

## URBAN SUSTAINABILITY IN DECLINING ERA: CHALLENGES AND RESPONSE

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**Abstract:** *World population is now passing through the transitional point. Some countries are loosing population while others are gaining. The developing countries will be the last to pass through this tipping point. Decline of urban population is becoming more and more common phenomenon nowadays. Planning and managing cities are becoming easier said than done. This paper briefly discusses different aspects of urban declination. This paper has also addressed the global and local challenges and issues of urban declination and subsequently their response pattern at the same scale.*

**Key Words:** Counter-urbanization, Global and local policy, urban transformation

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

World population is currently growing at a rate of 1.2 percent annually, implying a net addition of 77 million people per year. Six countries account for half of that annual increment: India for 21 percent; China for 12 percent; Pakistan for 5 percent; Bangladesh, Nigeria and the United States of America for 4 percent each. Today the population of the more developed regions of the world is rising at an annual rate of 0.25 percent. For the less developed regions, this figure is nearly six times higher (1.46 percent) (Population 2005, 2003). The world's urban population today is around 3 billion – the same size as the world's total population in 1960. During the 20th century, it increased more than tenfold and close to 50 percent of the world's population now lives in urban centers, compared to less than 15 percent in 1900 (Satterthwaite, 2005). However, the very important population growth rate has begun to slow down. From a record high annual growth rate of 2% in 1968, it has declined to 1.4% in 2000. That is a 30% decrease in the rate of growth, and it will have significant effects on future demographic developments (UNjobs, 2005). Before stating the planning subjects at the era of counter-urbanization, it is worthwhile to justify the extent of counter-urbanization. The extent of problems and opportunities are largely dependent upon this. Unfortunately, urbanization rate in the developed nations are slower than that of the Asia, Latin American, Caribbean and African countries. Nevertheless, this rate is slowing down day by day.

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UN demographer Joseph Chamie has identified the following reasons behind the decreasing trend of world population (UNjobs, 2005)-

1. mortality rates have come down due to the improvement in the medical science and people's awareness.
2. people are moving to cities, life is changing; children are not as needed as they were on farms and agricultural work.
3. women are becoming educated, once they become educated, they join the labor force, they are delaying marriage, and they're delaying their first birth.
4. Tastes of the people have changed.

Again, there may be different reasons behind the deurbanization process. Such as-

1. Due to the recent industrial changes, companies have moved to lower cost areas.
2. Due to the developments in transport and increased car ownership, people can get from place to place more easily.
3. With the Technological advancement - e.g. Internet etc - people can work from home.
4. Idealistic views of the idyllic countryside where there are less social problems such as crime, muggings and drugs etc. are always attractive to the people.
5. For better quality of life, people would prefer rural areas.

Moreover, geographically non-transferable assets like social relations to friends and relatives, properties, and place attachment certainly play an important role in the decision-making process of counter-urbanization (CERUM, 2002, p. 38). These reasons are very dependent upon the socio-economic conditions and politico-cultural surroundings. Due to the difference of these issues, the population transition would occur at different parts of the world at different time. For instance, Japan, USA, Italy etc. have already started loosing population. On the contrary, South Asian and sub-Saharan African countries are still growing up in their population volume. They will be the last to go through this demographic transition (UNjobs, 2005). And population is one of the basic determinants of the development of a region. Due to the variation of timing in the demographic transition, global inequality, migration related problems, terrorism etc. occur.

## **2.0 TRANSFORMATION OF CITIES**

The shift of humans from being predominantly rural to predominantly urban is an integral part of the demographic transition and is moving along in concert with the other parts of the demographic transition. The world has in fact reached the point in history where it can visualize the end of the urban transition. This is already happening in the more developed nations, where nearly everyone lives in or very close to an urban environment. However, the end of the urban transition does not necessarily signal the end of urban evolution (Pumain,

2004). Evolutionary processes include patterns of sub-urbanization, ex-urbanization, peri-urbanization (the shift of urban populations from more dense to less dense regions), multi-nucleation (the clustering of population around several centers, rather than just one, within the same region) and even counter-urbanization (a return of some people back to more urban places) (John et. al., 2005, p.2). The decline of once urban powerhouses such as Detroit, Buffalo, Cleveland, and Philadelphia is an outstanding feature of the evolution of American cities in the latter half of the 20th century. In addition, the American story is not unique, as the shift of manufacturing employment away from urban areas also was foreboding for the decline of European cities such as Glasgow, Liverpool, Rotterdam, and Turin.

Globalization, exclusion, multiculturalism and ethnicity, governance, ecology, science and technology, are driving social transformations at work in cities (in various forms and degrees of intensity), presenting a series of continuing challenges to people and to decision-makers (Sachs-Jeantet, 2007). In several countries, the discussion about the new urban form in which we live started in the early eighties from the concept of *de-urbanization*, with loose talk about the “death of cities” and even on what has been called “neo-ruralization”. The idea that the city is dying is not new and it has surfaced periodically ever since the urban form made its appearance. However speculation on the social effects of the explosive diffusion of information technology, gave empirical body to the most recent version of this recurrent idea. In fact, the city, and even the large city, is far from disappearing. Trends observed so far, in urban systems in most of the advanced economies, indicate that cities are not declining but are undergoing a profound transformation, the full consequences of which are still to be completely fathomed (Guido, 1996; p.5; Sachs-Jeantet, 2007).

### **3.0 DIMENSIONS OF COUNTER-URBANIZATION**

The severity of the problem remains not only at the global level but also at the local level. Counter- urbanization from the population’s viewpoint can occur in two ways- firstly, people would prefer to leave cities because of congestion, high cost of living etc. and secondly, urban population would decrease naturally.

Until now, the objective of decentralizing services and facilities in are not yet achieved all over the world, and these are concentrated at the urban areas; people will keep continuing to come to the urban areas. However, this is not always true. For example, in Sweden counter-urban migration from the large cities to the urban periphery is the major issue. The reason behind this counter urbanization remains in the nature of the counter urban movers. Counter-urban mover is probably older, less well off, having a university exam, living single, not participating in the labor force, and having recent experience of migration (CERUM, 2002, p. 38). Some studies have shown that relocation of population has occurred in response to employment opportunities, i.e. somehow employment sector is relocating itself from the

urban to suburban or rural areas. Now the question comes, what drives this employment sector to settle in these areas? Two causes can be predicted virtually; (1) labor force has shifted itself to the sub-urban or rural area; (2) some economic aspects like pollution tax, government regulations, lack of backward and forward linkage would influence these employment sectors to change their location. Again, both these causes would be mutually dependent.

In the case of natural decrease of population, not only urban areas but also rural population will decrease. An annual loss of 1.5% in rural population is expected in these more developed regions (Frey and Zimmer, 2001). Now the question comes, whether urban congestion and sprawl will also decrease with the rate of population decrease. The answer would be negative. Because, people would prefer to live close to the urban areas to enjoy the social life, community services and facilities. Moreover, when rural population will decrease, some people may feel to be socially isolated. This isolation would cause a severe social disaster. For example, the suicidal tendencies, social crime among the people would increase. This paper will not only describe the local level planning and management issues but also global scale policy issues in the era counter urbanization.

## **4.0 LOCAL AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES OF COUNTER-URBANIZATION**

### **4.01 Local aspect of counter-urbanization**

Counter-urbanization is usually seen in the prominent or old urban areas. Because of counter urbanization, a complete urban economic transformation would occur in these areas. Housing, industrial and motorway developments around new towns threaten (previous) areas of outstanding beauty. Due to the urban to rural migration, traditional rural form will be fragmented and a new urban character dominated rural area will emerge. From the very external viewpoint, this would somehow look like the Garden city. Nevertheless, through extensive resource extraction and waste disposal, these semi-rural communities would increase the intensity of pollution. Controlling this environment will be a tough task for the planners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Solid waste management and resource management is much easier if many people live in a small area (urban areas) than in the rural areas. Hence, with the increase of the counter-urban migration urban areas would loose its environmental sustainability. Management of the waste and resource will be a great challenge for the urban local government.

Again, many other large cities like Tokyo has huge underground utility services network. With the decrease of population, these utility services will loose its demand. The government may abandon these networks. There may be several causes behind this-

1. Due to the lower number of taxable people in the urban areas, the city government may not have sufficient fund to renovate these infrastructure.
2. The city government may consider demand for services as the basic determinant for investing money. In some parts of the city, these services will loose its demand; the city government may consider the construction of these services as the waste of money.
3. Due to the continuous urban to rural migration, the city will expand and the demand for services will increase at the peripheral areas of the city. The private service providers may prioritize these areas for providing services, as it would maximize their profits.

Due to the mismanagement of this network, it will create severe health problem for the city dwellers. For example, leakage in the sewerage system would be the main reason for cholera and other water-borne diseases among the city dwellers.

With the increase of counter urbanization, the distance between the living and working place would increase. It may also be a result of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) use. To reduce the transport cost and time, people would prefer home based employment, i.e. people would reduce travel to the city center (or CBD). More and more pressure of cars will be on the urban periphery and the inner city will loose its importance. That implies more and more demand for parking, more traffic congestion, more demand for transport infrastructure etc. Due to the emission of smoke from the relatively higher number of cars would cause serious air pollution in the sub-urban areas. For instance, in the sub-urban-Tokyo, train network is not so developed as Tokyo Metropolitan area. People are either dependent on the non-motorized vehicles or the cars. Certainly, this would cause huge air pollution. To meet these new needs, people will have to pay more tax; the result would be inflation through invisible tax. Consequently, people's life expenditure will be higher.

Before talking about the future of transport, some questions needed to be answered first. Will clean technology save the day or only stem the tide? Can demand management and urban planning really make a difference? Will the internet help to solve traffic jams, or create new and more complex forms of travel frustration and system failure? Will globalized business and leisure travel overtake all the traditional concerns of local transport? (Visions NW, 2000; p.1). Some of the issues, facts and needs identified by Prof. Hayashi would be helpful to answer these questions (Hayashi, 2005).

- both developing and developed countries are suffering from combined negative effects of auto-mobilization and sprawling suburbanization
- both urban sprawl and auto-mobilization are mutually accelerated

- there is a strong correlation between traffic congestion in inner areas of cities and seamless rail transit to suburbs
- what one should learn from old theories as created by Ebenezer Howard and Sun Wen one hundred years ago is their very holistic visions, although they must be fully modified and updated to meet the situations in the current stages of developing and developed countries.
- heavy dependence of public transport patronage on its quality assurance in both urban and regional scales
- big differences in the full costs, including long term maintenance of built-up areas, between 2-D sub-urbanization caused by road and 1-D sub-urbanization caused by rail
- rapid shift of the car market to low energy consumptive vehicle due to greening car related taxes

He has also suggested some needs and solutions about the same (Hayashi, 2005):

- the cities need holistic approaches to overview the whole sphere of urban and regional space and the transport to support.
- research and new innovative tools to support holistic approach are urgently required.
- attractiveness of houses on residential choice due to comparative level of QOL (Quality of Life) of the inner city with the suburbs would be helpful to attract the people to the urban areas.
- Structural articulation of planning objectives, visions, strategies and policy instruments are useful for formulating integrated policies for sustainable cities and regions.

There are also many controversial arguments regarding the concept of Compact Township. Some scholars think that due to the social isolation of the people occurred by the natural decrease of population, people living in the sub-urban areas may prefer to live close to the city to get rid of the feelings of social exclusion. More organized and well planned urban forms can be achieved. However, every achievement comes with some problems. The utilities and services at the rural areas will loose their demand. On the contrary, the existing urban centers will require more and more infrastructure.

At the same time, if de-urbanization occurs because of the urban to suburban migration the compact form of township would be shattered. Hence, service-providing organizations will face severe problem, as the cost of service will be higher than as usual. This is because of the long distance to cover all the stakeholders. Moreover, urban utility sector will feel a severe demand shock.

While describing the impact of de-urbanization on the housing market; Gyourko said, “A strong negative demand shock such as that associated with the de-urbanization of manufacturing inevitably impacts local housing markets, and we often see decay in the housing stocks of declining areas. This large effect we find in the micro data for individual households suggests that declining cities in particular cannot afford to be expensive cities, as modest differences in replacement costs can be critical on the margin to determining whether fundamental decay sets in or reinvestment occurs in the face of a negative shock for houses in neighborhoods with prices near construction costs. What makes a place expensive in terms of construction costs? It is not the level of development activity itself. Places with high levels of permitting and building do not have appreciably higher construction costs, implying that the supply schedule is not steeply upward sloping.” (Gyourko and Siaz, 2003, p.2)

Due to the new demand for urban housing in the urban periphery, the need for more intensive regional housing policy will be felt. This will change the urban local government's expenditure structure largely. The renovation of the abandoned houses and construction of new housing units will be the main challenges for the urban local government. Stabilization of the land price would be another problem. Because, there is a huge possibility that the land price in the urban areas will go down and the price of the sub-urban land will trigger up. These words are reflected at the Northwest, UK.

*“Industrial restructuring has left widespread dereliction and contamination on up to 10% of the urban areas in the Northwest, UK; a quarter of all housing is over 100 years old, and 40% is unfit or in poor condition. The people have departed from many inner areas, leaving large gaps in the urban fabric, while the pressure for development mounts at the periphery and beyond”. (Visions NW, 2000).*

All Major Industrial Countries will experience significant population aging over the next several decades. The European and Japanese aged-dependency rates (the ratio of persons aged 65 and over to the population aged 15-64) will exceed 40 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050, substantially above today's rate of about 25 percent (Barry et. al., 2004, p.1). Every month, the world's population of persons age 65 and older grows by 800,000 individuals according to a report by the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Institute on Aging (NIA) (About.com, 2005). Through influencing the aggregate household saving, investment demand, financial market asset prices and returns, this huge aged population may create disastrous impact on the national and global economy (Barry et. al., 2004, p.1). Certainly, they will be burdens for the little number of working population. Surely there some positive aspects associated with this fact. Persons borne in the baby-boom period of Japan after the Second World War have started retiring from their job from this year. This will create significant vacuum in the experienced workforce. At the same time, due to the retirement of the highest

salary holders, large number of employment opportunities will be created. New workforce will join the economy with highest strength with relatively lower salary.

If the counter-urbanization occurs all on a sudden, a rapid shock will be felt on the urban community. Hence, the recent “community based self help” type activities may not be successful. The government will have to spend more resource for the aged people. To provide services and facilities for these old people, government will have to impose taxes on the little number of working populations.

Again, the government may find it less expensive if the residences of these people were shifted from the current country to somewhere else in a different country. For instance, it would be less expensive for Japanese government to accommodate these people in Philippines rather than in Japan.

In the urban areas due to the market force many clubs, community centers, parks, and so many community based service centers are built up. All these are the basic components of community life. With the loss of population in the urban areas, these services and facilities will collapse and a tremendous social shock would be felt in the form of loss of community feelings among the people; social alienation; a conflict between local and national pride vs. regret; lack of people's mental stability; stress; frustrations, lack of involvement in the community based activities, lack of freedom of choice and self-expression, disruptions etc. These would not only shatter the community life and mutual dependency tendency among the people but also increase social crime and psychopathic activities among the residents of the people; as it is seen in the Newcastle and Manchester of the United Kingdom (Power and Momford, 1999). Protecting social security will be a great challenge for the deurbanizing nations.

There are four stages of urbanization (Hayashi, 2005).

- (1) Urbanization (Population boom in urban areas)
- (2) Suburbanization (Urban expansion at the peripheral areas)
- (3) De-urbanization (Population decline in urban areas)
- (4) Re-urbanization (Reemergence of the urban characters at the urban areas)

Table 01: Different types of policy measures are required for the different urbanization stages. Here these are summarized in a simple form.

<b>Urbanization</b>	<b>Suburbanization</b>	<b>De-urbanization</b>
Economy of agglomeration, industrialization, Concentration of administrative and commercial activities, Higher demand for skilled and unskilled labours, Better infrastructure, better services and facilities in urban areas	Congestion, Pollution, higher cost of living, collapse of urban economy, Economic inequalities	Highest state of congestion, Higher landuse conflict, unemployment, Highest living cost, Fall of commercial activities.
Rural to urban migration, Natural growth, Population boom in urban areas	Rural to urban migration still continues, People from the core areas shift themselves at the suburban area.	Rural to urban migration is almost stopped, Urban to sub-urban/rural migration starts.
<b>Planning subjects / challenges</b>		
Unplanned Urbanization, Urban sprawl, Traffic congestion, uncontrolled Landuse, Slums and squatters,	Uncontrolled physical growth of the cities, Higher demand for services and facilities in the suburban areas, Congestion in the suburban areas, environmental pollution	Huge number of abandoned houses and infrastructure, less demand for commercial goods in the urban areas, Total collapse of urban economy, Decline of inner cities.
		Relatively higher cost of services and facilities, Old and vulnerable buildings, Skewed distribution of demand for services and facilities,

#### 4.02 Global policy issues

UN demographer Joseph Chamie (UNjobs, 2005) says that the global population boom has been accompanied by revolutionary changes in life expectancy, fertility, population aging, and large-scale migration – issues that will fundamentally shape the politics of the next century. He pointed out some other issues regarding the demographic change which are quite important for the planning also-

1. The highest rates of population growth will continue to occur in the developing world and will lead to increased migratory pressures from individuals who wish to move to wealthier regions of the world.

2. The wealthier regions will concurrently grapple with a demographic challenge on the opposite extreme: a sharp increase in the numbers of elderly people, who will strain pension programs and health care systems.
3. To face this situation, widely unpopular policies such as a raised retirement age, reduced old-age benefits, and higher taxes will have to be implemented. Thus, while the developing world seeks to find work for its massive young population, the developed world will struggle to find a means of supporting its elderly.

The current trend shows that Counter-urbanization due to the natural decrease of population is seen in developed countries. For instance, in Japan counter urbanization is basically a product of natural decrease of population. Most of the cases, generally due to the very good health services, average life span of the people of these developed countries are very high. The result is huge number of aged population. To meet the needs of the labors, these developed countries may permit controlled immigration to their country. There are so many controversial opinions regarding the impact of the immigration on the socio-economic and political conditions of the country. Nevertheless, some studies have shown that the ultimate productivity of the immigrant is relatively lower than that of the native people; i.e., economic sustainability of the country cannot be achieved through this immigration related policies. As Chamie said, developed nations will face severe migratory pressure from the developing nations. Controlling this pressure will be a challenge for the developed nations.

Politics is always one of the major influencing factors that influence the urbanization rate of a region largely. One example of the influence of political change on urban change is the very large increase in the populations of Karachi, Calcutta, Mumbai and Dhaka around the Partition of India by the departing British powers in 1947 (and the large increases and decreases in population in many other places in India, Pakistan and what later became Bangladesh). This situation is also common for the developed nations. There may be several other factors that are influencing the urbanization process. *Growing cross-border flows of raw materials, goods, information, income and capital, much of it managed by transnational corporations, have underpinned a network of what can be termed ‘global cities’ that are the key sites for the management and servicing of the global economy.*(Sassen, 2002)

Current counter urbanization process would be the result of the declining trend of political influence of the cities. Moreover, due to the advancement of Information and Communication technology (ICT) and transport infrastructure the production sector can work separately from the management sector of industry. Consequently, urban areas are losing its importance from the industry's point of view. Simultaneously, current trend of decentralization of the services and facilities as well as the administrative functions would increase people's tendencies to

live in the urban growth centers rather than in the prominent urban areas. The metropolitan government system would also patronize this trend.

Global economic conditions are another influential factor of changing the urban system of any region. For example, in Bangladesh due to the global demand of garments product, Dhaka is still a major area of labor-intensive industries. At the same time due to the emergence of the two port cities (Chittagong and Mongla); two other cities (Khulna and Brahamanbaria) are losing their economic importance. Nevertheless, urbanization trend is still high in these cities because of rural poverty. If this situation occurs in a developed nation like Japan, these cities would lose their population. Trade liberalization and a greater emphasis on exports have also increased the comparative advantage of many smaller cities. Meanwhile, advances in inter-regional transport and communications have lessened the advantages for businesses in locating in the largest cities.

In the developing world, due to the rapid urbanization, management of the cities has become almost impossible. For example, the urbanization of Bangladesh is quite similar to the Latin American urbanization; formerly called "over-urbanization" in 1950s, a situation where a rapid rate of urbanization did not mean a corresponding growth in industry and economy but a shift of people from low-productivity rural agricultural employment to low-productivity urban employment or underemployment. The clearest symptoms of over-urbanization were found in major cities of Latin America, where an imbalance between rapid population growth and insufficient employment opportunities produced spreading poverty and the mushrooming slum and squatter settlements. "Favelas" in Brazil, "poblaciones" in Chile, "barrios" in Venezuela and Ecuador, "vilas miserias" in Argentina, "barriadas" in Peru were understood as maladjustment and pathology (Valladares et. al., 2002). Hence urban economy and landuse has gone beyond control. Due to the skewed distribution of the demand for services and facilities, the urban local government used to fail to provide services and facilities. But the situation is quite reverse in the developed countries like Japan.

The report entitled "Urban Development 2050" has raised some questions related to the social morality and community life at the face of counter-urbanization in the developed nations—

*What if many hopes and desires really came true – for communities, neighbors, safe streets, good schools – a city and region where people cared and looked after each other. What if global markets became regional and local again and the exploitation of country by city turned to mutual support? But can things really work in such harmony, or would the rich get richer while the poor stay poorer? And if such 'sustainable communities' were possible, what would it mean for the shape of the city and the region? (Vision NW, 2002, p. 13)*

The answers remain in several other questions. Such as-

1. How far globalizing trends could be reversed towards the local, or simply shifted towards a more connected global identity.
2. How far such a society could be ‘sustainable’ in the sense of stability over time – whether in practice such balanced communities are unstable and temporary states in a cycle of change.
3. Whether such apparent harmony itself could only rest on a stable but inequitable social structure.

Production and trading activity may see a resurgence of social economy, ecological values, ethical investment and localized production. This may be enabled by new technology and small-scale batch production based on the internet or cyberspace as the organizing medium. Due to this technological advancement, most production is now in zero-waste processes for products which are then leased over their life-cycles, so that employment and general satisfaction increases, while material consumption reduces. The responsive economy is helped by new patterns of stakeholding in firms and organizations, and a participative democracy in business and public policy which is enabled by cyber-net organization.

This might seem to be a communitarian utopia, but it appears likely that globalization, technical shock and environmental stress would continue. Local autonomy and self-reliance could produce problems, in that rich and poor communities would each tend to stratify and reinforce patterns of dependency. There would be an agenda for regional / national redistribution and strategic management, as much as with the other scenarios, but the context for doing this could be quite different to that of today.

There are new housing forms and tenures to reflect new patterns of organization, where groups and networks of families and cooperate on childcare, schooling and transport. Older terraces and even suburban estates are converted for such networks, but social differences often turn such arrangements into defensive territory with high physical security and inward orientation.

## **5.0 DEURBANIZING CITIES OF THE WORLD**

### Case study (The United Kingdom)

*Britain's major cities have been losing population since the turn of the century. Between 1971 and 1996, Manchester lost 22 percent and Newcastle 16 percent of its population. Depopulation has paralleled severe job losses, mainly in manufacturing. Job losses have hit low-skilled men particularly harshly. Long-term unemployment in inner cities is chronic. Good quality, modernized homes are being abandoned in some inner city neighborhoods. House prices have fallen, in some cases to zero, and some*

*blocks and streets are being demolished, including new housing. Demolition of empty properties has not generally stemmed the tide of abandonment. Whole areas have virtually no demand for housing. Council housing dominates in the low demand areas, but all tenures are affected. Very few tenants have become owners under the Right-to-Buy. Low-cost owner-occupation outside the city is often a more attractive and cheaper option for those in work. Low demand has generated falling school rolls, loss of confidence in the area, a vacuum in social control, anti-social behavior and intense fear of crime. Many regeneration initiatives have been tried - intensive management, proactive policing, and resident involvement. These help hold conditions. Resilience and vitality co-exist with acute decline. A fight back has developed involving local leaders, innovative pro-city strategies, and new urban initiatives. Obsolete old buildings are being converted into attractive apartments and new high density developments are in demand, attracting working people back into cities. (Power and Momford, 1999).*

Now let us cast a focus on the Japanese cities. At present, Japanese cities are at the best condition ever in the history of Japan as urban population has touched its peak, urban utility services have sufficient demand, political stability is patronizing the economic growth, and infrastructure is still at a better condition as Japan has passed only thirty five to forty years after the high-growth era. Nevertheless, the challenges are coming ahead. Some of the replications of the previously stated problems are already seen in Japan. If this trend of worsening conditions continues, then these will be the most important challenges for the future counter-urbanizing Japan. Prof. Hayashi has identified some problems of the existing Japanese Cities (Hayashi, 2005). These are-

- a) Average lifetime of buildings is 30-40 years in Japan. Buildings have not been adequately stocked.
- b) Maintenance/repair cost of infrastructures is increasing because of continuous urban sprawl.
- c) Low quality small buildings are existing due to small-subdivided plots, resulting in poor landscape.
- d) Brown areas have been redeveloped for commercial/office use but not for residential use.
- e) Efficient mixed use by adequate planning is sometimes obstructed by the current zoning system.
- f) Public and private lands are independently planned by each sector.
- g) Aged people are remained at old narrow houses in the center of the city.
- h) Young people are moving towards the sub-urban area due to lower land price with better environment.

- i) Communities in the city center face difficulties to maintain their facilities due to generation unbalance.
- j) Urban sprawl enforces people to spend long time for commuting. It makes difficult the continuing working by women/aged people.
- k) Future population decline makes the above situation worse both in social and financial aspects.

## **6.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Most demographic literature contrasts urban and rural places as though they were always uniquely distinct places. However, as the urban transition progresses, a considerable middle ground has been developing in human settlements. Urban places are socially and environmentally more complex and variable than ever before and rural places are more urban-like than ever before. These transformations suggest that an urban gradient may be more useful for social science research than a dichotomy.

Due to the urbanization of the rural areas through urban to total areas and ruralization of the urban areas through the decrease of population densities in the urban areas; more intensive need of rural-urban linkage will be felt. The present state of urban-biased policies will be challenged by these new issues. Hence, there would a total transformation from urban planning approach to the regional planning approach would emerge. Or, more influence of regional issues on the local planning system would be observed.

As counter-urbanization comes with so many global challenges, city to city, country to country relationships will determine the future of urban areas. Inequality and disparity will be the main threat for the urban areas. A new global agenda with more focus on the bilateral and international cooperation would be required to face these challenges.

Natural population decrease is nothing but a reflection of the social, political and cultural norms of a nation. These are the basic determinants that shape the mentality of a person. At this era of counter-urbanization, more and more people centered policy should be taken to tackle this decreasing trend of population.

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