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Full Length Research Paper

Conceptualizing Growing Urban Centres: A Review from Literatures a reflection on studies of urban hubs

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Abstract

Studies on minor settlements which are characterized by urban life has been a challenge to many researchers on whether they should term them as small town or small urban centers. Many studies point out that researchers have concentrated on studying cities and big towns while neglecting the importance of studying small town/small urban centers. Naming is one thing, but putting them in different scales has also been a challenge. This article discusses this challenge on the town sizes and how should one identify it. If studies have concentrated on small urban centers while clear cut line on small town and big town has not been established, how is this argument relevant? There is a necessity to establish a clear line on small urban centers and big towns by considering things other than population size in order to have a clearly defined settlement category.

Keywords: Small town/urban centre, perceptions, concentration.

INTRODUCTION

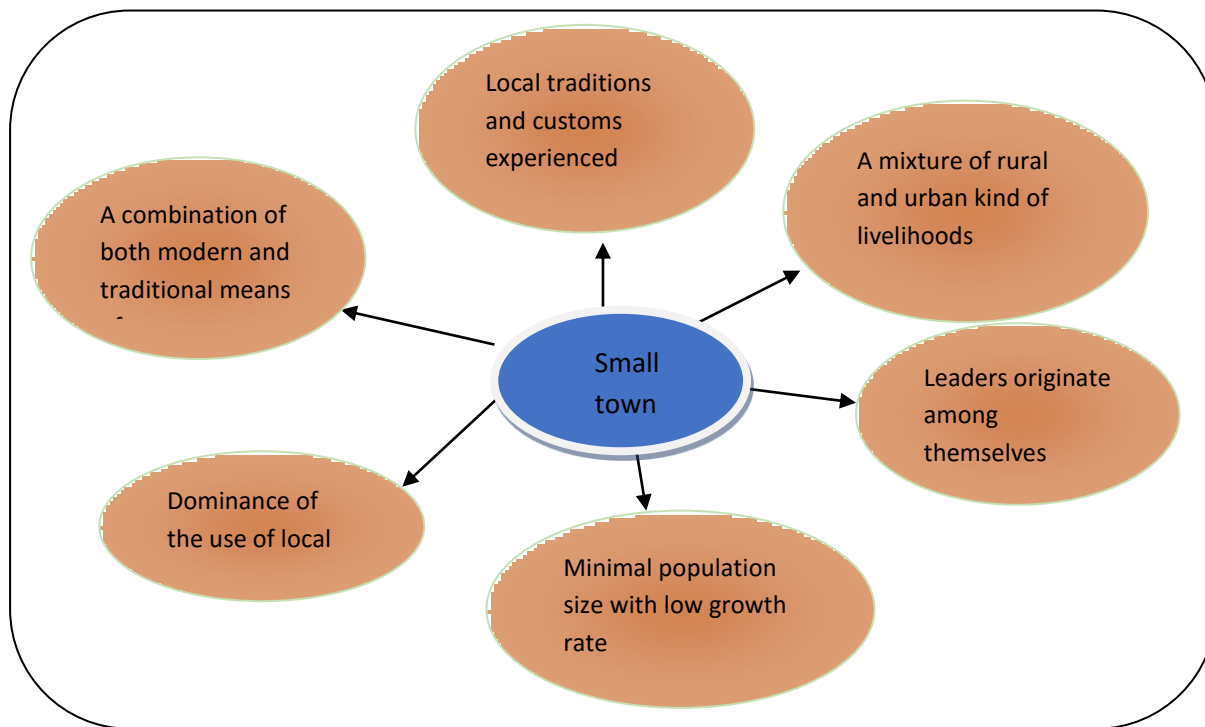
Studies on urban growth particularly those dealing with urban challenges have ignored the importance of studying small urban centers. Small towns are important centers of growth for both regional and country has been discussed in isolation to its general meaning and content. Several authors have discussed about its importance but without explicitly defining and explaining on what real constitute small towns. Some researchers have gone further by not even pointing out whether what they are studying are either small towns or big towns. As Muzzini and Lindeboom (2008) pointing out that there is no universal agreed definition for small town and even within a single country itself, there are variation to what can be termed as a small town.

Focusing on understanding whether studies have much concentrated on big towns while neglecting small towns have not real captured its core. This is due to the reason that there are a lot of studies on some intermediate and small centers to which no one can say whether is a small town issue or otherwise. Hardoy and Satterthwaite

(1988) have tried to show the weakness of considering small town by looking at population size that it can hide some crucial information. Baker, Pedersen, and Johnston (1992) have shown that population size cannot be a good measure of identifying small towns since more populous countries and regions have some small towns with population size which is higher than some big towns in less population countries such as the case of some countries in Asia and in Africa sub Saharan in particular.

Defining small towns by considering two blocks of developed and developing countries cannot again give a precise clear line since countries in respect to population size whether developed or developing are heterogeneous. But now how can we differentiate small towns from other town sizes? We have seen authors such as Roberts (2014) discussing about secondary cities, are these cities different from small towns? Do they fall within big towns and cities or in between? What categories of towns are these? Owusu (2005) differentiated small towns from secondary cities and

Figure 1: A conceptual definition of a small town



Source: Authors construct

major towns in his study for Ghana about the decentralization for promoting small town's growth. Can a concept town be defined by just population, economic activities and income of either individuals or town? How about the life styles, customs and traditions of individuals living in these urban centers? Who is responsible to bring forth universal definition and classification of small towns? Can an urban center be named synonymous with small towns?

Nevertheless different authors have shown the importance of considering small towns as engines for growth of the region and national at large they seldom considered traditions and customs which create activities of the town. Roberts (2014) emphasis that secondary cities are important points in determining development of both cities and small towns. This rise a query whether small towns or secondary cities have strong influence to the growth of the region and/or nation. Again it creates contradictions to whether what authors refer to as small towns are the same as secondary cities or they mean something very different. This is because in the same country you can find a town which you cannot tell whether is a second, third, fourth or at which level of order does it fall. In some sub-Saharan African countries there are town's population beyond what the government recognizes as small town but they still function as small towns or urban centers. This necessitate seriousness in describing what a small town is different from other level

of towns.

METHODOLOGY

This work has applied reviews of the literature to develop the argument about neglect of studies on small towns and/or urban centers. The reviewed articles have been considered as the stronghold to inform about the perceptions of biasness on studied areas. The information gathered from several studies has been used to inform about the ideas different authors have on what size is the area termed as a small town or city.

Meaning of small town

In explaining about the meaning of something someone is supposed to capture the content. One can ask why small? What are the important elements which make it regarded small? The point here is can distance from the metropolitan be considered as either small or big? Can someone draw a line of boundary between a big town and small town juxtaposed together? Can the political influence convince on this respect? Owusu (2005) in his study in Ghana tried to develop his own classification for the purpose of doing his research but he claims that there is no universal definition and even in Ghana they don't have, something which applies also to Tanzania. I have

tried to think and rethink about small towns due to its influence on the growth of other surrounding areas and attractiveness embedded to them for the surrounding communities.

As Christiaensen et al put, moving out of agriculture to town based activities in small towns is more poverty reduction than in cities (Christiaensen, De Weerd, & Kanbur, 2016). In their study authors have considered a city of more than 1 million people but the question remains at which marginal line on small towns were this argument measured?

Definitional challenges has posed difficulties in studying what we call small towns (Roberts, 2014) and this has developed neglect to them to the point that Bell and Jayne (2009) suggest their influences and reach be considered rather than their population size and density. The point here they are trying to raise is on reach and influence, but how can this be captured if the interest is lost and studies have not considered this town sizes? I think we need to reconsider defining these town levels than neglecting their identity.

Thinking on what could be a small town

How can a person feel that I am in a small town or a big town if they can get everything they want from it? Thinking about a town, authors have discussed about important elements of a town. On regard to what has been written, a small town could be a settlement with urban characteristics such as urban life, homogeneous society by means of their origin, relying on major means (factors) of production only in their area and surroundings and with both rural and urban characteristics. One may ask can this be enough to characterize small towns. There is no direct answer to this since due to their diversity and perceptions anyone can decide on how they can be named but by making a baseline definition this one captures a lot. Figure 1 tries to capture important components for a small town and how these features could explain on the characteristics and elements of its identity contained in. The interrelationship between the variables in the diagram show how small urban settlement can be explained and classified.

In the small towns is where traditional ceremonies and activities of some communities can be experienced. People from these areas dominate some income generating activities of the town since they are somehow homogeneous and still practice their traditional income generating activities such as farming, animal keeping, gardening (husbandry) and local trade.

In any attempt of getting leaders a small town is where native population come in power to rule because of perhaps their ability to know each other. This made the area or town to stagnate in some instances since leadership from this growing areas is not necessarily from a well capable people but rather the main point becomes who they are and to whom do they belong. Experience from big towns and cities has shown that being an inborn

does not necessarily make you in power or have influence to some development decisions. The rate of growth of population in the major towns and cities is also higher because of the natural increase and urban migration due to the promises of white-collar jobs and availability of social services.

Experience from Tanzanian context

Tanzania has the same system of recognizing small towns as point of growth. These towns though functions as servicing centers to the rural hinterlands for services, non-farm employment and technological innovation due to presence of small scale industries, still classification and definition of small towns is unclear. In regard to population size there is no real marginal line to whether a certain centers fall within a big village or small town as discussed. Muzzini and Lindeboom point out important contradictions which exist within a single country. In this case Tanzania is among the countries where definition of urban versus rural is not explicitly given (Muzzini & Lindeboom, 2008).

For Tanzania there are three perspectives to urban areas which fall under three different authorities. The first one is under the politico-administrative perspective in which its legal base is under the local government authorities Act 1982 which among others gives power to the minister responsible to declare any areas as a town within his/her areas of jurisdiction (Tanzania, 1982). Another perspective is embedded under the human settlement perspective in which its legal base is under the human settlement development policy which classifies settlement based on population size, level of service, economic base and level of sustenance (Tanzania, 2000). The third perspective on urban definition is rooted on statistical perspective in which smaller unit areas are considered. The principle followed by the national bureau of statistics (NBS) is of outlining enumeration areas of which under no situations should an EA cut across the existing boundaries of region or districts.

Under all these three perspectives some challenges still exist. While other considers administrative areas, others decide on their wish and merit whereas others detail what they are focusing on. In this way, it means even a study to be conducted cannot provide useful information across all sections of the same country since their perceptions and considerations differ. In some centers what calls to be a small town is rather different from what someone can term it as town. The other factors apart from population size as discussed earlier should be put into consideration for a study to align itself whether is of small town or otherwise.

CONCLUSION

The discussion on how urban areas can be categorized is in one side developed many questions. Authors on urban

issues have shown how research on small towns have been neglected without showing explicitly how they separated town sizes to understand studies concentration whether in small towns or major cities. A major city in one area cannot necessarily be a major city in another locality, a good example given has been the case of some countries in Asia such as India and china while less populous countries especially in sub-Saharan African countries. As provided above there is a need to understand ways of generalizing and classification of urban areas especially small towns so as to clearly explain and compare about the studies in both what we call small town and cities or secondary cities.

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