Production of informality and everyday urban governance: Case from Delhi

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Urban Informality is a complex phenomenon, and recent work shows the imperative need for newer theoretical frameworks to analyze and understand the empirical observations. Robinson in her book 'Ordinary Cities' calls for shifting towards a more situated theoretical approach to study cities in the developing world. This, particularly, is with respect to the understanding of modernity, which disenfranchises many parts of the developing cities by terming it informal. Informality is thus rendered undesirable, or conversely, championed as 'alternate' modernity. Both these approaches lead to a situation of theorizing urban informality through confining it to specific classes of people (e.g. urban poor, subaltern etc.), or/and specific places (e.g. slums, unauthorized colonies, etc.). Such a link makes the approach broadly based on the spatial justice framework. Breaking away from this cordon, proposing a more ground-up approach, this paper enters the urban informality discussion through everyday practices. The analysis is based on Bourdieu's practice theory and theorizes informality as a compilation of practices. Thus, practices are considered formal or informal, rather than a groups of people or places (e.g. squatting on land is informal, but the land itself or the people are not). Informal practice thus is pragmatically rendered as one that is not registered with the state. At a given point in time, an actor involved in informal practice is an informal actor and/or vice-versa. This theorization firstly limits identification of informality only to practices. Secondly, this helps in understanding nuances of informality; e.g. it is shown in the paper how informal actors can reinforce formal practices, or the formal actors can push for informality that gets contested by informal actors, etc.

The paper builds on the situated archive from around and inside the settlement of Jagdamba Camp, Delhi, India. Jagdamba Camp is a squatter settlement and this paper

takes two interrelated case studies. The cases, one on water supply and the other on solid waste management, show how informality is produced through the interaction of multiple actors in different fields and manifests itself in everyday urban governance. The data is collected through qualitative mixed methods fieldwork done from May until August 2015.

The first case study is on water supply management that was established in Jagdamba Camp in the early 1980s by state-government actors. However, government officials were not able to manage the installed water pumps properly, and eventually, their operation was 'handed over' to the local Residents Welfare Association (RWA), an unregistered organization to which executive members are elected by the local community. The discussion begins with how an unregistered organization could claim to be sole and legitimate representatives of the people. Thereafter how managing the local water supply has over time become an important source and means of power for the executive members of the RWA, particularly its head, and how community members responded differently to this manifestation of power and governance. The formal water supply system thus becomes a mean to informally govern the neighborhood.

The second case study on solid waste management is linked to the first through the mentioned power relations. The local authorities do not regularly clean a municipal garbage dumpsite, at the entrance of the settlement. This motivated an NGO running an education project in the neighborhood, to clean the garbage dump themselves. Furthermore, the NGO suggested the municipality to put up community garbage bins near the main road in order to facilitate regular garbage collection by the municipal workers. However, this initiative led to conflicts between the NGO and the RWA, because the RWA saw its power contested through the management of waste. Thanks to the NGO's connections to the government actors, the original garbage dumpsite was cleared to create some community space. Nonetheless, a part of the community at the behest of the RWA continued to put their waste in the old location of the dumpsite leading to two parallel garbage disposal chains. Thus, through the control over water supply, the RWA was able to create allegiances and govern the settlement well beyond the water sector.

The two interrelated case studies point to the complex interactions between formal and informal components of an urban system in the production of informal practices and manifestations of these informal practices in everyday urban governance. This paper tries to demonstrate that the nuances of informality can be studied by moving away

from linking informality non-contextually to people and/or places. One of the possible options for this 'de-linking' is explored in this paper by studying practices of people from the situated archive of a settlement and its surroundings.