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**Plurality of Voices: Emerging Pathways
Towards Planning Southern Cities**

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore alternatives to the dominant Euro-American planning approaches, which, while premised on the urban experience of the 19th and the 20th century, made passage to the global South through processes of colonisation and globalisation. The need for this exploration arises from the radically different contemporary (21st century) urban experience concentrated in the global South. Drawing attention to the diverse political, economic and socio-cultural processes as well as attendant knowledge systems specific to the Southern cities, the paper relies on debates and discussions emanating from a two-part seminar series held in Colombia and India. In doing so, the paper makes two broad arguments. First, the dominant planning discourse emanating from the global North is both inadequate and irrelevant to address the varied and diverse experience of Southern cities. Rapid urbanisation processes in the South have manifested and found expressions in diverse urban forms such as primates, peri-urban, sprawls and associated functions. The Euro-American models, given the lack of a similar experience in those geographies, do not account for these forms and functions. Second, the rapid pace of urbanisation and ensuing urban forms of the South should draw on learnings emanating from within the diverse Southern contexts that also showcase similarities. In other words, South-South dialogues emerging from embedded knowledge systems constitute a fertile ground for mutual learning. Set against this background, the paper makes an argument for framing locally rooted urban practices as a pathway to Southern theory for urban planning

1. Introduction

For long, mainstream urban planning processes have claimed global applicability, both theoretically and empirically. Conceptualised and framed primarily in the 19th and the 20th century, these processes emanate from realities and experiences of the global North.¹ Contemporary urbanisation, in contrast, is concentrated in the global South, and has unfolded as a radically different experience on various counts, three of which are critical. First, the unprecedented nature, scale and pace of urbanisation experienced by the Southern cities has led to new urban forms characterised by sprawls, burgeoning peri-urban, primates and attendant informality and exclusion, all of which necessitate new approaches. Second, while the existence of stable, capacitated and accountable state structures coupled with an informed civil society underpins planning in the Northern cities, this is not so in the global South. Although most countries in the global South have democratic states; lingering feudal values in governance, tendencies of crony capitalism, and an increasing reliance on techno-managerial approaches to planning have hindered meaningful democratic debates and solutions. Finally, global concerns of climate change, natural resource depletion and food insecurity, necessitate planning for resilience, which is an added complexity calling for immediate action in the South.

The differing contemporary urban experiences of the global South, render planning approaches, methodologies and vocabularies premised on, and deriving from the experience of the global North, inappropriate and irrelevant.

¹In the 1980s, the Brandt line was developed to geographically mark the relatively richer and poorer nations. Accordingly, richer countries are largely in the Northern Hemisphere while the poorer countries are mostly located in tropical regions and in the Southern Hemisphere. There are exceptions in both categories. Hence the global North includes the developed societies of Western Europe and North America, with Australia, Israel, and South Africa amongst others as exceptions. Similarly, the global South represents the economically backward countries of Africa, India, China, Brazil, Mexico with Argentina, Malaysia and Botswana exceptions amongst others. This paper uses the two categories broadly as representative of the developed and developing societies respectively.

Largely because contemporary urbanisation concentrated in the global South is a vastly different experience from that of the earlier century. In light of this, a simultaneous call for reinventing planning has led to an acknowledgement (amongst urban studies scholars) of a ‘Southern-turn’. Critical to this re-invention is the need for new vocabularies and pathways that speak to, and, derive from the socio-cultural, political and economic contexts of the global South, while embracing the additional ‘burden’ of planning resilient cities.

This acknowledgement of the Southern turn and the call to re-invent planning constituted the basis of a two-part seminar series organised in Medellín, Colombia (2019) and Bengaluru, India (2020). The series sought to privilege research that engaged with embedded wisdom and socio-cultural specificity as the ‘ordinary.’ The main objective was to frame planning discourses that implant context specificity.² Pushing for a radical departure from a somewhat easier and accepted method of contextualising existing and emerging planning models developed in the North to ‘suit’ the South, the series explored alternative locally rooted knowledge systems as possible conduits to evolving planning methods. This paper encapsulates the knowledge generated during the seminar series to contribute to the emerging scholarship on the Southern cities, while also providing queues to arriving at suitable planning approaches. In particular, it draws upon the alternative realities of cities in the global South to push for the framing of planning and governance theories and practice, that are both appropriate and relevant to the Southern contexts.

The seminars, while acknowledging the differences between the global South and the North, also acknowledged the diversity within the South that

² The seminar series were funded by the Urban Studies Foundation. The background for the series can be accessed at <https://urbanstudiesfoundation.org/funding/grantees/dr-anjali-karol-mohan-professor-pellisery-and-professor-cadena-gaitan/>

simultaneously renders the homogenous South a heterogenous space, specifically one that can be leveraged for mutual learning. In the words of Roy (2014) and Bhan (2019), this simultaneous homogeneous and heterogeneous experience of the global South calls for a two-fold shift towards- vocabularies (for theory and practice) emanating for and from the South; and, a renewed acknowledgement that the South is not a static location. Premised on this understanding and the scope for mutual learning, this paper argues for a transition to a 'for and from' the South approach to frame new vocabularies and approaches, particularly those that blend theory and empirics. It uses the seminar series to contribute to the emerging scholarship on urban theory by tracing some of the diverse geographies in the South spanning India, Colombia, Ecuador, Argentina, China, Israel, Sri-Lanka, Namibia, Malawi and Nigeria amongst others. The research presented at the seminar can broadly be categorised as- a) studies that speak to and emanate from the contestations and conflicts arising from a juxtaposing of the traditional (or remnants of it) and the modern; and, b) research that contextualises emerging urban forms – particularly sub-urban and the peri-urban; slums and informality, displacement and displaceability and the lived experience – and arguing for these as the theoretical and practical lenses to reframe and reconsider the urban in the South.

Following this introduction, the following Section establishes the need for newer, contextually appropriate and relevant planning approaches and attendant vocabulary. It traces the genealogy of urbanisation in the global South with a specific focus on the contestations and conflicts arising from the layering of shared colonial histories and post-colonial development debates over distinct context-specific pre-colonial practices. Section three traces the inextricably linked emerging urban forms and the need to foreground these not just as empirical cases but also theoretical constructions. Both section Two and Three discuss the research papers that were presented in the seminar

series. The paper concludes in Section Four to argue that the political, socio-economic and cultural diversity emanating for and from the global South, theoretically and empirically, should be actively acknowledged and used to frame planning practices and approaches in Southern cities.

2. Southern Urbanism: Transition to ‘For and From’ the South

Two overarching and intrinsically connected experiences necessitate the transition to a ‘for and from’ the South vocabulary shared across the global South. The first is the unprecedented pace at which most of the global South urbanised. For instance, Mexico and Sao Paulo expanded from 3.1 million and 2.8 million, respectively in the 1950s, to approximately 24 million in the 2000s (Kasarda and Crenshaw 1991). In comparison, New York, which was the ‘world’s largest metropolis in 1950 (Kasarda and Crenshaw 1991: 469),’ took a century and a half to increase by 8 million. Thus, the current wave of urbanisation is more an onslaught concentrated in the South. Notably, even within the South, while much of Latin America is urbanised, Asia and Africa are predicted to reach their peak urbanisation between 2015 and 2030, with some countries reaching their peak in 2050.

The second is the diversity that the South embeds within itself. Urban theory (as other socio-political and cultural theories) is shaped significantly by the places they stem from (Bhan 2019). This is in contrast to the existing planning approaches codified in the Master Plans or Development Plans, which are ‘borrowed’ and/or ‘imposed’ by knowledge systems developed in the global North through complex processes of colonialism and globalisation (Watson 2009). The underlying approach to planning Southern cities continues to be an ‘uncritical import’ from the then (i.e., 19th to mid-20th century) prevalent town

planning and regulatory practices in Britain and the United States of America.³ Primarily based on forecasting and management models, these practices called for rational/orderly development of cities through strict spatial segregation of land uses (Batra 2009). This imposition of the rational order (Euclidian models of planning often equated with the scientific) over all other orders (by extension irrational/ disorderly) weakened traditional knowledge and governance systems, while cities continued to grow by transnational processes and ideologies (Gupta and Sharma 2006; Mahadevia and Joshi 2009).

Scholars argue that these Euclidian models of planning are a part of the problem in an increasingly non-Euclidian⁴ world of many space-time geographies (Friedman 1993; Mahadevia and Joshi 2009; Watson 2009). Arguably, the planning tools emanating from the dominant Euro-American approaches are 'context-blind', still stuck in the traditional conception of a plan as a spatial blueprint. Thus, the need for alternate conceptions that emanate from the lived experience of the South seeking to address its multifarious challenges.⁵

Along the same lines, Roy (2014) argues for a recalibration of urban theory by shifting the focus onto a different question – what is it that the global South can offer to cities elsewhere? Entrenched in post-colonialism, this shift begs a larger ontological question – why and what does theory from the South mean? For some, it means that cities from the South are no longer (just) used as case

³ The Global North since then has moved onto strategic planning emphasizing spatial integration of sectors and policies through inclusive stakeholder participation processes (Healey, 2006; Watson, 2008 in Todes et.al).

⁴ The non-Euclidian model is characterised to be normative, innovative, political, transactive and based on social learning (Friedmann 1993). It seeks to transform the fundamental basis of Euclidean planning, particularly, the top-down approach to a bottom-up approach- advocacy, transactive and collaborative communicative planning (Lawrence 2000).

⁵ Watson (2008) defines Master plans as spatial or physical plans that depict the existing and future uses of land on a map. Viewed as a technical activity, planning was premised on forecasting/projections.

studies and/or ethnographies. Instead, they are presented as theories that interrupt, critique and (re)understand the urban world. For others like Bhan (2019), this also means creating vocabularies of Southern urban theory. In his view, conversations from and about Southern cities have progressed with an acknowledgement that the South is not a static location, nor is it a 'set of places' (Bhan 2019: 4). Rather, it is an intersection of histories, economies, politics and society; all of which are more relational than geographical (Roy 2014). Such a conceptualisation of Southernness and Southern theory also moves beyond conventional assumptions of ontological subalternity and resistance, to an understanding that is distinct from European Enlightenment (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). In doing so, it breaks apart the linear modernity that urban theory from the North relies upon (Mabin 2014) and brings a certain newness to the table; that cities from the South are located in 'in-between spaces' (Leontidou 1996). This is not to say that urbanism plays out in similar, heterogeneous ways in the global South (Bhan 2019). Instead, it is to provoke an inquiry that stems from and within Southern urban systems.

2.1 Southern Spaces of Mutual Learning

The global South's shared colonial history as well as a shared post-colonial development narrative, manifested in homogenising urban experiences across Latin America, Asia and Africa. Yet, this happened over varying timelines intersecting with distinct and specific pre-colonial histories and or remnants of the same, and thus resulting in heterogeneity. Across the three continents, urbanism has long figured prominently with cities developing in relation to local conditions (soils, water sources, minerals, trade potential) and other socio-political factors. In Latin America historically, the contribution of the Mayas, Incas and Aztecs in creating sophisticated urban centres is well documented (Rodgers et al. 2011). These civilisations developed sophisticated planning approaches, many of which were dismantled by the colonisers. The

Aztecs (modern Mexico), for example, created floating gardens for agricultural production to sustain their populations (Irazábal 2009). These were guided by a sense of ecological stewardship, evidenced by integrating water into their urban design. Mayan Planning in what would-be modern-day Mexico, Guatemala and Belize, was known for its investment in road infrastructure. Likewise, the architecture and design of Incan planning processes (visible across modern-day Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile and Columbia) was focused on roads and public projects. Cities like Machu Picchu hosted designated spaces for critical functions like spiritual ceremonies, residential purposes and noble classes. The Incans were also known for design innovations that helped resist seismic activity for centuries (Irazábal 2009).

These systems and the ways of living they embodied, were destroyed and shaped by colonisers. To illustrate, Spanish and Portuguese colonisers built urban spaces on 'the ruins of the destroyed ancient civilisations' (Irazábal 2009: 42). As a result, the continent's contemporary urbanisation trajectory is molded largely by Iberian rule. Post-colonial Latin America saw an intensification of these planning processes through international influence. A development narrative premised on structural adjustment policies led to international migration, as well as industrial clustering in urban areas. The latter fueled rapid rural-urban migration, eventually leading to dominant urban centers or primates (discussed in detail in the next section). According to Browning (1989), primacy patterns first emerged when Spanish colonisers established centralised urban centers in cities like Mexico City and Lima. Simply put then, post-colonial urbanisation patterns and processes replaced the colonial system with a capitalist one (Browning 1989). Not only did this contribute to unequal urbanisation as the hinterlands were soon abandoned, it also swept over the pre-colonial urban culture.

Nevertheless, since Latin America emerged sovereign almost a century before Asia and Africa, ⁶ this enabled a head start in experimenting with urbanisation. Current planning in several Latin American countries has transitioned from a technical, expert-driven function usually undertaken by a small group of bureaucratic elites, to one that is more concerned with communication, facilitation, and strategic spatial planning. Significant amongst these experiments is that of social urbanism in Medellín.

The transformation of Medellín from a ‘condemned city’ at the mercy of violence in the 1990s, to one making headlines for its urban transformation in the 2000s, is premised on the centrality of socio-spatial inclusion in the urban strategy (Chau et.al, 2015). Called Social urbanism, this is a pioneering governance framework that channelised and prioritised the urban to the city’s poorest areas. The approach evolved through an integrated system of civic infrastructure, social housing, transportation projects and economic development, all of which became ‘flagships’ of broader transformation (Echeverri 2008, in Bahl 2011). The seminar series at Colombia discussed the transformation of Medellín between 2004 and 2011 and its varied experiences on the need to understand the complex social reality of the city and the criticality of people’s narratives in the process of transformation (Echeverri 2018, opening session of the Seminar at Medellín).⁷ While social urbanism has led to noticeable improvements in mobility, accessibility, economic growth, declining crime and increased safety and community perception, it also paved the path in reconceptualising urban development. In particular, it enabled planning and governance processes to be responsive to, and, embedded within socio-economic and cultural contexts. Often referred to as the ‘Medellín Miracle,’ the social urbanism strategy factored in contextual political and social

⁶ Several Latin American countries have celebrated or likely to celebrate their bicentennial anniversary of independence (Argentina, Chile, and Mexico in 2010, and seven other countries in the next 15 years).

⁷ Seminar participants visited several sites transformed through social urbanism. The site visits were led by Alejandro Echeverri who led the conceptualisation and implementation of social urbanism in Medellín between 2004 and 2011.

drivers and inhibitors. Its experience has much to offer to other Latin American Countries, where older planning styles (master planning) persist, and holds learnings for the Asian and African contexts that emulated the Latin American urbanisation and response trajectory, notably a whole century later.

Urbanisation and state formation in China occurred at roughly the same period that similar developments were occurring in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley (In present day India and Pakistan).⁸ In the pre-colonial era, city planning was fundamentally influenced by religion and trade, with strong Indian and Chinese influence. And in Africa, pre-colonial cities were agrarian, and urban settlements were characterised by dense and mixed-use development (Asomani-Boateng 2011). These forms and associated cultural practices were the first casualties, as elsewhere, of imperialism, with European colonisers undermining traditional practices (Tom et al. 2019). Since 1880, the colonisers not only established a mechanism to repress the cultural life of the colonised people and change the development discourse, but also provoked and formed the cultural alienation of some local groups, either by assimilating native populations or by establishing a social divide between native, affluent and common masses (Tom et al. 2019). Similarly, in Asia, colonisation set-in motion the transition from village to towns, the development of multi-ethnic societies and settlements through urban planning practices (Stark in Yoffee 2015). Apart from the changes in the built fabric, the colonisers also introduced British legislations and imposed land tenure arrangements, many of which decimated existing systems and often resulted in landlessness and marginalisation of local communities (Yuen 2009). Post-World War II, with many African and Asian nations emerging sovereign, cities – both old and new – in these continents witnessed population explosion. Coupled with a surge in rural-urban migration, this surge led to the primacy of urban agglomerations (Freund 2007; Förster and Ammann 2018).

⁸ Ancient Cities Discovered in Yangtze Valley (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/ancient-cities-discovered-in-yangtze-valley-98830.html>).

To sum up, the layering of colonial practices coupled with interventions emanating from a post-colonial development narrative as well as the intersection of these two with pre-colonial urban practices, has had an indelible impact on societies and the spaces these societies occupy, often manifesting as contestations and conflicts between the modern and the traditional. Contestations arising from remnants of localised knowledge and cultural specificity, clashing with modern practices of city building and planning were discussed in the seminars. Manda uses Mzuzu City in Malawi, Africa to illustrate the contestations emerging from the modern planning acts and attendant processes of land planning and their layering on traditional societies, values and practices. Traditional chiefs in Malawi are required to rely on physical plans for land allocation on customary land - land that was previously outside urban boundaries but over the years engulfed by the urban. Manda illustrates and critically analyses the role of planners in rationality conflicts emerging from implementing planning theories and concepts emanating from the Global North. While Northern ideas are inappropriate in the Global South, they also include ostensibly exclusionary elements that allow for cultural integration but are deliberately thwarted by planners who seek urban order as rhetoric rather than belief.

In a similar research set in India, Khakha examines the modes and practices of urban planning in the city of Ranchi in Jharkhand, a tribal province in India. Historically known as the land of forests and mineral resources, as the state urbanised, it's original inhabitants, - the tribal/indigenous people - rather than getting absorbed in the urbanisation processes and the cities that emerged, got marginalised. Many lost their lands to the expansive cities, despite the constitution restricting the alienation of tribal land. The research explored the conflicts between prevalent mainstream planning processes, the constitutional provisions and legal safeguards and the ethos and values of the tribal people, to suggest how the latter can potentially

inform planning processes for tribal areas. The research mainly focused on tribal cultural specificities such as egalitarian and co-operative living on one hand and embedded knowledge emanating from a deep cultural orientation that respects nature and environment on the other.

Two other research studies that hold relevance for the seminar and the discussions on contestations are conflicts set in Lagos, Nigeria and Namibia. In the former, Lawson discusses the role of religious institutions, attendant practices and the associated built fabric in land use planning. Using relevant case studies, the author delves into incidents of top-down (enclave urbanism/prayer cities) and bottom-up (transient conversion of religious building) planning to further interrogate extant urban planning administrative practices and implications for city development. On similar lines, breaking through the commonly observed practice of Northern planning strategies imposed in the South, Delgado explores an emerging mode of co-produced spatial production in Namibia, to highlight planning inclusive practices that involve local communities, governments, academia, and professionals. While the processes deployed are “locally grown”, the research argues that these cannot be claimed as “locally sown” as it draws from geographies like India and is influenced by Latin American thinkers. This puts into question the extent to which innovations in urban development are owed to “embedded wisdom” and “cultural specificities.” The research concludes by pinpointing what “embedded knowledge” could mean in the context of spatial production in contemporary Namibia. In saying so, it puts forth the following working hypothesis: new ways of urban development in Namibia are not a diametrically opposite reaction from the Global North imposed paradigms promoted under colonial-modernist regimes, but instead draws in a more liberal influence from various geographies to constitute a distinct local practice.

All four authors generated discussions on how the social, physical and material markers of the contestations, in effect, have emerged as the defining features of the contemporary urban in the global South. These include emerging urban forms such as urban primates, expanding peri-urban, and the periphery. Notably, rapid urbanisation in both continents has endorsed what Dahiya (2012) refers to as ‘urbanisation of poverty’ and increasing inequality and informality, much of which is intrinsically connected to, and exists in parallel with the formal sectors (Chen and Doane 2008).

The next section of this paper unpacks the inextricably linked emerging urban forms across the global South to argue for both their functional connectedness as well as their ability to constitute relevant starting points to Southern urban theories for and from the South.

3. The Inextricably Linked Emerging Urban Forms

There are several new urban forms – customary trends – that constitute similarities across the three continents. Notably, these emerging new forms are in themselves a manifestation of the post World War II dominant development discourse that pushed for modernisation as a desirable goal as well as an aspiration. This discourse and the ensuing practice, while on one hand destroyed ‘traditional lives’ in the developing world (Massey 1988 cited in Kasarda and Crenshaw 1991: 476), on the other, manifested in binaries such as modern and traditional, farm and non-farm, and urban and rural (to name a few). Within this framing, the modern and the non-farm, largely categorised as the urban, are the end goals. With the West viewing urbanism as a mark of civilisation, a lack of this in precolonial Africa [and Asia] led to development narratives positioning the city as a mark of modernity (Blier 2007). By extension, the policy focus has inadvertently framed the urban as the future

while the rural is a space of amelioration as against proactive investments. In contrast, overt investments in the urban has led to the emerging forms discussed below.

Over-urbanisation, megapolisation, and urban primacy are common characteristics across the global South. Over-urbanisation refers to the rapid growth of settlements, independent of industrial development (Bairoch 1975; Kasarda and Crenshaw 1991) and is a consequence of accelerated development coupled with rapid population growth and urbanisation. Physically, it manifests as megacities (and megapolisation) and urban primates. While megacities are cities with a 10 million-plus population, urban primacy refers to population concentration in few large cities (Bhattacharya 2002). For example, in the early 2000s, more than a fifth of the urban population in half of Asia's countries lived in the largest city. Similarly, some cities in Latin America were home to more than 25% of the population, although this has considerably declined since the 1970s. In Africa, too, cities in Sierra Leone, Cameroon and Zimbabwe are highly primate (Bhattacharya 2002). Notably, these primates are also a result of the colonial past with several present-day primates being the previously established colonial capital cities (Liu 2019).

To put these characteristics into context, in the 1950s, there were a total of six megapolitan cities, including New York, Mexico City, São Paulo, Tokyo and Osaka. This increased to sixteen in 2000 and thirty-three in 2018. The maximum increase in mega-cities is in Asia and Africa during this period. As the dominant process of urban development in various global South countries, over-urbanisation, megalopolisation and urban primacy are considered as ideal settings for the perpetuation of poverty (Gugler 1982) and inequalities and therefore demand a critical enquiry. The seminars witnessed discussions on these from various perspectives. Drawing upon the megapolis of Kolkata, India, Khatua argued for training a lens on the sub-urban to understand the core-

periphery relations as a determinant of spatial development. In contrast to the peripheral urbanisation, Banerjee focused on the megacity of Delhi to dwell on the phenomenon of ‘urban villages’ – once the periphery to gradually transition to the core of the megapolis - to highlight the simultaneous interconnections between the urban and rural, the modern and traditional, and the planned and the unplanned. These contrasts contribute to the lived experiences of urban development in the South and should therefore necessarily constitute the theoretical and practical lenses for reconsideration of the urban reality in the global South.

Inextricably linked to, and underpinning over-urbanisation and megapolisation is the process of migration, proliferation of slums, and associated informality. The promise of the urban as a space that offers employment and enhanced access to basic services including social infrastructure, often in contrast to the rural – in practice, policy and perception- has triggered a massive migration to the cities. These unprecedented movements have resulted in a widening gap between the demand for and supply of housing and basic services. A direct manifestation of this demand-supply gap is the rapid proliferation of slums, informal settlements/favelas. To give a perspective, around one billion people in the world live in such conditions, and 94 percent of them reside in developing countries (Bolay 2020). In 2010, approximately 32.7 percent of the world’s population was living in slums, 61.7 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, 23 percent in Latin America and 35 percent in South Asia (Bolay et al. 2016). Yet, slums in Mumbai and Nairobi and *favelas* in Brazil come with their peculiarities. Furthermore, an influx of people to cities, generally beyond the carrying and economic capacity of the area has led to increasing rates of unemployment and burgeoning ‘informal’ parallel economies, proliferating across fringes of formal industries (Lewis 1954). The informality, when mapped onto housing, implies

operating and residing in spaces outside of *formal* decision-making processes and laws (Dupont et al. 2015).

Scholars theorising the urban consider these spaces as *tutelary personage* (Watson 2009) built on inequalities and shortages of the contemporary South city, and has become its most recognisable component (Roy 2011; Bhan 2019). In effect, these are the locus of urban problems, situated on the edges of planning models implemented by planners and policymakers. Urban intellectuals from the global South increasingly challenge the negative framing of slums and attendant informality. For instance, Ananya Roy (2011) in particular, criticises the informal understanding of slums through a conceptual phenomenon of subaltern urbanism. She argues against the dystopian narratives, pushing for an acknowledgement of the agency, innovation and reason present in these settlements. Along the same lines, Dupont et al. (2015) reveals how slums, *favelas* and (informal) townships are, in fact, spaces that invent cities and citizenship.

Another significant character of the Southern urban, especially in the Asian agglomeration is what McGee (1991) conceptualises as *desakota*. Combining the Bahasa terms *desa* (village) and *kota* (city), the *desakota* concept indicates the megacities mixed rural-urban characteristics, a critical difference between the mechanisms of metropolisation between the North and South. In other words, as the size and degree of urban development has increased, the South has blurred the urban-rural dichotomy by widening the dimensions of a particular metropolitan area into the milieu of sub-urbanisation; defined as the combination of non-central population and economic growth with urban spatial expansion (Ekers et al. 2012). A direct manifestation of the sub-urban is the peri-urban. As with over-urbanisation and primacy, peri-urban is also representative of poverty and inequality linked primarily to rapid changes

because of transitioning land-use and resource extraction (Allen 2010; Marshall and Dolley 2019).

Having laid out the context, seeing from the South and for the South would necessitate, for instance, unpacking and comprehending slums and the associated informality as the context for reimagining planning approaches. In this regard, Méndez Abad, Leinfelder and Scheerlinck's research in El Cisne Dos, Guayaquil, Ecuador juxtaposes the everyday practices and public space re(appropriation) in informal settlements against the official mechanisms of space production that result from institutional agendas and standard spatial models. The research points to self-produced and redefined public space resulting from everyday rhythms and local practical knowledge, one that is beyond institutional conceptualisations, yet relevant and appropriate from the community lens. Similarly, Sakay, Aùn and Okabe focus on the Barrios of Argentina, arguing for tenure security as a fundamental livelihood asset critical to improving the physical and socio-economic conditions in informal settlements. In a third study, Calderon uses Medellín city to trace the displacement-resettling processes (premised upon conflicts) and its contribution to informal urbanisation of the global South. The accelerated rates of forced displacement [worldwide] have exacerbated the urban growth of marginal settlements in the periphery of Southern cities. This has been creating 'mutant territories' (CNMH 2015 in Peak Urban) to which municipalities do not have the infrastructure and capacity to respond to, due to the unpredictable nature and complex character of socio-environmental-political conflicts. The lack of territorial and legal recognition of these new marginal settlements - 'invisible territories'- has generated an argumentative dichotomy of the advantages of being visible or invisible. The research foregrounds the relevance of "(in)visibility" as a concept in informal urbanisation discourses worldwide. The study particularly attempts to

understand the systematic formation of marginal settlements resulting from forcible displacement-resettlement.

All three studies discussed informal urbanisation as a consequence of forcible displacement and resultant resettlement processes. They also highlighted the value of inhabitants in 'auto construction' processes while showcasing interconnection between formal and informal sectors. Such a reading necessitates the need for planning approaches that integrate diverse logics of spatial production and socio-cultural specificity. The seminar further acknowledged the criticality of informality in saying that 'while the rest of the world deems informality as an issue urban planning hopes to solve, informality is where it begins for us [global South].'

In expanding the conversations, Yiftachel trains a lens on Colombo, Sri-Lanka, Tallinn in Estonia and Beersheeba, Israel, arguing for a shift in the analytical lens to focus on the condition of displaceability as against the act of displacement. Mapping a continuum of 'displaceabilities' across geographies, the research focuses on how these underpin urban citizenship and should, therefore, constitute a reference point on which to rebuild pluriversal urban policies for the diverse settings of the contemporary urban world.

The emerging urban forms discussed in this section are realities of Southern urbanism and therefore emerge as important sites for critical analyses. Seminar conversations around the various research spanning the diverse Southern geographies point to how these can facilitate insights into diverse political, economic and socio-cultural processes and embedded knowledge systems as alternative realities of cities in the global South.

4. Conclusion

This paper set out to capture the knowledge generated from a two-part seminar series conducted in Colombia and India that aimed to evolve urban planning and management pathways that are contextualised to the diversity of the South. The seminars pushed for a radical departure from adopting and adapting existing and emerging planning models developed in the North to 'suit' the South, in order to provoke an inquiry that stems from and within Southern experience. To this point, the seminars engaged with research from the Latin American, African and Asian contexts.⁹

The trajectory of contemporary cities in these geographies, albeit heterogeneous in nature, share commonalities such as a colonial hangover that constantly leaks into planning systems, a large informal sector, over-urbanisation, urban primacy, migration, gentrification and sprawls to name a few. These themes set them far apart from the global North and provide a chance to re-imagine urbanisation in the global South. At the same time, they also push for conventional urban theory to turn on its head i.e. theory(ies) that are applicable to cities like Paris, London and Brisbane, but grounded in the realities of Mumbai, Santiago, Caracas, Haifa and Lagos.

In pushing for this departure, the paper argues that the shared past and, subsequently, the pace and patterns of urbanisation that these geographies experienced and continue to do so, offer a fertile ground for mutual learning. Latin America, Africa and Asia have their own contexts and drivers, each of which cause common peculiarities, but with vividly different flavours. The varied research, while speaking to the theme of the seminar series, also drew

⁹ The research papers from the African context were not physically presented in the seminar series.

upon what Ananya Roy (2009) refers to as disciplinary identities to advance new geographies of urban theory. The research papers provided context specific or area-based conceptualisation of challenges to not just reiterate the complexity of urbanisation processes and its manifestation in city form and function, but also, to enable a search for meeting challenges from within the same contexts. The broader focus was to privilege localised knowledge, embedded wisdom and culture specificities to inform planning and management of the Southern cities. This includes (un)learning land rights systems and the roots of gentrification, re-imagining the rural-urban divide, unpacking the link between service delivery and land rights, re-conceptualising the duality of (in)formality and of course, theorising from the South using local histories.

To conclude, the paper, in bringing together knowledge generated during the seminar series, responds to Friedman's (1993) observation of a non-Euclidian model of planning, one that acknowledges and emphasises processes that are *regional and local* while operating in *real-time* (Friedmann 1993). It uses this approach to showcase the potential of decentering the epistemological foundation of urban studies as a discipline.

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