

4. The Future of the People and their Heritage in the Residential Quarters of the Lahore Walled City

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The Walled City of Lahore continues to have a declining and relatively poor residential population, despite the fact the Walled City provides increasingly cheap homes and jobs for the poor. The reasons for this decline in numbers are many—to be found in the history of the social and political economy of the Walled City and spatial changes in the larger context of Lahore as a whole, as also in certain trends in the course taken by national economic processes. At the same time the Walled City has been turned into a dynamic powerhouse of economic production, most of the benefits of which go to non-residential populations, in the larger context of a generally dysfunctional metropolis of close to ten million people. To what extent does the Walled City have any residual heritage that can help shore up a declining sense of self-identity among the myriad stakeholders: the residents, the citizens of the larger city, of the province of Punjab, of Pakistan, of the World?

What constitutes an urban heritage is an issue that underlies any discussion of the third serious attempt at urban heritage conservation in old Lahore. Based on a close-up study of the residents of a small lane in the Walled City, the paper will examine whether and to what qualitative extent the sense of “heritage” still resides in the stakeholders, confronted by change, poverty, and the externalities of a heritage conservation project. An incipient urban conservation project will be described with ramifications on the residents, on those they are pitted against, and on the future of the Walled City itself.