

Sustaining Sense of Place of Kandy, Sri Lanka: The Role of Commercial Spaces

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Abstract

Developing a historically important city while retaining the essence of that place is a crucial issue confronted by architects, urban designers and planners worldwide. It should neither be a repetition of elements nor total disregard of conservational norms: if that city is an urbanized living city, many facets such as public services, commercial activities and conservation issues require consideration. Understanding the sense of place is considered as the means of ensuring healthy and sustainable development in a historical city. Sense of place is always related to human interaction with places and is reflected in commercial spaces, which have the potential of creating an identity to a city. Therefore the objective of this research is to explore the sense of place in commercial spaces of a living historical city.

Key words: historical city developments, urban conservation, sense of place

1. Introduction

Preserving the 'sense of place' in a historical context has become a crucial issue with today's new development programs and many theories have been established in this area of study based on the issues that arose from time to time. These theories prove that a proper understanding of the sense of place for a particular space is needed for a positive development in future. Relph, (1976) has written in-depth regarding the increasing level of placelessness, stating that the current scale of destruction and replacement of the distinctive places of the world suggests that placeless geography is increasingly the more forceful of these, even though a considerable diversity of places persist.

There is a research gap regarding the sense of place in the historical context and especially in relation to commercial spaces. It is inevitable that the cities have to undergo to changes from time to time and developments had to take place. Thus preserving the 'sense' of that place is important even if the place cannot be preserved (Steven, 2007; Shu-Yi, 2010). It could be perhaps that the commercial aspect of the city is neglected when it comes to the preservation of a historical city and it should be noted that in a living historical city like Kandy the two facets cannot be segregated. Sense of place is always related to human interaction with places and thus it is reflected in commercial spaces. They also have the potential of creating an identity to a city and therefore the research is to explore the sense of place in commercial spaces located in a historical city.

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2. Research objectives

Primary objective

Understanding the attributes of 'sense of place' in a historic city and exploring the means of preserving it through commercial spaces.

Secondary objectives

- Understanding what is 'sense of place'
- Exploring how the concept of 'sense of place' has been handled in the past
- Identifying the constraints which hinder the developments in historical cities from conserving its 'sense of place'
- Suggesting strategies to preserve the 'sense of place' in a historic context in future.

3. Methodology

An intensive literature review was conducted on the subject area and a theoretical framework was developed based on the concepts of 'sense of place' as discussed by numerous scholars. The research was case study based, with the city of Kandy - a living historical city - being selected for the research. Three different commercial spaces from within Kandy city were selected for the data collection based on the time period they were built. The reason for selecting 'time period' as a criteria to select the samples was that it is with 'time' the changes occur in any city and it is more appropriate for a historical city as well. Therefore the selected sample areas were:

- a. Kandy Municipal Market,
- b. Kandy City Centre,
- c. Part of a commercial street

The first stage of data collection was done through observation; each case was observed for particular period during the weekends and the weekdays and important details were gathered by photographs as well as personal notes. The factors that were observed during the visits were;

- ✓ the activity types
- ✓ most crowded spaces
- ✓ type of people visiting the place
- ✓ their behavior patterns
- ✓ their interaction with the salesmen
- ✓ interaction with other visitors
- ✓ the type of shopping etc

The second phase of data collection was by means of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Two questionnaires were prepared separately for the local visitors and the foreigners; along with the questionnaires some information were collected from them by casual conversations. The interviews were informal, and conducted with the salesmen. A total of 61 questionnaires were filled from the three study locations: 22 from Kandy Municipal Market, 20 from Kandy city centre and 19 from the Commercial street.

Methodology of data analyzing

The data collected by the observation¹ was analyzed based on the spaces in which the observation took place.

Example: Activity- More people were seen chatting with each other; it was analyzed as to where it occurred? What was the reason for that? Whether there was any special characteristic in that space? Whether there was any architectural element that supported that function? Thereafter contribution of that particular activity to generate an intangible quality was analyzed and finally the connection between the tangible component or space that produce an intangible quality which help to create a sense of place is made.

The data collected from the questionnaires, interviews and the casual conversations were interpreted based on the theoretical framework as they require qualitative questions and answers. Further, the fact that respondents were from separate groups of people and the difference in the age group of the local visitors were considered when analyzing the questionnaires.

4. Defining 'Place' and the concept of 'sense of place'

All the literatures which try to address the issue of the cities losing their 'sense of place' try to come out with ways by which the sense of place can be measured and all of them are intangible facets which are beyond the physical appearance of a building or places. Phil Turner & Susan Turner (n.d . p.14) perceive 'place' as an objective dimension whereas the 'sense of place' is its subjective dimension. According to Dovey (1999) the concept of 'place is aligned with group of terms, such as 'identity', 'community', 'character' and 'home'. A place is given meaning by the activities of the people (Norberg-Schulz,1980; Relph, 1976). For Najafi & Shariff, (2011) it is the relationship of the people with the physical along with the former. For Hauge (2007), the ingredients which give identity to a place generates the 'sense' of that place. Jiven & Larkham, (2003) argue that this identity has close relationship with the history of a place. Hayden (1997) further states that the urban landscape should help the citizens to define their public past.

4.1 Importance of retaining the 'sense of place' in living historical cities

One of the major problems identified in the historical cities is the repetition of the same elements without a meaning and thus affecting the sense of that place. As a result s, when one building sets a wrong example, as all the buildings are not designed or renovated by professionals sensitive to principles of urban conservation, many other buildings also have the tendency to follow them because of the lack of knowledge of the people. Hence Steven (2007) insists that the city as a whole should be considered when proposing renovations for old buildings or construction of new buildings. Also Shu-Yi, (2010) insists upon the fact that the locals and their lifestyles should be considered rather than the purely focusing on tourism especially, which is a much debated topic in contemporary development and conservation plans.

4.2 Role of commercial spaces in retaining the 'sense of place' of historic cities

Commercial activity is considered as one of the important functions that have been there even before the civilization of mankind. Even though it was not in an advance form as it is now, it had the basic concept of selling and buying. The beginning of the commercial activity can be considered as the Barter system where goods were exchanged between two individuals or

parties. This small action constitutes many social as well as cultural aspects to it apart from its commercial purpose, because the human interaction between two individuals is strongly felt in this action. Hence the setting or the place, where this action takes place, which is the architecture, has a powerful impact on commercial activities; the degree of the impact depends

on how that architecture is relevant to that particular place, especially the spirit of the place (Day, 2002).

Unfortunately, the so called 'historically or culturally important places' are affected by the name of 'commercial purposes' as a result of the development around the world. Thus Hayden (1997) criticizes them by saying that "The process that transforms places demands analysis. As a field of wild flowers becomes a shopping mall at the edge of a freeway, that paved over meadow, restructured as freeway lanes, parking lots, and mall must still be considered as place, if only to register the importance of loss and it has been damaged by careless development."(Hayden, 1997: 37).

5. Theoretical framework

The main theoretical framework is derived from the literature review. That is to identify the intangible qualities that are generated by the tangible components or the spaces to create 'sense of place'. At the same time the tangible components and the spaces are compared with reference to the past. Therefore the intangible qualities that are derived from the literature survey and the tools that help to explore them in the case studies are discussed below.

5.1 Roots

According to Day (2002), 'root', is knowing the past which, in time and place give context to individual life; connecting individuals with community, nature, even identity and self-esteem. For Relph (2008), a public place is an expression of community, where communally held beliefs and values and interpersonal involvements are reflected through the landscape, the street and the buildings. This notion envisages that architecture should reveal the 'culture' of a place, because 'culture' means, the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.). Based on this argument, some scholars refer to culture itself as what makes the sense or the spirit of a place (Durrell , as cited in Jiven & Larkham, 2003).

As such, the following are the aspects which should be looked in to when examining whether a particular place has the component of 'root' which will give a sense of place to it:

- The building's impact on the culture of the place
- The building's contribution towards the reinforcement of the community and vice versa
- Reflection of the beliefs and values of interpersonal involvements of the people and the place through the building
- The building's image as an expression of the community

5.2 Honesty

Relph (1976) insists that places become 'placeless' by losing their authenticity where either stereo 'type conventions' or 'technological sophistications' siege them. Relph further states that by losing the essence or the honesty of a place, people who are living there also lose their true

identity, because peoples' identity is mostly related to the place where they are associated with. Accordingly, certain considerations are derived to decide whether a building or a place has a sense of honesty:

- Authenticity of the building
- Authenticity of the tangible components of the building
- Unselfconscious experience of the building
- The building's impact on the symbolic quality of the place

5.3 Sustainability

For Day (2002), social, cultural, economical, ecological and health are the factors by which sustainability of a place should be measured. These aspects can be into two spheres as socio cultural and ecological, economical and health, because these two have become the two extreme problems in the contemporary world. The contribution of built environment for these two issues is comparatively large. Its negative impact has an effect on the past, present and the future of a community, and an understanding the past as well as creating the architecture of the people would help to sustain those five aspects ,which are categorized as:

- Ecological, economical and health
- Social and Cultural

5.4 Memory

Making connections with what one heard or read in the past with what he sees in the present is an inevitable nature of human mind. Thus memory has the power to create a bridge between the past and the present. Accordingly, what one perceives in the present must be a tangible component that should be able to trigger a memory of the past. "Place memory" says Hayden (1997: 36) "is the key to the power of historic places to help citizens define their pasts; places trigger memories for insiders, who have shared a common past, and at the same time places often can represent shared pasts to outsiders who might be interested in knowing about them in the present". Therefore, in order to understand the sense of a place through the facet of memory, the following aspects should be considered:

- The contribution of the built environment in remembering the specific place as a historic city
- The contribution of the built environment in defining the public past of the citizens or the community

5.5 Place attachment

According to Cross (2001, p.1),

"...place attachment is more than an emotional and cognitive experience, and includes cultural beliefs and practices that link people to place".

Yi-Fu Tuan (as cited in Cross, 2001, p.2)

refers place attachment as '*topophilia*' and says it is "... the affective bond between people and place or setting". As a result of having an attachment towards a place, man eventually takes care of what he does to that place and his future actions and impacts to that place is decided or defined by it. Accordingly it should be concluded that a building in a historical city, which is also

an action made by man should be able to enhance this attachment toward itself as well as to where it is located, because it will shape the future of the city as well.

Therefore the following aspects are derived which help to decide the component of 'place attachment' of a building:

- The impact of the building on the peoples' attachment to the place
- The feeling of belongingness
- The attitudes of the people about the building

5.6 Identity

A place is considered as something that gives an identity not only to that place, but also to those people who live there. Thus 'identity' is considered as the vital ingredient that creates a 'sense of a place'. Relph, (1976) explains that the identity of a place is expressed in three ways; they are the 'physical appearance', 'observable activities and functions' and 'meanings or symbols'. These three aspects Relph (1976) says, express a 'socially structured' identity. Thus he tries to explain that an identity of a place expresses a 'common identity' of a community.

Especially in a historical city, there is more potential to express the identity of not only the present state and lifestyle of a community, but also the 'public past' of that community as to what kind of activities and rituals took place in particular spaces.

"Group identity is thus closely linked with the form and history of a place, creating a sense of place"
(Jiven & Larkham, 2003:69)

Based on the following three areas, the element of identity is discussed:

- Expression of common identity through the physical features.
- Expression of common identity through the activities.
- Expression of common identity through the symbols and rituals.

6. Kandy

Kandy is selected for the case study as it is a living historical and cultural city. One of the widely debated topic related to Kandy is in how the new developments should respond to its historical, or Kandyan architecture and beautify the city; yet a forgotten topic is that while adopting certain elements from old architecture and having new buildings in order to discipline the city, the character and the essence of the place deteriorates and thus the city losses its life in certain activities. Although Kandy is a service city with commercial activities, despite being a cultural city, the commercial or the service sector of the city is either ignored or forgotten when development takes place. It is only confined to providing buildings for those function while the human relationships and behavior patterns related to functions are being neglected. Therefore the value of the 'place' is lost. Thus a comparison of the new infills in the city for the commercial activities and the old shopping areas, and extent to which they help to preserve the value of the city by sustaining it as a 'place' along with the experience of the people require consideration.

7. Case study Analysis

Analysis of all three case studies is beyond the scope of this paper. As such, a detailed discussion is confined to an analysis of the Kandy market, while only a summary of the findings are explained for the Kandy City Centre and the Shopping street.

7.1 Kandy municipal market

The current Municipal Market in Kandy was built in 1957 in the same place where the old market had been. It is located in the centre of the city providing ample facilities for the public (Karunaratna & MSA :Sri Lanka, 1999).



Fig 1. Kandy municipal market- built during the post independent period.

Source: author

7.1.1 Roots

The building's impact on the culture of the place

The building which was built during the post independent era exhibits the features of vernacular as well as Kandyan architecture; among them the Kandyan roof, colonnaded lobby, courtyard and the corridor are some important features. The tangible components and the spaces are significantly a response to the traditional architecture of the place.

The market complex itself is a living example of the commercial culture that existed many years in the country as well as the city; that is the traditional 'pola' (fair) and the stalls where the buyer and the seller interact with each other. Other than the physical appearance and the observable functions of the market, there is closeness between the buyer and the seller; they have regular customers who visit their shop for the sake of friendship.

The building's contribution towards the reinforcement of the community and vice versa

The market complex and the community reinforce each other in two ways. One is the traditional pola in the heart of the city and it was observed that it is the busiest and the bustling part of the whole complex. The second is how, the people think that the architecture of the building reinforces their culture and religion. The responses to the questionnaire indicate that the roof reminds most respondents of the temple of tooth, and Kandy city being the one of the most

sacred places for Buddhists and its connection with the historical importance create a bond between the building and the community.

Reflection of the beliefs and values of interpersonal involvements of the people and the place through the building

A noteworthy response from all the questionnaires is that the place is friendly; both the locals as well as the foreigners mentioned this and would recommend this building to someone else as a place that is a full of friendly people.

Such friendliness and hospitality had been valued by all users and aided by the interpersonal involvements of people since early days. It is reflected through the architecture which enhances this interaction: how the corridors help people to pause and talk for a while; the view towards the

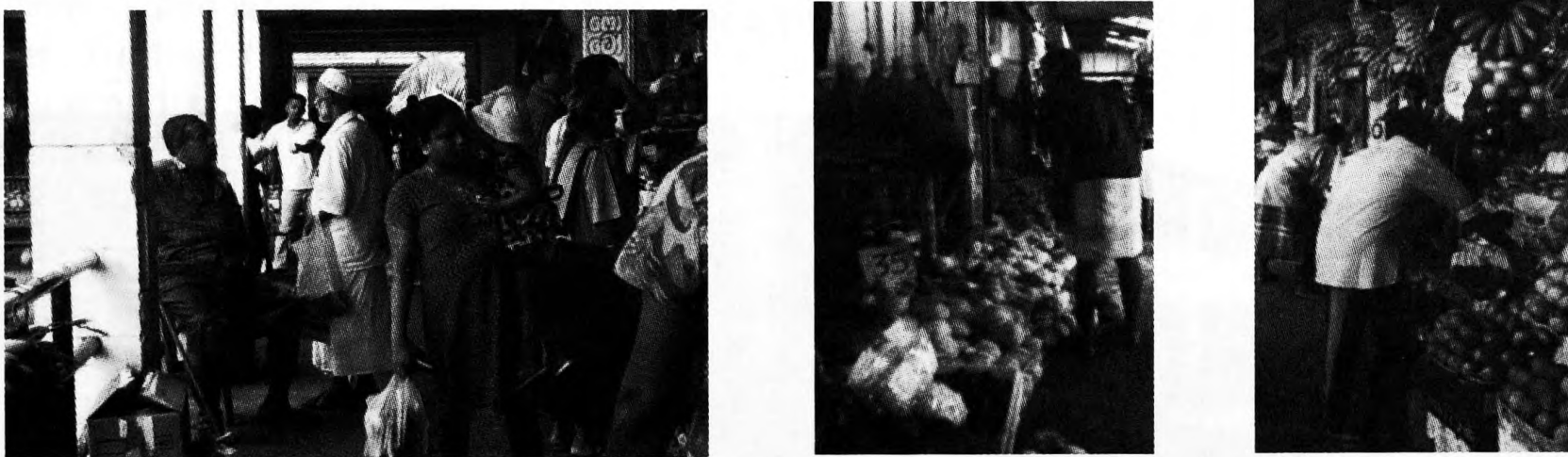


Fig. 2 The corridor as an interactive space for the people.
source: author

central courtyard give them a feeling that they are in a relaxed space and this makes them stay in those places for a longer period (Fig.2). The stalls being opened to the corridors as well as the 'pola' function add more value to it.

7.1.2 Honesty

Authenticity of the building

The market complex cannot be defined as an authentic place based on the physical appearance as it was built responding to the traditional architecture. Yet the expression of the architecture and the experience of those who use it becomes authentic, because of the familiarity of functions to which people have been used to.

Unselfconscious experience of the building

The spaces are unselfconsciously experienced by the public because of many reasons such as the functions and the methodological zoning layout which is not only defined by the type of goods they sell but also the colours and the smell of the goods, the volume of the space and its density as well as the noise of the people. This is very well noted by the all the respondent said it is for

them to find the places and some mentioned the reasons as zoning , organized manner and familiarity and others even though did not mention a particular reason yet they don't have a problem in finding their way.

The building's impact on the symbolic quality of the place

The building helps to retain the symbolic quality of the place through its response to the traditional architectural features which is supported by the respondents.

7.1.3 Sustainability

Ecological, economical and health

The courtyard, the small windows to the road side, the roofing material in the corridors and the building being opened to the interior make it possible for the building to get natural light and ventilation (Fig.3); no mechanical ventilation systems are used in the building and this makes it ecologically, economically as well as health wisely a sustainable building (Fig.3).

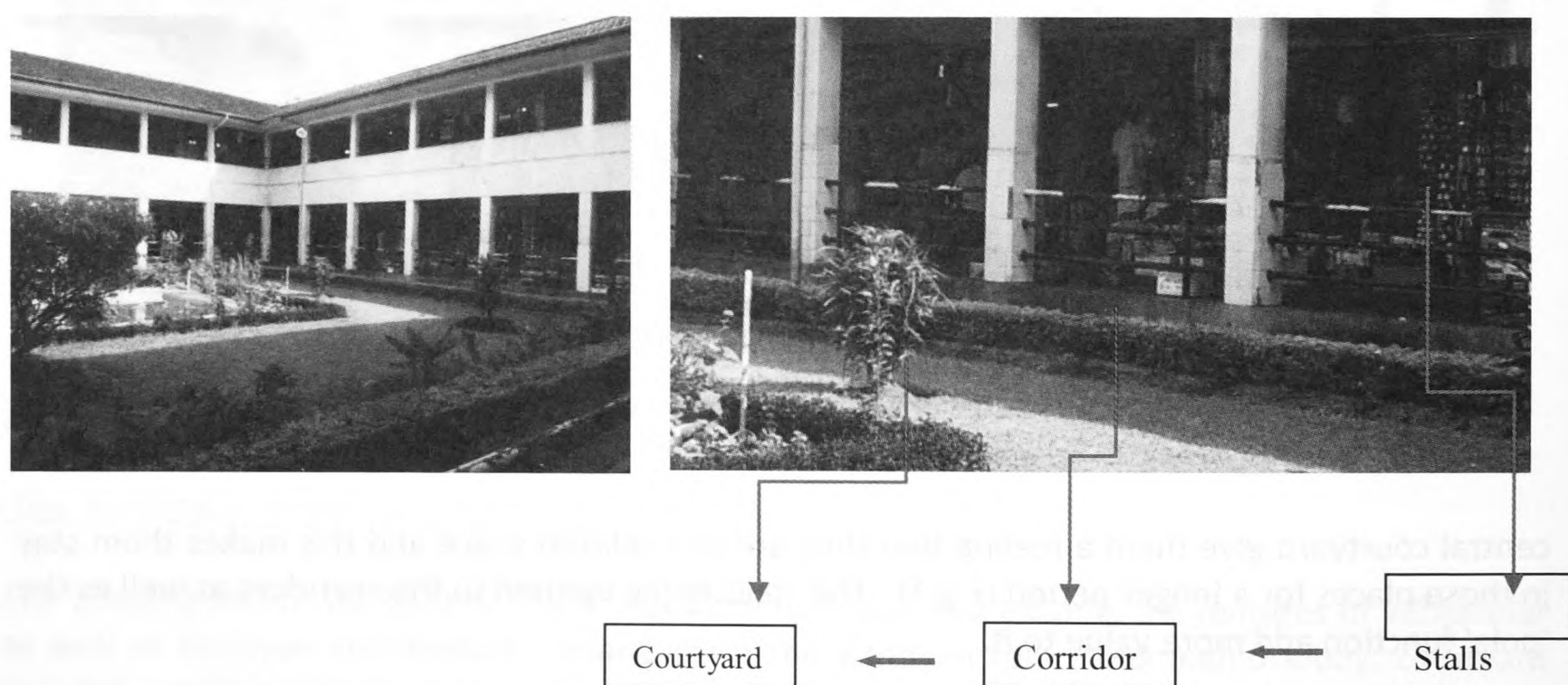


Fig 3. Stalls opened towards the courtyard and composition of spaces within the market source: author

Social and Cultural

The building could be considered as a sustainable building, which not only functions with natural light and ventilation but also social and cultural sustainability which helps to carry the 'trails of the past to the future as well. In these modern days where every action has become computerized, having a well organized traditional 'pola' in the middle of the city is a cultural sustainability and continuing the tradition of a close relationship between the salesman and the customer is another social sustainability; The Tradition is being taken to the future through the 'pola' and the other commercial activities.

7.1.4 Memory

The building's contribution in remembering Kandy as a historic city

The building helps to remember Kandy as a historical city by its architecture. In spite of being a building that was built as a response to a particular type of architecture, the building itself is being able to mark an era in the history of the country as well as the city. Even though new

materials are used (concrete), the building able to make it belonging to the city. Yet based on the response of the people, only those who are above the age of twenty do see these kind of connections between the building and the past.

The building's contribution in defining the public past of the citizens or the community

The important fact is that the type of commercial activity and the interaction between the salesmen and the customers help the people to define their public past. The commercial activities in the past have always been encouraged public interaction and creating new ties in the past society. That is evident through the salesmen's' responses that they have their regular customers and when another customer approaches the place, they introduce the former to the other. Further, the forecourt of the market acts as a gathering space as well as a space for other small vendors to sell their products.

7.1.5 Place attachment

The impact of the building on the peoples' attachment to the place

One of the interesting facts that were found through the survey and the casual interview is that most of the people have an attachment towards the building because of their childhood memories; especially those who are above twenty years old and all the respondents related the building with their childhood memory. More than fifty percent of them have a sensitive attachment towards the place because once they used to come here with their parents. They are able to narrate where they used to stay and wait till their parents bought goods, how the salesmen used to make them sit near the edge of the corridor and give them fruits and sweets etc.. Thus they relate their attachment with reference to some the spaces in the building.

The feeling of belongingness

People from all income levels visit the building; not only because of the prices of the goods but they are used to the place, according to the respondents. The welcoming nature of the spaces is one of the reasons why most of the people like to visit the place and it is evident through more than 70% of the responses.

The peoples' attitude about the building

A majority of the respondents indicated that they are proud of the building, which is in a prominent location of their city. Yet only those who are above thirty years old have a solid reason as to why they are proud of this building and more than eighty percent of those who belong to the younger generation do not have an idea as to why this building is important to them.

7.1.6 Identity

Expression of common identity through physical features

The physical appearance is very much apparent that they represent or have connection either with the temple of tooth relic or vernacular architecture. The Kandyan roof represents the roof style of the temple and the colonnaded lobby reminds the columns in the temple of tooth. Even though the details of the columns are not similar to that of in the temple the proportions have a

connection. The small openings or the windows also have the decorative finishes which reminds of the detailed decorations of the temple. The corridor and the courtyard have connection with the traditional architectural features where they have been used in the 'walawwa' houses (ancestral houses) of the Kandyan period.

Expression of common identity through the activities

The architecture enables traditional type of commercial activity to be carried out. At the same time, the building acts as a public gathering space. Both spatial as well as the social factors help to enhance this function of the building. Spatially, the access to the building, the hierarchy of spaces enables a high degree of interaction.

More than 70% of the responses confirmed that they are used to this building for a long time and feel as if it is their own place; thus it helps them to do whatever they want to a place where they are not worried about being noticed by others, especially because the functions that happen in the spaces as well as the people who visit the place are not something new to them. Having a linear corridor and the evenly distributed stalls and the 'pola' which do not focus on one particular place is another important reason for it.

Expression of common identity through the symbols and rituals

The market building is decorated with certain objects during special occasions; the spaces are converted according to the seasonal festivals that take place in the city or the country and even though they are very small changes, they have the potential to create a large impact as representing a common identity of a community.

7.2 The Kandy City Centre and Commercial Street

Kandy City Centre

One of the major problems identified in the building is that it lacks authenticity in spaces as well the architectural elements and features. They either do not have the same functions or does not help to create the required spatial quality. As a result of this the building does not promote healthy activities that would reveal an identity of the people as well as the community (Fig. 4).

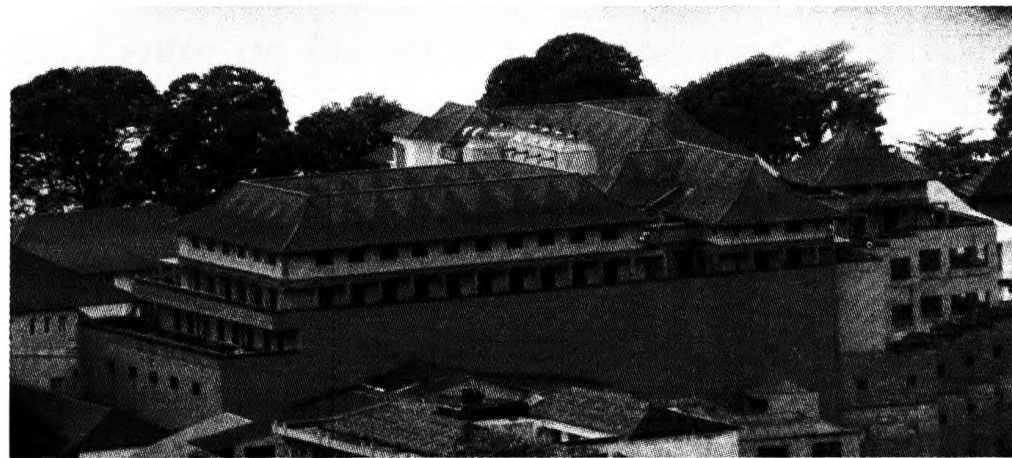


Fig 4. Kandy City Centre

Source: <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/75362199>

The main issue with the spatial configuration is that the zoning and the layout are confusing to the people and this is revealed by responses of the public as well as the observations. Further,

the conflicting spatial attributes from the entrance to the interior reduce the intangible qualities that could create a sense of place. Thus the fact that repeating the elements would not help to

create a 'sense of place' and it is not an effective method of responding to a historical city is proven by the studies.

The shopping street

The selected commercial street is a part of the Yatinuwara weediya from Dalada veediya junction to the Colombo street junction (Fig. 5). It consists of old as well as contemporary buildings. Most of the

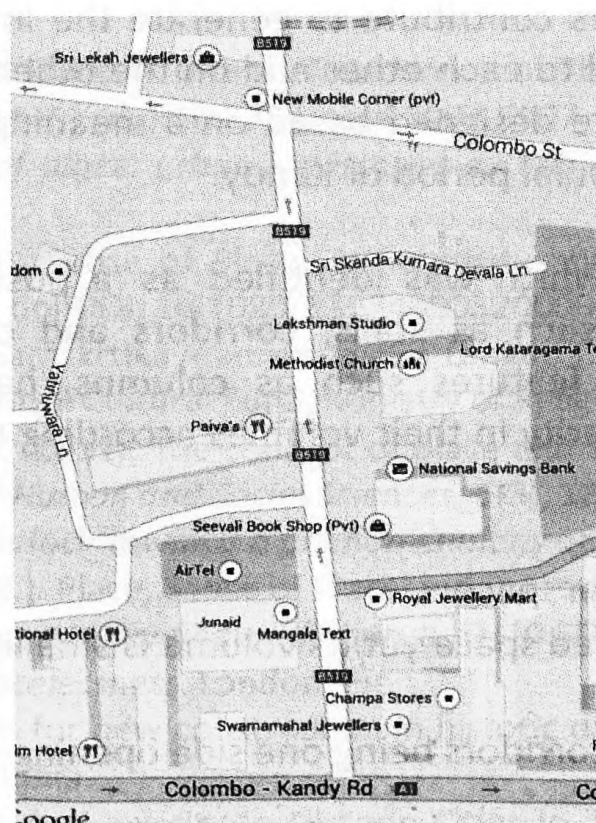


Fig 5. The shopping street

Part of commercial street in the city (Yatinuwara weediya-from dalada veediya to the Colombo street junction)- consist of buildings that belong to various time periods and is undergoing many changes

Source: <https://www.google.lk/maps/@7.2938558,80.6350899,18z>

buildings are commercial and there is one chapel and an entrance to the 'Katharagama devalaya' is located in the street. The street consists of one of the oldest houses in Kandy, the 'Giragama walawwa' as well.

The intangible attributes generated by architecture to create a sense of place in the street is contradicting with each other mainly due to the fact that the street consists of historical as well as contemporary buildings. As a result certain important factors regarding the sense of place of the street could be noticed:

- Even though the old buildings and their façades and functions do help to retain the sense of place, the contemporary buildings have become a threat to them
- The width of the street which is a dominant factor has given more priority to the vehicles rather than the pedestrians.

8. Remarks

The research reveals that the relationship between the architecture and the functions contribute towards the creation of a 'sense of place' in a building .

The factors that help to generate the intangible qualities that create a sense of place in the market are architectural features and elements such as roof, columns, windows, openings, handrails and etc.; the spaces are the forecourt, entrance lobby, corridor, courtyard and the stalls; the spatial qualities are zoning, methodical layout, response to the streets, contextual response, volumes of the spaces and the visual connections between the spaces.

Nevertheless, none of these factors contribute to generate the intangible qualities in isolation. On one hand they are inter-related to each other and on the other hand they correspond to the needs of the people. Thus they are designed based on a meaning and a purpose which was a characteristic found in the pre -colonial period of Kandy.

Example: The methodical layout which was identified as a positive attribute of the market complex is formed with spaces such as stalls, corridors and courtyards; these spaces are demarcated out of architectural features such as columns, handrails, openings, etc; they respond to each other and have clarity in their volumes according to the hierarchy of the spaces such as:

- The forecourt is a large open space
- Entrance lobby is an enclosed space yet its volume is smaller than the forecourt and the corridors
- The corridors: most of the corridors being one side opening to the courtyard .

Simultaneously, this layout is acknowledged by the people because they are zoned in a way that is easy for them to move, find the places and engage in shopping activity. Hence the architecture of the building is able to generate the intangible qualities that create the 'sense of place'.

Thus it can be seen that the municipal market is able to generate sense of place more successfully because it has responded to the architecture of the place while simultaneously integrating how people use those spaces; thus the building, place and the people are

harmonized. Kandy City Centre on the other hand has tried to respond to the architectural elements in an objective way while ignoring the subjective phase of the place. The shopping street is in-between these two where a few old buildings contribute to retain the quality of the place while the others don't and as a result, it does not contribute towards 'sense of place' effectively.

9. Conclusion

The study on the above three case studies reveals that it is not only objective response to the built fabric that contributes to the 'sense of place' of a building or a street, but an integration of the needs of the public and how they move and use a space with the correct response to the architectural elements and spatial qualities of the place; this subjective response helps to generate the intangible qualities that create a 'sense of place'.

This paper which focused on the commercial spaces in a historical city and their 'sense of place' reveals that the architecture should be able to generate certain intangible qualities that would

eventually contribute to create the 'sense of place'. The research which was conducted based on the frame work indicates that the 'sense of place' of each case study area differs from one another owing to various reasons. The contribution towards sense of place in the Municipal market is strong, and shows that it has more sense of place compared to other two: the Kandy City Centre does not contribute towards sense of place, while the shopping street is in-between the two extremes.

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