Town Planning Machinery
Enquiry into Staffing Adequacy

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Globally, planners play a vital role in planning liveable, sustainable and resilient cities. In the Indian context, planners and planning need to be placed at the heart of our development process. By undermining our states' town planning machinery and shunning town planners from the task of planning our cities, we, in turn, risk undermining the potential benefits of such programmes to urban India.

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The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Urban Development reviewed the subject of town and country planning in India on 19 April 2016 wherein the state of staffing and recruitment processes of the state town and country planning departments (TCPDs) was a distinct topic. The Town and Country Planning Organisation (TCPO) of the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India has recently reviewed its recruitment processes for town planners. It has brought in necessary amendments that are in tune with the demands of a rapidly urbanising India and also considered the evolving contours of the urban planning workforce in the country. This study offers relevant insights into the state of staffing of town planners in state TCPDs and highlights potential areas for improvements.

The axis of global economy continues to shift southward. India is projected to take over the United States (US) as the world's second largest economy in purchasing power parity terms by 2050 (PwC 2015). Urbanisation in India will double over the same period both as cause and consequence, concordant with the postulates of classical urban economics (Brueckner 2011).[1] Managing the influx of over 400 million people in existing and future urban areas engenders a challenge of unprecedented scale for a country that has focused on rural development for the larger part of its post-independence history.[2] Yet, the potential implications of failure to address this challenge assume cataclysmic proportions as cities remain the underrated key to the global struggle for reducing carbon emissions (Bloomberg 2015; Erickson and Tempest 2015).

Insofar as cities remain key to India's future position as an economic powerhouse, urban and regional planning remains central towards ensuring the creation of an environment where "the fast-growing urban population of India
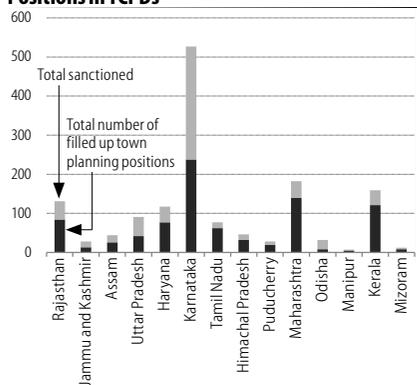
can live with higher standards of public service delivery and contribute to growth" (Ahluwalia et al 2011: 23). India's tryst with urban planning as a policy subject goes back to the Third Five Year Plan (1961–66) when states were recommended to constitute TCPDs staffed with adequate trained personnel (TCPO 1962). The primary functions of the TCPDs include providing advice to the respective state governments on all matters concerning town planning and assisting local authorities in preparing master plans and preparation of regional plans for significant areas of the state (TCPO 1996).

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment acts in 1992 mandated the devolution of regional and urban planning functions to district planning committees (DPCs)/metropolitan planning committees (MPCs) and urban local bodies (ULBs), respectively. This utopian reform has, however, largely escaped the realities of urban governance in Indian states for the past 25 years since the promulgation of the act (Planning Commission 2013). Meanwhile, parastatal organisations such as development authorities (DAs) have been set up in large cities by the state governments to guide their urban development in a planned manner. In the midst of this policy push towards devolution and reluctance of the state governments to do so, TCPDs have continued to have a role in ensuring planned development of small and medium towns which are not covered under the jurisdictions of parastatal DAs and where power devolution has not occurred either. Lapses on part of the TCPDs to perform this primary function have led to the present "near crisis situation with respect to urban service delivery in the cities of India" (Ahluwalia et al 2011: 61).
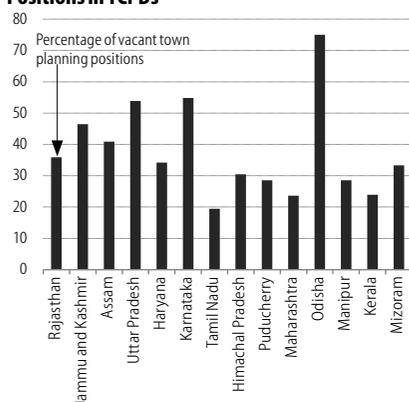
It is worthwhile to note here that small and medium towns are likely to carry the bulk of future urbanisation that occurs in India (Revi et al 2011). The unabated uncertainty associated with power devolution in municipal governance means that a large component of India's urban future may rely on the ability of TCPDs to perform their core functions properly. Adequate and appropriate staffing is central to the optimal performance of any organisation, with TCPDs being no exception.

Figure 1: Sanctioned and Vacant Town Planning Positions in TCPDs

Figure 2: Percentage of Vacant Town Planning Positions in TCPDs

state TCPDs with respect to town planning positions. For the purposes of this study, "adequacy" has been defined in terms of total sanctioned town planning positions, percentage of vacant town planning positions and the percentage of town planning positions being held by town planning professionals within the TCPD.
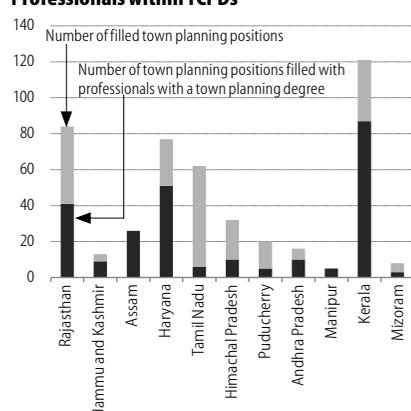
Methodology

In line with the objective of the study, data was acquired through the Right to Information Act, 2005 from various state TCPDs/concerned departments over a period of eight months. The data included the following:
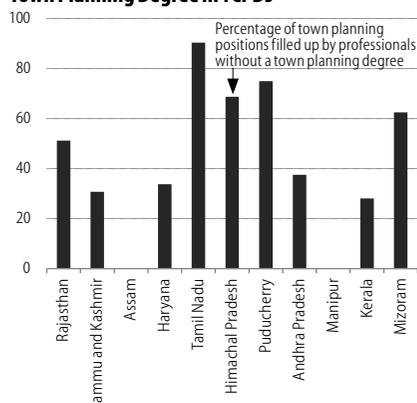
(i) Total sanctioned, filled-up and vacant town planning positions within the department including the organisational hierarchy.

(ii) Total town planning positions within the department filled up by town planning professionals (defined as personnel possessing either an undergraduate or postgraduate degree/diploma or both in town planning from an institute recognised by the Institute of Town Planners, India).

(iii) Latest recruitment rules applicable for all town planning positions.

It may be noted here that data on all aspects was not received from all state TCPDs, as many states had failed to give data. Table 1 gives the list of states for which the data was received, the concerned department that provided

Figure 3: Employment of Town Planning Professionals within TCPDs

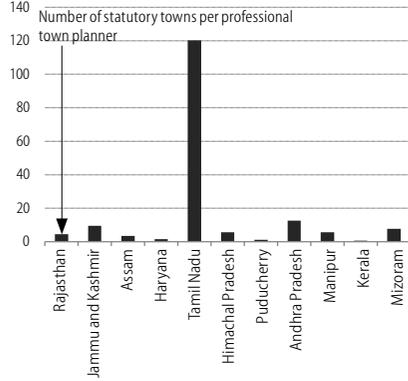**Figure 4: Employment of Professionals without Town Planning Degree in TCPDs**

the data and the time stamp of data indicating its recentness. In all, the states and union territories (UTs), for which data is available, constitute almost 62% of India's population (2011) and 66% of India's statutory towns (2011).

Town Planning Positions

Figure 1 shows the total number of sanctioned and filled up town planning positions, while Figure 2 shows the percentage of vacant town planning positions within the state TCPDs. In terms of absolute numbers, Karnataka and Maharashtra appear to be reasonably well-staffed. An average of 38% positions across 14 states and UTs are vacant with Odisha, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh having the highest percentages of vacant town planning positions.

Employment of Professionals

Figure 3 shows the number of town planning professionals employed within the TCPDs and Figure 4 shows the percentage of town planning positions

In light of this discussion, a need emerges to examine the state of staffing of TCPDs, particularly in the absence of any analyses on this subject. This study has been conceived and conducted by the Indian School of Business with an objective of assessing the staffing adequacy of

Table 1: List of States/ UTs for Which Data Was Obtained

Serial No	State/UT	Population in Millions (2011)	Number of Statutory Towns (2011)	Concerned Department	Time Stamp of Data
1	Andhra Pradesh	49.7	126*	Directorate of Town and Country Planning	17.10.2015
2	Assam	31.2	91	Directorate of Town and Country Planning	08.03.2016
3	Haryana	25.4	80	Directorate of Town and Country Planning	06.01.2016
4	Himachal Pradesh	6.9	56	Town and Country Planning Department	22.12.2015
5	Jammu and Kashmir	12.5	86	Town Planning Organisation	12.03.2016
6	Karnataka	61.1	220	Town and Country Planning Department	11.08.2015
7	Kerala	33.4	58	Town and Country Planning Department	29.03.2016
8	Maharashtra	112.4	255	Town Planning and Valuation Department	26.02.2016
9	Manipur	2.9	28	Town Planning Department	17.03.2016
10	Mizoram	1.1	23	Directorate of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation	28.03.2016
11	Odisha	42.0	107	Directorate of Town Planning	22.03.2016
12	Puducherry	1.2	6	Town and Country Planning Department	16.11.2015
13	Rajasthan	68.6	185	Town Planning Department	09.03.2016
14	Tamil Nadu	72.1	721	Directorate of Town and Country Planning	23.11.2015
15	Telangana	35.2	N.A.	Directorate of Town and Country Planning	20.11.2015
16	Uttar Pradesh	199.3	648	Town and Country Planning Department	02.02.2016

*Includes those of Telangana.

Figure 5: Number of Statutory Towns per Professional Town Planner Employed within TCPD

held by professionals without a town planning degree. Across 11 states and UTs, an average of 43% town planning positions are filled up by professionals without a town planning degree. Meanwhile, very few states like Assam and Manipur are reporting that all town planning positions are filled up by only professionals. Further, many states such as Jammu and Kashmir and Tamil Nadu have less than 10 town planning professionals employed across in the TCPDs. Moreover, as Figure 5 shows, Tamil Nadu has an abysmal ratio of one town planner per 120 statutory towns.

Eligibility Criteria

The situation above follows from the problem of eligibility of professionals with and without a town planning degree for holding town planning positions within TCPDs as laid down in the latter's recruitment rules. Out of 10 states for which data is available as shown in Table 2, a

Table 2: Employability Status of Town Planning Professionals in State TCPDS

States/ UT	No of Town Planning Professionals Employed within TCPDs	No of Statutory Towns per Employed Town Planning Professionals	Educational Degree in Town Planning as Mandatory	Under-graduate Degree in Town Planning Recognised as Competent Educational Qualification
Andhra Pradesh	10	12.6	No	No
Assam	29	3.1	Yes	No
Haryana	51	1.6	Yes	Yes
Jammu and Kashmir	9	9.6	No	Yes
Manipur	5	5.6	Yes	No
Mizoram	3	7.7	Yes	Yes
Odisha	NA	NA	Yes	No
Tamil Nadu	6	120.2	No	No
Karnataka	NA	NA	No	No
Telangana	NA	NA	No	No

degree in town planning is mandatory for town planning positions only in four states. Meanwhile only three states recognise an undergraduate degree in town planning as a competent educational qualification towards eligibility (as against a degree in civil engineering or architecture which is deemed eligible). While the former nullifies the purpose of acquiring professional training in town planning, the latter accentuates it by precluding undergraduate planning professionals from town planning positions.

Conclusions

The findings of this study clearly indicate the need for a significant infusion of town planners in the state TCPDs judging by the high percentage of vacant town planning positions within most of them. As depicted in Figure 6, by filling up all current vacant positions in TCPDs, one can achieve an average of one town planning official per three statutory towns as against the current ratio of one town planning officer per five statutory towns.

Figure 6: Number of Statutory Towns per Filled Up and Sanctioned Town Planning Position

The employment and employability of town planning professionals within the state TCPDs is an additional and perhaps larger concern. The recruitment rules (RRs) for hiring personnel for town planning positions within TCPDs are dated in most states and do not account for the rise in supply of trained town planners from over 20 schools/universities offering undergraduate and postgraduate town planning programmes in the country today. The RRs were laid down at a time

when eligibility was limited to trained town planners for town planning positions. It might have been perceived as an impractical luxury and civil engineers/ architects were required to fill in for the job. This clearly is no longer the case. As per data from the School of Planning and Architecture in Delhi, Bhopal, Vijayawada and the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT) University alone, a total of 516 postgraduate and 276 undergraduate planners (approximately 800 trained planners in all) have entered the workforce in the past five years. In comparison, there are roughly 600 vacant town planning positions within the 15 states/ UTs for which data was obtained for this study.

It is worth emphasising that a town planner (either an undergraduate or a postgraduate) is trained in various skills required for wholesome planning of cities and regions. These skills are ranging from statistical analysis of socio-economic data to understanding and conducting effective public participation, survey design and data collection, mapping, land use and density zoning, demand estimation and management of urban basic services such as transportation, water supply, sewerage and solid waste, environmental management, addressing needs of the urban poor and urban development financing and institutional mechanisms, to classify broadly. In addition, town planners are exposed to a wide range of social science subjects that enable them to grasp the wider potential socio-economic repercussions of urban planning decisions. Other professionals such as a civil engineer or an architect

cannot match up to these skill sets as they are not trained to and their proficiency lies in other domains. By putting a professional, technically qualified in other disciplines, into a town planner's job can at best lead to inefficiency, or at worst, create possibilities for catatonic policy and planning decisions.

Globally, planners play a vital role in planning liveable, sustainable and resilient cities. With global challenges being manifested in the Indian context too, such as in the form of disasters, climate change, growth of slums, etc, planners and planning need to be placed at the heart of our development process. India plans to create "100 smart cities" primarily in response to challenges and opportunities posed by urbanisation that is set to double by 2050. By undermining our states' town planning machinery and shunning town planners from the task of planning our cities, we, in turn, risk undermining the potential benefits of such programmes to urban India.

The TCPO revised its recruitment rules in 2012 making a degree in town planning mandatory for all town planning positions along with recognising the undergraduate degree as a competent degree towards eligibility for such positions within TCPO. There is merit in state TCPDs to follow suit and relook at their staffing situation and recruitment processes and attune them to the changing needs of a rapidly urbanising country.

NOTES

1 Urban share of gross domestic product (GDP) in the Indian economy grew from 37.7% in 1970–71 to 63% in 2014–15 and is projected to rise to 70–75% by 2020 (*Business Standard* 2014; Sankhe et al 2010). India's urban population currently at 410 million is projected to rise to 814 million by 2050 (UN 2015).

2 The first national-level grant-based government programme focusing on urban development came in 2005—roughly six decades after independence—in the form of Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM).

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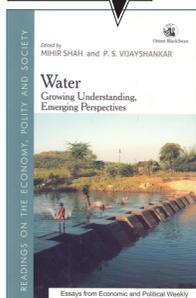
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