

A Grammar for Mutualism

NICOLE SYLVIA

University of British Columbia

Increasingly, planners and other urban thinkers are investing in the promises afforded by the Smart City—the ability to measure, model and project what the city is and to manage what it becomes. This way of approaching urban development inherently lends to urban spaces that are (intentionally) predictable and conservative. Working at the coarse scale of the zone, the city plan, and the spreadsheet, the urban environment is simplified, made easier to control and to understand. Consequently, complexity is purged and with it a host of agents and processes that are deemed undesirable for one reason or another. This is not the process for the making of an ethical city.

This project is a reassertion for architecture as a necessary and prominent agent of an ethical, inclusive urbanism. The very nature and scale of the key space-forming tools of architecture—membrane, shape, material—enable the creation of spaces of difference in close proximity. However, it is not the presence of difference per se that is the goal. In reconciling these differences architecture need not fortify hermetic enclaves, instead it may operate opportunistically to produce conditions of mutualism informed by these differences.

This project explores a grammar of architectural mutualism within the contemporary context of Chandigarh. While the original Corbusian design was highly functionalist and segregated in organization, this characteristic of the fabric has been co-opted and intensified as a way to promote a protectionist agenda by and for the city's elite. Over the last decade all new development of a significant scale—from the IT Park and mall, to slum rehabilitation colonies—has taken place outside of the formal city limits; the city is paralyzed as development grows haphazardly around it. This year's appointment as a Smart City (and the funding that comes with it) provides an opportunity to forge a new way forward. By refining the increment of zoning from the sector to the building the city may counteract the exodus in favor of cultivating inclusion and exchange and consequently, a more vibrant and vital urbanism.

Operating along one of the city's main boulevards, a systematic array of block-buildings redeploys the rules of the city-wide frame-control act. The buildings' simple frame structure allows for a diversity of occupancies while still conforming to an urban order. Instead of relying on the fabric's exterior spaces to soften the transition from one building's program to the next, each structure itself hosts two different tenures. Where they meet a third space forms, flexing and contracting to provide a synthetic and generative benefit to both—a moment of mutualism, embedded in both architectural and urban form.

A Grammar for Mutualism

architectural agency in the production of an ethical urbanism

Increasingly, planners and other urban thinkers are investing in the promises afforded by the Smart City—the ability to measure, model and project what the city is and to manage what it becomes. This way of approaching urban development inherently lends to urban spaces that are (intentionally) predictable and conservative. Working at the coarse scale of the zone, the city plan, and the spreadsheet, the urban environment is simplified, made easier to control and to understand. Consequently, complexity is purged and with it a host of agents and processes that are deemed undesirable for one reason or another. This is not the process for the making of an ethical city.

This project is a reassertion for architecture as a necessary and prominent agent of an ethical, inclusive urbanism. The very nature and scale of the key space-forming tools of architecture—membrane, shape, material—enable the creation of spaces of difference in close proximity. However, it is not the presence of difference per se that is the goal. In reconciling these differences architecture need not fortify hermetic enclaves, instead it may operate opportunistically to produce conditions of mutualism informed by these differences.

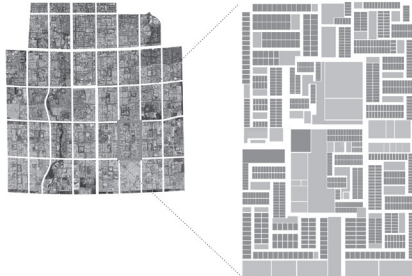
This project explores a grammar of architectural mutualism within the contemporary context of Chandigarh. While the original Corbusian design was highly functionalist and segregated in organization, this characteristic of the fabric, has been co-opted and intensified as a way to promote a protectionist agenda by and for the city's elite. Over the last decade all new development of a significant scale—from the IT Park and mall, to slum rehabilitation colonies—has taken place outside of the formal city limits; the city is paralyzed as development grows haphazardly around it. This year's appointment as a Smart City (and the funding that comes with it) provides an opportunity to forge a new way forward. By refining the increment of zoning from the sector to the building the city may counteract the exodus in favor of cultivating inclusion and exchange and consequently, a more vibrant and vital urbanism.

Operating along one of the city's main boulevards, a systematic array of block-buildings redeploys the rules of the city-wide frame-control act. The buildings' simple frame structure allows for a diversity of occupancies while still conforming to an urban order. Instead of relying on the fabric's exterior spaces to soften the transition from one building's program to the next, each structure itself hosts two different tenures. Where they meet a third space forms, flexing and contracting to provide a synthetic and generative benefit to both—a moment of mutualism, embedded in both architectural and urban form.

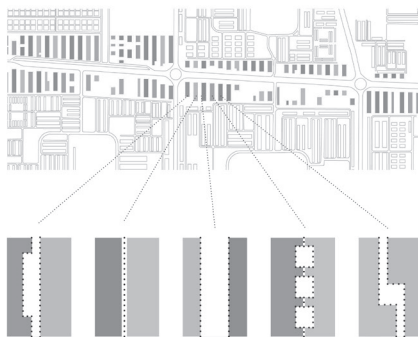
Diverse programs and actors cast from the formal city



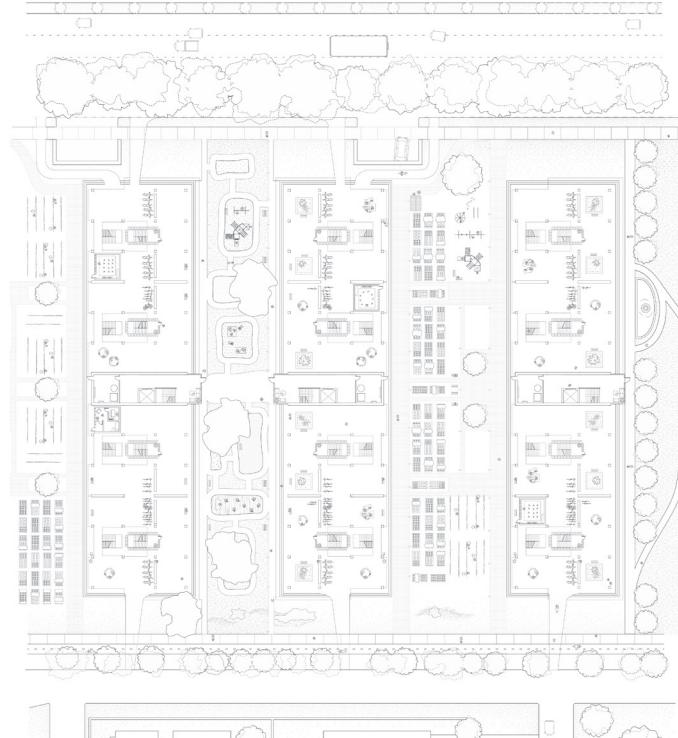
From the functionalist urban unit...



...to the mutualistic architectural increment



Architectural // Urban Mediation



Rehabilitation // Reliable Infrastructure // Luxury Housing



Craft-based Job Training // Socially-connected Workspace for Graduates // Dormitory



Start-up Incubation Offices // Flex Space // Research Laboratories

