

Abstract

CREATIVE PROJECT: Interventions in Urban Informality

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Streets lined up with hawkers selling everything from safety pins to fruits to suitcases with a fascinating backdrop of shops; Dharavi is always like being on a treadmill. It's always busy, chaotic and dynamic all at the same time. A recent survey of Dharavi by National Slum Development Federation counted 1,044 manufacturing units of all kinds. Almost every house in Dharavi can be described as a tool house. Dharavi has literally grown from the marshes. It is the land of economic heroes. Dharavi is very strategically located: a triangular land in the heart of the city of Mumbai. It is encompassed by railway lines on two sides and by Mahim creek and its mangroves on the third. Dharavi was initially in the outskirts of Mumbai but as the city started growing towards the south; Dharavi was found to be in the center of the city. It also shares its location with the Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) - a counter magnet of the Central Business Department in South Mumbai and the international airport, 15 minutes away from Dharavi. Dharavi has come a long way from the small fishing village of 18th century to the land of High returns.

Dharavi went through the storm of several redevelopment plans which were based on the high value of the land on which it is located. While several cities all around the globe have gone through these storms, some were severely affected and some survived. The question is will the importance and values of such neighborhoods ever be understood? Against Tabula Rasa approach, most urban planners today have recognized the informal neighborhoods as perfect examples of a user generated city. How can this urban informality inform the flexible urban structures which can absorb a continuous spatial reformation without losing its specificity? The neighborhood of Dharavi is a great example of incremental developments but at the same time it cannot be romanticized and the need for a better quality of life cannot be ignored. In this context, this creative project will attempt to elaborate the research that was carried out during the site visit to document the city of Dharavi and explore the potentials of change by design through adaptive interventions that will address the issue of the need for better infrastructure in the complex neighborhood of Dharavi without ignoring the highly sophisticated social fabric that has been evolved over the decades.