



LOCAL DEMOCRACY, PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT: SOME PERSPECTIVES FROM THE KARACHI METROPOLITAN REGION

By

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Abstract

In developing countries, urban planning and management has been administered through various institutional approaches. Centralized city government; location wise or functionally fragmented administration, elected municipalities with development authorities, combination of formal and informal institutions and geographically segregated jurisdictions are some of the alternatives that have been tried in different contexts. Karachi has experienced an uneven institutional transformation at the local government level during her post-independence history. As a consequence of experimentations and subsequent outcomes, many changes have evolved in the domains of urban planning and management of the city. This paper documents the changes and analyses the outcomes at respective stages to identify the impacts on the planning and management process till the present times. On the basis of the study, the paper also presents normative recommendations.

Key words: Local democracy, planning, management, Karachi

Urban Politics, Democracy, Governance and Participation

1. Information and Background

After the end of British colonial rule in 1947, Pakistan and India emerged as two major states in South Asia. Despite their large scale of territories and population sizes, each of them was pre-dominantly rural in demographic respect. The drastic political and administrative changes that emerged as a consequence of partition of Indo Pakistan Sub continent caused numerous transformations in the settlement pattern. A very large social dislocation from original places of habitation towards newly carved out states was a visible outcome. The port cities in India and Pakistan were the key recipients of refugees in a very large proportion. The administrative machinery of these cities was soon overwhelmed by almost the overnight increase in population. This transformation caused enormous problems in managing the cities.

The British had left behind a relatively stable mechanism of city administration. For management of towns and cities, municipalities of relevant legal and administrative composition were constituted. In order to deal with extraordinary issues in urban development and management, an exclusive institution with the nomenclature of

Improvement Trust was formulated. Thus Bombay (now Mumbai) City Improvement Trust was founded in 1898 after two years of a deadly plague epidemic. Delhi Improvement Trust was created in 1937, Calcutta (now Kolkata) Improvement Trust was founded in 1912 while Madras (now Chennai) Improvement Trust was constituted in 1945. The objectives behind each of these institutions was to deal with pressing problems of sanitation, road and street development, housing management and other related subjects. It may be noted that all of these cities had a reasonable size and complexity which required the concerted input of an additional institutional and technocratic arm. In contrast, Karachi was a small town of 435,000 inhabitants when Pakistan came into being in 1947 (KMC, 2012).

Before partition, Karachi was a well managed city comprising Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians, peoples. However the influx of refugees from India changed the composition, population status and urban profile (see Figures 1 – 5). The city rose to the size of 1,050,000 people in 1951. Due to inadequate provision of housing and other amenities, the refugees occupied significant part of the hinterland territories and squatted haphazardly all around the developed areas. While the city had a municipal corporation, it was unable to deal with the grave issues that emerged as a consequence of high in-migration. Learning from the experiences elsewhere in Indian cities, the central government of that time constituted Karachi Improvement Trust (KIT) to deal with planning, development and management issues in the city. Karachi continued to experience a high growth rate ever since and posed new challenges to the various forms and formats of administration.

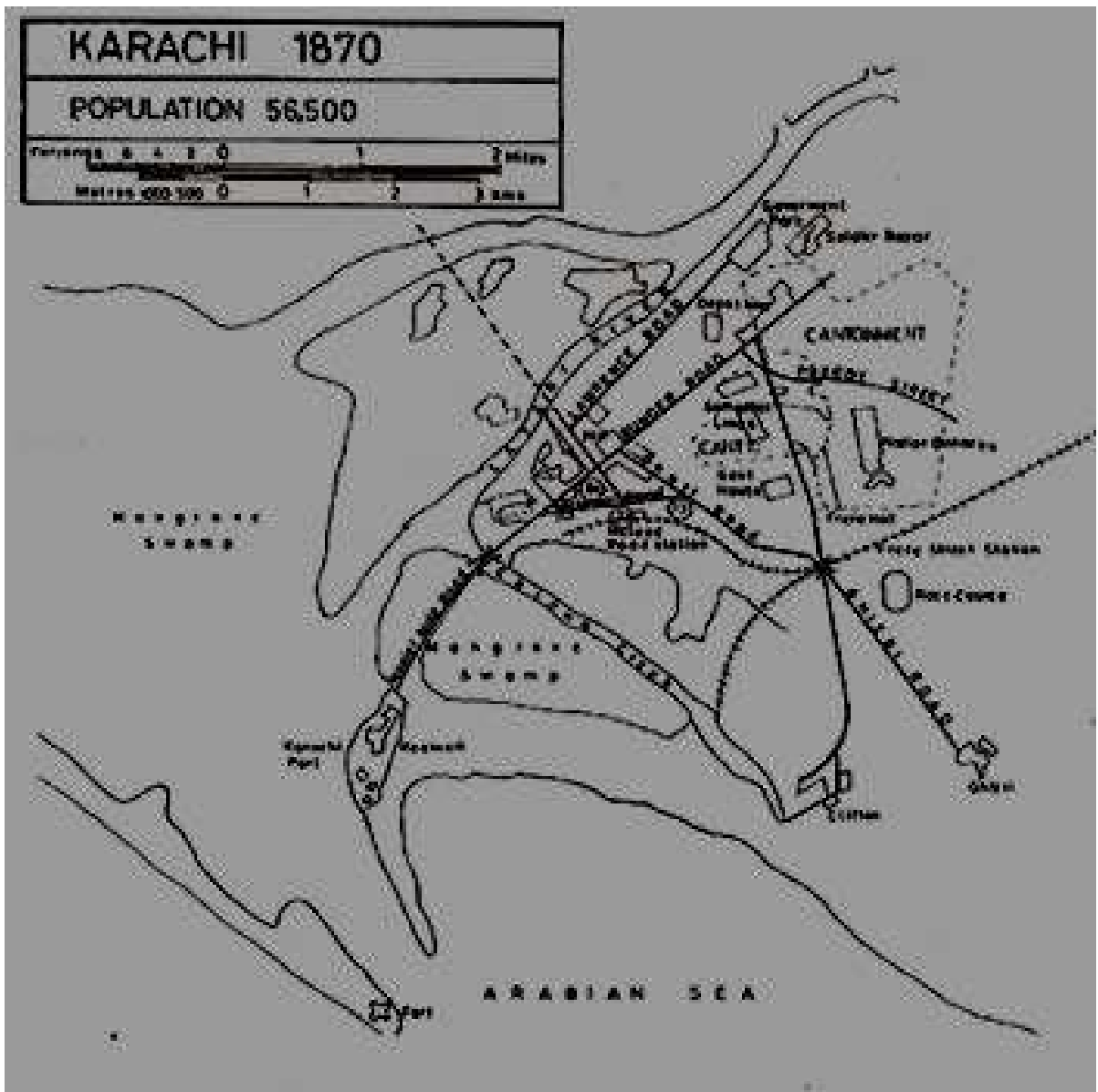


Figure 01: Karachi in 1870
 Source: KDA (1974).

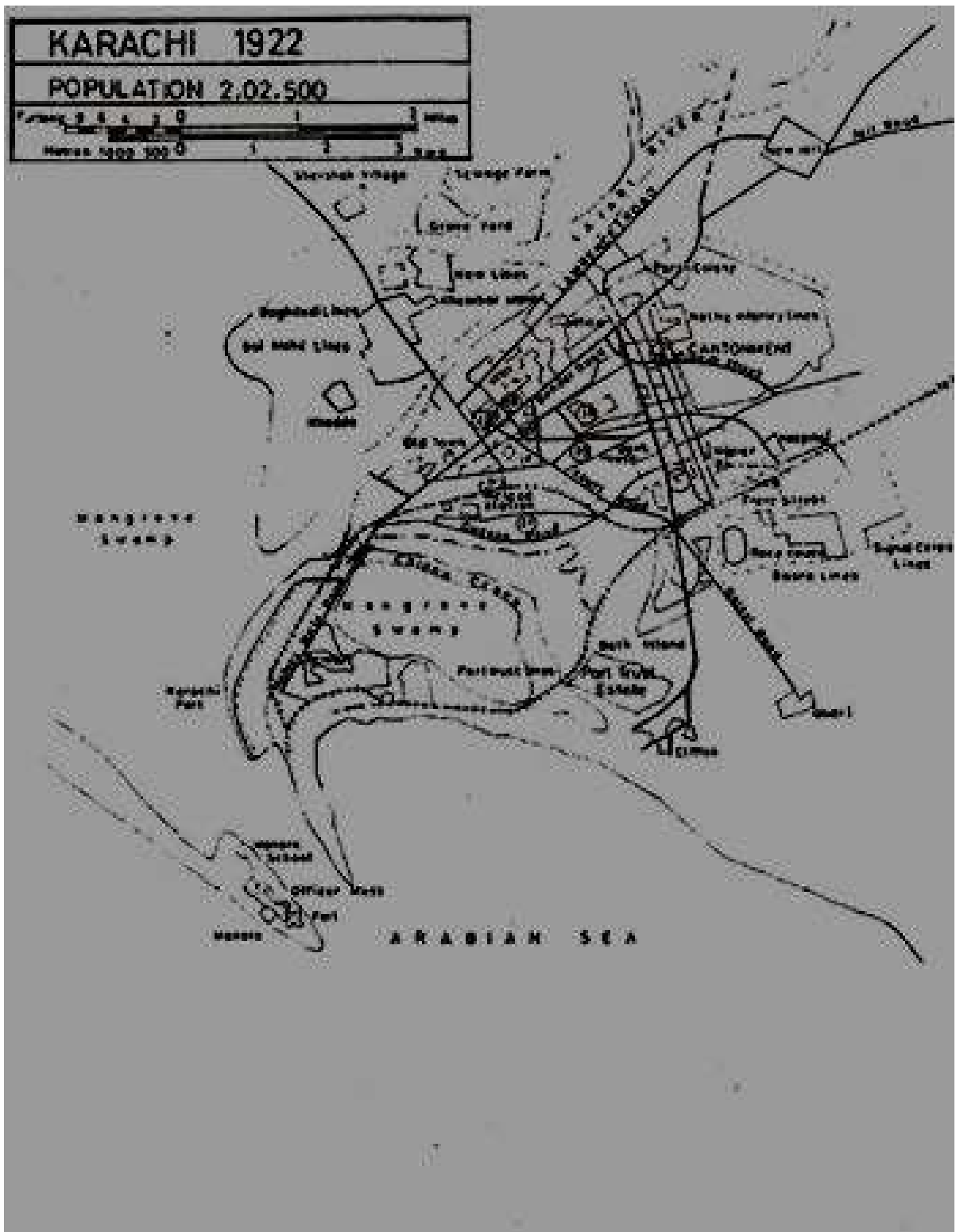


Figure 03: Karachi in 1922
 Source: KDA (1974).

3. Local Democracy, Planning and Management in Karachi: A Review

3.1 Local Democracy

It is important to note that for most of the time period during post independence times, the city has been governed by a combination of technocratic – bureaucratic nexus with very short lived phases of local democracy.

As observed in most of the young post colonial nation states that acquired independence in the twentieth century, Pakistani administration followed a centralist tradition of decision making and governance. Important decisions were taken by the head of the state and implemented by an efficient framework of bureaucracy. Thus key matters related to city planning and development was also settled by the federal government. An example of this fact is the creation of Karachi Development Authority in 1957 through a Presidential Order. The same order stayed valid as a law for the next half a century. The local government institutions, mainly the municipal corporation, were perceived as an urban management agency. It was assigned to deal with rudimentary matters such as maintenance of streets, retail water supply, sanitation, monitoring of public open spaces, maintenance of hygienic conditions in market places, management of abattoirs / slaughter houses and dairy farms, quality control of food and beverage items, preventive sprays on stagnant pools of water etc. as the country soon plunged into a political turmoil leading to military rule in 1950s, the necessary awareness to address policy making for local matters and connected avenues could not be explored. When the local elections were held by military regimes, the councilors and mayors gradually developed political maturity to deal with the pressing issues of the city and beyond. Many of these councilors became politicians of substantial acumen and status and led the various affairs of the country.

It is worth mentioning to note that while the decision making and implementation mechanism was largely centralized during 1950s and 60s, the visible sincerity of purpose of the bureaucracy and technical competence of senior officers in the municipality became the reason for better management and governance of the city. Some matters, which evolved to become grave issues in the future, included the rise in squatter settlements, pressure on water supply and sanitation, exponentially high population growth rate due to in migration, uncontrolled urban sprawl and slow but steady commodification of urban land.

The absence of a powerful and capable metropolitan government during the later part of the institutional history caused many grave consequences. Small and medium scale land management agencies multiplied. Such developments stretched city infrastructure in multiple directions and generated their own dynamics that gravely impacted respective neighbourhoods and the surrounding territories. A concise retrospect of the evolution and status of local democracy in Karachi during the post independence period is illustrated in Figure 06.

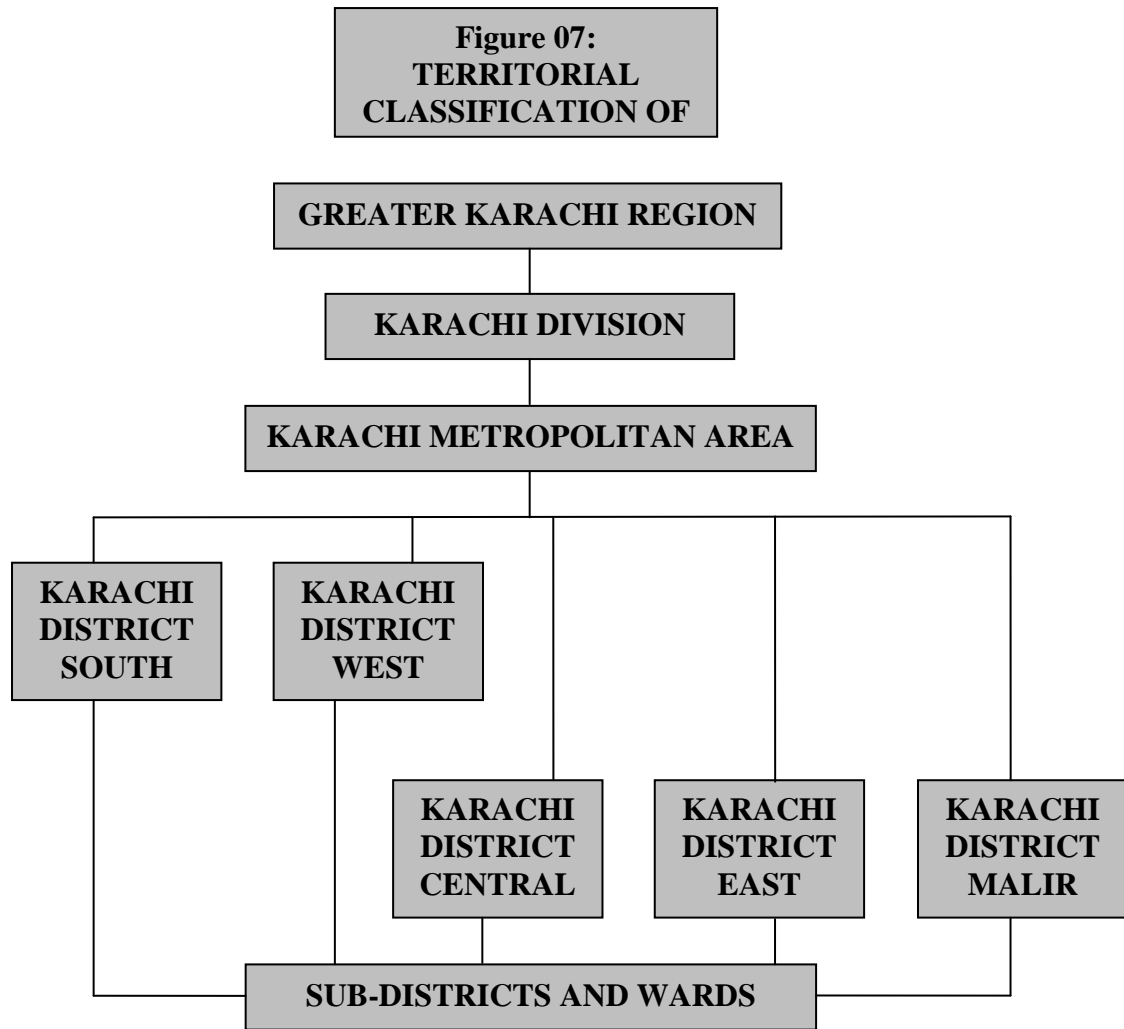
Figure 06: EVOLUTION AND STATUS OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY IN KARACHI SINCE 1947

PHASE	STATUS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT	REMARKS
Initial developments (1947 – 58)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Karachi Municipal Corporation functioned as local institution under bureaucratic leadership. • Commissioner of Karachi held most of local administrative powers. • Karachi Development Authority founded in 1957 to focus on and facilitate bulk water supply, sewage and roads / highways development. It also instituted physical planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negligible participation of citizens in municipal affairs. • City remained in a drastic stage of transition and change. • Being the national capital, Karachi was the centre stage of national political activities. • Infrastructure and housing shortage made the core reason for launching KDA. New housing schemes were developed.
Basic democracies (First and second military regimes) (1958 – 69 and 1969 – 71)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military regime introduced Basic Democracy (BD) System in 1959. • Elected municipal councilors in local government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BD system introduced to accord legitimacy to military regime. • Very limited autonomy was enjoyed by local government – privilege of decision making and administration remained with Commissioner’s office.
Democratic government at provincial and federal level (1972 – 77)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elected government at provincial and federal level. • KMC and KDA continued to function as bureaucratic organs – KMC upgraded as Karachi Metropolitan Corporation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite democracy in upper tiers, elected municipal institutions could not be revived. Potential political impediments from elected local government were found as the core reason.
Third military regime (1977 – 88)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elected local government in Karachi and elsewhere in the country revived in 1979 KMC had elected councilors and mayors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Though elections were held, KMC had limited powers and privileges – provincial bureaucracy and upper tiers of government controlled majority of affairs.

Democratic interregnum (1988 – 99)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elected local governments replaced by appointed administrators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perhaps due to quick changes in federal and provincial governments, the elected local governments could not be revived.
Fourth military regime (1999 – 2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local government in Karachi and elsewhere revived. • Significant powers and resources were devolved to local government in a completely re-vamped format. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide ranging reforms introduced. • KDA, KMC and DMCs merged to form City District Government Karachi. • Many provincial functions were devolved to the local government.
Current regime (2008 to date)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local government's reforms repealed. • Present working of local government partially reverted to the status of 1979. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of political consensus between political stakeholders led to stagnation of local government affairs.

Source: Author's interpretation of various government records and archives, 2012.

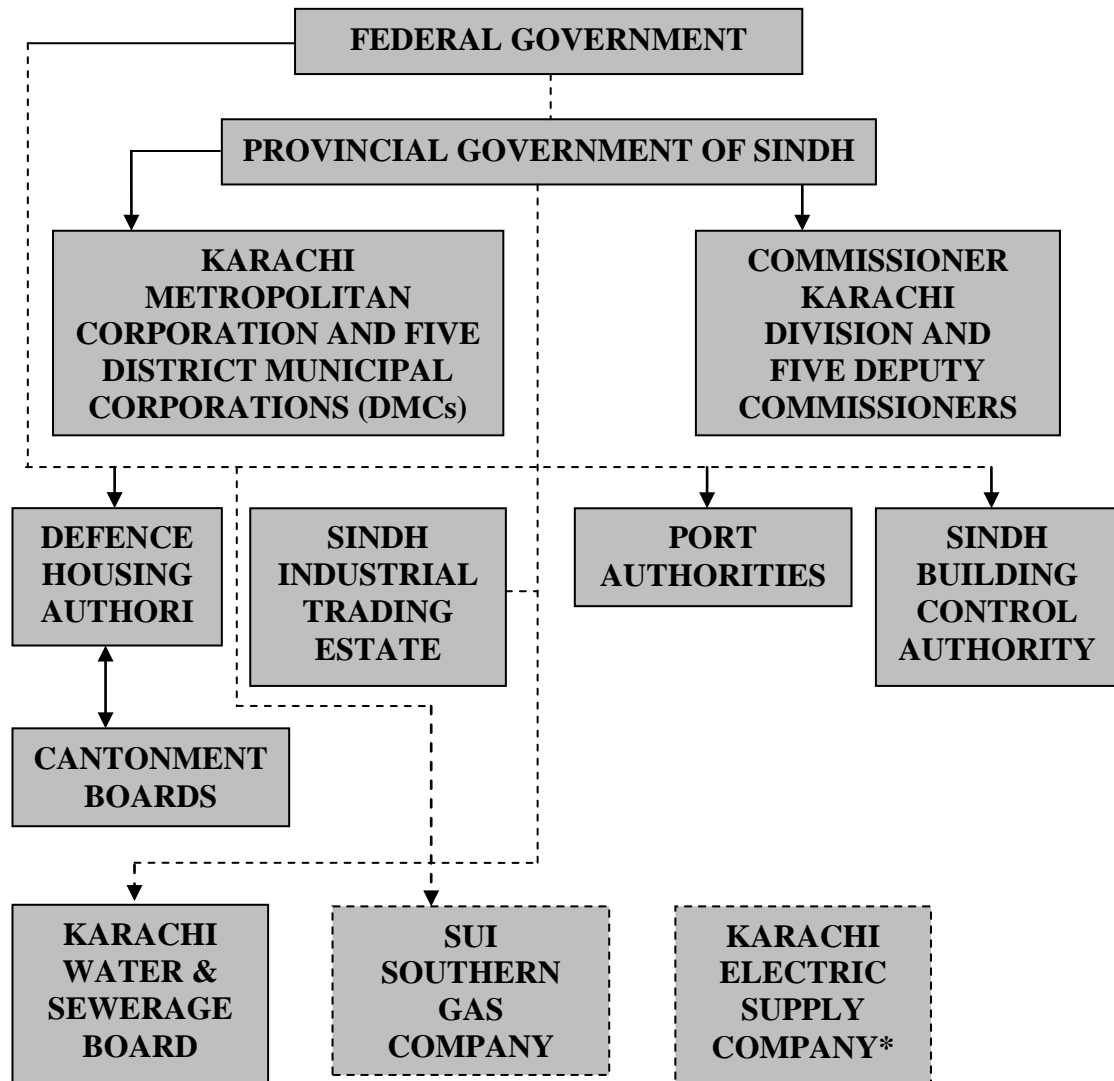
The present status of Karachi is similar to its administrative organization that was prevalent till 1999. The city is spread on a larger region termed as the Greater Karachi Region. However this physical space is valid for planning considerations only. The other details of territorial organization of the city are shown in Figure 07.



Source: KMC Archives, 2012

At present, the status of local government in Karachi and the Sindh province is passing through a stage of transition. The existing structure of institutional framework is presented in Figure 08. The political parties that have representation in the provincial assembly have to devise a new law to evolve a consensus for the future functioning of local government and elsewhere in the province.

Figure 08: LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN KARACHI – A DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION



Source: Based upon the archival information available in Karachi Metropolitan Corporation and Government of Sindh, 2012.

* Karachi Electric Supply Company is now a private entity. It functions under the regulatory framework laid down by National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA).

3.2 Urban and Regional Planning

Despite the burgeoning problems that the city faced during the earlier phases after independence in 1947, Karachi received many planning inputs on a continuous basis. Different institutional arrangements were manifested to channelize these attempts which are concisely illustrated in Figure 09. Whereas none of the plans and planning recommendations was implemented in full, many changes and impacts were caused by them during the entire time frame.

Greater Karachi Plan stabilized the direction of growth of the city towards north east and eastern stretches of the urban peripheries. The plan had also provided an elaborate scheme of a capital complex and allied facilities in the anticipation that the city will continue to function as the national capital. However due to an administrative decision of the government, the capital was eventually located into the newly planned city of Islamabad.

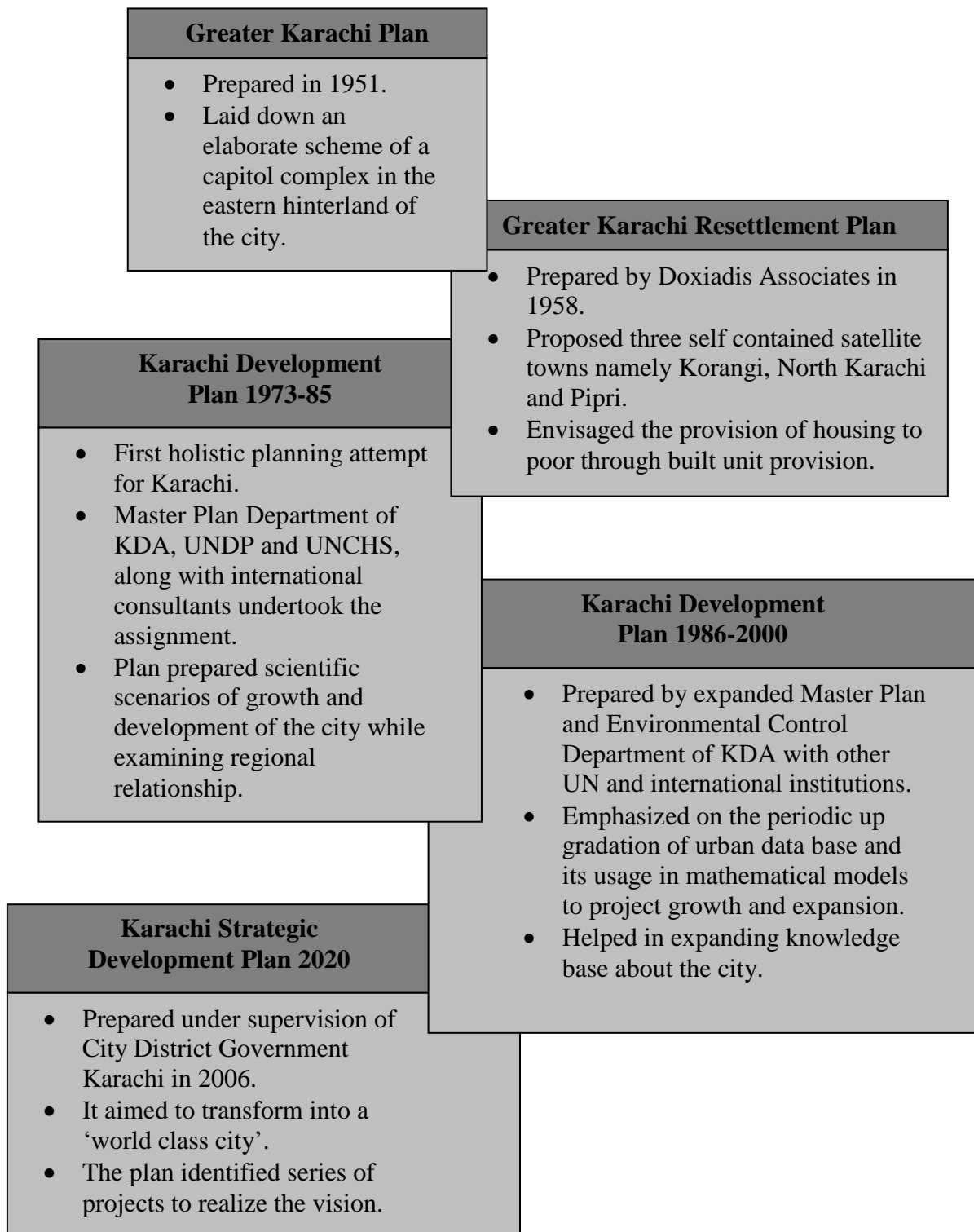
Well known planner C.A Doxiadis was commissioned to plan and develop organized satellite towns at a reasonable distance from the city centre. Articulated schemes were prepared for Korangi and North Karachi areas. The schemes were to ensure self contained and independent sub-urbanization. However due to concentrated location of manufacturing, government offices, small scale enterprises and other magnets of employment towards the south and west of the city, enormous demand for commuting eventually intensified. Many critics were of the view that the poor and low income households moved out from the vicinity of city centre and located at far away distance. After bearing high commuting costs for prolonged period of time, these people continued to struggle to escape from the spiral of poverty. Political factionalization and rise of ethnic politics eventually evolved as a consequence.

A well formulated planning attempt was begun in late 1960s. An exclusive planning unit namely Master Plan Department (MPD) was created. The MPD was an integral part of KDA and undertook extensive surveys, preparation of useful maps and profiles. It also launched sectoral studies to document and analyse the respective situation in a scientific manner. The planners in the team deliberated at length to evolve worthwhile proposals for instant action, medium and long term basis. The Karachi Development Plan of 1973 – 85 proposed a viable framework of growth facilitation and management that guided the city administrators and stakeholders to a reasonable extent. Through the same institutional setup, the Karachi Development Plan 1986 – 2000 was prepared. It aimed at growth management and use of accurate data to project management scenarios through mathematical modeling.

The Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020 combined the experiences gained during the past exercises. Prepared by a consultant, the plan aimed to support capitalist practices and devised pro-market approaches for real estate development. Some of its prescriptions, such as sub urban developments for consolidated land allocations for education, textile manufacturing and media facilities are being outlined for implementation.

A summary of planning exercises is presented in Figure 09.

Figure 09: PROFILE OF IMPORTANT PLANNING EXERCISES IN KARACHI SINCE

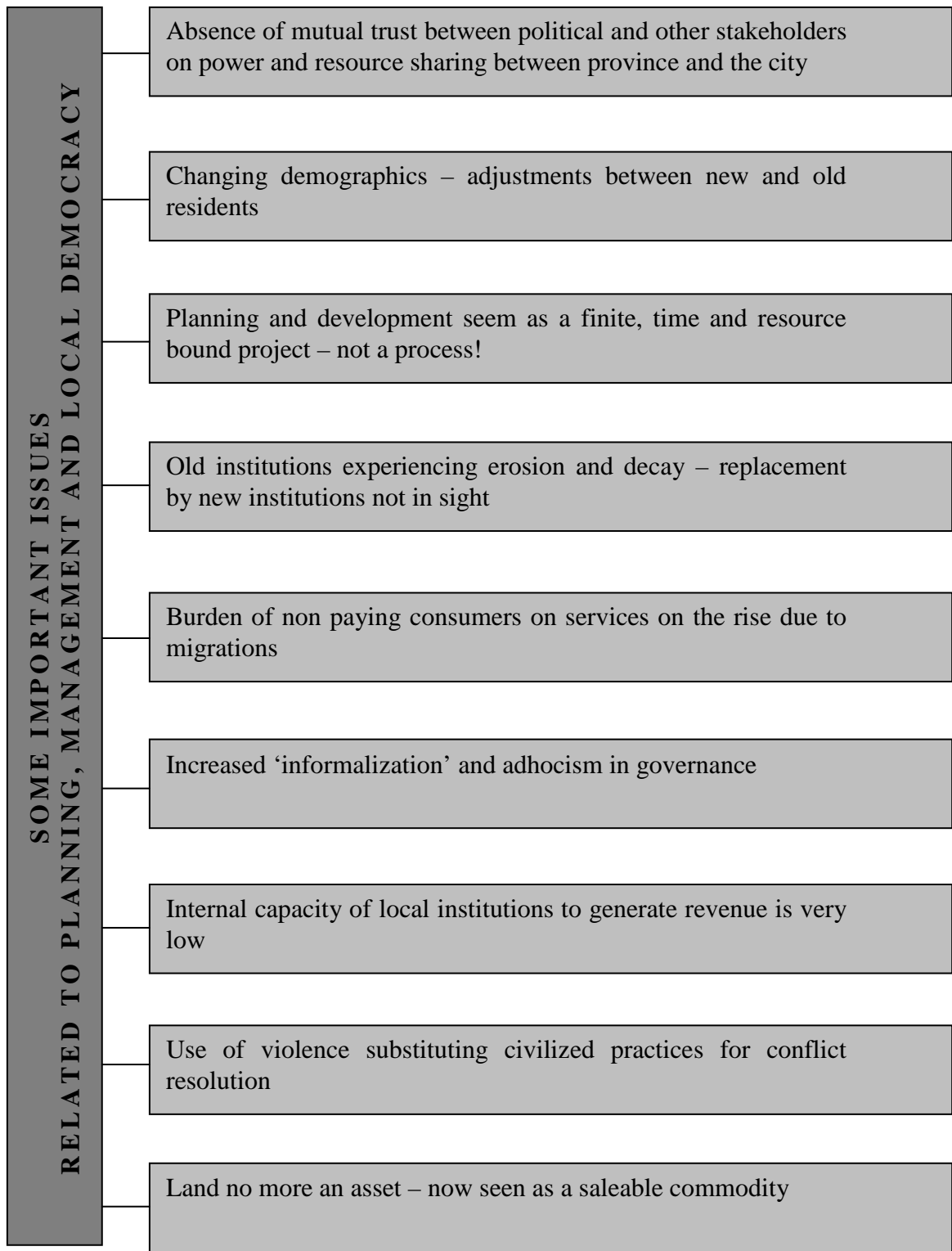


Source: Author's interpretation based on KDA (1974), KDA (1990) and CDGK (2006).

4. Issues

The above account refers to several core issues in respect to local democracy, planning and management that are outlined below in Figure 10. As the city evolved through cyclic migrations and other drastic socio political changes in the region, a political discord and mistrust evolved which was aggravated due to absence of a sustained system of local democracy. The changing stakeholders began competing politically rather than fostering collaboration for mutual benefit and progress. In a turbulent milieu, the process and institution of planning could provide partial relief around long standing developmental problems. With continuous change in the composition of local and even service delivery institutions, the capacity to respond to escalating needs in society became eroded. Socially and internally displaced people utilized urban services and infrastructure without any revenue contribution. In order to address common problems related to governance, informal sector bridged the gap which was created due to decline in administrative ability of local and autonomous institutions. Violence and use of force has now become the means to resolve disputes between factions and groups. Such a non-civilized practice has rendered the law and order machinery helpless. A key reason of dispute is the urge to control land which is perceived and transacted as a commodity. It is no more viewed and managed as a social asset.

Figure 10: LOCAL DEMOCRACY PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT IN KARACHI: A SUMMARY OF SOME OF THE VISIBLE ISSUES



5. Conclusions

This study offers several important conclusions and lessons. Political consensus at the local level is vital to be promoted around the form and format of local democracy. Such a consensus can help transform procedures and practices to manage the city affairs. An institutional system is needed to deal with social and political disputes and help prevent conflicts and violence. The process of planning must attempt to analyse the specific needs, aspirations and requirements of communities and stakeholders while determining the planning outcomes.

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