

Mobility-Responsive Urban Planning

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A proactive approach to migration can lead to significant benefits for the city economy and city vibrancy. The last decade has seen a substantive increase in varied forms of mobility in India. These forms of mobility stretch way beyond the stoic imagination of migration as reflected in definitional aspects or its directions as rural-rural, rural-urban and urban-urban migration.

Mobility is increasingly circular, semi or non-permanent, and though a bulk of it is regional, many stream of migration are also long-distance and interstate. This dynamic situation of mobility is at variance with public policies in cities, big and small, that are being transformed by the presence and contribution of these migrants. This article analyses housing policies in particular and how they are not in sync with the presence and needs of migrants. This gap in public policy compels migrants to find solutions outside the formal system. Such patterns generate a vicious cycle in which both cities and migrants get trapped. There is an urgent need to equip city governments with necessary capacities, resources and powers to recognise and respond to issues of migrants.

Introduction

While the census data estimates the number of migrants at 3.3 million; several studies including the Economic Survey of India 2017 suggest that this is a significant underestimation. The scale of underestimation of migration is a concern in itself because it

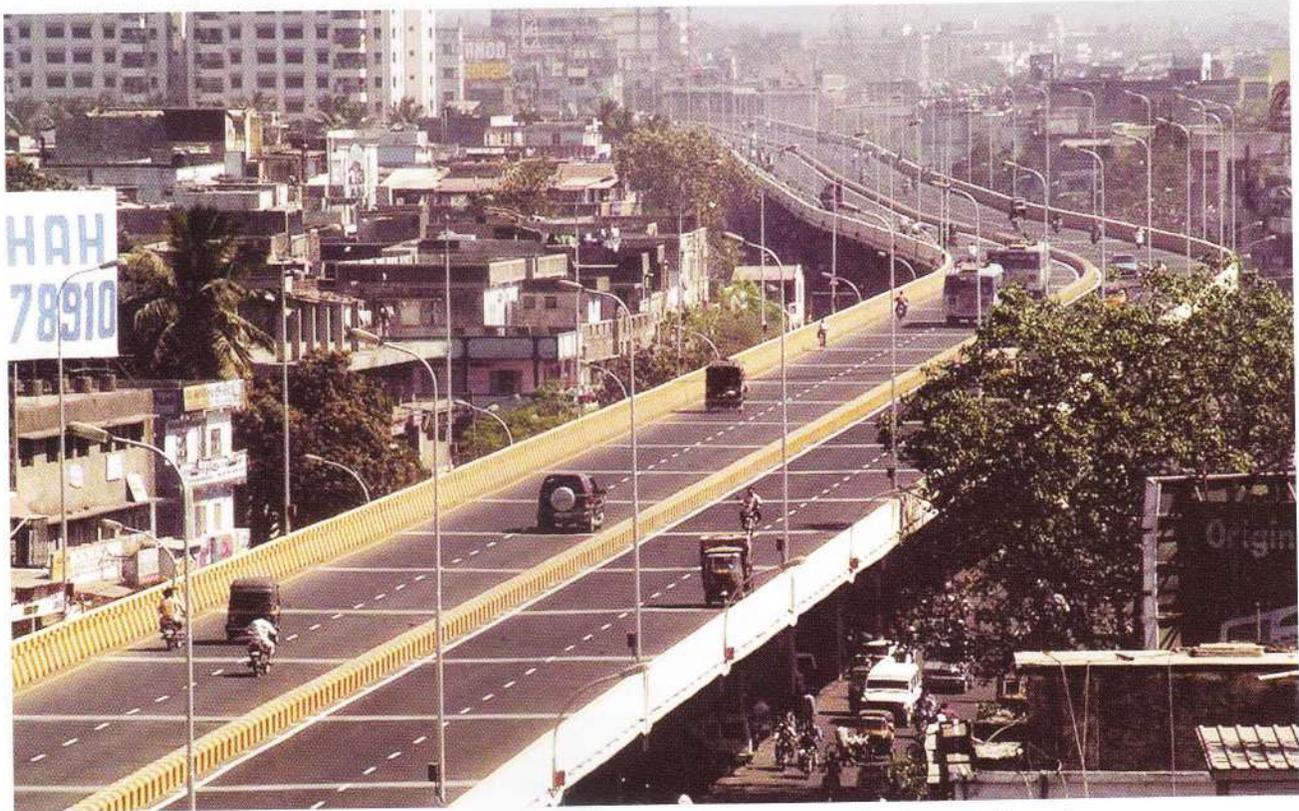
leads to potential neglect of policy (Chandrasekhar and Dore 2014). A second related concern is about the places or destinations that are transformed through the presence and activities of migrants. This concern forms the focus of this article. Assumptions that city dwellers are sedentary and linkage of citizenship to long-term residence do not fit the emergent pattern of migration that is largely circular, temporary and non-permanent. Most urban policies, initiated at the central or state level,

seemed to have overlooked these emerging forms of mobility. In fact, a sedentary bias is found even in special policies that are initiated for migrants. On their part, most migrants then are compelled to find solutions that are accessible to them and secure them outside the formal system. Such solutions in domains of shelter, basic services, education, and healthcare not only create difficult living conditions for the migrants, but more importantly most of these solutions lead to new challenges for the city government.



Housing policies need to be in synch with the presence and needs of migrants.

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Mobility-responsive, local government driven policy is important for urban transformation.

This article argues the case for a mobility-responsive, local government-driven policy environment as a significant part of urban transformation.

Changing Scale and Forms of Mobility in India

The last decade has seen a significant rise in the scale and form of mobility in India as well as the modes of studying the same. The conventional mode of understanding migration is based on census definition and attempts to understand the causes of the same. The census defines a migrant as a person whose residence has shifted from the place of residence enumerated in the previous census or one who has shifted from her birthplace. Of these, 64 per cent moved more than ten years ago to their present destination. This, however, is only part of the picture of mobility in India. Recently, several scholars and even the Economic Survey of India has pointed out that there is a significant underestimation of migration in census data as well

as National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data and that both these official data sources tend to neglect the short-term and circular migration. Some of these studies include those by Deshingkar and Akter (2009) who derived their estimation of 100 million

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migrants, based on sectoral analysis. Other studies by Chandrashekhar and Sharma (2014) estimate that the number of urban commuters was more than 10 million in 2009-10, and Tumbe (2016) points out that nearly 20 per cent rural households had at least one out-migrant. Other estimates on the share of migrants in the workforce place the estimation of migration to be somewhere close to the 100 million as suggested by Deshingkar et al. It may also be noted that the Economic Survey of India (2016-17) places the estimation of interstate migration at 60 million and inter-district migration at 80 million. However, it is important to recognise that there are clear indications that mobility in India is significantly increasing and that the forms of this mobility are varied and do not correspond to a permanent move. Two forms which are particularly significant are a) commuting and b) circular migration. Both these forms of mobility have implications for the way in which cities are shaped.

How Mobility Transforms Places?

Naik and Randolph (2018) assert that it is important to pay attention to transformations in places through migration as much as migrant flows. They introduce the concept of migration junctions in relation to the same. Large-scale migration has significant implications for places. Conventional data measuring more permanent movement would estimate such implications in terms of burdens on infrastructure and housing. However, the more transient forms of migration compel us to pay attention to the specific kind and form of infrastructure or housing as well as the terms at which the same is created. Temporary forms of migrants are people who contribute to the city economy while they are there but their effort is directed at places which they come from, i.e., the source areas. This is where they contribute in terms of remittances, investments, asset building, and state revenues. On the other hand, they contribute significantly to the economic flows and outputs, extract less resources from the city, and bring in new ideas and ways of doing things.

While work and economic reasons may be the largest drivers

While work and economic reasons may be the largest drivers for such migration, education and health resource seeking may also be supplementary reasons for the same. A proactive approach to migration can lead to significant benefits for the city economy and city vibrancy as they contribute significantly to the economic flows and outputs, extract less resources from the city, and bring in new ideas and ways of doing things.

for such migration, education and health resource seeking may also be supplementary reasons for the same. These create specific demands on city infrastructures and services. Further, such demands may be locality-intensive. For example, hospitals attract many patients requiring long-term treatment and hence may emerge as nodes for such migrants (patients and caregivers). Similar nodes are also seen around colleges and areas where migrant-heavy economic activities

such as construction, recycling etc. happen. Demands on services may range from requirements of transport infrastructure and making it amenable to large-scale and long-distance commuting to creating a range of accessible basic services in assembly areas to accessible nutrition and to creating shelter options that are accessible and proximate to such nodes. School level education in languages familiar to the migrants and a local administration and services that also use these languages in their communication is needed as well.

A neglect of these needs pushes people into creating their own makeshift solutions. A road junction is then converted into an 'adda' with tea-food stalls, rest places, footpaths, and roads are subsequently taken over as assembly places. Similarly, a street near a hospital may be converted into an informal settlement. Areas around colleges with outstation students may see emergence of rental housing and fast food stalls. Highly temporary shacks come up around recycling spots. In the absence of public conveniences, roads may become defecation or urinal spots; edges may become waste dumps, and the intensity of slum formation or homelessness may increase. On the other hand, a proactive approach to migration can lead to significant benefits for the city economy and city vibrancy. A good example is that of Hyderabad Metro that uses four languages in its written messages.

Need for Vision for Supporting Migrants in Urban Policy: Short-term Housing

Short-term housing is perhaps one of the most critical and unmet needs of migrants to Indian cities. This is often seen as the need for rental housing; but needs for temporary housing go way beyond rental housing that extends to several months. Short-term visitors to cities include all those groups that use the city as a resource. Needs for



Hyderabad Metro uses four languages as a mobility-responsive measure.

stays longer than hotel stays and lesser than rental housing are the most neglected. Housing markets have begun to recognise this need and cater to it through serviced apartments. However, there is a complete absence of options when it comes to the low-income end. In older days, cities had *dharamshalas*. Contemporary Indian cities lack such options. This leads to unfortunate situations. A moving example of this is of how cancer patients and their caregivers at Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai are compelled to seek shelter on the streets outside the hospital for a few months while the treatment is on.

The other significant barrier to creating short-term housing solutions lies in the current imagination of housing. Contemporary housing policies rest upon two broad principles—the first is ownership-based housing and the other is use of land as a resource. The first principle creates citizenship; it is a useful instrument to secure sustained commitment and

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investment in a place. The second helps to monetise land and contribute to state revenues in a dynamic manner. However, a negative impact of both these policy instruments is that they limit the possibilities of short-term housing and undermine the needs for space for shelter in cities. Unless a concerted attempt is made by governments, the tendency would be to overwhelm the entire city space by investment-oriented

housing blocks. This mindset linked to economic incentives is a powerful force to counter; but unless this is done, cities will also see the rise in examples such as the one described earlier.

There are some examples of civil society response to such issues. However, these are far too few and limited in proportion to the needs. Further, the prevailing land and housing market dynamics also act as a constraint to undertaking such initiatives. There is a definite need for governmental action in this sphere. The question is clearly then, which level of government has the capacity to recognise such needs and respond effectively to them? Only local governments with an on-ground knowledge of realities will be able to respond to these as opposed to State Governments who have a more top-down and homogenising view of housing and other issues. It is therefore essential to move away from the current State Government-based policy onus and equip local governments in terms of capacity to cognize such issues, collect data, and to possess the powers and resources to respond to dynamic phenomena such as migration. □

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People on streets seeking treatment at Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai.