

This is the accepted version of the following article:

Palat Narayanan N (2019) World-class as a provincial construct: Historicizing planning in Colombo and Delhi. *Planning Theory* 0(0). DOI: [10.1177/1473095219892999](https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095219892999).

which has been published in final form at <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095219892999> .

World Class as a Provincial Construct: Historicizing Planning in Colombo and Delhi

Nipesh Palat Narayanan

Department of Sociology, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Correspondence: Nipesh Palat Narayanan (email: nipesh.ar@gmail.com)

Abstract

South Asia's burgeoning agglomerations are argued to derive their imageries from the abstracted northern notions of the urban, partially captured by the umbrella phrase – world-class. This article unpacks the notion of world-class using planning exercises in Colombo and Delhi. I argue that world-class cannot be seen in isolation to read the violence of urbanization, but when planning is historicized, visions like world-class present themselves as a subsequent logical step. Therefore, for any radical opposition to exclusionary planning, we need to look at the possibility of an epistemological rupture in the planning discourse rather than to critique the notion of world-class.

Keywords: Master plan, planning history, postcolonial, world class, southern urbanism, South Asia, urban planning.

Introduction

“The world has entered the urban millennium. Nearly half of the world’s people are now city dwellers...” were the starting lines of Kofi Annan’s foreword to the UN report (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, 2001: v). This ‘urban age’ assertion is resulting from a long lineage (since the 1960s) of UN data predictions. In academia, the urban age has become a ubiquitous background to frame and question the contemporary urbanization processes, including in works which critiques the theoretical incoherence of this framing (c.f. Brenner and Schmid, 2014).

The halfway urban mark is emphasized as a collective, as a global perspective, as a human phenomenon, dividing the world into urban and non-urban. However, at least since the 1960s (when the UN started publishing world urban-population data), except for Asia and Africa, all other continents were already well above 50% urbanized. The factor that makes this ‘halfway’ mark noteworthy is Asia and Africa’s anticipated share in it and the resulting renewed interest in cities of the so-called global South. However, urban theory developed by basing few cities in the West/North (Connell, 2011; Robinson, 2006), could not accommodate the vastly urbanizing new forms of agglomerations and processes in the South. This increasing urbanization of the South is either elucidated using planetary phenomena (Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Scott and Storper, 2015) or with a call for developing theory from the South (Connell, 2011; Watson, 2009), loosely framed under Southern or Postcolonial Theory. The attempt in devising epistemological innovation in understanding Southern cities (Schindler, 2017) further divides urban into ‘the urban’ and ‘other urban’, using the othering process which social theorist has explored elsewhere (Brons, 2015; Jensen, 2011). ‘The urban’ being the one which is explored via critical urban theory and ‘the other’ which still needs newer theoretical underpinnings. This global trepidation has resulted in an academic reading of Southern urban development, using the lens of Northern urban theory (or as a counter to it), and consequently by the development agencies in the South as a means to ‘catch-up’ with ‘the urban’. One war cry which captures this development planning narrative is the aspiration to be a world-class city.

The world-class takes 'the urban' and renders it as a desirable urban class, which ought to be achieved by eliminating the 'other urban' (Rao, 2006). Developmentalist projects, in this manner, are often geared towards eliminating this vaguely constructed notion of the other. In this article, I will look into the idea of world-class, in two South Asian cities of Colombo and Delhi.

Various authors have critiqued the idea of world-class, causally linking it to disenfranchisement of citizens within cities. Being world-class is rendered as a planning agenda which justifies state violence, both in Colombo (Godamunne, 2015; Spencer, 2016) and in Delhi (Bhan, 2016; Ghertner, 2015). In this article, I historicize the modern planning exercises in Colombo and Delhi, to argue that being world-class is quintessentially a local construct. This local construct has developed as a result of planning history and it is this historical development that is resulting in exclusionary planning. The idea of world-class is not an aspiration copied from the west, e.g., Delhi's desire to be Paris or Colombo's desire to be Singapore, rather, the Paris and Singapore in these discussions are hyperreal ideals (c.f. Chakrabarty's (2000) notion of hyperreal Europe) constructed from within and having a local colonial imprint (King, 1977), i.e., these hyperreal ideals emanate from the historical progression of planning exercises. I will juxtapose Colombo and Delhi, to illustrate their differing planning histories and the resulting dissimilar ideas of the world-class.

In the following section, I will develop the theoretical outline of the paper by arguing that world-class read via global image flows is an ethnocentric view. Thereafter I will discuss planning in Colombo and Delhi in two thematic sections. First, I will trace the emergence of world-class in the latest planning documents of Colombo, relating it to its historical evolution. Second, I will unpack the vision stated in the latest planning document of Delhi as being world-class. The article thereafter juxtaposes these two distinct ideas of world-class from Colombo and Delhi. I will conclude by suggesting that any critical political position needs to take into account the planning history, emphasizing the need for an epistemological rupture rather than merely critiquing the idea of world-class.

World-Class and Knowledge Hegemony

To unpack the notion of world-class beyond global image flows, we need to read it through a framework of intersectionality between the process of worlding and knowledge hegemony. Critiquing the knowledge hegemony of the West/North, Connell (2011) mobilizes the term metropolis (for North/West) and periphery (for South/East). Although she uses these terms interchangeably, applying the terminology metropolis and periphery will help us introduce the scale factor to the discussion, as well as, to emphasize the political notion of the terms North and South. Situating these discussions in the urban milieu, Ong (2011) has argued the importance of cities in the worlding of urban Asia, delineating it as:

“We stay close to heterogeneous practices of worlding ... a non-ideological formulation of worlding as situated everyday practices identifies ambitious practices that creatively imagine and shape alternative social visions and configurations – that is, “worlds” – than what already exists in a given context.”
(Ong, 2011: 12)

The ‘art of being global’ as Ong (2011) outlines, lies in the cities, both as agents of worlding and the target of such formulations. To unpack the worlding exercises, we need to take it out of the ‘non-ideological’ formulations of Ong and juxtapose it with the critique of the metropolis. Taking it out of this formulation would highlight, how we may agree to multiple worlds as Ong claims, but the world that is worlded is dependent on its resemblance to the metropolitan notions of the urban. This resemblance could either be in the form of its deviance (e.g., poverty, informality) or its aspiration (e.g., to be world class). In this array of multiple worlds only a few (mostly ones that resembles the metropolis) get highlighted and is pictured as belonging to a certain place/city (Massey, 1993; Perera and Tang, 2013). Therefore, what is worlded in attempts to make the cities world-class need further enquiry and its metropolitan bias enunciated.

Discussing Eurocentrism in urban studies, Patel argues the hegemony of knowledge production. She articulates that:

“Fuelled by imperialism and colonialism, these processes [of Eurocentrism] negated this colonial and imperialist history, and universalized them through the model of scientific knowledge. As a consequence, this scientific knowledge argued...[among other things] that the non-Atlantic region [periphery] did not have these productive and intellectual resources and thus needed to emulate those that emerged in the Atlantic region [metropolis]...”(Patel, 2014: 40–41)

The project of critiquing/countering Eurocentrism is not new, neither is the enunciation of its hegemony and the permeating need to be copied by the world elsewhere, from Amin’s assertion of how:

“societies at the peripheries are trapped in the impossibility of catching up with and becoming like the societies of the centres...”(Amin, 2009: 8)

to the opposite spectrum of political positions like that of Kannepalli Kanth’s assertion that:

“... a “modernist” frame was slowly and painfully crafted in the periphery such that a “new,” alien, societal form bearing no connection with either its own heritage or culture now stood lumbering, uncertain of itself, and ever looking to Western inspiration to keep itself upright.” (Kannepalli Kanth, 2005: 121)

The aim of juxtaposing these various critiques and rationalizations regarding copying the west or worlding is done precisely to highlight its long-standing diverse existence and to unpack the notion of world-class which has a global connotation inbuilt into it. When Ong’s (2011) assertion of how cities are worlded, is juxtaposed with the knowledge hegemony discussions of Connell (2011) and Patel (2014), we see the tension between two contradictory claims. First, that the knowledge hegemony of metropolitan cities, renders the peripheral cities in a manner that the periphery perpetually aspires to copy the metropolis in its worlding efforts. Second, the subordination or ‘catching up’ is imagined and imposed from the metropolis onto the periphery, denying periphery the capability to imagine for itself. If cities in the periphery imagine their future within the matrix of metropolitan hegemony, then how do we explain the myriad imaginations that results from this? That is, how do we explain the difference between Bangalore (Nair, 2005) or Delhi’s (Dupont, 2011) rendering of Singapore as an epitome of city design (and city ness), as opposed to

Colombo's (Steinberg, 1984) rendering of the same Singapore as an economic success story of a country via its city?

If the global imagination is ideologically driven by metropolitan knowledge-hegemony, then we also need to enquire into this worlding process's manifestation within the periphery, where these imaginations are exhibited and developed. That is, not how the metropolitan hegemony dominates the narrative of what a city is, but also how this hegemony is locally adopted or appropriated. The point here is not to deny the hegemony of metropolitan knowledge, but to counter the universalization of this hegemony and emphasize the scale factor which I mentioned in the beginning of this section. At a global scale, the centrality of metropolitan knowledge is evident, however, when the reading is reversed as to how the metropolis is rendered in the periphery, we cannot use the same global lens. Which is to say that, it is palpable to claim that the domination of metropolis results in rendering metropolitan knowledge as universal; however, it is an error to claim that rendering of the metropolis in the periphery is also universal. An enquiry into the world-class phenomenon demonstrates this universalization of metropolitan renderings in the periphery. By comparing the different notions of world-class in Colombo and Delhi, I intend to enunciate this local appropriation, an approach which Perera and Tang (2013: 18) calls "theorizing from inside-out".

The world-class discussions are rooted in the global-city conceptualizations (King, 1990; Sassen, 1991). The global-city presents a hierarchy for cities based on their capabilities to modulate global capital flows. King (1995) conceptualizes the city as a representation and thus opens the possibility of enquiring, hegemony of different representations, which presents themselves as universal. He renders the city as a cultural construct as opposed to the economic one of the global-city discussions and goes on to develop the power dynamics within this construction, asking:

"... in addition to working with imagined constructs of 'the city', we are also working with imagined constructs of 'the world'. 'World-class city' (or, indeed, cities 'out of this world'), for example, already assume a positionality, a standard from which the rest are to be measured - but a standard of what, and according to whom?"(King, 1995: 217)

When, this framework of thinking is applied to non-global peripheral cities, the focus shifts onto the peripheral city's efforts and plans to improve their position in the global-city hierarchy or to be world-class as the 'standards' are set by the metropolis. Fu and Murray (2014) elaborated one such process of importing images to Johannesburg and other South African Cities. They argue that the importation of Vegas-style spectacle was devised to modulate capital flows and climb up the hierarchy of global cities. This image importation or appropriation is ascribed to exclusionary visions of the city to be a world-class one, which consequently disenfranchises the marginalized populations. Bose's (2014) argument of reshaping Kolkata via the imagery of its diaspora; to Spencer's (2016) showcasing of the postwar race to develop Colombo; to Nagaraj's (2016) description of disenfranchisement of the poor and simultaneous development of luxury housing in Colombo; to Fuglerud's (2017) work describing the cleaning of Colombo to welcome foreign investment; to Dijk's (2017) conceptualization of world-class in India as a neoliberal utopia, are all emblematic of this.

The discussions on violence of urbanization (Pedrazzini et al., 2014), on one side, are conceptualized as exclusionary visions (as discussed above) and on the other side by delineating structures which enable them. Ellis (2012), outlines how the participatory planning process in Chennai is designed to exclude the marginalized. She illustrates the process by which the elite appropriates and legitimizes the claim to be the representative of all city dwellers. Such exclusionary processes are further explored by Ghertner (2015), who enquires into the image consciousness of the judiciary system in Delhi which subsequently renders the urban poor as illegitimate and thus illegal. Similar is the imagination of public via elitist discourse in road development and making Mumbai a world-class city as explored by Anand (2006) or in Delhi by Truelove and Mawdsley (2011) via the discourse of a clean city.

This process of appropriation of representation by elites and the imposition of their ideas about the city as fundamental and legitimate, using the façade of being world-class is theorized by Baviskar (2002, 2003) as bourgeois environmentalism. In this theorization, the rendering of the city and consequently the world-class is seen as the one mobilized and controlled by the elites. Let us read bourgeois environmentalism through King's (1995) conceptualization of world-class as a

standard, set by the elites (bourgeois). The elite control over the institutions and their cultural hegemony is facilitating their idea of world-class to be hegemonic in nature. This framework is mobilized, as discussed above, by various authors to highlight the exclusionary vision and processes of making a city world-class. However, it remains unclear on how this elite idea of the city is moulded in the first place, and further, is this idea different across various contexts. This article is an attempt to fill this gap in the literature.

Outlining cultural imperialism, Hannerz (1997) argued the need to develop scenarios from the periphery. In this regard, the metropolitan hegemony of illustrating the aspiration to be world-class, prerequisites to be highlighted and countered. To render the idea of world-class as universal across various peripheral cities is an ethnocentric position, one which Connell (2014) and Patel (2018) have warned us against. The usage of world-class vision and processes, as a façade to justify violent urbanization by the state is true, but to establish a causal link between the two is to ignore the existence of contextual historical progression (Huxley, 2013) of city conceptualizations and to marginalize the agency of the peripheral city to imagine an urban, of its own. One possible way to provincialize the world-class discussion is to look at its evolution across different city-conceptualization exercises as well as recognize the local constructs. A move which Jazeel (2011) outlines as thinking geographically, to critically historicize and provincialize (Sheppard et al., 2013) as opposed to metropolitan universalization. That is, to enunciate and acknowledge the differing notions of urban in the peripheral cities and explore their historical evolution, as opposed to illustrating world-class as an attempt of ‘other urban’ to be ‘the urban’.

Methods

A documented version of city conceptualization over time are the various planning exercises, archived as Master Plans. Therefore, to uncover the different ideas of world-class in Colombo and Delhi, I use the master plans drafted for these cities over time, which in both cases, were incidentally written by/with the help of experts from the metropolis.

The starting point of the interventions in Colombo is taken as 1921 when Scottish planner Patrick Geddes published his report (henceforth Geddes Plan) (Geddes, 1921). Thereafter, there has been at least ten more plans, six of them in last three decades itself. To understand the myriad planning exercises in Colombo, we can broadly categorize them as regulatory plans and project-based plans. Regulatory plans are the ones which intends to achieve desired results by primarily proposing regulations, e.g., land use planning/controls, building byelaws. First regulatory plan in Colombo was introduced in 1985, thereafter in 1999, and the current one, being an amendment to the 1999 plan, was introduced in 2008 and is valid until 2020. Project-based plans are the ones which intends to realize its vision by primarily proposing projects as catalysts, e.g., new infrastructure, industrial hubs. Geddes Plan was a project-based plan and thereafter, similar plans were made in 1940, 1948, 1978, 1998, 2002, and the latest one in 2016 with a vision for 2030 (Ministry of Megapolis and Western Development, 2016).

The starting point of the intervention in Delhi is taken to be 1962 when the first master plan was notified. Unlike Colombo, Delhi has had only regulatory¹ master plans. Delhi developed two more master plans thereafter with perspective for 2001 (Delhi Development Authority, 1990) and 2021 (Ministry of Urban Development, 2007). Unlike Colombo, in Delhi all the three plans were developed using similar planning process and by the same governmental organization.

This article argues that the historical progression of planning is the causal factor for brutal urbanization projects being carried out under the vision of world-class and not the global image flows. In this regard, the planning histories of both the cities are first analysed separately using qualitative content analysis framework (Neuendorf, 2002; Weber, 1990). Thereafter, the results (notion of world-class) from both the cities are juxtaposed. In this manner, I was able to look at planning exercises in both the cities, which were carried out at different points in time and via different planning tools, yet compare the results in the end.

¹ *Except for the City Development Plan in 2007, which was exclusively prepared for availing funds from Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission.*

Tracing the World-Class in Colombo

The latest project-based plan of Colombo, titled ‘The Megapolis: Western Region Master Plan’ (henceforth Megapolis Plan) was introduced in 2016 and is projected until 2030 (Ministry of Megapolis and Western Development, 2016). The aim of the plan is to aid:

“Sri Lanka’s forward march to achieve the status of **‘A High Income Developed Country’**” (Ministry of Megapolis and Western Development, 2016: 2) *emphasis original*.

The key aspect of the plan is that it binds the city of Colombo with the entire Western Province and envisages it as a megapolis, to aid the overall economic development of Sri Lanka. The plan is the flagship project of Sri Lanka’s United National Party (UNP), which wanted to implement it in the early 1990s with Japanese assistance. However, due to multiple changes in the government, it did not shape until 2016 when UNP was back in power. In an opinion piece, Wickremesinghe (2011), the current Prime Minister who was then in the opposition, presented the broad idea of the Megapolis Plan. The Megapolis Plan was presented as a physical illustration of the otherwise policy driven promises in Sri Lankan electoral politics – economic growth, employment, infrastructure and so on. Wickremesinghe did not argue for a world-class city, rather for a hub which will dominate the economic activities in South Asia. Later on, the 2015 UNP election-manifesto mentions the development of megapolis under economic agendas, as a plan to attract foreign investment.

The assertion of megapolis to be the best in South Asia, is an aspiration of regional geopolitics of ports, to become an intermediary between Dubai and Singapore. However, this ‘being best’ discourse changed during the drafting of the plan, which was aided by a Singapore consultancy firm. Entry of the Singapore firm changed the projection of the megapolis from ‘being best’ to ‘being like Singapore’ in the media, which Wickremesinghe (2011) has been opposing ever since. This aspiration to be like Singapore emanates historically since the late 1970s onwards with the liberalization of Sri Lankan economy and the political rhetoric of comparison of Colombo with the ‘developed’ port city/state of Singapore (Steinberg, 1984).

Wickremesinghe's distancing from the term world-class is also partially due to its usage by the political rival Rajapaksa under whose presidency (2005-15), brutal beautification drives for making Colombo a world-class city were carried out (Amarasuriya and Spencer, 2015; Correspondent, 2013), very similar to what Ghertner (2015) and Bhan (2016) describe in Delhi. In a speech, the then Urban Development Secretary (President Rajapaksa's brother) claimed:

"I am confident that ... together with the other initiatives of the Government to develop Colombo, will help transform this city into a truly world class one...I am hopeful that the international community and especially the World Bank and other development agencies will continue to grant their assistance to us at this crucial point in our nation's history, when we strive hard and with determination to achieve economic development."(Rajapaksa, 2012)

I juxtapose these two political opponents with differing plans and ideas for Colombo to highlight the underlying similarity of their objectives and position. In both the cases, the economic development of Sri Lanka is causally linked to physical development of Colombo. Colombo is imagined as a city in South Asia. Furthermore, this physical development of Colombo has to come via expanding it. The vision for the currently under-construction port-city in Colombo's reclaimed shore, captures both these aspects:

"Building a World Class City for South Asia... The catalyst for growth ..."
(*CHEC Port City Colombo (Pvt) Ltd*, n.d.)

These two crucial themes of Colombo's world-class can be traced back to the planning history of the city as opposed to the global image flows. Although politicians across party lines have been using various cities as hyperreal ideals to project visions for Colombo, their renderings of these cities, from Singapore to Dubai, has quintessentially revolved around the two crucial themes outlined above.

Imagining Colombo within the larger geographical area of South Asia can be linked back to Colombo's importance as a port city. From Geddes Plan (Geddes, 1921) onwards, Colombo as a city is presented with locational advantage resulting from its port. The port being a geopolitical asset was essentially a colonial construct, which came as a result of trading posts and development of Portuguese Indian Ocean space

(Perera, 1998). However, Geddes Plan, linked this imagination to physical planning. When Geddes was invited to Colombo, one of the local concerns was the municipality's lack of funds for planning, which at that time was still considered a luxury. Therefore, Geddes oriented the report to justify his planning attempts and even suggested creation of a planning office. To make his case, he placed Colombo as an extremely important city for the then global British empire:

“The increasing progress of transport in the generation ended by the recent war had brought Colombo into the extraordinary and unexpected position of the third port of the Empire, and the fifth in the world. So now with renewing and ever-increasing shipping, we have the most direct of incentives towards a spacious forecast of the city's future. And since this progress is increasingly dependent, not simply upon the prosperity and growth of Ceylon [Sri Lanka], but, as regards shipping, still more upon the growth of Imperial, and even world... Large forecasts and ample preparations for the future are thus fully justified, even urgently necessary.”(Geddes, 1921: 5)

Note Geddes' linking of Colombo's development to the imperial growth of the entire British empire and Sri Lanka. In this manner, Geddes, who was initially invited to suggest solutions for parochial urban issues like flooding and slums, positioned himself to instead suggest a bold vision for the city. Geddes further used this argument to extend his city improvement suggestions, justifying the need for social infrastructure like museums, aquariums, zoological parks, and recreational parks.

The colonial project based out of ports has resulted in the city of Colombo (De Silva, 1981). Colombo was a small city, arguably due to lack of historical urban development on the site, as the pre-colonial cities of Sri Lanka were on agriculturally rich North Central Province. Envisioning Colombo, as a city of global importance, therefore justified the local urban expansion. Geddes devised various plans and suggestions for expansion, e.g., the one below, which will resonate with today's transit-oriented development schemes:

“[talking about train connections to Colombo]...at all stations within easy distance of Colombo a town planning scheme should be initiated, with say, 100 acres for local habitation and business development, and with a substantial

reservation of another 100 acres or so for homes for season ticket holders.”
(Geddes, 1921: 6)

Geddes' positioning regarding Colombo led him to overcome another local concern, which at the time was based on the fear of Colombo growing beyond its city limits (Perera, 2008). He instead turned it around and made expansion of Colombo not only a desirable proposition but one that also is urgently needed, filling his plan with numerous expansion schemes. Both these positions of (i) linking Colombo's growth with Sri Lanka's development, and (ii) proposals for expanding the city of Colombo, are progressively reiterated and developed in the later planning exercises. The plans introduced in 1940, 1948, 1978, and 1998, all increased the planning coverage area of the city (Gunaratna, 2002) to finally call for a Western Province plan in 2002, which was a precedent to the Megapolis Plan of 2016.

Over these reiterations, a certain image of desirable and undesirable urban comes into being. When the city of Colombo and its expansion is imagined as a project for the country's economic growth, then the initiatives that emanate from it need to be also of economic nature. As an abstract, anything that fuels economy becomes the desirable urban and which does not, as undesirable. These desirable and undesirable urban classification leads to material and ecological constructs that drive the planning exercises. From Geddes' (1921) zoological park, to postwar beautification drive (Amarasuriya and Spencer, 2015), to the development of megapolis (Ministry of Megapolis and Western Development, 2016), were all justified using this economic reasoning of spending by tourists, of foreign investments, and of becoming a high-income country. Thus, the aspiration to be Singapore or Dubai is rendered in these very economic terms – as a financial node in global capital flow, and a city which is big enough to offer economies of agglomeration. It is therefore, insignificant as to what Singapore is, but its local rendering as an economic success story is what matters when Colombo wants to be like Singapore or uses the term world-class. This idea of world-class as generated from within, becomes clearer when we compare it with a different kind of world-class being developed in Delhi, in the following section. I will further discuss this by juxtaposing the arguments from Colombo and Delhi in the section thereafter.

Unpacking World-Class in Delhi

The latest master plan, titled 'Master Plan for Delhi—With the Perspective for the Year 2021' (henceforth 2021 Master Plan), states its vision to be a world-class city and defines this as:

“Vision-2021 is to make Delhi a global metropolis and a world-class city, where all the people would be engaged in productive work with a better quality of life, living in a sustainable environment. This will, among other things, necessitate planning and action to meet the challenge of population growth and in-migration into Delhi; provision of adequate housing, particularly for the weaker sections of the society; addressing the problems of small enterprises, particularly in the unorganized informal sector; dealing with the issue of slums, up-gradation of old and dilapidated areas of the city; provision of adequate infrastructure services; conservation of the environment; preservation of Delhi's heritage and blending it with the new and complex modern patterns of development; and doing all this within a framework of sustainable development, public-private and community participation and a spirit of ownership and a sense of belonging among its citizens.”(Ministry of Urban Development, 2007: 1)

To unpack this vision, we can divide it into two parts (i) the desire, i.e., what it wants the city to be, and (ii) the action, i.e., on how planning will achieve this desire. The desire is “to make Delhi a global metropolis and a world-class city”. Similar to the notion of megapolis and world-class in Colombo, 2021 Master Plan also uses global metropolis and world-class interchangeably, albeit with a different connotation. The connotation of world-class is enunciated further through the action part of the vision. This action part can be further categorized into two, (i) problems to tackle (the undesirable urban), and (ii) things to promote (the desirable urban). The undesirable urban is constructed via a call to (i) tackle population growth and in-migration (ii) reduce housing deficit for urban poor (iii) solve problems of unorganized informal sector, and (iv) deal with the issue of slums and dilapidated areas of the city. Further, the desirable urban is constructed via a call to (i) provide

adequate infrastructure services, and (ii) conserve the environment and heritage of Delhi.

From the above categorization of desirable and undesirable urban, it can be argued that the idea of world-class in the 2021 Master Plan equates to (i) arresting population growth and related issues of slums and informality, and (ii) building infrastructure while conserving environment and (built) heritage. The academic critique of world-class in Delhi has been largely concentrated on these two interrelated focus of building new infrastructure while ‘solving’ the issue of slums/informality (Baviskar, 2003; Rao, 2010). The violence of urbanization in Delhi is assigned to the western image flows, liberalization of economy, and the aspirational aesthetics of being world-class (Baviskar, 2014; Dupont, 2011; Ghertner, 2015). However, the above construction of world-class in the 2021 Master Plan can be traced back to the historical planning exercises.

Planning in Delhi has a long history, nonetheless for this article, an entry point could be the inauguration of New Delhi as the capital of British India in 1931. After which, the native city of Shahjahanabad (later to be termed Old Delhi) got rendered as a congested city because of large in-migration. The then Delhi Improvement Trust (DIT) was given the task to decongest it (cf. (Legg, 2007)). DIT, however, was heavily criticized for its piecemeal and partisan approach, leading to an enquiry committee, which submitted its report in 1950. Since the criticism of DIT was focused on it not having any larger understanding of the city, predictably therefore, one of the DIT enquiry committee report’s suggestion was to make a citywide umbrella organization, which will look into the wholistic planning of Delhi. As a result, Delhi Development Authority (DDA) started its operation in 1957.

Criticism of DIT was not about its aim to decongest Delhi, but its inability to implement it; therefore, DDA was imagined as an organization which will be able to carry forward the decongestion activities effectively. Around the same time, Master Plan for Delhi was being prepared. DDA was entrusted with the implementation of the plan and came up with the first plan in 1962 (henceforth 1962 Master Plan) (Delhi Development Authority, 1962).

The 1962 Master Plan preceded with a work-study of the city. The preamble of the work study begins as:

“Delhi, with its population doubled since 1941, was in dire need of some drastic surgery, dynamic proposals to accommodate its expected growth... As a result the preparation of a Master Plan for Delhi and its region was undertaken. ... It is hoped that the preparation of this plan will point the way towards solving the growth problems that are besetting other urban areas in the country. In this respect the proposed plan becomes an all India prototype.”(Delhi Development Authority, 1960: xvii)

Subsequently, the introduction of the 1962 Master Plan starts as:

“To check the haphazard and unplanned growth of Delhi ...” (Delhi Development Authority, 1962: i)

The 1962 Master Plan was conceptualized to tackle the problem of population growth and issues that arise as a consequence of it, a continuation of the colonial construct. Furthermore, the aspiration was to develop Delhi “as a major world capital” (Delhi Development Authority, 1960: xvii). Unlike Colombo where the idea was to be a significant node in South Asia/world economy, the worlding of Delhi was inward looking and was aimed at making it a showcase of India, which may further be copied by other Indian cities. To make Delhi the showcase city, a lens for the world to look at India, the 1962 Master Plan suggest various measures to conserve built heritage and environment on one side and decongestion measures on the other. The planning in Delhi was neither to climb up the hierarchy of global cities nor to be a copy of the metropolis, rather to stage India’s own modern outlook. This showcase role assigned to Delhi could be linked to the political ideology at the time, which was focused on cities to modernize and decolonize India (Singh et al., 2019). This idea of global metropolis becomes prominent in the second master plan (henceforth 2001 Master Plan), with its preamble stating:

“Delhi, the focus of the socio-economic and political life of India, a symbol of ancient values and present aspirations, the capital of the largest democracy, is assuming increasing eminence among the great cities of the world... Imbued in it, is the history of centuries... presently growing at unprecedented pace... It

should be able to integrate its elegant past as well as the modern developments...” (Delhi Development Authority, 1990: i).

Looking at the historical evolution of planning, Delhi's world-class is imagined via two interlinked themes. First, to make Delhi a showcase city, which results in investment of spectacular infrastructure like flyovers, wide avenues, metro rails, and 'beautification' of the city. Second, to arrest and accommodate the population growth, a colonial discourse as discussed above, which results in exclusionary planning and initiatives to remove slums/urban poor. Delhi's much criticized brutal projects of being world-class, especially in light of the 2010 Common Wealth Games (Baviskar, 2016; Sarkar, 2014; Sengupta, 2016), were all geared towards realizing the above two themes. However, when historicized, these exclusionary projects emanate from the planning history as a logical progression of city conceptualization, rather than merely from the aspiration to be a copy of the west or appropriation of imported imagery. The idea of Delhi emanating from historical planning exercises, requires it to be exclusionary by decongesting itself and building a spectacular city for the world to look at.

Planning projects draped under the idea of making Delhi a world-class city are often exclusionary and therefore pictured in the literature as being prophesied by the elite or driven by middle-class aesthetics. However, this idea of world-class, is in contrast, a continuation of earlier city-conceptualizations of Delhi. This conceptualization of the city therefore, is what has been appropriated by the bourgeois to profess its environmentalism. As we have seen in this section, the world-class articulated in the 2021 Master Plan is a logical progression of previous planning exercises, from colonial construct of the native city, to the 1962 and subsequently the 2001 Master Plans (although without using the term world-class). The need to be a showcase city of India and at the same time regulate population growth has been reiterated in all the planning documents. In this manner world-class as rhetoric is a mere signifier, a catchphrase to market the planning exercises. These planning exercises would have been equally brutal even without the term world-class. This argument becomes clearer when we further juxtapose the world-class of Colombo and Delhi in the next section.

Juxtaposing world-class of Colombo and Delhi

The world-class in Colombo and Delhi, both have a global connotation but are intrinsically different. In Colombo, the global rendering is to make it a city of South Asia, which will control large capital flows via its port. In Delhi, the world-classness is to be achieved by preserving existing heritage/environment, developing infrastructure for the global spectacle, and to decongest the city. The aspirations like Singapore, Dubai, Paris, and London are evoked by politicians in both the cities to provide a signifier, a hyperreal ideal (Chakrabarty, 2000), to the already constructed and constricted idea of world-class (Flowerdew, 2004). Such usages give dividends in electoral politics, as Perera and Tang (2013: 12) points, because:

“Nevertheless, the hegemonic understanding of the city – which emerged through a combination of external and internal factors – leads many Asian subjects to identify with more Western values that are hegemonized as universal.”

In a situation of such hegemony, the planning projects uses exotic reference points, such as ‘world-class’ (or smart cities). However the justification for these world-class projects emanates from historical evolution of city conceptualization and local understanding of the particular exotic references. The infrastructure component in Colombo’s world-class is to garner foreign capital investments and in Delhi it is to be a spectacle. The growth component in Colombo is to achieve the economies of agglomeration to be able to both absorb and recirculate the anticipated capital, and contrarily, in Delhi, the decongestion is to reduce the population growth and the undesirable connotations ascribed to it. This difference is further highlighted in the way the urban imageries to be a world-class city is manifested through projects on ground. One such project would be that of slum demolitions/relocation/upgradation, which in both Colombo and Delhi is blamed upon the idea of being world-class. However, the differing world-class in both the cities also lead to a differing rationality for such projects.

The slum demolitions in Delhi are done to make way for new infrastructure, even if not needed, because the making of Delhi into a spectacle demands it (Bhan, 2016; Ghertner, 2010). Therefore, such actions in Delhi are rationalized under the need for

infrastructure which will make the city 'look' world-class (Ghertner, 2015). Contrarily, in Colombo, the slum demolitions although carried out to make it a world-class city, are justified by the motive of making way for the global capital to manifest its development potential and make Sri Lanka a developed country (Nagaraj, 2016; Spencer, 2016). The violence of demolition and relocation is the same in both the cases, nonetheless the rationality governing this action is different. Here I am asking the Weberian question articulated by Jacobs (1994) as moral syndromes associated with economic reproduction strategies that have opposite outcomes for cities, i.e., to ask: why would a planner choose to demolish slums and brutally displace lives? I argue that it is the city conceptualization that enables and justify such actions. It is therefore, politically stifling to critique the aspiration to be a world-class city as a means to counter this violence of urbanization and further narrowing of it via universalization.

The vision of world-class is globally linked and the peripheral cities are worlded, not to be the metropolis, but to fulfil their locally constructed imaginations of the city. These imaginations although having strong colonial links, e.g., British colonial town planning imports in both Colombo and Delhi, takes divergent development trajectories. The world-class aspirations of peripheral cities, therefore, cannot be rendered universal through the developmentalist and ethnocentric lens, which illustrates the peripheral cities' urbanization as an attempt to copy or catch-up with the metropolis and miserable failing in that endeavour. Rather, it is a provincial construct, emanating from local history.

Conclusion

In this article, we have seen how the world-class is essentially a provincialized aspiration deriving from the local city conceptualization, driven historically and worlded via metaphors of the metropolis. However, the world-class has been universalized as an attempt by the periphery to catch-up with the metropolis, which reiterates the colonial prerogative. This colonial prerogative dehistoricizes the periphery and creates a knowledge system where the periphery is perpetually incapable of thinking and acting by itself. Such a conceptualization has had a twofold impact. First, development of theory is illustrated via the need to

understand the myriad processes, which the periphery mobilizes in order to be like the metropolis, i.e., an overt emphasis on epistemology. Second, the structural (urban) violence in the periphery is passed over to the global aspirations, denying possibility of any local political action.

World-class as a notion indeed have global connotations and planetary implications, however, in teasing out the global, which is dominated by the metropolis, the possibility of resistance in the periphery is devalued. In this manner, the critique of world-class as a tool for normalizing and justifying the violence of urbanization, misses the critical point of its local evolution. A possible consequence of such a critique is the change of the metaphor, to replace the axiom ‘world-class’ with another catch phrase, yet continue with a similar oppressive structure. An example of this can be seen in Colombo, on how after Rajapaksa’s vehement and brutal usage of world-class has resulted in the political opponent Wickremesinghe distancing himself from it, yet adhering to the same idea of what Colombo should be. For a critical position, we need to question the planning history and city conceptualizations, which has led to these processes in the first place. Therefore, this paper argued to change the structure which results in exclusionary planning and not the agency being garnered by the metaphor of world-class. The age of urban compels us to see the world as speedily urbanizing and majority of us as being urban dwellers. However, just as the definition of the urban is different in different countries (one of the statistical critiques of the urban age), the aspiration to be urban and what this urban means, also differs. The idea of urban, shall not necessarily be a copy of the Eurocentric ‘urban’.

References

- Amarasuriya H and Spencer J (2015) “With That, Discipline Will Also Come to Them”: The Politics of the Urban Poor in Postwar Colombo. *Current Anthropology* 56(S11): S66–S75.
- Amin S (2009) *Eurocentrism: Modernity, Religion, and Democracy: A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.
- Anand N (2006) Disconnecting Experience: Making World-Class Roads in Mumbai. *Economic and Political Weekly* 41(31): 3422–3429.

- Baviskar A (2002) The politics of the city. *Seminar* 516.
- Baviskar A (2003) Between violence and desire: space, power, and identity in the making of metropolitan Delhi. *International Social Science Journal* 55(175): 89–98.
- Baviskar A (2014) Dreaming Big: Spectacular Events and the ‘World-Class’ City: The Commonwealth Games in Delhi. In: Grix J (ed.) *Leveraging Legacies from Sports Mega-Events*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 130–141.
- Baviskar A (2016) Spectacular events, city spaces and citizenship: The commonwealth games in Delhi. In: Anjaria JS and McFarlane C (eds) *Urban Navigations: Politics, Space and the City in South Asia*.
- Bhan G (2016) *In the Public’s Interest: Evictions, Citizenship and Inequality in Contemporary Delhi*. Geographies of Justice and Social Transformation Series 30. Georgia: University of Georgia Press.
- Bose PS (2014) Living the Way the World Does: Global Indians in the Remaking of Kolkata. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 104(2): 391–400.
- Brenner N and Schmid C (2014) The ‘Urban Age’ in Question. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38(3): 731–755.
- Brenner N and Schmid C (2015) Towards a new epistemology of the urban? *City* 19(2–3): 151–182.
- Brons LL (2015) Othering, an analysis. *Transcience, a Journal of Global Studies* 6(1): 69–90.
- Chakrabarty Dipesh (2000) *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- CHEC Port City Colombo (Pvt) Ltd (n.d.) Port City of Colombo. Available at: <http://www.portcitycolombo.lk/about/> (accessed 21 February 2019).
- Connell R (2011) *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*. Reprinted. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell R (2014) Using southern theory: Decolonizing social thought in theory, research and application. *Planning Theory* 13(2): 210–223.
- Correspondent A (2013) Cementing Hegemony. *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 48(Issue No. 34).
- De Silva KM (1981) *A History of Sri Lanka*. London, Berkeley, and Los Angeles: C Hurst & Company and University of California Press.
- Delhi Development Authority (1960) Work Studies Relating to the Preparation of the Master Plan for Delhi - Volume 1.
- Delhi Development Authority (1962) Master Plan for Delhi. Government of India.

- Delhi Development Authority (1990) Master Plan for Delhi - Perspective 2001. The Gazette of India: Extraordinary.
- Dijk T van (2017) The Impossibility of World-Class Slum-Free Indian Cities and the Fantasy of ‘Two Indias’. In: Kuldova T and Varghese MA (eds) *Urban Utopias: Excess and Expulsion in Neoliberal South Asia*, pp. 19–36.
- Dupont VDN (2011) The Dream of Delhi as a Global City. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35(3): 533–554.
- Ellis R (2012) ‘A World Class City of Your Own!’: Civic Governmentality in Chennai, India. *Antipode* 44(4): 1143–1160.
- Flowerdew J (2004) The Discursive Construction of a World-Class City. *Discourse & Society* 15(5): 579–605.
- Fu AS and Murray MJ (2014) Glorified Fantasies and Masterpieces of Deception on Importing Las Vegas into the ‘New South Africa’: Importing Las Vegas into the ‘new South Africa’. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38(3): 843–863.
- Fuglerud Ø (2017) Manifesting Sri Lankan Megalomania: The Rajapakses’ Vision of Empire and of a Clean Colombo. In: Kuldova T and Varghese MA (eds) *Urban Utopias: Excess and Expulsion in Neoliberal South Asia*, pp. 119–138.
- Geddes P (1921) Town Planning in Colombo: A preliminary report. Government Record Office, Ceylon.
- Ghertner DA (2010) Calculating without numbers: aesthetic governmentality in Delhi’s slums. *Economy and Society* 39(2): 185–217.
- Ghertner DA (2015) *Rule by Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Godamunne N (2015) Development for whom? Reimagining urban development in Colombo, Sri Lanka. *Journal of Urban Regeneration & Renewal* 8(2): 186–192.
- Gunaratna KL (2002) The Spatial Evolution of Colombo and Needed Interventions for the Future. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka* 47: 1–34.
- Hannerz U (1997) Scenarios for Peripheral Cultures. In: King AD (ed.) *Culture, Globalization, and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 107–128.
- Huxley M (2013) Historicizing Planning, Problematizing Participation: Historicizing planning, problematizing participation. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37(5): 1527–1541.
- Jacobs J (1994) *Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books.

- Jazeel T (2011) Spatializing Difference beyond Cosmopolitanism: Rethinking Planetary Futures. *Theory, Culture & Society* 28(5): 75–97.
- Jensen SQ (2011) Othering, identity formation and agency. *Qualitative Studies* 2(2): 63–78.
- Kannepalli Kanth R (2005) *Against Eurocentrism: A Transcendent Critique of Modernist Science, Society, and Morals: A Discursus on Human Emancipation: Purporting to Be a Speculative Critique and Resolution of the Malaise of Modernism*. 1st. ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- King AD (1977) Exporting ‘Planning’: The Colonial and Neo-Colonial Experience. *Urbanism Past & Present* (5): 12–22.
- King AD (1990) *Global Cities: Post-Imperialism and the Internationalization of London*. International library of sociology. London ; New York: Routledge.
- King AD (1995) Re-presenting world cities: cultural theory/social practice. In: Knox PL and Taylor PJ (eds) *World Cities in a World-System*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 215–231.
- Legg S (2007) *Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi’s Urban Governmentalities*. RGS-IBG book series. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Massey D (1993) Power-geometry and progressive sense of place. In: Bird J, Curtis B, Putnam T, et al. (eds) *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*. London: Routledge: 59-69
- Ministry of Megapolis and Western Development (2016) The Megapolis: Western Region Master Plan. Ministry of Megapolis and Western Development.
- Ministry of Urban Development (2007) Master Plan for Delhi—With the Perspective for the Year 2021. The Gazette of India: Extraordinary.
- Nagaraj VK (2016) From smokestacks to luxury condos: the housing rights struggle of the millworkers of Mayura Place, Colombo. *Contemporary South Asia* 24(4): 429–443.
- Nair J (2005) *The Promise of the Metropolis: Bangalore’s Twentieth Century*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Neuendorf KA (2002) *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Ong A (2011) Worliding Cities, or the Art of Being Global. In: Roy A and Ong A (eds) *Worliding Cities Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*. Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Patel S (2014) Is there a ‘south’ perspective to urban studies? In: Parnell S and Oldfield S (eds) *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South*. 1 Edition. London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

- Patel S (2018) Rethinking Urban Studies Today. *Sociological Bulletin* 67(1): 1–19.
- Pedrazzini Y, Vincent-Geslin S and Thorer A (2014) Violence of Urbanization, Poor Neighbourhoods and Large-Scale Projects: Lessons from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. *Built Environment* 40(3): 394–407.
- Perera N (1998) *Society and Space: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Postcolonial Identity in Sri Lanka*. Transitions--Asia and Asian America. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.
- Perera N (2008) The Planners' City: The Construction of a Town Planning Perception of Colombo. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 40(1): 57–73.
- Perera N and Tang W (eds) (2013) *Transforming Asian Cities: Intellectual Impasse, Asianizing Space, and Emerging Trans-Localities*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Rajapaksa G (2012) Metro Colombo Urban Development Project will transform city into a world class one: Gotabaya. *Daily Financial Times*, 2 June. Colombo. Available at: <http://www.ft.lk/opinion/metro-colombo-urban-development-project-will-transform-city-into-a-world-class-one-gotabaya/14-90113> (accessed 21 February 2019).
- Rao U (2010) Making the Global City: Urban Citizenship at the Margins of Delhi. *Ethnos* 75(4): 402–424.
- Rao V (2006) Slum as theory: the South/Asian city and globalization. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30(1): 225–232.
- Robinson J (2006) *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*. Questioning cities. New York: Routledge.
- Sarkar S (2014) Remaking the 'World-Class City': The Commonwealth Games as a media event in 'Emerging India'. *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture* 5(2): 215–230.
- Sassen S (1991) *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Schindler S (2017) Towards a paradigm of Southern urbanism. *City* 21(1): 47–64.
- Scott AJ and Storper M (2015) The Nature of Cities: The Scope and Limits of Urban Theory: The nature of cities. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39(1): 1–15.
- Sengupta M (2016) Non-place, dispossession, and the 2010 Commonwealth Games: An urban transformation analyzed. *City, Culture and Society* 7(4): 259–266.
- Sheppard E, Leitner H and Maringanti A (2013) Provincializing Global Urbanism: A Manifesto. *Urban Geography* 34(7): 893–900.

- Singh G, Kahlon S and Chandel VBS (2019) Political Discourse and the Planned City: Nehru's Projection and Appropriation of Chandigarh, the Capital of Punjab. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*: 1–14.
- Spencer J (2016) Securitization and its discontents: the end of Sri Lanka's long post-war? *Contemporary South Asia* 24(1): 94–108.
- Steinberg F (1984) Town planning and the neocolonial modernization of Colombo. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 8(4): 530–548.
- Truelove Y and Mawdsley E (2011) Discourses of Citizenship and Criminality in Clean, Green Delhi. In: Clark-Decès I (ed.) *A Companion to the Anthropology of India*. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 407–425.
- United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (ed.) (2001) *Cities in a Globalizing World: Global Report on Human Settlements 2001*. London ; Sterling, VA: Earthscan Publications.
- Watson V (2009) Seeing from the South: Refocusing Urban Planning on the Globe's Central Urban Issues. *Urban Studies* 46(11): 2259–2275.
- Weber RP (1990) *Basic Content Analysis*. 2nd ed. Sage university papers series no. 07-049. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications.
- Wickremesinghe R (2011) Colombo is Colombo. *Sunday Times*, 25 September. Available at: http://www.sundaytimes.lk/110925/News/nws_28.html (accessed 21 February 2019).