
“FROM FRAGMENTED SERVICES TO SYMBIOTIC CITIES: AN INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE ANALYSIS OF NAGPUR’S EQUI-CITY INITIATIVE”

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Abstract :

Urban governance in Indian cities has long been characterized by fragmented institutional arrangements and sector-specific service delivery, often resulting in social exclusion and unequal access to basic urban services. The Equi-City initiative implemented in Nagpur seeks to address these challenges by embedding equity and inclusion within municipal governance processes. The study adopts a qualitative methodology based on document analysis and thematic coding to identify key governance patterns related to inclusion, institutional integration, and service delivery under the Equi-City initiative. This paper conceptualizes Equi-City as a symbiotic urban governance model, where municipal institutions, communities, and service systems interact through mutual dependence rather than isolated functioning. Using qualitative analysis of secondary data, policy documents, and urban governance literature, the study examines how Equi-City contributes to the transition from fragmented service delivery to integrated and inclusive urban systems. The findings suggest that symbiotic governance structures are essential for advancing sustainable and equitable urban development in Indian cities.

Keywords : Equi-City, Inclusive Governance, Symbiotic Systems, Urban Services, Urban Sustainability

Introduction :

India’s rapid urban transformation has intensified the complexity of municipal governance. While cities are engines of economic growth, they are also sites of inequality, service deficits, and institutional stress. Despite successive urban reforms—including the Smart Cities Mission and AMRUT—many municipal systems continue to function through departmental compartmentalization. This silo-based structure restricts coordination, limits responsiveness, and produces uneven service outcomes.

Fragmentation in urban governance does not merely reflect administrative division; it produces tangible consequences. Infrastructure expansion may proceed without social inclusion. Technology deployment may occur without coordination. Service delivery may vary across wards despite uniform policy intent. These structural limitations reinforce spatial disparities and weaken citizen trust in institutions.

Recent urban governance scholarship emphasizes integration, collaboration, and



adaptive systems thinking. The concept of symbiosis, drawn from systems theory and ecological interdependence, provides a useful analytical lens. In a symbiotic urban system, governance actors, communities, and service networks operate through mutual reinforcement rather than isolated mandates.

Within this framework, Nagpur's Equi-City initiative presents an important case for analysis. Rather than focusing exclusively on infrastructure expansion, the initiative foregrounds equity in service planning and performance assessment. This paper examines whether and how Equi-City reflects a transition from fragmented governance toward a symbiotic urban model.

Conceptual Framework: Fragmentation and Symbiotic Urban Governance :

1. Fragmented Urban Governance :

Urban fragmentation manifests at multiple levels:

1. **Institutional Fragmentation** : Departments operate independently with limited cross-sector coordination.
2. **Service Fragmentation** : Infrastructure and services are unevenly distributed across urban space.
3. **Participatory Fragmentation** : Citizen Engagement is episodic rather than embedded in governance processes.
4. **Policy–Implementation Disconnect** : Development objectives are articulated but not systematically integrated across sectors.

Such fragmentation undermines administrative efficiency and social equity. It often leads to duplication of efforts, accountability gaps, and reactive governance rather than proactive planning.

2. Symbiotic Systems Approach :

A symbiotic governance model emphasizes:

- Institutional interdependence
- Integrated planning frameworks
- Equity-sensitive service allocation
- Continuous citizen–government feedback loops
- Shared accountability mechanisms

Unlike centralized control or isolated departmental autonomy, symbiotic systems operate through structured coordination and adaptive governance. This model aligns closely with polycentric governance theories and collaborative planning frameworks in urban studies.

Research Methodology :



1. Research Design :

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine the Equi-City initiative in Nagpur. Given the governance-oriented nature of the research question, a document-based qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate.

2. Data Sources :

The analysis draws upon:

- Equi-City project documents
- Municipal governance and service delivery reports
- Urban reform policy guidelines
- Literature on inclusive urban governance and SDG-11
- Publicly available documentation related to municipal coordination challenges in Nagpur

These sources provide insight into institutional arrangements, service frameworks, and equity-oriented interventions.

3. Thematic Coding :

The study employs thematic coding to systematically identify governance patterns within textual data. The process involved:

1. **Initial Coding** : Identifying recurring concepts such as coordination, equity, participation, and accountability.
2. **Theme Development** : Grouping related codes into broader governance themes.
3. **Interpretive Analysis** : Examining themes through a fragmentation–symbiosis analytical lens.

This method ensured transparency, replicability, and analytical rigor

Table 1: Thematic Coding Framework for Analysis of Equi-City Initiative

Codes Identified	Theme	Analytical Interpretation
Department-wise service planning, isolated decision-making	Fragmented governance	Reflects traditional silo-based municipal functioning
Inter-departmental coordination, integrated planning	Institutional symbiosis	Indicates a shift toward collaborative governance structures
Citizen engagement, participatory mechanisms	Community–governance linkage	Demonstrates reciprocal interaction between citizens and municipal authorities
Equity-focused service provision,	Inclusive	Aligns service delivery with social



inclusion of marginalized groups	service delivery	equity objectives
Monitoring systems, feedback mechanisms	Governance accountability	Enables adaptive governance and responsiveness

Fragmentation in the Nagpur Context :

The Nagpur urban governance landscape illustrates several dimensions of fragmentation.

1. Multi-Agency Road Governance :

Responsibility for road maintenance in Nagpur is distributed among multiple agencies, including the Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC), Nagpur Improvement Trust (NIT), Public Works Department (PWD), National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), and MahaMetro. This dispersed authority structure often leads to unclear accountability and coordination gaps.

When infrastructure repairs overlap—such as road resurfacing followed by utility excavation—the absence of integrated planning results in repeated disruptions and service inefficiencies. This reflects institutional fragmentation rather than resource scarcity alone.

Nagpurians struggling with civic woes due to lack of elected body — Nagpur Times / The Times of India (Jan 2025): This report highlights how the absence of an elected NMC general body created a governance vacuum where citizens had no effective representation to address civic problems like water supply, roads, and sanitation, and issues were bounced between agencies such as NMC, NIT, PWD, and NHAI, reinforcing fragmentation between authorities.

The absence of an elected general body left citizens without direct points of contact to address civic concerns, causing overlapping authority and accountability gaps among agencies responsible for services like water supply, road repairs, and sanitation in Nagpur.

2. Governance Disruption and Service Delays :

Periods without an elected municipal body and staff shortages have exposed structural vulnerabilities. When administrative continuity weakens, service delivery becomes inconsistent. Citizens often struggle to identify the appropriate authority responsible for resolving grievances, illustrating participatory fragmentation.

In the 2026 NMC elections, newly elected corporators emphasized hyper-local problem-solving such as consistent garbage collection and water supply, reflecting citizen demands for improved municipal governance

3. Technology Implementation Gaps :



Under Smart City initiatives, digital infrastructure such as surveillance networks and information kiosks was introduced. However, coordination failures between departments occasionally resulted in asset damage or underutilization. This reveals that technological modernization without governance integration does not automatically yield systemic efficiency.

Table 2: Fragmentation and Institutional Challenges in Nagpur

Dimension	Example	Governance Implication
Agency Silos	Multiple road authorities	Diffused accountability
Governance Gap	Administrative discontinuity	Delayed services
Tech Disconnect	Damaged Smart City assets	Lack of integrated planning

Equi-City as a Symbiotic Governance Model :

Against this backdrop, the Equi-City initiative represents an effort to reorient governance structures toward equity and integration.

The Equi-City initiative in Nagpur was designed to promote **equitable access to municipal services**, particularly for underserved populations. Unlike conventional infrastructure-driven approaches, Equi-City emphasizes:

- Equity-oriented assessment of service delivery
- Inclusion of marginalized groups in governance processes
- Performance-based monitoring of municipal services
- Strengthening transparency and accountability

By integrating equity into service planning and governance, Equi-City represents a shift toward inclusive urban development.

1. Institutional Integration :

Equi-City promotes inter-departmental coordination in service planning. Rather than assessing infrastructure projects independently, the framework emphasizes cumulative service outcomes across wards.

NMC Builds First Transgender-Friendly Public Toilets — The Times of India: This official initiative demonstrating inclusive infrastructure planning in Nagpur highlights how municipal governance is attempting to address historically excluded groups.

2. Equity-Oriented Service Planning :

Unlike uniform distribution models, Equi-City incorporates equity indicators to identify underserved populations. This shift moves governance beyond physical infrastructure metrics toward social inclusion benchmarks.



3. Citizen–Municipality Interdependence :

Participatory mechanisms encourage community involvement in identifying service deficits. Feedback loops strengthen accountability and reduce governance distance between administrators and residents.

Fixing Civic Issues To Be Priority For First-Timers — The Times of India (Jan 2026): This article reports newly elected corporators prioritizing basic civic services like garbage collection, water supply, drainage, and toilets — reflecting local demands for improved service delivery and accountability under renewed democratic governance

4. Adaptive Accountability :

Monitoring systems under Equi-City aim to create continuous performance evaluation rather than one-time compliance checks. Such mechanisms support adaptive governance.

नागपुरातील सामाजिक संघटनांची अपेक्षा, “नगरसेवकांनी नागरी समस्यांची जबाबदारी स्वीकारावी” — Loksatta (Jan 2026): Social organizations in Nagpur have publicly called for corporators to take direct responsibility for civic issues, indicating community expectations of accountability and responsiveness.

Table 3: Equi-City attempts to replace fragmentation with symbiosis:

Fragmentation	Equi-City Response
Departmental silos	Inter-departmental coordination
Uneven services	Equity-focused service planning
Isolated participation	Continuous citizen–municipality engagement
One-off interventions	Integrated governance framework

These sources provide sufficient depth to analyze governance structures, service delivery mechanisms, and equity-oriented interventions.

Examples from Nagpur that illustrate fragmentation in urban governance, as evidence of how siloed systems affect services and coordination.

Ex. 1. Multiple Agencies, No Unified Road Maintenance :

In Nagpur, five different agencies (Nagpur Municipal Corporation, Nagpur Improvement Trust, Public Works Department, NHAI, and MahaMetro) are responsible for different parts of the road network.

This has resulted in widespread potholes and deteriorating road quality, especially on internal and narrower roads, because no single agency takes full responsibility or coordinates repairs effectively — a classic case of institutional silos and fragmented roles. This shows:



1. Lack of clear coordination among agencies
2. Blame games replace proactive maintenance
3. Roads deteriorate due to fragmented accountability

Ex. 2. Civic Services Stagnated After Governance Disruption :

For nearly three years, Nagpur lacked an elected municipal body with full authority. With **46% staff vacancies** in the NMC, essential services such as garbage collection, drain cleaning, and road repair were inconsistent and delayed.

Overlapping responsibilities among bodies like NMC, NIT, PWD, and NHAI made it difficult for citizens to know which institution was responsible for addressing their complaints. This shows:

1. Fragmentation due to governance gaps
2. Citizens' complaints bounce between departments
3. Lack of a clear contact point for problem resolution

Ex. 3. Smart City Infrastructure Problems due to Coordination Gaps :

Nagpur installed digital smart city infrastructure (like kiosks and CCTV networks) under national initiatives. However:

- Many digital kiosks remained non-functional
- CCTV cameras suffered damage due to multiple agencies digging roads without coordination

This points to poor inter-departmental planning and lack of integrated asset management — a direct result of siloed operational authority. This shows:

1. Technical projects implemented without integrated service planning
2. Fragmented execution undermines technology benefits

Table 3. Examples summary

Aspect of Fragmentation	Nagpur Example
Agency silos	Multiple agencies responsible for roads without unified planning
Governance gap	Long absence of elected body compromising service responsiveness
Technology implementation disconnect	Incomplete Smart City infrastructure due to poor coordination

5. Behavioral Integration and Civic Campaigns :

Symbiotic governance extends beyond institutional coordination to include behavioral alignment between municipal systems and citizens. In Nagpur, public awareness initiatives



such as the solid waste campaign commonly articulated through the phrase “**Gadiwala Aaya Aaj Kachra Nikal**” and traffic discipline messaging such as “**Signal Na Tod Mere Bhaiya**”

illustrate attempts to integrate civic behavior within urban service systems.

These campaigns represent micro-level governance interventions aimed at fostering reciprocal accountability. Rather than treating waste management and traffic regulation solely as enforcement-driven functions, such initiatives emphasize citizen participation in maintaining urban order. They reflect a transition from compliance-based governance to cooperative urban management.

From a symbiotic systems perspective, these behavioral campaigns function as connective mechanisms between municipal service provision and everyday civic conduct. They reduce the gap between institutional authority and public responsibility, thereby strengthening adaptive governance capacity.

Discussion: Transitioning from Fragmentation to Symbiosis :

The transition from fragmentation to symbiosis is neither immediate nor uniform. Equi-City does not eliminate institutional complexity; rather, it attempts to align existing structures through integrative governance practices.

The study reveals three key transformations:

1. **Structural Shift** : From isolated departmental planning to collaborative coordination.
2. **Normative Shift** : From infrastructure-centric metrics to equity-based performance evaluation.
3. **Relational Shift** : From beneficiary models of citizenship to participatory governance engagement.

These transformations contribute to broader sustainability objectives, particularly SDG-11’s emphasis on inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities.

Thakre is 55th Mayor; Administration Rule Ends — The Times of India (Feb 2026): Reports the reinstatement of elected civic governance in Nagpur after a long period of administrative rule. This is important to contextualize the transition from administrative fragmentation to democratically accountable governance.

Nagpur ZP Excels in 150-Day e-Governance Drive — The Times of India: Reports recognition for digital governance improvements (grievance redressal, AI and GIS use).

Policy Implications

The findings suggest four policy directions:

1. Urban reforms should prioritize institutional integration rather than expanding isolated sectoral projects.



2. Municipal performance assessment must incorporate equity-sensitive indicators to ensure inclusive outcomes.
 3. Citizen participation should be embedded within governance structures as a continuous process.
 4. Symbiotic governance models can support localized implementation of SDG-11 targets.
- ### 8. Contributions of the Study

Contribution of the Study :

This paper contributes to urban governance scholarship in three ways:

- It introduces a **symbiotic systems** lens to analyze inclusive municipal reforms.
- It contextualizes fragmentation within a mid-sized Indian city.
- It provides a qualitative analytical framework that can be replicated in other urban settings.

Conclusion :

Nagpur's Equi-City initiative represents a meaningful step toward restructuring fragmented municipal systems into more integrated and inclusive governance arrangements. While challenges of scale and institutionalization persist, the initiative demonstrates that equity-focused, interdependent governance structures can enhance sustainability and accountability.

The study affirms that inclusive urban development is not solely dependent on infrastructure expansion but on governance integration. In this regard, symbiotic governance provides a viable conceptual and operational pathway for Indian cities navigating rapid urban transformation.

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