

Disappearing image of an urban space: an impact of residential conversions

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In a city, the image of a space plays a significant role in characterizing its identity. Colombo 07 has an image of its own known as a high income residential zone with Colombo's most fashionable neighborhood, having a favorable environment with a lot of greenery. Clifford Holiday in his report to Colombo Memorandum on Town Planning in 1940 stated that "It is hardly necessary for me to say what fine residential roads those are and all that requires to be done is to preserve the existing character and not permit the sub division of plots", which further emphasizes the image of Colombo 07 as a Primary Residential Zone.

Today there is a trend of conversion of residential buildings into non-residential uses in urban areas which is a common phenomenon with the increasing demand for business and office premises. Colombo 07 being centrally located at the heart of the city is also experiencing the same with the infiltration of non-residential activities, disturbing its pleasing environment and the well-being of the people. This leads to enquire the reasons behind these conversions. Is it because the development control mechanisms are inappropriately directed, or due to some other reasons. In this regard the main objective of this research is to identify the problems associated with the current development control mechanisms regarding the conversion of residential buildings into other uses. This paper describes and illustrates in detail the pattern of conversion of residential buildings in this area and the problems arising for the well-being of the people. These conversions result in diminishing the image of the area while creating a namelessness situation in the area. The identification of the unique character of an area separately as a special element of urban space is therefore essential in preparation of development control mechanisms.

Key words: Colombo, Image, Residential, Human well-being, Development control

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