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Changes in the cultural landscape and their impacts on heritage management : a study of Dutch Fort at Galle, Sri Lanka

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8. Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter concludes the book, and addresses the main questions raised in chapter 3: what changes has Galle Fort undergone since the initiation of the World Heritage project, and why are these changes difficult to manage amid the prevailing heritage regulations of Sri Lanka? It also provides recommendations in order to find a more equitable solution for Galle Fort.

CONCLUSION

This 0.3 sq km patch of earth surrounded by the Indian Ocean and secured by 17th-century Dutch ramparts—which we call Galle Fort, a World Heritage city but a *gama* (“village”) to its local resident community—continues to be a prime location. It is a place over which battles were fought by colonial and local powers in order to gain control, and where investors today part with millions of dollars to gain possession of a few square metres of it! Just as the colonial powers secured it with strong rampart walls, strong regulations are implemented today to secure its Dutch colonial architecture, which primarily contributed to its prestigious World Heritage status in 1988.

This study has dealt with the World Heritage recognition of Galle Fort, a colonial fortified town in a South Asian country, within the scope of the modern discourse on urban heritage conservation that underscores maintaining the balance between material preservation and the aspirations of an urban community. It has illustrated how Galle Fort changed within three decades of its World Heritage recognition—from a small walled seaside town with a local community living in dilapidated colonial houses, to a tourist hotspot and prime real estate site with increasing tropical modernist architecture, attracting visitors, tourists, investors and even researchers from within and beyond the borders

of Sri Lanka. Although “change” is an ordinary process in any city, this study has shown that Galle Fort’s change has been drastic and constant in every respect, according to the findings—its buildings, demography, economy, urban culture and way of life: a strong testimony to how World Heritage affects the historic city as a monument and its urban community in both positive and negative ways.

The conventional urban conservation approach, which was practised at Galle Fort over the last three decades, could be also viewed as analogous to the Hindu trinity of supreme divinity. In Hinduism, three main cosmic forces that create change are personified by the Trimūrti—Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the preserver and Shiva, the destroyer; in the context of Galle Fort, if viewed conservatively, this could symbolize past generations as the “creator” of urban heritage, the experts as the “preserver” and, ultimately, the current urban community as the “destroyer.” Yet based on the research findings, the residential urban community should rather be seen as “the preserver.”

First, this research has provided substantial evidence to prove that a local community has lived in the fort since it was used as a “fortified town” by the Portuguese—the founders of the fort; this community continued and thrived after independence with the relocation of the Burghers. This local community, which cultivated strong neighbourhood relationships, created a *gama* (“village”)—a typical social and territorial space for themselves—within the colonial walls. The research has argued that while the fort’s Dutch colonial architecture is the most prominent piece of material heritage in Galle Fort, its essence lies in its local community, which has turned the fort into a “living town.” In fact, through the continuous use of the fort by different groups, it has primarily been the local community that has contributed to its long-term existence and preservation—not the “expert preservation,” a fact

not realized by experts. While the larger majority of uninhabited colonial forts in Sri Lanka are in a ruined state, Galle—a fortified town, colonial port city, administrative centre and *gama*—became an exception, and was elevated to World Heritage status as the “the best example of a fortified city built by Europeans in South and South-East Asia” (UNESCO) thanks to the care of the people who continuously inhabited this urban landscape. It was the local people of Galle who saved the Dutch ramparts from being dismantled by the British government and turned them into the “Pride of Galle.” The people of Galle were accepting towards the former colonial landscape, which became part of their daily lives, despite harsh colonial memories. It was the place where you were born and bred, played and walked; you eventually love it and tend to protect it! Thus, I argue that the residential urban community should be seen as “the preserver.”

It was the inhabitants who preserved their town until 1971—until the implementation of a 400-yard (365.76-metre) rule by the Department of Archaeology. Interestingly, the immediate reason for implementing the law was not because the residents destroyed their town’s heritage, but that “state agents” (the military) did, namely during the insurgency of 1971 (as discussed in sub-chapter 1.3.1). This research has shown that the expert preservation of Galle Fort, which specifically began in 1988 with World Heritage recognition and continues to this day, is largely focused on material preservation. This is evident from the results of 30 years of “expert preservation” attempts geared towards the “Dutch colonial landscape” at Galle Fort, which however is heavily influenced by numerous uncontrollable effects of heritage recognition, both local and global.

Second, based on these findings, I argue that the material preservation goals of the experts are only partially fulfilled at Galle Fort, while the socio-cultural values of the fort’s residential urban community, which was not given proper attention in heritage practice, have sharply declined. Galle Fort’s material heritage comes under two categories within the scope of local heritage legislation—state-owned and privately-owned—and the latter largely comprised private houses at the time of World Heritage recognition. The monuments owned by the state—including the Dutch ramparts, the main

physical feature of the fort—are well preserved and even successfully used for adaptive reuse projects, fulfilling the goal of material preservation. As argued in chapter 4, this shows the influence of the Antiquities Ordinance, the national (colonial) heritage law, on state-owned monuments.

By contrast, the privately-owned buildings, which make up the majority, comprising more than 500 individual units, have been altered throughout the passage of time by their owners, who were naturally inclined to change their “homes” mostly as they wished. Since the late 1990s, maintaining these buildings’ “Dutch colonial character”—with a colonial verandah, no more than two floors and half-round tile roof—was of the utmost importance for the World Heritage project, while the previous practices of the local community no longer met World Heritage standards; these changes were identified as “illegal developments” and “destruction of antiquities” by the heritage laws. The introduction of building regulations in 2009—the Special Regulations (Planning and Building), which had prevailed since 1997—at the recommendation of the World Heritage Committee created a constant struggle between community and heritage authorities, giving rise to “illegal” developments. Research findings also show that the community has now adapted to the situation after two decades, also proving their “adaptation to the environment,” a very natural phenomenon.

The study has critically questioned the success of the practical application of the Special Regulations 2009, an initiative of the experts. Although the law is successful insofar as it preserves the features of the building façades—colonial verandahs, building colour, roofscapes, etc.—the changes to the internal features behind the façades—such as the addition of third floors not visible from the façade, swimming pools and rooftops, all “illegal”—are drastic. This scenario also shows that the wishes of the urban community—who naturally hope for some economic benefits from World Heritage recognition—are not properly facilitated by the law. The findings clearly indicate that the aspirations of the users of heritage determine the direction of “urban landscape change” as much as the law does. The community has strongly supported certain articles of the law that are easy to follow, such as maintaining the building colours and roof materials, while substantially violating the height

restrictions, which bar a much-needed possibility for terraced houses with limited space. This could also be viewed within the remarkable vertical development of the city over the past 30 years, as analysed in chapter 5; 70% of single-storeyed buildings at the time of heritage recognition have since turned into double-storeyed buildings, with a substantial number of these buildings containing “illegal” third floors.

The former colonial townhouse—in which residents lived for generations and to which they demonstrated a strong emotional attachment—has become an object of income generation today, gradually turning the former residential streets into shopping streets and ultimately the whole fort into a “touristscape.” Such single-use tourism is also promoted by heritage and state policies that gradually remove the fort’s administrative function, also creating threats to its “living heritage” by the decisions to remove public institutions, including a school. An increasingly large number of approved developments, oriented towards tourism and guided by building regulations, has brought tropical modernist and resort architecture to the fort, as argued in chapter 5, which also questions preservation standards.

Galle Fort, like many other World Heritage-recognized historic Asian cities, had experienced the most common unavoidable outcomes of heritage recognition—global tourism, foreign direct investments, real estate pressures, continuous urban regeneration and gentrification—which directly affect its residential community, both negatively and positively. This research has argued that the rapidly increasing commercial land value, coupled with foreign investment opportunities provided by (changing) laws and policies, has ultimately contributed to the decline of the fort’s local community to one-third of its original occupancy over the past 30 years. The fort has undergone higher levels of gentrification, with 16% of properties owned by foreign investors (2016) and a substantial number of local investors and businessmen taking over the spaces of the former local residents. “Super-gentrification” and “commercial gentrification” have become common today at the fort. This research also argues that loopholes in laws and overall policy decisions on boosting foreign investment in the country have been undertaken without considering

how, in special cases such as Galle Fort, these policies have negatively affected its population and led to gentrification.

These impacts on the fort’s residential community have been both positive and negative, as identified by the research. Although residents still call the fort a *gama* (“village”), their traditional neighbourhood—“one large house with so many rooms”—has changed substantially due to decreasing neighbourhood relationships and sense of place amid the process of tourism-oriented commercialization, gentrification and foreignization of land. Although the residential community itself has also contributed to this, there are also residents who value their attachment to the local landscape more than money, and continue to live in the fort. The local community, which naturally has priority over the local amenities of their *gama* (“village”) within the local context, are somewhat dissatisfied with their own amenities being enjoyed by others, while their wishes are being neglected. Alongside these negative impacts, it is also the case that the tourism economy, coupled with gentrification, has caused a remarkable improvement in the socio-economic level of the local population, who are now on par with their foreign counterparts, resulting in the rise of the middle class and thus creating social change in the fort. Positively, the benefits of tourism have reached all strata of society, and Galle Fort has achieved the economic goal of the modern people-centred approach, a sustainable trend in which the local community benefits from heritage. By contrast, its social goal has failed, as they could not enjoy the landscape as before, which has become a place for “outsiders” by displacing the residents in their own city.

Third, the research has identified the above changes as a number of interconnected outcomes or impacts, both positive and negative, which also translate into threats and challenges in managing the World Heritage property. These interconnected impacts affect each other at different levels, while the same impact may contribute to both positive and negative outcomes, an indication of the complex nature of urban heritage management, which only allows for mitigating the negative impacts rather than eliminating their root causes. For instance, gentrification has positively contributed to uplifting the local economy, while it has negatively created

a social imbalance at the fort. The interconnected critical issues within and outside the fortress walls (buffer zone) have ultimately created an entangled mass—commercialization and gentrification, “illegal” developments, a drop in the local population and their intangible values, threats to “living heritage,” intrusive developments at buffer zones, threats to the colonial architecture and the visual integrity of the landscape—all of which recalls the famous Pāli stanza commonly used in the country: *anthō jatā bahi jatā [jatāya jatithā pajā]*, “entangled inside, entangled outside [and all together].”

Fourth, this research has identified why it is challenging for the country’s long-established national heritage institution, empowered by a strong (colonial) legislation, to manage this small patch of land—less than one square kilometre—with other partner intuitions, while it has continued to manage the country’s monumental heritage successfully for over a hundred years. The research recognizes a number of limitations in conventional management/regulatory systems and heritage institutional structures. Local heritage practice, heavily influenced by Western schools of thought and guided by conventional Western material-based preservation approaches, leaves no room for the community or its needs, as argued by the research. Against this background, managing a “dynamic city” with heterogeneous urban communities—local and foreign, residential and investor, state and institutional—with diverse needs, has become a challenge at Galle Fort.

The management of the World Heritage city is a matter handled collaboratively by a few state institutions, with a top-down management practice that has left no space for the community until very recent years. A number of cases discussed in this research show that collaboration within institutions is largely a matter of personal relationships between officials, while there are also conflicts of interest and power struggles among institutions for supremacy over each other. Furthermore, the (local) institutional management plans and building regulations of the World Heritage city have primarily been formulated according to the recommendations of the World Heritage Committee. The research argues that these policies and laws represent the preservation interests of UNESCO as seen by local policymakers, but not the requirements of the community—the real users

of the urban landscape. Adding to the complexity, heritage decisions since the mid-2000s have tended to be politicized. Furthermore, empowering Galle Heritage Foundation as the key heritage management institution, as recommended by the World Heritage Committee, is weakly supported by heritage bureaucracy, and still remains vague. Weak decision-making power on the part of Galle Heritage Foundation, coupled with the personal power of officials, incentivizes the foundation to rely on political authorities to gain power, which will only sustain the politicization of heritage decisions in the future. Against this background, the overall management of the heritage city—with less integration of its community—remains a concern. This research questions the capability of Galle Heritage Foundation in managing the property without a serious structural and legislative revitalization, including expertise, financial transparency and the integration of the community into its management structure.

The major limitation of the Antiquities Ordinance (9, 1940), the most powerful (colonial) heritage legislation in the country, is identified as not having provisions to deal with (living) historic cities and historic buildings, which has also become a major obstacle in managing Galle Fort. Thus, the fort has been declared a “Special Regulatory Zone” within the provisions of the Urban Development Authority Act (41, 1978), a designation specifically focused on developments within the fort.

Chapter 7 provided strong examples to prove that the law is not implemented equally in the heritage city, i.e. between ordinary inhabitants and powerful investor/businessman, which is a strong criticism against the system by the local community. The chapter also shows that the attitudes of the heritage officers are the most important to the legislative process, rather than the equity of the law itself. Furthermore, the building development procedures, as currently practised under Special Regulations, 2009, have become a burden to ordinary residents, both financially and bureaucratically, while they have indirectly contributed to an increase in tourism-oriented commercialization.

The research has identified “materiality” as the priority of both the community and heritage institutions, however, aimed towards two different

goals—development needs versus preservation requirements. This has contributed to a major conflict of interest at Galle Fort. Both groups are eager to assert their needs and are mostly reluctant to compromise in many cases, highlighting the need for dialogue between stakeholders. The lack of negotiation and compromise between parties has created a contested landscape at Galle Fort, and ultimately a widening gap between the heritage institutions and the community.

The research has argued that bureaucratic and political will has played an important role in shaping the World Heritage project. As argued in the first chapter, the World Heritage recognition of Galle Fort was entirely an expert effort, supported by local politicians. “A Monument of Dual Parentage,” a strategic phrase used in the preservation campaign, killed two birds with one stone by gaining the support of the country’s highest political authority to list the country’s largest colonial fort, and that of the Dutch donors, who financially supported the quest to preserve its “Dutchness.” The strong economic interests behind this process have since grown, while the “Dutchness” of Galle Fort has become a central branding feature today, used in the same measure by the state, investors and the local community. The state always fears the possible delisting of the World Heritage city—a blessing, as also exemplified by the parliamentary debates regarding Galle International Cricket Stadium—tactfully used by the heritage officers of this generation in achieving their preservation goals within the political agenda. Thus, it is possible to negotiate with the state as shown by Galle Harbour Development Project, a positive example, which indicates that even firm political agendas can change in order to maintain World Heritage status, a “prestige” apart from its economic benefits.

Fifth, the research highlights the importance of the intangible values of the urban landscape, especially a sense of place on the part of the inhabitants. The anecdote on the poet’s house in chapter 6 is an example that proves Lynch’s (1975) idea of sense of place—which is created by memories associated with human activities in a particular place. The importance of “place” is further shown by three women’s collective memories of the “earlier fort” (chapter 6); they recalled their memories of particular events merely by seeing that “particular place” on the map they

created, despite the fact that the building associated with their collective memory was not physically there anymore. Their collective memories also show that place attachment differs from one person to the next. Adding to the complexity, the absence of a physical structure in the place creates more memories. Mrs Miguel regularly remembers the poet’s late wife even when she sees the new building that replaced the former house, while the case is mostly the same for the poet. Furthermore, the research shows that the social capital of the city—the urban culture, the community feeling and shared customs—is dynamic amid the regenerating urban landscape and thus a challenge to preserve.

Despite these changes, critical issues and challenges, 30 years of the World Heritage project at Galle Fort have yielded significant positive achievements, including the remarkable improvement in the quality of life of the remaining local community, mentioned above. The preservation of material heritage has currently improved to a larger extent despite questions about conservation standards. Gradually, the community is recognizing the positive benefits of preserving material heritage, a matter largely associated with the economic benefits of World Heritage recognition. Most importantly, the former material-based preservation approach is slowly changing towards a participatory approach, while trust, dialogue, negotiation, cooperation and support are slowly progressing. Similarly, scientific research and capacity-building have improved substantially, mainly due to projects funded by Dutch donors.

Finally, the research argues that in spite of the best practices of participatory and people-centred approaches developed and promoted at the international level, they are slow to be implemented at the local level. The research has shown that urban materiality and the urban community who create or use this materiality and its memories cannot be separated from each other. The findings strongly emphasize the need for the “harmonious coexistence” of the urban community and its historic urban landscape, which are interdependent, in order to survive as a “living historic city.” Thus, Galle Fort requires a well-balanced urban preservation approach that gives equal importance to fulfilling the aspirations of the “current urban community” and preserving

the “former colonial landscape.” The research has also shown that urban heritage management is complex, challenging and also a sacrifice, as it is practically difficult to fulfil both the aspirations of the community and the experts, or all stakeholders, while also achieving the ideal “expert preservation” goals. I conclude that World Heritage recognition of the historic city should optimistically be seen as a new phase, rather than judging it as having failed or achieved success through its visible changes, which are heterogeneous, as seen at Galle Fort.

As expressed by a popular Sinhala saying, Galle Fort should not be *lōketa parakāsē, gedarata maragāthē*, “glory to the world, but a burden at home.” World Heritage should be an instrument that can be used positively for the creation of a sustainable local community at Galle Fort, who could contribute to the posterity of their “*gama*” (“village”) by continuing to exist as the “Pride of Galle.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are provided based on the research findings in order to foster a participatory and people-centered urban management solution (discussed in sub-chapter 2.4.2) for Galle Fort with a greater consensus amongst stakeholders, especially the local community. Some of these recommendations also aim to increase the community’s sense of belonging to the historic urban landscape as their *gama* (“village”).

- i. It is advisable to implement the two proposals in the “Integrated Management System 2015” to “harness the community in participation in the management of the property.”⁹⁷⁴
 - a. Establish the Coordinative Working Committee (CWC) with community representatives.
 - b. Integrate community groups within the middle-level management structure of Galle Heritage Foundation.
- ii. Consider having at least three community members—two for the residential community and one for the business community—in the Board of Management of Galle Heritage

Foundation to improve collaborative and non-hierarchical decision-making, specifically in the decisions affecting the community. It is also recommended to consider the local community’s request to appoint a community member in the Planning Sub-Committee.⁹⁷⁵

- iii. Maintain close cooperation and collaboration with essential stakeholders in planning, decision-making and implementation processes that affect them. Apart from the proposed CWC and community groups, public participation methods such as stakeholder dialogue sessions, round-table discussions, etc. could also be used. Rather than sticking to a bottom-up or top-down management approach each time, it is advisable to use both in a complementary manner in each specific case.

Stakeholders: local residents, local business community, foreign businessmen (and expats), public institutions located within heritage city, religious authorities, heritage institutions, policymakers, public institutions affiliated with the World Heritage city in various ways (e.g. Sri Lanka Cricket, Sri Lanka Ports Authority, etc.), political authorities, investors (local and foreign), etc.

- iv. The above-mentioned recommendations could also be strengthened by appointing a public relations officer at the Galle Heritage Foundation (GHF) and thereby encouraging community dialogue.
- v. Provide support (institutional and financial) for long-term residents in undertaking the development procedure.⁹⁷⁶ It is recommended to provide a free consultation service (e.g., monthly) at the GHF and to make a chartered architect’s services available for a nominal price through GHF, either by collaborating

974 p. 24, “Integrated Management System 2015” (Mandawala 2015).

975 As mentioned in sub-chapter 7.1.4.

976 As requested by the community and outlined in chapter 7.

with the heritage institutions that currently offer this or by appointing their own chartered architect. It is also recommended to continue the ongoing free service for families with a lower income. This would ensure a level of fairness for residents burdened with the excessive costs of the building development procedure.

- vi. Provide technical booklets in order to help building owners and developers comply with development guidelines.⁹⁷⁷
- vii. Apart from decision-making, it is also recommended to include community members (i.e. volunteers, schoolchildren, etc.) in archaeological initiatives in the heritage city, such as conservation projects, museum work, site monitoring, etc., and thereby to increase the community's sense of ownership of the historic urban landscape.
- viii. Encourage and support (with expert/financial assistance) the local community in establishing a museum on their *gama* ("village"), managed by the community, which presents their shared customs, collective memories, stories, etc. in order to increase their sense of belonging to the *gama* as well as to promote valuing and preserving these assets.⁹⁷⁸
- ix. Share necessary information with the public, including the fort community, with standards, specifically the laws, institutional policy documents, heritage decisions, projects planned and implemented in the heritage city and the annual finances of GHF, preferably through the official website of GHF.
- x. Increase consciousness towards the practical uses of participatory management and best practices among stakeholders, including the community, heritage practitioners, officials, policymakers, bureaucrats, etc., preferably through workshops, social media and the official website of GHF.

⁹⁷⁷ This was a practically successful initiative in the urban renewals of Singapore in the early 1990s, carried out by the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore (Kong 2011). An another example is "Heritage Homeowner's Conservation Manual Series" available at <https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/heritage-homeowners-conservation-manual-series> (accessed 20 March 2019).

⁹⁷⁸ A somewhat similar project that showcases the local community's presence in Galle Fort is currently being proposed by Dutch donors in collaboration with Galle Heritage Foundation.