

Book Review

Ashok K. Dutt, Allen G. Noble, Frank J. Costa, Sudhir K. Thakur, Rajiv R. Thakur and Hari S. Sharma (eds.) (2015) “**Spatial Diversity and Dynamics in Resources and Urban Development**” (in two volumes) Vol. 1. pp xvii +562, Vol. II pp. xviii+537, Springer Science + Business Media, Dordrecht, price not stated on the book, according to Springer web site Hardcover 169.99 €, e-Book 142.79 €

This set of two volumes carrying a common title - “*Spatial Diversity and Dynamics in Resources and Urban Development*” but each having a distinct theme, the first devoted to Regional Resources and the second discussing Urban Development is a **Festschrift** in honour of Professor Baleshwar Thakur, Professor of Geography, at Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi. The project for this festschrift, as mentioned in the preface, was initiated by Professor Ashok K. Dutt with his colleagues Allen G. Noble and Frank J. Costa, all faculty members in the Department of Geography and Planning, University of Akron, OH, USA.

The first volume, running into 560 pages, contains 28 research papers and is divided into eight parts starting with Introduction (Ch.-one) and ending with ‘Land Cover and Rural Planning’ in Ch. 8. In between, the six chapters discuss ‘Methodology’, ‘Global Perspective’, ‘Economic Perspective’, ‘Ecological Perspective’, ‘Water Management’, ‘Energy and Forest Resources’ and ‘Land and Rural Planning’. Thus, the themes range from land, water, forest and mineral

resources on the one hand to ecology, flood management and environment management including wildlife preservation, poverty reduction and nutritional level of masses in some parts of India, on the other. But for a few methodological papers like “Spectral Unmixing....” Authored by C. Dey Sarker et al, or Bruce Mitchell’s ‘Innovations...’ discussing the idea of resilience and adaptive management, most other papers present case studies of a country or a regional development issues linked to some resource. Following the organization of the text in the first volume, the second volume is also divided into eight parts that include 1. Introduction, 2. Theoretical Basis, 3. Quantitative Analysis, 4. Economic Impact, 5. Infrastructure Development, 6. Housing, 7. Planning, and 8. Cities.

The first two chapters, written by the editors, define natural resource and give a hint of the consequences of their unequal distribution in lands of varying population density, resulting in an imbalance between the resources and the population. They emphasize the inadequacy of the concept of Gross National Product (GNP) as, they believe, the depletion and depreciation of

natural resources is seldom factored in, in assessing the GNP. They suggest the concept of an Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW). The GNP is an assessment of the contemporary economic situation, measured by Gross National Product and remains a valid tool to broadly gauge the state of the economy of a country. The ISEW attempts to estimate the potential for sustainable development. The next chapter (Ch. 2) is a portrayal of the academic brilliance and contributions of Professor Thakur to geographical research.

In an edited work of this nature where the perspectives and approaches of the contributors, coming from different geographical milieu and background, differ considerably, a congruence of views is the least expected result, yet the findings of the contributors suggest a range of possibilities either for sustainable use of resources or for the structural organization of the cities and their metropolitan regions.

Volume I, Regional Resources

The volume on Resource Development starts substantively with the discussion of the technique to improve the quality of mapping of the flood inundated area in cases where houses and trees are only partly submerged. Those interested in mapping from remotely sensed data may find it worth testing. The advocacy of micro level management with the cooperation of the local or regional populace, as suggested by Chattopadhyay (Ch. 4) with a case study of Kerala (India) is in the spirit of co-operative management of resources like forests and is finding increasing acceptance. The essay on 'natural resource based livelihoods in the context of

climate change' and the stance of the policy makers is based on a patchwork of quotes from some official speeches coupled with some pathetic pictures presented by some writers. The stark disparity in the styles of living presented in the concluding remarks (quoted from International Tribune-Set, 2009-Yardley) has nothing to do with the stance of policy makers. Socio-economic inequity has not suddenly cropped up as result of the creeping climate change. A more cogent argument could have been made to suggest policy prescriptions to enhance livelihood in view of the anticipated climate change. Bruce Mitchell's advocacy of adoptive and collaborative management (Ch.6) is on unassailable ground when he talks of 'fair treatment of and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour or national origin... which implies that no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences...'. 'The Evolution of Land Markets and Rights before Independence' by Sanjoy Chakravorty (Ch. 7) takes a historical perspective contrasting the value of land as a source of revenue during the British rule to one of competing demands for a variety of uses in after-independent India. Geographic Distribution of Land Trust Activities and the protection and conservation of land by trusts are the theme discussed by R. C. Hess and George M. Pomeroy (Ch. 8) and their distribution explained. The authors have demonstrated an effective use of various statistical techniques like a multiple regression analysis and location quotient to work out the relative concentration of these trusts, and the value of these techniques has been enhanced with a three-dimensional mapping.

Among the papers under Ecological Perspectives, the one authored by P. P. Karan is quite significant. With a clear understanding and rich experience of the Himalayan states like Nepal and Bhutan behind him, Karan talks of eco destruction in Nepal and Sikkim, contrasting it with Bhutan, with not-so-serious ecological degradation, where the constitution mandates the maintenance of at least 60% of the land under forest. Bhutan is a state where “the king’s actions are formulated under the over-arching policy of ‘Gross National Happiness’ as opposed to economic growth at any cost.” ‘Himalayan governments, he suggests, must continue to weigh carefully the relative desirability of uncontrolled growth or guided growth with conservation’ In another chapter, Robbins and Chhangani, taking specific example of Kumbhalgarh wild life sanctuary of Rajasthan, advocate an adaptive management of sanctuaries with the best suited practice established by experimentation.

Part VI of the volume discussing Water Management, the most crucial of the natural resources, though containing nine papers doesn’t have a comparative picture of impending water crisis, especially in Monsoon lands. All the papers are case studies related to ground water depletion, flood hazards, irrigation, flood plain management and artificial recharge in specific area or in a specific river basin. Inter-state water sharing has received some attention from Nina Singh recommending a shift from confrontation to co-operation.. Similarly, part VIII ‘Land Cover and Rural Planning’ has two case studies from Thailand, one discussing the ‘Land Cover Pattern and Rural Types in Lop Buri province of Thailand’ written by

Risa Patarasuk. The paper is interesting in the sense that using satellite images over a period of two decades, the author has established a relationship between road network, improved accessibility, change in the land use pattern and the loss of forests. In a subsequent paper, also from Thailand, Khongsatjaviwat and Routray evaluate the comparative roles of TAO (Tambon Administrative Organization), a local Self Government organ and CBO (Community Based Organization) in the development of the area. The research is based on the performance of these bodies against the expectation of local communities measured through their perception. The authors used the weighted average index (WAI) to assess the performance on a five-point scale. In the last paper of the volume Ravi S. Singh talks of land use changes in Arunachal Pradesh, one of the peripheral states of India, inhabited largely by tribal communities.

Volume II, Urban Development

The volume starts with a general introduction to the contemporary trends in urban development and a well-written summary of different chapters by the editors, without any comments. The papers contained each of these parts, evaluate the significance of different facets of urban development through specific case studies. Sudhir Thakur’s paper ‘Recent Trends in Regional Urban ... Implications’ is a comprehensive review of urban studies done in India, grouping them in three categories, viz. urban growth theories, colonial space economy and regional urban growth patterns case studies. He has evaluated the regional trends by dividing Indian urban space into four parts: northern,

eastern, western, and southern. A medley of theories and modeling of complex urban systems, sandwiched in the essay together with prescription for future directions for research, don't add proportionately to the value of the paper. Notwithstanding with these comments, the essay is a serious attempt to understand and explain the complex urban system of a fast developing economy like India. Banerjee-Guha (Ch.4) offers a critique of Neoliberal Urbanism, illustrating its impact by evaluating the result of Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). In a similar vein, Saroha (Ch. 5) laments the current unsustainable urbanization in India and attributes the 'the present urban chaos to ineffective and inefficient urban administration, multiplicity of authorities and inadequate revenue base. Christopher D. Cusack & Kathryn J. Mill make a case study of Nairobi and assess the problem and prospects facing the city, recommending, at the same time, a model of sustainable urban development that advocates technology transfer and collaboration between politicians, business community and public representatives. Ashok K. Dutt and his colleagues, using a large number of variables and correlating them with each other conclude that 'Socio-economic correlates of Asian Urbanization' suggest that increasing urbanization is linked to higher economic development that also leads to a decline in fertility and infant mortality, improved sanitation and greater per capita health expenditure. Certainly, it has to be pointed out that rural poverty – that always existed - is not enough of a trigger to initiate and perpetually feed the rural-urban migration stream. The expanding economic base, especially the service sector with

the latter's growing share in the national economy, has been an important contributor to urban growth. (as seen in the regression. Fig. 7.2). An important insight one gets from the paper is that the authors think of increasing urbanization as a problem and retention of the rural population in the countryside by encouraging village industries, a solution. This is highly debatable. With excessive and disproportionate overload of population in rural areas in India where agriculture accounts for 14-15% of the GDP, migration to high-income areas is not a regressive phenomenon. Settlement systems in general and urban centres in particular are driven by contemporary development and economic realism.

An interesting paper titled 'Assessing the Impact of Global Financial Crisis' - a joint effort of five authors led by S. Brunn (Ch. 8), applies a novel source of data to assess the relative impact of financial crisis on some selected cities of Southeast Asia. by using the frequency of hyper-links of each of the selected cities with phrases like 'economic slow-down' and 'global financial crisis'. The results show the intensity of impact, not the kind of impact, that each city experiences. Similar studies have been conducted earlier as can be seen from the reference at the end. The use of a search engine and associating cities with some problems like economic slow-down could give a tentative idea of the association or the impact the cities experience. The paper entitled 'Asian Indian Settlement Patterns ...' (Ch. 9), authored by M. E. Harvey & others introduces a number of new features. First, the use of the term Asian Indians in preference to Indian Americans, a term widely used for Indians settled in the USA,

second, the 'Gateway Concept' implying the entry points of immigrants, and a third that they appear to settle close to their points of entry, 'the gateways'. Asian Indians, according to the authors, are a growing segment of both the Asian and total foreign born population. The large continuous gateways of Boston, Chicago, New York and San Francisco still attract large number of immigrants... Their settlement patterns, near these gateways, is the suburbia, their choice being attributed largely to their fluency in English and high socioeconomic status. A significant finding of the paper is that Asian Indian migration represents a significant and continuing wave of immigration to the USA. The paper carries meaningful maps showing the concentration of Asian Indian, by counties, in the USA, and some illustrating the settlement pattern of Asian Indian in Washington, D.C., New York City and Los Angeles. **A MUST READ** for Indian scholars interested in the geographical spread of expatriates settled in the USA. Neil Reid & J. D. Gatrell discuss the importance of cluster based economic development, illustrating the phenomenon with four case studies, two from India, one from Nigeria and one from Brazil. In all the four cases, a cluster of single product industries in a region, not only promoted the economic development, but even survived competition with the industries benefitting from globalization and enjoying better access to international market.

The volume has many case studies of Indian cities analyzing one aspect or other of a specific city. These are urban structure, transport, slums, in and out-migration, and some aspects of urban planning, all very informative and instructive.

The two-volume set - the first devoted to Regional Resources and the second to Urban Development - is a collection of 53 research papers, written by scholars with different perspectives. These, together, present a substantial quantity of reading material with divergent content, style and methodological approach. It is difficult to hazard a generalized view of the quality of contents, yet one may observe that most of the papers in the book are readable, a few quite interesting and a few very original not only their content and style but also in their convincing argument, based on an in-depth study.

The price of the volumes are rather prohibitive for students, the volume deserve a place on the shelves of educational and research institutions.

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