District-level Urban Governance Policies in India: Cities of Neglect?

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Abstract
This article deals with district level urban governance policy and planning with respect to two Indian states, Karnataka and Telangana. While there is a clearly envisioned policy for urban governance in India, this article highlights that its implementation continues to remain patchy. It examines whether the constitutional provisions envisaged for the said purposes are being practised or not. The article demonstrates that while the provision of drinking water and sanitation remains a problem across the cities discussed, social capital in terms of making governance work and cope with communal issues too is a major issue. It tries to argue that a better social capital among citizens can be helpful in making the institutions of local urban governance work.

Keywords: Urban governance, District level, Social Capital, Urban planning

1. Introduction
Urban governance is one of the most neglected areas of study. This is even more so in the context of medium-sized district headquarters. The main reason for this lies in the policy bias shown by successive governments towards mega urban centres and agglomerations with the entire attention being directed towards mega cities. In policy enunciation, practice and academic research, sufficient attention has not been paid to district-level towns (Gill 2013). Central and state governments have been changing periodically, but the policy towards these towns has not undergone any major transformation.

In Karnataka, it is the District Collector (DC) office that determines all the governance-related issues (Anil Kumar 2013), while in Telangana, it is the Municipal Commissioner Office that takes all the decisions. Hence, in these cities, the attention paid to governance is minimal, because the responsibilities of these officials are far too many for them to pay attention to city governance.

Local governments in these cities are often weak, and the powers devolved to them along with the resources they have are limited (Swain 2013). These shortcomings are becoming more visible at a time when economic growth is rapid, with the private sector expanding into these cities at a rapid pace (Shaw 2013). The local governance at the district-level cities is woefully inadequate as compared to their economic growth. As a result, these cities are becoming chaotic with basic civic services such as sanitation, drinking water and solid waste management being neglected or often overlooked.

As far as Karnataka is concerned, what is worrisome is the nature and pattern of urbanization in that the urbanization process continues to remain spatially skewed towards one metropolitan city, that is, Bangalore, resulting in neglect of other urban centres.

Bangalore is a next major urban center in Karnataka – I by various government initiatives. The general attitude of the elites, resulting in rent seeking behavior, attenuates the governance process in these cities.

This article deals with the district level governance purposes are better understood in context. This article attempts to explain the inadequacies of the governance of these cities and how an alternative to the current system can be found.

This article argues that social capital or the positive ties among residents can contribute to effective governance. Therefore, given how the two states are the case in both Karnataka and Telangana, the study relies on two case studies. The second section discusses the methodology, while the third section focuses on findings which include the role of residents to improve urban governance.
Bangalore, resulting in serious urban governance and management problems. Urbanization of this nature defies spatial justice, and as such, causes problems of migration and difficulties in providing housing, civic amenities, law and order, and a myriad other services, particularly at a time when urban population is growing at a faster pace than rural population, as is the case with Karnataka.

Bangalore is a ‘primate city’, that is, the biggest city in the state, which is nine times bigger than the next major urban conglomeration, Hubli-Dharwad. Hyderabad occupies the same place as Bangalore in Karnataka - being a ‘primate city’. Hyderabad is the biggest city in Telangana and the attention paid by various governments towards Hyderabad has not been matched by a similar level of attention to other cities/towns of Telangana.

The general argument advanced with respect to economies of scale and agglomeration benefits does not apply to such mega-cities. Instead, such a spatially skewed urbanization benefits the elites, resulting in housing and real estate prices skyrocketing and city governance suffering. As a consequence of such growth, many extra-legal groups seek to benefit from the city's development. Rent seeking too afflicts city governance. In this pattern of urbanization, the governance of cities that are at the district and lower levels becomes hugely problematic.

This article deals with urban governance policy and planning with reference to two Indian states at the district level. It examines whether the provisions envisaged under the constitution for the said purposes are being practised, and if so, how these practices take place within a larger state-level policy context. This article primarily raises four questions concerning the three district cities of two states, namely Karnataka and Telangana. The questions are: a) how is the district city planning taking place; b) how effective/efficient is the delivery of basic services such as drinking water and sanitation; c) how effective is the city governance; and d) lastly, are there any social capital issues that merit attention?

This article argues that the major reason for an apparent governance deficit at this level is the lack of social capital a) in making the government work towards providing basic civic amenities such as sanitation and drinking water, and b) in improving inter-ethnic relations. We define social capital as increased cooperation between political parties and among citizens connoting inter-ethnic relations. Therefore, given a constitutional structure with well-defined responsibilities, city-level governance as well as inter-ethnic relations can improve considerably in the presence of increased social capital.

The study relies on interviews with key informants in all the three cities in both the states. These include key political figures, local bureaucracy, academics, journalists, prominent citizens and observers of these cities. This paper is divided into four sections: Following the introductory section, the second section deals with urban decentralized planning in Dharwad and Udupi in Karnataka, the third section focuses on governance in Mahabubnagar in Telangana. The last section concludes.

2. Urban Governance in Dharwad
Dharwad is a major educational and cultural centre of North Karnataka. Governed by the municipal corporation, it comprises the twin cities of Hubli (Hubballi) and Dharwad. Hubli is a commercial centre

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1 This data was collected in an interaction with the officials of State Institute of Urban Development (SIUID), Mysore.
while Dharwad is a cultural and educational centre. The total population of Hubli-Dharwad is around 13 lakh, while the population of Dharwad alone comes to around 7 lakh. The city faces several major problems that have been persisting over a long time. There is an acute shortage of drinking water with its supply being rationed. However, a 24/7 water supply scheme is being run on an experimental basis in Hubli-Dharwad twin cities, though with only two wards of Dharwad being covered presently.

A study by the Centre for Multi-Disciplinary Development Research (CMDRI), Dharwad on the functioning of the scheme, refers to the increasing cost and the difficulties involved in providing this facility to slum areas. The burden of increasing water rates seems to be coming in the way of an effective implementation. The city faces a severe shortage of drinking water in the summers besides sanitation related problems. Governance of solid waste management and drainage systems is poor. There are 24 slums in Dharwad and providing civic services to them is a challenge. The city also often faces communal tensions mainly between the Hindu and Muslim communities. However, it would be incorrect to isolate Dharwad from the rest of Northern Karnataka when it comes to examining the city’s problems such as shortage of water as an individual case, since the overall backwardness is shared by the entire sub-region. Despite its rural background and governance problems, Dharwad is still a highly developed cultural and educational hub for Northern Karnataka. However, the fact remains that governance is seriously lacking in this city, much of which can be attributed to civic apathy. The activities of civil societies such as NGOs and voluntary agencies, and civic awareness are low as compared to Udupi. The city, of course, is much bigger than Udupi in terms of population and geographical spread, but civic activity in making governance work towards solving its persisting problems has been relatively low. This is despite the fact that it has quite a few musical and intellectual geniuses, who are greatly appreciated not only in Karnataka, but also throughout the country.

A serious drawback noticed during the fieldwork is related to the inadequacy of city municipal revenues to address its civic problems. This is true of many district cities in Karnataka, as well as larger cities facing acute financial problems. However, given the educational, cultural and intellectual capital of the city, Dharwad could have performed better in respect of day-to-day governance. Its failures extend not only to the functioning of institutions, but also to the civil society.

Lack of social capital in addressing issues concerning day-to-day governance is plaguing the city. This deficiency is more visible despite the city’s achievements in the realm of culture. A major impetus to urban governance comes from a governance-institutions and local-civil society synergy, which raises the quality of urban governance. The effectiveness of citizenry is often inversely proportional to the city size, with resultant indifference and civic apathy. However, there is no denying the contrast between Udupi and Dharwad as far as the influence of social capital on governance is concerned. In fact what appears puzzling is that the governance-related performance of Dharwad is not on par with Udupi, despite the former’s cultural and intellectual capital.

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1We conducted interviews (from April 23rd 2014 to April 26th 2014) with scholars in Karnataka University, Centre for Multi-Disciplinary Development Research, municipal and planning officials, local observers and journalists who had been living in the city for a long time. The names are too numerous to mention here. They all agreed on the basic problems of the city, while mentioning its cultural and intellectual significance.

1Respondents with academics, scholars University Dharward, academics.
There are six urban local governments in Dharwad district and the urban population constitutes 57 percent of the total population of the district. Of this, 90 percent lives in Hubli-Dharwad twin cities. Dharwad was the headquarters of the collectorate in the Bombay province and Hubli, a Municipal borough of greater Bombay. When Karnataka was formed in 1956, the then rulers thought that these two should come together and in 1962, they were merged into Hubli-Dharwad Municipal Corporation. The now merged entity is the second biggest and oldest corporation after Bangalore. Hubli is a commercial centre, while Dharwad is an educational centre.

Field visits to Dharwad demonstrate that for a city of its size, municipal pourkarmikas (workers) are few in number and are not efficient in solid waste management. They dump the waste on roadsides, which in turn leads to the pollution of water and surrounding areas. The open drainage system is not maintained properly either. Although many NGOs are active in the health and education sectors, no one is making an effective intervention with respect to urban issues. The interviews inform us that with good cooperation and effective people’s participation, governance can be improved. Although housing conditions are improving and many new buildings are coming up, agricultural land is being converted to residential purposes with many private companies now being engaged in the construction of new buildings.

Governance of the City

Interviews conducted in Dharwad related to different aspects of city governance. According to the respondents participating in the interview, there is an influx of young people into the city because of the expansion of a number of higher education and training institutions. The city, known for long as the habitat of seniors, the elderly and the retired, is now finding it difficult to reach out to the younger migrants and to encourage them to take an active part in its urban governance. It has also not received the due support of public authorities for reasons such as non-availability of funds or non-response from the public at large. As a result, maintaining public parks and parking places for vehicles and enforcing traffic rules are becoming increasingly difficult—a sign of increasing strain on governance. For instance, people are not even willing to pay property taxes or taxes on garbage collection.

On how governance can be improved, according to the residents, a proper implementation of legislations is required. It appears that smaller street- or locality-based community associations and organizations can make a positive impact provided they are trained and empowered regarding issues such as garbage handling and recycling, maintaining street lights, small libraries, public parks and lakes. Secondly, it also appears that there is a need for improving communication between the residents and the public authorities concerned.

Some citizens think that it is also necessary for authorities to hold meetings with the public regarding the city’s cleanliness and that the city does not seem to have adequate planning. If at all city planning is undertaken, it is mostly concerning restructing the central part of the city to find space for educational institutions and residential areas. Solid waste disposal and open drainage system are major governance problems facing Dharwad city. Respondents say that the problem of solid waste

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management has not received the attention it deserves from public authorities. In addition, managing drainage is very difficult in Dharwad in view of the undulating landscape. There are many reports of downstream colonies being troubled by excess drainage water and waste. Unless disposal and dispersal of drainage water are undertaken based on a scientific elevation of land, these will become a burden transferred to downstream colonies at the cost of upstream colonies that enjoy cleaner habitats. There is also an urgent need for building an underground drainage system in the market areas of the city.

Although there is some improvement in drinking water supply, sanitation issues remain unresolved in Dharwad with the civic bodies struggling to provide water and sanitation to all the wards. The slums and the poor are among the worst affected. An increased water supply with no sanitation facilities can further worsen the situation in the urban slums.

Dharwad city planning and governance are still with the DC's office and the municipal commissioner's office. The role of legislators in the city's governance is unclear with bureaucracy calling all the shots. The more important problem, however, relates to social capital. For one, Dharwad comes under the municipal corporation of the twin-city Hubli-Dharwad, and together with Hubli, it is much bigger than Udupi. The size of the city makes it difficult to manage. There also exist ethnic divisions in the city, with communalism spreading. Glaring incidents were reported of the breakdown of law and order because of inter-ethnic tensions in the recent past in the city.

Udupi

Udupi is a coastal temple city in southern Karnataka, with a total population of 1,35,000. It is a district city governed by the 74th Amendment to the Constitution. The city is remarkably well governed, with underground drainage and sanitation, and surplus drinking water facilities. The city municipality functions effectively with basic civic services such as drinking water and sanitation being taken care of effectively. The city council is elected periodically and follows the provisions of the Constitution strictly. Any visit to the city leaves us with a striking impression of its cleanliness and well-organized and well-functioning urban governance. What makes governance work in Udupi? The city is well governed in view of an active and informed citizenry. An active and vocal civil society keeps the municipality accountable. Different civil society organizations like Citizens Consumers' Forum (CCF) conduct regular interactive meetings between citizens and municipality. According to the 74th Amendment of the Constitution, the District Planning Committee of the district has to conduct urban and rural integrated planning. However, throughout Karnataka, as is elsewhere in India, a small cell in the DC's office is in charge of urban planning. The same is the case with Udupi. The difference, however, is that rural plans are prepared by the District Planning Committees (DPCs) and the elected Zilla Panchayat (ZP) in all the districts in Karnataka. The function of urban planning alone does not distinguish Udupi from other district-level urban cities in the State. What distinguishes it from other cities is the social capital between political parties that manage the city, a municipality that is ready to cooperate and the active civil society and citizens' forums that hold the municipality and political parties accountable. Social capital appears to be relatively more visible in Udupi, which is why governance is more effective than in Dharwad, where it appears to be less effective.

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There is a well-functioning Zilla Panchayat (ZP) Office in Udupi, which prepares the urban plans, but the urban/city planning is done entirely by the municipality. The remarkable aspect is that the municipal council makes the city municipality work very efficiently. The municipal office is accountable to the municipal council. As the interviews show, the municipality keeps the streets exceptionally clean — for a district city in India—and there is no drinking water supply problem. The only civic service that is not in perfect condition is the drainage, as the city does not have a 100 percent underground drainage system.

Much like in other districts in Karnataka, the integration of urban plans into rural plans, by Zilla Parishad (ZP), is a problem in Udupi too with the municipality and the urban cell in the District Collector’s office calling all the shots.

City governance is remarkably effective and efficient due to synergy between the citizens of Udupi and the city municipal council. There is also a remarkable social capital present among the citizens of Udupi, irrespective of their political affiliations. Both INC and BJP come together and exert pressure on the municipal council to work for an effective delivery of civic services with sanitation as a case in point. The city also has well-functioning public libraries. It is remarkable that even the hoteliers’ association takes a keen interest in the upkeep and sanitation and civic services of the city. Hence, it is no surprise that the city’s governance works effectively.

The city has slums in adjacent Manipal inhabited by migrant workers, from Hyderabad-Karnataka and other parts of the country. They also seem to be satisfied with the basic civic services such as drinking water and sanitation being provided to them. It is also worth noting that municipal councillors do attend to their problems. The major advantages of the city lie in the civic culture of its citizens and the manageable size of the city.

3. Urban Governance Policy in Telangana: Continued Neglect

There is no clear urban governance policy put forth for cities of Telangana. Although there exists a great amount of enthusiasm and drive towards developing the cities, it is yet to be translated into a coherent policy. Therefore, the question of implementation of policy does not arise here. What we have instead are steps towards the revitalization of the municipal administration being undertaken by individual bureaucrats on their own in some districts. The same can be said in respect of district planning and District Planning Committees (DPCs). District planning and DPCs have long been neglected. Although elections to the local bodies have been held in all cities, municipal councils and corporations, there is no explicit document prepared regarding governance policy for all. The same is the situation in the study city of Mahabubnagar in Telangana. In this city, the private sector is making major inroads, linking the markets to metropolises and even to global markets, but there is no attempt made to regulate this growth and plan for it at the local level.

Mahabubnagar

Mahabubnagar consists of 41 wards, with 38.99 percent of the city, or 74,244 of its population, living in slums. There are a total of 12 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in Mahabubnagar district. There are 87 notified slums in Mahabubnagar city, while the others are not notified. Although elections were conducted in all the ULBs, the ward committee GO has not yet been implemented in this city. All
municipalities are financially self-sufficient; they have received 13th and 14th Finance Commission grants, and other grants from the state government. Additional taxes and resources can be mobilized, given there exists a great potential for it in the municipality. With the mobilization of additional resources, the municipality will be in surplus. It already has a surplus budget and there is certainly no shortage of funds.

The municipality earlier used to supply water once in 4 to 5 days; however, they now supply water every 3 to 4 days. The charges collected for the same amount to Rs. 100 per month. There is no metering of drinking water usage—it is a flat rate per household.

The municipal commissioner observes that sanitation has improved in the last one year. Earlier, sanitation workers were working only on a single shift during the forenoon; they now work in two shifts. The municipality has 25 acres of wasteland at its disposal, where garbage is dumped. The majority of the workers are outsourced.

Plans for ULBs are prepared by the municipalities and are submitted to the Directorate of Town and Country Planning (DTCP). ULBs come under the Municipal Administration and Urban Development Department of the State Government. Municipal bodies themselves prepare urban plans, it is not the district collector's office that prepares them. These plans are then submitted to the DTCP directly. The current growth of the city is neither haphazard nor planned. It is happening in an ad-hoc manner. Private layouts and buildings are developed first before being regularized later. At the sub-district level of urban bodies, there is not much planning taking place.

Problems facing the city:
Respondents from the city hold that change in Mahabubnagar city happens slowly. The city is faced with the problem of outmigration. Many youths migrate to Hyderabad and other places seeking jobs and education. From rural areas, people migrate to Mumbai. There is always a 'Mumbai bus' to take the migrants to their destination. Migration is seasonal in rural areas and permanent in urban areas. Those who migrate rarely come back to town.

It is evident that the infrastructure base is very poor, with the roads being very narrow. Once, a strict commissioner wanted to remove all the commercial hoardings for widening the roads, but he could not succeed because of strong political pressure. Business people put pressure on him through political leaders not to remove or change the hoardings in the city.

The city's population comprises 60 percent Hindus and 40 percent Muslims with communal tensions erupting frequently, mostly on occasions such as Ganesh Chaturthi (the local Hindu festival) and during times when religious processions are taken out. Being close to Hyderabad, there is also a 'Hyderabad effect', which implies that whatever happens in Hyderabad finds its echo in Mahabubnagar, including communal tensions.

Nevertheless, it can be observed that overall, there is communal harmony. Hindus visit Abdul Khader Darga (a Muslim religious place), while Muslims take part in the Ganesh Chaturthi procession.
Urs, which is a Muslim religious festival, draws a large number of Hindus too. Overall, this situation prevails, but tensions break out when outsiders or political parties deliberately play the communal card whipping up religious differences for various reasons.

City transport is entirely managed by autos, which ply in the thousands. With demand for road transport being very high, the number of vehicles including cars has increased manifold. In the city, drinking water is scarce with the municipality supplying water once in six days. In summer, the municipal office supplies water through tankers, but that is not sufficient for the season. At the same time, there are many water purifying plants (reverse osmosis) in the city that make hard water potable and these plants are doing a brisk business. The entire district has been affected by drought and water scarcity, and so is the city.

As far as drainage is concerned, new colonies have access to underground drainage system but old colonies have access only to an open drainage system that is prevalent in 80 percent of the city, while only 20 percent of the people have access to an underground drainage facility.

4. Conclusion
Planning of district-level cities, both in Karnataka and Telangana, is not taking place according to the constitutional stipulations. Deputy Commissioner’s office in Karnataka and Municipal Commissioner’s office in Telangana determine all the urban planning matters concerning the respective districts. In addition, DPCs as democratic planning institutions exist in Karnataka but remain dysfunctional, whereas, in Telangana, DPCs do not even exist.

Secondly, the delivery of basic services such as drinking water, sanitation and solid waste management leaves much to be desired in respect of all the three cities. All the three cities suffer from open drainage problem, and often most of the localities in the cities do not have access to an underground drainage system, which in turn leads to many sanitation related problems. In addition to this, solid waste management is a huge problem in Dharawad and Mahabubnagar but the status of drainage and solid waste management is much better in the case of Udupi, which could be attributed to a better social capital amongst citizens.

Thirdly, if one has to gauge the effectiveness of the governance of the cities – by the standard of meeting basic needs of drinking water and sanitation of all the citizens – all the three cities are found wanting in this respect, with Udupi being the only exception. Udupi is an exception, because it is a smaller city with better cooperation prevailing among the citizens, which in turn helps to run the basic services efficiently. The exceptional nature of governance can be explained in terms of: a) Udupi is a smaller city and therefore more easy to govern from above; b) Udupi is a temple city wherein special interest is taken in matters of sanitation and drinking water by the citizens as well as the Municipality; and c) Udupi belongs to the southern part of Karnataka wherein the region is contiguous with Kerala and the culture of public action and citizen action that is found in Kerala is also found in Udupi. However, this is not the case with Dharawad wherein the civic culture is not the same as that of civic and public action. It is also to be noted that within Karnataka, entire southern Karnataka has higher HDI ranking status than northern Karnataka. Consequent to all these facts is that there is better civic cooperation
among the citizens of Udupi in making the municipality deliver public goods of drinking water and sanitation. This is not at all the case with Dharward and Mahabubnagar. Lastly, the social capital is low in both Dharward and Mahabubnagar. This is evident from the interviews we conducted as well as from the fact that both the cities remain affected by communalism. In respect of Dharward also we have indicated the abysmal failure of law and order at times owing to communalism.

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