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Delhi between potentiality and crashing

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Picture 1. View of the city of Delhi

Delhi is usually said to be a city that came out from nowhere, a big metropolis with no past and with an uncertain future, without a coherent historic identity that characterize it. It is a very ancient territory, populated since the middle ages of the sultanate, when it had already been the location of seven ancient Moghul cities, and represented an important crossroads for merchants and migration flows. Delhi conquered his role of capital only at the beginning of the 20th century when, for political reasons, Indian capital was moved there from Calcutta.

To tell the truth, Delhi did not go through a stratified development to whom we could refer as we have been doing for Italian cities since the Middle Ages until today: it did not grow in an homogeneous way but it is the result of unpredictable and inorganic additions. Even if it happened recently, the capital started to show a multiple and at the same time resolute temper, both in urban-architectonic and cultural-anthropological terms. A very important aspect of the plans, even if unrealised, as described along the contribution is the ability of understanding the peculiarities of the different areas and translating them in a project point of view.

Becoming Capital

Delhi started to develop its urban identity in 1911 when a group of planners, guided by the English architect Edward Lutyens, was commissioned to prepare the plan. The project had to guarantee the representative places and the “*loisir*” places of a capital range.

The further intention was to underline, from a territorial point of view, the grandeur of the monumental architectures of the former empires, disposing green areas protected by enclosures, creating in this way several points of interest surrounding the various archaeological sites.

Even today, while moving through the boulevards of Delhi, it is possible to see parts of the ancient city emerging behind the thin gates of ASI (Archaeological Survey of India).

These enclosures, questionable from an aesthetic point of view, were put there after the coming of the first two massive groups of refugees: the first one after to

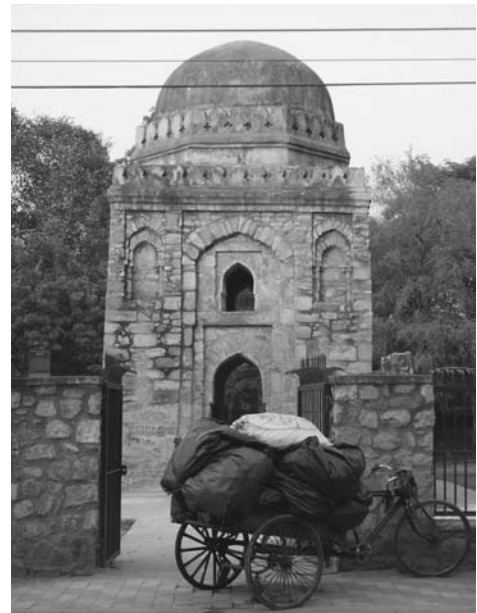


the liberation of India from English colonisation; the second one during the period of tension under the government of Indira Gandhi in the 1970s.

Lots of refugees from Pakistan and from Punjab firstly camped inside the mosques and Moghul mausoleums walls; then occupied empty partitions and areas. In the late 1950s, right after the massive post-partition demographic growth, it was created the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), a governmental organism of supervision with the task of managing the organization of public areas and planning housing projects.



Picture 2. Shajhanabad: inside the court of an Haveli



Picture 3. Ancient Moghul ruins

The Plans

After few years, in 1962, the first Master Plan was written, which was realised by Albert Mayer and a staff of experts coming mainly from America, invited by the Ford Foundation, but always in direct contact with the Indian government.

This first plan was in effect until the '80s, when something changed due to several factors: the second migration wave during the emergency period, the important changes brought by the project for the Asian Games of 1982 and the industrial development of some suburban areas. The immigrants, arrived to the city for political reasons or in search of a job, started some urbanisation processes, parallel to the institutional ones, that led to the occupation of big abandoned areas and interstitial territories. They built emergency homes by following informal procedures, sticking one house to the other and generating collective colonies and real urban sub-areas. Entire blocks of the city were born principally because of the



real people's needs of a place where to live, rather than because of predictions or prescriptions of the plans.

Then the geopolitical dynamics were strongly interconnected with socio-economic events that are reflecting in current affairs: specifically the liberalization of Indian economy and the coming into effect of the 74th Amendment Act.

The economic liberalization in India, at the start of the '90s, did not benefit from the experience or the mistakes made by western countries; and the political decentralisation after the 74th Amendment Act opened the collectivity's mind to the idea of a larger active democracy.

In the specific case of Delhi, all this led to a re-edition of the second Master Plan in 2001 and to the following passage of a third new and much discussed Master Plan for 2021.

Following the current legislation, every plan lasts effectively for a period of two decades at the end of which the running plan is re-designed, as to say corrected and modified considering the mistakes or the necessities which emerged during the period in which the former plan was effective. The second version of the first plan (MP2001) came into effect only in the '90s. The version denominated Delhi Master Plan 2021 came into effect in 2001 and it is currently effective and potentially valid until 2021.



Picture 4-5. Shajhanhabad: composite pattern of the ancient city

The old two Master Plans of 1962 and 2001 were based on a fluid and organic model, in which the simplicity of movement and the functionality of the transports were the most significant points.

Specifically the re-edition of 2001 did not consider the right transformations related to the economic development that took place in several areas of the city, mainly in the south where little manufacturing farms were born in Okhla and in Noida since the '70s. These new industrial work spaces attracted considerable migration flows and were the cause of the huge growth of city demography: according to the *Census of India*, the citizens were about four millions in 1971 and today they are more than seventeen millions.

The mistakes in the planning process are the inability to interpret the progress tendencies in a realistic way and some lacks in the planning, to which were added complications due to the melting pot of the different socio-cultural tendencies, and to the increasing gap between rich and poor people, not to mention the divergent opinions about development.

Distances incremented by the fight between multinationals interests in managing new economy spaces, on one hand, and, on the other, the preservation of the territory and traditions by those who think that India has still something to learn from his villages.

The last plan was very criticized because for the heavy impacts that it had on the city and its folks in the different areas, as in the infrastructural contest as in the welcoming areas for athletes and tourists, referencing specifically to Commonwealth Games of 2010.

The Games

The sports event could have been a really good excuse for building better roads, public spaces, blocks and infrastructure would have led to the rise of the average level of life quality. What has been done came out to be more a media operation than a good chance to make sustainable developments, and even brought negative consequences under different aspects.

Even Italian press reported these theories. In addition to the description of several problems related to the corruption that had been developing during the seven years of works that preceded the games, it's necessary to point out the disastrous conditions of the houses built for the athletes, that, together with the fall of some structures in construction, had put at risk the inauguration ceremony until one week before the start of the games.

The dismemberments for the realization of new housing areas, caused collective traumas because of the forced removals and the perpetuation of not tolerable social violences towards the residents of the slums. Demolitions annihilated the pre-existent neighbourhood relationships and human relations inside the old informal blocks, while the new urban and architectonic developments produced an ulterior fragmentation and proliferation of living islands in the middle of urban tissues with no designed homogeneity. Housing speculation episodes impoverished local potentialities and resources, substituting vernacular architectures with *gated*



communities and, more frequently, with no energetically sustainable buildings, conceived with no aesthetic criteria.

The ways suggested by the spontaneous forms of resistance and fight against cultural globalization are, still today, valid alternative solutions, supported by the intelligentsia and by the local academy, that contrast the architectonic propositions of the managers who are far from admitting the impact and the responsibility that architecture can have on the contemporary city.

The re-collocation colonies in the marginal parts of the current urban body, that stands in awful hygienic-sanitary conditions, were the chosen place for the forced removals of entire groups of poor people: they were allowed to access the compensatory program according to a selection, that media and local activists accused to be unconstitutional because of the non objective criteria followed for the assignation of the lands.

The current state of indefiniteness and of “unfinished”, that still floats among the piles of rubble of the new roads and the realization of new all-inclusive blocks, gave the impulse for an effort to re-define the plan. The following state of calm of the post-games period opened the way to the re-definition of the entire project.

In fact the result seems to be the re-opening of a dialogue between institutions, citizens and politics in a transformative perspective aiming a well-guided creation of an inclusive and unitary Delhi.

There is a big debate about this, as the two following interviews witness, with different and sometimes contrasting accents. Debate that agrees with the fact that Delhi still resists to the globalization attacks, thanks to the strength of its citizens: it seems, in fact, that the capability to resist to global transformations is one of its aces in the hole for the future.



Picture 6. Athletes village, commonwealth Games 2010





Picture 7. Athletes village, commonwealth Games 2010

State planning liberalism, violent welfare

K.T. Ravindran, professor and director at the Urban Design Department of the School of Planning and Architecture of New Delhi till April 2009, he was also the founder and president of the Institute of Urban Designers, vice-president of the commission created by the Indian government to control the environmental impact of massive architectural projects, and even the former president of DUAC (Delhi Urban Art Commission), the institutional organism commissioned to take care of the urban equilibrium between aesthetic, respect for the environment, preservation and new architectural developments.

The government of Delhi, after the partition period, drew up the first Master Plan, followed by new drafts. Which are the differences between the three plans?

First of all, after the partition between India and Pakistan the government decided to create an organism responsible for the supervision of planning: more exactly in 1956 the Delhi Development Authority was founded and few years after the first Master Plan of Delhi was redacted, specifically in 1962.

To be more exact, all of the re-editions of the plans are valid each for twenty years, also if in reality the extension of the first plan came into effect in 1991 and the second extension in 2007. The latest one that is in force is hypothetically valid until 2021 and in fact the plan is called New Delhi Master Plan 2021.

To tell the truth, the new drafts are nothing new, basically they are the extensions of the first one and the same mistakes and the inaccuracies have not been corrected or considered for improve the new urban management politics.



Who are you talking about?

I'm talking about the economic transformation that followed one another in the last years, causing changes in the politics and urban assets. The first Master Plan was an instrument generated by the approach to the socialist styled urban governance. The government in fact created a system of regulation and management of the territory, taking a very important role in the management of the use and worth of the ground, and in the prospective of the city development. But, unfortunately, this first plan permitted the proliferation of illegal situations aside the planned legal developments. Attitude that got worst after the edition of the second plan, redacted in 1988 and potency since 1991; this mostly because all the mistakes, committed during the period of validity of the first plan were not corrected in the following extensions, but contrary they were amplified by the echoes which followed the trade liberalization and the arrival of new private investors in the economic management of the capitals invested in the city development. All this strongly polarized, enlarged and worsened the contrast, already very diffused in the city, between the presence of legality and illegality.

Can you give us any example?

Even if, for example, following the prescriptions of the first Master Plan, DDA had the responsibility for the control of the lands, having the position to decide for the entire development of the city, in a neohuman perspective following the socialist model, assuring this way more attention towards social housing and community politics, the government did not fulfil any of its promises, provoking, like answer to that, occupation of illegal soils by the poor people, who found themselves obliged to invent alternative solutions facing the lack of real proposition that are coming from the institutions.

The plan was repeatedly violated: thing that has been getting worst along the time because of the inaccuracy of the second edition that didn't provide any correction to the mistakes of the first one, but on the contrary accentuated the scissor between legality and illegality. Binomial which is to be considered in a very serious way, evaluating, for first, how much the land and its use could have a different impact or grade of attention, if the legal violation was committed on the poor people or on the rich people.

As to say: if poor people take possession of a certain area in an illegal way, and build houses with salvaged materials and undulating plates, they will always be at risk of eviction or forced removal, on the contrary, if rich people do the same kind of violation, but using different materials as luxury marbles or fine finishes, the government will try to accelerate the legalization processes because of its interest in an economical expansion politic, always thinking that growth power is always the better choice about development.

Basically, the differences between the old government will and the liberalization economic politic, have been increased.

Government and DDA, was compared to an elephant, too slow to follow the transformations caused by the new economic boom.



Urban development minister, Mr. Khamal Nath, claims that the Master Plan, and the following three, are nothing but absolutely useless documents that have no interest in terms of sustainable development for the city and its folks, furthermore he says that it would be absolutely necessary to rewrite it considering the current temper en essence of the city. To say the truth the new economy and the socialism styled management of the governance, by which the plan was created, are absolutely not capable to communicate one with each other in a constructive and proactive way.

In which way, this reflects on the organic growth of the city?

How can we speak about organic growth? Implicit in the concept of organic growth there's a reference to a kind of development not directly controllable with pre-imposed rules, as much as to an informal growth that, even if not guided, doesn't lack internal logic. After the 90s the city yielded to the growing economical interests of the banks, of the new rich Indians and of the foreigner investors, responsible for its development through actions that don't really correspond to the development described in the plan. In the capital, the 80% of the urban development is represented by informal organizations and aggregation systems, fact that remarks in a very clear way how strong is the contradiction between the idea of future imagined by the government and the one followed by the majority of the citizens. The role of the state itself, and of its capability to decide, is more and more reduced and has less and less influence on the possible urban evolutions. Speaking about this, we can take as an example the very representative fact that the government reduced its actions aimed at generating progress and collective wellness: think about the *Factory Act* of 2005, act that caused the close-down of little informal industries, because they represented an emanation of illegality, to substitute them with a regulation system for the use of the land, absolutely favourable for rich people, and with no consideration for the consequences that these measures would have caused to the equilibrium of entire parts of the city. In Bhavana, in the south of the city, more than two millions people lost their jobs, following the prescriptions of the act, that claims the necessity to sell lots of at least of the measures of hundred squared meters for an industrial use, with the consequent close-down of the farms, situated in areas described by the plan as housing zones but actually used as areas for illegal work places.

This example is a cameo of how the government is moving in the direction of capitalist investments, taking advantage of the opportunities given by its early idea of a socialism styled politic: once the lands were taken, damaging in this way the former occupants, the lands have been gifted to rich investors that made circulate much more money than the former occupants did. The control and management of the lands turned completely to the benefit of an economical development filtrated by governmental decisions.

Again in the *Factory Act*, in the cases where the previsions were respected, the standards related to the infrastructural benefits are completely in the detriment of the workers: is evident think about the fact that for hundred mq of industrial surface only the present of nine workers are considered; and the access to minimal



habitations and services are evaluated in accord to this number of workers, but it often happens that these zones are occupied by more than ten workers who and are not safeguarded nor protected with the right services.

How could we explain the oversight of collective wellness and good governance of the government?
This is an example could be confirmed by thousands of others: like the fact that less and less houses for poor people are previewed and on the contrary large portions of lands are used to build houses for the rich and the middle class, in a total orientation dominated by the economy power. Common citizens don't get advantage of any real power: building multiplies and the price of tomatoes doubles with no effective protection for the social status.

Lots of social injustices have been committed towards the citizens, before and after the Commonwealth Games. What's the situation today?

To say the truth nothing really effective has been done. There is not the complete freedom to express your opinion about that: government doesn't appreciate much negative judgements about its work. For example for the construction of the metro lines lots of trees were cut down. For every single cut down tree other four were planted to replace it, but inside the forest. Naturally this is constantly justified by fake statistics capable of mystifying reality.

The city risks to acquire the face of a multinational city, with no areas conceived for children, for women, for elder people, disabled people or animals, all kinds of necessities which are not considered in the concept of development of the plan.

Poor and ordinary people don't absolutely take part to the global imagination.

As an answer to this, what kind of city do you imagine for 2021? Which possible solution for a better city?

I imagine homes for everybody, and a decent job too..... Global scenarium is producing areas like Gurgaon, new suburbs conceived for global investments.

I wish there was a capitals control on the governance management, and that we went back to a more socialist conception of the welfare state. Just give up with this kind of economy, the result of a less and less sustainable growth.





Picture 8. Pre-Commonwealth Games works in progress

The opportunity of an unstable palimpsest

Ravi Sundaram is one of the founders of Sarai, a program of CSDS, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. His interest is for the intersection between the post-colonial city and urban experiences mediated by contemporary media.

His last book titled “Pirate Modernity” is the description of illicit forms of urbanism inspired and generated by the media and by the technological infrastructures in the post-colonial city.

Which are the most visible changes in the city after the Games of 2010?

Day by day sports events are becoming, in the global system of reference, event of economical mobilization. In the case of Delhi the Games were the perfect pretest to raise the city standards to the level of those of a global city: opening the doors to commerce and mobilizing big flows of money to use them for the construction of infrastructures, and stadiums. Today the city, for example, has lots of tall buildings, skyscrapers. The Games caused the opening of the city to a transformation in terms of shape; this means that, moreover in terms of infrastructures, a public dialogue has started.

In a negative or a positive sense?

Not positive nor negative but, instead, in the sense of creating a creative distraction.

A creative distraction in comparison with the old infrastructural system.

An important amount of money has been spent to improve the infrastructural system: new bus lines, and metro lines, with a renewed attention for the shores of



the Yamuna river. These were substantially the progresses after the Commonwealth games.

It seems that the run for the preparation of the Games stopped due to the inquiries about corruption.

Lets expand our reflection: the evolution statuses of a big city can be calculated in a lapse of ten, twenty, and thirty years. Just think about Barcelona and what happened during the Olympic Games: the city changed in something completely different. In the case of Delhi the city didn't reach the anticipated standards but it succeeded in quite radical transformations, I'm talking about the commercialization of the lands.

A sort of important market influence started in the field of lands worth evaluation and even on the city development in a vertical growth.

A new commercialization brought by the desire of having an home, and in this sense, even the infrastructures and their development started to be a part of the planning for the city.

After the closure of the Commonwealth Games, the commercialization process started to run faster.

Faster?

In a certain way the Games were the climax of a urban crisis that had been going on for five or six years, until we came to the moment where things started to go better.

What connections are there between the Master Plan and ordinary people?

The master Plan as we used to know is dead. Its role becomes more interesting in the cases subdued to the new forms of legal control, mostly referred to the recent commercialization.

The Master Plan never effectively worked, its territorial boundaries neither. It started to go up in value only after the control will, expressed by the supreme constitutional court, connected to the lands use commercialization after 2006. The court, having to decide about the destination of the lands, made use of the Master Plan as an official instrument of reference, but apart from that the Plan is planning model too old for Delhi.

Which are the consequences of the "cleaning" actions after 2006?

The destruction of some places of commerce, and some markets. The parliament first approved the law then suspended it: as a consequence for that we had the re-settlement of some markets. The Master Plan was useful to start a modification process. The consequence is that the modification has now become a continuum, a non-stop as If there was no end to it. This is an hazy situation. The master Plan doesn't absolutely work in any way.



If not the institutions, who can decide for the city development?

Good question. There are no easy solutions, because this is a transitory situation. The Master Plan is not the answer. It would be necessary having a new vision of the way to plan, based on a different approach. The planning division of the Master Plan has no worth ; we would need a completely different approach. It is the planning scale what it isn't good any more, it would have to be reduced to make things a lot easier.

Acting with individual plans for every different zone could be the solution?

May be, but we should start a public debate in relation to this. A debate about what Delhi is today, not about what it could be.

Which was the reaction of the citizens after 1990 and 2006?

There have been lots of arrests for corruption. The city went through a very strong crisis which lasted about six or seven years. Now, after the Games, the situation has calmed down.

But what if demolition started again? If demolition started again, I said if, there would be several protests from the citizens that now are quiet. Everything is so uncertain, for example in suburban areas there are big fights about the takeover of the lands between farmers and the government. Again to create new areas for private housing.

Are the citizens opposing to DDA?

No, they aren't, to tell the truth they're not directly against the government, but against private investors, which anyway are protected by the government.

But this is only happening in the suburbs of Delhi.

Farmers rebelled because government confiscated the lands with the pretext of an industrial development, refunding them for the expropriation with amounts of money correspondent to an industrial-commercial use, to sell them to private investors

at much more elevated prices with the purpose of building housing units.

What do you imagine for the city of the future?

It is really hard question. There's a complete lack of critic urbanism and I can't have a single vision; it's like if I saw several levels of the city.

The palimpsest of a city. Yes, It's like there was several cities one inside the other.





Picture 9. Empty space in the resettlement colony



Picture 10. Resettlement colony

Tutte le immagini sono state scattate da Claudia Roselli in un arco di tempo tra il 2009 e il 2012.

