

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN CITIES AND DEVELOPMENT

The Politics of Slums in the Global South

Urban informality in Brazil, India, South Africa and Peru

Edited by
Véronique Dupont, David Jordhus-Lier,
Catherine Sutherland and
Einar Braathen



The Politics of Slums in the Global South

Seeing urban politics from the perspective of those who reside in slums offers an important dimension to the study of urbanism in the global South. Many people living in substandard conditions do not have their rights as urban citizens recognised and realise that they cannot rely on formal democratic channels or governance structures.

Through in-depth case studies and comparative research, *The Politics of Slums in the Global South* integrates conceptual discussions on urban political dynamics with empirical material from research undertaken in Rio de Janeiro, Delhi, Chennai, Cape Town, Durban and Lima. The chapters engage with the relevant literature and present first-hand information on urban governance and cities in the South, housing policy for the urban poor, the politics of knowledge and social mobilisation. Recent theories on urban informality and subaltern urbanism are explored, and the issue of popular participation in public interventions is critically assessed.

The book is aimed at a scholarly readership of postgraduate students and researchers in development studies, urban geography, political science, urban sociology and political geography. It is also of great value to urban decision-makers and practitioners.

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The broad project explored how governments and citizens in fast-growing cities of the global South with a different economic base made use of participatory spatial knowledge to direct urban governance towards more sustainable development. The material for this book is drawn from one of the 'work packages' of this project, which focused on policies and politics to address the challenge of substandard settlements, with an emphasis given to related social mobilisation. This work package was led by Einar Braathen (NIBR). This book covers all four countries of the project, namely Brazil, India, South Africa and Peru, but only six of the ten cities were selected for further analysis: Rio de Janeiro, Delhi, Chennai, Durban, Cape Town and Lima.

Over the nearly five years of this project, our work has benefitted from the many fruitful exchanges and various meetings with the different researchers involved in this collective endeavour. At the outset, this project would not have materialised without the inspiration, perseverance and constant efforts of its initiator and scientific co-ordinator, Isa Baud (AMIDSt – UvA). We wish to express our most heartfelt gratitude to her. Michaela Hordjik (AMIDSt – UvA),

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Two scientific events were particularly important for the research team involved in the preparation of this book. The first one was a panel entitled 'Reconfiguring the fast growing city: Exploring the interaction between urban governance, mega-projects and settlement dynamics in cases from India and South Africa', convened by Loraine Kennedy (CNRS, CEIAS), Glen Robbins (UKZN) and Einar Braathen (NIBR) at the EADI-DSA Conference on 'Rethinking Development in an age of scarcity and uncertainty' in York (19–22 September, 2011). Earlier versions of some of the settlement stories included in this volume were first presented during this panel, and benefitted from the comments of the convenors, the two discussants – Monique Bertrand (IRD) and Pushpa Arabindoo (University College, London) – and debates with the audience.

The second scientific event was a seminar on 'City governance, politics and the poor' organised by Einar Braathen along with Trond Vedeld, Berit Aasen and Peris Jones at NIBR in Oslo (24 April, 2013). This was followed by a two-day workshop focusing on the theme of our Chance2Sustain work package. This gave us the opportunity to present our first research findings, strengthen our comparative perspective and get invaluable feedback from the participants, whom we want to sincerely thank. Among these, we highly appreciated Colin MacFarlane's (University of Durham) precious comments. Other discussants included: Berit Aasen (NIBR), Rolee Aranya (Norwegian University of Science and Technology), Michaela Hordjik (AMIDSt – UvA), Yuri Kasahara (NIBR), Marianne Millstein (Nordic Africa Institute), Ingrid Samset (Chr. Michelsen Institute), Trond Vedeld (NIBR) and Henrik Wiig (NIBR).

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1 Introduction

Situating the politics of slums within the ‘urban turn’

*Einar Braathen, Véronique Dupont,
David Jordhus-Lier and
Catherine Sutherland*

Urbanisation continues to transform both society and the environment in profound ways. Its impact on cities, their citizens and authorities therefore forms a major focus of research for both academics and practitioners. Contemporary urbanisation has become a phenomenon of the global South and it is happening at a rate and scale that is far greater than when the same process unfolded in the North (UN 2014). Urbanisation in the South occurs at a pace that renders formal urban planning processes and capacity insufficient. Hence, city growth is not matched by growth in housing and service opportunities, resulting in millions of people living in substandard conditions in cities across the world. These settlements are often identified as ‘slums’ in the global discourse (UN-Habitat 2003, Davis 2006). Most slum dwellers, or their parents, have migrated to cities in search of better income opportunities and livelihoods (IOM 2013). However, many of the urban poor find that their rights as urban citizens are not recognised and realise that they cannot rely on formal democratic channels or governance structures for their needs to be met. As a result many marginalised citizens mobilise politically in response to what they perceive as undignified living conditions, or to direct threats such as evictions. To complicate matters, this discontent often takes place in cities whose authorities have their eyes set elsewhere, on ambitious agendas for economic development and competitiveness motivated by visions of the ‘world-class city’. This ‘dressing up for the world’ is often in conflict with the direct interests of the poor citizens of a city. It channels funds away from social spending or results in the spatial relocation of marginalised communities. In sum, cities in the South are arenas of intense tensions, that often result in the rise of urban social movements.

This book focuses on substandard settlements in the urbanising global South, and on the efforts of residents and authorities to secure housing and improve living conditions. How were substandard settlements addressed through urban policies? And how do civil society organisations mobilise and engage in both the formation

and implementation of these policies? These two questions have guided the empirical research that is presented in this volume. While our main focus is on social mobilisation, we also explore mobilisation through two related research themes: policy-making on substandard settlements, and the politics of knowledge shaping interventions in these settlements. The book aims to connect these three main themes and to reflect on the relations between them. Social mobilisation can be understood as the encounter at the settlement level between public interventions from above, social responses from below, and struggles over knowledge construction and its legitimacy. The interactions between these dimensions are critical to participatory public interventions in pro-poor housing and determine when they succeed or fail.

Understanding the politics of slums from the perspective of those who reside in substandard settlements reveals much about the power struggles and tensions around urbanism in the South. Through in-depth case studies and a comparative approach, this book combines conceptual discussions with empirical material from a research project on six cities in Brazil, India, South Africa and Peru. The six cities – Rio de Janeiro, Delhi, Chennai, Durban, Cape Town and Lima – reveal similarities and differences in housing policies, knowledge production and social mobilisation emerging in the urbanising global South. The eleven case studies of substandard settlements are not viewed as isolated enclaves in their respective city. On the contrary, we analyse their dynamics in relation to transformation and development occurring elsewhere in the city, at other scales. Thus, the dynamics of slum formation, demolition, resettlement or upgrading are part of a broader urban restructuring process shaping metropolitan areas.

Consequently, the first section of this introductory chapter locates the politics of slums within the broader context of what we call the ‘urban turn’, in which city authorities are assigned new and sometimes conflicting roles. At an analytical level, this also requires that we focus on debates about urban governance, what is meant by governing cities and who takes part in doing so. The next two sections develop our conceptual and methodological research framework. We introduce our approach to urban informality and discuss the concepts of substandard settlements and slums. The comparative approach, which constitutes a main dimension of this research, is discussed, as well as the common methods of investigation that were applied to the case studies across the six cities. The last section presents the structure of the book, and outlines the three main themes with their related research questions.

Global context: the ‘urban turn’ and new strategic roles for the city

In this section we discuss how cities have come to inhabit a new and more central role in the world economy, and as a result in social sciences, and how this has encouraged new forms of urban governance and ascribed new roles for the urban authorities.

The 'urban turn': the growing importance of the city

Over the last decades, cities have acquired an increasingly important place in the social sciences, not only in human geography, but also in social anthropology and political science. This 'urban turn' reflects the increasing dominance of cities in all aspects of life, both globally and locally. This dominance is a result of a spatial reordering of the world, which many scholars see as linked to a wider process of neoliberal globalisation (Sassen 1991, Castells 1996, Jessop 2002). Arguably, the national state, and its spatial-political centre, the capital city, has yielded power and responsibilities to other nodes of power, including local governments and regional urban centres. Concomitantly, a group of so-called 'global cities' have emerged and claimed strategic positions in the new world economy (Sassen 1991), sometimes in ways that threaten to usurp the power of the nation-states that accommodate them.

Looking to the successes of other cities, urban authorities across the world are drawn into competing against other urban centres on a global stage. By developing urban growth strategies they aim for 'their' city to transform according to this model (see Robinson 2002). This point has also been made with special reference to some of the cities in this research (see Lemanski 2007, with special reference to Cape Town; Dupont 2011, for the case of Delhi; and Hannan and Sutherland 2015, for the case of Durban). Neoliberalism became a powerful dominant discourse and strategy to restructure, rescale, and reorder accumulation and regulation in capitalist societies, and numerous measures to sustain the neoliberal project at the urban scale were initiated by international organisations such as the World Bank (Jessop 2002). These efforts led to the transformation of the governance system of large cities. Technically oriented 'managerialism' was replaced by market economy-oriented 'entrepreneurialism' as the main principle of urban governance (Harvey 1989). It resulted in some cities such as Rio de Janeiro being managed almost like a private company (Vainer 2011). The main imperative of entrepreneurial cities is to create economic growth, often through attracting foreign (and domestic) investors by means of large-scale projects for infrastructure and business development (Kennedy *et al.* 2014). Decentralisation policies in many cases form part of this neoliberal agenda in practice, although these two phenomena are not necessarily linked. For instance, decentralisation drives in developing countries since the early 1990s often preserved privilege and prevented substantive democratisation, as sub-national governments and local municipalities were dominated by local oligarchies whose primary political agenda was to siphon off rents from entrepreneurial activities and build clientelistic networks, making their economic privilege and political control unassailable (Heller and Evans 2010).

In contrast to the neoliberal trajectory, the 'urban turn' has also manifested itself through a 'counter movement' of social movements and certain progressive city administrations, resulting in an alternative spatial reordering of the state. In some countries, or in federated states in some countries, decentralisation has encompassed other, more democratic possibilities. In India, the cornerstone of urban decentralisation reforms was the 74th constitutional amendment

promulgated in 1992, which not only awarded greater autonomy to municipalities, but also promoted participatory democracy. This amendment guarantees the participation of women and the marginalised sections of society through the reservation of seats.¹ It further provides for the formation of ward committees to deal with local issues, including representatives from civil society. However, an assessment of participatory democracy as a result of the decentralisation reforms shows mixed results, revealing strong social barriers to inclusive urban governance (Tawa Lama-Rewal 2011). The states of Kerala and West Bengal in India are nevertheless good examples of this progressive 'urban turn' (Heller 2001). Brazil has also adopted more participatory forms of urban governance, as developed below (Heller 2001; see also Heller and Evans 2010). In South Africa, which has a transformative and economic growth agenda, the national and local state are sites of struggles to balance both pro-growth and pro-poor approaches to development.

Urbanisation in the global South: uneven and unequal

With urban dwellers outnumbering rural dwellers for the first time in history, and the global South being the main location of urban growth, the 'urban turn' is also starting to dominate the agenda in development studies. However, the level and pace of urbanisation across countries of the South is not equal, nor does it take place in a spatially even manner. For example, the level of urbanisation has remained much lower in India in comparison to Brazil. While the share of the urban population in the total population in India increased from 23 per cent in 1980 to 32 per cent in 2014, it increased from 66 per cent to 85 per cent in Brazil during the same period (UN 2014, see also Table 1.1). As a result of urban expansion, migration and natural population growth, cities in developing or emerging countries now occupy most of the places on the list of the thirty largest urban agglomerations in the world (UN 2014). Despite its relatively low level of urbanisation, India is, according to UN estimates, home to four 'mega-cities' in 2015, each with more than ten million people. With 25 million inhabitants, Delhi ranks as the second largest urban agglomeration in the world.

Cities of the global South have also grown in ways that create stark inequalities and produce acute shortages of decent housing. It is essential to indicate the magnitude of the urban population living in 'slums' in developing regions:² 820 million in 2010, corresponding to 33 per cent of the total urban population, as per UN-Habitat definition (see Box 1.1) and estimates (UN-Habitat 2012: 6). Table 1.1 shows the respective percentages for the four countries in this study, ranging from 23 per cent in South Africa to 36 per cent in Peru.

Such urban inequalities produce political responses. In Brazil especially, during the debates over the new constitution that began in 1986, urban social movements successfully made demands for more accountable forms of city governance, calling for decentralisation and citizen participation in the running of city affairs as a basic right of citizenship (Holston and Caldeira 2008). Brazilian municipalities are among the most autonomous and best resourced in the global South (Baiocchi

Table 1.1 Urbanisation and urban slums in Brazil, India, South Africa and Peru.

Country	Total population (in thousands)	Level of urbanisation: percentage of urban population in total population			'Mega-cities': urban agglomerations above 10 million inhabitants (or largest national urban agglomerations) – population in millions	Percentage of urban slum dwellers in total urban population at the country level
		2014 (mid-year)	1980	2000	2015 (projection)	
Brazil	202 034	65.5	81.2	85.4	Sao Paulo: 21.1 Rio de Janeiro: 12.9 Delhi: 25.70	26.9
India	1 267 402	23.1	27.7	32.4	Mumbai: 21.04 Kolkata: 14.86 Bangalore: 10.09	29.4
South Africa	53 140	48.4	56.9	64.3	Johannesburg: 9.40	23.0
Peru	30 769	64.6	73.0	78.3	Lima: 9.90	36.1*

Sources and definitions:

- i) United Nations (2014) *World Urbanization Prospects. 2014 Revision*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. Available from <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/>. Accessed on 15 January, 2015.
- In this table, the concept of 'urban agglomeration' used by the UN Population Division refers to the population contained within the contours of a contiguous territory inhabited at urban level of residential density. In some cases, it includes not only a main city and its suburban fringes but also other cities situated in this same contiguous territory. Consequently, the administrative boundaries and population of the urban agglomeration do not necessarily correspond to the municipality of the main city.
- ii) For slum population: UN-Habitat (2013) *Global Report on Human Settlements 2013*, Table B.3: 'Urbanization and urban slum dwellers'. See Box 1.1 for the definition of 'slum', which may differ from the national definitions (see Boxes 1.2 to 1.5).

Box 1.1 UN-Habitat operational definition of slum

The operational definition of a slum recommended by a United Nations Expert Group Meeting (Nairobi, 28–30 October, 2002) for international usage, defines a slum as an area that combines, to various extents, the following physical and legal characteristics:

- inadequate access to safe water;
- inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructure;
- poor structural quality of housing;
- overcrowding;
- insecure residential status.

Source: UN-Habitat (2003) *The challenge of slums – Global report on human settlements*. Abingdon: Earthscan-Routledge.

2006). Social movements engage with the state and drive urban governance in the direction of democratisation to serve subaltern classes, while recognising that the national state remains fundamental to reduce inequality. The Brazilian cash transfer programme, the *Bolsa Familia*, is one of the most successful redistributive programmes in the world, and it illustrates the role of both the local and national state. This programme is prepared through local governments, but it could not exist without the capacity and political will at the national level (Heller and Evans 2010).³ Urban social movements in Brazil have long been striving for a deeper ‘urban reform’ (Rolnik 2011), and these efforts have escalated after the mass street demonstrations in June 2013 (see Box 7.2). Inspired by the visions of ‘the right to the city’ (Lefebvre 1968, Harvey 2012),⁴ radical improvement and transformation of the urban transport system are now on the public agenda in the municipal, state and federal spheres of government, as a result of social action (Maricato 2013). As Sassen (1996) argues, neoliberal globalisation has nurtured resistance and alternate claims from urban social movements.

Urban governance: towards a critical understanding

Since the 1980s, governance has emerged as a dominant school of thought in political, sociological and administrative studies, particularly in the management of cities and other sub-national entities. It has provided a framework that has inspired reform strategies linked to the diverging constructions of the ‘urban turn’ in the socio-political domain, which were presented in the previous section. Urban governance can further be used as a dynamic framework for exploring the contested politics of land, housing and state-civil society relations in expanding cities, and hence it is adopted as an analytical framework for this book.