

# BUILD SMART, BUT ALSO SLOW, CITIES

Relevant for: null | Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies incl. Migration & Smart Cities

Jan 18, 2020-Saturday

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The past few decades in India have seen a consistent increase in urbanisation . The movement has been attributed to many things, including better education and employment opportunities in cities, shrinking incomes from traditionally rural occupations, and the increasing emphasis on city-style development even in rural areas. To keep up with this boom, cities and governments tend to pursue corporate-centric economic development schemes that make cities seem “fast”.

The Slow City movement that began in Italy in 1999, offers an alternative to this seemingly inescapable paradigm of urban culture. The movement was inspired by the Slow Food movement, focusing on preserving regional cuisines, local food, and traditional cooking methods. In the same vein, the slow city movement intends to improve the quality of life in cities. Fast growth cities tend to create enclaves of prosperity surrounded by labourers and poor service providers for these prosperous enclaves. As cities grow faster, they tend to acquire a life of their own, becoming more and more indistinguishable from each other, but less and less like the regions they originated from. The solution to this inequitable growth that leaves behind regions and people is, it has been argued, to deliberately slow down the pace at which cities grow. In a recent article, researchers from TISS Mumbai and University College London have argued that slower cities can help reduce the glaring inequality of cities in the developing world.

Instead of adopting urban policies from the West, they argue, developing countries must figure out ways to make urbanism work in their specific contexts. *Cittaslow* (meaning, slow city), the Italian slow cities initiative, has certification criteria (54 of them in spheres ranging from environment and infrastructure to technologies, and awareness) to certify slow cities around the world. The movement has caught on well since it began in 1999, with about 141 *Cittaslow* in 23 countries certified by 2011. It is perhaps time for a new kind of urbanism in India as well. Inequality and poverty have been endemic problems, and policymakers have struggled with these issues for as long as the country has been independent. Perhaps instead of trying to go faster, adopting a slower pace of technology and growth might finally ensure that we build cities for people, instead of the other way round.

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