Public Space and City Functions.
A Case Study of Historic Rawalpindi

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Abstract
The study explores how public spaces contribute to a city's core functions—economic, social, and political—through a conceptual framework that positions public spaces as central. However, focusing solely on these typologies may not fully address the complexities of contemporary cities. The framework is a starting point to discuss this correlation in a South Asian context.

Drawing lessons from various public spaces in cities across the world, the research carries out an in-depth analysis of the public space of *Raja Bazaar,* a historical market in the centre of Rawalpindi city. *Raja Bazaar* is a shared street with pedestrian and vehicular movement, fulfilling its role as a trading centre for the city. It has a lot more potential in its unrecognized heritage, food industry, and local crafts which is currently lost in urban challenges. Urban mobility has recently dominated the public space, consequently, suppressing the social function of the street especially for the residents. The political functions and religious festivities still thrive with temporary pedestrianization, pop-up activity and space appropriation at particular times of the year. The study also finds the positive impact of community's ownership of public spaces. However, even the community engagement and mobilization have limitations in the absence of well-functioning local governments–a major lesson learnt during the implementation of public space revitalization initiatives in Raja Bazar.

Recognizing the complex nature of city functions and the diverse characterization of public spaces, the conceptual framework developed under this study needs further investigation through comparative analysis of its application in different neighbourhoods and regions.

Keywords: public space, city functions, Rawalpindi historic city centre, socio-economic role, political function

1. Introduction

How do public spaces impact functioning of a city? To answer this question, this study builds on the concept of public sphere. In the 18th century, Jürgen Habermas characterised the public sphere as an arena for the formation of public opinion (Habermas, 1991, p. 54). Later, the works of Fraser (1990), distinguished the public sphere from the political apparatus and economic markets. Today, while public spaces and the public realm are often used interchangeably, the complex interplay of their utilitarian functions and environmental challenges, exacerbated by the recent global pandemic, has necessitated a rethinking of their design, form, and purpose. This refers both to their physical and intangible attributes. This paper theorizes that well-designed public spaces can enhance a city's economic competitiveness, environmental sustainability, resilience, and social inclusivity by positively influencing core city functions.

The benefits of public spaces in terms of recreation, aesthetics, and social interdependence are well-documented (Low, 2022, pp. 28–31) but its impact on the core functions of a city is under-researched, particularly in the South Asian context. Understanding this is important because a city's infrastructure, urban functions and character are rooted in its network of streets and public spaces (UN-Habitat, 2018). The study addresses this gap by defining a typology of city functions—economic, social, and political—through a comprehensive literature review. The theoretical framework acknowledges that cities are complex, influenced by factors like scale, history, and geography. However, it uses a broad approach with three core functions to explain the interconnectedness of public space to city functions and to start the discussion of complexity in developing cities. A case study of Raja Bazaar, a historic market in the city of Rawalpindi is discussed under the conceptual framework.

This study is organised as follows: The first section classifies the core functions of a city under economic, social, and political typology. The second section discusses the theoretical foundation of public spaces and how public spaces impact core functions of a city. The third section applies the theoretical framework and the functional typology to analyse the public space of Raja Bazaar, Rawalpindi. This section also presents alternative scenarios to make public spaces more beneficial for the city and its residents. The last section presents conclusions and recommendations for the way forward.

2. The Core Functions of a City

Historically, cities emerged from a complex interplay of factors, often rooted in the accumulation of resources (Sjoberg, 1965), achieving economies of scale or competition for space (Batty, 2008). Whether it be agricultural surplus, architectural marvels, religious significance, trading prowess, technological advancements, or even strategic political positioning as a capital, the assets that the cities possessed served as catalysts for their growth and development. As cities scaled, they became multi-functional and developed interdependencies, adding more complexity to their functionality and nature. This is further explained by Romer (2013), who describes how the urban environment is multifaceted, encompassing biological, social, built, market, business, and political dimensions, and how these aspects interact within and among cities. While interdependencies in 'organised complexity' have allowed the survival of cities and contributed to their functioning (Jacobs, 1961, pp.428–448) by fuelling innovation and

economic growth, they have also created challenges such as crime, pollution, and disease, as starkly illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

What are the core functions of a city? This answer to this question remains elusive in literature. However, extensive empirical research by Bettencourt et al. (2007) gives evidence of urbanism as a way of life where "demographic, socioeconomic, and behavioural urban indicators", being scaling functions of cities, may predict growth across cities of all sizes and over time. By examining existing research in this area, analysis of renowned public spaces, and an in-depth case study of Raja Bazar, a historic district in Rawalpindi, this study creates a typology that categorises a city's functions into three interconnected areas: economic, social, and political. Our framework, demonstrated in the next section proposes that public spaces influence these core functions.

Economic Functions

One of the core priorities of any city is often economic development and it achieves this through creation of agglomeration economies, characterised by the clustering of firms and individuals within urban areas. This promotes efficient matching of supply and demand, shared infrastructure, and mutual learning (Iftikhar, Justice and Audretsch, 2020, pp.1–16). It also reduces infrastructure costs, enhances income and educational opportunities, and supports informal trades like street hawking. Moreover, cities generate wealth for governments through taxation, funding essential services such as water, sanitation, waste processing, energy, transportation, telecommunications, police protection, and support for small and medium enterprises (Haseeb, Iftikhar & Hasan, 2019). These broadly encompass the economic functions of a city.

Social Functions

Cities are not just engines of wealth; they contain in them social systems to improve human well-being (Montgomery, 2013). Maretto (2014, pp.163-174) describes cities as organisms made of social, economic and cultural structures where urban morphology such as the streets and squares give a physical form to the intangible structures of the city. Cities are primarily a public space where the society is performed, representing a community that "cohabitates and shows its contradictions, disputes and differences" (Mota Utanda, 2018).

Culture and heritage are attributes of a city's social capital. Similarly, social functions allow people to interact with one another, leading to the exchange of knowledge and ideas. The sense of community in densely populated urban neighbourhoods enables more 'eyes on the street' leading to safety from crime (Jacobs, 1961, pp.152–154). It also results in psychological wellbeing and higher civic participation (Francis et al., 2012, pp. 401-409). However, cities should provide a balance between the need for density and privacy. The role of architecture, urban design and engineering then becomes important in creating happy cities, a term coined by Montgomery (2013) who uses happiness as an indicator to explore the planning and design of cities in his book, 'Happy City'. Public spaces in compact mixed-use neighbourhoods enable social interaction making them safe, as opposed to low-density suburban areas and high-traffic streets. Compact neighbourhoods also reduce car dependence with walking and cycling options, allowing resources to be redirected towards public transport (Montgomery, 2013).

Thus, cities find their spirit in thoughtfully planned public realms where people come together.

However, urban density has countervailing arguments to it. While density increases infrastructural economies of scale, efficient energy consumption and delivery of social services such as health, education, and governance, it can also contribute to negative externalities. These include the urban heat island effect with intensified land use, transmission of disease, and even crime (Bettencourt et al., 2007). COVID-19 pandemic reignited the debate about urban density and spread of disease, but research by Khan et al. (2021), gathering evidence from Karachi, Pakistan, showed that factors like education, healthcare, and income inequality, rather than density, drove COVID-19 disparities. A broader study of thirty-six cities also showed a minimal link between density and the pandemic's impact (Adlakha and Sallis, 2020). These confounding effects of urban density underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of how to balance competing urban functions.

Well-designed urban infrastructure is only a framework without efficient governance and politics. The next section on political functions shows how they are essential for cultivating sustainable cities and delivering substantial environmental and social benefits.

Political Functions

Urban governance directly impacts a city's municipal reforms while the overall political dynamics of a city ensure that citizens have access to public systems, political movements, and legal institutions in the city. Poor planning policies and weak political mandate results in ad hoc urban development, loss of public land and objectionable use of public spaces (Kaw, Lee and Wahba, 2020).

Public spaces have historically served as platforms for peaceful expression and civic support in the urban landscape. Major civic uprisings such as the Arab Spring in 2011 (Knell, 2012), and movements such as 'Black Lives Matter'(BLM) gained momentum in public squares, parks, markets, and streets of multiple cities. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, open public spaces provided a safe space for protestors in the BLM movement to assemble and raise their voice. The political function of a city extends beyond open public spaces to include institutions such as libraries, cafés, and community centres that foster a sense of community. Establishments like Pak Tea House in Lahore, founded before the 1947 partition, epitomises this function by serving as a venue for writers and intellectuals, sustaining social, cultural, political, and intellectual discourse post-partition (Jaffery, 2013).

Cities must deal with complex and interdependent challenges such as those of sustainability, climate change, housing, public health, and social justice, among others. Effective governance and design of public spaces is then crucial for managing these diverse challenges. In this, the urban design of public spaces including greenery is becoming an important indicator of a city's economic vibrancy, quality of life, sustainability, and innovation (Kaw, Lee and Wahba, 2020). Communities are healthier when they have access to green spaces that help filter air pollution, reduce air, and ground temperatures, and provide opportunities for physical activity (Abbasi et al., 2023).

In conclusion, cities are complex ecosystems where economic, social, and political functions intersect to shape urban life. The next section advances this discussion by elaborating the role of public spaces in helping cities perform these core functions.

3. Public Spaces and Core Functions of a City

Public spaces take a variety of forms vis-à-vis their functions (civic spaces, community spaces, and public services) and their physical manifestation (indoors vs. outdoors, and green spaces vs. courtyards) (Carmona, 2019). The conceptual model of this understanding places public spaces at the core of the city, as shown in figure 1. The outer circle represents city functions classified as economic, social, and political. In the later sections, this conceptual demonstrates the performance of city functions and is applied to the case study of Raja Bazar to represent its analytical outcome.
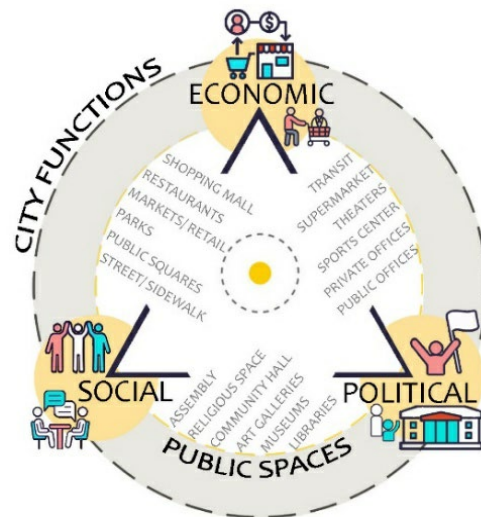

Figure 1. Conceptual Model (Source: Authors)

City planning approaches of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries deprioritized public spaces and began prioritising suburban development and transportation planning dominated by cars. Jacobs (1961), Gehl (2007) and Montgomery (2013) critique modern planning, which segregates the functions of the city into single-use zones, promoting horizontal development and dependency on vehicular mobility. However, twenty-first century onwards, cities in North America and Europe began adopting urban regeneration and people-centric planning principles. Cities in the Global South still follow the flawed urban development practice of the barren suburban model "that has been drying out of culture, public space, and commerce" (Haque, 2015). Successful public spaces stimulate economic activity as evidenced by mediaeval market squares in Europe (Carr et al., 1992) to the bazaars in Iran (Moosavi, 2005). The modern shopping malls found all over the world are contemporary examples of the same. Aesthetically pleasing public spaces attract tourists that benefit local businesses and entrepreneurs, lead to job creation and revenue for the city (Kaw, Lee and Wahba, 2020, p.252). In addition to this, public spaces like parks, running tracks and bicycle lanes provide means for a healthy and active living, reducing the cost of healthcare for a society (Pacheco, 2017; Sahakian et al., 2020). During the pandemic, the closure of third spaces such as cafés and gyms, affected the local businesses significantly. Repurposing cities in a post-pandemic world will involve reassessing outdoor cafes, and parks

because they disproportionately affect lower-income groups who rely on these spaces more than the affluent (Martínez and Short, 2021).

Governments facilitate the eco-political functions in cities by providing amenities such as water fountains, and restrooms in public spaces. Well-developed public transportation and pathways increase mobility and access to services such as healthcare and education. They also help sustain business supply chains and connect the urban centres with neighbouring local economies.

Traditionally, public spaces have served as platforms for political gatherings, cultural, and religious ceremonies, while also supporting civic engagement through safety and participation in events like voting and demonstrations (Elshahed, 2011). Public squares all over Europe provide entertainment to the public in the form of bullfights, concerts and craft shows etc. (Carr et al., 1992). Thus, they enhance the liveliness of a city by facilitating interaction, idea exchange, and skills display. Indoor public spaces such as cafes, bookstores, bars, open libraries, and community centres also influence the urban environment. These spaces promote diversity, ease coexistence, and foster a sense of permanence in communities (Pacheco, 2017).

Public spaces help break the monotony of concrete and add a lively aspect to the city (Sahakian et al., 2020), particularly through enhancing greenery. This reduces the environmental impact of development in cities. Green spaces function as natural drainage systems in cities, preventing flooding in urban areas and reducing the heat island effect, thereby enhancing a city's resilience. Green aesthetics play a vital role in making public spaces user-friendly but only when other factors such as the centrality of location, provision of services, and amenities are also present (Ferdous, 2013).

The following section presents case studies demonstrating how cities have strategically leveraged public spaces to enhance their economic, social, and political functions, to build smarter, sustainable, and resilient cities.

Global Case Studies
Economic Function

River Surfing in Munich

Munich, a city 500 km from the coast, became a pioneer in river surfing in 2010. Eisbach River, the city's only flowing water body, remains unfrozen throughout the year due to strong currents. Local surfers saw this as an opportunity to start a new sport. Through lobbying efforts, the sports fans encouraged the city to legally purchase the land along the river for use as a river surfing area. This public space is now one of the major tourist attractions for the city featuring international surfing stars (The Eisbach surfer wave in Munich: The 'Eisbachwelle,' 2021). A popular stretch for surfing is located around English Garden, an urban park in central Munich that has become a cultural node in the city. Such public spaces boost recreation and economic activity through tourism. Figure 2 shows the river surfing from this stretch as photographed by Tom Sekula (Blickenstaff, 2015).

Figure 2. River surfing in the Eisbach River, flowing from Munich's English Garden
(Source: Blickenstaff, 2015)

Singapore Hawker Centers

Developed in the 1960s, Hawker centres accommodate unlicensed vendors who ply their trade on the streets. These centres have evolved into inclusive, community-centric spaces for selling clean, affordable, and culturally diverse foods where hawkers help with providing affordable food as well as creating jobs. A number of them are co-located with other community-centric facilities. The recent hawker centres adopt universal design elements of inclusivity to meet the needs of the elderly and people with disabilities. Singapore's hawker culture is now a part of UNESCO's list of intangible heritage with its innovative integration of economic, social, and public health functions of a city. These centres serve as "community dining rooms where people from diverse backgrounds gather and share the experience of dining over breakfast, lunch and dinner" (Matthews, 2020).

Figure 3. Maxwell Food Centre, Singapore (Source: Tang, n.d.)

Bab el Oued, a neighbourhood in Algiers

Public spaces in neighbourhoods create communities with strong social cohesions and solidarity. Khemri, Melis and Caputo (2020) studied the area called "Bab el Oued" located in Algiers with a population of approximately sixty-eight thousand as of 2016 in an area of 1.21km². Built during the French colonial era, the neighbourhood is compact with mixed uses. The proximity of the dwelling and shared open space results in sharing the same space for various outdoor activities. Researchers mapped outdoor social activities in parks, streets, and squares. Urban design features, street furniture, trees, streetlights, and activities of placemaking created a sense of belonging among the residents. People-centric activities, as well as temporary appropriation transformed the public space at various times of the day. This enables the neighbourhood to remain active throughout the day with varying usage. Urban sociologists have referred to the neighbourhood as the true embodiment of community bonding.

Figure 4. Activities performed in the neighbourhood square (chatting, resting, drinking, playing marbles, playing dominos (Source: Khemri, Melis and Caputo, 2020)

Pakistan Chowk Initiative in Karachi

Pakistan Chowk, popular for its printing press market, is a landmark heritage site in an old town, South of Karachi. Due to its historical significance in the literary space, people would engage in poetry recitals known as *mushaira* as well as other artistic and cultural activities. The residents of Old Town also used the public square. After the seventies, the rising social exclusion of classes along with hierarchies of wealth in the society damaged the social set-up. The political instabilities in Karachi further deteriorate the experience of public spaces. The project of Pakistan Chowk emerged in 2016 with the need to revive the public space. The first phase remodelled 6,633 sq. ft. of public space, which had been reduced to nothing more than a wasteland. The second phase included

building a two-room community centre adjacent to the public square in a heritage building, Sultani Mahal which now serves as a venue for cultural and artistic activities. It also facilitates the residents of Old Town by encouraging social engagement, networking, and civic engagement (Pakistan Chowk Community Centre, 2014). The collective of the community centre started social projects such as The Talking Circle (Baithak), The Spoken History Project, Old Town Mapping and Heritage Walk Karachi. In The Talking Circle, people meet to discuss problems that affect their community and mobilise in response to them. The Spoken History project gathers storytellers, old residents, labourers, loiterers, or any citizen to map out the city through memory and oral tradition. The aim is to create an archive as well as exhibit it. There have also been film screenings, workshops, and photography exhibitions in the space (Mazhar, 2019).

Figure 5. Inauguration of Pakistan Chowk Community Center (Source: Rafi, 2017)

Figure 6. Painters at Pakistan Chowk (Source: The Karachi Walla, 2017)

Political Function

Tahrir Square Egypt

Tahrir Square, a historically significant location in Cairo, witnessed the world's greatest revolutionary moment in 2011 during the Arab Spring. What started from online support groups saw its physical manifestation in the public space of the square. Millions of protestors from various socio-economic and religious backgrounds demanded the overthrow of the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The protests continued for 18 days with violent revulsion from security forces (Knell, 2012). Protestors reconfigured the public space in three days by temporary set-ups of medical facilities, camping areas, stages, food and beverage carts, restrooms, art exhibits and newspaper booths (Sinno, 2020). Despite the site experiencing injuries and death, people did not leave the square until the President stepped down after ruling Egypt for thirty years. Tahrir Square gave a spatial dimension to people's power for their liberation (Knell, 2012).

Figure 7. Young activists turned Tahrir Square into a carnival of freedom (Source: Knell, 2012)

2019 Lebanese Uprising

Public spaces have played a crucial role in the uprisings across the Middle East. From October 2019, civic movements also started in Lebanon where underutilised public spaces brought people together to demand their basic rights and freedom of speech. The three types of public spaces reclaimed were multi-purpose wide streets of Central District, open public spaces such as Kassir Garden, and abandoned urban public facilities such as the dilapidated cinema, The Egg, and depreciated Grand Theatre. The latter were transformed into a community centre and an observatory, respectively. These activities in the form of placemaking and reclaiming public spaces reunited citizens of all ages, religion, gender, and social classes. Place-making and public spaces played an important role in making the uprisings a success and demonstrating citizen unity (Sinno, 2020).
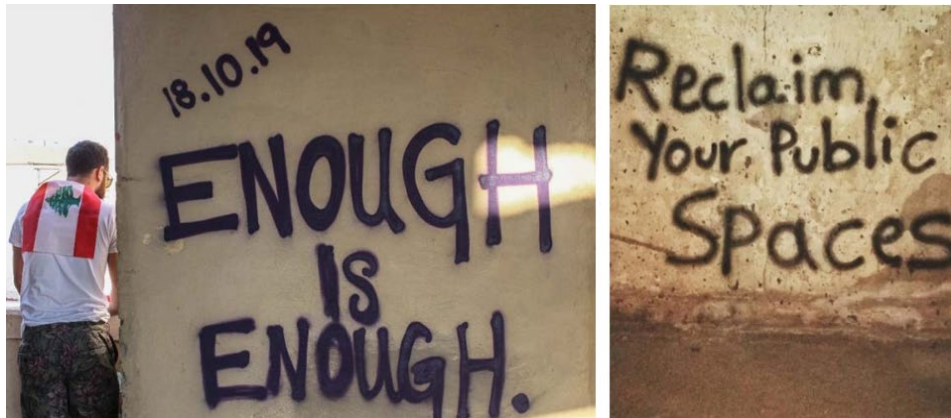
Figure 8. Graffiti during Lebanese Uprising (Source: Sinno, 2020)

Figure 9. Aerial View of Beirut Central District on 19 October 2019 (Source: Sinno, 2020)

The case studies reflect on the economic, social, and political role of public spaces within the cities. While in some cases citizens drove the initiatives, others highlighted the collective efforts of government policies and actions to meet the needs of citizens. Nevertheless, the essence of public space remains the same, that is to contribute towards the social, economic, and political needs of people for a well-functioning city. The New Urban Agenda (Habitat III) – an outcome of the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development - also positions public space where "cities for all" manifests most powerfully – where people may encounter one another, interact, trade, and advocate (Mehaffy and Low, 2018).

All the case studies above also highlight the interdependence of economic, social, and political functions. Munich's river surfing case study highlights economic gains from resources and creates an active social environment. Hawker centres in Singapore provide affordable food options, maintain livelihood, and supply chains. Additionally,

they have become significant cultural and tourist landmarks. Emerging from the social and political need to create peace in the city, Pakistan Chowk community centre intended to reclaim their public social space. Successful public spaces have diversity in their use, engage people of all age groups and strata, promote prosperity, equity and manifest democratic values.

Figure 10 is an updated version of the initial concept presented in Figure 1. It aims to quantify the impact of public spaces on a city's overall performance. The model uses a circular diagram divided into three sections representing city functions. The brightness of the colour within each section indicates how well that function is supported by public spaces, with the brightest point (at 120 degrees). If all three functions reach their maximum potential, the result is an equilateral triangle - an ideal scenario and providing a framework for analysing the role of public spaces in city functions. The model does not intend to simplify the complexity of functions, nor is it limited to just these three functions. In fact, it holds within it a detailed qualitative analysis regarding the complexity and interdependence of each function.
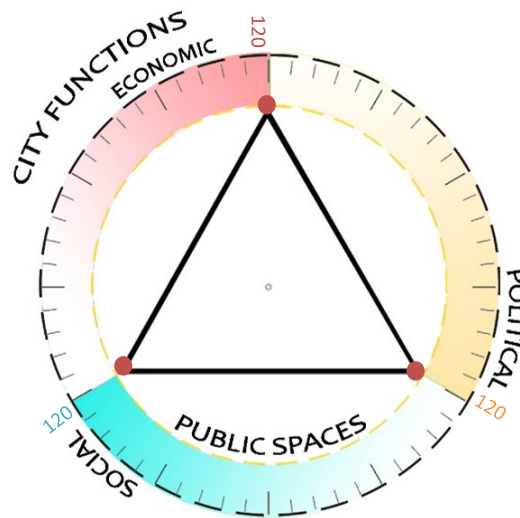

Figure 10. Conceptual Framework (Source: Authors)

The next section applies the conceptual model outlined above to the public space of *Raja Bazaar*, a historic market in Rawalpindi, Pakistan to assess its contribution towards Rawalpindi city's function. The analysis also considers the broader urban context within which *Raja Bazaar* is situated.

4. *Raja Bazaar,* **Rawalpindi - A Case Study from Pakistan**

Raja Bazaar[1], a historic market, lies in the heart of Rawalpindi. It is an urban centre with large-scale mercantile activities and residences. The bazaar reflects the complex socioeconomic evolution of the area through its peculiarities such as narrow

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[1] Bazaar: Urdu term for Market

meandering *galis*[2], slender houses, shops, roadside vendors, mixed-use activities, worship places and erratic open spaces nestled within the density.

Urban history identifies '*bazaar*' as a significant component of growth and spatial organisation of streets. With building structures in proximity, the streets are a witness of public life for social, economic, political, cultural, and civic activities of the people (Moosavi, 2005; Pourjafar et al., 2014). Historically, the main bazaar determined the transport routes to facilitate trade. Raja Bazaar is one such historic market. Its streets provide an immediate urban experience and a multiplicity of functions. They are quintessential public spaces with cultural, economic, social, religious, and political functions. Thus, the core functions of the city, as understood in this research, exist in an intricate and resilient pattern of this market.

This historic market is itself a merger of smaller *bazaars* namely *City Saddar, Sarafa Bazaar, Bhabhra Bazaar, Qila, Sabzi Mandi, Machli Bazaar, Urdu Bazaar, Nankari Bazaar*, and *China market*, each unique with their specialty merchandise. The street morphology is such that six major roads branch out from *Fawara Chowk*[3] further splitting into smaller street markets.
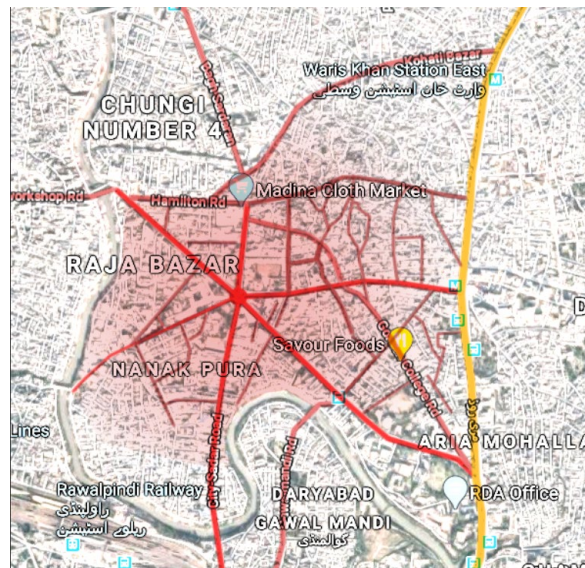

Figure 11. Organic Street network emerging from the main Raja Bazaar Market, Rawalpindi
(Source: Authors)

Historical townhouses and mansions, also known as *Haveli*, in the streets recall the rich heritage of the subcontinent from colonial and pre-colonial times. Adorned with wooden balconies called *Jharokhas*, the facades showcase the decorative splendour of that era, overlooking the bustling streets below.. The bulk of the buildings date from early 19th c. to early 20th c, and some of their features are in a vulnerable state (Rogers, 2014). There also exist a number of mosques, temples and a *gurdwara*[4], as the

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[2] Gali(s): Narrow streets like alleys leading up to residences

[3] Fawara Chowk: Fawara is the Urdu word for fountain, chowk means intersections. The road intersection is famous for the water fountain in the centre

[4] Gurdwara: A place of worship for Sikhs

area has nurtured a diverse mix of religions and cultures in the past and continues to preserve the lived heritage. The *bazaar* also offers a variety of street food that is representative of the various tastes evolved in Pakistan.

Raja Bazaar area is now fraught with problems in the absence of planning management and service upgradation. High density, unplanned land-use, traffic congestion, visual clutter, inefficient infrastructure services and degraded housing has depreciated the liveability of the area. Vehicular traffic in the shared street and incompatible commercial activity and has exasperated both customers and residents in the area. Customers and tourists – when visiting at all – confront a public space that lacks the most basic urban amenities such as walking paths, benches, trees, and adequate lighting (Khan, 2021).

Raja Bazaar is a case of a contested public space. The market serves the core functions of the city, at the expense of desirable qualities of a public space. This research was conducted as a team of urban planners, transport planners, economists, and community mobilisers with the aim to identify urban challenges in *Raja Bazaar* and analyse solutions towards urban regeneration of this public space. Primary data was collected by conducting field observations, visual surveys, focus groups discussions with the community and interviews of key stakeholders.

Research Findings from the Public Space in Raja Bazaar: Shared Street

The shared street in *Raja Bazaar* is an unplanned outcome of organic urban growth in a trading centre. Throughout centuries, the pattern has proven to be resilient for community development, circulation, economic and social activity.

The mixed-use activities, culture and urban heritage of *Raja Bazaar* are fading with the contemporaneous urban chaos in the shared street. Residents, traders, customers in the form of walking, shopping, driving cars, motorbikes, and freight carriage, use the shared street in *Raja Bazaar.* Among all the activities, motorised vehicles in the street, whether parked or mobile, dominate and hamper all other functions (figure 12). Various streets also serve as a short route in Rawalpindi's physical layout, adding to the vehicular traffic and invading the public space.

Figure 12. Jeweller's Street in Raja Bazaar, Rawalpindi (Source: Authors)

The following sections explore how the economic, social, and religious-political functions of Rawalpindi city are occurring in *Raja Bazaar*.

Economic Function
Economic activity in *Raja Bazaar* is diverse, with smaller *bazaars* specialising in their unique merchandise such as *Urdu Bazaar* for all kinds of stationery items, gold market in *Sarafa Bazaar, leather market in Mochi Bazaar*, meat market in *Qasai Gali* and general-purpose goods in *Bhabra Bazaar* (Jaho, 2014).

Street vendors and roadside sellers punctuate the public space with diverse goods, establishing the informal economy of the area. All these bazaars also constitute a large wholesale market. While traders from other parts of the city purchase commodities in bulk for further retail, the lucrative prices also attract the citizens. In addition to buying and selling, the old city has clusters of crafts and manufacturing (Rogers, 2014). Carts and vehicular transport deliver merchandise, which combines the fast-moving and slow-moving traffic. Some shops have set timings for delivery, but often freight carriers arriving around midday halt the mobility in the streets.

Regardless of the thriving economy, the *bazaar* suffers from traffic congestion due to which many customers and tourists hesitate to visit the area. The *bazaar* has immense potential to captivate the customers, proliferate food retail and unravel the hidden historic heritage in the *Muhallahs*. Public spaces can play a key role in holding tourists for a longer duration.

Social Function
> *"Following the narrow galis into the mohollas the clamour of the marketplace is left behind. It is replaced by the sounds of children playing in the streets and neighbours chatting at their doorways, the smell of meals cooking, the sight of the elderly sitting and watching life go by and the constant passage of residents on foot and motorcycle moving from home to market, school and back."* (Rogers, 2014)

Strong community ties foster high social capital among Raja Bazaar residents. In the absence of proper public furniture, the high steps outside shops called 'tharas' (figure 14), steps outside buildings and benches with doorways (figure 13) have transformed the narrow streets into social hubs. Schools and clinics within the streets encourage diverse circulation. Many related families live close by so women and children move around the streets to visit each other.

Shopkeepers use the immediate surroundings to sit and unwind with their co-workers in the market (figure 15) while street corners have become gathering spaces for men to maintain the privacy of the small houses for the women. Traders and residents conduct community meetings and informal gatherings in the streets.

The use of the street evolves with time of the day and days of the week. While vehicular traffic dominates the street in the peak hours, children and youngsters roam freely in the streets at night and on the days when the shops are closed.

Figure 13 (left). Built-in benches with entrance of historical houses (Source: Authors)
Figure 14 (right). Customers resting on a shop step called thara, in the absence of sitting spaces
(Source: Authors)

The social function in the bazaar is the unifying factor for historic cities reflecting the true spirit of the community. The challenge lies in the coexistence of social functions with all other roles the bazaar is serving.

Figure 15. Shopkeepers socializing in the streets of Raja Bazaar (Source: Authors)

Political and Religious Function
As *Raja Bazaar* houses a close-knit community with strong social ties, there is a high turnover in the celebration of political and religious events.
The period of election - national, local and trader's association – witnesses politically charged streets. Political leaders form close connections with the community leaders and notable traders as the density of *Raja Bazaar* offers a significant vote bank. Customarily, prominent traders use their network to contest for political

representation. Temporary set-ups transform the streets for holding formal and informal political gatherings. Remnants of banners and posters remain in the street as a memory of events for a long time.

The streets are also transformed for religious gatherings and processions. Annual religious occasions are observed in the Islamic month of *Muharram,* along with key religious festivals throughout the year such as *Eid-ul-fitr, Eid-ul-Azha* and *Eid Milad-un-Nabi.* Specific days are allocated in the month of Muharram for road blockages to create procession routes. The month of *Ramzan* is marked by change in shop timings and the blossoming of the food industry at dawn and sunset as Muslims fast. Community leaders conduct food drives in the streets during this month for the underprivileged. The activity in jewellers and clothing markets also creates a festive atmosphere during the festival of *Eid*.

Figure 16 (left). Street Pedestrianization for festival gatherings
(Source: Hassan, 2013)

Figure 17 (right). Pop up food vendors during religious festivals (Source: Hassan, 2013)

Eid-ul-Azha involves the religious ritual of animal sacrifice; hence, there is a unique addition of animals in the streets. In some open spaces and main streets shepherds sell animals, while the animals occupy space in front of each house in the *galis*. The bazaar is illuminated with festive lighting during *Eid Milad-un-Nabi*, which celebrates the birth of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Many committees are formed to conduct 'Naat[5]' competitions. A temporary setup with a decorative stage and sound system makes the streets resonate with religious chants. Vehicular traffic halts and temporary pedestrianisation occurs in a few major streets (figure 16).

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[5] Naat: Islamic poetry sung in the praise of Holy Prophet (PBUH)

Analytical Findings Under the Conceptual Framework
The narrow streets in *Raja Bazaar* are a shared space without vehicular and pedestrian traffic segregation. Pedestrians juggle their way through the parked and moving vehicles with minimum social encounters. Regardless of the contemporary challenges, the street has thrived to embody density, diversity, and festivity. The bazaar's potential, culture, and heritage are being lost due to inefficient use of the street. In local jargon, *Raja Bazaar* is referred to as the place of chaos rather than being signified as the historical centre with urban heritage and economic diversity.

As narrated by one of the visitors, '*Raja Bazaar is a place where I least enjoy going for one simple reason – one cannot get a place to park one's car. The place is already occupied by hundreds of motorcycles, so artfully parked by the shopkeepers, so that no one gets to park his vehicle in front of their shop. [...] Although a huge parking lot has been constructed and all shopkeepers as a matter of fact should park their cars and motorbikes so as to provide space for customers, it remains empty*' (Jaho, 2014).
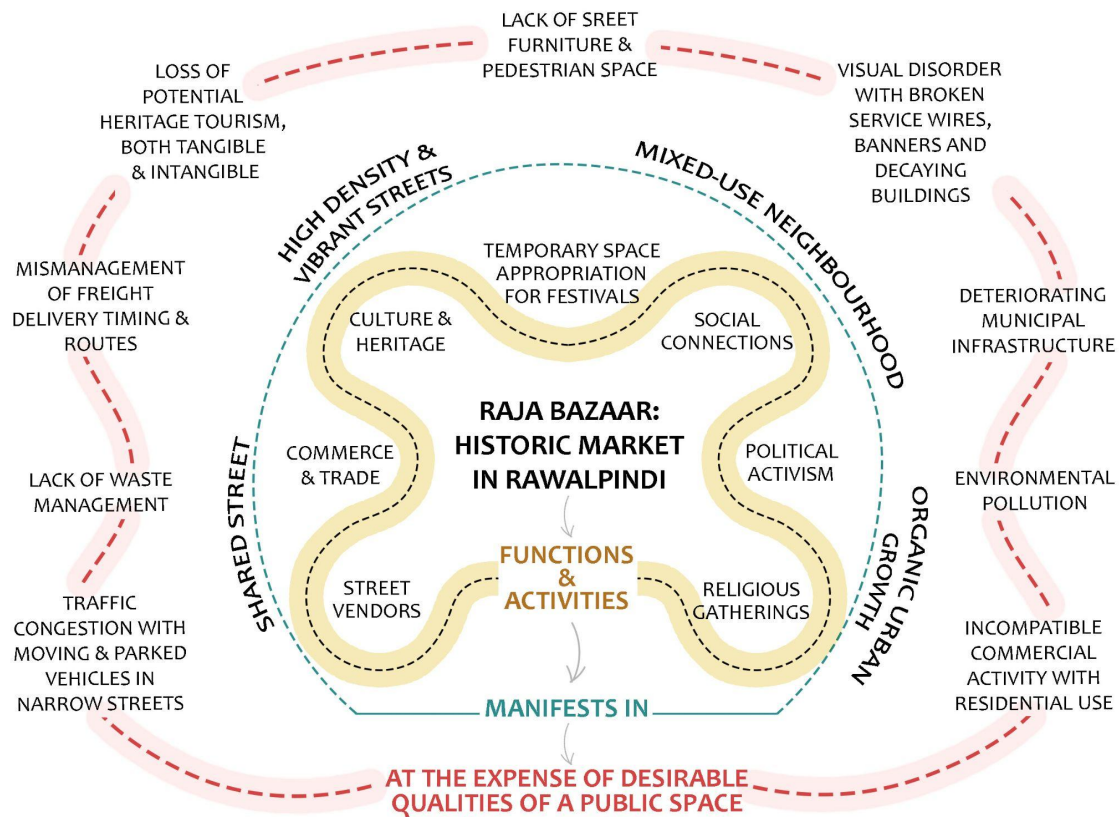

Figure 18. Analytical findings in the case of Raja Bazaar

The analytical findings from the public space of Raja Bazaar are summarised in figure 18. These contribute towards developing the conceptual framework, figure 19, which represents how the public space of *Raja Bazaar* is contributing to city functions. The public space fulfils the political function to its fullest. This function is achieved through temporary predestinations, pop-up activity and space appropriation in

particular times of the year. As the trading centre of the city, the *bazaar* scores well in the economic function regardless of the congestion and environmental challenges. However, architectural heritage, food tourism, and local crafts are being lost due to urban congestion. Socio-cultural functions are also sacrificed; more than half the population i.e. women, children and people in old age do not have access to the desirable qualities of public space due to over-powering economic activity, vehicular traffic, congestion and neglect of the space. It is also important to mention the challenges of pandemic lockdown in Raja Bazaar. Comprehensive measures, including specialized wards, clear guidelines, extensive public awareness campaigns, targeted economic relief, and strategic lockdowns, contributed to relatively low morbidity rates compared to other nations (Akhtar et al., 2021).

However, the economic challenges which did befall the country affected each trader in the supply chain. Loss of livelihood was experienced more in the informal economy i.e. the street vendors. The financial strain often led businesses to open, prioritising economic survival over full compliance with lockdown measures. In terms of physical space, Raja Bazaar has seen minor change after the COVID-19 waves, with its functions returning to their previous state.

The scoring presented in figure 19 below is an average representative response from all research participants.
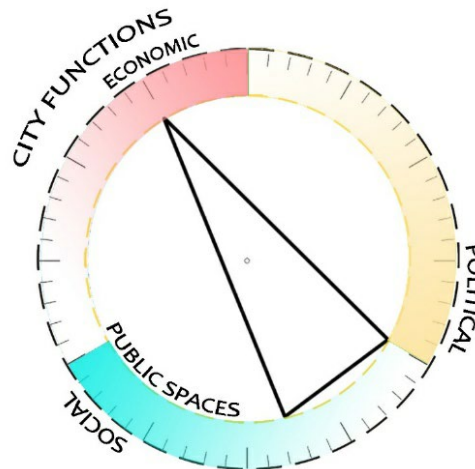

Figure 19. Research findings of Raja Bazaar, Rawalpindi translated in the conceptual framework.

Towards finding the public space in Raja Bazaar

The reinvigoration of *Raja Bazaar* as a public space requires reclaiming the street to improve social and economic functions as well as bring attention towards the tangible and intangible heritage. The religious function shows a pattern of temporary pedestrianisation during festivals. To address tensions between mobility and other functions, large-scale pedestrianisation is needed in Raja Bazaar. This will facilitate the locals, attract visitors, and reduce noise and pollution. However, this ideal scenario conflicts with the complex real-time context.

Space programming has evolved in the streets in such a way that isolating vehicles is a challenge. Taking an example of *Bhabra bazaar*, a street in *Raja Bazaar,* researchers

identified motorbike workshops in one segment. The workshops emerged in the last decade owing to the rising number of ownerships among the residents. Such shops require the entry of motorised vehicles and blocking their entry would mean relocation of workshops or loss of livelihood to some extent. *Bhabra Bazaar* Street branches out into sixteen residential *galis*. Pedestrianization of *Bhabra bazaar* will need to exempt the residents who use motorbikes in these sixteen subbranches. Another example is of the gold market, *Sarafa Bazaar* where customers arrive with a large sum of money. Naturally, private vehicles increase their sense of security as opposed to public transport and walking.

One of the challenges in Raja bazaar was mixing freight deliveries with customer traffic. Freight timing is crucial for optimising public space usage. To resolve conflicts, functions should be scheduled to avoid overlap—merchants receiving goods should do so at times that do not disrupt customer movement. Such rules do exist, however, their implementation is weak. Managing deliveries for numerous traders and coordinating the supply chain remains complex, rendering time-based regulations ineffective.

Furthermore, urban mobility can be enhanced by addressing encroachments. Administrators often blame shopkeepers, roadside vendors, and pushcarts for occupying streets, targeting low-income traders in anti-encroachment drives. This approach overlooks the fact that these informal vendors contribute significantly to the local economy. However, such measures lack long-term effectiveness and strategy for relocation, hence the vendors persistently return to available location (Dawn, 2019; Iqbal, 2021).

On-street parking in Raja Bazaar, used by shopkeepers, salespeople, and customers, severely reduces shared street space. Some shopkeepers have created informal parking areas in nearby plots but still use up to 18% of the street space with parked motorcycles. Reviving the street from parking and vehicular traffic in Raja Bazaar calls for a scrutiny in the macro context of Rawalpindi. The city has a weak public transport system hence the alternatives of mobility are few. The issue is compounded by limited parking facilities, free on-street parking, and minimal enforcement of 'no parking' zones. Motorbikes are a preferred, affordable choice for residents navigating the narrow streets.

The mobility plan for Raja Bazaar needs both city-level integration and localised changes. It must include a program to promote walking and public transport. Feasibility studies considered options like full pedestrianisation, mixed vehicular traffic with shuttle services, and one-way traffic routes. Conflicts between stakeholders' interests complicate the planning. Addressing these challenges requires detailed planning to ensure equitable access for residents, customers, and traders, with a focus on community-centred solutions.

Raja Bazaar has seen numerous bottom-up initiatives reflecting its community spirit. A social programming activity was conducted to discuss the use of shared streets, featuring a bicycle race for children aged 8-12, funded and organised by the community and local traders (figure 20). The event surpassed expectations with around two hundred children participating. Traffic police and city administration helped close the area to vehicles. This raises the question: if so, many children use bicycles, why are motorised vehicles still dominant on the streets? What public spaces exist for the neighbourhood's children?

Street revival is for the greater good of the community. Up until now, the urban planners and government have blamed the traders for encroaching the public space in *Raja Bazaar.* The traders blame the residents for commuting at high speeds and the government for not maintaining infrastructure. Residents blame the incompatible commercial activity taking over their streets. The public space dialogue is lost in this confusion, and the image received by a visitor is of chaos. The role of experts, thus, lies in understanding the complex dynamics of the area and mediating the conflicts to reach viable solutions. The research activities in Raja Bazaar realised that community engagement is crucial for street revival. It was recommended appointing champions from each street to consult with experts, facilitating a two-way process where researchers understand community needs and inform them about public space opportunities.

Figure 20 (left). Temporary setup organized by the local community and traders after closing vehicular traffic. (Source: Authors).
Figure 21 (right). Cycling event conducted for children in one street (jeweller's street) of Raja Bazaar in January 2021. (Source: Authors)

5. Conclusion

While cities deliver complex functions such as municipal services, housing, mobility, economic growth, to name a few. This study categorises the core functions into three areas: Economic, Political, and Social. The analysis provides evidence that public spaces contribute significantly to the functionality of cities, making them liveable for its residents, economically competitive, social, and environmentally resilient.
The conceptual framework, derived from literature and global case studies, highlights the central role of public spaces in achieving city functions and services. Worldwide, cities are using public spaces as a medium to attract more residents, investors, and tourists, as well as addressing challenges such as crime, congestion, pollution, and the impacts of COVID-19.
The case study of Raja Bazaar in Rawalpindi reveals the multifaceted roles of shared streets in dense, mixed-use neighbourhoods. The shared street serves as a marketplace, circulation route, and site for socio-political events. However, motorised vehicles have diminished the vibrancy of the public spaces. The absence of local governance and

strong community initiatives has further hindered its revitalization for the locals. The analysis reinforces the complexity of cities and interdependence of functions. There is a need to understand the public realm, which has a causal relationship with the city functions, for a sustainable balance of development in cities.

This paper offers a unique contribution by enhancing our understanding of public spaces in historic city centres of developing countries. However, it acknowledges that the framework developed under this study may not fully capture the complexities of all urban environments. The study applied the framework to a single neighbourhood in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. To further enrich the knowledge base and expand the framework's scope, a comparative analysis involving multiple cities/neighbourhoods is needed.

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