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Q1 1 **Himalayan Boom Town: Rural–Urban Transformations**
2 **in Namchi, Sikkim**

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5 **Duncan McDuie-Ra and Mona Chettri**
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10 **ABSTRACT**

11 Namchi, in the Indian state of Sikkim, is undergoing a building boom that
12 is transforming a small district headquarters into an urban showpiece. Cen-
13 tred on religious theme parks and urban beautification, the boom captures
14 Sikkim's emphasis on tourism as a development strategy. Growth in hy-
15 dropower and pharmaceutical industries within the state, and infrastructure
16 enabling this growth, seek to reduce dependency on the Indian government
17 and have turned Sikkim into a 'backyard' for Indian capital. In contrast,
18 Namchi epitomizes the transition from rural to urban space through tourism-
19 led growth, creating a 'front yard' exhibit which was recently awarded Smart
20 City status despite its small size and relative unimportance. This article ex-
21 plores Namchi's boom by analysing the politics that drive it, the buildings
22 and landscapes that capture its excess, and the town's lived urban spaces. The
23 authors focus on three aspects of Namchi's boom: first, it is crucial for projec-
24 tions of success in Sikkim and aligns urban transformation with a particular
25 vision of development actively promoted by the Chief Minister and ruling
26 party; second, it is not based on resource extraction or agrarian expansion
27 but on funds transferred to cultivate and reward loyalty in this border region;
28 and third, it is drawing migrant workers to the town in large numbers, caus-
29 ing fissures and tensions, and simultaneously creating an emergent, though
30 uneasy, cosmopolitanism.

31
32 **INTRODUCTION**

33 Flanked by religious theme parks and crammed with new buildings, Namchi,
34 in the state of Sikkim in Northeast India, is rapidly transforming from a small
35 district headquarters to a showpiece urban centre. Namchi is located on a
36 Himalayan hilltop with little room for expansion, yet the population of the

37
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town increased 12-fold between 2001 and 2011. The driving force behind this transformation has been state-financed tourism projects, infrastructure connecting tourist sites, and the expansion and relocation of state government departments — Sikkim's largest employer.

Frequently narrated through the personal vision of the long-serving Chief Minister Pawan Chamling (in power since 1994), development in Sikkim rests on the tripartite strategy of tourism, industrial growth (particularly pharmaceutical manufacturing and hydro-electric power projects), and the infrastructure that connects and enables these sectors. With 29 operational pharmaceutical factories and over 13 hydroelectric power projects in different stages of construction,¹ Sikkim is rapidly becoming a 'lucrative backyard' for Indian capital (Eilenberg, 2014) by offering extremely generous incentives for private investment. In the front yard, so to speak, the creation of modern, clean and simultaneously exotic and ecologically rich landscapes are crucial to the ways development is undertaken, financed and legitimized (Arora, 2009). New development initiatives are usually launched as state 'missions', such as the Green Sikkim Mission, Sikkim Organic Mission and Sikkim Tourism Mission. The ability of the state to preserve Sikkim's mountain ecology while making astounding progress in human development — evident in dramatic reductions in poverty rates, allegedly universal sanitation, impressive electricity provision, and strong education indicators (GoS, 2015a: xxxvi–ii, 18–19, 21–22, 29, 69) — is central to narratives of success repeated internally and projected externally. The state's reputation as peaceful and prosperous, particularly when compared to other border states in the Northeast region of India, coalesces in the oft-repeated claim that Sikkim is a spectacular development success, captured in labels like 'Little Miracle' (Rai, 2010, n.p). These initiatives culminated in Chamling receiving the Sustainable Development Leadership Award from the Energy and Resource Institute in 2016 (*Times of India*, 2016). This was one of several awards received by the Chief Minister for his, and the state's, development achievements, all of which are documented and displayed publicly throughout the state.

Namchi is central to the tourism mission and this drives the rapid transformation of the town — a town held up as a model for the development of newly urbanizing areas in the state. From a nondescript district headquarter two decades ago, Namchi is experiencing fast-paced construction and expansion, manifest most visibly in religious theme parks and urban beautification. However, the town continues to struggle with water supply, waste management and basic maintenance, and the recent building boom

1. Hydroelectric power projects are listed by the Energy and Power Department (GoS, 2017a) and pharmaceutical projects by the Commerce and Industries Department (GoS, 2017b). While only 13 of 29 pharmaceutical projects are listed on the government website, the Principal Secretary of the Commerce and Industries Department issued a statement confirming the total number of pharmaceutical units in Sikkim (Oberio, 2018).

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exacerbates these struggles. The boom has brought migrants from other parts of Sikkim, the Himalaya, and faraway localities in Bihar and West Bengal, generating a major demographic shift. This shift is highly sensitive, with migration remaining a contentious issue in most parts of the state.

In this article, we analyse Namchi's boom to create a preliminary understanding of rural–urban transformations in small towns in the eastern Himalaya, where the drivers, form and consequences of recent and rapid urbanization have yet to be studied in depth. Using ethnographic methods we explore Namchi's building boom by analysing the components that drive it, the showpieces that capture its excess, its lived urban spaces and the social order that governs them. From this analysis, we make three arguments. First, Namchi's boom demonstrates one of the three core strategies of development in Sikkim, tourism, which is crucial in its projections of success internally and to the rest of India. Second, Namchi's growth is not based on accumulation through resource extraction or agrarian expansion but on funds transferred from Delhi to cultivate and reward loyalty in the border region. Namchi has a limited capacity to raise revenue as a municipality and its transformation is underwritten by political patronage at central and local state levels. Third, labour migration accompanying and enabling Namchi's boom has transformed the demography of the town. This diversity is mostly tolerated, which is significant in a polity where protection of the Sikkimese population underpins political legitimacy. However, an emergent cosmopolitanism can also be witnessed, especially in the town's public spaces.

This article has four sections. The first discusses the significance of researching Namchi's boom and situates it within literature on rural–urban transformation in India, small cities, and development in the eastern Himalaya. The second details the politics that underpins Namchi's boom: central state finance, local patronage networks, and labour migration. The following section then focuses on Namchi's religious theme parks and urban beautification project, the 'front yard' veneer of state success. The final substantive section explores Namchi's lived urban space focusing on three sites: the Plaza, 'the cottage', and Central Park. These sites reveal the dynamics of inter-ethnic and local–migrant relations along a spectrum of tolerance, tension and transgression. The conclusion draws on these findings to discuss the dynamics of urbanization in India's border states. Namchi offers insights into rural-to-urban transformation in these small spaces which, despite varied drivers of growth, share similar demographic pressures and social tensions.

BECOMING URBAN IN THE HIMALAYA

Researching Namchi takes up the challenge set by Bell and Jayne (2009) to take small cities more seriously, a crucial task in developing countries where 'two-thirds of urban residents live in places of less than 1 million

people' (ibid.: 689). This scholarly deficit is pertinent in India where the mega-city and the village dominate research. Like others, we argue that this focus overlooks some of the most significant sites of change in India (Bhattacharya and Sanyal, 2011; Shah, 2012; Sharma, 2003). As Verstappen and Rutten demonstrate in their study of Anand in Gujarat, towns and small cities function as 'node(s) of interconnection between rural urban and local global mobility' (2014: 232). In the introduction to a recent volume on 'ordinary towns' in India, Zerah and Denis (2017: 2) argue that small towns should not be considered simply as the antithesis of the metropolis but 'need to be studied for themselves, as sites of urbanity, economic activities and social transformations and for their place in urbanization, rural-urban linkages and the global economy'. Such research requires us to 'redraw the map, reinstating the small towns and big villages where an increasingly large number of people reside and build their livelihoods, slowly embracing the habits and lifestyles of urban consumption' (ibid.: 5). Zerah and Denis ask, 'what kind of social change characterises small towns in terms of migration, social mobility, shifting power relationships or transformation of lifestyles and aspirations, among others?' (ibid.: 9). We have been driven by a similar question in Namchi, though we are also compelled by the changes to the landscape around the town and the spaces within, both of which we read as constitutive of the social changes taking place.

Using cases from West Bengal, Sircar (2017) analyses the ways urban space is defined and governed in India. In discussing the roles played by the central Ministry of Urban Development and Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Sircar argues that both demonstrate 'a conspicuous absence of any substantial mention of small and emerging urban settlements, accompanied by an overall bias in favour of large metropolitan areas and urban agglomerates' (ibid.: 231). When compared to rural areas, 'urban status therefore automatically acts as a claim to superior stake in economic growth and better investment-worthiness, while rural status comes with an implicit assumption of stagnation and dependence' (ibid.: 232). Thus urban status is cast as superior, yet where do its boundaries lie? Sircar explores the contentious politics of categorization and the contrasts between official and everyday epistemologies, concluding that 'the true character of these settlement systems, the essence of their historical development and thereby the core narrative of urbanization in India can only be deciphered through relying on the rich, embedded epistemologies that have taken shape within these settlement systems' (ibid.: 242). This is crucial in many of the census towns and other agglomerations in India that are urban in character and present urban development problems but are not categorized as such. Namchi poses practically the reverse scenario. It is categorized as urban, even being awarded prized Smart City status, yet has a very small population, a short history as an urban settlement, and limited potential for growth both physically and economically. In line with Sircar's assertion about status, it seems that for a small state like Sikkim, eager to demonstrate economic

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growth and investment-worthiness, developing urban space becomes crucial, even in areas with small populations and meagre prospects.

There is a limited focus on urban transformation in the eastern Himalaya beyond work on Kathmandu (Leichty, 2003; Rademacher, 2011; Thapa et al., 2008) — itself a mega-city of sorts — Thimpu (Walcott, 2009) and Darjeeling (Drew and Rai, 2016; Mell and Sturzaker, 2014). Despite this lack of attention, small rapidly growing towns and cities are proliferating throughout the Himalaya and in the border regions of India. Focusing on the western Himalaya, Mehra's (2017) work on Kullu town in Himachal Pradesh is one of the few studies of a mountain town experiencing rapid urban growth. Kullu's growth resembles that of Namchi in many respects, especially new capital flows from nearby development projects including hydropower, state-led urban development based on expanding government institutions and employment, and the draw for migrants producing what Mehra calls 'accretive citizenship' over time. Despite demographic similarities, however, in Namchi the possibilities of accretive citizenship are foreclosed given Sikkim's distinct rules of inclusion and exclusion.

For our research, we utilized walking ethnography to engage with Namchi's social and spatial transformation and to 'grasp the city at large' (Hentschel, 2014: 171). As Edensor (2010: 69) argues, walking reveals rhythms that intersect, 'adding to the complex polyrhythmy of place'. A mobile sense of place can be produced (and identified) 'through longer immersion by the walking body across a more extended space' (ibid.: 70). As Cheng (2014: 212) notes, the practice of walking itself is a 'mobile and embodied practice' and 'inherently a rhythmic experience and potentially offer[s] insights to the multiple splices of time-space narratives'. Thus, walking brings relational moments of ethnographic practice to the fore in ways that are difficult using other forms of point-to-point mobility.

The two authors conducted walking ethnography together, alone, and with local research assistants, engaging in conversations with people encountered along the way. This gave us the opportunity to learn more about Namchi while narrowing our focus to explore particular sites and microsites (sites within sites) in more depth. We shared photographs, videos and objects with friends, research assistants and interviewees to seek explanations and impressions of the urban landscape, of what is being built, sold and transformed, and who is involved. We were struck by Namchi's juxtapositions, what King calls the positioning 'of the dissimilar and even the incompatible' drawing attention to the ways space is appropriated officially and unofficially, temporarily and more permanently, reflecting past and present configurations of power and their accompanying imaginations (King, 2011: 12). We paid close attention to: (1) infrastructure: new and old, functional and dysfunctional, including infrastructure being utilized for unintended purposes; (2) graffiti: including political slogans, symbols and text, and street art; (3) memorials and statues; (4) houses: new and old, big and small, traditional and contemporary; (5) neighbourhoods; (6) places of worship; (7) markets

(mobile and permanent), illegal and legal, indoor and outdoor; and (8) parks and watercourses in various states of ruin and rejuvenation. In addition, we undertook social mapping based on ethnographic data which we triangulated with land-use maps, satellite imagery and official maps to gauge the ways space was being used and altered by residents. Much of Namchi's growth has been vertical, and thus we also used photographs from public and private collections to get a sense of the building boom 'upwards', especially following a major earthquake in 2011. This approach helped us to read Namchi through our own assemblage of spaces, texts, objects and images in order to explore the emerging urban order.

NAMCHI'S URBAN BOOM

The headquarters of one of Sikkim's four districts and a municipality since 2010, Namchi occupies just 7.5 km². The official population of Namchi is 12,194 (Census of India, 2011) with historical data suggesting the town has grown 12-fold since 2001 (and 20-fold since 1991).² In the same period (2001–2011) Sikkim's urban population increased two and half times, from 59,870 to 153,578, representing an increase from 11 per cent to 25 per cent of the total population of the state.³ Namchi has the second highest urban population in Sikkim, though it is far smaller than the state capital Gangtok which has a population of 100,286.

Across India the reclassification of land is a major factor in the recorded growth of urban populations in the last decade. Sikkim has one of the lowest levels of reclassification in the country at just 6 per cent in this period (Pradhan, 2012: 5).⁴ In other words, the urban population of Sikkim has grown without any major increase in the land classified as urban, at least when compared to other states and to national averages, suggesting growing density of existing urban areas. Despite limited reclassification, Namchi's official population excludes the peri-urban areas expanding to the north and southwest, and the network of villages and smaller towns whose populations come and go from Namchi daily. Large construction projects on the outskirts, such as Kisan Bazar (farmer's market), Bhaichung Stadium and Namchi indoor stadium, have extended Namchi's boundaries with new

2. The population of Namchi was recorded as 630 in 1991 and 979 in 2001.

3. The 2011 Census defined an urban area as: (a) All statutory places with a municipality, corporation, cantonment board or notified town area committee, etc. (b) A place satisfying the following three criteria simultaneously: (i) a minimum population of 5,000; (ii) at least 75 per cent of male working population engaged in non-agricultural pursuits; and (iii) a density of population of at least 400 per km² (1,000 per sq. mile). Namchi satisfies both (a) and (b).

4. Since 2015, Sikkim has had two municipal corporations (Gangtok and Namchi), two municipal councils (Jorethang and Gyalshing), and three municipalities (Mangan, Rangpo, Singtam) increasing the areas that can be classified as urban.

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roads and new tracts of land released for construction. The precise size of the urban area outside the municipal boundaries is difficult to determine given the recent completion of many of these projects, post-earthquake reconstruction (that is, post-2011 Census), and recent road upgrading. Most recent residential and commercial construction has been vertical, adding density in the form of six- to eight-storey buildings to an earthquake-prone area (see Supporting Information Photo S1 in online article).

Namchi has certainly undergone a building boom in the last two decades — a period coinciding with the reign of Pawan Chamling as Chief Minister of Sikkim. Chamling is from just outside Namchi, and there is a general sense that the town and district have benefited substantially from his time as Chief Minister. Indeed, the town and the surrounding areas are replete with marble plaques commemorating the Chief Minister's inauguration of buildings, as well as portraits of the Chief Minister in foyers and on calendars produced by his ruling Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) hanging in shops, houses and government offices. These artefacts align development and prosperity with his period in office.

Along with Gangtok, Namchi is intended for emulation within Sikkim. Gangtok's growth has been more organic compared to Namchi and the planned expansion of the latter is thus seen as a realistic prototype for urban transformation elsewhere in the state, as envisioned by the Chief Minister. In his foreword to a report celebrating the achievements of the Urban Development and Housing Department in the first two decades of his rule, the Chief Minister wrote of plans to 'upgrade and beautify' all towns 'on the lines' of MG Marg in Gangtok and Central Park in Namchi (GoS, 2015b: 3). The Secretary of the Department took this further, claiming that '[r]emarkably the Remodeled [sic] MG Marg and Central Park at Namchi has stood out as a mark of excellence in urban renewal which is being appreciated by one and all across the country. These now serve as a model for the entire nation' (ibid.: 11). Namchi's boom directs attention to three key components of politics in Sikkim: central state finance, local patronage networks and labour migration.

Central State Finance

Namchi's boom is not financed through resource extraction, industrial or agrarian expansion, or even through designation as a special economic zone. It is almost entirely financed through transfers from Delhi. Transfers from the central government to Sikkim come in three main forms: a share of central taxation, plan grants (for 'non-productive areas' including salaries, subsidies, loans), and non-plan grants (projects under various ministries). The distinction between plan and non-plan grants was collapsed in 2016. According to the Government of Sikkim (2016a), transfers from the central government constituted 79.17 per cent of revenue in 2014–15, an increase

from 72.05 per cent in 2008–09. Centrally Sponsored Schemes transfer additional funds directly to implementing agencies in Sikkim; before 2014–15 these were external to the state budget but following the 2014–15 budget year these transfers went through the state budget making a greater volume of transfers visible. Market borrowing also plays a substantial role, comprising a reported 68 per cent of Sikkim's debts and liabilities in 2014–15 (ibid.). In addition, Sikkim receives funds through the specialized Ministry for Development of the Northeast Region, a number of state-specific grants for schemes such as border areas development, tourism development and police infrastructure, as well as subsidies and concessions for state enterprises.

Sikkim struggles to generate internal revenue. There is no income tax in Sikkim for bona fide 'Sikkim subjects' under Sikkim Income Tax Manual 1948 (now under Section 10 of the Indian Income Tax Act 2005). The state has had meagre success in generating revenue through the pharmaceutical industry, hydropower projects⁵ and, most recently, legalized gambling.⁶ Municipalities across the state, including Namchi, have very limited avenues for generating revenue and are mostly restricted to taxes from business licences, user fees, parking fees and road taxes (GoS, 2017c). Tourism is thus prioritized as a development strategy, as will be discussed below.

In 2016 the Ministry for Urban Development named Namchi a Smart City. Launched in 2015, the aim of the Smart Cities Mission was 'to promote cities across India that provide core infrastructure and give a decent quality of life to [their] citizens, a clean and sustainable environment and application of "Smart" Solutions' (MUD, 2016: 2).⁷ The vagaries of the scheme have been heavily criticized (see Datta, 2015; Hoelscher, 2016); however, those same vagaries are in the interests of the state and municipal authorities set to benefit from additional central funds and compulsory public–private partnerships. Namchi's Smart City proposal is replete with buzzwords. The 'city vision' reads: 'Namchi Smart City will be an ecologically responsible and a vibrant community supported by a robust local economy and a zestful cosmopolitan culture; offering an enviable quality of life and lifestyle

5. The 2017–18 to 2019–20 Government of Sikkim Medium Term Fiscal Policy report states that 'Although the manufacturing, power and construction sectors emerged as major driving force for the Sikkimese economy, its impact on State finances, particularly on revenue generation has not been very productive. . . . The generation of hydroelectricity, though [it] adds to the GSDP numbers, remains outside the State tax system. Similarly, the pharmaceutical industries send their products out of the State through consignment transfer, which is not captured in the VAT' (GoS, 2017e: 5).

6. In July 2016, the Government of Sikkim passed an amendment to the Sikkim Casino Games (Control and Tax) Law 2007, banning local residents from entering casinos in Sikkim. However, this rule does not apply to online betting shops.

7. State and municipal governments had to bid for selection through various rounds held between 2015 and 2017, with the aim of reaching 100 Smart Cities.

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options that would make it attractive for all its citizens and tourists alike' (GoS, 2016b: 16).

Up to US\$ 15 billion has been earmarked for the scheme nationally, with successful cities receiving US\$ 32 million in the first year and then US\$ 16 million every year for the next three from the central government (MUD, 2017). In Smart Cities in other parts of India, this amount is to be matched by state and municipal authorities, encouraging authorities to find new ways to raise revenue and attract investment. In Namchi, however, the central government will provide 90 per cent of the funds, leaving the state government to contribute just 10 per cent. The awarding of Smart City status raises a number of questions for Namchi around the absorption and use of funds in such a small town and the form of the so-called 'Smart Solutions'. Namchi's boom looks set to continue under the scheme regardless, while also elevating the status of the town to showpiece city — one that vindicates the development strategy of Chamling and the SDF.

Local Patronage

Development in Namchi reflects an extensive patronage network that has been cultivated by the SDF since 1994 among its political supporters, ethnic and familial connections and businesses. This draws attention to the murky world of contracting and sub-contracting (and sub-sub-contracting) along political and or/familial lines, most of which is opaque and rarely discussed outside informal settings (see Chettri, 2017). While patronage politics is a staple of hearsay in Sikkim, an audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in 2014 identified (through 200 pages) routine incidences of 'unauthorised expenditure', 'irregular excess expenditure', 'excess issue of materials', 'procurement of materials at exorbitant rates', 'non-adherence to bidding documents', 'irregular selection of consultants', 'undue favour to contractors' and delays in identifying and delivering services to beneficiaries (CAG, 2014).⁸ The report by the CAG is one of the very few official accounts of practices that are acknowledged privately and are evident in the landscapes and built environment of the state, including — and especially — Namchi. Alongside finance from the state government, the private expenditure of the large civil servant population in the town contributes to the boom. Civil servants can secure loans from the scores of private banks lining the town's main plaza and these loans go into purchasing cars, investing in businesses such as hotels and clothing stores, and building multi-storey dwellings for the rental market, occupied by migrants attracted by the boom.

8. The CAG report focuses on five sectors: Social, Economic, Economic (Public Sector), Revenue, General. Most of the criticism by the CAG is directed at Economic, Economic (Public Sector), and General (including some infrastructure projects) sectors.

Labour Migration

Namchi's boom has brought demographic diversity to this part of the Himalaya, replicating the conglomeration of communities living in larger cities such as Gangtok but in a much smaller area — in 'tight spaces' (Bollens, 2012: 13). We posit that this particular demographic conglomeration is fast becoming the norm in areas transforming from rural-to-urban in the Himalaya. Importantly, most of these migrants were not part of the pre-urban landscape. Three categories of migrants can be identified: (1) intra-Sikkim migrants comprising students and civil servants; (2) migrants from villages close to Sikkim as well as neighbouring Darjeeling District (West Bengal), the majority of whom work as cooks, drivers and shop assistants; and (3) Indian migrants; this group can be further subdivided into older residents who are mostly members of the Marwari business community and a section of Bihari population, and the recent wave of semi-permanent, male Bihari and Islampuri⁹ labourers, small-scale entrepreneurs and street vendors.

Despite Sikkim being part of Indian sovereign territory since 1975, migrants from this third category are referred to as 'Indians', distinguishing them from communities from adjacent and ethnically contiguous territories who share a greater social and cultural affinity with the local population, including Bhutan, Darjeeling District (West Bengal), Nepal and Tibet (China). Migrants from these adjacent territories are able to blend into the local population, at least in public spaces. This distinction between 'Indians' and 'hill' communities (Nepalis, Bhutias, Tibetans and Lepchas) is crucial for exploring Namchi's spatial order. While we do not seek to gloss over differences within either of these groups, we argue that how one 'looks' is not always aligned with one's legal status as either a citizen of India or a subject of local protective regimes (also see McDuie-Ra, 2015: 6–7).

On the one hand, the conditions of Namchi's boom extend tacit social tolerance of migrants. Migrants from Bihar and Islampur are culturally distinct, yet their presence is seen as necessary and temporary and is accepted provided they abide by the spatial order discussed below. Grievances against the economic power of established Indian communities, especially the Marwari business community, ebb and flow, yet they too are perceived as necessary players in the local economy, especially in urbanizing areas given their role in wholesale and retail trade. In Namchi there is an emerging — albeit limited — sense of cosmopolitanism visible in social and religious interactions such as inter-ethnic and inter-caste/religious marriages between locals and Marwari/Biharis, or the tolerance of Bihari festivals like Chaat Puja and the Muslim festival of Muhharam, both of which are celebrated freely with great fervour by the respective communities in the town.

9. From the city of Islampur in Uttar Dinajpur district, West Bengal.

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Here we take cosmopolitanism to be a situated openness to external influences. Ethnographic accounts of cosmopolitanism focus less on universal humanism and instead pay attention to a more complex interplay between ethnic, national and worldly components in grounded social contexts (Calhoun, 2003). As Schiller et al. argue, rootedness and openness to external influences need not be seen as oppositional. They contend that ‘a cosmopolitan dimension and the maintenance of ethnic/national ties or religious commitment and identities can occur simultaneously’ (Schiller et al., 2011: 400). Migration is an important part of understanding grounded cosmopolitanisms, and Werbner’s (1999) study of working-class cosmopolitanism among transnational Pakistanis shows the multidirectional nature of cultural exchange among those crossing borders. In Mathews’ ethnography of Hong Kong’s Chungking Mansions, Africans and South Asians experience cosmopolitanism through ‘low-end’ globalization, a cosmopolitanism that is ‘beyond the imaginations of much of the Hong Kong world that surrounds it’ (Mathews, 2011: 214). These approaches to grounded cosmopolitanisms that do not necessarily erase or discourage ethnic and national identities but enable a certain group to create place in distinctive ways, often in contrast to the larger space around them, are illustrative of the experiences of migrants and locals in Namchi.

On the other hand, tensions linger beneath the surface. At the popular level outsiders are fused together under the label of ‘non-Sikkimese’ and are the subject of grievances over taking jobs, engaging in predatory business and lending practices, and eroding local cultural sensibilities through the physical, sonic, visual and olfactory effect on ‘Sikkimese’ space (see Low, 2013). For a small state like Sikkim, cultural erosion and the potential dilution of rights and privileges extended to Sikkim subjects is feared across the society, usually referred to as ‘influx’. Ethno-nationalist organizations have become more vocal on these anxieties in recent years. For instance, when the Bhutia-Lepcha Protection Force was established in 2013, it declared that checking the ‘frightening’ ‘explosive’ and ‘unsustainable’ influx into Sikkim would be its primary function (BLPF, 2013), while the Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee talks emotively about Sikkimese ‘becoming refugees in their own homeland’.¹⁰ The All Sikkim Educated Self-Employed and Unemployed Association has been at the forefront of ‘safeguarding the interest of the Sikkimese youth’ whose socio-economic rights are apparently being threatened by outsiders.¹¹ These challenges are

10. See the homepage of the Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee website: <http://www.siblac.org/index.html> (accessed 6 September 2016).

11. In October 2010, the All Sikkim Educated Self-Employed and Unemployed Association submitted a memorandum to the state government urging it to start the ‘purification process’ of Sikkim subjects, by which it meant purging Sikkim of those residents who held invalid or fake Sikkim Subject Certificates. Earlier in 2010 (June), 31,180 individuals were reported as holding fake Sikkim Subject cards (*Sikkim Express*, 2010).

managed by the Government of Sikkim through the creation of ever-more categories of Sikkimese subjects, placated with differentiated rights, reservations in public employment, and seats in all levels of government (Chettri, 2017).

RELIGIOUS THEME PARKS AND URBAN BEAUTIFICATION

Namchi's religious theme parks and urban beautification projects are staggering in their scale and provide a telling contrast to more conventional development projects (or lack thereof). The tourism sector contributes 8 per cent to the state's GDP yet accounts for 27 per cent of capital expenditure.¹² Even these figures understate the centrality of tourism as a development strategy and its appeal at the community level. The *Sikkim Human Development Report 2014* introduces the Sikkim Tourism Mission 2015, which '[seeks to make] tourism the main livelihood of the people of Sikkim, and each every household [sic] and individual a skilled force for the tourism industry. The mission also seeks to give importance to domestic tourism, focusing on pilgrimage, culture, tradition, heritage, adventure, ecotourism and wellness' (GoS, 2015a: 76).

Tourism also feeds the central state patronage discussed above. Between 2008 and 2015, 83 tourism projects in Sikkim were sanctioned by the central government, the highest amongst the Northeast states (GoS, 2017d). Communities throughout Sikkim lobby for tourist sites in their villages and neighbourhoods to create livelihood opportunities and as a way to guarantee infrastructure provision, especially in locations long neglected by the local state (McDuie-Ra, 2011: 91–92). In Namchi, religious theme parks and urban beautification are intended to attract tourists to the town, putting it 'on the map'. Infrastructure, especially new and upgraded roads, bridges, cable cars/ropeways and transportation hubs (Namchi Plaza) connect these sites with each other, the town and other parts of the state. Additional benefits include the awarding of construction and maintenance contracts for these sites, providing opportunities to exercise the patronage discussed above.

12. According to the Government of Sikkim's Medium Term Fiscal Plan for Sikkim 2016–17, capital spending on tourism almost quadrupled between 2013–14 and 2014–15. At 23.6 per cent of capital expenditure, tourism tops the sectors listed by the Finance, Revenue and Expenditure Department for 2014–15, above transport (22.4 per cent), rural development (1.6 per cent), health (4.8 per cent), education (4.4 per cent), and even above water supply, sanitation, housing and urban development (21.8 per cent). It is important to note, that much of the expenditure under water supply, sanitation, housing and urban development is spent on infrastructure to improve access to designated tourist sites and urban areas seeking to benefit from increased tourist traffic such as Namchi and Gangtok (GoS, 2016a).

Religious Theme Parks

The ‘world’s largest’ statue of Guru Padmasambhava (patron saint of Sikkim) is located in Samdruptse, 7 km east of Namchi. It was completed in 2004 and has become an important part of the Buddhist pilgrimage circuit. A ropeway and cable cars take visitors to the complex from the rock garden on the edge of town, itself proclaimed as a tourist attraction. The ropeway is being extended into the centre of Namchi and will form part of a mammoth 10-storey hotel complex currently under construction.

Guru Padmasambhava faces the more recent Shiva statue at Char Dham on the opposite hill, a ‘pilgrimage cum cultural centre’ on a razed hilltop at Solophok to the west of the town centre (see Supporting Information Photo S2 in online article). Completed in 2011 and ‘dedicated to the nation’, the complex features replicas of the four most important Hindu pilgrimage sites (Badrinath, Jagganth, Dwarka and Rameshwar) designed to appeal to Hindus unable to travel to these temples to attain *moksha* (salvation). Along with these replica temples and the gigantic statue of Lord Shiva are a *mankhim* (a Limboo temple) and a statue of Lord Kirateshwar (local incarnation of Lord Shiva). Amidst inexplicable statues of aboriginal peoples of no defined origin, the complex also offers free yoga classes as well as a flight simulator and a racing car simulator. Signage is in English and Hindi, not Nepali, the lingua franca of Sikkim, nor Bhutia, the language of Sikkim’s former Buddhist rulers. A plaque on site commemorating the official opening in 2013 informs visitors that the ‘entire project had been conceived and conceptualized’ by the Chief Minister Pawan Chamling. As Chettri (2015) argues, the complex signals a shift in the cultural production of the religious landscape away from Buddhist structures towards Hindu cultural influences, representative of an acquiesce to dominant themes in local politics rather than a recognition of religious heritage or diversity.

The sites target different faiths while focusing on tourists from within Sikkim, India and neighbouring Nepal and Bhutan. Char Dam in particular is directed at Indian tourists with some token recognition of local sacral traditions. Samdruptse is on the trans-Himalayan Buddhist pilgrimage and tourist circuit while Char Dam locates the site and Sikkim within Hindu mythology as well as Indian sovereign territory, an important gesture in a border polity that has long generated anxiety for India (Rose, 1969). Noticeably absent from the religious tourism landscape are Christian and Muslim sites, despite a large presence of both religious communities in the town.

Urban Beautification

Beneath the 100 ft gods, a more conventional urban beautification strategy is visible in the town centre. Central Park (inaugurated in 2009) is the main

feature: this is an L-shaped promenade fronted by upscale boutiques, sweet shops, banks, alcohol shops and travel agencies. The space contains many of the standard local architectural forms now common in cities and towns throughout Sikkim: wrought iron fencing featuring the Buddhist *palbheu* (the endless knot) painted yellow and green, green painted buildings fronting public space decreed by the Sikkim Green Mission, sloped roofs reminiscent of a *gompa* (monastery) on public buildings, a statue of Gandhi (a feature of towns throughout India) and water fountains.

Central Park also contains a more unusual edifice; an outdoor aquarium containing large tanks under a tree, surrounded by a chain-link fence and potted plants. Faded underwater scenery motifs are still visible in tanks where the water level is low — a perhaps predictable circumstance for a town with chronic water shortages. Gone are the piranhas and the famed hammerhead shark, and though one tank still featured live fish in our early periods of fieldwork, by September 2016 it too was empty.

A short distance to the south of Central Park is Namchi Plaza (inaugurated in 2011), a six-storey multi-use space with access for vehicles on the three lower levels courtesy of a winding concrete ramp attached to one side. The Plaza is designed to keep traffic moving in and out of town and to provide transport services to tourists. On Sundays hundreds of locals from surrounding villages sell local produce along the snaking ramp, although this is a temporary arrangement until the new multi-storey farmers market (Kisan Bazar) is completed nearby. The upper three floors of the Plaza hug a central chamber topped with a large semi-opaque Sikkimese roof and smaller chambers. The overall appearance resembles an oversized *gompa* fashioned from reinforced concrete. Both Central Park and the Plaza are important sites for understanding Namchi's spatial order, which will be discussed below.

While religious theme parks and beautification give a glossy veneer, the provision of basic needs is a challenge, especially in the neighbourhoods away from the town centre (Boomtar, Kazitar, Dambudara) and in the migrant housing enclaves scattered in the lower reaches. From mazes of entangled water pipes leaking onto the pathways and causing water shortages, to human waste and construction debris dumped onto pathways and drains, and the very limited public spaces away from the commercial centre, Namchi has all the problems of a boom town. Yet despite such deficiencies the town continues to draw migrants, creating a new spatial and social order.

NAMCHI'S LIVED URBAN SPACE

This section explores lived urban spaces of Namchi by focusing on the use of three sites: Namchi Plaza, 'the cottage', and Central Park. We posit that attention to lived urban spaces is crucial for understanding the ways residents and migrants experience rapid change and the everyday urban epistemologies emerging from Namchi's transformation. We explore the spaces and users

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of space in the process of ‘becoming urban’, revealing dynamics of inter-ethnic and local–migrant relations along a spectrum of tolerance, tension and transgression. Furthermore these sites demonstrate the ways diverse groups are brought into contact, and utilize the changing urban landscape in intended and unintended ways to pursue pastimes, explore deviancy, and feel a sense of belonging.

Namchi Plaza

As mentioned above, Namchi Plaza is a six-storey multi-use building in the centre of the town (see Supporting Information Photo S3 in online article). The microsites within the plaza reveal distinct uses of the building for intended and unintended purposes by different groups based on ethnicity, class, age and gender. Taxi drivers occupy the lower floors, youth the upper floors, and passengers, villagers (on market days), porters and new arrivals pass through the six-storey centrepiece and mingle on its edges. Five years after its completion the Plaza is showing signs of age: worn green paint, water damage, weeds poking through concrete, and plastic sheeting protecting against leaks mark the exterior. At first glance the interiors of the 4th and 5th floors appear deserted. The shops — which are arranged in laneways around a central amphitheatre — are mostly closed or unoccupied. Of the shops that are functioning, there are four hairdressers/beauty parlours, a printing block maker, a small restaurant and bar, an online gaming shop, and a snooker hall with several tables. Unlike the other commercial areas in Namchi, and with the exception of the printing block shop, most of the businesses are staffed by hill people.

These upper floors are littered with debris: strands of electrical wire, blister packaging from pharmaceuticals, empty medicine bottles, cigarette butts, chunks of cement, improvised bongos and pipes, and all manner of scraps from the erection and demolition of temporary bamboo structures on the roof. In a vacant area with no shops, local youth in school uniform or hip-hop style clothing come to hangout, smoke, chat, play music on phones, and ride skateboards. This area is out of view of the rest of the plaza and far from the watchful eye of teachers, parents, relatives and neighbours but often targeted by the local police patrol. Males and females occupy the space, though at the times we visited females were a minority and we never encountered all-female groups.

In the centre of the 4th and 5th floors is an amphitheatre featuring a triangular stage and tiered seating. Many of the lighting rigs are damaged, the interior paint is severely water marked, and the backstage area is now a gym called Iron Body, with unused equipment stored on the stage itself. During our visits to the amphitheatre the stage was being used by a breakdancing group of local youth (b-boys) rehearsing a choreographed routine. The plaza has become the space for the exploration of sub-cultures and aspirations

neither fully understood nor readily accepted by society, especially parents anxious about the employment prospects of their children. For the b-boys these are not simply pastimes and sub-cultural identities; they present pathways for upward mobility taken by others and a future away from the hills for dancers and singers made possible by hill celebrities like Prashant Tamang and Mingma Lepcha (more on this below).

These aspirations are confronted with a different reality on the lower floors of the plaza where vehicles shunt in and out of tight parking places, passengers wait for vehicles to fill and depart, and members of the drivers' cooperative sell tickets from small tables. In a rectangular waiting area on the local taxi level (3rd floor), a television hangs from a steel bracket and sitting on benches and chairs arranged around the television are taxi drivers — most of whom are local or from surrounding hill areas — watching films and serials throughout the day. If the b-boys embody hill youth pursuing aspirations, the groups of underemployed taxi drivers embody the future for those who don't make it. For taxi drivers, the promise of tourist traffic encourages financial investment in licences, vehicles (both to own and lease), and cooperative fees. The wait for fares can be very long given Namchi's small size, abundance of taxi drivers, and the lack of tourist traffic in the low season. The television nook helps time to pass, cultivates camaraderie with fellow drivers and fosters a sense of belonging. Clearly this is their space.

Seemingly at odds with the masculine occupation of the Plaza are the hair salons and dance schools on the upper floors. Despite these floors being littered with debris, drinking and gambling dens, dark corridors, and foul-smelling toilets and stairwells, these microsites bring women into the plaza as workers in the salons, as customers, and as pupils in the dance schools. Coming to the beauty parlour and attending dance schools are a few of the ways of experiencing and expressing urban lifestyle in Namchi, especially for women. Transient in all these spaces are the Islampuri and Bihari workers, some of whom stop to watch the b-boys in the amphitheatre or stand behind the taxi drivers to watch serials on the TV. On the one hand, the Plaza is a site of refuge for young people with aspirations different to the older generation. On the other, it is a space for the local drivers and migrant porters to gather and wait for work, connected through their dependency on showpiece constructions and tourists, waiting for the promises of Namchi's boom to improve their own lives.

The Cottage

In contrast to the Plaza is the distinctly migrant space in and around the only remaining wooden building in the main market area with no other signage or obvious name. The two-storey cottage is nestled between multi-storey brick and concrete structures where the Namchi–Damthang road enters the town centre. Its slanted roof of jagged slate tiles stands out in the mass of

flat-roofed buildings, many of which have steel rods shooting towards the sky at all four corners in the hope of adding more floors when finances, permits or favours allow, evoking Forty's description of the 'near-permanent state of incompleteness' common in rapidly growing (vertical) settlements (Forty, 2012: 29). On the ground floor of the cottage is a small tea shop which, unlike other restaurants nearby, has no neon signs, no product endorsements, just a row of wooden benches and tables, a small food preparation area in one corner, a counter staffed by the multi-lingual manager, a small family shrine high on one wall, and a glass window cabinet of dusty odds and ends, including a faded Sikkim Government publication from 1994 with the Chief Minister on the cover staring out at customers with mountain scenery behind him.

At the back of the shop a stairwell leads to the video hall on the top floor. The tea shop/video hall is flanked by a network of indoor and outdoor alleys leading into and through surrounding buildings containing a wholesale food shop, barber's shop, and tiny online gaming shops. Deserted during the week, on Sundays this small enclave is abuzz with activity, conversations in Bhojpuri and Islampuri, and the occasional burst of Bhojpuri music from mobile phone speakers. In this heavily gendered and ethnically delineated space just a road's width from the seemingly cosmopolitan Central Park, Bihari and Islampuri men loiter, chat, attend sessions in the video hall, and observe the town from the balconies and landings of the adjacent buildings.

The cottage is integral to the socio-spatial map of central Namchi where invisible lines demarcate the boundaries for each ethnic group. This spatial order is crucial in maintaining tolerance of outsiders, especially in a rapidly changing landscape. Migrant labourers are otherwise invisible in Namchi's public spaces. They exist on its edges, in the building sites and the migrant housing enclaves in the lower reaches of the town. On Sundays, this small hub around the cottage is a site for social interaction in their languages, information exchange about new work opportunities or news from home, and entertainment. Although confined to this space, housed in a crumbling building and its vicinity, this is a site of belonging for the Islampuri and Bihari men. The cottage and environs allow them to claim a tiny piece of the town — a town they are building — as their own.

Central Park

Central Park, with its defunct aquarium, green painted buildings and dry water fountains, is at the core of Namchi's urban beautification. Central Park represents the accomplishment of the state's urban vision: clean, orderly, modern and intended for emulation as discussed above. Many of the shops that line Central Park are bright and new, ranging from handmade candles to expensive clothing to coffee shops. Interspersed are shops selling 'Chinese

gifts', school uniforms and tax-free alcohol (see Supporting Information Photo S4 in online article).

Central Park is an open space where all activity is visible — unlike the Plaza and the back alleys of the cottage that attract people because they screen activity from public view. Furthermore, unlike the ethnically delineated spaces of the cottage and Plaza, Central Park appeals to all communities. Children in school tracksuits eat snacks outside a sweet shop, clusters of Bihari Muslim women stroll together in the evening, teenage girls parade in carefully torn jeans, office workers greet colleagues and relatives after work, and children play badminton among the moving bodies in joyous oblivion. It is a shared space, though within the shared space, segregation — especially between hill communities and non-hill communities — is the norm, interspersed with moments of interaction. The delicate balance between tolerance of demographic diversity and tensions between communities is tangible in Central Park. Bihari and Islampuri labourers keep a low profile. Mostly present after work hours or on Sundays, they avoid making too much noise, occupying too much space, or approaching members of hill communities, especially women. While mixed marriages and relationships do occur, rarely are these paraded publicly. Just a short distance away, in the cottage and its surrounds, migrants are better able to shape the sounds, smells and tastes of their own small enclave.

An exception is the early hours of the morning when Central Park is empty and the businesses have yet to open. During these hours migrants occupy almost the entire western portion of the L-shaped marble edifice, sitting, standing and spreading themselves out to talk in their home languages, network and joke around. By 9 a.m. they have disappeared back into their enclaves and the construction sites. In contrast, locals — who in everyday encounters include people from Namchi, surrounding villages, and other parts of the Himalaya — utilize the space with far more confidence, visibility and authority. Young men and women chat to each other in mixed-sex groups, monks loiter outside shops in their robes, and young women pose for selfies in front of gardens and other pieces of urban beautification (including the defunct aquarium). The space is shared, yet visible outsiders must obey a stringent code of behaviour and 'stay in their place', whereas more legitimate urban dwellers are able to utilize the space with more freedom. Rarely is this divide transgressed.

During public events, however, there are moments of transgression that hint at a cosmopolitan future for transforming Himalayan towns. During our fieldwork we witnessed two main public events in Central Park, one specific to an ethnic community and the other broad-based. In early September crowds gathered on a Saturday afternoon to welcome the statue of Gyalwa Lhatsun Namkha Jigme, one of the three monks who consecrated the first religious king of Sikkim at Yuksam in 1642. The statue had been brought to Namchi before its final installation in the Sangachoeling Monastery, the second oldest monastery in Sikkim. Mounted on the back of a pick-up

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truck, the statue was driven into Central Park and stopped in front of the aquarium. Monks stationed on the back of the pickup truck caught *khadas* (silk scarves) and touched them to the statue before returning them to their owners. The ethnically and religiously diverse crowd tried to get a glimpse and take photos of the magnificent gold statue. As an event, a happening, people came out to see what was going on, to take photos, or to simply marvel at the beauty of the statue and the group of Buddhist dignitaries. The crowd was packed around the vehicle in close proximity to one another and the lines between local and migrant, hill and valley, resident and transient were blurred. Yet the moment was fleeting. The statue was driven away, the official party disappeared and life in Central Park returned to segregation.

The second example ran over a number of Friday and Saturday evenings on consecutive weeks in August 2016, during the progression of Namchi-born Mingma Lepcha through the rounds of a national television talent programme, *Dance Plus*. In principle, the progress of contestants on these programmes depends on voting by viewers. Fan clubs and local organizations seek to galvanize local communities across the Himalaya to vote for contestants from the hills, a strategy that brought great success in 2007 when Prashant Tamang from Darjeeling won *Indian Idol*, a victory implicated in the revival of an ethno-nationalist movement in the area (Middleton, 2015: 195–97). This precedent was followed by organizing public events supporting Mingma, to spur voting. In Namchi, Mingma's presence on the national stage also served to cultivate a shared sense of identity from a shared sense of place. On these evenings, glaring lights and an unpredictable sound system transformed Central Park into an open-air entertainment zone. The repertoire of acts reflected the multi-directional cultural appropriation of contemporary Himalayan life and the galvanizing power of a place-based identity. An all-female troupe performed the Maruni (a Nepali dance), singers from hill communities sang Hindi love songs, local boys beatboxed, and the b-boy group that rehearsed in Namchi Plaza delivered an impressive routine including breakdancing to a Bhojpuri pop song.

Between speeches by Mingma's former teachers and local politicians, members of his support club read voting instructions carefully in several languages in the hope that all of the crowd would understand. The crowd reflected the cultural hybridity on stage. Local families sat on benches or on the storefront stoops. Children ran through the crowd playing games. Rows of male migrant workers stood along the front of the stage illuminated by spotlights, seemingly unmoved by the performances but intent on maintaining their position in the front of the crowd to be part of the spectacle, perhaps part of the place, their temporary home. The concerts closed with 'vote for Mingma' chants before the crowd started home to watch the broadcast of the show or to mimic the songs in the town's karaoke dens. By the next morning the prevailing spatial order of Central Park was visible once again, the evening of transgression barely noticed by those moving through the space. These moments of shared space and experience reflect a nascent

but uneasy cosmopolitanism borne of Namchi's boom and, more generally, the unprecedented demographic change in eastern Himalayan towns rapidly becoming urban (see Supporting Information Photo S5 in online article).

CONCLUSION

Namchi is booming. Religious theme parks, urban beautification, a growing population and rapid construction have brought migrants from near and far. At the same time, conventional infrastructure such as water provision, waste management, and general maintenance of the town is deficient. In a polity where sensitivities over migration are fundamental to the ways the state operates, the arrival of large communities of migrants from outside Sikkim into a small physical area has the potential to unravel the peaceful social relations at the core of Sikkim's success and legitimacy. Spaces such as the Plaza, the cottage, and Central Park highlight the spatial order that prevails following a period of unprecedented growth and demographic diversity, marked by a pervasive segregation between local and migrant communities. Yet at certain times segregation is transgressed and Namchi's diverse population appears immersed in a shared sense of belonging to the town, a nascent vernacular cosmopolitanism (Werbner, 2006) that is reshaping identities in new ways.

An interesting point of comparison is the ways urban development has been carried out in other heavily dependent border states in the Northeast such as Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. All have aligned themselves with the central government's urban development agenda to find additional ways to receive finance and to cope with the realities of rapidly urbanizing populations. In these states the priorities of urban development have been towns and cities with large populations, histories of urban settlement and long-standing urban problems, including friction between customary and municipal authority, migration, military occupation and expansion, and rapid settlement by people fleeing violence and counterinsurgency operations (see McDuie-Ra, 2016, 2017). The cities that successfully bid for Smart City status in these states — Aizawl (Mizoram), Imphal (Manipur), Kohima (Nagaland) — and others that are still bidding, such as Shillong (Meghalaya), all have populations in excess of 100,000 people and account for significant proportions of their overall state populations. They have the kinds of urban problems that might be improved by the Smart Cities Mission, or indeed by the Atal Mission for Urban Rejuvenation, which includes these same Smart Cities along with Dimapur (Nagaland).

Emerging urban areas in India often face the problem of misclassification. They are urban in form but not in categorization, denying resources to target urban development problems. By contrast Namchi is small, its growth recent, and its prospects dependent on state and national benefactors. Yet Namchi has been elevated to Smart City status, eligible to receive funds and infrastructure equivalent to those granted to towns and cities many times its

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size. For a small state lauded as an exemplar of sustainable development, creating showpiece towns and tourist sites is an important part of Sikkim's overall development strategy. It is the 'front yard' of visible progress that deflects attention away from the ecologically destructive 'backyard' industrialization concentrated on pharmaceutical manufacturing and hydropower projects.

In this way Namchi offers insights into purposeful transformations from rural to urban in small places, so-called 'ordinary towns', where people are — to return to Zeráh and Denis (2017: 5) — *becoming* urban through their lifestyles, behaviour and experiences of changing social and spatial relations. Namchi's boom has implications for new urban areas driven by different forces but subject to similar demographic changes, economic vulnerabilities and landscape transformations. Some of these sites are being transformed by infrastructure built for tourism, as in Ilam (Nepal) and Uttarey (Sikkim), some by the rapid growth of the pharmaceutical industry as in Ranipool (Sikkim) and Rangpo (Sikkim), some by hydropower industry such as Mangang (Sikkim) and Chukha town (Bhutan). Indeed, Ilam town across the border in eastern Nepal is promoting itself as the Green City of Nepal, and its public and policy rhetoric as well as urban beautification strategies echo those of Namchi, complete with green buildings and a fountain in the middle of the town square. Despite their different economic drivers, all of these emerging urban forms are, like Namchi, being shaped by new dynamics in inter-ethnic and local–migrant relations played out in lived urban space. And like many other ordinary towns in India, they are places where everyday epistemologies of what it means to be urban exist alongside — and in defiance of — official categorizations.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Supporting Information Photo S1: Namchi's vertical growth viewed from Damthang Road.

Photo D. McDuie-Ra.

Supporting Information Photo S2: Char Dham religious theme park.

Photo D. McDuie-Ra.

Supporting Information Photo S3: Namchi Plaza.

Photo D. McDuie-Ra.

Supporting Information Photo S4: Central Park with aquarium to the right of frame.

Photo D. McDuie-Ra.

Supporting Information Photo S5: Cement, mountain motifs and Mingma.

Photo D. McDuie-Ra.