Subaltern urbanism in India beyond the mega-city slum: The civic politics of occupancy and development in two peripheral cities in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region

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CHAPTER 5: AGENTS OF CHANGE AND OBSTRUCTION: MUNICIPAL COUNCILLORS AND URBAN D/DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Municipal Councillors and Urban D/development

Municipal Councillors (MCs) are elected to represent the residents of their electoral ward at both the administrative ward level in ward committees and at the city level in the legislative wing of municipal corporations. While their official mandate is small, this chapter will show that in practice MCs play a constitutive role in locality development and forms of occupancy and civic politics. To add more depth and nuance to the role MCs play in the development of these cities it is useful to divide development, following Hart 2009, into its two differently packaged but interrelated parts—little ‘d’ and big ‘D’ development. Little ‘d’ development in this case refers to the creative destruction required for capitalist urbanisation—i.e. increased capital circulation and accumulation through real estate and the built environment. Big ‘D’ development refers to social programs and interventions targeting people and areas yet to benefit from economic growth or who have been negatively impacted by the socio-spatial and economic shifts it necessitates. India’s neo-liberal leaning urban Development policies designed at the federal level and implemented at the local level focus on infrastructure development, micro-credit, self-help, self-employment and staple subsidies for those below the poverty line. These actions are supposed to bring about inclusive growth. Development serves both to tide people and places over until the benefits of (neo) liberal capitalism reach them, and to pacify them enough to not cause problems (Hart 2009). The legitimacy of urban development hinges upon urban Development in addition to macro and international economic policies (Porter and Craig 2004).

At the macro-level policies focusing upon liberalising markets, privatisation and decentralisation dominate (Chandra, 2010; Patnaik et al., 2010). Cities are encouraged

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32 Others have assessed Maharashtra’s compliance legislation for the 74th Constitutional Amendment, which mandated decentralisation, in detail (cf. Baud & de Wit, 2008; Palshikar, 2002; NCRMC, 2000). The state holds sway both financially and administratively over urban local bodies. By legislating but not enacting, and by holding decisions in permanent states of being “under consideration,” the state undermines self-government. The State keeps de facto control over local matters concerning D/development funds and decisions. The consensus is that too few formal fiscal, political, or administrative powers have been devolved.
33 This paper uses Wacquant’s 2009 definition of neo-liberal as a, “political project aiming to remake the nexus of market, state and citizenship from above.” While this project has met differential reception and adaptation, four specific logics remain ubiquitous: (1) economic deregulation and the avowal of market-mechanisms for organising more and more human activities, (2) welfare state devolution, retraction and recomposition to expand and support the intensification of the refication of labor, land, and public goods, (3) articulation of the trope of individual responsibility in all spheres of one’s livelihood, and (4) and expansive, intrusive, and proactive penal apparatus to deal with those who resort to illicit activities or who are associated with blight or obsolescence (306-307).
to focus on FIRE (finance, insurance and real estate) sectors (Nachane, 2006). Planners, developers, elite urbanites, and their partners in government want Mumbai to transform into Shanghai with Indian characteristics and the rest of the region to become sufficiently ‘world-class’ and ‘slum free.’ According to the Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Urban Housing and Poverty Reduction the economic growth this restructuring brings will trickle down:

Once India reaches double digit growth backward linkages (trickle down) begins and all those benefiting from growth in more formal high-skilled sectors will need more: drivers, peons, and domestics plus will be able to support more of the vendors/hawkers etc. in the informal low-skilled sector... Those left out of these linkages (Dalits, low-caste women, and Adivasis) will be propped up with government subsidies (Mohanty, personal interview, 2010).

Rehabilitation and redevelopment programs manage to gloss over housing deprivations. Slums and other struggling areas with overwrought basic services and infrastructure remain prevalent. High levels of inequality remain the norm rather than the exception. Dreams of producing world-class inclusive cities often shatter when they meet the human and political geography. Much has been written about the shift from government to governance—i.e. from a focus on citizens to a focus on creating a good business climate—that neoliberal urban strategies in India attempt to embed and the injustice issues these raise (cf. Chopra, 2003; Chatterjee, 2004 & 2008; Banerjee-Guha, 2002 & 2009). However, few focus on the agents or obstructers of urban D/development—the street-level actors upon whom the promise and folly of interventions often rest. D/development rests significantly on local-level actors because while the policy-sphere presumes a Weberian like liberal democratic republic, on the ground informality (practices and institutions not instituted or regulated by law) prevails. Informality in governance, occupancy and work is the norm rather than the exception in urban India (Harriss, 2006; Roy, 2005; Benjamin, 2008; Harriss-White, 2010). The majority of land development violates one or more building laws or master plans (Roy, 2009; Bhan, 2009) and some recent studies put the percentage of people at work in the informal “unorganised” sector as high as 90 percent (Sammadar, 2009). These two aspects together mean that urban governance—defined broadly as the organising of social, political, economic, spatial, and environmental relations, and requisite classification of people and places to set entitlements, responsibilities and modes of discipline—is largely guided by informal institutions. In practice application of laws and codes is flexible and negotiable depending on the capacity and legitimacy of those attempting to govern economic and spatial practices and those attempting to thwart or alter these actions. Informal does

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34 While I find the goal of inclusivity problematic as it does not require better ‘rights to the city’ in terms of access and a say in how it should be shifted and shaped going forward, it is the term used by both those focused on urban Development and urban development in India and as such I will not dispute the legitimacy of it in this article.

35 Some notable exceptions are: Anjaria, 2009; and de Wit & Bemer, 2009.

36 Discipline should be understood here in the Foucaultian biopolitical/governmentality sense. It refers to how governance actors create the types of places and people their interests, visions, and desires require.
not mean ungoverned or unstructured, and MCs alternate between mediating (brokering, gatekeeping, blocking parts of interventions or reforms) and intermediating (fixing bottlenecks and monitoring implementation) when D/development projects and policies reach the city in general and their electoral ward in particular.

This paper focuses on MCs—an actor too often demeaned, minimised or left out entirely in urban D/development studies. Both flat conceptions of MCs (that they only ‘thugs’ interested in exploiting the poor and government coffers for their personal gain, or that their official mandate is too small to bother with) are rebuked by this chapter that shows how the regular activities of MCs both facilitate and obstruct D/development and structure the contours of occupancy and citizenship in their wards.

5.2 Theoretical Framework

Lipsky (1980) argued that policy implementation and success comes down to the street-level bureaucrats in street-level bureaucracies who actually enact it on the ground. “Policy is not best understood as made in legislatures or by top-level administrators, because in important ways it is made in the daily encounters people have with street-level actors” (Lipsky, 1980, p. xii). Their practices construct the forms policies and projects take on during implementation and daily operations. People do not experience urban D/development policies directly rather they experience them via interactions at the municipality, ward offices, MC offices and in their homes and neighbourhoods via social workers, party workers, tax/fee collectors, demolitions crews and developers. These players influence how policies and interventions manifest and thus how people perceive the D/development in two ways. First, the coping strategies they take up in relation to situational pressures, such as limited resources, skyrocketing demand and powerful vested interests affect how services and resources are allocated and how different people are processed. Secondly, opportunities for personal or political gain (given levels of discretion) impact the degree implementation goes as designed. While MCs are elected politicians, fieldwork reveals that they in many ways act as street-level bureaucrats (SLBs). Most junior and executive engineers, as well as assistant and district municipal commissioners, in the municipality often rely on MCs’ street-level knowledge either because they do not know the ground realities very well, or because they are too apathetic or overworked to find out for themselves (cf. Pellissery, 2007; SARC, 2007; van Dijk, 2007). By default and out of interest to deliver patronage to accumulate political capital, MCs often decide who gets what in terms of urban Development in their electoral wards. As such, they can be considered to be SLBs as well as politicians. This makes them important actors to include when looking at the capacity of individual or household capitals related to housing and locality development.

To avoid the erasure of stratified and informalised governance society concepts of civil society and citizen need to be divided in two; into civil and political society and
citizens and populations (following Chatterjee, 2004). Analytically, citizens refer to residents who seem to comply with norms of propertied citizenship, obey laws, pay taxes, and thus can have rights-based interactions within the market, the state and civil society. ‘Populations’ refer to those whose residence and livelihood activities contravene formal norms private property, valued work, and bourgeois aesthetics. Therefore state, market and civil society actors do not regard them and their associations as having the same rights or ability to participate in governance as civil society. Populations rest upon negative normative bases implying deviance and degrees of (un)deservingness which codifies and rationalises the exclusion and adverse incorporation of certain groups when it comes to tending to their spatial and civic needs. This makes civil society primarily the domain of middle and elite classes able to comply with private property regimes, tax responsibilities, and participate in the professional economy—a situation where the links between civil society, the state, and the market are clear and reinforcing. Political society—understood in this paper as including the MCs, local leaders, party-workers, street-level bureaucrats and service providers—is the civic political domain residents from formations considered to be slums engage with to access state controlled or regulated services and resources. ‘Populations’ relations with patrons, politicians, landlords, and employers are favour-based, and their relation with the state and civil society is fickle. It can be argued that political society constitutes the sphere of informal governance responsible for dealing with those rendered superfluous or inimical to ‘world-class city’ centric urban development. Its present form and functioning can be seen as an outcome of D/development process. The truncated growth and present retreat of the social arm of the state in the context of intensified marketisation, monetisation and commodification creates an ever increasing governance gap between what the formal state is willing and able to do which necessitates and empowers political society. In my fieldwork MCs emerge as slum residents key contact in political society. Key because they occupy structural holes or the gaps between the formal channels of Development and basic services and those who live and work informally—extra-legally—with few statutory entitlements (cf. Pellissery, 2007). Political society is definitely not egalitarian and has predatory tendencies. However, many MCs feel responsible for their poorer constituents and help them if they can. Ironically those who support neoliberal D/development and attempts to disempower “local politics” end up strengthening its raison d’être—structural holes between populations, the state, and D/development.

37 Chatterjee sees ‘populations’ as having no normative base. However, Baud (2009 personal communication) drew my attention to how it is more accurately described as having a negative normative base based on ideas around who is deserving and who is not.
38 Referring to the actual person who hooks up the electricity or water, or who de-clogs drains, etc.
39 Burt’s (1992) structural hole argument posits that social capital is created in networks where nodes can facilitate connections between two or more detached sections. A person or organisation occupies a structural hole, if they are perceived to be a viable access point to what would otherwise be closed off to the rest of their network.
Methodology

The arguments made in this paper began with informal discussions with the 11 MCs as well as with municipal officials and staff, three slum leaders, and three ‘middle class’ housing societies. Next each of these actors was given semi-structured interviews focused on governance processes and key actors at this level. Many subsequent visits to MC offices and wards followed allowing for valuable observational data of real time interaction and practice. Through this process MCs’ Street-level bureaucrat and political society activities emerged, and this resulted in giving them a time-use survey to see which activities took up most of their time and attention. I also probed these issues more fully with key informants—those most willing to go into the details of both their statutory and extra-statutory activities. Additionally, fieldwork does not only take place during scheduled meetings. I tried to engage in conversation regarding people’s views on and experiences with local governance and D/development on the train, in cafes, and in markets and malls. Findings were triangulated with secondary sources and previous fieldwork I carried out on MCs in Mumbai.40

5.3 Broader Political-Economic Context

Understanding the overlapping roles MCs (i.e. SLBs, nodes in political society, and occupiers of structural holes) helps frame where and how MCs can be expected to be conduits, partners, barriers, or indifferent in D/development processes. We also need to know what conditions MCs work in to know what can be reasonably expected of them in struggles over creating world-class cities and to determine which responsibilities lies with them and which lie more with the “compulsions of social structure” (Parekh, 2009: 327). Key contextual forces constraining and enabling MCs are: the conflicts and contradictions of neoliberal D/development and the normative expectations of public office holders.

Neoliberal D/development, Contradictions and Democratic Deficits

Neoliberal development requires entrepreneurial urban governance. This mode of governance gives primacy to creating a “good business climate” (Harvey 1996). Cities view themselves as being in competition for capital and model (middle-class) urbanites hence the interest in world-classing cities. The shift from government to governance makes it easier for elites to access formerly public assets (land especially) and gives business interests (developers in particular) a larger say in development plans and building/land regulations (Noor & Baud, 2009). City and regional development plans and discussions with high-level bureaucrats and planners show that the urban development regime’s top priority is to render itself desirable to middle-class professionals and to draw capital intensive businesses in the finance,

40 van Dijk 2006.
insurance, education, and real estate development sectors that require highly-skilled labor. This focus creates more intervention in urban real estate markets (Weinstein, 2008; Nanain, 2009) and spatial organisation as a mode of capital accumulation (Roy, 2009). The probability of integrating the majority of the urban population—who are non-skilled or low-skilled workers in micro-enterprises—into this growth model becomes nonsensical and we can reasonably forecast dualising cities with stratified citizenship. Primitive accumulation and/or ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey, 2006) have not been at all sufficiently mitigated by adequate & regular wages or redistribution policies (Harriss-White, 2009). Regardless, economic policies and city development plans continue to be dominated by a corporate market logic and a desire to fashion world-class, and thus slum-free cities.

Neoliberal norms of personal responsibility and entrepreneurialism dominate urban Development policies and interventions. There is a focus on infrastructure via the BSUP (Basic Services for the Urban Poor) and a focus on self-help groups, self-employment, and micro-credit. This presumes that the liberalised market and the poor will meet if more money is spent on infrastructure to facilitate mobility and exchange of people, products, and services, and the poor realise their entrepreneurial potential with a dash of social capital and a little micro credit. This focus points to the state and capital abdicating their responsibility for decent job creation, and functioning built environments, and placing it on the shoulders of vulnerable communities. It also privileges the market over other mechanisms for Development and avoids power relations that can make the market quite a precarious place for the poorly positioned and resource deprived. Conversations with planners at the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority, developers, and what Fernandes calls the ‘New Indian Middle-Class’\textsuperscript{41} made it become clear that the optimism that cities like MB an KD should and can be ‘world-class’ is wide-spread. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with this vision, the poor and slums are absent except for being the implicit targets of bio-political interventions focused on entrepreneurial behaviours and beautification projects respectively. Direct ways of integrating poorer groups and places into these processes, somewhat in line with their socio-spatial needs, are absent.

Entrepreneurial governance suits middle and elite classes oriented to the future, enamoured with world-classing cities, and who can compete in the professional job-market, live in a legitimate flat, and secure needed services. The ethos of self-responsibility and entrepreneurialism mixed with consumerism and faith in technology position them as the implied ‘good’ citizen large-scale urban renewal projects imply. They are the citizens who will benefit from the malls, business districts, and leisure facilities. If the government “cleans up its act” they are happy

\textsuperscript{41} “The New Indian Middle Class represents a specific social category that has emerged in the context of economic policies of liberalisation. The boundaries of this class are defined by practices of consumption associated with the newly available consumer goods in liberalising India.” (Fernandes, 2006: 2415). This group’s lifestyle is glorified by the media and held up by proponents of liberalisation as a sort of Indian Horatio Alger story as they represent what young urbanites can achieve in Mumbai.
about the market and individual effort doing the rest. They can problem-solve quite well and profitably within neoliberalism as their associations can work directly with the government in the form of private-public partnerships for the purposes of tackling urban blight or to be granted space for self-regulation of their settlement and leisure space. While closer scrutiny reveals informal aspects of formations dominated by middle-class residents—their access to services and land are sometimes managed through political society arrangements—these practices are almost never the focus of Public Interest litigation, media attention, or state eviction/demolition drives.

The poorer resident’s experience of neoliberal D/development appears precarious and punitive. The stunted growth of redistribution programs and the opening of markets have increased their economic insecurity (Samaddar, 2009) at the same time it has made them vulnerable to punitive measures targeting urban blight and obsolescence (Ramanathan, 2006). Argawala’s (2008) cites the following statements from an informal workers organisation: “We don’t even fight for a minimum wage because it created so much unemployment. Instead we fight for the right to live. We don’t want to rebel anymore [we] want a job” (393-394). The poor may have little reason to trust a political society that benefits from their insecurities. However, development often results in them being stigmatised, shifted around, or targeted for removal, while the state and NGOs only offer them self-help provision, the rhetoric of entrepreneurialism, and micro-credit. Thus the urban poor still see political society (and MCs in particular) as their best bet at obtaining a manageable level of insecurity (see Wood, 2004; Harriss, 2005).

Urban D/development policies do not address conflicts and contradictions regarding the use value, exchange value, and claims to land in cities. Officially, services should only be provided to registered slums\(^{42}\) on city or state land. The local government does not provide services to slums on privately owned land or on land owned by the central government unless the owner or the central government request it which rarely happens. The majority of residents in MD and KD acquired shelter and basic services through informal housing and amenities sector in part financed via what can be termed the ‘informal second circuit of capital.’ Officially the built environment, land-use and access are supposed to conform to government codes and plans. In India informality is the dominant mode of urbanisation from squatters to elites (Roy, 2009). Therefore the interesting distinction is between degrees of legitimacy and which places get targeted as urban blight or obsolete in D/development interventions. The link between capitalism, bourgeois culture and urbanisation has been well established (Harvey, 1990 & 2006; Chatterjee, 2004). These links should be kept in mind when viewing present conflicts over urban space and the utility ‘illegitimate occupancy’ plays in both the middle class goals to reduce urban blight, and in facilitating capital accumulation via world-classing and slum-freeing cities. In mega-

\(^{42}\) Slums that have proof of existence from no later than 1995 presently can go through the process of being registered by the government and then can legally access public services government and some form of legal entitlement to their home (the structure, not the land).
cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta, and Chennai, the middle-class’s aggregate and intentional impact on urban space is increasing (Baud and Nanain, 2008; Anjara, 2009; Ghernter, 2011). This positions them in a structural antagonism with slum residents and their presumed “vote-bank politics” (Benjamin, 2008). Once distinguished by its lack of engagement, some middle-class associations are activating civil society in the name of beautification, authoritative morality, and citizenship rights—to push officials to give their demands priority over those viewed as ‘encroachers’ and the ‘land mafia.’ (cf. Chatterjee 2004). At the neighbourhood level this takes the form of residents or developers lobbying officials to focus on improving their locality development and cleanliness. At higher levels, it takes the form of filing Public Interest Litigations that while directly targeting public officials, who are not enforcing rules and regulations, often result in punitive measures being taken against residents and the livelihoods of poorer inhabitants.

Actors in the formal ‘second circuit of capital’ and the bureaucrats and politicians friendly to their cause leverage arguments of obsolescence and rent gaps⁴³ to justify which areas get targeted for renewal. These arguments—blight, rent gaps and obsolescence—are mutually reinforcing and antagonistic with livelihood practices and spaces of poorer residents. They both tend to aestheticize anti-poor politics and D/development, to elevate exchange value over use-value, and to elevate the demands of citizens over the needs of ‘populations’ (cf. Ghertner, 2011a). Considering the middle-class’s expressed disdain of political society in combination with the profits, and rents possible from development; turf battles and competing claims can be reasonably expected to increase along with democratic deficits. Adept MCs are manipulating these tensions and contradictions to their political and economic benefit. Contradictory land and livelihood needs and desires make populations more dependent on MCs, allowing them to garner votes for less patronage. These contradictions and speculation opportunities push developers and higher-level officials to engage with MCs in order to manage some of what they seek in terms of facilitating land acquirement, power of attorney, evictions, demolitions, resettlement processes, and locality development (eg. Shatkin, 2014).

These contradictions also make it difficult for MCs (when they were so inclined) to mobilise sufficient support for making cities more inclusive. They also perpetuate the need and scope of MCs capacities in political society. Importantly, most MCs are not ideologues; they are interested in political survival and mobility. Plus many demonstrate genuine concerns for their poorer constituents. It is not inconceivable that targeted mobilisation of voters, and a few key constituents, combined with a push to focus on increasing the ‘rights to the city’ for those with informal residence and work could decrease present democratic deficits surrounding urban development processes. This becomes more likely the more MCs come to associate their political

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⁴³ Whitehead and More (2007) discuss how projects of urban redevelopment in the Mumbai Region are being significantly determined by the gap between existing rents and rent that could be accumulated if land was put to “higher and better use.” (2429).
survival and future as being related to increasing, rather than thwarting or stalling, the poor and other vulnerable groups access to basic needs and services.

Normative Expectations of Municipal Councillors

In liberal democratic theory the political community of which every citizen is apart is comprised of autonomous individuals equal in terms of moral and legal status. Officials, both elected and appointed, are expected to orient their duties to the public interest and without prejudice. In India the situation contradicts these principles (Corbridge et al., 2005; Gupta, 2007). Individuals are more enmeshed in family, kinship and caste relations and are in practice expected to place obligations to these connections over and above official or professional modern dictates. This goes to explain why ‘corrupt’ politicians and bureaucrats are so pervasive. While those outside a politicians or bureaucrat’s core constituency are not happy about preferential treatment and the scope for rent-seeking it creates, they lobby for preferential treatment when “one of their own” occupies a resource rich position or is in close proximity to an occupier. Currently meeting the socio-cultural obligations carries more weight than complying with norms of liberal political and civic communities (Parekh, 2009). The statement I often heard by slum residents currently not in the favoured group of the MC reflects this understood structural obligation. “It is okay if they eat a lot [play favourites and skim funds] as long as we don’t starve.” MCs with the highest status are those who provide the most for their core constituents; those who are best able to bend or break the most rules in this regard.

The local pressure to put private obligations before official ones also obliges MCs to take on a Street-level bureaucrat role. Bureaucrats are also predisposed to favouritism and MCs need to take an active (albeit informal) role in project implementation, targeting, and tendering to direct some of the resources to their wards. This obligation also underpins and reproduces the client-patron relationship that dominates MCs political work. Presently voters almost never express interest in what MCs are doing for the good of the city or region, but rather on what material benefit or protection they have personally delivered to key constituencies in their ward. Bureaucrats expect MCs to allow them to direct enough resources to meet their personal and professional obligations and to fill in their street-level knowledge gaps. Higher-level politicians and party leaders expect MCs to deliver votes and rents via whatever means culturally tolerable. National and International level D/development policy makers seem to expect MCs to adhere to a liberal democratic ideal that runs counter to prevailing social structures and common practices.

These conditions complicate MCs’ abilities to act in line with mainstream D/development. The push to ‘world-class’ these cites makes programs that primarily

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44 Those outside the core will need to pay tribute or a bribe of some sort to get access/attention.
45 See also Keefer and Suti (2004)
benefit slum dwellers less en vogue than building upscale shopping malls and apartment complexes, business districts, fly overs, and expressways. The contradictions and inequalities between middle-classes and the poorer classes and between political society and civil society pose serious obstacles to creating an inclusive, let alone more equitable, urban environment. These combined with the gargantuan task of improving housing and amenities in the context of an embedded informal housing market and decades of laissez-faire development, and social obligations to engage in favouritism and rule-breaking all contribute to make world-class, inclusive cities unlikely without significant structural and cultural shifts. Most important for this thesis in general, there is much more than ‘vote-bank politics’ and corruption propelling inequalities—aspects of D/development can also perpetuate and deepen inequalities.

5.4 Work

This section condenses numerous observations of MCs at work and informal discussions to describe their formal MC role, their street-level bureaucrat role, and the structural holes in urban governance they occupy.

MCs on Ward Committee

Ward Committees\(^{46}\) should consist of: the MCs representing the electoral wards within the administrative ward, the Assistant Municipal Commissioner in charge of administration, and no more than three appointed representatives to be selected from NGOs registered with the Municipal Corporation who specialise in social welfare activities within the administrative ward. These appointed MCs do not possess voting privileges. There are no registered social welfare NGOs in KD and MB, and in both cities appointed members were political appointees, ‘friends’ of powerful MCs. Officials and politicians are hesitant to partner up with NGOs that are not directly or indirectly tied to their party. Nonaligned NGOs are perceived as political adversaries who likely will turn their constituents against them. Decision making power still sits with the elected and appointed officials as formal citizen participation is not present (beyond voting in elections) and civil society organisations are not present. While in theory ward works are to be debated and then voted on in ward committees, all proposals presented to the ward committee meet with approval. If money is there, the work will eventually be sanctioned. No system of prioritisation that facilitates areas of greatest need being targeted first is in place. MCs stay out of each other’s

\(^{46}\) The Ward Committee’s official powers and responsibilities are: to give administrative approval to the plans & estimates up to Rs. 5 lakhs for civic works in the areas for which certain budget provisions are sanctioned by the municipal corporations, to consider proposals of expenditure on different Heads of Budget provisions relating to the said Wards, to dispose of expeditiously matters of citizens relating to: water supply, drainage, cleanliness and storm water drains and other basic amenities and local civic amenities, the renaming of roads and crossroads, and to meet officially at least once a month.
business. If they want to get their works through the committee, it is best to approve other’s works.

However, much intermediation is needed to make sure works get designed sanctioned and carried out. Figure 18 diagrams the intermediary functions of MCs related to getting works sanctioned and carried out. I will use a case shared with me by a MC to illustrate this process. The ground level column represents channels of information. Her political workers and many residents share with her the need for a formal drainage system. She inquires with the public works engineer, but is told it is not possible expand the drainage system without an NOC from the owner and that given the locational issues that money would have to come from the city level budget. She then does her own research by looking into similar localities that have better drainage, and she inquires into city-level funds availability. Since the cost of this project goes beyond what can be done at the Ward Committee level (i.e., exceeds 5 lakhs) and there is the issue of the NOC, she goes to the Assistant Municipal Commissioner to lobby him to forward her work request to the municipal level. It is decided to check that the NOC from the landowner was given and if it comes up to suggest that it must have fallen out of the file. The rationale was that since the landlord had not been heard from in many years, it is best to handle it this way than to file a formal request to this effect.

MC priorities and those of bureaucrats can differ, and heavy workloads or poor work ethics play a role. MCs often complained that if you do not “follow the file” along the chain it will likely not be acted on in a timely manner, if at all. This seemed to be more pervasive in MBMC, where the MCs reported that, “you have to sit on their (touts, babus) heads to get any work done.” As such, she continues to follow up by letter, phone, via party-workers, and in person. This eventually pays off and the proposal finally makes its way to the Standing Committee. Now she must continue to apply pressure for weeks to months. Endurance, information, and intermediation skills are key to getting works through the system.
Figure 18: Intermediation work: pushing sanctioned work through the system
The official responsibilities of MCs are: to be the main interface between the local government and the public. They are responsible for the quick redressal of citizen complaints and/or issues with municipal services, and for offering suggestions for proposals for: keeping and promoting area cleanliness, repairing of market yards (informal markets), for road repairs, for municipal building upkeep, for improvements of gardens, for composting, for road beautification, and for repairing of footpaths and pathways. They are also required to attend ward committee meetings and the meetings of the other municipal committees they are assigned to, and to spend their Councillor Development Fund of 20 lakhs\(^{47}\) in their electoral ward. A MC is a part-time position, the salary is 4,000 rupees/month (around 80 euros), and the official jurisdiction is low. However, the time-use survey shows that many work full-time. The reasons for this extra effort are (1) if they do not do it no one will and (2) the political capital they can build by undertaking such activities. Their efforts garner them political capital with voters who see them as caring, and political capital with their political party hierarchy who will be more inclined to put them up for re-election or field them for higher office. Several MCs said that in practice they are available “24 hours a day to their constituency,” and that late night phone calls by a frantic constituent are common.

MCs control a 20 lakhs/year development fund. These funds are to facilitate the devolution of Development money and allow elected representatives to distribute some Development directly to their constituencies. MCs speak of needing to spread the money evenly to get as much exposure as possible from their small fund. This need for exposure pushes MCs to opt for more visible works (such as pathways, community centres, statues) rather than less visible, while perhaps more necessary, needs like underground sewerage. One BJP MC in Dombivli, under the budget heading of ‘ward beautification,’ erected a statue of Ambedkar during election season in the slum in his ward.

Poorer residents and their “community leaders” lobby the most and the middle-class and elites the least. The poor come for “every little thing,” while the middle-class and elites usually only come to report encroachments and basic service grievances. Contractors and developers also maintain good connections so that their applications for building permits are sanctioned and properties are serviced. It is commonly expressed that a core group of politically and bureaucratically connected builders steer the direction of development. These clandestine, exchange-based connections are conflicts of interest when it comes to acting to promote the public good of the city or one’s ward. MCs are expected to push through contracts and turn a blind eye to sub-standard work and illegal constructions for favoured developers and contractors. In exchange MCs receive payments, payments which some reinvest in contractor/developer projects (eg. Nainan, 2006; van Dijk, 2006). Their investments also compel them to act in ways that facilitate capital accumulation within

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\(^{47}\) Lahk = 100,000 rupees
the informal second circuit. Most MCs in these cities belong to the contractor/developer lobby directly via family construction and real estate related ventures. The reach and capacity of this group needs to be addressed more in future policies and interventions aimed at promoting inclusive D/development given the extent that profit and rents from land development can come at the expense of poorer residents who are either priced out or forced out. Additionally, areas not targeted in these ventures suffer indirect neglected by resources being eaten up by projects with larger profit margins and rent-seeking opportunities (cf. Benjamin, 2004).

Informal institutions also influence the choosing and sanctioning of civic works. The most prevalent are influence fees (kick-backs) provided by contractors and developers and rents collected from those who want to access a service or resource they are legally or in practice excluded from. These sources of income are made possible and flow through a nexus of MCs, municipal officials, and municipal staff and subcontractors. It is an open secret that officials and staff are able to acquire influence fees. Anyone who ‘touches’48 a proposal that ends up being tendered to a private contractor becomes entitled to a kickback. Apparently fixed amounts are kicked-back to those involved, and it is widely assumed that all contractors participate in this system to remain eligible for government contracts. Influence fees can affect what work is done, because different works result in different kickbacks. Works that do not require private contractors may not be as desirable. Work with a short shelf-life, i.e., pathways, which can be repaired every three years and thus money made off of again, tends to be more popular than those that last longer. This institution also contributes to the use of substandard materials.

Influence fees offer MCs and municipal officials and staff reasons to spend more time on getting sanctions and licensing for larger scale-development projects, rather than projects that solicit less or no influence fees. Candid MCs rationalise this system by citing the lack of remuneration they receive, and by citing how influence money makes the process move. Some argue that this system is institutionalised to the point that if one opts not to participate they will be regarded as a fool, treated with suspicion, and they will find it very difficult to get any work done. The current rates of influence payments for a MC were reported to be five percent of all civic works and private building (formal and informal) carried out in his or her ward, with another 25 percent divided among others attached to the process.49 This implicates MCs in both the informal and more formalised second circuit of capital accumulation dependent on the built environment.

In general, bureaucrats are seen as being overly concerned about norms and rules and MCs are seen as being pushy and uninformed or dismissive about proper procedure.

48 Involved in the sanctioning process.
49 These figures come from what was expressed to me during informal discussions with MCs, developers, and contractors.
Sometimes they operate at cross-purposes. Before the 74th Amendment cities were officially ran by bureaucrats and some residual resentment exists about sharing official power with MCs. However, the nature of the influence payment system produces incentives for them to collaborate. For example, ward engineers approach MCs to suggest that they start pushing for proposals for road widening or footpath repair, because of the budget available for such projects, and thus kickbacks. Both sides earn from these channels of income and this creates common cause and cooperation between MCs, municipal officials and staff.

**Municipal Councillor’s as Street-Level Bureaucrats**

The previous discussion shows several mechanism’s obliging MCs to take on the street-level bureaucrat role: personalised execution of work and/or apathetic bureaucrats, clientelism, money, and status. To highlight this role I will discuss the part they play in implementing a community toilet block project.

A popular way of dealing with slum sanitation issues has been toilet blocks. The latest version of this scheme directs the municipality to partner up with NGOs for the purpose of creating community toilets. A CBO (community based organisation) is formed from the community and officially recognised by the municipality to manage the toilet block (i.e. fee collections, bill payment, and upkeep). This is supposed to result in communities feeling greater ownership of the toilet block, via rights to exclude outsiders and the duty to pay. NGOs were brought in to both organise and train CBOs and to oversee the construction of the blocks. The public works department previously carried out these activities. However, as previous toilet block schemes in slums became means for garnering influence fees and quickly fell in to disrepair, the World Bank and the Mumbai Metropolitan Development Authority made NGO participation mandatory in this latest scheme viewed blocks.

While MCs are not mentioned in the program, they play an active role in its implementation. MCs are centrally placed in the social-political networks of poor communities. These communities were unwilling to work with a NGO if their MC disapproved. NGOs quickly realised that if they wanted meet the basic requirements of their contracts with the municipalities, they must allow MCs to co-opt the project to a large extent. MCs were allowed to use it as a patronage generator via site and CBO selection, and to earn kickbacks from labour providers and contractors. In these communities, toilet blocks are associated more with MCs than they are with the municipality or NGOs. MCs made (or signed-off on) site and community selection, labour/contractor selection, and CBO designation. When NGOs leave toilet blocks only partially built, or when water and electricity issues come up, it is the MC rather than the NGO or public works department that is expected to help. It was not only

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50 Community toilet blocks are different from past public ones in two main ways. First, they are not open to everyone – only the community they have been built for. Secondly, participating community members pay a monthly fee around 50 rupees/household.
the power of MC in his or her electoral ward, but also the preferences of the public works officer (some of whom are responsible for the oversight of 200 plus toilet blocks) that push MCs into their Street-level bureaucrat role. City employees are more comfortable working with MCs, especially those they have close ties with via party, caste, or kin group and who participate in the same influence fee institution.

**MCs in Political Society and Gatekeepers to Development**

To both mitigate poorer voters’ exclusion from private and collective provision of basic services and infrastructure and to keep tabs on them, political parties setup service delivery organisations that run parallel to formal government institutions. Local political party offices, “try to fulfil what the state promised but did not deliver: infrastructural measures, such as garbage collection, water connection, public toilets […] they also initiate, youth activities, and cultural activities and festivals” (Eckert, 2002: 5-6). However, MCs and party offices have limited resources and can play favourites, so these services are unevenly provided. This level of contact and service delivery seems positive, but this embedding can also promote “perverse accountability,” (Stokes, 2005) a situation where parties and politicians can monitor members and clients’ loyalties and then reward or sanction accordingly. Too little space between the governed and those who govern is problematic, especially for the poor whose level of insecurity makes angering one’s patrons or brokers problematic. Those outside clientelist politics often judge it as being antithetical to ‘good’ governance because it is based on relations of domination perpetuated by entrenched inequalities. Slum residents offer more varied views of MCs. Some view them as exploitive and corrupt, while others speak of them as “caring and helpful” authority figures who fix drains and pathways, and who also mediate disputes and offer advice. Figure 19 depicts how the interrelationships and hierarchical structure of ward-level political society in the slum formations studied. The pyramid shape is on purpose as power flows upwards and resources pass downwards with each level taking a portion and with the portions being spread across more people. MCs normally are on the top patron at the electoral ward level in slums. In some cases the MC is also the de facto landlord or the de facto landlord is a friend or family member. They occupy structural holes between slum residents, local government, other service providers and d/Development projects. Their status and preferences impact the degree slums and other illegal constructions are tolerated and the coverage of informal service provision. Their status and preferences also impact the level and quality of Development funds and projects their area receives. A high-level officer at the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority said it succinctly, “the difference between slums of despair and slums of progress are the differences in interests and ‘muscle and money power’ between MCs.” Below the MC are his or her ‘fixers’ who represent the MC’s inner-circle. They get sent to handle important issues on behalf of the MC and can also act as brokers between the MC and inhabitants of the electoral ward who do not have direct ties. Next is the ‘entourage.’ Every local party office has a group of young men who call themselves party-workers, ‘consultants,’ or ‘social-workers,’ but who have not been officially hired by the party. They first have to demonstrate their ability to navigate micro-politics. The brokers are
mentors of sorts to these young men, and the entourage has loose ties with the MC. They help “solve” the everyday issues of slum residents and mobilise them when necessary for protests and campaign rallies as instructed. They also are responsible for collecting the various rents or fees for ‘services.’ At the bottom are voters participating as clients, customers, or wannabe clients or customers (if they have no direct ties to the MCs, Brokers, or entourage). Residents bring their problem or request to the person within this network they have the closest tie. In exchange for the client’s loyalty and/or a fee their issue is addressed if possible, and, or course, if the contact is inclined to follow through.

Figure 19: Slum Formation Political Society

Role in Informal Housing Market and Conflict Mediation

Most MCs operate in the informal housing market and provide counselling or mediation services to their poorer clients across a variety of needs. Figure 20 gives an overview of this process and highlights the structural holes MCs tend to occupy. The formal housing market is unable to provide adequate levels of affordable housing, so an informal system evolved to match supply with demand. Landlords (legal and de facto), MCs, various municipal offers and staff, and the police govern the informal housing market. Demand, patronage, and rent seeking forge the links between these groups. This system both complements the official system by providing shelter to those it prices out, and competes with it over space and the problems it poses for producing serviced land. Those looking for shelter, who cannot afford more formal
options, will look to a member of ward-level political society for information about available space and prices.\footnote{A few candid MCs shared the going rates MCs receive for informal settlements in their areas: 2000 rupees for every new illegal construction of hutments or add-ons, 5000 rupees per chawl room, and 20,000 rupees per flat in an illegal apartment building. The price to be paid to build in a slum is not standardised and likely varies depending on the strength of the tie between the builder and the Broker or MC.} While the state cannot officially condone encroachment and unauthorised development, its agents can facilitate it by turning a blind eye and keeping up plausible deniability of direct involvement. This does not happen automatically and requires mediation and rent extraction and distribution that the MC is central in arranging. The slum resident also requires electricity, water, and perhaps cable TV. These services on unregistered slums are provided via informal arrangements with service providers. Arrangements in terms of access and rates are often mediated by MCs if conflicts arise.

MCs report and were observed addressing issues for their constituents that run the gamut from basic services to sexual harassment to housing issues which Table 5 demonstrates.\footnote{See van Dijk (2007) for the results of a similar survey given to a Mumbai ward committee consisting of 15 MCs.} Most have an open door policy and a willingness to (at least) listen to any issue. During one MC interview, a woman came to seek his advice about what to do about her youngest daughter who had ran off to marry her boyfriend. When asked if this type of personal issue was something people often brought to him he responded, “day and night.” During another discussion with a different male MC, a lady ran in bloody having been beaten by her husband. She pleaded for protection and advice. It would be unusual for a woman in this situation to go alone to the police, or to decide on her own to go to a shelter. It terms of social and protective services for slum residents—women in particular—MCs also occupy structural holes.

The relation between MCs and their constituents is not only the formal one dealing with civic amenities. People go to them with all sorts of issues looking for assistance or advice. Often poorer constituents bend down to kiss the feet of a MC.
Figure 20: Acquiring Informal Housing in Slums
They often call them ‘father’ or ‘mother’ out of respect and to compel MCs to enter into patron-client relations. The intimacy level and frequency of interaction that MCs have with slum residents, in particular, highlights an important relational issue to inclusive D/development—while clientelist relationships provide the poor with some level of access to services and resources they do so on a foundation of inequality and dependence. D/development programs must deal with this, “Faustian Bargain…the trade-off between the freedom to act independently in the pursuit of improved livelihoods and the necessity of dependent security” (Wood, 2003: 455). The process of turning clients into citizens and patrons into representatives is complex. It becomes even more complex considering that neoliberal D/development policies do very little to reduce the poor’s dependency on political society. These policies presuppose people willing and able to act like ‘consumer citizens,’ which in this context would likely increase poorer residents’ dependency on political society in general, and on MCs in particular.

Table 5: Counselling and Mediation Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counselling Mediation Areas &amp; Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Harassment</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dowry</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandonment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goonda Harassment</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locality Improvements</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Services</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts between neighbours</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debt Disputes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 11, 7 MCs from KD and 4 from MB
The effect informal governance activities have on formal activities can only be supposed. Time constraints did not allow for collecting evidence of knock-off effects. However, it can be said that the majority of a MC’s interactions with the residents of his or her electoral ward are patron-client in practice. MC governance activities expand way beyond their official mandate and this expansion is supported by the actions of MCs, their constituents, and the processes and contradictions of D/development.

5.5 Discussion

Given the political geographies of MCs, one would expect them to be included officially in D/development discussions and practices. Unfortunately both higher-level government agencies, INGOs and NGOs targeting urban inequalities view MCs as competitors for clients or problems. When possible they endeavour to operate under their radar to avoid sabotage. This raises the issue of how to get actors to collaborate, or to at least not sabotage each other at the expense of Development better reaching the poor and vulnerable.

Focusing on MCs brings up critical information for urban D/development. The governance context in MB and KD is not very fertile ground for producing inclusive world-class cities. This highlights the need for those engaged in these causes to take the governance setting into consideration when deciding on interventions or targeting barriers to implementation. The relationship between MCs and their constituency are not very susceptible to formal institutional reforms rooted in liberalism or neoliberalism. MCs rarely take on the representative role as they rarely interact with citizens with rights-based demands. Some who share the vision of making a world-class city—both for development reasons and for capturing of higher rents—are shifting to alliances with the city’s ‘modernisers’ and developers. However, most MCs still spend most of their time attending to poorer residents in clientelist exchanges. This relationship strengthens the likelihood of poorer resident’s capital to bring about achieved functionings because MCs occupy key structural holes between those dependent upon political society and access to tolerance, services and Development available from the state and its partners. This relationship becomes even more important when you consider the visions held by upper-levels of government and their private sector partners, where poorer residents are mostly absent. If there were no MCs and political society for who would the livelihood issues of slum residents be of any priority? MCs are both agents for and against D/development. They emerge as obstructionists because many engage in corrupt activities that allow them to benefit personally from public office and pervasive inequalities. However, they also mediate

53Several NGOs and heads of centrally planned poverty alleviation schemes I spoke with mentioned that WCs see them as wanting to break-up their vote bank and inform citizens of their rights and thus they attempt to undermine the organisation’s or scheme’s reputation in the slum communities.
and intermediate access to services, occupany and safety. They emerge as central intervening actors whose actions and capacities affect the capacity and achieved functionings of resident’s capitals related to housing and locality development. They are Janus-face both from the point of view of slum residents, and from the point of view of those wanting to world-class these cities. They are agents of obstruction for those wanting to slum-free the city because of their role in slum creation and maintenance, and at times agents of change. Some see the “embourgeoisement” (Chatterjee, 2004) of the city as inevitable and position themselves strategically between developers and the land and building codes they covet to solicit higher rents. The capacity of poorer residents to contest D/development processes is linked to how MCs make use of the structural holes they occupy in relation to these processes.

MCs are firmly embedded in the street-level realities that maintain political society and they are intimately involved in the livelihood issues of slum residents. Those interested in designing and implementing agendas that can world-class the city, while reducing inequalities and not excluding poorer residents, should not take MCs for-granted. These agents of change and obstruction need to be brought on board to benefit from their local knowledge and to influence and to perchance minimise their regressive tendencies.