Masters Thesis Information Showcase
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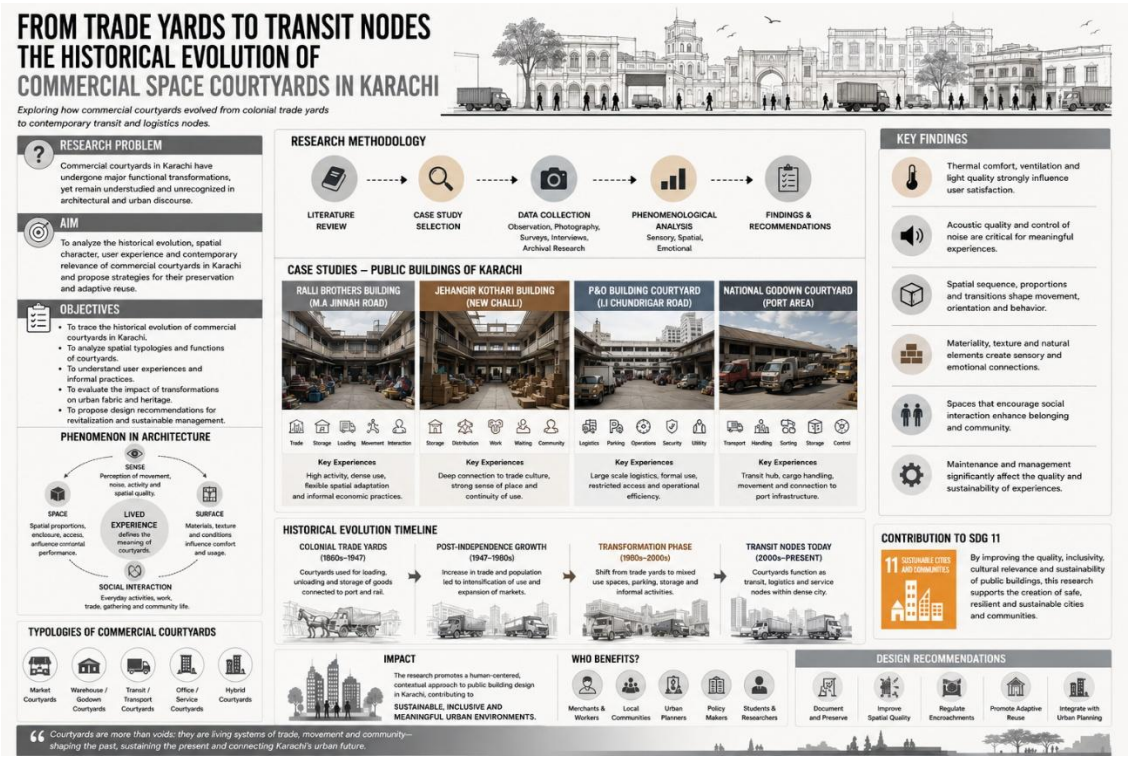
Department: Architecture and Planning Programme: Masters of Architecture Specialization: Architecture	
1	**Title of the Thesis** From Trade Yards to Transit Nodes: The Historical Evolution of Commercial Space Courtyards in Karachi
2	**Abstract** (min 300 to 500 words) The urban landscape of Karachi, Pakistan's largest metropolis and principal port city, has been influenced by centuries of commercial activity, colonial planning, and rapid post-independence development. Among its architectural features, courtyards, traditionally examined in residential contexts, play a crucial yet often overlooked role in commercial buildings. This thesis explores the cultural, historical, and functional significance of commercial courtyards in Karachi, with the aim of documenting their typology, evolution, and contemporary relevance, as well as providing strategies for their preservation and adaptive reuse. The research reveals that commercial courtyards in Karachi, unlike their residential counterparts, are intricately linked to logistical networks, trade systems, and informal economic practices. Despite their historical and functional importance, these spaces face numerous threats, including structural deterioration, encroachment, unregulated vertical expansion, and loss of heritage value. A systematic study of these courtyards, therefore, enhances the broader understanding of Karachi's urban morphology and its socio-economic dynamics. This study employs a mixed-methodology approach integrating field surveys, architectural documentation, ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews, archival research, and GIS-based spatial analysis. The study identifies five primary typologies of commercial courtyards in Karachi: **Market Courtyards**: Medium-sized courtyards serving wholesale and retail merchants, often densely encroached and active throughout the day. **Warehouse/Godown Courtyards**: Large open spaces surrounded by thick-walled colonial warehouses, retaining most of their original logistical function. **Transit/Transport Courtyards**: Extensive open yards primarily used for truck marshalling, cargo handling, and transport-related operations. **Office/Service Courtyards**: Vertical light wells and service courtyards in multi-story commercial and financial buildings, often partially enclosed and underutilized.

	The comparative analysis of the case studies identifies patterns in spatial adaptability, functional continuity, heritage value, and socio-economic roles. Market and hybrid courtyards exhibit significant informal adaptability, facilitating high-density commercial activities and informal economic practices. In contrast, port and transit courtyards are characterized by formalized, large-scale logistic functions. Although office courtyards are architecturally planned, they experience functional decline due to neglect and inadequate maintenance. Encroachment, vertical expansion, and informal interventions are common across most courtyards, especially in high-density market areas such as New Challi and M.A. Jinnah Road, posing threats to both operational efficiency and historical integrity. This research underscores the cultural and economic importance of commercial courtyards, emphasizing their dual role as functional trade spaces and repositories of Karachi's urban heritage. Recommendations include documentation, conservation policies, adaptive reuse strategies, and integration into urban planning to balance functional commercial use with heritage preservation.
3	**Impact on SDGs"** (min 500 words) **SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities** This research directly contributes to the achievement of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11): Sustainable Cities and Communities, which aims to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. By examining the historical evolution, spatial transformation, and present-day significance of commercial space courtyards in Karachi, the research highlights the importance of conserving these spaces as integral components of the city's architectural and urban heritage. The study demonstrates that commercial courtyards are not merely remnants of colonial architecture but historically significant urban spaces that have played a central role in supporting trade, commerce, circulation, and climate-responsive design. Through archival research, field documentation, spatial analysis, and comparative case studies, the research establishes that these courtyards continue to contribute to the identity and functionality of Karachi's historic commercial districts despite undergoing considerable physical and functional transformations. The proposed design strategies emphasize adaptive reuse rather than demolition, encouraging the revitalization of existing courtyard spaces to improve accessibility, environmental quality, pedestrian movement, and commercial activity while preserving their historic character. Such interventions support sustainable urban regeneration by extending the life of heritage buildings, reducing the need for new construction, and maintaining the cultural identity of the historic city. Furthermore, the research promotes the integration of commercial courtyards into future urban planning policies by recognizing them as valuable public and semi-public spaces

	capable of enhancing the social, economic, and environmental performance of historic commercial districts. Conserving these spaces not only safeguards Karachi's architectural heritage but also contributes to creating more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban environments. This research supports **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities** by demonstrating that the conservation and adaptive reuse of commercial space courtyards can preserve Karachi's architectural heritage while addressing present-day urban challenges. The findings provide a framework for heritage-sensitive planning that balances economic development with cultural preservation, ensuring that historic commercial courtyards continue to function as valuable urban assets for future generations.
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6	**Graphical Abstract**