

# EMERGENCE OF MIXED-USE HOUSING IN KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

## Part-1 (Courtyard Mixed-use House)

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**Abstract**— Kabul City is the capital and the largest city of Afghanistan. The city has faced many huge urban problems. One of the famous types of housing is mixed-use, and it is growing fast. This paper studies the historical emergence of mixed-use housing. The Old City of Kabul being the base of courtyard housing in the city is select for this research.

**Index Terms**—Mixed-use Housing, Kabul, Emergence, Courtyard, Old City

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Kabul City

Kabul as capital and largest city with a history of 3500 years is the political, administrative, educational and financial center of Afghanistan. The city with semi-arid climate is located in the eastern part of the country (figure 1). Historically, Kabul, with its wonderful traditional architecture of courtyard, lavish Timurid (Later Mughal) gardens, decorated worship centers and its glowing historic bazaars that enticed trade enter-prises and merchants around the region, sustained a vibrant city life for its citizens (Kazimee and Najimi, 2017). The Kabul urbanized area started in the old city. The old city as an Islamic city has its characteristics, and in general, it has similarities with other Islamic cities, Friday Mosque (Masjid Jami), public bath, courtyard houses and Bazaar which usually are located near the Friday Mosque are traditionally the indicators and the main elements of the Islamic cities. The old city with Islamic background has bazaar which is located inside the city, it has courtyard houses, and the shops are located on the first floor, and the upper floors are used as residential. The shopkeepers lived on the outskirts of the city, and the landlord uses the first floor. This city is located in district 1 has the total land area of 4.67 km<sup>2</sup> which is all urbanized. At present, the Kabul land area is 103,049 hectares, and it has 22 districts.

#### B. History of Urban Housing in Kabul

Kabul has a long history of urban at least since the time of Alexander the Great. At the beginning of sixteenth century, Babur, who was later to found the Moghul Dynasty of India, made Kabul his capital, and upon his death, he was buried

there (W. B. Bechhoefer, 1975). Nonetheless, in 1773 it became the capital of the region, and the city growth began. In the early 1930s, when the population growth was more rapid, 120,000 populations (Samizay, 1974) and almost it was doubled comparing to 1916, the government for the first time implemented residential projects outside of the old city. Shahr-e-Naw meaning the new city was formed as a result of these projects. In Shahr-e-Naw, the plots were allocated in spacious sizes, and the city was used for residential and commercial activities. After Shahr-e-Naw some other projects such as Khair-Khana, Kart-e-Panj, Kart-e-Say, and Kart-e-Char were planned by the government.

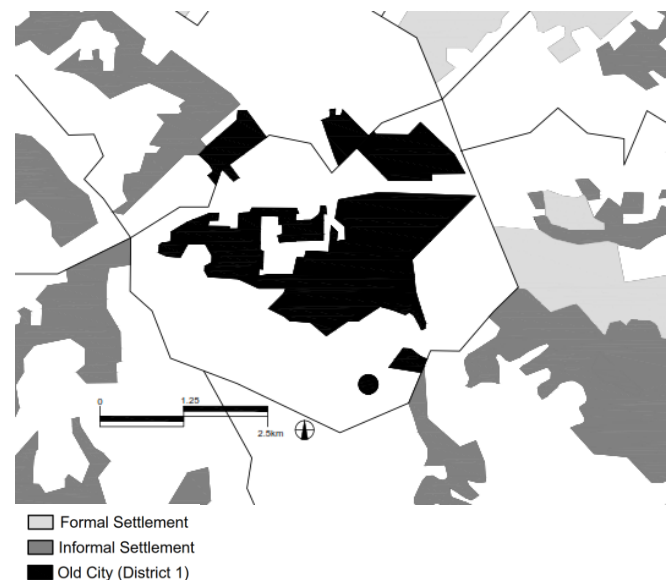


Fig.1. The Old City in Kabul

#### C. Mixed-use Housing and Research Objective

In the master plan of 1978, the land use of these projects was defined, and the city was planned for two million

people, but after 2001 the population growth was rapid, and it was estimated 4.22 million in 2014 by Central Statistics Office (CSO). As a result, the city faced many big urban problems, development of informal settlement and developing of houses in the planned areas without considering the government regulation and codes. In the most upgrades areas of the planned area the residential transformed to mixed-use. Mostly, those houses which they are located along paved streets developed rapidly with contradiction to the defined land use of the master plan. In other words, in many parts of residential zones, landowners to get more income from their houses, they built some commercial spaces for rent purpose. It is a type of financial support for the owner, to make their investment sustainable because building and construction cost a huge amount of budget. Generally, these spaces are shops or retail. Thus, this type of commercial with residential in the same building is the most common prevalent type of mixed-use housing in Kabul. This transformation happened so rapidly. However, these houses built with lack of consideration of regulation about the land use and building height. Based on this background, this paper study the emerging of mixed-use housing in Kabul city with the inquiry of is this can be a good answer for the future housing needs. It is the broad concern of the paper. In particular, this study examines how, why and when the mixed-use housing came to the Kabul city and what are the main reasons behind this revaluation

of changing residential to mixed-use houses.

- To define the emergence of mixed-use housing in the Kabul city

This study will not only fill in a missing gap in the housing history of Kabul, of which there is a shortage of research about the mixed-use housing but also illustrate the more recent revaluation and dominant housing types.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Kabul is the hub of all economic, politic, social, and cultural activities of the country with four times larger in population than the next largest cities of Afghanistan. Notwithstanding being the capital city and the availability of resources and opportunities it has the worst environment and housing problem. Consequently, this paper focused the housing in Kabul to better sketch the condition of housing. The mixed-use housing a dominant type of housing is growing rapidly, therefore this paper will study this type of housing engaged in the following methodology; literature review, field survey, photography, key informant survey and focus group discussions with residents, shopkeepers, builders, and government officials. As the Kabul background is an Islamic city, for this reason, some literature about Kabul and other Islamic cities was reviewed some examples are J. L. Abu-Lughod researched about the Islamic city-

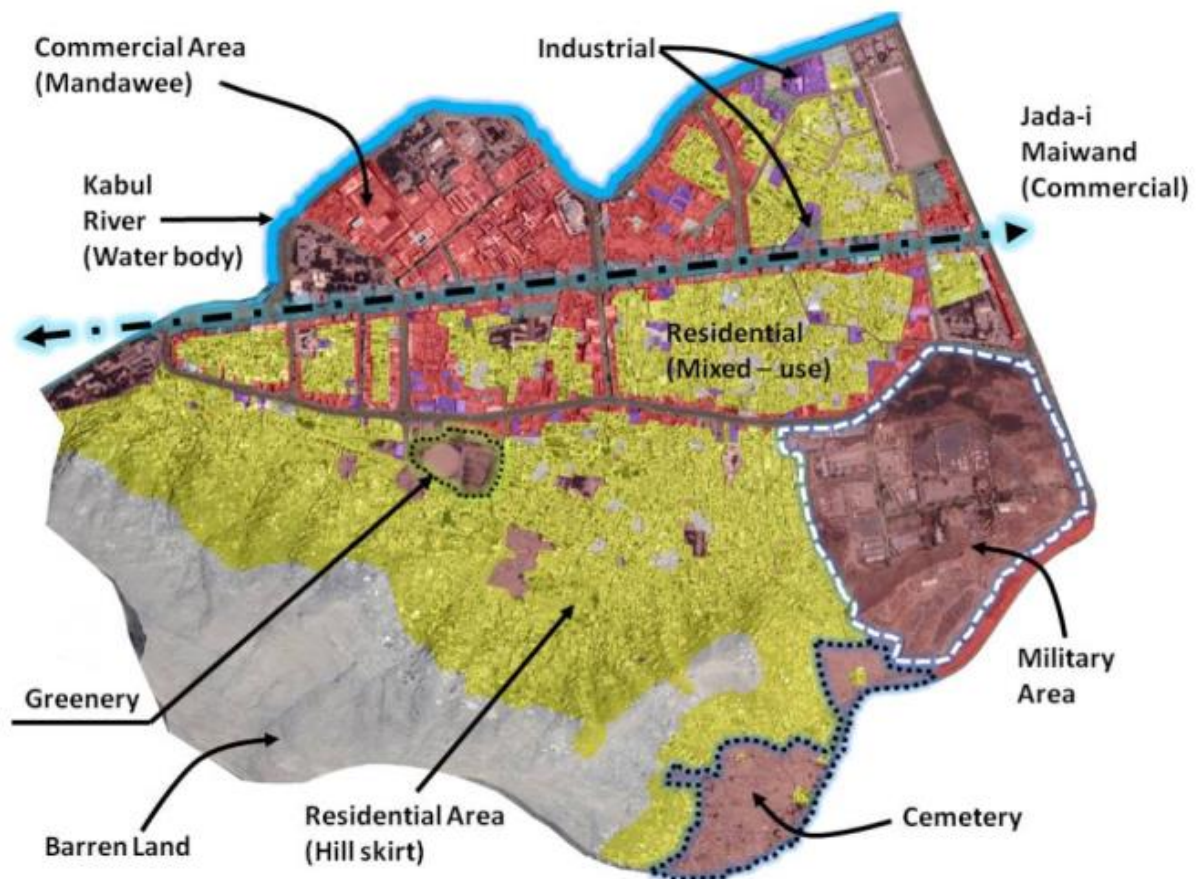


Fig.2. The Old City of Kabul district 1 (Shahra-e-Kona Kabul)

Historic myth, Islamic Essence, and contemporary relevance. His research ended with a brief discussion of whether and in what ways it would be feasible or desirable to build contemporary cities on Islamic principles. He points out that, the historic Islamic city often achieved community, privacy, and beauty; it would be wise to seek these same goals, even though the old means are no longer available. Besides this, from the recent research literature review in Kabul, it can be concluded that there are some studies about the housing in Kabul city, but none of these conduct on mixed-use housing.

Nevertheless, some important points are essential for this study, for instance, Nabizada and Kita (2012), conducted research on the process and mechanism of transformation in settlements in the Kabul city and relationship between the typology and resident's demands. This study focused on the types of transformation which have taken place in urban areas of Kabul, and also it emphasized that the transformed houses accommodate the majority of the population. Although he focused on the planned area of the city specifically the expansion of residential houses, he did not consider the mixed-use buildings in Kabul.

The approach was to search about the factors that influenced the emergence of mixed-use housing and to know about its sustainability. Although the paper mainly focuses on the emergence of mixed-use housing but as historical background somehow the current mixed-use linked to the courtyard house with shops in the old city, for this purpose at

first, this research glanced the courtyard house with shops. To conduct this research district 1 (Kabul Old City) is selected for the study. The selection of the site was based on these principles. First to ensure that the site represents a typical one. The second consideration is to make sure that the site has a traditional type of mixed-use. This research is based primarily survey data which has done in 2017.

### III. THE STUDY AREA

The old city of Kabul (Shar-e-Kona) is located in District 1. The district is located centrally as it represents the old city that area in the south of the Kabul River. It is surrounded by Districts 3, 6 and 7 constituting part of Chahar-dehi or the four old villages in the west and the southwest, and the extension of the city center in District 2 to the northwest and parts of Districts 9, 16 and 8 to the northeast, east, and southeast, respectively.

### IV. COURTYARD HOUSE WITH SHOPS

#### A. Historical Background

Shahr-e- Kona (old city of Kabul) is the oldest part of the city. In the nineteen century, the outlines of what is now called the "old city" were clear, on the north is Kabul River; to the south is Sher Darwaza Mountain, with the fortified wall on its crest, which joins Bala Hissar citadel to the east (W. B. Bechhoefer, 1975). Shahr-e-Kona as an Islamic city has its characteristics, and in general, it has similarities with other Islamic cities, Friday Mosque (Masjid Jami), public bath, courtyard houses and Bazaar which usually are located near the Friday Mosque are traditionally the indicators and the main elements of the Islamic cities. Shahr-e-Kona with Islamic background has bazaar which is located inside the city, it has courtyard houses, and the shops are located on the first floor, and the upper floors are used as residential as shown in Fig. 3. The shopkeepers lived on the outskirts of the city, and the landlord uses the first floor. The history of these houses is referred to the changing the religion of Kabul residents to Islam in the eighth century.

#### B. A typical courtyard house with shops

##### a) Commercial activities correlation with residential

There are many historical residential quarters which have houses with a shop inside the courtyard house. All these residential neighborhoods are intertwined with commercial bazaars and public and religious buildings, which are tightly woven with the physical fabric of courtyard houses and access by narrow alleyways for circulation (Kazimee and Najimi, 2017). These houses were previously used by the merchants who came from different places to the bazaar for exchanging materials and lived in the upper floors of these mixed-use houses. However; in the case of landlord utilizing the first floor as shops and upper floors for living purposes, specific doors were interconnecting the residential and commercial spaces. The latter case with interconnecting doors is in use up to this date. The women were rarely in the



Fig.3. Courtyard mixed-use, shops in first floor



Fig.4. Type of commercial activities in courtyard house



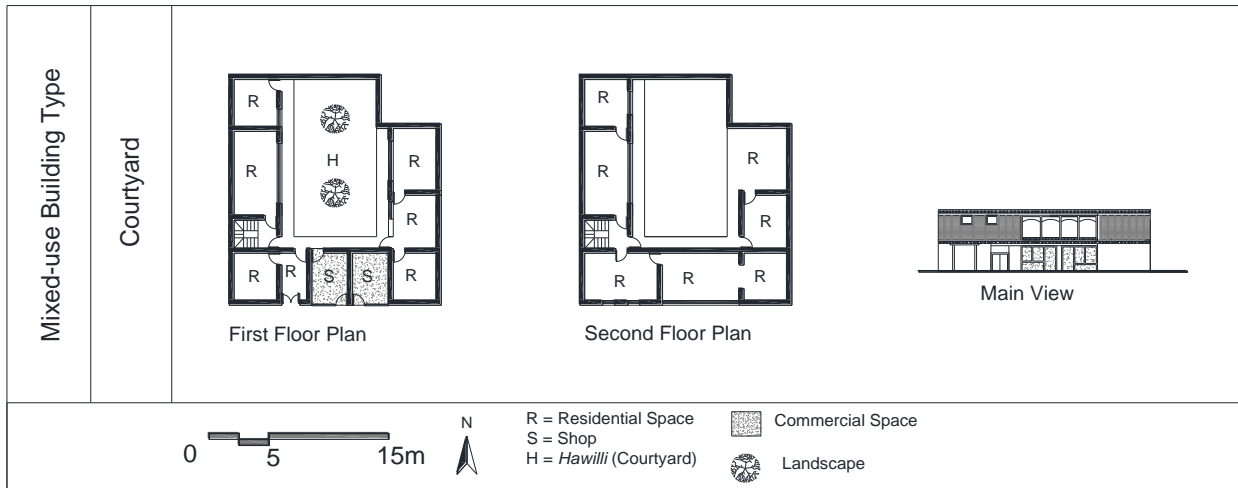


Fig.5. Courtyard mixed-use house plan and elevation

public areas such as bazaar, as it is Islamic culture, that is why the courtyard was the best place for women gathering in a house, and they had their discussions between each other during the day when the men were out of the door. Courtyards with adequate privacy for women gatherings are meeting the cultural requirements of Islamic society to an acceptable extent.

#### b) Structure, material, and design

The courtyard houses build traditionally with simple structure system. The basic structural system is one of mud or brick bearing walls and poplar joists and beams (W. B. Bechhoefer, 1975). Bearing walls were used as the main walls of the building while traditional shear walls (Senj) were used for bracing purposes. The common materials were; sun-dried bricks, Kagil ( a common traditional way of making a soil that has higher cohesive properties and can efficiently be used as plastering layer on wall and roof finishing), natural rubble stone and wood.

The concept of these houses is simple, but it worked perfectly at that time. Although the residential and commercial activities occurred in the same building, the house has its privacy for the family members. The shops are located on the first floor; in some cases, the shopkeeper was the one who lives in that house; the owner of the house or the tenant. The commercial activities were oriented outside of the residential spaces.

#### c) Construction technology and method

These houses are built traditionally by a local builder called Gilker (This term means the one who expert in Mud construction) with the self-help process of the landowner family and friends. The local expert carpenter who has experience of same projects is vital as the courtyard housing has more wooden windows with classical decoration. The

knowledge of building a house is carried from generation to generation. The local material such as mud, sun-dried brick, and wood, are cheap and available. Thus, the availability of the material makes the house to build economically

## V. CONCLUSION

Shahr-e-Kona with Islamic background has bazaar which is located inside the city, it has courtyard houses, and the shops are located on the first floor, and the upper floors are used as residential. It is also found that, this type of housing was built with simple structure system. Usually the builder is locally trained.

This research clarified that: The courtyard mixed-use buildings have built with local material which usually available in the country. The contemporary types of mixed-use will be studied in the next researches.

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