Chapter 6
Growth of Census Towns in Capital Region of India:
Informal Urbanization as a Symptom of Counter-Urbanization?

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ABSTRACT

Managing urban growth has become one of the important challenges of the 21st century in the Global South, where agglomerations are being formed by the coalescence of urban and rural areas. The scale and speed of transformation have outstripped the capacity of local governments to provide adequate basic amenities. Using the National Capital Region as a case study, and census data and spatial boundaries, this chapter attempts to understand the process of urbanization underway in India. Results show that the region is currently in the stage of sub-urbanization, and that recent growth has been predominantly in 'census towns' as informal urbanization. Three main reforms are required to achieve sustainable urbanization: First, integration of infrastructure development into spatial planning at the national level and in lower tiers of planning. Second, empowering local authorities to incentivize urban development in order to fund urban infrastructure. Third, notifying census towns with municipalities, thereby providing for urban infrastructure and controlling unplanned growth.

INTRODUCTION: URBANIZATION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH WITH A FOCUS ON INDIA

Urbanization in the Global South is characterized by the coalescence of urban and rural areas. Managing these has become increasingly complex due to the scale and speed of transformation, which has outstripped the capacity of local governments to provide adequate basic amenities, thereby constraining sustainable development (Mertins & Kraas, 2008; Kreibich, 2010; Sorensen & Okata, 2010).

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There is a growing concern about urban expansion and its problems, particularly as researchers in the Global South have not paid sufficient attention to the physical aspects of settlement (Singh, 2008; Todes, 2008). The understanding of the spatial distribution of urban areas and how this distribution and their regional variation are essential to successfully manage urban environmental impacts (Decker et al., 2007). In this regard, urban areas – in particular their form and function – have been the focus of research by urban planners, economists, geographers, and sociologists, however, physical processes leading to the spatial configuration at the regional level are relatively understudied (Fragkias & Seto, 2009). One dominant pattern of grown in the Global South is the formation of urban agglomerations by the expansion of urban areas into neighboring rural areas that lack urban amenities. It is vital to understand the dynamics of such growth as well as the processes behind this trend.

Currently, 54% of the world's population lives in urban areas and is projected to increase to 66% by 2050. Over 90% of growth will be concentrated in Asia and Africa. The two Asian 'giants', India and China, will see their urban populations grow by another 404 and 292 million residents, respectively, between 2014 and 2050 (UN, 2014). In view of the fact that a large proportion of urban growth in these two countries is informal (i.e. growth deprived of basic amenities), it remains a challenge to manage this projected increase in a formal sustainable manner. Compared to India, China has been better able to regulate its urban growth and provide for adequate urban infrastructure due to its coercive migration policies and decentralization of fiscal powers to local authorities. However, the fact that local authorities in both countries are only required to provide basic amenities within their areas of jurisdiction has fostered informal urbanization adjacent to formal urban areas. In India, these new urban areas are termed 'census towns' while in China these are called 'urban villages' or 'undesignated towns' adjacent to or enclaved around recognized urban areas. Such settlements are the grey areas existing between urban and rural areas. This chapter aims to shed light on the process of urbanization underway in India and to draw parallels between urban governance in India and China in this regard.

The 2011 Census of India reported a level of urbanization of 31%, corresponding to 377 million urban dwellers (CoI, 2011a). Two main features of urbanization between 2001 and 2011 were: (i) higher growth in the urban population than the rural population (Bhagat, 2011), and (ii) an increase in the number of census towns, representing approximately 30% of urban growth in India (Pradhan, 2013). Census towns are settlements that, despite having urban characteristics and fulfilling the census criteria of being urban, are not notified with a municipality. In this respect, the growth of census towns has been termed 'non-recognized growth' (Samanta, 2014), 'unacknowledged urbanization' (Pradhan, 2013) and 'denied urbanization' (Denis et al., 2012). Such growth is also termed 'informal' as being outside the purview of municipalities. In this way, census towns generally suffer from a lack of basic amenities.

Very little empirical research has been conducted on the correlation between infrastructure provision and the population growth of census towns. In a study on the level of infrastructure and service provision based on household surveys in Singur City (West Bengal), Samanta (2014) found that infrastructure and services remain poor under rural authorities that lack financial resources. Therefore, a further aim of the chapter is to investigate whether infrastructure provision and the growth of census towns are correlated.

Depending on the stage of urban development, planners adopt spatial planning policies to promote a smooth transition from one stage to another and to minimize the disparities between desired and actual development. Here cyclical models of urbanization can help to identify the actual stage of urban development, thus enabling the next stage to be predicted and supporting planners in making appropriate policy decisions to provide necessary infrastructure. In the model of urban development devised by Klassen