



Taken for a ride? Mainstreaming periurban transport with urban expansion policies



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ABSTRACT

This article describes the transportation needs and practices of periurban residents in a village in the Gurgaon district of the Northwestern Indian state of Haryana. As conurbations grow, urban authorities place much emphasis on connecting them with other major cities or towns. Improving their connectivity with the peripheral villages receives scant attention. This ignores the duality of economies that operates within the newly created urban spaces. This article argues that this reflects a bias in and politics of urban planning that accepts the hegemony of cities to the peril of rural areas that support them and with whom crucial rural–urban links evolve with urbanization. Using a qualitative research design, an ethnographic approach and a diversity of data sources, this article shows how social heterogeneity, land use change and other transformations in rural–urban links brought on by urbanization shape periurban transportation needs and practices. Though the acquisition of private means of transport is made possible through the sale of agricultural lands by the periurban elite, the article shows the increasing role of shared private transport in linking the village with the city. Urban authorities focus on connecting growing cities with other major urban centers; however, the article argues that linking them better with peripheral villages will be essential for making processes of urbanization equitable and sustainable and have wider spin-off effects. Such interventions need to be based on a nuanced understanding of transition processes underway in periurban spaces as well as the complementary roles of private, public and shared private transport.

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1. Emergence of periurban spaces amidst urban expansion: a politics of neglect and marginalization

Rapid urban expansion in many nations proceeds concomitantly with the growth of periurban areas that have elements of both 'urban' and 'rural' characteristics and present new challenges to urban growth management (Tacoli, 2006). There is no single satisfactory definition of the periurban interface (Brook et al., 2003). However, the word is generally used in three different ways, that is, to denote a place, concept or a process (Narain and Nischal, 2007). As a place, 'periurban' refers to rural fringe areas surrounding cities. These villages near the administrative and geographical boundaries of cities bear the brunt of urban expansion by providing resources to the city and receiving its wastes. Iaquineta and Drescher (2000) however caution against place-based definitions of periurban; they note that the co-existence of rural and urban activities and institutions defines periurban, rather than proximity to urban centers.

More generally, the word 'periurban' has come to serve as a construct or conceptual lens to study core-periphery relationships in the wake of urban expansion. The expression represents a duality inherent in processes of urban expansion with pockets of deprivation surrounding the growth of modern cities with wide variation in access to basic services and natural resources between the core and periphery (Janakarajan, 2009; Narain, 2009a,b). As cities grow, policy-makers and planners focus on plans of urban expansion with little regard for how this ecological footprint is borne by the peripheral locations. On account of the fragmented nature of urban planning and rural development, there is little cognizance in formal policy and planning of the implications of urbanization for rural livelihoods, how periurban livelihoods are sustained by links with the city or how rural–urban relationships are transformed with urban expansion (Tacoli, 1998, 2002).

This article demonstrates how the dichotomy between urban planning and rural development and the urban bias in policy and planning extends to the formulation of policies for transportation and urban connectivity. As conurbations grow, planners and policy-makers focus their attention on connecting the emerging cities with each other and with other urban centers, while neglecting con-

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necting them with peripheral villages. In fact, when it comes to connectivity of the city with the peripheral areas, periurban residents are 'taken for a ride'; they lose their lands for the widening of highways, while themselves bearing the brunt of poor connectivity and facing longer times in commuting to the city (Narain, 2007). The construction of highways linking major cities affects their quality of life by affecting their routes to agricultural fields or to sources of natural resources like water (Brook et al., 2003). They face longer distances and waiting time as their commuting routes are diverted for widening highways that link major cities with each other.

In the periurban literature – that has grown in recent years – there is wide recognition that periurban livelihoods are sustained through a two-way flow of goods and services between the villages and urban centers and improving transportation and connectivity of these villages with urban centers has a clear role in strengthening these (Tacoli, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2006); Kruger, 2006; Baker and Wallevik, 2003; Baker, 2006; Rigg, 2006; Narain, 2009a; Narain and Nischal, 2007). However, there is relatively little understanding of the transportation needs and practices of periurban residents or of the role of social heterogeneity and transition processes underway in periurban areas in shaping these.

Some insights into the links between poverty, rural mobility and sustainable livelihoods do come from such studies as Sohail (2000), Porter (2001), Njenga (2001), Malmberg-Calvo (1992), Howe and Davis (2002) and Bryceson et al. (2003). However, there is relatively little understanding of how processes of social transition and heterogeneity – very typical of periurban areas – influence periurban transportation needs, practices and preferences, or of the wide diversity in the means of transportation used by periurban residents to link with the city. This research seeks to bridge this gap in the periurban literature.

This article argues that the above reflects a strong bias in transport planning that ignores the dual economies that operate in emerging conurbations. It is a manifestation of a larger politics of urban expansion that seeks to protect the interests of the urban and industrial elite, while further marginalizing those displaced by these processes. This article reinforces the arguments made by Shatkin (2007) and Roy (2004) that much of the literature on urban planning has failed to consider the significance of 'politics and power relations', assuming that all actors have equal amounts of power (Shatkin, 2007:9). City planners cater to the needs of those whose interests are more powerful; planning thus turns out to be a battle to assert dominance over areas of space which are negotiated by many different actors (Roy, 2004). In this space of contestation, periurban residents themselves have barely any role. The article makes a case for a strong focus on strengthening periurban links with the main cities based on a nuanced understanding of transformations engendered by urbanization processes, the transformation of rural–urban links as well as the diversity in the means of transportation through which they materialize.

2. Gurgaon: India's emerging 'global' city

This research is located in Gurgaon – a district in the northwest Indian state of Haryana., Gurgaon city – the capital of the district – is the sixth largest city of Haryana. It has expanded phenomenally in recent years as a major outsourcing, residential and recreation hub of Northwest India.

The growth potential of Gurgaon has been harnessed by the State Government, particularly since the 1990s, with the onset of the current phase of globalization and liberalization of the Indian economy (Narain, 2007). Gurgaon has now emerged as one of India's major outsourcing hubs, housing major multinationals such as Alcatel, HCL Technologies, IBM, General Electric, Ericsson, Hewlett, Hindustan Lever Limited and British Airways. Several com-

panies such as Coca-Cola, Nestle, Pepsi, Citibank, Gillette, Nokia, Xerox, General Motors, Trinity BPM and Nestle have made Gurgaon their headquarters. The biggest car and motorcycle manufacturers in India, namely, Maruti Udyog and Hero Honda, respectively, have also set up plants in Gurgaon. About 80% of the foreign investment in Haryana is found to be concentrated in this district.

Following this industrial growth, thousands of professionals have made their home in Gurgaon city. The fast growing population with an ever-increasing purchasing power has created a huge demand for housing, and property prices have escalated steadily in recent years. Real estate has emerged as a major economic activity. Gurgaon's growth has been facilitated by several factors (Narain, 2007). The first is that it is located very close to Delhi, the National Capital – just about 32 km away – and the international airport, that is about 12 km away. Second, following the initiation of the phase of economic reforms in 1991, the State Government has taken several policy initiatives to invite industries in Gurgaon. The most recent such initiative, that has spawned considerable debate in the media, as well as in academic and policy circles, has been the setting up of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). These special Economic Zones – that seek to grant special privileges to industry – have been the subject of much debate in the country particularly on grounds of land acquisition. Debates have evolved around the compensation that landowners receive, the clause of 'public purpose' for which the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 authorizes such land acquisition as well as around wider resettlement issues. There has been wide criticism of these policies in recent years.

Third, Gurgaon's growth has been fuelled by a real estate boom. This process of growth and transition has been characterized by a steady process of land-use change, in which agricultural lands have been acquired from the peripheral villages to meet the growing needs of industrial and residential areas. This process in turn has created a dual economy; tall skyscrapers, glitzy malls and high rise residential buildings all co-exist with village settlement areas. The periurban landscape is thus characterized by a mixed patchwork of high-rise buildings, new buildings under construction, village settlement areas and water bodies.

The acquisition of agricultural lands has brought in widespread transformation in the peripheral villages. It has affected in many ways the access of periurban residents to such resources as land and water (Narain, 2009a,b). Periurban residents have lost access to land as well as to water sources such as village ponds located on them to support construction of urban residential areas, parks, amusement hubs and headquarters and plants of corporate giants. Lands have also been acquired to build infrastructure such as water treatment plants to quench urban thirst. Former agriculturists, that is, small and medium farmers – having lost their lands now operate as traders, fruit and vegetable vendors, travel and tour operators or real estate agents.

This process has been associated with widespread dissent against the manner in which policies for land acquisition have been implemented (Narain, 2009a). The dissent has been against the low rates offered for lands acquired by the state, the delay in compensations received as well as the absence of alternative sources of livelihoods for those whose lands are acquired. The most negatively affected are the landless, sharecroppers and tenants who receive no compensation. Several forms of force are known to have been used to acquire lands; this includes threats of physical violence.

The processes of marginalization that policies for urban expansion have engendered are reproduced in the context of efforts to improve transportation and connectivity in the city. With the growth of Gurgaon city, much attention has been focused on improving the connectivity of the city with the country's capital, New Delhi, with little regard for improving its connectivity with the peripheral villages. Several efforts are underway to improve Gurgaon's connectivity with Delhi. The most recent has been the

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