

UNEVEN GROWTH: TACTICAL URBANISMS FOR EXPANDING MEGACITIES

November 22, 2014–May 10, 2015

MoMA - Museum of Modern Art, NY.

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In 2030, the world's population will be a staggering eight billion people. Of these, two-thirds will live in cities. Most will be poor. With limited resources, this uneven growth will be one of the greatest challenges faced by societies across the globe. Over the next years, city authorities, urban planners and designers, economists, and many others will have to join forces to avoid major social and economic catastrophes, working together to ensure these expanding megacities will remain habitable.

To engage this international debate, Uneven Growth brings together six interdisciplinary teams of researchers and practitioners to examine new architectural possibilities for six global metropolises: Hong Kong, Istanbul, Lagos, Mumbai, New York, and Rio de Janeiro. Following the same model as the Rising Currents and Foreclosed, each team will develop proposals for a specific city in a series of workshops that occur over the course of a 14-month initiative.

Uneven Growth seeks to challenge current assumptions about the relationships between formal and informal, bottom-up and top-down urban development, and to address potential changes in the roles architects and urban designers might assume vis-à-vis the increasing inequality of current urban development. The resulting proposals, which will be presented at MoMA in November 2014, will consider how emergent forms of tactical urbanism can respond to alterations in the nature of public space, housing, mobility, spatial justice, environmental conditions, and other major issues in near-future urban contexts.

Urban Case Study Teams:

New York: SITU Studio, New York, and Cohabitation Strategies (CohStra), Rotterdam and New York

Rio de Janeiro: RUA Arquitetos, Rio de Janeiro, and MAS Urban Design, ETH Zurich

Mumbai: URBZ: user-generated cities, Mumbai, and Ensamble Studio/MIT-POPlab, Madrid and Cambridge

Lagos: NLÉ, Lagos and Amsterdam, and Zoohaus/Inteligencias Colectivas, Madrid

Hong Kong: MAP Office, Hong Kong, and Network Architecture Lab, Columbia University, New York

Istanbul: Superpool, Istanbul, and Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée, Paris

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Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanisms for Expanding Megacities is organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in collaboration with MAK – Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art.

The exhibition at MoMA is organized by Pedro Gadanho, Curator, and Phoebe Springstubb, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art.

This is the third exhibition in the series Issues in Contemporary Architecture, supported by Andre Singer.

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MUMBAI - case study ::

URBZ/user-generated cities, Mumbai

Ensamble Studio/MIT-POPlab, Spain/USA

"How can urbanists, architects, community groups, and end users come together to produce ever-evolving, dynamic, urban habitats? We explore paths that are both conflict-ridden and full of potential".

Mumbai is a city of disparate and incoherent habitats, loosely tied into a restless, shape-shifting whole. It emerged through various historical encounters—from the marshy margins of medieval kingdoms to expansive Portuguese colonial landscapes, and from a constrained English port city to its latest identity as a global metropolis—to become the dense and intense city we know today. Mumbai continues to evade attempts to reshape it into a modern, standardized metropolis.

Contemporary Mumbai is represented in bipolar terms as a city of slums and high-rises. In reality, its great diversity of built-forms represents creative ways in which inhabitants occupy urban space. Dharavi and Shivaji Nagar, officially treated as slums, have grown incrementally over time and embody many complex dynamics with their own spatial innovations and organizational strategies. They are part of a larger urban fabric of similar neighborhoods that reportedly absorb well over half of the metropolis's 12 million residents.

They are composed of hundreds and thousands of tiny homes squeezed into a disproportionately small share of the city's land. These homes exist in large interconnected collectives and often serve as both residences and workspaces. What we call "tool-house" is a distinctive housing archetype across Asia. It combines and compresses various functions. Its other avatars include Singapore's shop-house and Tokyo's home-factory. These efficient live-work spaces exist all around the world, independent of geographies and classes.

In Mumbai, the tool-house, which generates value through its use rather than land speculation, is the lifeline that keeps millions of people afloat and allows them to grow roots and a future in the city. Many poor artisanal communities, manual workers, and small-time traders—often from castes historically belonging to the so-called low strata—productively occupy these spaces. In the name of redevelopment, however, these neighborhoods are progressively being replaced by single-function high-rise residential blocks, revealing the arrested imagination of the authorities.

Instead of feeling threatened by a planet of slums in need of clearance, we believe in a planet of neighborhoods and habitats in different stages of evolution. Taking such a view, we can do greater justice to those living in habitats that have gradually developed over time thanks to the efforts of their residents. This will help reclaim the idea of growth in ways that escape old-fashioned notions of urban development to pave the way for richer and more diverse environments shaped by users' needs and aspirations.

Imagining how growth could happen in such dense and use-intensive environments, we explore new technologies and territories. The air appears as new territory to claim, where live-work conditions and public infrastructures recover their rightful place, thus liberating the excessive pressure on the land. Through design, the existing incompatibility between typology and scale gets diluted, the productive hybridization of different uses—inherent to the spirit of the place—is reinforced, and new alternatives to single-minded redevelopment strategies become refreshed.

Out of a creative and sometimes troubled collaboration, the in situ work of URBZ and the inventive explorations of Ensamble Studio/MIT-POPlab draw from a collage of tactics, technologies, visions, and imaginations. They prevent an automatic disqualification of homegrown neighborhoods to present them not as tabula rasa but as a "tabula pronta" with real value to drive any development strategy.

In the end, it is the users themselves who will make the final difference by seizing the tools of institutions and experts to continue doing what they have always done—to control and shape their environments with higher levels of professionalism and good sense. Never before have creative collaborations between planners, architects, local groups, and end users been at once so conflict ridden and full of potential. Unleashing this potential requires overcoming narrow interests and miscommunication.

What we envision here is not a speculative future, but an expanded present, where inhabitants can at last reclaim growth for themselves. Cities would be substantially different if their processes of urbanization could align with these goals. It is time for radical, incremental strategies that align global experiences with local knowledge and experience of urban spaces.