

ABSTRACT

The process of rapid urbanization process along with improved infrastructure services, transport system and better Quality of Life have resulted in blurred boundaries between urban and rural areas thus contributing to a consolidated, homogenous and a composite pattern of settlement systems. Researchers in these areas are often intrigued by a wide range of issues related to administration, planning and management resulting concerns while earmarking an approach to reclassify the distinct composite pattern, its typology and propose long term strategies accordingly. Hence, this study proposes to delineate such an approach to rightly capture the typology and pattern of such composite settlement system by taking Kerala, a state in south of India as a case study.

An initial analysis is conducted on the urbanization and urban processes in Kerala based on conventional definition of 'urban' and 'rural'. The analysis revealed that the definition cannot be taken in its true sense and most of the Kerala settlements are neither urban nor rural. Hence, in order to understand the typology and pattern of such settlements, variables from various socioeconomic domains of life are selected from literature. Accordingly, a second study based on Principal Component Analysis (PCA) is used to group the selected variables into meaningful subsets (factors). The result revealed a 5 factor grouping which best explains the nature of variables. A concluding and third analysis is conducted to derive a Socio Economic Index of Rurality so that all the settlements in Kerala could be ranked on a linear scale relative to each other.

The results obtained from the initial analysis of PCA are used to reclassify the settlements in five shades namely 'Urban', 'Semi-urban', 'Rurban', 'Semi-rural' and 'Rural' settlements using cluster analysis. The result revealed the presence of 6 mega urban regions surrounding the municipal corporations which are coalesced between some semi-urban and rurban clusters thus forming a continuum of composite settlements. In summary, the research has initiated an approach to reclassify the required typology as evident from an evolving composite settlement system in India which may be replicated in other developing countries with appropriate modifications.

Key Words: *Rural urban continuum, Composite settlement system, Typology, Pattern*

