

The Role of Urban Geographer in Urban Planning

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Abstract

Geography is one of the umbrella disciplines which integrated with lot of sub disciplines. Urban Geography is one of the young sub disciplines of Geography. Temporal and spatial view in geography is unique and that influences the professionalism of urban Geographer. It is considered that the role of urban geographer is prominent figure on urban planning due to their holistic perception on urban landscape. The need of urban planning emerged with the Industrial Revolution in 1830s in the west. In the third world countries, urbanization has become a controversial and complicated trend with the over population. Theories, concepts and assumptions of the notable urban geographers are practically applying for the field of current urban planning. The aim of this article is identifying the importance of the role of urban geographer in urban planning and highlighted the contribution of notable urban geographers that are appreciated in current urban planning.

Introduction

Geography is one of the core sciences that heirs a longer genealogy than any other discipline. It emphasizes the significance of location, place and the spatial relations of the earth's features within the context of man and environment interactions. In the period of German School of Geographers, between 1750 and 1850, two major branches of geography emerged as physical geography and human geography. Urban Geography has developed as a young branch of human geography, concerned with the various aspects of cities such as location and the processes that create spatial patterns observed in the urban areas.

Besides an urban geographer studies urban places with references to their geographical environment and the geographical factors that shape the city landscape. There are various geographical factors which operate spatially within the economic, socio, cultural and political contexts at a given time. In a way, a geographer is a person who asks questions about the significance of location, distance, distribution,

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and spatial succession. Majority of urban attributes on genetic and functional aspects, evolution and spatial relationships of townscape are considered by a geographer to develop his holistic view and synthesize phenomenon related to urban ecology.

L. D. Stamp in 1947 emphasized city as an entity, and Dickinson defined urban geography as the study of a city commanding the surrounding region (in 1948). Raymond E. Murphy, (1966) points out the dual role of geographer; one is to analyze cities as entities in terms of location, growth, and relations to the surroundings countryside. The second role is to discuss patterns of the city's interior land use, social and cultural patterns of circulation. However, broadly speaking, there are three major topics which are highly concerned by urban geographers;

- Origin of towns and cities.
- Their growth and development.
- Their functions in and around their surroundings.

The contribution of the notable urban geographers to the development of the subject provided important impetus. Karl Hassert's *Die stadte geographisch betrachetet* published in 1907 at Leipzig was the first volume which presents an outline for the field of urban geography. Similarly Raoul Blanchard's *Grenoble, etude de geographie urbaine* published in 1911 was the first classical study of a single city. Those urban geographers' work explains basic concepts on the origin and development of the town. The first general review of urban geography was made by Arousseau in 1924. He commented that city geography embraces such a large section of human geography that is hardly a specialization at all. Most of the urban geographers at that time faced a challenge when they identified the role of urban geographer. With the decline of a site and situation concept in 1915 Patrick Geddes provided an impetus to the subject. He coined the new term "conurbation" and introduced the concept of "region" to field of architecture. Geddes was influenced by French theorists Fredric Le Play and Herbert Spence. He collaborated for city planning in Palestine, India and Sri Lanka too. In 1921 Patrick Geddes provided the city plan for expansion to the port, the setting up of parks and the zoological garden in Sri Lanka. In 1920s the Chicago School of human ecologists focused on the city

as a social laboratory. They did researches about urban environment by combining theory and ethnographic field work in Chicago.

Lewis Mumford's (1895-1990) contribution to the subject is very critical. He analyzed his urban experience as an integral component in the development of human culture and the human personality. He argued that the physical design of cities and their economic functions were secondary for their relationships to the spiritual values of human community and the natural environment. He applied these principles in the 1920s to his architectural criticism for *The New Yorker* magazine. He worked with the Regional Planning Association of America and launched a campaign against plans to build a highway through Washington Square in New York's Greenwich Village in the 1950s.

Until the end of the Second World War, urban geography is not taught as a special field in the most of the universities. The period of 1930 is a turning point in the subject. Most of the geographers had a different view on city. Edward Soja, the professor of city planning University of California, provided the description of Los Angeles Sixty – Mile Circle in 1989 His model of Los Angeles Sixty – Mile Circle is rich in complexity and paradox. David Harvey, 1997 emphasized the importance of considering the cities in terms of process rather than just things. He explained cities are a place of conflicts- based on race, ideology, gender and other values. Dialectically thinking on cities Harvey argued that the process is shaped by time, place and shape. Looking through the prism of arts and popular culture is another different way to see the cities, according to Sharon Zukin, sociologist in 1995.

Imperialism between 15th and 19th Centuries and Industrial Revolution in 1830s provided major impetus to rapid urbanization in the world, converting towns and cities as magnets of economic, social and political process. In the 18th Century large number of people migrated to the urban areas from neighboring country side with the boom of factory laborers in Europe. This led to development of lame settlements known as “Shanties” in almost all metropolises. This informal way of urban development emphasized the need for planning urban landscape in rational way. Therefore a new discipline as well as a practice of urban planning emerged incorporating knowledge in various related fields.

An “Urban Place” has been defined in various ways by different scholars and institutions. The United Nations Demographic Year Book gives a wide range of examples as cited by various countries defining urban areas demographically. UNO defines a permanent settlement with a minimum population level is 20,000 as an urban place. But several countries have their own minimum thresholds such as Botswana (5000), Ethiopia (2000), Argentina (2000), Israel (2000), Czechoslovakia (5000), Iceland (200), Portugal (10000), and Japan (5000).

The urban planning is the act of making or carrying out plans, specifically the establishment of goals, policies, and procedures for a social or economic unit designated as urban. Urban planning refers to a both collective actions that shape and improve human settlements and to a profession that developed to guide urban growth and improve the conditions of industrial cities. According to American Planning Association, urban planning or city and regional planning is a dynamic profession that works to improve the welfare of people and their communities by creating more convenient, equitable, healthful, efficient, and attractive places for present and future generations.

The need for urban planning emerges with the rapid growth of urban places. It is soon realized that without total planning it is not possible to manage city space. In England, the Green Belt Policy was considered as an effective method for controlling urban sprawl. Visualized by Ebenezer Howard in 1898, the first Green Belt was designed in 1935 around the city of London, followed by all conurbations in England. Enclosing the city and satellite garden cities, it formed a protective belt and also provided recreation facilities such as golf clubs. These efforts gradually help to promote the field of urban planning. At the end of 19th century, the idea of New Towns also evolved in England. The formal implementation of the idea was a post-war phenomenon which aimed at reconstructing a war-torn London city. Several New Towns were built around London and elsewhere in England. Milton Keynes and Peterborough are best examples. These have proved to be successful in solving several urban problems. A concept of New Town is a planned, self-contained settlement with a controlled population density, which has all the urban advantages without damaging either the physical or the social environment. It is designed

primarily to receive the excess population from congested conurbations and create a balanced urban environment.

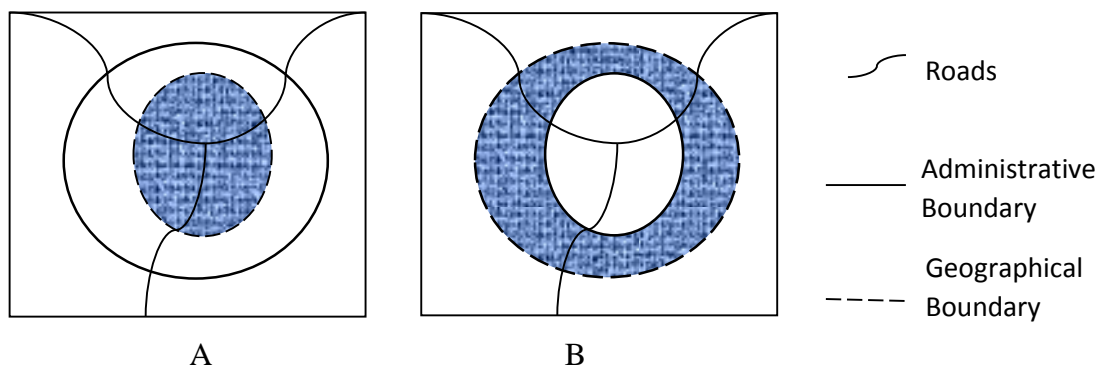
The success of the British experience with New Towns made several countries especially in the Third World adopt urban planning for solving the problems of urbanization. In India new townships that were designed for the growing industries were the planned towns e.g. Jamshedpur. The new capital cities that were built after Independence, such as Chandigarh, Bhubaneswar and Gandhinagar were planned on similar lines. The major problem in sustaining New Towns in India is the large increase of population in any urban center within a short span of time which disturbs basic planning objectives of a New Town. The need for proper planning of the urban environment to control epidemics threatening the city was most urgent in India in 1960s. The Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization was set up by the government in 1960 for planning and developing the Calcutta Metropolitan Area. Especially the four objectives of urban planning are important to future urban geographers,

- To promote a more dynamic growth of the economy with increased production and employment
- To develop an urban environment which is socially satisfactory and capable of sustaining a population of about 12.3 million in the Calcutta Metropolitan Area by 1986
- To create the machinery for sustained development planning
- To strengthen local self-government and citizen participation in the development of the development of the Metropolitan District

Experiences of urban planning proses in developed and developing countries shape the role of urban geographers to upgrade the perception on urban landscape. Administrative boundary of a city and geographical boundary of a city is a controversial factor that should be more concerned by urban geographers. Most of the time, the geographical boundary of a city differs from the administrative boundary of it. Good planning helps to create communities that have better choices for where and how they live. The views of urban geographers can be valuable inputs for proper planning for cities to achieve such welfare objectives.

Dr. Jean Gottman is one of the pioneer French geographers who contributed to sub fields of human geography such as urban, political, economic, historical and regional geography. As a geographer his prediction is highly appreciated and practicable with current situation of urbanization. His study was published in 1961 as “Megalopolis”: The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States”. He introduced this area was the cradle of a new order in the organization of inhabited space and he used the term Megalopolis. As he predicted in 1960s Boston to Washington northeastern seaboard in United State of America is a popular megalopolis in the world. Walter Christaller is considered as a founder of settlement geography as he provided a theoretical background to the subject in 1933 by his work *Die Zentralen Orte in Suddeutschland* (Central Places in Sothern Germany). He divided his book into three parts such as theoretical part, connecting part, and regional part. The Central Place Theory explained broadly, according to the order of service centers how settlement pattern spatially distributed on the landscape. He used hypothesis to generalize his idea and Central Place theory is appreciated very much in the field of urban geography as it provided new direction to the field. In 1954 August Lorsh formulated to the Christaller’s theory. He changed some assumption and Lorsh used it to described settlement patterns in Indiana in United States of America.

Different between Administrative Boundary and Geographical Boundary of an Urban Landscape



Source: Manusha Boogola Vidyawa, 1996

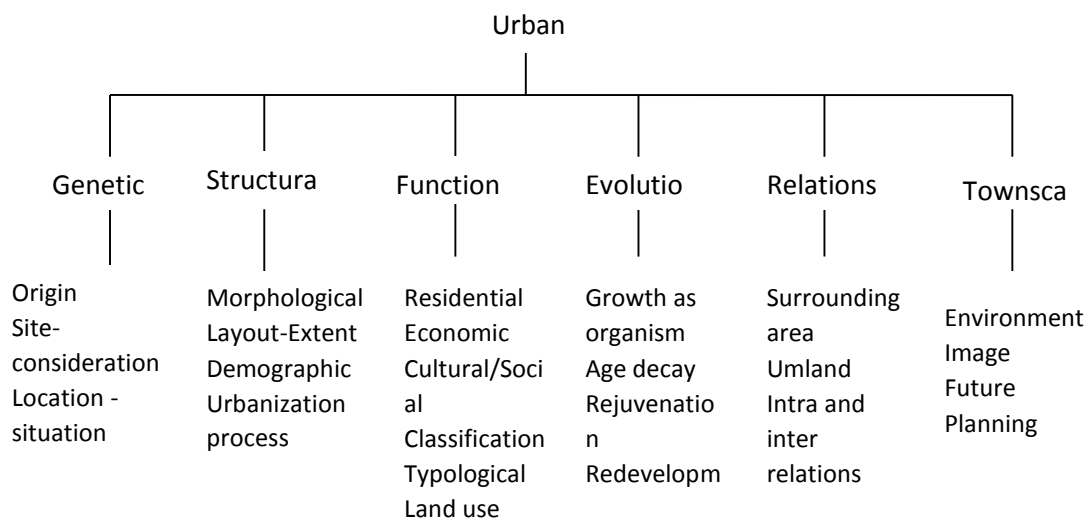
Planning is a highly collaborative field, and planners spend much of their time working with others. Frequently urban planning field deals with streams of science and Mathematics. Urban Planners are also most of the time engineers, architectures,

draftsmen and surveyors. The role of urban geographer also should be engaged with the urban planning recently to face the big challenges of the environmental issues regarding urbanization. Planning helps communities to envision their future. It helps them find the right balance of new development and essential services, environmental protection, and innovative change. The view of urban geographer on landscape always deals with three major areas, those are,

- Economic value of an urban place
- Social value of an urban place
- Environmental value of an urban place

These broad three topics are always helps to create more safety and durable urban planning decision. Sustainability of urban planning is a vital need with the modern boom of economic environment. Equibirilium between man and environment is the most sensitive factor for urban planning as it shows rapid changes within very short time period. Urbanization is an animate factor to the urban geographer. Ecological process of an urban area should be highly concerned for sustainable city planning. That discipline has been inherited to the geographer when they deal with the subject for a long time. Urban ecology influenced the relationships with the surroundings areas of a city and had its sway over the people and their environment

Table 1



Source: Verma L.N., (2006), P.13

Cities can be emerging due to some geographical factors and; gradually it expands its landscape making changes of the surrounding environment. Therefore urbanization is a very rapid process and complex phenomenon. Urban attributes constitute one of the unique concepts that guides to find out some of the answers for geographical questions related with urban planning. It is important to recognize that a plan will have different purposes. A variety of interventions including policy recommendations, community action plans, comprehensive plans, regulatory and incentive strategies or historical preservation plans must be applied properly according to the specific contexts. Rather than mathematical designs of urban landscape, the geographer should concern about the ability to predict the future trends of a specific urban agglomeration, analyzing related geographical data successfully. Census reports and maps are the most powerful sources of information for urban geographers. Technological knowledge helps in harnessing important tool for creative planning in modern society. One common tool used in urban planning is Geographical Information Systems (GIS) that link data and digital maps. Creativity and power of decision making with the holistic perceptions are the two important unique characteristics which promote urban geographer's role in urban planning.

Conclusion

Urban Geography is one of the practicable and recently valued disciplines which were developed as a sub field in Human Geography. With the rapid of change of urban ecology, urban geography and scholars who familiar with it has been important resource in decision making for urban development. Expanding of urban landscape is beyond control and a factor related with the prevailing changes in socio-economic system. Mitigating urban issues and proper planning are the most suitable strategies for sustainable future. The role of urban geographer is essential to overcome lot of urban issues as they have holistic approach in observing nature. In order to serve this purpose urban geographers should be trained and experienced through continuous research and applications of expertise in reality. The human and land interrelationship should be harmonious and safe. The economic, social, political and environmental conditions must be considered in micro and macro level to make a comprehensive plan for a city. Geographer can synthesis factors and identify the

cross actions of the factors. It will be a valuable guidance for lasting and accurate decision making for urban planning.

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