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Understanding Localness of Built Form at the Urban Scale: Case of Karachi, Pakistan

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Abstract

Many cities in the developing world aspire to imitate cities of the West in their built form since for them this represents 'modernism' and the future. Pakistan is a young country and the contribution of a new generation of architects and planners has been inspired by the West, in the post-modern traditions and not informed by the local cultural, social and physical aspects of the society. Karachi, within Pakistan, has recently seen the construction of a number of buildings and urban design projects that conform to the international concepts of entrepreneurship and innovation and are a response to the desire of politicians to create a global image for the city.

Using the Urdu word *maqamiyat* in relation to the built form, this research assesses what it means for a city to be local in the context of Karachi, being specific, having particular variables impacting the built form, but dealing with similar issues of identity crises as other formally colonized nations. A combination of deductive and inductive research approach that arch over mixed methods are used, in order to reveal the nature and value of *maqamiyat* of built form. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, urban morphological documentation, archive review and personal observation methods have been used for data collecting. Content, narrative and focus group analyses are used to interpret data. This research is part of a Ph.D. that was undertaken at Oxford Brookes University from 2012-2016.

The research postulates lessons from its study of local processes of built form production, the value given to local places by indigenous communities and the impact of global forces through imageability, aesthetics, and style.

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Keywords

Global; Indigenous; Local; Urban Morphologies; Karachi

1. Introduction

Karachi has recently seen the construction of a number of architecturally distinctive buildings that conform to the international concepts of entrepreneurship and innovation and are a response to a global image (Mumtaz, 1999). Karachi, a mega city of 15 million residents and the main seaport of Pakistan, has a rich collection of buildings and structures of varied architectural styles ranging from 20th-century architecture to neo-classical buildings and classical British architecture. There is also the presence of Indo-Gothic buildings, Neo-Renaissance and Hindu Architecture. A new generation of architects and planners, mostly trained in the Western institutions of planning and design, has been engaged with the recent building activity in the city. Their contribution to the cityscape has

been the introduction of some form of ornamentation and cladding on the building facades and designing of urban spaces in the post-modern traditions (Mumtaz, 1999). These built forms do not use the architectural and urban design elements existing previously in the city and are not the best climatic or responsive solutions.

Furthermore, professionals do not understand the way communities associate with local spaces and thus these spaces are not considered important enough to be included in the design of newer housing. These urban spaces, which have certain meaning associated with them, and certain words, are used to describe them, and cannot be translated into other languages without losing their meaning, are documented and analyzed in this paper. The paper is divided into four sections with the first section providing a synthesis of the literature reviewed and explains the meaning of *maqamiyat*, the second section documents and analyzes the case study area of Clifton in terms of urban morphological evolution, the third section analyzes the case study area in terms of local tangible and intangible aspects of the built form and the meaning people associate with the built form, and the fourth section presents a conclusion to the research findings and analysis.

2. Literature Review

Recent literature (Davoudi and Madanipour, 2015; Hirt, 2012; Peterson, 2010; Sheppard and McMaster, 2003; Marston et al., 2005; Low and Lawrence, 2003) addresses the role of designers and architects in design and development of newer localities within cities of the developing world. This literature focuses on the debate about how can cities modernize and develop and yet retain their identities and localness as the indigenous spaces of the cities and the meaning people attach to them are not always valued in the newer developments because of which they are being lost. Thus, the question, about the role of understanding the indigenous places and communities and the requirement of feeding the lessons learned therein, into new developments within a city arises. The literature review of works of urban anthropologist (Low, 2009; Marston et.al, 2005; Holtzman, 2004; Sheppard and McMaster, 2003; Low and Lawrence, 2003) details the requirement to analyse places at diverse global and local scales, and to understand that the global models get incorporated in the local contexts, but, these spatial models are contextual rather than universal.

The importance given to an indigenous language does not always have to be in a physical form (street names written in an indigenous language); it can take ideological roles too (Baloy, 2011; Low, 2009; Oliver 1997). The acknowledgment of a certain local word used to describe an urban space and the inability to translate it into any other language (e.g. English, which is the de facto official language of planners and architects) is a recognition of certain types of urban places in a context, which is lost in newer developments. Thus, local urban spaces and practices, which cannot be linguistically translated into English, represent spaces, which are not always valued by professionals designing newer areas in a city. These professionals are mostly trained in western planning and design schools and have little analysis of the local urban spaces and the value communities give to them.

Professionals use different terminologies, which represents modern spaces, which are the result of the globalization phenomena. Steger and McNevin (2010) point out the many new metaphors and similes used to define the changing urban space as a result of globalization: 'networks', 'nodes', 'cells'. Metaphors are not only meant to capture in 'words and sentiments what already exists in space' space' (Steger and McNevin, 2010), but also drive the development of cities in a particular direction. For instance, in the case of Karachi, politicians talk about 'making it like Dubai', which results in the design and development of tall buildings clad in glass and steel responding to a certain aesthetics preferences of politicians. Thus, the study of figure of speech, within the language used in planning and policy documents to describe the vision for the city might lead to an explanation of the type of built form being produced in the city as 'language transforms space just as space transforms language' space' (Steger and McNevin, 2010).

3. Urban Morphological Evolution of Kehkashan, Clifton

Part of Kehkashan Clifton in Karachi (called Clifton in short) was developed by the British. This area still exists with a few landmark buildings and retains its urban morphology, although the land use of the majority of the buildings has changed from residential to commercial. The British had developed what is known today as Old Clifton to house their top ranking government officials in bungalows as they believed the sea had healing powers and provided pleasant environmental conditions away from the congested parts of the city (Figure 1). Thus, the inception of this case study area was in its elitist background, and it still continues to be a locality within the city housing the elite. Although there are many pockets of informal settlements, which have sprung up over the years to house the domestic worker serving the elite, but the dominant face of Clifton remains elitist.

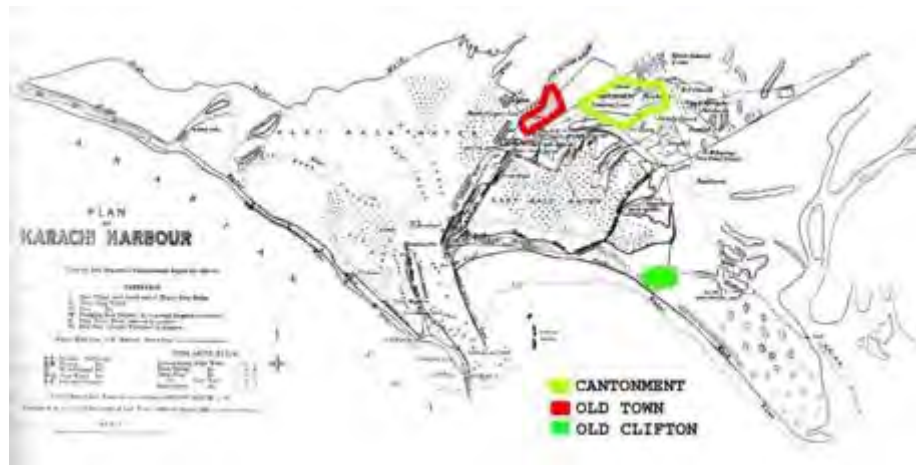


Figure 1. 18th century map of Karachi drawn by the British showing Clifton and its connection to Cantonment and Old Town.

The locality houses, the Mausoleum of Abdullah Shah Ghazi, a saint who is venerated throughout the sub-continent, and attracts thousands of visitors daily (Figure 2). This Shrine dates from the 9th century, and has acquired a landmark status over the years. There is also a temple next to the Mausoleum named Maha Dev Temple, which is equally venerated by Hindus and is believed to be a hundred and fifty-year-old structure (Figure 3). Both the Shrine and the Temple have been a part of the indigenous settlement of Karachi and have continued to be a major part of its history.



Figure 2. The new face of the Mausoleum of Abdullah Shah Ghazi

There is also a beach in Clifton, which attracts visitors from all of Pakistan because of its easy access and supporting facilities. The presence of the Clifton beach has always given importance to the development of the locality. As mentioned previously, the roots for the development of its urban morphology were laid during Colonial times and some important landmark recreational buildings came into existence in the early 19th century like the Band Stand

and the Lady Lloyd Pier which was originally a pier but with the receding sea today it has become a walkway (Figures 4 and 5).

Kehkashan Clifton covers an area of 1,950 acres and was sanctioned by the Government of Pakistan in October 1964. This scheme was meant as a recreational-cum-high income residential scheme for bungalows and multi-storied flats on plots varying from 600 to 4,500 square yards. This scheme was meant to extend the city right up to the sea eliminating marshes and sandy wastes providing space for a population of 150,000 (KDA, 1969) (Figure 6). It had to grapple with many technical issues, the most important being land consolidation and reclamation. A well-established network of main streets, service lanes, pedestrian paths and connector roads were inherent characteristic of the scheme.



Figure 3. Mahadev Temple in Clifton



Figure 4. The Band Stand as seen in 19th century



Figure 5. The Band Stand as seen today

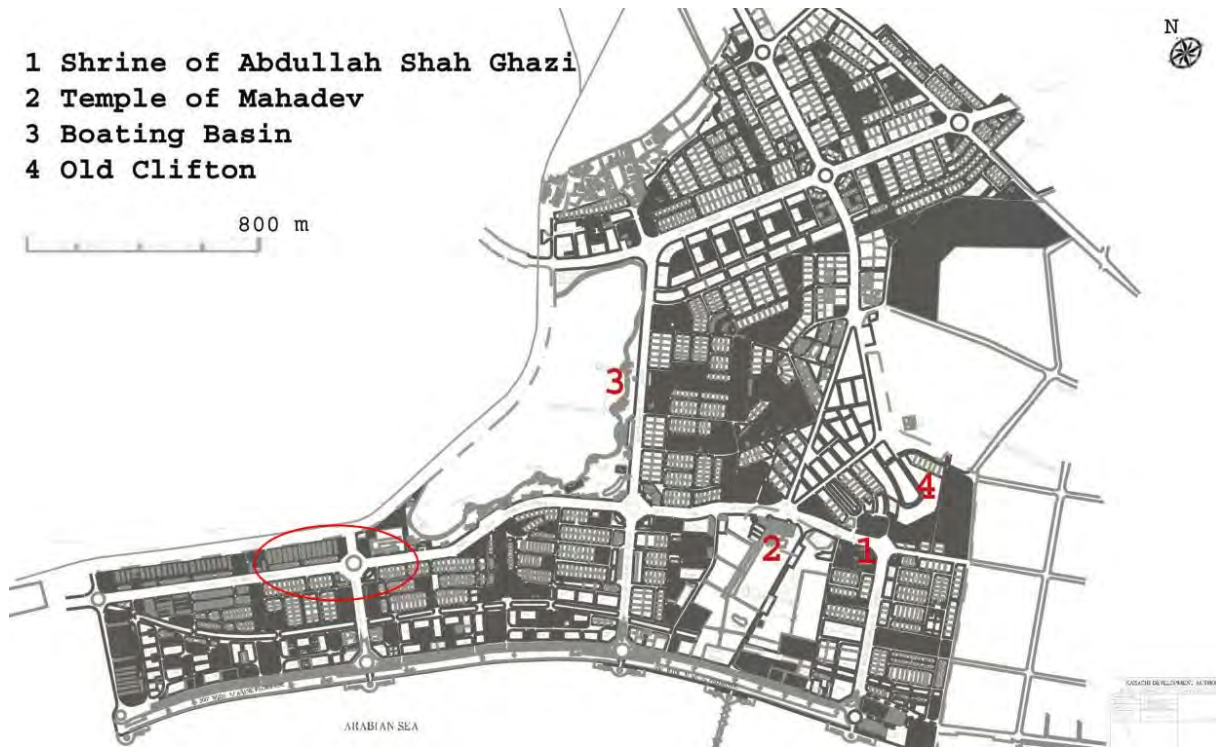


Figure 6. Layout Plan of Kehkashan Clifton Karachi

The idea behind the launch of Clifton Kehkashan was to develop residential zones along the beach and provide multi-storied high-density housing on the pattern of similar beaches in other parts of the world. It was also meant to provide accommodation for various foreign diplomatic missions in Karachi. The boating basin was to develop, as a recreational zone within Clifton, catering to the locality and to the rest of the city as well.

Kehkashan Clifton was thinly populated until the 1970s but with the ethnic violence erupting in the city in the 1980s and with migrant Pathans settling in the northern and central parts of the city (which was the location of the ethnic clashes), the wealthy and elite started shifting to the southern parts of the city, including Clifton. As Clifton had initially developed as a locality catering to the elite, it suited the requirements of these people moving from the north of the city with big plot sizes, the presence of many parks and recreational areas. The beach also acted as a leisure point.

The physical distance of Clifton from the rest of the city has also led to social and cultural distances as residents of Clifton only interact with people of common backgrounds and interests and the poorer sections of the city and the elite never come in contact with each other except as domestic workers in the houses of the rich. The elite enjoy going to hotels, clubs, parks, malls, cinemas and expensive restaurants dotting Kehkashan Clifton and adjoining the elite locality of Defense Housing Society, whilst the poorer sections of society visit the beach, Play Land, Fun Land and some parks for recreation. The majority of the private schools and colleges are also located within the elitist neighbourhood.

Recently, the city has also been experiencing the shifting of offices from the Central Business District (CBD) to Clifton. This change in the land use with the relocation of head offices of a number of banks and financial institutions to Clifton has resulted in an increase in the real estate value of the locality and it is envisaged by the city planners that with efficient transport connections, housing mixed land use, with residences for the elite and proximity to the harbour, Clifton has the potential of developing into a CBD for the city. The downside of this consolidation of land use in Clifton is the decline of the building stock in adjoining areas of Saddar and II Chundrigarh where property owners are finding it difficult to find a tenant for their properties as the locality of Clifton is preferred.

The Clifton commercial area has, over the years, emerged as a sub-metropolitan centre. Besides retail activities,

it also has a large percentage of offices and institutional uses. Being amongst the early schemes planned and developed by KDA, Clifton has served as a reference scheme for other similar development initiatives within the city. Clifton has, over the past ten years, experienced a rapid change in its land use with the change in the Floor Area Ratios (FAR) for the main arteries and the land use regulations for the locality. The single storey houses and residential complexes facing the primary roads have been replaced by high-rise real estate, mixed use development, incorporating offices, schools, shopping malls, apartments and other non-residential uses. The trend in the change of the land use continues in the secondary lanes where schools or offices causing traffic chaos have replaced the residences. Recently Clifton has seen the construction of a number of shopping malls, parks and educational institution facilities and projects by private developers. The area to date has retained its elite and high profile ambience.

The extroverted Colonial bungalow has been an intrinsic part of the urban morphology of Clifton. Until today, the bungalow style development dominates the urban morphology of the locality, although the sub division of plots has reduced the sizes of these bungalows and many of the Colonial bungalows have seen a change in land use from residential to commercial.

The bungalow, which was part of the initial development of the Clifton Cantonment by the British, is a hybrid built form that was introduced as a foreign element but was adopted by locals and eventually became part of the indigenous landscape. In studying the evolution of this typology, lessons can be drawn with respect to urban morphology, sense of aesthetics, climatic response, use of technology, respect for traditionalism versus modernism and response to global imagery.

4. Local Tangibles

The case study area comprises of a gridded urban street pattern with low density and mixed land use. According to the interviews conducted in the case study area, the residents of the low income area within Clifton perceive the boundaries of their neighbourhood according to the bus stops in the vicinity, although the locality has street numbers and road names. These are secondary in their association about the boundaries of the neighbourhood. The residents of high-income areas within Clifton are related to the boundaries of the neighbourhood via the landmarks in the area, these landmarks could be a school, a restaurant or a historical recreational building. Very few respondents (two out of fifteen) identified the limits of the neighbourhood with the current governance structure.

Generalabad colony, within Clifton, is a low income housing settlement, with residential land use dominating the locality. It has a gridded urban street layout, with all streets leading to the railway tracks at the rear. The streets are narrow with no vehicular access. The street is an extension of the house, and is utilized for socializing by men and by children playing. The locality is a Pathan dominant area, thus women socializing on the streets are not seen. Women stay indoors and are rarely seen outside their homes as this is a requirement of the cultural norms of the community.

The majority of the residential buildings are ground plus one (Figure 7). A trend is however seen of going higher (up to ground plus five) with the new structures coming up on the primary roads of the locality. The residential typology of apartments is also being introduced along with a new language for the facades, which are being clad in materials like tiles and make use of pre-fabricated screens (Figure 8).

The area around the railway lines serves as the open space for the locality and many men can often be seen socializing there. The railway tracks are only used twice a day by local trains thus, during the rest of the day, the area is safe for the children to play around (Figure 9).

The open ground of the railway lines is also used for informal parking by transporters and many informal grocery shops serving the locality have sprung up (Figure 9).

As the high income locality within Clifton is dominated by large plots, the residents are not seen socializing on the streets because all these houses have lawns within their plots and elders mostly socialize there in the evenings (Figure 10).



Figure 7. The ground plus one residential development in Generalabad



Figure 8. Newer building in the locality of Generalabad



Figure 9. Railway lines in Generalabad



Figure 10. The houses in Clifton Block 5



Figure 11. The parks of Clifton Block 5

Children play within their houses or in the nearby parks. The area is dotted with trees, which adds to the aesthetic quality of the locality along with the presence of the parks (Figure 11). These parks were previously open grounds (in 2010), which were used by young men for playing ball games as they were freely accessible. With the development of these grounds into designed parks, the users have changed from children and teenagers to the elderly. The entry to the parks is restricted to families, and they have entrance fees and ball games are not allowed.

The primary roads of Block 5 Clifton house have many cafes and restaurants, some of these serve at the city level and have, over time, acquired the image of landmarks for the locality.

Many schools dot Block 5 Clifton. Most of these are housed within bungalows and only a couple of them have purpose built campuses. Land use controls are weak within the locality, thus, these ad hoc land uses spring up in bungalows but the control over height restrictions are strong and the bungalows located along secondary roads are not allowed to go beyond ground plus one, no matter what their land use is.

For the residents of Generalabad, different spaces within the neighbourhood were important (according to the qualitative interviews conducted in the area). These vary from the railway lines to the government school to the beach. The reason for giving importance to these areas is either because they serve as social gathering spaces for the community (space around railways lines, jirgah, park, beach) or as landmarks that are used to define the limits of the locality (Ziauddin hospital, railway line). There is a custom within the locality of Generalabad that a committee based on the elders gets together regularly to decide on important matters related to the neighbourhood. These elders (men only) meet regularly, or as and when required. They have designated an area along the railway lines where they meet, and the area is defined by a few benches (Figure 12). This is known as the jirgah and is an informal system of decision-making but is acknowledged and respected by formal governance structures. A jirgah is a traditional assembly of the leaders that make decisions by consensus according to the teachings of Islam and is a cultural and ethnic practice taking place in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province from where the residents of Generalabad originate. The decisions taken in a jirgah range from urban infrastructure to family feuds to inheritance to marriages to adultery. The jirgah is very traditional in its outlook and women are not allowed to participate. They are considered not knowledgeable enough as they live a segregated life staying mostly indoors. Any issue that a member of the community faces is discussed and decided in the jirgah, which cannot be challenged by the community or by any formal system of governance. Only the people belonging to the same ethnicity can be a part of this informal decision making process. Since the jirgah is an ethnically and religiously unified group of people, social aspects of maqamiyat in the form of community empowerment and mobilization are an inherent part of it. Decisions about the provision of sewerage and water lines through community mobilization are taken by the jirgah in Generalabad and followed up successfully with the government. The jirgah appoints people from within the community to liaison and follow up with the government.



Figure 12. Jirgah along the Railway lines

The residents feel that the particularity of the neighborhood stems from the fact that the locality is in close proximity

to porch areas and is well served via public transport offering the area particularity in terms of real estate values. This is complemented by the fact that the majority of the area is leased, unlike other low-income settlements in the city. Yet another particularity is offered by the fact that the locality has block and street numbers giving a sense of ownership and belonging to the residents. This is not the norm in the rest of the city where low-income settlements may not always have street names and house numbers, especially if they are neighborhoods, which have not been issued property lease by the official bodies.

As Generalabad is a low-income settlement, the implementation of building controls is weak. This gives the residents the possibility of adapting their structures to their social and economic requirements. The houses expand vertically in an incremental manner. The individual houses allow the possibility of adaptability to accommodate the increasing household sizes and more than one household. The weak controls also result in adaptation of public spaces for purposes they are not meant for, for instance, the open space around railway lines is being used for socializing and as a playing area for adults and children respectively.

On one hand, the residents see the proximity of the settlement to the elite neighborhoods and developed areas as having potential, and on the other hand, it is also seen as a threat, as the builders and developers eye the locality for upscale development. The threat is increased by the accessibility the settlement offers. The proximity to the beach offers another threat to the area as there is a general trend of developing localities close to the beach as upscale housing schemes in order to promote a global image of the city. With the development of the China Port along the beach right across Generalabad, residents fear the conversion of their settlement into a high-income residential area in the future. As mentioned previously, the elders are skeptical of the rapid infrastructure development happening within the vicinity.

5. Local Social Processes

The intangibles that help explain maqamiyat of the built form is the structure of the society in terms of its ethnicity and demographics. This section analyses the reading and interpretation of the built form with respect to social responsiveness and is largely based on the data obtained via stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions. The role of the built form in the co-existence of the communities, the social meanings associated with the built form and ideas about place attachment are reviewed here.

The planned area within Clifton has mixed ethnicities and mixed political allegiance. The unplanned areas are mostly ethnically homogenous. The development of low-income areas in the city follows a certain process where one family coming from a rural area settles in the city and then asks other members of the same ethnicity to join them. The low-income settlements are usually supported via political patronage. This support gives them economic and political security as when the locality has consolidated over a number of years the settlers can apply for regularization and lease documents. According to the focus group conducted in the low income area of Clifton, the political and ethnic homogeneity helps the residents approach the local government and lobby for issues like lease of plots, provision of infrastructure, and preparation of plans for their localities as ethnicity is a common bond between them, and they are able to operate as one force.

Generally, because of the presence of the beach, people from the entire city associate with Clifton. The middle income and the low-income groups are the major users of the beach, although a smaller percentage of the high-income groups also frequent the beach. The citizens do not talk about going to the beach; they talk about picnicking in Clifton. The recreation opportunities like Fun Land, the presence of the Mausoleum and the Temple, and the recently constructed Dolmen Mall add to the experience of the picnickers. Stakeholders along the beach of Karachi vary from hawkers, restaurants owners, visitors, vendors, residents and shop owners. These stakeholders have different types of interest in the area, which are not necessarily being addressed in the current development of the area as envisaged by politicians and developers. Their focus is more on upscale, enclosed development in the form of malls, cinemas and shopping complexes, which is disconnected with the reality of the stakeholders using the beach on a daily basis. The activities taking place on the beach include kite flying, children playing, camel and

horse riding, riding beach buggies and morning and evening walks.

The festive and spiritual activities of Abdullah Shah Ghazi's Mausoleum start on Thursday after dark and end on Sunday. This activity attracts thousands of people on a daily basis from within the city and the rest of the country. These people visit the shrine to pay offerings and niyaz (offering food in the name of Said). The pilgrims visit the beach in the vicinity. The traditional route adopted by the pilgrims to reach the beach has become a heritage walk in itself.

As the upscale developments are aimed towards gaining maximum profit, the local stakeholders, vendors and hawkers are being removed or minimized, with their replacement of newly built kiosks and restaurants. The stakeholders that are still present on the beach pay bhatta (bribes) to the police that affect their daily income.

In the low-income settlement of Clifton, which is located in close proximity to the Clifton beach, the impacts of these upscale developments are enormous as there is a threat of eviction despite the fact that the locality is a leased settlement. The security of ownership is important for the residents and they take pride in the fact that they are the first residents of the area and have managed to get 80% of the houses leased. They also take pride in the fact that the locality has a homogenous ethnicity living in close proximity to people belonging to other ethnicities, (there is a Christian colony in the neighbourhood) peacefully in a city that is generally troubled by ethnic rivalry.

In Generalabad, the open land around the railway track has been adapted for social purposes by elders and children. The streets have also been adapted for social and recreational purposes by children. This is possible because the narrow streets do not allow any vehicular traffic. This possibility of adaptation of the open land to the social requirement gives the area residents a sense of belonging to the locality.

The open area around the railway lines provides opportunities for different types of economic activities to spring up informally, which cater to the locality of Generalabad. Activities like grocery shops and gaming areas are seen along the railway lines. The gaming area around the snooker table (called dubbo locally) (Figure 15) is an important socializing area for the residents too, especially men and young boys but not women because women stay indoor due to social and cultural norms.



Figure 13. Economic (left) and entertainment (right) activities along the railway lines in Generalabad

The weak regulation controls of the built form allow it to be adapted to household economic needs as well. This is appreciated by the residents of the area who belong to low income groups and feel the need to accommodate economic activities like religious schools, tuition centres and cottage industries within their household to earn extra income.

The participants of focus group in Generalabad defined the edge of the locality as the railway lines and the main road. The open area around the railway lines and the local mosque were pointed out as important social nodes. The streets double up as social/recreational spaces for children and the railway line doubles up as an edge where children play. The church, the lumberyard, the local park and the government school were pointed out as important

landmarks which have existed since the inception of the neighbourhood and with which residents associate some meaning. These structures give the residents a sense of continuity, spatially and temporally.

The residents feel that the particularity of the neighbourhood stems from the fact that the locality is in close proximity to porch areas and is well served via public transport offering the area particularity in terms of real estate values. This is complemented by the fact that the majority of the area is leased, unlike other low-income settlements in the city. Yet another particularity is offered by the fact that the locality has block and street numbers giving a sense of ownership and belonging to the residents. This is not the norm in the rest of the city where low-income settlements may not always have street names and house numbers, especially if they are neighbourhoods, which have not been issued property lease by the official bodies.

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded that there is a discrepancy between how the politicians and government representatives perceive the development of Kehkashan Clifton and how the residents want it to be developed. The government envisages the locality as an upscale residential development located on a beachfront, whereas the residents perceive it largely as a residential area and are more concerned about adequate infrastructure and water provision than seeing the locality changing with time because of global influences.

The section on the tangible aspects of maqamiyat aimed to explore the meaning and multiplicity that the residents and shop owners attach to the environmental responsiveness of the built form. The historical evolution of the case study area from a remote place connected via a dirt road to the main city during the Colonial times to the thriving city centre today housing malls, hotels, embassies, parks, cinemas, retail and housing facility, located on the beach front, points towards the economic potential of the area.

In terms of the intangible aspects of maqamiyat, the sense of social attachment is strong amongst the low income neighbourhoods where the streets and open spaces, like the railway lines, are used as a space for socializing by residents and gives them a sense of security and belonging. The major conclusions point towards the meaning of space that, as perceived by communities, is not always bound by physical form.

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