

UNlverseCity: A Vision for a University Township.

An alternate proposal for a new premises for UoM in Piliyandala.

A conceptual project proposal unravelling the potentials of developing a university township at Piliyandala while addressing the space constraints for growth at University of Moratuwa.

1. Introduction

The role of universities can go beyond offering higher educational qualifications, to conduct research & development and promoting entrepreneurship. University townships play a vital role in fostering regional development and innovation, as supported by academic literature.

This article aims at (a) highlighting the role and importance of university townships through a brief case study review, and (b) present a conceptual proposal that highlight the possibility of expanding University of Moratuwa considering recent land use changes in Piliyandala town.

2. What are 'University townships'?

University townships represent unique ecosystems where academic institutions coexist with surrounding communities, fostering collaboration, innovation, and cultural exchange. The university towns that built over centuries are classified in to two types. First the original type that have been founded before or around industrial revolution, this include iconic examples of Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, Leuven, Ghent, Heidelberg that are built not purely with higher education interests yet with wider socio-political and cultural setup. Second typology is that the development of university towns in peripheral areas to serve the growing demand for higher education that was seen mainly in US in 1990s [1]. These models of university towns has been adopted worldwide, whereby the university town has become a typical facet of urban models [2]. Universities are also regarded as anchor institutions that trigger and catalyze urban development.

3. Contemporary status of University of Moratuwa: growing student and staff numbers vs. space constraints

As per the UoM master plan in 2017, in 2013, the student population was 5,500 and it has increased to 8,035 in 2016. The enrolment of postgraduate student numbers has been recorded as 2,558 in 2016. Further, the master plan emphasizes that the maximum in-house daytime population, which the present land extent of the University has to accommodate, shall not exceed 15,000 [3]. With recent addition of Faculty of Business and Faculty of Medicine and increase in student intakes, the total undergraduate student population is recorded as 10,476 in early 2023. The total staff working at the university is recorded as approx., 1,300 with over 400 academic staff and over 700 non-academic and administrative staff population [4].

The land area of the University remains more the same to a 25 acres physical footprint in Katubedda, except the purchasing of several adjacent land plots. There are constraints for further horizontal expansion of the university for its neighbourhoods with the current residential and environmentally sensitive land use character of the surrounding. Further, there are vertical development restrictions with the location of Ratmalana domestic airport

and aviation relation operations in the area. Though a land in Diyagama, Homagama is vested to University by the Urban Development Authority (UDA) except to the reestablishment of Institute of Technology -University of Moratuwa (ITUM) in Diyagama in 2017, to date the rest of the land vested seems vacant amidst various proposals that emerge to time to time. There is a strong perception among both academics and students that remote locations (distant locations) from the University can distant the interactions and this had a played role keeping the Diyagama land vacant for more than decade. The University Master Plan that originally formulated in 2017, acknowledge the limitation of Space for future expansions and propose the need of new premise to expand university operations [3].

4. Urban land use changes in Piliyandala?

Piliyandala is a small suburban town with a residential population of 245,232 and with a population density of 3,822 people/sq.km located 3km from the University of Moratuwa (10 minutes' drive or in the bus, 15 min in the bicycle, and 30 min walk) and 18 km from Colombo city.

Over the years, Piliyandala emerged as a popular residential suburb with its proximity to Colombo and affordable and range of housing /residential options.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

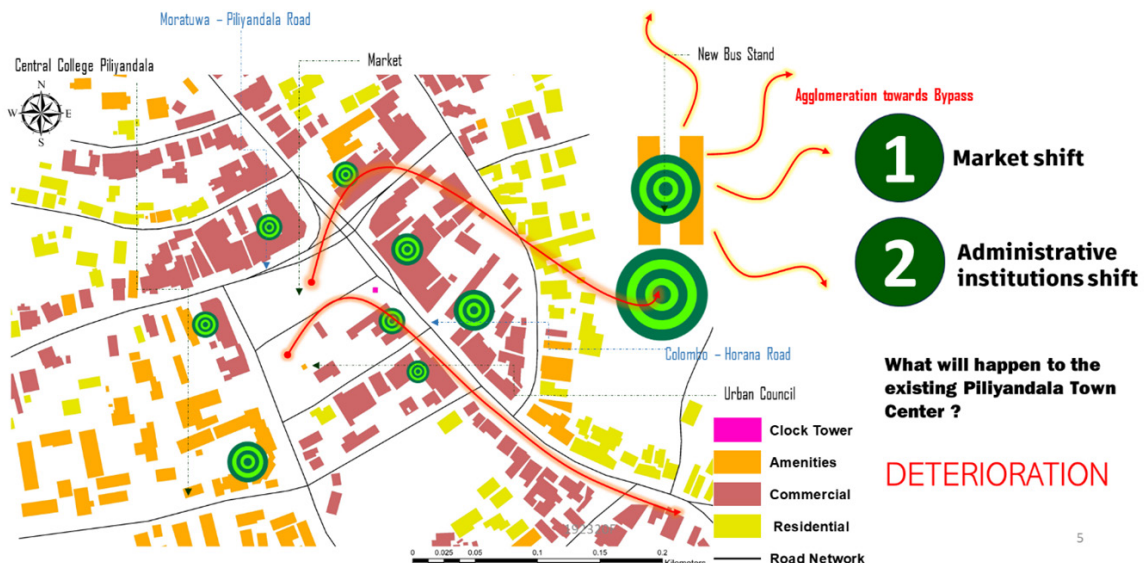


Figure 1: Contemporary changes in Piliyandala town

“...Piliyandala is a popular residential suburb due to its proximity to other urban centers around it. It is the 9th most popular location for property sale searches and 11th for land sale searches, according to LankaPropertyWeb.com. Piliyandala has seen the land and house prices increase in the last year with land prices increasing by 19%, with the average land price at 450,000 per perch and a 4-bed house with an average price of 18 million, an increase of 23% from last year. With the increase in relevance of Piliyandala as a main transport hub, no doubt that the value of land will be increasing in the next few years... [5].”

During the last decades, Piliyandala had subjected to series of planned land use interventions, initially with the construction of Piliyandala-Kesbewa bypass road and subsequently, with the shift of bus station to a new location. It is likely to evolve further with the propose new market complex near the new bus station and proposal to shift the administrative activities to Kesbewa.

5. UNIversecity: Conceptual project proposal

The proposed development mainly include multi-storied building complex (4 academic bud-

dings, 1 administrative building and 4 commercial buildings) with maximum Gross Floor Area/Developable area (sq.m) of 63,000 with total buildable land area of 7,000 sq m with a plot coverage of 66%. The facility could include exclusive spaces for university activities including lecture halls, staff rooms, reading areas, etc. and also spaces that university community and local communities can interact, which consider cafeterias, commercial spaces and exhibition and open day rooms. This proposal is in line with the existing planning and building regulation guidelines stipulated by UDA, Sri Lanka.



Figure 2: Proposed conceptual plan



Figure 3: detailed land use plan with landscape

6. Way forward and realization

As the next step of this study, it is expected to evaluate the financial performance, identifying a suitable business model that effectively accommodate the interest of multiple stakeholders (from higher education & university, city level stakeholders and public) and different implementation mechanisms.

References:

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- [3] University of Moratuwa, "University of Moratuwa Master Plan 2017", 2017.
- [4] University of Moratuwa, "Facts and Stats about UoM", 2024.
- [5] L. B. Onlinee, "Piliyandala – from 15th century transit point to Colombo's main transport hub", *Lanka Business Online*, 2018.

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