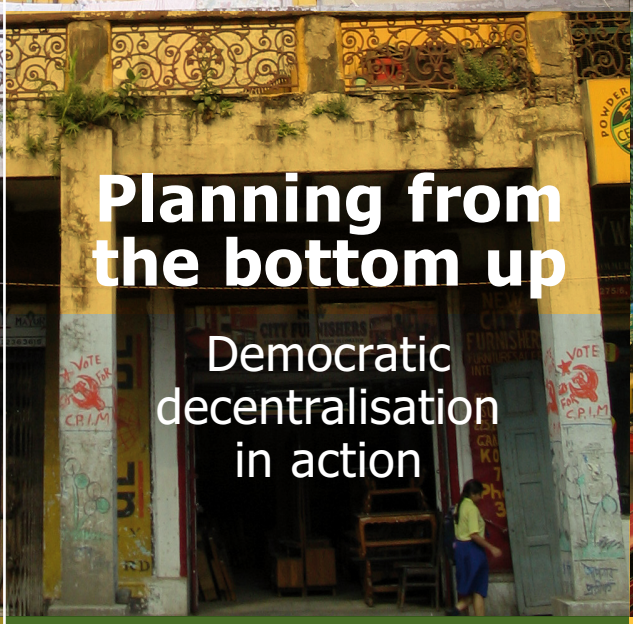
SUSTAINABLE URBAN AREAS 20



Planning from the bottom up

Democratic decentralisation in action

Anirban Pal

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Delft Centre for Sustainable Urban Areas

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Contents

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1 Introduction: purpose and design of the study

1.1 Introduction

In the planning literature there are quite a few examples of well-documented cases of 'plan-making' and formal decision making (Altshuler, 1965; Benveniste, 1989; Flyvbjerg, 1998, 1955) and substantive literature on implementation (Gualini, 2001; Mastop & Faludi, 1997; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Wildavsky, 1979). There are not many cases that analyse planning processes from the perspective of intergovernmental relations and 'political class'.[1] Therefore, political decision making often seems like a 'black box' to planners (Albrechts, 2003). Planning needs a fine-grained analysis of what actually takes place in formal decision making and implementation, in the transition from planning to formal adoption of the plan and in its actual implementation, as opposed to what politicians and public officials normatively would like to see happen (John Friedmann, 1987). Research by Flyvbjerg (1998) makes clear that critical analysis of cases is needed to discover the 'whys and wherefores' of how elected representatives or other actors influence the planning process and why and how executive officers depart from a formally approved plan.

The key issue that is addressed in this volume is the gap between the official rhetoric and the political reality of democratic decentralisation and bottom-up planning, using an in-depth study of the process of metropolitan planning in Kolkata (previously called Calcutta), India. I focus on the dynamic interactions between planners and the operation of the political process that shape this reality (Albrechts, 2003; Forester, 1999; Kitchen, 1997; Krumholz, 1982). Through the analysis of this case I illustrate that metropolitan planning processes have to focus on the design of institutional mechanisms through which to address common problems, values and images of what a society wants to tackle and achieve (Gualini, 2001; Healey, 1997). The case also demonstrates that these processes need the expertise of people skilled in communicative, people-centered practices (Forester, 1989; Habermas, 1984; Healey, 1997; Innes, 1996) and shrewd strategic actors who understand the power dynamics of the wider political context (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Forester, 1989; Huxley, 2000; Logan & Molotch, 1987; Yiftachel, 2000). In addition, it questions the assumption that merely holding elections for political actors responsible for public decision making at the local level can address issues of local accountability in the face of elitist and unaccountable technocratic planning (see, for example *The Economist*, 2008). The research suggests a greater role for non-partisan and locally based civil society organisations instead (Evans, 2002; Mitlin, 2004a) in order to deepen democratic principles within the emerging decentralised institutions of metropolitan governance.

1 Here, the political class denotes the group of politicians who come to occupy public office through an electoral process.

In the following section I discuss the weakness of Kolkata's non-state actors in the planning process compared to their counterparts in Mumbai – both cities of similar size within the same country. It was this difference between the two cities which first led me to the central research question that I address in this book.

Why do this research?

There is a growing awareness among development institutions and scholars that at the most basic level, there is a need to empower individuals and households through what Arjun Appadurai (2004) calls the 'capacity to aspire': conceived as a cultural capacity, in order to go beyond relationships of patronage between local elites and ordinary citizens. In a detailed ethnographic account of an alliance of housing activists based in Mumbai, working with the poor and building a global coalition to serve their vision, Appadurai (2001) sees a kind of grassroots globalisation that has replicated itself in more than a dozen countries in Africa and Asia (notably in India, South Africa, the Philippines and Thailand). He points out:

> *In this ongoing exercise, which is a textbook case of what 'empowerment' could really mean, important segments of Mumbai's slum dwellers are exercising collectively the sinews of the capacity to aspire, while testing their capacities to convince skeptics from the funding world, the banking world, the construction industry, and the municipality of Mumbai that they can deliver what they promise, while building their capacities to plan, coordinate, manage, and mobilise their energies in a difficult and large-scale technical endeavor. (Appadurai, 2004)*

It would be expected that in a country where such a successful case of empowerment evolved and then spread elsewhere that other cities in that country would have the same propensity for similar grassroots participation in decision making. It is reasonable then to ask, if such a grassroots mobilisation of the 'poor' in Mumbai can be so successful in 'empowering' marginalised communities to participate in metropolitan planning, why has it failed to make a similar impact in Kolkata? Indeed, there have been studies on grassroots movements for urban development that point to the failures of civic activism in the area of urban planning in Kolkata (KUSP Design Team, 2003; Mageli, 2004; Sarkar, 2006). This is despite the fact that the state of West Bengal, of which Kolkata is the capital, has had an elected communist government advocating democratic decentralisation and bottom-up planning in the state for the last twenty-eight years. The issue therefore has added significance if we note the success of the Mumbai Alliance model being replicated not just in other cities in India, but in cities in other countries as well, whereas it is failing in another metropolis of similar size in the same country. Therefore there

is a need for comparative research[2] in order to better understand the differences in contexts that might explain the difference in grassroots empowerment in cities in India.

There are a number of possible explanations for the difference in civic activism between Kolkata and some of the other cities in India. In recent years, there has been a growing interest among scholars in various disciplines to include both political and planning culture (Cullingworth, 1993; Friedmann, 2005b; Bishwapriya Sanyal, 2005a) and culture in general (Appadurai, 2004; Rao & Walton, 2004; Sen, 2004) in the debate over development and public action. It is in culture that ideas of the future, as much as those about the past, are embedded and nurtured (Appadurai, 2004). Thus, it is in culture that the future-oriented logic of planning and development finds a natural ally. And since culture is dynamic in nature, it provides decision makers a point from which to intervene in the process of planning for the future. Each place has its own political and planning culture, uniquely defined by its local values and historic legacy and continually altered by the process of social learning. Can culture then explain the difference in civic activism between Kolkata and Mumbai?

I argue here that, until not very long ago, Kolkata had an active urban social movement (in the form of NGO activism and voluntarism) that was no less significant than Mumbai's. Eldrid Mageli (2001, pp. 26-48) describes the long and rich tradition of associational life from colonial times in Kolkata that has contributed to the use of the term 'Bengali Renaissance' to characterise this epoch. She also describes the disillusionment with the government's efforts to substantially improve living conditions for the poor in the late 1960s and the 1970s in West Bengal. Economic crises and political instability, droughts, floods and price rises, and the influx of refugees after the liberation of Bangladesh contributed to the emergence of a new generation of social and political activists. In Kolkata, numerous civil rights groups were formed to protest the imposition of a state of national emergency in 1975. Soon after, the participation of the people and the empowerment of the poor became part of the new rhetoric among NGO activists. In particular, an alliance similar to the one in Mumbai evolved under the initiative of a Kolkata-based NGO called *Unnayan* (a Bengali word meaning 'development'). It consisted of a community based organisation (CBO) called *Chhinnamool Sramajibi Adhikari Samity* and the National Campaign for Housing Rights, which engaged in advocacy and lobbying within the government's policy-making process. The launch of the National

2 My research was a study of a single case, with only limited comparison to metropolitan planning in other cities. Nevertheless, the selection of my case (Kolkata) was based on the above idea of comparing Kolkata with the political and planning culture in cities like Mumbai, whose civic activism and political and planning culture have been extensively researched already.

Campaign for Housing Rights at the national level led *Unnayan* to be regarded as a significant player within the urban social movement in India. Eventually, in the late 1990s, the NGO and the campaign lost steam and disintegrated.

If we delve deeper into why *Unnayan* failed to sustain itself in its effort to play a significant role in metropolitan planning, we find hints of political fragmentation (many of *Unnayan's* workers were members of the radical Naxalite movement of the 1960s and 70s and the general perception among the field workers of *Unnayan* was that the organisation was being driven by foreign-educated, upper-middle-class elites) which resulted in a perceived class fragmentation and ultimately in the demise of the organisation (see Mageli, 2001, p. 221).

Non-partisan, non-governmental organisations in Kolkata are not just fixtures from the past. In areas other than urban development planning, Kolkata still has successful examples of civic activism. A case in point is public health, in particular, HIV/AIDS prevention among the prostitutes of Kolkata's *Sonagachhi* red-light district. Instead of using health extension workers to spread AIDS awareness and increase condom use, a team of doctors trained a small group of twelve sex workers as peer educators to pass on information to their coworkers. This process of mobilising the sex workers for HIV-AIDS intervention led, over a period of two or three years, to a metamorphosis in the sex worker's aspirations. They founded a union called the *Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee* (DMSC – literally meaning Powerful Women Co-ordination Committee) to fight for the legalisation of prostitution, reduction in police harassment, and other rights (Rao & Walton, 2004). The mobilisation of this marginalised and stigmatised population has been widely acclaimed, not just nationally but internationally. Now, sex workers from all over Asia visit Kolkata to learn from the DMSC about how to organise themselves to demand legal rights and protections, how to practice safe sex by making condom use mandatory and how to keep away those who try to take away their hard-earned incomes (Bhaumik, 2005).

My hypothesis is that DMSC's success with HIV/AIDS prevention among sex workers in Kolkata is attributable to the political space that these marginalised women inhabited, where none of the political parties saw the potential to mobilise popular support.[3] The social stigma attached to prostitutes in a conservative society such as Kolkata prevented political parties from co-opting HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness activities among prostitutes. This has allowed NGOs and civic activists to get involved and work with the sex workers in a way that was hugely successful.

3 For a more elaborate comparison between DMSC and *Unnayan/Chhinnamool*, see Pal, 2008.

Hypothesis

Based on the experiences from *Unnayan* and DMSC, I derived the following hypothesis: the extreme politicisation of decision making along party lines is obstructing the political space needed for non-partisan, non-governmental civic associations to effectively participate in the planning process in Kolkata. As a consequence, the excessive partisan politicisation of local decision making is detrimental to the cause of decentralised metropolitan planning.

There has been insufficient evaluation of the literature and challenging of the established notion of developing decentralised planning and decision making by promoting the idea of elected local governments. My hypothesis therefore questions the near-universal application of the arguments put forward by international agencies such as the World Bank and UN-Habitat that good governance can be had by promoting the holding of local elections and by giving more decision-making power to these elected local bodies (Linn & World Bank, 1983; UNCHS (Habitat), 1996).

In the subsequent chapters I will narrate a story of how public decisions are taken in metropolitan Kolkata and how citizens exercise their agency within the socio-political-historic structure of the city. From this story, which is specific to Kolkata, I will try to discern some generalisable lessons in terms of public policy and institutional infrastructure that will be applicable in other cities in India and beyond.

The selection of the case was also based on observing phenomena that are less frequently studied. The scale (metropolitan versus municipal level in most cases), the subject matter (the planning process, not a project or programme), a different political tradition (post-colonial single-party hegemony in an electoral democracy in comparison to European and North American liberal democratic traditions or the autocratic regimes in China) all add to the specificity and uniqueness of this case as compared to others (Doig, 1995; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Friend & Jessop, 1969; Kitchen, 1997; Meyerson & Banfield, 1955; Pinto, 2000; Savitch & Vogel, 1996; Wu, 2002).

1.2 A review of the literature

1.2.1 The origins of the 'bottom-up approach' in the planning literature

The relationship between planners (seen as experts), the state (constituted of elected representatives of the people) and citizens themselves is a complex one, and one that has been constantly shifting. The theoretical foundation to develop an understanding of this relationship was laid out by John Friedmann in his book, *Planning in the Public Domain* (1987). Much of this section summarises his thoughts on the subject.

In the introduction to this book, Friedmann writes about the dual legacies of 'reason' and 'democracy' that were bequeathed to us in the eighteenth century. 'Reason' meant trust in the capacity of the mind to grasp the orderly processes of nature and society, and to render them intelligible to us. 'Democracy' meant trust in the capacity of ordinary people for self-governance. 'Reason' had to do with 'facts' or bits of truth that only scientific reason can discover, and the discovery of 'laws'. And 'democracy' was concerned with 'values', conceived as relatively stable preferences drawn from human nature, social tradition, and self-interest. Among the early references to the idea of 'planning and decision-making from the bottom up', Friedmann cites Thomas Jefferson, describing his vision for a self-governing republic whose basic units would be rural neighbourhoods, or wards, in a letter written to a friend in 1816 (letter to Joseph C. Cabell, in Abbott, 1947). Only questions that could not be resolved at this lowest level of governance would filter upward, to be resolved at successively higher levels. His vision therefore presupposed a capacity for reasoning in all of us – a confluence of 'reason' and 'democracy'. The only surviving model of such an 'elementary republic of wards' is the Swiss tradition of local self-governance (Kälin, 1999; Linder, 1994) that has managed to forestall an excessive concentration of power in the hands of a remote and abstract state (Friedmann, 1987).

By the early nineteenth century, the idea of 'reason' and rationality had begun to undergo a subtle transformation. By the early twentieth century, 'reason' in its scientific and technical form had come to be ranked highest in the hierarchy of authority. The conviction that public affairs should be informed by planning – done by specialists who were experts in mediating scientific knowledge and action – was grounded in the popular belief that ordinary minds, untrained in the subtleties of the scientific method, were no match for the rationality of those who knew how to make judgments about efficiency in relating means to ends. Planning therefore came to be seen as a scientific endeavour where planners in their collective wisdom produced a comprehensive plan and budget, laid out as a 'rational' design, and safeguarded from the self-serving meddling of politicians (Tugwell, 1939).

Beginning in the 1940s social planning experienced a remarkable period of efflorescence. Once again, as it had during World War I, global conflict required the mobilisation and management of the war economy by the state's planning apparatus. When the return to a peacetime economy posed equally challenging tasks, the state's planners were again the decisive agents. The state's new role as a major provider of social services had to be planned. And in rapidly decolonising countries, development planning became a popular instrument for accelerating economic growth and rationalising the use of foreign assistance.

In the postwar United States, planners were sustained by a widely held belief that science and the new technologies of decision making, such as game

theory and cybernetics, could help provide what the planners promised: rational counsel for charting courses of action into the future. As members of the state apparatus, planners were inclined to see the managerial state as a guardian of the public interest and an instrument for social progress. But the dream of endless progress did not last. Within two decades after World War II, the US was bogged down in its war in Vietnam. Poverty was rediscovered; Blacks became restless; and the inner cities burned. Militant students read Marx and Marcuse and organised themselves for political struggle. During these years, planners began to listen more attentively to the voice of the people, and 'public participation' was given an official blessing in urban renewal and other public planning programmes and in legislation such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

As far as the theory of planning is concerned, the culminating work of this period was Amitai Etzioni's *The Active Society* (1968). Etzioni proposed a model of societal guidance in which the people make demands, the state responds by providing answers, the people (now pacified) accept the state's authority, and the state builds a consensual basis for its policies. In making the state the principal player in his scenario, Etzioni was no exception among planning theorists. From Auguste Comte to Rexford Tugwell, planners had always sought support from ruling elites.

But in the literature on the relation of knowledge to action, there was still another tradition that specifically addressed the needs of those who lacked substantial power. Its chief proponents, drawing on certain strategic aspects of three political movements – utopianism, social anarchism, and historical materialism – saw power in collective action, which Friedmann calls 'social mobilisation'. These movements arose in response to the dark underside, the injustices and exploitation, of industrial capitalism. Unlike social guidance theorists who codified the world of power holders, advocates of social mobilisation sought a radical transformation of society. A sub-group within this group, composed chiefly of historical materialists (such as Marx, Lenin, and Mao), looked to a revolutionary practice aimed at transforming the structure of the existing power system, either through a direct assault on its strongholds or through a series of radical reforms. Their political strength was based on social movements, particularly of labour.

Friedmann finds planning for societal guidance to be incapable of coping with the crisis of industrial capitalism because planning is invariably integrated into the state apparatus (Friedmann, 1987, p. 10). As a result, citizens around the world have begun to search for an 'alternative' development that is less tied to the dynamics of industrial capitalism. Emancipatory movements have emerged to push for a more positive vision of the future than the present system-in-dominance holds out to us: a world working to eliminate the threat of a nuclear winter and in serious pursuit of a balanced natural environment, gender equality, the abolition of racism, and the eradication of

poverty. Though diversely inspired, these social movements appear to coalesce around two central strategies: collective self-reliance in development and the recovery of political community.

Thus there is a renewed urgency in the question posed by the philosophers of the Enlightenment: Are 'reason' and 'democracy' compatible? Can ordinary people be trusted to use their heads in the conduct of their own affairs, or is superior wisdom needed? Can people free themselves from tutelage by state and corporate power and become autonomous again as active citizens in households, local communities, and regions? Industrial capitalism has answered these questions in the negative. It has placed its trust in men of wealth and power, the formally educated, and the experts. This position was vigorously defended by centralists, who remained profoundly suspicious of the 'masses' (Crozier *et al*., 1975; Huntington, 1981). The contemporary literature on planning theory, however, has come to recognise almost universally that the scientific mind – or the planner-as-expert, applied to practical affairs, cannot be trusted to itself. 'By serving corporate capital, it is caught up in the vortex of unlimited economic expansion. By serving the state, it works for the economy of destruction. Only by serving people directly, when people are organised to act collectively on their own behalf, will it contribute toward the project of an alternative development' (Friedmann, 1987, p. 11).

1.2.2 Models for institutions that support people-centred planning

Assuming Friedmann's view of people-centered planning to be an established position, the question that arises is: what kinds of institutions are needed to support planning that serves the people directly instead of serving corporate capital and the state? Susan and Norman Fainstein (1996) proposed a planning typology (Table 1.1) that provides a handy, practical tool for the empirical analysis of actual planning-governance case studies. Planning is political, and according to the Fainsteins, the types of planning practice (traditional, democratic, equity, and incremental) are either derived from a political theory or model (technocratic, democratic, socialist, and liberal, respectively) or function within specific types of governance coalitions or regimes with those characteristics (Irazábal, 2005). Evidently, these are ideal types and any real planning case may present a dynamic combination of these types. Using this language of the four typologies, the traditional planning model is giving way to one of the other three models of planning, at least in terms of the official rhetoric.

In India, as in many other developing countries (see Kohl, 2003; see Manor, 1995; Souza, 2001), the democratic model of planning has gained significant currency. The state of West Bengal was, in fact, the pioneer of the democratic decentralisation of urban planning within India. As discussed in Chapter 3,

Table 1.1 Types of planning

Type	Traditional	Democratic	Equity/Advocacy	Incremental
Political Theory	Technocratic	Democratic	Socialist	Liberal
Who Plans?	'Expert' planners.	'The public'. In practice those who can advance their interests.	Planners and community advancing the interests of the poor, racial or ethnic minorities.	No planning. Policy makers weighing marginal advantages of a limited number of alternatives for the short run.
Type of process	Top-down.	Participatory; allowing 'all' voices to be heard.	Bottom-up or representative. Participation (of excluded groups) is an ideal but not a necessary condition.	Step-by-step, working out compromises among a multitude of interests. Atomised decision making.
Objectives	Rational, scientific planning.	Process (who governs?) more important than results. Acting in the public interest: rule of the majority.	Results (who gets what?) more important than process. Increasing equity, examining distribution of costs and benefits.	Small or incremental changes from existing policies.
Conflicts	Planners are not free from class or special interest biases, so they end up serving particular social interests, generally fitting the predispositions of the upper classes.	Popular will may conflict with the interest of deprived groups. Dilemma: is there a genuine democracy without the representation of interests of typically excluded groups?	Equity planning is not always democratic, since it will favour redistributional goals even in the absence of a supportive public.	Ends and means are not formulated, so decision makers may not work out means to achieve socially desirable goals. Strategies to cope, but not to solve problems.

Source: Fainstein, S. & N. Fainstein, 1996, as elaborated by Irazábal, 2005, p. 60

Kolkata's politicians and a few of the city's planners take pride in the fact that it has led almost a national movement towards the political emancipation of elected local representatives with respect to the bureaucrats and technocrats. They see this as a sign of progress towards greater democratisation and local accountability in planning. Their glorification of the process of democratisation of local decision making is however undermined by scholars who point to the limitations of elections as a means of ensuring social justice. As Leonie Sandercock points out, democratic planning's legal framework has been embedded in a particular conception of democracy as majority rule, and a corresponding belief that the 'right to difference' disappears once the majority has spoken (Sandercock, 2000).

There is yet another planning issue within the democratic planning model – that is to identify the right geographical/administrative scale at which to intervene in the face of a planning problem. If a household or a neighbourhood needs additional drinking water, the solution might be to dig a tube-well. If a town needs additional water, an expansion of the local water-treatment plant might meet the requirements. If a whole region has a water shortfall, a system of dams to hold water and a network of artificial canals to carry the

water might be a solution. Therefore, in spatial and temporal senses, there is no single correct level on which an administrative structure had best be situated (Berg *et al.*, 1993). So planning intervention in the public domain needs to address each problem at an appropriate scale. Also, each level of planning intervention affects planning at the next higher level. For example, each additional tube-well that the neighbourhood installs will cause additional pressure on the ground water reserve in the locality far beyond the boundaries of the neighbourhood. So the municipality might have to take steps to augment the ground-water reserve and limit its depletion through regulations, projects or programmes.

The example above is an idealised version of a 'bottom-up planning' process in which plans at one level are consolidated in the plan-making process for the next higher level. The consolidation of plans takes place from an individual household level, to a neighbourhood, municipal, metropolitan, state, national and even to an international level. Therefore each successive higher level is thought to intervene in a way that supports the actions taken by the lower levels of administration. In India, the Constitution and the legal framework surrounding it have been designed to support such a process of 'planning from below' (Bandyopadhyay, 2000).

There are two underlying assumptions for a bottom-up process of planning and decision making to effectively allow the consolidation of plans from lower to higher levels. One is that the power is evenly distributed in space (such that there is no scope for phenomena such as NIMBY, or social and environmental injustice) and second, it is evenly distributed across different levels of government. In reality, and as I describe in Chapter 4, neither of these assumptions hold ground. Therefore a bottom-up approach to planning often fails in identifying the appropriate administrative level at which planners should intervene for particular problems. This was realised in the 1990s, which made the planning discourse move away from using the term 'bottom-up' to describe the strategies by which various local level voices enter into the public planning process. The phrase that has gained currency lately is 'participatory planning'.

This phrase has come to mean, among other things, a process by which a community undertakes to reach a given socio-economic goal by consciously diagnosing its problems and charting a course of action to resolve those problems. The process includes limited mediation by the next higher level of community aggregation. Experts are needed in this process, but only as facilitators (Jain & Polman, 2003).

The expansion of participatory decision making venues may grant citizens greater authority, but these institutions could also undermine the ability of municipal councils to curb the prerogatives of mayors (see Wampler, 2004, for studies in Brazilian cities). Is accountability enhanced if citizens must still depend on mayoral administrations? The focus of the accountability debates

has been on how one agent (the voters, the courts) can control another agent (elected officials, the executive branch). One weakness of such a focus is that the conceptual variants – horizontal, vertical, and societal – tend to run on parallel tracks, unable to show how citizens, civil society organisations (CSOs), politicians, and institutions may place interlocking checks on the ambitions of other actors (Wampler, 2004, p. 75). Participatory institutions, by contrast, tap into all three dimensions of the debates. Participatory institutions have the potential to act as a check on the prerogatives and actions of mayoral administrations (horizontal), to allow citizens to vote for representatives and specific policies (vertical), and to rely on the mobilisation of citizens into the political process as a means to legitimate the new policymaking process (societal).

Vertical accountability, generally framed as the control of public officials by citizens, primarily via elections, has received significant attention as scholars have analysed how citizens can use elections to exercise control over public officials (Przeworski *et al*., 1999). Horizontal accountability, the distribution of authority among different departments or branches of government, has also received attention as scholars have sought to evaluate the consequences of institutional arrangements that were designed to strengthen democratic practices and rights (O'Donnell, 1998). Societal accountability, the pressures placed on state agencies by civil society organisations to encourage elected officials and bureaucrats to abide by the rule of law, has emerged as a counterbalance to the other two approaches; it can directly link ongoing political activity in civil society to formal political institutions (Smulovitz & Peruzzotti, 2000).

Among the various means to achieve a participatory approach in public decision making, the one that has the greatest visibility – at least in India (see Dreze, 2000), but also in many other countries (Shah & Thompson, 2004; Suwandi, 2001) – is through democratic decentralisation. This has come to be generally associated with holding elections at the local level. But the relationship between democratic decentralisation and enhanced participation in planning in the public domain has not been supported by empirical research. There is an inherent complexity in the relationship between decision making by existing state agencies, including elected representatives and government bodies, and decision making that emerges from participatory planning and governance. Many elected politicians oppose most forms of participatory governance because they see themselves as the legitimate decision takers, elected by citizens through a democratic process, and believe such participatory processes take decisions and control away from them (Cabannes, 2004; Etemadi, 2004; Mitlin, 2004b).

Therefore, some scholars have argued that participatory planning (just like participatory governance) is a 'necessary complement to representative democracy' (Mitlin, 2004b). Representative democracy often fails to represent

the interests of less powerful groups, especially in situations of resource scarcity, where elections become a way of allocating limited state benefits rather than making political choices. In North America, Europe and Australia there is already recognition of the need to infuse representative democracy with participatory democracy and also to extend participatory democracy (e.g. by funding non-statutory groups, sending delegations to neighbourhood/community groups, referendums, citizen ballots, etc.). This need is yet to be recognised in the so-called 'developing' countries.

This research is concerned with the communicative processes of policy and decision making. I attempt to describe what goes on in the Kolkata planning office by using the Habermasian concept of communicative planning (Habermas, 1984). I am most interested in what Jean Hillier calls the 'who, how and why issues of policy decisions'. Who really takes the decisions? How are they arrived at and why are such processes used? What power relationships between the various participants may be revealed? (Hillier, 2002, p. 3)

I ashamedly admit to having been inspired by the work of John Forester, Jean Hillier, Patsy Healey, and Judith Innes in particular. I agree with Forester (1999, p. 3) on the importance of planners dealing with 'far more than "the facts" at hand'. If planning is to be taken seriously in the future, planners must adjust their 'toolkits' or mindsets to the changing needs and challenges of democratic society (Albrecht & Denayer, 2001, p. 371). With an increasing number of cities in the world moving towards participatory forms of democracy from merely representative democracy the challenge for the planners is even greater. As Young (2000, p. 4) points out, however, 'we have arrived at a paradoxical historical moment when nearly everyone favors democracy, but apparently few believe that democratic governance can *do* anything. Democratic processes seem to paralyze policy-making' [emphasis in original].

In such circumstances, it is not surprising that planners will resist working with, and not excluding, actors that hitherto didn't have much say in planning. 'Working with others that we disagree with, that we do not understand, that we do not have much respect for, or that we might even dislike is just plain hard…We think we know what should be done, and we do not want to listen to other people's views' (Briand, 1999, p. 8). Alternatively, as Hillier (2002, p. 5) notes, 'some planners may be happy to talk and spin out information-seeking so that they seem to be doing something without actually risking anything'. In most cases the performance measurement of planners depends on minimising mistakes by avoiding taking responsibility.

Despite the emphasis on the role of planners in the planning process, in recent times there has been an increasing realisation that there are multiple actors involved. This research uses the urban governance framework (Pierre, 2005, p. 16) to disentangle the complex web of actors in the planning process of a large metropolis in the context of limited resources. This framework allows us to observe all actors (state and non-state) in the management of

Table 1.2 National infrastructures of local government and politics: the three main systems in the West

	Northern Europe	Southern Europe	(Anglo-)American
Administration	Local	Supralocal	Local
Governmental organisation, finance	Standardised but decentralised	Centralised (prefectoral system)	Decentralised, unstandardised
Legal supply	Extensive local authorities	Administrative regulation	Limited, functional authority
Politics	Supralocal	Local	Local
Supralocal representation of municipal interests	Weak	Strong	Moderate
Political parties, organised interests	Strong	Moderate	Weak

Source: Sellers, 2002a, p. 17

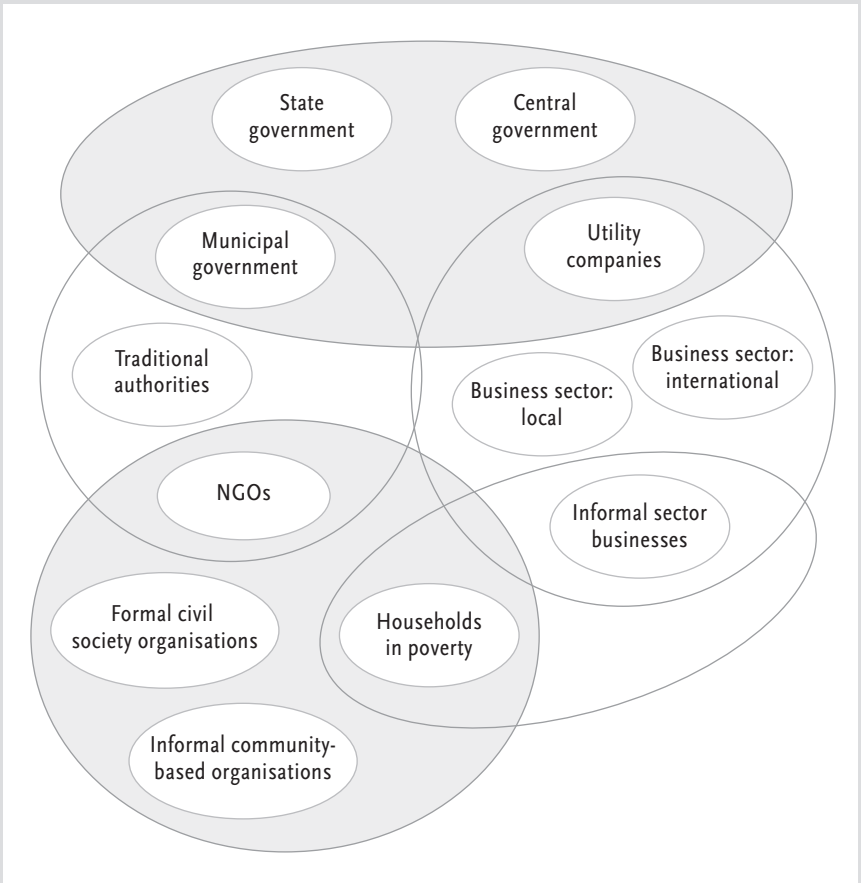
urban affairs holistically and not in isolation from each other. (For a more detailed literature review on the actors and processes through which urban regions are governed, see Sellers, 2002a, p. 6). There have been studies that have tried to compare nations or global regions in terms of governmental structures and use them to explain how local government exercises power over its locality. 'Governmental and political influences encompass a range of policies and institutions usually imbedded at higher levels of government. Alongside familiar classifications of territorial structures like federalism and unitary government at higher levels of states, more recently established typologies of local government and politics furnish part of the basis for understanding how these influences vary. A full analysis requires attention to the state-society relations of urban regions and to lateral relations among municipalities' (Sellers, 2002a, p. 16) (see Table 1.2).

In the urban governance literature there are scholars who have come up with models to describe the relationships between various actors who actively take part in or influence the urban planning and decision-making process (See Fig. 1.1 for a categorisation of these actors within the State-Market-Civil Society framework). In addition to these actors, there are external 'agents of change' (such as international bilateral and multilateral aid agencies) that can sometimes play a crucial role in changing the balance of power within local decision-making structures. Although they function in a hierarchical top-down fashion, when they choose to work directly with grassroots groups or promote these groups in the formal structures of local governance, they initiate positive change towards a bottom-up approach to public decision making. In the case of Kolkata, as we will see in subsequent chapters, the new actor was DFID, which tried to change the existing structure of metropolitan decision making. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

1.2.3 Decentralisation, participation and democracy

Decentralisation is a word used by many in many different ways. Businesses and big corporations talk about decentralisation, as do governments. Even within governments, some use it to mean fiscal decentralisation (Garman *et*

Figure 1.1 Actors and institutions of Urban Governance



Source: Devas, 2004

al., 2001; Rodden & Wibbels, 2002) and others use it to describe new institutions of local administration. Here I use the term to describe decentralised decision making. In the US, state decentralisation of higher education, health services, etc. emerged as a significant governance trend of the 1980s to 1990s. Yet little is known about how or why decentralisation first became an issue to which state governments paid serious attention. One study (McLendon, 2003) employs multiple theories to analyse the agenda-setting stage of policy formation in three states in the United States that enacted decentralisation legislation. Rodden's (Rodden & Wibbels, 2002) research analyses the political and fiscal structures that are likely to account for the highly divergent economic experiences of federal systems around the world. To test these propositions, the authors use an original data set to conduct analyses of budget balance and inflation in fifteen federations around the world, from 1978 through 1996. The empirical research suggests that the level of fiscal decentralisation, the nature of intergovernmental finance, and vertical partisan relations all influence macroeconomic outcomes. The findings have broad implications for

the widespread move toward greater decentralisation and for the theoretical literature on federalism and macroeconomics.

Why does decentralisation attract so much coverage in both the academic and the non-academic literature? Many donors have great confidence in the potential for good governance that decentralisation offers. Also the UN (UN-Habitat, 2004) and the World Bank (Yusuf & World Bank, 1999) have advocated for greater decentralisation. The World Bank has recognised the need to engage in essential institution building at both the supra- and sub-national (particularly local) levels in order to capture the benefits of growth in the 21st century (Yusuf & World Bank, 1999). It has actively advocated decentralising government so that more decisions are made at sub-national levels, 'closer to the voters'. Such localisation, according to the Bank, 'nourishes responsive and efficient governance' (World Bank, 2000). Great publicity about the economic benefits of decentralisation comes from China. China's remarkable economic success rests on a foundation of political reform providing a considerable degree of credible commitment to markets. This reform reflects a special type of institutionalised decentralisation that some have called 'federalism, Chinese style'. This form of decentralisation has three consequences. First, it fosters competition, not only in product markets, but also among local governments for labour and foreign capital. This competition, in turn, encourages local government learning and experimentation with new forms of enterprises, regulation, and economic relationships. Second, it provides incentives for local governments to promote local economic prosperity. Finally, it provides a significant amount of protection from political intrusion by the central government to local governments and their enterprises (Montinola *et al*., 1995).

There is a growing realisation of the onerous economic and political costs of centralisation. Britain is one of the most centralised governments in the Western world. Local governments in Britain now raise – through property taxes, one of the most difficult taxes to assess and collect – only one-quarter of what they spend and only five per cent of total government revenue, an unusually low level for a large wealthy democracy.[4] Central government controls how much local governments tax and what they spend money on. As a result, voters pay them little attention: turnout in English local elections has slumped to around 35 per cent. In addition, monitoring local governments currently costs the government departments in London £2.5 billion ($4.4 billion) a year (*The Economist*, 2006).

Recent political and academic discourse about devolution has tended to stress the economic advantages of the transfer of power from national to sub-national institutions. This 'economic dividend' arises through devolved

4 In the United States, local government tax revenues as a percentage of total government tax revenues is 15%; in France, it is 11 per cent and in Germany 7 per cent (OECD as cited in The Economist, February 25, 2006, p. 60).

administrations' abilities to tailor policies to local needs, generate innovation in service provision through inter-territorial competition, allow cost-sharing with local community in-service delivery and stimulate participation and accountability by reducing the distance between those in power and their electorates. Some have argued however (Rodriguez-Pose & Gill, 2005) that there are related caveats to all this. First, there are many forces that accompany devolution and work in an opposite direction. Devolved governmental systems may carry negative implications in terms of national economic efficiency and equity as well as through the imposition of significant institutional burdens. Second, the economic gains, as well as the downsides, that devolution may engender are contingent, to some extent, upon which governmental tier is dominating, organising, propagating and driving the devolutionary effort. Also, decentralisation can extend the state's control over the people just as it can aid the people's control over the state and its activities. Therefore, decentralisation is very much a 'double-edged sword' (Webster, 1992, p. 130).

It is sometimes not exactly decentralisation that is problematic, but the way decentralisation gets adopted that becomes a problem. For example the involvement of political parties in local elections can be problematic (Sabatini, 2003). But overall, by bringing government closer to the people, decentralisation has widened opportunities for deliberation and participation and has given citizens a more tangible and 'close to home' sense of their rights and responsibilities in the political process. Real local elections for officials with real authority also mean more accountability and better representation, at least in the near term. Groups and demands that were once excluded from consideration by highly centralised and self-absorbed national parties can now find a voice through smaller, local parties. The traditional political parties that had existed before decentralisation have struggled to adapt to the unexpected challenges posed by the direct election of local officials and loss of control over patronage. The irony has been that many of the parties that pushed for decentralisation are simply not well-equipped organisationally to deal with its political consequences (Sabatini, 2003).

A recent study by Merilee Grindle on the effects of decentralisation in Mexico since the 1980s looked at a stratified random sample of 30 medium-sized municipalities – five from each of the six regions in Mexico. The research noted that the effects of the policy of decentralisation on local government performance varied from municipality to municipality. She concludes that governmental performance is the consequence of a combination of different factors, *inter alia*, new opportunities and resources that are created in the wake of decentralisation, the impact of leadership motivation and choices at the local level, the influence of civic history, and the effect of institutions that constrain and facilitate innovation (Grindle, 2007). Based on Grindle's research, one can conclude that overall, the impact of decentralisation was tangible in the research communities and, although its impact was not always positive, it

held out some promise for better governance in the future.

I use the word 'decentralisation' to stand for a policy of allowing decisions to be made from the bottom up by consolidation of plans from the lowest level. By definition, then, in a decentralised government, no one level in the hierarchy can claim to be the most appropriate level at which all public decisions should be made. Every decision made at any level in such a decentralised process, therefore, is the consolidation of decisions by its constituent units at the previous level.

There are a number of planning scholars whose works have tested the boundaries of planning with politics (Flyvbjerg, Forester, Hall, Hillier, Healey, and Innes among others). The effect of power in the process of 'using technical knowledge in public decision making' (Friedmann's definition of planning) has been studied extensively already. This research focuses on one aspect of power – how power held by political parties affects decision making and possible ways to address the resulting lack of accountability.

1.3 Research question

Based on the literature on planning theory, democratic decentralisation is supposed to result in an inclusive process of participatory planning from the bottom up. That would mean that planning in Kolkata would be more participatory and inclusive than in other cities in India, where democratic local elections were introduced much later. But, based on my observations described earlier in this chapter, this is not the case. So the theoretical question that arises from the conflict between what is expected and what is actually happening is: *What causes a difference in levels of citizen participation in public decision making at the local level?*

More specifically, I ask: *How do elected officials at different governmental levels, professional planners, and ordinary citizens interact, and which of these players are dominant in the process of metropolitan planning?*

The empirical question that I address here is: *How effective has the strategy of democratic decentralisation been in making the metropolitan planning process in Kolkata more participatory?* The aim of this research is to understand the nature of a political context that can support bottom-up planning.

The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act envisioned that the governments of states and union territories would take action to pass new legislation or amend existing laws by 31 May 1994 to bring them in conformity with the constitutional provisions for democratic decentralisation as proposed in the Act itself. This task of conforming legislation has since been completed. At this stage, some of the important questions that arise on municipal decentralisation include: (1) Are the provisions in the 74th CAA adequate to achieve the objectives? (2) Does the conformity legislation provide for adequate meas-

ures to honor the amendment act in both letter and spirit? (3) What should be done further to carry forward the decentralisation process?

1.4 Research methods

Case study method

Research methods are selected based on the research question and also on what is practicable. The question that I am asking would require a comparative case analysis between Kolkata and some other cities. But the resources (time and money) at my disposal were not enough to conduct more than one in-depth city case study for comparative purposes. 'Urban governance research would benefit greatly from the more widespread use of existing descriptive methods and techniques which produce results that are easy to compare across cities, and thus expand the basis for inductive theory building' (Gissendanner, 2003, p. 663). Therefore, I conducted a single case study and used literature available on other cities as evidence to support my arguments.

I selected Kolkata as my case because I intended to generalise on the basis of a single case. As Flyvbjerg (2004) has noted in his work, one of the misunderstandings about the case study is that it is claimed to be most useful for generating hypotheses in the first steps of a total research process, while hypothesis-testing and theory-building is best carried out by other methods later in the process. I conceive Kolkata as the 'most likely' critical case (Flyvbjerg, 2004) that would allow information that permits logical deductions of the type, if this is (not) valid for this case, then it applies to all (no) cases. As described in Chapter 3, the West Bengal government is widely recognised to be in the forefront of 'democratic decentralisation' in India using elections at the local level as a means to achieve it (Thomas Isaac & Franke, 2002, p. 15). My argument is: if there is a deficit in democratic decentralisation and bottom-up planning in Kolkata, then there is a need to more closely examine the institutions of governance that rely only on local elections to promote democratic decentralisation in other cities in India.

Data collection

In addition to a selective review of the planning literature and interviews with key political actors, this research relies on the analysis of a case study. The empirical material for this case study came in part from direct observation, from interviews with actors involved in the metropolitan planning process in Kolkata, and from the reading of documents, including study reports, master plans, minutes of meetings, and official memos produced by the planning agency and by other organisations and individuals involved with metropolitan planning in Kolkata and in the state government. Articles from local and

national newspapers and magazines were also used to substantiate some of the information gathered from other sources.

I collected both primary and secondary data. At the initial stages of my research prior to my going to the field, I collected academic and non-academic literature dealing with urban issues in India in general and Kolkata in particular. I also established professional relationship with scholars who have done research in Kolkata and through them was introduced to some of my key informants within the planning establishment in Kolkata.

After I arrived in Kolkata, I first spent several days collecting archival data – mostly in the form of plans, reports, newspaper articles, etc. I interviewed several key informants – urban activists, academics, private urban consultants, municipal councillors, municipal chairpersons, planners, and concerned citizens. Most of the interviews were about an hour long and were recorded with the subjects' explicit permission. My original plan of action changed considerably over the course of my fieldwork as some of the archival information collected in these early stages pointed me to a different research question than the one with which I had started. (Before going to Kolkata, I proposed a research project on the costs and benefits of urban land regulations to different income groups in Kolkata.) Therefore, some of the initial clues as to possible interviewees, interview questions and analytic themes were very different from what I finally set out to write about in this book. Nonetheless, I have included all the data collected in those interviews, using them for a completely different purpose than what I originally intended.

In some ways I would describe my methodology as akin to grounded theory. Grounded theory was conceived as a way of generating theory through research data rather than testing ideas formulated in advance of data collection and analysis. Although I had formulated a set of hypotheses before beginning my research, I abandoned it in the course of my research. The process of generating ideas through data requires an innovative approach to data selection. Instead of identifying a sample at the outset, grounded theory involves a process of 'theoretical sampling' of successive sites and sources, selected to test or refine new ideas as they emerge from the data. Sites and sources are selected flexibly for their theoretical relevance in generating comparisons and extending or refining ideas, rather than for their representational value in allowing generalisations of particular populations.

Third, grounded theory relies primarily, but not exclusively, on qualitative data acquired through a variety of methods: mostly observation and unstructured interviews in the initial stages, then more structured forms of data collection as the study becomes more focused. Thus decisions on sampling and data collection develop as the project progresses, continually informed by and not merely anticipating the results of ongoing data analysis. The process of analysing data, centres on 'coding' data into categories for the purpose of comparison. These categories are analytic – not mere labels but conceptuali-

sations of key aspects of the data. And categories are also sensitising, offering meaningful interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation. Through 'constant comparison' their relations and properties can be identified and refined. Finally, grounded theory offers pointers about how to bring the research to a successful conclusion. Data collection stops when categories reach 'theoretical saturation', that is, when further data no longer prompts new distinctions or refinements to the emerging theory. Data analysis stops when a core category emerges around which the researcher can integrate the analysis and develop a 'story' encapsulating the main themes of the study (Dey, 2004, p. 80).

One of the most important cautions that a researcher needs to keep in mind is to be explicit about her/his internal biases. There should be a 'comprehensive rather than selective examination of data/evidence' (Seale *et al.*, 2004). I very strongly believed that electoral democracy at the local level would enhance people's participation. I would never have tried to challenge my own beliefs until they were pointed out by one of my colleagues, who read a draft paper I prepared after my initial analysis. She suggested that my conclusion – that local elections are just the first step to solving the problem of non-participation – didn't make sense because all the evidence I presented made it seem that elections were the problem rather than the first step to any solution. I have since then gone back to my data, being more conscious about my internal biases.

In the following chapter, I describe the context of this case study, i.e. the political, social, demographic, and institutional contexts of metropolitan planning in Kolkata along with the historical trajectory of their dynamics. Chapter 3 describes the planning process in Kolkata in relation to the stated decentralisation policy that the West Bengal government has adopted. Chapter 4 draws from the literature on urban politics to present Kolkata's case in comparison to other cities in India and the world. Finally, Chapter 5 summarises some of the key lessons from this study and offers policy recommendations for various actors in the planning process.

2 Context of metropolitan planning in Kolkata

2.1 Political context

Partisan politics

Politically, Kolkata and the rest of West Bengal have been through a number of periods of turmoil in the first three decades since India's independence (see Table 2.1). The partition of Bengal led to two massive influxes of refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), once in 1947 and again in 1971. This put additional pressure on the already crippled infrastructure of Kolkata. Second, the violence of the radical Naxalite movement of the 1960s and 70s and its brutal suppression and the rise of 'electoral communism' posed challenges to the existing Congress Party's grip on the state. Finally, the electoral victory of the Communist Party of India – a Marxist (CPI-M)-led coalition of left-wing parties[5] in the West Bengal legislature in 1977 and its subsequent consolidation of power at all governmental levels within the state has led to its holding office for six consecutive terms, spanning 28 years.

The initial electoral successes of CPI-M have been largely due to the popularity of its land redistribution policy, mostly among the rural poor. Over the last twenty-eight years, it has consolidated its power base throughout the state, including in the urban areas[6], not always by fair means. The sheer length of time that the party has maintained its hold on the state administration has made the line separating the party and the state's administrative machinery (including the police) less distinct (Sanyal, 2005b). Both the local and the national media have time and again reported widespread electoral irregularities – rampant rigging, booth jamming, casting of false votes, voter intimidation, assaults on opposition candidates by CPI-M cadres and the police, etc. – in both municipal and state legislative assembly elections (Statesman News Service, 2005).

Although these allegations cannot be independently verified – and for that matter the CPI–M also alleges that opposition parties indulge in poll-related violence – a matter of greater concern is the number of uncontested seats. In the local elections held in West Bengal in May 2003, about 6,300 seats (nearly 11 per cent of the seats) went uncontested, and most of them went to the CPI–M and its allies (Mathew, 2003). Although one can only speculate about the reasons for opposition parties not fielding candidates for these seats, the fact remains that one party has held sway over the state administration for a long period of time, and that this one-party status has led the state to a condition that can best be described as a pseudo-democracy (see Table 2.2).

5 The coalition is popularly known as the Left Front.

6 In the most recent elections, held in 2005, the Left Front won 75 of the 141 seats in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation. The main opposition party, All-India Trinamul Congress, won 42 seats. In most of the other municipalities in the KMA, the Left Front won more than a two-thirds majority. For example, in Bidhan Nagar Municipality, the Left Front won 18 of 23 seats.

Table 2.1 Kolkata's planning practice: key turning points

1911	Capital city moved from Kolkata to New Delhi. Calcutta was the capital of British India from 1773 until 1911 (declaration of the British Parliament).
1947	India's independence, Partition of Bengal and influx of refugees (national and international events combined with religious fundamentalism).
1958	Cholera outbreak in Kolkata.
1959	WHO expert team recommend need for planning.
1960	Ford Foundation enlisted as consultants for Kolkata planning project.
1964	Dissident CPI members form CPI(M).
1960s	Equal freight introduced for balanced regional development leading to industrial decline (national level policy).
1967	The first CPI(M)-led United Front government took office in West Bengal; simultaneous peasant uprising in the Naxalbari region of northern Bengal.
1967-71	President's rule imposed in West Bengal.
1969-70	The second CPI(M)-led United Front government in West Bengal took office. It was again dismissed by the central government after one year because of its support for large-scale peasant mobilisation.
1970	KMDA was formed to administer funds from the World Bank for infrastructure development based on the Basic Development Plan.
1971	Congress Party overwhelmingly returned to power in West Bengal.
1971	Second wave of refugees from Bangladesh arrive in KMA.
1977	The Left Front Government comes to power in West Bengal.
1979	The West Bengal Town and Country (Planning and Development) Act was passed, making KMDA the statutory planning body for Metropolitan Kolkata (it was based on the British Town and Country Planning Act).
1980	The Bengal Municipal Act 1932 was amended.
1981	Municipal elections in West Bengal were held for the first time after a 15-year suspension. Regular municipal elections were held thereafter, without another interruption – the only state in India that can boast of this record.
1983	Third phase of the Calcutta Urban Development Programme in which a budget for local governments was approved for the first time.
1992	73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act was passed in the Indian Parliament.
1993	West Bengal Municipal Act was passed in the state legislature.

It would be wrong, though, to assume that fraud and the threat of violence are the only reasons for the Left Front's continuous electoral victories. The opposition parties in the state are disorganised and highly fragmented. Internal divisions between factions in the main opposition party (the Trinamul Congress – TNC) and divisions among different opposition parties have helped the Left Front in the elections (Statesman News Service, 2002). In addition, in sharp contrast to Bangalore where a significant number of elected officials are elected as independents without political affiliations (Benjamin, 2000), Kolkata's electoral politics are extremely partisan in nature, with very few independents winning elections.

Table 2.2 Number of state assembly seats won by CPI-M, of 294 total seats*

Year	1977	1982	1987	1991	1996	2001	2006
Number of CPI-M seats	177 (230)	174 (238)	186 (251)	189	157 (203)	143 (199)	175 (233)

Source: Basu, 2002; Chaudhuri, 2001; the Election Commission of India website

* Figures in parentheses are the total number of seats won by the Left Front Coalition.

In addition, a recent article (Sarkar, 2006) argues that economic stagnation and the increasing informalisation of West Bengal's economy, far from weakening the Left Front's hold in the state, have actually helped enhance its power. Using social, economic and election data for West Bengal, Sarkar infers that the vulnerability of those who depend on the informal economy has made them increasingly dependent on the Left Front for protecting their livelihoods. He argues that if formal-sector jobs were readily available in the state, and if the formal legal system were less costly in terms of time and money so that the common citizen could seek its protection, the people would have enjoyed a more secure life and hence dependence on politics would have been minimal. Even many among those who are employed in the formal economy in West Bengal – particularly those in state government institutions – believe that they owe their employment to the Left Front. A Class-IV staff member from a local state-run university in the municipality of Kalyani confided during an informal interview that he voted for the party that he believed was his *annadaata* (a Sanskrit word for 'food provider', referring here to the CPI–M). He believed that 'the party' hired him to work for the public university because he sees no difference between the party and the administration. This is evidence of a paternalistic relationship (as described by Rudolph, 2000) between the state and the citizens of West Bengal.

Civil society

West Bengal has a seemingly vibrant civil society comprising trade unions, trade associations, cooperatives, citizen groups such as *Nagarik Samities*, media-based groups and organisations, women's groups, advocacy groups, community-based groups (better known as community-based organisations, or CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). However, these are not uniformly distributed throughout West Bengal. With the exception of Howrah, and to a lesser extent Bally, NGO presence is extremely sparse in the outlying KMA municipalities (KUSP Design Team, 2003). Youth groups exist in practically every settlement and in many cases provide a safety net for some of the poorest people. The women's groups organised under *Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgaar Yojana* (SJSRY, a central government-funded urban employment programme) are found in every KMA town and have the potential to become a powerful platform for women's participation and empowerment.

The *Nagarik Samiti* – a formation that pre-dates ward committees – provides a public platform for civic engagement in many towns. Trade unions and other occupation-based organisations in the industrial towns have often been instrumental in improving job security and working conditions. They have been identified by consultants hired for the Kolkata Urban Services for

Election graffiti

the Poor (KUSP), a project to improve urban services in the Kolkata Metropolitan Area, as having the potential to play a role in negotiating improvements in living conditions in defunct industrial areas, and in freeing such areas for more productive use to benefit the poor. The informal sector has spawned several associations, related to rickshaw pulling, hawking and vending, daily labour and so on, to deal with issues of extortion and official harassment.

In the subsequent chapters I will discuss some of the reasons why civil society in Kolkata, unlike in other Indian cities, has not been very successful in playing a constructive role in planning and decision making. There are two main deficiencies: first, the groups are mostly associations of individuals with very little say in the decision-making process. And second, those groups that have any influence in the decision-making process are closely associated with one political party or another. This makes them less effective in representing the interests of people within a particular geographic community. I will come back to these two points in subsequent chapters.

2.2 Socio-economic context

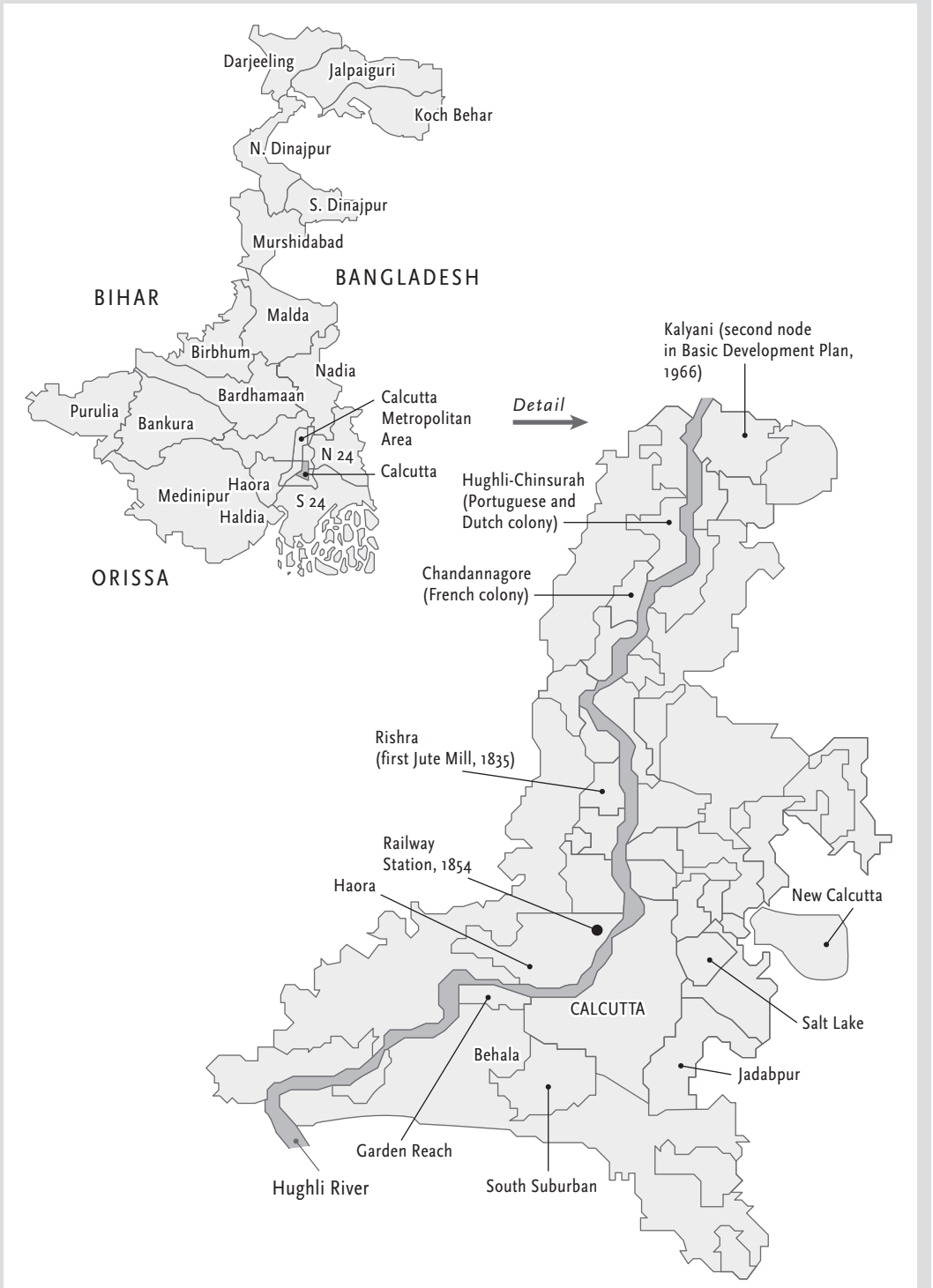
Kolkata is one of the most populous metropolises in India. It also one of the poorest urban centres in India, with a visibly crumbling public infrastructure and widespread poverty. In addition, it is not homogenous spatially or temporally (Chakravorty, 2000). There are distinct parts of the city with very distinguishable economic and demographic profiles (see Fig. 2.1 for a plan of the Kolkata Metropolitan Area).

Urban demographic trends in India and West Bengal

According to the 2001 census, in India around 285 million people or about 28 per cent of the population live in urban areas. In 1991 there were 300 Class I cities accommodating about 65.2 per cent of the total urban population, while 1135 Class IV cities accommodated only 7.7 per cent. In most towns of other class sizes a declining trend was discernible. In Class I cities however, a steady growth was registered, with 44.6 per cent of total urban population living in them in 1951, 57.2 per cent in 1971, and 65.2 per cent in 1991. Amongst the Class I cities in India those with a million-plus population were growing at an alarming rate. According to the 1991 census there were 23 cities comprising 32.5 per cent of the total urban population. Some Indian metropolitan areas have the world's highest population densities (Kundu, 2003).

Urban areas form the backbone of the country's economy, acting as major attraction zones and reservoirs of skills for the millions of migrants from the rural areas. In India, about 29 per cent of GDP was contributed by the urban sector in 1950-51 and since then the share has steadily increased; it had passed the 60 per cent mark by the year 2001. Thus, a little more than one-

Figure 2.1 West Bengal State and the Kolkata Metropolitan Area



quarter of the population generates more than half of the country's total GDP. Nevertheless, urban growth, especially in the metropolitan areas, has been exploitative and chaotic, resulting in rising unemployment and low productivity work-sharing in the informal sector, squatting in teeming slums, congestion, encroachment on public space, water and air pollution and deteriorating infrastructure and services (Kundu, 2003).

Against the background of these changes in the demographic, economic and social geography of India's largest cities, there is also the emergence of new cores and peripheries. The old hierarchy of four megacities (Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai) located in different regions of the country is giving way to urban corridors and clusters of new investment located mostly in the southern and western parts of the country (Shaw, 1999).

Only eight of the 23 metropolitan cities fall in what Shaw (1999) calls 'the periphery' (a broad term that encompasses all those regions not experiencing growth of the type described above). It contains regions and cities that once saw better times – Kolkata best epitomises this decline. Kolkata today ranks fourth – after Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai – in many important economic functions. Though Kolkata's decline began with its loss of national capital-city status in 1911, it was hastened further by the overall decline in manufacturing industry that has beset the state of West Bengal (of which Kolkata is the capital city) since the early sixties and which persists (Shaw, 1999).

In the 1960s West Bengal, along with Maharashtra, was India's leading industrial state, accounting for 14 per cent of India's industrial output. This had fallen to 9.8 per cent by 1980-81 and to 5.6 per cent by 1992-93. Industrial decline has affected all spheres of business and commerce and is reflected in the slowly declining share of Kolkata's port and airport in all-India foreign trade. According to 1964 figures, Kolkata port handled 92 per cent (by tonnage) of India's exports and 25 per cent of its imports (Banerjee & Chakravorty, 1994). In 1985-86, 10.57 per cent of India's exports and 9.57 per cent of India's imports passed through Kolkata's port and airport taken together. By 1995 this had fallen to 2.69 per cent and 5.5 per cent respectively (Shaw, 1999).

The local economy

At the macro level, the economy of metropolitan Kolkata since India's independence has been characterised by the decline of the traditional jute, engineering and textile industries. Many industrial sites are derelict or occupied by terminally sick industries. This is reflected in the slow growth of the population, high levels of unemployment and dependence on the informal sector, with the poor competing for survival as hawkers, rickshaw pullers or domestic servants.

Youth unemployment is high and many end up participating in antisocial activities – gambling, using drugs or illicit liquor, and prostitution. Many poor households are dependent on the earnings of women (see Roy, 2003).

Informal streetside economy

The most dynamic sector is small informal and unregulated industry and services, often sited in poor neighbourhoods and providing a vital source of employment (Sarkar, 2006). Many of these activities are dangerous or polluting and working conditions are poor, with low wages, long hours, a reliance on casual and often piece-rate labour, and with little concern for the health and safety of workers and the frequent use of child labour. As traditional industries close down and lay off their workers, the livelihoods of the poor and lower-middle-class are becoming less and less secure. At the same time there are areas of the KMA where small-scale entrepreneurs are developing new options. The livelihoods of the poor can be divided into several categories:

- Mill workers: mostly men with regular, seasonal or temporary work.
- Small-scale manufacturers and microentrepreneurs: particularly refugees from Bangladesh, engaged in the manufacture and sale of articles such as bangles, toys, bags, hosiery and so forth using traditional or acquired skills. They operate on a small scale, due to lack of operating capital and secure markets. The working conditions may be hazardous, and may include the use of dangerous chemicals, like acids.
- Skilled labour: in the informal sector, engaged in rod binding, painting, whitewashing, carpentry, plumbing, electrical work and so on. They have no guarantee of regular work.
- Unskilled labour: manual workers on building sites, roads or any kind of unskilled local work; if work is not available locally they travel long distances to find it. Other jobs include carrying metal scraps and loading/unloading cargo trucks.
- Hawkers: often with very little capital, selling used garments or a variety of

low-end products for the poor and middle class in local markets or on the pavements of Kolkata.

- Vendors: retailing small domestic articles or vegetables or running teashops and small wayside eateries.
- Rickshaw pullers: as a full-time or part-time activity, usually involving paying rent or a portion of the profit to the owner of the rickshaw. The typical daily income is Rs 30-40, although on special occasions this may go up to Rs 150-200.
- Domestic workers: thousands of poor, unorganised women, many of whom come into the city every day by train.
- Fishing: this age-old occupation for communities on both sides of the river is declining. Fishermen who are better-off have moved to organised inland fish farming in ponds and bheris.
- Scavengers and garbage pickers: desperately poor households resort to garbage picking and scavenging plastic bags, papers, bottles and so on and selling them to wholesalers and organised buyers. Another widely practiced income-generating option for the poor – especially old women – is the collection of cow dung for making fuel cakes (KUSP Design Team, 2003, Annex 1, p. 3).

Poverty in KMA: an overview

It is difficult to give a precise measure of poverty in the KMA. The best available information is SUDA's survey of Below Poverty Line (BPL) households, which gives a figure of around 425,000 BPL households in the ULBs situated outside the Kolkata Municipal Corporation area. With an average household size of 5-6 people, this would give a figure of around 2,350,000 people, or 30 per cent of the total population of 7,800,000, with an income that is insufficient to feed themselves adequately (KUSP Design Team, 2003, Annex 1).

West Bengal has been successful in reducing poverty from 55 per cent (1983) to 36 per cent (1993-94).[7] The urban poverty rate was estimated as 22 per cent (1993/94). Nevertheless, urban poverty has increased in absolute terms. The most common definition of poverty in use is income that is Below Poverty Line (BPL). In urban areas it is defined as the per capita income required for a minimum of 2,100 calories per day or Rs. 415 (approx US $10) per month.[8]

Following the introduction of SJSRY in 1997, the ULBs were expected to undertake a household survey to identify the BPL population and identify the poorest among them. Kolkata and Howrah Municipal Corporations and a few municipalities have not completed the first stage of the BPL survey. Most ULBs have not completed the second stage, which is intended to identify the poorest households among the BPL population for the purpose of targeting the economic benefits of the SJSRY scheme. The priority rating of each BPL household is determined by seven non-economic criteria related to living conditions, access to water supply and sanitation, levels of education, type of employment and the status of children. SUDA provided financial and technical assistance to undertake the survey, which was carried out by a variety of people, including councillors and Honorary Health Workers. The accuracy of the data is questionable.[9] Existing figures may be overestimated by 15-20 per cent.[10] The proportion of BPL households varies from 12 per cent (Chandannagore Municipal Corporation) to 58 per cent (Khardah municipality).

The urban poor are characterised by linguistic and ethnic diversity that reflects the historical processes of migration into the KMA. They include refugees from Bangladesh, migrants from rural areas of West Bengal and neighbouring states – particularly Uttar Pradesh and Bihar – and minority groups, especially Muslims, who have been associated with Kolkata for generations.

The situation of the poor is characterised by unemployment and low levels of income, a degraded environment, deficient levels of basic services and

7 Planning Commission, government of India as cited by (KUSP Design Team, 2003).

8 See (Ganguly, 2003). This newspaper article talks about the difficulty of identifying BPL households.

9 Report of the Municipal Administrative Reforms Committee 2001, ILGUS, GoWB.

10 Source: Director, SUDA in an interview with KUSP Consultants as cited in (KUSP Design Team, 2003).

varying degrees of social exclusion. In some municipalities the organised middle poor – such as the refugees represented by the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC) (for a more detailed study, see Dasgupta, 2000) – have a voice in municipal affairs and are able to press their demands for improved levels of service. However, the poorest and most vulnerable – those who live in areas with irregular tenure – have no access to services and little or no say in the decisions that affect their daily lives. They include pavement dwellers and people living in irregular settlements on land belonging to defunct mills or government agencies or along drainage canals, railway tracks and under bridges. They are handicapped by low levels of literacy, and have little understanding or ability to deal with the institutions that are intended to serve them.

The most explicit social exclusion is tenure-related. The very poorest settlements – perhaps 10 per cent of the total – are those with problems of tenure. These are settlements of last resort, occupied by people who have nowhere else to go and who are unable to pay even the lowest rents. They include large numbers of households headed by single women, widows or women whose husbands are sick or handicapped. Since they have irregular income, they lack the most basic service provisions, and the inhabitants are often subject to harassment (KUSP Annex 1, p. 2).

Historically many poor settlements grew as non-Bengalis migrated from adjoining states to work as labourers in the jute mills. The population in the KMA towns was also swollen due to an influx of refugees in 1947 from what was then East Pakistan and as a result of the war in 1971. The refugees settled on government, private and railway land, often in hazardous conditions.

Despite the diversity of low-income settlements within the KMA, it is broadly possible to identify the following typologies:

- Peri-urban settlements: those in outlying towns with rural characteristics, heterogeneous populations and the poor living in single bamboo mat rooms between better-off neighbours. Many of these are in low-lying areas, subject to flooding. Most of the land is privately owned, although it is sometimes sublet.
- Refugee settlements: peri-urban areas dating back to partition; others from 1971 with conditions similar to those above but with a marked difference between settlements that have achieved security of tenure and those that have not.
- Bustees and mill lines in high-density industrial areas located along both sides of the river Hooghly, especially to the north of Kolkata: many of the housing colonies established by jute mills in the past have fallen into disrepair. Other workers, mainly from rural areas of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa, rent rooms in the large, densely packed slums that grew up outside the mills. Even where mills have closed or no longer provide a significant source of employment, housing may be characterised as densely packed,

rented accommodation organised into baris – single-storey buildings divided into 15-20 rooms facing into a common courtyard or alley. Each room is occupied by a family or joint family, with as many as 20 people sharing a single room. The landlord often lives in the bari, in similar conditions to those of his or her tenants. Most tenants have occupied their rooms for at least 20 or 30 years, a factor that has encouraged a high level of bari and neighbourhood solidarity. Many migrant families retain ties with their villages of origin, and remit part of their earnings back to their families. One of the reasons they prefer to remain in the slums – despite the poor standard of housing – is that the rents are low, typically in the order of Rs 25-50 per month. New tenants pay much higher amounts – up to Rs 200-300 per month. Outside Howrah there is little evidence that these neighbourhoods are being redeveloped. This may be because bari landlords are unable to accumulate or borrow capital to buy out tenants and construct multi-storey apartment blocks, or because of the political pressure tenants can bring to bear if landlords try to increase the rents.

- Squatter settlements: the very poorest neighbourhoods with irregular settlements situated on private or government-owned land. These have little or no access to services, and are frequently located in hazardous areas, under bridges or on canal banks and railway lines. Most unrecognised settlements have been occupied for a long time – at least 20-30 years. To avoid encouraging squatters the Government of West Bengal does not allow the provision of infrastructure in irregular settlements. However, the West Bengal Municipal Act provides for measures to be taken to protect public health, for citizens dwelling in such areas and in the surrounding neighbourhoods. In practice, service provision is typically limited to stand posts provided outside the settlement.
- Pavement dwellers: live in the most dynamic areas of the city with a large number in and around Howrah station. Outside KMC and Howrah there are a few places where people live on the streets, as in the immediate surroundings of Dakshineshwar temple where one finds a concentration of beggars, street children, hawkers and the mentally handicapped. The people who live on the streets are a particularly vulnerable group, and are often subject to harassment and abuse.

Environmental and infrastructure context

Kolkata is characterised by very poor levels of environmental and infrastructure provision. This is particularly so in poorer neighbourhoods. Nearly all low-income neighbourhoods have a degraded and unhealthy environment with a deficient level of basic services. Water supply is intermittent. The water from shallow tube wells is often contaminated, while drinking water is only available for a few hours a day, leading to long queues at stand posts (see Basu & Main, 2001). Drainage is poor, with drains often blocked by waste. Sol-

id waste disposal is irregular and garbage accumulates providing a breeding ground for flies and vermin. Many areas are low-lying and flood during the monsoon. Sanitation is deplorable. In densely populated neighbourhoods it is common for as many as 40 households to share only one or two latrines. The latrines are often blocked and people may have to queue from the early hours of the morning to use them. Children, and some adults, rely on open defecation, on pavements, areas of waste ground or in open drains. Environmental problems are not simply caused by lack of investment but by poor planning, the absence of consultation, bad construction and no maintenance (KUSP Design Team, 2003).

2.3 Planning institutions in India

The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act passed by the Indian Parliament in 1992 provided for:

- regular and fair conduct of municipal elections by statutorily constituted State Election Commissions;
- limiting the state power to do away with democratically elected municipal governments;
- adequate representation to weaker sections and women in municipal bodies through reservation of seats;
- constitution of ward committees in municipalities with a population of three hundred thousand or more, with no bar on such committees in cities having lesser population, to ensure popular participation in civic affairs at the grassroots level;
- specification by law, through the state legislatures, of the powers and functional responsibilities to be entrusted to municipalities and ward committees;
- a relationship of state governments and urban local bodies on firm footing with respect to local taxation powers and revenue sharing between state and local authorities through statutory state finance commissions, to be set up every five years; and
- involvement of elected representatives in planning at the district and metropolitan levels.

The planning institutions in India are complex and often have overlapping jurisdictions.[11] The function of the National Planning Commission at the national level is mostly recommendatory; it includes preparing a plan model for

11 For an in-depth historical analysis of the roots of contemporary urban governance institutions in India starting from the Mughal era see (Datta, 1999).

the allocation of national resources among various central government ministries and among different states. These tasks are increasingly being seen as irrelevant by some, even within the Commission (Shourie, 2004).

> *[W]hat the [National Planning] Commission says or decides on even those traditional functions, carries much less authority:*
>
> - *As an institution it has no greater expertise on those questions than other institutions: the operational ministries, for instance, or the better-run states.*
> - *In part because, with the weakening of the political class [emphasis added by the author], more and more of its allocations have become formula-based: just two factors – last year's allocation, and assorted formulae – are estimated by senior officials of the Commission itself to determine nine-tenths of the annual allocations to central ministries and to states.*
> - *In part because, having become and having come to be seen as but a limb of Government, the Commission has got into the habit of not speaking the whole truth (Shourie, 2004).*

The Planning Commission has also come under attack for not being cognizant of the constitutionally mandated district and metropolitan plans prepared by the District Planning Commissions and the Metropolitan Planning Commissions, respectively, which are constitutional entities (Bandyopadhyay, 2000). This is seen by many as a violation of the constitution by the planning commission, which has not recognised the district and metropolitan plans and is not trying to incorporate them into the state and central plans.

Planning functions at a sub-national scale have been assigned to different agencies at different levels. 'At the state level Planning Boards have been set up. These Boards are neither Constitutional bodies nor are they statutory entities. (The same is true for National Planning Commission.) The State Five-year Plans generally follow the formula of the national plans not only in content but also in methods and techniques of preparation of plans' (Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority, 2001). Therefore the main task of the state planning board is to allocate state resources to various districts and local urban bodies within the state. The board is afflicted with problems that are similar to those faced by the National Planning Commission discussed above. These boards do not concern themselves with spatial planning in the context of sectoral planning for housing, infrastructure, land use, and urban and rural development. 'There is nothing in the Constitution to indicate how these district plans [and likewise the metropolitan plans] would be integrated into the state plan. Theoretically state plans could be prepared independently totally ignoring the district draft plans. In that case it would be an ungainly caricature of planning from below' (Bandyopadhyay, 2000).

The first two five-year plans (both at the national and state levels) did very little for cities. When India gained independence in 1947, 85 per cent of the population lived in villages. Rural poverty was seen as a central challenge for

the political leadership, economists and planners. Successive five-year plans earmarked large amounts for agriculture and rural development, and in the 1960s, drought and famine further encouraged a rural focus. The problems of urban India were barely recognised. This is particularly true for Kolkata. The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M)-led Left Front government in the state of West Bengal had given relatively little attention to Kolkata. Both ideologically and politically it was in the interest of the Left Front to focus its attention on rural West Bengal. Through vigorous pursuit of land redistribution programmes and village-level electoral politics, the Left Front has effectively consolidated its political base in rural West Bengal. Kolkata has thus suffered from a Marxist policy of benign neglect. Today, in spite of rapid urbanisation (with an urban population of 300 million, and 35 per cent of India's population living in urban areas), the mindset of giving priority to rural areas has changed little (Burra, 2005).

India's constitution is federal insofar as certain areas of concern fall within the legislative domain of the central government of India (for example, foreign affairs, defence and finance). Other areas fall under the states (for example, housing and urban development) and in others, both the central and state governments have jurisdiction (such as education, criminal law, economic and social planning). With regard to urban development, the central government can influence states in only limited ways, through national policies that the states are not obligated to follow and through centrally sponsored schemes implemented through budgetary transfers to the states (Burra, 2005).

Despite progressive policies in the past, many state governments in India have continued implementing flawed urban development policies with little or no concern for the urban poor and other politically marginalised sections of urban society.[12] Between December 2004 and February 2005, 50,000 to 70,000 hutments were demolished in Maharashtra (whose capital is Mumbai), in violation of poll promises and of international covenants to which India is a signatory (Burra, 2005). Similar demolitions have occurred in other cities in India, including Kolkata.[13] As described by Burra, '[T]hese actions by the government raise fundamental doubts about the health of self-professed democracies in the absence of counteracting powers, and underline the vulnerability of the poor where there is a consensus across political parties, significant sections of the media, and captains of industry and trade' (Burra, 2005, p. 88).

12 This fact is discussed in greater detail by Benjamin (2000).

13 On 22 September 2001, the West Bengal government and the Kolkata Municipal Corporation evicted some 20,000 people from Tolly Nullah; on 10 December 2002 another 40,000 people were evicted in Kolkata; on 2 February 2003 some 7,000 Dalits were evicted; and on 15 December 2003, 75,000 people along the canal side settlements at Bagbazar and Cossipore area were evicted. See Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (http://www.achr.net/impacts.htm) for details.

Planning institutions in West Bengal

Kolkata's post-colonial planning experience is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it included an unprecedented effort at transferring Western planning technology (mainly through the Ford Foundation) to a Third World city. Second, this particular transfer represented a major 'paradigm shift' – from the highly codified physical master planning of the British colonial administration to a performance and mission-oriented strategic planning approach heavily influenced by contemporary social sciences. Third, it serves as a graphic example of how the larger picture of a city's future is drawn by the forces of politics and economics (Banerjee & Chakravorty, 1994).

It is now clear that since the departure of foreign experts from Kolkata, the institutional apparatus for planning has undergone several mutations as it has adapted to local expertise, politics and bureaucracy (Banerjee & Chakravorty, 1994). The urgency of planning for Kolkata was first recognised as the result of a public health crisis in 1958 – an outbreak of cholera in the city that claimed about 250 lives. In 1959, a team from the World Health Organization recommended immediate planning for potable water supply, drainage and sewerage, along with a general planning effort to address the abominable condition of the city's transportation system, housing, slums, and land use. In 1960, the Ford Foundation was enlisted as consultants to a Kolkata planning project.

When Ford Foundation consultants came to Kolkata in the early sixties, however, no state or local agency with responsibility for urban or regional planning existed. An authority was needed to receive the advice of the Ford Foundation experts; the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMPO) was created in 1961 to plan for the entire metropolitan area and to offer the experts a base (Banerjee & Chakravorty, 1994).

The effect of the American planning style was apparent from the very beginning. Despite the presence of the prominent land-use planners, the conventional British master plan approach, still popular in most parts of the world, was dropped. The Basic Development Plan (BDP) concept was advanced instead. Such a plan was seen as much more encompassing and strategic in scope than a physical master plan. The BDP was to emphasise economic development within the regional context (Banerjee & Chakravorty, 1994).

The planning document proposed that separate, detailed plans for water and sanitation, and for traffic and transportation be made within the overall framework of the BDP, whose recommendations nevertheless remained indicative only. That is, instead of earmarking specific projects, the BDP should simply outline the desired direction of growth. The plan was meant to be comprehensive, covering all facets of urban life including health, education, recreation and beautification. An urban policy planning exercise of such scope had never before been attempted in India. The data requirements were immense, while the resources were scant.

The document finally published in December 1966 was the first perspective plan for Kolkata. It was expected to cover the twenty-year period from 1966 to 1986. Although the BDP was never intended to be project-specific, it now included a list of projects already underway or under consideration. The list of specifics, although perhaps inevitable, greatly compromised the plan's original intent. Yet this list turned out to be the very essence of the BDP.

Other criticisms of the BDP did not surface publicly at that point. Over time, however, the BDP's emphasis on economic development was criticised as grandiose but lacking in tangible prescriptions for generating hard revenue. The plan was also criticised as being remiss in encouraging participation by local urban public works agencies (e.g. the Calcutta Improvement Trust) or local governments (e.g., the Kolkata Municipal Corporation or the Howrah Municipality). Moreover, despite the preponderance of urban informal sector employment in the Kolkata area, its role in economic development was not incorporated into the BDP perspective (Banerjee & Chakravorty, 1994).

But what really upstaged the BDP were the political changes that began in the late 1960s. By the mid-sixties the leftist political parties led by the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) had made strong inroads into state politics. In the state elections of 1967 the BDP's principal patron, the Congress Party, which had held power in the state without interruption since independence in 1947, lost to a coalition of leftist parties. Although technically the BDP survived, it was pushed to the side by the political instabilities of subsequent years. The next four years saw three elections and several coalition governments of left- and right-wing parties, each lasting for about a year on average. The political instability and partisan infighting soon escalated to widespread violence, triggered mainly by a new radical force, the Naxalite movement. Marxist-Leninist in ideology, the Naxalites rejected the democratic process and sought to capture the state through revolution. They challenged the authority of the established political parties, especially that of the CPI-M. Such confrontations led to political conflicts and violence throughout the state of West Bengal. As the political chaos continued unabated, the national government (with the Congress Party in power) finally intervened. What was needed at once in Kolkata (and West Bengal), the reasoning went, was a massive infusion of funds for physical improvement projects that would improve the physical city, create jobs, and ultimately counteract the rising twin forces of 'revolutionary Marxism' and 'electoral Marxism'.

Accordingly, a special presidential decree created the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (now called Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA)) to serve as a conduit for funds. Ostensibly the purpose of KMDA was to coordinate the implementation of projects and not duplicate the functions of the Calcutta Improvement Trust and other line agencies. The KMDA was flush with funds from the central government and international aid agencies such as the World Bank; to move expediently it adopted the

BDP's appended list of projects as its own mandate. The underlying assumption was that 'better' infrastructure would lead to a 'better' and less Marxist city (Banerjee & Chakravorty, 1994).

Thus in 1974 KMDA, with the help of a $35 million World Bank loan, began major projects in Kolkata. It has been noted by Banerjee and Chakravorty (1994) that the World Bank chose only 44 out of 160 projects recommended by BDP that met the bank's criteria and development philosophy. Thus the Bustee (slum) improvement programme, which has been widely acknowledged as a major KMDA achievement, was not among the projects funded by the World Bank. The authors also argue that planning projects in Kolkata even today remain driven by external donor agencies such as the World Bank, which subscribes to the neo-liberal development agenda, often ignoring local perceptions of the needs and priorities within the community.

Curiously, CMPO, the original planning organisation that gave birth to BDP, was neither abandoned nor folded into the newly created KMDA. The CMPO was allowed to continue its planning mission; meanwhile, however, the KMDA had the authority to plan and the funds to implement. In 1977, CMPO was formally merged into the Town and Country Planning Organisation (TCPO), a state agency; CMPO, an urban planning body, became responsible overnight for planning for villages and for those cities that did not yet have any planning or development authority.

The KMDA, though, is an organisation in decline (B. Sanyal & Tewari, 1990); previously, the KMDA was the supreme planning body. According to the West Bengal Town and Country planning Act, in 1979 KMDA was made the statutory planning body for metropolitan Kolkata. (This act was based on the British Town and Country Planning Act.) The Municipal Development Programme, initiated in the 1980s by the Left Front government, was an effort to decentralise planning and curtail the powers of the KMDA. In the 1983-84 financial year, during the third phase of the Calcutta Urban Development Project, some of the major changes in planning in metropolitan Kolkata began. Some of the local governments were given a budget and they prepared a plan of action for a 5-year period with a set of guidelines (such as encouraging the use of locally available technology, and stressing sanitation and water supply, financial discipline, and revenue performance targets with incentives and penalties attached to funding based on whether those targets are met). These are some of the major departures that have taken place from the earlier practices. Because of its earlier centralised planning process, KMDA had failed in most cases to appreciate needs and priorities at the local level. In addition, when KMDA finished a particular infrastructure project, they asked the Urban Local Body (ULB, i.e. municipalities and municipal corporations) to take it over. A number of problems in maintaining the newly created infrastructure cropped up because of mismanagement by ULBs.

Meanwhile, institutions involved in planning have proliferated. TCPO is en-

gaged in planning outside Kolkata. The State Planning Board, although more policy-oriented and ostensibly concerned with state-wide issues, maintains a strong interest in urban matters as well, and in Kolkata's affairs. Such institutions (and commissions, task forces, research organisations) are predictable bureaucratic responses to the complex social problems in developing countries, serving as effective foils against political heat, diffusing accountability, and excusing failure to act (Banerjee & Chakravorty, 1994).

Why did the West Bengal government initiate decentralisation at such an early stage, when no other state initiated it? First, the decentralisation process in West Bengal began even before 1977 when the Left Front came to power. In 1973 a congress ministry passed the West Bengal Panchayat Act, creating a four-tier structure (Thomas Isaac & Franke, 2002, p. 15). Second, the main reason why the West Bengal government pushed forward the introduction and implementation of decentralisation was to implement land reforms in rural areas so as to increase its electoral strength. 'The primary activity of the West Bengal local governments during their first term in 1978-83 was to implement land reforms. The *panchayats* became the main administrative instruments for detecting illegal landholdings, identifying the sharecroppers, and distributing the land. They were able to carry out these tasks successfully because the 1978 elections, held during the heyday of the peasant movement in West Bengal, had brought up landless and poor peasants into *panchayat* leadership positions' (Thomas Isaac & Franke 2002, p. 15). That is the monitoring and policing role of all the different roles of local government that was played by the *panchayats*. Decentralisation in urban areas came by proxy, not by design. Most of the designed decentralisation was in rural areas.

Different people have different notions of what planning is. For the purpose of this research it is important to discuss what planning means in the context of Kolkata. There are basically two categories of plans, differentiated in terms of their overall objectives, as per one of the senior KMDA planners:[14]

> *One kind of planning is narrowly defined by the West Bengal Town and Country (Planning and Development) Act, 1979 as the Land Use and Development Control plan. It contains a written statement formulating the policy and the general proposals including maps of the Planning Authority (in this case KMDA) in respect of development and general use of land in that area predominantly concerning itself with measures for improvement of the physical environment.*

This kind of plan contains zoning and subdivision regulations that are expected to be enforced by the respective local governments. According to the act, these plans need to be advertised in one or more local newspapers for comments from citizens before they are adopted and approved by the state gov-

14 Interview with Mr. Kalyan Roy, Director Macroeconomics, KMDA.

ernment (e.g. regulations for wetland conservation, FAR and density restrictions, ground coverage restrictions, etc.). It is rigid in the sense that it doesn't change over a long period of time. It is restrictive, i.e. it is more about regulations controlling the density of development and the type of land use. For Kolkata Metropolitan Area, KMDA has been made the statutory planning authority as per the West Bengal Town and Country (Planning and Development) Act of 1979. The Act specifies a detailed procedure for publishing information about this kind of plan, before it is accepted, in one or more local newspapers and seeking comments from the general public.

The second kind of plan has social equity and economic development as its main objectives as opposed to improvements in the physical environment.[15] The West Bengal Municipal Act, 1994 defines a Draft Development Plan (DDP) for any municipal area as a written statement that includes the schemes administered by the municipality or the notified area authority for social and economic development. It has a provision for review every 5 years. KMPC has the mandate to prepare such plans for KMA for all sectors (water and sanitation, bustee improvement, traffic and transport, health, and education). These sectors represent the five responsibilities that were conferred to the local bodies in the 12th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The objectives of this plan are not to regulate or control density or land use. Since KMPC already has elected representatives, the plans prepared by KMPC are not released to the public for comments. According to a senior planner in KMDA,[16] 'there is no need for it to be presented to the public as it is prepared by elected representatives'.

There is a third type of plan, called the annual action plan, prepared by the various state departments. The five-year DDP has no significance in the finance department of the state, for investment decisions are made in an annual cycle. Since the investment actions in the state are rigidly compartmentalised through the various departments, each department (such as the state irrigation department, KMDA, public works department and others concerned with a drainage-related project that might be part of DDP) needs to prepare its annual plans for approval and allocation of funds by the state government. In some cases a development or infrastructure project within KMA might involve action on the part of multiple state-level departments. Although KMPC allows the participation of all the departments and agencies concerned (both state and federal) in the planning process for such projects, the different departments and agencies still need to prepare the action plan for each year for the purpose of resource allocation.

15 As per author's interview with Mohit Bhattacharya, an ex-academic and an independent consultant in public administration.

16 Author's interview with Mr T. K. Mitra, Director General (Planning and Development), KMDA.

Metropolitan planning

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1992 mark a watershed in the evolution of local-level planning and decision making in India. For the first time the *panchayati raj* (village council) institutions in rural India and the municipalities and municipal corporations in urban India were accorded constitutional status in these two amendments. They were therefore raised to the status of 'governments' at the local level, like the union government at the national level and the state government at the state level. These constitutional amendments were followed by state legislation compatible with these amendments. The legal framework for 'planning from below' throughout the country came into being by April 1994.

These developments bestowed constitutional status on 'planning' at three levels: (1) the village and the municipal level, (2) the district level, and (3) the metropolitan level. The National Planning Commission at the national level was established by executive fiat and has no constitutional status. But local and regional (district)-level planning was accorded constitutional status, which underscores the importance the national political class attached to 'decentralised' planning (Bhattacharya, 1998). The intent of the constitutional amendments was to induce the state legislatures to make laws that would lead to the devolution of power and responsibility to the municipalities with respect to the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice.

The Left Front government that came after the Congress government in 1977 had already adopted a decentralised planning and development policy as discussed earlier. But for a city-region like Kolkata with 41 contiguous urban local bodies and 100 or so rural local bodies, some of the planning interventions and physical infrastructure cut across the boundaries of local bodies. There was a felt need for a metropolitan-wide planning body to administer such a planning exercise.

In this regard, the state of West Bengal enacted the West Bengal Metropolitan Planning Committee Act, 1994 for the purpose of decentralising spatial and socio-economic planning in Kolkata. The Act provided for the constitution of the Kolkata Metropolitan Planning Committee (KMPC) and for the preparation of a draft development plan for the metropolitan area as a whole by consolidating the development plans for its constituent municipalities and *gram panchayats* (village councils). Two-thirds of the committee is elected by, and from, the elected councillors of the 41 municipalities and around 100 chairpersons of the village councils in the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA). Another one-third of the committee is made up of nominated representatives of the Government of India and the state government and of organisations and institutions relating to urban development and infrastructure. It took seven years after the enactment of the Act before the Kolkata Metropolitan Planning Committee was formed and began deliberations.

The KMPC is currently in the process of finalising five sectoral plans for

the KMA area. In this exercise KMDA has been made the technical secretariat following which KMDA was asked to prepare a perspective plan for the Kolkata Metropolitan Area. This they did in the form of the '*Vision 2025: Perspective Plan of CMA*' in 2001 (Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority, 2001). It is worth noting that a perspective plan with a time horizon of 20 years, called *A Perspective Plan for Calcutta: 2011* had already been prepared by the State Planning Board in 1990-91 (see Figure 2.2).

The idea of the KMPC is to consolidate local needs and priorities, as expressed in the municipal development plans for the local bodies, into a metropolitan development plan. This invariably involves resource allocation within Kolkata Metropolitan Area that has a variable impact on different local bodies within the metropolitan area. Thus KMPC is envisioned to assist also in managing conflicts among various local bodies within KMA and letting the local bodies negotiate development-related allocation with the state government.

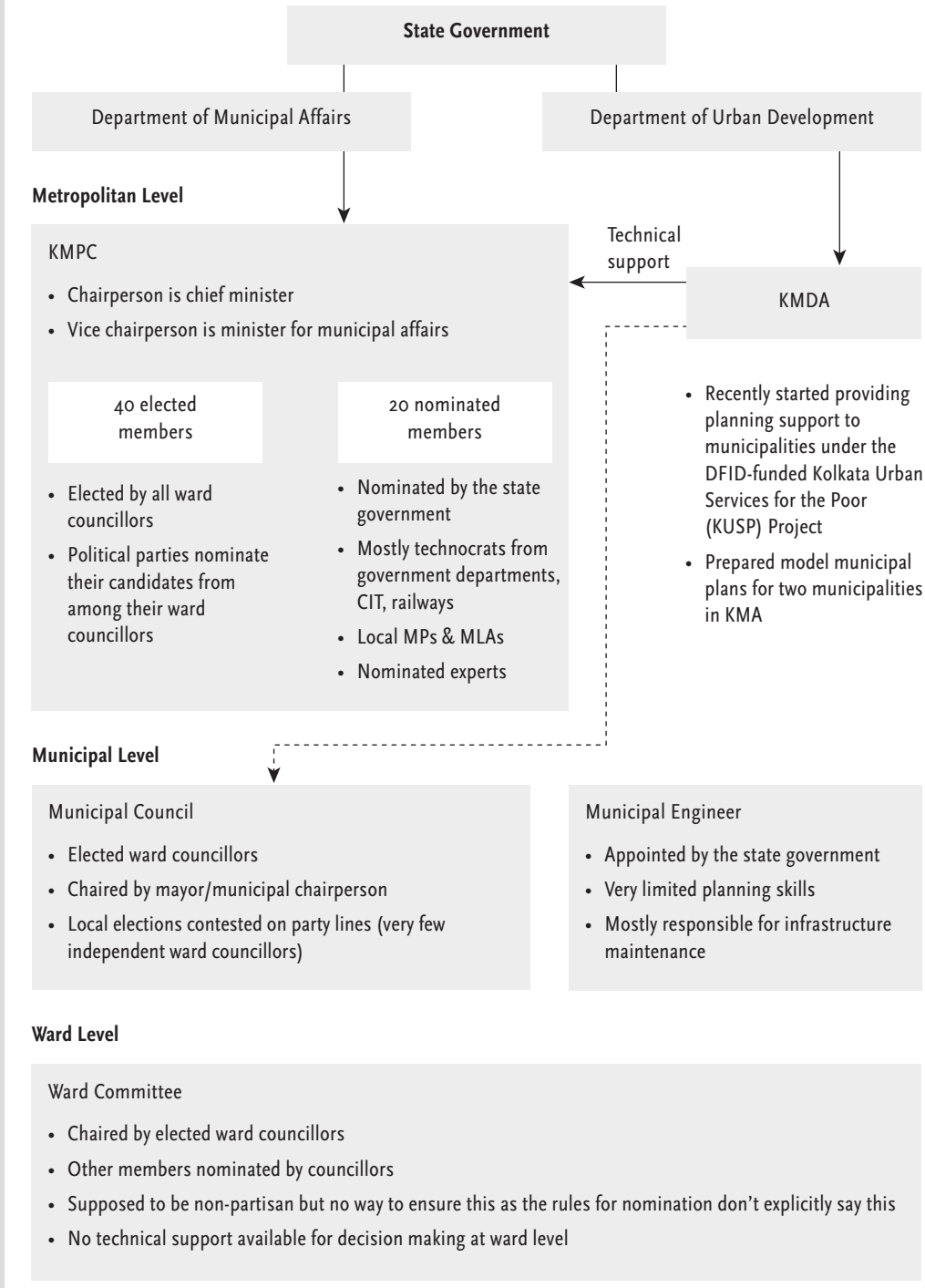
It is a hard reality that the task involved in preparing the municipal development plan according to the constitution's guidelines, cannot be performed by the municipalities all by themselves. The reason lies not in municipal institutional debility, but in a lack of organisational capacity (Bhattacharya, 1998). Given their fiscal constraints, the municipalities will remain incapacitated from bearing the financial cost of internalising the required planning expertise. A cost-effective and workable alternative is the preparation of model development plans for a municipality in each size class – small, medium, and large – by a multidisciplinary expert group. KMDA has offered to prepare model plans for two municipalities (Titagarh and Barrackpore) within KMA. It remains to be seen how successful these model plans will become as helpful tools for other municipalities to prepare their plans themselves.

Municipal institutions

In most ULBs ward committees have only recently been formed, and as such, their role is still evolving. The value of the ward committee is, however, generally accepted, and most committees meet on a monthly basis, with annual meetings open to the general public. Membership in the ward committees is broadly determined by ward committee rules set by the government of West Bengal. The background and range of members varies from ward to ward depending on such factors as the councillor, chairperson and the nature of the ward. In poorer wards there tends to be greater representation of poor and unemployed individuals. Some councillors place an emphasis on representation from those living across the ward, and some on ensuring that the committee has people with a range of backgrounds, hence bringing different skills and knowledge to the committee. Common features include:

- Under-representation of women. Most of the committees that were visited did not have more than one or two women members.

Figure 2.2 Institutional framework of Kolkata's 'Decentralised' decision making



- Limited representation of SJSRY[17] or Indian Population Project VII (IPP VIII) representatives on the committee.

In general SJSRY Neighbourhood Committee members and IPP VIII workers were not represented on the ward committees. As a result the representation of the poor is weak, and the integration of SJSRY with ward committee planning has to be mediated through the office of the councillor. In wards headed by a woman councillor the poverty agenda is often better integrated with the work of the ward committee, since the councillor is better acquainted with the neighbourhood groups, neighbourhood committees and other women's organisations.

The committees prepare annual plans to prioritise their needs. These consist primarily of small-scale infrastructure requirements, combining new capital works with maintenance functions (such as repairs to roads, drains, etc.). Plans are generally short-term and tend to be 'wish' lists of requirements and outline costs prepared with little or no technical input from engineers. The planning process is weak for a number of reasons:

- Plans are short-term with a focus on small-scale infrastructure and lack an integrated vision.
- There are limited mechanisms for public consultation. (Details follow in the next chapter.)
- Local level planning is undertaken with a limited information base, and there is little information about the problems facing the urban poor, or integration with the *para*[18] level needs-identification promoted under SJSRY. (It is an irony that these committees are closest to the ground and that they lack information. This is a complete contrast with Mumbai Alliance's neighbourhood mapping activities.)

Committee members commonly identify needs on the basis of their knowledge of the ward and limited discussions with others. Formal consultative mechanisms are not well established. The majority of annual public meetings serve as a forum at which the priority lists compiled by the committees are presented and ratified. Because the poor are generally not represented on the committee their needs are not necessarily reflected in the annual plans. Beneficiary committees overseeing local development schemes were found in a number of wards. Although empowered to do so, ward committees do not play an active role in the implementation of urban poverty programmes under SJSRY or NSDP.

17 SJSRY is a central government sponsored urban employment programme to alleviate poverty, with neighbourhood-level committees.

18 "Para" is a Bengali word that refers to a geographical unit synonymous with neighbourhoods.

Most councillors hold meetings of the ward committee in their own homes or in local clubs or public buildings. Some of the more prosperous municipalities (such as Kalyani municipality) have constructed ward offices for each of their wards. There were some discussions about the extent to which ward committees should be supported with additional staff (with a municipal officer reporting to the ward committee) and with funds to cover their administrative costs and some minor maintenance activities. Such discussions are sporadic and not institutionalised in the ward committee rules.

Capacity of municipal and community institutions

The 3-tier women's community-based structures required by SJSRY have been set up in all but 3 of the towns. In addition there are CBOs such as youth clubs, savings groups and trade organisations in almost every poor neighbourhood. Currently TPOs have been appointed in 29 towns and there are 64 COs spread across 33 towns, 37 of whom are women. Urban poverty alleviation schemes are coordinated by the Urban Poverty Eradication (UPE) cell at the municipal level. It can be said that the base for community participation exists both in poor communities and in the municipality. However there are serious constraints to capacity and functioning, which will assume greater proportions with the additional and diverse demands made on the municipalities once the KUSP project gets underway.

Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) have not yet been set up in all poor settlements, raising questions about the representation of poor women at higher levels of the structure. Also the ambit of their activities is narrow. Municipalities and the State Urban Development Agency (SUDA) attribute this to limited staff capacity. Community development staff capacity is limited not only because of limited numbers but also because TPOs and COs are not skilled or experienced at the time of recruitment. Training courses by the state government's Institute for Local Government and Urban Studies (ILGUS) and other institutions and exposure on the job have helped to develop skills to some extent. But a consolidated salary of Rs 2000 per month hardly offers incentives or career prospects to COs. COs are even expected to incur the expense of travelling across the wards under their supervision, which are sometimes spread over a large area. TPOs are paid a consolidated salary of Rs 4000 per month and are usually retired state government or municipal employees.

To summarise, in this chapter I have presented the context – political, socio-economic, and institutional – within which the planning process of metropolitan Kolkata operates. I have described Kolkata's extreme poverty, the political turmoil in its recent history, followed by the long and continuing dominance of the Left Front coalition at the state level, and the Left Front's past and recent experiments in decentralising urban planning. The following chapter presents an analysis of the information I have gathered on the planning process in Kolkata in the backdrop of the context presented in this chap-

ter. It will provide a closer look at the stated goals and objectives of decentralised planning as implemented by the West Bengal government in relation to the reality of the decision-making process as it exists in metropolitan Kolkata.

3 Decentralisation of Kolkata's metropolitan planning

3.1 The 'official story'

There is a story about a would-be school teacher who was asked during an interview by the principal of a conservative religious school, 'Is the earth flat or round?' The hapless teacher looked around at the faces of the interviewers for hints and, not finding any, settled for this response: 'I can teach it flat or round.' The above story might help us understand the relationship between the planners of Kolkata and their political bosses at the state and local level. In this section, I discuss the role played by the political culture at the state level in influencing the planning process at the local and metropolitan level.

West Bengal is one of the few states in the country to have carried out all the compliance legislation in connection with the 74th CAA, either with new laws or amendments of the existing ones. The West Bengal Municipal Act 1993 (including the formation and functions of borough committees, and reservation of seats) has become a national reference point (at least in its conceptual form); the West Bengal District Planning Committee Act, and Rules 1994; the West Bengal Metropolitan Planning Committee Act 1994, and Rules 2001; the West Bengal Municipal (Ward Committee) Rules 2001 have been enacted. Two State Finance Commissions (SFC) were appointed as per the new requirement of the CAA during 1995-2000, followed by a Municipal Administrative Reforms Committee (MARC) in 2001 and most recently Kolkata has become the first metropolis in the country to constitute a Metropolitan Planning Committee (KMPC) which started functioning in December 2001.

Although the legal framework for decentralised planning is in place, some have expressed doubts about its real efficacy in the political context of West Bengal. In the state, among its bureaucrats in particular, there is a perception that the state has been at the forefront of the current shift to decentralised planning and administration. In one of the interviews, a senior planner in KMDA even attributes West Bengal's success with decentralisation as the 'driving factor' for the passage of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts in the National Parliament in 1992. A number of documents produced by state agencies (CEMSAP, 1996; Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority, 2001) and also by academicians and practitioners (Ghosh, 1996; KUSP Design Team, 2003) have claimed West Bengal to be a pioneer in terms of developing the legislative framework for elected local self-government in India. At the same time, there are others (Webster, 1992) who have expressed doubts about the state's real motive for decentralisation. Some have clearly suggested that the Government of West Bengal is not functioning as well as it should. One study provides an interesting insight into the difference in perceptions of the councillors in local bodies and their voters in explaining the inadequacies in basic services in their localities:

> *…the majority of councilors in local bodies perceive shortage of funds to be one of the most important factors affecting the provision of adequate basic amenities…while only 7.6% of voters agreed with this….The majority opinion (60.66%) was that the administrative deficiency was the main culprit (Ghosh, 1996, p. 45-46).*

Is it really in support of the notion of 'planning from the bottom up' as an ideological goal that is pushing the drive towards decentralisation in West Bengal? And if that is really so, does the official policy of decentralisation actually get translated into an effective strategy for 'governing from below' (as described in Sellers, 2002a)? Are the current structures of power facilitating or hindering the local level plans from informing higher level decisions? This chapter tries to answer some of these questions.

On reading the planning history of Kolkata through the eyes of planning academicians and practitioners (see Bagchi, 1987; see Banerjee & Chakravorty, 1994; S. K. Roy & Roy, 1990 among others) one can easily see that what they describe in their works is the 'official story' (see Sandercock, 1998, p. 2) of planning in Kolkata. The official planning history only helps in justifying the planning profession and doesn't document the criticism inherent in the profession. Sandercock (1998) argues for the need for two diversions from the current trend in planning history: (1) The object of planning history should not be just to describe and celebrate the profession's emergence and achievements but also to be critical about things that have gone bad or haven't gone the way they were intended. (2) The subject should not be just the planning 'profession' and state- and market-sponsored planning but include non-professionals resisting and making positive changes in their community and environment.

Although I agree with her on the need for a shift in focus of both the object and the subject of planning research, the resources and time available to me to conduct my fieldwork placed artificial boundaries on the scope of my research. To identify and document cases where citizens or communities have come together in an effort to resist 'official' planning and development or have an 'alternative' planning and development (see Friedmann, 1992) of their own would have required much more fieldwork than my available resources could permit. I chose instead to focus my data collection and analysis on the edges of the 'official' or the state-controlled planning institutions, where voices from the citizens and communities gain entry, often times under conditions of harsh structural constraints and bureaucratic barriers. These edges exist at all levels of decision making – ward, municipal, metropolitan, state, national and even beyond. Although in this research I do not study the non-state planning aspect, I do hope the critique of the state-sponsored planning and changes in the state-sponsored planning process will bring important changes to the way planning theory, planning culture and planning history is written and talked about.

In the existing planning literature on Kolkata, which has focused mainly on the 'official story' we also find instances of influence from actors beyond their local, regional or even national realm. One such study (Banerjee & Chakravorty, 1994) serves as a graphic example of how the larger picture of a city's future is drawn by the forces of politics and economics in conjunction with 'foreign' expertise and values that are often attached to external funding. My research also delves into the dynamics of external funding and how that changes the structures within which the voices of ordinary people are inserted in the public decision-making process. I will come back to this aspect later in Chapter 5. In the following section I outline the unique features of decentralised planning in West Bengal's context.

3.2 Decentralisation in West Bengal

I begin by asking: what does decentralisation mean to West Bengal's Left Front government? Which of its characteristics are different from the word's commonly understood idea? First, the policy to decentralise decision making was primarily meant for rural West Bengal. So decentralised planning in urban areas in West Bengal was not by design but as a consequence of rural self-government. Next, I argue that decentralisation in West Bengal is more or less understood as local representative/electoral democracy. Participatory democracy is not very well developed in West Bengal. The third point I make here is that democracy (like participation) is seen as 'instrumental' – as a means to some other end, rather than an end in itself. I present evidence in support of these three points below.

Since India gained independence, there has been a systematic rural bias not just in West Bengal but throughout India. At the time of independence 85 per cent of India's population was living in rural areas. Rural poverty was seen as a greater challenge for the political leaders and economists. The problems of urban India were barely recognised (Burra, 2005, p. 68). The administrative system for the country after Independence was designed with the vast rural population particularly in mind, with very little thought given to urban administration. In West Bengal in particular, experiments with decentralisation began during the late 1960s when the Communist-led United Front coalition briefly came to power and tried to implement a policy of large-scale redistribution of agricultural land in rural areas. To mobilise support for the policy locally and to implement such a policy effectively CPI-M decentralised the way its cadres operated. Even though the United Front government did not last for very long, the seeds for a decentralised administration had been sowed. After the CPI-M came back to power in 1977, mainly due to the support it received from the rural poor, it embarked on even greater decentralisation – resuming local level elections with a focus on strengthening its rural support base

(Webster, 1992). 'The process of decentralisation in West Bengal happened not by design but by event [reference to CPI-M coming to power] starting with its practice in the rural areas'.[19] For a long time the governmental needs of urban areas,[20] and metropolitan areas like Kolkata, in particular, remained more or less unchanged from what was inherited from the British administration. Only after the 74th CAA, when the West Bengal Municipal Act 1993 was passed, was there a concerted effort in the West Bengal legislature to implement the policy in urban areas.

The decentralisation process in West Bengal is characterised by its insistence on representative democracy, with a negligible amount of participatory democracy. The area of governance relating to the consultation for public policy and planning necessitates actions at the city level and beyond, where the conflict between representative and participatory approaches comes into sharper focus. It also relates to decisions which have larger regional impact and, therefore, are not generally given priority by small, community-based groups (Mehta, 1999, p. 174). Not only does West Bengal lack the civil society infrastructure needed for participation by various interest groups at the city or regional level, but also technocrats, planners and politicians have hardly shown any interest in including non-partisan civil society groups in the planning process. When he was asked if the five sectoral plans prepared by the KMPC are to be made public before they are approved, so that concerned citizens or groups can comment or raise objections to them, KMDA's Director General (Planning and Development), Mr Tushar Mitra stated:

> *"KMPC is given the authority to prepare the plans. Once KMPC approves of the plan, it will be final. No public hearing or publication of the draft plan in local newspapers is proposed since KMPC already has 40 elected representatives."*

He legitimises adoption of the plan without inviting comments from the general public on the basis that there are already elected members[21] in KMPC. A non-partisan civil society organisation, the Bus and Railway Commuters' Association, for example, can have no direct say in the preparation of the traffic and transportation sector plan in Kolkata. In spite of their repeated grievances about train and bus service in the city, they were never invited to be part of the process of route and fare rationalisation of buses and minibuses that were part of KMPC's sectoral plan for traffic and transportation. Can KMPC's elected representatives substitute for the participation of concerned citizens and civic groups in the planning process? In other words, does KMPC claim to

19 According to Mr Sunil Kumar Roy, ex-Director General (Planning and Development), KMDA and a nominated member of KMPC, interviewed January 11, 2005.

20 The administrative and governmental needs of the urban areas are different from those of rural areas where the spillover effects of decisions made in one local jurisdiction on another are limited.

21 A point to be noted is that these elected members are not directly elected by the citizens of KMA.

include all interest groups, making a public hearing of the plan redundant? These are some of the questions addressed later in the chapter.

What were the main arguments within the planning discourse that led to the adoption of the policy of a decentralised and participatory planning and decision-making process in Kolkata? The initial driver for greater decentralisation in KMDA's planning process derived from the failure of the centralised planning strategy in improving the living environment and service delivery. The planning process that KMDA had initially adopted was based on the rational comprehensive planning model where 'experts' armed with data and prediction tools made the decisions on land use and infrastructure development without (or with very little) participation from local communities or end users. In an interview Mr. Kalyan Roy, Director (Microfinance) in KMDA, identified two reasons for the failure of this kind of planning process. First, it failed to capture the needs and priorities at the local level. Second, the operation and upkeep of the infrastructure that was built by KMDA was transferred to the municipalities, but they failed to take ownership (in terms of responsibility) of these projects because they were never made part of the planning process earlier. So many of the projects soon went into a state of disrepair and subsequently ceased to operate. Mr Roy therefore attributes the policy of decentralised and participatory planning in KMA to the failures of the incumbent planning process.

This idea of participation, as largely linked to development projects, was with a view to improving effectiveness and project efficiency and, in some cases, to encouraging cost-sharing. These project-linked objectives or rationales of participation have often been called 'instrumental' or a means to other ends (Mehta, 1999). This rationale is significantly different from the idea of empowerment and capacity building through participation that the NGO sector has long advocated. This latter rationale treats participation as an end in itself but one which often leads to other positive spin-offs in the form of empowerment and capacity building, enabling communities to continue with their regular functions as well as participating in project deliberations more effectively.

In the following section I examine the influence of party politics on the decentralised planning process at the metropolitan, municipal and ward levels.

3.3 Partisan politics and urban planning

Although many officials in West Bengal's Left Front government often claim that it was the pioneer in democratic decentralisation and bottom-up planning in India, many scholars (Webster, 1992) have noted a gap between the official rhetoric and existing reality.

In Calcutta, as in West Bengal and the rest of India, planning is done from

Streetside market: recipients of party patronage

the top-down. It has been argued that planning is fundamentally a 'state apparatus', and that seems particularly true in India. After forty years of post-colonial organisational developments, few municipalities can plan, and activism by citizen groups is minimal. Calcutta, despite its heightened political culture, is no exception.

> *The apathy of the urban public means that the political parties have little incentive to decentralise planning. In examining the recent experience with district-level planning in West Bengal, Ghosh (1988) points out that the idea of bottom-up planning is contradictory to any political framework, regardless of who holds power.…And while the rural reforms pursued by the Left Front have significantly increased political awareness and participation at the* Gram Panchayat *and* Panchayat Samiti *levels,* partisan politics *[emphasis added] still shape its policies. (Banerjee & Chakravorty, 1994)*

My research reconfirms the above mismatch between the strict top-down hierarchy in which political parties are organised and the approaches of bottom-up planning as envisioned by the constitutional amendments.

As Susanne Rudolph notes in her article on civil society (Rudolph, 2000), not all kinds of civil societies (in her words, 'associationalism') are friendly to democracy. Differentiating types of associations might produce better assessments of their effect on democracy. To differentiate among associations she addresses three types of questions: (1) Are associations political or non-political; if political, are they deliberative or interest-oriented? (2) Are they hierarchical or egalitarian? (3) Are they voluntary or natural (ascribed)? According to her, such differences may be consequential for the relationships between associations and democracy. In the case of Kolkata, the dominant forms of civic associations that are part of the metropolitan decision-making process, i.e.

CPI(M) flags on a traffic pedestal at Nagerbazar intersection in North Kolkata

the political parties, are political associations by definition and strictly hierarchical. They are structured on Leninist-style principles of leadership. Members in this kind of association stand in a dependent, clientelist relation to patrons. They are habituated to comply with and act on the directives of those in authority. 'Hierarchical associations are not likely to create the sort of psychological and moral preconditions that generate the social capital considered a pre-condition for democracy' (Rudolph, 2000).

Since 1977 the CPI-M party organisation in West Bengal, along with various mass fronts affiliated to it, have witnessed a steady growth in membership which has narrowed the bridge between the population and party members. For instance, in 1992, the total membership of all the mass fronts of the CPI-M in Burdwan district in West Bengal was 2,466,728 (this excluded the party membership which in 1992 was 10,676) when the total population of the district was about 6 million (Sain, 1995, p. 241-266).

In the following section, I describe the planning process at three levels – metropolitan, municipal and ward levels – in greater depth. Figure 2.1 in the previous chapter illustrates the institutional framework for Kolkata's decentralised planning.

3.3.1 Three-tier metropolitan planning

Planning in India is a function of elite civil services at both federal and state levels that were designed to encourage separation between the political and administrative arms of the government. Admission to and promotion within the civil services are considered to be based on merit, not patronage. The cadre of administrators responsible for planning is presented as a socially representative, civic-minded, politically independent group working to improve the general living conditions of Indian citizens. In reality, women are

largely under-represented in the civil service, which is comprised mostly of urban, upper-middle-class males. The theoretical separation between political and administrative functions is often tangled and blurred (Friedmann, 2005b). Planners at the metropolitan level in Kolkata are supposed to be doing what the dean of Berkeley's Graduate School of Public Policy referred to as 'speaking truth to power' (Wildavsky, 1979, as cited by Friedmann, 1987, p. 8). In the days of royalty, such speech had been the privilege of trusted chamberlains – and the court jester. Now it is the planners' turn. But are they really doing it?

An example of the hierarchical patron-client relationship among elected officials of different administrative levels is illustrated by what a senior planner in KMDA (who was also serving as a nominated member of KMPC) had to say about KMPC meetings:

> *"We wouldn't expect a councilor or a municipal chairperson [i.e. a municipal-level politician elected to be a KMPC member] to oppose any suggestions made by a [state-level] minister [also belonging to the same party], would we?"*

Most councillors have political ambitions beyond ward- or municipal-level politics. To bring these ambitions to fruition, they need to avoid antagonising (if not actively seeking favours from) their party leaders at the state level. And even those councillors and municipal chairpersons who would like to remain active only in their local politics, need the patronage of their party bosses at the state level in order to secure the party ticket to contest the next municipal election. Along with the fact that the Minister for Municipal Affairs in the state-level administration (ex-officio chairperson of KMPC) presides over all KMPC meetings, this makes the power relations between the state and the local similar to those in a patron-client relationship. Such a relationship undermines the state government's efforts towards democratic decentralisation in urban development.

It is implicit in the quote above that the interviewee omitted any mention of elected members in KMPC who are from political parties other than the ones that form part of the ruling coalition in the state government. Of course, this omitted group of ward and municipal-level politicians would be freer to voice their local concerns in metropolitan-level deliberations. But they are only a handful in number compared to the majority who belong to the ruling Left Front coalition. In addition, according to another nominated member of KMPC, most of the elected KMPC members from political parties outside the Left Front fail to take an active interest in the workings of the KMPC – they feel they have very little political influence in decision making through KMPC due to their very limited representation. They seldom attend KMPC meetings.

Such hierarchical relationships of patronage are not limited to the circle of elected local officials. They also apply to the technocrats employed in KMDA, including their planners. When talking to the planning officials from KMDA, and a few academicians who have turned to advising the state government

on issues relating to urban planning and decision making, there seems to be a general sense of approval (and in some instances, enthusiastic support) of the Left Front government in the state and in many municipalities in KMA. Some citizens have noted and voiced their concerns over the lack of independence of the bureaucratic machinery in the state of West Bengal from influence of dominant political parties:

> *[T]here is no one in West Bengal today who has not witnessed vote fraud in some form. Consider the methods of intimidating the voters of the opposition parties that the CPI-M uses to achieve uncontested victory – 'motorbike brigades', ostracism, threats of rape, actual murder and all that. And who has not seen the televised reports of vote rigging at the Salt Lake [one of the municipalities within KMA] civic poll in 2000, with Alapan Bandyopadhyay, district magistrate [who coincidentally was to be made the CEO of KMDA during the course of my fieldwork in 2004], and Gautam Chakraborty, DIG, Presidency Range, looking on as nonplussed bystanders? A much respected former IAS[22] officer says a government-officer must needs deal with governments run by rival parties in order to realise what it means to achieve stability in a democracy despite political flux. In this view, those who joined the services in 1977, and are going to retire before long, without working with any government other than the Left Front have clearly developed a vested interest in inefficiency by being party to the vote fraud. (S. Sanyal, 2005b)*

This not only holds true for IAS officers working in state departments but also for planners working in KMDA. The CEO of KMDA is usually an IAS officer on deputation by the state government. Most often CEOs have little or no planning experience; their professional training is mainly in the area of public administration. Friedmann (2004) has already noted that India's planning function is directed by the elite civil service bureaucrats. And Indian civil service entrance exams favour general knowledge over specific skills, leading to criticism that the civil service lacks professional and technical proficiency in endeavours such as planning. In addition, the ruling political party is highly influential in decisions such as the promotion and transfer of these bureaucrats. Further, the newspaper editorial that reported the local district magistrate deliberately ignored (if not actively assisted) vote rigging by the ruling political party and was then deputed to head the organisation entrusted with the planning function (rationality being key to its process) for Kolkata Metropolitan Area is an extreme example of the blurring of the theoretical separation between power and rationality, similar to what Flyvbjerg (1998) finds in his Aalborg Project case in Denmark.

Therefore, the 'latent' function (Merton, 1957, p. 60) of KMDA's planners was 'mere rationalisation of political decisions' (see Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 19) al-

22 IAS is an abbreviation for Indian Administrative Service, the post-independence equivalent of the Indian Civil Service.

ready made by the politically stronger interests within the KMPC. It is worth mentioning here that, based on my analysis of the minutes of the KMPC's various sector committee meetings, only rarely did the nominated (non-elected) members (representing planners and engineers from various public agencies, such as KMDA, Port Trust of India, Indian Railways, etc.) in the KMPC propose any new plan or alternatives to existing plans or opposed to any of the proposals that came from the elected members (politicians) of KMPC. The planners in KMDA did have a role to play though. When they were to make decisions on how to allocate limited state resources among the various plan proposals that came from many elected members of the KMPC, they had to justify the inclusion of some of the proposals and the dropping of others based on some kind of 'technical' analysis. The minutes of the KMPC meetings did not provide enough data to decipher any real pattern in the way some of the proposals made their way in the annual plan-of-action of KMPC and whether and how power relations among the members of KMPC had a role to play in the so-called 'technical' analysis conducted by KMDA. Nevertheless, the dominance of the state's ruling party and its regimental hierarchical organisation seemed to significantly reduce alternative proposals that came to be discussed in KMPC.

In order to understand how planning at the metropolitan level is informed by more local municipal and ward-level plans, I asked one councillor from Kolkata Municipal Corporation and one councillor from South Dum Dum Municipality, who were not members of KMPC, about the processes of information flow between them and KMPC. To my surprise, neither of them was aware of the metropolitan level sectoral plans prepared by the KMPC. One of them did not even know who among the councillors in his municipality was elected to represent the municipality in KMPC. Talking to some of the planners in KMDA who are non-elected (nominated) members of KMPC, I learned that there were a few councillors who were not members of KMPC but who regularly sought information about KMPC decisions; two of them even proposed projects in their locality to be included in the KMPC sector plan for traffic and transportation. Therefore, despite KMPC being seen by the state government as providing a forum to help information flow between metropolitan planners and local leaders who are most aware about local needs and priorities, the elected members of KMPC were not obliged to report the proceedings of the KMPC meetings to their colleagues at the municipal level. Neither were the local councillors who are not members of KMPC aware of the role and functions of KMPC or the ways in which they could have a voice in the decisions taken by KMPC.

3.3.2 Agents of change in the decentralisation process

Among the professional planners in KMDA with whom I spoke, and contrary to Sandercock's (1998) thesis, I found a general consensus in the perception that all planning and development work that goes on in the city is driven by the 'government'. But the notion of which governmental level – national, state or local – initiates and implements the policy of democratic decentralisation is more ambiguous. In response to my question, 'who is the change agent in the process of democratic decentralisation in Kolkata?' a planner in KMDA noted:

> *"Frankly speaking, whatever changes are taking place in developing countries are initiated by the government. In West Bengal the changes were initiated when the Left Front government came to power in 1977. They adopted a policy of decentralisation of planning and development in both urban and rural areas. Dwelling on the experiences in WB, the central government initiated the proposed bill for the constitutional amendment in the parliament. [The] late Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, initiated it in parliament but he didn't live to see it approved."*

Despite his attributing the role of change agent more broadly to the 'government', he assigns the Left Front government in West Bengal, in particular, the role of initiator of the process of decentralisation, not just in the state but for the entire country. This is yet more evidence of the widespread perception among planners within KMDA that the Left Front Government in West Bengal has been the pioneer of democratic decentralisation in India. But the above quote also illustrates that the Congress(I)[23]-led government at the national level adopted this policy to be implemented nationwide through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. The Constitutional Amendments mandated all state governments to amend their laws relating to local administration. West Bengal, where the state government had already introduced some of these changes[24], still required additional changes in its laws on town and country planning to bring it in conformance with the mandates of the constitutional amendments of 1992. So, in a way, the national government adopted the policy of decentralisation as practiced in West Bengal and took it one step further.

The quote also places significance on the efforts by individuals within the 'government' – in this case, India's late Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. As pointed out by Nas (2005), current urban social science research often neglects the role of those individuals who take decisive action for urban change and in-

23 Congress(I) is a rival political party to the Left Front coalition in West Bengal.

24 For example, the West Bengal Government had introduced the Mayor-In-Council (MIC) and Chair-In-Council (CIC) forms of local government in urban areas a decade earlier than the constitutional amendments in 1992.

stead overemphasises impersonal aggregative social processes as the main determinants of urban structure and change. Although this research recognises the importance of viewing 'governments' as being made up of individuals, each of whom brings their own values and charisma with them into the institution, it is beyond the scope of this research to actually study their influence in any detail.

Local planning institutions and organisations are also affected by donor agencies, which exert an important influence, one which is often ignored in the literature on local government. Donor agencies can be either higher levels of government or external bilateral donors or development banks. The central government funds projects and programmes in various states contingent upon their adopting certain policies. This gives them added leverage in negotiating with the states to implement some structural changes to make the process of decentralised planning more participatory. In Kolkata, a number of central government-sponsored programmes like Environment Improvement in Urban Slums (EIUS), Urban Basic Services Programme (UBSP), *Nehru Rozgar Yogjana* (NRY), National Slum Development Policy (NSDP), and recently *Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojna* (SJSRY) have also resulted in making the state government agree to certain policies of the central government. Similarly, external donor agencies play a significant role in making 'structural' (as (Giddens, 1984) would call it) changes in the context of local planning and decision making. In Kolkata, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) has been an important donor for urban development and municipal capacity building since the 1980s. Recently, DFID agreed to fund the Kolkata Urban Services for the Poor (KUSP) programme that would build capacity for decision making and planning at the ward and municipal level for all the 40 urban local bodies in order for them to provide urban services with a focus on the poor and on marginalised groups. The programme began in March 2004 and is scheduled to run for 8 years with a budget of Rs 800 crores (Biswas, 2003). The Metropolitan Planning Committee Act, which was mandated by the 74th CAA, proposed the creation of the Kolkata Metropolitan Planning Committee. Although this Act was passed in the West Bengal State Legislature in 1994, KMPC was not formed till 2001. KMPC did not function for years, until DFID made it a condition for going ahead with funding for KUSP. Many believe[25] that KMPC was a way to keep KMDA alive by making it serve as its technical secretariat. Once KUSP is fully operational, the major funding route for the municipalities will be through the Draft Development Plan that they prepare at the municipal level and which is consolidated at the Metropolitan level. In the first phase of the programme, it is expected that at least 12 ULBs will have their municipal development plans approved for funding

25 Source: Personal communication with Ms. Banashree Banerjee (Aug. 25, 2005).

(Biswas, 2003).

In addition to agents of change, it is important to identify the agents that have resisted change towards decentralisation in West Bengal. According to Arun Ghosh (Ghosh, 1989), a former member of the National Planning Commission and the key architect of decentralised planning in West Bengal, departmental sectarianism and the resistance of the bureaucracy were the most serious impediments to the meaningful integration of the district sector schemes with the local plans (as cited in Thomas Isaac & Franke, 2002, p. 15). Others have also noted the problem of inertia within the bureaucracy that was inherited without serious changes from the colonial past:

> *Within the Indian bureaucracy, as in most bureaucracies, the hierarchical structure of command and responsibility and other factors such as the process of promotion serve to reinforce the concentration of power at the top. This has in turn reproduced the strength and power invested in the bureaucracy which was originally developed to serve the needs of a colonial state (Webster, 1992, p. 131).*

I cannot conclusively verify this claim through my research. I did not specifically pose this question to my interviewees from the planning bureaucracy, but a veteran housing activist in Kolkata whom I interviewed described KMDA as a 'mafia organisation' and said that with a few exceptions, most high-level planners are benefiting from the old ways of centralised planning through corruption in land allocation and development rights.

3.3.3 Actors in planning at the ward level

One of the significant provisions of the 74th CAA has been the setting up of wards and ward committees (WC) in urban local bodies with a population of more than three hundred thousand. This was envisaged to ensure people's participation in civic affairs at the grassroots level. Ward committees were therefore meant to be the lowest level of organisation of the state. This places them at the edge of the state (the government) and the non-state (the citizenry or the governed). In the present discussion it is therefore important to understand how the state and the non-state interact from the two sides of the edge in the public planning and decision-making process. This section will describe the functioning of the ward committees in greater detail.

The objectives of the WCs are firstly, to ensure the enhanced proximity of elected representatives for better accountability and performance at the neighbourhood level, and secondly, the increased participation of people in the delivery of services and governance of their areas. Article 243S of the constitution empowers the legislatures of a state to make, by law, provision with respect to the composition and the territorial area of a ward committee and the manner in which the seats in a ward committee are to be filled. Even though all states have incorporated the provision regarding the formation of

WCs in their conforming legislation as per constitutional requirements, wide variations are found across states in terms of constitution, composition, nomination and also in the functional and financial powers of the WCs. Different state governments have different rules for the formation of WCs. There may be one committee for each ward or for a collection of wards. The decision depends entirely on the state government (Ghosh & Mitra, 2003).

The West Bengal Municipal Act, 1993 (amended in 1994) has the provision to constitute WC in each municipal ward. All the municipal corporation acts have also been amended to include that provision. According to the West Bengal Municipal (Ward Committee) Rules, 2001, WCs have been entrusted with most of the important functions that an urban local body performs at the ward level.

After the municipal elections in 1995 consequent to the 74th CAA West Bengal was one of the few states that ensured that WCs were formed in every municipality. However, the functioning of WCs is not uniform in all municipalities within the state. It differs from one WC to another in the same municipality (Ghosh & Mitra, 2003).

There have been studies that describe the functioning of ward committees in West Bengal. According to a study (Ghosh & Mitra, 2003) in two ULBs in West Bengal (six wards in Siliguri Municipal Corporation and four wards in Bidhannagar Municipality, (the latter is within the Kolkata Metropolitan Area)), in the low income and slum dominated localities, people's interest and participation in the day-to-day activities of the WCs is more than in middle and high-income communities where people feel that because they pay taxes to the municipalities, they are entitled to all services and their participation in local affairs is not necessary. There are a number problems in terms of representation and participation through ward committees that this study has identified. The inadequate representation of women and youth in most ward committees is widely recognised. Also some have pointed to the fact that WCs do not have any financial allocation or resources to take up developmental work. Their job is confined primarily to monitoring and supervision. In addition, the performance of a WC depends heavily on the initiatives of the ward councillor. If he is enthusiastic and committed, he can select good members without political considerations who are more involved in the ward activities (Ghosh & Mitra, 2003). Otherwise, monthly meetings and annual general meetings become 'rituals'.[26]

I identified some problems from my fieldwork. One is that the population size of the wards is often too large for effective participation by its citizens. For example, among the two wards that I studied, Ward 7 of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation has a population of about 30,000. The other ward that I

26 As per one of the councillors I interviewed.

studied (Ward 11 of Kalyani Municipality, about 50 km north of Kolkata Municipal Corporation) has a population of about 10,000. The latter of the two wards had an attendance of about 100 people (1 per cent of the total population of the ward) in the annual general meeting.[27]

Second, the ward committees are currently not performing any planning function – not even collecting information that might be useful for planning and decision making at higher levels. Even though the constitution provides for its role in the overall planning of the metropolitan area, ward committees have not been involved in the planning process at all. The West Bengal Municipal (Ward Committee) Rules, 2001 (Part IV, Rule 11) clearly states the planning function of the WCs: (1) to prepare a list of the schemes for development of the ward to be undertaken within the next five years; (2) to prepare annual priority lists of these schemes and submit the same to the municipality (or the Notified Area Authority) for incorporating them in the Development Plan of the Municipality as per the provision of the West Bengal Municipal Act, 1993.

In reality however, neither of the two ward committees that I studied were performing the planning functions as envisaged by the Indian Constitution. Ward 11 of Kalyani Municipality was somewhat better than Ward 7 of Kolkata Municipal Corporation in that it at least brought problems of maintenance and upkeep of municipal facilities like parks and roads to the attention of the municipal authorities. Other than that, I did not find either of the ward committees engaged in identifying problem areas or preparing a list of schemes to address them.

Third, like the KMPC and the municipal councils, the ward committees were found to be working in extremely partisan ways. The system of selection of ward committee members by the ward councillor is highly discretionary and the ward committee rules specifying the types of nominees to be selected are often violated. Since the ward councillor nominates the WC members, the general tendency has been for them to select people from their own political party. WCs under a councillor from the party opposing the party in control of the municipality also complain of discrimination by the municipality in financial allocation, provision of services and general neglect. Therefore even though ward committees were designed to be 'non-political entities',[28] the field observations show that they are becoming another political organisation at the sub-municipal level. Other studies on WCs have shared this observation:

> *The ULB's nominees may come from another party if the chairperson belongs to that party but in such cases the members do not take much interest in the WC as they are in the minority. Also sometimes they create problems in the smooth functioning of the WCs.*

27 Annual general meetings are open to all citizens residing in the ward.

28 As per Mr Prabhat Dutta (Advisor, ILGUS), interviewed on January 8, 2005.

Therefore the 2003 amendment to the Rules, which proposes that the names of the members selected by the councilor have to be presented before the first AGM [Annual General Meeting] to public for their approval so that the selection could be more democratic, is a welcome step (Ghosh & Mitra, 2003).

However the additional clause making it mandatory to present the names of the councillor's nominees for membership of the ward committee to the public and seeking people's approval was found to have a limited effect on making the process more democratic. Most of the participants in the annual general meetings organised by ward committees were found to be either close to the ward councillor or were drawn by the various incentives[29] that some of the more innovative ward councillors provided in order to enhance attendance at AGMs. The people who are critical of the councillor's leadership in the ward, including those belonging to the other political parties, have not used the AGMs to voice their concerns so far.

Fourth, councillors, in general, were found to be ignorant of many of the ward committee rules. One of the councillors I interviewed in fact mentioned to me that among the many ward committee rules, there is one which says that the person who lost the municipal election cannot be a member of the ward committee. In fact, there is no such rule stipulated in the West Bengal Municipal (Ward Committee) Rules, 2001 or the amendments made to it in 2003.

Fifth, inequity in the distribution of power and influence within the ward has created problems described by some as 'elite capture' (Azfar *et al*., 2004; Crook, 2003; Kimenyi & Meagher, 2004; Olowu, 2003). The following extract from my field notes presents the political dynamics among the different actors and ordinary citizens in a ward in Kolkata Metropolitan Area. Although this ward may not be representative of all wards within KMA, this description will help us appreciate the complexity of power relations at the ward level, some of which are inherited from the past and are therefore structural in nature.

Three years ago, in a neighbourhood in a municipality adjacent to Kolkata Municipal Corporation, a locally influential and prosperous trader of timber (Mr. X) sold part of his land to a promoter to construct an apartment complex where his timber workshop once stood. Mr. X is locally known well enough that the local rickshaw pullers and autorickshaw and taxi drivers would take you to this apartment complex without having to give them directions if you just asked them to take you to Mr. X's timber workshop. According to long-time residents in the neighbourhood, Mr. X has close links with the local and state-level party bosses in the sense that they benefit from each others' influence. He is also known to have close ties with antisocial hoodlums in the locality.

29 An incentive that Councillor of Ward 11 of Kalyani Municipality provides to increase attendance at the AGMs is having people enter into a lottery for small gifts.

Even after the apartments in the complex were sold and individual homeowners moved in, the influence of Mr. X in the area remained. Some of the people who worked for him earlier and who got into a patron-client relationship with Mr. X kept receiving favours in kind, often at the cost of causing a nuisance to others. For example, some of the ex-employees of Mr. X park their pushcarts and taxis inside this apartment complex at night for security reasons. Some of them even use part of the building complex as a cowshed for their cattle. The apartment owners secretly expressed to me their displeasure about the arrangement as it makes the entryway to the building complex dirty and smelly (because of cow dung) and more crowded. No one raises the issue of the cattle, pushcarts, rick-shaws and the taxi in any of the resident committee meetings. This is less out of respect for Mr. X than out of fear. No one wants to confront him and the subtle authority that he exercises locally. Since the new residents in the apartments moved in, he no longer holds the same 'godfather' position in this neighbourhood that he previously enjoyed. The composition of the neighbourhood has started to change from generally poor residents to an upwardly mobile middle-class community that sees his political influence both as an asset and as a nuisance. Many of the new residents in the building complex have developed cordial relations with Mr X in the hope that they can tap into his 'political connections' if ever needed. One of the apartment owners from this building complex and a long-time resident of the neighbourhood is a member of the local ward committee. He too receives patronage from Mr. X.[30]

There are a few points that can be drawn from the above description. First, ward committees operate in the same patron-client relationships that they were intended to replace. Second, there is a general disinterest among residents to publicly voice their opinions in matters of the public good due to a fear of antagonising the established authority. Third, new people in the neighbourhood did reduce the influence of the existing power structures. But at the same time, with the waning of the existing power structure, which provided some sort of support for many of the poor households, even though it was in the form of patronage, a need has grown for other forms of organised mobilisation of the interests of the poor households.

Generally speaking, the WCs were found to have the following roles: (1) monitoring and policing; (2) information collection (very weak but potentially useful); (3) implementing projects and policies (executive role); (4) planning (very limited – based on available resources and local level needs); (5) capacity building and mobilisation (ward committees also become the training ground for many in their political career); (6) representing local interests in municipal level decision making (lobbying role – mainly for maintenance and repair of infrastructure). This last role of WCs is key to a successful bottom-up metropolitan planning institution; because of this, it was mandated by the 74th

30 This account is based on my interviews with two residents living in the above-mentioned housing complex.

Constitutional Amendment Act.

To summarise, in this chapter I have discussed the reality – as distinct from the official rhetoric – of democratic decentralisation in West Bengal in the context of party politics, the absence of non-partisan civil society actors and the lack of political opposition to the ruling party. It describes the *real-politik* at the metropolitan, municipal and ward levels in Kolkata, which undermines the notion of bottom-up planning that the institution was designed to promote. The next chapter draws lessons from some national and international comparisons of planning institutions and processes using Kolkata's planning process as described here as a benchmark.

4 Comparative urban politics

4.1 Why study comparative urban politics?

Within comparative macro-sociology, quantitative or 'variable-oriented' and qualitative or 'case-oriented' methodologies are typically counterposed. Goldthorpe (1997) argues that by emphasising the distinctions between the two methodologies, the nature of key methodological problems is obscured. Three such problems – the small N, the Galton, and the black-box problems – are shown to arise with both approaches.

However, Ragin (1997) suggests that the case-oriented approach poses important challenges to variable-oriented research, challenges which, if answered, would make variable-oriented research more rigorous. For example, in most variable-oriented research the sample of relevant observations is usually set at the outset of a study and is not open to reformulation or redefinition. In most variable-oriented research, the operation of causal conditions that are constant across cases is obscured. In most variable-oriented research, it is difficult to examine multiple conjunctural causation (the complex web of interrelationships that occur among various causal variables) because researchers lack in-depth knowledge of cases and because their most common analytic tools cannot cope with complex causal patterns. Finally, in most variable-oriented research, ignorance of cases may find its way into the error vector of probabilistic models. Of course, the practical concerns of case-oriented research may be difficult to address in variable-oriented approach. It is still reasonable to hope, at a minimum, for greater appreciation of the special strengths of different ways of constructing social scientific representations of social life.

There are important challenges in conducting international comparative social science research (for an elaborate discussion of these challenges, see Øyen, 1990). But urban research is a more promising field of comparative research than comparing nation states. First, for the comparative urbanist, the embeddedness of cities in national institutional contexts offers good possibilities for intra-national comparison among cities, an analysis that allows for full control of national policies or factors related to political culture (Sellers, 2002b, as cited by Pierre, 2005). Furthermore, by using countries as cases and cities as units of analysis, the scholar can conduct intra-national as well as international comparisons. Finally, there is the simple observation that there are more cities than countries in the world and subsequently a greater universe is available for case selection, thus addressing the 'small N problem' mentioned above. All other things being equal, that should make it easier to find cases that allow the observer to use the most similar systems design or, alternatively, the most different systems design (Pierre, 2005, p. 455).

4.2 What is the framework for comparison?

Jon Pierre (2005) suggests using urban governance as a framework for the comparative analysis of urban politics. Comparative urban governance holds tremendous potential for assisting scholars in uncovering the causal mechanisms and drivers of political, economic, and social change at the urban level. This framework makes two propositions: first, that any analysis of livability should begin by looking at communities, NGOs, political parties, and 'the variegated collection of organisations that constitute the state'; second, that all of these were likely to be imperfect agents of livability and therefore it is necessary to think of agents of livability in terms of 'ecologies of agents' rather than single actors (Evans, 2002, p. 222).

Urban regime – a relatively stable set of rules, both formal (for example, a constitution) and informal (common law, cultural or social norms, etc.) that regulate the operation of a city government and its interactions with the economy and society – is only one specific type of urban governance; there are other types that are better-suited to cities outside the United States. Urban regime theory came to prominence with the publication of Clarence Stone's study of Atlanta in 1989, although earlier studies by Fainstein & Fainstein (1983) and Elkin (1987) have also been influential. Since then, regime analysis has been extensively used to examine urban politics both inside North America and beyond. Mossberger & Stoker (2001) argue that the wide use of regime analysis is a recognition of its value and insights but that some applications have stretched the concept beyond its original meaning to the point that the concept itself runs the risk of becoming meaningless and a source of theoretical confusion. It is suggested that regime analysis has helped considerably in reorienting the power debate in North America and in facilitating the analysis of politics beyond the formal institutions of government outside North America. The genius of the concept is its synthesis of elements of political economy, pluralism, and institutionalism. This synthesis, however, creates complexity. It views power as fragmented and regimes as the collaborative arrangements through which local governments and private actors assemble the capacity to govern. Although regimes represent the way in which local actors mediate external pressures such as economic change, the focus in regime analysis is on the internal dynamics of coalition building, on civic cooperation or informal modes of coordination across institutional boundaries. By this definition, Kolkata's governance does not fit into the idea of a regime for two reasons. First, it clearly lacks the prerequisites of public-private cooperation in pursuit of a common agenda. The Left Front government in West Bengal has shown little interest in partnering with local businesses and grassroots organisations on equal terms but has preferred to offer political patronage to them occasionally. They believe that only the public sector can restore the local economy although this belief is increasingly being questioned by a section of the

Left Front government at both the state and municipal levels.

Second, the intergovernmental relations between the local and the provincial levels are quite different from what Clarence Stone (1989) describes in his study of Atlanta as an example of an urban regime. American cities exist in a substantially different policy environment than cities in India because American local government is more dependent on cooperation with business to carry out projects such as downtown redevelopment or maintaining the local tax base. In India, local governments depend on the state government (and to a limited degree on the national government through special programmes or projects) more than on businesses and local fiscal revenue. In Kolkata, this dependence is exacerbated by the CPI-M's near-total control over public decisions as described in the previous chapter.

If Kolkata does not have an urban regime, what kind of urban governance framework can be used to compare Kolkata with other cities? I use the term 'governance' in a neutral sense to refer to the range of relationships between civil society and the state. According to Halfani (1997), governance provides the institutional framework within which the civic public realm is managed. My analysis of urban governance is an adaptation of Nick Devas's framework and includes a whole range of actors and institutions, and it is the relationships and interactions between them that determine what happens in the city (Devas, 2004). The actors and institutions involved include: private sector businesses, both corporate and informal; civil society, including community-based organisations, NGOs, political parties, religious groups, trade unions and trade associations; and the whole range of governmental agencies of national, regional, and local government, including traditional authorities where they exist. These are illustrated in Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1. Urban governance also, crucially, involves individual citizens and households in as much as they have any influence over what happens. Within this framework, the municipal government is but one element, albeit often the largest and most obvious.

There are comparative studies in India where the unit of analysis is the state rather than the cities. One such study compared the progress made towards decentralised decision making in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and West Bengal. It finds that the Karnataka experiment has been widely hailed for the non-partisan way in which it was conducted and for the substantive devolution of authority from the state level to local bodies, in terms of both executive powers and financial resources. States other than Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal, Kerela and Tamil Nadu did not make any worthwhile efforts to restore elected local bodies in rural areas (Raghavulu & Narayana, 1999).

The same study also questions the love for grassroots democracy on the part of the states introducing major reforms on the grounds that the then-ruling parties were motivated by a vested interest in accommodating local political elites in the power structure with a view to broadening and strength-

ening their power base. The restoration of democracy at the local level was definitely helpful in broadening the political base of the then-ruling parties at the grassroots level in the respective states (Raghavulu & Narayana, 1999, p. 124). But equally important is the argument that the ruling parties in other states were free to follow the same strategy – but they did not.

There can be no genuineness about decentralisation unless there is an assured devolution of funds. The state budget of Karnataka is split into two, providing a separate budget for local bodies. The action of the state legislature in this regard enables the statutory and automatic transfer of over Rs 900 crore annually, both on plan and non-plan accounts, to local bodies. There is no provision for the statutory allocation of funds among local bodies, let alone the machinery, in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. In the latter, there are allegations that at present the financial devolution from the state government to local government institutions is done arbitrarily and along partisan lines (Raghavulu & Narayana, 1999). Local governments that are in the good books of the ruling party are being favoured at the cost of others (Raghavulu & Narayana, 1999).

Apart from municipal institutions, the Indian urban scene is cluttered with a host of parastatals, and departmental agencies dealing with urban services, in addition to the general regulatory activities through the police and district administration, so much so that the substance of urban governance really lies with the state government, rather than in the municipal institutions (see Table 4.1). Jones explains this phenomenon in his case study of Indore[31] city politics: 'The bulk of the important decisions affecting the city's political destiny are made externally, at higher levels of politics. In fact, the governance of the city...is essentially by the state government' (Jones, 1974).

Since this study focuses on the government's role in planning, it will be worthwhile to point to already completed comparative studies on state-initiated planning and urban development. One recent comparison of eight case studies (Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2004) concluded that one of the reasons for government failure is its unwillingness to act appropriately (for political reasons or because of a lack of profit; no democratic pressures; no accountability to populations; no developmental state; national or provincial governments allocating city and municipal government's responsibilities without the necessary powers and resources). Comparing Kolkata with the eight case studies presented in the above research, the city belongs to the category of those that lack democratic pressure and those with an inadequate devolution of powers and resources to local authorities.

Another cross-country comparison (Meenakshisundaram, 1999) finds that even though countries favour local governments with minimal controls from

31 Indore is a city in central India in the state of Madhya Pradesh.

Table 4.1 Jurisdiction and ownership of special authorities within metro areas in 1981

Function	Delhi	Kolkata	Chennai	Mumbai
Water and sewerage	UT(L)	M(S)	S(S)	S(S)
Bus transport	UT(N)	M(S)	M(S)	L(L), S(S)
Suburban railways	UT(N)	M(N)	M(N)	M(N)
Electricity	UT(L,N)	M(S), S(S)	S(S)	L(L), S(S)
Town planning	UT(N)	M(S)	M(S)	L(L), M(S)
Area development	UT(N)	L(S), M(S)	M(S)	M(S), S(S)
Housing	UT(N)	L(S), S(S)	M(S)	M(S), S(S)
Slum improvement	UT(N)	M(S), L(S)	S(S)	S(S)
Telecommunications	M(N)	M(N)	M(N)	M(N)
Industries	UT(UT)	S(S)	S(S)	S(S)

Source: Datta, 1999

L = Local, M = Metropolitan, UT = Union Territory, S = State and N = National.
Notation outside the parentheses indicates jurisdiction, and notation within parentheses indicates ownership.

the centre/state in theory, in actual fact they pursued a centralist development strategy. This goal is achieved either by surreptitiously subverting constitutional guarantees (as in Nigeria, during the civilian era) or by openly bypassing the local bodies through the creation of development agencies which are directly under the surveillance of the higher-level governments (as in India) or by tight party control over the local bodies, at both horizontal and vertical levels (as in China). Kolkata resembles China more than it resembles the rest of India, although up until KMPC was set up in 2001 it also shared the problem of the rest of India – that of powerful state-government-controlled development agencies bypassing local bodies. It is widely believed that most developing countries seem to favour administrative rather than political decentralisation at the local level, a view held even by the World Bank until not too long ago. The poor quality of political leaders, the shortage of trained and qualified bureaucracy, the generally low status accorded to local governments and the resultant corruption and poor performance have left even the local people unenthusiastic about local governments (Meenakshisundaram, 1999).

Also, the responsibilities and resources of local governments vary in different countries. The local government share of major public consumption functions has gone up in many countries that adopted decentralisation policies. For several decades, most local governments in northwestern Europe have experienced a growth in tasks and resources. In the Scandinavian countries, this has been because local governments have administered most of the functions of the welfare state: social security, social services, health and schools; functions whose expenditures have grown because of a more fine-tuned coverage system (see Table 4.2). Of the total public consumption in 1992, local governments spent 69 per cent in Denmark, 60 per cent in Norway and 70 per cent in Sweden (Nordic Yearbook of Statistics 1994, Table 198).

Table 4.2 Local government share of major public consumption functions (in %)

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
Education	63	76	79
Health	93	93	99
Social security and welfare	95	83	92
Culture and recreation	60	66	90
Transport and communication	66	46	46
Housing and community amenity	50	N/A	82
Public order	9	16	18

Source: Nordic Yearbook of Statistics 1994, Table 198 cited in Bogason, 1996, p. 2

These numbers are not available for India. Also the varying geographic definitions of the local governments in different countries make comparisons of these numbers of little use. For example, the whole of metropolitan Beijing consists of one municipality. In such cases, the sub-municipal levels of governments resemble local governments in India.

4.3 A comparison with Mumbai, revisited

Based on the discussion in Chapter 1, there seem to be two distinct factors that contribute to the difference in the effectiveness of community organisations at the grassroots level in Mumbai and Kolkata. One is the absence of political space for such organisations in Kolkata. And second, Kolkata's administrative and planning bureaucracy is extremely dependent on the political class, unlike Mumbai's. This section elaborates these two points in greater detail.

4.3.1 Political space for non-partisan grassroots organising

The success of Mumbai's 'Alliance' is due to the demands made by organisations representing the urban poor, when they are allowed the space to make them. In Mumbai, women pavement dwellers have been important precedent-setters. Since 1984, when SPARC was founded, the National Slum Dwellers Federation and *Mahila Milan* membership at local levels made demands on SPARC for activities that the poor and the NGOs who work with them, do not generally take on. For instance, when the women pavement dwellers in the Byculla district of Mumbai urged SPARC to help them do something about the eviction notices against them that had been posted in 1985, they did not want to fight the municipality (the weaker groups always lose in such fights); they wanted to avoid the violent reaction that their men were moving towards and they sought a long-term resolution to their problems. From discussions between women pavement dwellers and SPARC came the first enumeration of the pavement dwellers (published in 1985 as *We the Invisible*), which set a

precedent for showing how community-centred enumerations can provide the information base from which community-driven solutions (and partnerships with local governments) can be developed. When the immediate threat of evictions was over, the women demanded that something be done about their inability to get alternative housing – and from this came savings and credit schemes, collective leadership, life-sized house models and, later, these women's survey of vacant land to demonstrate that there was land available on which they could be re-housed. The inter-city community exchanges began when the women pavement dwellers were discussing which building materials might reduce housing costs. One type that appeared to have potential was the funicular roofing pre-cast tablet developed in Kerala that had greatly reduced the cost of roofing, so a group of pavement dwellers made the long trip to Kerala in 1986. The women pavement dwellers also created the concept of a house model exhibition to demonstrate publicly and visibly what they wanted – because risk-averse bureaucrats are much more likely to accept a new idea if they see it working in practice (d'Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2005, p. 50).

The Alliance in Mumbai has used precedent setting to change many of the city's rules and regulations. This included promoting the use of a mezzanine floor in the design of houses developed by the federation, because it provides households with more room and more flexibility in their homes but costs much less than a two-storey unit. Government designs did not allow this. So the federation demonstrated what could be done (and how well it worked) before negotiating for its approval. Now this design is being used in a new housing development for pavement dwellers, and in housing being built within one of Mumbai's densest and largest slums (Dharavi), to allow all the inhabitants access to better-quality accommodation. The community-directed house modelling described earlier has also produced precedents showing how particular designs better serve low-income households' needs; so too have the community-designed and managed toilets (Bartlett, 2005). These are excellent examples of a bottom-up approach to public decision making where decisions at the city level help support the solutions proposed at the grassroots level.

Why didn't the urban poor in Kolkata achieve similar success in planning from below despite a communist government which is ideologically pro-poor? Based on Mageli's work, Chhinnamool had the potential to do this sort of thing but it fell apart because it was driven mainly by its NGO partner, *Unnayan*, which itself disintegrated because of internal divisions. The reasons for the lack of independent grassroots organisation in Kolkata can only be speculated upon. Based on the discussion on Kolkata's sub-municipal level governance in Chapter 3, we see the influence of CPI-M offering its patronage to all forms of community organising – even the most innocuous ones that relate to organising religious festivities or cultural/sports events.

A recent article by Abhirup Sarkar (2006) about the political economy of West Bengal takes a somewhat unorthodox route to explain the role of politi-

cal organisation in Left Front's continuing electoral victories. He argues that economic stagnation has actually helped maintain political stability in the state rather than opposing it. He characterises economic stagnation in the state to focus on its ever-increasing informal sector. The following quote from his article sums up his main thesis:

> *People dependent on the informal sector for their livelihood do not always live by the formal laws and norms. Some live illegally on government or railway land, others encroach upon city streets to sell their ware. A third group, owning shops or small businesses, is exposed to the local thugs because it is too costly to get protection from the formal legal system. All these people need political protection, which has to be provided by one party or the other. Of course, in West Bengal it is best provided by the Left who are better organised. Had the majority been securely employed in the formal sector their dependence on the party would disappear. Thus it is the increasing informalisation of the economy on the one hand and a strong political organisation of the Left on the other which have helped to gain support for the rulers and maintain political stability in the state for such a long time. (Sarkar, 2006, p. 342)*

The role of the informalisation of the economy in creating new dependencies for political protection is particularly relevant in the context of Left Front's increasing influence in urban areas in recent years. A number of people in Kolkata depend, in a fundamental way, on political parties for their livelihood. A political party gives them protection and in return gets their support at the time of elections. Chatterjee (2004) has called it a 'political society' as opposed to a civil society. Indeed an individual living in a political society has one important commodity to sell, apart from his labour, namely, his right to vote, which makes him attractive to the political parties. Contrast this to Mumbai, where pavement dwellers, who are generally seen as a nuisance by most urban dwellers, attract very little political patronage from the multiple political parties competing for votes. This is because this marginalised section is spatially scattered across the city, and a large number of them are not registered to vote, so they don't constitute a viable 'vote bank' for the political parties. This has led self-help groups among Mumbai's pavement dwellers to utilise this political space to be their own representatives in their community decision making. They have then sought assistance from more formal NGOs such as SPARC in negotiating with the city authorities to recognise their community solutions. The comparison with Mumbai therefore strengthens my argument relating to the need for adequate political space for non-partisan grassroots organisations in order to promote and sustain a bottom-up approach to public decision making.

So what if Kolkata and Mumbai are different? What does the literature say on contexts that politically resemble that of West Bengal, i.e. an elected government ideologically inclined to social justice and with very little political opposition? A comparison with South Africa points towards similar prob-

lems relating to party dominance. Despite the successes of the South African Homeless People's Federation and despite a national government strongly committed to improving housing conditions and ensuring universal provision for basic services, the South African federation has had to face many difficulties. These include national and local political structures that distrust any movement that is not within the ruling party (the ANC). As in Kolkata, politicians in South Africa work through patron-client relationships and do not want their decisions challenged or discussed by community organisations. This can also be seen in South Africa's surprising lack of support for federation schemes from the national housing subsidy programme (d'Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2005, p. 38).

4.3.2 Politically independent bureaucracy

Another reason for the difference in the success of community-based organisations in Mumbai and Kolkata is the difference in the degree to which the planning and administrative bureaucracies in the two cities are dependent on their political masters. West Bengal has adopted a Mayor-in-Council system of urban administration throughout the state, thereby strengthening the powers of the political class over the bureaucrats (the municipal commissioner) in urban areas. In contrast, in Mumbai and throughout Maharashtra, although the mayor is the head of the house, his role is largely ceremonial and almost all powers are vested in the commissioner. The commissioner is an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer appointed by the Maharashtra state government. He is responsible for the infrastructure of the city and its maintenance. Sewage, lighting, roads, schools, water, garbage – all of these are his responsibilities.

The experience of the Mumbai Alliance suggests that bureaucrats show themselves to be better partners to community-based organisations than elected politicians. In most cities where federations of the poor have been successful, their first choice has been to begin a dialogue with the local bureaucracy, not the politicians (d'Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2005). This has several advantages. In most instances, it is the bureaucracy that ultimately influences most political decisions and that is in charge of implementing most government programmes and policies. This is not quite so in Kolkata, where the mayor holds the most power as well as influence in political decisions at the local level.

In addition, educating civil servants and including them in federation discussions and initiatives from the beginning has been extremely beneficial in Mumbai. It is also a long-term investment that often brings benefits to the federations in Maharashtra, even when the civil servants with whom they have worked get transferred – as these civil servants take with them their experiences working with the federations to their new department (d'Cruz &

Satterthwaite, 2005). This indeed was the case in Mumbai.

Having said this, there also are good reasons (beyond political expediency) why West Bengal adopted a system with greater power allocated to the elected head of the local authority compared to state appointed bureaucrat – the municipal commissioner. Municipal commissioners belong to the elite national or state civil services in which admission and promotion are considered to be based on merit rather than patronage, and the administrator in Indian society is regarded as both an employee of the state and a servant of the public. To accommodate the diversity of Indian society within the civil service, an official policy is in place to attract women, ethnic and religious minorities, the disabled, individuals of certain castes and rural inhabitants. The cadre of administrators responsible for planning is presented as a socially representative, civic minded, politically independent group working to improve the general living conditions of Indian citizens. Yet, in many ways, this official story belies the realities on the ground, both in terms of empirical evidence and as perceived by the public (Friedmann, 2005b). To begin with, both central and state civil services are far from representative of the actually existing diversity within Indian society. Women are grossly under-represented, and the civil service is staffed primarily by members of the urban upper-middle class. More problematic, perhaps, are structural issues that have limited the actions of the civil service in India. At both federal and state levels, the civil service is a highly regimented work environment, defined more by procedural accountability than by pragmatic decision making. Hierarchical in structure, there is little direct communication between individuals of different rank. The civil service entrance exams favour general knowledge over specific skills, leading to criticism that the civil service lacks the professional and technical proficiency in endeavours such as planning. Finally, the theoretical separation between political and administrative functions is often tangled and blurred. In the field of planning, this has led to large-scale improprieties and corruption related to land allocation and development rights. The inability to elevate the living standards of the common Indian citizen in combination with the news of corruption scandals has begun to erode public confidence in the civil service, and the country's planning establishment is increasingly seen as a career-oriented elite with an incentive to maintain the status quo while minimising public participation in the decision-making process (Friedmann, 2005b).

West Bengal's response to the failures of such bureaucracy-led local administration was to give greater powers to the elected mayor. But drawing lessons from international experiences of similar policy direction highlights the limitation of this tactic. A study of the process and effects of democratic decentralisation in thirty medium-sized municipalities in Mexico (Grindle, 2007) shows that elected mayors can play an important role in reforming local administrations. The commitments, personality, persistence, and political networks that mayors brought to the office in Mexico were important factors in

determining how much was done during a three-year term of office. But the lack of institutional constraints that helped mayors to exercise their discretion also systematically undermined the sustainability of change as successors reversed policies when they came to office.

In most societies in the modern world, planners and elected politicians have generally accepted a norm that defines their role in the public decision-making process. The planners have tended to take on the role of technical rational experts who make use of information and knowledge to design public action towards larger societal goals. The elected politicians, as the representatives of the people, assume the responsibility to define these larger goals. But by the nature of the institutional relationship between the planning bureaucracy and the political class, where one is the boss of the other, there remains the danger of undue political dependence of the planning bureaucracy to the extent that might be detrimental to the public good. Bent Flyvbjerg's book, *Power and Rationality* (1998), which describes the planning process of the 'Aalborg Project' in the city of Aalborg in Denmark, demonstrates that modern 'rationality' is nothing more than an ideal when confronted with the real rationalities involved in decision making by central actors in government, economy, and civil society. He describes how planners 'rationalise' decisions that have already been made elsewhere, defeating the purpose of the division of the responsibilities between planners and politicians. Flyvbjerg makes a strong case for 'participation…practical, committed, ready for conflict' as a 'superior paradigm of democratic virtue' (p. 236).

In this chapter, I present a framework for comparative research on urban governance, following which I draw lessons from some national and international comparisons of planning institutions and processes using Kolkata's planning process as described in the earlier chapter as a benchmark. I have discussed how political space for non-partisan grassroots organising can be opened up in places where it has not existed before. I also describe some failings and opportunities that bureaucrats have in a bottom-up planning institution. In the following and concluding chapter, I offer some theoretical implications of my research along with generalisable lessons and possible research questions to explore in the future.

5 Lessons in decentralised planning

5.1 Theoretical implications

This research has focused on planning in the context of the decentralisation of governmental authority. This transformation of the formal institutional infrastructure of urban governance reflects the changes in the decision-making process within the 'government' or the 'state' arena. These changes have the potential to provoke deeper structural changes that can eventually transform the on-going routines of governmental practices. But the domain of urban governance includes other actors, events, and sites of decision making. As noted earlier in Chapter 1, in Kolkata the amount of influence that non-state actors have on the public decision-making process has varied considerably with time and place (for instance comparing Kolkata with other cities and also comparing Kolkata now with Kolkata in the 1970s and 1980s). The question that planning theoreticians need to ask then is: what affects the extent of the role of non-state actors in public decision making?

As the literature on urban social movements emphasises (Evans, 2002; S. Fainstein & Hirst, 1995; Mayer, 2000; Pickvance, 2003), the proponents of local initiatives arising from neighbourhood mobilisation and civil society arenas have great difficulty accumulating power sufficient to shift the dominant governance cultures within which they are situated (Gonzalez & Healey, 2005). Among the methodological strategies with which to analyse the qualities of governance capacity to promote socially innovative[32] initiatives, the one proposed by Gonzalez & Healey (2005) uses a three-level conception of governance dynamics with which three questions are addressed. First, how do we identify and assess that urban governance is changing and that emerging forms might have the potential to significantly transform existing ways of doing things? Second, once we have identified that significant transformation of institutional dynamics is taking place, how do we evaluate whether the emerging forms allow for social innovation? Third, what kind of power dynamics are mobilised in initiatives that promote socially innovative local development and what resistance is encountered by such initiatives in their struggles to expand and institutionalise?

The story of Kolkata's planning process can be described using the above methodology to show the dependence path and also the effects of unexpected events in bringing about social innovation. How do innovations in the planning process occur and how can they be institutionalised for replication?

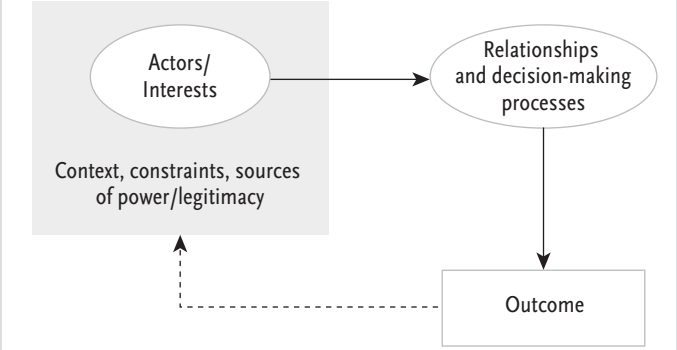
Decision making involves not just formal processes, but also the myriad of informal processes by which resources are allocated, access is achieved and

32 By social innovation, Gonzalez & Healey (2005) mean 'changes in governance institutions and agency that intend to or have the effect of contributing to improving quality-of-life experiences in a socially inclusive and socially just way' (p. 2055).

development takes place. In particular I am concerned with processes and mechanisms, both formal and informal, which enable the poor to have influence over, and thereby to benefit from, the decisions and actions of the various institutions of city governance. In this research I have sought to explore the influence that the various actors, interests and institutions have on decisions and outcomes. This has involved looking at the relationships between the various actors, the interests and institutions involved, the processes of decision making, and what gives the various actors and interests power and legitimacy, as well as what constrains that power. Figure 5.1 illustrates the process where outcomes of one decision change the context of power and legitimacy within which actors shape the subsequent decisions. This makes the process path-dependent at the same time, allowing scope for transformation to occur, either when new actors are thrown into the mix or global or national forces change the contexts within which cities function. This research helps us understand how new actors in the urban governance process (such as DFID or new middle-class residents in redeveloped neighbourhoods) can change the context and the rules of the game as traditional actors play it.

As described earlier, DFID made its funding for the Kolkata Urban Services for the Poor (KUSP) project contingent on the implementation of the West Bengal Metropolitan Planning Committee Act 1994. DFID's project design, in fact, made the Kolkata Metropolitan Planning Committee (KMPC) a key actor in determining priorities that the KUSP project needed to address. The West Bengal Government reluctantly agreed to the establishment of KMPC in 2001. Although KMPC in its current form has failed to fully achieve metropolitan planning from the bottom up, it has played a significant role in sensitising some of the local level politicians to what planning is all about. Some among them now realise the significance of planning and the political nature of planning. This planning consciousness had previously been absent among ward councillors and municipal chairpersons owing to the long-held notion in India that planning is done by planners and not by elected representatives. KMPC also enhanced transparency in metropolitan planning by exposing the distribution of power between different groups of elected local representatives and networks and alliances that they formed with the bureaucrats and planners in order to exercise some agency in the planning process. KMPC also provides a forum for information exchange between local representatives, planners, bureaucrats and the state level ministry of urban development and municipal affairs. All these changes have invariably weakened the state government's absolute control over Kolkata's planning process. It has also made the planning bureaucracy open to criticism from the local politicians. These are welcome changes that came about due to DFID's influence on the state government. Pressures for change from below did not have much political support; without DFID's bargaining power, it is unlikely that such deep structural changes would have come about.

Figure 5.1 Actors, relationships and outcomes: How change is induced within the 'structure'



Source: Devas, 2004, p. 27

Another example of structural change in local power dynamics due to new actors/interests was at the neighbourhood level. Parts of Kolkata have seen the rapid redevelopment of land earlier occupied by informal workers or the low-income population. As identified in Chapter 3, this has led to a change in the socio-economic profile of some of the neighbourhoods where new middle- and upper-middle class households have moved in. This has diluted the influence of local political elites who had earlier held significant power over the original residents through patron-client relationships. This has, on the one hand, dispersed power that was earlier held by a few in the neighbourhood, on the other hand, it has left the marginalised households vulnerable as their patrons lose control.

An important implication of this research is that the usual discourse about the need for participatory and communicative planning, as Habermas, Innes, Hillier and others have described, doesn't apply to Kolkata, which is led by a single party in a democratic country that has historically had rigid class, gender, and other social hierarchies. There is also a body of literature about the Chinese system of urban governance where some have described local governments as 'amphibious' organisations (Friedmann, 2005a) that are extremely decentralised in terms of their freedom in local investment decisions. These 'amphibious' local governments act less as a state and more as business enterprises. Kolkata does not fit this model either. What kind of planning theory would then best describe the scenario in Kolkata? I address this question by theorising about the planning process within the context of partisan politics. Primarily, I argue that partisan politics determines the planning process when other forms of civic associations are absent.

5.2 Lesson drawing

Knowledge is a resource for influencing those with power. Specialist knowledge of a repertoire of successes and failures in effect elsewhere can gain an expert the ear of a policymaker wanting to do something. When policymakers are under great pressure to act and do not know what to do, policy entrepreneurs can market their prescriptions for action. If a prescription is accompanied by evidence that a similar measure has brought satisfaction elsewhere, then promoters of a new programme gain greater credibility (Rose, 1993, p. 14).

Although this research is based on a single case of the planning process, there are a number of generalisible lessons that can be drawn from it for use in other cities. Below I discuss some of the principles that I derived from my research.

1. *There are differences in what the real motives are for the state to pursue decentralisation and what it claims to be behind its decentralisation policy. This difference hides the real impact of the policy on the planning process. The policy discourse then tends to emphasise the indicators of 'input' (legislative reforms, special programmes, etc.) rather than of 'effect' in measuring the success of democratic decentralisation in making the planning process bottom-up.*

In Kolkata, the official rhetoric of the Left Front government emphasises decentralised decision making as a means to democratise the planning process and correct the historical structural imbalances between the different classes of society. A secondary goal was to make planning decisions more responsive to the needs of the local people. In reality, this research concludes that the institutions of decentralised planning in Kolkata have in fact helped strengthen the ruling party's influence but have done little in the way of democratising local decision making or responding to local needs and the aspirations of the people. Many of the leaders within the CPI-M cadre come from modest backgrounds which is a welcome change from the social elites who used to dominate the political space prior to the Left Front's coming to power. But it was only a changing of the guard; the old patron-client relationship between the rulers and the ruled remains, and as I argue earlier, has in fact worsened in the absence of any credible opposition to the ruling party. Despite this, West Bengal's experiments in putting in place institutions for decentralised planning is pointed to by many as being an exemplar. The emphasis on the state government's pioneering effort in putting legislation for decentralised planning in place has therefore overshadowed an examination of the actual effects of that legislation on the planning institutions.

The literature on China's fiscal and administrative devolution to sub-municipal levels (Friedmann, 2005a; Wu, 2002) also points out the gap between

the stated goals for such a policy[33] and the actual consequences of its implementation. If we just go by the input indicators to evaluate the decentralisation process in China, it can be said to be hugely successful. Indeed, districts and street offices within Beijing municipality have raised considerable revenue through fiscal decentralisation, resulting in significantly improved urban infrastructure. But the competition among the different districts to attract foreign investments has also seen negative consequences. For example, district level governments have indulged in widespread redevelopment and forced evictions, leading to social unrest. This again highlights the need to evaluate the costs and benefits of decentralised governance within particular contexts in actual effect, independent of the government's stated objectives.

Readings of the literature on Brazil's experience with decentralised participatory budgeting also suggests similar lessons. The large numbers of community councils that now exist in Brazil have enhanced the 'voice' of the marginalised but have done little to empower them, i.e. these councils have transformed unorganised people into members of a civil society that can influence – but not decide – issues that directly affect them (Souza, 2001, p. 174). Stimulated either by national policies or by foreign grants that require the creation of community councils in return for funds for local government's basic responsibilities, almost all local governments in Brazil have created community councils. This has generated a merely formal reproduction of what the rules say, therefore threatening participation's fundamental assumptions of credibility, trust, transparency, accountability, empowerment, etc. Although there is still no body of research analysing these community councils in depth and in comparative terms, there have been several accusations in the media about the control mayors exert over them, together with suspicions of corruption in the use of resources for education and health (Souza, 2001, p. 175).

2. *The planning process is unlikely to be truly bottom-up if power is concentrated within any one political organisation. In the absence of multiple and competing channels to organise themselves to participate in the planning process, citizens and neighbourhood groups get co-opted by the government, resulting in their acceptance of decisions made at higher levels. This phenomenon is aptly described by V. Ramaswamy, a social activist in Kolkata, as 'the orchestration of the disgruntled by the political elites'.*[34]

In Kolkata, the lack of an effective opposition to the ruling party, along with a dearth of non-partisan civil society organisations in the city, mean that there are very limited opportunities for individual households to channel

33 The official goal was to improve urban public services and the targeting of populations in need of public assistance. But Friedmann and Wu suggest that China's real reason for devolving certain powers to sub-municipal levels was to replace the old danwei (work unit) system of public service provision in China's transition to a market economy and still maintain the party's influence in urban decision making.

34 Source: interview with author, September 28, 2004.

their voices in local planning. To represent the multiplicity of voices within a society there need to be multiple organisations that can compete with one another on an equal basis. According to Leonie Sandercock, public planning needs to be seen as 'managing coexistence in shared space', with an explicit recognition that there are 'differences' in opinions, values, and aspirations among individuals within the space. Kolkata's urban governance framework is embedded in a particular conception of democracy which strictly believes in majority rule, and a corresponding belief that the right to 'difference' disappears once the majority has spoken (Sandercock, 2000).[35]

3. *External funding, either from international agencies or higher levels of government, has the potential to force change in the local and regional structures of decision making so that the voices of ordinary people are inserted in public decision making.*
Changes to the existing power structures are not easy. DFID's funding for KUSP, made contingent upon the implementation of the MPC Act, is an example of how external funding agencies can significantly alter planning practices locally. Higher levels of government or international donor agencies who share common values in terms of democratic and participatory decision making can change local structural barriers to effective participation. However, it should also be noted that their influence can bring changes in only the formal rules of the game; they do not alter the informal balance of power between ordinary citizens, bureaucrats and the elected politicians. These donors and charismatic local leaders who are ideologically inclined towards bottom-up planning can create opportunities for sub-municipal governments to express their voice in local planning but cannot really empower them to make their own decisions without a sustained demand for such empowerment from below.

The comparison between the chairman of Kalyani municipality and the chairman of Borough 1 of Kolkata Municipal Corporation also suggests the difference that local powerful individuals can make within existing systems. Both chairmen belonged to the Communist Party of India – Marxist and both were elected members of the KMPC. Whereas the chairman of Kalyani municipality was pro-active in setting up and conducting regular meetings of ward committees within his municipality, the chairman of Borough 1 of KMC expressed disinterest in the functioning of ward committees or their role in local planning.

In Mexico, Grindle (2007) finds that mayors and other elected and appoint-

35 It is not easy to generalise on the basis of one case and there are cases that defy my reasoning above. For example, Porto Alegre in Brazil was dominated by a single party for many years (the PT) but this was the party that also helped pioneer the application of participatory budgeting (Souza, 2001). Further research is needed to identify aspects of the PT in Brazil that differ from those of the CPI(M) in India.

ed officials are the most important source of change in local governments. Mayors in Mexico are almost always the primary movers and shakers of local government. But she also acknowledges that a lack of institutional constraints, allowing mayors to exercise their discretion to bring about difficult change, also systematically undermines the sustainability of change as successors reverse policies when they come to office.

In Brazil too, the vitality of participatory institutions that delegate authority to citizens builds on the intense support of mayoral administrations. If mayors and their political allies have significant ties to participatory civil society organisations, then it is far more likely that mayors will seek to promote the delegation of authority. In Recife, São Paulo, and Porto Alegre, mayors had deep connections to the new civil society, which helps to explain why they were all willing to experiment with the delegation of authority. The form of delegation differed in each municipality, largely based on the degree to which the mayor sought to include citizens in the decision-making process (Wampler, 2004). This reiterates the need for support from those in positions of power and authority to effectively change the local structures of power in which decisions are made in the public domain.

Similarly, there are ample opportunities for international development agencies to be active agents of change at the local level. This can happen in more ways than one. For one, donor agencies can make funding of development projects and programmes contingent on reform of the ground rules that form the basis of local decision making institutions to favour bottom-up planning. (DFID funding for KUSP is an example of such leverage by external agencies.) But there are other ways as well. Mitlin & Satterthwaite (2007) describe an initiative by which international donors can support grassroots initiatives directly by setting up an international fund managed by a transnational network of slum/shack/homeless people's federations and their support NGOs. Official international aid agencies and development banks are not set up to work with groups of the poor or to be directly accountable to them, even if their work is legitimised on the basis of these groups' needs. The bureaucracy of such agencies works primarily with and through national governments and is generally unable to catalyse or support the local social processes needed to make external finance effective in addressing many aspects of poverty. The fund demonstrates to international agencies what their monies could do if they were willing to relinquish more decision-making power and more financial control to local organisations of the poor rather than local, regional or national governments. In so doing, they also fundamentally change the power relations between urban groups of the poor and the local state.

4. *For an effective implementation of bottom-up approaches to metropolitan planning, the planning bureaucracy needs to be independent of the political class. In the absence of an independent planning bureaucracy, professional planners employed by the state*

are less likely to be 'rational' (in Flyvbjerg's words) in informing the decision-making process.

The current institutional framework, within which Kolkata's planning bureaucracy functions, blurs the role of planning as linking 'scientific and technical knowledge' (Friedmann, 1987, p. 38) with public decision making. Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA), in its role as the 'technical secretariat' of Kolkata Metropolitan Planning Committee (KMPC), has failed to provide independent, objective scientific and technical knowledge to inform metropolitan decision making. The state government has absolute control over KMDA through the department of urban development. As suggested in Chapter 3, appointments and promotions of senior bureaucrats and technocrats within KMDA go through the state government. Only rarely did the nominated (non-elected) members representing planners from KMDA and engineers from various public agencies such as the Port Trust, Indian Railways and Calcutta Improvement Trust propose any new plan or alternative to existing plans or oppose any proposals that came from elected members from the Left Front. Proposals from opposition party members in KMPC received less enthusiasm from KMDA, which made them reluctant to participate in the KMPC deliberations. The subservience of the planners to the state administration did not allow them to provide wholehearted support to sub-municipal level planning initiatives even if they came from elected representatives from the ruling coalition.

5. *The politicisation of local decision making along party lines has severe limitations in encouraging public decision being made from the bottom up. Where parties are hierarchical organisations whose members are accountable only to those above them, they are unlikely to act as effective agents of change for bottom-up planning that reflects the needs of their constituents. What this suggests is that civic participation in public decision making is unlikely to happen by means of political parties or partisan organisations without greater accountability at the ward level.*

As Kolkata's case demonstrates, local level civic participation is lacking because political parties dominate the local and regional political space and because these political parties have a very rigid hierarchical organisation where local leaders hardly challenge their party bosses at the state level. This doesn't allow the local leaders to effectively participate in the planning process on equal terms. Local leaders are accountable to the citizens who elected them to power; at the same time, they hold a subordinate position to their party bosses at the state and national level. The lack of local autonomy due to party politics is reinforced by strong systems of patronage that reward loyalty with jobs and civic works. With party politics increasingly shaping council politics, an efficient and remunerative way for councillors to elevate the system is to attempt to gain the confidence and support of members of the state legislative assembly (i.e. state level politicians) without reference to local needs.

This is especially in order to get nominated to the important municipal committees, such as the works or finance committee. Decisions about larger civil works projects are driven by and further reinforce 'party politics'. It is common knowledge that between 25 and 30 per cent of construction funds are routinely diverted through the party system – forming a significant incentive for compliance with the party system, including compliance by political functionaries of the opposition (see Benjamin, 2000, p. 51). Thus, any attempt at political autonomy, both from within the party or from the opposition, is diffused via the potential benefits of these funds.

Unlike Kolkata, Bangalore's local politics appear to be much less partisan in nature. 'While the party system may be rootless in Karnataka, the political climate [in Bangalore] is also known for the large number of independents [candidates with no political affiliations] and cross-party shifts' (Benjamin, 2000, p. 54). Benjamin also notes that the large number of independents and the frequent cross-party shifts by local politicians benefit and secure the efficacy of the local economy and are driven by a complex coalition of the local elite, workers, small landlords and their political and bureaucratic connections at various levels of government. In other words, in Bangalore political functionaries are not as dependent on their party bosses for their political career as they are in Kolkata.

6. *Bottom-up planning requires planning capacity to be built from grassroots organisations. This requires the devolution of both responsibilities and the means/resources to carry out those responsibilities to the lowest level of planning. Legislation by itself is not sufficient.*

Municipalities in West Bengal do not employ planning professionals. Up until 2001 all development planning activity within Kolkata Metropolitan Area was undertaken by planners in KMDA with no dialogue with the constituent municipalities. KMPC meetings did help in sensitising some of the ward councillors – at least those who are members of the KMPC – to the issues involved in the planning process and the preparation of the Draft Development Plan. But wards and municipalities still lack professional planners on their staffs. This is in sharp contrast with the way planning has been decentralised in Karnataka (Raghavulu & Narayana, 1999) and Kerala (Thomas Isaac & Franke, 2002) where planners employed by the state government were sent on deputation to work for local governments.

Another dimension of decentralised planning where West Bengal differs from Karnataka is the extent of its devolution of fiscal resources. There can be no genuineness about decentralisation unless there is an assured devolution of funds to the local governments. The state budget of Karnataka is split in two, providing a separate budget for local government bodies. The action of the state legislature in this regard enables the statutory and automatic transfer of over 9 billion Rs. annually in total, both on plan and non-plan accounts,

to local governments in the state. There is no provision for the statutory allocation of funds among local bodies, let alone the machinery, in West Bengal. In fact there are allegations that at present the financial devolution from the West Bengal government to local government institutions is done arbitrarily and along partisan lines. Municipalities that are in the good books of the ruling party are being favoured at the cost of others (Raghavulu & Narayana, 1999, p. 124).

5.3 Policy implications

Based on the comparison of Kolkata's case with the literature on other cities in the world, what are the key policy recommendations for a bottom-up approach to metropolitan planning? In this section, I discuss the policy lessons for each category of actors separately.

5.3.1 Lessons and policies for civil society organisations

While aware of the ambiguity of civil society's role in rebuilding governance relationships, this research argues that non-partisan civic activism is absolutely critical in bridging the divide between public and private interests in planning from below. Such conditions involve the existence of a multi-scalar democratic governance regime that favours public deliberation and social economy initiatives. In many countries, welfare states are in crisis, suffering from post-Fordist transformations. In cities, new ways of governance are needed to overcome the consequences of economic, social and political restructuring. Civil society in new urban governance arrangements will hopefully contribute to counteracting the trend towards social exclusion under such circumstances.

A form of civil society organisation that has been very successful in inserting the voices of the marginalised sections of the urban population in the planning process has been the federations of urban poor in alliance with intermediary organisations (such as NGOs) that form horizontal networks with similar federations in other cities in the world. These federations are by definition organisations that develop from the bottom-up and are therefore ideal partners in decentralised metropolitan planning.

The tools that the federations use allow the negotiations and long-term pressures to go beyond negotiated deals for individual settlements and to change the contexts that allow many more such deals to happen within the city. This means that their negotiations are also directed toward changing laws, regulations and housing finance systems. The city level may be particularly important, being the level at which organised groups of the poor can get government organisations to address structural issues that national govern-

ments won't address. For instance, local organisations can address the allocation of land and infrastructure to urban poor organisations and can change standards and the ways in which government agencies work with poor or homeless groups. This ability to get change at the city level may then feed into national processes – as was evident in the response of the Cambodian government to the community-driven innovations in Phnom Penh, and in the response of the Thai government to the urban poor organisations and networks described in detail in a report from IIED (d'Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2005). This may provide a critical clue as to how it is possible to get the kinds of structural changes in what governments do and how they do it that are central to 'significantly improving the lives of slum dwellers' on a large scale. The ambitious *Baan Mankong* programme in Thailand that the IIED report describes depended on city-wide processes through which urban poor communities and their networks engaged with city governments and other key actors to see how the needs of all urban poor communities can be addressed generally, and how they can respond to the needs of particular communities.

This emphasis on the importance of processes managed by urban poor groups and their federations is controversial, in that many researchers and activists think that it pays too little attention to the role of governments (and political will) and of representative democracy in driving change.[36] There is not much disagreement on the need for democratic processes, political will and continuity, or on the need for changes in political practices and large-scale public investment. Rather, the point of contention is the extent to which community-driven processes can contribute to these changes. The evidence presented by d'Cruz & Satterthwaite (2005) suggests that community-driven processes have strengthened democratic processes – especially those within the organisations comprised of the urban poor. They have produced many examples of commitment from senior politicians, including prime ministers, other ministers in national governments, mayors, city administrators and heads of housing departments.

There is yet another reason why it is important to have strong non-partisan organisations of the poor. Without a strong, effective urban poor organisation exerting political pressure, maintaining continuity in policies towards

36 This proved to be a contentious point in the discussions of the Millennium Project's Taskforce on Improving the Lives of Slum Dwellers. It also led to disagreements among taskforce members about the emphasis that should be given to the role of international funding and international development agencies. The taskforce members who work with NGOs or government agencies that support community-driven processes, and who have long worked with the urban poor/homeless organisations and federations, assigned less importance to the role of international agencies and more to locally generated resources and local political change. They also wanted less emphasis on estimating the cost of significantly improving the lives of slum dwellers, based on the costs of international projects and on the assumption that it would be primarily international agencies that funded the interventions. (See d'Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2005)

bottom-up planning when governments change is almost impossible. This is especially true where change in political parties in power also means wholesale change in senior government positions. In West Bengal, decentralisation and bottom-up planning have always been on the agenda of the Communist Party of India alone. After they came to power in West Bengal in 1977, there was no political pressure from outside the party to evaluate its commitment to bottom-up planning. This has partly contributed to the gap between the official rhetoric of the Left Front government and the reality of the planning process in Kolkata that is discussed in this research.

What kind of policies should guide the civil society organisations? The failure of the alliance of the CBO *Chhinnamool* and the NGO *Unnayan* in Kolkata as mentioned in Chapter 1 suggests, among other things, that their policy of making demands on the government led to too many disappointments when the demands were not met. This gradually led to the organisations' disintegration. This suggests that non-partisan civil society organisations should move away from a strategy of making demands to a strategy of constructive engagement with the government that allows small successes that can build confidence in the organisation's abilities, both internally and externally. The urban poor may have set precedents in their organisations for land invasion, site layouts, house forms and community-developed infrastructure, but these were not systematically used as evidence of precedents that could form the basis of effective community–government partnerships. Several case studies from various countries compiled by d'Cruz & Satterthwaite (2005) also suggest moving away from the rhetoric of 'rights' and 'demands' to 'self-help' and 'precedent-setting' at the grassroots level. Perhaps the most important change here is a shift from organisations of the urban poor making demands on the government to demonstrating to governments what they can do (and what governments could achieve) in partnership with them. This is based in part on the recognition of urban poor organisations that government systems – for instance, for land management, infrastructure and services – are too weak, ineffective or rooted in vested interests to deliver for them in conventional projects. In part, it is recognition that these non-partisan civil society actors must define, design and manage the 'solutions' if these are to be appropriate, especially for the poorest. This change is most evident in the Indian National Slum Dwellers Federation in the early 1980s, as it moved from not only fighting evictions and making demands on government but also to developing projects and programmes that set precedents for community-government partnerships that urban poor organisations designed and managed – working with the NGO SPARC and the cooperatives of women slum and pavement dwellers (*Mahila Milan*). This change can also be seen in Thailand in the land-sharing projects and the community organisations and federations that developed there – also with support from local NGOs. This change had great significance not only for the work of the federations in India and Thailand but

also for the way in which all the urban poor federations have worked.

This raises the question of why this has not happened in Latin America where, in many nations, squatter organisations were stronger and urban poor organisations were important parts of citizen movements fighting dictatorships and demanding democracy and respect for civil rights. A careful consideration of this is beyond the scope of this book – although part of the reason may be that when the dictatorships were overthrown and democracy came (or returned), the organisations of the urban poor weakened, in part because their constituents assumed that now they had a government that represented them (and some of them, or the staff of the NGOs they worked with, became part of the government), in part because their members got involved in party politics, which created divisions in urban poor settlements that were previously united, and in part because in some cities or districts the new political systems did deliver more for them. It is also entirely legitimate for urban poor organisations to expect governments that they help to elect to deliver for them. The potential divisiveness of this issue is illustrated by the divisions among the urban poor organisations in South Africa mentioned earlier, as the apartheid government was replaced by the first democratic government. Just as in Kolkata after the Communists came to power, many urban poor leaders in South Africa have not seen the value of forming an urban poor/homeless federation, because their party (the African National Congress) is in power and they assume that it will deliver for them. Some of these leaders were also successful in standing for election – so the urban poor had some of their colleagues in office (d'Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2005). This is another example of co-optation of the non-partisan grassroots organisation into the party system. In order for civil society organisations to be effective agents in planning from the bottom up, therefore, it is important that they remain independent of political parties.

One of the most important features of the successful urban poor and homeless federations is their explicit avoidance of any political alignment or affiliation (d'Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2005). This can mean major disadvantages in particular circumstances – as in Kolkata for instance, as local politicians inevitably steer benefits to members of their own party, and often prevent benefits from going to neighbourhoods or communities that did not explicitly support them. Politicians or bureaucrats expect the urban poor organisations to act as clients under their patronage (and patron-client relationships also mean a hierarchical power relationship and a lack of possibilities for the urban poor to design and manage their own 'solutions'). A difficulty arising from this in South Africa lies in the fact that ANC politicians were wary of (or actively opposed to) community organisations that were not within their party. The larger and more successful the federation, the more national and local politicians will want to get its support, or will fear its capacity to generate opposition if such support is not forthcoming. This never makes for an easy

relationship between federations and politics (d'Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2005).

This refusal of the federations to endorse any political party is particularly important for three reasons:

- It keeps the federations open to all comers. If they align with any political party, this inevitably excludes those from other political parties. This is a particular problem of the ward committees in Kolkata. Even though ward committees were officially envisaged to be apolitical bodies, the rules of their constitution indirectly exclude those people belonging to political parties other than the ward councillor's party.
- It protects their independence, continuity and capacity for independent action. One reason for the declining influence of many key urban poor movements in Latin America has been their members' diffusion into different political parties, once they thought they had achieved the political reforms they had fought for. However, the federations do not discourage the active political involvement of their members, and many federation leaders have been elected into office – although they cannot remain as federation representatives if they do this (d'Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2005). Being independent of political parties can also provide some protection from undemocratic and repressive governments who target opposition parties.
- It allows them to negotiate and work with whoever is in power locally, regionally or nationally. This has opened the federations to much criticism from NGOs and academics, as the federations can work with governments controlled by political parties that NGO staff or academics oppose (and who are also opposed by large sections of the urban poor). The response of the federations to this is that they have a duty to get the best possible deal for their members from whoever is in power (d'Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2005). They do not have the luxury of being able to wait until the 'correct' political parties are in power. This does not mean that the federations do not fight and, where needed, oppose governments. For instance, federation groups frustrated by delays and broken promises will often take illegal action – for example, invading land, as in the case of Ruo Emoh in South Africa (People's Dialogue on Land and Shelter, 1999). Similarly, in Mumbai, when the railway authorities began a large-scale demolition of railway slum dwellers' homes in 2000, going against an agreed work plan between the railways, the state government and the federation, federation members occupied the railway tracks and paralysed Mumbai for a couple of hours while they contacted senior politicians and civil servants to get the demolitions stopped. The federation showed that it had the capacity to disrupt transport for the rest of the city dwellers when needed. But it chooses instead to seek a solution to which its members contribute – as it has done in the community-managed resettlement programme (d'Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2005). All the federations seek creative and mutually beneficial relationships with politicians and bureaucrats. As noted earlier, in the

many public events that are part of the federations' methods (house model and toilet exhibitions, opening of a new housing scheme, celebrations on land acquired for a housing project), the federations often use these events strategically to thank politicians and bureaucrats and give strong public acknowledgement of their role.

Thus the politics of the federations are the 'politics of patience' in negotiation, consensus building and long-term pressure rather than confrontation, and are based on the understanding that federating gives this more power. This is clearly evident from the success story of the federation of sex workers (DMSC) in Kolkata discussed in Chapter 1. DMSC's success can be partly attributed to its avoiding confrontation with the 'powers that be'. Urban poor groups often fail in their negotiations because they have not developed any mechanism to exploit their numbers, their knowledge and their potential for large-scale mobilisation as citizens. Underlying the federation model is a model of teaching and learning, where the goal is for the poor to 'own' the expertise that is necessary for them to claim, secure and consolidate basic rights in urban housing and access to infrastructure and services (d'Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2005, p. 54). This is a key characteristic of a successful federation of the poor that was missing in Chhinnamul's organisation in Kolkata as described by Mageli (2001), mentioned in Chapter 1. The organisation was driven by its NGO partner, *Unnayan*, which kept *Chinnamool* from claiming ownership of its achievements.

5.3.2 Lessons and policies for the political class

This research has important lessons for the political class at all levels. National government has a role to play in setting the political agenda and general values such as social justice, participatory decision making, including the voices of women and of marginalised populations, etc. It needs to create conditions that push for greater transparency in the planning process. Although legislation at the national and the state level alone cannot ensure the effective adoption of bottom-up approaches to planning, it can create the legal basis for action by other actors. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act passed in the Parliament was significant in institutionalising decentralised decision making in India. The Freedom of Information Act 2005 is also a step in the right direction. It can enable media and civic activist groups to subject planners, bureaucrats, and politicians involved in public decision making to greater scrutiny and thus mobilise support in favour of or against planning decisions that take place in the 'shadows of power'. Just as an example of the opaque nature of the current planning process in Kolkata, I faced enormous resistance to when I tried to access supposedly public information (such as minutes of the meetings of a ward committee in Dum Dum Municipality in

North Kolkata and the minutes of the meetings of the KMPC's sector committee on transportation), even for educational purposes. The Freedom of Information Act, if implemented the way it is envisaged, can force bureaucrats and politicians to allow public scrutiny which will enhance their accountability to the public they serve.

At the local level, as discussed earlier, bottom-up planning and partisan control of planning cannot go together. Planning needs consensus, whereas parties look for cleavages. There is a need to 'departisanise' planning. The politicisation of local planning is inevitable, but there are precedents in which planning politics is non-partisan. Also, parties act as actors in realising hegemonic projects within their roles as mediators between the government and society (Jessop, 1990, p. 318f). And there are examples of non-partisan elections in Scandinavia (Aars & Ringkjob, 2005; Bergman, 2004) and North America (Raymond, 1992; Schaffner *et al.*, 2001; Siegel, 1994) that offer possibilities of the politicisation of local politics without the divisiveness and hierarchical control that are associated with political parties.

Despite the constitutional amendment, in India the real authority for urban planning still rests with the state governments. If governments at the state level are really committed to the cause of a bottom-up approach to metropolitan decision making, then the state leadership needs to show the political will to increase participation by non-partisan organisations at the grassroots level. For example, in West Bengal, a change in the ward committee rules by the state legislature can make the ward committees less prone to party influence. Including local party workers from the opposition party would make ward committees more inclusive and create checks and balances to the power of all local leaders. Although political parties that have advocated decentralised planning have benefited in subsequent elections, they have refrained from changing the existing patron-client relationships that exist in most communities in India. Only charismatic leaders at the municipal level (such as Dr Shantanu Jha, chairman of Kalyani municipality) who are really committed to the cause of participatory planning from the ground up have made significant improvements in strengthening the ward committees and involving citizens in ward-level deliberations. To replicate such actions, all political parties need to make use of the KMPC as a forum for the most dedicated local leaders by nominating the best of their councillors for KMPC elections.

In addition, as my analysis suggests, currently the state government has considerable influence in KMPC's operations. The West Bengal government's minister for municipal affairs and urban development is the ex-officio vice-chairperson of KMPC and the chief minister of the state is the ex-officio chairperson. Most KMPC meetings are presided over by the minister of municipal affairs and urban development where ward councillors from the same party hesitate in opposing or questioning suggestions made by him or other state-

level party representatives. Therefore, in order to let elected and nominated members decide solutions that are most appropriate to local level needs and aspirations, the state government should stay away from moderating KMPC functioning.

One important traditional role for party politicians is to act as an intermediary between communities and the state agencies that supply infrastructure and services to communities. This relationship can bring with it divisive and demobilising side effects, but the negative political effects must be balanced against the positive effects of the infrastructure itself (see Evans, 2002, p. 231). Also, opposition parties may be less effective at providing traditional services, but they deliver more positive political side effects. When opposition parties become strong enough to win local or state-level elections, they do two important things. First, when they grow out of a base in social and community movements, opposition parties support increased participation by communities and social movement groups. Second, they challenge the exclusive emphasis on the accumulation of power that generally characterises the discourse of dominant parties (and the economic elites that support them). These effects can be seen both in Asia (Taiwan) and in Latin America (Mexico and Brazil) (see Evans, 2002).

If parties are not the uniformly nefarious actors that they were sometimes portrayed to be in the literature on urban community struggles, they are, even under the best of circumstances, imperfect intermediaries, certainly not solutions in themselves. Parties, particularly opposition parties, can however provide two kinds of support. At the macro level, they can open political space for communities and other social movement groups to participate in debates over rules and policies. They also create discursive space, enabling imaginaries to extend beyond the standard monolithic emphasis on accumulation and development. At the micro level, they can provide organisational niches that give innovative community leaders extra leverage. Evans (2002, p. 233) gives examples from Brazil and Mexico.

It would be foolish to suggest that parties are the solution to communities' needs for external linkages. Control, clientelism and co-optation, and the quest for partisan advantage play much too large a role in the repertoires of even progressive parties. Nonetheless, it would be equally foolish for activists and community leaders to ignore the possibilities that party structures afford and the ways that oppositional parties can open up the larger political environment for new discourses and new forms of participation (Evans, 2002, p. 234).

5.3.3 Lessons and policies for planners and bureaucrats

Communities need capable public institutions desperately, but, unfortunately, they need states quite different from the ones that currently confront them.

The question is how that difference might be reduced. 'The apparent inability of existing states to combine capacity for effective public action with openness to grassroots initiatives and responsiveness to community needs defines what is lacking in existing public institutions' (Evans, 2002, p. 236). Political efforts to restructure existing state apparatuses at the national level are admirable endeavours, worth pursuing but unlikely to produce the desired combination of capacity and openness in the foreseeable future. Efforts to transform city administrations appear to be more promising, but local governments will still sit in the shadow of national rules and power. Less ambitious, but more likely to produce concrete results, are what Peter Evans calls 'jujitsu tactics' – efforts to leverage the conflicts and contradictions that already exist within state apparatuses to shift the balance of state action toward livability.

'Jujitsu tactics' are based on the premise that most public institutions are both collections of organisations, some of which actually have a vested interest in promoting livability, and aggregations of individual incumbents, some of whom are potential allies. Even state bureaucracies with relatively effective forms of hierarchical coordination are fraught with conflicts among competing projects and organisations. The balance of power among these competing interests within the state depends in part on the effectiveness of their allies in society. If planners and bureaucrats, who are most familiar with the internal conflicts and contradictions within the state apparatus, make effective use of potential allies – communities, NGOs, and other institutions – to strengthen the position of these allies in their conflicts within the state, prospects for livability increase substantially.

Some of the planners I talked to during my fieldwork were shrewd actors who understood and used the internal power struggles within the state bureaucracy to allow greater participation from grassroots communities. There were others who were reluctant to take risks and feared public participation and greater transparency in the planning process as a threat to their power and authority. Among the planners in KMDA, I found that those who were trained in social sciences (such as geography and economics) understood and used the power dynamics within the state apparatus to broaden and level the playing field for non-state actors to get involved in local planning. On the other hand, those planners who were trained in the British-style master planning curriculum that is taught in various engineering and technology colleges in India tended to be risk-averse and doubtful about the value of increased participation. This suggests a need for reforms in planning education and curriculum, to show the way planning as a profession can work in other cities in the developing world. Kolkata's case also demonstrates that metropolitan planning processes need expertise in communicative, people-centered practices and shrewd strategic actors who understand the power dynamics of the wider political context. The training and education of planners needs to include a broader skill-set than simply collecting and analysing data and mak-

ing projections for the future.

Like many professionals, planners identify problem areas based on the perceptions of those who hire them. Since most planners in the developing world are hired by the state at the provincial or metropolitan level, they often miss the real picture about whom they are planning for. They often plan top-down instead of consolidating plans from the bottom up. This research suggests that planners be responsible to (even though they may be paid by state governments) municipalities rather than the state for them to be most effective in local decision making.

5.3.4 Lessons for civic activists, NGOs and international agencies

Overall, the external connections that these intermediaries provide play an essential role in enabling communities to become effective agents of livability. Romantic visions in which individual communities can somehow resolve problems of livelihood and sustainability on their own are analytically misguided and a political disservice (Evans, 2002, p. 234). The combination of providing access to a broader range of ideas and supplying connections to a network of other potentially supportive organisations is the archetypal NGO contribution. NGOs also are better able to transform immediate local struggles of federations into specific instances of universal issues, such as housing rights and social justice. *Unnayan* in Kolkata (like SPARC in Mumbai) did show these characteristics of a successful NGO. What was missing in *Unnayan* was that it did not let its community partner Chinnamool be the main driving force in their alliance while it took the back seat, acting as a reservoir of strategies and ideas. This is fundamentally important for the successful operation of federations.

As discussed earlier, federations of the poor and the marginalised are also seeking to change the way in which international agencies, NGOs, and other intermediaries work. This agenda introduces controversies as to who has legitimacy to speak for 'the poor'. Bilateral and multilateral aid agencies and development banks (such as the World Bank and the different regional development banks) work with and through national governments. So too do United Nations agencies which, like the development banks, are overseen by government representatives. Within these international agencies, national governments from low- and middle-income nations regard themselves as the legitimate representatives of their citizens – and if elected or appointed by elected governments, they have a strong justification for this. Yet as demonstrated by d'Cruz & Satterthwaite (2005), one of the main reasons why urban poor and homeless organisations and federations are needed is because 'representative' democracies were not addressing their needs. Thus, it is not surprising that conflicts arise in international agencies and at international meetings

over who has legitimacy to speak for the urban poor. It is also uncomfortable and often embarrassing for national or city politicians or civil servants from low- and middle-income nations, who are the official government delegates to international agencies or at international meetings, to have representatives from the urban poor or homeless organisations from their country or city at these meetings – and sometimes publicly questioning their official statements and speeches (d'Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2005). For the federations, the potential for conflict is moderated by the fact that they are seeking constructive engagement with their governments. Indeed, the federations often invite senior government staff and politicians to come with their representatives to international conferences, to emphasise their desire to work with governments and to explain how they do so. However, the official international aid/development system has made insufficient formal provisions to encourage the involvement of people's organisations in their work or to become more accountable to people's organisations for their decisions and policies. Many international agency staff members recognise the legitimacy of the federations and the contributions they can bring to more effective development, but their agencies' structures and modes of operation usually present many blockages to more equal partnerships with them. As my research demonstrates, DFID was instrumental in forcing the West Bengal government to act on its stated commitment to bottom-up planning through setting up KMPC. More needs to be done in the way of incorporating informal neighbourhood groups or communities of urban service users (such as the Bus and Railway Commuters Associations) to be part of the decision-making process. DFID's funding can be used as leverage to force the present structures in the state to insert voices from such groups.

All these lessons and policy recommendations are tied to one another. Each of them is necessary but not a sufficient condition to enable public decisions to be made by consolidating decisions made at the lower levels. There is a need for a concerted effort from all actors to make any significant change in the way decisions are made in large metropolitan regions in the developing world.

5.4 Future direction of research

The view that one dominant party with little opposition is detrimental to the cause of promoting a bottom-up system of public decision making that so many in Kolkata espouse, has not gained much currency in the public consciousness in the city, even among its intelligentsia. It is not hard to imagine that this is the case in many other cities in the world. This research therefore hopes to raise this as an issue fit for further study. It also highlights the need to evaluate actual effects – the costs and benefits – of decentralised govern-

ance within particular contexts, independent of the government's stated objectives.

Every research method has its strengths and weaknesses. Since this study focused on 'how' and 'why' questions about a contemporary set of events and, as noted above, addressed a process not yet thoroughly researched, a case study was the logical choice for a methodology. However, the most significant limitation of single-case qualitative research is the difficulty of determining cause and effect from one reconstructed case. I have tried to address this limitation by triangulating my observations in Kolkata with those from the existing literature on other cities. There is an important distinction in terms of conceptualisation of the issue at hand that needs to be made explicit. My aim for this research was to understand the complex process of planning in a large metropolis in the developing world. In the process I hoped to discover broader lessons for governments to bring about bottom-up planning. I focused my attention in this research to finding the answer to the question: why have governments not been able to create institutions for public planning that allow consolidation of plans from the bottom up? As Sandercock (1998) points out, there is an alternative question that might help us better achieve the aim I describe for this research. That is to ask: what are the various ways by which the marginalised are opposing/resisting state-sponsored planning or making and implementing their own plans? The Alliance in Mumbai is one among several other examples of such an effort. Future research should document such 'insurgent planning' in cities where such planning seems non-existent. Kolkata, Harare, Singapore, and Beijing are all possible cases for such a study. This will provide evidence of truly bottom-up strategies that urban residents are employing in the face of increasing marginalisation within the formal planning apparatus.

As Wampler (2004) suggests, vertical accountability, generally framed as the control of public officials by citizens, primarily via elections, has received significant attention as scholars have analysed how citizens can use elections to exercise control over public officials (Przeworski *et al.*, 1999). Horizontal accountability, the distribution of authority among different departments or branches of government, has also received attention as scholars have sought to evaluate the consequences of institutional arrangements that were designed to strengthen democratic practices and rights (O'Donnell, 1998). Societal accountability, the pressures placed on state agencies by civil society organisations to encourage elected officials and bureaucrats to abide by the rule of law, has emerged as a counterbalance to the other two approaches; it can directly link ongoing political activity in civil society to formal political institutions (Smulovitz & Peruzzotti, 2000).

Given the imperfections of each type of actor in the governance process, progress toward urban livability could be envisaged only by thinking in terms of 'ecologies of agents', in which synergies compensated for imperfections

and overall effects transcend the capabilities of individual actors. The concept of an 'ecology of agents' that was put forward by Peter Evans in his book *Livable Cities* is crucial for achieving structural changes that will allow for a truly bottom-up approach to metropolitan decision making. Like Castells's vision of the 'network society', the idea of ecologies of local political agents focuses on the power of connections rather than the capacities of individual actors. Though it does not negate the existence of Castells's 'space of flows', this imagery focuses on a more modest set of networks, with very different aims, rooted in a 'space of places'. While more modest, the constellations of actors that are the focus of this study still have the potential to collectively effect change, if only they can figure out how to better exploit the social and ideological resources at their disposal. Future research should therefore be directed to helping identify these resources in particular contexts.

Abstract

This research highlights the gap between the official rhetoric and the political reality of democratic decentralisation and bottom-up planning using an in-depth study of the metropolitan planning process in Kolkata, India. The key question that I address here is: *how do elected officials at different governmental levels, professional planners, and ordinary citizens interact in the process of metropolitan planning, and which players dominate the process?*

I focus on the dynamic interactions between planners and the operation of the political process that shapes this reality. The empirical material for this case study includes interviews with actors involved in the metropolitan planning process in Kolkata, documents in the form of study reports, master plans, minutes of meetings, and official memos produced by the planning agency and by other organisations and individuals involved with metropolitan planning in Kolkata. Archival data from local and national newspapers were also used to substantiate some of the information gathered from other sources.

My analysis of the case illustrates the following: (1) there are differences in the real motives for the state to pursue decentralisation and what it claims to be behind its decentralisation policy; (2) the planning process is unlikely to be truly bottom-up if power is concentrated within any one political party; (3) external funding, either from international agencies or higher levels of government, has the potential to force change in the local and regional structures of decision making so that the voices of ordinary people can be included in public decision making; (4) for the effective implementation of bottom-up approaches to metropolitan planning the planning bureaucracy needs to be independent of the political class; (5) bottom-up planning requires that planning capacity be built from a grassroots level. This requires devolution of both responsibilities and means/resources to carry out those responsibilities to the lowest level of planning; (6) the politicisation of decision making along party lines limits planning from the bottom up. Political parties in Kolkata and West Bengal are hierarchical organisations where members are accountable mainly to those above them. Therefore they are unlikely to become advocates for multiple constituencies and effective agents of change for bottom-up planning processes.

Abbreviations and acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
BDP	Basic Development Plan
BPL	Below Poverty Line
CAA	Constitutional Amendment Act
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CIT	Calcutta Improvement Trust
CO	Community Organiser
CPI-M	Communist Party of India-Marxist
CMPO	Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DDP	Draft Development Plan
DFID	Department for International Development
DMSC	Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee
EIUS	Environment Improvement in Urban Slums
GoWB	Government of West Bengal
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
ILGUS	Institute for Local Government and Urban Studies
IPP	Indian Population Project
KMA	Kolkata Metropolitan Area
KMC	Kolkata Municipal Corporation
KMDA	Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority
KMPC	Kolkata Metropolitan Planning Committee
KUSP	Kolkata Urban Services for the Poor
MARC	Municipal Administrative Reforms Committee
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
MPC	Metropolitan Planning Committee
NIMBY	Not In My Back Yard
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHG	Neighbourhood Groups
NRY	Nehru Rozgar Yojana
NSDP	National Slum Development Policy
SFC	State Finance Commissions
SJSRY	Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgaar Yojana
SPARC	Society for the Promotion of Area Resources Center
SUDA	State Urban Development Agency
TCPO	Town and Country Planning Organisation
TPO	Town Planning Officer
UBSP	Urban Basic Services Programme
UCRC	United Central Refugee Council
ULB	Urban Local Body
UPE	Urban Poverty Eradication
WB	World Bank
WC	Ward Committee
WHO	World Health Organization

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Curriculum Vitae

Anirban Pal was born and raised in India. He studied Design and Planning at the University of Colorado (USA). Anirban is an urban planner by profession, specialised in urban governance, metropolitan decision-making processes and utilisation of evaluation research in public policy and planning. He has conducted research in India, China, Kenya and the United States on a number of different issues, ranging from urban land tenure, democratic decentralisation, environmental justice and local government institutions. He has also worked as a consultant for UH-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Programme). In May 2007 he successfully defended his PhD research, also at the University of Colorado.

Currently Anirban is working as a postdoctoral researcher at the OTB Research Institute for Housing and Urban Renewal (TU Delft), where he is currently engaged in a cross-country comparative research on urban social movements and their impact on housing and urban poverty alleviation. He remains deeply committed to bridging the gap between research and practice in public policy.

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This book is based on the author's dissertation research. It contains an evaluation of the policy of democratic decentralisation through a case study of the metropolitan planning institution in Kolkata, India. In this research, the focus is on the relationship between planning bureaucracy and the political class, the rhetoric and the reality of the bottom-up planning approach, relations between different levels of government and the relationship between the state and the civil society.
The book illustrates that politicisation of decision-making along party lines limits planning from the bottom up. Parties in Kolkata and West Bengal are hierarchical organisations where members are accountable mainly to those above them. Therefore they are unlikely to become effective agents of change for bottom-up planning processes. Among other policy recommendations, the book argues that for an effective implementation of bottom-up approaches to metropolitan planning, the planning bureaucracy needs to be independent of the political class.

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