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Revitalizing Urban Voids: An Urban Design Research Project for Blue Area, Islamabad



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Abstract: *This research explores the potential of urban voids in the heart of commercial activity in Islamabad, Blue Area. The project reimagines voids as vibrant public spaces to enhance quality of urban landscape and public activities. Adopting a mixed-method approach, this research combines qualitative and quantitative tools to document urban voids. The research begins with a comprehensive site study and data collection, with field visits, observations, questionnaires and surveys; followed by analysis using mapping and categorization of voids, based on urban parameters. Key findings of the study highlight challenges including, lack of pedestrian infrastructure, poor maintenance, and absence of green spaces. The research identifies the inherent transformation potential of voids into vibrant public realms and concludes in a series of interventions focused on enhancing accessibility, creating social nodes, integrating green elements, and improving aesthetics and functionality. Proposals are developed through an iterative design process, considering permeability, connectivity, and human-scale design.*

Keywords: Public spaces, Urban architecture, Urban design, Urban redevelopment, Urban regeneration,

Introduction

The primary goal of urban design and planning is to create public spaces that are interactive, dynamic and encourage public life¹. Effective urban design always points towards spaces where people can be themselves, express themselves and build community relationships. A good urban design proposal categorizes spaces with respect to their uses considering the public. A good land use plan will be one that identifies a range of activities and uses across the plan integrating a range of individuals. In this

designed sequence, spaces that are left undefined or just without any specific use sometimes end up as abandoned, ignored, or wasted space.

In the context of Islamabad, one of only surviving linear planned cities of the world, urban voids not only exist but have ingrained in the very core of the city. There may be an opportunity to study the voids as part of the original master plan and to understand Doxiadis' vision for them and then revitalize the spaces for public use, revenue generation, community

¹ A. Elshabshiri et al.: what can we learn from the characterization of new Cairo's urban voids?

building and overall uplifting of the space landscape of the city.

This paper aims to recognize the relationship between architecture design and urban precincts. Without doubt, the city embodies the collective memory of its people, and people's memory associated with objects and places.

Buildings and Voids

Buildings are essential to cities. They define cities in that they define place. Since centuries, the spatial relationship of building and its contextual built environments have been and continue to be cultivated without the help of formal professionals as an expression of architecture without architects. As a result, when cultures develop in different geographical contexts and humans begin to formalize knowledge, architecture becomes formalized. Without the craft of the architects, cities would not exist in their current form.

Roger Trancik defined 'urban voids' over 30 years ago. In his book, *Finding Lost Space*, he was able to shed light on spaces within urban agglomerations that remain unconnected to the overall public life, are incoherent with positive city life, discourage human interaction and are not contributing positively towards the urban fabric of any city. In the 1980s Kevin Lynch went on to build upon this phenomenon by using the term 'neglected' and 'waste zones' for areas that had no sense of place or identity within the urban fabric. They are anomalies in an otherwise systematic order, whereby, even though, while being in plain sight, these spaces are not remembered or identifiable or even noticed by the people. As a result, these spaces attract garbage, unpleasant activities, and an overall air of unpleasantness. Lopez Garcia² in his work clearly states that for places to be positively memorable to the community it may be a good idea to revitalize urban voids instead of using new land elsewhere.

de Solà-Morales argued what he called the 'terrain vague', to be characterized as "internal to the city yet external to its everyday use... These strange places exist outside the city's effective circuits and productive structures."³ de Solà-Morales in his work was trying to identify the individual nature of an urban void, not existing in the system or essence of the city while also physically existing. Following this thought, it may be logical to conclude that urban voids exist outside of the functional and conceptual framework of a city. They are evidence of the urban fabric's capacity to dominate people's lives and exist as a rebel to urban development. Devoid of urbanity, without apparent control, and appearing open and available, marginal spaces allow for the emergence of individual spontaneity.

Urban Voids: from the developed world

Before analyzing and reimagining urban voids in Islamabad, it is essential to understand that urban void as a concept has been derived out of cities like Denver, Philadelphia, London, Sydney, Melbourne etc. having urban sprawl mostly linked to rapid urbanization and the city growing as an organism. Significantly, voids in these cities are developed due to the infrastructural requirements and distantly placed land uses⁴.

In developed countries such as the USA, UK, Japan, and South Korea, the emergence of urban voids has become a significant concern, presenting challenges to the overall health of cities. Urban voids, often characterized by vacant lots, abandoned spaces, or underutilized areas, are symptomatic of complex socio-economic and urban planning issues. These spaces often pose opportunities for illicit activities. The primary concern in this phenomenon is their contribution to the fragmentation of the urban fabric, diminishing positive sensory and psychological qualities of the city. Unclaimed or abandoned plots, like these

² International Conference- Green Urbanism, GU, 2016 From Void to Opportunity Lopez Garcia

³ De Solà-Morales, I. (1995). *Terrain Vague*. In C. C. Davidson (Ed.), *Anyplace* (p. 120). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

⁴ An Introspection of formulation of Urban Voids in highly urbanized Indian Cities Conference Paper · April 2020 Harshad Raisoni, Arati Petkar

regions, also lead to decreased property values, impacting the economic health of neighborhoods.⁵

Factors Contributing to Urban Voids in Developed Countries

Economic Shifts:

Developed countries have experienced economic transformations, shifting from industrial to post-industrial economies. The decline of traditional industries and the rise of technology-driven sectors have left behind vacant factories and warehouses, contributing to urban voids.

Deindustrialization:

The relocation of manufacturing industries to cheaper labor markets has led to the abandonment of industrial sites. These areas, once bustling with activity, now stand as vacant lots, creating voids within urban landscapes.

Technological Advancements:

Automation and technological advancements have reduced the need for large office spaces, leading to the abandonment of older commercial buildings. This is especially evident in the central business districts of developed cities.

Changes in Retail Patterns:

The rise of online shopping and changing consumer behaviors have impacted traditional brick-and-mortar retail. Empty storefronts and shopping centers have become common, contributing to the proliferation of urban voids.

Zoning Regulations:

Stringent zoning regulations and land use policies may hinder the adaptive reuse of vacant spaces. In some cases, the mismatch between zoning restrictions and emerging urban needs exacerbates the problem.

Demographic Shifts:

Changing demographics, such as aging

populations and urbanization trends, influence the demand for different types of spaces. Areas that were once vibrant may become obsolete, resulting in urban voids.

Literature tends to point to the assumption that planned cities that are meticulously designed with a focus on zoning and land use would have no margin for leftover space. However, that remains untrue. Variation in economic dynamics and major shifts in populations, over the past decades, have led to the emergence of urban voids in planned cities as well. Unplanned cities, on the other hand, characterized by organic growth face the issue of irregular land use very frequently. These cities, even in the developed world, have a higher prevalence of urban voids.

The developed world has seen numerous examples of urban voids being recognized and reimaged as meaningful functional spaces. These revitalization projects have used adaptive reuse, community engagement and strategic urban planning as the primary approaches towards reimagining urban voids as meaningful public space.

The old harbor of London lost its original function; the effects of its closure resulted in employment loss. As soon as the jobs disappeared residents began to depart, leaving behind whole districts of abandoned land. As part of the revitalization project the dirty docklands of London were converted into a harmonious combination of old and new buildings with a view of the river Thames.⁶ Many cities consider the British capital a model as regards the reuse of fallow harbor areas.

A similar approach was taken while revitalizing the Goods Line in Sydney, Australia. ASPECT Studios transformed a defunct rail line into a leafy, energized civic spine in the heart of Sydney's most densely populated area. The Goods Line is a vibrant "public campus" that connects Sydney Harbour and Central, while

⁵ An Introspection of formulation of Urban Voids in highly urbanized Indian Cities Conference Paper · April 2020 Harshad Raisoni, Arati Petkar

⁶ Exhibition of the Museum of London Docklands (No 1 Warehouse, Thames Highway, Trade

Expansion and Legal Quay, City and River, Sailortown, First Port of Empire, Warehouse of the World and New Port/New City).

physically and socially networking arts, cultural and educational institutions.⁷

Urban Voids: from the developing world

An in-depth study of literature and precedents from the developed world help build a conceptual foundation for understanding the possible opportunities within urban voids. However, the voids in dense cities of developing countries follow a different pattern of generation. Although these voids are small or medium in size fragmented in highly populated cities, they have a strong socio-cultural and economic association with the context. Two of the main challenges in developing contexts include rapid urbanization which results in outstripping the capacity of local governments to implement comprehensive planning strategies and secondly resource constraints, whereby there is often a lack of funding, irregular infrastructure or a lack of specialized human resource which results in limiting the ability to implement large-scale redevelopment projects.

Considering the unique pattern of generation as compared to developed countries, urban voids in developing countries may require a context-oriented approach for achieving the most effective results. On the one hand, while the situations pose unique and multifold challenges, the impact of such initiatives can permeate into the psychological health of communities. Redevelopment of these voids can contribute directly to microeconomic development as well as in fulfilling the infrastructural and societal needs.

Urban Voids: in the modernist planned city

The Context: Doxiadis' Islamabad

Islamabad is Pakistan's first new town project as the capital of the newly independent state, and one of the main new town initiatives in the sub-continent like Chandigarh in India or Brasilia in Brazil. The idea behind Islamabad was to build a "city of the future" based on the idea of a

"dynapolis," or a planned, unidirectional, linear city that relies on strong environmental elements, as presented by Constantinos Doxiadis.⁸ A synthesis of architectural and town planning principles as the only way to deal with the rapid growth of an era of urbanization.

Before the urban voids of Islamabad are analyzed or even studied, it is essential to study Doxiadis' vision for the city, which remains relevant, to ensure that the problem identification and solution gathering process remains contextualized. One of modernism's final big innovations, Doxiadis' plan is not included in the sanctioned history of icons since it deviates from mainstream modernist practice and instead makes a shift that affects many.

A scalar arrangement of "landscape" in the forms of Productive Landscape (agro-grid, urban agro-farm), Ecological Landscape (eco-grid, natural plant, green, ravine and wildlife), and Urban Structuring Landscape (public, private and hybrid) types achieves the idea of design to integrate nature and the city. The concept shows a sophisticated approach to finding ways for nature to enter the city and the entire metropolitan environment; rather than attacking nature, it weaves it through landscape techniques and multi-layered interventions.

Doxiadis, in his original work, proposed the idea of 'Ecumenokepos, the global garden' as a strategy in urbanism that would cater for future global urban patterns. This strategy is a joint framework of futurology, urbanism and environmental protection. Doxiadis coined the term "Ekistics" to encompass the science of human settlements, which extends urban planning by integrating social, economic, and environmental factors into the design process. Ekistics aims to grasp the patterns of human habitation, community dynamics, and the influence of settlements on overall quality of life. Ekistics advocated a comprehensive vision for developmentalism.

⁷ ASPECT Studios <https://www.aspect-studios.com/projects/the-goods-line>

⁸ Social Implications of the Modernist Urbanism: Islamabad Master Plan By Doxiadis. A Thesis

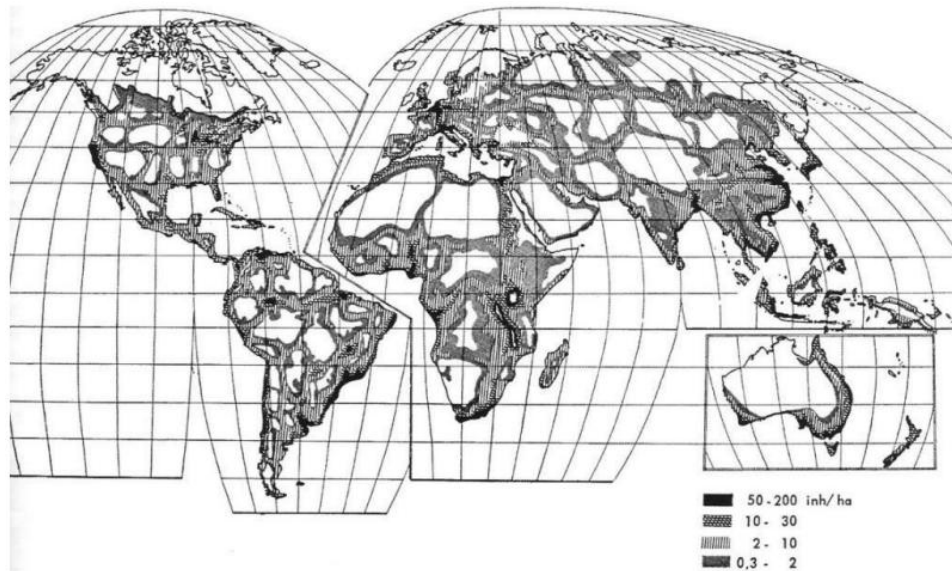
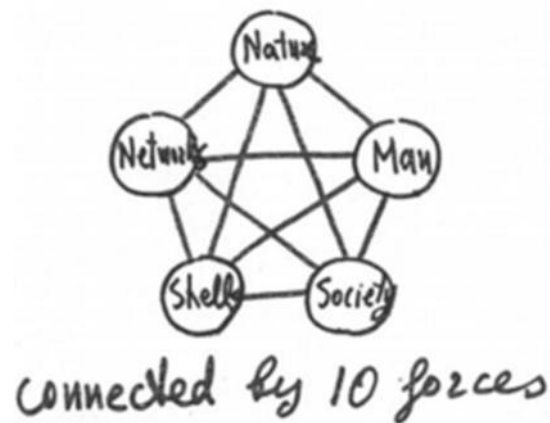


Figure 1 - Spatial vision of Ecumepolis envisioned by C. A. Doxiadis (world global city)

(Source: Constantinos A. Doxiadis Archives, Athens.)



Spatial vision of Ecumepolis envisioned by C. A. Doxiadis (world global city) (Source: Constantinos A. Doxiadis Archives, Athens.)

Doxiadis's classification was based on the idea of a city as a complex system containing man, nature, society, shells (all sorts of buildings) and networks.

G - The human bubbles as conceived by E. T. Hall.

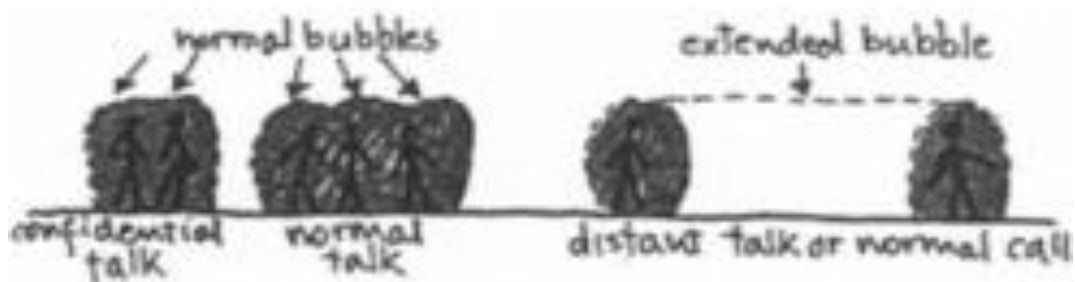


Figure 2 - Ways of looking at a city and ways of situating a man in the city (Source: Constantinos A. Doxiadis Archives, Athens)

This concept, denoting a dynamic city, was central to the formation of the capital. Doxiadis aimed for the twin city of Rawalpindi and Islamabad to grow in a unidirectional manner leading with the help of a parabolic form instead of favoring the radial city form of older times. This was to help the city in its modern era of change and explosive growth, not to result in an uncontrolled urban sprawl (Doxiadis, 1965). Instead of placing the city center in the middle of the new city, like most historic cities, Doxiadis placed the center on the expanding axis, now known as the 'Blue Area.'

Methodology

The research uses a mixed-method approach, adopting both qualitative and quantitative research tools. The data collection and research are conducted by a team of undergraduate architecture students⁹ under the supervision of faculty members¹⁰, from COMSATS University Islamabad. Data collection was followed by an analysis phase for a thorough study of the area. The site was studied and analyzed through descriptive-analytical methods for making conclusions about the development and potential of urban voids in Blue Area, Islamabad. The mixed methodology maps, describes, and catalogs the surveyed urban voids to contribute toward creating a holistic and meaningful framework for proposing design interventions in the selected voids. The intervention area was limited to the original central business avenue of Islamabad, i.e. Blue Area.

The project was divided into the following five stages:

1. Site Study & Data Collection
2. Mapping & Analysis
3. Design Strategies >> Program

⁹ Undergraduate student team from B.Architecture: A.Subhani, A.Khan, A. Shabbir, A. Mukhtar, A.Ahmed, A. Qazi, A. Zehra, B. Marwat, F. Iqbal, F. Tariq, G. Mustafa, G.Khan, H.Qureshi, H.Naseem, H. Naushad, I.Rehan, J. Shahab, M. Shahid, M. Talat, M. Akram, M. Nazir, M. Fatima, M. Ali, N. Mazhar,

Evolution

4. Site Synthesis >> Zoning >> Masterplan Schematics
5. Volumetric Studies >> Spatial Planning >> Design Development
6. Design Interventions

The first stage of site study and data collection involved preliminary visits to the area, making sensory observations on the environment, people, sounds, colors, and overall urban fabric of the area. This stage progressed into collecting data, via observation, measuring equipment, photographs, and public surveys. field visits were conducted that entailed recording observations, taking measurements, documenting tangible and intangible parameters. The site was visited several times, on Fridays, weekends, and weekdays at three different time periods: morning, afternoon, and evening.

The second stage of research methodology was a combination of urban mapping through satellite images, categorization of data and mapping of data collected at the first stage to produce analytical diagrams, sections, and sketches to understand the 'canvas' along a developed criterion.

Identifying Urban Voids

Blue Area was conceived as the central commercial and business district of the city, the nucleus. It stretches across a range of more than 2 kilometers. The area contains shops, businesses and there is dense mixed use land use in four level buildings consisting of corporate, healthcare, commercial and retail. Currently the Blue Area is developed up to the seventh phase, the eighth phase is currently under development

N. Ashfaq, M.O. Khan, R. Saleem, R. Khalid, R. Saboor, R. Mehmood, S. N. Zaidi, S. U. Batool, S. Khan, S. Islam, S. Ali, S. Yasmin, S. Shabbir, S. Ahmed, U. Khan, Z. Abrar

¹⁰ Ms. S.Ejaz [AP], Ms U.Kabir [AP], Mr L.Haider [AP]

whereby a new phase of high-rise mixed-use buildings are being envisioned ahead of the current developed area. Highways not only accommodate traffic, but also serve as communication and utility corridors. The fully developed strip of Blue Area is across from Sector F7 and F6 to the North and G7 and G6 to

the South. The area is a mix of commercial, business, and corporate use. The current program results in numerous people using the area regularly and periodically for the wide range of existing offices, shops, and services.



Figure 3 - Aerial view of Blue Area and immediate physical context. (Source: Google maps.)

In view of the definition of an urban void developed above, in Islamabad's context, designated parking areas located at regular intervals throughout the 4 km strip are identified as urban voids. Some of these areas are located across the width of the commercial strip, some are located on the south side accessible from Fazle-e-haq road and some areas exist between building blocks along the strip.

Most urban voids are 'leftover' space between building blocks, additionally some of the voids mainly consist of underutilized or scarcely maintained green spaces. The height of the buildings is not more than 40' feet and street

widths vary from 6' to 10'. Most importantly, streets are primarily built for vehicles with little or no consideration for pedestrian circulation, standard pavement width is not available for use at most places due to presence of encroachments.

In all locations, the parking areas are overcrowded and inadequate for the influx of cars. These open areas also present the potential to be reimaged as public spaces that cater to the users in the area beyond the function of parking. There is also a good opportunity to integrate Doxiadis' ideology of man, nature, scale, and networks into this new vision.

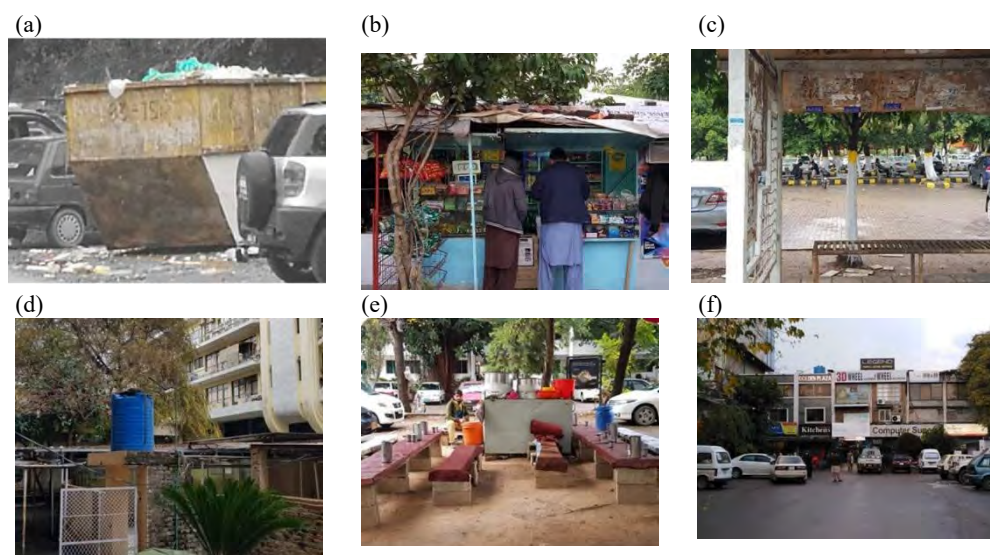


Figure 4 - Current activities and uses in urban voids. (a) garbage dumping (b) informal commercial activity (c) sitting area (d) service and utility equipment (e) informal eatery (f) allocated parking spaces (Source: Author.)

The project presents challenges of imagining public spaces within a dense urban scenario,

defining a suitable architecture language for an already crowded visual environment,

determining a scale for interventions with reference to the human and most importantly proposing solutions considering Ekistics.

Mapping & Analysis

To determine the categorization of space typologies existing in the area, parameters were developed based on the general understanding of urban voids beyond its existence as an empty plot. Developing a list of parameters for analysis ensures consistency and standardization during data collection and mapping and creates a foundation for future research efforts tackling urban voids. The parameters chosen to study urban voids cover all major aspects of urban design and have been selected after the literature review. The parameters include urban morphology, connectivity & connections, form & visual quality, land-use & services infrastructure, open spaces and landscape, context and sense of place, people, culture, and environment.

The voids were categorized by use and nature, natural voids, parking lot voids, landscape voids, informal parking voids and empty plots.

Natural voids are unclaimed or unmarked open spaces, these are mostly used for dumping garbage, shelters for stray animals, informal eating stalls and kiosks, though a significant amount of local flora exist in these parts, it is mostly ridden with litter and smell. Parking lot voids are designated parking areas, these include basic sitting areas where people are seen sitting, waiting, or eating. Landscape voids an attempt to counter traffic pollution and noise while adding a green element into the urban landscape for aesthetic purposes. Informal parking voids include any space accessible by vehicle where vehicles and motorcycles are parked.

Many taxis and vans are seen throughout the day other than private vehicles; these areas may otherwise be imagined as green open spaces; however, the overflow of vehicles does not allow for any space to remain car free. Empty plots are also unclaimed or 'leftover' spaces in the urban fabric. These are mostly near ravines or attached to services or utilities. Most of these are used for garbage dumping and illegal encroachment.



Figure 5 - Urban Void Map for Blue Area (Source: Student group work.)

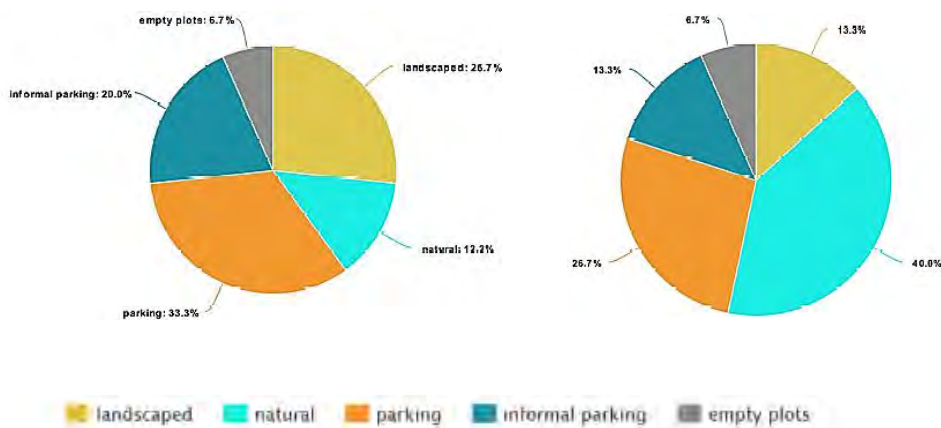


Figure 6 - Categorization of urban voids in Blue Area (Source: Student group work.)

The team was able to identify 4 major and 6 minor urban voids that have the potential to be converted into thriving public spaces while maintaining the needs of the context. These sites were parking lots and undeveloped empty plots that were serving no positive purpose. Parking requirements are to be kept in mind and the potential of multi-level parking zones may be explored.

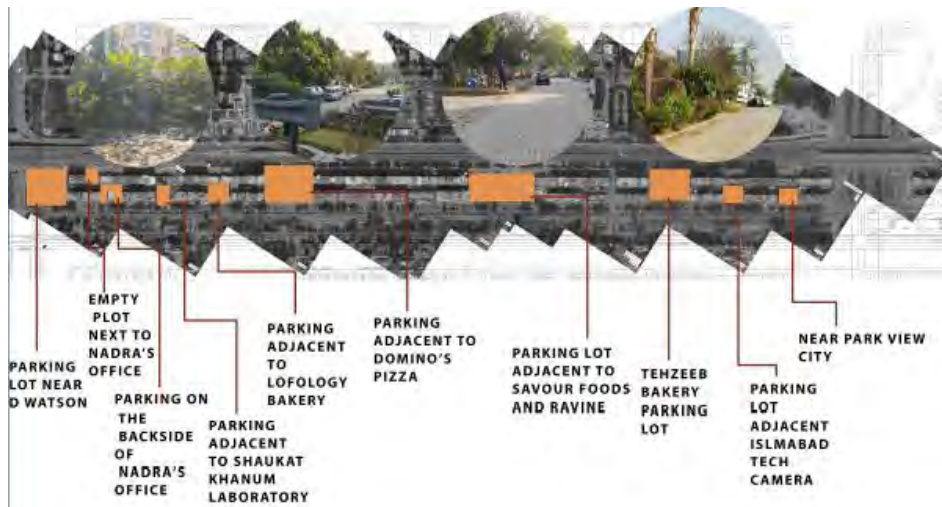


Figure 7 - Identification of potential urban voids for design interventions (Source: Student group work.)

Urban Morphology

From 2004 to date most of the reconstructed and newly built structures are commercial and corporate consisting of small to big businesses, healthcare-related facilities, and real estate agencies. The fully developed strip facing

G7 green belt has gradually been converted into parking areas by the public. The development pattern across the area is in a checkered pattern on the North side and a linear pattern on the south side. The increase in informal parking areas clearly points towards the increase in the

number of vehicles in the area. Some limitations on timing and direction of traffic exist, however, the regulations are not duly followed as are not displayed formally and change from time to time.

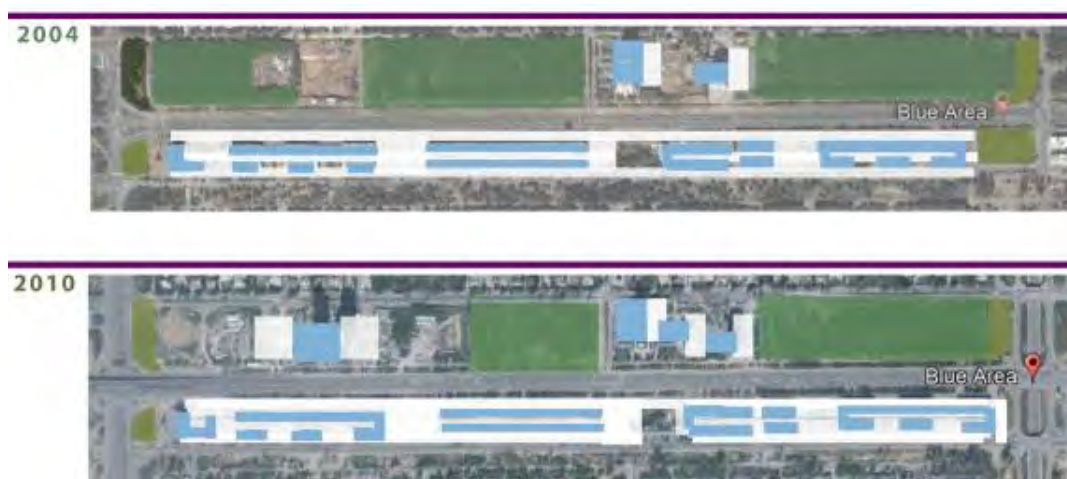


Figure 8 - Urban morphology study of voids. (Source: Student group work.)



Land use and Service Infrastructure

A comprehensive land use survey was conducted on the entire area, encompassing both the north and south sides of Blue Area, Islamabad. The overall land use typology is predominantly mixed-use, featuring commercial activities on the ground floor and corporate or medical facilities on the upper levels. This configuration supports a vibrant and functional urban environment, catering to diverse needs within the community.

The land use study identified that parking constitutes 8% of the total land use area, addressing the critical need for vehicular accommodation in an urban setting. Mixed-use areas, making up 16% of the total land use, blend

commercial, corporate, and medical services, promoting economic vitality and ensuring a seamless integration of various urban functions.

Residential zones, accounting for 63% of the area, were also included in the study due to their proximity beyond the main road. The proposed urban rejuvenation programs are expected to impact these residential areas, potentially enhancing their connectivity and accessibility to commercial and corporate amenities. The relationship between the residential zones and mixed-use areas is crucial, as it influences the overall urban dynamics and livability.



Figure 1 - Land use map. (Source: Student group work.)

Figure 9 - Land use map. (Source: Student group work.)



Figure 1 - Land use distribution. (Source: Student group work.)

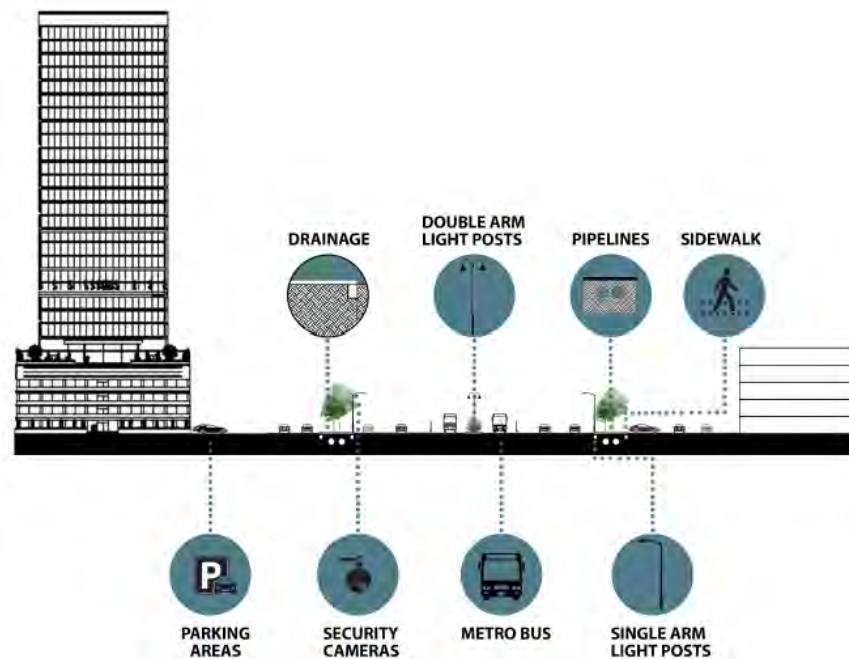


Figure 10 - Road section with existing service infrastructure. (Source: Student group work.)

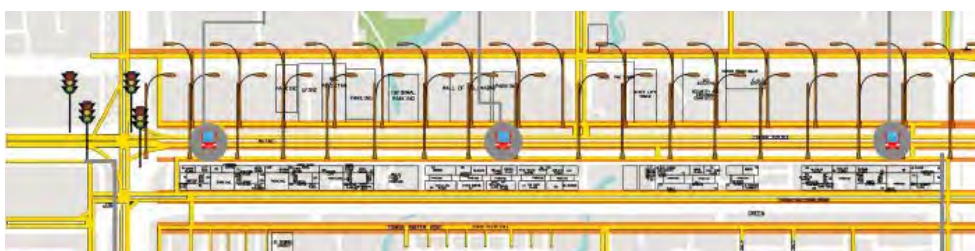
Regarding service infrastructure, the survey underscores the importance of efficient utility systems, transportation networks, and public services. All the essential utilities are spread across the area in a planned fashion. These elements are essential to support the mixed-use developments and ensure a high quality of life for residents and workers alike especially for future interventions. Though available, the

service infrastructure is not located at designed or designated locations, and most locations are unmaintained and create centers of garbage dumping. Adequate provision of water, electricity, waste management, and telecommunications is imperative for the sustainable growth and functionality of Blue Area, facilitating its transformation into a well-integrated and thriving urban district.

(a)



(b)



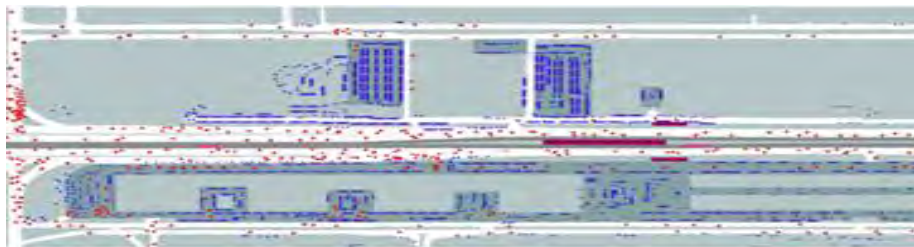
(c)



Figure 11 - Mapping service infrastructure. (a)Electricity Transformers (b)Electric poles (c)Garbage Disposal



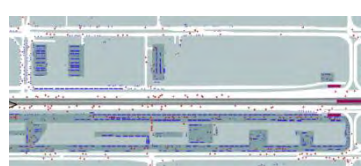
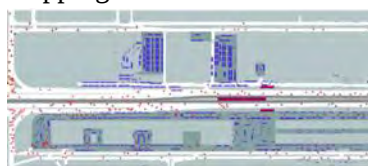
Figure 12 - Abandoned transformer locations and overflowing garbage disposals.



User Activity & Traffic

An extensive activity mapping of all users and vehicles was carried out. The activity mapping of users displays changes between weekdays and weekends, whereby there are most users seen in and around the area on weekdays. This is expected as all business and commercial activity is open through the weekdays while only some remain open through the weekend. Traffic mapping data shows a stark difference in the

traffic in the area across the week, the congestion, as seen during direct observation is clearly visible to be at its peak during the weekdays while most of the traffic remains calm during weekends. This may also be since several public transport vehicles don't run as regularly on weekends.



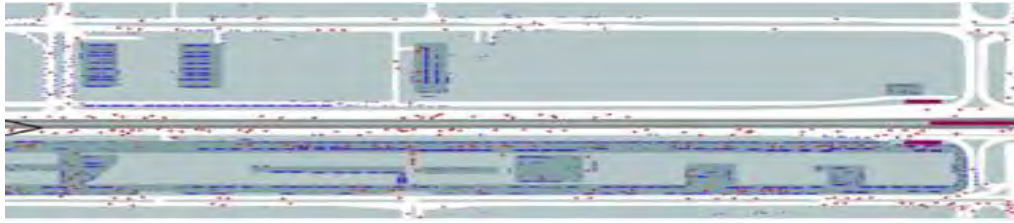


Figure 13 - Activity mapping for weekdays (above) and weekends (below). (Source: Student group work.)

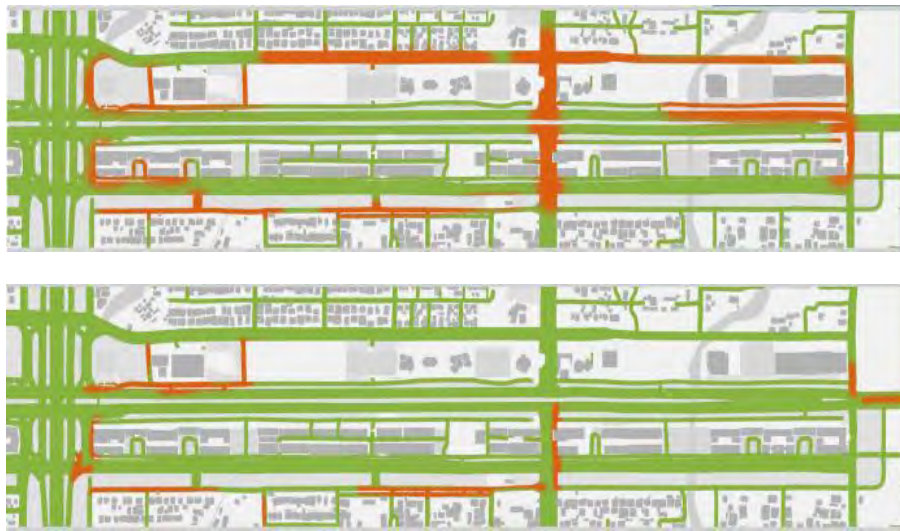


Figure 14 - Traffic mapping for weekdays (above) and weekends (below). (Source: Student group work.)

Landscape

The green landscape in the area mostly consists of natural vegetation in the form of local flora that are very low maintenance. Designed landscape has been attempted at some part along the whole strip in the form of trees and potted

plants, however most of the empty plots and voids consists of unkept plant species some of which were also identified as invasive alien species that are notorious for being toxic causing allergies including the paper mulberry and the common cocklebur.



Sense of Place

As per the data collection, 90% of visitors to the Blue Area are men and a mere 10% are women. These women are seen mostly around food retail. Some nodes in the area have been developed around informal eateries and kiosks, these nodes present a strong sense of place. These areas have shade provided by trees and sitting space for

people to interact. Though the spaces are not well maintained and there is little to no signage, regular users of the areas have developed a strong connection with these nodes as part of their everyday routine.

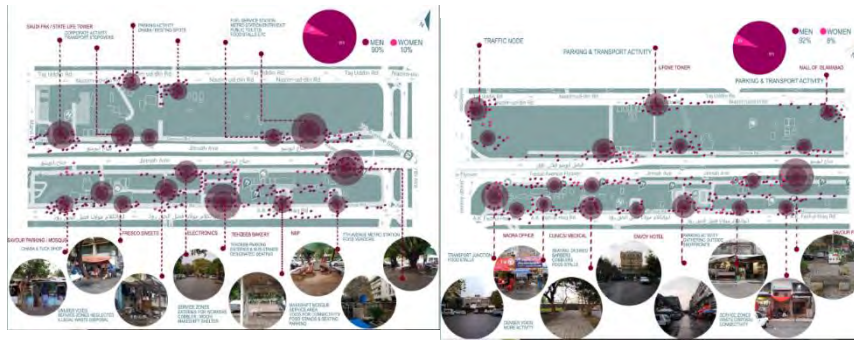


Figure 15 - Identifying sense of place. (Source: Student group work.)

Parking lot voids provided a weak sense of place since the overflowing with vehicles and there is a constant lack of positive visual quality or public space. Empty plots and abandoned areas are mostly ridden with garbage and therefore the least number of users are seen spending any time in these areas even though they exist amidst the built environment. In some cases, services and kitchens are opening into the voids and they are

used for storage, equipment, and garbage disposal. The legibility of the area is also very low, though landmarks exist they remain very local, navigating through the built area to reach destinations is extremely difficult with a lack of signage. Most of the landmarks and nodes created over time are connected to informal and formal eating places and restaurants. Some landmarks are connected to business types, for instance, all mobile buying and repairing shops exist mostly in one area.

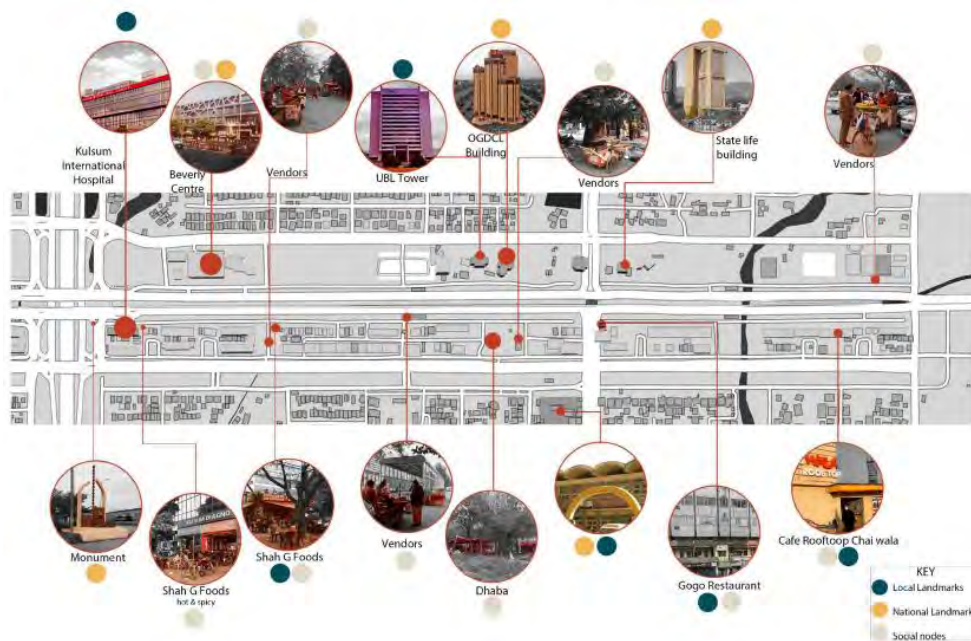


Figure 16 - Identifying landmarks. (Source: Student group work.)

Site Selection for Interventions

After conducting a thorough analysis of the area, a criterion was developed for selecting sites to develop proposals aimed at addressing the identified major issues. This criterion is rooted in a comprehensive understanding of the area's dynamics and the challenges that need to be resolved to enhance its functionality and livability. The key parameters included in this criterion are as follows:

Parking Management: The analysis highlighted the need for structured parking facilities and optimized parking space utilization. Sites were selected based on their potential to incorporate vertical and horizontal parking solutions, ensuring sufficient parking capacity to meet current and future demands.

Encroachments: Unauthorized constructions and encroachments disrupt urban planning and

hinder accessibility. Proposals aim to address these encroachments, reclaiming public space

and ensuring that urban development adheres to regulatory standards.



Figure 17 - Selection. (Source: Student group work.)

Accessibility: The selected sites demonstrated a need for improved accessibility features, such as pedestrian pathways, ramps, and designated crossing points. Enhancing accessibility ensures that all users can navigate the urban environment comfortably and safely.

Service Entrances & Equipment: Sites with poorly managed service areas were prioritized, aiming to redesign these spaces to minimize visual clutter and enhance operational efficiency.

Public Spaces & Activity: The criterion focused on identifying sites with the potential to develop or enhance public spaces, promoting activities that contribute to the area's liveliness and cultural vitality.

The above parameters aimed to ensure the selected sites are well-suited for targeted interventions that address specific urban issues, paving the way for organized, accessible, and radiant urban environments in Blue Area.

Design Strategies

In the context of rejuvenating urban voids in Blue Area, Islamabad, a comprehensive urban

design proposal was developed that effectively addressed several key issues and may be vital in creating harmonious and dynamic urban environments. The proposal design proposals were developed with emphasize on the following design strategies:

Imageability is crucial for crafting spaces that are distinct, recognizable, and memorable. By incorporating unique architectural features, public art, and landmark structures, each site can gain a strong visual identity, fostering a sense of place and attachment among users.

Legibility improves the ability of people to navigate and recognize the urban environment. This can be achieved through clear signage, intuitive street arrangements, and visual markers that guide residents and visitors, making the area more user-friendly and accessible.

Human Scale ensures that physical elements are proportionate to human proportions, increasing comfort and interaction. By designing buildings, streetscapes, and public spaces that reflect human proportions, the area becomes more attractive and favourable to pedestrian activity.

Parameters For Analysis	Urban Morphology	User Activity & Traffic	Landscape	Sense Of Place
				
Parameters For Proposals	Parking Management	Encroachments, Service Entrances & Equipment	Accessibility	Public Spaces & Activity

				
Design Strategies	Vertical & Horizontal Parking	Designated vehicular and pedestrian circulation	Walkability	Positive Public Realm

Figure 18 - Design Strategies developed from parameters of analysis and design.

Transparency concerns the visibility and openness of spaces. Increasing transparency through glass facades, open plazas, and visible public spaces encourages engagement and safety by allowing people to see and be seen, thereby encouraging a sense of community.

Linkages focus on the integration of buildings and streets to maintain continuity in the urban fabric. Creating strong physical and visual connections between different parts of the Blue Area will enhance cohesion and accessibility.

Permeability refers to the ease with which people can move through space. By ensuring several access points, pedestrian ways, and open spaces, the design will promote inclusivity and ease of movement, making the area vibrant and spirited.

Density considerations involve balancing the number of people and the built environment. By strategically increasing density through mixed-use developments and optimizing the floor area ratio (FAR), the area can support more activities and services, leading to a more dynamic urban

center.

Additionally, exploring vertical and horizontal parking potentials may alleviate congestion and optimize land use. Designated routes and spaces for vehicles and pedestrians could ensure safe and efficient movement while enhancing overall walkability. Lastly, the positive use of the public realm, both as an independent entity and as a transition to commercial activities, can activate urban voids, creating spaces for social interaction, leisure, and commerce.

Implementing these design strategies in the rejuvenation of selected voids may create a thriving, navigable, and human-centered urban environment, tailored to the specific context of each site.

Design Proposals

Proposal 01 is developed on the southern side of the area. The selected site is a double access void, marked as the junction between block H and I of the commercial buildings. The proposal imagines the space as a multi-level parking area that provides open views to the North and South, multiple accesses with positive aesthetic value.



Figure 19 - Proposal 01 – Site (Source: Student group work.)

The proposal for the area provides direct solutions to wasted space by

- improved pedestrian walkability

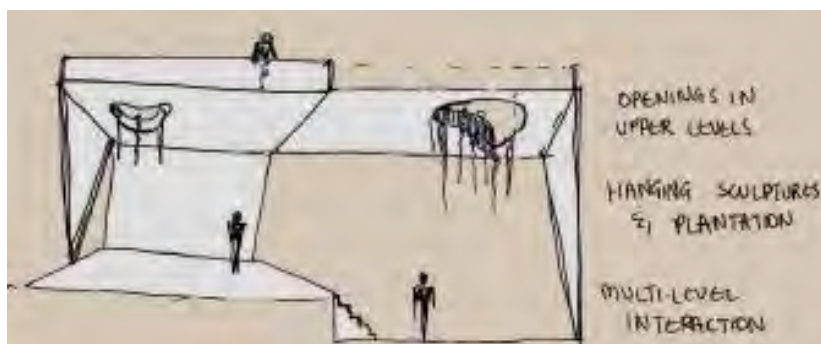
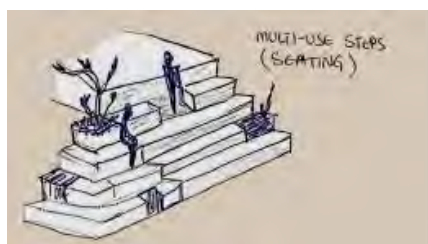
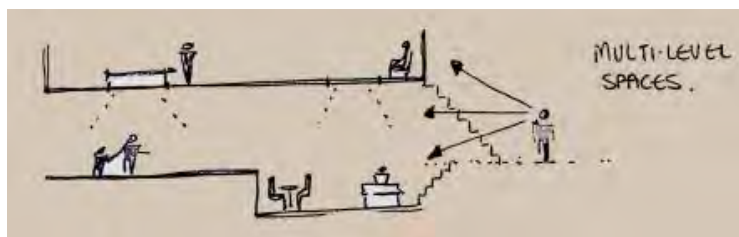
through provision of ramps and overhead connectivity for safety and addition of textures and visual queues for improving wayfinding. a, improving existing conditions of the public realm.

- improving existing conditions of the public realm including suitable urban furniture
- reworking vehicular circulation to avoid

obstructions and creating unidirectional traffic loops.



Figure 20 - Proposal 01 – Master plan (Source: Student group work).



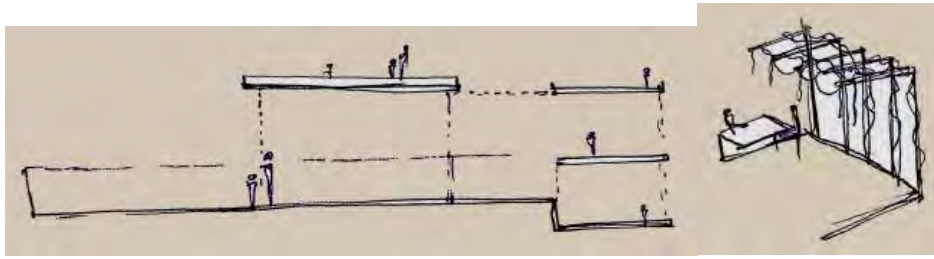


Figure 21 - Proposal 01 – Design Sketches
(Source: Student group work.)

Proposal 01 – Design Sketches (Source: Student group work.)

- proposing light and transparent structures to maintain the open views



Figure 22 - Proposal 01 – Elevations (Source: Student group work.)

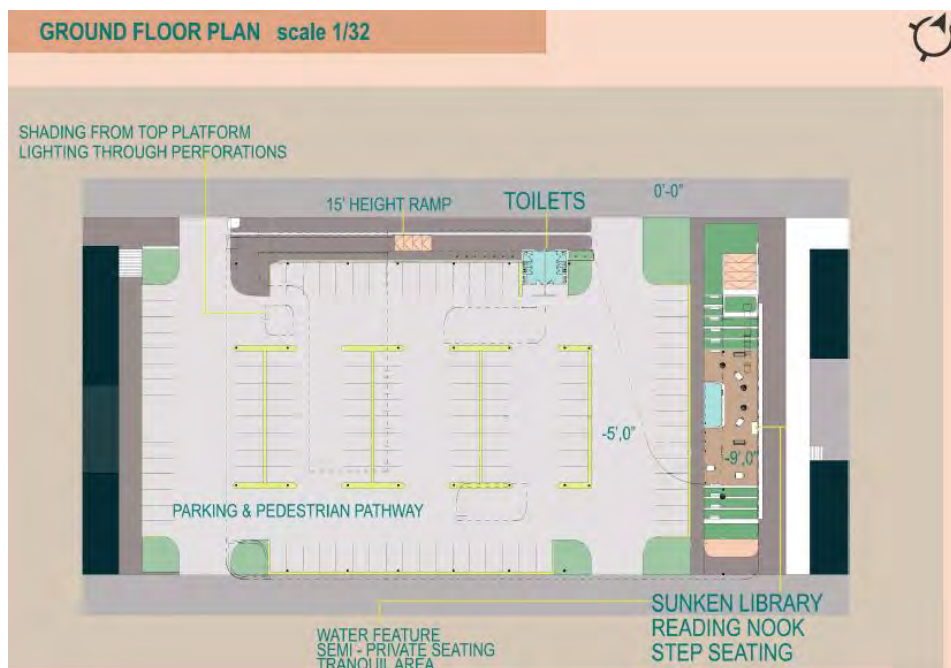


Figure 23 - Proposal 01 – Ground Floor Plan (Source: Student group work.)

and avoid heavy massing in an already crowded environment.

- using advantages associated with height and levels; for instance, visual connections, socializing spaces, light, and shadow interactions etc.
- creating activities and social nodes whereby commuters and/or visitors can linger and participate.

The above configurations are manifested into design through a design iterative process that resulted in using multiuse pedestrian bridges, shaded seating modules, workstations, exhibition spaces, gathering spaces, event spaces and services.

Proposal 02 is developed on the southern side of the Blue Area strip, near the beginning of the

whole commercial area. The selected site is a single access void, marked as a parking area at the end of Block A. Waste management, service equipment and infrastructure are well maintained and managed here, unlike the previous proposal. The proposal goes beyond the basic standard requirements to create a thriving public space that offers a healthy breathing space to the public.



Figure 24 - Proposal 02 – Site (Source: Student group work.)

The design proposal manifests a series of strategic interventions aimed at enhancing the area's functionality, aesthetics, and sustainability. Key among these strategies is the creation of a common node for the public, with

the potential to connect existing nodes. This connectivity fosters a cohesive and integrated urban environment, promoting interaction and movement throughout the area.

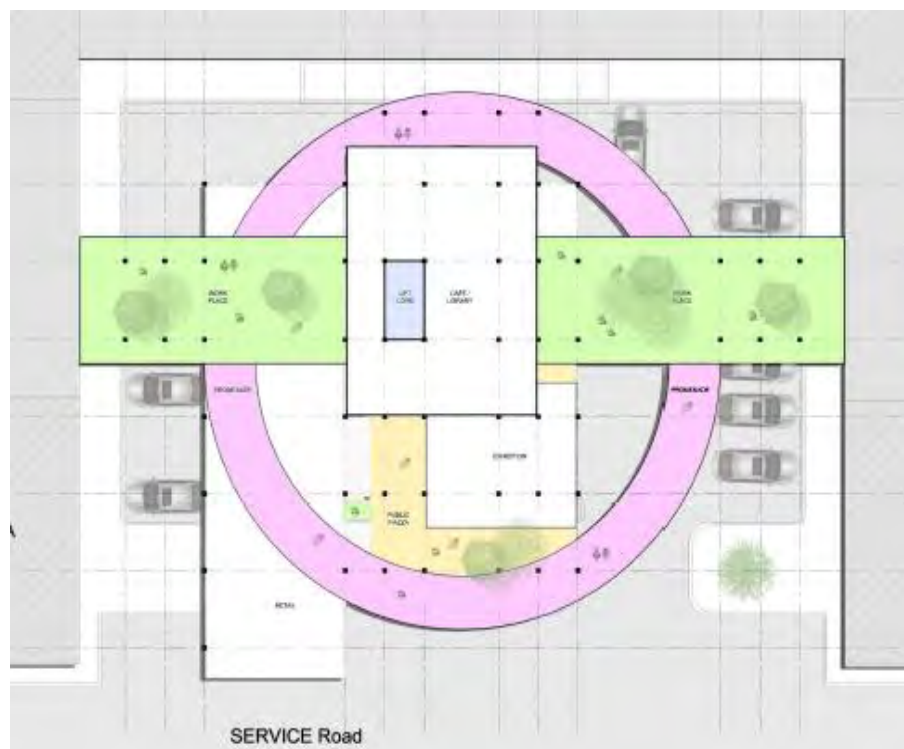


Figure 25 - Proposal 02 – Master plan (Source: Student group work.)

Public seating areas are meticulously designed to provide comfort and encourage social interaction. These seating areas are strategically

placed to maximize their utility and accessibility, creating inviting spaces for rest and engagement.

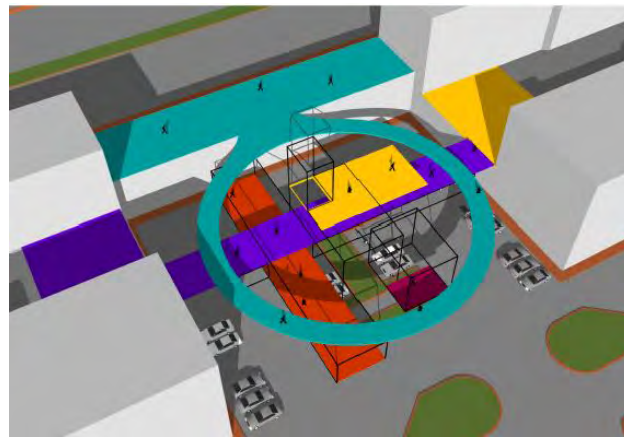


Figure 26 - Proposal 02 – Visualizations of public seating areas and pedestrian promenade (Source: Student group work.)

The design also accommodates current users and activities by incorporating recreational spaces, retail spots, and both informal and formal kiosks. These additions ensure that the area remains vibrant and functional, catering to a

diverse range of needs and preferences. The inclusion of recreational spaces encourages physical activity and leisure, while retail spots and kiosks provide economic opportunities and enhance the area's attractiveness.

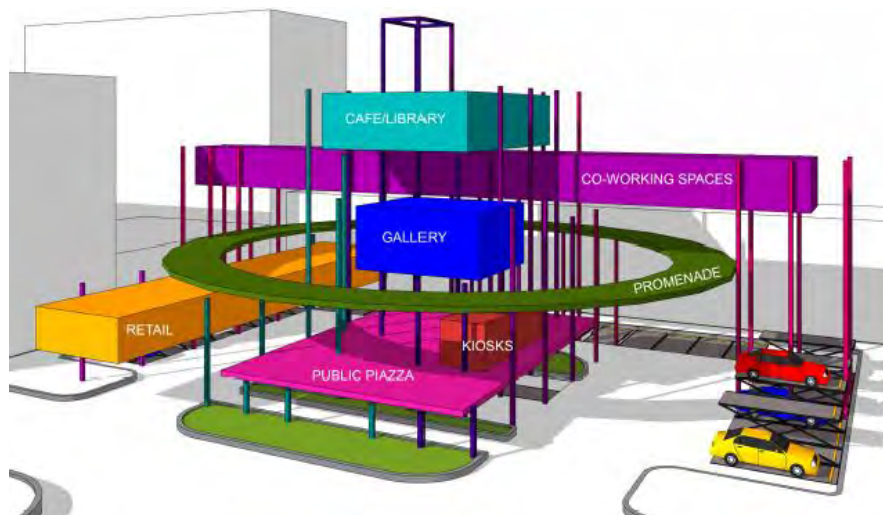




Figure 27 - Proposal 02 – Volumetric Representation of program and overall design enclosure (Source: Student group work.)

Improved walkability is a major focus of the design, with the potential introduction of a promenade and ramps to enhance accessibility.

The use of color coding and textured surfaces further improves navigation and visual impact, making the area more user-friendly and engaging. These enhancements promote pedestrian movement and connectivity, contributing to a more active and livelier urban environment.



Figure 28 - Proposal 02 – Visualizations of pedestrian promenade and integration of plantation (Source: Student group work.)

Landscape regeneration is another critical component of the proposal. This includes the introduction of roof gardens and vertical green pockets, which enhance the urban environment by adding greenery and promoting biodiversity. These green spaces not only improve the aesthetic appeal but also contribute to

environmental sustainability by reducing urban heat island effects and improving air quality. Maintaining open views is achieved through a thoughtful combination of solid and void spaces, ensuring that views from various spots are preserved and enhanced. This approach balances the built structures with open spaces, creating a harmonious and visually appealing urban landscape.

Overall, the design proposal integrates these

strategies through a cohesive and iterative process, resulting in a vibrant, sustainable, and functional urban space that meets the needs of its users while enhancing the overall aesthetic and environmental quality of the area.

Proposal 03 is developed on the North most corner of the commercial strip. This is the main joint between the old and new Blue Area. The

immediate surroundings consist of commercial, corporate, and business offices. The major feature of the site is the influx of people as the site is also home to the main office of the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA). The site is accessible from all four sides and adjacent to the main highway. Currently, the site is also an informal garbage disposal point for surrounding users.



Figure 29 - Proposal 03 – Site (Source: Student group work.)

The proposal addresses existing issues within the designated area, tackling problems such as a lack of vegetation, unsafe environments in dimly lit areas and abandoned spots, pedestrian-unfriendly routes and design, as well as accessibility concerns. Despite the diverse age groups within the community, there's a notable absence of a recreational program integrated into the commercial activity.

However, the selected site boasts several strengths that present opportunities for improvement. Its existing mixed-use land use sets the stage for the integration of dynamic programs. Furthermore, the potential for open views and wind channels offers natural light and ventilation advantages for the area.



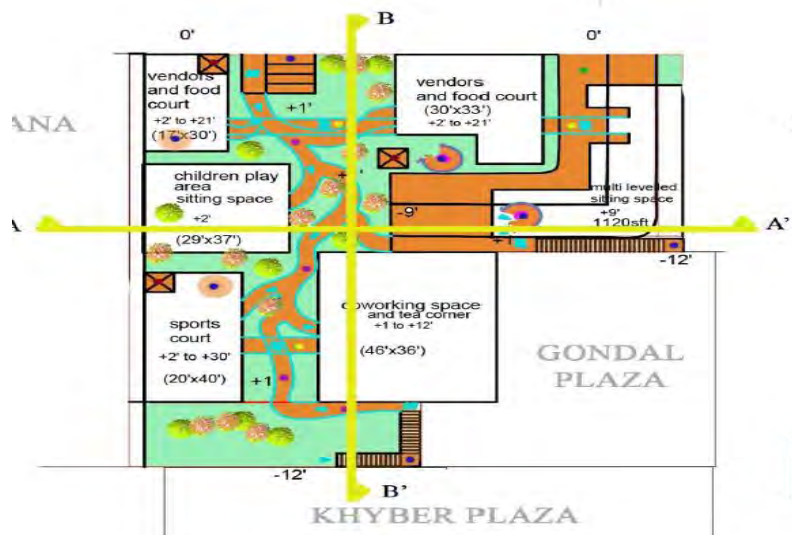


Figure 30 - Proposal 03– Master plan (Source: Student group work.)

The proposed program for the site is intricately connected to the conclusions drawn from user analysis and site assessment. This program encompasses various features such as vendor

kiosks, small retail shops, food outlets, designated sitting areas for social gatherings or meetings, and informal sports areas to promote physical activity. Additionally, shading devices are proposed for all-weather use, enhancing the overall comfort of the space.



Figure 31 - Proposal 3 visualization

Emphasizing sustainability, the final proposal suggests the reuse of existing materials like tires, leftover wood, and corrugated sheets to repurpose as furniture, swings, and seating arrangements, minimizing environmental impact while adding character to the space.

Design strategies for the proposal focus on human factors, cognitive behavior, placemaking, urban landscaping, and the development of landmarks, signage, and wayfinding features. Objectives include creating

a dynamic architectural language that incorporates material reuse, prioritizing user-centric design for accessibility and pedestrian ease and establishing an urban living room concept that fosters comfort and functionality, enhancing the area's positive character. The comprehensive program incorporates workshop spaces for learning and interaction, charging stations integrated with seating areas, seasonal exhibit galleries (e.g., flower displays), a vendor marketplace supporting small businesses, co-working spaces, and underground parking,

ensuring a diverse array of amenities for community members and visitors alike.



Figure 32 - Proposal 3 visualization

Proposal 04's designated site for stands as a prominent intersection within the bustling Blue Area strip. Positioned towards the northern extremity is Block A, boasting a highly frequented bakery and eatery, alongside a telecom network's customer service hub. These establishments witness a substantial footfall

throughout the day, extending well into the evening hours. Much like other urban gaps along the strip, this locale grapples with familiar challenges, notably the absence of designated parking despite a consistent influx of vehicles. Serving as a conduit between opposing sides of the strip, this site presents ample prospects for implementing supportive programs that engage the public.



Figure 33 - Proposal 04 – Site (Source: Student group work.)

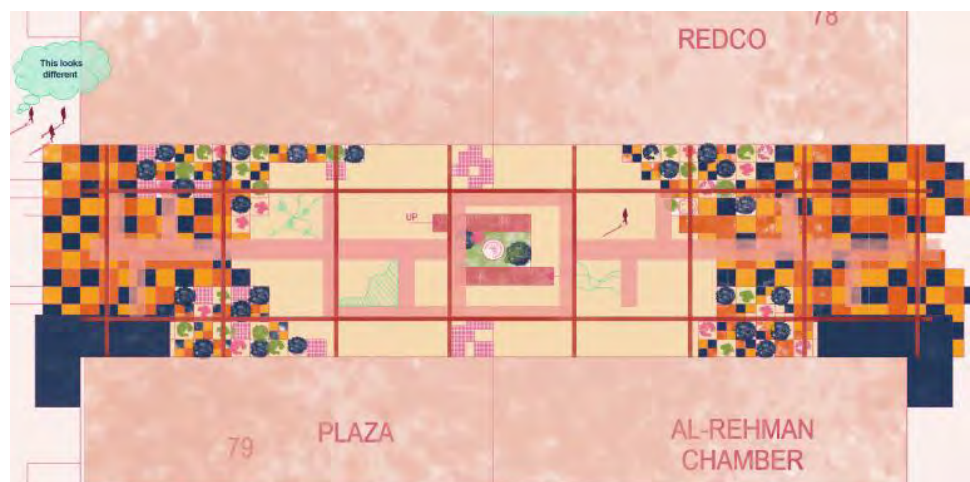


Figure 34 - Proposal 04 – Master plan (Source: Student group work.)

Proposal 04 – Master plan (Source: Student group work.)

While informal food stalls occupy portions of this void, the overall ambiance remains neglected and unregulated. Nonetheless, these food vendors signal an opportunity for food retail ventures to cater to the throngs of patrons frequenting the area. Notably absent are green

spaces or shaded seating areas, with concrete dominating the landscape, imparting a harsh and unwelcoming aura while hindering water

infiltration opportunities. The proposal identifies the narrow void between buildings as the focal point for rejuvenation.

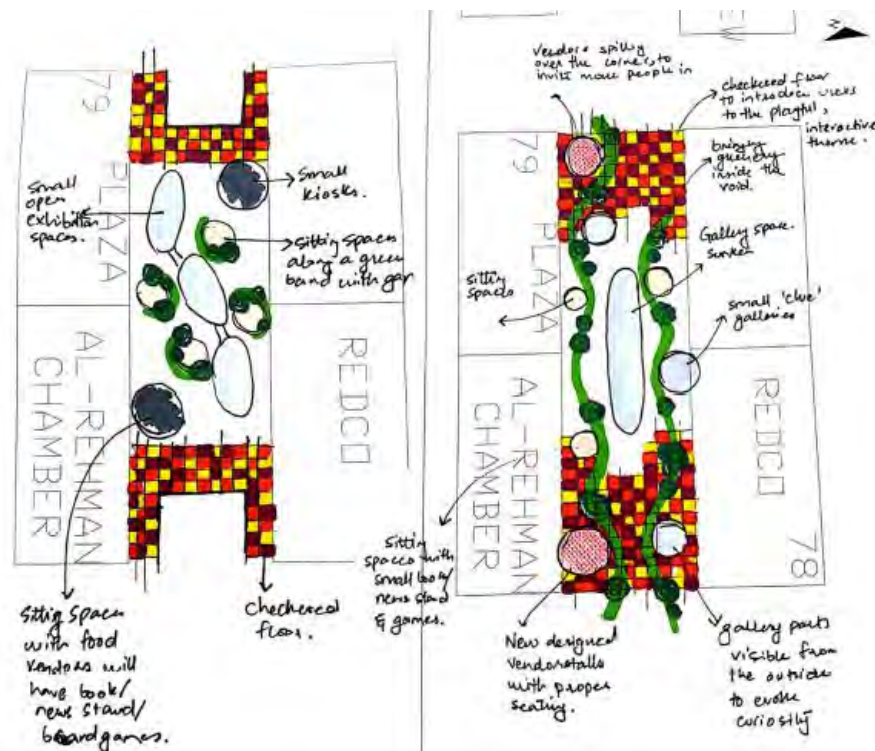


Figure 35 - Proposal 04 – Program Insertion into context (Source: Student group work.)

Proposal 04 – Program Insertion into context (Source: Student group work.)

The design process underwent iterative refinement, concentrating on crafting site-specific seating areas and fostering connectivity elements to nurture a vibrant public space

vertically and horizontally. At its core lies the concept of installing a steel bar grid across the void, offering shaded enclaves and enhancing aesthetic appeal. Three primary design strategies—permeability, connectivity, and social nodes—underpin the proposal, leveraging the notion of the "third space" to evolve the void into a multifunctional domain. These strategies manifest as spatial typologies encompassing a playful public space, an exhibition area, and tailored vendor zones.

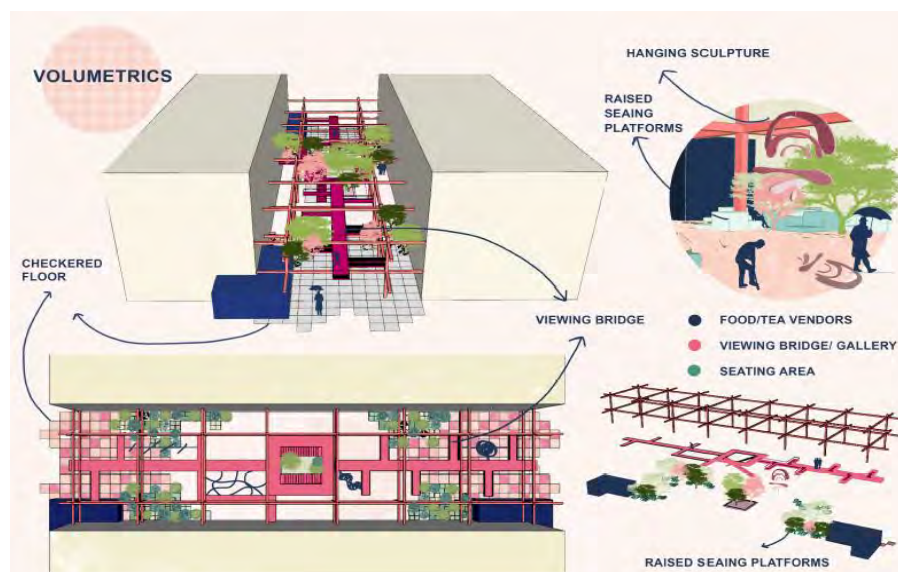


Figure 36 - Proposal 04 – Design Details Insertion into context (Source: Student group work.)

Central to the proposal is the endeavor to foster an environment of mutual respect between public and private realms, reconciling urban dynamics with architectural form. By synergizing these elements, the proposal aims to instill a sense of unity within the fabric of the cityscape, enriching the lived experience for residents and visitors alike.

Conclusions & Future Implications:

Revitalizing urban voids can contribute to microeconomic development and fulfill infrastructural and societal needs in developing contexts. The impact of such initiatives can permeate into the psychological health of communities by providing well-designed public spaces for interaction and recreation.

The research on urban voids in Islamabad's Blue Area provides a comprehensive framework for revitalizing these neglected spaces and enhancing the overall urban environment.

The key conclusions and future implications are as follows:

Transforming Urban Voids into Vibrant Public Spaces

The design proposals outlined in this study demonstrate the enormous potential of urban voids to be transformed into dynamic, functional, and sustainable public spaces. By addressing issues of accessibility, connectivity, social interaction, and environmental integration, these interventions can breathe new life into the Blue Area, catering to the diverse needs of the community.

Fostering Microeconomic Development

The introduction of small and medium retail, co-working spaces, and other commercial amenities creates opportunity towards microeconomic development in the area while enhancing the overall vibrancy and attractiveness of the location.

Enhancing Environmental Sustainability

The integration of green elements in the form of roof gardens, patios and living walls contribute to improving the environmental quality of the micro area. These interventions can help mitigate urban heat island effects, enhance air quality, and promote biodiversity, contributing to a more resilient and ecologically conscious urban environment.

Improving Psychological Well-being

The development of well-designed public spaces, with multiple opportunities for recreation, social interaction, and community engagement, can have a profound impact on the psychological well-being of the public. Provision of spaces for respite, relaxation, and social cohesion can enhance the overall quality of life for all users.

Towards a Holistic and Inclusive Urban Development

The research highlights the importance of adopting a holistic and inclusive approach to urban development. By addressing the needs of diverse user groups, including pedestrians, commuters, and local businesses, the proposed interventions aim to create a more equitable and accessible urban environment that caters to the needs of all stakeholders.

The research project provides a compelling vision for the future development of this important commercial and business district. By transforming neglected spaces into vibrant public realms, the proposed interventions aim to enhance the overall quality of life, foster community engagement, and promote sustainable urban growth and maintaining the dynamic vibe of the capital city. As Islamabad continues to grow and evolve, the lessons learned from the revitalization of Blue Area can inform future urban development projects, contributing to the creation of more livable, equitable, and resilient cities.

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