

## Classicising Dharavi

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When OMA in 1987 designed the masterplan for Melun Senart, it decided to define just a clear system of voids, public spaces which allowed to keep a control on the ultimate form of the urban whole. Facing these empty axes, there was a multitude of building blocks where the designers deliberately surrendered to the unpredictability of the future development: the model made for the competition reflects this condition, showing a confused agglomeration of building, an accumulation of people, along with their lives and livelihoods, whose destiny was going to be uncertain. OMA's operation was not different at all from a (neo-)classical city plan where a few open spaces (fora and main squares) and recognisable elements (monuments and civic buildings) defined the image of a city that would have lasted for ages, indifferent to the inevitable transformation of the surrounding areas.

In informal contexts such as Dharavi, and more specifically in Chamba Bazaar, similar operations are possible and somehow needed: while accepting and valuing the complexity of the urban environment, there is the need to define and make clear some directions, to fix some points on a plan that otherwise would keep being barely readable. Therefore, preserving (or liberating) a few key open spaces is necessary to make them work as catalysts of the future development – to attract new identities and capitalise the present ones, to foster the encounter of flows of people, capitals and knowledge from the external areas and highlight even more the nature of receptacle of otherness which Dharavi itself already is.

While these spaces can become the new fora of this potentially contemporary ideal city, what is around them will change its shape and content continuously, including the monuments which delineate the boundaries of such catalytic spatialities. Indeed, they will not be the over-imposed iconic objects of the classic or neoclassic age. But they will not be, either, the chaotic and uncontrollable fragments of OMA's projects. Rather, they will look as monuments embodying the result of long (and still open) processes of negotiation between the several stakeholders, and representing at the same time their disagreements and struggles. New monuments as outcome of layering operations, reflecting both the aspirations of the place and the power relations between the many actors of the urban transformation, both the desires of being represented and the frustrations of whom will not be successful in this quest.

Obviously the form, the function and the ultimate meaning of these monuments and their piazzas could change in the future according to different economic and political contexts, making their built environment definitely the receptacle of the social change. And also, more importantly, the stage of citizens' empowerment, the background for the creation of a shared knowledge, the arena of the struggles for the right-claiming. The space where new forms of citizenship arise, hopefully looking back at the classic ideal of *Cives Romani*, the ones who fully enjoyed and held that right of citizenship itself, not entrapped in a condition of otherness but rather building on such otherness itself to claim a voice in the whole process of urban development.



