



INTRODUCTORY REPORT WORKSHOP 1: The Economics of Urban Sprawl vis-a-vis the Regulatory Framework - Contrast or Complementarity?

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Introduction

Cities of almost all countries are experiencing a large increase in urban growth which results in a mostly horizontal expansion of such urban centres. This horizontal expansion has serious consequences in terms of cost, transportation, physical and social infrastructure, consumption of fertile agricultural land, ecology or in other words the overall quality of life of people. It is felt that to make it economic and environmentally sustainable and to achieve a good quality of living the sprawl of these centres needs to be minimised.

The form, nature, density/intensity of the built volume, the quality of physical and social infrastructure in these sprawl areas depend on various factors in the country, i.e. political set up, economic status, governing mechanism, legal and other institutional systems etc. However, the situation within the developed countries is similar to the developing countries. In developed countries the reason is mostly quality living away from congestion which is largely supported by a private mode of transport, whereas in developing countries it is an economic housing option for the generally economically weaker migrant population as the services and infrastructure are missing there, both physical and social. The other important reason for fringe growth is land grabbing/speculation due to a weak enforcement of law, a manipulation through bureaucratic and legal systems etc. However, whatever is the situation the provision and maintenance of services in these unintended extensions is a costly affair due to its sparse and irregular built-up form in every situation, whether it is in the developed or the developing world. The developments in these sprawl / fringe areas become a costly and difficult affair as various stakeholders come into picture, and there are no payers or any willingness to pay for the provision of infrastructure.

Congress Theme and its Focus

The main theme of the congress has been divided into six workshops based on different aspects of urban sprawl i.e. transportation, ecology/environment, management, cultural/-

heritage conservation, density/urban structure etc. The theme of workshop 1 is urban sprawl vis-à-vis the regulatory framework – contrast or complementarities. It has been further divided into the following three major sub-topics:

1. Conceptualising the economies of urban sprawl
2. Antidotes to sprawl and best practices
3. Economics of the infrastructure system.

Considering the experiences of China, India and other developing countries where urbanisation is growing at a very rapid pace and has reached enormous proportions of challenges and opportunities, the purpose of discussion is very important. The economy of urban policies, urban form and hidden social and environmental costs and their externalities, metropolitan growth management, regulations and economics and the impact of physical infrastructure and its recurring maintenance are issues which need serious consideration for a long term vision.

Workshop Focus

The workshop has 22 papers. The authors who submitted the papers are from various countries of Europe, Brazil, India, China, Australia, South Africa etc. The authors have described observations, analyzed the existing situations in case studies and have drawn conclusions based on their experience.

It has become clear that factors such as demographic growth, social stratification conditions, real estate markets, scientific and technological changes, etc. affect urban sprawl, and the land which is the less fertile and has the less speculation/land value resist the least for urban sprawl. Associated problems with urban sprawl are a.o. the high cost of travelling, the degradation of environmental quality, inefficient management of the city. Urban renewal has been preferred above urban sprawl as the advantages of urban renewal are that it facilitates higher densities, accesses advantages to city centres and transforms the city into a new urban design (but the process is slow and expensive). Densification has also been supported by plans of Geneva, an example of Sydney, and it has been mentioned that it has helped in the preservation of natural greens, the check on increasing rents, reduced pressure on urban ecology, cohabitation of different social groups and the economic vitalisation of the city. The situation of Brasilia has been explained as unfriendly to the people due to their long commuting for work and home which has resulted in a fragmentation of the city and its dispersion in every way. Long distance commuting is a daily nuisance for people without a suitable mode of public transport. The sustainable solution to urbanisation has been advocated in the form of eco-cities, but it has been objected that the backyards of our living areas should not be converted into built-up for the sake of containing the sprawl which degrades the existing environmental living quality of the area. The author from Spain has stressed the importance of planning acts / legal provisions for social cohesion, social equity, social housing etc. The author from Dhaka suggests that a large scale land acquisition policy



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may be helpful in checking the sporadic growth, and comprehensive planning with the use of satellite / GIS data may be useful tool in checking urban sprawl. Mixed use has been explained as another alternative to urban sprawl as it may help in retaining the centrality and urban character of the city core. This has been explained with the example of Amsterdam. In China, the Development Zones and Export Processing Zones at state level have been taken up which are a horizontal expansion of the urban area but in a planned manner. They are very successful.