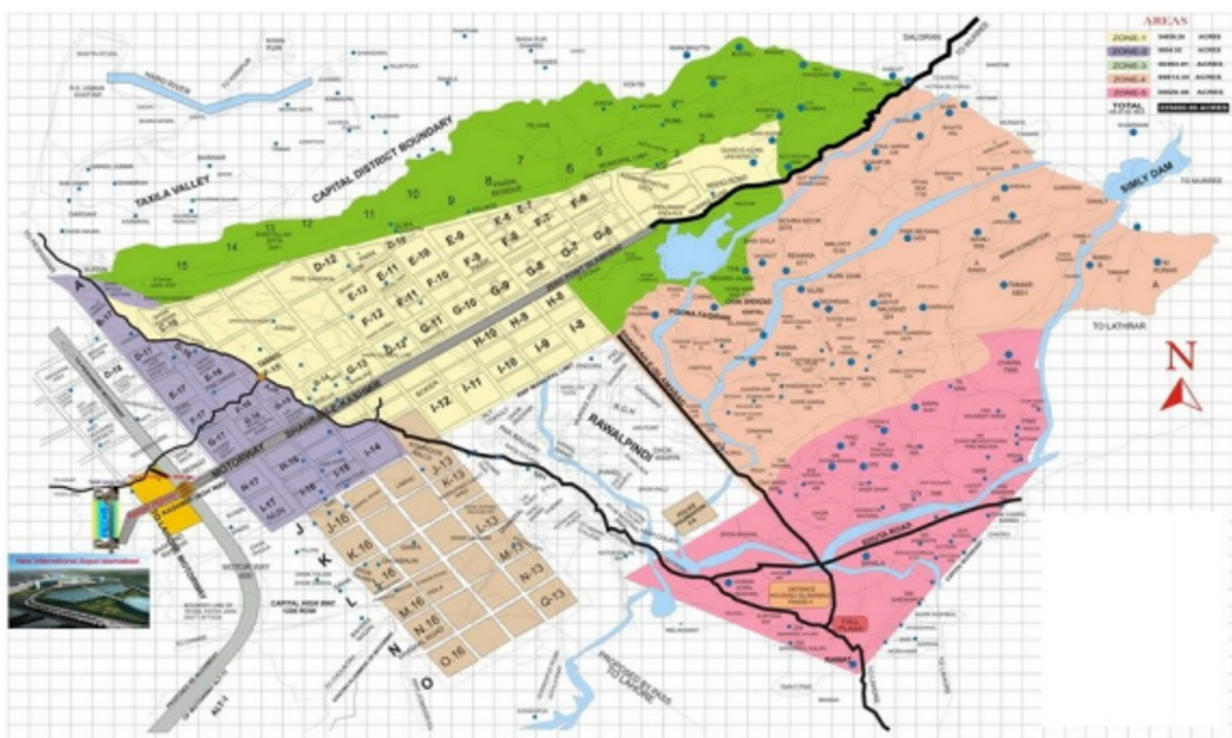


Islamabad: Is it the city of future?

Islamabad, the capital, was chalked out in hilly Potohari region of Northern Punjab by the Greek architect Doxiadis. What had to be the 'city of future' remains exclusionary, devoid of sufficient public utilities and leisure spaces, and affordable housing. The PIDE Policy Viewpoint 16 has underscored the lacunae in process of master-planning this city all along; questioning the very nature of planning then and now. Recently, as the Supreme Court directed, the government has constituted another commission to review the master plan and 'regularize' the 'irregular' construction.



Source: Capital Development Authority, www.cda.gov.pk

The Grid Iron Pattern

Established in 1960s, the Islamabad was to be developed by CDA under MLR-82 which later promulgated Zoning Regulation 1992 dividing the city in 5 zones. The city was planned on the grid-iron patterns. The city divided into 84 sectors, 5 sub-sectors of each sector: 4 for residential and 1 for commercial purposes, largely called as Markaz.

As good as it seems to have a low-density city, the architect overlooked the need to include Commer-

cial Business District (CBD) or any sectors for poor. The lone CBD of Blue Area was ideated to include the high-rise mixed-use buildings, but CDA excused from 'destroying the margalla view for houses of nearby sectors'—as lame as it may sound.

The Doxiadis' plan of no good has left the city devoid of any urban experience with scattered centres and unease furthered by the CDA. The sprawl is evident, and CDA has greatly benefited from the phenomenon. Despite the powers entrusted, the CDA has not announced any residential sectors since 1989. In turn, the urban sprawl has taken a huge toll on urban experience of the Islamabad with increased traffic, greater distance to cover, the higher public service delivery costs, poor office and commercial spaces, and diminishing public spaces. The citizenry has, all along, been deprived of any say in city matters.

Restrictive zoning laws have barred the city to grow into a vibrant and urban experience, therefore, leading to sprawl and single-family houses. As the interim report on Master Plan suggests, there is a need of regenerating city centre with changes in zoning rules.

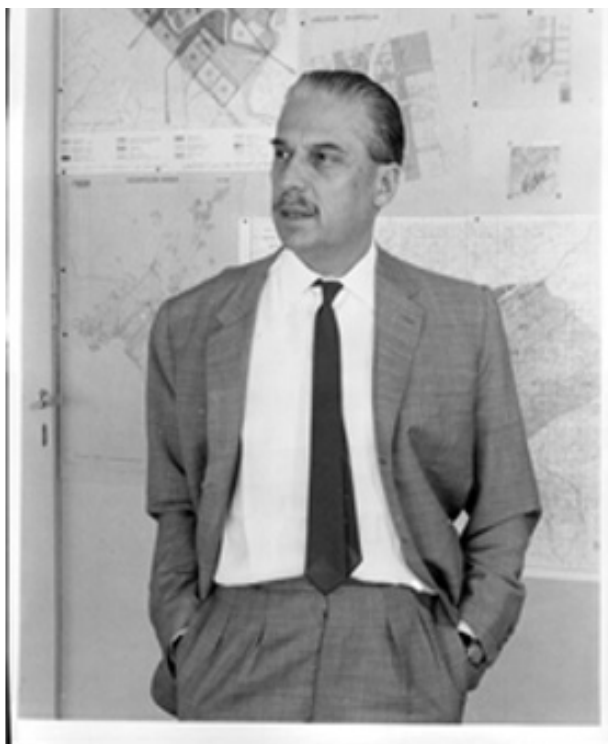
The uniformity of all sectors, the exclusion of poor from planned sectors has made Islamabad a contrasting city to that of many developed cities. The sprawl and sector planning have suppressed the need and affordability of public transport. In contrast, the New York has the zoning mechanism with three zoning districts of residential, commercial, and manufacturing with each dividing into low, medium, and high-density areas to suit the local needs. This endogeneity of need is sorely missing in a masterplan that is iron-grid designed. The planners have sinned more than its sins; and that deepens the need to integrate some changes. The Federal Commission Recommendations Recommendation of the Federal Commission for Review of Islamabad Master Plan (2019) continue to tread the same path that Doxiadis did. The commission has proposed:

1. Amend the bye-laws to encourage high-rise building in Blue Area, Mauve Area, Class-III Shopping Centers and I&T Centre.
2. Vertical Development in Zone 2 and Zone 5.
3. A ring road around Islamabad for better connectivity.
4. Widening of existing roads to cater to increasing traffic flow
5. Municipal tax to be collected from residents and businesses for public service deliveries,
6. Construction of f3 mass transit lines
7. Conversion of designated parking lots in Blue area into multi story parking areas on BPT/PPP basis
8. Regeneration of G6 sector,

These recommendations attest to the continuous oblivion that planners live in, and silos they think in.

Constantinos Apostolou Doxiadis (1913-1975)

C. A Doxiadis was a Greek architect/town planner and the lead architect of Islamabad, the new capital of Pakistan. In 1951, he founded the private consultancy firm - Doxiadis Associates - and undertook projects in many developing countries of the world. "A crucial element in Doxiadis's modus operandi was his attempt to shore up business success through the excessive branding and mystification of his personality and work. His theoretical discourse abounded in neologisms and unique technical terms - 'Ekistics', 'ecumenopolis', 'machine', 'shell', 'dynapolis', etc. - which were meant to lend an air of distinctiveness to proposals that often shared more with prevailing architectural fashions than he was ready to admit" (Daechsel 2015). But from all of the projects, he considered Islamabad as his best town planning. Islamabad plan was conceived in 1959 and it took 4 years to complete the plan.



Constantinos A. Doxiadis (1913-1975)

Are Master Plans necessary?

- Master plans are relics of past. Cities need to grow and evolve organically through the needs and mobility of its residents. While the ideas of zoning can help in keeping the irregularities under control, these are also needed to be evolved with time.
- Master Plans are not forward looking, in fact, they inhibit the growth. They cap the high-rise, and are antithetical to the idea of evolving and modernizing cities. This makes the cities static against the moving needs of people.
- In countries like Pakistan, the master-planning is a play of clique, without input from public and citizenry. The community involvement is non-existent.
- Masterplans delude the policymakers through the lens of economic development. This minimizes the humanistic contribution to city development.
- Similarly, master plans direct the development of markets, instead of making the markets follow their own path of development.



Cities are markets

Cities are engines of growth, as PIDE has reiterated time and again through its consistent work on cities and growth. Cities are markets and they should grow as they must—freely. Cities that drive productivity and growth are not made for cars, gentrification, or neatly addressing the needs of few. To achieve the purpose, the cities are moving away from master plans to simple guidelines and rules that allow the market and investors to determine the shape of city as it suits the community; and as the public service delivery mechanisms are robust and efficient. Based on needs, the investors should build flats, malls, leisure spaces, public spaces and vibrant experience of city.

City Wealth

Pakistani cities are poor and financially dependent on the federal or provincial governments to give them money. This vertical flow of funds lead to crippled city management. Cities often sit on goldmines that include real estate and public resources and can create wealth through socioeconomic uplift of its people and regeneration of decaying urban areas, such as Singapore did. Regenerating the neighborhoods in line with market demands can create new revenue streams for cities.

Authors: Lubna Hasan, Aqeel Chaudhry, Ayaz Ahmed and Hanzla Jalil

Reported by: Hafeez Ur Rehman Hadi