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**RESIDENTIAL AND ECONOMIC PRACTICES
OF PAVEMENT DWELLERS IN OLD DELHI**

by

Véronique Dupont
&
Dhananjay Tingal

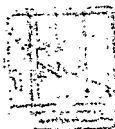


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Véronique DUPONT* and Dhananjay TINGAL**

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1- INTRODUCTION

The sight of people sleeping at night on the pavements in large Indian metropolises like Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras, can be first apprehended as a manifestation of abject poverty, an acute form of deprivation from shelter and basic services, and the pavement dwellers as "the unfortunate victims of diverse kinds of physical and social crisis among our rural and urban societies" (ARORA, CHHIBBER, 1985: 1). At the macro-level, the increase of shelterless people in urban areas is analysed as "an inevitable outcome of the urbanisation process" (NIUA, 1986: 90). a consequence of industrialisation and economic development inducing migration of rural poor to the cities with resulting pressure on land and housing (GUPTA, KAUL, PANDEY, 1993: 29).

While it is not our purpose to deny this side of the reality, we would like to propose a more qualified appraisal of the practice of pavement dwelling. In the same way as rural to urban migrants should not be considered merely as pawns pushed and pulled by macro-economic forces but also as actors in a position to shape the urbanisation process, pavement dwellers in big cities should not be considered only as the victims of striking poverty, but also as dynamic agents capable of implementing their own economic strategies and of finding appropriate responses to a specific urban environment.

In this perspective, we shall investigate the residential and economic practices of the shelterless persons found at night in the Walled City of Delhi, the historical core of the capital. The reasons for this focus will become more evident after we have outlined the distinctive features of this area; this will allow us to better understand the context in which the residential and economic practices of the pavement dwellers have developed. Three pairs of interrelated questions will orient our investigation:

- i) To what extent is this shelterless population socially marginalised and to what extent is it integrated into familial networks extending to the rural places of origin ?
- ii) To what extent are the pavement dwellers economically marginalised and to what extent are they an integral part of the metropolitan labour force, and not necessarily the worse off in terms of income levels?
- iii) To what extent is this shelterless situation a consequence of a process of exclusion from access to the urban housing system and to what extent is it a residential strategy serving individual or familial economic betterment?

As it will be shown by this exploratory study, the heterogeneity of the houseless population and the variety of situations encountered makes general and definite statements invalid, and calls for a discerning assessment, through a micro-level and detailed analysis. Before presenting our findings, the sources of data and the research methodology are described below.

2 - SOURCES OF DATA AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Secondary data available

Although the pavement dwellers are generally qualified as "the poorest of the urban poor" (JAGANNATHAN, HALDER, 1988: 1175), barring some rare exceptions¹ the issue of homelessness is generally overlooked in the abundant literature dealing with the urban poor or urbanisation problems², and primary survey data are relatively few³ as compared to the numerous studies on slums and squatter settlements' dwellers. In particular, there is a striking lack of specific studies on pavement dwellers in Delhi, the capital city. The main reference dates back to 1971: this is the special study on houseless population carried out with the 1971 census operations (GANDOTRA, 1976). The other references correspond to unpublished studies, poorly circulated: the pioneer report of the Bharat Sevak Samaj, a non governmental organisation dedicated to the cause of the poor (1964); a special study conducted by the Slum Wing of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) on the children staying in night shelters in winter (ARORA, CHHIBBER, 1985); a sample survey of about 1069 pavement dwellers in Old Delhi, conducted in 1989 by the Slum Wing of the DDA ... and whose report was unfortunately untraceable even in the concerned administration; a thesis of the School of Planning and Architecture based on a sample survey of 71 pavement dwellers and 30 inmates of government night shelters in different localities of Delhi (KURUVILLA, 1990-91).

A direct consequence of the paucity of studies on the houseless people in Delhi is the lack of accurate information on this specific segment of the urban population, and to start with on its total number. The houseless population enumerated in Delhi urban agglomeration at the time of the 1981 census was 22,516, and about 50,000 as per the 1991 census

¹ See for example: ALAM & ALIKHAN (1987), SINGH & SOUZA (1980), SOUZA (1983).

² To quote a few among some recent studies: NAGPAUL (1996), GUPTA, KAUL & PANDEY (1993), JAIN (1996), KUNDU (1993), NIUA (1986 & 1989), PERNIA (1994), SURI (1994).

³ One can however mention: DHAR (1985), JAGANNATHAN & HALDER (1988-a, 1988-b & 1989), ISI (1977), MUKHERJEE S. (1975) for Calcutta; RAMACHANDRAN (1972), SPARC for Bombay; ARORA, CHHIBBER (1985), Bharat Sewak Samaj (1964), DDA (1989), KURUVILLA (1990-91) for Delhi. (This list is not exhaustive)

(according to a figure quoted in an unpublished report of the Slum and *Jhuggi-Jhopri* Department of the DDA (1994), although the corresponding census table has not been published yet). These figures are obviously under-estimates of the actual population living in the capital with no form of shelter whatsoever (or the so-called pavement dwellers) due to the conditions of identification and enumeration of this specific segment of the population during the census operations. According to a more realistic estimate provided by the Slum and *Jhuggi-Jhopri* Department of the DDA in 1985, the number of houseless people in Delhi would be 1 % of its total population, which would correspond to about 100,000 persons in the mid-nineties. The heaviest and most conspicuous concentrations of pavement dwellers are found in the Old city and its extensions, where the Municipality has - logically - opened 8 of its 16 night shelters (6 in the Walled City proper), representing three fourths of the total sleeping capacity of about 4000 provided for the shelterless people in the entire urban agglomeration .

The morphological and economic characteristics of the historical core of the capital city (which will be described in the next section) may explain the specific attraction exerted on a floating population without shelter. This resulting situation further explains our choice to focus the investigation on the pavement dwellers in Old Delhi.

Specific survey of pavement dwellers conducted in Old Delhi

The findings of this paper are based on primary data from our own socio-economic surveys⁴. The target population consisted of the persons deprived of any form of shelter of their own and sleeping at night on the pavements, under the verandas and in other open spaces, or in the night shelters run by the Municipality⁵. The studied area was further limited to the Walled City of Delhi. Two types of observation have been combined: a statistical survey and in-depth interviews.

In a preliminary phase, the main concentrations of pavement dwellers were identified, a head-count carried out in each location late at night, and the corresponding information reported on a detailed map⁶. The 6 night shelters located in the Walled City proper were

⁴ This investigation is part of an on-going project on the patterns of population mobility in the Delhi Metropolitan Area (see DUPONT, 1995).

⁵ See description given in the next section.

⁶ 'Main concentrations' mean also conspicuous ones, hence the pavement dwellers scattered in the backside streets of the bazaar, or taking refuge in the underground parking lots, and more generally those sleeping in the darkest corners of the Old City were not covered by our survey, for security reasons, since all the field work had to be conducted at night. Consequently, there is a risk of bias in the sample, and the pavement dwellers surveyed should be considered as representative of the 'main stream' houseless people in Old Delhi, while the underground section, the most marginal among them, and those more likely to be

also included in the survey: for each night shelter the average attendance was estimated on the basis of the entrance records for the last previous month, and a map showing the layout of the premises prepared. This set of maps (for the pavement dwelling areas as well as the night shelters) was used as a sampling frame to draw an area sample of about 5 per cent individuals⁷ for the statistical survey. The survey was conducted at night in January and February 1996, covering a total sample of 248 individuals: 99 sleeping in the night shelters and 149 in various open spaces⁸.

The survey schedule aimed at collecting information on the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of each individual, and on his mobility pattern including commuting to place of work, main migratory steps, and temporary moves in and outside Delhi. A last section dealt with the characteristics of the family members not living with the respondent.

Along with the statistical survey, in-depth interviews were conducted simultaneously with a sub-sample of 36 individuals randomly selected: 16 among the night shelter inmates and 20 among the pavement dwellers sleeping in various open spaces. These in-depth interviews did not aim at providing statistically representative estimates, but rather to supplement the statistical survey by an anthropological approach. Their objective was to collect detailed migration, occupational and familial histories with special emphasis on the migration to Delhi and absorption into Delhi's labour market, as well as relations maintained with the native place; to better understand the present shelterless situation and living conditions; to inquire about the future plans including willingness to move to another dwelling.

This paper however will not contain an exhaustive presentation of the results of these surveys: this would go beyond the scope of this contribution, and data processing for the statistical survey is also not complete. Rather our objective is rather to provide some illustrations and initial reflections to highlight the issues raised above, on the basis of an analysis of the in-depth interviews, and some preliminary manual tabulations of the statistical survey.

involved in illegal or criminal activities, might be under-represented. Besides, the survey could not be conducted in two of the previously identified and enumerated pavement dwelling areas, following interferences by the police. But it is not possible to appraise the exact nature and extent of the sample bias.

⁷ As it will be described below, the population of pavement dwellers in Old Delhi consists almost exclusively of individuals without their family.

⁸ When referring to the findings of this survey, and unless otherwise stated, the term "pavement dwellers" will be used to designate this segment of the population sleeping either in various open spaces or in night shelters.

3 - CONTEXT OF THE STUDY: THE WALLED CITY OF OLD DELHI

The Walled City of Old Delhi, the historical core built by the Mughals in the 17th century, exhibits features typical of traditional Indian cities, with a mixed land use pattern combining a high concentration of residential units with an important aggregation of commercial and small-scale manufacturing establishments. What is however remarkable in the case of Old Delhi is the extremely high residential densities (616 persons per hectare on the average in 1991, with a maximum of 1596 in one of the census divisions) combined with an equally impressive congestion of economic activities.

This situation is in fact the result of a two-pronged process which has affected the dynamics and urban morphology of the old city core. On the one hand, there has been a decline of the resident population, first noticeable during the 1961-71 decade in certain areas, and which has continued and spread since then. Hence, although the present residential densities are still excessively high in the Walled City, they were significantly higher in 1961, with an average of about 740 persons per hectare. But at the same time, the Walled City has recorded a dramatic increase in the number of its commercial establishments (shops, workshops, warehouses and wholesale markets) as well as manufacturing workshops, including noxious industries and hazardous trades. For example, the number of registered commercial establishments increased by 700 per cent in two decades, from 22,000 units in 1961 up to 155,000 units in 1981 (DDA, 1993). Moreover, as rightly underlined by Mehra (1991: 50), the official statistics underestimate the extent of the growth of economic activities, since the latter do not include the informal sectors of employment.

While the deconcentration of the population from the urban core is in line with one of the proposals of the Delhi Master Plan - although the extent of the population decrease remains far below the objective initially stated⁹ -, the proliferation of commercial and industrial activities, especially noxious industries and hazardous trades, is on the other hand in contradiction with the objectives of the Plan. This shows the limitations of the attempts at urban planning in the Old City.

⁹ For example, at the time of the preparation of the Delhi Master Plan (1958-59), the planning division 'A', which includes the Walled City and its extension, contained a population of 607,000, and Delhi Master Plan projected that its population in 1981 be reduced to 322,600. "The population of this division according to 1991 census is 616,000 indicating that the dedensification proposals of Delhi Master Plan could not be realised" (JAIN, 1996: 85).

The overuse of the physical space and building infrastructure in the Walled City - both in terms of residential and economic use - has contributed to the degradation of its housing stock. However, the "cycle of deterioration" was at the outset a perverse effect of the rent control policies leading to low rents and insufficient income generation, hence discouraging the owners from incurring expenses for the maintenance of their building (HSMI, 1988: 4). As a matter of fact, practically all areas of the Walled City were gradually declared as "slum" under the Slum Areas (Improvement and Clearance) Act of 1956.

The transformation of the urban morphology in the Walled City and its decaying conditions of housing have been linked with a certain social recomposition of the residing population. The better off sections of the population are impelled to move their residence from the old city, in search of better housing conditions in less congested areas, leaving behind the low-income group people, in particular tenants who would not be able to find alternative accommodation elsewhere in the urban agglomeration for such low rentals¹⁰. Besides, the proliferation of commercial and manufacturing activities, as well as related services, which provides a large number of informal job opportunities, has attracted a floating population of male migrant workers whose residential integration remains extremely precarious¹¹. Thus at night many of them are found sleeping on terrace roofs, at their work place, in the night shelters run by the Municipality for houseless people, under the verandas in the bazaar, on the pavements or other open grounds.

A range of services specifically oriented towards the needs of the houseless population have also developed. The Government itself, taking cognisance of the plight of the houseless, started constructing night shelters in the early sixties, 6 of them - out of 16 functioning today - being located in the Walled City proper. In the night shelters run by the Municipality, for a nominal rate of Rs. 3 per night, each inmate is provided with a blanket and a ground carpet, and has free access to the toilets and bathrooms usually available in the same building. Some small private entrepreneurs have figured the shelterless situation of so many people as a good business opportunity: they rent out sleeping place and bedding facilities to the pavement dwellers. Quilts on hire are available for an average rate of Rs. 5 per night, and cots with bedding for an average rate of Rs. 15 per night. Most of the entrepreneurs involved in this business also provide sleeping place to their customers: at night they encroach some sections of the pavements, in particular those covered by verandas, as well as pedestrian over-bridges and precincts, or other open grounds, on which they spread plastic ground sheets or place their cots. In the

¹⁰ See also TCPO, 1975: 16.

¹¹ See also MEHRA, 1991: 46.

sleeping areas which are entirely in the open, overhead plastic sheets are also arranged in case of rain to protect the sleepers. The bedding facilities are particularly in demand in winter, when the temperature at night can go down to 3° C. However the facility of a relatively protected sleeping place, and of cots for the better-off pavement dwellers, finds also customers during other seasons. Since it involves illegal encroachment on public land, the trade of renting quilts and cots is not authorised; such situation inevitably calls for police interference, including possible eviction of both quilts' owners and pavement dwellers and, in order to minimise this risk, bribes to be paid by the "illegal" entrepreneurs to the police. Yet, a substantial proportion of the pavement dwellers (including in the sample surveyed) do not avail bedding facilities on rent, they have their own blankets and sleep under verandas or in open spaces whose access is free - apart from harassment by the police. Another type of service developed for the pavement dwellers relates to the provision of hot meals, by road-side food stalls directly installed on the pavement, most often without any structure, just for a few hours every night at dinner time. Road-side tea stalls are also a common sight in or around the pavement dwelling areas, sometimes operated by the entrepreneurs renting out quilts.

The main features of the Old Delhi 's scene being drawn, our paper will focus now on the residential and economic practices of its shelterless population, on the basis of our own field investigations as described in the previous section.

4 - SOCIAL MARGINALITY VERSUS INTEGRATION IN RURAL-URBAN FAMILIAL NETWORKS

Analysing the socio-demographic profile and the migration history of the houseless people will help us to better portray this specific population; beyond this description we shall attempt to appraise its degree of social integration versus marginality. One set of interrelated questions arises here. Is the migration to Delhi part of familial strategies rooted in the native place? What is the relevance of basic social institutions like the family and the caste affiliation to understand the trajectory and present living practices of the pavement dwellers? Or, to what extent is the present shelterless situation the result of a crisis, the outcome of breaking off in the traditional systems of solidarity, or/and the consequence of a process of individualisation, all leading to anomie in the metropolitan set-up?

The first findings presented in this paper may not allow us to evaluate accurately these alternative processes, nor to draw definite conclusions; nonetheless we can at least

highlight some related indications in this respect and illustrate the most significant situations.

Socio-demographic profile

The first salient feature about the houseless people in Old Delhi is that they are almost exclusively male, living as single individuals. Access to the night shelters run by the Municipality is, by rule, restricted to males. And among the main pavement dwelling areas identified in various open spaces of the Walled City, only a very few women and families (less than 10) could be seen during the head-count, and their presence was moreover confined to one or two localities. Hence the sample surveyed comprises only male individuals. The predominance of single men (unmarried or not) among pavement dwellers is especially pronounced in the Walled City as compared to some other parts of Delhi where pavement dwellers are also located and where familial units are more conspicuous - like in Nizamuddin. But this is also a distinctive characteristic of Delhi as compared to other Indian metropolitan cities. This is clearly shown by the sex ratio of the houseless population in the first four megapolises as per the 1981 census¹²: 187 females for 1000 males in Delhi Urban Agglomeration, as against 453:1000 in Calcutta, 278:1000 in Bombay and 955:1000 in Madras. The average size of the shelterless households further confirms the specific position of the capital city: 1.9 in Delhi, as against 4.8 in Calcutta, 2.0 in Bombay and 4.1 in Madras.

The quasi absence of familial units on the pavements of the Walled City is reflected in the age composition of the shelterless population. Although the presence of street children living on their own is one of the most disquieting aspect from a humanistic point of view, in demographic terms they represent only a very minor group among all the pavement dwellers (in our sample, less than 5 per cent of the respondents were below 15)¹³. The majority of the pavement dwellers are young people belonging to the age group 15-29 years (54 per cent of the respondents).

More significant from the point of view of its social integration, is the marital status of this population. Thus, 78 per cent of the respondents were never married in the age group 15-29 years, and 43 per cent in the age group 30 years and above. To better appraise the specificity of the homeless population, these figures can be compared to the

¹² The corresponding data for the 1991 census were not published when this paper was written.

¹³ Data on socio-demographic attributes of the houseless people of Old Delhi (sex, age, marital status, literacy, percentage of scheduled castes and tribes, place of birth) are based on the total sample of 248 individuals, sleeping either in various open spaces or in night shelters.

corresponding percentages in the male population of Delhi urban agglomeration at the 1991 census, that is, respectively: 62 per cent and 3 per cent. The remarkably high percentage of never married persons at a relatively advanced age can be considered as an indicator of a certain degree of social marginality among a section of the houseless, a manifestation of a process of individualisation, chosen or endured. The circumstances of their migration to Delhi and more generally their life story will provide some explanation to this situation (as analysed below).

The percentage of scheduled castes and tribes' population enables us to appraise the extent to which the houseless population in Old Delhi hails from the most underprivileged sections of the society. In the sample population, 13 per cent of the respondents have reported belonging to a scheduled caste or tribe. Given the sampling error, this represents a proportion very close to that recorded in the total male population of the Walled City at the 1991 census, namely 11 per cent. Interestingly, it is also almost similar to the proportion of scheduled castes and tribes recorded at the 1971 census among the homeless population in the territory of Delhi Municipal Corporation, namely 12 % for males. On the other hand, the proportion of scheduled castes and tribes among the pavement dwellers of Old Delhi is significantly lower than their share in the male population of the entire Delhi urban agglomeration, that is 19 per cent at the 1991 census. Though no comparison can be done with census data, it is noteworthy that the majority of the houseless surveyed in Old Delhi belong in fact to upper castes or communities (56 per cent of them), the remaining share corresponding to Other Backward Classes (31 per cent).

The proportion of illiterates is another indicator of socio-economic backwardness. In this respect the houseless population in the Walled City of Old Delhi appears clearly as a disadvantaged section, counting 38 per cent of illiterates, whereas, according to the 1991 census, the proportion of illiterates in the total male population of the Walled City was 24 per cent, and in the total male population of urban Delhi only 18 per cent¹⁴.

Migration history

Migration is a common experience shared by almost all the houseless people in Old Delhi (96 % of the respondents are non-native to Delhi). Most of the migrants hail from rural areas (almost three fourths of the sample migrants), with the major single group among migrants coming from Uttar Pradesh (47 % of the migrants), followed by migrants from

¹⁴ At the 1991 census, the numbers of literate/illiterates (and hence the corresponding percentages) pertain to the population aged 7 and above.

Bihar. The share of the giant neighbouring State of Uttar Pradesh conforms to the general pattern of migration to the capital city; what seems more remarkable is that the catchment area of the Old Delhi pavements extends to farther eastern and southern states like West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, ...etc. These results are consistent with the findings of the survey of pavement dwellers conducted in 1989 by the DDA in Old Delhi, according to which 98 % of the respondents were migrants, most of them coming from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. For comparative purpose, it can be recalled here that, at the 1991 census, the migrants accounted for 40 per cent of the total male urban population of Delhi, with 45 per cent of them coming from Uttar Pradesh.

The analysis of the reasons which motivated the departure from the native place (or home) and the migration to Delhi (or arrival to the pavement) reveals contrasting situations. A first striking point is the impact of familial tensions, quarrels and ill treatment in case of children: children beaten up by a drunken father or ill treated by a step mother, cases of disputes over the familial property after the death of the father, quarrel with the spouse, brother or other parent or relative, ... etc., are frequently quoted in the migration's histories of the respondents¹⁵. When the migration to Delhi corresponds to a departure from home under circumstances of familial crisis, the main concern for the migrant was to escape from an unbearable situation, and no wonder that the arrival in Delhi was not prepared, and the choice of the destination sometimes not envisaged previously or even left to chance while catching the first departing train. When flight from home is eventually followed by the severing of all links with the family, no wonder also that, if unmarried at that time, the young migrant will generally remain so, since he cannot benefit any more from the support of his family to arrange his marriage according to the prevailing social tradition.

In greater conformity to the general pattern of migration expected for a large metropolis, the large majority of the respondents have chosen to come to Delhi for reasons related to better and ampler employment opportunities and economic prospects. This includes the many migrants from rural areas or small towns, whose incomes in the native place were not sufficient to sustain their families, as well as young people willing to get income on their own outside familial agriculture. The choice of Delhi is often influenced by the presence of relatives, parents or co-villagers already working in the capital and conveying information on job opportunities; but it may be also merely based on the assumption that Delhi being a big city, *"everybody can accommodate himself"*, *"everybody can find a job if hard working"*. In the former category, mention should be made of migration rooted in

¹⁵ About one third of the 36 respondents selected for in-depth interviews have reported such type of reasons in their migration trajectory. The statistical analysis of the entire sample will provide a better estimate of the share of this type of reasons in the migration to Delhi.

familial or even village tradition: this is the case of some pavement dwellers working as cycle rickshaw drivers, handcart pullers or construction labourers in Delhi, often on a seasonal basis during the lean season for agriculture, and who are thus perpetuating a practice initiated by their father, or by other villagers. They follow a migration channel already well established, going to the same labour markets, the same rickshaw garages, and sleeping in the same pavement dwelling areas. Such groups of villagers can be found in the wholesale market of Khari Baoli or under the verandas of Asaf Ali road. In the latter place, for example, a group of 25-30 persons from the same village in Uttar Pradesh was identified, staying together though from different castes, sometimes also cooking together; moreover they return together to their village for the main festivals, and every month one person goes back to the village and takes the remittances from all the villagers working in Delhi to redistribute them to their respective families.

At the opposite end of these well organised migration channels, some pavement dwellers, especially among children and young people, have been attracted by the capital city as a place to visit ... and eventually stayed over, because they also found better economic scope in Delhi.

Due to the different circumstances under which the migration to Delhi takes place, the previous information about job opportunities, possibilities of accommodation and other living conditions in the capital varies a lot. Though the sub-sample of houseless persons selected for in-depth interviews is small (36 respondents out of which 33 are 'decision making' migrants¹⁶), it seems significant that at least one third of the migrants reported that they did not have any information on employment opportunities in Delhi prior to their arrival, and two thirds had no specific knowledge about possibilities of accommodation. Furthermore, while some migrants had specific information pertaining to certain jobs, especially those coming through familial or village-based migration channels, for others the type of previous information reported may be very vague, and limited to a general knowledge on Delhi's labour market as a potential source of numerous employment opportunities, in particular of manual jobs.

Other indicators can help us to better appraise the extent to which the houseless were and had prepared their settling in Delhi: One third of the migrants interviewed had previously visited Delhi - but at that time not necessarily with any prospective concern; and less than half knew already some person(s) settled and/or working in the capital, be they relatives, friends or co-villagers. But only very few (4 out of 33) had made previous arrangements to secure a job in Delhi: apart from one case of transfer on government job, one case

¹⁶ "Decision making migrants" means that follow-up dependent migrants are excluded.

through contractor, and the other two through urban contacts (relatives, co-villagers) who gave them assurances of introduction and help to start a work.

A question remains: are the conditions of migration of the houseless people in Old Delhi different from that of the "usual" migrants to the capital, with respect to the prior degree of awareness about employment situation in Delhi and previous arrangements for work? Although it is difficult to establish any statistically significant comparison, the study conducted by Banerjee on *"Rural to urban migration and the urban labour market"* in Delhi (1986) provides some insights¹⁷. Focusing on information flow and rural-based job search, the author notes: "The most striking feature (...) is that 28 per cent of the migrants stated that they had no information on employment opportunities in Delhi prior to their arrival (Banerjee, 1986: 79). Yet, the majority of the rural migrants (53 per cent) had received previous assurances of urban employment, from the employer himself, or from urban contacts who made suggestions to move (1986: 82-83). This survey "also confirms the findings of earlier studies on the importance of relatives and friends in transmitting information" (1986: 79).

Thus the 'common' flow of migrants to Delhi seems to include a rather significant proportion of individuals who have come to Delhi without previous information on work opportunities, and from this viewpoint the houseless migrants of Old Delhi would not be exceptional. However, it seems that among the latter the elements of uncertainty about absorption into the labour market (prior to their arrival in Delhi) are much more prevalent than in the main stream of migrant workers. This is probably related not only to the familial and social context of the migration of certain pavement dwellers (as seen above), but also to the range of possible jobs that this largely uneducated and unskilled population can expect to get, that is mainly work as casual labourers or as own-account workers in the informal sector (as it will be developed in the next section).

The question of help received by the migrant at the time of his first arrival in Delhi is certainly revealing in order to evaluate the degree of integration of the homeless population in the urban social fabric. It is however ambiguous since the perception of help or support is highly subjective and hence varies from one respondent to the other. For example, information about possibilities of sleeping in this night shelter or that pavement dwelling area, or about a specific labour market and employment opportunities in a certain branch of activity may be considered as a form of help by some, while others in the same context would narrate their arrival in Delhi as an ordeal where they had to

¹⁷ This study was based on a sample of 1,615 male and decision making migrants surveyed in 1976 and who came to Delhi in 1965 or later, out of them 1,407 coming from rural areas.

manage entirely on their own without outside support, crucial though this information might have been. In the same way, help can be provoked by the first approach and the contacts established by the migrant in a market area or around the railway station or main bus terminal. Given all these reservations, about one third of the 33 decision making migrants interviewed stated that they did not receive any type of help at the time of their arrival in Delhi. Among those who acknowledged some type of support, help related to finding a job or starting work as self-employed comes in the first place, followed by help related to accommodation or place to sleep. The networks of relatives and co-villagers is approached by the migrant in the majority of the concerned cases, showing that the present houseless condition does not mean necessarily that the pavement dwellers operate in a familial and social vacuum. However, the economic and housing conditions of the relatives already settled in Delhi may put limits to the type and duration of the help extended to the new migrant, especially as far as accommodation is concerned. In a few examples, after an initial stay upon his arrival in a slum hut or one-room tenement with his parents or relatives, the migrant is compelled to leave due to lack of space and to stay in a night shelter or a pavement dwelling area. The persons working in the occupation or sector of activity in which the migrant has been eventually absorbed also play an appreciable role in introducing him to a new work, including sometimes training, and showing him cheap (or free) and convenient places to sleep.

Examining the relations maintained with the native place or home¹⁸ is a way of investigating the extent to which the houseless population in Old Delhi remains integrated into familial networks most often rooted in rural areas. Most of the respondents interviewed still have family members staying in their native place (only 3 out of 36 respondents did not) and the majority of them visit their native place and family more or less regularly - at least once during the last two years - or intend to do so in case of very recent migrants (less than one year). On the other hand, visits of parents and relatives to Delhi to meet the pavement dwellers are infrequent, which is not surprising given the lack of accommodation of the latter. A notable proportion of the houseless migrants also maintain contacts with their families through letters. Another revealing indication is the practice of remittances or support in kind provided to the family: about half of the respondents still having family members in their native place do provide financial support, often supplemented by gifts of clothes or household items at the time of visits. Reciprocal exchanges for the benefit of the migrant in Delhi, through gifts of food or clothes for example or even financial help, are much more rare, which is to be expected given the fact that it is precisely the unsatisfactory economic conditions at the native place

¹⁸ The pavement dwellers native to Delhi are also included in the following analysis, since it is also relevant to appraise the type of relations maintained with their previous home and family.

which pushed many prospective migrants to leave. Attachment to the family is further revealed by future plans of returning to the native place (in the next years or much later), a wish that is shared by the majority of the houseless migrants interviewed. Admittedly, the reference to a future return to the 'village' and the basic community includes also a mythical dimension, that may help the pavement dwellers to accept better their present living conditions in Delhi, and to justify the hardships and degrading aspects of their situation.

The purpose in reporting the above findings based on a limited number of in-depth interviews is - evidently - not to provide any statistical estimate of the frequency of certain attributes or practices among the houseless, but to illustrate the various situations encountered and give an idea of their significance. In particular, as regards the significance of the familial unit for the houseless individuals living alone in Old Delhi, two distinct - and opposite - patterns can be identified, with a whole range of intermediary (and transitory ?) situations. Corresponding to the highest degree of familial integration, one can find the seasonal migrants coming every year to work in Delhi for a few months, usually during the lean season for agriculture, and supporting directly their families in the native place. Close to this group are the married migrants whose spouse and children (if any) are left with the extended family in the native place and to whom remittances are periodically sent, as well as the unmarried migrants contributing to the familial income, both groups visiting their families regularly. These remitter-migrants exemplify familial solidarity transcending residential unity: this is a common feature of migration process, especially of rural-urban migration, in India as well as in other developing countries. What deserves to be underlined here is that the houseless condition of the migrant in the city does not prevent him from exercising this solidarity; in fact, as it will be developed in another section, it is this very condition which allows him to support financially his family.

At the lowest rung on the scale of familial attachment, one can find the individuals who ran away from home following an acute familial crisis often involving violence (quarrel, dispute,... etc.), and who eventually severed all links with their families and native place (if it is not Delhi). While most of the children belong to this category, as also adults who felt compelled to take this radical step when they were young, some individuals experienced such crisis at a relatively advanced age. Given the circumstances of their departure from home, these migrants or escapees cannot rely on familial networks for their integration in a new place. In this group of houseless, a process of individualisation and anomie, more forced than chosen, may be at work, resulting from the breaking away from the basic social institution, the family.

Such traumatic experiences at the origin of the present shelterless situation should not be confused with the few examples of pavement dwellers who decided deliberately to withdraw from family life and all material attachments to live a life of renunciation - or close to it.

Relevance of caste and community

Turning to the relevance of caste, community affiliation and ascriptive social status in the living practices of the houseless people, the accounts of some individuals provide a few insights in this issue. There are, first, the cases of several upper caste pavement dwellers who dislike sleeping in night shelters due to overcrowding which may compel them to sleep close to people from very low castes or other religions. Hence they prefer to sleep in open spaces, where this constraint is not felt, sometimes even if they have to pay more than the entrance fees for the night shelter in order to hire a quilt to protect themselves from the cold during winter nights (Rs. 5 as against Rs. 3 per night). The high original social status of some pavement dwellers also shows through the fact that, though shelterless, they never sleep directly on the ground and always take a cot on rent for the night. Further, at the sleeping place some pavement dwellers and inmates in night shelters would socialise only with people from their religious community. The network of socialisation at the pavement site or night shelter does not appear, however, to be caste based. In fact, the work place and the community of workers in the same type of occupation provide the main network of socialisation for the houseless people during their stay in Delhi. In the wholesale market of Khari Baoli especially, many handcart pullers can be seen staying in groups at night, sleeping on their cart or under the verandas of the market, and cooking food on the pavement in small groups for their dinner. For the youngsters as well as old-aged people, the age group is also a relevant group of reference to make friends and sleep in the same place. As seen above through the example of a group of seasonal migrants from the same village staying together on the pavement site and who managed to reconstitute a sort of community life, belonging to the same place of origin can create links which transcend the caste differences, at least during the temporary stay in Delhi, led by work concern. Yet, a notable proportion of the houseless people interviewed stated that they did not socialise with anybody at their sleeping place and the majority of them usually have their dinner alone.

Other revealing case stories with respect to ascriptive social status concern pavement dwellers from upper castes who had to leave their native place due to stringent economic conditions or following a sudden financial crisis. They chose Delhi as a place to migrate

not only for the larger range of employment opportunities provided in a big metropolis, but beforehand for the anonymity offered by such an urban environment, hence allowing them to take up jobs (in particular manual jobs) that their social status would not permit them to carry out in their native place. Far from the native village or town and from the primordial community, in short far from the original social context, the range of acceptable occupations becomes wider for the migrant. However, the psychological cost of such survival strategies may be high. Since nobody in their native place should know about their working and living conditions in Delhi, they do not give any contact address, do not exchange any news through letters or messengers, avoid meeting people from their village or town of origin and, above all, seem to be overwhelmed with the shame of their "non respectable" work, compounded by their shelterless situation. This feeling of shame prompted some of them to sever all contacts with their families and native place, and, in Delhi, to minimise their relations with other pavement dwellers, hence aggravating their isolation.

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Living alone and without shelter does not necessarily imply familial vacuum and social marginality. For the majority of the houseless surveyed in Old Delhi, the family and the native place remain their context of reference. Furthermore, the shelterless situation of the migrants in the capital is not a deterrent factor of familial solidarity, on the other hand it is often a precondition.

There is some evidence of the persistent significance of ascriptive social status and community feeling in the living practices of the houseless people. However, other networks of socialisation gather momentum in the urban set up, in particular the group of co-workers and people from the same village or region of origin.

Yet, there is also a certain section of houseless who seem to undergo a process of individualisation and anomie: those, especially the children, who fled their homes following an acute familial crisis and eventually severed all links with their place and community of origin.

5 - ECONOMIC MARGINALITY VERSUS INTEGRAL PART OF THE METROPOLITAN LABOUR FORCE

Having explored the socio-demographic profile and migration history of the shelterless population of Old Delhi in order to assess its degree and mode of integration in the urban as well as rural society, the same type of investigation can be carried out in relation with the economic profile of this population and the question of its economic marginality

versus integration. One correlative question concerns the degree of poverty of the houseless, in particular, can the pavement dwellers be considered as "the poorest of the urban poor"?

Occupational pattern

Table 1. Occupational pattern of the houseless population of Old Delhi - 1996.

OCCUPATION	Main occupation		Other occupations		All occupations	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
Clerical workers	2	0.8	-	-	2	0.6
Sales workers (vendors, shop assistants)	10	4.1	1	1.2	11	3.4
Cooks, waiters and related workers	54	22.2	46	56.1	100	30.8
Other service workers (domestic servants, barbers, etc...)	2	0.8	2	2.4	4	1.2
Production workers including mechanics and repairmen	16	6.6	2	2.4	18	5.5
Construction workers including painters	22	9.1	7	8.5	29	8.9
Loaders, unloaders, porters and other material handling workers	21	8.6	10	12.2	31	9.5
Hand cart pushers or pullers	58	23.9	7	8.5	65	20.0
Cycle rickshaw drivers	48	19.8	6	7.3	54	16.6
Other drivers (motor vehicle)	1	0.4	1	1.2	2	0.6
Rag pickers	5	2.1	-	-	5	1.5
Beggars	3	1.2	-	-	3	0.9
Other workers (musician)	1	0.4	-	-	1	0.3
Total	243	100.0	82	100.0	325	100.0
Non workers = 5						
The occupations taken into account include all the occupations carried on in Delhi during the last 12 months preceding the survey. Hence are excluded the occupations carried on during the reference period but outside Delhi (for example in the native place or previous place of residence).						
Source: Own sample survey - 1996						

Table 2. Percentage distribution of the houseless population of Old Delhi by industrial category (1996) and comparison with the urban population of Delhi at the 1991 census

INDUSTRIAL CATEGORY	Houseless population of Old Delhi 1996	Male population of Old Delhi 1991	Male urban population of Delhi 1991
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Agriculture, livestock, mining, quarrying	0.0	0.6	1.3
Manufacturing, processing, repairs	6.2	32.0	26.4
Construction	9.0	2.8	7.9
Trade, commerce, restaurants, hotels	28.4	38.3	26.4
Transport, communication	51.9	7.9	8.8
Community, social and personal services	4.5	18.3	29.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Source: (1) Own sample survey - 1996			
Sample of 243 workers classified by their main occupation (non workers = 5)			
(2) & (3): Census of India 1991, Delhi, Primary Census Abstract.			

The occupational pattern of the houseless population of Old Delhi is analysed here on the basis of the total sample of our statistical survey, taking the last twelve months preceding the survey as the period of reference to record all the occupations carried on in Delhi. Hence are excluded from this analysis the occupations carried on during the reference period but outside Delhi, for example in the native place or any other place of previous residence. This allows us to highlight one revealing feature of the houseless' economic strategy: the combination of several occupations during their stay in Delhi. Thus, almost one-third of the respondents have carried on more than one occupation, usually two. These are often alternated according to the changing opportunities of the labour market, in particular according to a seasonal pattern; sometimes different activities are also carried on simultaneously throughout the year. On the other hand, the proportion of houseless not reporting any income generating activity¹⁹ in Delhi remains marginal (2 % of the respondents), these are essentially very recent in-migrants (less than one month) still looking for a job.

Examining now the different types of occupations performed (Table 1), the major groups reflect directly the economic functions of Old Delhi. There is first the large lot of handcart pullers and pushers transporting goods in or from the wholesale markets of the old city (20 per cent of the respondents are engaged in this work for their main occupation). Loading and unloading activities in the markets, carriage of luggage in the two nearby main railway stations of the capital provide also appreciable employment opportunities for the pavement dwellers. Transport of passengers by cycle rickshaw in a densely populated and very buoyant market area, with two adjoining railway stations and a major inter-state bus terminal is another activity attracting a significant number of houseless workers (20 per cent of the respondents for their main activity). Altogether, the sector of transport seems to absorb the majority of the houseless workers based in the Walled City (52 per cent of the respondents for their main activity). This appears as a major distinctive characteristic of the occupational structure of this population, as compared to the male population of urban Delhi as a whole, but also to the male population residing in the Walled City: the sector of transport and communication employs only 8 to 9 per cent of the corresponding workers (Table 2).

Another specificity of Old Delhi lies in the many labour markets, in the strict neo-classical sense of the term, which take place in different places of the Walled City. Some of them

¹⁹ In this study, beggars are considered as part of the workers, contrary to the convention applied in official statistics like those issued from censuses and National Sample Surveys.

are specialised in recruiting various types of workers (in particular waiters, cooks and related service workers) for marriage parties and other functions requiring catering services and the set up of temporary tent structures to host large numbers of guests. The demand for this type of workers is submitted to seasonal fluctuations, with peaks corresponding to the most auspicious periods for marriage ceremonies. Such employment opportunities draw many houseless workers, especially for a supplementary seasonal or temporary activity: while the occupational category of waiters, cooks and related service workers²⁰ accounts for 22 per cent of the main occupations reported by the respondents, it accounts for 56 per cent of the supplementary occupations reported (Table 1).

On the other hand, marginal economic activities which are often associated with the condition of the urban poor, like rag picking and begging, concern only very minor groups of the houseless surveyed in Old Delhi (2 and 1 per cent respectively in the sample). Rag picking is more specifically carried out by children and teenagers.

A significant feature of the occupational pattern of the houseless is the general lack of employment security or lack of guarantee in getting sufficient work. Going daily or periodically to the labour market to get recruited by a contractor or to the wholesale markets and bazaar areas to find assignments, is the common fate of construction workers, service workers for caterers, loaders and unloaders, handcart pushers (helping the main puller and recruited by him), and other casual labourers ... Among the houseless working as employees, only a very small minority have secured salaried jobs. As for self-employed workers like handcart pullers and cycle rickshaw drivers, they have to hire their cart or rickshaw everyday ... without any guarantee about the number of trips -for transport of goods or passengers - they will be able to get. The situation of street vendors, roadside mechanics, and other self-employed in the informal sector, is similar from the viewpoint of precariousness and correlative irregularity in income.

In fact, the combination of several occupations and flexibility in changing work - a rather frequent practice as seen above - is a response to the risk of unemployment and irregularity of work. Although, eventually, most of the houseless surveyed in Old Delhi were not affected by unemployment during last year and, among those who were, only few reported significant unemployment periods, the insecurity of employment and hence the lack of guarantee of regular income, is a critical fact to understand the shelterless situation of these workers (as we shall elaborate in the next section).

²⁰ In the context of the survey, this occupational category corresponds mostly to service workers for caterers, but it also includes cooks, waiters and related workers employed in restaurants and tea stalls.

Income, debts, savings and remittances

Though the data pertaining to income, debts, savings and remittances are based only on the 36 in-depth interviews with a sub-sample of houseless, some meaningful features can be stressed. At the outset, the houseless workers appear to form a very heterogeneous section of the urban labour force in terms of earned money income: the average monthly earnings (for the last twelve months preceding the 1996 survey) range from Rs. 520 (case of a child rag picker) up to Rs. 4500 (case of a pavement dweller involved in illegal trade combined with other legal occupations)²¹, with half of the respondents earning between Rs. 1000 and Rs. 2000 per month. Furthermore, intra-occupational income differentials are very large, as shown by the following examples²²:

- from Rs. 1100 to 2250 per month for cycle rickshaw drivers;
- from Rs. 900 to 2500 for handcart pullers;
- from Rs. 500 to 2000 for handcart pushers;
- from Rs. 600 to 2700 for street vendors (incidentally, these two extreme cases sell the same goods, namely pens);
- from Rs. 520 to 1800 for rag pickers;
- from Rs. 300 to 1700 for waiters, according to the place of work, in restaurants or for caterers.

If certain figures for the monthly earnings by occupation given above are lower than the minimum average monthly earning computed for the preceding year, it is because the concerned individuals did not stay in this occupation throughout the year: they left it precisely to escape from too exploitative conditions and changed for another better-paid work.

With a view to the discussion on urban poverty and houseless population, it is interesting to compare the average monthly earnings of the individuals surveyed with the poverty line. We refer here to the usual official definition (discussed later in this section), namely the level of expenditure required for a daily calorie intake of 2,100 per person in urban areas (as per the norm determined by the Nutrition Expert Group), and estimated at Rs. 310.50 per capita per month at 1995-96 prices²³. According to this criteria, all the

²¹ In fact the highest income reported corresponds to the specific case of a transient pavement dweller, a ticket checker having a permanent government job in the railways, with a monthly salary of Rs. 4820, and having been transferred to Delhi three weeks ago. While waiting to get a government accommodation, he sleeps in an open ground located just opposite the Old Delhi Railway Station, his work place, hiring a cot and bedding for the night.

²² The monthly incomes given here correspond to an activity performed on a full time basis, but with possible variations in the number of working hours in a day and the number of work-days in a month.

²³ This figure is calculated on the basis of the last published official estimate, that is Rs. 209.50 per capita per month in urban areas at 1991-92 prices, converted to present value by applying the index numbers of consumer prices for industrial workers in Delhi for the corresponding period.

respondents of our sub-sample are above the poverty line²⁴, in so far we consider that their earnings are available for their own and single consumption and they do not have to share them with other family members not living with them in Delhi. Thus, to have a better appraisal of the economic condition of the houseless, some indications about their pattern of debts, savings and remittances are required.

Incurring debts for everyday expenses does not emerge as a widespread nor regular practice among the houseless interviewed, moreover, the amount borrowed is usually limited (the highest recurrent amount reported was Rs. 150 per month). However, the effective debts incurred could underestimate the real needs, for two reasons, pointed out by some of the respondents themselves. On the potential debtor's side, the lack of guarantee can be an obstacle to the grant of a loan, or at least is likely to put constraints on the amount of the loan. On the potential creditors' side, the network of acquaintances usually approached involves also some restrictions: the co-villagers, co-workers or other pavement dwellers known often share similar economic conditions, hence limiting the amount of financial help they can extend; as for the employers or contractors, a certain degree of regularity in the work relationship is required to enter in a debtor/creditor agreement, which is precisely lacking in the case of casual labourers.

On the other hand, a large majority of the respondents report a saving practice, with a varied range of situations, depending not only on the income level but also on the way of living in Delhi and on the relations maintained with their families. The average amount of saving varies from zero to Rs. 1100 per month²⁵, and in terms of percentage of income, from zero to 65 per cent. There is no systematic inverse relation between savings and debts: individuals who do not save are not necessarily those who are often indebted, and incurring debts does not necessarily prevent from regular savings. There is no simple linear relation either between the capacity to save (measured as a percentage of income) and the income level. For example, among the workers saving more than 50 per cent of their monthly income, one can mention a beggar earning Rs. 800 per month as well as a cycle rickshaw driver earning Rs. 2000 per month.

One strong motivation to save is remittance, and the houseless migrants who contribute financially to the expenses of their families in their native place usually send the entire amount of their savings or most of it. Hence, the amount of remittances as well as the corresponding percentage of income show ranges of variation similar to those observed

²⁴ The statistical analysis of the entire sample will allow us to determine to what extent this finding can be generalised.

²⁵ Barring one exceptional case of Rs. 2000 per month corresponding to the government employee already referred to in note 21.

for savings, and among the top remitters (proportionally to their income), we could mention again the two examples already given above. However, all the persons who save more or less regularly do not remit money to their families (in the sub-sample of 36 respondents: 24 as against 16 respectively, although 33 still have family members in their place of origin). In this matter, the circumstances of the migration and the nature of the relations maintained with the family in the place of origin also intervene, as already discussed in the previous section.

Returning to the question of poverty line, we can consider now the average monthly income available after remittances, which makes the comparison with the level of per capita expenditure corresponding to the poverty line more relevant in order to appraise the economic condition of the houseless population in Old Delhi. This net income shows a range of variation wider than the gross income, from a minimum of Rs. 350 per month (case of a beggar sending more than 50 per cent of his income to his family), to the same maximum of Rs. 4500. The majority of the respondents have a net monthly income ranging between Rs. 500 and Rs. 1500 (as against half between Rs. 1000 and Rs. 2000 as per their gross income). Yet, all the respondents in our sub-sample, including those engaged in marginal economic activities like rag picking and begging, remain above the poverty line of Rs. 310.50 per capita per month, considered as the expenditure required for a daily calorie intake of 2,100 per person in urban areas. Thus, the incomes generated by the houseless interviewed in Old Delhi place them in a position to meet their minimum nutritional requirements. But other basic needs, especially shelter and clothing, which should be also considered in a comprehensive approach of urban poverty, are not necessarily covered. The deprivation of shelter is obvious in the case of the pavement dwellers; as for clothing, the sartorial condition of some of them testifies by itself to the non fulfilled needs. Thus, several respondents acknowledged that they had only one set of clothes, to be worn until the clothes are completely torn and have to be replaced by a new set. Nonetheless, the lack of purchasing power is not the only explanatory factor; the lack of safe place to keep one's belongings is another major problem faced by many houseless people²⁶.

The official definition of the poverty line, based on a nominal level of calories, has already attracted criticism (NIUA, 1986: 11-12). And our finding that the houseless people surveyed in Old Delhi stay above the poverty line can be considered as another

²⁶ Some houseless people manage to keep their belongings (and savings) at their work place; others confide them to a shop-keeper or a tea-stall owner's care; or resort to the safekeeping of another acquaintance settled in Delhi under better housing conditions; a few pavement dwellers mentioned the washerman for storing their spare sets of clothes; as for savings only a few respondents keep them in a bank account; while other houseless people have no alternative solution but to keep the very few things they possess with themor have no belonging nor saving to look after.

evidence of the limitation of this official definition. A subsequent question arises here: if the pavement dwellers in Delhi -at least a section of them- are above the poverty line, who and where are the "poor" of Delhi, namely the 17 per cent of the population of the capital estimated to be under the poverty line²⁷ ? Assuming that most of the urban poor are likely to be concentrated in the city slums (NIUA, 1989), it would mean that the houseless people living alone on the pavements in Old Delhi are in a better position to meet their minimum nutritional requirements than many slum dwellers living with their families and having housing accommodations, precarious though they may be. This calls for a better scrutiny of the survival strategy of the pavement dwellers (as it will be developed in the next section).

Assets in the native place and investment projects

The economic condition of the pavement dwellers and night shelter inmates in Old Delhi has also to be considered in a larger perspective than their present stay in the city as homeless people, and replaced in the context of the economic situation in their native place.

The first interesting point to underline is that the houseless do not hail necessarily from the poorest rural families. Most of the respondents for in-depth interviews reported a familial house in their native place, and the majority of them had familial agricultural land, though generally small properties. Certain respondents even hail from well-off families, their migration in that case is more likely to have been motivated by familial disputes than by economic factors. The familial assets in the native place bear some relevance to appraise the current economic condition of the houseless in Delhi only for those migrants who have maintained relationships with their families, still the majority of them (see previous section).

Projecting now the houseless people into the future, among the migrants who wish to return to their native place, future plans of investments there are frequent, in particular to open a general store or another type of shop in the village, to buy more agricultural land or more generally to invest in agriculture. To realise their investment project, the individuals interviewed plan to raise funds from their own savings, supplemented if necessary by familial contribution. Some of these investment projects may not be realised, yet some seem viable given the saving capacity of the concerned workers. This

²⁷ This percentage corresponds to the 1987-88 estimate given in the *Report of the Expert Group on Estimation of Proportion and number of Poor*, Planning Commission, Government of India, July 1993.

shows a definite degree of economic dynamism among certain houseless persons, and conveys an image which is not that of abject poverty, but more of an economic calculation entailing a temporary sacrifice in terms of housing conditions in the city, in order to improve the economic conditions in the native place.

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This first investigation of the economic profile of the houseless people in Old Delhi allows us to highlight some significant features. At the outset, this shelterless population proves to be an integral part of the normal metropolitan labour force, which is in accordance with previous studies on pavement dwellers and night shelter inmates in Delhi (see ARORA & CHHIBBER, 1985: 5). Furthermore, the incomes generated by the houseless workers surveyed place them in the low-income group but above the poverty line, even after taking into account the remittances sent to the family outside Delhi. In proportion to their income level, the saving capacity of the majority of the houseless is also far from being marginal. Remittances to the family and future plans of investment after returning to the native place are other encouraging indicators of the economic potential of a good number of them. In this respect, the findings of our survey corroborate the conclusions of other studies on the urban poor, as underlined by Kundu (1993: 23): "the thesis regarding economic marginality of the people in urban informal sectors, slum dwellers, pavement dwellers and other is an exaggeration"²⁸. Yet, insecurity of employment or uncertainty in getting sufficient work, and hence the lack of guaranteed and regular income, constitute a widespread concern. A last striking fact regarding the economic condition of the houseless people in Old Delhi is the large variety of situations encountered, including very contrasting cases. Thus, qualifying the pavement dwellers as the "poorest of the urban poor" without further distinction appears as a simplistic statement.

6 - EXCLUSION FROM ACCESS TO A DWELLING VERSUS RESIDENTIAL STRATEGY

In this section, we shall further investigate the present shelterless situation of the pavement dwellers surveyed, including: circumstances of the arrival on the pavement or in a night shelter, residential mobility in Delhi, choice of sleeping places - especially in relation to workplaces and employment opportunities, and willingness to move and to

²⁸ Quoted from: LEE (M.), 1986. "The mobilisation of informal sector savings: the USAID experience", paper presented at the International Workshop on Mobilisation of Informal Sector Savings, 8-12 December, Society for Development Studies, New Delhi.

pay for a dwelling. We shall attempt to appraise the elements of constraint and the elements of choice, with an underlying question: is the shelterless situation merely the consequence of a process of exclusion from access to the urban housing system? or does it correspond also to a residential strategy aimed at improving individual or familial economic conditions? Another question pertains to the perennial versus temporary nature of the shelterless situation: is it a transitory stage preceding a better integration in the urban housing system? or does it correspond to a permanent way of life or at least a long lasting one for the duration of the stay in Delhi?

Residential trajectory in Delhi

Several types of residential trajectory eventually leading to staying on the pavement or in a night shelter can be identified. In the most frequent pattern, the shelterless situation started upon the arrival in Delhi as a migrant and continued thereafter: without knowing any alternative place to stay, and given his financial constraints, the migrant resolved to sleep on the pavement or any open ground, or approached a night shelter following some indications grasped from people at the railway station, bus terminal, or after a few days of exploration in the city. Moreover, the first stay as shelterless in Delhi corresponds also in most of the cases to the first migration in the capital. Another noticeable trajectory, though less frequent, starts in Delhi with a stay at the workplace (restaurant, shop, factory, workshop, construction site...) and ends on the pavement or in a night shelter following the termination of the work contract or in search of better employment. As already noticed in a previous section, there are also a few cases of migrants staying initially with their relatives, and who were compelled to leave due to lack of space or for better proximity to their workplace. A last mention is also deserved for the cases of natives of Delhi who fled from their home following familial problems, especially children, and stayed on the pavement for lack of alternative accommodation.

Financial constraints

Financial constraints are put forward by the large majority of the houseless people interviewed to explain the origin of their shelterless situation. However, the significance of this factor has to be appraised in relation with other contributing factors and to be considered in a long term perspective. The financial constraints are likely to be more stringent at the initial stage of pavement dwelling in particular when it corresponds to the arrival in Delhi, and that the migrant has to get absorbed into the labour market. Then the

financial constraints may result not as much from the average level of income than from the lack of guarantee of regular income. This element of uncertainty restrains many casual workers staying on the pavement or in a night shelter to envisage an accommodation on rent even if they have the financial potential for it, because this would entail regular and fixed expenses which cannot be adjusted to the actual earnings. On the other hand expenses for hiring a quilt or a cot outside or for entrance to a night shelter (for those availing these facilities) are incurred on a daily basis and hence can be easily adjusted to the daily earnings. Even for the houseless with a sufficient saving capacity to rent a room (alone or by sharing it with one or two other workers), priority may be given to remittances to the family or to long term savings for future investment in the native place. In other words, preference may be given to the family's living conditions in the native place over the migrant's living conditions in Delhi, and to future over present. In that case, it cannot be said that there are absolute financial constraints preventing the houseless migrant from renting a room, but rather relative ones resulting from his own choice and priorities. The priority given by the houseless migrants to remittances over their present housing conditions in town does not mean however that they do not fulfil first their own basic needs in terms of food requirements, in order to insure the reproduction of their own work force. This may explain why the houseless workers living alone in Old Delhi are able to stay above the poverty line (as per the definition given above), while it may not be the case for many slum dwellers living with their families.

Proximity to the workplace

Another major factor to understand the shelterless situation of many workers in Old Delhi and the choice of their sleeping place, is the location of their workplace. Better proximity to the place of work or the source of employment opportunities is one of the reasons reported explicitly by certain respondents for staying initially on the pavement or in a night shelter, and more frequently to explain the choice of a specific place to sleep. The actual 'residential' location of the houseless is more revealing than these explicit answers. Thus, most of the respondents interviewed in Old Delhi work in the Walled City itself or in adjoining areas, within a walking distance from their place of sleep, often within 10 minutes walk or less. The cost of transportation to commute to the workplace is consequently reduced to nil for them. Even among the respondents who said they exercised preference in their location's choice for the sleeping environment, especially the presence of acquaintances and the facilities available, most of them stay also *de facto* in a walking distance from their place of work or labour market.

The importance of staying close to the source of employment opportunities depends on the type of occupation. For the casual workers having to go daily to a labour market to get recruited, like workers for catering services and construction labourers, this proximity factor appears primordial. In order to get more job offers, and to be in a better position to bargain with the contractors, it is necessary to reach the labour market early morning, and hence not to have to spend time on commuting.

For handcart pullers or pushers and loaders working in market areas, transportation activities do not start very early in the morning (usually at 10) but they often continue till late in the night, which makes it more convenient to sleep in the market itself, and more profitable to get assignments. Since the nature of the work requires intense physical strength, the transportation workers are usually exhausted after long working hours, hence sleeping at the same place (or nearby) enables them to avoid the additional tiredness of commuting. In addition, in the market they can sleep on their handcarts or under the verandas of the buildings, and do not face harassment by the police since they are known to work there.

The position of the cycle rickshaw drivers (whose nature of work is also physically demanding) is mixed. Those keeping their rickshaw at night can sleep on it and have more flexibility in their location's choice within the zone where they ply, providing they can park their rickshaw safely. But for the drivers having to take their rickshaw every morning from the owner's garage, staying in proximity to the garage is also important, as explained by one respondent: *"If you stay far, you have to start early in the morning and do not get proper rest. And if you start late, your work suffers and your income becomes less"*.

Even for the houseless workers whose nature of occupation and mode of recruitment do not require necessarily to stay near the source of employment opportunities, proximity between sleeping place and workplace is sought-after in order to reduce - or cut entirely - transportation expenses for commuting.

Residential mobility and duration of stay in Delhi

Examining the residential mobility in Delhi of the houseless people allows us to highlight some revealing facets of their living conditions. Change of residential location during the year is a frequent practice among the pavement dwellers surveyed in Old Delhi, according to two main reasons.

Seasonal pattern can be first of all observed, with various possible combinations. For example, in summers preference is given to sleeping on open grounds, non covered pavements, road dividers, or in parks; during the rainy season, verandas, night shelters, cots or mattresses on hire in sleeping areas protected with ground and overhead plastic sheets, are more in demand; and in winter preference goes to quilts on hire, night shelters and verandas. For the pavement dwellers who never avail bedding facilities on rent and never go to night shelters, the change of sleeping place may be limited to crossing the road, from a veranda in winter and during the rains to a nearby park in summer, or even to the divider of the same road. Some pavement dwellers have been repeating the same seasonal pattern with the same combination of locations for years. This flexibility in sleeping places also helps us understand how the pavement dwellers who can afford to spend Rs.3 per night for access to a night shelter, or Rs. 5 to hire a quilt, up to Rs. 15 for cot and bedding, are not necessarily ready to spend the equivalent monthly amount to rent a room. Whereas taking a room on rent entails regular and fixed expenses throughout the year, resorting to a night shelter or bedding on hire involves daily expenses which can be entirely cut during certain periods of the year.

The second main reason for residential mobility in Delhi is directly related to occupational mobility. The houseless people also adjust the location of their sleeping place according to employment opportunities, to the location of a particular labour market, or to the possibilities of sleeping at the workplace. The rationale behind these changes of residential location is the search for a better proximity to the place of work or the source of potential employment.

On the other hand, there is also a category of houseless people staying in the same night shelter or on the same section of pavement throughout the year (when in Delhi) and for several years, with duration of stay extending in a few remarkable cases up to ten years or more.

Considering now the entire duration of stay in Delhi as houseless, there is a notable proportion of houseless people who have been living under this condition for ten or more than ten years²⁹ - which does not exclude however regular stays in the native place. For this category of pavement dwellers, and especially for those staying in the same night shelter or sleeping place for many years, or repeating exactly the same seasonal pattern sometimes for the last ten or even fifteen years, their houseless condition seems to be a

²⁹ In the sub-sample of 36 respondents selected for in-depth interviews, one third have been living in Delhi as houseless since 1985 or before. The actual proportion will have to be confirmed by the statistical analysis of the entire sample.

permanent way of life in Delhi, or for the duration of their working life before the definite return to their native place.

Willingness to move and to pay for a dwelling

Investigating the future plans of the houseless people, in particular their willingness to move and to pay for a dwelling, can bring further elements of answer to the question of the perennial versus transitory nature of the shelterless situation in Delhi.

Among the respondents of our sub-sample, the capacity and willingness to pay for a dwelling varies from zero to Rs. 500 per month³⁰, and in terms of percentage of income, from zero to 35 per cent maximum. However, the willingness to move as expressed through the answers of the respondents may remain in a good number of cases abstract wishes, subject to several conditions. The constraints are sometimes so stringent that they make the possibility to move very unlikely. Here we find again the factors whose importance has been already underlined to understand the shelterless situation, namely: financial constraints, regular incomes or even getting a permanent job as a prerequisite to move, dwelling in proximity to the place of work. Among the houseless who have already attempted to move to a proper dwelling (a minority group), the reasons for eventually returning to the pavement or a night shelter are also interesting to point out. Some mentioned difficulties to adjust with other persons with whom they shared the same room - a common way to reduce housing expenses. Others realised that their work and income were suffering from the fact of staying too far from their place of work. Hence, wishes and even actual attempts to move are not sufficient indicators to foresee the shelterless situation of the concerned individuals as a transitory stage preceding a better integration in the urban housing system.

The arguments of the houseless persons who stated that they had no willingness nor intention to move to a better accommodation, and who form an appreciable group, are also revealing in order to appraise the transitory versus perennial nature of the shelterless situation. Interestingly, those reporting a 'zero' willingness to pay for a dwelling are not necessarily those who have no saving capacity and hence no financial potential. In that case, two types of reasons are put forward to explain the lack of willingness to pay for a dwelling. Some pavement dwellers do not intend to stay in Delhi for a long period, and hence would find it irrelevant to take a room on rent. Others give a clear priority to the maximisation of their savings, especially in order to send remittances to their families,

³⁰ Barring one exceptional case of Rs. 1400 per month, corresponding again to the government employee already mentioned, who earns a monthly salary of Rs. 4 820.

and hence try to minimise expenses for housing and transportation, or even to reduce them to zero. Being alone, without their family in Delhi, some of the houseless migrants do not perceive a proper accommodation as a need for them. As a matter of fact, most of the houseless interviewed do not plan to settle in Delhi permanently, but to return one day to their native place or to migrate to another city. Hence they perceive their stay in Delhi as limited in time, even if this transitory situation may eventually last for the duration of their working life³¹, and consequently a dwelling is not perceived as a priority need.

*

Coming back to the questions raised at the beginning of this section concerning the interpretation of the shelterless situation, we can sum up the main arguments which have emerged at several points from the in-depth interviews with houseless people in Old Delhi. Financial constraints undoubtedly prevent or limit the possibilities of access to a dwelling. Nevertheless this factor has to be considered in combination with other explanatory factors, forming a system in which choice is often present. The residential practices of the majority of the houseless reveal an economic rationale that aims at maximising savings and remittances to their families in their native place, by minimising their housing and transportation expenses. Proximity between the sleeping place and the place of work provides another important clue in understanding the shelterless option and choice of location by the pavement dwellers. A location near the workplace or the labour market enables them not only to cut their transport expenses but also to avoid a tiring commute. This ensures a proper rest, which is vital for manual workers involved in occupations demanding intense physical strength. In addition, for casual labourers, proximity to the source of employment opportunities also increases the probability of getting daily work. When the logic of staying shelterless in Delhi is an integral part of familial strategies rooted in the native place, priority being given to the economic condition of the family in the village at the expense of the migrants' living conditions in Delhi, then the shelterless situation is likely to last for the duration of their stay in the capital.

The part of rational choice in the residential practices of the houseless people has been highlighted in other studies - although the exercise of choice for this segment of the urban population is restricted to a choice under strong economic and social constraints. For example, in the conclusion of his primary survey of pavement dwellers and night shelter inmates in Delhi, Kuruvilla states: "The choice of the pavement is mainly for reduction of

³¹Or may be even their entire remaining life, in so far the future plan of returning to the native place might be in some cases more mythical than realistic (as suggested above).

expenses on housing, proximity to employment opportunities, (...), availability of facilities, services, food and water and maximise savings to send back home. Thus it becomes a deliberate rational decision to live on the pavement" (1991-92: 85-86). Jagannathan and Halder, in their study of the pavement dwellers in Calcutta, also infer: "Pavement dwellers of the main stream vocations have chosen this life style to protect their access to earning opportunities. In addition (...) a substantial proportion are temporary migrants, who remit savings home to the village". Further: "The majority of pavement dwellers live without shelter as a deliberate rational decision, by which the expenditure on housing is reduced to zero" (1988-a: 1177).

The importance of proximity to the source of livelihood is also emphasized in the two studies quoted above. This factor is crucial not only to understand the residential practices and location choices of the houseless, but more generally of the urban poor³². The failure of many attempts to relocate slum and squatter settlement dwellers far from their initial residence is thus due to inadequate consideration for easy physical access to earning opportunities.

7. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

Old Delhi, the historical core of the capital city, is characterised by extremely high population densities combined with a remarkable concentration of commercial and manufacturing establishments. While a process of population deconcentration from the old and deteriorating housing stock is at work, economic activities have proliferated. This has attracted a floating population of male migrant workers, most of them unskilled, whose residential integration is extremely precarious. Surveys conducted on a sample of shelterless persons in the Old City allowed us to examine their residential and related economic practices and contribute to the discussion on the social and economic marginality of the houseless population.

Only a few have broken away from the basic social institution, the family. These are those who have left their homes following acute familial tensions, especially with parents. Although they live alone in Delhi, the majority of the houseless migrants maintain a regular link with their families in their native place, which remains their place of reference.

³² See for example: GUPTA, KAUL, PANDEY (1993: 86), SURI (1994: 273), KUNDU (1993: 65).

The houseless population of Old Delhi also forms an integral part of the metropolitan labour force, which, in terms of income, seems to be able to stay above the poverty line. Yet, the lack of guaranteed and regular income constitutes a general concern. At the same time their saving capacity, remittances and plans of future investment, all represent encouraging indicators of the economic potential of a notable share of the houseless. Finally, the large variety of individual situations encountered indicates that the houseless are not a single category of 'urban poor', nor are they necessarily 'the poorest of the urban poor'.

Although financial constraints form the background of the shelterless situation, the residential practices of pavement dwellers and night shelter inmates should not be seen only as the consequence of a process of exclusion from access to a dwelling. One should also appreciate the economic rationales of individual migrants who try to maximise remittances to their families in the village by cutting their housing and transport expenses. Priority is therefore given by them to a location near the workplace or near the labour market. For casual labourers, in fact, proximity between the sleeping place and the source of employment opportunities often increases their probability of getting daily work. Thus the condition of the houseless has to be seen in relation to their needs and priorities. This is a prerequisite for formulating appropriate urban housing policies.

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APPENDIX

Presentation of the research programme: PATTERNS OF POPULATION MOBILITY IN THE DELHI METROPOLITAN AREA

1 - Context of the study

Promoted the capital of the British Indian Empire in 1911, then capital of independent India in 1947, Delhi is the Indian metropolis (over a million inhabitants in 1981) which has experienced the highest demographic growth over the last decades. Its population has expanded from 1.4 million in 1951 to 8.4 million in 1991. The rate of growth, however, slows down over that same period: 5.1% per year from 1951 to 1961, 4.5% to 4.6% from 1961 to 1981, and 3.9% per year between 1981 and 1991.

Today, Delhi is a city in full expansion: although traditionally, it has always had a political and administrative role to play, it is now becoming one of the country's major centres of economic growth. In addition, the capital has pioneered original experiences in town and country planning, with a rigorous planning of the city, policy of urban public transport, the creation of satellite towns, measures of land control, relocation of slum dwellers. However, despite these policy measures, speculation on land and formation of slums could not be avoided. Delhi thus provides an example of how a capital with several millions of inhabitants has developed, with a sustained growth in the context of wilful urban policies.

Moreover, this capital's dynamics is part of an urbanisation process that has two characteristics at a national level. Firstly, with a level of urbanisation that is relatively moderate (26% in 1991), India remains a predominantly rural country - and will remain so in the medium term. Secondly, the urban scene is dominated by the big metropolises, and the urbanisation process has gone hand in hand with a growing concentration of the urban population in the metropolises of a million- and multi-million inhabitants.

In Delhi, like in other large metropolises in the world, the process of urbanisation seems to be linked to other specific phenomena:

- the deconcentration of the urban core;
- a process of suburbanisation, with the rapid development of suburbs and the formation of satellite towns;
- an increased differentiation and segmentation of the metropolitan area;
- the development of commuting between place of residence and place of work as well as the development of other forms of circular mobility between different places of residence inside and outside the town, resulting in complex and multi-polar spatial residential patterns which go beyond the urban/rural dichotomy.

The development of a metropolis like Delhi, with several millions of inhabitants, raises crucial and specific problems in terms of urban administration. Furthermore, the rate of demographic growth, in spite of its slow down, remains quite significant, which compounds the task of town planners.

Understanding how cities function and, in the first place, how their population dynamics function, is an indispensable prerequisite for any attempt at town planning. In this research project on Delhi, the study of population movements is used as a preferential tool to analyse and understand better the dynamics of the metropolis: its development as well as its internal structuring and transformations.

2. Research objectives

The main objective of this research project is to improve our knowledge of the different forms of spatial mobility and of the complex spatial residential patterns in a large metropolis, and to analyse the different types of mobility practised by the population in relation to its absorption into the urban labour market and conditions of access to a dwelling.

Then, it aims to analyse the impact of such residential and occupational strategies on urban dynamics, and this at three levels:

- Impact on the global dynamics of the town, in terms of geographical spread of the urban agglomeration and development of suburbs and satellite towns, that is, more generally, impact on the process of metropolisation and suburbanisation;

- Impact on the internal structure of the metropolitan area, in terms of population redistribution within the urban space and in terms of differential dynamics of certain neighbourhoods, and, more generally, role of residential strategies in the process of spatial segmentation ;

- By putting Delhi into its regional context, the different forms of population mobility will be also examined in order to better understand the structure of the exchanges that take place between the metropolis and the neighbouring states of North India, or other places of the national territory, or even international space.

In this perspective, we shall also examine the links between the urban policies at the macro-level and the individual's residential practices at the micro-level.

The following two questions guide our investigation:

- What are the residential practices developed by the population, its strategies as regards the occupation of the geographical and economic space of Delhi metropolitan area? What are the occupational, familial, etc... determinants of such practices?

- What impact do these residential practices have on the global and intra-urban dynamics of Delhi?

Particular attention is given to the forms of temporary and circular mobility and their evolution. The permanent versus transitory character of circular mobility will be questioned: do these complex residential patterns represent a step towards a settling down into the city or do they tend to become perennial? What lessons can be drawn as to the impact of such patterns on urban dynamics?

The objective of such research in the Indian national context is also to understand to what extent the development of the forms of circular mobility can help to maintain a relatively moderate rate of urbanisation.

The research project on Delhi is also conducted in the perspective of an international comparison with another metropolis of the developing world, Bogota (Colombia)³³. This

³³ The research programme on Bogota is conducted by Françoise DUREAU (ORSTOM, France) in collaboration with the CEDE (University of Andes, Colombia). The comparative programme on the residential practices of the populations and their impact on the dynamics and segmentation of large metropolises has received a financial support from CNRS - *PIR-Villes* (Paris).

will also allow us to compare the different patterns of spatial mobility in two large metropolises which face some similar problems although they belong to contrasting geographical and socio-political contexts.

3. Research methodology

The official systems of demographic data production in India (the censuses and the National Sample Survey) do not provide adequate information on the different forms of spatial mobility in relation to urban dynamics: first they focus mainly on migration seen as a relatively permanent transfer of residence, and secondly the level of aggregation of the data on migration does not allow a differential analysis of the neighbourhoods inside a given urban agglomeration. Hence, in addition to making use of the bibliographical and statistical data available on Delhi, this research programme relies essentially on specific surveys carried out on samples of population in seven selected neighbourhoods, in Delhi urban agglomeration and in two satellite towns of the metropolitan area, and covering different types of settlement including a sample of houseless people.

In order to get a better understanding of the urban transformations linked to the residential behaviour and to the spatial mobility practised by individuals and their families, the system of observation follows three basic principles:

- To take into consideration the set of all types of mobility, regardless of the distance (intra-urban movements in the metropolitan area and migrations towards and from Delhi) or the duration of the movement (permanent or temporary migrations and daily commuting).
- To introduce a longitudinal approach, which helps us to understand the way in which people combine different residential practices throughout the different stages of their life cycle.
- To take into consideration the family units in the observation and analysis of the migratory practices, in order to relocate individuals' mobility behaviours into their familial context, and thereby recover the collective dimension of the mobility logic, evidenced in numerous socio-anthropological works.

Only a combination of the quantitative and qualitative approaches can adequately meet the three principles stated above, and help us to determine the direction and socio-demographic compositions of the principal population flows towards, from and inside the Delhi metropolitan area, as well as the individual and family strategies under which these population movements take place. Thus, the system of observation adopted combines a quantitative and a qualitative approach, and includes two main phases:

• **A statistical survey** was carried out on a sample of approximately 1,700 households in seven selected zones of the metropolitan area. The data collection was based on a structured questionnaire, and information was collected regarding:

- housing conditions,
- demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the members of the household,
- commuting between the place of residence and the place of work or study,
- main migratory steps,
- temporary moves in and outside Delhi,
- characteristics of family members not living in the household surveyed.

The general survey was conducted from mid-February to the end of April 1995 in six zones, and covered a total sample of 1413 households. The specific survey of pavement dwellers in Old Delhi was conducted in January-February 1996, and covered a sample of 248 houseless people.

- **An anthropological observation** supplements the quantitative observation, and consists of semi-directed interviews carried out on a sub-sample of people selected from the file of the statistical survey. The purpose of these in-depth interviews is to collect detailed migration, occupational and familial histories, as well as information on the circumstances and reasons of the migration to Delhi, the conditions of absorption into the city and the urban labour market, and the relations maintained with the native place. This will allow us to deepen in the understanding of the population's mobility behaviours. Till today, about 50 in-depth interviews were conducted: with houseless people in Old Delhi, and with inhabitants (natives as well as migrants) of an urban village of NOIDA. This will be completed by 2 other series: one with slum dwellers in a centrally located area, and the other with occupants (owners as well as tenants) of flats built by the Delhi Development Authority.

This two-fold observation of spatial mobility and residential practices was supplemented by the collection of **basic information on the contextual background** of each neighbourhood selected for the survey: civic amenities available, land use pattern, history of the neighbourhood, how the area has developed over the last decades in terms of housing, civic amenities and economic activities, whether it has benefited from specific urban policies or whether it results mainly from non governmental initiatives (including unauthorised settlements). This will allow us to analyse the extent to which the main characteristics of the neighbourhood (in terms of housing and economic activities in particular) may influence certain residential strategies at the individual and household levels, and, reciprocally, to which extent the residential strategies have an impact on the dynamics of the neighbourhood and the structuring of the city.

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