

On popular participation in a culture of patronage; patrons and grassroots organization in a sites and services project in Hyderabad, Pakistan

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SUMMARY: *This paper begins by discussing the ways in which patronage inhibits housing solutions for low-income groups and the conditions under which it has greatest scope for operating. There follows a discussion of what factors diminish the power of patronage within the context of a government-run site and service programme in Hyderabad (Pakistan). Here, reducing scarcity (in this case affordable land sites) and the distance between people and government were important in reducing (although not removing) the role of patrons. The paper ends with some suggestions as to how the role of patrons can be reduced in government projects - and how low-income households' direct access to land and basic services without the involvement of a patron are among the best forms of "participation".*

"If you live in the river, it is better to stay friends with the crocodile" (Pakistani proverb).

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THIS ARTICLE IS based on data collected in 1989 during a month of field research in Hyderabad, Pakistan, complemented by brief visits between 1990-1995 and more extensive evaluative research during two weeks in 1993. The article argues that patronage stands in the way of planned implementation of policies and that a system based on patronage has a tendency to perpetuate and reinforce itself. The aim of the article is to trace those circumstances under which the influence of patronage diminishes thus enhancing the scope for successful intervention. Decreasing (artificial) scarcity and shortening the distance between the government apparatus and the population appear to be of great importance in this respect. Such circumstances, in their turn, can partly be influenced by purposeful intervention.

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1. Galjart, B.F. (1969), "Patronage als integratie mechanisme in Latijns Amerika", *Sociologische Gids*, page 402.

2. Baróss, P. (1983), "The articulation of land supply for popular settlements in Third World cities" in Angel, S., R.W. Archer, S. Tanphiphat and E.A. Wegelin (editors) (1983), *Land for Housing the Poor*, Select Books: Singapore, pages 180-210; also Van der Linden, J. (1986), *The Sites and Services Approach Reviewed*, Gower: Aldershot, Chapter I.

3. Yap, K.S. (1982), *Leases, Land and Local Leaders*, Free University: Amsterdam; also Van der Linden, J. (1983), "Actors in squatter settlement upgrading; their roles and interests" in Schoorl, J.W., J. Van der Linden and K.S. Yap (editors) (1983), *Between Basti Dwellers and Bureaucrats*, Pergamon Press: Oxford, pages 249-261.

4. Van der Linden, J. (1991), "Dalalabad; an inquiry into illegal subdivision in Karachi" in Van der Linden, J and F. Selier (editors) (1991), *Karachi, Migrants, Housing and Housing Policy*, Vanguard: Lahore, pages 385-419.

I. INTRODUCTION: LOW-INCOME HOUSING AND PATRONAGE

THE HOUSING PROBLEM of the poor in Third World cities can be considered a problem of scarcity, limiting access to a number of basic elements of housing - such as land and infrastructure - for increasingly large groups of the poor and in some cases also the less poor. Almost universally, governments appear to be incapable or unwilling to guarantee, or even facilitate, this access. Mostly, the bulk of low-income housing comes about outside official intervention, often illegally, or at least in contravention of official rules set for planning, servicing and construction of housing.

The basic elements of housing referred to above are pre-eminently issues over which governments have - or want to have - some authority; forms of legal tenure are determined by the government. Normally, the infrastructure is installed according to planning done or approved by the government. Very often, the installation of the infrastructure is the task of public agencies. The distribution of water and electricity and the provision of sewerage and transport are mostly taken care of, or regulated, by governments.

With this state of affairs, it is clear that the creation of extra-legal neighbourhoods entails a lot of work for patrons. Patrons are those who have some power to influence the allocation of goods and services in favour of their clients, in exchange for counter services of all sorts.⁽¹⁾ Persons in the government apparatus have to be persuaded to take no action against all kinds of law-breaking and to provide elements of the infrastructure to neighbourhoods which officially do not, and should not, exist. Such patrons' operations are especially clear in cities such as Karachi and Hyderabad, Pakistan, where most of the land around the city is public land and where the most crucial item of the infrastructure, water supply, has to be regulated by some large (public) organization since neither groundwater nor rain water is available.

Logically, both in establishing illegal neighbourhoods and in the provision of services to them, patrons play a dominant role. Their dominance on the low-income housing scene has become even more prominent because of the commercialization of illegal housing over recent decades, rendering individual squatting impossible so that the poor have no option but to turn to illegal brokers or developers.⁽²⁾

Obviously, patrons could not operate successfully if they were not complemented by a government apparatus characterized by systematic chaos and bureaucratic involution.⁽³⁾ It is not only a case of individuals in the public agencies manipulating the procedures, the rules and the interpretation of laws for their own interests; it can be demonstrated that several laws and bureaucratic procedures are themselves already instrumental to allocation based on patronage.⁽⁴⁾

For instance, the almost ubiquitously cumbersome bureaucratic procedures in Third World countries have less to do with incompetence than with purposeful institution of such proce-

5. SKAA (Sindh Katchi Abadis Authority) and UNICEF (1994), "On the role of SKAA, local councils, NGOs, community in the regularization and upgradation of *katchi abadis*, Proceedings of the Workshop, 12/06/94, SKAA and UNICEF:Karachi.

6. Nientied, P. (1987), *Practice and Theory of Urban Policy in the Third World; Low-income Housing in Karachi*, PhD Thesis, Free University:Amsterdam.

7. Wolf, E.R. (1956), "Aspects of group relationship in a complex society", *American Anthropologist* Vol.LVIII, pages 1056-1078.

dures, or at least, the lack of will to simplify them. A notorious example from Pakistan was the number of steps required, namely 24, to obtain a lease to a plot in an unauthorized settlement that was to be regularized. For a couple of years, even after completion of all these steps, only provisional entitlement certificates were issued having no legal value whatsoever.⁽⁵⁾ Laws which enhance patronage characteristically are open-ended, i.e. they do not settle an issue once and for all but it is as if they take away with one hand what they have given with the other. A Pakistani example is a Martial Law Order (MLO 67, of 1978, later replaced by MLOs 110 and 183, of 1979 and 1982) stipulating that all squattments on government land having existed from a certain date would be regularized, except in a few well-defined cases (such as neighbourhoods located in river beds etc.). The same Martial Law Orders state that from their institution onwards, no further illegal construction would be tolerated. As a result, incremental house construction, which is the common way for the poor to achieve a house, was not officially tolerated before legalization of the plot which may easily take 20 years or more. Second, while no measures were taken to provide the estimated 20,000 low-income plots per year required at the time, illegal occupation of land had been made even "more illegal" in view of the liberal attitude taken with regard to existing settlements. Right from its promulgation, everybody knew that this part of the law was impracticable and would only boil down to yet another opportunity to graft without otherwise changing anything.⁽⁶⁾ Thus, the laws and procedures themselves necessitate their circumvention and so enhance intervention by patrons. No wonder, then, that the mode of operation and the goals of persons in the government characterize them as patrons too.

a. Patronage and Policy Implementation

By definition, patronage stands in the way of a solution to problems. This is so, in the first place, because the interests of patrons often do not coincide with those of the clients whose interests they are supposedly serving. Second, patrons strive for particular *ad hoc* solutions to parts of problems only and they cannot afford to solve problems in the long term or in a structural way since, by doing so, they would undermine their own usefulness: the problems are the basis of their income and/or their power position.⁽⁷⁾

The incompatibility of patronage on the one hand and a correct implementation of policy interventions on the other is understandable when it is realized that patrons bestow favours upon their clients and are, therefore, opposed to efficient implementation of policies in which the rights and duties of the actors are well-defined and regulated. In contrast to processes in Western countries, where political activity takes place during the input stage of the political process (policy-making), in the Third World, often, a large part of individual and collective lobbying, representation of interests and the rise and solution of conflicts takes place during the output stage, i.e. the execution

8. Grindle, M.S. (editor) (1980), *Politics and Policy Implementation in the Third World*, Princeton University Press: Princeton.

9. Schuringa, M., S.A. Khan, E. Meijer and K.S. Yap (1979), *Baldia Evaluation Survey Report*, KMC/DAM:Karachi.

10. Kardar, S. (1989), *Institutional and Legal Arrangements for Administration of Urban Land: the case of Lahore*, UNHCS:Nairobi.

11. De Wit, J. (1985), "Slum dwellers, slum leaders and the government apparatus; relations between actors in slum upgrading in Madras", Urban Research Working Paper No.8, Free University:Amsterdam; also Van der Linden J. (1989a), "The limits of territorial social movements: the case of housing in Karachi" in Schuurmans, F. and T. Van Naerssen (editors) (1989), *Urban Social Movements in the Third World*, Routledge:London, pages 91-104.

12. Ellemers, J.E. (1969), "Patronage in sociologisch perspectief", *Sociologische Gids*, page 440.

13. Banck, G.A. (1986), "Poverty, politics and the shaping of urban space: a Brazilian example", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* Vol.X:4, pages 525-526.

phase of the political process.⁽⁸⁾ Thus, such political activities are directed at deviations from the policy rather than at execution along the lines described by the policy.

Often, patrons monopolize information, pass on incorrect or partial information to their clients⁽⁹⁾ and try to inhibit the realization of a policy directed at fundamental improvements:

"The bureaucracy and the political leadership use the absence of ownership rights for their own economic and political gains. They are the most formidable opponents of the process of regularization of illegal neighbourhoods which, according to the policy, have to be legalized."⁽¹⁰⁾

Mostly, the urban poor themselves appear to be well aware of the abuse of their situation by patrons. Inhabitants of illegal settlements can describe extensively the wrong-doings of their leaders and often conclude by saying that all of their leaders are "friends of money" or other similar remarks. However, because of close cooperation between the government apparatus and local leaders/politicians, patronage is, mostly, the only channel through which residents of illegal colonies can get some access to public - and other - goods and services. However bad the patrons' image, the clients often have no other option than to consider their patrons an unavoidable evil and thus play their role in the system under a formula which is well-expressed in the quotation heading this article: "If you live in the river, it is better to stay friends with the crocodile."⁽¹¹⁾

b. The Dynamics of Patronage

The above description of patronage provides a rather static notion of the concept: patrons are out to retain the status-quo and are not inclined to really solve problems; clients on the other hand have no choice. Thus conceived, patronage can only reproduce and reinforce itself. As far as I am aware, relatively little research has been done on the circumstances under which patronage changes or can, to some extent, be checked. A remark by Ellemers, that "clarification of rights and duties weakens patronage"⁽¹²⁾ is almost tautological: patronage flourishes in a context of opaqueness and poor information, a context purposefully maintained by stake-holders. More relevant, perhaps, would be the question as to the circumstances under which such lack of clarity diminishes. In this connection, a conclusion by Banck is important:

"Mass communication (especially TV) and improved education made people better informed which, in turn, broke the effective monopoly on information held by the local politician...This process went hand in hand with more complex administrative structures. This was partly fostered by the military regime's strengthening the executive powers as a way of political control but it also reflects tendencies in the direction of more complex and diversified bureaucratic structures linked to formal planning procedures."⁽¹³⁾

14. Gilbert, A. (1990), "The costs and benefits of illegality and irregularity in the supply of land" in Baróss, P. and J. Van der Linden (editors) (1990), *The Transformation of Land Supply Systems in Third World Cities*, Avebury:Aldershot, page 26.

15. See reference 14, page 29.

16. Burgwal, G. (1992), "Collective clientelism in contemporary Quito; some comments on its structure and culture", *Antropologische Verkenningen* Vol.XI:2, page 36.

17. De Wit, J. (1992) "The rise and fall of leaders in a Madras slum: the case of Mr. Ravindar, Mrs. Sarasvatti and Mr. Shekar", *Antropologische Verkenningen* Vol.XI:2, page 94.

18. Amis, P. (1984), "Squatters or tenants: the commercialization of unauthorized housing in Nairobi", *World Development* Vol.XII:1, pages 90 and 95.

Gilbert also pays attention to the dynamics of patronage. Contrary to Banck, who emphasizes the changing nature of patronage, Gilbert asserts that patronage diminishes when this allocation system becomes impractical or costly to urban management.⁽¹⁴⁾ In this connection, the scale on which services are requested, as well as some reduction of scarcity, are of importance.⁽¹⁵⁾ Both interrelated factors require greater rationalization than can be realized when patronage is the main method of problem-solving.

For instance, the provision of a larger quantity of water to a growing population requires skilled personnel and sophisticated organization to plan, to put the system in place, to maintain and to finance it. This requirement matches poorly with petty local leaders dropping by all the time to try and push their particular priorities. Attending to the needs of these patrons can become quite costly indeed.

Perhaps, finally, patronage also contains a self-destroying aspect. In order to retain their credibility and indispensability, patrons cannot but give in to their clients' requests from time to time. Especially when different patrons are each other's rivals, a process of demand inflation can very easily come about, substantially enhancing the clients' bargaining position.⁽¹⁶⁾ Such a process, however, can only take place if there are sufficient goods and services to be distributed. Ultimately, demand inflation is dependent on a reduction of scarcity which probably is the crucial variable.⁽¹⁷⁾

c. The Context of Patronage

There is also reason to pay attention to the context of the changing nature of patronage. It has been noted above that systems of illegal housing have become commercialized. In such commercialized systems, patron-client relations have often assumed a predominantly commercial character. For instance, the client's counter service is more and more rendered - at least partly - in terms of hard money. In this connection, an observation by Amis is of interest when he reports that in Nairobi "...claims to settle in an area shift from being based on ethnicity to being based upon more strictly economic criteria, i.e. ability to pay...The patrons even try to ethnically mix the new inhabitants in an attempt to limit the potential for opposition to their dominant position."⁽¹⁸⁾ In all likelihood, with the process of commercialization, misuse on the part of patrons has also increased; cases of pure fraud, such as the double or triple sale of the same plot to different persons, are very frequent in the Pakistani situation. In such a situation, the client's "loyalty" will be determined exclusively by the degree of his dependence on the patron. As soon as other, cheaper or more direct, ways are available, the client will prefer to make use of these, unless the patron still has a hold on his client in other ways.

In conclusion, in an urban context, patronage around housing issues has assumed a more business-like character. The question of how dependent clients remain on a patron's services is determined to a great extent by two factors: the degree of

scarcity and the presence or absence of alternatives, i.e. the degree of accessibility to public goods and services. In the case described below, scarcity was partially eliminated and the distance between government and people substantially reduced.

II. KHUDA KI BASTI: A SITES AND SERVICES PROJECT IN HYDERABAD

a. Low-income Housing in Hyderabad

UNTIL RECENTLY, LAND supply for low-income housing in Hyderabad was in a very poor state. Between 1979 and 1986, the Hyderabad Development Authority (HDA) had provided over 15,000 plots amongst which were relatively small ones, destined, in principle, for low-income groups. However, land is an important object of investment and speculation. Therefore, the demand for plots is many times that the number provided and the result is that, very soon, the available plots come into the hands of investors or speculators who have no intention of living, or even of building, in the new neighbourhoods. In turn, this makes it impossible to go and live in such neighbourhoods, should any allottee wish to do so, because it is practically impossible to live in settlements that will only be inhabited after 10 or 15 years. By that time, the plots will have changed hands between three and five times, and their prices will have gone up tremendously. Of the 15,000 plots mentioned, only 35 were inhabited by 1986.⁽¹⁹⁾ For the poor, this procedure completely blocks any opportunity for living on such plots; they do not want to, and cannot, invest in a piece of land which they will only be able to use after 15 years, and by the time the plots have become habitable, their price has risen far beyond the poor's affordability. The paradoxical result is that large "neighbourhoods" lie vacant while the poor's housing problems keep increasing, since there is no accessible public supply of plots for them. The poor have no option but to resort to the services of illegal brokers.

b. A New Approach to the Housing Problem

In 1986, the HDA started applying a completely new - for Pakistan - approach to land supply for low-income housing with the aim of creating access to legal plots for the poor.⁽²⁰⁾ An initial project called *Khuda ki Basti* ("God's Settlement") started in Autumn 1986 with this goal in mind. Important components of the approach are, first, that applicants for a plot have to present themselves with the whole household and all the household's goods. They are then accommodated in a provisional camp, the "reception area", where they have to live for about a fortnight. Secondly, the allocatees do not receive allotment orders for their plot. Instead, after a first, modest downpayment, a small monthly amount has to be deposited for infrastructure provision. Only when the full costs of the plot and infrastructure have been paid will allotment papers be issued. In this way, any long ab-

19. Siddiqui, T.A. and M.A. Khan (1990), "Land supply to the urban poor: Hyderabad's incremental development scheme" in Baróss, P. and J. Van der Linden (editors) (1990), *The Transformation of Land Supply Systems in Third World Cities*, Avebury: Aldershot, page 309.

20. It is important to note that a well-placed public officer with good intentions is apparently capable of achieving amazingly good results without changing a structure notorious for its neglect of the interests of the poor. The case presented here could be an indication of the fact that, especially in developing countries where bottlenecks are identified in the implementation of policies rather than in the policies themselves, the role of "urban managers" is much more crucial than the critique of "urban managerialism" has it. In Nientied, P. (1989), "Are the urban managers retired? The urban management model and its relevance for Third World social science", *Nagarlok* Vol. XXI:1, pages 10-21.

sence from the plot can be punished by cancelling the application and, with it, the allocated plot. Thus, investors and speculators can be excluded. Thirdly, infrastructure comes about incrementally in accordance with the inhabitants' monthly deposits. It is they who decide which item of infrastructure has priority. Just as in illegal sub-divisions, initially only water supply (by tank vans) and transport to the city centre is provided.

The project was - and still is - accessible to a very poor segment of the population. As the HDA has also opened a small branch office on the site, in principle there is also reasonable access to information about the project and to negotiation about all sorts of issues arising from the project. One indicator of the project's success is the enormous degree of resistance which the project gave rise to amongst illegal sub-dividers, land speculators, the police, government officers, planners and political leaders; apparently, the new approach posed a threat to all these groups.

c. Popular Participation and Patronage

With this thoroughly thought-out project, the Director General of the HDA wanted to break away from a notoriously poor policy for low-income housing and for the poor in general⁽²¹⁾. The Director General wanted the inhabitants to have an important say in the neighbourhood's further development. He wanted their cooperation, and indeed responsibility, in any attempts to exclude speculators, in managing the fund for infrastructure and in deciding priorities for spending this fund. When self-appointed leaders met with much resistance on the inhabitants' part, the HDA decided that it would be better for the residents to elect leaders for each building block (of about 200 houses) who were charged with communicating between inhabitants and the HDA, and with managing the infrastructure fund.

This leadership, however, does not seem to function well either. According to many inhabitants, the leaders constitute the new neighbourhood's biggest problem; the stories about the leaders' wrong-doings are in no way different from what people in illegal neighbourhoods report.

Typical of this is what the spouse of a person in my 1989 survey sample told me. In the absence of her husband, she was willing to answer my questions. Asked about the head of household's occupation, she said: "He was (provider of a service from his house) but, two months ago, he was elected a block leader so he has now given up his business. He is a leader now." When I presented this case anonymously to a number of leaders, they tried to find out to whom I was referring. When I refused to disclose the person's identity, they came up with no less than seven potential candidates, not including the person in question.

Apparently, leadership is still a profitable affair although it is not officially remunerative. By implication, there is clearly still scope for doing extra-legal business with HDA personnel. Leaving undisturbed a number of vacant plots in the colony is no

21. For details about the approach, see Siddiqui and Khan (1990), reference 19; also Siddiqui, T.A. and M.A. Khan (1994), "The incremental development scheme", *Third World Planning Review* Vol.XVI:3, pages 277-292; Van der Linden, J. (1989b), *Successful Supply of Plots for the Poor*, Urban Research Working Paper No.22, Free University:Amsterdam; Yap, K.S., A.H. Aliani and M.A. Khan (1991), *The Incremental Development Scheme; a case study of Khuda ki Basti in Hyderabad, Pakistan*, UNCHS:Nairobi; and Saiban (1993), "Evaluation of *Khuda ki Basti*", mimeo, Saiban:Karachi.

doubt one of the situations from which mediators and public personnel can gain. At the same time, money and/or power can be made from the threat to cancel the right of occupation of a plot.

A bus driver in *Khuda ki Basti* was offered a job for a couple of months on a tourist bus; doing this, he could earn much more than he usually did. As he had no relatives living in the neighbourhood, he did not want to leave his wife and children behind alone. But neither did he dare send his family temporarily to relatives for fear of leaving his plot uninhabited, lest his rights to it might be cancelled. When I asked him if such problems could not be discussed with the HDA, he admitted that the HDA would probably allow him to temporarily leave his plot. However, he said "I do not trust the leaders. In my absence, they can sell my plot to someone else. Maybe, in the long run, I would get my right but that would cost me much time and money. I am not going to run that risk."

An evident question is why leaders elected by the population misbehave to such an extent. The inhabitants' replies to this question speak for themselves:

"If we elect the good ones, then these are people with insufficient power to get anything done in government offices. They are people who work and therefore do not have time to spend whole days in government offices." Also: "If we elect the ones who are able to do something for us, then they are the ones who misuse the opportunity."

One person lived in the colony whom many people reported as honest and having the capacity to deal with public offices: a unique combination. There had been some pressure on this man to become leader of his housing block but he had refused. When I asked him why he had not given in to his neighbours' pressure, he said: "I want to live as a decent and honest person; do you think I would spoil my good name by becoming a leader?"

d. The Paradox: More Participation through Less Voice

The above is a somewhat sobering picture for those who think (rightly, of course) that people's right to have a say and to a democratically elected leadership are valuable things. The Director General was also disappointed. He had tried in various ways to check the leaders but the results have not been impressive.

At the same time, the inhabitants are full of hope. In contrast to residents of illegal neighbourhoods, they no longer consider their leadership an unavoidable evil: "Put an end to our leaders" was their often heard comment, "...we ourselves can do business with the HDA."

The fact that poor inhabitants of a popular neighbourhood insist that their leadership be abolished and that they are con-

fidant that they can themselves deal with a public office can probably be ascribed to the reduced influence of two circumstances which enhance patronage: scarcity and distance between government and people. In *Khuda ki Basti*, the people have official rights to housing albeit not in the shape of full allotment orders. These housing rights are not abstract goals, they are tangible and actively exercisable: an applicant household will immediately be accommodated in the scheme; they will not be kept on a waiting list but instead will become inhabitants from the moment of their application. Also, there is a reasonably accessible branch office of the HDA at the site, and: "Once we are rid of our leaders, the HDA people can no longer refer us back to them."

III. CONCLUSION

SURPRISING PERHAPS FOR those who value grassroots democracy, in a case such as the one described here, the rights and interests of the poor are probably best safeguarded by a rather centralized top-down approach with no tolerance for exceptions. One of the consequences would be a foregoing - at least for the time being - of those forms of popular participation which require leadership: a collective say in the neighbourhood's affairs, checking of speculators, collective management of funds, etc. Having access is the best guarantee for participation and seemingly democratic procedures stand in the way of participation.

This is so because an essential ingredient of poor people's survival strategies is keeping a low profile. Attempts to force them to speak out when this is inconvenient obstruct such strategies and, therefore, will not work: poor people are very dependent on their leaders and will not easily antagonize them. Therefore, in a culture of patronage, having a say or a vote is not as meaningful as it might seem. At the same time, when government officers try to communicate with the people through their leaders, they confirm and even reinforce the leaders' claims that nothing can be done except through them, thus increasing people's dependence instead of empowering them at a grassroots level.

This is not to say that people could not, or should not, come up with their own organizations. If they do, however, three things are important. First, such organizations are more likely to represent grassroots interests when they are not created through a public agency's initiative. If they are, the impression is created automatically that the organization and its leaders are the channel to public goods and services. In other words, if such an organization comes about through government instigation, this is perceived as a direct invitation to patronage.

Second, chances for really representative leadership are best enhanced when people feel they have access, even independently of their leaders. The more dependent people are, the better their leaders' opportunities for misuse. Indeed, as the case of *Khuda ki Basti* seems to demonstrate, it was better access which

22. Yap, K.S. (1983), "Access to resources and services as a form of participation" in UNCHS (1983), *Community Participation for Improving Human Settlements*, UNCHS:Nairobi.

enhanced people's opposition to their leaders. They felt that they could do without them because their rights were more secure. "I do not need a leader to buy a stamp from the post office" as one informant very succinctly put it. Yap also contends that access to resources and services is the best form of participation.⁽²²⁾

Third, communication through leaders only should be avoided since it is open to abuse; instead, discussions between public officers and leaders should always take place in open meetings. Decisions reached in such discussions should be made public officially.

More generally, all rules, regulations and procedures should be kept as simple, straightforward and transparent as possible, as abuse is directly proportional to their degree of complication. While this, of course, is a truism, it would seem that in a context of increasing costs of illegality and higher sophistication in city governance, urban managers have a better chance than ever before of operating in a way that limits abuse through patronage.