Walled City of Jaipur: Chowkri Modikhana Project

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This is a brief report on the work undertaken by the students on the MA International Architectural Regeneration and Development programme of Oxford Brookes University, UK in the 2006-07 academic year. The project was undertaken in collaboration with the Jaipur Virasat Foundation and a group of 15 students and two members of staff visited Jaipur in January 2007.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Jaipur Virasat Foundation for their hospitality and assistance, in particular Faith Singh, Shikha Jain and Pooja Agrawal. The students were also greatly assisted in their work and made very welcome by the families of the three Havelis that they surveyed. Finally we are grateful to the INTACH-UK Trust for providing us with a grant in support of this study.

What we offer is a series of illustrated ideas for the regeneration of Chowkri Modikhana developed by the students working initially in groups and then individually. The proposals must be accepted as student work, but we hope they will stimulate discussion and future ideas and projects for the area and indeed other parts of the walled city. In effect it is but a small drop in the ocean of work that is currently being undertaken, one more bead to add to the intricate embroidery that is Jaipur’s walled city and its preservation for the appreciation and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Dr Aylin Orbasli, course tutor and fieldwork leader
Jaipur is a well established tourism destination of India, attracting both national and international tourists. It is one of the points of the famous Golden Triangle along with Delhi, Agra, providing visitors with limited time an easily accessible glimpse into Rajasthan. In India the city is also well known for its rich craft traditions. The major attractions for most visitors are the two palaces, city squares and other historic monuments. The restoration of a number of palaces and large Haveli as hotels has added to the glamour of visiting the city and the visitor experience. For most, however, the walled city continues to be that glimpsed from bus windows or from auto rickshaws and often only from the main axes that cross through the walled city.

What therefore are the benefits of tourism to the numerous interlinked neighbourhoods within the walled city and for their future survival? While the palaces and squares and the elevations on the major roads may be of higher architectural quality, the integrity of this unique walled city can only be maintained by affording equal protection to its many interlinked neighbourhoods.

Unlike the experience of other historic cities in the world, the historic buildings of Jaipur are not being abandoned. On the contrary overcrowding is a recognised issue as is uncontrolled building and encroachment. The availability of modern materials and aspirations for new architectural styles, coupled with limited consideration for the maintenance of the old is gradually eroding the character of the old town. In this sense also its attractiveness for tourists.

Nonetheless, the old town is alive and well and thriving with genuine activity. Today, so many historic cities from Europe to South East Asia have been reinvented for tourists, with imported or staged activities and chain stores that they are no longer real places.

In Jaipur there is a unique opportunity to regenerate the historic quarters for the benefit of the residents through improvements to infrastructure, sensitive upgrading and introducing new buildings where necessary (not necessarily in a historic style). In this way the city will continue to be a ‘real’ living place. Finding the necessary funds, especially for larger projects will be the major challenge. This does not mean, however, that smaller scale interventions and changes are not possible.

Tourism is simply another layer in urban conservation and regeneration, and not necessarily a direct source of finance. A well maintained, not perfect but a living place will be more attractive to tourists than yet another ‘perfectly preserved’ historic town destination. In Jaipur they will have the chance to experience a real place and even become part of it and participate in its activities.
The visual form of Chowkri Modikhana

The walled city has a dense mixed land use pattern, with co-existence of commercial, industry units and home based economic activities.
Andi Kercini, Nisha Yadav, Besnik Bijo, Charalampos Mantzouranis

Jaipur: Public & Private Interfaces
A number of studies preceding this one have already undertaken detailed analyses of the walled city as well as the study area. They have provided a very valuable basis on which to build our site analysis on. The existing traffic and issues studies were particularly useful.

Explorations on the ground and many informed conversations with locals, however, also revealed several interesting aspects on life in the walled city. Most notably:

♦ The complex craft, trade and social networks that exist within the neighbourhood and across the walled city, but also beyond into the global domain. A lone craftsman working from the family house could be producing jewellery items that are commissioned and sold in the United States. These relations, illustrated overleaf, are part of the richness and the balance that keeps the community in the walled city together.

♦ People continue to value living in the walled city and many have lived there all their lives. The ongoing difficulties faced by lack of services (water, garbage collection) and traffic problems, coupled with young peoples desire to move to more ‘private’ accommodation are the major reasons people eventually choose to leave. Unlike many places in the world, there exists a unique opportunity in Jaipur to capture and maintain an ongoing community spirit.

Jaipur is a world leader in championing what could be described as craft-based regeneration. City decision makers and various organisations are finding ways through which the rich craft traditions of the city can be supported, enhanced and developed to provide one of the key economic bases for the city. While festivals bring people to Jaipur, good promotion is taking the Jaipur brand and its association with high quality hand produced products to domestic and international markets. The walled city plays a significant role in this industry and can also benefit from the associated regeneration.

The common goals that have guided the projects have therefore been to protect the unique architectural character of the walled city and the Haveli in particular while finding ways in which the city can develop and remain in touch with the 21st century with improved living conditions for its inhabitants.
Architectural character

Broad shading band:
Bands of cantilevered stone slabs demarcate each storey and shade the windows and ventilation holes on each floor.

Proposed Extension:
Narrow grouped openings rather than larger windows, bays and system of shutters, screens and vents in an integrated unit.

Original Critic:
Small, grouped openings with vents above, timber framed with shutters. All openings are double, regardless of size, reflecting the concept of duality.

Courtyard stack effect:
The large building footprint is broken into narrow plans around the central courtyard. This allows a simple but effective passive ventilation strategy to keep the building comfortable.

Lever above shutters:
The large thermal mass helps keep the internal spaces comfortable all year round, absorbing and releasing heat.
Urban realm improvements

For many the small square on which the study area centred was seen as a major catalyst for regeneration, and a means of recapturing public pride in the area. At the present time the ‘square’ is an empty plot mainly used for car parking. Yet it is located at an important intersection and has a temple overlooking it. For some reason the edges around the square have become inactive, possibly being used as storerooms rather than active workshops or shops opening onto the streets.

Several projects considered the opportunity this open space presented to create a public space and identity for the neighbourhood, in which a number of activities could be brought together. Proposals considered tourism interest in the area, but predominantly focused on local needs and uses of the space. The location (or re-location) of the cows and management of litter were amongst some of the considerations.

The last project in this sequence looks at the public park and ways in which it might be improved to incorporate a community centre that could also be linked with the adjoining school.
The collaboration of the residents is vital to implementing any strategies for urban improvement. Youth is the smallest unit of the community, but will play a huge role in developing the country. The community centre will provide connections through each family, and helps establish concern for environmental issues and community responsibility.

JAIPUR: Community Learning Centre
Adapting the Haveli

The Haveli is the predominant dwelling form in the walled city and many continue to be occupied by several generations of the same family occupying ancestral houses. Each and every one has been changed and adapted to accommodate changing family needs and social situations. At the start of the 21st century and at a time when India is rapidly changing and developing into a powerful world economy the pressure for change in housing is also increasing. The group noted that although the families they met valued living in the walled city for its networks and connectivity and equally valued living as a large and extended family unit, their needs were also changing. Most notably there was a greater demand for privacy amongst the younger generations, while modern day technologies from fridges and televisions to computers were creating demand for new spaces within the building.

The following projects consider ways in which the Haveli might be adapted to provide greater privacy within or extended, while the integrity and character of the whole was still maintained.

It is also possible that some Haveli will become redundant over time and the last project in this sequence considers the use and adaptation of a Haveli as a museum celebrating local craft traditions.
Re-organising internal spaces for more privacy for the family and modern day requirements  

Maria Yianni
Extending the Haveli: a combination of contemporary style and light-weight structures

Jenny Kerrigan
The design adds new minimal interventions (units) that adapt well to the existing left over (defunct) spaces, providing a catalyst for integrating the old and the new. The roof-top intervention is a stand-alone environment responding to the individual context of the slum and its surroundings spaces. The scheme provides a new interpretation of the slum building, using controllable yet complementary technology and design against the traditional architecture of enclosure and separation.

JAIPUR: Roof-tops / Transition Thresholds

Andi Kercini
Craft Museum in a Haveli  •  Besnik Bijo
One of the issues identified for the walled city was the level of change that was occurring through often small interventions to historic buildings by their owners. At street level this includes new types of shutters, insensitive signage and most significantly encroachment onto the street. Houses are also being altered with new windows and balconies or extended upwards using new materials and styles that are not in keeping with the character of the area.

Much of this change is a response by owners and occupiers to optimise their space, accommodate new functions or family members and subsequently continue to live in the walled city. Change at all levels is a necessary part of urban development and continuity. On the other hand, the significance of the walled city lies in its built form and the architectural character of the individual buildings.

One group looked at ways in which design guidelines could be introduced to inform owners of good practice when making interventions on their buildings, especially on external elevations. The group worked on an easy to understand and pictorial guide with good practice examples that could be easily understood by those seeking to alter their buildings as well as guidance in making improvements to already implemented changes.
Design Guidelines: alternative approaches to elevations • Zheng Ping
This unique international and multi-disciplinary programme has been established in the belief that the regeneration and development of the historic built environment is an essential component of sustainable development. The course draws on two established areas of expertise at Oxford Brookes University, combining an interest in international vernacular architecture studies with that in architecture in regeneration. Focusing on both rural vernacular traditions and historic urban centres, it promotes the re-use and integration of existing buildings, technologies, skills and knowledge in contemporary design and development, taking into account the wider political, cultural, economic and environmental context.

The aim of the programme is to provide students with the knowledge, skills and tools that will enable them to recognise the potential of and contribute creatively to the reuse, regeneration and development of the inherited built environment in countries around the world.

The programme aims to develop a critical understanding of the complex and dynamic relationship between the built environment and its economic, social and cultural values. It promotes an interdisciplinary approach that combines critical thinking and analysis with creative design, using a teaching and learning programme grounded in theory, field research, master classes, workshops and design studios.

The international field work is an integral part of the International Architectural Regeneration and Development programme. The objective of these visits is to experience first hand reuse, urban regeneration and renewal projects to observe different levels of intervention and associated outcomes in different cultural contexts. The field study develops and enhances the content and learning outcomes of the first semester taught modules. The fieldwork is undertaken in collaboration with local partners and the objective is not only for students to benefit from a real or live project situation but also to provide useful feedback to the process.

On return to the UK students build on the study visit findings and working in groups develop area based regeneration proposals and then work individually to develop building reuse projects or propose new buildings and/or urban realm improvements in accordance with the regeneration objectives set out in the group work.

Programme leader: Dr Marcel Vellinga
Course tutors: Dr Aylin Orbasli, Geoffrey Randell, Prof. Paul Oliver, Prof. Nabeel Hamdi

More information on the programme and Oxford Brookes University can be found at: http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/be/architecture/postgraduate/iard/index.html