

Planning Unit- Kerala Context

(Draft for circulation)

A neighborhood is taken as a planning unit universally. But due to the peculiar settlement pattern existing in Kerala, a neighborhood of conventional type is not existing here and hence it is difficult to take neighborhood as a planning unit. This necessitates the identification of a planning unit relevant in the Kerala context and is attempted here.

The existing nature of the physical, social and economic development of an area is to understand in the first hand in order to identify a planning unit relevant to that area.

Nature of Physical Development

All over Kerala, it is like a large number of small and medium towns distributed in the village background. It is very difficult to demarcate the end or beginning of a town and a village in Kerala. Here exists **urban rural continuum**. Regarding planned intervention of any sort in the physical structure of a place, it can be seen that it is the minimum in Kerala. In those few areas where there are some sort of planned interventions in the physical development, it is achieved through Master Plans, Detailed Town Planning Schemes and Building Rules formulated based on Municipalities Act. This is enforced only in the urban areas of the State. It implies that there are practically no guiding tools for the physical development in majority of the areas of the State and the development there is organic in nature.

Another aspect to be considered in the present context is that the population density of Kerala which is the highest when compared to other states of India. Due to the high population density the demand for residential land use is very high and one can see residential pockets in every nook and corner of the State. This necessitate the development of wide spread of road net works

connecting the residential pockets with each other and with other infrastructure facilities. In most of the areas basic facilities (High school, Clinics and dispensaries, commercial establishments selling the daily needs) is available within a distance of 5 to 10 km from a residential pocket (with a travel time of 20-30 minutes). The road density of the State is the highest among other States. So when planning is done this organic nature, high population density, comparatively better accessibility should be considered.

Preference of the Keralites in their housing characteristics is unique. They like to have single houses in a plot with back yard kitchen garden and coconuts all round the building. They do not prefer housing agglomeration like flats. This preference necessitates single plot for each family, which in turn increases the pressure for land for housing even in rural areas.

Nature of Social Development

The literacy rate of Kerala is an indication on the importance given by the people to their education. With a literacy rate of 90% Kerala stands in the first position among other States of India. As per the socio economic survey conducted at Kollam District, about 60-70% of the total population are having at least high school education (passed +10). One can see educational institution (Primary level to high school) in every Panchayat of Kerala. Though the present trend is shifting from Govt. Education Institution to private management education, the need of the educational institutions are very high here.

Another social factor to be considered while planning is the awareness of the people about the health aspects which is indicated by the birth rate, death rate and the infant mortality rate. These health indicators of Kerala are comparable with even some of the advanced countries of the world.

Nature of Economic Development

The economic status of a place is measured by the Net Domestic Product and the per capita income. The net domestic product of the state is Rs 78933.13(2003-04) and the per capita income is Rs 12109. Kerala is placed in the 5th group (others in the group are Andhra, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and West Bengal) based on the per capita income. The sectoral distribution of State income shows that 64% is from tertiary sector which shows the primacy of the service sector in the State.

A viable Planning unit in the Kerala context.

A focus on neighborhoods as a planning has long been present in the planning field, and there has been growing interest in the use and viability of neighborhood-based planning in recent years. Such an approach is increasingly seen as an essential part of a comprehensive planning process to inform citywide policy and to gain input, clarify priorities, and garner support for neighborhood-level details of such plans. Usually a neighborhood is defined based on four dimensions which are (1) the neighborhood as a set of social relationships; (2) the neighborhood as defined by its relationship with one or more institutions; and (3) the neighborhood as a symbolic unit with a name and recognized identity (4) the neighborhood primarily as a place or unit of space within which various activities occur;

In Kerala the neighborhood concept is difficult to apply in planning as the development here is organic in nature and is lacking a neighborhood as seen elsewhere. A close examination of the four dimensions in the Kerala context for delineation of neighborhood is made here.

The Delineation of the neighborhood based on social relationships is individual specific. The extent of the neighborhood may differ from person to person.

The definition of the neighborhood based on an institution may result in the delineation of a group of people with practically no social interaction. For example if one delineate a neighborhood based on the location of the users of a community health center ,majority of the people within the neighborhood will be nonusers of the facility.

The second dimension is also not practical in Kerala, because there is no definite physical demarcation for a place known by a name. When one say 'Thevally' as the name of a place, there is no definite boundary delineating the area known by the particular name.

If we go by the fourth dimension to delineate a neighborhood, i.e. delineation of neighborhood, as place within which various activities occur, the activities which we are considering for the delineation should be defined first. The selection of the activity (ies) should be such that that activity should be seen even in a small area like a neighborhood.

An activity area which are visited by the most of the people living in the surrounding with its name representing the name of the place and that activity makes it possible to have some sort of social interaction (though in the name sake) and is definitely seen in every local body can be taken as a yard stick for defining a neighborhood here in Kerala.

The presence of schools in all local bodies and the importance people are giving to the education makes the population in the catchments of an educational institute , to be more specific a school , can be assumed to form a coherent unit from which the planning standard can be derived. But the actual practice here is that people give preference to the standard of coaching in a school rather than its proximity to their houses and usually opt for schools

with high though it is far away from their residence. In this when the area served by a school is taken as the planning unit, it will not uniform but the catchment of town school will be much wider than that of a village school. So in the practical sense a school cannot be taken as a planning unit in the Kerala context.

The next viable planning unit that can be taken in the Kerala context is serving area of a market consisting of the local fish market where almost all the people residing nearby visits at least once in a week to buy fishes. The service area of the local market can be taken as the area which consists of the threshold population of the local fish market.

Threshold population of a fish market of average size is derived below.

An average size fish market in a Grama Panchayat consists of 25-35 fish vendors

Assume the profit of a fisherman is Rs. 250 to 350 / day

Total Turn over assuming a profit margin of 20%

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= \frac{300 \times 100 \times 20}{20} \\
 &= 1500 \times 30 \\
 &= 45000
 \end{aligned}$$

An average family (consisting of 4 to 5 members) spent about Rs. 30/ day for the purchase of fish

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{No of families depending} \\ \text{The fish market} \end{array} \right\} = 45000 / 30$$

$$= 1500 \text{ families}$$

$$= 7500 \text{ person}$$

(Assume a family size of 5)

Hence it can be assumed that the threshold population of a fish market is 7000-8000. Assume that average population size of the ward as 1000, 7 to 8 wards surrounding the fish market will be taken as a planning unit.