Experiences from India
- a collaboration between ASF-Sweden and SPARC
Sharing experiences

Since 2008, ASF-Sweden collaborates with SPARC-India. The aim of the collaboration is for members of both organisations to gain knowledge and experience by working together in ongoing projects. The learning processes are to be shared through workshops and seminars where students, professionals and civil society will be involved.

For ASF-Sweden the aim of this collaboration is to learn how to practically apply enabling housing and urban design strategies. ASF-Sweden has been involved in a number of different slum upgrading projects in India, mainly in the state of Odisha, together with UDRC, an allied partner to SPARC. In these projects Swedish architects and planners have, among other things, been able to creatively work out alternative models for affordable spatial and physical solutions together with SPARC and local professionals. More specifically it includes contributing with plans for area layout, house drawings and methods for participatory planning.

ASF-Sweden has also linked up a number of master students from universities in Sweden with SPARC. As a result of this, a number of academic field studies, with connections to some of SPARC’s projects have been carried out.

Both organisations have the ambition to continue the collaboration and more exchanges will hopefully take place. In order to develop the collaboration with SPARC and to share gained knowledge within ASF-Sweden, the ambition is that all work shall be documented. The aim of this documentation is to describe the exchanges that has been conducted this far. Besides giving a background to the project, it includes a short summary of the projects that members of the India-group within ASF-Sweden have been involved in. It also briefly presents some master theses that have been carried out within the collaboration. Finally, the document also includes some reflections and lessons learnt that might be helpful for future exchanges.
India’s urban population is expected to increase from the current 28 percent to 50 percent over the next two decades. This means that the number of people living in slums is expected to increase.

The Indian government has since the 1960’s undertaken various policies and schemes to tackle the issues of slums. The policies have ranged from eviction and slum clearances to social housing initiatives and relocation of communities. Lately, the government and other stakeholders as well as NGOs have initiated upgrading projects together with the communities to improve housing and infrastructure in-situ.

A slum-free India
In early 2010, the government introduced a scheme named Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY). The scheme has the ambitious objective “a slum-free India” and provides assistance and guidance on “a slum-free city planning”.

Differently from previous schemes, RAY puts responsibility on the states to identify cities that will be part of the program. The Indian government estimates that 250 cities will be covered by the program before the end of 2017. The ambition is that the states should take a holistic approach to slum problems by focusing on:

- bringing all existing slums - notified or non-notified - into the formal system, and enabling them to avail of the same level of basic amenities as the rest of the town,
- redressing failures in the formal system that lead to the creation of slums,
- tackling the shortage of urban land and housing that keep shelter out of reach of the urban poor and force them to resort to extra-legal solutions in a bid to retain their sources of livelihood and employment.

For the selected cities, action plans should be developed. The plans should include both how the existing slums can be upgraded and how the creation of new slums can be avoided. Also, for each city, a ”slum-free city plan” should be developed and then integrated into the local equivalent of a master plan. Ten percent of municipally owned land has to be set aside for housing for the poor. As a basis for action plans it is required that each city surveys its slums, both geographically and socio-economically.

RAY partly gives the states and local governments the option to choose methods of how the various slum areas shall be upgraded, while still require that certain condition are followed in terms of both process and results. An holistic approach should be used for the entire city and the residents of the areas should be involved in every stage of planning. RAY includes improvement of both houses and infrastructure. Upgrading of areas will be encouraged before relocation in order to ensure that development does not lead to loss of livelihood for citizens or extended routes to work. If areas still need to be relocated, because of security or otherwise, necessary steps to make it easier for citizens to continue to support themselves are required.
The Alliance Model

SPARC works in an Alliance with Mahila Milan and National Slum Dwellers Federation in organising the urban poor to come together. Household savings, enumerations and mapping is the core of all redevelopment processes that the Alliance is engaged in. The aim is to first build capacity and organisation within communities.

SPARC and the Alliance

SPARC was established in 1984 and is today one of the largest NGO’s in India working with housing and infrastructure issues for the urban poor. Together with the two community-based organisations, Mahila Milan and National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF), SPARC forms what is called the Alliance. The focus of the Alliance is organising the urban poor to come together, articulate their concerns and collectively produce solutions to the problems they face.

SPARC’s role is to provide professional support to Mahila Milan and NSDF in order to build their capacity to play a proactive role in developing solutions to urban poverty. SPARC also creates links between the community-based organisations and formal institutions and resources.

The Alliance works in 73 cities across India and has networks in 32 countries around the globe. Its role
has been to mobilise the communities in relocation processes in order to assist the citizens in the planning process with the governments. Together, the Alliance organises hundreds of thousands of slum dwellers and pavement dwellers to collectively produce solutions for affordable housing, secure tenure and sanitation.

The core of all redevelopment processes that the Alliance is engaged in is household savings, enumerations and mapping to first build capacity and organisation within communities.

**Mahila Milan and NSDF**

Mahila Milan, which is Hindi for Women Together, is a community based grass-root organisation, which was formed by a group of poor women in 1986. Mahila Milan aims to strengthen the role of women in order to improve their living situation. The organisation is working with organising loans for women and collecting money from households in order to create a saving account. By saving a small amount of money each day, the women in an area can take out a loan or save up for school fees, start-up businesses or renovating their homes.

NSDF is a community based organisation, which mobilises the urban poor to come together against demolitions, but also to secure basic needs such as sanitation and water facilities. Community groups from NSDF, are present in slum areas all over India and are actively participating in slum upgrading. Members participate for example in mapping their area.

**Community surveys**

The Alliance always starts a redevelopment process with a community survey and believes that the surveys are critical processes for community mobilisation. It provides an information base for communities to understand their situation, to gain legitimacy in the eyes of authorities. After that, the Alliance engages with government to undertake housing and sanitation projects which are led by the community.

The Alliance has been conducting enumerations and making community maps since 1984/85. It started with pavement dwellers of Mumbai that surveyed themselves to contest official government statistics about how many people that lived in informal settlements in the city. The government of India and many state governments now want to have digital information about cities and slums. The RAY-scheme requires digital maps, GIS and slum databases for a slum area to be eligible for subsidies. The Alliance began di-
and to develop a tenure policy which would be able to provide security for tenure to all. However, in their Annual Report 2011-2012, SPARC is critical and fears that RAY is now turning into a policy that is confusing both cities and citizens. For example they point out that the Ministry for Housing has given states money to conduct household settlement mapping in Pune, Bangalore and Cuttack already in 2009 and is therefore well suited to deal with enumerations and mapping in projects that can get support from RAY.

Originally, the Alliance was deeply committed to RAY recognizing that it sought to develop social audits of what had not worked previously, and to develop a tenure policy which would be able to provide security for tenure to all. However, in their Annual Report 2011-2012, SPARC is critical and fears that RAY is now turning into a policy that is confusing both cities and citizens. For example they point out that the Ministry for Housing has given states money to conduct household surveys which in turn were tendered to consultants instead of being the bottom up community driven strategy which the Alliance promote.

**In-situ upgrading**

A primary ambition in all of the Alliance projects is to avoid having to relocate the residents from their areas. The answer to this is upgrading the existing slum in-situ. This model is possible for slum dwellers that already own the land they are currently living on, or at least are able to get secure tenure. SPARC’s role in securing the tenure for slum dwellers around India has been important. The major advantage of in-situ upgrading is that it makes it possible for the residents to hold on to neighbours and their daily lives, not risking to be moved outside the city with less possibility for employment or large commuting distances.

The houses in slum areas in India are classified as either kutcha or pucca. Kutcha refers to a temporary makeshift structure and is regarded as an informal structure. Pucca means solid and permanent structure and is regarded as formal. In-situ upgrading means that houses classified as kutcha are demolished and a new house is erected on the same site. Kutcha houses are usually built of corrugated iron, cardboard or plastic sheets. Pucca houses are normally built in brick or concrete and do not qualify for redevelopment projects.

**Relocation**

For slum dwellers that are not able to get secure land tenure, the Alliance works to support resettlement, or relocation projects. This means that the residents are moved to a new area, either nearby or in another part of town, where new houses are being constructed.
Relocation is often used for slum areas that have been built along railways or other dangerous places. Another reason could be that the land has become too valuable as the city is growing.

**Challenges with in-situ upgrading**

Even though in-situ upgrading is to prefer, there are some challenges connected to the model. Creating a good living environment in these often very dense areas is a major challenge. Limited space, cramped pathways, long and narrow plots make both logistics and actual construction rather complicated. Implementing water and sewer lines as well as securing accessible pathways for fire fighters is often a major difficulty.

Another challenge with in-situ upgrading is that alternative houses have to be arranged for the families while construction is going on. Also, the process of sorting out land issues is often long and complicated. There is a risk that some residents lose hope because of the sometimes slow development.

So, why is in-situ upgrading still preferred by the Alliance? The main reason is that this approach respects the residents. In-situ upgrading means that you can take advantage of existing qualities and also provides an opportunity to gradually improve the area. The houses can be upgraded when the residents have the opportunity and finances and with respect to the way life is lived.
Slum Redevelopment in Odisha

The Alliance is active in 225 settlements in five cities in Odisha. There are about 9,000 members under the Alliance fold, indirectly serving at least five times that many households through their work.

The Alliance in Odisha

In Odisha, SPARC is present through its partner organisation Urban and Development Resource Centre (UDRC) that also work closely with Mahila Milan and NSDF. UDRC is providing support to Community Based Organisations and linking them with formal institutions. They serve as a platform and catalyst for a decentralised, bottom-up, women-led organisational process. UDRC has built community and individual toilets, installed water and drainage in a number of areas throughout Odisha. They have also assisted with land negotiations and secured land for around 5000 households.

In Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, UDRC and Mahila Milan have been appointed to conduct city wide socio-economic surveys as a part of implementing RAY. Community-led surveys have been carried out and will be the basis on which slum settlements and households are selected for upgrading, either in-situ or relocation.

Odisha is one of the least urbanised states in India with only 13% population in urban areas as per census data. Urban poverty is estimated to be around 42% which is much higher than the national average of 30%. About 20 to 30% of the urban population live in slums. The fact that the state is being constantly hit by natural disasters makes the poverty situation even worse and the cities have to deal with people immigrating due to the problems of salination of agriculture land, destruction of trees causing lack of firewood, lack of employment and access to resources.

ASF-Sweden has been involved in projects in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Puri. This includes both in-situ upgrading and areas where relocation is the only solution. On the following pages this projects are presented.

Slum Redevelopment in Odisha

The Alliance is active in 225 settlements in five cities in Odisha. There are about 9,000 members under the Alliance fold, indirectly serving at least five times that many households through their work.

The Alliance in Odisha

In Odisha, SPARC is present through its partner organisation Urban and Development Resource Centre (UDRC) that also work closely with Mahila Milan and NSDF. UDRC is providing support to Community Based Organisations and linking them with formal institutions. They serve as a platform and catalyst for a decentralised, bottom-up, women-led organisational process. UDRC has built community and individual toilets, installed water and drainage in a number of areas throughout Odisha. They have also assisted with land negotiations and secured land for around 5000 households.

In Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, UDRC and Mahila Milan have been appointed to conduct city wide socio-economic surveys as a part of implementing RAY. Community-led surveys have been carried out and will be the basis on which slum settlements and households are selected for upgrading, either in-situ or relocation.

Odisha is one of the least urbanised states in India with only 13% population in urban areas as per census data. Urban poverty is estimated to be around 42% which is much higher than the national average of 30%. About 20 to 30% of the urban population live in slums. The fact that the state is being constantly hit by natural disasters makes the poverty situation even worse and the cities have to deal with people immigrating due to the problems of salination of agriculture land, destruction of trees causing lack of firewood, lack of employment and access to resources.

ASF-Sweden has been involved in projects in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Puri. This includes both in-situ upgrading and areas where relocation is the only solution. On the following pages this projects are presented.
Nayapalli is a small and centrally located slum in Bhubaneswar where UDRC has been engaged with in-situ upgrading for several years. Like in all other Alliance projects, construction here has been designed, supervised and implemented by the federation and local groups. ASF –Sweden has been working with UDRC and the community in Nayapalli in 2010, 2012 as well as in 2014.

Nayapalli was originally part of a larger farming area. The residents have lived in the settlement for many generations. The majority of them have proof of land ownership while the houses generally are in very poor condition. As the city has grown the land available for the community has become smaller. Also, space in the area has become very scarce as a result of families getting bigger and new generations are added. Flooding as well as strong monsoon winds often hit the area which leads to a continuous need of maintenance for many of the residents.

**Housing design and infrastructure planning**

During the autumn 2010, ASF-Sweden worked together with UDRC in their ongoing in-situ project in Nayapalli which includes both houses and infrastructure. By then, UDRC had already been working with the community for several years. The layout of the area had been done, some houses were under construction but infrastructure had yet not been delivered. Also what had been discovered was that although the municipality had provided some standard drawings for the houses, almost all of them needed to be customized according to plot conditions and family priorities. The requirement for the houses was 25 sqm and the families should contribute with 10% of the construction cost.

In discussions with the residents some priorities for the housing designs were set up. NSDF and ASF-Sweden did additional measurings of some of the more complicated plots. The plots in question were generally very small and required houses with limited footprint. The proposals made by ASF included both two- and three-storey buildings. With these drawings, UDRC continued the dialogue with the families and the drawings were consequently adjusted. ASF-Sweden also participated in early planning dis-
Discussions about implementation of infrastructure in the area. This included connecting water and sewer lines to the municipal system as well as building roads within the area. A preliminary infrastructure plan was drawn up.

When ASF returned two years later, a majority of the houses had been finalised or were at least under construction. Some plots were still pending construction due to land issues or lack of money.

**Infrastructure development and community centre**

The ASF participation in Nayapalli in 2014 was a continuation of the previous work in 2010. The work at this stage focused on infrastructure for the settlement and a new community centre.

The work included input to the work with the ongoing infrastructure plan. Another part of this work was to propose various examples of sustainable small-scale solutions for water, sewagerage, solid waste, electricity, energy, urban agriculture, roads, drainage and garbage disposal. The different alternatives were analysed and compared. Desirable from UDRC was that the various solutions, in addition to being durable and cost beneficial, should complement each other and add value to the residents in the area.

In addition, the work included to develop sketches together with the residents of the development of the existing community centre in the area. One of the important factors was to create secure spaces for women and children. There were some constraints for the design because of the existing community centre that the community wanted to keep and the site being very small, in combination with the many functions that were wished for. Finally, the proposed design included an angan wadi (play school) with an outdoor playing ground which in the evenings can be used for adult education, courses and meetings. The building also included toilets and bath for community use, a medical centre, a community office, a kitchen and rentable upper floor for ceremonies and parties, all in about 100 m².

**PROJECT FACT**

September - November 2010  
Anna Synderå (Engvall), architect  
Ingrid Svenkvist, architect  
Anna Olsson, planner/architect  
This exchange was financed by ASF-Sweden and Wernstedtska resestipendiet, Chalmers University of technology.

January-February 2014  
Helena Ohlsson, planner/urban designer  
Anna Vindelman, planner/urban designer  
Edit Humble, architect student  
This exchange was made possible by a grant from FFNS Foundation.
Gokha Sahi and Mangala Sahi are two former fisherman villages on the city edge of Puri. As the city grows, these areas are gradually being integrated in the city structure. The Alliance together with the residents is managing an in-situ upgrading of the areas. ASF-Sweden participated in an early stage of the project in 2010.

Both Gokha Sahi and Mangala Sahi are located along a thoroughfare close to the city boundary, about 3 km from the city centre. This is an area full of religious buildings and ghats. It was once the countryside but is now becoming an integrated part of the city. The built-up area is mainly on the south side of the road and has a mixture of large solid structures and more traditional clay houses and corrugated steel shacks. Mangala Sahi is a green village with large open spaces while Gokha Sahi has a more urban quality, combining a dense structure with few open spaces, a vibrant main street, local street shops and small pathways connecting the other plots.

The occupied land is owned by the residents while much of the surrounding open space is owned by the municipality. The upgrading of Puri is part of a governmental scheme, covering 800 of the 2500 inhabitants, and includes both housing and infrastructure. UDRC started their involvement in the area after the municipality had proposed a plan that stirred protests as it did not take the existing plot boundaries or the solid houses into consideration.

During 2010 ASF-Sweden assisted in the survey of the area together with the Alliance. The ASF team carried out analysis and made a first sketch of the area layout and proposed house types. In addition to the sketches, a document with design guidelines was put together to highlight some of the main findings. The guidelines were focusing on four aspects: indoor, outdoor, ventilation and identity.
The proposed layout plan of the area tried to include existing qualities such as small shops, squares, semi-private areas, verandas and greeneries. It also facilitated a future densification by proposing how to connect internal roads.

The plots in the areas are small and irregular. On some of them it is hard to fit a functional home of 25 sqm which was required. The possibility for families to collaborate and together create useful semi-private outdoor spaces was discussed. Although, a number of benefits could be seen with this suggestion, it was difficult to implement since the majority of the land was already privately owned and therefore represent a value for the owner.

Another principle that the guidelines stressed was that the house should reflect the daily life of the inhabitants. Besides creating a more durable structure, the redevelopment is also a possibility to add qualities to the houses that will facilitate and improve the daily life for the families. This could for example include an improved indoor climate.

In the beginning of 2013 ASF-Sweden revisited the project. By then, a number of houses had been constructed according to the early plan. However, sewerage had not yet been implemented.

**PROJECT FACT**

September - November 2010

Anna Synderå (Engvall), architect

Ingrid Svenkvist, architect

Anna Olsson, planner/architect

This exchange was financed by ASF-Sweden and Wernstedtska resestipendiet, Chalmers University of Technology.
The Cuttack Ring Road Resettlement

The slums along the Ring Road, in the city of Cuttack, are hit by floods and therefore need to be relocated. In 2011, a team of professionals from SPARC, KRVIA (a university in Mumbai) and ASF-Sweden worked with the settlement to develop a plan for a new area.

Cuttack is located about 20 km northeast of Bhubaneswar. The city is situated at the beginning of the Mahanadi river delta and is surrounded by the river and its tributaries Kathjori, Kuakhai and Birupa from almost all sides. Cuttack used to be the seat of government in Odisha for close to a thousand years, before its burgeoning size forced the creation of a new capital at Bhubaneswar in 1948. Today Cuttack has a population of about 600,000 people.

The Cuttack Ring Road resettlement project consists of 14 slums and 1500 households. Today, the settlements are situated in water logged areas or between the Ring Road and the river and are therefore flooded every monsoon.

During 2011, ASF-Sweden participated in the work and planning of the new relocation site. The work included inventory, analysis, plan components and proposal for the relocation site and were jointly carried out by Mahila Milan, UDRC, SPARC, KRVIA and ASF-Sweden.

The inventory and analysis were important tools to identify and understand the qualities in the existing settlements and to develop them in the new area.

The base of the inventory was a socio-economic survey, hand drawn maps and GPS-mapping of the areas. For the analysis the data were compiled and complemented with field visits, interviews and dialogues with community leaders and people living in the areas. The settlements were documented through photographs and measurements of houses and outdoor spaces.

An important finding in the analysis was the great importance of semi-private and semi-public spaces. Semi-private space is used for private purpose, but here you can also interact with close neighbours. This can for example be a veranda. Semi-public space is shared between a limited number of households and is a place where one can interact or meet neighbours e.g. a shared courtyard. These places have the multipurpose of serving both as a place for domestic work and a place to socialize. They fill a major role of social life in the areas. The analysis showed that they were especially important for the women who more seldom left the vicinity. In slum upgrading and slum redevelopment the focus is often on the building and the space in-between the houses are often neglected. In this project the importance and design of these spaces were highlighted.

The plan components that were developed included recommendations for:

- Plan structure
- Livelihood
- Architecture
- Environmental aspects
- Social aspects
- Maintenance
- Process

During 2012 a proposal was developed for the relocation site based on the analysis and plan components. Unfortunately the project has been on hold because of litigation since 2012.

In the beginning of 2014, ASF went to Cuttack to follow up their work and to discuss the continuation of the project.

**Project Fact**

September - December 2011 and January - February 2014

Helena Ohlsson, planner/urban designer
Anna Vindelman, planner/urban designer

ASF’s participation was made possible by a grant from FFNS Foundation.
Student Projects and Other Studies

One part of the collaboration is master student projects with the purpose of Swedish architect and planning students doing their master thesis in India in participation with SPARC. Since 2008, six students have made their diploma works through contact with ASF-Sweden and SPARC. All students have spent time with representatives from SPARC in Mumbai in the beginning of their stay. This gives an orientation of the work of the organisation, the problems behind the upcoming of slums and the ongoing work with slum upgrading.

Gendered spaces

The study explores the relation between built form and socio-cultural relationships with Dharavi in Mumbai as a case. It explores gender segregation and the relation between use of space and urban form and in what way the built structure and its functions influence the everyday life. The thesis is based on, and discusses, theories about globalisation, public space, use of space and gender relationships.

The data collected in field through observations and interviews shows a difference in use, activities and access within the three analysed areas of Dharavi. In Mumbai, where land prices and density are high and the political vision aim to create a world-class city, the present schemes are market-driven with multistorey buildings planned from a top-down perspective. The housing situation for the urban poor has not been solved and many of the new areas are criticised as problematic and turning into new vertical slums. The discussion brings attention to the local relationships and the importance of understanding the local context as well as social and cultural constructions in development projects of slum areas. In redevelopment processes, the space in between buildings as well as socio-cultural aspects are often neglected. A difference in accessibility and movement between groups in relation to build form may enlighten the discussion of how the development of our cities influence the way life is lived. The gender segregation in India today, where women often are restricted to the space close to their homes, illustrate the importance of semi-public spaces between buildings and the access to public spaces. The effect on the daily life and social sustainability is further on discussed as a proposal for urban form as enabling instead of restricting.

Helena Ohlsson
Blekinge Institute of Technology
2008-2009
From Different Perspectives

The aim of the thesis was to gain a greater understanding of the difficulties and possibilities with slums and slum upgrading in both theory and practice, and to answer the questions of what a slum is and how its physical conditions can be improved.

One part of the thesis was to perform a field study in Bhubaneswar in a slum area called Salia Sahi. Through visual observations, key person interviews and literature studies information was gathered. After analysing the gathered information a proposal on slum upgrading was created for Salia Sahi. This proposal was presented for the people at UDRC who commented and gave remarks which were put together in an assessment of our proposal. Well back in Sweden the assessment were continued and the work focused on different perspectives on slum upgrading, taking inspiration from what was learnt on site in Bhubaneswar.

“Performing our thesis we learnt that it is of great importance to build relations between actors, to let it take time and to nurture it for a long term perspective. The work with soft and solid matters is equally important, so upgrading not only provides new houses but also teaches the inhabitants means to take care of their new dwelling and handle their household finances so they are able to keep it.”

Farming in the City

The study aims to explore how urban agriculture can contribute to slum upgrading in a developing country such as India. In order to investigate the aim, a case study has been carried out in Mumbai and Pune, with focus on the situation in Mumbai. The study looks at the examples of urban agriculture that can be found and cultivation techniques that are used. Furthermore, the main challenges for urban agriculture in Mumbai are investigated. Finally the report explores how urban agriculture can be introduced in slum upgrading schemes in Mumbai.

Through interviews and observations, a number of different types of urban agriculture practices, such as railway farming, beach farming and community farming along with different types of rooftop farming, were discovered. These turned out to be a mix of formal and informal activities, performed by people from various socio-economic backgrounds. Some of the farmers produced cash crops while others had it as a hobby. Different actors view on urban agriculture in the fast growing city of Mumbai, was also included in the study.

“Our study taught us that the physical conditions in terms of building design and available resources and materials are possible to overcome with innovative use of space and the right cultivation techniques.”

Lena Johansson and Emma Joseffson
Blekinge Institute of Technology
2010-2011

Ellen William-Olsson Heed and
Pernilla Knutsson
KTH Royal Institute of Technology
2012
Participation in upgrading of Informal Settlements

The aim of this study was to explore how participation can take place in slum upgrading and also put this subject in context of rationality. The study focus on different group’s approaches and ideas towards participatory planning. To enable a feasible study and exam the subject, a case study was carried out, based on interviews and observations. An in-situ project in the city of Pune was chosen as the case of this study since this project involve public participation. The study also puts focus on in-situ scheme as a model for a more inclusive way of upgrading slums. Furthermore the study investigates potential conflicts of interests with the participation approach used in the case project. Different rationalities that are embedded in the case project are investigated. Two main rationalities are identified. A clash between the two rationalities can also be identified.

“My experience of this study is that participation can help to decrease the clash between the different types of rationality. The study shows that participation can be successful with the help of NGOs and CBOs that are already known to the locals.”

Karl Fyhr
Stockholm University
2012

Bhubaneswar and Cuttack Wastescape

In this thesis, the wastescape of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack was studied through interviews with waste pickers and municipal officials as well as site visits to e.g. waste transit stations, waste picking and trading communities, a land fill and a recycling factory.

A wastescape could be described as the spatial network and flow of waste through a city or area. This incorporates both formal and informal waste management systems as well as consumption and wasting behaviours. In India, both environmental and social issues are of great importance when it comes to waste management. Sediments in Bhubaneswar largely consist of waste; low density plastics clog drains and worsen flooding, leachate contaminates fresh water and plastic is eaten by stray animals. The recycling in Odisha depends solely on the informal waste pickers reclaiming waste materials to sell for their livelihood.

Although waste pickers in Bhubaneswar earn more than rickshaw drivers and maids, their working conditions are extremely poor and their work is looked down upon by most of society.

The thesis propose a catalogue with a series of interventions, of varying scales and complexity, ranging from very practical to artistic solutions, which serve as inspiration and suggestions for local residents, artists, NGOs, municipalities or the state government to carry out.

“We believe that the problems of waste cannot be solved only by working on an abstract, formal scale, but that the work of the many informal waste handlers should be recognized and interventions designed to improve their livelihood.”

Linda Ringqvist and Oskar Gudehn
KTH Royal Institute of Technology
2014
Saving by sharing

This study was carried out through interviews and field visits, parallel to ASF-Sweden’s involvement in Bhubaneswar and Puri in 2010. It focused on the possibilities of collaborative housing in the sense of organising common dining in order to save money. It turned out that dining and cooking is a difficult thing to share. Different castes don’t share meals, due to the belief of purity and “pollution”. Another limitation for people to socialize or eat together is the different economic groups. Once you get a better income, better or different food will be on your plate. If there are different religions different food is on the table. Although applicable in a homogenous area, all India is a mix of different areas and different traditions when it comes to food. In Puri and Bhubaneswar the people were from the same area and mostly with the same religious background. Most were out of the same caste, but not all and the food served was according to the affordability of the family.

Other ways of “saving by sharing” were also investigated in upgrading projects in Puri. For example, in one multi-storey house, the possibility to create a common space for toilet and shower on the ground floor were discussed. The background for this proposal was that buildings with several stories require a water pump and during power cuts -during the monsoon happens a few hours daily- the upper floors will not have functioning water or toilets. Energy can also be dependent on whether the electricity bills are paid or not. The argument used towards municipality for this idea was that they did not quite have 25 square meters to build on this specific plot. Pointing out the problem of power cuts or lacking electricity lines would be criticizing the authorities. The common space at the entry floor on this building was never built. If you are promised privacy after living in shared space and under poor conditions for so long you can only imagine what jeopardizing that chance would mean.

Anna Synderå (Engvall)
Wernstedtska resestipendiet, Chalmers University of Technology
2010
Reflections

Through our collaboration with SPARC, we have had the opportunity to experience some of the challenges of working with slum redevelopment. It has also been a possibility for us to learn more about working as an architect/planner in a foreign context and furthermore, working in a community-driven process. The experiences have been both on a personal and on a professional level. For the continuation of the collaboration with SPARC it is valuable for us to reflect on these experiences.

**Working in a community-driven process**

Working as an architect in a community-driven process, is in many ways different from working with a traditional client. As SPARC has pointed out to us – a house is more than a product, it is a process. It is therefore important to differ between the local processes and the need for the architectural profession. The NGO or the community themselves should always be in charge of the process while, hopefully, the architect is asked for only when the profession of the architect is needed. The competence that an architect can offer is one that the local community does not usually have itself and often can not afford to buy. However, as an architect one must not start processes which breed unrealistic expectations among people. To be able to assist in a fruitful way, it is important to really listen to the community who are the experts on their situation.

**The outsiders perspective**

As architects and planners, getting to know a new site and a new context, is a common feature in many projects. Working with slum redevelopment in general, and in India in particular, has however been new to most of us. It is therefore a necessity to work as integrated as possible in the ongoing local process and, while working, doing so in an open and inclusive way, and to avoid forcing things into an own frame of how things shall work. On the other hand the advantages of coming from “outsid-
de” and not fully understanding - for example the cultural context - is that one can ask “stupid” questions that will give new perspective on thing. This can breed positive discussions and hopefully new and better solutions can come out of it. New perspectives and new knowledge is the biggest benefit and joy for both the visiting architect and for the local community.

Learning from India

One valuable experience from taking part in projects run by the Alliance is a new understanding of how a participatory approach can be taken a step further than we often experience in Sweden. This means not only consulting the community, but actually letting the community be in charge of the process and thereby having a real possibility to influence their future living conditions. The Alliance approach shows that long-term change is achieved only by building the capacity of communities to contrast forced evictions and develop affordable housing solutions adapted to local needs. The work is done collectively at some or all stages of every project, and it powerfully demonstrates that residents can be the agents, rather than the recipients, of their own development. As the local community is the primary supervisor of the architectural work, technical knowledge and empowering processes can develop hand-in-hand to create solutions that ultimately affect the whole city and its residents.