

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the Lahore Improvement Trust in relation to the urban development of the city of Lahore in mid-twentieth century. LIT was responsible for most major urban development in the city from 1936 up until 1975, when it metamorphosed into the Lahore Development Authority. However, its impact on Lahore's urban history is surprisingly under recognized, and this may be due to the relative failure of the body itself in delivering a large part of its mandate, despite being responsible for major morphological changes in the city.

The formation of LIT, like other Improvement Trusts in India, was based on a real need for planned urban development of a rapidly expanding city. This thesis argues that the structure of such a body was, however, based on conceptual frameworks that were introduced in India by numerous different British institutions, with the aim of either 'testing out' or for furthering a particular colonial agenda. These inherent structural beliefs were carried through numerous cycles of 'reform' before being applied onto the Improvement Trust network which, this study argues, followed a strict path dependent paradigm in a late colonial institution such as LIT. Using the annual reports of LIT, I show that this was evident in the modus operandi of the body, to the point that despite being able to implement individual projects that can be considered successful to a certain extent, it failed to develop or implement a coherent urban vision. Projects under LIT were fragmented instances in the larger urban morphology of the city, which failed to respond to the more pressing problems in the city. Its failure to register itself as a viable body was further exacerbated by the body's incapability to deal with issues such as housing shortage in the city. This was particularly evident in the face of a major shock as Partition in 1947. A huge influx of migrants from East Punjab and riots within the city that caused major infrastructural damage within the city meant that the deficit of the body carried itself exponentially beyond the event of Partition in 1947. That the Trust exhibited institutional inertia well beyond the Partition in its mode of operating explains the weak progress it made beyond that event, and its eventual dissolution into Lahore Development Authority in 1975.

Hence, while most projects implemented by the Trust were moderately successful, the lack of a holistic urban plan, a result of both structural (internal) and situational (external) problems, was where LIT failed to deliver causing it to leave an ineffectual mark on Lahore's urban history.