

Rethinking Social Inclusivity. The Case of Urban Villages in Delhi

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Abstract

This study analyses the socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion of Delhi's urban villages under the framework of inclusive and safe urban development. Unlike slums, urban villages receive limited policy attention, despite their important role in housing rural migrants and supporting local economies. Their exclusion from official planning makes them vulnerable to marginalisation or gentrification. Using a qualitative technique, the study combines policy analysis with comparative case studies of Hauz Khas and Zamrudpur. Findings reveal a gap between policy intent and implementation, facilitated by fragmented governance, dated planning regulations, and inadequate finance. The two cases illustrate distinct outcomes driven by selective planning, political influence, and administrative neglect. The paper recommends for a context-sensitive, participatory planning acknowledging unique characteristics of urban villages, along with inclusive, localised policy reform.

Keywords: Socio-Spatial Inclusion; Urban Village; Gentrification; Marginalisation; Inclusive Planning Policies; Participatory Planning

Introduction

Urban Village Exclusion: A Global Issue

In the recent years, urban villages—former rural villages now encroached by cities, have garnered increased attention in urban studies, notably in cities in global South (Wang, 2022). Found predominantly in India, China and other Southeast Asian countries, urban villages are often viewed as informal settlements, arising from rapid urbanisation (Banerjee, 2021, Chen et al., 2023, Kochan, 2015, Tong et al., 2021, Wang, 2021) and large scale rural-to-urban migration (Al, 2023, Zhang, 2021, Tan et al., 2019). These settlements exist at the intersection of rural and urban systems and are typified by dense mixed-use development (Banerjee, 2021, Islam, 2023, Lin and de Meulder, 2011) with dark and narrow streets (Al, 2023, Qu, 2020, Zhang, 2021), inadequate infrastructure, and sub-standard rental housing (Wang, 2022, Tong et al., 2021, Spreeuwiers, 2014). Given these physical characteristics, urban villages and their residents often face socio-spatial segregation within broader urban fabric.

In addition to their physical characteristics, urban villages experience socio-economic marginalisation. Many urban villagers, particularly rural migrants, lack recognition as “citizens,” limiting their access to economic, social, political, and cultural spheres, making their integration into cities difficult (Cappo, 2002). This is further aggravated by internal stratification among urban villagers, which increases existing social disparities. According to He et al. (2010), rural migrants who make up for a significant portion of the urban village population are at the bottom of the social structure, while indigenous villagers who own land assume the role of petty landlords, benefitting from rental income. Furthermore, existing research have documented socio-economic exclusion of urban villagers, particularly rural migrants, who incur structural barriers across multiple domains. Their access to legal housing is limited (Lin et al., 2015) due to the lack of formal employment opportunities as a consequence of low education levels (Yu and Wu, 2021, Zhang, 2021). Furthermore, their political representation is overlooked, often hampered by discriminatory institutional systems (Li and Sun, 2021, Ren, 2018, Wong et al., 2018).

While socio-economic exclusion is well-documented, the spatial exclusion of urban villages remains an equally pressing issue. Despite being an important part in the local economy and offering affordable housing (Islam, 2023, Liu et al., 2018, Chen et al., 2023, Spreeuwiers, 2014), urban villages are systematically excluded from formal urban planning frameworks (Banerjee, 2021). This exclusion is perpetuated by urban governance structures that either neglect these areas or impose restrictive planning controls. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, such as time-con-

suming land title registration (Tong et al., 2021), further hamper their integration. Discriminatory practices like China's hukou or household registration system limits rural migrants' access to formal housing and services, aggravating urban villages' marginalisation (Chen et al., 2023, Zhang, 2021). Wu et al. (2020) underscore that despite urban villages falling within the city or the officially designated urban growth boundary (UGB) they are excluded from the urban service boundary (USB), which defines the extent of municipal service provision. This deliberate exclusion reinforces a cycle of informality, socio-spatial inequality and constant marginalisation. Market-driven urban redevelopment strategies further compound the problem, prioritising financial benefits over social inclusion and often resulting in the displacement of vulnerable populations (Liu et al., 2018). Gentrification processes, spurred by urban renewal projects, frequently transform urban villages to attract wealthier demographics while alienating lower-income residents (Davidson and Lees, 2005, Song et al., 2008). This phenomenon underscores the increasing overlap between social and spatial exclusion, emphasising the need for integrative planning approaches to mitigating urban inequalities.

Role of Planning in Exclusion

In many Global South cities, urban planning frameworks fail to integrate urban villages into formal urban development strategies. Strategic planning measures for their inclusion are either poorly articulated or entirely absent from master plans (Thin et al., 2024). Zoning and planning regulations play a pivotal role in shaping urban villages (Wu et al., 2022), often determining whether they are integrated or excluded from the broader urban fabric. As a top-down regulatory framework, zoning governs land use through bureaucratic controls such as restrictive land-use conditions, complex planning permissions, and rigid development bylaws. These mechanisms are embedded in urban governance instruments, including development plans, building codes, deed restrictions, and transferable development rights (Geyer, 2024). However, in many Global South nations, zoning laws have been inherited from colonial-era planning systems with minimal adaptation to contemporary socio-economic contexts. Many African and Asian countries, including India, continue to rely on outdated master planning and zoning frameworks introduced during colonial rule (Watson, 2009). These rigid regulatory structures fail to accommodate the needs of marginalised urban populations, limiting their access to tenure security and formal economic opportunities (Devas, 2001).

Instead of promoting inclusion, zoning and planning rules often displace vulnerable groups, prompting them to informal settlements such as Brazil's favelas, Bogota's barrios, India's jhoppad-pattis, functioning beyond the regulations (Mangin, 2014, Nel, 2016). Once zoning regulations are enforced in these areas, residents face costly and impractical regularization measures that further deepen socio-economic inequalities (Geyer, 2024, Pennington, 2000). The exclusionary nature of these policies necessitates a critical reassessment of how zoning and planning mechanisms impact urban village development. Policymaking plays a decisive role in determining whether urban villages are included or excluded from formal urban systems. When zoning laws and planning regulations are designed with inclusion in mind, however, they can facilitate tenure security, improve infrastructure provision, and support social mobility for marginalised communities. Conversely, exclusionary policies reinforce urban inequalities by limiting access to public services, employment hubs, and civic participation. Addressing these systemic challenges requires a paradigm shift in urban governance—one that prioritises inclusion over market-driven imperatives (Lens, 2022).

In the light of the above challenges, this study aims to bridge the identified gaps by examining the central research inquiry: How do existing regulatory tools and planning policies influence the socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion of urban villages within the broader urban fabric? The specific objectives addressed include: (1) analysing policy gaps in existing regulatory tools and planning policies governing urban villages; (2) identifying key stakeholders and their role in shaping urban villages; (3) assessing policy outcomes that contribute to socio-spatial exclusion of urban villages; and (4) proposing policy recommendations for fostering integration of urban villages through inclusive zoning, planning and urban governance mechanisms. To achieve these objectives, this study employed a systematic policy review and comparative case study approach to inform inclusive policy reforms that enhance urban governance and integrate urban villages.

Methodology

This study used a two-phase method that combined a policy review with comparative case study approach (Yin, 2009) to analyse the planning policies and regulatory tools that impact urban village's socio-spatial inclusion. In India, urban villages, often occur in grey areas of urban planning systems, experiencing exclusionary planning practices that impede their inclusion into formal city frameworks. The study aimed at understanding how urban planning instruments, such as master plans and zoning regulations affect these communities. The first phase included a thorough analysis of 'pre-textual sources' (Morgan, 2022), like land-use policies, government documents, and planning policies pertaining to urban villages in Delhi NCT. A systematic search method was utilised to collect policy papers from official government websites, with an emphasis on policies that have historically and now governed urban villages. The second phase included a comparative case study (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2017, Yin, 2009), concentrating on two urban villages in Delhi: Hauz Khas Village (HKV), a gentrified neighbourhood, and Zamrudpur, a marginalised village. The case study sites were chosen for their distinct socio-spatial, economic, and cultural qualities, which provide insights into how similar regulatory frameworks result in disparate outcomes in urban integration. This comparative analysis sought to emphasise the influence of planning strategies in either reinforcing or alleviating urban inequality.

The study employed the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework (Kiser and Ostrom, 1982, Polski and Ostrom, 1999) an analytical tool for data analysis (Figure 1). This paradigm is intended to help researchers better understand the interplay between governance, actors, and the external factors that influence policy outcomes. It focuses on the "action arena," where policy decisions are made and influenced by three external variables: biophysical conditions, community characteristics, and rules in use. For this study, the bio-physical conditions refer to characteristics of urban villages, rules-in-use are formal planning policies and regulations governing urban villages. The action arena is the urban village policymaking, where policies are formulated, and decisions are made by key actors or decision-makers. The pattern of interactions has been revised to stakeholder interactions, to understand the relationships and differences between key actors, which can aid in identifying management gaps. Finally, the outcomes of these policies were assessed through comparative case study approach, by analysing baseline reports, and other grey sources discussing the implications and effectiveness of these regulatory tools. Based on the assessment, policy reforms were recommended aimed at modifying the exogenous factors like rules-in-use, to reshape the action area i.e., policymaking landscape to enable inclusive and effective policy enforcement for Delhi NCT's urban villages. In conclusion, the adoption of IAD framework helped in identification of policy gaps, stakeholder interactions and interests hindering inclusion of urban villages. The IAD framework was used during both the policy review and comparative case study phases. The study followed a qualitative thematic analysis using NVivo software for data coding. The study revealed reoccurring themes, sub-themes, and gaps in policy implementation. Thematic analysis was carried out using Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase approach: data familiarisation, code creation, theme search, theme review, theme definition, and reporting findings. This method enabled a thorough understanding of how policies reinforced exclusion or promoted inclusion in urban villages.

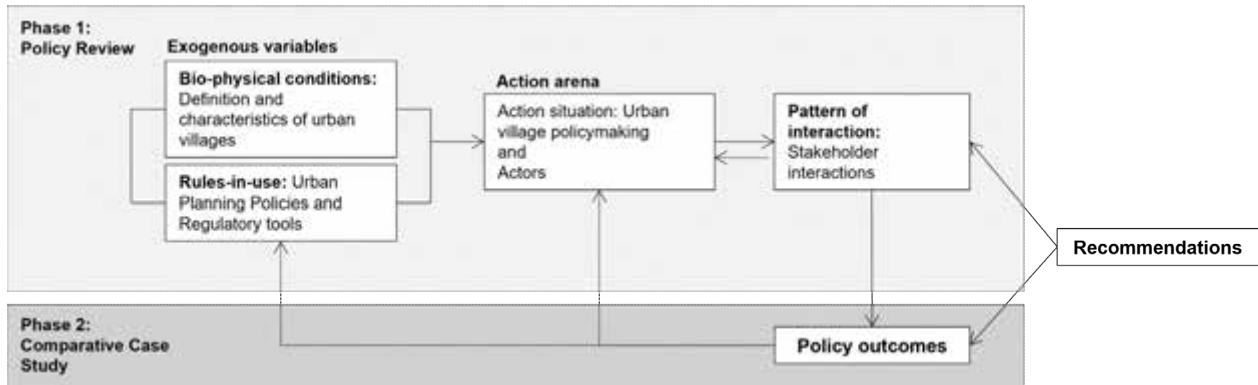


Figure 1 The IAD framework for structuring policy review.
(Source: Adapted from Ostrom (2005); grey square added by Author).

Findings

India's urban planning system is structured as a hierarchy of statutory and non-statutory plans that are developed in response to evolving planning needs, legal mandates, and traditions (TCPO, 2015). These include the Perspective Plan, Regional Plan (RP), Development Plan (e.g., Master Plan, City Development Plan), and Local Area Plan (LAP), which operate at various spatial levels and increase in detailing with descending hierarchy (Kundu et al., 2019), as illustrated in Figure 2. Perspective Plans establish long-term objectives at the national, state or regional level, whereas Regional Plans combine state and national resources at the metropolitan or district level. Development Plans address city-wide policies, while Zonal Plans and LAPs govern zones and neighbourhood-level planning. Furthermore, Special Area or Purpose Plans address context-specific issues, while Annual Plans developed by local bodies assist in project implementation and budget allocations (TCPO, 2015). In accordance with this hierarchy, this study reviewed important regulatory instruments influencing Delhi's urban villages. These were the NCR Regional Plans, the Delhi Sub-Regional Plan, the Delhi Master Plan, and the Zonal Development Plans, as highlighted in blue in Figure 2. Special Area Plans and frameworks tailored to each urban village were also considered. This multi-tiered policy research sought to identify policy flaws, operational gaps, and socio-spatial impacts affecting the inclusion or exclusion of urban villages in Delhi's overall planning framework.

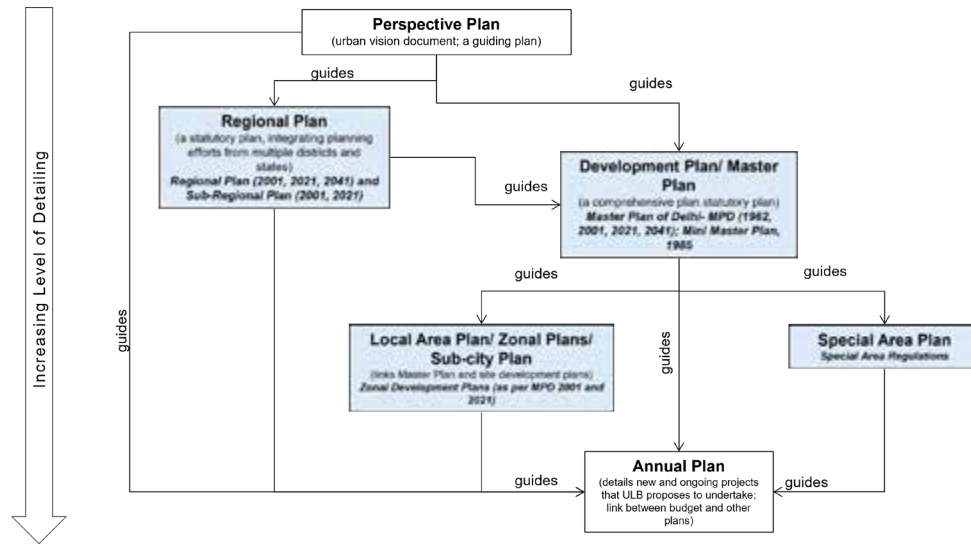


Figure 2 Types of plans and their inter-relationships in India (Source: Author's compilation).

Variable I: How are Urban Villages Discussed within the Existing Rules-in-Use?

Within the existing rules-in-use, Delhi's urban villages are often classified as unplanned settlements in legal documents like the MPDs and ZDPs, suffering from inadequate infrastructure, low housing quality, and a lack of regulatory control (DDA, 2021b, DDA, 2007a, DDA, 2011). These settlements have emerged from the British-era Lal Dora notification, which exempted them from building regulations with the intention of preserving rural identity, in unregulated development and spatial separation from adjacent urban areas (MoUD, 2007). Today, 135 urban villages in Delhi are centres for affordable housing, predominantly housing labour migrants. They also serve as hub for small-scale businesses, yet these villages are politically ignored and excluded from mainstream urban development (MoUD, 2007, GNCTD, 2024).

Variable II: The Rules-in-Use: Key Planning Instruments and Policies

The Foundational Planning Frameworks: Regional, and Sub-Regional Plans

The examination of Delhi's planning tools found several policy gaps, particularly in terms of socio-spatial integration. The NCR Regional Plans, which serve as the foundation for urban planning in the National Capital Region (NCR), only briefly address urban villages. The Regional Plan-2001 focused on regional development but disregarded urban villages, classifying them as rural (NCRPB, 1988). The following RP-2021 made minor attempts to incorporate urban villages by focusing on infrastructure improvements through public-private partnerships (PPP) modes but without planning strategies for their development or integration (NCRPB, 2005). The latest plan, RP-2041, explicitly acknowledged the existence of urban villages, and suggested redevelopment and conservation measures tailored to their distinct needs and characteristics, such as heritage preservation and environmental considerations for communities in sensitive locations like riverbed (NCRPB, 2021). However, these plans did not effectively address these communities' socio-spatial, and cultural dynamics, limiting the potential for significant urban transformation.

At the sub-state level, the Sub-Regional Plans (SRPs), developed under the NCRPB Act, 1985, serve as an intermediate plan translating the objectives of Regional Plans (RPs) into feasible proposals. The NCR Planning Board mandates all participating states to develop SRPs to integrate planning efforts with the larger objective of balanced regional development (DDA, 1994a). In Delhi NCT, the SRPs were prepared by DDA (NCR Planning Cell), aligned with the objectives of the Regional Plans 2001, and 2021, respectively. The SRP-2001 aimed to relieve the capital's urbanisation pressures by projecting its demands into the larger Regional Plan, consequently influencing the Master Plans and SRPs of neighbouring NCR states (DDA, 1994a). Like RP-2001, SRP-2001 did not acknowledge urban

villages' existence. The plan had primarily concentrated on the urban and rural areas, ignoring the transitional and informal characteristics of urban villages, thereby excluding them from formal planning document (DDA, 1994a).

In contrast, the SRP-2021 conformed with the aim of RP-2021, acknowledged the urban villages, particularly in the context of demographic shifts. Between 1991 and 2011, Delhi experienced decline in rural population from 11% to 2%, this can be attributed to reclassification rural villages as urban as per Master Plan-2021. Also, with land pooling scheme in pipeline, the plan anticipates all existing villages will become urban villages (DDA, 2021a). Despite their official recognition in SRP-2021, substantial policy and data gaps persists. The plan did not provide population data or socio-economic profiles for urban villages, unlike its detailed treatment of slums and unauthorised colonies¹ Furthermore, the plan stereotyped urban villages as one of the sources for encroachment, and unplanned development near heritage precincts like Shahjahanabad, Mehrauli, and Tughlaqabad, highlighting negative perceptions and lack of inclusion DDA (2021a). Overall, while SRP-2021 marked a change toward acknowledging urban villages in planning debate, it fell short of providing a viable framework for their growth. Both Regional and Sub-Regional Plans lacked a comprehensive knowledge of how urban villages fit into Delhi's urban framework. Their continuing marginalisation, whether through omission or unfavourable portrayal, highlighted a persistent gap between planning strategy and ground realities.

Provisions under Master Plans: Evolution of Urban Village Policies

The Master Plan Delhi (MPD) have gradually addressed urban villages, with each update reflecting changes in administration, urbanisation, and policy objectives. These urban villages, which are frequently viewed as marginalised pockets, have undergone substantial transformations in both policy discourse and urban planning practice, but in inconsistent ways. The following describes the evolution of provisions for urban villages in several Master Plans, aligning with broader Regional and Sub-Regional Plans, highlighting key issues and developments.

The First Master Plan for Delhi formulated in 1962 (or MPD 1962) was designed to control the city's expansion in response to the population influx post-partition. The goal was to guide urban expansion using land use zoning and spatial consolidation for an estimated population of 5 million by 1981 (DDA, 1962). The plan divided Delhi into eight planning zones, with an additional zone for rural areas in Outer Delhi. It emphasised on large-scale land acquisitions, structured zoning, and infrastructure development to meet projected population growth. However, the MPD 1962 overlooked urban villages, regarding them as rural areas, and sites for non-polluting industries and rural trades like dairy and cow farming (DDA, 1962). In the following year 1963, an exemption notification by the MCD, permitted urban village residents to develop structures without legal authorisation from governing agencies. This resulted in unchecked growth, congestion, and increased migration, altering the socio-economic and spatial landscape of urban villages (MoUD, 2007).

In 1985, the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD), drafted a Mini Master Plan for the planned development of rural areas, including 135 urban villages. The strategy aimed to prevent unregulated expansion and promote the orderly development of urban villages by abolishing the Lal Dora system and requiring the adoption of municipal regulations for construction activities (GNCTD, 1985). It advocated incorporating urban villages into the Delhi Development Authority's (DDA) development limits, as well as the introduction of land use policies to regulate the villages' increasing industrial activity. Furthermore, the plan also proposed a gradual redevelopment strategy for urban villages, with a focus on infrastructure upgrades, integration with adjacent planned areas, and the implementation of village-specific building codes (GNCTD, 1985). However, a lack of regulatory clarity and a failure to apply the suggested building regulations resulted in the prolonged neglect and marginalisation of urban villages. The intended policy framework was left in uncertainty, and urban villages were excluded from the larger urban transformation effort.

¹ Unauthorised colonies refer to residential areas in Delhi that have developed in violation of the city's master plan regulations.

MPD 2001: A Shift in Acknowledgment of Urban Villages

The Second Master Plan-2001 (MPD 2001) identified urban villages in a more structured way, including them into the larger framework of the Delhi Metropolitan Area (DMA) (DDA, 1990). The MPD attempted to address the housing needs of informal settlements, including urban villages, and encompassed a variety of planning zones, such as heritage zones and periphery rural areas. The plan focused on physical infrastructure, health, and education services in certain regions, while also acknowledging the need for transforming urban communities and preserving their traditional lifestyles (DDA, 1990). However, the rules for urban villages in the MPD 2001 were ambiguous and lacked clear planning guidance. The plan advocated for 'sensitive treatment' and the provision of new amenities while retaining cultural identity, but it did not offer tangible solutions for integration. Urban villages were left with few alternatives for planning, particularly in places with inconsistent land ownership, dense built form, and insufficient infrastructure.

MPD 2021: A Progress Toward Integration

The Third Master Plan (MPD 2021) aimed to transform Delhi into a global metropolis and a world-class city. This version of the plan identified urban villages as crucial components of Delhi's urban fabric, highlighting their distinct socio-economic and spatial qualities. It permitted small-scale businesses within villages, encouraged mixed-use regulations, and relaxed group housing standards to accommodate the compact, organic structure of urban villages. Furthermore, the plan established requirements for public facilities, enabling the efficient supply of services in limited spaces (DDA, 2007a). The plan designated the urban villages and its extension areas under residential zones, even though they did not fall under the standard land-use classification. Furthermore, it identified pedestrian-friendly commercial streets, and mixed-use corridors, highlighting the vital role of urban villages in supporting local economies (DDA, 2007a). The plan additionally recommended the Land Pooling Model for land assembly and infrastructure development, highlighting a move towards more inclusive and adaptive urban planning. However, MPD-2021 had certain implementation flaws. While the master plan developed foundations for integrating cities, their implementation remained aspirational, slowed by policy formation delays and regulatory uncertainty. The plan indicated a trend toward acknowledging the urbanity of Delhi's urban villages, but it failed to transform these objectives.

MPD 2041: Shift towards Sustainable Development and Heritage Integration

The MPD 2041, which was implemented in 2021, sought to make Delhi a sustainable, liveable, and vibrant city. Several elements of previous plan MPD 2021 were maintained in this plan, notably the residential character of the urban villages. It also highlighted the regeneration of urban villages, particularly those with heritage significance, and regarded them as sites for high-end retail and cultural activities (DDA, 2021b). The plan aimed to improve physical infrastructure, safety standards, and overall quality of life in these villages, and solve the issues of integrating urban villages into the city. Still, MPD 2041 failed to explicitly state regeneration implementation methods, and a lack of specificity about important stakeholders and regeneration techniques left many anticipated actions unresolved. Despite acknowledging the socio-economic potential of urban villages, MPD 2041's policy shortcomings underscored the persistent issue of bridging the gap between planning and execution.

Zonal Development Plans: The Micro-Level Plans (2001 to 2021)

Zonal Development Plans (ZDPs), which bridges Master Plans and neighbourhood or layout plans, have addressed urban villages haphazardly across planning periods. Urban villages received divided attention in the ZDPs under MPD-2001. For example, zones A, B, and C ignored urban villages (DDA, 1994b, DDA, 1994c, DDA, 1994d), while Zones D and F identified urban villages primarily due to presence of heritage monuments, recommending 'conservative surgery' approach for heritage villages like Nizamuddin (DDA, 1988). Whereas zone F emphasised unsuccessful redevelopment attempts and allowed restricted mixed-use until formalisation (DDA, 1998). Other zones, like zone K highlighted infrastructural deficiencies, indicating ongoing planning negligence (DDA, 1992).

Under the framework of MPD-2021, ZDPs experienced a partial policy shift with the Village Redevelopment

Schemes, promoting infrastructural upgrades, mixed-use zoning, and re-densification. Villages in Zones A, C, and F were classified as 'Special Areas' to foster context-sensitive development (DDA, 2007b, DDA, 2010f, DDA, 2010c). Some were also permitted to develop small-unit housing opposing planned developments (DDA, 2010b, DDA, 2010e, DDA, 2010f). Zones K-II and O (DDA, 2010a, DDA, 2010d) indicated a rising but limited sensitivity to heritage and the ecological environment, with Zone K-II mandating heritage protection, emergency access, and social services. Despite these improvements, implementation remained patchy. Formal integration was hampered by regulatory constraints.

ZDPs under MPD-2041 are still pending, indicating a procedural gap between strategic vision and local planning. This delay denies urban communities timely development recommendations, maintaining their socio-spatial marginalization (DDA). Overall, a review of Delhi's planning instruments demonstrates a recurring gap between strategic objective and execution, resulting in the socio-spatial exclusion of urban villages. Although regional and sub-regional plans eventually acknowledged urban villages, they were presented as unfavourable pockets of the city with few integration approaches. While Master Plans progressed from neglect in MPD-1962, to gradual recognition in MPD-2001 and MPD-2021, and regenerative goals in MPD-2041, implementation delayed due to legal ambiguity and a lack of stakeholder transparency. Zonal Development Plans reflected this inconsistency, with selective attention and delayed modifications. In conclusions, urban villages continue to be neglected by inclusive urban development because of fragmented, and inconsistent planning strategies.

Actors in the Urban Village Policymaking: Their Interests, Goals, and Conflicts

Ostrom (2005) describes the action situation as a 'conceptual space' or setting where actors interact on a particular issue—in this context urban village policymaking resulting in a shared outcome. It is structured by institutions or rules-in-use and is also influenced by exogenous variables. Also, during the interaction process, the actors respond in a certain way that enable them to achieve goals, preferably based on their interests, goals, mandates, and benefits. For this study, the key actors and their interactions in the urban village policymaking (action situation) were identified through the assessment of urban planning policies and regulations (rules-in-use).

Delhi's urban village governance is influenced by a multi-scalar, fragmented structure including multiple institutional players with overlapping mandates and frequently competing interests (Figure 3). Although urban development is theoretically a state responsibility, Delhi's governance is divided between the central and state governments, which adds to administrative ambiguity (GNCTD, 2024, NIUA, 2020a, NITI Aayog, 2021).

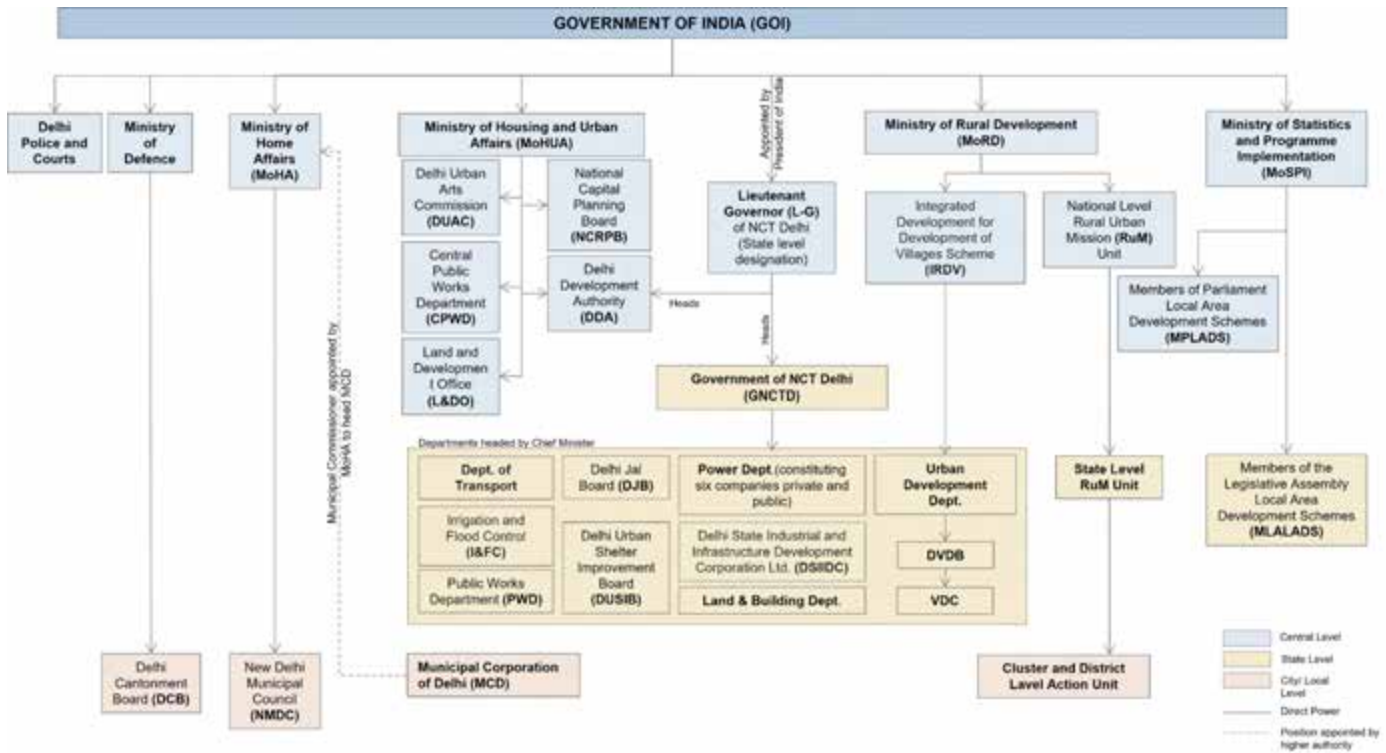


Figure 3 Key actors and their interactions in urban village planning and governance. Solid lines show administrative hierarchy; dashed lines indicate appointments by higher authorities (Source: Author's compilation).

Statutory planning is driven by key central institutions such as the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and the National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB), which use regional and master plans. However, early NCRPB plans lacked specific solutions for urban villages, instead focusing on infrastructure through public-private partnerships that ignored socio-spatial issues (NCRPB, 2005). Only RP-2041 proposed mechanisms such as TDRs, higher FAR, and GIS-based land titling, but implementation remained limited (NCRPB, 2021). At the subregional level, SRP-2001 failed to identify urban settlements at all, whereas SRP-2021 recognised them but supported their integration but lacked socioeconomic data (DDA, 2021a). On the implementation front, institutions like DDA, MCD (Urban Local Body), and state departments like DJB, PWD, and DVDB have been pursuing infrastructure targets with little coordination (GNCTD, 2024, GNCTD, 1985). This institutional distribution has resulted in service gaps and unfulfilled growth in urban communities.

Meanwhile, informal actors such as private developers, NGOs, heritage organisations, and local leaders add to the complexity of governance. While commercial developers profit from high-density redevelopment, NGOs and historic organisations such as ASI and INTACH frequently have contradictory missions and lack a single heritage database (NIUA, 2020b). Residents of urban villages seeking tenure security, service access, and cultural preservation continue to be caught between regulatory complexity and policy neglect because of outdated rules and inaccurate land records. These competing interests and fragmented responsibilities have exacerbated socio-spatial exclusion, highlighting the importance of coordinated, context-sensitive governance anchored in local reality.

Assessing Policy Outcomes through Comparative Case Study Analysis

This study assessed the local, case-specific outcomes by conducting a desktop-based comparative case studies of HKV and Zamrudpur villages, situated in Zone F. The zonal level proposals and regulations specific to urban villages were compared to current state of identified sites. Doing so, enabled identification of effectiveness of

these rules-in-use, and addressing local-level gaps, particularly how policies are planned, governed, and implemented. Utilisation of the IAD framework encouraged this assessment of effectiveness of urban planning policies and regulations (Heikkila and Andersson, 2018), and how these rules hinder or foster socio-spatial inclusion of urban villages in Delhi. Data for the analysis was gathered from zonal plans, policy documents, official government websites, grey literature, blogs, and media sources, resulting in thorough, case-specific insights into these villages. Before conducting the comparative studies, the review first identified key provisions for urban village provisions in zone F (Table 1). These key themes were then assessed against the existing conditions of the two urban villages under investigation.

Table 1 Urban Village Zonal Development Plan Provisions for Villages in Zone F.

Zonal Plan Provisions	As per MPD-1962 (DDA, 1962)	As per MPD-2001 (DDA, 1998)	As per MPD-2021 (DDA, 2007b)
Land Use Classification and Zoning	Classified as rural use with agricultural activities	Acknowledged urban villages; permitted residential use and potential for mixed-use under Urban Renewal Scheme	Identified as 'Special Areas' with special regulations; compatible mixed-use permitted provided it is compatible with the surrounding residential areas
Mixed-Use and Commercial Development	Not specified	Mixed use was conditionally permitted under conditions	Identified mixed-use zones and pedestrian commercial streets in village
Building Regulations and Development Control Norms	No village specific provisions; bylaws relaxed to allow sub-standard housing	No provisions; highlighted weak enforcement of bylaws leading to substandard growth	Village Redevelopment Schemes proposed with stricter controls aligned with Special Area Regulations
Infrastructural Improvement and Provisions	Encouraged basic improvements to support village economies	Recognised need for upgrades; implementation remained inconsistent	Infrastructure improvement prioritised with redevelopment, mixed-use and conservation
Urban Village Planning and Integration Approaches	Proposed village-specific master plans for conservation, rehabilitation, and redevelopment	No provisions; some redevelopment plans were prepared but poorly implemented	Mandated Village Redevelopment Schemes with infrastructure upgradation to foster integration
Heritage Management	Heritage not addressed	Prioritised conservation of ASI protected monuments; mandated conservation measures under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, and special building controls ; proposed landscaping strategies near monuments and improvement of basic services recommended	Emphasised on heritage conservation; HKV monuments (10) under ASI and five tombs under state government (GNCTD) ; highlighted conservation schemes through local authorities or designated organisations

Institutional Mechanisms	Not specified	No clear enforcement or monitoring highlighted	Role of local authorities and designated agencies for implementation of redevelopment and conservation initiatives
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Case Study I: Hauz Khas- The Gentrified Enclave

Hauz Khas Village (Figure 4), formerly a rural settlement mainly inhabited by the Jat² community, exhibits the gentrification trajectory of Delhi's urban villages. The DDA designated it an 'urban village' in 1962, and large land acquisitions in the 1960s provided the groundwork for future change. HKV's transformation began in the late 1980s, when a well-known designer built a shop, attracting Delhi's elite and sparking its transformation into a cultural and commercial hub (Negi and Taraporevala, 2018, S, 2019, Ramesh et al., 2023). Low rents, closeness to heritage monuments, and important roadways all encouraged this transition. By the 2000s, HKV had surpassed markets such as Defence Colony and Khan Market, becoming a thriving hub of cafés, galleries, and boutiques (Gupta, 2024, Bernroider, 2015). However, rising property values, speculative development, and commercialisation have displaced many original residents, and exacerbated socio-spatial disparities, drawing uneven policy attention.



Figure 4 Location of Hauz Khas Village (Source: OpenStreetMap).

Case Study II: Zamrudpur- The Marginalised Village

Unlike the highly commercialised Hauz Khas Village, Zamrudpur (Figure 5) in South Delhi is an urban village that has received little policy attention or urban integration. Zamrudpur, located near the affluent neighbourhoods of Greater Kailash-I and Kailash Colony, has typical urban village features such as congested, haphazard development, narrow streets, and deteriorating infrastructure (Prakash and Sharma, 2021, Memories, 2016, Justtripping, 2021). Despite its rich cultural legacy, the village has been continually neglected in Delhi's planning narratives, with little investment from both the government and market actors. Zamrudpur, which is predominantly inhabited by migrants and service workers who support neighbouring affluent areas, demonstrates the systematic marginalisation that many urban villages in Delhi NCT face when governance frameworks fail to address their developmental demands (Prakash and Sharma, 2021, O'Leary, 2014). While both HKV and Zamrudpur fall within Zone F (South Delhi) of Delhi's Master Plan, their divergent outcomes reveal deep-rooted inequalities in planning implementation across the city.

² Jat (also Jaat or Jatt) are traditional agrarian community found in Northern India and Pakistan. Today, they are prominent landowning farmers and key contributors to India's food grain production.



Figure 5 Location of Zamrudpur Village (Source: OpenStreetMap).

Evaluating Policy Implementation to Outcomes

The systematic comparison of policy outcomes is structured across six key themes: (1) land use, zoning, and mixed-use development, (2) building regulations and development control failures, (3) urban village planning and governance, (5) heritage management and commercialisation, and (6) planning and institutional gaps (Table 2).

Land use, Zoning, and Mixed-Use Development

HKV, which was previously a rural community, has evolved into a premium business and residential hub mostly through informal and market-driven mechanisms (Gupta, Negi and Taraporevala, 2018). Initially designated as an “urban village” by the Delhi Development Authority in 1962, it was not subject to conventional zoning regulations, allowing for substantial commercialisation (Ramesh et al., 2023). This regulatory loophole, which was reinforced by the NCTD Amendment Act of 2017, encouraged the expansion of unlicensed cafes, boutiques, and bars that violated land-use restrictions (Darji, 2018, Jeelani, 2018). Gulam et al. (2018) titled “How Delhi's urban villages turned into 'no plan land'” published in Hindustan Times. The outcome has been the fast commercialisation of residential plots with no formal planning control, displacing long-term residents and accelerating gentrification (Bernroider, 2015, Gupta, 2024, Verma and Modi, 2024). Property values in HKV have skyrocketed, with 3-4 BHK flats ranging from 1600 to 2000 sq. ft. costing more than INR 5 crores and renting for INR 50,000 to INR 110,000 per (Grovy India Limited, Royale Realtors India, 2025). Market-driven growth has transformed HKV into a high-value enclave that combines heritage and modernity, aided by its green surroundings, cultural activities, and central location (Ramesh et al., 2023).

Zamrudpur, in contrast, operates as an informal low-income rental zone surrounded by affluent neighbourhoods while remaining outside of official land-use plans and policy frameworks (Menon and Varma, 2019). Despite housing five neglected Lodi-era tombs, the region is not included in formal urban documentation, resulting in spatial fragmentation and unregulated development (Prakash and Sharma, 2021). According to limited real estate data, Zamrudpur's rental market mostly caters to hostels and paying guests, with monthly fees ranging from INR 6000

to 10,000, depending on occupancy and access to amenities (Magicbricks). Financial institutions continue to market urban villages like Zamrudpur as affordable home zones, using exemptions from building codes that allow for unregulated construction without municipal approval (Bajaj Finserv, Godrej Properties Limited, 2023).

Unlike HKV, which has been integrated into Delhi's economic framework through informal commercialisation, Zamrudpur is still institutionally excluded and functionally invisible in the planning regime.

Building Regulations and Development Control Failures

Failures in building regulation are obvious in both villages but emerge in different ways. HKV business facilities frequently operate often without license, fire safety clearances, or other legal permissions (Gupta et al., 2022, Darji, 2018). Height violations, insufficient setbacks, and small, narrow streets endanger emergency access and fire safety (Betigeri, 2013, Press Trust of India, 2020). Political intervention, particularly during elections, frequently undermines regulatory enforcement (Singh, 2013). Multistorey rental structures flourish in Zamrudpur without permits, and congested layouts with exposed electrical wire demonstrate a lack of commitment to development rules (Justtripping, 2021, Memories, 2016). In all cases, planning officials failed to enforce or monitor building codes, exposing residents to long-term risks.

These inequities are also evident in infrastructure development. HKV's physical infrastructure has not kept up with its commercial growth (Darji, 2018). Sewer lines, solid waste management, and streets are still inadequate, resulting in frequent water logging and poor sanitation (Bernroider, 2015, Ramesh et al., 2023). Despite requests for modifications in redevelopment plans, execution remains inconsistent and disjointed (Guerrieri, 2017). Zamrudpur, in contrast, lacks even basic amenities: open drains, inconsistent water supply, mismanaged garbage, and dangerous electrical systems are frequent (Prakash and Sharma, 2021). Streets as narrow as three meters limit access for municipal or emergency vehicles. Despite its strategic location near metro lines and educational institutions, the town is excluded from most urban service plans, furthering its marginalisation.

Urban Village Planning and Governance

Furthermore, the governance structures in both villages are fragmented and ineffective, but the impacts differ significantly. Villages such as HKV and Zamrudpur were historically excluded from Delhi's formal planning processes. HKV benefited due to location, while others remain marginalised (Negi and Taraporevala, 2018). HKV's transformation proceeded in the absence of a coordinated planning framework, facilitated by political inertia and inadequate administrative control (Gupta, Jeelani, 2018, Negi and Taraporevala, 2018). Initial efforts to exempt such villages from planning laws have backfired, resulting in ad hoc urbanisation (Ramesh et al., 2023). Although strategies like Local Area Plans (LAPs) attempted to fill this gap, entrenched landownership and resource scarcity have slowed implementation (Bernroider, 2015). HKV benefits from its accessibility to key metro routes and universities, but the community's institutional capacity to manage change remains low (Betigeri, 2013). However, participatory planning procedures, such as consultations between local organisations and stakeholders, are theoretically possible and can aid in the balance between development and cultural protection (Guerrieri, 2017).

In contrast, Zamrudpur exemplifies institutional neglect. It lacks a single agency responsible for development or heritage preservation. Outdated land records and a lack of socio-economic databases lead residents to perform their own surveys (Menon and Varma, 2019, Prakash and Sharma, 2021). This fragmented governance has resulted in extended exclusion from planned urban structures. Despite its proximity to major metro line and educational institutions, Zamrudpur remains absent from formal master plans and socio-economic databases (Prakash and Sharma, 2021). This neglect from formal planning and census documents perpetuates exclusion from municipal infrastructure services and larger redevelopment initiatives, leaving basic service provision ad hoc and unplanned.

Heritage Management and Commercialisation

The treatment of heritage further reflects contrasting forms of policy failure. HKV's architectural legacy, particularly the Hauz Khas Complex, is integral to its identity, although it has been commercialised to some extent (Beyondbombay, 2021, Madan, 2015). The built heritage serves as a visual background to cafes, and pubs (Bernroider, 2015, Gupta et al., 2022). Despite tourism-related conservation measures, the shift toward aesthetic consumption threatens the area's historical integrity (Guerrieri, 2017). In comparison, Zamrudpur is home to five Lodi-era tombs of archaeological significance, the sites are not on the ASI's protected list in Zone F, and relevant agencies have allowed them to decay (Menon and Varma, 2019). Today, they serve as temporary shelters and dumping places. The lack of conservation plans, or heritage-zoning restrictions has made these structures vulnerable to encroachment and irrevocable heritage loss.

Planning and Institutional Gaps

Both villages have revealed how institutional gaps in planning, regulation, and enforcement can produce radically different yet equally problematic urban outcomes. The HKV's current state demonstrates institutional fragmentation and ineffective enforcement. Weak oversight has enabled illegal operations to thrive while lawmakers struggle with coordination and regulatory clarity (Ramesh et al., 2023). Political challenges, particularly from strong real estate and corporate interests, restricts implementation of building and zoning rules (Jeelani, 2018). Although participatory planning frameworks exist, their implementation is sparse (Guerrieri, 2017). Zamrudpur represents this inefficient through a severe governance gap. With no official planning agency or protected status, the village operates informally. The lack of institutional engagement has resulted in it being excluded from municipal records, diminishing responsibility and capability for integrated development (Prakash and Sharma, 2021). As a result, both settlements represent distinct manifestations of institutional failure: one of laissez-faire overdevelopment, the other of continued neglect. For the assessment of Zamrudpur village, limited data was available online, with most focusing on existing conditions of heritage tombs rather than overall urban village. Based on the data analysed from media sources, blogs, and a few articles, the analysis reveals that there is a lack of effective land use planning, heritage conservation, infrastructure development, and governance mechanisms in Zamrudpur.

Table 2 Overview of Policy Intent versus Outcomes.

Category	Hauz Khas Village	Zamrudpur
Land Use and Zoning	Uncontrolled commercialisation due to exemptions and unclear zoning regulations (Gupta, Negi and Taraporevala, 2018, Ramesh et al., 2023)	Primarily residential; neglected from all sources (Menon and Varma, 2019, Prakash and Sharma, 2021)
Building Regulations and Development Controls	Widespread violations of building controls; unauthorised vertical growth; no fire NOCs (Darji, 2018, Gupta et al., 2022, Press Trust of India, 2020)	Unregulated constructions; unsafe development; no building permits (Justtripping, 2021, Memories, 2016)
Urban Village Planning and Integration	Some efforts like LAP were attempted but inconsistently implemented (Gupta, Negi and Taraporevala, 2018, Ramesh et al., 2023, Jeelani, 2018)	No efforts made towards village integration, excluding from city and local planning initiatives (Prakash and Sharma, 2021)
Heritage Management	Heritage driven development, due to presence of ASI protected monuments, but largely commodified; tourism focused (Beyondbombay, 2021, Gupta et al., 2022, Madan, 2015)	Existing heritage monuments neglected by state government; lack of conservation efforts (Menon and Varma, 2019)

Mixed-Use and Commercial Development	Unregulated commercialisation: cafes, pubs, and boutiques dominate (Bernroider, 2015, Guerrieri, 2017, Gupta et al., 2022)	No commercial development, remains as a low-income residential enclave (Prakash and Sharma, 2021)
Infrastructural Development	Strained infrastructure due to commercialisation (Bernroider, 2015, Guerrieri, 2017, Gupta et al., 2022, Ramesh et al., 2023)	Lack of basic services (Prakash and Sharma, 2021)
Institutional Mechanisms	Fragmented governance; political influence; market-driven inclusion (Betigeri, 2013, Guerrieri, 2017, Jeelani, 2018, Ramesh et al., 2023)	Institutional neglect; total policy neglect (Prakash and Sharma, 2021)

Discussion

The analysis of policies through IAD framework, provided a comprehensive overview of the urban village policy planning, implementation and its outcomes. The primary goal of this research was to examine existing policy gaps and their impact on socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion of urban villages. Based on the coding, the review identified five inter-related themes perpetuating socio-spatial exclusion of urban villages at city level: (1) political influence and erosion of community rights, (2) institutional fragmentation and regulatory ambiguity, (3) neglect of informal economies and socio-cultural transitions, (4) spatial exclusion and built environment neglect, and (5) transparency and administrative accountability.

Political Influence and Lack of Community Rights

Land reform and development policies, particularly the Delhi Land Reforms Act, fragmented land acquisition processes, and land pooling mechanisms, have adversely impacted rural livelihoods while providing little or no compensation to displaced populations (Datta, 2004, Mehra, 2005, MoUD, 2007). These efforts have disproportionately benefited corporate investors and politically associated actors, directing urban village development toward political gain rather than community need (Sheth, 2017, MoUD, 2006, MoUD, 2007). The adoption of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and selective regularisation procedures has resulted in uneven infrastructure provision and increased land commodification, marginalising original landowners and reducing local governance capacity (MoUD, 2006, Tyagi and Vats, 2020). Absorbed by neighbouring wealthy neighbourhoods, urban villages have not benefited from integrated development (GNCTD, 1985), leading to a system of spatial outcomes. The extension areas of urban villages have often been misused due to speculative development under the guide of community development (GNCTD, 1985). These practices have therefore resulted in scepticism towards planning and administrative organisations by the urban village residents.

Institutional Fragmentation and Regulatory Ambiguity

Institutionally, urban villages function within a fragmented structure characterised by overlapping mandates, inefficient inter-agency coordination, and lax enforcement. The lack of co-ordination among key planning and managing authorities—such as the DDA, MCD, GNCTD—has led to significant administrative and policy gaps (MoUD, 2006, Singh, 2024, GNCTD, 1985). These fragmented duties, coupled with the lack of a dedicated planning and management cell for urban villages, have hindered the urban village integration. Furthermore, the incomplete implementation of previous redevelopment plans, demonstrate administrative stagnation (GNCTD, 1985). A regulatory void has existed between the formal declaration of urbanisation and the execution of applicable regulations under the Delhi Municipal Corporation (DMC) Act, allowing unregulated building to spread unabated (GNCTD, 1985). Additionally, the breakup of village council (gram sabhas) and the failure to apply land mutation standards have increased legal uncertainty, limiting access to municipal services, credit systems, and secure tenure (Tyagi and Vats, 2020). These institutional flaws not only push informality but also limit meaningful community participation in planning processes (Singh, 2020, Singh et al., 2024). The overall administrative system of Delhi is widely viewed as overly fragmented (MoUD, 2006), preventing the integration of

urban villages into larger city frameworks. Furthermore, statutory planning documents such as Master Plans and Zonal Development Plans have consistently failed to account for the tangible and intangible qualities of urban villages, making them almost invisible in official spatial development strategies (Rewal, 2014, Sheth, 2017)

Neglect of Local Informal Economies and Socio-Cultural Transitions

Urban villages have been transformed into essential hubs of affordable housing and informal economic activity, but changes to laws have not kept pace. Existing regulatory frameworks do not provide for inclusive zoning, livelihood integration, or acknowledgment of informal rental and commercial networks (Mehra, 2005, DDA, 2007a). As a result, populations, particularly marginalised, landless, and migrants, continue to be excluded from social services, inheritance rights, and financial services (Tyagi and Vats, 2020). The lack of property documentation perpetuates informality, exacerbating inter-class disparities, and undermining community cohesion. Informal businesses face a constant danger of penalties, while regulatory neglect undermines social mobility, gender fairness, and long-term socioeconomic resilience (Singh et al., 2024, Govinda, 2013).

Spatial Exclusion and Built Environment Neglect

Despite their 'urban' status, many villages experience chronic infrastructural neglect and spatial exclusion. Inadequate building regulatory implementation, redundant land record systems (e.g., single-khasra or plot no.), and prolonged sanctioning processes enabled for unregulated growth and unplanned mixed-use development (Harikrishanan, 2021, GNCTD, 1985). Aggressive enforcement measures, such as sealing and demolition, focus on the tangible signs of informality rather than the underlying socio-economic conditions (Singh, 2020). Redevelopment projects continue to be elite-driven, with little participatory processes or context-sensitive design, alienating residents further (Tyagi and Vats, 2020). The lack of planned public infrastructure, municipal services, and open space perpetuates slum-like conditions (Bernroider, 2015, Prakash and Sharma, 2021, Ramesh et al., 2023). These findings suggest that urban villages are symbolically included through over-regulation but functionally excluded by inadequate funding, prolonging cycles of socio-spatial injustice (Sheth, 2017, Datta, 2004)

Transparency and Administrative Accountability

Administrative transparency has exacerbated these inefficiencies. Residents are usually unaware of the documents required for permits, and critical information—such as sanctioned layouts, ownership records, and building codes—is neither accessible nor proactively supplied (Prakash and Sharma, 2021). The lack of digitised and publicly available information reinforced reliance on informal brokers and brokers, delaying legal recognition, and exacerbating animosity between communities and institutions (GNCTD, 1985, NCRPB, 2005).

What Approaches Can Integrate Urban Villages and Promote Socio-Spatial Inclusion?

Existing studies presents several alternative planning and policy approaches that challenge traditional top-down urban planning frameworks for urban villages. Prakash and Sharma (2021) have highlighted on Bottom-up Jugaad ³based placemaking approach, which promotes community ownership and tangible outcomes. Furthermore, they also argue for moving away from the traditional PPP model to more inclusive People-Public-Private Partnership (PPPP) model. This new framework empowers locals to identify local needs, choose experts, and contribute to resource mobilisation, while public and commercial stakeholders assist with implementation (Prakash and Sharma, 2021). WRI India (2020) provided actionable recommendations like the Urban Village Development Plan (UVDP), a gradual planning framework for phased, local-level planning. The UVDP prioritises eight principles, including stakeholder engagement, transparency, and accountability, context-sensitive design, and linkage with larger urban planning policies and zoning regulations (WRI India, 2020). This framework assures that village development is both locally relevant and institutionally consistent.

³ Jugaad in Hindi language refers to an innovative, and creative idea offering a quick, alternative way—often cost-effective—of solving problems using readily available materials and resources.

Harikrishanan (2021) established the Shared Responsibility Model, which bridges the gap between top-down and bottom-up approaches by encouraging residents and the state to collaborate. This concept brings together adaptive reuse of built heritage, catalytic pilot interventions, and conservation incentives. It is built on enabling reforms including flexible master planning, digitised land records, and incentive-based land pooling to promote long-term spatial and socioeconomic integration. Gupta (2025) suggested for the integration of urban villages through neighbourhood-level planning frameworks, stating that their exclusion causes spatial disintegration, land misuse, and speculation. He further advocated for equitable distribution of surplus land value, infrastructural provisions, participatory methods, and employment-oriented planning. By addressing residents' lived realities, such initiatives can help to promote inclusive urban government, reduce socio-spatial disparities, and improve the incorporation of urban villages into metropolitan growth processes.

Conclusion and Future Suggestions

This study analyses the persisting policy gaps affecting urban villages in Delhi, India, using the IAD framework to investigate the drivers and consequences of socio-spatial exclusion. A comparative case study of Zamrudpur and Hauz Khas Village reveals a gap between planning discourse and implementation. Urban villages, while symbolically mentioned in policy documents, are functionally excluded from formal development due to political influence, institutional fragmentation, disregard of informal economy, spatial marginalisation, and inadequate administrative transparency. This selective integration exacerbates urban inequality and maintains socio-spatial imbalances. In theory, the study strengthens our understanding of how planning tools and governance institutions lead to urban exclusion. In practice, it provides guidance to urban planners and lawmakers by advocating for collaborative, integrated, and context-sensitive strategies. Recommendations include updating outdated land and zoning regulations, promoting bottom-up governance, recognising informal economies, ensuring transparency, and integrating urban villages into larger planning frameworks. Future study should investigate comparative case studies across Indian cities, socio-cultural dynamics within urban villages, the effectiveness of participatory planning, and novel finance mechanisms and public-private partnerships for urban village redevelopment. Such research will help to advance inclusive urban policies that address exclusionary actions and empower communities at large. Overall, the study adds to the greater issue of urban inclusion by providing a structured socio-spatial policy analysis. It highlights the necessity of hybrid governance models in which inhabitants collaborate to build development visions that are supported by public and commercial institutions, ultimately achieving the objective of equitable, inclusive cities.

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