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THE DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN CENTRES IN SRI LANKA:

A CASE STUDY

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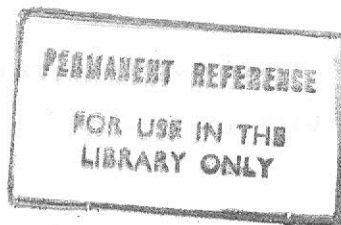
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ABSTRACT

During the past three decades (1950-1980) urban centres in many developing countries of Asia, Africa, Middle-East and Latin America experienced a rapid growth and considerably slow urban development. But in Sri Lanka, both urban growth and urban development of the majority of its urban centres remained at a low level during the same period. This study attempts to provide an explanation as to why these urban centres remained less developed during the period 1963-1986.

The identification of Sri Lankan urban centres with a low level of development was done by means of a classification, based on the cluster analysis. This classification was based on thirty variables describing various development characteristics of 94 urban centres that were found in the country. Findings of this analysis show that there are ten different types of urban centres in Sri Lanka. Of this ten, seven are characterized with a low level of development and these less developed urban centres were found to be located in all parts of Sri Lanka.

Then, an explanation as to why Sri Lanka's urban centres had experienced a low level of urban development is attempted by means of a case study based on a selected urban centre which represents a category of low urban development. The urban development of this selected town -- Matale -- was explained in terms of a conceptualized model, major determinants of which are the accumulation of capital, the role of government and the

urban economic base. This was done by examining the contribution made by each of these determinants towards the development of Matale town.

It is evident from the study that the development of commercial and industrial functions of the Matale town remained at a low level during the period under study. This was mainly a result of the accumulation and circulation of little capital within the private sector commercial and industrial enterprises. This, in turn, was due to the existence of less dynamic and less diversified economic base of the Matale town. However, there observed a limited development in the residential sector of Matale town because financial capital, accumulated in the form of savings in the households, and the financial assistance provided by the state banks, had been significant towards housing construction.

The role of government in the development of Matale town was confined to its capital investment in selected urban functions which included, housing administration, education, health, post and telecommunication and public security. The amount of capital invested in these sectors differs significantly, thus bringing about differences in the levels of development in these facilities. For instance, government capital investment has made an impressive contribution towards the development of educational, health and administrative facilities of the Matale town. However, the small amount of

capital investment in the postal and recreational facilities resulted in an insignificant development of these facilities.

The examination of role of economic base in the development of Matale town showed that its basic economic activities had been less significant in encouraging city serving activities. Furthermore, multiplier values calculated for the economic base indicated that the basic economic activities of Matale town were less contributory in bringing about a demographic expansion of the Matale town.

Findings on the role of each of the three determinants in the development of Matale town suggest several implications. The observed relationship between the low capital accumulation and the slow development in the private sector commercial and industrial enterprises further strengthen the capital logic theory put forward by David Harvey. The present study further upholds the validity of economic base theory for it can partially explain the slow demographic expansion of the Matale town during the period under review. The other implication of the present study is its discovery of the leading role played by governments in the development of urban centres in the developing countries.