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CrossRef DOI Number: [10.67244/jar.bwo-researches.v6i3.a626](https://doi.org/10.67244/jar.bwo-researches.v6i3.a626)

Link to the Paper: <https://jar.bwo-researches.com/index.php/jarh/article/view/626>

Edition Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH, 6\(3\) Jul-Sep 2026](#)

HJRS Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH \(HEC-Recognised for 2026-2027\)](#)

YouTube Link for the Paper Video Overview: <https://youtu.be/GG2RKMV2D4M>

Informal Governance, Community Resilience, and the Making of Public Space: A Case Study of Lyari, Karachi

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Paper Information

Citation of the paper:

(JARH)Shakir, M. M., Sarfaraz, S. (2026). Informal Governance, Community Resilience, and the Making of Public Space: A Case Study of Lyari, Karachi. In *Journal of Academic Research for Humanities*, 6(3), 61–76.

Subject Areas for JARH:

- 1 Community Resilience
- 2 Public Space
- 3 Social Sciences & Humanities

Timeline of the Paper at JARH:

Received on: 04-08-2026.
Reviews Completed on: 17-08-2026.
Accepted on: 26-08-2026.
Online on: 28-08-2026.

License:



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Recognised for BWO-R:



HEC Journal
Recognition System

Jointly Published by BWO Research INTL:



CrossRef DOI Image of the paper:



Abstract

QR Code for the Paper:



Public spaces in informally developed Global South settlements are frequently studied through a lens of deprivation and institutional neglect, yet research on community-managed public space in marginalized settlements remains limited. Actively used public spaces in such settlements offer critical insight into community-led spatial governance under minimal administrative control. This paper examines how community organization, cultural identity, historical attachment, informal governance, and spatial networks sustain the vibrancy and resilience of two community-led public spaces — Dreamhouse and Bambasa Street — in the oldest Baloch-majority neighbourhoods of Lyari, Karachi. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research draws on 30 semi-structured interviews, 2 focus groups, spatial mapping, and photographic documentation with space coordinators and community representatives. Findings identify historical rootedness, community networks, football and welfare organizations, informal norms, and shared cultural identity as key structuring forces sustaining these spaces and generating place identity in marginalized urban contexts. This demonstrates how community-led, self-organized governance constitutes a form of decolonial urbanism, challenging planning assumptions that treat informality as a deficiency and formal recognition as a prerequisite for legitimate public space. The paper argues for greater recognition of such informal, community-led spatial practices within urban planning and public-space governance frameworks.

Keywords: community resilience, Global South, low-income neighbourhoods, Lyari, public spaces, decolonial urbanism.

1 Introduction

Public spaces are shaped by the communities and social practices that inhabit them (Calderón & Chelleri, 2013; Madanipour, 2003). Spaces responding to local needs can become successful and socially meaningful even when not formally planned; creative adaptation and appropriation offer important lessons for understanding how public space functions in practice (Lehmann, 2023). In South Asian cities, public space commonly involves negotiation among multiple stakeholders — informal commerce, services, temporary extensions — occupying a grey zone between formal regulation and everyday use, tying particular spaces to the cultural practices and identities of their communities.

Public spaces have been classified through functional, perceptual, ownership, socio-cultural, and political-economic perspectives (Kohn, 2004). De Magalhães and Carmona (2009) distinguish overmanaged spaces, characterized by privatization, consumption-oriented design, and heightened security (Carmona, 2010a), from undermanaged spaces, which experience limited formal regulation and investment but may instead be sustained through community-based mechanisms and adaptive everyday use (Low & Smith, 2013; Pieterse, 2011; Roy, 2005; Simone, 2004) — a distinction particularly relevant where formal provision does not reflect local patterns of use.

South Asian cities show pronounced social and infrastructural inequalities reflected in the quality and condition of public spaces. In Karachi, low-income settlements span over 9% of the metropolitan area while housing almost 60% of the city's population (Hasan et al., 2013; Hasan, 2023). Despite prevailing perceptions of insecurity, some such neighbourhoods sustain localized community-managed public-space use, in which the relationship between place, ownership, social acceptance, and everyday activity is central, as the character of public space becomes closely tied to neighbourhoods and communities (Jacobs, 1961).

This paper examines two such spaces in Lyari, Karachi: Dreamhouse and Bambasa Street. Both

International "Journal of Academic Research for Humanities (JARH) 6(3)" operate within a dense, organic neighbourhood with limited formal open space, yet demonstrate different organizational configurations of community capacity — Dreamhouse through a relatively formal community organization, Bambasa Street through distributed networks of football clubs, families, residents, and supporters. The comparison examines how community practices, cultural networks, historical rootedness, and adaptive use of existing spatial resources sustain the continued activation of public space.

The study contributes to debates on decolonial urbanism by foregrounding forms of local knowledge, organization, and spatial practice often overlooked by formal planning systems. Rather than treating informality as a flaw to be formalized, it examines how community-led practices produce and sustain urban space — particularly significant in Lyari, one of Karachi's historically established settlements, where the Baloch community's long-standing attachment to place intersects with histories of neglect under colonial and post-independence governance. Formalization may otherwise reproduce planning logics that overlook the functions served by existing informal practices (Olajide et al., 2026).

The paper pursues four objectives:

1. To examine how community-led organizations and everyday practices contribute to the activation and sustained use of public spaces in Lyari.
2. To identify the socio-spatial, cultural, and institutional forces structuring the use and management of Dreamhouse and Bambasa Street.
3. To analyze, through Giddens's structuration theory and Agnew's concepts of place, the role of community networks, cultural identity, and informal governance in producing resilience and place identity.
4. To examine the implications of these practices for inclusive planning and the recognition of informally produced public spaces within decolonial approaches to

urban governance.

2 Literature Review

The character of public space is shaped by its users. 'Place' — inscribed with association, meaning, and emotional attachment — carries geographic and socio-cultural value, its identity tied to a particular locality (Tuan, 1975, 1979). Places are "socially constituted through practices... and material manifestations," simultaneously structuring and structured by social life, functioning as "a performative act and a structuring order... a medium through which social life is affected" (Gieryn, 2000, p. 468) — where community, cultural, and interpersonal relationships happen, creating place value (Altman & Low, 2012; Relph, 1976).

Accessibility to place, activities, information, and resources, alongside ownership and control, are major aspects of publicness (Benn & Gaus, 1983). A public space's social and morphological context — size, scale, proximity, and residents' social hierarchies, challenges, and affiliations — shapes its use and organization. Public spaces in low-income and informal settlements are especially actively used, as spatial and economic constraints generate necessity-driven interaction between neighbours and the community. Streets, as public spaces, carry demarcations between public and private use, host commercial, recreational, service-based, and social activities, and generate varied perceptions of inclusion, exclusion, and marginalization.

Cities display uneven development due to processes of capitalism (Harvey, 2010), with some areas receiving investment and controlled infrastructure while others are neglected, allowing informal urban processes to consolidate (Pieterse, 2011; Roy, 2005; Simone, 2004). Lehmann (2023) discusses informally adapted urban spaces as successful, entrepreneurial spaces representing the city and its stakeholders; the "unplanned" is thus a welcomed exception to formal planning order (Hall & Pfeiffer, 2013), carrying its own internal logic as a response to weak regulatory enforcement and unmet social demand. Persisting from colonial urbanism, informally developed settlements like Lyari

International "Journal of Academic Research for Humanities (JARH) 6(3)" remain historically excluded and marginalized, receiving limited planning attention (Olajide et al., 2026).

Despite limited formal planning support, these overlooked public spaces are not necessarily unplanned or neglected — ownership and claim by individuals or groups, addressing pressing local needs, can generate collective public use. This paper argues that public spaces are regulated through informal mechanisms where formal mechanisms fall short, albeit with limitations. Debates should instead reflect how people actually use public spaces: value is not defined by ownership and appearance but through "the opportunities it provides for shared use and activity" (Carmona, 2010b, p. 162). Inclusivity and use flexibility are tied to control and management, so populist public spaces characterized by informal commerce cater to local demand — pointing, through a pluralistic approach to urban knowledge and its application (Roy, 2005, 2009), toward decolonial urbanism.

Daily activities connect users to a place, creating integration and layered social and cultural association. Adjoining land uses shape a public space's activity, character, and spatial language; its publicness is defined by location, proximity, and social disposition, and its inclusive character remains subjective and relative, particularly in a large city — spaces that function well are not necessarily inclusive or democratic.

Parallel, and often contrasting, ways of seeing and acting exist within cities, neighbourhoods, and public spaces (Calderón & Chelleri, 2013; Madanipour, 1996), shaped by interactions between structuring forces and actors of specific time-place contexts — "both medium and outcome of" organized social practice (Giddens, 1984). The two cases exemplify this. Giddens (1984) describes structuring forces as allocative structures (distribution of material and human resources), authoritative structures (formal and informal rules and norms), and systems of meaning (the knowledge and cultural structures through

which action is framed and legitimated). Access to resources, governing regulations, and the ideologies driving area development together constitute structuring forces in urban planning (Healey, 2006; Madanipour, 1996); how actors manage, uphold, or reject these forces significantly shapes area development — "the ability of individuals to imagine and mobilize attention and action, discourses and practices, in ways that challenge and potentially change these structuring forces as well as sustaining them" (Healey, 2006, p. 20).

Agnew (2011) identifies two methods for analyzing place: a phenomenological analysis of how physical, social, and economic processes mediate the emerging environment, and a spatial analysis of nodes and networks that geometrically connect across a wider area to activate public spaces and their activities. A wider network of similar nodes, connected to specific social groups, gains significance where "ideas, claims and interests intersect and sometimes converge" (Desplat & Schulz, 2014). Public spaces result from complex social processes in which multiple forces and actors interact, agree, conflict, and dominate during area development (Healey, 2006; Massey, 1994). Using Giddens's (1984) and Agnew's (2011) frameworks as analytical lenses, this study examines the forces and actors shaping the making of community-led public spaces as nodes within a network, highlighting the contextual structuring forces that sustain their vibrancy and continued use.

3 Research Methodology

The study is situated in Lyari Town, Karachi, and emerges from a broader qualitative documentation of the physical and socio-cultural character of Shahbaig Lane and Baghdadi neighbourhoods. Urban spaces of social value identified through this documentation were subsequently selected for detailed qualitative study. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling, including long- and mid-term residents, community organizers, and individuals managing local institutions. Thirty in-depth interviews were conducted across the study area, alongside mapping and photographic

International "Journal of Academic Research for Humanities (JARH) 6(3)" documentation. Baghdadi was documented by final-year architecture students through the Comprehensive Environmental Design Studio, while Shahbaig Lane was documented through a concurrent research project.

Following case selection, site-specific interviews were conducted by the authors with actors involved in sustaining the two spaces: football club managers (8), core members of the Dreams of Youth Welfare Society (5) and Hussain Welfare Society (3), former street-school managers (3), and youth engaged in boxing and football (6). Findings were triangulated.

The study distinguishes between public, semi-public, community-managed, and privately owned but publicly accessible spaces, treating publicness as a graded rather than binary condition (Madanipour, 2003; Varna & Tiesdell, 2010). Bambasa Street is classified as a public space because it has unrestricted physical and legal access. Dreamhouse remains privately owned but is publicly accessible through formal authorization for DYWS's educational and community activities. Its operating hours and organizational oversight distinguish its publicness from that of Bambasa Street.

Annexure A

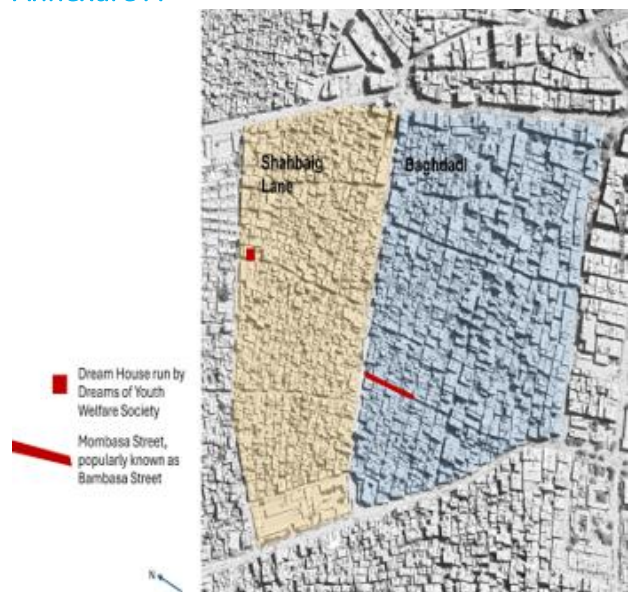


Figure 1: Locating case study areas in Shahbaig Lane and Baghdadi, Lyari – Karachi

4 Research Context: Lyari, Karachi

Among the oldest urban settlements in

Karachi, Lyari traces its origins to early eighteenth-century coastal trade realignments following the decline of Karak Bundar in 1728 and the rise of Kolachi-jo-Goth. Successive political transitions and early migrations from Sindh, Balochistan, Kutch, and Africa embedded strong clan-based social structures and cultural traditions that shaped Lyari's identity. Under British rule, the transforming port city expanded Lyari into a dense working-class neighborhood, absorbing dockworkers, fishermen, and artisans; the "Native Town" was considered unimportant for colonial governance (Lari & Lari, 1996). By the early twentieth century, Lyari had consolidated into the city's more compact and socially vibrant quarters, shaped by informal growth and limited infrastructural investment.

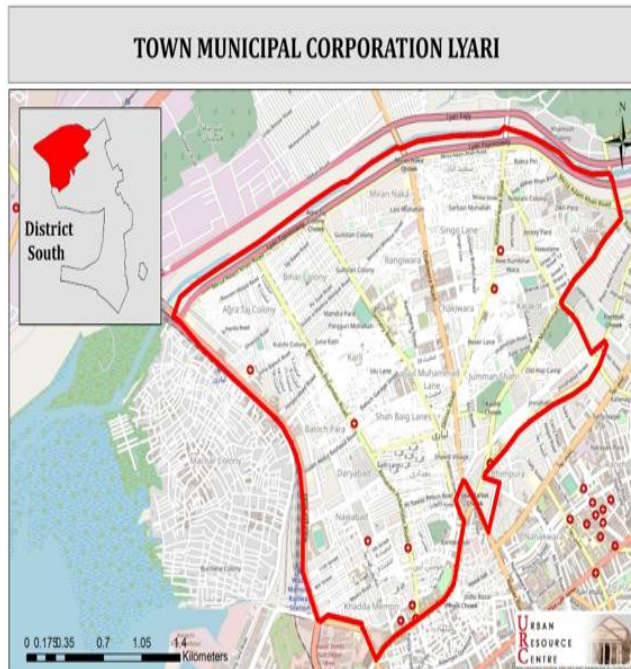


Figure 2: Lyari Town is located in the South of Karachi

Source: Urban Resource Center

Post-independence demographic shifts, poverty, unemployment, and political marginalization placed sustained pressure on Lyari's social and physical fabric. From the 1960s, informal economies and localized power networks caused instability; in the 1970s, under the PPP's mandate, the area was uplifted to make it a major electoral base. Following the Afghan war, it became a corridor for arms and drug trafficking (Viqar, 2014). Gang rivalries

International "Journal of Academic Research for Humanities (JARH) 6(3)" consolidated control over the Lyari riverbed, embedding illicit economies within everyday life, continuing for almost two decades. Declared a no-go zone, social and cultural practices are annulled amid a stressful daily life for residents. Despite prolonged violence, political manipulation, and social stigma, Lyari demonstrated persistent resilience. Following the 2013–2015 Karachi security operations that dismantled armed control, the neighborhood entered a phase of gradual recovery. Community-led initiatives — street schools, youth sports clubs, welfare anjumans, women's participation in public life, street art, cultural festivals, and collective celebrations such as the Football World Cup — actively reclaimed streets, grounds, and everyday public spaces (Alikhan, 2022), reinforcing Lyari's collective identity and culture of community engagement.

4.1 Baghdadi and Shahbaig Lane, Lyari neighbourhoods

The two adjoining sub-neighbourhoods of Baghdadi and Shahbaig Lane are predominantly residential, high-density areas shaped by population pressure and affordability constraints, with tightly clustered housing on small-to-medium plots (40–120 sq. yards) and narrow internal lanes (3–12 ft). These conditions support frequent social interaction and informal street life.



Figure 3: Street picture, Baghdadi



Figure 4: Street picture, Shahbaig Lane

Source: Authors 2025.

Shahbaig Lane has a density of 612 people per acre, while adjacent Baghdadi reaches 775 people per acre, with smaller plots of 40 sq. yards and narrower streets (Figure 4). The area is predominantly Baloch (approximately 80%), with a Katchi minority (20%) (CED student social survey, 2025; Gazdar & Mallah, 2013). Both neighbourhoods combine planned and informal development. Public amenities include schools, healthcare, community centers, mosques, imambargah, churches, and a mandir, reflecting religious diversity and everyday interfaith coexistence. Regulatory authorities have largely overlooked informal development in such areas (Interview with Building Control Authority official, 2024; Hasan, 2015). Subsequent informal encroachments following area leasing have prompted weakening regulatory control.

Annexure B

The Baloch residents' socio-cultural networks have contributed to distinctive activity patterns, particularly around football, alongside sports like chess and bird fighting. Approximately 33 social welfare and football clubs (Figure 7) are privately supported by traditional families through regular donations. Together, they create a network, examined in later sections.

Figure 5 maps Giddens's (1984) structuring dimensions onto the area's public amenities, community organizations, and cultural identity. Social networks extend beyond individual sites:

Dreamhouse is connected to other projects and spaces of DYWS, while the compact urban morphology of Baghdadi reinforces the role of streets as multifunctional public spaces used for play, gathering, vending, football, and livestock.

As part of a broader study of four low-income Karachi neighbourhoods by the authors, Lyari was noted for its youth networks, historical settlement, and residents' place attachment (Focus Group Discussion at Dreamhouse, 2024). These characteristics constituted the criteria for the selected cases. Dreamhouse functions as a community anchor within Shahbaig Lane, while Bambasa Street illustrates the adaptation of an ordinary residential street into a socially significant public space in Baghdadi.

5 Case Study 1: Dreamhouse, Shahbaig Lane

Dreamhouse is a project of DYWS, a non-profit founded in 2013 and listed in 2018. Active since 2021, it is described by founding member Sabeer Ahmed as a safe community space with outreach covering three-quarters of Lyari. Developed post-gang war as an activity hub for women, children, and older residents seeking positive collaboration, it is one of four DYWS learning centers in Lyari.

Originally a residence in dilapidated condition, it was converted into a community space dedicated to education and cultural activities — beginning as a tuition center before expanding to language courses, a computer lab, skills training for girls, and a multipurpose audiovisual room. Today, Dreamhouse hosts a kindergarten-to-grade-three morning school; evening hours host skills training and community activities, including exhibitions, music performances, and workshops, with community engagements scheduled on weekends.

Management operates across four levels — Dreamhouse activities board, DYWS governing body, general body members, and operational team — with different people participating according to their inclinations and capacities.

On a 150 sq yd plot entered through a safe open gate, its spatial character is marked by a portico, colonnade, and central courtyard with a

tree. The L-shaped structure has an upper storey accessed via an open staircase and a semi-covered terrace used for gathering; brightly painted walls, potted plants, and pet birds create a natural, welcoming ambience.

Annexure C

Dreamhouse caters to various ethnic and social groups within the neighbourhood and beyond, drawing people through shared concerns and interests. Amid a densifying neighbourhood facing plot subdivisions and floor additions, its central courtyard and linking spaces create a safe, distinct community space accommodating multiple functions, sustained by educated youth and the DYWS network.

Annexure D

Public space in informally developed settlements, as this case shows, cannot be understood through a simple public/private binary; it can emerge through appropriation, adaptation, and shifting relationships between private structures and collective use (Kamalipour, 2023; Kamalipour & Dovey, 2020).



Figure 8: Dream House courtyard used for various community events

Source: Sabeer Ahmed



Figure 9: Dream House Multimedia room

Source: Samia Sarfaraz



Figure 9: The street outside Dream House, used for community events too, is called "Dream Street."

Source: Shabbir, B. (2023). Iftar feast lights up Ramadan for Pakistani kids in an impoverished city neighborhood. Arab News.

6 Case Study 2: Bambasa Street, Baghdad

Bambasa Street was well known in the 1980s–90s for its pioneering street school, set up by four founding members in response to poverty and restrained access to schooling. Known as the Baloch Free Tuition Center, it operated within the street between curtains, using adjoining residence walls painted as blackboards (Figures 11–12), for about 18 years (1980–1998) across two evening shifts for primary and secondary levels (Interview, Mahmood Alam, November 2025).

The street school functioned as educational and social infrastructure produced through collective action, motivating 60 more similar schools across Lyari, with a shared administrative board for extracurriculars, exams, and celebrations — a claim to public space under the motto "learn and teach," engaging the educated to teach others. Interviews highlight well-known poets, writers, and educationists produced through this, now settled across the country and abroad.

Today, Bambasa Street hosts FIFA World Cup screenings every four years (1988, 1992, 2022, 2026), drawing the community's enthusiasm for football with high-spirited, energetic celebration (Figures 13–17); up to 300

people gather in a street no more than 12–15 ft wide. Three football clubs are situated on the street, part of a wider network owned and managed through generations of families, organizing tournaments at local grounds — the blackboards once used for teaching now announce tournament schedules.

In the post-gang war period, community support for education, sport, and welfare has been part of a longer process of social recovery. Political mobilization by the Baloch community further lobbied for public amenities, including hospitals and sports facilities — community action thus extends beyond maintaining existing space to collective claims upon the formal city.



Figure 11: Street School in Baghdadi, Lyari, Karachi

Source: Model Street School (Aug, 2022) Facebook.



Figure 12: Street School, Baghdadi

Source: Jamil Khan, Lyari Street Schools: Street Education,

<https://jamilkhan.wordpress.com/lyari-street-schools/>



Figure 13: Football match screening at Bambasa Street

Source: City Life – Lyari during FIFA World Cup, The Karachi Walla, 7 July 2018.



Figure 14: Painted walls with flags of countries and teams supported by Lyari youth.

Source: Comprehensive Environmental Design Studio on Lyari, 2025





Figures 15, 16 and 17: Celebrating the FIFA World Cup at Bamba Street, June 2026.

Source: Authors

7 Comparative Findings

The two cases demonstrate different configurations of community-led publicness, shaped by access, management, and patterns of use rather than ownership alone (Németh and Schmidt, 2011; Varna and Tiesdell, 2010; Table 2). Neither derives its continuing significance from formal planning. The networks activating them differ in form: resources and norms concentrate within an organizational hierarchy at Dreamhouse and are distributed across clubs and families at Bamba Street. Both nonetheless demonstrate adaptive appropriation, with spatial flexibility enabled by social practice — consistent with research suggesting public space in informal settlements is often produced incrementally through appropriation rather than formal design (Kamalipour, 2023). Spatial adaptation, in both

International “Journal of Academic Research for Humanities (JARH) 6(3)” cases, proves inseparable from organizational and cultural networks.

Annexure E

The comparison highlights domains of inclusivity within each space's organizational framework, including ethnic/religious inclusion and political mobilization — both requiring further investigation. The actors identified are not simply users of space but participants in practices that mobilize resources, organize activities, and reproduce shared meanings.

Both spaces are sustained through this interaction of actors, resources, and practices. Football clubs do not merely use Bamba Street; through tournaments, team organization, and screenings, they repeatedly reinforce football as a collective practice tied to the street. Similarly, DYWS's organizational structure enables recurring educational and cultural activities that reinforce Dreamhouse as a community-oriented facility.

This process connects structuration to place. Agnew (2011) conceptualizes place through the relationship between location, locale, and sense of place, emphasizing that places are not merely physical containers of activity. In both cases, repeated practices and networks attach meaning and social relationships to locations, contributing to their recognition as community spaces.

8 Discussion

8.1 Structuring Community Resilience

Continued activation of community spaces in Lyari cannot be explained by physical characteristics alone. Spatial form, historical attachment, organizational capacity, cultural practices, and social networks interact to sustain collective use (Table 2). Community resilience is therefore articulated as an ongoing capacity to sustain and adapt collective functioning through available social and material resources (Norris et al., 2008; Magis, 2010).

Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) explains this process of sustenance through the duality of structure. Actors draw upon existing rules and resources while their practices reproduce or modify the conditions for

subsequent action. Practices that mobilize resources, reproduce social norms and meanings, and adapt existing spatial conditions lead to consistent use.

Dominant planning rationalities fail to recognize practices and capacities through which marginalized populations produce and sustain urban space in Global South contexts (Roy, 2005; Watson, 2009). Two different organizational configurations include a relatively formal community organization for Dreamhouse and a distributed form and network activate Bambasa Street.

Resilience can involve continuity through transformation, as actors mobilize existing resources and relationships while adapting practices to changing conditions (Giddens, 1984). Bambasa Street's transition from Baloch Free Tuition Center to football-based activities illustrates the reconfiguration of its practices, networks, and meanings within the same street.

8.2 Mechanisms for Community Resilience

Historical rootedness and place attachment. Historical memories, sustained participation, and collective relationships contribute to the continued social significance of places (Zahid & Misirlisoy, 2021; Low, 2022). At Bambasa Street, the memory of street schooling forms a history of community mobilization, while football has added new layers of collective meaning. Dreamhouse represents a different trajectory, emerging through the transformation of a distressed residential property into a recognized community facility. In both cases, place attachment is produced through accumulated relationships between people, activities, and locations, consistent with Agnew's (2011) understanding of place through location, locale, and sense of place.

Community organization and governance. Demonstrating distinct forms of community governance, Dreamhouse relies on a relatively formal organizational structure that provides continuity, coordination, and access to resources, while Bambasa Street relies on family patronage, football clubs, and informal community norms. Collective capacity is sustained through these configurations.

Cultural networks and intergenerational continuity. DYWS's wider network of learning and welfare initiatives connects Dreamhouse to activities beyond the building, while football clubs at Bambasa sustain relationships across generations. These networks support the circulation of knowledge, responsibilities, and social relationships through which collective practices are maintained (Giddens, 1984).

Spatial constraints and adaptive appropriation. Lyari's dense morphology encourages residents to adapt available spaces, of which the two cases are examples. They demonstrate collective functioning through adaptation and repeated use of places (Kamalipour, 2023).

8.3 Resilience and Publicness

Community resilience does not indicate uniform patterns of participation. Neither case showed evidence of explicit exclusion, but participation varied by gender, age, and activity. For example, Dreamhouse's community activities involve active female participation, while at Bambasa, women are less visible in football-related gatherings. Shaped by both access and social context, community resilience may coexist with uneven participation.

The relationship between resilience and publicness is highlighted thereby. Resilience should therefore be assessed not only through sustained activity but also through organizational influence: who participates, who organizes, and who influences the production of space.

8.4 Publicness and Community-Led Urban Capacity

Publicness is produced and maintained through access, control, management, and patterns of use (Németh & Schmidt, 2011; Varna & Tiesdell, 2010). Dreamhouse, though privately owned, is community-oriented and often invites specific groups; Bambasa Street lies within the public domain but acquires collective significance through informal organization and recurring practice.

Community capacity does not require the absence of formal institutions, actors can

engage formal structures while simultaneously organizing resources, adapting spaces, and sustaining collective activity. Recognizing community-led spatial production does not mean treating informal practices as inherently equitable or superior to formal planning; it means acknowledging forms of spatial knowledge, organization, and resource mobilization that conventional frameworks may overlook (Roy, 2005; Watson, 2009).

In Lyari, resilience emerges from the interaction of historical rootedness, community organization, cultural networks, and adaptive spatial practice, identifying the socio-spatial mechanisms through which such settlements are actively (re)produced as resilient.

Publicness thus appears relational rather than determined by ownership alone, though community-produced publicness remains socially differentiated and should be assessed against participation, access, and internal power relations. Community-led spatial production is best understood as an existing form of urban capacity operating alongside — and sometimes in response to — limitations in formal provision, without romanticizing informality or substituting for formal planning.

9 Implications for Urban Planning and Decolonial Urbanism

The binary of public and private space separation is part of modern planning. The traditional, indigenous settlement is described as graded with semi-public space types (Hosagrahar 2005; Shakir 2018). These semi-public spaces are safe, not inclusive, and clearly delineate space use, producing spaces addressing community needs. Decolonial urbanism does not reject Western planning, but prompts simultaneous recognition of pluralistic knowledge and informal ways of organization within existing planning practice. It promotes inclusivity in space organization, management, and regulation. The decolonial approach challenges the binary, recognizing that informality is produced due to the actions or lack of actions by the state itself. It is not something outside of planning and can be accommodated, recognized, and regulated by the

International “Journal of Academic Research for Humanities (JARH) 6(3)” state itself (Roy 2005). This requires recognition of the continued patterns of colonial planning, policy, and regulation, referred to as coloniality (Quijano 2000).

10 Limitations

Case-based studies cannot be generalized to all similar cases. The analysis of public spaces of Bambasa Street and Dreamhouse can be applied to similar places within Lyari (Figure 7), since the area and attached community have a shared past. It, however, does not apply to other low-income settlements of later origin, belonging to other communities.

11 Conclusion

Acceptance and recognition of increasing inequality and informality in Karachi city due to continued coloniality and the need to be inclusive and pluralistic in strategies of public space planning and governance will instill sustainable collaborations in city development. Addressing decolonial urbanism can target issues of rising disparities in developing cities. Semi-public spaces controlled and managed by community organizations are responsive to communities and their socio-cultural needs (Coppola and Vanolo, 2022). Spatial configuration (allocative), community organization (authoritative), and values shared by the community together structure forces that enliven public space (Giddens 1984). Networks and nodes (Agnew 2000) support allocative forces for public spaces in informally developing neighbourhoods.

12 Recommendation

Recognizing and supporting such mechanisms through governance can foster improved urban living. Alternative governance arrangements may redistribute responsibilities for producing and maintaining publicness among public, private, and voluntary actors (De Magalhães, 2010). Infrastructure support, like access to water and electricity, can reduce deprivation. If supported, disadvantaged neighbourhoods with such public spaces can create positive social and cultural development, offering engagement and inspiration for other city residents and youth.

13 Innovation

The study contributes a decolonial reading of urban governance, highlighting self-organized community practices that sustain public spaces where formal planning remains limited — not as a deficiency, but as evidence of local actors mobilizing resources, networks, and collective practice to maintain and adapt space.

This extends work on undermanaged public spaces (Carmona, 2010a) by showing how grassroots organizations govern. Despite varying form and effectiveness, community-managed spaces share recurring mechanisms of sustained use: structural reproduction through everyday practice (Giddens, 1984), historical-cultural rootedness, and networks linking people, activities, and place (Agnew, 2011).

The innovation, therefore, lies in identifying socio-spatial mechanisms through which resilience and publicness are produced under different organizational configurations. The study contributes empirical evidence for understanding community-led urban capacity in the Global South without romanticizing informality.

14 Declarations

Ethics Statement:

The study aligns with the ethical research guidelines of the Advanced Studies Research Board at NED University. Interviews and focus groups informed participants of the purpose of the research, taking verbal consent and noting requests for anonymity.

Declaration of conflicting interest:

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to this research, authorship, and publication.

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Annexure A

Table 1: Data collection methods and protocols

Method	Sample/Participants	Sampling Approach	Structure/Protocol	Purpose
In-depth interviews	30 residents, community organizers, managers, and youth.	Snowball sampling, via community-embedded contacts	Semi-structured	Perceptions, governance, historical narratives
Focus groups	2: one at Bambasa Street, one at Dreamhouse	Participants invited via Dream House management and community contacts; diverse cross-section	Group discussion at the community site conducted by the authors	Stakeholder viewpoints
Mapping		Spatial mapping using AutoCAD, satellite imagery verified through field visits, twice a week for six months.		Physical and relational spatial structure
Photographs		Detailed photo documentation with community consent; collecting over 1,000 photographs.		Spatial and everyday activity documentation
Student studio documentation	Baghdadi neighbourhood, led by students under faculty supervision	Snowball sampling	Comprehensive Environment Design Studio course, 2025	Spatial/photographic documentation, cross-verified by authors

Annexure B

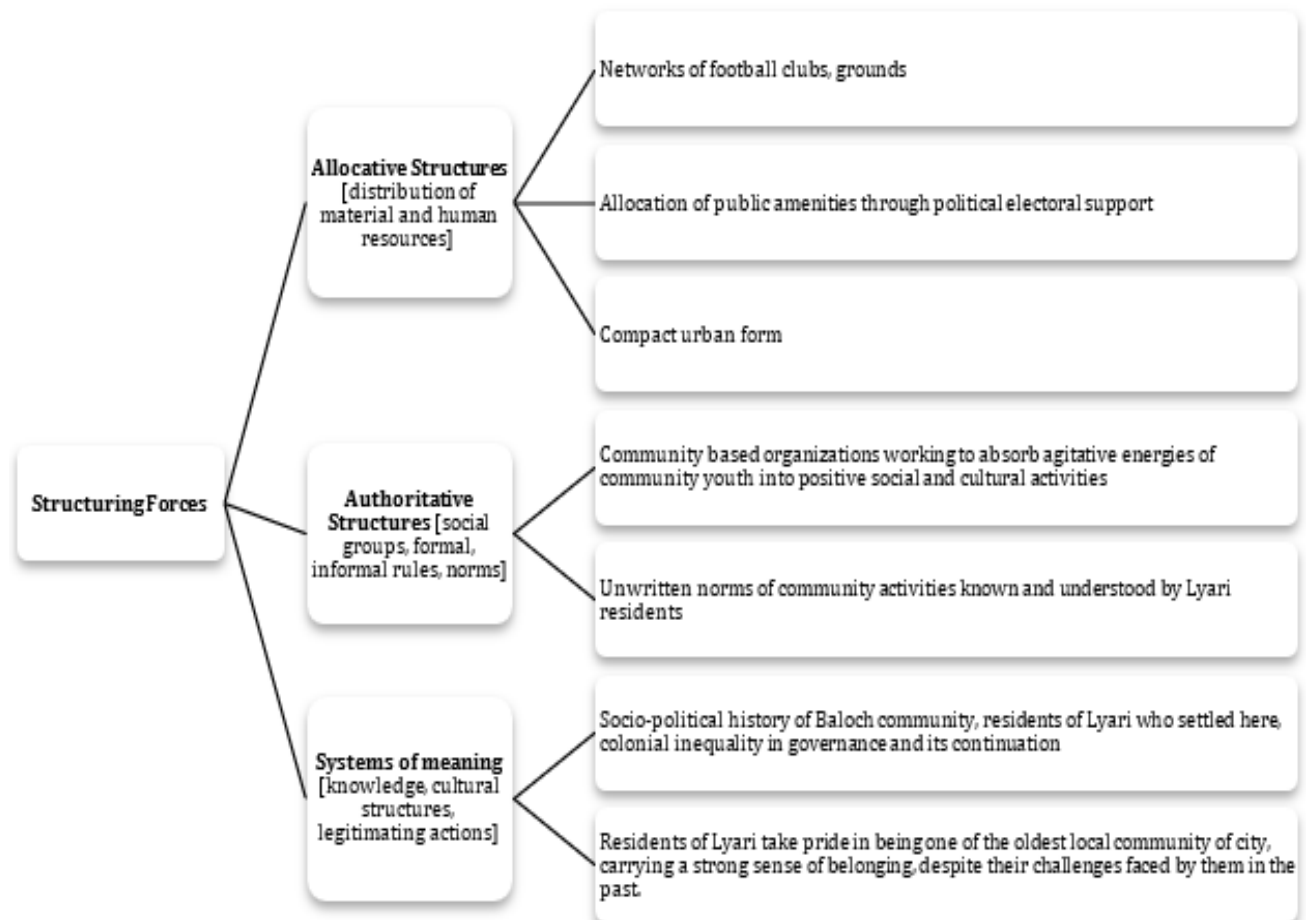


Figure 5: Linking theory to case study analysis

Source: Author adapting Anthony Giddens' theory to the case

Annexure C

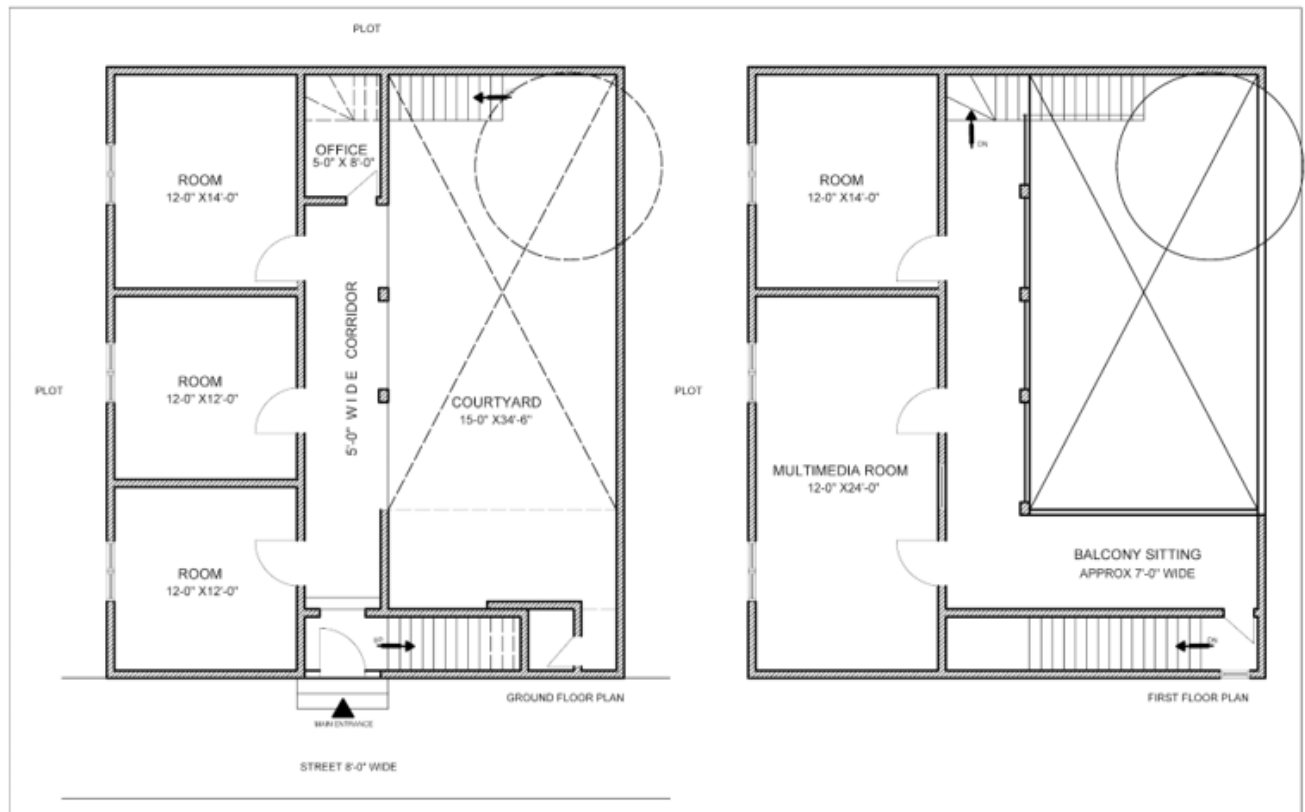


Figure 6: Plan of the Dream House

Source: Authors

Annexure D

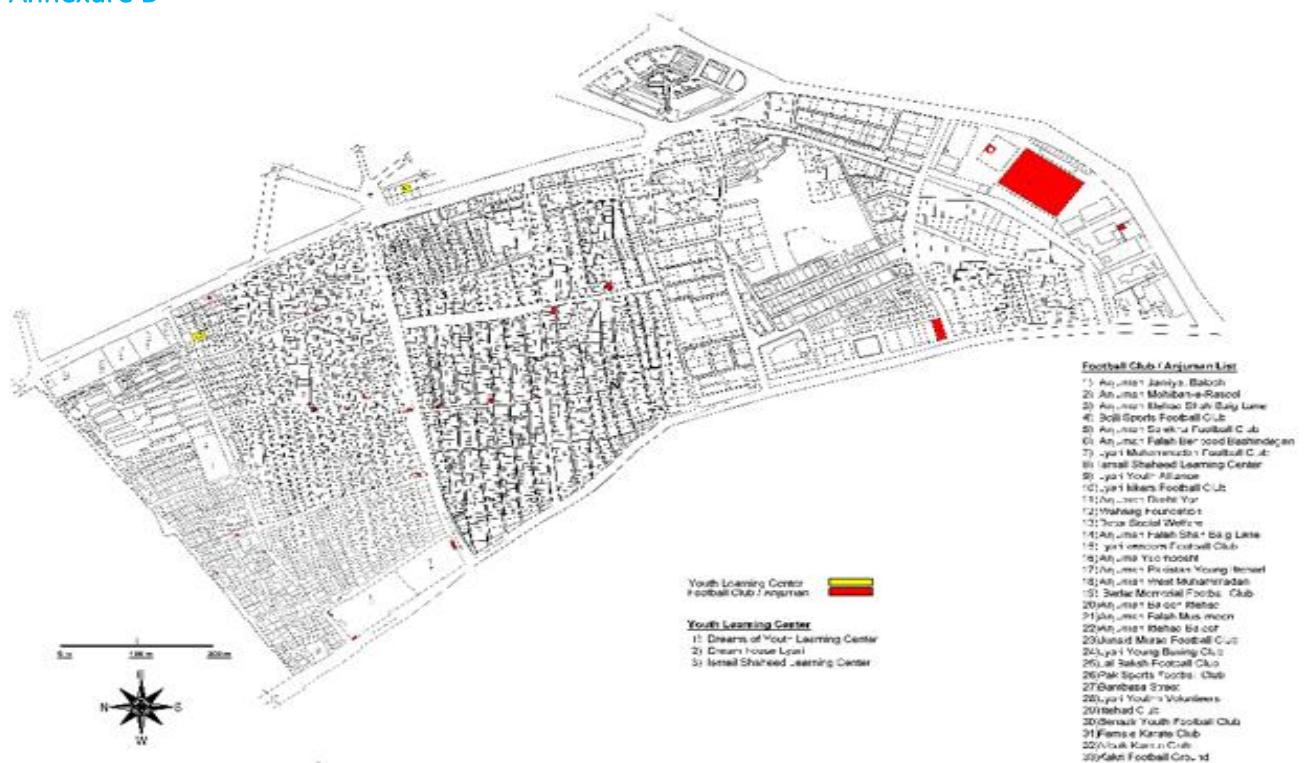


Figure 7: Nodes and Networks: Map showing football welfare clubs, karate clubs, and youth learning centers managed by DYWS.

Source: Authors

Annexure E

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Dreamhouse and Bambasa Street

Dimension	Dream House	Bambasa Street	Comparative significance
Spatial form	Community facility within a converted residential plot; courtyard, colonnade, and semi-open spaces	Tertiary street 12–15 ft wide	Different spatial forms can support sustained collective use
Publicness	Privately owned but community-oriented and semi-public	Publicly accessible residential street; event-based publicness	Publicness is produced through use and social legitimacy, besides ownership
Historical trajectory	Residential property → community facility active since 2021	Street school (1980–1998) → disruption during gang conflict → football-led reactivation	Resilience involves both institution-building and reactivation after disruption
Primary functions	Education, training, arts, culture, community engagement	Circulation, football, screenings, tournaments, and historically, street education	Different activities generate recurring collective practices
Governance	DYWS board, governing body, volunteers, and operational team	Football clubs, families, athletes, residents, and informal community coordination	Centralized organizational structure versus distributed community governance
Allocative resources	Dedicated plot and institutional facilities	Street space, club resources, family support, and neighbourhood facilities	Resources are organized differently but support collective activity.
Authoritative resources	DYWS organizational hierarchy and recognized community leadership	Distributed authority among clubs, organizers, and community actors	Authority is centralized in one case and networked in the other
Network	Node within the wider network of DYWS's facilities	Football clubs and neighbourhood networks	Both spaces function as nodes within wider socio-spatial networks
Cultural infrastructure	Education, arts, training, workshops, and community events	Football clubs, tournaments, screenings, and street-school legacy	Cultural practices provide continuity and meaning
Inclusion	Reported use by different social groups	Participation extends beyond the immediate neighbourhood during events	Inclusion requires further systematic investigation
Political context	Primarily community-organizational and welfare-oriented	Community political mobilization is also linked to claims for public amenities	Community action can operate both within and beyond the space
Adaptive mechanism	Conversion and multifunctional use of a residential property	Temporal/event-based appropriation of an ordinary street	Both demonstrate adaptive appropriation of existing urban space
Form of resilience	Institutionalized community capacity	Distributed/networked community capacity	Resilience can be sustained through different organizational configurations.