

AN URBAN DESIGN FOR BORELLA
TOWN CENTRE

A Dissertation,

Presented to the Department of
Town and Country Planning,
University of Moratuwa,
Sri Lanka.



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SYNOPSIS

Borella is one of the most important sub centres of Colombo city, with a high concentration of commercial and service activities. Heavy congestion of people and activities, problems of traffic & transportation, give rise to an urgent need for a development plan for this area. This dissertation is an attempt to study Borella town centre in order to prepare a planning scheme with special reference to the Urban Design aspects and three dimensional physical development of this town.

The first part of this study includes the historical development of Borella in the context of expansion and development of Colombo city. The origin of Colombo and its development through the Portuguese, Dutch and Colonial periods up to the present day with reference to Borella is given in Chapter I. In Chapter II the past and present attempts to plan the city were described. Details of the Geddes Plan, Holiday Plan, Abercrombei Plan and the present UDA planning schemes are given in this chapter.

The third chapter highlights the significance of Borella in the context of Colombo city. The physical characteristics of the study area including land use, population, traffic and transportation data are given in this chapter. Analysis of the two field surveys on land use and traffic is described here.

Economic characteristics revealed from a commercial survey carried out in the study area and the analysis of land values, construction rate and trends are given

in chapter four. This follows the Qualitative aspects of the environment in the Borella area given in chapter five. Different type of environments prevailing in the study area were identified in the interests of easthetics and Quality.

The second step of the study bigins with chapter six, where the functional efficiency of Borella Town centre is analysed. All charactoristics,phisical,social, economic; and environmental were analysed in relation to the functial efficiency of the study area. It was revealed from this that the functioanl efficiency of Borella town centre could be improved by proper spacial organisation of land and activities.

Chapter seven brings out the outline proposals for the development of Borella town centre. These proposals basically consists of land use & zoning proposals, traffic management proposals, environmental & building proposals. These led to the detailed urban design proposal for the core area of Borella presented in chapter eight. A project area was identified in the town centre and a detail design of three dimensional form was attempted, as seperate project.

In chapter nine the detailed Urban design proposal was analysed in terms of financial viability and feasibility of the project.

The document concludes with chapter ten giving the conclusions & recomandations of urban design for Borella town centre.

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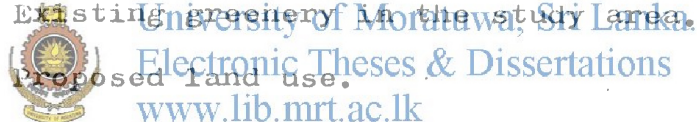
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INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka has only one dominant metropolitan centre, namely Colombo. It is not only the core city that is relevant in the metropolitan sense, but also the agglomeration of other areas encircling it.

Colombo became the capital city of Sri Lanka during the British occupation of the country. The British made Colombo not only the administrative centre of the island but also the centre for commerce and trade.

The dominance of Colombo has had a retarding effect on the growth of other urban centres of the country. Thus, Colombo became the place of attraction for many people from other parts of the island. The commercial activities of the city increased rapidly as many people found it a good place for trade and business. An increasing number of shops and offices sprang up while the residential area expanded and became more densely populated.

The growth of the city reflects a sixfold increase of population over the last one hundred years. The population of 1881, which was 110,000 according to the census is now (in 1981) about 600,000.

A significant phenomenon in this process of the metropolitan development of Colombo has been the simultaneous growth of various sub-centres within the city.

These sub-centres were mostly the core areas of residential zones and important road junctions, and served as commercial and service centres for certain vital areas of the city.

The Colombo Municipal Council has demarcated these sub-centres to a certain extent and named them as 'wards' of the city. In 1910 there were 8 wards which were increased to 31 in 1950. Today there are 47 wards identified by the Colombo Municipal Council. (see Illustration I)

The Urban Development Authority which plays a major role in Colombo's development has demarcated areas serviced by one or more of these sub-centres as "Planning Units" of the City.

Borella is one of the major sub-centres of Colombo, with a high concentration of commercial and service activities. It is an integral part of the city, with a densely populated residential area surrounding the commercial core.

Sri Jayawardanapura, the new administrative capital of Sri Lanka, and the heart of Colombo city, would be linked through Borella making Borella an important junction. It also links the free Trade Zone to Colombo city to which it is one of the most important gateways.

Borella displays both high-rise and low-rise urban features, residential areas, parks, a prison, a cemetery, and a hospital, and shows a large degree of commercial development which no other single sub-centre possesses. It is important to note that Borella contains in itself, all the characteristics of a separate town.

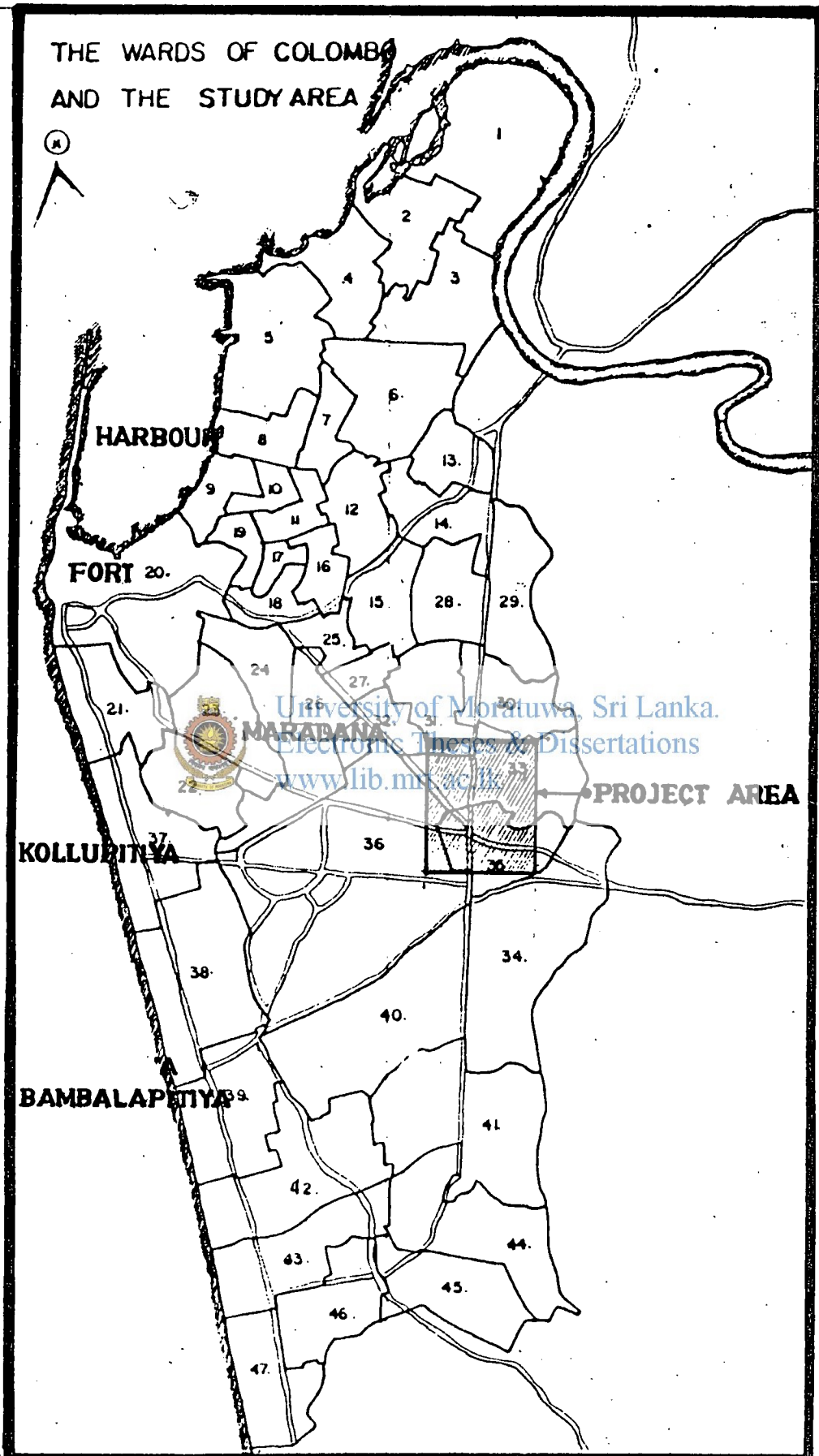



ILLUSTRATION I

For some time now, the influx of an ever-growing number of people, vehicles and activities into a limited space has caused enormous problems for Borella. Especially in the vicinity of Borella Junction, (where five major roads meet) this problem of acute congestion is particularly serious.

The urban problems of the sub-centre of Borella have not emerged overnight. They have built up progressively and have compounded themselves over a period of time. The lack of proper planning and control of urban growth in the city of Colombo as a whole, is one of the reasons for this chaotic situation.

 There have been many attempts in the past to arrest the haphazard growth of the city of Colombo. "Many Town Planners have shown that in respect of Colombo, most attempts to formulate and implement a structural development plan have not been successful". (1)

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The first of such attempts was in 1920 by Professor Patrick Geddes, who prepared a comprehensive plan for the development of the city of Colombo. Then in 1940 another planning scheme was prepared by Professor Clifford Holiday. In 1950 a British planning expert, Sir Patrick Abercrombie, prepared yet another plan for the development of the city of Colombo.

Most of the past concepts in regard to the planning of the metropolitan area no longer remain totally valid or conceptually relevant or feasible. A fresh approach to effectively guide the development of the metropolitan region is vital at this stage. The UN-assisted project in the Urban Development Authority is now working on detailed proposals in this connection.

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The preparation of a Metropolitan Plan for Colombo at this stage, becomes crucial for several reasons.

Firstly, solutions are necessary to the many current problems faced by the city and its suburbs. The nature of these problems requires planning intervention in an integrated manner. Piecemeal solutions will only lead to further problems. Long-term planning is also necessary. In this context, planning has to be regarded as a process and hence trends must be identified and appropriate action taken.

It is important to study the development plans prepared for the city of Colombo in the past, before attempting to present a current planning scheme. The earlier plans were drawn up with much thought and effort and had many valuable proposals and recommendations. (See chapter III)

These plans, although well-concieved, posed many practical difficulties such as the lack of intergration in the local planning bodies, limited finance etc.

Another problem about the planning schemes in the past is discussed in the "Economic Review" thus :

"The plans however were not intended to be more than a general land distribution scheme. The actual detailing of the broad recommendations were left to the subsequent follow-up by specific local town planning schemes."

It is probable that most of the planning schemes and development plans prepared for the city of Colombo were lacking in the qualitative aspects of urban environment. They were mainly two-dimensional and lay-out types. This is clearly seen in the Colombo Regional Plan prepared by Abercrombie in 1950.

The objectives of my study are to evaluate the qualitative aspects of planning and to prepare a plan with special reference to the design aspects and threedimensional perspective of physical development for the Borella town centre.

In this respect, a detailed design for the urban core of Borella has been attempted. A feasibility study of one of the projects included in the urban plan has also been carried out in detail, as an approach to more realistic design criteria.

The methodology of my study would include the following:

- (a) A field survey of physical land use, a commercial survey of the town centre, and a study of the demographic structure, the transport system and the socio-economic characteristics of the study area.



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(b) Collection of published and documented
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data relevant to the study.

- (c) Detailed study of the qualitative aspects of the urban environment.
- (d) Discussion with government and other officials concerned with the area, and with selected residents of the area.