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Current State of Built Heritage in Karachi The Case of Empress Market

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Abstract

Modern Karachi has a fragmented and multifaceted social formation, while its historic core presents a diverse range of historical attributes of its built heritage. The increasing urban population of Karachi contributes heavily to its degradation including the degradation of its historical attributes. There is no effective heritage legislation and there are conflicts between what people do and what the government institutions do. Consequently, there is chaos and deterioration in the inner city. The city has been developing rapidly and the government has proposed many projects for the revival of the historic core of the city. However, most of them have not been successful. The objective of this research is to examine the situation in which heritage buildings face a serious threat. The current research focused on one such project, that is, the Empress Market – the restoration and redevelopment of its historic precinct. It adopted physical observations, archival analysis, and site surveys along with photographic documentation and interviews of the local shop dwellers (especially to focus on the historical evolution of the building) as research techniques. The findings showed that the state of deprivation of the historic core of Karachi is the reflection of a collective devastation of the precinct in terms of social and historic values, which is further supported by the non-prevailing heritage legislative system. The research also investigates the present condition of the Empress Market in connection with its glorious past and urban decay befallen to it over time due to vandalism and the numerous restoration plans proposed for it over the years. The study can be beneficial to comprehend the ground realities concerning the survival of heritage properties within the cumulative urbanization process. The results can be used also to propose the rejuvenation of the lost splendor of the historic urban core of Karachi as a prototype for parallel development schemes.

Keywords: built heritage, historic built fabric, historic core / precinct,

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inconsistency and chaos, social formation

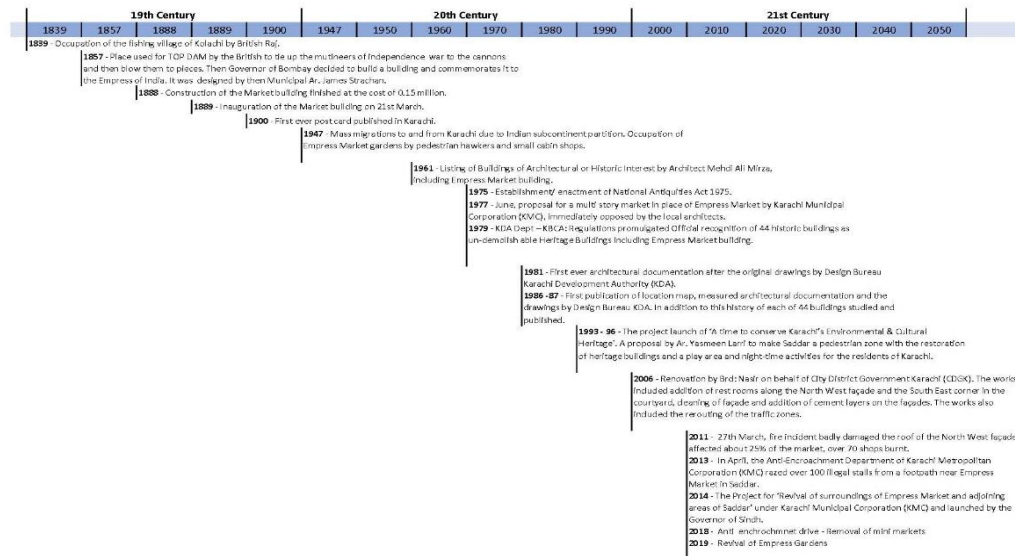
Introduction

The built heritage of Karachi encompasses its historic quarters, monuments and urban sites related to a variety of ethnic groups demonstrating the country's rich history at the crossroads of culture. On the one hand, this heritage constitutes the nation's pride and identity and is considered priceless. On the other hand, there are many disparities that become impediments to its sustenance. Most inhabitants (various ethnic communities) lack awareness about the significance of historic properties and the need for their protection. This results in illegal demolitions and inadequate measures for the restoration of the historic built fabric. This situation is aggravated by the absence of a proper legal system designed for the protection of built heritage and the lack of resources needed for appropriately safeguarding the built heritage. As a result, the destructive practices continue. This research further explores these issues.

The Empress Market is considered one of the oldest markets in Karachi which has retained its original function till the present day. So, it is analyzed in this research from the point of view of its evolution from an elegant monument to an encroachment and a liberated free standing landmark. A chart of the chronological evolution of the building is given below:

Figure 1

Figure Showing Chronological Development of Empress Market

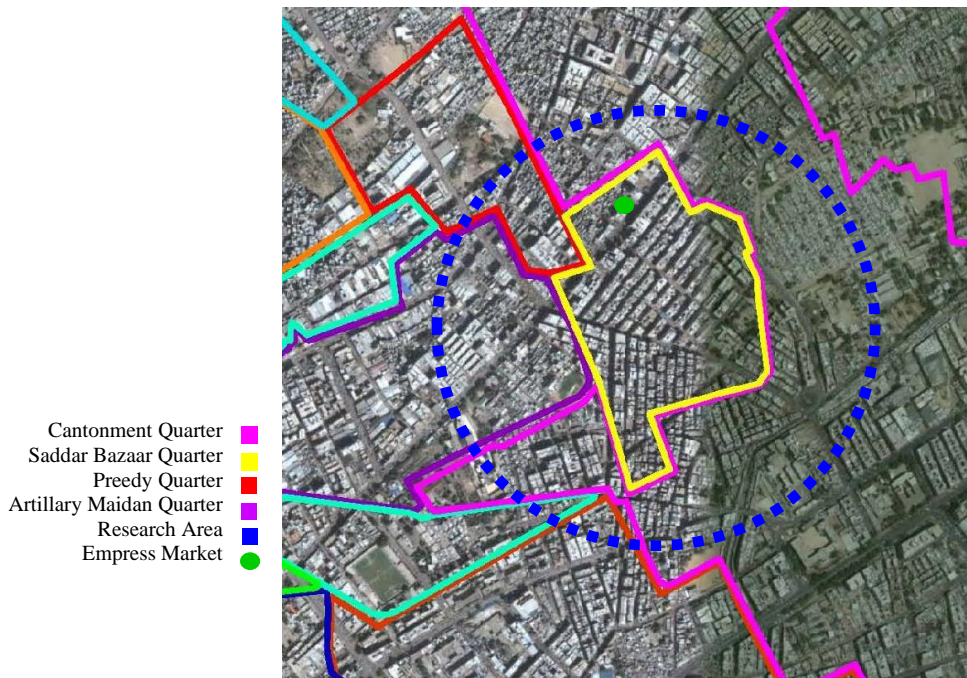


Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this study comprised the triangulation process in which multiple research methods including archival analysis, physical observation and photographic documentation of the survey area and interviews with local shop dwellers were included.

Figure 2

It Shows the Boundaries of the Historic Quarters of Karachi



Source: Base map and data acquired from the Heritage Cell – DAPNED University Archive 2014

At first, a pilot study was conducted to comprehend the context. To limit the study area, the physical scope of research was defined within certain limits demonstrated by the blue circle in Figure 2. It included the whole of Saddar Bazaar quarter and parts of the adjoining quarters of Cantonment from north to southeast, Artillery Maidan from the west and the Preedy quarter from the northwest. Empress Market is represented on the map with a green dot.

The research process initiated with data collection and archives, libraries and offices within the city were visited for this purpose. Information was also acquired

from both printed and non-printed sources, through internet and various newspapers. The interviews of the shopkeepers of the Empress Market proved very informative regarding the condition of the building at the time of partition and the fire incident in 2011. Other than the formal data collection system, discussion in this paper is based on personal experience and on a scientific dialogue with professionals: architects, conservationists and specifically the faculty from the architecture department of two Karachi based universities, that is, NED and Dawood University, as well as the faculty of the University of Bahrain.

Physical observation included the study of the micro climate of the survey area. The sensitivity of the passers-by towards the heritage buildings and their values was documented. This analysis helped in understanding the behavior of people who are associated with these buildings directly or indirectly. At the same time, heritage buildings were studied physically to determine their current conservation status (externally only to generate an opinion) and they were also photographed. In some streets of Saddar Bazaar (focus research area), resistance towards documenting the buildings was observed. Thus, a prior permission for photography was sought from the owner of the property or the local management head of that particular parcel (whichever applicable). The conservation status is explained in section 2.2 where possible reasons for the current state of built heritage in Karachi are analyzed and documented.

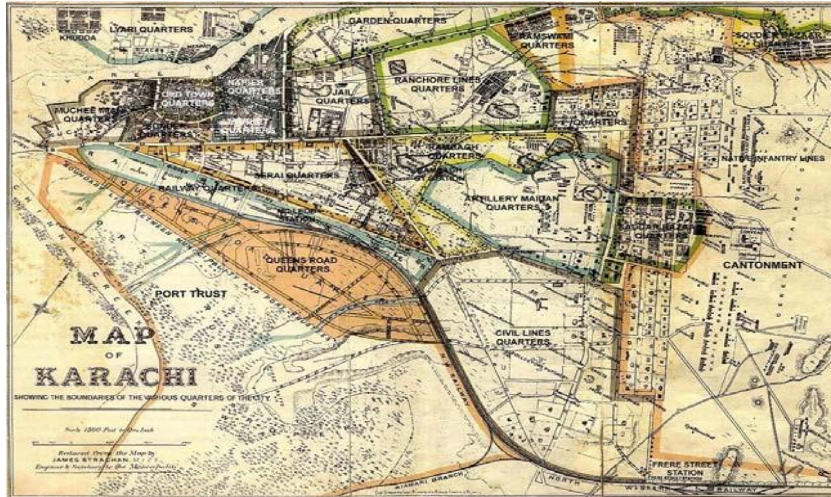
Literature Review

The city of Karachi, also the former capital of Pakistan (1947-57), is the main economic center of the country. The city's history dates back to the 19th century. It used to serve as a port on the Arabian Sea located north-west of the mouth of the Indus river. It was identified as Krokala, the transitional port used by the fleet of Alexander the Great in 326 BC, as noted in a collection of 16th century Turkish sailing directions (British online library). Karachi was built as "Kolachi", a small fishing village inhabited by the local Balochi tribe under the Talpur regime, prior to British annexation. Despite the fact that the city's history is not that old, yet it houses religious places that are centuries old (Baille, [1890](#)).

This modest village became a thriving port town (Karachi harbor) after the British conquest of Sindh in 1839 by the regiment of British commander Sir Charles Napier. It was then, for the very first time, that the name Karachi instead of Kolachi was used (Baille, [1890](#)). Alexander F. Baille, the then municipal engineer, divided the city into 18 diverse quarters (refer Fig 2 for more detail). The city extended around these quarters marking them as the historic center of the city.

Figure 3

Map of Karachi – Colored Lines Depict the Boundaries of Historic Quarters



Source: Kurrachee Past, Present & Future – Alexander F. Baillie 1997 Edition

Figure 4

Year 1930 – Street View of Tram Moving on Bunder Road Showing Jehangir Kothari Building at the Back in Serai Quarter



Source: © Archive 150 – April 2017

Figure 5

Year 1910 - Elphinstone Street View in Saddar Bazaar Quarter



Source: Archive 150 – April 2017

The colonial administrators introduced technological innovations into their European inhabited quarters via introducing electricity, road networks, and automotive transportation systems such as railways and tramways. The British were very keen to redevelop the essence of their hometown in their colonized settlements, thus the streets were paved, had footpaths and were lined with street lamps (lights). Their houses were accommodated with a proper system of water supply and waste disposal arrangement. Gizristone was the main building material used, both as dressed and in an embossed manner having plain or decorative finishes on the structures. Today, these structures are part of the colonial history of the city and are notified as protected heritage.

The architectural approach followed was the imitation of a unique style prevalent then in Europe in general and predominantly in England and it was assorted with the local architectural attributes and the local context of the area (Morris, 1983). This approach helped introduce a typical architectural notion, hybrid in nature and a combination of both imported and regional concepts, to the built environment of Karachi. This is mostly referred to as Anglo-vernacular, colonial or the domestic gothic and/or sometimes as the Italian Renaissance architectural approach (late 19th- early 20th century).

Architectural Analysis of Saddar Bazaar Quarter

Saddar Bazaar, one of the 18 historic quarters, became a high-end fashionable district at the time of its inception as the central souk / bazaar with shops denoting the most expensive range of products. The source of the title ‘Saddar’ comes from the Arabic language and means chief, principle and/or the ultimate. The British developed the Saddar area as a major urban intervention within the city and as a ‘Camp Bazaar’ specifically for the British, although it was gradually transformed into the central bazaar of the town (Baille, [1890](#)). A number of mediocre manufacturers were also located along Elphinstone Street, one of the initial shopping streets in Saddar.

Figure 6

Krishna Mansion in Saddar Bazaar (Highly Deteriorated)
Source: Authors, 2015



With the development of the market, a number of recreational and entertainment works came to surface. These included a variety of garment stores, shops, coffee / liquor houses, commercial cum residential apartments, amenity spaces such as libraries and public parks, and healthcare facilities including dispensaries and hospitals. Soon after its development, Saddar was inhabited by many migrant communities who all came in search of business and trade.

Those included Brahmins and Bunyas from all parts of India, Hindus from Cutch, Parsis from Gujrat, Mohammedan traders of all kinds from Cutch and Baluchistan including Khojas, Bohras, Arabs, Persians, Afghans, Goans and Jews (Ovais, [2013](#)). The main building material used was yellow Gizri limestone adorned with attractive ornamentations.

Saddar Bazaar has many magnificent structures reminiscent of the architectural and ornamental skills of the colonial masters. They are built mainly out of yellow Gizri stone. One can find entrance portals with colonnades and pediments, high-pitched roofs with round windows, pilasters and sometimes, various types of balcony projections.

A. W. Hughes remembers it in his book in the following words:

“...Sadar Bazaar adjoins the Preedy quarter, and is situated between the Depot and European infantry lines. It depicts fine broad streets and stone-flagged pavements, with good houses and shops on either side. It has a well-stocked and commodious market, called the Cunynghame Market (demolished later, location unknown probably situated on the eastern end of the Bazaar), built in 1861, at a cost of 17,500 rupees. Here supplies are readily obtainable from an early hour in the morning up to 9 or 10 o'clock. Great improvements have been carried out in this part of Karachi during the past few years. In this quarter is situated the Parsi infant school. Sadar Bazar quarter has 897 numbers of houses and 3,649 numbers of inhabitants...” (Hughes, [1876](#)).

In 1888, the British decided to build a grand market building within the Saddar precinct along the Preedy street in an artistic representation of the Gothic style fused with a domestic approach in order to eradicate the negative impact of the site of “*Top Dam*” (Larri, [1996a](#)). History suggests that this specific site was a punishment ground for the rebels of 1857 independence war, where they were tied against canons and blown up. The layout of the Empress Market was set as a traditional square-ish plan, then popular in British India. It was humble in design but still displayed the British splendor and was very functional. The long barrier free wings of the market were dedicated for specific functions and were one of their kind.

Presently, the Saddar Bazaar quarter has gone through several transformations, mainly undesirable in nature, which have damaged greatly the architectural heritage of the quarter. A small number of colonial structures have survived in a better condition, rest are either gone or remain in a highly dilapidated or partly demolished state. Some structures are still inhabited, specifically those which remain structurally sound but even those are highly encroached and vandalized.

The images in Figure 6 showcase the urban densification and encroachment. They highlight that the historic premises is suffocating in a highly dense concrete jungle. Unwanted conservation practices, political pressure and graffiti with political logos are the main sources of the vandalism of historic properties.

Figure 7

Various Images of Built Heritage Show the Dilapidated State of Conservation



Source: Authors, 2018 - 19

Possible Reasons for the Current State of Built Heritage in Karachi

The present day degraded ensemble of the historic core of Karachi is a reflection of multiple factors including social, political, ethnic and economic factors. It is a typical case where the exploitation of the historic core was initiated immediately after the establishment of the country.

Karachi, being the largest commercial hub of the country at the time of partition, had to cater the incursion of migrants born out of partition in 1947. The history of Karachi has two other phases of the influx of refugees, that is, refugees of Pakistan / Bangladesh partition in 1971 and Afghan-Russia war refugees in 1980s. The need to accommodate the sudden increase in population with insufficient infrastructure led to a hasty developmental process without any planning. The empty structures left behind by the outgoing migrants were allotted to the incoming migrants without

any particular social status. However, in reality the allotment was unbiased although it caused irreversible damage to the historic structures. They were altered (vandalized in many cases) in order to accommodate the domestic needs of new migrants without realizing the architectural significance of the premises.

Later, the situation consolidated with the establishment of cooperative housing societies and satellite towns, depriving the historic town of its original populace (Hasan, 1999). The city grew both inwards and outwards; people occupying historic properties within the city center moved to the new housing settlements leaving behind the structures to be taken over by wholesale markets. Gradually, almost the entire historic center was transformed into wholesale markets. The left behind properties were converted into godowns, storages and other related spaces.

Figure 8

Population Statistics of Karachi 1931-2020

Table 1. Population statistics of Karachi 1931-2020.

Years	Population	APGR (%)
1931	263.565	-
1941	386.655	3.70
1951	1.068.459	11.50
1961	1.912.598	6.05
1971	3.515.402	5.00
1981	5.437.984	4.96
1998	9.856.318	3.52
2002 ^a	11.364.707	3.02
2005 ^a	15.120.000	4.15
2010 ^b	18.529.000	4.05
2015 ^b	22.594,000	4.05
2020 ^b	27.550.000	3.50

Source: Handbook of population census, GOP (1985)
^aEstimated population using annual population growth rate (APGR). ^bProjected population by CDGK-MPGO (2007).

Source: Mentioned above

The current trends in the city’s planning are also among the causes that put critical economic pressure on its historic quarters. At the moment, the city is planned based on an introverted high-rise scheme that puts pressure on the existing structures. Moreover, this pressure is strengthened with the amendment of floor area ratios in building by-laws. The areas which were eligible only for G+2 structures in the past can now opt for G+8 structures or even more. The facts

revealed during observational surveys showed that the city needs a reverse change. It needs to stretch its arms and expand. Due to the availability of land, the city has the potential to grow outside based on a preferably linear planning.

Transportation crisis developed with the introduction of new satellite towns, which added to the existing chaotic situation in the city. Due to the lack of a formal transportation network, the working class (dependent solely on communal conveyance) was left with no transportation facility. Most of the movement of both people and goods went through Saddar (the present historic core of the city) transforming it into a transit camp, always overcrowded and with gravely organized traffic (Soomro & Soomro, [2018b](#)). The mismanaged traffic trends were also supported by commercial enterprise development along the major arteries which badly affected the recreational, artistic and intellectual role of the Saddar area.

With less land available, the multistorey building trend became popular, transforming Karachi into a highly dense city while ensuring less foot print coverage (Qureshi, [2010](#)). According to the World Population review, the current population of Karachi in 2020 is 16,093,786 and it has an annual growth rate of 5% (World Population Review, [n.d.](#)). Apart from the historic exodus phases, annual rural-urban migration has become the reason of the unexpected population growth. The minimum economic incentives for heritage property owners provided by the government and the pressure to justify the needs of their ever increasing household under insufficient law implementation has resulted in the poor state of conservation of the architectural heritage within the city.

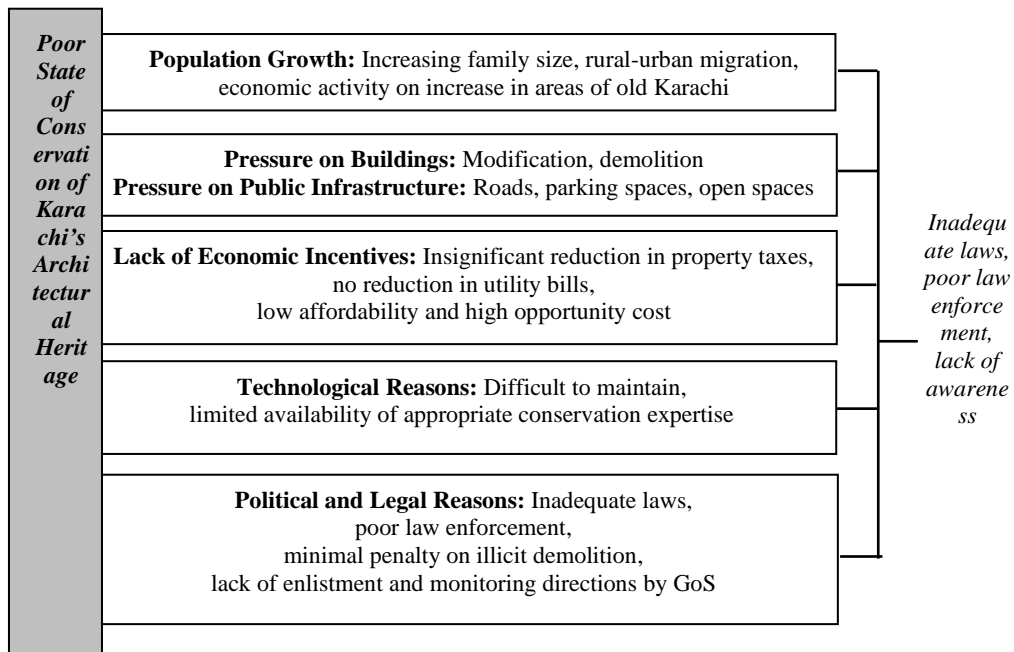
The current building by-laws and regulations are an updated version of the previously developed regulations of 1979. They clearly forbid any sort of intervention within the notified and protected heritage buildings without getting a 'No Objection Certificate (NOC)' as a prior authorization from the relevant departments. This may include alterations, additions, removal and/or demolitions. In the case of illicit demolitions, no new approvals of building plans on that particular plot shall ever be allowed and a doer will be penalized for doing so (Government of Sindh, Housing and Town Planning Department, [2015](#)). Moreover, 'Sindh Cultural Heritage Preservation Act (1994)' defines the amount of the penalty as only 1 lac or 0.1 million rupees along with an imprisonment of 3 years (Section 18 - Sindh Cultural Heritage Preservation Act (1994)). These laws and regulations only emphasize the maintenance of the properties and very few fines are imposed as a result of unauthorized actions. However, none of them offer any supportive incentives to the owners, which eventually makes them less interested in the well-being of their properties. A very common practice by people is to leave the premises

untouched after any kind of catastrophes, which results in decay and eventually causes the fall of the building.

Inadequate conservation practices and lack of awareness not just among the dwellers but also among the authorities support the existing situation. People generally defy consciousness regarding the worth of a heritage unless it belongs to them (as an ancestral asset). Authorities such as government departments lack passion among them and are stuck with non-flexible approaches (mainly monument centric) which do not have an impact on a large scale.

Figure 9

Figure Shows Various Factors Affecting the Condition of Built Heritage in Karachi



Source: Authors, 2019

The behavior or attitude of users impacts the premises directly. According to the findings of the survey analysis (by authors in 2018) shown in Table 2 and based upon the various values associated with the heritage buildings, it was found that very few agencies such as the academia, some NGOs and other amiable people see the historic premises as having cultural value. On the other hand, heritage is assessed only in terms of its functional value. For instance, the shopkeepers see their shops

only as shops (economic asset) based upon their functional utility but not as heritage premises (Soomro & Kumar, 2013). Another behavioral aspect identified through the same survey is the lack of the sense of ownership. In the historic area of Saddar Bazaar and also in the rest of the historic quarters, there is an informal rental system which is called ‘pugree’ in which the building is hired on a rental basis for around 100 years with a minimum rental sum paid each month. In this situation, the owner receives almost nothing which makes him the least interested in his property. On the other hand, the tenant considers it as a rented property. Both ways, the property suffers.

Case of Empress Market

Description of the Building

Empress Market is strategically situated on the main thorough fare of New M. A. Jinnah Road, formerly known as Preedy Street, in the Saddar Bazaar quarter. Its location allows it to access any part of the city. The history of the Empress Market dates back to the British occupation of Karachi in early 19th century. When built, it was one of the seven markets the city had at that time. Its design as an enclosed compound signified the slogan ‘under one roof shopping culture’. The exquisite design by the architect successfully eradicated the violent memory of the place and achieved a fresh memory which was absolutely opposite to its earlier reputation.

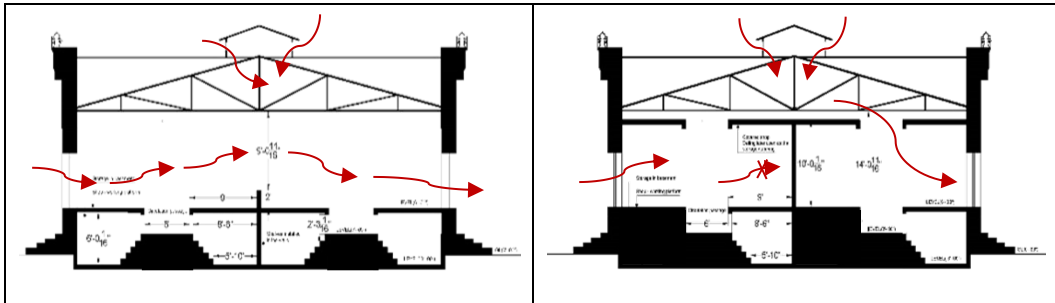
The Design Philosophy of James Strachan

Strachan designed the building in a well-proportioned style encompassing an open piazza connected with four entrances. He designed it in the Domestic Indo-Gothic Style with his signature style of a clock tower. Strachan demonstrated a unique design responsive to the local climatic conditions; he kept internal spaces as open, barrier free, long wings. The shops were set not as usual enclosed spaces; rather, they were set in the form of working platforms without any roof covers or dividers between them. Each shop was provided with a basement storage (Soomro & Soomro, 2018a). This type of layout avoided any visual obstacle and ensured the better circulation of air and light (refer Fig. 8 for more details). Later on, the design of shops was upgraded by incorporating higher walls and canopies on the top. Due to the rising dampness, basements were removed from underneath the majority of the shops.

Till 1947, the Empress Market was surrounded by open spaces known as the Empress Market Gardens (Table. 3). These were also referred to as the Empress Gardens.

Figure 10

Section Shows Internal Space Layout



Source: Authors, 2015

Figure 11

Figure Shows Architectural Drawings and Other Details, Section Shows Internal Space Layout

Architectural and Other Details of the Empress Market		
Legal Status	Protected Heritage Enlistment no: 1995-047	Date of Construction
Architect(s)	Municipal Architect of the British Era James Strachan	Location
Total Area	23644.00 ft ²	Cost of Construction

Source: Authors, 2015

During 1947, an unexpected population growth accelerated the financial burden on the market building along with its neighborhood. With the intention to support the migrated families economically, the government decided to build shops on the Empress Gardens. Later, these small commercial centers situated along the four corners of the market building were registered as official markets by the Karachi Municipal Corporation (KMC). These changing trends also exerted pressure on the internal space of the market and transformed the original architectural style of shops from working platforms to independent shop units. Most basements located underneath the shops were also removed due to the rising dampness. Consequently, the unique concept of the market building as a barrier free and well-ventilated space was lost.

Empress Market was declared as a protected heritage of Pakistan in 1995, having the enlistment number 1995-047 under the Antiquities Act, 1975 and the Sindh Cultural Heritage (Preservation) Act, 1994 by the Ministry of Culture under the Government of Pakistan. The revision of building by-laws by the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) had adverse effects on the historic structures; the areas that were eligible for G+2 structures can now opt for G+12 structures, putting a huge economic pressure on the historic premises. The current context of the market building has changed entirely. Once, it used to be visible among the rest of the structures situated next to it. Now, its presence is subdued due to the high-rise structures standing on all of its corners.

Interviews with the Shopkeepers

There is a large number of old age shop owners in the market building who have witnessed the heyday of the market and have seen the market grow to its present day appearance. They recall it as a jewel in the crown of the city. Most of them agree that the market has lost its old glory, although its function still remains the same but the shoppers' profile has shifted from high-end elite class to the middle and lower class. The oral history of the market collected through interviews reflects that the central courtyard used to have a drinking water fountain in the middle of it, which reflected cultural sensitivity as well as the ideas inspired by the consideration for the local climatic conditions. The market not only served the people related to it but it was used as a common communal space. Due to its access from all four sides, it created a cross axis which was used by the passers-by as a shortcut to reach the other side of the market. In other words, it depicted the combined approach of a rational and modernist intellect with attention given to the domestic features of interest. The openings are still there but due to the added markets to the outer building façades the axis is gone. The leisurely circulation of pedestrians that was

further articulated by culture specific components is no more to be seen these days. After the fire incident in March 2011, the Government of Sindh (GoS) promised to support the shop owners to help them rebuild their shops but the promise didn't materialize. The United Merchant Association (Anjuman Taraki-e-Tajraan) of the Empress Market took action and built the shops using their own funds with the help of shop owners.

Further information revealed that there are two types of clientele, those who are directly linked with the market such as buyers and those who are not linked with the market because they don't hold any stake in it, although they are involved in taking its direct advantages. For instance, there are a number of people and for them the toilet facility is the only social interaction with the building (Empress Market toilet block is used as a paid public facility). Another big merchandize group comprises the walking tea / cold drink sellers. They don't own any space within the building, yet their business is directly linked with the market. The same is true for the roadside vendors / hawkers who occupy small corners or the stairs. An interactive platform that creates a dialogue and helps remove the social boundaries is missing. There is a need for promoting awareness about the importance of the cultural diversity in the city. The building is also visited by foreign tourists but in a very small number due to the lack of a sense of security. There are also people, particularly the shop owners, who see the building as a commercial resource. They are not concerned with the heritage significance of the building; rather, they consider it as a burden which prevents them from incorporating any changes in their shops. They are content as long as the commercial activity is going on.

Historical Analysis of the Status of Empress Market

Proposed Projects for Empress Market

The Empress Market remained the constant interest of many developers for years until the introduction of the formal system of heritage enlistment. A proposal for replacing the Empress Market by a multilevel commercial plaza was put forth by the local municipal government in June 1977. It caused great unrest among the experts and the proposal was ultimately opposed. Contemporary sources quoted it as “...the Karachi Municipal Corporation revealed its great plan to use the space for a multistorey market and called for feasibility reports to be prepared...”. The process exposed the bureaucratic mentality of viewing the low rise foot print of the Empress Market merely as the underutilization of the precious commercial space (Haroon & Baig, 2004). Following the consequences, the Karachi Development Authority (KDA), Karachi Municipal Corporation (KMC) and Karachi Building Control Authority (KBCA) took the initiative of raising awareness regarding the

built heritage of the city, which eventually led to amendments in the Town Planning Regulations creating a separate chapter on heritage buildings. Under this collaborative effort made for the very first time in Karachi, a total number of 44 historic buildings including the Empress Market were recognized as protected heritage buildings that cannot be demolished at any point in the future.

In 1993, the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan presented a proposal for developing an urban square in front of the Empress Market. A year later in 1994, the Empress Market Square proposal titled ‘Saddar Pedestrian Precinct and Empress Market Garden Project’ was developed in collaboration with the then Commissioner Karachi and other relevant departments. This project basically aimed at converting a crowded area of the historic center of Saddar Bazaar into a vehicle free walking district by providing well-designed spaces for pedestrians. This was aimed to be achieved by converting the vehicular streets into landscape walking districts by providing a pavement, a fountain, seating, food vendors etc. The maintenance of a litter free and secure area through the provision of proper security and proper traffic management was the significant component of the project that were discussed in detail. It also emphasized more vegetation by planting trees and shrubs in the area (Larri, [1996b](#)). However, no implementation of the project is evident today. In 1995, with the support of KMC, a joint Pakistan Heritage Foundation / KMC committee was formed. The final scheme for the rerouting of traffic for Saddar pedestrian precinct was worked out by this committee.

In the year 2006, the City District Government of Karachi (CDGK) took the initiative of introducing restoration measures. These included restoration and cleaning of the external façade. These were the measures mainly used for reversing the rising dampness and rerouting of traffic to avoid encroachment and overcrowding in front of the market building. The entire restoration process was executed under the supervision of Brigadier Nasir who acted as the consultant. He also added restrooms within the courtyard, which later on were badly maintained from the aspects of sanitation and drainage system. This whole situation doubled the problem of rising dampness.

On 27th March 2011, an unlikely incident of fire happened which affected almost 25% of the shops in the western corner of the northwest (back) and the southwest (left) wings. The reason remains unknown but there were no signs of arson attack seen on the site. Shop owners who suffered hefty damages were overlooked by the government and were not compensated to date. The entire reconstruction and repair work was carried out by the shop owners themselves.

Since the repairs were very organic and did not involve any expert, they resulted in an irreversible damage to the building. Later on, no documentation exercises for before and after repair activity were carried out.

Figure 12

Images of Various Development Projects Proposed for Empress Market



Source: Mentioned on Each Image. Slide Taken from The Presentation: The Future of Heritage by ADA & AKTC By Tania A. Soomro

In 2013, a parking plaza project named as Shahabuddin Parking Plaza surfaced right next to the Empress Market (at the back side). A huge debate began among the experts about the planning of this plaza which demonstrated its location to be very close to the market building. It was anticipated that excavation in the close vicinity of the market can damage its structure, thus it was seriously criticized and much pressure was put on the authorities that consequently stopped the construction of the plaza mid-way. The plaza’s project director Muhammad Athar said, “...that allegations of damages to the heritage site are completely baseless. The Sindh Archaeological Department has also endorsed the parking plaza and the non-governmental organizations that are speaking out against the constructions have vested western interests. The project provides new jobs and opportunities since it will have three shopping floors along with a five-storey parking. Nearly half of the

construction has been completed and we will soon open bids for the shops... ” (Ousat, [2014a](#)). According to the experts, this project was just another failed project because of its close location with the already existing Saddar Parking Plaza, which has the capacity to accommodate the required number of vehicles.

Apart from the permanent structures, the market building is encroached by hawkers who occupy the space in a seemingly permanent manner. Hawkers do not pay any formal rental fee but they reportedly pay substantial sums of money to the traffic police and/or to their middlemen in the form of an informal fee or bribe commonly known as *bhatta*. This system prevents them from being formally evicted and/or charged by the police for encroachment (Hasan, [2008](#)). In April 2014, the anti-encroachment department of KMC eliminated the encroached footpaths of the Empress Market by removing over 100 informal shops / stalls. These stalls reappeared after some time, nullifying the claims of keeping a close watch on the encroachers (KMC, [2014](#)).

In 2004, Governor Sindh (Dr. Ishrat-ul-Ebad Khan) launched the Saddar Bazaar quarter revitalization scheme under KMC titled as *‘The Revival of Surroundings of Empress Market and the Adjoining Areas of Saddar’* (Ousat, [2014b](#)). The main target of the project was to revive the exclusive historical and cultural character of the quarter. The project objective was to reinvigorate the city’s downtown as well as its localities in a way that would sustain the bazaar concept and the old street atmosphere. Moreover, it was intended to revitalize the original lifestyle of Saddar; making it a shopping and cultural magnet and destination.

Part of the project also included:

- Development of piazza and streetscape in the front area of the Empress Market.
- Temporary relocation of existing shops from the Empress Market and it’s both sides.
- Empress Market’s restoration and rehabilitation.
- Development of the remaining three sides of the Empress Market as pedestrian piazza.
- Some underground commercial activities to create sustainability.
- Space for the existing tenants of the Empress Market and its surroundings.

By 2018, another anti-encroachment drive with the objective of *‘...Empress Market should be restored to its former glory... ’* was initiated as per the directives of the Chief Justice of Pakistan. The interpretation of the term ‘former glory’ was made in an extremely narrow sense. The perception of the consistency of style was

solely limited to the building structure. It was acknowledged only as in the times of its construction in the British era. All additive alterations were considered baseless and were ruthlessly removed without documentation.

No consultations were made, no prior NOC was acquired from the Culture Department, not even a master plan was developed having fresh architectural documentation, neither the identification nor the mapping of the damages / alterations took place. All actions were taken without any restoration plan and without consulting any relevant institutions / experts. The operation caused a massive gridlock on roads at Saddar and nearby areas, creating hardships not just for the affected population but for the vehicular traffic as well, since the debris was scattered all over the place. Thousands of shops including the roadside vendors, hawkers and informal sellers were gone in a small wake of time. The actual count is supposed to be more than what actually appears. The issue that created an uproar among the heritage professionals was the application of devastating restoration measures without appropriate consultation.

Figure 13

Various Images Show Deliberate Man Made Vandalism By Anti-Encroachment Drive In 2019, Section Shows Internal Space Layout,



Source: Mentioned on Images. Slide Taken from Presentation: The Future of Heritage by ADA & AKTC By Tania A. Soomro

A major damage done to the building was the cleaning of the stone façades. Although the cleaning of an old building is a much required measure but the methods used can be disastrous. In case of the Empress Market, it was cleaned with

a high pressure water hose which broke the glass panels of the old surviving clock in the tower. Prior to the cleaning, no analysis was done of the masonry joints for the detection of cracks and cavities. The abrasive cleaning method that includes blasting was used which harms the building and has long been rejected by the larger conservation community and was ultimately stopped. However, the plight of the shops that were evicted in and outside the building still remains the same.

Results and Discussion

Critical Analysis of the Development of Empress Market

The Empress Market is a unique building with its beautiful design and it is a seamless amalgamation of western and eastern styles that provide it a high functional value. The socio-historic value that it has attained since its initiation is rooted in the sociocultural fabric of its context, making it inseparable from the city at large. Thus, any description of the building cannot stand separately from the broader narrative about the city and its historic or recent conditions. The Empress Market has continued functioning as a market in its true value. However, the neighborhood that creates the context of the market place has fallen to dilapidation. It can be reverted to its best condition by implementing appropriate conservation measures.

The Empress Market not only stands as a glorified built heritage of Karachi but it also has the potential to be effectively used in its true essence in its conserved form. Therefore, any kind of conservation activity performed on the building is likely to impact the city in a diverse manner including its economic influx, social characterization, and built heritage value. The only condition is to follow the standardized measures developed for the heritage premises because appropriate preservation becomes a vital tool for the city's urban rejuvenation. Some key benefits of heritage conservation are financial because restoration is often cheaper than new construction and it is also a major indicator of tourism. In case of Karachi, the revitalization of the old neighborhoods will guarantee enhanced quality of life and community interconnection because all activities for maintaining and promoting heritage buildings such as guided tours, neighborhood activities and organization of festivities are volunteered by the community itself. This practice has been applied at a very small level in the revitalization of *Pakistan Chowk* precinct, yet it has to be applied on a larger scale to have a city level impact.

There are many examples in the world where organic commercial developments in and around the markets have been viewed within the broader social and economic condition of the cities, developed / upgraded in a manner that has a minimum

impact on their use value yet they attract tourists. For instance, the over-spilling informal commercial growth of the central market of Phnom Penh in Cambodia has been upgraded by adding horizontal strips of shops in a radial manner, having the domical structure of the market at the center. Similarly, adjacent market strips were established to ease the commercial pressure on the Grand Bazaar and Spice Market in Istanbul. The Bazaar of Tabriz is one of the oldest bazaars in the Middle East and the largest covered bazaar in the world, also a UNESCO WHS. It was also a victim of urbanization in Iran. With its restoration in 2000, it has become a place of cultural exchange with its original function intact.

In case of the Empress Market, as per the monument centric conservation measure and following the stylistic unity approach, indiscriminate action was taken against all later added interventions merely referred to as encroachments of least significance. One needs to understand that these interventions became a part of the building evaluation and were not liable to be removed unless they projected a negative impact on the original structure. Thus, the organic growth of commercial activity in and outside the Empress Market was ‘disorganization’ for many and was criticized accordingly by the planners and city managers. Yet at the same time, it was appreciated by many architects and romantics, and especially by tourists. This was because it provided a strong informal culture and the atmosphere of an oriental bazaar.

Conclusion

The current decrepit condition of the historic ensemble of Karachi is the result of multiple reasons. The cause which is the driving force behind the dilapidated state is the inappropriate master plan. A master plan focuses on expected development in any form tied with the primary objectives of city planning. It helps in identifying the needs to be incorporated for the greater good of the city in order to evaluate the development pre-requisites and other vital factors. Regrettably, at Karachi’s regional level, experts’ advice is not incorporated in the master plan which adversely affects the city. It is important to understand that unplanned settlements around the historic buildings with insufficient economic activities, minimum commuting facilities, traffic congestions, unplanned construction and conservation practices are interdependent and should be planned holistically.

The conservation approach followed in the case of the Empress Market is merely cosmetic in nature. The application of the treatment before the diagnosis of what is happening to the building and its root causes is highly condemnable. Unfortunately, the exercise has already happened and has resulted in the loss of historic layers of great importance. Another aspect that has been blindly followed

in the recent anti-encroachment drive is the removal of the previous alterations without any analysis of their impact on the structure. This has greatly impacted the contextual setting of the market building because not only the historic structure but its contextual setting is also of utmost importance, without which the structure loses its integrity and identity.

Since concrete plans for the various works (restoration and adaptive reuse) have not surfaced as yet, the post anti-encroachment state of the building has generated many perceptions among the larger audience. As a result of the current conservation effort, the building's function will remain the same. It will also facilitate the resettlement of shopkeepers and the upgradation of the built environment. If it will be restored properly with the consultation of experts, it might provide an opportunity of learning for both academia and professionals. It will become a better maintained public space for common people possibly leading to various constructive social activities.

Whereas, the worst case scenario suggests the loss of economic activities and displacement of people whose livelihood is directly associated with it. The building will be redesigned as a high-end dining space, museum or a gallery with restricted access at the cost of the current stakeholders. In other words, the process of gentrification will take place. The idea of a bazaar which is practiced in so many other parts of the world, specifically in many touristic destinations that attract thousands of tourists, will be replaced by some alien concept forcibly.

Between the two very complex scenarios, it is quite challenging to establish a definitive assumption which is rather an impossible thing to achieve. But one can anticipate that by understanding city level issues better results can be extracted. However, the current research strongly asserts the need for the protection of built heritage in general but unplanned management and continuous commercialization is casting a negative impact on the building.

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