Intermediary Politics in a Peri-Urban Village in Mangaluru, India

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Abstract  This article examines an unsettled institutional setting in a peri-urban coastal village of Mangaluru, India. This village is experiencing rapid economic, social and political changes. Urbanity has introduced formal institutions into this area as part of decentralization and state recognition to a dedicated economic development area. This peri-urban area, however, did not exist in an institutional void prior to formal recognition but under customary institutions. The newly introduced formal institutions therefore create an entangled and overlapping peri-urban governance setting. In order to understand the complex relationship between local governance bodies in swiftly urbanizing contexts, I use intermediary lens to view how institutions adapt to changing environments when becoming (formally) urban. The results show that instead of fixating performances according to mandates or laws, the formal and informal institutions both operate through intermediary performances to respond to residents’ requirements and state provision of public services. To negotiate with the state, intermediaries use their skills to cultivate personal relations with local political parties, low-level bureaucrats and caste-base organizations, as well as to record vital information like demography and land relations. Furthermore, the intermediaries need to build reputation based on the perpetuation of successful representation, caste-based identity and political influence within the area. The intermediary lens illustrates a dynamic relationship between institutions influenced by current political issues and always emerging (re)alignments part of peri-urban political and economic transitions.

Keywords: Formal and informal institutions; peri-urban; governance; intermediaries; reputation; skill

1. Introduction

Waves of development and urbanization have in Mangaluru, like in other Indian cities undergoing similarly dramatic changes, influenced a rapid urban expansion with additional pressure on scarce land resources (Bhatta, 2013; Kadfak and Knutsson, 2017). What until recently were rural villages today contain diverse social groups with migrant workers moving into intensified industrial and service sectors, an influx of students attending colleges as well as government and office workers looking for affordable housing. This emerging urbanity brings about major changes to the city’s
periphery with often unclear, and complex legal and institutional arrangements. Peri-urban areas do not exist in an institutional vacuum, but rather under the influence of both customary, and newly introduced, formal institutions and practices to create an entangled peri-urban governance setting.

Peri-urban areas are characterized by Dupont (2007, p. 89) as ‘mixed-spaces, midway between urban centres and rural spaces’, and containing multiple transformations of physical, cultural as well as socio-economic characteristics. Peri-urban areas hold both rural and urban characteristics, as rural areas are commonly relying on agriculture or other primary economic activities, while urban areas contain industrial-based economic activities and better-functioning amenities and services (Shaw, 2005). Peri-urban areas are hence socially and politically dynamic places, where people, activities and institutions are often mixed (Narain and Nischal, 2007). The literature on urban developments in the Global South has however noted that the neat distinction between the regulated, industrialized cities and the informal and resource-dependent rural hinterland often remains unclear with highly inter-mixed activities taking place (Roy, 2009). According to Indian governance literature, the discussions on tensions between formal and informal institutions as part of decentralization processes are either in urban areas (Baud and Nainan, 2008; Wit and Berner, 2009) or in rural areas (Ananth Pur and Moore, 2010). However, peri-urban areas are understudied on issues related to formal and informal institutions in Indian governance literature. Therefore, we know very little about the processes of decentralization in an area which is becoming urban.

Recognizing the importance of economic development in peri-urban areas, governments often attempt to rescale government to local levels through decentralization (Chattopadhyay, 2015, p. 23). Formal institutions are introduced as top-down intrusions by the state in the name of deepening democracy. When this happen there is a risk of a mismatch with existing localized governance structures and practices. This leads to potential clashes in governance practices between institutions in peri-urban areas.

This article focuses on the tensions and dynamics in how urbanizing settings are governed. I discuss these dynamics in the case of the Corporator and Kuppam Mahajana Sabha (KMS) in Kuppam,1 a village located on an outskirt of Mangaluru in southern India. Here, the previously neglected and largely abandoned village is experiencing rapid changes from several development projects, including an extension of the fishing harbour, an international golf course, a deep-sea ship making factory, a coastguard authority office and several tourism projects. These urban economic ‘spillovers’ propose to reshape the Kuppam village socially and economically, turning it into an economic expansion area. Therefore, the idea of Kuppam being a ‘natural village’, where historical and cultural backgrounds are shared among local people (Ananth

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1 I have changed the name and location of the village to preserve the confidentiality of the participants.
Pur and Moore 2010, p. 607), is challenged by the increase in economic activities and influx of new residents from the outside.

Enabling these urban projects is the decision of the city council, Mangaluru City Corporation, to include the village and nearby area into a formal part of the city in 1995. As a consequence, the village is represented in the City Corporation by an elected ward member, the so-called Corporator. The inflow of urban professionals, students and migrant workers, and the increasing economic interests and development plans in the area relates to the inclusion into wider urban governance but also improved infrastructural connectivity and an overall growing urban economy. The urban local body of Corporator has been introduced to area under the responsibilities of ‘economic development and social justice and for implementation of development schemes as may be required to enable them to function as institutions of self-government’ (The Constitution (74th) Amendment Act, 1992, (g)).

However, alongside the Corporator, there are several customary institutions in the village formed by dominant castes known as sabhas since settlement in the late 1800s. These castes have a joint village-level forum the Kuppam Mahajana Sabha (KMS) or Great People Assembly. Today, the KMS is the dominant institution in the village together with the elected Corporator. These two institutions are the main ways for local residents to connect with various branches of the local state. In order to understand the complex relationship between local governance bodies in swiftly urbanizing contexts, I draw on a perspective of intermediary to show how institutions adapt to changing environments when becoming (formally) urban. As Olivier de Sardan (2005, p. 177) suggests that intermediary is a situation characterized by ‘multifocality’ in the local political arena it is rarely the case that there is only one predominant power, but a co-existence of multiple centres of power. An intermediary becomes known, according to Olivier de Sardan, as a social actor who is required to provide services of mediation to connect multiple actors for mutual benefits. An intermediary depends on being perceived as trustworthy and with good reputation. Moreover, intermediaries require having extensive knowledge of the local context and with skills to interpret technical planning language and development ideology. An intermediary cannot singularly focus on personal, immediate material interests, but needs to continuously reinforce his/her reputation in local politics.

My argument is therefore that through an intermediary lens we can see fluid politics exhibited through formal (the Corporator) and informal (the KMS) institutions in Kuppam lubricate the often inaccessible and complicated state machinery via everyday politics in India. Moreover, the fluid politics of intermediaries fundamentally constitute

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2 The Corporator is also known as Councillor/Councilor in other cities in India. Scholars often use the general term Councillor when referring to an elected representative at ward level, but often show in their empirical material that residents prefer Corporator (Berenschot, 2010, p. 895; Ranganathan, 2014, p. 89). I use the term Corporator to match with local practice.

3 Retrieved from http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/amend/amend74.htm on 17 January 2017.
state-citizen relations in the peri-urban area. Reputation and skill, as discussed in the Indian governance literature, are the main characteristics of the intermediary. In this article, the intermediary becomes the analytical lens to make visible how intermediaries function in the everyday politics of Kuppam. This lens helps us see the irrelevance of formal and informal categorizations and mandates that follow. Instead, I start to see how the Corporator and the KMS transform according to the claims and demands which are made on them by the state and local residents.

This article draws on empirical data from eight months of ethnographic fieldwork between 2013 and 2015 (with a short visit in December 2016), together with 51 semi-structured interviews with government officers, NGO representatives, academic scholars and local residents, as well as a household survey (155 out of 982 household were randomly selected). This article starts by identifying conceptual entry point to intermediaries in peri-urban India. I then introduce details about Kuppam in Section 3. I divide the analysis section (Section 4) into three sub-sections to explicitly analyse how each intermediary operates and how their internal relationships unfold, before providing concluding remarks in the final section.

2. Intermediaries in peri-urban India

The resource intensive and urban-centric form of economic growth which has been pursued in India has spread from city cores to peripheries and can be experienced via the physical accumulation of land in peri-urban areas (Narain, 2009). This is not merely a transition from an economy relying on natural resources to one of trade and manufacturing, but due to the simultaneous existence of all of these activities in overlapping spaces and with unclear and always reshaping governance mechanisms under formal as well as informal jurisdictions. As such, peri-urban areas constitute growing, mixed economic categories which are highly challenging to govern.

The governance challenge is also related to resource allocation. This is since ‘[c]ity governments in urban agglomerations have to deal with administrative boundaries that do not recognize where and the extent to which urbanization takes place’ (Baud and de Wit, 2009, p. 8). This causes the introduction of formal institutions to safeguard and regulate valuable economic activities and forms of land use. However, the way in which formal institutions in peri-urban areas safeguard land and economic activities is to create ambiguity and informality in how the state plans, or intentionally unplans areas (Roy, 2009), in order to govern peri-urban land. Therefore, governments often uses the ambiguous legal status of land as a governing strategy (Kadfak and Oskarsson, 2017) to open up for preferred land uses, primarily favouring urban economic elites, in real estate or industrial development, rather than tenure for poor people.

The peri-urban area is institutionally complex since some administrative activities may fall outside of the core urban areas of both rural and urban governance (Narain and Nischal, 2007, p. 262). Transitioning peri-urban areas lack institutional capacities and governance structures to respond to these rapid changes in a positive way (Shaw,
At the same time, existing institutions of customary caste- and religious-based entities are embedded in local governance and have to react to new institutional settings (Ananth Pur, 2007). The result of these governance challenges is to open up spaces for the agency of political actors who make use of, and even create further, ambiguous and complex institutions which enable them to act.

In spite of the many attempts to formalize institutions since the colonial period, overlapping institutional dynamics remain a distinct feature (Lindquist, 2015, p. 2). Historically, South Asia experienced the penetration of localities by formal institutions in agrarian societies during the colonial times but continued to rely on traditional headmen to collect land taxes and manage land records (Ananth Pur and Moore, 2010, p. 606). Since independence, Indian governments have attempted to reduce the influence of these traditional authorities by promoting democracy and decentralization through secularism, formalization and legalization (Chattopadhyay, 2015). However, in many parts of the country the reform process remains half-finished or become intermixed as customary authorities became elected in ostensibly democratic politics.

The modern Indian state has then been introduced to rural and urban areas (Ananth Pur and Moore, 2010) via Gram Panchayat (Village Councils) for the former and municipal Corporator/Ward committees for the latter. Via the 74th amendment of the Constitution in 1992 responsibilities were transferred to urban bodies to provide local infrastructure and services, and to collect a number of local taxes. A fundamental lack of resources, e.g. manpower and funding, and rapid urban growth have been some of the reasons why the Indian state at local, state and national levels has not been able to provide services to at all match aspirations (Gupta, 1995).

Taking the enormous shortages in service provision and ambiguity of state’s plans into consideration, citizens have tried to hold the state accountable, by for instance going to court, talking to media, performing collective action via NGOs, social movements or labours unions, and sending petitions to various government authorities among other approaches (Harriss, 2007). In addition to all these options, a common practical approach to solve everyday challenges has been to rely on intermediaries. This is a well-ingrained approach with deep historical roots, which has come to be relied upon in many different settings from politics to business and religion, or within wider society in both urban and rural settings. Intermediaries work on a wide range of issues, for example as small-town political fixer (Manor, 2000), land/housing intermediaries in middle-sized cities (Cook, 2015), water intermediaries in metropolitan (Ranganathan, 2014), or patrons/informal leaders in urban slum areas (Jha et al., 2007; Wit and Berner, 2009). The literature has so far catered to understand the divided formal and informal categorization. But with the perspective of intermediaries, one can see these categories become fluid, depending on an at times overlapping and competitive division of labour among intermediaries but at other times complementarity and even cooperation.

Recent development studies literature suggests viewing intermediaries as part of a broader context. It encourages studying intermediaries beyond a fixed
conceptualization of scales, but to understand scales as emerging from ethnographic accounts, or to study ‘things in motion [rather] than put an issue to rest’ (Lindquist, 2015, p. 11). This is to view the scales beyond the fixed binary of either formal or informal institutions and focus on the malleability that allow institutions to transform to always changing circumstances part of processes of becoming urban. Besides, intermediary is not only related to the performance of individuals but also to associations (Olivier de Sardan, 2005). Examples from South Asia and Africa show how traditional village chiefs and leaders continue to mediate between the state and citizens (Bierschenk et al., 2002; Kruks-Wisner, 2011) in post-colonial contexts. Traditional mediators draw on long-established links and can push government agencies, as well as Inter- and Non-Government Organizations, to bypass or workaround the locally elected/formal institutions (Olivier de Sardan, 2005; Ribot, 2007). Or as Baviskar (2004, p. 37) puts it, ‘[...] decisions are usually made by a handful of village leaders who have cultivated links with the government officials that others cannot easily replicate’. As the provision of public services remains lacking, intermediaries have been widely adopted by formal institutions, e.g. allowing intermediaries to intervene and in turn gain political authority (Berenschot, 2010). Intermediaries in formal politics soften the functions and mandates that otherwise distinguish formal/informal boundaries. Understanding institutional dynamics through intermediaries can shed light on exclusionary governance arrangements in peri-urban communities. Reputation and skill are the two characteristics of the intermediary emerging from this extensive literature review.

First, the intermediary requires having a certain reputation to carry out the work. As suggested in Lewis and Moss 2006 (p. 16) ‘[b]rokers deal in people and information not only for profit in the narrow sense of immediate reward, but also more broadly in the maintenance of coherent representations of their own social identities’. The reputation of the intermediary frequently reinforces identity politics in India (Chhatre, 2008; Krishna, 2007). Often, intermediaries represent those who share the same social backgrounds of caste, class and religion (Berenschot, 2010, p. 890; Mosse and Lewis, 2006). For example, slum dwellers are known to seek access to government services and development programmes through customary leaders drawing on existing rural, caste-based networks also in a new urban context (Jha et al., 2007). Ananth Pur and Moore (2010) explain the continued role of caste leaders in Karnataka as depending on: (1) caste leaders being trusted because they do not have a strong hold over collective resources or funding in comparison to cases in African countries, (2) caste leaders are not totalitarian giving local residents the choice to always find alternative authorities in the case of conflict or failure to secure a certain solution and (3) caste leaders to an extent transcend the dominant caste orientation to represent the village collectively. Hence, caste-leaders’ role on intermediary works differ to the patron in Africa due to a reduced ownership of resources (Lindquist, 2015, p. 1). However, these caste-leaders become influential by having other resources such as money, family or personal networks (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007). Similarly, Kruks-Wisner’s (2011) study in
two coastal villages in Tamil Nadu shows a caste Panchayat becoming an intermediary for Hindu males during the mediation of international aid after the 2004 Tsunami. This, however, caused women and minority groups in the village to turn to formal institution (Gram Panchayat) for help.

Second, an intermediary additionally requires *skills* and knowledge to interpret different cultural and sociotechnical categories in order to ‘strengthen or destabilize existing structures’ (Cook, 2015, p. 297). Skills relate to mediation and negotiation of local resident demands on the one hand, and official/formal/state requirements on the other. To connect local citizens, an intermediary often needs a ‘sophisticated understanding’ of local conditions and grassroots problems, as well as familiarity with how local affairs are managed through informal mechanisms and resources (Manor, 2000, p. 819). Education and practical knowledge of the outside world, or at least outside of the village, are essential for an intermediary (Krishna, 2007, pp. 143–144).

Often the intermediary is actively networking with lower-level bureaucrats and local politicians on a daily basis, or becomes affiliated with a political party to get things done or at least push the local agenda in the right direction (Berenschot, 2010; Cook, 2015; Krishna, 2007; Wit and Berner, 2009). Besides, the intermediary should have skill to interpret the cultural importance of caste identity and the politics of subalternity in order to gain trust and act on behalf of local residents. In Berenschot’s (2010, pp. 885–887) study the Corporator Pravin together with his temporary ‘roadside officer’ show significant support to the Hindu-dominated political party supporters when negotiating for a discount on a hospital bill. This is done to strengthen political gains in the next election.

Equipped within a solid understanding of the local context and issues, the intermediary is skilled in making herself/himself (usually himself) visible. By announcing himself as an intermediary, the political fixer in Karnataka state can show symbolically his importance by hanging a towel over his shoulder when moving about in town (Manor, 2000, pp. 816–817). Similarly, Corporator Pravin in Gujarat state uses letter-pads carrying his signature almost like an official form to get a discount from hospitals in Ahmedabad (Berenschot, 2010, p. 891). Visible signs with the intermediary’s name at public parks, on buildings or on public banners, offer material proof of successful service provision and, thereby, also of successful intermediary works. These works, performed through symbolic practices by intermediaries, show the importance of having a significant understanding of local ideology and culture as the way to earn local trust and reputation.

To sum up, to become an intermediary, one needs to accumulate skills and networks, and to be able to translate or interpret uncertain regulations into actionable interventions requested by local citizens (Kruks-Wisner, 2011; Manor, 2000). Intermediaries need to earn trust and reputation from local residents on a continuous basis drawing on political party and identity politics, as well as satisfactory link work. In a fluid system, intermediaries have to react to always ongoing realignments, seek alliances and reconfigure their strategies as they act as the interface between
state and citizens. At the same, they have to carefully strategize to ensure continued relevance in relation to other intermediaries in a certain area (Jha et al., 2007; Manor, 2000).

This section has provided conceptual entry points for understanding intermediaries in peri-urban areas characterized by economic intensification and fluid governance boundaries. It emphasizes the significance of the peri-urban as a mixed governance space and proposes an intermediary lens to make visible the ongoing negotiation between formal and informal institutions. Skills and reputation are the two characteristics that I draw on from the literature review to analyse the performances of BMS and the Corporator in the Kuppam village case study. These characteristics make it possible to further discuss how intermediaries function and make visible the constantly shifting relationships between the two institutions. These are discussed further in Section 4 after I shortly introduce the background context in Section 3.

3. Case study: Kuppam’s tenuous journey towards urbanity

Since the late nineteenth century, Kuppam village has grown slowly from temporary huts into a village with permanent houses and basic facilities including electricity and water supplied by the city. A distance from city centre, the village is relatively isolated and until recently a lack of economic interests have kept the area relatively untouched from urban planners and the government authorities. In 2015, there were approximately 6,000 people with 982 houses registered in Kuppam, consisting of 90 per cent Hindu, 6 per cent Muslim and 4 per cent Christian (household survey). Moreover, the KMS secretary informed me that approximately 1,000 people have moved to the village (interview 20-05-2014). Many of these are seasonal workers and Special Economic Zone employees.

From the late 1800s, the only authority present on this coastal village was the Port Authority of the national government. The local residents had to wait until 1994 to experience some recognition via the Ashraya housing programme, which registered about half of the houses via a temporary licence for 20 years. The temporary land status and unclear plans for the area marks the on-going land rights negotiation between the local residents and the state. Presently, the village is a recognized part of the city but all its land is owned by the state government.

Considered as barren land during early settlement, Kuppam has, in practice, remained governed mainly by customary institutions. This includes Sabhas, The Youth Association, The Women’s Livelihoods Association, temple associations, and the ferry service. All these have close connections to Hindu ceremonies or main livelihood activities. The Kuppam Mahajana Sabha (KMS) has 21 committee members,

4 Ashraya programme is a housing programme that give temporary rights to existing houses as legal structures.
among these two are women. KMS sets up general rules and maintain the welfare of the residents in the village. The rules are often discussed and agreed upon during annual meetings. Urgent issues, e.g. disputes among local residents, in the village are brought up in monthly committee meetings. Moreover, KMS is accountable for organizing activities, e.g. sport events and Hindu festivals and ceremonies.

Mangaluru is a rapidly growing middle-city and known as a university and hospital hub in southern India (Cook et al., 2013). With the growing population and the increasing interest in various forms of development in the area, Kuppam became the most recent urban constituency (ward) in Mangaluru in 1995. A ward was formed with a voting population of approximately 5,000. The Corporator is elected to Municipal Assembly every 5 years. The present Corporator at Kuppam is female, and elected in 2013 from women-reserved quota. The Corporator is according to the 74th amendment mandated to provide various local public services e.g. water, electricity and garbage disposal, as well as to regulate land use, carry out slum improvement programmes and many other forms of poverty alleviation (cited Singh (1996) in Banerjee, 2002, p. 38). The Corporator is supposed to be the main institution connecting local residents to urban government authority.

Recently, seen three major development projects have been proposed in Kuppam and adjoining villages. First, the Kuppam waterfront became the location for an extension of the fishing harbour. Once completed, this harbour will have space for more than one thousand large-scale fishing vessels such as trawlers and purse-seiners. Second, the international 18-hole golf course with clubhouse is planned for the Kuppam ocean front. This project is a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) project between the ‘Karnataka State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation’ and ‘Opus Laguna Golf and Resorts Pvt. Ltd.’. By 2015, 135 acres of beach area was transferred to the company while national coastal land use permission is pending. Third, Kuppam is the location for a coastal protection and management project to strengthen the breakwaters which protect the land against erosion supported by the Asian Development Bank and the Government of India.

Kuppam is additionally only half an hour’s drive away from the core economic development areas of Special Economic Zone, with industrial facilities like the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board, Mangaluru Special Economic Zone, Mangaluru Chemicals and Fertilizers, and Mangaluru Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited. Besides, there is growing tourist attractions along the coastline just a few kilometres north of the village. These changes have brought pressures on land for habitation and economic attention to the area (see also Kadfak and Oskarsson, 2017).

4. Intermediaries at work in Kuppam village

Having discussed the anthropological perspective on intermediaries, the KMS and Corporator become apparent as the main intermediary institutions in the Kuppam local

5 The 74 Amendment’s Women Reservation’s Bill was passed in 1993 to reserve one third of the municipality seats to women, as part of Municipality restructuring.
political arena. I now turn to analyse empirical data using the two main intermediary characteristics of skills and reputation. I address each institution in two separate subsections, to elaborate how the intermediaries functioned in local politics through the performances of the KMS and Corporator. I focus on these two institutions since respondents identified them as having the main influence village politics. Within this section, I also continue to explore dynamic interactions between the two institutions. Understanding these interactions help problematized the division between formal and informal institutions, as both institutions adapt to the social terrain.

4.1. The KMS and its intermediary works

KMS is ruling this place, they are the king so they will help us! (Interview 2-03-2015)

This response came from a local resident when I asked about the lack of land titles during fieldwork. I received many similar answers showing local perceptions toward KMS as a trusted body which represented, and to some extent even ruled, the village. Being referred to as ‘the king’ appeared to reflect an understanding based on the historical legacy of customary ruling practices where KMS for a long time was the only actor mediating between local residents and the government since British Colonial rule. For instance, KMS had negotiated with the Port Authority on land distribution and later helped the Port Authority to collect revenue tax (interview 14-03-2014).

In the light of the intermediary literature, one can see intermediary characteristics through the governance practices of KMS in Kuppam. KMS interprets caste network as beneficial practices of its intermediary works reinforced through customary regulation and caste-based traditions. Existing customary regulations allow only KMS members to vote in elections for key positions. KMS members are ‘Hindu males, who are born and brought up in the village’ according to the secretary of KMS (interview 13-05-2014) thereby excluding the female, non-Hindu population but also village newcomers from participating in the decision-making process. KMS maintains extended caste networks with other fishing villages within the district and continues Hindu traditions such as annual temple festivals.

The historically neglected location, a growing population and economic interests on the village prevent residents from securing tenure. This, in turn, keeps local livelihoods, and even an assured place in the city, insecure and prevents access to some public services. KMS, via its leadership group, has been the main actor negotiating with the government on this issue. The first successful story of intermediary work came in 1994, when KMS was able to interpret the Ashraya housing programme proposed by the state government in a way which allowed it to be implemented in Kuppam. The Ashraya housing programme was introduced to the state early 1990s, to build house for the poor and to give temporary legal permits with conditions to houses that have
been built on government land (interview 12-02-2015)(cf. Benjamin, 2004, p. 180). The KMS placed survey stones, actual stones to demarcate individual housing plots, which gave (most of) Kuppam’s residents a temporary right to live on plots of land for 20 years.

When the Ashraya programme ended in 2014 this coincided with the initial phase of the construction of a golf course affecting most of the sea-facing area of the village. These events were assumed to have caused the City Electricity Cooperation to deny electricity supply to 245 houses in the village. Although by mandate, the Corporator and the City Corporation were the formal institutions with the main responsibility to provide urban services including electricity. However, in this case the denial of electricity was based on a lack of land recognition and known by the KMS since earlier. It especially affected newly built houses on the beach built outside of the original Ashraya programme area. It is with the skill of the KMS president and committee members at the time that allowed KMS to include the local Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA)\(^6\) in negotiation processes.

I followed up the negotiation process over land and observed several meetings that took place at the District Office. Participants included the District Commissioner,\(^7\) the City Corporation commissioner, local politicians including the MLA, and mid-level government officers. In these meetings, the local MLA spoke in favour of the KMS and tried to pressure the District Commissioner to assign government officers to follow up on, for example, electricity, water, and, ultimately, the crucial land issue. During these on-going discussions, the District Commissioner and the local MLA together with a few officers from City Corporation visited the village to investigate land perceived as encroached on the beach side. Even though this issue is yet to be resolved (to date June 2017), further development of the golf course has been slowed down and a few households gained access to electricity using temporary house registration numbers provided by the City Corporation.

Similarly, the KMS became the main actor to negotiate with the Port Authority and the Fisheries Department on behalf of Kuppam residents regarding the new fishing harbour construction. Fishing harbour development was proposed in Kuppam in 2007 when the Port Authority and the Fisheries Department jointly decided to expand fishing facilities to the Kuppam waterfront due to the high demand of seafood in the greater Mangaluru city and in export markets. The fishing harbour development has involved a number of stakeholders including, the Port Authority, the Fisheries Department, large-scale fishing associations, small-scale fishing and fish drying groups. Long negotiations took place for example at the Mahavishnu temple, in the KMS office or at other meeting points (observations throughout fieldwork). The negotiations remained unresolved on my last visit in December 2016. However, the fish drying group successfully received new fishing huts and water facilities through

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\(^6\) MLA is a representative as district constituency of a lower house of the state legislature.

\(^7\) District Commissioner or District Collector is the head of administrative office at district level.
negotiations, while the small-scale fishing group lost their space on land for the post-fishing activities like net mending.

The increasing land pressure across the city makes it difficult for the KMS to make its voice heard in urban land negotiations. Nonetheless, the KMS has cultivated networks with local politicians, e.g. the MLA, to make these negotiations possible. Historically, the most influential KMS leaders have been affiliated with the Congress party and to this day those active in the KMS need to support the Congress. One of KMS leaders stated that:

Outside the village my family supports BJP [the Bharatiya Janata Party]. But while I am here, I need to become a Congress man. I would like to get into politics of this place, and it is important to align myself with the right party. (Interview 19-05-2014)

I often observed that mostly politicians from the Congress party were invited to light the lamp for inaugurations at village festivals. And during the national election campaign in 2014, the KMS president organized a group of local residents to join political rallies for the local Congress candidate for parliament (Interview 14-03-2014). KMS’s identity-based networks of caste organizations are thus complemented by long-running formal political networks in the Congress party. Skilled KMS leaders manoeuvre precarious political negotiations between multiple local and higher-level authorities, while continuously re-interpreting the present strength of the Congress-led political leaders and the possibilities to draw on these, and other supporting networks. Furthermore, KMS as an intermediary carries important information back to the government in exchange. The KMS secretary has notable book-keeping skills with the ability to record demographic information in the village crucial at election time. This includes the precise number of voting cards, housing certificates, welfare cards and other resident details including informal but vital land records that allow KMS to negotiate with different parts of the local government.

Local residents communicate with the state via KMS in their attempts to claim certain rights. Additional examples of this are the attempts to apply for ration card\(^8\) registration and voting card. And since recently the KMS became a registered, local society in 2005, the institution has become eligible to provide income and death certificates\(^9\) for local residents. The pragmatic approach of link work by KMS has inarguably been an important part of connecting local residents and the state before formal institutions were introduced to the village. It has also, in a sense, formalized the KMS itself and made it a part of registered civil society associations in the city in spite of its non-democratic constitution. Through intermediary activity, the KMS

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\(^8\) This card is registered one card per family, given to for purpose of buying subsidized food and fuel and being a database for government to identify family economic status.

\(^9\) The income certificate identifies caste belonging used for government positions and scholarships. The death certificate is required for the proof of death within the village.
continues to keep its reputation and influence over village matters, by standing in between what can be considered formal and informal institutional mandates.

It is through successful intermediary function that KMS maintains its reputation and represent the interests of majority of the residents. The KMS does not only fixate upon customary institutional mandates, but also adapt to new political arenas of emerging urban governance by nursing connections with the Congress party and being present at district-level meetings. The advantage of having a ‘sophisticated understanding’ (Manor, 2000, p. 819) with a long history working on land struggles and a well-kept archive of documents, while simultaneously strengthening its Hindu identity, indicates a multi-pronged strategy of how local politics need to be played out. However, KMS’ attention and benefits are directly mainly toward its supporters, the Hindu residents and mainly the adult men, and to Congress members within the village. The Christian, Muslim and non-Congress supporting members within the village are left out from the core benefits of KMS intermediary work, constituting a intermediary gap which needs to be filled. This is where the elected Corporator enters the stage.

4.2. The Corporator and her intermediary works

In Kuppam, the intermediary role of KMS has been challenged since the introduction of the Corporator in 1995. Also the Corporator has restricted personal influence and available resources and thus operates mainly in ways understood as intermediary in relation to higher-level authorities. The present Corporator of Kuppam was elected in March 2013 representing the BJP party. Prior to elections she was a representative of the Women’s Welfare Association on village activities like helping out with funerals, preparing for temple ceremonies and participating in KMS meetings. Therefore, the Corporator is not a new face in local politics, but has embedded knowledge on how politics function in the village.

Since becoming the Corporator she has carried out her political work strategically. Not quite having her office ‘by the roadside’, like in the Berenschot (2010, pp. 885-887) example, the Corporator has however often been present in public and, therefore, easily accessible for local residents. This included for example instructing labourers to put up and maintain streetlights, planning concrete roads in the village, locating where to place garbage bins for the new solid-waste management programme, and registering people for City Corporator-related government programmes. In this way the Corporator has become an alternative channel for access to state resources and the bureaucracy mainly for marginalized social groups and the non-Hindu minority within the village. During fieldwork I spent a few days following the Corporator and local NGOs visiting widows and elderly people to raise the awareness about their rights. The Corporator was able to personally identify beneficiaries when we made door-to-door visits and register these for monthly pension allowance benefits. Moreover, a few times when I visited the Corporator’s house, I met elderly women sitting on the
balcony waiting to register a pension claim, get help with filling in forms or to be given advice on which authorities to turn to regarding certain problems.

In areas of emerging urbanity like Kuppam, infrastructure development and urban services continue to be discussed and contested among residents. Being the most recent urban constituency of the Mangaluru City Corporation, the Corporator took on the main responsibility, as part of the formal institution, to provide urban services to the local residents. However, the way in which she has operated and negotiated for service provision relied on credible political skills and reputation. For instance, solid waste collection was introduced to Mangaluru in December 2014. Prior to this, due to the long distance from Kuppam to Mangaluru centre, the door-to-door collection service of garbage had not been delivered as promised. The Corporator used her political skills by visiting the City Corporation Commissioner as well as consulting on the issue with Corporators in neighbouring wards to pressure the responsible unit to come and collect the waste on weekly basis (interview 17-03-2015).

It is evidently the Corporator’s strategy to gain political support from social groups that do not have a strong connection to the KMS. For example, Muslim and Christian residents whom I interviewed mentioned that they can easily communicate directly with the Corporator by phone or by personally visiting her house. In contrast, it is rarely the case that especially the Muslim residents contact the president of KMS for help. A few more voices were registered during my fieldwork, such as a Christian housewife who moved to the village after her marriage and had only been in contact with successive Corporators (interview 14-05-2014). This is not in spite of frequent involvement of non-Hindu residents in village discussions at KMS annual meetings but nevertheless indicates a clear preference for the Corporator.

In meetings attended on various occasions at City Corporation it became clear that infrastructure such as playgrounds, concrete roads and streetlights are among the most popular development projects supported by Kuppam’s Corporator and other Corporators in the adjacent city. In the visible outcomes of infrastructure development in the area the Corporator has been able to show her successful resource allocations. A recent example of intermediary work was observed on my last visit to the village in December 2016 when a playground was built from extra budget accumulated by the Corporator. This project was made memorable by a granite sign with the Corporator’s name and the City Corporation by the entrance helping to increase the reputation of the Corporator in local politics.

The Corporator continues to keep close links with her political party to gain support at the City Corporation assembly and to access allocation of external funds. The Corporator regularly visits the BJP party office for a few hours before the monthly City Corporation Assembly meetings to discuss current issues. Apart from fixed budget from the City Corporation, the Corporator also cultivates her budgetary support or service from her party network. The Corporator has her own advisory team of the local BJP committee party members to plan strategies for how to allocate resources
to maximize the benefits from the intermediary works to party supporters, and for the benefit of the party and its leading candidates in the area.

Ethnographic experiences from spending time with the Corporator, and additional interviews with other Corporators in Mangaluru, make it clear how the politics of intermediaries work in the urban governance context of the city. The Corporator requests the City Corporation to carry out particular development tasks or projects. These are filed on formal letterhead with full signature. Following this, the Corporator visits the City Corporation office almost every day in the late afternoon when most of the City Corporation officers and other Corporators are present. Through the right skill and knowledge, she knows when and which departments to visit to pursue issues concerning local residents. The Corporator often walks between her office, shared with other Corporators from different wards, and the City Corporation departments, to create a personal connection with the bureaucrats and build alliances with the other Corporators. The prime time of late afternoon hangout at the City Corporation office is known to be the time when many business deals and projects are settled. This is also the time when Corporators learn intermediary ‘tricks’ from each other.

The Corporator starts to earn respect from local residents based on the successful outcome of her intermediary work. The Corporator tries to put herself in a reachable position from the perspective of all groups in the village since intermediary is exercised through accessibility on a personal level, often with marginalized groups. In this way, the Corporator has become an alternative channel for individuals and groups not well represented by the KMS. Earning success as part of successful intermediary is the key for the Corporator to get re-elect in the next City Corporation election. Her marginalized support groups in the village at the same time indicate limitations in her own influence and ability to get things done.

4.3. *Ambiguous dynamics between two village-level intermediaries*

In the last two sub-sections, it has become clear that both the Corporator and KMS have performed beyond their fixed mandates according to laws and customary practices respectively. The two intermediaries navigate politics at different scales to enhance their chances to successfully deliver services and gain influence as well as to consolidate their positions within the societal fabric. To understand further how Kuppam’s institutional setting unfolds, I turn the analysis to the relationship between the Corporator and KMS.

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10 I visited the City Corporation office several times with NGO friends who had been working with urban development issues over a decade. One NGO friend explained an insight about how new Corporators learn new tricks or procedures, such as how to apply for more funding or make small money from the approval of projects, from the more experienced Corporators.
Through everyday observation, friction seems to be a common relationship between the two intermediaries. The Corporator was absent from most of the KMS committee meetings including joint negotiation meetings between the city authorities and KMS. After meetings, I often asked ‘why didn’t you invite the Corporator to join this meeting?’ Or ‘is the Corporator informed about this meeting?’ One KMS committee member’s reply was that, ‘We do not want to involve politics in our decision-making, so we are not inviting the Corporator to the village-sabha meetings. We want to keep the village-sabha politically neutral’ (Interview KMS committee member 7-04-2014). This statement and similar comments from the KMS came up on different occasions when it supposedly attempted to stay free from politics.

The officially neutral stance marked by KMS was for the customary institution to maintain its reputation using headman legitimacy and avoid admitting the political party affiliation among its leadership members. The KMS navigated its way to exclude the Corporator from its intermediary processes using divisive party politics as an excuse. This is can be interpreted as the Corporator representing a threat, or at least competition, to the KMS’s competence as neutral intermediary in the village. On the other hand, when I asked the same question to Corporator, she responded that ‘it is only men in the KMS. I did not want to invite the KMS because I am the elected representative in this ward. Why should I invite them?’ (Interview Corporator 12-02-2015).

The Corporator, in a similar manner, argued that it was her formal right as an elected representative to connect local residents to the government instead of the KMS. The Corporator’s strategy was to create and guard her political space by claiming the mandate indicated by the formality of her position. The Corporator in this way attempted to compete with the existing political mandate of KMS established since the settlement of the village. The Corporator marked her frustration with me one day in relations to the exclusion from local negotiations.

On one of many occasions that I was not invited to join government meetings, the KMS president told the government officers that [the] former Corporator [from the Congress party] was still a Corporator of this ward. It was party politics. I was very unhappy about that and even raised this issue in a meeting once. (Interview with Corporator 12-02-2015)

I observed and participated in many community events where the ambiguous and dynamic relationship between intermediary functions of the two institutions was expressed through their communication and in their actions. Among many village events, I observed a three-day village cleaning campaign in December 2014, which was initiated by the Corporator, KMS and the youth association. The Corporator and KMS, led by its secretary,11 worked in complementarity to request the City Corporation

11 Ambiguity came down to individual level of collaboration. In my observations the Corporator and the president of the KMS were hardly shared stage or sat in the same meeting room.
to fund the waste collection service. The cleaning days came with participation of City Corporation officers, the District Commissioner, local politicians, the KMS president and the Corporator. Both intermediaries tried to claim success by competing to get into informal group discussions with politicians and officers throughout the event. Therefore, what seemed to be a collaborative dynamic between Corporator and KMS, in the end was a competition when each intermediary tried to earn reputation by making themselves visible for top city leaders.

This occasionally complementary relationship between the Corporator and KMS turned to outright friction during election periods. A few months before the national election took place in 2014, the Corporator and the KMS president took part in political campaigns for the two main parties in the state, the BJP and Congress respectively. This competition was intense within the village. I observed meetings from both parties led by the Corporator or the KMS president and committee members in various public spaces in the village. During this period leading up to election day many sport events and entertainment programmes were organized by political parties to gain popularity and support. According to the president of KMS, 82 per cent of Kuppam’s eligible voters went to vote in 2014 national election (Interview 22-04-2014). This was a much higher turnout in comparison to state level. The BJP won the MP seat for the district to give rise to even higher tension within local politics where the Congress party held a majority of seats in the Municipal Assembly and held the local MLA seat for the part of the city which included the Kuppam village.

The friction between the Corporator and KMS was clearly derived from the oppositional political party stand required to enhance their influence as intermediaries. However, sharing the same political space within the village, both intermediaries required keeping their relationship in a complementarity mode. The Corporator and KMS have been collaborating on activities that required a combination of their skills and knowledge. For example, the annual revenue tax collection is considered a formal mandate of the Corporator. However, the lack of bookkeeping means that the Corporator has involved KMS in the activity. Here the KMS secretary provides a preliminary record, offers a temporary office for government officers and announces the exercise via village speakers. Another example is how, occasionally, the Corporator would provide funds from her annual budget to the village development plan which is guided by KMS. Secretary of KMS once informed me that KMS was planning to build parking space and a small road toward community ferry and request for partial budget support from the Corporator (Interview 13-05-2014).

However, the Corporator could work with the KMS secretary. This is because the KMS secretary sometimes was not part of the mediating process led by KMS president. I asked the secretary of his absence in one of the meetings I observed at District Office and he mentioned he was not informed about it. The MLA would call the KMS president directly, and only KMS committee members associated with the Congress party would join (interview 14-03-2015).
By applying the lens of intermediary politics, the evidently relationships between the Corporator and KMS comes into focus as ambiguous and dynamics. My material shows that neither institution holds fixed positions but rather respond to shifting political opportunities and networks that come up from time to time. The ways the two institutions navigate their intermediary roles has led to both cooperation and friction as discussed above. It is this fluid political field of intermediaries that offers local residents choices and different channels of mediation in order to request services from the government.

Both the Corporator and KMS are in thus in somewhat fragile positions. They have to try to consolidate their positions with the local residents to show that they can deliver services as promised, and maintain their political support from local politicians and low-level officers to maintain, or preferably even improve, their intermediary capacity. The fragile positions are ever more challenged in the time of economic transition in the village. There is increasing speculation regarding the proposed golf course area and tourism projects appear to risk spreading sprawling from the northern part while the new harbour already occupies half of the village riverfront, and additional large-scale fishing activities are about to be introduced (observation 5-12-2016). These economic activities may pose threats or benefit to local residents. The intermediaries, therefore, need to transgress the formal/informal boundary and fluidly move in the direction that benefits their political positions, while ensuring that core constituencies of local residents largely benefit from their intermediary works.

5. Conclusion

This article has analysed intermediaries in an unsettled governance setting in a peri-urban, swiftly transforming village with overlapping authorities. The increasing economic value of the land of Kuppam and its surroundings brings formally recognized institutions into what is considered to be Mangaluru’s next intensified area for economic activities. Yet, this area already has a customary institution which has tried to continue its strong political influence. Due to economic tensions and shifting institutional functions and boundaries within the peri-urban area, both institutions have been forced to respond to the various demands made on them by carrying out mediating works between citizens and the government. The intermediary lens helps shine a light on the relationship between formal and informal institutions as well as the interactions between the local residents and these institutions at a time of transition.

Two concluding remarks emerge from the Kuppam case study. First, the Kuppam example aligns with Lindquist (2015) argument on how the intermediary lens helps making it possible to view institutions beyond the formal and informal binary instead focusing on the malleability of institutions. The intermediary as an analytical lens helps us understand the fluid dynamics between formal and informal institutions in an unsettled institutional setting like Kuppam. Instead of fixating the performances of institutions as stated by mandates or laws, institutions operate according to current
political issues and (re)alignments that emerge during political and economical transitions. As the empirical details presented show, the KMS did not only restrict its duty only to customary or Hindu caste-related activities. Instead, the organization has been involved in, and negotiated on, broader issues beyond their customary mandate. And the same observation holds for the Corporator. By mandate, the Corporator should ensure that various local public services are provided and regulate land use in the area. However, the Corporator has attempted to push for increased political spaces in the political sphere of Kuppam by promising and offering particularly excluded non-male and non-Hindu residents added support beyond her official mandate. It is important to note that the intermediary lens helps us see performances not only by individuals but also, in the case KMS, by associations, as discussed in Olivier de Sardan (2005).

Moreover, rather than reducing their relationships solely to competition or complementarity, KMS and the Corporator have flexible relationships. This is because both institutions need to constantly react, form new alliances and reconfigure new link works to match local requirements with state policies and implementations under conditions of great uncertainty. Within this article, skills and reputation become the two main key characteristics that help identify and comprehend how and why the Corporator and KMS perform their intermediary works during political transition period. The findings show that both the Corporator and KMS carry reputation to do link work. In this study, reputation is the core and also the consequence of why certain institutions act as intermediaries. The intent to do link work does not depend solely on immediate beneficial returns for ‘linked’ residents but is based on the perpetuation of social representation, reputation and political influence within the area. This is reflected by the continuity of KMS’s work in an age of democratic decentralization India. Furthermore, the Corporator draws on the formal institutional recognition and political party association to be a reachable person for marginalized groups in support of her elected role and as a means to build additional reputation. Moreover, the Corporator also supports the aligned political party followers through intermediary works, in hope of good outcomes in the next election.

Based on the historical establishment in the village and a strong political affiliation, KMS has the skill to connect with lower-bureaucrats and interpret government projects. KMS is embedded within the village with deep knowledge of the local context including previous struggles, such as the struggle for land rights. The Corporator, in comparison, has fewer established connections with mid-level politicians and bureaucrats. She has, however, slowly gained political momentum by being easily accessible to all social groups and attempting to solve concern issues for local residents regarding the works of Municipality. She also earns skill from interacting routinely with more experienced Corporators at the City Corporation.

Second, the example from Kuppam contributes to the lack of studies on formal and informal institutions and decentralization processes in peri-urban India. Learning from the Kuppam case, a perspective on intermediaries becomes a very useful lens to view dynamics between institutions that emerge during the period of becoming urban in
post-colonial India. Kuppam has attracted a range of development projects over the past decade due to its connection to the ocean. Growing economic activities attract investors and new residents alike. At the same time, urbanization processes have also forced local residents to respond to economic pressures on land and livelihoods. In response, local institutions need to continuously adapt to these transitions to safeguard the interests of Kuppam residents.

Due to the fact that Kuppam is embedded in a transitioning peri-urban space where legal arrangements are up for interpretation, and swiftly changing economic and political conditions act as potential threats but also as opportunities, KMS and the Corporator need to perform their respective roles with great fluidity. As a result, both the KMS and the Corporator have been actively responding to threats and opportunities through broader networks of exclusionary governance arrangements, particularly the party politics, in the urban political sphere of Mangaluru. Learning from Kuppam, identity-based caste politics are no longer considered as the only applicable network cultivated by local intermediaries. Caste politics are instead obscured and facing interventions by political parties. Party affiliation has become a major cross-cutting factor since many hold a strong patronage relationship to the intermediary of the same political party they are associated with. At the same time it is clear that political parties to an extent continue to rely on caste calculations for votes, as is apparent in for example the strength of the BJP party at both Karnataka state and national levels. Seen from these examples, existing institutions mediate between state functions and local residents, though in significantly different ways and drawing on different forms of support. I here see the institutional complexity of peri-urban spaces as a result of a set of intermediary performances.

To conclude, this study contributes empirically to the Indian governance literature in the governance space between rural and urban areas. The mediating practices seen in Kuppam are especially noticeable as part of changing governance mechanisms in decentralizing and swiftly urbanizing India. Existing institutions mediate between state functions and local residents, though in significantly different ways, and drawing on different forms of support. In such an uncertain environment local citizens need to actively draw on support and communication channels through intermediaries, to access basic public services but also to keep up the required political pressure needed to safeguard against land and livelihood pressures from the expanding city.

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