

Paper Title:

Temporary Provisions- Rethinking Hybridization in the Planned Modernist City of Islamabad.

Abstract:

Historical and anthropological critiques of modernist cities built in the post-WW2 era articulate the hybridization of these planned places using binary, mutually dependent, or inherently constitutive correlations (utopia-dystopia, planned-spontaneous, center-periphery, etc.). Moreover, these studies highlight a struggle between state officials, who enforce the sanctioned master plan, and deviant citizens, who engage in spatial practices that undermine the overall modernist scheme. An examination of the functioning and everyday life of these planned places, however, reveals that the hybridization of modernist cities takes place often with the knowledge and consent of city officials. For instance, in the planned modernist city of Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan designed in 1959 by Greek architect-planner C. A. Doxiadis many spatial exceptions often with long histories are tolerated once they are labeled “temporary” in official discourse. France Colony, one of the oldest squatter settlements in Islamabad, was created in 1979 when a group of displaced low-income government employees was given “temporary” permission by the municipal authority to settle in a green belt along a natural storm water channel. Despite being provisional, France Colony is one of the earliest settlements in Islamabad, and continues to thrive amidst one of the city’s most affluent sectors. Other examples include municipal authority’s conditional approval to informal commercial enterprises, such as licensing of roadside kiosks, and hawking carts. In my analysis of such practices in Islamabad, I will employ the term “long-term temporariness,” which refers to special allowances made for unregulated activities once they are labeled temporary. If the modernist master plan represents an ideal to aspire to in the future, then invoking the notion of “temporariness” serves as an important strategy to make room for those things that cannot exist in the ideal state and must only be allowed “temporarily”. This paper thus attempts to investigate the hybridization of Islamabad by focusing on strategies devised by city officials to tolerate and justify (even if on a provisional basis) those spatial practices that exist outside the modernist plan yet play an important role in the way the city is developed and experienced.