

SUSTAINABLE BUILT ENVIRONMENT - EXPLORING EXISTING AND EVOLVING DIRECTIONS FOR HIMALAYAN REGION

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ABSTRACT

The broader intention of this article is to present a methodological framework for working towards sustainable built environments in contexts that are characterized by rapid growth, change and urbanization. The article aims to contribute to this intention by examining the interaction between theory and practice of urbanism through analyzing a specific case - metropolitan plan for Rawalpindi-Islamabad area by the Greek architect / planner C. A. Doxiadis - in the light of the emerging discourse of sustainable urbanism. In analyzing the case of Islamabad, the idea is to see whether the historical development of its plan (1959-63) had any sustainability agenda embedded in its spatial articulation? And whether reinterpreting that agenda, and its original metropolitan framework, can lead to understanding and imagining new prospects that allows working towards a more sustainable built environment? More importantly, the article attempts to examine and reflect upon the capacity and ways in which urban design and planning approaches and strategies deal with the issues of sustainability in the production of the built environment. The article addresses these intentions and aims through three stages of analyses: i] the evolution of the sustainability paradigm and within that the emergence of the nascent discipline of sustainable urbanism; ii] the historical development of the plan of Islamabad and its distinctive aspects in terms of sustainability; and iii] the formulation of a design and policy framework for developing Islamabad-Rawalpindi area towards a more sustainable built environment. Within these analyses, several arguments and findings are linked in developing a case for reimagining urban form as a factor of sustainability that is not only a contemporary concern in the sustainability debate but also embedded in the spatial articulation of the historical plan of Islamabad. For understanding the sustainability prospects through such reimagining, a conclusion is drawn that the making of the plan of Islamabad unfolds a synthesis-based approach to urban design in constituting a metropolitan framework that facilitate a coherent urbanisation process, comprehensible built-form, architectural variety and a symbiotic relationship with the surrounding landscape. Theorising this framework and its key themes that are identified, allows one to comprehend the 'anthropocentric managerialism' based approach towards sustainability, with several elements that imply a precursor to sustainability discourse and a preamble that is being reincarnated as 'landscape' and 'ecological' urbanism. Theorizing such themes alone, however, is necessary but not sufficient condition for unfolding sustainable built environment. In this regard, several shortcomings are identified that contradict the sustainability credentials in the implementation of the plan together with the adoption of an integrated and transdisciplinarity-based approach in formulating design and policy strategies that allow working towards a more sustainable built environment in the Rawalpindi-Islamabad metropolitan area.