The notion of citizen participation in governance is not just a moral argument but constitutes a strong accountability mechanism for local government. This article analyzes the effectiveness or otherwise of the Indian federal system through its functioning in both rural and urban sites. It concludes that the system of decentralization in which citizen participation constitutes the main component functions relatively effectively in the rural sites, but that there is minimal accountability in the urban areas.

Based on a study conducted in Bangalore by the NGO Janaagraha (Centre for Citizenship and Democracy), of which the author is co-founder, the paper seeks to understand the reasons for the failure of the present system of urban decentralization. The author suggests that effectiveness in urban local government is dependent on the reformation of the functioning of the municipalities to allow the urban citizen to access a platform for full freedom of expression and to institute a mechanism to ensure the local government’s accountability. Providing the urban citizen with an opportunity for participation can be achieved through legal mechanisms at the state and municipality levels, without having to change the Constitution per se.


In this article the author explores the relationship between the institutions of governance, various sections of the population and their sectoral interests, and urban transport policies and planning. Although similar trends are visible in other cities and towns of India, the author’s focus is on the national capital of Delhi which has a complex system of governance involving many different ‘stakeholders’, each with its own internal conflicts. The discussion is concerned particularly with the urban policy outcomes for vulnerable social groups who have little access to information and research inputs.
The evidence presented in this paper shows that the procedures of governance in the city are conditioned by a variety of elected and nominated officials and bureaucratic institutions that contend for supremacy in decision-making. Since the first Master Plan of Delhi in 1962, there has been increasing focus by policy-makers on private motorized modes of transportation that exclude large sections of people who are dependent on personal, non-motorized, or public transport vehicles. In particular, walking and cycling, which are the predominant modes of transportation for the weaker sections, are almost completely ignored in transport planning.

The author concludes that there appears to be a deepening gap between the institutions of governance and the people, with policy planning catering primarily to the needs of a select few within the population who are both wealthy enough to meet the increased costs as well as powerful enough to influence the government.


This paper offers a political economy analysis of housing policies in Mumbai that maps the class locations of various actors in the city’s burgeoning real estate market, outlines the recent spatial history of the city, and situates the role of urban NGOs within this spatial mapping of class power and privilege. It also illustrates how various actors, both governmental and non-governmental, either promote or impede the massive capital flows that have characterized Mumbai’s financial and real estate markets.

Since liberalization, Mumbai has become an especially costly city, divided into different sectors on a class basis. This ‘sectorization’ is the result of the urban restructuring brought about by a huge rent gap. In such a high rent city, the large majority of salary-earners and the urban poor cannot afford to own an apartment or house, and are pushed outside of the high-end areas. The state government and real estate groups in collaboration with certain NGOs have developed ‘urban slums’ on the city’s outskirts, without proper resettlement and rehabilitation facilities. In this sense, the state government has become more revanchist in its approach to slums and the poor in Mumbai. The policy of forced demolitions and
evictions in fact amounts to a process of ‘class cleansing’, sacrificing the poor in order to make central Mumbai a recreational, commercial and residential zone.

In sum, analyzing the spatial changes in Mumbai through the lens of the rent gap, the article illustrates the emerging ‘class-based-sectorization’ in which the state government and NGOs collude to attract off-shore and domestic investment, while the provision of public service becomes its secondary concern.

See also Kundu & Sarangi (26.2)

22.3 Housing and Slums