

ANALYSIS OF THE APPLICABILITY OF ECO CITY CONCEPTS TO SRI LANKAN CITIES

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Abstract

The concept of "Eco-Cities" has recently attracted attention in planning and development field. Until now, it is hardly possible to find a standardized definition of the term "Eco-City". Nevertheless, in general the concept of Eco-Cities is closely aligned with the concept of sustainable development, through the adoption of sustainability as the driving objective and the integration of ecological and resources management principles into the urban planning process.

Since prehistoric times the ecosystems have been modified by man. But in recent times, man's use of land has increased in intensity. With the globe becoming more populated, less desirable lands are being settled and the modification of natural systems has become more extreme. While no reasonable individual intends to destroy his own environment or livelihood, collectively man has greatly disrupted the natural ecological systems of which he is a part. Natural disasters all over the world today are dramatically illustrating this and reveal that our contemporary land use and development patterns are not sustainable.

The ecological principles in urban planning originate from the fundamental objective of sustainability and the Eco-Cities are a concept to achieve this sustainability by taking the ecological principles as the central driving force for the planning of cities. This was in the discussion and practices of many developed nations and in particular the fast developing nations of China, Korea and Japan, recognizing this as a way to address the sustainability issues. Sri Lanka today presents a picture of a country experiencing rapid urban growth and social change. The cities all over the country are experiencing high rate of migration, compaction and sprawling effects. The agricultural lands are moving fast into residential land lots, vulnerable and sensitive areas are becoming severe environmental threats. Urban transformation can be seen in every aspect.

Yet the Sri Lankan cities are relying on conventional land use development strategies and struggling with usual development problems of economic, social and environmental. Among those the environmental matters are less prioritized and the Sri Lankan cities are with severe environmental degradation. Moving for innovative sustainable city development strategies such as Eco City development are still under recognition either due to lack of awareness or these concepts are not much explored or localized in the planning industry in Sri Lanka.

The attempt of this study is to examine the Eco city concepts practiced around the world and find the concepts that are capable to resonate with local urban challenges and useful for planners and locally applicable in physical development in Sri Lanka and to demonstrate those with an example in Sri Lanka while taking into consideration the local conditions, negative and positive features. Subsequently the study is intended to explore the importance and possibilities of adopting eco city concepts in city development in Sri Lanka while making knowledge and awareness about the concepts.