

The struggle for urban livelihoods and the quest for a functional city -reconciling informal and statutory planning institutions in Dhaka, Bangladesh



German Research Foundation

University of Dortmund

Introduction

The German Research Foundation (DFG) launched a priority international research programme under the name “Megacities – Megachallenges. Informal Dynamics of Global Change”. This programme aims at the systematic investigation of informal urban processes in megacities and the effect of global change upon the reorganization of spatial, social and institutional relations.

Under the impact of globalisation Bangladesh is rapidly urbanising. By 2020 almost half of the population of Bangladesh will live in urban areas. The metropolitan area of Dhaka will come under intensive pressure to provide land for additional housing considering the restrictions set by flood hazards. The shrinking supply of land suitable for urban development will further increase building densities in informal inner city settlements where the poor are seeking access to urban livelihoods.

Regarding this situation, the metropolitan area of Dhaka, Bangladesh, was selected in order to investigate the informal processes shaping its urban dynamic.

The Megacity- Project Dhaka

The Department of Urban and Regional Planning (SRP) of the Faculty of Spatial planning at the University of Dortmund has started a research project in December 2006 in Dhaka by looking at the struggle for urban livelihoods and the quest for a functional city in informal settlements.

The research starts under the assumption that in the pursuance of livelihoods, the urban poor run the risk to sacrifice the functionality of the city by blocking vehicular access, encroaching upon land reserved for public infrastructure, threatening public health and settling on flood-prone land. The statutory planning system is, however, ill equipped to establish an appropriate balance between the vital interests of individual households and enterprises on the one hand and public welfare on the other.

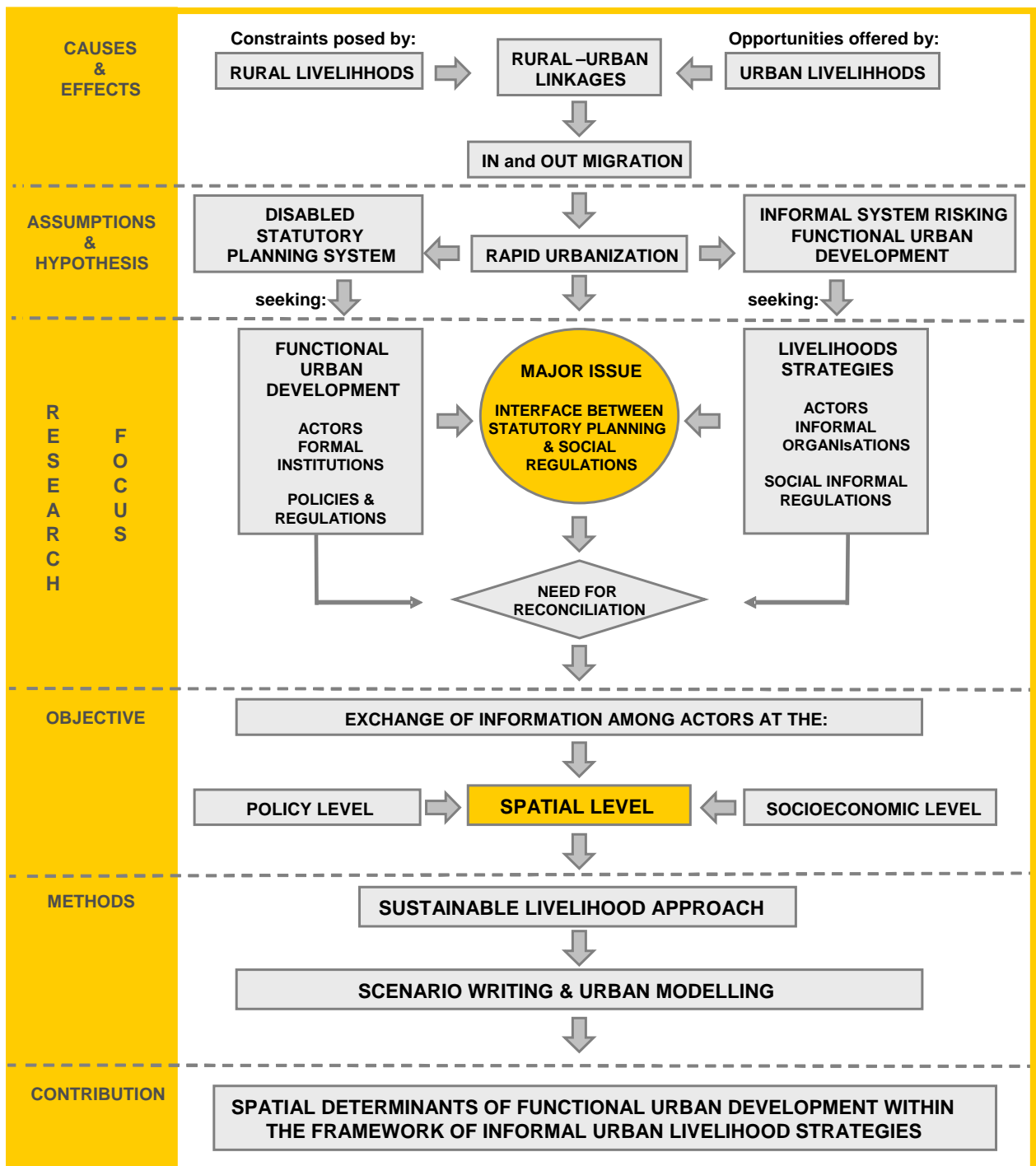
The project is based on the proposition that the interface between statutory planning and ‘social regulation’ at the grass-roots has to be developed in order to achieve more sustainable patterns of urban growth. The exchange of strategic information between the different levels of urban planning governance constitutes, therefore, the central component of the research design. Information on future states of the city derived from urban growth modelling and communicated in scenarios will be shared with both informal institutions of ‘social regulation’ and the statutory planning system in participatory procedures in order to test the usefulness of planning information for pro-poor and sustainable urban growth regulation.

Objective of the research

Following the definition of advocacy as the deliberate process of influencing those who make policy decisions, the research project main objective is to activate, nurture and support the exchange of information between urban planning institutions and informal organisations by:

- using the livelihood framework and its translation into space as the analytical base
- creating the necessary awareness of all stakeholders through spatial modelling of future scenarios
- providing recommendation on necessary policy reforms and planning strategies through guided planning

The Framework of the Research Project



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