

#### 4. AREAS OF RESEARCH IN REGIONAL PLANNING WITH REFERENCE TO URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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##### *Regional Planning—Its Implications and Limitations*

1.1 Regional Planning and Development is obviously a very vast and complex subject embracing the development of every aspect of human activity. On one side of its wide spectrum lies the development of basic sectors of economy like Agriculture, Forestry, Mining and Industry and layout of macro infra-structure like Irrigation and Power and on the other, provision of physical infrastructure and services. The latter could include even a micro project like the location and design of a small market or shopping centre. Consequently, Regional Planning involves knowledge of well-established and yet widely diverse subjects like Economics, Geography, Geology, Agriculture, Planning and Design of physical environments, Engineering, Architecture, Sociology, etc.

1.2 Considered in the context of their gestation periods, various developmental activities which constitute Regional Development cover an equally varying time spans partly due to their inherent characteristics and partly due to the varying levels of technology, quality of human resources like sense of entrepreneurship, organisation and financial resources as available for a specific field of such activity at a single point of time. It is because of these characteristics and limitations of different sectoral activities that it is rather difficult to conceive and much less achieve in relation to a single point of time a picture of balanced and integrated development for the

whole of a region or an area, however desirable such an objective may be or as is usually emphasized upon. In fact, it is only after a stage of development in some vital sectors of economy that development in other sectors really triggers off. Comprehensive development of a region, in its fullest sense, is thus a staggered and unending process.

1.3 It may be relevant in this connection to add that, being alive to its complexities and vastness, the draft Fifth Plan does not treat Regional Planning as a distinct and self-contained subject in its own right and at one place. National Planning being nothing but Regional Planning for a country as a whole, its regional and area implications, problems and proposals could be said to have been brought out only at a few places in the draft Plan viz. (a) Command Area Development under the Chapter on Irrigation and Power, (b) Backward and Special Areas Development in Chapter 14, (c) Community Development in Chapter 1, and (d) Metropolitan Regional Development in the Chapter on Urban Development and Housing.

##### *Formulation of a Regional Plan and Concept of a Planning Team*

2.1 Nevertheless judging by the current ideology of aiming at a comprehensive Regional Plan, there is perhaps not enough awareness of these limitations and constraints and it appears that each of the several disciplines involved in this process has a mixed idea of its role and functions.

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For example, as you are aware, for the last 50 years or so, the Town Planners or Urban Planners have extended their nomenclature and functions to that of Town and Country Planning or Urban or Regional Planning. This has been done with some justification because of the complexities of urban growth and spatial pattern of human settlements and because their discipline covers planning of land for comprehensive and optimum utilisation, inter-alia, to take care of the interaction and movements that flow from such uses. In this attempt, the Town and Country Planner, therefore, tends to stray into the feared paths and usually gets himself involved in the intricacies of the various aspects of economic planning. Since, however, the task of comprehensive Planning is beyond a single individual or profession, the concept of an inter-disciplinary team to undertake this work has been steadily growing. Such a team is usually taken to mean leaders of various disciplines dealing with various activities. This concept has led to a good deal of long winding processes, confusion of responsibilities and frustration not only in India but perhaps all over the world. The nature and level of work involved in various forms of development activity being widely different, possibly each one of them needs a planning team of its own, supported further with work of specialists to deal with specific problems. Consequently the task before the main Planning team is not so much of direct planning as of co-ordination and controlling the limits and depths of such work in each field. This obviously requires the fullest knowledge and a mature undertaking of the intricacies of comprehensive planning but since enough experience and know-how is as yet not available in this direction; it is here that the matters seem to go awry.

2.2 Further in actual effect, the inter-

play of sectoral activities is relevant only in some especially intimate and critical aspects. For example, it is neither necessary nor possible to fix the desired land use for all the vast areas of a region before arriving at reasonable estimates of inter-movements that flow such uses, to plan a network of roads and transport. Such a work could well be confined to pockets of potential growth points. Besides such plans are by no means the once for all final Plan and there is, against perfection, the oft repeated phrase "Best is the enemy of good".

2.3 Therefore much against the ideology in vogue, it may be more workable to divide the task formulation of a Regional Plan into distinct and separate parts—at least two—as below—

- (i) A Plan for the development of natural resources, creation of employment opportunities and estimating the consequent population potential of that area; and
- (ii) A Plan for the provision of physical infrastructure services and other needs. This may need to be provided either prior to or parallel within or subsequent to measures taken for economic development.

2.4 In view of this, the discussion is confined to the second part of the Regional Plan and for that purpose, the main objective, scope, methodology and contents of such a Plan could well be limited to—

- (i) A quick and broad assessment of the potentialities and possibilities of the area or the region as can be ascertained on the basis and within a possible and likely range of technology, quality of human resources and level of investments;

- (ii) Based on this broad assessment, proposals for the physical infrastructure and other needs such as a network of transport, pattern of human settlements, services and housing etc., leaving land use planning to only of potential and vulnerable spots;
- (iii) Regulatory and preventive measures which are necessary against misuse and damage to existing lands particularly against such uses which would create ecological imbalances.

2.4 The task of quick and broad assessment of the possibilities and potentialities of an area or a region is most vital to the preparation and workability of such a Plan and indicates the need for a methodology for which there is great scope of studies, research and even of innovations and improvisation. How is the growth of an area affected by the varying levels of technological inputs, sense of entrepreneurship and level of investments? The task is perhaps almost the same as working out suitable models for economic growth. Even though this is perhaps a well-trodden field but apparently there are not enough ideas and knowledge which could be applied in relation to a specific area to bring out quick and intelligent results. This field is, therefore, one where there is great scope for meaningful research.

### *Spatial Pattern of Regional Development*

3.1 Now let us consider the objectives and the assumptions on which we normally base such plans, namely, that such plans should be spatially oriented. Such an objective and assumption *per se* holds good in a developing country (a) because here agriculture and allied activities continue to be a major component of economic growth and these are inherently of a

'dispersed' nature, (b) because even in respect of other development activities like industry, they lend themselves to dispersed location because of the widespread availability of land, water and hydel power, more particularly in India and (c) because of the overhead social costs per capita and waste of human energy which are comparatively very high in large urban concentrations.

3.2 How is it then that, despite this seemingly unquestionable validity of dispersed and spatially oriented development, it is rather difficult to achieve this pattern in actual practice and we have before us the examples of urban concentrations like Tokyo, New York, London, Calcutta and Bombay? This is due to the compulsions and exigencies of economic systems more particularly as prevailing in countries of mixed economy. Referring to the development of Backward Areas, the Fifth Plan states—

"Development of backward areas represents a very complex problem in planning. Market forces normally operate in such a way that growth tends to be attracted to the already developed areas. The economies of agglomeration, size and specialisation accentuate the trends which widen the inequalities between different areas, making it difficult to alter the growth process in favour of the less developed areas and to evolve policies concerning the spatial allocation of resources and activities".

3.3 An example which accepts the theory and play of market forces in the 'New Bombay' project—a metro centre of 20 lakhs on the mainland across the Thana Creek to face the existing population of nearly 70 lakhs on the Bombay Island. It could perhaps be said that this decision

does not fully take into account the direct and indirect costs likely to be involved to cope with the economic interaction and intermovement over the Creek, between the two huge masses of population. From some points of view, these would be unavoidable, while some take the view that the two cities will be so designed that they would be self-contained and remain detached from each other. These conflicting views seemed to have so far remained unreconciled but the idea which remained unquestioned is that the level of future activities and play of market forces within this area are such that they could be efficiently discharged only by setting up a metro centre of this scale and size.

3.4 Thus the apparent validity of dispersed location is not so unquestionable as it may first appear to be. The hierarchical pattern of human settlements is by itself a vast field for research but keeping in view several abstract and intangible factors like the ideology and values of life and concepts of what is efficient and what is not and what basically influences such patterns, it is doubtful if such a subject is really amenable to any concrete conclusions, much less that the conclusion so drawn would be amenable to acceptance.

#### *Measures and Tools for a Spatial Pattern of Development*

4.1 Nevertheless reverting to the measures for promoting a spatially oriented pattern of growth, in a mixed economy we have, for the last 15 to 20 years, tried to achieve such objective through various physical and fiscal measures. These could perhaps be categorised as below—

- (a) Provision of infrastructure and institutional facilities at cheaper and concessional rates;
- (b) A deliberate policy and programme

for induction of economic activity at new places through the public sector to promote other development; and

- (c) Fiscal and taxation concessions in favour of less developed areas and disincentives against already developed areas.

4.2 Such measures have been on the anvil for a long time but their feasibility and effectiveness have left much to be desired and need a review, e.g., it will be noted that—

- (a) Experience shows that in order that new centres become attractive, the quality of the infrastructure has to be superior to what exists in already developed areas. Chandigarh is an example illustrating this point. Despite its superiority as a capital town, not until institutional and infrastructure facilities of a distinctly superior quality were provided for the economic functioning of this city that it could overcome the competition of neighbouring small towns like Ludhiana and Ambala to eventually get established as a Regional centre—now not only for the whole of Punjab and Haryana but in a wider sense of Himachal Pradesh.
- (b) What is the nature, scope and size of urban economic activity that needs to be induced through the public sector to trigger off other development? We have before us the well known examples of the location of steel plants at Rourkela, Bhilai and Durgapur in comparatively less developed areas. Despite huge investments made in this direction, the development process failed to trigger off in such areas,

- (c) In regard to fiscal and taxation incentives, it will be seen that such as have been in operation are firstly more in the nature of promotion of a specific sectoral activity like industry and secondly where such incentives are extended on the areawise basis, they apply to specific type of undeveloped areas like the Backward areas, Tribal areas and Hill areas. Such schemes also do not operate on intra-regional basis e.g. in relation to less developed parts vis-a-vis more development parts of the same region. Evidently there is, as yet, no scheme to this effect. In this connection, it may be relevant to cite an example of the Tamil Nadu Government which is implementing a Regional Plan for the Madras Metropolitan Area. In their anxiety to develop a satellite town within or in the vicinity of the metropolitan region, they requested that the satellite town area may be declared as a Backward Area to attract the incentives and pattern of assistance. This, as expected, was immediately turned down because the area, by stipulated standards of backward areas, was really not backward. If an influential State Government like Tamil Nadu had instead come up with this genuine difficulty in clearer terms and with a concrete scheme, it could have perhaps set the ball rolling for consideration of an intra regional scheme for balanced development of a region.
- (d) In regard to disincentives against already developed areas, they are only restrictive in scope and not financially oriented, e.g. land use regulations or prohibition against flow of a particular type of activity as a part of Master Plans or even in pursuance of an industrial licensing policy which marginally covers locational aspects also. As such these disincentives have not been very effective and also the standards of enforcement are usually very weak. Even in places like Bombay and Delhi where there has been partial success of the ideas of restriction and land use have been rather loose. For example, take the policy of the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation in establishing a huge industrial estate in Thana area in the name of decentralisation of Bombay and the Centre and the State Government to be concentrated in Faridabad within a distance of hardly 10 to 15 miles from the edge of Delhi Union Territory without ensuring all the necessary infrastructure to contain the effect of such activity with Faridabad itself,
- (e) Measures against flow of industry in already developed areas alone are not adequate. Of late, there has been increasing concern regarding the impact of large scale commercial and office activity flowing into such cities because of the play of market forces. The effective ideas of land use planning like succumbing to existing land and property values—which are only a by-product of laissez-faire—and permitting liberal floor space indices has been almost suicidal to the planning of London and Bombay. In Delhi, it is perhaps the indifference of the Central Government to this problem which has led to a growth rate of 60 to 70 per cent in a decade despite fairly effective measures against the location of large scale industry in Delhi Union Territory.

4.3 These are thus the second category of areas where there is great scope for study and research to enable a more meaningful formulation of policies and programmes towards Regional and Urban Planning. Let me repeat them. They are—

- (a) The quality of infrastructure necessary to make new centres more attractive;
- (b) The nature, scope and size of urban economic activity that needs to be inducted through the public sector in less developed areas to trigger off other development;
- (c) The mechanism for extension and implementation of fiscal incentives on intra-regional basis as distinct from inter-regional basis; and
- (d) More effective disincentives against developed areas than merely those restrictive in scope.

#### *Areas of Research in Technical Aspects*

5.1 In regard to purely technical aspects, some of the important areas in which there is apparently immediate need for meaningful research and studies could be as follows—

- (i) Of late, there has been a lot of talk about the compatibility of growth and development without destroying ecological balance and changes that cause environmental pollution and deterioration. In any process of development, such changes in the existing conditions are inevitable but they are not necessarily harmful nor are the likely impact and scale of such problems so alarming. However even where they are somewhat alarming, it may be pertinent to keep in view the fact that our capacity to enforce and implement these mea-

asures is rather weak. For example regardless of the effect of any development, the physical environment of our country, for ages, has suffered from elementary public health nuisances of dust, pests and parasites without much action or relief. It is, therefore, very necessary that concrete problems in this field as are consistent with our prospective level and extent of development, are identified and action is sponsored only in selected and critical areas to enable a more effective and meaningful action. Apart from elementary problems of public health and insanitation, water and air pollution are subjects which are of obvious priority. The intensity of these problems is, however, of local and sometimes only of sporadic nature. Even though a Water Pollution Control Board has recently been established at the Centre, it appears that ideas and future tasks in this field still await proper identification and selection.

- (ii) The influence of transport on the spatial location of urban economic activity is another field requiring studies and research. It is often remarked that there should be more efficient transport system like a Rapid Transit System in a metropolitan region to enable urban economic activity and 'living' to function on dispersed basis. Transport has, however, a two-fold effect—Centripetal and Centrifugal. The Centripetal influence has so far tended to dominate—the present metropolitan muddle is by and large its product—of faster transport like the automobile and electric trains with their flexible halts. A very efficient and fast transport on an intra or inter re-

gional basis has been responsible for destroying a good number of metropolitan plans. This subject, therefore, lends itself to a good amount of original thinking and research.

- (iii) Another field is the structural quality of urban settlements in a developing country more particularly keeping in view the needs of the urban poor. Much against the desired objectives of a decent house of a minimum standard, the normal concept of a pucca house is well beyond the reach of nearly 25 to 40 per cent of our urban population. These necessitate radical changes in the concept of present land use planning and structural quality of our urban settlements. In urban planning and implementation, we have tended to neglect the imperatives of better civic amenities and sanitation in favour of too much of brick and mortar. Master Plans should, therefore, be instruments of positive action programme of regulation.

#### *Organisation and Administrative Aspects*

6.1 The fourth category in which there is need for research in Regional Planning is in the field of administration and organisation. The first in this category is the need for a radical restructuring of our Local Government set-up. In its present form, the Local Government has been conceived for a city as if it exists in isolation from its hinterland. The present framework is also more oriented towards 'maintenance'

rather than 'development' of cities. This is, however, not to say that a highly centralised authority for a region dealing with all aspects of development is a substitute to achieve the desired objectives. Varying forms of development activities require varying levels of organisations. Irrigation and power are obviously not local subjects. So are intra-regional transport network and in several cases intra-regional systems of water supply. Exigencies of Regional Development require suitable tiers of well coordinated organisational set up having regional and local jurisdiction. The needs of metropolitan regions require a special consideration.

6.2 Another field is the augmentation, mobilisation and efficient management of financial resources of regional and local authorities within whatever framework they may be set up. This is an aspect which is more governed by the quality of human resources — their civic consciousness and level of efficiency.

7. These, thus are a few of the areas which offer great scope for fresh thinking and research but as in the beginning of this paper, the whole subject of Regional Planning and Development is too complex that even where ideas are very clear and policy issues well identified, they defy solution because of several constraints such as level of technology, quality of human resources and availability of investments to implement regional development. Consequently it can be concluded by submitting that whatever areas of studies and research are identified for further action, their scope must be so determined that it takes cognisance of these basic constraints.