

# GOOD CITY FORM AND ITS MANIFESTATION THROUGH BUILDING DESIGN

## A CASE STUDY OF COLOMBO

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### Introduction

Cities are urban settlements of people, in which the natural surroundings are dominated by man-made features thereby revealing the collective attainments of people through their physical appearances. In one sense, these cities and their physical forms are a statement frozen in space and time, revealing the spirit of its people.

Good cities are those in which people have memorable places and an identifiable structure to organize them. If the environment is well organized, and sharply identifiable, then it becomes a true 'place'. Once these become associated with meanings and connections strengthening the memorability of both inhabitants and visitors, these places become unmistakable and remarkable.

While identifying the environments, which are unstructured or disorganised is an ability people possess, there is no doubt that they desire to live in well organized, pleasant environments. They experience the places in relation to the surroundings and therefore these places need to have different identities. On the other hand if the places lack their identities all the places in cities will look alike and become uninteresting.

In most new cities around the world this has already occurred. They lose different identities which the remarkable old cities were proud of. (Fig. 1, 2) The historic towns like Florence and Venice for instance, have had their own identities which make them memorable places to experience and are unique in character. Their structure had a certain order and the buildings and the open spaces had clear relationships which are so meaningful. "In the traditional city, the rules were clear. Buildings were subordinate to the more powerful collective realm to an implicit vocabulary of design and a difference to the larger order of things. The "manners and rules of a place" gave instructions on how to connect." (Trancik, 1986:11)

Although these historic cities which naturally evolved embodying the inspirations of people who inhabited them had such characteristics, the intervention of planned control has totally changed the face of today's cities. City development has become more of a bureaucratic process alienated from natural forces of the political, social and cultural forces of the city dwellers themselves, while the economic forces have begun to dominate over almost every aspect of the development activities. The Indian city Chandigar and most American

cities are good examples which exhibit the disastrous effects that have come about by the planned interventions, totally ignoring the values of their inhabitants and the inter-relationship of the physical elements that create the city.

The reasons for this scenario are many. Attitudes towards architectural design after the modern movement produced free-standing buildings. Land use policies of the Urban-Renewal movement brought about zoning that divided the city. There is an ever-increasing dependance on the automobile. With these have come the destruction of the city which we see everywhere today.

Kevin Lynch has examined the Good City Form and its constituents and have suggested that good city forms have identifiable places. He has shown that the good cities are imageable and constitute Paths, Nodes, Edges, Landmarks and Districts.

None of these physical elements exist in isolation. They intermingle creating a coherent network of physical relationships and spatial flow patterns which are typical to a particular city as its form. Different three dimensional arrangement patterns of physical elements create different city forms,



Fig. 1 - A Modern City

1 Trancik, Roger, **Finding Lost Space**. Theories of Urban Design. Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, New York, 1986, p.11.

which ultimately appear as compositions of volumes and masses.

### CITY FORM AND BUILDINGS:

The physical elements are either collective creations of natural and man-built objects together with open spaces or a special building or a natural feature in case of a landmark. They create different places within a city and contribute to structure the city orderly and meaningfully.

Buildings, defining the spaces within themselves as well as the spaces outside unavoidably become parts of one or number of physical elements identified above. They play the major role in urban areas creating spatial flow patterns and boundaries, giving terms to the urban spaces while ultimately creating the whole city.

Therefore, these places become the results of buildings and exhibit a definite relationship between city form and the buildings. As the most important contributing factor, each building has to play a certain role in its physical environment in order to create a good city form with imageable and meaningful places.

Therefore, it is important to study the relationship between these places and buildings. This paper attempts to examine the Good City Form and its

manifestation through building design, and potential elements of buildings which contribute directly and indirectly to create meaningful urban places.

The illustrations for physical elements were selected mainly from Colombo Fort, except for an urban edge a proper example for which cannot be found within this area. Number of examples were studied under each physical element while the example which has the most possible correlation is illustrated here.

### PATHS

Paths are channels through which people move, and they can be streets, walkways, railroads, transit lines or canals. They make communications between different points of a city by physically connecting them together. They are the principal organizing elements of a city while the other physical elements can be arranged relating to the paths.

A path should possess certain characteristics for it to become a truly meaningful and desirable place. It should primarily have continuity, sense of enclosure and directional quality with a definite beginning and end.

Apart from these characteristics, a path should be scaled by means of a number of landmarks or nodes and that also will enhance the sense of

direction. A certain rhythmic pattern of buildings, facades, boulevard planting of trees, pattern, colour or texture of paving can be attributed to the continuity of a path.

Since a street is normally perceived as a thing which goes towards something, it should have clarity of direction and at the same time shifts in direction will enhance the visual clarity while creating interesting views at such points.

Further, the characteristics along a path such as landmarks and space changes should be arranged in such a way as to create a certain pattern which is meaningful for the street, while the form can be introduction – development – climax – conclusion process or more subtle in shape avoiding a conclusion.

These physical characteristics of a path are mainly the results of the buildings alongside. The scale of buildings alongside and the width of the streets determine the degree of enclosure. Plan configuration, number of minor streets connecting and the gaps between the buildings are the other influencing factors of the sense of enclosure. Directional quality can be achieved by regular change in quality cumulative in one direction. For instance, gradually narrowing plot size indicates the nearness to a junction.



Fig. 2 – An Old City – Venice

## **NODES**

As Kevin Lynch has identified, nodes are points, the strategic spots in a city into which an observer enters and which are the intensive foci to and from which he is travelling. They may be primarily functions, places of a break in transportation, a crossing or convergence of paths, moments of shift from one structure to another.

Basically, nodes are man-made spaces which come mostly in the form of functions of paths. Apart from this, a node can be a concentration having a special use or physical character, a street corner, enclosed square or extended linear shape etc.

A node should essentially have a sense of enclosure, visual impression and should be easily identifiable in terms of its physical objects. The continuous quality of walls, floor details, skyline etc. create a place with a unique identity as a node. Although the physical form of a node need not necessarily be a strong one, if it contains a well-defined form with sharp boundaries, the effect will be much stronger. If there is an object displayed as a foci of attention within these well-defined boundaries, the value of that space will be intensified as a node.

As with paths, nodes also can have a directional quality having exit and entry points.

Being somewhat larger area within its surrounding, the nodes receive more attention as special places within a city. However, they call for more visual interest and offer physical objects the advantage of being special and prominent in its building fabric.

As physical character of a node the buildings become the main attributors since they define one space while giving character to that place as well.

## **EDGES**

Edges are lateral references and usually act as the boundaries between two kinds of areas.

"Edges are the linear elements not used or considered as paths by the observer. They are the boundaries between too

phases, linear breaks in continuity; shores, railroad cuts, edges of development, walls." (Lynch, Kevin, 1960;47)

Edges become strong when they are visually prominent, continuous in form and impenetrable to cross movements. Although they need not always be impenetrable, since continuity and visibility are the crucial characteristics of an edge. As with paths, edges also have directional quality and a definite end. However, an edge should have a considerable depth to become a strong element which shape city form rather than just be a barrier.

Edges are very significant and important features in a city whether they are in the form of railroads, thoroughways, district boundaries or topographical features. They provide special opportunities, for the designer to contribute his skills in making the city interesting. It can be a response to an edge already existing or a new creation of an edge by the design itself, since the physical character is generated through the buildings themselves.

## **LANDMARKS**

Landmarks are point of references as nodes, but in this case the observer does not enter within them and they are external. They are physical objects which stand out as single elements against the background of a vast number of other objects.

The figure-background contrast is the principal factor for an object to become a landmark. The figure-background contrast is a result of a number of other factors like scale, form, location etc. They should have the singularity, a kind of uniqueness to be memorable. Further it is necessary for the landmarks to be easily identifiable and significant, and for this to be achieved they should be clear in form, contrast with their backgrounds and have a prominence in spatial location.

Being located at a junction as well as having an important historical value makes a landmark more strong and identifiable. Therefore characteristics of the physical object itself as well as its surroundings become important in forming a landmark.

## **DISTRICTS**

Kevin Lynch has described the districts as the medium to large sections of the city, conceived of as having two dimensional extent, which the observer mentally enters 'inside of' and which are recognizable as having some common, identifying character.

The physical characteristics which generate a common character in an area are numerous in variety. It can be the character of spaces or spatial flow pattern in an area which makes the homogeneity. Common building forms, building types, facade treatments, fenestrations, detailing, use of materials, colour, texture, roofscape and even the skyline can create an area with homogeneous character. The boundaries of a district can be well-defined or obtuse. Within the limits of a district there can be other elements, paths, nodes, landmarks and in reality it is these elements that form a district which constitutes a common character too.

Whether the physical element is a path, node, edge, landmark or a district, it is the building design and location which generates the formation of these elements and their physical characteristics. Buildings are the solid content of these physical elements and they define the voids as well, forming three dimensional compositions which ultimately create the city. It is therefore clear, that buildings are the major contributor of city form the design elements of which exhibit a possibility of correlation with the characteristics of physical elements as illustrated by the following case study.

Number of examples were studied under each element that constitute a city, though the example which has the most positive correlation is illustrated here. The diagrammatic representation of the correlation does not show the correlation between design factors and physical characteristics of one such instance, but it is derived from all the examples studied.

## **THE CASE STUDY: FORT IN COLOMBO**

### **1. PATHS: UPPER CHATHAM STREET**

Upper Chatham Street runs East West direction connecting York Street and Janadhipathi Mawatha which are

parallel. Its physical characteristics make it a memorable, among the other streets in Fort.

Once entered from York Street end, the view is directly focussing on the clock tower at the opposite end. The well-enclosed corridor effect can be strongly experienced throughout the street, while it forces the people to move. The street is narrow, so that the activities on one side can be sensed even from the opposite side making the street more live.

While experiencing the continuity as one entity, it also allows to enjoy the variety of the streetscape. The physical boundaries of the street are strongly defined providing a high degree of enclosure. Continuous walls on either side direct the street to its climax at the end, supported by its visual clarity.

**Beginning and end:**

'Beginning' and 'end' of the street are clearly marked by the intersection it makes with York Street, and the Clock Tower located in the centre of the junction it makes with Janadhipathi Mawatha consecutively.

**Sense of Enclosure:**

Tall and narrow built forms produced by the narrow building plots bordering the street, are bound together creating two continuous walls on either sides. The proportion between height of these buildings and width of the street create square cross-sections generally throughout the street providing proper sense of enclosure.

Although the height of some buildings vary making an undulating skyline, it does not affect the sense of enclosure because of the continuity of two walls on either side with straight building lines. The clock tower in the centre of the junction at the end has heightened the effect by closing one view beyond.

**Continuity:**

Built forms of the buildings, building line and their detailing

contribute in achieving the continuity of the street. The tall and narrow buildings create a vertical rhythm to the street which has been followed by the vertical divisioning of linear built forms of Marketing Dept. Building and National Mutual Building. (Fig. 3)

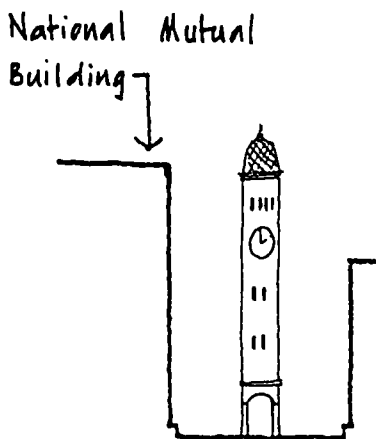


Fig. 3

This vertical rhythm strengthens the continuity, established by the continuous building facades on a straight building line.

At ground level, detailing and divisioning of shop fronts express a repetitive pattern followed by the arcades of Marketing Department Building and National Mutual Building thus supporting continuity.

Most of the buildings support the continuity of the street, constituting

solid and void facades with a similar window to wall ratio. But, excessive use of glass in curtain wall facades of few buildings disturb the continuity. The white dome of the mosque on Northern side and odd 'Lalchand' building with its tiled gable roof provide variety to the streetscape. The narrow gap between Marketing Department Building and National Mutual Building glimpses a view of historic Dutch Hospital and Bank of Ceylon Tower provides a relief to the busy atmosphere in corridor-like space of the street without breaking its continuity.

**Directional quality:**

Directional quality has been established by the corridor effect of the street directly focussing on the clock tower at its end. The straight building line has contributed greatly in establishing that by creating visual clarity of the street.

Contribution of building design factors in forming the physical characteristics of a path as exemplified by the selected examples (Upper Chatham Street, York Street & Lower Chatham Street) can be diagrammatically shown as below. (Fig. 4)

Having a strongly positive correlation between the building design factors and play characteristics, the Upper Chatham

Qualities of a Path	Building design factors								
	Built form	Scale & proportion	Building line	Sky line	Facade treatment	Ground floor details	Roofscape	Materials & colour	Landscaping
Continuity	●	○	●	○	●	●	×	×	○
Sense of enclosure	○	●	○	○	×	×	×	×	○
Directional quality	○	×	○	○	●	×	×	×	○
Definite end & beginning	○	○	×	○	×	×	×	×	×
Visual clarity	×	×	●	×	×	×	×	×	
Scaled by nodes or landmarks									

**KEY:**

- Primary positive
- Secondary positive
- ×
- ×

Figure 4 – Contribution of building design factors to the physical characteristics of Paths.

Street forms a good path which is clearly identifiable and unique in character in Colombo City.

## 2. NODES: INTERSECTION OF JANADHIPATHI MAWATHA AND UPPER CHATHAM STREET

Upper Chatham Street and Galle Buck Road perpendicularly meet at the Janadhipathi Mawatha forming the node. (Fig. 5) While the corner site bordering the southern part of Janadhipathi Mawatha and Galle Buck Road is unbuilt, other three corner sites facing the node constitute two and four-storeyed buildings.

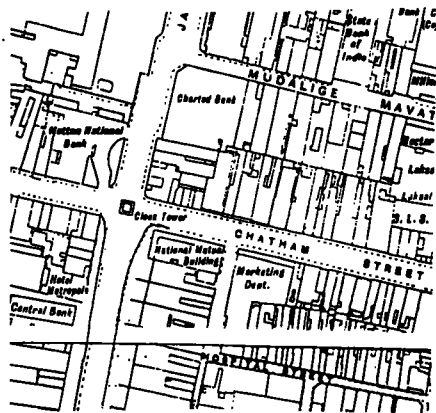


Figure 5— Plan of the node created at the intersection of Janadhipathi Mawatha and Upper Chatham Street.

A person who enters the node can experience its intimate and friendly character with a proper sense of enclosure. Node itself is a visually interesting place while it provides vistas through the connecting roads.

Physical form with sharp boundaries has made the node as a 'place' having proper sense of enclosure. Human scale, central foci and other physical characteristics of the node have achieved its visual interest while it has been enhanced by the views it provides.

### Physical form:

Physical form of the node is not complete, since one corner site does not constitute a building. But, the Central Bank Building and Navy Quarters in adjoining sites enclose the view, thus visually completing the form of node. Five-storeyed

National Mutual Building, two-storeyed corner building on Northern side of Chatham Street and the four-storeyed Hatton National Bank Building have defined the physical boundaries of the node. The scale of those buildings which emphasizes the height has strengthened the physical form by creating visually prominent sharp boundaries. Although the scale of the two-storeyed corner buildings is not appropriate when compared to other surrounding buildings, the adjoining five-storeyed Chartered Bank building avoids the form of the node being weakened visually. Straight building lines of Chatham Street and Janadhipathi Mawatha contribute to form a sharp boundary while the Hatton National Bank located with a setback of about 3m from the building line slightly weakens the effect.

### Sense of Enclosure:

The surrounding built forms provide a high degree of enclosure to the node. Scale and proportion of these buildings are appropriate for the scale of open space at the intersection to provide a sense of enclosure. Their close proximity to the centre of the node and the continuous level of skyline around the node has heightened the effect. Although the Hatton National Bank is located with a setback from the building line, it has not affected the sense of enclosure because of the large Bo-tree in front. (Fig. 6)

### Continuity:

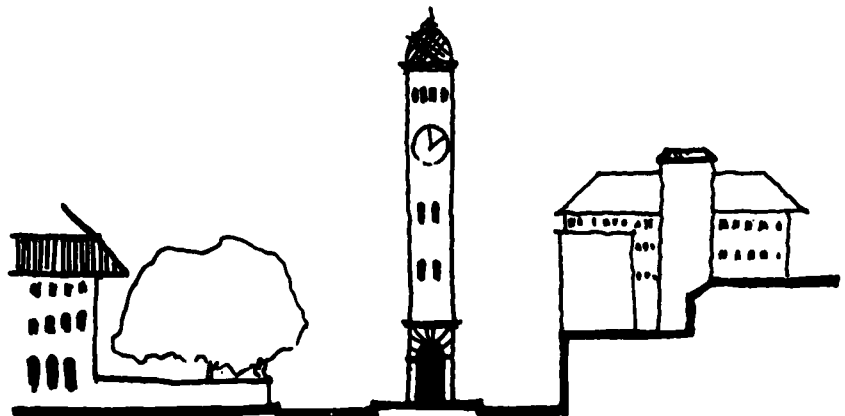
Tall built forms located around the node have established its continuity, presenting a vertical rhythm with a horizontal window pattern. National Mutual Building has responded to the reference of floor levels of the two-storeyed corner building on its opposite side by visually dividing its double height arcade into two horizontal segments thus forming a continuous pattern upto a two-storey level on the western part of the node. The two-storey high podium of Central Bank attempts to continue this pattern, though in an unsuccessful way. Continuous level of skyline formed by surrounding tall buildings and the straight building lines which have resulted in continuous facades have supported to establish continuity of the node as a single space.

### Foci:

the Clock Tower, the most important feature of the node attracts attention to the centre of the node acting as the foci which strengthens and enhances its importance. It clearly demarcates the intersection of streets while binding all the built forms around the node into a single group. It also gives a significant identity to the node with its historical value and speciality in form and detailing.

### Entrances and Exits:

The entrances and exits to the node cannot be identified by the physical form of streets.



Bo-tree in front of the Hatton National Bank Building and the Standard Chartered Bank Building located behind the two-storeyed corner building on Chatham Street also contribute to form enclosure of the node.

Figure 6— Cross Sections

**Visual Interest:**

The Clock Tower, standing in the centre of the node has made it a visually interesting and memorable place which attracts attention from all directions. The surrounding built forms, especially the Hatton National Bank and National Mutual Building enrich the visual interest of the node. The vista it provides towards the sea formed by the Northern part of Janadhipathi Mawatha contributes to make the node an interesting place. The intimate scale of the central space has resulted in its pleasing effect while being surrounded by tall built forms.

The following diagram shows the relationship between the building design factors and the physical characteristics of the selected nodes, namely the intersections of Upper Chatham Street, Janadhipathi Mawatha, York Street and Sir Baron Jayatilake Mawatha and Lower Chatham Street and Lotus Road. (Fig. 7)

Intersection of Chatham Street and Janadhipathi Mawatha forms an interesting node, having necessary physical characteristics which are identified as the presence of a well-defined physical form, sense of enclosure, continuous quality, visual interest and a foci marking the intersection. In creating those physical characteristics, built forms,

their scale and proportion, building line and facade treatment have primarily contributed while the other details and skyline have supported secondarily to establish these qualities.

**3. EDGES: COLOMBO COMMERCIAL COMPANY BUILDING AT SIR JAMES PEIRIS MAWATHA, COLOMBO 2**

Beginning at the Slave Island junction, Sir James Peiris Mawatha stretches upto Dharmapala Mawatha. This covers a length of about 500 m along the Eastern Bank of South Beira. The C.C.C. Building forms a strong edge here, facing the lake, along James Peiris Mawatha.

The C.C.C. Building is experienced as a strong boundary which differentiates the two zones of the natural water body and the built area.

The continuous form of the building with its visual prominence, impenetrability and considerable depth can be considered as the physical qualities which results in such experiences as an edge.

**Continuity:**

Continuity of the form of C.C.C. Building is the main physical quality which has established it as an urban edge. Linear form of the building continuously stretches upto a length

of about 300 m, facing the lake thus clearly expressing the direct response to the water edge. Although the building can be divided into different segments according to their heights, proportion of each part has maintained the linearity to collectively form a continuous linear form as a whole. The straight building line with no setbacks or projections and continuous skyline have heightened the effect of the linear form as a continuous straight edge. The building facade constitutes a vertical rhythm created by the repetitive pattern of emphasized columns strengthening the continuity of edge while it has been enlivened by the horizontal pattern of windows.

**Visual Prominence:**

Having been located in a straight Street line, and the scale of the building are the major contributors in achieving visual prominence in its context. The height which varies from 4m to 10m in in different parts, is proportionately appropriate for its 300 m length to make the edge visually strong. Continuity of the straight building facade with no gaps in between and its strong and solid appearance which is a result of the low window to wall ratio have strengthened the visual prominence.

**Depth:**

Since the building has a depth of about 20 m, it has been established as a seam rather than being a mere barrier.

**Impenetrability:**

It does not allow for cross movements at any point throughout the entire length. This impenetrability has fortified the effect as a strong edge by enabling to be perceived as a continuous whole.

**Beginning and end:**

The edge exhibits a clear beginning and end. Beginning from the 4 m high section which runs upto a length of about 80 m, it increases the height upto about 10 m and again decreases the height to a 6 m

Qualities of a Node	Building design factors									
	Built form	Scale & proportion	Building line	Sky line	Facade treatment	Ground floor details	Roofscape	Materials, colour etc	Landscaping	
Physical form	○	●	●	○	×	×	×	×		
Sense of enclosure	○	●	○	○	×	×	×	×		
Continuous quality	○	○	○	○	●	○	×	×		
Visual interest	○	○	×	×	●	○	×	●	○	
Entry and exit	×	○	×	×	×	×	×	×		
Foci	●	○		×	○	×	×	×		
Intersection clearly marked	●									○

KEY:  
 ● Primary positive    × Primary negative  
 ○ Secondary positive    × Secondary negative

Figure 7- Contribution of building design factors to the physical characteristics of nodes

level at the end. This has been expressed also in its facade by the pattern of fenestrations. At the beginning, facade does not constitute windows and after having a single row of small openings the higher middle portion employs a large number of windows of varying patterns arranged in three rows, and finally comes back to a single row of windows representing the end of the edge.

**Directional quality:**

The vertical rhythm of columns and horizontal pattern of windows give a directional quality to the edge. Straight border line also contributes strongly in this respect.

Facade treatment of the linear building which has avoided the monotony by employing a vertical rhythm harmonized by the horizontal pattern of windows in varying patterns and its different roof system add interest and visual richness to the context. Its visual prominence and effect as an edge would have been much stronger and clearer if not for the row of trees on the opposite side of the road, thus allowing it to be viewed even from the western end of the lake.

C.C.C. Building at Sir James Peiris Mawatha, Sea Beach Road and Chaitiya Road. If the correlation between the physical character of

the selected edges and design factors is shown diagrammatically it will be as follows. (Fig. 8)

Colombo Commercial Company Building at Sri James Peiris Mawatha constitutes continuity in form visual prominence, impenetrability, directional quality, beginning and end, and a considerable depth which are identified as physical characteristics of an edge, thus creating a strong urban edge. Form of the building, scale and proportion, border line are the main factors which have established these characteristics while its facade treatment, skyline and roof scape have supported secondarily to strengthen those qualities.

**4. LANDMARKS: BANK OF CEYLON TOWER**

Bank of Ceylon building is located in the Echelon Square in Fort, facing the Janadhipathi Mawatha and Bank of Ceylon Mawatha.

The tower is visible even from long distances from the Colombo City and even though it stands among the high-rises and multi-storey buildings, it is clearly identifiable. When approaching from the direction of Galle Face esplanade and Bank of Ceylon Mawatha, one can strongly experience the dominating quality of the tower.

Its clear form, figure-background contrast, singularity in context and

spatial prominence has made it identifiable and memorable as a landmark.

**Singularity:**

Singularity of the building in its context is a result of the scale of building which contains 37 floors. Since the surrounding buildings which also comprise of high-rises do not affect or compete with the tower in their scale or form for dominance or attention.

The tower stands out as a single object governing the building fabric of the area. Its cylindrical form that stands on a podium enables the building to be identified as a single object among other high-rises which are rectangular in form.

**Figure-background contrast:**

The figure-background contrast, which is the most crucial factor in becoming a landmark, has been achieved by several means. The clear cylindrical form of the tower and its height contrasts with surrounding buildings of rectangular or linear built forms and comparatively low scale, makes it significantly identifiable.

In contrast to the horizontal rhythm formed by Galadari Meridien Hotel, Intercontinental Hotel etc. in the background, Bank of Ceylon Tower has emphasized verticality by its form and detailing as well. Simple detailing of the tower emphasizes the verticality which is harmonized by the horizontal lines of windows running around. The emphasizing of verticality fortifies the dominance acquired by its height, while contrast with the rhythm of neighbouring buildings makes it stand out from the rest. The height also contrasts with the horizontal continuous flat skyline and enlivens it.

**Identity and Spatial prominence:**

The clear form of the building has made it significant and identifiable while the scale also has enabled to obtain spacious prominence among other buildings.

It has become a focal point to Galle Road as well as to cross streets of

Building design factors \ Qualities of an Edge	Built form	Scale & proportion	Building line	Sky line	Facade treatment	Ground floor details	Roofscape	Materials, colour etc	Landscaping
Continuous form	●	○	○	○	●	×	×	×	×
Visual prominence	○	●	○	○	×	×	×	×	×
Impenetrability	×	×	×	×	×	×			
Depth	×	●	×	×	×	×			
Directional quality	○	○	○	●	●	×	×		
Beginning & end	●			●	○				

KEY:  
 ● Primary positive    × Primary negative  
 ○ Secondary positive    × Secondary negative

Figure 8 – Contribution of building design factors to the physical characteristics of Edges

Pettah enriching its importance as a landmark.

The correlation between physical characteristics of landmarks studied (Bank of Ceylon Tower, Clock Tower at Janadhipathi Mawatha, Stupa at the Harbour and Khan Clock Tower) and their design factors can diagrammatically be shown as below. (Fig. 9)

Qualities of a Landmark	Building design factors									
	Built form	Scale & proportion	Building line	Sky line	Facade treatment	Ground floor details	Roofscape	Materials, colour etc	Landscaping	
Spatial prominence	○	●	×	○	×	×	×	×		
Figure background contrast	●	●	×	×	○	×	×	●		
Singularity	●	○	×	×	○	×	×	○		
Memorable in context	●	○	×	×	○	×	×	○		
Easily identifiable	●	●	×	×	●	×	×	○		
Significance	●	●	×	×	○	×	×	○		
Historic value										
Symbolic value	●									

KEY:

- Primary positive
- Secondary positive
- ×
- Primary negative
- Secondary negative

Figure 9- Contribution of building design factors to the physical characteristics of Landmarks

As exemplified by these examples, built form, its scale and proportion become the major determinant factors of design which establish the spatial prominence, singularity, identity and figure-background contrast while sometimes detailing, colour and facade treatment also may create the possibility for a building to become a landmark supported by its location.

The correlation between the built form, scale and proportion and physical qualities can become the sole contributors of a building to be established as a landmark. The contribution of building design factors especially to establish spatial prominence and figure-background contrast is essential to create a landmark.

Bank of Ceylon Tower, having clarity of form, singularity, significance, spatial prominence, figure-background contrast and identity has become the most prominent landmark in Colombo.

These qualities have been achieved primarily by the form and its scale while its facade treatment support to establish certain qualities.

### 5. DISTRICTS: COLOMBO FORT

Fort is the core area of Colombo, well defined by physical boundaries possessing four entrances from other parts of Colombo.

With its spacious streets and well-arranged built forms, one can experience a prestigious and dignified character within the Fort area.

Well-defined boundaries of the area, and the common characteristics of its buildings, which is a result of its origin and development as a colonial city, distinguishes Fort as a separate district.

#### Boundaries and Topography:

Fort is physically bounded by the sea from south and west, and by the Beira Lake and its canals from South and East, thus demarcating the Fort at a separate area. Topographically, the whole area contains similar conditions basically consisting of flat land.

#### Common character:

The historical background which gives a colonial character to the area makes it easily identifiable as a district. Grid-layout pattern of its

roads, organizes the built forms as well as the urban spaces. Streets are well defined with straight building lines and a proper sense of enclosure in most cases. Comparatively large plot divisions which is a result of it once being the administrative and high-rank residential area, and the absence of a need to build higher. Therefore the buildings are linear or rectangular in their form while presenting the bulkiness. The skyline is not uniform, as the height of buildings vary from two storey to six storey while most of them are four-storeyed.

The facade treatment binds the buildings as one group presenting solid and void patterns with rich detailing and grand continuous arcades. They are mostly of brick or stone masonry constructions and most commonly painted white. Hip or gable roofs were hidden by the detailed cornices. All these physical characteristics of buildings create an architectural homogeneity which results in a common character differentiating the Fort as a separate district.

But, a change of this basic character is evident, as the district combines with Pettah on East and the Galle Face Green on South. The buildings on eastern side of Lotus road and in Bristol Street are smaller in scale and present a bazaar like quality expressing a close relationship to the adjoining Pettah area. In contrast to that, buildings on the Southern part of the Fort, clearly exhibit their response to Galle Face Green, Beira Lake and sea with their larger scale and the height being more emphasized than the bulkiness. They express an individualistic and free approach to building designs when compared to the compacted and grouped nature of buildings in other parts of Fort. With these responses to the adjoining districts, Fort has physical characteristics of its own to be considered as a separate district.

The following diagram shows the correlation between physical characteristics of the districts studied (Fort and Galle Face area) and the building design factors. (Fig. 10)

Building design factors Qualities of a District	Built form	Scale & proportion	Building line	Sky line	Facade treatment	Ground floor details	Roofscape	Materials, colour etc	Landscaping
Boundaries									
Common character	●	●	○	○	●	○	●	○	
Topography									

**KEY:**

- Primary positive      ✕ Primary negative
- Secondary positive    ✕ Secondary negative

*Figure 10 – Contribution of building design factors to the physical characteristics of Districts*

The correlation between building designs and districts present the necessity of built forms, scale and proportion, skyline and roofscape to establish the physical characteristics of a district while building line, facade theatre materials and colour would strengthen the effect. Well-

demarcated physical boundaries and similar topographical conditions alone cannot create a district, without the contribution of building design factors of its buildings.

Fort being demarcated by strong boundaries and constituting

common topographical conditions and common character of buildings have been able to create a district within Colombo City. Built forms, their scale of proportion, building line and skyline has mainly contributed to create a common character while their facade treatment, colour and roofscape secondarily support to strengthen the effect.

It is evident that with the pressure to build, more and more buildings specially high-rise are being built, within the Fort, immediately outside it as well as its edge.

In this context it is important that these new buildings borrow sympathetically from the existing city and builds with the city in order that it could be allowed to grow with its character.

Our task today, is to know what needs to be done and do it appropriately. This paper has attempted to provide an aperture of understanding towards this task.

“When you look at the  
vast number of books  
on Architecture  
that are being published nowadays  
and you see  
all those glossy photographs  
taken without exception  
in perfect weather conditions  
You can't help wondering  
what gets in the architects' minds  
how they see the world  
Sometimes I think  
they practice a different profession  
from mine”

Hertzberger H (1991)

Lessons for Students of Architecture  
Nijmegen. GT Theime BV