VIABILITY OF UTILIZING URBAN CANAL SYSTEM FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN THE CITY OF COLOMBO

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ABSTRACT

Water is used as a utilitarian, recreational, landscape or experimental element in the urban context of Sri Lanka. Among the inland water bodies in Sri Lanka the canal system in Colombo is unique. It was meant for storm water drainage & inland transportation. Properly functioning canal system is an asset to the city structure. Even though the SLLRDC annually spend millions of rupees to maintain and keep the canal system in order, the canals continue to pollute and clog resulting environmental problems particularly floods. This has become a major problem in the city, which raises the necessity of improving and utilizing the canal system rather than keep it alone. On the other hand the people living in Colombo and its vicinity are looking for places for recreation.

The intention of this study is to investigate whether civic activities can be used on canals in order to enhance the quality of urban life, while safeguarding the urban canal network. Therefore the study mainly focuses on the viability of utilizing urban canal system for socio-economic activities, in the pretext of sustainable development.

This study was initially carried out by close observation and investigation of the total canal network in Colombo and its vicinity. This lead to identify the potential area for developing socio-economic and civic activities along the canals. The demand for recreational activities in the city was found by using a structured questionnaire, with randomly selected residents in and around Colombo. Observations and informal interviews conducted at waterfronts recreational spots helped to identify the participation level of recreation under prevailing opportunities. Economic viability of utilizing urban canal system for such activities was analyzed by considering the proposition, and its capability to achieve the three overall goals of sustainable development. The study concludes that introducing socio-economic activities along the canal system is a feasible idea, when compared to the costs and benefits incurred to the society, the city environment and the economy as a whole.

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