

Speculative Planning: Agrarian-Urban Transformation in Peri-Urban areas

Case study of Land Pooling Policy, Delhi

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Abstract

Much of the urban transformation in major metropolitan cities of India is taking place on the peripheral/peri-urban boundaries of the city. The urbanisation of agricultural lands has been identified as a key state strategy to undertake planned development in metropolitan cities but this has revealed considerable change over time - shifting from a state-led comprehensive planning towards a more market-led speculative planning approach. The research aims to understand the shifting role of the state in development of peri-urban areas through examining land pooling policy introduced by the Delhi Development Authority. Peri-urban areas are agrarian - urban frontiers marked by unique historical, social, cultural, political, spatial and economic relations rooted in local contextual settings. Focusing on one peri-urban village in Delhi, the study examines the manifestation of the policy on ground and over time, as well as assesses how local agrarian relations and equations have a large bearing on the development pattern that emerges in response to state-led land development. The shifting role of the state in the planning process, has a large bearing on the relations and equations between different stakeholder groups and vice versa. The research concludes by reflecting on the change in planning approach, and the implications of different stakeholder groups towards this new model of land development.

Keywords

Peri-urban, Speculative Planning, Land Pooling, Agrarian, Urbanism

1. Introduction

The villages located in peri-urban areas provide a unique interaction of social, spatial, economic, and environmental mechanisms of a place. These villages located on the periphery of a city, are engulfed within the urban boundary by declaring them as urban or development areas, even though there exists a rural character within the village. Ramachandran (1989), defines rural-urban fringe as: 'the area of mixed rural and urban populations and land-uses, which begins at the point where agricultural land-uses appear near the city and extends up to the point where villages have distinct urban land uses or where some persons, at least, from village community commute to the city daily for work or other purposes (Ramachandran, 1989, p297).'

The Delhi Reforms Rules, 1954 lists 358 villages in Delhi. These rural villages located in and around Delhi, continued to be urbanised. While the abadi area¹ or the population inside Lal Dora² was not touched by Delhi Development Authority (DDA), and some of the villagers continued to live in the expanding city. The Master Plan for Delhi (MPD), 1962 saw rural villages, as sites of shifting village like trades and industries from city to the outskirts of the city. As DDA was near its completion of first master plan phase, and failed

¹ Abadi area refers to the residential area within a village.

² Lal Dora land or Red Tape property is the name classification assigned to the part of village land, which comprises the village habitation, referred to as *abadi* in this context.

to effectively implement the plan, the villages located on peripheral areas of Delhi saw unauthorised colonies and slums spiralling up.

As a result of continuous rise in housing demand, influx of global capital, shift in agricultural patterns and mismatch between housing supply and demand, agricultural lands surrounding these villages located on the outskirts of the cities are being urbanised. DDA has come up with a market-oriented Land Pooling Policy as a planning tool to undertake development in 95 urban villages of Delhi. This marks a tremendous shift in approach of DDA in land development from the earlier state led land acquisition policy in Delhi. The new policy approach had significantly altered the role of stakeholders such as private builders and developers, DDA, land owners, property dealers, who are most associated with land. Land speculation has become a central part of development in policy, engaged in by land owners, property dealers, builders and developers. This research paper briefly discusses the emergence of land pooling policy as a new land readjustment technique in Delhi and analyse the transformation in the planning approach from master plan that were followed traditionally to the new sector/project-based approach introduced through the land pooling policy.

The introduction chapter of the research sets a background to the topic and broad significance of the research. The second chapter introduces some of the theoretical concepts that are studied to build argument while relating the concepts with field based research. The third chapter lays out the methodology adopted for undertaking the research and explains why a mixture of qualitative, quantitative and mapping methods were used to conduct the research. The fourth chapter introduces the case study area by giving a brief location context of Neelwal village in Delhi, and then provides a brief summary of Neelwal village through photographs and maps. The fifth chapter discusses the research findings by reflecting on understanding the existing landownership pattern inside the village by locating it spatially on GIS produced maps and major findings based on targeted interviews conducted with relevant stakeholders inside the village. The final chapter summarises the core findings that emerge out of the research and tries to connect all of them to put forth a coherent argument.

2. Literature Study

Two bodies of literature are identified for conducting the research. The first deals with literature on the importance of land as a subject within the practice of urban planning, specifically how land was approached within state-led planning in Delhi. The second body of literature deals with agrarian-urban/peri-urban spaces, and the transformation of land and associated agrarian and socio-economic relations as a result of the turn toward a more speculative planning. Studying the interaction of these two bodies of literature tell us something larger about state-led planning and the changing nature of the state itself, especially in context of planning peri-urban areas.

2.1 Planning approach in Delhi

Delhi Development Authority, in its Master Plan of Delhi (MPD) 1962 followed a regionalist model as it recommended managing the urban sprawl through a green belt and developing counter magnet neighbouring towns around Delhi. DDA acquired about 35,000 acres of land all around Delhi through large scale land acquisition policy under the Land Acquisition Act of 1857. The rationale behind large-scale land acquisition was to 'reduce land speculation and provide enough housing facilities for the Government and other purposes.' However, a document produced by Town and Country Planning Organisation (TCPO) on review of Master Plan of 1962 stated that squatting, unauthorised colonies, and non-conforming industries spiralled as the city's spatial segregation progressed. The paradigm of land use and complete separation of industry, commerce and housing failed. Though DDA kept acquiring the land, but it was not followed by corresponding large-scale housing development (Bhan, 2013). The poor and economically weaker sections (EWS) continued to struggle to access affordable housing. The pressure

was majorly on peripheral areas where most of the unauthorised colonies sprung up and the infrastructural services failed to develop at the same rate.

2.2 Shift towards Land Pooling Policy

Since the year 2001 DDA, abstained from large scale public land acquisition in Delhi, even though the land prices continued to rise in the city. The dissatisfaction of the landowners with the compensation amount offered by DDA led to disputes and litigations, leading to a delay in allotment and increase in the cost of land. Apart from failure of large-scale public land acquisition policy, the DDA faced significant challenges in the implementation of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Act, 2013. These included challenges of providing adequate compensation and mandatory preparation of Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) reports required by the LARR Act. Both these challenges pushed DDA to look for an alternative model that could provide an easier model of land development. The land pooling model introduced in 2013, provided one such strategy to further develop areas on Delhi's periphery. The policy proposed for land assembly and development, created two categories of plots i.e., Category I for 20 Ha³ and above and Category II for 2 Ha to less than 20 Ha. The land returned to Developer Entity (DE)⁴ in category I and category II was to be 60% and 48% respectively, with rest of the land retained by DDA (40% in Category I and 52% in Category II). The development control norms notified in the policy allowed a residential Floor Area Ratio (FAR)⁵ of 400 for Group Housing. The external development charges to be incurred for development of city infrastructure was to be paid by DE on actual cost incurred by DDA. The policy also stated that DE shall be returned land within 5 kilometres radius of pooled land subject to other planning requirement.

However, the policy was not implemented due to several reasons such as change in political regime at the central and state level, complex governance structure of Delhi, ambiguity in FAR and development controls and legal issues.

2.3 Revised Land Pooling Policy, 2018

DDA took five years to revise and notify the new land pooling policy in 2018. The revised policy exclusively mentions 'private sector' as an active player in development of Delhi, starkly different from earlier land acquisition policies of government and even the first version of the policy. It is also interesting to note that DDA has portrayed the outcome to be 'world class smart and sustainable neighbourhoods' using words such as world class, smart, increase in value of land, portrays the ambition and vision of the cities in the global South. From earlier adopting a top-down Master Plan approach, to now adopting a bottom-up sector led project planning approach, DDA is changing its larger course of land development paradigm. What is different in this new approach is the function of these private developers in the planning, design and regulation of urban spaces at a much larger scale which was previously confined to scale of a building, or at the most a block. This marks a larger shift in role of states from imposing modernist visions, to a more entrepreneurial role in facilitating private-sector development as a means of capitalising on the economic opportunities presented by globalisation (Roy & Ong, 2011).

³ Hectare is primarily used in the measurement of land. 1 Ha is equal to 10000 square meters and 100 Ha is equal to 1 square kilometers.

⁴ Developer Entity defined in the policy as a land owner, or a group of land owners (who have grouped together of their own volition/will for this purpose) or a developer.

⁵ Floor area ratio (FAR) is the ratio of a building's total floor area (gross floor area) to the size of the piece of land upon which it is built. It is often used as one of the regulations in city planning along with the building-to-land ratio.

Under the revised policy, for a sector to be eligible for development in the policy, a minimum of 70% contiguous land of the developable area within the sector should be available. Unlike two types of category proposed in 2013 policy, the revised policy eliminated such category and notified that, of the total amount of pooled land, 60% will be retained by the Consortium⁶ for development of residential, commercial, public and semi-public facilities and remaining 40% will be surrendered to DDA for development of city level physical infrastructure, recreational and public/semi-public (PSP) facilities. The consortium will mutually decide a formula for redistribution of developed land/ built space, or any other form of fair exchange as part of a 'Implementation Plan' and convey the same to DDA with the consent of all landowners.

2.4 Intersection of land pooling policy and peri-urban areas

The introduction of land pooling policy has promoted the involvement of private players in the development of land, the speculation around real-estate and farm lands, and has tremendously influenced the new relations around land. Most stakeholders associated with land, are encouraged to speculate based on various factors and their social, economic, spatial and political position in the society. Gururani & Rajarshi (2018) argues that it is the changing agrarian dynamics that set South Asian urbanisation apart from the dominant modes of sub urbanisms and suburbanisation in the Global North. With focus on centrality of land, the urbanisation in South Asian cities revolve around these contested spaces of peri-urban areas. These are characterised by messy and highly contested processes of conversion, acquisition and privatisation of agricultural land. Shubhra Gururani in context of Gurgaon discusses how in agrarian societies like India, only by understanding how rural and urban are coproduced, can we begin to understand the complex process of sub urbanization and recognize that urban question is indeed also the 'agrarian question'. Through her study of Gurgaon, she explores how the politics of caste and class, continue to play a significant role when it comes to dealing with rural and agrarian dynamics in context of Peri-Urban areas. The shift in the state's planning approach to encourage speculation by a host of private actors becomes important to analyse in the context of peri-urban areas as they are the next set of spaces that would be subsumed within the course of urbanisation.

3. Research Methodology

The qualitative case study approach that relied on mapping analysis was used to focus on the case study area. The case study approach helped in analysing the chronology of events and people's behaviour over a period of time. This helped in examining the decision-making process of various stakeholders as when, why and how certain decisions were taken with regard to time, space and process. As one of the research questions deals with understanding policy roll out in a particular village, the case study approach helped to broaden perspective of understanding the processes around land such as land ownership pattern, role of dominant stakeholder groups, governance mechanisms and aspirations of villagers from the policy. This approach enabled to delve more into 'lived experiences of villagers and property dealers in the area', to understand their behaviour, reaction, emotions and response to the policy, as the village is going to see a drastic change in future through implementation of the policy. Further research tools such as documentation, targeted interviews, mapping, direct observation technique and photographic survey were used to better understand and contextualise the research study.

⁶ Consortium means a duly registered association having rights, duties & obligations in accordance with law, consisting of multiple landowners/ Developer Entities who have come together to pool land for unified planning, servicing and subdivision/share of the land or any other defined action for development of sectors under the Land Policy as per prescribed norms and guidelines.

4. Case study selection

The National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi is divided into 17 planning zones demarcated by DDA (Figure 1).

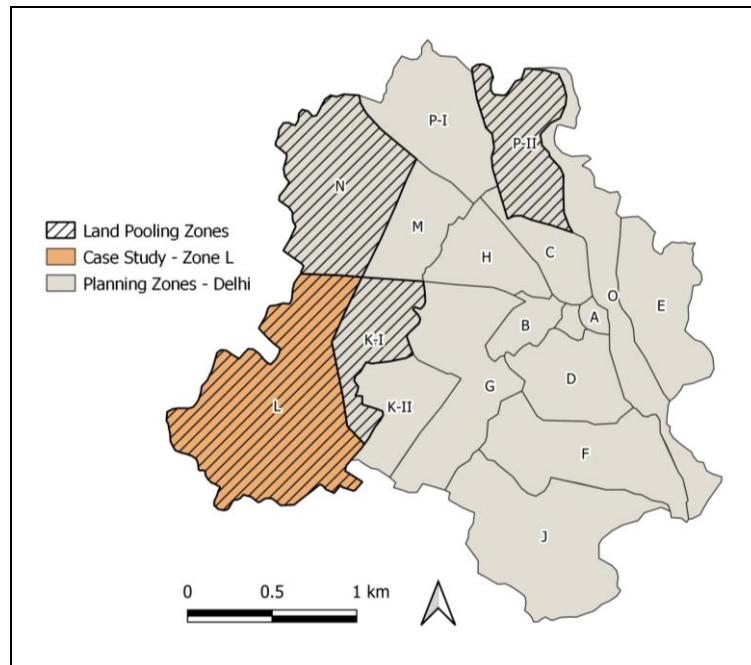


Figure 1. Planning Zones in NCT of Delhi. Source: Author

The land pooling policy is being implemented for 95 villages in Delhi located in five different zones in Delhi (Figure 2).

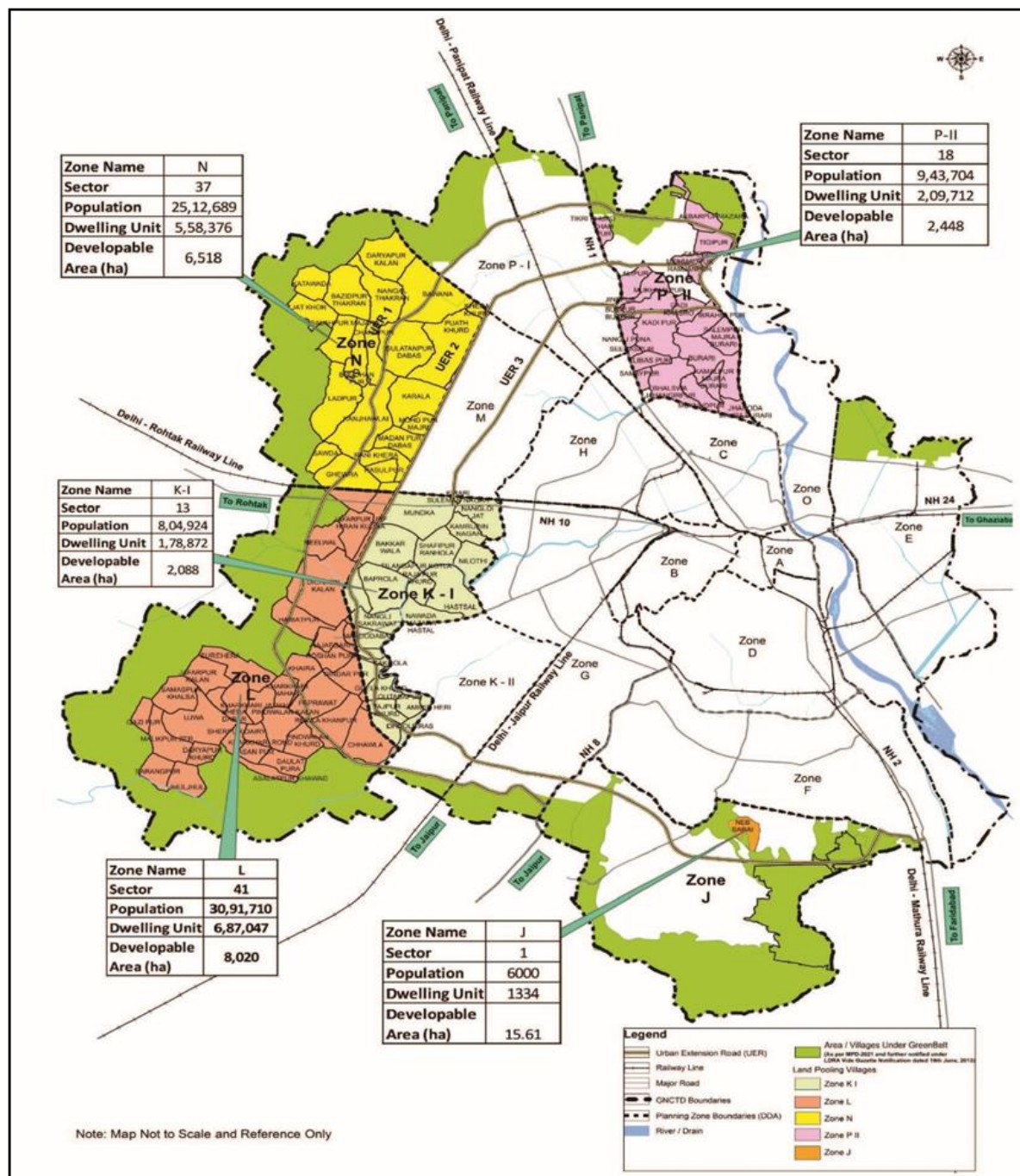


Figure 2. Proposed details of land pooling zones in Delhi. Source: Delhi Development Authority.

Through in-depth case study approach, the study focused on one village i.e., Neelwal village in proposed Sector-03 (Figure 3), Zone – L, covered under the land pooling policy. As per Census 2011, the area of the village is 340.60 Ha and has 2637 population.

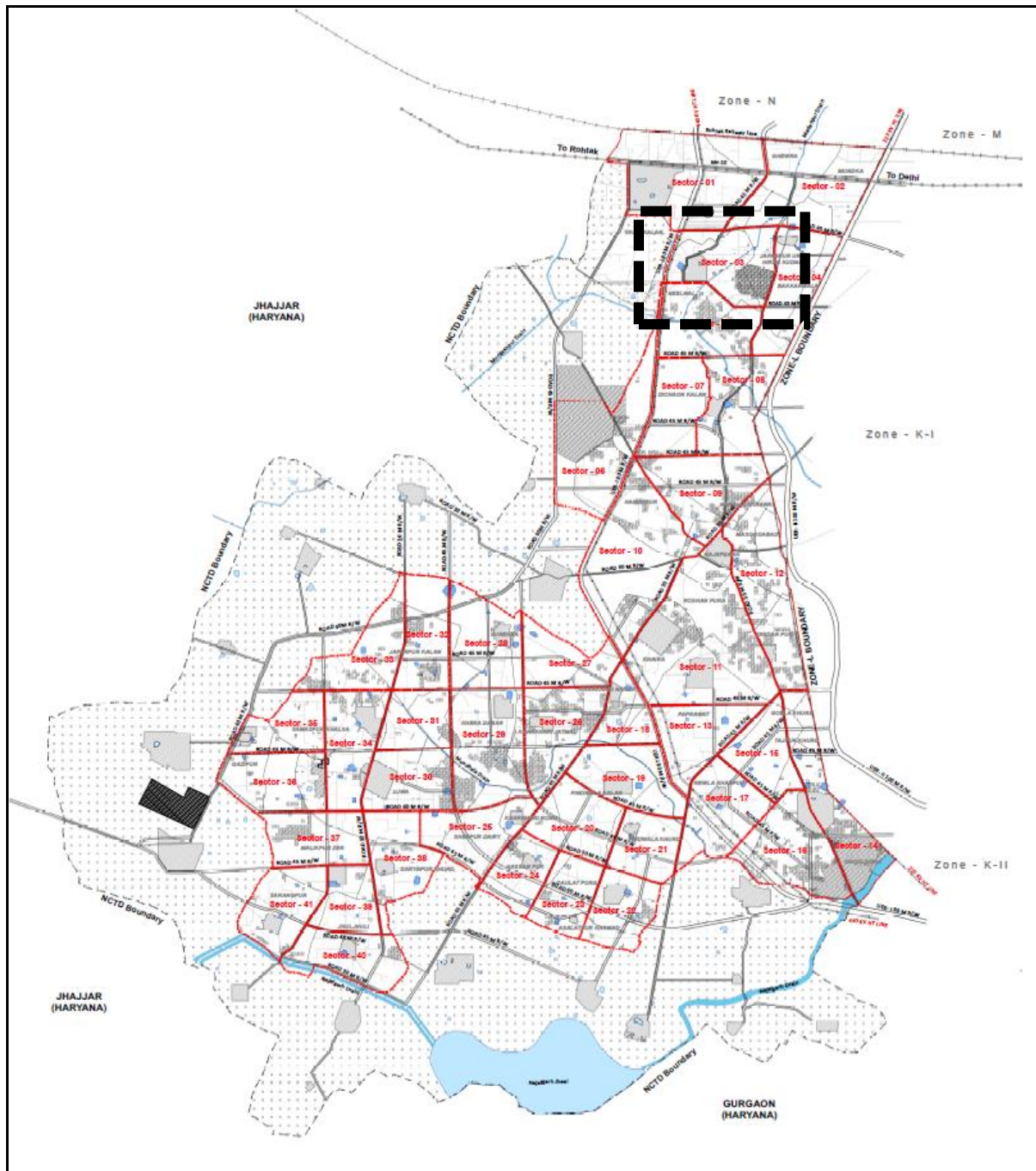


Figure 3. Location of Sector-03 in proposed Zonal Development Plan of Zone L. Source: Delhi Development Authority

The houses constructed inside the village reveal a mixture of both urban and rural characteristics. Some of the residents have invested huge amount of money in constructing and rebuilding their houses, giving them a modern look, while some continue to live in traditional houses made from bricks or mud.



Figure 4. A newly built house inside the village with modern architecture and building material. Source: Field visit, author.



Figure 5. Open spaces used by residents to keep their cattle and dry cow dung cakes. The photos reveal a mixture of rural and urban characteristics in the village. Source: Field visit, author.



Figure 6. Community pond inside the village. The pond is currently used to bathe cattle as the water is not fit for drinking purposes. Source: Field visit, author.



Figure 7. Villagers practicing agricultural activities. Cauliflower is one of the main seasonal vegetable sown in the village Source: Field visit, author.

5. Research findings

5.1 Mapping spatial correlation between landownership pattern and land pooling process

Using Geographic Information System (GIS) as a tool, a base map was prepared by taking reference from Khasra⁷ map, google satellite image and proposed sector plan prepared by DDA. Based on spatial mapping and ownership data, four types of ownership details could be found (Figure 8) i.e., land parcels owned by residents of village, land parcels owned by individual owners but not residing in the village, land parcels owned by registered private companies/builders/developers and land parcels jointly owned by village residents and private developers.

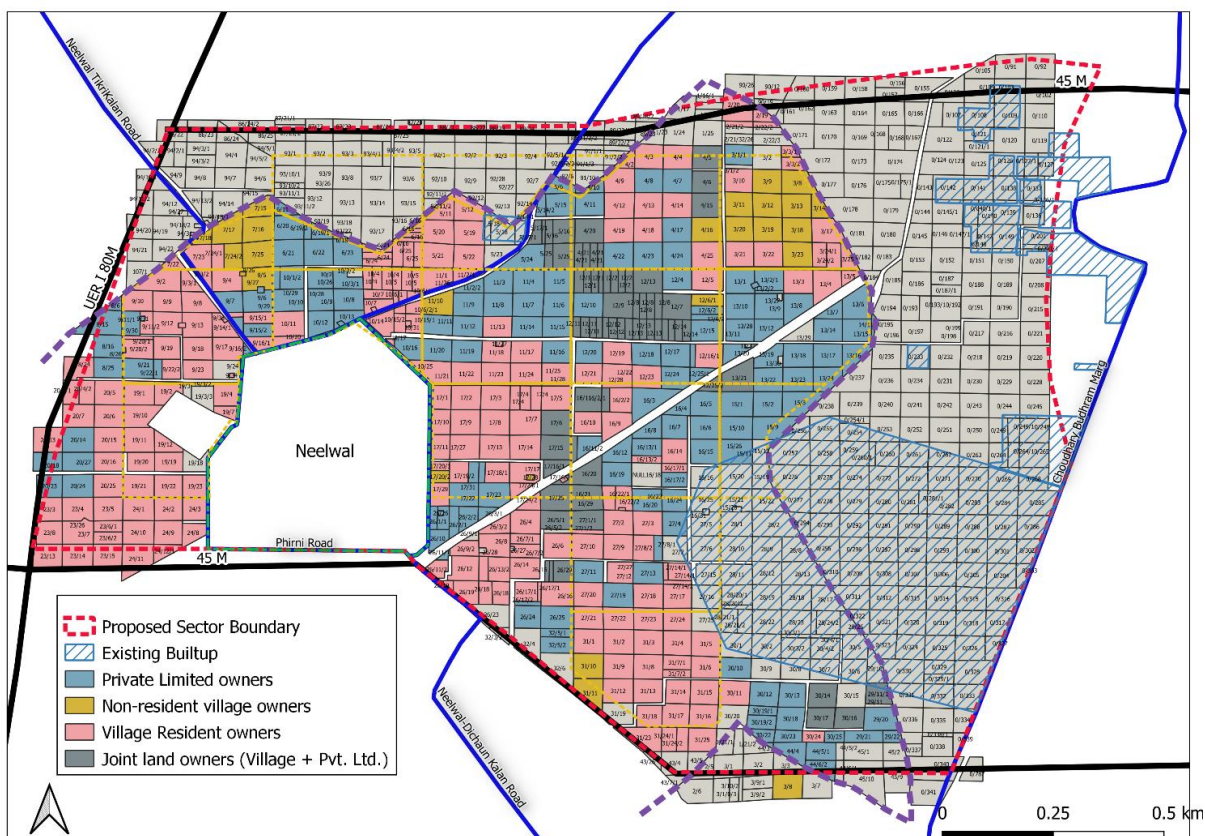


Figure 8. Spatial demarcation of land ownership pattern in proposed sector-03. Source: Author.

Lands owned by Private Developers and Builders – The lands owned by private players are continuous land parcels consolidated together on a large area that would provide an advantage when consortium will be formed and redistribution of land takes place. It is observed (Figure 9) that most of the land owned by private builders and developers independently or jointly with villagers, has shown willingness to register their land under the land pooling policy. Further, a significant amount of these lands is owned by single real estate developer group, purchased over a period of time when the policy was first announced in 2013. Thus, private builders and developers are a major stakeholder who are driving the land pooling process in the village.

⁷ Khasra Map is legal revenue department land details record that specifies land ownership and crop details.

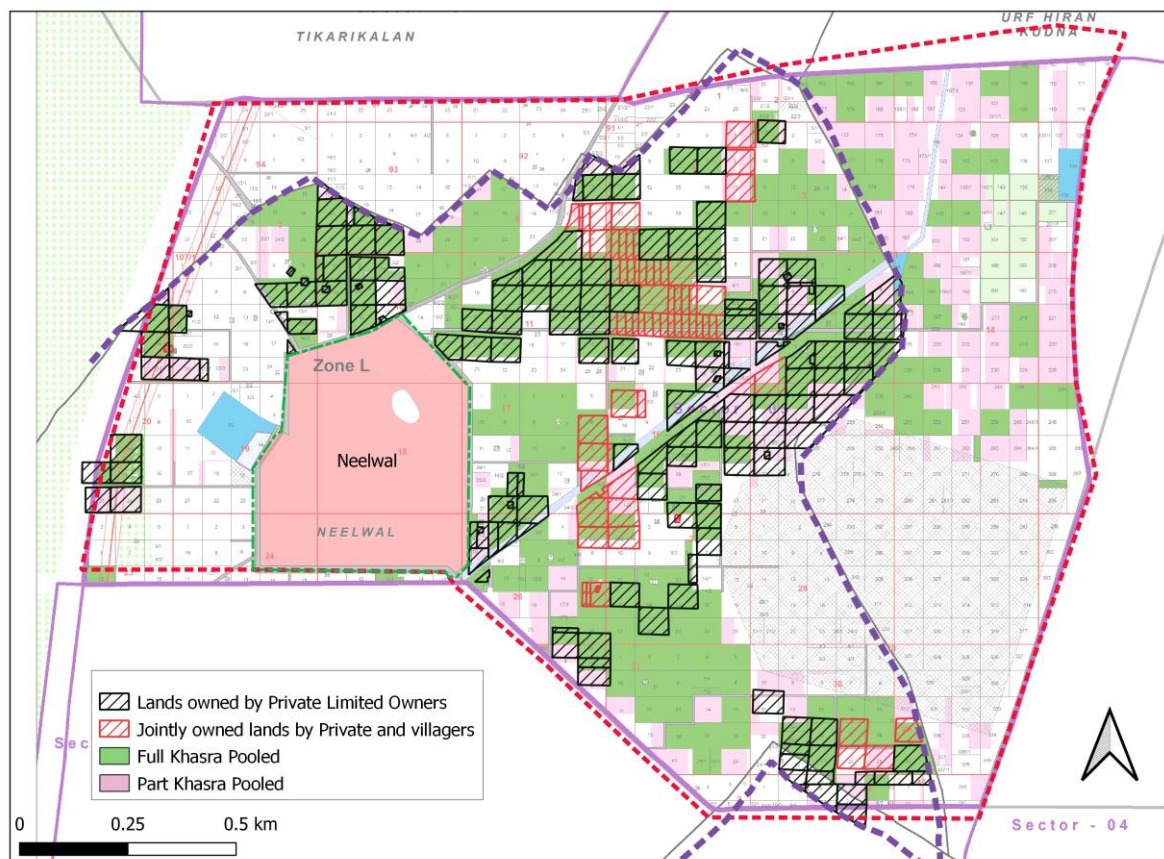


Figure 9. Correlation between lands owned by private developers and pooled land map. Source: Author.

Lands owned by villagers – The lands owned by villagers are divided into two types: small and marginal lands i.e., land parcels subdivided and owned by multiple owners and large lands i.e., land parcels owned by single owner (Figure 10). With subdivision of land into small land parcels and less than 2 ha, these land owners cannot individually be part of the consortium and are thus excluded from the formal process of sector planning. The lands owned by villagers whether fragmented or consolidated lies mostly in different parts of the proposed sector unlike the lands owned by private developers which are mostly continuous. This might put villagers at a significant disadvantage at the time of redistribution of lands because the policy is silent on redistribution process. It can also be observed that some of the residents of the village who own land in the proposed sector, are yet to register their land under the land pooling policy.

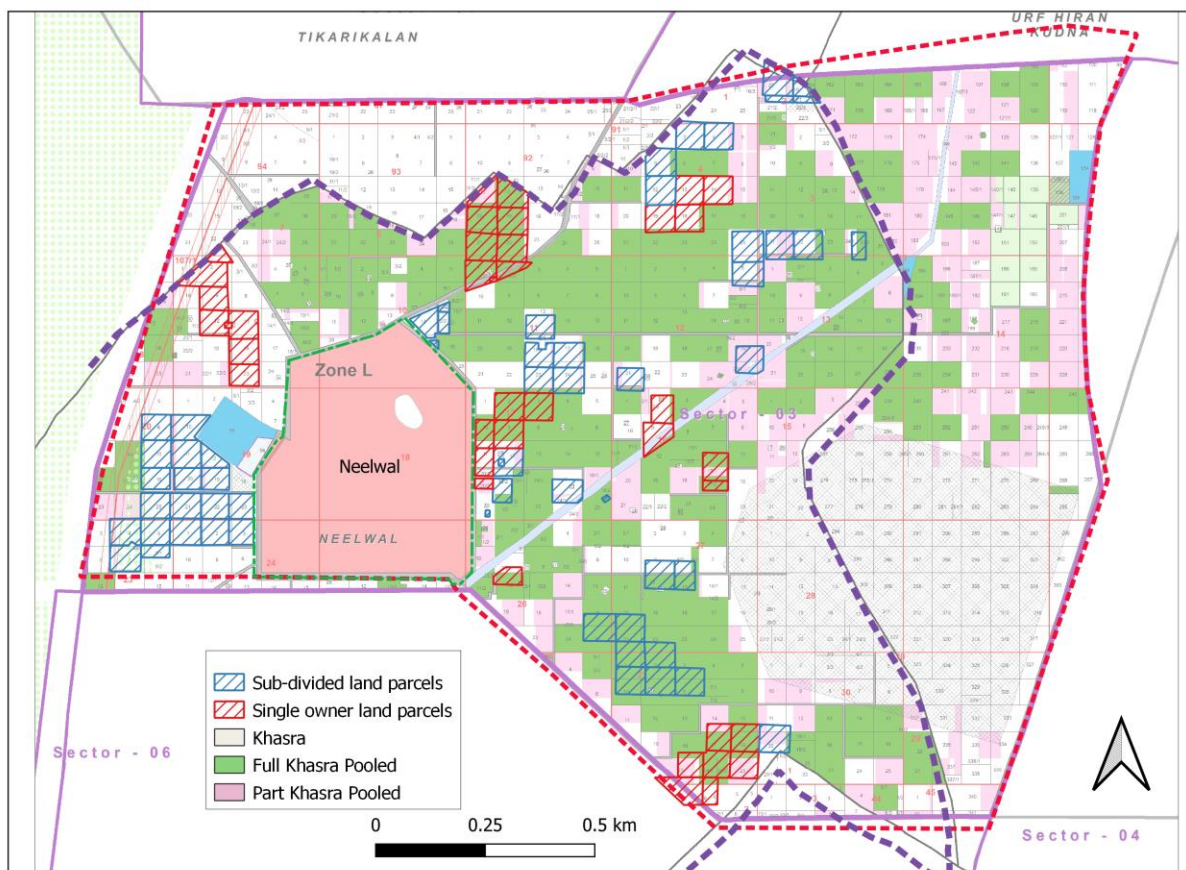


Figure 10. Correlation between villagers' owned lands and registered pooled lands. Source: Author.

To further understand and establish the correlation based on spatial mapping, in-depth interviews were conducted with village landowners and private developers to seek their response and actions towards the land pooling policy.

5.2 Uncertainty about policy provisions

The ambiguity over the implementation of land pooling policy remains a cause of concern for landowners to register their land under the policy. The issue was highlighted by villagers in Neelwal and said, 'There is an apprehension within villagers that, if it is directly registered under DDA, we never know when would the development going to take place and the land would remain like this for don't know how many years. How will we feed our children, what will we eat?'. Some of the village landowners have decided to not register their land under the policy because they are unclear about lot of policy provisions. However, they are willing to sell their land to private developers who can offer them better and instant cash in hand. Since the policy is already delayed by DDA for about 5 years, and amendments are still being made, landowners feel that policy will take years to implement and get their pooled lands back.

5.3 Unsustainable agriculture

With meagre income, small and marginal farmers find it unsustainable to continue practicing agriculture. One of the landowners said, 'Water is very salty and not feasible for farming. Labour cost is very high. Family people don't want to work, and have to employ labour from outside. Also, size of land has reduced significantly. Either people have 1 acre or 1.5 acre of land. The tractor operating cost is high. One cannot buy a tractor of his own, and have to rent it. The rent is around 1000/acre per round. That is why we want to sell the land. Land has reduced and operating cost is very high.' Due to fragmentation of land, the

operating costs are very high. The small and marginal landowners do not have sufficient financial resources to sustain agricultural activities and are ready to sell their land.

5.4 Private players versus village landowners

With participation of private players in the land pooling policy, the village landowners constantly referred to the competition between them and developers and how the latter will benefit in the long run. Village landowners talked about same issues in detail and said, *'a landowner who owns land between 1-2 acre will either have to collude with a developer or form a group with other small landowners to be part of the consortium. Developers will first develop their land rather than ours.'* As the policy does not allow landowners who own land less than 2 hectares to be part of the consortium, it is unfair to them as they might not get a say land redistribution. Bose (1980), has studied that the benefit from the appreciation and selling of land benefitted only a few. Barring a few people who could strike a better deal because of their social, economic and political situation, the people of urbanised villages fell prey to speculative private builders and developers who cheated them (India 1987:4330 as cited in (Mehra A. K., 2005)).

5.5 Contradictions between lived reality and planned

The local property dealers who are aware about different hierarchy of plans available for the area such as existing Zonal Development Plan, Master Plan of Delhi 2021 and the proposed sector plan talked about contradiction and confusion that prevails within real estate dealers. There are few agricultural lands that are already converted into small warehouses and for other non-agricultural purposes. Though the percentage of existing built-up land for non-agricultural purposes is marginal in comparison to agricultural fields available under land pooling policy, the increasing number of warehouses in the area and delay in implementation of the policy, further raises a concern on how the policy will accommodate these developments within the existing framework.



Figure 11. Warehouses built by residents of Neelwal and Hiran Kudna village in proposed sector 03 on agricultural lands. Source: Field visit, author.

Roy and Ong (2011), discusses the practice of citing a 'more successful city' to stir urban aspirations and sentiments of intercity rivalry, or pit one city in relation to another by invoking icons of 'world class'. The practice of inter-referencing drive speculation on city's future residents and the citizens of a city gets caught up in inter-city rivalry. In Neelwal, different stakeholder groups compared the existing and proposed development by referring to cities or areas located in and outside Delhi. The tentative

proposed layout plans such as structure diagram, proposed schematic layout plan, neighbourhood plans and character zone maps prepared by DDA for sector-03 has already steered speculation and imagination in eyes of local stakeholder such as property dealers who are eyeing to buy best parcels of land from village landowners.

As Bhan (2013) writes, plans do not control but they influence, determine and limit. Within housing in Delhi, planning plays at least two key roles: (a) determining spatial patterns even in cities that are 'unplanned' and 'chaotic'; and (b) producing and regulating illegality. The concepts such as 'urban informality', 'flexible planning' becomes all the way more important and relevant in context of 'peripheral urbanism' or 'frontier urbanism' which is characterised by speculative planning.

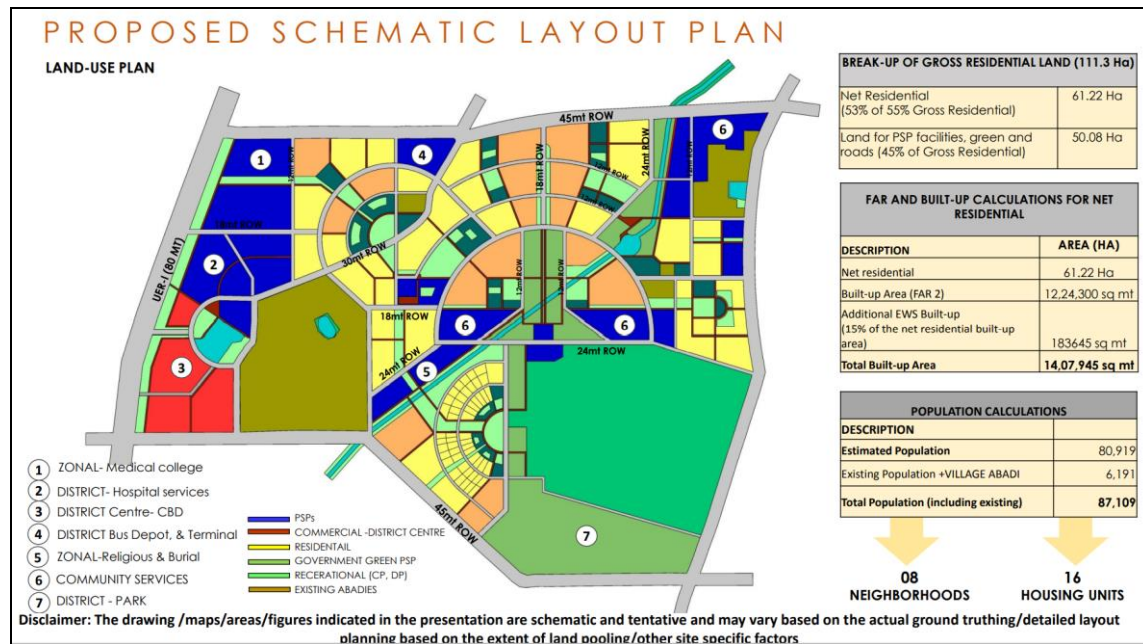
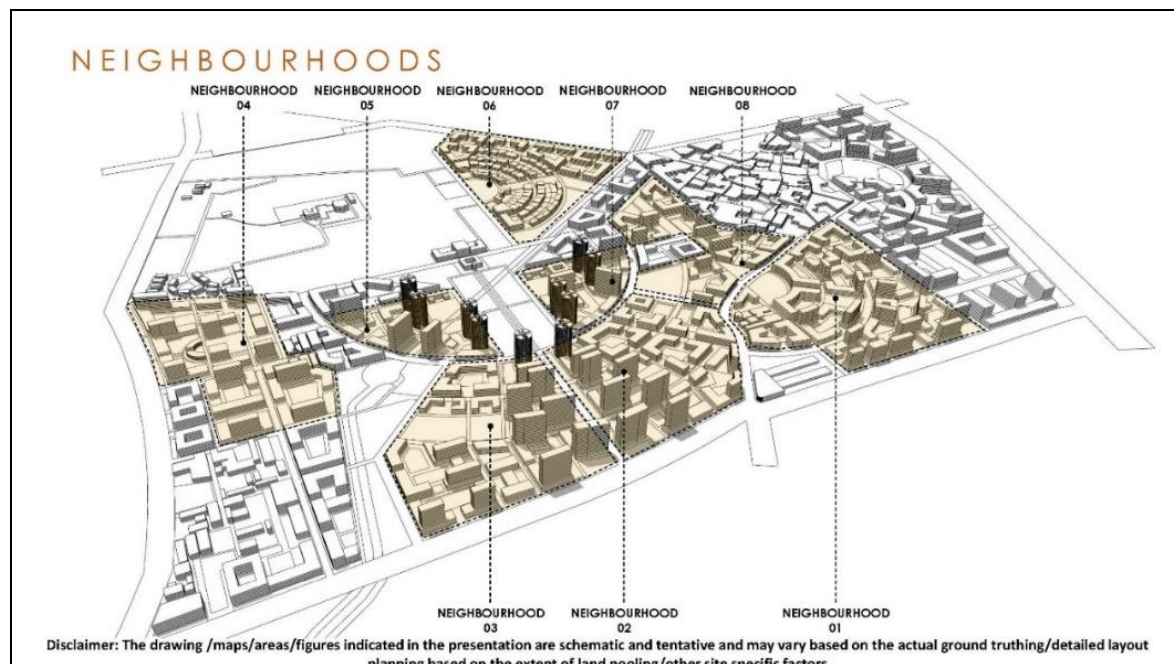


Figure 12. Tentative proposed layout plans prepared by DDA for Sector-03. Source: Delhi Development Authority.



It is interesting to focus on imagination that is created by these plans in the eyes of property dealers. Matthew Hull (2011) discusses how state documents such as maps, and reports have a significant impact on the material realities along with creating new effects as they get circulated among property owners, property dealers, businessmen, bureaucrats and builders. The inter-referencing to cities such as Gurgaon and Dwarka by property dealers points to the fact that these property agents have their own aspiration of profit making from these developments. These aspirations are based not only on the plans that is generated by DDA but also their own experience of interacting with these areas, and hearing stories. Though the proposed sector plans have created an aspiration among property dealers, the ambiguity around implementation of these plans casts a shadow on how this might take years to materialise on ground.

5.6 Impact of real-estate slowdown and demonetisation

The economic decisions announced by Central Government such as demonetisation and Goods and Services Tax reduced interest among the private investors to participate in the land pooling policy. The developers suffer from lack of capital due to demonetisation introduced in 2016. Michael Goldman in his study on Bangalore's peri-urban development has talked about the importance of capital that underlies speculative urbanism and investment in these developments (Goldman, 2011). Large sums of capital are required to finance these mega projects and urban infrastructure services, often having global linkages. The villagers in Neelwal believe that, greater sources of capital available with developers, and their better contacts at larger level, will put them at a significant advantage compared to them. Big developers will have better sources to speculate, invest, and re-distribute the land parcels.

6. Conclusion

The land pooling policy has emerged as one of the prominent land reorganisation and development tools in India. With State acting only as a facilitator, the economic, social, and spatial situations around land reveal that all cannot be left at the hands of consortium to decide. While speculation around land continue, and is further expected to increase, with each stakeholder expecting to benefit and make profit in the longer run, the research raises a question on inclusive, affordable and accessible housing for poor income groups, even the small land owners inside the village. With half of EWS housing being left for consortium to build, it would be critical to evaluate the affordability and even the availability of such category of housing. The state has to address the social and equity concerns that arise during the implementation of policy. It requires constant interaction with all the stakeholder groups especially the small and marginal land owners who will find it difficult to compete with big developers and builders. The State has to play a pro-active role in transparency, availability, accessibility, and delivering of information to the all the stakeholders in order to achieve an equitable form of development. The dilemmas around what to do with their lands can also be gauged from a section of landowners who have turned their agricultural lands into warehouse businesses, reflecting on the contradictions and flexibility in planning. These practices, conflicts, and negotiations are the result of changing nature of planning at the larger level i.e., from comprehensive planning to speculative modes of planning.

7. Future scope of investigation

The research is one of the few qualitative studies undertaken while analysing the implementation of land pooling policy in Delhi. There are 109 sectors proposed to be developed in 95 villages spread on periphery of Delhi under the policy. By analysing one sector, this research provides insights on how the policy is rolling out and the kinds of impacts it has on different stakeholder groups. The research further opens up certain questions and trends that remains to be analysed as the policy proceeds in its

implementation phase. Further, the research will add on to the existing studies on (peripheral /frontier /agrarian) urbanism.

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