

## Modern Built Environments

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Ever since human evolution, man has made numerous changes to his surroundings. Among the basic needs of a man, shelter is one of the main requirements that is vital for his existence. Built environment satisfies needs in both qualitative and quantitative terms (or psychological and physical) of people, similar to medicine. Man has been transforming natural spaces into built and shaped spaces to match their needs firstly, then for shelter and food mostly, and finally for the luxury of living. This has ever since been the endless and overwhelming creation and recreating built environments that kept changing from time to time, enriched with different cultures, beliefs and perceptions.

This process of shaping and transforming space creates the built environment, separating it from the natural environment.

Built environments are created by people for the people, which continue to be influenced by socio-cultural, economic and various human perceptions and beliefs from time to time. The built environment must be shaped to cater to the needs of its inhabitants in all aspects of their existence including where they live, work and play, and thus to benefit people. Once Winston Churchill stated that 'We shape our buildings, and afterwards they shape us'. Built environments can be defined as the vast spectrum of tangible and intangible forces which are either

characterized by form or formless, that is, related to existence of human beings and the built spaces. In creating and shaping the built spaces, attention needs to be given for every single detail of each slight alteration that a designer attempts. Each line, each curve sketched on a paper has a great impact on built environment. Often this is not understood. Our built environments must be created to enhance human life by shaping and reforming the built spaces, while adapting to the natural flow to keep the balance, catering to the qualitative and quantitative patterns of interplay amongst people, nature and built spaces, to promote desirable and sustainable qualities and perceptions that can be applied across various living environments. This requires ample creativity and ability to nurture the love of a place



Fig : The Centre Pompidou in Metz by Sheuru Ban depicts the innovative use of Bamboo for structure



Fig : The stainless-steel exterior of Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles



Fig : Moshe Safdie's Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts in Kansas City, Missouri

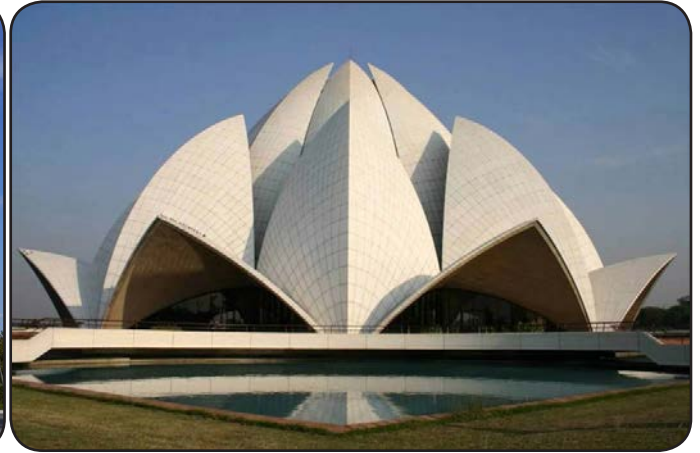


Fig : Lotus Temple in India by Architect Fariborz Sahba



Fig : The Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku, Azerbaijan by Zaha Hadid; a building of concrete that dances like folded paper



Fig : City of Shanghai with its modern sky scrapers



Fig : Anticipated new additions to Colombo's skyline



in harmonizing built with unbuilt, to create a pleasing interplay to enhance the quality of life.

From the simplest structures, today the built spaces have evolved to be much complex and eye catching. With the technological

advancements, impossible has become possible, where structures of any shape can be built with the use of numerous advanced materials and advanced construction technologies. Potential to experiment, and materializing imaginations, has given birth to

masterpieces and landmarks highlighting the creativity of the architects and designers.

However, on the other hand, modern built environment has more challenges than in past decades. Today built environments



**Fig :** Intervening greenery to modern built environments

must be formed to address the challenges faced with urbanization trends, climate change phenomena as well as numerous health issues, while at the same time satisfying the basic needs. It is evident that we humans, and our actions in forming the built spaces have collectively been the cause behind every consequence we face today. Our actions and decisions in creating chaotic urban-scapes, depletion of green cover, extensive energy use etc., have given birth to many critical issues. These issues are interlinked, and are growing each day. In present skyscrapers glazed with mirrors and energy craving buildings are popping up like mushrooms, causing more and more heat islands. Pollution has overtaken some cities, making lives vulnerable to various ailments. It is commonly seen that the majority lacks the true understanding of how the built spaces enhance and influence the daily life. Thus, the building and the built spaces are often looked at as just a composition of materials, and as a form that would please individuals' aesthetic appeal rather than the true impact of planning, functioning and socio cultural

context. Lack of concern of human beings on the natural surrounding when shaping the spaces in accordance with their personal requirements and luxuries has led to make man a threat to nature and to himself. It must be understood that buildings and built spaces, should be created to address the needs of people, considering all the contributing forces that refine and shape them. It must also be kept in mind that this should be achieved with selfless motives and due responsibility, attention and care, that will sustain and nurture love for nature and all living beings including mankind.

With well-planned sustainable approaches modern built environment including buildings, can satisfy these trends, and help people to live healthy and peacefully. Modern built environments have the potential to avoid existing problematic situations and find solutions to such issues. Regenerating greenery and promoting energy efficient and sustainable buildings to form friendly and healthy built environments that promote socio-

cultural well-being as well, is identified as the main requirement in modern built environments.

Many novel concepts and trends have been identified, researched and practiced globally. This practice is also slowly being introduced to Sri Lanka as well. Such decisions will enable cities to become places where we can live happily, healthily and have sustainable lives. Sustainable and green architecture, low energy architecture, zero emission buildings, smart cities,



green cities are concepts that have arisen and are being experimented as solutions to address the crisis situation arising from congestion. Instances can be found where buildings are created in harmony with nature, peacefully linking the built environments with natural environment.

Architects and building designers have the best potential to make the difference. Each building no matter how big or small, residential or commercial contribute in forming the overall built environment and its characteristics. Thus, when designing every single building, not only the specific building aspects but also the surrounding built and natural environments and overall built environment must be considered. In Sri Lanka too, many architects are taking efforts



Fig : Community Library at Ambepussa by Dr. Milinda Pathiraja; mastering the material use to inspire innovation



Fig : Artist's Retreat by Archt. Palinda Kannangara ;an escape merged with nature



Fig : Santani Retreat –Theldeniya; a building subtly blended with nature by Archt. Thisarahanapathy



Fig : Nikini Automation, Colombo: by Dr. Upendra Rajapaksha; linking effects of microclimates to building design, section and internal planning to reduce the building's energy foot print

to make a change and ensure sustainability to modern built environment with the intension of creating eco-friendly, sustainable built environments. Buildings that blend with nature; buildings that are live and have utilized novel technology and sustainable materials; and buildings that use natural energy sources are being added to the modern Sri Lankan built environment.

Cities around the world have started making their way towards a sustainable and greener future with goals for zero emissions, 100% renewable energy etc. Human

society is embedded in environment. We should keep in mind that the human being is first and foremost an animal, sharing living space with other animal species in an environment in which they are mutually dependent. It is quite evident that because of our unchecked actions, we have disturbed the ecological balance of our environment, and hence are facing various critical issues. It is high time that we take some strict actions to preserve our environment and conserve the environment for our generations. It is our responsibility to shape our built environments to be in

harmony with the natural environment, and ensure the possibility of healthy and happy life here. The creation of a pleasant and healthy living environment.

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