

Symposium on Planning Challenges and Planning Education in Iraq

January 10 – 11, 2018, Dortmund

Group 2: Urban-rural divide and regional disparities: challenges of recent spatial development in Iraq

Input and facilitation: Dr. Hasan Sinemillioglu

How to approach the urban-rural divide in Iraq was the entry question, which led to first understanding the urban rural divide in general. It was clear that this is a wide area of discussion; mainly it can be approached to evenly distribute the living conditions in a territory like a state. How to achieve this “evenly distribution” is discussed by Kreibich on the case of Germany: “(...) the deliberate policy to establish equivalent standards of living all over Germany as spelled out in the German Basic Law.” (Kreibich 2016).

One can reason out of this definition, that the urban-rural divide is about equal chances for all. Nevertheless the case is rather the contrary. Most people living in poverty are located mainly in rural regions as Davis, A. & Njenga, P. (2003) point out: “Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and South Asia are regions with the world’s poorest people. The poor are unevenly distributed, estimated as being about 60% of the rural population in Sub-Saharan Africa, 31% in Asia (46% if China and India are excluded), and 61% in Latin America and the Caribbean (Jazairy 1992).”

The paradox of the dependency

In general the catchment areas of an urban region supplies especially the economic activities in the urban areas. Without raw materials out of the regions one can hardly imagine the functioning productive activities in urban areas. Nevertheless the catchment areas and regions seem to be dependent on the urban systems. This interdependency seems to be biased in favour of the urban areas. Indeed the urban areas are strongly dependent on the regional supply but the regions are neglected somehow in order to offer equal life conditions like in the cities. This is the paradox of the dependency; the regions supply the urban areas, but they are not in the position to get the necessary services in return. However, in terms of food, Mohammed 2018 found that fruit and vegetable products from the rural areas in Duhok Governate are imported at a ratio of 250 tons to 1 on a daily basis by imports even though the Governate estimates there is enough prime farmland to supply all of Duhok Governates fruit and vegetable demand annually with local production from rural hinterlands.

One of the obvious developments is the concentration of development and human population in urban areas. This concentration attracts more and more activities, labour, capital and so on, which means that the regions lose the importance and the attractiveness. The concentration of the socio-economic life activities including the cultural and social infrastructure in the urban areas means that the rural regions are often neglected or even underserved by labour, capital and expertise.

This is also the case in Iraq, although out of different reasons and especially under the conditions of permanent crisis. Crisis means that people cannot look forward but only look for survival. And the institutions are involved in crisis management instead of managing the bettering of the life conditions.

Beyond crisis management, the general policies regarding rural development are very ambivalent. Especially in Kurdistan, the policies of food distribution, disbursement of large numbers of greenfield development plots in the large cities, and the weak competitive rural products lead to human migration from the rural regions to the urban areas. This process is strongly supported by state controlled employment policies; every family tries to get a job as state servant. Possibly the oil-rent-based economy of Iraq promotes this tendency. Once having a job as state servant the families do not look for other main income sources – instead, the other income sources are then subsidiary and secondary.

Potential areas for strengthening the regional development

In Kurdistan there are potentially certain fields allowing the focus for regional development. One of these is forest management, which would improve the regional attractiveness. The other one is the certain facilities which can potentially support economic activities – for example the border gate *Ser Zer in Berwari Bala* region. In all regions the planner and decision maker shall look for similar potentials, which can be focused on for the regional development activities.