

# Urban Policy Changes in Chandigarh: Fallibilism or Fatalism

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## Abstract

*Since last two decades, some of the major urban policy, legislation and building regulation changes have been made in Chandigarh, which are having a major impact on the physical and the visual fabric of the city. This paper, which is a pre formative guideline for author's further research is an attempt to understand these policies and urban regulation changes and how are these going to affect the future growth of the city?*

*Some of the regulations may be required to keep the pace with time while others have been made as part of public demand or few of them may just be for speculative purposes but all of these are going to have some affect on the city character.*

*This paper highlights some of the major changes in the original master plan of the city which could have some irreversible impact that could take a long time to restore the concept. It is an initial exploration by author in the field of city regulations. A change in land use or in building regulations is an attempt to make the city lively and growth oriented for citizens, but are these changes really helping or not is another important aspect to be understood.*

**Keywords:** Chandigarh, Urban controls, Building regulations, visual character, urban policy

## Introduction

Chandigarh has been one of the best examples of modern city planning where the growth has been totally regulated by a set of rules and regulations as envisaged by the author of the plan, who is a famous architect and planner of the modern architecture **Le Corbusier**. Almost for 50 years, Chandigarh has maintained its original planning concept, i.e. the symbolic representation of the city as Head, heart and body. Even the visual character of the city also evolved as envisaged by the planners through various controls.

One of the first and one of the most significant urban projects of the post war period arose in India in 1950 with the establishment of Chandigarh, the new capital city of the province of Punjab. At the time Chandigarh was conceived, conditions in India were chaotic, especially in the province of Punjab, which has been physically dismembered, shown in the process of its best

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arable land, disrupted socially, and burdened with refugees. The economy was prostrate, future uncertain, and although the government may have had some sort of general aims regarding future industrial development or economic improvements, nothing specific in the nature of comprehensive planning was underway.

As it happened, the planning of Chandigarh was purely physical; one might say, in fact the city was designed rather than planned. The program of the city as a government centre would govern the overall building pattern of the city.

By and large, Chandigarh represents a currently unfashionable type of planning, inasmuch as almost every major decision relating to the city-selection of the site from the air, the establishment of population densities, the layout of the streets and sectors, and the creation of the capitol complex-was made intuitively.

This story about the design of Chandigarh as told in the early sixties by Norma Evenson continued to be held there during the construction of this capital city till the early nineties.

But since the introduction of the market driven economy and decentralization of cities, enactment of 73 and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution of the India, the planning and development of Chandigarh has also undergone major transformation. Physicists and socioeconomic changes have made the governing people to change some of the major aspects of the planned city.

In the case of Chandigarh great difficulties are evident in problematic contexts, where planning and design traditions have certainly been reliable and influential .Over the last decades, the gap between disciplinary dreams and real outcomes has been growing in the field of urban planning and urban design. However, there is an astonishing lack of critical reflections within the disciplinary field. The aim of this paper is to focus on a set of critical issues, and to suggest new directions in the current practice as listed below under different heads.

### **Planning and Change**

In a variety of contexts, a large number of experiences demonstrate that planning mistakes tend to proliferate, and the difference between hopes, plans and effective outcomes has been ever wider. However, these empirical observations do not appear to give rise to a real desire for critical thinking and, where necessary, changes to the stances and behaviour adopted within the discipline.

The capacity to direct and control spatial transformation appears weak not only from the regulatory point of view, but also from that of the effective capacity in terms of voicing and urban designing. In general, doubt is cast upon the social role and influential capacity of the disciplines of spatial organization and transformation.

It is still relevant to Chandigarh the statement as written by Pier Carlo Palermo in one of the research articles (City, Territory and Architecture 2014, 1:7) “At the same time, however, the culture of urban planning continues to display certain patterns of involution. The ambitions declared on its foundation at the start of modernity, often realised in unsustainable ways, even in the second half of the 1900’s (Boyer 1983) were followed by appeasing visions lacking a solid basis and real effectiveness, such as the strand of “collaborative planning” which saw its heyday in the 1990’s (Healey 1997), as well as some purely intellectual reveries involving unjustifiable and inconsequential themes and visions (Gunder and Hillier 2009). In many cases, the real effect was that of abandoning reforming aspirations in favour of the adaptive spirit of Post modernity,

that sort of “adaptive realism” of which Koolhaas himself became the exemplary figurehead (Koolhaas 2000).”

The recent experiences of urban development in Chandigarh offer a complete array of possible critical points. Amongst the most striking points are: extremities of land use; the dearth of a comprehension; architectural elements, which are thrown together in an almost haphazard fashion; the foreignness of the emerging forms with respect to the urban history and context, the indifference shown towards the director unexpected consequences that such large-scale intervention wreaks on the entire urban organization.

### **Legal structures to control the city development in Chandigarh**

Urban controls as a tool to govern were on the agenda of the team working in Chandigarh even before the selection of the architect /planner to design. Mr. Varma was the strongest voice regarding instituting legal structures. It was under his direction, legislation to govern construction, Land and economics was established. Varma was agitated from the very beginning for control over the quality of building materials used, building standards, and over the construction itself. It was only because of this reason that in the contract of Albert Mayer the architectural controls were one of the earliest to be decided and finalized by the planner. Mayer suggested institutionalizing a strong system of City Planning that would periodically review the master plan, based on public understanding and acceptance.

Le Corbusier more than Mayer, saw the need to treat the city as a finished work of art Whereas Mayer preferred to make it an ongoing process with feedback on people's needs in the planning loop, Corbusier instituted bylaws that controlled visual parameters-location, heights, blocking, band widths, even column spacing- of public buildings and residences fronting onto main public streets. Schematic design controls were set in place for cinemas and petrol pumps. And, the control on architectural treatment of the exteriors was applicable to all buildings along m and the City Centre. He also suggested institutionalizing a strong system of National City Planning to enforce this control.

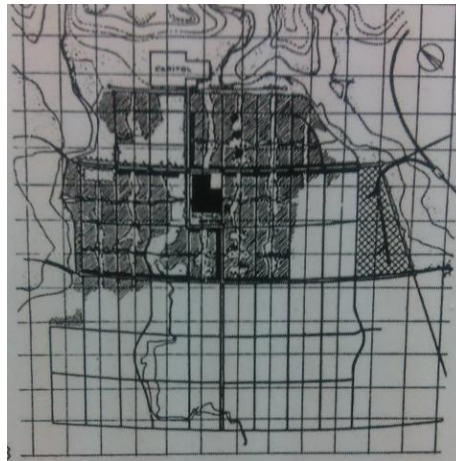
### **Master plan edict change**

The prime objective of the Master Plan is to guide and rationalize the future growth and development of urban centres, promote economic development, improve service delivery, provide an appropriate level of amenities, ensure quality of life and making rational policy choices. The growth and development of Chandigarh have been, primarily and essentially, dictated by “The Capital of Punjab (Development & Regulation) Act, 1952” which is the mother law defining the framework of city planning and construction of buildings.

To create it as a finished work, Le Corbusier designed the master plan (Fig1), gave an edict for its realization and operation, and designed the Capitol Complex at the head of the city. Le Corbusier conceived the master plan of Chandigarh as analogous to the human body, with a clearly defined head (the Capitol Complex, Sector 1), heart (the city Centre, Sector 17), lungs (the leisure valley, innumerable open spaces and sector greens), the intellect (the cultural and educational institutions), the circulatory system (the network of roads, the 7Vs) and the viscera (the industrial Area). The concept of the city is based on four major functions: living, working, care of the body and spirit and circulation. Residential sector constitutes the living part, whereas the Capitol Complex, city centre, Educational Zone and the Industrial Area constitute the working part. The Leisure Valley, Gardens, Sector Greens and Open Courtyards etc. are in the care of

body and spirit. Nonetheless, local order in Chandigarh may spring from the design of surprising public, commercial plazas, as in the central commercial sector contrasting with the repetitive, banal and uninformative configuration in Chandigarh.

This uninformative configuration along with the new socioeconomic needs must have asked for major changes in the recent time in the Chandigarh plan which was being perceived as monotonous and confusing by the visitors but for the city residents it became a status symbol of living because of its best physical infrastructure. These changes by relaxing certain controls have their success or failures.



**Fig.1** original concept plan  
(source: Hasan- Uddin Khan)

## **Failures and Good practices**

### **IT PARK**

It was one of the first major physical transformations in the city plan which was guided by the new economic and technological transformed global world to create new employment opportunities in stagnating opportunities for jobs. At that time by most of the planners (especially conservation architects who liked it as a potential heritage site status) perceived this as one of the major threat to the planning and architectural character of the city.

Over the time due to its location disconnect and the new typology of architecture merging with the peripheral development has been accepted as a good development. Though there is a different point of view on the new mixed architecture, developing here, which is thought to be not in line with city vocabulary? But its landmark quality has attracted the people towards this new development. Another opportunity has been in creating the alternate traffic routes to reduce the traffic congestion on connecting corridor to eastern development. . Therefore, also in this case there are some of the negative consequences to be feared, notwithstanding the fact that there is some indication of success.



**Fig.2** New development in IT Park  
(source: Rajiv, cca)



**Fig3:**Opportunity for new architectural form experiment (source [http:// blackeyesontarget.blogspot.in/2010/06/air-tel-office-in-it-park-chandigarh.html](http://blackeyesontarget.blogspot.in/2010/06/air-tel-office-in-it-park-chandigarh.html))

### **Industrial area land use change**

From the very initial stage of planning the Industrial area has struggled to establish. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of development additional area was developed. Guidelines along which the Chandigarh administration developed this area are that “As a planned city, the industrial pattern has to fit into the overall planning and architectural control and cannot impair the aesthetics of the city.”

But the “Chandigarh conversion of Land use of Industrial sites into commercial activity/services in the Industrial area, Phase I and phase II, Chandigarh scheme, 2005” has just reversed the above statement by allowing to convert the same land given on cheap rates to promote industry into commercial areas(fig4). This conversion has posed some serious questions on the conceptual order of the city as envisaged by the planners. “A lack of capacity to conceive and manage the great urban project as a complex program has been displayed in this decision, which requires guidance and public learning, but also interaction and partnership between the multiple players, with the possibility of evolutionary developments, which may help to perfect the project in the course of time, without ruining it.

Certainly the role played by urban planning has been of little importance in this case, both in terms of the capacity to regulate and to orientate. The fundamental choices have regarded the concession of building rights, which are always exaggerated, following a rationale of mere building development. In reality, no real attempt whatsoever has been made to examine the links between rules and shapes in greater depth; likewise there has been no attempt to conceive a truly spatial framework”. (Palermo)

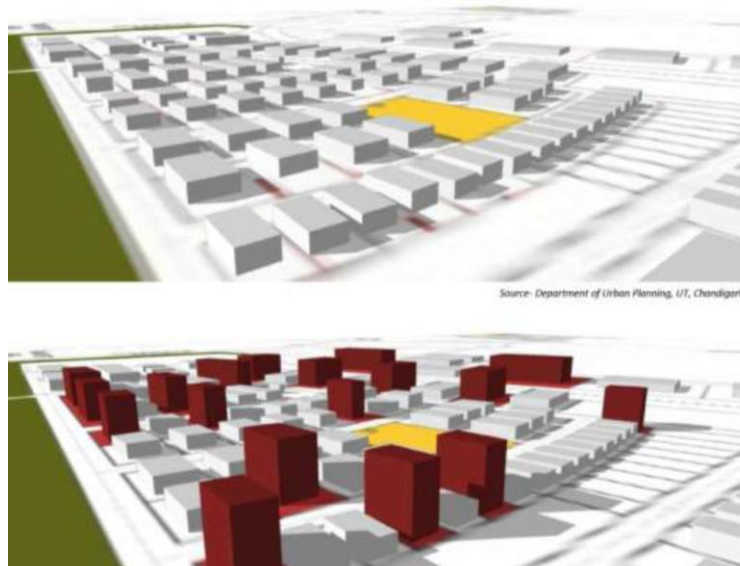
Temporary success of one of the largest shopping malls in industrial area could be attributed to its size and scale and other factors as described, “In managing public spaces, “people are drawn to, and tend to stay longer in, public spaces that offer interest and stimulation and/or a degree of comfort. Survey and observation data show that people appreciate and look for special events and activities in public spaces, both locally and in the town center. Unique and special events including spontaneous ‘street entertainment’ also grab the attention and help to define places as interesting one. People are more likely to linger if there is somewhere comfortable to sit, especially if there is also some protection from the weather”. (Sivas Jalaladdini and Derya Oktay) Long term impact of it may be seen on the Central business district(sector-17) and the new commercial development already planned in the master plan in the southern part of the city (Vikas Marg).



**Fig4:** Largest shopping mall as a destination  
In industrial area but facing co existence



**Fig5:** chaotic visual environment for  
New Functions (Source: Author)



**Fig6:** Conversion totally in Contrast to City character (from order to chaos)  
(Source: Department Of urban planning, Draft master plan)

### **Commercial area streets revival**

Though there is no major visual fabric transformation of the city, but changes in the most of commercial areas which are part of the neighborhood and the main streets, have been affected in terms of small modifications such as removal of trade change restrictions, change in shop cum flat to commercial allowed, entry to the first floor from the front side in internal markets etc.. But the city streets have been revived and made livelier as the number of food joints and discotheques opened in the shops where it was not allowed earlier. The sV4 market street of sector-11, 10, 9 and Madhya Marg Street in sector -26 are a few of the successful examples of this change.

Cautious and meticulously thought of decisions have been able to maintain the order and at the same time the upcoming demands of society have also been catered for without any change in



city's visual character. This new buzz has rather created new landmarks and nodes for the citizens which is changing the image for visitors also.



**Fig7:** Sector-26 is the latest food street of The city changing the visual image (Source: Rajiv,cca Photographer)



**Fig8:** Sector -11 market is now most happening place with variety of shops/ activity. (Source: Rajiv,ccaPhotographer)

### Residential area change

Increase in the FAR (Floor area ratio), front side projection beyond the frame, coverage equivalent to Ground floor allowed on other floors, any material and finish on the exterior and some part of residence can be used for commercial purpose by professional people are some of the significant changes which have been made in the residential areas called as Marla houses which is more a part of plotted development in the city along the V3 (sector surrounding roads). Opportunity to increase the FAR has not been exploited much as yet because most of the construction is recent and people do not want to demolish the newly built houses. But it has started to reflect its impact on the sector peripheral roads with rear side zoning line extended and the terraced form being flattened to make vertical wall directly abutting on the V3 street. In the long term the climate advantage as planned in initial plan may have a huge impact on the energy demand and on the reduction of city green cover which is not legible as yet.

The increase in the number of households as every plot could have three units will result in road congestion due to traffic increase, but at the same time can result in more livelier streets, the sign of which has started appearing in the few parts of the city.



**Fig9:** V3 Street from ordered terraced to Flattened and chaotic (source: Rajiv, CCA)



**Fig10:** Parking problem already visible on Marla houses street in sec-46 (source: Rajiv, CCA)

## Conclusions

Today the space for problems of urban transformation is a playing field used by the operators of several different disciplines and professions, often at the same time, and motivated by interests which are generally competitive. What legislative and procedural framework and what planning tools would be more coherent with the idea of urban design that they support?

Over the last 10-12 years the spatial change in Chandigarh has manifested the mixed character of the ideology of Chandigarh administration. There is a visible conflict in the decisions of change between the planners and the administrators. If planners have been successful in conserving the character of commercial areas the local politicians have been key to get transformed the industrial area. In most cases, the intervention has been legitimized by way of ad hoc variations of obsolete planning tools. Author is looking at these ad hoc challenges as fatalism to conceptual plan if the remedies are not provided immediately.

There is little doubt, in fact, that we must test the potential effects of urban-planning regulation in space and on site, in other words, to perfect form-based normative codes instead of the traditional zoning systems. More in general, we certainly need an adequate "design code", whether it be Quaroni's idea plan, or the more current master plan, to place the territorial transformations in the physical and spatial context. The issue of the urban project is undoubtedly fundamental to the conception and realisation of important urban transformations; however, it should respect a double-barrelled requirement, which is often neglected. On one hand, the emerging projects must be well-rooted within a spatial development framework in order to find coherence and validation (Siavash Jalaladdini and Derya Oktay,).

Before Le Corbusier it was Albert Mayer and first it was the team of Albert Mayer and Mathew Nowicki who were working on Chandigarh plan but it was due to death of Mathew Nowicki in a plane crash that Le Corbusier was brought in.



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