

**Fragmented perspectives, transiting signs of urbanity -
Everyday life's representations and uses of space
in Dhaka, Bangladesh**

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*To my parents,
for their constant trying to believe in me*

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Content	Page
Thanks	3
Overview	4
 Part 1	
1.1 Introduction: Dissertation's goal, hypotheses and underlying questions	6
1.1.1. Backgrounds of Dhaka's urbanisation	9
1.1.2. Literature review	14
1.1.3. Dissertation's structure	15
1.2. The production of space through everyday life practices	16
<i>Digression I</i> / Henri Lefebvre's evolutions, and convolutions, towards a „trialectic“ model	20
1.2.1. Lefebvre's conception of <i>everyday life practice</i> and <i>urbanisation</i>	23
1.2.2. The theory of production of space	26
1.2.3. From theory to practice – applying Lefebvre's model to field work	32
<i>Digression II</i> / Michel de Certeau and Hubert Fichte, or narration versus poetic word	35
1.2.4. „Public“ or „social“ space	40
1.3. Methodology	42
1.3.1. Specific design of the survey	48
<i>Digression III</i> / Own positioning between researching and „feeling with“	53
1.3.2. Very particular political period in Bangladesh	56
1.3.3. Problematic statistical data	57
1.3.4. The questionnaire	59
 Part 2	
2.1. Physical field – Spatial practice	69
2.1.1. The respondents	70
2.1.2. Characterisation of areas	78
2.1.3. Everyday reality	104
2.1.4. Summary and further comments	113
2.2. Mental field - Representation of space	116
2.2.1. Representations of City	125
„City is something else than home“	126
„City means social, cultural, political life, history... and memories“	128

„City means its infrastructure“	132
„City means a chance“	133
„City means inequality, exclusion and injustice“	136
„City means buildings and congested streets“	138
<i>Digression IV / „Dhaka is the city of the kuttis“</i>	140
Conclusions	142
2.2.2. Representations of space	145
On religiously-rooted representations of space	146
On cultural representations	152
On representations of political power	158
Spaces for communication, information, opinion making	161
Spaces for expression and demonstration of public opinion	165
Conclusions	167
2.2.3. Representing spaces – Mental maps	170
Conclusions	194
2.2.4. Summary - Juxtaposing the respondents' representations	195
2.3. Social field - Observing representational spaces	199
An informal settlement on private land, Sukrabad, Dhanmondi	202
Self-organisation of space in Dhaka's biggest squatter, Karail Bustee	208
Female and ritual space in the old town: Shakhari Bazaar	213
The street as everyday-use-space: Geneva Camp	218
Urban living between tradition and modernity in Dhanmondi	222
Krishna's birthday in Old Dhaka	226
2.3.1. Summary – Dynamic and emotional spaces	230
 Part 3	
3.1. Trying to bring the elements together	234
<i>Digression V / Zooming in and out Dhaka's spaces to unveil them</i>	240
3.2. Conclusion and outlook	247
 4. Bibliography	251
5. List of figures and photos	261

1.1. Introduction: Dissertation's goals, hypotheses and underlying questions

While demographic and socio-economical processes characterising contemporary mega cities undoubtedly challenge urban administrations in the first instance, inter alia with an urgent need for sensitive and creative governance solutions, the focus of this dissertation on Dhaka was set on the *moments* of the transitional period which the city is presently experiencing. „Moments“ are hereby meant in a spatial rather than temporal sense, as simultaneous elements of a spatial process: urbanisation. In other words, the aim of this research project was to **study and describe cultural elements of Dhaka's process of urbanisation accepting its transitory and constitutively fragmentary - because not complete and heterogeneous - character.**

The study consciously distanced itself from common interpretations according to which urban dwellers, especially recently urbanised migrants, are passive “repeaters” of precedent cultural influences. The **first hypothesis** underlying the dissertation was that new and original “strategies” and survival modes are being developed in the challenging urban environment.

The **second hypothesis** assumed that adopting, or being adopted by, one of Dhaka's various “subcultures” (in the sense of values and norms shared by segregated communities), dwellers not only end up to live and work in definite parts of the city, but they will find themselves gathering in particular spaces, building relationships with and within them, and giving them an identity. This process leads to the transformation of spaces with mere functional character into spaces with peculiar identities. Correspondingly, the object of interest became concrete urban spaces with symbolic, i.e. culturally produced and codified, value.

Finally, a parallel level of research was represented by urban everyday life, which reflects progressing and individual spatial „competences“ and „performances“ as well as ongoing cultural and social processes. Dhaka dwellers' everyday life appeared to be characterised by extremely original and creative practices, necessary to cope with the quickly evolving physical and social environment. These practices give form to what was termed *enriched space*, a space rich in different functions. In Dhaka - so the **third hypothesis** – space becomes a n-power of itself through peculiar uses, religious and symbolic transformations as well as through the overlapping of productive activities fulfilled by the inhabitants.

Correspondingly to these premises, the dissertation's first research object was defined as: to **individuate varying identities of *places*, decipher the *symbols* they are made of and deduce the meanings of *space* in the mega city**. The second research object was **to study how, on the base of their representations of space's meanings, dwellers „produce“ space by means of practices of everyday life**.

The study itself, designed as an empirical one, was supported by the theory on „production of space“ by the French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre, which was found particularly adaptable due to an equal stress on space and everyday life practices. The chosen approach, which is going to be explained respectively in a theoretical and a methodological chapter, excluded a pre-formulated thesis, as such would have evidently affected the researcher's perspective during the survey phase. Instead, it developed along three questions, that are here presented. The **first question** emerged along with the examination of spatial practices of everyday life, which – out of the necessity to cope with a changing environment and congested or lacking space – give form to creative adaptations and solutions and generate or „produce“ space. *Is the „production of space“ observed in everyday life practices in Dhaka merely the response to urban congestion, or does it emerge thanks to specific understandings of space (for example religious or social values of the inhabitants, peculiar understanding of space deriving from rural life...)?* As such „produced“ space is not only physical or mental, but strongly related to social interaction, it appeared to have a potential in terms of „social capital“.

The particular object of study required a certain clarification concerning the choice of the survey's perspective. Compared with European and Western cities in general, on which this author's experience was based and existing urban theories were mainly formulated, Dhaka is in a different – and not directly comparable - stage of modernisation and urbanisation, which required an open perspective. It appeared to be involved in a transition, in which pre-industrial and industrial social forms coexist and pre-urban and post-modern spatial features are mixed. At the level of the meanings of spaces in Dhaka, the **second question** regarded the interaction and mixture of existing representations with ongoing modernisation phenomena that can be already observed in the capital city. *Do representations and meanings deriving from cultural and traditional understandings of space remain untouched in times of globalisation, or are they subjected to a transition due to both physical transformation of space and shifting (urbanising) lifestyles?* On the base of mentioned understanding of „transition“, the effect of traditional cultural patterns on spatial representations were not expected to be disappearing, but rather to coexist with new

ones. This would give form to hybrid, transitory states of mind and norms of behaviour that reflect both global trends and culturally or regionally peculiar traits.

Dhaka's society, it could be said following a certain school of thought, is not yet „emptied“ due to the domination of abstract representations and consequent alienation, but rather „filled“ by the overlapping of unequal ways of life and fragmentary development phases¹. Precisely these „filled“, or „hypersignificant“, space and society were considered with particular interest and an implicit question, the **third question** of this dissertation. *Is Dhaka's „hypersignificant“ space, the fragmentary and contradictory space of a city that is still „point of confluence of different social actors“ as the classic literature used to describe cities, the core of a multi-faceted, not only top-down but „collective“ urbanisation?*

Before passing to the dissertation's theoretical base and methodology, the following paragraphs are dedicated to a short compendium on Dhaka's urbanisation in the last decades, a literature review as well as the illustration of the study's structure.

¹ As stated for example by Tom McDonough in an article on *Situationist Space* within his publication *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, p. 241-265. For Guy Debord's theory cf. *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography*, in: Ken Knabb (ed and trans.): *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 5-8. This interpretation is going to be deepened in the course of the survey and especially in the theoretical chapter on *The production of space through everyday life practices* (1.2.).

1.1.1. Backgrounds of Dhaka's urbanisation

*1951, regional capital of East-Pakistan: 336,000 inhabitants.
1971, political centre of new-born Bangladesh: 1 Million inhabitants.
2001, world's first mega city in a Less Developed Country: > 10 Million².*

During the period of field research and writing of this dissertation, between 2006 and 2008, Bangladesh's capital city Dhaka was preparing to celebrate its official 400th jubilee³. While the city's still partially investigated remote past would merit the attention of the historians, its huge growth in the recent years, making it a prime example of the contemporary centralisation and urbanisation processes in Developing Countries, justifies studying Dhaka's present with particular attention.

Between 1950 and 2000, Bangladesh's urban population grew at an annual average of 5,9%, the world's highest rate over such a long period of time⁴. While in 1950 little more than 4% of the country's population was urban, the proportion had grown to 25% in 2000; currently, the forecasts predict 44,3% of the Bangladesh's population to be urban by 2030. The process has been disproportionately concentrated in Dhaka and few other larger cities, especially the port city Chittagong and the southern Khulna, whereby Dhaka with its 12 million inhabitants in the expanded metropolitan area accounts for more than one third of Bangladesh's total urban population⁵. Though this concentration is partly explained by the city's being the historical capital of present day Bangladesh, its rapid growth is linked to various factors. First of all, Bangladesh's overall poverty should be mentioned⁶, also linked to particular geo-climatic factors deriving from the country's location in a humid-tropic and monsoon region and contemporarily on one of the world's biggest Deltas, in which the

² Data from Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, reported by Nazrul Islam in *Dhaka Now* (2005), p. 12-13, which will be here used as a reference also for further information on Dhaka's population growth and urban development.

³ Dhaka actually existed long before 1608, year in which it was declared capital of the imperial Viceroy of Bengal by the Mughals. In particular, it is known to have been the capital of a Buddhist kingdom since the 7th century (Kamrup Kingdom) and to have been ruled by Hindu kings from the 9th to the 13th century. After 1299, under Sultanate rule, Dhaka existed as a prominent commercial centre for Hindu craftsmen. Cf. Sharif Uddin Ahmed (ed) (1991): *Dhaka Past Present Future*, p. 24-42.

⁴ The average urban growth in Developed Countries in the same period was less than 2%, that of Developing Countries comprised between 2% and 5,9%. Data from the UN report *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2001 Revision*, www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wup2001/WUP2001report.htm (cf. in particular chapter IV: *Urbanization patterns and rural population growth at the country level*), which are also going to be referred to in following lines.

⁵ This is stated in mentioned publication by Nazrul Islam. The data was found to correspond with the cited UN report, according to which Bangladesh's population in 2000 was 140 million with an urban population of ca. 37 million.

⁶ Bangladesh is the world's ninth most populous (est. 2008) and the world's most densely populated country (except for state nations like Singapore or Hong Kong). It is hereby an extremely poor country, with 45% of population living below the poverty line (est. 2004) and an average GDP (purchasing power) per capita of 1,4 US\$ a day (est. 2007). US government's data, cf. *The World Fact Book* (www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html).

River Ganges unites with the Jamuna and later joins the Meghna to empty in the Bay of Bengal. The seasonal rains can easily lead to serious inundations of the fertile land and consequent loss of significant parts of the crops for the rural population, whose economies are mainly based on agriculture. River erosion and consequent loss of land are a further important factor for rural-urban migration. A second aspect, of rather administrative type, concerns Dhaka's primacy in Bangladesh's context due to the failure, on the part of the public sector, to implement decentralisation measures. Not only are the capital city's infrastructural and socio-economic conditions clearly advantaged compared to those in the rest of the country: political, administrative, financial, commercial and educational functions are concentrated within its area. The third consideration to be made is historical and is mirrored in the city's extreme urban growth between 1971 and 1991⁷. In 1971, present day Bangladesh, then East Pakistan, was the stage of a 9-month-long war against current Pakistan (then West Pakistan) that is recorded in history books as the Bangladesh Liberation War and ended with the declaration of the independent People's Republic of Bangladesh. One of the consequences of the war was the extreme impoverishment of the rural population, which in turn led to massive migration towards Dhaka as, for many, the capital city represented the only promise of survival.

The rash urban expansion caused by these processes is illustrated by the figure below.

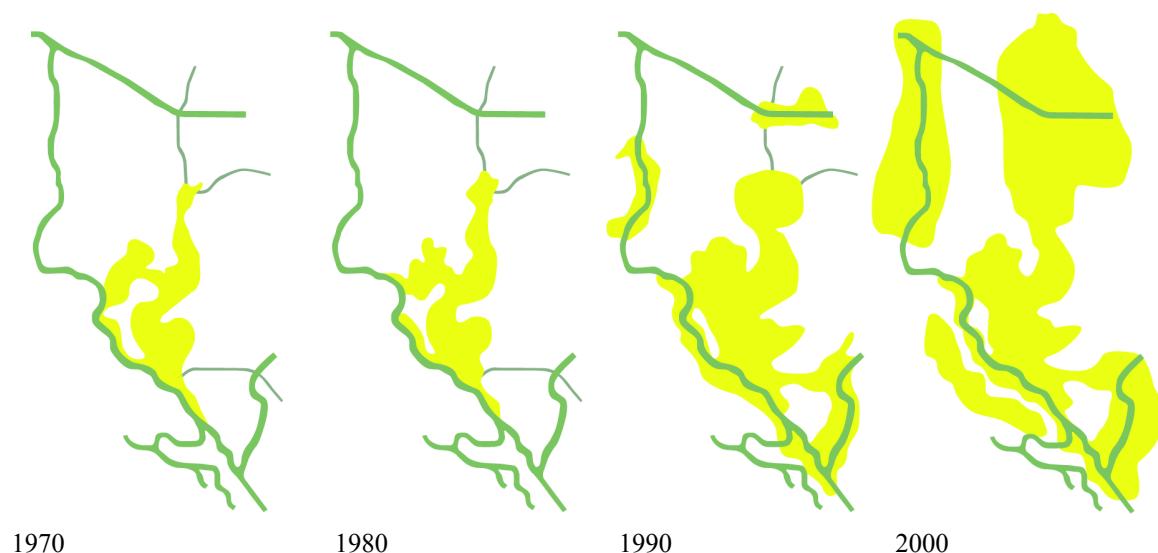


Fig. 1: Visualisation of Dhaka's urban growth since Liberation (1971). Design: Jennifer Nitschke.

⁷ An extreme growth was registered in the period from 1971 (1 million inhabitants) to 1974 (1,774 million) as an immediate consequence of the Liberation War. Due to latter, the census could not be held in 1971 but was shifted to 1974. The annual growth rates in the period 1974-1981 and following decade were of 8,1% and 6,5% respectively. Cf. Islam (2005), p. 12-13.

Though in the last decade (1991-2001) the urban growth rate lowered to 4,5% and is expected to further decrease to 3,5% in the next 2 decades, Dhaka's pace of urbanisation remains one of the fastest in the world.

In 1981, according to a survey by the Bangladeshi geographer and urban researcher Nazrul Islam, 69% of Dhaka's urban population were first generation⁸. While in the following ten years (1981-1991) the most relevant factor for urban population growth was the annexation of new areas in the course of a reform of the urban limits, rural-urban migration was recognised by him as the main reason for Dhaka's urban growth⁹. The extreme and uncontrolled pace of population growth affected Dhaka in terms of both socio-economic characteristics and physical appearance, so that Islam described it as “possibly the world's poorest and most ruralized megacity”¹⁰. Poverty can be stated on two levels: on one side, nearly 50% of Dhaka's urban population is poor¹¹; on the other, its planning and management along the years have been inadequate, creating a critical situation characterised by lack of infrastructure and basic services. One of the most visible and urgent problems is hereby housing, chronically lacking due to the high demand and, in particular, unaffordable for the poorest groups of society. Pavements dwellers, scattered squatter settlements usually developed on public land, slums as well as informal housing for the poor on private land characterise the urban scape¹².

As far as Dhaka's „rural“ appearance is concerned, again two aspects are meant. These are on the one hand the comparatively high percentage of settlers from rural areas in relation to the total population, and on the other the consequence of the typical coexistence of rivers, canals, high ground and low-lying areas in Bangladesh's landscape. According to Nazrul Islam, „many of the illiterate poor migrants find it rather difficult to adopt urban customs and acculturation is extremely slow for these groups of people”¹³ - that is to say, rural lifestyles appear to be characterising the still emerging urban life. To the socio-demographic aspect the comparatively high presence of undeveloped and rurally used

⁸ In particular, 81% of all heads of households were found to have migrant status. Cf. *Migrants in Dhaka Metropolitan Area*, in: Nazrul Islam's publication *Dhaka – From City to Megacity* (1996), page 55.

⁹ During said period, annexation contributed 44,15% of growth against the 33,53% of rural-urban migration. Further 22,31% of growth derived from natural growth. Cf. Islam (2005), p. 13. In absolute terms, the migrant population can be said to be continuing to grow, whereby its ratio to second+ generation urban dwellers may be decreasing with passage of time.

¹⁰ Cf. Islam (2005), p. 2.

¹¹ Cf. Islam (2005), p. 29-30, who in 1990 found 50% of urban population to be living below the poverty line and 30% below the extreme poverty line.

¹² In 2005, a survey led by Nazrul Islam identified 4.342 slums and squatters within the limits of Dhaka City, that are showed in a plan in the appendix (cf. Fig. 1, page 3). For the report cf. Centre for Urban Studies (CUS), National Institute of Population Research (NIPORT) and Training and MEASURE Evaluation (ed.) (2006): *Slums in Urban Bangladesh: Mapping and Census, 2005*.

¹³ Cf. *Megacity Problems: The case of Dhaka* in Islam (1996), p. 196, in which Dhaka was termed a „premature mega city“. The average literacy in 2001 was found to be 64,9% by the local census, though the rates strongly varied between urban areas, with lowest values of 30% and peaks of 90%.

portions of land can be added, often occupied by semi-permanent or temporary dwellings in ephemeral materials, giving the cityscape a „rural note“.

The administrative plan reproduced on next page provides the opportunity to define Dhaka's territorial identities and make the mentioned figures on population more precise. It has been mentioned above that Dhaka's population passed the 10 million mark in 2000, and that it was estimated to have reached 12 million in 2005. Yet, as Nazrul Islam pointed out, these figures refer to Dhaka Mega City or Dhaka Metropolitan Development Planning area (DMDP), whose only in part urbanised area of 1.528 square kilometers is popularly known as Greater Dhaka¹⁴. It comprises the two smaller territories of Dhaka Metropolitan Area (DMA) and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC). While latter corresponds to the central and most urbanised city, Dhaka Metropolitan Area is constituted by DCC and some adjoining areas to the city's east, which have been developed and built up in recent years in order to face the housing demand by the growing urban population¹⁵. Following the perspective adopted by precedent studies, among others also Nazrul Islam's, this survey was limited to DCC, that is the area generally called „Dhaka“ by the locals, in which 6,7 million inhabitants live¹⁶.

¹⁴ Cf. Islam (2005), p. 8-10. DMDP area is the result of a planning effort, it corresponds in fact to the extension that planners expected to be urbanised within 2030 and for which the last Structure and Master Plans have been compiled.

¹⁵ DCC has an area of 145 square kilometers, DMA of about 306 square kilometers. A further „concept“ of Dhaka is constituted by Dhaka Statistical Metropolitan Area (DSMA), which has an area of 1.353 square kilometers and includes the four municipalities marked in blue in Fig. 2. (Narayanganj to the south, Tongi to the north, Gazipur further north and Savar to the west. It is the total area considered by Dhaka Census.

¹⁶ Three further administrative subdivisions are relevant for statistical and administrative purposes: *pourashavas*, *thanas* and wards. *Pourashavas*'s (Bangla for „municipality“) boundaries, mainly used for taxation and delimiting the urban area's boundaries, are broad administrative unities; the municipalities are followed by the *thanas* (Bangla for „police station“), and in turn the wards, representing the smallest units of local government.

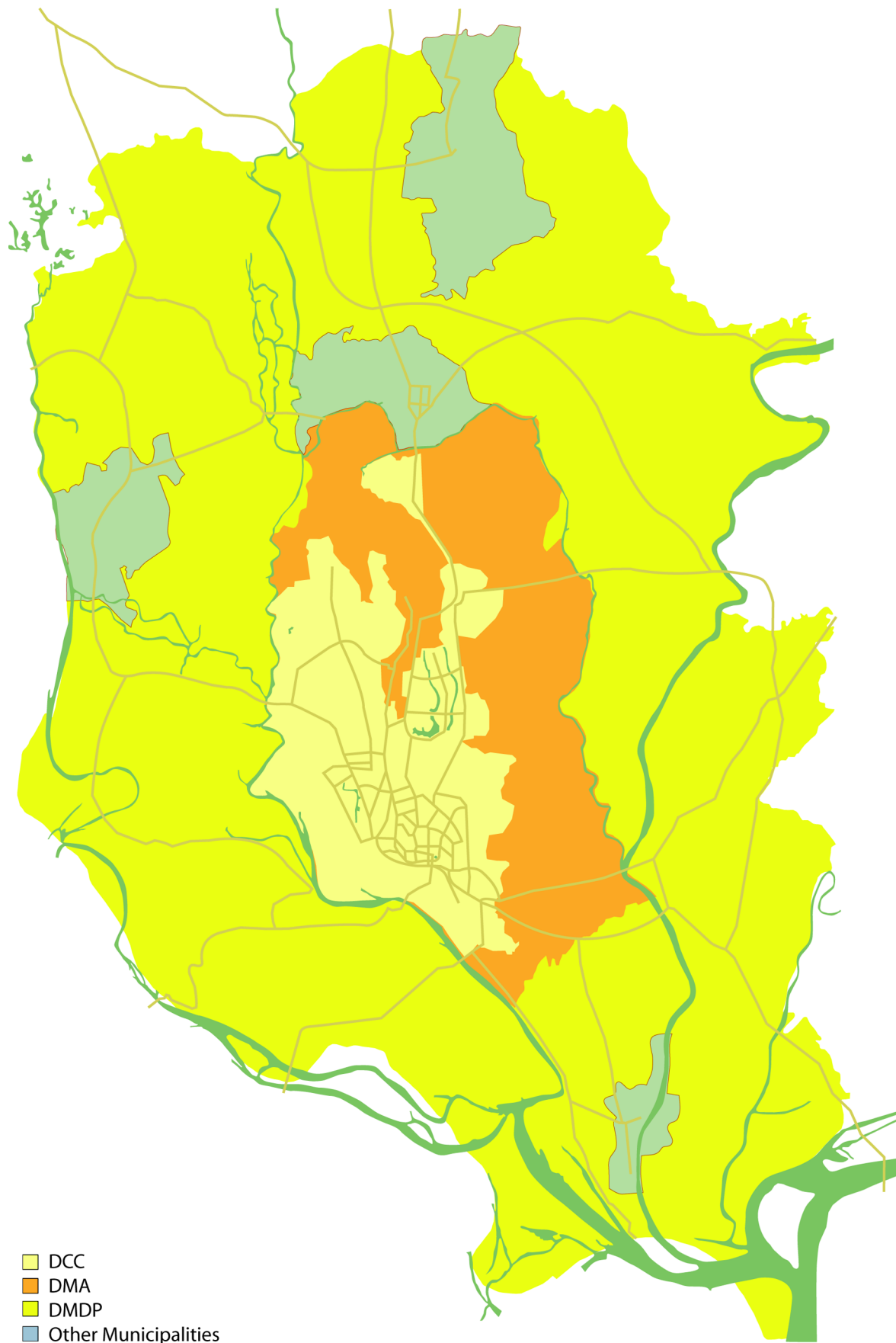


Fig. 2: Visualisation of administrative identities of Dhaka. Design: Jennifer Nitschke on the base of *Dhaka City and Rajuk Plan*, published by The Mappa Ltd., 2007.

1.1.2. Literature Review

Given the accumulation of problematic consequences linked to the narrowly delineated urbanisation process, it should not come of surprise that in the last years local as well as international agencies have initiated urban upgrading and development projects in Dhaka¹⁷. However, at the beginning of this dissertation in 2005, attempts at wide-reaching urban research appeared to have been rather sporadic¹⁸. With the exception of the work of Nazrul Islam and the Centre for urban Studies (CUS) created by him - which represents a relevant and indispensable contribution to the exploration of the process' course, of its implications (especially for the urban poor) as well as of possible solutions -, only a few English speaking researchers from Bangladesh have been involved in in-depth studies on Dhaka's urbanisation and urban population. The publication *Dhaka Past Present Future*, edited by historian Sharif Uddin Ahmed after a conference held among national researchers in 1989, dates from 1991¹⁹. Single articles by architects and planners, especially from Dhaka's engineering university and Aga Khan Foundation, evidence sectoral aspects of urban planning and development. Also at the international level, research on Dhaka appeared to have been rare; the analysis underlying Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan, though accurate, goes back to 1990-1995. Apart from the scattered information provided by studies by international agencies and human rights organisations, rare articles in publications concerning urbanisation in Asia could be consulted.

As far as the author's personal field of competence - which could be ascribed to the sphere of **cultural studies** - and area of interest - which was clearly focused on **space and its cultural representation** - are concerned, a similarly limited choice of works from Dhaka could be referred to. These (for example the publications by geographers like Rosie Majid Ahsan and Hafiza Khatun, or the Dhaka-based anthropologist Thèrese Blanchet) were characterised by a strong focus on gender or referred to urban areas or settings with very specific, or sectoral, characteristics. Such state of research necessitated a multidisciplinary involvement within the frame of the envisaged research – Dhaka - and a very individual definition of the topic and its approach. Searching for references and viable approaches in

¹⁷ Cf. Islam (2005), p. 77, for a review of last decades' most relevant supports to urban development, among which UNDP (for the preparation of one Strategy and one Master/Structure Plan in 1979-81 and 1990-95 as well as squatters resettlement), Asia Development Bank (for urban planning in 1979-1981 and primary health care in the 90s), World Bank (for environmental improvement in Old Dhaka in the 80s, water treatment plan in 90s and transportation development in the late 90s and at present) as well as international NGOs and European states' support (for poverty alleviation programmes) are referred to.

¹⁸ Cf. *Bibliography*.

¹⁹ The work of the renowned Bangladeshi historian Muntassir Mahmum, who delved into many aspects of urban life, has unfortunately not been translated so far.

studies on other cities and urban contexts, some inspiration was found in the publications by the Indian anthropologist Nita Kumar, who described everyday life spaces and their cultural value, as well as in the Central and South American urban studies, with anthropological and ethnological works inspecting „imagined“ space and its effect on urban life and culture²⁰.

1.1.3. Dissertation's structure

The dissertation was structured around three main parts: Part 1 introduces both the theoretical and methodological approaches, on which the survey was based. In particular, chapter 1.2. on *The production of space through everyday life practices* delves into Henri Lefebvre's theory on the production of space and recognises the conditions for its application in the context of an empirical survey. In the *Methodology* (chapter 1.3.), the obtained insights are used to define the concrete „tools“ of the field research.

Subsequently, Part 2 delves into the results of the conducted survey, which were obtained from an analysis of Dhaka's spatial dispositions, illustrated in chapter 2.1. or *Physical field – Spatial Practice*; from an evaluation of the interviews on representations of space, presented in chapter 2.2. or *Mental field – Representation of space*; as well as from the participant observation, whose findings are collected in chapter 2.3. or *Social field – Observing representational spaces*.

The central part is followed by Part 3: while attempting a first summary of the completed work with special regard to Lefebvre's theory, paragraph 3.1, or *Trying to put the elements together*, re-collects the research's main insights. In *Conclusion and outlook* (paragraph 3.2.), finally, the questions as presented above will be answered.

²⁰ Cf. for example Kumar, Nita: *The space of the child: the nation, the neighbourhood, and the home* in: *The Politics of Gender, Community, and Modernity* (2007) as well as *Friends, Brothers, and Informants: Fieldwork Memoirs of Banaras* (1992); Aguilar, Miguel Angel (et al.) (ed.): *La ciudad desde sus lugres. Trece ventanas etnográficas para una metrópoli*, Mexiko (2001), or Wildner, Kathrin: *Zócalo – die Mitte der Stadt Mexiko. Ethnographie eines Platzes* (2003).

1.2. The production of space through everyday life practice

...In the space of 30 years, Dhaka's literally car-free streets transformed into congested roads, where brand-new Japanese cars and rusted Chinese and Russian buses challenge hand-painted rickshaws (latter only partially allowed in main streets and rush hours) and their drivers; its neighbourhoods, until then unfolding around the traditional centre represented by mosque and bazaar, lost these traditional reference points and opened up to the proliferation of shopping malls, attractive purchase and leisure resorts for an upcoming and aspiring middle-class; and in the meantime, a new type of procession rhythmically poured young women in the streets - from home to the garment factory, and back...

...It may be less a question of overpopulation than of tradition if the artisans' and small businesses and shops dispose over little space in the Subcontinent – the observation of their set-up in the villages would confirm that. Instead, everyday actions are often displaced to outdoor spaces: private gardens, verandas, or on the street, scenes of work, chats as well as of a bustling coming and going of people and goods. Thus, depending on time – within a day and within the year -, and along with the varying users, the street assumes different functions. Such variability of uses, gestures and passages in space is related to a simultaneity of actions and interactions between various individuals and social groups, which gives birth to what initially instigated the present research: an „enriched space“, at once used by the most different individuals with the most different purposes, in an overlapping of inter-actions. This does not simply multiply, but squares, cubes, or elevates space to an even higher n-power...²¹

These „impressionistic“ sketches should have made clear that also Dhaka's urban scape is rich in objects and signs revealing and mirroring ongoing historical processes; yet, as witnessed by the described rickshaws, the indices of globalisation, of migration and adaptation perceptible on Dhaka's streets are neither univocal nor exclusive. While some dimensions of everyday life undoubtedly underwent a complete transformation, others remained untouched or are still in transition, or in a passage. Confronted with developments that are spanned between mazy lanes and the real estate market or, leaving the metaphor, with the coexistence of traditional and new production ways, uses of space and lifestyles, this dissertation renounces to indicate the way, through an assumed “process of modernisation”, towards a “final”, or “ideal”, stage of development for Dhaka. Extent

²¹ Notes from own diary, April 2005.

and nature of the changes presently concerning this mega city (and others of recent urbanisation in non-Western countries) are such that the word “process” can be only used in its dialectic sense - meaning a constant transformation through the influence of coexisting and never completely disappearing antithetical agents. Hence, the concentration on *moments*.

A problem this author had to face during the definition of the research object consisted of the urban studies' main concentration on analysing physical and practical aspects, for example natural environment, infrastructure, or the socio-economic patterns of singular areas. This seemed to actually reduce heterogeneity and simultaneity of trends, peculiar to each city, to a few assessable layers. Although against the background of increasingly virulent problems and of global co-responsibility such an option is legitimate, with this dissertation project a change of perspective from the technical and demographical to a socio-cultural focus and at the same time from the specificity of particular areas to the city „at large“ was aimed at. A broad point of view should allow the most contradictory trends and diverse living forms in Dhaka to be embraced. The purpose necessitated the examination of possible theoretical models that legitimise and sustain the undertaking. To start with, the study of Dhaka, a city which challenges or even rejects traditional views with its inscrutable mixture of structural features, individual biographies and living forms, requested to make object of an in-depth reflection the same concept of „city“. The difficulty in approaching a fast growing city does not primarily come about in the confrontation with the proverbial congestion, informality or comparatively recentness of urbanisation *per se*. Reason of a „critical diffidence“ was rather an overall euro-centric perspective²² and the mentioned tendency, in urban studies, to “reduce” city to objectivable matters.

Since Max Weber²³, who described the historical development of the Western city from the charisma-dominated, through the commercial, up to the independent city based on political self-organisation, modern urban studies have contributed to foster a pragmatic view of urban history leaned on economic argumentations. Such was „varied“ by historians like

²² In fact, urban studies are mostly limited to analyses of the European/Occidental city, though Peter Marcuse has made a fascinating trial in an article of his book *Of States and Cities: The Partitioning of Urban Space* (2002)., in which he tried to shift the attention to the question whether „alternative notions“ of urban life are peculiar of non-European countries and whether they continue to survive despite the colonial and globalisation influence.

²³ Weber's analysis of the city is included in his fundamental work *Economy and Society* of 1914. Herein, the German thinker made a clear distinction between European and Asian urban history due to the lack, in latter, of an emancipation process from feudal social systems towards free cities.

Lewis Mumford or Paul Wheatley²⁴, who, stressing the ritual i.e. ceremonial foundation of cities since the antiquity, focused on the cultural and symbolic role of cities within their societies; nonetheless, these authors also basically continued to lean on the concept of domination. Along with industrialisation and the improvement of capitalistic production systems, cities and urban structures underwent progressive changes and/or dissolved. According to the analyses of sociologists like Georg Simmel, Louis Wirth or Jürgen Habermas²⁵, in the modern city „urban culture“ consisted of an increasingly perfect adaptation to the market economy, parallel to the uniformation of everyday life. Beyond the respective accents, the urban society described by all these models comes to coincide with the final point of a universal „modernisation“. In the last decades, such interpretations have been challenged by theories that conceive of the city as a continuous and never finalised process²⁶. Contemporary thinkers stressed the *simultaneity* of communication and interaction, *heterogeneity* of lifestyles, ethnicities and languages as well as *hybridity* of forms – medieval, rural-urban, pre-urban, post-modern – characterising cities.

Such understanding appears not only reasonable, but indispensable, especially when mentioned theories are applied to urbanisation processes in Industrialising and Developing Countries. It would be in fact difficult, if not impossible, to regard Dhaka as a static, quantifiable fact, after having observed its inhabitants in the traffic ocean, slaloming on rickshaws, making hour-long walks (maybe in a *borkha*) to reach and leave the working place in garment factories, or driving protected from sun and sight in their cars, and having tramped through vegetable gardens cramped between the new high-rise buildings that are occupied by offices with modern furniture. Similar examples of fragmented development charm and at the same time face the student with a challenge, as it becomes crucial to define which and especially whose city should be looked at, and how. To recapitulate:

²⁴ Cf. Lewis Mumford's work *The city in history* (1961) and Paul Wheatley's *The pivot of the four quarters* (1971). For Mumford, the historical development of the city started with the necessity to celebrate funerals as a way to elaborate the fear of death. Division of labour and consequent emergence of professions, as well as hierarchies, appeared in his interpretation along with an increasing importance of celebrations and rituals and an always bigger abstraction of divinities. Wheatley dedicated one part of his work to demonstrating how, in the 7 regions of primary urban generation (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus valley, North China Plain, Meso-America, central Andes and the Yoruba territories of south-western Nigeria), the city originally represented a ceremonial centre.

²⁵ Cf. e.g. Simmel's *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903), Wirth's analysis of modern urban life's phenomena (dissolution of family bondages, isolation and individualisation, mobility, etc.) in *Urbanism as a Way of Life* (1938), as well as Habermas' *Technology and Science as Ideology* (1968).

²⁶ The spectrum goes from sociologists like Richard Sennett (*The Fall of Public Man*, 1976), to architects/planners/architecture theoreticians like Rem Koolhaas (*The Generic City*, 1995), to thinkers like Jean Baudrillard (*Citoyenneté et urbanité*, 1991), Jean-François Lyotard (*Perspektiven metropolitaner Kultur*, 2000) or Boris Groys (*Die Stadt auf Durchreise*, 2003), etc. Not all refused the classical views: it is rather possible to integrate them in nowadays' context, as the same definitions of city as „confluence of diversity“ or as „stage of an active public opinion that shapes social processes“, owed respectively to Wirth and Habermas, can be re-interpreted to explain the globalisation, fragmentation, individualisation and diversification processes characterising post-modern cities.

- asserting that Dhaka can not be approached by classic sociological theories due to latter' rootedness in the European socio-cultural and urban history,
- under consideration of the fragmentary nature of its urban development, which is the reason of the city's appearance as a juxtaposition of different hybridities,
- but especially and primarily out of an understanding of city as process, which has shifted the perspective from city to urbanisation,

the coordinates for the search of an alternative theoretical approach are given: theories on **urbanisation instead of city** are to be looked for.

In the phase of orientation, an approach beyond the established theories of urban geography and sociology was searched for in philosophy. Hereby, it was difficult to figure out that the post-structuralist thought with its absolute refusal of unitary models and programmatic fragmentariness could be applied within a study that aimed at describing a concrete city's everyday life practices. An illuminating reading were the thoughts on urbanisation of the French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre. In this book *La production de l'espace*²⁷, Lefebvre integrated his critique of everyday life and an epistemology derived, and originally developed, from the dialectic of historical materialism, into a unitary theory of urbanisation, hereby maintaining an awareness of the irreducible complexity peculiar to post-modern cities. Following, his work will be contextualised within the pertinent philosophical traditions and movements; secondly, his theory of the production of space will be illustrated and, thirdly, critically arranged for the envisaged research²⁸.

²⁷ English: *The production of space*. *La production de l'espace* (following called PE) was first published in 1974. This survey refers to the fourth French edition, published in 2000; for English quotations, if not differently indicated, I will refer to the English translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith from 2007, *The Production of Space* (following called PS).

²⁸ I'm thus following the encouragement of the German author Christian Schmid, who compiled a very useful work on Lefebvre's spatial and urban theory with the purpose to make it accessible for empirical applications as well as theoretical developments. Schmid expressively suggested that empirical applications in all fields of social and urban research should make fruitful the revealed theory. Cf. Christian Schmid (2005), *Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft. Henri Lefebvre und die Theorie der Produktion des Raumes* (SRG). The analysis in next paragraphs will lean on Schmid's work.

Digression I /

Henri Lefebvre's evolutions, and convolutions, towards a trialectic model

*The leitmotif of Lefebvre's philosophical project, developed within the three volumes of La critique de la vie quotidienne (English: Critique of Everyday Life)²⁹, consisted of a survey of everyday life based on the concept of **practice**. Since the late 1930s, when he published Le matérialisme dialectique, the French thinker had been concerned with the idea of human self-production, according to which the human nature transforms reality through **inventive, sensually perceivable and social action**. The concept of action, equated by Marx to labour and work, has for Lefebvre a broad meaning, as he considered this „action“ as a basis of cognition as well as of social reality. Correspondingly, in the course of his occupation with everyday life, „action“ was progressively substituted by the term „practice“³⁰. The steps of his search towards a new philosophical model are here presented in order to be later discussed with reference to the theory of production of space. Unsurprisingly for a thinker bound to the historical materialism, Lefebvre conceived of philosophical thought as a necessarily dialectic one. Hereby, he did not limit himself to Marx's dialectic, but started from Hegel and was inspired by Nietzsche, which led him to develop an own original conception³¹. He agreed with Hegel on the fact that every concept „self-directedly“ tends towards a second concept which is its own contradiction or negation, and from here to a third concept - their confluence and overcoming³². However, he regarded as problematic the fact that, in Hegel's reception, this „unity“ was often equated to a completion and actually implied a stop to the historical movement of concepts. With his notion of production, implying an essentially contradictory and never-ending reality due to the „human factor“, and an ideologically sustained refusal to*

²⁹ The first volume hereof, called *Introduction*, was published in 1947; the second, with the subtitle *Fondament d'une sociologie de la quotidienneté*, in 1962, and the last one, *De la modernité au modernisme (pour une métaphilosophie du quotidien)*, in 1981. However, Lefebvre's intense occupation with everyday life gave birth to further publications, like *Introduction à la modernité* (1962), *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (1968) as well as *Éléments de rythmanalyse* (1992, one year after his death).

³⁰ Lefebvre also distanced himself from Marx's narrow economic definition of production and intended it as a poietic act, from which all bearings of social beings are derived: the individual own life as well as History, individual consciousness as well as social relations, logical forms as well as cognition, art and pleasure. To the later concentration on economic theories, Lefebvre preferred Marx's earlier, less axiomatic works like *Grundrisse* (1857) and especially the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844). Cf. Lefebvre's former works on Marxism such as his suggestion for a „dialectical materialism“ in *Le matérialisme dialectique*, as well as *Problèmes actuels du marxisme* or *Le romantisme révolutionnaire* (latter written with Tristan Tzara, Claude Roy and Lucien Goldmann) both of 1958.

³¹ In SRG, Christian Schmid pointed out that Lefebvre's „dialectic“ has not yet been exhaustively studied, which is partially due to the fact that he continuously enriched and modified his theory. Here, a broad delineation will be attempted.

³² For Hegel, cf. *Wissenschaft der Logik I*, in: *Werke* 5:114, also shortly in SRG, page 88-91.

conceive of a perfectible history, Lefebvre could not embrace this view. Instead of the „perfect“ synthesis, he insisted on „transformation“, an aspect actually implied in Hegel's original German term „Aufhebung“, and stressed the fact that the negation carried by the second term must be contained - and not solved -, in transformed and more complex form, in the third³³. Such overcoming offered the premises for a promise, for a „project instead of reality“, i.e. a possibility that can be realised through action³⁴.

In the development of his thought, Lefebvre exerted a more profound critique to German idealism: by regarding philosophy as first dimension of cognition, thought was „alienated“ from material practice. Hence the declaration of **movement** – i.e. the dynamism created by the negation of practice and thought – as the basis of a new dialectic, in which practice and thinking are two „essences“ that run parallel to each other and vis-à-vis others, whereby their dialectically emerging unity transcends both³⁵. The „essence“ standing vis-à-vis to practice and thinking is precisely the human being, his vitality as conceived of by Nietzsche, a fantastic, poetic and poietic element based on an absolute will³⁶. Such vital force is neither localised in thought, nor in the pure practice, but externally to both, as a transcendental concept which „contains“ and at a time contradicts, hereby never completely overcoming, practice as well as thought. Herewith, Lefebvre had founded a „**trialectic**“ of thought, practice, and active poetic power, which, some years later, should constitute the basement of The Production of Space³⁷.

The poetic power was never completely defined by Lefebvre, although he often referred to it in terms of "desire", regarded as the means for the establishment of practice in the theoretical discourses. What is the meaning of "desire"? One first delineation can be found in the so-called „strategy of residues“, the basis of Lefebvre's meta-philosophy or philosophy of everyday life, in which desire is synonymous of „residues“. Latter are

³³ In fact, Hegel used the German word „Aufhebung“, which contemporarily means „overcoming“ and „maintaining“. This double meaning may be the reason of interpretation problems for non-German readers of Hegel. Cf. Lefebvre's *Métaphilosophie. Prolégomènes* (1965), page 30.

³⁴ Ibid. The implications of this inventive act will be disclosed in the course of present chapter.

³⁵ Following Lefebvre's formulation in *Le matérialisme dialectique*, SRG, page 100, practice is one „essence running parallel to thought, standing against other essences, whereby their unity transcends it“.

³⁶ Lefebvre (1965), page 137.

³⁷ „Trialectic“ was preferred to „dialectical trilogy“, „triadic dialectic“ or „Dialektik der Dreiheit“ (all suggested by Schmid in course of SRG), which appear as oxymoron, and is more synthetic than „dialectically developing trilogy“. „Three-elements“ systems became a constant in Lefebvre's theoretical work to come, also beyond epistemology and urban research (for instance, in his theory of language and political theory), and featured an own individuality in comparison to other „three-partied“ theoretical systems. Also Lacan's psychoanalytical „topology“, which was known to Lefebvre, consisted of three registers, i.e. 1) of an imagination that resembles Lefebvre's "desire", 2) of reality as empty space or stability and 3) of symbolism as premise of language and mediator between the others. However, Lefebvre criticised Lacan's system as it assumed „the logical, epistemological and anthropological priority of language [instead of everyday life social practice] over space“ (PS, p. 36) – a critique he expanded to semiology - from Kristeva, to Barthes and Derrida - too.

elements of human life that are not reducible to abstraction and thus uncontrollable, for example spontaneous vitality, the human being in his non-philosophical (everyday life) existence, sexuality, the freedom of individual opinion, behavioural deviancy, etc. In the envisioned strategy, these elements should be collected to create a „truer universum“ characterised by heterogeneity, plurality, discrepancy and disharmonies³⁸, in which the traditional dichotomy of philosophy and everyday life, of spirituality and materiality, theory and practice is dissolved.

An interesting aspect of Lefebvre's trialectic model is that it does not request any „over-ordered“ identity, because the process of social reality is essentially dynamic and thus „non-perfectible“. In the reception of Lefebvre, the unclear and contradictory formulations intertwining his work gave reason to surmise that the idea of an „over-order“ was not actually abandoned, but merely „hidden“, in the concept of social space. Furthermore, many criticised the apparent contradiction between two possible meanings of social field in this model: on one side, it seemed to be a coequal element beside thought and practice, on the other, it would also be an over-ordered „container“ of the entire production process. Such criticism appears unfounded and can be contrasted in 2½ ways:

- *the fact that Lefebvre did not employ more words on the „over-concept“ despite his occupation, also in future, with the production of space, seems to attest that he expected his dynamic model per se, and not a system, to be focused on as primary characteristic feature and novelty of his trialectic;*
- *looking for a writing and analysis form for the Urban, he became interested in „rhythms“ - which are essentially based on dynamism and not on a beginning and end (like, for instance, harmonies) - and created the „rhythmanalysis“; but also before this, he had a erratic throughout, „musical“ writing style. Such style should be acknowledged as programmatic choice, rather than „tolerated“ as mere formal exercise³⁹: with it, Lefebvre did not want to confuse, but to suggest that the production of space, based on everyday life, can not be conceived of as an „order“. He rather preferred to think of a „theoretical unity“ as a dialectic relation between the three*

³⁸ The „strategy of residues“ was actually the most consistently developed of a series of „strategies“ that Lefebvre elaborated along the years, from the „revolution of everyday practice“, to the „urban revolution“, to the „production of a differential space“. I advert to SRG, page 108, for a more profound description of the residues.

³⁹ This would be confirmed also by his later comments in interviews and works, beside the mentioned *Elements of Rhythmanalysis* especially *Introduction à la modernité – Douze Préludes* (IM) of 1962 (*Introduction to Modernity: Twelve Preludes, September 1959-May 1961*, translated by John Moore in 1995), in which Lefebvre seemed to experiment, in written form, the same „revolution“ attempted by the modern composer Arnold Schoenberg, about whom he had written: „Schoenberg was dismantling the monolithic structures of classical harmony; and regardless of whether we like the twelve-tone scale or not, we must admit that it was a revolutionary direction for music to take“.

elements, whereby this should not be taken for a „universal“ or „essential“ unity, which would again imply one unitarian essence comprehensive of all others, in a finished system;

- *the consideration of his „intellectual entourage“ - the surrealists first, the situationists later – additionally confirms his preference for dynamisms and dynamics over „systems“ and finalised thinking processes.*

An excessive insistence on the definition of social space, deriving from an exclusive concentration on finding concrete applications for the model, would fail to acknowledge the actual novelty and originality of the trialectic model in itself. In the contrary, this study has consciously aimed at understanding and interpreting the trialectic before adapting it⁴⁰.

1.2.1. Lefebvre's conception of *everyday life practice and urbanisation*

After having delved into a theoretical evolution spanning over more than 20 years, the focus comes herewith back to the “critique” of everyday life, which occupied Lefebvre for the years to come and confronted him with an increasingly important topic, urbanisation. It was said that Lefebvre regarded **everyday life** as the real centre of social practice and as source of any form of social cognition⁴¹. An heir of the Marxist method, he understood everyday life as the object of historical analysis, whereby its being a product of social reality requested to make it the object of in-depth critique. Why a „critique“? Because in modern urban life - and here Marx, but also Simmel and Habermas are echoed - reality, analytically subdivided in functionally organised sectors (work, private life, leisure time, etc.), alienates and lacerates human beings. The importance of urbanisation for the analysis of everyday life can be explained in two ways. On one side, for Lefebvre, urban life was the dimension in which alienating routines could be broken: city and urban reality, as products, can be „consumed“ by human beings when they follow their desire instead of

⁴⁰ It would be possible to speculate whether Lefebvre's reception, embedded in (Neo-)Marxist thought, has failed up to present day to acknowledge his actual contribution to, and/or points of contact with, post-structuralist thought. For example, Deleuze, who with *Différence et répétition* (1968) (Engl. *Difference and Repetition*) had developed the idea of a transcendental empiricism. Could it be spoken also here of an „Aufhebung“ in Lefebvre's sense?

⁴¹ In Lefebvre's political writings, everyday life, usually characterised by bureaucratisation and directed consumption, can thus become the starting point for social change through a change in everyday life's practices – here intended as routines – that could initiate a revolution. Differently, since his precedent reflections on surrealism, Lefebvre considered poetic language as ideally, but not factually, adaptable to defeat everyday life's alienation due to the fact, that language itself had fallen victim to tradition (cf. *La révolution urbaine*). The consequences hereof were drawn by the situationists, who transposed the „fight“ from language to urban space.

being dominated by ideology – for example in festivals⁴². Secondly, Lefebvre's thinking was a product of its time. He „discovered“ urbanisation during the 60s through its symptoms, visible in broad parts of France: mechanisation of rural work, increasing industrialisation and partial transformation of villages into urbanised settlements for factory workers. From an initial interest for the changes in everyday life practices and the boredom deriving from the monotony of regularised working and living processes, he resolved to study the transformations triggered by urbanisation in cities.

While searching for an alternative theory on which to base his analysis, he confronted himself with the contemporary *discours* on the city, characterised by a number of critical writings that declared the „crisis“ of the city⁴³. Successively, he re-defined the terms and causes of this crisis on the base of the (Marxist) contradiction between land and city. As such contradiction was about to disappear due to a double and intertwined process affecting city and agriculture, the „crisis“ actually consisted in the fact that 1) the city was losing its autonomy and its clear form, whereas 2) the land, itself urbanised, was losing its characterising attribute, the work on the fields⁴⁴. These reflections gave him reason to postulate the **complete urbanisation of society** and the future emergence of a post-industrial society characterised by pervasive urbanisation - as in its material structure (which becomes homogeneous in the heterogeneity intrinsic to the urban fabric), so in culture, ways of life and production system⁴⁵. The insistence on the still *unrealised* nature of such „urban society“ distinguishes Lefebvre's thinking from other authors' analyses, which regarded contemporary cities, in Europe and globally, as an already ultimated form,

⁴² Maybe in a naive way compared with Michael Bachtin's work on carnival, Lefebvre recognised in the festival – a typical feature of every city and in every era - the primary moment of consumption of the city's streets and squares, buildings, infrastructure and monuments, which breaks the domination, on the part of the urban structures, over the inhabitants; by introducing in everyday life some elements of jocosity and unpredictability that humans need to escape from social reality's monotony, festivals encounter and activate their "*desire*".

⁴³ Cf. publications such as *The Exploding Metropolis*, edited by young US-American journalists, as well as *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs (1961). These authors brought forward the problems of urban sprawl, of the mixture of functions and inner-urban reorganisation in post-war American cities, and addressed urban planning and design as principally responsible for such „urban crisis“. Analogue criticism was carried over also by the French activists' group of the *Situationnistes Internationales*, among whom many a student of Lefebvre's were active, whereby they proposed a new form of urbanism, called „*urbanisme unitaire*“, as well as a series of tools for intervention, action and creation of situations in the urban scape.

⁴⁴ *Le droit à la ville*, page 82, Lefebvre (1968).

⁴⁵ Cf. *La révolution urbaine*, page 7 as well as SRG, page 128-131. Lefebvre expressively spoke of an „urban fabric“ that is proliferating, expanding and almost organically devouring rural existence, whereby its loose mesh allows rural „islands“: cf. *Writings on Cities*, translated by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, page 71-72 (2005): „[the expansion of urban fabric] leads at the same time to the depopulation and the <loss of the peasantry> from the villages which remain rural while losing what was peasant life: crafts, small locals shops. Old <ways of life> become folklore. If the same phenomena are analysed from the perspective of cities, one can observe not only the extension of highly populated peripheries but also of banking, commercial and industrial networks and of housing“. I regard this quotation as central for an understanding of Lefebvre's perspective, which was constantly tensed to grasp simultaneous and necessarily convergent processes.

and thus excluded any possibility for different developments.

In its involvement with urbanisation, Lefebvre equated it with movement, tendency or tension. Yet, if in order to “observe” [Lat. “watching over”] it is necessary to stand on an exterior observation platform, “observing” urbanisation risked to be impossible: at most, it could be “spoken of” on the base of its observable consequences, signs and symptoms, whereby their isolated observation and combination could not grant an understanding of the whole. Was „city“ as object of social research lost, split into a thousand parts by an uneven development, exploded in a cacophony of theories? In search of a way out from his self-created impasse, Lefebvre initially thought of an historical analysis. He traced a spatial-temporal „line of urbanisation“, in which History was illustrated as passing from a natural status, through the political, then commercial and industrial city, to the „critical phase“ represented by the ongoing dissolution of the contradiction between land and city⁴⁶. Though, also this system based on the trilogy „Rural – Industrial – Urban“ could not rescue the reflection on city from its fall in the inscrutability of urbanisation and virtuality of the „urban society“. In order to re-establish the definition of city and reintroduce it to scientific research, Lefebvre had to go further; his next attempt was again of macro-sociological nature and started from the consideration of two basic „schools of thought“ on the city. The first postulated that city is a delimited, distinct spatial unity characterised by specific attributes, in the tradition of Max Weber and, later, of the Chicago School. The second was Marx/Engels' orientation, centred on the contradiction between city and land. Again, Lefebvre preferred the dialectic option and created an original theory based on three „spatio-temporal social levels“: the private level (P), the „total“ level (G), and the intermediate level between them, the city (M)⁴⁷. Level P, also called „near order“, can be easily traced back and equated to the everyday life or practical-sensual reality (including family, neighbourhood and kinship, organisations and corporations). The „far order“ or level G, in contrast, was less clearly defined: it could be said to be the level of entire social reality, comprehending international organisations and institutions that have the power to form moral and judicial principles, ideologies, political strategies, etc. through codes and culture⁴⁸. Such a level is abstract and formal, and encompasses „global“ relationships like

⁴⁶ Cf. SRG, page 132ff for an in-depth description of the urbanisation phases, which on one side show an indisputable influence of Marx/Engels' historical thought and on the other are comparable to Castells' later analysis in *Is there an urban sociology?* of 1976.

⁴⁷ P = „private“; G = „global“; M = „mediator“. In *La Production de l'espace*, Lefebvre clarified that all three levels contemplate, in turn, characteristic traits of publicness and privacy, openness and closure, etc., meaning that all three spheres have different degrees and mixed or intermediate forms as well. Further on, he attributed to the levels various disciplines: planning and economy to level G, urban design and planning to M and architecture to P. Cf. PS, p. 155 and 12.

⁴⁸ In PS, global G is furthermore equated to the „public“ level, that „of temples, palaces and political and administrative buildings“. Cf. PS, p. 155.

capital market and physical planning as well as processes like industrialisation and urbanisation. The city (M), lastly, mediates and penetrates both levels and as such appears respectively as a „projection“ of society on the concrete ground, and as voice of society through monuments, ceremonies, festivals, „times and rhythms“⁴⁹.

Though neither this sociological, nor the historical approach managed to reintroduce a viable definition of city, it was important to illustrate Lefebvre's efforts towards a more mature theory not only in order to introduce his terminology and philosophical context, but to describe a search that was found highly in line with the doubts which emerged during the empirical and theoretical development of this dissertation. Furthermore, accordingly to what is illustrated above it is now possible to give a definition of „urbanisation“ as used in this study: **urbanisation will be understood as a continuous process and city as essentially in a transitory state, whereby the concrete everyday life practice dominates and directs its development.**

1.2.2. The theory of production of space

It was showed how, by shifting from city to urbanisation, Lefebvre had lost an „object“ that could be observed by sociological and philosophical analysis of social reality. Despite having reached important assertions, such as:

- the city is a historical configuration linked to centrality,
- it constitutes an intermediate level between near and far order, between everyday life and state,
- it is characterised by various dimensions, i.e. it is simultaneously a *practice*, a *strategy* (to the realisation of an „urban society“) and a *text*,

at the beginning of the 70s he was still lacking a term that could contain and integrate all these ideas and, after all, give the city back as object of survey to social science. By 1974, with *La production de l'espace*, he had eventually found this term: **space** - occupied, or appropriated, by the city, produced by social practice⁵⁰.

To define the new term, Lefebvre consulted the Western philosophical tradition, whereby he refused the Cartesian separation of *res cogitans* (or thinking subject) and *res extensa* (or the perceivable „being“, object of thinking), because it reduced space to a materiality, or at

⁴⁹ Cf. Lefebvre (1968), page 64.

⁵⁰ From this moment onwards, with a logical move, Lefebvre used the terms space and city as equals.

best to an order intrinsic to existing things⁵¹, and especially because it implicitly separated mind and body. From his point of view, space could also not be conceived of as a form enabling knowledge like in Kant's philosophy, because space (and time as well) is hereby exterior to the world of objects. In the course of his search, Lefebvre also rejected Hegel's interpretation of space as a product of history, Newton's „reduction“ of space to a mere fact of nature, and even Marx⁵². Also structuralist, phenomenological, semiotic, linguistic as well as psychoanalytic epistemological models of the 20th century were refused due to an exaggerated importance of „mental“ configurations of space. Unsatisfied with these interpretations, he then rooted his spatial theory in a production process: postulating that **(social) space is a (social) product, and, in particular, a togetherness of productive relationships occurring in history, he defined the task of social analysis as the study of production of space.**

At a first glance, such „production of space“ could appear to simply shift the problematic inscrutability of urbanisation leaving it unsolved: why should it be possible to inspect the process of production of space, but not that of urbanisation? The answer resides in Lefebvre's peculiar understanding of space: while urbanisation can not interact with social practice but through a mediation of the city, space is an integrative part or precondition of all three levels (P, M, and G). The next urgent question would regard “how” space is produced: „[...] confronted by an indefinite multitude of spaces, each one piled upon, or perhaps contained within, the next: geographical, economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political, commercial, national, continental, global [...], the theory we need might be called a „unitary theory“: the aim is to discover or construct a theoretical unity between „fields“ which are apprehended separately [...] In other words, we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias“⁵³. The heralded third element is thus a „social practice“ led by imagination and utopias (hence desire) that includes and transposes mental conceptualisations as well as physical phenomena on a more complex level, itself constitutionally contradictory and dynamic. As all three so-called fields are object of three simultaneous and interrelated production processes (material production, knowledge

⁵¹ For a more in-depth illustration of the theories on the ontology of space considered by Lefebvre, cf. SRG, page 193-198.

⁵² Though he sometimes used terms that could remind of the German ideologist - for instance when he distinguished between a) historical space as „full“ space of accumulation, expression of the city's control over the surrounding land, b) absolute space or „empty“, religious and civil space, and c) abstract space as result of alienation through capitalism -, he did not really find an answer in this „model“, as the different „spaces“ still remained disconnected.

⁵³ PS, page 8 and 11-12.

production, production of significance), **space is at the same time perceived, conceived and lived: therefore, it shall be analysed from three points of view respectively.** The three intertwined fields of the production of space - the physical, the mental, and the social – shall now be more closely defined.

Physical field

This field regards the continuous material production, through appropriation and mastering, of a society's space by *spatial practice*, which dialectically propounds and presupposes it. The perceivable aspects of space are hereby concerned: material production and reproduction processes as well as specific places and spatial ensembles that are inherent to, and the starting point of, every social formation – be these a room, a street-corner, a square or a market. These places are never isolated, but always inter-related and inter-penetrated. Furthermore, spatial practice emerges from the close association of everyday reality (routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, private life and leisure)⁵⁴ and thus requests a certain spatial competence and performance. Latter point shows that, for Lefebvre, spatial practice also includes a mental act as, in his words „space can not be perceived without a notion of space“⁵⁵. The abstract moment is linked to the concrete space through the body's ability to occupy space. In conclusion, an important concept for the dissertation's methodology: the physical field of spatial production can be observed in the net of places of everyday life – of work, home and leisure –, and in their connections, i.e. infrastructure, as well as economy and work. For example, in Lefebvre's words, modern, or contemporary, spatial practice could be represented by the everyday routine of a person living in a subsidised high-rise housing project.

Mental field

Through a mental act, single details of material reality can be collected to form a (ideal) totality. Representations of space are created in this way by scientists, technocrats, urban

⁵⁴ Cf. PE, p. 48.

⁵⁵ An echo of linguistics is clearly confirmed by the literal reference to Chomsky, whose work *Syntactic Structures* (1957) and especially theories on „generative grammar“ were referred to by Lefebvre in PE. For Chomsky, people are able to generate all possible grammatical sentences thanks to an innate „intuition“ of language, by him also called competence; performance, in contrast, is the transformation of this competence into everyday speech. Transposed to spatial practice, this means that e.g. the word „market“ is a significant for specific spatial uses that individuals can figure out (competence) and fulfil (performance).

planners, social engineers, architects and intellectuals (but also some artists), who equate what is *lived* and what is *perceived* with what is *conceived* – but not imagined⁵⁶ - via their respective language. Plans and floor views, mediating between geometrical space and the occupied or appropriated space, are typical representational forms beside language and images – to all is attributed a potential danger as they can be loaded with rhetoric and, thus, fool their readers as well as their creators. Conceptualised space, which emerges thanks to a system of verbal signs (codes) that represent it, is permeated by knowledge i.e. ideology⁵⁷. Due to the progressive detachment from physical work and to individualisation (with the consequent loss of social interaction) in modern life, the mental field dominates over the others, and in its name spatial texture as well as political and social practice can be changed⁵⁸. For an „urban revolution“, such an ideological component should be uncovered and the actual interdependence between mental field and spatial practice strengthened: like physical space, mental space admits or even requires a dialectical interaction with spatial practice to emerge⁵⁹.

Social field

Physical and mental production of space are integrative of lived space, called social practice. This social field directly implies time: social practice originates from history, history of peoples as well as history of individuals. This is, furthermore, the field of a dominated, and hence passively experienced, space, whereby "desire" and imagination seek to change and appropriate it. Within the social field, space is lived and suffered by inhabitants and users, but also by artists and „those who describe and aspire to do no more than describe“⁶⁰. Their associated images and symbols create what Lefebvre called representational space, or space of representation⁶¹ - it „represents“ social values,

⁵⁶ Imagination, it was said, belongs to the poetic activity of the third moment and is thus constitutive of the social field.

⁵⁷ Lefebvre distinguished between knowledge („*savoir*“) and cognition („*connaissance*“): knowledge serves or follows power intended as ideology and political practice, whereas cognition is subversive and (self-) critical, open for reality and possibility. This differentiation of meaning will be observed in the text.

⁵⁸ In more explicitly socio-political terms, Lefebvre said that concrete, lived space was dominated by mental, abstract space, „the free space of the commodity“, which nonetheless is characterised by contradictions that can be only hidden, but not solved, by a homogenising ideology.

⁵⁹ „If indeed spatial codes have existed, each characterising a particular spatial/social practice, and if these codifications have been produced along with the space corresponding to them, then the job of theory is to elucidate their rise, their role and their demise [...] Instead of emphasising the rigorously formal aspects of codes, I shall instead [*sic*] be putting the stress on their dialectical character. Codes will be seen as part of a practical relationship, as part of an interaction between „subjects“ and their space and surroundings. I shall attempt to trace the coming-into-being and disappearance of codings/decodings. My aim will be to highlight contents – i.e. the social (spatial) practices inherent to the forms under consideration“. Cf. PS, p. 17-18.

⁶⁰ PE, p. 49/PS, p. 39.

⁶¹ It is important to note the distinction between „representation of space“, which is inherent to mental field,

traditions, dreams, collective experiences, imagination, as well as "desire" and, for this reason, anthropological and ethnological science should be, and in fact are, occupied with this field. Socially produced space is imaginary, directional, situational (or relational), transversed by symbolisms and history, essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic: these attributes make it the space of poets and artists, who are capable of „re-connecting“ representational space and the representations of space thanks to their free poetic action⁶². Other than in physical space, objects are used here symbolically; other than in represented spaces, representational spaces are „alive“ and originate from „more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs“⁶³. The effective centres of social practice are loci of passion, of action and of lived situations: the ego, the bed, the bedroom, dwelling or house, but also square, church and graveyard.

Making the meaning of the „production of space“ more precise:

- space is a producer of structures as well as a product of the actions that produce it.
- (social) space is not a system, but a process consisting of the combined action of three contemporary processes of production: material production, knowledge production and production of significance. In other terms:
- space consists in concrete materiality, mental conceptualisation and experience – life, feeling, imagination, "desire" -, whereby each of the three elements respectively presupposes the others.
- the product „social reality“ does not arise from any singular fields, but from their collective and simultaneous interaction.

Concluding this paragraph, Lefebvre's model can be subsumed in the illustration offered below, in which physical, mental and social field are part not of a static, but of a moving unity and they interact and steadily affect each other⁶⁴.

and „space of representation“ or „representational space“ - which is the space in which symbols, values, etc. are socially produced.

⁶² Hereby, theatre especially was regarded as capable of integrating a representation of space – the scenic space, product of a specific spatial conceptualisation – and a representational space – a directly (though mediated through a communicative act) lived space. Cf. PS, p. 175 and 188. Guy Debord and the group of the situationists tried to apply Lefebvre's thought in favour of a “re-appropriation” of urban space, for example through walks “à la derive” in urban spaces.

⁶³ PE, p. 49.

⁶⁴ The chosen form, a conic helix, represents a) the dialectic movement, „open“ to modifications and contrasts deriving from the three different production processes; and b) the „historical“ nature of the model itself (that could not be expressed by the two-dimensional spiral), which – without implying a positivist view of history as progress – consists in the interaction of three production processes following and completing each other.

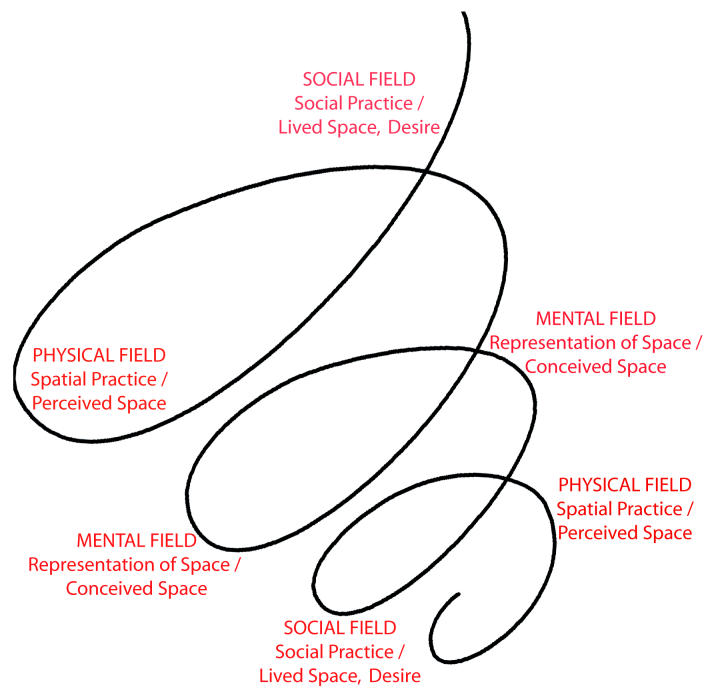


Fig. 3: Visualisation of Lefebvres trialectic model.

1.2.3. From theory to practice – applying Lefebvre's model to field work

The precedent paragraph reproduced the steps through which Lefebvre, in an effort to describe postmodern cities' complexity instead of reducing them to static “matters of fact”, shifted his attention from “city” to “space”; these steps were:

- focussing on urbanisation (seen as the inevitable, but open for changes, destiny of cities) instead of city,
- as urbanisation in its nature of process revealed to be inscrutable and a “theory of urbanisation” useless, recognising space as common ground of the private, global and the city's level,
- acknowledging space as a product of social practice and defining social analysis as the study of the “production of space”,
- identifying three continuous and intertwined processes of production of space: material production, knowledge production, production of significance (space is at once perceived, conceived and lived), and, therefore,
- characterising the respective fields of production as physical field, mental field and social field.

What has been of value and what contribution to urban studies has been made Lefebvre's theory of production of space? *The Production of Space* can actually be regarded as one of the main inputs to the “strategical hypothesis” of primacy of space over time, also called “spatial turn”, that characterised postmodern thinking in the fields of geography, philosophy as well as planning⁶⁵. Among others, Michel Foucault gave an insightful explanation of how, after the 19th century that had been dominated by the paradigm of *time*, in the 20th *space* reemerged in the philosophical thought and almost became the obsession of a generation that was experiencing the world only secondarily as a historical process, but primarily as a net of points that can be linked and shifted, and include simultaneity, heterogeneity and juxtaposition of differences⁶⁶.

⁶⁵ Jörg Dünne and Stephan Günzel talk about the „spatial“ or „topographical“ turn in their introduction to *Raumtheorie. Grundlagentexte aus Philosophie und Kulturwissenschaften* (2006), p- 12-13. For references on Lefebvre's reception in recent years, for example in the thought of Edward Soja, David Harvey and Manuel Castells, cf. SRG, pages 62-70.

⁶⁶ Cf. Michel Foucault, *Des espaces autres*, in *Dits et Ecrits*, vol 4 (1994), p. 752-762. The similitude with Lefebvre's word choice is significative, and also other contemporary and post-structuralist thinkers found in his poetic metaphysical reflections inspiration and/or accord, as it has been pointed out above with the reference to Deleuze. The development of postmodern geography can be related to Lefebvre's thought as well. On one hand, his materialism convinced authors like David Harvey (cf. for example *The condition of Postmodernity*, 1990); on the other, his space conception was applauded by e.g. Edward W. Soja (for

Moreover, Lefebvre's approach appeared to grant a series of advantages for concrete applications in urban studies. For instance, his understanding of the mental field makes the comparison of insights from philosophy, sociology, ethnology and anthropology, but also urban those of planning, engineering, etc. possible, as all can be understood as equal „abstractions“, or conceptualisations. Such an insight may have a liberating effect for researchers and professionals from all disciplines, who are no further called to „defend“ the legitimacy and/or major relevance of the respective point of view; but not only this. The assertion that city as a social product arises from three production processes in a dialectical relationship factually strengthens already existing calls for an integration of different methods in urban studies and practice: future surveys, considering physical, mental as well as everyday life, should be able to take distance from generalisations and normative descriptions. The trialectic model could be especially fruitful for cultural (and inter-cultural) research, because it makes clear the role played by mental conceptualisations for physical as well as social practice. Hereby, the call for an attentive inspection of everyday life contemporarily acknowledges the task of anthropology and ethnology – to investigate peculiar cultural conceptualisations and their effect on everyday life. Short, Lefebvre's „materialistic“ approach allows academic, theoretical discussions to be brought onto the level of experience, of observable everyday life practices, without giving up the legitimate ambition to „produce knowledge“⁶⁷.

At this point, Lefebvre's theory can be „transposed“ and made fruitful for the concrete dissertation project. On the basis of the reached understanding, this will be defined as a study of **how urban space is produced through practices of social interaction that take place in everyday life (social field) and correspond to a specific material environment (physical field) as well as intellectual/mental conceptualisations (mental field)**. The complexity of the trialectic model and the novelty of its application to empirical research make some preliminary remarks on presentation form and organisation of the research necessary⁶⁸. First of all, a definition of everyday life on which to base the work is necessary. In the course of his several year-long reflection, Lefebvre provided an ample spectrum of definitions: it was seen that he considered everyday life as historical product

example in *Postmodern Geographies. The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, 1989) as the base for a new geography. However, as pointed out by Schmid, these authors often misunderstood or only partially understood the actual value of Lefebvre's thought, which consisted in its specific and programmatic openness, as they tried to make it concrete, systematise it and re-transpose space on one only level (the physical). Cf. SRG, p. 65-66, 295-297 and 301-303.

⁶⁷ This enables an overcoming of the relativistic trends sensible in post-structuralist thought, which actually challenges scientific activity per se.

⁶⁸ An attempt in this direction was made by Kathrin Wildner in her already cited survey on Mexico City, cf. Introduction.

and at the same time as producer of representational spaces⁶⁹; that he equated it to programmed consumption⁷⁰, and that he wanted to underlay its repetitive, non-creative, but only reproductive, practice, with a critique. Further on, in *The Production of Space* it is possible to understand that everyday life takes place in work, leisure and living spaces⁷¹ - short, on a “<micro> level, on the local and localizable [*on which*] everything (the <whole>) also depends [...]: exploitation and domination, protection and – inseparably – repression”⁷². On the other hand, such critically observed everyday life is one of those “vulnerable areas” and “potential breaking points” - like urban sphere, body and the “differences that emerge within the body from repetitions” (i.e. gestures, rhythms or cycles) - for the realisation of human "desire", of creativity and poetic action⁷³. Yet, what does it mean to study, or to make everyday life the base of a survey?

A comparison of definitions could be helpful hereby. Lefebvre's notion of everyday life has been compared to that of Georg Lukács for a common Marxist approach, and contrasted to non-Marxist interpretations like that of Alfred Schütz. For Lukács, everyday life is at the same time base and final point of human action, whereby this action emerges from individual reflection⁷⁴. Lefebvre would have probably criticised such a view due to an exaggerated focus on the individual and exclusion of the collective social level. Alfred Schütz worked extensively on Husserl's phenomenology, which he sought to integrate with the Weberian “sociology of understanding” in a „phenomenological sociology“⁷⁵ - an approach that allows the observer to „categorise“ the practices delivered by everyday life according to an ideal typology. A problem of phenomenological sociology concerns however in its incapacity to overcome the “classifying” perspective, as Lefebvre repeatedly criticised in various passages of the *Production of Space*⁷⁶. One further attempt.

Also the French thinker Michel de Certeau was concerned with the notion of everyday life. In an inspiring book on everyday practice, he acknowledged *La critique de la vie quotidienne* for Lefebvre's peculiar interpretation of everyday life and his postulation of

⁶⁹ PS, p. 116.

⁷⁰ PS, p. 89.

⁷¹ PS, p. 59.

⁷² PS, p. 366.

⁷³ PS, p. 385.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen* [Engl. *The Specificity of the Aesthetic*, 1963] or also *History and Class Consciousness* (1923).

⁷⁵ Cf. *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt: eine Einleitung in die verstehende Soziologie* (1932), [Engl. *The phenomenology of the social world*, 1967].

⁷⁶ Among others, anthropology was vehemently attacked for such reason by Lefebvre; for example, on Rapoport's anthropological study of housing forms, he wrote: „The limitations of anthropology are nonetheless on display here, and indeed they leap off the page when the author seeks to establish the general validity of reductionistic schemata based on a binary opposition [...] and goes so far as to assert that French people always (!) entertain in cafés rather than at home“. Cf. PS, p. 123.

an „anti-discipline“⁷⁷. In the reflection opening his chapter on „spatial practices“, he opposed New York's view from the 101th floor - the bird's view, that of architects and planners, but also the view on the city which painters in Middle Age and Renaissance desired to represent - to the city's experience on the street, where the ordinary dwellers live. It is here, on the „ground floor“, that urban dwellers, experiencing urban space in a blind, intuitive and sensual way, not at all congruent to the clear geometrical or geographical space, write the urban text. De Certeau described first a choice of practices - urbanism, reading and ways of belief – from a rather theoretical point of view, then, it delves into the exhaustive illustration of concrete spatial practices (e.g. the “reconstruction” of space in one family's everyday life, and the way a net of relationships develops through culinary practice)⁷⁸. Here some important inputs to keep in mind for the empirical work: **everyday life takes shape from practices that can not be categorised, but have to be described by juxtaposing collective, or “macro” level, and private, or “micro” level aspects.**

Is it by narrating instead of cataloguing uses of space that the city's process-like nature can be apprehended and properly mirrored?

Digression / Michel de Certeau and Hubert Fichte, or narration versus poetic word

In Arts de faire, Michel de Certeau made a famous distinction between a) space, defined as a net of dynamic elements in the variation of time and identified with movement, and b) place, an order, a constellation of fixed points, identified with the map⁷⁹. Starting from the results of an empirical study demonstrating that, when we want to describe a place, we tend to refer the actions necessary to go, thus to move, through it instead of using „static“ expressions like “left”, “in front of”, etc., and that this is also the case when we base our description on a map, he pointed out that these “accounts” of movement in space and/or time are nothing but “the base of the everyday narrations” (and in fact, it was with journey accounts that narrative historically started). Narrations are for de Certeau always related to movements in space, and these in turn are the condition for the compilation of

⁷⁷ In his book (cf. p. XL and XLI in the *Introduction générale*), de Certeau used „art de faire“ synonymously to „pratique“ [Engl. „practice“] and „manières de faire“ [Engl. „ways of doing“]. With the term „art de faire“, apparently, he wanted to dignify everyday life. Cf. *L'invention du quotidien – I. Arts de faire*, new edition 1990. English translation: *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1988.

⁷⁸ The theoretical foundation for this book consisted of an illustration of relevant theories of the „art of practice“ including Foucault's *Surveiller et punir* [Engl. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*] and Pierre Bourdieu's *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* [Engl. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*], but also of Kant's „art of thought“ and Detienne's historical and anthropological „art of (story) telling“.

⁷⁹ De Certeau also made an example: a street, itself a geometrically fixed *place*, becomes *space* when people walk on it. Cf. *L'invention du quotidien*, p. 172-173/ Engl. page 117.

maps and for the “scientific” definitions of place; eventually, narration appears capable of continuously transforming space into place, and place into space. The dialectic between movement and map, or between “dynamic elements in the variation of time” and “fixed points”, would thus depend on the creative ability to narrate. Now, de Certeau's model of space based on a binom (space/place) in which, from the point of view of Lefebvre, mental space is missing or wrongly mixed with physical space - in other words, he seemed not to give relevance to the fact that a map is produced by means of an intellectual act -, and his definition of place as „constellation of fixed points“ could be at most compared to the materiality of physical space. What makes de Certeau's work notable for the present discussion is the insight that space (easily comparable to Lefebvre's space of social practice if defined as „dynamic elements in time“) interacts with its dialectic counterpart thanks to the creative, imaginative act of narration, everyday stories, also called “treatments of space”. Through these – be their scope the communication, organisation or reclamation of space -, human beings combine mental conceptualisations (the map) and lived space (Lefebvre's space of representation). In this sense, it can be said that also de Certeau regarded space as a “translator” or “mediator” between physical, mental and lived space; this makes his use of narrative forms for the analysis of space interesting.

Quite differently, German author Hubert Fichte declared the “poetic word” as the methodological basis for social sciences⁸⁰. Undertaking the difficult task to “observe” a social reality in which they are imbedded and from which they never can completely prescind, social scientists are faced with an antinomy, similar to that of the urban researcher pretending to “observe” urbanisation, that can only be overcome by use of poetic word – so Fichte's point. After stating linguistic impoverishment and increasing abstraction of the observers from the observed in mentioned disciplines due to the substitution of poetic word with scientific formula and technical terms, he pleaded for the reintroduction of “charm, discipline, lightness, fantasy, freedom and short form” in order to re-approach them to reality. To be clear, the German author did not doubt the legitimacy of scientific research and on the contrary, he stressed that clearly determined observation and logical deduction are and have to remain the conditions of scientificness; yet, this does not make necessitate scientific languages to becoming aseptic.

And then:

⁸⁰ Cf. Hubert Fichte (1977): *Ketzerische Bemerkungen für eine neue Wissenschaft vom Menschen* (suggested English translation: *Heretical observations for a new science of men*; Fichte's work is only partially translated in English). Fichte started his speech by pointing out that the suffix „-logy“, reminiscent of the Greek term „logos“ [Engl. „word“], in terms like sociology, anthropology, ethnology, etc., should actually suggest the essential role of language for social science.

“Haikus often express more about a society than three folios from upended slip boxes. Rhythm. / Timbre. / Sharpness.”⁸¹

In his concluding words, Fichte, who considered research as a dialectic process, asked scientific surveys not to try to hide or dissolve doubts and contradictions, but to include “holes” and mistakes on the part of the observer as constitutive parts of research as well as of its object, reality.

With Fichte and de Certeau, two diverging approaches to scientific writing were represented here⁸²; despite working in different fields - de Certeau was a philosopher and historian, Fichte an ethnologist and author -, comparing their positions was legitimate because both reflected on the same subject, social science and the way to write it. Following de Certeau, the ideal presentation form for social studies would be a narrative one, whereas with Fichte one's work would be conceived as a poetic act: the first would recommend “story telling”, thus to compose the research elements along a narrative line; the second would plea for the flights and falls of poetry, which is always strongly related to an individual. It appears that the option represented by de Certeau promises a certain formal unity, while Fichte's “poetic” option necessarily leads to research which develop fragmentarily, “in pieces”. Considering Lefebvre's understanding of “unity”, the second way appears to be more appropriate for this dissertation.

It is the moment to finally “decide” how space shall be described by the present survey. The method of anthropology would consist of combining the enumeration, or inventory, of concrete spatial elements - huts, cabins, houses, streets and squares -, with the description of space as a whole: such combining implication and explication would allow to unite social and mental, abstract and concrete space. Yet, as mentioned, Lefebvre refused the anthropological methods of his time, which in his view reduced space to a means of classification, to a nomenclature for things, a taxonomy⁸³, and recommended a pure descriptive approach that “preserves differences in their discreteness and then plunges into the poorly charted realm of the specific”. Furthermore, he envisaged a “rhythmanalysis” - an analysis of *uses of space according to time* - as a viable alternative to “spatial

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 17. This “musical” semantic is noticeable, as also Lefebvre spoke of social reality in terms of rhythms and - it has been mentioned – programmatically adopted a “musical” writing style. While it appears as irrelevant to ask whether Fichte and Lefebvre knew about each other's works, it may be interesting to delve into an analysis of how music – its melodies and harmonies, thus its aesthetic/composition rules - can inspire literary and scientific works.

⁸² It should be stressed again that the discussion concerns here the writing and „assemblage“ of information, not the methodology of empirical research on the field.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 295-296. Lefebvre also criticised in this context Lévi-Strauss' works like *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* for its treatment of sexuality from a merely functional, „aseptic“ point of view.

analysis”⁸⁴. Rhythms are for Lefebvre both natural and produced by human action, they “inter-penetrate” one another, are eternally crossing and recrossing, and always bound to space and time; they “have to do with needs, which may be dispersed as tendencies, or distilled into desire”: “what we *live* are rhythms – rhythms experienced subjectively. Which means that, here at least, “lived” and “conceived” are close”⁸⁵; “through the mediation of rhythms, an animated space comes into being which is an extension of the space of bodies”⁸⁶. In short, rhythms, which are constitutionally inherent to the social field due to its bondage to time and temporal cycles, could be the searched for mediation between the three fields. A late essay, *Elements of Rhythmanalysis*⁸⁷, shows how such an analysis could take from: **on the basis of a balanced mix of participation and contemplation, city can be apprehended and descriptively analysed** – without pretending to give further interpretations and, especially, to be the author of a unity, but accepting that the fragmentary Urban is that dialectic unity.

Other than narration, rhythmanalysis can impossibly be linear, but enables to comprehend complexity through the non-linear, free assemblage of significative elements; other than traditional anthropological approaches, it refuses categorisation. Is it possible to realise such ambition within a scientific survey? And how can the analytical aspect be preserved herein? One possibility was seen in „repeating“ Lefebvre's „juxtaposition“ at the structural level of the survey, which will thus develop along a physical, a mental as well as a social field. To analyse aspects of spatial practice, i.e. of space's materiality, associative walks along Dhaka's principal areas (for example, squatter in the fringes, inner-urban settlement, purely residential area, or Campus) shall be integrated with selective observation of the characteristics of architecture and construction in general, of infrastructural provision as well as „generalisable“ aspects of everyday life practice (Lefebvre's „everyday routine of a person living in a subsidised high-rise housing project“), hereby also mobility.

⁸⁴ PS, p. 205-207, as well as p. 351, 356 and further 405. It should be also stressed hereby that space was not seen by Lefebvre as the producer of social life or reality, but as the level of their regulation in everyday life: “Spatial practice regulates life – it does not create it. Space has no power <in itself>, nor does space as such determine spatial contradictions. There are contradictions of society [...] that simply emerge in space, at the level of space, and so engender the contradictions of space”. PS, p. 358. Herewith, Lefebvre would have also taken distance from geo-deterministic tendencies, which regard society on the base of spatial concepts, whereas the contrary should be the case. As Lefebvre pointed out in PS, this was a mistake undergone by urbanism and also by Bauhaus. Though the Bauhaus architects, especially with Gropius and Le Corbusier, had the merit to understand that spatial ensembles can not be thought of as single products, but have to be inserted in social practice and thus interact with it, they made the mistake to believe that the same ensembles can change social practice and understood themselves as revolutionaries, while their thoughts were „tailor-made for the state“ (*La révolution urbaine*, p. 108, 166 and further 171 as well as PS, p. 124-127).

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 206.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 207.

⁸⁷ Cf. Henri Lefebvre and Catherine Régulier, *Elements of Rhythmanalysis* (ER), in: *Writings on Cities*, p. 228ff.

Lefebvre's second field consists of the representation of space. While mental maps spontaneously appear as an ideal tool for the inspection of mental space, a regulative artifice may be necessary in case of impossibility or inability of asked persons to draw a map. At the same time, the influence of Western conceptualisations of space on the researcher can not be ignored if partial results and/or interferences in the survey shall be avoided. To counter this problem, a series of questions explicitly referring to such Western conceptualisations of space and city, but “transposing” them into the field of social practice, will be prepared. Lastly, the third field, that of production of significance, or social space, has to be based on participant observation of everyday life practices by different individuals, in order to enable an “immersion” in that “poorly charted realm of the specific” – in passions and desire, in bedrooms and prayer rooms – that constitutes social practice and incorporates mental and physical field. According to this “programme”, the survey is going to be composed by “rhythmically” juxtaposed pieces of information - subjective observations, expert talks, maps of the practices, interviews, background information, historical data, etc. -, whereby people's everyday life, led by emotions, or desire, and producer of social space, will be its climax. The sketch on next page illustrates the combination of theory and empirical tools corresponding to this programme, which is going to be treated in depth in following chapter, the *Methodology*.

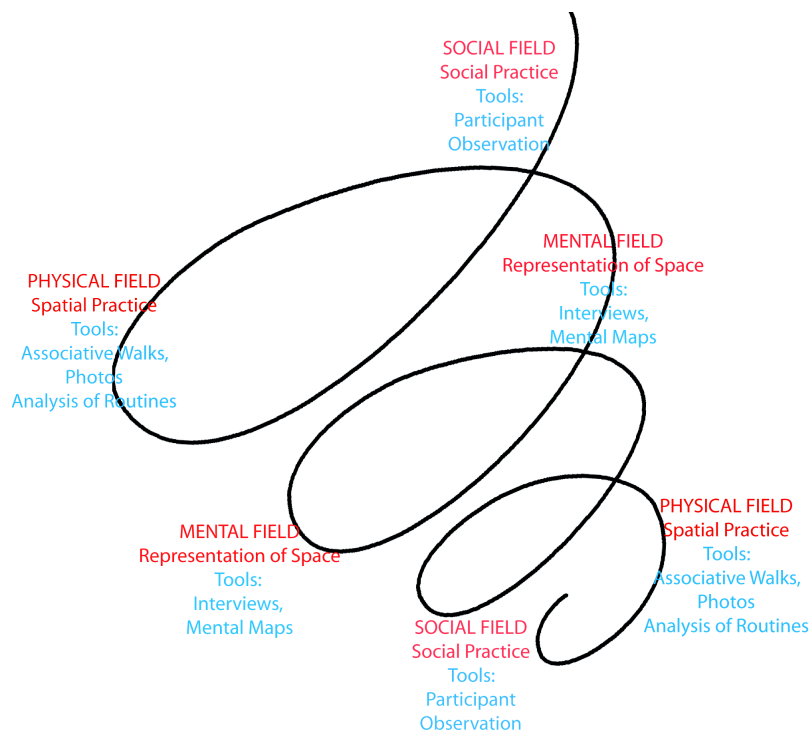


Fig. 4: Visualisation of adopted methodology according to Lefebvre's trialectic model.

1.2.4. “Public” or “social” space

Before passing to the definition of the tools for empirical research, the own positioning concerning the discussion on public space should be clarified. The stress on „social“ rather than „public“ space in this study may appear curious considering that the discussion on public space, especially after the declaration of latter's „disappearance“⁸⁸, has been playing and currently plays a protagonistic role in contemporary urban studies, management as well as politics. Lefebvre seemed to prefer talking about „social“ rather than „public“ space, although he had attentively described the phenomenon of its disappearance as early as in the 1960s. His choice was partly related to a seemingly superficial handling of the term, found uncritically equated with „social space“ and „outside space of the community“ in the *Production of Space*⁸⁹. However, a more important reason should have been his specific understanding of „public“, which was compared, in the sense of „public buildings“, to monuments, myth, and eventually ideology. Lefebvre pointed out that the state's operationalism – the arranging and classifying of space - „conflates <public> space with the <private> space of the hegemonic class“, that „retains and maintains private ownership of the land and of the other means of production“⁹⁰; such space, so the author, is always „dominated“ by means of representations, and only rarely can dweller „appropriate“ it through social practice⁹¹. Thus, Lefebvre's reluctance to use the term public space can be said to have resided in the statement of its „emptiness“ behind the facade of representations.

In the context of the present work, further reasons add to Lefebvre's political statement; the idea „public space“ is in fact critically looked upon as a „Western“ myth, and its projection onto a different socio-cultural area as an imposition due to the different historical and social development. Interviews and participant observation made evident that what would be called “public” space and sphere in European contexts is often used and shaped by individual actions, i.e. spontaneously, informally, in Dhaka, and that the “public” may be

⁸⁸ Richard Sennett's delineation of the process that led to such „disappearance“ may be the most popular one: first, public and private were separated; in a second moment, the private prevailed over the public; in the final stage, corresponding to the modern time, increasing privatisation and social exclusion characterise social life of cities. Cf. the already mentioned *The Fall of Public Man* (1976) or *The Conscience of the Eye. The Design and Social Life of Cities* (1990).

⁸⁹ PS, p. 166.

⁹⁰ PS, p. 375.

⁹¹ PS, p. 166. In Lefebvre's analysis, the „monumentalisation“ of public space started as early as in the Greek *polis*, whose space was absolute, i.e. the „public“ included religious and political dimensions and was „made up of sacred or cursed locations“. However, the *polis* was still „filled“ with belief and carried by a non-alienated production system, while in the postmodern city, capitalistic production systems would have destroyed the link between representation and life, i.e. between mental and social field. Cf. PS p. 240-241.

not so easily discernible from the „private“ in a city in which space is strongly segregated, congested and, also, illegally used. So understood, „public space“ will be thus encountered in the context of the survey of spatial practice, which – it will be illustrated – is characterised by exclusive or segregated public spaces and fragmented public spheres; the attention will then pass to other, culturally peculiar, “categories” in which space is thought, and in an even more decided step, from public space to space of everyday life practices, i.e. to social practice.

1.3. Methodology

This research project on Dhaka was conceived of as an empirical study; it was guided by a theoretical approach that affected evaluation and assemblage of the various results, but was equally determined by a series of “tools” in its field research phase. The insights gained during latter resulted from an *ad hoc* application of the ethnographic research, a process „invented“ in the field of cultural anthropology and used among others by such authors as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Clifford Geertz⁹². For ethnographers, cultural knowledge is organised into categories that are systematically inter-related within the culture which they belong to⁹³. Accordingly, the „contact persons“ who „guide“ the ethnographer among the observed group, or „informants“, will have their own sets of categories in which they divide their culture. Empirical research aiming at describing cultural knowledge should thus search for the parts of a culture and their relationships in the conceptualisations of its members, as one isolated observation can not be understood unless understanding its relationships to other aspects of the situation in which it occurred. In this sense, some ethnographers speak of their work as a „search for connections“, and distinguish it from that of „hypothesis-testers“⁹⁴, because ethnography renounces initial theories and considers itself as a descriptive, explorative approach⁹⁵.

If popular proverbs, old wives' tales and common sense in general can be regarded as cultural representations, interviews and participant observation have to be used to go „behind“ them. Hereby, the statements and explanations of informants provide orientation to compose the diversified information and understand it until being able to „paraphrase“ it for laypersons⁹⁶. Before delving in detail into the methodology adopted to achieve such „paraphrasing“ in this survey, a clarification on the type of the research should be made:

⁹² Lévi-Strauss's work *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) is one of the most famous examples, whereby Geertz's contribute consisted in a further reflection on the „translating“ of cultures (cf. for example the essay *Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight* in his most-cited work *The Interpretation of Cultures* of 1973). As already mentioned, different passages in *The Production of Space* outspokenly criticise technical categorisations of space and anthropology itself for a certain schematic tendency. It could be indeed objected that any methodology derived from the social sciences would represent a contradiction of Lefebvre's mentioned scepticism towards categorising methods; however, the focus of his critique was the evaluation, i.e. the interpretative part in anthropological and ethnological works, but not the methodological aspects of empirical research.

⁹³ Strauss/Corbin's *Grounded Theory* (1967), James Spradley's *The ethnographic interview* (1979), Roland Girtler's *Methoden der qualitativen Sozialforschung* (1984) as well as Michael Agar's *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography* (1995) were important references.

⁹⁴ Quotations from Michael H. Agar's *The professional stranger*, p. 124-125. Ethnography also differs from grounded theory – which also uses field observation, interviews and various materials, both qualitative and quantitative -, insofar latter is constitutionally oriented towards the formulation of a theory on social processes and less strongly concentrated on description.

⁹⁵ This echoes Lefebvre's recommendations concerning the analysis of space, or rhythmanalysis.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 128.

empirical research allows, in fact, to work on the base of quantitative data, or to rely on qualitative information. Under consideration of the preceding chapter it should be evident that „quantifying“ everyday life practices would mean to fatally miss their peculiar effect on, and interaction with, the social space, and thus limit the inspection within the so-called physical field. Further reasons that supported the choice of a qualitative method were:

- Dhaka's extremely fast growth, the simultaneity of phenomena taking place within its congested space, as well as the speed of adaptation and appropriation processes on the part of its dwellers, creating a „black box“ situation, which can be best approached by an explorative field work (*actuality*);
- the particularly unstable political scenario during the study period, demanding its observer to be flexible in order to react to short-term changes which can not be predicted (*flexibility*);
- the mentioned scarcity of previous research on Dhaka at the starting point of the survey, providing a further argument for an explorative approach (*state of research*);
- the only partial reliability of statistical information, which was found to be contradictory and fragmentary (*insufficiency of statistical data*); and finally:
- the insight that the own foreignness should not be underestimated and evaluation methods and interpretations not be applied without a direct confrontation with the local culture⁹⁷ (*intercultural character*).

Quantitative information, which as mentioned is „admitted“ by ethnography, will find place in present survey as reference or counterpoint for the better illustration of specific issues, whereby for reasons of legibility the majority of qualitative data – maps, tables, graphics as well as original materials i.e. interview transcriptions are presented separately from the main text, in a separate appendix.

Introducing ethnographic research, James Spradley recognised the different types of interaction with individuals that the researcher can pursue: *respondents*, in the following also called interviewees, who respond „to a survey questionnaire or to queries presented by an investigator“, *informants*, *subjects* and *actors*. Informants are the persons directly interacting with the ethnographer, whom they lead during his search, while subjects are the persons that are „simply“ observed and constitute the base for the testing of certain

⁹⁷ A former working experience in Dhaka had made evident a non-definable but indubitable discrepancy between local and Western ideas of society as well as urbanity. Cf. also Edward Said's criticism on European views of non-European contexts, by him accused to be romanticised and partial in *Orientalism* (1978), or Homi Bhabha's more up-to-date perspective in *The location of Culture* (1994).

hypothesis. Actors, eventually, are persons who „become the object of observation in a natural setting“⁹⁸. In the course of this study, all types of interaction were sought: hundred respondents were presented with the questionnaire, informants followed in different settings, actors observed in their everyday life.

Why, concerning this study, an „*ad hoc* application“ of ethnography was spoken of remains to be explained. The subject of interest, Dhaka's urbanisation and its urban population as a whole, may in fact be untypical in comparison to the classical issues that interested urban ethnographers. Since its applications within the Chicago School⁹⁹, ethnographic research has gained credibility in the field of urban studies and borne surveys for example about homeless, racketeers, hip-hop gangs, or bar tenders. In this survey, however, no particular „subculture“ - the term is hereby meant broadly: a subculture in Dhaka could be for example the street-hawkers as well as the Hindu or „tribal“ minority, the rickshaw *wallahs* as well as the female garment workers – was chosen, but a general outlook was consciously aimed at. Therefore, an individual and creative use of ethnographic methods had to be preferred to a one-to-one adaptation. In particular, the specific research topic and the problem of „translation“ of space representations rooted in the European urban tradition into an Asian context necessitated a) the additional use of a questionnaire and b) designing it in a very individual way. Both may be found very different from typical ethnographic studies, which often absolutely renounce questionnaires and prefer to ask about very concrete aspects, like uses of things and meanings of words, at the very moment of observation.

In the following pages, the mix of survey methods applied in the empirical phase will be presented in following order:

- **associative walks** in Dhaka's principal areas and area types; **selective observation** of architecture and construction, infrastructure; **routines**;
- **interviews** (hereby semi-structured, narrative and experts interview) and **mental maps**;
- **participant observation** of different individuals' everyday life practices as well as festivals as moments of “desire”¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁸ Cf. Spradley p. 29-34.

⁹⁹ Where it „arrived“ thanks to the anthropologist Lloyd Warner and the journalist and sociologist Robert Park, who influenced for example W. F. Whyte's *Street Corner Society* as well as Drake/Cayton's *Black Metropolis*.

¹⁰⁰ Such a methodological base necessarily has to affect the study as a whole: as a scientific report of each phase of the field work would have been of little use, the „writing down“ will rely on the author's capacity to „filter“ relevant and outstanding information as well as on a critical handling of the collected materials. It would also have been possible to analyse media contents such as newspaper articles and TV-reports,

Associative walks and detailed inspection of „materialities“

On the base of several transits in Dhaka in all moments of the day, by all means of transport, but especially on foot, a sensibility for its different urban settings and “characteristic” areas was obtained. Specific neighbourhoods and resorts were chosen to mirror different spatial practices, whereby infrastructural and architectonic as well as other „material“ constituents of space were compared. The recognised **six main structural areas** tried to consider the entire spectrum of physical ensembles which can be encountered in Dhaka, from parts of the old town to the historically first planned residential areas of Wari and Dhanmondi; from fringes like Hazaribagh or Badda – which strongly differ in population structure and development - to nerve points like Gulistan or Mohakali; from the business district to the „village-like“ community of one of Dhaka's biggest squatter settlements; from the eviction areas of Tongi, Demra and Bhashantek to the recently developed areas of Gulshan and Baridhara. In short, representativeness, actuality of ongoing development as well as specificity were important criteria, whereby the latter was especially the case of segregated communities, which became object of concentrated analysis. In order to encounter the „perceivable“ character of this part of the inspection, the author's descriptions will be accompanied by **photos** of particular structures and building forms.

Further on, in order to analyse spatial **practices** of individuals, everyday routines were surveyed also in the context of the interviews, whereby the dwellers' mobility was inspected with particular attention.

Interviews and mental maps

Following the proposition to bring to light conceptualisations on space, in particular on (public) urban space, hundred persons were interviewed on the base of a **semi-structured questionnaire**¹⁰¹. The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that, as the questions are only partially inter-linked, they allow a comparatively free development of the interview along with the development of the interviewer/interviewee relationship. That means: this type of interview grants a certain freedom regarding „which questions to ask when“, so

however, due to my knowledge of spoken, but not written Bangla and the comparative difficulty of decoding TV-news, features or fiction in Bangla for a non-native speaker, I opted for different methods. Limiting the content analysis to English-medium channels was regarded as unsatisfactory and partial.

¹⁰¹ The successive steps that guided the development of the questionnaire are described later in this chapter, specifically in paragraph 1.3.4. The qualitative questions on space representations were preceded by a „quantitative“ part regarding for example age, family and household status, profession, living and working area, which was used as means of appraisal of the interview partners' standards of life.

that the interviewer, respecting the interviewee's ability and disposition to speak about specific topics, can „build up“ the trust and comfort degree in a situation that, for some, can be difficult¹⁰². The flexibility of semi-structured questionnaires was also helpful concerning the situations in which the talks took place - often among various listeners and in chaotic environments -, because the interviewees could answer particular questions only after having changed place or left the colleagues and friends. A disadvantage, on the other hand, is that the interview's „structure“ in part blocks or hinders the emergence of unexpected issues, i.e. issues for which no questions have been formulated; this deficiency was compensated by other types of interviews.

Parallel to the improvement of the language skills, it became possible to lead **narrative interviews**: with questions that “generate a narration”, the interviewees are invited to tell a story on the studied process, i.e. on development and changes that they could state along with the passing of time. Evidently, this type of interview could be ideally applied in case of persons who lived for long time or during their life-time in Dhaka and could make comparisons and establish relations between different events, while recent dwellers' narrations distinguished themselves with rich descriptions of rural life and the reasons for their migration. The narrations were particularly important because they brought to light “lived” aspects of urbanisation processes and revealed in how far these are reflected by urban dwellers. Another condition relevant to this type of interview is a certain trust on the part of the interviewee, as well as the availability of time. Not all semi-structured interviews opened out to narrative ones, and vice versa not all “narrations” started from semi-structured interviews.

A variation of narrative interviews consists of **talks with experts** - individuals who, thanks to their professional interests, have an exclusive knowledge and/or particular decision-making power and responsibility, and are contemporarily part of the studied process. During the empirical study in Dhaka, these talks, which were led at regular intervals with various persons¹⁰³, contributed on one side extra information, and helped on the other to focus the survey, increasing sensitivity towards specific cultural aspects, which had to be

¹⁰² Another aspect that should be mentioned is that the questions were not always obvious for the interviewees, who often requested further explications or took more time to answer. Particular difficulties were encountered by women, children and the inhabitants of slums and remote areas in general, whereby the fact that women were in a slightly higher proportion was regarded as a consequence of limited mobility, hence minor „spatial competence“, and maybe a lack of preparedness and experience in expressing their opinion in public.

¹⁰³ These were one historian, one literature professor, two urban researchers, one sociologist, one activist, one journalist/columnist, one filmmaker, three planners, as well as an architect/philosopher. While all talks with experts were led by this author in English, half of the narrations on Dhaka's changes were in Bagla and were therefore collected with the important support of an assistant as well as a recorder, which gave the possibility to re-listen and discuss the information with him as well as with other trusted persons and experts.

taken into consideration during the interviews (e.g. with a major attention for eventual gestures, attitudes or behaviours which revealed particular emotions on the part of the interviewees during the communicative act). A further important function of concerned talks was the discussion and clarification of words' meanings, historical backgrounds and cultural concepts that emerged along with the interviews and could not be properly judged by the author.

Since Kevin Lynch and Amos Rapoport used them in their studies on environmental psychology and anthropology, **mental maps** have become a popular tool for the survey of people's specific *spatial* images of the physical environment, which primarily affect their spatial behaviour¹⁰⁴. Mental maps, made by individuals and not by geographers, are representations reflecting an affective, symbolic meaning of everyday spaces, and can be used in order to analyse such meaning as well as the attributes that individuals give to space. In the context of the dissertation's occupation with representations of space, the mental maps offered an ideal complement to the interviews; all interview partners were asked to draw a map of the places they had mentioned and/or of their everyday spaces.

Participant observation of social practices

The term „participant observation“ describes an approach in which the observer collects knowledge on a specific topic through the observation of perceivable actions of everyday life, in which he/she takes part¹⁰⁵. Hereby, the researcher tries to passively observe and not to affect the observed situation, and at the same time to increasingly focus his/her observation through the formulation of successive „working hypotheses“. In the adopted variation, the *free* participant observation, there is no restriction to, or control of the observed situation in terms of what, how long and from which perspective to observe, which grants a high grade of freedom and flexibility¹⁰⁶ in the observation of individual uses of space in Dhaka. Special attention was dedicated to the „transformation“ of space, i.e. to its „production“ via appropriation through everyday life practices and specific rules for

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Kevin Lynch's classical work *Image of the city* (1960), but also *What Time is this Place?* (1972), and especially his articles *The city as environment* (1965) in: *Scientific American* vol. 213, nr. 3, 209-219, as well as *A walk around the block* (1970), written with Malcolm Rivkin, in: Proshansky et al. (ed.): *Environmental Psychology*, p. 631-642, and Amos Rapoport's *Human Aspects of Urban Form* (1977).

¹⁰⁵ For a detailed introduction in this method and its application in sociology and ethnology, cf. Girtler (1984), p. 42-49; Agar (1995), p. 134-167.

¹⁰⁶ An often mentioned critique to participant observation is the fact that the presence of an observer can modify the observed situations, which clearly challenges the authenticity of collected data. In fact, this was the case in the initial phases of the participant observation in Dhaka, whereby the reluctance faded away and everyday life continued in a „natural“ way after the first 12-24 hours after the arrival, as particular behaviours that had been apparently „avoided“ with consideration of the guest in the initial phase of observation re-emerged, or vice versa advertencies disappeared.

social interaction as well as rituals and festivities (e.g. the Hindus' *pujas*, that are celebrated in the private sphere and in urban space, but also public holidays, which serve the building of national identity in the young country).

It is important to note that participant observation should not be regarded as a substitute of, nor as prior to, interviews: as pointed out by Michael Agar, „observations are a way to test out what you've learned, ways to complicate and contradict the encyclopedia and develop additional interviews and conversations based on those problems“¹⁰⁷.

1.3.1. Specific design of the survey

The field work was conducted between October 2006 and March 2007 as well as in August/September 2007. Despite having learnt Bangla, which was considered as a precondition for the field work, it was not regarded as possible to apprehend in its complexity the whole “system of verbal or intellectually created signs, or codes”¹⁰⁸, on which the representations of space are based. To encounter this problem, during the first five months of research an assistant supported the interviews and at the same time taught how to interpret and cope with specific culturally derived communication rules and rituals – he was, in ethnographic terms, the survey's first “informant”. Following, specific steps of the survey regarding the interviews as well as the participant observation are going to be illustrated more in-depth¹⁰⁹.

Though the complexity of Dhaka's urban fabric in terms of heterogeneity of physical structures coexisting in restricted spaces could have given reason to opt for a „micro“ analysis, for example of two or three urban areas, in this study the entire area of Dhaka City Corporation was considered. However, a certain delineation of the locations in which to conduct the interviews was necessary. This happened by tracing a mental „cross“ from North to South and East to West in Dhaka's plan: from the newly planned residential area for the middle class of Uttara, to the ancient quarters of Dhaka, from the Eastern fringes,

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *The Professional Stranger*, p. 8-9.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. illustration of mental field in last chapter. It was mentioned that these codes depend strongly on language and especially on the symbolic and suggestive value of language. They are thus cultural products, „incorporated“ since childhood by the members of each particular culture.

¹⁰⁹ A particularly careful methodological explication is requested by the mentioned „newness“ of the application of ethnography to an entire urban setting as it was attempted here. While associative walks and material observation are a popular approach to cities in ethnographic but also architectural and planning practice, the steps that accompanied the inspection of features belonging to the mental and social fields succeeded appeared to deserve a special description. However, essential remarks concerning the mental maps, which constituted a very interesting and productive part of the field research, will be made in Part 2, paragraph 2.2.3., as the necessary explications would overload present paragraph.

where real estate and mixed economic activities are protagonists, to the Western ends leaning against the Buriganga. It was hereby planned to include some areas lying beyond such scheme to complete and counter-check the defined sample of locations. Yet, the „cross“ was not traced on one of the available plans of Dhaka City, but in mind, i.e. on the base of the own representation of Dhaka's plan – which, in turn, corresponded to the “felt” city as traversed on foot. This gave birth to a **“personal” constellation of locations** that followed the main traffic axes and touched most characteristic as well as transit areas¹¹⁰. In the effort to avoid a completely arbitrary sample of interviews and at the same time represent as heterogeneous and varied perspectives as can be expected to coexist in a mega city, the interviewees were „chosen“ according to „criteria“ that would grant a certain grade of representativity. Therefore, a broad „correspondence“ in terms of age and religion groups, gender and income was sought between the group of interviewees and Dhaka's population as described in technical literature and Census.

During the evaluation, answers and lifestyles evinced common features among the respondents, giving reason to delineate **six groups of respondents**. Group 1, one of the most populous, had the lowest living standard; the latter increased all through the others until peaking with group 6, which had a very high living standard¹¹¹. By “living standard”, a series of interrelated parameters are meant: education level, profession, housing, as well as personal identification and social network, and so forth¹¹². In Developing Countries like Bangladesh, income plays a comparatively important role for social stratification and in general corresponds with individual education, housing and lifestyle; after the direct experience also confirmed this for Dhaka, income was used as the major classification factor for the study¹¹³. It could be now objected that the assessing of groups essentially

¹¹⁰ A plan of the interview locations will be presented in Part 2.

¹¹¹ Comparing the own subdivision with existing ones, among others Nazrul Islam (2005), page 29-30, group 1 could be termed as „hardcore poor“; further group of interviewees as „poor“, with monthly incomes respectively of less than 3,000Tk or between 3,000 and 5,000Tk. The next twenty-one persons could be described as „lower middle income“ group, earning between 5,000 and 10,000Tk/month, group 4 would constitute the heart of the middle income group, or “middle-middle income” group (between 10,000 and 25,000Tk/month), and group 5 the „upper middle income“ group, earning up to 50,000Tk/month. The remaining minority, with incomes of 50,000-100,000Tk or even higher than 100,000Tk, would represent respectively the „lower upper“ and „upper upper income“ groups. Yet, the bare expression of income - both in Taka or in Euro - was regarded as ambivalent and impractical for the study, not only due to Bangladesh's extreme fast inflation rates, but also to the fact that it would not be immediately understandable unless delving into some considerations on buying power.

¹¹² To grant a less partial estimation, the question directly regarding monthly income was accompanied by questions regarding other aspects, for example: household's members and their age structure, monthly rent, eventual ownership of a lot, flat or house up to more flats or houses, other consumer goods like cars as well as the employment of domestic servants, and finally the type of school (private or public) where children go.

¹¹³ In comparison to other classification options, for example the distinction between females and males or between recent migrants and those inhabitants who are living in Dhaka as second generation at least, the orientation on income was regarded as the most “efficient” because it allows more groups to be differentiated. The evaluation chapters, however, will also delve into the afore mentioned aspects.

means a generalisation, while the initially declared purpose for the interpretation part was, in line with Lefebvre's radical position, to avoid classifications. It is a matter of fact that this dissertation can not but co-exist with the tension between an analytical effort on one side, and the refusal of each traditional form of cataloguing on the other.: in this sense, the adopted classification will be relativised and thus re-embedded in a "rhythm" by the assembling of social practices, rather than grow stiff in a closed system.

It goes along with the research object and the followed method that a great part of the interviews were led in open spaces, busy streets and dusty slum lanes of chosen urban areas, often under the eyes of curious passer-bys or relatives and only in minor extent in private premises like homes, clubs and offices. After reaching the wished area and walking through the environment to observe physical characteristics, infrastructure as well as particular activities of the occupants, persons or groups were approached, who a) appeared to have time for a talk and b) corresponded to a certain expectation of the peculiar interviews. For example, observing predominant economic activities, but also in consideration of history and characteristic buildings of the areas, „everyday users“ and inhabitants could be distinguished from casual visitors. First were generally preferred, except in cases of markets and other logistically strategic points as well as special festivities in public space, that constitutionally are filled by masses of sporadic users and visitors¹¹⁴. No specific order of questions was followed and in cases of particular interest, unforeseen questions adjoined to the regular spectrum¹¹⁵; immediately afterwards, the answers were discussed among researcher and assistant and filled in a precise report with first „direct“ impressions, which were important as reminders and as supports for the later transcription of the recorded tapes¹¹⁶. The interviewees sometimes showed surprise and, as mentioned, needed some time for reflection before facing the questions, whereby instead of answering, they often indulged in long stories about their home villages, their children's marriages, their problems with the house rent or the political situation. Along with the

¹¹⁴ In particular, the envisaged respondents were approached by the author, who explained the object of interest: a simple explication like "space and its use in Dhaka's everyday life" was generally enough, whereby more time was often dedicated to a personal presentation, which was an important means for the creation of initial trust and sympathy. Once the chosen persons had agreed to cooperate, the interview could finally start; this was generally led by the author and the assistant jointly, according to both comprehensibility, for the author, of the respondents' changing dialects, and to the type of respondents. For example, female interviewees often showed to feel better answering my questions, and only turned to the assistant in the cases in which I could not understand them despite many trials.

¹¹⁵ For example, this happened in the case of a street-hawker who revealed the existence of an illegal system of taxation for the selling space on the street, of a rickshaw wallah, who was asked about his way of orientation through Dhaka's streets, or of a very religious woman, who explained about particular religious practices.

¹¹⁶ 80 of the total 100 interviews were held in Bangla, the remaining 20 in English by the author alone. The assistant had the task to transcribe all interviews, nevertheless, this process took place in steady interaction with the author, and personal observations were also used as accompanying information for the later interpretation.

increasing experience it became clear that, in these cases, the approached persons wanted to understand the motivation of my interest and contemporarily to test my determination, before stepping into an interview. While the latter may be related to the fact that the interviewer was a woman, what at a first glance appeared as scepticism about the research reasons could not be explained. I knew that ethnologists working on special subcultures or minorities often have to invest a lot of energy and time to gain the interviewees' confidence, but what I faced was, rather than mistrust concerning the good use of the statements, a latent expectation for some advantage. As a confirmation was regarded the fact that, after I had explained that the research was independent, i.e. it was not led by an development agency, there was in general a change of attitude – as one of the expert interview partners once commented, a probable “NGO-syndrome“. To recognise and prevent exaggerations or manipulations of information, some **check questions** were asked; also the reactions of surrounding listeners could reveal possible lies.

Similar “checks” had to be used also in the phase of the interviews' evaluation, which took place after the field research, in Germany. Apart from being a research method, ethnography constitutes an evaluation method as well, which consists of different kinds of analysis¹¹⁷. The answers to the led interviews were evaluated with awareness of latter instruments, although the peculiar „mixed“ character of the study, which moved between various disciplines and between two „urban cultures“ - the European and the local – as well as its qualitative nature, requested a flexible and creative application. This consisted of the transcription of all answers, divided according to respondent and topic, on two 5-metre-long sheets of paper. This had the function of bringing all answers into an also visual relationship, while the protracted transcribing deepened the knowledge and reflection on them. In a second moment, aspects of cultural knowledge regarding city (presented in paragraph 2.2.1., or “Representations of city”) and space (paragraph 2.2.2., “Representations of space”) were recognised, grouped and compared until individuating possible “themes”, which are presented in form of headings in Part 2¹¹⁸.

In contrast to the interviews, whose taking place depended on the interview partners' availability to talk for about one hour, but did not request a longer personal involvement, the „choice“ of informants for the participant observation was a more delicate part of the empirical work. Depending also on the learning of Bangla, the participant observation was

¹¹⁷ Such as domain analysis (i.e. the search for the larger units of cultural knowledge), taxonomic analysis (i.e. the search for internal structure of domains, identifying contrast sets), componential analysis (i.e. the search for the attributes that signal differences among symbols in a domain) and theme analysis (i.e. the search for the relationships among domains and how they are linked to the culture as a whole). Cf. Spradley (1979).

¹¹⁸ The successive steps of this working process can be observed in a copy of the coding tables reproduced in the appendix, cf. page 144.

in fact the last step in the whole field work, occupying the entire two months of August and September 2007, a time by which language knowledge allowed everyday life conversation without need of assistance. **Five families as well as one religious holiday** were observed:

- it was first of all regarded as interesting to „compare“ everyday life in two different types of dwelling for urban poor: a small-sized compound owned by a private in the inner city (Sukrabad) versus Dhaka's biggest squatter, *Karail Bustee*, laying on a peninsula on Banani Lake (Gulshan).
- these two cases were in turn distinguished from everyday life in a) one of the bazaars of the congested old town and b) the settlement of Geneva Camp, both characterised by high density and segregation. Among Old Dhaka's different bazaars, each with a strong identity linked to typical commercial activities, the Hindu Shakhari Bazaar was chosen;
- to counterbalance precedent examples, one „middle-upper class“ household were also looked for. The observed family, headed by a professional urban planner and her husband, a retired Army officer, lives in Dhanmondi, in an owned apartment of recent construction;
- beside these “spaces of social practice”, it appeared relevant to consider public events, because during these, collective action and “desire” subject space to a temporary, as well as temporal, change. The celebrations in occasion of Hindu pujas were considered as particularly indicated for the purpose, as pujas are universally accessible and typically “appropriate” urban space. In the specific case, *Janmastami Puja* was chosen or the participant observation.

The contact to the informants came about either thanks to suggestion and/or expressive invitation by friends, or through my own research. In the latter case, which regards the second, third and fourth households¹¹⁹, the envisioned location was generally reached in the morning and an entire day was spent talking with local dwellers. Before or shortly after dusk, those, men or women, who had showed particular openness or with whom longer talks had taken place, were asked whether it would be possible to stay some more time with them and their families in their home. If this did not cause particular problems and with the understanding of the family members, the permanence was protracted for 3 to 6 days.

¹¹⁹ I came upon the first after asking China, who worked as housemaid in the guest-house where I was living, whether I could spend some days in her family, whom I had already visited in occasion of festivities.

Digression III / Own positioning between researching and „feeling with“

„The field-researcher who makes a military dictatorship pay
for his three-month-long study and in exchange works
as a public-relations expert for it – who could condemn him?
Indeed he must openly expose it, this also is description of people.
If he neglects this, what remains is lies and mere venality“
H. Fichte, 1977¹²⁰.

The traditional „legend“ of the „good“ ethnographer, who is able to delve into different communities and gain their trust and friendship, becoming advocate of their specific needs and at the same time preserving scientific exactness and objectivity, has been challenged by various authors, sociologists and ethnographers themselves, in a discourse on the ethics of ethnography and ethnology¹²¹. In particular, it was pointed out that not only does the researcher affect the everyday life he/she pretends to observe, but his/her perception can hardly be exempt from personal bias, and his analysis be objective. When the observation regards cultural contexts that are strongly dissimilar from the one of origin, i.e. the difficulty of „decoding“ peculiar signs and communication rules adjoins to a possible „fascination“ for the exotic - both factors endangering the (critical) objectivity of the research -, may augment the problematic. It becomes, though, particularly awkward when the observed communities live in Developing Countries – when a romantic or interventionist attitude on the part of the researcher can contort his/her view of reality as well as role and positioning within it.

On the base of personal experience it could be said that a certain dosis of idealism and romanticism probably has to precede, rather than accompany, any ethnographic survey. This is especially true in Dhaka, where research is complicated by a very precarious and at times frustrating socio-political situation, and on the other hand lightened by a collaborative and, in general, generous population. In this context, the personal motivation and expectation towards not only the research, but its object - everyday life practices, which are inseparable from the people who are their protagonists -, had to undergo a self-critical reflection. Which motivation led to my work in Dhaka? Did I confront it with an expectation, and if yes, was it possible to limit it to the researcher's legitime expectation for knowledge, or was it sustained by an „ideal“, or an ideology?

¹²⁰ Cf. Fichte's mentioned speech for a new science of men, p. 14 (own translation).

¹²¹ Cf. among others Alan Fine's *Ten lies of ethnography* (1993) in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 22, p. 267-294; but also Fichte, Girtler and Spradley. As starting point of this discussion can be regarded the observation that the experience of making ethnography does „change“ or affect the observer and not only he/she changes the observed reality.

These questions appeared important for a survey which was expected to be as honest, if not „objective“, as possible. The potential danger of „motivation“ is to approach the study from a wrong, or idealistic, perspective. A four-month-long stay in Dhaka preceding the study had already „deflated“ the system of configurations that often accompany Western visitors on their travels to South-Asia, which generally range from prejudices concerning a „less progressed“ society to naive expectations on the „goodness“ and „happiness“ of poor people, passing through differently rooted anxieties about the local state of poverty¹²². Hence, it is possible to assert that the motivation behind the research was a genuine wish to understand, through a longer observation and consequent description, which consequences urbanisation has for everyday life and how Dhaka's population copes with the same. Especially the spatial competence and acceptance of society hierarchies to cope with an extremely congested space and – at least to Western eyes – very apparent social inequalities were the focus of attention. The second danger, that of expectation, could not be answered with the same certainty, as the ambition to „demonstrate“ and „teach“ in order to improve future intervention and development plans did accompany a relevant part of the survey. If it is not here that a discussion on humility in scientific research should be approached (though it has been eventually interiorised by this author), it appears important to share one insight gained through the field work.

Ethnographers, but in general each empirical researcher, should keep in mind that their position as more or less welcome, more or less participant and integrable „visitors“ is and remains such during and beyond the research. Existing ethical codes should be hence accompanied by a further cognition, that regarding the own termless foreignness (which is also related to the temporary character of the „immersion“). The latter does not exclude genuine emotional participation and involvement on the part of the researcher, but gives them a volatile appearance for those who host and introduce him/her into their life¹²³. In other words: so-called „respondents“, „subjects“, but also „informants“ do not regard the ethnographer as a less exotic „intruder“ than a hydro-engineer that tries to provide them better sanitary conditions, and both may be equally welcome to them – though the first may take the biggest advantage, in terms of human knowledge and „narrations“, from his/her type of experience. Considering this, ethnography is neither more nor less relevant

¹²² Crucial to this development was a friend and activist, who through several critical dialogues before and during the research period significantly contributed to the formation of my personal point of view.

¹²³ In this regard, Michael H. Agar's point in *The Professional Stranger* (the same title of his book is programmatic) was found consistent: „[...] participant observation as more about observation than about participation. [...] an ethnographer isn't really doing anything that makes any sense to anyone. He or she lives there and participates in community activities, but it's a major problem for people to figure out what he or she is up to. The ethnographer is a researcher, a scientist working in the laboratory that the participant observation provides“. Cf. *The Professional Stranger*, p. 9.

than other human, natural and technical sciences to the study of contemporary social phenomena. While human scientists seem to be „congealed“ in face of the urgent call for action coming from Developing Countries and struggle to formulate a shadow of an answer in their written pages, practitioners and other technical experts are challenged by the complexity of processes which cannot be faced by the sole reference to „operational“ structures. To make a step out of this impasse, this project shall try to give a contribute to scientific dialogue by making a first attempt of integration of various methods and materials (which Lefebvre's model allows). Only sharing, comparing and completing it with near and distant disciplines, it will test its value.

A third factor to be tested regards the temptation to judge, justify, or even condemn culturally rooted aspects of observed everyday life that contradict the own understanding of „human rights“ and, vice versa, to sympathise with those who could appear as „victims“ – in short, the temptation to „take a stand“. As far as the present study is concerned, such „temptation“ fast lost its attraction thanks to a consciously searched for experiencing of the heterogeneity of opinions in Dhaka's multi-faceted and transiting society. I gave importance to getting to know experts with diverging backgrounds and socio-political positions, which necessitated „searching for“ them in various premises. For example, attending the programmes of the German Cultural Institute (Goethe-Institut Bangladesh) - similarly to other foreign cultural institutions as well as the „Dhaka Club“, a meeting point for professionals, researchers, artists and students of very varied age, interests, values, backgrounds as well as orientations - it was possible to get in contact with what could be called the Bangladeshi „urban elite“. Hereby, especially the younger generations spend much time in cafés and shopping malls; working once a week as a waitress in one of the most beloved cafés of Dhanmondi, I could gain a better insight into the type of public sphere taking shape in these resorts. Parallel or alternatively, a second group of experts was found among activists and critical artists, who mostly gather in their own offices, in (illegal) bars, around the bookshops of „AZI-Supermarket“ as well as at the Art College. Finally, I did not avoid the contact to Dhaka's international community that converges at diplomatic events, various national clubs and private receptions.

Why all these „additional“ experiences? On one side, they simply came about with the necessity to meet the chosen experts, who, it was mentioned, played a determinant role for the formation of a complex own understanding of Dhaka. Hereby, the contact with the persons surrounding them, even though superficial and discontinuous, contributed important reflections, animated at times by frustration and consternation in front of the experienced contrasts. Changing sides on an almost everyday basis – from the air

conditioned flats in Dhanmondi, to the dusty guest-house in Shyamoli filled with foreign development volunteers, to the huts where the home servants of my hosts lived -, was helpful in remaining „down-to-earth“ and in avoiding too rash judgements. On the other side, these experiences as a whole contributed a unique source of geographical and cultural knowledge, which provided the basis for the overall evaluation. It is, from my point of view, hardly possible to give them a secondary importance compared to the applied methodology, which they rather completed.

1.3.2. Very particular political period in Bangladesh

Since the beginning of the field research in October 2006, Bangladesh's political scenario was characterised by extraordinary events. Though it was mentioned in the introduction that political instability/discontinuity is a salient feature of this young country, such events have had very dramatic effects, which broke the routine of Bangladesh's and Dhaka's population for long months. In occasion of the end of each government's mandate, that from 2001 till 2006 had been led by Bangladesh National Party (BNP) in coalition with two further parties, the Bangladeshi law contemplates a transitional period of three months, in which the election campaign can take place under the control of an interim, or caretaker, government commission. This started its work in the last days of October under the leadership of Bangladesh's President, himself near to BNP, and was supposed to hand over power to the new government after the new elections, planned to take place on 22nd January 2007. Yet, the caretaker government's operations - hereby especially the work of the election commission, preparing new voters' lists to hinder the election's manipulation¹²⁴ – was increasingly criticised on the part of the former opposition parties, headed by Awami League, which accused it to be partial. Initial doubts and appeals in the media were followed by mistrust and menaces, which took shape in increasingly violent demonstrations on the streets of the major cities, whereby Dhaka is always the first and most vibrant stage of national political concerns.

As early as December, first episodes of violence led to the closure of specific areas of the capital city (the Dhaka University Campus as well as the administration quarters in Ramna/Topkana Road), to armed police interventions against demonstrating groups and to the declaration of curfew during the night hours. In the course of January 2007, the

¹²⁴ Up to that moment, in Bangladesh there was no personal identity card and, with the registration of new-born babies still being difficult, many persons were not registered in State's lists.

situation culminated, with protesters blocking the country's main roads and stopping the economic (especially port's) activities in order to boycott each aspect of „normal“ life and in particular the government's work – and military intervention on the streets. Shortly before the planned election, it was clear that the latter could not take place; the protesting parties demanded that the existing election commission as well as caretaker government would be substituted. With the establishment of a second interim government and a new chief of the same, an indefinite period of preparation for the new election started, whereby according to a proposed schedule this should take place within 2008. Beside a new design for the compilation of electoral rolls, the new interim commissioners, who contemporarily function as ministers, started a wide reaching programme for the fight against corruption. Such took shape in relevant reforms of the judiciary, massive investigations into and condemnations of corrupted politicians as well as businessmen, but regarded, on the other end of the „anti-corruption move“, also squatters, pavement dwellers and hawkers, who were evicted from relevant areas as New Market and further central business resorts through military intervention and/or „accidents“ like for example the burning of squatters. If similar events evidently affected the field work, which in some cases had to be stopped, postponed and/or re-started, a more crucial effect could be an alteration of Dhaka's social space, due to increased political activity and, on the other side, decreasing everyday life activities. In the course of the study, both possibilities are going to be critically reflected.

1.3.3. Problematic statistical data

Being ethnographic, the present study will not primarily refer to statistics for its argumentation, but these also will play a role within the entire project nonetheless; this makes it necessary to spend some words on the state of affairs regarding these sources. It was previously mentioned that, beside researchers from most various fields who referred indirectly to Dhaka's urbanisation, i.e. in its role as context, or frame, of the singular socio-demographic or planning processes by them studied, few authors have concentrated their attention and analysis efforts on the city's urban growth at large.

In this sense, Nazrul Islam's and CUS' pioneering works continue to represent an important reference. The currently most up-to-date publication, *Dhaka Now*, appeared shortly before the data from the last census had become available, so that its statistical references are in part fractional and quite heterogeneous as far as origin and publishing authority are concerned. Hence, while various data are exhaustively explained in the book, it is difficult

to get an orientation within the partial and hardly comparable numerical information. The problem of comparability is also related to the mentioned administrative subdivisions of Dhaka, as different studies often consider different areas. Nor can this difficulty be immediately overcome on the basis of the new *Population Census*, which presents the results of a survey held in 2001 and published in February 2007, due to the fact that the census unit corresponds to none of Dhaka City's administrative definitions, but to Dhaka *Zila*, which has a different administrative composition, extension and population¹²⁵. Statistical lacks regarding specific survey areas (Demra, Tongi) follow from this fact, whereby a more serious problem could be the absence of separate statistics for Dhaka City Corporation, the chosen study area. These can actually be traced back on the base of the population census, which includes the descriptions of singular *thanas* and wards. However, also during such attempt some problems emerged, as particular data appeared to have low or only relative pertinence to the actual *status quo*¹²⁶. The fact that necessary infrastructure (for example, cabling or the removal of sewage) has been built up does not yet mean that electricity or water provision is factually available to the inhabitants of fringe or new areas - even in Gulshan, not to speak of the quality of provision (for example, electricity is in general very „erratic“ even in better-off areas as Dhanmondi, but is often cut off in the slums after dusk). This on one side led to consider only percental and not numerical results, so to have rather a „suggestion“, or an impression, on the proportions; on the other, it confirmed the importance of everyday life as base for observation and corresponding evaluation¹²⁷.

¹²⁵ In Bangladesh there are 64 *zilas*, or „districts“, which in turn underlie six major divisions - corresponding to the six biggest cities (Barisal, Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet) -, and are further subdivided in sub-districts, or *upazilas*. E.g.: Dhaka District, along with other 16 neighbouring and non-neighbouring districts, is one part of Dhaka Division. Compared to the illustrated administrative units for Dhaka, the District comprehends three more *upazilas* (Dhamrai, Dohar and Nawabganj) than DMDP, but lacks the herein planned eastern expansion of the metropolitan area in Narayanganj and Gazipur Districts. It has accordingly an area of 1,459.56 square kilometres (DMDP: 1,528sq. km; DSMA: 1,353sq. km; DCC: 145sq. km). In terms of population, Dhaka *Zila* – with ca. 8,5 millions inhabitants and 5.835 inhabitants/square kilometre - appears to be far less populated, especially *less densely* populated, than DCC with 14.608 inhabitants/square kilometre.

¹²⁶ I'm not referring to data which have been grouped under the category „Others“, which is a legitimate practice as traditional parameters and definitions often are unable to comprehend fast fluctuating data, though this would suggest that alternative methods of collecting data are to be searched for.

¹²⁷ Another example would be the surprisingly high number of divorced women compared to a very much lower proportion of divorced men, which is due to the fact that re-marrying is very rare for women after divorce, but not at all for men. Thus, this discrepancy has to do with the statistics' difficulty to cope with time, or changes in time, as it asks – or may be answered – only about present situation. Also in this case, the interpretation and comparison with social reality is essential.

1.3.4. The questionnaire

Before passing to the evaluation, in Part 2, the questionnaire is going to be explained in present paragraph. This represented a fundamental tool of the field work because it was given the role of „translator“, or filter, of European conceptualisations of city and space. Its formulation implied a crucial challenge, as the chosen theoretical approach was focused on the dialectic interaction of physical, mental and social space rather than on providing a precise definition of each of them. Precisely this uncertainty led to the study of relevant works on the „conceptualisation of space“ in European and Asian contexts, thanks to which the existence of discrepant meanings of space – partly, but not totally coinciding with religious differences - was recognised; peculiarities in the social structures, ritual components as well as colonialism and globalisation as factors for „contagion“ were especially taken into account.

In the European medieval city, the space around churches was considered holy; built up so to constitute a square, it played a special role for the inhabitants' spatial understanding and orientation within the city and was the focus of urban design projects – Pope Sixtus V's Rome may be the most famous witness hereof¹²⁸. Such symbolical importance has survived the passing of time, as evidenced by current plans for new squares and open spaces around churches, but increasingly also in commercial and leisure areas, which deliberately refer to the historical models - often also in their semantic: *piazza*, *agora*, *forum* or *arcade*. In the Hindu tradition, which characterised the early phase of Bangladesh and Dhaka's development before the advent of Islam with the Mughals, a city's form and its landmarks inside and outside the walls were planned to mirror the cosmological order, which the dwellers ritually celebrated in processions, and research in Nepal and Northern India have shown that the same ideas have partly been preserved up to contemporary times¹²⁹. Though in this case a similar base - religious belief and need for representation of sacral values - is common to European and South-Asian cities¹³⁰, it appears that the „transposition“ of this symbolic and cultural base into architecture, urban planning as well as social practices took

¹²⁸ Richard Sennett has shortly described how, between 16th and early 17th century, the city of Rome underwent significant interventions under the direction of Pope Leo X and especially Sixtus V. Both provided the „Holy City“ with centres and landmarks like Piazza del Popolo first, and the obelisks on the way towards it then, thus creating perspective views which should help the pilgrims' orientation in the until then chaotic system of roads. For Sennett cf. *The Conscience of the Eye. The Design and Social Life of Cities* (1990).

¹²⁹ Niels Gutschow and Jan Pieper worked on this topic, cf. for example Gutschow's publication *Stadt und Ritual. Beiträge zur Stadtbaugeschichte Süd- und Ostasien* (1977, together with Thomas Sieverts) and Pieper's *Die anglo-indische Station oder die Kolonisierung des Götterberges* (1977).

¹³⁰ In the theoretical part, it has been mentioned that Paul Wheatley demonstrated that actually all antique civilisations developed upon ritual and sacral values, which functioned as aggregation tools and „justified“ the political authority or domination of rulers and contemporarily constituted the base of cities.

very different forms in different geographical areas. The heterogeneity of cultural influences that concerned the Subcontinent in History is hereby a very strong barrier for the definition of one „main“ way to represent space. This leads to the insight that a) socio-cultural and historical aspects make mental representations complex and only partially or carefully comparable and generalisable; and b) that these same representations implicate differences in cities' physical and social space (and *vice versa*)¹³¹. It thus appears that representations of space in Dhaka should not be surveyed without at least an awareness of the intercultural nature of the attempt. During the search for a viable way to analyse representations of space in Dhaka without abstracting away from the recognised intercultural aspect, an important input was found in the words of US-historian Paul Wheatley, who stated, with reference to the problem of intercultural comparison of urban processes, that “[...] the ordering of social institutions at all times, and that series of structural relationships which constitutes the city in particular, are to a very great extent independent of cultural form, and, existing in a wide range of different cultures, may be symbolized in correspondingly diverse ways [...]. It is clearly not in localized idioms of urban form that cross-cultural regularities are to be sought, but rather at the operational level, where social, political, and economic processes can be reduced to functional terms. And it is this underlying structural pattern, rather than its superficial cultural overlay, that is of primary concern to us”¹³².

If the „operational level“ is the level at which „cross-cultural regularities“ can be found, its „functional terms“ could constitute the starting point for the talks with the interviewees – that is, concrete everyday uses of space and its functions should be asked about. The next step consisted in developing a questionnaire that a) refers to the functional, *operational* aspect of urban forms; b) remains aware of its nature of „translation“ of European conceptualisations; and c) comprehends contrasting, heterogeneous elements which could be juxtaposed but not definitely integrated.

¹³¹ For example, in Dhaka, buildings hosting mosques can not be destroyed as they are regarded as holy, even when they hamper traffic. Yet, apparently no restrictions are imposed on the more or less temporary encroachment of the immediate space around them. The New Market mosque, planned in 1953 by a Danish architect, is an exemplary case. While the project contemplated an empty esplanade around the mosque, which is centrally located within the market space, this remained a favourite selling point for hawkers even after the eviction of most street-vendors from New Market, under the present caretaker government.

¹³² P. Wheatley, *The pivot of the four quarters* (1971), p. 387. Wheatley stated that the ordering of social institutions within urban studies must happen independently from cultural forms after having observed that these can not be compared, as a Greek would have requested a *prytaneion*, a *gymnasion* and a theatre to declare a city, a Muslim a *jami* (mosque), a *souq*, and a *hammam*, but not a centre of government, a Mesopotamian just the temple, a Carolingian a church as well as a keep and a market, a Mauryan Indian a temple, palace, and market, and finally a Chinese an altar to the god of the soil, a temple and a wall.

The first requirement implied that the formulated questions should refer to the concrete case of Dhaka and not to a generalised city, that is, interviews should regard the level of everyday-life practice. The second two preconditions were an „insurance“ for the study, insofar as they bound it to look for contradictions and not for conformances, to juxtapose and not melt individualities that statistics would absorb, and - with the heterogeneity of the results - hindered any generalisation.

Once agreed on the questionnaire's tenor, it was the moment to develop it. Various interpretations in the tradition of urban studies were considered, from Max Weber, to Louis Wirth and Jürgen Habermas to Janet Abu-Lughod and Richard Sennett, whereby the reference to a historian like Lewis Mumford and a planner like Kevin Lynch was important as well. Their definitions, which can be said to constitute the base of the European „representations“ of space and in general tended to identify urban space with „public“ space, were subsumed in five main “trends”, corresponding to five main disciplines (law; political and social philosophy; cultural studies; urban planning; economy). They are presented in the table below.

(PUBLIC) SPACE¹³³				
...space where individuals are allowed to stay and circulate freely under certain restrictions deriving from the contemporary use by others	...congregation space for class-specific interests, implying the emergence and expression of public opinion with a political resonance	...system of meanings based on cultural values, which can be shaped by performative acts (also architecture)	...road system, squares, green and open spaces objects of public use and planning	...platform for exchange of goods, explicitly produced to be sold e.g. in the city's market place
LAW	POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY	CULTURAL STUDIES	URBAN PLANNING	ECONOMY

Fig. 5: Schematic representation of main traditions of interpretation of (public) urban space in Western urban studies.

¹³³ Due to the implication of „public“ in the European denomination of „urban space“, „representation of space“ and „representation of *public* space“ will not be differentiated in the context of the European representation of space treated and translated by the questionnaire.

Subsequently, these interpretations were transposed to the operational level, resulting in **six functions of (public) urban space** that, as „operative“ features underlying different activities constitutional to urban life, can be made the object of different interpretations, but are essentially independent from cultural variations:

- **free accessibility,**
- **communication and information,**
- **expression of public opinion,**
- **cultural/political representation / building of identity,**
- **infrastructure / built environment** as well as
- **economic exchange.**

Starting from the such obtained functions, respective questions were formulated and collected in three different blocks of the questionnaire¹³⁴, regarding infrastructural functions (also architecture) and everyday routines¹³⁵, representations of the city as well as national and cultural representation or building of identity (also on the base of ceremony), communication as information, expression of public opinion, freedom of accessibility respectively¹³⁶.

One practical advantage of such a questionnaire is that it makes the putting of informal uses of space on a level with traded or formal ones possible: its validity was tested for example during the talks with squatters, who necessarily spend all different moments of their everyday life in public spaces, as well as in the classification of free accessible infrastructural features like flyovers, parks or footpaths, where lovers go to enjoy some minutes of solitude and groups of men improvise the maybe most public form of chess-board, mindless of the surrounding human and motorised traffic.

The four parts constituting the questionnaire are following presented.

¹³⁴ The questionnaire is presented on pages 4 and 5 of the appendix.

¹³⁵ The „economic exchange“ aspect was treated here, as it became clear that for a very consistent part of the population Dhaka's primary function is that of market – the labour market.

¹³⁶ The „concept“ of free accessibility posed particular problems during the questions' development as it appeared that asking, for instance, whether mentioned places would be accessible without paying and/or without need for permission, the original meaning of this conceptualisation would have been missed. In fact, such concept is tightly linked to Western values on justice, whereas against the background of segregation, exclusion and fragmentation, but especially of congestion as well as informal occupation and development of space in Dhaka, it was admittedly impossible to find an adequate formulation for the questionnaire. Hence, this aspect was rather made object of the participant observation.

First step – Personal information

The first part of each interview generally aimed at collecting personal information regarding the interviewees¹³⁷ - from age, profession, religion and education level to duration of stay in Dhaka, place of work and place of residence. Knowing these particulars about the interview partners was on one hand important for the later comparison and „contextualisation“ of their answers, on the other, the uncomplicated, informative questions built a sort of self-confidence and a confidential climate before starting with the more abstract part of the interview. Some of these, for example about number of children, residential neighbourhood or mobility within Dhaka, were also useful to estimate the interviewees' economic situation, as these were sometimes understandably reluctant or unable to give information on their monthly incomes. Partial repetitions were also useful, because in some cases, the comparison of single answers revealed that the interviewees were lying or concealing particular information that had to be searched for through new questions. Through this initial part, read information on lifestyles and life-stages peculiar of different inhabitants of Dhaka became „alive“, that is, statistics until then read in literature took the form of *real* persons, with names, hands marked by physical work and faces which would remain in memory, but most importantly acting in specific locations, repairing a rickshaw on the pavement or cooking on the home's threshold. They were, in short, inserted in the concrete urban space.

Second step – Everyday Life

After this first block, the interview continued with the inspection of everyday life, for example daily routines, usual marketing and shopping places, means of transport used to reach various locations or memberships in any group, which are going to be illustrated in the paragraph on *Everyday reality*. Here an overview of the questions:

- Can you describe your daily routine? (How) Does it change on week-ends?
- Where do you buy food/clothes/ other goods?
- Which neighbourhoods/areas (other than yours) do you go to? How often?
- Do you know any place where only women gather (religious, cultural groups..)?
- Are you member of any groups (civil society group, savings group, women groups...)?

¹³⁷ An overview of these data is offered in the chapter on *Physical space – Spatial practice*, in particular paragraph 2.1.1.

This group of questions was conceived to meet the problem that the dissertation, basically surveying space, necessarily had to delve into the description of lifestyles and everyday life practices until then largely unknown to the author. Before an „immersion“ in said everyday practices factually occurred and succeeded with the participant observation, concerned questions had the scope to „enlarge“ the observer's horizon and at the same time to sharpen her attention for eventual exceptions. While, during the participant observation, the informants contributed a certain idea of the myriads of possible life-styles and „pre-classified“ them, with the questionnaire the effort was made to let the interviewees explain their movements and actions along one day, before going and doing the same with them. That is to say, the hereby collected knowledge – a still conceptualised, mental one – allowed an individuation of which aspects should be especially studied¹³⁸.

Third step – Representations of City

After the first two blocks of questions tried to inspect people's everyday life practices and delve into their underlying values, with the next two the survey passed over to the conceptualisation of mental space. The third complex of questions, presented in paragraph *Representations of City* (2.2.1.), aimed at unveiling how city and urbanity are conceived of. Besides looking for historical and cultural influences, a further aspect of interest was whether these representations are at present being affected by the adoption, absorption, or adaptation of values „intruding“ from the Western urban tradition.

By such analysis of representations of the urban *per se* it was further on envisaged to understand extent and level of Dhaka's dwellers' reflection on city and urbanity, which can be expected to also affect the representation of space. In a still prevalently rural country like Bangladesh, the idea of city and urbanity could be rather undefined (as the existing literature indirectly tends to suggest), however, the extreme rate of urban population growth in Bangladesh gives reason to expect that, if not complete representations, a set of expectations on the city should be responsible for people's choice to migrate.

Two leading questions - *is there a specific set of ideas regarding the city, the urban? What does „city“ mean for urbanising and urbanised Bangladeshis?* - „materialised“ in the questionnaire in form of the questions presented on following page.

¹³⁸ Similarly to the precedent ones, these questions gave occasion to talk about familiar topics, particularly beloved friends or preferred activities, which also contributed to make the interviewees feel more confident and relaxed. They „proofed“ the consistency of previous and following statements as well.

- Do you like living in Dhaka? Why is it good to live in Dhaka?
- Why did you move to Dhaka?
- Which advantages and disadvantages (better infrastructure, education and recreation facilities vs. chaos, traffic, lack of open spaces..) does Dhaka offer?
- How are people in Dhaka? Do you think there is any difference between settlers and those born in Dhaka?

Whether it is „good“ to live in Dhaka - at a first glance, a controverse starting point for a survey which should aim at comparable, classifiable, results, being the parameters for „good“ or „bad“ naturally subjective: they vary according to individual experiences, needs, aspirations, value systems and expectations in life¹³⁹. However, precisely this was the kind of information aimed at by present dissertation: the abstract meaning of city, respectively space, should be recognised on the base of people's own conceptualisations, because, as suggested by Lefebvre, it is their interaction with physical space that results in the definition of social space. In this point, it was not relevant whether the mega city is at large evaluated positively or negatively to give Dhaka a „mark“, but rather to sense the extent of correspondence between subjective conceptualisations and concrete circumstances. The subsequent questions, specifically addressing infrastructure and other urban features, led the interviewees to further define their answers.

Further questions dealt with eventual differences between urbanised and urbanising inhabitants aimed at broaching the issue of migration, in particular of the process of adaptation that migrants have to undertake. In the particular case of Dhaka, experts commonly assumed that second or further generation dwellers are concerned about the way the city is changing and want to influence or alleviate the effects of urbanisation, while new settlers ignore them. It seemed important to test such an assumption, basically to answer the questions: *are there any differences between recent settlers' and long-dated inhabitants' attitudes towards urbanisation and urban life?*¹⁴⁰ *Is the process of urbanisation as such perceived by migrants? In how far and with which images is it expressed? How do migrants feel about the city - passive, critical, resigned? Are they as unadaptable as they are described?*

¹³⁹ There is no doubt about the fact that an appropriate analysis in this sense could lead to interesting insights as well. The character and extent of the collected material would in fact allow further uses than the one chosen here, as further interpretations according to respectively different research foci are possible. Therefore, the transcriptions of all interviews are reproduced in the appendix, cf. p. 24.

¹⁴⁰ In the talks that preceded the interview phase an initially surprising insight consisted in the fact that persons who were born in Dhaka often had vague, „pre-confectioned“ ideas on the meaning of urban life, whose features were enumerated like clichés that could suit every city, whereas migrants based their argumentations on concrete comparisons between rural and urban environments.

It was furthermore surveyed whether the city or urbanity are „loaded“ with symbolic values, in other words, whether Dhaka is directly linked, in people's minds, to ideals, for example, of wealth, better chances, or modernity - in again other words: *Are there „urban legends“ on Dhaka?* Lastly, also asking the interview partners how they regard the people who live in Dhaka was a means to delve into Dhaka's „character“ as perceived and „produced“ through urban legends, as statements like „Our neighbours here are Muslim, but they are good to us and I could get used to living in Dhaka despite missing the village“, „I think I'm living in Dhaka's best place because of the people living in DU Campus – most of them are fantastic“, or „Nobody will help me here, it's the city“ gave evidence to the fact that the „city“ can not be seen separately from the experience of, and interaction with, its inhabitants.

Fourth step – Representations of space

Here, the attention was focussed on the “character” space is respectively attributed by dwellers¹⁴¹. Such characterisations range from religious and other symbolic meanings linked to activities that build (confessional, national, socio-political) identity, to political uses of space and its assumed role as fosterer of “public sphere”. At the varying of the considered aspects, the interviews should shed light on the elements of that complex assemblage of meanings which mental space is. The following questions, obtained on the base of the process illustrated above and „translating“ functions and (Western) interpretations of space, were relevant to this part of the survey:

- Where would you go if you wanted to pray? Are there other religious spaces, in Dhaka, where you can worship? Is space particularly “holy”, to you, in some parts of Dhaka?
- Is there a place, building, or neighbourhood, in Dhaka, that in your opinion represents Bangladesh as a whole? Which is Dhaka's most characteristic location for you? And which is its most characteristic public celebration? Do you take part in any of these, where are they typically organised?
- At which location or building, in Dhaka, do you think, is Bangladesh's political power concentrated? How do you notice or feel it? Is the Parliament such a space in your experience?
- Where would you go if you wanted to get informed and discuss about political and social events you care of?

¹⁴¹ Results are illustrated in the paragraph on *Representations of space*, cf. 2.2.3.

- Where do you think that political processions or social demonstrations take place in Dhaka? Have you ever taken, or do you at present take part? Where do they start and end? With whom do you go there?

The concentration on spaces for communication, information and political activism derives from a relevant expectation on urban space as sociologists like Habermas or Wirth conceived of it, i.e. as birthplace of public opinion and public sphere thanks to human communicative actions taking place in “public spaces” and fostering social organisation. It should be stated hereby that the author's personal *need* for spaces of communication - cafés, galleries, local cultural centres etc. in which “diverse urban dwellers contribute to building public opinion” and “urban culture” can be lived - initially generated the questions on the uses of space in Dhaka and, after all, underlies the entirety of present study. According to a European understanding of city and being habituated to correspondingly conceived features of urbanity and urban space, my initial concern was to understand its use by the local dwellers, which appeared to differ from known practices also independently from the higher degree of informality¹⁴². *Where does socio-political reunion take place in an urban environment lacking those physical arrangements that typically accompanied it (in Europe)? Are specific spatial dispositions conducive to the formation of public opinion and socio-political organisation? Do, for example, historically relevant buildings or areas like Dhaka University or Shere-Bangla-Nagar encourage political activism thanks to symbolical meaning?*

The attention given to ritual, intended both as common prayer and as national holidays in commemoration of particular historical achievements, derived from the consideration that Bangladesh has been an independent nation only in very recent history and thus national and cultural identity could still be “under construction”. The question is not merely in how far public celebrations like Language Day, Victory Day or Bangla New Year are permeated with an awareness of the country's national history or actually contribute to building identity, but primarily which spatial disposition within the city they refer to. *Which locations “symbolise” Bangladesh and its identity? Due to which historical value or representative building?*

¹⁴² As discovering these “spaces of diversity” required some time, an initial hypothesis had consisted in the assertion that congestion or overpopulation had “destroyed” them - basically a confirmation of popular theories from the “classical” urban studies.

Concluding this paragraph, a few words on the “manipulation problem” inherent to pre-formulate questionnaires should be said. For example, it could be objected that the questions indirectly suggested that there *have* to be differences between recently immigrated and Dhaka-born inhabitants, or that everybody must perceive political power in correspondence with determined spaces. A question always, directly or indirectly, implies an intentionality and an eventual interpretation on the part of both the interviewer and interviewee indeed. Empirical social research has thus established that the only possible „way out“ from the dilemma is a sensitive approach to the interviewed person as well as the faithful reproduction of the answers¹⁴³.

A last important note on the questionnaire regards the fact that the questions had to be translated from English to Bangla. Not only was the translation *per se* a challenge that required various clarifications and discussions between researcher and assistant as, often, not the mere word choice, but the symbolic and ideological sphere were concerned. The double translation – from Western representations to the level of everyday practices as well as from English to Bangla – fostered the sensitivity to the way of thinking of Dhaka's dwellers as well as to eventual misunderstandings. This made it possible to intervene in singular situations of the interviews and „correct“ the questions with sub-questions or examples. In this sense, the questionnaire often played the role of a „memo“ for the general development of the interview, which indeed could include longer explications and in some cases sub-questions.

At this point, it is possible to pass to the presentation of the survey's results, which will start from an in-depth description of the respondents, in Part 2.

¹⁴³ Moreover, due to the researcher's status as a foreigner and complete outsider, the questions appeared to be encountered with a particular „acceptance“ by the respondents, who tried to explain in a similarly direct way their view, eventually also correcting that implied by the interviewer.

2.1. Physical field – Spatial practices

As explained in the theoretical part of this study, the physical field, object of empirical philosophy and basis of empirical research, contains for Lefebvre the material production of a society's space through *spatial practice*. According to his trialectic model - in which global, „local“ (or urban) and private production processes interact –, said spatial practice is equally dependent on material production and reproduction processes (level G), spatial ensembles (level M) and specific places (level P). Furthermore, it was stated that spatial practice emerges from the close association of „urban reality“, i.e. the routes linking work-, private life as well as leisure places, and „everyday reality“, i.e. routines. In this sense, spatial practice can be defined as the sensible and most directly observable „layer“ of a much more complex urban life – its functional, operational dimension.

In the first approach to Dhaka, the general impression could be that functions and operations are suffocated by an unmanageable urban growth and pressure; yet, a second look would recognise management and planning efforts concerning infrastructure, as well as rhythms and rules governing its everyday life: here, an attempt to delineate them is made. One of this chapter's concerns is hence going to be the definition of the **localities** in which the just presented respondents of the survey were interviewed, whereby the „macro“ and „micro“ views shall be integrated: the chosen areas, neighbourhoods and resorts are described „from outside“, i.e. in their overall structure as well as meaning for the city (level G), and „from inside“, i.e. in architectural and other „material“ constituents that carry traces of their development and history and were observed from streets and paths (level P).

Beside this „urban reality“, the present chapter aims furthermore at illustrating **routines** - which, it was seen with Lefebvre, have to be distinguished from social practices as, being imposed and controlled by a dominant ideology, they actually detain urban dwellers from the realisation of their „desire“. The questionnaire's second block of questions, called „everyday life“, provides the basis for the hereby attempted illustration.

Before delving into these aspects of spatial practice, however, the interviews' respondents shall be shortly presented.

2.1.1. The respondents

In the illustration of the adopted methodology, it was shortly mentioned that an effort was made to ensure that the study had a certain degree of representativity; and that this was possible thanks to an accurate choice of interview partners. Technical literature and the Dhaka Census provided general demographic and socio-economic parameters concerning Dhaka's inhabitants – for example, the respective proportions of religious groups, of male to female inhabitants, average age, income groups, etc.; according to these, and basing the calculation on a sample of hundred persons, an “identikit”, or ideal profile, of respondents could be prepared; these were accordingly searched for during the empirical phase. It would have been overambitious to constitute, with the planned sample of interviews, the base for a quantitative, statistical evaluation (such an intention would have requested a much bigger number of interviewees, and also a completely different design of the survey). The interviews as part of the field work were rather conceived as an effective means to “portray” - the word is used in a literal sense, as “paint”, or “trace”, implying also a creative act – Dhaka's inhabitants. A spectrum of possibly broad and non-continuative living forms, economic activities, experiences and ideas from all over Dhaka City was considered. In following table, the interview locations, numbered from 1 to 18, are listed and identified by their ward number¹⁴⁴; they can be recognised in the plan on next page.

Nr.	Location / Ward Nr.	Nr.	Location / Ward Nr.
1	Badda / 21	11	Azimpur / 62
3a	Dhanmondi Residential / 49	12	Mirpur 2 / 7
3b	Khala Bagan / 51	13a	Shyamoli / 45
3c	New Market / 52	13b	Geneva Camp / 45
4	Gulshan / 19	13c	Mohammadpur / 44
7	Rampura / 22	15	Uttara / 1
8	Bonogram / 74	16a	Mirpur 1 / 8
9a	Tejgaon / 39	16b	Bhashantek / 15
9b	Monipuri Para / 40	17	DU Campus and Shahbagh / 57
10a	Nawabpur / 70	18	Tongi / outskirts
10b	Shakhari and Bangla Bazaar / 73		

Fig. 6: List of interview locations accompanied by ward number.

¹⁴⁴ The belonging to specific wards was important because it made possible the consultation of statistical data, which are presented in the appendix. The interview locations' numeration, which reflects the temporal succession of the interviews, is not continuous due to the progressive concentration of observation and grouping of areas.

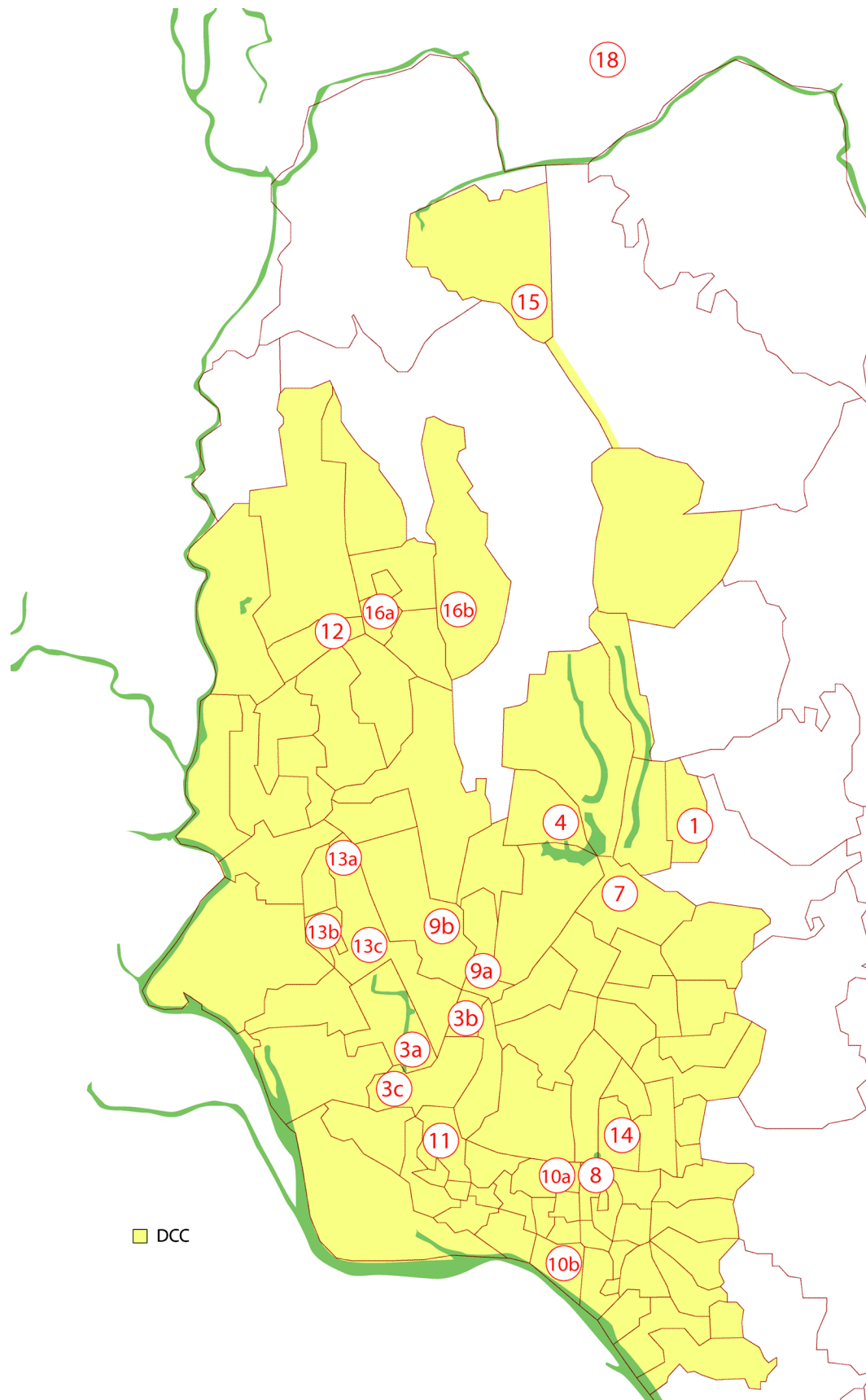


Fig. 7: Visualisation of interview locations. Design: Jennifer Nitschke on the basis of *Dhaka City and Rajuk Plan*, published by The Mappa Ltd., 2007.

How were the interviewees “recognised”? While appraising parameters like gender, religion or age is comparatively easy, the simultaneous consideration of various aspects, or “evidences”, was necessary to figure out respective economic situations: in some cases, the place of meeting - a slum, a specific neighbourhood, a café or office, etc. - was relevant; in others, specific behaviours as well as clothing, presence of a servant, ownership of a car, etc. provided a significant help. In this introductory paragraph, the respondents shall be presented; after **gender, religion, age and income**, slightly more specific information like **employment, marital status, education level as well as origin** will be delved into.

Gender, religion, age and income

A total number of 42 women and 58 men were interviewed¹⁴⁵; with six Hindus, four Christians, and one Buddhist beside the dominating number of Muslims, the survey also tried to mirror Dhaka's mix of religions¹⁴⁶.

Though the respondents' age ranges from 10-15 to more than 60 years, the majority can clearly be located in the age group between 16 and 30 years¹⁴⁷. The likelihood of migration is in fact the highest in this age, as both statistics and a glance at the big groups of young male students and female garment workers on Dhaka's streets would confirm; it should be also mentioned that the broad space of time encompassed between 16 and 30 contains the period in which Bangladeshis (particularly women, whose existence after marriage is mainly segregated to the private sphere of the home¹⁴⁸) can enjoy “social life”, before marriage and familiar responsibilities change priorities and lifestyles; and that as a consequence, it is very probable to find people of this age in a stronger proportion than others on the street.

¹⁴⁵ Such proportion nearly corresponds to the statistical ratio for Dhaka, estimated to be of 100/130 by the Population Census 2001. Given the increment of female migration in the last years (e.g.: female/male ratio was 100/141 in 1981 and 100/130 ten years later; especially women of lower socio-economic status migrate to Dhaka; cf. N. Islam, 1996, page 220), linked to the expansion of garment industries, this ratio could significantly increase in future. For example, the residential area of Dhanmondi, typically inhabited by middle- and upper-income groups, has a ratio of 124/100, whereas in Karail, the proportion of female to male is 108/100 (own calculation on the basis of Dhaka Census 2001, cf. appendix, Fig. 19, p. 14).

¹⁴⁶ One answerer defined himself an „individual believer“ and followed Lalom's mystic thought, while further 87 respondents declared to be Muslims. In the appendix, Fig. 20, p. 15, statistical data on religious groups can be compared. The proportion of interviewed Christians may appear exaggerated especially in comparison to the tiny number of Hindus included in the survey; this is to justify insofar as, in the case of the two Christian respondents living in Monipuri Para, it was interesting to survey spatial segregation linked to religion (the third Christian respondent was a foreigner, the fourth was converted in Europe).

¹⁴⁷ The interviewees' age structure can be observed in the appendix, Fig. 2, p. 8. These proportions can be compared to the census-data, reproduced in Fig. 18, p. 12.

¹⁴⁸ The term „segregation“ will be here used in the sense of isolated/separated living of different ethnic or social groups in a specific location (physical segregation), but also concerning gender segregation as a consequence, or typical feature, of the *purdah*, establishing the separation of female and male adults in Muslim and Hindu cultures, and precisely the protection of women from public spaces.

As explained in the chapter on methodology, the interviewees were divided into six groups according to their living standards: in how far do such “living standards” actually differ? The thirty-two persons assembled in groups 1 and 2 had low or no education and were prevalently first generation dwellers living in slums on public or private land, often also in Dhaka's outskirts and Old Dhaka, hereby mostly near water bodies as well as in the low-lying areas along the Buriganga River¹⁴⁹. As with housing, their typical occupations were informal: transport, “self-initiative based” commercial activities (i.e. as street hawkers or door to door sellers), as well as industry, especially in the garment sector, and small trade¹⁵⁰. In groups 3, 4 and 5, comprising 59 persons, illiteracy tended to be rare and higher degrees of educational qualification - secondary, higher secondary and also university up to doctorate – respectively increased in number. In particular, from group 5 the gap concerning education level between men and women progressively decreased, and comparatively more women had a university degree. Also the proportion of first and second+ generation dwellers gradually varied, so that in group 4 there was an equal number of both and, by group 5, urbanised inhabitants were actually the majority. These latter respondents generally lived in new areas like Mohammadpur and Mirpur, but also nearby or within the Campus, in Wari, Dhanmondi, Ramna, as well as in the administrative core of Paltan and Azimpur, whereby housing conditions and provision of services progressively improved.

As the number of college and university students increased already by group 3, the employment structure typically included small trade and medium informal business, industry, but also an increasing number of clerical workers (employees in private companies) and public or semi-public services (NGOs, administration, schools and universities). The remaining nine interviewees of group 6 had high education levels (never below higher secondary) and were predominantly second+ generation dwellers¹⁵¹. It could be stated that in this group of society, males and females have the same potential access to education and work and gender inequalities tend to disappear; the fact that working women are still lower in proportion has reasons comparable to European or Western contexts. The

¹⁴⁹ Cf. table and graphic representations of the respondents' living areas in appendix, Fig. 3 – 9, p. 8 to 10. Seven interviewees lived in big resettlement areas created since 1975 in the peripheral zones of Demra, Tongi and Bhashantek.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. appendix, Fig. 10 and 11, p. 11, on employment patterns of all groups.

¹⁵¹ Two members of this group, a foreign diplomat and a freelance development and gender researcher, are slightly different to the other seven - not primarily due to very high incomes. In fact, they could be considered as representatives of a no-longer-urban (in the sense of no-more-Dhaka-based) but global-city (in Saskia Sassen's sense) culture. In Dhaka, few have such a privileged way of life: they have the freedom and possibility to travel, work, shop etc. internationally, maybe living in Dhaka for only some months in a year for business reasons, sometimes having a displaced family in other regions of Asia and the world. However, for the sake of representativity, no further distinction was made among this tiny minority; eventual relevant peculiarities are going to be dealt with as footnotes.

interviewees lived and worked almost exclusively in Gulshan and Dhanmondi, often in owned houses or apartments, whereby the housing standards were very high; their occupation was generally linked to administration, finance, NGOs and universities.

Employment patterns

In the chapter on methodology, it was also mentioned that interview partners were generally met on their way to, or during, their work. In this sense, work as an occasion for, and a reason of, urban dwellers' use of Dhaka's spaces played an important role for the survey and hence deserves some specifications. As showed by Fig 11 in appendix¹⁵², more than half of women in group 1 was or had been in a working relationship, or at least contributed to the household through begging; in groups 2 and 3, all female respondents worked, and the interviewed women from groups 4, 5 and 6 were also mostly employed or studying. Hereby, concerned interviewees of group 1, 2, 3 and 4 were in general occupied in small business - from the courageous woman running a tea stall thanks to a loan, up to the mature and old ladies who leave the slum of Demra in big groups to sell ash and clothes in Dhaka -, whereas two ladies gave private Arabic lessons to children of particularly religious families and other two were workers in garment factories¹⁵³. At last, respondents of groups 5 and 6 worked as teachers, in offices and NGOs.

The proportion of occupied persons among the male interviewees was almost absolute, whereby many were students at primary, secondary and higher level schools, eventually giving private lessons to help finance their studies – an especially common practice for boys in groups 3 and 4. Also the interviewed men prevalently worked in the informal sector, as street hawkers and door to door sellers, as small or medium business owners, middle-men in the garment business, as well as transport workers - *rickshaw-wallah*, van pullers and bus drivers¹⁵⁴. Again, respondents with higher incomes (groups 5 and 6) were mostly employed in private and public offices.

¹⁵² Cf. appendix, page 9, but also the data of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics on women employment, Fig. 21. p. 15. The survey, led by the BBS in 2001 and showing 1,967 million women working over a total amount of 3 million (thus a percentage of 65%) would confirm the proportion.

¹⁵³ As far as female work is concerned, the survey has left out one popular professional group, that of the *bua*, or domestic helpers in middle and upper income families. This is due to the fact that concerned women spend 10-12 hours a day in their working places and at times even live there, so that it is rare to have a chance to interview them. To counter this gap, a *bua*'s everyday life was followed during the participant observation. N. Islam (2005, p. 28), who estimated that 500.000 women could be working as domestic helpers in Dhaka City, explained that they are at times old ladies, others young girls, and even children, whereby child workers are particularly common in lower middle and middle income households.

¹⁵⁴ According to estimations by N. Islam (2005), 750,000 rickshaw pullers were working in Dhaka and the almost completely informal transport sector offered employment to 22% of poor males. Regarding employment, Islam's publication, based on data from the 1991 Census and a *Study of Urban Poverty* by Government of Bangladesh and Asian Development Bank of 1996, was rather useful as analysis.

A general observation can be made with regard to group 3, in which the most varied spectrum of jobs was found: university students as well as small business owners, DCC employees and street hawkers were represented. This gives reason to expect that members of group have the strongest chances of socio-economic improvement.

Marital status

It could be relevant to note that all adult female interviewees from groups 1 and 2 were married (a recently immigrated garment worker of 17 occluded) and, correspondingly, only one adult man in the same socio-economic situation was unmarried¹⁵⁵. However, in groups 3 up to 6, the proportion of unmarried persons gradually increased along with the increase of students, and in general in direct relationship with education level, though unmarried women remained rare. The discrepancy gives reason to recognise income as the main factor for marriage politics, as women's financial dependence typically leads to early marriage of daughters in poor families: the better the natal family's economic situation, the rarer early marriage should be. However, the situation can be expected to change in the future along with the increase of work opportunities for women - though it must be mentioned that the employers of female workers often exploit the weak social position of women -, and the improvement of female accessibility to education.

Education level

Among the interviewed women, 21% had no educational qualification as opposed to 27% of men, and the proportion of women who had a primary school degree was clearly higher than the men's, with 23% to 13%; nevertheless, the negative trend of male school attendance changed from the secondary level and it stood out that women having a secondary or higher degree became much rarer; the gender discrepancy eventually dissolved at the university level. While it has been said above that education level was found to directly correspond with the income group – a relationship confirmed by the Dhaka Census and which characterises the societies of Developing Countries -, it was observable that female school attendance strongly decreases beyond the primary level, despite a higher drop-out effect of male students in the same phase. Again, this is linked to

¹⁵⁵ Older than 15 for girls, 18 for boys. Still at present days, marriage is often celebrated before the 20th birthday: a Bangladesh-wide study of UNFPA (Child Marriage Fact Sheet, 2005) stated for instance that 51% of the girls are married before 18; 45% of the girls between 25 and 29 years of age had been married at the age of 15, and the Dhaka Census revealed that 1% women were married at an age between 10 and 14. Cf. www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm. For data on the respondents' marital status, cf. appendix, Fig. 12 and 13, p. 11-12.

the economic situation of the families of origin, but it also witnesses a subtle gender discrimination taking form in the tendency, on the part of parents, to support the school attendance of at least one of the male children, to the disadvantage of the daughters¹⁵⁶.

Rural or urban origin

Fifty-four of the interviewed persons had been the first of their families to move to Dhaka (they were, thus, *first-generation urban/Dhaka dwellers*, also shortened to first-generation dwellers), whereas 45 were migrants' descendants who knew little about their parents' villages, or had an even longer urban tradition¹⁵⁷. High value was placed on interviewing at least one foreigner¹⁵⁸ because the international community is an influent factor for economic, demographic and material structure of the "upper class" areas in the north of Dhaka, in which it lives factually segregated, but also for representations, as the empirical research evidenced: in Gulshan, the characteristic concentration of foreigners, materialising in form of national clubs and exquisite restaurants, ladies in Western clothes hidden behind darkened car windows and impenetrable foreign embassies, leads other dwellers to equate this neighbourhood with wealth, cosmopolitanism and exclusivity.

A second look at these data is helpful to reflect on the extent to which migration is changing Dhaka's population structure: among the 45 second+ generation dwellers, a majority was only second-, hardly third-generation Dhaka dwellers, whereas descendants of ancient Dhaka-based families, living especially in Old Dhaka, represented a small portion. On the other hand, the majority of interviewed first generation dwellers had lived in Dhaka for 16-30 years, followed by slightly younger interviewees, whose permanence

¹⁵⁶ Cf. appendix, Fig. 14 and 15, p. 12. Latter is confirmed by a report on Bangladesh by UNESCO, which showed that girls stop earlier school, reaching more rarely than boys the secondary level; although in Dhaka the situation for women may be slightly better than in the rest of the country, this statement can be viewed as a mirror of a society whose values are changing slowly. In spite of positive progress made in recent years (a UNICEF report stated that „during the 1990s Bangladesh recorded a remarkable achievement in primary education with net and gross enrolments and completion rates all increasing by over 20 per cent. Girls' enrolments increased by over 30 per cent during the period. Girls' net enrolment in 2003 is 84 per cent compared to 81 per cent for boys“), women's grade of literacy and school attendance is generally lower than that of men, and 59% are illiterate, against 46% of men (UNESCO 2005). Cf. www.unicef.org/bangladesh/education.html and stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=121&IF_Language=eng&BR_Country=500 for UNICEF and UNESCO reports respectively.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. table and graphic in appendix, Fig. 16 and 17, p. 13. This study may present a slightly increased proportion of second+ generation to disadvantage of first-generation dwellers in comparison to the "real" state of affairs, whereby the Population Census does not provide data on recent migrants. The missing 100th person was actually not living in Dhaka but in one of its neighbouring *zilas* beyond the Buriganga, and was nonetheless included in the sample of interviewees because "regular visitors", i.e. persons who reach the mega city from its hinterland on a weekly basis and mostly with commercial purposes, were considered to be a numerous group and to affect urban landscape and life through their occupation of open spaces along with animals and rural products, and secondarily by "reminding" the settled inhabitants of their rural origins.

¹⁵⁸ In the statistical elaboration, he was assembled to group 6 and considered as „first generation“.

was 6-15 years long: considering an average age of 35, this means that many had already spent the half or more than the half of their lives in the mega city. The third most numerous group of interviewees who were not born in Dhaka consisted of persons who had arrived during, or immediately after, the Liberation War.

Almost one of four first-generation interviewees was alone in Dhaka, whereby this group generally consisted of unmarried boys arrived in Dhaka for study or work. Adult migrants, who had left wives and children back in the village, mentioned economic restraints as the main barrier to bringing the entire family to the city. First-generation dwellers in general were poorer than Dhaka-born respondents, as the fact that 25% belonged to group 1 and that the main concentration was found within the three lower income-groups seems to confirm¹⁵⁹. The disadvantaged situation of first-generation dwellers also revealed spatial consequences, as, by same income-group, they had comparatively worse living conditions than Dhaka-born respondents - for example, they were more often living in slums and in peripheral areas. On the other hand, they were more strongly spread in new areas than Dhaka-born respondents, among whom none lived in Gulshan and a much larger proportion lived in Old Dhaka and in traditional administration areas like Azimpur.

Another observable trend regarded the emigration of (skilled and unskilled) Bangladeshis to Developed Countries, especially to Malaysia and Middle Eastern Countries, which in the last 25-30 years has become a very important factor for the country's GDP and has also consequences for Dhaka's urban development¹⁶⁰. Among the interviewed persons, 16 had lived abroad for at least 5 years, whereby none of the interviewees of groups 1, 2 and 3 has migration experiences and the majority - persons who had left Bangladesh for study reasons, or accompanying family members employed in academic, research or industrial institutions - belonged to group 6¹⁶¹.

¹⁵⁹ Dhaka-born respondents were more equally distributed in all income groups. Cf. appendix, Fig. 16, p. 13.

¹⁶⁰ A ILO-report of 2003 compiled by Tasneem Siddiqui and Chowdhury R. Abrar stated: „From 1990 onwards on an average 2,25,000 Bangladeshis are migrating on short-term employment, mostly to 13 countries. In the past the bulk of the migrants consisted of professional and skilled labour. However, the recent trend is more towards semi- and unskilled labour migration. Major outflow of Bangladeshi labour generated significant financial flow to the country in the form of remittance. [...] Remittance is crucial for Bangladesh's economy. It constitutes almost one-third of the foreign exchange earning. In 1998-99, remittance contributed 22 percent in financing imports. Studies have shown it has strong positive impact on GDP, and also on consumption and investment“. Cf. ILO's *Working Paper 38, Migrant Worker Remittances and Micro-Finance in Bangladesh* (September 2003). In Islam (2005), p. 20, Nazrul Islam noted: „The second factor [of urban growth] is foreign remittances from Bangladeshis working abroad, much of which was invested in the land and housing sector in Dhaka urban area in the late seventies, as well as in the later times“. To encounter the problem of illegal migration (especially strong that towards Malaysia), the government is supporting legal migration with bilateral contracts.

¹⁶¹ This appeared to be confirmed by mentioned ILO report, whose field research showed that the migrants „on an average are staying for more than five years overseas. 76 percent of them were less than 35 years of age. One-tenth of the remittance sending persons was illiterate, and about 77 percent of them had an educational background from Class I to Secondary School Certificate. About 25 percent of remittance senders were students when they went abroad“.

2.1.2. Characterisation of areas

As illustrated in chapter 1.3., the choice of interview locations succeeded on the basis of a „mental cross“ laid over Dhaka's plan, along which particularly representative, outstanding or currently developing urban areas were identified. During the field work, the repeated walks, observations and stays provided a crescent knowledge of Dhaka's urban fabric that in turn allowed the comparison between them: a distinction and equation process based on the consideration of social as well as physical features started, leading to the delineation of **six major structural areas** with pronounced identities:

- old town;
- traditional „urban“ areas;
- new areas;
- slums, squatters and informal settlements (often within other structural areas);
- „upper class“ areas;
- fringes.

As this perception seemed to be confirmed by the interviewees' statements, the six areas are presented here and accompanied by photos - a first approach to Dhaka's urban space¹⁶².

¹⁶² Graphics and tables showing a) the provision of basic infrastructure, b) density, c) the proportions of interviewed persons (according to income group, religion and rural/urban origin) living in each of the six here recognised structural areas, d) the most characterising qualities of each area according to its inhabitants, as well as e) the relationship between respondents' profession and living area are collected in the appendix, cf. Fig. 22 up to 31, p. 16-20. Beside various publications, the following review is based on an analysis of three reports on Dhaka prepared by urban experts in the 20th century: 1) Patrick Geddes' *Report on Dacca* (1917), 2) Minoprio, Spencely and Macfarlane's *Master Plan for Dhaka* (1959), and 3) *Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan, 1995-2015*, submitted by a consortium of international firms (Mott Mac Donald Ltd. and Culpin Planning Ltd.) and three local firms (Engineering & Planning Consultants Ltd., Consociates Ltd. and Development Administration Group) for UN Habitat.

Old town

The old town is delimited by the Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge to the East and *Lal Bagh* („Red Fort“) to the West, by Zahir Rahian Sharani-Kamruzzaman Sharani Roads to the North and the River Buriganga to the South¹⁶³. The „bazaars“¹⁶⁴ with their specific handicraft groups and commercial activities practiced in the ground floors of the residences necessarily gave form to mixed used neighbourhoods, in which productive, commercial and residential were flanked by industrial uses¹⁶⁵. Two of present day Dhaka's most vibrant poles for commerce, goods and public transport are located within the area: the port around *Shadar Ghat* and Gulistan/Bango Bazaar, constituting with their extreme traffic and encroachment of public spaces by innumerable street-hawkers one of the most impressive pictures of Dhaka for those who dare to penetrate the old town's mazy lanes.

Developed by means of private initiatives rather than on the basis of urban plans, the old town is typically characterised by very dense construction, a labyrinth-like road network¹⁶⁶ as well as extreme population density that reaches peaks of 170.114 persons per square kilometer¹⁶⁷. Its overall urban fabric is varied: walking eastwards to Sutrapur on Patuatuli and B. K. Dash Road, the decadent but impressive Mughal and colonial two- or three-storeyed buildings facing the Buriganga gradually give way to a new generation of more humble constructions and scattered market places, huts and squatters. The environment

¹⁶³ This is the maximal extension reached by the city in Mughal times, although areas as northern as Mirpur were known and „belonged“ to Dhaka already in the 17th century. The pre-Mughal extension of Dhaka is said to have corresponded to the course of the nowadays encroached *Dholai Khal* (canal) to the East and babu Bazaar to the West. Detailed research on pre-Mughal Dhaka in English language is still lacking and, unfortunately, non-continuable. I advert to Ahmed's mentioned publication *Dhaka Past Present Future*, in particular to three articles by Abdul Karim (*Origin and Development of Mughal Dhaka*, p. 24-42), A.M. Chowdhury and Ms. Shabnam Faruqui (*Physical Growth of Dhaka City*, p. 49-51), as well as K.M. Mohsin (*Commercial and Industrial Aspects of Dhaka in the eighteenth century*, p. 64-73).

¹⁶⁴ Here with the meaning of area, neighbourhood.

¹⁶⁵ The Mughal rulers had established state-owned factories specialised in the production of textiles, whose high quality attracted colonial companies in the course of 17th century. Cf. Ahmed (1991), p. 65.

¹⁶⁶ In the 17th century, the first colonial businessmen and missionaries already described Dhaka as chronically overpopulated. Despite the development of the city and relocation of industries towards the north during the Colonial and especially British period (in particular, industries were settled in Tejgaon), Old Dhaka maintained its relevance as distribution and storage centre thanks to the river port. The colonial businessmen (Armenians, Greeks, Dutch, French, Portuguese and British) built new storage and residential buildings, as the names of historically more recent neighbourhoods bear witness: *Armanitola* and *Bose's Garden* (reminiscent of the Armenians, a group that strongly contributed to Dhaka's development, also by founding schools), *Olandaze's Dewry*, *Dutch Garden*, or *French Garden*. Against this background, it is not surprising that rural migrants, who reached Dhaka along with the political events that transformed it in the capital first of East-Pakistan and then of Bangladesh, often settled in the city's most ancient part. The 1995 Plan stated: „Old Dhaka [...] is the engine room which drives a large portion of the city's economy. Accommodating one of five of all urban Dhaka's job opportunities, the area also presents a concentration of economic activity which continues to both retain established city dwellers and attract new urban migrants“. Cf. Dhaka Structure Plan, p. 41.

¹⁶⁷ Data refer to Nawabpur in Kotwali *Thana*, which is Dhaka's most densely populated *thana* (average density: 139.101 p/square km., own calculations on the basis of Dhaka Census 2001, cf. appendix, p. 17.

becomes less dense and the first green areas appear. In correspondence to the port area, leaning against the embankment, decaying concrete storage rooms alternate with more recent ones, mainly made of corrugated iron, where spices, vegetables and materials wait to be transported to the central vegetable market in Kawran Bazaar¹⁶⁸. The tight, shadowy lanes of the centrally located bazaars are flanked by three- or four-storeyed old houses and higher apartment buildings, whereby the ground floors continue to be occupied by workshops, small restaurants and shops. An exception is represented by Wari, at the northern extreme of Old Dhaka: its development is actually owed to the British Collector Frederic Wyer, who chose the until then sparsely populated area to become a residential neighbourhood for local government employees, professionals, businessmen and landlords in 1885¹⁶⁹. However, since 1947, its exclusive character has deteriorated due to the progressive penetration of small industries, workshops and commercial firms, while real estate development is at present changing the topology and physical structure.

The provision of basic infrastructure varies according to the location of the respective neighbourhoods: the households of Sutrapur and Bonogram, but also those of many ancient buildings in the elderly bazaars, often have to pump drinking water from pipes in the courtyards¹⁷⁰. Black-outs, especially in summer, are very common and can continue over hours; street illumination is irregular. Architecturally, a mix of construction forms and styles ranging from the 13th century until the British period witnesses progressive expansion and improvement phases, whereby Old Dhaka's residential buildings are typically characterised by their courtyards – often, two or three can be found in the same house - and terraces in which women and children gather and laundry can be washed and dried. In its oldest areas, those of Hindu origin, unusual buildings consisting in 20- or even 27-meter-long „corridors“ of three (or less) metres of width represent an outstanding architectural form¹⁷¹. Due to the described urban planning and architectural peculiarities,

¹⁶⁸ Kawran Bazaar is some kilometers north of the old town, in Tejgaon. At present, a plan for the decentralisation of this central market and creation of different vegetable and fruit markets in logistically strategic peripheral areas is being finalised by the city authorities.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. also N. Islam (1996), p. 14-23. Despite its different origin and the outstandingly planned road network, Wari was included within present structural area due to a) its geographical location within its boundaries and b) the fact that its inhabitants regard themselves as *Dhakaiyas*, i.e. original dwellers.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. appendix, Fig. 22, p. 16 for data on the provision of drinking water, hygienic services and electricity.

¹⁷¹ Cf. appendix, Fig. 32, 33, 34, p. 21-22. In neighbourhoods of Mughal origin, the plots have a rectangular form. In *Shakhari Patti: A unique old city settlement, Dhaka* (1990), Abu H. Imamuddin, Shamim A. Hassam and Wahidul Alam discussed on the reasons of this construction form and offered different explanations, for example that the plots may have been progressively split among successors, or that it had security reasons (better protection from burglary or robbery). Two other explanations are here suggested: a) building the houses beside one another could have been a means to save on construction materials; b) since the cost of the plots may have been very high due to the concentration of population within the restricted space, and the building side facing the street was the most important for commercial aims, a broader facade - which would have meant a broader width of the building - may have implied too high costs, so that it was preferable to buy tight plots and develop them in the length.

the ongoing development process led by real estate companies that „develop“ the pre-existing houses into multi-storeyed apartment buildings and factually destroy architectural, but also social structures traditionally centred on the courtyards, has effects that are not comparable to those visible in other urban areas¹⁷².

Compared to the „extroverted“ logistical poles of Shadar Ghat and Gulistan/Bango Bazaar, the rather introverted neighbourhoods of pre-Mughal and Mughal origin - that also host some of Dhaka's most ancient temples and mosques - could be spoken of as the „everyday life sub-stratum“ of Old Dhaka. Each of them is famous for a peculiar handcraft - as their names in part indicate: *Shakhari* for „shell workers“, *Tanti* for „weavers“, *Kumar* for „potters“ - or for goods that can be there peculiarly purchased, for example, Bangla Bazaar is famous for its presses and book shops¹⁷³, Chawk Bazaar¹⁷⁴ for its sweets, Islampur for its huge market of fabrics. It is only in the bazaars that special fried sweets and freshly baked breads can be bought from shops, cramped along lanes where two rickshaws can barely pass; that hand-made bracelets of shells and traditionally produced gold and silver jewellery can be found; or that, in small workshops, artisans paint the colourful rickshaw labels, one of Dhaka's symbols; here are the best Byriani restaurants, the *Eid* celebrations¹⁷⁵ are still organised collectively and the *pujas* have their only setting.

¹⁷² In particular, an even more drastic loss of living quality, but also of a precious architectural heritage. It will be hereby remarked that a Campaign for Heritage Conservation, aiming at the documentation of ancient buildings, support of relevant traditional handcraft like *shankharis* and goldsmiths, as well as their preservation, started in 2004 under the impulse of USG (Urban Study Group). This group, mainly constituted by architects and architecture students that became involved in the issue on architectural heritage after the collapse of a building in Shakhari Bazaar, is appealing for the formulation of a countrywide heritage policy through competent authorities. Thanks to the advocacy and information activities among the local population of the group, house owners from Old Dhaka are giving signs of a first becoming aware of the topic: in September 2007, a successful exhibition of the documented architectural heritage was also visited by some of them. Yet, although the initiative has found large support among civil society, intellectuals and some NGOs (as well as UNESCO), local authorities have not yet forbidden the „development“ of Old Dhaka's heritage buildings.

¹⁷³ Bangla Bazaar deserves a mention as traditional commercial (it lays beside Shadar Ghat along the River Buriganga and hosts still nowadays several storage buildings), but also intellectuals' area due to the here developed and still functioning press industry.

¹⁷⁴ Chawk Bazaar, developed around the Mughal Fort of Lal Bagh (still nowadays an important landmark), represented Dhaka's most important commercial area for retail business until the 1930s and remained a relevant wholesale centre until the 1960s, when the city's development towards north shifted its commercial centres. Cf. Rosie Majid Ahsan's article *Changing pattern of the commercial area of Dhaka City*, in Ahmed (1991), p. 396-414.

¹⁷⁵ *Eid* [Engl. prayer, also: festival] will be here used to connote two of the most important religious holidays for Muslims in Bangladesh. *Eid ul-Fitr* is celebrated to mark the end of the holy month of fasting, Ramadan, whereas the second *Eid*, the „festival of sacrifice“, called in Bangladesh *Eid Korbani*, commemorates God's forgiveness of Abraham's vow to sacrifice his son.

Fragmented perspectives, transiting signs of urbanity



Traditional „urban“ areas

Leaving Old Dhaka, the European observer recognises a more familiar air immediately to the north, in the long band extending from Motijheel to the east up to Dhanmondi to the north-west, and passing by Ramna with Dhaka University Campus and Paltan. While the first two are the result of a modernisation momentum that led the development of commercial and residential areas in the 1950s, Ramna took shape under the British as leisure site in the first years of the 20th century and later assumed residential and institutional uses¹⁷⁶. Despite their different functions and „identities“, a planned road network, comparable quality of infrastructure and common architectural forms justify their assimilation in a unique structural area that reflects European models of urban planning. The households of the entire area are generally provided with tap water and functioning toilet services, whereby Motijheel's houses, especially at the periphery, have slightly lower quality; electricity is almost universally provided and, apparently in consideration of the business district's interests, breakdowns are generally shorter than in other regions of Dhaka. In a „walk“ from north-west to south-east, the areas introduced so far are going to be presented in following pages.

Dhanmondi, which was urbanised after 1955 to deal with the growing residential needs of Pakistan's new provincial capital, but also Ramna, developed in two phases during the colonial period (1825-1840 and 1905-1911), have maintained their reputation as exclusive residential areas despite heavy encroachment with consequent mixture of residential and other uses¹⁷⁷. In 1962, Nazrul Islam described these two „exclusive areas housing the upper crust of the society“ to have merely residential character, very high rent levels, Dhaka's most developed infrastructural service provision (water, electricity as well as telephone) and lowest population and construction density, with almost 90% single family

¹⁷⁶ Also the 1995 Development Plan assimilated the two areas, called Central Business District South (Ramna/Paltan/Motijheel) and North (Dhanmondi/Bangladesh Rifles Headquarters), whereby the northern district included Tejgaon.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Chowdhury /Faruqui, *Dhaka Past Present Future*, p. 54-59. Ramna, originally a jungle to the north-east of the just described old town and extending up to nowadays' New Circular Road/New Eskaton Road, was first developed as a leisure area with a race course and later built up to accomodate residential and administration buildings in European style for the government of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam as well as the new university, which was founded in 1921. Following N. Islam, Ramna will hereby also comprehend the residential areas of Kakrail, Shantinagar, Siddheswary, Rajarbagh, Magh Bazaar and Eskaton, which actually developed in the Pakistan period, but are structurally and socio-economically similar. Cf. Islam (1996), p. 29. The highland of Dhanmondi, extending on both sides of Mirpur Road, used to be a rice field until the beginning of the 1950s and was initially developed by the state, which bought a ca. 2-square-km-wide area, traced a grid of roads, transformed a former canal into a lake (Dhanmondi Lake) and created equal sized rectangular plots. These were leased to private builders, often public officers, who built their own houses, typically in reinforced concrete and glass, with large balconies, big windows and gardens. Cf. Islam (1996), p. 23-25.

dwellings¹⁷⁸. In contrast, their present days' appearance is strongly characterised by construction sites, as apartment buildings of five/seven up to fifteen storeys are replacing the former residences, by office and administration complexes as well as shopping malls, which augmented the traffic flows in both areas; also due to the fact that the city administration failed in upgrading the road network, traffic jams are very common. Though Ramna Park and Dhanmondi Lake provide both areas with attractive open spaces - beloved gathering and leisure spaces for far more than the local inhabitants -, these are threatened by encroachment and polluting activities (for example illegal fish cultivation). In the last fifteen to twenty years, the development rush has concerned Dhanmondi in particular way, which, under the pressure of new schools, hospitals, cultural institutions as well as small firms and boutiques has completely lost its character of a residential area, becoming more and more synonymous with cultural and leisure activities¹⁷⁹. Hereby, the homonymous lake represents the probably most outstanding attraction pole for youth and adults, who gather along its shores in groups or in couples and foster the image of a city still oriented towards water¹⁸⁰.

South of Dhanmondi, the big shopping complex of New and Gausia Market, extending also beyond Mirpur Road - between Elephant, Kataban and Nilkhet Roads -, constitutes one of „*New Dhaka*“'s most important commercial points. Continuing¹⁸¹ eastwards along Nilkhet Road and passing a security barrier, it is possible to reach the Campus of Dhaka University, an airy and green area in the southern part of Ramna, which was developed by the British with the initial plan to use it as administrative centre¹⁸². With its expanded road

¹⁷⁸ Islam (1996), p. 20-27.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. appendix, Fig. 35, p. 23 on Dhanmondi's spatial uses and activities.

¹⁸⁰ The Lake has been the object of a re-qualification intervention initiated by the state in the 90s with the aim to counteract the water body's environmental degradation. Few planning studios took part in the public competition as the chances of realisation were estimated to be low, but the project was funded and in the end realised by a young architectural studio. The lake's banks have been planned as to prevent illegal encroaching by the poor, an open-air theatre, walking paths and gazebos placed so to attract local inhabitants to gather. In order to finance the maintenance costs, various business activities, including a restaurant and boat rental, are operated on the banks as well.

¹⁸¹ Also the government settlement of Azimpur, south of New Market, was included in the area examined here for comparable physical structure and period of development (early 1950s). Another included area, east of New Market, is Shahbagh, developed in mid 19th century as garden and residential complex by a local family and later occupied by residential buildings and, partly, university premises. Today, it constitutes an important logistics node and commercial point, beside hosting some of Dhaka's most prestigious hotels, the UNESCO premises, various local NGOs as well as AZI Supermarket, a multi-storey building occupied by book-shops, cultural activities and publishers, and an „institution“ for leftist students, intellectuals and activists.

¹⁸² One of the first buildings to be built in the area, in 1904, was Curzon Hall (after the name of Lord Curzon, at the time administrator of Dhaka), which was originally planned as a new town hall; later, it was established that the Science Faculty of the University would be housed here. The University officially started functioning in July 1921; it was successively expanded towards Shahbagh to make space for the Engineering University (Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, BUET), which was founded in 1947. In spite of a rich offer in new private universities, Dhaka University as well as BUET have remained Bangladesh's biggest and most renowned educational institutions.

network and wide streets, green areas and overall urban design, the „Campus“, as generally called by local dwellers, may give an idea of the original disposition of entire Ramna in British times. Beside the buildings of ten faculties and other functional premises like libraries, sport facilities, Teachers and Students' Centre (TSC), dormitories as well as teachers' dwellings, it also comprises the Medical College, the Institute of Fine Arts¹⁸³ as well as one of Dhaka's most important monuments and Bangladesh's national symbols, Shahid Minar. Walking further east, following Kakrail Road beyond BUET and Ramna Park, an important administrative and representative area will be reached, Paltan¹⁸⁴. Though structurally sharing the characteristics of Ramna, Paltan is occupied by some of Dhaka's politically most relevant buildings, displaced along and around Topkana Road: High and Supreme Court, Foreign Ministry, Press Club, Bangladesh Secretariat, General Post Office, as well as party and bigger NGOs offices¹⁸⁵. The alternation between big public premises protected by parks and gardens and modest residential buildings from the 1950s, but also hotels, office and other representative buildings, whose front sides directly face the street, creates a very heterogeneous plot structure; chronic traffic problems and recurrent political demonstrations additionally contribute to the general impression of dynamism.

The walk ends in the commercial area of Motijheel, which became functional in 1954 to encounter the new needs of the modern provincial capital of East Pakistan. The centre and typical landmark of Motijheel used to be *Sappla Chottor*, a monument representing a lotus (Bangladesh's national flower); this however changed along with the last years' expansion: the recent high-rise buildings, added to the bank and office houses of the 1950s, create one of Dhaka's most „urban“ impressions. Since the proximity of Paltan and *Banga Bhaban* (President's residence, located in Motijheel's south), this area is also, politically, a particularly lively one, whereby it should be mentioned that the concentration of day workers and low-paid labour in correspondence with the here installed banks and commercial firms is a further factor for political activism.

¹⁸³ The beautiful construction, mirroring the teachings of classic modern style and called „Art College“ by students, remains one of the most famous buildings planned by architect Muzharul Islam in Dhaka.

¹⁸⁴ The first to use this area were the British, who in the first half of 19th century installed here a cantonment; after latter was re-settled in Lal Bagh area in 1853, Paltan was maintained as exercise and parade area for the military. It came to a new development after Partition and the creation of Pakistan, when the request for new residential space by the increasing population led to the construction of houses in entire northern Ramna. Cf. Chowdhury /Faruqui, *Dhaka Past Present Future*, p. 54-58.

¹⁸⁵ Beyond these locations of political and administrative value, the nearby stadium, built in the 1950s, constitutes a further centre for sports activities.

Fragmented perspectives, transiting signs of urbanity



New Areas

The fact that Dhaka is mainly located on low lying land subjected to regular inundations from the Buriganga and Balu River had an obvious consequence for the city's urban development: „blocked“ to east and west, regarding the Buriganga as a factual barrier to a southwards growth (also due to a similar exposure to floods of the southern areas), it could only proceed towards north¹⁸⁶. The areas adjacent to Dhanmondi and Ramna – Mohammadpur and Mirpur, Tejgaon and Mohakali –, urbanised partly through leasing of land to privates since the 1960s¹⁸⁷, are the witnesses of such phenomenon; to these, the „satellite“ Uttara, conceived in 1965 in the effort to react to the congestion of inner-urban areas by means of decentralisation, is here added. In recent years, the eastern fringes of Rampura and Badda have also been progressively urbanised, whereby the first was mostly developed by real estate investors, and the latter is characterised by rather small-scale, scattered growth. Despite the different functions and origins of the mentioned areas, in this survey they are assimilated due to their comparable recent urbanisation led by a mix of public and private investment, as well as to the common „background“ of their development, i.e. the huge population pressure Dhaka was faced with after Bangladesh's Independence, and the inability to cope with it on the part of the administration. The irregular and fragmentary development is mirrored by a very heterogeneous urban fabric, ranging from Uttara and Mirpur's grid road network that at some point loses ground to squatted areas, to Mohammadpur's mix of convoluted and regularly laid streets, from Rampura's wide empty spaces intercalated by dense urbanised areas with geometrical plots and road patterns, to Tejgaon's desolated industrial area in which only a part of the factories are in use, but smaller manufacturer and new stores have recently penetrated. Also the provision of basic infrastructure is very unequal, whereby peripheral zones - those of most recent urbanisation at Dhaka's fringes, but also those surrounding the respective „centres“ - present lower standards concerning the availability of tap water, toilets and even electricity. Starting from north, four broad areas – Uttara, Tejgaon, Mohammadpur/Mirpur and Rampura/Badda - are shortly illustrated here.

Uttara was conceived of as a residential model town with working opportunities for middle class families, whereby the financing model consisted of subsidised investment by private

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Islam (2005), p. 3-6.

¹⁸⁷ Thus after the creation of Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT) in 1956, which undertook the responsibility of road construction and urban development. In particular, DIT developed Gulshan Model Town (1961), Banani (1964), Uttara (1965) and Baridhara (1972), also on the basis of a Master Plan prepared, as mentioned, by a British firm in 1959. In 1987, DIT was re-named in RAJUK, present days' authority for urban planning and development.

buyers¹⁸⁸. Dhaka Improvement Trust disposed an area of ca. 9.5 square km to the north of Dhaka, beyond the cantonment boundaries, for the future satellite city; in 1966-67 and again in 1985-86, it made almost 4 square km hereof accessible by new roads and provided them with basic services like electricity and sewerage system. 4,302 plots of different size, divided in nine sectors, were then made available to potential buyers; yet, by the beginning of the 80s, 75% of the plots were vacant and twenty years later still 50% were unoccupied¹⁸⁹. Nowadays, approaching Uttara by bus via New Airport Road and Dhaka-Mymensingh Road, the first impression is of a modern, planned „island“, with big shopping malls, fast food as well as several textile factories; but that impression has to be revised after leaving the main road to explore the residential sectors with their empty plots, exuberant villas, busy construction sites, parks, multi-storeyed apartment buildings and more or less expanded and organised squatters, standing one beside each other along the geometrically laid out roads.

On the way back, leaving New Airport Road in correspondence with Mohakali's fly-over and turning left, the special case of Tejgaon can be observed. The development of the area, which extends from Kawran Bazaar in the south to Mohakali and Gulshan to the north and is traversed by the railway track, was primarily aimed at creating a modern industrial site on the basis of the pre-existing British settlements for textile production¹⁹⁰. After the failure of the plan, apparently due to logistic reasons (easier reachability of other urban areas) as well as the preference of factory owners to disperse their activities in different areas to avoid a too strong concentration of workers and labour unions within the same region (today, textile factories can be found in Uttara, Tongi, Mohakali and Mirpur)¹⁹¹, it was

¹⁸⁸ The same financing model can be found also in Mirpur and Dhanmondi. This review is based on a report by Mamun Rashid, Department of Architecture, BUET, on *Housing at Uttara Model Town in Dhaka City - An analysis and exploring ways to tackle the housing problem of middle class*.

¹⁸⁹ According to Rashid's analysis, such failure had many reasons, from the high cost of the plots (and imperfect financing models), which automatically excluded buyers from lower-middle income groups, to a mismanaged allocation system which made the purchase to a form of investment for the retirement years, but not to a reason to immediately build and settle down, to the inefficient provision, on the part of the administration, of basic infrastructure like roads, electrification works, water supply and schools, colleges as well as commercial facilities, whose construction started only in the mid 80s, as well as to the lacking coordination between different actors, which failed to support the potential buyers instead of supporting them. Talks with experts made the logistical aspect as a further factor emerge, as the road communication between Uttara and the inner part of the city was not improved (nowadays, commuting from Uttara to Dhaka/Shahbagh – a route of ca. 16 km – can take 2 hours).

¹⁹⁰ In the colonial period, the high land was chosen to host textile but also other manufactures outside the urban area and was flanked by a railway track, which ended some kilometers south-east, in Kamlapur. The development of Tejgaon, both with airport and industrial settlement, began in the early 1950s. The area north of it, Mohakali, developed spontaneously, leaned on its industrial activities and although it nowadays hosts important private universities and manufacturing firms, it still lacks proper services.

¹⁹¹ The 1995 Structure Plan stated that, in 1994, only 54% of the total area of ca. 1,4 square km was nominally used by industrial establishments, but 18% of these were not operational and only 28% were running at full capacity. Accordingly, it suggested to support the decentralisation of industrial enterprises in order to foster a de-congestion of inner-urban areas, and contemporarily to further parcelise the disposable land so to allow the establishment of smaller industrial enterprises.

occupied in a scattered way: between the industrial buildings, dwellings for railway employees and lower public officers of Pakistan period, low-rise apartment buildings as well as new commercial enterprises have found space; especially the railway track is squatted. An outstanding contrast to the „post-industrial“ landscape is provided by *Sher-e-Bangla Nagar*, the wide Parliament area designed by Louis Khan, with its synthesis of built spaces in brick and concrete, water bodies and parks¹⁹². A further site of relevance within Tejgaon is the church of Holy Rosary, Dhaka's and Bangladesh's oldest existing church¹⁹³: due to its presence, the adjacent residential area of Monipuri Para is known to be a favourite living area of upper-middle income Christian dwellers.

Continuing westwards on Manik Mia Avenue, the tour reaches Mirpur Road: several bus lines rush on this chronically busy street from the southern parts of Dhaka towards Mohammadpur and Mirpur. Although the latter was sparsely urbanised already in Mughal period – in particular, it was the destination of worshippers to the shrine of Shah Ali Mazar -, the development of both areas, subsidised by the Government, goes back to the 1960s¹⁹⁴. Hereby, while Mohammadpur maintains a strong link to the southern parts of the city and its southern portion, stretched over Road Nr. 16 (or 27, as dwellers still call it, ignoring the reformation of the roads numeration), is undergoing a development very similar to Dhanmondi's - with pretentious apartment buildings, fast growing schools and private universities, cafés and shopping malls -, Mirpur, lying much further north, appears „independent“ from other urban regions. This is probably due to both its bigger geographical distance and a very well developed infrastructure comprising NGOs (such as Grameen Bank and Proshika), military, educational and production premises, a Zoological and a Botanical Garden, as well as the modern Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium and National Indoor Stadium, that were here built accordingly to the decentralisation strategy recommended by the Development Plan of 1995.

A 27-km-long riverfront, completing an original string in Dhaka's south (the „Buckland

¹⁹² Louis Khan was commissioned the project for the Parliament building already in Pakistan period, in 1962, as the government in Karachi approved the creation of a second capital in Dhaka. The architect worked for more than ten years on the project and was actually still working on the surrounding parliament quarters when he died, in 1974 (the finalised building was inaugurated in 1982 by the independent government of Bangladesh). Cf. Kazi Khaleed Ashraf and Saif Ul Jaque (2002): *Sherebanglanagar. Louis I. Kahn and the Making of a Capital Complex*.

¹⁹³ It was built in 1677 by the Portuguese colonial community and subsequently repaired and extended until assuming today's form of a large basilica.

¹⁹⁴ In this and the former periods, consequent to the Partition, Dhaka was being reached by consistent numbers of Muslim migrants from India, for whom various „Housing“ neighbourhoods were built under the direction of the Housing Settlement Directorate. The immigration flow after Independence led to the urbanisation of further low-lying areas north and west to Mohammadpur, like Kallyanpur and Shyamoli, also enhanced by government benefits. Nowadays, a similar construction and urbanisation momentum is being fostered by private investors with disputable attention for climatic and environmental consequences, as the extremely dense residential complex of Japan Garden City witnesses.

Band“), protects Mirpur and Mohammadpur's low-lying areas from floods¹⁹⁵. In contrast, the eastern part of the city is not yet protected and, as a result, is regularly submerged between June and October. In spite of this, the fringe, and low-lying areas of Badda and Rampura have experienced continuous urbanisation in the last twenty years¹⁹⁶. Badda's growth was spontaneous: its nowadays' appearance, characterised by scattered squatters, workshops and retail shops for building materials, reveals that the residents are lower-middle income households or poor as well as the proximity, beyond Gulshan Lake, of the homonymous „upper class“ area. While in all eastern suburbs an overall lack of services, sanitation and roads as well as poor living conditions are characteristic, in the new settlements of Rampura – a „Housing Projects“ that still struggle to be acknowledged as „real“ residential areas - shops and groceries, but also schools and purchasing premises are developing. Rampura's land development was led by private real estate firms, which bought the low-lying land from farmers since the late 1980s. Parallel to the occupation of the apartment buildings by the new owners - middle-income families, among them many public service holders and former expatriate workers -, mosques, police stations and a telephone tower have been installed; yet, the developers did not plan any recreation areas or open spaces.

¹⁹⁵ Dhaka's first embankment, planned in 1864, was completed in the 1880s and called Buckland Band after the commissioner who gave order to build it. After severe floods in 1987 and 1988, a Flood Action Plan (FAP) for Dhaka was prepared. Originally, the city's eastern and western low-lying boundaries should be protected, but only in the densely populated western part a new embankment was built (FAP 8B, from Ahsan Manzil nearby Sadar Ghat until Uttara, 1992-2000).

¹⁹⁶ It should be remarked that, according to the Strategy Plan prepared in 1995, the eastern and north-eastern fringes should have been prevented from urbanisation and used as flooding retention areas to protect the inner city from inundations from the Balu River; however, this did not prevent RAJUK from progressively selling land and giving construction licences to private owners and real estate investors against payment of bribe, as criticised by press and civil society. On present day real estate firms-led development of fringes, Nazrul Islam commented: „In recent years, in spite of concern over diminishing agricultural land around Dhaka city, conversion of lands for urban uses, mainly through earth filling, is taking place very fast. [...] Most of these lands are bought by individuals, housing companies and real estate developers who keep these for higher prices. Intensive speculation therefore stands at the second most critical issue for the development and expansion of urban areas“. Cf. Islam (2005), p. 56-57.

Fragmented perspectives, transiting signs of urbanity



Rampura, Banasree Project



Lalmatia, Mohammadpur

„Upper Class“ Areas

Though since the 1970s Gulshan, until then a residential and diplomatic enclave comprising Banani and Baridhara and extending over an area of ca. 13 square km, has also experienced increasing infiltration of commercial and institutional functions along its main roads as well as (especially in Banani) within the residential quarters, a planned road network and broad avenues separated by green strips contribute to an „airy“ appearance that distinguishes it within Dhaka's dense urban fabric. The origin of this northern area, enclosed between Tejgaon and Rampura to the south and the Cantonment to the north, traces back to 1961, when DIT decided the development of Gulshan Model Town as future „upper class“ residential area, which was followed by the western Banani in 1964 and the north-eastern Baridhara in 1972¹⁹⁷. Banani and Gulshan Lakes represent beloved open spaces for the dwellers and contemporarily function as retention ponds, so that floods are rare and a rich greenery characterises the urban scape; two roundabouts, the „circles“ of Gulshan 1 and 2 with their respective bazaars, constitute the area's commercial and logistic poles. To these should be added the big bazaar of Banani as well as Banani's Road Nr. 11, which in the last decade has been „invaded“ by boutiques, beauty parlours, bakeries and confectioneries for an increasingly interested and exigent group of customers, among them many foreigners.

While walking on the inner streets flanked by trees and palms, the fact that the road pattern of the singular quarters, consisting of an ordered sequence of numbered streets, is „broken“ by the apparently odd emergence of higher street numbers, may be irritating, but in fact witnesses the process of subdivision of the blocks parallel to the acquisition of plots through new house owners, who typically built, and continue to build, mostly two-storey villas in classical, modern and postmodern styles. Nevertheless, many are being increasingly occupied by restaurants and offices and surrounded by qualitative apartment buildings of recent development. Re-emerging in the main roads, high-rise buildings, office and shopping complexes in concrete and glass as well as restaurants with international names complete the overall impression of modernity and progress. Both flanking the main roads and „hidden“ in the green inner quarters, embassies of different countries have traditionally settled in Gulshan, with the consequent concentration of further premises linked to the diplomatic institutions, like ambassadors' residences and

¹⁹⁷ These new neighbourhoods definitely took over the role of Ramna, that for long time used to be the residential and institutional area in which foreigner administrators and businessmen but also wealthy local families lived and worked, and partly also of Dhanmondi, although the latter continues to represent an attractive living space due to its cultural and leisure offers.

national clubs for the expatriates. The character of exclusiveness and the accompanying feeling of exclusion that are almost inherent to Gulshan are clearly related to these premises, with their thresholds controlled by wardens and the frequent passage of foreigners in protected cars. Indeed, no other urban area but the Cantonments is so strongly characterised by security forces - and in the extreme case of the „gated“ Baridhara, accessible only via two check points delimited by barriers, as socially discriminating - as Gulshan. An observation of the infrastructural services well reflects the inequality peculiarly characterising this area: while the dwellers, owners and tenants, of houses or apartments dispose of a good provision of drinking water, efficient sanitation and electricity, it stands out that Dhaka's infrastructurally most disadvantaged inner urban area is precisely within Gulshan: it is, at the same time, also Dhaka's biggest squatter, Karail.



West view from Gulshan 1



Gulshan 1 Circle

Slums, squatter and informal settlements

It is important to stress that all of the structural areas presented so far should not be considered as homogeneous and continuous, but comprehend in their respective peripheries and cores free standing undeveloped portions of public and private land that are mainly occupied by urban poor. Hereby, it will be distinguished between:

- *slums*, understood in the original meaning of degraded urban fabric and structures that come to be occupied by lower income groups;
- *squatter settlements*, or spontaneous settlements on public land, for example along the railway track, on river and lake shores, on the pavement or beside construction sites, where construction workers temporarily settle (and never leave); and
- *informal settlements*, generally inner-urban, occupied by urban poor who pay a rent to the plot owners.

Though all have a temporary character, the difference between slums on one side and squatter and informal settlements on the other derives from their origins: the first originate from degradation or urban re-organisation processes, while the latter are the result of unplanned and uneven urbanisation leaving vacant spaces, and of population pressure causing lack of dwellings. The distinction seems to be recognised in Dhaka, as local inhabitants speak of *bustee* referring to squatters and informal settlements, but not to the decayed areas in the old town¹⁹⁸. Common to all is the poor quality of dwellings and infrastructural provision: a 2005 survey by the Centre for Urban Studies stated that „only 10% of slums had sufficient drainage to avoid water-logging during heavy rains [...], more than half of the slums had no fixed place for garbage disposal and no mechanism for regular garbage collection. However, 96% had access to electricity. A similar proportion had access to safe water. In Dhaka, slum residents relied mainly on municipal taps for drinking water while in other cities pipe wells were the principal source. Only around 5% of slum households did not share their drinking water source, while 40% shared it with more than 11 families. Cooking gas was not available in the slums of Khulna, Rajshahi and Barisal, while almost 58% of the slums of Dhaka did have access to it. Over 70% of slums

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Islam (1996), but also a 2006 report by the Centre for Urban Studies (CUS) in cooperation with the National Institute of Population Research (NIPORT) and Training and MEASURE Evaluation: *Slums in Urban Bangladesh: Mapping and Census, 2005*. However, in these publications, the word „slum“ is often applied to all settlement types. Originally, the Hindi and Bangla term „*basti*“, or „*bustee*“, indicated „a settlement, a particular residential area in an old town or village“ (cf. Nigel B. Hankin: *Hanklyn-Janklin - A Stranger's Rumble-Tumble Guide to Some Words, Customs and Quiddities, Indian and Indo-British*, page 18).

had no access to safe latrines [...] Most (56%) residential structures in the slums were made of low quality materials¹⁹⁹. Another 42% features brick walls with a tin roof [...] The poor quality of the housing materials likely reflected the low socioeconomic status of the residents: roughly 90% of slum households had a monthly income below the poverty line²⁰⁰.

The number of squatters in Dhaka city started growing in 1971, when thousands of rural dwellers impoverished during the Liberation War migrated to the capital; in 2005, the mentioned survey identified 4,342 informal clusters in Dhaka City, in which a total population of 2,5 million was living²⁰¹. Further on, it showed that peripheral areas, mainly the low-lying areas along the embankment (the land is public), are increasingly encroached through illegal garbage disposal and construction waste and occupied by highly polluting industrial activities (tanneries; recycling of plastic and batteries), especially in the south, in correspondence with Hazaribagh²⁰². Further accumulations were found along the railway line in Tejgaon and in Mirpur, in proximity of nerve points like Zia International Airport or the Kamalapur Railway Station, as well as in the developing residential neighbourhoods of Gulshan. *Karail Bustee* is a special case hereof: situated in Mohakali/Gulshan on a big sedimentary peninsula protruding over Banani Lake, it started being squatted in the 1970s, when the intense construction activities in Gulshan and Banani required the labour of thousands of construction workers. Today, it is Dhaka's largest single slum, extending over an area of ca. 0,13 square km and giving shelter to ca. 36.000 people²⁰³, whereby its future existence is challenged by the pressure of real estate investors and the government's will to evict squatter communities from the central city.

¹⁹⁹ 52% of the households lived in semi *pucca* structures, made of bamboo and corrugated iron sheets, clay tiling or thatch, and almost 40% lived in *katcha*, i.e. structures in temporary materials like thatch, straw, bamboo and other organic, ephemeral materials; another 6,3% lived in *jhupris*, that is improvised shelters made of decayable materials and tin and a remaining 1,2% lived in dilapidated old buildings (for example in Old Dhaka). Ibid., table 3.15., p. 41.

²⁰⁰ Cf. CUS/NIPORT (2006), p. 12.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 21 (I re-advert to the map of slums reproduced in appendix, Fig. 1, p. 3). The number of slums had thus increased by 65% since 1996 and the proportion of population living in slums passed from 20% to 37%. Hereby, the slums occupy only 5,1% of Dhaka's total land area, so that the density in the most congested settlements, generally those on public land, can reach peaks of 220.246 persons/square km (ibid., table 3.12, p. 40) and the living space of 20% of slum dwellers be as limited as 7 square metres (p. 41). The report also showed an increase of the number of slums on private land. This was due, as the report states, to a greater vigilance over public land by the government. It is here suggested that this could be also related to the increasing practice, on the part of land owners especially in inner-urban areas, to sub-let not yet developed plots as a temporary earning source, and to the major attractiveness of such dwellings due to comparatively better building materials and provision of infrastructure (the report shows that, from 1996 to 2006, the quality of building materials especially on private lands improved).

²⁰² Beside the occupational factor, also the progressive building up of inner-urban areas, pushing away the temporary dwellers, can be regarded as a reason for the proportional growth of peripheral squatters.

²⁰³ Thus, density reaches 213.000 persons/square km (own calculation on the basis of physical and demographic data from BRAC University's *Study Report of Squatters at Korail* by Rabeya Rahman, Chaitaly Rahman, Shamarukh Moutushi and Laboni Kamal, 2005, as well as *Dhaka Census 2001*). CUS/NIPORT report however, indicates a much higher population of even 100.100 inhabitants.

A last note concerning the squatters should regard their management on the administration's part, whereby a phenomenon accompanying Dhaka's urbanisation since its first outbursts appears to be eviction. In 1975, ca. 74.000 squatters were resettled from Mohammadpur, Tikatoli/Jatrabari and Agargaon respectively in three resettlement camps in the peripheral areas of Tongi, Demra and Bhashantek²⁰⁴. While Tongi and Demra have comparatively well laid *katcha* (non asphalted) roads, provisions for common toilets and drinking water from tube wells thanks to the intervention of NGOs, the situation in Bhashantek is more haphazard. Common to all camps are high densities as well as a peculiar segregation, which is due to the geographical distance from Dhaka, which enhanced the development of fully independent structures, but also to the underlying social exclusion: the introverted disposition of the settlements with their inner bazaars and mosques used only by the dwellers are a sign hereof.

The three resettlement camps were given only temporarily to the evicted; apparently justified by such „temporary“ character, the government did not support their development, which was largely financed by NGOs (Red Cross, Concern, World Vision and Proshika) and by the concerned groups' efforts. In the course of the years, the Demra and Tongi dwellers requested and obtained to stay permanently in their areas. In contrast, whether Bhashantek dwellers will be allowed to remain is uncertain due to the requests advanced by the Mirpur-based Banarashee textile co-operative, which was promised the area during Ershad's ruling period. Since 1997, several attempts to bulldoze the area by the governments of Awami League and BNP were faced by the dwellers, who would leave on the condition to be given new land. Their struggles, supported also by civil society, led to the assurance that one of the existing sectors would be developed and assigned to the dwellers within 2005, but little progress has been made.

²⁰⁴ The evicted persons were largely rural migrants, but also Muslim war refugees from India and Bengalis who had come back from Pakistan after Liberation and could not be accommodated in the then developed Housing Programmes. Eviction measures have been adopted also under current caretaker government, as a US report on human rights for 2007 states: „Shortly after assuming power, the caretaker government launched a country-wide drive to remove illegal shops and shelters from government-owned property. [...] In September Chief Advisor Fakhruddin Ahmed apologized for excesses in the eviction drive [...] The military continued to attempt to evict 120 families, 85 percent of them Hindu, from land in the Mirpur area of Dhaka abutting the military cantonment. The eviction, based on a 1961 land purchase agreement by the military, was challenged legally and the case was pending at year's end“. In particular, drastic measures to evict squatters and street hawkers were adopted along the railway in Tejgaon and along Sat Majid Road in Dhanmondi. Cf. the publications of the NGO for legal Action, Awareness and Advocacy Ain-O-Salish Kendra (ASK): *Human rights and eviction in Bangladesh* as well as *Slum eviction in Bangladesh 2001-2003*, both published in 2003.



Fringes

Beyond the mentioned peripheral zones, it is necessary to take in consideration also those areas included within DMDP or RAJUK Plan, from which several thousands workers commute to Dhaka City on a daily basis²⁰⁵. In spite of this study's conscious concentration on the area delimited by DCC, having a notion of the fringe is important because, as commented by Nazrul Islam „what was a fringe 40 years ago, is part of the inner city today, what was fringe 20 years back, is now part of the intermediate zone of the city“²⁰⁶. Still rural physical and social structures are here characteristic, whereby two main features may be recognised in the areas' being very flat, and therefore subjected to regular inundations²⁰⁷, as well as in the villages' typical structure, consisting of a mosque and *math* (playground) that represent the reference and confluence point for scattered households grouped around small courtyards. Architecturally, the houses are generally *jhupris* and *katcha*; often, the mosques represent the only structures made of brick.

Lack of utility services, sanitation and roads as well as poor living conditions are typical and explain the commuting towards Dhaka for better earning opportunities. However, the proximity to, and orientation towards Dhaka is noticeable not only insofar as the male adults generally go to work there, but also in the number of informal earning activities of the female family members – they can be seen embroidering, cultivating fruits or sticking recycled sheets of paper together to form shopping bags -, which reveal the city's function as a „market place“ for the suburban dwellers.

A particular mention should be done in the case of Kamrangir Char, a sedimentary peninsula on the western fringe of the Buriganga, described in the already mentioned report by the Centre for Urban Studies as a „single largest concentration of slums“. The same report explained that, due to the recent formation of the char, the area is not yet officially part of DCC, and that among a total population of 300.000 people, 265.000 lived in squatters.

²⁰⁵ In Nazrul Islam's definition, these would be the areas of Tongi Khan, Uttar Khan, Dakshin Khan as well as Joydebpur to the north; Goran, Mathertek, Nandipara, Meradia, Manda, Kalachandpur, Jatrabari and Jurain to the east; Jinjira to the south (beyond the Buriganga). Cf. Islam (1996), *The dynamics of land and residential development in the fringe of Dhaka City*, p. 165-166. The development to the west is blocked by the Buriganga, or more precisely by the fact that, in these low-lying areas, the seasonal inundations have become increasingly severe after the construction of the embankment.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 165. It should be hereby mentioned that annexations of fringe areas to Dhaka Development Plan occurred as early as the 1980s, when an administration reform expanded Dhaka's boundaries to the present concept of DMDP.

²⁰⁷ Cf. CUS/NIPORT (2006), p. 21.



„Geneva Camp“

The discussion on the resettlement of squatters gives reason to add some words on the „rehabilitation“, or refugee, camp called Geneva Camp - a topic most Bangladeshis try to avoid, and at the same time the case of an urban community living in extreme segregation²⁰⁸. Neither the dwellers of Mohammadpur, nor those of the Camp that occupies its core, consider Geneva Camp as a part of Dhaka: in fact, its inhabitants are stateless, they may call themselves *stranded Pakistanis*, while in the common language they are referred to as *Biharis* as well as, in a less respectful way, *mourah*²⁰⁹.

The term „Bihari“ indicates Urdu-speaking inhabitants who were living in East-Pakistan before 1971 and fought beside Pakistan's army during the Liberation War. Their forefathers, who factually came from the prevalently Hindu province of Bihar, in India²¹⁰, had belonged to the supporters of the Muslim League, which advocated an independent Muslim state and played an important role for India's Partition in 1947. When the independentist wish in East-Pakistan took form in the struggles against West-Pakistan, they took position against a separation of the two provinces. After the war, they found themselves in a new country that was trying to erase any traces of Pakistan from its soil and regarded them as enemies and betrayers, also due to the fact that, when asked to choose between Bangladeshi or Pakistani citizenship, they had opted for latter; spoiled of their belongings and homeless, they were settled in 66 countrywide temporary refugee camps set up by international organisations. While between 1971 and 1975, 160.000 persons were repatriated, the process was later stopped, apparently due to the incapacity of the two countries to find a compromise concerning the payment of the repatriation costs, and in the years to come, Pakistan's government, on the basis of their „Bihari“ origin, shirked any responsibility in their regard – on Bangladesh's part, a year-long ignorance started²¹¹.

²⁰⁸ The name „Geneva“ derives from the fact that the International Red Cross (whose headquarters are in the Swiss city) led the construction of the original camp, which had to be re-built after a big fire had destroyed it in 1986. In the common language, it is common to hear also „Bihari Camp“. Due to its particular situation, four interviews were conducted in Geneva Camp. The following account is based upon own interviews with Geneva Camp Committee members.

²⁰⁹ „*Mourah*“ is the name of the bread these dwellers typically bake and are said to be particularly fond of, in contrast to the „Bengalis“, who mainly eat rice.

²¹⁰ But also from India's United Province (UP), Central Province as well as Madras, who all had small Muslim minorities. Bihar, likewise Orissa, used to be a part of Bengal until 1912, when the British administrators decided to split the big province into three parts – East- and West-Bengal as well as Bihar and Orissa. Despite knowing that Bihar as a „minority province“ could never have been integrated to the envisaged independent Muslim country, many of its Muslim inhabitants supported the Partition. After 1947, probably also reminiscent of the precedent linkage within British Bengal, many of them moved to East-Pakistan, and not to West-Pakistan. In Dhaka, they often settled in the new developed residential area of Mohammadpur (the Shiite's mosque seems to be an indicator of their presence, as Bengali Muslims are prevalently Sunni) and generally worked as public officers and railway workers.

²¹¹ In 1979 and 1982, some 9.000 persons were repatriated after heavy protests on the part of the community.

In present day Dhaka, 4.500 families, or 25.000 - 30.000 people, are said to be living in the former refugee camp, which has an area of ca. 62.500 square meters („like a football pitch“)²¹². Such an extreme concentration derives from a particularly high birth rate and the fact that many prefer to live in Geneva Camp although they could afford to pay a rent „outside“, for economic (the dwellings in the camp are free of rent) and social reasons; as a consequence, families of often nine members live together within one room of six or seven square metres. Of 200 public latrines, provided by Caritas and other NGOs, half are not functioning; the local government, after having initially provided basic facilities like a school, two mosques and a *madrassa*, limited its support to the provision of electricity. To face the maintenance costs of shrines, mosques and schools as well as for the organisation of collective celebration, especially the Shiite ritual celebration of *moharram*, the community has introduced a system of self-taxation. Another form of self-organisation is a committee, part of a national network, for the advocacy of repatriation of Stranded Pakistanis, whose office, located within the camp, is known to every dweller.

Geneva Camp gives job opportunities to ca. 10% of the dwellers, who work in video, music and retail shops, in small restaurants as well as in embroidery workshops scattered along the irregular lanes (also an increasing number of women work, mainly embroidering and tailoring, within the home premises). The others typically work as barbers, embroiderers and tailors, rickshaw and bus *wallah*, mechanical workers, or drivers in particular areas of Dhaka City, especially Old Dhaka (whose original dwellers, the *kuttis*, speak a mix of Bangla and Urdu) and Shyamoli/Adabar. In the last years, the insufficiency of education facilities within the camp, as well as lack of perspectives²¹³, caused very early school drop-outs and low literacy levels; however, this is changing along with the households' economic improvement as well as a major confidence of the younger generations, who are ready to learn Bangla and thus have the opportunity to join formal education institutions.

In 1992, Pakistan again agreed to repatriate 3,000 families, but only ca. 50 families, or 325 persons, factually left Bangladesh, while illegal immigration continued to take place. Up to the present day, the „Biharis“, estimated to be 300.000 all over Bangladesh, are stateless, with neither a passport nor civil rights; their exclusion from Bangladesh's society is visible in the fact that, often, children speaking Urdu are excluded from joining public schools, or apartment owners deny to rent their flats to „Biharis“.

²¹² The corresponding density of population would be of ca. 400.000 persons/square kilometre. In September 2007, however, the Election Commission preparing the vote scheduled for December 2008 announced that „Biharis“ who meet citizenship requirements would be permitted to register to vote for the first time (cf. a report of the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor published in March 2008, *Bangladesh. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2007*).

²¹³ Due to a) lack of knowledge of the Bangla language, which hindered the access to formal higher education (70% of children were said not to go to school at all; according to Dhaka Census, in 2001, only 31,17% of Geneva Camp dwellers were literate), and b) a feeling of discrimination, as for example respondents as well as the informants in the Committee Office alluded to the lower retribution reserved to „Biharis“ by Bengali employers. After reaching an age of 10-12, the majority of boys are generally expected to find a job and generally adapt to learn their parents', relatives' or friends' activities.



Geneva Camp from outside



inside Geneva Camp

2.1.3. Everyday reality

After the presentation of the so-called “urban reality”, this paragraph is concerned with “everyday reality”, which, as it was seen with Lefebvre, is based on individuals' spatial „competence“ and „performance“. on the basis of an „intuitive“ understanding and perception of space in its various practical functions - a „passive“ moment that requires an abstract notion of space (competence) -, urban dwellers can move in various spaces and use them - an „active“ moment that implies an occupation of space by an individual's body (performance).

Following Lefebvre's advice that the physical production of space succeeds in places of everyday life (of work, home and leisure) and in their connections (infrastructure, as well as economy and work), the questionnaire included a series of questions which tried to examine the different aspects. For example, the interviewees were asked what they worked as and where they worked, and by which means of transport they usually reached their workplace, or where, with whom and how they would make their everyday purchases. Successively, **three main components of everyday reality** were recognised: routines, market and mobility.

Along with their different „sub-aspects“, these are going to be presented from a broad perspective and by means of the everyday life's descriptions of six among the respondents, who were chosen according to their representativity, and will be “accompanied” in their actions and movements: the fruit seller Pannu, the cake-seller /street-hawker Parul, the recently arrived Popy, the English teacher Michael Rio, the NGO-health worker Khadija and the developer Fayzal²¹⁴.

²¹⁴ The six respondents represent respectively all six income-groups and lived in very different neighbourhoods: Pannu (between 20 and 30 year old) in a *jhupri* nearby New Market, Parul (30 years old) in the resettlement camp of Bhashantek, Popy (19 years old) in a semi-pucca in Badda, Michael Rio (40 years old) in a rented room in Malibagh, Khadija (30 years old) in a flat in Uttara, and Fayzal (45 years old) in his own house in Dhanmondi/Khala Bagan.

Routines

Asking the interviewees to describe their daily routines and whether these would change on Friday constituted an attempt to comprehend the difference and singularity of living standards and forms that typically characterise every city and - at an even higher extent - mega cities, whereby they were expected to be particularly evident in the case of Dhaka due to its inhabitants' extremely divergent living standards. By “routines”, thus, were meant sequences of actions that are not necessarily linked to each other, but mirror the multitude of situations faced, and “roles” played, within a day by social actors in modern urban life²¹⁵.

The evaluation resulted in the acknowledgement of very differentiated working and living processes, whereby the socio-economic differences described in the preceding chapter (in particular, in paragraph *Who was interviewed?*) appeared to be synonymous of relevant differences in everyday life routines. From a broad perspective, it was possible to recognise a first group of dwellers, corresponding to this survey's groups 1 and 2, working in the informal sector (especially street-hawkers), as small artisans, as well as in transport, whose working days begin at around 6 o'clock in the morning, and end in the late evening²¹⁶. Females, who particularly often work outside home, characteristically have to “re-organise” their routine concerning household and care of the children, and were found to get up earlier and go to sleep later than the other family members. Hereby, in comparison to the families of non-working women, family or neighbourhood networks assume a particular importance, for example as steps are made by husbands, relatives or neighbours to attend to the children. Against this background and considering the fact that most part of the day is spent outside, the evening represents the only moment for the gathering of all family members within the space of the home. Further on, the idea of “week-end” was very rarely found to be of any relevance for a change of routines, but for the fact that male respondents may go to the mosque.

Along with higher incomes and increasingly formal occupations, the daily rhythms of the next three income groups tend to become shorter, though especially women, working or not, continue to wake up earlier than other family members in order to cook or assist children and husbands by their preparations for the day. Furthermore, a growing number of interviewees had part-time occupations, which left them one part of the day free – this was

²¹⁵ The term was preferred to “cycles”, which would imply the continuity of actions and hardly contemplates their overlapping.

²¹⁶ It should be noticed that, probably due to the rural working rhythms, Bangladeshis generally wake up in the early morning (5/6 am) in order to take advantage of the cool temperatures and lower humidity; although in less universal proportion, the same can be confirmed for Dhaka dwellers, too.

the case of many of the female respondents, who generally worked between 10 am and 3 pm; correspondingly, also the dinner times tend to be shifted from 10/11 to 8/9 pm. Evening activities started to be mentioned, though these generally consisted of watching TV or going to internet cafés, but also meeting friends or attending cultural events; thanks to the rather formal working relationships, week-ends too assumed a certain relevance: beside resting, cleaning and purchasing necessary goods for the following week, also leisure programmes like going out with children and friends or one-day trips to peripheral areas were mentioned²¹⁷. It is in the case of the highest income group, however, that the evening becomes an occasion of informal talks with friends at home or in cultural institutes or restaurants, formal occasions and cultural events, and week-ends often give reason to leave Dhaka and visit Asulja or other peripheral areas with family and friends. Also thanks to the increasing support in the household through home-maids, female interviewees of this group appear to be increasingly free in the management of their time. The sketch on next page, comparing the routines of the six chosen interviewees, well expresses the differences in daily rhythms as they were here illustrated.

²¹⁷ It was also observed that, from group 5, the interviewees disposed of two days free of work, Friday and Saturday.

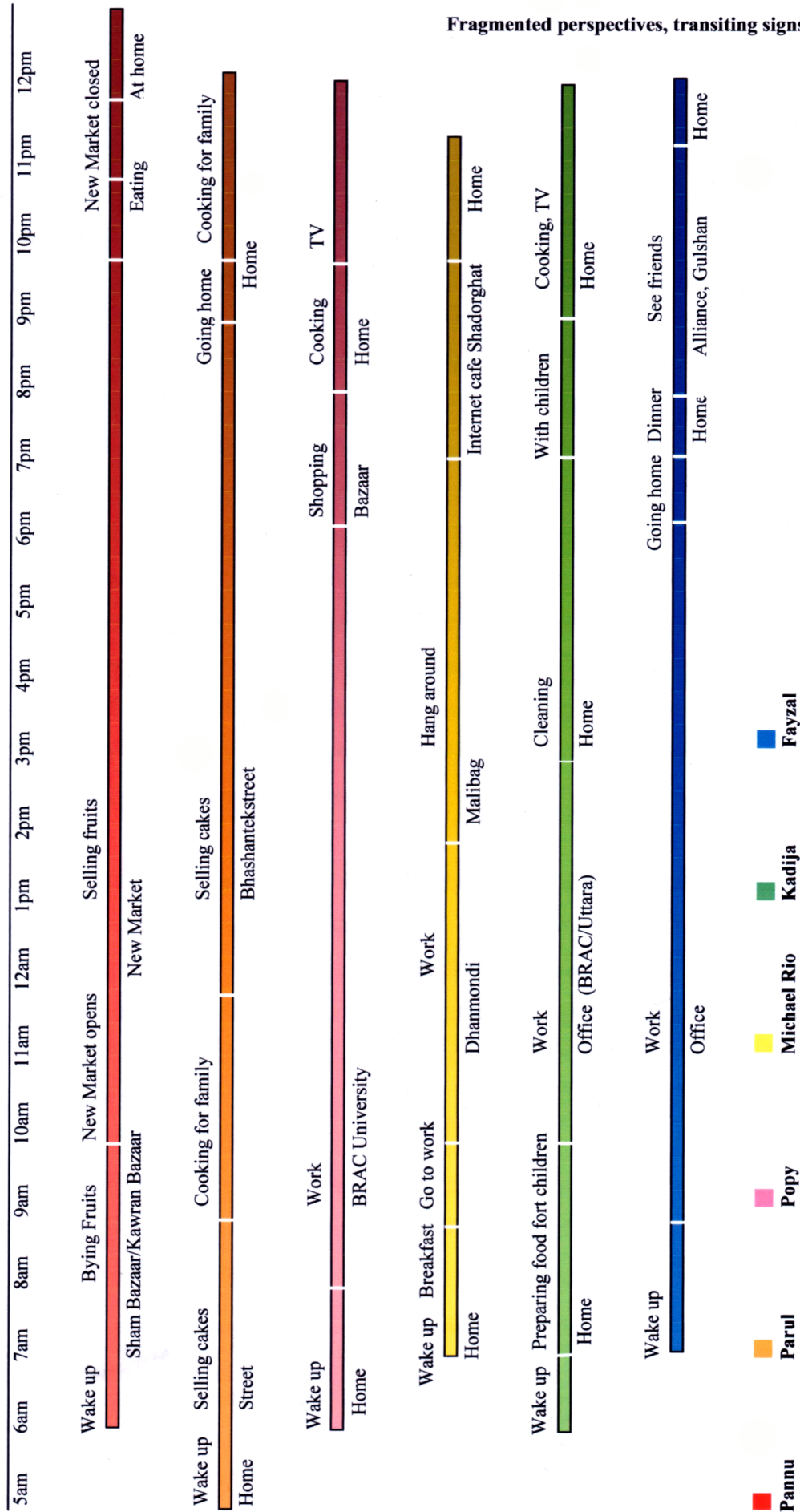


Fig.8: Visualisation of six respondents' daily routines.

Market

The market, which historians and sociologists have seen as one among the decisive factors for the formation of cities and urbanity and – in traditional Muslim cities, as *souq*, or *bazaar* – point of confluence of citizens with different ethnicities, religions and cultures otherwise living in akin-based neighbourhoods²¹⁸, was also expected to play a relevant economic as well as social role in Dhaka. The question about purchasing habits and spaces gave indeed a very differentiated picture, as first of all 30% of the interviewed women, expected to be directly interested and involved in this activity, said they did not go to the *katcha bazaar*²¹⁹ due to its “unsafe” environment: hereby, rather than the observation of *pardah*, the characteristic congestion of this type of markets was meant, which could (and often, does) allow men to importune or harass women. Another 20% said they went accompanied by male relatives, sons, husband or driver²²⁰. Also in this case, differences of income appeared to be determinant for everyday life practice, as among these respondents none belonging to group 1 and 2 was found; female respondents from group 6 often explained that their home-maids go to the bazaar, or that they purchase personally in Dhanmondi's and Gulshan's modern supermarkets. Nevertheless, on the basis of the evaluation it is possible to state that:

- dwellers have clear ideas on respectively typical or specialised purchasing spaces - for example, many could illustrate in which areas to purchase furniture, music, or books;
- there are two “commercial poles” in Dhaka: Gulistan and Bango Bazaar in the old town and New Market/Gausia Market to the south of Dhanmondi, unanimously mentioned as purchase locations by respondents of all income groups and living in all parts of the city²²¹.

It is here suggested that the answers concerning the “specialised” markets may be used as a mirror of Dhaka's urban development, insofar a more specific analysis could probably succeed in establishing how the mentioned areas grew along with the development of one

²¹⁸ Cf. for example the description of the typical features of Muslim cities by Mohamad Nizar Ismail, *Grundzüge des islamischen Städtebaus. Reorientalisierung städtebaulicher Prinzipien*, p. 105-118.

²¹⁹ Vegetable markets, generally set up in each neighbourhood as wooden stands. In Bangladesh, vegetables and spices, but also meat and fish – in short, decayable products - are generally bought on a daily base, which appears to be due to heat and lack of refrigerators to store the products, but also to a peculiar, „natural“, understanding of cooking and eating related to the still influent rural culture.

²²⁰ 10% of female respondents admitted that their husbands and children also buy clothes and other products of everyday use in their place.

²²¹ It would be possible to identify a third pole in the two big bazaars of Gulshan 1 and 2, which were also indicated by respondents of different incomes, though exclusively living in northern areas of Dhaka.

commercial or productive activity (for example, New Elephant Road - recommended for the purchase of male shirts and shoes – developed as a commercial area due to its proximity to the purchasing complex of Gausia Market, itself built after New Market²²²); or when activities existing in other areas requested new spaces due to the northwards enlargement of the city (for example, AZI-Supermarket - synonymous for “books” for students, NGO workers, researchers and development workers of groups 3 to 6 – developed in the 80s nearby the Campus, when the publishers in Bangla Bazaar started being “too far away”, as well as too well-established, for the students who wanted to animate political activism); or again developed peculiar productions thanks to a logistically advantaged location (for example, Mirpur - famous for the production of wooden furniture – was the entry point for materials from the densely wooded north as early as Mughal times). Reminiscent of the traditionally specialised bazaars of the old town, it is a spontaneous thought that, more so than the market, production activities are a factor for urbanity.

Mobility

For urban planning²²³, mobility of dwellers constitutes an important reference factor, on which the development of road network as well as transport services can be based; hereby, the concept of „action space“ is generally taken into consideration, and in particular, it can be distinguished between *potential* action space, i.e. the spatial entity in which a person could travel considering technological possibilities and physical constraints, and *actual* action space, i.e. the area in which daily travels are made in reality. It is also a common insight that, along with improving economic situations, mobility increases. Transposed to Dhaka, these concepts need to be slightly re-vised due to the peculiar informality of urban development and the problems in its management: with Nazrul Islam, it can be stated that, while „Dhaka is fairly well connected by road, rail, waterways and air with the rest of the country. [...] the transport services within Dhaka city are more precarious. It is characterised by poor planning of route network, inadequate capacity of roads, poor road

²²² New Market was opened in 1954, Gausia Market developed some ten years later to complete it. In 1991, Rosie Majid Ahsan wrote that the „extension of retail business along the Elephant Road adjacent to Gausia is a recent phenomenon. During the early years of independence this area was dominated for residential use with some confectioneries. Development of Gausia commercial block enhanced the change in land use of this area“. Cf. her mentioned article in Ahmed (1991), p. 396-414. Gausia Market comprehends *Chadni Chawk* (Engl. “ladies place/square”), one of the most recurrent listings by female respondents, in which fabrics, *sawar kamiiz*, saris, beauty products and jewelry can be bought.

²²³ Cf. Klaus Müller-Ibold (1996): *Einführung in die Stadtplanung. Definitionen und Bestimmungsfaktore* and M.J. Dijst (1999): *Action Space as Planning Concept in Spatial Planning*, in: *Netherlands Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, Vol. 14, No. 2, p. 163-182.

maintenance, poor management of traffic, indiscipline, overcrowding, slow movement, congestion and accidents²²⁴. Congestion of streets and recurrent jams coerce dwellers into exaggerated long trips and in fact limit their mobility as they are discouraged from taking long trips if not strictly necessary. Further on, it should be mentioned that peripheral areas can often only be reached by car or rickshaw, as the public, private as well as informal transport service is insufficient. Thus, the *potential* action space comes to be limited by inadequate planning, and additionally by restrictions of socio-cultural and economic nature - for example, women are physically disadvantaged in the access to the often overcrowded (because cheaper) informal transportation system, and in general feel insecure travelling on them. A recurrent comment heard in the interviews, in which they were asked whether they would visit neighbourhoods other than their own, was „it is better to stay nearby home, at walking distance, buses are dangerous and in the crowd you can be robbed or harassed“. This limitation tended to disappear along with better incomes, which made other means of transport – rickshaws, auto tempos (called „CNG or baby taxi) as well as taxis – affordable; it disappeared completely by group 6, whose members generally commuted in their own car.

For the survey of the *actual* action space, the interviewees were asked about their daily movements as well as about other movements – which they did on a regular weekly, monthly or even yearly base - within Dhaka City. On the daily level, which is strongly related to the respective workplace or working activity, it was first of all shown that the dwellers' mobility is circumscribed within a radius of 5 km of distance from the living place for 63% of dwellers, whereby almost the half hereof, and thus one third of all interviewees, actually remain at walking distance. Considering the single income groups, relevant differences emerged: half of interviewees of group 1 live and work within a radius of less than 1 km and were thus found to be highly integrated in the productive or commercial networks of their settlements (this is especially true in the case of women, who may sell small products or food on the pavement); the share decreases to an average of 23% within the other groups: hereby, females' low mobility could be an especially important factor. It also stood out that more than two thirds of interviewees in group 6 remain within 5 km of distance from home in their everyday life - which, since they have cars, was initially surprising. The respondents, who mainly live in Dhanmondi and Gulshan and work in the same neighbourhoods, explained that this was due to the traffic rather than to a disinterest in other areas. Interviewees of group 4 and 5 were found to be the most mobile, as almost one of three covers distances up to 10 km from home every day

²²⁴ Cf. Islam (2005), p. 49 and following.

to go to college (often in Old Dhaka) or university, or due to professions that request many movements (they were NGO workers, business owners, or middlemen for commercial business, travelling between Old Dhaka, Tejgaon and Gulshan), though women are still less represented. 13% of interviewees from groups 1 to 5 have to travel for distances longer than 10 km daily, hereby with a slightly higher incidence of interviewees from group 2 (the interviewees lived in fringes and worked as hawkers in the main city), for commercial and study reasons.

The used means of transport directly reflect the respondents' economic situation and length of the commuting: while for long distances, along with increasing spending power of the travellers, human haulers and minibuses are successively replaced by formal bus transportation²²⁵, CNGs and taxis, short or mid-long distances are covered on foot by respondents of group 1, 2 and 3, rickshaws become an affordable and comfortable alternative for those of group 4, 5 and 6. Hereby, male respondents of group 6 explained that for them alone a rickshaw or CNG can do, whereas they would take the car in case female family members were travelling with them; a similar precaution was showed by male respondents of other groups, who, in the same case, preferred to avoid buses and searched for rickshaws or CNGs. In all types of buses, it is worth mentioning, one or few banks generally in the front portion of the machine are „*mohilar sit*“, i.e. „reserved“ for females travelling alone.

Regular commuting for other reasons – visits to friends or relatives, special purchases, or daily trips for example to the zoo or botanical garden – was shown to be related to the rhythms of workdays and week-ends, whereby the extent to which these opportunities to „break the routine“ can be seized is clearly dependent on the individual economic situations. An exception was represented by activities with a religious or ritual background, insofar respondents from all socio-economic groups mentioned monthly or yearly visits to the *mazar* (shrines like Mirpur's Shah Ali Mazar) and trips to Old Dhaka in occasion of *pujas*, but also to the Campus and in Ramna Park for national and cultural festivities like Language Day and Bangla New Year. Also in this case, the chosen six interviewees' daily, weekly, monthly and yearly movements (reproduced on next page) mirror income-group and gender specific peculiarities concerning mobility in Dhaka.

²²⁵ These are run by public sector agencies (Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation, or BRTC), with a fleet of 600 buses, of which only 400 can be operational at any time, as well as by private companies and owners. Cf. Islam (2005), p. 50.

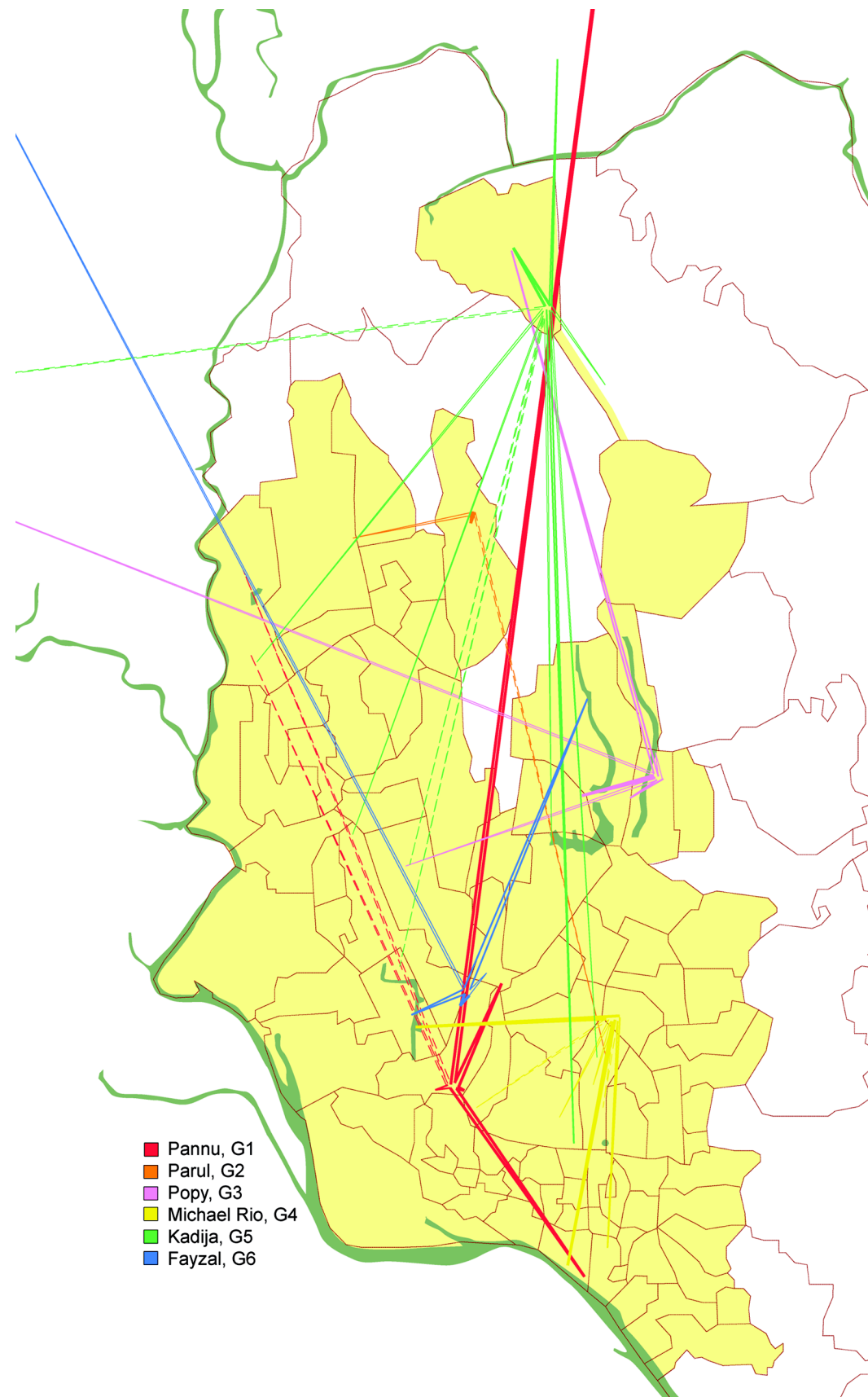


Fig. 9: Visualisation of six respondents's daily, weekly, monthly and yearly movements. Design: Jennifer Nitschke on the base of Dhaka City and Rajuk Plan 2007.

Pannu, G1

Every morning, before reaching his selling corner in New Market, Pannu may simply go to Kawran Bazaar's central market, to Gazipur in the north of Dhaka for fruits delivered from the northern districts, to Shadar Ghat for fruits that are freshly arrived via Buriganga, or cross the river and purchase them from local sellers. Once a year, his wife and children visit Dhaka and on this occasion they go to the zoo or Botanical Garden. Celebrations like *Language Day* or *Bangla New Year* are a good earning occasion: those days, he sells his products nearby Dhanmondi Lake, *Shahid Minar* or in Ramna Park.

Popy, G3

Popy has been living in Dhaka for three months: her husband has been able to provide her with employment as a security guard in the firm he works for, and they have settled in Badda. Beside their daily trips from home to the workplace in Mohakali, she does the *katcha* purchase near home; once a week, she goes to the big bazaar of Gulshan 1 in order to buy tea and other products, and on Friday she goes with her husband to various locations of Dhaka: the Parliament gardens of *Zia Uddyan*, Gulshan Lake, or the airport.

Khadija, G5

Khadija's everyday life is concentrated in Uttara, where she lives and works at one of BRAC local offices. Once a week she goes to Old Dhaka to visit relatives and takes the chance to go to Banga Bazaar, which is her favourite place for shopping. Due to her work, she attends seminars in the seats of different NGOs, which leads her to Shyamoli, Paltan and Mohakali monthly. She is a frequent worshipper of Mirpur's *Shah Ali Mazar*. Her children like to go to *Shishu Park*, in Ramna, and to the airport; they join Bangla New Year in Ramna Park and the Campus, Victory and Independence Day in Savar.

Parul, G2

Parul's everyday life movements consist of the way from her hut to a nearby place, where she fries and sells cakes to the dwellers of Bhashantek, and to another hut, a few meters away, in which women living in the camp regularly meet to discuss community as well as political concerns; once a month she and her husband may go to Mirpur to watch a movie, and being politically engaged, she sometimes takes part in political demonstrations in Paltan.

Michael Rio, G4

Michael works as English teacher in a private college of Dhanmondi, which he reaches daily via bus or rickshaw; after work he generally likes to have a walk in Lakshmi Bazaar's Bahadur Shah Park (Old Dhaka), or to watch the lively coming and going of Shadar Ghat. He buys his books in Purana Paltan and goes shopping on Topkana Road or in Dhanmondi; for national holidays like Bangla New Year and Language Day he generally joins the celebrations at Dhaka Stadium or in the Campus.

Fayzal, G6

Fayzal lives and works in his home along Green Road; when he does not spend the evening with his family, he visits friends in Gulshan and Dhanmondi or goes to the nearby Alliance Française to meet them. Once a month, he takes his children to the cinema of the new shopping centre of Boshundara City, along *Pantha Path*, or goes with his family to Asulja.

2.1.4. Summary and further comments

After the approach to Dhaka on the basis of its localities and its dwellers' routines, it is appropriate to come back to the initially mentioned spatial practice, consisting in reproduction processes (level G), spatial ensembles (level M) and specific places (level P). At level G, it was seen that poor or unsuccessful urban management and planning have led to a very high extent of **informality**, which characterises reproductive (i.e. work) as well as spatial/structural processes (encroachment and squatting with consequent eviction, progressive – and not always legal - urbanisation of the fringes).

Hereby, a phenomenon that was so far only indirectly mentioned and may need to be highlighted is the growing access to economic activities of women, as it could strongly impact on social structures in the future and is already having “spatial” consequences insofar as the increasing presence of women in urban space, though still lower than men's, is creating new needs (e.g. the *mohilar sit* in buses). The establishment, since the 80s, of multinational (especially textile) factories that typically employ female workers²²⁶ is accelerating this process, as reflected in many (male and female) interviewees' assertion that women are numerous or even dominant on Dhaka's streets. Considering a) the results of the evaluation, which showed females moving less within the city and less frequently working, b) the statistical data of Dhaka Census on working women, as well as c) the personal experience, according to which Dhaka's streets were characterised by a clear prevalence of men (rickshaw *wallahs*, vendors, hawkers, construction workers or artisans), it is here suggested that the discrepancy found in the dwellers' perception is due to the novelty of the phenomenon as well as to the fact that women generally move in big groups. In particular, work in the textile factories always starts at a specific hour - generally at 8 am -, so that hundreds of workers can be seen commuting simultaneously towards the factories²²⁷.

Passing to level M - the urban one -, rather than clearly demarcated areas with strong identities, peculiar topographies and socio-economic or demographic constants, it was

²²⁶ This is often due to the fact that women can be paid less than male workers, whereby it should also be mentioned that the still disadvantaged social position of women in Bangladesh is a reason for their exploitation at the workplace. According to Islam (2005), the salaries vary between 1.200 and 4.000Tk, though the data collected during the interviews spoke of a majority of salaries in the lower category (1.200-2.000Tk). After long struggles and demonstrations, in late 2007 labour unions managed to obtain the establishment of a minimum salary of 1.600Tk, but many factories have not yet applied the reform. This has been for example researched and investigated by Khorshed Alam in various reports, cf. for example the recent report: *Wer bezahlt unsere Kleidung bei Lidl und KiK?*, published in Germany by *Kampagne für 'Saubere' Kleidung* (ed.) (2008). According to Nazrul Islam, over 1,5 million female workers are employed by 2.957 textile industries in Dhaka. Cf. Islam (2005), p. 26.

²²⁷ Islam (ibid.) noted that garment workers generally walk to their place of work, sometimes also 3 km away from home.

showed that divergent spatial phenomena and socio-demographic situations coexist within restricted space, making Dhaka's urban fabric resemble a juxtaposition and overlapping of differing layers. In spite of such a mix of spatial and social characteristics, it can be spoken of segregation (voluntary or involuntary)²²⁸ in the case of the dwellers of resettlement camps, who were shown to be particularly often “enclosed” in their communities, of Geneva Camp, of Baridhara, as well as of specific religious groups²²⁹. In latter case, the presence of religious centres like a temple, a Buddhist *vihara* or a church explained the concentration of respective religious groups, though political and historical reasons, mainly linked to repression or persecution of minority groups, often constitute the background of segregation²³⁰. This appeared to be the case of the Hindu respondents, who mainly lived in the old town. Though there are no Hindu temples beyond the old town's boundaries, such segregation can not be explained by the presence of religious institutions and has to be brought in relationship with social exclusion and deprivation of which Hindus were victim since Bangladesh's Liberation, including property expropriation and discrimination with their consequent socio-economic regression. It could be moreover suggested that the bazaars' introverted structural form and homogeneous social pattern may constitute a decisive factor for the dwellers' perception of these neighbourhoods as protective and familiar. A special mention should be made with respect to Old Dhaka's dwellers, whose everyday life was found to be literally confined within the old town, and who often admitted to ignore “New Dhaka”.

As it is going to be explained in the paragraph on *Representations of City*, the interviewees generally attributed very strong peculiarities to original dwellers of Old Dhaka, commonly called “*Dhakaiyas*”, and clearly distinguished them from the main population. In this sense, it would be possible to speak of a “voluntary introversion” of Old Dhaka's dwellers,

²²⁸ Gottdiener/Budd recognise two measures of segregation, dissimilarity and isolation, whereby dissimilarity describes the case of a social/ethnic group living disproportionately in some areas relative to other groups, and isolation refers to the interaction or non interaction between groups. Cf. Mark Gottdiener and Leslie Budd (2005), *Key Concepts in Urban Studies*, page 34 – 39. Isolation, independent of geographical boundaries, could be as well seen in the reduced mobility between neighbourhoods (resulting in a partial experience of urban space) and in the high number of private watchmen and security systems protecting residential and commercial buildings.

²²⁹ Cf. appendix, Fig. 20, p. 13, for an overview of the distribution of religious groups in chosen urban areas, as resulted from own calculation on the basis of Dhaka Census. Four of the Hindu and two of the Christian interviewees lived in the “typical” neighbourhoods of the respective religious groups, Old Dhaka and Monipuri Para; the Buddhist respondent lived in a private Buddhist school that has been recently built on a broad lot in Mirpur. An old Buddhist temple is in Bashabo, south of Motijheel.

²³⁰ For example, the already mentioned US Report on Human Rights stated: „During the year the government did not take any measures to implement the 2001 Vested Property Return Act providing for property restitution to persons, mostly Hindus, who had their property seized by the government after the 1965 India-Pakistan war. Discrimination against Ahmadiyyas, Hindus, and Christians occurred during the year“. Within the research period 2005-2007, the number of met Hindus for whom Muslim terrorism was an issue in Bangladesh increased.

who may feel proud of their long-standing residence and cultural identity, or, on the contrary endangered by the ongoing urban changes, and therefore concentrate their lives in the familiar area. Yet, as demonstrated by recent studies, present day Old Dhaka dwellers are in majority migrants and not *Dhakaiyas*, and the lower living standards in comparison to other areas have led many of them to move away²³¹, so that the stated **segregation appears to be derived from economically disadvantaged situations**.

Memberships in groups or organisations, originally regarded as a possible indice of integration (a person belonging to a savings group, to an NGO or to a sport club will be comparatively well networked), reflected the difficulty to bridge social gaps due to the strongly divergent living standards. While the interviewed persons of groups 1 and 2 knew and took part in two forms of organisation, i.e. initiatives for the improvement of their settlement as well as saving groups (formal and informal), the varied memberships of respondents of other groups were related to their personal everyday life experience either within the school, work, or restricted communities²³².

Finally, some remarks on level P, thus concerning specific places, shall be made: first of all, it is possible to recognise **foci of urban everyday life** – urban areas characterised by their particularly high coincidence in the interviewees' mentions and bridging the socio-economic gap - due to either productive, commercial or cultural and leisure activities. Secondly, **foci of urban development**, that is areas of particular interest for planning due to their spontaneous as well as controlled growth. Under the first should be included Gulistan/Bango Bazaar (and possibly, Motijheel) in the old town and New Market in the “new town” for their commercial relevance, and Dhanmondi and the Campus (to which Mirpur could be added for its monuments, leisure activities and *mazar*) for the poles of attraction they respectively host - from the University to Dhanmondi Lake. Gulshan's exclusion should not be misunderstood as a nostalgic ignoring of the new northern areas, but factually derives from their logistic disadvantage²³³. As foci of urban development the former “fringes” Badda and Rampura (but also the currently developing areas north to Gulshan/Baridhara, with “*Bashundara Housing*”) are recognised here, indeed posing grave questions on the (environmental, social, logistic) sustainability of said development.

²³¹ Cf. Hafiza Khatun (2003): *Dhakaiyas on the Move*. The geographer could show that, since the 1950s, an increase of moves from Old Dhaka to new areas, especially Uttara, has taken place.

²³² A particular form of “membership” revealed by the survey is *tablik*, which along with *dawat* (invitation for religious talks) is becoming a popular form of collective prayer, study and congregation based on a very traditionalist interpretation of the Quran all over Bangladesh. In talks with experts, women were said to be especially attracted by *tablik* for the possibility to fulfil the fundamental duties established by the Islam, but also as an occasion to share some moments with other women.

²³³ Not only traffic: it should be kept in mind that, to reach Gulshan, dwellers of the western parts of Dhaka have to make an extensive detour around the Cantonment.

2.2. Mental field - Representation of space

In this chapter, the attention is shifted from the production of physical space towards representations of space. It was pointed out that these are carried out by scientists, planners, as well as intellectuals in the effort to *comprehend* – used in its original etymology as „grasp with the mind“ - material reality; and that conceptualised space, emerging thanks to a system of intellectually created signs that „represent“ it, is strictly linked to knowledge, and thus ideology. Lefebvre stressed the dependence of knowledge on power i.e. on its domination tools, political practice and ideology; he spoke of ideology only in the singular form, hereby intending a system of beliefs, values and interpretations. In this survey's case, however, the plural form, *ideologies*, could be more appropriately used, meaning the religious, cultural, political and democratic values as they have been „condensed“ in the questionnaire. These stand in a relationship of clear interdependence with physical space and social life, and correspondingly this chapter is placed centrally within the report.

The aim of this evaluation process was to focus on categories of cultural knowledge recognisable in Dhaka dwellers' representations of space and city. Though it is easy to figure out that, at present, expansion and concentration processes are giving birth to highly varied and increasingly contradictory „images“ of the city, it is also certain that cultural knowledge has been producing representations of space since antiquity. Before delving into the conceptualisations of contemporary inhabitants, it is appropriate to reflect on traditional conceptions, definitions and corresponding uses of space, which, at least at a sub-conscious level, may also affect contemporary ones. Hereby, the attention will be initially concentrated on an overall level, that of urban planning, comparable to Lefebvre's „G“ level, and progressively pass, through level „M“, or the city itself, to the level at which ideologies are materialised, i.e. architecture, or level „P“.

One possible factor of influence, the traditional way of building cities according to a cosmological model in Hinduism, has been mentioned above²³⁴; it was also stated that dispositions of living space deriving from religious, specifically cosmological, representations, could have developed in Bangladesh within four centuries of domination by Hindu kings. In Hinduism, living space has to mirror the immutable events of heaven; the planning of Hindu cities used to start from a square and successively develop along a mandala, whereby different patterns were possible. Beside the strictly urban design elements – the square form and a system of landmarks as shrines, cloisters, as well as

²³⁴ Cf. the questionnaire discussion in paragraph 1.3.4.

particular street patterns -, ritual movement, fulfilled in processions and ritual celebrations (the „pujas“), constituted the second, inseparable, element of representation and perception of space in antique Hindu cities²³⁵. Beside the indisputable logistical aspect, also the fact that the original settlement grew along the river is not separable from the symbolic and ritual meaning of water for the Hindu religion. The question whether the physical planning of Old Dhaka's most ancient parts - Shakhari, Lakshmi or Tanti Bazaars - and/or antique processions paths reflect similar notions should be answered by an appropriate study; on their part, the interviews of this study tried to discover possible „residuals“ of the concerned spatial understanding. Such may in fact continue to shape (Old) Dhaka inhabitants' representations of space even independently from their belief, to the same extent as in their everyday life a multitude of practices are reminiscent of traditions that, socio-culturally, have heterogeneous though seldom acknowledged origins²³⁶.

At the beginning of the 17th century, when the general („*subahdar*“) Islam Khan Chisti chose it as the strategical headquarters, Dhaka emerged as Mughal capital city. It thus became the centre of regional administration, and also of „urban“ institutions like the *kotwal*, which was responsible of maintaining the order in the city, and the *muhtasib*, who represented a moral authority²³⁷. Along with the military establishments, also their *lakherajadars*, the war adjuncts, reached the city, and to support a fast urbanisation and development, the government gave them grants in form of tax-free land. With the passing of time, this *de facto* forged a feudal land property system, as the original pioneers became owners of land and houses and had a large influence on the local administration through their faculty to determine the composition of the *panchayet*, the carrier of control, self-

²³⁵ These symbolic processions along the cities' borders contributed to the commemoration of their own foundation and constituted a regeneration rite favourable to the future preservation of the city. Cf. the studies of Niels Gutschow and Jan Pieper, especially *Indien – Von den Klöstern im Himalaya zu den Tempelstädten Südindiens* (1986) and Gutschow's *Stadtraum und Ritual der newarischen Städte im Kathmandu-Tal. Eine architekturanthropologische Untersuchung* (1982). Gutschow wrote: „And we may ask if not all architecture is only the static aspect of an entity which has an equally important dynamic side. The conclusion may be anticipated here: both in the analysis of architecture as well as in the actual design process the consideration of movement is essential, not as a functional, but as the decisive aesthetic determinant“. Cf. Gutschow/Sieverts (1977), p. 87. Traditionally, also the construction of singular houses, thus architectural forms, underlie symbolic thinking.

²³⁶ At the everyday life level, this was noticed for example when the same types of food, cooked on particular occasions (Christmas, pujas, or the Muslim *Eid* celebrations), were described by different groups as „typical“ of their own religion, tradition or ethnic group.

²³⁷ Islam Khan Chisti settled in Dhaka in 1610. While the term *kotwal* corresponds to the Arabic expression *qadi*, the name *muhtasib* is a properly Arabic term (for following illustration of traditional Muslim urban structures, I based on a profound study by Mohamad Nizar Ismail, *Grundzüge des islamischen Städtebaus. Reorientalisierung städtebaulicher Prinzipien*, especially p. 105-118). After the establishment of the court in Dhaka, since 1610, in place of the *thana* (control post) along the Buriganga, a stable Fort was to be used as residence. However, the first *subahdars* continued to live in a royal boat anchored in Chandni Ghat, because they received short-term appointments, and their courts were camped in tents around it. The *ghat* was also used as landing site for the imperial army and navy coming and going by river. Only in 1678, Prince Mohammed Azam decided to develop, not far away, a new fort, known as Fort of Lalbag, or Fort Aurangabad. Cf. *Dhaka Past Present Future*, p. 24-63.

administration, arbitration and protection in the single neighbourhoods²³⁸. The new rulers brought not only new institutions, but also a new religion. Typically, the Mughal strategy for the expansion of Islam in occupied areas consisted in granting a favourable treatment concerning the taxes to Muslim citizens rather than „imposing“ the conversion²³⁹. The same was practiced in the Subcontinent since the 16th century, whereby it should be noted that in remote areas as Bengal, which was reached by the Mughals almost one century later than the northern areas of today's India, conversions succeeded as well thanks to the preaching of itinerant Sufi mystics and Muslim teachers, so that it quickly spread also in the villages²⁴⁰.

The different *subahdars* enhanced the construction of representative buildings (mosques and residences) and of infrastructure – bazaars, streets and bridges – in the “new” Dhaka as well as in the original (Hindu) areas, and expanded also towards the north-west, along the Buriganga (present day Mirpur)²⁴¹. Merchants also played an important role in the development of the city, financing for example bridges and mosques and developing new residential and storage centres²⁴². This is relevant especially in combination with what was stated by historians A.M. Chowdhury and MS. Shabnam Faruqui: “...In this growth of Mughal Dhaka the general characteristics of a Mughal city are noticeable. The Fort served as the nerve centre of the city; the adjacent market places and the surrounding *mahallas* growing out of the residential needs follow the well-established pattern with winding roads, not really following any plan...”²⁴³. Considering the the Turko-Persian influence on the Mughal culture as well as the fact that the professed religion Islam, these “general characteristics” could be traced back to the Muslim city, whose characteristics are:

²³⁸ *Panchayet* is an old Bengal system of local government run by five elected persons (mostly local elites), which in Dhaka was started by the Moguls and disappeared after the Municipality, introduced by the British, became strong from the early 20th century.

²³⁹ Cf. Ismail (1981). As a consequence, this process was generally faster in cities and urban administrative centres than in peripheral areas and, it should be mentioned, often succeeded „bottom up“, in the sense that especially members of lower castes were sensible to the new belief with its basically equal treatment of all human beings.

²⁴⁰ I advert to the case-study *Segregation of Women in Islamic Societies of South Asia and its Reflection in Rural Housing - Case Study in Bangladesh* by Tasneem Chowdury, in which the author pointed out: „far from the cradle of Islam, with no knowledge of Muslim scriptures (which were either in Arabic or Persian), illiterate Bengali villagers evolved their own brand of Islam. [...] As a result, many local customs, rites and rituals were incorporated into Islamic beliefs. Saint worship, belief in supernatural powers of the spirit world, belief in astrology - although contrary to Islamic practices - all are part of the rural spiritual faith“. The popularity of Lalom Shah, a Bengali poet and mystic who „mixed“ Muslim, Hindu and animist thought in form of songs, may witness the extent to which present day Bangladesh results from a „mix“ of traditions – a mix visible in everyday life, though often unaware to the people.

²⁴¹ According to A. Karim, the Mughal rulers extended Dhaka progressively towards west, always along the river, whereas artisans, craftsmen and professional classes made their settlements in the east.

²⁴² Abdul Karim compiled a list of these new residential areas funded by merchants, among which are: Rokumpur, Islampur, Nawabpur, Nimtali, Dhakeswari, Phulbaria, Hazaribagh, Jafarabad, Mughaltoli. Cf. *Dhaka Past Present Future*, p. 37-39.

²⁴³ Cf. A.M. Chowdhury and MS. Shabnam Faruqui's article *Physical Growth of Dhaka City* in: *Dhaka Past Present Future*, p. 43-63, especially p. 48.

- the actual “freedom” or lack of planning in urban development due to the absence of monumentality and ritual exigences as typical in Greek-Roman and Hindu cities;
- the predominance of the individual dimension of clan and family over collective, urban interests, with the consequence that the (often delineating as hierarchic, segregated living space for one ethnic or religious group), with its local bazaar and seasonal *melas*, and not the entire city, is the citizens' primary reference;
- the *souq* around the mosque, a place of confluence and heterogeneity counterbalancing the akin-based neighbourhood's private and exclusive character;
- the mosque itself as a fosterer of social bonding through its religious value and high potential for identification²⁴⁴ – and, through the mosque's constitutive centrality, a factor strengthening the focus on local neighbourhood instead of the entirety of the city;
- the constitutive ability to quickly integrate different cultures - that of citizen and that of nomads getting together in the city - and to develop thanks to them;
- the secondary role of urban administration compared to efficient neighbourhood-based control systems (e.g. the mentioned *panchayet*)²⁴⁵ on one side and the primary position of the State (or central system in general) for big infrastructural works on the other;
- the herewith connected relevance of private initiative in facts of local administration through self-regulation and self-initiative²⁴⁶ but also through the foundations of well-off inhabitants (the “*waqfs*”);
- in architecture, the courtyard: the entire (female) community living in the house, otherwise closed to the street, gathers in this semi-private space, which also welcomes male visitors.

Although this enumeration should be taken with due caution and its suitability for Dhaka analysed by means of a specific study, all these factors *may* have characterised the city's administration and life until the progressive assumption of power by the British, and were

²⁴⁴ Gustav Grunebaum arrived to define the Islam as an urban religion because the city as constitutive environment of the mosque represented the actual space in which a Muslim could fulfil his duties as a believer. Cf. Grunebaum, G. E.: *The structure of the Muslim town* (1955), p.140.

²⁴⁵ Although these decreased in importance along with the establishment of the Colonial power and progressive introduction of Western urban administration authorities, various talks with experts and Old Dhaka-based informants seemed to confirm that religious - Muslim as well as Hindu - authorities, but also the Church as well as other religious and civil groups, still have a certain faculty to control and distribute land among their own communities.

²⁴⁶ A. Karim (p. 37) also explains that the names „*Jammal*“ and „*Dewry*“ - like „*Ali Jummal*“ and „*Becharam Dewry*“ - carried by some of Old Dhaka's areas clearly show that these originated from the establishment of a mansion by important persons or merchants, who gave their name to the localities.

hence borne in mind during the interviews as possible factors of the representations of the Urban and of space.

Continuing the historical review of influence factors for urban ideologies and representations, the colonial period should also be mentioned. As administrators of the East India Company (since 1765), the British initially left the local administration untouched due to the latter's primary commercial interest, but also to the almost immediate crisis of cotton trade in late 18th century, which determined the decay of Dhaka until the second half of 19th century, when a commercial recovery also fostered urban development. In the years between 1865 and 1915, the British brought infrastructural improvements like a new train track and station as well as an embankment to protect the city from flooding and erosion, cleared nowadays' Ramna and constructed herein a race course, established a new cantonment (the future Purana Paltan), planned a new residential area (Wari) and installed premises for the processing of hides and skin (Hazaribagh), jute pressing and bailing (Nawabpur). Hereby, they applied "European" ideas on sanitation, administration (by introducing a Municipality and municipal taxes, especially the house-rate), public work as well as election system and conservancy²⁴⁷.

Nonetheless, the Municipality had a weak position in Dhaka due to the fact that its commissioners as much as the electorate (only 1/9 of Dhaka's total population according to the British provisions on the voting right) continued to depend strongly on local personalities, e.g. the exponents of the rich Nawab family, for their decisions, as well as to the antagonism between Hindus and Muslims represented within it. Historical reports give the impression that a main problem for the Municipality was to make municipal taxes, which would have enhanced its own operability, acceptable to an electorate stubbornly counting on private donations for the financing of public works. In this regard, it should be mentioned that the provincial government of Bengal played a very important role compared to the Municipality²⁴⁸, which could reveal an heritage of the described primary reference to local actors or caretakers (and *waqfs*) as well as State for urban development in Muslim cities²⁴⁹.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Sharif Uddin Ahmed's article *Municipal Politics and Urban Developments in Dhaka, 1885-1915* in *Dhaka Past Present Future*, p. 151-182, especially p. 152. According to Ahmed, the British thought that the Municipality would be stronger if led by local elites and thus gave land owners and wealthy businessmen (both of Hindu and Muslim religions, which were equally distributed) the positions of municipal commissioners, and probably due to this, it was never really free from peculiar class interests.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 173-174.

²⁴⁹ In the same period, printing and publishing were introduced in Dhaka by the Europeans: after the first publication by the Swiss mission in 1849, especially Hindus took over most of the printing trade in Dhaka, publishing books (among others school books), but also newspapers in English and Bangla. In particular the introduction of newspapers may have played an important role for opinion making on urban political matters. This is for example evident in Ahmed's mentioned article, which is rich in quotations concerning public urban life from the local newspaper *Dhaka Prokash*.

The provided historical “framing” of Dhaka's urban (management) history should have given some points for the reconstruction of corresponding interpretations and uses of space until modern times²⁵⁰. Cultural or “ideological” factors that could play a role for spatial representations were recognised in segregation, reference to or even exclusive “closure” within family and local network, as well as a fluent relationship between inside and outside. Yet, did they really affect physical and social practice? In Lefebvre's terms, the question could be transformed in the following: how did these ideas, these cultural values belonging to the level “G”, affect the level “P”, or physical space, and social practice, or level “M”?

At level „P“, an observation that can be done still in today's Dhaka regards the notion of „*ondor mahal*“, connoting the interior space typically reserved for the female family members in Bengal's gentry palaces and urban houses. In the region, female segregation was actually practiced long before the impact of Islam on society²⁵¹; as an architectural feature common in the old town and especially in Shakhari Bazaar evidences, the courtyard, main element and almost synonym of the „*ondor mahal*“, is typical in houses located not only in Muslim, but also in traditionally Hindu neighbourhoods. Thus, the courtyard should be considered as actual centre of everyday life practices, but also of gathering between acquainted persons²⁵². Its equivalent in open space would be the *ghats*, the masonry steps used to descend to the river that typically characterise riverine landscapes in the Subcontinent and are by nature multi-functional (ritual, working, gathering, etc., especially for lower income groups). To these should be added the “*mazars*”, which still nowadays attract male and female worshippers of different belief and status and allow social – and not solely ritual - practice to take place. For male urban dwellers, temples, mosques, gardens and graveyards, or everyday life spaces which allowed the play of social – not barely religious - life, should be considered.

At the level “M”, festivals (*melas*) allowed a special kind of social interaction, in which urban space came to “represent” ideologies but also support the emergence and realisation of “desire”. However, the actual centre of social life were the segregated and self-organised neighbourhood and the herewith linked *panchayet*, the moral and decision making body

²⁵⁰ It could be added that, in 1956, the forefather of present day's RAJUK, DIT, was created as a trust with the task to co-ordinate the construction of roads and the general development of the city. „Trusts“ appear to correspond to a clearly „Western fashion“ that seemingly overcame the ancient neighbourhood-based *panchayet* as well as the *waqfs* with their implied moral or educational intention in favour of a rather bureaucratic view of urban development.

²⁵¹ The term's root is Persian. At present, the word is used by women to allude, also critically, to the traditional terms of their education, imposing to stay at home, out of public view, after the age of 11 or 12.

²⁵² Another functionally correspondent architectural form is the veranda, which existed in rural as well as urban houses.

with everyday life level: it decided marriages, *melas* and *pujas*, local business as well as public infrastructure like playgrounds or libraries²⁵³. Trust in this self-organised social network probably enhanced a sense of collective life; the various clubs and organisations for the exercise of specific interests – from literature to religion, to music and politics – may be seen as a fruit of such system, which allowed diversity within its frame.

Before passing to the evaluation, a short reflection on traditional *rural* living and social forms appears to be unavoidable due to the strong rural-urban immigration towards Dhaka, as recent immigrants' points of view and expectations on „City“ could be determined by these. Studies on rural Bangladesh's life and housing defined the traditional Bangladeshi homestead as „an aggregation of loosely spaced free-standing units grouped around a central courtyard²⁵⁴“ and including vegetation. These units are used for the storage of common property and as living space of related households - nuclear, but also „semi-extended“ families with separate incomes and eating arrangements -, whereby the introverted courtyard represents the heart of the homestead, in which most activities take place²⁵⁵. As far as the representation level is concerned, a recent report by BRAC University showed that, asked to draw the form of their homesteads, rural Bangladeshis designed square courtyards and rectangular huts and could not figure out alternative forms, as a „square plan is perceived as plan of temples“²⁵⁶. On the square ground plan of the courtyard, the report continued: „Religious values of Muslims and Hindus about direction and privacy also justify this; as a result homesteads are similar in pattern. Shape of the courtyard other than square or rectangle confuses orientation of east-west-north-south and thereby the direction of Kaaba for the Muslims“.

It was already mentioned that, in villages, everyday routines typically take place outside and on the street, or, as Chowdury states, „men walk along the roads and congregate to

²⁵³ In some of the more segregated parts of Old Dhaka, for example in Shakhari Bazaar, the *panchayet* is still practised although it has officially disappeared; as it influences the communities' lives up to present day, the Dhaka Shomitee has even suggested to reintroduce it to face the challenges originated by the fast population growth, which can be hardly tackled by the „formal“ administration.

²⁵⁴ I advert to the mentioned case-study by Tasneem Chowdury as well as to *Dynamic Vernacular: Outdoor Spaces in the Homesteads of the Ultra Poor* by Khondaker Hasibul Kabir and Fuad H Mallick for BRAC University, Dhaka.

²⁵⁵ In this context it is interesting to mention that the courtyard typically has a square form, which could be put in relationship with the square base of the Hindu mandala and also, as it will be explained in short, with another religious aspect. Further on, Chowdury wrote: „A large courtyard is fragmented into smaller ones as the family multiplies and separates. This flexibility is inherent in the organisation of the homesteads and the transitory nature of the building materials used“.

²⁵⁶ Geographically, the direction of Kaaba happens to be in a negligible angle with the west of Bangladesh. Further in the report, the authors explain: „there are more than one or several justifications regarding defining shape and size of spaces. They seem to be beyond justification, beyond explanation through conventional communication tools. Sometimes comments, such as, <I like this> or <It looks good> may not be explained. But this perception seems to be so strong that it controls perception of aesthetics“. Cf. *Aspiring above the line: Spaces in Rural Homesteads of Bangladesh* by Fuad H. Mallick and Khondaker Hasibul Kabir (2007), p. 4-5.

stand and talk. They sit by the roadside to socialise or to work. Mosques and small neighbourhood shops on the roadsides also encourage social gatherings²⁵⁷. Chowdury's study also stated that female segregation has remained a peculiar characteristic of social life: „Women are almost totally missing from the street life. Their appearance there is conditional to necessity and to modest behaviour. [...] Their role in the street-life is as discreet spectators, never as participants. [...] Public spaces are conceived as <male spaces>²⁵⁸. While men generally gather on the „goli“, a large semi-private transition space on the street side of the plot, in their free-time, women invite each other in the rather protected courtyards, which in turn corresponds to the already mentioned *ondor mahal*. Concluding this introductory paragraph on representations of space, it is possible to confirm that Dhaka dwellers' representations can be influenced and “reconstructed” on the base of mental, or “ideology-based”, factors. Correspondingly, in the evaluation of the interviews, additionally to the peculiar questions on City and space, following aspects will be particularly taken into account:

- spatial, and underlying social, segregation between citizens of different religion, ethnicity, economic status, as well as between males and females;
- religious and ritual values affecting spatial representation;
- traditional “mistrust” in public sector (cf. the resistance to taxes) and dependency on private initiative organised by better-off players (also a certain “fatalistic” *laissez faire?*) concerning urban development;
- a peculiar understanding of space and boundaries (cf. the shifting threshold between inner and outer space, mediated by verandas, *goli*, etc.) as fluent or flexible according to time²⁵⁹;
- the (partial) internalisation of (colonial) European urban structures.

²⁵⁷ A peculiar meeting point for villagers, the banyan tree, could be also mentioned. This type of *ficus*, particularly common in whole Bengal and in the Subcontinent as well, is characterized by aerial prop roots that grow into thick woody trunks and, in very old trees, can spread out laterally to cover a wide area. The banyan, holy to the Hindus and object of innumerable Bangla songs, traditionally collected all men of the community to talk, discuss common concerns or share stories in the evening, so that it seems possible to define it as a „rural materialisation of desire“.

²⁵⁸ Further, Chowdury: „Women do not visit public institutions such as the mosque or the bank. They use spaces according to the order; the higher in the hierarchy, the less the spaces are used by women“. See also her classification, in the same article, of public spaces in rural areas into: „A) Public: D.B. Road, mosques, fields, mango orchards, daily and weekly markets, school, bank, rice-mill; B) Semi-public: Village lanes, neighbourhood shops, the frontyard or goli, public handpumps; C) Semi-private: Back-lanes, women's pond and bathing pier; D) Private: The enclosed courtyard, the backyard or kanta.

²⁵⁹ This is related to the observation that a) seasons, b) ephemerality of building materials, c) „occasion“ - for example the presence of men or the visit of strangers in the home, the necessity to wash/hang clothes/cook in a courtyard or the recurrence of festivals, strongly affect spatial and social practice.

These agents should become evident in their interaction with contemporary processes affecting Dhaka's physical space and social system, whereby both are expected to be rather mixed, simultaneous, and overlapped than clearly discernible. The answers' divergent foci as well as the different methodologies applied in the interviews necessitated the subdivision of the analysis into three phases, which defined the three sub-chapters. In the first, the main topic is the representation of City, in the sense that expectations, prejudices and generalisations on Dhaka as capital or industrial city of Bangladesh, but also on urban life in general were often faced during the discussions with local dwellers, which could not be “mixed” with spatial representations but evidently could affect them. In the second sub-chapter, the concerned object consists of conceptualisations of space, or those representations of space that result from knowledge, education, but also internalised and unconscious social norms. At last, a choice of representative mental maps drawn by the respondents will be discussed.

2.2.1. Representations of City

This paragraph presents the results of a comparison between conceptualisations on „City“, i.e. urbanity and urbanisation, as they emerged during the empirical work. The pertinent questions are here reproduced:

- Do you like living in Dhaka? Why is it good to live in Dhaka?
- Why did you move to Dhaka?
- How are people in Dhaka?
- Do you think there is any difference between settlers and those born in Dhaka?
- Which advantages and disadvantages (better infrastructure, education and recreation facilities vs. chaos, traffic, lack of open spaces..) does Dhaka offer?

The aim of these questions was to find out an „overall attitude“, a series of dispositions regarding the City, from which actual conceptualisations affecting the dwellers' representations of space could emerge, and at the same time to inspect eventual ongoing transformations of such dispositions caused by an increasing interaction with foreign countries.

During the evaluation, the answers were used and compared in the whole; income, although a relevant differentiation factor, was not the only and not always the most decisive one, as whether and to what extent exigences and expectations that would be spontaneously classified as „urban“ by a European reader came up appeared to depend at least as strongly on education level and, often, on the respondents' origins. The first and rare mention of Dhaka's importance as centre of Bangladesh's socio-political life, for example, came from a free-lance researcher of group 3 (or „lower-middle“ income group). For him, this was the main reason to remain in Dhaka in spite of recognised problems and disadvantages: “It is not relevant whether I like it [living in Dhaka] or not, for my choice is based on my necessity. The city is useful for my purposes, [as] it is the only place where political activism can take place. It is not the *infrastructure [English]* that attracts me, I actually like spaces with trees, the River Buriganga, and the organic sensations one can grasp in Dhaka. I like the joy of city”. He thus expressed with a shy grin also the sensuality of urban landscapes, which made this statement particularly unusual, but representative of a young generation of intellectuals who have absorbed cultural influences and trends from European films and books. A second example can be the answer of a Dhaka University student, involved in socio-political movements, who found within Dhaka an ideal place for

his own and his aspirations' realisation: "I think I'm living in Dhaka's best place, as the DU Campus has cultural, educational, and intellectual significance". Also in this statement, referring to the Campus' heritage as historical space of Dhaka's and Bangladesh's fight for freedom, independence and democracy, symbolic values are attributed to a place within the city. The extremely broad span of answers confirmed the expectations in the sense that, having consciously interviewed persons from all age, income and professional groups, with very varied backgrounds and cultural level, the resulting picture could not be but a heterogeneous one. For example, the most mentioned notion of the city, according to which city is a chance, an opportunity for enhancing one's life, was shared by merely 29 interviewees. This is to say that the single answers could not always be reduced to one common meaning and rather remained elements that have to be assembled, traces that have to be followed. In spite of this, **six main groups of representations** („City is something else than home“, „City means social, cultural, political life, history... and memories“, „City means its infrastructure“, „City means a chance“, „City means inequality, exclusion and injustice“ and „City means buildings and congested streets“) were recognised, which are presented in following pages²⁶⁰.

„City is something else than home“

“My roots are here, I know my place is here –
but it is not because Dhaka is the capital city,
I would feel equally attached to Barisal,
if I were born and had my friends there”

“For every Bangladeshi, the birthplace is very important
and for this reason I will always feel
that my place is somewhere else.
Even if in that place I could not earn as much money,
even if I would hunger, to me,
that place will seem important and good.
My mother lives there, that's the other reason”

These statements by two different interviewees – a man of second generation from group 6 and a college student of first generation from group 3 – are quoted here to introduce the topic of this paragraph: the belonging to, or identification with, Dhaka as own city in function of lineage. Already during the interviews it stood out that the city is recognised as „own“ when: a) it is the own birthplace, and/or b) parents and nearest family members are living there²⁶¹. However, it is in the comparison of urbanising and urbanised interviewees

²⁶⁰ It was always possible to give more answers to a question and all were considered in the evaluation, so that the sum of answers to each topic is always higher than 100.

²⁶¹ This applied for 22% of the total interviewees. It should be noted that the interviewees who stated having

that an interesting implication emerges, as the majority of the statements derives from persons who were born in Dhaka. They tended to take for granted that the city has to be „their own place“ since they were born there, whereas first generation urban answerers made their bonding depend on the presence or absence of their own family or relatives. Yet, this does not mean a refusal of Dhaka in favour of the village, nor, in the contrary case, a complete alienation from the village through the adaptation to urban life. All, first generation as well as second+ generation, were rather expressing a culturally rooted respect for their own place of birth and their family's origin²⁶². Against this background, it is possible to understand why the urbanising answerers could put into perspective their being Dhaka dwellers but at the same time interact and engage within the city. On the other hand, the answers of urbanised persons mainly showed a still existing awareness of the rural origins, and also various informants explained to see no contradiction between an „urban“ way of life and defining oneself only secondarily as Dhaka-born but primarily according to the great-grandfathers' villages.

A couple of statements should be more efficacious: „I belong to Dhaka. There have been a lot of changes, but I know that people on the streets know me, I don't feel a stranger. I have my roots here“; „Dhaka is my second mother. Since I was born here, it's my home, and although I have lived in many cities and there have been many changes - rarely, or never, positive ones - I am always homesick when I'm far from Dhaka“; „Dhaka is my first reference, I identify myself as an inhabitant of Dhaka rather than as Bangladeshi, because my mother and father are here and because this is where I grew up, although I was not born here“; „I belong to Dhaka, it's my city. I quitted my job at the Foreign Ministry because I missed my city, my country, my family“. Such „consciousness of the roots“ is not due to non-adaptability, but to a culturally ascertained importance of family. A confirmation hereof comes from the interviews in group 5 and 6, in which almost half²⁶³ declared „roots“ and familiar bonding as reason for liking and staying in Dhaka despite the disadvantages intrinsic to the fast growth of the poor mega city. The relevance of such statements derives from the fact that many of these answerers could live, or have lived, abroad, as they were keen to mention. In some cases, they considered Dhaka from the point of view of near relatives who had already left, while especially the youngest were well aware of living standards in foreign cities through TV, music and internet. In this sense, their constancy to the own family and origin, rather than to the city, was absolute, because „free“.

a family's bonding to Dhaka jointly mentioned other reasons for liking, and staying in, the city, which are going to be presented in the following paragraphs.

²⁶² This was also confirmed by the fact that, when asked about their origin both Dhaka-born and first generation migrants) gave importance to mentioning their fathers' locality.

²⁶³ In these groups, respondents were mainly long-time residents of Dhaka. Cf. appendix, Fig. 16-17, p. 13.

In conclusion:

- urbanised and urbanising persons keep alive the relationship to the natal localities through an awareness of, and respect for, family origins. This insight contrasts the assumption that rural origins imply a persistence on rural life or a lack of adaptability to the urban environment;
- the fact that interviewees from groups 1, 2 and 3 mentioned familiar bonding more rarely than the others does in no way mean that family as a value becomes less important through migration or poverty, but can be explained as a matter of income insofar as the poor have no or limited freedom of choice but to migrate in the city. Hereby, the lowest percentage of answers was in group 3, in which young migrants with good perspectives of economic improvement - like students - become numerous, and in this case it could be interesting to observe whether, once “settled down”, family becomes important for establishing a new feeling of rootedness;
- in this sense, a „future rootedness“ could be spoken of, based on the expectation that the own future family will live in Dhaka. Although this expectation did not cancel the silent awareness of the own foreignness, the hope in a better future for the children appeared to be a good reason to stay, as it is going to be shown in following paragraphs.

„City means social, cultural, political life, history... and memories“

Whereas a relevant amount of the interviewees of group 5 and 6 mentioned political, cultural as well as social relevance of Dhaka, groups 1, 2, and even stronger 3 and 4 tended to consider the city from other, more functionalist, points of view²⁶⁴. It is hereby most probably discrepancies in education level and in setting of priorities (also of economical nature) between the studied groups that affected the answers.

Interestingly, all concerned persons from group 5 and 6 were second+ generation, or Dhaka-born, who were keen on telling about the own family's participation and sufferings in the struggles for Independence, and felt therefore proud to live in Bangladesh's capital city. The answer of a former professor at Dhaka University, now working as executive director of an NGO, is representative for conceptualisations linked to Bangladesh's recent history: “We actually had the option to go to Kolkata – an option an Hindu has to think about twice -, but I unconsciously decided that I wanted to stay in Dhaka. I belong to this

²⁶⁴ In detail, present paragraph is concerned with 18 answers. 8/18 came from interviewees of group 5 and 6, who are thus slightly overrepresented.

city, meaning that I belong to its history, culture and politics". It stood out that personal memories and dreams from earlier years were an important reason of identification, as statements like following ones significantly evidence: "Much has changed and not always or never in a positive way, but memories hold me here"; "I studied here, so I still have strong feelings for the Campus, I have lived the most joyous part of my life there - that is my most beloved place in Dhaka and I like to go there"; "I belong to Dhaka, it's my city. My dreams are here because I have lived my childhood and youth here, Dhaka has formed my aspirations [...] But we don't have any features for a city in Dhaka, nowadays. There used to be a pride in being a dweller of Dhaka, [...] it was normal to go to Old Dhaka, we identified ourselves with that part of the city as a mirror of our culture. Nowadays, people identify themselves with shopping malls"; and "I have a feeling for Dhaka, I love it, and whenever I leave it, I miss it. Dhaka is near my mind and heart, I can't imagine to live somewhere else [...] I remember when everybody knew every street". Which significance for urban studies should be acknowledged to an individual's memories? Maybe, as much as these affect his/her own identification with the city?

Insofar as childhood and adolescence tend to be remembered as positive periods despite perhaps have been lived through with a totally different feeling, having spent them in a particular city rather than in another or in a village could be formative for the later attitude towards the urban. This may be particularly true for a capital city. One century ago, Walter Benjamin²⁶⁵ inaugurated a *discourse* on the symbolic and even prophetic meaning of the city, interlacing concrete places of the Berlin of his childhood with his later development as an intellectual and flaneur. Everyday life memories became the filter for his reading of the contemporary city, and the juxtaposition of the two cities, the past and the present one, often revealed historical changes in a more direct, clear way than historical analysis. In Dhaka, memories of the past city appear to constitute an "excuse" for loving the present one despite its problems or even to "cover" it in a nostalgic denial of the recent years' changes.

For comparatively young interviewees, the city's attraction is based exclusively on its present socio-cultural role and image, almost exotic for dwellers who have lived abroad: "Dhaka's landmarks are important emotional places to me, they build my <sense of residence>: Manik Mia Avenue, the parliament, the trees in Pantha Path, the flyover with the weird billboards [...] in Dhaka, anything can be the reason to look at anybody, I see that in the penetrant looks from the window of another car... this easiness to show our lives and

²⁶⁵ See Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood Around 1900* as well as his *Arcades Project* or Michael P. Steinberg's (ed.) *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History* for an analysis of Benjamin's philosophy of history.

emotions is actually typical, we Bengalis are emotional, sentimental people, who almost enjoy romantic sadness”; “I feel a particular linkage to Dhaka University Campus, it is an important part of the city and of the country, here the education standard is special, I can identify myself with that”.

Like younger second+ generation interviewees, first generation urban settlers from groups 3 and 4 tended to stress Dhaka's socio-political importance as the capital city of present day Bangladesh²⁶⁶, as some quotations can exemplify: “Dhaka is good, you can embrace all Bangladesh from here”; “Here I can see in face everything I used to see only on newspapers”; “Dhaka is relatively progressive in Bangladesh, other cities don't have a *modern [English]* life at all, whereas you can learn and experience many contemporary things here, from politics to lifestyle”; “Dhaka University Campus is the best place to live in Dhaka City. It has cultural, educational, and intellectual significance [...] although the people who are settled here for longer time are not enough involved in the nation's political and social life. We [*the recent settlers*] do care more and therefore we stay and are active here”. These quotations speak of a group of urbanising inhabitants who have already appropriated “urban” expectations and aspirations – proximity to the current, a liberal lifestyle, political activity and self-organisation, etc. -, which they will try to transform in reality. Asked persons from the same groups, but also interviewees from group 1 and 2, stated to like the freedom characterising their life in the city, thus expressing a common place on urban life that could sound particularly familiar to an European reader. Since the Middle Ages, when, according to the phrase “*Stadtluft macht frei*” („Town air makes free”), former serfs were free of their bond towards the feudal rulers and could be declared citizens after having lived in a city for one year and one day, the European city is synonymous with an ideal of freedom and equality. Given the existence, in rural Bangladesh, of practices regulating a feudal-like land property system, but especially assuming that long existing traditions are struggling against an advancing social and cultural modernisation, this may be applied, with due precautions, to the concerned statements. As a middle-man met in Shadarghat put it: “If you choose your own way, nobody can influence you or bring you out of your way“ - he explained with these words why, after year-long interferences of his villagers and neighbours in his efforts to start a business, he preferred to live in Dhaka. For others, moving in the city meant physically distancing themselves from unwanted familiar bounds “I did not want to live with my relatives in the village, most of them did not understand and respect me, now I am free”, or

²⁶⁶ A more secure evaluation will be possible through comparison with the space conceptualisations – especially regarding the building of national identity in and through space -, which are going to be approached in next chapter.

enjoying the possibility to break social rules without being judged: “I live a free life here, I have no responsibility to my family but earn money and beside this I can do whatever I want, I can go to a bar and drink with friends, which is not possible in the village”. Women were equally conscious of this freedom, as one commented: “Life in the village is tight and full of problems. As adolescent girl, I played with a drama team and fell in love with a boy. For both these reasons my own villagers insulted me and repelled my parents, so I followed him to Dhaka. Here, we are free to live together”. The issue of female work, a still controverse one also among urban dwellers, was repeatedly object of appreciation of Dhaka's more liberal atmosphere: “In my village it is unusual that women work, but in Dhaka it is common”; “Working women are a bad thing in villages, people will regard you as a bad girl if you decide to work”.

After this paragraph, which revealed a reflective urban population able to formulate individual conceptualisations, three insights will be noted:

- for Dhaka-born interviewees, memories and common places of the own culture, i.e. emotional values based on individual experience, are mixed with historical awareness and pride in a city, whose inhabitants – generally the fathers' generations - fought twice for their own language and independence;
- although only a tiny minority, the interviewees from groups 3 and 4 expressed representations, and expectations of, Dhaka which could be spontaneously called “urban”. Possibly, they could be even more “urban” than former second+ generation groups and should be observed as upcoming urban class;
- the “freedom of the city” was mostly mentioned by migrant interviewees and by absolutely no members of group 5 and 6, which may depend on the first group's possibility to compare urban and rural life, but also gives reason to assume that urbanised upper-income individuals are constrained by stronger social bounds than other dwellers.

„City means its infrastructure“

What emerged to be significant for the interviewees²⁶⁷ and to clearly make a difference between Dhaka as an urban environment and the rest of Bangladesh was a complex set of factors that, in the evaluation phase, was grouped under the name infrastructure. „Infrastructure“ is used as an umbrella for different features that are peculiar for a city, from the employment opportunities, over NGO activism and education facilities like schools and cultural centres, up to household services.

In particular, the provision of services constituting the basic infrastructural apparatus of a city were particularly appraised by interviewees of all groups, who knew that the living conditions in remote, and less remote, areas of Bangladesh are very different. The spectrum of answers from group 1 – appreciating the availability of electric light in the huts, shops, cars and buses - to group 5 or 6 – that referred very strongly to the excellent education facilities – mirrored significantly the big discrepancy in living standards still characterising Dhaka. Villages and district cities were generally used as comparison term, and hereby the most important asset was proximity, often equated with availability: „Here, everything is closer, in the village you have to walk more for everything“; „Dhaka is a city of possibilities, I can get everything here. Think about Kushtia, there are not even shopping malls“; „You get everything here“.

Another group of answerers, interestingly exclusively men, stressed „money and jobs“ as well as typical phenomena accompanying modern progress - growth of traffic and leisure facilities, development of the tertiary, but also changes in the urban landscape through new buildings for new uses - as characteristic of the city: „Dhaka is Bangladesh's living heart concerning work and production, there is nothing to do or search for outside the city, only here there are job opportunities different than agriculture and industry“; „I have learnt how to cope with the rules of the textile business, I could not do a different job than this. No, I could not survive but in a city“; „I really like that here there are more vehicles, more people on the streets“; „I have forgotten the village, Dhaka is so beautiful – with Shishu Park, Wonderland, Fantasy Kingdom, and the toys shops. The village has ponds and paddy fields, but Dhaka has Fantasy Kingdom“; „Dhaka offers many facilities, take Motijheel, I have a fascination for that area since my student life, with its many buildings, banks, street vendors disposed along such complex pattern of streets, ways and squares“.

Parallel to the enumeration of similar advantages – whose reverse is going to be illustrated as well -, the interviewees showed a consciousness of Dhaka's status as primate city, which

²⁶⁷ It is the case for 18 interviewees, 11 first generation and 7 second+ urban dwellers, whereby the interviewees of group 5, with 8 answers, were proportionally very influent.

they described with expressions like „it's the root of the country“, „it's the centre of Bangladesh“, „in our country, everything is centralised“. This was generally taken for granted, due not only to Dhaka's being capital city, but apparently also to the outstanding role historically played by the city in East Bengal.

A secondary effect of primacy came to light in the words of a pavement dweller: „You can easily survive, there are lots of businesses or activities to earn some money and NGOs have programmes to support us“. The problem of Dhaka's poor being too complex for single intervention plans, but the majority of international and local development agencies having an office in the capital for the mentioned reason, partial, sporadic efforts to alleviate the situation on the streets are typical in the capital (as well as country-wide) and meanwhile represent an integral part in the poor's informal economies.

„City means a chance“

The last paragraph showed that, for urbanising as well as urbanised answerers, a character or even condition of urbanity is infrastructure, whereby its clearest specification after the heterogeneous spectrum of mentioned aspects may probably be „whatever is not in the village and makes life easier“. It is thus a positive feature, which can be directly added to the representation of city as chance, or even as last survival chance. Herewith, the survey approaches not only the most mentioned conceptualisation of Dhaka²⁶⁸, but also the one typically shared by interviewees of groups 1 to 4, that is the numerically biggest portion of Dhaka's population. In particular, the survey confirmed that Dhaka is believed to represent the solution to poverty for poor from rural Bangladesh, as only four Dhaka-born persons considered the city as opportunity, mostly stating or lamenting the non-existence of alternatives countrywide: „In the village there is no food, only poverty“; „There are no chances to earn our life in other cities than in Dhaka, although they may be more beautiful“; „There is little alternative to Dhaka in Bangladesh. Here there are better chances for business. Chandpur is good to live, Dhaka to establish a business“.

The city can be considered as much more than a mirage, because its promise seems to have become true for more than half of the total migrants in these four groups. Many defined Dhaka in terms of a last chance, of a turning point of their life in situations of extreme need – loss of parents, loss of belongings to natural disaster, etc.: „I lived in a village until I lost my home due to river erosion. I had no chance but moving to Dhaka and searching for a new job. I had some relatives here, they helped me a lot in the beginning“; „I was betrayed,

²⁶⁸ By 29% of total interviewed persons, hereby 8/19 in group 1, 7/13 in group 2, 9/21 in group 3, 5/19 in group 4 but none in groups 5 and 6.

I went to Pakistan in the belief of finding a job waiting for me, but when I arrived I was forced to become a prostitute. Once I came back I did not dare to go back to the village, I settled in Dhaka. I found support in an NGO which supports stranded migrants and thanks to their training I felt better. I like being here now“²⁶⁹. It also became clear that widows or betrayed women took the way of Dhaka in order to escape a destiny of deprivation in the village, leaving often with their children: „I was alone after the death of my parents, for years I depended on my husband, but he was addicted to alcohol and eventually left me. Then I came to Dhaka, here I have found another husband, he is also bad, but I can work – I could not have managed in the village“; „My mother wanted to leave my father and thus we came here. Then, he reached us“; „My father died when I was a young boy, so my mother came to Dhaka. She worked as maid servant as long as I grew up“.

In the majority of the cases, however, villagers decide to move to Dhaka in search of better survival opportunities, which they often find: „I came for higher study, it's an obligatory stage for career“; „Time is faster in the city, but there is more money and thus I am happy to have moved. There are better facilities for education too, my son is now going to school²⁶⁹“; „I come from a family of cultivators, but since I was a bit educated and it's hard to make a life with the work in the fields, I decided to come to Dhaka²⁷⁰“. Dhaka is transformed into the symbol and patron of individual success by urbanising dwellers of all groups, who may not yet have acquired full awareness of urban life *per se* – or may lack any reflection on its meaning –, but have managed to learn its basic survival rules: „I decided to start a business on my own, I knew I could find a loan and a place, here in Mirpur I don't have to pay any rent²⁷¹“; „Well, there are many job opportunities here. One can easily take over a completely new profession, like me for example. I took a loan and started to sell bananas, I had never had to do with commerce, but it worked²⁷²“; „If one learns to adapt and arrange himself, he will have a good life here. When I came, my brother helped me to start, now I am independent²⁷³“; „In the village, I would have never thought that you can commerce on old furniture, but this is what I am doing here. One of my relatives was already in the business, he introduced me²⁷⁴“.

In the home country of micro-credit programmes, it is not surprising that loans play an important role also for the destiny of urban dwellers, whereby recently arrived migrants often count on the support of relatives or acquaintances that have lived longer in the city.

²⁶⁹ Toffael (group 2), street-hawker from Tongi.

²⁷⁰ Md Haque (group 2), employed in a book-shop.

²⁷¹ Achia (group 1), running a small tea-stall.

²⁷² Sikandar (group 3), street-hawker.

²⁷³ Jahurul (group 3), street-hawker.

²⁷⁴ Jamal (group 4), small business owner.

The latter often introduce the new-comers to the same or similar working fields. Work – its lack in the rural areas, its abundance in the city - is the fundamental and drastic reason to leave one's own roots and search for survival in the city for poor, but also „middle class“ Bangladeshis. Overall, men and women are equally satisfied with their decision to migrate and migrant women are more often working than Dhaka-born women in the same four groups.

Many interviewees could formulate a judgement on Dhaka only by starting from their previous life in the village or that of relatives and friends who have remained to live there. Hereby, the comparison between rural and urban life was based on services and infrastructure, but first of all on earning possibilities: „My sisters brought me here, it was difficult in the beginning but I found a job as maid servant, afterwards I gave birth to my son here. Dhaka is better than the village, those of my sisters who remained there are poor, here I am happy²⁷⁵“, „Dhaka is the stem of Bangladesh, people come here full of hope. There are other district towns, but here there are better and more chances²⁷⁶“, „We settled up in Karail *bustee*, it's a good place because it has all facilities. I am happy we have moved here, now we have a better income than at home, in the village²⁷⁷“, „Dhaka is full of factories, here we can work, whereas in the village there are no opportunities. I came six months ago and some days ago my sister has joined me, too. Certainly, it is difficult in the first times as Dhaka is dangerous, but then one learns to cope with the stress²⁷⁸“, „I came for work and because I wanted a better life. See, my friends in the village are still in very difficult economic situation, I am having a better life here²⁷⁹“. The comparatively high number of interviewees that expressed a positive conception of Dhaka on the base of its capacity to ensure a better existence is countered by the 3% who showed a certain disillusion - as anticipated in paragraph 2 of this chapter, especially elderly persons. Besides the formerly quoted statement, two more interview partners from group 1 explained in a very realistic way that the chances of improvement for the own social group are limited. The latter is and remains excluded from primary facilities like housing and education and little efforts are being made by the public sector in order to change the situation. For them, the mega city does not mean a chance, but merely a missed opportunity, a reneged promise – also on the part of Bangladesh, whose birth they witnessed with great hope. Besides the clearly more advanced age of concerned

²⁷⁵ Fulbanu (group 1), who has stopped working due to her old age, but still likes to assist her brother-in-law at work as rickshaw repairer in a busy street of Mohammadpur.

²⁷⁶ Mohammad (group 2), rickshaw wallah.

²⁷⁷ Jasim (group 2), young street-hawker.

²⁷⁸ Jui (group 2), garment worker.

²⁷⁹ Samad (group 3), three-wheeler driver.

interviewees, also the living area may be related to their peculiar sight, as all had been subjected to the eviction plans of the 80s and lived in Bhashantek. In this sense, it seems important to stress the role segregation can play in the process of conceptualisation of the city. Concluding, it will be stated that:

- Dhaka is synonymous with work and as such seen as a chance for rural poor, who migrate to Dhaka with an expectation for better life. Hereby, not necessarily a better work is expected, as the perspective of any, also humble, job – often arranged by already settled relatives or acquaintances - provides enough a readiness reason to leave;
- in the name of such enhancement, interviewees showed ready to accept and adapt to the unknown urban environment, even with its difficulties and disadvantages. Also this insight seems to contradict the simple assumption of migrants' non-adaptability, although this could be the case of elderly persons, who migrated to Dhaka in its first years as a capital city or even before.

„City means inequality, exclusion and injustice“

“Lankai o vikhari ache, makkai o gadha ache”, or: *“there are beggars also in Lanka and donkeys also in Mecca”*. By stating that even in a place of wealth there are poor as much as in any place of wisdom and knowledge there are also unwise inhabitants, an elderly interviewee outlined the paradox concurrence, in Dhaka, of fast enrichment on one side and massive growth of poor people on the other²⁸⁰. Hereby, he gave the probably most expressive statement of disenchantment regarding the “Dhaka Dream”. Himself migrated 45 years earlier to Dhaka, where he worked as rickshaw *wallah* and lived on the pavement in the area of the big Mohammadpur Bazaar, he was resettled in Bhashantek in the 80s and had since then gradually broken any contact with the exploding city.

However, not only the elderly, also young people perceived exclusion, inequality and injustice as typical features of the city²⁸¹. On one side, the critical issue was accessibility of services and facilities that, in Dhaka, are often the exclusive privilege of better-off households, but are free in rural Bangladesh. This problem of socio-economic exclusion is typically related to chronic socio-economic inequality, as some statements can exemplify:

²⁸⁰ It could be asked whether the proverb also states that a city is a city only if it has a mosque, like some theories on Muslim cities – it has been object of a short digression in the introduction - assert. Although in the course of my research similar mentions did not recur, it could be the objective of a specific study whether in rural context urban and rural are distinguished in such terms.

²⁸¹ It is hereby the case of 8 interviews from group 1, 2 and 3.

„Policemen always try to evict us, nothing is free, there is everything but it is not for all²⁸²“, „In the village, there are ponds where to swim and collect water, they are not our propriety, but there are no restrictions for their use. If you have time, you can collect water lilies from the ponds and *shaak* [*spinach vegetable*] from the fields, and men generally catch food from the ponds, all for free. In Dhaka, in the contrary, nothing is free and everything is expensive. We have to pay for water!²⁸³“, „In the city, there are the richest and poorest people, you can see how sharp the differences between them are. In the village, you can enjoy the river and greenery for free, whereas here, you have to give money away to enjoy some green²⁸⁴“.

The interviewees linked inequality to injustice when referring to the, at least apparently, arbitrary justice system applied on the streets, thus pointing out a lack of transparency that becomes especially drastic in the case of squatters and hawkers, who often have to face corrupt policemen. Timid, rather indirect allusions to the work of Rapid Action Bataillon (RAB), the specialised public justice corps introduced in the 90s in an effort to defeat micro-criminality, made clear the people's perception of an unequal treatment in comparison to the „rich, whose money can buy anything“. To this adjoins the fact that no interviewees from groups 4, 5 etc. as most influent and generally wealthy social groups made mention of these problems in public life. How to interpret this discrepancy? On one side, it is spontaneous to think of a real disinterest, or even „dis-involvement“, as the public sphere of latter, who are more rarely in the situation to observe, and also be victim of, everyday injustice on the streets of Dhaka. On the other, it is also possible that those groups are the most frustrated witnesses, and sometimes heirs, of a crisis of public sphere which has little improved in Bangladesh's history as a nation. In this context, it may be interesting that informants regarded people's diffidence to the justice system as the first reason for lacking, partial, or sectoral civil participation: so, environmentalist organisations have more members than those campaigning for human rights due to the latter's juridical character.

²⁸² Shima (group 1), a migrant living on the pavement nearby Shah Bagh, DU Campus.

²⁸³ Popy (group 3), migrated to Dhaka 3 months before.

²⁸⁴ Shilpi (group 3), garment worker, recently settled in Dhaka with her family.

„City means buildings and congested streets“

Streets overfilled by public and private means of transport, rickshaws, beggars and pedestrians; chronic shortage of living places; densely populated neighbourhoods – in short, congestion in the built landscape and as consequence of population pressure, was a recurrent issue of the interviews²⁸⁵. Urbanising migrants, who addressed the topic comparatively more often than second+ generation urban dwellers, were indeed ready to accept it as something just pertaining to urbanisation: „Dhaka? Buildings and money²⁸⁶“; „Dhaka is much more dense and chaotic than the village, but this makes it interesting, it's a city and should be like this, don't you think?²⁸⁷“; „Dhaka is full of buildings, but empty of joy. It is very different than Rangamati, where we have green mountains instead of this very populated city with its heavy trafficked streets... but I guess it has to be like this, otherwise we would not come to search for jobs and better education here²⁸⁸“. Sometimes, the answers expressed indirectly the feeling of non-comfortability that migrants must feel when first approaching the new environment: „Well, I have to say that Gulshan and the Parliament Area are my favourites, they are less chaotic and loud, there is a little bit of green...²⁸⁹“; „In the very beginning I used to feel narrow, as if I were missing space, but I got used to it²⁹⁰“.

The quoted statements speak of tolerant rather than uncritical views of the city: traffic, lack or loss of open spaces as well as dirt were referred to as burdening problems by first generation and second+ generation urban dwellers alike²⁹¹. Indeed, the latter – though generally more used or resigned to traffic and congestion and thus less relevant for the topic treated in this paragraph –, showed more criticism, if not often consternation: „Our life has changed a lot in the last years. Each family used to live in an own apartment, now we make do with one room²⁹²“; „A real problem is that the city has become so crowded, it used to be normal to go out by rickshaw, whereas nowadays we depend on cars, and jams

²⁸⁵ In particular, 15% of interviewees described congestion as a clear problem for their life in Dhaka, which they generally mentioned among the city's disadvantages, whereas 8% expressed themselves in neutral terms.

²⁸⁶ Hakim (group 2), leader of a logistic team in Motijheel.

²⁸⁷ Pannu (group 1), flying fruit seller in New Market.

²⁸⁸ Pintu Chakma (group 3), young student living in the Buddhist Centre of Mirpur.

²⁸⁹ Mohammad (group 2), rickshaw wallah.

²⁹⁰ Lipi (group 4), living in Tejgaon.

²⁹¹ The statement by Nargis (group 6), who has lived in Dhaka for 25 years, may summarise the feeling of many dwellers of Dhaka: „It has changed much in the last years, becoming louder and noisy, full of traffic. There are too many schools and clinics, that's the cause of traffic. Privacy has gone lost through that, too. See, we used to have a beautiful sight from our windows, but they recently built a high-rise building beside our house“. It will be mentioned here that 9 first generation interviewees, spread from group 1 to group 5, declared to miss the village and prefer it despite the advantages of Dhaka.

²⁹² Parvin (group 3), living in Bonogram (Sutrapur /Old Dhaka).

make our lives difficult²⁹³. Similar statements revealed a still partial reflection on the implications of the introduction of „modern“ utility services and lifestyles on the part of Dhaka's better-off inhabitants.

The ammassment of people on Dhaka's overfilled streets, along with the extreme density of population in slums and industrial workers' settlements, but also in Old Dhaka and the outskirts in general, appeared to create a diffuse sensation of danger, expressed almost exclusively by female interviewees²⁹⁴. Although none had been victim of direct violence, they reported of spoken harassment on the street and were worried about robbers, a risk that was mentioned also by first generation male dwellers. As these answers stood in apparent contrast to the data on the degree of violence in Dhaka, which is comparatively low²⁹⁵, it is here suggested that the concerned respondents were strongly influenced by a culturally generated „genderisation“ of public space according to which outside space, and the congested urban space in special way, is „not made for women“²⁹⁶. Although women can factually be object of forms of violence in public space (with understandable consequences for their mobility) and it is undeniable that women rights are a particularly critical issue in Bangladeshi society²⁹⁷, it is important to acknowledge the role played by such conceptualisation, which could be be also brought in relationship with the *purdah*.

Concluding this paragraph, it should be noted that:

- city appeared to be naturally synonymous with high-rise buildings, concentration of many people in small space and lack of greenery – which could be also spoken of as expectations for a lower quality of life;
- urbanised dwellers, though convinced of Dhaka's privileged status within Bangladesh, were shown to be not as ready as migrants to accept the flip side of progress; this appeared to be especially true for better-off and Dhaka-born interviewees.

²⁹³ Nargis (group 6), living and working in Dhanmondi.

²⁹⁴ Only one male interview partner mentioned violence on the streets as a crucial problem endangering life of Dhaka's dwellers, though he explicitly referred to politically originated and organised violence, whereby his statement may have been affected by the exceptionally tense political period of the empirical research. In contrast to this, female interviewees from group 2 up to 6, urbanised and urbanising alike, mentioned this issue with a certain emphasis.

²⁹⁵ In recent years, micro-criminality and violence on Dhaka's streets have been sensibly damped down through the introduction of special justice corps (Rapid Action Battalion, RAB).

²⁹⁶ Cf. also Tasneem Chowdhury's statement on male and female spaces in rural settings above in this chapter.

²⁹⁷ Although sexual harassment against them does factually existing, hereby in especially dramatic extent at working places, recent studies have showed that domestic abuses, which often remains hidden, are a more recurrent form of violence against women. Various authors (2005): *Looking Afresh at Violence against Women and Girls Through an Exploration of the Political Economy of VAWG and Masculinity*; New Delhi; Nasreen Huq and S. Hassan (2002): *Review of Research Studies on Violence against Women in Bangladesh*; ASK (local NGO) (2000): *Violence against Women and the Legal System: A Bangladesh Study*.

Digression IV / „Dhaka is the city of the kuttis“

A significant fact for this study was that, in the interviews, „kutti“ appeared to be used as a synecdoche for all groups of original residents, i.e. in synonymous way to „dwellers of Old Dhaka“. In mid 18th century Dhaka, „kutti“ was the name of local labourers of tribal origin who were employed in the processing of paddy into rice²⁹⁸. According to historians, they arrived in the city after a great famine in 1769/70 and settled at its outskirts, then the area nearby the Dholai Khal. Eventually, „Kutti“ also became a language, a hybrid dialect or „jargon“ of Bangla derivation²⁹⁹, through the everyday communication between the rice huskers and their employers, rice exporters of Hindustani background. Today, Kutti-speaking inhabitants live mostly in Old Dhaka; although the educated class is increasingly abandoning the dialect even in everyday life, it remains the common language of a big portion of dwellers of the old town who use Bangla exclusively in official cases³⁰⁰. Local authors from different periods and disciplines have made quite clear distinctions between the communities of Old Dhaka dwellers, described inter alia as having strong ties through segregation of social, cultural and economic activities. Precisely, literature talks about language differences and social (marital) and geographical segregation between the kuttis, who still nowadays mostly belong to the lower-middle or middle income group³⁰¹, and the khusbas, who belong rather to the upper-middle income group. Especially the historian Syed Taifoor has treated the two as distinguished groups for mentality and everyday life; he explained that „kushbash“³⁰², meaning „carefree“ in ancient Persian, were a refined urban class that liked amenities and culture, whereas the kuttis had more rigid behavioural norms and observed religious rules very strictly. Since Dhaka's extraordinary growth, however, these distinctions have lost relevance in comparison to the

²⁹⁸ According to historian Sirajul Islam (*Dhaka Past Present Future*, page 83), the name derives from the Sanscrit word <kuttin>, smashing. For literature on the kuttis and other original inhabitants of Dhaka refer to Syed Muhammed Taifoor's *Glimpses of Old Dhaka* (1956) – one of the first books on Dhaka written by a local author and an influential work for many successors - as well as to Hafiza Khatun's *Dhakaiyas on the Move* (2003). Rice export became an important economic factor in East Bengal since mid 18th century. Dhaka-based Marwaris as well as upcountry traders imported the paddy from the interior and transformed Dhaka into a centre for the processing and distribution of rice. As the steady shift of zamindars (feudal landlords) to Dhaka necessitated many new houses, another typical employment of kuttis in history was in the construction sector.

²⁹⁹ As Syed M. Taifoor calls it in *Glimpses of Old Dhaka*, page 52. It is also referred that the Kutti is object of humour by other Bengalis who are supposed to have a more refined way of talking.

³⁰⁰ It should be mentioned that Old Dhaka's dwellers generally speak and understand Urdu as well. See Khatun (2003), p. 32.

³⁰¹ According to Hafiza Khatun, they work as „low class professionals like mason, shoe makers, tannery workers etc.“. Khatun 2003, page 30.

³⁰² These were descendants of the upcountry settlers who populated Dhaka in the pre-Mughal and Mughal periods (before the kuttis) and belonged to the ruling class. Also this group speaks its own language, a variation of Urdu that is defined by Hafiza Khatun „Dhakaiya Urdu“.

differences between Old and New Dhaka. Hereby, as some of the collected answers showed, the traditional characteristics of the singular groups - probably „mixed up“ by literature, media and popular sayings – can be found to be melt together under the name of „kutti“³⁰³. Both long-established inhabitants and recent settlers, living in Old Dhaka or not, relied on prejudices surrounding the kuttis. The most common regarded the kuttis' dress-code („they wear white shirt and white lungi“), mentality („they don't give enough importance to the education of their children“; „they are more conservative, although some of them are highly educated; they don't like modernity“; „they have joined families and work in the family business“) and way of life („their food is better“; „they are closed in their community“; „they like companionship, music and party“)³⁰⁴. A short review of literature on Old Dhaka's dwellers explained the popular perception of the kuttis, making at the same time clear what the interviewees' statements referred to³⁰⁵. In history books, they were described as „very religious by nature“ and actively committed to religious festivals – from Eid to the Muharram rally, to the pujas. A further typical attribute regarded their being „conservative by nature“ and „well networked for commercial and social purposes“³⁰⁶. Eventually, the kuttis' very late and still partial disclosure to socio-cultural modernisation (especially concerning school education) as well as to New Dhaka was mentioned.

Taking into consideration the respondents' answers as well as the consulted literature, it is here suggested that the kuttis' dominance over other groups like khusbas, but also the shankharis, in the mental representations concerning Old Dhaka dwellers is equally due historical and soci-cultural reasons. On one side, their historical participation in urban development – as construction workers as well as land owners – is thought of; on the other, their extroverted, collective celebrations may produce urban images and significances going beyond the old town's boundaries.

³⁰³ Interviews as well as the experts' statements gave certain evidence that, often, *kuttis* are thought of as the only actual „inhabitants by birth“ of whole Dhaka. This was expressed by the answers on the difference between recent settlers and people who were born in Dhaka, described as „the real Dhakaiyas“, who „speak another language or dialect“.

³⁰⁴ Among these, at least the aspect regarding a joyous way of life with frequent parties and music clearly should be ascribed to the *khusbas* and not to the *kuttis*, whereas the reference to a certain observance of traditions or marital segregation would apply to all long-dated dwellers of Old Dhaka.

³⁰⁵ Cf. especially Hafiza Khatun's work.

³⁰⁶ For example, a non-written law used to support marriages within the community as a means to strengthen social bonds - a tool of segregation typical in the Subcontinent. The eldest or most influential community members still consider it a responsibility to make sure that this happens, whereby marriages within different *mahallas* of Old Dhaka are also accepted. In her book, Hafiza Khatun depicts the still existing tradition to celebrate very colourful, expensive marriages that are not reserved to the relatives but shared with all community members. The latter participate in all moments of the ceremony, including buying presents in favour of the bride's father, who is expected – likewise in the Hindu dowry system - to gift the married daughter. Cf. Khatun (2003), page 34.

Conclusions

The interviews, and the discussions inspired by them, made clear that the city is actively perceived on the base of comparison – with the village or with other cities, in Bangladesh and abroad –, and represented on the base of corresponding values. Further on, the evaluation showed that Dhaka is as much fragmentarily experienced, lived, and perceived, as its dwellers are segregated. A vision of the City as a meeting point of diverse social actors, birthplace of democratic organisation or predestined setting of a unitary „public sphere“, like many sociologists have liked to see it, was strikingly not contemplated by the interviewed persons. These often wanted to explain their lineage and parents' (rural or urban) origin, before moving on to expose their ideas on the city itself: hereby, they were not merely „gaining time“ to reflect on an eccentric question, but expressed the idea that **bonding to a locality depends on emotional, affective and biographic reasons**. Only latter create a *space* out of *place*³⁰⁷ through a process of production of significance that is only secondarily affected by administrative definitions and material features of the place itself.

Some of the answers suggested the disappearance or decay of „urban“ representations. An elderly expert who digressed to describe the Dhaka of his youth provided an unmistakable explanation for this: in the 30s and 40s, he said, it was easy to go to someone else's house without disturbing the household's privacy, because courtyards and verandas ensured a semi-public space that was not too invasive for the family members, but was still apart from the street and foreign persons. The neighbourhoods were cohesive through the influence of elderly persons, who could give suggestions or even deliberate on community problems, but primarily through the organisation of community life (it disposed over a common ground for meetings, festivities etc.) and maintenance of common infrastructure like playgrounds and libraries. In other words, „urban life“ spanned three „public spaces“ or settings of public sphere: the cohesion of small groups in private homes; the informal community institution of the *tana*; as well as the prayer in the mosque or in the temple. The same can be expected to apply also for the next generation, but not any more for the grandchildren: since the 60s, the *tana* has disappeared and the rash construction process, making apartment buildings out of the private houses, altered the traditional everyday dynamics (it is easier to trespass the threshold of a veranda than that of an apartment-house). New have still to be found or are rather being created in form of segregated premises - private parties,

³⁰⁷ I refer back to Michel de Certeau's distinction of space and place. In the conclusion of the whole chapter on mental space, some further consequences of this conceptualisation are going to be drawn.

clubs, cafés and bars accessible only by payment and, often, on invitation. Nowadays' settlers, often unaware of the role public space plays in urban context, can not count on a clear urban public sphere giving certain rules and contemporarily inviting to involve and become part of it³⁰⁸.

Moreover, the answers revealed that Bangladeshis „believe“ in Dhaka out of a more or less desperate lack of alternatives; **the city could be left for another, if there were another**. Only for some of the respondents who have settled down in Dhaka and thus have a point of reference within it - hereby not only *Dhakaiyas*, but also former migrants who have built up their family in the city -, the city is „readable“. They recognise its language, are aware of its history, and, thanks to memories, see their own personal history intertwined with it. The process of urbanisation was more clearly, though more rarely, reflected on, on one side by mentioning Dhaka's role as a primate city - or, expressed in simple words, as „centre of everything“; and on the other by remembering its former size and how particular buildings, open spaces and fringes fell victim to construction and occupation, i.e. by trying to express the city's changes, but also those in the personal everyday life.

As such, **urbanisation was regarded as an ambivalent process**: on one side, it has destroyed environment and community feeling, on the other, it has given Dhaka a „modern“, „cosmopolitan“ flair. Such choice of terms actually reveals that urbanisation, which has accompanied the city since its declaration to capital of Bangladesh and „brought“ international embassies and investments in the until then underdeveloped provincial capital, is intrinsically tied to an idea of progress. Especially younger inhabitants and recent migrants, actually a respondents' majority, were inclined to take this relationship for granted. To this is related the second aim of the present chapter, i.e. to delineate eventual peculiarities in migrants' conceptualisations in comparison to those of second+ generation. Though recent migrants' actual „lack“ of a feeling of bonding, which naturally has a relevance for integration, involvement and participation in urban life, was confirmed by the survey, such was compensated by the so-called „rootedness to be“; in contrast, urbanised answerers often revealed a partial, more superficial involvement with urban questions. However, the undeniable differences in everyday practices between urbanising and urbanised interviewees were found to concern lifestyles and everyday routines, but not to constitute essential differences in their representations, insofar as they were strongly emotional in general.

³⁰⁸ Which does not contradict the general impression that migrants are adaptable, in certain extent even more adaptable than second+ generation urban dwellers, to the urban environment.

A further aim of this chapter was to find out eventual „urban legends“. While the only to be found regarded the *kuttis* presented in the antecedent digression³⁰⁹, it can be spoken of a very strong „conviction“, apparently confirmed by the facts for most interviewees', regarding Dhaka, or the city, as synonymous with jobs, money, and chances. With reference to Weber's classical equation of city and market place, it should be noted that the **employment market is factually a primary feature of Dhaka as a capital, industrial and commercial city**, and it is obvious to think that it is therefore chosen as a living place. Though this should be regarded with due distance and in its due relationship to other factors, the presence of a „market“ with its consequent concentration of work and earning sources can in fact explain the development of cities itself, whereby not primarily the City, but urbanisation, is related to the market. Inequality, for example of accessibility to services, but also of human rights, which could have been linked to „negative“ representations of the city as cohort of injustice – an indeed very popular „myth“ regarding cities up to postmodern times -, was very seldom mentioned in the interviews' context. This could be put in relationship with Bangladesh's overall socio-politic situation, characterised by severe lacks in the field of human rights³¹⁰, along with an only partial awareness of democratic rights on the part of its population.

³⁰⁹ Rather than for a particularly high number of mentions (10% of the asked people, to which the comments of various experts could be added), the popular belief around the *kuttis* was interesting because it was shared by members of all social groups, with exception of the interviewees of group 1 and 2, who did not mention the *kuttis* at all, and among whom only one, significantly an elderly inhabitant of Shakhari Bazaar as well as a *Dhakaiya*, actually made a distinction between Old and New Dhaka.

³¹⁰ UN-Watch (2007): http://www.unwatch.org/atf/cf/%7B6DEB65DA-BE5B-4CAE-8056-8BF0BEDF4D17%7D/DAWN_OF_A_NEW_ERA_HRC%20REPORT_FINAL.PDF.

2.2.2. Representations of space

In the precedent pages, the respondents' views on the City were expanded upon and were shown to depend on the comparison of environments and lifestyles in rural and urban contexts: by showing that mental representations, which according to Lefebvre „dominate“ the other fields, emerge from the individuals' consideration of physical facts as well as of experiences from the social practice, this also confirmed the interlaced action of physical, social and mental field. In this paragraph, with the shift of attention from City to space, Dhaka's different areas come to the fore, as the respondents were asked to „attribute“ specific representations to specific urban spaces. Hereby, it was especially surveyed whether particular architectural or physical features, as well as historical, cultural, personal experiences, desires or aspirations play a role for such representations. Answering these questions means revealing on one side how mental representations of space are created in general, on the other, which “ideologies” are at present influent for Dhaka's dwellers.

While a rural or urban origin of the respondent could be determinant for the answer to questions of the precedent interview block, in the present one differences of education, gender, age or income assumed a rather decisive role, although the education level was stated to be the most important discriminant. It was, indeed, a predictable result, considering that the “mental field” by definition deals with *learnt* conceptualisations. Before delving into the evaluation, here a review of the concerned questions:

- Where would you go if you wanted to pray? Are there other religious spaces, in Dhaka, where you can worship? Is space particularly “holy”, to you, in some parts of Dhaka?
- Is there a place, building, or neighbourhood, in Dhaka, that in your opinion represents Bangladesh as a whole? Which is Dhaka's most characteristic location for you? And which is its most characteristic public celebration? Do you take part in any of these, where are they typically organised?
- At which location or building, in Dhaka, do you think, is Bangladesh's political power concentrated? How do you notice or feel it?
- Where would you go if you wanted to get informed and discuss about political and social events you care about?
- Where do you think that political processions or social demonstrations take place in Dhaka? If you have ever taken, or at present take part, where do they start and end? With whom do you go there?

Similarly to the former analytical phase, the here concerned evaluation consisted of a first comparison of the singular answers³¹¹, through which “domains” could be recognised, and in assembling the diverse spatial conceptualisations into the general insights that follow („On religiously-rooted representations of space“, „On cultural representations“, „On representations of political power“, „Spaces for communication, information, opinion making” and “Spaces for expression and demonstration of public opinion”).

On religiously-rooted representations of space

“A city of 52 mosques and 53 lanes³¹²”: during the talks with experts, this saying about Dhaka was repeatedly heard; the reasons hereby were various, as some intended to stress a proverbial religious fervour, others to praise Old Dhaka's valuable architectural heritage, whereas some just mentioned it while describing the phases of the city's development. Here, the phrase is being used in again another sense, that is to introduce some questions on religious space and practices in today's Dhaka, whose society was initially expected to be “marked” by religion. Such an expectation derived first of all from the consideration that religion is often not separable from, but actually congruent with, culture as a carrier of “ideologies” in Lefebvre's sense³¹³. Also the tragic and not yet forgotten socio-political events that destroyed a secular (though never strainless) bi-religiosity in the course of the 20th century could provide the base for a vibrant *discours* on religious identity. At an everyday life level, furthermore, it was observed that all dwellers have at least a notion of ritual practices of different religions, which on their part affect everyday life: from the appropriation of urban spaces and consequent limitation of mobility during the processions of the *pujas*, to the ritual sacrifice of goats and cows on public roads in occasion of *Eid Korbani*.

It was in precedence illustrated how, since antiquity, human beings felt the necessity to

³¹¹ In this paragraph, the totality of respondents is not 100, but 99, because the answers given by an interviewed commuter who was on visit in Dhaka, lacking determinant experiences as well as knowledge of urban space and not having part in the city's everyday life practices, could not be regarded as valid. The process through which the answers were codified can be observed on the basis of the table reproduced in the appendix.

³¹² Popular saying, originally referring to Pre-Mughal Dhaka, which was said to contain „52 bazaars and 53 lanes“ within one square mile (N. Islam, 2005, p. 6). According to a typical feature of ancient Muslim cities, the bazaar generally coincided with the area occupied by a mosque; already in 18th century Dhaka, a special form of mosque developed to provide for the neighbourhood's shopping necessities in the concentrated and dense town: in a double storied building, the ground floor offered space to shops, while the first floor was occupied by the mosque.

³¹³ For example, two of the four-party coalition that held the majority until October 2006, *Jamaat-e-Islami* and *Islami Oikya Jote*, represent and advocate religious values as a foundation of social life; during the period of the field research, also the opposition, led by Awami League, was in search of a stronger linkage to parties with a clear religious orientation.

„transpose“ religious concepts and feelings into space and gave them form in impressive architectural works; it was also shown that religious representations affected not only architecture, but also urban design and social practice. While mentioned „feelings“, approached by means of participant observation of social - and in this context especially ritual - practice(s), are going to be described in the next chapter, here particular conceptions of sacred space, religious representations, but also norms and notions regarding rituals will be focused on. The interviews aimed at surveying which spaces are regarded as sacred and whether those corresponding to other confessions are hereby considered; with reminiscence of the ritual's capacity to “transform” space described above, it also questioned whether “sacredness”, for the interviewees, is confined in formal, apposite premises like mosques, temples, shrines, etc., or if everyday places can also become holy on particular occasions³¹⁴. In order to start the conversation, the interview partners were asked whether they could mention a place which they regarded as sacred or as particularly important for their religious life; however, the surprising answer to this question was often negative or very vague, as more than one third of the respondents could not think of any space, did not regard such aspect as relevant in their life and often admitted that they did not pray³¹⁵. So how can this striking contradiction be explained?

A first possibility was to consider the religious belief of the concerned answerers, which showed that these were exclusively Muslims³¹⁶: it hence appeared decisive that Muslim women lack the actual possibility to refer to the mosque as a religious space, since the broad majority of Dhaka's mosques architecturally does not meet the requirement of Islam to separate women and men during the prayer, and therefore women's access is „automatically“ excluded. In fact, while almost three quarters of male respondents immediately identified in the mosque their „religious space“, this was the case of only one in ten Muslim women³¹⁷, who admitted: „there are only two or three mosques with a space for women in Dhaka, so we pray from home”; “I pray at home, our teachers taught us how

³¹⁴ The analysis was led also against the background of segregation, which in Dhaka *can* have religious reasons, as shown by the clear concentration of Hindus in Old Dhaka or the fame of respectively Monipuri Para as quarter for the Christians and Bashabo as the one where Buddhists live.

³¹⁵ In particular, 34/99 respondents, with a clear concentration in groups 1, 2 and 3, but also 6 (3/9), against 52 who mentioned physical spaces like mosques (43 references), temples (8 references), churches (6 references) and shrines (*mazars*, 8 references). It should be noted that, after a negative answer, the respondents were encouraged to think about it but nonetheless only in rare cases arrived to mention any concrete space, whereas a comparatively often reply consisted in mentioning those practices linked to celebration days, for example cooking special food, buying presents and visiting relatives on the *Eid* days, which often could not be fulfilled due to lack of financial means.

³¹⁶ As a reminder: the total number of Muslim respondents was 87, while 6 were Hindus, 4 Christians, 1 Buddhist and one was not affiliated with any formalised belief.

³¹⁷ In particular, 4 of 38 women and 36 of 49 men. Among the four female respondents only one also goes to the mosque. However, two interviewed women said to be members of *tablik* groups (cf. explanation in paragraph 2.1.1.).

to do that from home since our childhood. Women don't go to the mosque in Bangladesh"; "I have never gone to a mosque in my life, I am religious but I don't feel the necessity to go to a mosque as a woman. For us there is no prescription to pray in the mosque, because it is just better to stay home, where there is enough to do, in particular with children. I think religion also has to be practical sometimes".

It could be thus stated that the access to, and use of, concrete, physical space in everyday life practice is factually a precondition for the mental representation of the same³¹⁸. Yet, this relationship is two-directional, in the sense that also the contrary was confirmed by the respondents' statements, especially by those of the „excluded“ Muslim females: for more than one of five interviewees³¹⁹, space can become, or precisely be „made“, sacred through prayer and religious thoughts, independently from physical premises. In order to understand this, it is necessary to bring to mind one of the five essential prescriptions of Islam, the prayer, that has to be performed five times a day. As in other Muslim countries, in Dhaka the believers are called to prayer by the muezzin's ritual verses, whose voice is broadcast from the mosques at the appropriate time and fills the air with religious meaning. Shall these repeated calls, along with the groups of believers correspondingly heading towards the mosques, be compared to a *routine*, are they components and producers of physical space, or is not a „ideology“, a producer of representations with a specific effect on (mental) space, recognisable herein? From the point of view of a believer, the answer must lie in the second suggested interpretation; but it is also valid for a foreigner arriving in Dhaka (and likewise in any other city with Muslim predominance) from a Western country, because the ritual, lost in Western everyday practice and therefore particularly striking for outsiders, brings to light what Lefebvre intended by the „dominance of ideology [of mental space] over physical and social practice“.

Religion affects, or dominates, space insofar as it causes specific changes in its representation and use; and it is this experiencing of religion translated into *life*, of religious values that temporarily overcome everyday practice, that swamps Westerners arriving in Eastern cities. The so-called „change“ of representation and use of everyday life space often succeeds in the familiar space of the home, but the answers showed that also the self, as well as the working place or school can be „transformed“ by a ritual: “if I wish, I can pray anywhere, but I mostly do that in my room”³²⁰; “I generally don't have time to

³¹⁸ A much higher proportion of Muslim women (37% or 14/38) could not think of any space, while the proportion among the male answerers was much lower (18% or 9/49).

³¹⁹ Precisely, 23/99, whereby 17 were female Muslim respondents and one more woman of Christian religion; four further Muslim males said respectively to pray in oneself, at office and at home, while the remaining person was a Hindu male.

³²⁰ Nasima, female lawyer, group 4.

pray, but when some trouble comes, then I sit down in my home, here in front of the bed, for a prayer”³²¹; „I do my prayer twice a day, in the garment factory they have provided a place for the prayer of the workers”³²²; “I do not pray at special times or occasions, and I can pray anytime and in any place, I don’t have to go to the temple. I go there for festivities, though. Purity is in everybody if his or her mind is pure. Even this awful place is holy if I look at it with a good perspective and mind”³²³; “I pray 5 times a day, but I only go once a week, on Friday, to the mosque nearby with my son; otherwise I use the space of my office”³²⁴. The underlying conception of a ritually transformable, temporally flexible space is common to Hinduism as well: beyond the public celebrations, Hindu believers can also worship the divinities on a private scale, generally at a shrine installed within the home³²⁵. As with the Muslim prayer, this form of individual worshipping is practiced at given times (generally before taking food), thus ritually.

One of the questions that this part of the survey aimed at answering was whether a religious „syncretism“ for a society that has been long bi-religious could be talked of. On the contrary, very few respondents mentioned religious spaces or practices that are not immediately linked to their own confession³²⁶. A reflection on Islam and Hinduism allows the suggestion that a relevant barrier may be represented by the „exclusive“ character of mosques (accessible only to Muslims) and of Muslim rituals like the fasting or the sacrifice of cows. In the contrary, the Hindu temples and rituals are open for believers of other religions, and the *pujas*, collective by nature, have a strong impact on public space: yet, like churches and Buddhist temples, they were looked at as exotic features of clearly „other“ beliefs rather than as integrative or parallel part of religious or spiritual life. The statements of two interviewees would simply point out: „By religious space I think of Ram Krishna Mission near Motijheel, Dhakeshwary Temple - I love being in European cathedrals, the wide spaces... I don’t know if there is anything like that in Dhaka, maybe

³²¹ Popy, female GROUP 4-ward, group 3.

³²² Jui, female garment worker, group 2.

³²³ Subrata, male Hindu student, group 4.

³²⁴ Fayzal, male developer, group 6.

³²⁵ One Hindu *puja* was made object of participant observation, because these temporal transformations of space, universally accessible and „invasive“ of urban space, were regarded as phenomena of the social field.

³²⁶ It was the case in 13 interviews, whereby it could be noticed that only Muslim (and the foreign) respondents mentioned spaces and practices which did not characterise the own religion – especially the Hindu *pujas* and *kirton*, while the two references to the church have rather geographical reasons, as both respondents lived in Tejgaon, where Dhaka’s biggest church is located. The apparent limited interest for different religious spaces and practices on the part of respondents with other beliefs could be explained by their higher segregation or status of „minority“ in society, but also by the tiny sample of interviewees from other religious groups. Concluding, a case for itself should be Lalom’s mystic philosophy (shortly illustrated in the introducing paragraph on mental representations), which for three young professionals represented an important alternative to religious practices, whereby in one case this interest could be explained by the fact that the respondent was original from the same city as the poet.

the mosque near BRAC has this kind of wide space... - and the Mirpur shrine: I like it because their celebrations are very exciting”; “Except the mosque, I think of the High Court *Mazar*, I go there to watch people, and for the same reason I also go to the *pujas*”.

A special and maybe single case of „syncretism“, or at least of cross-religious space, could be the *mazars*. The existence and meaning of these spaces - shrines generally erected over the graveyard of a saint and open to worshippers of all religions - was revealed to the author by the interviewees, who by and then mentioned some of the most famous ones by their location - „High Court“ and „Mirpur“ *Mazar* - rather than their official names. A noticeable feature of these interviewees was their heterogeneity³²⁷: from first-generation van pullers that admitted to „like“ to go there once in a year, to *Dhakayas* who only had an abstract notion of them, from diplomats who enjoyed the lively and intriguing functions at nights to businessmen who hope to ensure the profitability of their affairs through generous alms and to students mocking the *mazar* worshippers as ridiculous and superstitious, etc. Precisely this heterogeneity indicated that the *mazars* could be not only cross-religious, but across-the-board spaces.

For one in ten respondents, religion contributes spaces and occasions for gathering, socialising and congregating, thus has a social function beside, or even prior to, the religious one: „I go to the mosque for the prayer every day, which is also good to get information on the neighbourhood activities: since I have engaged myself for the night security service in our neighbourhood, it is important to be in touch”³²⁸; “Well, I go to the mosque just once a year, for *Eid* [*Korbanī*]; after the prayer, I meet the friends from my neighbourhood: for some of us it is actually the only chance to come together in a year, as we all work and otherwise don't find the time! We make *adda*³²⁹ nearby the mosque and thus get updated about what happened during the last year”³³⁰. An important aspect hereby seems to be the political congregation: “I always spend some time at the mosque and talk with the other men about the last news, at my age I am not active any more, my experience is actually limited within Bhashantek and thus talking with younger males gives me ideas and information. For example, though I am not politically active, I know about political activities through the mosque talks, without having to go to the party office³³¹; “I generally do not pray, but during *Eid*, with my political group, we generally arrange a concert in which we are the performers, we are collecting money from our circle of friends and some

³²⁷ In total nine respondents, among whom three female and six male.

³²⁸ Shahabuddin, decorator living in Rampura.

³²⁹ The term „*adda*“ describes a very beloved socialising activity in Bangladesh, meaning the free discussing on various topics.

³³⁰ Arif, Sutrapur (Old Dhaka).

³³¹ Kafiluddin, met in Bhashantek.

from local people”³³²; “I seldom go to mosque, but if I go, I choose the one in the Campus because there are many professors and *VIPs* and we can talk and discuss about politics after the prayer”³³³. In particular for the Hindu respondents, celebrations like *pujas* and *kirton*³³⁴ appeared to have a strong congregational and „social“ value that possibly dwarfs the religious aspect: „I go to the temple in the morning, but I am also a member of the *puja committee* – of course, at my age, I am not taking part in the *pujas*, which are for the youth, but it's important that also elderly people contribute to the organisation”³³⁵; “Siddeswari Temple is our meeting place also during *Eid*, you should understand it's a place of the heart for us. Me and my friends spend the whole night there, and also my family, making music and gossiping, sometimes dancing”³³⁶; “I don't pray, but I join the *pujas*, which, for me, is rather tourism and a reunion occasion with childhood and study friends from my original neighbourhood”³³⁷. In conclusion:

- the role of religious representations for the respondents is, on one side, strongly linked to social practices like the prayer in the mosque and collective events; on the other, especially for female interviewees that are often excluded from social practices, religious belief can „affect“ or „transform“ physical space by an individual act; in both cases, these representations are related to *time*;
- despite its exclusiveness, the *mosque* was recognised to be a reference point not only insofar as it was the most mentioned religious space for those who have access to it (Muslim males), but for its strong symbolic appeal that, rather than architecturally, takes form „atmospherically“, when the ritual call to the prayer is broadcast in the cityscape and universally received - also by those excluded from the prayer³³⁸;
- contrary to the expected vibrant exchange between religious traditions, little interpenetration was found within the representations of Muslim and Hindu respondents. This could be due to the circumstances by which at first East Bengal (with the Partition of India), then Bangladesh (during and after the Liberation War), oppressed and „rejected“ the Hindu community, as well as to a reciproque mistrust - if not resentment - subliminally fostered since then.

³³² Saiful, met in Tejgaon, is also an active supporter of BNP.

³³³ Shariar, lives in DU-Campus.

³³⁴ *Kirton* is a propitious festival taking place every winter for one week, during which ritual and traditional music is played in the bazaars' streets as well as in the local *mundir* (temple). Each bazaar invites singularly the artists, paying from a collective fund.

³³⁵ Horidas, Shankari Bazaar.

³³⁶ Subrata, living in Tikatoli (Old Dhaka).

³³⁷ Meghna, born in Laki Bazaar, now living in Mirpur.

³³⁸ It was for example observed that women commuting in open spaces when the ritual call begins generally cover their head in sign of respect.

On cultural representations

Amar sonar Bangla
Ami tomay bhalobashi,
Cirodin tomar akash, tomar batash, amar prane
O ma, amar prane, bajay basi.
Sonar Bangla, Ami tomay bhalobasi.
O ma, Fagune tor amer bone ghrane pagol kore, mori hay, hay re
O ma, Fagune tor amer bone ghrane pagol kore,
O ma, aghrane tor bhora khete ki dekhechhi ami ki dekhechhi modhur hashi
Sonar Bangla ami tomay bhalo bashi, ki shobha, ki chhaya go ki sneho,
ki maya go ki achol bichhayecho
boter mule, nodir kule kule.
Ma, tor mukher bani amar kane lage sudhar moto,
Mori hay, hay re, ma tor mukher bani amar kane lage sudhar moto.
Ma tor bodonkhani molin hole, o ma, ami noyonjole bhashi.
*Sonar Bangla, Ami tomay bhalobasi.*³³⁹

In Western contexts it is almost universally accepted that cities “build identity”. The notion is clearly related to the fact that urban space constitutes the stage of urban *culture*³⁴⁰, i.e. of lifestyles and attitudes as portrayed in songs, novels and films, as well as of (government-, administration-, welfare-, etc.) institutions and symbols, that have strong potential for identification. After Lefebvre's analysis it should be clear that, behind specific architecture in its materiality and design, and behind social practices like festivals and events, the coexistence of human beings in urban settlements is based upon the sharing of knowledge (or ideology), transposed onto an everyday life level in form of cultural values. Hence, it is here asked which values - deriving from knowledge, and defining identity - are shared by Dhaka's dwellers. Moreover, it will be aimed at recognising which material features and personal experiences the form the representations, and whether some urban areas are particularly concerned by this process.

Having mentioned that Bangladesh's history as an independent country is very recent, the own language, Bangla, may represent the only “positive” factor of cultural identification for contemporary Bangladeshis³⁴¹. Other attempts to define an own culture appeared as

³³⁹ Transcription of Bangladesh's national hymn, Rabindranath Tagore's lyric „*Amar Sonar Bangla*“ [Engl. „*My Bengal of Gold*“, complete translation: „My Bengal of gold, I love you / Forever your skies, your air set my heart in tune / as if it were a flute / In Spring, Oh mother mine, the fragrance from / your mango-groves makes me wild with joy, / Ah, what a thrill! / In Autumn, Oh mother mine, / in the full-blossomed paddy fields, / I have seen spread all over sweet smiles! / Ah, what a beauty, what shades, what an affection / and what a tenderness! / What a quiet have you spread at the feet of / banyan trees and along the banks of rivers! / Oh mother mine, words from your lips are like / Nectar to my ears! / Ah, what a thrill! / If sadness, Oh mother mine, casts a gloom on your face / my eyes are filled with tears!“].

³⁴⁰ Lefebvre did not delve into the concept of culture, but in his view, space (and city) overcomes the classic contrast between nature and culture and rather constitutes a „second nature“: „If it is to be carried through to the end [...] this gigantic task now calls for the immediate production or creation of something other than nature: a second, different or new nature, so to speak“ (PS, p.109).

³⁴¹ At least two generations of East-Pakistanis have fought for their right to the mother language. In 1952, the

“negative”: for example, Bangladesh is *not* the Indian Bengal, Bangladeshis are *not* West-Bengalis (but possibly are the only Bengalis) and Dhaka is *not* Kolkata³⁴². Against this background, it could be even the case that a cultural representation by means of, or within, urban space actually missing. However, considering Dhaka's status as primate city not only in economic, but also in cultural terms, this survey assumed that a relevant part of Bangladesh's process of cultural representation should be presently concentrated in the capital city. Hence, asking about spaces that “represent” Bangladesh was also a way to find out at which stage the “taking shape” of national and cultural identity is at present. To avoid over-interpretations, the respondents were also asked to comment on specific representative areas and buildings (Old Dhaka, the Buriganga, the Parliament...) as well as on public celebrations, expected to be strongly related to “cultural property” - religious, national, cultural (and sub-cultural) or political identity.

The high number of both interviewees who could neither conceive of spaces “representing” Bangladesh, nor took part in any of the public celebrations organised on national holidays, confirmed the expectation of a “work in progress” as far as the production of identity is concerned³⁴³. Respondents from all income groups had difficulty to recognising such an urban space, whereby those with very low or very high education levels were particularly challenged by the question³⁴⁴. Education, it is hence suggested, is factually a “negative” determinant - the formulation of representations requires a certain capacity to think in

repeated trial, by then Pakistan's government sitting in Karachi, to impose Urdu as unique national language also in the Bangla-speaking East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh) provoked an outburst among the students of Dhaka University and Dhaka Medical College, who protested in a procession in the Dhaka University Campus and were brutally repressed and killed by the police. As a consequence, the unrest which spread throughout the country, ended with Bengali being recognised as national language by the government. This first movement is believed to have created the premises for the independence movement, which almost 20 years later, in 1971, led to the declaration of Bangladesh with again huge costs in human lives. While Shahid Minar in Dhaka University Campus commemorates the struggles of the language movement, the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial in the north-west of Dhaka reminds of the students and intellectuals who tragically fell in the first phases of the Liberation War.

³⁴² Hereby, both Indian province and city are looked at with a mixture of pride in their own independence on one side and nostalgia and admiration on the other. Nostalgia could be stated among those Bangladeshis who have a part of their family in India, and especially Hindu Bangladeshis, who live as a minority in Bangladesh; admiration was at times noticed in the context of statements on India's overall economic progress, but especially among educated dwellers of Dhaka, who admired Kolkata's more lively cultural life and urban development.

³⁴³ Respectively 37% and 32%, whereby the two aspects often coincided. Female answerers were slightly more uncertain than males about urban spaces (45% could not answer against 32%), but they were more clearly more excluded from public celebrations: less than one of four among total female respondents (against 39% of the men) said to take part in public events, whereby better income and education corresponded with higher attendance, which – also considering that the men's attendance was not in direct relationship with their economic situation - can be regarded as a symptom of female segregation. Besides problems of affordability and segregation, the taking part in public celebrations is hampered by „law and order“ factors: for example, the fear of terrorist attacks (bombing and other forms of violence mainly with political background) - which, in fact, were numerous in the course of the last years – has become a strong constraint, but also harassment of women in the congested public spaces was a strongly feared factor that male as well as female respondents mentioned.

³⁴⁴ 20 of the 37 respondents had no or only primary education, 10 had a university degree.

abstract way, which requests a certain learning process, generally at school; if this is lacking, the representations will also be negatively affected. The concentration of negative answers at the other end of the interviewee spectrum poses the question differently. A solution should be searched for within the concerned respondents' individual statements: these were based on a comparatively good knowledge of the city's topography (for example due to high mobility) and were in general rich in comments both from a socio-historical and personal³⁴⁵ point of view. Accordingly, it was not out of a lack of representations, but due to the contrariness of coexisting "layers" of Dhaka's topography on one side, of rational as well as emotional factors determining the individual attitude toward it on the other, that the respondents could not find an adequate answer. Sociologically, it would be possible to argue that illiterate and socially weaker as well as privileged urban dwellers are, for obviously different reasons, more often segregated and therefore may lack the base of everyday life practice which allows a spontaneous answer; the remaining respondents, who gave individual and personal answers, would then be able to relate to urban space on the base of a lived everyday life and thanks to the capacity to interpret and formulate representations of space.

The second most common type of answers³⁴⁶ consisted of mentions of spaces that are typically "natural", like Hazaribagh with its ditches losing themselves in rice and grass fields along the banks of the Buriganga, or the similarly watery outskirts of Savar or Asulja, as well as newly urbanised areas in which small portions of vegetation and water bodies have survived the construction momentum, and also the zoological and botanical gardens. Though apparently "anti-urban", these answers were regarded as a very important mirror of the respondents' representations of Bangladesh and of their aspirations regarding urban space. In fact, for some of them it was difficult to recognise any sign of "their" Bangladesh in the built up cityscape, whereby the underlying conception well reflected the strong feeling of bonding and identification with the village stated also in previous paragraph. Some of the answers are presented here: "The Bengal which used to be called *sonar bangla* is not golden anymore – it has gone with the British, the Pakistani and then the factories"³⁴⁷; "You should see Bosila area, it's just beside Mohammadpur, there is a medical college called Shikder medical college, and beside it a pond - me and my friends go there every week"³⁴⁸; "I think of Savar and Coach Barah [beyond the Buriganga], these

³⁴⁵ For example, insofar as many among the concerned respondents could put their own linkage to the city in a relation with a life abroad, which determined a certain distance in the judging.

³⁴⁶ 18% of the respondents, spread over group 1-5.

³⁴⁷ Amir Ali, living in Dhaka for more than 50 years. The „Golden Bengal“ of traditional descriptions owed its name to its landscape, characterised by wide extensions of jute fields, which, when the crops are mature, resembled gold.

³⁴⁸ Mithu Mia, van puller, living in Dhaka for 20 years.

are places where you can actually get an idea of Bangladesh, rather than Dhaka”³⁴⁹; “Bangladesh means paddy field and water bodies, no, that’s totally absent here”³⁵⁰; “Asulja. Now in Dhaka it is impossible to find anything like Bangladesh. The whole country, and formerly also Dhaka used to be like Asulja, not too long ago...”³⁵¹; “It’s Mohammadpur, at least there are some trees, the other areas of Dhaka City seem to me desert without trees”³⁵². Dhaka-born and immigrated dwellers in the same proportion acknowledged Bangladesh’s “greenness” as the main feature of its identity and looked for corresponding spaces in the mixed urban space of Dhaka³⁵³.

At the third and fourth place, Bangladesh’s fight for Independence and related “becoming-a-nation” as well as the acknowledgement of an own cultural property were confirmed to have a certain relevance for identity³⁵⁴. The distinction is important because it implies different attitudes and representation types. National monuments³⁵⁵ and *Sher-e-Bangla Nagar* (the Parliament) depend on public intervention (the process is hereby “top-down”), meaning also the political intentionality of a State that expresses and fosters national identity through them. In contrast, respondents who primarily mentioned Dhaka University Campus and Shahid Minar, Ramna Park or Dhanmondi appeared to seek and intend a cultural and collective identity (so, it could be spoken of a “bottom-up” perspective)³⁵⁶. A second distinction will be made between commemorative spaces, or *spaces of remembrance*, or spaces that have an “aura” due to historical events that took there place or are commemorative of historical circumstances - for example, the memorials to the victims of the Liberation War -, and *spaces of social practice*, i.e. urban spaces that attract and allow social practice due to peculiar facilities and characteristics, or imply an intention to foster identity like the National Museum, built in 1983 thanks to the commitment of a civil society group. The “model” showed on next page would then take shape:

³⁴⁹ Pannu, fruit seller living in Dhaka for 27 years.

³⁵⁰ Shahana, lawyer working for the Government, lived in Dhaka for 20 years.

³⁵¹ Salahuddin, Ministry secretary, born in Dhaka.

³⁵² Sagor, student, born in Dhaka.

³⁵³ 15% among Dhaka-born and 20% among first-generation dwellers. Hereby, recently immigrated respondents found this aspect far less relevant than respondents that have lived in the city over a longer time.

³⁵⁴ Respectively 14% and 11% of total respondents, hereby from all 6 groups and education levels. *Sher-e-Bangla Nagar*, i.e. the Government Quarter designed by Louis Kahn, was mentioned particularly often as outstanding representative and symbolic urban space.

³⁵⁵ Two male respondents also mentioned the Cantonment.

³⁵⁶ Also these are nonetheless products of knowledge and depend on ideologies, for example: Shahid Minar’s specific architecture and design is highly symbolic (and repeated in smaller versions all over Bangladesh, generally in proximity of schools or public buildings) and immediately recognisable to every Bangladeshi.

	STRESS ON NATIONAL IDENTITY	STRESS ON CULTURAL IDENTITY
Spaces of remembrance	National Martyrs' and Martyred Intellectuals Memorials in Savar and Mirpur	Shahid Minar, DU Campus
Spaces of social practice	<i>Sher-e-Bangla-Nagar</i> , National Museum	Ramna Park, Dhanmondi

Fig. 10: Schematic representation of some urban spaces and their different meaning for cultural identity.

In fact, the same spaces, with the exception of the Parliament and the National Museum, are also the locations of public events during national holidays - Victory Day, Language Day, Women's Day, Independence Day, or *Boishak*³⁵⁷. Their respective identity affects, indeed, the different types of celebration: in commemorative spaces, official rituals take place, while in the mentioned spaces of social practice different cultural programmes are performed. Different “types” of celebration in turn attract different types of public, for example, none among the interviewed female dwellers made mention of the army parades and marches taking place in the Cantonment during Victory and Independence Day, but only women took part in Women's Day. Furthermore, proportionally more male than female respondents appeared to visit the national memorials, which could be explained by the difficult reachability of these monuments, laid in peripheral zones of Dhaka, but also by the minor participation of women in political life.

The overall preference for spaces which emanate cultural identity, stated in the answers of male and female respondents, seems to be due to the cultural programmes organised within the Campus and along Dhanmondi Lake on Language, Victory, Independence and New Year Day, as much as to the popularity of the Bengali New Year as a peculiar Bengal celebration, and to the symbolic power of Shahid Minar: “Well my favourite is Shahid minar, I love street drama, and I always watch the dramas organised in these day at Shahid Minar or near Dhanmondi Lake”; “I do not join any national holiday because the present political and social situation make it not safe to, but I always join Bangla New Year, in our tradition women wear white and red sari and we all go to Ramna Park”; “*Pohela Boishak* is very important, we always join there with the entire family - it's my heritage as Bengali. And I go to Shahid Minar for Language Day and Victory Day of course, it is a duty - but I

³⁵⁷ Respectively, Victory Day (16th December) commemorates the surrender of Pakistan's Army to the joined forces of Bangladesh and India in 1971; Language Day (21st February) commemorates Bengal peoples' struggles for the right to speak Bangla language against the imposition of Urdu, in 1952; Independence Day (26th March) commemorates the declaration of independence which officially gave birth to Bangladesh as a nation in 1971; and at last the Bengal New Year, celebrated on 14th of April.

do not bring my wife or the children”; “I like to attend these functions, on 21st February we go to offer flowers at Shahid Minar in the morning and attend the cultural programme taking place there during the whole day”.

According to age, topographical knowledge, living area and everyday life practices, the respondents also gave varied answers that revealed a transformation of cultural values going on in present day Bangladesh: comparatively young interviewees, for example, thought of leisure time facilities like *Fantasy Kingdom*, *Shishu Park*, but also the recently opened shopping centre *Boshundara City* [Engl. “*City of Beauty*”] or the “westernised” Gulshan with its restaurants, shopping centres and boutiques³⁵⁸, whereas respondents whose everyday life is centred in Old Dhaka referred to the historical importance of this area and indicated its ancient monuments, like *Lal Bagh* or *Ahsan Manjil*, for their strong identity³⁵⁹. The lively production centre of Motijheel, with *Sappla Chottor*, the coming and going of businessmen and its buildings representing two different generations of economic growth was mentioned by other interviewees, mainly working in the same area³⁶⁰.

At last, detached observers of the city's developments, mainly having a wide knowledge of its different parts, indicated spaces peculiarly characterised by transition and chaos, like the riverine port and the banks of the Buriganga, the New Market or bus stations, to give expression to the also negative implications of said developments³⁶¹.

In conclusion:

- Dhaka, as capital city, reflects in particular way past social movements that affect and form cultural identity, and is at the same time particularly receptive to new influences; struggles and changes materialising in contradictory, heterogeneous architectural features and urban spaces make it difficult to find one main identity within too many contradictions;
- while many dwellers still conceive of Bangladesh's and their own identity as rural, a future “urban” identity based on recent history and urban spaces of social practice can be said to be growing around *Shahid Minar*, University Campus, Dhanmondi, and probably increasingly in leisure and commercial areas.

³⁵⁸ Seven interviewees from group 2, 3 4 and 5, with an average age of 24 years.

³⁵⁹ Seven interviewees from group 3-6; two were students at schools located in Old Dhaka and three were *Dhakaiyas*. *Lal Bagh*, or Red Fort, was built in 1678 by the Mughal prince Mohammed Azam along the Buriganga, then flowing slightly more northerly than nowadays, and its still existing tree main buildings are a touristic attraction of Old Dhaka; *Ahsan Manjil*, also called Pink Palace, used to be the residence of a rich landowners' family, the Nawabs, and is currently a museum.

³⁶⁰ Six interviewees from groups 1 to 5.

³⁶¹ Seven interviewees from group 3, 5 and 6, whereby three had lived abroad and two worked in New Market.

On representations of political power

In last paragraph it was shown how national identity can be fostered through so-called “spaces of remembrance”, like memorials, and “spaces of social practice”, like the Parliament, which, it was said, have in common an intentionality on the part of the State and are differently perceived by the population. This topic can be linked to a discussion on representation of political power, as said intentionality also regards the expression, through the State, of peculiar values like for example its authority and authorisation, stability and advocacy of public interest. Such representation can be expected to be a particularly sensitive issue in a country like Bangladesh. In its capital city, Dhaka, political parties, civil society as well as interest groups struggling for power express their programmes and concerns, more or less peacefully, in urban space. Political manifestations consist of both demonstrations, speeches, rallies etc. and verbal or visual messages – phrases, posters, pictures and manifestos filling the walls of buildings and cantonments and accompanying passersby and passengers of rickshaws, cars, buses and tracks on their everyday routes along the jam-plagued streets. Here, the attention is concentrated on the reception and conceptualisation, on the part of the dwellers, of spaces that emanate an aura of power and therefore, as will be shown, could be eligible as settings of said manifestations; particular architectural features and/or historical meaning will be especially regarded. The centres of political events, from the impressive Parliament building and quarter to the already mentioned Shahid Minar, from the seat of juridical power, the High Court with its British architecture, to the administration quarters along Topkana Road, from the Prime Minister Residence to one of the favourite settings of TV political reports, *Banga Bhaban* (President's House), are hereby implied.

In consideration of the fact that, due to political instability and a fragile social situation, Bangladesh's political understanding and experience are extremely fragmented, expecting that the dwellers would “locate” power in only one building or area of Dhaka would have been illusory; it was rather interesting to survey whether, and on the base of which notions and judgements, such mental allocation of power takes place. On one side, there was reason to doubt that any urban spaces could have been linked with political representations in Dhaka's short period of life as capital city of Bangladesh, or to ask in how far political events can be elaborated and interpreted by poorly educated and illiterate dwellers. Yet on the other, the year-long instability and virulence of political life, which additionally escalated during the field research, led me to expect that representations of political values

and power would be real and vibrant³⁶². On the base of the conducted interviews, it can be said that ignorance of political issues (or disillusion towards them) and structures on the part of almost half of the respondents³⁶³ factually hampers political reflection. Education and gender appeared to be main differentiation factors: corresponding to higher education levels, the density of answers grew, and a clearly bigger proportion of women could not give an answer³⁶⁴. Since higher education levels were in much stronger way proportional to the women's than the men's capacity to answer, and a difference between working and non-working women could not be stated, it is suggested that peculiar education patterns and the disadvantaged position in society, rather than mere segregation within the home, explain the female respondents' apparent lack of interest and information, but also embarrassment to express personal opinions in public³⁶⁵.

Subsequently, the survey passed to analyse the collected representations, keeping the following questions especially in mind: do historical settings of Bangladesh's political fights play a particular role in dwellers' representations of power, or are present day events and actors rather more decisive? In which spaces are these representations materialised, but in particular: what do the mentioned spaces reveal about dwellers' political and urban knowledge? The most frequent answer to the questions "At which location or building in Dhaka is Bangladesh's political power concentrated?" consisted in the reference to "Paltan" and "Dhanmondi"³⁶⁶. Both neighbourhoods have strong political connotations, being Paltan the seat of administration buildings, various parties' main offices as well as Press Club, and Dhanmondi the residential neighbourhood where the "founders of the Nation" lived and Sheikh Mujibur was murdered in 1975³⁶⁷. Yet, the respondents used the neighbourhoods' names as synecdoche for the two main parties - Bangladesh National Party and Awami League, whose respective offices are located there— and often regarded as negative this "shift" of power from the actual and ideal space of political power, the

³⁶² Political activism suffered after the fall of Ershad's rule, as also the comparatively large number of respondents that admitted to having been members of political parties in the past confirmed. Nowadays, every bigger informal settlement is provided with party offices at least of the two main political parties. The latter fact actually leads over to expect political instrumentalisation of the poorer groups of society, which was confirmed by some of the respondents' statements, who admitted to taking part in political demonstrations in exchange for financial compensation, as well as by the consulted experts; against this background, political representations shall also be seen as the fruit of manipulation.

³⁶³ 45% of the respondents could not give any answer on concerned topic; hereby, contrarily to one of the considered possibilities, urban or rural origin did not determine the respondents' answering or not.

³⁶⁴ Almost half of the female respondents against one in three men could not answer the question.

³⁶⁵ This would confirm the role of education not only as precondition for abstract representations, but also as emancipatory factor.

³⁶⁶ 14% of respondents from group 1 to group 6 and with different education levels, though with a clear dominance of male respondents over females. This, put in relationship with a higher number of female answerers among those who located power in the hands of private persons, seem to be due to limited information concerning political structures.

³⁶⁷ Cf. precedent description of main areas in the chapter on the physical field, especially paragraph 2.1.2.

Parliament. The latter was anyhow the second most often mentioned space together with “caretaker government/Iajuddin³⁶⁸”. The meaning of education was hereby clearly recognisable: while all respondents who indicated the Parliament had a university degree (and increased from group 3 to 6), those who localised power in the current rulers' hands had low or very low education levels (and belonged to groups 1 to 4)³⁶⁹.

A further recurrent answer, given by interviewees of all groups and education levels and witnessing a deeply rooted disillusion about the real state of power in Bangladesh³⁷⁰, consisted in an equation of power and private persons, interest groups, or criminals: “It has been Dhaka University during the period of the student leaders, until the caretaker government; now it is *Banga Baban*, but eventually political power is in the hands of political leaders, and some of Dhaka University professors, who co-operate with the parties”³⁷¹; “I hate politics, but Bihari people generally believe that during the Ershad period and also under Hasina's government we received a certain benefit in comparison to the others; nowadays, though, political decisions are a thing of few criminals”³⁷²; “Power is just under the control of two families in Bangladesh, in Sheikh's and Zia's family”³⁷³; “It should be within the parliament, but it is rather the cantonment and some key-homes in Dhanmondi, Banani, Bharidara, where decision-takers live”³⁷⁴.

Few respondents mentioned the Campus with Shahid Minar, but also the Liberation Memorial in Savar, whereby these areas express an underlying belief in democratic values and people's power³⁷⁵: “I think power is within the University Area, the Campus is the nucleus for politics also nowadays, and also the Press Club”; “Dhaka University is historically the heart of activism and politics, since the very beginning of Bangladesh, some streets are related to political history – Shahbagh to Paltan is one of them, the streets of Dhaka University also”; “Power used to be concentrated in Dhaka University, a real incubator for revolutionaries, for instance it was the students who contrasted and defeated the military regime, but this has changed in the last 10 years, corruption has also taken over politics at Dhaka University, since students' leaders understood they could make money out of their engagement”. Also the mention of Topkana Road and Purana Paltan³⁷⁶ in coincidence with Gulistan and Motijheel as commercial and business district and trade

³⁶⁸ Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed has been the President of Bangladesh since 2002.

³⁶⁹ Both concerned answers were given by 12% of respondents.

³⁷⁰ 11% of interviewed persons had this opinion.

³⁷¹ Shariar, researcher, group 5.

³⁷² Sagor, student, group 3.

³⁷³ Nasima, lawyer, group 4.

³⁷⁴ Farah, researcher, group 6.

³⁷⁵ 8% of the interviewees, from group 4 to 6, hereby mainly Dhaka-born and highly educated (all had a university degree).

³⁷⁶ 6% of the interviewees, from group 3 to 6.

unions pool, should be interpreted as the sign of a basic belief in political practice from the bottom up, as these areas are going to be revealed to be the focal points of demonstrations and political processions in the next paragraphs.

Concluding, in this paragraph:

- the stated precedence of the current actors of political events (main political parties, caretaker government, private persons, etc.) over concrete official spaces in the answers was shown to be dependent on the respondents' education levels, whereby less educated respondents tended to ignore the Parliament as an instance of democracy, which can be explained by a minor knowledge of political structures and rights;
- in spite of the heterogeneity of answers and their limited representativity due to the high number of non-answerers, “Paltan” as a broad denomination including Topkana Road, Gulistan, Motijheel, *Banga Baban* and the central office of the last government's period ruling party, BNP, was revealed as the politically most vibrant area of Dhaka, though its relative dominance in dwellers' representations may be due to the political activities going there on, rather than to *Banga Baban* as specific landmark or spatial feature.

Spaces for communication, information and opinion making

“Where would you go if you wanted to get informed and discuss about political and social events you care about?”: the „representation“, or ideology, at the base of this question is Jürgen Habermas' theorising of public space as the setting of *public sphere*, an essentially urban system of communicative interactions between individuals which provided the base of modern democratic life³⁷⁷. The German sociologist thought hereby of cultural and social gathering points that are tightly linked to the European urban history, but not only: he conceived of the participants in this public sphere as a self-reflective and homogeneous unity, which presupposes a similar capacity and possibility to participate in public discussion. In a contrast herewith, the constitutive segregation, and accompanying fragmentation of social groups, found to characterise Dhaka's spatial practice, could give reason to talk of a “fragmented public sphere”: by this apparent oxymoron, indeed

³⁷⁷ On the basis of his understanding of British cafés and salons of the 18th century as the „public spaces“ that accompanied the development of a „public sphere“ based on the acknowledgement of critical discussion and thus fostered (along with the upcoming mass media) Enlightenment and democratic thought, Habermas suggested that, after the development of capitalism and commercialisation of mass media had suppressed the same critical discussion in a politically mature public sphere, discursive communicative actions with a positive effect for democratic participation could be re-established thanks to „public spaces“. Cf. Habermas, Jürgen: *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981).

cohesive and even homogeneous networks or clusters of various interest groups are meant, which however fail to constitute a “homogeneous unity”.

After this brief summary provided orientation within the problematic topic here concerned, the evaluation shall delve into the respondents' specific “spaces” for information, discussion and opinion making, whereby, to start with, it will be stated that the emerging picture of dwellers shows an interested majority that seeks information and forms its opinion through discussion in various locations and forms³⁷⁸.

As far as the informative moment is concerned, the most used information source appeared to be TV and radio, though these were rarely indicated alone and most commonly accompany other forms of information, either informal talks or newspapers³⁷⁹. Hereby, it should be noticed that radio was far behind TV, which indicates that information is very often a collective experience for a consistent portion of society³⁸⁰. The consideration of the second more common answer, according to which information occur in informal talks during free time, but also at the working place (and in both cases, very often on the street)³⁸¹, additionally supports this view. For respondents of groups 3, 4 and 5, TV and radio are similarly important, whereas this changes by group 6, whose members clearly appeared to prefer newspapers and *adda* in rather private settings as office, cultural centres, temple or club, also in the context of civil society activities like environment protection or welfare³⁸². Newspapers, but also posters, manifestos, flyers with commercial or political information had the third place as source of information³⁸³, whereby also in this case the essential role of income and education levels has to be taken into account. Printed information appeared to be almost irrelevant for illiterate and low educated answerers; it attained interest for respondents that had a secondary school degree and belonged to group 3, who mainly read newspapers and posters stuck on the walls of University, Shahbagh, Motijheel or Dhanmondi. Newspapers were a very important reference for respondents with university degrees from group 4 to 6, who took the time to read the news in private.

³⁷⁸ Three quarters of the interviewed persons gave often more than one answer. The remaining portion of respondents, 24% of the total, did not have common outstanding characteristics that could have given reason to talk of any clear phenomenon of exclusion, as they belonged to all income and age groups, both genders, and had most various education levels.

³⁷⁹ 39% of respondents, from group 1 to 6 and all education levels: for one quarter hereof, TV and radio (7%) are the only occasion of information and the „substitutes“ of discussions; 10% - four interviewees from group 1 to 6 – of the respondents watched BBC for more impartial information.

³⁸⁰ All respondents of groups 1 and 2, but also a portion of group 3 (males and females equally), explained that they watched TV, and correspondingly discussed the news. In tea-stalls along the street. This is easily explained by the fact that households of these groups rarely have a TV set at home.

³⁸¹ 31% of respondents.

³⁸² While only 1 respondent watched BBC, the interviewees of group 6 strongly preferred to get informed via talks with colleagues and friends – at work or in clubs, and to read newspapers (in the case 33%). Discussion and opinion making were clearly confined to within the home (55%).

³⁸³ 25% of respondents.

Tea stalls, shops thresholds, pathways and in general streets appeared as vibrant spaces not only for the search for information, but also for the collective and informal discussion of news, which can contribute to opinion making: especially for the respondents of group 1 and 2, who mentioned main streets, place of work as well as the paths that criss-cross informal settlements, the moment of information and that of collective comment and discussion seemed to be directly linked³⁸⁴. The fact that talks and discussion at work or in outside space in general decreased in importance proportionally to higher incomes has to be explained by the increasing formality of working structures and rhythms; they were replaced by discussions in private settings, mainly at home, during which not only information is exchanged, but opinions are formed³⁸⁵. Yet, also a basic mistrust or disillusion regarding socio-political events may play a role for the respondents' "retirement" to the private sphere: "When I was a student, I used to speak about politics openly, nowadays, as a public officer, I only speak with similarly minded persons and I only discuss politics in the private sphere. I read the newspaper or talk with some of my colleagues in the Press Club to be informed"³⁸⁶; "I used to inform myself in the Centre for Social Studies, where I have worked for a long time; in my present working place we can't discuss much because the consensus is less broad, so I talk with my husband, friends and daughters"³⁸⁷; "I discuss with my uncle, but I am not involved because it is not worth it in Bangladesh"³⁸⁸; "Since now I am in the age to vote, I also speak about politics with friends, talk about political events, and I read the newspapers, too, often with my parents. But since I go to a private university, people around me don't bother much politics"³⁸⁹; "I read the newspapers, but it is risky to speak about politics in public because people ignore the principles of democracy and violence is spreading out"³⁹⁰. When asked about "public" spaces of opinion making, concerned interviewees mentioned settings in which a "consensus" is attained or a common goal is pursued, rather than spaces in which diverse opinions and groups coexist³⁹¹: in particular, party offices, clubs or organisations, as well as the French Cultural Institute and the temple for Hindu respondents are here put in contrast

³⁸⁴ 16% of respondents, all from group 1, 2 and, in much lower proportion, 3. A difference linked to the respondents' gender could be stated, as male interviewees generally intended urban outside spaces, while females spoke of tea stalls and paths within their living areas, informal settlements as well as inner-urban courtyards.

³⁸⁵ 17% of respondents, mainly of groups 4 to 6.

³⁸⁶ Salahuddin, public officer, group 5.

³⁸⁷ Suraya, researcher, group 6.

³⁸⁸ Fayez, student, group 6.

³⁸⁹ Nashreen, student, group 6.

³⁹⁰ Subrata, student, group 4.

³⁹¹ 11% against 8%; male and female respondents are hereby equally distributed, and also income and education level are spread over the entire spectrum of held interviews, while age appeared as a possible distinction factor, as younger interviewees were concentrated among the 8% who mentioned the Campus, while the other 11% was primarily constituted by more elderly persons.

to the Campus with Teachers and Students' Centre, Modhur Canteen, Shahid Minar, the Art College and the nearby book shops of Azi Supermarket. The reason for such distinction, supported by the near analysis of the respective respondents' biographical data, is seen in two polar understandings of information and communication: on one side, the desire to find homogeneous opinions, develop and defend them within a group of similarly thinking persons leads to the search for segregated and exclusive spaces; on the other, the “authority” and implicit exclusiveness of one space attracts individuals who set a priority in information and, only secondarily (or later in time), in the application or putting the common insights into action. To conclude:

- the street and in general outdoor space, already described as constituent setting of everyday life in Dhaka, was confirmed to be a space of information and opinion making via informal exchange of information, word of mouth, but also thanks to the increasing presence of TVs in tea stalls and shops, around which groups of passersby or workers having a break can gather;
- as a “universal” public space, the street would allow access to everybody, but only one part of society “uses” it (often out of compulsion or lack of alternatives); dwellers with higher incomes were confirmed to have “retired” not only from the streets, but also from public sphere in the sense that information and discussion predominantly take place in private or in other “spaces of fragmented interests”;
- the Campus with its historical and intellectual appeal revealed to be a possible “universal” space for opinion making for Dhaka's younger educated dwellers.

Spaces for expression and demonstration of public opinion

“It’s normal and necessary as a woman to take part in demos,
in particular for women’s rights.
Last time I have taken part in a demo was when the Americans bombed Afghanistan,
there was a demo around Dhanmondi Lake.
But Ramna Park is a traditional area for demos of this type, too”

“...the seniors phone me, they order me to manage some people,
I manage some of my friends and juniors
and go to the procession.
Basically it's Muktangaon , Paltan, the BNP office”

“I take part in processions because I am an activist.
Basically, the procession goes from Shahbagh to Palton, historically, this route is important: in
front of the National Museum you will find a different taste and smell,
it is related to this country's history”

Less than one third of the interviewed persons could comment on the function, related to public space, of political reunion and demonstration of public concerns³⁹². The question, consciously bi-partied to gradually approach a topic that, due to the current tense political situation, was expected to be accompanied by a determined conflictual and critical potential, aimed at revealing which parts of the city, due to which characteristics, are conceived of as “political” in the sense that a public *discourse* can be represented there, whereby different areas would imply different understandings of political practice, and at the same time also at surveying a population's “mental state” and related attitude towards political events and activism³⁹³.

Regarding the question's first part, two clearly equally important areas with a slightly different connotation as well as a third “minority” political area came out: these were “Shahbagh-Campus”, with Shahid Minar playing a role as a landmark and meeting point; the broad area here called “Paltan” – precisely, the axe Elephant Road - Topkana Road - Press Club – Gulistan – Motijheel - Zero Point - Muktangaon³⁹⁴ - *Banga Bhaban*; as well

³⁹² 29 interviewees, whereby the question's awkward object of interest was regarded as a possible reason for the particularly low number of answers. It shall be here reminded that the interviews generally took place in public spaces, while respondents and interviewers were surrounded by various listeners, so that admitting personal involvement in political activities may have been difficult for some interviewees. On the other hand, the 29 concerned persons stated taking part, or having taken part, in processions in the locations they mentioned.

³⁹³ It was mentioned that only three respondents were at present members of political parties or associations, while several admitted to having been members of leftist parties in the past, but also that political activity appears to be strongly based on the recruitment of demonstrant masses within slums and informal settlements though political leaders, who promise future political advantages and often small compensations, without request of membership. However, other 20% of respondents explicitly stated not being involved in politics and to have never taken part in any procession: they described as main reasons law and order problems during the processions, which are often the setting for violent fights and bomb attacks, as well as lack of interest or trust.

³⁹⁴ Muktangon (Engl. „open space“) is a small park besides the General Post Office, where political parties and labour organizations are traditionally known to organise meetings and rallies; its „official“ address,

as Ramna Park and Dhanmondi³⁹⁵. In fact, political demonstrations start within the Campus, flow towards Shahbagh and then follow Elephant and Topkhana Road towards Motijheel and *Banga Bhaban*, so that a single parcours or procession and of single “path of political expression” could be spoken of in Dhaka City. Nonetheless, it is here suggested that two different representation types on the part of the respondents were implied, as the answers but also a general observation would confirm. In comparison to “Paltan”, Shahbagh and Dhaka University Campus were mentioned by a higher proportion of members of groups 5 and 6 and also by a major number of women, who also said they took part in demonstrations within the area.

The significance of the University Campus, owed to the historical events that took place there as well as to the lively atmosphere typically characterising this space of cultural and intellectual life “appropriated” by a large majority of young people, has already been pointed out; beside the political rallies, demonstrations with a social background, for example Women's Day or those appealing for a better observation of human rights, generally started there and, continuing towards Shahbagh, head towards Ramna Park instead of Bangla Bhaban. Thus, the route broadly described as “Paltan” is apparently linked to political rallies as well as fights and would represent a purely “political congregation space” within Dhaka, while in the Campus' case, though said rallies also start here, the social component may be stronger. Further on, Ramna could be confirmed as a space of socio-cultural representation, while Dhanmondi appeared to be at present attaining a similar connotation for the upcoming “educated class”³⁹⁶. Two concepts of political practice, related also to the respondents' education levels and socio-economic groups, are faced hereby: one mainly party political, the other with a stronger socio-political aspect.

The second part of the question, asking about concrete participation and activism in the context of demonstrations, revealed a comparatively equal distribution of party politically and socio-politically active dwellers, although the education level is here indicated as an

which would be North South Road, is irrelevant to the people, who talk about Paltan or Topkhana Road. The area is owned by Dhaka City Corporation and prior to organising any meetings, a permission from DCC as well as Dhaka Metropolitan Police is needed. During the last government period, the ruling parties banned political meetings on the street and established specified places, one of which was Muktangan, in which they could be held. However, since the declaration of emergency no meetings of this kind have taken place.

³⁹⁵ Respectively, 17% of respondents mentioned Shahbagh-DU Campus and Paltan, while 3% also referred of Ramna Park and Dhanmondi. The proportion of male and female respondents was equal (28% of total women, 30% of men were able to answer) and all income groups were included, although extremely few respondents of group 1 were ready to answer (11%) and respondents of group 2, on the contrary, were particularly highly represented (54%). Lastly, higher education levels were slightly correspondent to higher participation in demonstration.

³⁹⁶ Only one among the three respondents who mentioned Ramna/Dhanmondi lived in the latter residential area, but all three had high education levels. The first quotation at the beginning of this paragraph was chosen as an example of this group of society's peculiar state of mind.

influential factor not only for the respondents' representations, but also for their application of democratic ideals into practice. Interviewees with higher school degrees appear to participate in socio-political rather than party political demonstrations. A particular note should be made on the impression, confirmed by the answers of respondents between the ages of 16 and 30 and later strengthened by the consulted experts, that political "involvement" is often linked to the influence of informal networks on individuals who, both in the Campus as well as in urban areas, are asked, convinced, engaged, or forced to participate in the processions³⁹⁷.

Conclusions

For the analysis presented in this paragraph, religious, cultural, national, political and democratic values in European and Western contexts have been condensed into five questions to be transposed onto Dhaka dwellers' representations of urban space. The aim of such an enterprise was to answer four interlinked questions: 1) which material and symbolic features (architectural/physical and historical, cultural, personal experiences, desires or aspirations) influence the representation of space?; 2) which areas of Dhaka emerge respectively with which role?; 3) how do the representations concerning the respective areas take shape?; and 4) which "ideologies" are at present "moving" the dwellers' mentality and perspectives on ongoing social events? These are going to be answered in following lines, which at the same time will constitute a summary of the respectively collected insights.

Particular architectural characteristics were at large ignored by the respondents, who, for example, never mentioned the architecture of *Sher-e-Bangla Nagar* despite its outstanding quality, or Shahid Minar's design as a monument, or again the peculiar form of the old town's residential houses and lost magnificence of its historical buildings. An exception was hereby the "glass and concrete" architecture typical in the recent office and shopping complexes of Gulshan and, in much lower proportion, Motijheel. Yet, precisely due to their architectural features, these areas were connoted as "non typical", "modern", or "Western", and were apparently felt to be exclusive by the respondents, both in the sense of "appealing" (for those who have access to and use these buildings) and "non accessible"

³⁹⁷ Different statements demonstrated the assumption, for example: "As students of private universities, we are more concentrated in our studies; students at Dhaka University, however, are due to commit to one party, as even to get a place in a dormitory it is necessary to take position for one party – generally the ruling one" (Nashreen, 23, group 6); „I used to go to processions when I was a student. In that age, political life is an adventure, lacking of other facilities to make sports – and with such an unemployment. You should keep in mind that 20% of students are really involved in politics, whereas the others just have to „fake“ in order to be allowed to live in the Campus“ (Shariar, researcher involved in politics, group 5).

(for those who are not allowed to enter them). Characteristics of urban design, rather than architecture, were considered or implicit in the answers, for example insofar as the city's constitutive built environment was clearly distinguished from the appearance of fringe areas. The latter were hereby recognised as “representative” of Bangladesh, and often also appreciated and preferred to the first, due to the prevalence of green and water. Ramna Park and Dhanmondi Lake as open spaces are a further example of urban design positively affecting the dwellers' representations of urban space. In another sense, areas like the Campus or Paltan could not host the demonstrations for which they are known and characteristic for the dwellers, if they did not include esplanades and green areas where congregations can take place and if their streets were not as broad. However, the evaluation in general showed that **emotional and symbolic features count more** for the dwellers' spatial representation. These “features” can be the “atmospheric” transformation of everyday life space into religious space through the muezzin's call to prayer; the almost sacred historicity of national monuments (*Shahid Minar* as well as the Liberation monuments) that are so central in the dwellers' representation; the political “character” of Dhanmondi or Paltan, due to the party-offices there located; as well as the political activism and still strong ideological power emanating from the Campus.

As far as the search for locations with particular identities and roles is concerned, the urban area corresponding to the “structural area” called in this survey ***traditional „urban“ areas can be recognised as Dhaka's core of identification in cultural, national and political terms***. Cultural institutions (University, as symbol of the fight for the own language and tentative base for the construction of national identity)³⁹⁸ as well as particular environmental features (Dhanmondi Lake, Ramna Park) primarily explain their preference by a very eclectic group of respondents. They are furthermore foci of political, national and democratic events due to the activities of socio-political organisations, and could therefore play an important role for the development of civil society and national democratic identity. In comparison to spaces of cultural identification, those related to the “Nation” Bangladesh, from the Memorials to the Parliament, appeared to have a secondary position, probably also consequently to the country's unstable political situation. A different case is the respondents' „location“ of religious values, which were shown to be scattered within Dhaka, either in correspondence with the neighbourhood mosques, or in the private sphere of the home, the self, or workplaces.

The „making sacred“ of space through religious, ritual representations is evidently linked

³⁹⁸ This is something differentiating these areas from Gulshan and the so-called „upper-class“ areas, which are still lacking historical value and thus can not be considered as „representative“. If these have been described as exclusive, the traditional „urban“ areas can be said to be inclusive thanks to their historicity.

to an implicit understanding of **space as „flexible“, transformable, „container“ for abstract thoughts**, for sacred values and divinity, which permeated the answers of one fifth of respondents. For them, the ritual prayer becomes a lift to an „other“ space, independently from the concrete location in which they are time by time. Furthermore, **remembrance and social practice building national and cultural identity are deeply related to specific areas and form their particular representations**. In particular, the importance of the just mentioned traditional „urban“ areas is based on the remembrance of Language Movement and Liberation War, on practices like the celebrations on various national holidays, as well as on the action of the two contrary political parties and the political struggles animated by them.

Finally, the research tried to bring to light which “ideologies” are at present “moving” the dwellers' mentality and perspectives on social events. First of all, it was shown that Dhaka, that was the stage of persecution, but also of violent crimes against Hindu inhabitants in the 20th century, apparently **struggles to become a city in which different religious beliefs can coexist and communicate**. National and cultural identity in Bangladesh are in a formation phase that heavily leans on cultural values. While globalisation “imports” new values that are being quickly interiorised by the youth, due to the progressive transitions, and also breaks, undergone by the country in the 20th century, **ancient traditions and peculiar cultural traits are being revised** (e.g.: the identity as Bengalis, of which the independent Bangladeshis may feel the only real heirs, in contrast to the East Bengalis), **denied** (e.g.: the Hindu and British cultures, in spite of their indisputable historical influence, revealed by architecture as well as concrete everyday practices that today are no longer discernible from the “main” culture), or on the contrary **re-adopted** (e.g.: the Muslim identity, put in the background by a phase of socio-political modernisation during the first years of Bangladesh's history, at present “re-introduced” not only within the political scenario, but at everyday life level, for example in form of *tablik* - possibly in a reaction to the perceptible processes of liberalisation of society).

The respondents showed a difficulty, linked to a **strong disillusion concerning political events**, to make reference to democratic values and the historical origins of independent Bangladesh as the base of power - which, however, would be clearly materialised in the Campus rather than in the highly impressive but “history-less” Parliament building.

In next paragraph, the interviews' concluding phase, the drawing of mental maps, will be object of a further reflection on the emotional and symbolic meaning of space.

2.2.3. Representing spaces - Mental maps

*„Par l'espace, l'univers me comprend et m'engloutit comme un point;
par la pensée, je le comprends“*
Pascal, 1670³⁹⁹

*„L'espace sociale m'englobe comme un point. Mais ce point est un point de vue, le principe d'une
vue prise à partir d'un point situé dans l'espace sociale, d'une perspective définie dans sa form et
son contenu par la position objective à partir de laquelle elle est prise“*
P. Bourdieu, 1994⁴⁰⁰

Precedent paragraph delved into the interviewees' abstract representations of space, those linked to religious, cultural, national and political values condensed in the questionnaire and transposed on Dhaka dwellers through it. In contrast, the respondents' “active” representations of urban space as space of everyday life, collected by means of mental maps, will be focused on here. In the paragraph concerning this survey's methodology, mental maps were explained to be representations of everyday spaces that reflect, beside spatial knowledge, the affective, symbolic meaning of space, as well as preferences attributed by individuals to their environment. The urban planner Kevin Lynch was one of the pioneers of mental mapping; after in-depth studies of mental maps, he argued that „the creation of the environmental image is a two-way process between observer and observed. What he sees is based on exterior form, but how he interprets and organises this, and how he directs his attention, in its turn affects what he sees. The human organism is highly adaptable and flexible, and different groups may have widely different images of the same outer reality“⁴⁰¹. With this statement, seeing the created „environmental image“, or mental map, as a part, or an aspect, of cultural knowledge, the base for an ethnographic interpretation of mental maps is given. Relevant insights in the context of urban studies were reached by the architect Amos Rapoport, who integrated notions deriving from psychological and anthropological research⁴⁰² into his work.

Before delving into the analysis of Dhaka's mental maps, it is important to reflect on their use and utility in the context of this work. It has been mentioned that anthropological

³⁹⁹ „In space, universe comprehends and swallows me like a point, in thought, I comprehend it“ [own translation], Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* 146 (1991), p. 204, quoted by Pierre Bourdieu in *Espace social et espace symbolique*.

⁴⁰⁰ „Social space comprehends me like a point. But this point is a *point of view*, the principle of a view taken from a standpoint in social space, of a *perspective* that is defined in its form and its content by the objective position from which it is taken“ [own translation], Pierre Bourdieu, *Espace social et espace symbolique*, in: *Raisons Pratiques. Sur la theorie de l'action* (1994, Engl. *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, 1998), p. 28.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. *The image of the city*, p. 131.

⁴⁰² Amos Rapoport's analysis of mental maps in previously mentioned book on *Human Aspects of Urban Form* (1977), which can be inserted in the tradition of ethnographic and especially Spradley's research, constituted an important reference for this part of the survey.

methods were explicitly criticised by Lefebvre for reasons that appear valid also to this author: the tendency to produce generalisations and hierarchic distinctions as well as the, probably more disputable, disregard for the moment of social interaction, in which learnt and „made meaningful“ knowledge can be subverted or just transformed in unforeseeable ways through individuality, creativity, and desire. Keeping this in mind, a definition of what mental maps originally are will be made; in second instance, the role which they play within this research will be defined; finally, the way they will be used and analysed here will be clarified.

According to Rapoport, it can be said that mental maps are „*spatial* images which people have of the physical environment and which primarily affect spatial behaviour“. While he distinguished them from *cognitive schemata*, or the „subjective knowledge structure of an individual - a sum of his knowledge, values and meanings organized according to certain rules and affecting behaviour“⁴⁰³, he admitted the denomination „*cognitive map*“, generally used by psychologists and geographers to describe „long-term stored information about the relative location of objects and phenomena in the everyday physical environment“⁴⁰⁴. Typical of cognitive or mental maps is that they are strongly based on remembered (but also imagined, cf. for example the medieval representation of the earth centred on Jerusalem) everyday life experiences and express emotions, values, judgements and also prejudices on urban spaces. Rapoport consistently concentrated his attention on „taxonomies“ - schemata, classification, and „cognitive splits“ - that individuals use to structure the world and give it spatial, social and temporal orders, whereby his understanding of the relationship between individuals' representations and built environment regarded latter as passive and the first as active: in his words, the built environment is an expression of cultural cognitive categories that, „if the environment is meaningful“, produce appropriate cognitive schemata⁴⁰⁵. This view apparently confirms the dominance of mental over physical field, and makes what in the course of this survey has

⁴⁰³ Rapoport (1977), p. 119.

⁴⁰⁴ The term was first used by Edward Tolman in *Cognitive maps in rats and men*, published in *Psych. Review*, vol. 55, p. 189-208. For current discussion on cognitive maps, cf. among others Tom Vanderbilt's article *Cerebral cities* in the publication *Else/Where – Mapping new cartographies of networks and territories*, edited by Janet Abrams and Peter Hall (2006), p. 176-183. Vanderbilt put his text in the context of cognitive studies and reported Barbara Tversky's suggestion that, rather than a map, a „cognitive collage“ it should be spoken of as, „in wayfinding, memory and judgement, we make use of a multitude of information, not just remembered experiences or remembered maps of environments“. Corresponding studies on British taxi drivers have for example shown that these were physically affected by the study of the map of London, insofar as their posterior hippocampus had grown along with the increasing knowledge of London. Cf. Maguire, E.A., Woollett, K., Spiers, H.J. (2006): *London taxi drivers and bus drivers: A structural MRI and neuropsychological analysis*. In: *Hippocampus* 16 (12), 1091-1101. Similar results lead to ask about the brains sizes of other „urban navigators“, of policemen concerned with the incidence of criminal behaviour in particular zones, of homeless persons, whose map is determined by the necessity to find a safe place to bed down, of *rickshaw wallahs*, etc.

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. sketch in Rapoport (1977), p. 109.

become known as social field just another product, with a pale reminiscence of physical environment, of the mental representation. In particular, Rapoport's model is not based on a dialectic interaction between the three fields, but on the dependence of physical and social field on mental field, that elaborates outer impulses and accordingly forms the outer world. Though this discrepancy does not affect the validity of Rapoport's analysis of mental maps – his observations are, on the contrary, going to be an important reference for following evaluation –, it is necessary to approach the study with an individual notion of their role within this work on Dhaka. In latter, mental mapping was acknowledged as an essential aspect of the mental field and, accordingly, mental maps were seen as an important tool for the study of dwellers' representations of space beyond the interviews. Likewise the interviews, however, the mental maps were also regarded as representations of space that run parallel to, and are continuously affected by, physical and social practice. A survey of Dhaka based only on mental maps would ignore essential components of the production of space to the same extent of one which only considered the city's infrastructural aspects. This insight implied that mental maps were to be considered not only as producers, but also as products of the city – and that peculiar values linked to the respondents', or drawers', desires and life experiences were particularly focused on.

In the empirical phase, each of the 100 respondents was asked to make a picture of „his/her Dhaka“ as he/she had described it during the interview, that is, on the base of important places mentioned and movements made in everyday life. While a certain group, mainly women and children, could not understand the task and/or gave up after some failed trials, 68 interviewees were able to provide their „map“ of Dhaka. The first question, „could you make a drawing of Dhaka as you have talked about it with us so far?“, often had to be completed by further explications about what was exactly meant. We made a recollection of the places and settings of everyday life mentioned during the interview, and asked to represent the most important among them in the sheet of paper, draw their interconnections and locate them in relation to particular landmarks (e.g. the Buriganga River, *Shahid Minar*, New Market or one of the main streets). Often, the respondents turned to tell a story of their everyday routines, from waking up at home to going to work, to the bazaar and back home at evening, while they were drawing their maps⁴⁰⁶. Concerning the maps' interpretation, the first decision to be taken was whether to proceed „statistically“, i.e. by individuating the most recurrent features, grouping them into trends and accordingly

⁴⁰⁶ This could be seen as a confirmation of de Certeau's reflections around narration being essentially a report of movements in space and time. Their explications as well as the successive steps of the drawing process were recorded by the author in personal notes, and in some cases the names of the drawn places were noted on the original maps by the assistant.

making a „typology of mental maps“⁴⁰⁷, or to apply the issue-based methodology also used in the previous two chapters, i.e. starting from the personal „preliminary reading“, recognising outstanding or significant features and illustrating them. Although the first method initially appeared to promise a „representative“, ordered choice of samples, the collected mental maps were considered to be too diverse and non-comparable⁴⁰⁸ for a statistical solution. In contrast, the second option seemed to encounter the overall „ideology“ of the study not to pursue an ideal of unity and continuity, but to consciously assemble elements that can be divergent. Consequently, a choice of ten mental maps, particularly full of character, is going to be presented in following pages. Their evaluation was based on different points, derived from Rapoport's suggestions⁴⁰⁹ as well as from issues that had previously emerged, for example:

- **Difference in cognitive domains:** do the representations of streets, nodes, landmarks, or districts diverge (e.g. is a street an edge or a path? Is one landmark rather than another shown?) along with different „biographic“ characteristics – for example, the belonging to a certain „subculture“, the level of education, whether the respondents work or live in concerned areas, whether they are first-generation or were born in Dhaka, etc.?
- **Naming:** are special names or denominations used instead of official ones? Does the “role” of the area play a role for the use or non-use of administrative, tourist, resident or planning definitions?
- **Similarity/Dissimilarity:** are the maps „realistic“, trying to precisely reproduce specific places, or are the peculiar material features of concerned spaces simplified, ignored, hidden?
- **„Transformation“** of environment according to aspirations⁴¹⁰: do the respondents „ignore“ or „hide“ unpopular/undesirable areas and „beautify“ others?
- **Territoriality:** where does the „familiar“ space end, where does the „foreign“ start? Is a „boundary“ felt especially by women or children⁴¹¹?

⁴⁰⁷ For example, Kevin Lynch didn't use a single one of the maps he collected, but preferred to „summarise“ them in maps of his own revising.

⁴⁰⁸ This was due to the different capacities, on the part of the respondents, to conceive of their environment in two-dimensional terms, and also to draw.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. Rapoport (1977), pages 111-118.

⁴¹⁰ Also in the sense that cognitive maps are subject to asymmetries as well as to „deformations“ due to man's struggle for symmetry. Cf. Vanderbilt (2006), p. 176-183.

⁴¹¹ Beside Rapoport, Peter Jüngst's work on territoriality and psycho-geography in his book *Territorialität und Psychodynamik* (2000) gave some insights on cultural, but also gender differences concerning the way human beings perceive and represent space from the perspective of cognitive psychology.

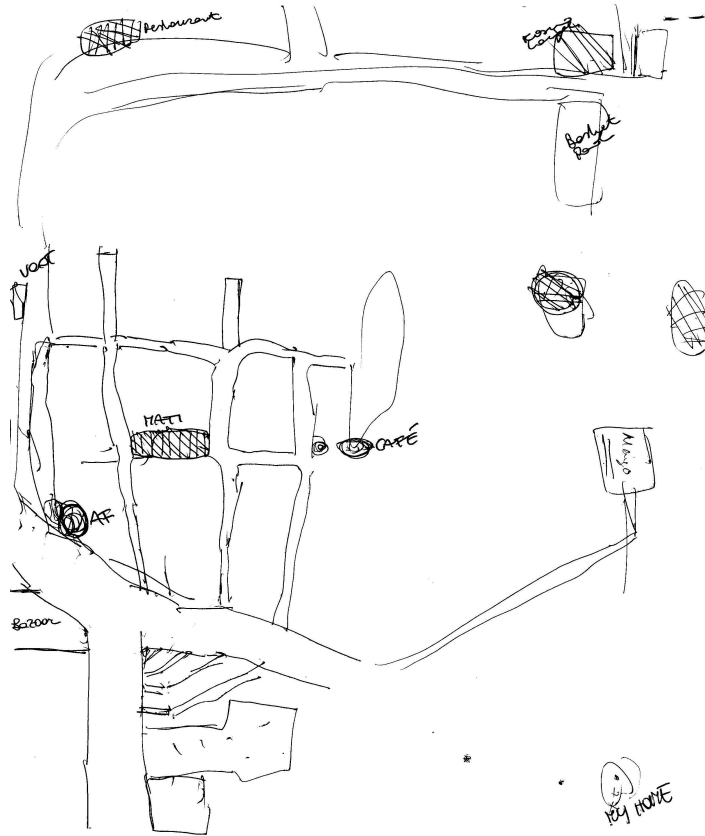
- **Gender:** do female and male respondents use different orientations?⁴¹² Do the mental maps reflect gender segregation?
- **Time:** do the maps reveal a sense of time? How are distances mirrored by the mental maps?⁴¹³
- **Other factors of influence:** are modes of travel, types of traffic, temporal rhythms, sequences of movement, etc. relevant for the spatial experience mirrored in the map?

In following pages, the ten exemplarily analysed mental maps are presented.

⁴¹² For example, behavioural psychologists have noted gender differences in the process of „wayfinding“: accordingly, women would generally rely on landmarks and things such as street names, while men employ geometric and distance cues.

⁴¹³ A related aspect to take in consideration is Vanderbilt's remark (ibid.) that „landmarks turn our perception of distance to chaos“: for example, various studies have showed that, asked about the distance from a landmark to an anonymous building, respondents tend to make this distance shorter than in the contrary case – a phenomenon due to the so-called „contextual scaling model“: when people retrieve the location of buildings, they activate in long-term memory what they know about that memory and what the neighbouring buildings are in the space or on the map. A landmark activates a larger context – more things come to mind – and the actual space, the distance of the other objects that come to mind from that landmark, is greater than when they first think of a non-landmark.

„Seeing the city like a planner“



Although the respective level of education did not directly affect the ability to draw maps, the mental mapping experiments showed that educated interviewees, thanks to a major acquaintance with drawing and writing, often handled the task with higher self-confidence. In rare cases, these individuals were also keen on representing the city as it can be observed on plans, whereby their attempts were limited to parts of the city they knew particularly well. Having been born and raised in Dhanmondi, Pratim⁴¹⁴ approached his neighbourhood with this intention, and started from the cross between Mirpur Road and Green Road, whereby he shifted his view of the two streets that embrace the sub-district Khala Bagan 45 degrees to the right. The latter's dense, but planned road network is suggested in the map's right part, whereby the initial concern for the correspondence between the roads coming from Khala Bagan and those encountering them on the other side of Mirpur Road was abandoned along with the increasing complexity of such effort and contradictoriness of the network itself; a recently built hospital and the neighbouring

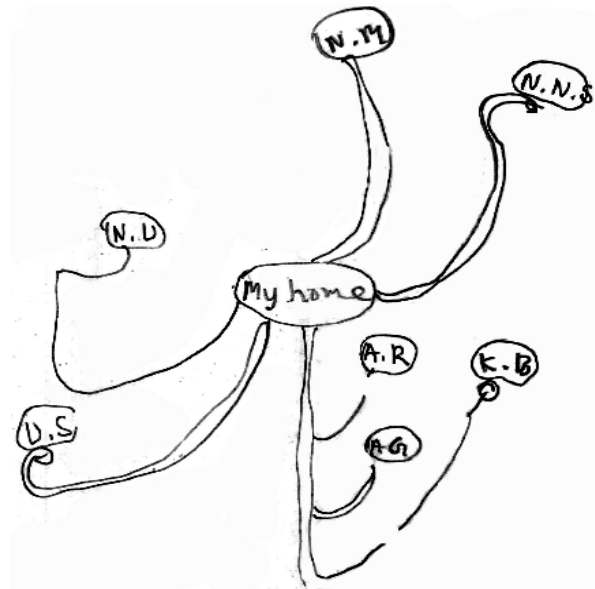
⁴¹⁴ He belonged to the interviewees' group 6.

building on Green Road appeared to be precisely inscribed in Pratim's memory, anyway. He consequently placed his home, and those of two friends, in this „suggested“ space along Mirpur Road. Below Khala Bagan, he traced the boundaries of a bazaar, and on the other side of the street, he marked very clearly the location of Alliance Française, the French Cultural Institute, in which our meeting took place and Pratim regularly meets friends after work. The „planners“ view continued in this part of the map, dominated by the *math*, a football and cricket field that was rescued from redevelopment thanks to a civil society's initiative of which Pratim is a member, and by a café on the shores of Dhanmondi Lake. The lake's complicated, weaving form gave him reason to just leave the remaining space until Café Mango, at the top of the view, as well as Sat Majid Road (with one restaurant, Kozmo Lounge - a further popular café facing the lake – and a basketball hoop), on the left, empty.

Pratim's mental map was regarded as particularly interesting because, while drawing, he appeared to notice that the planner's view, despite its complexity, would not mirror the special value of the so beloved neighbourhood; he started to talk about the cafés and meeting points that make it important for him, delved into a long illustration of the process that led to the football field's preservation, and subsequently invited the author to visit the elderly neighbours that had fought in order to save a space linked to their first and most dear memories. Despite having lived abroad and in other cities of Bangladesh for professional reasons, which gave him reason to discuss Dhaka's development in detached terms, during the interview and particularly along with the drawing, Pratim showed a very emotional attachment to Dhaka: while in the beginning he spoke in terms of security and infrastructure („I live in Khala Bagan because my family and friends live here, it is safer, I feel at home and confident also to walk or jog at night“), he increasingly stressed personal reasons for his attachment („Dhaka is a second mother to me. Since I was born here, it's my home, and although I have been in many cities, I am always homesick far from Dhaka. Much has changed and not always or never in a more positive way, but memories hold me there“), until passionately declaring what distinguishes a Dhakaiya from a settler: “A Dhakaiya loves his town, a settler loves his house”. Dhanmondi appeared to be a much more important living space than Motijheel, in which Pratim spends many hours a week working as a banker, whereas he admitted that he would like to go more often to Gulshan and Banani, where some relatives live and other cafés could be found, yet this is hardly possible due to the heavy traffic. The personal identification with his neighbourhood, confirmed by the mental map, is here suggested to depend on a second, so far not considered aspect, that is the fact that an insufficient road network can “isolate” different

urban areas and “close” them to non-dwellers in spite of their high attractiveness; segregation, insofar, has also planning reasons.

„Dhaka from the car“



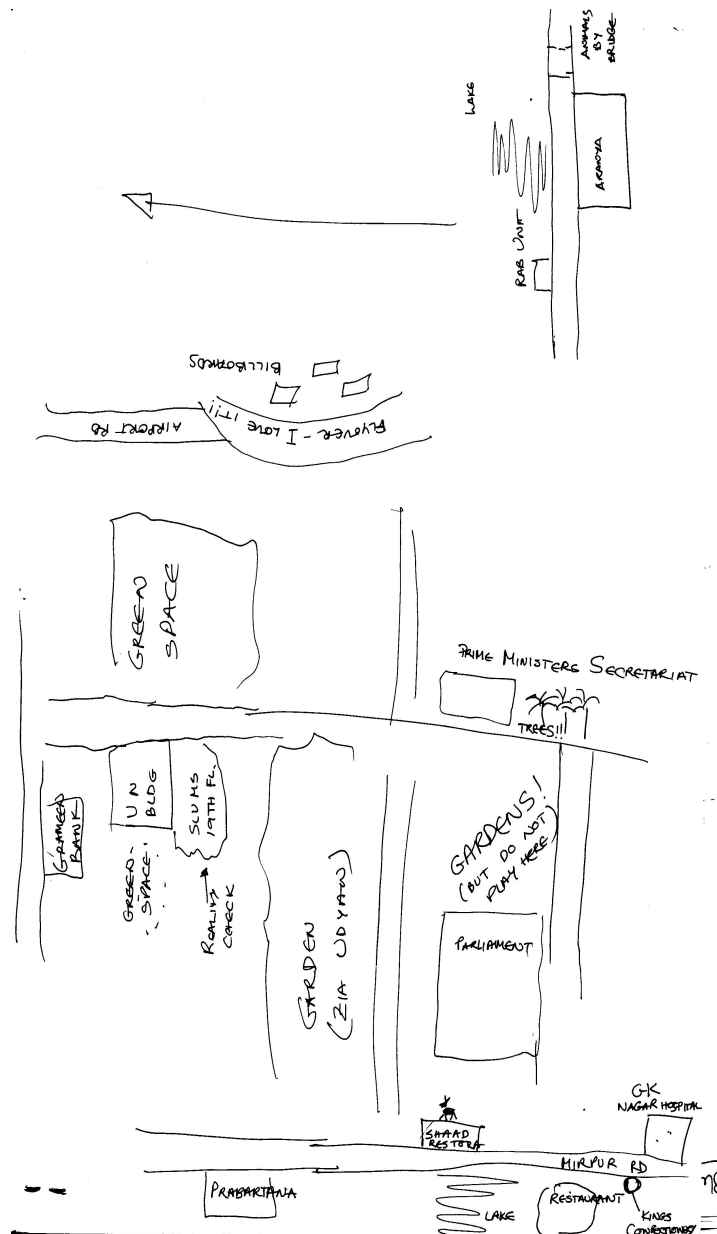
What would become of de Certeau's distinction between the experience of the city from the top of a high-rise building and from the street, with its smells, its sounds and its „texts“ emerging from the thousand human stories that cross each other on the pavement, along the footpaths or in the squares, if applied to a small but relevant portion of urban dwellers who, though commuting on the streets, though getting out of the car for the *katcha bazaar*, do not contemplate the possibility to walk on them? The interview with Nargis posed the question. She has lived in Dhaka for the last 20 years and before, during her university studies; between these two periods she followed her husband to Bahrain, where their first daughter was born; once back in Bangladesh, thanks to the good earnings made abroad, it was possible to buy eight apartments in Dhanmondi and Mirpur, of which they sub-let seven and live in one, in Dhanmondi 14⁴¹⁵. Initially, they settled in Mirpur, but soon moved to Dhanmondi, “a sophisticated area and less densely populated than other neighbourhoods, convenient for business and shopping, and of course a safer area to live in. I like to live here, though it has changed much in the last years, becoming louder, noisy, and the traffic is huge – there are so many schools and clinics, this creates the traffic jams: the plot beside our house was an open space until 1996, but then they built a hospital. Privacy gets destroyed like that“. Asked about her movements in Dhaka, Nargis explained

⁴¹⁵ Nargis belongs to group 6.

that, to possibly limit these, she usually purchases big quantities of meat, rice and fruits respectively in a neighbouring Bazaar, the supermarket of Agora as well as New Market, which she stores in big fridges. She only has to go out for the fresh vegetables, which - she stressed with a certain pride - she still does by herself: other housewives in Dhanmondi, worried about law and order, send their home-maids or buy vegetables from door-to-door sellers. However, she would never allow her daughters to accompany her either to the vegetable or New Market, as these are open air spaces in which girls apparently should not be. For all mentioned movements, and with major reason also for the shopping of fabrics and clothes with her daughters, she uses the car. Nargis's mental map of Dhaka is very clearly centred on her home, which assumes the role of a „cell“ or nucleus, from which five weaving branches depart in direction of New Market (N.M.); of her younger daughters' schools near Rifle's Square (N.N.S.) and in Monipuri Para (U.S.) as well as of her eldest daughter's university (N.U.) in Dhanmondi/Green Road; of the Supermarket (AR), the beloved shopping centre of Aarong (A.G.) – both facing Mirpur Road - and the *katcha bazar* of Mohammadpur (K.B.), which by car is reachable through a left-turn from Mirpur Road into Asad Avenue. No landmarks or particular buildings constitute references of a certain importance for Nargis, who apparently does not watch the street-life from the window, but prefers to concentrate on her duties as a mother and wife during the drives; she also showed no concern about their geographical orientation, which is shifted by 180 degrees. In spite of this, she was able to place the different locations in a correct relationship to each other, seemingly thanks to the orientation on Mirpur Road, which leads both to New Market in the south, and to the other shopping facilities in the north of Dhanmondi, and divides the neighbourhood in two parts.

The mental map made evident that the use of the car for every movement affected Nargis's perception of distances, as it stood out in the case of Agora, drawn at a certain distance from home but actually occupying a multi-storeyed building in the same block as her house's. Indeed, this could be brought in relationship with a personal feeling concerning the home, which represents an emotional centre rather than a material place, and is correspondingly kept separated, or distinguished, from the neutral outside. Her Dhaka is congruent with Dhanmondi - a neighbourhood rich in schools, shopping centres and hospitals that stand out in empty of life streets.

„Dhaka from all sides“



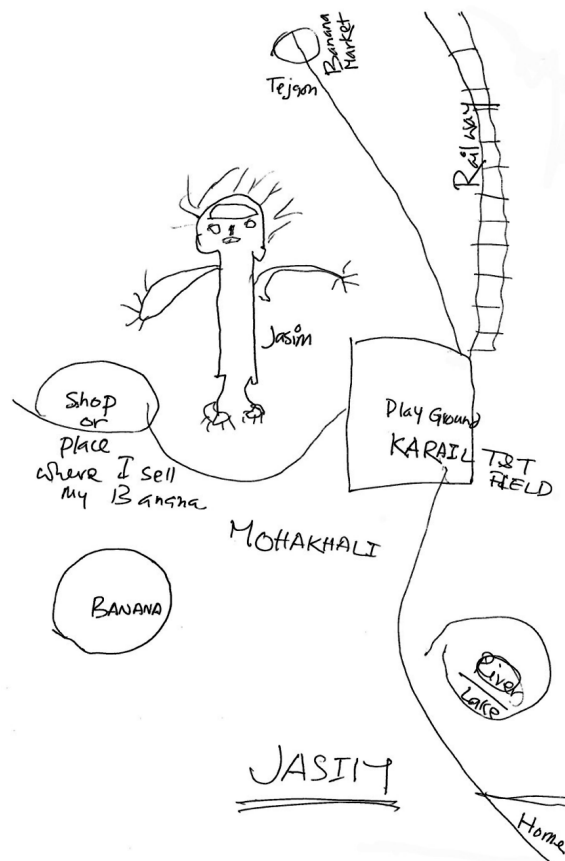
“I spend long times in the car, which I use to think and look at the spots I like along the way, like Manik Mia Avenue, the Parliament, the trees in Pantha Path, the flyover with the weird billboards...” - Farah's experience, and representation, of her city seen from a car, on daily drives from her home in Baridhara to a hospital in Dhanmondi for a medical therapy, provided an interesting contrast to Nargis's case despite a similar “retreat” from streets and public spaces (“My room is my world. The security problem has increased and this naturally affects our [women's] trust and presence in public space. My sense is that, through the overall change in society, I feel less secure. I regard it as more comfortable to

be a woman during events than in the everyday-life, then there is at least a justification to be on the streets. But going out because you have to manage things is different”) and a special mistrust concerning means of public transport (“I would never go by bus because they are too crowded and people could touch you”), as well as comparable education levels. Her having studied and worked abroad, her currently working as a columnist as well as her involvement for development policies constitute in fact strong factors of differentiation from Nargis's - and many other women's - life experiences and ideologies. These materialised in a lively and very opinionated mental map, lacking a home but starting from the fair-trade shop run by her mother, where she daily works for some hours. Nearby the shop, which is located in Banani, she was keen on drawing the Lake and the RAB's check point that controls the passengers approaching Gulshan 2; her next “favourite” is the flyover of Mohakali, linked to the shop by an arrow that should “jump” over the traffic-plagued Ataturk Avenue. Turning the sheet of paper 90 degrees to the left to better “manage” the remaining space, she continued by drawing the Prime Minister Secretariat, followed by the Parliament with one public and one no-more public garden. Turning her sheet of paper in the same direction again, Farah was in Mirpur Road, which she liked to remember for *Prabartana*⁴¹⁶, *Shaad Restaurant* (especially for a particular door decoration), Dhanmondi Lake, one further restaurant and a café (*Kings Confectionery*), which, being precisely in front of her hospital, has become a common meeting point for her and her friends. Turning back her sheet of paper, she eventually made place for another important part of Dhaka: the UN-building and *Grameen Bank*, provokingly juxtaposed to green areas and one slum that occupy the backside of Khan's Government Complex. Beside her very self-confident handling of the drawing space, Farah showed a similarly “dominant” approach to entire Dhaka, whose different parts and layers were portrayed, assembled and brought into relationship by her “comprehensive” view. The obtained mental map revealed respective ideologies by her actively linked to different urban spaces: in the commercial billboards - advertising Italian car tyres, detergents, real estate companies and track oil at one of Dhaka's most trafficked spots -, her criticism about an uneven economic growth pulled by the globalisation is sensitive; the RAB-posts suggest a fragile law-and-order situation; her comment on the Parliament's garden (“Gardens! But do not play here”) expresses frustration concerning Bangladesh's struggling democracy; the (fictive) proximity of Grameen Bank and UN-building should derive from the fact that she worked for both, while the comment “reality check” on the nearby slum, reveals a realistic

⁴¹⁶ „*Prabartana*“ is a centre of fair-trade and production of natural fabrics that employs only female workers, including a café and small restaurant which male customers can only access if accompanied by a woman.

understanding of the work of these institutions; and love, or rather a nostalgia, for natural spaces is visible in the repeated indications on trees, gardens and lakes criss-crossing the entire map. “Urban texts”, she made evident, can also be perceived from the car: „...during those car-trips I have once more the confirmation of the fact that anything can be the reason to look at anybody, we Bengalis are emotional, sentimental people who almost enjoy romantic sadness. We celebrate that also in the city, take for instance a young boy in the park, singing and exhibiting his emotions publicly, even if he can’t. This actually saves the city!”

„City, the routine and the desire“



To interview Jasim, it was necessary to change places with house owners coming back and reclaiming their parking spaces , which he was occupying with banana baskets – quickly collecting the bananas he had displayed on the pavement to attract buyers, agilely standing up with one basket on the head and another leaned on the hips, and naturally sitting down three metres away, until the next car approached. While for a European experiencing these repeated „evictions“, the spontaneous reaction is a feeling of frustration that consequently turns in a question of law concerning „whose right to this space is bigger?“, the fact that

the availability of space is flexible and can temporarily change is not only accepted, but internalised since the early childhood – apparently, since the village life, as the fact that much part of everyday life routines are fulfilled outdoor necessarily implies that space will also undergo different uses and appropriations⁴¹⁷. Jasim, 15 years old⁴¹⁸, moved to Dhaka with his mother, father and sisters four years ago and since then he and his father have worked as a banana sellers; they found shelter in Karail Bustee, where relatives already lived. Jasim's father goes daily to the central fruit market in Kawran Bazaar to buy fresh bananas, sometimes, Jasim also goes with him as he is „growing older and should learn to do that by himself“; subsequently, both go on foot to Mohakali: Jasim usually sells his fruits beside the *Panir* (water) Tank, around which a small informal bazaar has formed. He started his mental map by drawing himself and the basket of bananas; in the centre of the sheet, he drew the playground where he usually goes to play after work, and explained that it is near to the TNT⁴¹⁹ field. The playground actually dominates the map and is the centre from which Jasim started drawing other urban spaces that recur in his experience of the city: the fruit market in Tejgaon, which is crossed by the railway; his working place in Mohakali; Banani Lake (he was not sure whether this would be a river); and his home, nearby the lake.

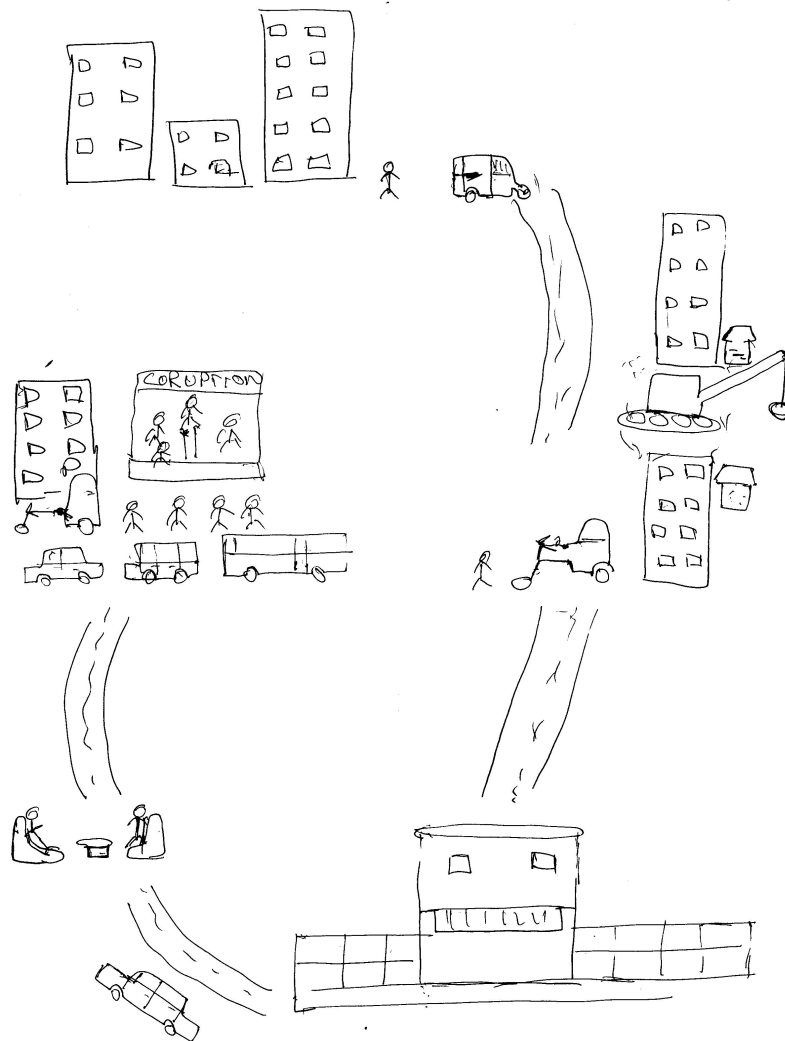
Orientation and distances of the drawn urban spaces are strongly based on Jasim's personal perception rather than on an attempt to „think with a map“, whereby such perception „springs“ from the playground to the other settings, which do not have any spatial relationship to each other. In this sense, the resulting mental map, showing locations of the interviewed boy's everyday life in different moment of the days, has a temporal rather than spatial connotation. Considering the fact that only few hours a day remain for him to play, the playground's central position and role in the map make evident how important this „space of desire“, of meeting and playing with friends, is in Jasim's „everyday life map“.

⁴¹⁷ While the meant „internalisation“ regards the *understanding* of space, (culturally) common to the pavement squatter and the car driver, it must be pointed out that the congestion chronically affecting Dhaka's urban space, especially against the background of the repeated eviction campaigns on the part of administration and State and considering that the lack of an own space is often the reason for social discrimination, does pose the question on the „right“ to its *use*, i.e. on its repartition/distribution.

⁴¹⁸ For the evaluation, Jasim was put in group 2.

⁴¹⁹ Central Telecommunication Office.

„The whole of the city in a one-day journey“



Commuting between the different „worlds“ of which Dhaka is constituted without time or work constraints, but with open eyes and mind to be able to perceive them, is a „privilege“ that few urban dwellers have; male students, indeed, were found to be particularly often in this privileged position. The 19-year-old Faye⁴²⁰, met one afternoon in a recently opened café in which he admitted spending many hours a week, moved everyday from home, in Shanti Nagar, to his private university in Mohakali, to Dhanmondi's or Gulshan's cafés and pool-rooms for leisure moments with cousins and friends, and then, at 9 or 10 pm, went back to the „concrete jungle“, as he defined the neighbourhood in which his family has resided for generations. About Shanti Nagar, which developed in the first years of East Pakistan's history, he said: “although congested, it's nice: I know it so well, I know our

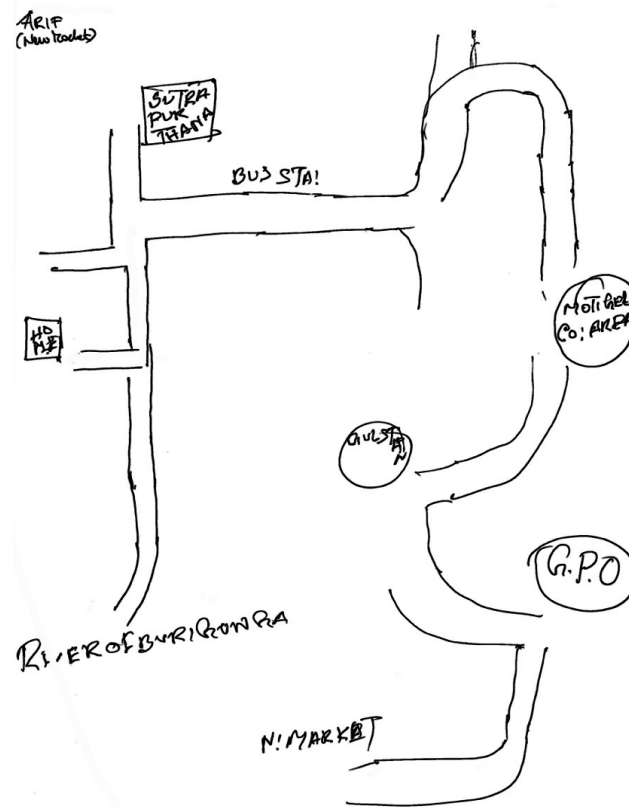
⁴²⁰ For the evaluation, Faye⁴²⁰ was put in group 6.

neighbours and we are friends - this would not be the case in other neighbourhoods, people don't have any attachment in newer areas. If I feel I do belong to Dhaka, it surely depends on the people living here, the *Dhakaiyas*: they are friendly and open, they like companionship and can gather in congested places without minding". His father passed away and his mother moved to the USA, thus, in the period of the research, Fayeze was getting prepared to be admitted to an American university. His day begins in Shanti Nagar, in his grandmother's house - drawn on the bottom of the paper so to make space for the long way to Mohakali -, a one-family building standing out among a compact row of smaller ones, whereby a comparison with the multi-storeyed constructions that fill the near Old Dhaka makes evident that it has not been "developed". As a *Dhakaiya*, Fayeze likes to go to *Puran Dhaka*, although what can be found there is not an *old* city, but the stage of a violent development process that is modifying the traditional cityscape. The classes, he continued, begin at 11 - hereby, he drew himself entering the modern university buildings, placed at the most distant point from Shanti Nagar - and continue until early afternoon, which he spends in different cafés, represented by two comfortable chairs and a tea-table. Their location within Dhaka's map - the south-western Dhanmondi or north-eastern Gulshan - seems to be unimportant, as this kind of spaces appears to be connoted by the quality of time spent *inside* them, rather than by their relationship to the space *outside* them. Though he declared himself as politically uninterested, Fayeze completed the map with a scene from "Paltan", interpreted in the sense suggested in precedent chapter, i.e. as space of representation of power (visible in a high administration building) and of political activism (materialised in a stage from which "political leaders" talk to supporters, yet under a banner entitled "corruption").

While drawing his mental map of Dhaka, or maybe in order to draw it, Fayeze made a report of his everyday routine and thus "joined" space and time in a narration of his movements within the time of a day; the result, much more similar to a cartoon than to a map, integrates graphic elements like the elevations of buildings with one only figurative element, the streets. Indeed, the latter assume a dynamic character, playing the role of "bridges" between different worlds and different times of the day. The awareness of the relationship between time and space did not only guide the creative process, but is "transposed" in the final mental map in form of means of transport that appear beside the different locations and give an idea of *distances*: to reach Old Dhaka from Shanti Nagar, a rickshaw will do; but the much more distant university in Mohakali makes necessary a motorised means of transport, here a three-wheeler. In the afternoon, some friends' cars make the commuting from Mohakali to either Gulshan or Dhanmondi comfortable and fast

(the cafés' indifferent placement could also be due to this reason). Interestingly, before Paltan all types of transportation are collected, which not only witnesses the confluence of people from different parts of the city, but also mirrors a “space of social practice” in which different interest and income groups come together.

„Old Dhaka - New Market back and forth“

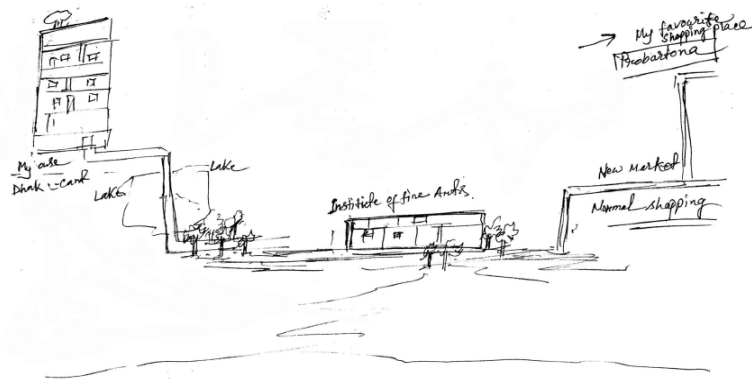


A basic availability of time is not the only premise for the perception of city, also a certain interest, a participant experience of its spaces and everyday life are necessary, which appeared to depend strongly on the dwellers' personal attitudes. Asked whether he likes Dhaka, Arif, also a young *Dhakaiya*, answered: „I would rather say that I like to live in Sutrapur. New Dhaka is interesting for the new buildings and companies, it is more developed than *Puran Dhaka*, but people have good neighbourhood ties here, whereas in New Dhaka people are more individualistic, the only relationships they allow is that to their relatives, but they are closed to others. We in Old Dhaka have a better feeling of community“. Except for rare shopping trips to Banani, he admitted that the only area outside Old Dhaka that he regularly goes to is New Market: there, he has found a job as employee in an accessories shop, after quitting the secondary school and failing in the

attempt to run an own business⁴²¹. The limited interest, deriving from a basic refusal, for the new parts of the city also affected his mental map. On the left side of the sheet, Arif drew his home, from which he made a small road depart ending in another road, which in turn leads to Sutrapur *thana* office and crosses a broader street, that of his bus station; subsequently, he represented the route taken by his bus, first to Motijheel, than to Gulistan, passing by the general post office (GPO) and finally reaching New Market. Asked whether this would be his Dhaka, he extended the road leading to his district's administration office towards the Buriganga: „do you know the Buriganga? I love walking along the shores or going by boat to Narayanganj, and then until it crosses the River Shita Lakha“.

Arif's mental map may well reflect the „urban experience“ of many dwellers of Old Dhaka, who have found a job in other areas of the city, but continue to live in its ancient part: to them, New Dhaka is a city seen from the bus⁴²², consisting of some landmarks (e.g. Motijheel, Gulistan, GPO..) and an unclear road network. Their social life remains basically oriented on the local community (the *thana* office), their leisure on the river.

„Territoriality as consequence of identification“



Chobi's mental map reflects a headstrong perception of Dhaka's cityscape, highlighting five determinant urban spaces that appear to be so powerful in her memory and experience to dwarf distances, respective location, road network as well as neighbourhoods' names and

⁴²¹ For the evaluation, he was included in group 3.

⁴²² Every morning, after reading newspapers, he leaves his family's house and takes the bus to go to New Market; the shop closes at 10 pm, and at this time of the night Arif goes home with the same bus. It should be remarked that similar mental maps, that were strongly based on the – often very long - route of the bus taken from home to the working place, were drawn by interviewees who also lived in other areas of the city and for whom neighbourhoods, avenues and parks were names of unknown stations.

relationships. About her it should be said that she is a student of painting at the Institute of Fine Arts - which may have played a role for her conscious use of mixed design techniques like elevation and aerial view -, and that she was born and raised in Dhaka - which could partly explain her comparatively independent commuting in the city by bus and rickshaw⁴²³. Since her birth, she has lived in *Kachukhet*, a residential area within the Military Cantonment, in a subsidised apartment that was granted to her father in his function of public officer: „it's a residential area, being near the military cantonment, crime is low and laws are strict, especially the traffic laws. Though communication with the rest of the city is not so easy, I like it". She seemed not to consider *Kachukhet* as a real part of the Cantonment in spite of its actual location within the area and its being not universally accessible, surrounded by a wall (that is not shown in her mental map). As it should be difficult to overlook these facts in everyday life, it is here suggested that the lack of experience of different areas (she has always lived in the same place), thus routine, and the unconscious wish to "beautify" her environment, may have led Chobi to ignore the wall as much as the restrictions implicated by it⁴²⁴. A tendency to overstress positive features can be observed in her strongly graphic mental map, in which her house, a fictive lake on the way between home and college, and the college itself are "decorated" by trees: though trees are almost constitutive of lakeshores and the Cantonment as well as Dhaka University Campus are very rich in vegetation, their reproduction in a „mental map“ witnesses a clear intentionality. While this changes in the right part of the drawing, in which „shopping spaces“ - the chaotic and congested 1950s' commercial complex of New Market and the three-storeyed building along the busy Mirpur Road, *Prabartana* - are reproduced, the interviewee's desire to give space a positive and personal connotation is showed by the notes „normal shopping“ and „my favourite shopping place“.

It has been shown that a strong will to delimit an own space – a space that mirrors personal needs and aspirations⁴²⁵ - guided Chobi's drawing, although there are no clear boundaries to demarcate any „territory“ between the five locations. They are rather „comprehended“ by the interviewee's fantasy, recollecting her everyday movements within Dhaka and compiling them in a „story“ irrespective of „which road links the Cantonment to Shahbagh“ or „whether there is a lake or not along this road“, as well as of the real disposition, on Dhaka's plan, of each of the relevant sites. The beautiful building and (oversized) garden of the Institute of Fine Arts dominate from the centre of her mental map

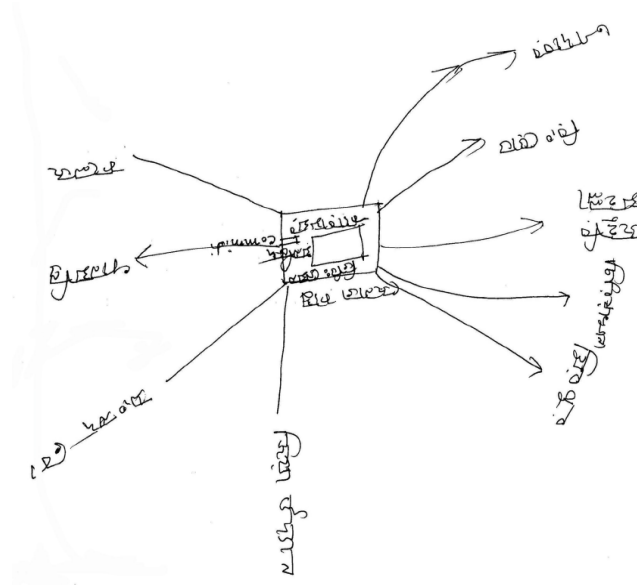
⁴²³ Chobi was a member of group 5.

⁴²⁴ The attitude towards Cantonment, and Army in general, of many students at the Art College is often hostile.

⁴²⁵ This could be put in relationship with Chobi's being born in Dhaka and, possibly, having a stronger identification with the city.

Dhaka's space: there is no need for gates to „segregate“ oneself in the capital city's most attractive and free area; „To me, Shahid Minar and my entire Campus are the centre of Bangladesh, but not that they represent the whole of Bangladesh”.

„Territoriality as a consequence of exclusion“



After his childhood in Geneva Camp, Faisal, a 17 year old college student, has been living with his parents in *Jahuri Mahalla*, Mohammadpur, for some years⁴²⁶. Though he goes to a college in the same neighbourhood and has „Bengali friends“, he spends most of his time with Bihari friends in the Camp because, as he put it, „*Jahury Mahalla* is obviously better than Geneva Camp, it is more open, has better living conditions and a playground, and nevertheless, to a Bihari Geneva Camp remains the best: most of my Bengali friends say <you are Bihari, do you live in Geneva Camp?>. Most of the people outside this camp are Bengalis and they think we are not real Bangladeshis; in the Camp, all know each other so I feel better, it's a friendly environment“. The interview took place in front of one of his favourite shops, a room with a big carrom board, which he generally leaves to play video games, not too far away, every afternoon until midnight. The role of the Camp in Faisal's everyday life had become especially clear when he mentioned that, after college, he may go home just to do his homework, if necessary, or to sleep; his map of Dhaka City, however, made this attachment even more evident. A central quad containing a second smaller one is the starting point and also the only delimited „form“ in the drawing: Geneva

⁴²⁶ In the general evaluation, Faisal belonged to group 3.

Camp. Within it, a video shop, a mosque, the carrom board shop as well as the Bihari committee office are indicated; while the latter is delimited, the former are represented just by means of their names. From the sides of the external quad, three lines link the Camp with *Shangshad Bhaban* (the Parliament) and *Zia Uddyan* (the public park annexed to the Parliament complex) to the right top, as well as with Faisal's college, right below the Camp; and six arrows point towards different urban locations that recur in the boy's everyday life and are important for his representation of Dhaka City: starting by his *mahalla*, on the left side to the Camp, and Dhanmondi at the opposite end of it, Mirpur and the Zoo on the left top of the Camp as well as Ring Road and Adabar below it.

While the respective location of each place is correct, Faisal appeared not to be concerned by the geographic orientation of his own map, which is „shifted“ by 90 degrees towards the left, so that north comes to coincide with west⁴²⁷. He paid attention to relative distances, as *Shangshad Bhaban* and *Zia Uddyan* as well as the college are similarly near to the Camp – they can be reached by foot, while the other locations, which would have requested a bigger sheet of paper to respect the scale, were not „placed“ but indicated by arrows. Latter actually reveal that Faisal generally moves by rickshaw, as Dhaka's streets or roads appear not to matter at all – „the *rickshaw wallahs* have to know“ - and are in fact ignored by his drawing, while the „felt direction“, better remarkable during a rickshaw drive than from the car⁴²⁸, always corresponded to the reality. What about the urban locations drawn by him? While the names of *Zia Uddyan* and Dhanmondi with its lake fell in the interview as spaces where to go with friends and especially a girlfriend in leisure time, it is here suggested that the zoo was a childhood reminiscence awakened by the act of drawing and thus placed in the map as a „desirable“ reference place, and that Mirpur, from where the buses and rickshaws to reach the zoo start, was therefore included in the map. Adabar and Ring Road, a second „island“, or satellite of the Camp beside Old Dhaka are confirmed to be important references in Biharis' urban scape.

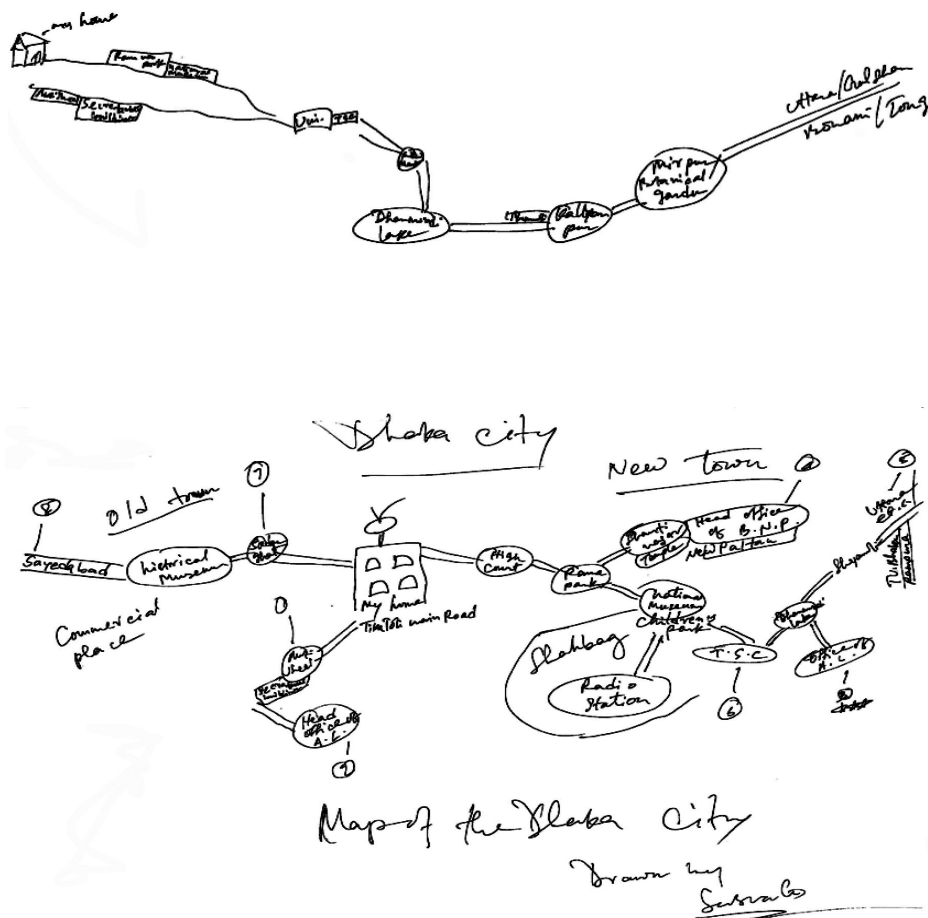
Instead of his home, Faisal recognised his „familiar space“, his territory, in Geneva Camp, represented as closed in spite of at least one street that crosses and actually opens it to the surrounding neighbourhood, and of various breaches that allow the inhabitants to exit on Guznavi and Babar Road - all are ignored by the drawing. The singular representation of two quads, one containing the other, recurred in the mental maps of other interviewed Biharis, but does not have any correspondence with the Camp's built space, which is

⁴²⁷ The same „shift“ recurred in various mental maps done by Biharis and is probably due to the fact that the main „entrances“ to the Camp are not on its short, but on its long sides, that are also parallel to Mirpur Road, identified as „Main Road“.

⁴²⁸ Compared to a person being driven by car, the rickshaw passenger maintains a better notion of space thanks to the wider view, which allows to better perceive trajectories and changes of directions.

asymmetrical and does not have a „centre“⁴²⁹: considering the interviewees' emotional bondage and strong identification with the area, it is presumable this „transformation“ was presumably used to symbolise the unity and coherence of the Camp itself, whereby sacral architecture forms, e.g. of shrines, could be thought of.

„Zoom out, zoom in – Dhaka for commuters and for insiders“



At the time of the interview, Subrata was about to finish his university studies in economy at the National University in Tongi; having met him at *Shiddeshwari Temple* during the celebrations for *Durga Puja*, he offered himself as a guide of Dhaka, where he was born and lived, and which he knew very profoundly⁴³⁰. At the next meeting, at Dhanmondi Lake, he was, indeed, surprised to be asked to draw a map of his city: what should a map be good for? Once convinced of the experiment, he started a „cruise“ from his home to some of

⁴²⁹ It could not be the Camp office, which is nowadays in a rather peripheral zone within the Camp and was always rightly correctly in the maps; a possible „centre“ could be recognised in a shrine, which was found to play an important role during the celebration of the Shiites' religious celebration of *moharram*.

⁴³⁰ Subrata belonged to group 4 in the evaluation.

Dhaka's most important places, Ramna Park and the National Museum as well as Motijheel with the Secretariat, Dhaka University and TSC, New Market, Dhanmondi Lake, Mohammadpur and Kallyampur (where some of his friends live), Mirpur and the Botanical Garden, until Uttara (coupled with Gulshan) and Tongi (coupled with Banani). The resulting mental map had a very linear appearance due to Subrata's initial intention to represent the whole of his city as he had known it from the bus, „in transit“ from home to his university in Tongi. After reflecting on what Dhaka means to him, however, he decided to draw a second map, for which he again started from home (dominated by a satellite dish), in the „Islamic neighbourhood“ of Tikatoli, in Old Dhaka; from here, three „directions“ lead to Old Dhaka (left), Motijheel (below) and New Dhaka (right). The port of *Sadar Ghat* and Ahsan Manjil (in which the historical museum is situated) appeared to be his principal landmarks in the old town, which he additionally characterised by mention of the „commercial place“, meaning especially Islampur.

He furthermore showed the way, via Tikatoli's „main road“, to Motijheel and, behind it, Bangladesh Secretariat as well as Awami League's Head Office. To the right, he indicated settings of political, cultural and social life that follow each other on the way north: High Court; Ramna Park (behind it also Shanti Nagar Temple as well as the head office of BNP, in New Paltan); National Museum with Shishu Park and a radio station, all included in the broad Shahbagh area; Teachers' and Students' Centre (TSC); as well as Dhanmondi Lake with a second party office of Awami League⁴³¹. He continued towards Shyamoli along Mirpur Road, whereas he also was keen to indicate the direction of Uttara and the TV-centre in the south-eastern Rampura. Subsequently, probably influenced by the interview's question on Dhaka's political spaces – which he had said „not to care about“-, he numbered the different areas according to their political relevance: starting with Motijheel, respectively Awami League's head and Dhanmondi offices, BNP's head office, Uttara, TSC, Sadar Ghat and Sayedabad⁴³². Looking at the final result of his memory exercise, he commented „this is the Dhaka that counts, and try not to be around these spots in the next months!“.

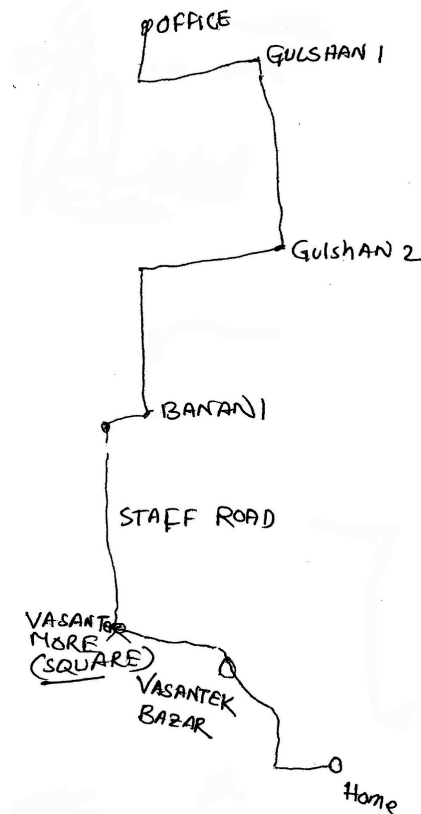
Concerning Subrata's orientation, it would be possible to recognise Dhaka City's broad disposition on the north-south axis by turning his map 90 degrees anticlockwise, though singular settings, especially in the second drawing, are disposed according to a narrative rather than to any geographical relationship: in this sense, it was spoken of „directions“

⁴³¹ Bangladeshis of Hindu religion, like Subrata, generally support this party for an apparently friendlier behaviour towards religious and cultural minorities.

⁴³² Sayedabad, famous for a big bus station and a frequent locality of political struggles, is actually in the area of Khilgaon, north of the old town.

and not of streets or roads concerning the three ways departing from his home. Which narration was Subrata following? The second map is particularly interesting against the background of the statements he had made in the precedent interview - in which he declared to be uninterested in politics and tried to avoid any comment on the topic⁴³³ -, because it revealed an unexpected awareness of the settings of political events and activism. Hence, it appears that in his drawing he was trying to combine the awareness, which he strongly related to the media, about Dhaka's being the capital of Bangladesh, with his physical knowledge of the city itself, based on bus stations and rickshaw routes. Also interesting is that New Market, the University, Mohammadpur and Kallyanpur as well as Mirpur and the Botanical Garden, which had been represented as relevant stations of Dhaka City in the first map, „disappeared“ in the second, whereas TSC and Dhanmondi Lake remained: while the Teachers' and Students' Centre is a specific space of socio-political activities within the Campus and should have been maintained for this reason, Dhanmondi Lake's relevance as meeting and leisure space for Dhaka's youth is hereby additionally confirmed.

„When city means work“



⁴³³ Such reluctance was explained by the fact that he perceives himself as member of a minority („Bangladesh is my homeland, although it is difficult to live here because we are a minority in the country. I feel at home, but it is the home of others“), and politics as awkward.

Dwellers of Bhashantek were found to have a very strong feeling of bondage and identification to the own area and community, which was for example revealed by their mentioning the resettlement area as the „centre of Dhaka“ or „the place that best represents Bangladesh in Dhaka“, but also insofar as they often stressed their feeling secure and supported within the community. Among them, Mannan explained that after having been evicted from Magbazaar he never dreamt to go „back to Dhaka“, as in Bhashantek he had found a natural environment, in which he could raise some goats, and he had the feeling to be in „his own place“. Having lived in the capital for more than 40 years and as a maintenance worker of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC)⁴³⁴, he could count on a deep knowledge of different urban spaces, yet he explained not to be very interested in the city. His mental map clearly mirrored his pragmatic view: starting from home, he very carefully drew the way which he generally takes to get to the settlement's bazaar as well as the *more*, a big esplanade at the exit of the settlement, from which it is possible to reach the main street. From here, he made a long straight line to represent his way through the Military Cantonment - on „Staff Road“ (*Government Staff Road*) -, in direction of Banani, where he generally receives orders regarding his daily duties at one of the posts of DCC. His work as a street cleaner generally brings him to Gulshan 2 and 1: going from Banani to Gulshan 2, the Banani Lake has to be passed – corresponding to the bridge, his drawing hand changed direction of 90 degrees – while the way from Gulshan 2 to Gulshan 1 was represented as a long straight road. Behind the circle of Gulshan 1, eventually, he placed a DCC office. With its strong reference to the daily work routine, Mannan's mental map reveals an „everyday life practice -based“ view of the city and at the same time a strong „retreat“ from it, which is observable in the proportionally bigger scale and curved trajectory of his way within Bhashantek – a way filled with known neighbours, with the tea stall and the mosque – in comparison to the others, by him perceived as straight, modern streets and as a mere place of work. The esplanade in correspondence with the settlement's end, in this sense, seems to play the role of a threshold between the familiar space of feelings and the urban space of functions.

⁴³⁴ In the evaluation, Mannan belonged to group 1.

Conclusions

Space, as observed by de Certeau and confirmed by the mental maps of Jasim and Chobi, **is a matter of *memory***, of recollection of movements and of things that have happened or have been lived, **as well as of *desire***, of things that could happen and be lived. But social, and thus symbolic, values and discourses are projected onto space, too, making it to a representation: in Farah's, Fayez's and Subrata's mental maps these values are represented in individual and original ways. Space for Mannan, Nargis, Faisal and Arif was in the things that are or can be found in it, whereas Pratim tried to think of the „background“, or the structure, of Dhaka's urban space, until he noticed that that was not his Dhaka and started placing „objects“ to characterise it⁴³⁵.

Beside the individuality of each of the respondents' mental maps, it became evident that drawing a mental map, being an „active“ *representation* process, is strongly dependent on individuals' more or less developed capacity to draw and is not proportional to the accuracy and accurateness of *perception*, which is a rather „passive“ activity⁴³⁶. Due to this fact, the mental maps of Berlin, London or Cairo will not be very different from those of Dhaka, although European urban dwellers may have learnt to use city maps and to read plans - something only a minority of Dhaka dwellers can do.

City, to non-professionals as well as to geographers or architects, is factually what is lived at street level: that which influences and accompanies everyday life's behaviours, that where desire can potentially be realised, that of everyday life objects and landmarks.

⁴³⁵ A similar result was also obtained in the context of representation of interior space by Anne Kockelkorn, who analysed the spatial representation of squatters of Ambedgar Nagar, a slum in Mumbai's neighbourhood of Colaba (*Can you make a drawing of your house?*, 2000, unpublished report).

⁴³⁶ This would be also the sense of Rapoport's observation that mental maps depend on behaviour *in* space rather than on knowledge *of* physical space. Cf. Rapoport (1977), p. 122.

2.2.4. Summary - Juxtaposing the respondents' representations

After having reflected on natal bonding, maybe comparatively, wondering for the first time about the own relationship to the „home-town“ in Europe; after experiencing how Dhaka's „primacy“ within Bangladesh is delineated respectively by first-generation and long-entrenched inhabitants, and recognising women's uncomfortable position in Dhaka's built, as well as social, space on the base of the dwellers' representations of City⁴³⁷; after having approached Dhaka's religious life, and reflected on all religions' almost constitutive relationship to time; after discovering the city's most beloved gathering points and wondered about streets emanating a stronger political aura than buildings with the dwellers' representations of space⁴³⁸; and after having confirmed the insight that space is a matter of memory, adding that it is, indeed, also a matter of desire as observed in the respondents' mental maps⁴³⁹, it is now the moment to draw a balance of the here attempted approach to mental representations. By juxtaposing the respondents' representations, it was assumed, it should be possible to figure out the complex processes Dhaka is presently faced with: instead of the flaneur's intuitions and idiosyncratic interpretations, heterogeneous elements provided by urban dwellers should unveil the meaning of urban life and space in Dhaka.

In the different paragraphs, the respondents' individual, emotional, pragmatic, and contradictory opinions and representations were brought to light. It is important to stress this result as a first „proof“ of the profitability of ethnographic method, as it allowed the respondents – migrants, students, and also illiterate persons - to form and express their own opinion on abstract topics⁴⁴⁰. The answers rarely had a pre-formulated character, also due to the fact that, in absence of generalised, commonly recognised expectations on the meaning of City, the representations were expressed spontaneously and often „generated“ at the very moment of the interview. Recent settlers as well as Dhaka-born interviewees gave comparatively equally „rich“ and individual answers, which represents a second important insight insofar as it would contrast the recurrent assumption that migrants are unadaptable to, and overstrained by, urban life⁴⁴¹.

⁴³⁷ Cf. paragraph on *Representations of the City*, 2.2.1.

⁴³⁸ Cf. paragraph on *Representations of space*, 2.2.2.

⁴³⁹ Cf. paragraph on *Mental maps*, 2.2.3.

⁴⁴⁰ Education revealed to be decisive for the answers to all questions, as it was seen that low education levels corresponded with a difficulty in reflecting on cultural, national, and in fact also individual identity.

⁴⁴¹ This raised a question on representations of City and space on the part of inhabitants of cities with longer urban traditions: in how far would the answers of German or Italian interviewees differ from those given by Dhaka's dwellers? The fact that it did not compare two different cities and their populations could be regarded as a limit of this study and possibly provides a suggestion concerning further projects - which, especially against the background of globalisation of values and lifestyles in increasingly „global“ cities, could give extremely profitable results.

In this paragraph, representations of space, defined as those ideologies that “scientists, technocrats, urban planners, social engineers, architects and intellectuals, but also some artists” create in their efforts to comprehend material reality, were at the centre of attention. These ideologies “condense”, by a mental act, single details of material reality in a (ideal) totality; in another place within the *Production of Space*, Lefebvre said that they consist of a system of signs that “represent” space. In his analysis - which was influenced by the lessons of historical materialism -, such a mental field of spatial production dominates the others due to the progressive detachment from physical work, to individualisation and its consequent loss of social interaction in modern life. Against this background, Dhaka could be approached in two opposite ways: on one side, the fact that different phases of economic progress („rural“, industrial and tertiary) are co-existing allows to expect that the „totality of ideology“ is contradicted by not-yet-condensed details of material reality, that is, the domination of the mental field could be still „incomplete“. The high proportion of recent migrants could be a second source of contradictions, as it was shown in the introduction to this chapter that rural life is also dominated by strong representations of space affecting physical and social practice. In this case, a „mental production“ of space in Dhaka would not exist, or be not observable due to the still fragile, unstable nature of spatial and social practice in Dhaka.

On the other side, if the mental field is about ideologies and is defined as a system of “representations”, the researcher could have concentrated on the abstract categories of cultural knowledge that were recognised through the historical analysis of spatial forms and urban development already in the introduction to this chapter, and limit the survey to a “proof” of the same categories. For each of them - spatial and gender segregation, cosmological representation of physical space, missing reference to formal actors (i.e. urban administration) in favour of informal actors and private initiative for urban development, a fluent and temporally modifiable understanding of space -, confirming or contrasting examples could have been found. The survey could have been conducted without needing to interview its dwellers. What is, then, the qualitative advantage of the chosen approach? Only interviews with the dwellers could in fact ensure the application of Lefebvre's theory in its real meaning of trialectic. The idea of the trialectic consists in a constant interaction between the three fields of production, which continue to affect and modify each other. Despite its momentary dominance, the mental field must also be regarded with an awareness of physical and social fields; this can only succeed by an inclusion of the dwellers perspectives and personal representations.

Once the approach has been justified, a relationship between the three paragraphs' most

important insights shall be established before passing to the illustration of space's social production in next chapter. The illustration of the respondents' representations of City resulted in three main insights: first of all, **Dhaka is seen as an „investment“ for the future** (i.e. children, future generations) rather than as an environment in which to set roots, because birthplace, familiar lineage and kinship continue to represent the primary terms of definition of the own identity („future rootedness“). Moreover, it was showed that Dhaka means an almost *a priori* promise of survival chances and is directly synonymous of market, in particular employment market, as well as that **Dhaka's primary feature as a city is at present recognised in its infrastructure**, i.e. in broad roads and flyovers, educational institutions, public and private means of transport, industries and high-rise buildings hosting offices and firms. Such characterisation, which could clearly be applied to any postmodern city and is reminiscent of contemporary analysis attempts of the „global city“, could lead to call Dhaka a „generic city“, even a „non-place“⁴⁴². It is combining this deflating result with those derived from the following paragraphs on representations of space and the mental maps that Dhaka's „image“ achieves a more complex level. Giving them the possibility to delve into representations of urban spaces and allowing them to represent these actively, the dwellers showed differentiated, personal and individual approaches to Dhaka itself. For example, a particularly broad appreciation of the so-called traditional „urban“ areas, but in particular of Dhanmondi – and within Dhanmondi, of its Lake - emerged in both interviews and mental maps.

The insight that emotional and symbolic features of urban spaces count more than architecture and urban design for the dwellers' interpretations and representations of space is regarded as particularly important as it gives an indication of possible „starting points for interventions“, but also because it confirms the importance of surveys aiming at this type of „soft“ parameters. A second considerable insight regards the respondents' understanding of space as flexible, transformable „container“ of religious or in general abstract thoughts, because it throws light on the herein implicit capacity to conceive of multi-functional and multi-layered space⁴⁴³. At the same time, this gives an important indication for planning approaches aiming at tackling the concrete problem of congestion and lack of space.

How can the discrepancy between a “generic” feeling towards the city as a whole and the opinionated, participated representations of particular spaces within it be explained? Here, it is suggested, the potential of complexity and contradictoriness of cities becomes evident.

⁴⁴² Both metaphors, deriving respectively from Rem Koolhaas and Marc Augé, were formulated to express post-modern cities' impersonal character due to globalisation and homogenisation of their standards and ways of life, cf. Koolhaas's article *The Generic City* in *S,M,L,XL* and Augé's book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, both of 1995.

⁴⁴³ This is in fact going to be one of the main themes of the participant observation in next chapter.

Due to the appeal of cities, which have attracted rural inhabitants since antiquity and constitutionally represent the confluence point of dwellers “from somewhere else”, a certain detachment is constitutive of urban life and is often linked to the awareness that a life “somewhere else” – in the birthplace, in another neighbourhood, other city, or country - would be possible. Yet, this does not implicate an incapacity to get involved with the city, to comment on it and recognise individual places of desire that make it liveable and give it a complex personal, emotional and symbolic character. Asked about their attitude towards Dhaka, the respondents often “introverted” their perspectives, taking distance from the urban space in favour of their “own” space, that of bonding and origin. In contrast, once they were asked about concrete “values” and “reputations” regarding urban spaces and to represent them by a sketch on the base of apprehended knowledge, education, internalised and unconscious social norms but also everyday life experiences, their perspectives “extroverted”.

This is the point at which social practice begins, at which the broad “panorama-view” can be replaced by individual, personal perspectives on Dhaka.

2.3. Social field - Observing representational spaces

Physical and mental production of space, which were illustrated in last chapters, are integrative of lived space, or *social practice*. In this field, the witness and result of the history of peoples as well as of histories of individuals, social actors interact, adapt and transform their environment, whereby their "desire" and imagination can appropriate the „dominated“ space of physical practice. At the same time, it is the space of representation of social values, traditions, dreams and collective experiences, and therefore it is „imaginary, directional, situational (or relational), transversed by symbolisms and history, essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic“. Other than in physical space, objects are used symbolically here; other than represented spaces, representational spaces are „lived and suffered“ in *loci* of passion, of action and of lived situations.

Instead of equating social space with „social values“ like it is typically done in social sciences, Lefebvre contemplated the coexistence of various social spaces, each produced by respectively different sociological relations, but all interlinked and overlapped. This understanding determined the preference of his model for the survey of Dhaka's coexisting social spaces, which shall be described here on the base of the own participant observation of different individuals' everyday life practices. This method of empirical research was preferred to others because it appeared to allow an immersion in the “realm of the specific”, i.e. social practice, by means of the direct experience of dwellers' passions and “desire”.

The table on the next page presents the locations of social practice, listed according to a decreasing degree of „privateness“ and subdivided in everyday life spaces on one side and rituals⁴⁴⁴ allowing the realisation of „desire“ through special collective experiences on the other, that were concerned with participant observation⁴⁴⁵.

⁴⁴⁴ Lefebvre's understanding of rituals is applied here: „there are several rituals which *punctuate* our life: 1) Religious rituals, their irruption and also their intervention in daily life; for example fasting, prayers, ablutions, the muezzin, the angelus and ringing of bells, etc. 2) Rituals in a larger sense of the word, both sacred and profane such as festivals and carnivals which inaugurate or terminate a period, rites of intimate conviviality or external sociability 3) Finally, political rituals, that is, ceremonies, commemorations, votes, etc.“. Cf. Henri Lefebvre and Catherine Régulier, *Elements of Rhythmanalysis* (ER) quoted from *Writings on Cities*, p. 235.

⁴⁴⁵ With exception of *Janmastami Puja*, all locations and events were reached thanks to five guiding persons, China, Mamun, Sunila, Sabbir and Parveen, at whose houses the participant observation began.

EVERYDAY LIFE SPACES	RITUALS
<p>HOME...</p> <p>At China's family in a private-owned inner-urban informal settlement/ Sukrabad</p> <p>With Mamun in and along the squatter of <i>Karail Bustee</i>/ Gulshan</p> <p>With Sunila at her family in Shakhari Bazaar/ Old Dhaka</p> <p>With Sabbir in Geneva Camp/ Mohammadpur</p> <p>At Parveen's office and home/ Dhanmondi</p> <p>...AND AROUND IT</p> <p>Courtyards and lanes within housing complexes, where women gather</p> <p>Old Dhaka's workshops' and shops' front spaces, from where the shop-keepers chat with the colleagues on the other side of the street</p> <p>Tea-stalls where TV is watched.</p> <p>PURCHASING AND GATHERING</p> <p>Shopping malls, whose entrances are watched over by guards to prevent squatting</p> <p>The booming restaurants and cafés</p> <p>Playgrounds where „associated“ male youths play cricket, football or badminton</p> <p>EXPERIENCING PUBLIC SPHERE</p> <p>Neighbourhood's <i>katcha bazaars</i></p> <p>Buriganga riverbanks, stage of Hindu rituals, working and living area for the poor, river port and marketing/delivery space, playground, etc.</p> <p>The lakeshores of Dhanmondi Lake, meeting place for morning joggers, lovers and young people alike as well as favourite location for drama and music events</p>	<p>RITUALS in PRIVATE SPHERE</p> <p>Home shrines for the family Gods of Hindu believers</p> <p>The „making sacred“ of Parveen's office during the ritual prayer</p> <p>RELIGIOUS SPACES</p> <p>Mosques</p> <p>Hindu temples</p> <p>FESTIVALS</p> <p><i>Janmastami Puja</i> in the old town, which change space through collective action and “desire”</p>

Fig. 11: Schematic representation of observed spaces of social practice.

The peculiarity of observation method and „object“ requested an equally individual and flexible writing method for the consequent description in this survey, which clearly could be neither a purely „objective“ report nor the issue-based description applied in precedent chapter. In a late text, *Elements of Rhythmanalysis*, Lefebvre wrote that „it is impossible to

understand urban rhythms without referring to a general theory, which we call <Rhythmanalysis> [...] More aware of times than of spaces, of moods than of images, of the atmosphere than of particular spectacles, [the rhythmanalyst] is strictly speaking neither psychologist, nor sociologist, nor anthropologist, nor economist. Yet, by turn he comes close to these disciplines and can use all the instruments employed by the specialists. He therefore adopts in relation to these different sciences a transdisciplinary approach⁴⁴⁶.

Following his suggestion regarding a rhythmanalysis that mixes contemplation and participation and highlights times, moods and atmospheres, the collected observations will be so „composed“ as to give birth to an “animated space”. The object of the analysis is Dhaka's multi-layered urban space, the source of such “animation” - the production of space in creative, personal, adaptive and appropriative everyday life practice. To highlight the individuality and a-synchronicity of urban rhythms, the results of participant observation periods of three up to six days have been condensed into one-day reports with different starting points and evolutions⁴⁴⁷.

⁴⁴⁶ ER, p. 228-229.

⁴⁴⁷ Due to the researcher's very personal involvement in this part of the field work, the personal verbal form will be used here: by „I“ or „me“, the researcher is thus meant.

An informal settlement on private land in Sukrabad, Dhanmondi

China doesn't know precisely when she came to Dhaka – it could be 15 or 20 years ago, she adds after an approximate calculation of her children's age, she was given as a wife to a family's acquaintance and followed him to the capital in search of better job opportunities. At that time, her older sister, who had repeatedly refused to get married, also moved to Dhaka; another of their sisters married and moved to Dhaka some years later⁴⁴⁸: they all live nearby each other in Sukrabad. The elder sister learnt to produce and sell small handicrafts and is living alone in a *pucca*⁴⁴⁹ within a big and congested plot; she remained unmarried but thanks to a good relationship to her sisters and neighbourhood, her hut is often filled with visitors. The youngest works in a garment factory and has a one-year-old son; she and her husband Tajul live in a tiny, dark *jhupri*⁴⁵⁰. China's new family is completely constituted by men - beside her husband, her three sons of 13, 11 and 9 and her brother-in-law, who has recently moved to Dhaka in search of a new occupation - but, since she has been the only bread-winner for years, she enjoys absolute authority. She works as a *buah*, home-maid, for an activist and NGO-founder in Shyamoli, some kilometre north of Sukrabad. Although it takes her almost one hour on foot, bus and again on foot to reach there, when her former landlord decided to develop his plot and she had to look for a new home, six months before, she didn't have any doubt that they would remain in the same neighbourhood, Dhanmondi. At that time - she was desperately looking for a new place and I had suggested that a house in Shyamoli could have been much cheaper and easier to find -, she showed her surprise at my ignorance of a „basic“ understanding concerning Dhaka. First of all, she explained, Sukrabad – which extends along one of

⁴⁴⁸ They have two more younger sisters, who are studying at a college in the capital. According to tradition, boys and girls who wish to marry are allowed to do that only after their respectively older brother or sister have been married. In families with many children, this is seen as a means to ensure a balanced progress of the familiar economy. Long-term marriage refusal by a son or daughter can give reason to expel him/her from the family. In particular, since sons generally keep living with the parents and support them in their late days, when one of them delays his marriage he can be „tolerated“, whereas girls, who will leave the parents' home to join their husbands' families, are not expected to refuse marriage for long. It should be hereby mentioned that the payment of a dowry for the marrying daughters is still a very common practice in Bangladesh, especially in rural areas, although it is officially forbidden by Bangladesh's government and NGOs and international agencies are conducting strong campaigns against it. In 2007, the already cited US Report on Human Rights stated: “Laws specifically prohibit certain forms of discrimination against women, provide for special procedures for persons accused of violence against women and children, call for harsher penalties, provide compensation to victims, and require action against investigating officers for negligence or willful failure of duty; however, enforcement of these laws was weak. In 2003 parliament passed an amendment to the current law, weakening provisions for dowry crimes and addressing the issue of suicide committed by female victims of acts of dishonor. [...] Some of the reported violence against women continued to be related to disputes over dowries. From January to December, BSEHR reported 145 dowry-related killings”.

⁴⁴⁹ House made of concrete; cf. chapter on the physical field (in particular, paragraph 2.1.2.) for descriptions of constructions.

⁴⁵⁰ House made of ephemeral materials and tin.

Dhaka's rare East-West axes, Pantha Path - is easy to reach by bus or rickshaw; secondly, it has one covered bazaar and many shops around it; thirdly, it is provided by street cleaning and employees of DCC regularly came along to disinfect the sewerage during monsoon time, which is actually not guaranteed even in middle class areas. Finally, she also mentioned that her children's school and her sisters' homes are nearby, so that the children can reach both independently on foot while she's absent.

However, her arguments, expressed in simple words and with the reluctance of every woman of her social background to speak out what she likes personally - and not as mother or wife -, made another factor evident. Having spent many hours with China over one year, I knew how much she enjoyed going to *bottrish number* („Street 32“, nowadays Dhanmondi's Road 11) in a nice saree on Victory Day, or walking around Dhanmondi Lake during holidays; if she had lived far away from this lively centre of urban life, she couldn't have gone there alone, or her neighbours would have reminded her of *purdah*, and recommended to stay more at home. A working woman, China has learnt to recognise her needs and self-confidently claims freedom of movement within her own family, but the same claim becomes timid, or even remains hidden, in her social environment: despite various women from her plot and both her sisters working, few of them „go out“ alone on celebration days. Thus, her reasons for living in Dhanmondi are related to infrastructural considerations, but to cultural and recreation needs as well.

Like every day for six days⁴⁵¹, after her work is done, China and I take a minibus for Sukrabad in front of the amusement park, *shishu mela*; leaving her workplace, she covers her head with a colourful *orna* [scarf] - she didn't do that some months before, but since her brother-in-law has arrived from the village, she is getting used to it. She moves watching carefully where she is putting her feet, heading straight towards her target, with calm and attention; in her cautious, although self-confident way of moving, she leads me to the bus's *mohilar sits*, the sitting places for female passengers, that are free as at this time of the day, 5 pm, the majority of working women are still busy in factories or homes. Her landlord, she explains on the way, owns five apartment houses between Sukrabad and Khola Bagan and is letting this plot as long as he needs to collect the funds to develop it into an apartment building: in six months, one year or a few years, she knows, she will be told to leave again. She chose this dwelling because it disposes of a shared cooking area with three gas cookers and a common latrine, built in concrete; due to these services, it is pretty expensive as she is paying 2,500 instead of the previous 1.500Tk. Another disadvantage of this dwelling is the higher number of neighbours, as only six or seven

⁴⁵¹ The participant observation took place from 4 to 9 August 2007.

families surrounded her previous one. Yet, she says, „*protibesh bhalo*“ - the neighbourhood is good: the majority, including many women, has a paying job, some are artisans who work at home, thus ensuring a certain security during the day-time, and all children go to school – a positive indicator of parental care⁴⁵².

Entering the plot, surrounded by a fenced wall, through a thin, rusted iron door, we find fourteen semi *puccas*⁴⁵³ arranged linearly along the sides of a long and narrow corridor, each about 8sqm in extension and 2,5m high and elevated on a cement basement of 40 cm to prevent flooding during the monsoon. On the right, a cooking corner is filled with clothes hung to dry: its walls are all in concrete and it is illuminated and ventilated by a small breach in the outer wall. On the left, the latrine: 2 WC-rooms, closed by iron doors, a water pump and a corner to take shower, delimited with a piece of cloth. Along with the everyday life of the entire small community, both spaces, not bigger than 4sqm, become the stage of an amazing coming and going. The corridor, where sandals and small buckets for water are left beside the entrances, is flanked by a colourful succession of saris and *sawar kamiiz*, the ladies' clothes, that are drying on the bamboo walls. Informed by the children, few faces of women emerge from the darkness of their huts' interiors to look at the new-comer: they linger on the threshold a bit longer to observe my movements until I enter the hut. The space in the *basa*, the home, is dominated by a bed that fills a good half of the entire area. Other pieces of furniture are placed along the walls: beside the iron door there's the most important, a wooden cupboard with glass vitrine. In the village, I am told, lower-income households don't have any cupboard but store everything in shelves fixed on the walls, therefore women are particularly proud of this piece of furniture. In fact, it seems to be a purely female reign occupied by China's *sawar kamiiz* and *sharees*, fairly ordered in the vitrine on the right, and small gadgets, tea-cups, puppets, ceramic statues, two photo frames with pictures of herself and her youngest son, a table clock, stuffed on three shelves on the left. Only China and her husband are allowed to open the generally locked vitrine, in which a small bowl is used as safe and a small money-box collects little coins, quarters of Taka, for the children. The foreigners she comes in contact with at work often make her gifts before leaving Bangladesh, as walls and the vitrine well demonstrate: the tea cups are decorated with Bavarian landscapes, the calenders portray Walt-Disney figures, and a safari-hat is hanging on the wall.

⁴⁵² She also explained the reasons for which she refused other plots: in some cases, the neighbours were involved in illegal businesses like dealing drugs or stealing; in others, proportionally many women were living alone within the plot, maybe abandoned by their husbands, expelled by their in-laws or their families, and thus she expected intrusions by thieves and mishandling by *mastans*, local „leaders“ (generally involved in illegal business like taxing squatters of public land for rent or forcing women to prostitution), to be then more frequent.

⁴⁵³ Temporary dwelling made of bamboo and covered by corrugated iron sheets.

Everything in the small room seems to have its defined place, which all know and attain to: everyday clothes, if not hung on a line, are collected in two cotton sacks that are stored on one side of the bed; the children's notebooks and writing tools are always in their school bags and will be taken out from the same bed side whenever they think of homework; a small plastic bag in a corner beside the door collects rubbish; an ash-tray is hidden in the hut's floor - it will be placed in the middle of the bed only when one of the men smokes. China controls an impenetrable second „female“ realm, under the bed. All kinds of things are stored in these 3 cubic meters: from various pots (which she shares with her sister), scoops, plates in hard plastic, recipients for rice and garlic, chillies and other spices, to a big cement sack containing old and new clothes. Whatever she needs, from the mysteriously lost pants of her youngest son, to the *koin* against mosquitoes, China finds it there.

While China washes up plates and pots left after lunch by her family members at the water pump adjacent to the latrine, I'm shown the family's photographs by her brother-in-law and the children: I learnt to acknowledge this practice, through which a *meoman*, a guest, can be made part of the family, and ask many questions to show that I am gaining confidence with names and kinships. After having talked and rested a bit, China brings me to the bazaar; she has a good orientation in the mazy lanes and knows where things can be bought at a better price. The best and most expensive bazaar, Sukrabad Bazaar, is a covered market where all kinds of vegetables and fish can be bought; however, she buys fish and vegetables from the sellers surrounding the building, with whom she bargains for a satisfactory price. In a nearby vacant plot, the caretaker-government has provided a weekly market for the evicted street-hawkers: here, her behaviour towards the sellers becomes „colloquial“ as all seem to live in the same neighbourhood. China tells one of the vendors, a neighbour to her sister, to inform the latter about my visit: lacking forms of telecommunication, she uses common acquaintances as „postmen“ in a very effective messaging system based on the reciprocal knowledge of dwelling and kinship patterns. Similar appropriations of vacant urban spaces by the administration, opening and making them available for dwellers, in fact allow the latter to „produce“ space through uses: along with the installing of tents and stalls by the sellers, children found a new space to play and the neighbourhood a new collective space where to bargain, gather and share information. Dinner starts immediately after the bazaar. First of all, all kinds of tools are pulled from under the bed and laid out on the floor: two *piri*, minuscule stools to sit on while chopping, then pots, bowls, *pata* and *puti* - the tray and stone used to smash chillies, garlic and other spices for the *masla* that constitutes the base of all preparations - as well as a small plastic

container of rice. Within some minutes, the floor has been transformed to a cooking platform, where China disposes various vegetables, fish and spices to be cut, chopped and smashed. From this very same moment, the neighbours - that have been coming and going to talk with me - will respectfully remain on the hut's threshold. The longer observation confirmed that activities related to the females' work in the household are distinguished from moments in which all family members are „only“ chatting on the bed. The first are regarded as private, whereas it is acceptable, especially in the case of children, to enter any hut in other situations. A more powerful „delimitation“ is represented by the bed, on which non-relatives, even children, will never sit without being invited to. They rather lean on the edges and stand on the floor, which assumes a second function beside that as cooking platform: it necessarily becomes the gathering place for the community of neighbours. In general, males who are neither relatives nor invited guests are „tolerated“ to cross the huts' thresholds as long as this does not affect the females' space, which in turn is not static or continuous, but emerges during repeated household activities. Children can access different households with a higher freedom, whereby they also observe the privateness of the bed, that results to be a purely private space. In contrast, however, women visiting each other can gather, chat or play table-games on each other's beds⁴⁵⁴.

Usually, at this time of the day – it's by now 8pm, the sun set 2 hours back -, it occurs that electricity breaks down and thus women are trying to hurry in their work. The ingredients are chopped, cut and smashed and China grabs her *orna* to go to the kitchen – why, I ask her, is she wearing it also here, „inside“? She explains that, for elder and married women, it is recommendable to wear the veil whenever outside of home⁴⁵⁵: evidently, she does not regard the plot as an „interior“, although it is fenced in and protected from sight from the street and shared by a small community. At the „cooking corner“, we have to queue: each woman waits for her turn, then starts to cook and, when a second place becomes free, other pots can be put on the fire too. In order to avoid too long queues, a rotation has been introduced - a good „system“, as China calls it in English, which also makes the sharing of tools and pots possible. Near the water pump, an orderly line of women are collecting water in buckets full of plates and pots remained after dinner, on the other hand, men and children of other families come to the pump in order to refresh themselves before dinner⁴⁵⁶.

⁴⁵⁴ This could remind one of the rural houses' form and use, insofar, as described in chapter 2.2., women visiting each other gather in the interior, introverted courtyard, while men remain on the frontyard, along the street.

⁴⁵⁵ The neighbouring unmarried girls, on the contrary, seemed to limit their use of the *orna* to the street.

⁴⁵⁶ Need for space and lack of specific tools appear to give birth to varied creative stratagems: an interesting example is the “production”, to pour rice, into a basin consisting of a bucket and a triangular iron frame. Leaned upon the frame, the hot pots can be inclined until the water falls in the bucket. It will be conserved and used to wash saris and *sawar kamiiz*.

Steaming pots are lying on the floor, generally protected under the bed, waiting for all family members to come back home. This is the most enjoyable time of the day for women, as all their duties are fulfilled and fathers and husbands are mostly still out of home – a time for visiting each other to relax, and for *adda*, chatting about the just past day, gossiping and discussing topics of common interest with friends, relatives and children. Shohel, the youngest son, is still occupied with his homework, which he is silently doing on the bed.

By 10pm all family members are collected at home and time for dinner has come. China's husband and brother-in-law are sitting on the bed, other family members on the floor, waiting to be served dinner. Due to the spatial constraint, it is untypical that the entire family eats together: usually, as I will notice in the next days, children are the first to eat, then it's the adult men's turn, and finally the females. The food is served by China, who regularly pulls the pots to add some more fish or vegetables to the plates of her children, and pushes them back to make space. Dinner is the day's last activity, it is rare to see any of the neighbours outside their huts or on the street now. China's children are quietly lying on the bed, watching their mother's actions or listening and taking part in the discussion between her and her husband. It's almost 11, time to go to bed – in the plot, some lights have already been switched off, although loud TV programmes are still going on. China and I go to the latrine to get ready for the night. Men are smoking their last cigarettes on the thresholds of the huts or near the plot's gate, beside the emptied cooking corner. She sweeps the floor, where the two of us are going to sleep, and prepares the beds with blankets and sheets taken out from the cotton bags stored beside the bed⁴⁵⁷. All children lay down one beside the other, their father covers them with a sheet; China switches off the light, and it does not take long until everybody is silent. China seems to be tired too and, wrapped in her sari, after combing her hair falls asleep, undisturbed by the neighbours' TV on one side, loud voices on the other.

At around 5am, working men and women wake up, quickly take a shower and get dressed, whereby women also do the washing up, cook rice and *dhal* (lentil soup). The activities in the plot's front part are slightly more condensed than during daytime, as almost all community members are contemporarily busy around the cookers, beside the water pump or with their own toilet. Nonetheless, everything occurs without need of words, as if each dweller were trained by daily practice to instinctively take into consideration the others' movements and act correspondingly. Wearing their clothes, they wash themselves at the pump, helped by others who pump water out for them. A *gamsa* (a light cotton towel) hung

⁴⁵⁷ She generally sleeps on the floor with one of her sons.

along a wire hides a small corner for those who prefer to take off their clothes. Children get up at 6-7am; encouraged by their mothers, they wash at the pump and come quickly back to eat their *bhat-dhal*, rice and lentils. As usual, China is the last to eat; after this, she immediately cleans up and sweeps the floor again. Calmly, she starts getting ready for work, while discussing the new day with her husband and making recommendations to the children. In the plot, men and women are now getting ready to leave - the huts are emptying as only few women and seniors remain at home. Two of them are wearing a black *chador* over their *sawar kamiiz*, and cover their head and face with a colourful *orna*. Also China would like to have a *chador* - yet, these are too expensive.

Self-organisation of space in Dhaka's biggest squatter, Karail Bustee

To reach Karail⁴⁵⁸, it is necessary to take a boat from an informal landing place along Mohakali-Gulshan Road and cross a tiny stream of water. The residential buildings built facing the squatter, invisible from the street but revealed to the eye from the Lake, make one aware of Gulshan's rate of development, and at the same time wonder how long the settlement will stand the pressure of construction firms fostering further developments. Landed on the fragile fringes of the sedimentary peninsula, seemingly made of garbage that is being progressively "incorporated" into rich aquatic vegetation, I follow the other passengers into a tiny walkway flanked by 2 meter-high *jhupris* of corrugated iron. The first time I visited Karail was in March 2005, when an increasing interest for Dhaka's urban development was guiding me through its streets, searching with stronger attention for signs and stories of its dwellers. The squatter had suffered under a heavy fire in the previous year, which had destroyed a relevant part of the dwellings and cost the life of some infants and elderly. More than two years later, few traces of the fire have left - the blackened corrugated iron sheets that acted as reminders of it have been progressively replaced by routine improvements to the *jhupri's* ephemeral construction materials, plants have grown.

Passing by an improvised stand selling greeting cards for the approaching *Eid ul-Fitr*, the muddy path covered in waste leads to the heart of the squatter's southern part, *Boubazar*. In shops of circa 3 square meters, made of tin and bamboo, it is possible to make phone calls via mobile, to get a haircut, order a *sawaar kamiiz* at a tailor's, buy medication as well as for wood construction. In the nearby *katcha bazar*, a stand is exposing the fried specialities

⁴⁵⁸ The local denomination „Karail Bustee“ is here adopted. The participant observation took place from 23 to 26 August 2007, during Ramadan. Cf. chapter 2.1. for the description of Karail's historical development and physical features.

for *iftar* (the first meal after fasting): in a few minutes, the call to the prayer should give the sign that the fasting is broken.

A dozen children⁴⁵⁹ would like to bring me to their schools: taken by hand by the 10-year-old Mamun, I follow and let them show me the settlement. The first thing they want to visit after having passed the bazaar is the new mosque - along with another mosque in *Jamai Bazar* (the northern part of Karail), it is the only *pucca* building in the entire squatter. All their families, they say, have contributed to the fund-raising for the works; later, Mamun's father will explain that similar collections of funds for communal purposes – often initiated by the religious authorities - are frequent and well accepted by the dwellers. We head towards north-west, while I notice that the dwellings differ in quality and size and are not directly accessible from the walkway: assembled in groups of 10-20, their doors open towards a common courtyard, accessible through tiny transversal passages. This “closure” seems to be a very conscious construction choice, as the huts also have no windows along the walkway. A comparison with the dwellings of big settlements like Demra or Bhashantek, whose front facades are open to the walkway, gives evidence a) of the rather spontaneous and step-by-step development of Karail, witnessed by the heterogeneity of its physical structure and construction materials, and b) of Karail dwellers' higher need for privacy due to the particular congestion of built environment. Further on, Karail dwellers' economic situations appear to be rather diverse, as some of the dwellings are visibly bigger than others; while the majority lives in *jhupris*, households with slightly better incomes live in semi *puccas* with concrete basements, walls and roofs of corrugated iron.

Continuing on the walkway, the huts and stands progressively give way to small workshops for the recycling of plastic, collection of paper, or preparation of wood for constructions. I notice that the children apparently know all workshop owners and approach the young women coming back from the garment factories by name. They want me to admire the watery landscape from a *katcha* duct linking Karail's peninsula to the southern Mohakali, but advise me not to approach the water, which is polluted by the workshops' production waste and latrine discharges. Their schools are on the other side of the duct, protected by trees and bamboo fences; the last learning groups of the day are still having lessons⁴⁶⁰. We continue to Mamun's favourite place, the big T&T playground where

⁴⁵⁹ Compared to the average of the districts of Dhaka, Karail is characterised by a very young population, as 33,24% of dwellers are under 14 and another 46,32% can be found between the ages of 15 and 34. Inhabitants of more than 60 years of age are only 2,13%, that is 48% less than in the area with the highest share of elderly inhabitants, Dhanmondi, where they account for 3,95% of total population and children under 14 are 23,43%. Own calculation on the basis of Dhaka Census 2001, cf. appendix, Fig. 23, p. 17.

⁴⁶⁰ According to the talks with dwellers, UNICEF and BRAC have opened respectively three schools for Karail's children; a few additional institutions teaching slightly more grown-up children small crafts (especially embroidery, sewing and tailoring) are present within the squatter area as well. Considering the

all boys of the *bustee* come to play, yet, as it is becoming dark, the girls in the group suggest that we should go back. We stop again at a big banyan tree surrounded by a small esplanade, where some other friends are gathering nearby a BNP-office and a UNICEF-school. It is already 8 pm, the children start going home called by their mothers; Mamun invites me to stay at his parents, and I accept. With two well-organised bazaars, two mosques, schools, its introverted dwelling groups organised around a common courtyard and the separated “industrial” area, the squatter appears as a fully structured and cohesive community within the not as structured nor cohesive urban community surrounding it. Will an observation of the dwellers' everyday lives confirm that?

Mamun's compound is not only structurally introverted, but physically enclosed: a corrugated iron wall, running along the path I initially traversed to reach the bazaar, separates it on two sides from other parts of the settlement, and water surrounds it on the other sides. It is poorer than other dwelling groups - a higher number of families live here and the huts are simple one room *jhupris*. It is already dark when we enter, and I can only recognise some women collecting water at a pump; weak illumination comes from the dwellings, in which candles are burning. Electricity, I'm told some minutes later by Mamun's father, is generally available for four or five hours a day, and generally never at evening, despite the rent of 800-1.200Tk a month paid by each household includes electricity and water. As I am surprised to hear that a rent is paid in the squatter, whose land is public, he explains in calm words that a part is for the maintenance, and the other is given to *mastans*, “leaders” who control the settlement's growth and “manage” the dwellings.

I'm warmly welcomed by Mamun's family - beside his father Abdul, a *rickshaw wallah*, and his mother, who has just come home from work, his sister Shilpi, who is nursing a baby in her arms, are at the moment at home. His older brother is still at work – yet, I have already seen him, as he is employed at the phone shop I passed by some hours earlier. While mother and daughter, crouched on the floor, prepare *masla* and *dhal* for dinner, Abdul is sitting on one of the two beds disposed, at different heights, at the hut's two sides. I have been told to sit on the other, which is bigger and just in front of the door and a lifeless TV; Mamun has been ordered to go to the bazaar and buy two cups of tea for me and Abdul, he will then go to play.

Talking with the adult family members, I get to know that Abdul and his wife Marzena married 17 years ago and have always lived in Karail; he had already settled in Dhaka,

density of children, however, this provision appears to be insufficient: as a consequence, very short lessons can be granted to the children, for example, Mamun's classes were only one and half hour a day.

where he used to work as a construction worker on the nearby sites of Gulshan, and was “offered” Marzena via a friend from their same village. Since then, they have moved four times within the *bustee* - the last time was after the fire. When Abdul was dismissed from the construction site, the children were already grown up and since the industrial work is less consuming than pulling a rickshaw, Marzena started to work in a garment factory. Nowadays, their first son is also contributing to the household and Abdul can work a bit less. Their daughter's child's father, I'm told, “has not come back”. Despite her socially unacceptable status as unmarried mother, Shilpi and her son are carefully treated by the rest of the family, though she rarely goes out, or only accompanied by her mother.

I ask about the most common working activities of Karail dwellers: many are employed on construction sites or work as rickshaw pullers, some as boatmen and street-hawkers, while many of the women are employed in garment factories in Gulshan and Badda or as domestic helpers in wealthier families. Yet, quite a high number work within the settlement, as various activities have developed in the last years: recycling or processing of waste materials (for example, paper, plastic, glass or neon), commercial activities linked to the bazaar, production of wood furniture. We spend the rest of time before our *dhal-bhat* is served talking about my parents, country and friends, whereby all family members take part in the conversation and they smile very often; as the entire compound has heard of my presence, male neighbours and children regularly appear at the threshold, greet and ask some questions, which Abdul mostly answers in my place. Mamun arrives with his older brother and, shortly afterwards, Marzena, who had disappeared carrying two pots with her, comes back with the hot dinner: almost automatically, the visitors leave and the door is partly closed. After having deposited the pot of rice and that of *dhal* on the floor, she distributes the supper in hard plastic plates and hands them successively to me, Mamun, Abdul, Shumon, and Shilpi - she will take what remains. Marzena and Shilpi are the only one to have dinner on the floor, while I'm forbidden to leave my place on the bed and male family members are as well sitting on the beds. It's fasting time, thus I expect all family members to be very hungry as, since Marzena was not there to cook for *iftar*, this should be their only meal since the very early morning. Yet, only Marzena and Shilpi are keeping to fasting, while Mamun is too young and Abdul and Shumon do not fast at all “due to their work”. In fact, also along Karail's walkways, like on Dhaka's streets, many tea stalls are covered with black fabrics to “hide” those who want to eat or drink during daytime. Electricity has not come back, the humid and heavy air as well as the food make everyone feel tired; Abdul sends his son to buy him a cigarette, which he will smoke lying on the bed. The two boys leave the hut for a short gathering with their friends, while some of the

neighbours' faces appear at the door. I recognise some by the weak candle light, they have come back to ask me more questions about Europe and the reason of my stay in Dhaka. However, after half an hour, at around 11pm, the entire compound is silent; the boys have come back too and we prepare for the night, which I will spend on the wide bed with Marzena, Shilpi and her baby.

The next day is Friday and Marzena does not have to go to work; like many other working women in the neighbourhood, she will spend the day washing clothes and cleaning the hut. We, the women, wake up at 6 and immediately go to the well to refresh after the humid night. A light rain - as characteristic of this late monsoon period - has made the paths muddy and slippery, and now a curtain of fog is covering the entire compound; the air is fresh. As a few other female neighbours are already doing the same, we have to wait in a queue: each group of dwellings disposes of a water-pump for drinking water, and a well for the everyday use. Open-to-sky latrines are available at the other end of the compound, along the Lake. On sunny days, male and female dwellers are commonly descend the squatter's fringes towards the lake, to take a bath or wash clothes and blankets though people seem to avoid it during monsoon. To her visible dissatisfaction, Marzena will wash the clothes in a big bucket, with water collected from the well⁴⁶¹. We go back to prepare breakfast, which consists of the last night's dinner's left overs of *dhal* and fresh rice, whereby I can understand where Marzena had gone to cook dinner: not far away from the hut, in the compound's largest free area, three *chula*, ovens made of mud, are shared among the dwellers. The small area is protected by a roof and it is understandable that, here, women from the entire compound find an ideal space to exchange information, especially while queueing for their turn. With the hot *bhat-dhal*, we enter the hut, where Mamun is still sleeping and Abdul is folding the blankets used during the night, storing them in a bag. I can now better observe the hut's interior, which is dominated by a shelf with a display cabinet and the TV; a small window cut into the tin wall allows some light to enter the shadowy room of three square metres and 1,80m high. After breakfast, Abdul goes to the Friday prayer wearing a fresh shirt, while Shilpi starts a beautifully designed embroidery on a piece of cloth, and Marzena gets ready to wash the clothes. As I'm again not allowed to work, I go with Mamun to *Jamai Bazar*, the northern part of Karail. This time we follow one of the girls, who has come to pick us up to introduce me to her mother. The children, seemingly trained to recognise slippery spots on the walkway, indicate the safest parts to

⁴⁶¹ This seemed to confirm the information of one of the met experts, who explained that poor women continue to prefer to use rivers, ponds or canals for heavy washing, otherwise a strong sense of dissatisfaction remains in their minds. As she reported, in particular first generation migrant women believe that after giving birth all clothes are "polluted" and remain impure until they are washed in the river or at least in a pond.

me while hurrying on the irregular, muddy paths. We are approaching the fringes on the eastern part of Karail: the congested, suffocating built environment becomes progressively more airy and the path broadens; the dwellings, also organised around courtyards, appear wider and more stable. At Nasreen's home, part of a recently re-built compound constructed on a concrete basement, I meet her mother and relatives, mostly women, who invite me for a tea. Their husbands are outside, working, at the mosque or drinking tea around it – on the contrary, they gather here, while cooking at a well-disposed ensemble of ovens, washing clothes or taking a shower. In a few minutes, a real singing and dancing contest for girls and boys is initiated in my honour: hours of friendship, oblivious of the rules imposed to the adults. Is it a case that they could be experienced in the protected, but non-exclusive, courtyard space?

On the base of the observation, it is in fact possible to distinguish between the space of the settlement's community, a space of functions that underlies certain rules and implies high interaction, and the protected space of the dwelling unities, cores of far more than spatial performance insofar as personality and individuality can take shape and be shared, transforming the “kitchen-courtyard” into a “courtyard of *desire*”.

Female and ritual space in the old town: Shakhari Bazaar

For some mornings, after each puja, Shakhari Bazaar⁴⁶² is animated by drums and songs produced by the temple committee, which, ambulating along the whole street at 6.30am, reminds the dwellers of the just past celebration and wishes another prosperous day of business under the protection of the gods. Waking up beside the still sleeping Achla, I wonder whether the rest of the family has already got up, but since everything is silent, I indulge in an observation of the room where she normally sleeps with her husband and child. At half the height of the eastern wall, beside our bed, the small shelf hosting the Hindu idols is still hidden by the curtain that separates gods and humans at night. In front of me, a big locker with a mirror; on the side, near the locked door, a big wooden cupboard

⁴⁶² The *shankharis*, or shell workers, are Dhaka's oldest homogeneous resident group (cf. Syed M. Taifoor, *Glimpses of Old Dhaka*, 1956). „*Shanka*“ is the name of the shell typically worked out by these artisans until obtaining very sophisticated bracelets and other types of jewelry. Even nowadays, at marriage, Hindu women receive two *shanka* bracelets, which they will wear, until their husbands' death, on both arms to signalise their status. In the last decades, due to the ongoing economic change concerning Dhaka, to the small proportion of Hindus left in Bangladesh, as well as to the rising price of raw materials – yet, possibly, also to the group's segregation within the bazaar, which, located in a very southern and congested urban region, is hardly accessible for non-Old-Dhaka dwellers –, the serious *shanka* business has suffered a crisis. The latter's consequence is the progressive abandonment of the profession in favour of more remunerative commercial or productive activities, which seriously endangers the future existence of *shankharis* and of their handicrafts. The participant observation took place on 5, 6 and 7 September 2007.

with a display cabinet for Achla's and her husband's clothes. The stone floor is tidy and refreshingly cold; the dusty curtains hung at the barred windows let the morning light enter the room. She is now waking up, as every morning, she will smile and unlock the door to look for Rahul, her five-year-old son. The four adult males of the family – Achla's father-in-law and three elder sons, all working as silversmiths in the nearby Tanti Bazaar - have already left to go to work, while the 13-year-old Toni is probably under the shower⁴⁶³.

By now, I can hear his mother - Achla's mother-in-law - preparing breakfast in the kitchen. She decided to invite me to her flat, and she decided that I could stay for several days. As she is emerging from the small chamber, where a cooker and a basin have been installed, I greet her with a „*shubo shokal*“ and offer my help, as always without success. Achla has to join her, I am allowed to have a shower in the bathroom. The second room of their flat, which is used as a dining room and as a bedroom for the three unmarried sons, has already been freed of the blankets and *lungis*⁴⁶⁴ left by the boys and prepared for breakfast, which the family eats sitting on the floor, like all other meals. In a few minutes, Toni should be ready to leave for school, his crackers and tea are already waiting for him on a plate. Rahul is still sleeping on the grandparents' bed, in the last room of the flat, which is stretched entirely along the street facade of the building. The latter, a recently built six-storeyed residential „cum office“ complex, belongs and has been developed by the temple, i.e. by the temple commission. The rents paid by the tenants – private households as well as lawyers' offices (nearby there is the civil law court) – contribute to a common fund for the maintenance of the temple, organisation of pujas and other religious events, support of poorer families as well as for the guru who once a week comes from Joykali Temple for a collective prayer. Sunila, who is very religious, is in fact proud to live above the temple, which she considers a distinguished location as well as a guarantee for the social and spiritual security of the house. Though she and Achla are in good relationship with the women living in the nearby apartments and they sometimes visit each other, the single households are introverted. Sunila likes in particular the privacy of the dwellings, that are placed parallel to each other along corridors instead of opening onto a common courtyard like those of ancient houses in Shakari Bazaar⁴⁶⁵. The apartments on the other side of the corridor, which do not overlook the street but another developed building, are very dark

⁴⁶³ Sunila gave birth to seven children, of which six boys: the first married Achla, the second, who had been a brilliant student at the nearby Pogose School, migrated to Canada and became an electrician, and another son is living in Bombay. The only daughter born to this second-generation migrant family is studying at college in Kolkata and staying at some relatives'.

⁴⁶⁴ *Lungis* are garments worn around the waist by men, they are generally in cotton in a variety of designs and colours.

⁴⁶⁵ Due to its original use as temple, the plot of this house is rectangular and not linear like the majority of dwellings in the old bazaar. Cf. chapter 2.1. for the physical description of the ancient Hindu bazaars.

and have to be illuminated by lamps or, during electricity breakdowns, candles, even during the day. An „enlargement“ of her living space is represented by the house's big roof, on which she and other women talk by and then while hanging clothes up to dry, children of Rahul's age can move in an open space under their mothers' attentive eyes and teenagers like Toni or his brother Johnny go up at sunset to chat with their girlfriends via mobile phone. The roof is also used by the temple's committee in occasion of large pujas or cultural festivals, when - protected from sun and rain by colourful tents – it is transformed into a restaurant for dozens of guests.

Immediately after Toni's departure, and after a short meal, Achla and Sunila start their housework. Having to care for a family of eight persons, they have plenty of things to do: sweeping the floor, cleaning the bathroom, tidying the furniture. At about 8am, Rahul will also wake up and he will request his mother's attention. As they are not supposed to „do the *katcha bazar*“, Johnny brings the vegetables from the nearby street market at around 10. After all vegetables have been chopped, the *masla* prepared and the pots set on the cooker, both women can rest, waiting for the males to come back for lunch, at around 3. Despite rarely taking part in the pujas organised in the temple (and - being a married woman - would never think to take part in the processions on the streets) as she has no time, she performs a personal ritual at home three times a day: before lunch, after her afternoon nap, and again before dinner. The preparation requires some time, as fruits and flowers have to be cut, betel nut rolled in its leaves (called *pan*) and incense prepared in a bowl; everything will be stored under the bed near the altar, ready for use. The wooden shelf on the eastern wall of the apartment is her altar, filled with colourful pictures and small idols symbolising different divinities, especially Kali, as well as the young Krishna⁴⁶⁶. The puja starts simply, by Sunila's approaching the gods via a short silence; then, she prostrates herself in front of the altar and, one after the other, she prepares to offer sweets, flowers, *pan* and fruits. Standing again in front of the altar, she repeats gestures learnt by heart, chanting and reproducing the symbols performed by the priests during the big pujas in the temple. After lighting an incense stick and transversing the entire home holding it in the hand, she will prostrate herself again, praying in silence, and then conclude the puja distributing the fruits among the present family members. These, though continuing their activities, remain calm while she prays, and the young Rahul, who has learnt to copy her, follows her in the different steps of the ritual: in this way, three times a day, the small flat is transformed into a sacred space and its inhabitants are confronted with divinity. Space is thus temporally (at

⁴⁶⁶ If Sunila lived in an older house, she would perform the puja on the roof, as the tops of the houses of Old Dhaka are typically provided with a small altar that recovers the functions of a „house-temple“.

precise times), and temporarily (for a precise time), occupied by religion⁴⁶⁷, whereby its becoming „sacred“ is based on performed activities and on their acknowledgment on the part of the believers.

Shortly after the puja, Toni comes home from school, and following him, the other family members also knock at the door to be admitted to the flat. In contrast to the morning, lunch and dinner are enjoyed together and silently, sitting in a circle on the floor; Sunila and Achla often have to interrupt their lunch (consisting of two strictly vegetarian main dishes), to put some more food on the plates of their children and husbands. Without having tea, which they will drink on the way to the shop, these leave shortly afterwards, leaving the two wives, and Rahul and Toni alone. All go to their beds for a nap of two hours; as electricity is available, the fans in both rooms are activated and a fresh breeze accompanies their sleep. Sunila is again the first to get up and, after taking a shower, she comes into Achla's room, where we are still lying, for a second puja, which seems to give a sign to the entire family. Toni goes to see his friends, Achla and Rahul, sitting on the bed, start some Bangla writing exercises before the child's private tutor arrives. Rahul being too young to go to school, his parents have engaged a teacher who, everyday for one hour, teaches him basic notions of Bangla writing: this will help him once started the real school, next year. Sunila, who only went to school until class three, is proud that all her children have studied at Pogose, Dhaka's eldest, and still very renowned, school, and in particular that her only daughter is also granted this opportunity. Although for her husband it was important that some of the children would continue the family's profession and business, both regarded formal education as important and encouraged all children to continue their studies until the secondary level. For her youngest son Toni, who is still studying at Pogose School, she hopes that it will one day be possible to go to university.

As we are unoccupied, Sunila decides to go to the temple with me: while in general it is closed during the afternoon, these days it remains open all day to allow especially fervid believers to worship Khrishna. Businessmen and teachers, but also young female students and working women, regularly enter the temple and prostrate themselves on the floor, pronounce a short prayer to the divinities, softly touch the ground and leave again. Shakhari Bazaar's most devote men and women are gathering there together, singing and discussing the just celebrated puja and planned activities. Many dwellers from this and the surrounding bazaars are involved in the community activities, go to regular prayers or –

⁴⁶⁷ In *Mapping the religious and religious maps*, Axel Michaels explained that, in this sense, religious spaces are never „relative“ to the believer, but „absolute“ (in the moment), in contrast to scientific space that is defined by three-dimensional coordinates allowing topographical as well as metric concepts and norms to be imposed over it. Cf. Martin Gaenzle and Jörg Gengnagel (ed.) (1989), p. 140.

especially the youth - are occupied with the co-ordination of pujas and other recurrences set by the Hindu calendar. Sunila, however, is not particularly interested in their discussions, thus she suggests me go back home: my alternative proposal, to go for a walk in Shakari Bazaar, looks very strange to her as it is a normal working day and „nothing“ is happening, moreover, it is starting to rain.

Between 5 and 8 pm there is no electricity, and as it has become dark, candles help move within the flat. Alone with the two women, I talk with them about their families. Achla's relationship to Sunila is very respectful and humble, and it seems that the mother-in-law holds the control of the household; she is also very respectful to her father-in-law, in whose presence she covers her head. After marriage, she has never visited her home-village though it is just some kilometers north of Dhaka, but she apparently accepts this as a condition of marriage, which means to leave parents and friends and regard their husbands' mothers and sisters as new ones: Sunila hardly mentions her parents and never sees them, in spite of the fact that they live in Dhaka. Thus, once married, Hindu women seem to adopt as theirs the „married home“, which replaces the parental home⁴⁶⁸. Moreover, Sunila and Achla seem to regard their home as their only living space. They have a very partial knowledge not only of „Dhaka“, identified with the big selling centre of Islampur and New Market⁴⁶⁹, but also of the neighbourhood beyond Shakari Bazaar and their family's shop, in Tanti Bazaar. Differently, Toni and Johnny know Dhanmondi, and Rahul's favourite subject for photographs (he is learning at an astonishing pace how to cope with my camera and, in particular, from which different perspectives to portray objects and persons), is the urban environment visible from the windows.

The rain has pulled Toni and his friends from the street and they come home, wet and loud, in a group of four; as we are gathering in Achla's room, they occupy the other bedroom, where they will sing, chat and make jokes in the dark. Sunila, who would like to take part in her son's life, prepares tea for the guests, but she will leave them alone after a while. After their departure, Toni remains in the room, which is provided with a small table, listening to music: privateness, he is showing me, can be „installed“ like sacredness, through an action that symbolises a wish, a belief, a desire – in this case, it is the desire to be left alone. When electricity returns, parallel to the start of songs of prayer in the temple, Sunila decides to fulfil her last puja, after which she will cover the shelf to let the divinities

⁴⁶⁸ Nita Kumar has described how the very design and organisation of the Indian traditional house, by defining an interior space for women and, within this space, also the space for mother- and daughter-in-law, can express a hierarchy in the family and impose a discipline on the latter. Nita Kumar's article, *The space of the child*, can be found in *Visualising Space in Banaras - Images, Maps, and the Practice of Representation*, 1989, edited by Martin Gaenzle and Jörg Gengnagel, especially p. 255-278.

⁴⁶⁹ Sunila and Achla go shopping once or twice a year, but Achla has never left Shakari Bazaar alone.

sleep without being disturbed by human activities. Little by little, after 10 pm, the male family members come home after their working day; they are wet and will take a shower before sitting down in the dining room or laying on one of the beds, waiting for all to be back. Their discussions are fragmentary as they are always interrupted by the new-comers; the atmosphere is calm and intimate. When their father arrives, his bed will be left free for him and he will rest a bit before dinner, playing with Rahul and watching TV. Dinner, taken as well together on the dining room floor and equally calm, will be the family's last activity before going to sleep.

The street as everyday-use-space: Geneva Camp

Approaching Geneva Camp⁴⁷⁰ from outside at 9 in the morning, memories of people's sayings as well as own prejudices regarding a „refugee“ camp may lead the visitor to think of a ghost city. While in the nearby bazaar, housewives and *buahs* are already intent on bargaining with the *katcha bazar* sellers, and the shop employees try to attract the attention of potential buyers to their colourful fabrics, along the wall enclosing Geneva Camp only two tea stalls and a modest workshop producing paper lunch-boxes are open. Customers of the tea stall, gathering before going to work, are not sure about the opening times of the „Biharis“; surprised, then suspicious about my interest („I could be there to accuse Bangladesh of the Biharis' critical situation, which is actually Pakistan's fault“), they try to convince me to leave. Yet, young workers start to accrue in front of the shop on the opposite side of the streets. When a taller one arrives to open the shutter, I recognise the garage I have passed various times sitting on the rickshaw from Shyamoli to Dhanmondi. Its twenty-five employees, who call themselves „engineers“, are between 5 and 25 years old - the elders repair engines, the youngest do humble jobs like carrying replacement parts, and bringing tea, as one of them has been promptly been ordered to do in my honour. The „official“ workshop consists of two dark rooms of 2 metre in height, altogether 3.5 m long, that are used to store mechanical pieces, and in which I recognise a motorcycle. The „boss“ - a young man of the same age - arrives, grabs his motorcycle and drives away with one of the more experienced workers, who is holding two fittings for an urgent commission. After few minutes, a customer approaches the workshop guided by the boys, who give him directions to drive backwards up to the main road⁴⁷¹ and park some 10 meters away, on the left. Cars can not be repaired but on the main road, they explain, as the street running along the Camp and especially the workshop are too small; only motorcycles

⁴⁷⁰ The participant observation took place from 31st August to the 3rd of September 2007.

⁴⁷¹ I.e. Guznavi Road.

can be done in the immediate workshop's front space, if the traffic allows it. On Guznavi Road, in the contrary, unlimited space is available for disparate uses like repairing cars and CNGs, begging, chopping and selling wood, parking broken rickshaws, or simply drinking tea. Yet this „enlargement“ of the working space succeeds with an order, as different garages occupy determined portions of the street, and so other businesses, too. In the first portion there is a rickshaw station from which rickshaws can be rented by *rickshaw wallahs*; correspondingly, also the „makers“ specialised in repairing them, from filling the wheels to oiling the engines when they are too rusted by rain, are camped nearby. Their tools – screwdriver, cycle pump, oil – are well disposed on the walkways in front of them, as if their services would need to be advertised. The young team of „engineers“ generally works just beside the rickshaw station, which is a strategically advantaged place because, occupying the top of a row of five other mechanical teams, they are the first to be reached by customers coming from Mirpur Road. Watching towards Guznavi Road, after the mechanical engineers, I recognise the wood-traders, who also use the street for work and commerce.

The customer - a regular customer of this garage - has recognised a problem with the water pump of his car. Three of the specialised workers are now crooked on the bonnet, supervised by an elder one and assisted by two or three of the children, who are going forth and back between street and workshop with necessary tools and replacement parts. While they continue their work, another group has started working on a motorcycle in front of the garage, while some have left by bicycle to give local support to other customers or buy necessary things. A working day consists in this - the abandoned workshop continuously reached by helpers in an ants-like coming and going of replacements, one or two cars repaired „on site“ at the customers' homes as well as one up to three parked on Guznavi Road: likewise a hut's room, also the street, despite its so many and various users with divergent needs, is a flexible, dynamic space. When one or the other worker wants to make a break, he is allowed to do that, and some decide to leave for lunch already at 1 pm. I follow them in the camp, where I quickly lose the orientation. Whereas outsiders think of it as an enclosed space, it is open on its northern side and rickshaws commonly transverse its main road when travelling from Shyamoly to Mohammadpur. Like its prolongation outside the camp, this long street is completely occupied by a vegetable market, where not only the „Biharis“ purchase vegetables, rice and spices. Due to its commercial use, the road has a public character that makes it difficult to think that it transverses a segregated community. Indeed, the threshold demarcating the end of the camp and the beginning of the „outside“⁴⁷²

⁴⁷² This is the term used by Geneva Camp inhabitants to intend Dhaka City.

is a visible one, as at one point, the muddy street becomes an asphalted and broader road. Considering that the majority of customers, mainly *buahs* from the neighbourhood, arrive in the bazaar on foot, the boundary, though immaterial, is easily sensible.

Keeping the two boys' pace (they tell me they are brothers) on the irregular interior lanes is not easy: while they are moving in a reign they perfectly know, the narrow, uneven ground makes the way impervious for an outsider. The difficulty is increased by the fact that, at this moment of the day, women are occupying consistent portions of the roads, cooking lunch on small gas cookers on the thresholds of their homes to prevent the smoke to fill the interiors. The two-storeyed dwellings are mainly built with heavy brick walls painted in bright colours; generally, one entire family lives either on the ground or first floor, that are connected by an interior stair, so that, often, more than six people are sharing a living space of 6-8 square meters. Thus, whereas the homes' quality in terms of stability, infrastructure and security is higher than in informal settlements, the density of population makes Geneva Camp proverbial for bad and unhealthy housing among Dhaka dwellers. The dwellings, built one beside the other, form interminable rows of two-storied homes divided by muddy paths-corridors of 70-90 cm. The ground floors are very shadowy as no light can enter from the street; hygienic services are completely lacking. The interiors of their homes are distinguishable from those of other *puccas* or *katchas* along Dhaka due to an uncommon emptiness. This is explained by the fact that many „Bihari“ women work as tailors or embroiders at home, and thus objects necessary to everyday activities are stored on high shelves around the home's perimeter, while the entire space is occupied by web chairs or sewing tables. When they want to prepare lunch, they take cooking tools, pots and gas cookers down from the shelves, vegetables out of the shopping bags, and spices from plastic boxes. When the meal is ready, the used tools have already been washed and laid back, the home's basements swept, the organic waste thrown on the street, and plates and glasses disposed, ready to be used. Boys and husbands are gathering on the near main street, talking with each other while waiting to be called inside. All of them work in direct proximity of the camp and will stay at home just for the time necessary to eat. When we arrive, the boys explain their family members that I shall be their guest for lunch, and after a short uncertainty on the part of their mother, who is afraid the lunch will be not good enough for a *bideshi*, I'm sitting in a circle and eating meat, fresh vegetables and bread with the two boys and their father: mother and sisters will follow after us. Their father, a *rickshaw wallah*, needs to recover after nine hours of work: he places a big bedstead, which until now was leaning along a wall, on the empty floor and, after telling me good bye, closes the dwelling's door.

Back „outside“, I start watching an embroiderer's work in his shop along the street, some four meters past the garage. He doesn't talk to me until I ask him some questions: he smiles and seems to be pleased that I am sitting at his working place. His name, Sabbir, is nicely painted in yellow Bangla and English characters on the external walls. The space in the workshop, which is narrowly two meter long, one meter deep and two meters high, is completely exploited in the height as well as in the width. Three shelves hung on all sides of the workshop are filled with glasses of colourful pearls, wire, and whatever an embroider needs for his work, bags are hanged along a wire at middle height. Some beautifully embroidered saris are hanging from the roof, ready to be picked up by the clients: they are at the same time an excellent advertisement for the shop, which, thanks to its visibility from the road, has many customers. A neon light and a bulb provide light to work at night, an old fan is switched on by and then, in particular when Sabbir smokes a cigarette. He seats on the floor, curved on a big web-chair that occupies almost the entire area; yet, in a corner behind him, his 7-year-old son is working at another small round frame, at which he is embroidering a future *sawar kamiiz*. Attracted by my presence, passersby often stop nearby the shop: they first need to observe and listen at a certain distance, then intervene in the conversation and make some steps towards the shop. When a small group of persons has come together, they come even nearer, so that the shop arrives to resemble a public gathering, where discussions on the Stranded Pakistanis, the Liberation War, Hitler and politics take place. Sabbir, on his side, listens and participates in the discussion, unperturbed by the mass of people; while I am worried that the chaos could burden him, he smiles and seems to like the attention and the discussion, too. The appropriation of the shop's space on the part of the other „Biharis“ seems to be as obvious as the occupation of Guznavi Road on the part of the „engineers“ and various workers, yet a mutual precondition underlies both: that a mass, a group, takes shape and „directs“ the process, which will appear to have no generator or author. Describing it as a „spontaneous“ movement would mean to miss its real character of collective action with own rules and phases, and thus to overlook this production of space through a collective will. The street, implicitly public, explicitly encroached and congested, is in this way revealed as space of desire, in the sense that collective acts like the „spontaneous“ gathering around an „attraction“ (which could be also a cricket play or a political speech transmitted on TV) can transform its everyday meaning of working space.

At around 5 pm, Sabbir's brother arrives in the workshop to help accomplishing the load of work; to make him space, Sabbir's web-chair has to be pulled towards the street. Sabbir complains about the small size of his shop, but a regular shop „outside“ would cost him

around 5.000Tk rent, whereas his shop is free of costs as it belongs to Geneva Camp. Another boy reaches the workshop: Sabbir smiles and introduces his „boss“, the son of a neighbour, who helps with the work before and after school; he finds place beside Sabbir's son and starts to work on a small web tool. The four work in silence, their movements equally careful and measured to fit in the scarce space, with Sabbir smoking a cigarette by and then, until 10 pm, when all shop shutters start being closed and the men going home, to their families. The Camp's main road is lively, as young boys are listening songs at the CD-shops, playing video-games or karom board, and the dwellers coming back from work gather for a cigarette at the streets' corners. However, in the private streets, the atmosphere is characterised by the families' silent waiting: from the dwellings' doors, disclosed to allow husbands and sons to enter, trembling candle lights indicate the way. At this point, Sabbir bids my farewell: he would have liked me to stay with him and his family, but he can not figure out where I could sleep as eleven of them are sharing a small room. We have decided that I should go back home and come back at 6 o'clock, when his day - another working day - will start again.

Urban living between tradition and modernity in Dhanmondi

My first acquaintance with Parveen took place in the Bengal Gallery, one of Dhanmondi's most renowned and beloved art galleries, in occasion of the opening of an art exhibition. After having being introduced by common friends, we talked about our fields of work and discovered common interests, as she is a planner and architect and has been involved in urban planning for some years, both as a teacher at BUET and as a researcher. She invited me to visit her at the University, and in the following days our lively talks on Dhaka City started being filled also by her children and husband, whom she described with love and proud. After realising that my age coincided with that of her daughter, who is studying abroad, she decided to invite me to live at her family for some days, and I accepted⁴⁷³.

Parveen lives in a nice residential building located between a private university and a surgery clinic in Dhanmondi, which has been developed seven years ago on the plot of a one-family house belonging to some acquaintances. The planning process, led by a big architectural firm, was moderated in order to allow the buyers to influence the design of their future apartments, so that all flats have slightly differing dimensions according to the dwellers' needs. She and her husband guide me along the well proportioned flat, consisting in a small atrium, living and dining room, three bedrooms and corresponding bathrooms, as

⁴⁷³ The participant observation took place from 12 to 15 August 2007.

well as a kitchen - which Parveen hardly enters - and two balconies. They enlarged the first suggested plan for their bedroom, entirely painted in warm indigo blue and enriched by several paintings by local artists; the modern TV set in front of the bed „disappears“ at the sight of Parveen's wardrobe and dressing table, on which several bracelets, necklaces, hairbrushes and cosmetics attract the attention. They seem to have put particular attention in the design of living and dining room, which represent the core of family and social life: entering the flat, a glass-wall divides the big space in two almost equal portions, of which the left one is used as sitting room and the right one, directly beside the kitchen, as dining room. Though the glass panels, which can be shifted to ensure the transit between the two rooms, are mostly open, this architectural solution appears to re-interpret, in modern way, the traditional separation of social, „public“, and female reigns. Thanks to the – usually also visual - separation, guests on visit are welcomed in the sitting room, which is also arranged to play music on a precious Indian reed organ, while women can prepare the meal in the dining room without feeling embarrassed⁴⁷⁴. In spite of the fact that Parveen is less acquainted with the kitchen than her husband, the disposition appears particularly favourable for the two home servants, who, emerging by and then from the kitchen, seem to be happy about the proximity of the big dining table: they generally move along the wall, „protected“ from the sight of strangers behind the big wooden table.

Parveen's husband is a retired bank officer of Standard Chartered: in this position, he travelled and lived in Europe and the USA for many years - yet, he and Parveen, who followed him during the US-period, always agreed on the fact that once he would retire, they would settle in Dhaka. Since her work keeps her busy also beyond the teaching hours, her husband is responsible for most of the activities concerning the house keeping, and he is also an important reference for their son, Shaheen, who is concluding his secondary level studies. Since he needs to pass his exams with brilliant marks in order to be admitted to higher studies in an American college, he is spending most of his time in his room, curved on school books. Since the 18-year-old boy has reclaimed his room as private space, the home servants are not allowed to make order; when his friends come for a visit, they close themselves in the room as well, listening music or watching TV. I have been accommodated in Parveen's daughter's bedroom, in which I find the home's only computer, placed there since her departure. It is a very nice room with a book shelf arriving to the ceiling, in which English literature but also Parveen's music books are placed. As I will have the opportunity to appreciate, she is the owner of the organ in the sitting room, and a

⁴⁷⁴ Such impression was confirmed by several stays in „upper-middle class“ apartments, as well as by explanations of designers and the personal observation of inhabitants' uses of space.

passionate singer of Tagore's songs. Each of the windows is provided of impenetrable nets to protect from mosquitoes, darkened glasses protect the entire flat from too high illumination and heating, though the air conditioning is generally on.

Parveen wakes up every morning at 6 am and walks around Dhanmondi Lake, where she gathers with other friends in one of the esplanades surrounding the water. Like her, also her neighbours appreciate the fresh air that can be enjoyed in this beloved green space in morning hours, whereby they also stress that a particular advantage of this early moment of the day is the minor concentration of beggars and squatters on the lake shores. Sitting in a circle, they talk about the news or intone Tagore's, Lalom's or Bangla folk songs, while rare sellers and passersby stop to listen – a nice way to start the day, Parveen says, which will never be as harmonious as in these short moments. After taking a shower and having a short breakfast, we leave the nice and fresh apartment by car to go to the university, where she generally stays until 4 pm. At around midday, she interrupts her work for the prayer, which she fulfils in her office with a very simple ritual: after closing the door, which is in general disclosed to allow a better ventilation, she lays the prayer rug towards West and, covered her head by the veil, begins to pray. Neither my presence, nor the room's functionally different character disturb her, as, she will explain, it is not important where you are to pray, but that you are able to make space to your belief *in yourself*. Due to this understanding, Parveen regards as „normal“ to recite her prayer also in her car, if necessary; in all cases, the „passage“ from our discussions to the prayer is a flowing one, as she does not seem to conceive of religion as a dimension separated from everyday life.

After work, Parveen has promised to bring me to Gausia Market, and especially Chadni Chawk, to buy some fabrics for *sawar kamiiz*⁴⁷⁵. She usually goes to this market despite its typical congestion for one practical as well as one personal reason: first of all, it is near to university and lays on her way home, on secondly, it reminds her of her study years, when Gausia Market was the only place where to buy fabrics within „New Dhaka“. We descend from the car and dive in the colourful market, which has been object of radical eviction measures since the establishment of the caretaker government. Since then, only licenced sellers with an own selling place are allowed to occupy the square in front of the market building, while illegal encroachers are not tolerated; not far away, a small RAB gazebo represents a living warning to eventual hawkers. I follow Parveen, who determinedly walks towards the interior of the market, well knowing in which precise place the fabrics we are looking for are sold. Someway similar to the specialised bazaars of Old Dhaka, Gausia

⁴⁷⁵ Though the majority of women buy ready-made *sawar kamiiz*, which are in general less expensive, according to affordability some prefer to buy fabrics and have individually tailored clothes.

Market is in fact organised in departments, i.e. particular products are concentrated in different areas and stores to allow the comparison between different offerers⁴⁷⁶.

She stops in proximity of a narrow corridor at the ground floor, in which dozens of sellers exhibit their merchandise. Many have similar or the same products, so that the „art“ consists in sellers' and buyers' ability to bargain rather than in the businessmen' choice of products. While the sellers are all of male gender, customers are exclusively females, which is an almost exceptional case considering that women often prefer to be accompanied by men and generally avoid congested spaces. Yet, as I can understand within some minutes, the very nature of the sold products as well as the market's spatial configuration in narrow but clearly distinguishable departments constitute a „female space“, neither threatening nor foreign⁴⁷⁷. Hereby, it could be observed that other purchasing areas, like the book-shops of Nilkhet or the non-specialised Bango Bazaar and New Market, often remain „male domains“, insofar women going there prefer to do that in company of a man. Thus, the *objects* contained in space, and the *uses* corresponding these, appear to play an even more determinant role than spatial *dispositions* for the perception of space.

Once the shopping is completed, we head towards home as Parveen feels the necessity to have a shower after the long stay in the hot and scarcely ventilated corridor. She has invited some colleagues for dinner in occasion of her birthday, which will be one day later. The flat is pervaded by a pleasant smell of spices and food, Parveen's husband reports her the progresses of the works in the kitchen before she retreats in her room, where she will first have a bath and then rest for half an hour before getting dressed for the evening. The guests, two couples in her same age, arrive at 8 pm and are guided in the sitting room by her husband, who offers them something to drink. A couch and sofa as well as a chairs group are located at two opposite corners of the room, apparently corresponding to the idea that they should be respectively occupied by men and women separately. Parveen in fact instructs me to take place with her and the two ladies instead of sitting with the male guests, and to make me understand she adds: „I spend so much time with men during the day and I enjoy it, but at evening I am happy to be among women“. Having got to know and respect her for her intelligent and sensitive way to live as a „modern“ woman and mother, I did not need her apologise, yet her need to explain such behaviour may give evidence of the still „critical“ passage from a long established segregation to an

⁴⁷⁶ The same organisation characterises shopping malls, in which the same products are sold at one floor.

⁴⁷⁷ Furthermore, Parveen and the majority of women have covered their heads with the *orna* (if they were not already veiled) in the moment of entrance into the selling space, which gives reason to think that a sense of „foreignness“ to the market space is in fact present, but does not preclude its access.

individually lived gender equality as it is taking place among Dhaka's educated classes⁴⁷⁸.

Krishna's birthday in Old Dhaka

Janmastami, the birthday of Lord Krishna and one of the biggest religious festivals of Hindus, will be celebrated across the country today. Bangladesh Hindu Parishad, Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad and Geeta Sangha have chalked out elaborate programmes, including special prayers in temples, Geeta Jagna, Kirtan, discussions, drama, rally and peace processions, on the occasion. The traditional Janmastami procession will be brought out from Dhakeshwari Temple in the afternoon. Thousands of Hindu devotees are likely to take part in the procession. The day is a public holiday.⁴⁷⁹

The historical Dhakeswari Temple, to which a popular legend ascribes the origin of Dhaka's name, is the first station of today's puja, in which Hindu believers celebrate the birthday of Krishna - Visnu's „son“, as Krishna's nature as incarnation is explained in simple words. In the past, Dhaka used to be famous for the rally of depicted carts organised in this occasion, like ancient paintings and even nowadays' commercial slogans for the city's 400th anniversary⁴⁸⁰, showing a rushing horse-driven cart, demonstrate. The tradition persists still nowadays, in spite of the country's internal political unrests and of a declared intolerance, on the part of extremist Muslim groups, towards all Hindu celebrations⁴⁸¹.

The ritual part of the puja, which is celebrated in the temple - or better to say in its „enlargement“, an esplanade of 100 square meters that has been covered by a roof of corrugated iron -, starts at 3 pm and will take half an hour. The celebration area is open on all sides but on the bottom, where high statues of Hindu divinities – above all Kali, the

⁴⁷⁸ Stays in other households in comparable festive occasions showed that the spatial separation of male and female guests is still considered as a „normal“ practice in families with similar incomes but minor education, and that it leads to the accommodation of female guests in one of the bedrooms in case of a too small sitting room.

⁴⁷⁹ *The Daily Star*, 4th September 2007, Dhaka.

⁴⁸⁰ This occurs in 2008.

⁴⁸¹ In former years, the functions were disturbed by violent attacks. Nevertheless, I was informed about the function by Muslim friends who participated in the puja, which was officially supported by the State, with a massive presence of intelligence agencies, plainclothes, uniformed police, as well as BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) and RAB (Rapid Action Battalion) as well as official speeches in favour of intercultural understanding by one of the caretaker government ministers as well as Dhaka's mayor.

Mother, who enjoys a particular reference in entire Bengal - occupy a wide stage. Standing on it, a priest prays for peace and prosperity of the country and explains the reason of this festivity as well as the symbolic meaning of different ritual moments⁴⁸². While passing by Dhakeswari Temple in normal days, the view of the humble prayer hall does not transmit any religious or sacral feeling, today it is transformed in a sacred site by the presence of the priests, the incense and the community of worshippers that are listening to the prayer or swinging at the drums' rhythms – in other words, by a collective act guided by belief. This same belief seems to make it tolerable for the worshippers to stand in the inundated hall, squeezed in a sweat mass beside foreigner, and keep concentrated in the rite. As the ceremony narrows its end, the priest's voice becomes louder while he ecstatically repeats his mantra, and helpers start collecting symbolic offers (fruits, sweets, only rarely small amounts of money) in big straw baskets, blessing the babies and painting the symbol of Krishna on the believers' foreheads. After having received the priest's blessing, people leave the place, which, once empty, re-transforms in a common tin-roofed hall inundated by rain water.

The next venue of celebrations is a nicer marble hall beside the antique temple (that remains closed), which can be entered only barefoot. At the building's threshold, sandals, sneakers and leather shoes have formed a colourful mount. Inside, the believers head individually towards one of the three niches occupied by a god figure, prostrate in front of them, intone songs or prayer verses and lay fruits, coins and banknotes of small value at the statues' feet. The contemporary performing of these ancient rituals gives shape to a feeling of sacredness that neither the congestion of people, nor the overall loudness can perturbate. After the procedure, which takes few minutes, the worshippers join friends and relatives spread out in the hall and chat with them loudly under the beats of a resounding drum until the procession's beginning. Although there are no specific sitting prescriptions that should be followed and men and women seem to choose freely where and with whom to sit, women's visible concentration in the front and men's predominance in the bottom part of the hall reminds of the demarcation of „female“ and „male“ space in Muslim events like *akika* (name-giving), birthday or other family's parties. Socialisation (and not religious) rules based on gender segregation, it could be said, are maintained and affect semi-conscious behaviours also in exceptional moments, instead of being suspended for one day of „carnival“. The atmosphere is excited as the highlight of the event, the rally - a complex process involving an elephant, decorated trucks and cars as well as the urban

⁴⁸² Hindu pujas are known to be *sarba janin*, open to all, in the sense that also visitors of other religions are welcome and can worship the divinities in their own known way.

dwellers - is going to start in short⁴⁸³.

At 4.30 pm, the waiting finds an end, as we move from the temple following an elephant's wide steps towards Palashi, where rickshaws and mini-vans are sticking in a mass of jubilating Hindu inhabitants. Imperturbable, the organisers push back cars and vans, confident that nothing could stop the process. The air is marked by a mix of odours - spices from the surrounding tea-stalls, incense, dirt and putrefying garbage from the streets, as well as human sweat – that peculiarly interact with the humid heat of the late monsoon's afternoon. Moreover, the music coming from dozens of stereo boxes fixed on the carts and an ocean of colours from deep blue to red, from green to orange, are altering the states of mind. In the middle of this unmistakably sub-continental scene, it is spontaneous to wonder whether there are qualitative, or emotional, differences and/or parallels between pujas and mass events in Western cities. The same ammassement of people in public space, the same concern for law and order and consequent deployment of security forces, the same excitement deriving from a combination of music, colours, as well as the proximity of thousands of bodies; probably, also the same expectation for something special, non-ordinary. Yet, what is impressing in Dhaka, and may differentiate it from a city like Berlin celebrating one of its street events, is the implicitness with which such „appropriation“ of space - necessarily accompanied by the loss of privateness and individuality – takes place. Such is due, it appears, to the inhabitants' everyday life experience of space's flexibility, as space can be altered and occupied many times in a day by changing human activities as well as by religious, symbolic values.

The rally finally „starts“, unimpressed of the regular means of transport – rickshaws, cars and motorcycles – that are fighting their way through the masses. Hundreds of trucks, cars, and even some carts literally filled with singing and dancing people circulate in all directions, rushing on the street in a „tour“ that narrowly has to inscribe entire *Puran Dhaka*. All start from the respective *mahallas*, reach Dhakeswari Temple and Palashi, where they queue in a row with dozens of others, before continuing in one common direction, leading from Palashi via BUET Campus to Paltan and Gulistan, and from here

⁴⁸³ The rally, likewise all pujas, is an informal, self-organised process depending on the interaction between different Hindu communities, represented by each neighbourhood's *puja committees*, collecting donations, activating the respective inhabitants and administrating a common „puja fund“. In addition to the citywide pujas, different communities of Old Dhaka organise celebrations dedicated to specific divinities for the protection of peculiar living areas or professional groups, which, however, remain *sarba janin*, i.e. open to outsiders. For example, the most important puja for the dwellers of Shakari Bazaar is Bisho Korma Puja, dedicated to workers and businessmen. In contrast, Bisho Nari Puja, dedicated to the goddess of Education, is one of the major events for Dhaka University students of all religious groups. The well organised event, comprising inter-faculties contexts for the nicest decoration and concerts and celebrated until late night, seems to be the only puja able to attract an entire community without distinction of religion.

spreading either towards Victoria Park and Shakari Bazaar, or towards Motijheel and *Banga Bhaban*.

The more the rally progresses in the Campus, the bigger becomes the number of festively dressed Hindu women with their children, greeting the participants with big smiles from the street sides: they are the wives of the men dancing on the carts, who are enjoying the celebration „from beside“. Thousands of boys and men hopping and dancing on, beside and around the carts, make the way difficult for those who want to commute with the procession without being its integral actors. Nevertheless, in a way or the other the majority keeps pace and walk either beside one favourite cart, or between different of them. In the very core of the Campus, colourful manifestant groups join into the procession. Beside different civil society organisations, Puja committees, and some of the most important bazaars, also students' groups of both major political parties and radical initiatives claiming for the Hindu community's rights are campaigning for respective quests, distributing flyers and formulating loud appeals to the government. The cultural manifestation represents also an occasion to give voice to problems that remain unspoken in nowadays' Dhaka, due either to the actual emergency status (which bans direct political activities), or to an overall ignorance of human rights. Negative and positive associations seem to go through the minds of these activists looking at High Court and Press Club, which demarcate symbolically the passage from the administration and education centre (Ramna) to the political Paltan. All commuting participants may be thinking of past demonstrations, bombings, police attacks, seen on TV or fled in person; some of them may remember one of the most powerful leftist parties, which during the Ershad period had its general quarter in front of the Press Club and from there organised political attentates, others may fear new disorders, and therefore walk away or spread out.

It's dusk when the rally approaches Gulistan, and the traffic, always intense in this focal traffic point and huge market place between Old and New Dhaka, has reached immense proportions through the pedestrians' affluence. In correspondence of the popular roundabout, Old Dhaka inhabitants that could not join earlier meet friends and relatives to share the rally's final part; a big portion, however, is already about to leave: meanwhile it is 8pm and the way back could be enervating. Similarly, those who co-ordinated the rally so far are „passing over“ the direction to dwellers of Old Dhaka and Wari. Eventual inhabitants of „New Dhaka“ seem to prefer to continue towards west; in contrast, young people and *kuttis* will mainly take the way of the bazaars.

2.3.1. Summary – Dynamic and emotional spaces

In this chapter, the survey entered the everyday lives of five chosen urban dwellers, yet not with the aim to follow their movements within Dhaka or listing their routines. The objects of interest were representations, yet not representations of space. What was of concern in the present chapter were **spaces of representations**. Created by urban dwellers' associated images and symbols on the base of social practice, i.e. of lived and suffered situations in loci of passion and action, the representational space „represents“ social values, traditions, dreams, collective experiences as well as "desire". This socially produced space is imaginary, directional, relational, transversed by history, essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic: in short, the space of poets and artists. Other than in physical space, objects have a symbolical meaning and interpretation here; other than in represented spaces, representational spaces are „alive“. While social practice is also generally *dominated* by mental conceptualisations, it is in this same social practice that interacting social actors transform and appropriate space, thus re-establishing the dialogue on equal terms between the three fields. Sociological relations between urban inhabitants, to put it more plainly, produce social spaces that are interlinked like their „generators“ - the dwellers - and overlapped, like the layers of a city. Precisely the observation of interlinked dwellers led by desire and of the overlapped layers or social spaces constituted the thread of this chapter.

Having to conclude the experiment herein undertaken, two steps remain to be made: on one side, the singular observations should be brought in relationship in order to contribute an actual achievement of knowledge out of the specific. On the other, the value, for the survey, of such „immersion“ in everyday lives should be appraised: in how far does the here collected knowledge add to the insights already reached by means of the interviews? In other words, is it necessary to include Lefebvre's social field in the study of cities?

The „rhythmanalysis“ presented six different cases, or types, of social practice, which can in turn be compared on the base of two main characteristics: the **dynamism of space** and the **prevalence**, in the respective moments of production of space, **of components from the social, mental or physical field**. Dynamic spaces were encountered in China's inner-urban settlement, in Sunila's ritually transformable and multifunctional flat, as well as in Mohammadpur's streets that punctually „enlarge“ the working space of different professional teams. It could be for example observed that, thanks to their dynamic or flexible notion of space, the actors could not only rely on a prompt adaptability to temporal and temporary changes of space, but were advantaged in the „production“ of space through mental acts. For example, domestic spaces of households with lower incomes are

peculiarly non-specialised, like China's, and partly, Sunila's cases showed: the single living room can become, in turn, a bedroom, a dining room, a sitting room, a study, a workplace, a gathering point, a dining room again, and again a bedroom. In another case, the „transformation“ of everyday space in sacred space through a burning stick of incense and the sacrifice to the gods can be regarded as an example of how mental acts can easily change the connotations of space. And how if not through a „mental“ will, translated in unwritten rules and a determined order, can the garage and other workers occupy Guznavi Road in Mohammadpur?

More specifically, the floor in China's inner-city compound appeared as a perfect example of dynamic space. Also the threshold as „flowing“ delimitation of private and public (or community) space was regarded with particular attention. Its „permeability“ or „penetrability“, as observed, is variable: not the material presence of an entrance or door - which is usually open or semi-open to let light come inside -, but the activities being performed, thus temporal factors, indicate whether to enter or stay back and thus differentiate private and public⁴⁸⁴. Also the idea of property may be „flowing“: whenever she needed an object she did not own, China told her youngest son to borrow it from other neighbours. Tools of everyday life use, like pots or buckets for the washing up, were shared within the community, although they were returned to the proprietors after usage. It could be thus said that everyday life space becomes „social space“ through the interaction of people who trust each other on the base of mutual need.

Rather than for its dynamic use of (private) space – which is indeed a characterising feature of its everyday life practice -, *Karail Bustee* stood out for its very high social cohesion and feeling of collectivity, possibly of community. Its dwellers knew and referred to each other both at the level of everyday life practice – emerging from the necessity to share infrastructure and living spaces –, and at structural level, for example in form of a self-taxation system. In contrast, the dwellers of Sukrabad's compound often did not know each other's names or kinship relationships, in spite of the fact that everything, from everyday use items to daily actions and private life, should be shared. This difference possibly derived from a) the dimensional difference between the two settlements: Karail's bigger extension could lead its inhabitants to seek higher forms of organisation; b) the temporal aspect (Karail's first encroachment can be traced back to the 1970s): a longer coexistence may explain the improved solidarity patterns; c) Karail's very nature as encroached and illegal settlement in contrast to China's rented hut in Sukrabad: in the

⁴⁸⁴ However, the „barrier“ represented by women's activities can drastically lose its symbolic validity as soon as many people should enter the hut: at China's, groups of boys and men „intruding“ the hut in order to „see the *bideshi*“, the foreigner, also opened the way for other curious neighbours.

settlement's critical situation (dwellers have never been assured that they could live permanently there) a further reason to organise representative structures could be recognised.

Parveen's everyday life, on the contrary, was characterised by highly specialised living spaces, whereby this could also be regarded as the base of certain spatial segregation corresponding to economic status and gender. The observation of *Janmastami Puja* confirmed that rituals can play a particularly effective role as „producers“ of space and thus have relevant implications for urban space, whereby the latter is not „dynamic“, but rather „transformable“.

As far as the second classification or distinction is concerned, everyday life appeared to be near to social practice in Karail Bustee, in the spatial „enlargement“ outside, and social solidarity and cohesion inside, Geneva Camp, as well as in the Puja. Due to the „exceptional“ conditions characterising them, these areas and situations showed their capacity to produce social space that fosters „desire“ and imagination. Hereby, the ability of „protected spaces“ like courtyards or the Camp's interior lanes to generate collective moments, in which urbanity and urban life are not alienating, but give form to strong social bonding, was showed. On the other hand, public events should be attentively studied and highlighted as generators of urban identity, and at the same time as important moments of freedom for urban dwellers – maybe, moments for desire.

Parveen's and Sunila's everyday lives, in contrast, seemed to be rather affected and dominated by mental representations of space, from those concerning ritual transformations to the peculiar gender segregation, which the two women experienced in very different ways. Gender segregation was hereby confirmed to be a still influent part of socialisation, whereby „female“ and „male“ spaces are not always segregated. They are rather distinguished by temporal uses (the female reign of Sunila's home, for example, is rhythmically „invaded“ and changed by males), practices as well as objects that can be respectively found in spaces (for example in the case of Gausia Market).

The observation of China's everyday life revealed the alienating nature of the physical field, defined by Lefebvre as material production and reproduction processes occurring in specific places and spatial ensembles. Neither desire nor imagination could break the monotony of spatial practices in the inner-urban compound, controlled by routines and led by specific rules necessary to the dwellers' survival and operational coexistence.

At this point, some words on the relevance of the „social field“ for future studies can be given. In this survey, the participant observation of everyday life practices, whose results were presented in the current chapter, succeeded on the base of Lefebvre's trialectic model,

which was included in, and became an integrative part of, the field research. His model appeared to represent an important progress for the theoretical reflection on city and urbanisation, insofar it tried to include, instead of separating, various levels of spatial „production“, and hereby indicated the social level, or field, as a new dimension beside physical and mental production processes. The application within this survey showed that this „new-entry“ can enrich urban studies with important information, first of all by making the insights derived from analyses of respectively mental and physical fields concrete and specific. At the level of social practice, that is in lived space, urban inhabitants' perception and handling of physical as well as mental definitions and determinations of space become visible. This can be of absolute relevance for planners involved in the design of specific spaces (architecture and urban design) as well as in planning. In the case of Dhaka, said perception and handling, with their informality and flexibility, definitely appeared to pose a question on the possibility and goals of planning in cities growing at uncontrollable pace. Against the background of increasing appropriation, or encroachment, of urban space for private uses (in Western and non-Western contexts), it appears that for urban design and planning, but especially for urban *development*, taking the social field serious, i.e. dwellers' lived and suffered practices and spatial uses, beside physical considerations and mental representations, is urgently called for.

With this chapter, the evaluation part has reached its end; the aim of following chapter will be to „bring all elements together“.

3.1. Trying to bring the elements together

*„Every spatial disposition
bases on juxtaposition in intelligence and assembling of elements“
H. Lefebvre, 1985⁴⁸⁵*

The dissertation's „convolution“ from the physical, to the mental and then to the social field of production of space in Dhaka is at this point complete. In order to allow further, new convolutions, which should deepen, develop and carry forward the here attempted approach, but could also focus their perspectives on specific urban areas and social phenomena, it is now necessary to assemble the insights gained from each of the studied fields. If these - and correspondingly, also different survey methods and presentation forms - have been so far „juxtaposed“, the envisaged „assemblage“ will constitute the result and indeed the value of the conducted research as a not merely narrative enterprise. Before attempting the assemblage, an overview of the steps made in this study, especially in its central part, shall be given.

This was originally motivated by an interest for Dhaka's dwellers and their survival strategies, which appeared to be equally dependent on high spatial competence and performance, culturally rooted values and the day-by-day interaction in, and adaptation of, urban space by means of everyday life practices. The *context* of these strategies, i.e. the environment in which the dwellers moved and acted, made an occupation with Dhaka's recent urbanisation necessary. These two components, dwellers and urbanisation, gave first indications regarding the theoretical and methodological development of envisaged study. The starting points for the theoretical reflection consisted of a) the insight that Dhaka with its complex cultural background and history could not be directly approached by classic sociological theories rooted in the European socio-cultural and urban history, b) the consideration of the fragmentary nature of both socio-economic development and urbanisation in Dhaka, and c) the understanding of city as process, placing the research's focus not primarily on city but on urbanisation. In the course of an occupation with Henri Lefebvre's work *The Production of Space*, the focus shifted to space, recognised as the observable dimension of the actually non-observable historical process „urbanisation“.

In Lefebvre's conception, space is not a system, but a process consisting of the contemporary interaction of three production processes: material production, knowledge production and production of significance, whereby the latter is considered as the most important object of both research and action. Space, it could be said in other words, means

⁴⁸⁵ Own translation. With these words, Henri Lefebvre commented his work in the preface to the 1985 edition of *La production de l'espace*. Cf. PE, „Préface“, p. XXII.

concrete materiality, mental representation and *experience* (life, feeling, imagination, desire) that respectively presuppose each other.

On the base of this understanding, the dissertation project was defined as a study of the production of urban space by practices of social interaction that correspond to the given material environment as well as to mental representation. Three corresponding fields of production of space - physical, mental as well as social field – were made object of three distinct analytical moments. Differentiated tools for the collection of data, survey of representations and observation of everyday life situations were developed. Also in the phase of evaluation, different methods allowed the respective fields of production to be coped individually with. As far as the process of “writing the thesis” is concerned, a mix of styles was used. The clearly descriptive form chosen for the *physical field* was followed by a rather analytical moment in the presentation of the *mental field*, while in the chapter concerning the *social field*, mentioned “practices of social interaction” were condensed in a “rhythmanalysis”. The latter approach, which Lefebvre defined as transdisciplinary and “more aware of times than of spaces, of moods than of images, of the atmosphere than of particular spectacles“, revealed a high potential for the analysis of urban dwellers' everyday life in its complexity and actual non-reducibility to routines. The changing „rhythms“, corresponding to changes in the observed situations and to the course of the researcher's reflections, allow the variability of uses of space in time, but also of „intensities“ linked to these uses, for example whether many actions happen contemporarily, or orderly follow each other, to be mirrored. The attempted inspection of the three moments, or fields, of production of space results in a series of insights that are presented here, still „juxtaposed“.

- On the base of associative walks and repeated observations, **six structural areas** were recognised and described in their physical peculiarities: old town; traditional „urban“ areas; new areas; „upper class“ areas; slums, squatters and informal settlements; as well as fringes, from which daily commuters reach the mega city for work and business purposes. It was hereby shown that **spatial and socio-demographic features can strongly diverge within restricted space** (cf. for example the dissemination of informal settlements in developed and even „upper class“ areas).
- The **everyday reality** was surveyed on the base of questions regarding the dwellers' **daily routines, market places as well as mobility**. In particular, it was shown that daily actions mostly varied according to the respondents' income groups, as occupation patterns become

increasingly formal parallel to higher incomes: interviewees with lower incomes, representing a broad majority of Dhaka's population, generally working in the **informal sector**, have longer working days – often 12 or more hours – and also work during the formal sector free-time. Moreover, the interviews gave evidence of the existence of areas for **specialised purchasing** (both traditionally renowned or recently developed out of increasing needs and urban growth), and revealed the importance, in the respondents' everyday lives, of **two “commercial poles”**, Gulistan and Bango Bazaar in the old town and New Market/Gausia Market south of Dhanmondi. Probably due to the wide variety and affordability of goods and (in New- and Gausia Markets' case) the presence of established firms, these have apparently preserved their primacy over other areas despite Dhaka's enlargement towards the north. Inner-urban mobility was proven to be generally motivated by professional necessities and to vary according to different incomes and gender (females' mobility is clearly lower than males, though the major access to work could change this in future). The **underdeveloped road network constitutes a strong barrier to the respondents' readiness to commute** within the mega city if not strictly necessary. Their daily movements were mainly contained within a radius of 5 km of distance from the living place, whereby the lowest mobility was found in the group with the lowest income. Interviewees of group 4 and 5 - the „middle“ and „upper-middle class“ - were found to be the most mobile, as almost one of three covered daily distances up to 10 km from home for study or professional and commercial reasons.

- The compared analysis of mobility, purchase habits and daily actions has given evidence of a strong **segregation** in terms of gender segregation, spatial segregation of dwellers of the old town, as well as religious segregation (also linked to social exclusion and discrimination).
- The last mention from the physical field regards the acknowledgement of **foci of urban everyday life** (Gulistan/Bango Bazaar/Motijheel and New Market for their commercial relevance, Dhanmondi and the Campus for their cultural attractions) and **foci of urban development** (Badda and Rampura, yet posing grave questions on the environmental, social, logistic sustainability of said development).
- In the mental field, the first area to be examined was how city is “produced” by the respondents, who generally showed little attachment to Dhaka as **the city could be “exchanged” with another**. The idea of “City” mainly appeared to coincide with

“infrastructure” - wide asphalted roads, public and private transport means, flyovers, industries, high-rise buildings used for commercial and administrative uses. Nonetheless, for a relevant part of the respondents living in the **city means an “investment” in the future**, which makes the losses linked to a shift from rural areas bearable.

- Passing to the representations of space, rather opinionated and personal answers were noted. Space, often in relation to the possibility of its religious “occupation” and transformation, appeared to be conceived of as a **“container” of abstract thoughts**, which can affect it. The respondents' answer also showed that, **for dwellers' interpretations and representations of space, emotional and symbolic features have primary relevance** compared to architecture and urban design. Historical and cultural spaces like *Shahid Minar*, Ramna Park and Dhanmondi (especially Dhanmondi Lake) were confirmed as urban spaces that encourage free congregation and leisure pursuits and allow identification thanks to both their environment (green spaces, water...) and the cultural activities there organised.
- The mental maps reinforced the insight that **spaces are remembered emotionally**.
- The divergence between detached view of the „city“ and personal view of its spaces has given reason to think of an „urban attitude“ characterising Dhaka dwellers irrespectively of rural or urban origin, but not compromising their capacity to get involved with the city. Dwellers were able to comment on the city and recognised **individual places of desire that make space personal, charging it with emotional and symbolic value**.
- At last, the inspection of the social field of production of space, or social practice, through participant observation allowed different degrees of **“dynamism” of space**, which appeared to be **related to religious “transformations” and proportional to the lack of space** (or to the necessity to enlarge available space) to be recognised. Domestic spaces of households with lower incomes were found to be peculiarly non-specialised, as a single living room can assume in turn the functions of bedroom, dining room, sitting room, study, workplace, or gathering point. The meaning of the term **„representational space“** for the social field became clear through the observation of transformations of everyday life space into sacred space through, for example, a burning stick of incense in front of divine icons, or to the orientation towards Mecca: in this field, (conceived) **symbols are transposed in lived and felt practice**.

- In the everyday lives of observed actors, the respective **prevalence of mental, physical or social moments of production of space** could be stated, revealing also the practical effects of, for example, the dominance of mental representations on everyday life, or indicating the meaning of what Lefebvre called „desire“. Mental representations of space, from those concerning ritual transformations of space to gender segregation, are mainly influenced by rules and norms learnt along with socialisation and thus appeared to be linked to ideology. In contrast, during *Janmastami Puja*, or on the base of the forms of solidarity and self-organisation observed in *Karail Bustee* and Geneva Camp, an idea about social space's potential to encounter urban dwellers' „desire“ and imagination could be gained. Hereby, „**protected spaces**“ (e.g. courtyards or the Camp's interior lanes) have been recognised as especially positive factors for the generation of collective moments that can encourage social bonding and, possibly, enable the emergence of desire.
- The observation of social practice has moreover shown that (female/male, private/public, interior/exterior) **spaces and (social, mental, spatial) production processes** are not separated by clear boundaries, but **depend on temporary uses, particular practices as well as objects** that can be respectively found in spaces. This has posed a **question about the „possibility“, or the sense, of not only spatial, but overall urban planning.**

Or, developing the already introduced helix:

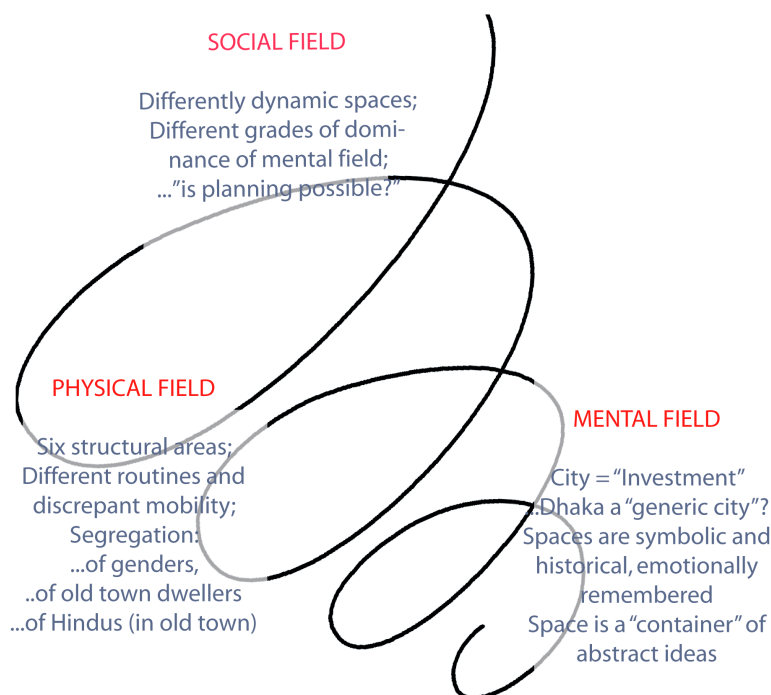


Fig. 12: The survey's main insights inscribed in the conic helix of production of space.

After this recollection of the study's main insights, the moment has come to attempt the announced assemblage of elements - that is, the spatial dispositions that emerged from the study of the physical field, Dhaka's dwellers representations of space as well as the "representational spaces" discovered during the occupation with social practice. Was the "social space" - resulting for Lefebvre from the three production fields' interaction - encountered in the course of this survey? In other words: could physical, mental and social field be brought in relationship through the chosen combination of survey methods and presentation forms?

Social reality (or social space), whole and at the same time broken, global and at the same time fragmentary, was said to emerge thanks to the contrasting effects of physical, mental and social production. In *The Production of Space*⁴⁸⁶, Lefebvre explained that it plays a role among the forces of production and is politically instrumental (as it facilitates the control of society) as much as a means of production⁴⁸⁷. At the same time, social space contains potentialities "of work and of re-appropriation" that can be realised in the artistic sphere and especially in the project of a different space created by the body⁴⁸⁸. However, he did not explained "how", concretely, the production fields interact and his tone assumed strong programmatic character in the development of his work. Finding salvation in a "programme" after having applied his theory in an empirical survey and anchored it in Dhaka's reality would mean indeed forgetting this work's actual intention, i.e. inspecting lived spaces of interaction and the "hidden" rules governing them.

To attempt this assemblage, the perspective will distance itself from the three fields of production of space and shift the reflection to a "broader" level in the following digression. One of Lefebvre's tentative models, based on three „spatio-temporal social levels“ - the global level „G“, the intermediate or urban level „M“, and the private level „P“ - will provide support. A double "zoom" - first in-, then out-wards - shall pass from the global to the local level and from the particular (or private) to the general. Taking into account the constitutive contrariness of social space and accepting that its elements can not be composed in an univocal "assemblage", both views will proceed in non-linear way, corresponding to the irregularities, fractures and breaks inherent to social space.

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. PS, p. 349.

⁴⁸⁷ In the sense that (ibid.) „already towns and metropolitan areas are no longer just works and products but also means of production, supplying housing, maintaining the labour force, etc.“.

⁴⁸⁸ Lefebvre meant (ibid.) „either the space of a counter-culture, or a counter-space in the sense of an initially utopian alternative to actually existing <real> space“.

Digression V / Zooming in and out Dhaka's spaces to unveil them

Dhaka, Bangladesh, on the threshold of the 21st century. The background is that of globalisation of economic flows and networks through the expansion of economies of scale, parallel to world-wide migration flows from the peripheries to the centres (either intra- or international, that is: as peripheries can be considered the rural areas compared to urban centres, but also the Developing Countries to the centres of production of Industrialised Countries), linked to world-wide urbanisation. Bangladesh allows both the effects of Developing Countries' assent of the global economy and of the discrepancy between centres and peripheries on the base of few prime examples to be observed. In the last four decades⁴⁸⁹, the country has experienced a very fast urbanisation, whose pace, reasons and consequences were described in the introduction and which ran parallel to industrial development. Carrying forward a century-long tradition that had started with the Mughals and continued in Colonial period, the major part of industrial development after Liberation succeeded in the textile sector, first under direction of the State, then – with the new government of 1975, which increasingly fostered private sector friendly policies - on the base of private investment. Progressively, since the 80s, the textile industry has been supplemented by an export-oriented garments industry supplying multinational firms⁴⁹⁰. Dhaka, offering better infrastructural and logistical conditions for the establishment of industries, was the first and main stage of this progress⁴⁹¹. On its part, the public investment in the capital city mainly contributed to the construction and tertiary sectors, as those years' construction momentum as well as growth of purchase centres, cinemas and cultural institutions witness. Due to the failure of decentralisation programmes, the discrepancy between the capital city, centre of industrialisation and object of public investments, and the underdeveloped rural areas with their precarious economic and social situation (aggravated by regular floods and famine) additionally grew. Assistance and funds by international agencies and donors supported and at the same time influenced the young country; signs of these efforts are visible in Dhaka City, for example in Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge as well as Convention Centre, the

⁴⁸⁹ The period after Bangladesh' Liberation War is hereby meant.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. Islam (2005), p. 15-23; Dirk Saam's article *Die Bekleidungs- und Textilindustrie Bangladeschs*, in the cited report by *Kampagne für 'Saubere' Kleidung*, January 2008, gives a short overview on the concrete dynamics of garment industry in Bangladesh. According to this article, the exports of the garment industry provide yearly 8 billion US dollars, 13% of the national GDP (the national GDP amounts to ca. 60 billion dollars, cf. cited report by Islam).

⁴⁹¹ According to N. Islam, in the first years of life of Bangladesh public investment in Dhaka reached 20% of the total public investment. Nowadays, of the round 4.000 garment factories countrywide, 75% are in Dhaka, employing round 2 million workers. Cf. Islam (2005), p. 19-21.

new broad roads founded by Asia Development Bank but especially by Japan, as well as various health and educational institutions sponsored by Muslim countries⁴⁹².

Through a further zoom, the urban level is approached. The mentioned public investment in the 70s and 80s created work opportunities for thousands of migrants, who found employment in construction sites and mainly settled within the developing areas; as described in this survey, Karail Bustee, whose growth took place in the concerned period, showed the consequences of this process on urban structure and social life. During such intense urbanisation phase, the dream of owning an apartment or even a residential building in Dhaka became a possible reality. Thanks to the leasing programmes of Dhaka Improvement Trust (later, RAJUK), the upper-middle income classes and especially former expatriated Bangladeshis invested in real estate in the housing projects of Mohammadpur, Mirpur, and Uttara. Similar developments gave form to the faith in an unlimited progress accessible to everybody - a „Dhaka Dream“ that was increasingly supported by marketing strategies of the private real estate sector. Since the late 80s, the latter progressively substituted the public sector's investment concerning urban development; lack of planning and a degree of illegality have characterised the recent progress, especially in the still undeveloped fringe areas, as the description of Rampura exemplarily showed. Contemporarily, professional agencies convinced an increasing number of owners in the congested Old Dhaka and sought-after Dhanmondi to „develop“ their former residences into apartment buildings. On the other side, urbanisation was accompanied by encroachment of public spaces as well as squatting, phenomena that the government tried in repeated phases to repress by means of eviction. The last effort of this kind, as explained in the chapter on „physical field“, was made by the caretaker government in 2007 and hit squatters on public land as well as street-hawkers. After civil society's protests against the drastic and inefficient drive, the government allowed the evicted families to settle, temporarily, in Karail, and the street-hawkers to sell their products in weekly markets. The latter case represents an actual „appropriation“ of space on the part of the public sector, which opened to informal commerce streets and esplanades⁴⁹³, but also vacant spaces like Sukrabad's vacant plot (described in the chapter on „social field“). In fact, a „production“ of space was in this way encouraged by public administration: working

⁴⁹² Cf. Islam (2005), p. 77, for a review of last decades' most relevant supports to urban development, among which UNDP (for the preparation of one Strategy and one Master/Structure Plan in 1979-81 and 1990-95 as well as squatters resettlement), Asia Development Bank (for urban planning in 1979-1981 and primary health care in the 90s), World Bank (for environmental improvement in Old Dhaka in the 80s, water treatment plan in 90s and transportation development in the late 90s and at present) as well as international NGOs and European states' support (for poverty alleviation programmes) will be recalled.

⁴⁹³ In the initial phase, a big weekly market was installed in the normally barred entrance road to the Parliament.

space for the sellers who installed tents and stalls, play spaces for children, and a new collective space for bargaining, gathering and sharing information for the neighbourhood. Nowadays - and here, the „private“ level of urban design, architecture and communication is approached -, outstanding features marking Dhaka's urban scape (not only in Gulshan and Dhanmondi) are the increasing number of Japanese cars and motorcycles as well as the glass and concrete architecture of new university and office buildings. Magazines and bill-boards spread all over the city advertise the new settlements developed by real estate firms, fashionable department stores, weekly visited by an upcoming middle-income class, and the attractive offers of telecommunication firms. The role of newspapers and TV advertisements as producer of signs should not be underestimated. The press' tradition in Bangladesh is mirrored by the high number of national daily newspapers in English and Bangla: around 50 national daily newspapers with their special editions and supplements are published from Dhaka and communicate political as well as socio-cultural information countrywide⁴⁹⁴. A particular influence on popular imagination is exerted by nine private and two government TV channels, propagating not only relevant national and international news and Indian movies, but also forming, in sequels and shows, a new and mainly „urban“ image of Bangladesh's society. Mobile phone and internet, making communication with different cities and countries possible, are affecting Bangladeshis' perception of time and distances. Since the mid 90s, four big telecommunication companies offer a fast improving mobile communication service, which meanwhile connects the entire country⁴⁹⁵. In Karail Bustee like in Sukrabad or Mohammadpur (but also in the villages countrywide), „mobile-phone stalls“, simply arranged with a table and a chair for the owner (often women), enable to call or be called by migrated relatives and friends. Walking on Dhaka's streets - from the old town, to Dhanmondi or Gulshan -, it is not difficult to find internet caf  s abuzz open till late at night⁴⁹⁶.

It is on the streets that the “zoom” inwards, which led from the global to the local, restarts for a contrary movement from the particular, or private, to the general. The streets constituted the first platform from which Dhaka could be observed and its spaces' materiality, infrastructure and dispositions compared in order to investigate urban history;

⁴⁹⁴ About 5-8 English and 15-20 Bangla newspapers also reach readers in Bangladesh's remote rural areas.

⁴⁹⁵ According to Nazrul Islam, 7,5 million mobile phones are in use in Bangladesh, of which Grameen Phone has the highest share (5 million subscribers) and the majority is concentrated in Dhaka. Available data on the recently introduced state-owned mobile phone company, Teletalk, can be used as an indice of the growth rate of mobile communication in Bangladesh: in less than one year, 100.000 subscriptions in Dhaka and over 210.000 in the country as a whole have been collected. Cf. Islam (2005), page 56.

⁴⁹⁶ Internet is meanwhile accessible, though in still limited form, in the district towns and in many sub-district headquarters.

also the majority of interview partners were encountered and a main part of observed situations took place on the streets. Due to the stated physical segregation of urban areas (stated in the rare commuting between Old Dhaka, New Dhaka and the out of reach Gulshan) and “exclusiveness” of living forms (from the gated communities of Baridhara to the potentially universally accessible, but socially excluded informal settlements), this second movement up along the helix will show two different urban areas and settings in which everyday practice appeared to have the potential to reach the dimensions of “social space”, that is to reach an urban scale.

The “zoom” outwards starts from the segregated bazaars' streets in the old town, with the work- and retail shops' front spaces populated by artisans and customers discussing from one side of the street to the other. Like the kuttis worn in white, the disappearing crafts represent a cultural continuity endangered by the moving in of migrants on one side and the increasing mechanisation of production on the other. A possible “resistance” to the delineated dissolution processes was recognised during the survey in the common funds, administrated by respective committees, which the residents of Hindu bazaars are expected to contribute to. These cover the expenditures for the different pujas, in particular for the cleaning of the streets after the celebrations, but can also be used to support the neighbourhood's economically disadvantaged families. In this way, solidarity networks that apparently „survived“ the pressure of urbanisation were brought to light in parts of the old town, though it should be acknowledged that these are probably related to both the dwellers' segregation and disadvantaged economic situation, which enhanced social cohesion⁴⁹⁷. They shall be regarded as „intermediate“ phenomena, in which the particular is linked to the general thanks to social interaction on a neighbourhood base⁴⁹⁸. Yet, at the same level, the development of existent residential structures into apartment buildings was found to dissolve traditional architectural forms like the courtyards and in this way affect social interaction especially among women. The observation of Sunila's everyday life in a recently developed building in the old town gave a particularly clear impression hereof⁴⁹⁹. The same streets of Old Dhaka are, eventually, stages of celebrations that mark months and seasons – kirton and the kite festival in winter, Janmastami Puja in summer, Durga Puja after the monsoon, as well as the two Eid festivals. As showed by interviews and participant observation, both Hinduism and Islam conceive of space as “transformable” through religious practices. This flexible passage can take place in the private sphere (at

⁴⁹⁷ This appears to be confirmed also by the persistence of the *panchayets* in some of Old Dhaka's bazaars, as described in the chapter on mental field, cf. 2.1.

⁴⁹⁸ A view also adopted by Ali Madanipour in his model of the subsequent passages from private (mind, body, home) to public (neighbourhood, city) sphere in *Public and Private Spaces of the City* (2003).

⁴⁹⁹ In chapter on social field, 2.3.

home or in the self) as well as in public spaces, when belief invades the streets, like during a puja or Eid. The observation, in this survey, of a Hindu celebration despite the limited proportion of Hindus in Dhaka's present day society is explained by the consideration of the pujas' universal accessibility and constitutive role played by urban space in the ritual processions, which pass from the local neighbourhood to the general all-urban level.

The streets of Dhaka University Campus and Dhanmondi, less marked by religious spirit, were found to be highly characterised by values concerning cultural and national identity. Flanked by rich vegetation and colonial buildings as well as more recent constructions witnessing the impact of 1950s' and 60s' classic modern architecture on Bangladesh⁵⁰⁰, the Campus' streets are characteristically filled by groups of students and street-hawkers selling sweets and jewellery. In contrast, Dhanmondi, with its mixed uses, high population rate, the concentration of local and international cultural institutions, hospitals and clinics, clubs, schools, boutiques, cafés and other meeting points for the emerging upper-middle income inhabitants, is the stage of a change of social practices that is creating the opportunity to „break“ traditional norms and rules on the part of various social groups. The survey showed that not only many families with a longer urban tradition live in Dhanmondi in spite of the possibility to move to Gulshan; also urban poor like China were found to prefer this neighbourhood for a series of reasons ranging from logistic and infrastructural advantages, to the beloved Lake, to a certain identification potential with a developing „urban life“. Compared to Dhanmondi, Gulshan appeared hence to be still missing historical value: the exclusive appearance of its modern buildings, strikingly contrasting with the scattered squatters, can not be counterbalanced by means of cultural values or historical symbols. Dhanmondi, though originally planned as an exclusive residential area and at present affected by a new development and construction momentum, is inclusive thanks to its historicity and everyday social practice. The survey showed also that the area represents a platform for the emergence of civil society's initiatives, like the residents' self-organisation to prevent construction work devouring the last green plot where children can play, or their public demonstrations and political advocacy of environmental preservation and protection from encroachment. Leaving the local level and climbing up the next twist, the symbolic all-urban sphere is approached. Students and intellectuals led the Language Movement as well as the protests against Ershad's regime from the Campus and Shahbagh; intellectuals and political leaders have lived in Dhanmondi since Dhaka's and Bangladesh's cultural heydays, in the 60s and 70s.

⁵⁰⁰ Among others, the Institute of Fine Arts, realised in 1953/54, was planned by the Bangladeshi architect Muzharul Islam, who was inspired by Le Corbusier, and the Teachers and Students' Centre, built in 1963, was planned by the Greek architect Constantine Doxiadis.

Bangladesh's founding leader, Sheik Mujibur, resided and was killed in his home, nowadays a museum, in Dhanmondi's bottrish number (present day's Road Nr. 11). These are only some examples explaining the reasons of both the areas' political and national identity, that is perceived by the dwellers and makes them to representative urban spaces. The respondents explained they gather between Ramna and Dhanmondi Lake during the most beloved national holiday, Bangla New Year, as well as in the majority of cultural and national celebrations, including also the two Eid festivals. Hereby, especially Dhanmondi Lake and Ramna Park, which were frequently drawn in the mental maps, were confirmed as important landmarks and, contemporarily, as places of desire.

At this point, it should be possible to answer the initial question regarding “social space”, which asked in how far a relationship between physical, mental and social field could be established by the survey. In the “zoom in”, Dhaka's streets, increasingly filled by advertisement and phone shops, were reached from a global perspective that considered worldwide migration and expansion of economic networks and progressively descended into urbanisation facts like encroachment, public intervention, eviction and increasing dominance of private sector in post-modern urban development. Hereby, the city was confirmed to play the role that Lefebvre assigned to it - that of “mediator” between global and local perspective, in which conflicts, trends and emerging needs come together and are coped with by social actors, giving form to new kinds of social interaction. Co-existence and the combined effect of physical, mental and social field in the described process were also examined: not only had the described urbanisation a perceptible impact on the material urban space, new values and myths were also hereby produced, like for example the so-called “Dhaka Dream”, that is the city's representing a chance, or investment, for the future. Eventually, the described eviction and “appropriation” measures on the part of the state acted as reminders of the social implications always inherent to urbanisation processes, linked to democratic rights like the right to dwelling and commuting in public spaces. The “zoom out”, in contrast, started from the streets of two distinct urban areas and showed, on the base of their materiality as well as objects and atmospheres, ongoing social processes of Dhaka - the dissolution of gathering points for women due to the disappearance of architectural features and consequent loss of neighbourhood feeling in the old town; the recent phenomena linked to the society's liberalisation and modernisation in Dhanmondi. The different symbolic meanings (religious/ritual and cultural/national), with which both old town and Campus/Dhanmondi are charged, were shown to have the power to “transform”, in the dwellers' minds, urban

space. This happens in everyday life, for example in the ritual prayer of Muslim and Hindu believers, as well as in cyclical rituals like pujas and national holidays. The recent emergence of civil society in Dhanmondi was hereby contrasted to the old town's traditional committees and panchayet. Also in the second "zoom", hence, the collective effect of mental, physical and social production processes was confirmed, whereby public events - dependent on concrete urban space, organised on the base of self-organisation, always symbolically charged - appeared to give not only social space, but also desire, a possibility of realisation.

3.2. Conclusion and outlook

After having brought to mind the survey's main insights, confirmed the intrinsic interdependence of physically, mentally and socially „produced“ space and given a visual impression of their relationship in concrete spaces of Dhaka, the moment has come to test the conducted work on the base of its initial aim and objectives. At the core of present research was the intention to study and describe cultural elements of urbanisation in Dhaka. The special stress laid on the nature of urbanisation as process implied a particular attention to the transitions currently affecting the city's physical as well as social environment on one side, and the acceptance of the latter's constitutive fragmentary character. Against this background, the focus was consciously put on the cultural production of significance through representations attributed by dwellers to urban spaces, whose “identities” were analysed and compared. Moreover, these representations were expected to affect everyday life behaviours in, and especially uses of, urban space.

The study, which availed itself of a mix of tools like the study of physical dispositions, different forms of interview as well as participant observation, was able to show that space is not only “perceived” on a sensual or physical level by the dwellers, but loaded with symbolic meanings and actively interpreted according to personal and cultural values. Hereby, **two types of representations could be distinguished**: the first **depend on historical heritage**, which in Dhaka's and Bangladesh's case is mainly related to the recent history, in particular Language Movement and Liberation War. Urban spaces commemorating this period of Bangladesh's national history - from Dhaka University Campus with its symbolic monument, *Shahid Minar*, to Dhanmondi's *bottrish number* (Road Nr. 11), where one of the fathers of the nation, *Bangabondhu*, lived and was murdered, were found to be particularly beloved urban, as well as mental, landmarks. Not only: thanks to their symbolic meaning, these spaces continue to be the stage of demonstrations, cultural events and political activism up to the present day.

The second type of representations are **religious representations**, often found to constitute a strong reference for the respondents' individual behaviours and everyday life activities. Hereby - as it was stressed in various phases of the work -, religious feeling, being *per se* abstract, appeared to be potentially independent from any spatial precondition. A common feature of all religions, common also to the two otherwise so contrary beliefs that influenced Bangladesh in history, Hinduism and Islam, concerns the ritual, and rhythmic, reminding of the divine, which is “transposed” into the real word of humans through symbolic acts. The symbolic meaning of specific objects like a prayer rug or a stick of

incense, as well as of particular acts like veiling the head or searching for a point of the compass, has a primary value compared to respective places.

This leads to an important aspect, which the study attempted to describe, i.e. the **“flexibility” of spatial understanding** observed in Dhaka dwellers' everyday life practices as concerned by the dissertation's first question. On the base of the led analysis and of consulted experts' explanations, such flexibility, enabling the dwellers to “produce” multifunctional spaces in an apparently spontaneous way, derives equally from traditional housing and living forms characteristic of rural life – that are “transposed” in the urban setting –, as well as from the mentioned understanding of space as temporally fluent or variable. *The role played by these mental factors for spatial behaviour and use appeared to be more determinant than actual congestion and lack of space in the mega city.* The weight of religion hereby should not be underestimated as, still in the present day and in spite of a short period of rather politically fostered secularism in the 60s, 70s, religious and cultural values appear to intertwine and are actually inseparable in Bangladesh's society.

While latter reflection answers the question on the “how” of production of space in everyday life, two further questions presented in the introduction to this dissertation shall be now approached.

The second question was motivated by the assumed “modernisation” of lifestyles currently going on in Dhaka, and concerned its possible effects on pre-existing representations. In this regard, *traditional meanings of space – from its religious component to the typical segregation of genders, from the notion of private and public space to latter's typical flexibility – were found to be more “preserved” than expected throughout all income groups and education levels.* At the level of everyday life practices, indeed, the growth of women's employment was recognised as a very strong factor for possible shifts of values, which could eventually affect representations of space, not only in terms of gender segregation, but also of needs, requirements and claims on urban space.

The third and last question concerned Dhaka's multi-layered, heterogeneous and dense (in terms of population, stories as well as sensorial impressions) space, in short its “hypersignificance” - the origin of the fascination exerted by Dhaka on the author and other visitors coming from Europe alike. On one side, falling in this fascination and trying to demonstrate that, for example, such space allows diversity and is in turn benefited by it in the mega city's everyday life, would mean blanking out the real state of urban development and, most importantly, of civil and human rights in a still extremely unequally structured city. On the other, the chronic informality characterising all sectors of social life in Dhaka was confirmed to offer a potential for the emergence of mixed forms of

urban management: prime examples could be the caretaker government's "appropriation" of urban spaces then transformed in weekly markets for street-hawkers, or the overall functioning socio-economic subsystem found in *Karail Bustee*. *Provided that similar "compromises" on the part of the public sector as well as dwellers' self-organisation forms were encouraged and at the same time consistently protected from (illegal) sellout and overall privatisation of land, in Dhaka's informal and hypersignificant urban space the fundament for a pluralistic urban development can be recognised.*

At this point, further and new questions can be delineated. Studies on mega cities in the Developing World are typically focused on the analysis of the consequences, for liveability and governability, of urbanisation processes, often with a certain overassessment of demography. Hereby, especially in the last two decades, an increasing acknowledgement of the informal sector (including forms of self-organisation) and the meaning of non-government institutions (NGOs) has led to stress the importance of the cooperation between public and private agents. A common feature of these studies led by sociologists, anthropologists and urban planners is the effort to define *sustainable* solutions, which can range from interventions in the cities' urban design to the support of local actors, from ecological planning to measures for the enhancement of dwellers' participation. Throughout this survey on Dhaka, the coexistence of globalised and pre-industrial stages of development at all studied levels – the physical/infrastructural and economic one, the cultural, as well as the social – made a general interpretation of its current society difficult and actually inopportune. An inherent transition was rather recognised and acknowledged as the city's leitmotif. This constituted the base of a possible suggestion for future studies and interventions: what can be planned, what should be left to spatial competence and performance of urban dwellers, who give shape and „produce“ space on the base of their interactions, needs and values? Is there a planning practice capable of defining as multifunctional spaces such as those observed and described?

A different aspect of urban life that prominently emerged within this work consists of public events. According to the conducted observation, these do not only represent beneficial moments of freedom for urban dwellers – possible moments for the realisation of desire -, but play an indisputable role as generators of urban identity. The collective experience of, and in, urban spaces, "produces" memories, identities as well as bonding and should be therefore attentively studied as an act of cultural production of significance with a direct implication for urban life.

Concluding, a few words on this study's overall conception. This dissertation has taken the twofold risk to apply a theoretical, specifically philosophical, construct to the empirical study of a concrete city, and to „trust“ the suggestive power of language for its description. Considering the made experience, the approach to urban issues on the base of philosophical and not only sociological, anthropological or ethnological theories can be recommended as an effective support for the comprising of phenomena that, in studies of other fields, are often simplified and „robbed“ of their reciproque relationships. Philosophy, thanks to its constitutive authorisation to be abstract, has the possibility to potentially delve into all fields of social reality and is thus able to deliver thought-provoking impulses and models that can guide the study of concrete objectives⁵⁰¹.

In this specific dissertation, Lefebvre's theory on production of space provided a thread for the development of the work both in its field research and writing phase. The latter, in turn, was led by the effort to bring to light the collected and evaluated information and at the same time give expression to the dwellers' experiences, points of view and perspectives, and to thus act as a reminder of the central issue concerned by the study of cities, *people*. The adopted ethnographic method demonstrated its particular advantages for this aim, insofar as it has proved to allow a direct experience of spaces and social situations as well as the collection of differentiated and non generalisable information. Directly coming into contact with spaces and people, differentiated perspectives: to the author of this study, the possibility to comprise and possibly improve increasingly complex urban societies resides here.

⁵⁰¹ Cf. for example Deleuze/Guattari's inspiring and outspokenly headstrong *A Thousand Plateaus* (1981) in the context of post-structuralist philosophy, or the work of Thomas Pogge (among others: *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms*, published in 2002) in that of practical philosophy.

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5. List of Figures and Photos

<i>Figures</i>	Page
Fig. 1: Visualisation of Dhaka's urban growth since Liberation, 1971. Design: Jennifer Nitschke.	10
Fig. 2: Visualisation of administrative identities of Dhaka. Design: Jennifer Nitschke. Source: <i>Dhaka City and Rajuk Plan</i> , published by The Mappa Ltd., 2007.	13
Fig. 3: Visualisation of Lefebvre's trialectic model.	31
Fig. 4: Visualisation of adopted methodology according to Lefebvre's trialectic model.	39
Fig. 5: Schematic representation of main traditions of interpretation of (public) urban space in Western urban studies.	61
Fig. 6: List of interview locations accompanied by ward number.	70
Fig. 7: Visualisation of interview locations. Design: Jennifer Nitschke on the base of <i>Dhaka City and Rajuk Plan</i> , published by The Mappa Ltd., 2007.	71
Fig. 8: Visualisation of six respondents' daily routines.	107
Fig. 9: Visualisation of six respondents' movements in a day. Design: Jennifer Nitschke on the base of <i>Dhaka City and Rajuk Plan</i> , published by The Mappa Ltd., 2007.	112
Fig. 10: Schematic representation of some urban spaces and their different meaning for cultural identity.	156
Fig. 11: Schematic representation of observed spaces of social practice.	200
Fig. 12: Visualisation of the survey's main insights inscribed in the conic helix of production of space.	238
 <i>Photos</i>	
Photos: Günter Nest (top); Elisa T. Bertuzzo (bottom).	82
Photos: Günter Nest.	86
Photos: Elisa T. Bertuzzo (top); Günter Nest (bottom).	91
Photos: Günter Nest.	94
Photos: Günter Nest (top); Elisa T. Bertuzzo (bottom).	98
Photos: Archive Salahuddin Ahmed (top); Günter Nest (bottom).	100
Photos: Günter Nest (top); Elisa T. Bertuzzo (bottom).	103