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STUDENTS' INFORMAL SPACES IN UNIVERSITIES OF SRI LANKA. A STUDY ON THEIR USAGE AND FUNCTION.

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ABSTRACT

The Sri Lankan community likes to live in-groups together (informal gathering) in a free and open environment quality which helped to have free movements activities.

The informal space is a pattern of behaviour, which can be varied; a space which encourages such behaviour and is flexible in usage.

Learning is an activity where informal space requirement is greater. Also, depending on the type of learning, the informal education, affective learning has to take place at peak level in university education. For such kind of learning to take place effectively, students must be able to maintain their informal spaces.

A pattern of events that takes place in an affective learning space has a strong similarity to the pattern that takes place in an informal space in a university. In fact effective learning primarily takes place in informal spaces such as, lobbies, courtyards, corridors, canteens, common rooms and student centers in a university. Therefore we may conclude that informal spaces are the effective leaning specs in an university.

Basically there are two types of Sri Lankan University establishments. These are institutions totally designed for purposes of a university and other institutions which have later developed to university status. In these situations, created informal spaces, which are popularly used are neglected.

Informal spaces create more and more opportunities for students' behaviour and living patterns.

Therefore, informal space is an essential part of a design, which contributes to both aesthetical and functional aspects.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

(i) TOPIC EXPLANATION

The basic goal of education should be the development of responsible and loyal citizens who will be able to contribute meaningfully to the development of a country through a well-balanced general education.

Sri Lanka can boast of a number of universities scattered all over the country. The most recent addition to this number are provincial Universities.

Basically, there are two kinds of university establishments. Some are evidently designed as complete universities. While other institutions commence at Tertiary level and are later developed in to universities.

The basic idea of a university, according to Dr. L. S. R. Perera,

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"... Is to make integrated balanced men and women like parts of human anatomy".

(Dr. L. S. R. Perera, 1986)

For that purpose it is necessary to preserve, transmit and expand knowledge. This can be achieved through teaching, research and informal education. The student is expected to experience all branches of learning and arrive at a truth so as to be prepared to be a citizen.

> **"...University cannot be simply concerned with the accumulation of knowledge, it must be the cultivation of truth, goodness and beauty of social quality and freedom."**
>
> (V. H.H. Green, 1960, p.319)

Universities are sanctuaries of the intellectual life of a country and those entering them have different ideas on various topics. They are the wellsprings of national awakening.

It is upon the involvement of successive generations of students that the life and vitality of the community will depend. A properly designed environment could generate the appropriate environment quality that would facilitate learning. Thus the required environment quality to facilitate university education would vary from active and a live environment to attentive environment.

> **"...University is a public institutional setting, which aims to develop in students, the ability to undertake independent studying and bring judgment to bear on their own works."**
>
> (University of Stering, 1986, p. 11)

Thus in a university, a student has to be self motivated and self confident, having a firm sense of him own identity to do such learning comfortably and efficiently. Therefore the degree of the need for informal spaces in universities is higher..

The informal space is hence very important for university education, because it develops the intelligence of the student. Informal spaces primarily take place in communal spaces such as lobbies, pathways, open spaces, terraces, courtyards, canteens and student centers.

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There are special features that are necessary for the formation of informal spaces. These are location, enclosure, continuity, landscape and adaptability.

This connection between informal spaces and university environments is termed as 'co-relation' in this study.

(ii) PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

A university environment should primarily cater to affective learning. As affective learning is defined, learning attitudes and values makes students to be creative characters. Affective learning primarily takes place in informal spaces such as common areas.

It is the lack of informal spaces that caused on unfortunate situation in the universities in Sri Lanka. The lack of informal spaces can be directly attributed to the failure of psychological satisfaction in students. Such failures resulted in the formation alien of the base for planned and unplanned universities.

In a university, informal spaces are used for various purposes such as political activities in the form of unions; discussions about welfare activities, study activities, student relaxation and other social interaction such as recreational activities of music, drama and exhibitions.

Informal space designing is very important for future needs. In most of the buildings space wastage can be identified due to functional failures and unplanned layouts. Therefore, it is important to enlighten designers on these issues on optimum space usage, popular places and neglected areas in the existing context of a university environment.

(iii) INTENTION OF THE STUDY

Considering these issues, an attempt is made to identify the reasons behind this variety of usage of informal spaces in universities. It will also help to create informal spaces and modify those spaces for future university design in Sri Lanka. By focusing on the identification of spaces in terms of functionality, spiritual qualities of informal spaces and students needs. It is hoped to enhance this further.

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(iv) SCOPE AND LIMITATION

Spaces could be identified as informal spaces in a university. Even though informal education should be encouraged in classrooms and laboratories, the study does not examine these types of spaces, because predominating activity in such spaces is not informal education. The study, examines only the informal spaces related to the academic facilities and not the informal spaces related to residential facilities of the universities.

Further, the study examines only the selected informal spaces according to their popularity under each category of informal spaces in these case studies. specially, there are three kinds of student informal spaces in universities.

- Informal spaces designed for congregating; actually used, such as canteens
- Informal spaces not designed; but, actually used by student, such as pathways and terraces.
- Informal spaces designed for congregating; but, not used by student, such as lobbies.

Therefore this is an attempt to identify the reasons behind this variety of usage of informal spaces in universities.

(v) METHODOLOGY

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At the start, the study examines the idea of the university education system, university students and their behaviour to identify the informal spaces in a university. In this part of the study, the importance of informal spaces on education and how informal spaces enhance university education will be studied. The common behavioural patterns of students that will help in designing for informal spaces will also be identified.

In the second part of the examination a number of universities in Sri Lanka will be identified in terms of their various informal spaces design concepts. For this purpose three types of universities will be selected.

1. Designed for university - Basis of a "designed" University
   eg. University of Ruhuna

2. "Vocational and Technical Basis"
   eg. University of Moratuwa

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LANKA

3. "Social and religious basis" – commencement as a religious educational institution.
   eg. University of Sri Jayawardanapura

Firstly, the study is focused on the layout survey and on site, through the photographic survey and observation survey with informal discussions under previously mentioned three kinds of university environment. Finally, a comparative analysis of the role and function of the students' informal spaces will be studied to obtain the result on the issues as well as architecturally, focusing on the modification and alternation to their existing environments.

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