

A Review on Impact of Local Area Planning in Urban Settlements of a Developing Economy: Identification of Critical Barriers

Soham Mukhopadhyay¹, Abhinanda Chatterjee²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, GITAM University, Visakhapatnam, India (Corresponding Author)

²Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, Sister Nivedita University, Kolkata, India

Abstract: *Local Area Planning (LAP) has increasingly become a vital planning instrument for addressing the complexities of urban development in developing economies. Unlike conventional master planning, which primarily adopts a city-wide, long-term perspective, it focuses on neighbourhood-level interventions by integrating land-use planning, infrastructure development, community participation, and environmental management. Rapid urbanization, population growth, and the expansion of informal settlements have exposed the limitations of traditional planning approaches in many developing countries. For efficiency in intervening the city areas ranging from wards to zones to boroughs as applicable administratively, this paper reviews the LAP approaches and its morphology in the developing economy with the intent of identifying the critical barriers, which will lead to or could become a basic framework for enabling policy formulation pertaining the concerned issue. The critical examination of the papers published in the timeline of last 50 years, gives a comprehensive narrative of the revision in approaches with policy revisions and also the gaps and critical barriers in implementing the LAP. The identified factors are related to Physical Infrastructure, Social Infrastructure and Governance based Institutional Barriers that are further sub categorised to 14 constructs in the conclusion segment.*

Keywords: Local Area Plan, Critical Barriers, Urbanisation, Developing Economy

1. Introduction

Rapid urbanization, population growth, and the expansion of informal settlements have exposed the limitations of traditional planning approaches in many developing countries. Consequently, LAP has emerged as an effective strategy for translating broader urban development policies into implementable, context-specific plans that respond to local socio-economic and spatial condition (UNHabitat, 2015). One of the most significant impacts of Local Area Planning is the improvement of urban infrastructure and public service delivery. Several studies indicate that neighbourhood-scale planning allows authorities to prioritize investments in roads, drainage systems, water supply, sanitation, street lighting, public transport, parks, and social infrastructure based on local needs rather than city-wide averages. Such targeted planning improves accessibility, enhances connectivity, and increases the efficiency of infrastructure provision. Furthermore, phased implementation through Local Area Plans enables urban local bodies to optimize limited financial resources while addressing critical infrastructure deficits in rapidly urbanizing settlements (UN Habitat, 2020). Environmental sustainability is another key benefit that comes with Local Area Planning. Many experts point out that planning at the neighbourhood level makes it easier to include climate-friendly urban designs, green infrastructure, stormwater management, biodiversity protection, and disaster risk reduction right into the community layout. Adding features like parks, green corridors, permeable surfaces, and sustainable drainage systems helps cities better handle flooding, reduce heat island effects, and tackle other climate-related challenges. Moreover, mixed land-use development and improved walkability promoted through Local Area Planning encourage non-motorized transportation and reduce dependence on

private vehicles, thereby contributing to lower greenhouse gas emissions and improved environmental quality. Within the Indian context, Local Area Planning has gained increasing prominence through national initiatives such as the Smart Cities Mission, the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), and the Model Urban and Regional Planning and Development Law. These initiatives recognize the importance of neighbourhood-level planning for improving urban governance and infrastructure delivery. Consequently, researchers advocate greater integration of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), digital planning platforms, participatory governance mechanisms, and performance monitoring frameworks to enhance the effectiveness of Local Area Planning.

2. Literature Review Findings

The entire globe is experiencing the centre of an urban revolution that is analogous to the one that attended the industrial development era, but currently, change is much more enormous. Currently, a double amount of population is residing in urban areas than used to live three decades ago. The urban revolution did not happen in an identical time frame. Instead, it was concentrated on a few identified regions of the world. India and China have witnessed a boom of three times in urban population only in the last three decades. In the last decade alone, China added 194 million urban population, which is greater than the whole population of Brazil. In contrast, India added 91 million, which exceeds the entire population of Germany. Urban revolutions are not majorly due to urban growth but rather an outcome of the severe and several social transformations they undergo. Urban revolutions of this order, it seems, change everything. Urban revolutions are closely related to shifts in the mode of economic production. The urban revolution in the 19th

century was closely associated with industrialization. Cities were the essential sites of production that necessitated human labour, and thus, urbanization was induced. As a cause, several scenarios developed: the method of production transformed; the urban social fabric was restructured, and a new class system was generated; urban lifestyles were revised; the meaning of work transformed; and the politics changed. Moreover, the consequences reached (F.A.R.) past the urban landscapes that so noticeably marked the revolution. Urbanization and industrialization, collectively, have driven the changes at broader scales, distressing national economies and stimulating international trade, requiring adaptive political comebacks by national states, and igniting imperialist inclinations with the new requirement for raw materials to keep manufacture apace. The initial consequences from the Indian Census 2011, released online by the Office of the Census Commissioner since mid-2011 (Government of India, 2011), show numerous enormously significant developments since 2001 that are probable to tolerate significance for upcoming years. First, India's total population growth rate for 2001–2011 decreased to 17.6 percent, the lowest level since Independence.

Second, India's urbanization rate, which had deteriorated in the two decades since 1981, has increased somewhat. The decreasing urban growth rates from 1981 to 2001 sharply contrasted with China's accelerating urban growth during this period and could be measured as adversative to modern development. Decadal urban growth augmented from 31.2 percent in 1991–2001 to 31.8 percent in 2001–2011. It has been a diffident upsurge, but the main point is that there has been an optimistic reversal. This reversal is more critical in amalgamation with a noticeable deterioration of the rural population growth rate that has touched an all-time low since the independence of 12.1 percent (Nijman, 2021).

Around four village clusters shaped a peripheral ring outlining urban Delhi; Najafgarh is one of them. According to the 1961 census, it had an overall population of 77029 on 79734 acres of land with 11757 dwelling units. It was the second-largest rural cluster in the expansion blocks after Shahdara. These villages went through a significant change over time. Planners' adage them as development blocks that acquired maintenance of the remaining agrarian purposes zoned out of central Delhi. The population of these villages was not like the stereotypically rural inhabitants, as they were part of the peripheral mind of the capital. The first Master Plan drafters of the city (indorsed in 1962) framed the term 'urban villages' to classify these villages that did not exhibit strict rural attributes (Sarcar, 2022).

At the onset, it is significant to classify some of the main local and international forces driving the reformation of Indian cities. This requirement arises from the situation that there has been a universal inclination, both in the current media and in conventional researchers, to link all forms of variation in society, economy, and culture to globalization. Undertaking so has obscured rather than illumined the definite developments of transformation proceeding and their insinuations. One of the key drivers of development and transformation in large Indian cities is demographics (Shaw, 2003). The majority, or around two-thirds, of the vast urban agglomerations have been increasing at advanced rates than

the national urban average. Just 8 out of the 35 metropolitan cities had a growth rate lesser than the national average (Shaw & Satish, 2007).

Studies were undertaken in the Delhi region; the National Capital Territory (NCT) Delhi is India's administrative and second financial capital. It became the most significant urban agglomeration, with a 23 million population in 2011. The Delhi Metropolitan Area (DMA) was categorized in the sub-urbanization phase of development, with extreme growth since 2001. It is projected to cross the threshold of counter-urbanization. Market- and government-based services have been recognized as accountable for the present developments in the Delhi region. Delhi was planned in the provincial context to decrease the invasion of migrants to the core by creating sub-centres similar to the region. The goal was to be achieved by regionalizing economic activities and residential allotments to the adjacent satellite towns recognized in the neighbouring states within a distance of 25-30 kilometres, amalgamating regional tax framework, and establishing a greenbelt for a better quality of life and edge its progress (Jain & Siedentop, 2014).

The urban villages in Delhi are the villages immersed in urbanization. These settlements happened as rural villages preceding some planning involvement. After rapid urbanization, they were cut down into urban areas and were renamed "urban villages." The urban village lands were also classified as 'Lal Dora.' Delhi grew up on agricultural lands attained by the villagers; a red line restricted the residential areas of the villages, and that is how the term Lal Dora came into use. Land use in the Abadi village inside the Lal Dora was sternly residential. Urban Delhi grew fast around them while the villages remained within the confines of their Lal Doras. Currently, the urban villages of Delhi characterize a procedure in which a rural settlement is wedged in the development of rapid urbanization of a conurbation. Thus, while such a settlement abruptly loses the basis of its living over the loss of pastures and losing (F.A.R.) as an economic activity, it has to alter to innovative types of economic activity it has not yet been acquainted with. Lal Dora was excused from the building bye-laws and severe building norms and guidelines structured under the Delhi Municipal Act. There was no necessity to smear the building sanction plans. Building control regulations frameworks were neither arranged in the Master Plan nor made operative in urban villages (Lal Dora or Extended Lal Dora). Under the specious but suitable assumption that such guidelines were not appropriate in the village of Abadi, the same would also not apply to urban villages. The urban villages were informed under section 507 of Delhi Municipal Corporation (DCM) in 1963, 1966, 1982, and 1994. The urban villages' distribution per the 1963, 1966, 1982, and 1994 statement. These villages, which were transported to the urban fold during the 1970s, are at present intensely marketed, high-density settlements outside the reach of the building bye-laws. Apart from this, the negligence of the development authority about the very transition process of the 'urbanizing villages' led to the expansion of another 'urban village' inside the urban development. This reinvigorated unrestrained as well as unintended development and overcrowding. The high-density built-up areas have been exercising compression on the prevailing infrastructure and facilities, resulting in high

ingesting of resources, distressing the urban ecology, and resulting in social insecurity. In the context of the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi. The evolution of the interface propositions due to urbanization has as considerably an influence as its outcomes in development. Urbanization outcomes in the alteration of land use, environment, and values of communities, explicitly in the boundary, thereby varying the city-regions ecology. The boundary is the territory of urbanizing villages with dissimilar concentrations and dissimilar scales of urbanization. The procedure guides the creation of urban villages, which, in contrast to Western realism, are frequently shaped into slums. The village of Abadi is limited to a constrained area. However, a slight assumption is specified to the problem of discovering space for the usual growth of the population and their requirements for substitute living resources after acquiring their agricultural land. Consequently, these urban villages endure the solemn problems of random growth, poor layout, congestion, degraded environment, lack of infrastructure, etc. These circumstances make the village susceptible to disaster. According to the latest Gazette Notification concerning Building Control Regulations for the village of Abadi dispensed on 17th January 2011 by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), all the present exclusions concerning sanctioning buildings in the village of Abadi terminate. Master Plan of Delhi 2021 mentions that building regulations are applicable for the urban villages; sanction of building plans are to be made obligatory; fire and earthquake standards are to be functional; buildings should not disregard the lift requirement rules; adulterating industries not to be legalized, household industries can be legalized; commercial usages only to be acceptable in areas with appropriate approachability by roads with width not less than 6 meters, i.e. the least prerequisite for fire safety guidelines; no projection outside the building line is permitted however. Yet, in the prevailing state, none of the buildings are constructed with endorsement from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). Henceforth, there is a violation of the standards.

The indicator is an outline that reflects a variable used for a study. An indicator indicates the occurrence or absenteeism of the perception of the study. The indicators are a primary milestone in suitable risk measurement to specify the precedence it justifies in the development process. These indicators apprehend the capacity to improve from or captivate the influence of hazardous phenomena, whatever their landscape and severity. The hazard could be appraised, taking risk and vulnerability into interpretation. Quantifying risk exclusively in corporeal terms has been mutual, given that social susceptibility is hard to appraise quantitatively. Nevertheless, risk indices should consider physical, social, and cultural risk features. The rationality of a risk model depends on the presence of reliable and good-quality data that gratify the weights of a conceptual model. There is a wide variability of methods integrating data and modelling risk. Risk measurement analyses the opportunity and influence of a hazardous occurrence, considering political, cultural, and psychological factors. The researcher highlights the degree of hazard and vulnerability by covering indicators. Thus, the indicators are the first step in appropriately measuring risk. The variable is anything that can take on diverse, fluctuating values. The researchers enlighten the inconsistency in the dependent variable. The variables accountable for hazards in

the urban villages are independent variables. The subsequent Composite Vulnerability Index contains 12 discrete indicators of Vulnerability. The researcher has used the contextual severe literature assessment to identify indicators and variables (Kumar, 2018).

Globally, the urban slum population is projected to grow by 27 million yearly from 2000 to 2020. In India, 104 million people are expected to reside in urban slums by 2017, and the maximum of this upsurge will happen in small cities that are under-resourced and under-served with administrative and planning abilities that are facing cumulative stress. Issues like the circumstantial of scarce resources predicted growth and limited institutional capacity to respond to such growth are observed. Studies suggest approaches to pursue spatial urban transformation in the background of the advent and development of slums in South Asian cities. Since the 16th century, slums have been the only low-income, large-scale housing resolution. Slums are settlements where a category of people contribute to building cities or more services are required, and the incidence of these settlements recommends that the city in which they are situated is economically efficacious. Circumstantially, slums are an important, prolific economic mediator of the urban economy. However, public authorities infrequently identify and discourse slums as fundamental or equal parts of the city. Slum settlements with extremely concentrated consumption and waste production outlines undergo and aggravate environmental degradation. UN-Habitat describes slums as settlements in which people have insufficient housing and essential services. They are categorized by uncertain residential status, insufficient access to safe water and sanitation and other infrastructure, poor-quality housing, and overcrowding. Meanwhile, UN-Habitat (2008) has located cities under the slum cities category, which designates that urban services in those cities are insufficient for rich and poor alike. The current development inclination designates that more than 70% of development happens outside the prescribed planning process as urban sprawl and 30% of the urban population survives in slums. As expansions extend, local authorities find it more challenging to deliver essential services due to the amplified cost of infrastructure supplies. These development trends have been recognized in old Indian megacities and emerging megacities. In Indian metropolises, only 70% - 80% of urban houses have sanitation facilities, and untreated water is discharged circuitously into rivers, lakes, and ponds. Therefore, 90% of the water supply is contaminated. In emerging megacities, the freshwater supply is limited to 2-3 hours daily. This state is known as shock urbanization, i.e., urbanization in which development overtakes infrastructure provision. Without enormous funds to recover urban infrastructure and living conditions significantly, most cities in India will face a major crisis in the future (Manisha Jain, Jörg Knieling, 2015).

(Chaplin, 2011) argues that sanitation policies have historically favoured centralized and top-down approaches, often neglecting the needs of slum dwellers and residents of unauthorized settlements. A major issue identified is the poor coordination among multiple planning and service-delivery agencies, resulting in inefficient infrastructure provision and maintenance. The paper further reveals that community-led sanitation initiatives have demonstrated success, yet their scalability and integration into formal governance systems

remain insufficiently explored. Consequently, future research should focus on institutional coordination, participatory governance, tenure security, and the long-term sustainability of community-managed infrastructure models to promote equitable and inclusive urban development in rapidly urbanizing Indian cities.

(Oostrum, 2021) critically observes that existing literature has primarily emphasized the physical transformation and redevelopment of urban villages, while comparatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding the influence of governance frameworks, regulatory policies, and socio-economic factors on their spatial evolution. Furthermore, the paper identifies a significant research gap in developing context-specific planning strategies that retain the intrinsic functional attributes of urban villages while simultaneously addressing deficiencies in infrastructure, environmental quality, and public amenities. The author argues that future research should adopt an integrated planning perspective by combining morphological analysis with Local Area Planning, participatory governance, and urban regeneration frameworks to ensure sustainable redevelopment without compromising the affordability, socio-economic resilience, and mixed-use character that define urban villages.

(Syal, 2025) identifies an important research gap in the limited understanding of how legislative overlaps, inter-agency coordination, and institutional networks collectively influence infrastructure accessibility in informal settlements. Furthermore, the study recommends extending the proposed regulatory overlap framework to other cities and integrating network-based governance approaches to better understand the interactions among governmental and non-governmental actors. Future research should therefore focus on developing coordinated institutional mechanisms, clarifying agency responsibilities, and strengthening collaborative governance models to ensure equitable, efficient, and sustainable infrastructure provision in rapidly urbanizing informal settlements.

(Sahasranaman & Bettencourt, 2021) demonstrates that although larger cities generally exhibit better infrastructure provision due to economies of scale, slum settlements continue to experience systematic under-provisioning when compared to formal urban areas. The authors identify a critical research gap in understanding the temporal evolution of infrastructure scaling and the regional variations influencing service delivery, particularly in smaller and economically weaker cities. Furthermore, the paper highlights the need for future research to integrate urban scaling analysis with localized planning interventions, governance mechanisms, and socio-spatial inequalities to develop context-specific strategies for improving infrastructure accessibility and reducing disparities between slum and non-slum settlements.

(Deshpande et al., 2019) through multiple case studies demonstrated that inadequate access to basic services, insecure tenure, weak institutional coordination, and limited community participation significantly constrain the resilience of informal settlements. The study further argues that conventional, top-down urban policies often fail to address the localized and heterogeneous needs of informal

communities, highlighting the critical role of grassroots organizations and participatory governance in bridging institutional gaps and improving service delivery. However, the paper identifies a research gap in understanding how adaptive capacity can be systematically integrated into urban planning and policy frameworks across diverse settlement contexts. Future research should therefore focus on developing context-specific, participatory planning models that strengthen institutional collaboration, enhance community agency, and improve the provision of infrastructure and essential services, thereby fostering resilient and inclusive urban development in rapidly urbanizing cities. (Ghia & Mukhopadhyay, 2024) demonstrated the redevelopment strategies in the slums of Dharavi precinct which showcased the barriers in facilitation of social and physical infrastructures by the local slum dwellers. (Reddy & Mukhopadhyay, 2024) conducted cohort surveys among the fishermen community affected in Hudhud cyclone that showcased the correlation of habitable spatial quality and social infrastructural facilitations.

3. Methodology

This review adopts a systematic narrative literature review approach to critically examine the impact of Local Area Planning (LAP) on urban settlements in developing economies. The review aims to synthesize existing knowledge, identify prevailing research trends, evaluate methodological approaches, and highlight gaps that warrant further investigation. A systematic search strategy was employed to ensure the transparency, comprehensiveness, and reproducibility of the review process. The review primarily considered peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2005 and 2025, while a limited number of seminal books, international planning guidelines, and policy documents published before this period were included to provide conceptual and theoretical foundations. Only publications available in English and directly related to urban planning, local area planning, neighbourhood development, governance, infrastructure planning, land-use management, and sustainable urban development were considered. Studies focusing exclusively on rural planning, engineering design, or unrelated policy domains were excluded to maintain the thematic relevance of the review.

Following the identification of relevant literature, duplicate records were removed, and the remaining publications were screened based on their titles, abstracts, keywords, and full-text content. The selected studies were subsequently classified into thematic categories, including planning frameworks and implementation, urban governance and institutional coordination, land-use planning and spatial development, participatory planning, infrastructure and service delivery, informal settlements, Transit-Oriented Development, and environmental sustainability. Particular emphasis was placed on empirical studies conducted in developing economies, with additional attention given to the Indian context due to its evolving policy emphasis on Local Area Planning. The selected literature was analysed through a qualitative thematic synthesis, whereby recurring concepts, methodological approaches, planning outcomes, implementation challenges, and policy recommendations were critically compared across studies. This interpretive

synthesis facilitated the identification of common patterns, areas of consensus, methodological limitations, and unresolved research gaps concerning the effectiveness of Local Area Planning in promoting sustainable urban development. The adopted methodology therefore provides a robust and comprehensive evidence base for evaluating the role of Local Area Planning in enhancing urban governance, infrastructure provision, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability within rapidly urbanising settlements of developing economies. The search strategy implied with the keywords, “Local Area Planning” OR “Local Area Appreciation” OR “Local Area Development” OR “Zonal Development Plan” OR “Ward Area Plan” AND “Developing Economy” AND “Urban Areas” from esteemed database and interface indexed in SCOPUS, Web Of Science, UGC CARE Listed or Approved Journals and Reports from various Bilateral or Multilateral Organizations.

4. Observation and Conclusion

For unauthorized colonies, disputed settlements, urban villages, informal settlements, and unplanned colonies in India, the barriers to accessing and utilizing social and physical infrastructure are multidimensional. Based on findings reported in recent urban planning, housing, infrastructure, and informal urbanism literature, these barriers can be grouped into institutional, physical, socio-economic, legal, governance, and environmental categories.

The critical barriers identified through the literature review and contextual assessment of unauthorized colonies, urban villages, and disputed settlements in India demonstrate that the challenges to sustainable urban development are multidimensional, extending beyond deficiencies in physical

infrastructure to encompass governance, socio-economic, environmental, institutional, and legal dimensions. These barriers are highly interdependent and collectively influence the accessibility, quality, and efficiency of urban services, thereby affecting the overall quality of life of residents. Recent studies have emphasized that the persistence of these barriers is largely attributed to fragmented governance structures, insecure land tenure, inadequate infrastructure investment, rapid urbanization, and weak participatory planning mechanisms (Chaplin, 2011), (Syal, 2025).

Among the identified constructs, physical infrastructure barriers constitute one of the most significant impediments to sustainable urban development. Deficiencies in potable water supply, sewerage systems, stormwater drainage, road networks, solid waste management, electricity distribution, and public transportation continue to constrain the livability of unauthorized settlements. Narrow internal streets, inadequate parking facilities, poor pedestrian connectivity, and insufficient emergency vehicle access further aggravate mobility and safety concerns. These deficiencies are often intensified by high population densities and unplanned urban expansion, resulting in excessive pressure on existing infrastructure systems (Chaplin, 2011), (Sahasranaman & Bettencourt, 2021). The review also identifies institutional and governance barriers as critical determinants of ineffective infrastructure provision. The involvement of multiple planning agencies with overlapping mandates frequently results in fragmented decision-making, regulatory ambiguities, bureaucratic delays, and poor inter-agency coordination. Such institutional fragmentation significantly limits the implementation of integrated planning initiatives, particularly within unauthorized colonies and urban villages where legal status and land ownership remain uncertain (Syal, 2025).

Figure 1: List of Factors and Constructs, Source: Author

Construct Code	Construct (Latent Variable)	Barrier Code	Critical Barrier / Indicator
C1	Physical Infrastructure Barriers	PI1	Inadequate potable water supply
		PI2	Poor sewerage network
		PI3	Inadequate stormwater drainage
		PI4	Poor road network and connectivity
		PI5	Traffic congestion
		PI6	Lack of parking facilities
		PI7	Poor pedestrian infrastructure
		PI8	Inadequate street lighting
		PI9	Irregular electricity supply
		PI10	Poor solid waste management
C2	Social Infrastructure Barriers	SI1	Inadequate healthcare facilities
		SI2	Lack of educational institutions
		SI3	Absence of community centres
		SI4	Deficiency of parks and open spaces
		SI5	Inadequate recreational facilities
		SI6	Poor public safety infrastructure
C3	Governance and Institutional Barriers	GI1	Fragmented institutional framework
		GI2	Poor inter-agency coordination
		GI3	Bureaucratic delays
		GI4	Weak implementation of planning policies
		GI5	Limited stakeholder participation
		GI6	Weak grievance redressal mechanisms
C4	Legal and Land Tenure Barriers	LT1	Unclear land ownership
		LT2	Land ownership disputes
		LT3	Delayed regularization of settlements
		LT4	Lack of formal property rights
		LT5	Complex land administration

		LT6	Restrictions on infrastructure investment due to legal ambiguity
C5	Socio-economic Barriers	SE1	Low household income
		SE2	Housing affordability constraints
		SE3	Informal employment
		SE4	High rental dependency
		SE5	Migration pressure
		SE6	Social inequality
C6	Environmental and Spatial Barriers	ES1	High population density
		ES2	Overcrowding
		ES3	Lack of open spaces
		ES4	Environmental degradation
		ES5	Flooding and waterlogging
		ES6	Poor climate resilience
C7	Housing and Built Environment Barriers	HB1	Dilapidated housing stock
		HB2	Poor structural quality
		HB3	High ground coverage
		HB4	Under-utilization of permissible FAR
		HB5	Inadequate habitable space
		HB6	Poor housing maintenance

Based on findings reported in recent urban planning, housing, infrastructure, and informal urbanism literature, these barriers can be grouped into institutional, physical, socio-economic, legal, governance, and environmental categories. These barriers are particularly relevant for Local Area Planning (LAP), urban redevelopment, and infrastructure assessment studies in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and other rapidly urbanizing Indian cities.

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