

Urban Governance under Neoliberalism: Increasing Centralization or Participatory Decentralization

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Abstract

Urban governance has become the buzzword for urban planning under the present trend of liberalisation, globalization and privatization. Urban governance in general refers to a market-led entrepreneurial activity including risk-taking by the urban local bodies, though often argued as ‘maximum governance’ and ‘minimum government’. However, in the fray of attracting more and more international finance, it seems that, especially in the developing world, opposite is equally happening. The state adopts a proactive approach at identifying market opportunities for urban regeneration. In India, urban governance has been propagated by the national as well as international agencies as an approach that will make the create solutions for the existing problems of urban India. Governance on the one hand has resulted in withdrawal of state from various sectors conspicuously from housing and basic civic amenities. The New Economic Policy in India was introduced as a

means of decentralization of administration, finance and function with greater autonomy to sub-national and urban local bodies. Over the period of last few decades, however, it has become clearer that resources, capital, investment and growth are increasingly getting concentrated in mega-cities of the country often at the cost of smaller towns and urban centres. This is quite contrary to the proclaimed objective of bringing decentralization. The present chapter emphasizes the state’s initiatives of urban rejuvenation programmes through analysing cases from India to understand the contemporary urban governance situation.

Keywords

Accumulation • AMRUT • Decentralization • Governance • JNNURM • Urban rejuvenation urban renewal

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18.1 Introduction

Governance as a concept encompasses a range of ideas and deviations. In the context of post-Washington consensus consolidation, ‘good’ governance is understood as a system of government in which countries had to be structured in

terms of layer I governance¹ (Angelis 2003). Contrary to this conception, scholars also understand governance especially metropolitan governance in terms of cooperation or collaboration including cooperation among government, non-governmental and private organization (Norris 2001). As such, the focus moves away from the actor or entity that is doing the governing, but instead analyses the process of ruling and managing the territories and the populations (Gupta et al. 2015b). Different countries and societies have applied governance as the ‘magic potion’ to end the miseries of their respective societies. Such applications often remained limited to articulations only and failed to get translated in something that can be measured on the outlined principals of governance at different scale (Gupta et al. 2015a). This also means that the neoliberal governments often acted as neo-populists, where the messianic characteristics of the leader become unquestionable and these also form the benchmark for governance. The structure of governance has in-built mechanism of decentralized decision-making, which stands against the crucial selling point for governance, i.e. efficiency (van Dijk 2015). Feiock (2009) argued, ‘fragmentation of policy among multiple governmental units diminishes problems of concentrated powers and can promote competition and innovation, but it also imposes inefficiencies, as decisions by one governmental unit impose positive and negative externalities on others’. The highlighted contradictions in the functioning of multiple levels of government systems or decision-making processes are more commonly reported from different parts of the world, though not recognized as the epistemic inconsistency. We discuss this inconsistency in the outlined structure of governance and its application taking Indian

case. In 2001, the Government of India (GOI) along with United Nations (UN) agencies and other multilateral institutions launched the campaign for ‘good governance’. The overall goal of the campaign was outlined as ‘to move towards an improved quality of life in cities, particularly, for the poor and marginalised, through good urban governance’ (GOI 2001). However, when funds were allocated in the decades that followed, one can see the contradictions in fund allocations. We also highlight how governance eventually promotes centralization in the functioning of the state rather than participatory decentralization.

18.2 Governance as Absence of Government

Urban governance refers to the introduction of a variety of actors (Fig. 18.1) into the task of the provision of public services, which potentially constitutes a withdrawal of the central state and the government. Such actors include the private sector, the civil society and supranational organization. This approach is sometimes referred to as ‘maximum governance’ and ‘minimum government’ (Hacker and Pieterse 2010). With this, market-led entrepreneurial activity including risk-taking by the urban local bodies is encouraged (van Dijk 2015). The central question remains—Which sector does the state withdraw from? Is it from decision-making processes or from service delivery system? Neoliberalism often gets associated with withdrawal of the state and absence of the state from public domain. Jouve (2009) wrote that the term governance is used by the international financial institution to indicate a new approach to aid-receiving developing state giving more weight to civil society and less to national institutions in the management of loans and implementation of international programmes. It is interesting to note here that the Indian state has talked about governance more than once. One would certainly wonder if the Indian state is truly in favour of less power to national institution and more devolution of power to civil society, given the contradictory evidence of the banning of non-governmental

¹Massimo De Angelis mentions two types of governance and argues that most literature deals with Layer I governance, which is to discuss issues such as reforms of international organizations and institutions. In all these In all these cases, the key words are notions of ‘transparency’ and ‘good governance’. Governance in this sense becomes the institutional backbone of neoliberal projects. For more on layer I and Layer II, please see, Angelis (2003).

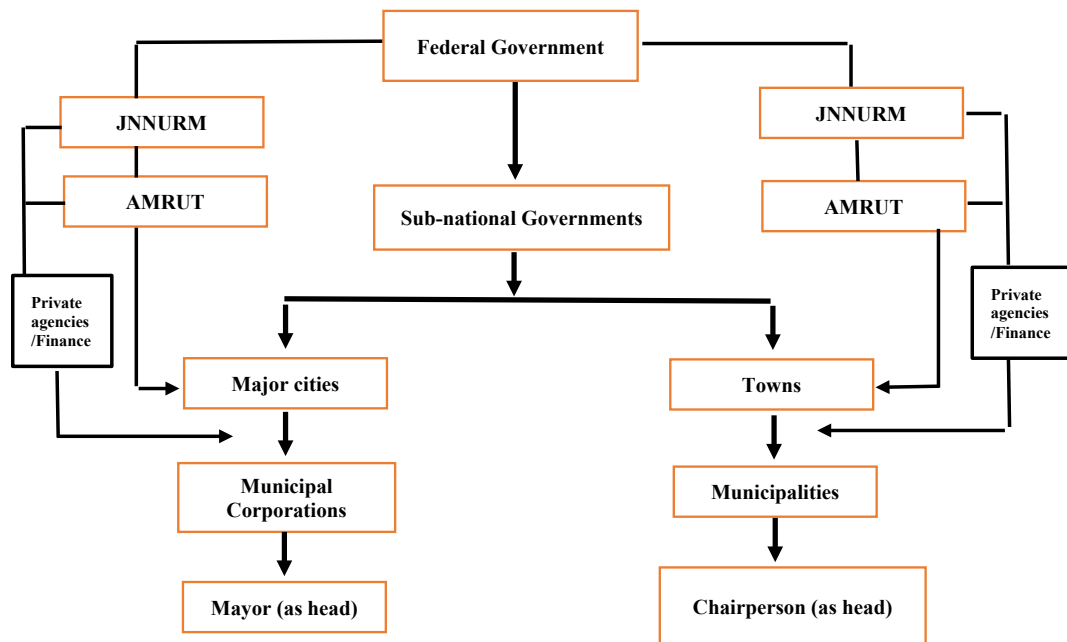


Fig. 18.1 Flow-chart on India’s urban governance

organizations. This is especially carried out to those critical to current policies of the government; for instance, the activities and finance of Green Peace (Rowlatt 2015) and Amnesty International (Doane 2016) have been constrained, signs of a more intervening government. Moreover, the critique of government and governmental policies are not naturally welcomed and are termed as against ‘national interest’. However, governance that primarily focuses on decentralization of financial liability on one hand and almost complete control in favour of international agencies constitute the tone of ‘nationalist’ narrative. The new narrative is embodied in the emerging global context in which cities are continuously being transformed.

Cities across the globe are undergoing deconstruction and reconstruction. Brenner and Theodore (2005) wrote that during 1980s and 1990s, categories like deindustrialization, reindustrialization, post-Fordism, internationalization, global city formation urban entrepreneurialism, informalization, gentrification, social polarization and so on were utilized to describe and theorize the ongoing deconstruction and attempted

reconstruction of urban social space. The shifting from a Keynesian model of uniformity, central management, redistribution for the creation of even spaces into a model that places priority on downscaling and a competitive economy (Klink 2013) constituted to a re-scaling of the state space. As such, cities then become key sites where resources are concentrated for the purpose of creating value and encouraging production, essentially serving as growth engines for the region and the state. Prince (2012) described governance as hollowing out of the state as the nation’s power and responsibilities are rescaled ‘upwards’, ‘downwards’ and ‘outwards’ to supranational institutions, local administrations and non-state actors respectively. The urban on one hand goes global on the other it gets inward in terms of creation and manifestations of local conflicts and contestations in name of culture, religion and other pre-modern identities.

In the fray of attracting more and more international finance, it seems that in the developing world opposite is equally true. The state adopts a proactive approach at identifying market opportunities for urban regeneration. In India, urban

governance has been propagated by the national as well as international agencies as an approach that will make the problem of urban area as the reality of past (James and Verrest 2015). However, governance has resulted in withdrawal of the state from various sectors conspicuously from housing and basic civic amenities. The New Economic Policy (NEP) in India was introduced during early 1990s as a means of decentralization of administration, finance and function with greater autonomy to sub-national and local bodies. Over the period of the last few decades, it has become clearer that resources, capital, investment and growth are increasingly getting concentrated in mega-cities of the country often at the cost of smaller towns and urban centres. This is quite contrary to the proclaimed objective of the NEP to bring decentralization. With NEP in place India became part of a new global economy that has already begun to unfold. The role of FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) which was as low as 0.14% for India during 1980–85, rose to 2% of the global FDI flow for 2016 (Krishna 2018). The population in towns and cities grew from 217 million in 1991 to 377 million in 2011 as per census of India; the share of urban population also grew from 26% in 1991 to 31% in 2011. Though, the relative share of urban population in total population is still low by international standard. For example, even in developing countries, like 48% in China, 78% in Mexico, and 87% in Brazil the relative percentage is higher compared to India. In most Asian cities, a majority of GDP is generated by their cities, with extreme cases like Bangkok (44%), Dhaka (40.9%) and Seoul (24.1%) and so on (Yeung 2011). In India, Mumbai contributes to 40% of income tax and 60% of custom duty, an indication of the centralization of economic and commercial activities at the largest urban centre of the country. Roy (2009) also considered city-region as the building block of the global economy. Quoting Scott (2001) she argued that city-region heralds a new phase of capitalist territorial development which in turn makes city-region the key space of accumulation, competition and governance. Most of the Third world cities either tried to maintain the city-region as nodes of global capital

accumulation or were enthusiastic to join the league as viable node. This rise of city-region as a key space and scale of accumulation is also an evidence of the growing re-spatialization and the re-scaling of state space (Brenner et al. 2003; Brenner 2004).

18.3 Renewal/Rejuvenation Missions as Neoliberal Projects

This section takes examples from the urban renewal missions namely Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) initiated by the federal government in India and helped and financed by the private agencies. Indian cities in recent times got remodelled and articulated as ‘world class cities’ with the aim to function as nodes of circulation of global finance and high-tech activities. The aim was to attract investments across cities, especially to the larger ones. The organization of investment summits, seminars by different states in India since late 1990s supports this understanding that the cities are competing within the national territory. Sub-national states of India have been projecting their cities as world-class, global and high-tech and entrepreneurial destination for investment. The chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, Chandrababu Naidu’s efforts of promoting Hyderabad through Cyberabad high-tech knowledge enclave during late 1990s and early 2000s can be taken as an example. Similarly, the Karnataka chief minister, S. M. Krishna branded Bangalore as the Silicon Valley of India since 1990s, which helped in investment flow into both the cities. This initiative was in tune with what Roy and Ong (2011) would call ‘art of being global’. The beginning of such autonomous city level neoliberal initiatives lies in the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act which was adopted by Indian Parliament in 1992. The aim of the act was to grant greater autonomy to urban local bodies (ULB) along with decentralization of power and ensuring better participation of people especially weaker section in decision-making processes of these bodies (Ghosh et al. 2009). The art of being global also means that

the urban local bodies are no more dependent on the financial resources allocated by the sub-national and federal governments and, are expected to generate resources, prioritize needs and act based on local requirements.

Government of India on December 3, 2005 launched JNNURM across 63 cities with centralized financial support. The support was to be routed through existing ULBs. The then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (2005) launched the mission with two clearly stated objectives namely: strengthening infrastructure and addressing urban poverty. Singh during the launch of the mission noted that 'our vision of urban development has been so far 'uni-dimensional'; we have focused more on space and less on the people. We need to have an integrated framework in which spatial development of cities goes together with improvement in the quality of living of ordinary people living there'. The renewal mission seems to be ideal as it considers the concerns of citizens in the city and as outlined in the speech it aimed to have an integrated framework. The reality, however is the centralization of entire renewal process as the mission itself was launched as 'top-down' approach. In 2001, when the 'good governance campaign' was launched the government expected mobilization of finance to create infrastructure to make the 'world class city' that will have ease of doing business. However, since 1992 when 74th Constitutional Amendment Act was brought in, most of ULBs failed to mobilize finance for upgradation of existing infrastructure or creation of new infrastructure. The talks of 'good governance' proved to be hollow as one important component of good governance, i.e. to bring qualitative change in the lives of citizen remained mostly unattended and to some extent that could be said to have contributed in the loss of NDA government in 2004 despite high-pitched 'shining India' campaign. The UPA government after assuming office in May 2004 decided to mobilize finance for urban infrastructure and for improvement of basic amenities in slums and in 2005 officially launched the renewal mission. Actual implementation of JNNURM started only in 2006. Moreover, JNNURM was clearly biased towards large cities, with the funding given proportional to

the population. As a result, the urban poor and small and medium towns were neglected under the scheme (Kamath and Zachariah 2015).

Decentralization has been a key to the propagated model of governance. The governance model advocates for autonomy for the local bodies but also restricts the national governments from directly financing the ULBs to provide services to their citizens including the poor. Under aegis of international development institutions like UN Habitat (1996) and World Bank (2004) which advocate models of urban management premised on the decentralization of government responsibilities, the local government ought to be a facilitator rather than a direct provider of services (Lindell 2009). The local bodies across the world including that of poor countries like Uganda ought to coordinate at best the provision of services and infrastructure by other actors and by entering partnerships with private enterprises and non-governmental organizations (Lindell 2009). It is expected to draw on the capacities and energies of these multiple actors especially transnational corporations and to create an 'enabling environment' for their direct involvement. India while pumping money under the UPA government for urban infrastructure across 67 cities for seven years, mode of expenditure was through consultants and private entrepreneurs. The guidelines under JNNURM was clear enough in favour of the funding agencies who will receive money from the centralized funded renewal mission as it states that (i) Privatization of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) will be the preferred mode of implementing projects and (ii) the onus of minimizing risks for the private investor would be on state governments/ULBs. The hypocrisy of JNNURM has been argued by several theorists. For instance, Fitch (2012) argues that the focus was on finance and making the municipal funding sustainable by depending on private funding, so that they are less reliant on the state, rather than for the wellbeing of the people. Moreover, while JNNURM discursively argued for a decentralized governance, it does not empower the ULBs who are still under the control of the state government; state do not seek to increase the capacity of the ULBs nor the

municipalities, but instead encourage the outsourcing the consultants (Grant Thornton 2011). As such, rather than engendering decentralization as proposed by the 74th Constitutional Amendment, has increased centralization (Jha and Jha 2010) and reduced local capacity (Mehta and Mehta 2010; Ghosh et al. 2009). By pushing the cities into debt financing, local municipalities have been bogged down by the need to expand their energies on forging partnerships and ensuring the balance of accounts instead of focusing on meeting the needs of people through services and infrastructure (Goldman 2011). The seed of ease of doing business was planted in the renewal documents, with certainly the laws of business was ought to prevail over rights to citizen in such a situation.

The AMRUT mission document (2015) concedes that 'learnings from the earlier Mission have shown that infrastructure creation should have a direct impact on the real needs of people, such as providing taps and toilet connections to all households' in the opening paragraph. The mission, therefore claimed to have objective of (i) ensuring that every household has access to a tap with assured supply of water and a sewerage connection; (ii) increasing the amenity value of cities by developing greenery and well maintained open spaces (e.g. parks); and (iii) reducing pollution by switching to public transport or constructing facilities for non-motorized transport (e.g. walking and cycling) (GOI 2015). Under AMRUT it was decided that grant approvals were to be carried out through the State Annual Action Plan annually rather than project to project basis; this was claimed to be a form of 'cooperative federalism' by the union government. The mission, unlike JNNURM was extended to all Class I towns means all urban centres with more than 100,000 population. In the hill regions, population criteria was further relaxed, same was the case with thirteen towns situated along the river (GOI 2015). Under AMRUT, the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) pays for half the project costs for cities with populations of less than 10 lakhs and a third of the cost for those with population

above 10 lakhs. Moreover, the central government funding is higher for the North-east and Hilly States (90% and is completely centrally funded for the Union Territories (Pandey 2016). The funding formula made provincial governments more accountable than earlier as union government pledged to fund only one-third of the cost for the infrastructural components including, water, sewerage, transport. Moreover, the states, as opposed to the MoUD are now responsible for the evaluation and approval of projects (Sadoway et al. 2018). The union government pledged to fund one half for the cities having population less than 10,00,000. The rest of the funding was to be mobilized either by the provincial government or through private investment. Experiences have shown that it is difficult to mobilize funds for basic infrastructure like water supply and sewerage in small and medium towns. This was the reason why the ULBs have largely failed to improve their infrastructural and sanitation condition since 1992. Larger cities which were made to aspire to be 'world-class' got funding under JNNURM but small and medium towns remained largely untouched and were at best left to their own. The launch of AMRUT in 2015 brought hope to the citizens of small and medium towns especially Class I towns, however the guidelines on funding patterns ultimately constrains the possibility of these cities improving their basic services. Bringing in reforms remained the key similarity in both the renewal missions; higher tax collection by ULBs which was 85% under JNNURM and 90% under AMRUT was significant. To ensure user charges, collection of property tax and levy of new/additional changes to ensure better financial health of ULBs were part of the reforms. Another commonality is the focussed priority in favour of larger cities to make them 'world class' which not only allows, but also encourages private investors to generate profit using the public assets of the city. Smith (2016), taking the example of San Francisco, argued in an article how public spaces are going private and make cities vulnerable for the future especially for the poor and marginalized.

18.4 Participation in Peril

In 2001, during launch of the good governance campaign, one of the three objectives were 'to secure the commitment of key stakeholders to improving the quality of urban governance through the public signature of a memorandum of understanding (MOU)'. Different countries of the world have shown us that meanings of law are taken differently, and they usually imply multiple things rather than one universal understanding. Sellers (2002) while studying three cities from three countries, viz. USA, France and Germany concluded that in the USA respondents conceived of the rule of law as a comprehensive trope that encompassed most of the ends of policy; in France respondents identified it mainly with the public interest; and in Germany respondents from the left and the right related it to very different norms. Based on standardized and open-ended questions to some 240 respondents, Sellers (2001) in his book *Governing from Below* concluded that differences in the rule of law and its operational reality did differ in multiple ways and contributed different results. Not only did the patterns in the rules vary, but the surveys showed that elites and activists in different settings thought about law and its application in significantly different ways. Although the concept of governance and participation across the world is taken as universal in literature, the meaning varies in different context; local bodies implement participation under the governance frame as they find fit. In most of the cases the public signature of MOUs is taken as the display of terms of reference (TOR), and modification plan for the review of the stakeholders in the darkest corner of the municipal head-office for thirty days. The same is of course taken out without any observation or comments from the public. In some of the cities, where aware activists give in writing the objections on plans or TOR, they are conveniently ignored. If the case is pursued further, a legal battle ensues for years. In certain cases, like Metro Project in Hyderabad faced opposition by the traders or got caught up in legal battle, the part of the project remained unfinished. Such situations contribute negatively

to larger public interest in more than one way. For instance, if the cost of project gets escalated, the builders and consultants pass the cost to people, citing public disturbance as the reason for delay. Moreover, there will be additional inconvenience to people because of long duration of work left incomplete. The TOR in most cases though unfairly (to the people of the city) provides such immunity to the builders/consultants/operators.

Liberalism ideologically claims that economic, political and social relations are organized through free choice of formally free and rational actors who seek to advance their own material or ideal interests in an institutional framework (Jessop 2002). The idea is based on the spontaneous freedom only constrained through constitutional provisions. The governance model propagated claimed to have every citizen's participation in decision-making as per their free choices. The so-called free choices are exercised as per the relative power each one has. As Marx (quoted in Jessop 2002) once said 'where equal rights exist, force decides'; it is witnessed that the relative balance of economic, political and civic power decides the mode of development let alone be the individual free choices in decision-making under the neoliberal governance model. The strengthening of transatlantic capital and technology even if not through hegemony resulted in rolling back of state intervention to contain inflation and government deficit. The outcries like that of the newly elected PM of India in 2014s 'minimum government and maximum governance' can be considered also one such reassurance to the transnational producers and financiers. The reassurance, that India was going to continue to be a hospitable location for foreign capital, was required especially when the inherent articulated characteristics of the party and the organization in government was that of an 'indigenous' model.

The United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UNHABITAT) has developed 23 indicators to measure governance including efficiency, equity, etc., the key component of governance, i.e. participation which was articulated in 2001 governance campaign remained at best absent in the implemented governance model.

AMRUT has advanced JNNURM to more cities with adding of SMART city Mission for 100 cities. The internal competition of cities and the participation of citizens in voting/ranking of the cities on certain services can be articulated as participation. However, participation does not mean to respond/react to the agenda already set up by those in power politically with having the capabilities to influence the investments across sectors and spaces. In the case of JNNURM, the citizen inclusion and public transparency are included as specified reforms in exchange for central funding assistance for urban infrastructure (Sivaramakrishnan 2011). However, the cities were subject to the different steering and monitoring units with their concomitant approval, reporting and accountability procedures that ensure that the cities fall in line and conform to the wider agenda (Sadoway 2018). This is on top of a centrally determined 'scorecard' that the cities are graded upon, in exchange for funding (Kamath and Zachariah 2015). Additionally, Citizens reviews have shown that the role of the citizens is limited to selective consultation and not participatory democracy, with little accountability of the Mission (Kamath and Zachariah 2015). It was also revealed that the authorities did not hold the required number of meetings with the civil society as part of JNNURM mission (Kamath and Zachariah 2015). This can be argued to be a form of 'social steering', whereby instruments are utilized to 'get people to do things that they might not otherwise do'; or it enables people to do things that they might otherwise not have done (Schneider and Ingram 1990: 513). This ultimately accounts to a form of 'social control and the ways of exercising it' (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007: 1). The rise of consultants and contractual provision is also evidence of this effect, where there is an increased reliance on 'third parties' [...] to deliver publicly financed services and pursue authorized public purposes (Salamon 2000). Therefore, the shift in from a hierarchical government to a more network-oriented approach with governance in the name of participation and empowerment (both for the citizens and for the municipal authorities) has been accompanied by

a change in the instruments applied (Majoor and Schwartz 2015). Means such as agreements, contracts, incentives (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007) are considered as less interventionist and less authoritative (Savini 2013), but do not go far in diluting or reducing the power of the central government. It encourages accumulation by the big consultants and global corporate who participate in planning the rejuvenation of such 'global cities' and execute them. In short, the new model of governance is also a new means of accentuation of power and wealth which can be safely called 'accumulation by rejuvenation'.

18.5 Conclusions

This conceptual paper aims to develop a hypothesis that contradicts the established propagated norm of decentralization with liberalization and the myth of absence of state after globalization. As Harvey (2008) rightly puts it, 'rights of private property and the profit rate trump all other notions of rights'. The governance model of the twentieth century did not challenge the profit maximization model of our time; it only deviated from the post-Thatcher-Regan insofar as consolidating the energy of neoliberal era towards the notions of participation and empowerment. Exclusive enclaves, exclusive shopping centres, clubs and exclusive residential complexes, exclusive areas with free internet facilities became key features of the rejuvenated cities. The poor and 'dirty' were to be relegated from the real city despite always dominating the speeches of the key political leaders and policymakers, in a way reminiscent of what Kundu (2001) terms 'in the name of urban poor'.

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