

SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION OF URBAN TOWN HOUSES IN THE HERITAGE SITE OF GALLE FORT IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable conservation of heritage sites contributes to sustainable built environments in a city. Conservation should maintain the integrity of the physical place with social equity and environmental soundness in order to be a sustainable conservation endeavor. Efforts should go beyond conserving the façade of buildings of heritage value but sustain the embedded social needs of the occupying society.

The study focuses on the heritage site of Galle Fort in Sri Lanka to establish the importance of a sustainable conservation effort that maintains the authentic physical definitions of the place, while accommodating the transforming societal needs within an environmentally sound urban context

Galle Fort was declared a UNESCO world heritage site in 1988 for its unique physical definition and social significance as a living city. It is an outstanding example of an urban ensemble, which illustrates the interaction of European architecture and South Asian traditions from the 16th to the 19th centuries. The “town houses” (attached street fronting houses) within the grid network of streets, form a larger percentage of the built fabric of the Fort and establishes a distinct identity that strengthens the heritage value of Galle Fort.

The heritage value of the town houses goes beyond the surface/ facade of their physical identity. As a living city, the historic layers represent both the physical and social evolution.

The study firstly identifies physical typological characteristics of the town houses that represent authentic spatial definitions. Thereafter, four town houses are presented in detail as cases, to identify the existing spatial definitions to trace the authentic spatial characteristics embedded within and the social context and functional needs of users represented through the evolved physical definitions. Subsequently, the study suggests spatial principles that will sustain the authentic physical definitions while fulfilling the functional needs of the inhabitants within a habitable context (climatically responsive).

The study establishes that sustaining the habitability of the town houses with temporal changes inevitable with changing societal needs is paramount in conserving this living heritage city for posterity, enabling a sustainable built environment that is physically, socially and environmentally appropriate.