

Blurring Boundaries: The Shifting Rural-Urban Divide and the Rise of Urban Villages

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Abstract

The dichotomy between rural and urban areas has long affected academic debates, policy decisions, and common-sense knowledge. This is because urban areas are usually presented as centres of development, and rural areas, in comparison, are depicted as static. On the other hand, research on urban villages and peri-urban areas shows the flexibility of spatial classification, thereby casting doubt on this rigorous division of urban and rural. This paper investigates historically the framing of the rural-urban divide, its effects on governance, and the necessity of a more integrated perspective in the present times that recognises the connectivity of urban and rural emerging from the peculiar case of urban villages or peri-urban zones.

Keywords: *Rural-urban divide, urban villages, peri-urbanization, spatial transformation, post-liberalization*

Introduction

The conceptual divide between rural and urban spaces has long shaped academic discourses, planning paradigms, and developmental policies. Based on early sociological ideas, this two-way split has often shown rural areas as old-fashioned, static, and economically dependent on farming, while urban areas have been linked to progress, changing economies, and complicated social relationships (Simmel, 1903; Bendix, 1964). Such conceptualizations have deeply influenced governance structures, leading to the formulation of distinct policy measures for rural and urban regions. While urban areas were prioritized for industrialization and infrastructural expansion, rural development policies were focused largely on agrarian growth and poverty alleviation (Chenery et al., 1975). This differentiation has not only structured economic planning but has also reinforced the perception that rural and urban exist as separate, self-contained entities.

However, in the last few decades, scholars have questioned how rigid this two-way split is. They say that rural and urban are not two separate, set categories, but rather

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