

Contested Meanings of Slum in Indian Cities: Implications (Beyond) RAY

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and Eric Denis*





Chance2Sustain
Work Package 5 Thematic Subreport

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1.1. Changes in national policy during the course of research

This report is based on research conducted in Indian cities in Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu. During the time of research between 2008 and 2013 the poverty alleviation mission “Basic Services to the Urban Poor”(BSUP), a sub-mission of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), was in full-swing and subsequently transitioned into the “Rajiv Awas Yojana – Slum Free Cities” national policy. At the time of writing this report, RAY has been abandoned by the newly elected national government and replaced by the “100 Smart Cities” program¹.

These changes in policy indicate a trend towards increasing reliance on digital technologies to govern urbanization. Under BSUP analogue and dispersed digital desktop technologies dominated, and Geographic information systems (GIS) were slowly being introduced to support the management of information about slums and residents, who constituted the mission’s main target for housing and infrastructure provision, but also excused eviction drives. GIS gained a central role for information management under RAY, again with explicit focus on slums, especially the formalization of land tenure and housing, and the prevention of slum development. The new “100 Smart Cities” program shifts focus away from slums and appears to be headed towards the creation of formally planned cities, built from scratch and essentially run by digital technologies.

What happened to RAY? Why the most recent move to a policy that seeks to create digital cities from scratch?

The changes at national policy level seem to indicate a race to formalize, strategically plan, and “inclusively grow” (Roy, 2014) Indian cities with digital technologies and

related organizational set-ups perceived to be as an essential mechanism to enforce the restructuring of urban governance. At the same time, as RAY abandonment illustrates, these policies appear to struggle at the moment of implementation. In this report we focus on the nexus between the assumptions that underlie both BSUP and RAY policies regarding information management about slums, on one hand, and persistent locality-guided and historically contingent practices of defining and recording areas under the label of “slum.” These practices are deeply embedded in the politics and spatialities of urbanization. As such they explain (at least in part) the difficulties of implementing digital technologies under programs such as RAY and the relatively quick abandonment of the policy.

If we hold our breath for a moment and take the perspective of existing practices described in this report the trend towards governing the city increasingly through digital technologies is not only an astonishingly ambitious feat to move political contestations and underlying values into a purely technology- and finance-driven realm (and in extension the arena of private actors providing technologies and know-how). Taking the perspective of existing processes of defining slum also brings to light the risks involved in the continued trend towards “rendering technical” (Rose, 1999) the politico-spatial contestations, which (so far) lie the heart of “the urban.”

1.2. Explicating the relevance of the report to Chance2Sustain

The analysis and discussion outlined in this report address four main questions of work package five in the Chance2Sustain project with link to WP5’s focus on sub-standard settlements.

1. What are the discourses and framings?

This question is addressed in the report with focus on the discourse of “slum,” and the different meanings “slum” (in its discursive as well as material form) holds depending on interests attached to it by relevant social groups. We explain the choice of this focus in section 2 of the report.

1 JNNURM has been discontinued by the new federal government which substitutes it with the 100 Smart cities programme. The 2014-2015 budget has registered the discontinuation (<http://www.asianage.com/india/smart-city-plan-set-replace-jnnurm-880>; <http://www.niticentral.com/2014/07/22/jnnurm-failed-upas-urban-housing-scheme-ineffective-234424.html>).

2. *Who are the actors/network of actors and their dominant knowledge types*

To identify “relevant social groups” the report draws on social construction of technology theory. We identify groups based on their interests vis-à-vis slum at different points in time through interpretation of empirical material. This undertaking is rather conceptual in nature, drawing on insights from four cities in three Indian states. Details about the development of the analytical framework can be found in section 4.

3. *What knowledge building processes, exchange, contestation and use do you observe in the researched initiatives?*

The report explicitly juxtaposes basic assumptions of knowledge building about slums underlying BSUP and RAY policies with existing processes through the lens of slum definition processes. Section five provides empirical illustrations of these processes, which are summarized in table one. Section six distills the main characteristics of slum definition processes relevant to the implementation of RAY and RAY-like policies.

4. *Materialities: what are the products and platforms of knowledge production?*

To address this question we specifically distill types and functions of records involved in the slum definition process during each of the processes described in section five, and summarize these in table one. These are tightly interwoven with the meaning contestations over the term and place slum. The final section distills specific implications for GIS implementation under RAY.

5. *What are long-term visions and their social implications, especially regarding transparency and accountability?*

This question is addressed in both introductory paragraphs, the identification of basic assumptions underlying national policies with respect to information management, as well as an explicit final section where we discuss the implications of existing slum definition processes for the implementation of digital technologies and with a tentative outlook towards the latest “100 smart cities” program. In this final section the themes of transparency and accountability are tangentially referred to. A more elaborate discussion of these concepts surpasses the frame of this report.

2

Framing Poverty as “Slum:” Academic Criticism, Indian Policy, and the Multiplicities of slum in Action

The use of the term slum in the 1999 UN initiative “Cities without Slums” and in several books (e.g. Davis, 2006; Verma, 2002) has evoked criticism by authors like Gilbert (2007), who argues that years of careful research have discredited the term and that its resurrection brings back a gamut of problems, including stigmatization of slum residents, demolitions and forced relocations. Furthermore, research has shown that in India areas officially declared as slums are not necessarily the most deprived areas considering the multi-dimensional character of deprivation (Baud, Sridharan, & K. Pfeffer, 2008), but also by measures of income only (Risbud, 2009). Yet, while slum as metonym has become “the most common itinerary through which the Third World city ... is recognized” (Roy, 2011, p. 225) in the Indian city it also continues in localized and tangible form as label for places, target area for housing and poverty programs, inscribed into project reports, beneficiary databases, and maps. So called slum

rehabilitation was at the core of Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission’s (JNNURM) Basic Services to the Urban Poor (BSUP), as well as the most recent mission to eradicate and/or improve slums in Indian cities under the Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) program. Thus, despite academic critiques of the term slum, it is alive in urban planning and development practice in India (Arabindoo, 2011). At the same time, the use of the term’s definition is ambiguous and varies from place to place. Various lists of so called slums are in circulation locally, and their content is contested among different urban social groups. Furthermore, rehabilitated or improved neighborhoods continue to be officially listed as slums. On one hand, the term carries a negative connotation in the context of forced evictions and stigmatization, on the other it emerges in a positive light, for example as a label around which slum residents organize collectively to access urban services and make their voices heard.

An all-too-obvious assumption underlying poverty alleviation and slum eradication programs (in this report we refer empirically mainly to BSUP and RAY schemes) is the idea that areas can be identified comprehensively across each city based on certain criteria and one definition. This information would then constitute a permanent knowledge basis to identify target areas for further improvement work. In comparison to previous programs, RAY differs in so far as it introduces the development and maintenance of slum databases by use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). As such RAY is indicative of a governance environment increasingly characterized by E-government initiatives, which also include digital land administration systems and citizen e-grievance systems (Martinez, Pfeffer, & van Dijk, 2011; Ranganathan, 2012; Richter, 2011; van Teffelen & Baud, 2011), and which are characteristic elements of neo-liberal reforms, urban renewal, and administrative decentralization efforts.

Projects and programs to institutionalize the “e” in government and governance are mushrooming across the country with the promise to manage and plan cities more efficiently and in a more transparent manner (Raman & Bawa, 2011). The capacity of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to store, integrate, manipulate, update, and retrieve ever larger quantities of information quickly and across vast areas and distances is all the more tempting in light of the South Asian cities’ fast rates of change and complexity (Madon & Sahay, 2000). A body of applied research investigates the possibilities and methods by which spatial technologies can provide more comprehensive, up-to-date, and accurate information about cities, for example data and analyses to allocate and distribute services, to identify spatial concentration and levels of deprivation, and to tackle the problems related to the formation of “informal settlements” or “slums” (Abbot, 2003; Baud, Sridharan, & K. Pfeffer 2008; Baud, Pfeffer, Sridharan, & Nainan, 2009; Joshi et al., 2002; Kohli, Sliuzas, Kerle, & Stein, 2012; Livengood & Kunte, 2012).

Nevertheless, digital GIS or semi-digital dispersed information management technologies, both still follow a fundamental assumption of information management for strategic planning (Mintzberg, 1994), namely that data about the city will serve the planners and implementers (albeit in various constellations of administrative, political representative, state-level

board, and private consultant governance actors) as a basis (database) to arrive at sound decisions and subsequently appropriate interventions with respect to a certain area and/or urban population.

In this report, we outline the stark contrast between the processes of defining and listing slums in Indian cities and the role information plays within these processes, in comparison to this fundamental assumption. Empirically, ‘slum’ appears in different ways: it is as much a word as it is a place or a precisely delineated area or a column name in administrative records. Defining slum criteria and perceptions of what a slum is vary depending on different governance actors’ interests vis-à-vis an area and vis-à-vis each other. The meanings of slum according to the interests of different actors also vary through time in rather unpredictable ways depending on politico-spatial circumstances and alliance formation.

Our insights are based on empirical research² between 2008 and 2013 in Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu. The report is structured as follows. In section two, we give a brief background on BSUP and RAY distilling their similarities and basic assumptions. In section three, we describe the research background, in particular data collection methods and analytical framework. In section four we describe the elements of the analytical framework through empirical illustrations in the form of very short and simplified summaries. In section five we distill the main characteristics of defining slums in Indian cities and the embeddedness of these definitions in the processes of urbanization more broadly before distilling the implications for the implementation of RAY in the final section six.

2 The qualitative methodology involved a) the collection and review of government documents [5], collection of slum lists and socio-economic data of beneficiaries, b) semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with officials and staff at the district slum office, at the municipal and local zonal offices, with ward councilors (politicians), Slum Dweller Federation (MSDF), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), an NGO funding organization, c) (participant) observations, actor shadowing and transect walks, d) workshop and discussions among researchers from Europe and India, and a grounded-theory informed approach to data interpretation.

3

Common Assumptions about Slum Definition Underlying BSUP & RAY Programs

JNNURM, a seven-year long national investment scheme for major cities across India, was launched in 2005 to reform urban governance. Its focus was on “efficiency in urban infrastructure and service delivery, community participation, and accountability of ULBs/Parastatal agencies towards citizens” (MoUD, no year). Implementing ICT in government played a key role to support systematized accounting, benchmarking, and performance measurements in JNNURM as well as in a similar state-wide program *Nirmala Nagara* (Clean City) (Ranganathan, 2012). BSUP, as a sub-mission of JnNURM, sought to improve the lives of slum dwellers through housing and infrastructure provision, and as such it is also deeply implicated in land and property use and ownership as well as urban planning interests and contestations more broadly. For example, there is a close connection between relocating slum residents on new plots of land and issues of land ownership and claim making.

Following JNNURM, the RAY policy was initiated under the direction of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation at central government level. The main aims of RAY are to bring all slums – officially notified or not – into the formal land and tenure system, but also redressing failures of the formal system to prevent the creation of slum, and to tackle shortages of urban land and housing that deny the urban poor access to formal shelter and livelihoods (Gol, “Rajiv Awas Yojana – Towards a slum free India – Guidelines”). The policy intends to transform 250 Indian cities with an estimated 32 million people living in slums (Roy, 2014). On the one hand, the RAY policy signals safety nets for the urban poor according to one of the policy’s main authors. But the policy also “seeks to transform slum land into urban assets, in other words, to initiate slum redevelopment. Slum-free Cities marks a decisive urban turn in India policymaking, one in which the governance of spaces and populations of urban poverty is a priority. It also marks a break with previous frames of world-class city making, which relied on the crude techniques of slum evictions and demolitions (Roy, 2014). One aspect of this “governance of spaces and populations of urban poverty” is the introduction of GIS to collect, maintain, and use spatial information about slums, their boundaries, names, and residents as a core information management technology to support redevelopment of slums (Gol, “Guidelines for GIS Mapping, MIS development, and integration of GIS with MIS”). This includes the integration of MIS data generated under BSUP (<http://www.cggi.gov.in/workingpaper/BSUP%20Publication.pdf>).

Both programs run on the same basic assumptions with respect to data collection and function. In both programs administrators with the support of private planning and architecture consultants, are expected to delineate boundaries of slum areas and their respective residents along with their characteristics through slum listing. This information is required for funding release, monitoring of progress, including land acquisition, building construction and subsequent housing allocation. In RAY the construction of the GIS database is furthermore highly relevant to and an important aspect of bringing various forms of occupancy into what guidelines refer to as the “formal system” of land tenure and housing.

Both programs share the basic assumption that city administration needs to produce and aim for unambiguous, standardized knowledge of slums, included residents as well as their characteristics. As far as the schemes are concerned this knowledge would ideally be permanent providing a basis to take subsequent steps in scheme implementation and other strategic planning. In both BSUP and RAY slums are thus viewed as physical areas of the city with varying (degrees of) problems, including insecure tenure, lack of housing, lack of sanitary and water infrastructure, and lack of social capital, among others. The meaning of slum is thus implicitly related to the notion of the city as a structure or patchwork of different types of areas, where the slum is one such type. Unambiguous definition of and the gathering of data about slums drive the process of identification of areas with the plan to subsequently improve clearly delineated slum areas and populations.

This basic assumption is also supported by academic literature. While researchers recognize the historical and socio-economic complexity of slum areas (Nijman, 2008; 2010; Sharma, 2000), the slum is still almost always considered a problematic area. Some authors view slums explicitly as an outcome of the state’s “inability to deal with many urban problems, [where] local and national authorities let slums develop as a form of ‘low-cost’ urbanization” (Milbert, 2006). According to Verma (2002) “the emergence of slums” in our cities is “the end result” of commercial development and accrual of urban wealth (xix). Slum targeting and upgrading has been on the agenda of international funding and development agencies and governments since at least the 1970s. In Indian public administration, “the term ‘slum’ is a formally defined

settlement category” (Appadurai, 2001, p. 27), which is different from informal settlements that reflect a different stage of regularization (Baud et al., 2010, p. 360). From the perspective of the slum as a distinct category of urban areas a clear definition and corresponding data availability are considered important in order to target intervention. Dupont (2008, p. 1), for instance, states that “the lack of updated and reliable data on the slum population jeopardizes any rigorous planning exercise that would aim at tackling the issue of adequate housing for the poor at its roots.” A number of studies now investigate different forms of data collection and analysis for slum identification and development (Abbott 2003; Joshi, Sen, and Hobson, 2002; Livengood and Kunte, 2012; Patel and Baptist, 2012; Patel, Baptist, and D’Cruz, 2012; Sen, Hobson and Joshi 2003; Sliuzas, 2003 for “informal settlements”) and use slum indicators for assessment and comparisons at trans-local and citywide scale (Khadr, Nour el Dein, and Hamed, 2010; Kohli, Sliuzas, Kerle, and Stein, 2011; Martinez, Mboup, Sliuzas, and Stein, 2008; Turkstra and Raithelhuber, 2004; Weeks et al., 2007). Different typologies of the slum or slum like settlements have been proposed (for example recently by Khalifa, 2011). At least since De Soto’s work (De Soto, 2000; De Soto and Cheneval, 2006) land tenure security has become an important criterion to distinguish between slum types. The assumption here is that land and occupancy practices are either formal or informal, or that degrees of formality can be distinguished. Second, research has shown that slums on official lists in India do not coincide with the

most deprived areas. For identification of target areas and to prioritize funding and service provision, researchers have developed alternative socio-spatial classifications of the city, for example based on multi-dimensional indexes of deprivation (Baud et al. 2008, 2009, 2010; Martinez, 2009; Noble, Wright, Smith, and C. Dibben. 2006). What BSUP and RAY assumptions ignore, however, is not only the problematic use of the label slum, but also the socially constructed nature of “slum” as both term and place. Even if we take “slum” to be a useful category to identify deprived or poor urban populations, the definition of slum in local parlance is contextual and deeply political (Nijman, 2010).

Our analytical framework and empirical illustrations in the following sections seek to account for slum not only as a spatial form, but also to take into account how slum “straddles the conceptual and material forms of city-making that are challenging the imagery of the modern city” (Rao, 2006, p. 231). Neither does the framework perceive of the slum a priori as an area “out there” in the city and clearly identifiable based on a set of criteria, nor does it view slum purely as a label employed by one specific group of people, like city planners, who “by the means of a behaviorist setup, [would] act upon the city from the outside, not as a part of it” (Czarniawska and Solli, 2001, p. 7). The framework is thus partially informed by different perspectives in the literature about slums as well as empirical insights gained during the research.

4

Development and Nature of the Analytical Framework

The analytical framework presented below and the summary of findings in table one are a synthesis of material collected and interpreted across the different cities between 2008 and 2013 in several time periods. However, it needs to be noted that the conceptual level of analysis washes over some empirical differences between cities. For instance, slum declaration as a formal, administrative process exists in cities of Karnataka, but not in Kadovali³. Also, in Karnataka, the definition of slum as per 1973 Slum Clearance Act influences slum definition during official recording processes, in Maharashtra the criteria during this

process are set by a given poverty alleviation scheme (e.g. BSUP at time of study). In both Chennai, Tamil Nadu, and cities of Karnataka, an important actor in slum improvement work and related data management is the Slum Board, which does not exist in Kadovali’s case, where a municipal engineering department is key to the implementation of BSUP and RAY locally.

The analytical framework, captures conceptual commonalities in slum definition processes across cities by highlighting several key features of the process. First, meanings attached to slum differ between social groups in the city depending on a group’s respective interests vis-à-vis an area and each other. These different definitions – or meanings – contest with one another. Second, these

3 Except for Chennai and Bangalore, city names have been changed to fictitious names in this report as this is consistent with previous publications that were part of this research.



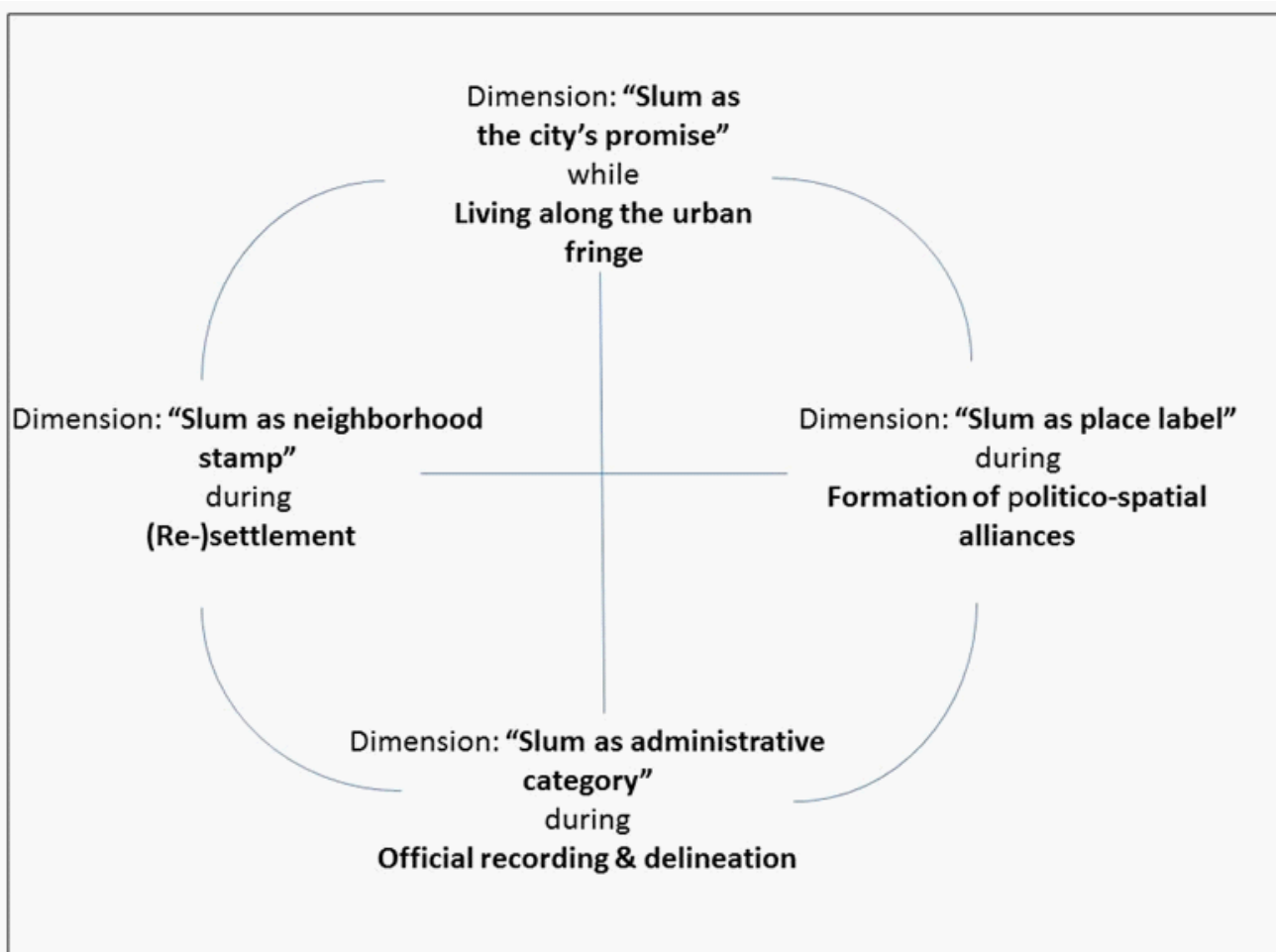
meanings also change through time even for the same group of governance actors. Third, records of and about slums are not a basis for one group to make decisions regarding the city as a whole, but play a decisive role as tools in political contestations.

The framework is the outcome of interpretations of empirical material collected during the course of the study, and labels to each dimension and process were given by the researchers. To derive the analytical framework we adapted Langley's (1999) "Temporal Bracketing Strategy" for analysis of process data. Process research is concerned with how things evolve over time and why, and draws on data about events, often in sequences. Deriving process models (linear or not) also serves to make sense of raw data more so than to build theory from the data (Langley, 1999, p. 692). "Temporal Bracketing" is used to divide empirical data into "phases," but "these are not 'phases' in the sense of a predictable sequential process but simply, a way of structuring the description of events" (Langley, 1999, 703). This is important to our analysis, because in some cases,

these dimensions can be linear time periods or phases, but they do not have to be. To a group of people continuously migrating from city to city, slum may mean the "city's promise" for generations. In which sequence processes lead to the emergence of slum in a new dimension is in actuality highly unpredictable. To avoid confusion, we chose the words slum dimension and related process, and not "phase."

We identified four processes which lead to the emergence of slum in four different dimensions (figure 1). In our framework the underlying logic is not explicitly based on any single measure, e.g. from informal to formal, or illegal to legal. Instead, the names for each dimension "were chosen, because there is a certain continuity in the activities within each [process] and certain discontinuities at its frontiers" (Langley, 1999, p. 703). Within each of these dimensions, slum has different meanings to relevant social groups in the city. Relevant social groups – urban governance actor groups at a conceptual level—are those, whose "[m]embers share the same set of meanings attached to a specific artifact" in reference to Pinch and

Figure 1: Analytical framework: different dimensions of slum and related processes



Bijker's social construction of technology theory (1984, p. 414; see also Aibar and Bijker, 1997; and Bijker, 2010;). For analytical purposes in this report we take slum – as term and place – to be the artifact in question, the thing to be defined, or problem to be solved. Because each group attaches different interests with respect to one or several

“slums,” various solutions and strategic moves, as well as actor alliances, are possible. These solutions and strategies compete with one another. Because the processes, dimensions, as well as “relevant social groups” are an outcome of the interpretation of empirical material, and as such have been labeled by the researchers.

5

Empirical Illustrations of Slum Definition Processes

In the following section we provide very short and simplified descriptions of each dimension of slum and contestations over what “slum” means to different actor groups during the processes of migration, formation of politico-spatial alliances, official recording, and re-settlement.

to make sense of raw data more so than to build theory from the data (Langley, 1999, p. 692). As previously mentioned these dimensions can be linear time periods or phases, but they do not have to be. To a group of people continuously migrating from city to city, slum may mean the “city’s promise” for generations. A place labeled as slum by neighbors, but not listed in any administrative database, may be evicted and demolished, or may become officially recorded first (i.e. emerges as administrative category). If, for instance, if there is an interest among administration to ignore or eradicate a place despite having been inhabited by people for generations and which is closely embedded in local economy, the slum label is denied by administration and these places may be labeled “migrants” in order to legitimize demolition or non-recognition. Analysis seeks to highlight the political contestations over the meaning of slum from different actors’ angles, and how their different interest contestations carry out through time. In which sequence processes lead to the emergence of slum in a new dimension is in actuality highly unpredictable. To avoid confusion, we chose the words slum dimension and related process, and not “phase.”

5.1. Living Migration along the urban fringe: Slum as the city’s promise

Groups of people setting up make-shift shelters for varying periods of time at the fringes of the city are not labeled slum, nor are they recorded as slum in the records of

administration. The “fringe” in this context should not be mistaken for the administrative municipal, planning zone, or urban growth boundary. Rather, these are zones strewn about the city characterized by their temporality and fluctuations; and the term “fringe” here seeks to capture the notion that access to urban services, a stable home in the city, and political rights to the city are out of reach at worst or at least very insecure. Sometimes labeled “encroachers” or “squatters,” at other times nomads or migrants, people create social and temporal spaces that are in constant flux. They are daily commuters from surrounding villages, who may eventually set up more permanent camps at lorry pick-up sites, people from out of state, who have stayed in make-shift tents at the edge of town for weeks or years, jewelry and basket makers, who move every few months in search for new markets, and folklore singers and dancers, who leave during the wedding season to perform across the state. The line between voluntary migration and forced migration is blurred. One leader of a group of families, who sell pre-manufactured baskets, explained that it is impossible to stay for more than two years, because the families cannot construct brick houses as the private land owner would oppose this. They cannot forge alliances with slum residents in the city and lay claim to land, because the families are strangers and unable to approach local administration directly, because all of them are illiterate, he explained.

We repeatedly inquired about the option to provide basic services to people moving in, towards and around the city. Our questions were met by similar answers from different groups. A municipal community organizer answered: “You mean the people, who move? They are from other states and do not have state identity cards. So, we do not need to provide them with services.” Politicians bear little or no attention, because as long as people move frequently, it is difficult to engage them in politico-economic endeavors and “vote bank” politics.



The discourse of administration and/or politicians, denies the label slum to some groups of people and places, even if they have been settled for a long time, and at the same time deploys the labels “encroacher,” “out-of-state-migrant,” or “nomads.” The interest reflected here is the legitimization of ignoring these groups and places, denying land, housing, or access to services, or eviction and as such is a the strategic deployment of the meaning of slum.

From the perspective of living along the urban fringe slum is counter-positionally defined: it does not refer to the people making a living between and along the urban fringes, but means belonging to the city, namely possessing some kind of identity document, proof of stay, literacy, or social ties to residents whose claims to urban land are more secure in one way or another. In cases in Tamil Nadu even paying a fine for illegal settlement is a prove of residence. Paradoxically, but importantly, it is the process of becoming visible through


the establishment of document-based relations between residents, politicians, and administrators. The highly risky process of being recognized as “illegal” counts at the same time as prove of resident, and as such as being recognized for being in the city! Looking from the unmapped and unmappable fringes, slum is metonym for the city, the ability to stay and work in the city by establishing socio-political links. In this sense slum means belonging to the city.

5.2. Formation of politico-spatial alliances: contestations over slum as place label

During processes of politico-spatial alliance formation slum emerges in its dimension as a label (given by others and residents themselves) for approximate places of the city that are not drawn on administrative maps.

Figure 2: KSB slum, which is not officially recorded, with partial services provided by municipality, and known by the name of the community displayed at the entrance to the settlement





(Sometimes they are shown on official maps as white or gray areas). An example is Kausalya Samudaya Bhavana (KSB) Slum in Mugdali, Karnataka (see figure 2). It is not recorded as administratively declared slum, but has partial services provided by the municipality. Its name signifies social belonging more than a specific location as it makes reference to the community hall at the entrance to the settlement. During each of our visits residents insisted that “this [their] place is a slum,” partially in expectation of receiving further services based on this label, referring to neighboring areas that have been officially recorded by the State’s Slum Clearance Board as slum, where construction of multi-level housing takes place in situ.

Entry into the city’s alliances is a deeply political process and situation dependent. For local and mid-level politicians (including ward councilors), the places labeled slum in common usage mean vote bank. In return for votes, politicians offer identity or ration cards, inclusion on beneficiary and voters’ lists, land, and services. To a slum “senior,” aligned with different political parties, a slum are the people, who pay rents for occupancy and access to water taps. To residents a slum means being able to stay in the city, engaged in urban political and economic alliances. To public administration a slum means the possibility to clear and retrieve land either in the name of city beautification and adherence to planning regulations, but it also means group identity of people, who can now request recognition and service provision.

To NGOs and to slum dweller federation a slum is a (social) label around which to organize groups and strengthen their status as residents of the city. NGOs and MSDP provide lists of people and areas labeled as slums for subsequent declaration and rehabilitation or direct inclusion in education and health programs.

When slum emerges as a label for places, its meaning is contested.

Forging alliances with the city does not entail immediate claim to any particular plot of land as cycles of eviction and relocation continue. Semi-legal documents as proof of identity and occupancy (e.g. tax assessment forms) and beneficiary lists for different programs become tools in the politics of patronage, but also in alliance forming among social groups of the city. Through time the tie between slum residents and land may strengthen as politicians and NGOs provide links to local administration and partial service provision to areas.

5.3. Official recording & delineation: contestations over slum as administrative category

During the process of official delineation, a slum crystallizes in its dimension as administrative socio-spatial category. Procedure for official recording of slums vary by state. In Karnataka, for instance, procedure of so called “slum declaration” involves a series of steps from mapping the place and socio-economic surveying by slum board officials, who also check applicability of the (legal) administrative slum definition as per Slum Clearance Act and additional legal stipulations to the publication of the slum’s name in the gazetteer by the District Commissioner. In Maharashtra, recording as per procedure is outlined in the specific policy’s guidelines, e.g. BSUP, and coordinated by a municipal engineering department rather than a state level slum clearance board.

However, in practice, official slum recording is characterized by multiple, contested, and changing lists of slums and slum residents. This is due to prevalent forces at work other than the standard criteria and official guidelines set forth in procedure. The multiplicity of lists of slums in the city and official lists of slums, as well as related documents that circulate among urban actors become plausible only when we take into consideration that in practice the procedural logic presumably enacted through administration intermingles with interest contestations enacted through shifting socio-political alliances and relations between people, land, and built environment. “Classifying the city into slum and non-slum, and its residents into slum- and non-slum residents is not only driven by standard formal classification criteria. Standard classification and formal procedure become adjusted and morphed through the influence of actors inside as well as outside of administration, the latter including residents of slums themselves, various intermediaries, NGO members, funding agencies and slum organizations”(Richter, 2014, p. 227-228).

In addition to any official definition of slum at a given point in time (if it exists), “there are further criteria that establish eligibility of residents to be included in a given slum improvement scheme, especially the length of stay of residents, and residents’ income as well as material belongings. These latter criteria change through time depending on different government policies. These criteria influence the declaration process. Evidence of income requires possession of below poverty line (BPL) cards. These documents are issued via a BPL survey conducted at times, based on criteria, and involving



municipal and district departments that differ from those of slum scheme surveys. Acquiring a BPL card requires possession of identity documents. Various semi-legal documents may serve as proof of occupancy and length of stay: official letters addressed to the family, tax receipts and electricity bills (Bannerjee, 2002). To further complicate matters, BPL cards, voter lists, electricity bills and so forth are not necessarily issued according to administrative procedure by a designated bureaucrat behind his desk” (Richter, 2014, p. 228-229).

As administrative category a slum now carries a more explicit meaning to administration, also as an opportunity to forge alliances with politicians. With the influx of funding from national and state levels, the declaring/ed slum also means money for public administration and (construction/labor) contractors. During the process of declaration the slum means source of money more so than a target area to invest money into. The other main point of contestation is related to land ownership and clarification thereof. This is where another meaning of slum emerges for administrators and/or private developers, namely it means the land under the slum, land for infrastructure and real estate development.


In Mugdali, Karnataka, for the Slum Dweller Federation (SDF) and two NGOs working in alliance with SDF the officially recorded slum means visibility of residents in the eyes of the state, but also in the eyes of international donors. Members of SDF are nearly always present in meetings between public administration and slum residents, and are regular visitors at the slum office. Both SDF and NGOs provide own lists of slum residents and socio-economic survey data to public administration for official recording. But more visibility also entails potentially increased risk of relocation.

For residents the slum may mean – depending on circumstances – security of tenure, legal ownership of (new) housing, or new renter status. But at the same time, the slum means insecurity with respect to location and livelihood. Entry in administrative records does not necessarily secure a stable (in socio-political or spatial terms) location in the city, because it may lead to resettlement or moving into upper floors of new housing. Resettlement and multi-story construction may increase distance from jobs, split communities, and deprive of livelihood resources like livestock, if people have to move to upper floors. In Kadovali, Maharashtra, these contestations over official recording led to serious delays in BSUP implementation and residents’ demands to be taken off the record to avoid relocation.

Official recording is a crucial process, a time when meanings of the slum as administrative category are highly contested among social groups in the city. It means vote bank, money and land source, risk to livelihood, and the promise of tenure and housing. In response, the recording practice (as opposed to procedure) are akin to what Roy (2003) calls the “politics of lists, where the ‘verification’ of lists soon turns into at best a set of negotiations and at worst an opportunity for strong-arm tactics” (p. 208). Through these practices areas and people become selectively inscribed into the records of public administration.

5.4. Re-settlement: contestations over slum as neighborhood “stamp”

As ‘improved neighborhood’ the relocated or “in-situ developed” slum emerges as a more or less permanent stamp. Because of relocations and allocation of new units to different groups of residents the physical boundaries of a “developed slum” often do not coincide with those of the delineations of a slum during official recording (both in terms of area and residents). Residents are quite literally tied to a neighborhood called slum through tax and electricity payments to the municipality and loan payment to the slum board office in Karnataka. One interviewee, resident of an in-situ “rehabilitated” slum area stated that “this should not be called a slum anymore [but is listed as such in administrative records]. We have houses and sanitation now, and we know the importance of hygiene and education.” The statement and context of the interview reflect different meanings attached to the term slum as a designation of (re-) settled neighborhoods. To residents the term slum means tenure and housing security, but it also means being “stamped” (quite literally also on administrative documents) a slum resident officially and more visibly now. The negative connotation of such a label are also indirectly addressed in the quote. It also reflects a trajectory of meetings and awareness workshops which the interviewee has passed in the course of government and NGO programs with intervention focus on slums. Formalized tenure means both security, but also confinement. It is confining in physical terms as it is common for five to seven people to live in new one-room units without the possibility of adding rooms, e.g. when sons marry. It also ties residents much more formally into the bureaucracy of district and municipal paperwork. Rent, loan, tax, and utilities bills are now issued by administrative collectors, and recorded in administrative databases. But this also means closer, lasting and personal relations to street level bureaucrats and municipal community workers.



The slum as neighborhood designation still implicitly means problem area to administration, especially emphasized in conversations with respect to maintenance of infrastructure. But because of the relations that have developed between administration and residents through the course of time and stabilized through the above mentioned paper and money transactions, the slum has an additional meaning for local administrators involved in skills, micro-finance, savings, and education programs. It also entails the homes of beneficiaries, and the neighborhoods, whose social composition and networks municipal community organizers are familiar with. Municipal and district administrators may also support residents to gain access to a variety of government programs. Official records of (re-) settled slum areas continue to serve as base maps for surveys and identification of beneficiaries for other programs, for example those targeting minorities and scheduled castes/tribes, because even relocation sites remain on the officially registered list of slums.

Similarly, for NGOs and SDF, who are likely to have been involved in processes of declaring and resettling, the slum as designation still means trans-local socio-political alliances and identity through membership in men and women's slum federations, a realm in which educational and skills programs can be furthered and for "networking" between slum neighborhoods.

Depending on circumstances, to residents the slum neighborhood at the edges of town after resettlement means (re-) exclusion from the city, if political, social and economic ties are broken. New units are often constructed 10 to 20 km away from original slum locations, at the edges of cities, sometimes without public transportation or water and sanitation infrastructure in place at the time of anticipated unit allocation and move. Furthermore, with politico-spatial alliances being broken, for instance to local politicians in original inner city areas, residents in resettled slums may

also lose voting rights if residents cannot become included on new voters' lists. Paradoxically, this moves people into a similar position as during infringing in socio-political terms, but at the same time ties them physically to a specific location and building.

Different social groups attach different meanings to slum as neighborhood designation. The neighborhood is still called slum, because of tax and loan payments, recording of the same in official databases, the community's alliances in slum dweller federations. Once inscribed into administration's records as a slum it often remains target area for education, skill, and micro-finance programs, even if they are not explicitly targeting so called slums, but rather specific groups of people, for instance scheduled caste based programs. Still perceived by administration and neighbors as a problematic neighborhood the label sticks. For its residents the "improved slum" if located outside of the city also means political as well as spatial (re-) exclusion from the city.

Finally, it is necessary to emphasize one more time, that the processes described here are not linear phases. Even after relocation and "rehabilitation" people may be evicted in some cases moved again to live along the urban fringe, foster new politico-spatial alliances, move in with other family in the city, etc. In Tamil Nadu the land of improved slums remains the property of the Slum Clearance Board, where the issuance of a "conditional patta" has been the norm for at least ten years; and where people could thus be further displaced.

The last two rows in table 1 on the next page make more explicit, in how far various documents – beyond official records of slums—are implicated in terms of types of documents involved as well as their function. These changing types and functions of documents are embedded and driven by the processes and meaning contestations previously described and summarized in rows one and three of table one.

Table 1: Summary of Findings

	Slum as the city's promise while living on the urban fringe during migration	Slum as place label during politico-spatial alliance formation	Slum as administrative category during official recording & delineation	Slum as neighborhood stamp during (Re-)Settling
Slum dimension	(Counter-positionally defined as the city)	Unofficial label for approximate places	Administrative category officially recorded and delineated based on Slum Act and/or policy criteria	(re-)settled neighborhood with term slum in its official and/or popular name
Description of process	Groups of people at the fringes of the city (by bureaucrats often referred to as "migrants")	Alliances among groups of slum residents, between residents and different politicians form, in turn connecting to public administration	Places become officially recorded slums according to procedural steps, but in practice also influenced by legal litigations and through "politics of lists"	Urban area of pucca housing with state provided infrastructure, but still in official record as slum and member of slum federation
Meanings of slum (among social groups in that dimension)	Meanings do not vary. "Slum" are not the migrants, but implies a belonging to the city	Meanings vary by social group (vote bank, belonging to city, label to organize people)	Meanings vary by social group (additional meanings enter, e.g. money source for public administration)	Meanings vary by social group (a neighborhood with problems, a networking realm, exclusion from city, continued target areas for intervention programs)
Types of Records	Identity, ration cards, semi-legal documents as proof of occupancy, voters' lists	Identity, ration cards, semi-legal documents as proof of occupancy, voters' lists	Lists of to be officially recorded and recorded slums, lists of beneficiaries of declared slums with socio-economic data, boundary drawings, improvement progress report tables	Tax, loan, tenure documents Lists of beneficiaries for explicit slum and non-slum programs Lists of declared slums
Functions of Records	They are types of records produced/exchanged in alliance formation process but from the perspective of "migrants" they function like an impenetrable "paper wall" around the city	As "paper tokens" in negotiations between social groups	As "paper truths" & to fulfill funding requirement	Tie area and people into city's administration Maintaining the term slum in the neighborhood name

Three Most Relevant Characteristics of Defining Slums

Based on the preceding analysis and description, we distill three most characteristics of the process of defining slums in the cities studied, especially within the framework of BSUP. These characteristics are relevant for RAY implementation and – as of yet more implicitly – programs beyond RAY.

First, and most obviously, there is not one standard definition of slum. Instead, various social groups in the city attach different meanings to a place and population in question. Slums are never a singularly definable set of urban areas. Rather the places called slum differ depending on social groups' meanings and the processes taking place at that point in time.

We neglected two social groups relevant to the meanings of slum: the judiciary and the media. The judiciary has become another “relevant social group” in slum development, especially as the role of courts in evictions and land litigations has increased in recent years (Bhan, 2009; Dupont & Ramanathan, 2008). How slum is constructed (positively or negatively) through narration and description also requires closer attention to current media in India. Despite this shortfall, analysis brings to light the interpretive flexibility of slum, its definition never reach full closure. On one hand, relevant social groups identify different interests with respect to slum. On the other hand, the problems and solutions vary across dimensions and processes. For example as vote bank, a slum is a group of people, who are the solution to a politician's vote problem. The politician's interest may be to avoid declaration of a place as slum and retain its unofficial slum label in order to exchange votes for incremental service provision. A contractor aligned with an administrator, on the other hand, may have an interest in declaration in order to benefit from improvement and construction work, perhaps under the auspices of planning regulations and city beautification. Under the conditions of each process and dimension, social groups struggle over different problems and objectives with respect to slum. What happens to a group of people, a place, and area called slum then depends on whose solutions and objectives win at a given point in time. Depending on situation (time, place, and social group) the term slum appears in more positive or negative light. But precisely because contestations over its meaning have become a powerful force in urbanization and de-urbanization (if people are evicted, lose access to voter lists, or employment, for instance during resettlement)

processes it is difficult to imagine “eradication” of the term (as proposed by some).

Second, meanings attached to a place or group of people by each social group also vary through time and it is precisely the strategies to contest different meanings and in such way to strategically advance one or more groups' interests, which form an urbanization mechanism itself. Each dimension and process sketched out selectively move groups of people into new processes, where new kinds of contestations again arise.

The same social group often attaches different meanings to slum depending on situation. For an administrator the slum during declaring process may mean money source, but the slum as

(re-)settled neighborhood might mean a place of a specific caste and beneficiaries of various government programs. Contesting meanings do not stabilize, no overall consensus on slum's defining characteristics is reached over time. Rather they are the mechanism by which groups of people urbanize. People, places, and areas labeled slum in different ways, including by themselves, may become increasingly urban in terms of the rigidity of physical boundaries, in terms of administrative recognition, but also socially tied into urban networks through tax and loan payments and membership in federations. But contestations are also the mechanism by which groups of people may de-urbanize in spatial, economical, and political terms, for instance in case of resettlement to edges of cities away from socio-political networks and livelihoods.

Third, official records of slums do not comprehensively represent the city's slums according to one standard definition, because they are a – more less temporary – outcome of political contestations over the meaning and thus official recording of slums depending on specific situations of a place and group of people. Instead, content of records, such as voters' lists, lists of declared slums, identity cards, etc. are not only reflective of contesting meanings, but drive the processes as they serve different groups' purposes. Any current list of declared slums, for instance, is an outcome of contesting meanings and preceding changes in slum's dimension.

While living on the urban fringe, identity and ration cards and literacy as the basis to access official and unofficial



records create a kind of “paper wall” around the city, which makes it difficult for those who are being labeled “encroacher,” “migrant,” or “nomad” to enter the city in spatial and political terms. In another situation, these same documents turn into a token. They may be sold for votes and money. Various semi-legal documents can serve as proof of occupancy: official letters addressed to the family, tax receipts and electricity bills (see also Bannerjee, 2002). At the point in time and space when the slum emerges as administrative category a lot of work has been done already by unofficial records and alliances forged around and through them. At the same time any current list of declared

slums is itself a tool in the contesting meanings over the slum as administrative category. Records are strategically employed in the struggle between social groups. Construction of records may also serve as legitimization tool for slum residents themselves vis-à-vis administration. Slums have thus “ironically become a key entity through which urban poor negotiate their presence in the city” (Arabindoo, 2011, p. 642). In this sense, record construction is also a resource for claim-making processes under certain conditions and a territory, where “the subaltern is granted a distinct political identity” (Roy, 2011, p. 227).

7

Implications for RAY and Beyond

Once recorded officially as the slum and even after physical infrastructure improvements, a community and place often remain on lists of slums. At once inscribed in the official records (through tenure records and declaration) and in physical terms (through construction work and unit allocation) these neighborhoods continue to be target areas for government programs by public administration, NGOs and slum federation. The stamp sticks, for better or worse. And again, the recording itself contributes to this stickiness as the name carries over from ownership records databases to the lists of beneficiaries in other government programs, and onto the e-mail lists of slum dweller federations.


But what is important to note is that this “permanent official slum database” (paper or not) is constructed through records that serve multiple functions and that are embedded in political contestations over the meanings of slum, which in turn form one mechanism of urbanization. In sum, the multitude of competing lists of slums and beneficiaries one may encounter in the city among different social groups do not reflect a “social mosaic that composes the metropolitan fabric,” but an “ever-evolving socio-spatial arrangement with multiple causal factors” (Dupont, 2004, p. 174). Records do not fail to represent. Rather they represent contestations more so than any socio-spatial structure of the entire city at one point in time.

RAY is an ambitious endeavor, even from the analytical angle chosen in this research, which focusses on existing processes of defining slums in cities.

In light of the three main characteristics outlined above assumptions behind the RAY policy blend out and in light of this study will thus require the deletion of processes in columns one and two: processes through which groups of people and places urbanize in spatial as well as political terms. In terms of guidelines and specific technology required, i.e. GIS and MIS for the recording of slums, focusses directly onto the process of official recording only. This makes sense in light of RAY’s aims to formalize land tenure and housing across the city. This would require the deletion and/or effectively the exclusion of processes of migration and politico-spatial alliance forming, the documents embedded in these processes, and the contestations over the meaning of slum, which constitute mechanisms of urbanization. In essence, RAY, intended or not, seeks to change current mechanisms of urbanization.

Indeed, GIS and database maintenance can provide a technological means to remove slum recording from access by other social groups in the city, including residents, their political representatives, and slum dweller organizations, especially in combination with organizational design that shift information management into the hands of private actors, such as planning consultants. Similar trends can be identified in the implementation of GIS databases for urban property administration (e.g. Richter, 2011; Richter and Georgiadou, 2014).

Official records of slums – including during politico-spatial alliance formation—are tightly woven into the contestations over the meanings and thus eventual official recording of slum. Any current official database is a



mediated reality, co-constructed by various urban actors, including residents and their elected or more informal representatives. Not only would the formalization of one slum definition and database, exclude or at least side-track other meanings and related strategies to enter the city, changes in recording technology (GIS for data collection, maintenance, and use), also has the potential to increase the permanence and legitimacy of a new official slum database. The already difficult to penetrate “paper walls” around the city from the perspective of migrants may become increasingly impermeable. Furthermore, there is a risk of deleting “organic forms of participation.” The networks formed between residents, administrators, various organizations and socio-political leaders through the manifold paper and document constructions (what Hull, 2012 refers to as “paper infrastructure”) currently characteristic of the slum definition processes, also provide entry points to negotiate and influence – albeit in a stealth-like fashion – the implementation of government schemes.

This offers difficult to pin-point, but nevertheless existing, modalities of accountability. For example, personal relations between a resident and street-level administrator allow for informal conversations also about promises made and met or not (Richter and Georgiadou, 2014). Alternatively, GIS construction under RAY may have simply become embedded into existing meaning contestations, positioned as yet another – in this case digital geographic – database of slums.

However, with the new program “100 Smart cities” now having replaced JnNURM and RAY we are inclined to entertain the thought, that the “city of contested meanings,” the political city or in Latour’s (2011) words the “invisible city” in its contestations, ambiguity, and localized meanings may be set aside in national policy in search for “greener pastures,” for the greenfield development of visible cities that run smartly: seamlessly, visibly, and based on a set of standard definitions.

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Chance2Sustain examines how governments and citizens in cities with differing patterns of economic growth and socio-spatial inequality make use of participatory (or integrated) spatial knowledge management to direct urban governance towards more sustainable development.

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