From Raj to Republic: Colonial Continuities in Urban Morphology of Islamabad and Rawalpindi

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Abstract

Constantinos Apostolou Doxiadis' 1960 planning and implementation of Islamabad is often viewed as a progressive, modern, and planned development. However, upon closer inspection, several spatial planning inconsistencies, administrative malpractices, and governance structures become apparent, echoing a continuity inherently colonial in nature. Its sectoral zoning, hierarchical road network, and segregation bear a striking resemblance to Rawalpindi's British colonial cantonments, developed independently next to the native town during the Raj. Islamabad's initial development depended largely on its geographically adjacent twin. Rawalpindi eventually took a back seat as the labour pool and service zone for Islamabad. Modern city planning often relegates traditional cities to an old, marginalised, secondary status. Islamabad's governing bodies consciously introduce and impose 'rationality' and 'discipline' on a populace and separate them from the bureaucratic and civil class, displaying a consistency in the British attitude towards natives. Within Rawalpindi, a dense military fabric exists today that enjoys the privilege of separation and a spatial disconnect from civilian governance, just like it did before Pakistan successfully gained Independence in 1947. This paper employs interdisciplinary research methods, including comparative urban morphologies between the two cities, a critical review of literature and archival material culture. Power and control manifest in Pakistan's contemporary urban spaces in ways akin to several planned, post-war cities. The outcomes of this research pose an important scholarly contribution to global postcolonial discourse. It focuses on colonial and military urbanism and postcolonial planning combined with dated spatial governance, to look at the way in which exclusionary logic in many ways is reproduced and repurposed to older forms of power and control over society.

Keywords

Urban Morphology, Spatial Governance, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Postcolonial Planning, Military Urbanism.