

The Liveable Life in Slums

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1 ABSTRACT

More than 1 billion people of the world's urban population lives in slums. One in eight people. The locus of global poverty moves to cities, with the majority in the developing world. Low incomes, poor infrastructure and rising exclusion are just minor stimulants that contribute to a poor quality of life. Long since nations, governments and local administrations recognised the need for higher living standards for each and every citizen. The focus on creating worldwide sustainable livelihoods peaked in 2015, with the international acceptance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), followed by the New Urban Agenda (NUA) in 2016. Liveable areas became a priority and the concept of liveability evoked a new sense for sustainable improvements of human life. Still, liveability remains a complex concept that includes a variety of elements and can be measured through a set of sub-dimensions and encompasses objective indicators, as well as subjective indicators. Problematic is the fact that in most cases liveability indicators are measured and quantified for whole regions, rather than individual neighbourhoods, "you can live in a city that ranks high in terms of quality of living and still suffer from a low quality of life because of unfortunate personal circumstances [...]" . The extent of disparity in perceptions of a liveable life is mostly limited to formal settlements, whereas in countries, as India a large proportion of the population lives in informal settlements.

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the holistic approach to identify liveable life indicators within the framework of a fieldwork study in slums of Bhubaneswar (Odisha, India). The identification of indicators aims to act as a lever within participative slum upgrading through the formulation of a Liveable Life Index. It hypothesizes that community perceptions of a liveable life are the most influential indicators and they perform weakest in slum upgrading. The area of research is Bhubaneswar, the capital of the Indian state Odisha and centre of pilot projects of "Odisha's Liveable Habitat Mission". The method developed includes focus group discussions in slums of Bhubaneswar to identify liveable life indicators. Further, it includes Expert Interviews with slum upgrading experts to identify perceptions of liveable life indicators and anticipated best practices for upgrading. The study's primary research framework enables slum upgrading strategies to be viewed from two different perspectives. Splitting perspectives is important as congruent and diverse perspectives can be analysed to transform hidden potentials into sustainable opportunities.

Keywords: liveable life, slums, upgrading, quality of life, safety

2 INTRODUCTION

Transferring liveable life perceptions to the guidance of slum upgrading, mainly emphasises the interplay between top-down and bottom-up approaches. Lack of studies for informal settlements often lead to the assumption that upgrading tasks, such as building improvements, basic service provision or access to water automatically lead to improved local living conditions but a lack of local comprehension, along with upgrading assumptions are deeply intertwined, this paper argues, so are their solutions. Liveability is mainly calculated to take a quantitative approach, rarely differentiating between social classes or focussing on individual perceptions.¹ The concept of a liveable life goes one step further and focuses mainly on perceptions at a defined community level. Lining the trend of raising global liveability to the papers' informal settlement context, the liveable life at the urban slum level is investigated to define a "liveable life" from a slum neighbourhood perspective. Subsequently, a "Liveable Life Index" (LLI) is developed, based on identified liveable life indicators and aimed to identify relevant locally rooted liveable life components, which can be translated into priorities and strategies in slum upgrading at governmental level.

3 BACKGROUND - ODISHA'S LIVEABLE HABITAT MISSION

Odisha's Liveable Habitat Mission can be split into two components, "The Odisha Land Rights to Slum Dwellers Act" and "Jaga Mission". In 2017, the government of Odisha enacted the landmark legislation "the

¹ Kovacs-Györi, A.; Cabrera-Barona, P.; Resch, B.; Mehaffy, M.; Blaschke, T. (2019): Assessing and Representing Livability through the Analysis of Residential Preference. Sustainability, Vol. 11, No. 18, p. 4934.

Odisha Land Rights to Slum Dwellers Act, 2017”.² The “act [provides the assignments] of land rights to identified slum dwellers, for redevelopment, rehabilitation and upgradation of slums, and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto”³ in 114 Notified Area Councils and Municipalities. In the course of the act, the use of high-resolution drone imagery enabled Odisha to map slums and become the only state in India with a spatial database of every slum in every city and town.⁴ The database created, facilitated the identification of dwellers eligible for the Land Rights Act and by the end of 2019, already 60,000 slum dwellers in Odisha received land titles.⁵ Subsequent to the granting of land rights, “Jaga Mission” was implemented. The Mission aims at transforming informal settlements into liveable habitats by improving the standard of infrastructure and access to livelihood opportunity services at par with the better off areas within the same urban local body.⁶ The focus of upgrading are six general habitat services: road, drain, individual household latrines, pipe water supply, in house electricity and streetlight. Local agreements to planned approaches display a prerequisite for upgradation, as well as local resident participation.

4 THE LIVEABLE LIFE

Focus Group Discussions disclosed that informal settlements can be categorised as economic powerhouses where cleaners, drivers, sex workers, servants, leather workers, metal workers, waiting staff and many other trades flourish. This sector displays a type of informal parallel economy, outside parties often declared as a problem; but people tend to forget about the fact, that informal workers are the ones supporting the comfort of the middle and upper class. It is important to take responsibility for them and keep this sector upright, ensuring a fair, equitable treatment and liveable life conditions. Indeed, supporting institutions would do better in developing slums, when they refrain from prejudices about settlements and view them for what they are: not just areas of misery, but a place where many people have been living for generations, a place which they call home.⁷

In order to identify liveable life indicators in slums and use this perspective as a guideline for sustainable slum upgrading, a Liveable Life Index (LLI) has been developed. From the identification of individual sub-elements to the local LLI, three essential steps are required. It is a simple, flexible and adaptable procedure.

(1) In a first step (identification), liveable life indicators are randomly identified in neighbourhoods of a specific area. These indicators are aggregated and reduced, based on frequency and relevance.

(2) In a second step (test run), the filtered out liveable life indicators are again randomly analysed in the same area but in other neighbourhoods with regard to their weighting and priority. The test run is crucial: This way it is ensured that only generally accepted and relevant indicators become part of the index. So to speak, the index displays the "bible of upgrading".

(3) In a third step (implementation), the LLI is constructed and locally implemented. At governmental/ aid agency level the LLI is transformed into guidelines for upgrading orientation. The resulting measures of the guidelines are then transferred to an entire area and applied across the slum neighbourhoods in that area. In exceptional cases, slum neighbourhood-specific individual factors can be added or subtracted afterwards for optimal adaptation. This is important, as it helps to prevent irrelevant measures and to highlight neighbourhood specific thematic fields to focus on.

With reference to the upgrading approaches under Jaga Mission, a unique attempt for slum upgrading in Odisha can be identified. Still, this approach does not cover all relevant upgrading areas. During the research different neighbourhoods were selected and analysed. It follows that the different slum neighbourhoods

² Social Services India (2018): Jaga Fellows for World’s largest slum land titling Programme, retrieved from <https://socialservicesindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Jaga.pdf> (27.03.2020).

³ The Odisha Gazette (2017): The Odisha Rights to Slum Dwellers Act, 2017, Cuttack, p. 3, retrieved from <http://govtpress.odisha.gov.in/pdf/2017/1652.pdf> (10.09.2019).

⁴ Tata Trusts (2019): Odisha: Land Rights to Slum Dwellers, Observations on detailed work flow process maps, p. 10, retrieved from <http://www.jagamission.org/pdf/Compendium%20Land%20Rights.pdf> (19.09.2020)

⁵ Chakrabarty, A. (2020): COVID-19, JAGA Mission and the value of already existing solutions, retrieved from <https://www.iied.org/covid-19-jaga-mission-value-already-existing-solutions> (26.08.2020).

⁶ Paty, S. (2019): Re: Questions to Jaga Mission, Personal E-Mail, sradhapaty@gmail.com, 14.11.2019.

⁷ Mehra, C. (2020): From Dharavi to Sao Paulo’s favelas, a Covid-19 response must engage the communities that live there, retrieved from <https://scroll.in/article/960980/from-dharavi-to-sao-paulos-favelas-a-covid-19-response-must-engage-the-communities-that-live-there> (09.05.2020).

analysed face similar liveable life perceptions, but location specific priorities for certain liveable life indicators can clearly be noted at the individual locations. Considering slum development under the Liveable Life Index, implies that areas are aimed to improve to the extend of local dwellers perception of satisfaction. How it will exactly develop is dependent on the local situation and the clear set of priorities in the LLI. These differences need to be taken into account, in order to ensure sustainability in realised approaches.

In comparison, Jaga Mission focusses on a firmly structured plan, whereby the LLI relates to a flexible framework. Further, the reduced scope of action, can also be traced back to the fact that it is a state program, where standardised methods and procedures dominate for faster implementation. As a result, not all relevant liveable life indicators are taken into account at Jaga Mission. Further, field research proved that participation and inclusion into upgrading projects is highly demanded. In general, slum dwellers seek out for participative strategies; they are willing to contribute personally to the development of their living environment; they want to feel a sense of ownership and they prefer dialogues in all directions to top-down approaches and monologues in one direction.

As mentioned above, the local upgrading strategy pursues a fixed set of approaches, which are mainly of a physical nature. As the local research – in non-upgraded slums – verified, non-physical elements exceed the physical ones and locally perceived liveable life components surpass the six upgrading areas. Based on the Focus Group Discussions, 15 liveable life indicators were identified and categorised under four topics, here called elements:

- (1) Safety - Neighbourhood Safety (Crime & Environment), Tenure Security, Employment Security (Working Contract);
- (2) Social - Respectful Behaviour & Trust, Sense of Belonging & Community Relations, External Neighbourhood Relations;
- (3) Physical - Basic Services, Adequate Housing, Parks & Green Spaces, Neighbourhood Cleanliness, Community Centre;
- (4) Service - Proximity to Public Transport, Proximity to Doctors, Proximity to Schools, Proximity to Employment.

4.1 Safety Element

The safety element refers to a community's sense of safety from crime, protection against environmental risks, ownership of legal land rights, as well as employment security. Based on primary and secondary research it is important for dwellers that living in a crime free neighbourhood is a prerequisite for selecting living sites. With regard to tenure security, land rights are of high relevance only in specific cases. In periphery areas where land is less in demand, dwellers rarely require land rights. The granting of land rights is accompanied by the provision of personal data to governmental institutions and some dwellers fear to be on the authoritative radar. On the other hand, slums located in the urban centre prefer the possession of legal land rights, as areas close to centres of economic activity are popular and expensive. The high demand for urban land is well known and, in many cases, private land owners evict slums to build lucrative complexes, such as offices or hotels. In this case, tenure security prevents the fear of eviction, allows families to settle down and invest in home constructions. Next to a safe neighbourhood and tenure security, dwellers highlighted contractual work environments. Usually, dwellers manage several workplaces per day, which are irregularly paid and permanence is insecure. Contract work provides additional experience, knowledge, skills, ensures a regular income, and gives dwellers more control to approach productive daily routines.

4.2 Social Element

The social element refers to a community's sense of behaviour patterns, social integration and interactions with individuals within their settlement, as well as connections to neighbourhoods in the direct vicinity. Relationships to communities beyond slum boundaries display a crucial aspect of a liveable life, as they ensure social inclusiveness and a stronger feeling of belonging. Slum residents' value trustful relationships with all people they are or would like to be in contact with. In their opinion socialising displays the basis to initiate community thinking and strengthen a sense of belonging within the community, which is crucial in periods of crisis. Further, mutual tolerance, respectful interactions and the acceptance of social responsibility are another part of the slum dweller's personal perception of a liveable life. Many dwellers are familiar with

oppression. They know how it feels to be neglected, discriminated and governed by the formal sector. For this reason, they welcome any individuals entering their territory, as they do not want to convey the impression that individuals are not accepted or tolerated, just because they have different religions, political views, nationalities, social origins or other distinguishing features. Dwellers compare respectful behaviour to a gift. It is barely possible to show gratitude or appreciation through dinner invitations or small souvenirs, when neighbours or other visitors enter the slum, but they can offer respect, which displays the highest of their social values. At Nala Muha Sahi Basti the slum leader stated: “We cannot offer you drinks, food, or a comfortable chair, but we will always welcome you with and show respect.”⁸

4.3 Physical Element

The physical element refers to the functioning architecture of a community’s direct environment and identifies fundamental amenities indispensable for a liveable life from a slum dweller perspective. These include basic services, adequate housing, parks & green spaces, neighbourhood cleanliness and meaningful communal areas with a high quality of stay. Most identified physical elements are in par with Jaga Missions upgrading agenda and will be improved within each slum in Bhubaneswar, such as sanitation and drinking water, which fall under the category “basic services”. Further, parks & green spaces, clean environments and community centres are highly valued to enhance cohabitation and especially enable the younger generation to exercise, encounter friends and participate in other outdoor activities. Residents also claimed that green spaces have a cooling effect and can reduce the temperature in inner-city areas, which is particularly important during the hot summer seasons. Lastly, the physical element is of particular importance, when categorising a certain area as a slum area, as the identified components display vital parts of the UN-Habitat’s definition of a slum, where the absence of one or more of these indicators defines a slum.⁹

4.4 Service Element

The service element refers to a community’s proximity to vital services and development prospects, such as public transport, health care centres, education facilities and job opportunities. This dimension builds on the physical dimension and illustrates, how the physical environment meets local requirements from a service perspective. Still this element rather displays a crucial determinant in the personal development of individuals, as opposed to the physical element, which focuses on improving the external environment. In particular, the proximity to and affordability of health care services is high in demand, as insufficient waste management, the lack of sanitation facilities and broken drainage systems impair hygienic environments, contributing to poor health conditions. In addition, maintaining physical and mental health are one of the main prerequisites, to join school and guarantee an established education or access job opportunities to finance expenditures. Access to any of the four services mentioned ensures a balance between personal well-being, future interests and the achievement of other components that contribute to a liveable life from a personal point of view on a daily basis.¹⁰

5 CONCLUSION

Comparing the local upgrading strategies and focus areas with expectations of realistic necessities from a dweller perspective in slums, discrepancies in perceptions can be determined. Upgrading work under Jaga Mission follows a strict guideline, which might be the determining factor for high success rates and rapid implementation measures in Bhubaneswar. Still the upgrading focus is mainly based on a pre-defined plan, which covers some, but not all components identified as decisive factors to live a liveable life in slums. In the short run, current upgrading might have positive effects, but in the long run the sustainability of upgrading approaches neglects local needs in its entirety and settlements easily revert back to old patterns. Within upgrading it is important to employ strategies that focus on the interdependencies of liveable life indicators and indicators, residents consider most influential for a better liveable life.

⁸ “Quotation of Personal Correspondence“ (Slum Leader of Nala Muha Sahi, Personal Correspondence, Slum Dweller, Bhubaneswar, 20.11.2019).

⁹ UN-Habitat (2006): *The State of the World Cities 2006/7*, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, Kenya, p. vi.

¹⁰ Murza, G., Laaser, U. (1994): *Gesundheit und Schule. Theorien zur Verbesserung der Lebens- und Lernqualität bei Kindern und Jugendlichen*, IDIS, Bielefeld, p. 35.

Local slum dwellers idea of a liveable life and participatory strategies go not hand in hand with Odisha's Liveable Habitat Mission. Odisha's Mission claims to act participatively, but its implementation admits difficulties, especially in times of Corona. Addressing this weak interface is where the research intervenes, making recommendations at authority level for optimal upgrading design according to local needs. With the developed Liveable Life Index, a tangible tool is established which supports the identification of locally rooted liveable life perceptions and the coordination of associated key stakeholders. This constitutes the basis and can be further developed at governmental level into a feasible project.

A lesson learned is that there is no construction plan for optimal upgrading. Various slum upgrading plans have conducted countless surveys, invested considerable sums and applied the concept of "participation", but still failed because anticipated best practices and perceptions of optimal solutions overshadowed realistic demands at local level. It seems a challenge to break the separation of perceptions and realities, top-down and bottom-up, and clichés and abstractions. What and how something is achieved needs to be tailored to local conditions and requires iterated cycles of learning and feedback. Slum upgrading involves time to embed solutions at local level and instead of rushing to reach outputs, the focus should be based on processes with steps that keep to the local pace and ensure sustainability in approaches.

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