

DESIGN PRACTICES IN DHARAVI:

Redefinition of the Role of the Architect in the user-generated city

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ABSTRACT

The consequences of the quick and uncontrolled Urbanization of the XX century which led the Third World developing Countries to an exponential increase of informal settlements will constitute a huge challenge of the current and future architects' agenda. The 2016 Venice Biennale represents the first trial to extend the role of these professionals to the social and economic field, according to the urgencies which this informal growth highlights.

The role of the architect has to be redefined in front of these transformations, but how?

My research starts from an extended critical review of the actions which have anticipated this exhibition, trying to define some strategies which could be useful for future designs in these areas. The second step consists in the analyze of the specific context of Dharavi, a slum area which is located in the city of Mumbai, close to the recently built Kurla financial Complex. After two month of direct experience on the field, and thanks to the co-operation with the Urbz office, which supports this homegrown neighbourhood through social and architectural inclusive actions, I've recollected important datas about this scenario, supported by a retrospective



analysis of the previous academic work. Through the review of specific co-operations between Urbz and different studios and researchers acting inside this specific user-generated neighbourhood, I've been able to retrieve common points between internationally recognized actions and more specific strategies, in order to understand how efficiently the first ones can adapt in a specific environment. Dharavi is a place of fragile connections, from the socio-economic networks which define it to the political pressure of authorities which aim to speculate on its land. These conditions are fundamental to discover that the new architect has to understand, before producing every kind of design, the specific issues of the field where he is acting, and the connection he needs to establish with the site has to be the most direct as possible.

The co-operation with local actors, such as the contractors and the artisans of Dharavi, represents the final step of a process which aims to respond to that simple how: together with the Urbz team, I've defined a co-operative procedure which allowed us to produce new models and designs for the most common urban typology which emerges from this context, the tool-house.

