

A Qualitative Inquiry of Institutional Responsiveness in Public Land Development in the Urban Areas in Sri Lanka

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Abstract : The public land ownership is a common phenomenon in many countries in the world however, the development approaches and the institutional structures are greatly diverse. The existing scholarship around public land development has been greatly limited to Europe and advanced Asian economies. Inferences of such studies seem to be inadequate and inappropriate to comprehend the peculiarities of public land development in developing Asian economies. The absence of critical inquiry on the public land ownership and the long-established institutional structures which govern the development has restrained these countries from institutional innovations. In this context, this research investigates the issues related to public land development and the institutional responses in Sri Lanka. This study introduces the concept of 'Institutional Responsiveness' in Public land development, which is conceptualized as the ability of the institutions to respond to the spatial, market and fiscal stimulus. The inquiry was carried out through in-depth interviews with five key informants from apex public agencies in order to explore the responsiveness of land institutions from decision-makers' perspectives. Further, the analysis of grey literature and recent media reports are used to supplement the analysis. As per the findings, long term abandonment of public lands and high transaction costs are some of the key issues in relation to public land development. The inability of the institutions to respond to the market and fiscal stimulus has left many potential public lands underutilized. As a result, the public sector itself and urban citizens have not been able to relish the benefits of the public lands in cities. Spatial analysis at the local scale is suggested for future studies in order to capture the multiple dimensions of the responsiveness of institutions to the development stimulus.

Keywords : institutions, public land, responsiveness, under-utilization

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