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Title

Negotiating Nonconformity: The politics of encroachment in the planned modern city of Islamabad

Abstract

This paper will explore the interplay between formally and informally planned spaces in the planned modern city of Islamabad - the purpose-built administrative capital of Pakistan developed in the 1960s. By focusing on the high- and low- end commercial encroachments in Islamabad, this talk asks: Why are certain nonconforming spaces tolerated in the planned city while others resisted by the city officials? How do concerns for preserving the 'master plan' of Islamabad affect the status of permitted encroachments in the planned city? Research on encroachments and nonconforming spaces in Islamabad shows that they are routinely created by both the rich and the poor residents, and business people of the city, and that they are not always instantly resisted and removed by the city officials. Instead, certain nonconforming spaces are tolerated for long periods of time when they are framed as temporary in official discourse in order to accommodate various unfulfilled spatial, political and economic needs. Recent court decisions on encroachments in Islamabad, however, reveal growing frustration of 'concerned' citizens and the judiciary with the city officials in their failure to preserve the 'planned character' of Islamabad. This discussion will thus reveal nonconforming spaces as being integral to the development and functioning of Islamabad as a comprehensively planned city, as spaces of contention and collaboration between various state and nonstate actors, and as spaces where non-planning actors like the judiciary directly intervene in the planning and management of the city. This paper will ultimately argue that these aspects of encroachments and nonconforming spaces in Islamabad are integral to its history as a comprehensively planned modern city, and to our understanding of the relationship between formally and informally planned urban spaces.

Bio

Faiza Moatasim is a postdoctoral fellow in Asian Studies and a visiting assistant professor in History at Hamilton College. She received a PhD in Architectural History and Theory from the University of Michigan in 2015, a Masters of Architecture from McGill University (Canada) in 2006, and a Bachelors of Architecture from the National College of Arts (Pakistan) in 2003. Her research interests include modern planning theory and modern colonial urbanism, low-income housing and urban informality in South Asian cities.