

1 INTRODUCTION

Informal modes of urbanisation

Informal urbanisation is driving the urban growth and expansion of major cities of the developing countries. While there are variations in the forms and patterns of urbanisation in different regions and countries, there are also many similarities. Informality, illegality and unplanned development characterise the urban development of many cities of the developing countries (UN-Habitat 2008). A growing proportion of the urban population of the developing countries lives in urban areas under ambiguous status and without adequate municipal services. Urban development of these cities is mostly carried out through land invasion, informal subdivisions and self-help housing initiatives and often in violation of zoning laws and various planning regulations (Fernandes and Varley 1998; Roy and AlSayyad 2004; UN-Habitat 2008). The transfer of property and the management and regulation of land, infrastructures and utilities in these cities are guided by a dense and complex network of social institutions (Nkurunziza 2004, 2006; Musyoka 2006; Rakodi 2006a, 2006b; Kalabamu 2006; Leduka 2006; Kombe and Kreibich 2006, 2000; Fernandes and Varley 1998). Transfer of property rights is supposed to be attested by state legal provision, but, in most cases, is based only on unrecognised deeds. Between 15 and 70 percent¹ of the population of these cities live in irregular settlements like squatters, unauthorised land developments, and in rooms and flats in dilapidated buildings (Durand-Lasserre and Clerc 1996; Durand-Lasserre 1998). More than two thirds of all houses in the large cities of Sub-Saharan Africa have been built without building permits or on land zoned for non-housing purposes (Kreibich 2010). Informal and small-scale private water providers serve many African, Asian and Latin American cities and up to between 70 and 80 percent of the urban population in some African cities (Collignon and Vézina 2000). These informal practices are now regular and everyday urban phenomena for access to land, housing, utilities and services in the majority of the cities in the developing world.

Urban informality is a result of the failure of statutory institutions, the resultant involvement of a number of actors in the distribution and management of land, housing, utilities and other urban services, and the varying relationship of the state authorities with different urban groups. The involvement of non-statutory actors

1 Here the request is to consider the statistics presented in this book as only being indicative for this study's acknowledgement of the fact that statistics are produced in the contestation of power and interests and in the absence of a non-biased situation: the 'global' figure presented in the literature is only an average of the statistics already contested at national, regional or local levels. See Foucault (1991, 2009) for more about the politics involved in the production of statistics.

and the state's differential relationships with them create options for negotiations and contestations in the distribution of public resources and in the creation of urban facilities and services. Due to the fact that urban populations differ in terms of e.g. their influence and control over the social, economic, political and cultural systems of the urban environment, their access to decision-making and in the process of institutionalisation of urban interests and their various relationships with statutory actors, this practice of contestation and negotiation creates inhabitants' uneven access to public resources and facilities. The spatial translation of this practice is urban segregation with privileged access to public resources (e.g. roads, utilities and municipal services) in some identified locations that are inhabited by the urban minority and the influential, in a situation when other locations fail to meet the basic municipal needs of the excluded or unrecognised inhabitants due to the inadequacy or absence of public provision. Such segregation of the urban environment through differential access to public resources contributes to the production of social instability and thus high social and economic costs, however, not only for the excluded and less influential population groups, but for society at large.

Failure of the statutory institutions in Dhaka

Dhaka, one of the very fast growing cities in the world, has been experiencing tremendous growth in recent decades. From 1971 to 2001 the population of the city grew from around one million inhabitants to more than ten million inhabitants (Islam 2005). Annually between 300,000 and 400,000 new migrants are added to its population, which had reached about 13.5 million in 2008 (UN 2008; World Bank 2007). State authorities have failed to respond to the demands of the growing population in providing, among other things, affordable land, housing and municipal services. Government policies and programmes are selectively implemented despite acknowledgement of people's rights, including the poor (Rahman 2001a). In fact, state practices are rather targeted to control development of squatter settlements through squatter clearance programmes that are carried out offering no alternatives for the evicted (Wendt 1997) or through imposing statutory obstructions in the provision of municipal services. Realisation of state supported resettlement programmes is very limited or almost absent compared to the massive eviction of squatter settlements that has been carried out in the last three decades (Rahman 2001a). This situation explains the fact that only less than ten percent of the total *bosti*² (informal 'slum' settlements developed on private and public land and inhabited by very low income inhabitants) in Dhaka are located on

2 *Bosti* and the other Bangla words (nouns) used in this report indicate both singular and plural forms of the term. Despite the widely used spelling of the term as *basti* or *bastee*, this book uses *bosti* because it is close to the local pronunciation of the word by native speakers.

land owned by public and semi-public authorities (CUS et al. 2006: 42). The increasing population and new migrants to the city find their place primarily in the growing urban settlements at the spatial periphery of the city and in its large number of *bosti* mostly (about 90 percent) developed on private land. The municipal governments, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and municipalities, fail to address the needs of the inhabitants, according to Islam et al. (2000) and Siddique et al. (2000), for reasons like inadequacy in budgetary allocation, management and institutional problems, and absence of appropriate planning. DCC, for example, has the capacity to transport only about half of the daily generated waste to dumping locations (Japan International Corporation Agency 2005). The rest of the waste remains scattered on the streets and simply waits for transportation in the following days.

While, again, only about two thirds of all households in Dhaka have access to piped water, the supply is very irregular and varies in quality (ADB 2007; World Bank 2008). Huge water wastage for, e.g., washing cars and watering gardens is often seen in the high income settlements in a situation where demonstrations are held in other parts of the city demanding regular supply to existing water connections. Informal negotiations are regularly held with DWASA officials in an attempt to gain access to water in the growing peripheral settlements, increase water share to one's own house or to manipulate water bills by paying bribes (Hossain 2011). Despite a wide gap between the utility needs of the inhabitants of the existing settlements and the capacity of the government agencies to make such provisions, the official water supply network is gradually being extended, however only selectively, to the growing peripheral settlements.

The utility authorities do not have direct supplies (e.g. water, electricity and gas) in *bosti* settlements where more than one third of the total population of Dhaka city lives. *Bosti* that are developed on public land do not comply with the statutory requirements for access to urban utilities like water, electricity, sewerage, gas and waste collection due to the dispute about their legality of tenure. There are only limited numbers of public water taps in some selected *bosti* of Dhaka, as many as about 500 families on average are reported as sharing a public water tap (UN-Habitat 2003: 73). The water users also pay high monthly charges to the local leaders who operate the public taps, maintaining relationships with the official staff of the public authorities (DWASA or DCC) that installed the services. The other *bosti* settlements that are developed on privately owned land, on the other hand, fail to get appropriate attention from the land owners for the extension of official utilities to the settlements. There are, however, many local vendors in every *bosti* who supply utilities under informal negotiation and communication with the staffs of utilities authorities and leaders of the political party in power, however only at a very high price compared to the official rates (Akash and Singha 2004; Rahman 2001b; Afroz 2001).

Contested 'public' resources in Dhaka

The scarcity in supply of urban utilities and the failures of the statutory authorities result in contestation and negotiation of the access to urban land, housing and public utility provisions in Dhaka. There is growing domination by and involvement of a number of actors like individual vendors, community groups, non-government organisations (NGOs), local associations, and local offices of the ruling political party in the distribution and management of land and utilities in the city. Informal land development, for example, represents an effective mechanism through which an increasing number of populations, especially the poor, get access to affordable housing in Dhaka. In a study in an informal settlement of Dhaka, Hackenbroch (2010) observed that the contestation and negotiation of the access to 'public space' is dominated by powerful individuals and institutions that appropriate public spaces with the backing of the party system and produce continuous insecurity to the 'others' who do not have such relationships with political parties. In another study, Etzold et al. (2009) and Etzold and Keck (2009) also reported a similar process of domination and an informal network of the powerful that conditions the livelihoods of the street food vendors in Dhaka. The studies reported a complex network and relationships between statutory and non-statutory actors and an informal arrangement that defines inhabitants' access to public resources in the city. This informal arrangement creates a new form of dependency and power relationship conditioning the regular practice in the provision of urban amenities and services, and informing the logics of this urban informality and a new form of urban governance.

Similarly, the water needs of the majority of the inhabitants of *bosti* are primarily met by local vendors who maintain unofficial negotiations with DWASA staff and thus illegally tap water from the water mains (Afroz 2001; Hossain 2010). Accessing water from local water vendors costs a lot in terms of, among other things, high water prices, long waiting times for water collection and dependency on local leaders and water vendors. The water price in *bosti*, according to Akash and Singha (2004: 38), is ten to twelve times higher than what DWASA charges for its supply. A survey conducted by the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research Bangladesh reported the half of the population in *bosti* settlements spend an average duration of more than half an hour each time they collect water from a nearby water tap (UN 1997). Other studies reported water collection time in the *bosti* of Dhaka as varying between ten minutes and more than an hour each time (Afroz 2001; Rahman 2001b). The absence of official supply, the prevailing patron-client form of political system (Sarker 2008) and the dependency of the inhabitants on the water vendors, who are often the local leaders, provide the inhabitants with no alternative but to buy water accepting the conditions posed by the vendors.

While local vendors' involvement in water supply often dates back to the starting of each *bosti*, NGOs' involvement in this sector is gradual and comparatively recent. Before the 1990s, the involvement of NGOs in water supply in Dhaka was limited to the distribution of hand operated tube-wells in some *bosti* of the

city. Only in the early 1990s, a local NGO offered a guarantee to DWASA for any revenue lost due to its extension of official connections to a *bosti* in Dhaka (Akash and Singha 2004). The success of that pilot project, in which DWASA had relaxed the necessary formal requirements (discussed in detail in Chapter Nine), helped the extension of additional water connections to some other selected *bosti* of Dhaka. Despite gradual involvement of some other NGOs, only a few selected *bosti* have so far been covered by NGO implemented water supply projects. Hanchett et al. (2003), however, reported that these water supply projects disproportionate benefit the comparatively well-off, especially due to the fact that the urgency of economic involvement prevents the extremely poor from participation in NGO meetings and that the comparatively well-off dominate in community groups and in local level decision makings. Rather than addressing the needs of the extreme poor, such projects, according to Hanchett et al. (2003), reflect the interests of the well-off of the community. Besides their role as a service provider, a few of the NGOs have been doing advocacy with DWASA, aiming for institutional change and thus the removal of institutional barriers to official water supply to *bosti* settlements. In 2007 the DWASA institution was also amended in order to allow the extension of water supply to community groups (not to individual inhabitants) of the *bosti*. The institutional amendment has so far brought little improvement in the water supply situation in the *bosti* settlements, especially due to community groups' lack of capacity to approach DWASA and their continued dependency on NGO offered project supports.

The above observations indicate that the distribution of public resources (e.g. utilities, public space, etc.) in Dhaka is not only irregular but that people's access to them is also unequal and contested. In this city, access to public resources is guaranteed only under negotiations and contestations. The negotiations are, however, not guided by any statutory framework, but are rather carried out in an informal sphere that either complements 'legal' processes or contains many aspects that are 'ignored' by the existing statutory structure. The informal negotiations practically guide decisions e.g. about the extension of public provisions in the peripheral settlements, the arrangement of alternative access options for unrecognised populations (inhabitants living in the *bosti*), the conditional involvement of non-statutory actors in the distribution and management process, the subjective incorporation of influential interests, or even the selective violations of statutory regulations to accommodate certain interests. The power-play in action and the domination of influential interests in this process of informal negotiation contribute to the creation of an invisible border between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', the 'centre' and the 'periphery', or in other words, the 'influential' and the 'marginalised'. The proliferation of these informal practices and negotiations results in a fragmentation of society where space and opportunities are differently produced, appropriated, transformed and used and where the benefits of the urban process are unevenly distributed in terms of the economic, social, political and cultural status of the population.

Research framework

The objective of this research is to elaborate these informal arrangements and negotiations through an investigation of the everyday practices, actors and institutions in actions, the prevailing power and dependency structure, and the process of the legitimising of the informal arrangements that may complement or contradict the statutory institutional provisions. The study further deepens the discussion by explaining the relationship between the resources available to different actors, whom a number of studies have identified as only heterogeneous groups in terms of their differential access to social, economic, political and cultural resources (for example, Bertuzzo 2009; Wendt 1997), and the different strategies each group considers for the continuation and legitimisation of their activities. While the corrupt official procedure and bribe culture in DWASA activities have been identified in a number of reports (ADB 2007, 2004; World Bank 2007, 2008; Rahman 2001b; Afroz 2001), the field level informal activities of DWASA staff and their negotiations with local inhabitants have rarely received appropriate attention. This research contributes to the filling of this knowledge gap first, by explaining community level informal activities concerning water supply, involvement of DWASA and other local actors in the informalisation process, and the informality in the official practices of the water authority. The study then maps the relationship of DWASA with the external interests (e.g. CBA, leaders of ruling political party, central government representatives, and local government system) and thus establishes a link between the informalisation of this public authority and the broader political context which is currently guiding urban transformation of the city.

In the description of empirical findings, references to the informal practices in waste collection services and electricity supply are made. Though the findings are gathered from field investigation following the same investigation methodology, it was not possible to make the investigation as comprehensive as that considered for water supply. It is necessary to understand observations about waste collection and electricity as being only supplementary to the main focus of this research. Words of caution should thus be noted here about the further application of observations on waste collection and electricity supply presented in this book. A comprehensive study on waste collection and electricity supply including the institutional arrangement of the authorities responsible for these urban amenities and their relationship with various interests is also worthy of consideration.

The empirical investigation is carried out in two differently identified settlements (i.e. recognised and unrecognised by the state) of Dhaka. The evidences generated from the inner city squatter settlement, Korail Bosti, contribute to the understanding of the arrangement of water supply in a situation where statutory institution's water supply to the settlement is restricted. An investigation in a peripheral settlement of Uttor Badda, which is developed on private land, deepens the discussion by reporting the informal arrangement, negotiation and contestation current when the state water authority itself supplies water in the settlement. The complexity and sensitivity of the research issue necessitates consideration of a

‘grounded theory’ research approach, a research investigation at the very settlement level, and a narrative reporting developed from the combined consideration of all the research aspects considered in this study.

The intervention at the very local level and the dependency on two settlements are a result of the research’s acknowledgement of the importance of “‘little’ things” that Nietzsche emphasised in his writing in *Ecce Homo*: “All the problems of politics, of social organisation, and of education have been falsified through and through, because one learned to despise ‘little’ things, which means the basic concerns of life itself” (Nietzsche 1969: 256). An elaboration of how the knowledge gathered from the ‘little’ things of two settlements can contribute to generalisation and the production of substantive theory is explained in detail in Chapter Five. There is also acknowledgement that no knowledge is ‘complete’, no knowledge represents ‘complete truth’; however this is how knowledge is produced. With this understanding this research identifies a number of similarly important aspects that need further investigation and elaboration for a contribution to a more complete conceptual understanding.

Report overview

This research reporting is broadly divided into three parts.

Part I – situating the research gives an overview of the research context, theoretical departure, methodological considerations, and research framework. Chapter Two gives an overview of the research context, considers a brief description of urban complexities in Dhaka and provides a short description of the water supply authority, DWASA, that shows the broad statutory institutional framework for water supply in Dhaka. Chapter Three presents the theoretical discussions that shape and are shaped by the empirical study considered in this study. The relationship between the theoretical knowledge and the empirical study is, however, not linear: while the preliminary theoretical understandings supported the initial empirical phase, both theory and empirical study have incorporated updated understanding and thus been gradually improved over the whole research period. Based on the theoretical discussion, Chapter Four presents the research objectives and research questions that provide a framework for the empirical investigation of this research. Chapter Five elaborates the research approach and the empirical research methodology that guide the field investigation and reporting of the study. It starts with my positionality and stance as a researcher and the research traditions that inform the empirical investigation methodology. It then explains grounded theory as a research approach for this study, the selection criteria for the study settlements and respondents, elaboration of different empirical methods, and details of the analysis and report writings. This chapter ends with a reflection that indicates some practical considerations and suggestions for future research.

Part II – Empirical Knowledge consists of six chapters. The first four chapters report the empirical findings learnt from Korail Bosti followed by two chapters on Uttor Badda. The number of chapters assigned to each settlement depends

on the complexities that each settlement presents and the diversity of the actors involved in the process of contestation and negotiation in water supply.

Of the four chapters on Korail Bosti, Chapter Six describes the settlement's spatial, social, economic and political structure to give an understanding of the settlement in general, the organisation of the daily life of the inhabitants, and their relationships with influential inhabitants, local leaders, local associations and political party offices, in particular. Chapter Seven presents water supply in the same *bosti* in terms of the involvement of actors, the supply scenario (quantity, quality, regularity, etc.), the operation and management of the water business, and the different resources and support systems that the water vendors develop and invest in their water business in the settlement. In order to understand the involvement of local associations in water supply in Korail Bosti, Chapter Eight presents the case study of a local association and elaborates its formation history, contestation between different groups and its relationships with political leaders and government administration that characterise the different support systems of the associational leaders. This chapter explains how the relationship of local leaders with ruling party political leaders and the government administration creates a contested power and dependency structure and a different mechanism of community level regulation and control. WASA regulation 2007 (Government of Bangladesh 2007) creates options for official water supply in *bosti* through community groups and NGOs. Examining whether this institutional amendment brings changes in the water supply situation in Korail Bosti, Chapter Nine describes a water supply project implemented by a local NGO and a water line extension project that DWASA has implemented in cooperation with another local NGO. The analysis of this chapter presents NGO implemented development works in terms of NGOs' relationships with donors, government authorities, political party leaders, influential local people and inhabitants and examines how such relationships inform the impact of development initiatives in the settlement.

The next two chapters present empirical knowledge derived from the other settlement, Uttor Badda. Chapter Ten presents the settlement in terms of its spatial structure, the socio-economic situation of the inhabitants, municipal services, and, finally, the dependency structure prevailing in the settlement as necessary to understand the informal practices in water supply presented in the following chapter. Chapter Eleven presents the water supply in Uttor Badda in terms of the informal arrangements at the local level and DWASA's official practices, the involvement of different statutory and non-statutory actors that shape and support these informal practices, and the meaning of the informal practices for influential actors, institutions and the inhabitants.

Part III – Reconnecting empirical knowledge and theoretical discussion relates Part I and Part II and thus presents the theoretical contribution of this research. It includes two chapters. Chapter Twelve relates the theoretical discussion and the empirical evidence and tries to establish the general patterns and logics of these informal practices to offer a theoretical contribution to the discourse of urban informality. The final chapter, Chapter Thirteen, summarises the study and indicates entry points for urban planning and issues for further investigation.