

BUSINESS CENTER, TRAFFIC PLAN AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY: A STUDY ON RAWALPINDI CITY FUNCTIONAL ZONE

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ABSTRACT: *Appropriate spatial and traffic planning to create organized functional zones is critical for businesses aspiring to utilize their infrastructural resources in the most productive manner. The paper highlights the effect of an unorganized traffic plan on the business activities of a specific functional zone. The study was conducted in "Raja bazaar", a major functional zone of Rawalpindi city, using a blend of both qualitative and quantitative techniques, by drawing a sample of 50 respondents. The economic activities of the functional zones were found to be significantly dependent upon a smooth traffic arrangement, which when sundered negatively affected the rate of customers, income, profit and thus the overall economy.*

Key words: Functional zones, Business center, economic activity, traffic plan, unplanned urbanization,

INTRODUCTION

The urban population is increasing rapidly and so is the demand of resources. The increase in the demands has thus led to the elevation in the pressure on the supply market. The factors all combined led to an accelerated unplanned accumulation of business centers forming congested functional zones "congestion", occurs where the buildings are attached with the traffic area, increasing the demand of road space. Further it indicated that congestion is increasing as functional zones and residential areas are shared [1].

The socioeconomic disparities are reflective over the spatial positioning of people, "Changes in the spatial arrangements in urban areas reflect changes in overall socioeconomic conditions as well as spatial pattern of land values in major metropolitan centers" [2, 3]. If change occurs in city then it also affected the economic and social pattern of city.

To enhance the business activities and promote a healthy economy the locality of the functional zones need to be planned properly, for effective provision of services. The business centers since provide services not only inter-regionally but also intra-regionally, thus the major factor effecting the business activities is accessibility. "Functional Region (FR) is a region characterized by a high frequency of intra-regional economic interaction, such as intra-regional trade in goods and services, lab-our commuting and household shopping patterns" [4, 5]. Thus, in order to facilitate larger mobility, interaction and provision of services, the need is of improved "spatially located" functional zones, so that they are "ecologically, economically and socially efficient" and "satisfy the demands of the sustainable development" [6].

With accelerated population growth, the functional zones are growing too. Poor development schemes amalgamate the residential and business centers, leading to severe traffic concerns, since "intense economic interaction" which is characteristic of "functional regions", takes place within the region rather than "any area outside the region" [4]. Traffic problems, mobility crisis and resulting economic adversaries is a "global phenomenon" in city management [7]. The "agglomeration benefits" are obvious, as it undoubtedly derives "gains in productivity", however since "traffic congestion" is only acceptable if it derives "economic benefits" thus incase of economic loss then traffic and mobility turn into a crises [1].

A functional region is characterized by collective activities and "by its intra-regional transport infrastructure, facilitating a large mobility of people, products, and inputs within its interaction borders" "traffic congestion" that has undesirable effects on the "economic and social life-style" of people [4,7,8].

The volume of traffic on roads increased with time however infrastructural improvements have been minimal. With increase in "work zones", the "traffic capacity" reduces leading to "traffic congestion" leading to serious "social, economic and environmental" repercussions. The community not only faces "damage to business" but also wastage of "valuable time", psychological effects like "frustration" and "accidents" [7, 9].

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted in district Rawalpindi, while the sampling frame was selected from "Raja bazaar" a major business center in the city. A sample of 50 respondents; 25 shopkeepers, and 25 customers were selected through convenience sampling from which detailed data was collected using a blend of both qualitative and quantitative tools regarding the effect of traffic plan upon economic activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pearson Correlation Sig. (2 tailed)

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Correlation Sig. (2 tailed)
The business center amalgamated with residential areas effects the economic activities negatively?	Do you think that the unorganized traffic affects economic activities?	-.137
Parking area affected the economy of business center?		-.036
How has mega metro project affect the economic activities of the business center?		-.078
Are the business centers easily accessible?		.178
The rate of customers is affected if the business center is in congested area?		-.083
Do you think that ineffective public transport; leads to decrease in customers?		-.076

The correlation value of the variables, “The business center amalgamated with residential areas effects the economic activities negatively” and “Do you think that the unorganized traffic affects on economic activities” was $-.137$ reflecting there is a negative relation between the variables presenting that the amalgamation of residential and business centers, leads to congestion and unorganized traffic which effects the economic lives adversely. As, 86 % respondent agreed that the unorganized traffic plan affects the economy negatively, it can be deduced that better zonal planning, with effective traffic plan will decrease the economic loss faced by the business centers. The citation supports the results, that the “reduction in traffic capacity” of roads leads to serious “traffic congestion” which effects the economic activities [9]. The correlation value of the variables, “Parking area affected the economy of business center” and “Do you think that the unorganized traffic effects on economic activities” was $-.036$ which shows a negative correlation as the business centers observed to be lacking parking areas had lower rate of customers and income. Percentile analysis showed that the 86.3 % respondents that were shopkeepers agreed that lack of parking areas affected the economic activities. The argument of the functional zones usually have no specific parking place which gives rise to traffic problems and disturbed economic activities [10].

The correlation value of the variables, “How has mega metro project affected the economic activities of the business center?” and “Do you think that the unorganized traffic affects economic activities?” was $-.078$ reflecting a negative effect of the metro project over the traffic flow, and thus the economic activities. Majority of the respondents i.e. 74.5% agreed that there was no need for a mega metro project, and its initiation had negatively affected the business centers, since the work sites hindered the customers from reaching the functional zones due to serious congestion issues and lack of parking.

The correlation value of the variables, “Are the business centers easily accessible?” and “Do you think that the unorganized traffic affects economic activities?” was $.178$ that shows there is a strong correlation between the accessibility to the business centers and economic activities. Percentile analysis further confirmed how unorganized traffic led to constraints of accessibility to the business centers and thus the falling economy, 29.4 % of the respondents affirmed that the business centers were not easily accessible, the travelling time had increased, and the visit to any market area was sheer stress and torture. The general public travel through the “work zones” are seriously affected by congestion, in terms of wastage of “time “and “frustration” [9].

The correlation value of the variables, “The rate of customers is affected if the business center is in congested area?” and “do you think that the unorganized traffic plan effect on economic activities” was $-.083$ showing a negative relation between the variable as 62.7% respondents agreed that unorganized traffic and congestion decreased the rate of customers.

The correlation value of the variables, “Do you think that ineffective public transport; leads to decrease in customers” and “do you think that the unorganized traffic plan effects on

economic activities” was $-.076$ reflecting a negative effect between the variables. It was observed that 64.7% of the respondents agreed that the present public transport is ineffective. Grass root level problems include changed routes, increased travel time, doubled fares not according to the approved “fare list” all these issues collectively effect the rate of customers.

The traffic plan within the locale was highly unorganized; while no proper plans were implemented to resolve the problem of traffic congestion. The business activities were highly disturbed due to traffic congestion, which was firstly due to the lack of parking areas, and proper implementation of parking regulations, secondly, another casual factor of traffic congestion within this specific locale were “rairi walay”, “thalay” and “phairi walay” i.e. mobile sellers using carts, and static sellers without proper shops that organize their products on the streets right in front of the shops who are not included in direct taxation nor is their business approved by the district government.

Thirdly, it was observed that the parking area that was present charged 50 rupees per hour, which if compared with the usual shopping time was quite expensive; this led people to park their respective vehicles right in the center of the roads along with other illegal mobile and static sellers. Fourthly, since the roads were extremely congested it was highly difficult even for the pedestrians to walk through the area without being pushed and pressed between the crowd which mostly resulted into sexual harassment or pocket picking. Fifthly, the congestion of traffic also increased the travel time within the functional zone, and use excessive use of fuel.

All these internal factors restrained the common man from visiting the business center until seriously necessary. The situation has been worsened further due to the Mega Metro Project, which increased the travelling time to reach the functional zone.

CONCLUSION

The study presents that the economic activities of the business centers both local and regional are directly affected by the land use, zoning and traffic policies. The economic analysis verifies that traffic congestion, ineffective traffic plans and implementation are directly related to the overall decline in the economy. The Municipal administration, the city government needs to improve the infrastructures like roads and parking areas within the functional zones, decreasing the commuting costs, and optimizing the efficiency of the business centers.

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