

PAPER NO. 246

URBAN PLANNING IN PAKISTAN

By

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In the mediaeval Europe, Mercantilism and industrial revolution brought rapid changes in Road Transportation. Town and cities emerged to accommodate commercial and industrial establishments. Urban planning is, therefore, a recent branch of social engineering. In the agrarian society of the days gone by, there was no requirement of organized city planning. Agriculture was the only source of economy. Elementary form of handicrafts and services revolved around agriculture. The increase in population was automatically accommodated near or around the culturable lands. Absence of mechanical traffic did not require any TEPA. Artisan wells fulfilled the need of water for human and animal consumption. Open land was freely available to meet the call of nature. So there was no need of **WASA as well.**

Urban planning is essentially land use planning mainly for public purposes such as roads, water supply, sewerage, graveyards, open spaces etc. Although urban planning is a recent engineering discipline, we, however, do find in the ancient history some excellent examples of proper planning to house growing population. In the Sub-continent, we can count HARRAPA, MOINJODARO AND TEXILA as planned cities although in an imperfect grid pattern. The blessings of the industrial revolution also came in the sub-continent through British Raj who needed well planned housing for its civil servants in the shape of civil lines and for the military personnel in the shape of cantonments. Interestingly, we see that KOLKOTA, MADRASS and PANDICHARI are the first Urban developments of the sub-continent which came up in the middle of 18th century when East India Company defeated the French and captured the area permanently. LAHORE, PESHAWAR, RAWALPINDI, QUETTA and KARACHI Cantonments came up after one hundred years. Urban planning is a dynamic science. Its fundamentals have remained the same since its recognition as a high-tech science; nonetheless, its modalities and priorities keep changing. Some time personal fads of city administration force an Urban planner to make compromises in the designing of road crossings, open spaces and public structures. That is why we find technically non-acceptable structures, roundabouts and ugly plazas in our larger cities. Storm water drains are covered and sold as commercial space. All these unprofessional interventions have made our metropolitan cities overcrowded and ugly.

Important elements of city planning for a community are enumerated below:-

- 1) **Economic conditions** (Poor, middle class and rich communities) .
- 2) **Cultural habits** (Elitist culture and populist culture).
- 3) **Demography** (Children schools and recreational facilities for them).
- 4) **Social awareness of the community** (Respect of environment, cleanliness, road discipline, building bye-laws)
- 5) **State policies & facilitation** (State financed municipal services, structural and link roads, electrification)
- 6) **Availability of public transport, health services and higher education in the neighbourhood.**
- 7) **Security factor** (Law & order in the neighbourhood).

•Retired Banker

- 8) **More importantly, the topography of the area chosen for developing an Urban facility**
(Nearness to natural drains for storm & sewer water, subsoil water quality of land).
- 9) **Last but not the least administrative / political pressures on the Urban Planner.**
- 10) Effect on environments (Self-explanatory).

Let us see how our Urban planner has to work under the above stated constraints despite excellent competence in his trade.

Economic conditions of the locality where an Urban community is to be developed play an important role at the planning stage. Our major population lives in rural areas and is associated with agriculture. Rural planning has to be, therefore, done under different criteria. Domestic animals are almost a part of the household of farmers. Larger cities surrounded by rural population on the periphery are confronted with unruly tractor trolleys, animal pulled carts, cattle on the roads, and bicyclists ignorant of lane discipline. Among disciplined communities, narrow roads can bear the burden of users/crowded traffic because people show patience, follow the lane and traffic signals.

State policies towards Urban planning are sometime unprofessional. Look at Lahore, hundreds of housing societies in the public and private sectors have been approved or fully developed. Hardly 10% of developed plots have houses, remaining are vacant. Why? Because all these societies lack public amenities such as public transport, schools, healthcare centers, markets, recreational facilities and all such amenities which would induce a plot holder to build his / her house. Hence the society will remain un-inhabited for decades. The land, which is already scarce in vicinity of large cities, is rendered useless due to its non-use either for housing or agriculture. The green belts around Lahore, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Multan and other sizeable cities have vanished. Only two decades ago, these green belts were the main source of fresh and cheaper vegetables for the city dwellers. The Public Authorities keep developing land but without ensuring construction of houses on developed plots, in advanced counties, the state provides structural roads, electricity and trunk sewer. Automatically the private sector is attracted to create housing around the state-developed facilities.

Urban planner has to care for the cultural background of the community, he is designing for. The elite culture and the populist cultural influence differently on the planning criteria. The elite class may demand wider roads, larger residential plots, larger parks, community clubs and fabulous shopping Malls. Lower income class on the other hand would need smaller plots, playgrounds for kids, public transport and elementary schools for children and too many mosques (religious sensibility plays important role in our Urban planning). An Urban planner has to take into account the topography of the area, which also includes availability of sweet water in the vicinity. Islamabad is a well-planned city, which was originally planned for a population of quarter million. For this population, water of Rawal and Simili Dams was more than enough. The width of roads and their grid pattern was excellent. But what is the position now. Islamabad's population has swarmed to over one million. Roads are jammed with traffic despite restriction on auto-rickshaws, animal driven carts and tractor trolleys. Water is perennially in short supply. Islamabad's green dividers and green belt on the periphery are being converted into residential quarters. The Town Planner of Islamabad may feel sorry to see his Islamabad of to-day. Urban planner is a sort of visionary when he is designing a township. But his vision cannot see beyond 50 to 60 years. Change in economic conditions, growth of population, change in social and cultural behaviour and too many modifications in the priorities and policies of State authorities alter the shape of a city. Same is happening in Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi,



PEDESTRIANS RIGHT TO USE THE ROADS IS MOSTLY IGNORED. WHO IS AT FAULT? THE TOWN PLANNER OR THE LOCAL BODY

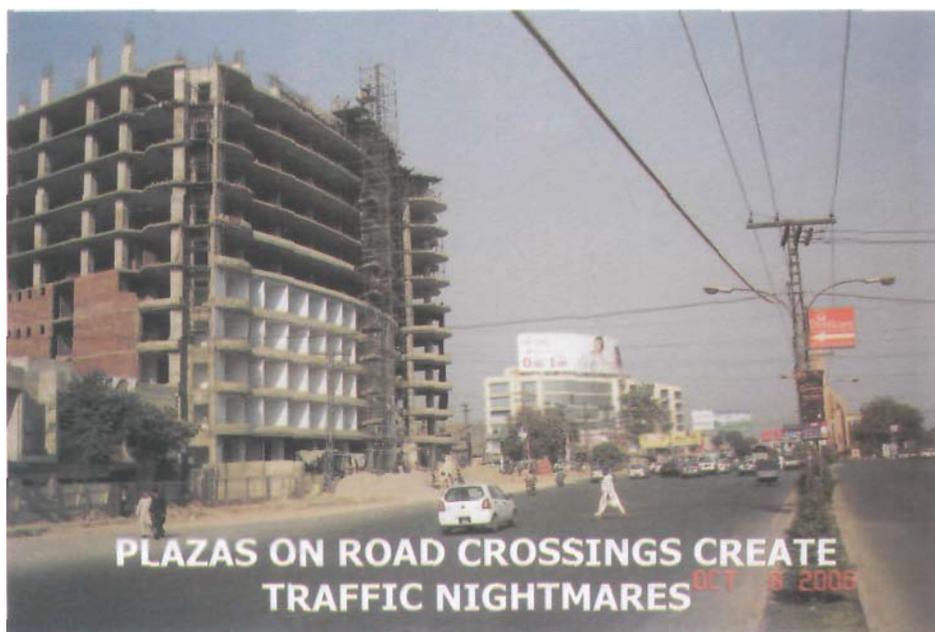
Manzoor Ahmad

Paper No. 246

As stated earlier in this article, Urban Planning is essentially rational apportionment of a piece of livable land. Best use of land cannot be made unless the State authorities cooperate with the Urban Planner by not intervening in his assignment and by providing basic facilities to the property being planned and developed. The State therefore.

Should not allow encroachments on roads and public parks / open spaces.

- b) Should not allow any commercial structure on road crossings.



- c)- Should not create roundabouts on roads and lease them for commercial publicity. Roundabouts are now being removed in advanced countries.



ROUNDBABOUTS ARE NOW OBSOLETE IN MODERN PLANNING. OUR KIND OF TRAFFIC MIX IS PRONE TO ACCIDENTS.

d)-



DISPLAY OF RELIGIOCITY AT BUSY CROSSINGS HINDERS VISION OF DRIVERS AND ALSO CREATES BOTTLENECKS



MISLOCATED PATRIOTISM CREATES TRAFFIC JAMS

Unfortunately this cannot happen in our country despite the fact we have stringent laws of building controls and town planning. External factors tend to defeat good urban planning.