



How and Where is Urban Growth? Analysis of Urban Growth in Colombo District, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Urban growth is a spatial and demographic process and refers to the increased importance of towns and cities as a concentration of population within a particular economy and society [1]. The spatial formation and the dynamics of urban growth are important topics of analysis in the urban studies. At early stages scholars considered Western and Asian urbanization process to be a result of urban rural migration. Later various scholars felt that there are some differences in the Asian urbanization process. In 1970 McGee-Ginsburg concluded that Asian urbanization is not a result of urban rural migration and that it is an economic transformation of agricultural activities to non-agricultural activities. Although, the McGee-Ginsburg model captures the socio-demographic dimensions of the rapid urbanization process, little is known about the dynamics of landscape structures in the emerging desakota regions in Asia. GIS and remote sensing applications have the possibility to identify this dynamic landscape structure. Aim of this paper is to explore the landscape dynamics and socio-demographic transition of Colombo district in Sri Lanka. It also expects to review its emergence of desakota regions in Colombo district.

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INTRODUCTION

Urbanization and urban growth is a common global phenomenon throughout the Western and Eastern world. In 2011, world urbanization rate was 52%, of which 77.5% was related to developed countries and 46.5% was related to developing countries. This indicates that currently half of the world's population is being urbanized [10] and cities are liable to accommodate this population with better living standards [2]. The developing countries' urban figure is controversial, and it also indicates that nearly half of the population is agglomerated in dense urban areas.

Urbanization and urban growth in the Asian countries is distinctly different from what had happened in the Western countries during the late 20th century [5]. The massive rural to urban migration is a common feature of urbanization in the Western countries and this influence did not come to Asian countries directly and its picture is completely different from that of the West [5]. "The major difference is that the urbanization in Asia takes place predominantly in already densely populated rural regions between big cities, thus does not need a massive rural-to-urban migration. Instead, the rapid urbanization in Asia is characterized by the economic transformation of the heavily populated areas from agricultural activities to non-agricultural activities" [9]. Hence the common character of urbanization in Asian countries is the densely populated rural regions between big cities. But spread of this situation is rather different from South East Asia and South Asia. There is a research gap in the studies of urban growth in South Asia related to the McGee's model. Especially Sri Lankan literature is never concerned over this matter. Sri Lankan urban scholars also have developed extensive literature describing and explaining the evolution of the country's urbanization forces from 1950 to 1981 period. [4] But they lack studies concerning the urban growth after that. Hence this study attempts to explore the urban growth in Sri Lanka during the four decades' period from 1972 to 2012. This paper presents a case study on the urban growth in the Colombo district which is the fastest growing urban area in Sri Lanka. Hence aim of this study is to fill two gaps in the literature. Firstly, to study the emergence of desakota regions in the Colombo district, related to the