

IMPACT OF DUTCH FORTS ON THEIR URBAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

The strategic locations of the Dutch Forts were built on an urban set-up based on ease of collection and export of spices, elephant tusks and other commodities. These points developed into urban areas centred around this focal activity. Currently even though they are in ruins or part ruins, they still stand in an urban setting which has developed around the said fortification since its inception. Eg: Jaffna, Mannar, Batticaloa.

This paper looks at how the importance of these are still within an urban context and how they have shifted use from a defence post to a community use; administration, pleasure, living or tourism. It was built initially to keep the locals community away and now it is adapted to bring the community in. The socio-cultural change deals with how the colonisers dominated the fortifications and how currently the locals use it to solve their own problems and for emergencies. This study was carried out to develop a comprehensive understanding of the fortifications, its related socio-culture pertaining to the people and its locality during the time of colonial rule. Along with how adaptive reuse has been taken into consideration during conservation of these monuments for the betterment of the city it is in. The objective of this study was to document the reuse of the colonial forts on the coastal belt of Sri Lanka and assess whether the adapted reuse is sustainable.

Keywords: Heritage, urban context, fortifications, adaptive re-use, culture, conservation, socio-cultural.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Forts, in many parts of the world have been abandoned, destroyed or in rare cases they have been reused. Restoration, conservation and preservation are taking place under the guidance of various standards, charters and heritage groups and societies. "Heritage-led regeneration through reuse presents an opportunity to encourage the enhancement and protection of both the existing built heritage and the wider historic building stock." (Architects, 2012 December)

Forts of Sri Lanka which were built during ancient and colonial eras have stood the test of time. Despite exposure to the elements and in the North & East a civil war, they portray a rich history

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which is hidden amongst the built fabric of these forts. Getting to this information is not easy as they are not always freely available.

Forts can be conserved and reused for many functions just like other historic buildings; from museums, hotels, theme parks, places of education etc. to cultural centres and other tourist activities. The fact that forts were military outposts or places of governance, do not limit their reuse in the present context. Adaptive reuse is an important topic in today's era as there is a reduction in the availability of resources especially in the building industry. These also play an important role as landmarks in the urban context of the city it is situated in and creates a sense of belonging or familiarity to the local community in an ever changing local setting.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

This study was carried out to get a comprehensive understanding of the fortifications and related culture that existed during the time of colonial rule and how adaptive reuse has been taken into consideration during conservation of these monuments during the post-civil war period. The objective of this study was to document the reuse of forts on the coastal belt of Sri Lanka and assess whether the potential reuse is sustainable.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

The study will be conducted by first, a literary survey to establish the theoretical framework. This is done to get a complete understanding on the background of the subject of study. It will be focused on conservation, forts, adaptive reuse, policy guidelines and exemplars.

The methodology for this study will be done in two parts. The first being documentary of the past & present of the selected case studies, followed by the analysis and their potential for adaptive reuse. Examples selected along the Northern & Eastern coastal belt of the country are based on size, location, condition and post-independence interventions, physical and functional.

Photographic and observation studies will be done via field visits to each fort. This helps to capture the ambiances of each location and helps in the observations for the research proposition. Furthermore interviews with scholars and members of the community interested in maintaining these ancient monuments. This will lead to a higher accuracy rate in the information obtained on the present and future plans for the Forts.

The established policy guidelines (both internationally and locally) will be explored and suitable selection will be used to evaluate the potential adaptive reuse.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Scope

The scope of the study is to assess the potential for adaptive reuse in the forts of the country supported by clauses in selected international policy documents.

Limitations

Selection of the Burra Charter: Charters relating to conservation have existed since the 1960s with the introduction of the Venice charter and has been adopted by many countries to suit their own practices and cultures. Burra Charter in comparison to the other charters of the world talks about adaptive reuse.

Selection of Forts in Sri Lanka: The maritime powers built forts only in Sri Lanka but in other occupied territories and countries.

ARCHITECTURAL BENEFITS OF STUDY

The study hopes to reveal the importance of conserving local historic monuments and to establish the importance of selecting a suitable adaptive reuse which retains the authenticity of it. By;

3. Saving resources – Reuse existing resources rather than constructing new buildings.
4. Preservation of historically significant buildings.
5. Creating awareness - They can be reused to house functions which expose the general public to their tangible heritage.
6. Empower the local community – Creating job opportunities by involving the local community in the restoration and subsequent maintenance of the place.
7. Creating a local landmark through conservation and restoration.
8. Giving identity to the local area.

Literature Review

Humans have constructed defensive works for many thousands of years, in a variety of increasingly complex designs from earth embankments, timber fences/ palisades to stone and concrete. Fortifications are defined in the oxford dictionary as, “a defensive wall or other reinforcement built to strengthen a place against attack”. The term is derived from the Latin word *fortis* (strong) and *facere* (to make).” (Fortresses and defence walls)

For the purpose of this paper, to conserve a building is to enhance or infuse new life into and the process of keeping the building alive. It involves the building, its environment and the view points from near and far. It can also be described as the action taken to preserve the heritage for the future generations. This doesn't mean a building needs to be frozen as an object in a museum but can be adapted to a function which suits the requirements of the modern day user. For the best fit into the urban context that has got interwoven around these structures, community based functions give it a higher purpose than a baseless conversion.

Over 30 Colonial forts began emerging around the island from the early 1500s with the arrival of the Portuguese who were followed by the Dutch and the British. They used the forts as defence and administrative posts. These with their architectural designs have become landmarks to their immediate context. While some of the existing fortifications have been continuously changing their function over the years in their administrative roles, while some were used for tourism, some others went into rack and ruin.

By the 1940s the Department of Archaeological of Sri Lanka, under the Antiquities Ordinance had declared the Dutch forts as archaeological monuments. With this declaration, ownership and maintenance fell under the Department of Archaeological. To prevent these from becoming dead

monuments, creating public awareness, education of the professionals involved in the historic area, integration of local participation in the restoration process and as means of an income generator within the adaptive reuse framework should be included in future proposals.

Adaptive reuse is the process of changing the function of a place from what it was originally designed for. Here the Forts were initially designed for defence and later used for administration purposes. Post-independence saw abandonment and destruction due to or during the civil war. Through conservation and adaptive reuse, these monuments can be given new life for the use of the community and public. Reuse can be seen in the Galle fort, where it is now a gentrified commercial town. Batticaloa Fort, was developed from a defence structure to an administrative post which served to provide relief to the local community in their hours of need, such as the tsunami, floods and other natural disasters.

Methodology

The methodology for this study was carried out in 2 parts. Firstly, by documenting each of the selected cases and secondly by analysing the potential of adaptive re-use of them. The case studies were selected based on location, size and condition during post-independence examination. These were further justified by studying their historical significance, locational significance, architectural significance and by doing a basic condition survey, photographic survey and accessing simple measured drawings.

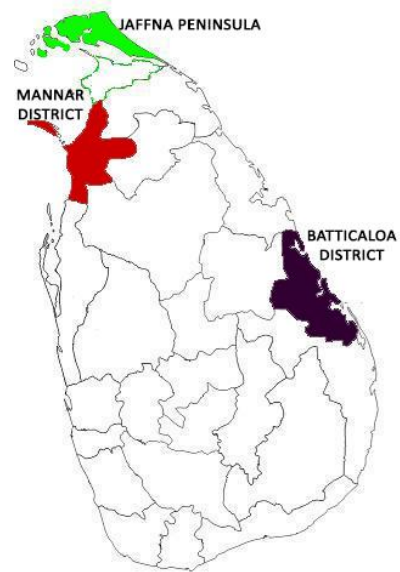


Figure 1- Map indicating districts of selected case studies.

Case Studies

Analysis of the selected case studies through the justification parameters explained earlier give an insight to the physical and functional significance of the forts.

The mandates of the Portuguese were to monopolize the trade in the country and to convert the locals to Catholicism (History, 2018). Once they captured the coastal regions of the island, they built Forts where required to safeguard themselves from the locals and the other maritime rivals.

These fortifications were developed during the occupation of the maritime powers as follows;

Table 1 - Timeline of Colonial rulers & Forts

	Mannar	Jaffna	Batticaloa
Portuguese	1560	1618	1628
Dutch	1658 - Take over 1686 - Completion of reconstruction	1658 – Take over 1680 - Completion of reconstruction	1682 – Takeover & Completion of reconstruction

British	1795 - Surrendered to the British	1795 – Surrendered to the British	1795 - Takeover
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Mannar Dutch Fort

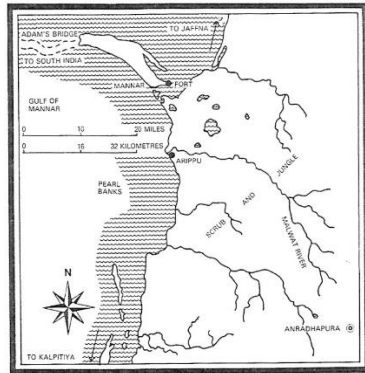


Figure 2 - Mannar District with Forts of the area (The Dutch Forts of Sri Lanka – W. A. Nelson. p106)

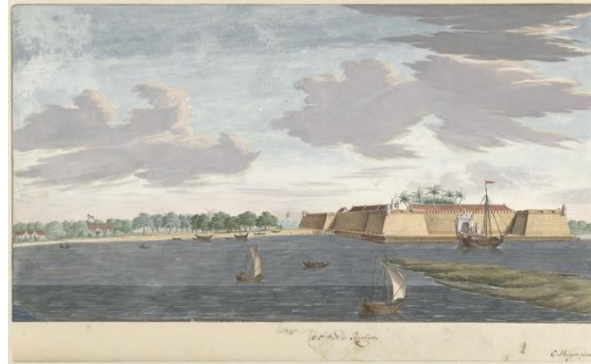


Figure 3 - The Mannar Fort as seen from the lagoon, (Cornelis Steiger, c. 1710)

Mannar proved to be of a strategic location in the Indian Ocean when it came to the Mediterranean and South-East Asian trade network (Silk route). Many texts from Greece and India (3BC – 3AD) refer to Sri Lanka as the 'spice island' and Mannar was one of the main trading ports with its bazaar being famous for its luxury goods, spices and other commodities received through the trade links. This led to Mannar being referred to as the international trade emporium.

The strategic location worked not only as a trading port but also as a port-of-call for ships to be moored for restock and repairs. Since the taxes and customs duties brought in good revenue for the country, they provided services in return such as supplies, good administration and safe coastal regions for mooring free of pirates. In addition, Mannar became one of the first trans-shipment port in South-Asia.

Mannar Fort has gone through many trying times throughout history and was eventually abandoned after the recent civil war. These fortifications are located at the edge of the town, showing how the urban context has developed around it. Since the super-structure of the fort is intact with only missing the roofs, this place can be suitably restored to serve the local community and through them, the country. It should be cautiously carried out with respect to the place and to maintain authenticity.



Figure 4 - View from the parade grounds with the shaded warehouses, ramp and belfry in the background in 2018 (Source: Author)



Figure 5 - View of the South rampart with the surface drain network (Source: Author)

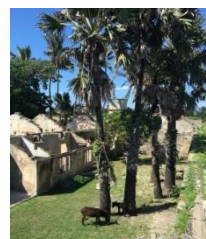


Figure 6 - External view of the Fort from the West side - Mannar Fort (Source: Author)



Figure 7 - Rear Courtyard area of the jail compound - Mannar Fort (Source: Author)

To prevent this Fort from going to disuse after restoration, a suitable adaptive reuse should be established. By introducing a public function, it will invoke a higher interest to the people. To the locals, the fort is not only a landmark but also a part of the heritage of the area. While considering the recent talks of the road & rail link between India and Sri Lanka this island will be the first landing point in Sri Lanka for those travelling by land through India. One such suitable proposal would be a visitor centre which caters to the needs of the travellers and run by the locals who can generate an income. The visitor centre can also include entertainment activities (which are currently lacking in the area to the locals and visitors), history museums and galleries, workshops for local crafts etc. Other proposals could include retail outlets, public promenades, school etc. Music festivals can be also encouraged here as the area has a culture which involves music. This gives the locals opportunities to showcase and provide awareness to visitors of their heritage. By bringing in the people who were initially kept out, a sense of belonging is restored and it improves how they see it as part of the town's development.

Mannar is an island that has becoming increasingly popular with the tourists in Sri Lanka, thereby showing high potential for development. Unlike similar forts in the area the amount of intactness here is high. This creates an opportunity for great entrepreneurship. Its strategic location at the entrance to the island and being one of the first sights visible from the causeway increases accessibility. It has a high level of potential to be restored, conserved and adapted to suit the needs of the public and the community while enhancing their quality of living.



Figure 8 - View of Parade ground and front of Governor's Bungalow - Mannar Fort (Source: Author)

Jaffna Fort

Port of Yalpana or Jafnapatam, was one of the important trade ports of the Northern area. Due to its close proximity to India, this too was subject to various invasions from the powerful Indian kingdoms during ancient & colonial times.

Recent excavations have provided evidence that Nagadipa was also a control centre for trade between India and Sri Lanka, famous for trade in pearls and elephants. Arab traders had set up commercial areas along the coast in the current location of the fort. These were destroyed by the Portuguese upon invasion (Kunarasa, 1995, p. 4). During the Portuguese rule, Jaffna continued as a centre for trade. The Dutch made the Fort their Northern headquarters and controlled aspects such as law, trade, governance and people problems from here (Nelson, 1984, p. 82). This control passed over to the British during their take over.



Figure 9- Aerial photography of the Jaffna Fort and its immediate context (Central Cultural Fund).

Throughout the war, Jaffna Fort was under the control of the Sri Lankan army, Indian Army and LTTE (Kunarasa, 1995). It underwent significant destruction when the LTTE blasted the south rampart to escape into the sea. By the end of the war, the internal buildings had suffered major damage and the ramparts were substantially intact. Over the years it has been reconstructed while knowingly or unknowingly it has followed policy guidelines in the Burra charter. Restoring and conserving this majestic Fort isn't sufficient to maintain it. The funding provided by the Dutch government was on the basis that after restoration it should be used for the public. Due to political reasons this couldn't be accomplished.



Figure 10- Internal view of the outer circuit south ravelin from the entrance gate - 2019 - Jaffna Star Fort (Source: Author)

Currently the ownership of the Fort is with the Department of Archaeology. As stated in the Burra Charter, *“Adaptation is acceptable only where the adaptation has minimal impact on the cultural significance of the place”* (Burra Charter, 2013, p. 7). By putting it to public use, suitable adaptations can be followed by either restoring the destroyed buildings to its original designs or by preserving them in the ruined state like the Queen's house currently. Adaptation of the building should be decided prior to any interventions.

In an interview with a senior lecturer of the Department of Geography, Jaffna, he stated,

“think of more appropriate uses to suit the locals and tourists alike. It will help the economy while allowing cultural growth and enlightenment of traditions to others.”

Provision of novel ideas within the Fort will attract the public and the locals, enabling the fort to relate to the surrounding, rather than a stand-alone statement figure of the town. With the ample space available inside, functions which cater to the public can be implemented. An amphitheatre can be a congregational point where the locals can showcase the culture and traditions of the area to the tourists. This will also be a source of entertainment to the community. Other craft markets can be housed in tensile shaded structures in the open areas. The buildings remaining relatively intact can be converted to history museums to reinforce the heritage of the area. Music & literary festivals can all be held here under temporary tensile structures to provide shade from the scorching heat. The style of music unique to the peninsula can be promoted through these music festivals. The option of a playground catering to both adults and children can be created in one part of the Fort.

Selecting a suitable adaptive reuse is important to maintain the authentic cultural significance of the fort, as mentioned in the Burra charter. Any additions done to the buildings should be carefully considered and carried out according to these guidelines. As this too is a developing town, there is high potential for it to be adaptively reused and to involve the community in it.



Figure 11- Remains of Dutch church after Civil war bombing - Jaffna Star Fort (Source: Author)



Figure 12- Aerial view of the Gelderland Bastion and Queen's House - Jaffna Fort (Source: Author)



Figure 13- Remains of the guard rooms - Jaffna Fort (Source: Author)



Figure 14- Remains of the Queen's Palace (Governor's residence) super-structure - Jaffna Fort (Source: Author)

Batticaloa Fort

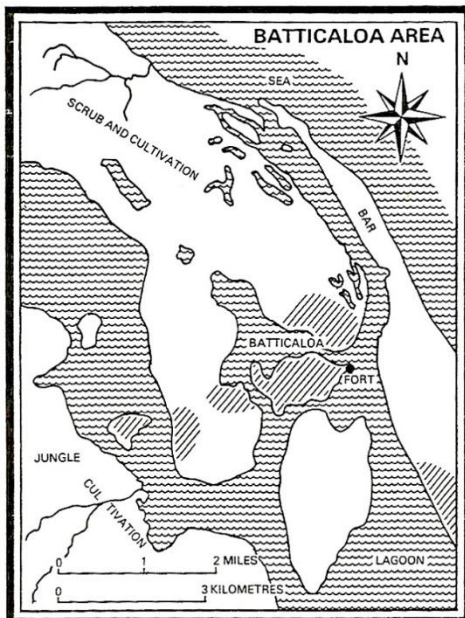


Figure 15- Batticaloa fort location (The Dutch Forts of Sri Lanka – W. A. Nelson. P.120)

Batticaloa was its trade point for cinnamon, pepper, chilli and other miscellaneous items and the Portuguese made it their centre for trade and economic administration. The British took over from the Dutch in 1795 and used it as a garrison to consolidate their power till 1836 and thereafter as an administrative centre (Environment Planning Services (Pvt) Ltd & Institute of Town Planners Sri Lanka, 2012, pp. 7-8).

Post-independence brought upon the civil war in the 1980s and Batticaloa town came under parallel administration of both the government and LTTE. Post-war period sees it as a larger yet less known town of the Eastern coast of the island which is in the process of major developments (Batticaloa).

While being one of the badly hit districts by the 2004 Tsunami, the Fort suffered no noticeable damage and was used as one of the major relief centres in the post-Tsunami period. It has also withstood other natural disasters such as the cyclone of 1978 & floods in 2010 (Environment Planning Services (Pvt) Ltd & Institute of Town Planners Sri Lanka, 2012, p. 8).

This Fort was identified by the World Monument Fund as a 'Heritage at risk' in 2010 and as is also listed as a protected monument by the Archaeological Department. In a joint venture between 'The Institute of Town Planners Sri Lanka' (ITPSL) and 'Environmental Planning Services (Pvt) Ltd' (EPS) a proposal to conserve the Fort has been submitted to the US Ambassador's fund for cultural Preservation (AFCP) in 2011. This proposal is to be developed as a "*Cultural Resources Management Centre*" (Environment Planning Services (Pvt) Ltd & Institute of Town Planners Sri Lanka, 2012). It came about as a step in the post-war ethnic reconciliation of the area. This is important as there are 5 identified communities currently living here (Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Afro- Burghers & the coastal Veddha's). To accommodate this change, the current government offices are being moved to a new building away from the Fort.

Despite Batticaloa being one of the largest towns on the East coast, there is a significant lack of entertainment for both locals and visitors. With the exception of the beach, introduction of entertainment aspects has high potential. This too can be promoted for music festivals (musical heritage of the coastal veddha's and the Arfro-Burghers) and literary festivals (sufficient built environment to house the activities).

Taking into consideration its location to the lagoon, a proposal can be done for a water sports centre. The visitor training, bookings, restaurant and other required facilities can be housed within the Fort. Other functions could include retail outlets for local trade and crafts, training centre's etc.

Over the years the ramparts have become overgrown with scrub and foliage which causes instability in the walls. The buildings too have been painted and renovated with no care to its historic authenticity. Prior to simply adaptively reusing the fort, special care should be taken to bring the Fort back to its former glory and authentic significance of the place. The selected clauses from the Burra charter highlight this statement. While restoring the ramparts may not be easy, care should be taken to adapt similar techniques and materials as was originally used.

If reconstructing, care should be taken to find sufficient historic evidence to support it. If sufficient information is inadequate, steps should be taken to adapt following the set out guidelines. To adapt with new materials and techniques, there must be control to not destroy the ambience and authenticity of the Fort, while the new work is easily identifiable.

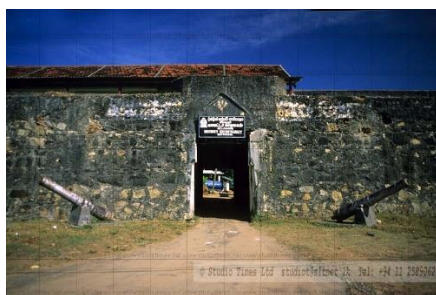


Figure 16- Batticaloa fort location
(The Dutch Forts of Sri Lanka – W. A. Nelson. P.120)



Figure 17- Building A, shows similar features to the Colombo Dutch Hospital (Studio Times Pvt Ltd)



Figure 18- Bastion overgrown with foliage (Studio Times Pvt Ltd)

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to document the reuse of the colonial forts on the coastal belt of Sri Lanka and assess whether the potential reuse is practical for the benefit of the further development of its urban context, people of the country and the local community. Through evaluation of the case studies, the potential of adaption is high and if carried out following the correct process, it will be a success. Since these structures are partially used or not at all, they are currently a burden to the urban context. By sufficiently using it for the people, it gets incorporated to the day-to-day life of the locals. By converting it to an asset, it gives a sense of belonging and identity to the place. It is not only a theory, but has been carried out in many similar projects both local and international. Most of the forts that are over 75% intact can be converted into places which are of significance, both culturally and functionally to the locals and visitors alike. Such developments add to the quality of the local development of modern living. These go on to prove that ancient monuments in modern urban areas need not be destroyed but plays a significant role in urban design. It provides a special place for the urban area under study, in the hearts and minds of the people living in the cities and surrounding areas.

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