



URBAN GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: THE CASE OF A METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMITTEE

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ABSTRACT

Metropolitan growth is emerging fast across urban India while the country's municipal institutions have neither the mandate nor the vision or the capacities for metropolitan governance. Reforms were initiated with the landmark 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) in 1992 to provide political, functional and financial empowerment to urban local bodies. Simultaneously, this Act provided for formation of "metropolitan planning committees" (MPCs) for individual metropolitan areas. Both the initiatives, however, rest upon the political will and legislative and executive actions of the individual state governments across the vast country. Now, the formation of the first MPC of the country, the Kolkata Metropolitan Planning Committee (KMPC), in 2001 has enthused planners and is being viewed as a path-breaking arrangement for emulation by the rest of the country. This paper examines several basic attributes of this newly developed arrangement for metropolitan governance, specifically in terms of issues of spatial jurisdictions, coverage of metropolitan functions and the autonomy of individual urban local bodies within metropolitan jurisdictions.

The contention here is that there is an inherent contradiction between the concept of municipal autonomy enshrined in the CAA and the MPC concept where a metropolitan jurisdiction is state determined and especially the KMPC model where the jurisdiction is coterminous with that of a pre-existing state agency which is instituted as the nodal agency for metropolitan planning while such an arrangement is operationally convenient for the state. It may preempt the local bodies' roles in metropolitan delineation, choice of partners in development and options to leave the arrangement. Furthermore, metropolitan delineations based on jurisdictions of existing state level machineries may not cope with the realities of many emerging spatial patterns of metropolitan growth, especially urban corridors along highways and inter-state urban agglomerations. Functionally, there is an overemphasis on planning in the MPC concept and the Act is rather silent on metropolitan organization for various infrastructure development and operation.

India may learn from the numerous formal and informal arrangements for inter-municipal governance operating across highly urbanized and pluralistic societies and models of conflict resolution between local autonomy and integrated metropolitan governance. In India, however, speedier devolution of power and capacity building

at the grassroots level, for which the CAA provides a golden opportunity, is more fundamental and its achievement may eventually help in matured inter-municipal collaboration, cooperation, partnership or tradeoffs towards responsible, transparent and democratic metropolitan governance rather than replicating a top-down, state imposed regional organizational frame.

1. GROWING SIGNIFICANCE OF METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE

Relatively low level of urbanization in India (27.78 percent in 2001) should not hide the issue of extremely skewed spatial distribution of urban population across our vast country, more specifically, the massive concentrations of urban population in a limited number of large cities. Especially, the million-plus, so-called 'metro' cities constituted in 2001, make 38 percent of the total urban population, which in absolute terms was 108 million of the total 285 million urban population of the country. The number of these large nodes of population concentrations has grown significantly, from 12 in 1981 to 23 in 1991 and further to 35 in 2001.

Some, but not all, of these large cities are truly metropolitan in nature, in the sense of being agglomerations of many local bodies having independent jurisdictions of their own within spatially contiguous urban growths whereby interdependencies among individual urban (and rural) entities are manifest in terms of economic linkages among establishments, home work commutation, social interactions, markets, sharing of common environmental resources and infrastructure, spread of environmental impacts and so on, transcending their individual spatial jurisdictions. Such functional and social linkages among individual urban (or rural) entities across metropolitan areas call for not only visions of their integrated planned development, but also coordinated delivery of various urban services across them. These, in turn, require complex organizational collaborations and governance frameworks at the metropolitan level.

Our fast-globalizing world has brought the metropolises into sharp focus, especially across the competing developing economies. If markets erase borders of countries and cities become harbingers of the end of the nation states in a globalizing world (Ohmae, 1995,

1999), in the Indian context, the metropolises, with their dynamic engines of economic growth, the largest markets and centres of excellence having concentrations of elites and skilled labour alike, are possibly the vanguards to propel this vast developing nation onto a faster orbit of progress in a competitive world. Their efficient governance through high levels of organization for sustained development is an imperative today, which poses one of the greatest challenges at the turn of this century to planners, urban managers and policy makers. The main issue is how well we are prepared to meet these challenges.

2. NON-EXISTENT METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

If metropolitan growth is an emerging phenomenon in the country, a self-governance framework at the metropolitan level is almost nonexistent. Here one discounts, of course, the institution of municipal corporations operating across demographically large so-called 'metro' cities as it represents merely single large entities of urban local bodies and hardly any integrated framework for governance at the level of urban agglomeration. Under the Indian Constitution, it is primarily the state government machinery which is traditionally engaged in most functions pertaining to urban planning, development and management at all levels through its various line departments (viz. town planning, public works - roads and buildings, public health, police, etc.) and para-statal agencies like boards, corporations or authorities constituted for specific dedicated functions such as urban development authorities, transport corporations, water and sanitation boards, housing boards, electricity boards, industrial and infrastructure development authorities, etc. The latter ones are usually autonomous, operating with their own independent budgets and programmes.

Organization for planning and development functions for metropolitan agglomerations across a handful of metropolitan areas like Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore and so-called 'metros'. Generally termed as metropolitan development authorities, these special purpose agencies operate within their contrived spatial jurisdictions under respective state governments and they hardly represent a platform for democratic self governance of their respective agglomerations.

Even the representation of the local bodies lying within the jurisdictions of these metropolitan authorities is meager in comparison to those of their respective state level bureaucracy, in the constitution of these authorities. For instance, the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority is made up of 23 members of whom only four are representatives of local bodies in the metropolitan area which has one corporation, 16 municipalities and 20 town panchayats within its jurisdiction. Besides a minister as the chairperson of the authority, its remaining members are bureaucrats and officials of different state departments and parastatals (www.cmdchennai.org, 2008). Similarly, the 17 member strong Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority, which covers 20 urban local bodies, has only three representatives of the local bodies, all from the corporation of the central city. While the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA) is apparently an exception with half of its board members being peoples' representatives from urban local bodies, but larger urban centres are overwhelmingly represented.

Within a metropolitan area, individual municipal bodies function only in their own jurisdictions, independent of one another, but all under the shackles of state government policies and laws. Traditionally, these local governments have little role in urban planning and very limited role in development works even within their own jurisdictions, not to speak of any role in integrated planning or action programmes for their entire metropolitan agglomerations. Rather, in a situation where the self governance of the individual urban entities is traditionally weak, lacking in political empowerment and financial and technical capacities under the shackles of their respective state governments, it may be difficult to conceive that they would have any constructive role in planning and development at the metropolitan level.

The above situation is in sharp contrast with those of many western countries like the USA or Canada where both formal government structures and less formal governance arrangements have emerged at regional or metropolitan levels (for instance, see, Feilock, 2004; Phares, 2004) in response to metropolitan urbanization. In the USA, there are numerous multi-purpose *metropolitan* public authorities that finance,

build and operate various metropolitan utilities and facilities; some even regulate metropolitan land uses and air and water qualities. Also, there are private, non-profit civic organizations like the Regional Plan Association, Councils of Government representing multiple local bodies which have been at the helm of affairs for metropolitan strategic planning and metropolitan chambers of commerce and regional economic development corporations who prepare and implement economic development plans promoting even external and international trade for their respective metropolitan regions. In Canada, 'Metro Toronto' is a unique case of formal full fledged regional government structure. The Greater Vancouver Regional District in British Columbia is on the other hand an example of inter-municipal governance through voluntary association of regional municipal bodies which evolved incrementally over time fighting the formation of overarching formal regional government structure imposed top down by the provincial government, in a culture of strong autonomy and fierce independence of urban local bodies (Artibise et al, 2004).

3. RECENT INITIATIVES TOWARDS REFORM

Modern urban local self governance might have been initiated in India during the colonial regime; but it is only through the recent Constitution (74th Amendment) Act (CAA) of 1992 that urban local bodies in India have received, for the first time in independent democratic India, their constitutional recognition as the third tier of governance. Beyond its explicit provision for political empowerment at the grassroots level, the 74th constitutional amendment possibly embodies the nation's aspirations for urban sector reforms through functional autonomy and financial capacity building at the local level. More specifically, the Article 243W (Schedule XII) of the CAA provides for functional autonomy to individual municipal bodies for physical, social, economic and environmental planning and infrastructure development and management within their jurisdictions. If implemented in its true spirit, the CAA has the potential to bring in revolutionary changes in the institutional arrangements for urban planning, development and management which virtually rests, since pre-independence period, on respective state government machineries, specifically with their

line departments and special purpose agencies for urban and infrastructure development and management.

Unfortunately, however, the process of decentralization of power to municipalities for self governance of their jurisdictions is not automatic in the said Act, but is dependent primarily on the discretion, political will and expediency of respective state governments to amend their own acts and procedures towards empowerment of urban local bodies. Thus, even after sixteen years of passage of the CAA, there has been little devolution of functional and financial autonomy to the municipal bodies and they have little capacities to play a significant role in urban planning, development and management. Comparatively though, the municipal corporations of large cities enjoy greater autonomy than their smaller counterparts to develop their financial resource base.

Another noteworthy development in the above CAA is its provision for *declaration of metropolitan areas* comprising more than one local body jurisdictions for which the *respective state governments* can constitute 'Metropolitan Planning Committee' (MPC), through its Article 243 ZE, for the *preparation of draft development plan* for the entire metropolitan area. Furthermore, the Article 243ZE stipulates,

- the legislature of the *respective states*, by law, may *determine* the *composition* of such metropolitan planning and the process of its constitution, provided *at least two-thirds* of the committees are *represented by* the elected members of the *municipalities and the panchayats* in the metropolitan areas in proportion to population ratio between these urban and rural local bodies;
- State and central government organizations and institutions may be represented in these committees as may be deemed necessary to carry out their functions;
- *Local plans* of municipalities and panchayats shall be *regarded* along with *matters of their common interests*, including coordination of spatial planning, integrated development of infrastructure and conservation of environmental resources, in

the preparation of the metropolitan plans. Also, the plans should regard the programmes and investments of the various government agencies (Government of India, 1996, pp 76-77).

Thus apparently, for the first time, there is an attempt towards formal recognition of the emerging metropolitan pattern of urbanization in the country as well as development of institutional arrangements to address planning issues at the higher spatial level by creating a platform for coordination between local aspirations and common issues of development. Local bodies will have the democratic opportunity to represent themselves on a common platform to decide about the development of a larger metropolitan context of their existence. At the same time, the CAA apparently determines firmly the continuance of the role of the state and its established institutions in the process of planning and development.

Nevertheless, the implementation of the CAA in respect of formation of MPCs in the country in terms of Article 243ZE is even more dismal than in respect of the states' devolution of planning and development functions to their individual local bodies in terms of Article 243W (Schedule XII). Decades after its passage, only one state i.e. West Bengal has enacted its own law to form one and only MPC in the country, the Kolkata Metropolitan Planning Committee (KMPA) in 2001. And, even after about seven year of bringing out the first MPC, there is no second one in sight, although the state of Maharashtra has enacted an enabling law towards formation of such committees, especially for the metropolises of Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur. For Mumbai, it has initiated already the process of preparing electoral rolls for local bodies that might constitute the proposed MPC (Express India, Feb. 10, 2008).

Apart from bureaucratic and legislative lethargies and confusions to deal with a new institutional arrangement, are there unstated apprehensions of loss of functional domains, resources and political power on the part of the existing stakeholders in the establishment? Firstly, the para-statal agencies for urban development in India have grown historically at the cost of municipal bodies through state suppression of the functional domain and political power of the latter.

They have expanded and established their domain over a long time, since independence. Although there is explicit mention in Article 243ZE of representation and functional roles of these agencies, hesitation to share their long established domains in a participatory platform can not be ruled out.

Further, is the MPC a harbinger of new tier of governance in the country? If 'planning' is conceived as an integral part of governance, can this participatory decision making platform assume a political identity of its own with time, shaking the traditional 'top down' process of the state governments and the political domain of the state legislatures? Furthermore, this new platform may push local bodies that are anticipating stronger power base as the third tier of governance, into a lower 'fourth tier' and also induce sharing of resources and revenue for some preconceived common development agenda where they may not have exclusive political stakes.

In the meantime, however, the state of West Bengal has not only enacted all relevant laws for the implementation of the CAA - the municipal acts and the DPC (District Planning Committee) and MPC acts, but also formalized the institutional arrangements for metropolitan planning by declaring its well established agency, KMDA as the administrative and technical secretariat of the KMPC and rendering the agency's spatial jurisdiction coterminous with the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA). Furthermore, the established juggernaut of KMDA has articulated the metropolitan planning process by preparing a self generated long term Vision 2025 for the KMA and detailed plans like sectoral master plans, five year development plans for KMA's municipal corporations and annual plans for municipalities. It is the schooling of local bodies who 'do not have planning manpower' through its manual for preparation of the local plans (Bandopadhyay and Som, 2003).

4. BASIC CONCERNS ABOUT THE POTENTIAL OF EMERGING MPC MODEL

Obviously, the MPC mode has enthused planning academicians as well as practitioners who are concerned with the emergent phenomenon

of metropolitan growth and are interested in integrated spatial development of these regions to realize their immense socio-economic potential in the overall economic progress of the country. At this juncture, when the metropolitanisation scenario in the country is becoming significant and the MPC mode is slowly taking off, it may be worthwhile to ponder over several basic attributes of this newly developed arrangement for metropolitan governance, before actions on articulation of the esoteric details for its implementation gains ground.

4.1 Duality in the CAA and Putting the Cart before the Horse

Decentralization of state level political power through empowerment of the urban local bodies is in the real spirit of the 74th CAA. While, the concept of Metropolitan Planning Committee attempts to address an emerging aspect of regional urbanization in the country, the institution pulls individual local bodies from their decentralized domains to a shared platform of common vision and understanding. One may debate if the local bodies which are today incapable of planning for their own jurisdictions are mature enough to face the complex decision making platform of coordination, trade offs and conflict resolution at macro- vis-à-vis micro-level aspirations and imperatives, which are ingrained in a regional or metropolitan planning process. Any attempt to bring individual entities onto a common platform without first preparing them to function at equal footing through capacity building is almost like putting the cart before the horse. On the other hand, can metropolitan level organizations for planning, development and management emerge spontaneously from within through grassroots level decisions of individual local bodies to participate through acts of cooperation, contribution, trade, bargains, partnership and so on at bilateral or multilateral levels? Does the MPC, especially as embodied in the KMPC uphold truly the spirit of autonomy of individual local bodies (as enshrined in the CAA) in terms of their choice of metropolitan jurisdiction and partners in development or opportunities for opting out of a given frame?

In the absence of local capacities to plan, integrated planning at a higher level may be contrived and top down which apparently, the

present MPC represents. Although the CAA provides for representation of each municipal body and panchayat in the metropolitan area, in the context of dismal capacities of local bodies to plan for and manage their own areas and their extreme financial dependencies on external sources, democratic representation may only be symbolic and rhetoric in nature. With hardly any planner or technical expert across most of the representative local bodies and a state government level organization acting as the technical secretariat, metropolitan planning and development are bound to be top down, at best through a paternalistic approach of the state. At the same time, it may be argued that the very constitutional obligation of the MPC to regard 'the plans prepared by the Municipalities and the Panchayats in the Metropolitan area' in its preparation of the draft development plan for the region (Article 243ZE (3) (a) (i)) cannot be met truly unless the local plans are prepared actually at the local level.

The question, therefore, may be one of priorities, which aspect of the constitutional amendment to give thrust on. If local autonomy and decentralization of power are accepted as its true essence, the answer should not be hard to find. Probably, a stronger, stable, matured and democratic Metropolitan Planning Committee will emerge when individual local bodies have acquired their capacities not only to plan their own areas but also to develop a shared vision towards regional (metropolitan) development and powers to negotiate with other regional entities on the same in equal footings, rather than moulds and formats flowing from the top through a state level agency.

4.2 Operation and Maintenance of Infrastructure vis-à-vis Plan Preparation

How far does the MPC mandate allow holistic metropolitan governance, especially operation and maintenance of urban infrastructure vis-à-vis plan preparation? Metropolitan governance covers not only the aspect of planned urban growth and development of urban infrastructure of various kinds, but also operation and maintenance aspects for a host of service delivery systems such as transport services, security, education and health, water supply, sewerage, drainage and solid waste management, etc. The Twelfth Schedule to the Constitution of

India guides to empower individual urban local bodies for the provision of several such services. But in a metropolitan framework where interactions of residents, interdependencies among agencies, overlaps of jurisdictions of different service providers and sharing of environmental resources and infrastructure are common, the organization for metropolitan level delivery of various urban services needs to be conceived.

Apparently, there is an overwhelming thrust on development planning function in the MPC through Article 243ZE which specifies the objective of the MPC as 'to prepare a draft development plan' for the entire metropolitan area which should take into account the local 'plans prepared by the Municipalities and Panchayats' as well as 'matters of common interests' covering 'spatial planning', 'sharing of resources' and 'integrated development of infrastructure and environmental conservation'. And, the Act is quite silent about organization for operation and delivery of various urban services. Even the Kolkata model of the MPC, the only operational MPC, reflects the same theme. Although it mentions of five sub-committees on water supply, sanitation, environment and heritage, traffic and transportation and education and health, the plan execution and service delivery roles are not clear. It articulates significantly on the process of draft plan preparation, including development of municipal information system and organization for planning; but the organizational aspect for service delivery is not apparent (Bandopadhyay and Som, 2003).

In the absence of any guidelines in respect of MPC towards development of an organizational frame at the metropolitan level for development and operations of different urban infrastructure, especially, transport, water supply, drainage and sewerage, security, etc., one wonders if a declared metropolitan area will continue to remain the domain of pre-existing state level line departments and special purpose agencies (and private players wherever they are) and, what kind of convergence may emerge between so-called metropolitan plans and the operational and resource mobilization agendas of individual agencies. Take for instance, the case of public transport system across a large metropolis and its essential ingredients

of routing and frequencies of transports of different modes, facilities for modal splits and feeder services, maintenance operations, cost-sharing, fare structures and so on. Should there be a metropolitan level special purpose agency to plan for and operate the entire system? Should there be an organization for integrated actions of different existing state and local level, public and private sector transport organizations; and, if yes, how? Or, should the decisions and actions in respect of all such ingredients be left to individual players leading to their competitors and collaborations based on market forces?

In this context, it may be interesting to note that regional or metropolitan level governance structures are not uncommon in the West, especially in the USA and Canada. Throughout the US, there are numerous *metropolitan public authorities* that finance, build, and operate regional airports, transit systems, highways, bridges, water and sewer systems, electric power, zoological parks, sports stadiums, performing arts centers, forest preserves, parks and recreation centers, parkways, and many other public facilities. These metropolitan authorities in some cases also regulate certain aspects of regional land-use, particularly related to sensitive wetlands, coastal zones, open space, transportation, air quality, and water quality. There are also examples of consolidation of city and county governments and councils or associations of local bodies for metropolitan governance.

4.4 Rationality in Size and Spatial Jurisdictions of Metropolitan Areas

From the point of view of urban governance, one of the important attributes of a metropolitan area, which may distinguish it from a large city, is its polynodal or agglomeration characteristics requiring more complex inter-urban organization for governance. In our Census, the demographic factor of population size tends to override the geopolitical factor of spatial agglomeration of urban local bodies. Thus 16 of the 35 metropolises as per the Census 2001 (each carrying more than a million population) have only single urban local body (municipal corporation) within them (Singh and Shanker, 2003). They are Surat, Kanpur, Lucknow, Nagpur, Indore, Vadodara, Bhopal, Meerut, Jabalpur, Allahabad, Amritsar, Rajkot, Jaipur, Ludhiana and Faridabad. They do

not have even *Nagar Panchayats* in their fringes. The CAA is however clear in its definition of a metropolitan area through its Article 243P as being comprised of two or more municipalities while it is similar to the census definition in terms of the population size of ten lakhs (one million) or more.

The above definition excludes smaller urban agglomerations, which may have similar attributes of sharing common resources and infrastructure and require common platforms for integrated planning. On the other hand, one may argue in favor of much larger metropolises in constituting the MPCs. For, it is the mega-cities that tend to snowball faster demographically in our skewed urbanization pattern. Large metropolises are also likely to contain many large urban nodes that tend to compete in their share of common resources and assume greater functional specializations and interdependencies. Moreover, the need for coordination may be greater with greater presence of development and service provider agencies in the large metropolises.

But a more contentious issue is the political vis-à-vis functional characteristics in delineation of a metropolitan area. Article 243P is not explicit in this regard while it clearly prescribes a top-down process of delineation by the Governor of the state apparently excluding any consultative process involving the potential partners in the MPC i.e. the local bodies.

Ideally, metropolitan delineations should be based on rational criteria or factors related to inter-urban functional and operational interdependencies across a region for metropolitan governance. Some of the key words specified under the objective of preparation of draft development plan as given in the Article 243ZE, such as 'coordinated spatial planning', 'sharing of water and other physical and natural resources' and 'integrated development of infrastructure' may be useful towards development of such rational criteria for delineation of a metropolitan area, not only for planning purposes but also for institutional arrangements for plan implementation and operations and maintenance of urban services.

The question is: how far a consultative process can be developed for a rational delineation of a metropolitan area vis-à-vis the power vested

in the state government to predetermine such an area? For operational purposes, it is a convenient arrangement, especially for the state government to render a metropolitan planning and development area co-terminus with the jurisdiction of a pre-existing state agency. The only implemented MPC in the country, the KMPC has made this intention clear. Furthermore, the process of delineation should be a continuous one related to the urban growth dynamics. Again, the CAA is silent in this regard. Should the individual constituent local bodies' jurisdictions be extended or modified to fit the future urban forms? Or, will it be simply a recurrence of state level decisions to extend its development authority's limit? Development of rational criteria for delineation based on planning, service delivery and political factors applicable to varied metropolitan contexts will be helpful to sustain a technically sound as well as participatory process for delineations and re-delineations.

4.5 Management of Spatial Configurations and Inter-state Metropolitan Growth

The Article 243P of the CAA provides flexibility by allowing an MPC to transcend *district boundaries*. Thus the KMA spreading across six administrative districts fit comfortably to the given model. However, as a reminder, the KMA (as the successor of the erstwhile Calcutta Metropolitan District) has had the historical advantage of metropolitan planning area delineation through several past metropolitan plans and pre-established planning and development organizations. Several other large metropolises, viz. Mumbai also have similar history. But it remains to be seen how other individual urban development authorities are suitable for planning and governance of many atypical but discernible metropolitan growth patterns, like twin cities and urban corridors (viz. Lucknow-Kanpur, Bhubaneswar-Cuttak, Hubli-Dharwar, Pune-Chinchwad and several others) which are growing fast with the development of regional transportation corridors.

For sure, the MPC model in its present form will be unusable to govern metropolitan growth transcending state boundaries which are fast becoming ground realities. The Central National Capital Region (CNCR)

a notional metropolitan planning region of contiguous urban growth cutting across boundaries of three states (NCRPB, 2005) is an outstanding case in point. But with highway developments fast crisscrossing the country, a host of other typically linear urban growths along highways, cutting across individual state boundaries, are discernible (for instance, see Shivaramakrishnan, 2001) that may challenge the present MPC model.

4.6 DPC Versus MPC

The Article 243ZD of the CAA provides for the formation of District Planning Committees in every district of the country to consolidate plans prepared by local bodies and to prepare draft development plan for the district as a whole. Whereas the MPCs are also supposed to consider local plans within their jurisdictions in preparing metropolitan plans for the entire area, there is likely to be a conflict between district and metropolitan plans where they coexist unless there is coordination between the two. Although the nature of district development plans are socio-economic plans in nature while metropolitan plans are primarily spatial plans, allocation of resources in the DPC's sectoral plans should be considered in the MPCs plan for spatial allocation of investments and growth. Similarly, these allocations in the MPCs plan need to be taken into account in the district plans that contain metropolitan area or parts thereof.

However, neither Article 243ZD nor Article 243ZE is explicit about any mechanism for such coordination. However, the common elements in both DPCs and MPCs, where they coexist, may be the local bodies participating in both the committees and their roles in such coordination become crucial. This in turn highlights again the significance of capacity building, planning and coordination at such grassroots level.

5 EPILOGUE

There is no simple answer or a single model for developing organizational framework for metropolitan planning and development. Worldwide, there have been very limited examples of formal multi-

purpose government institutions at metropolitan or regional level (such as, Metro Toronto), but a growing number of varied organizations through collaborations or voluntary associations of local bodies at metropolitan or regional levels either for multi-purpose or for single-purpose governance involving strategic planning, execution and operation of services, especially in North America. Private sector, especially chambers of commerce and utility agencies have their significant roles in the matter (Phares, 2004). While on one hand, the continent has experienced massive metropolitan (if not megapolitan) growth requiring integrated urban management, on the other, longstanding traditions of federal democracy, if not pluralism, and fierce independence of local governments have stood in the way of imposed top down general purpose metropolitan governance. Often, inter-municipal governance has been based on ad hoc incrementalism (Cameron and Karlsen, 1992).

India may take a cue from the experimentations done across democratic urbanized countries before paving a path for a single, rigid, state determined organization across the vast country for metropolitan planning and management. After more than half a century of practice of democracy in the country, the 1992 constitutional amendments have opened the door for development of a pluralistic society and grassroots organizations for urban development. The opportunity may be nipped in the bud through ubiquitous practices of regional organizational frameworks being imposed from the top even though these may have advantages of established institutions. Therefore, let the regional framework emerge from the grassroots with speedier devolution of power and capacities to urban local bodies.

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Endnote

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