden the rediscovery of the inherently political nature of space, necessarily produced in contestation and dissensus which is able, in turn, to reveal the lines of power and agency that are written and rewritten in cities.

Assuming then that scarcity is an “unapologetically political issue”, of particular relevance to the argument in this paper, an in a call to *defend* architecture and design from the pessimism that has been attributed to them, but also to challenge their epistemologies in dealing with the post-political scarcity-driven condition, the present contribution aims to suggest actions, intellectual and practical, for a deeper reorientation between politics and aesthetics, not simply a reordering of power relations between groups, but the creation of new subjects and heterogeneous objects. In doing so, design, architectural and urban must take different forms, from a conscious act of not intervening physically in the built environment, to the production of spaces that explicitly challenge dominant ideological perspectives, and engage with issues at a level beyond the merely technical, aesthetic and physical.

When thinking on informality, scarcity, scarce resources and design, the practice of the urban designer requires a further deconstruction and recalibration (Boano, 2013, Boano *et al.* 2013) in order to gain a better understanding of how to deal with the urban project and more specifically in order to deal with the *not-designed* and the *un-designable*. Investigating and working in informalities should allow us to develop trans-design-research that, despite its inherent forward-looking nature, does not fixate on elements, images or forms, but on their processes and their potentialities. To meet the challenges posed by the post political configuration of urban design and cities in which “design consensus uproots the foundational political impulses that centre on disagreement [...] struggles over the real of different urban possibilities” (Swyngedouw 2011: 25). I want to offer a theoretical reconfiguration of design base on Giorgio Agamben and Jaques Rancière, which helps underpinning the inherently political nature of space, contestation and dissensus in its production, revealing the lines of power and agency that are written and rewritten in cities. More specifically, two hopefully mutually reinforcing notions are put forward: *potentiality*, drawing from Giorgio Agamben reflections on *poiesis* and the *dissensus*, drawing from Jaques Rancière spatialities of equality. Indeed a number of common concerns typify the work of these thinkers, both of whom are attempting to theorize the condition of politics today, while critically drawing on the resources of classical political thought.

### **An integrated theoretical approach: Agamben and Rancière**

The idea of using two theorists, Agamben and Rancière, requires some reflection and some justification. Both authors are looking at specific modes of *politics*. For Rancière, politics is never static and pure as it is characterised in term of division, conflict and polemics that allow the invention of the new, the unauthorised and the disordered. Referring back to the Aristotelian *polis*, Rancière used the word *police* to refer to the established social order within a process of governing where the political problem is drastically reduced to assigning individuals their place/position through the administration of the conflicts between different parties by a government funded on juridical and technical competences. In contrast, Rancière’s *politics* is constituted by dis-agreement/*dissensus*, by disruptions of the police order through the dispute over the common space of the *polis* and the common use of language. Politics, therefore, is not about identifying the *excluded* and trying to include them, as such logic of identification belongs to the police. Politics proper is to question the *given* order of police that seems to be the *natural* order of things and to verify the equality of any speaking being to any other speaking being (Rancière 1999). Although similar in the use of ancient references, addressing conflict between Schmitt and Benjamin, Agamben argues that in contemporary politics, the *state of exception* becomes the rule. In discussing *homo sacer* paradigm, the notion of *bare life* that Agamben develops from the Ancient Greek distinction between natural life-*zoe*-and a particular form of life-*bios*, it is articulated in Aristotle’s account of the origins of the *polis*. The importance of this distinction in Aristotle is that it allows for the relegation of natural life to the domain of the household (*oikos*), while also allowing for the specificity of the good life characteristic of participation in the polis. Stemming from Aristotle’s account on the shift from voice to speech (from voice to language) as constitution of the political nature of “man” there is the founding condition of political community since speech makes possible a distinction between the just and the unjust. Agamben writes that the question of how natural *bare life* dwells in the polis corresponds exactly with the question of how a living being has language, since in the latter question “the living being has *logos* by taking away and conserving its own voice in it, even as it dwells in the polis by letting its own bare life be excluded, as an exception, within it” (Agamben 1998: 8).



They both look at *aesthetics*; Jaques Rancière's caesura with the linguistic structural Marxism towards a material, sensorial and concrete formulation of politics and political participation and emancipation are the centre on a new politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics. Rancière called this *le partage du sensible* to describe the many procedures by which forms of experience – broadly understood as the domains of what can be thought, said, felt or perceived – are divided up and shared between legitimate and illegitimate persons and forms of activity. As the concept of partition of the sensible serves to draw together Rancière's political-philosophical apparatus, it also acts as lynchpin to his interests in aesthetics when he states that "aesthetic is at the core of politics" (Rancière 2006: 13). He defines aesthetics as "a delimitation of spaces and time, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise" (Rancière 2006: 13). For him, artistic practices are forms of visibility that can themselves serve as interruptions of the given partition of the sensible and therefore, the work on aesthetics is a work on politics. On the other side Agamben's contributions to aesthetics revolves around the distinction between philosophy and poetry as a complex exercise of language and representation, experience and ethos. The urgent task of thought and criticism for Agamben is to rediscover "the unity of our own fragmented word" (Agamben 1993b: xvii). For the Italian philosopher the origin of western metaphysics lies in the conception that "original experience be always already caught in a fold [...] that presence be always already caught in a signification" (Agamben 1993b: 156). Hence, *logos* is the fold that "gathers and divides all things in the 'putting together' of presence" (*ibid.*: 156). Ultimately, then, an attempt to truly overcome metaphysics requires that the semiological algorithm must reduce to solely the barrier itself rather than one side or the other of the distinction, understood as the "topological game of putting things together and articulating" (Agamben 1993b: 156). Bringing into play various literary techniques such as the fable, the riddle, the aphorism and the short story, Agamben is practically demonstrating an exercise of criticism, in which thought is returned to a prosaic experience or awakening, in which what is known is representation itself.

Finally, both Agamben and Rancière *did not* discuss architecture *per se*, but they were greatly inspired by Aristotle and Plato reflection on the *polis* as spatial reference. Giorgio Agamben's (1942-) voluminous body of works reveals a transversal spatial reading, his philosophy cultivates thoughts concerned with the deactivation of devices of power in the interest of a coming community that is present but still unrealized. His philosophical enquiries contribute to the evolution of topological studies (Massumi 2002, Giaccaria and Minca 2011, Boano and Marten 2012) and yield an optimistic rediscovery of *potentiality* in relation to architecture and design. Rancière's presupposition of inclusion and equality permeates all of his debates on democracy and coming-community. His central spatial reference of a political space as a re-configuration of a space "where parties, parts or lack of parts have been defined... making visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise" (Rancière 1999: 30) remain heavily illustrative for architecture and urban design.

Without aiming to be comprehensive and teleological, the paper is engaging with each tinkerer adopting an integrative theoretical approach, to contribute to a debate over design and scarcity. As such, this paper builds on and further enriches the existing body of work developed around the relevance of Agamben's philosophy on space (Boano and Floris 2005, Boano 2011, Boano and Martens 2012; Boano and Leclair-Paquet 2014), and Rancière's spatialities (Boano and Kelling 2013).

## Agamben's Potentiality

The work of Giorgio Agamben outlines a spatial approach to understanding the urban dynamics of contested spaces and territorial partitioning (Boano & Marten 2012), mainly through his popular *homo sacer* where the notion of 'state of exception' and his concept of 'the camp' were defined (Agamben 1998). In this part of the paper I'm concentrating on lesser-known incisive concepts that can offer a reinvigorated political possibility as it considers the notion of potentiality as central gesture. Potentiality is often understood in relation to actuality. Agamben read the Aristotelian opposition between potentiality (*dynamis*) and actuality (*energeia*) and foreground his notion using the Latin *potere* (potency) meaning to be-able-to-do something. Potential is generally defined as something not-yet actual, but that over time and through the principle of development has the power to become. Expression, which is developed from the debate over what it means to have a faculty to do something and yet not be doing it. Agamben, who frequently draws on Aristotle in his own explorations on the notion of potentiality, connects this position with what the Greek philosopher called generic potentialities. Borrowing the same example as Aristotle to illustrate these *generic potentialities*, Agamben (1999: 179) writes that the child "is potential in the sense that he must suffer an alteration (a becoming other) through learning" in order to reach a state of actuality.

For Agamben, potentiality is not so much the ability to do as the ability to chose not to (be, say, design) or to put in other words, it is a matter of keeping one's ability in reserve and withholding its exhaustion in actuality. Potential is not "not-being", privation, absence but rather an effective faculty or capacity with the status of genuine, albeit concealed, presence.

Agamben follows Aristotle into a parallel direction as they define another source of potentiality, going beyond the binary of potential/actual. In an essay titled *Potentiality*, (1999) Agamben expresses a shared sense of concern with Aristotle for a second type of potentiality that they refer to as existing potentiality; a terminology used to describe potential that already *belongs to someone*, a potential that is already accessible.

Agamben supports this concept through the example of the architect who is said to have the potential to build, or the poet who has the potential to write poetry. While Agamben's "architect is potential insofar as he has the potential to not-build," (1999). All potentiality, he concludes, is based on a choice not to do, so that potentiality is not simply actuality to be but also the refusal to actuate one's potential. Agamben identifies the key feature in Aristotle's thoughts in this crucial notion of 'existing potentiality'; that of being capable of resisting one's own potentiality. "The greatness – and also the abyss – of human potentiality is that it is first of all [the] potential not to act" (Agamben 1999). Existing potentiality contains the power of negation, the freedom to resist; "potentiality is always also constitutively an impotentiality, [...] the ability to do is also always the ability to not do" (Agamben 2009: 43). Indeed, at every moment that the poet is not writing a poem they are in a state of potential privation: they could write but they choose not to. "What is essential is that potentiality is not simply not-being, simply a privation, but rather the existence of non-being, the presence of an absence (Agamben 1999: 179). The presence of an absence is then the very definition of potentiality for Agamben and not the assumed movement from potentiality to actuality, which we might call "creation" or "invention". In defining, then, the artist (poets and architect respectively), the actual and surprising definition of the poetic being is a possession of a faculty and not using it.



As Agamben (2009: 45) writes “nothing makes us more impoverished and less free than the estrangement from impotentiality.” Agamben (2009: 44) argues that what separates human beings from other living beings is that we are the only “animals who are capable of their own impotentiality.” Deprived from this capacity - from our impotentiality - we are forced to translate potential into actuality, thereby losing our freedom to animal instinct. Echoing the thoughts of Aristotle, Agamben (1999) explains how “human potentiality is in relation to its own privation,” and that there lies the origins of human power, “which is so violent and limitless with respect to other human beings.” Separated from its impotentiality, human power is left in a state where all potentialities must be actualized, expressing its might and superiority on whichever agencies it seeks to outdo.

What makes us human, according to Agamben, is precisely not our power of actualization, but the potential to not-be, which refers to the fact that we are capable of our own incapacity. Agamben therefore relocates freedom on the other side of the spectrum, not in actuality, but in the domain of potentiality, which, as we have seen, is the mirror of impotentiality: To be free is not simply to have the power to do this or that thing, nor is it simply to have the power to refuse to do this or that thing. To be free is, in the sense we have seen, to be capable of one’s own impotentiality, to be in relation to one’s own privation. This is why freedom is freedom for both good and evil (Agamben, 1999).

The reading of potential implies a difficult ambiguity. Potential is both an experience of privation, as sensation (*aestetsis*) of being without sensations (*anaesthesia*), or a remembrance and forgetting. It is both potential to-do and not-to-do. Transposed to architecture, it is an architecture that simultaneously delivers and withholds. The co-presence of actuality and potentiality is central to understand scarcity and non-scarcity (abundance) neither as opposed nor as complementary but potential to each other, so that the term becoming-other of the other is an interminable transactional process “becoming-scarce-becoming-abundant”. Hence the idea of the potentiality – as actualized alterity – is not annulled but retained in actuality: saved, stored and conserved or solved and dissolved.

If impotentiality is the essence of potentiality, the root of human freedom can be found in our capacity to not-be; the power of freedom and human action subsists in the capacity to not act on every potentiality. It is precisely in this non-active potentiality that fundamental passivity lays (and where passive resistance locates its *modus operandi*). What are the political consequences of defining freedom not in terms of actuality, but in terms of the potentiality to not-be? If “the greatness of human potentiality is measured by the abyss of human potentiality”, (Agamben 1999: 183) what kind of environment would a society incapable of its impotentiality produce?

Building on Aristotle’s radical work once again, Agamben (2009: 44) writes that separated from his impotentiality, deprived of the experience of what he can not do, today’s man believes himself capable of everything, and so he repeats his jovial ‘no problem,’ and his irresponsible ‘I can do it,’ precisely when he should instead realize that he has been consigned in unheard of measure to forces and processes over which he has lost all control. He has become blind not to his capacities but to his incapacities, not to what he can do but to what he cannot, or can-not, do.

Agamben finds the “root of freedom” within the “abyss of potentiality” (Agamben 1999: 183). In thinking design as potential and not simply actual we tried to offer an



alternative reading, a more positive one that carves out possible spaces of agency. In doing so, Agamben's political praxis became one of radical desubjectivation that refuses to be captured in a topological state of exception. He writes, "We can say that between immanence and a life there is a kind of crossing with neither distance nor identification, something like a passage without spatial movement" (Agamben 1999 : 223). Our understanding of the exception as topological, emergent, and potential does, however, point towards a way to propose, to seize the potential of emergence, the potential of topological transformation, to undermine the apparent fixity of current geometries of power. Agamben's perspective can hence be made fruitful in critical research on urban policies and critical architecture.

### **Rancière's dissensus and the politics of aesthetics**

After the French strikes of 1968, Rancière broke with Althusser and structuralist Marxism as well as his philosophy due to its elitism. He rejected the rigid and hierarchical distinction between science and ideology, which Althusser's philosophy presupposed, accusing it of distrusting spontaneous popular movements and supporting a 'politics of order'. He began to develop an oppositional and radical political philosophy, aiming to give voice to an egalitarian politics of democratic emancipation.

In refusing the Althusserian approach, he turned instead to the archive in the form of an intellectual history of labour. This was an attempt to recover the virtue of *the worker* by showing that he resists not merely the hardship of the work but the very system that confines him to the role of the worker in the first place (Chambers 2010). In this, he discovered the *disorder* of the nineteenth-century French workers and their refusal to play the part they have been given, breaking down the Platonic legacy and centrality of 'order.' In that respect, Rancière's belief that the role of the philosopher is not to give his/her voice to the silent aspirations of the dominated, but to add his/her voice to theirs, therefore, to hear their voices, rather than interpret them. Rancière's fundamental political concern is the denial of recognition experienced by the dominated.

Such interests and intellectual processes were more developed in works like *The Philosopher and his Poor* (2004) and *The Order of the City* (2004) and secured the foundation for his later works constructing themselves around the relationship between *order of the city* and *order of discourses*. Rancière's innovative thoughts could be understood as a redefinition or recalibration of politics, moving forward concepts developed from Arendt and Foucault: "Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, [it denotes] the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles and the system of legitimizing this distribution" (Rancière 1999: 28).

Rejecting the Habermasian liberal idea that politics consists of a rational debate between diverse interests, in the 1980's Rancière truly defined what constitutes the essential aspect of politics: the affirmation of the principle of equality in the speech of people who are supposed to be equal but not counted as such by the established policing of the democratic community (Mecchia 2009: 71). Thus, political struggle occurs when the excluded seek to establish their identity, by speaking for themselves and striving to get their voices heard and recognised as legitimate. Politics is thus a struggle between the established social order and its excluded part, which has no voice. Critical then are the political consequences of this exclusive focus that signalled the history and the practice of participation. Reframed spatially, we must unco-



ver the political implications of such a focus on deprived and marginalised (scarce) areas that legitimise a participatory intervention.

What is important for Rancière and this argument on the constructed political scarcity, what he called *police*, not to refer to repressive forces but rather to refer to the order of things, of the *polis*. Therefore, police refers to the established social order within a process of governing. A process we can call the *scarcity-police*. Since the *demo*s is included by nature in the *polis*, the political problem is drastically reduced by assigning each his own place through the administration of the conflicts between different parties by a government funded on juridical and technical competences (Mecchia 2009: 77). In other words, a “society is represented as being divided into functions, into places where these functions are exercised, into groups which are, by virtue of their places, bound exercising this or that function” (Rancière 2001). In contrast, *politics* in its very essence is constituted by dis-agreement/*dissensus*, by disruptions of the police order through the dispute over the common space of the *polis* and the common use of language.

For Rancière, genuine political (or artistic) activities always involve forms of innovation that tear bodies from their assigned places and prevent free speech and right of expression from being reduced to mere functionality (Rancière and Corcoran 2010). One of the ways in which the police avoid the disturbance of politics is to name phenomena and assign them to their *proper places* in the established order, thereby de-politicising them (Dikeç 2012). This is exactly the detrimental but interesting use of Rancière’s thought in the debate over urban poverty, marginalisation and the inclusive practices on which different participatory experiences lie. Slums, marginal areas, low-income communities, barrios, etc. are included in the police order by their exclusion.

Their territories, their histories and their societal features, although neither homogeneous nor reducible to the same categories, legitimise interventions, namely participatory ones. Such co-option of the participatory process to merely replicate and strengthen the established order is made easier with such marginal communities that significantly differ from formal areas of the city (Frediani and Boano 2012). In Rancière’s approach, this is not a question of politics; it is about alterations in a police order. *The inclusion of the excluded* is the wrong way of thinking politically about the issue; even exclusion from formal power is a form of inclusion in the police order (e.g. women and slaves in the Greek *polis*). Politics, therefore, is not about identifying the *excluded* and trying to include them. The logic of identification belongs to the police. Politics proper is to question the *given* order of police that seems to be the ‘natural’ order of things, to question the whole and its partitioned spaces, and to verify the equality of any speaking being to any other speaking being (Rancière 1999). The idea of inclusion plays a central role in the debate on democracy and participation, although the process of inclusion appears to be conceptualised as one in which those who stand within the sphere of democracy selectively invite in those who do not. The rendering of this process as one that works from the inside-out, which emanates from the position of those who are already considered to be democratic, reveals the underlying assumption that democracy can and should become a de facto political reality. As such, using Rancière’s vocabulary, we begin to see this trajectory as the construction of a particular police order, becoming then a teleological trajectory toward an already known end-state in which inclusion becomes an entirely numerical operation. In contrast, “a political moment would not merely entail the inclusion of excluded groups, but rather an inclusion that, through such including, reconfigures the landscape in such a way as to change the conditions under which arguments can be understood, speakers can be acknowledged, claims can be made,



and rights can be exercised” (Ruez 2012: 15).

Democratisation in general, and specifically in more democratically produced cities, appears to be a practical test of the assumption of equality between any and every speaking being (Rancière 1999: 30). Equality, for Rancière, is not an end-state, but a starting point that requires constant verification in an open, experimental and non-teleological logic operating from the outside-in. If the concept of police is a set of implicit rules and conventions which determine the distribution of roles in a community and the forms of exclusion which operate within it, then genuine political acts do not simply reorder relations of power (a different order, but an order per se) but disrupt this order, tearing bodies from their assigned places. This happens when “the traditional mechanism of what are usually called politics are put into questions” (Rancière and Corcoran 2010: 22), which takes the form of what he calls *dissensus*. *Dissensus* then introduces new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the fields of perception.

One of Rancière’s most suggestive and fruitful concepts is *le partage du sensible*. It refers to the way in which roles and modes of participation in a social world are determined by establishing possible modes of perception referring back to Aristotle’s difference between the *phōnē* and *logos*, which can only be determined by politics. The partition of the sensible sets the divisions between what is visible and invisible, speakable and unspeakable, in Rancière’s words - audible and inaudible. It functions like a Kantian categorical framework that determines what can be thought, made or done (Porter 2007). As Rancière explains, such a partition is what “define[s] the ‘modes of perception’ that make that order visible and sayable in the first place” (Rancière 2001: 20).

Such a definition is useful for our discourse as distribution implies both inclusion and exclusion. The current social order is conceived here as an anti-democratic, anti-political/de-politicised order, which attempts to maintain the existing pattern of inclusions and exclusions. In this sense, “[p]olitical activity is always a mode of expression that undoes the perceptible divisions of the police order by implementing a basically heterogeneous assumption, that of a part of those who have no part, an assumption that, at the end of the day, itself demonstrates the sheer contingency of the other, the equality of any other speaking being” (Rancière 1999: 30).

Since the early 1990’s, Rancière’s work has increasingly focused on aesthetics. He has written a series of works on film and literature in which he stresses the political dimension of aesthetics, and a number of works of political theory in which he argues that an aesthetic dimension is inherent in politics. As the concept of partition of the sensible serves to draw together Rancière’s political-philosophical apparatus, it also acts as lynchpin to his interests in aesthetics when he states that “aesthetic is at the core of politics” (Rancière 2006: 13), especially for him, aesthetics is another name for the partition of the sensible. He defines aesthetics as “a delimitation of spaces and time, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise” (Rancière 2006: 13). For him, artistic practices (despite his direct reference to literature, film and fine art, we can extend it to architecture) are forms of visibility that can themselves serve as interruptions of the given partition of the sensible (Chambers 2010). Therefore, work on aesthetics is work on politics. Rancière’s work is illuminating in our discourse as it clarifies the call to see aesthetics as political and politics in aesthetic terms, as a form of the ‘distribution of the sensible.’ Importantly though, this approach is not anti-materialist, in contrast, it is essential to see that aesthetic transformation involves not only a change of consciousness but also material social changes. Central to this is the *process* of becoming a political subject, in which those who have not recognised part in the social order, who are invisible or inaudible in political terms, assert their egalitarian claim – a collective claim to exist as political



subject. Such a process has three different dimensions. First, it is an *argumentative demonstration*, second, it is a *heterologic disidentification*, and third, most relevant to this paper, it is a *theatrical and spectacular dramatisation*. Space is crucial to this, as it becomes the creative and dramatic stage for visibility. In the words of Holloway (2005) this process is ‘theatocratic’ as it is creative and constructive and involves not only the manifestation of a new subject but also the construction of common space or ‘scenes’ of relationality which did not exist previously. This dimension of theatrical dramatisation goes thus beyond the single perception of visibility/audibility in that it constructs new ways in which parts of society relate to each other, and reconfigures the way in which subjects are heard and seen. “[S]pace...becomes an integral element of the interruption of the ‘natural’ (or, better yet, naturalized) order of domination through the constitution of a place of encounter by those that have no part in that order” (Dikeç 2002: 172).

This is where design becomes relevant, as this conception of politics ascribes to design the potential of instigating “the invention of sensible forms and material structures for a life to come” (Rancière 1999: 29). Aesthetics such rethought as ‘the invention of new forms of life’ – as a critical break with common sense – opens up possibilities of new commonalities of sense. Politics change the fundament on which judgements about what makes sense are based and thus destabilises the ‘aesthetic regime’ that renders occurrences sensible or not. In *The Critique of the Judgement* (1952), Kant asserts that what we define as beautiful has nothing to do with objectivity (e.g. the beauty does not belong to the object which is under scrutiny), but rather is a subjective condition. We are used to attributing the quality of beauty to something only if there is an agreement among our cognitive faculties. On the contrary, we experience the sublime when a disagreement among those faculties takes the place of that agreeable condition.

The same assumption plays into Rancière’s distinction between a ‘mimetic regime’ and an ‘aesthetic regime’ of the arts. The former is founded on the agreement between ‘content’ and the way we represent that ‘content,’ that is, the way we deal with a given subject and the perceptible general data, organised by a certain taste of the audience. The latter, instead, is based on the lack of agreement. The emergence of an event takes shape as a dissension (or a disagreement) because it makes it necessary to think *ex novo* about the rules of a judgment “in order to reconfigure the identities, relations, and arrangements through which positions and arguments make sense” (Ruez 2012: 2). With this theoretical frame for the contribution of design to socio-political change, it is illuminating to examine architecture and design acts and the ways in which they have the potential to promote the creation of new commonalities of sense in the name of equality.

### **Design poiesis: actually making processes**

The Greek word *poiesis*, is the origin of the term poetry, which explains why poetry came to be the archetype of all the arts, but in its wider meaning we can use it as *creation*. Plato says in the *Symposium* “any cause that brings into existence some something that was not there before is *poiesis*” (2001). The dictum since the Romanticisms has been reduced to simply mean the making of something: creation, vision that confirm the onto-theological and masculine activity of god-like invention as creation *ex nihilo* that dominate the modern and contemporary idea of the artist-creator and the architect-god. It is a closer look to Plato’s incipit, “any cause” that can contribute to our thoughts. Sure “any cause” seems to include much more than a willed creative agency. At the same time, creation does not simply indicate the god-like making of a new object in the world, but could be easily an observation or a thought. Finally the process of actually-making can be less glamorous, as the various Frankenstein



filmic experiences are portraying. On the contrary, bringing something into presence can be, to say, the least timorous. For Heidegger, *poiesis* makes something manifest to appearance that was not manifested before through a process of *unconcealment* which, following the four causes theory of philosophy (matter, form, purpose and efficient cause), he considers *poiesis* in terms of that which brings all these elements together into his chosen art object: a silver chalice. Such example of *poiesis* makes emphasis on the object's availability for use.

According to Agamben, *poiesis* was opposed to *praxis* for the Greeks and he explained that “the essential character of *poiesis* was not its aspect as practical and voluntary process but its being a mode of truth as unveiling” (Agamben 1999b: 69). Thus, *poiesis* does not share with *praxis* the element of practical, voluntary willful action – that's why we often call the creative production practice and the creator, a practitioner. This slippage confines creation into the realm of *praxis* rather to the natural one of *poiesis* and therefore confusing the bringing into being as act of *praxis*. “The central experience of *poiesis* – the pro-duction into presence – is replaced by the question on the how, that is on the process through which the object is produced” (*ibid.*: 70). Such production into presence is not referring to a production of *meaning* but as a production of *sense*, which can be read in architecture as a performative act, not in the sense of performing a specific plan but in the sense of producing a plan. Consequently architecture would reveal and perform in at least two ways: in being designed and in being experienced as designed. In this way, designing architecture would not be prefiguration, organization and prediction nor manufacturing of a formal outcome using scarcity as calculative device, rather design would be about attention and potential: working out an emergence of potentials allowing for the capacity of a potential to actualize itself. Such potentiality of what cannot-not or cannot do is not exhausted or erased but presented and maintained in actuality. This is what gives the actual an enduring capacity to become. Likewise, experiencing architecture is not experiencing a design intention translated into a product, so matching prefiguration with outcome but making sense of the making of sense or creating a *poietic* of place, which in reality is an act of emancipatory sense.

Every art (*techné*) is concerned with bringing something into being (not mimetical as the original Platonic version but in Heideggerian sense), and looks for technical and theoretical means of producing a thing which belongs to the category of possibility and the cause lies in the producer, not in what is being produced. *Techné* becomes then instrumental. The complex relation of *poiesis* and the human doing is, for Agamben, central to the notion of potentiality. He declared: “Poiesis, poetry, does not designate here an art among others, but is the vey name of man's doing, of that productive action of which artistic doing is only a privilege example” (Agamben 1999b: 59). The two key issues in Agamben philosophy: poetry and potentiality, he says that every act of pro-duction into presence, natural or atrophic, has the character of what is usually transited as actual reality defined in contrast with potentiality. *Poiesis*, as a creation, is made up therefore by three elements: the first is potential, the availability-for of a material and a skill that, however, without *techné*, cannot come into actuality. The second is actuality, which is potentiality realized in the form of being-at-work, in process, in a form of work. And the third is entelechy, which here cannot be developed in detail.

Coming back to scarcity and informality, potentiality is correlated to the notion of scarcity, informality and makeshift in several ways. Makeshift/informality and scarce-resource-contexts foreground possibilities embedded in designed environments that were not explicitly designed. It made use of available elements and configura-



tions to construct new assemblages that created effective functionalities. Such possibilities are not part of a program or a brief. In addition to such unprogrammed possibilities that were not, but could have been predicted, are some possibilities that remain radically unpredictable since they arise out of uncontrolled and imprevisible actions. Making design needs to respond to the programmed, the un-programmed and the un-programmable.

In informality and scarcity, it is the un-programmable that took place at the edges, at the boundaries and in the thresholds. What happened exceeded the program and contested the architecture, both of which were meant to contain, circumscribe, define or limit what was entitled to take place. Designing for potential is designing for potential to be bound to, but not actually to take place. It is to maintain the potential in virtuality, not to actualize it, to inscribe and embed potential in the fabric of places without explicitly manifesting it. Keeping potentiality in reserve keeps the design resilient and open for adaptations, transformation, translation and transference.

Agamben's potentiality forms the key concept of his specific mode of politics, for which we should not simply accept what is, but look at how the world where we live comes into being. Agamben's meditation on the history of aesthetics suggests that humans are in essence, poetical, the points from which both facticity (*bare life*) and the political (historical, relational etc), spring forth: "that art is architectonic means, etymologically: art, *poiesis*, is production of origin, art is the gift of the original space of man, architectonics par excellence" (Agamben 1999b: 100). Space, like art and the polity, must spring from potentiality in general and not just be the space across from which this or that actual body is placed. Agamben refuses an aesthetic of *praxis*, which would merely negotiate a field of force where one is already within productive relations, and insist on an aesthetic of *poiesis*, where space and relations are produced from one non relational potentiality.

Referring back to Rancière, design can then become an act of decomposition and re-composition of the relationship between ways of doing, being and speaking. This *becoming central* to the urban development of a city is a political act as it "perturbs the order of things... creating new political identity that did not exist in the existing order" (Rancière 1999: 30). The becoming present, in the agenda and in the reality of urban development positions the urban poor – individually and collectively – in a different place than the one assigned to them by mainstream development practice and the scarcity-police. Such emancipatory logic of design repositions space from an instrumental way of urban upgrading to a process that gives renewed capacity to speak, have an audience and overcome social barriers. What clearly emerges is the presupposition of inclusion as central in any design and architectural attempt to deal with scarcity, as is a critique of numerical teleology, offering a political space, or a re-configuration of a space "where parties, parts or lack of parts have been defined... making visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise" (Rancière 1999: 30). Moreover, the underlying logic of *unlocking people's energy*, often expressed in the literature on scarcity and adaptation to such condition, is achieved through strategic reconfiguration. This takes up existing identities and subjects and presupposes their equality, which drastically changes the status quo of individuals and communities, who are no longer simply invited to participate (quantitative) but whose power and agency are redistributed (qualitative), thereby impeding the simple reproduction of police order that contributed to their marginalisation in the production of cities.



## A possible design framework

Far from being the only specific conditions in the global South informal urbanisms and the urbanism of scarcity as sites of engagement, are taken in their “power” to reconfigure design from the pessimism that has been attributed to it and to the romanticisation that emerges from their everyday spatiality, to challenge their epistemologies with its contingent and immanent condition where design, architectural and urban must take different forms, from a conscious act of not intervening physically in the built environment, to the production of spaces that explicitly challenge dominant ideological perspectives, and engage with issues at a level beyond the merely technical, aesthetical and physical. When thinking on informality, the practice of the urban designer requires a further deconstruction and recalibration in order to gain a better understanding of how to deal with the urban project and more specifically in order to deal with the not-designed and the un-designable.

Architecture and design in informality and in marginality is to engage in a less-than-ideal-world that determines the point of entry in the time when speculation could begin. It starts with the current state of affairs, with the current modes of productions of spaces and its material manifestations and is not a claim for revolution! It is a quest and a continuous investigation to rethink the problem of political subjectivity and its material/spatial coordinates from a different perspective. Is becoming a different engagement with multiple references, codes, experiences and languages all trans-gressed in a dialectical productivity.

For our purpose, we hold that the process of design can be conceived and organized along four distinct, though not mutually exclusive sequential parts (Boano, Hunter, Newton 2013):

*Retrospective*: where efforts focus on identifying and analyzing discursive and non-discursive elements in order to decipher/depict the implicit nature and production of space (rhetoric, policies, actors);

*Descriptive*: where efforts focus on representing physical and non-physical elements that are present- ‘mapping’ the visible and latent with the intention of uncovering windows and opportunities for strategic design capitalization;

*Possibility*: exploration that hinges on present potentials, social practices, and material/immaterial spaces in a feasible, yet strategically future-adaptive manner;

*Alternative*: the obligatory action, especially in extreme cases of polarized visions that threaten local contingents, to challenge through a continuous dialogue with the conflictive nature and dynamism of the (re)production of space(s).

Naturally the thresholds between these four parts are not always as straightforward as the distinctions suggest. Without doubt, during a design process we continuously backtrack as well as fast-forward, manoeuvres brought on by internal or external cause. Micro processes and resurrection of information are inherent in what we do and these parts are exactly sequential in that they have the capacity to build on one another. Though this breakdown suggests that if we critically slow down our action by way of thinking more strategically about where our actions stem from and where they are meant to lead, we might better understand and uncover greater possibilities for identifying our intention of intervention. More specifically, an operational mode of design begins with:

- *No-Design* recalls the radical alternatives refrains. Stemming from inappropriate design implementation, the idea cautions against assumptions and immediately jumping to object-driven design responses while hoping to avoid being complicit of dominant systems (economic, political, professional). This calls for *abandoning* craftsmanship and imaginative skills, forcing one to consider and prioritize the dynamics and processes of collective claims. This could be seen as the



ultra-preliminary aspect of a process or a consistent convicted humility.

- *Research* stresses that without completely abandoning creativity, imagination, and craftsmanship skills, agents (students) can render the invisible, visible by employing a particular way of thinking, communicating, and reflecting that articulates and explores windows of opportunity. These can expose potential catalyst interventions and collectively-derived design proposals within situations of uncertainty, instability, and uniqueness.
- *Critique* calls for the critical deployment of imagination and craftsmanship skills in order to question and understand complexities of contested situations. This highly convicted and reflective positioning offers options of speculating, mobilizing, and demonstrating the potential of informed spatial alternatives that contribute to inclusive transformation.
- *Resistance* directly responds with the intent of reducing unjust domination. Here, there exists a condition of possibility in which design becomes a convicted emancipator using craftsmanship and imagination to promote opposition through feasible alternatives. It collectively questions spatial production not as objective provision, but as a strategic arena for accommodating the convergence of policy, aspirations, struggles and the future.

Such design gestures seem appropriate to illustrate a newly framed perspective on scarcity and its challenges. As such we position in the field of architecture organized around the refusal, disagreement to professional conventions and the creation of an autonomous field of creativity. Again it locate in the variety of experiences and practices that continue question the relationship between architect and political power, between client and service, between ideology and built form doing it as refusal (to engage in what is deemed unjust), subversion (of forms and languages) and retreat (in words, paper and pedagogy).

### A coda

Poetry and philosophy, for Agamben have a common history and destiny that for the Italian philosopher can be related to the notion of *gesture*. Agamben came to define gesture via an alternative reading of the two sides of Aristotle's famous distinction between action (*praxis*) and production (*poiesis*), in which gesture is neither a production nor an enactment but is "undertaking and supporting [...] breaking the false alternative between means and ends" (Agamben 1993c: 155). Positioning scarcity as architectural and design gesture is stressing it as the display of mediation, the making visible of means as such and its potentiality of making something other-than-itself. Central to a design argument here will be potentiality as the choice of 'not to do', which is the deliberate refusal to activate one's potential - a feature that is central to the nature of what Agamben defines as the 'the presence of an absence': the scarcity.

On the other side choosing to use and develop Jaques Ranciere's spatiality of *equality*, signifies adopting a caesura with the linguistic structural Marxism towards a material, sensorial and concrete formulation of politics and political participation and emancipation along with earlier design and architectural political reflections, such as those elaborated by Tony Fry in *Design as Politics* (2011), Nadir Lahiji in *The Political Unconscious of Architecture* (2011) and Micheal Tawa *Theorising the Project* (2011). What is central in Ranciere's most basic assumption is very simple: everyone-thinks, everyone-speaks. Like many of his philosophical contemporaries, thinking evades regulation and it contests classification. To think is to subvert any rigid distribution of classes, place or norms. Such context, dissensual, opens an alternative way of debating the intersections between aesthetics and politics, detaching from "political art or aestheticized politics" to elaborate ways in which the activity of the two sepa-



rate domains can, in parallel at an abstract level, operate a distribution or sharing of the common. Rancière's approach becomes even more powerful once we add to it recognition that the production of the common is becoming increasingly central in today's biopolitical and post-political order.

Recalling an early quotation that states, "design consensus uproots the foundational political impulses that centre on disagreement [...] struggles over the real of different urban possibilities" (Swyngedouw 2011: 25) Giorgio Agamben and Jaques Rancière's reflections offer a theoretical reconfiguration of design with the inherently political nature of scarcity, as contestation and *dissensus* in its production, revealing the lines of power and agency that are written and rewritten in cities as well as *potentiality*.

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A group of people are gathered in a room with a corrugated metal roof and bamboo blinds. Some are standing and talking, while others are sitting on the floor. The room appears to be a classroom or a community space. The floor is tiled with a geometric pattern. The walls are light-colored. There are some posters or notices on the wall. The overall atmosphere is one of active participation and collaboration.

Working together to finish upgrading the classroom,  
Baban Seth quarry settlement, March 2010

**#shared spaces**  
**#peri-urban**  
**#informal settlements**  
**#participatory methods**  
**#India**

# Negotiating shared spaces in informal peri-urban settlements in India.

The role of amenity buildings and the effect of the post-hoc introduction of infrastructure towards the creation of common places

## Introduction

The majority of cities in India have grown and developed organically from indigenous origins. Many of these cities have been under colonial rule, and today continue to exhibit characteristics of western influence. Secular ‘public-ness’ and ‘civic-ness’ (Hosagrahar 2005) instilled by the British colonials through the rebuilding of cities such as (New) Delhi challenged the traditional predominantly religious Mughal spaces that had existed before in North India. Today, the definition of ‘public spaces’ in Indian cities is being further challenged by informal urban settlements. Unplanned urban development has led to the creation of new spaces typified by their informal occupation and changing use through the day, month and season. Conditions of these topographies are constantly being redefined with the changing urban landscape and demands of society. The nature of shared spaces in informal settlements can be revealed and understood by first referring to them using more appropriate words that more accurately describe their position within the urban order. Places that are shared or common, invoke a sense of place and belonging more than that of ‘public’.

Informal peri-urban settlements exist at the periphery of major cities and towns throughout India. As rapid urbanisation continues globally and cities expand, some rural settlements are swallowed up and become islands - ‘urban villages’ - within cities. These emerging hybrid landscapes (Davis 2006) often struggle to develop under conditions of scarcity caused by lack of physical and social integration with, and connection to the city. Problems experienced by communities living in these urban fringe settlements include issues relating to clean water and sanitation infrastructure, housing and provision of amenities and services. Whilst government institutions fail to deal with the scale of the problems that need to be addressed, foreign (outside) aid and intervention by NGOs and charitable institutions attempt to alleviate these conditions of scarcity through amenity building and upgrading of settlements. Whilst rural to urban migration is increasing as villagers make their claim to the city, there is little sense of civic space (in the Western sense) beyond the centre of the city.

In his book *Arrival cities* (2010), Saunders discusses the choices people make to migrate from villages to cities, creating opportunities for themselves to better their lives. Saunders believes that the durable clusters created by semi-permanent village migrants are not a reproduction of agrarian living, but a new understanding of home. He supports the positive impacts of mass migration on cities and people,

emphasising that they are not victims, but citizens aspiring towards a middle class<sup>1</sup> world. Davis (2006) on the other hand takes a rather pessimistic view of peri-urbanisation and slum growth, and their detrimental effects on the city.

### **‘Participation’**

There are several toolkits for participatory design in building and urban decision making (UN-HSP 2001, Wilcox 1994). However, most of these strategies focus on community consultation and design prior to building, with involvement ceasing once construction starts on site. Hamdi’s Placemaker’s Guide to Building Community (2010) focuses strongly on participation at the design and decision-making stages and social engagement following a strategy called PEAS (provide, enable, adapt and sustain), but with less emphasis on engagement through making. Within the framework of social sciences, conventionally practiced research methods are well developed and clearly defined processes, offering well-tested formulas for carrying out fieldwork in the fields of anthropology and sociology amongst others. However, when applied to architecture, these methods focus on quantitative and qualitative approaches and used on their own, tend to: “‘*flatten*’ our ontologies so as to erase the differences between living and those things that mediate the living, but do not, in and of themselves, initiate it” (Ivakhiv 2011).

Well-established participatory methods developed since the 1980s have been adopted as standard practice by NGOs, development agencies and practitioners. Chambers’ (1994) Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) focuses on the incorporation of knowledge from local people, developed from Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) – techniques that could bring about a ‘reversal of learning’ (Chambers 1983). However, the limits of participatory approaches have been raised with a critical view towards PRA and other similar participatory development methods adopted by NGOs and development agencies (Cooke & Kothari 2003). These views highlight a failure to engage with issues of politics and power, instead creating a ‘technical approach to development’ (Hickey & Mohan 2004). They suggest instead a transformatory approach that addresses citizenship and political capacities within a civil society.

Today participation is widely regarded as the consensus for grassroots initiatives promoting inclusive community engagement in their various projects. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Wilcox 1994) proposes a ‘five-rung ladder of participation’ consisting of information, consultation, deciding together, acting together and supporting independent community interests. The process is described as four-phase: Initiation, preparation, participation and continuation, with emphasis on initiation. Five different levels of participation have been identified by Hamdi & Goethert (1997): None, indirect, consultative, shared control and full control. Levels of participation are dynamic and need to be considered throughout the different stages of slum upgrading (as defined by the Community Action Planning model (Batra 2012): Initiation, planning, (shared control) design, implementation and maintenance (involving city and community).

Organisations such as Architecture Sans-Frontieres (ASF) promote a community-led participatory design approach to building communities. Their recent action research workshop Change by Design (ASF 2011) explored the opportunities and limitations of this approach through concurrent investigations at the ‘macro’ institutional scale, the ‘meso’ neighbourhood scale, and the ‘micro’ dwelling scale.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Middle-class’ is an ambiguous term in the Indian context used in recent literature to describe the burgeoning class driving the bourgeoisification of Indian cities (Ghertner in Rademacher & Sivaramakrishnan 2013: 272).



Participatory Action Research (PAR) practitioners have developed these participatory methods to make a concerted effort to integrate three basic aspects of their work: (1) participation - life in society and democracy; (2) action - engagement with experience and history; and (3) research - soundness in thought and the growth of knowledge (Chevalier and Buckles 2013: 10). PAR focuses on reflexive enquiry and offers researchers a way to investigate the experience of the individual, raising awareness of inequality and social policy issues. However, PAR projects highlight limitations that a small scale investigation can have on bringing about social change beyond the specific project or case study situation and often have little impact on changing policy at higher levels.

What is important here is the forming of relationships, developing of confidence and building of trust between those involved that takes time, leading to a sharing of commitment. Every person involved can learn from another in a formal setting (training) and through informal situations - this is the true nature of participation. The manner of engagement becomes a negotiation of the very nature of participation. Participation should build relationships and the sharing of resources between informed citizens “with space to have a voice” (Appadurai 2007), eventually leading to partaking in self-governance.

### **Research Through Making**

Building/making can be used as a method for generating self-conscious engagement with spatial practice, where judgements made through practice can result in a process. Andrew Pickering in his book *The Mangle of Practice* (1995) discusses a view of the context for practice:

“The dance of agency, seen asymmetrically from the human end, thus takes the form of a dialectic of resistance and accommodation, where resistance denotes the failure to achieve an intended capture of agency in practice, and accommodation an active human strategy of response to resistance, which can include revisions to goals and intentions as well as to the material form of the machine in question and to the human frame of gestures and social relations that surround it... The practical, goal-oriented and goal-revising dialectic of resistance and accommodation is, as far as I can make out, a general feature of scientific practice” (Pickering 1995: 22-23)

Pickering’s ideas of research practice are useful in understanding the notion of research through making. Here the ‘actors’ (taken from Latour’s, 2005, Actor-Network Theory), include the material conditions, the significance of the place in the community discourse between artisans and citizens and officials, each with different kinds of virtue, skills, commitment and generosity.

Sennett (2012) explores the idea of cooperation as a craft and as a way of connecting the community with the outside world. Through understanding patterns of behaviour in collaborative settings, he highlights the difficulties of working together in situations where people are living in conditions of scarce resources, and claims that society is “losing the skills of cooperation needed to make a complex society work”. In his book *Together*, Sennett coins the term ‘dialogic skills’ emphasising the need for listening for intention rather than meaning. In Sennett’s view, the distinction between cooperation and collaboration is the idea of cooperation as something with an end result. Collaboration as a process is different to cooperation, which should not be treated as a means to an end (such as agreement). In his words: “poor skills of cooperation disable collaboration” (Sennett 2013).



## Freedom, Democracy and the City

Recent discussions in development economics, such as Sen's (2009) theories of social justice (based on Rawls's (1971) rights-based theory of justice), suggest the opening up of choice, and opportunities, leading to individual freedom and increasing the capabilities of the poor. There is a move towards a focus on how people actually live out their lives (lived experience) and the kinds of opportunities and choices that are afforded to them. In *Poor Economics*, Banerjee & Duflo (2012) tell the story of how poor people live their lives, of the constraints that keep them poor, and of the policies that can alleviate this poverty. Lack of information and incorrect expectations can trap the poor, and Banerjee & Duflo suggest accepting the possibility of error and engagement as part of city life. To address Sen's (1999) insight for the need for 'substantial freedom' to enhance 'the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy' the two live projects developed new methodologies for upgrading these informal peri-urban settlements through a series of small scale interventions directly associated with the way people live their lives.

Notions of urban democracy are discussed by Amin and Thrift (2002: 137- 141) who propose a shift from traditional deliberative democracy (of which participation is central) to radical democracy, and Arjun Appadurai (1996) who uses the term 'community of sentiment' to describe communities moving from shared imagination to collective action. In his paper *Deep Democracy: urban governmentality and the horizon of politics* (2001), he discusses reworking urban governance by embodying local practices and values and enabling people to negotiate their own collective localities through the creation of a coalition of interest.

David Harvey (2008, 2012, first proposed by Lefebvre in 1967; Lefebvre *et al.* 1996) describes how failures of urban planning and issues of collective 'right to the city' are faced particularly by (migrant) dwellers in informal peri-urban settlements in India. Veena Das (2011) speculates that when capitalism and democracy work against each other, the credentials for rights are built incrementally - around ration cards, water, electricity and so on. The two projects tested the capacity of people to self organise around the creation of shared spaces and the extent to which this engagement enhanced their sense of empowerment and accomplishment and eased their connection into the wider opportunities offered by the city.

## Two Case Studies

The two case studies illustrated in this thesis discuss on-going small-scale interventions in marginal settlements in two cities in India – Kachhpura, a rural-to-urban village in Agra, and temporary migrant quarry worker settlements in Navi Mumbai. Both are located at the periphery of rapidly developing cities - Agra, a historical Mughal city that thrives economically on the great demand for tourism; and Navi Mumbai, built as a new planned town in the 70s (Correa 1989) to ease congestion in Mumbai.

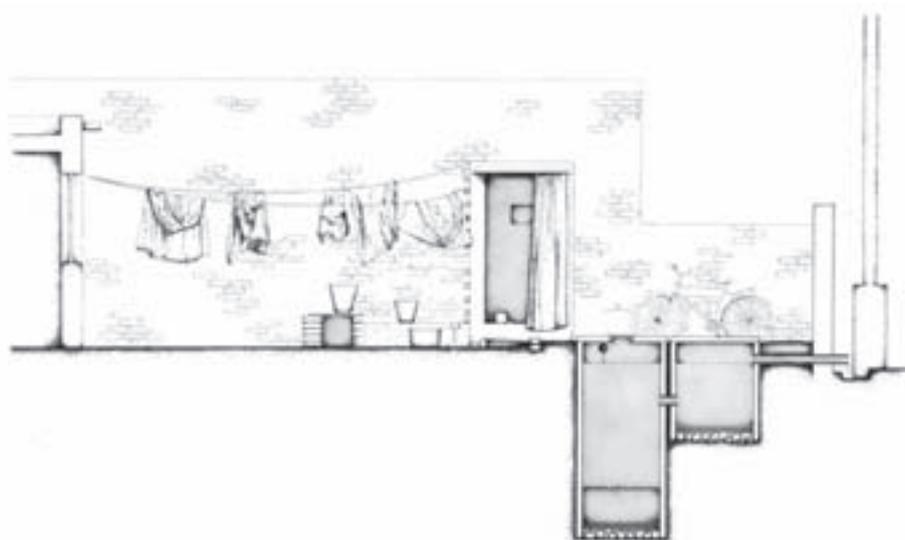
The first case study – the Kachhpura Settlement Upgrading Project (KSUP) began in November 2006 with an architecture studio field trip<sup>2</sup> travelling to Agra to investigate the topography of this urban village, which was one of four settlements surveyed to generate hypothetical student proposals from a study of the physical and cultural context. Collaborating with Indian NGO Centre For Urban and Regional

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<sup>2</sup> The studio operates under the research cluster 'Architecture of Rapid Change and Scarce Resources' (ARCSR) at the Cass Faculty of Art, Architecture and Design, London Metropolitan University (LMU).



Excellence (CURE), we responded to the overwhelming need of the female inhabitants of Kachhpura for sanitation. In summer 2007, as students we installed the first internal household toilet and washing space (figures 1 and 2). We carried out hygiene awareness workshops in the schools and established quality standards, a sound construction methodology and a sustainable maintenance programme. Subsequently, by revolving the funding, more than 200 internal toilets have since been produced.



*Figure 1.* Section through an individual septic tank toilet system constructed in a household yard.



*Figure 2.* Sunita standing proudly in front of her completed toilet and washroom, August 2007.

From 2008, further investigation and representation of ideas; collaboration and negotiation with residents led to the construction, at the neighbourhood scale, of a Decentralised Waste Water Treatment system (DEWATS) built to clean waste water for irrigation and toilet flushing along a 100 metre long stretch of an existing polluted watercourse (figure 3). Shared common places at dwelling, street and neighbourhood scales have emerged from the interstitial spaces formed by this intervention linking the area around DEWATS to other community facilities.



*Figure 3.* Completed Decentralised Wastewater Treatment System (DEWATS), Kachhpura settlement, July 2011.

The second case study - the Quarry Classrooms project began in 2008 in Navi Mumbai as a partnering between LMU and local NGO - Association of Rural People for Health and Educational Needs (ARPHEN), stone quarry owners and worker settlement families. In March and November 2009, two quarry classrooms were constructed in the settlements of Baban Seth (figure 4) and Tata Press (figure 5). The approach to carrying out this project was the creation of shared environments in situations of scarce resources, through a process of collaborative participatory design and making to link architectural endeavour with the process of establishing common ground within the migrant workers' community.



*Figure 4.* Completed classroom building at Tata Press quarry settlement, November 2009 [Source: Helena McDermott].





*Figure 5.* Completed classroom building at Tata Press quarry settlement, November 2009  
[Source: Audrey Lematte].

As a result of the classroom construction, ARPHEN secured funding for teachers' salaries, children have a route into state education, adult literacy and women's sewing classes have begun and the Municipal Corporation have provided water taps, electricity and street lighting, new pathways and formalised drainage, consolidating the settlement.

### **Methodology: Making and Meaning, towards understanding**

This research involved direct, hands-on engagement with, and the implementation (through making) of the two ongoing live projects over six and four years respectively in marginalised settlements in two cities, Agra and Navi Mumbai. As a result, a new understanding and interpretation of shared spaces in Kachhpura and Baban Seth, is emerging. These common places are the result of everyday engagements, collaborations, conflicts and negotiations between local institutions: families, neighbours and community groups, as well as longer-term interventions from outside involvement (NGOs, governments, academic institutions).

The methodology developed in this research begins with the exploration of the physical and cultural topography of a place. The case studies emphasize the need for a process of learning on-site, in continual concrete dialogue with the constituents, requiring a building of trust and understanding between those involved. This may lead to a different project than first imagined, therefore a 'loose-fit' strategy (Mitchell 2010) has been adopted that allows for flexibility and adaptability to circumstances of construction and unplanned or unexpected events that do not necessarily result in a directly linear process and is not completely hostage to chance but adheres to the common topic, which allows for collective engagement, together with individual accomplishment.

Investigating physical and cultural topography is the basis for understanding a place, which seeks to uncover the layers of richness in structures of dependency, getting deeper and allowing a more appropriate fit between intervention and context. Hypothetical testing through student projects is followed by testing through making real-life initiatives. Drawing from anthropology, ethnography and philology, this stu-

dy attends to the narratives of particular individuals and of concrete human lives, through the lens of the architect – as detective, author and craftsperson (Mitchell 2010: 38-56). The background to this research is a rolling studio programme, out of which live projects emerge which use local physical and cultural resources to change urban contexts as the vehicle of collaborative self-empowerment. Upgrading incrementally and iteratively using several small projects (dispersed initiatives), gradually raises the discourse surrounding urban poverty issues within the settlement. Insights have been gained and lessons learned through direct involvement in the two case study projects over a number of years, developing academically and professionally through my shifting roles as architectural student, researcher and PhD candidate.

The built interventions carried out in this research followed a cyclical process of experimentation developed by Mitchell (1998) as a method for testing through making: [1] Cultural and physical surveying; [2] Provoking through a small intervention; [3] Recording resistances; [4] Making accommodations; [5] Sustaining this process. This cyclic process of experimentation, focused group criticism and modified proposition allows for continual reflection during the act of making that progresses in a dynamic manner, allowing flexibility for adapting the proposed intervention as necessary.

This process of learning through making is focused on the idea of collaboration and collective involvement, understood here as ‘negotiations’. Some participatory theories and methods put into practice can result in a static process, lacking flexibility and adaptability to changing situations. In order to set up the horizons of involvement for praxis, there is the understanding of levels of engagement as a method for creating a hierarchy for involvement at various stages, where hierarchy refers to an intensity of holistic participation.

### **Emerging Themes**

Emergent themes arising from the process of making and collaboration can be identified and categorised as the following: [1] Partnering, communication and contracts; [2] Identifying a site and programme; [3] Coalition of the willing: explicitness and knowledge; [4] Building on the familiar and with the local; and [5] Placemaking: recording change through small details and events. This last one identifies lessons learned, and these themes will be discussed in further detail, and illustrated with examples from the case studies.

#### **1. Partnering, Communication and Contracts**

When London Metropolitan University (LMU) began their collaboration with each of the NGOs, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was used in place of a standard form of contract. This is an agreed understanding where both parties have their own agenda (social, academic or project driven) but common interests and a shared vision or goal. These agendas overlap at particular points, and collaboration is achieved through sharing of knowledge and assisting each other where possible. An MOU used in place of a contract, and the idea of partnership allows for more freedom and flexibility from rigid obligations and targets, and a ‘loose fit’ way of working together. In Kachhpura, this on-going partnering has led to a shared ambition between CURE, LMU, residents and the local authority to make Kachhpura the first ‘open defecation-free settlement in Agra’.



A contract (figure 6) was used between householders and CURE for the household toilet project in Kachhpura - this determined the terms of the subsidised loans taken out by residents for new toilet systems and structures. The project funding worked on a subsidised basis with the Water Trust<sup>3</sup> providing initial funds for the construction of ten septic tank toilet systems. A revolving Community Credit Fund and Toilet Savings Groups were set up for householders to take out loans for the construction of the toilet and washing structures. Borrowers pay back a small amount every month according to their household income, allowing other individuals to take out loans. This local level loan system is based on established microcredit programmes originating from the Grameen Bank model in 1983. This loan process is continuing into its sixth year, with 235 toilets installed in Kachhpura by 2013.



*Figure 6.* Householder signing a toilet contract, Kachhpura, July 2007.

In Agra, students worked closely with the local septic tank fabricator and contractor, Vinod Kumar, to improve the concrete mix and reinforcement used in the construction of the pre-cast concrete septic tanks at his yard (figure 7). Vinod was offered an exclusive contract with CURE to construct all the proposed toilets in Kachhpura and nearby settlements under KSUP, and with the moral assurance that he would maintain the high quality of the tanks produced (most tanks produced in the area were of poor quality due to fabricators attempting to maximise their profit at the expense of quality by saving on cement). Vinod was provided with a certificate of quality following cube tests on the improved septic tank concrete mix, which has seen his business grow rapidly in the years thereafter. The idea of a regulated monopoly with close engagement rather than competitive capitalism provided a collaborative approach focusing on the development of care and responsibility that then followed.

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<sup>3</sup> The Water Trust was set up in 2007 to support the work of the Architecture of Rapid Change and Scarce Resources (ARCSR) research area at London Metropolitan University.



*Figure 7.* Student and contractors making a pre-cast concrete septic tank, Agra, July 2007.

## 2. Identifying a Site and Programme

Identifying a site and programme involves looking for opportunities that present themselves within situations where there are limited resources. Students, researchers and professionals come into the picture as outsiders, bringing with them fresh outlooks on situations of rapid change and scarce resources. However, unfamiliar territories require an understanding that can be acquired through looking at the physical and cultural topography. This understanding, together with real insights from those engaged in the everyday workings of the place, are a vital initial stage that can lead to the identification of sites and programmes for possible interventions.

Delhi based NGO CURE works under several general development themes such as sanitation, sustainable urban livelihood, and community based tourism. In identifying a site and programme, the idea of a common topic could be developed. In Kachhpura, the topic of clean places was developed under the general heading of sanitation, that dealt with hygiene behaviour and practices, access to toilets and treatment and reuse of wastewater, common interests shared by both NGO and academic institution.

In March 2007, an email workshop was set up between CURE in India and Cass students in London. The workshop was focused around toilets and sanitation – a theme that had emerged from CURE’s work with the communities, and the student’s field work in Agra that year. Around the same time, a local woman in Kachhpura, Meera Devi, was in the midst of a land ownership dispute with her brother. This dispute resulted in the division of the property where they both resided, and for Meera, importantly the loss of access to a private toilet (figure 8). Meera collaborated with students and CURE to become the first householder in Kachhpura to have an improved septic tank toilet system installed in her dwelling, and soon became an instrumental player in kick starting the pilot toilet scheme. The local press (Bhardwaj 2009) called her a ‘Toilet Missionary’. These chance conditions led to the identification of the first site and programme for an individual household septic tank toilet in Kachhpura village.





Figure 8. Meera's toilet dispute and development of the dwelling, Kachhpura.

### 3. Coalition of the Willing: Explicitness and Knowledge

The idea of a 'coalition of the willing' can be used as a way of getting people involved in a collaborative process, engaging with a decision at a particular time and stage of the development of the project. In order to engage constituents at various levels of interaction and enable them to take control, it is important to provide knowledge and be explicit throughout the process. Gradual involvement (say with children to begin with) can lead to gradual accumulation of partners/participants that eventually leads to full cooperation (figure 9). A collaborative spirit can be formed through commitment between several parties to achieve something, and only happens when people care and/or are interested in that something, and where goals are realistic.



Figure 9. Working together to finish upgrading the classroom, Baban Seth quarry settlement, March 2010.

An essential part of the process of integrating sanitation infrastructure into the community was the involvement of the residents themselves. In Kachhpura, a hygiene awareness campaign was instigated to inform and educate the community. This involved a basic hygiene workshop with the children of the main primary school (figure 10), and distribution of visual leaflets to every householder in the village that we developed, explaining how septic tank toilets work. The potential of educating children for advocacy in their households became apparent.

Children play an instrumental role in engaging communities in collaborative projects. Local kids get involved right from the start, enthusiastically helping students to survey by holding tape measures and acting as unofficial tour guides, offering hidden insights into life in the community. The friendships initiated can lead to events such as workshops at the local school through children's introductions to their teachers. Below, kids were involved in an exercise to envisage the scale of the proposed classroom building by standing along the marked out perimeter holding hands, thus spatialising the imagined structure (figure 11).



Figure 10. A Hygiene Awareness workshop with children at the local primary school, Kachhpura, August 2007 [Source: Shamoan Patwari].



Figure 11. Envisioning the site through children and games, Baban Seth quarry settlement, March 2009 [Source: Shamoan Patwari].

#### 4. Building on Tradition: Familiarity

As mentioned in theme [2], unfamiliar territories require an understanding of the physical and cultural topography before one can honestly intervene to improve the most basic of conditions of scarcity. Building on knowledge of the existing situation - familiar building methods (skills), materials and structures in the vernacular, as well as familiar ways of living and social institutions - allows for appropriate actions to be taken.



At Baban Seth quarry settlement, this idea of familiarity was the launching pad for involving community residents in the process of design and construction – and therefore allowing for freedom of choice. Community platforms exist throughout the settlements, providing a political and social forum for collective gathering within a community (figure 12). As a traditional concept, with its origins in rural villages, these platforms have emerged as a stable institution within a transitional place.



Figure 12. A familiar community platform structure found in settlements.

The design of the Baban Seth quarry classroom building began as a simple raised platform, to address issues of monsoon flooding highlighted during initial discussions. Once the stone platform had been constructed, residents expressed a need for a roof structure to provide shelter from the sun and rain (as well as stray rocks from the nearby quarry blasting). A simple lightweight roof was proposed. This process of negotiation with the site, people and evolving building continued through each stage of construction - with the addition of a low wall, building began to change from a platform to a classroom, consolidated with the introduction of the final major element, security. Women expressed concern that drunken men would misuse the building, leading to the addition of steel grilles and a lockable gate, thus securing the building, whilst allowing for ample light and ventilation. The result of this process was a building that had developed from an initial imagined gathering place as a raised platform to a classroom connected to the temple (figure 13).



Figure 13. Development of the classroom building, Baban Seth quarry settlement, March 2009.

## 5. Placemaking: Recording of Change Through Small Details and Events

Placemaking is defined as “the way all of us human beings transform the places in which we find ourselves into places in which we live” (Schneekloth & Shibley 1995: 1). The principal idea of community placemaking to be discussed here is that of taking something and making it your own. Empowering people at different levels and enabling them to have some level of control over their environment is the key to successful (design and planning) interventions in the built environment.

The recording of change that happen around the built interventions enables interpretation through the notion of placemaking. Appropriation through temporary events and small gestures at and around the sites were collected and documented over time. Analysis of these moments has generated ideas and topics about permanence/temporality (*pucca/kuchha*), middle-classness and collective identity - topics that address aspirations and suggest a changing metabolism of the settlement (and interpretation of town).

The introduction of toilets in Kachhpura has led to the changing of daily habits within the household. Meera’s yard with her new toilet and wash area (figure 14) now resembles a Victorian scullery, where the washing up of dishes and laundering of clothes takes place in a wet zone, and extension of the kitchen area. Tidy yards create better-utilised common places within the dwelling, and the permanent infrastructure acts as a catalyst for improvements to communal streets and drains (figure 15). The introduction of informative signage and posters, and the naming of places such as “*Swaach Gal?*” (“Clean Street”) have given significance to a new kind of public space, represented by cleanliness.

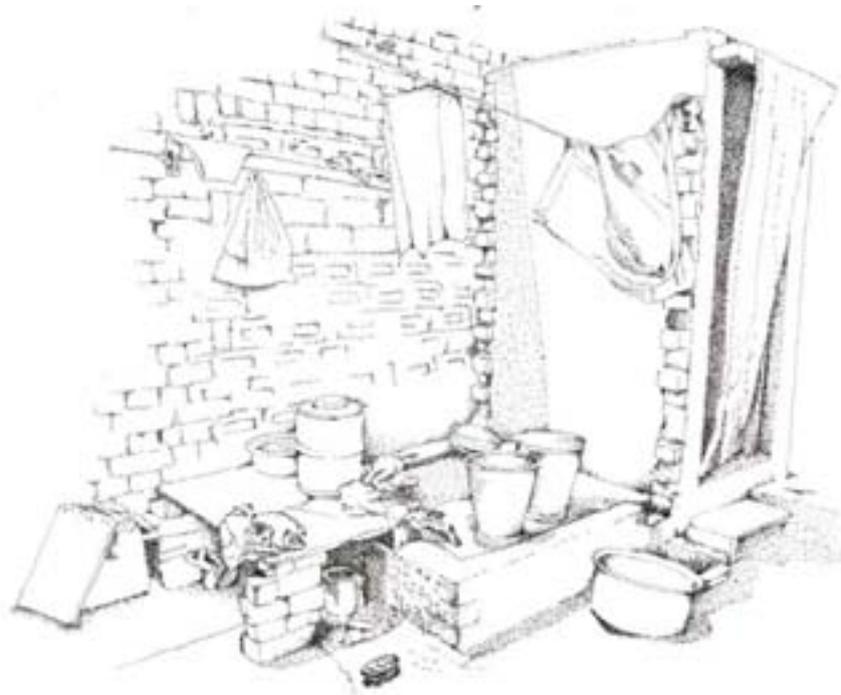


Figure 14. Meera’s new toilet structure and washing platform, Kachhpura.



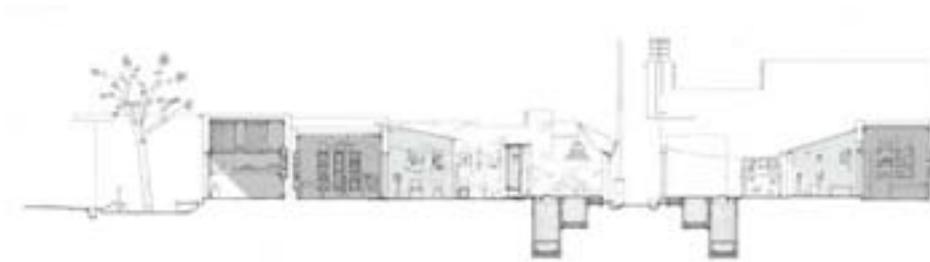


Figure 15. Section through Swaach Gali (Clean Street), Kachhpura.

The architecture of the DEWATS has created a new identity for the former waste-filled edgeland of Kachhpura village. Brijesh's *baraat* (ceremonial wedding procession) proudly passed along the area that used to be the *nala*, taking foul water away from the village. The notion of the DEWATS as a clean setting has encouraged appropriation of the area by nearby residents for important functions such as a marriage celebrations with the erection of a temporary colourful *pandal* (tent) structure (figure 16).



Figure 16. Marriage pandal (tent) erected adjacent to the completed DEWATS, Kachhpura, November 2011.

Long-term Kachhpura resident, Bhajan Lal's new house (figure 17) is an example of the shift towards a middle class lifestyle, represented through the design and layout of the dwelling. *Pucca* materials (glass, concrete, bricks) are used throughout the building, with a strong emphasis on security. The tradition of multi-functional spaces typically found in most houses has been replaced with individual rooms for sleeping, cooking and entertaining; even the furniture is different (more mass-produced than hand-crafted). With Bhajan Lal's new house, the rejection of the former traditional village lifestyle common throughout Kachhpura suggests aspirations towards a higher class of living, akin to Saunders's idea of middle-classness (2010), and is a reflection of his children's success (educated with well-paid jobs).



Figure 17. Bhajan Lal's new house along the DEWATS 'street', Kachhpura, November 2011.

At Baban Seth quarry worker settlement, the sacred centre of the *Mandir Chowk* (Temple Square) represents the collective values and beliefs (just as the dwelling represents the centre of individual identity) of the migrant workers at Baban Seth quarry settlement, and brings them together as a community (figure 18). The proximity of the new classroom with the existing temple space and the conscious decision to link the two at the centre of the settlement has created an extension to the *Mandir Chowk*, bringing together sacred and secular places (figure 19). The classroom building creates the notion of a public setting to which the community can commit itself, and, in turn, discover itself as a collective with a shared political voice and opportunities beyond subsistence (Tang 2012). Today, the extended *Mandir Chowk* (shrine and classroom) is a respected central place for social gathering, worship, education and empowerment of the community as a whole (figure 20).



Figure 18. The Mandir Chowk (Temple Square), Baban Seth quarry settlement, November 2009.





*Figure 19.* New classroom building and connection to the Mandir Chowk, Baban Seth quarry settlement, April 2010.



*Figure 20.* Section through the new classroom building and Mandir Chowk, Baban Seth quarry settlement, April 2010.

## **Working Re-definitions**

A discourse around, and an analysis of the evolving process and methods adopted for this study lead us to new understandings of commonly used terms in the field of community development in the built environment. The re-defining of certain terms within a local cultural context can offer a more profound and useful meaning, arising out of direct negotiations in a particular setting.

### **1. Informal Peri-Urban Settlements and Urban Villages**

The term ‘slum’ here has intentionally not been used to describe the case study settlements being discussed. Kachhpura is officially now an urban village. The quarry worker settlements in Navi Mumbai are identified as different to established ‘slum’ areas in the same region.

‘Peri-urban’ locates these settlements at the periphery of the city, more part of the urban than the rural, but with connections to the villages. ‘Informal’ describes their low-income, incremental growth as settlement colonies. Peri-urban areas are characterised by uncertain land tenure, inferior infrastructure, low incomes, and lack of formal recognition by governments.

With the rapid urbanisation of the world's cities, rural villages are gradually being swallowed creating a new category band/belt of peri-urban settlements - the phenomenon of the urban village. An example of this is Kachhpura settlement in Agra. In addition, the growing migration of workers to the cities creates new settlements in these edgelands. The stone quarry worker settlements in Navi Mumbai are marginal communities situated at the foot of a 15km long stretch of hillside actively being mined for road stone. The nature of these clusters of small settlements evoke a temporal sense of rural living in a harsh urban context, in a way much like a village in a city (or urban village).

## 2. Shared Spaces

This paper addresses shared spaces in the local sense, as opposed to 'public space'. Public spaces, as defined in the West (with roots in the agora, forum or commons), do not exist in informal peri-urban settlements in the sense of formal civic places such as park or squares in cities, or even such settings as the agora or forum. Instead, the informal places that emerge out of daily routine and formal institutions are created by tradition and culture. In contrast to Western cities, shared places in Indian cities are generally seen to be dirty, noisy, smelly, crowded and poorly managed.

The city was filled with a collection of both religious and secular spaces, each offering a different kind of place for social interaction amongst the residents. Like the church in medieval Europe, religious institutions such as temples and mosques formed the focus of the communal life in Indian cities. The courtyard of the main mosque was one of the largest open congregational spaces in the urban fabric, whilst the *bazaar* (market) street formed the main commercial spine. Shared spaces were traditionally associated with trade and sacred/secular-ness, but were not political arenas (like the Greek agora).

Migration from rural areas to the city for livelihood opportunities requires adapting to urban living, which often results in a sacrifice of the life left behind. In *The New Landscape - Urbanisation in the Third World*, Charles Correa (1989: 32-33) describes urban living as a series of spaces operating within a hierarchical system, under Indian conditions that appear to have four major elements: private space for the family (for cooking, sleeping, storage); areas of intimate contact (front doorstep for interaction with neighbours; children's play spaces); neighbourhood meeting places (water tap or well for connection to the community); and a principal urban area (for example, Maidan used by whole city). The lack of connection to the city, physically, socially and legally leave urban villages, such as Kachhpura, though situated within the city landscape, sitting as islands amongst the urban fabric.

## Reflections on Spatial Practice: Collective Architectural Making as a Catalyst for Community Self-Empowerment and Social Change

The two projects/interventions discussed in this paper aim to bring about social change, by giving more meaning, identity and place in newly-empowered people's perceptions and experiences (endowed with a civic consciousness), towards a new interpretation and development of public spaces. The ongoing development of these projects is the result of conflict, mediation and negotiation, and of sharing through collective making. The notion of negotiation can be viewed in this context, as a practice of collaboration, participation, engagement and dialogue; and of finding a way through (resistances and accommodations).



The evolutionary character of the methodology has developed through a journey of continual learning by reflecting on making throughout the process. Understanding the cultural and physical topography (Architect as Anthropologist) through a narrative lens (Architect as Author) and through spatial practice (Architect as Crafts-person) is a cyclical process. These modes of interaction, and the nature of this practice can be represented through understanding the resources in a place and making appropriate interventions that build on understood traditions and respond to individual and group aspirations. This is an on-going gradual process that is adaptable and empowers people at different levels (through placemaking and appropriation of the new places), leading to open-ended interventions that follow certain traditions but also invite meaningful change through practical responses to current (modern) demands. This process has allowed me to derive insights into the nature of shared spaces in the two case study situations.

The notion of negotiation is viewed in the context of this study as a culmination of cooperation, participation and engagement. We should encourage a culture of learning from making, shifting the focus from decisions made at the top or from the outside. The project and partnership cycle offers a flexible programme - neither case study project followed the exact same process or involved the same levels of participation. Proposals usually developed at the start are then modified to take into accounts resources available - materials, skills, labour and time. Everyday limitations caused by conditions of scarcity are overcome by transforming places through improvisation – what Sennett (2012) calls ‘users’ art’. Dealing with physical conditions of scarcity releases immense resources of creativity within the people. A cyclical process of negotiation, adaptation, resistance and accommodation, as opposed to problem and solution, can be used to find and sustain a good fit between places and people. The notion of scarcity can begin to be addressed through the idea of fit with topography.

At stake is a more concrete and nuanced understanding of the nature and settings of what is too-often generalised as ‘public space’. The provision of amenity buildings and of such post-hoc infrastructure as purification drains creates situations of negotiation with constituents, who in turn develop a civic commitment and solidarity in the course of the work. These negotiations depend upon subtle and rich cultural contexts, which become evident during the course of the project, and which properly characterise ‘public’ in this non-Western culture. In this way the projects are vehicles of research and understanding, not applications of a theoretical approach divorced from the concrete conditions.

Embodied in the topography is a social change from which a new kind of public space and town is emerging, that is situated somewhere between traditional order and urban modernity. The conflict between traditional order and urban modernity exists somewhere between custom and reason, that address and accept certain traditions but also practice responses to current pressures. In her study of changes in the social and physical environment of Delhi taking place during the colonial era, Hosagrahar (2005) calls these conditions “indigenous modernities”.

The mixed world of tradition and innovation from new partnerships between NGOs, academics and students, and communities address notions of capacity building and empowerment. In situations where the primary order is rooted in tradition, the introduction of small-scale interventions have involved setting the horizons of involvement beyond survival (subsistence) to a situation that alludes to capacity-building (Sen 1999) and participations within democratic capitalism or free market democracy, eventually leading to meaningful change.



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#post-scarcity  
#city  
#disaster  
#L'Aquila  
#social ecology

# Scarcity, post-scarcity and local community: L'Aquila as a case study

## 1. Literature context

According to the Human Development Report in 2005, “the richest 500 individuals in the world have a combined income greater than that of the poorest 416 million” (HDRO 2005: 4). Meanwhile, in 2010, within a sample of 104 countries “almost 1.75 billion people, experience multidimensional poverty” (HDRO 2010: 96). When either considering simple monetary income or a multidimensional index of well-being (which considers education, health and living standards) the results are the same: we live in a world of global inequalities and poverty that fosters “an inevitable social disintegration, violence and national and international terrorism” (Makwana 2006). However, as openly recognized even by United Nations (2005), this global scarcity of resources, both physical and social, is not understood as a consequence of a natural inability of our environment to sustain its inhabitants, but rather as a result of global policies based on globalization, deregulation and liberalization where unequal distribution of resources, corporate interests and increasing practice of shock threaten human life.

It is precisely the current capitalistic system that bases its growth and understandings of ‘wellbeing’ on exploitation of the environment, and social inequality (Swyngedouw 2004; Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw 2006), ever increasing the incredible polarization between a small and wealthy elite who benefits from its policies, the ‘haves’ and the ‘haves-not’, as recently underlined by the slogan of the Occupy Movement, ‘We are the 99%!’.

All these effects can be easily traced in an urban context “that was crucial to the survival of capitalism”(Harvey 2008: 29) and that is still shaped by its needs: an incredible socio-spatial transformation emerges, where cities are and will be the main stage, the place where the majority of the population lives (United Nations 2008) and the main source of environmental and social problems (Klein and Tremblay 2010; Low and Gleeson 2006). However, they can also be understood as major sites for re-imagining a sustainable future (Hern 2010). Living in cities is indeed the only way, in a world so densely populated, for reducing waste and consumption, sharing resources, stopping sprawl and saving energy due to the increased density that reduces everyone’s footprint (Hern 2010).

Following this idea, different traditions have focused their attention on cities, like Urban Political Ecology and Social Ecology<sup>1</sup>. In a society increasingly detached from nature in the “synthetic environment” (Bookchin 1995: 17) of the cities, both these

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1 As defined by Bookchin 2005.

theories recognise the importance of the link between environment and humanity, and the importance of power relations in understanding urban transformation and its potential. In particular Bookchin goes further and stresses how “the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human” (Bookchin 2005: 65). Thus the realization of a different society that can overcome scarcity and inequality should be based on social change able to deeply criticize hierarchy and domination and developing new forms of political and social organization, rooted in a new relationship with nature and an awareness of how resources are affected by rates of human consumption (Bookchin 1988; Hopkins 2008; Hern 2010).

This process, as again recognised by Bookchin, can also benefit from the incredible technological level reached to-date that is able to give incredible help in redistributing resources, energy and reducing the global need for hard work, achieving a “balance between man and the natural world” (Bookchin 1995: 188), a post-scarcity society. In the original etymology of ‘techne’, rediscovered in the works of Mumford (1934), the connection of technology with art, human skill and dexterity (Downton 2008), would permit the building of an alternative to the current energy system that is dependent upon polluting and exploitative sources. The use of green technologies indeed, would permit “the fulfilment of social and cultural potentialities” (Bookchin 2004: iv) and “to reconstruct urban life along lines that could foster a balanced, well-rounded, and harmonious community of interests among people and between humanity and nature” (Bookchin 1986: 162). In this context, post-scarcity is not understood as merely a material state: the possibility of having a large enough quantity of goods for all people to survive at a decent level opens the doors to a deeper possibility, namely, the achievement of freedom (Bookchin 2004).

In order to proactively move society in that direction, from a political perspective Social Ecology proposes Libertarian Municipalism (Bookchin 1995, Biel 1997, Hawkins 1993) as a new political system that allows people to return to the heart of political debate, suggesting an organization which should encourage public participation and democratic decision making. Drawing from Proudhon and Kropotkin’s idea of ‘communes’ led by principles of self-management, complementarity, and mutual aid, the principal characteristics of this new kind of political organization become decentralization, statelessness, collective management and direct democracy (Bookchin 1986, 1995). The first objective of Libertarian Municipalism is thus to gradually “advance a perspective for extending local citizen-oriented power at the expense and ultimately the removal of the nation-state by village, town, and city confederation” (Bookchin 1995: 1).

This new political form, on a larger scale, proposes that each municipality should be self-governed in a confederation. This ‘Commune of Communes’, becomes “a dual power that contest[s] the legitimacy of the existing state power” (Bookchin 1995: 264).

The importance of the urban space is stressed also by the concept of right to the city, firstly introduced by Lefebvre in 1968, that has become a powerful slogan both for academics and urban movement to the point that it has been recently introduced into the international bodies’ agenda (United Nations 2010). It, as “a transformed and renewed right to urban life” (Lefebvre 1996: 158), opens up the possibility of people shaping their own city. Harvey, defining it as “the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves” (2008: 23), puts the emphasis on the collective aspect and also on the “connection between urbanization and surplus production and use” (2008: 40).



As we will see, our case study, L'Aquila, is a perfect example of the negation of the right to the city: for example still today, three year after the earthquake, the population of L'Aquila do not have the 'right' to enter many parts of the city and the voice of the people for an equitable and sustainable reconstruction can hardly be heard in the corridors of power. However, we recurred limitedly to this framework, because results „vague and radically open“ (Attoh 2011: 670); in our opinion, the focus on the idea of rights can lead to a dilution of radical demands or to a form of co-optation, in a practice of de-construction by the system to the movement (Souza 2012).

For our research we thus decided to concentrate our attention on an urban setting and, allying ourselves with Castells (1985) and Moulaert *et al.* (2010), analysed an actor able to transform local community and able to challenge the political-social status quo: the Grassroots Urban Initiative. The adjective 'urban' clearly indicates the focal point of these initiatives: the city. The term 'initiatives' refers, on the one hand, to the autonomy of the actors and, on the other, to the evolution and the undecided future of these actors (Fraisie 2011). The term 'grassroots' is a broad concept as well, but we can find general agreement on the idea that the actor has a deep origin in and connection with the community and has a relatively horizontal structure, compared to more institutionalized groups (Fraisie 2011).

Our research is based on analyses of broad literature, collection of original material through fieldwork, and personal experience in L'Aquila, an Italian city heavily damaged by an earthquake in 2009. We took this site as a context of induced scarcity and of some Grassroots Urban Initiatives developed within it. After giving a broad narrative of the earthquake and institutional emergency management, we will concentrate on two Grassroots Urban Initiatives: the "Assemblea cittadina dell'Aquila" (City Assembly of L'Aquila) and the "Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore" (Board for the Rebirth of Pescomaggiore). For each initiative analysed, we decided to take into account why and in which context they developed, who is involved, what their objectives are and finally the main similarity with Social Ecology.

For space reasons, we omit the analysis of other interesting groups such as two social occupied spaces (Asilo and 3e32, figure 6) and several local organizations.

## 2. Case study

A deep shock is an incredibly powerful lens for understanding the specific inequalities and contradictions embedded in our society: the sudden collapse of most of the ordinary social, economic and political structures not only leads the population to a global scarcity of primary resources, but also to a temporary vacuum of power and a subsequent race to fill it.

The L'Aquila earthquake, an incredible example of Italian disaster capitalism (Puliafito 2010), acts to underline all those incongruities, with particular regards to the importance of induced scarcity for the flourishing of the 'shock economy' (Klein 2007). This case study will give us the opportunity to consider a well-known malignant mechanism of produced scarcity, both physical and social, that overlaps the damages induced by the disaster and its devastating effects on the local community. Moreover, it will also permit a look at different approaches to the emergency that are able to translate the crisis into a rebirth for the community and a way towards a post-scarcity society.



## 2.1 The context

On the 31st of March 2009, in Rome, the national department of Protezione Civile (Civil Protection) convened an extraordinary meeting of officials, scientists and politicians, the Commissione Grandi Rischi (Commission on Major Risks), to discuss the situation in the nearby city of L'Aquila where after more than three months of repeated minor earthquakes, a stronger, magnitude 4.1, shock happened that day. After meeting for less than an hour, the committee declared that there was no reason to expect a major shock, reassuring residents that otherwise, "in similar past instances, would typically have slept in their cars, just to be sure" (Lewick 2012) trusting a centuries-old fear, historical memory and connection with the territory that maybe would have been able to save some lives<sup>2</sup>.

At 3:32 on the 6th of April, a 6.3 magnitude earthquake occurred, causing 309 deaths, the destruction of the centre of L'Aquila and of several surrounding villages in a territory of the exceptional dimension of about 2.400 kmq, and the displacement of around 67,000 people, of a population of roughly 73,000 citizens, resulting in "the most important disaster to happen in Italy in the 30 years" (Farinosi 2012: 27) and "the first great disaster in the Era of communication" (Gatti 2012: 28).

The earthquake surprised a territory and a city already in crisis. Almost ironically, L'Aquila's motto is "Immota Manet", that more than the original wish for absence of earthquakes, seems to indicate a trend on the cultural, political and economic life of the city in the last centuries "marked by impotence and resignation" (Salvatore 2012: 209). This is probably a lasting effect on the collective psychology of a history sprinkled by earthquakes whose biggest, in 1703, definitely stopped an incredibly lively community. The rural and commercial economy based on the close contact with the surrounding territory that saw L'Aquila's magnificence in the Middle Ages was lost in the following centuries, as well as its political and cultural role, that could not compete with a labour and economic crisis that since the 90ies has left the city with a high level of unemployment (Berardi *et al.* 2008).

L'Aquila before the earthquake was in an exposed, economically and socially vulnerable situation, in a region in which the development corridor moved to the coastal area, irreversibly impoverishing the inner region. Between 2009 and 2010 this situation became critical: the agricultural sector, the industrial sector, the manufacturing sector and tourism all suffered a dramatic drop, at the regional level<sup>3</sup> and most dramatically in the areas affected by the earthquake. The economic, social and cultural impacts of this catastrophic event have been tragic in a territory that had already experienced "a dramatic destruction of the social fabric and an impoverishment of his personal ties and community" (Farinosi 2012: 32), together with a "considerable increase in new poverty" (ATTAC Italia 2011: 24) due to the increased unemployment rate and lack of employment security<sup>4</sup>. The fragmentation is spatial and social: "the loss of connection with the usual loci of identity destabilizes existences, communities and daily practices" (Calandra 2012b: 39). The former fragility and, especially away from the mayor centre of L'Aquila, the disconnection and vastness

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<sup>2</sup> In October 2012 the six scientists and a former government official, members of the commission, have been charged with 6 years of prison, guilty of involuntary manslaughter. Not entering into the huge debate regarding the responsibility of the people involved (among others see Hall, 2012), we stress the main reason of their judgment: not a lack of prevention but a lack of information for the population.

<sup>3</sup> They respectively decreased by 8.6%, 12%, 72.8% and 17.5% (ATTAC Italia 2011: 11-13).

<sup>4</sup> "From the first first quarter of 2010, in the crater of the earthquake the total hours of layoffs increased by 423.4% compared to the same period the year before" (Puglielli 2010: 10).



of the territory exacerbates this: the phenomenon of marginality emerges as “the major social risk in a context of crisis” (Imperiale 2011: 14). Moreover, the lack of social organizations in the territory and of a strong sense of community over the parental relationships have been contributory causes to the slowness and weakness of its reaction, in a context in which new spaces of social reconstruction and connection are desperately needed, as for example demonstrated by the importance of schools and university as re-composition places (ATTAC Italia 2011).

## 2.2 Earthquake’s effect and management

Despite a lack of preparedness and prevention (specifically meaningful is the lack of evacuation plan for the Regional Hospital), the Protezione Civile, revealed itself to be incredibly able to impact a “big event”, acting undisturbed while “exercising a power not derived by any form of democratic delegation” (Puliafito 2010: 72), bolstering the idea that “democracy is not possible in emergency” (Puliafito 2010: 72). Following the direction of the *Metodo Augustus*<sup>5</sup>, a heavy deployment of volunteers, firemen, military forces and officers transformed the devastated territory into a living experiment of ‘Command and Control’. The Protezione Civile, a powerful machine able to act notwithstanding the current environmental regulations, working contracts and urban planning, started its work. After 48 hours more than 24,000 people were accommodated in tents or hotels, increasing to a maximum of 67,459 (Protezione Civile 2010) in the next months. This was “the first time in modern Italian history that a major city had been completely emptied of its population by government decree” (Alexander 2010: 332). Assisted by a multitude of volunteers, the residents were for more than six months not only unable to access the city and the surrounding villages that were declared ‘red zones’ (figure 1), guarded by the army and fenced, but also to carry out independently ordinary living skills. Groups of psychiatrists and psychologists started working with the population, diagnosing it to be mostly “apathetic, depressed, unable to plan for the future and imagine positive and tending to the delegation” (Sirolli 2012: 62). The rate of consumption of drugs, alcohol and medicines increased incredibly after the 6th of April, as well as episodes of anxiety, depression and insomnia (Stratta *et al.* 2012, Dell’Osso *et al.* 2011, Pollice *et al.* 2011, Torsello 2012). However, instead of ascribing these collective symptoms as post-traumatic stress syndrome, as usually happens in post-disaster contexts, the experts mostly described the population as being affected by institutional syndrome (Sirolli 2011): the L’Aquila inhabitants were ‘over assisted’, obligated to live in an over controlled situation that impeded any attempt to get back to daily life. In this context, the decision to host the G8 2009 in the same city enhanced the militarization of the territory and the control (it is interesting that the order was given to not serve any coffee, tea or Coca Cola in the tents to avoid over-excitation of the guests). To this is to be added the effects of the ‘dividi et impera’ policy: the uneven treatment of different groups within the population, divided between ‘the ones in tents’ and ‘the ones in hotels’ and the merit ranking for accessing to the shelters definitely put every individual against the other, in a spiral of fear and hate that damaged the initial empathic reaction to the disaster (Imperiale 2013).

In analysing the social fabric in the post-shock environment it is thus difficult to di-

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5 “If its institutional counterpart will be sufficiently authoritative and determined, most citizens will be willing to abdicate their decision-making autonomy, to undergo hardship and limitations, to “obey” to the guidelines. This attitude, once manifesting itself, can be of great help in the provision of evacuation plans, of mass health interventions, of restriction on the circulation, of rationing of food, water and medicine” (Galanti 2008: 47).

stinguish between the damages and impacts of the traumatic event and the collateral effect of a peculiar management strategy, especially as there was no social impact assessment analysis that could have developed a clearer understanding of effects and responsibilities (Cottrell and King 2010). However, as stressed in the introduction, it needs to be said that “the 2009 disaster was, quite simply, ‘bad’. It was bad, too, from a physical pain perspective, given the number of people injured and killed. Yet, there was also the unquantifiable cost of mental and emotional suffering” (Sargiacomo *et al.* 2014: 5).



*Figure 1.* Policemen guarding the red zone, on the gate the keys of the houses whose inhabitants were deprived of access as symbol of protest

While in the main stream media, following the typical style of an “embedded communication” (Petrei 2012: 43), the Government, in the binomial Berlusconi and Bertolaso (the Italian Prime Minister and head of the Protezione Civile), appeared to make major effort to support the population, in reality from the first emergency there began a history of power games and bypassing of local authorities (Alexander 2010), whose effects were still evident in the region three years after the quake: the rebuilding process had not started, the centres of L’Aquila and surrounding villages were still fenced, the economy in desperate crisis. Moreover they gave space to mafia infiltrations, caused environmental damage and impeded the beginning of a proper reconstruction.

The situation is only slightly changed 5 years later (in 2014), when, according to data provided by the local council (Comune dell’Aquila 2014), in the town of L’Aquila and in the 56 municipalities hit by the earthquake there are still 14,320 people who live in housing solutions provided by the State, 4,054 people who benefit from the contribution of independent accommodation, while the number of people assisted inside hotels is finally null (while it was still 283 in 2012, Farinosi 2012). Moreover, the Protezione Civile also enhanced an overall external disinformation only partly uncovered by the huge amount of work of citizens and independent journalists through the Internet (Imperiale 2010; Farinosi and Treré 2010) and stopped only by the inquiry from the public prosecutor’s office of Firenze on the Protezione Civile that lead to a persistent dramatic silence on the situation.

All these details stress again the lack of attention towards the needs of the city that instead claimed at transparency, reconstruction and participation.



### 2.3 C.A.S.E.<sup>6</sup>

The scarcity of housing and the magnitude of the disaster gave the Government the possibility of implementing a new interpretation to the emergency: the C.A.S.E.. Skipping any intermediate solution of provisory shelter or accommodation (Alexander 2010), thanks to the innate power of the Protezione Civile to jump some natural passage of environmental and landscape protection<sup>7</sup>, 2,700 € per square metre were spent in order to build 19 permanent new towns. This misleading idea of giving temporarily-permanent solutions (Calvi 2010) provided the Government with easy publicity, building contractors with easy money and the population with the permanence in tents for almost a year. Even omitting an in-depth analysis of the environmental impact of the C.A.S.E. (such as the lack of a dirty water treatment plant) and the debate rising around the consumption of territory (Ciccozzi 2009), it is worth underlining its urban effects and how the new city has been shaped by capitalism, that historically found in housing one of the best ways for absorbing surplus (Harvey 2008).



Figure 2. Location of the CASE post-seismic housing complexes in the L'Aquila area. (Alexander 2010: 336)

Despite the fact that most of the new towns are completely detached from the previous urban centres and from any kind of services or amenities (figure 2), they permanently reshaped the territory, fragmenting the urban dimension, boosting the car-dependency of inhabitants<sup>8</sup> and obstructing any possibility for the population to re-establish its connection with the territory and affirming its ability to live it in the first step of rebuilding, their right to the city. This effect has been enhanced by the total absence of social spaces within the new towns and its substitution with shopping centres and the complete neglecting of the city centre, historically the vital core of the community, affecting the more fragile parts of society: elderly people, people with disabilities, women and migrants (ATTAC Italia 2011). The ideas of

6 C.A.S.E.: Complotti Antisismici Sostenibili ed Ecocompatibili (Anti-seismic Sustainable and Eco-friendly buildings).

7 In particular are completely ignored fundamental planning regulations such as the Piano Regolatore and the Legge quadro nazionale n. 394/91 sulle aree protette.

8 Also due to the complete inefficiency of the public transport system, poor before the earthquake and after incapable of adequately covering the new long distances of the urban sprawl (Contreras *et al.* 2014).

common space and sociality seem to be dispersed, in a project that “trivialize the complex dimension of inhabiting to the sole dwelling (or even the sole house) and produces in the individuals the closure in the private space and a retreat within its family” (Calandra 2012a: 309).

It is worth noting how the Protezione Civile, in this entire project, never referred to an attempt to initiate the proper reconstruction process while widely supporting “a logic that sees in the emergency an opportunity for make enormous capital circulate” (Puliafito 2010: 163): the final results have been the “over-sizing the supply of services-residential” and the “dispersion / fragmentation settlement” (Bazzucchi 2010: 60). However, the choice of building the C.A.S.E “actually affects the future construction of the new society of L’Aquila for at least three reasons: 1) because the 19 new settlements do not take into account in any way the pre-existing bonds, networks of solidarity and proximities; 2) because they affect the symbolic economic and organizational tightness of sociality; 3) because that choice is binding the future redesign of living, working and socializing spaces, to decisions taken in the full emergency phase to provide response to a need, the living, however temporary and transitory as it relates to reconstruction”(Calandra 2012a: 297).

Moreover, the C.A.S.E., despite an incredible expenditure, did not host all the evacuated. All the others were either accommodated in temporary shelters or, in most cases, found a new house themselves, starting an incredible phenomenon of exodus strongly aided by the dramatic economic situation. Many citizens that still have not seen their houses rebuilt nor had any opportunity for rebuilding them by themselves have lost their jobs. The unavailability, indeed, of allocation for shops, industries and commercial spaces has made more than 26,000 people unemployed (Alexander 2010). Moreover, apart for the provision of shelters, there is a complete lack of good policies and infrastructural changes operated in order to improve transportation problems or urban services, commercial, educational and offices facilities (Conteras *et al.* 2014).

However, there are different approaches: in the following sections we will explore two of them, developed in the same context, following a completely different trajectory.



Figure 3. C.A.S.E. post-earthquake housing at Bazzano on the periphery of L’Aquila city (Alexander 2010: 335).



## 2.4 Assemblea Cittadina

Since immediately after the earthquake, citizens of L'Aquila started feeling a deep need to participate in civic life, recognizing the crucial importance of any decision taken. The importance of citizen involvement in a post-disaster scenario has been recognised to be crucial in assuring a healthy rebuild for the community and a smooth reconstruction process (Davis 2007). However, this fact has been possibly forgotten in the special strategy adopted by the Italian Government in the L'Aquila Content. The complete absence of a mechanism for participation implemented in the usual political routine and especially in the commissariat of Protezione Civile forced citizens to find alternatives, finding powerful answers in the practices of self-management and direct democracy. In a city where the associationism level was historically really low, after the quake there was an explosion of grassroots initiatives that tried to make some noise to be heard. In particular, one of them had the peculiarity of trying to coordinate all of them, becoming a meeting point for the citizens. It was called Assemblea Cittadina<sup>9</sup> (Citizens' Assembly) and, with a deep symbolic meaning, based itself in a big tent in the main square, in a permanent presidium. It represented an important locus of debate, internal or with the local institutions and a starting point for several initiatives. In particular, from the tent of the assembly all the main demonstrations that involved the city, such as the "Sundays of the wheelbarrow", departed and the organization of the demonstrations carried out in Rome took place. It is worth noting how these episodes, corresponding to an enormous increase of self-managed information and desire of participation (Farinosi and Treré 2010), started to happen only 9 months after the earthquake, when the Protezione Civile had left and when the corruption of most of the people involved had come to the main stream media's attention<sup>10</sup>. For the first time, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2010, the population violated the red zone during a symbolic event for reclaiming the city centre in which the citizens tied on the gate the keys to their houses of which they were deprived access (figure 1). Again on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2010 more than 5,000 citizens, armed with shovels and wheelbarrows infringed the red zone, self-managing an efficient way of removing ruins: while some shovelled, others carried, passing buckets hand to hand, building a human chain 1 km long. Children, elderly people, adolescents, all together for the first time in the city centre, working as a symbol of rebirth.

The event is only the first of a long series of violations of the red zone: every Sunday the citizens continued to get inside and tried to attract the attention of the media and local institutions.

The participation both to the Assemblea Cittadina and to the so-called Popolo delle Carriole (People of the Wheelbarrow) has been particularly transversal and horizontal. The Assemblea Cittadina, as a container of all the other groups born in L'Aquila, was representative of all the main civil actors, even if the most active role was taken by people usually involved in politics letting it be mainly the expression of a certain middle-class cultural elite of citizen, tied to the L'Aquila city centre. On the other hand, the Popolo delle Carriole, representing an event more than a locus of debate, had the ability to be completely intergenerational and involved large parts of the population from the villages of the destruction zone.

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<sup>9</sup> For further information [www.facebook.com/assembleacittadina](http://www.facebook.com/assembleacittadina).

<sup>10</sup> For example the scandal of a phone tapping of businessmen that were laughing about the earthquake (Puliafito 2010).



Figure 4. The human chain of the Popolo delle Carriole, 28/02/2010.

The Assemblée Cittadina tried to respond to the need for participation and information as well as monitoring the situation of the territory, putting pressure on the institutions. Because of their peculiar composition, they mainly concentrated on issues regarding the city centre reconstruction and the economy recovery. Some of the people involved also ran for election to the City Council in May 2010 within the Civic List “Appello per L’Aquila” that was able to elect a candidate. The requests of the Popolo delle Carriole, instead, seemed to be more practical: in particular their actions aimed at the problem of ruins that had not been removed for years. However, to this hands-on meaning should be added the clear rebellion against the universal management of the emergency, the closure of the city centre, the lack of participation and transparency, the corruption and social and economic crisis. It is the place wherein different actors in the society met, planting seeds for different future initiatives like the project C.As.A., acronym for Comunicazione per l’Ascolto Attivo (Communication for Active Listening) (Italian for ‘home’) (Calandra 2012a). This project, utilizing active listening techniques, tried to build a process of communication to open spaces of participation on the problems connected with the reconstruction and start that process of citizen participation that will result in the experiment of participatory budgeting in the city and the institution of the “Department of Participation” in the local council.

In 2014 the Assemblée Cittadina, despite having lost its central role in the political life of the city, continues existing, organizing initiatives and monitoring the situation of the reconstruction.

The Assemblée Cittadina can be easily analysed in terms of Social Ecology, comparing it with the idea of Libertarian Municipalism, as being a concrete experiment of a reconstructive approach to the reality based on direct democracy. The decision to run in the local election again resembles the objectives of Libertarian Municipalism and of the creation of Dual Power.

### 2.5 Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore

Pescomaggiore is a typical rural village of Abruzzo. Before the earthquake it was inhabited by less than 50 people, mostly elderly, having experienced a process of depopulation since the ‘50’s. However, the small community showed in the years an innate vivacity evident in the projects of the Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore<sup>11</sup> (Committee for the Rebirth of Pescomaggiore), constituted in 2007 by residents, natives and property owners in the attempt to “improve the quality of life and regain the historic village centre with information campaigns, enabling participatory processes and starting micro-projects in agriculture, tourism and conviviality art”

<sup>11</sup> For further information [www.pescomaggiore.org](http://www.pescomaggiore.org).



(Pescomaggiore 2012a). One of the key points of this group is to defend the 'bene comune' (the commons) and its main goal is to reach the ALMA (Pescomaggiore 2012b) (Latin for 'soul'), acronym for Abitare, Lavorare, Memoria e Ambiente (Inhabiting, Working, Memory and Environment): a particular approach to all aspects of life with a clear eco-sustainable point of view, taking care of the concept of community. At first they actively opposed the extension on the village's territory of a quarry only 500 metres from the town that produces significant quantities of dust, increasing air pollution and distorting the landscape (Cure *et al.* 2012).

After the earthquake the existing social framework constituted within the Comitato was the natural loci for a struggle against the plan of the Protezione Civile that foresaw a complete displacement of the inhabitants to a different village. Opposing that, a project to build an entire eco-village, made up of 5 buildings, started, together with the management of a permaculture allotment and the organization of various events, including community meetings in order to rebuild the nearby historic village. The eco-village has been called EVA (from the Latin for 'mother of the living'), acronym for Eco Villaggio Autocostruito (Self-made Eco Village): it is built implementing Alternative Technologies solutions, like the use of straw for the walls, solar panels, phytopurification system, etc.. It has been self-rebuilt and self-founded on plots close to Pescomaggiore, recalling the tradition of houses built "arraiutasse" (helping one each other): the building of a new house is a collective joyful moment wherein all the community, anyone bringing its skills and having as payment just food to share and conviviality (Carnelli 2012).

The actors involved in the project are mainly Pescomaggiore's inhabitants, citizens of neighbouring villages or from L'Aquila but also an incredible network of hundreds of supporters and volunteers from Italy and abroad.

The objectives are primarily those inscribed in the idea of ALMA and in a response to the induced scarcity of houses and to the economic crisis that historically threatens small countryside villages. The focus is on memory, as consciousness of the importance of the historical heritage, and on the environment. The emphasis is on the local territory with its biodiversity and local resources, of the use of historical ability and technology linked to the soil and nature that are getting lost. The recovery of orchards and native seeds, the edible landscape projects, a series of handicraft laboratories and the promotion of new forms of green tourism play an active role in promoting this policy.

All of Pescomaggiore's projects base their beauty not only on a DIY approach, but also on the recognition of the incredible importance of local traditions and on the connection of people with their environment. Most traits of the ALMA projects recall Social Ecology principles, despite this not being openly acknowledged by the group. Their use of Alternative Technologies, in particular, in overcoming the housing crisis recalls the possibility of building a post-scarcity society: using the modern approach of bio-architecture, the houses are built using local and low-impact/low-cost materials like wood and hay, heated by a wood stove and equipped with photovoltaic.

In a conscious remark on the significance of the re-appropriation of the 'commons', foundation of the community, (the Comitato also rebuilt the local common bread oven) they thus promoted a process that could bring "a renewable endogenous co-production of human groups and resources that keep them alive, the capital and the

neoliberal economy historically determined leverage with both hands, trapping the subjective existences, forming them” (Cure *et al.* 2012: 82).

The whole project is based on a genuine “interpersonal relationship and relationship of cooperation, solidarity and sharing” (Cure *et al.* 2012: 82) that can be easily linked with an attempt to build dual power and a moral economy. In particular their decision making process is strictly connected with the recognition of the power of the community and of the importance of the assembly. Furthermore, Pescomaggiore has been chosen, together with five other towns, for a project, called Borghi Attivi (Proactive Towns), of participatory construction (Pescomaggiore 2011) that has involved interviews, focus groups, questionnaires (Pescomaggiore 2012c) and after one year of community work, stated the community for reconstruction, based on permaculture principles and focussed on the importance of the landscape and the nature and of common spaces for the community.



Figure 5. EVA@Pescomaggiore in 2011 (Robazza, Savini 2011)

Today, in 2014, the project in Pescomaggiore continues: 5 houses have been built and various economic activities are carry out such as the cultivation of saffron, a typical product. Unfortunately, the still lacking reconstruction of the original village demoralized the participant of the project, that however continue to create projects with the local community.

### 3. Latest events

In this analysis we focussed only on the post-shock primary phase (restoration), that, in the specific case of L’Aquila, lasted for at least 3 years (Contreras *et al.* 2014). However, it is worth mentioning how the development of the events in the following 5 years and thus approaching a proper recovery phase, reconfirmed most of the assumptions made, exacerbating most of the themes highlighted.

First of all, a mention is due to the corruption problem that started emerging with the phone tapping in 2010<sup>7</sup>, and continued with the arrest of 4 local politicians for corruption in 2014 and several investigations on mafia infiltration in the reconstruction works. Court proceedings have taken place throughout the post-shock phase, from the condemnation of the Commissione Grandi Rischi in 2012, to the sentence against the engineers that worked on the Casa dello Studente, University accommo-



dition that killed 8 students, and with 189 investigations with 18 subsequent court proceedings. Finally also UE criticised the L'Aquila post-quake policies, with a report denouncing the waste of public money which often ended up in the hands of criminals and the low quality of the shelters provided (Søndergaard 2013).

Secondly, it is important to recognise that the reconstruction, material and immaterial, is still in its early stages: "almost five years later some areas of the city centre of L'Aquila remain off limits to citizens, and plenty of buildings are supported by electro-welded buttress" (Contreras *et al.* 2014: 127). The dramatic situation of the surrounding territory, and the decades of villages in a state of neglect should also be considered. The emigration and unemployment rates are somewhat higher than before the quake, as well as the social fragmentation that persists together with the medical crisis situation and suicide rate.

These elements, adding to the social damages of the rehabilitation, the corruptive focus on individual needs of the policies implemented (starting from the Decreto Abruzzo - Puglielli 2010), the lack of resources for the physical rebuilding<sup>12</sup>, and the persistence of elevated poverty, have made progressively ending the initial self-management explosion.

Nonetheless, the necessity of public participation made it possible to start a variety of new different projects in the city that, even having lost the initial energy charge of self-management and become more institutionally focussed, often guided by international associations or the local university, are still trying to propose a different approach for the reconstruction, that not only looks at the physical aspect on living, but also at the cultural, economic and social potential of the territory<sup>13</sup>. They are still showing how, to a certain extent, "nations and communities typically demonstrate amazing toughness and resiliency in absorbing and coping with the disintegrative effects of disaster. And disaster-struck societies not only quickly rebound from disaster but often reconstruct and regenerate their social life with added increments of vitality and productivity" (Fritz 1996: 19).

#### 4. Conclusions

In a growing context of crises, induced both by Climate Change and by shock capitalism, the considered case study, that can be easily translated into any other context of shock and deprivation, showed how a disaster is an opportunity for the economic growth of certain elites (Klein 2007), but also is an open door to re-found a city on a different basis. As a starting point, it could indeed give the chance to change the social mechanism implemented, to the point that we can consider disaster as a way for liberating people psychologically (Fritz 1996). The challenge is thus to give the opportunity for these effects, that are evident in the incredible explosion of "freely chosen cooperation" (Solnit 2009: 91) in the primary emergency (Imperiale 2013), to last into the future. The prospective included within the experiences of Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore and Assemblea Cittadina dell'Aquila, are examples of how Grassroots Urban Initiatives are concretely able to plan the existence of spaces of utopia and include them in everyday life. Despite the fact that, in the specific context of L'Aquila, they have not been able to sprout to reach a significant dimension, it is important to stress their existence, their peculiar innovative stands and their ability to prepare the terrain for similar initiatives to be structural seeds of change in our societies.

It is important to stress how they have been able to propose a physical as well as

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<sup>12</sup> "There are more projects than available founding" (Comune dell'Aquila 2014: 1).

<sup>13</sup> Among the several others is interesting the project "Save the Plane" ([www.salviamolapiana.org](http://www.salviamolapiana.org)), that focusses on the economic rebirth of the rural territory of the crater.



social, cultural and economic reconstruction, based on different models. From an economic point of view, they propose a ‘moral economy’ (Bookchin 1987) based on collective responsibility and moral complementarity, trying to go beyond a market economy. As ecological utopias they “represent a most pertinent form of social critique; they can truly function as a rich source of ideals for a different arrangement of contemporary society” (De Geus 2002: 198). Moreover, they embody a potential approach to any future emergency and an input for starting understanding how it is fundamental, in any process towards post-scarcity, that the existence of a social network is deep-rooted and active in the territory and the importance of the assembly as a locus for building social fabric and self-management is recognised.



*Figure 6.* 3e32, an occupied social space in L'Aquila.

Their temporary, realized decision making process gives a clear example of how to create new spaces of direct democracy. As experiences that last for a considerable period of time and have the ability to modify the urban and social fabrics, they are much more than simply movement democracy and constitute an answer to the critiques moved by Chodorkoff (2012), being clear examples of reconstruction beyond the protest moment (Chodorkoff 1983, Biel 1997, Heller 1999). Both of the examples analysed represent the overcoming of Temporary Autonomous Zones (Bey 1991) and the realization of clear examples of direct democracy. It is clear how all those characteristics can be linked to Libertarian Municipalism that, based on the same potential of the assembly, could give a clear direction on how to build a dual power that can really challenge the current dynamics. Both of our analysed experiences are clearly going in that direction. Bearing in mind that our effort to change society is, with a slogan reminiscent of Holloway, “together with the state, despite the state, against the state” (Souza 2006: 327), the examples from L'Aquila represent different, valuable attempts to build a different society.

It is also necessary to acknowledge their limits and problems, often peculiar to a territory never hospitable for these initiatives in the past, in which “looms a disturbing continuity between pre-event and post-event which manifests itself in the perpetuation of the mechanisms of non-communication between representative institutions and inhabitants of the territory represented, but also between instances of so-called organized civil society and people, and between associations, groups and committe-



es” (Calandra 2012a: 309).

These limits stress again the importance of constant work in preparing the terrain for different initiatives to be born and of future research that could deeply assess and confirm the importance of grassroots initiatives and self-management practices in generating valuable alternatives in a situation of scarcity.

To conclude, recognising the history and process behind post-scarcity initiatives, as well their limits and the circumstances that hindered their flourishing, it is a first step to recognise and support, in any situation, post-disaster or not, the existence of new open space for discussion and realized utopia.

## Note

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Ardenne S-Train station, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2008 © Piero Sassi

**#post-growth alternatives**  
**#green growth**  
**#degrowth urban policy**  
**#soil consumption**

# Degrowth urban policy? The contemporary debate on post-growth alternatives and the challenges posed by soil consumption

Over the past four decades, resource scarcity and strategies to overcome finite resource depletion have been a major subject of political debate in Europe. Among other things, advocates of degrowth approaches proposed a radical cultural shift towards new production and consumption patterns by questioning the underlying assumptions of growth. However, these models were disregarded in mainstream economics and urban planning. Recently, insecurity regarding the global economic recession and acknowledgment of the threats of the current ecological crisis have provoked a new wave of interest in post-growth alternatives. Most noteworthy are the influences from Serge Latouche's *Petit traité de la décroissance sereine* (2007) on the international and Reinhard Loske's *Abschied vom Wachstumszwang* (2010) on the German debates.

Based upon these two major contributions, this article aims to discuss whether and to what extent post-growth alternatives, mostly related with small-scale projects, could help address large-scale challenges such as those posed by soil consumption. This paper argues that some of these proposals could define new ways of dealing with current soil consumption patterns if implemented through urban policies. However, given the diversity of the claims, it is nearly impossible to identify a shared concept of “degrowth urban policy”. For this reason, it would be superficial to look at post-growth alternatives as a panacea for soil scarcity.

## The discussion on “degrowth”

Concerns about limits of growth-oriented production and consumption patterns are by no means novel in political discourse. Social injustices and environmental problems brought about by industrial society already represented the focus of the work of several scholars and intellectuals in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. More recently, *The Limits to Growth*, the 1972 report by the Club of Rome, warned about the threats of economic strategies based on finite resource depletion. By selling more than 12 million copies worldwide, the report strongly contributed to spreading awareness about some of the issues that still characterize the growth vs. degrowth debate. These informed several movements with diverse aims: among others, those opposing the realization of large infrastructural projects throughout Europe, such as the Turin-Lyon high-speed railway in Italy and the Stuttgart 21 project in Germany, and those advocating for new and more aware lifestyles such as *Slow Food*. Thanks to the efforts of some scholars to popularize the major issues of the growth vs. degrowth debate, they have gained increasing attention in political discourse in the last years. After having been relegated over decades to the grassroots dimension of the political debate, the growth vs. degrowth debate entered the agenda of green parties throughout Europe in the 2000s (Latouche 2007). The internal debate within the German Green Party (*Bündis 90/Die Grünen*) represents in this regard an interesting, though to some extent controversial, example.



Serge Latouche's *Petit traité de la décroissance sereine* appeared in France at the end of 2007, almost simultaneously with the beginning of the global financial crisis, as a compendium of the main issues debated in the degrowth discourse for the public at large. Latouche, Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Paris XI, has been actively engaged in the international debate on post-development and degrowth for two decades. In the years following his publication, we witnessed a new wave of interest in the growth vs. degrowth debate. The global economic recession, along with the current ecological crisis, provoked a widespread feeling of insecurity about future prospects of mainstream growth-oriented economics. On the one hand, advocates of the "growth gospel" (most of the European governments and institutions, among others) put forward a new mismatch of growth- and austerity-oriented strategies as a panacea to revive national economies. In this fashion, concepts like "green growth", "sustainable growth" and "green capitalism" are gaining an increasing consensus in current political discourse. On the other hand, by acknowledging the irrationality of present consumption patterns, made possible through the depletion of finite resources, an increasing number of scholars and activists are questioning the underlying assumptions of mainstream economics. These are often referred to as "degrowth advocates". In fact, it is nearly impossible to outline a shared degrowth concept. Degrowth may be described rather as a motto under which the current overwhelming growth paradigm is criticized in different fields and based upon diverse arguments (Latouche 2004). Its advocates thus propose a radical cultural shift towards new production and consumption patterns, informed by the acknowledgment of resource scarcity. In this context, *Petit traité de la décroissance sereine*, which has been translated into several languages, achieved immediate resounding success among a broad international public, being acknowledged as a "tool that can be used by anyone who is actively involved in environmental politics or political activist, especially at the local and regional level" (Latouche 2009: viii).

Given the diversity of the claims put forward by movements and scholars advocating for post-growth alternatives, their in-depth analysis is far from being the goal of the present paper. Nevertheless, some of the proposals, summarized by Latouche as the "eight r's"<sup>1</sup>, are worthy of being considered to tackle the issue of resource scarcity.

*The radical cultural shift towards a new value system.* The underlying assumption for a new value system is the shift from the consideration of the human being as a "homo oeconomicus" to the acknowledgment of its vital relation with the cultural, social and environmental context (Loske 2010: 22). Hence, our understanding of "well-being" needs to be based on an analysis of life quality. In this view, the importance of abstract economic parameters such as GDP becomes somewhat marginal (Latouche 2007 and Loske 2010). The redefinition of the relation between the core concepts of "growth" and "well-being" in present society was (2011-2013) the main task of the commission *Wachstum, Wohlstand, Lebensqualität* (Growth, Well-Being and Life Quality), a working group in the German parliament composed of politicians and scholars.

*New lifestyles informed by an awareness of resource scarcity.* The acknowledgment that strategies based upon green growth and "efficient resource depletion" do not represent serious options to overcome threats from present and future resource scarcity is

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<sup>1</sup> Latouche describes the changes necessary for the transition towards a post-growth society in eight actions to be undertaken: namely "re-evaluate", "reconceptualize", "restructure", "redistribute", "relocalize", "reduce", "re-use" and "recycle" (Latouche 2009: 33).



one of the assumptions shared by degrowth thinkers. Hence, claiming that present lifestyles are sustained through irrational resource depletion, they propose a radical change in our habits. Contracting and redefining our consumption trends, and thus drastically reducing our ecological footprint, are essential conditions to overcome the ecological crisis. Food production and consumption patterns formed with these issues in mind, for instance, would have a very strong impact on the agricultural sector, and thus on land use and soil consumption. These principles inform several movements focusing on various specific issues and challenges. Among others, the *Cittaslow* movement, founded in Italy in 1999 and present nowadays in several countries around the world, is based on the implementation of urban policies aimed at the creation of “human-friendly” cities and “contraction-based” societies.

*Focus on the local level in redefining new economic, political and social models.* Post-growth alternatives often focus on the institutional frameworks of local politics associated with awareness raising and the participative administration of resources. In this regard, they are comparable with Ostrom’s “enduring, self-governing common-pool resource institutions”.<sup>2</sup> The focus on the local dimension of politics is motivated by the aim to reduce the ecological footprint of cities by developing integrated and materially self-sufficient local societies and coupling local consumption patterns with local production and resources. In regard to the concern about the local dimension of urban policies, the *Transition Towns Movement*, founded in England in 2006, represents a paradigmatic example. Aiming for local ecological resilience in response to threats from the global ecological crisis, the movement consists of a network of small cities and towns with the goal of local self-sufficiency in fields like energy and food provision.

### **Green growth vs. Degrowth debate in urbanism**

There is no doubt that the proposals put forward by degrowth thinkers over the past few years contain innovative approaches, which deserve to be taken into consideration both in current discussions on resource scarcity and the development of new policies to tackle the depletion of finite resources. Nevertheless, post-growth alternatives still occupy a minor role in the present discourse on sustainability.

*Abschied vom Wachstumszwang* was published at the end of 2010 in Germany; it was written by Reinhard Loske, then Senator for Environment, Construction, Transportation and European Affairs in Bremen and currently Professor for Sustainability and Transformation Dynamics at Witten/Herdecke University. In his book, degrowth alternatives are analyzed within the broader debate on sustainability. Loske points out the main limits of the proposals embedded in the discourse on “sustainable growth” and advocates for a more radical cultural shift in our habits as the prerequisite to avoid current irrational resource consumption patterns. Via discussion during several lectures and conferences throughout Germany, *Abschied vom Wachstumszwang* immediately provoked a controversial debate, to the point that the author decided to tackle questions and criticisms in a further book (*Wie weiter mit der Wachstumsfrage?* 2012).

The most controversial contributions are included in the first chapter. Here, Loske warns about the threats of increasing divergence within the debate on possible paths out of the current ecological crisis. The strengthening of different positions could

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2 For accounts of how “enduring, self-governing common-pool resource institutions” work, see Chapter 3, “Analyzing long-enduring, self-organized and self-governed CPRs”, in Ostrom (1990).



eventually lead to what he calls a “[green] schism” (p. 5). With “green schism”, Loske means a prospective separation between rather consolidated opinions, namely those supporting a radical cultural and political change towards a degrowth society and those based upon a sustainable growth concept (Loske 2011: 63). Likewise, if we focus on the present debate on sustainable urban forms, a growing fracture is noticeable between advocates of mainstream “sustainable urban growth” and degrowth thinkers.

Supporters of the “green growth approach” advocate for technology as a panacea to overcome current resource scarcity. They claim that challenges posed by an increasing population and finite resource depletion can be met through efficient resource consumption patterns, made possible through technological innovation. In other words, a “green growth” in production (e.g., in food production) would be key to managing the food supply for an increasing population. Since this option implies a growth in production and occupation rates, it is welcomed by economic elites on the one hand and unions and Social Democrats on the other (Loske 2010). The so-called “rebound effect” is often undermined in green growth strategy. In several circumstances, technological innovation has failed to meet the goal of decreasing resource consumption, since improved resource efficiency was accompanied by increased consumption rates, a classic example being the production of more ecological cars accompanied by a quantitative increase in car production rates.

Focusing on the production of the built environment and on the major issue of soil scarcity, a green growth approach can be found in the production of “sustainable” settlements. From the construction of new towns in emerging countries like China to the development of sustainable, well-connected, eco-efficient suburbs on the outskirts of European cities, we have witnessed over the past few years the rise of urban projects informed by a green growth approach. By proposing sustainable urban growth, inspired by the ideal model of the compact city as opposed to the urban patterns of the sprawled city, these projects have the merit of trying to channel urban development into a more sustainable path. Nevertheless, this kind of approach shows two major limits. Possible “rebound effects” connected with the depletion of resources (e.g., land and soil resources) necessary to build the new settlement in many cases threaten the overall sustainability of these projects. Furthermore, if not integrated into broader political and economic strategies, these projects fail to bring more than small and isolated contributions to tackle resource consumption challenges.

On the other side of Loske’s prospective green schism, degrowth thinkers put forward a radical cultural shift towards a contraction-based post-growth society. Spatial structures often refer to networks of small urban centers with a high degree of autonomy in regard to political and economic administration and food production. At the local level, these urban centers are characterized by public spaces that facilitate social relations.

Scholars, intellectuals and practitioners have put forward diverse proposals over the past few decades, most of them based on self-sustainable local development and participation. By proposing a shift not just in the way we plan our cities, but also in their administration and political systems, social relationships and consumption patterns, they are based upon the assumption of a broader political, economic and social change, without which they would lose their underlying meaning. From Murray Bookchin’s *Ecomunicipalism* to the *Transition Towns Movement*, we have witnessed several attempts to implement post-growth alternatives in our cities.



Noteworthy both for theoretical production and for attempts to implement its concepts in planning practices is the work carried out by the so-called *Territorialist School* over the past few years. Founded by Alberto Magnaghi, Professor Emeritus for Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Florence, and developed around the work of a group of Italian scholars, the territorial approach is characterized by an understanding of territory based upon its specific natural and social features, its *bio-region*. Magnaghi (1994) suggests a network composed of small urban units to increase participation, livability and self-sustainability in urban areas. The “ecopolis” (p. 60), an ideal polycentric urban structure composed of small and partly autonomous urban centers with strong identities and a high degree of integration with the surrounding landscape, is opposed to unlivable, contemporary megacities. Being based upon a high quality of life for its inhabitants and a strong concern for environmental issues, it is one of the possible implementations of post-growth alternatives through urban planning. The soil scarcity issue is tackled by underlining global environmental consequences (e.g., air pollution) of uncontrolled local urban growth and proposing the reuse of existing urban areas to avoid further soil sealing.

Though relegated to a minor role in scholarly discussion on sustainable urban development, some of these concepts have been implemented in recent years in planning practices on different scales, the Landscape Territorial Plan of the Region Puglia (*Piano Paesaggistico Territoriale Regionale*, PPTR) being one of the most recent experiences. In the next few years, it will be possible to draw some more precise conclusions about the prospects and limits of these planning practices. It is, however, plausible to assume that the acknowledgment of the unsustainability of current urban consumption patterns will motivate further implementation of similar urban models in the near future.

### **“Peak soil”: an urgent environmental challenge in a fragmented political context**

The issues of soil scarcity and consumption are without a doubt among the most compelling environmental challenges facing urban planning in Europe today. Addressing the larger political context of soil scarcity and soil protection policies through the inclusion of the debate on post-growth alternatives offers two benefits. On the one hand, the ideas proposed by these debates offer the potential to define new methods to change current soil consumption patterns. On the other hand, this opens the general discussion on the limits and risks of such an approach when dealing with planning and environmental challenges that exceed the local scale.

Soil is a non-renewable, scarce resource that carries out essential functions, food production being the most acknowledged in public opinion. Once consumed or eroded, it is nearly impossible to recover its original features. Its essential role was very clear in ancient agriculture-based societies, which underlined its importance by referring to soil in their mythologies. The acknowledgment of soil as a finite, scarce resource should be even clearer nowadays in the face of dramatic challenges posed by population growth and consequent food security challenges. Soil scarcity and soil consumption should thus be found at the top of the agenda of politicians, practitioners and scholars. Nonetheless, soil has been depleted in different forms and for different reasons throughout the planet over the past few decades, to the extent that the expression “peak soil” emerged in political discourse to describe the threats connected with current soil consumption patterns.



Challenges posed by soil scarcity and prospective ways out of current soil consumption patterns were broadly debated by scholars, practitioners and politicians from all over the world during the first *Global Soil Week*, which took place in Berlin in November 2012.<sup>3</sup> The conference-issued paper *Towards integrated governance of land and soil: Addressing challenges and moving ahead* (Weigelt *et al.*, 2012) clearly points out two of the main problems hampering the implementation of soil protection policies: namely fragmentation in scholarly discussion and the difficulties in outlining coherent strategies to tackle soil consumption on different scales. The authors describe the lack of integration between the academic discourse on land use policies, focusing on the local political economy of land but disregarding the global consequences of land use, and the discourse on soil consumption, centered on the physical aspects of soil depletion but often undermining its social and economic drivers, as one of the limits that future integrated land and soil governance practices need to overcome. Moreover, they underline how the understanding of the soil scarcity issue, and thus of policies to deal with it, differs consistently depending on the considered scale. On the one hand, on the local scale, the discussion of land and soil issues is strongly based on the supremacy of private property and interest. On the other hand, if considered on the global scale together with their vital environmental functions (e.g., carbon storage), soil resources are “common-pool resources”<sup>4</sup> that must be preserved for the next generations. Considering the strong influence of local land use policies on the preservation or depletion of soil resources on the larger scale, it is easy to define the integration between the different academic fields and the different policy scales as one, if not the most compelling, challenge of soil protection policies (Weigelt *et al.*, 2012).

Soil sealing is considered among the most dangerous factors of soil consumption and is deeply connected with the physical growth of urban areas. Europe witnessed the urbanization of more than 8,000 km<sup>2</sup> in the 1990s (EEA, 2006). Although this trend has “slowed down” in more recent years, there is no evidence that uncontrolled urban growth will stop in the future. Some major consequences of this phenomenon are the fragmentation of the ecosystem, the increasing use of private cars and the loss of good agricultural land to urban use. Thus, by avoiding uncontrolled urban growth on the one hand and by directing urbanization processes towards areas unsuitable for agricultural production on the other, urban planning and urban policies can deliver an important contribution to soil protection policies. Nonetheless, the contribution of spatial planning to the preservation of soil resources cannot be considered more than marginal unless urban and regional planning practices are integrated with and supported by interdisciplinary policies, taking socio-economic drivers of soil depletion on the different scales into account. This is the case, for instance, with the urban patterns created by small and medium enterprises in so-called *distretti industriali* (industrial districts) in some northern Italian regions. Here, uncontrolled urban growth has been driven for decades by complex social and economic phenomena that go far beyond those addressed by conventional spatial planning tools. The “positive” goals of an economic strategy based on the flexibility of small industries produced “negative” environmental effects connected with land consumption. Uncontrolled urban growth should thus be tackled here more as the

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<sup>3</sup> The Global Soil Week is an international meeting of scholars, practitioners, politicians and other representatives of civil society who are engaged in soil protection. For more information, see [www.globalsoilweek.org](http://www.globalsoilweek.org).

<sup>4</sup> Common-pool resource “refers to a natural or man-made resource system that is sufficiently large as to make it costly (but not impossible) to exclude potential beneficiaries from obtaining benefits from its use” (Ostrom 1990: 30).



physical effect of a broader and longer-lasting economic strategy rather than as a mere planning issue.

### **Degrowth urban policy?**

Over the last decade, an increasing amount of concern has been invested, both in academic discourse and in planning practices at different levels, in threats from soil scarcity and strategies to limit soil consumption. In planning discourse, the negative consequences and environmental implications of uncontrolled urban growth have been acknowledged. Its socio-economic drivers, disregarded for a long time, are gaining growing attention in the debate. Simultaneously, we witnessed the development and implementation of programs that, at different scales and by using different approaches, tried to limit the land consumption phenomenon. The German *30-hectare goal* represents a paradigmatic example in this sense. Conceived as part of the *National Sustainability Strategy*, approved in 2002 by the red-green government, its goal is to reduce land take through urbanization processes from an average of more than 120 hectares a day during the 1990s to 30 hectares a day in 2020. Though great effort was put into its development and implementation, the 30-hectare goal is far from meeting its target, as the consumption of land in Germany is still around 74 hectares per day (BMUB, 2013). The same happened for several other programs, at different planning levels and in different fields, throughout Europe. We are far from finding convincing solutions to serious issues like soil scarcity and soil consumption. New strategies and approaches thus need to be experimented with.

Hence, it is plausible to imagine that some of the proposals embedded in post-growth alternatives will likely play an important role in the discussion on strategies to tackle soil scarcity over the next few years.

*The integrated approach advocated by the promoters of degrowth for debates on urban policies.*

If urban planning practices and urban policies are coherently considered and developed together with other policies (e.g., economic and environmental ones), they are more likely to be effective in reducing land consumption and soil depletion. Considering the vital functions performed by soil, not just in the production of food but also as a platform for human activities, soil protection is at the top of the agenda for degrowth advocates. In a society where social, cultural and environmental values could compete with economic ones, the overall “land development” concept would be reconsidered by uncoupling it from “land revenue” and mere economic profit.

*The contraction of individual consumption habits.* Phenomena like land grabbing, driven by multinational companies acquiring large amounts of land in developing countries, cannot be explained without the disproportionate consumption habits in industrialized countries. Degrowth advocates suggest more awareness in food production and consumption based on local products. This would allow for a redefinition of the broken relationship between inhabitants and surrounding agricultural areas. In the same fashion, it would raise awareness about the importance of soil resources on the one hand and about their outstanding scarcity on the other.

*Focusing on the local scale to address global issues.* It is a common feature of post-growth alternatives. Taking the soil scarcity issue into consideration, land use policies that take not only the local political economy of land into account, but also the global environmental consequences of local decisions, would represent an important contribution to reducing soil consumption. Furthermore, implementations of post-growth alternatives like those observed in the Transition Towns Movement, being based



on the attempt to realize self-sufficiency in food production and energy supply on the local scale, are likely to reduce land and soil consumption. With regard to these issues, uncontrolled urbanization processes represent a serious threat. On the one hand, they imply a growing demand for energy supply; on the other, in many cases, they cause the loss of good agricultural land to urban use.

There are two problems inherent to the alternative approaches of the degrowth discourse to overcome current resource consumption patterns (e.g., soil consumption).

*The “scale problem”*<sup>5</sup>. The implementation of post-growth alternatives on the local scale appears to be rather problematic if not supported by coherent policies on the larger scale. Harvey Molotch, in his classical essay *The City as a Growth Machine* (1976), appropriately describes the mechanisms through which land developers, “land-based elites” (p. 309) in his text, impose economically convenient land use policies through their influence on politics. The implementation of post-growth alternatives on the local scale requires the overcoming of local “growth machines”. This appears to be one of the biggest challenges for degrowth alternatives. Even though small-scale projects can contribute to limiting soil consumption on a local level, they appear to be inappropriate to tackle soil scarcity on a global one. In order to overcome this “scale problem”, soil protection policies developed at the upper level appear to be the necessary support for responsible land use policies at the local one.

*A definition of “degrowth urban policy”*. In the same way that it is not possible to define a shared “degrowth” concept (Latouche 2004), it appears to be nearly impossible to consider “degrowth urban policy” as different than an alternative to a growth-oriented one. The claims made within the degrowth discourse are many and diverse. This represents on the one hand an advantage since it enables for the addressing of a wide range of issues and at the same time a broad audience. On the other hand, it is superficial to talk about “degrowth urban policy” in general when discussing concrete planning issues (e.g., soil scarcity and soil consumption). Thus, when talking about the potential role of post-growth alternatives to address concrete planning and environmental challenges, attention should be paid to the specific proposals of the single degrowth initiatives.

With respect to degrowth movements, there is no evidence that they will succeed in the coming years in gaining enough political power to put their proposals in place on the national and global scales. Both Loske and Latouche recognize that degrowth alternatives can hardly be imagined as political programs in the classical meaning of the term. For different reasons, very few politicians could endorse a degrowth program without at least losing popularity (Latouche 2007 and Loske 2010). Nevertheless, we witnessed in recent years an increasing number of projects inspired by the degrowth discourse. The irrationality of our current resource depletion, the seriousness of the present ecological crisis and widespread insecurity about future prospects of mainstream economics suggest that a radical shift in our production and consumption patterns is a compelling necessity rather than a utopian ideal.

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5 David Harvey (2012) describes a “scale problem” (p. 68) as the difficulties we meet in attempting to tackle large-scale challenges (e.g., food security) through small-scale projects.



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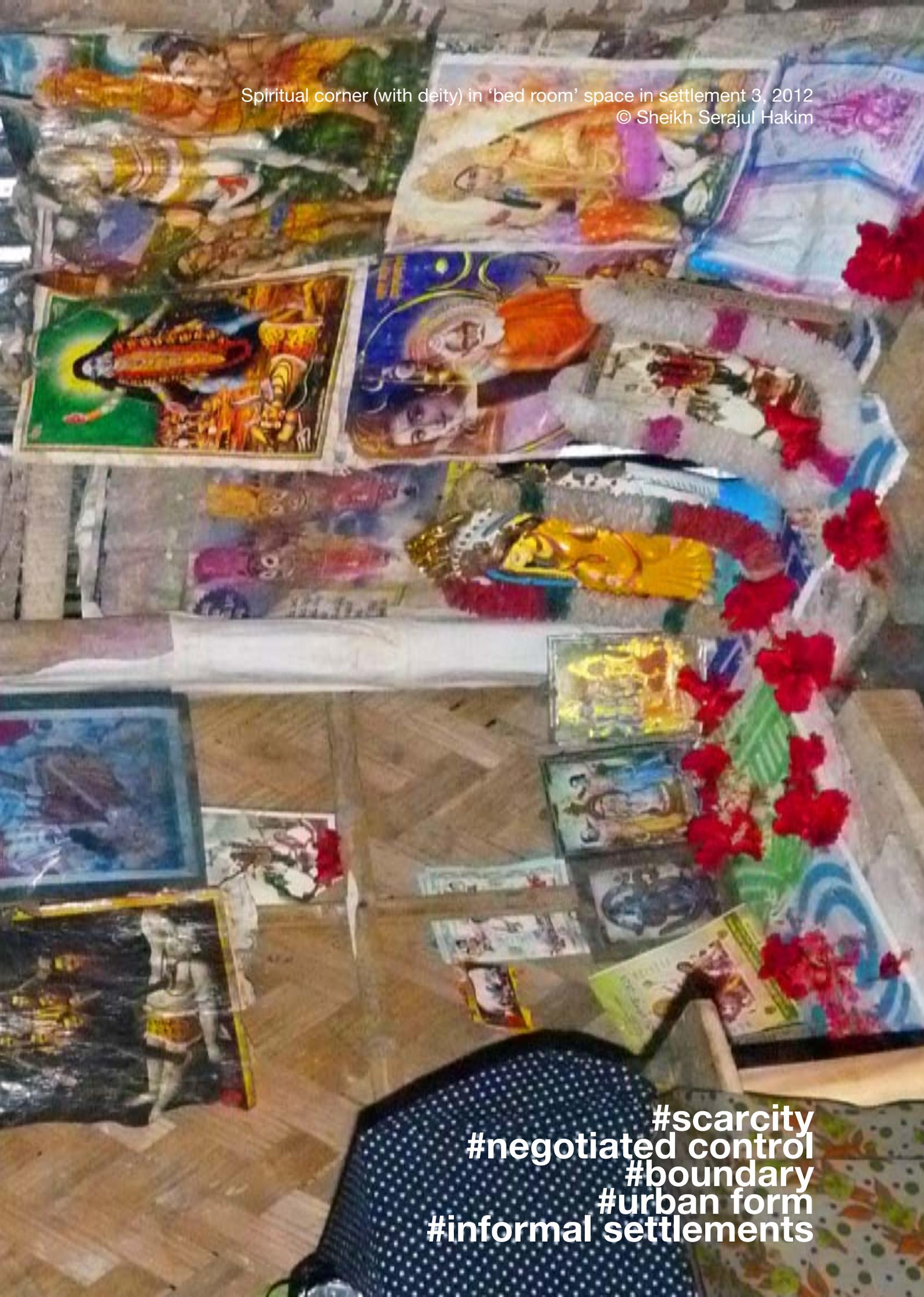
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- The Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development | [www.bbsr.bund.de](http://www.bbsr.bund.de)
- The Federal Environment Ministry | [www.bmub.bund.de](http://www.bmub.bund.de)
- Global Soil Week | [www.globalsoilweek.org](http://www.globalsoilweek.org)
- Slow Food | [www.slowfood.com](http://www.slowfood.com)
- Transition Initiativen in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz | [www.transition-initiativen.de](http://www.transition-initiativen.de)





Spiritual corner (with deity) in 'bed room' space in settlement 3, 2012  
© Sheikh Serajul Hakim



#scarcity  
#negotiated control  
#boundary  
#urban form  
#informal settlements

# Scarcity, control and negotiations: an interpretation of form in urban informal settlements

## 1. Introduction

Once peasants and employed in rural agriculture, the rural-to-urban migrants constitute a third of the entire urban population of any typical city in the global south; migration-driven urbanization has since the 1950s infused a new order to their spatio-physical form (UN 2008). During these post-WWII decades of unprecedented urbanization, governments and other formal-sector actors failed to provide these ex-peasants any affordable housing in the city. Amid this failure, it is the illegal and informal settlements that have proliferated in these cities<sup>1</sup>, and have since remained the most predominant form of affordable accommodation for the ordinary migrant (Neuwirth 2005; UN 2008). Moreover, the spatial implications of informality remain under-researched; there is a lack of well-developed theories of how such urbanism works (Dovey 2012: 351). Therefore, to understand migrants' many informal, illegal and nonstandard spatial practices for urban home making, one way could be to see them in relation with their binary oppositions (e.g. formal, legal, standard). Viewing informal settlements as the physical manifestation of the working of these binaries, it might be useful to explore the: (1) socio-spatial mechanisms deployed by migrant dwellers to remain engaged with the formal; (2) socio-spatial outcomes of this engagement.

In terms of engagement between informal and formal, a review of land-related administrative policies (in Bangladesh) reveals how the latter's authoritarian manipulation has left grave consequences for Bangladeshi agrarian socio-spatial structure – displacing people and resulting in socio-spatial inequalities and major urban spatio-physical transformation<sup>2</sup>. And while the authorities remain in control of the allocation of scarce resources (e.g. land), the migrants tend to exploit this condition of scarcity to negotiate with authorities for space and infrastructure while legitimizing the role of the latter. In terms of spatio-physical consequence, the acute dearth of space and resources are compensated by a range of socio-spatial practices. Space-making by various negotiation of socio-spatial boundaries (e.g. obscuring public-private delineation or adapting to domestic practices for economic gain) have become customary in Khulna's<sup>3</sup> informal settlements. These practices, as found, are all based on flexibility, adjustment and manipulation of the available and affordable, and in no way consistent with the 'standard' or 'formal'.

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1 UN-HABITAT (2007) suggests that by 2030, global slum-dwelling population will double (reach 2 billion).

2 A portion of this we have discussed elsewhere in Hakim and Lim (2013).

3 The city under investigation is Khulna, Bangladesh; details are provided later.

## 2. Methodology

This paper begins with an introduction to the context of Khulna, followed by a brief on tools, techniques and methods used in this research. The concept of Scarcity is discussed as a product of modern conditions, where scarce conditions such as informal or illegal are depicted as being deliberate and strategic constructions by authoritative (formal sector) regimes. Further discussions reveal how in the agrarian context of Bangladesh the 'politically charged' market-driven land/housing policies have created numerous moments of crisis in the lives of peasant-turned-migrants. Alternatively, study on a typology of Khulna's informal settlements and their morphological transformation demonstrates a correlation between the home-making efforts by successful permanent migrants<sup>4</sup> and their various socio-spatial negotiations – all taking advantage of the same scarce conditions across the various levels of settlements. Finally a framework is suggested where Scarcity is viewed as an opportunity for the migrant dweller, while negotiated control of socio-spatial boundaries remaining as a means to deal with scarce conditions.

In terms of research setting, Khulna (figure 1)'s selection is significant for it being a medium-sized city<sup>5</sup>. Khulna is the third largest city in Bangladesh with a population of around 2 million and with a density of 67,944 persons/km<sup>2</sup> within 45.65km<sup>2</sup> of its core municipal area (KCC 2012). With its 37th ranking amongst the world's fastest growing cities (Citymayors 2007), it also has the highest concentration of urban poor amongst all the coastal towns and cities in Bangladesh (Ahmad 2005: 16). Khulna has one of the largest concentrations of "poor settlements" in the country as well (5080 of varying size and tenure types), with more than a million (58.9%) people living there presently (CUS-UNDP-KCC 2011: ii; figure 1 - right). Most of these 'poor' however are recognized as ex-migrants (KCC-LGED-UNDP 2009), where amongst them, 27% own a house of some sort while 66% remain as tenants (Ahmed 2005: 10). Less than 30% of these poor people actually own some kind of land (WB 2007: 36).

The research is both inductive and deductive; but an initial discussion on Scarcity helps formulate hypotheses for further exploration. The research methods used are chiefly qualitative; quantitative data from secondary sources are only used to supplement the findings from fieldworks. The fieldwork-based research is conducted considering 'types and levels' of settlements. In that, ten (10) informal settlements<sup>6</sup> based on tenure were chosen (figure 2). Their morphological reading shows how, despite having dubious tenure status, each settlement succeeded to attain some form of 'secured tenure' through various socio-spatial negotiations during the post-WWII years of modernization and industrialization in Khulna. To comprehend migrants' everyday building activities and spatial practices, 34 dwelling units and corresponding neighbourhood tissues are also studied over a period of two years (2011-12).

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4 The term 'successful' refer particularly to those permanent migrants (living in Khulna for at least two generations) who despite their dubious tenure status (illegal, and lease-holding or renting without documents) are now in possession of a piece of land, or a dwelling unit or both.

5 Cohen (2004: 25) argues that "most urban growth over the next 25 years will not take place in megacities but in smaller towns". UN (2008: 15) also asserts that *medium-sized cities* (>5million but <1million) would house 23% of entire global population (second highest) by 2025.

6 In the studied settlements, settlement size varies from 0.03acre to 15acre, population size from 5 households to 2,500 households, while population density ranging from 520p/ha to 3,200p/ha. Generally, migrants living here originate from three particular rural regions.



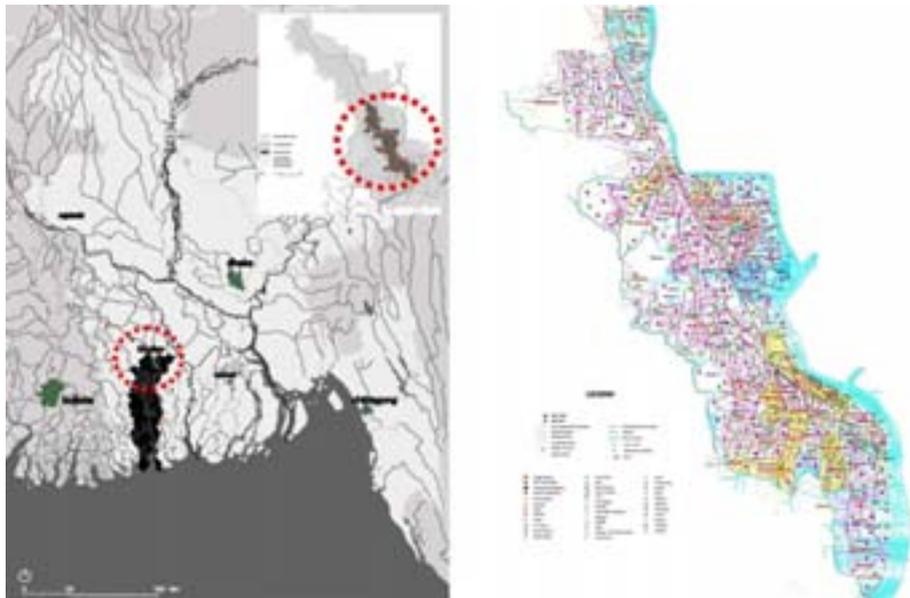
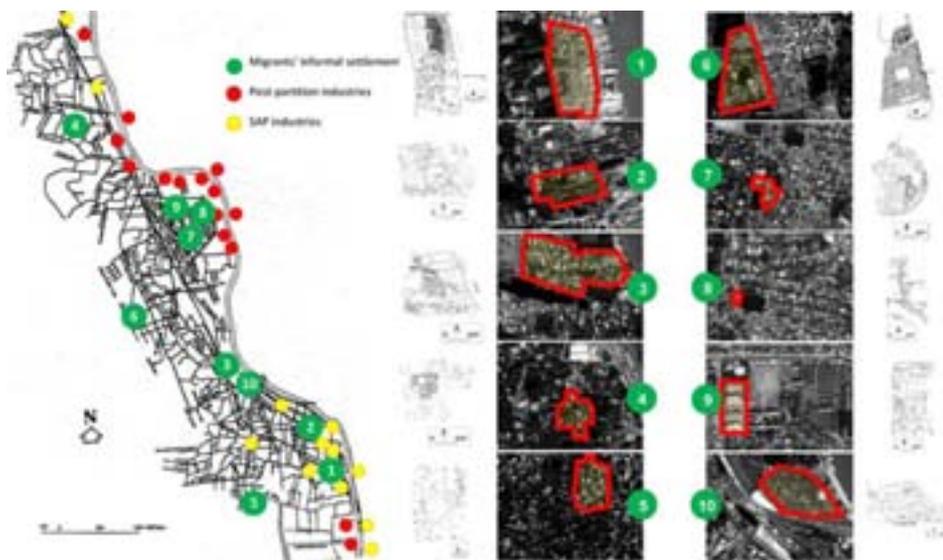


Figure 1. (Left) Khulna in relation to Bangladesh; (inset) administrative boundaries of Khulna – dark portion being the present municipal boundary; (right): mosaic-like (dots) distribution of ‘poor settlements’ within Khulna’s present municipal boundary. Source: (Left) Dudek and Van Houtte (2008); (right) KCC-LGED-UNDP (2009).



Tenure-based typology of 10 high-density low-income informal settlements in Khulna: (1) Government land is developed by migrants – no agreement between government and tenants; only active support from political leaders; (2) Private land is only rented to people from own regional origin; tenants build (and un-build) their own houses and pay rent accordingly; (3) Bangladesh Railway’s land squatted by migrants where tenants are not landowners; an informal arrangement was made earlier with the influence of a *Miznao* (mafia boss); after he perished local politicians bargain with government officers in support of migrant tenants; (4) Government land leased (long-term) to landless migrants from a particular regional location following decades-long political and bureaucratic lobbying by inhabitant labour leaders; (5) Privately developed small informal settlement cluster on city periphery where land is cheap and so is rent; tenants pay monthly/weekly rent; the owner of these plots are also ex-migrants who became the landlord him/herself; (6) Government initiated *site and services* project for the once-landless; inhabitants enjoy ownership of land, but without a formal title; (7) *Bihari Refugee Camp* within the planned township of *Khalishpur*; some Bangladeshi migrants also live alongside non-Bangali *Biharis*; (8) Squatter settlement within the planned township of *Khalishpur*, established and maintained by ex labour leader; (9) Government-built mid-rise apartments for lower-level government employees squatted by current & former jute mill workers; and (10) Bangladesh Railway staffs’ residential quarters & adjacent land modified by Railway’s staff themselves.

Figure 2. (Left) KCC jurisdiction map. Green dots showing spatial distribution of 10 informal settlements; red and yellow dots showing locations of export-oriented industries of post-partition and post-SAP phases respectively; (right) satellite view and maps of informal settlements. Source: KCC (2012); image courtesy Google Earth (2012).

Findings from an earlier 57 household survey, 10 group discussions, 6 key informant interviews (2009-10) supplement this. In both occasions, targeted sampling and snowballing are used for selecting and locating particular migrant households. Households are selected ensuring variety according to religion, ethnicity, rural origin, headship and in-house income generation. For data collection, literature review, life history, architectural mapping and drawings, semi-structured interviews and FGDs are used. Content analysis, descriptive morphology, behavioural regularities in everyday life and social world analysis are used for analysis.

### **3. Scarcity and the two hypotheses**

Scarcity is a condition contrary to abundance and a synonym for ‘insufficiency’ (Bronfenbrenner 1962: 265). Yet under modernity, scarcity is a more constructed condition rather than a mere period of dearth (Xenos 1989: Introduction). Scarce conditions are created through the uneven distribution of resources or denying specific groups of people or settlements from accessing certain resources to serve eventually the interest of the market (Till 2011: 4). In the context of the developing city, scarcity then can be viewed as a means to fulfilling political objectives (read ‘control’) especially by the formal sector authorities where resource allocation and resource accessibility are enabled through the systematic creation and maintenance of binary opposites. So when poor migrants choose informal housing for themselves, it is not because of government’s resource scarcity alone. We have discussed elsewhere that even under affluence, ordinary people might be deprived of housing on political grounds (Hakim and Lim 2013: 6). “A famine can occur even if food supplies are adequate and markets are functioning well” said Amartya Sen. It is not the scarcity of food that creates famine only; rather its inequitable distribution between rural and urban West Bengal made it inaccessible to a certain section of society (Devereux 2001: 246). So it is not unusual that ‘the formal’ (e.g. governments) often tolerate or even stimulate informal activities to promote political patronage (Castells and Portes 1989: 26); this is also seen in Chatterjee (2004)’s idea of ‘political society’.

In the agrarian context of Bangladesh, it is only natural that scarcity of land would be used as a political tool to control the agrarian masses, and thus retain power at elite’s disposal (Harris 1989). In addition to its value as a scarce resource, land is also the essential component of economic production and home-making, and also an ever-shifting physical entity shaped by the deltaic river-systems. Land therefore has always remained an elusive cultural component in rural Bangladeshi society; it, however, has continued to do so even in the urban context. Therefore, for the ordinary migrant in Khulna, access to land (hence housing) remained a subject of constant negotiation with influential middle-men (Hakim 2012). And when land/housing was meant to be delivered by government agencies, it mostly required the bargaining with and mediation of ‘powerful’ actors – a political figure, a rich businessman, a government official, a religious institution or in recent time, a number of NGOs and UNDP-led projects. Roy (2004)’s discussion on Kolkata tells of similar processes of “choreographed” creation of urban informality by political elites.

On the other hand, informal is often inseparable from formal; a series of complex interactions between formal and informal operates in between. Informality operates on the “margins of rules and organizational arrangements that no longer fit people’s real condition and experience” (Castells and Portes 1989: 29). In planning terms, what are officially classified as informal settlements, are not something that ordinary people recognize or apply to their reality. In the former colonies of the Global south, formal standardization such as urban planning was primarily intended to ser-



ve colonial interests. Yet in present condition, urban planning benefits mainly the new elites. In all formal situations, some form of informality then should be present (Jenkins and Andersen 2011: 1-3). In many cases, such activities – in both overt and covert forms run parallel to formal developments. They take advantage of ‘loose’ official systems and use its spatio-political cracks and niches (Kudva 2009; Perara 2009). People with insufficient means derive maximum outcomes from a minimum of elements; rules are formed from processes of endless convertibility, turning commodities, found objects and resources into uses previously unimaginable (Simone 2004). Such fluidity of forms, practices and meanings suggest of “slippages” (Dovey 2012: 358), which in Heynen and Loeckx (1994)’s terms, may be described as ambivalent, hybrid or even creative.

In light of the discussions so far, two hypotheses could be formulated. One, scarcity can be used as a ‘strategic tool’ by both ordinary migrants and formal sector authorities, where each of them deploy specific socio-spatial control mechanisms to validate respective prowess and position in the particular context of Khulna. Informal settlements hence can be viewed as physical sites for the socio-political interplay between the migrant and those actors – both seeking legitimacy in the context of scarcity. Two, scarcity of space and resources produce alternative socio-spatial practices; often unorthodox yet they compensate migrants’ present deficits of spaces and resources. Discussions on and around these two hypotheses are made on the following two sections.

#### 4. Scarcity as a ‘tool’

##### 4.1 The politics of in-between-ness

Land transaction in Bangladesh has been embroiled with corruption and conflict<sup>7</sup>. Land scarcity has been the result of it being curtailed and hoarded by the public agencies<sup>8</sup> and the gentry to manipulate land price for profit<sup>9</sup>. Neither from government banks nor from NGOs, any loan was ever made available for the urban poor for land purchasing or house building. Although more than 16,000 NGOs are operating in Bangladesh in sectors allied to housing<sup>10</sup>, the immediate return from the involvement with socio economic issues of the slums prompt these NGOs to set a low priority on housing issues. NGOs also look for a safer return from their investments, which the landless migrant does not guarantee. So, as early as in 1997, 97% of the Bangladeshi urban poor did not own any land, as private developers were serving exclusively the upper and middle classes (WB 2007: 35). Government

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7 Bangladesh land record management system is antiquated; it keeps adding to the already existing conflicts. Nearly 2 million legal cases are pending in the judicial system, of which more than two-thirds are about land disputes (Islam 2010). Land administration accounts for almost 40% of total corruption cost in urban and rural areas (Siddique 2001).

8 Public agencies continue to occupy large quantities of underutilized land (approximately 10% in Khulna); *Bangladesh Railways* alone, for example, owns 2.5 km<sup>2</sup> of unutilized land in Khulna. Similar is seen in Dhaka, where “the real scarcity (of land) is compounded by an artificial scarcity stemming primarily from the lack of utilization of public land” (WB 2007: 38).

9 Bangladesh is amongst the most densely populated nations in the world (1125 person/km<sup>2</sup>) (CIA 2012). Yet ‘land-grabber’ elites illegally hold 1.3 million hectares of government-owned *Khas* land, ignoring the official maximum allowable slab (Islam 2010).

10 Rahman (2002: 435) informs of the NGOs working in Dhaka slums that apart from their involvement in poverty reduction, education, health, family planning and gender issues, their works in housing has remained limited to infrastructure and utility provisioning. Recently, BRAC is putting in efforts to create a housing fund for assisting Dhaka’s female industrial workers by building dormitories, and acting as intermediaries between female tenants and private slum landlords (WB 2007: 46).

agencies like KDA<sup>11</sup> behave as private developers, developing fringe lands for profit and selling them to middle and higher income buyers. A review of nine ‘completed housing projects’ (KDA 2007) shows that at least six of these have become the most expensive land plots in Khulna. The remaining three identified as “low income residential area” (KDA 2012) are in fact 150 m<sup>2</sup> land plots for the lower-middle income groups in Khulna – not the lowest. Land-plot distribution and the dissemination of current structural plan still privilege the rich who indulge in speculative markets<sup>12</sup>.

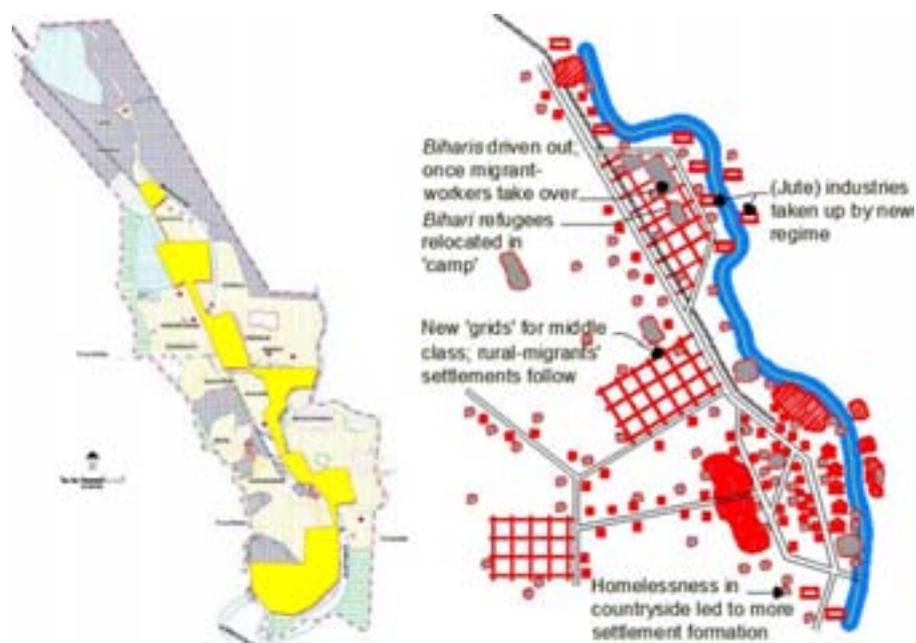


Figure 3. (Left) Khulna Master Plan 1961 (industrial area in yellow); (right) Diagrammatic expression of Khulna's urban form (1990-present). Source: (Left) KDA (2002: 11); (right) Author in accordance with Miah 2002

The near-absence of formal agencies in public infrastructure provisioning is also glaring; a failure to realize local socio-political-economic realities becomes evident in Khulna's 1961 Master Plan. Whilst large portions of land were zoned for industry and housing (figure 3; left), the British planner ignored cultural tradition, affordability and the nature of housing required for industrial workers. This left little choice for migrants except to settle in areas between these industries, disregarding the Master Plan intention (Chaudhury undated: 5; figure 3). None of the nationalized jute industries in Khulna were designed to provide adequate accommodation for its migrant workers either; not even during their thriving years<sup>13</sup>. Studies on three oldest and largest nationalized jute mills in Khulna (figure 2 left: red dots) show that housing was only available to less than 10% of total jute mills workers (Shahed 2006: 31, 33, 35); of these 10% however, most relied on their 'desi manush' (kinship networks, e.g. family members, friends or known persons from same regional origin) or political connections (with labour leaders or junior political leaders) to gain access to housing

<sup>11</sup> KDA stands for *Khulna Development Authority* – responsible for all sorts of physical planning and its control in Khulna; it is a central government authority headed by government bureaucrats.

<sup>12</sup> Ghafur (2010) similarly shows how Dhaka's planning and development agency (RAJUK) has formed a syndicate with land developers, politicians and the affluent higher middle class.

<sup>13</sup> Between early- to mid-1970s, Jute export contributed around 80% to national export revenue (Rahman and Khaled 2011: 2).



(Hakim 2012). In the later industrial developments like the private-sector shrimp industries that have fuelled Khulna's economy since 1990s (figure 2 left: yellow dots), no accommodation or housing subsidy was provided for the workers either.

Squatting on Khas land<sup>14</sup> has thus produced a form of rhizomic growth within the formal 'grid'; tenanted shelters of varying size and configurations adjacent to these industries (settlements 1, 2) has become the only choice for (re)making home. When government officio were to be involved in the settlement process, bribing to retain tenure security was frequent (settlements 4, 8, 10). Even for those with formal recognition (settlements 3, 5, 6), political patronage is still required. Local-level politicians, from both ruling and opposition parties, are persistently lobbied by migrant-tenants. These politicians assure the migrants by visiting settlements regularly and taking care of their immediate needs (e.g. repair roads and construct public baths). In cases where disputes on land ownership appear resolvable, the process is often delayed beyond accepted limits. As in settlement 6 (called Vastuhara locally) – the government-provided low income site and services project originally allotted to the homeless migrants of Khulna in mid 1970s, formalization of title has still been deliberately kept unresolved. It was only a 'Land Allotment Slip' (figure 4 left) that was issued for a 42 m<sup>2</sup> parcel in 1977 instead of a formal title deed ('Dalil' in Bangla). Although entitled for such a Dalil through years of possession, the holders of these slips are still kept in a state of dilemma with a tenure which is neither formal nor informal. This situation is further compounded by the contradictory 'acts of recognition' by various public sector organizations. While migrants without a Dalil continue to remain outside the central government's land-tax roll, Mayor's office<sup>15</sup> continue to put holding numbers on each of these 'illegal' dwelling units and collect Holding Tax from their owners. Lobbying and political pressure from reigning Mayor<sup>16</sup>, Ward Councillors and party cadres on other central government offices (e.g. postal, electricity and water supply) also ensures that these essential services are extended to these settlements, which would otherwise have not been possible<sup>17</sup>.

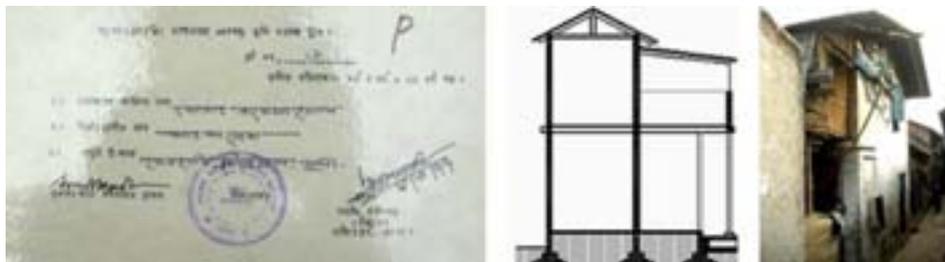


Figure 4. (Left) typical 'Land Allotment Slip' for Vastuhara; (middle and right) brick-built house with wooden floor and CI sheet roof., Source: Author.

The creation of uncertainty though such 'quasi recognition', however, gives Mayor

<sup>14</sup> *Khas* land is central government-owned land, intended to be leased for both agricultural and non-agricultural purposes. The most eligible for *Khas* land is the landless poor (both urban and rural), significant contributors to society/economy and persons/groups/institutes who wish to use it for public purpose (Hossain 2010: 77).

<sup>15</sup> *Khulna City Corporation* (KCC) is the local government office headed by the Mayor; it is divided into 32 *administrative Wards* each represented by a *Ward Councillor*.

<sup>16</sup> KCC's history suggests that each of its Mayors typically got elected from the same party that formed the central government; thus central government organizations had to respond to the Mayor's and his party workers' (including the *Ward Councillors*) political persuasions even if they were illegitimate or extra-legal.

<sup>17</sup> This is coined as "the coupling of party and state, the combining of informal party tactics of mobilization with the formal state apparatus of infrastructure provision" (Roy 2004: 149).

and Ward Councillors crucial political imperatives. For them, partial legalization of Khulna's 1 million population living in these settlements would improve the latter's confidence in them and ensure political compliance. Provisioning of land, although unsecured, therefore provides a sense of 'anchorage' for home-making and augments migrant's reliance on the political machinery as the provider. Thus, as we have come to recognize, the initial formation of 9 out of 10 settlements have been through the direct patronization of political actors and their associates (e.g. businessmen or labour leaders). Migrant population in these settlements residing even for 4 to 5 decades still rely heavily on these patrons for all infrastructure/utility provisioning, and for potential formalization of land title (Hakim 2012). A systematically slow disbursement of infrastructure through strategically prolonged promises also helps sustain these interests and ensure political compliance. Such "choreographed unevenness" (Roy 2004: 154), deliberately devised and maintained by the powerful actors lead to the curious construction of 'in-between-ness' in these settlements manifest in a number of 'neither-nor' scenarios of uncertainty. Both social and physical boundaries between legal and illegal, and differentiations between formal and informal hence appear blurred and ambiguous. These benefit political actors to control this large demography yearning for legitimization of their present tenure.

The 'Allotment Slip' thus embodies a political instrument in land scarce Bangladesh. The unresolved cases of ownership therefore sustain conditions that impart a sense of rootless-ness<sup>18</sup> amongst the tenant migrants. Ananya Roy's seminal work on Kolkata in relation to its Communist government's manipulation of informality similarly suggests that party politics has been an "everyday business" that ran parallel with government policy. Panchayet in the villages and party cadres in the urban informal settlements have continued to play an active brokerage role between the central power and grassroots migrants in order to maintain a systematic control over the latter's spaces. To further strengthen this control over "every detail of daily life from clogged toilets to domestic disputes" and infrastructure provisioning was taken care of by such brokers. Threatened by similar moves by opposition parties, there was also a persistent "search" for new territories of support (hence voters) through "constant recharging of patronage". In the absence of a Master Plan and without an active registry of sites and deeds, territorial flexibility<sup>19</sup> was practiced by the Communist Government of Kolkata. The planners in the land department were also barred from preparing any such plan or land record by the government itself. In addition, a legal provision called 'vested property law' was put in place that facilitated the government to acquire and expropriate any private land (at its will) in the name of public interest (Roy 2004: 149-158).

Such in-between-ness can also be found in physical manifestations referred to as 'politics with plinths and roofs'. 'Plinths and roofs', as an axiom, here portrays a symbolic category that has crucial spatio-physical implications for informal settlements and their rather 'slippery' tenure status (e.g. settlements 1 and 7). Although not designated in the KDA plan as a residential zone, these settlements during the last five decades have physically proliferated in a manner that many 'formal' townships and settlements of Khulna have not. Many buildings in these settlements

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<sup>18</sup> In Bangladeshi context, 'Rootless-ness' is defined by Ghafur (2006: 45) as "loss of identity, privacy, comfort and protection enjoyed at home by default".

<sup>19</sup> Formation of numerous informal settlements on the city fringes, their eviction and relocation, illegal subdivision of peripheral agricultural land, their development using the relocated informal population and their eventual selling off to large-scale private sector projects (*Op. cit.*).



(some two-storied) are constructed using brick and other permanent materials, while gentrification and property transfer remains part of everyday life. Both settlements have a long history of negotiation with elites. Settlement 1 with fish merchants and shrimp factory owners, Christian Service Society (CSS) and KCC Mayors and Ward Councillors from successive political regimes; settlement 7 initially with International Red Cross, and later with Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee and right wing Ward Councillors and local MPs. Here, migrants are allowed to do most things that a typical owner is able to do: buy and sell property, construct permanent building etc. Most urban infrastructure and utility services are also available in both. Yet what makes their case interesting is the ambiguity between permanent and temporary where migrants are not allowed to construct permanent (concrete) roofs (Figure 4: middle and right). Permanent roofs, as locally perceived, are culturally approved symbols of permanence. The politics of 'in-between-ness' thus results in a landscape of 'roofless-ness', which also epitomizes the conditions of 'rootless-ness'.

#### 4.2 The politics of control

In many cases, the migrant dweller may compromise or give up portions of spatio-territorial claim, for example, of his dwelling unit in order to strengthen privacy for the household and social control at a higher level. In the context of a severe deficiency of space as in the (28'x11') house in figure 5 (left), a (6'x6') verandah space has been given up for constructing a community bathroom cum water collection point (circled). Although none of the inhabitants of settlement 7 are 'owners' in usual sense, yet giving up of a tenth of what is already scarce according to most definitions of 'standard', is certainly indicative of a different set of life priorities for this owner. In short, this addition ensured the owner's family and her adolescent daughter in particular a better sense of privacy – who can now take her bath in the house without having to go to the community bathroom. It also has saved the landlord time that was normally lost waiting in a water collection queue. However, there were vested interests too. The female owner of this house, who is also a cluster-leader for UNDP-run community improvement project (UPPR) that operates in settlement 7, was ready to make this apparently costly sacrifice on the ground that this would eventually reinforce her social position. Although not willing to give in initially, her ultimate compliance with the communal decision for constructing this service area within her home had placed her in high esteem amongst community elders, neighbours (potential users of the new bathing/water collection space) and other UPPR personnel. This sacrifice of valuable space, culminating in the construction of a very small physical structure, therefore has had a much broader social implication. The landlord's magnanimity thus legitimizes her position in the society for now her premise is serving the larger community. For the community, this construction legitimizes the community's position as the key decision-making body and re-affirms its authority over the control of all socio-spatial activities within settlement. It also exhibits the community's strength to the external actors (UPPRP officials, NGOs and local Ward Councillor) by showing its solidarity and willingness toward the betterment of the community. Simultaneously, the external actors understand that any intervention on their part must first satisfy a complex and hierarchical decision-making process.

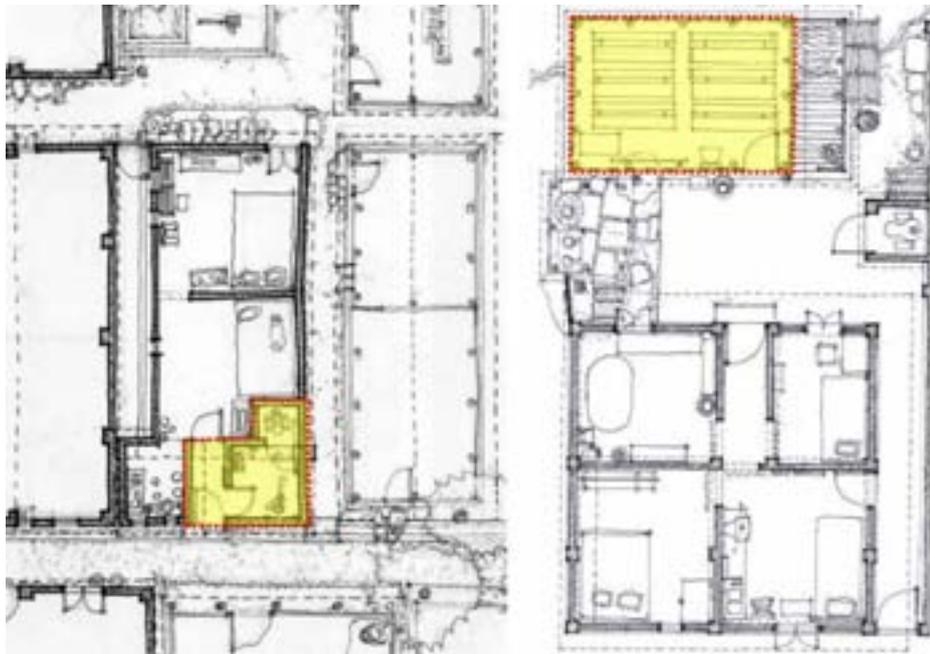


Figure 5. Compromised control: (left) part of house premise given up to community bath in settlement 7; (right) previously vacant in-house space transformed into NGO-run pre-school in settlement 1. Source: Hakim 2012

Similar ‘negotiated control’ may be noticed in another dwelling-level example, where the Christian owner permits the Christian Missionary-led NGO (CSS) to construct a pre-school in her house compound. Whilst the function of a school should upset the privacy of a home within the same compound of (50’x22’), the owner benefits from the goodwill forged in the relationship with the NGO, and spiritual fulfilment through a religious and educational cause, not to mention the modest rent received as compensation.

#### 4.3 The politics of infrastructure

With the aim to validate their present status and hence become ‘visible’, migrants engage in a ‘politics of infrastructure’ too. These can be identified particularly at the settlement level – in the realm of public. Irrespective of the hidden nature of all these settlements, migrants put in efforts to legitimize their ‘illegality’ by trying and getting recognized by as many formal public- (such as utilities boards, postal service etc.) and private-sector institutions (e.g. NGOs) as they can. The construction of physical infrastructure has been the most widely used form of laying claim to land occupied. Infrastructures, which are at once visible and permanent investments from the part of official bodies, are believed to leave a ‘formal stamping’ on these otherwise informal and illegal spaces. All forms of exogenous interventions, including NGO or Donor-led infrastructure projects hence are welcomed and enthusiastically pursued. NGOs having their own objectives (such as donor-defined Slum Upgrading Projects), also make use of this opportunity and continue funding for schools and community buildings, communal and individual baths and toilets, water distribution points, sewer drains and internal roads. Through these interventions, vested interests converge into projects of mutual interest and mutual claim.





Figure 6. Infrastructure politics (clockwise, from top left corner): electricity meter at settlement 1; school, Madrasah and orphanage at settlement 6; less used toilet structure at settlement 3; community building at settlement 4; Hindu Mandir at settlement 3.

Source: Hakim 2012

Infrastructures enabling political advantage may also be self-financed. In large settlements as in settlement 6, secondary schools, Madrasah and Yatimkhana<sup>20</sup> are built, managed and promoted by the community itself where outsiders can also send their children to (figure 6). Likewise, in the Harijanpara Kali Mandir at settlement 3 – self-financed by the Harijan community<sup>21</sup>, a Muslim woman is seen sitting before the Hindu temple waiting for a spiritual healing session to begin (circled, figure 6). Although the Mandir primarily serves the ritual purposes of the Harijan, outsiders even from other faiths are also encouraged to join. The spiritual healing session that takes place every Tuesday afternoon on the temple premise, is actually a more secular event that draws in people from different faiths and from diverse localities. The non-monetary transactions and information flows between migrant communities and outside societies by making use of the sites of both modern and traditional (religiously significant) institutions and edifices again help earn a good name for the community. Still unable to make any permanent claim on the land, the Harijan community's establishment of these apparently 'neutral' public infrastructures hence start making sense. One realizes how their many socio-financial investments in these infrastructures are aimed to elevate their status to the level of any 'mainstream citizen' and hence reinforce their claim on land. In both cases, these interventions may be viewed as acts of 'territorial compromise', which allow outsiders to penetrate

<sup>20</sup> Arabic terms referring to a Muslim religious school and an orphanage respectively. These are both religiously significant institutions and are very common in Bangladeshi villages and towns. Commonly a *Yatimkhana* stands for a boarding school for orphan boys. It is a sensitive institution in any Muslim society as Prophet Muhammad (SM) was himself an orphan and he repeatedly stressed the need for taking good care of orphans. Different forms (and sums) of donation from both wealthy and poor are used to run these institutions. Any acts benefiting the erection, management and continuity of these institutions are considered as acts of divinity.

<sup>21</sup> The *Harijan* is a tribal community working as sweepers and cleaners in Khulna were brought along by the British Planters during Colonia.

and participate in their spatio-physical environment. In the naive eye, these are mere donations and contributions made by outsiders. Yet a critical reading into this reveals of a strategic loosening of territorial control – a means to sanitize their present negative image as ‘Bastee’ or ‘Colony’.

## Scarcity, or alternative materiality?

### 5.1 The obscured boundaries

The perception of density and its qualitative evaluation depends on both desired and actual levels of interaction between people and their socio-spatial environment and hence also by the way socio-spatial boundaries are defined and upheld by the inhabitants of the settlements concerned (Rapoport 1975: 142). Typically, informal settlements are high-density agglomerations where conditions are often exacerbated by ‘intricate’ physical conditions such as minimum greenery and maximum man-made features, lack of public space and shortage of land for non-residential use etc. Individually and collectively, these all add up to the negative construction of density (Opcit: 138-140). Yet here, an underlying mechanism of synthesis has been devised and gradually converted into practice. To overcome the norms of fixed private-public and communal boundaries, the definition and implications of density statistics became meaningless as social and spatial boundaries are made to work flexibly, permeably, sometimes ambiguously and serving even dual purposes. Through these means – built-forms, spaces and associated social exchanges find alternative usage and meaning.



*Figure 7.* (Left) shared functional space leading to social exchange between landlord and her tenants in settlement 5; (middle) territorial encroachment of public street during dry seasons; (right) spiritual corner (with deity) in ‘bed room’ space in settlement 3.

Source: Hakim 2012

In settlement 3, a public street temporarily becomes a living, child-rearing, or a cooking space; a room for rest and retreat performs also as a place for spiritual fulfilment (figure 7: middle and right). The Church or Mosque premises continue to serve as children’s play area or other domestic purposes in settlement 3 and 5 respectively, while within the privately owned migrant-house in settlement 5, the conventional landlord-tenant division becomes blurred, and a common space for social exchange and domestic cohort is created and negotiated between the landlord and her tenants (figure 7: left). This justifies the hypothesis that in small-scale housing markets, resident owners’ relationship with tenants remains personal and is enforced by social exchange; this enables small owners to achieve greater social efficiency at a lower cost and benefit socially and economically (Peattie 1994: 140-141).



## 5.2 Spatial compromises

The urban dwelling unit of the migrant is used also as a space for retail and production. Indeed, practices of using the entire household premise as a space for economic production<sup>22</sup> was (and still is) only natural in the context of agrarian rural Bangladeshi society (Hakim 2010). In the context of the urban house, however, similar practices cannot be expected because of the non-agrarian nature of livelihoods in the city, and also considering its insufficiency of space compared to rural households. Yet driven by the need to make a livelihood, these unregulated dwelling environments in Khulna are often used for income generation (as in Peattie 1994: 136). In this context, the notion of a dual usage of tenanted space has been a means to overcome the need for renting, commercial or production space, and the further demand on land area for differentiating domestic activities from income generation. Yet these practices make the domestic realm – the only (spatial) resource available at the individual level – to be compromised to supplement economic return and to establish and maintain alliance with important actors.

In settlement 1 for example, works, particularly related to backward linkages of nearby export-oriented industries (e.g. fish scaling, carton making) are carried out within dwelling unit (figure 8). These works benefit both; the industrialist elite benefits from saving factory space, supply and utility cost, and most of all crucial ‘formal labor hours’, while the migrant worker benefits from a flexible time schedule (particularly for female), lesser travel cost and easier marketability. Through these ‘primarily economic transactions’, a symbiotic social relation with industrial-elite is also established. These arrangements provide the migrants considerable leverage in retaining their occupancy of settlement territories and leading to a more intense and vibrant mix of activities. The elite support thus becomes crucial especially to neutralize eviction threats or during contingencies when financial support is required (e.g. marriage).



Figure 8. (left to right) NGO signboard describing the nature of their involvement at settlement 5; house interior transformed to workspace for producing export-oriented products (Saree embroidery at settlement 6, and shrimp at settlement 1). Source: Hakim 2012

Additionally, NGO intervention in the built environment is also noteworthy. NGOs prompt for trading off domestic privacy for migrants’ economic (and also their own) gains. This can also be observed at the settlement level. Space, although scarce, is sacrificed for accommodating interventions by NGOs (e.g. Saree embroidery financed by NGO loan in settlement 6). This is an opportunity that both would embrace with relative ease; a sense of synergy again underlies such transactions in anticipation of continuing social gains. For the migrant, NGOs remain the only government they have ever known. NGOs, though not loved always, are still considered as ‘the sole providers’ of instant credit and caretakers of livelihood issues including education,

<sup>22</sup> Although a typology exists (Ali 2005: 253), this typically includes open land, multiple dwelling units shared amongst members of the extended family, orchards and vegetable gardens, cowsheds and poultry house, and at least a pond (Ahmed 2006: 10-11).

healthcare, sanitation and infrastructure. So those understood as the negative components of density – enhanced activities, movements and ‘information flows’, and also the domestic encroachments, are not in fact crowding per se. The same conditions of round-the-clock activities (as in settlements 1 and 10), which are feared to worsen the perception of density (Rapoport 1975: 139) instead becomes key factors for household’s financial gain, women’s empowerment and economic security, settlement reputation and hence a bargaining tool for its safeguarding, and also a key driver for Khulna’s economic growth.

### **Scarcity or the urbanism of negotiations?**

In the hunter-gatherer society of the “uneconomic man”, human wants are limited and few; people enjoy material abundance with lower standard of living by being free from the market-creation of scarcity (Bronfenbrenner 1962: 266). Likewise, Australian Aborigine’s access to material, edible and instrumental resources is limited; yet “it allows them to open up to an astonishingly abundant set of mythical and human horizons. Scarcity only makes sense in relation to the context (physical, material or conceptual) which it is part of” (Till 2011: 1). Taking account of this context-dependent view of scarcity and basing on the premise that migrants’ wants are limited by manufactured scarcities, migrant spaces then can be viewed as “alternative ideal environments” (Ghafur 2010: 12). Characterized by “mobility, resilience and adaptiveness”, these spaces suggests of underlying ‘synthetic processes’ where “social and spatial boundaries are inscribed, erased (and) identities are formed, expressed and transformed” (Dovey 2012: 353). It is therefore, the formal and informal binary should be viewed as something that is grounded in particular cultural, social, institutional, economic and political realities of informal settlements (Jenkins and Andersen 2011) as those in Khulna.

So if scarcity is a product, then we must consider ourselves part of it and do something about it (Till 2011: 10); there indeed is social, cultural and spatial room for manoeuvre. The perceived lack of space and resources in Khulna settlements, at least what is presumed from outside, hence turns out to be something not in need of external fix. Migrants have time-tested socio-spatial mechanisms to address those. For a sustained stay, strategic making of social-networks with elites thus seems ingenious where settlement configurations are allowed to be controlled by individual elites or by a combination of them. This substantiates that in a traditional society, people tend to satisfy their wants using alternative logics of reciprocity, redistribution and exchange (Bronfenbrenner 1962: 265); people cooperate with each other in adversity to avoid high transaction costs associated with their failure to comply (Southerton 2011: 1247). Informalities hence remain “flexible, ad-hoc form of economic activity that, while reviving old methods of primitive exploitation, also provides room for personal interaction” (Castells and Portes 1989: 26). The personal interactions with the elite thus can be viewed as a revival of the traditional social structure. These have been seen in the accepted compliance to pre-colonial hierarchical land-ruling class such as Zamindar, Jotedar and Mathbar<sup>23</sup>, and to the late-colonial English-educated higher-middle class ‘Bhadrolok’ (Nahiduzzaman 2003: 50). In the presence of a highly stratified social structure, compliance to the elite seems to be a proven tactic for compensating material inadequacies. Even under present democratic conditions, similar is found in rural Bangladesh. Elites there still play an “active brokerage role between villagers and wider institutions” (Lewis and Hossain 2008:

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<sup>23</sup> *Zamindars* were tax collectors for Mughal (later Colonial) rulers; *Jotedars* were intermediaries between *Zamindars* and peasants and *Mathbars* were community leaders (Ray and Ray 1975: 84).



48-49). At the household level, rural landless population continue to “make innovative use of kinship and other ideologies legitimating reciprocity and mutual aid to re-establish themselves rent-free on the land of others” (Indra and Norman 1997: 26). With cultural approval, these all remain rooted in the vernacular customs<sup>24</sup>.

In this predominantly Muslim society, the notion of privacy is clearly defined with implications for a gendered distinction of space<sup>25</sup>. This was stressed by both male and female members of Muslim migrant households. Hindu (settlement 3) and Christian (settlement 1) migrants have equally expressed similar need for privacy – revealing that privacy is more a culturally desired category rather by religion alone. Yet the situated practices of privacy in Khulna settlements are of socio-spatial compromise and negotiations. So when slippages as such occur, scarcity of space is naturally held responsible. But a closer scrutiny reveals that once such socio-spatial compromises become customary through decades of residence within a familiar context<sup>26</sup>, they could not be viewed as consequences of scarcity alone. Instead, they are to be seen as conscious acts of socio-spatial negotiations to establish territorial claims over public spaces. Usage of such means hence helps retain a desired level of privacy for individuals. Familiarity with patterns (rules) of spatial encounters (e.g. male and female time-slots for using community baths), and hence respecting each other’s boundaries actually allow these people to maintain privacy within the realm of the public. An unwritten code of behavior exists that facilitate co-existence and sharing to retain privacy.

## Conclusion

The idea of scarcity offers an alternative way to comprehend urban form-making while substantiating to the two hypotheses. First, opportunistic tactics from all actors in response to waves of constructed scarcities hence influence urban form-making. Both migrants and authoritative actors use scarcity as politics of in-betweenness is pacified by politics of control and politics of infrastructure. Second, the negotiated spatial structure through behavioural and territorial compromises also demonstrates migrant dweller’s alternative practices in response to ‘real’ scarcities of space and resources. One might see creativity ‘amongst nothingness’ evident in migrants’ ingenious use of ‘social’ in combination and interchangeably with ‘spatial’ to compensate for economic lacks, and in their play with control-mechanisms through many acts of compromise and negotiations during hardships. For migrants in Khulna’s informal settlements, ‘need’ remains perpetual; under modern conditions this should persist as a sense of ‘not having enough’. But as long as such periods would occur, it would most likely be dealt with by creativity of some sort, using elements of the built environment as one of its key instruments.

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24 “Extended entitlements” (Dreze and Sen 1989: 11) theorizes how a poor family uses the socially sanctioned rights through a range of informal social relations (instead of legal rights to ownership), which becomes the primary means of accessing food, health care and other necessary household commodities (Southerton 2011: 1248).

25 Considering migrant’s rural origin, a review of rural house forms and spaces substantiate that a variety of spatio-physical mechanisms, including zoning and sequencing of open, semi-open and enclosed spaces, use of barriers (vegetation and screen), time-zoning etc. are traditionally used for achieving a desired level of privacy (Ahmed 2006: 12; Muktadir and Hasan 1985: 82, 84).

26 Positive outcome of a desired level of density is related to familiar patterns of interaction between migrant dwellers and other actors who use that public space equally. *Privacy* is seen as the ability to control unwanted interactions (Rapoport 1975: 140).

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Territorial Compromises: Informal back alley food market in a shadow of an industrial compound across and at the back are worker dormitories. Shipai, Dongguan, China, 2008 © Tomaz Pipan



#rural urbanization  
#urban order  
#dongguan china

# Territorial compromises: limits of morphological and civic negotiation

## 1. Introduction

Shortage and scarcity breeds competition, cooperation and ingenuity. It is almost ironic that the supposedly most egalitarian system of communist China created a condition of land-use with such a high degree of scarcity. From the *bukou residence system* to the *Great Leap Forward*, these and other ‘special’ policies contributed to a fractured social landscape with uneven distribution of resources and rights. In an allegedly egalitarian society it does not get more ‘special’ than a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), an incubator of free market and global economy. Such a political act in 1978 transformed the Shenzhen village into the first SEZ, and soon after a wider area known as Pearl River Delta (PRD) followed, creating a special economic region (SER) a resource of liberal capitalism – an utterly scarce resource in otherwise socialist China<sup>1</sup>.



Figure 1. Location of the research area in reference to the Pearl River Delta, Dongguan prefecture and local townships.  
(All images by Google, additional manipulation by Tomaz Pipan)

- 1 On the 11th Plenary Session of Central Committee of PRC in 1978, the Chinese government decided to reform the socialistically planned economy by opening up specific carefully selected areas to overseas markets. One of the instruments was a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) that facilitates economic exchange between China and global markets featuring favourable laws to attract foreign investors and producers. In 1980, Shenzhen in PRD, by then a village, was designated as one of the first SEZs. The economic success quickly grew and so did the area. By 1988 the whole region of PRD was designated as PRD Economic Zone. For the purposes of this paper, we shall name this Special Economic Region (SER), to distinguish it from the smaller area of Shenzhen – the initial Special Economic Zone (SEZ) of the PRD region.

This special situation and its exclusive character made the PRD (figure 1a) highly desirable. We could say that for China, this kind of condition was scarce indeed. The following thirty years witnessed an unprecedented rural urbanization that fuelled a wild social, cultural and spatial experiment. A deregulated ‘land of plenty’ within the PRD experienced intense pressures and transformations and a subsequent creation of some of the most unique urban patterns we can imagine. This is most apparent in industrialized areas, where agriculture is being replaced with Processing and Assembly (P&A) industry as showcased in the research area – a rural-industrial conglomerate in Dongguan prefecture (figure 1b and 1c)<sup>2</sup>.

These strained conditions unleashed a spontaneous creativity that produced a new urban topography (figure 1c), one that accommodates change well and is highly flexible. Here traditional communities as well as migrant workers from other rural areas came face to face with technological and economic pressures of liberal capitalism. Rice paddies and fish farms were transformed overnight into a new industrial-rural landscape consisting of kilometres upon kilometres of fragments – interlocking low-end housing, factories, rudimentary services, walled villa estates and agriculture (figure 2).



Figure 2. 1. Gardens, 2. New middle class development, 3. High End developments, 4. Linear Housing along new roads, 5. Themed Condos, 6. Small Industrial Compound, 7. Village, 8. Rice paddies, 9. Large Industrial Compound, 10. Shaking-hands villages (all images by Google)

These industrialized areas have a particular morphological structure, which allows for local and global claims to be accommodated within small area. The conflicting pressures exerted on the territory have provoked spontaneously-created or improvised topographies that at the same time ‘culturally’ refer to, what is later in the text defined as traditional and techno-capitalistic orders. These landscapes are assembled from typological fragments through which local historical villages and young regional infrastructural corridors can be connected and ‘stitched’ together. This creates zones of ambiguity in which competing claims are negotiated without reference to an overall planning policy. This meshwork landscape is as varied in its social life as it is in its physical appearance. From afar it looks hopelessly disorganized and mishandled. However, the result is not as chaotic as might be suspected.

<sup>2</sup> Within PRD SER, Dongguan is one of the most famous cases of rural urbanization as it experienced an incredible growth from the onset of its accession to the special economic status in 1985. Dongguan city proper was very successful in attracting foreign direct investment and due to this grew economically and in population. With the economic success its prestige and standing amongst neighbouring cities progressed. Dongguan was first upgraded to county level city in 1985 and finally to prefecture level city in 1988. This also brought about higher degree of administrative freedom that local level governments (like village committees) at different levels have.



This paper will look closer at the morphological organization and further into the patterns of civic negotiation to outline a unique cohabitation of local grassroots and state official decision making. The case study will show that, in the competition between state-managed infrastructure and traditional settlements there arises a curious ambiguity of actual practices and potentially new institutions, not always, or not yet, realised. The scarcity of land and uniqueness of situation requires a consensual nature of these territories so to accommodate two orders that are so different. The paper will therefore look at the capacity of fragments and describe how these fragments comprise an unorthodox urban topography; further the paper will attempt to evaluate their ability to support a new civic order. This will be done through identification and description of typical situations.

## **2. Description of typical situations and conditions**

Firstly we have to describe typical conditions and situations that constitute this landscape. These typical fragments and the kinds of life they enable are identified on the basis of what kind of order they support and are a part of.

The swiftly industrialized areas of Dongguan give a unique opportunity to study effects and consequences of a conflict that lies at the heart of contemporary culture not restricted to China – an apparently unresolvable dispute between fragmented reality of technology on one side and the continuities of traditional order, on the other. For example, the experience of history has changed from the continual re-interpretation of what were deemed original conditions to a perception apparently inspired by technological innovation: death-and-replacement oriented to an open, ever-deferred condition of betterment. Vesely poses this conflict as a question, “how to reconcile the inventions and achievements of modern technology, which have already established their autonomy, with the conditions of human life, our inherited culture, and the natural world.” (Vesely 2004: 7) For the purposes of this paper, I am designating two orders in conflict: the techno-capitalistic and the traditional order. As implied by Vesely, we can distinguish these two orders by the fundamental difference in their understanding of their relation to the natural environment. Contemporary fragmented reality promotes multiple interpretations of nature, all apparently of equal value (usually utilitarian). We can say that nature has in the contemporary culture different incarnations, from scientific and technical descriptions of material processes with emphasis upon efficiency, to political and moral concerns for sustainability, to sentimental attachments to views, to animals and to holidays (that are themselves another “industry”). Establishing communication between these readings remains an open problem.

### **Traditional order**

Within this duality, nature as understood in traditional order has a unique quality of concrete engagement with situations, objects and people. This condition of engagement spawns from cycles of praxis usually connected to agriculture, which are informative regarding how much land is available, what are the water and weather conditions, when to plant crops, when to harvest, how to store grain etc. Moreover, the cycles of praxis are not limited to matters of production, but are inscribed in rites and ceremonies that include family genealogies, law, religion and art, therefore consequently instrumental in establishing culture, civic life, architecture. In the context of rural China, this translates into ancestral worship, Taoism, Confucianism, belief in supernatural forces, etc.



Many studies on the subject of rural urbanization in China show that local village communities are still in part governed by remnants of these traditional norms and practices. (Guldin 1997, Leng and Zhu 2010). The civic space of the village is still enforced through local community, village elders and leaders, that is to an extent organized on basis of rites, strong family ties, communal law, ancestral temples, worship, etc. In 1987 this grassroots village organization was translated into a form of direct democracy by way of an “Organic Law of Village Committees” (Shi 1999). This instituted the right of people with local village hukou – peasants and villagers – to elect village-level governance; village chiefs and village committees. This bottom-up governance is a necessity that enables a state the size of China to operate. The centralistic top-down governance is met by a bottom up grassroots governance on the village level. The immediate land surrounding the village becomes a stage set where traditional (grassroots) and techno-capitalistic (top-down) orders collide. Let us first look at the typical situations of the two orders separately and then describe and evaluate the situations arising from their interaction.

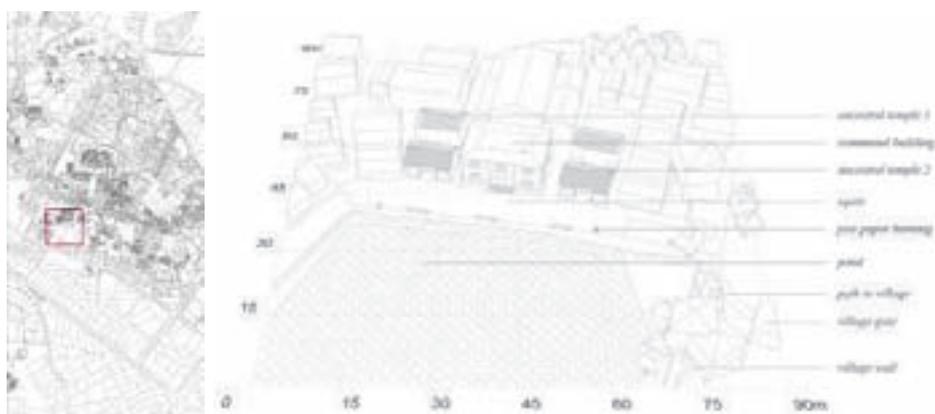


Figure 3. 3a: Location of the fragment. 3b: Birds-eye perspective view of a village fragment (Drawing by Julija Domariska & Tomaz Pipan)



Figure 3c. Village entrance, path, joss burning furnace, playing mah-jong in the community building (Images by Tomaz Pipan)



Figure 3d. Ancestral home, community building, square (Images by Tomaz Pipan)



The typicality of traditional order can be exemplified through a fragment (figure 3b). This is a prominent place of the village, surrounded by a fish pond, two ancestral homes and a public building of the local community. In the communal building locals play cards, mah-jong and shoot pool most of the time; but the community building also acts as a place for communal meetings and decision making on all facets of daily life (figure 3c and 3d). As a whole, this can be read as a political – civic space where disputes and conflicts of the village are discussed and handled. The arrangement of this typicality is an intrinsically rich organization where horizons of engagement orbit around topics dealing with family, ancestral worship, history, culture, management of village, what to do with the land, etc. The morphology and typology of space is ‘gearing’ towards this order. The deeper structure is revealed through the layering of elements that constitute the area (figure 3c): the entrance gate has an altar to local gods and an L-shaped entrance, where a visitor has to turn a corner, because evil spirits can only travel in a straight line. A curvy path leads past a joss paper furnace for burning offerings onto a square. Here the most prominent building (the communal building where civic disputes are handled) is lined with ancestral halls (figure 3d), where villagers go to remember and worship their ancestors at special occasions.

This shows that remnants of deeply historical conducts still exist and govern a contemporary traditional order. Even though the contemporary questions orbit around topics ranging from redistribution of land, rent fees extraction, building a new shaking hands village, the way these negotiations are handled carries the authority of tradition. Under these conditions, history is a matter of continual renewal of original – inevitably ‘natural’ conditions. However, the traditional civic space is being challenged by an aggressive techno-capitalist imperative that perceives history in terms of constant change, destruction and replacement; a continual production for the sake of economy.

### **Techno-capitalist order**

‘Nature’ as employed by the techno-capitalist order is domain of resource-capitalisation according to criteria of efficiency, economic profits and losses and maximization of production through serialization and optimization. This order rests upon hierarchical planning from afar through deputies and instruments such as policies, aerial plans and drawings, zoning and infrastructure. Decisions are made by the central government in Beijing, later influenced and executed by regional governments and deputies.

Techno-capitalist order, it could be argued, “takes account only of that which is susceptible to mathematical understanding” (Vesely 2004: 241), where infrastructure becomes a vehicle through which this mathematical nature can be envisioned, managed and implemented. Nature becomes an abstract idea that can be manipulated and represented in different ways as flow charts, production targets and quotas. A detachment from the experience of nature as a part of everyday life is the fundamental characteristic not only in the raw instrumentality of the planning but also in the social embodiment of the planning hierarchy. For example, filthy water from the industries is seen neither by the planners in Beijing who merely define a policy that the water has to be clean nor by the local managers of regional government and developers who sip iced tea in fully air conditioned villas.

Calculated, tabulated and graphed, ‘synthetic nature’ enables liberal capitalist world of economy, fuelled by infrastructure, building a contemporary world of urbani-



zation, a “condition of limitlessness and the complete integration of movement and communication brought about by capitalism” (Aureli 2011: 9). In Dongguan, urbanization (as noun) could be divided into ‘infrastructural space’ of migrant workers without decision-making privileges as they do not have a local *hukou* (residence status) and private space of decision making elites that rests upon economic imperatives. This separation removes the political and civic from the public and moves it into domain of the regional officials and well-connected local investors / managers that live in the walled luxurious villa compounds, making deals in restaurants and ‘gentleman clubs’: “...the overt use of money, and spending cause Dongguan’s secret space to be used first for spending into pre-liberation activity; the developers’ spending is a release of communist inhibition.” (Smith in Koolhaas 2001: 314) The power and decision-making structure is based on *guanxi* local connections that play an important role in making business deals, creating new enterprises or securing development land (Yeung 2001).



Figure 4. 4a and 4b: Adjacent organization of industrial compounds along regional infrastructure, creating regional corridors.  
(Drawing by Tomaz Pipan redrawn from Google orthographic photographs.)

This described order produces a very efficient and economic organization of corridors (figure 6, described later in the text) where regional government dictates everything. The efficiency is morphologically palpable (figure 4a and 4b) and amounts to kilometres of transport infrastructure lined by industrial compounds intermittently populated by housing and rudimentary services. This reproduction of efficiency forms a network for transportation of goods and flow of capital.

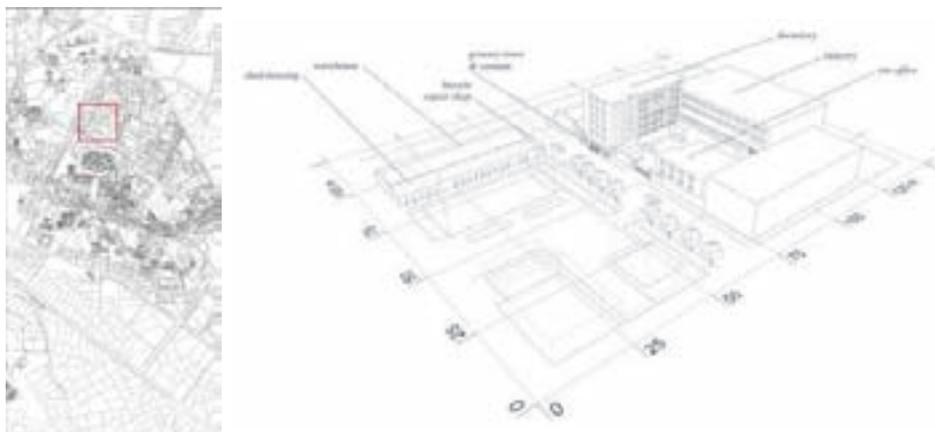


Figure 5. 5a: Location of the fragment. 5b: Birds-eye perspective view of the industrial cluster (Drawing by Kristin Krause & Tomaz Pipan)





Figure 5c. Low-end shed-housing, canteen and grocery shop, industrial compound entrance, bicycle repair shop (Images by Tomaz Pipan)

This curious infrastructural space is a place of anonymous, disenfranchised workers; a fragmented space inhabited by rural-to-urban migrants who have surrendered their traditional culture for wages. The predominant typologies are industry, dormitories and primary services that form clusters of social life infused with capitalist working ethic (figure 5c). Figure 5b shows a typical situation where a cluster is created around a smaller industrial compound with dorms. This cluster comprises additional housing sheds, a bicycle repair shop, canteen and grocery. These services form a centre of localized social activity and life. Workers from nearby dorms come here to eat, fraternise and shoot pool.

All the customary typicalities (like turning a corner at the entrance, the altar, a square with ancestral halls and communal building) are erased and cannot structure the individual's experience. Transport infrastructure and alleys around canteens, grocery stores and make-shift restaurants take over the function of village squares (figure 5c) and communal rooms and are imprinted with historical functions as life demands it – migrant workers are still deeply communal people and their social life was always manifested on village roads and squares. Although the transport infrastructure provides places to socialize, it ceases to support the political and the civic. Furthermore, there are no other symbols that would structure and maintain the organization of a community. Infrastructure, especially as it pertains to contemporary capitalist development, has the potential to represent the anonymous whole, however it does not attract the commitment, solidarity or memory of the traditional city or village.

These two examples show a confrontation between two worlds. An infrastructural system which neither supports nor requires any civic involvement has been superimposed upon traditional topographies structured around places of civic resolution of conflict. The temptation is to suggest that the infrastructural system here embodies a pure form of capitalist development, unpolluted by civic scruples...and therefore that the problem raised by the confrontation is inherent to this style of economy.

On this basis we now move to a third example of typicality, the in-between area that will hopefully show characteristics of both orders and give us a basis for concluding discussion and speculations on a possible new order.

### **The composite order**

When local government started to develop infrastructure for industrialization led by foreign direct investment (FDI), agricultural land was taken away from villagers. They were deprived of a significant portion of their income; and, as compensation, agricultural land immediately next to the village was deregulated and given over to village community for management, use and most importantly ownership. Villagers were now able to build on this land instead of using it solely for growing food. A new morphology of the area started to take shape, which we can observe today (figure 6). Regional corridors, organized along new transport infrastructure (figure 6, light grey line) are managed by central and local governments through delegated

officials. Amidst this graft, we can observe a more loosely connected local topology (figure 6, black line) spawning from traditional, historic villages (figure 6, red fill) and connected by traditional elements like ancient ponds (figure 6, grey fill with red outline) and old roads and paths. Local topology is managed and owned by villages and their myriad grassroots village committees. The difference between the two organizations is quite apparent in the morphology, grain size and in the building typologies as already explained.

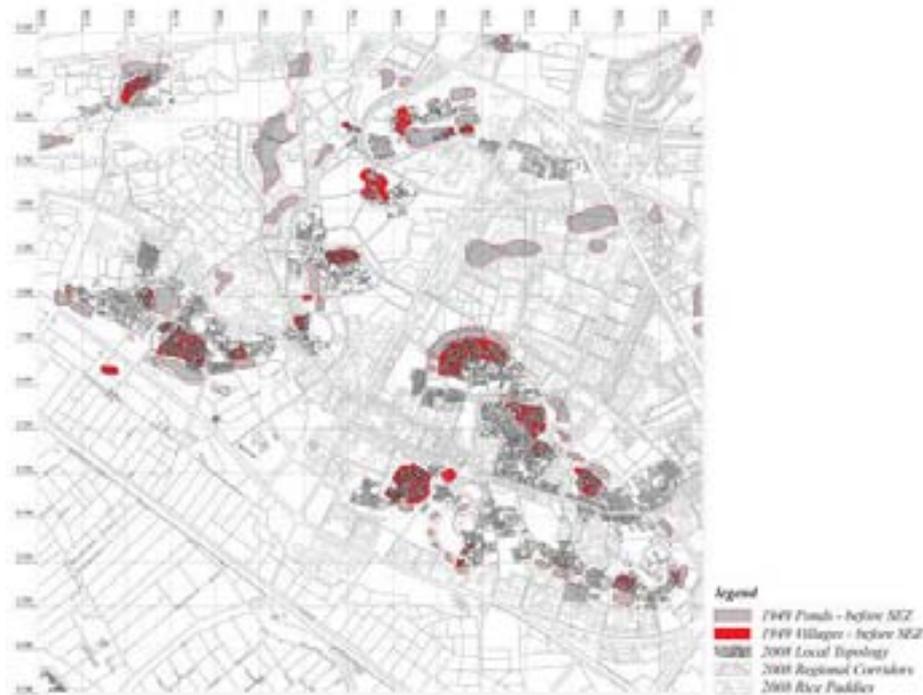


Figure 6. Pattern of negotiation between the Local Topology and Regional Corridor. (Drawing by Tomaz Pipan redrawn from Google orthographic photographs and historical maps from Great Britain War Office)

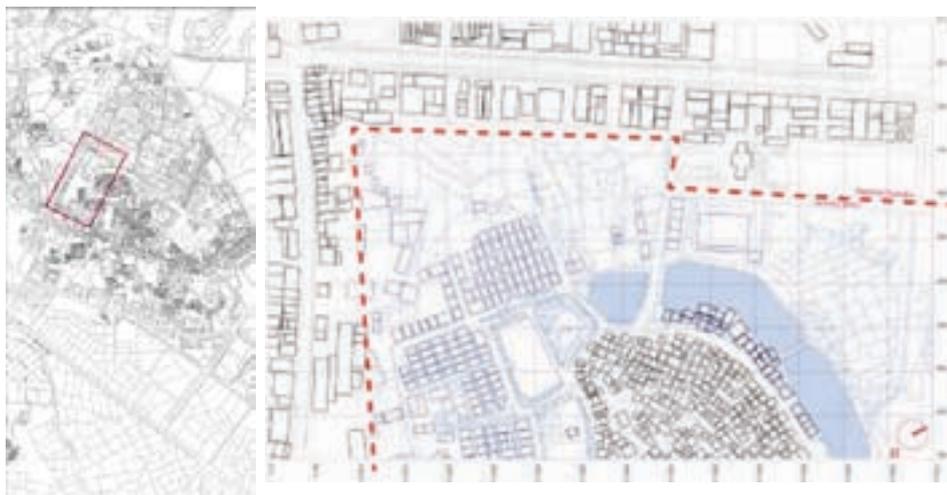


Figure 7. 7a: Location of the fragment. 7b: Deregulated land (blue) where building laws are very relaxed and decision making is in the hands of grassroots village government. (Drawing by Tomaz Pipan redrawn from Google orthographic photographs.)



The deregulated part of land given to local self-governance represents a test bed for a new type of order (figure 7a). Here grassroots village committees are trying to reconcile historical with contemporary economic condition – their traditions with wants and aspirations – by combining virtues and flaws of both orders and finding a middle way. As these areas do not fall under jurisdiction of the state they do not have to abide by the building regulations imposed on the regional corridor. This is at the heart of its morphological fragmentation.



Figure 8. 8a: Location of fragment. 8b: Birds-eye perspective view of the area. Typologies and typicalities can be attributed to traditional and to techno-capitalistic orders. (Drawings by Tomaz Pipan)



Figure 8c. Public space under a tree, re-allotted gardens with shaking hands village in the background, fish pond, new cardboard factory (Photos by Tomaz Pipan)

This is why typical conditions in these transitional territories are more ambiguous and can be attributed to both of the previously described orders. Figure 8 is another example of such territory. This composite condition consists of an area for elder folk of the village to relax and to converse in the shade of an ancient tree (8c). The area has been recently upgraded and refurbished. Just next to the lounging area are vegetable gardens that locals still use for their personal needs. These have been re-distributed and re-allotted after the last time the village committee decided to rent out additional land parcels to industries. These parts clearly allude to traditional order and to local affinity to agriculture and working with the land. The pond and the big tree are typical entrance markers of ancient villages. Big old tree as a meeting and public village spot is also historically relevant (Knapp 1992). However within this order comes the reality of current economic condition – some of the land was used to build what is called a shaking-hand village that is usually rented out to migrant workers, yet another area was rented out to developers who built a paper cardboard factory.

We can see that the range of engagements is much more diverse and refers to traditional and techno-capitalistic horizons of commitment simultany. This in-between area depends on both orders to exist. It provides the local villagers with means of economic survival and at the same time preserves at least a tenuous connection to the land and cultural attachment to history. Throughout this description we observe

a curious negotiation between the forces of global markets and world economy on one side and aspirations of the local community on the other. The question is whether this composite territory offers a potential for reconciling the two orders, or whether it enhances the conflict.

The local morphology caters for additional housing for migrant workers, the regional corridor gives good access and transport connections that enables local villagers to rent out space also to industries, shopping malls, etc. Due to its position between the two orders the morphology is unique and more diverse than any of the previously described typicalities.

In this territory, negotiation is the matrix within which a fundamental question about the relation of 'culture' to 'nature' is played out; between exploitation of and respect for natural conditions, ultimately a question of a civic order which embodies an ethical interpretation of nature.

### 3. Discussion

The presented description of orders and their co-habitation opens up many topics for discussion ranging from questions on social order, civic order and freedom and on the other side of the spectrum, questions about typology, urban structure and scale. For the purpose of this paper, we will outline conclusions regarding limits and opportunities these topographies give in regards to understanding of city as civic locus and how these topographies refer to scarcity.

Firstly a general overview and summary of the condition is in order. The topographies we are presented with look like a field of fragments created by superimposition of a non-hierarchical infrastructural system of production on top of ancient pattern of villages...as if the historical sea of rice paddies had suddenly grown factories. This is also evident in the mismatch of scales that is a symptom for a mismatch of meaning, resulting in the conflict between a vast infrastructure oriented to streamlined efficiencies (of supply, of production quantity, speed and low cost) and small nuclei harbouring the remains of an ancient and rich tradition. To this belongs as well a mismatch of political authority or governance, where the production-corridors enjoy regional control, and the villages exercise their few options in the domains left over. The kinds of choices available to the villages are exercised within the over-arching conflict: they can participate in the capitalisation of the land, selling off their heritage for short-term profit, in effect supporting the over-arching motives of an SEA, and they can cultivate surviving customs within the remains of community buildings, temples, archaic trees, fishponds and allotment gardens. Finally, the majority of the population is migrant workers, with no political voice, very austere living-conditions (except for the managers in villas), and no basis for commitment to a particular segment of the field.

In terms of scarcity, the economic condition of capitalised land-use affects everyone. Scarce as it is on the scale of China, it generates intense pressures for everyone establishing a basis for competition (how grassroots communities rent out their land for industry) and sharing (how agricultural land gets re-allotted so that each villager gets a part to keep up the gardening). These new organizational structures show how scarcity initiates questions pertaining to moral horizons and how these might be reconciled. In the case of SER developments in general and the PRD in particular, these horizons are most commonly portrayed as extravagant abuse of agricultural land and local people, customs and way of life for imperatives of liberal capitalism. However, closer inspection reveals a more complex interaction between, on one hand, developers, state managed infrastructure and economy and on the



other, traditional settlements and ways of life. The possible composite topographies – part synthetic and part traditional – show how to think a possible new civic order. Only time will tell if this composite is anything more than a mishmash of typologies and fragments of disparate life. Or in words of Vesely: “... complexity is often the result of an attempt to reconcile different spheres of reality. If reconciliation is successful, the whole situation may be enriched: if it is not, complexity remains as only an unfulfilled promise of richness.” (Vesely 2009: 303)

In regards to the limits of what these topographies can and could be. Above all else, they are quite young, and their possible development is still uncertain and widely open. In addition, the physical and ontological flattening infrastructural corridors engender suggests different sets of relations between topography and civic order as those of classical agora, forum or piazza, where the hierarchy culminates in a town centre as a civic locus. The infrastructural identity of presented topography restricts such readings. In a similar manner it is also hard to draw any parallels with rigorously structured Chinese traditional cities where walls meticulously prescribed the order, shape and programs of the whole city and each part. However, within the apparently undifferentiated sprawl of economic efficiency, there are, for example, shops along the roads and markets tucked away in alleys of the regional corridor (figure 9) in which one can find fragments of the sort of life generally supported by towns. The infrastructural urbanization promotes non-hierarchical structuring of the expanse where pockets of town happen almost sporadically. In the best case, we might suggest a comparative reading with mature contemporary rural-industrial conditions like *Ruhrgebiet* in Germany or suburban Milan and try to understand questions regarding the civic and the social through the lens of infrastructural urbanization that does not resort to the cliché of ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’, but instead strives to understand city as an ethical interpretation of the natural conditions.

This brings us to a fundamental question whether this condition can be called “city” at all. In this respect, we believe that examination of the different typicalities from a close range hint of possible evolution into a long-term and sustainable civic order. This appears to be the matter of finding hierarchy – similar to a high street – that achieves cohabitation and continuity with the traditional orders. In addition, the typology of industrial clusters (concrete frame and infill or platforms and sheds with service-yards between them) geared towards economic and production efficiency becomes completely devoid of meaning, which is an advantage. In other words, such organizations are programme and usage non-specific, which makes them extremely flexible and adaptable, accommodating change over time easily. Refurbishing and re-programming old factory compounds has been successful also in mature Chinese cities. Moreover, our concrete example shows that within this sea of infrastructure, a seed of traditional and local life persisting in migrant workers and local communities is always present. This can be seen as a comparative advantage over more settled topographies as it offers beginnings to structure the infrastructure hierarchically. This offers an opportunity to better understand an unresolved question in our own cities – the potential civic nature of what is too-easily generalised as “industry”.

Speculating upon the future development of such topographies is extremely relevant especially due to the fact that the present monofunctional industrial “gold rush” geared toward P&A will not self-perpetuate forever. Dongguan is chronically addicted to FDI which in turn brings in only fresh P&A and no knowledge or sustainable research for independent development. That is why we believe existing pockets of local life, tradition and freedom are so important. They represent the kernels of hie-

rarchical orders that can help these areas adapt to the inevitable changes and avoid collapse. However, in order to achieve a significant change, this monofunctional industrial oriented P&A would need to be connected to research and development (R&D). This shift can be difficult, especially as academics point out that R&D needs prime academic and research institutions (Porter 2000, Lai 2004). In addition P&A so typical for Dongguan does not encourage “knowledge spillovers” which are needed for long term competitiveness, usually attributed to the R&D clusters. Even so, it helps to understand that innovation works best if it is recognized that knowledge is imbedded in the culture whereby the cultures are local and specific. In addition, by retaining agriculture and industrial production, crucial inputs are retained in the form of skills that inform the innovation environment geared towards research of these sectors. Consolidating material cultures that are disappearing (such as fish farming, rice farming, bamboo usage know-how) by preserving the nuclei of traditional civic life, we hope to offer an unorthodox reinterpretation of regional corridors and reading of infrastructural economy as a phenomenon. This suggests a completely different reading of infrastructural landscapes than, for example the private walled-in self-sufficient company towns like Foxconn in Shenzhen. “In addition to its dozens of assembly lines and dormitories, Longhua has a fire brigade, hospital and employee swimming pool [...] More than 500 monitors around the campus show exercise programs, worker-safety videos and company news produced by the in-house television network, Foxconn TV. Even the plant’s manhole covers are stamped ‘Foxconn.’” (Dean 2007). By clustering industry and agriculture with other more civic activities and institutions one may imagine structures of local collaboration able to contend with the shifting currents of capitalism and perhaps even able to again reconcile their vulnerability in history with the natural conditions.

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Blokovi, New Belgrade, Serbia, 2009 © Alessio Maximilian Schroder

#New Belgrade  
#scarcity  
#Henry Lefebvre  
#post-modern

# Voids as modern ruins. The project for the city in the face of the new spatial scarcity

The scarcity of space might seem easy to understand in Euclidian and Cartesian terms. Confined to quantity, prone to measurability and objective assessment, space, so understood, can be partitioned to units of surfaces and volumes, and its scarcity evaluated relative to these units' limits in all of the three Euclidian directions. That the Sahara desert, featuring 9.400.000 sq km of surface, is abundant with space is meaningful to us if contemplated from the comfortable confines of our 94 sq m apartment. Compared, alternatively, to the "size of the Earth", together with its subterranean space and its atmosphere, the notion of the scarcity of Euclidian space, as such, loses any meaning.

It is only near, or in, the urban centres that the shortage of space can be observed, as a distinct socio-economic phenomenon (Lefebvre 1991): what gives weight to the notion of spatial scarcity is the definition of space as a *productive process*. If social space is a social product, as has been clearly put forward by Henry Lefebvre in the 1970s, then the scarcity of space must also be understood as being produced, thus inevitably involving the questions of the socio-economic organization and politics in the discussion.

In his theory of the production of space, Lefebvre intended to systematize the entangled relations between mental and social space, that combined to form, as he argued, our understanding of space both as a concept and reality. In his well-known spatial triad Lefebvre proposed that we should understand space as three intertwined productive processes: 1. The *conceived* space of ideology (epitomized in urban plans and projects and their inherent socio-economic programs); 2. The *perceived* space of social practice (the materiality of the urban); 3. The *lived* space of the citizen (the experiential life related to the symbolic aspect and emotions). All of these, Lefebvre argued, must be taken into account if we want to meaningfully address the reality of social space, beyond the mental and abstract scientific models (Lefebvre 1991).

In this paper we are seeking to address the notion of the scarcity of space by taking advantage of Henry Lefebvre's spatial triad, and in relation to the modern project for the city. The case in point will be New Belgrade, a new city initially planned as early as the 1940s as the socialist counterpart to then Yugoslavian capital of Belgrade, which in this sense can be considered as the oldest of the great urban projects carried out by modernity. What makes New Belgrade an invaluable example that can help us understand the multi-layered notion of the scarcity of space, we propose, is its complex ideological history, and its character as the *new central place*.

In Lefebvre's work, it is exactly this new centrality that holds the stakes of the future of urban society (Lefebvre 1991). For Lefebvre the urban *is* centrality (Schmidt 2006), and the advancement of urban society is based on the possibility of imagining the new kind of centrality, beyond the historic centre of the European city. Under-

stood in this way, the project of New Belgrade becomes clear in all of its complexity. Having been conceived as a new administrative centre of the emerging nation state of Socialist Yugoslavia, and featuring, in the words of Ljiljana Blagojevic, the idea of ‘building of socialism on a clean slate in a supra-historical time constellation’ (Blagojevic 2004), New Belgrade epitomizes the project of modernity in its most radical manifestation: the invention of the new society and its space, through the invention of a new centrality.

If the scarcity of space can be “measured” and addressed, as Lefebvre proposed, only if accompanied by the idea of the urban centre, we propose to examine the plans and projects of New Belgrade in terms of dealing with different manifestations of the scarcity of space.

Furthermore, the emergence of the “new scarcities” of space in post-socialist New Belgrade, occurring through the introduction of neoliberal democracy, provides for an opportunity to comparatively assess the scarcity of space as a product of different ideological constellations. In order to make our inquiry more consistent across shifting ideological eras, we will be looking at the voids – the open, unbuilt spaces – as the perceived elements of comparison. Except for being one of the most important constituent of the intermediary level of social space that Lefebvre deemed properly urban (Lefebvre 2007), and thus responsible for securing the unity of the city, the voids of New Belgrade seem to be the main field of change and subject of scarcity in post-socialism. As such, the urban voids can be seen as a comprehensive ‘register’ of the main traits of an on-going urban transformation.

Departing from Lefebvre’s spatial triad, we propose in this paper that the scarcity of space has to be understood and addressed as a system of conceived, perceived and lived scarcities. By comparing the changing rationale of these different scarcities of space in the socialist and post-socialist eras, we will expose the ways in which the scarcity of space is constructed, as well as the way in which we can understand the modern project for the city through the lens of scarcity.

### **The conceived, the perceived and the lived scarcities of space**

The ways in which different ideological arrangements have articulated the concept and the reality of scarcity have been crucially determined by their inherent programs of socio-economic development. These different scarcities of space, stemming from the organization of society founded on different ideas, can be understood as being conceived, as is made manifest by the crucial role that the concept of scarcity has had in the theories of political economy (Marx 2002; Keynes 1963; Friedman 1992). This understanding of scarcity has been recently complicated by the emergence of scarcities of natural resources (Neumayer 2000). The shortages of water, air, energy etc. that are material and conceivable on a global level, can be thus understood as absolute scarcities.

In contrast to this absoluteness, the relativity of the scarcity of space provides for an opportunity for it to be addressed through a project. As different ideologies conceived of a scarcity of space according to their different socio-economic programs, mediatized through and materialized by architecture, these became a part of the domain of the perceived.

Today’s bird’s view of New Belgrade reveals different variations of concrete prisms organized around large green patches of urban parkland inside a tidy, orthogonal grid. Recalling the comment that Manuel de Sola Morales, the Spanish urban theorist, has made about East Berlin, is apt here: this is the city less of buildings and more of – distances (Sola Morales 2008). The image of these spacious voids, formed as a part of large collective housing apartment blocks, has come to represent both the failure of the modernist and of the socialist project throughout the second



half of the 20th century. The perceived abundance of the voids indeed reveals the way in which the socialist regimes used to conceive the scarcity of space. The quest for the solutions to urban problems ‘within a philosophical framework of Marxist doctrine and mostly within a practical, decision-taking structure of a command economy’ (French and Hamilton 1971), has differentiated the socialist urban regime from its capitalist counterpart in two important ways: the absence of land-value and an ambition to provide a “home for everyone”. The ideas of minimum dwelling (Teige 2002), originating in the early work of the socialist members of the CIAM, and the rationalist-functionalist discourse of its latter phases, merged with the difficult circumstances of the command economy and resulted in a conceived scarcity of space of the socialist era. The words of Yugoslavian architects Dusan Grabrijan and Juraj Neidhardt, witnesses to the first projects for New Belgrade, reveal a true ethos of spatial scarcity of socialism: “The time disappears when the man constructs only the roof above his head. But there would also be no luxury, because it is as much a detriment as poverty itself. What we care about is the healthy standard...”(Grabrijan and Neidhardt 1957). This ‘healthy standard’ resulted in New Belgrade, as elsewhere in socialist new towns, in standardized buildings featuring humble apartments for growing working population.

A second, more meticulous look at the contemporary panorama of New Belgrade reveals the character of the urban change, introduced along with the ideological switch to neoliberal democratic capitalism – the city is being densified. On the southern verges of the “Block 21”, for an example, rows of new apartment and small office buildings have sprung up during the course of the two post-socialist decades, thus enclosing the prismatic ‘meanders’ of the socialist residential development by occupying the voids around it. The introduction of space into the market system as commodity, now additionally endowed with exchange value, has meant a very different kind of the conceived scarcity of space. In Lefebvre’s view, the commodity is defined by its comparable traits, the recognizable characteristics that make it tradable for other similar commodities in the market (Lefebvre 1991). Seen in the light of this new idea, it is the undeveloped space that is understood as a luxury. Becoming much more than the mere organization of the production and catering for the needs of the population, or rather, addressing these in a different way, the new urban economy conceives the voids as scarce potential for producing a tradable and sellable global currency.

The leap from the abundance to the scarcity of the voids reveals the relativity of the conceived scarcity of space that, in New Belgrade, has followed the shifting of ideological and socio-economic programs. Looking at New Belgrade from high up, we judge the space inside its confines as more or less dense and the distances between its buildings, wide or narrow. We perceive the vanishing abundance of the voids. But is this knowledge exhausting the complexity of the scarcity of space?

In 1985, an International Competition was launched for the New Belgrade ‘Urban Structure Improvement’. Focusing on the central zone of New Belgrade, it posed a question that encompassed and superseded both the ideologically-economically conceivable scarcity and its material-perceivable dimension. What this competition brief was addressing, we argue, underneath its manicheistic critique of modernist urbanism that echoed the contemporary post-modern discourses in architecture, was the third aspect of spatial scarcity – the scarcity of the lived.

## Addressing shortages of space in socialism – the explicit abundance and the implicit scarcity of voids

The intention of the socialist authorities to found the new state capital for the emerging Yugoslavian nation was a question of considerable representational weight, given the project's potent symbolic function (Blagojevic 2004). This intervention, simultaneously, gave rise to the notion of Old Belgrade – pre-socialist part of the city that was now abandoned as a distant image across the water, contemplated from the left bank of the river Sava where the new history was going to begin by the decision of the new state.

Starting with 1945, and throughout the next decades, New Belgrade was restlessly planned over and over again, as a largely self-referential urban 'island', floating between the Old City and Zemun (the satellite town of Belgrade) both of which it was going to try to involve into a new kind of urban culture. But how was this new, essentially socialist urban culture going to emerge? In Lefebvre's view, a society can acquire a reality and duration, only if it invests in its own space, in which centrality plays the crucial part as an intersection between the conceived, perceived and lived formants of space (Lefebvre 1991).

It is therefore less than strange that the most contested field of the entire project of New Belgrade, and the one left unfinished to this day, is its central zone, meant to be organized around a 1.2 km long axis that prevailed as a feature of all of the proposed design solutions, from the 1940s to the 1980s, when it became subject of the international competition.

In the 1945 proposal of Nikola Dobrovic the Sava River occupies a prominent place in the organization of urban space. Its focal point are the two squares, placed one across the other, on the opposite banks of Sava: the first (figure 1) defined by modern terraces that cascade down to the river starting at the centre of Old Belgrade, the second (figure 2) – on the other side of the Sava, defined by the axis that spans the river and an imposing building of the railway station. The entire urban composition of the proposal revolves around this one element. But it is not the aesthetics alone that holds Dobrovic's project together – through the building of the railway station, this plan sets a new gateway to the city and thus returns to the essence of its vocation as an interchange.

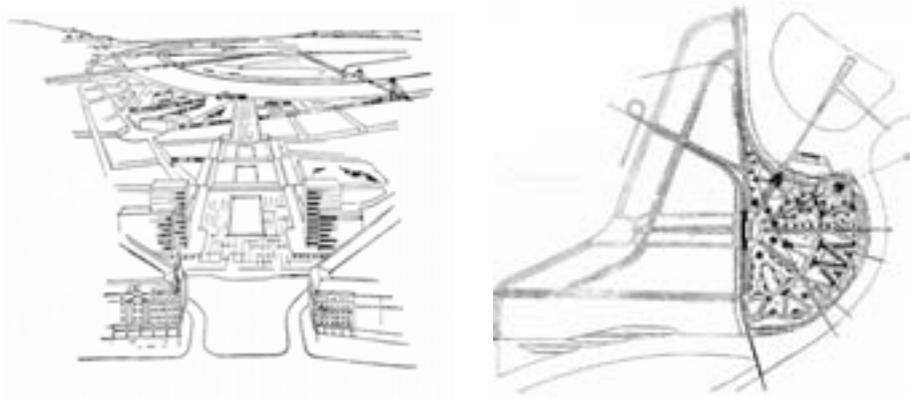


Figure 1 and 2. in Uros, Martinovic, Moderna Beograda, Privredni Pregled, Beograd, 1974

This very civic symbolic potency of the train station square was, already by 1947, contested by the first proposals for the two buildings representing the state power: the large headquarters of the Yugoslav government and the high tower of the Communist party. Seeking to be situated on or near the established central axis, these two buildings demonstrated the temporary consensus reached between the



architects and the politicians – as Yugoslavian architect Neven Segvic was writing at the time: “Our theoretical position on the issues of architectural design has to be based on the analysis of contemporary socialist socio-economic system, on the analysis of its organization, analysis of development of its capital assets, analysis of its ideological progress. The totality of all these factors forms the foundation for the development of contemporary architectural design, which has to be the expression of its time.” (Segvic, quoted in Blagojevic 2004) The large symmetrical structure of the Presidency of Government building, fully executed by 1949, fixated one end of the central axis to the riverbank, effectively blocking, by the same token, the direct pedestrian access from the axis to the water. Instead, everyday life was to unfold around the axis in the opposite direction: spanning 1.2 km towards the second end to the planned railway station and its square.

The Master Plan presented by the City Planning Institute in 1950 was the first one to clearly set out the ‘shape’ of the new centre, implicit in the previous plans and discussions. Organizing the rest of the space of New Belgrade through an orthogonal grid and the application of the functionalist principles, it committed to merely distinguishing the position of the new centrality by colour, as the new urban centre is covered in a single red pattern (figure 3). Nothing more, however, on the vision of the new lived space is revealed – one might imagine, upon abstracting the schematic nature of the plan, this space as a large red square, canopied perhaps, proposed for exchange of ideas to build a new urban culture.



Figure 3. in Uros, Martinovic, Moderna Beograda, Privredni Pregled, Beograd, 1974

Coinciding with the concluding debates of CIAM, which held its final meeting in

Dubrovnik in 1956, the project for the central area of New Belgrade, completed in 1958, echoed its concern for the role of the architect-planner in developing the new spatial, political and economic aspects of society. This proposal (figure 4) can be understood as an expression of the new needs of the modern city to define public space through the construction of squares. It shows a division of the centre by means of three squares along the 1.2 km long axis, “spacious yet on human scale, bright, lively and useful” (Djordjevic 1960).

The complementary concerns about the notion of the landscape of the modern city were formulated by 1963 in the ideas of Branko Petricic, one of the authors of the Master Plan of New Belgrade. However, this idea, instead of following the directions of Dobrovic, comes from a very different reference, drawn from Le Corbusier’s Radiant City. It is in Petricic’s work, that the application of the CIAM functionalist discourse starts being gradually modified and partially left behind. If the development of modernist discourse was influenced by an implicit anti-historicism, which was confirmed by a number of avant-garde manifestos published between the two world wars, the 1950s are beginning to see this radical position as a contingent phenomenon, justified as a reaction to the eclecticism of the nineteenth century - and that leads to its reconsideration.



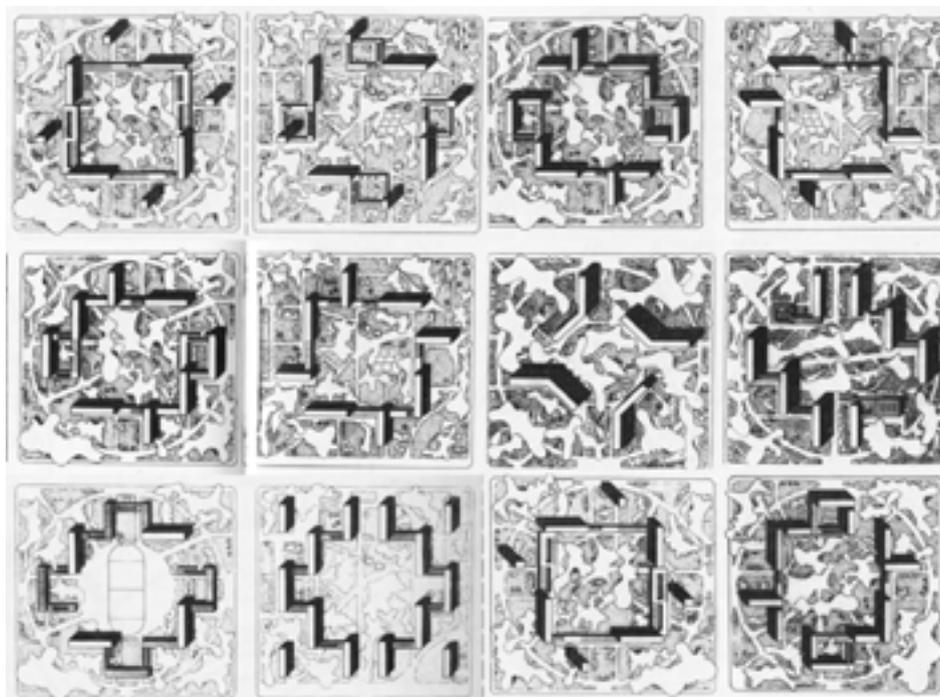
Figure. 4. in Uros, Martinovic, Moderna Beograda, Privredni Pregled, Beograd, 1974

Already in his writings during the Second World War, and specifically so when defining the pilot plan of New Belgrade, the revolutionary Petricic critically reviewed the directions of the Athens Charter to establish a connection between modernist discourse and the art of city-building by defining a spatial continuity between *redents* and offering clear community gathering places (figure 5).

However, this revision of modernist principles was not the only interpretation of continuity. If Petricic’s reconsideration of the construction of the city in experiential terms is still linked to ‘Le Corbusian’ imperatives, Bogdan Bogdanovic, his contemporary, simultaneously develops a contrasting position.



The core point in Bogdanovic's theory lies in the definition of the centre of New Belgrade as a place of memory that – the concern that, by the same token, defines the main problem of the modern project. Similarly to Ledoux, who decided to stop building after the French Revolution, Bogdan Bogdanovic acknowledged the departure of J. B. Tito by ending his career as a builder of monuments in 1983, three years after Marshall's death, to devote himself to politics. Serving as a Mayor of Belgrade from 1982 to 1986, it was Bogdanovic who initiated the international design competition entitled 'The Future of New Belgrade'(1985).



*Figure. 5.* Branko Petric, Bloks for New Belgrade, in Ljiljana, Blagojevic, Novi Beograd: osporeni modernizam, Zavod za Udzbenike i Nastavna Sredstva, 2007, Belgrade, p.152, 153, 2003

While Bogdanovic's interest in memory could be related to the discourse of post-modernity, it is impossible to reduce this experience-centred strain of thought on New Belgrade, epitomized in the work of Petric and Bogdanovic, merely to an echo of the mainstream architectural discussions that emerged in that later time period. What these architects knew all too well, as early as the 1950s when New Belgrade was witnessing the peak of the foundational enthusiasm, was that the new socialist city was not going to emerge only through the imposition of order by the application of principles of the Athens charter – not even through the provision of the "home for everyone", that resolved the ideologically constructed scarcities of space. What was at stake in New Belgrade was addressing the scarcity of the lived - this perennial scarcity that socialism was called upon to resolve, by reclaiming the bourgeoisie's civic culture, and re-evaluating it, straightening it out, to invent the 'New Urban'.

Out of the 60 projects submitted to the International Competition for the 'New Belgrade Urban Structure Improvement' project in 1985, two can be distinguished as displaying distinctly counter-poised positions towards this problem: one, Italian-Serbian, led by Paolo Portoghesi and Slobodan Selinkic, with its attention to the design of public space (figure 6) and the other, French, led by Henry Lefebvre, with the political message it conveyed (figure 7).



Figure 6. Prospective of New Belgrade, Rome 1985.  
 Courtesy of Slobodan Selinkic Office-Rome.



Figure 7. Poster series #4 Gazela, New Belgrade and #5 Peti Park, Belgrade.  
 Courtesy of Fillip and Sternberg press.

Portoghesi and Selinkic, together with Pier Luigi Erolì and Sandro Sartor, formulated the problem of the scarcity of the lived in New Belgrade as the “lack of the city effect” (Portoghesi and Selinkic 1985). The Italian team sympathetically recognized



the lively unfinished condition of New Belgrade as a common urban situation - even the oldest cities have passed, in their history, through a moment of incompleteness. Subsequently the growth and integration with new projects led them to reach a level of quality that has defined their social-aesthetic balance. If New Belgrade could be compared to a living organism, they asserted, then its brain functioned only partially, and especially so sense of memory, the coordination between the functions, the unit reconciliation of the many aspects of life, the unity that is essential in an individual element of personal identity. What the Italian group therefore offered was to complete the modern design of New Belgrade giving it the full function of a brain and nervous system. To achieve this, they tried to re-establish the balance between the existing parts and the project through a therapeutic transplant that joins separate parts, one that redefines the role of aggregation at the centre, similarly to the historic cities in Europe, where this role is exercised by the ancient nuclei, around which the town developed at different times.

In Portoghesi's and Selenkic's project, the 'city effect', that we propose to understand as an attempt at the resolution of the scarcity of the lived, was pursued in a complexity that defines the mysterious and elusive in the perception of urban space, through the construction of an urban tale with a plot which unfolds gradually and unpredictably in various situations (figure 8).



*Figure 8.* Plan of city center and Prospective of New Belgrade, Rome 1985.  
Courtesy of Slobodan Selinkic Office-Rome.

The issue of complexity, they maintained, is not foreign to modern design. In the space of New Belgrade, it is embodied in the sense of infinity, conveyed by the large gaps between the buildings. The main material fact that has been 'discovered' in New Belgrade is neither green space, nor water, nor a way to mark the paths according to the specific patterns. It is the void, alternating between the sense of the infinite - through long perspectives (around 1500 meters) - and distances between the architecture-noticeable-like-apparition, that defines the alternating perception of the position of the 'observer'.

What was pursued through the experiential complexity in the Italian project came to be addressed as political complexity in the project of the French team, comprised of Henri Lefebvre and architects Serge Renaudie and Pierre Guilbaud (Bitter and Weber 2009). In this late phase of Lefebvre's work, already transcending the enchantments and disenchantments with institutionalized socialism, the 'new centrality' and the 'new urban' could only be understood through a new political project – the notion of the 'new citizenship.'

Systematizing the topics in which Lefebvre inquired throughout his work, the 'new citizenship' merged his earlier notion of 'the right to the city' (Lefebvre 1991) with a more spatially reflected political program. His life-long interest in the concept of self-management that has been ultimately disappointed with the failure of Yugoslavian self-managed socialism, brought Lefebvre back to the utopian considerations of the necessity of the abolishment of both capital and the state (Stanek 2011).

In his team's proposal for New Belgrade, as in his general meta-philosophical project, the production of space becomes something that goes beyond planning, and becomes a synthetic process that is not organized by the state but by *polities*. Those that can participate in this process are those who live in the city, who are experiencing a sense of belonging to an urban setting. What stands out in his proposal for New Belgrade is, therefore, not a defined and definitive project. Similarly to the Italian entry, Lefebvre, Renaudie and Guilbaud seem to pursue a necessary complexity, as an increasingly urgent consideration for the contemporary city, through architectural concepts that are not processed, but are substantiated in dynamic development over time.

Departing from a critique of the abstractions of the functionalist doctrine, especially its homogeneous and uniform systematization of the city, the French team proposes overlaying and diversity as the appropriate traits of the project for the new urban. This is understood as the total diversity of housing types, production units, spaces for interaction and land uses. All of this is put in place through an overlay of infrastructures that, through straight and circular architectures meet with a specific character defined by the performed function (figure 9).



Figure 9. Plan of city center of New Belgrade, Rome 1985, Courtesy of <http://serge-renaudie.com/spip.php?article133>



The playful, differentiated forms of their project reveal the rigid sterility of the modernist organization of voids, as they also simultaneously subvert it. Although essential in this sense, architecture is deployed here to remedy the scarcity of the lived in much less mediated way than in Portoghesi's and Selenkic's proposal. Rather than the carefully carved possibility for an aesthetic experience that achieves the unity of the city through the shared productive nexus of perception and memory, in Lefebvre's proposal for New Belgrade the overlapping levels, volumes, and other diversified elements of everyday life preserve the crucial possibility of appropriation – the possibility for the people to access physically, and to occupy and use urban space.

## Conclusion

The *relativity* of the scarcity of space provides for the possibility to address it through a project. The *complexity* of the scarcity of space has to be fully grasped in order for this project to be credible. To fully understand the scarcity of space and the possible interests it holds in relation to the project for the city, we leaned on the spatial 'trialectics' of Henry Lefebvre and employed it as an epistemic tool to assess the scarcity of space in the City of New Belgrade that has itself been conceived as a modernist-socialist project.

The *constructedness* of the scarcity of space is made manifest in the project for New Belgrade by the virtue of its discontinuity - undertaken in one, and continued in another, very different, socio-economic system it can be used to reveal the similarities and differences of their respective constructions, through a process of systematic comparison.

Departing from Lefebvre's all-encompassing theory of the production of space, we have traced and described three different aspects of the scarcity of space: the conceived, the perceived and the lived. The elements of the inquiry and the units of comparison were the 'voids', understood as the constituents of the properly urban level of space.

While the logic and the constructedness of the conceived and the perceived spatial scarcity are much easier to understand and much less difficult to reveal, in the project for New Belgrade we have found the notion of the lived scarcity to have been persisting as the most elusive and to have been addressed meticulously, by both architecture and ideology. Although the notion of the scarcity of the lived space has been inaugurated into the political and the disciplinary discussions already in the early phases of the project, as a problem poised to solve in order to achieve the new, supra-historical socialist society, reflexive architectural involvement was inferior to the one of politics: the monumental buildings representing the state and the party have been introduced in strategic places to act as the exposed signifiers of state power. While the mere existence of these buildings obviously presupposes architecture, we recognize the reflexive disciplinary involvement, not in their authors, but in the ones like Petricevic and Bogdanovic who, throughout the unfolding of the New Belgrade project strived to address the lived scarcity of space, from the inherently architectural standpoint.

It was only in the 1980s, however, when the practical manifestations of both Yugoslavian self-managed socialism and the modernist project were dramatically revealed as unsatisfactory that the scarcity of the lived had to be addressed in the most fundamental terms.

By making their proposal for the new exuberance of the lived in New Belgrade, Portoghesi and Lefebvre answered to this imperative from two opposing, yet complementary, ends. What probably represents the strong link between the architect and the philosopher is the underlying and deep need to re-establish new relationships - in and with the modern city. If this is not explicitly clear in the competition-report sur-



veys, it is rendered clearer in the way in which both of the two thinkers decided to operate on the ruins of the modern city: by using the explicit perceived abundance of the voids to both reveal and supersede their implicit lived scarcity. Potoghesi by searching for the experiential and political expansion of the everyday life in architecture, Lefebvre by looking for the architecture of the new society in overlaying differences of everyday life, politics and play.

How can we learn today from these very different strategies, projected upon the “ruin of the modern”?

Should the inverted scarcity principle, brought about by the neoliberal *conceived* scarcities of space, be understood as a signal that the time has come for the design intelligence, the reflective architectural practice to engage again (now with the vanishing) voids as ruins of modernity, meticulously and dedicatedly, much akin to the attention that the first modernist architects have paid to the minimal dwelling? Should we deliberate at the spatial left-overs of the large real-estate developments – to their lawns and green buffer zones – pursuing the end of the scarcity of the lived by inventorying all imaginable uses and providing them, while subscribing to a polite disgust for luxury, a humble, but comfortable, space of their own?

Or should we, alternatively, and following Portoghesi, confine ourselves to architecture-like-appearitions, while putting out faith in the instaurational potency of the spatial composition and its ‘city effect’ that, in the circumstances of the densifying New Belgrade of today, will soon have to contend with being appreciated through less than 1500 m long perspectives.

Finally, should we follow Lefebvre and work on the margins, corrupting slowly, but steadily the limits to the voids by meandering, penetrating, involving, engaging, with one final and irreparable objective – the prospective confirmation of the “new citizenship” as the vision of the collective beyond the authorities and invested in hope for the new abundance of everyday life?

Which of these ways to the lived should be chosen?

The defense of the void in New Belgrade at all costs could be easily judged as yet another kind of ideology. If it is true, however, that the “necessary inventiveness can only spring from interaction between plans and counter-plans, projects and counter-projects” (Lefebvre, 1991), the voids of New Belgrade, as modern ruins, demand a consistent inquiry. Both the chance and the peril for architecture are contained in its obligation to undertake this inquiry in the face of the conceived, the perceived and the lived scarcity of space.

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