

Transforming Periurban Futures

POLICY BRIEF No. 1



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GOVERNANCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE VOIDS OF PERIURBAN SPACES

Periurban spaces are zones in transition at the urban fringes or close to expanding agglomerations. They are often considered as geographical patchwork spaces characterized by diverse functions (food and water security, provision of livelihoods, ecosystem services, etc.), a mosaic of land uses with rural and urban features, a multiplicity of stakeholders sometimes with diverging interests, and overlapping governance structures. These features create diverse opportunities, but also expose periurban spaces to deep transformations and make them challenging to govern

Policy Recommendations

- Identify basic economic, ecological, and social needs of periurban communities to assess historically grown, periurban complexities and vulnerabilities to create tailor-made solutions.
- Build up and balance local agency (e.g., representation of different livelihoods, genders, ages) and articulate heterogeneous interests to strengthen long-term capacities.
- Take periurban spaces proactively into account in infrastructural planning on the urban-rural continuum, e.g., through cross-regional infrastructure projects.
- Coordinate interlinkages between different entities and scales on a cross-sectoral basis to enable comprehensive, participatory planning, and create a successful learning environment among district level planners, planning committees, expert groups, the civil society and private players.
- Create continuous and flexible governance structures through adaptive and inclusive planning to respond to the constant state of flux of the periurban and cater for the heterogeneous periurban patchwork.

Challenges for governance and infrastructure

Directing particular attention to the governance and infrastructures of periurban spaces, reveals which interlocking processes pose challenges for their future development. A common feature of periurban spaces in India is their situatedness in a landscape of complex, multiscale governance structures, with ambiguous actors and complex power hierarchies, yet experiencing an institutional void between the urban and the rural. Periurban spaces are typically managed by rural self administrations, gram panchayats, which are however, often ill-equipped and inadequately capitalised to effectively serve the local communities' needs. This leaves room for new actors to emerge. In contrast to urban areas, periurban spaces thus often lack a consistency of governance and the necessary resources that come with it.

Coordination between rural and urban entities with new institutions emerging and old ones changing or disappearing is often challenging and results in the periurban becoming immersed in an urban-rural vacuum. This in turn forms the basis of many challenges, e.g., it provokes a lack of clarity in responsibilities for planned development, for the management or control over local infrastructural development and for its maintenance.

The understanding of where the infrastructural needs of periurban spaces exist is impeded by the lack of data, e.g., about population dynamics. One reason for these difficulties is the heterogeneous nature of the periurban population (e.g., different livelihood groups, religious groups, migrated groups) and their limited agency. Plans for shaping the future of periurban spaces are often informed not by grassroots voices, but through top-down development that is commonly unilaterally induced from the outside. As a result of this type of development, periurban areas lose their distinctive identities and/or important issues that are worthy of change are not taken up. The latter is evident in Bhubaneswar, inter alia, where the actual Master Plan addresses infrastructural improvements through growth corridor development, but the importance of developing the marginal land area of the corridor to serve the local needs is little reflected. This type of development leaves room for the evolution of unplanned and informal infrastructures in peri-urban areas which are further reinforced by complex and dynamic land-use patterns and functional attributions (e.g., in regard to livelihoods, resource provision, ecosystem services, etc.) that prevail there. This in turn drives land conversion and in the

long-term predominantly results in water bodies, arable lands or other natural habitats being encroached upon, amongst others.

One of the prevailing infrastructural challenges in the periurban lies in the area of resource supply, e.g., water, as they often only dispose of inadequate supply systems (e.g., water canals or pipes). Available infrastructures are not equipped according to the local communities' needs or the changing periurban setting (as, for example, seen in Paud, in periurban Pune, where new township development creates new water pressures) and only insufficiently maintained. First, this affects the quality of water, especially for drinking, but also for domestic purposes, for instance, through pollution from adjacent industries' effluents or urban wastes (e.g., in Hadia, periurban Kolkata), or the merging of fresh and waste water pipes. Second, it affects water quantity, e.g., through water leakages due to defective hydraulic systems (e.g., through debris in pipes, malfunctioning pumps, etc.), inadequate water access (e.g., due to different household capitalization and their possibilities to afford water sourcing means), or water overexploitation for the benefit of urban agglomerations. The infrastructural distress evokes long-term health hazards and diseases, and produces tension between the heterogeneous water-user groups in the peri-urban, which often result in the scarce resource being drawn in an unsustainable and overexploiting manner

Policy interventions for governance and infrastructure improvements

In response to these challenges, there are some interventions which aim to streamline the tasks of governance and infrastructure improvements for the future without pressurising periurban areas. Many of these calls for a participatory approach, including stakeholder consultation, gender inclusiveness and targeted capacity development. On the municipal level, for instance, entities, such as the MMRDA (Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority), are responsible for the preparation of a Regional Plan, including stakeholder engagement for infrastructure provision through sufficient financial resources and therefore take charge of improving the technical and social connectivity between the periurban and the municipal area.

On the local level, for instance, interventions focus on inclusive governance, e.g., through organic waste initiatives (e.g., in Tamil Nadu), which links environmental prospects of composting as a sustainable way of closing infrastructural waste-loops with providing peri-urban livelihood opportunities, or on gender inclusive governance, by improving the women' roles and empowering them in leadership positions, e.g., through a solid waste management initiative (e.g., in periurban Sambalpur).

A way to address this kind of inclusive participation has been shown in the case of Hadia in periurban Kolkata, where a transformative pathways approach was applied to identify more sustainable and flexible plans for managing household water and livelihood needs to counteract future governance and infrastructure challenges.

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