[Upwards rather than outwards](https://nation.com.pk/20-May-2019/upwards-rather-than-outwards%22%20%5Ct%20%22_new)

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Pakistan has a plethora of problems when it comes to the rapid growth of population and unplanned growth within cities. A shift in planning policy approach can help Pakistan solve its growth mismanagement for decades to come. It’s easier than most think since; in cities like Lahore and Islamabad, most of the infrastructure required is already laid, ready to be utilised.

Upwards rather than Outwards

The “Upwards rather than Outwards” policy dictates that instead of cities expanding horizontally, through new settlements on the city boundary, the cities ought to grow upwards through tall developments closer to the city centre.

The idea of tall residential buildings replacing housing is that a residential building provides accommodation to a large number of people on a smaller ground area by gaining area through a high number of floors in a tall building. So instead of people settling over a larger ground area, they cram into a smaller area as their houses are stacked vertically (apartments). By cramming a large number of people in a smaller area, the ground area, which could otherwise be used for expansive housing societies, is basically being left for forest cover (trees and wildlife) or farming.

Environment

In China, this concept is adopted to save the ground area for farming. However in Pakistan over the past few decades, significant farming land has been converted into housing societies to accommodate population growth, seriously damaging the country’s potential for agricultural growth. This has been done to a point that there is little to no agriculture land left within cities.

The ground cover towards the boundaries of cities, which is not yet absorbed by cities, can still be used for farming or be left off for forests. As the cities significantly cut down their tree cover, it makes sense to retain trees in the vicinity of the cities as they help reduce the carbon content of the air. The forest cover also helps retain wildlife that would otherwise be wiped out by unplanned expansion.

Urbanising a smaller area with high population density is an efficient way of protecting the environment whilst allowing the city to grow. Imagine a city where a residential tower and the commercial tower, supporting hundreds of people, are just blocks apart rather than miles (Cue New York, Hong Kong, Tokyo); the commute is easier. Most people travel either through walking, since the distance is short, cycling or public transport since driving in a crowded city is a chore. This not just saves travel time for the people living in it, but it also significantly reduces the fuel emissions, helping improve the air quality. In New York City, public transport can take you from one corner of the city to another in around 20 minutes, whereas in Lahore, to travel from Model Town / Johar Town to Jail Road (considered centre of the city) it will take 30 to 45 minutes on a car. According to the latest statistics, 54% of the air pollution in Lahore is also caused due to transportation.

Infrastructure Network

For cities to expand, they require a lengthy infrastructure network like roads, water supply network, drainage and sewage network, electrical network, gas pipelines, internet lining as well as network of emergency services before people even start moving in.

In a vertical city, the requirement for roads is significantly cut down, as the developments are closer to each other. The water supply and sewage networks need to be bigger and on a smaller area, so it significantly saves on pipe lengths as well as pumping stations required. Supplying water to a smaller area (even if in larger quantity) is easier than supplying water over a larger area. The electrical network needs to be robust. The emergency services need to be covering a smaller area again, so are far more efficient than in a horizontal city. Consider with these the costs of supplying groceries over a larger area compared to supplying them to a smaller area in a vertical city; the vertical cities are simply easier to manage, even if they accommodate more people.

Though the vertical cities require a planned infrastructure; the construction and maintenance costs are far lower than installing it over a larger area. Pakistan is in luck in this regard, since in big cities like Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, the infrastructure is already available, waiting for investors to recognise the opportunity and transform the city-scape.

Socio-Economics

The more connected a city is, the higher its chances of growing new businesses and adding to the overall economy. Over the last decade, cities in Pakistan have spent hefty amounts on building public transportation networks, with the intention that connectivity will spur economic growth within these cities. It has to some extent worked as well. The Lahore Metro has made it surprisingly easier for people in corners of the city to commute to and from their jobs, allowing youth without cars or bikes to travel. Safer transport enables them to explore new opportunities and adds more women into the workforce by easing their travel needs. These expensive solutions could’ve been avoided had the city encouraged people to live closer together, in a vertical city with high population density, rather than letting the city develop far and wide.

Commutes being a nightmare have disallowed most cities from developing public squares and a realm where all can relax, linger, share ideas and meet new people. The social interactions work tremendously well in improving the mood of the people living there and can create opportunities for economic development out of the most unexpected circumstances. London, for example, has encouraged the development of the public realm and public squares, as the population of London is mostly young and the authorities want to enable them as much as possible to spur economic growth. It has worked too; London being a one-time financial capital of the world is now also dubbed the next Silicon Valley or the European technology capital.

Design of Urban Developments

A mixed-use development, on a large plot, with retail space on ground and first floor levels, as well as a twin tower concept (a residential and a commercial tower) originating from above the retail space can offer an all in one development. The podium can be used as the public realm, with artificial gardens, swimming pools, cafe spaces; basically a space for the public to hang out. In such designs, the building aerodynamics also plays a part. The tall buildings divert cooler air to terrace levels and allow for a cooler, open-air public realm to develop within the development.

Ultimately, such developments are the future. With rising environmental issues and awareness within authorities, a shift to vertical cities will be made. It is only a matter of when, not if.