Livelihoods and Collective Action among Slum Dwellers in a Mega-City (New Delhi)

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Abstract

This papers deals with livelihoods and collective action among migrant slum dwellers in the rapidly expanding slums of New Delhi; a Mega-city of 14 million people. Close to half the city population lives in unauthorised colonies and more than one third in illegal slum settlements. The slum and slum expansion, a consequence of both national and global forces, has increasingly become a hotbed of urban politics. An historical-institutional perspective is used in combination with household surveys, field observations, and key informants in order to examine relationships between local governance and access to housing, property, and social services among migrant settlers of the Sangam Vihar slum. This is an unauthorised settlement with about 400 000 people located close to the ruins of the "old city" of Tughlaqabad in South Delhi. In contrast to the public discourse, which characterised the slum dwellers as illiterate, poor, unemployed, and polluting, it was found that almost 85 percent among the sample heads of households had completed primary education (while more than 20 percent had education beyond high school); more than 95 percent were employed – with an average income more than twice that of official poverty line; and a majority owned their own house, TV, radio, and bicycle. Most of them were able to accumulate some savings, and had capacity for own development. Slum living was part of a chosen long-term economic strategy that provided access to nearby employment and low-cost housing. Although many poor people were also found, the data illustrate a diversity in livelihoods that had not been recognised in public discourse nor manifested in urban planning and development. The paper illustrates a clear connection between the public discourse, which promoted rather stereotype and stigmatising images of the slum dwellers, and the lack of public support for slum development. Rather, the government has had slum demolition with buldozers as its major strategy, and not *in situ* rehabilitation, which would be the slum dwellers preferred type of intervention. Reflecting public neglect, local people started to organise themselves, with the help of local civil society organisations, in order to find own solutions to collective resource management problems, albeit often in imperfect manners. The paper concludes by raising certain dilemmas researchers have to face when applying discourse analysis to development and policy analysis.

Introduction: Slums as hotbeds of urban politics

The slums of Delhi represent hotbeds of urban politics. The recent Supreme Court decision to demolish squatter slums of the central city and evict thousands of slum dwellers, mainly on hygienic and evironmental grounds, lead to immediate and heated reactions in the streets of Delhi, and broad attention from the national media. More than 6 million people - almost fifty percent of Delhi's population

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today live in a diversity of illegal settlements or slums across the city – many at daily risk of being displaced and loosing their homes. Addressing the variety of social and environmental issues arising from the rapid proliferation of slums is a major challenge for the governance of Delhi; a Mega-city with a population of almost 14 million people (2001 population census).

This paper applies Foucault's "discourse" concept in order to explore the public debate about migrant slum dwellers and slum development within the context of urban development.[2] The paper starts by characterising one dominant discourse about the slums, propagated by people in powerful positions, and indicates a close connection between this stereotype image and dominant strategies for urban slum development. The paper concludes by raising certain dilemmas researchers have to face when applying discourse analysis to development and policy issues.

The dominant discourse about slums in Delhi can be traced to the colonial past, and emerged from a stereotype image of the slum dwellers, who were mainly immigrants from other states, as "the others". The slum dwellers were – and are still - generally portrayed as illiterate, jobless, poor, polluting people of low caste and status that represent a threat to a "clean" and "green" and "healthy" Delhi. Urban policies have, until recently, been geared towards demolition and resettlement of slum dwellers in the outskirts of the city, rather than *in situ* rehabilitation of the slums; which is the preferred strategy of most slum dwellers.

This rather biased, generalised and stigmatising image, when contrasted to the empirical findings from a sample of the population of one of Delhi's largest and oldest slums, Sangam Vihar, did not hold. It did not capture local diversity and complexity in livelihoods, and the dynamic capacity expressed by the social fabric of the slum society. Over a period of two or three decades, Sangam Vihar emerged as a dynamic housing and business zone, with important contributions to the local economy. In the absence of government support, people came together to address collective problems related to supply of basic services through private

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[2] A "discourse" in Foucault's world is – directly translated - a "speech". In a more general sense it is a world view, a social paradigm (not necessarily based on empirical observation), or a "truth regime" with its related narratives and constructed explanatory images. In this context "to take part in or be part of a discourse" is to choose a set of ideas, meaning, and practices within a societal game. One's choice of discourse would tend to reflect one's societal status or identification (class, caste, gender, age, occupation, institutional belonging), practice, or other material conditions. Hence, a dominant societal discourse will often reflect the views and images of a powerful social groups. At any one time, there will be many discourses and world views – competing for hegemony. A narrative is a story with a chronological order – with a beginning, an analysis, and an end, but it is not necessarily based on well founded empirical, historical or social analysis. It is often based on constructed images or myths; or received wisdom. A narrative is a generalized abstraction and may easily underplay the specifity, diversity, and complexity of a local phenomenon or social processes. Discourse analysis was used by e.g. F. Fanon in in chracterizations of stereotype images of non-Westerners/non-white – "the others" in the 1960s. It has been used in more recent anthropological studies from urban and rural settings (e.g. Ytrehus (ed) 2001). In the environmental field, discourse analysis has been used to characterise social constructions or images of environmental crisis based on narratives (e.g. in Benjaminsen and Lund, 2001).

and collective solutions. As a reflection of such developments, a majority of the heads of households in the sample was found to be fairly well educated with living standards well above official poverty lines – even if there were also many illiterate and poor people .

A main point of this paper is that the "dominant" image would disregard the diversity in livelihoods *among* the slum dwellers, and underplay that there are, in fact, many similarities between the slum dwellers, mostly migrants from neighbouring states, and the average Delhites, people born and raised in Delhi. If the empirical findings of the study were to provide a more plausible image of the slum dwellers of Delhi than the "dominant" image, it would have important implications for the formulation of more effective urban policies and strategies for slum development. If government strategies build on narratives that blame the "poor" slum dwellers for the urban degradation and pollution, and place the responsibility for own destiny solely on the slum dwellers' shoulders, important issues at policy and institutional levels are easily neglected. Urban strategies will then remain ill informed about the real potentials of the slum dwellers, biased against slum rehabiliation, and favour the privileged groups and housing zones of the city.

The paper finds that the state and municipal government has a key role to play in slum rehabilitation. Even if important social and environmental issues were addressed through privet solutions in Sangam Vihar, it happened in uneven and inadequate manners. The area faced important deficiencies in urban infrastructure, sewerage, garbage collection, electricity and water supply. Better solutions to such issues would require the support of a committed and willing government working in partnerships with local people and their organisations. The most recent policy initiatives by the city government recognised elements of this new perspective, accepting slum dwellers as citizens with a right to basic services, and the need for decentralised and reformed governance structures.

Methodology

The approach to the paper combined a brief account of historical events, related to the evolution of Sangam Vihar as an illegal settlement colony, with studies of individual livelihoods and group action. Survey material of livelihoods at household level was combined with focus group discussions and interviews of key informants at local and government levels. The characterisation of the dominant discourse was created from interviews and reading of newspapers and secondary documentation (government reports, NGO documents, scientific articles). The head of household survey covered variables related socio-economy,

property rights, access to public services, migration and social relationships.[3] For the in-depth survey, two hundred households were selected randomly (every tenth household) in three housing "blocks" out of a total of thirty blocks in Sangam Vihar.

Influx of migrants and the demographic factor behind emergence of slums and attitudes towards slum dwellers

The rapid growth in Delhi's population, from about 1 million in the 1940s to 14 million in 2001, represented a major challenge for urban housing and development. An important part of this growth was due to a large annual influx of migrant labourers from neighbouring states, about 100 000 annually over the last decades, reflecting the city as a key agent of economic growth and provider of social and cultural services (Dupont, Tarlo, Vidal, 2000). This rapid growth, combined with inadequate supply of low-cost housing, was a major factor behind the rapid proliferation of illegal settlements inside the city boundaries.[4] According to recent statistics, almost half of Delhi's population lived in illegal settlements; either in unauthorised colonies, whose existence is not officially recognised, or in squatter settlements which are more permanently threatened with demolition (Vidal et al. p. 20, 2001). At the same time an "urban conquest" of the rural and peri-urban outskirts of the city took place. It was in these Southern outskirts of the city that Sangam Vihar emerged during the 1980s and 1990s to form one of Delhi's largest unauthorised settlement colonies or slums.

The case study and the dominant discourse

Stereotypes of slum dwellers
The city planners of Delhi – and the urban elite - have for decades been preoccupied with this massive in-migration to Delhi. On the one hand, these migrants constituted cheap productive labour, in search of housing, services and urban infrastructure. On the other hand, "these others" represented various pressures on urban infrastructure and threats to the environment. Although a fairly nuanced public debate was also present, it is fair to claim that certain dominant myths and stereotype images existed; constructed by urban elites and government officials. Migrant slum dwellers were generally portrayed as fairly young, illiterate, backward, and uprooted men of low caste coming to Delhi in search of unskilled work in some form or another. They were considered illegal encroachers on government and private land, pollutors of the environment, and thieves of electricity. The expanding slum population enhanced water and air

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[3] An indepth survey of 200 households was carried out in May-August, 2001. This survey builds on the results of a less elaborate survey of 1400 households (undertaken in 1998), which among others covered household income.
[4] Even if overall population growth has slowed down over the last decade, and there are fewer annual migrants (cf. 2001 census data).

pollution, and represented a threat to a "clean" and "green" Delhi. The slums were considered breeding places for everything evil, such as criminality, alcoholism, drug trafficking, and prostitution. Due to lack of clean water, sanitation, garbage collection, and sewerage they represented a potential threat for the city hygiene and spread of water and air borne diseases, such as cholera and malaria. Several major cholera outbreaks, the latest in 1987 - which resulted in 1500 casualties, underscored the perceived importance of demolishing these congested, dehumanising, and unhealthy living quarters.

Sangam Vihar: "A dingy backyard" or a dynamic city zone?
Government neglect is easily observable in the unauthorised Sangam Vihar settlement. This area is part of outer Delhi, in the metropolitan periphery, and considered to be one of the least prestigious, though fastest growing political constituencies.[5] Outer Delhi has an image of a "dingy backyard littered with crime and corruption" (Soni p.76, 2001).

Despite people having lived there for many years, the risk of demolition has made people build fairly modest one, occasionally two, storey houses in mud or brick. Families of five and six lived in one or two rooms houses, more congested than Indian health norms permit. Despite constituting an urban living area for almost three decades, Sangam Vihar had no proper road system and few paved roads, no drainage, sewerage system or garbage collection, and most people relied on private or collective solutions for water supply, electricity, health and education. The area was flooded and muddy during the rains with smell of cloak and uncollected garbage. The municipal government, reflecting unwillingness to invest limited city resources in the development of illegally occupied land, and that demolition was its preferred strategy, had neglected the slum dwellers potential rights to basic services. For outsiders, Sangam Vihar could easily be characterised as a dingy and dehumanising place to live.

But another image could also be raised about Sangam Vihar, which might be more fruitful in an urban development context. The area once belonged to the "old city" of Tughlaquabad, established by early Mughal emperors. The ancient and mighty ruins of could still be admired across the main road North of the living quarters. Bordering on the Southern side, was a green and huge forest along a ridge. In the past, this land served as crop land, forests, and pastures for the buffaloes of Gujjar nomads, and provided milk and meat for the emperor and later for the British colonial administrators. The ridge was used as summer retreat by the Mughals and British.

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[5] According to the latest census, Sangam Vihar is one of the fastest growing zones in Delhi, encompassing a population of 300-400 000 people (rougly estimated from 2001 census).

Dominated by dense forests until two decades ago, Sangam Vihar today was – also – a buzzling, dynamic, and evolving housing and bussiness zone. There were markets, bazaars, tea-shops and street cafées, various enterprises, and new on-going constructions everywhere. Men were bussy in the streets, going to and fro work; women were seen cleaning and cooking; children in uniforms on their way to local private schools.

It is important that, apart from certain general factors that enhanced in-migration to Delhi, three particular historic events made people *choose* to move to Sangam Vihar. These events were related to political and economic factors and local demand for labour.

First, following the Partition in 1947 (and establishment of Pakistan), many better-off Mouslim families, some who had owned large properties since the Mogul and British period, fled from these areas of Southern Delhi, leaving land vacant in an area that was already sparcely populated. Following the civl war, many of the newly arriving immigrants from todays Pakistan settled in these Southern areas, occupying land, and lay the foundation for peri-urban townships and new communication infrastructure. Delhi's population almost doubled through the Partition. Second, the hosting of Asian Game by the city of Delhi in 1982, in major ways demanded construction workers for new housing, sports arenas, and communication infrastructure in Southern parts of the city. Third, new industrial zones were established during the 1980s and 1990s, including the nearby Okhla industrial area, which grew in importance as the economy responded to new global markets for Indian made garmets. Through these developments, the market for unskilled labourers kept growing. New middle-class living quarters also increased job opportunities in the private service industries, for shop keepers, craftsmen, domestic servants, guards, and drivers.

The availability of jobs around Sangam Vihar met a key demand of potential migrants. 83 percent in our survey claimed that the main "pull factor" attracting them to the city was the chance to improve income. Similarly, 93 percent held that the main "push factor" was deteriorating income at native place.

Availability of cheap housing and the property issue
Aaccording to the survey, however, the main reason for chosing Sangam Vihar over other places in Delhi were related to low property prices; low land costs (52 percent of the respondents) and low house rent/costs (29 percent).[6] The emergence of an illegal property market, facilitated by local politicians and

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[6] The respondents also mentioned factors such as "closeness to work place" and "relatives already living here" as important. Almost 60 percent joined one or several of their relatives when migrating to Delhi. This is one indication of social networks being an important motivating factor for promoting migration. The social capital present in local networks and norms, manifested in solutions people find to water supply and social services, is likely to be a key resource to build on for recreation of livelihoods and slum rehabilitation.

officials working in tandem with local property dealers, ensured availability of land and housing at comparatively low prices.

But being squatters on illegally occupied land meant that the migrants found themselves in a permanent state of insecurity. Their house and neighbourhood could be demolished any day. This insecurity clearly limited local interest in investing in the house - as well as in other aspects of developing the neighbourhood – and was likely to be a major obstacle to upgrading the slum. The informal and insecure property rights regime, which have existed for decades, must be understood within a political context. Political games were played between local leaders, officials and politicians, who took on a patronizing role – in which they had various economic beenfits. It was an immediate and vested interest for local Big men in keeping people with such insecure property rights. Local politicians would, for example, make promises to ensure a regularization of the situation and improve service provision - in exchange for political support. But the slum dwellers were clearly aware that "no politicians would be so foolish as to redress the situation for this would mean relinquishing his or her hold over potential electors" (in the words of Dupont, Tarlo, Vidal, 2001, p. 21).

The slum dwellers: dominant discourse vs. practice ("myth" vs. "reality")
Below follows a comparision between the dominant discourse, examplified through certain stereotype images and concepts, and the empirical "reality" (column one and two in Fig.1). The third colomn indicates the great diversity in livelihoods found among the sample of slum dwellers (N= 200 heads of households). Such diversity is underscored by other studies referred to below.

Figure. 1. Stereotype image: Discource, practice and diversity among migrant slum dwellers (N=200)

Stereotype images of slum dweller by urban elite (dominant discourse)	Empirical evidence of livelihoods among the average slum dweller (practice)	Empirical variation in livelihoods (diversity)
Illiterate	84 percent litterate; higher than Delhi average (82 percent)	16 percent illiterate; 33 percent completed matriculation; 23 percent with higher education
Low status and backward	More than 80 percent middle- or high-cast; higher than for Delhi average	16 percent low caste (scheduled); while 40 percent are high caste
Unemployed	96 percent employed – mainly in private business	Only 4 percent unemployed; 15 percent as daily wage labourer
Poor	Average income about Rs 3 000 (NOK 500) per month – more than twice that of official poverty line; 65 percent between Rs 2000 and 3000	Relatively even income distribution; although 1/3 below Rs 2000 per month; and 16 percent above Rs 5000; one person earning Rs 16 000 per month
Young single men	Majority were married men,	Age varied between 17 to 67

	average age 37 years, three children	years; family members from 2 to 12 people
Rural land-less	Majority still owned crop land at native place (61 percent); average 1-2 acres	Majority likely to be rural landless or landpoor; but many from urban areas
House-less	Majority posessed a one- or two-room brick house (pucca)	Almost 30 percent had three rooms or more; while 40 had only one room; 22 percent lived in mud house (kuccha); 23 percent rented
Asset-less	Majority posessed TV, radio, fan, bicycle	A few posessed phone and refrigerator, but many had few consumer assets
Stealing our jobs	Majority worked in informal private business – many self-employed entrepreneurs	Only 9 percent worked in government business
Stealing electricity	Only 2 percent had connection to government source, since few transmissions lines present	(No survey of electricity theft done)
Degrading the environment	No sewerage, hence, contribute to water pollution. Depletion of groundwater a problem. Consume little and produce little waste, yet no permanent garbage collection.	
Burden on society due to low income	Income of household was well above consumption level, hence, likely net contributors to societal saving/economic growth	Solution to social services such as water, electricity, education and health were mostly private or communal
Uprooted	Majority established new networks and maintained social contacts to native place; 82 percent still owned a house there; almost 50 percent sent remittances annually	Some cut relationships, and sent no remittances; the majority contributed to social events at native place; women felt constrained and uncomfortable
Unstable	Lived on average 14 years in Sangam Vihar	Some stayed other places in Delhi before moving to Sangam Vihar; visits to native place were of 1-2 weeks duration
Criminal	Reported as a problem	-
Drug and alchol users	Reported to be a problem among men	-

Some stark contrasts emerged when comparing the stereotype images with the way people practice or live their lives; 1) The percentage of literate people having completed primary education was higher than the average for all Delhi; in fact a high percentage (23 percent) among the respondents had "higher education" (beond high school); 2) There was a higher percentage of high- and middle ("Backward") caste represented in the sample than average for Delhi; 3) The employment rate was low; only 4 percent unemployed; 4) Average income was more than twice that of official poverty line, and quite a few households were able to save and accumulate a little on a monthly basis, thereby contributing to own and societal saving. A majority of the responendents owned their own brick house, and assets such as TV, radio, fan, and bicycle. Most of them still possessed

a house and land at their native place. 5) When they first arrived Delhi, on average 14 years ago, most of them had joined relatives that lived there, and they maintained social networks to these, to their new friends and neighbours from the same districts. Most of them would visit their native place once or twice annually and maintain relationships to these family members. This relationship was mostly of social nature, since remittances were fairly small and seldom spent on economic investments in land or bussiness at the home place.[7]

People perceived the lack of *electricity* and *water* as the two key problems they faced (49 percent and 29 percent respectively mentioned this as the first factor when asked to rate problems perceived). A third problem was perceived to be the lack of good roads. Only a few mentioned inadequate sewereage system or waste disposal as problems; which is in contrast to what government officials (or donors) tend to perceive as their key problem. People do, however, organise themselves to supply such services or demand the government to improve their efforts – on ad hoc and more permanent basis. Reflecting government inaction, amost 50 percent of the respondents were members of "collective" water management groups. The groups were organised on street basis; one group assigning a member to manage a tubewell to which they all would connect and pay a monthly fee. The tubewells were either constructed by a local NGO, private individuals, or occasionally by the government. Problems were still perceived by many, however, regarding quality, timing, and inadequacy of the water supply. Less than 10 percent had tapped water.

Regarding electricity, their other major concern, only 2 percent had a legal government source (no survey of illegal connections was conducted). 35 percent of the respondents had no electricity, while as much as 63 percent were connected to a private source. Private generators were diesel driven, and 46 percent complained about "high costs". Other problems such as low voltage, inadequate, and irregular supply were also mentioned as deficiencies (by 34 percent, 28 percent, and 25 percent respectively). Due to inadequacy of public schools, most people sent their children to private schools. The health service also seemed mostly to be provided by private doctors and a few efficient NGOs involved in areas such as mother and child care.

Overall, people did not appear to be among the poorest and least connected in the city, even if there were great internal variations – as apparent in column three in Figure 1. The majority seemed to have access to a variety of social services, albeit mostly private or communal in nature.

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[7] Some would, however, cut most ties to their place of origin and seldom visit their relatives. Family conflicts was one important factor mentioned by one third as a reason for migrating.

But important environmental issues were not being addressed in appropriate manners, such as depletion of ground water levels (due to uncoordinated and excessive use), weak sanitation, sewerage, garbage, and contamination of water. The direct contributions of these people to air pollution would be minimal, due to few owning two-wheelers or cars.

While local officials would place the blame for the state of affairs in the slum regarding environmental degradation on the slum dwellers themselves, the residents would raise issues of bureaucratic neglect and inefficiencies, arrogancy, and own leaders being coopted by corrupt officials and politicians.

Urban development strategies and the slums

To what extent is the dominant discourse about slums and slum dwellers reflected in general urban development strategies? The presentation below raises a few salient features of the dominant stereotype images and their manifestation in approaches to the slum issue. In the past, the mainstream debate on urban development in Delhi was first of all focused on issues of economic growth and how to foster growth through industrial, commercial, and infrastructural development. A major related issue was how to meet the demand for low-cost housing, water, sanitation, and social services of the rising population, which constituted the main work force as stated in the two post-colonial Delhi Master Plans of 1962 and 1986 - respectively. These master plans were to provide guidance on key urban development issues; to restrict the total urban population (e.g. by curtailing the influx of migrants), locate industries and commercial areas. Only more recently, in the post-Rio era, did the debate start to encompass the broader concepts of "sustainable cities". Sustainable cities were, however, in the official discourse, associated with more narrow environmental management (pollution control, solid waste), hygiene, and protection of parks and greenery, under labels such as "clean" and "green" Delhi. Focus was on the immediate environmental quality and living conditions of the urban middle class, reflecting their dominant position as citizens and skilled labourers. Less attention was accorded sustainable livelihoods, poverty reduction, and basic services to poor citizens and the migrants of the expanding slums (Mahadevia, 2001). The Master plans failed on many accounts reflecting among others uncoordinated and inefficient city governance – as well as rapid urban population growth. Delhi's population increased from about 1 million in the mid-1940s to about 14 million today. The problems of coordination – for example between municipal bodies and federal state bodies – remained a key issue. For example, federal state bodies such as Delhi Development Authority (DDA) have responsibilities for planning and development of land, while municipal governments and city state government have responsibility for maintenance of infrastructure installed. Coordination becomes particularly difficult when the city government is ruled by one political

party (today: Congress), while the federal government of India is ruled by another party (BJP).

Civil society actors claimed that the master plans represented a chaotic planning system, in which good intentions were never implemented, while many mega-projects were never discussed in the context of the plans (e.g. infrastructure built for the Asian Games, industries and commercial units in numbers far beyond the limits set by the plan, constructions by government and semi-government agencies, rapid expansion of unauthorised housing areas for the middle-class, 40 fly-overs and many road stretches, and even the recent start on the Delhi Underground Metro). Development of the city was uncoordinated, biased in favour of better off areas, and focused on "beautification". The plans were frequently circumvented through the influence of powerful interests.

Favouring middle-class with water and electricity

It has been documented through various sources, that middle class housing colonies were greatly favoured when it comes to supply of urban infrastructure, housing schemes, electricity and water, availability of social services, and enforcement of property rights (ref. for example Sajha Manch, 2001, Background documents to Delhi master plan). Land availability per capita was, for example, ten to twenty times higher than in the slums. Consequently, civil society actors focused on the need for *uban land reform* with allocation of land rights to poor people as a first key step for improved urban management. Certain myths have been created about the state of affairs in the city that accompany the biased urban investment and development strategies.

"There is an electricity crisis in the city
A dominant myth: By government bodies it is claimed that there is a crisis in supply of electricity to the city. It is argued that due to their huge numbers and illegal encroachments the slum dwellers are to be blamed for the overburdening of the total electricity supply system. The slum dwellers are in major ways responsible for power thefts, said Delhi electricity board (Delhi Vidyut Board, April 2001, cited in Sajha Manch, March, 2001).

Civil society view: There are sever problems in Delhi about irregular and insufficient supply of electricity with frequent power cuts, but these are more pronounced in low-cost housing and slum areas. Out of a total supply of around 3000 MW about 80 percent is consumed in residential areas, bussiness and industrial centres; the middle-class areas consuming a lion share of the private household consumption through new consumption patterns (refrigerators, air conditioning, heating). Only 15 percent of slum dwellers were found to have electricity connections according to a recent study (Sajha Manch, 2001). Close to

50 percent of the electricity produced and delivered to the city is stolen, in one way or the other. A recent study, however, done for the Delhi electricity board, suggested that by far the largest illegal consumption was by the industrial and middle-class households. Moreover, 90 percent of the measurement meters distributed by the electricity board were in fact faulty. Hence, the board itself was in a major way responsible for the state of affairs.

"Slum dwellers overload the water supply system"
A dominant myth: It is held by government bodies (and middle-class people) that the millions of slum dwellers in major ways contribute to the water supply crisis in the city. They also undermine the ground water and pollute the river systems.

Civil society view: Almost 90 percent of the water supplied to Delhi city is for domestic consumption. But while average per capita water consumption in Delhi is about 350 liters per person per day – the average consumption per capita in the slums is about 35 liters. This suggests that water is supplied disproportionately to the middle-income areas and non-slum zones. In Sangam Vihar – in one group – the norm was 60 liters to each family household per day. Moreover, few were connected to official water supply. Only 10 percent had tapped water. Water was provided through deep tubewells. Ground water depletion was a problem – since no higher-level body regulated the exploitation of the ground water. One collective or private group's use would subtract from other groups' potential use of the common-pool resource. Lack of sewerage and sanitation contributed to inferior quality of water, water contamination, and pollution of rivers.

Until the recent Supreme Court order to clean up Delhi came through, the dominant discourse had been clearly Malthusian in character. Environmental pollution and unhygenic conditions was blamed on poor people and population pressure.[8] In its ruling, the Supreme Court contributed to a major transformation of the dominant discourse by placing the blame for the state of affairs on the lack of accountability in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, and the lack of coordination between various municipal and state government bodies responsible for urban planning and governance in Delhi. However, the Supreme Court order

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[8] When arguing that the discourse about urban environmental management in Delhi having a Malthusian touch to it, it relates to several factors in the understanding of problems and proposed solutions. First, there is a sense of a direct relationship between the increase in population and depletion of the urban environment. More people – more degradation. Hence, the solution to urban degradation is seen to limit the number of people through various population control measures. Second, poor people are blamed for the degradation, even if each poor person contributes much less than each better-off person due to much lower consumption. Third, there is a sense of a long-term absolute resource scarcity in the public discourse (e.g. regarding availability of water). Finally, each person is seen as carrier of his or hers own destiny – inherited through the genes – or rather through one's family's caste belonging or social position in society – and is to blame for his/hers own actions. The Malthusian perspective directs attention away from more optimistic Bosrupian views which would suggest that there are soultions to be found at policy and institutional levels and that resource scarcity is always a relative term. Resources can, for example, be enhanced through technological or institutional interventions and their utilization distributed more evenly or differently.

located the source of garbage and pollution to the slums and recommends slum clearance as a solution to the "unhygienic" conditions in the city. Here, the Supreme Court reiterated concerns present througout the whole urban planning history of colonial and post-colonial Delhi[9]. The order directed all concerned bodies to take appropriate steps for preventing further encroachment or unauthorised occupation of public land which potentially would lead to new slums. Reflecting this order, the government at the initiative of the Urban Development Minister at federal Indian Government level, recently commenced demolition of several slums established on public land after 1990, often without adequate notice, and relocation of squatter slums established before 1990. Here, there was a tension between the policy of the central government acting on the order of the Supreme Court, and the more recent alternative policy of the Slum Wing of the Delhi government. The anti-slum sentiments were reflected also in the press and among members of middle-class residents (CARE, 2001b).

This raised a major policy dilemma for city governance. Should the illegally established slums be demolished and the slum dwellers evicted – and re-established in low-cost housing complexes in more "healthy" environments in the outskirts of the city - or should the slums be provided legal authorisation and upgraded *in situ* – a strategy for urban slum rehabilitation that has emerged with the new discourse? Only recently has the latter strategy gained some terrain, the Supreme Court ruling being an exception. The Municipality of Delhi has, for example, agreed in principle to start *in situ* upgrading provided the land owner concerned (usually a government body) provides a No-objection certificate.[10]

The past initiatives to relocate slum dwellers were generally not successful. First, the number of such schemes were limited and reached only a minor share of the population. Secondly, the government seldom delivered housing schemes with a standard of services and infrastructure as required by the settlers. Third, since job opportunities were small in the new neighbourhoods in the outskirts of the city, many later chose to leave, and moved back to the slums of the city centre.[11]

A main concern for the city government - and the urban tax paying elite - was always the large cost implications of providing housing for millions of people – far beyond the financial capacity of the government agencies concerned. This was a major reason why past efforts in urban housing schemes fell far short of

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[9] Concerns which have also been present in the history of city planning in the West.

[10] The Delhi government has also recently launched a scheme called Bhagidari (meaning "participation") which would imply the creation of Welfare Associations in all housing colonies; a program that might be extented to the unauthorised slums in line with recent efforts to promote decentralized city governance (according to the 74th constitutional amendment of 1992).

[11] An extreme variation of such control of the population in the slums occured during the Emergency in the mid-1970s, when massive slum demolition, eviction of more than one million people, and re-settlement programs were accompanied by large scale sterilization campaigns; a fact that still makes eviction a very controversial strategy for urban development even today; twenty five years after.

requirements.[12] The recent focus by the city government on *in situ* rehabilitation, rather than eviction and resettlement, which is a much more costly urban development strategy, seems to emerge more out of compulsion than conviction.

Validity and representativity of the data concerning livelihoods

Caution is warranted about making generalisations from the small sample of 200 heads of households. The standard of education, income and living among the sample population was – a bit surprisingly - found to be fairly high, and higher than one might have expected in a "slum" area of Delhi. Even so, the sample is likely to be fairly representative of migrant slum dwellers in this part of Sangam Vihar. The income distribution and levels are, for example, confirmed by the data from our study of 1400 households from 1998 in the same basic location. However, the sample is not nessarily representative of migrant slum dwellers in Delhi in general, due in part to the great diversity of slums and livelihoods of slum dwellers.

The tendency of the findings from Sangam Vihar, especially concerning the diversity of the livelihoods, does find support in the recent literature from Indian cities, however. Although most studies still provide a rather gloomy picture of slum dwellers' livelihoods, the mosaic of more recent case studies bring together a new and more diverse image of local dynamics, relative prosperity and complexity than those of the past (Dupont, Tarlo, Vidal (eds), 2000).

One study among houseless people, those sleeping on the pavements and in the night shelters in the Old City, in support of our findings, claimed that even these groups were not among the poorest fraction of the population, and their situation was perceived not as precarious socially and economically as often held. The majority among them made pavement sleeping a deliberate choice as part of a long-term economic strategy, given the expensive housing situation in Delhi (Dupont, 2000:99).

But other important perspectives should not be underplayed. In another study by Haider among squatter slum dwellers in Rapur, a place not far from Sangam Vihar, it was found 52 percent illiteracy, an unemployment rate of 37 percent, and income below Rs 1000 (NOK 200) per month by about 83 percent of the population. This area had high presence of Scheduled Castes (75 percent of the population). Haider found that migrant women of this squatter appeared to deplore the conditions under which they lived. They felt that their life and prospects had become more constrained than in their villages of origin. In personal narrations, they often admitted feeling stigmatised and regretted being

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[12] Another reason was that most of the land in urban areas was owned by various municipal and state agencies unwilling to give up plots for private housing schemes.

there. They would prefer another life situation, even moving back to the village of origin (Haider in Dupont et al. (eds), 2000).[13]

Regarding *diversity* in livelihoods and living conditions, the urban slums and unauthorised colonies in Delhi can be conceptualised along a continuum from houseless pavement sleepers, via squatter clusters and unauthorised colonies, to more "posh" illegal settlements found, for example, in the immediate neighbourhoods to Sangam Vihar. Sainik Farms is one such area that attracts the attention of some of the most enterprising and ambitious members of the Delhi upper class (Soni p. 76, 2001). It is illegally encroached upon, yet free from congestion with unspoiled green scenery and "reserved" for the wealthy and privileged few with good poliltical and bureaucratic connections. The area allocated per family household is ten-twenty times what is found in the slums. But images about these housing areas differ. According to one researcher they are "arrogant complexes of palatial mansions with gardens, enclosed behind tall boundary walls" (Soni, p. 76, 2001). What is clear is that these houses and colonies were erected illegally on agricultural land, in similar ways as Sangam Vihar. Hence, they were also unauthorised colonies, yet this term or image was seldom used about them. Rather they were termed as "farm house" areas. The owners of these mansions had "the means to arrange their own electricity, water, drainage and sewage disposal service. They often indulge in massive power theft with the connivance of law-enforcement agencies" (Soni p. 77, 2001).

In conclusion, since a main objective of the paper has been to direct attention to the great *diversity* in livelihoods among slum dwellers in Delhi from one locality to another, and that this diversity should be recognised both in discourse and practice, it may not be of major importance whether or not the sample is fully representative for slum dwellers and dwellers in unauthorized colonies across Delhi.

Still, if many of the people living in Sangam Vihar are considered of relatively higher status regarding income and social standing, we need to explain why they settled there in the first place. Many arrived ten, fifteen even twenty years ago; at a time when Sangam Vihar appeared more like a "slum" in the everyday meaning of the concept. The area at that time consisted mainly of scattered mud huts with very rudimentary infrastructure – inbetween a few rural village clusters and some farm houses. The answers given by respondents confirmed that settling in Sangam Vihar was part of a long-term economic strategy related to availability of and access to low-cost housing and nearby jobs. Many people chose to settle and

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[13] The women of Sangam Vihar were also in a precarious position. Most of them had followed their men to the city; it was not necessarily their choice to move. Only 2 percent had permanent employment outside domestic work, and they were highly dependent on their men economically and socially.

live more or less permanently.[14] Gradually, Sangam Vihar evolved into a more well-established housing and business area. As a reflection of this permanency, people invested small surpluses in housing and infrastructure. From a slum area in the peri-urban area of Delhi, Sangham Vihar has in many ways evolved into a lower-middle class living quarter, and, although still located on unauthorized land and lacking many basic facilities, it may today not appear as a "slum" by many observers.

Critique: Difficulties in applying the "discourse" concept

This paper applied concepts and elements of a "discourse" analysis to illustrate specific issues related to urban policies and slum development. The approach raises some issues and challenges confronting the utilization of "discourse" as a method of analysis for research.

First, it turned out to be difficult to characterise the "dominant" discourse, its main proponents, and trace the dirct influence of these social groups in the formulation of urban policies (e.g. an urban elite or urban "uppers"). It was also difficult to characterise precisely the alternative or sub-discourses (among e.g. civil society groups or "lowers"). The characterisation provided are also generalisations and to some degree stereotypes. This suggests a weakness with the application of the method, perhaps beyond the relatively crude way in which it was done here. An additional and problematic aspect of describing a discourse seems to be that one does not – as researcher - easily escape being part of the discourse. I cannot claim to be an "objective" observer of the positions portrayed. More indepth analysis of the actors, their status and standing, and the tracking of direct connections between the diversity of views, discourse change (through history) and urban policy formulation would have been warranted. The evolution of Sangam Vihar and the livelihoods of its slum dwellers was best understood by examining the broader relationships between people and local resources, property systems, markets (e.g. cost of land and housing, job opportunities), and local politics (e.g. interactions between local stakeholders, local representatives, and government officials).

Second, the slum dwellers presented in this case study need not be representative of those particular slum dwellers the people articulating the "dominant" discourse had in mind (nor of slum dwellers in Delhi in general). "Slum-dwellers" represent different images to different people. When middle-class people are asked to think of slum dwellers they are likely to construct an image based on a particular form of slum arising out of their own experience. Since they are often quite ignorant about the real state of affairs or diversity in slum settings; they have mostly never

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[14] The average number of years the heads of households in the sample had lived in Sangam Vihar was 14 years. We do not, however, have data on those heads of households who for some reason chose to move, however.

been there, they may easily raise images with reference to the most visible and "spectacular" of the slums; the squatter settlements or JJ clusters or colonies (known as Jhuggi-jhonpri – or hutments). JJ clusters are spread all over Delhi – and quite frequently found next to better-off housing colonies. The JJ clusters are often made up of less permanent dwellings of mud, bricks and corrigated iron sheets – sometimes with thached or polythene roofs. These clusters provide a packed, filthy apparence, that lends them to creation of particular images.[15]

Third, the paper illustrates that a "discourse" is not a solid, or closed and monolitic phenomena. Rather, a discourse is an open and fairly penetrable process that evolves over time and is subject to forces of change from actors within as well as from the outside - through processes of "discourse choice" and "discourse change". Discourse transformation might perhaps be explained in similar ways as shifts in scientific paradigm (Chalmers, 1992). The dominant discourse was recently challenged "from within", for example, through acts of individual officials of the Slum Wing of Delhi's Municipality Corporation (cf. Sajha Mancha, 2001, Draft urban master plan, 2000). Their efforts questioned the dominant image; hence, they participated in a process of "discourse change". Several sub-discourse and images existed, that competed for hegemony. From the "outside", two type of actors influnced the discourse. First, a set of civil society actors related to Sajha Mancha challenged the dominant discourse by choosing to promote alternative discourses; i.e. through a different "discourse choice". Second, a main opposition to the dominant discourse was created by the slum dwellers themselves through the way they chose to live, act and speak. The government officials, the elite and the discourse they lead, was not entirely uninfluenced by such other sub-discourses (Vidal et al., 2001:17). The dominant discourse itself seemed to be carrying the potentials for its own transformation into a discourse with greater accepance that would open for new and more fruitful avenues (or fall from a "dominant" standing). Despite "dominant" discourses being relatively exclusive and having a tendency for manifesting positions in society, supporting the "uppers" and marginalizing the "lowers", there would always be some scope for individual choice – among "lowers" as well as "uppers" - for example in choosing which discourse one wants to voice or live, or in ways and means to transform a given discourse. A more thorough analysis of the interactional processes between different actors and how the outcome would affect both *discourse change* and *discourse choice* would have been important in a more complete discourse analysis.

Fourth, the urban history of Delhi is so complex that its development cannot easily be reduced to stereotype descriptions of dominant discourses and perceived connections between a dominant discourse, urban plannning, and practices. The

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[15] There was an estimated 1100 JJ clusters in 1997 with a population of more than 3 million (Haider p. 31, 2001).

diversity of urban space in a mega-city, with a vast number of stakeholders, huge geographical extension, social and institutional variation, can probably best be examined through acceptance of the local diversity and variation from one local context to another; as each locality is influenced by critical historical events and specific circumstances. There were many factors and relationships to consider at various levels and locations of society, ranging from broader state-society relationships, to issues of caste, class, profession, political party, age, and gender – to mention but some.

Finally, the "dominant" discourse, even if manifested in master plans, quite frequently never really materialized on the ground or had any effects in the slums. Plans were often not implemented - partly due to lack of finances, partly due to lack of institutional capacity and will to engage in slum development.[16]

Conclusions

The "dominant discourse" portrayed the slum population mainly as a problem – and not as a resource for environmental management and city development. The concerns of the slum dwellers, their poverty and livelihood problems, were excluded from the centre stage of the discourse, except in political rhetoric. Few government efforts reached the slum dwellers in a positive manner. Strategies for slum development were made to correspond to a generalised image of the slums and their role in city development, while aspects of the slums which did not correspond to this stereotype image or other sub-discourses were supressed. The diversity and dynamics of the evolving slum societies were underplayed and neglected.

The more recent literature on slums in Delhi bring out a more diverse image of who the slum dwellers are, and how well they perform and connect to society. Our point has precisely been to stress the great *diversity* in livelihoods within one setting (as well as between localities), and confront the dominating myth with empirical data. The fact that our sample exposed a group of "better-off" slum dwellers, however, does not preclude that a majority of the poorest and most stigmatised people in the city are *also* likely to be found in the slums of Delhi.

If accepted that the stereotype and dominant image of slum dwellers characterised in this paper neither reflected the real nature of local dynamics, nor captured well the causes and effects of urban environmental degradation, more empirical research would be needed to understand who the slum dwellers really are, what diversity of interests and capacity they possess, and how they could become engaged in formulating alternative urban strategies. Through recent public

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[16] This happened even in authoritarian social settings like Delhi (cf. Vidal et al., 2000:19).

consultations organised by civil society actors and NGOs in Delhi, in collaboration with government bodies, new empirical findings have been brought to the attention of a variety of stakeholders; findings that provide a more diverse, realistic and positive image of the slum dwellers.

Such changes in images are today increasingly reflected in more positive attitudes to slum-rehabilitation. By the local government accepting to take responsibility for slum upgrading, more positive attitudes are likely to emerge since the aim would now be to build on whatever capacity the slum dwellers have and what local resources are available. The new agenda for urban politics, as promoted by civil society groups and critical researchers, is precisely to move issues of poverty, empowerment of slum dwellers, and partnerships between the city government and people to the centre stage of urban politics – and thereby create a new dominant discourse (Mahadevia, 2001).

Public debate is essential for effective transformation of the slum discourse and adoption of alternative and more fruitful perspectives by the parties concerned. A combination of research, advocacy, and public reform might be needed to promote greater pluralism in the discourse. Empirical research along these lines would require more than a simple analysis of the discourse – understood as an analysis of the confrontation between constructed ideas and images. It would require an understanding of the variety of social and institutional stakeholders concerned, their views, interests and influence, and the specific outcome of their interaction with each other and the government. It would require a focus on historical events and processes, and the material expressions of such processes. In an authoritarian societal setting, open public debate – informed by empirical research - is a necessary condition for the emergence of good government policy and practice based less on ideologically constructed myths and more on empirical "realities".

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