

# URBAN CRISIS - GENERATOR OF THE INFORMAL CITY?

URBAN FOAM  
exhibition





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# INTRODUCTION - PROJECT HISTORY

## URBAN FOAM - research project till travel exhibition

The URBAN FOAM exhibition is the result of a two years lasting research project initiated and conducted by Ingrid Sabatier and Stephan Schwarz questioning the role of urban informality in relation to urban crisis in Istanbul, Berlin and Mumbai. The concept of the overall project was developed by the two architects from France and Austria in Paris in 2010.

During a one year field research trip through the three cities the two founders of ISSSresearch could realize a series of 50 UrbanExplorations and more than 100 Interviews with local experts to create a huge archive of observations and knowledge about the issue of the project and its particular articulations in the three Case Study cities.

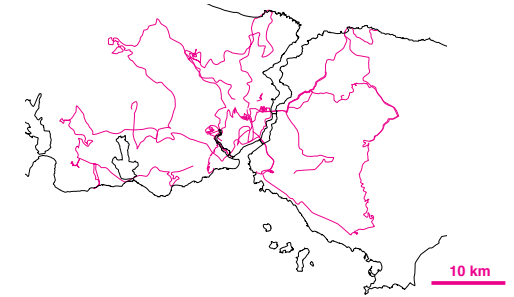
After the completion of the field research trip began an intense work on means and methods of decoding and representing the earlier gained informations and their correlations took place in Berlin. At the same time an exhibition design was developed by ISSSresearch to communicate the results and the output of the research in an appropriate way. The URBAN FOAM exhibition is conceived as a travel exhibition and was first shown in Berlin in November 2012 - January 2013 combined with an event series and attracted more than 700 visitors.

## Research and exhibition were funded and supported by various institutions:

Paris jeunes aventures | City of Paris  
Envie d'agir | Region Rhones Alpes  
Créavenir | Credit Mutuel Bank  
Anthroposphere Association  
Architects without borders France  
Kunst - Stoffe - Berlin e.V.  
Repro GRIMM  
Raumlabor Berlin  
Hoereth Regalsysteme  
Ministry of education, arts and culture of the republic of Austria - BMUKK  
Department for urban development and the environment of the Senat of the city of Berlin

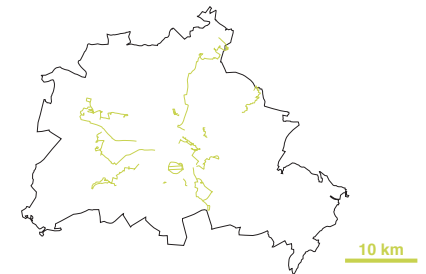
## UrbanExplorations Istanbul (Turkey)

3 Months in-situ research  
19 UrbanExplorations & Restitutions  
2.883 Photos  
77 Films  
73 Audio recordings  
35 Expert Interviews



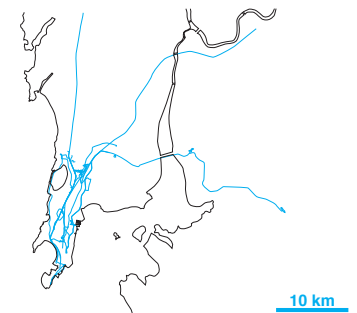
## UrbanExplorations Berlin (Germany)

3 Months in-situ research  
15 UrbanExplorations & Restitutions  
2.823 Photos  
159 Films  
24 Audio recordings  
50 Expert Interviews



## UrbanExplorations Mumbai (India)

3 Months in-situ research  
16 UrbanExplorations & Restitutions  
3.881 Photos  
188 Films  
46 Audio recordings  
27 Expert Interviews



# ISSUE OF THE EXHIBITION

## URBAN FOAM

The informal city, do-it-yourself urbanism, the spontaneous city and similar labels appear rather frequently in the contemporary discussion of cities and urbanism. Noticeably, they are commonly described as being opposed to the city and its formal and highly regulated structures. Yet, these dualisms are hardly sufficient to behold and comprehend current urban situations in their entire complexity and diversity. The city is neither a black-and-white scenario, nor is it divisible into formal and informal, it is rather an accumulation of a variety of at times contradictory actors, practices, spaces and meanings. The term foam, derived from Peter Sloterdijk's theory of spheres, allows for a perception and understanding of the city as something in motion. Social, economical, ecological and cultural urban crises have in recent years forced an ever-increasing amount of people to draw on informal networks to ensure their survival in the city, both in terms of labour and housing. These developments lead to informal and improvised urban practices, spaces and structures. The increasing complexity of the city has prompted even wealthy people to realize that their needs are oftentimes better and quicker served if they resort to informal conducts. All of these informal and improvised practices and spaces of the city, with the variety of their causes and origins, are part and parcel of the city's meshwork – they are bubbles of foam. We name them *URBAN FOAM*. Our project endeavours to trace and explore *URBAN FOAM* in the complex urban meshes of Berlin, Istanbul and Mumbai and identify their multifarious relations in the production of urban

space. Many of these informal and improvised practices and spaces evolve when people, whether voluntarily or out of necessity, actively engage in shaping and creating urban space.

These phenomena, with all their problems and potentials, are hereby not perceived as threat or menace to, but as an integral part of the city. The exhibition *URBAN FOAM* is the result of our observations and findings and shall provide insights into the experiences, questions and conclusions, which this project has unveiled. The different levels of illustration in the exhibition allow visitors to explore the variety of aspects involved in the project and let them immerse in the universe of *URBAN FOAM*.



## Urban crisis – generator of the informal city ?

The unbridled growth of cities and the vastly expanding urbanisation of society in the 21st century contribute to the emergence of social, economical, ecological and cultural urban crises. Migration from rural areas to conurbation, natural catastrophes and the growing effects of climate change as well as the ever more frenetic operations of the global economy are exacerbating these urban crises. Figures published by renowned institutions, such as the Urban Age Institute, are hardly ambiguous: By 2050, approximately 75% of the global population will live in cities. Large segments of the population of metropolis already stay in constantly expanding, self-constructed townships.

While the fast-paced growth applies particularly to southern Megacities, rural and post-industrial regions are shrinking. Strikingly, both extreme expansion as well as decline and shrinking are commonly accompanied by the same phenomenon - the growth of *URBAN FOAM*. The experiences of our research trip have proven that politicians and real-estate managers often perceive *URBAN FOAM* as a threat to the city they envision: a city, which functions according to legislative periods and the principle of maximum profit. Architectural endeavours as well as urban renewal and transformation projects flowing from such mindset are guided by a capitalistic, economic value system and most commonly aim to remove or bowdlerise informal and improvised urban practices and spaces. We could witness in all cities and their diverse settings how such projects have oftentimes triggered new urban crises. Opposing these policies, we call for a sensible and conscious handling of *URBAN FOAM*, for an alternative to destruction and tabula-rasa followed by a reconstruction aiming solely at profits, under the disguise of slogans such as “clean city”, “pretty city” or “save city”. Efforts to create an exclusively clean, pretty and save city undermine the very principle of urbanity and ultimately lead to what can be called an anti-urban city. Only for whom such city would be built, remains unanswered.



## Learning from ... ?

These transformations lead to an ever more complex and unmanageable city and render it increasingly difficult to fully grasp its substance and ambits with traditional scientific methods. The city wants to be explored and experienced, so it can divulge information about itself and its *URBAN FOAM* and tell us about its multifaceted urban conditions. Against this background, the research journey across Berlin, Istanbul and Mumbai included over 50 so-called UrbanExplorations, which aimed to explore and scrutinize the above cities, their specific characteristics and their *URBAN FOAM*. Urban dynamics and their implications were examined, documented and complemented by approximately 100 interviews with local experts and their insights. Our subjective and selective method is premised on the conviction that we cannot comprehend the city as a closed unit. We have, for this reason, refrained from using maps or traditional representations (other than text and pictures) in the processual diagrams, which mirror the documentations and experiences of the research journey in the exhibition. Such illustration shall highlight that *URBAN FOAM* is not a sealed system in itself, but part and parcel of the open and dynamic mesh of actors, spaces and relations responsible for the production of urban space as defined by Lefèbvres and shall foster a perception of an active and productive component of the city.



The processual diagrams do not aim to evaluate *URBAN FOAM*, but to explore and understand its intrinsic dynamics and its interrelations with urban crises. This will allow visitors to compare the de facto significantly differing contexts of Berlin, Istanbul and Mumbai. We would like to encourage to get to know and better understand your own urban surroundings by looking at, instead of overlooking them, to explore connections, interrelations, urban dynamics, their actors and implications and your own opportunities to engage and contribute. Only the concurrence of recognizing, understanding and acting in light of and in accordance with the above by every individual enables diverse, participatory and holistically sustainable urban development based on creative and locally adapted solutions. As such, the city is a process of constant evolution and re-creation.



# IN-SITU RESEARCH

## UrbanExplorations and Expert Interviews

50 UrbanExplorations were conducted during the field research trip in 2011 by ISSSresearch in Berlin, Istanbul and Mumbai. These tours were documented by photographs, films and texts, on the website <http://issresearch.com> and are freely accessible for a large public. These UrbanExplorations were supplemented by more than 100 Expert Interviews to gain a deeper insight in actual urban development in Istanbul, Berlin and Mumbai.

During the exhibition in Berlin, Texts and Images for exemple were mapped on 50 boxes, which were part of the exhibition architecture and served as seats for the screens which presented films and sounds from various UrbanExplorations in the three cities. The moving images with sound reminded of the atmospheres in Berlin, Istanbul and Mumbai and inspired the imagination of the visitors following the Explorations in the exhibition.

Concerning future exhibition scenarios, the images and texts from the UrbanExplorations could also be presented in lot's of other ways, such as wallpapers, prints, hanging brochures, etc. Videos showing impressions from the UrbanExplorations could be projected on big screens or displayed on a series of small screens for exemple. The different elements of the documentations can be shown in various scenographic installations in future exhibition displays.



# EXHIBITION DISPLAY

## Processual Diagrams - a tool to understand complex socio-spatial processes in time



**A Orientation** Informal and improvised urban practices and spaces are explored by means of scrutinizing their implications as actors of the city's production of urban space. Due regard is taken to the respective social and historical context of the city and the associated urban crisis situations.

**B Process-driven development** The process-driven development unveils and demonstrates the different connections between various informal and improvised practices and spaces of the city. This is where a myriad of narratives converge, intersect and spread again. Following the plethora of different narrative strands will allow visitors to bring urban spaces and practices to life and follow their stories.

**C URBAN FOAM** Various forms of informal and improvised practices and spaces of the city are illustrated both verbally and visually and elucidated as to their origins, their core and essence, their particularities as well as different angles they can be looked at. The collection shall make their variety visible.

**D Reactions** Just as any dynamic process, informal and improvised urban practices and spaces trigger reactions, reaching from resistance and rejection to mere acceptance to attempts to utilize them constructively. This section shall describe various reactions and their relation to informal and improvised urban practices, out of which they evolve.

**E Urban crisis situations** Social, economical, ecological and cultural urban crisis situations and the socio-historical context have strong bearings on the emergence and evolution of informal and improvised practices and spaces of the city. These again, can trigger urban crisis situations. These interconnections and interdependences shall be highlighted in this section.

**F Tapestry of relations and interactions** Informal and improvised urban practices and spaces do not only correlate with each other, but are in permanent interaction with the city as a whole. This dynamic and constantly evolving interrelation can and should be incessantly augmented and refined. The contradictory reading directions of the processual diagrams rise questions without obvious answers, questions about the future of the city, questions inquiring into which city we actually want. These questions shall prompt people to reconsider their own actions and opportunities to shape their city.

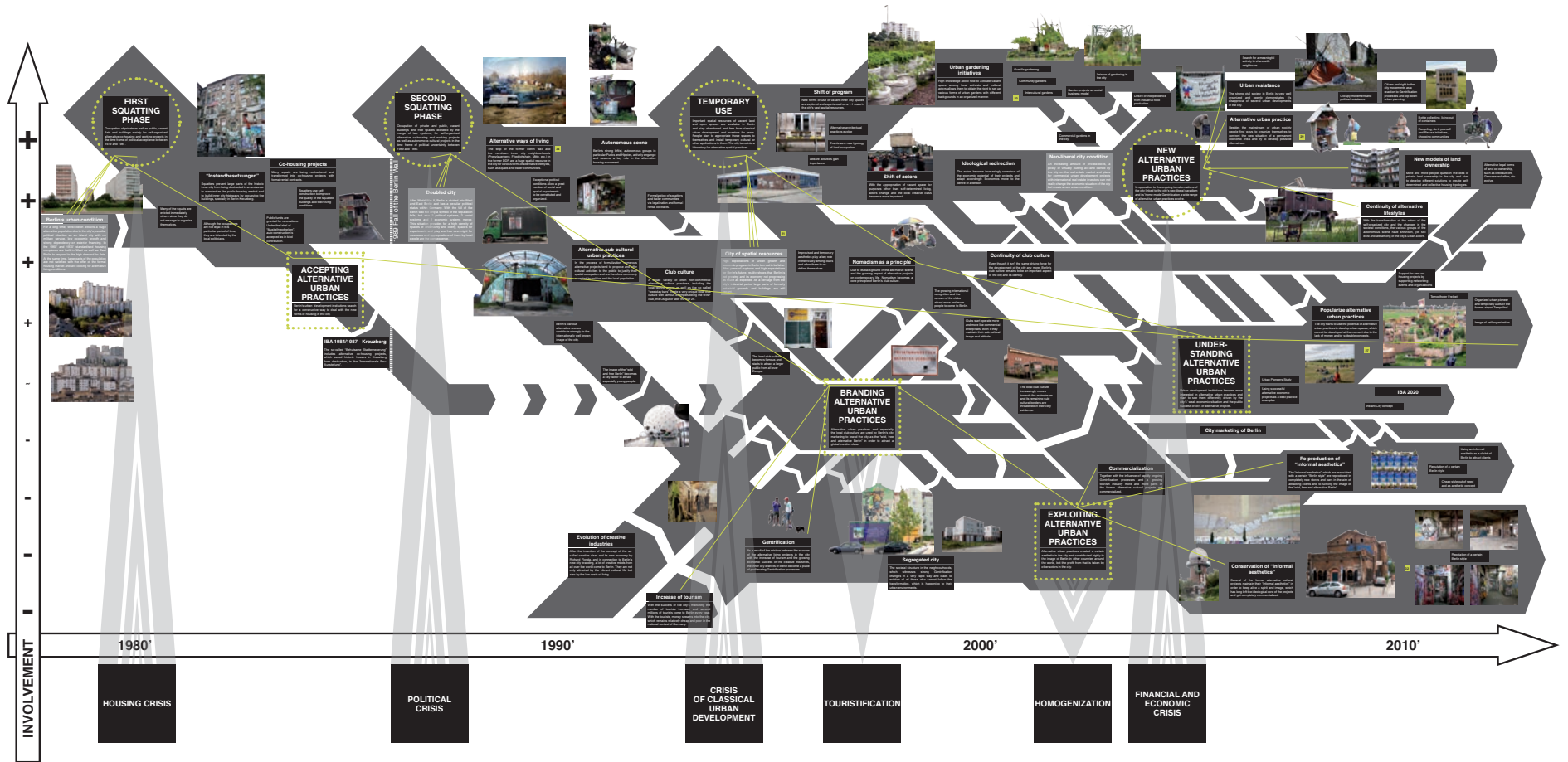
# PROCESSUAL DIAGRAM BERLIN

## BERLIN STADT-SCHAUM

PROCESS OF INFORMAL AND IMPROVED SPATIAL PRACTICES GENERATED BY URBAN CRISIS

EXPLORING THE DEGREE OF PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE SOCIO-SPATIAL PRODUCTION OF URBAN SPACE

IN RELATION TO THE CITY'S HISTORICAL-SOCIETAL CONDITIONS OVER TIME





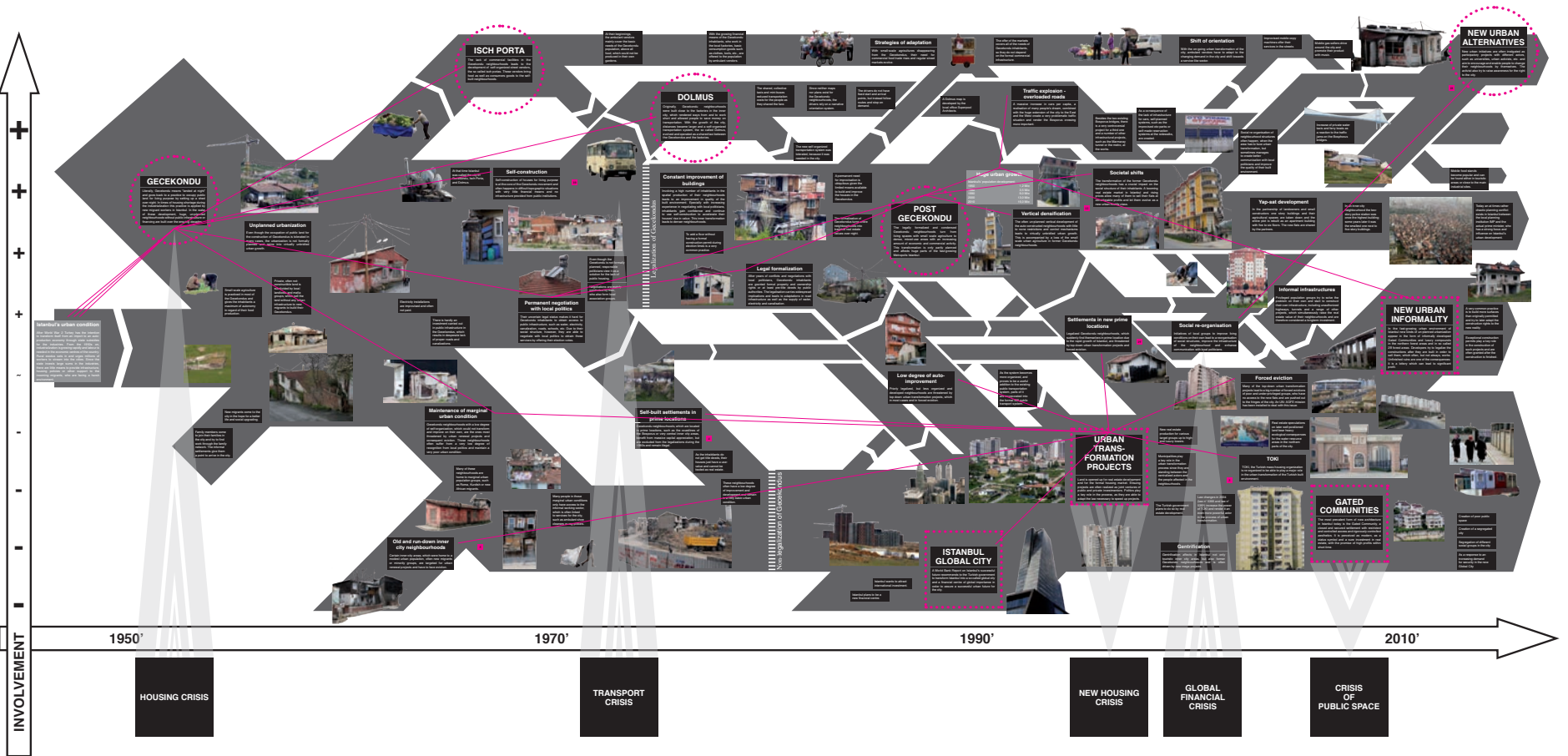
# PROCESSIONAL DIAGRAM ISTANBUL

## ISTANBUL STADT-SCHAUM

PROCESS OF INFORMAL AND IMPROVED SPATIAL PRACTICES GENERATED BY URBAN CRISIS

EXPLORING THE DEGREE OF PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE SOCIO-SPATIAL PRODUCTION OF URBAN SPACE

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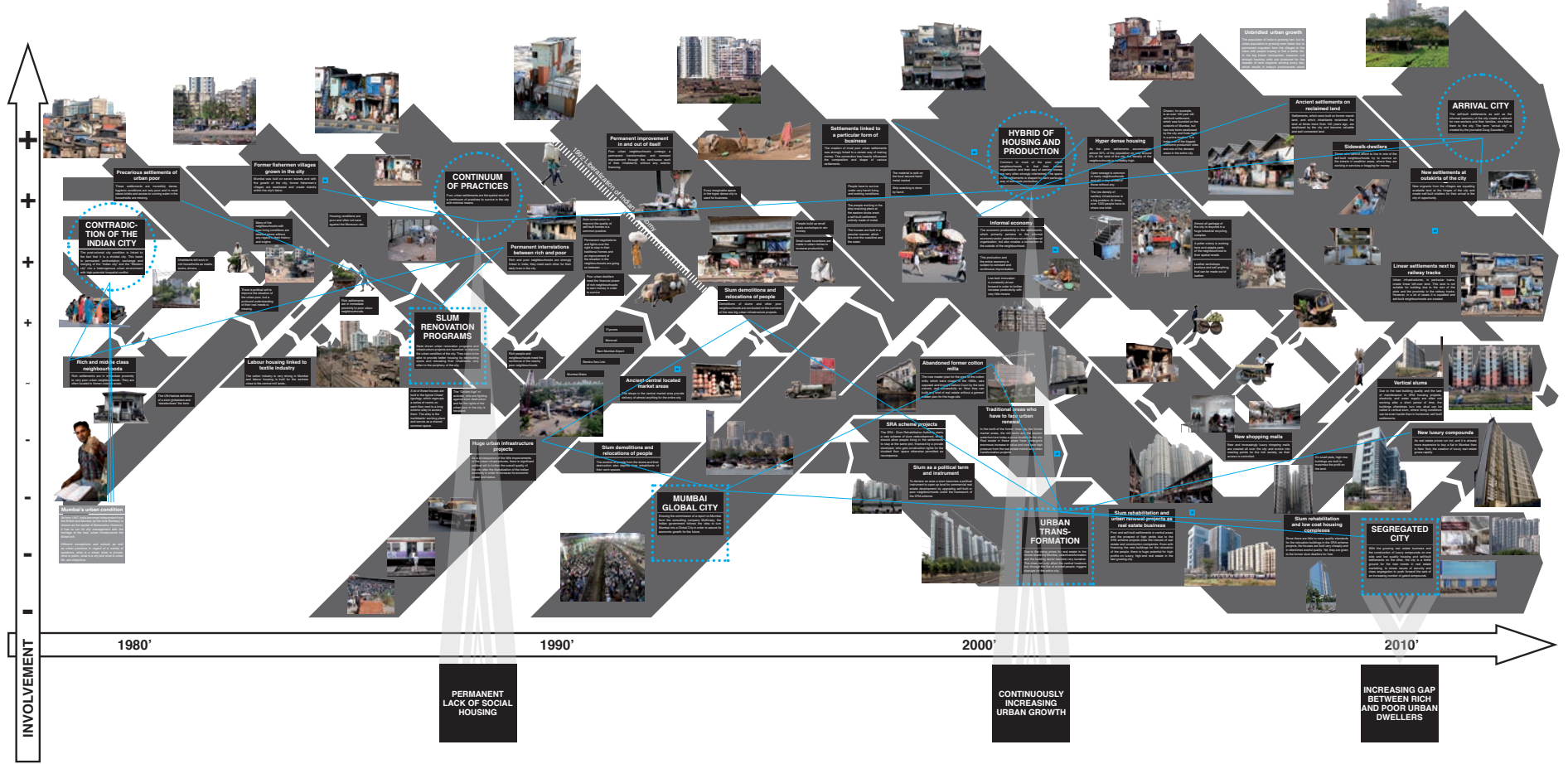
# PROCESSUAL DIAGRAM MUMBAI

## MUMBAI STADT-SCHAUM

PROCESS OF INFORMAL AND IMPROVED SPATIAL PRACTICES GENERATED BY URBAN CRISIS

EXPLORING THE DEGREE OF PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE SOCIO-SPATIAL PRODUCTION OF URBAN SPACE

IN RELATION TO THE CITY'S HISTORICAL-SOCIETAL CONDITIONS OVER TIME



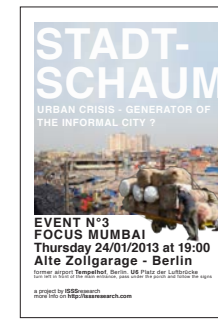
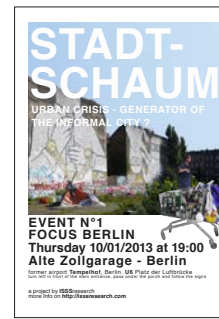
# IMPRESSIONS FROM THE FIRST STATION OF THE EXHIBITION

**URBAN FOAM exhibition in Berlin, November 2012 - March 2013**

Organized by ISSSresearch, the URBAN FOAM exhibition in the former airport building Tempelhof was a great success and attracted a lot of guests, specially young architects and urban planners were showing big interest in the project and the issues addressed by the exhibition. Due to its success the exhibition was prolonged in the exhibition spaces of the Department for urban development and the environment of the Senat of the city of Berlin.

A series of public discussions and film screenings took place in the framework of the exhibition. These event series could attract a lot of people to the exhibition and created a communicative format for informal exchange.

The URBAN FOAM exhibition is conceived as a travel exhibition, which was first shown in Berlin where it attracted more than 700 visitors. Now we are looking for partner institutions which want to show the exhibition in further cities.





## IMPRESSUM - CONTACT

### Overall project conception and coordination

ISSSresearch - Ingrid Sabatier, Stephan Schwarz

### Research team

ISSSresearch - Ingrid Sabatier, Stephan Schwarz

### Exhibition concept and architecture

ISSSresearch - Ingrid Sabatier, Stephan Schwarz

### Exhibition design and graphic design

ISSSresearch - Ingrid Sabatier, Stephan Schwarz with Laurent Pellissier

### Exhibition construction and montage

ISSSresearch - Ingrid Sabatier, Stephan Schwarz with Laurent Pellissier, Matthieu Lalanne

### Translation and proofreading

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# INFORMAL CITY - GENERATOR OF AN URBAN FUTURE?

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