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## Book Reviews

Environment and Urbanization ASIA  
9(1) 107–112  
© 2018 National Institute  
of Urban Affairs (NIUA)  
SAGE Publications  
sagepub.in/home.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0975425317748536  
<http://journals.sagepub.com/home/eua>



**Eric Denis and Marie-Hélène Zérah (Eds), *Subaltern Urbanisation in India: An Introduction to the Dynamics of Ordinary Towns, Exploring Urban Change in South Asia* (New Delhi: Springer India), 2017. 614 + xxxvi pp. ₹8349. (ISBN: 978-81-332-3614-6).**

Contemporary conceptions within academia, policy makers and the popular imagination seem to be preoccupied with the dichotomy of the rural–urban divide. The ‘urban’ is further delimited in its metropolitan vision as evidenced by the current focus on *Smart Cities* mission, or the recently concluded Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), apart from various state-level initiatives for infrastructural planning in existing urban areas. This vision is in sync with most developing countries that mirror similar planning initiatives and research that is focused on metropolitan growth. While these initiatives to revive and sustain urban growth took shape in the last decade, there was another unnoticed transformation of the ‘urban’ in India alongside China and South America. The 2011 census recorded a growth of census towns from 1,352 to 2,894 in its decadal analysis; this indicates a growth of 2,774 statutory and census towns in the first decade of the twenty-first century as opposed to a growth of 500 towns in the previous decade. This monumental, yet unchronicled growth is the genesis for the SUBURBIN project and this book, which shifts the focus of discussion from large metropolitan agglomerations to the ‘small towns and large villages’ of India.

### Subaltern Urbanization

The editors and the authors use census data along with spatial analysis to locate these loci of urban growth. While there is obvious significant urban growth in peri-urban areas, and in locations proximate to or with adequate connectivity to urban locations, these account for barely half of the recorded growth; in the other cases, there is a significant randomness in the locations of most towns, some of which the book covers. The book challenges this connectivity and proximity determination of the *New Economic Geography* (NEG), and makes a case for urbanization that does not stem from migration or urban-dependent growth, suggesting that various local dynamics shape the urbanizing process. While most contemporary academic assumptions suggest a decline of small towns stemming from migration to large cities, the book suggests otherwise, projecting a consistent urban growth of these small towns in the future.

While studies of the census like that of Kanhu Pradhan (Chapter 2) and others have highlighted this growth, it still lies in a grey area as far as state administrations are concerned. While the census identification of ‘town’ exists, most of these new towns have not been administratively recognized as urban. The editors argue that this negation of recognition as ‘urban’ of large villages that meet administrative

criteria can be understood as *denied urbanization* or *invisible urbanization*. This leads them to pose a methodological question regarding the demarcation of urban and rural in India—How are we to recognize these dense agglomerations as urban?

This lack of determination, compounded with the short-sightedness regarding the longevity of these towns, is what the book addresses through its various case studies. It suggests that these sites are urbanizing through specific local and global social, economic and political processes. It identifies the changing nature of economic activities that not only mark the shift from agrarian processes to industrial and commercial ones, but also how capital flows, local investments, land relations, seasonal migration and local entrepreneurship influence this unparalleled growth. Similarly, the book through its case studies highlights the various ways in which social transformation in seemingly stagnant or backward rural regions is nuanced by mobility, aspirations, lifestyle changes and changing power relations.

The book, therefore, makes a large argument suggesting that these new agglomerations are as complex, dynamic and even cosmopolitan as large cities, and it is important to study the processes of urbanization ‘from below’ of what were heretofore considered as ordinary towns. Furthermore, it makes a case for a balanced and inclusive imagination of urban development that incorporates these subaltern agglomerations.

## The Dynamics

The book charts out the dynamics of subaltern urbanization through four distinct, yet interdependent parts. The studies in each part combine multiple disciplines that use macro analysis along with field work across 17 towns in 9 states.

The chapters in Part I largely use macroeconomic analysis to define the larger context of urban growth in the past decade. The notable work of Pradhan (Chapter 2) bears anchor to the entire volume by locating the subaltern urban growth. It traces origins of these towns, demarcates their economic characteristics, gauges their contribution to urban growth and focuses on the contribution and patterns of migration. Importantly, the chapter makes a spatial analysis of the locations in order to evaluate effects of urban proximity among other factors. The other chapters in this section buttress the arguments for distinctly conceptualizing subaltern urbanization. These include locating the significant demographic share of small towns in India’s urban network, correlating income of individual states and their patterns of urbanization, and identifying the role that transition from agricultural dependence to rural non-farm employment in such growth. Two chapters (Milan Punia et al. and Eric Denis and Zarin Ahmad) are more focused in their analysis of towns in Haryana, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu. While the former enhances Pradhan’s point for growth in urban sprawl and longevity, the latter showcases a small town reformulating its economy activity towards a global market. This case study is a synecdoche for other latter chapters which suggest that small town sites are geared towards becoming parts of transnational economic networks through their constant economic innovations.

Part II focuses on change in land relations and migration patterns in two northern and two southern sites as important contributors to this growth through ethnographic and historical studies. Most chapters in this section identify how religion, caste, region or indigeneity play a role in ensuring a process of capital accumulation and wealth distribution—largely by maintaining control over ownership and use of land—which is necessary to facilitate urban growth. Whether one considers the nativism in the case study of Himachal, or the agglomerations that benefit from the economic activities of temple towns, both follow the same pattern of internal migration that can be sustained by local economic activities.

The chapter by Raman demonstrates how infrastructural growth such as highways or Special Economic Zones in the proximity of small towns brings about a change from agrarian use to residential and commercial use of land. Using the case study of Tamil Nadu, it suggests that despite the trickle-down suggestions of NEG, local actors like investors, developers and entrepreneurs that work within intra-community relations and negotiate with caste-dynamics characterize subaltern growth.

Part III focuses on multiple administrative questions: one chapter focuses on the question of centralized planning, one suggests state-wise analysis is important to understand policy decisions, while another looks at the role of local administration. In her chapter, Saba Khan suggests the centralized distribution of equity for development to challenge the current unequal distribution of resource. The argument is made by suggesting that growth in population and economic activities in conventional urban demography is matched in these regions and, therefore, there is no reason for administration to hold back on the resources. Partha Mukhopadhyay, on the other hand, suggests that administrative recognition may not always matter for some small towns; growth is not necessarily dependent on this recognition, and urban amenities and shifts to non-farm work are being noticed in multiple census towns. But this merits state-level analysis to evaluate characteristics of agglomerations which are able to make these shifts. Zérah focuses on how local leaders are negotiating with changing power relations, capture of land resources and undeveloped administrative skills, while traditional social dynamics and new economic activities shape the growth in Haryana. Aditi Surie and Zérah's chapter on women's participation in governance of small towns is a refreshing inclusion. Through case studies of women councillors in Haryana, they suggest that despite the persistence of inhibiting cultural structures, certain councillors are able to practice their agency and articulate political capital albeit in limited capacities.

As identified above, the volume indicates that many of the identified small towns exhibit a dynamic economy that is innovative and geared towards the global market. Part IV takes case studies from diverse geographies and economic activities. Rémi de Bercegol and Shankare Gowda use the case study of Kartarpur in Punjab where a community of local carpenters have transformed a traditional industry into a modern craft market that uses local and regional resources in labour to create export goods. They argue that local informal networks and organization among the community brings considerable wealth to the town despite not having infrastructural benefits of an urban classification. Similarly, the other chapters cover dynamics of caste, labour relations, transport availability and access to resources within specific cases of small towns to highlight innovative economic activity that is the driving force for the growth in these locations. The macroeconomic study of Elfie Swerts and Denis paints a detailed picture regarding the nature of economic activity; most of the small towns cater to their rural surroundings which continue to be primarily dependent on agriculture. However, these towns are also marked by their largely male workforce and an economy that is gradually diversifying away from the agrarian sector, a 'privileged space' of transformation that is marked by underemployment and poverty as well.

The chapters across different parts of the book constantly reflect the larger paradigm posited by the editors. Recurrent patterns are visible in the data tables of the macro studies, in the spatial analysis of locations and in individual ethnographic accounts. At the same time, the arguments of social transformations, political capital, migration, economic innovations and the perplexing nature of administration and policy are echoed across different chapters of the volume. The significance of the methodological repositioning defined by the editors at the beginning of the volume is not lost in the individual cases, significantly challenging contemporary approaches to understanding urbanization. The tome—both in its editorial tone and in the different cases across India—constantly asks state and central policy makers to

take cognisance of this subaltern growth to make urban planning more inclusive. Through its exhaustive introduction, macroeconomic studies and field-based analysis of specific locations, the book manages to make a strong case for reshaping academic approaches to the study of small towns in India.

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**Smitha Kanekanti Chandrashekar (Ed.), *Entrepreneurial Urbanism in India: The Politics of Spatial Restructuring and Local Contestation* (Singapore: Springer), 2017. 220 pp. (ISBN: 978-981-10-2235-7).**

DOI: 10.1177/0975425317748537

This is a timely book, attempting to document, in the context of India, the gradual shift from a managerial to an entrepreneurial approach in urban management and governance. While the broad outlines of such a shift would bear similarities to what has happened in other parts of the world, namely, a shift in city government's preoccupation with the provision of services and other facilities to urban residents to a more commercial and competitive local government focused on economic growth, India's specificities anchored in its regional and cultural complexity and its stark inequalities require separate treatment. Smitha's edited book, comprised of 10 chapters, attempts to fulfil this need through interesting essays on urban policy, institutions and practices as emanating from the top such as from government, the private sector and international institutions on the one hand, and on the other, on the incompleteness of reforms and project implementation due to various reasons including resistance and contestations from the ground. Twenty-five years after the official starting of economic reforms, it is indeed important to understand the nature of the changes taking place in the management of Indian cities and the effects of opening up on urban governance and liveability. The book is divided into three parts: the first dealing with the rules, regulations, norms and new policies underlying contemporary urban governance in India, the second is on the political economy of urbanization; and the third is focused on urban inclusions and exclusions.

Based on a wide ranging review of the literature, the editor in the opening essay attempts to provide a framework to understanding entrepreneurial urbanism in India and explains the purpose of the book which is to 'contextualize the entrepreneurial urban initiatives and projects produced within local context' (p. 25). In Chapter 2, Kundu and Krishna note three ways by which urban local governments in India have become entrepreneurial, namely, through a change in function from delivering social welfare to promoting economic development, the wide use of public-private partnerships to boost local economies and the prevalence of practices and discourses that are business friendly. Their article provides an overview of recent central government programmes such as Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, Smart City Mission and AMRUT. Sudhira, in Chapter 3, examines the nature of entrepreneurial governance in Bengaluru using terms such as 'political entrepreneurship' and 'bureaucratic entrepreneurship' to highlight the role of political leadership and state government organizations such as KUIDFC in facilitating the city's transformation into 'a beacon of the globalizing world' (p. 69).

In the second part of the book, Mohan, in Chapter 4, provides an interesting case study in her article 'From Hierarchy to Heterarchy: Moving beyond Entrepreneurial Governance'. Using the concept of

'heterarchy' which refers to the networks of collaborations between the public sector, private sector and civil society, she analyses the Municipal Reforms Programme (MRP), an e-governance programme of the Karnataka government that was launched in 2002. While noting the success of the pilot phase, she points out the problems of its scaling up during 2006–2012 when the 'fluidity' or relational contract among the various nodes of the heterarchy could not be facilitated by the state and there was little ownership of the reforms. Raman, in Chapter 5 entitled 'Speculative Spaces: The Material Practices of Urban Entrepreneurialism', examines the land development policies and practices of Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) and Delhi Development Authority (DDA). Focusing on three smaller towns in the NCR-extended area, she examines the activities of both large and smaller developers and their relationship with HUDA, while in the second case, DDA's attempt at slum redevelopment of Kathputli colony is explored. Both cases reveal the active role of the urban development authorities as land brokers for private developers, how speculative practices drive the actions of major stakeholders and how projects, at the local level, can be ruptured by 'unpredictability in local politics'. In Chapter 6, on 'The Politics of Entrepreneurial Vision Group Plans and their Impact at the Local (Government) level, Bengaluru', Baindur follows the increasing corporate influence on urban governance in Bengaluru and its consequences, namely the prioritization of infrastructure growth against basic needs. He concludes that 'entrepreneurial' or 'hybrid' governance is having a 'predatory impact' as these infrastructure projects are excluding the poor while dislocating and displacing them.

Part 3 on urban inclusion and exclusion starts with Chapter 7, entitled 'Remaking the "Mohalla": Muslim *Basti*-dwellers and Entrepreneurial Urbanism in Mumbai' by Contractor. Attempting to break away from stereotypes and present a nuanced and changing perspective, the article while situating the trajectory of Mumbai's Muslims as a marginalized urban community, also, describes 'the efforts of Muslim *basti* dwellers at finding infrastructure solutions as bottom up approaches to urban entrepreneurialism...' (p. 142). But these examples are limited and do not address larger concerns such as spatial segregation, state negligence and discrimination in the mainstream housing market. Chapter 8 entitled 'Fragile Entrepreneurialism: The Mumbai Airport Slum Redevelopment Project' by Ren also attempts to break out of existing ways of thinking and go beyond the two dominant perspectives that have marked critical work on urban governance in India, namely, the framework of neoliberalism and the post-colonial perspective. Her focus is on 'graduated forms of citizenship obtained in the contestation over urban development'. Using this in her case study, she shows how entrepreneurialism in urban India is different from that in the post-industrial cities of the West. Here, it is a 'fragile entrepreneurialism' due to the extreme fragmentation of state power at the urban scale. Every large project requires a new coalition of stakeholders and prior success does not guarantee smooth alliance building in the future even with the same stakeholders involved. Thus, while two pilot projects of resettling slum dwellers to expand Mumbai Airport's runways in 2000–2002 were successful, the same stakeholders could not reassemble themselves for the main project (2007–present) of resettling around 400,000 slum dwellers.

Chapter 9 by Dhananka on 'Planning their Homes in Entrepreneurial City: The Capacities of the Urban Poor and the Constraints of Public Policy' is a comparative study of two poor communities assisted by the same NGO to access adequate housing in Bengaluru. One community was covered by the central government's Basic Services to the Urban Poor (BSUP), while the other was not covered and continued to live in an informal settlement and build its own housing. Findings indicate the success of the latter community where construction was completed to the residents' satisfaction in contrast with the unsatisfactory state of delivery of the BSUP units where participatory planning had not been done, and buildings were of poor quality. In the last chapter, Chapter 10, entitled 'Spatial Reproduction of Poverty in Entrepreneurial City: Bengaluru, India', Smitha, on the basis of a socio-economic survey of the dwellers of two relocated slums, attempts to show how they renegotiate city spaces for employment and income.

Several interesting insights into the specificities of entrepreneurial urbanism in India are revealed through the articles of this book. One is the success of projects at the pilot phase, such as, Karnataka's MRP and Mumbai Airport's slum rehabilitation and their stalling or unsatisfactory performance at a more scaled-up level. The causes and ways to avoid this situation of early success and subsequent failure or slowing down should be of great interest and are a part of the narrative of these cases. A second issue that emerges is of the continuing need of the state to act as coordinator and facilitator in the multi-organizational networks that are increasingly characterizing urban infrastructure projects. An overtly hierarchical and dominant state agency, however, is unlikely to succeed in such a role. More critically, is an issue that has been touched upon by several authors and it is the impact of entrepreneurial urbanism on the poor and marginalized in the city. Current urban policies and practices have been regarded by them as favouring the elite and being 'predatory' in its unconcern for the poor and in using the land that houses and sustains the poor for infrastructure projects. However, some authors have also pointed out effects that have been somewhat moderated by subaltern agency at the ground level. In this view, the poor too are 'entrepreneurial' seeing in the city opportunities and possibilities for economic and social mobility and seizing them to actively remake their immediate environment.

The book as a whole, however, highlights the fragile and fragmented nature of urban entrepreneurialism in Indian cities, beset with numerous overlapping organizations that do not coordinate effectively for the city's betterment. When they do, as in the case of Bengaluru, it is to promote an elite vision of city growth. In fact, another feature of the first 25 years of entrepreneurial urbanism in India is the continued lack of an inclusive vision in the urban planning process. Planning by an elite cabal of government bureaucrats, private sector consultants and civil society organizations that represent the middle and upper middle classes continues to leave out an important stakeholder, namely, residents of slums and squatter colonies. Their voice has to be configured in the planning process. Leaving them out is one of the major causes of project delays and non-implementation of plans that could improve the city. Here, the government has to play a just and neutral role thinking of the larger interests of society rather than the narrow interests of the corporate and real estate lobby. Without the hope of improvement in their lives via slum-upgrading programmes where they rather than developers actually benefit, irregular settlement regularization, social rent initiatives and self-help housing projects controlled by community associations, as was the case in Brazil from the mid-1980s, urban infrastructure building in India will continue to be challenged by ground level opposition, making it slow and costly. More proactive and humane state and city governments, prioritizing an agenda that balances the growth of the city with the basic requirements of its poor for livelihoods and decent housing, are clearly needed. It is this inclusion and balance that must be worked at in the next 25 years.

To conclude, there is much of value in this edited book, in particular, several fresh and interesting case studies. However, some of the book's shortcomings need to be mentioned as well. One is the fact that of the 10 chapters, 5 of them are on a single city, Bengaluru. This has resulted in quite a bit of repetition of the information on urban governance organizations and policies and reduced the scope of the book. A second shortcoming is the lack of careful editing and numerous errors, both typos and grammatical, in the text which make the reading of some articles less smooth and even confusing. A glossary of acronyms at the start of the book would have been helpful as well.

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