

**Form for Dissertation/thesis/diploma/master thesis on WORLD HERITAGE
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Language of thesis: English

Title of thesis: "Islamabad's modernist heritage: a potential dossier for UNESCO
world heritage recognition"

Type of thesis: Master

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World Heritage/UNESCO resources used:

- Nomination Files
- World Heritage Website
- Journals 5 and 85

Date of (foreseen) submission of thesis: 24 March 2025

Date: March 2025

Please provide a 500 words abstract outlining your thesis; you may wish to attach a table of contents or any other relevant material:

This thesis explores the modernist heritage of Islamabad, Pakistan, and its potential for recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Conceived in the 1960s as a purpose-built capital, Islamabad represents a landmark achievement in modernist urban planning and architecture. Designed by Greek architect Constantinos Apostolou Doxiadis, the city embodies a unique synthesis of modernist ideals, international architectural influences, and cultural symbolism. Its grid-based sector system, hierarchical road network, and seamless integration with the natural landscape reflect a visionary approach to urban design that addresses the challenges of rapid urbanization, social harmony, and ecological sustainability.

The study examines Islamabad's architectural and urban planning principles, highlighting its key attributes that are blend of modernist aesthetics with cultural and national symbolism. The thesis underscores the global exchange of ideas that shaped Islamabad's development, with contributions from renowned international architects and the adaptation of Doxiadis' theories of Ekistics and Dynapolis.

By proposing Islamabad as a potential nomination for UNESCO World Heritage recognition, this thesis contributes to the broader discourse on modernist urbanism and the preservation of 20th-century architectural heritage. It advocates for the protection and sustainable management of Islamabad's unique urban landscape, ensuring its continued relevance as a model of modernist planning and a symbol of Pakistan's aspirations for modernity, unity, and progress. Furthermore, the thesis positions Islamabad alongside other celebrated modernist capitals, such as Brasília and Chandigarh, highlighting its significance as a global exemplar of postcolonial urbanism and modernist innovation.

In conclusion, this research not only underscores the value of Islamabad's modernist heritage but also calls for its recognition as a vital part of the world's cultural and architectural legacy, deserving of preservation and celebration on the global stage.

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"ISLAMABAD'S MODERNIST HERITAGE: A POTENTIAL DOSSIER FOR UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE RECOGNITION"

1. INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Islamabad¹, the capital city of Pakistan, was conceived in the mid-20th century as an embodiment of modernist urban planning. Designed by Greek architect Constantinos A. Doxiadis, the city exemplifies the principles of **Ekistics**, a theory of human settlements that sought to integrate functionality, growth, and sustainability. Despite its **architectural and urban significance**, Islamabad remains largely overlooked² in **modernist heritage discourse**, with limited research on its contribution to **global modernist movements** and **heritage conservation efforts**. This gap has resulted in **restricted recognition and preservation efforts**, leaving Islamabad's modernist legacy **underrepresented in global urban history**.³

Islamabad was envisioned as more than just a **functional capital**; it was designed as a **symbol of national unity and modernity**. For President **Ayub Khan**⁴, it represented Pakistan's aspirations for progress and **post-independence national identity**.⁵ Simultaneously, **Doxiadis' vision extended beyond Islamabad**, aligning with his **Ecumenopolis** concept—a futuristic global network of human settlements.⁶ He referred to

¹ Markus Daechsel, ed., "Introduction," in *Islamabad and the Politics of International Development in Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107298033.001>, notes that the scholarly literature on Islamabad as a city and development project is limited. The only available monograph, written by a key participant in the project, is O. Yakas, *Islamabad, the Birth of a Capital* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), which provides useful information but is entirely based on the "official" narrative from the perspective of the consultancy firm Doxiadis Associates. From an architectural standpoint, the most extensive discussion is found in A. Z. K. Mahsud, *Constantinos A. Doxiadis's Plan for Islamabad: The Making of a City of the Future, 1959–1963* (PhD diss., Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2008). For an anthropological perspective on contemporary Islamabad, including some historical analysis, see Matthew S. Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). Additionally, Markus Daechsel, "Misplaced Ekistics: Islamabad and the Politics of Urban Development in Pakistan," *South Asian History and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2013): 87–106, offers a historical evaluation that aligns with some of the ideas presented in this book.

² Ahmed-Zaib K. Mahsud, "*Constantinos A. Doxiadis' Plan for Islamabad: The Making of a 'City of the Future' 1959–1963*," (PhD Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven Belgium, 2008), 19.

³ Robert A. Mohr, "The People in the City of the Nation: Re-Viewing Islamabad's Fifth Function," 2009, 13, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-people-in-the-city-of-the-nation-%3A-re-viewing-Mohr/abcf413be3c5ecd750e5b7144f7b12da98848d>.

⁴ Mohr, Ayub Khan, "*Pakistan's gregarious and globe-trotting general-cum-president*"

⁵ Farhan Karim, "The Modernist Historic Urban Landscape of Islamabad, Pakistan," 2018, 113.

⁶ Robert Allen Mohr, "The People in the City of the Nation: Re-Viewing Islamabad's Fifth Function" (Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009), 12, <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/49870>.

Islamabad as the **City of the Future (COF)**⁷, a model for sustainable urbanism that could address the challenges of rapid urbanization, particularly in regions like the sub-continent, where growth rates remain high compared to European and North American contexts, where they have significantly lower. Mahsud has noted about Islamabad that *it is interesting as it's a peculiar combination of theory and practice*.⁸ Doxiadis envisioned a metropolitan framework designed to endure for centuries, supported by extensive architectural and planning efforts, including over 4,000 drawings and 8,000 pages of text by contextual conditions and ambitious goals, Doxiadis proposed a modern metropolis for 3 million people across a 3,626 sq. km area by 2000, reflecting his forward-thinking urban vision.⁹

Today, Islamabad stands as a testament to Pakistan's development aspirations and Doxiadis' vision, though it faces challenges in maintaining its original design principles. **Islamabad's population** is approximately **2.2 million people** (as of 2023)¹⁰. This figure reflects the city's rapid growth since its inception, though it has not yet reached Doxiadis' original projection.

The city's integration with nature, through the Margalla Hills National Park and its green belts, continues to be a defining feature. However, rapid urbanization and population growth have strained its infrastructure and led to deviations from the master plan, such as the abandonment of the metropolitan framework that originally connected Islamabad with Rawalpindi. Despite these challenges, Islamabad remains a unique example of planned urbanism, blending modernity with natural beauty, and serves as a reminder of the importance of sustainable development in the face of urban expansion.

Islamabad is also celebrated for its modernist architecture and housing, designed by both national and internationally renowned architects. The city features iconic works by **Edward Durell Stone**¹¹, **Gio Ponti**¹²,

⁷ "Doxiadis formulated COF as a theoretical project with the aid of Ford Foundation (FF) for 'cross cultural training in urban planning' by using the opportunity created by the new capital project to demonstrate and develop a methodological framework for the design of an optimum urban settlement of the future. Islamabad offered Doxiadis a favorable juncture of circumstances - assembling an international team of interdisciplinary research experts at FF's expense, and pursue the ambition to enlarge the scope of architectural modernism to the international development and postcolonial context characterized by cold war politics and modernization euphoria – to rethink modernism and develop a certain view about the future of urban organization at large." Mahsud, *Exploring Urban Futures in the European Cities: A Social Cohesion based approach*, (2008), 138–149.

⁸ Ahmed Khan, "Towards Sustainable Built Environment: Understanding Sustainability Prospects in a Metropolitan Framework," *Journal of Research in Architecture and Planning*, Vol 11:2 10 (January 1, 2012): 36, https://doi.org/10.53700/jrap1122011_3.

⁹ Ahmed Khan, "Towards Sustainable Built Environment: Understanding Sustainability Prospects in a Metropolitan Framework," *Journal of Research in Architecture and Planning*, Vol 11:2 10 (January 1, 2012): 38, https://doi.org/10.53700/jrap1122011_3; Ahmed-Zaib K. Mahsud, "Constantinos A. Doxiadis' Plan for Islamabad: The Making of a 'City of the Future' 1959-1963." (PhD Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven Belgium, 2008), n.d.).

¹⁰ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Population Census of Pakistan*. Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.gov.pk>.

¹¹ Edward Durell Stone _an American architect known for the formal, highly decorative buildings he designed during the 1950s and 1960s.

¹² Giovanni "Gio" Ponti _ Italian architect, industrial designer, furniture designer, artist, teacher, writer and publisher. His career, which spanned six decades, with projects in Italy and rest of the world.

Vedat Dalokay¹³, Anwar Said¹⁴, Nayyar Ali Dada¹⁵ and many more have also left their mark, contributing to the city's architectural diversity. These works reflect Islamabad's identity as a city of modernist architecture, where international and local influences converge to create a unique architecture urban landscape.

Despite its architectural and cultural significance, the city remains a blind spot in modernist heritage discourse. Limited scholarly research, restricted access to archival data, and a lack of preservation efforts have contributed to this neglect, leaving Islamabad's modernist legacy underexplored in global urban history.¹⁶ However, while **other modernist capitals like Chandigarh and Brasília** have been extensively studied and recognized, **Islamabad's modernist heritage remains absent from both national¹⁷ and international heritage records, leading to its absence at UNESCO's World Heritage List¹⁸, due to a lack of formal recognition, documentation, and advocacy, despite having the ability to meeting key criteria for Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)¹⁹.**

Pakistan, though a relatively young country, holds a geographically ancient land with an architectural heritage that spans centuries, reflecting a rich blend of influences from ancient civilizations, colonial rule, and post-independence modernism.²⁰ Despite this diverse legacy, heritage recognition remains heavily skewed towards ancient landmarks, particularly those from the Indus Valley and Gandharan civilizations. This focus on antiquity overshadows the significance of post-colonial and modernist architecture, leaving many 20th-century works unprotected and unrecognized.²¹

In the 1960s and 1970s, 'recent' or 'twentieth-century' heritage, especially modern architecture, began receiving more official heritage attention from architectural historians and organizations like ICOMOS²² and

¹³ Vedat Dalokay (1937-1991) _ Turkish architect and a former mayor of Ankara.

¹⁴ Anwar Said _ Pakistani Architect who has been a pioneering force for the development of cityscape of Islamabad.

¹⁵ Nayyar Ali Dada _a Pakistani architect.

¹⁶ Robert Allen Mohr, "THE PEOPLE IN THE CITY OF THE NATION," n.d.

¹⁷ As of March 4, 2025, there is no official list of modernist buildings to be included or considered as heritage or protected in Islamabad. Ibtisam Pirzada, DD Architect at CDA (Capital Development Authority) interviewed by the Author , February 6th, 2025 "*After devolution of archeology federal chapter under ministry of culture is working to preserve things in federal area and other sites. Mostly they are focused on Buddhist sites...nothing is happening on modernist heritage on government level.*"

¹⁸ The UNESCO World Heritage List is a collection of cultural, natural, or mixed sites that are recognized for their Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). These sites are designated by the World Heritage Committee for their cultural significance, natural beauty, or scientific importance, ensuring their protection and preservation for future generations. Inclusion in the list signifies that a site holds exceptional importance that transcends national boundaries and is of common importance to humanity.

¹⁹ Outstanding Universal Value _ cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries.

²⁰ Mohr, "The People in the City of the Nation," 2009.

²¹ "Time Frames: Conservation Policies for Twentieth-Century Architectural Heritage," Routledge & CRC Press, 166, accessed February 14, 2025, <https://www.routledge.com/Time-Frames-Conservation-Policies-for-Twentieth-Century-Architectural-Heritage/Carughi-Visone/p/book/9781138392779>.

²² ICOMOS - International Council on Monuments and Sites

DoCoMoMo²³. These organizations aimed to conserve and educate the public about the architectural significance of the modern movement, working to develop national registers of Modern Movement buildings and campaigns to preserve key Modernist works.²⁴

There has been growing international recognition of modern architecture as part of cultural heritage, as seen in UNESCO's Program on Modern Heritage.²⁵ However, this recognition remains uneven, with South Asia's modernist sites—including Islamabad—receiving limited documentation and preservation efforts.²⁶ While neighboring countries like India and Bangladesh²⁷ have nominated modernist landmarks, Pakistan's modernist legacy remains largely undocumented.²⁸ The 2003 UNESCO report highlighted that modern heritage is severely underrepresented on the World Heritage List, with only 12 out of 730 listed properties related to modern heritage at the time.²⁹ Even two decades later, this imbalance persists, particularly in the Global South.³⁰

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND GAP

While cities like Chandigarh and Brasília have received extensive scholarly attention, Islamabad's modernist heritage remains understudied. Existing research primarily focuses on:

- Early urban planning and development³¹
- Administrative and ideological foundations³²

²³ DoCoMoMo (International Committee for the Documentation and Conservation of Monuments and Sites of the Modern Movement).

²⁴ Rebecca Ferguson, Rodney Harrison, and Daniel Weinbren, "Heritage and the Recent and Contemporary Past," ed. Tim Benton (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010), 5–6, <http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/catalogue/book.asp?id=1204538>.

²⁵ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Modern Heritage Programme," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed March 4, 2025, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/modernheritage/>.

²⁶ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "N°5 - Identification and Documentation of Modern Heritage," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed March 1, 2025, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/series/5/>.

²⁷ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "The Architectural Works of Muzharul Islam: An Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement in South Asia," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed March 1, 2025, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6674/>.

²⁸ "Time Frames," 166.

²⁹ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "N°5 - Identification and Documentation of Modern Heritage," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed February 1, 2025, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/series/5/>.

³⁰ "Modern Heritage Under Pressure: Perspectives from the Global South by John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design - Issuu," August 8, 2023, https://issuu.com/danielsfacultyuoft/docs/20230726_kimmhup_8dcb31919eddd6.

³¹ "Khan | Brussels Centre for Urban Studies," accessed March 2, 2025, <https://urbanstudies.brussels/person/ahmed-z-khan>. Ahmed-Zaib K. Mahsud, "Constantinos A. Doxiadis' Plan for Islamabad: The Making of a 'City of the Future' 1959-1963." (PhD Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven Belgium, 2008), n.d.).

³² Robert Allen Mohr, "The People in the City of the Nation : Re-Viewing Islamabad's Fifth Function" (Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009), <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/49870>; Annie Harper, "The Idea of Islamabad: Unity, Purity and Civility in Pakistan's Capital City - ProQuest," 2010, accessed

- Bureaucratic and governance aspects ³³
- It's position within Modern South Asian Architecture ³⁴

However, there is little research on Islamabad's architectural significance within global modernist heritage discourse. This thesis addresses that gap by:

- Evaluating Islamabad's modernist heritage against UNESCO criteria
- Comparing it with other UNESCO-listed modernist capitals
- Developing a preliminary framework for its nomination

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research on Islamabad's Modernist heritage and its potential nomination for UNESCO World Heritage recognition follows a structured and multi-disciplinary approach. The methodology employed in this study mirrors global best practices, similar to the methodology used for Kaunas' Modernist heritage nomination, adapted to the local context of Islamabad. The methodology comprises several key components:

- **Archival and Historical Research:** A thorough review of primary and secondary sources, including architectural plans, historical documents, and government records, to understand the development of Islamabad's modernist heritage and its significance.
- **Cartographical and Iconographical Analysis:** The study of maps, blueprints, and visual representations of Islamabad's urban design and key modernist structures to trace the evolution of the city's architecture.
- **Heritage Protection Documents:** Analysis of existing heritage conservation frameworks and policies, both in Pakistan and globally, to understand their relevance to the preservation of Islamabad's modernist buildings and their potential for UNESCO World Heritage recognition. This involved reviewing national and international guidelines on architectural preservation, as well as examining the criteria and processes for UNESCO nomination, to assess the feasibility of Islamabad's modernist heritage meeting the required standards.
- **Interviews with Architects and Scholars:** Conducting interviews with architects, urban planners, scholars, and professionals from Islamabad, especially those practicing or involved with the Capital Development Authority (CDA). These interviews focus on gathering insights into the social, cultural, and architectural significance of Islamabad's modernist structures. Particular attention was given to scholars who have written extensively about the city and professionals who have firsthand experience in shaping its urban landscape. This method provided valuable perspectives on the local and professional understanding of Islamabad's modernist heritage and its potential for UNESCO World Heritage recognition.
- **Comparative Analysis:** The boundaries of Islamabad's potential UNESCO site will be delineated through comparative analysis with other modernist cities mainly Brasilia and Chandigarh that have

February 8, 2025, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/618701766?fromopenview=true&pq-origsite=gscholar&sourcetype=Dissertations%20%20Theses>.

³³ Matthew S. (Matthew Stuart) Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), <http://archive.org/details/governmentofpape0000hull>.

³⁴ Karim, "The Modernist Historic Urban Landscape of Islamabad, Pakistan."

received UNESCO recognition or are celebrated in modern heritage discourse. This will be followed by defining the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of Islamabad's modernist heritage.

- **Organizing Attributes:** The attributes of Islamabad's modernist heritage will be organized using the themes outlined in *The Twentieth Century Historic Thematic Framework*³⁵. These attributes will be categorized into broad themes that reflect the city's unique urban design, architectural significance, and environmental integration. This process will involve analyzing Islamabad's urban structure, its symbolic role as a capital, and its sustainability principles, all of which will be essential in building a compelling case for UNESCO recognition.

This multi-disciplinary and inclusive approach ensures that the research thoroughly captures the historical, cultural, and architectural significance of Islamabad's modernist heritage, positioning it as a strong candidate for UNESCO World Heritage recognition.

RESEARCH AIM AND CONTRIBUTION

This thesis develops a preliminary nomination dossier for Islamabad, aligning with UNESCO's heritage frameworks. By applying global modernist heritage framework, this research intends to:

- Advocates for Islamabad's recognition in international heritage discourse
- Provides a template for Pakistan's future heritage nominations.
- Bridges the gap between local conservation policies and global heritage frameworks.

The study acknowledges the Preliminary Assessment³⁶ and legal requirement for national nomination before UNESCO consideration.³⁷ While this project is solely for research purposes, it follows a structured framework³⁸ to hypothetically build a case for Islamabad's inclusion on the World Heritage List.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What aspects of Islamabad's modernist design fulfill UNESCO's OUV criteria?

³⁵ Marsden, Susan. "The Twentieth-Century Historic Thematic Framework: A Tool for Assessing Heritage Places." Getty.edu, 2021.
https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/twentieth_century_historic_thematic_framework.html

³⁶ The Preliminary Assessment is a mandatory desk-based process for all sites that may be nominated to the World Heritage List and is undertaken following a request by the relevant State(s) Party(ies). Information included in the Preliminary Assessment request should build on the information provided in the Tentative List and also on any Upstream Process advice and/or Preparatory Assistance and its outcome must be provided at least one year before a full nomination dossier can be submitted by the State(s) Party(ies).

³⁷ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed March 4, 2025, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>.

³⁸ Assuming that all stages leading up to the dossier nomination are conducted hypothetically.

2. How does Islamabad compare with other UNESCO-listed modernist capitals?
3. What policy and conservation barriers prevent its nomination, and how can they be addressed?

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

- **Focus:** Islamabad as a **modernist city**, with broader implications for modern heritage in postcolonial contexts.
- **Comparisons:** Other modernist capitals, such as **Brasília and Chandigarh**.
- **Limitations:** This study focuses on establishing a theoretical framework for recognizing Islamabad's modernist heritage as a potential candidate for UNESCO World Heritage recognition. However, it does not delve into the detailed legal and procedural requirements of the UNESCO nomination process. The research is constrained by time and resource limitations, which restrict the depth of analysis. While the study identifies key modernist principles and highlights significant modernist structures in Islamabad, it does not provide an exhaustive examination of individual buildings or sites. Instead, it serves as a foundational effort to draw attention to the undervalued modernist heritage of Islamabad, offering a starting point for future, more comprehensive studies.

Islamabad represents a rare example of a fully conceptualized modernist city, integrating postcolonial identity, urban planning innovations, and global architectural discourse, as the city has been home to works by many internationally acclaimed architects, making it a true product of international and intercultural collaboration among professionals from around the world.³⁹ Despite its historical, urban and architectural significance, it remains absent from modernist heritage frameworks. This research argues that Islamabad's potential meets UNESCO's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) criteria, advocating for its recognition and conservation. Through comparative analysis, this thesis positions Islamabad within the global discourse on modernist heritage and proposes strategies to overcome existing barriers to its preservation and nomination.

³⁹ Ahmed Z. Khan Mashud, interview by Author, February 14, 2025.