



# Urban enigma: Becoming of today's Karachi

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When Saba Imtiaz wrote Karachi, You're Killing me! she portrayed Karachi's metropolitan life full of paradoxes. While she pictured it through the vantage point of the reporter, Ayesha; the same was done by Arif Hassan through his paper on trends of urbanization in Karachi. Hassan attempted to map out juggling of urban planning in Karachi under scores of influences ranging from political, social, and national and international. However, my commentary, comments on corresponding inequality with lack of inclusive planning concluding in planning failures, and simultaneous successes of informal projects of land mafia—that is Katchi Abaadis or settlements.

## **The Odds with Karachi**

Karachi has been plagued with issues of sorts, and yet serves as riveting economic hub; housing major multinational corporations, economic institutions as well as I.I. Chundrigar Road is mailing address to all public and private banks headquarters. Karachi has suffered political rifts, racial profiling, unplanned and unwarranted migrations and classic cases of planning failures in settling citizens peacefully.

## **Welcoming All—Karachi's Migrant Population**

Karachi has faced three major waves of migration: first, dating back to Partition when 600,000 migrants moved in causing great increase in number of Urdu speaking as compared to Sindhi speaking. Second wave came as Pakistan delved into cold war, and Pashtun Community from North West took refuge in Karachi, and thirdly after the 2010-2011 floods when hundreds of thousands fled to Karachi as result of hefty losses in their crops. The on-going migration process has put Karachi at awkward demographic position in its own province of Sindh; as it owns more urban population than remaining Sindh altogether. As a result, population in Karachi exceeds 20 million with several million illegal migrants, while city is unable to provide facilities pertaining to sanitation, gentrification and transport at large.

## **State Bailed out: Government and Neo-Liberal Agenda**

Government' attempts at formalizing settlements plans in 1958 (Karachi Resettlement Plan) failed because Satellite Town establishments were not coupled with timely installation of industrial estates as promised. The plans were curtailed after only 10,000 houses were built, out of planned 200,000 initially.

## **Informal Institutions and Politics of Katchi Abaadis**

Katchi Abaadis became informal settlements as government succumbed to mega challenges of urbanization. Police, Middlemen and Government officials corroborated to establish settlements for migrants.

As poorly managed as it could get, it provided land rights to residents of those settlements. Plans of re-locating settlements to peripheries could not succeed in following plans of Karachi Master Plan 1975-85 and Development Plan of 2000; because both largely focused on densification and high-rise commercial buildings that snubbed social and cultural life of families, and aggravated crimes and drug use.

As densification took best of Karachi's metropolitan life, in a parallel world, elite started securing large lands to have houses horizontally expanded in housing schemes. This widening gap in density corresponds to increasing inequality in society, and how housing schemes and plan are elite-driven and for elite. Large reason for government to bail-out on these settlements was of pursuing neo-liberal agenda of Laissez Faire—Let the private sector do its magic through investment and be capital/market driven.

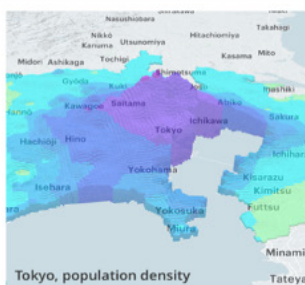
### What lies ahead: Outlook for a Welfare Karachi

The key challenges and corresponding solutions certainly need more concerted efforts of not only governments; but also, of private stake holders. As the dust has settled, peace is prevailing in Karachi, most imminent challenge is smooth transition of informal sector to formal sector, and then focusing on providing services to everyone. Land reforms must be foremost agenda from hindsight, and inclusive—as well as conclusive—policies of house building loans must be set in place in coordination with government officials, planners and academic institutions. Instead of following liberal agenda to have transactions-based economy, government must act to provide comprehensive solutions regarding regularizing settlements, land registrations and urban planning. This shall make Karachi land equitable and efficient at the same time.

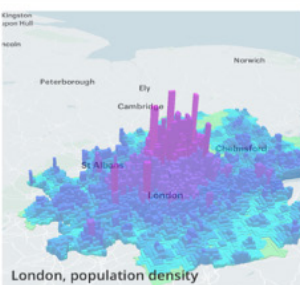
Because:

When we build a city, we take our grandest dreams as well as our deepest anxieties and set them in concrete for the next generation.

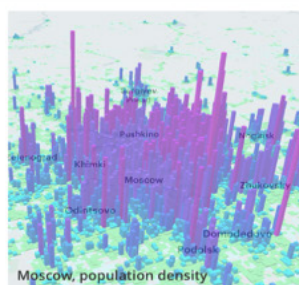
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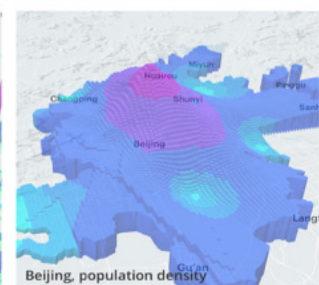
Tokyo, population density



London, population density



Moscow, population density



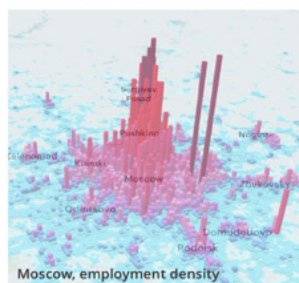
Beijing, population density



Tokyo, employment density



London, employment density



Moscow, employment density



Beijing, employment density