

Rethinking Asian Studies

The Idea of the City in Asian Contexts

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 IIAS

“Urban Democracy: Informality, Precarity and Modes of Survival”

Mumbai, India
10-11 December 2014

Venue:

Studio-X, 4th Floor, Kitab Mahal, 192,
Dadabhai Naoroji Rd, Fort, Mumbai- 400001

A workshop in the context of the “Rethinking Asian Studies” program, sponsored by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (New York) and the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS, Leiden, the Netherlands).

Co-organizers:

Paul Rabé (IIAS, Leiden, the Netherlands) and Anupama Rao (History, Barnard College, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA)

Workshop Format and Texts:

The workshop aims to maximize discussion between participants, each of whom will submit brief concept notes (2-3 pages) drawing on their research and activism. A set of common readings around issues of informalization, precarity and the specificity of informal settlements will form a baseline for discussion. These include:

- Vyjyanthi Rao, “Urbanism Beyond Architecture: African Cities as Infrastructure: A conversation with Felipe de Boek, and Abdou Maliq Simone,” *African Cities Reader*: 23-40.
- Saskia Sassen, “Land Grabs Today: Feeding the Disassembling of National Territories,” *Globalizations*, 10:1: 25-46.
- Ananya Roy, “Slumdog Cities: The Politics of Subaltern Urbanism,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35:2, March 2011.

Concept Note

The megacities of the global South present the paradox of high economic growth coupled with the ubiquity of the “slum” or informal settlement as the primary mode of housing the majority of urban dwellers (UN-Habitat, *Challenge of Slums*, 2003; Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, 2006; Rockefeller, *Century of Cities*, 2009). Informal settlements—slums, *barrios*, *gecekondus*, *favelas*, etc.—are an object of intense investigation and aggressive intervention. At stake are debates about housing as a right versus housing as a commodity; struggles over service provision; and the impact of longer-term policies of redevelopment and rehabilitation policies initiated by international NGOs, the World Bank, UN-Habitat, and other actors. Since informal settlements are a *spatial manifestation* of the *social inequities* that accompany contemporary globalization, discourse and policy intervention about them offer a template for understanding the social consequences of accelerated urban transformation in comparative and global perspective.

The first workshop of the project on “The Idea of the City in Asian Contexts” (New York, 27-28 August 2014) explored the politics of planning—everything from the physicality of the plan to its modes of visibilization—as a critical interface for exploring the relationship between spatial politics and social experience at a moment of neoliberal transformation. The present Mumbai workshop has a specific focus on the informal processes and actors that challenge the plans and programs of urban planners and policy makers alike. The conveners are interested in how historical legacies of planning, spatial segregation and informality have enabled practices of urban inhabitation whose logics challenge the aesthetics of modernism and the accumulative logic of private property. Our interest in urban democracy thus focuses on practices of survival, persistence and illegitimized existence found in the so-called “slums” and “ghettos” of colonial and late capitalist modernity. These spaces have been a refuge for disposable populations, including internally displaced persons, refugees, illegal immigrants—as well as the poor. But they are also sites of emergent forms of life-making practice, improvised and tenuous forms of sociality and social cooperation, and largely illegible political actions and claims that either go unrecognized or become stigmatized as violence, crime, or unproductive and fruitless “mob” behavior (as encapsulated in the notion of urban “riots”). Encroachment, illegality, and the resort to informal livelihood are dense sites of subaltern survival, and define struggles for recognition in the face of spatial exclusion and civic disenfranchisement: even as they concentrate poverty, informal settlements also act as repositories of ingenuity, creativity, and value production.

Though views of slums and the urban poor have evolved over time in response to political and social changes and trends, they reprise the dichotomy between structure and agency, and between a position that holds that the urban poor are caught in structures beyond their control, versus a position that views informal settlements as spaces of potential (John Turner, “Freedom to Build” focusing on self-help housing); sites of collective action and power (e.g., Slum/Shack Dwellers International in Asia and Africa); and as places of untapped property assets. This workshop seeks to go beyond such dichotomous thinking to identify new forms of theorization in policy and the academy vis-à-vis slums, e.g., arguments about ‘subaltern urbanism’ (Roy), ‘political society’ (Chatterjee), and ‘concrete becoming’ (Simone), as well as the practices of associational life and strategies of resistance through which Asian urbanity may be understood as challenging hegemonic models of urban development and planning which developed in response to the experiences of nineteenth century Europe and America.

Workshop Program

Day 1: Wednesday, 10 December

NOTE: Tea/Coffee and light snacks will be available throughout the day

10:30 – 11am	Brief Introduction by the Co-Conveners: Paul Rabé and Anupama Rao
11am – 2pm	<u>Morning Session: Between the formal and the informal: Thinking the 'Asian city'</u> Topics include: Regulation; policy and planning (including financial and juridical instruments like TDR and laws for peri-urbanization); land grab and urban dispossession.
2 – 3pm	Lunch
3 – 6pm	<u>Afternoon Session: Conceiving and Intervening in the “Slum”</u> Topics include: Approaches to the “slum” by governments, donor agencies; civil society and market players; theorizing the “slum” and slum dwellers; power and identity; collective action versus individual market opportunism.
7 – 9:30pm	Evening drinks and dinner

Day 2: Thursday, 11 December

NOTE: Tea/Coffee and light snacks will be available throughout the day

10:30am – 1pm	<u>Morning Session: Segregation and Ghettoization</u> Topics include: How categories of social difference such as migrants, caste, religion, gender are used to produce social and spatial separation; urban riots; political violence; tension among urban subalterns.
1 – 2pm	Lunch
2 – 5pm	<u>Afternoon Session: Housing and Right to the City Struggles</u> Topics include: Cultural and Activist Interventions drawing on the example of discrete case studies across South, Southeast and East Asia on behalf of precarious and un-housed populations, emerging sites of “infrapolitics,” experiments in utilizing public-private partnerships for spatial justice
6 – 8:30 pm	<u>Public Program: “Representing Asian Urbanity”</u> Participants include:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Literary theorist Emily Sun (National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan) on “Representations of East Asian Urbanity” ○ Anand Patwardhan, (documentary filmmaker), clips and commentary on <i>Bombay Hamara Sheher</i> [Bombay Our City] and <i>Jai Bhim Comrade</i> ○ Jerry Pinto (writer, cultural critic) reading from the work of Namdeo Dhasal, Arun Kolatkar, and Narayan Surve with discussion of the literary culture of Marathi modernism <p>***Evening moderated by Jared Stark (Associate Professor, English and Comparative Literature, Eckerd College)***</p>
8:30 – 10pm	<p>Reception</p> <p>Slide show of art on the subaltern city will accompany the reception.</p>