

Towards “Slow” and “Moderated” Urbanism

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Abstract

The city-building process in the global South is characterised by both the state and corporate-led production of “fast” cities. The mythology of “world cities” legitimises these city-building projects. It is interesting to note that while many cities in the global North are moving towards alternative development regimes under the “slow city” movement, urban production in traditional societies of the global South is being enslaved to “speed”. In this paper, we attempt to analyse the changes being brought about in these cities and how alternative forms of development and social organisation—termed as slow cities, akin to slow food—can lead to more sustainable cities and “eurhythmia” in urban life. we introduce some propositions with regard to alternative processes in city-building, urban social organisation, and everyday city life.

Introduction

The city and the urban environment represent man’s most consistent and, on the whole, his most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart’s desire. But if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemn to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself (Park 1967).

We live in an interesting time. In the global South, an existing order is dying and a new one has yet to replace it. Everything that infused postcolonial urbanism with a sense of continuity is changing, mutating, and re-emerging in a new form. Cities are experiencing not only an increasing influx of “private” capital and “fast” policy, but also a neoliberal socio-political ideological onslaught. Cities are emerging as business models of the global and local entrepreneurial classes; local and national governments have raised the stakes to become integral partners in this process. This is leading to changing relationships with space, people, and institutions within and without the cities.

Datta and Shaban (2016), referring to several cases of fast cities in the global South, argue that these new formations are innovations of sorts, pushing the concept of gated residential communities and

privatopolises to a new stage and scale in mega-urbanisation and master planning. Although there are economic and political differences between the countries and regions these cities are located in, they implicitly or explicitly manifest the same narrative of how mythologies of global cities are used to legitimise city-building projects. They also show that while many cities in the global North are moving towards alternative development regimes under the “slow city” movement, urban production in traditional societies in the global South is being driven by “speed”.

Fast urbanism prioritises “speed” over democracy and participation. The speed is considered extremely important in city-building. These cities chimerically are termed as eco-cities, smart cities, and so on. The aestheticisation of everyday life in cities due to consumerism is another hallmark of fast cities (Knox 2010; Wright, Ashford, and Stammer 1997; Levy 2008). Contemporary fast urbanism in the global South is a product of rapidly converging time and space under the imperative of fast growth, fast thinking,ⁱ material greed, and catching up with the West, which leads to out-of-context or exotic city planning. Exoticism or monoculturing may align the South economically with the North, but can cause significant social and environmental unsustainability.

In what follows, we attempt to understand the changes these cities are bringing about, and how alternative forms of development and social organisation—termed as slow cities, akin to slow food—can lead to higher sustainability and eurhythmiaⁱⁱ in urban life. Based on empirical realities discussed by Datta and Shaban (2016) and other available literature, this paper presents arguments in favour of implementing a slow urbanism movement in the global South.

Slow cities

“Government is often characterised as being too slow, but speed should not be a driver in itself. It could be that we need a form of slow government, predicated on a similar idea of slowness that underpins the slow-food movement: valuing craft, provenance, attention to detail, shared responsibility, while creating a platform for dialogue and community through human-centredness. The fast ‘push-button democracy’ might well be the last thing we need” (Dan Hill 2012).

“The way to block errors that originate in System 1 is simple in principle: recognize the signs that you are in a cognitive minefield, slow down, and ask for reinforcement from System 2,” (Kanheman 2001: 417).

Fast cities are being developed in the global South in spaces with largely slow or traditional societies. These societies’ thinking, everyday lives, and so-called development are being speeded up and “instantiated”ⁱⁱⁱ without any deep thought about sustainability (Portinari 1989: 1). Societies and individuals in the global South are being thrown into unfamiliar urban and social rhythms and material conditions. The growing alienation and arrhythmia of society, nature, mind, and body, and widespread discontent, call for an alternative urban development regime or the adoption of the “slow” city

movement. While some in the global North are turning to “slow” cities to enjoy social time, social space, and conviviality, it appears contradictory that the global South is pushing for fast cities and a quicker pace of life.

Cittaslow, an Italian initiative, has 54 certification criteria, of which 24 are compulsory. These criteria relate to six spheres—environmental policies, infrastructure policies, technologies and facilities for environmental quality, autochthonous production, hospitality, and awareness (Lowry 2011: 3). Specifically, to get certified as a cittaslow, a city must have a population of 50,000, which can be appropriately contextualised in high-density countries.

Akin to the slow food movement, the slow city movement began in Europe. Slow cities (cittaslow) were established in 1999 by the Mayors of four Italian towns (Greve in Chianti, Bra, Orvieto, and Positano) and the president of Slow Food (Lowry 2011). By 2011, there were a total of 141 cittaslow in 23 countries certified by Cittaslow International (2011). In January 2011, the countries with three or more Cittaslow were Italy (69), Germany (10), United Kingdom (9), South Korea (8), Poland (6), Spain (6), Belgium (4), Portugal (4), Austria (3), Holland (3), Norway (3), and the United States (3) (Lowry 2011: 3).

The ideological basis of the slow city movement is akin to that of the slow food movement, which emerged in 1986 when an Italian food writer Carlo Petrini initiated the movement. The movement’s aim is to protect the “rights to taste” (Slow Food 2004) by protecting traditional food products, promoting the pleasure of eating (including sharing meals socially), encouraging traditional agricultural methods and techniques, maintaining the vitality of local community economies, and promoting geographical distinctiveness with a conception of “territory”. This movement aims for the “creation of a progressive network of small towns – Slow Cities or Citta Lente – that set out to follow an alternative urban development agenda” (Mayer and Knox 2006: 327).

The slow city movement has now emerged as an alternative urban development approach that focuses on the local and historical context and “addresses the interdependencies between goals for economic, environmental and equitable urban development” (Mayer and Knox: 2006: 321).

My purpose here is not to create a fast–slow binary to argue the moral superiority of one over the other. Rather, we are interested in arguing for the prioritisation of sustainability as it relates to the social, contextual, temporal, and durational in the city-making processes. We accept that both time and duration are relative, but suggest a more careful consideration of time as a way to enrich (rather than curb) processes of democracy, citizenship, sustainability, and belonging in the making and celebrating of cities.

Proposition #1: grow slow

In a bid to catch up with the North economically, the global South is increasingly focussing on “speed”. Fast growth and increasing per capita income have become parameters to measure growth, although it is possible to achieve greater human development with strategic planning in the education and health sectors with slow and sustained growth. Fast urbanisation and city-making have become major strategies to achieve quick growth. Qatar’s Education City, Abu Dhabi’s Masdar, India’s smart city mission, Lagos’ Eko Atlantic, Mauritius’ La Balise Marina and Mall of Mauritius, Ghana’s Hope City, Uganda’s Kakungulu Satellite City, Korea’s Songdo, Zambia’s Lusaka, China’s eco-cities, and Indonesia’s Lippo cities are examples of such fast urbanisation (Datta and Shaban 2016). These cities are often raised on tabula rasa, after compromising or uprooting the local economy, and create a surplus population. In most cities and societies of the global South, instant urbanism or quick fixes led by technology are being deployed faster than the social changes can keep up with; thus, there is the possibility of destabilising the economy, society, and environment, which may be very expensive in both the long and short terms.

There have been attempts to depoliticise fast growth and fast cities. Fast growth is considered “value-free” at the political level (Houghton 1996; Logan and Molotch 1987). Exotic urbanism through the production of fast cities is causing multiple issues in the global South. First, the production of “privatopias” and “exopolises” (Soja 2000) lead to the “secession” of successful from main stream society or commoners” (McKenzie 1994; Keil 2002). These cities “culturally secede from their national and cultural locations and align themselves with global cities” (Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011: 41). This engenders dualistic development—a few advanced high-tech economic sectors exist, while the vast majority of people engage in traditional occupations. There are historical and structural conditions that enable the creation of private spaces. Gated spaces/cities are considered as marker[s] of prestige (Glasze, Webster, and Frantz 2006).

Second, the relationship between cities and city regions are bound to change drastically with such development. Cities are unhinged from their regional or national economies. Cities are often considered growth poles to peripheral regions. However, new development can leave cities functioning as cul-de-sacs, without much exchange with the periphery, except to use its environmental resources. New strategic and fast cities (e.g., Sangdo, Lippo Cikarang, and the Lavasa and Aamby Valley cities in India) show their weak and reverse links with the periphery and create exploitative chains through acquisition, command, and control over public goods like roads and the environment—water resources, scenic areas, etc. (Datta and Shaban 2016). In this context, Bhattacharya and Sanyal (2011) say, “this unhinging of the cities from their regional or national economies manifests in the dissociation of the new class of

workers engaged in immaterial production from regional lifestyles and prevalent social modes of reproduction” (44).

Third, the land is acquired or seized through state actions at various levels including local civic bodies and municipal corporations, as in the case of Rajarhat (Kundu 2016), or reclaimed land is sold to a corporate group to build the city, as in the case of Sangdo (Shin 2016). Due to land acquisition, peasants, agricultural labourers, and dependent service providers are thrown into an economy in which their skills are irrelevant. In other words, this subset of the population becomes a surplus that is not effectively integrated into the economy, except to perform menial and marginal work. This also shows that (a) at the core of new (fast) urbanisation lies the primitive accumulation of capital—the assimilation and capture of non-capitalist means of production or a subsistence economy and its integration into a capitalist system, and (b) a surplus population is created in an accumulation economy.

Fourth, new city-building and master planning is also characterised by bypassed development, both literally and symbolically. The schemes invented for easing city transport problems have specifically ignored the social and economic consequences to marginalised and minority cultural and social groups. Flyovers and bypasses are typically constructed to bypass congested areas which house such social groups. The development of bypasses and flyovers in such areas does not only economically deprive marginalised and cultural ethnic groups, but may have larger consequences for the marginalised and for the cultural ethos of the cities. These bypasses and flyovers essentially spatially alienate the marginalized communities. By providing speed to cities and economies, we end up destroying communities and people’s livelihoods.

Fifth, the new city-building process has led to an enormous assault on the natural environment in the global South. Ethical environmental concerns have changed to bourgeois environmentalism (Baviskar 2002) and ecological modernisation in the form of golf courses and parks. There has been widespread manipulation of nature, especially in terms of controlling water resources, manipulating forest land, constructing in coastal zones, and plundering minerals. As evident in the case of Navi Mumbai, Rajarhat, and other cities like Lavasa in India, the vast majority of acquired land has gone into creating modified environments for mass housing, rather than preserving the original environment, flora and fauna, or land. Bourgeoisie environmentalism is destructive for the survival and wellbeing of the poor—it serves the desires of the rich and the building of fast megacities.

A slowing down of the growth and production of fast cities is necessary, as they lead to many adverse consequences. We must reduce speed and pause to think on how we can collectively optimise economic growth, environmental quality, social cohesion, and human development. Slow growth may allow for the opportunity to be reflective and careful about local contexts while pursuing sustainable

development. Slow growth can generate stability, while fast growth allows socially and politically advantageous classes and groups to reap economic benefits. Slow growth provides individuals, specifically the disadvantaged, with time to adapt to the changes and consequently benefit. Further, fast growth, due to socioeconomic and ecological constraints, cannot be sustained for long. Given differential levels of initial socioeconomic advantages, it is not difficult to imagine that a thin stratum of the upper class and entrepreneurs will disproportionately benefit from fast growth, resulting in the further widening of inequalities.

Proposition #2: slow policy

In this interconnected world driven by information technology and fast-moving machines, ideas, fads, and fashion are also moving rapidly (Peck and Theodore 2005). Corporate knowledge economies and expert groups in the North are continually looking for avenues to further their growth through consulting, providing expert advice, and exporting their men and technologies to the global South. Overall, the global South is enormously prone to adopting the flood of ideas from the North. In sum, the North exercises a hegemony in the development policy arena of the global South. Further, ideas that worked in certain contexts are promoted everywhere, sometimes without understanding the contexts where they are being exported to or emulated in. In other words, policy-making and the policies themselves are now treated as without borders (Peck and Theodore 2005). In the process of exporting policies rapidly from the global North to the global South or from one context to another within the global South, we assume uniform conditions of economy, ecology, polity, and social behaviours or social contexts.

Further, the designs of policies have become expert-centric, top-down, and corporate driven; they flow from the North to the South, national to local, and from the rich to the poor without any concern for short- and long-term consequences. This flow also exposes the logic and limits of fast policies.

Policies need to evolve within local contexts and must include the participation of the people who will be most affected. This will reduce the need to import policies. Further, there may be important aspects in the policies that favour the North or which are being pushed by experts, but these policies need to be discussed by the people who will be affected by them before being operationalised. As such, a considerable slowing down of the process of adapting policies is necessary to exercise a reflexive and reasoned approach.

The development of fast cities in the North has become consultant-centric. Consultants reap enormous rewards from their ideas and policies, akin to a modern-day gold rush (Bhatia 2016).

However, it is not uncommon in the South to hear about how the fast export of democracy has destabilised the Middle East and created wars for peace.

India's smart city project is an archetype of "fast policies" or "exotic policies" that operate out of context (Bhatia 2016). It advocates solutions driven by information technology for all problems, from traffic and security to urban governance, in a country where only 9.5% of all households and 18.7% of urban households own laptops or computers (Census of India 2011).

Though slow policies can hinder the development of fast cities—and as such, fast economic growth—they can build sustainability and resilience into the system. We suggest that (slow) policies need to (a) be evolved keeping in mind local contexts and align with local geography and ecology; (b) consider local history and sociology; (c) reflect the aspirations of the people for whom the policies are made; (d) be evolved from the bottom up; and (e) align national goals with local goals and aspirations in the global context, and not in reverse.

Proposition #4: Deliberative democracy

Neoliberalism has created a socio-political condition where "power" has shifted to the hands of the economically powerful. Further, governments of the global South are embedded in agentic^{iv} chains, wherein powerful nations, global economic institutions, and multinational corporations play a major role in shaping economic and political priorities and policies, irrespective of local contexts. Governments/states often play a role on subduing critical thinking and opposition, and through governmentality (the process and act of governing), creating and reproducing subdued-citizenship. As such, democracies remain superficial and governments are not concerned about the needs of the masses. The poor are often reduced to terminology such as "vote bank", and decisions made in their interest are interpreted pejoratively. The rich have become prominently organised, defining their class interests and separating themselves from the proletarian masses. Most of these countries, through "shareholder democracy" (Durington 2011: 209) in industrial, house owners', and shareowners' associations, enjoy "club good" benefits (Atkinson and Blandy 2006) that fundamentally violate basic (social) democratic principles.

In recent years, the emphasis has also shifted from local government to local governance (Houghton 1996: 20), as in the cases of Sangdo, Rajarhat, African cities, and Masdar (Datta and Shaban 2016). Fiscal problems have forced local governments to outsource their functions to private organisations, and as such, be more responsive to demands of these organisations. This shift has dramatically altered the role of local governments. "In particular, it has shifted from being predominantly a frontline provider of services towards being facilitator and enabler ... Local governance then represents a more porous

system of power sharing and resource coordination than in the days when many more services were delivered directly by local authorities themselves” (Houghton 1996: 20).

Private organisations often act as growth coalitions and overemphasise fast growth at the cost of dispossession of peasants, tribal people, and the working classes in cities; this growth favours accumulation by the upper class and undermines distributive justice (see Harvey 2005; Banerjee-Guha 2008). These private groups, who are not directly answerable to the public through electoral links, wield substantial power and influence governments in making decisions.

However, if policies are to be rooted and to become context-specific and participatory in nature, they must be evolved through a process of deliberation by stakeholders. For this, states will need to use their powers to enrich the processes of deliberative planning and democracy. The development agenda can be brought to the public at different scales—local, regional, and national—as concerns them. Deliberations can be carried out in a non-coercive manner. This requires that citizens are empowered to dissent and are assisted by civil society groups.^v The state, through discursive democracy, can help stakeholders arrive at collective decisions.

Besides being local, discursive democracies can be transnational or global in relation and ecological in their stance on environmental problems (Dryzek 2002). Individuals must reflect on discourses associated with development and adopt changes. It is vital that we adopt reflexive modernisation, which questions forces of social control, such as discourses (Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash 1994). “Reflexive modernization means a future that is chosen rather than a trajectory to which everyone must adjust” (Dryzek 2002: 164). That does not mean that everyone has to become an expert, but they must all collectively deliberate. Collective risk, which is being pushed on the global South by a limited number of decision-makers, can be avoided by collective decision-making. This will also provide democratic control of the discourses spun by expert and corporate groups.

There is a need to increase awareness that corporate-led development and the fast, unimodal thinking associated with fast cities and economic growth can create risks in society, as Ulrich Beck argued in 1992. The risks are increasing as a result of development—environmental degradation, social discontent, and economic marginalisation—which will be difficult to deal with, even collectively. The discontent can lead to balkanisation, as we have seen in the Middle East, Central India, Syria, Africa, and Meghreb. In this context, Beck argues for bringing economic development and technological advances under democratic control rather than letting it remain the province of experts. This applies to the city-making process, too.

Deliberative states, through discursive democracy, can promote localism and align it to globalism,

which is the recipe for sustainability. However, in many countries, institutions created to promote localism and deliberative democracy have been short-circuited. For instance, in India, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments provide enormous power to local bodies, village panchayats, and urban local bodies (ULBs) in planning and making decisions related to land use, local taxes, budgeting, and audit (Government of India 1992). However, in reality, these local bodies are starved of funds and work towards furthering national government directed policies, whether it is the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (initiated by the central government in 2005–06) or the smart city mission (initiated in 2015). There is hardly any meaningful decentralisation as envisioned in the constitutional amendments legislated in 1992 by the Government of India (for a detailed discussion on how local bodies feel disempowered against corporate experts and global consultancy companies in smart city planning, see Bhatia 2016). Sangdo, Qatar Education City, Masdar, African cities, Jakarta, and Chinese eco-cities show significant top-down approaches in policy planning and import of policies from the global North and from experts, rather than local governments working toward effective empowerment of local communities/stakeholders in policy-making (Datta Shaban 2016).

Deliberative democracy requires the communication of public opinion to the government. However, this communication is lacking, and policies are being shielded by experts or are intentionally confused in debates. It is important to take into account the experiences of larger citizen groups to connect the particular to the general. Their rationality should not be discarded in favour of experts' logic. Collective choices are more tractable (Dryzek 2002: 169). In sum, discursive democracy may be the most effective political means currently available to solve complex social problems because it provides a means for coherently integrating various different perspectives.

Proposition #4: Eurhythmic urbanism

Sustainable societies live with rhythms that are well-adjusted to their physical, social, and economic contexts. Cities, as societies, must be careful about the rhythms they maintain. In the global South, communities have developed endogenous rhythms that are being obliterated by emerging urban entrepreneurialism and business models. The rhythm analysis suggested by Lefebvre (2004) provides a methodology with which to analyse urban life. This new field of knowledge describes how societies function in social time and space, especially with regard to people's intimate relationships. In other words, the "analysis of rhythms provides a privileged insight into the question of everyday life" (Elden 2004: viii). Fast and slow cities have distinctive rhythms. Slow cities demonstrate traditionally evolved rhythms, intimate to social time and communities, that help urban societies function as well-knit units. Their "le quotidien" (Elden 2004: ix), mundane, and everyday life is shaped by endogenous rhythms of body, mind, society, ecology, and economy.

Rhythm can be conceived as non-linear time, which is more the essence of social time than the linear physical conception of time. In other words, social time is lived, while linear time is dictated by the clock and evolves from days to months, years, and ages. Social time can be recreated, lived, and shaped together. Cities based on communal existence capture the essence of slow cities. Moments of celebrating togetherness and social time can be weighted more than years of lonely existence and psychologically adverse conditions in fast cities.^{vi}

Lefebvre's conception of time differs from the teleological progressions suggested by Hegel and Marx—it is closer to the Nietzschean sense of change and cycle. For him, “just as Cartesian geometry is a reductive way of understanding space, so is the measure of time, the clock, a reductive comprehension” (Elden 2004: xi). In rhythmanalysis, Lefebvre tries to understand the “body under capitalism” (Elden 2004: viii), and the transformation of rhythms it undergoes—physical, psychological, and social. The body goes through various pull and push of works with which one is alienated and individualised to the social rhythms, which demand more living together, eating together, and celebrating together with community and near and dear ones. Although one does not attempt to conceptualise slow and fast cities on a binary, fast cities disrupt social time and socially evolved rhythms. “The mechanical repetition of the cycles of capitalist production imposed over our circadian rhythms should remind us of the discussion of the working day in Marx's capital” (Elden 2004: xii), while community rhythms are empowering, participative, and inclusive.

Although the fast cities under production are yet to fully arrive and make their presence felt, we have seen what life is like in megacities like Mumbai, Tokyo, Sanghai, Cape Town, Beijing, Jakarta, Cairo, and Dubai. When individual's lives are based on non-communitarian principles and entrepreneurialism, their work–life balance is rendered askew. Their lives are subjugated by capitalist dreams and greed; they are taught to want what is difficult to achieve. They go to work early in the morning and return late—sometimes they might sleep without seeing their housemates, let alone community members and neighbours. They become strangers to their own families, communities, neighbourhoods, and many times, themselves. While in the global South, community rhythm involves conviviality and working together, families and communal celebrations occupy a prime space within social time. One can imagine the further havoc that would be caused to social rhythms and personal and communal lives with the increase of entrepreneurialism, the race to get rich using quick fixes, and the increased flow of information, which fast cities promise. In these societies, we may be heading towards meeting more charming lunatics and eccentric individuals, witnessing the breakdown of families, children being neglected, experiencing a fear of others, and cities full of strangers.

Without romanticising or creating a binary between slow and fast cities, imagining them from the perspective of social time and local context, slow cities represent melody, harmony, and rhythm, while

fast cities signify noise, discordance, and chaos. In fast cities and megacities, we involve ourselves in what Lefebvre calls “thingification” (Lefebvre 2004: 4), which emphasises materialism strongly and leads to the destruction of social time and space, and as such, of social living.

Fast cities are killing our qualitative and social rhythms. We are almost objects; humans are being made for cities, not cities for us. Fast changes in material and social conditions in fast cities do not allow material and social dialectics to work on each other thoroughly; one quantitative change after another overwhelms social space and time and causes the “thingification” of everyday life, where the race for material gain dominates the quality of lived time, space, and spatial practices. Historically, we have moved from animal to machine energy. Things have multiplied, but humans are universally worried. Fast cities in the global south created under global capitalism to overcome material accumulation may further erode the quality of social life and add to the worries. As Lefebvre states,

Capitalism makes masters and slaves, the rich and the poor, the propertied and the proletariat... This is not wrong, but it does not suffice for measuring the evil power of *capital*. It constructs and erects itself on a contempt for life and this foundation: the body, the time of living. Which does not cease to amaze: that a society, *civilization*, a culture is able to construct itself from such distain...Capital kills social richness. It produces *private* richness, just as pushes the *private* individual to the fore, despite it being a public monster. (2004: 52, emphases in original)

Fast cities, as entrepreneurial endeavours in traditional societies, further open doors to the exploitation and obliteration of traditional communities. Investors of the built environment enslave policy-makers, planning, and planners alike. As Lefebvre says, “Architecture and architect, threatened with disappearance, give up before the property developer, who spends the money” (2004: 54).

Fast cities under global and material assault focus on counting things, or what was earlier referred to as thingification. In other words, cities become assemblages of materials and their dynamic changes. Cultural and social aspects as well as “body” functioning get relegated to the rhythms of fast-changing capitalist processes. In such cities, one can count things as “present” rather than the “presence” of things, including individuals and social life. Thus, fast and slow cities may essentially differ in the way they demonstrate the “present” and “presence”. Many cultures, groups, and individuals, and the “vivacity” of life in fast cities, may be counted as present, rather than acknowledging their “presence” through their effective realisation and assimilation in everyday life.

Slow cities can have people with lives dominated by creativity who are well integrated with their internal and external realities. It provides spatial and temporal simultaneity and coexistence. Fast cities generate contradictory processes of assimilation and the exclusion of many cultures, creating parallel

existences between the social and everyday lives of different groups, or “dominating and dominated” rhythms, rather than “polyrhythmia”, where different beats and instruments (as cultures and ways of life in the city) add to the melody. In fact, as suggested by Lefebvre (2004), rhythmanalysis becomes significant. He argues,

The rhythmanalysis will give an account of this relation between the present and presence: between their rhythms... The act of rhythmanalysis [le geste rhythmanalytic] transforms *everything* into presences.... The act (geste) does not imprison itself in the ideology of the thing...thing make itself **present** not presence...rhythmanalysis integrate these things...in a dramatic becoming, in an ensemble of full meaning, transforming them no longer into diverse things, but into presences (Lefebvre 2004: 23; emphases in original).

Table 1: Characteristics of Fast and Slow Cities

Fast Cities	Slow Cities
Corporate-centred	Community-centred
Large	Small
Homogenised	Idiosyncratic/asset-specific
Single imperative of economic gain accumulation	Multiple imperatives of social development, belonging, and economic change
Class-led and inequitable	Community-led homogenised and egalitarian
Machine-led and industrial	Community-led and craft oriented
Standardised and duplicated	Customised, original, and authentic
Planted by the nexus of global and local capital and the national government	Organically grown, developed, and shaped by local communities
Corporate-oriented in decision making	Grassroots-centred in everyday life and decision making
Socially, economically, and ecologically unsustainable	Based on local context assets and peculiarities; sustainable
Low quality everyday social life	High quality community life
Replicable and transplantable	Non-duplicable and non-transplantable—based on local contexts and assets
Insensitive to local history and culture	Sensitive to local history and culture
Fast and industrial food system	Slow food and local cuisine
Mega structures and dizzying	Small and comprehensible
Noise, discordance, and chaos	Melody, harmony, and rhythms
Socially incomprehensible time and space	Socially controlled time and space
Impersonal body, space, and time	Personalised body, space, and time

Emphasises quantitative or thingification	Emphasises on qualitative and social
Linear and fast growth	Cyclical but slow change
Mechanical	Organic
Signifying present	Signifying presence
Statistical (counting of things) and monotonous	Poetical, aesthetical, and dominated by creativity
Exotic	Original
Mediatised	People-centric
Arrhythmic	Eurythmic
Tendency towards homogenisation	Tendency towards preserving unity in diversity

Note and source: 1. Mayer and Knox (2006: 325) have also described the characteristics of fast and slow cities (with alternative development models), which are subsumed in the table above; 2. Although the characteristic of slow and fast cities are presented in this table as binaries, we caution against romanticising slow cities over fast ones; rather, it is better to consider an appropriate speed that matches local contexts. Slow cities are representations of the ideal speed, which may lead to better outcomes for individuals, society, the economy, and the environment.

In sum, we do not wish to place fast and slow cities on a binary; there can be a range of the same, with various combinations of slowness in one sphere and quickness in another. Cities that are too slow will not undergo much change, while those that are too fast may experience drastic changes and a society filled with risk. we argue for a city with a rhythmic balance of economy, society, and ecology, which lead to more equal, healthy, pleasurable, and sustainable outcomes.

Endnotes

ⁱ In his book, “Thinking Fast and Slow” (2001), Daniel Kahneman, psychologist and Nobel Prize Winner in Economic Sciences, emphasises the demerit of thinking “fast” vis-à-vis thinking “slow”. He associates thinking fast with System 1 and thinking slow with System 2. He argues that System 1 operates involuntarily, automatically, and effortlessly and is associated with fast decision-making such as that employed while driving, recalling our ages, and reading angry facial expressions. On the other hand, System 2 requires slowing down, making decisions after deliberation, discussion, reasoning, concentrating, computing, focusing, and considering empirical facts, without jumping to quick conclusions. System 1 works on “heuristics” and may be inaccurate, while System 2 uses reasoning and the empirical facts available—it is likely to have errors based on the limitations of empirical facts. However, for long-term and sustainable planning and development, slow thinking is better than fast thinking, which may make us victims of our own caprices.

ⁱⁱ Eurhythmia in this context is an imaginary combination of balanced economic, social, and environmental development.

ⁱⁱⁱ Consumed by speed, through alteration of a sense of time, socioeconomic, ecological, and body rhythms, and taught to live in the moment.

^{iv} Agentic state is a condition in which governments/states are under the control of someone else (here, powerful western nations, global economic institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), and multinational corporations (MNCs), including corporate groups within

the country) and obey their orders even if they cause distress to their citizens and are against their economic interests.

^v However, many democratic countries, such as India, have been averse to certain civil society groups, as they feel these groups are anti-development. Green Peace was banned in India and enormous pressure is being exercised on those speaking against the current National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government; for instance, there are several cases against Narmada Bachao Andolan, Ford Foundation, Sabrang Foundation, and Citizens for Peace and Justice.

^{vi} However, one must also understand that not all communal existence can be valued equally, especially if it suppresses human freedom and equality. In slow cities, one assumes that communities are based on freedom, equality that promotes fraternity, and the joy of togetherness through collective existence.

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