

**Neoliberal Policy Thrusts and Fluid Transitions: Analyzing the
Dynamics of Water Supply and Sanitation Partnerships in Urban India**

by

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ABSTRACT

Infrastructure systems are some of the most basic as well as most extensive technological arrangements that define modern societies. Neoliberal reform imperatives are increasingly governing efforts to address technical and institutional deficiencies in infrastructures in developing countries. Focusing on water supply and sanitation infrastructure innovations in urban India, this thesis attempts to analyze and understand the dynamics of governed transformations in these infrastructures since the launch of neoliberal reforms. Five case studies of public private partnerships within three cities in India – Bengaluru, Chennai and Kochi form the empirical basis for the arguments that will be made. Qualitative data for this research was collected from both documentary sources such as media archives and official documents as well as from semi-structured interviews. Rejecting a simplistic explanation that neoliberal reforms are inserted unproblematically into India's entrenched political and infrastructural regimes, this thesis demonstrates empirically the complex, dynamic fashion through which responses to neoliberal reform processes are crafted. A multi-level sociotechnical transitions framework, which categorizes technological change into processes that occur at multiple scales of *landscape*, *sociotechnical regime* and the *technological niche* corresponding to macro, meso and micro levels, is employed to elucidate the interlocking dynamics of infrastructural transition. From the empirical data three social theoretical arguments are presented. First, at the *landscape* level a policy thrust dynamic governs the distinct thrust of neoliberal reforms that different sub-national states in India experience. Second, the territorial dynamic of urban *sociotechnical regimes* create a powerful set of opportunities and constraints that constitutes unique urban territories. Finally, partnership efforts within *niches* initiate regime transition through a strategic dynamic whereby astute actors purposively align their partnership strategies to the policy thrust dynamic at the *landscape* level and the territorial dynamic at the *regime* level.