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Adapting Grounded Theory to Investigate Sustainability Heritage in Informal Settlements: Case Studies from Islamabad, Pakistan

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Abstract: The paper investigates the sustainability potential of the intangible cultural heritage preserved in informal settlements seen as an extension of rurality in urban settings. It delves into this underexplored dimension of sustainability in the context of the Global South by analysing two informal settlements in Islamabad, Pakistan, namely, France Colony and Mehr Abadi. The grounded theory is adapted by using semistructured interviews during transect walks through the informal settlements followed by a thematic analysis conducted of the experiences, memories, values, religious beliefs, and norms of the dwellers in the two case studies. Four themes are deduced that identify sustainability heritage: (a) values and social practices; (b) communal networks and relationships; (c) built environment and ecology; and (d) remnants of rurality. The study contends that informal settlements are reservoirs of vernacular sustainability elements, and their cultural heritage should be supported instead of imposing planning policies influenced by the North. Culturally specific solutions acceptable to the informal communities are needed to improve the liveability within the city and inform the policy-making process. This requires finding a mechanism for preserving the indigenous regional culture in the informal settlements, their rich heritage, and sustainability-oriented knowledge and practices.

Keywords: grounded theory; sustainability; informal settlements; Islamabad; rurality



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1. Introduction

Rurality has multiple facets and dimensions. It has tangible and intangible attributes that together formulate the fabric of the rural environment and lifestyle. The tangible assets of natural scenery and village architecture build the imagery of the rural environment [1]. Still, the character of rurality is shaped by deep-rooted intangible attributes in social heritage that are narrated through cultural values, customs, norms, and rituals. The rural lifestyle revolves around the principles of self-sustenance, and the livelihoods reflect basic human necessities [2]. Through their occupation in agriculture, livestock farming, mining, or forestry, the prosperity of the rural dwellers is closely dependent on nature. The rural image celebrates a human-scale vernacular architecture that is mostly self-built with locally sourced materials.

In many rural communities, housing is mostly constructed on an incremental basis with community support using traditional techniques. The concept of incremental housing identified by John Turner [3] in relation to informal urban settlements is built upon the attributes of self-help and incremental building observed in rural architecture. Rural housing design tends to include adaptive ecological technology to deliver features, such as natural ventilation, wind circulation, temperature control, use of biogas, and solar energy. Rural architecture is based not only on sustainably harnessing natural processes and materials but also on upholding values that are respectful of the biophysical environment, promoting community participation, self-reliance, and self-sustenance through ancestral

wisdom. The sociocultural make-up of a place is reflected in the attention to customs, cuisines, social priorities, social integration, spirituality, folklore, and religious rituals [4]. These broad ranging factors influence the shape and character of the built environment. The attributes of the rural environment thus reflect the sociocultural and ecological choices the dwellers make over time. Instead of individualism and consumerism, rural communities tend to opt for community building and prioritise nature. In a country such as Pakistan, these virtues have led to a peaceful environment that evokes spirituality and sensitivity similar to the influences of Sufi spirituality [5].

Informal settlements represent a cultural marriage between the urban and rural fabric and provide habitat for the rural migrants within the city setting [6]. As rural to urban migration continues in the Global South, it pulls in rural dwellers who assimilate into the informal settlements of the city occupying unused spaces within the formal urban fabrics, such as riverbanks, escarpments, and road verges [7]. It is estimated that one billion people live in such informal settlements or informalities, mainly in low- and middle-income countries [8]. In many parts of the world, the sites for these informalities represent rural–urban interfaces [9] (p. 149). Investigating the elements present in informal settlements that depict the cultural residue of their dwellers’ rural lifestyle could aid in creating context-specific solutions for the urban spaces. Such an approach would provide a viable alternative to the application of Euro-American theories to other settings without fully understanding the particular context [9]. In the case of Pakistan, such an investigation can impact the urban planning paradigm where the formal-informal duality determines current practice regardless of the social, cultural, or environmental sustainability elements of the place.

There has been very limited research from a sustainability perspective about the role and future prospects of informalities in the Global South. A thematic review conducted by Azunre et al. [10] concludes that in the case of Ghana informalities contribute towards economic opportunities by providing employment as well as help in dealing with issues related to waste management, organic urban agriculture, social equity, and innovation. The authors argue for informalities to be seen through a productive lens and as part of the city development process. Another example is the 2020 quantitative study of two Indonesian kampungs [11], which concludes that placemaking in these informal settlements contributes to local empowerment and social connections between residents, while the link with their perceptions about quality of life was not that clear. The research by Soliman [12] analyses social inclusivity and exclusivity in urban informalities within the context of the Middle East and argues that informal settlements contribute towards reducing segregation and maintaining community cohesion. However, these papers do not raise the issue about cultural heritage and its role in the city. On the other hand, although there are numerous studies which analyse urban heritage, e.g., Baumanova [13], Hassan et al. [14], Perry et al. [15], and Udeaja et al. [16], they do not specifically analyse it as cultural heritage within the context of informal settlements. In the vein of the argument put forward by Cobbinah et al. [17] about the relevance of informal settlements in urban development, this study aims at understanding the culture of the informalities in Islamabad, Pakistan and linking it to advancing the city’s planning process.

The paper contends that informal settlements can be seen as places of diversity and cultural hubs, inhabited by striving enthusiastic people, who have greater ability to adapt and survive with the bare minimum resources. This alternative view of informal settlements has been suggested by theorists, such as P. Turner, John, and Mangin, who see them as a “highly successful solutions to the problem of mass urbanization” [18] (p. 127) by self-help and community participation. The present study builds on such ideologies to find the latent elements of spatiocultural values and sustainability that have shaped the informal community in order to explore them as assets for further development. Urban informalities are labelled as slums, shanty towns, ghettos, or squatters, and the UN-Habitat 2003 report defines informalities as “a heavily populated urban area characterised by substandard housing and squalor” [19] (p. 8). Davis describes informal settlements as situations of “overcrowding, poor or informal housing, inadequate access to safe water and sanitation

and insecurity of tenure” [20] (pp. 22–23). They are considered as “spatial manifestations of social inequality” built “without any planning regulations or building controls” [21] (p. 1). Such definitions overlook the ability of the informal settlements to give opportunity of affordable housing to the rural immigrants and to fill the gaps of housing shortage caused predominantly by inadequate and inefficient urban planning and policy. We seek to emphasise that understanding the place of informalities within the urban fabric differs from viewing them as unhealthy and overcrowded areas of social injustice, a manifestation of housing shortage, sociospatial exclusion, and, most emphatically, poverty-stricken zones.

This paper analyses specifically the social and cultural aspects of the informal settlements in the spatial setting of Islamabad’s modernist plan. It defines informal settlements as places that are self-builds with inadequate security of land tenure [21], poor housing, infrastructure, sanitation, and other services [22] but also as a medium of cultural proliferation from rural areas to the city [18]. They may thus also contain sustainability attributes which, if adequately identified, could effectively be utilised to relieve the pressure on the urban environment.

According to Markulev and Long [23] (p. 1), sustainability “refers to the capacity to continue an activity or process indefinitely. It can be related to any number of economic, social, or environmental activities”. As a paradigm shift, sustainability appeared in scholarly theories post industrialisation when it was realised that the planet is unable to sustain current lifestyles, energy consumption patterns, and the resulting pollution and that the world is destined to become a degraded space if nothing is done to curtail environmental stresses and significantly reduce irreversible damage. Although sustainability is a complex and multifaceted term, it is immensely significant as it is directly related to human survival. With an increasing proportion of the world’s population living in urbanised areas, the challenges of urbanisation and the stresses created by unsustainable urban lifestyles and climatic changes continue to escalate “with heritage diminishing at an alarming rate” [16] (p. 1). As explained by Cobbinah et al. [17] (p. np), in “this era of rapid urbanisation, an understanding of the role of culture in advancing urban planning and development is important for effective urban management”, especially in the Global South where the culture of informality is dominant.

This study focuses primarily on the social aspects of human settlements, but due to the elusive and integrated nature of sustainability, it is inevitable that the others are also discussed. Sustainability has many layers folded together in a complex manner that are often difficult to separate with social well-being, environmental health, and economic prosperity being intertwined [24]. Meanwhile, Barron and Gauntlett [25] (p. 12) point out that in order “to attain social sustainability, communities need to be progressive, equitable, diverse, connected, democratic and provide a good quality of life”. This applies to all human settlements, and the study specifically explores the informalities. The research question posed is whether informal settlements contain latent sustainability elements that are worth preserving. In particular, the study seeks to answer this within the context of informal settlements in Islamabad.

The use of grounded theory and the specific approaches adopted to explore two urban informalities in Islamabad, namely, France Colony and Mehr Abadi, are explained first. This is followed by a presentation of the results organised around four major themes, namely, values and social practices; communal networks and relationships; built environment and ecology; and remnants of rurality. The discussion outlines the need for a paradigm shift in policy making towards improved sustainability, where the significance of cultural heritage should be acknowledged and maintained. This will sustain urban informalities as vibrant, sustainable places within the burgeoning city environment. The paper closes with some concluding remarks, which argue for recognising the blend of rurality and city life in the urban fabric of the informal settlements. An ethics approval for conducting the study was obtained in accordance with Australia’s National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research requirements.

2. Materials and Methods

Focussing on the sociocultural sustainability elements in the intangible cultural heritage of the informalities, the study uses a grounded theory approach. It investigates the underexplored realm of informal settlements with specific reference to two informal settlements in Islamabad, Pakistan. The nature of grounded theory is explained first followed by a description of the fieldwork carried out to conduct the two case studies. Specific details about the interviews conducted and the use of gatekeepers and data analysis are then presented.

2.1. Grounded Theory

Originating from the work of Glaser and Strauss [26], grounded theory attempts to transcend traditional qualitative research from its descriptive nature into formation of a theoretical framework devised from abstract explanations and a comparative analysis of social processes with an open mind [27]. Grounded theory hence is used to produce a theoretical framework to study an area that is unexplored, assuming “... all of the concepts pertaining to a given phenomenon have not yet been identified, at least not in this population and place. Or, if so, the relationships between the concepts are poorly understood or conceptually undeveloped” [28] (p. 53). Thus, using grounded theory, the researcher embarks on the journey of data collection without any hypotheses as the aim is to discover new explanations, theories, and avenues of understanding social phenomena with an open mindset. Once theories or hypotheses emerge from the qualitative research, then they can be tested quantitatively, e.g., Wilson et al. [29], Gilgun [30], and Payne [31]. In their original work, Glaser and Strauss in fact warned against imposing hypotheses, which cannot be changed but only tested (confirmed or rejected) on the data [26]. According to Payne [31], some of the situations when researchers should use grounded theory are when little is known about the topic area and when there is interest to elicit participants’ views, perceptions, and experiences.

Given that the area of informal settlements is almost unexplored in terms of sustainability and culture, this study uses grounded theory to reveal undiscovered and latent dimensions of urban processes in the marginalised communities of Pakistan. Within a grounded theory approach, different structured guidelines can be applied to conduct the study by utilising techniques, such as interviews, coding, observation, photography, memo writing, and in-depth interviews during transect walks through the area of investigation. These research methods ensure simultaneous data analysis, contextual originality, and conceptual density of the theoretical process under study [26]. They also allow for data triangulation [32].

Interviews are one of the main methods for data collection in grounded theory and are also used in this study. They intend to investigate the core phenomenon or the socio-cultural process, casual conditions, strategies taken, and consequences [26] and clarify the different dimensions of the area of interest through a holistic understanding [28]. Photographs and observations made during transect walks of the area of investigation can also play an important role in deciphering the spatial and visual elements that are not conveyed through interviews.

Coding is a technique of labelling and categorising transcripts to extract deeper meanings from the lines of information and find connections between different categories. This analytical process is the core of the grounded theory methodology and needs to be performed effectively, meticulously, without preconceptions, and with an open mind. This allows for the data collection and analysis to be carried out simultaneously. The codes are put into categories for classification and further analysis and later on assessed in relevance to explored concepts, sustainability in this case. Memo writing is also an essential part of the process; it is a conversation with oneself and so a reflective way of analysing the data collection process. In essence, memos are stories of the process that help in exploring the theoretical framework at different stages of the fieldwork and thus emphatically contribute to the new knowledge development [27].

As an inductive approach aimed at discovering a fresh theory, grounded theory is grounded in the collected data. In this particular study, the coding of the in-depth interviews with dwellers of the informal settlements leads to a theoretical framework for the research [27]. The data analysis seeks answers to the research question to reach a conclusion [33] as it relates to the particular investigated area.

2.2. Case Studies

Out of 63 informal settlements in Islamabad [34], two were chosen as fieldwork sites, based on their location and basic characteristics. Yin states that it is always appropriate to use two or more case studies, which are within the same research in order to create a situation of replication [35]. According to Davis [20], informal settlements fall into two categories—metro core and periphery. These two different types of informal communities, one metro core, France Colony, and the other periphery, Mehr Abadi, are used to understand variables and commonalities and to support the reasons behind the findings from these cases.

Access to informal settlements is not always straightforward for outsiders. The informal communities are very well-knit and may become offended by foreign intrusion. A strategy adopted in this study is to use gatekeepers—socially responsive individuals who are prepared to help in the research process and facilitate access to the settlement. Therefore, the availability of a gatekeeper for access into the community and convenience were important considerations in the selection of the case studies [36]. Convenience is the most commonly used sampling technique [36], but in this case it was also combined with purposive selection [37] as we explicitly looked for representation of metro core and periphery informalities. According to Lavrakas [37] (p. 300), “A gatekeeper is a person who stands between the data collector and a potential respondent. Gatekeepers, by virtue of their personal or work relationship to a respondent, are able to control who has access, and when, to the respondent”. Different people can play the role of a gatekeeper; guards can take many forms, including family members, housekeepers, porters, secretaries, administrative assistants, or office managers [37]. They usually have well-established trust connections within the community, which allow them to introduce the outside researcher.

In this study, the gatekeepers were briefed at the start and on a regular basis throughout the fieldwork, and they were in close contact during the research [38]. They facilitated the transect walks through the communities and the engagement with the interviewees. Immensely helpful at each stage of the fieldwork, they were well versed with the place, community structure, and their ethical values and also helped in decoding the nuances embedded in the interviewees’ responses due to the knowledge they held about the two specific sites.

2.2.1. France Colony (Located within the F-7 Sector, Islamabad)

France Colony (see Figure 1) is a metro core informal settlement, which means it is in the midst of the urban centre of Islamabad [20]. Similar several metro core settlements have developed along the Naalah (natural water channel) in Islamabad. These places are mostly hidden from the rest of the city due to Islamabad’s urban street design based on cul-de-sacs (cul-de-sac is a street that is closed from one end, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>, accessed on 17 January 2022) and closed-end streets. Beyond these closed-end affluent streets of the formal community, the Naalah slums are located almost in every sector of Islamabad. Many Naalah slums are culture carriers of the old rural landscape that used to exist on the land where Islamabad was built, but the majority are recent arrivals from the countryside. They hold and continue the cultural values of the Potohar region in northeaster Pakistan. France Colony has received regularisation status from the Capital Development Authority (CDA) as it is a settlement older than 30 years.



Figure 1. Location of France Colony on the map of Islamabad, Pakistan. Source: Google Maps (public domain).

In 2018, France Colony had around 8000 residents, mainly of Christian religion [39]. The informal settlement emerged on the site of a past French Embassy, which gave it its name [40]. Being a religious minority in Pakistan (second after Hindus), most Christians are rural migrants forced to live in isolation in the cities [41]. A wall surrounds France Colony with one main entrance and several other rarely used openings.

The gatekeeper pursued in France Colony has been living in the informal settlement for 40 years and was a good source of information about the neighbourhood's environment and people. This person has voluntarily started a nongovernment organisation (NGO) that works for the betterment of the neighbourhood. He has registered the NGO, which has four members from the community who assist him on a voluntary basis. This person was instrumental in providing first-hand information about the people, commerce, systems, and social structure of the neighbourhood. The gatekeeper works as a driver in a foreign embassy and is also well versed in English in addition to his knowledge of Urdu, the national language of Pakistan and also Punjabi, the regional language of Potohar.

2.2.2. Mehr Abadi (Located within the G-12 Sector, Islamabad)

Mehr Abadi (see Figure 2) is classified as a periphery informal settlement. It is relatively new and has mushroomed within the last ten years due to urban sprawl into the rural peripheral land around the city. This has caused the previous rural dwellers to be pushed into high density, unwanted vulnerable land, which cannot be plotted or as yet is outside the city's jurisdiction. Although this informality is not regularised by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and has an illegal tenure, historical data of Pakistan [42] show that the eviction of such a settlement with a large population scattered over 4 square km of land is unlikely. It is therefore expected to exist as part of Islamabad's urban fabric in the future and needs to be properly understood.

Compared to France Colony, Mehr Abadi covers a larger area and has 10 thousand residents [34]. The gatekeeper used was a political party worker who through his networks also introduced other leaders active in different neighbourhoods within the settlement. This approach helped understand the context of the informal settlement and gain access to interviewees. The political party has carried out several voluntary work projects for the betterment of the community, without ever being in power, and has a philanthropic image. People from the settlement generally respect its members, and the gatekeeper was referred to with reverence as 'Haji Sahab' (revered Pilgrim), despite the fact that he has not performed the Hajj (the Hajj is the greater Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, which takes place in the last month of the year and which all Muslims are expected to take part in at least

once during their lifetime if they can afford to do so. It is one of the Five Pillars of Islam) as yet and has only undertaken Umrah (Umrah is an Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca that can be undertaken at any time of the year, in contrast to the Hajj).



Figure 2. Location of Mehr Abadi on the map of Islamabad, Pakistan. Source: Google Maps (public domain).

2.3. Interviews as a Research Tool

Interviews are the main research tool in the grounded theory methodology [28]. The study used in-depth interviews conducted with dwellers from the informal settlements. As a qualitative research tool, the in-depth interview enables a direct interactive conversation with the concerned person and gives an insight into their thought processes, behaviours, and emotional attachments to the issue at hand [43]. Creswell [44] stipulates that through in-depth interviews the views of the respondents are conveyed along with the collected information.

Eighteen interviews with dwellers were conducted for each case study site. The interviewees were from different walks of life, gender, tenure status, and age groups. However, their political affiliation was checked, and only nonpolitical members of the community were interviewed to curtail bias of opinion and conflict of interest. The interview questions were constructed to understand the sustainability concepts embedded in the lifestyle, value systems, day-to-day issues, and mindset of the informal populace. To ensure anonymity, the names of the informants were changed and replaced with other common local names to maintain the cultural relevance.

Distinctive recruitment methods were adapted for sampling the interviewees. The participants from the informal settlements were recruited through random sampling [45,46] without controlling for any specific demographic characteristics but with a focus on experience. This was mostly performed with the guidance of the gatekeeper and through finding influential people within the community by frequently visiting the respective sites.

The questionnaire was semistructured in nature with most questions being open-ended to let the respondent reveal the important information. Conducted in Urdu (the national language of Pakistan) or in some cases in Punjabi (the local language) as per the convenience of the informants, they lasted 60–90 min. The aim was not simply to elicit answers but stories, fables, anecdotes, and other ways of sharing the informal settlement experience. “Why” and “how” questions were often included in the semistructured format when the researcher deemed any information sufficiently valuable to probe the respondent further [47]. Most of these interviews were conducted during the transect walks throughout the informal settlement and led to open-ended discussions, which were audio recorded

with notes and photos taken and maps sketched. The interviews were transcribed in Roman Urdu (Urdu written with Latin script) and then analysed with NVivo software.

The in-depth interviews with dwellers of the selected informal settlements of Islamabad are a means to connect with the people's cultural heritage, way of thinking, and aspirations to extract and underline sustainable concepts, which are anticipated to be latent or lost during the rural to urban transformation process. The coding of the interviews further reveals the underlying values and symbols of these people [43].

2.4. Data Analysis through Grounded Theory

The data collection and fieldwork completion were followed by data analysis. A five-stage systematic process as laid out by Braun and Clarke [48] was adopted in the present study.

2.4.1. Stage 1: Data Familiarization

There was an extensive set of audio-recorded and visually documented data generated through the fieldwork. Although the process of transcription is time consuming and mundane, it gives the opportunity to dissect the interviews and recorded discussions in detail and simultaneously come up with initial ideas. The interviews, which were conducted in Urdu or Punjabi, were not translated into English, rather the transcription was conducted and analysed in Roman letters to avoid any loss of information or cultural terminologies as "literal translation into English is sometimes inadequate to express the subtleties of the concept at hand; or worse, may lead to 'translating the untranslatable'" [49] (p. 1286).

The data were read and reread several times, and initial ideas were jotted down. At this stage, the memo writings completed during the fieldwork were also read side by side to revisit the observations made during the time of the data collection on site.

Although the transcription was a very tedious task, it proved to be very fruitful in terms of creating an initial draft of categories. It confirmed the observation by Lapadat and Lindsay [50] that through transcription, meanings are created and issues are deciphered, and thus it should be recognised as an interpretative act.

2.4.2. Stage 2: Coding on NVivo Software

NVivo Software was used for keeping record of the transcripts, audio recordings, memos, photographs, and videos. This was a crucial stage, and from this point onwards, the data started to reveal any contained commonalities, exceptions, and latent meanings. Codes were created from the transcribed interviews and other data sources, which led to categories (see Figure 3). The categories were therefore labelled with the help of the software, in preparation for a systematic data analysis.

2.4.3. Stage 3: Looking for Themes

According to Braun and Clarke [48] (p. 8), a "theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set". Searching for themes marked the start of the data analysis. Initial ideas and categories were created around broader themes. This process was conducted efficiently by the use of the NVivo software. The process of coding the themes then led to axial coding, where a cross-checking of the viewpoints was carried out. This stage helped in converting codes from the interviews into themes that could be pivotal for the analysis.

2.4.4. Stage 4: Scrutiny of Themes

A maximum number of themes was coded from the dataset to make sure that none were missed. Thereafter, the generated themes were reviewed and refined to find meanings and correlation amongst the data. Hence, this stage represented a more reflective analysis to make sure that the data investigation was on track and within the parameters of the study [48]. Many themes emerged in the present research due to the variety of codes

generated at Stage 2. Stage 4 was important in streamlining the data and consolidating the themes in accordance with the topic at hand.

2.4.5. Stage 5: Defining Themes

Braun and Clarke [48] (p. 92) stipulate that “it is important that by the end of this phase you can clearly define what your themes are and what they are not”. Thus, a final set of themes was yielded, and an analytical meaning of the data was produced, which was vital in the development of a theory along with the help of the visual data collected. At this stage, the final themes extracted from the interviews were identified and defined for further analysis.

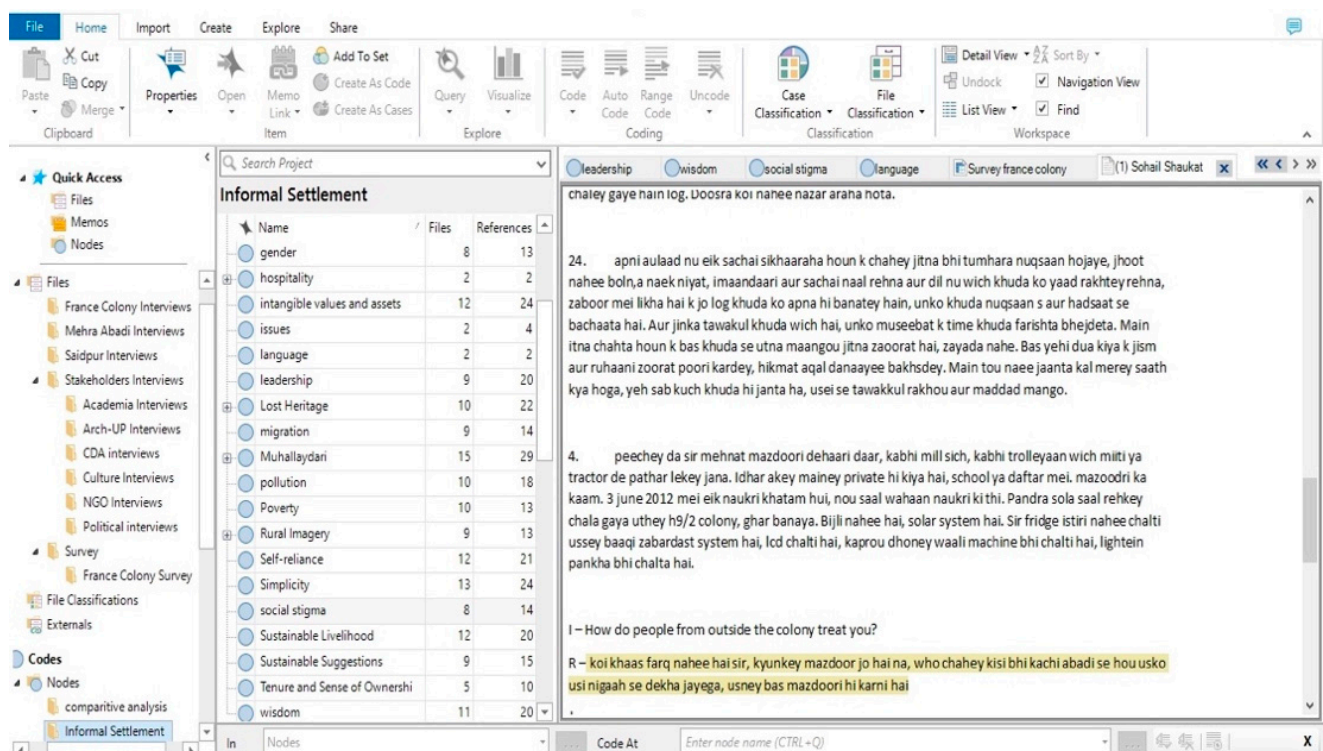


Figure 3. NVivo Analysis in Progress for the Study.

3. Results

This section discusses the themes and subcodes generated through the interviews with dwellers of the informal settlements of the two selected sites in Islamabad. The analysis provides empirical data which show dwellers of the informal settlements to be valuable cultural carriers of rural heritage through their memories, values, norms, mindsets, and ancestral wisdom. They can be seen as assets to the city through adding their cultural capital to the urban realm if incorporated and assimilated effectively. This intangible cultural heritage contains many sustainability attributes that are discussed below.

Four main themes were deduced through the grounded theory strategy and with the help of NVivo software. They are presented in Table 1, and excerpts from the interviews are used as direct quotations (presented in italics) in order to communicate additional insight about the participants' thoughts and perspectives while underpinning the data categorised as the subcodes under each theme (see Table 1). The grounded theory that emerged from the empirical evidence can be summarised as follows: Informal settlements play a vital role in the rural to urban migration by demonstrating sustainability elements through the values, lifestyle, and practices of their residents.

Table 1. Elements of Sociocultural Sustainability in the Informal Settlements.

Values and Social Practices	Communal Networks and Relationships	Built Environment and Ecology	Remnants of Rurality
Ancestral wisdom	Social cohesion (<i>Mohallaydari</i> and <i>Baradari</i> system)	Self-built, incremental, and vernacular architecture	Traditional craft and livelihood
Adaptability	Informal social justice (<i>Panchayat</i>)	Inclusion of flora and fauna	Traditional cuisines
Simplicity	Tolerance and diversity	Pollution crisis and indigenous waste management strategies	Folk games and festivities
Self-reliance	Leadership, volunteerism, and governance		

3.1. Values and Social Practices

The most emphatic evidence that emerged from the in-depth interviews with the informal settlement dwellers is the impact the value system, memories, and ancestral practices of these residents can have in inducing sustainability that is rooted in their culture itself. These intangible cultural elements are the foundation for sustainable liveability and a motivating fuel for establishing sustainability in a certain setting, as without willingness and motivation any policy cannot be welcomed and implemented by the people for whom it is designed. Rapoport emphasises: “Only people who are members of the community are able to manage an organic process of growth. Only they know their needs and only they are able to decide if the relationships between building and public spaces are appropriate” [51] (p. 10). The four aspects that emerged under this category are ancestral wisdom, adaptability, simplicity, and self-reliance, and they distinctively shape the culture of the informal settlements.

3.1.1. Ancestral Wisdom

Words of wisdom from the people of the informal settlements are some of the most significant findings of the study. The philosophical and rational arguments they gave are based on their ancestral knowledge, and the solutions they provide for sustainable liveability from a unique lens were vital to formulate the grounded theory. The mindset of the informal residents was revealed during the interview process, and some insightful words of wisdom were recorded. It was interesting to note during the interviews that these words of wisdom are kept intact in the form of proverbs, which were used by the dwellers frequently in their conversations. These proverbs have retained the original source of logic and values through generations but are often lost in the city’s formal structures.

This showed how cultural wisdom is challenging the modern mindset and consumerist approach. Sohail, a long-term resident of Mehr Abadi says:

Our land is our mother; it produces everything from itself which we can thrive on. We don’t consider it dignified (ghairatmand) if someone sells off their ancestral land . . . this is our value. Otherwise, we could have sold our land and come out of poverty, but we choose to keep our heritage in the form of your land and relationship with the earth and village intact.

He also uses a proverb to explain the significance of ancestral wisdom and how much it is valued in his culture: “wisdom is far stronger than any strong person” (“zor awar se kayi zor awar hikmat aur danishmandi hai”, original words in Urdu).

Salamat told an anecdote about his mother who never took money for sharing milk from her livestock. She said that if anyone from the neighbourhood came to ask for milk, she would say that milk should not be sold, as it is God’s light (“dodh vechi da nahi, Allah da noor vechi da nahi”, original words in Punjabi), demonstrating a sense of hospitality and considering social and cultural values greater than economic gains. Mansoor [52] highlights the significance of such proverbs and oral expressions in propagating cultural sustainability in different aspects of life.

In addition, Sohail explains the concept of *barkat* which means prosperity or abundance of resources, if earned lawfully, and spent efficiently and with gratitude. He says “wealth escapes up in the sky like an eagle, because if money is not earned under good values, it is not sustained either” (“doulat oukaab ki tarhaan par laga kay aasmaan pe urh jati hai”. original words

in Urdu). From this analogy of wealth as an eagle, Sohail has unconsciously defined the relationship of sustainable livelihood with well-being and liveability.

According to ancient wisdom and cultural values, materialistic benefits are hardly equated with social-spiritual gains. This mindset, originating in the cultural values of the region, contrasts with the global vision of achieving mere economic prosperity without considering the cost of socio-cultural resources, values, and heritage. Informal dwellers appear to be carriers of untapped reservoirs of wisdom through the proverbs they use in their oral expression, many of which have sustainability values and could serve as assets to the community.

3.1.2. Adaptability

Farooq, a shopkeeper while flaunting his village lifestyle in Mehr Abadi, said:

We are the same people as we were in the villages, same clothes and language. We have the same system here too . . . even in Mehr Abadi it has the same system as the villages. As we have adaptability issues, so we are living the same life as villagers, however, enjoying the amenities of the city.

He explicitly says that they have adapted to the city only in terms of livelihood and for the use of amenities, which it can offer. This point of view gives an insight into the mindset of the people who take pride in their cultural values and want to perpetuate their heritage deliberately in the urban setting confirming their role as cultural carriers.

However, there are other types of people who want to assimilate into the urban realm and want to keep pace with the modern world. Arshad and his wife from France Colony explained that:

Everything is Islamabad-like now, and we are living here, so we have to live like people of Islamabad. Similarly, if we live in a village, we will live like villagers. And if there is fashion of longer-length shirts, we have to wear them, otherwise people will make fun of us.

These people show the strength of adaptability and progressiveness of migrants. As adaptability is an essential element of sustainable liveability, it is viewed as an asset and a sign of resilience of the migrant community.

Kosar, a domestic worker residing in Mehr Abadi, explains that a “a few have adapted to the colours of the city, and a few are now going back to their roots”. Thus, those who stay in the settlements have already proven their resilience. The resilience factor of migrants in the informal settlements is already high as compared to marginalised communities, which do not consist of migrants [53]. This indication gives a clear idea about exploring the capabilities of the migrant community and the norms and values to which they adhere to give them the strength of ambition and ability to adapt.

John Turner [54,55] explains that only progressive people have the courage to leave the graves of their forefathers behind. He named these people as bridge headers. The informal settlers are very resilient and adaptable communities. Their malleability can become an important asset while devising sustainable solutions for the issues of informal settlements.

3.1.3. Simplicity

People of the informal settlements tend to discourage consumerism and promote simple living, which is close to nature and the biophysical environment resulting in a low-carbon footprint in terms of a sustainable lifestyle. For example, Fozia, a cook residing in France Colony explains: “Regarding lifestyle, our parents have taught us to be grateful for whatever you have. Learn to live with less money and save more”. She explains some of the values taught by her parents regarding the significance of simplicity. Gratitude and only wishing for what is needed are embedded in her cultural values. Similarly, Shaukat, a first-generation migrant at Mehr Abadi, says: “I only ask from God for what I need, not more than that. I pray for spiritual contentment and wisdom; that’s more important”.

However, this mindset is changing with each passing generation as these values are no longer preserved or acknowledged. Arshad from France Colony explains this transition between generations:

Once they went with me, it was very hot weather at night; mosquitoes were there. They woke me up at 3 am and asked me to leave for the city. I am a village dweller, and I can sleep out in the courtyard without fans, but our kids are used to the city's lifestyle; they can't.

He further points out the difference he has experienced between urban and rural living in the usage of resources and ostentatious spending compared to consciously trying not to waste. Remembering his village life, he explains:

Don't spend aimlessly or waste anything. In those days, we used to make one's dress and wear it to ten wedding functions, not like now, show-off was less. We used to earn less and also spend less too; life was simple in the villages.

Fozia describes the simplicity of her previous rural life:

It was my father's teachings not to waste even a single morsel. Food (resources) was considered very significant. Leftovers like potato peels, tea leaves, etc. used to go back to the fields as fertiliser. Women used to work in the fields, and men used to do other duties; my brother rode a truck, and my father had a general store. People used to give money on every seasonal change, the whole economy worked on a lending and barter system.

Her testimony gives an overview of a simple country life that is slowly diminishing even amongst the rural migrants present in urban informal settlements.

Urban capitalism and consumerism are diluting the values of friendship, social ties to support each other, and the barter and lending system. Eating and drinking simple yet pure foods were the key aspect of the village lifestyle, which Fozia still cherishes. Now, however, to assimilate in the urban setting, she very proudly explains that she takes her family to fast-food restaurants for recreation. Unawareness of the benefits of a simple and pure diet, lack of acknowledgment of a lifestyle that is based on efficient resource management, and generally appreciating the food on the table are uprooting the value system of village migrants. They are becoming part of the rat race in the urban lifestyle.

It was noted during the interviews that the dwellers had the tendency to return to their roots and can become beacons of a sustainable value system as it is already part of their cultural legacy and is reflected in the wisdom of their ancestors. Sohail states: *"one should ask only for money which can fulfil our needs; excess money leads to greed and wrongdoing. That is what I am teaching my kids"*. Similarly, Salamat explains that *"times change, but if you and I don't change, then things can't go wrong; there was a certain attraction and bliss in the simplicity of that life, and it was close to your values"*.

Such simplicity of rural migrant life is also reflected in the construct of spaces and public display of culture, such as during rituals and festivities in the informal settlements, which reflect practices of their rural past. Ishaq, a carpenter from Mehr Abadi, explains that festivals were very simple in the rural settings with no display of ostentation and flamboyance. This attitude is also reflected in the public spaces of these settlements. Figure 4 is an image of a wedding celebration at the United Prayer Fellowship (UPF) Church of France Colony that depicts a minimalistic ceremony with a few people present, which was later followed by a large gathering in a temporary marquee or *Tamboo* (a traditional cloth and bamboo tent) in the front yard of the church. Ishaq recalls that in rural areas they used to erect *Tamboo* in open areas, mostly harvested fields, on the occasion of weddings or funerals.



Figure 4. Wedding Ceremony Taking Place at UPF Church, France Colony.

Similar renditions for festivals, public get-togethers, and temporary arrangements depicted rural imagery in the informal settlements. Many simplicity traits, such as the efficient use of resources, temporary architecture, low-expense living costs, and simple diets, are all tied to sustainability in one way or another and are being practised by the dwellers of informal settlements.

3.1.4. Self-Reliance

Self-help and self-reliance were noted as some of the emphatic traits of the lifestyle in the informal settlements. These characteristics were reflected based on the dwellers' experiences of their previous life in the villages. Bhatti, a construction worker residing in Mehr Abadi, proudly beamed when telling: *"everyone knows how to do farming (at the village); I myself have done it with my own hands. I used to plough the fields, in the traditional style"*. This self-help can be seen in a physical aspect, such as incremental architecture by the locals, or in terms of governance and space management. An example is the community-based organisation (CBO) introduction of the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) which began work in Orangi town in 1980. Orangi, situated on the periphery of Karachi, is a cluster of 113 low-income settlements with a population of 1.5 million. Based on the success of its five basic programmes of low-cost sanitation, housing, health, education, and credit for micro enterprise, OPP was upgraded in 1988 to three autonomous institutions. The approach was to encourage and strengthen community initiatives (with social support, technical guidance and credit for micro enterprise) and evolve partnerships with the government for development based on local resource (<http://www.opp.org.pk>, accessed on 5 December 2020). In Karachi, OPP aims to properly manage the informal settlements and also serve as an interface between the formal and informal [56]. Such CBOs showcase the self-reliance and self-help potential of the informal settlements in Pakistan if basic technical guidance and social support are given to the community. The CBOs in the programme served as a liaison between people of the settlement and government, instigated micro-enterprise, and promoted the self-help mechanism within the settlement [57].

On remembering, Bashir says: *"the village was good because you could produce your own needs, like milk, wheat, etc."* Salamat explains self-reliance as part of their cultural heritage with an anecdote:

When there is a wedding at someone's place, it's a rule to not ask for help until four days before the wedding even in the case of stricken poverty. The wisdom behind is to urge them to carry maximum tasks on your own and then rely on others for remedial tasks, though the rural community is always willing to extend a helping hand.

These unwritten rules have perpetuated the sustainability values of the regional cultural heritage by pride and ownership of a cultural legacy. Such self-reliance values falter on migration to urban settings where everyone starts to move responsibility for communal management from each other to the state.

Chaos and pollution visible in public spaces show the lack of ownership, absence of responsibility, and loss of the self-help legacy, which these migrants brought along from the rural areas. These qualities are not completely lost but are overshadowed in the urban system within a new place.

Bhatti added: “*I do not get any chance to do something for the community (Mehr Abadi) . . . I go in the morning and come home at night*”. Lack of opportunity, responsibility allocation, and poor exploration of talent and skills in locals have led to situations of lost opportunities for potential volunteerism and self-help in the informal settlements.

3.2. Communal Networks and Relationships

Community settings and the hierarchy of social structures within the informal settlements are discussed under this theme. The codes which emerged describe the recreated social setting that has been influenced by the rural practices of the past life of the migrants and the memories of their ancestors. These dwellers have created a self-managed and self-reliant communal network in which they operate through relationships formed on the basis of religion, *Baradari* (community clusters based on kinship), native land, and other commonalities, such as language and rituals. Social cohesion, an informal system of justice, tolerance, and diversity as well as leadership and governance with volunteerism emerged as distinctive aspects.

3.2.1. Social Cohesion (*Mohallaydari* and *Baradari* Systems)

In the informal settlements, people, who in the past had banked on the social capital of an entire village to survive through tough times of poverty, are now limited to a few families. Disappointment in social networking in the community is evident in most interviews, except from a few who have migrated from their villages as a group of families and also have a large *Baradari* in the settlement. These *Baradaris* are extended family members or people from the same village, who stick together as a social safety net through thick and thin. A few people reported that they have built similar social capital through friendships and networking in the informal settlement within their neighbourhood (*mohalla*) as in their native villages. As Kollmair and Juli stipulated, “for the marginalised segment of the society, social capital mitigates the effects of shocks in other capitals through informal network” [58] (p. 6). Cultural preservation is a task for a community, reflected in communal events, collective celebrations, and unanimous perpetuation of art, value system, and rituals [59]. Many anecdotes of social cohesion, social capital, safety net, brotherhood, and sisterhood were recorded during the interviews that explain that this social cohesion is not entirely lost. Two main systems of social capital exist in the informal settlements—the *Baradari* and *Mohallaydari* systems.

While the *Baradari* system is based on kinship and common village roots, the *Mohallaydari* or neighbourliness is defined as the relationship between the inhabitants of a *mohalla* (<https://www.urdupoint.com/dictionary/roman-urdu-to-english/mohalla-roman-urdu-meaning-in-english/64190.html>, accessed on 9 June 2021), a term in Urdu used for a street or a neighbourhood. Traditionally in the South Asian region, people have close ties with neighbours, and a strong bond is maintained within a *mohalla*. This tradition is an important part of cultural heritage of the region. A *mohallaydar*, a fellow inhabitant of a *mohalla*, is deemed no less than kin and is a significant actor in the social safety net of informal inhabitants.

For instance, Bhatti explains:

The other day when it was raining, the Naalah water level rose and flooded our houses. It really affected us; a lot of our household stuff got destroyed. We even had to borrow clothes from people in our neighbourhood to wear.

Thus, the value system of social ties and bonding strengthens in the face of adversity, and having a social safety net is a vital asset for the entire community and is an important incentive to continue living in the informal settlement [60]. Hidayat, a resident of France Colony, explains how the *Mohallaydari* system is alive in the informal settlement:

We get together in times of sorrow and happiness; it is good that people meet each other. In the villages, we used to take care of each other even more.

According to him, the settlement is also a type of rural imagery present in the midst of the city, thus the same value system is established there. He says:

This settlement looks more like a village than part of the city. Mohallaydari and social ties are the same too. The only difference is you don't see children playing as they are on drugs. When kids play in the streets, everyone knows whose kids they are, and everyone participates in their upbringing.

Hidayat also explains the idea of collective upbringing, which is a cultural value where the entire community takes responsibility for nurturing the next generation. This is essential for educating the children in their cultural heritage in a protective and safe environment. In fact, this is a very vital concept of *Mohallaydari* living. It nurtures the next generation together by keeping “eyes of the street,” as also argued by Jane Jacobs to ensure surveillance and reduce crime in the public places of cities [61].

Figure 5 shows some examples from France Colony with streets bustling with children and adults in an interactive setting. It is possible to keep eyes on the street from elevated areas too. This fluidity of place is the key element of both analysed informal settlements. Their built environment defines the places it creates within and gives as well as takes the influences of the people it inhabits [62]. Although the unique architecture of these settlements is tarnished with traces of poverty, it still defines the creative and indigenous spirit of its people. Narrow alleys, covered streets, bridges, and stairway streets weave an interesting network of linkages within the settlement. They create social cohesion, a sense of community and belonging.



Figure 5. Interactive and Fluid Public Spaces (France Colony).

3.2.2. Informal Social Justice (*Panchayat*)

Ishfaq, a resident of Mehr Abadi, explains, “*Panchayat* resolves issues in the village, resolves them mutually in the village by dialogue and arbitration, and justice is served at the same time”. He sees this system as a means of self-help according to the cultural values of the natives. Bashirah from France Colony recalls the informal courts of the village, namely, *panchayat*, designed to resolve petty communal issues. She laments: “*In the Colony whenever*

there is a quarrel, they go to the police station. And the police are corrupt; they take money from both parties. In the villages, all the elders used to sit down and solve the issue with consensus and act as arbitrators to resolve matters". She explains that taking matters to police leads to further problems without resolving the main issue, which the community could sort out on its own. Swapan and Khan [63] also report the presence of such a parallel governance and justice system as a means to circumvent the local government's regulatory arrangements for the convenience of the dwellers.

In contrast to Bashirah's account, however, another resident of France Colony, Farooq, presents a very different picture, claiming that a functioning *panchayat* system does operate in France Colony too. He concedes, however, that it functions among smaller clusters of people and only amongst a few families whose *Baradari* (extended network of families) are settled there. He says with pride:

The entire Baradari is bound together. It has been four to five years since our migration. Initially, we were living alone, but now the entire family network has moved here. We also have the panchayat system here (in France Colony); they resolve all social issues and find solutions [within the Baradari]. These are the ways of the village life, which we are following here too.

Traditionally, revered elderly wise men (*Babas*) in the region's rural communities sit down together to solve petty communal problems and dispense speedy justice where required. The presence of such clans of *Babas* has been reported in France Colony [64]. However, while in Mehr Abadi an elaborate and established informal *panchayat* system is observed at the communal *Dera*, most of the *Deras* in France Colony are solely used as leisure areas for the adult males of the community. It seems to be a missed opportunity that their collective wisdom and status, based on cultural legacy, is not put to use in the informal settlement of France Colony as is done in the rural areas or even in Mehr Abadi. Communal areas in France Colony, such as the informal *Dera* (shown in Figure 6), could ideally house such gatherings of *Babas* providing community leadership, instead of serving as open spaces that largely remain vacant.



Figure 6. A Small *Dera* Near Street 54 at France Colony.

The physical requirements for the setting up the *panchayat* or gathering of *Babas* can be quite simple. A vacant space can suffice, while a tree could enhance the settings further as trees have a special significance in defining public spaces where the community interacts.

Ahmed recalls the setting up of the *panchayat* place in his village, reporting: “We had trees there, really huge trees in the village. Under the trees we used to put our *charpai* (traditional bench/bed), had a *gharrha*, (earthen pitcher) with a clay drinking cup next to it . . . This was how we made the place (for *Panchayat*)”. The *Dera* in rural areas, therefore, assumes a vital role as a place where the *panchayat* convenes, and the heads of different families resolve communal issues with consensus.

The distinct versions of the *panchayat* system in France Colony show that only certain clusters are practising the informal social justice system to resolve petty issues through arbitration. Meanwhile, the rest of the community that does not have a functional *panchayat* system, longs for a similar system to be established as they reminisce about their village life.

3.2.3. Tolerance and Diversity

The diversity in the community has currently created hostility, sectarian divide, and polarization especially in case of Mehr Abadi. During two transect walks, we experienced hostility entering from a different area, while earlier people were polite and collaborative when we used the entrance situated in their area. This anecdote indicates a rift between *Baradaris* and *Dera* owners within different clusters in the neighbourhood.

This is an aberrant scenario as the virtue of tolerance was a part of the South Asian region’s cultural heritage where people belonging to different religions, castes, and sects, lived in harmony. Razia while remembering her village explains:

Our village was really huge (and nice), Mashallah (May God protect), there were so many houses there . . . Muslims and Christians used to live together in harmony. Nobody used to say that he is Christian so don’t keep ties with him, or this person is Muslim so don’t meet him. Instead, all used to eat and drink together without any discrimination . . . like brothers.

We experienced traces of such tolerance towards other religions first-hand when Patras Kabaria from French Colony interrupted the interview in the middle and asked: “ . . . are you fasting, if not, I’ll bring something to eat for you”, though he himself is Christian. He respected the month of Ramadan when the interview was conducted and showed hospitality.

Culturally in this region, the rich and the poor lived in the same neighbourhood in close proximity to each other for centuries. In the same street the *Nawabs* (wealthy) and the *Kumhaar* (craftspeople) used to share house boundaries, common open spaces (*sehan*), interact in public squares, and play cricket together in the same fields. Charity, friendship, and compassion ruled the moral values of the neighbourhood. The strict spatial compartmentation of different economic groups has led to social stratification in modern cities such as Islamabad. It has created disparity, increased the gap between rich and poor, and reduced empathy and compassion towards the less privileged members of the community as they are rather considered outlaws or probably aliens [65]. We experienced the presence of tolerance, indifference, and hostility, all emerging from the diversity in informal settlements. However, during the interviews, it was noted that the notion of tolerance was cherished by the informal settlement dwellers in their native villages, and a longing to establish similar harmony is still prevalent in the communities.

3.2.4. Leadership, Volunteerism and Governance

Local governance, communal participation, and integration are an essential part of sustainable urbanism [66]. When these elements are tied with the cultural values of the people, it is anticipated that sustainability will be more effectively implemented and adapted [67]. Volunteerism and community leadership are essential in integrating people of the community in the decision-making process. A similar aptitude was found in the interviews of the informal settlement dwellers.

Bashir, a shopkeeper in France Colony, says:

Village life is nothing like city life. Here, life is good for one who has money, but I believe that a life of respect is better than a life with money.

The significance of respect and honour is still understood amongst people. Governance and management of the informal settlements can be based on the strong foundation of self-help, responsible and respected members of the community working as a liaison between the informal settlement and the city. These members of the informal settlements are an important asset and are willing to participate in volunteer work for the betterment of the community in exchange for respect, reverence, and gratitude just like their ancestors.

Gill from Mehr Abadi explains his motive of earning respect in the informal settlement just like his father:

My father died by then; he had a huge reputation in the village. He was called for panchayat to resolve disputes; he was highly respected. He used to say that after he was gone the villagers will remember him for his good reputation. He also campaigned in elections and won. We later came here. We have a good social circle here too. Then my wife and children asked me to campaign in council elections as our grandfather did.

His comment indicates that the legacy of volunteerism and sense of responsibility towards one's community is inherited by the informal dwellers from their predecessors, as rural governance and social fabric are woven on the bases of self-help, socially responsive values, and pride in giving back to the community.

3.3. Built Environment and Ecology

Theoreticians have debated about the nature of the built environment in relation to culture but have uncontestedly “agree(d) that the most important variables which influence the interaction between architecture and the use of space are some components of culture” [68] (p. 2). Kent [68] also stipulates: “My own view is that architecture is a reflection of behaviour or the use of space which, in turn, is a reflection of culture . . . ” (p. 3). The built environment is not a mere reflection, rather the product of culture itself. According to Trigueiro [69] (pp. 40–41):

It can hardly be accepted that a theory of society may be considered as spatial when space is being viewed purely as a ‘reflection’ of socio-cultural factors . . . By reducing the properties of space to a ‘mirroring’ effect, the active role that spatial arrangements play in generating encounter patterns and, therefore, in the ordering of human relations is being denied.

This theme is explored further according to the informants’ interviews, to give insight into the relationship of the natural and built environment with cultural heritage. The aspects covered are the nature of architecture, recycling, and pollution; inclusion on flora and fauna; and waste management.

3.3.1. Self-Built, Incremental, and Vernacular Architecture

The individual houses of the inhabitants of the informal settlements also reflect their cultural values and are remnants of indigenous architecture. A typical household in France Colony has two sections, divided by an open-to-sky courtyard, namely, *sehan*. Fozia mentions that she uses this small, yet the only open, space of the house to keep livestock and grow vegetables in pots. The *sehan* satisfied the need for open space, which these migrants enjoyed in their rural dwelling and is a source of natural light, ventilation, and plantation.

When Shabana invited us into her house to conduct the interview, she requested for shoes to be left in the front section. A stand-alone wash basin is also installed in most of the houses to ensure cleanliness while entering the private section (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. *Sehan* of Shabana's House.

The importance of trees in village houses was explained by Sajida, a long-term resident of Mehr Abadi. She explained that she has land in her native village and intends to go back to construct her own house in a few years, as she was renting in the settlement. Sajida said that they have completed the first task of house construction, which is to make a boundary wall and sow seeds of trees. As the house will be built incrementally, the trees will be grown by the time of completion. Trees around the house are an integral aspect of rural living and also are a vital part of the *sehan*. This courtyard, *sehan*, signifies the need for an open-to-sky space within the house, which serves as a transient place between the bedrooms and the street. The importance of the *sehan* and vegetation was evident during the visits to many interviewees' houses in both informal settlements.

3.3.2. Inclusion of Flora and Fauna

Fozia explains how she played a role at her village in creating an ecobalance by recycling the food and other materials and by default made conscious efforts to use resources efficiently. She points out that the flora and fauna were part of the recycling process. According to her:

Everything was pure there (at the village) ... We always used to save food leftovers. If they are to be thrown away, then we would separate the meat chunks and feed them to the birds, whereas the curry goes back to the fields. We never used to waste anything at all.

Fozia also explains how it is a struggle to perpetuate the same values in France Colony:

We need good fertile land here, just like in the village ... However, I do try to grow coriander and mint in a pot. Our house is small; we don't have land in here. If I had enough land to grow, I would have grown so many flowers and vegetables ... Once I even tried to grow zucchini in a pot ... ah yes and potatoes also once ... My aunty taught me how to grow vegetables and fruits in the open land in the village. I have taught myself to grow them in pots here at the Colony. I improvised, and it worked for me.

She also showed a great desire to keep livestock and grow her own vegetables as she has the skills but due to restriction in space it was difficult.

The coexistence of animals, plants, and humans is an integral part of a harmonious ecosystem, which is disrupted in modern cities such as Islamabad. Migrants who continue to cherish this coexistence with flora and fauna can teach the urban community about the sustainability benefits of such an environment in which all beings can flourish. In addition, these migrants hold great potential to improvise and implement traditional techniques in the urban setting. For example, Fozia's story about growing vegetables is actually about small-scale urban farming or can also be called a kitchen garden.

Bashirah also stated that *"everyone used to grow food . . . grow wheat, grow garlic, grow onions, all of the vegetables. Also eggplants and peas and turnips . . . we used to grow it all ourselves in our houses (at the village)"*. She says that people like herself have all the knowledge and ability to grow food in their own houses as before migration to the city, every household knew how to do this in the villages unlike urban people, who have distanced themselves from the soil.

This rural lifestyle is not lost completely. In the informal settlements, flora and fauna are incorporated as part of the environment by utilizing the rooftops with bird cages and chickens kept there. Other animals are not kept on the rooftops mainly due to loadbearing building structures which cannot endure their weight. Figure 8 shows examples of plants and pots in the built environment of the informal settlements. Plants on rooftops, balconies, and courtyards is a common sight in both settlements. Although the inhabitants live with minimum resources and amenities, they consider flora as an essential part of the environment they dwell in. This finding reinforces the significance of nature in the values of the cultural heritage. The longing for living together with flora and fauna is present, but due to limited space and resources, such a lifestyle is not prominent in these informal settlements.

3.3.3. Pollution Crisis and Indigenous Waste Management

Kosar, a domestic worker from France Colony explains:

There is not much waste in villages, waste from the livestock goes back to the land as fertiliser. Plastic has now come to the villages as well, but mostly people collect it and sell it to Kabaria (recycling person), so they have established a system of collecting it (plastic) and selling it off. But at the Colony, we just throw garbage in the bin. Here, there is no such system; no one cares. In the village, we have one elder who guides everyone, and people listen to him.

She highlights multiple facets of the rural systems, which are sustainable and closely tied with the value systems of the village. Pollution, though a physical issue, is conveniently resolved in the villages by disposing of any biodegradable material and recycling the nonbiodegradables.

However, the same people who have carried out this practice in their villages efficiently are indifferent and reluctant to perpetuate it in the informal settlements, blaming it on the system and state. Though in the villages they were engaging in waste management on a self-help basis, Kosar explains the main reason this was discontinued was a lack of leadership and poor communal ties. These migrant people have the cultural values that align with a sustainable mindset, but constraints in governance, ownership, and management have adversely influenced them to shun their old practices and blend into the urban system where they believe the state must provide all amenities, including waste management. These people with potential for self-management and self-governance lack direction once they have left their traditional way of living in pursuit of adapting to the urban lifestyle. This eventually causes harm to them and the natural environment.

In contradiction to Kosar's view, a plastic recycling yard is located in both settlements. This shows the absence of a collective waste disposal method but instead pockets of small industries. These small businesses are not utilised for a communal scale waste disposal and recycling system as yet, consequently creating pollution in the settlements.



Figure 8. Bird Cage and Plantation on Roof Tops and Terrace.

3.4. Remnants of Rurality

This theme deals with the everyday and ordinary lifestyle of the informal community, which entails remnants of their rural life. These remnants are symbolic of their identity and sense of pride from their rural roots. They are tangible as well as intangible in nature. If not practised in the day-to-day life, these traditions, rituals, crafts, and skills are cherished by the informal community. They can also provide economic benefits for the urban dwellers improving their long-term prospects in the city and supporting their survival in harmony with their culture and life in the metropolis.

3.4.1. Traditional Craft and Livelihood

Kulsum from Mehr Abadi explains the traditional crafts she knows and also expresses her willingness to teach other girls these skills:

People can create everything, embroidery designs, crochet, etc. I myself learnt from my mother how to cook, wash, knit a sweater, make Naaley (traditional belt for shalwar dress), Parandey (traditional hair accessory), Chaabey (bread utensil made out of straw), those which are handmade I can also make Charpai (wooden structured and

jute thread weaved traditional bed) myself. But yes, I have learnt sewing here in the city; I have also taught girls in a Silayi Centre (Sewing coaching centre) here in the settlement.

Resourceful people such as her are an asset that perpetuates traditional craft. They are willing to teach the next generation and create opportunities for a sustainable livelihood while showcasing the traditional handicrafts, which may attract tourism and preserve the skills that are centuries old.

Similarly, Bashirah says:

Yes indeed . . . everyone used to work at the village. The girls did sewing and tailoring . . . made designs out of embroidery, etc. I did these things as well. Now, I have almost forgotten how it is done, though I made everything out of embroidery . . . neckline designs, dupatta (a length of material worn arranged in two folds over the chest and thrown back around the shoulders, typically with a salwar kameez, by women from South Asia) and similar things. Ah, I made charpai (a traditional bed) as well. It is something we did since our forefathers; my ancestors were known for weaving charpai.

The crafts and skills, which people know indigenously, are not put to use in creating livelihood opportunities in the informal settlements. This can lead to a loss of such skills if not perpetuated. These crafts are the identity of the informal dwellers. Bashirah proudly introduced herself as a member of the family of weavers. The rural lifestyle livelihood defines one's identity, as craftspeople are given immense respect compared with unskilled workers or farmers. Titles, such as *Lohar* (ironsmith), *Nayi* (barber), *Marasi* (singer/performer), and *Molvi Sahib* (religious leader at the mosque), were respected in the rural setting due to their contribution to the livelihood. Reviving this sense of identity and ownership of indigenous skills is a unique way to keep the crafts alive or else they will fade away without being transferred to the next generation.

3.4.2. Traditional Cuisines

During the interviews, many traditional cuisines were mentioned, which are seldom available in urban areas. This indicated the risk of losing traditional recipes, culinary art, and the indigenous skills of making them.

Kulsum explains: *"In the summers, we used to make sawayian (traditional vermicelli) with our own hands, drink lassi (a sweet or savoury Pakistani drink made from a yogurt or buttermilk base with water) and sattu (a type of flour, mainly used in Nepal, India, and Pakistan; it consists of a mixture of ground pulses and cereals)".* She emphasises that these *sawayian* are hardly made now due to low demand and the arduous process of preparing them with traditional techniques and skills. Unlike the handmade pastas of Italy, the art of making this traditional vermicelli is not celebrated enough to be preserved, and now only factory-made varieties are available in Pakistan. The art of making *sawayian* has not been transferred to the next generation due to poor awareness and a lack of promotion of such traditional delicacies in the urban areas. Maintaining traditions also offers potential employment for people in the informal settlements.

3.4.3. Folk Games and Festivities

Folk games and festivals are a reflection of the creativity of the community [70]. Perry et al. [15] (p. 603) argue that "festivals are integrative sites in which tangible and intangible heritage properties are entangled".

Hidayat remembers the folk games and leisure time activities while complaining about the absence of an allocated place for children to play at France Colony. He states:

We don't do many excursions, just eat meals together with family, good chit-chat, boys would do folk dances sometimes. In the village, we used to play kabaddi (folk sports) and kushti (traditional wrestling sport), go to melas (funfairs) as well, every year to far-flung areas. In the mela, we enjoyed the kabaddi and kushti tournaments.

He explained that singing folk songs and playing folk games (see Figure 9) are still very popular in the settlement but not properly organised in the form of a *mela* as they were in the villages.



Figure 9. Locals Playing Lodo, a Traditional Game at Mehr Abadi.

A *mela*, is traditionally and historically considered an ephemeral settlement, which is a hub of cultural activities, exchange of ideas, poetry, trade, exploration of traditional cuisines, and playing folk games among others. *Melas* are also diminishing along with the rural lifestyle, endangering the existence of different cultural activities. During an interview, Rida very proudly talked about her father's profession of a *halwayi* (traditional sweet maker) in *melas* in her native village. Her father hopped from village to village wherever *melas* were organised, along with his mobile kiosk during the season of harvest. Now, the inhabitants of settlements go to the nearby parks outside the settlements for leisure-time activities. Children and adults playing traditional games were seen on several site visits (see Figure 10). This observation indicated the need for promoting and preserving folk games and folk songs by providing opportunities and places to organise *melas* that can reflect the rural heritage and showcase such cultural gems.



Figure 10. Children Playing Marbles (*bantay*) with Pebbles at Mehr Abadi.

4. Discussion

The study explained through empirical evidence that the rural migrants bring along intangible cultural heritage to the city, which is assimilated into their informal settlements. The sociocultural sustainability attributes reflected in the cultural values of the informal migrants are multifaceted and contain many sustainability elements, such as cultural identity, community centric policies, biodiversity management, cost saving, resource management, pollution control, (incrementally) improving the standard of living, etc. They also form part of current discussions [71] as a needed paradigm shift from conventional urban planning and development but are in fact deeply embedded in the cultural heritage of the region [72].

In order to resolve first the issues of urban informal settlements and second the cultural void in urban areas, a strategy needs to be devised with the participation, leadership, and values of the people of the informal settlements. Incentives are required that can convert informal settlements to environments of tolerance and cultural exchange. Volunteerism within the informal settlement can be explored, and strategies can be devised for utilising the cultural values of self-reliance and self-help of the informal dwellers. Livelihoods originating from traditional craft and skills need to be encouraged to provide incentives to community members. Hidayaat explains: *“We can teach our children to work as a mechanic; we can teach girls sewing and embroidery and to work at a beauty parlour too”*. This shows that most people want to educate their children only with urban skills, such as car mechanics and salon and beauty training, as they are under the impression that village crafts will not yield an adequate income for the family. This perception, if changed, can create incentives for keeping the craft knowledge alive, thus intervention and preservations are important. The steps of preservation and cultural awareness through the provision of sustainable livelihoods to the informal dwellers through their crafts and skills can eventually be beneficial for the surrounding formal areas and the city at large [73].

The findings show similarities between the cultural values of the rural migrants and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as they apply to informal settlements [71]. Sustainability in informal settlements seeks a sustainable community structure, which the indigenous people maintain by default through their rurality. Thus, the findings demonstrate indigenous solutions to be closely aligned to the SDGs. They are rooted in the cultural heritage and aim for the same sustainable liveability.

Schinldkrout [74] pointed out that while investigating informal settlements, sensitivity towards sociocultural content should be maintained. Their heterogeneous characteristics and cultural hues should be registered rather than simply considering all inhabitants as one homogenous “community”. He stipulated that the study of informal settlements should orient itself to sociocultural aspects:

In speaking of the emergence of new culture or sense of communal identity among urban immigrants, we can refer to the consequence of their incorporation into a community which has a distinct set of values . . . what might be called ‘value empathy’ exists, we can speak of a culture and a corresponding sense of communal identity. Outside pressures may contribute to the development of such an identity, in that they may help people to perceive common interests [74] (p. 172).

Lévi-Strauss stipulates that “a primitive people is not a backward or retarded people; indeed, it may possess, in one realm or another, a genius for invention or action that leaves the achievements of civilised peoples far behind” [75] (p. 102). This statement is in favour of the indigenous or traditional or rural society which he calls “primitive society”.

Findings from the in-depth interviews, memos, photography, and observations made in this study clearly establish that the inhabitants of informal settlements have preserved intangible cultural heritage in their memory, values, and through certain practices influenced by their rural experience in the past. The statement made by Lévi-Strauss [75] in the middle of the twentieth century is still valid now and appropriate in terms of sustainability. These cultural practices and the social systems have embedded sustainability within them with the potential to give an apt perspective on urban informal settlements as well. Hence, the

study has fortified with evidence the principle that cultural heritage entails the solutions to many issues of current urban settlements if viewed from a sustainability lens, which is an integral part of the cultural heritage itself [24,76]. Azunre et al. [10] (p. 1) highlight the same attributes of informal settlements and state that “informality plays a vital role in promoting the economic, environmental, and social sustainability of cities . . . Specifically, the informal economy and informal spaces contribute to the employment of both men and women, household income, tax revenue, waste management, water access, organic farming, health care access, social equity, and innovation”.

In a paradigm shift in policy making towards sustainability, the significance of cultural heritage should be acknowledged, explored, and highlighted. Oliver [77] advocated the exploration of a community’s resources, culture, and lifestyle and criticised the role of the “specialist,” who is an outsider and who disregards the cultural contribution of the local community in order to implement a top-down planning strategy. He advocates:

Shelters of societies whose social patterns require of their buildings specific forms to accord with their material, spiritual and kinaesthetic (sic) needs, resolved through the available resources and conditioned by factors of economy, environment, climate, and site. They are shelters built from within the community as essential to its life as a direct expression of it, and not to the plans and specifications of appointed specialists [77] (p. 28).

This continues to be the case with many urban planning initiatives nowadays.

The intangible elements of social and cultural heritage cannot be incorporated into the planning and policy-making process because they are not being well documented [78]. However, it is contended that the socio-spatial documentation of cultural heritage by applying the proposed grounded theory methodology in the urban planning process will by default result in policies, which are more sensitive towards safeguarding and preserving cultural assets of the informal community, and eventually benefit the city planning process. Jane Jacobs acknowledges the heterogeneous nature of informal settlement in the planning process by exploring their unique culture and characteristics for more informed policy-making process. She states: “It is futile to plan a city’s appearance, or speculate on how to endow it with a pleasing appearance of order, without knowing what sort of innate, functioning order it has. To seek for the look of things as a primary purpose or as the main drama is apt to make nothing but trouble” [61] (pp. 14–15).

The future planning process should be perceived as contextual, people centric, and discretionary in nature. Two broad considerations are to be made in developing a policy approach. Firstly, urban western ideologies cannot be implemented without a thorough study of the values, systems, culture, and social structure of the land where they are being implemented. Thus, without sociocultural contextualization, urban sustainability cannot be fully achieved. Secondly, future policies will need to reduce social stratification and focus on localised governance and a bottom-up approach towards urban planning. This is especially important in a city such as Islamabad that already has many sociocultural ambivalences due to a history of top-down planning policies and governance [65]. According to Soliman [12] (p. 223), in situations such as this, “a proper intervention is essential to maintaining the cohesion of urban informality within the urban context in a sustainable way”.

There are many avenues for future research. A larger set of informal settlements can be studied to further investigate the characteristics of sustainability in the informalities of the Global South. A larger sample would help enrich the description and understanding of these important parts of the urban fabric. The identified characteristics, including the role of culture carriers, may also be measured quantitatively through surveys and hypothesis testing. By expanding the scope of the field sites, nuances and variations in cultural practices in informal settlements and their contribution to sustainability can be further analysed. This equally applies for Pakistan, cities in the Global South, or any other parts of the world.

A framework for documenting the cultural heritage of informal settlements can be developed that involves input from residents and experts. Such an initiative can inform

the urban planning process in the city. Similarly, projects in informal settlements could be undertaken with a view to promoting community development, using cultural activities for resource enhancement, capacity building, and empowerment. Academia, practice-based, and state regulatory bodies can jointly participate in such projects to ensure the documentation and expansion of the existing capacity and assets of the informal communities that can benefit all in the urban realm.

Possible practical future research covering feasibility studies of the market potential of crafts, skills, and other activities, such as folk games, folklore, urban farming, traditional funfair, or cuisines, can be carried out to explore the potential for social enterprise. Private sector involvement and the proposition of sustainable livelihoods for the informal residents can be a positive outcome of such studies.

The suggestions here are only part of the numerous opportunities for future studies in light of the present research that can contribute to the theoretical debate on sustainability and benefit the economic, social, and cultural realms of the city. What this study has been able to show is that informal settlements have a future within the urban fabric of the cities in the Global South. Their sustainability characteristics add unique vibrancy and opportunities.

5. Concluding Remarks

Manifold assets and elements of sociocultural sustainability are found from the data collected through the application of grounded theory. We were able to establish that the dwellers of the informal settlements are culture carriers and play a vital role in demonstrating sustainability elements through their values, lifestyle, and practices. Saving the rural cultural value system from extinction is essential for sustainable living in the city. Rather than being seen as problematic, the informal settlements offer some glimpses of hope as many of the values and skills that allow a more sustainable way of living are preserved by the people who inhabit them.

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