



## Urban India

*At the time of Independence, Indian cities comprised two parts: the British-developed areas such as civil lines and cantonments, and the original Indian areas like bazaars, maidans, and residential zones that existed before British rule.*

The British mainly left the Indian areas untouched. After Independence, there arose a necessity to plan for these areas. The adoption of the Master Plan served as a tool to achieve this goal. The Master Plan aimed to separate various land uses and enhance the road capacity for new developments.

Put simply, Master Plans establish specific zones for different land uses, such as residential, commercial, and industrial. Within each zone, buildings must adhere to regulations concerning height, plot area, ventilation space, and more. The objective of the Plans was to guide growth in both existing and newly developed areas after Independence. The Master Plans set the land use for a period of 20-25 years, with the expectation that funds would be allocated for building infrastructure like water supply, sewerage, and roads based on the requirements of each zone. In 1988, the National Commission of Urbanization (NCU) was established, with Charles Correa as its Chairman and members including administrators like M. N. Buch.

One of the tasks assigned to the NCU was reviewing the approach of Master Plans implemented since Independence. The NCU discovered that Master Plans were reduced to being tools to control land and buildings, and did not reflect conditions on the ground, so were challenging to implement. Investment planning for infrastructure (e.g. roads) was not linked to the Master Plans, and had concentrated economic activities in existing large cities, thus reinforcing the old colonial economic development patterns. Even after the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991, the reliance on Master Plans persisted. However, they were found to be inadequate at adapting to the rapidly changing socio-economic conditions arising from globalization and the outsourcing of services to India.

Urban geographers Michael Dear and Steven Flusty at the University of Southern California have described how globalization interacts with the local environment, leading to rapid changes in city landscapes. According to their model, private investment randomly lands on a specific plot of land, disregarding the investment possibilities in the surrounding lots.

This initiates the development process in some plots while others remain unchanged. This development occurs in a quasi-random manner, with some plots undergoing development while others remain unaffected.

The traditional approach of Master Plans, with its rigid separation of land uses, proved to be inflexible in managing this type of urban growth. Consequently, entrepreneurial State Governments devised ingenious ways, both formal and informal, to promote urban growth. The formal approach involved altering land use and relaxing building regulations in areas identified for attracting private investment.

The states of Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, and developed cities, such as Gurugram, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Navi Mumbai, and Pune were pioneers. The informal approach entailed permitting building violations and subsequently regularizing unauthorized constructions through periodic building regularization schemes. This was adopted by a large number of states.



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To a Western observer (Idea 2 of India in My Blog), this type of city development may appear unregulated. However, studies by Ananya Roy, Professor of Urban Planning at UCLA, indicate that intentional action and planning are involved, rendering “deregulated” a more accurate description rather than simply unregulated.

Deregulation is distinct from planning failure or the absence of government intervention and represents a unique Indian governance approach connected to discipline, power, and regulation. The consequence of this deregulated approach is that city development occurs in a scattered manner, resulting in a disjointed relationship between developed and undeveloped areas within Indian cities. None of the emerging city landscapes in Indian cities are aligned with the predictions of standard urban planning models and this has adversely affected infrastructure in fast-changing cities. Typically, land uses and building regulations are locked for a specific period, and the construction of buildings on plots coincides with the provision of infrastructure. This is known as the concurrency principle.



*Sources: Smart Cities - Mumbai (Dhiraj Singh/Bloomberg via Getty Images)*

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In the deregulated approach, selective unlocking of land uses and building regulations means that the provision of water supply, sewerage, roads, parks, etc., does not go hand-in-hand with city development. As city infrastructure to support city developments lags behind, a perception develops that there is a perpetual shortage of infrastructure in Indian cities.

The present urban crisis is a result of the rapid growth of the Indian economy and cities, necessitating a new model to address the persistent shortage of adequate infrastructure and the absence of growth management. ■