



**3rd International Conference
on Public Policy (ICPP3)
June 28-30, 2017 – Singapore**

T16 P25

*Participatory Community-based Development Approaches, Local
Institutions and Indigenous and Traditional Societies*

Title of the paper

*Community Based Urban Development: Alternate Patterns of Spatial
Transformation*

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Date of presentation

June, 28th 2017

COMMUNITY BASED URBAN DEVELOPMENT: ALTERNATE PATTERNS OF SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION

ABSTRACT

With the advent of globalization, there is a high impetus on creating world class cities across the globe. This paper is aimed at understanding “New Towns” that have undertaken participatory community-based development initiatives in the context of urban development. This paper shall undertake comparative case studies of two cities of India: Magarpatta City (Pune) and Auroville (Tamilnadu) and trace out their developmental paths. Both these cities are an outcome of political- administrative as well as social decision making. These were initiatives by the future residents and serve as an appropriate example of how promoting community participation at the local level in city planning boosts the impacts of public policies aiming to create sustainable urban spaces. Displacing the traditional top-down design, such cities are likely to achieve better results in terms of human development as built environment directly influences not only physical activity but also human behavior. Hence, it would be more efficacious if government agencies tailor their policy actions according to the multidimensional features of specific local needs and capabilities while planning a city.

Key Words: Community based urban development, New Towns, community participation

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of globalization, there is a high impetus on creating world class cities across all states in India. Particularly after the 1991 liberalization, the market based land use has gained momentum as an increasing amount of land is required for infrastructure projects. Like many other developing countries, India too has become a neoliberal state that is a consummate agent of—rather than a regulator of—the market (Smith, 2002: 279). Along with this there is an increased impetus on improving the quality of habitat spaces. The land market function has changed considerably and its public policy counterpart services the interest of the capitalists and developers. The pressure to create global cities is so high that the state often does not focus on the local aspects of urban development such as creating affordable housing with the same rigor that they feel for creating world class buildings and roads.

This paper is aimed at understanding the phenomenon called “New Towns” in the context of urban development. We shall look at two cities of India: Magarpatta City (Pune) and Auroville (Tamilnadu) and trace out their developmental paths to examine the potential of collaborative approach of community based urban development. Displacing the traditional top-down design, such cities are likely to achieve better results in terms of human development as built environment¹ directly influences not only physical activity but also human behavior. Such initiatives can help policy makers in achieving more effective and resilient transformations of urban spaces. In the context of urban development, collaborative approach emphasizes “the importance of building new policy discourses about the qualities of places, developing collaboration among stakeholders in policy development as well as

¹ Built environment can be defined as the humanitarian-made space in which people live, work, and recreate on a day-to-day basis (Roof and Oleru, 2008).

delivery, widening stakeholder involvement beyond traditional power elites, recognizing different forms of local knowledge, and building rich social networks as a resource of institutional capital through which new initiatives can be taken rapidly and legitimately” (Healey, 1998: 1538).

The term “New Towns” originated in the United Kingdom; refers to planned communities of the new towns movement with its roots in the Garden City Movement, founded by Ebenezer Howard in the late 1800s, as an alternative to the over-crowded, polluted, chaotic, and industrial cities that had appeared in Britain.² In India, Chandigarh is the first planned city. Gandhinagar, the capital of Gujarat was designed based on the design scheme of Chandigarh. Mostly, new towns are planned cities. They are a deliberate attempt to develop a city to cater to particular needs of the region at a specific time. As urban population is rising, there is a growing need to integrate economic development within city. Cities act as planned hubs where economic activity is central to existence. New towns are designed to decongest the highly industrialized urban centres. New towns have a comprehensive and mixed-use design that is based on a single master plan and incorporates a population representative of various social groups.³ With increasing pressure on infrastructure and environment in limited city space coupled with demand from the emerging middle and higher income groups for better living environment; it is leading to urban planning mainly manufacturing new cities on virgin territories than urban renewals (Shaban, 2004: 5093). Appropriate government policy to facilitate and deliver this objective is necessary.

Magarpatta city and Auroville- both these cities are an outcome of political- administrative as well as social decision making. However, the social thinking and decision making preceded

² <http://www.urbannewsdigest.in/?p=6878>

³ <http://www.urbannewsdigest.in/?p=12459>

the formal administrative decision making. These were initiatives by the future residents; they were actively involved in conceptualizing the master plan of the city. The issues of environmental conservation, with appropriate emphasis on economic and cultural growth were dealt with while designing these cities. Commercial growth is imperative for an urban space and this has been taken care off in both the cases. A considerable area is used as green belt with proportionate allocation for housing, industrial use, education and agriculture. The most remarkable feature of both these townships is they are self-contained unit. Residents have an access to all the necessary amenities within walking distance. Both these cities are well integrated, well connected, well informed, and enhance local conditions; in the precise way that is expected of a new town (Healey, 1998). This distinguishes them from satellite towns; wherein residents commute to the nearby urban centres for work.

MODELS AND BEST PRACTICES

Political leaders and planners alike confuse the crass economics of construction with the nuanced socioeconomic development of a city as an economic system (Brugmann, 2009: 117). He observes that the city's development is now dominated by expedient city model, produced by a globalized city building industry made up of transnational developers and their supply chains (Brugamnn, 2009: 123). City models mode of urban development is not harmful per se. The problem with such system is that they are inorganic, they are not built overtime by the users and so even if they are carefully designed and built, the planners will not be able to foresee several things. In every urban area, there are too many parameters outside the planner's control, and there is no way of knowing how the world around will change (Patel, 2014: 18). Often the designs and plans of city models are not indigenous and not made keeping in mind the local traditions. The comprehensive importation of models leads to construction of a foreign structure within a city. Satterthwaite claims that the examples of Singapore, Shanghai and Dubai are used to justify projects and private sector

partnerships that do nothing to address very poor housing conditions. On the contrary they may involve large-scale evictions leading to further housing problems (Satterthwaite: 2010: 15). Roy argues that planning today is constituted through models and best practices; and these blueprint utopias are seen to be the key to the universal replicability of “good” planning (Roy, 2005: 156). However, we need to realize that these models which were successful in one region may not necessarily succeed when duplicated. Also, many such international blueprints have failed miserably in delivering and such instances should also be kept in mind.

Instead of repetitive duplication of world class cities, we need to build onto the robust socio-economic systems that our urban areas are. Ramchandran (1989: 187) has similar opinion and states that our urban systems are a system of diversified cities. With an enduring and huge economic base, these urban systems can be integrated into the global system as are several other world cities. Several successful world cities are not identical but differ depending on their domestic urban systems; attempts should be made to integrate Indian urban systems into global economy, and not so much to fit Indian cities into a broader global narrative, whether of global cities or new economic geography (Denis et al., 2012: 61).

Urbanism is not a mere process of building infrastructure but it is a way that builders, users and residents co- design, co- build, co- govern, and combine their activities to support ways of production and living that develop their shared advantage (Brugmann, 2009: 105). As city systems are co- created by multiple stakeholders; it enhances the city’s utility, efficiency, and productivity (ibid). Ad hoc cities can and most often do evolve into city systems. The production systems, governance mechanisms and social fabric function coherently to the community’s advantage. The governance mechanism may be formal or informal; however informality does not necessarily mean coercive means of governance.

I am presenting the two cases of Magarpatta city and Auroville as examples of how new towns can be developed by involving future residents; as an example of collective action and effective city systems. Citizens are the ultimate beneficiaries of urban development (Samarajiva et al. 2015: 42). However, I firmly believe that instead of creating new cities, emphasis should be on upgrading existing cities. Attempts should be made to improve our existing cities to meet our needs. I chose these two cities as Magarpatta City and Auroville are contradictory in nature. Magarpatta City was established as a result of concerted efforts of people belonging to the same ethnic community. Community identity played a major role in eliciting community organization. Contrary to this, Auroville is an experimental township where people from 123 nations seek to overcome the geographical boundaries. For them it is establishment of classless and nationless society.

MAGARPATTA CITY (Estd. 1988)

Built on an area of around 430 acres, Magarpatta City is a satellite township of Pune. However, the residents do not commute to the nearby urban centre for work. It is built in village Hadapsar, Pune. Magarpatta City is a prime example of organizing community for collective action. The land was inhabited by agrarian communities like Magar, Tupe and other local Marathi communities. The land was under the supervision of Pune Municipal Jurisdiction. In the year 1982, in its draft development plan, Pune Municipal Corporation marked this land as “future urbanizable zone”. This brought the land under the purview of the Urban Land Ceiling Act. Urban Land ceiling Act was aimed at preventing the concentration of urban land amongst few people to ensure equitable distribution of urban land. Reportedly Maharashtra government had acquired large tracts of land under the provision of this act. Around 123 families got together and decided to turn their agricultural land into a township which came to be known as Magarpatta city. This was their collective move to save their land from acquisition by the government under the Urban Land Ceiling Act. The residents

collectively pooled their land and hired a contractor to draft a township plan. Hafeez Contractor developed a draft developmental plan which was presented to the Pune Municipal Corporation. State administration approved the plan and a company was registered in the name of Magarpatta Township Development and Construction Company Limited. Sharad Pawar was the chief minister of Maharashtra then. However, it took political connections on part of Satish Nagar to turn the area into agricultural land. As the land was shared by the same community which was closely knit, it was easy to come up with a township with collective ownership. For heterogeneous ownership, the same might not be true. The township was not registered as a cooperative but a company in order to ensure company shares commensurate to the land holding.⁴

Landowners are primary stakeholders in the company and they earn a continuous revenue share from the sales proceed. This ensures that the land owner gets both; a revenue share plus equity position. 30% sales proceed was treated as land cost.⁵ It was not a purchase of land where a third party was the developer of the land; rather development was done by farmers themselves. On a mutual basis, people were working for the township and they were paid for it. A farmer moving soil in his tractor got 750 INR per day in addition to his share from the sales proceed. Mostly youth in the age group of 18- 30 chose to work for the township, chores included landscaping, building roads, shifting soil and bricks etc. The thumb rule was that each family be involved in the construction work and gets continuous income from the project.

⁴<http://infochangeindia.org/agenda/battles-over-land/the-magarpatta-model-for-land-acquisition.html>

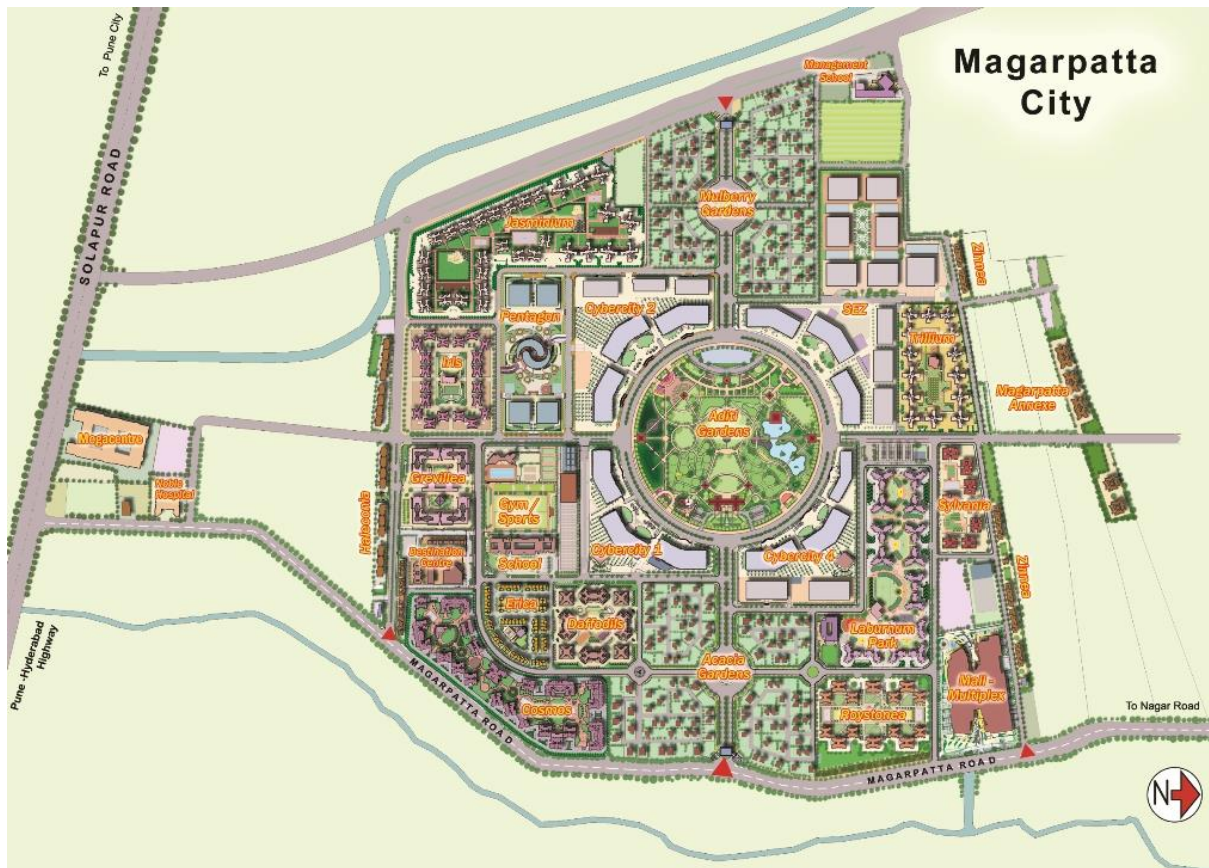
⁵ <http://www.rediff.com/money/2007/jan/11bspec.htm>

It is not an isolated fringe of residences at the periphery of urban centre, but the commercial spaces are well within the township. Green spaces consist around 30% of the township. Waste management, one of the biggest problems of urban administration is dealt with carefully. They have implemented a comprehensive waste management system which takes care of the waste generated in the city. Waste management is done in an eco- friendly way. Segregation of over 400 tons of household and commercial garbage, trash and waste per month is done at source of which 280 tons of bio degradable waste is used for vermiculture and bio-composting and around 120 tons non-biodegradable waste is recycled.⁶

The city has a balanced mix of residential and economic areas. An integrated and self-sustained city that takes care of basic needs of residents by providing residential, commercial, educational, industrial as well as agricultural areas. The economic development of the city has been kept in mind. Cybercity Park has not been sold but kept by the company to generate revenue. Magarpatta City has its own broadband, cable television, transport service and other small and medium enterprises to cater to the need of residents. The Government of India granted approval to Magarpatta City for development, operation and maintenance of an SEZ for Electronic Hardware and Software, including Information Technology Enabled Services in 2006. The area covered under SEZ is 11.98 hectares.⁷

⁶<https://www.google.co.in/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=magarpatta%20city%20plan>

⁷ <http://www.urbannewsdigest.in/?p=2389>



The primary landowners retain the authority of city administration via a council. Magarpatta City Council; its primary role is city administration, involving residents in socio- cultural activities, town management etc. It also plays an advisory role to the management for the maintenance of Magarpatta City.⁹ A major need of any city is ecological sustainability. The issues of environmental concerns and sustainability are well taken care of. Solar water heating systems comprising 7,160 Solar Water Heating Panels is used.

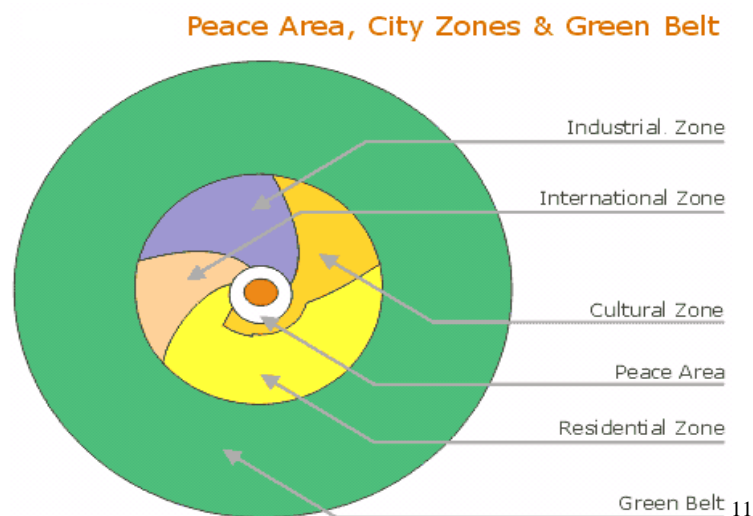
⁸<http://asci.org.in/asciwb/Technical%20Session%20V-%20Resettlement%20-%20Urban%20Sector/Presentation17.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.magarpattacity.com/>

Magarpatta city is a prime example as to how a shift in the task of urban planning from building urban places to fostering the institutional and local capacities in territorial political communities for ongoing ‘place-making’ activities can be achieved (Healey, 1998).

AUROVILLE (Estd. 1968)

Auroville is an experimental township located 6-7 km from Puducherry, Pondicherry. It was conceptualized by Sir Aurobindo, the concept was then put before the Government of India which extended support and took it to the General Assembly of UNESCO. In 1966 UNESCO passed a unanimous resolution commending it as a project of importance to the future of humanity, thereby giving their full encouragement.¹⁰ A diagrammatic representation of Auroville is given below:



Self- maintenance of the city and neighboring surroundings is the main characteristic of Auroville. The entire city is divided into several zones such as peace area, industrial zone, cultural zone, residential zone and green belt etc. There is a balanced division of land for

¹⁰ <http://www.auroville.org/contents/95>

¹¹ <http://www.auroville.org/contents/95>

greenery as well as other purposes. Residential zone and commercial zone are within walking distance. The entire city is developed in a circular fashion. The centre of the circle is the peace area which has a worship area and an amphitheatre with the Urn of Human Unity that contains the soil of 121 nations and 23 Indian states. Additionally, there is a lake to help create an atmosphere of calm and serenity and to serve as a groundwater recharge area.¹² The Industrial zone is a zone to make Auroville a self- supporting township; it mostly contains small and medium scale industries. The residential zones provide habitat both for individual and collective living.

It is noteworthy that Auroville is built on wasteland. A vibrant ecosystem complete with residential and economic activity has been set up primarily by the initiative of the citizens. Various aspects of ecological sustainability like soil and water preservation, rain water harvesting etc. are taken care of. It is a well-established combination of urban design and land use patterns along with transportation systems that promotes walking and bicycling which can help in creating active, healthier, and more livable communities (Handy et al., 2002: 67). The main zones and their important features are summarized in the table below:

¹² <http://www.auroville.org/contents/95>

Table 1		
Area	Area Coverage in Hectares	Main Features
Peace Area		Centre of township comprising of worship area, lake, gardens and amphitheatre
Industrial Zone	109	"green industries" for self- support, small and medium scale industries, art and craft, city administration
Residential Zone	189	45% built surface area, 55% green area, urban density balanced with nature
International Zone	74	hosts national and cultural pavilions
Cultural Zone	93	site for applied research in education and artistic expression, facilities for educational, cultural, art and sports activities
Green Belt	405	zone for organic farms, dairies, orchards, forests, and wildlife

INDIAN PERPECTIVE

In India, new towns can be broadly classified as port towns, industrial towns, capital towns, refugee towns, and satellite towns. The problem with such towns is that they have been mostly designed to address a single purpose and often are not always found to be integrated with surrounding areas (Rao, 1990: 8). The pressure to create new cities is so high that

governments do not focus on upgrading the existing cities and creating affordable housing for the poor as their priority with the same rigor that they feel for creating world class buildings and roads. This leads to development of “*city models*”. As seen in the case of Magarpatta City, residents have co- created their city. It is designed keeping their needs in mind. It is a result of such careful and participatory planning that most second generation farmers have become entrepreneurs, having small and medium sized business catering to varied needs of residents. In most endeavors of physical development, what is redeveloped is space, the built environment and physical amenities rather than people’s capacities or livelihoods (Roy, 2005: 150), Magarpatta City and Auroville have been careful about not making this mistake. This facilitates the agrarian shift also, migration from farm to non- farm jobs becomes easy. It serves as an example of a city system; co- created by multiple stakeholders; which enhances the city’s utility, efficiency, and productivity (Brugmann, 2009: 105).

The problem of urbanization is multifaceted and so in spite of the apparent constraints; new town development is emerging as one of the most viable approaches to resolve some of the problems of urban areas with increasing population size, changing economies and limited sources of livelihood. It is suggested that with careful planning and involvement of all communities and stakeholders, it has a great potential for emerging as a balanced solution that presents benefits for all.¹³

CONCLUSION

The success of cities and their viability require the rapid development of progressive urban regimes, capable of transforming cities, as they grow, into more equitable, ecological, stable

¹³ <http://www.urbannewsdigest.in/?p=12459>

and creative places (Brugmann, 2009: 275). Infrastructure development has to be coupled with socioeconomic development of a city for it to sustain as an economic system. Magarpatta City and Auroville have been designed and maintained keeping in mind these basic requirements of a city. Magarpatta city model has been duplicated by Nanded City, Pune which is spread over an area of 700 acres.

As suggested by Mahadevia, local and state governments must judiciously use the land for generating financial resources. Public lands earmarked for such resource raising purpose should be done keeping in mind that Urban Local Bodies are “not for profit” entities (Mahadevia, 2009: 217). Thus, instead of selling out urban lands for third parties to develop, participation from future residents should be promoted. The policy processes around such initiatives should facilitate more and more participation from citizens. The success of Magarpatta City led to special legislative provisions added to the Maharashtra Regional and Town Planning Act of 1972, called the Special Townships Notification of 2006. The provision lays down norms for amenities and infrastructure, and planning standards for development, simultaneously incentivizing the developer and its citizens with various procedural and Floor Space Index benefits to promote a good, sustainable development.¹⁴ Citizen’s participation ought to be given priority and policy makers should not try to glamorize cities and urban development, instead it people should be considered as participants in the process and not as beneficiaries (Mahadevia, 2011: 63).

However, it should be kept in mind that developing new cities from scratch is no panacea for resolving urban problems. In India, creating new cities receives much more emphasis than

¹⁴https://www.google.co.in/search?q=magarpatta+city+plan&oq=magarpatta+city+plan&aqs=chrome..69i57.4770j0j4&sourceid=chrome&es_sm=93&ie=UTF-8

urban development. Existing cities need to be upgraded and improved. Presently, the policy focus seems to around Howard's idea that better living could "be obtained by starting a bold plan on comparatively virgin soil than by attempting to adapt our old cities to our new and higher needs" (Howard 1965:147). New cities by themselves are not an answer to the urbanization challenges that India is facing; however, as an adjunct to the main strategy around small and medium city development, they can serve as a lever to direct future urbanization (Sahasranaman, 2012: 60).

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