DMIC: Decentralization and Other Stories

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When (and if) completed, the Delhi Mumbai Industrial corridor (DMIC) will be the largest and most expensive infrastructure project ever undertaken in the Indian subcontinent. Stretching more than 1480 kilometers between New Delhi and Mumbai, the DMIC, termed a 'mega-project' in infrastructural parlance, is projected to cost well over 100 billion dollars. The mainstay of the DMIC is a transportation 'spine' called the 'Dedicated Freight Corridor' (DFC) Connecting the two largest cities in India, the DFC is essentially a high-speed rail corridor that will radically reduce the time taken for goods to travel from the northern states to the ports on the western coast of the country. The DMIC will also, more importantly, build 24 new 'smart cities' between Delhi and Mumbai, each of which will be calibrated to function as 'Logistics Hubs', 'Investment Regions and 'Industrial Townships'.

The DMIC comes cloaked in possibilities and aspirations that not only appear manifold, but in doing so, transcend political and financial ideologies with alarming ease. This research project creates a visual cartography of the corridor, in terms of its physical characteristics and qualities but also in terms of the variegated relationships between the numerous actors involved in its conception and execution. These range from the almost precognitive involvement of McKinsey and Co. in the formative stages of this project, the increasing presence of 'Smart City' advocates in the form of IBM, CISCO etc., to the Government of Japan which is a major partner and stakeholder in the project. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of trying to unpack the DMIC is its refusal to present itself as a singular entity despite the deceptively straightforward 'pyramid' of characters that are responsible for its production and delivery. In fact, it is this 'looseness' which lends the DMIC a specter-like quality - intermittently present in mainstream media and occasional drawing room conversations, but never *concrete* and rarely instantiated. It is also a project where a study of *facts*, numbers, statistics and projections is challenging as they are constantly shifting. This, if anything is its one most recognizable quality – an incremental but constant reformulation of its scope, extent and objectives, brought about by changing political landscapes and economic considerations.

While it is obvious that the DMIC is a direct fallout of a particularly relentless strain of global neoliberalization; for architects, urbanists and geographers, it presents a more sophisticated category – where an apparently inordinate set of actions contribute to the overarching goal of 'decentralization' that appears alongside a wholehearted adoption of both 'smart-ness' and 'city-ness' at an immense national scale administered through a set of multipolar and complex public-private models of delivery. There are, of course, many questions. Perhaps the first and most fundamental question one might ask is - *Why and to what end?*

In many ways, the DMIC represents the becoming real of decentralization, both as political disposition as well as a morphological type that is purportedly dispersed, horizontal and formatted for contingency. In a country with some of the largest and fastest growing urban agglomerations in the world, the DMIC is a decidedly conscious change in direction from the rehearsed dialectics of urban- sub-urban, center- periphery, and vertical- horizontal. The accompanying visual material constitute – (i) a series of maps which illustrate physical relationships of the actual Corridor to various networks of extant infrastructure including ports, highways, airports and power plants, many of which will be absorbed by the DMIC 'influence region'; and (ii) a map of the web-like relationships, connections and networks between the myriad characters and events involved in the production of the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor.
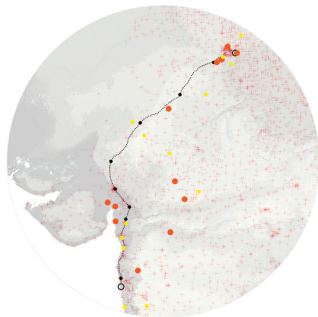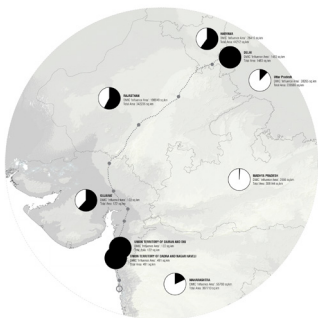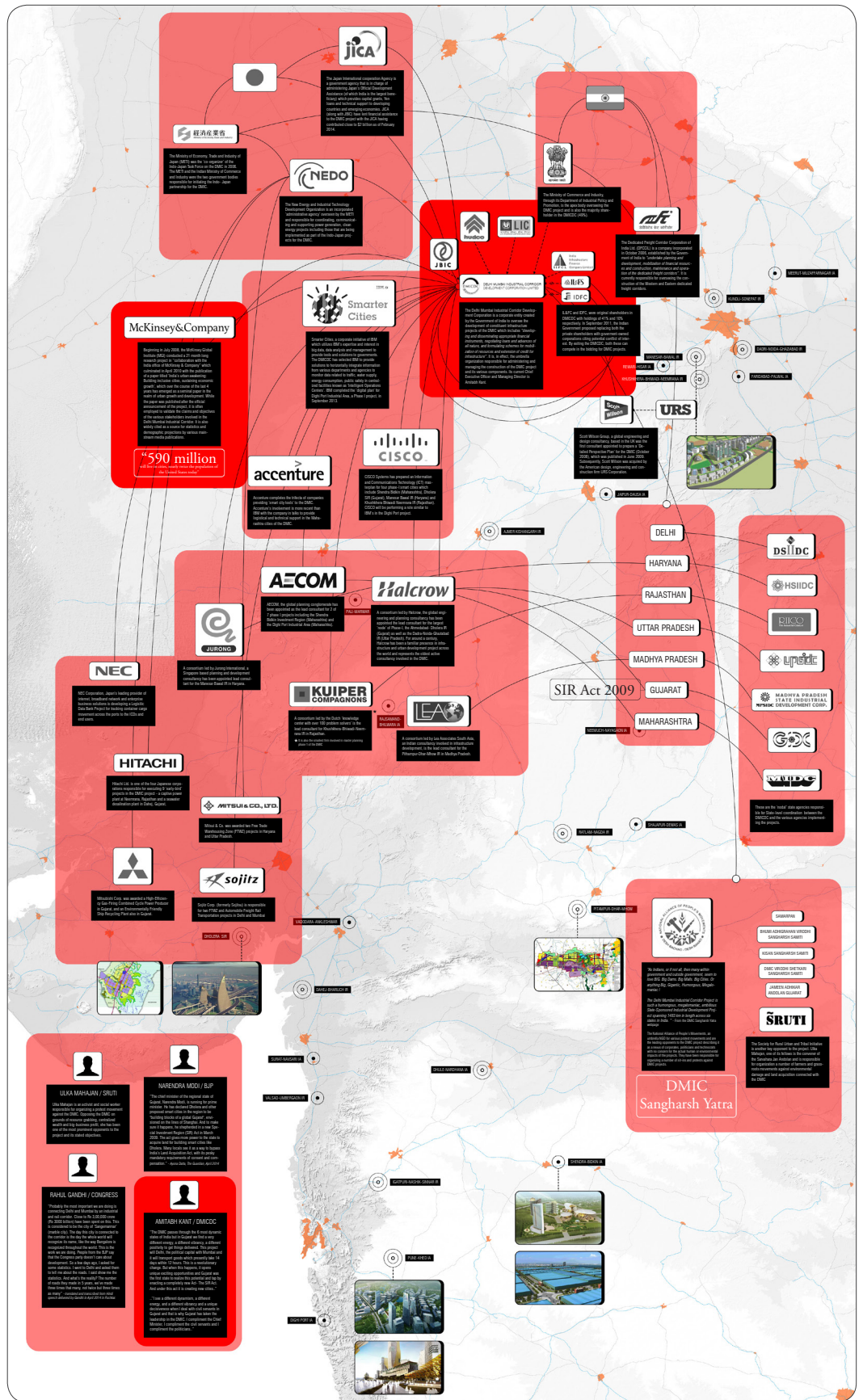
Investment Regions
and Industrial Areas

Agro Processing
and Logistics Hubs

'Phase I' protagonists

Proportionate 'Influence Region'
area by State

Cartography of actors, networks, locations and events