

# Introduction

**U**RBAN DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES ARE ALWAYS under scrutiny – will it be inclusive, will it erase the cultural autonomy of communities and individuals, will it correspond with the new technology and market demand, can it be adequate for the ever swelling demography, is it sensitive to the history of the city, how will it transmute the existing city form...and so on. Hence, understandably, the proposed Mumbai Development Plan (DP) 2014-2034 has been under scrutiny by various State agencies and civil society initiatives. A plan that will determine the shape and scope of a city's land use and infrastructure for the next twenty years is a tough proposition. Moreover, when the city in question is Mumbai – with a population of 12.5 million within a peninsular landmass of 440 square kms (Greater Mumbai), a population of multiple languages and cultures, and a financial profile ranging from over employment to under employment – the task becomes even more enormous.

Mumbai has been a quintessential 20<sup>th</sup> century city – the industrial city, the port city and the cinema city. These three characteristics have made it a city of mobility, of possibility and of growth. This city is regarded as a forward-looking entity that adapts to changes in economics, architecture and demography. But after an exciting stint through the 20<sup>th</sup> century the city is currently at a crossroad. The pivotal question is how much of the previous century is to be carried forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century in order to ensure a smooth transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy and cityscape. More precisely, and in the context of the current DP, the concern is how to include certain existing forms and infrastructures within the ambition and demand of the new era. One of the keys to this concern is to determine the role of public, public space and public entertainment in our vision of urban development for the next quarter of a century. In this dossier the chain of cinema theatres across the city are regarded as the artery line (along with the commuters' train lines) for the urban public culture and a case has been made to save those spaces and structures from disappearing due to purely profit based considerations. There is a notion that the pivotal 20<sup>th</sup> century public culture – films screened in large theatres for a mass of people – is dead, and hence the theatres that housed such a fare have become redundant which makes them susceptible to change of land use. In this dossier we argue that the cinema theatres have been more than a projection room for films – they are simultaneously the city's heritage and its spatial landmarks; the citizens' sense of belonging and a cultural conglomerate. Cinema theatres should be considered as spaces of broader

public culture that need planned protection and innovative intervention from the civic body and also from the civil society.

In this dossier we have documented the locational, cultural and architectural history of cinema theatres of Bombay / Mumbai through the 20<sup>th</sup> century and have traced its essential role in consolidating the urban public culture, in terms of shared spaces and facilities. The dossier also carries detailed documentation of formal and informal livelihood practices that survive in the vicinity of cinema theatres and memoirs of people regarding their deep bonding, or even the absence of it, with neighbourhood cinema theatres. In the last section we have illustrated how the cinema theatres, by definitions prescribed under DCR no. 67 (Development Control Regulations for Greater Mumbai 1991), are entitled to be regarded as culturally significant and / or heritage buildings / sites.

The research, documentation and arguments presented in this dossier are developed through years of fieldwork commenced by Majlis Cultural Centre and Urban Development Research Institute (UDRI). Majlis, in collaboration with KRVA (Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute of Architecture and Environmental Studies) has been leading a large scale research art project titled Cinema City since 2008. The project comprises of research, archiving, dissemination and production of documentary films, public art installations and analytical texts on various configurations of cinema and the city, in the context of Bombay / Mumbai. The project has been shared with the larger public through exhibitions at National Gallery of Modern Art in Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru; telecast of films on Doordarshan; publications of text books and a post graduate certificate course with SNT Women's University. Most part of the texts in this dossier have come out of this parent project. On the other hand, UDRI has been leading various civil society initiatives regarding protection of built environments and the improvement of urban communities since its inception in 1983. It provides a forum promoting interaction between architects, urban designers and professionals from related fields such as economics, sociology, planning, conservation and history. UDRI has initiated a public participatory process to support the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai in its preparation of the new Development Plan.

Majlis and UDRI have edited this dossier in order to put forth an argument for the protection of certain single screen neighbourhood cinema theatres in Greater Mumbai. We hope that such a provision gets a place in the forthcoming DP.