



Capitol Complex at Chandigarh Faces Development Challenges

Le Corbusier's vision for the Capitol Complex as the crown of Chandigarh city nestled in the backdrop of the Himalayas responded well to the aspirations of a modern and independent India in 1948. As recorded by several researchers of modern architecture, the Capitol Complex was strategically designed by Le Corbusier to share an intended visual transparency with its natural setting of the hills and forests in the backdrop. While Chandigarh has expanded to the south-west with the initial designed sectors now giving way to large scale housing structures on the outskirts, the original sectors and the Capitol Complex have, to a large extent, retained their authenticity well in terms of form, colour, location and setting.

However, the physical and administrative juxtaposition of Chandigarh with the two adjoining states of Punjab and Haryana have recently resulted in a land parcel that seems to allow controversial development projects such as the contested Tata Camelot Housing near Sukhna Lake just beyond the Capitol Complex. This multi-storied housing project, that was conceived in 2006 near the Sukhna

Lake on a land piece owned by the Punjab Government, is being contested by Chandigarh's residents and the Forest Department through the judicial court to save the city's green areas and its modern legacy. Even though the project was given an initial clearance by the environment department of the Punjab State government, there was strong resistance from Chandigarh residents who filed a writ petition in 2013 against the project in the judicial court. In October 2013, the Supreme Court asked for the status quo with a clear directive that "even a brick should not be laid in the area", and referred the case to the Delhi High Court. The Delhi High Court is expected to hear the case on July 15, 2015. The residents and administration of Chandigarh are absolutely confident that these multi-storied towers will never be built, thus retaining the authenticity and visual integrity of the Capitol Complex which is now nominated for World Heritage as part of a serial transnational nomination in 2015.

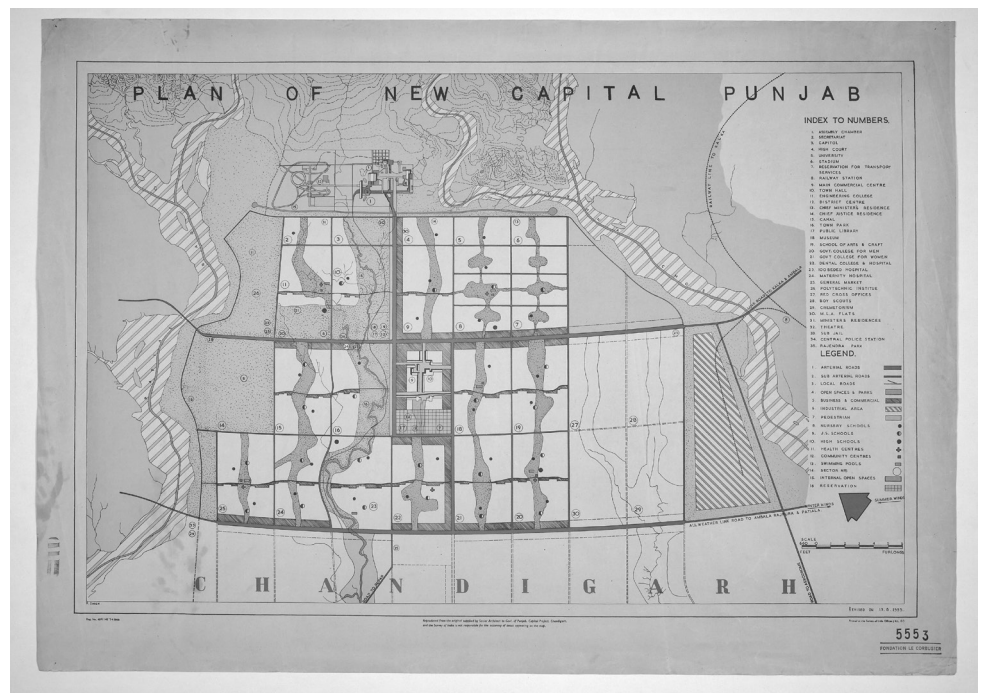
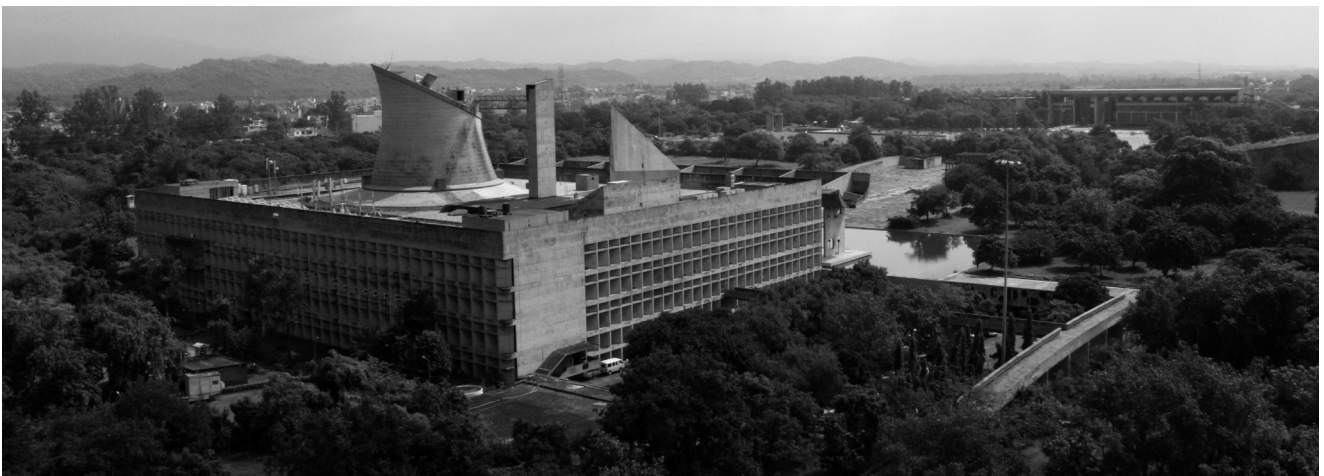
In a country like India, where cities face great pressures of social demands and urban expansion becomes a necessity, it is difficult to argue for the retention of large open rural-urban pockets vis-à-vis needs of the city. Clearly, there are diverse views that are

pitching heritage against development to justify such constructions. In the case of Chandigarh, the location of the proposed Tata Camelot Housing will be a visual eyesore from the Capitol Complex and also have a strong environmental impact as it is proposed to be built on a water catchment area near the eco-sensitive area of Sukhna Lake. Moreover, the Capitol Complex at Chandigarh, with its assemblage of the Assembly Building, the High Court and the Secretariat along with the Open Hand, is not only an internationally recognized masterpiece of modern architecture but also a national legend of independent India. This relic of 20th century architecture by Le Corbusier needs to be safeguarded in its natural setting for posterity and the will of Chandigarh residents will help in this realization. ■

Shikha Jain

Sign the petition to stop the construction of Tata Camelot Housing at

<http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/save-le-corbusiers-capitol?source=c.em.cp&rb=12525062>



04 Le Corbusier, Plan of New Capital Punjab, Chandigarh, India, 1950-1965. © FLC/SPA, 1953.