

Socio-Economic Importance of Karachi as a Port City

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Karachi, being the only international Port city in Pakistan plays a major role in the economy and development of the country.[1] Karachi was developed as a modern port city by the British in 1854.[2] Karachi Being developed as a port city, the port has become a significant part of the identity of the city of Karachi itself. Multiple bridges like the Native Jetty Bridge and the Jinnah Bridge have been constructed to connect the city to the port. These bridges connect the city to the port and serve as public spaces for the city's people. These bridges have declined in serving as public spaces after the development of the Native Jetty Bridge as 'Port Grand.[3] The research will focus on the factors that affected these bridges' role as active public spaces.

Karachi the beginning:

To understand the relationship between Karachi and the port, one needs to understand the city's historical background and how it grew and developed into a port city. Yasmin Lari, a well-known Pakistani architect, and authors discuss the city's development in much of her literature. She talks about how Karachi started as a small community inhabiting only around 15,000 people. Historically, Karachi has been linked to the ancient cities "Krokala" and "Debal". The growth of Karachi as a modern city started to gain prominence after the acquisition by the Talpur rulers of Sindh in the eighteenth century.[4] Karachi initially started as a small fishing village known as 'Kalachi-Jo-Ghote.' Its clear condition of the sea made it an important trading location. This growth in city trading activities increased security concerns, and the area was fortified. This fortification of the vicinity had two entrances known as "Khara Darwaza" or brackish gate and "Meetha Darwaza" or sweet gate.[5]

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Karachi had become Sindh's flourishing port and transit centre. The fortune of this transit centre changed when the British saw the potential of trade due to the presence of the sea. Hamilton described the city, "Corachie is a seaport town in the district of Tatta, province of Scinde, 57 miles from the district of Tatta.... The bay of Corachie affords good shelter for shipping and vessels of three or 400 tons burthen may enter the port from the beginning of September to May... the entrance of the harbour is narrow, and the deepest water is about 200 yards from the western point of entrance, on which is a castle...."[6]

Understanding the city's historical background, the port has undoubtedly played an influential role in developing Karachi. It can be apparent that the port plays an integral role in the city's identity and it is essential to comprehend the role the port plays now in the city's current identity.

Karachi Now:

Karachi is one of the fastest-growing cities in the world. A lot has been written on the development of the city by various authors. Arif Hasan, a well-reputed Pakistani author, and writer has written several articles and papers about the city. He talks about how Karachi is Pakistan's largest growing port city. The estimation says that 24 percent urban population of the country lives in Karachi.[7] Karachi is one of the most populated cities in the world.[8] Neoliberalism has changed the dynamics of the city. Karachi is competing in the race to become a world-class city. Studies show that the race to become a world-class city has affected the population. People living in the city centres are being evicted for the city's development. This exclusion creates a socio-economic divide among the people of Karachi. [9]

Since Karachi is one of the world's fastest-growing cities, it attracts many people from around the country and the world. People come to Karachi for better living conditions, aiding city densification.

Gentrification:

Karachi as a port city is not only studied and discussed locally but, a lot has been written about it internationally. Books like 'Global Gentrification' is a good example that discusses the idea of gentrification in Karachi. The idea of an international city has promoted 'Gentrification' in the entire city. Gentrification is the process of renovating and improving a district so that it conforms to middle-class tastes. Public spaces all over the town are being privatized. This privatization creates a divide among the people of Karachi on a socio-economic and even physical basis.[10]

The Native Jetty Bridge was built by the British in the 1800s. After the construction of The Jinnah Bridge, the Native Jetty Bridge served as a public space for the community and the entire city. It was a hub for various activities such as feeding dough to the fish, fishing, sightseeing, etc. Some various religious processions also took place on the banks of the water near the Native Jetty Bridge. These activities have now moved to Jinnah Bridge after the Native Jetty bridge was taken from the citizens of Karachi to develop a privatized food street named 'Port Grand.' All the upper-class and middle-income groups praised it. However, all the popular activities moved to the Jinnah Bridge. These activities have declined due to the restrictions and barriers placed on the opening of 'Port Grand.[11]

This shows that the local stakeholders have disowned these bridges as public spaces because of the intervention made in these areas. A clear divide can be seen in the user group of these bridges as public spaces. This divide causes a lack of connection between the city and the port. This shows how important it is for an architect or designer to understand the site's primary function before intervening in any public space.

A lot has been written and discussed about the city's development as a whole. There is a lack of substance that could help in understanding how these bridges play a role in developing a relationship between the city and the port. There is also a lack of substance in understanding what activities used

to take place in these public spaces. Detailed study and analysis of this can help understand how important it is to understand the context of public areas while developing it. So that they don't lose their identity and people can associate with them the same way as before.

It is evident that the port has always been a vital part of Karachi's identity and has played a critical role in its development, Whether as a trade hub or a metropolitan city. Karachi has always been known and will always be associated with its port. These bridges are one of the few binders left which allow the citizens of Karachi to connect to the port. This creates a sense of ownership for the citizens of the port. Losing these binders can affect the city's relationship to the port. Understanding how losing these binders will change the city's relationship with these spaces is essential.

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