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Architecture and Building:

An examination of the user's ability to sense the difference between the two situations, with special reference to commercial spaces

The Dissertation Presented to the Department of Architecture,
University of Moratuwa,
Sri Lanka
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and RIBA Part II Examination

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

UOM Verified Signature

Thilakarathana H.G.P.R.

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Light House Hotel, Galle	05
2	Building in the Kaluthara town	07
3	Centre of the space	09
4	Enclosure of the space	11
5	Continuity of the space	12
6	The Bo-tree on the Galle road near the Rawathawaththa	14
7	Interior of well design building shows the architecture	15
8	Kandalama hotel is the best example for context generated architecture	16
9	St. Briget convent pre school for user as a generating factor	17
10	The Colombo town hall for higher purpose as a generator	18
11	Olimpic railway station – Austrialia for function as a generator	19
12	Image of the independent square shows form as an exterior	20
13	Interior space give an idea about the spatial orchestration of the buildings	20
14	Interior space give an idea about the spatial orchestration of the buildings	20
15	This give an idea about the volume in architecture	22
16	This give an idea about the size in architecture	23
17	This give an idea about the scale in architecture	24
18	This give an idea about the proportion in architecture	25
19	This give an idea about the enclosure plane in architecture	26
20	This give an idea about the colours use in architecture	26
21	This give an idea about the colours use in architecture	26
22	This give an idea about the texture	28
23	This give an idea about the texture	28
24	The lighting use in the architecture	29
25	The lighting use in the architecture	29
26	Most of the users of the Majestic city are younger generation	40
27	People hang-around and join the window shopping	40
28	Users of the building moving freely inside the building	41
29	This shows many young people hang around in the Majestic city lobby	42

University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka. Electronic Theses & Dissertations www.lib.mrt.ac.lk

30 People moving on the corridors because its arrangement 42
31 The volume of the corridors are appropriate to the activity happens 43
32 The interior and exterior colour use is well matched 43
33 Illumination level of the interior is well matched 44
34 Small lobby and narrow escalators are not create an environment for people to gather 46
35 This shows how bad the interior composition of the building 46
36 The interior and exterior colours are not matched 47
37 High illumination level change the environment of the function 48
38 The double height volume of the main entrance of the building 50
39 Entrance from the station road 50
40 The main entrance from the Galle road 50
41 The corridor from the main entrance to atrium lobby 50
42 Right side of the corridor expose to the stairways and escalators 50
43 Entrance of the building directly links to the narrow atrium lobby 51
44 The atrium lobby make people move freely 51
45 Use small less intensity light make people sensitive 51
46 Use day light and make the environment more natural 51
47 View of the corridor from the atrium 51
48 Tiny escalator and highly enclosed corridors are increases the sense of privacy 53
49 The shops arrange around the major space of the building 53
50 Highly light up shops which are make insensitive atmosphere 54
51 Many people use this building 56
52 Many people use this building 57
53 People beehive freely in the entrance area 57
54 Many people satisfied about the interior composition of the building 59
55 Interior and exterior colours are matched well 60
56 The main entrance of the Sumanadisi Bakery at Wallawatte 62
57 The view after enter to the building 63
58 Lighting arrangement of the building 65
59 Exterior view of the Royal Bakery from the Galle road 66
60 Most of the people visit the building to buy or eat some food 66
61 Exterior view from the Galle road 67

University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka.
Electronic Theses & Dissertations

62 Steel structure and red colour fabric canopy in the double height space 68
63 The grand entrance from the Gall road to the building
and name board fixed old brick wall. 68
64 Front façade of the Royal bakery 68
65 Entrance and the façade of the building view from the Gall road 69
66 Main entrance of the building face to Galle road 69
67 Food display cabinets in the transition area 69
68 Sensitive colours used in the space, related to the activity happens 70
69 The spotlights use to light up the area 70
70 Steel structure which connects two spaces 70
71 The double height space create a link between ground floor and upper floor 70
72 No any kind of volume changes in the building, entire interior in the same laver 71
73 There is no physical connection between eating area
and transaction area and visual no strong visual connection also 71
74 There is no physical connection between eating area
and transaction area and visual no strong visual connection also 71
75 No specific colour scheme use for interior and exterior of the building 73
76 No specific colour scheme use for interior and exterior of the building 73
77 Sun light penetrate through the glass façade of the building 73
78 Florescent lamps with the mirror glass fixture use to artificial lighting 73
79 There is an eating area in the upper floor of the building
and massive glaze openings 73
80 Steel structure use to create the link upper floor with the ground floor 73
81 Colours use properly in the space 73

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Electronic Theses & Dissertations

LIST OF GRAPHS

Graph		Page
	Majestic City shopping complex *– Bambalapitiya, Colombo 04*	
1.	Question number 01	40
2.	Question number 02	40
3.	Question number 03	40
4.	Question number 04	41
5.	Question number 05	41
6.	Question number 06	41
7.	Question number 09	42
8.	Question number 14	42
9.	Question number 15	42
10.	Question number 08	43
11.	Question number 10	43
12.	Question number 11	43
13.	Question number 12	44
	Unity Plaza shopping complex *– Bambalapitiya, Colombo 04*	
14.	Question number 01	44
15.	Question number 02	44
16.	Question number 03	45
17.	Question number 04	45
18.	Question number 05	45
19.	Question number 09	46
20.	Question number 14	46
21.	Question number 15	46
22.	Question number 08	47
23.	Question number 10	47
24.	Question number 11	47
25.	Question number 12	48

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Electronic Theses & Dissertations
www.lib.mrt.ac.lk

Royal Bakery *– Wallawatta, Colombo 06*

26. Question number 01 56
27. Question number 02 56
28. Question number 03 57
29. Question number 04 57
30. Question number 05 57
31. Question number 06 58
32. Question number 09 58
33. Question number 14 58
34. Question number 15 59
35. Question number 08 59
36. Question number 10 60
37. Question number 11 60
38. Question number 12 61

Sumanadisi Bakery *– Wallawatta, Colombo 06*

Electronic Theses & Dissertations
www.lib.mrt.ac.lk

39. Question number 01 61
40. Question number 03 62
41. Question number 04 62
42. Question number 05 62
43. Question number 06 63
44. Question number 09 63
45. Question number 14 63
46. Question number 15 64
47. Question number 08 64
48. Question number 10 64
49. Question number 11 65
50. Question number 12 65

LIST OF TABLE

Table		page
	Majestic City shopping complex *– Bambalapitiya, Colombo* 04	
1.	Reference to the question numbers with number of people	79
2.	Reference to the question numbers with answer options	80
3.	Reference to the question numbers with answer options as percentages (%)	80
	Unity plaza shopping complex *– Bambalapitiya, Colombo 04*	
4.	Reference to the question numbers with number of people	81
5.	Reference to the question numbers with answer options	82
6.	Reference to the question numbers with answer options as percentages (%)	82
	Royal bakery *– Wallawatte, Colombo 06*	
7.	Reference to the question numbers with number of people	83
8.	Reference to the question numbers with answer options	84
9.	Reference to the question numbers with answer options as percentages (%)	84
	Sumandisi Bakery *- Wallawatte, Colombo 06*	
10.	Reference to the question numbers with number of people	85
11.	Reference to the question numbers with answer options	86
12.	Reference to the question numbers with answer options as percentages (%)	86

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ABSTRACT

The separation of architecture and buildings is not clearly visible. It is a qualitative attribute rather than a quantitative one. Habraken states architecture to be "process and product of human habitation." Hence, it is a spatial phenomena deeply bonded to the spatial existence of humans. But the prevalent social phenomena I the contemporary world is indicating a totalitarian destruction of the human civilisation. Humans are claimed to be increasingly insensitive to their built environment.

But, every human at an unconscious subliminal level is sensitive to their spatial existence. This sensitivity is not outwardly expressed and for that reason is not even understood by that person himself. If prompted, these sensitivities are expressed. But the general understanding however that is there is insensitivity to the built space.

This dissertation attempts to explain how a user senses and responds to physical and psychological attributes of the architecture of a building. It contains surveys done on several commercial buildings to asses how users feel physical attributes such as volume, size, scale, proportion, enclosure plane, colour, texture and lighting of the environment. Results of surveys are studied to identify how users sensed the psychological attributes such as belongingness, privacy, territoriality and identity.

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CONTENTS

			Page
Declaration			i
Acknowledgment			ii
List of figures			iii
List of graphs			vi
Abstract			viii
Table of contents			ix
Introduction			01
Chapter one: **Architecture and building**			05
1.1	Architecture Vs Building		
	1.1.1 Architecture as an Art	05	
	1.1.2 Building as a craft	07	
1.2	Space in Architecture		08
	1.2.1 Spatial attributes of space		09
	1.2.1.1 Centre	09	
	1.2.1.2 Enclose	11	
	1.2.1.3 Continuity	12	
	1.2.2 Human – Spatial relationship		13
	1.2.2.1 Existential space	13	
	1.2.2.2 Architectural space	15	
	1.2.3 Generating factors of the Architectural space		16
	1.2.3.1 Context as a generating factor	16	
	1.2.3.2 User as a generating factor	17	
	1.2.3.3 Objectives as a generating factor	18	
	1.2.3.4 Function/Activity Patton as a generating factor	19	
1.3	The constituents of Architectural space		20
	1.3.1 Form: as an Exterior	20	
	1.3.2 Spatial orchestration: as an interior	20	

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Chapter two:

Sensing Architectural space 22

2.1 Sensing Architectural space 22

2.2 Physical attributes of the Architectural space 22

2.2.1 Volume 22

2.2.1.1 Size 23

2.2.1.2 Scale 24

2.2.2 Proportion 25

2.2.3 Enclosure plane 26

2.2.3.1 Colour 26

2.2.3.2 Texture 28

2.2.4 Lighting 29

2.3 The Psychological attributes of the Architectural space 30

2.3.1 Sense of Belongingness 30

2.3.2 Sense of Privacy / Territoriality 30

2.3.3 Sense of Identity 31

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Electronic Theses & Dissertations
www.lib.mrt.ac.lk

Chapter Three:

User response to the commercial space

Part one

3.1 Survey Design 32

3.1.1 Introduction of Survey 32

3.1.2 The formwork of the User response survey 33

3.1.2.1 Observation method 33

3.1.2.2 Research: User Survey method 34

3.2 Methodology of the Survey 35

3.2.1 Questionnaire 36

3.2.2 Key factors of the Questionnaire format 38

3.2.3 Collection of data 38

3.2.4 Scope and limitation of the Questioners 38

3.2.5 Analysis of data 39

Part two: **Case studies of the building**

3.3 Case Studies: Case studies for Architecture and Building 40

3.3.1 Case Study one: Majestic City and Unity Plaza shopping complexes 40

3.3.2.1. Collected data of the survey 40

Majestic City shopping complex – Bambalapitiya, *Colombo 04* 40

1. User Identification 40
2. Senses evoked by the building to people 41
3. Direct response from the user 43

Unity plaza shopping complex – Bambalapitiya, *Colombo 04* 44

1 User Identification 44
2 Senses evoked by the building to people 45
3 Direct response from the user 47

3.3.1.2 The Users 48
Majestic city shopping complexes. 48
Unity Plaza shopping complexes. 49

3.3.2.3. Response to the Building 49

1 Entering to the building 49
Majestic city shopping complex – Bambalapitiya 49
Unity Plaza shopping complex - Bambalapitiya 51

2 Atrium lobby and corridors around it 51
Majestic city shopping complex – Bambalapitiya 51
Unity Plaza shopping complex – Bambalapitiya 52

3 Shops 53
Majestic city shopping complex – Bambalapitiya 53
Unity Plaza shopping complex – Bambalapitiya 54

Conclusion: For Majestic City and Unity Plaza shopping complexes 55

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3.3.2 Case study two: Royal Bakery and Sumanadisi Bakery 56

3.3.2.1. Collected data of the survey 56

Royal Bakery – Wellawatte, Colombo 06

1. User Identification 56
2. Senses evoked by the building to people 57
3. Direct response from the user 59

Sumanadisi Bakery – Wallawatte, Colombo 06 61

1. User Identification 61
2. Senses evoked by the building to people 62
3. Direct response from the user 63

3.3.2.2 The Users 66

Royal Bakery – Wallawatte, Colombo 06 66

Sumanadisi Bakery – Wallawatte, Colombo 06 67

3.3.2.3. Response to the Building 67

1 Entering to the building 67

Royal Bakery – Wellawatte 67

Sumanadisi Bakery – Wallawatte 69

2 Main space or Transaction area of the building 69

Royal Bakery – Wellawatte 69

Sumanadisi Bakery – Wallawatte 70

3 Dining area of the upper floor 73

Royal Bakery – Wellawatte 73

Conclusion: For Royal Bakery and Sumanadisi Bakery 74

Conclusion 75

List of References 78

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University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka.
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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Observation

The differentiation of architecture and buildings is not readily visible. It is a qualitative attribute rather than a quantitative one, and this does not allow for easy recognition of works of architecture among mere buildings by the general public. Almost always there seems to be a clear confusion as to what a work of architecture I sand what how that is different from the buildings.

However, every human at an unconscious subliminal level is sensitive to their spatial existence. This sensitivity is not outwardly expressed and for that reason is not even understood by that person himself. If prompted, these sensitivities are expressed. But the general understanding however that is there is insensitivity to the built space.

Criticality

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Art nurtures and nourishes the sensitivity of humans and in turn increases the sensitivity of the entire society. Architecture is an implemented art. It is called the "unavoidable art" and "mother of all arts".

General observations show that there is increasing insensitivity to the built environment. Instead of being emotionally uplifting built environments, human creations are increasingly becoming alien to their creators. There is increased urban crime in almost all cities, there is expressed hatred to the built environment, and there is a distinctive lack of emotion. These are dangerous symptoms of an even more dangerous disease: The lack of human emotions and sensitivity. This phenomenon needs exploration and it is necessary to see whether it is actually insensitivity of the humans that is the cause or is it something else.

Possible Causes

Several possible cause for this perceived insensitivity to architecture can be seen. Firstly it could be because the average human is actually insensitive to the built space diminishing the possibility of distinction between architecture and building.

Secondly, it could be that the average human is actually sensitive, but is unable to express it in spatial terms, to be understood by a fellow human.

Thirdly, it could be that they are sensitive to the built space, and are able to express it, but there is no real difference between architecture and building, or architects have been unable to create "architecture".

Hypothesis

This study takes the position that it is the second cause that could be the possible reason behind this phenomenon. Two facts point in the direction of this selection. Firstly, research into human environmental behavior and environmental psychology has proven that the human being is indeed sensitive to their built space. Secondly, there are groups of people that are able to recognize, study, and express in very distinctive terms what architecture is and, how it is different from buildings. This study will attempt to put this hypothesis on firmer grounds.

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Intention of the study

The intention is to formulate a methodology and implement it to show that though unable to express, a layman is sensitive to the difference between architecture and building and that they have their own ways in which that sensitivity if prompted, could be recognized.

It will further attempt to establish the fact that if prompted, the expression of sensitivity to the built space is recognized and even understood. It will also establish the fact that the difference between architecture and building is of significant proportions and has wide spread implications.

Methodology

A user response survey will be adopted as the method of the study. In the first segment, it will adopt established principles to formalize that architecture and building could actually be separately identified. It will then show what the differences between architecture and building are.

In the second segment, it will proceed to show how humans sense their spatial existence. This will be established through studies into physical attributes of architecture, and architectural space, the psychological and physiological implications of the built space on the user.

The third segment will be in two phases. First phase will attempt to identify possible scientific research methods that could be adopted to do a research of this nature. It will further attempt to review those methods and then will select the most appropriate. It will also establish a methodology for the research, data collection and a format for data analysis and presentation.

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In the second phase, two case study scenarios will be selected. Two generally accepted "works of architecture" will be compared against two "mere buildings". In each case, a standard questionnaire will be given to a selected sample of the general public, and a standard set of questions regarding the quality of the specific built space will be asked.

Based on the findings of these research, a series of analysis will be conducted to establish the hypothesis.

Scope and Limitations

In the first segment, only accepted, published studies into architecture and space will be analyzed to establish what architecture is. Similarly, defining building and architecture will use only accepted academic principles. In this regard too, the study will limit itself to available theories and research.

In the second segment, similar to that of first, the study into sensing architectural space will limit itself to accepted theories and research. Highlighting the significance of selected each.

In the third segment, the research method will be formulated only by reviewing the existing, established scientific research methods. There will be no attempt to formulate new methods. In selecting probable case studies, only public architecture will be considered. No residential architecture is studied due to the facts that uses of those spaces have special bonds to the dwelling allowing their comments to be influenced. Out of public buildings, only commercial establishments are selected due to its convenience in selecting examples that are similar in size, scale, function, location and other parameters which should not be different to the researched projects.

Only two case studies; two shopping malls against each other in Bambalapitiya, and two bakeries in Wellawatte will be used for the research considering practical limitations. Finally, it needs to be brought to light that an interview research of all users to a particular building is impossibility. Hence, it will not be attempted. A random sample of user will be selected to represent the larger, and only they will be interviewed.

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In representation of the research findings, standard graphical presentation methods will be adopted to express the final outcome of the research.