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- 1 The papers collected in this special e-issue highlight the contradictions and conundrums that have been thrown up by India's recent history of urbanisation, and which are best illustrated by the massive spatial expansion, population explosion and far-reaching social and economic changes witnessed in Bangalore (now Bengaluru). The rapid growth of the city, largely driven by its transformation into a major site for global IT service outsourcing, has not just given rise to the usual problems of megacities across the South—disintegrating infrastructure, poor civic services and widening inequalities and exclusions. Bangalore faces all these issues in abundance, but the specificities of the city's urban transformation make it somewhat unique in India. Therefore it is an apt site for studying the intersections between India's post-liberalisation development trajectory, the changing nature of the urban economy (especially the shift towards the service sector) and resultant changes in class structure—especially the expansion of the middle class. These transformations in Bangalore's political economy and social configuration have been reflected not only in new consumption and spatial practices as the affluent and new middle classes sequester themselves in exclusive residential developments, but also in the various urban environmental problems and modes of civic engagement documented in this issue.
- 2 As several of the contributors point out, discussions of India's new consumer culture have centred on the 'new middle class', members of which now earn sufficient disposable income to pursue much more resource-intensive lifestyles than the 'old middle class' of the Nehruvian era could enjoy. In Bangalore, this class fraction is best represented by educated professionals connected with software services, business process outsourcing and allied industries such as biotechnology (BT), as well as corporate and banking executives. Their relatively high salaries enable them to live in the large enclave

apartment complexes that have sprung up across the city, which offer comfortable lifestyles as well as an array of services (security, recreational spaces, assured electricity and water supply, etc.) conveniently provided within their high walls. The consumption style that marks off the 'new middle class' from other classes and fractions of the middle class involves not just new cultural practices such as 'eating out' (described in Karanth's paper, this issue) or increased reliance on packaged commodities and ready-made food (a common assumption that is challenged by Ganguly, this issue), but also car ownership—a major factor contributing to Bangalore's ever increasing volume of traffic and air pollution.

- 3 Thus, it would be easy to argue that it is these 'consuming classes' that have been largely responsible for the serious environmental issues plaguing the city: the growing amount of wet and dry waste that the existing waste management system is utterly unable to handle, or the constant push by municipal authorities to widen roads or build more flyovers to cope with the exploding traffic—projects that inevitably entail loss of tree cover, increased air pollution and higher ambient temperatures. However, the research reported in this issue, which focuses mainly on IT professionals living in gated communities, shows that this same social class has been at the forefront of diverse movements and organisations that are trying to tackle environmental issues of waste, water supply, air quality and the loss of lakes and green spaces. This form of civic activism, spearheaded especially by Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs), is seen in most Indian cities, but is particularly striking and significant in Bangalore.
- 4 The unusual level of civic engagement in Bangalore may perhaps be attributed to the city's history, which in the early post-independence years (and even earlier) developed as a major site of public sector institutions and industries, thereby attracting educated middle-class professionals, scientists and technicians from across the country. Consequently, the city has long been viewed as a middle-class city with an active and educated citizenry working to protect its natural environment and salubrious climate. The 'old middle class' of Bangalore—who often decry the city's degeneration after the IT boom—has a strong sense of 'ownership' of public spaces (especially the many gardens and parks), and it is these older citizens, together with younger activists, who periodically take to the streets when the metro project threatens to encroach on public land, or the BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, the governing body for Greater Bangalore) decides to cut down the majestic trees lining one of Bangalore's famous boulevards to make way for more cars. Environmental awareness, and the desire for a 'clean and green' city, is not the province only of the young IT professionals (most of whom come from outside Bangalore) who are the main subjects of these studies, but has been part of Bangalore's civic culture for a long time.
- 5 Nonetheless, this issue highlights a significant new contradiction—between the consumption-oriented culture of the new middle class and that class's environmental activism. As the paper by Ganguly and Lutringer and other contributions show, many IT employees as well as 'middle-class NGOs' have tried to address the most immediate and visible issues in their own 'backyards', such as garbage, by organising dry waste collection and biogas plants in their apartment buildings, or by evangelising separation of waste at source and composting. Consequently, in middle-class apartment complexes waste is increasingly being managed privately—largely, it should be noted, in response to rules issued recently by the government that require all 'bulk generators' to internally handle their own solid waste.

- 6 While these initiatives by individual citizens and groups are laudable, they are also piecemeal and isolated (judging from the piles of garbage and dirty streets that still plague most localities). Middle-class initiatives to create a more 'sustainable' city, or alterations in consumption and household practices to conserve resources and generate less waste, have not produced a comprehensive analysis of the political economy of consumption and waste or a larger critique of the current 'world-city' agenda that is driving Bangalore's development. Nor do these middle-class actors usually raise the questions about municipal governance and local-level democracy that must be addressed if long-term solutions to environmental degradation are to be found. Like the activities of RWAs in most Indian cities, middle-class activism tends to bypass ordinary politics: instead of pushing for the formation of mandated ward committees, standing for election to local bodies, pressurising their municipal or state representatives to bring about change or demanding that corporates pay local taxes so that municipal agencies have adequate resources, they create parallel institutions that then liaise directly with government bureaucrats and/or private players to create localised solutions.
- 7 The Karnataka state government has taken a similar approach to urban governance by appointing certain premier citizens (mostly corporate leaders from the IT/BT sector) to advisory committees such as the BATF (the Bangalore Agenda Task Force, formed by former Congress Chief Minister S.M. Krishna in 1999), ABIDe (Agenda for Bangalore's Infrastructure and Development, created by the subsequent BJP-led government), and the current avatar Bengaluru Blue Print Action Group (BBPAG). These groups, appointed directly by Chief Ministers, have had undue influence on urban planning and decision-making in Bangalore; their agenda has mainly been to improve the city's 'infrastructure' to make it a more attractive business destination. Their interventions in matters such as solid waste management have usually been to recommend greater private sector participation in basic service provision and infrastructure development. These committees are just one face of the increasing power of elite/middle-class/corporate actors in Bangalore. Thus, both middle-class actors and corporate leaders have pushed for privatised 'solutions' that assume that the state cannot fulfil its public responsibilities, when what the city needs are more equitable, sustainable and democratic *public* governance mechanisms that operate in consultation with elected representatives and diverse publics. Consequently, urban planning and governance are dominated by a currently hegemonic but unsustainable vision of Bangalore's future (and its position as a key site of capital accumulation) that has been promulgated by corporate elites and the real estate lobby.
- 8 In this context, we need to develop a critical understanding of waste (its generation as well as its disposal) as not simply a management or technical problem but also one of equity and political participation. Middle-class interventions that focus on keeping their own gated communities clean ignore the larger pattern of urban development in which they and their lifestyles are implicated, which includes not just environmental degradation but also the marginalisation of non-middle-class groups and lower-income locales by the 'worlding' of Bangalore. For instance, will they challenge the grabbing of formerly agrarian or public sector land by the real estate developers who build the high-end residential and commercial developments in which they live and work, in the process pushing aside existing communities or disrupting their livelihoods? Many middle-class citizens seem to be unaware of the increasing exploitation of rural India by this pattern of urban 'development', as the struggle over illegal landfills in villages outside Bangalore

illustrates. Another example is the siphoning of water from rural areas by private water tankers to supply the city's large apartment and commercial complexes and construction sites, leading to declining water tables all around Bangalore and the unsustainability of agriculture.

- 9 Thus, the middle-class environmentalists documented in this issue often fail to recognise the larger political-economic forces, as well as the changing class alignments and growing inequalities that are inextricably entangled with the problems of water, air and garbage that they seek to address. Consequently, they find themselves constantly fire-fighting each new destructive initiative from the state, such as tree-felling for new road-widening projects or flyovers—instead of searching for a more radical understanding of the problem. Urban chaos and environmental degradation are not simply outcomes of a burgeoning population, poor governance or corruption, but are direct results of urban development policies that promote particular business and class interests—including those of the 'new middle class'—even as these groups are assumed to be the main producers of value for the city.
- 10 But as the editors point out in their introduction, the middle-class is a diverse category and its environmental attitudes and cultural practices cannot be homogenised. For instance, the actions taken by NGOs such as the Environment Support Group (ESG) are very different from those of middle-class activists living in high-end residential complexes. The interview with ESG founders Leo Saldanha and Bhargavi Rao shows that they have raised basic questions about the city's political economy, and have successfully drawn the attention of the courts to the routine violation of existing laws and policy frameworks. Saldanha and Rao also recognise that litigation and judicial decisions can be only partial solutions, and their organisation engages in public campaigns and political organising around questions of democracy, environmental justice and the current pattern of urban development.
- 11 Clearly, a wider political movement and broad-based citizen action are needed to address Bangalore's environmental degradation, especially as this larger political-economic context makes simple techno-managerial solutions unworkable. As Biyani and Anantharam suggest, diverse stakeholders operate through different 'frames' structured by existing power equations and economic interests, which need to be mapped and acknowledged in order to create sustainable urban governance systems. For instance, popular debates about the garbage problem often do not acknowledge the potential value of waste, or that attempts by various actors to capture this value usually undermine even the best-designed policies. In this context, one should mention the interventions made by Hasiru Dala, an organisation that works with waste-pickers in Bangalore, which convinced the BBMP to integrate them more formally into the waste management system. The municipal government agreed to contract the management of dry waste collection centres to waste workers, thereby improving their livelihoods by allowing them to capture more of the value of waste (usually cornered by recycling businesses higher up the value chain). But private players such as waste contractors and truck owners are intimately networked with local authorities and so are able to exert influence over the granting of contracts, manipulate municipal rules, or bypass labour laws, as the authors show. Corporates too have now recognised that there is profit to be extracted from dry waste, and have tried to enter the waste management system—potentially undermining the livelihoods of thousands of waste workers.

- 12 The various twists and turns in Bangalore's efforts to create a decentralised and effective waste management system illustrate the complexities of urban governance and politics. As Lutringer and Randeria point out, pressure from citizens and NGOs has brought about much-needed changes—especially through judicial interventions, which led to the formulation of progressive waste management rules—that have been only partially implemented for the reasons cited above. However, this failure is not just a problem of 'corruption' or the stranglehold of the 'garbage mafia'—it is symptomatic of a political system in which diverse actors (poor and non-poor alike) can survive and prosper only by forging 'informal' ties with the local state (as the co-editors of this issue also point out). The seemingly intractable problems of the solid waste management system in Bangalore thus mirror the crisis of local democracy in cities across the country, where legally mandated, local-level institutions have been rendered dysfunctional by state-level politicians and local and transnational business interests.
- 13 Given the active involvement of many citizens in urban issues, why is local-level democracy in Bangalore so dysfunctional? Why do we not have systemic, legal channels through which citizens of all classes can participate in urban planning and governance? Why must opaque bureaucratic decisions, usually made public only through the press, be met on every occasion by hastily organised public protests and petitions or by expensive litigation, when a more democratic consultative process (which in fact is mandated by state town-planning laws) could potentially forestall or alleviate such conflicts? By way of an answer, can we argue that middle-class initiatives to clean up the city are essentially class-based and individualised responses that assume that the state should not, or will not, take responsibility for providing basic services or directing urban development in an equitable and sustainable manner? Can these responses then be viewed not as a potential solution but as part of the problem—given that they are framed within the same model of urban development that has created the urban environmental crisis in the first place? These are some of the questions that need to be explored through comparative research across several Indian cities, building on the excellent case studies presented here—a strategy that would help us to analyse and understand not only the conditions that have produced India's urban environmental crisis but also those that induce public concern and participation.

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## ABSTRACTS

Carol Upadhyia suggests that changes in Bangalore's social composition and political economy have not only affected the consumption practices of its middle classes, but have also shaped public perception of urban environmental problems as well as the modes of civic engagement documented in this special e-issue. India's new consumer and public cultures are increasingly centred on these new middle classes, whose lifestyles reflect a tension between a rising consumerist culture and growing environmental awareness. While civic activism and initiatives around waste management in Bangalore are aimed at more sustainable urban management, they fail to address the need for more equitable and democratic mechanisms of public governance. Middle-class actors rarely raise the twin questions of municipal governance and local democracy

that must be addressed if long-term solutions to environmental degradation are to be found. This afterword, therefore, invites us to analyse the political economy of consumption and waste that links it to a larger critique of the 'world-city' agenda that underlies Bangalore's development planning.

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Carol Upadhyia is Professor in the School of Social Sciences at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore, India, and is currently a CEU/HESP Visiting Fellow at the Central European University, Budapest. A social anthropologist by training, Upadhyia has researched and published extensively on diverse social and economic changes in contemporary India, including agricultural development and class formation, the 'new' middle class, Indian software capital and labour, transnational migration and regional diasporas, the urbanisation of rural landscapes, and the globalisation of Bangalore. She is the author of *Reengineering India: Work, Capital, and Class in an Offshore Economy* (Oxford University Press, 2016).