

THE EFFECT OF BUILT ENVIRONMENT AESTHETICS ON THE CITY IMAGE

Sugathadasa N B¹, Ariyawansa R G²

¹Department of Estate Management and Valuation, University of Sri Jayewardenepura,
Sri Lanka,
nimashasugathadasa96@gmail.com

²Department of Estate Management and Valuation, University of Sri Jayewardenepura,
Sri Lanka,
ariyaw71@sjp.ac.lk

ABSTRACT

Kandy, Sri Lanka's second largest city is a popular tourism destination for both residents and visitors from across the world. Modernization and commercialization of the built environment are currently posing a significant danger to city image, destroying its historical value. Therefore, this article aims to explore the influence of built environment aesthetics on the image of Kandy as a historic city. A selected sample of fifty repeat visitors who had regularly visited Kandy city in Sri Lanka was used to perform an online questionnaire survey to obtain primary data. The field observations were carried out for further confirmation of the data sources. The methods of data analysis were adopted as descriptive analysis and content analysis techniques. The findings revealed that, despite all of the history protection efforts implemented, the city's image has been distorted, and there is a risk of losing the city's historical value due to growing economic and demographic pressure. The Findings of the study prove that regardless of all the heritage conservation measures taken, the city image has been distorted and there would be a possibility of losing the historical value of the city with the rapid economic and population pressure. As key concerns of the cities built environment characteristics, vendors' lack of awareness for protecting the historic city image, a lack of coordination and rules, obsolete legal requirements, and a lack of transparency in compensating shop owners for their losses have been noted.

Keywords: Built Environment Aesthetics, City Image, Modernization, Commercialization

1. INTRODUCTION

The historic built environment includes cathedrals, cemeteries, businesses, galleries, marketplaces, and so on (Cultural Heritage, 2017). The United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has designated thousands of legacy sites across the world as heritage sites, based on their archaeological, cultural, and architectural significance, among other things. The city faces an extra-legal constraint by obtaining historic classification. This constitutional distinction enhances the city's image. Accordingly, every city aspect plays a distinct function in city image, and Lynch (1960) defined imageability as "the ability of a city to elicit a mental depiction of it in the minds of individuals who encounter a place." This mental depiction is known as the city's image. The historical value of a city, place or building elicits cultural memories and mental representations under several set values such as historical significance, connection with the people aesthetic elements, design flexibility, social value, scientific value, rarity, and other aspects of psychological representation (Feilden, 1994). Despite the fact that many cities' heritage-built environments are being damaged by the rapid conversion for economic expansion and advancement of science and technology in the twenty-first century globe (Sodangi et al., 2013). Therefore, the demand for conspicuous lands in city cores has grown. It has become a serious threat to the built heritage of cities. In contrast, an abandoned heritage structure or a site in the center of the city is detrimental to the city's image and future

growth. As a result, the preservation of the ancient urban environment has emerged as one of the most generally urgent and difficult concerns.

The assessment of the effects of newly developed environment aesthetics on historic city image is infrequent in the literature. Environmental cognition research has typically focused on the visual and spatial aspects of city images while disregarding the meaning or association attributes of the environment. In this way, Rapoport (1990) asserted that the significance of city characteristics is undervalued, as is the relevance of investigating meanings embedded in mental representations of settings. The environmental meaning based on a nonverbal communication model which suggested three categories of environmental meanings, high-level meanings (sacred meanings, such as concepts of sacrality and cosmological systems), middle-level meanings (social meanings, such as power, wealth, status, group identity, and political ideologies), and low-level meanings (instrumental meanings or basic factual understanding of the world) (Rapoport, 1990; Munasinghe, 2016). Later, Silva (2013) investigated the link between environment meaning and the often-overlooked meaning of sacred meaning, as well as different perceptual features of the environment. His research highlighted the various spiritual connotations given to the ancient city image and proximity to the various symbolic core aspects, such as sacrality, historicity, scenic tranquility, and well-being. According to the literature synthesis, there is a need for appropriate information and awareness about the elements that impact the built environment aesthetics on historic city image, as well as a thorough evaluation of the building problems that tarnish the historic city image.

In Sri Lanka, there are many cultural heritage buildings/sites located in highly urbanized areas, especially in Colombo, Kandy, and Galle. Kandy is currently known as Sri Lanka's second largest city, and it conjures a powerful historic city image owing to its intrinsic values of history, interaction with the people - visual qualities, aesthetic appearance, social worth, scientific value, and uniqueness among other things. Rapid development and urbanization, on the other hand, have put a significant strain on the historic backdrop and calm atmosphere of the area. Thus, land prices in the downtown region have skyrocketed due to increasing demand for business and residential properties (Abesinghe & Ariyawansa, 2018). Considering these background disputes, this study attempts to discuss the impact of built environment aesthetics on the historic city image of Kandy.

2. METHODS

An online questionnaire was constructed to obtain primary data from residents and visitors. The field observation was carried out in order to identify fundamental information about the city. The study focused primarily on secondary data sources such as documentary studies since it was the only way to discover background information, current problems, and Kandy city regulations. The information obtained was tallied using descriptive statistics and a qualitative method of content analysis was used.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study first identified the elements linked to the build-environment aesthetics on Kandy's ancient city image and then rated those factors based on the respondents' perspectives, as indicated in table 01 below.

Table 1: Factors relating to build-environment aesthetics on Kandy's historic city image

Base	Factors affecting Aesthetics Characters of Buildings	
	Percentage of Agreeing to the below facts	Rank
Historical Buildings in the city enhance the city image of the Kandy	98%	1

Historical street view reflect the city image of Kandy	94%	4
Distribution of Buildings in the city improve the city image of the Kandy	90%	5
Other forms of Aesthetics (Arts, Literature, Architecture) Contribute to the city image of the Kandy.	96%	2
Do you believe open spaces, greenery influence the city image	95%	3
Do you believe built environment can influence the image/ identity of the city	98%	

Source: Survey Data (2021)

As shown in **table 01**, respondents clearly confirmed the hypothesis across specified variables and their visual and cognitive characteristics of the Kandy city environment. According to the factor rankings, the most significant elements were historic buildings, other forms of aesthetics (Arts, Literature, and Architecture, for instance), and open space and greenery. These characteristics are closely related to the city's core dimensions and greatly enhance the city's image.

Table 2 presented the current problems related to the buildings which are identified from reviewing the literature and respondents' aggregated perceptions of approving the prevailing condition of the city.

Table 2. Overall Perception of Problems associated with the Buildings

No.	Problem	Perception regarding problems associated with the buildings
		Percentage of Agree (%)
1	Buildings block the view of other buildings	98%
2	Buildings are too big and too wide	62%
3	Buildings are too high	74%
4	The volumes of buildings are monotonously repetitive	88%
5	Buildings are disordered and irregular	84%
6	Buildings interfere with the natural environment	90%
7	The colors of buildings are too varied	82%
8	The materials of buildings lack variety	76%
9	Signboards on buildings are Disordered	100%
10	Scattered Buildings Located closed to Payments	50%
11	Lack of Maintenance of Buildings	90%

Source: Survey Data, 2021

The eleven concerns are mostly evaluated, and findings confirm that the majority of the replies are similar among local inhabitants and tourists therefore, consider the majority aggregate response rate for further indepth analysis of the above issues. The difficulties of building block view, disorganized and irregular, interfere with the natural environment, building color; materials, signboards, and upkeep are the most often recognized construction problems in Kandy city. Many dispersed structures in Kandy have an obscured view from neighboring buildings. For example, while going down D.S. Senanayake Street, some new structures have obscured the view of others. The planning authorities have set a maximum height of 12m, which corresponds to the height of the Temple of the Tooth relic in Kandy. It was one among the highlighted issues with the structures in Kandy Historic City. Subsequently, the high land values in the commercial grid zone, countless different listed preserved buildings have been totally destroyed or changed to make way for taller and larger structures. Owners, on the other hand, have a legal right to make such changes. Therefore, regulations have been established in order to restore the front section, while conservation plans must be prepared and authorized by the authorities. Typically, their frontage width is 3-5 m, and because these buildings are frequently part of larger structures, the back section extension must be considered as an individual building to preserve integrity. During the assessment, however, it was discovered that these preserved structures had been partitioned, with some restored apartments' where their integrity may be lost. As a result, the authorities should take it into account in order to preserve the cityscape's integrity. Thus, Observations revealed numerous instances where the colors of the façade are extremely vibrant and do not complement the ambience of the historic area. Because of the ownership subdivision, one building might have multiple distinct colors, resulting in no harmony and contradiction with a historical picture. Therefore, some form of cooperation among renters or owners is required in the future to have distinctive façade colors and protect the city's image. Furthermore, the majority of Kandy's structures were built of bricks during colonial times. As a result, numerous buildings have their facades covered with aluminum or other metal siding materials, obscuring the view of the façade. Finally, there is an invasion of newly placed, huge size signage that is virtually invisible, as well as the ruins of earlier signs that appear to be more appropriate with the remaining old structures. Older signage blends in better with the building's front. Furthermore, respondents cited excessive use of space by cars with severe traffic congestion and a lack of open spaces as major issues.

4. CONCLUSION

The study's primary aim is to discuss the impact of built environment aesthetics on historic city image. Kandy was selected as case area due to its diversity and historic significance in comparison to other cities. Initially, five essential elements were discovered that were linked to building environment aesthetics in Kandy's ancient city character. Following that, it was extensively expanded from three fundamental elements of city image, namely, sense of sacrality, historical solemnity, and scenic serenity. From findings, major problems of the built environment feature of the city have been addressed. Unawareness about the historical importance of the city amongst people, incongruous building sizes, and spatially disarrangement of the buildings which scattering everywhere in the city are identified main problems regarding the aesthetics aspects of the built environment in Kandy City. Therefore, implications of this study were important to create awareness of the Kandy city image and how the built environment may help to preserve the city's image and identity.

REFERENCES

- Abesinghe, A. G. & Ariyawansa, R. G. (2018). Competitiveness of Kandy City as a Heritage Tourist Destination in Sri Lanka, *Sri Lankan Journal of Real Estate*, 1-22.
- Cultural Heritage,. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/cairo/culture/tangible-culture-heritage>
- Feilden, B. (1994). *Conservation of Historic Buildings*. Reed Education and Professional Publishing Ltd.

- Lynch, K. (1960). *The Image of the City*, Massachusetts, MIT Press.
- Munasinghe, H. (2016). Aesthetics of urban space through collaborative urban planning: Integrating environmental aesthetics with the communicative theory of planning, *Built-Environment Sri Lanka*, 2(1), 35-44.
- Rapoport, A. (1990). *The meaning of the built environment: A nonverbal communication approach*, Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.
- Silva, K. D. (2011). Mapping meaning in the city image: A case study of Kandy, Sri Lanka, *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 28(3), 229-251.
- Sodangi, M., Khamidi, M. & Idrus, A. (2013). Towards Sustainable Heritage Building Conservation in Malaysia. *Applied Science and environment Sustainability*, 11-21.