NEGOTIATING PUBLIC SPACE FOR LIVELIHOODS:
ABOUT RISKS, UNCERTAINTY AND POWER IN THE URBAN POOR'S EVERYDAY LIFE

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Summary: Many urban poor depend on access to public space for everyday life. With this necessity to utilise public space comes the risks of being dislocated from a specific place and thus uncertainty about whether the current livelihood strategy can be maintained. The notion of risk here refers to the question of access rights, and thus to 'social space', which is produced through the various organisations and actors claiming space as well as the existence of social norms and values. This paper discusses the changing geographies of risk and uncertainty with regard to the negotiations of access to public space for urban livelihoods in an environment where informal institutions dominate. A partly ethnographic account of everyday life in a market place in a low-income settlement of Dhaka, Bangladesh, underlines the difficulty of securing one's 'right to space'. It furthermore shows how one's position in social space and one's access to sources of power can be utilised for minimising risk and uncertainty concerning access to urban public space.

Zusammenfassung: Viele ärmere Bevölkerungsgruppen benötigen im Alltagsleben Zugang zu öffentlichen Räumen. Mit dieser Notwendigkeit ist allerdings auch das Risiko verbunden, aus bestimmten Räumen ausgeschlossen zu werden. Dies führt zu Unsicherheit, inwieweit die aktuelle Livelihood-Strategie beibehalten werden kann. Das Verständnis von Risiko bezieht sich hier auf die Frage von Zugangsrechten zu öffentlichem Raum und damit auf den ‚sozialen Raum', der im Zusammenspiel verschiedener Akteure und Organisationen sowie durch soziale Normen und Werte bestimmt wird. Dieser Artikel diskutiert Geographien des Risikos und der Unsicherheit im Hinblick auf Aushandlungsprozesse über den Zugang zu öffentlichem Raum für Livelihood-Aktivitäten in Umgebungen, in denen informelle Institutionen vorherrschend sind. Die teilweise ethnographische Studie des Alltagslebens auf einem Marktplatz in einem Wohngebiet unterer Einkommensgruppen in Dhaka, Bangladesch, zeigt die Schwierigkeit von Händlern, ihr ‚Recht auf Raum' zu sichern. Desweiteren wird aufgezeigt, wie die eigene Position im sozialen Raum und der Zugang zu Macht genutzt werden können, um Risiko und Unsicherheit zu minimieren.

Keywords: Social geography, negotiations, uncertainty, power, public space, Bangladesh

1   Introduction

"One day in April 2009, Afsana[1] as usual prepared to sell vegetables from a small market place within an informal settlement in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Previously she used to put a wooden bed onto the sandy open field for display of the goods. But in recent months, after the election of a new government, this sandy field has been claimed by local leaders, affiliated to the now ruling political party, who subsequently established a concrete platform for market activities. They subdivided the platform into eleven units and distrib-

uted ownership of these units among themselves. The vendors who had previously used wooden beds to sell fruits or vegetables now had to pay rent to the new 'owners' of the public space. Because of her own affiliation with the ruling political party, Afsana was not made to pay rent but was given ownership of one unit. But the exact position of her unit remained contested due to contradicting oral and written agreements. Thus on this particular morning, she found that her neighbour had removed the vegetables she had planned to sell on that day. Seeing this she got angry and exclaimed: "You have removed the vegetables. If you can then remove me; I will not move from here. If you have

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[1] The names of interviewees appearing in this paper are entirely fictive.

power, then take possession of the *bhit* [shop unit[2)]] by removing me." To underline her claim she called Roxana, a respected female political leader of the ruling party beyond the local level, to whom she was close. Roxana told one of the local leaders who had been involved in claiming the public space and establishing the concrete platform: ""If Afsana files a case on the issue of woman torture then I will be the main witness." After this incident Afsana for a while did not get disturbed again in carrying on with her business"(Hᴀᴄᴋᴇɴʙʀᴏᴄʜ 2013, 17)[3)].

This was not the last encounter between her and the local leaders, and, along with the similar stories that could be told of other vendors in the same place, this narrative reveals the importance of the use of public space in the local economy as well as the continuous dynamics and contestations of access to public space in everyday life.

The use of public space in everyday life can be seen as a result of negotiations between different actors. The outcome always reflects the way society is organised (Mᴀᴅᴀɴɪᴘᴏᴜʀ 2010, 2) or to go with Lᴇғᴇʙᴠʀᴇ (1991 [1974], 26): "(Social) space is a (social) product", produced by society over time. In a nutshell, the example of Afsana's negotiation of a share in the market space underlines Mᴀssᴇʏ's (2006, 89–90) three propositions concerning the conceptualisation of space: First, the space described above is not merely a container or surface but "a product of practices, relations, connections and disconnections". Secondly, "space is the dimension of multiplicity" and thus allows for a multiplicity of parallel experiences and trajectories, represented by the variety of perspectives evident in the above narrative. Thirdly, "space is always in process" and "an ongoing production", which is evident in the temporality of the above outlined spatial constitution and the continuous dynamic of both social and physical space.

Inherent in the dependence on access to public space for everyday life are the risks of being dislocated from a specific place and thus uncertainty about whether the current livelihood strategy can be maintained. The notion of risk here refers to the question of access rights, and thus to 'social space', which is produced through the various organisations and actors claiming space as well as the existence of social norms and values. Dᴇ Hᴀᴀɴ and Zᴏᴏᴍᴇʀs (2005) identify the inclusion of access as one of the main challenges for future livelihoods research. They further put emphasis on the 'social space' and the notion of power – in the sense of differentiated access to power by different social groups – in saying that "[a]ccess to livelihood opportunities is governed by social relations, institutions and organizations, and it includes power as an important explanatory variable" (ᴅᴇ Hᴀᴀɴ and Zᴏᴏᴍᴇʀs 2005, 44; see also a more recent discussion of power relations and the livelihoods approach in ᴅᴇ Hᴀᴀɴ 2012).

This paper aims to discuss the changing geographies of risk and uncertainty with regard to the negotiations of access to public space for urban livelihoods in an environment where informal institutions prevail. The ethnography of everyday life in the market place is analysed to provide answers on how one's position in social space can be utilised for minimising risk and uncertainty concerning access to public physical/urban space. Thus this involves an analysis of actors' powers and power relations.

2 Theoretical considerations

Following the above outlined content of this paper I will here elaborate on how to conceptualise the negotiations of public space considering issues of risk, uncertainty and power. Seeing access to space as a product of negotiations firstly necessitates a discussion of the concept of power and power relations among actors and the spatiality of power. Secondly, the notions of risk and uncertainty require further elaboration and are here especially conceptualised as inherent in the lack of fixed regulations and boundaries due to continuous contestations and competing geographies. Hence, in the following these two notions of power and temporality are elaborated to frame the case analysis.

First it is important to reflect how power is not only a means of the 'dominant' but is "dispersed throughout society" (Fᴇᴡ 2002, 31), implying that the poor and most vulnerable do indeed possess agency in that they "always seek to negotiate options that help to secure their livelihoods" (Bᴏʜʟᴇ 2007, 130). Sʜᴀʀᴘ et al. (2000, 2), referring to Foucault, explicitly outline the positive and negative dimensions of power where power not only refers to domination

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[2)] The Bengali term *bhit* generally refers to a raised platform in a variety of contexts, for example in agricultural production or shop units in a market place. Here it refers to such shop unit demarcations on a concrete platform.

[3)] This paper has been elaborated from a completed PhD research (Hᴀᴄᴋᴇɴʙʀᴏᴄʜ 2013, published at Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart) and sets out to discuss part of the empirical material of the PhD research in the light of risk, uncertainty and power.

but also to the "ability to resist". Thus they further differentiate between 'resisting power' and 'dominating power', defining 'resisting power' as ranging from subtle moments to pronounced forms of social organisation and social movement (SHARP et al. 2000, 3). Viewing the entanglements of power as inherently spatial and geographical and power as emerging from spatial constellations (SHARP et al. 2000, 25), SHARP et al. continue by referring to LEFEBVRE's writing on the production of space (LEFEBVRE 1991 [1974]): "Different social groups endow space […] with amalgams of different meanings, uses and values. Such differences can give rise to various tensions and conflicts within society over the uses of space for individual and social purposes, and over the domination of space by the state and other forms of dominating social (and class) power" (SHARP et al. 2000, 25–26).

In the context of this paper and especially the case taken from Dhaka, Bangladesh it is important to emphasise the last point, i.e. "other forms of dominating social (and class) power". In the case of informal settlements in Dhaka state power or the state as an actor is rather peripheral, present only in very few instances. It is mostly local forces, often characterised as informal in their activities and legitimisation, that negotiate the social space and power relations (ETZOLD et al. 2009; HACKENBROCH and HOSSAIN 2012). As we will see, the local constellations bring to the fore forces that can be termed *de facto* state in these informal spheres (ROY and ALSAYYAD 2004). SHARP et al. (2000, 4) also consider such a notion of informality in postulating that "where power is more diffuse and clearly not restricted to the formal process of governing, researchers need to take cognisance of the more nuanced ways in which the ability to shape social action takes place".

SHARP et al. (2000, 27) furthermore understand the geographies of domination and resistance not as a static process but as highly dynamic, "as a contingent and continuous bundle of relations" and refer to the hybridity between dominant and resistant practices. In their call for extending the livelihoods approach DE HAAN and ZOOMERS (2005, 37) acknowledge that "[p]ower relations are re-created in interaction and thus constitute a dynamic process of 'wielding and yielding'". These notions of hybridity and dynamics directly lead us to the second point to be discussed here, the notion of risk and uncertainty due to continuously shifting boundaries. Risk here refers to the degree of vulnerability that is or has to be accepted when performing specific livelihood activities. This vulnerability can take the form of spatial vulnerability but has to be understood as being embedded in

the social and institutional setting. Uncertainty refers to vulnerability that is created by limited knowledge of and/or agency over processes and institutional decisions – which, as will be seen, can be used strategically.

In the context of violent conflict in Sri Lanka, BOHLE (2007, 130) refers to "geographies of violence and vulnerability as social spaces that have to be mapped according to the relative positions of vulnerable actors within shifting fields of power that deeply influence their abilities to live with violence". This article, however, does not focus on vulnerability to violent conflict, but to negotiations, claims and contestations of access to public space. While the subject matter differs, it can be argued that the basic characteristics of the spatiality of risk and uncertainty remain similar.

Risk and uncertainty emanating from 'shifting fields of power' are also at the heart of 'urban informality', here understood along with ROY and ALSAYYAD (2004, 5) as an "organising urban logic" that, contrary to formality, "operates through the constant negotiability of value". One such example is the "unmapping of space" that ROY (2003) refers to in relation to the territorial politics and ever-shifting spatial boundaries employed strategically by the West Bengal Left Front government. This notion of temporality is also inherent in other works. CHATTERJEE (2004, 60 and 62), in his writings on the achievement of political society in West Bengal, underlines the temporality and contextuality of political society in being successful in claim-making. This non-permanence is also reflected in the identification of "grey areas" that lack stability in the conflict regions of Sri Lanka and that BOHLE (2007, 137) sees as being the most unstable and insecure due to overlapping protection regimes.

Furthermore YIFTACHEL (2009, 89) in the context of unrecognised Bedouin Arab settlements in Beer Sheva refers to "gray space" as being positioned "between the 'whiteness' of legality/approval/safety, and the 'blackness' of eviction/destruction/death". While this whitening and blackening clearly refers to a state strategy in dealing with urban informality and thus inscribes risk and uncertainty into the everyday life of its inhabitants, it nonetheless bears relevance here. Accepting "gray spaces" means that activities and populations are branded with 'permanent temporariness' (YIFTACHEL 2009, 90), thus the concept indicates the pending character of the status-quo at any point in time and the essential uncertainty and insecurity. The above discussed theoretical conceptualisations have indicated how un-

certainty often is strategically created by a specific group of actors in order to maintain a certain order. Preserving a certain order is also the logic behind the 'invited spaces' that Miraftab (2009) identifies as stabilising strategies, for example by statutory planners in times of global neoliberalism. 'Invited spaces' for 'formal participation' stand in contrast to the 'invented spaces' of subaltern groups or insurgent citizenship (see also Holston 2009; Holston 1998), which are used to challenge dominant orders (Miraftab 2009). Again the boundaries here remain fluid, and thus the degree to which subaltern actors can claim agency also defines how much 'strategic creation of uncertainty' they have to cope with. In this regard, the concept of 'social resilience' as discussed in various articles in this issue of Erdkunde can be referred to. Keck and Sakdapolrak (2013, in this issue) have arrived at a definition of social resilience which underlines its adaptive and transformative capacities. Transformative capacities "encompass people's ability to access assets and assistance from the wider socio-political arena (i.e. from governmental organizations and so-called civil society), to participate in decision-making processes, and to craft institutions that both improve their individual welfare and foster societal robustness toward future crises." (Keck and Sakdapolrak 2013, 11). This closely relates to what has been discussed above, as it clearly positions power relations, whether in 'formal' or 'informal' socio-political arenas, to impact on a person's capability to deal with risks and uncertainty.

The above discussion has set the theoretical stage for discussing access to public space in the light of power, risks and uncertainty. The following empirical analysis will make use of these concepts in establishing linkages between the theoretical considerations and an ethnographic account of everyday life in an urban neighbourhood of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

3   Methodology

Methodologically this paper is based on grounded theory and accordingly the research field was approached in an open and explorative way. The empirical data collection carried out by the author between February 2009 and April 2010 involved both qualitative interviews and an ethnographic approach. The ethnographic approach included participant observations at regular intervals and numerous informal discussions at the market place.

Both were documented in ethnographic field notes. Qualitative interviews were carried out openly using only a basic topic guide with local vendors, local leaders and other key informants. Especially the vendors were visited repeatedly and the researcher was involved in numerous informal discussions with them in order to understand the new developments in the market place. Furthermore, interviews were stimulated with the help of Venn diagrams and solicited photography.

Based on the grounded theory approach research participants were selected following the concepts of theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation. The sampling process was based on previous structured observations of all activities in the market place, which enabled the researcher to select research participants as 'cases' based on maximum variations to be expected in their answers and narratives. The empirical data – interview transcripts, field notes and photographs – were then analysed in a process of open coding until typologies and categories emerged from the data which explained the practices of everyday life and negotiations of access to public space.

4   Negotiations of space in an informal market place in Dhaka

The following empirical analysis is set in a low-income settlement without planning approval within the core urban area of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. While the settlement has existed for a considerable time it has not received any official status and thus its residents have to adapt to continuously changing security conditions, ranging from immediate threats of eviction to perceived mid-term security dependent on political constellations. The neighbourhood is predominantly inhabited by socio-economically poor households, however, considerable differences exist between tenants and those that own housing compounds or shops or distribute urban utilities. The market place that is at the centre of this paper is part of the internal market infrastructure of the neighbourhood.

For the local vendors, accessibility to the market place is of great importance for sustaining their livelihoods, as the surrounding settlement is very densely populated and open space is rare, mainly limited to the space of streets and footpaths. The streets and footpaths, however, are not the most attractive setting for one's livelihood activities as vendors here seldom have a chance to occupy

larger spaces permanently, but are rather forced to be mobile and depend on the toleration of adjacent shopkeepers. This insecurity used to be less in the market space, where semi-permanent vendors sold their products from relatively mobile units of wooden beds (see Map 1 in Fig. 1). Before the election of the Awami League government in December 2008[4], the place had been accessible for all vendors based on mutual understanding. The only regulation applicable to everyone was the payment of 5 or 8 Taka[5] per day for the sweepers and night guards. The predominantly small-scale vendors at that time sold primarily vegetables, groceries, fish, rice and fruits. Especially in the afternoon and evening hours these semi-permanent vendors were joined by mobile vendors selling rather niche items or snacks.

Very soon after the new government assumed office, however, access to the market became contested. While before the strategy of "the quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (BAYAT 2004) seemed to have been successful, with only a few periodical interruptions by politically backed local leaders, now the 'ordinary's' claim was contested by the substantial spatial claims of the 'post-election-elite', i.e. the local leaders involved with the ruling party and its sub-organisations. These local leaders soon claimed ownership of the open market and without consulting the users established *paka*-platforms for selling (*paka* is Bengali for stable structures; in this case an elevated concrete platform; see Map 2 and Map 3 in Fig. 1). The *bhits* created in this way were divided among the leaders, who registered their rights of possession – the land belongs to the government and thus ownership of the land cannot be claimed – in the local party office adjacent to the market. The vendors now had to pay an initial deposit of 2,000 Taka and a monthly rent of 1,000 Taka for the place that they previously accessed free of monetary cost except for the contribution to the sweepers and night guards. In the course of time, this new regulation also changed the composition of the market place vendors, as will be discussed below.

4.1 The ordinary: low resistance power, continuous livelihood insecurity and contested space

Since the local leaders claimed ownership of the market place and distributed the *bhits* among themselves, the vendors who had been using the place before have displayed only very low resistance power. When in January 2009 the leaders evicted the vendors from the market place by telling them it should be maintained as an open field, many vendors made arrangements with neighbouring shop owners who allowed them to temporarily sell their goods in front of their shops. Thus they very quickly adapted their livelihood strategy to the new conditions, and in doing so did not contest the local leaders' claim. When after constructing the *paka* platform and distributing the *bhits* the leaders started charging a deposit and a monthly rent, the vendors largely accepted this due to a lack of spatial alternatives. However, often the rent represented a significant proportion of their monthly household income, between 15 and 25%[6], and thus many vendors experienced an increased vulnerability of their livelihoods.

The dominating power of the local leaders was mostly interpreted by the vendors as a 'given' force that could not easily be contested. Thus one woman expressed how the local leaders "make the rule of paying rent" (Shoma, 27.04.2010), indicating how she perceived herself to be rather without any resistance power and with very limited agency unless she changed her spatial strategy. Another woman tells how her family struggled with another increase of the deposit and how they could not enter into a negotiation process with the local leaders because they insisted on their position:

"Total advance money now is 5,000 Taka. Then we told them [the local leaders] about our present situation, that we have faced a huge loss because fruits of about 10,000 Taka perished. Then they told 'We don't want to hear anything. You have to give the money or otherwise you'll leave the shop.' Then we said 'We are poor people. How will we survive if we leave

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[4] From January 2007 until December 2008 Bangladesh was governed by a military-backed caretaker government. This came into place after the elections in 2007 were boycotted by the opposition party Awami League (AL) due to suspicion of fraud by the then ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). In the elections held in December 2008 the AL-led twelve-party alliance achieved a 'land-slide' victory, defeating the BNP's four-party alliance.

[5] In January 2013, 100 Bangladeshi Taka (BDT) equalled 0.95 Euro; the vendors paid about 5 or 8 Eurocents per day for the sweeper and night guards in 2008.

[6] An income of 4,000 to 6,000 Taka was common among the vendors in 2009. Of this, 1,000 Taka were usually spent on house rent, plus an additional 300–400 Taka for water and electricity. The remaining money was spent on children's education, repayment of loans and daily household consumption. Thus an extra 1,000 Taka per month to rent a *bhit* constituted a considerable challenge for many households.
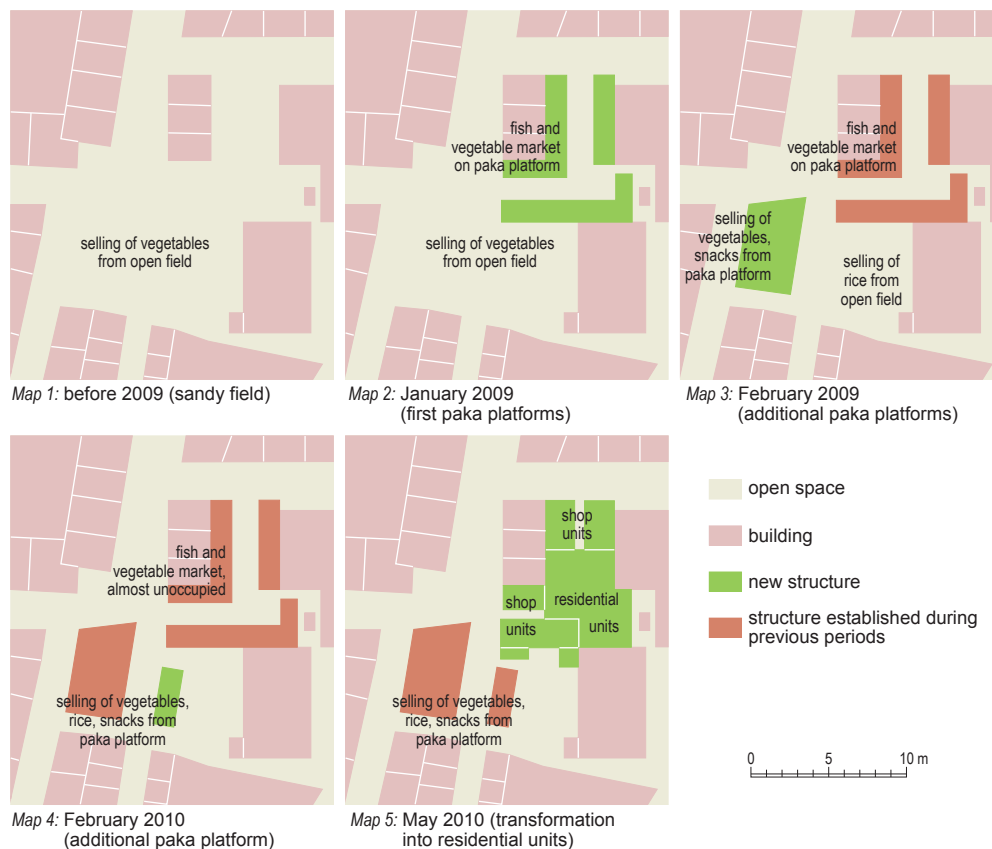
Fig. 1: Changes in the market place between 2008 and 2010. Source: adapted from HACKENBROCH 2013, 228

the shop? Now you have taken possession of the land since Awami League came into power. Before this we did not give any rent. Now we are giving the rent as you have asked. If you keep talking like this, then it is not fair.' […] Then they said 'Whatever you say, you have to give the money'" (Rohima, 18.01.2010).

However, eventually Rohima and her husband were successful in negotiating to stay in the place due to the support of a local leader. Such relationships between powerful kinship or quasi-kinship and their 'protégés' often helped local vendors to maintain their positions in the market place and produce long-term use 'rights' in response to those who promised higher rents to the new owners.

While most vendors tried to adapt to the new conditions, two women contested the leaders' claim by protesting against the establishment of the *paka* platforms. Independently of one another, they requested the leaders to spare their unit as they would prefer to continue selling from a wooden bed. Neither woman succeeded in their resistance to the establishment of the platforms, but the outcomes of their contestation of the local leaders differed tremendously. Dipa, a di-

vorced woman who had been living in the area on her own for years, argued with the leaders, but eventually had to accept their 'dictate':

"I used to do my business over there for seven to eight years. It was a low place before and I repaired it by spending money and did my business. So I have a right. Now, when I was asked to remove the shop to make the place paka, I told them to do it except for my place and I would make my place paka myself. Then they [local leaders] said 'No, we will make it paka. Later you will give us the money for the expenses'" (Dipa, 25.04.2009).

Consequently, she started to pay the rent and the deposit, however, her business turnover was not enough to sustain her increased monthly expenditures. Although she tried to negotiate with the leaders for a postponed payment of the outstanding amounts, she finally had to leave the market place to establish her shop elsewhere. Afsana, on the other hand, was absent when the local leaders finally constructed the platform and got angry when she realised that they had included her unit despite her objection. She thus protested and her determination not to pay the deposit becomes obvious from the following statement:

"After coming back, I found that all [bhits] were made paka. Now Hatem's sleep has gone after seeing me and he was trying to find a way to get me to give 2,000 Taka in the name of the bhit. Now my word is that I will not give even 2 Taka to him instead of 2,000 Taka!" (Afsana, 23.03.2010).

After her refusal to contribute, the local leader involved decided to inform the secretary of the AL Ward office, the lowest administrative level of local government. Afsana, however, reacted by consulting the Ward chairman and after another round of back and forth the chairman 'rebuked' Hatem for intended deception while Afsana did not contribute the money.

These two attempts at resistance clearly demonstrate how the ability to effectively utilise resistance power is strongly linked to one's social capital and networks, especially in political spheres. Due to her political affiliation, which will be discussed again in 4.3, Afsana was able to resist successfully, while Dipa, self-dependent and with a very marginal livelihood strategy, was not able to generate the necessary (political) backing.

Once the social space had become dominated by the local leaders the vendors' perception of risk and the insecurity of their spatial livelihood arrangements increased and they became highly aware of the temporal nature of spatial arrangements. After paying rent for more than a year, two vendors thus considered buying the *bhits* they occupied from the owners in order to decrease their vulnerability to sudden changes. The amounts the vendors planned to invest – 20-27,000 Taka – represented a considerable amount of their yearly income and they would only be able to manage this by taking out loans. However, both have so far not succeeded in buying their *bhits*. It even remains questionable whether the local leaders are willing to sell their *bhits* now as it is very common to do so only shortly before the next election. This enables maximum profit to be drawn before the opposition assumes power and then re-claims the possessions taken during the previous government.

The power of the 'ordinary' in negotiations on access to public space was very limited and mostly vendors simply accepted the conditions 'dictated' by local leaders, even though these were disadvantageous for their livelihood security. However, the relations built up over time with local leaders and other shop owners could be utilised in several cases for securing positions in the market, underlining the power of social relations. To employ resistance power successfully a strong position in political spheres was necessary, as the case of Afsana reveals (also see below). Accordingly, by May 2010 – when the market had been completely transformed into stable structures

and even partly transformed into housing units – the composition of vendors had considerably changed. Especially the fish vendors had left the place as their business turnover did not enable them to pay the rents. But also many of the units from where vegetables had previously been sold had been converted into full shops with closable shutters; these were often used by the new owners of the *bhits* to sell higher turnover goods.

4.2 The 'dominant': acquisition of dominating power, dictating the access to space

The 'dominant' are local leaders, who through their affiliation with the ruling political party have acquired the power to dominate the social space for an electoral period. The political parties in Bangladesh consist of party organisations and sub-organisations at the different administrative levels. The party organisations active in the market place and surroundings are subordinated to the administrative Ward level, the lowest level of urban local government[7]. This subordinate level is commonly referred to as Sub-Area or *mohalla* and its leaders do not have an official local government mandate. However, they acquire their local legitimisation via the organisational structures of political parties and secure their power by maintaining close connections to the higher level administrative and political leaders, both the Ward and Thana[8] level. Local party organisations are often part of the support structure for higher level political leaders who generate their vote banks from urban poor communities (see also Banks 2008, 269).

It is a very common practice in Bangladesh that the ruling political party's supporters are also the ones exercising influence 'on the ground'. Statements like the following from a local leader on the powerlessness of BNP supporters during AL government

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[7] The 90 Ward Commissioners are normally elected every five years and the last tenure period ended on 14 May 2007. While at that time there was a caretaker government, since the takeover of the new political government the Commissioner elections of Dhaka City Corporation keep being delayed. Many Ward Commissioners from the opposition party are thus still officially in office but practically powerless, while the Ward-level leaders and organisations of the ruling party have taken over the everyday business.

[8] A *Thana* is the area of jurisdiction of one police station, normally consisting of several Wards. The Thana, however, is not part of the urban local government system. Nonetheless it is the next level of party organisation.

times were made frequently both from politically af-filiated and non-affiliated interviewees:

"They [BNP] have nothing to say as AL has formed the government. They can't raise their voice. If I support BNP then I will not be able to say 'Don't do this work'. The decisions of AL people are the most grantable [the ones that remain] as AL is the government power holder" (Sayed, 21.04.2010).

Banks (2008, 270), in her study of urban poor communities in two Wards of Dhaka, also confirms the practice of "political patronage" as a "substitute for government services" and the tendency of the ruling party "to reward its supporters while neglecting those who support the opposition party". As this is very common practice resistance from BNP followers tends to be low. However, the dominance over the market place was negotiated between different local organisations, all backed by AL party support. The organisational landscape included the Bazar Committee whose area of jurisdiction was the adjacent bazar, while the open market remained without such a steering committee. This Bazar Committee, that was established a long time ago, used to be dominated by members of the ruling political party – thus in the beginning of 2009 AL people took over the leadership of this Committee. At the same time the Sub-Area Committee was formed as a sub-committee of the administrative Ward level with its members as AL-supporters. The office of this Sub-Area Committee – also the office of the Local Police Committee headed by AL leaders – was the Awami League Club that faces the open market. The different committees had a meeting and it was decided that the Sub-Area Committee (which if the matter had been decided according to hierarchies would have supervised all the bazar area) should have jurisdiction over the market place in order to generate income for their activities. Sayed, a leader involved in the Bazar Committee, interpreted this negotiation as a concession made by his Bazar Committee which he perceived to be more socially accepted and to have a better reputation:

"The Sub-area Committee informed the Ward Committee and the Thana Committee and they came to sit all together in a meeting. They [Ward Committee] told us [Bazar Committee] 'What should we do? As they [Sub-area Committee] are running a club now, they need some money for that.' We told 'What can we do?' Then they [Ward Committee] told us 'You can leave this space for the AL club.' After that we left that space" (Sayed, local leader, member of the Bazar Committee, 23.04.2010).

While in the first place dominating power is secured via the party support structures it is also expressed in the socio-economic status of the leaders.

Most of them have stayed in the area from the very beginning and they are known to be rich in assets and tend to earn well from the settlement. They are the ones who own several large compounds thus collecting a high income from house rents, or the ones that are involved in supplying water and electricity to the residents at much higher rates than the market price for a legal water connection (see also Hossain 2011 on water supply arrangements). Apart from this economic power, social status is at least equally important and several leaders hold relevant positions within the area. Hatem, the leader involved in the contestation with Afsana, for example, has central functions in the Sub-Area Committee, the Police Committee (a locally organised 'informal' police that reports to the *Thana* but has some independence in local affairs), the local *shalish* (a traditional social system for conflict resolution that is very common in rural Bangladesh, but also in the *bosti* areas) and is the Imam of the local mosque. In fact most leaders are found to also have a spiritual/religious role in the local religious organisations, which is socially well accepted. In addition, Hatem is a member of several NGO committees (a further discussion of how working in NGO committees relates to power can be found in Hossain 2012, 6). In this sense he, along with a few other leaders, clearly dominates the social space in the neighbourhood. In many ways this kind of domination resembles the common patronage relations that rich family members maintain with poorer kin in rural Bangladesh (Gardner 2000).

The improvements implemented in the market place, furthermore, might even be interpreted as expressions of symbolic power: the construction of the *paka* platform suggests stability, formalisation and might even carry a promise of wealth and modernity – powerful images to the urban poor. On the other hand the old *kaccha* field (Bengali for non-stable structures; here referring to the previously sandy/clayey surface) might have symbolised freedom and self-organisation, but at the same time hardship and a threat of poverty.

4.3 Resistance: contesting the powerful

Despite the domination of the local leaders, resistance power is not totally absent, as revealed by the cases of both Dipa and Afsana above. The ability and willingness to employ resistance power, however, depends highly on one's own social position. Thus the analysis here will focus on how Afsana's position in the social space of the local-

ity enabled her to successfully negotiate access to the market place and how she is also able to even consider resistance beyond her personal livelihood strategy.

Afsana was able to contest the local leaders' actions as she herself is involved in politics and thus able to produce some powerful people for support. On the one hand she is involved in the Awami League Dhaka Mohanogor Committee, the AL committee of Dhaka megacity, on the other hand she is connected to several, especially female political leaders on the local level, Ward level and Thana level. The style of her narrative demonstrates that she is highly aware of her own power. For example, she told Hatem who wanted to collect money from her for providing a tin roof for her shop "I made him do the work by telling bla bla" (Afsana, 23.03.2010). This indicates not only that she had no intention of paying him the money, but also her fearlessness and self-confidence. Furthermore, to secure her claims she is keeping a police diary[9] against one of the local leaders at the Thana police station as she does not trust them. Thus her resistance, that in terms of her personal livelihood was mostly successful, is secured by a variety of strategies involving the police and close ties to upper level political leaders, especially a network of female politicians.

Her resistance and contestation presented so far, however, had only helped her in performing her own livelihood strategy, but had not reduced the daily threats and risks the other vendors faced. Furthermore, despite her resistance and assertion in the negotiations she was nonetheless affected by the new environment produced by local elites, and thus also realised that her profit from selling vegetables had gone down considerably. Confronted with the permanent insecurity of other shop owners and the fate of those who had lost access to this place in the process of elite groups' claim-making, she eventually decided to try to re-establish the 'old system'. Through her political power, she planned to 'evict' those people who had claimed the ownership of the open space and wanted to return the 'right to space' to those who had been there for years.

"Now Shoma's husband who has one hand only, used to operate the shop along with me. My husband has some problem in his leg; but I had power and so I was able to take the shop forcefully. He [Shoma's husband] was not able to

operate the shop using power like me. He gave 5,000 Taka to Hatem in advance and operates the shop by paying 1,200 Taka as rent. […] He is operating the shop by paying rent because he did not have the ability. Then isn't a person like him supposed to get a shop in the market? If he operates the shop by paying rent then what will happen if all these shops do not exist? Then everyone should be able to do their business like before. My chairman and secretary [of AL Dhaka Mohanogor Committee] will help us for this. And they told me 'Collect two, four or five people like you and call a meeting and then call us. We will build a hawker's market there'" (Afsana, 23.03.2010).

Afsana had planned this initiative for after the Ward Commissioner's elections. These have however not yet been held (even at the beginning of 2013), and even if they occurred it remains questionable whether Afsana's plans would be implementable. The new vacuum could lead to the creation of a new social space – but not necessarily one that guarantees vendors comparatively free and inclusive access to space. In the logics of the spatiality of power it is likely that new organisations would come in and produce new spatial claims and thus create an atmosphere of new risks, insecurity and uncertainty. Furthermore, until May 2010 the space was further developed by the local leaders, one corner in particular has been transformed into residential units (see Map 5 in Fig. 1). It is rather unlikely that any political leader would support the demolition of these new houses, a rather strong contestation, simply to re-establish an 'old system' of market regulation.

Apart from such contestations and considerations of power there are also many 'subtle moments' of resistance power (SHARP et al. 2000) in everyday life. Such small moments of symbolic contestations are again mainly carried out by people who themselves have acquired a certain powerful position. In a meeting of a local NGO committee one politically active woman suggested protesting to the MP who, although invited and frequently present at such events, had not participated in a programme they had organised. She proposed leaving the next programme once he appeared. Moreover, when the local leader Hatem appeared at the door everyone went quiet and the lively discussion only resumed once he had left the place.

It becomes apparent that resistance power is highly linked to one's political power. Someone with the relevant connections risks less when resisting, while the 'ordinary' scarcely employ such strategies, rather accepting a dictate than increasing their risk by contestations.

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[9] A police diary or general diary is an expression that has made its way from English to Bengali and refers to a notification at the police station, thus of less consequence than filing a case would be.

5 Conclusion

The above example of the market space exemplifies how the spatialities of power lead to an increased vulnerability of the 'ordinary' while the 'dominant' are in a position to extend their spatial claims and dictate rather than negotiate social space and thus access to physical public space. Resistance power – the ability to resist – tends to be low in an environment where social space is dominated largely by local leaders who secure and legitimise their role via the party system and traditions of patronage relations. This confirms the importance of including power and power relations in both the discussion of the livelihoods approach as well as the concept of social resilience. Without understanding power as being unequally distributed and at the same time power relations as being dynamic and shifting, the sometimes overnight developments in the market place could not be explained. Space here becomes the arena where social relations are inscribed and continuously negotiated.

Uncertainty in the example of the market space has indeed been created by those in dominant positions and has resulted in those vendors without supporters leaving the market rather than accepting ever-changing conditions. The vendors in the market place were permanently located in a "gray space" (YIFTACHEL 2009) and in a space subject to permanent "unmapping" (ROY 2009) – thus they experience a permanent temporariness in exercising their spatial livelihood strategies. The consequences are exclusion and dislocation and a necessary change of livelihood strategies, or the continuous adjustment of strategies in order to maintain a specific position in space.

This paper has presented a partly ethnographic case study and embedded this empirical material into theoretical considerations concerning risk, uncertainty and power in relation to spatial constellations. Bringing this research into a conceptual framework of social resilience as proposed by KECK and SAKDAPOLRAK in this issue (2013) represents a future endeavour that would contribute an actor perspective to the discussion of especially the transformative capacities as a dimension of social resilience and the inherent socio-political processes associated with geographies of risk and uncertainty.

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