

# 1 Reimagining Housing, Rethinking the Role of Architects in India: An Introduction

## 1.1 Reimagining Housing, Rethinking the Role of Architects in India

This book seeks to explore the societal role and self-perception of critical architects in post-independent and contemporary India. It takes particular interest in the role of documentary films and other media forms used by architects, or architectural design experts, to intervene in ongoing debates on affordable housing and to share different perspectives as well as their alternative visions on housing, spatial design and sustainable architecture. The primary reading audience I had in mind while writing was students of various humanities and social science subjects who are increasingly interested in these issues, as I have been able to observe with great interest in my own seminars and lectures at the Institute for Asian and African Studies at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Since students are very much affected by the severe shortage of affordable housing, it may not be surprising that the topic is attracting growing interest among them.<sup>1</sup> Of course, this also includes their awareness and keen interest in questions of sustainability as well as the future of living/living (and working) together in cities. It therefore seemed important to me to think about suitable teaching materials that can, based on a selection of documentary films and additional audiovisual material, provide more insights specifically on the Indian context.

---

1 In Berlin, like other cities in Germany, it has been increasingly difficult for students to find affordable accommodation for years. Long waiting lists for places in institutional student housing, the tedious search for a room in a shared flat and, for many, barely affordable rents. Living on the outskirts or outside of Berlin is not an attractive alternative for young people who are drawn to the big city during this particularly formative phase of their lives. Long commutes, sometimes poor public transport connections and the lack of other important infrastructures for daily life are also not something many people want to put up with.

## 1 Reimagining Housing, Rethinking the Role of Architects in India: An Introduction

Furthermore, unlike many of their male colleagues, it has so far rarely been the case that female\* architects have been taken seriously in academic research as “actors of change”, especially in my field of Contemporary South Asian Studies. However, this may gradually change and some of the exciting exhibitions on South Asian architects who are increasingly interested in sustainable, context-sensitive and cost-effective construction, such as Marina Tabassum from Bangladesh (exhibition at Architekturmuseum der TUM in Munich, 2023), Yasmeen Lari from Pakistan (exhibition at Architekturzentrum Wien in Vienna, 2023) or Anupama Kundoo (exhibition at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen, 2020–2021), which are currently receiving increased media interest, will hopefully also lead to more academic research and publications in the coming years.

What exactly does ‘affordable’ denote in highly unequal societies? According to urban historian Robert Fishman, affordable housing can be understood as decent and appropriate accommodation that costs no more than 30 per cent of a household’s income. However, because of the global rise in inequality and the failure of governments to intervene effectively in housing markets, Fishman argues that affordable housing is threatened everywhere, not only in specific regions of the global North or South. He sees the reason for this primarily in the neoliberal view of housing as a commodity like any other and the associated conviction that the capitalist market, if only it were freed from any regulation, can provide this commodity more efficiently than any government scheme.

The very term ‘affordable housing’ denotes an emphasis on achieving a socially sustainable balance between household income and housing costs, while leaving open the means by which this goal is achieved. With direct grants from the state now drastically cut back, funding might come from tax incentives to developers; low-interest mortgages from foundations; special grants to replace or rehabilitate ageing high-rise towers; or programmes to support low energy use or the house the homeless (Fishman 2018: 29).

As David Madden and Peter Marcuse criticize in their co-authored book *In Defense of Housing* (2016), the notion of the housing crisis, often uttered in conjunction with a critique of neoliberalism, conveys that it is merely a temporary deviation from an otherwise far better normal state that could be restored with the right measures, as political rhetoric suggests. However, as the two authors remind us, Friedrich Engels had already recognized in his *Reflections on the Housing Question* (1887) for which social groups this ‘crisis’ actually represents the normal state of affairs at any given time:

The so-called housing shortage, which plays such a great role in the press nowadays, does not consist in the fact that the working class generally lives in bad, overcrowded or unhealthy dwellings. This shortage is not something peculiar

## 1.1 Reimagining Housing, Rethinking the Role of Architects in India

to the present; it is not even one of the sufferings peculiar to the modern proletariat in contradistinction to all earlier oppressed classes. On the contrary, all oppressed classes in all periods suffered more or less uniformly from it (F. Engels [1872]. *The Housing Question*, quoted in Madden and Marcuse 2016: 9).

The verb “to rehabilitate” in Fishman’s quote above, as well as in the current debate on affordable housing, deserves specific attention. According to various dictionaries, to rehabilitate means to return *someone* to a healthy or usual condition or way of living, or to return *something* to good condition. In the post-World War II as well as the post-Partition era, millions of refugees who had lost their homes were considered to be in need of rehabilitation (Datta 2022). So are, for instance, the many ageing high-rise towers today that were built to provide low-cost or affordable housing after the Second World War and Partition of India. War-related destruction of housing and rapidly rising birth rates after the end of the Second World War also led to housing ‘crises’ in European countries, while suburbanization and segregation were only two among many more factors which posed major problems for the housing situation in the USA. It was precisely during this period, from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, that a young architect from India, Charles Correa, went to the USA to continue his studies in architecture, first at the University of Michigan and then at the famous MIT, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

As part of his master’s thesis at MIT, which he completed in 1955, Correa made a short, animated film called “You & Your Neighbourhood. The Story of Urban Rehabilitation”. He was the scriptwriter, animator, photographer and director of this film. The Housing Association of Metropolitan Boston is credited as the producer of the short film, and Correa refers to a real project that he had worked on extensively in the framework of his MA studies in the 1950s. His animated short film starts with two initial considerations: what happens when a neighborhood develops to its disadvantage, for very different reasons, and the condition of the houses in it continues to deteriorate? And how can a development called urban sprawl be stopped or even reversed? Urban sprawl can be seen as a direct consequence of neighborhoods that have become unattractive and led to accelerated suburbanization in the United States at that time. Why this is a problem is explained by the narrative voice in the following half-minute excerpt from Correa’s film:

This is how a city grows. (Bild) But this is very wasteful. If we do want additional housing, why don’t we rehabilitate some of the areas that are slipping right within the city? Instead of abandoning and moving on, we must stay and consolidate. We must reverse this cycle of waste.

Remember, this is 1955, not the 2020s. Correa’s short film goes on to show an example of public participation in an urban neighborhood which had gone bad but successfully managed to reverse the cycle by refurbishing the houses, creating new

playgrounds for children and, the better things got in the neighborhood, the more people started to look after their houses as well as the neighborhood again.

Against the backdrop of the current global housing shortage, it is surprising how an approach as simple and as important as the plea for public participation and rehabilitation of existing housing could have been overlooked or underestimated in its effect in so many regions of the world and for so many decades. As is well known, the global built environment is currently responsible for a large percentage of all greenhouse gas emissions, and especially the reliance on building materials such as steel and concrete create large amounts of carbon dioxide during production. Therefore, many critical observers think that instead of building more, rehabilitating (or repairing, retrofitting) already existing housing or improving infrastructures, especially in areas where a very large number of apartments are currently empty because inhabitants can neither commute nor communicate and lack other services such as retail or medical facilities, should have the highest priority now. A particular focus in the current debate is also laid on the redesign of buildings and areas that were previously used for completely different purposes.

As a non-architect who is interested in debates on architects and housing, I take a special interest in the various forms and formats of knowledge communication that architects and designers have developed and use to give ‘non-experts’ better access to architecture and spatial design as a form of knowledge. From the perspective of someone who specializes in media and gender research and has always been interested in urban studies, I am convinced that these multi-modal and multi-media approaches – through exhibitions, documentary or animated films, public lectures, books, catalogues or podcasts – have the potential to extend a much-needed critical reflection and discussion on the built environment to many more participants than ever before. Charles Correa is certainly an outstanding example in this respect, for the cited animated short from 1955 was not his last film. I will discuss his documentary *City on the Water* (1975) on the planning of New Bombay in more detail in the following chapter on “Low-Cost Housing for the People – as Projected by the Films Division of India (1954–1982)”.

As a heterogeneous group of social actors, many of them highly mobile, who as practitioners, teachers and theorists, develop and implement viable solutions at the intersection of extremely complex challenges and for very specific regional and local contexts, architects from India (and South Asia in general) deserve far more attention than they have received to date. This is perhaps especially true of my own disciplinary context, that is, Contemporary South Asian studies in Germany. Learning and understanding more about a field of knowledge for which I was not trained, but which interests me greatly and increasingly affects us all, was a central motivation for this book. As mentioned above, another motivation for me to write this book originated from my search for suitable learning and teaching material so

that this knowledge can be integrated more strongly than before into the curricula at our universities. Films certainly provide an excellent basis for this and enable non-experts (and experts alike) to gain new insights. Even if the compilation of relevant – and in some cases not so easy to find – documentaries on the thematic complex of architects, sustainable architecture and ideas about affordable housing in this book is far from complete (and does not claim to be so), I hope that this book will provide a good starting point for interested readers.

In media portrayals, a strong focus on so-called starchitects continues to dominate and they are sometimes represented in a way as if, on the one hand, they have a lot of power and influence and, on the other, they conceive and construct buildings almost single-handedly. Against this background, it was surprising for me to learn that architects currently play a rather subordinate role in such a central area as housing in India, which is of particular interest to me in this book. More and more houses are today constructed by contractors and civil engineers who employ a minimum number of architects to “reproduce a repetitive form”, as Rahul Mehrotra put it in a podcast interview with the Bangalore International Centre (BIC Talks) on the “State of Housing in India” (2020). In general, architects contribute only a minuscule percentage to the world’s built environment, as Gertrud Tauber highlights in her study on “Architects and Post-Disaster Housing” in South India after the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 (Tauber 2014: 43). It is also important to note that their contribution is largely found in urban contexts, whereas “(t)o this day, formally trained architects hardly play any role whatsoever in rural housing” (ibid.).

Accordingly, how contemporary architects question and rethink their own role as social actors against this background, is a question that will run through the chapters of this book. To a certain extent, I am also concerned with the question of individual visibility vs. visibility as a professional group, both in India and in other regional contexts. Not only in media representations, but also, for example, in architecture exhibitions or documentary films, architects are rarely shown as a professional group or as belonging to a specific school of thought, but predominantly as individuals with their unique works and thoughts, similar to artists. At the same time, interest in certain architects also depends on specific trends, infrastructures, networks, locations, access points, and sometimes also on mere coincidences. Over the last years, architecture enthusiasts based in Germany, Austria or the United States could, for instance, see and learn a lot about outstanding architects such as Yasmeen Lari from Pakistan, Marina Tabassum from Bangladesh, Balkrishna Vitaldas Doshi and Anupama Kundoo from India through several international exhibitions.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the much-discussed 2022 exhibition on “The Project of Independence. Architectures of Decolonization in South Asia, 1947–85” at the MoMA in New York provided

## 1 Reimagining Housing, Rethinking the Role of Architects in India: An Introduction

However, the situation is very different with regard to the two architect brothers Shankar and Navnath Kanade (chapter 8), or a self-taught architect named Didi Contractor (chapter 7): they more or less accidentally sparked the interest of filmmakers from India and Europe, and it is mainly through these documentary explorations that more visibility and interest in their works and thinking can now be generated.

Unlike the formats mentioned above, a book offers the possibility to show the direct and indirect connections between the now two or three generations of architects in post-independent India, who in their designs and approaches deal(t) intensively with questions such as context-sensitivity, affordability and durability. Many of them have also begun to experiment with 'alternative' or locally available building materials and methods long before terms such as sustainable building were on everyone's lips. In my view, these diverse connections in their thinking and work can best be viewed and understood through the conceptual lens of critical regionalism. It may be no coincidence that both, the redefinition of the societal role and influence of architects and an increased desire to effectively counter the perceived 'placelessness' of an increasingly uniform global architecture, are currently reviving an interest in the concept of critical regionalism. Initially, in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the term was more strongly associated with the process of postcolonial identity formation of newly founded nation-states. In this specific historical context, a new generation of architects no longer simply wished to 'transfer' modernist architecture to a wide variety of regional and climatic contexts, but increasingly sought to emphasize a 'regional' identity as a central feature of non-western modern architecture. However, in today's discussions of the concept of critical regionalism, the local as well as regional scale and knowledge of specific building materials and techniques seem to come increasingly to the fore, whereas the quest for a national identity is not necessarily of central concern to architects. Once again, however, it is not a matter of rejecting 'global influences' altogether but rather of finding a sensible balance that serves the respective context, as will be explained in the following section.

---

an extraordinary opportunity to learn more about this historical period and some of its most outstanding architects, and also about the vivid ongoing debate about modernist architecture in South Asia. Among others, MoMA exhibition also laid a focus on the housing question in the post-Partition context, as well as on the role of state patronage for low-cost housing architecture until the mid-1980s.

## 1.2 Critical Regionalism as an Approach to Affordable Housing in India

*As an architectural approach, critical regionalism attempts to find the right balance between the universal lessons of science and locally rooted traditions of particular regions. It is essentially a variant of modern architecture that shows greater respect towards the climate, topography, local materials and sociological complexes of a place.*

*Critical regionalism is vital in contemporary times as it resists the homogenising force of global capitalism by using contextual forces that impart a sense of place and meaning to architecture.*

(Bahga & Raheja 2019: 1)

Critical regionalism can be defined as an approach that strives to counter the universalizing tendency or even homogeneity inherent in modernist architecture. As an architectural concept, the term critical regionalism was first coined by the architect and architectural theorist Alexander Tzonis and the architectural historian Liane Lefaivre in the 1980s and later elaborated more systematically by the architectural critic and historian Kenneth Frampton (see Frampton 1983; Lefaivre & Tzonis 2003). As Frampton writes, such an approach to regionalism is based on a connection between the “political consciousness of a society and the profession” (Frampton 1983: 148). One of the mainsprings of regionalist culture is an “anti-centrist sentiment – an aspiration for some kind of cultural, economic and political independence” (ibid: 149). As can be read in several articles, critical regionalists are also characterized by a strong rejection of an architecture which eclectically incorporates historical references into contemporary works without worrying about their appropriateness. Instead, they always critically examine the building traditions of a region and weigh up which solutions are suitable for the present. As Frampton explains, critical regionalism thus denotes a dialectic expression. On the one hand, it represents a self-conscious deconstruction of universal modernism through regionally and locally shaped ideas and values. On the other hand, critical regionalism recognizes that no living tradition can renew and develop without a synthesis with more modern procedures and approaches (ibid.):

Any attempt to circumvent the dialectics of this creative process through the eclectic procedures of historicism can only result in consumerist iconography masquerading as culture (ibid.).

Similar to other previously colonized regions and newly established nation-states, critical regionalism has been an influential architectural approach in post-Independence Indian and South Asian architecture. One architect whose work and influence on earlier South Asian approaches to critical regionalism is currently receiving increased attention is Minnette de Silva from Sri Lanka who spent several

formative years in India.<sup>3</sup> Chapter 3 is dedicated to the question who, in the absence of a film on her, or an exhibition (at least for the time being), is currently creating an accessible archive of the so-called ‘forgotten pioneer’ of critical regionalism in postcolonial India and Sri Lanka, and by which means or media.

As some authors therefore argue, even before the term was coined and increasingly popularized in the 1980s, architects in and from South Asia had already begun pursuing the ideas of critical regionalism in designing their buildings. Misra, Chakraborty and Mandal explain that Indian architects were going to Europe and America to seek higher education and cultural inspiration. When they returned to India during the 1960s, they “commanded high positions as professionals as well as teachers. They taught, practiced and experimented with what they had learnt in the West against the harsh realities of India” (Misra, Chakraborty & Mandal 2018: 110). However, exactly this practical experience may also have led to the realization that they would have to develop their own methods and materials of construction as well as their own expression of progress. Consequently, “architects started looking in different directions for various answers” (ibid.). Under the government of India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru (1947–1964), modernism was initially chosen by the state as the preferred architectural approach with the belief that it could solve India’s most urgent problems, including the acute housing crisis. As early as the 1960s, however, some architects in India recognized the limitations of modernist architecture. For instance, limited interpretation of ‘function’ offered by modernist architecture seemed inadequate to architects who also wished to fulfil the “social and cultural aspirations of their Indian clientele” (Bahga & Raheja 2018: 474). Well-known architects like Charles Correa (1930–2015), Raj Rewal (b. 1934) and Balkrishna Vitthal Das Doshi (1927–2023) therefore increasingly

sought to overcome the dominance of modernism that they had themselves inherited through their Western education. They began incorporating the ideas of critical regionalism in their works to counter the homogenization of architecture resulting from modernism (ibid.).

Bahga and Raheja (2018: 475) name seven key criteria that a building should respect to be critically regionalist:

- 1) **Context-specific Architecture:** The architecture should be context-specific and respect the character of the surrounding in which it is situated.

---

<sup>3</sup> Liane Lefavre and Alexander Tzonis discuss Minnette de Silva’s work in their edited book *Tropical Architecture. Critical Regionalism in the Age of Globalization* (co-edited with Bruno Stagno), specifically de Silva’s important contribution to “critical regionalism/critical tropicalism” in the field of housing architecture (Lefavre & Tzonis 2001: 29 ff.).

## 1.2 Critical Regionalism as an Approach to Affordable Housing in India

- 2) **Historical Knowledge:** The architecture should take the building traditions of the region into account – without resorting to literal reference or blind use of vernacular.
- 3) **Climate Responsiveness:** Does the architecture of the building respond self-evidently to the climatic conditions at the site where it is situated? The new building should benefit from the best solar orientations and minimize the dependence on mechanical means such as air-conditioning and artificial lighting for the functioning of the building.
- 4) **Materiality:** The project should predominantly use locally available materials for the construction.
- 5) **Ecology and Landscape:** The project should strive to minimize the impact of its construction on the ecology of the site and the surroundings.
- 6) **Social and Cultural Appropriateness:** Does the architecture of the building respond to the social needs and lifestyle choices of its intended users?
- 7) **Technology:** The design of a project should adapt modern technology in a sustainable way to benefit the building programme.

Based on these seven criteria, the two co-authors of the study identified about one hundred architectural projects of significance realized in post-independent India that integrate the ideas of critical regionalism in their design. However, critical regionalism as an architectural concept has never been embraced uniformly across different building types. It is also interesting to note that cultural as well as educational institutions and resort hotels which followed a critical regionalist approach have received greater patronage. Nevertheless, as Bahga and Raheja argue, critical regionalist projects of high merit have been realized in every building type, including, among others, cultural institutions, education and research institutions, religious institutions, offices and government buildings as well as, not least, housing.

In particular, the housing typology for the mid-rise, low-income to middle-income group proved to be the ideal ground for critical regionalists to “forge the lifestyle of traditional Indian villages into modern urban settings” (Bahga & Raheja 2018: 477). The predominantly rural population of India was moving towards urban centers for employment opportunities and by the late 1970s, more complex housing projects started getting developed through the critical regionalist approach. Particularly the public housing sector was in the domain of critical regionalist architecture until the economic liberalization of the 1980s and 90s. Especially Charles Correa’s, Raj Rewal’s and Balkrishna Vithaldas Doshi’s works of the 1980s acted as models for critical regionalist housing architecture in India in the decades to follow (Mehrotra 2011). Charles Correa’s Belapur housing project in the 1980s in New Bombay or Navi Mumbai, also known as the Artists’ Village, is an important illustration of his theoretical position on equitable housing in the global South. As architect and urbanist Rahul Mehrotra describes, the Belapur project

## 1 Reimagining Housing, Rethinking the Role of Architects in India: An Introduction

(d)emonstrated how low-cost, low-rise housing could achieve extremely high densities of two hundred persons per acre (five hundred persons per hectare) while still allowing for open spaces, community facilities, schools, and a range of other amenities. Conceived as an incremental self-built housing typology, Correa's design stood in stark contrast to all other housing projects undertaken by the state as well as the Chandigarh model, in as much as it attempted to dissolve all class and economic segregation, which had become a norm within housing design and site-planning in India (Mehrotra 2022: 127).<sup>4</sup>

Low-rise housing instead of multi-storeyed buildings is a central aspect of the critical regionalism approach to housing architecture, for several reasons that Correa discusses in his essay on "Equity" (Correa 2012). He argues that an individual low-rise house can be "constructed out of just about anything, starting with bamboo and mud bricks" (ibid.: 201), and the construction can be improved and renewed over time. Multi-storeyed buildings, on the other hand, must of necessity use steel and cement – materials which are short in supply and expensive (ibid.). Related to this central aspect is the principle of incrementality, which means that a low-rise house can always grow according to the owner's requirements and his or her earning capacity. In addition, this also allows the inhabitants to adjust the available spaces to suit their personal needs and preferred lifestyles, hence they can design the house individually. Not least, a low-rise housing can be constructed much faster, as an individual who is building his or her own house is, in Correa's view, a highly motivated person. It is also much easier and less cost-intensive to maintain low-rise houses. Especially in combination with a policy of equity plots, that is, a distribution of urban space not according to income or social status but to the actual household size, Correa's hope was therefore that the kind of low-rise high-density housing that he envisioned could constitute a crucial step towards defining a truly egalitarian urban society (ibid.: 202).

Another widely cited example is B. V. Doshi's Aranya Community Housing Project near Indore in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh which was realized in the 1980s as a sites and services scheme explicitly for low-income groups. The project was commissioned in 1983 by the Indore Development Authority and co-funded by the World Bank and India's Housing and Urban

---

4 Accordingly, Correa expressed skepticism early on about building in heights, for which the argument of high residential density in cities is also currently being cited again. As Correa has pointed out, however, tall office towers are often taken as a model for this, whereas for residential buildings, additional space per inhabitant must be included for the necessary infrastructure as well as facilities (kindergartens, green spaces, hospitals, libraries, schools, etc.) and not just the mere living space. See also chapter 4 in this book on "Living Together in Vertical Cities?"

Development Corporation (HUDCO). *Sites and Services* means that only land and basic infrastructure such as plumbing connections were provided. Importantly, it also involved a demonstration cluster of about eighty houses that, in the words of Rahul Mehrotra, “set the tone and architectural vocabulary for an additional construction of allocated plots by the families, whose adaptations of the prototype brought an incredible variety to the ensemble as they individualized their homes” (Mehrotra 2022: 127).

According to Mehrotra, these two projects by Correa and Doshi can be seen as

(e)mblematic of the evolution of the role of state patronage in housing delivery after Independence, from an all-encompassing production system run by the government in the early 1950s to a more nuanced partnership between the state, architects, and occupants by the 1980s. By taking account of both the limitations on resources and socioeconomic inequities across South Asia, such projects point to a future in which the state could facilitate the supply of land and infrastructure, while the architect could yet play a crucial role in facilitating sustainable housing design and site-planning (Mehrotra 2022: 128).

It is interesting to note that critical architects more and more came to realize the limitations of an approach to solving housing problems through the design of buildings alone and therefore began to focus more on aspects such as the redistribution of resources or provision of better employment opportunities. Increasingly, critical architects also became more involved in extensive research and experimentation in low-cost as well as low-technology solutions. In connection with a comprehensive reconsideration of ‘repair cultures’ or ‘repair societies’, renewed and intensified interest is currently being directed at the question of self-construction. In a recent article by Florian Hertweck and Markus Miessen on this question, the authors follow an argumentation according to which the reparability of architecture is generally increased with self-building / self-construction and the accompanying turn to the already existing building stock (instead of destroying and building anew) (Hertweck and Miessen 2022: 64).

### 1.3 Acknowledgements

Several chapters in this volume were first published in a similar or different form in the digital knowledge archive of the RePLITO research project. The longer title of the project is “Beyond Social Cohesion – Global Repertoires of Living Together”. RePLITO takes marginalized and neglected repertoires of living together as its starting point to rethink social cohesion from a transregional perspective. Repertoires of living together include, for instance, discourses of coexistence and cohabitation, as inscribed in intellectual and theoretical reflections and represented

in popular culture, art and literature; institutions and norms developed for (self-)governing living together in and with inequalities and differences, as well as social practices, observed in everyday life and within institutions. Although RePLITO started from different localities and regions, the project understands repertoires of living together as relational rather than pertaining to specific geographical units of analysis. Thus, the focused concepts and repertoires of living together<sup>5</sup> have been constituted and continue to be negotiated and transformed in the context of dynamic interactions beyond localities, nation-states and regions.

To think and look ‘beyond’ social (and cultural) cohesion, RePLITO argues, is necessary, as this normatively loaded concept continues to be closely linked to nationally or territorially defined societies or communities. This, however, inevitably raises the question of boundaries and exclusivity of community concepts as well as the cultural and historical narratives that promote – or counteract – them. Furthermore, the assumed sedentism that is likely to be reproduced through a focus, and even stress, on territorial delimitation in social cohesion measurement ignores the impact of multiple forms of mobility on preexisting ideas, imaginations, and practices of living together, which are not necessarily tied to a permanent physical co-presence in one place or country. If we only look at the prevalence of multilocal families who, thanks to the availability of digital and mobile media, practice new ways of ‘doing family’ and ‘living-together-apart’, it is important to bear in mind that a long history of repeated migrations, voluntary or forced, has already shaped the memory and lives of people and communities over many generations, notably in regions such as South Asia (Schneider 2022). Especially in cities such as Mumbai, which are also shaped by various forms of seasonal or temporal labor migration and, therefore, by the multilocal homemaking practices of many city dwellers, it becomes increasingly clear that critical architects can contribute significantly to a rethinking of what ‘cohabitation’, or ‘neighborly cohesion’ could mean in a situation of transient homemaking. As knowledge communicators and public intellectuals, they help us understand and see the city as ‘kinetic’, rather than static or permanent (Mehrotra 2021); as practitioners and critical design thinkers, they develop new models for spatial design in transient urban spaces.

RePLITO (October 2021 – December 2024) is funded by the Excellence Strategy of the federal and state governments in the framework of the Berlin University Alliance’s Grand Challenges Initiative (BUA-GCI). The academic quality assurance of publications emerging from this project is based on a collaborative and open

---

5 For an overview, see “Concepts and Repertoires of Living Together” at <https://replito.de/> (last access Jan 3, 2024).

peer-review process, for which we use the writing and community publishing platform pubpub. Authors, editors and reviewers can communicate directly through this platform and discuss every publication openly to improve the manuscript.

For their valuable comments on previous versions of several chapters in this book which were first published on RePLITO's pubpub platform, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Hilal Alkan, Schirin Amir-Moazami, Maria Framke, Reyazul Haque, Arshi Javaid, Lara Kauter, Max Kramer, Wikke Jansen, Iclal Ayse Küçükkirca, Dhara Patel, Saskia Schäfer, Anna Schnieder-Krüger, Juliana Moreira Streva, Julia Strutz, Fritzi-Marie Titzmann and Chandrika Yogarajah.

I would also like to thank the wonderful team at Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing (HASP), especially Nicole Merkel-Hilf and Jelena Radosavljević. It gives me great pleasure that this book is published in the open access eBook series Media and Cultural Studies.