Informal Production of the City: Momos, Migrants and an Urban Village in Delhi

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to understand the production of the city through informality. In particular, informal practices related to the momo (dumpling) industry, concentrated in the 'urban village' of Chirag Dilli, are analysed in their dialectic relationship with formal planning and legislation in Delhi. We use a Lefebvrian framework that views city-making as an interaction of formal representations in the form of master plans, etc., informal and formal spatial practices (including momo production and living patterns) and representational (imagined) spaces related to neighbourhoods and the city.

Drawing on primary qualitative data, we examine how informality informed the formal planning. The uneven application of state legislation, in turn, fostered particular informal practices (such as momo manufacturing) and the emergence of a distinct urban morphology and of new cohabitation practices. The informal momo industry also altered the representational associations made with both the Chirag Dilli neighbourhood and the city of Delhi.

The paper shows how informal practices constantly interact with formal frameworks to co-produce urban space and consequently the city. We argue that informal practices are not necessarily in conflict with formal planning or subverting it, but that they play a central role in their own right for the production of space.

Key words:

Urban development, informality, housing, economic clustering, production of space, Delhi

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1. Introduction

"I sell it because it sells" points out Vikram who produces momos from a small apartment in the neighbourhood of Chirag Dilli, and sells them 13 km away in Connaught Place, the centrally located commercial area of India's capital.

These dumplings with vegetarian and meat stuffing, originally from Tibet, Nepal, and India's north-eastern region, have become Delhi's quintessential street food over the past years. Today, momo stalls flock metro station entrances, markets, and street corners all over the city, and corporate executives, small business owners, taxi drivers, and students alike frequent them. These dumplings have become the object of the urban imagination, as demonstrated through dedicated food festivals in prestigious locations and food reviews in major local English-language newspapers.

Delhi's burgeoning middle-class, who are generally more associated with 'modern' ambitions to create a 'world-class city' (Baviskar, 2003), adore the dumplings, although they are sold mainly by informal vendors and are produced by petty entrepreneurs and migrant workers from Nepal and Darjeeling. Mostly, the manufacturing units are located in Chirag Dilli, a densely populated 'urban village' with an organic settlement pattern and a population of about 25,000 in South Delhi.

This article attempts to understand the production of the city through such interactions of formal and informal practices, and imaginations in and on Delhi. Without emphasizing the influence of capitalism nor the analysis of class relations, we thereby refer to Lefebvre's triad of the production of urban space through the dynamic relationship between (i) daily spatial practices or perceived space, (ii) representational or lived space and (iii) conceived space or the representation of space (e.g. maps, models, etc.) (Lefebvre, 1991) and argue that 'the city', understood as a plural set of socially produced and overlapping spaces, is intrinsically co-produced[1] informally. This view goes beyond seeing the state and its planning apparatus as the dominant actor in conceptualizing and shaping the city (Bhan, 2016; Roy, 2009). It represents also a partial departure from much of the urban informality literature that sees the informal sector as 'the other', either as a stifled economic segment (Soto, 2002) or the urban service delivery champion (Bayat, 2007).

For this paper, the little dumplings form an entry point that connects a web of interrelated informal and formal spatial practices of production, sale, and consumption,

but also of housing construction, interregional and international migration. This myriad of practices is linked to historical and recent plans that depict today's Delhi and also to urban imaginaries of diverse actors, such as state bureaucrats, urbanites, petty entrepreneurs, and migrants. We argue that the informal momo manufacturing alters not only Delhi's foodscape but also spatial practices of its residents and collective memories of its places, thus reinforcing the informality's diversity, both as a practice as well as of the resulting space.

In section 2 of this paper, we develop a theoretical framework drawing on the Lefebvrian concept of the production of space to expand the understanding of urban informality. Section 3 describes the methodology, including a justification for taking food (or a food item) as an entry point in understanding the plurality of urban informal practices and a discussion of the methods used for data collection. Sections 4-6 present the empirical core of this paper, structured in line with the Lefebvrian framework, and examining the production of space as a cyclical process combining informality and formality. Section 4, describes how informality influenced the formal representation of space (conceived space) via Delhi's Master Plan and, in particular, the category of 'urban village'. Section 5 examines perceived space (spatial practice) through the interrelations between informal momo production, building typologies, uneven applications of city regulations and legislations in Chirag Dilli, adaptations to material housing stocks, and living forms. Section 6 discusses the abstract and symbolic values associated with lived space (representational space). It assesses how the clustered momo manufacturing altered the geographical perceptions of the urban village and the city as a whole. In the conclusions (Section 7), we refer back to the literature on urban informality and elaborate on our call for placing informality at the centre of the analysis of the production of the city.

2. Informality and the production of the city

This paper builds on recent literature on urban informality in India that shows how the state uses the conceptualization of informality to oppress and delegitimize marginalized populations (Baviskar, 2003; Roy, 2011) and that examines the complex and ideologically charged conflicts and negotiations between the state and different groups of citizens (Bhan, 2016; Ghertner, 2015). However, much of this literature puts the formal representation of space, via master plans, city development plans, municipal bylaws, government policies, etc., at the centre of the analysis. These studies see the

state – including its representation of space and compartmentalization of neighbourhoods and people into specific categories, such as 'slums' or 'planned colonies' – as ever-present and determinant of informality. It renders urban informality (and urban poverty) visible by pitching it against the state (Baviskar, 2003; Bhan, 2016; Ghertner, 2015; Roy, 2011), although Roy (2009) shows how the state itself is enmeshed in, and constituted of, informality. Bhan (2016), for example, links his analysis of the planning's failure to urban poverty and informality:

> "I am interested particularly in the ways in which failure intertwines with some more familiar objects of urban theory when studying cities of the global South: informality and illegality, both of which are closely seen as the most visible manifestation of the failure of planning." (Bhan, 2016: 46)

Through this link to planning failure, the conceptualization of informality runs the risk of becoming epistemologically limited to formal planning. Although these scholarly frameworks are relevant and important in their intent and impact, they tend to identify urban informality as a consequence of, a reaction to, or a negotiation with, the formal representation of space by or within the state.

Building upon this literature, this paper attempts to decentre the state further from the analysis. We try to assess urban informality's role, as a proactive force in its own right, in the co-production of the city, yet in a dialectical relationship with formality. For this purpose, we refer to Lefebvre's triad of the production of space.

According to Lefebvre (1991), the production of space occurs through the dialectical relationship between lived, perceived and conceived space. In this triadic framework, the notion of spatial practice (perceived space) refers to the everyday practices; representational space (lived space) denotes the mental constructions and descriptions of a space or a city, including the symbolic and cultural associations made with that space; and the formal representation of space (conceived space) includes maps, plans, models, designs, etc. by planners and bureaucrats. The Lefebvrian triadic dialectic puts practices, perceptions and representations at an equal level of importance for the production of space (Schmid, 2008). This allows overcoming simplistic dualisms, for example, 'people versus state', 'practices versus planning' or 'bottom-up versus top-down'. Massey (2005) developed this notion of space further by articulating it as a multifaceted, continuous and cyclical process and by embedding it in time. She argues:

"…we recognise space as always under construction. Precisely because space on this reading is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far."(Massey, 2005: 9)

The significance of Lefebvrian project of space as Schmid (2008: 27-28) outlines "… lies especially in the fact that it systematically integrates the categories of city and *space* in a single, comprehensive social theory, enabling the understanding and analysis of spatial processes at different levels". Massey (2005), further enmeshed time, space, and politics in developing her conceptualization, specifically arguing for centrality of space in a globalising world. Further, Goonewardena et al. (2008) revisited Lefebvre, proposing a reading of Lefebvre beyond his own writings and beyond more orthodox Marxist interpretations of Lefebvre prevalent in those works that were translated into English (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 285). Locating urbanization as the centre of analysis, they concluded:

"… Lefebvre offers a view of the urbanization process that is distinct from most others…. In order to grasp the specific character of the urbanized world, a fundamental reorientation of analysis is required: the city has to be embedded in the context of society as a whole. Seen from this perspective, the focus of the analysis changes, from the city as an object to the process of urbanization and its implications." (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 290)

Focusing on the process of urbanization through a Lefebvrian lens also permits the complexification of the notion of informality, which we understand, following McFarlane (2012), as a set of practices that are not registered with the state (e.g., selling food without a license, buying land without registration, building a house extension without permit, etc.). Following Lefebvre, (informal) practices influence spatial perceptions and representations through their material imprint in lived space, and vice versa, and they are thus involved in the production of space. More specifically, the Lefebvrian dialectic, helps us to understand (i) informality as a co-producer of space in dialectic relationship with other agencies, rather than as a simple consequence of, reaction to, or negotiation with, the formal agencies of the state; and (ii) the production of space (including that of a city) as a cyclical (rather than a linear cause-effect) process.

Using Lefebvre's theories to study informality is not new. Various authors referred to his concept of the production of space, or his call for the 'right to the city'. Studying informal vendors in Dar es Salaam, for example, Babere (2015) argues how a 'new city' emerges as the street vendors try evading the municipality. The author describes various interactions between informal sellers, municipality, and other users to argue that the former produces the city, particularly after official trading hours. Such a positioning brings informality (and the urban poor) at par with formal agencies, showcasing the production of another city, elsewhere in time. Babere also criticizes the municipality's move pushing the informal vendors to the city outskirts, thus impinging on their right to the (main) city. Koster and Nuijten (2016), further broaden this conceptual framework of the production of the city, they argue for the right to the city for the urban poor, including for informal practices:

> "Rather than depicting marginalized urbanites as a nuisance to or a target group of formal planning, we consider them as coproducers of urban space who have a right to the city. In other words, we argue that the right to 'coproduce' the city, through formal as well more informal channels, lies at the heart of the Lefebvrian call for the right to the city." (Koster and Nuijten, 2016: 284)

Using the term 'co-production', Koster and Nuiten, not only bring informality at par with formality, but also conceptually merge the space where formal and informal agencies operate. Nonetheless, they claim that "… it is often in the 'informal city' where the poor assert their right to coproduce the city" (Koster and Nuijten, 2016: 286). Unfortunately, this conceptualization links the urban poor to informality (and informality to the urban poor) and limits the space (co-)produced by informal practices to the spaces physically occupied by the poor. These and other studies on the co-production of urban space put emphasis on the resistance of informal city dwellers (or the urban poor). The urban poor claim right to the city through direct opposition and subversive practices. While we share these important concerns, this type of theorization has also encouraged development policies and strategies to try removing informality or bringing it into the formal fold by conceptualizing them as the 'other', evident from state policies to regularize, modernize and formalize informality (Amin, 2013).

Moving beyond the idea of applying Lefebvre's framework to a separate 'informal city' (or to a city 'afterhours'), Kudva (2009) follows more closely what we believe was Lefebvre's original intent and points out usefully that:

"The vast literature on informal settlements … focuses on the production of deeply inequitable urban settlements and the mechanisms for the provision of better housing and services, but pays much less attention to understanding the relationship of fast-growing informal settlements to the larger patterns of urban spatial growth." (Kudva, 2009: 1617)

Kudva argues for keeping 'space' as the central concept in analysing informality and its politics. Her empirical work shows how the production of space in places of informality (where informal work and informal shelter come together) structures politics. She unpacks this using both the everyday life and the episodic conflicts of state action against informal practices. Drawing upon the cases of the closing of cottage industries in Delhi and the textile mills in Ahmedabad, she shows how the development of the local economy and of new neighbourhoods occurred in parallel with new environmental politics (in Delhi) and with broken structures and communal riots (in Ahmedabad). Thus, Kudva links informality not only to the material production of the city, but also to changed economic strategies and political structures. Her focus on space opens up conceptual possibilities of studying informality's contribution to the production of the city beyond its material dimension (i.e., construction through informal labour) to include legislative tools, imaginations, and practices.

Taking a cue from Kudva and building on the existing literature on informality and the production of space that focuses on the spatially and temporally limited co-production of the city by the urban poor, we analyse urban informality more broadly in a plurality of lived spaces, that is, in and beyond the city's 'informal settlements' and even in abstract, representational space. This implies a conceptualization of urban informality that is delinked from particular places (i.e., informal settlements or slums) as well as from particular groups of people (i.e., the urban poor). As McFarlane brings it to the point:

"…framing informality and formality as practices means dispensing with both the idea that informality belongs to the poor and formality to the better off, and the associated idea that informality and formality necessarily belong to different kinds of urban spaces." (McFarlane, 2012: 105)

In this perspective, urban informality can be found in the practices of any actor in the city, i.e., the same person can conduct both formal and informal practices. This view also avoids placing informality as a residual ('not yet formal') or as the 'other' category, and suggests a dialectical relationship between formality and informality.

Furthermore, this conceptualization implies that the "right to coproduce the city" (Koster and Nuijten, 2016: 284) has to be put in perspective with the fact that the city is already being coproduced by informal practices, beyond the physical space occupied by the urban poor or informal squatters. However, this is of course not to paint a glorified picture of urban informality nor to deny the problems occurring in the spaces occupied by the urban poor with respect to health, sanitation, citizenship, etc.

In this paper, we are particularly interested in how informal practices not only coproduce physical-material space but also influence representational (imagined) space and the representation of space, which in turn shape informality in a dialectical way. This argument is illustrated further below in the case of the relationships between momo manufacturing and consumption, changing urban imaginaries in and on Delhi, and some elements of the city's Master Plan. Thus, our analysis goes beyond the common interpretation of informality as a result of, or an opposition to, state-led planning to an understanding of informality as dialectically intertwined with formality.

3. Methodology

In accordance with our theoretical framework on urban informality, we take spatial practices as a starting point for the analysis, rather than the urban poor or a particular informal settlement. More specifically, we take the spatial practices around momos as an entry point to examine the physical and representational production of Delhi and its neighbourhoods. Food appears like a useful way into a Lefebvrian analysis, as it not only relates to physical-material everyday spatial practices (cooking, serving, vending, eating, etc.) but also to representational (imagined) space and geographical 'collective memories' (Barash, 2016). Nandy (2004), for example, shows the symbolic role of food as a constituent of self-definition (e.g., through public dining of a pan-Indian diet) and of collective memories (e.g., people who left their homes after the partition of British India remember the "lost village…through food" (Nandy, 2004: 17)). As we have seen in the introduction, momos too, have increasingly become a collectively imagined part of the Delhi's geography. Momos, and food more generally, are of course only one small element in the co-production of the city – others could be historical monuments, tourist trails, language, (cottage) industries and so on. Momos serve here more as a heuristic tool to unveil the influence of informal practices on the production of Delhi, starting from the 'urban village'[2] of Chirag Dilli, where momo production is concentrated.

Figure-1-here

Fieldwork in Chirag Dilli and other locations relevant for momos was conducted from May until August 2015 with a follow-up visit from October until December 2016. During these periods, semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with about 40 respondents. We interviewed 13 self-employed momo entrepreneurs, that is, eight owners of momo manufacturing units who are also involved first-hand in making and vending the dumplings, as well as five owners of momo eateries. Furthermore, we conducted interviews with 11 labourers in the momo industry; seven workers in manufacturing units and four servers and cooking staff in eateries. These workers were all migrant labourers (from Nepal and from the North-East of India) self-identifying as coming from outside Delhi and associating Delhi predominantly with work. The interviews focused on the life stories of the self-employed entrepreneurs and the migrant labourers and their daily routines of working and housing, as well as on the momo business and the relationships with the neighbourhood. All the interviewees were living in Chirag Dilli. In addition to people working in the momo industry, we carried out seven semi-structured collective interviews with a total of 16 non-migrant Chirag Dilli residents who had been living there for a long time (often their entire life). Additional insights were gained through participant observation.

The interviews and informal conversations were conducted in Hindi by the first author, recorded later as field notes, and translated into English. All the names used are pseudonyms.

4. How informal spatial practices affected the representation of space in Delhi's Master Plan

Lefebvre's discussion on the production of space is inherently linked to critiquing the space, as Schmid (2008: 28) beautifully phrases, "Space does not exist 'in itself'; it is produced". It is this production aspect that brings the critical reading of representation of space, as Lefebvre points out:

> "Knowledge falls into a trap when it makes representations of space the basis for study of 'life', for in doing so it reduces lived experience. The object of knowledge is, precisely, the fragmented and uncertain connection between elaborated representations of space on the one hand and representational spaces (along with the underpinnings) on the other…"(Lefebvre, 1991: 230)

In this section, therefore, we attempt to read the formal representation of space, particularly through the Delhi Master Plan, along with spatial practices and representational space. The Delhi Master Plan (Ministry of Urban Development, 2007) is an archive of the formal representation of space; it has statutory powers and puts together the present and future imaginations of the city. As any other representation of space that serves the purpose of governing and developing spaces and populations, the Master Plan is a simplified abstraction that compartmentalizes places and people into static categories, such as slums, urban villages, planned colonies, or economically and socially weaker sections, migrants etc. These abstractions are essential for current planning notions in Delhi and elsewhere, but by their very nature eliminate nuances.

The current Master Plan's vision is to make Delhi a "world-class city" (Ministry of Urban Development, 2007: 1) which is imbued with liberal ideas of equity and participation[3], and associated with both a beacon of modernization and state brutalization (Baviskar, 2003). This section focuses on the creation of the Master Plan category: 'urban village'. This categorization was influenced by informal land acquisition practices in the 19th century and as we shall see in Sections 5 and 6, this categorization influences the production of contemporary Delhi. To understand Delhi as "a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (Massey. 2005: 9), we also need to look at the history of Chirag Dilli.

Chirag Dilli was built around a 14th century-Sufi-Saint shrine popularly referred to as *Chirag-e-Dilli* (Light of Delhi). In 1729, the emperor Mohammed Shah Rangila built a square fortification wall around the tomb, as an offering to the *Dargah* (shrine), with a gate on each side. In the early 1760s, Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded Delhi, during which, many citizens took refuge inside the *Dargah* walls, and they never left, resulting in the village of Chirag Dilli (Mitchell et al., 2010). The second settlement wave occurred in the late 1850s from nearby villages, as Gupta (1969) mentions: "The village [Chirag Dilli] attracted different people from neighbouring places only in 1857, purely for safety reasons, since, the war of India's Independence was fast spreading" (Gupta, 1969: 16-17). These informal land occupations by the early residents led to a situation where the legality of land records became very complex. Contrastingly, the farmlands of Chirag Dilli had orderly land records, historically devised for taxation by the Mughals and then followed by the British.

Until today, it is very complicated to sell and buy houses and housing plots in Chirag Dilli (and other urban villages in Delhi) due to the lack of unambiguous historical land records. Thus, properties are almost exclusively passed on through inheritance. Living in one's inherited house leads to a *de facto* property right over the dwelling and its land. As Kumar (2015) notes: "possession of house is the main proof of ownership in *abadi* areas [residential areas of urban villages]"(Kumar, 2015: 131)

When the first Delhi Master Plan was conceived in the 1960s, the complexity of legal land records in Chirag Dilli and other similar settlements became a hurdle for planning regulations. Modern master plans operate on a clear and documented land titles paradigm, onto which they formulate bylaws and regulations. Lacking clear land property rights therefore impeded modernist city planning. To solve this problem, the planning authority, created a new category called 'urban village'. Since the authorities were not able to declare the informal historical land acquisitions in these areas as either legal or illegal, the Master Plan exempted urban villages from the building regulations formulated in the Master Plan. The residential boundaries of urban villages were fixed; inside these areas, building and other regulations were relaxed compared to the rest of the city. For example, building's renovations and structural transformations do not require municipal approvals in urban villages.

This example illustrates how informality is incorporated in the legal framework. Interpreted in our Lefebvrian framework, we can identify a dialectical relationship between spatial practice (i.e., the informal land acquisitions and house/land transfers) and representational space (i.e., the Cartesian logic underpinning the master planning paradigm) that influences the representation of space (the Master Plan). Such a reading of the representation of space, conceptualizes informality as a category that is not unilinearly dependent on, but stands in a dialectical relationship with, the state.

These interrelationships between the lived, perceived and conceived continue to shape the production of space in Delhi. The lack of bureaucratic hurdles in Chirag Dilli and other urban villages renders the physical housing infrastructure more modifiable and adaptable to new circumstances than elsewhere in the city. "Differential norms" (Ministry of Urban Development, 2007: 86) also apply in regard to use restrictions. According to the latest 2021 Master Plan, mixed use (i.e., commercial activities in residential areas) is allowed anywhere in urban villages whereas in most other settlement types, it is only permitted in buildings on wide roads and in demarcated

market areas.[4] This implies that it is very easy for property owners in an urban village to rent their property for carrying out commercial activities, including manufacturing or serving momos. Furthermore, the relaxed building and use regulations in urban villages reduce overhead expenses for bureaucratic red-tape, bribery, etc., rendering the commercial and residential rents cheaper than elsewhere in the city. (Unofficial mixed use and unapproved renovations certainly take place elsewhere in Delhi, but as they are deemed illegal as per Master Plan, officials often need to be bribed for turning a blind eye, thus increasing expenses and uncertainty for property owners.)

Chirag Dilli's representation as an 'urban village' in the Master Plan influenced the area's physical development. The above-mentioned exemptions, together with general cultural and demographic processes, led to massive morphological transformations here. For example, with the generally observable shift from extended to nuclear families, most of the *Havelis* (large old courtyard houses) were demolished and replaced with new 'modern' buildings with smaller detached apartments since the beginning of the 1990s (see Figure 2). Initially, the owner families normally occupied these buildings. Since the 2000s, however, more and more flats have been rented out to small-scale informal entrepreneurs and migrants seeking cheaper rental options than available in the surrounding areas. (Chirag Dilli got surrounded by new settlements built by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) from the 1950s to the 1980s: Malviya Nagar in 1950s, Greater Kailash in 1960s and Sheik Sarai in 1980s (see Figure 1). These 'colonies' cater only for a narrow bracket of middle-class residential owners and, as per Master Plan, use is largely limited to be residential.)

To sum up, the case of Chirag Dilli, and urban villages more generally, shows that the land acquisition and the resulting messiness of property rights influenced the formulation of the Delhi Master Plan. The state was not able to abstract informality for the purpose of the Master Plan. Here, informality preceded the Master Plan and was not simply a response to it (i.e., resistance). This case, therefore, broadens the arguments often put forward in the literature on informality in India (Bhan, 2013; Roy, 2009) to acknowledge the existence of urban informality beyond and partly independent from formal planning and the constraints it poses on people and their activities. Furthermore, the exemption from planning rules (rather than their implementation and imposition) encouraged the further development of informal construction, rental and commercial practices, as we will see in the following sections. It is therefore not the space left out of the ambit of planning, or the planning strategies alone, which produce urban

informality; rather, informality plays an active role in the production of space and thus the resulting city in an on-going cyclical process.

5. How informal spatial practices shaped the production of alternate housing types

As indicated in the previous section, "people from outside", as an elderly long-term resident put it, started seeking rental options in Chirag Dilli by the early 2000s. Some, including momo entrepreneurs, were also looking for commercial space.

Vikram's story (see introduction quote), whose father originated from West Bengal and came to Delhi in 2001, is a point in case (we illustrate our arguments with Vikram's case throughout, as he represents a typical momo entrepreneur). From his inherited tea stall in Connaught Place (central Delhi), Vikram started selling momos. He soon realized that it is more profitable to produce them himself and thus started manufacturing momos from his rented apartment in nearby Paharganj. However, it was difficult to conduct business there. In 2011, he shifted his residence and momo production unit to Chirag Dilli, 13 km (about 45-minute drive) away from his tea stall, which he kept. As he explains:

> 'It was not possible to work in the Paharganj apartment. The neighbours complained, sometimes they called the police, and I did not find any boys [hired workers] … There is everything here [in Chirag Dilli], from material to labour to access vehicles. It is far from Connaught Place, but it is much more convenient to work here.'

The Chirag Dilli momo cluster[5] developed through the mutually reinforcing relationship between manufacturing centres, neighbourhood shops providing raw materials (e.g., utensils, flour, vegetables etc.) and migrant workers into an 'ecosystem' conducive for the momo industry. Both house owners (often shop owners) and renters (momo entrepreneurs and workers) benefited from the cluster so that initial complaints from other neighbours were ignored and silenced. The so-called momo industry nuisances (e.g., concentration of young men, smell of cooking meat etc.) became a locally accepted norm. This clustering has been facilitated by the dialectics between perceived, conceived, and lived space: Cultural perceptions and expectations on Chirag Dilli changed; relaxed building codes in the urban village rendered the housing stock more

malleable and adaptable to this burgeoning industry; and entrepreneurs and workers adopted new forms of collective living (see below).

Local house owners capitalised on the opportunities from growing commercial and residential space demand, including from the momo industry, by converting their larger houses (*havelis*) into multiple small rental apartments and creating ground-floor shops (see Figure 2). Chirag Dilli thus offers a variety of rental options today, from single-room studios to multi-room apartments and ground-floor commercial spaces (shops), restaurants and even small manufacturing units. A long-time resident explained:

> 'We were not very rich. Initially [in 2000s] everybody started giving up their land to builders [small-scale local developers] and in return got multiple apartments and shops built [the developer keeping a few of the apartments for himself in lieu of a cash payment]. This led to easy income in the neighbourhood. Later, when people had money, they began building on their own [using a contractor rather than a developer]. Now very few *havelis* are left, everyone wants to build and earn rent.'

Figure-2-here

This new architectural infrastructure facilitated the emergence of the momo cluster, and vice versa. The very common layout of apartments, locally referred to as 1-BHK (one bedroom, hall, and kitchen), is suitable for momo manufacturing, as well as for many other, including residential, uses. Vikram, the momo producer, comments:

> 'We just need a hall, a kitchen and a toilet for making momos, so we easily fit into any apartment in Chirag Dilli. The only factor is that the rent should match the profit we make.'

This flexibility of the housing stock, together with the exemption of Chirag Dilli from use regulations, creates a situation where flats can shift easily between commercial and residential uses. This interchangeability is important for the property owners because of the Delhi Rent Control Act of 1958, from which urban villages are not exempt. Initially intended to protect the tenants from arbitrary rental hikes, this legislation prohibits rent increases without the tenant's written consent. However, landlords throughout Delhi responded to this law by limiting leases to 11 months or less. Subsequent short-term leases are offered, mostly with a 'customary' 10% increase in rent, or the flat is

given to a new tenant able to pay the market rate. While this (informal) practice is ubiquitous in Delhi, the particular housing stock and exemption from use restrictions allows Chirag Dilli property owners to rent their apartments not only to families but also to commercial momo manufacturing units. Indeed, momo entrepreneurs frequently shift within the neighbourhood to avoid higher rents given their tight profit margins. Vikram, for example, moved his manufacturing unit twice between his arrival in 2011 and 2015. Moving operations is relatively easy for the momos manufacturing units as they do not have heavy machinery. Furthermore, the entrepreneurs already established in Chirag Dilli find new rental space through their local networks, including the shopkeepers and workers who supply the raw materials. This particularity of conceived, perceived, and lived space in Chirag Dilli leads to a higher tenant turnover than in most other parts of Delhi.

Furthermore, the constant shifting of momo entrepreneurs and other tenants provides the opportunity for the landlords to regularly renovate the flats and adjust them to market demands. Interestingly, the demand of momo manufacturers for ceramic floors (as they facilitate cleaning and provide more comfort to the workers who sit on the floor) and other amenities, such as running water and a functioning kitchen, has contributed to the general improvement of the housing stock in Chirag Dilli. As of now, informality has created good-quality living conditions for momo entrepreneurs and workers here; it remains to be seen whether episodic moments of state interventions or gentrification processes will bring this to an end (as shown by Kudva (2009)).

The momo industry also brought about new living arrangements in Chirag Dilli. The entrepreneurs normally use their rented 1-BHK flat for both working and living. Producing momos, cleaning utensils, doing the accounts, cooking for the workers, eating and sleeping all take place in the 1-BHK flat. For practical and economic reasons, the momo entrepreneurs also live together with their permanent worker, as they require close contact throughout the day and until late at night (to sell the momos elsewhere in Delhi).

Thus, momo manufacturing created a new housing type that combines factory space with a residence. This is the resultant of both the spatial practice of momo-entrepreneurs and the representation of space with respect to Chirag Dilli. The dual use of flats is unregulated in urban villages while elsewhere in Delhi, commercial activities and residential use has to be separate by law.

Furthermore, the free accommodation provision to the permanent workers acts as a perk. The apartments, having running water and a working kitchen, present decent living spaces. Being small-scale momo factories, they are also cleaned on a daily basis and ventilated. The average person in the surrounding slums may earn more than a permanent momo worker,[6] but they generally live less comfortably, confirming that informal practices do not always lead to poor housing conditions.

The 1-BHK layouts also prove to be suitable for the casual momo workers, who have arrived in Chirag Dilli since the early 2000s as well, mostly from Nepal and the north-eastern states of India. They live in shared accommodation of five to ten persons occupying the same type of 1-BHK flats used by the manufacturing centres and other residents. Thanks to the high number of persons per flat, the rents become affordable to the workers even though their salaries are low and despite the increasing rents due to improving housing stock. These shared apartments also become the nodes of social networks for exchange of job prospects, contributing to the economic and ethnic clustering. As informal jobs are available and housing is shared, the transition from outside the city to the momo industry is very smooth. As Guddu, a young casual momo worker, who recently came from his native village in Nepal where he studied at the local high school, explains:

> 'My friend [who already worked in Chirag Dilli] was visiting his family in Nepal and asked if I wanted to join him. I convinced my father and we came to Chirag Dilli. I shared his bed in the apartment on the first day and on the second day, he introduced me to an owner who hired me to make momos. Now I have my own bed, and I live in the same apartment. It is cheap; we share food and other expenses. We are all friends so it is a good time-pass.'

Landlords welcome the migrant workers as they fit the existing 1-BHK flat structures and are able to pay the rent thanks to the employment opportunities in the momo industry. These migrant workers invariably intend to go back to their hometown in future; Delhi represents primarily a work place and only a transitory living place for them. This makes them ideal renters for the house owners: migrant momo workers have low expectations from the flat and put few demands on the landlord, and they can be evicted easily. One landlord told us that:

'These momo people rent a lot. It is hassle free because they are young boys, so don't complain a lot or argue. It is also easy to ask them to move out of the flat, as opposed to, say, a family.'

As discussed, the 1-BHK rental apartments are very malleable to different uses: they can be used for momo manufacturing as well as for housing of momo entrepreneurs, permanent workers, casual workers, and others. Flats used for commercial purposes in Chirag Dilli sometimes shift (back) to residences. For example, a casual worker of Vikram now lives in the space previously rented for his manufacturing unit. They now benefit from an 'upgraded' apartment with ceramic floors. Generally, the constant shifting of tenants and the shifting between uses both improve the quality of the housing stock and increase the rents.

The interactions of conceived, perceived and lived space led to the following four processes: (i) the development and constant improvement of housing stock; (ii) the oscillating use of this housing stock between commercial and residential property; (iii) the adaptation and differentiation of living arrangements in the same kind of housing units; and (iv) the economic clustering of momo manufacturing. The representation of space as per Master Plan and the rent control act motivated informal practices of short-term leases that led to high tenant turn-overs and the opportunity to adjust and improve the housing stock. At the same time, the representational space (urban imaginaries) of the casual workers rendered Delhi as a work place. This derives from them identifying themselves as migrants, who have a clear idea of a distant home where they want to go back (irrespective of how long they have lived in Delhi). Such a representational space affects the spatial practice in terms of their willingness to live collectively without complaining to the owner. The landlord exploits this situation by creating a rental market that is in constant flux (both in terms of change of tenants and increasing the number of tenants in case of casual workers). These situations reinforce our earlier argument on understanding the city as dialectic and constantly under production.

6. Representational space: multiple and changing imaginaries on Chirag Dilli

As seen in the introduction, an emerging street foodscape in general, and momos, in particular, has come to contribute to a sense of urbanity in the view of different social classes in Delhi. This urban imaginary is of course juxtaposed with many other ones,

including that of Delhi as an emerging world-class city. In this section, we will discuss how representational space (urban imaginaries) are produced with respect to the perceived and conceived space discussed in the previous sections.

While momo manufacturers find it preferable to work and live in Chirag Dilli, they attempt to sell the dumplings from retail outlets (tea stalls, mobile kitchens, etc.) elsewhere in Delhi to access a larger market. These retail outlets usually pop-up in the afternoon. Vikram, for example, brings momos to his tea stall in Connaught Place at 3pm to sell them until around 9pm or whenever all the dumplings are sold. Momo vending changes the character of the street. People gather to eat and the footpath is converted to a social, public place. These practices not only change the city's foodscape, but also the representational space or the urban imaginary associated with Delhi.

However, to establish a vending spot outside Chirag Dilli requires strong social networks to avoid harassment by the authorities and excessive bribery. Vikram, for example, uses his inherited footpath teashop in Connaught Place, where he grew up and has established a strong social network. His local social network is the result of spatial practices over years to establish relationships with the neighbouring shops as well as the local police and municipal inspectors. It is not that Vikram is able to avoid paying bribes, but they are set at a fixed rate and are thus predictable (cf. Schindler, 2014). Informal social networks are key because the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, which foresees the protection of small retailers from eviction (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2014), remains not implemented.

Other momo producers, who lack social networks elsewhere in Delhi, tend to start an eatery in Chirag Dilli. Raj, the owner of a momo eatery, commented:

> 'I know how to make momos and that selling them on streets is more profitable than running a 'hotel' [momo eatery]. When I started selling, the police harassed me and the owners of the nearby shops complained about garbage even though I cleaned it up. It is too much tension to sell momos on streets, so I am now happy with my hotel business [momo eatery].'

The migrant workers associate a different representational space. For example, Guddu, a casual momo worker whom we met in the previous section, described Delhi as a place of economic fortune, like many other migrant casual workers in the momo industry. Recounting his move to the city, Guddu explains:

'In our village when someone goes to Delhi, it is seen as a good employment venture. When we go back to Nepal [on yearly holidays] we have money [savings from working the whole year], people see us with respect. So when in Delhi we try to save as much money as possible.'

This urban imagination of Delhi (and of Chirag Dilli) as a site of making money and savings results in specific spatial practices (as discussed with respect to housing choices in the previous section). Returning and visiting momo workers depict Chirag Dilli as a place of job opportunities to their friends and kin back in Nepal and Darjeeling. In a similar vein, entrepreneurs associate Chirag Dilli with economic opportunities as Vikram reported to us: "My friend told me that to make momos, one need to be in Chirag Dilli."

There is a scalar shift in the way these two particular imaginations work. The migrant momo workers see Chirag Dilli as a hub of opportunity and build their image of Delhi based on this representational space. Momo eatery owners, contrastingly, see Delhi in general as a restrictive space where they are hindered to run a business due to the informal practices of officials. For them, Chirag Dilli is an exception where they can operate more freely, in part due to its representation as an urban village. Further, the people who enjoy momos on the street, build a mental foodscape imagery of Delhi. This foodscape imagery is based on the momos and the temporal changes it brings to the street and is devoid of what happens in Chirag Dilli (as evident from the numerous newspaper articles). By contrast, the Master Plan represents Chirag Dilli as a heritage zone in the city, proposing a "specific heritage complex" there (Ministry of Urban Development, 2007: 64). Finally, the residents both welcome the financial benefits from the changing work/live space and lament and imagined past glory of the urban village. The presence of the momo industry definitively changed their representational space of the neighbourhood. This is most evident through the narratives of the house owners and old residents on the momo eateries. The sprawling eateries in Chirag Dilli offering dumplings and other snacks have changed the eating habits of its residents. One resident re-constructs a nicer past as:

'Those days [during his youth, in the late 1980s] there were no momos, and very few shops. We used to eat from the *halvai* [sweet-maker]. These days kids eat momos and *chaumin* [Chinese-style noodles]. It is all over the place now [slightly angry and contemptuous tone].'

The recent changes in the food and cityscape of Chirag Dilli seems to have led to a romanticized view of the urban village before the arrival of momos. The old residents, though they benefit from the momo industry, produce an urban imaginary where the old eras of the neighbourhood with *havelis* are re-imagined. Following Appadurai (2010) and Nandy (2004), we argue that the changed foodscape of Chirag Dilli not only alters the settlement but also its collective imagination. By using the term 'these days', the resident quoted above is not only referring to the physical changes in the settlement, but also the change in the lived experiences of the residents. Here, momos have considerably altered the symbolic meanings and associations.

This section showed that a city or a neighbourhood is more than the images being projected by the formal representation of space (e.g., through the Master Plan). There is a multiplicity of representational spaces constructed by different groups of people. This multiplicity of representational spaces, further translates into various spatial practices (see section 5), resulting in both tangible and intangible aspects of the city. The type of city that is illustrated through this dialectic is one where the 'otherness' of informality dilutes to form one of the many factors producing the city. In the case of Chirag Dilli, many of these representational spaces have been shaped by the informal practices related to the momos industry in their dialectical relationship with the formal representation of space.

7. Conclusion

Following Lefebvre, we analysed the production of the city through interactions between the 'representation of space' (particularly through the Delhi Master Plan), 'spatial practice' linked to the momo industry in Chirag Dilli (e.g., production and vending practices, living patterns, rental practices) and 'representational space' (e.g., multiple imaginations of Chirag Dilli and its relation to Delhi). Thereby we found that informality is a crucial element in the production of the city. At the larger city scale, for example, informal occupation and resulting informal property relations in Chirag Dilli influenced the formal Master Plan, which created the 'exceptional' category of urban villages and exempted these from many formal clauses. In turn, the Master Plan, as well as related legislations and spatial exemptions, reshaped formal and informal practices (e.g., altering housing stock and use). Furthermore, we have shown how largely informal activities linked to the momo industry led to morphological changes (e.g., the improved housing stock) as well as the emergence of new living forms in

Chirag Dilli. We represented this urban neighbourhood as both a space of exploitation and of achieved social possibilities. Finally, we have described how momos and related informal practices created a plurality of representational spaces of Chirag Dilli and of Delhi that goes beyond the imagination of the city as an emerging world-class metropolis.

Through this analysis, we also challenge some of the existing literature on urban planning and on urban informality that puts much emphasis on the (governmental) planning apparatuses (including the master plans) as the key producer of the city, either through their omnipresence or through their absence. The first type of literature refers to the (often violent) implementation of the plan that criminalizes large sections of society and many informal practices. Informal settlements, or informality more generally, are defined, determined and created by a formal planning apparatus, without which they would not exist (Bhan, 2013; Heller and Partha, 2015; Roy, 2005). In another strand of literature, urban informality emerges and strives in the ruptures of the formal city making process, in those interstices where planning is absent. Thereby, informality is seen as the normality in developing cities (AlSayyad, 2004; Sen, 1976). Here, we put the emphasis on the variety of informal practices, such as those of momo entrepreneurs and workers, and on the dialectical relationships between them. Further, we broaden the argument that informality is not just a purview of the urban poor and it impacts beyond the physicality of the neighbourhood.

Taking this approach, we intend to avoid rendering informality as the 'other' (pre-modern in a linear timeline towards being modern) in understanding the urban. Contrasting informality to the formal representation of space carries the danger of decentring it in the urban debate. Researchers have shown how informality is not just a realm of urban poor, but there exists a gap in a clearer formulation on how to study informality. Therefore, we used informality as a tool to understand the city rather than the other way around, that is, starting with the state, the city or the master plan to understand informality. Thereby, we have shown that informality co-produced temporal social spaces, settlements, foodscape and imaginations of a city in their dialectical relationship with formal planning and state legislation.

Imagining a future city, Amin (2013) argues in his 'telescopic urbanism' for the city of collective rights that:

> "A first step towards a politics of the staples understood as shared infrastructural rights across the urban territory is to turn the telescope the right way round so that the whole city comes back into view, revealing the multiple geographies of inhabitation and their interdependencies, showing business consultancy city and slum city as part of the same spatial universe." (Amin, 2013: 486)
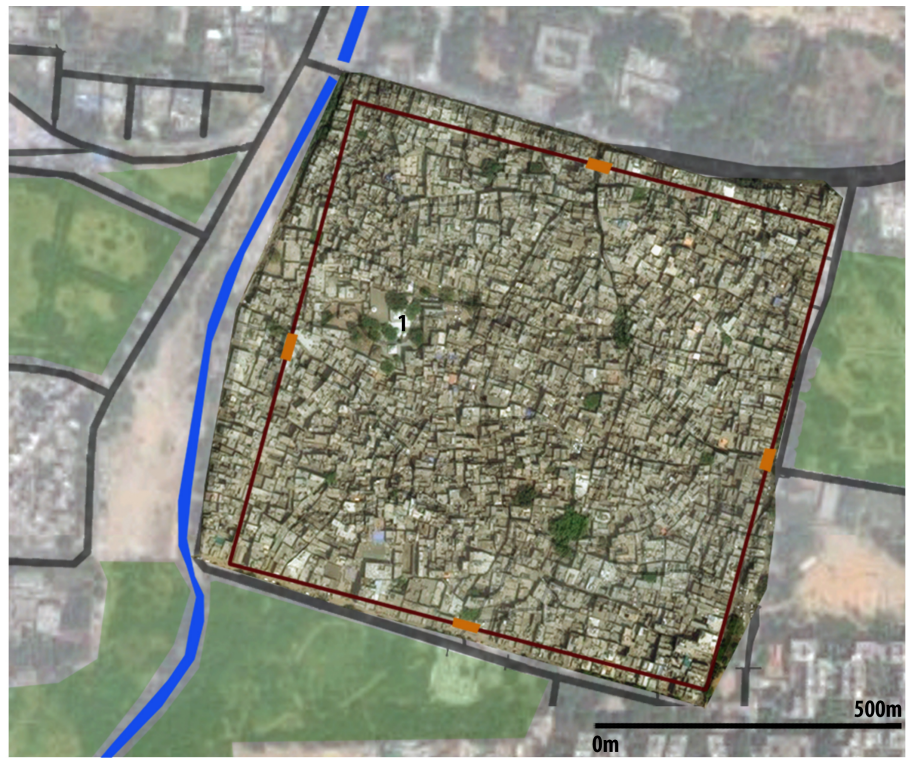
We positioned this paper in line with this spirit, but reasoning that to 'shift the telescope'; one needs to first shift the discourse. We cannot talk about collective rights as long as the disfranchised and their practices are seen as the 'other', who needs to be mended for the rest of the city to flourish. Walking a tightrope between glamorizing informality (or poverty) and an activist fight against the grim realities of hardship and violence, we propose to first work towards the shift in the way we study and position informality, that is, beyond the material spaces its practitioners occupy.
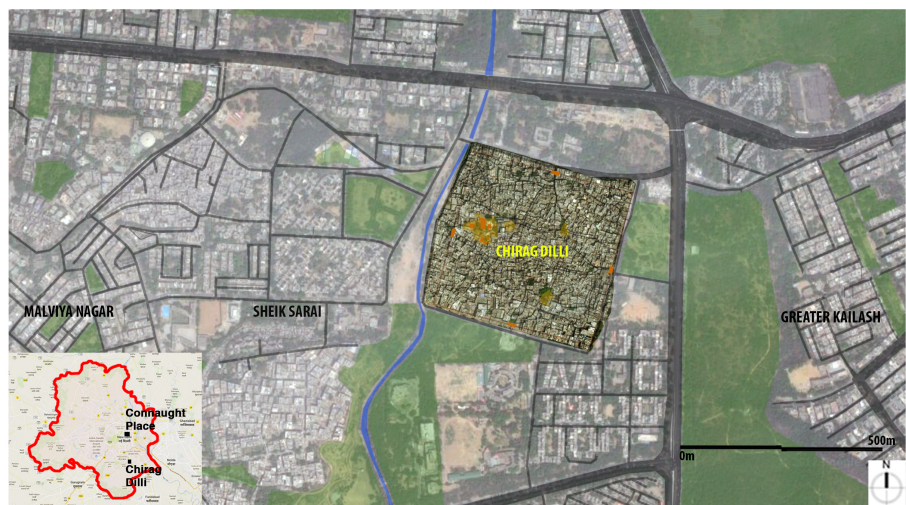
Figure 1: Location map (Traced by authors on google maps) (*Google Maps*, n.d.)

Haveli (for 1 extended family)

New House (shops at ground level and apartments on top on subdivided land)

Haveli (Sectional View)

New House (Sectional View)

Haveli (Courtyard House)

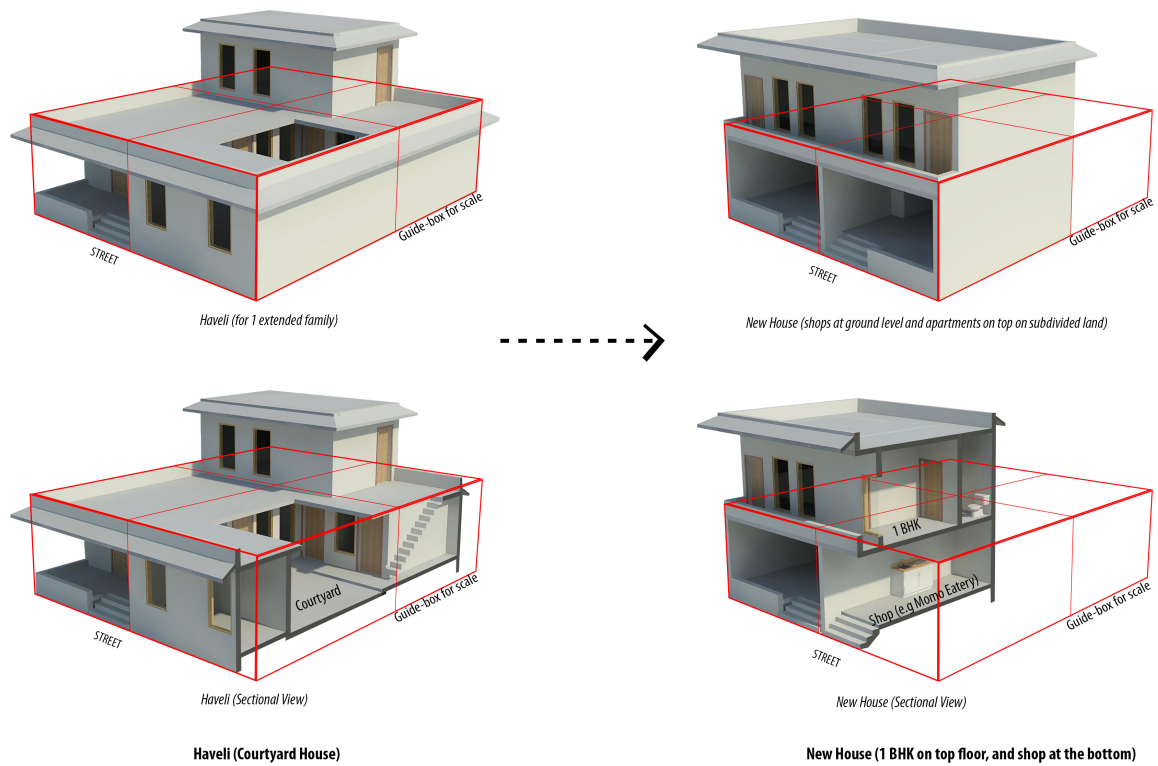**New House (1 BHK on top floor, and shop at the bottom)**

Figure 2: *Haveli* divided into ground floor shops (e.g., for momo eateries) and into 1-BHK flats above (e.g., for momo manufacturing). (This graphical representation is simplified; usually, there are more floors to the new houses).

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[1] We use the term 'co-production' to denote informality as one of the many factors producing the city.

[2] 'Urban village' is a settlement category in the master plan of Delhi. These were essentially villages that became engulfed during the urban expansion of Delhi.

[3] "Vision-2021 [of the new master plan] is to make Delhi a global metropolis and a world-class city, where all the people would be engaged in productive work with a better quality of life, living in a sustainable environment. … provision of adequate housing, particularly for the weaker sections of the society; addressing the problems of small enterprises, particularly in the unorganized informal sector; dealing with the issue of slums, up-gradation of old and dilapidated areas of the city; provision of adequate infrastructure services; conservation of the environment; preservation of Delhi's heritage and blending it with the new and complex modern patterns of development; and doing all this within a framework of sustainable development, public-private and community participation and a spirit of ownership and a sense of belonging among its citizens." (Ministry of Urban Development, 2007: 1)

[4] Differential norms are accorded in the Master Plan to additional settlement categories, such as regularized unauthorized colonies, resettlement colonies and special areas.

[5] There are two types of momo units: momo-manufacturing-centres and momo-eateries. The manufacturing centres run their own retail outlets (street-vending points) elsewhere and/or sell to other street vendors. The eateries make dumplings at a much smaller scale alongside other snacks; they serve them in a small room and as take-out. The manufacturing centres are usually run by an entrepreneur and one or two permanent workers. The entrepreneur and the permanent workers also act as vendors. Apart from that, there are 5-15 casual workers (hired on a daily wage basis). The eateries are operated by an entrepreneur with help from one or two casual worker.

[6] According to our own field data from 2015-16, a typical family of four in the nearby slum of Jagdamba Camp earns INR 19,000 (about EUR 250) per month (husband: INR 7000, wife: INR 12,000). A permanent momo worker earns INR 4000-6000 (circa EUR 50-80) per month. The conversion to EUR follows bank rates; the actual purchasing power varies widely on site.

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