

**ASSESSING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF
MILITARY BASES ON THE NEIGHBORING SOCIAL
CONTEXT AND URBAN SPATIAL FABRIC**

Avindya Ushani Dharmapala

219520D

Master of Spatial Planning Management & Design Degree

Department of Town and Country Planning

University of Moratuwa

Sri Lanka

April 2025

**ASSESSING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF
MILITARY BASES ON THE NEIGHBORING SOCIAL
CONTEXT AND URBAN SPATIAL FABRIC**

Diyagu Badthuruge Avindya Ushani Dharmapala

219520D

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of
Spatial Planning Management & Design Degree**

Department of Town and Country Planning

University of Moratuwa

Sri Lanka

April 2025

DECLARATION

The following declaration should be made by the candidate following the signature and the date. A candidate, after a discussion with the supervisor/s can request an embargo for a particular thesis/dissertation for a given work for a given time or indefinitely. Such an embargo may override the statement made in the thesis/dissertation itself.

“I declare that this is my own work and this thesis/dissertation² does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a Degree or Diploma in any other University or institute of higher learning and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where the acknowledgement is made in the text.

Also, I hereby grant to University of Moratuwa the non-exclusive right to reproduce and distribute my thesis/dissertation, in whole or in part in print, electronic or other medium. I retain the right to use this content in whole or part in future works (such as articles or books).

Signature:

Date:

The supervisor/s should certify the thesis/dissertation with the following declaration.

The above candidate has carried out research for the Masters/MPhil/PhD thesis/ Dissertation under my supervision.

Name of the supervisor:

Signature of the supervisor:

Date :

ABSTRACT

This study examines the socio-economic and urban spatial impacts of military land transformation on neighboring communities in post-conflict Sri Lanka. As military bases have served as strategic hubs for national security, their presence has significantly influenced local livelihoods, disrupted traditional land ownership patterns, and reshaped urban landscapes. The research addresses critical challenges including resettlement, economic displacement, and social integration while seeking to balance national security imperatives with equitable development. Using a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative research, this study analyzes secondary data on local and international military land transformations while employing theoretical frameworks on land use, urban morphology, and planning. Two prominent military installations in Colombo serve as case studies: the Defence Headquarters Complex in Akuregoda and the Welisara Naval Base Complex. Spatial data analysis using GIS maps land use changes over time, supported by census records, land use maps, and reports from relevant authorities. The research investigates how military land acquisition affects urban planning, infrastructure development, and local governance through structured questionnaire surveys targeting affected communities, local residents, military officials, and urban planners. Key findings reveal that while military installations contribute to infrastructure development and economic growth, they also create challenges including housing pressures, environmental impacts, and social disruption. The study proposes several recommendations including integrated planning frameworks, mandatory environmental and social impact assessments, collaborative governance models, sustainable development strategies, and economic integration programs. By recognizing military installations as integral components of the urban ecosystem rather than isolated enclaves, this research demonstrates the potential to transform these spaces into assets that contribute positively to sustainable urban development while respecting national security needs in Sri Lanka's post-conflict context.

Keywords: Military land transformation, Urban planning, Post-conflict development, Socio-economic impacts, Sri Lanka

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all who support and encourage me to complete this study successfully. First and foremost, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to my research supervisor, Senior Lecturer Dr. Sri Rohana Rathnayake, for his consultation throughout the initial stage to the final output.

Also, I like to acknowledge Prof. Jagath Munasinghe, who is the Head of the Department of Town and Country Planning and all lecturers in the Department of Town and Country Planning for the guidance and the dedication during our master's programme. At the same time, I express my deepest thanks to the Military Staff for the support in completing this research.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to my family members who were with me in every circumstance of life and my colleagues who gave immense support and assistance to make this research more effective.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

DECLARATION.....	3
ABSTRACT.....	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
TABLE OF CONTENTS	6
LIST OF FIGURES	8
LIST OF TABLES.....	9
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	10
Appendix – A.....	11
CHAPTER 01.....	12
INTRODUCTION.....	12
1.1 Background Study.....	12
1.2 Problem Statement.....	14
1.3 Research Questions	15
1.4 Significance of the Study.....	15
1.5 Aim and Objectives	16
1.6 Chapter Breakdown	16
CHAPTER 02	18
LITERATURE REVIEW	18
2.1 The Military, the Duty, the Location and the necessity	18
2.1.1 Understanding the military requirement in urban settings	18
2.1.2 Urban Militarism	19
2.1.3 Militarized landscapes and urban transformation.....	21
2.2 Socio-Economic Impacts from Military bases in urban settings.....	22
2.2.1 Urban infrastructure and Land use.....	23
2.2.2 Economic Factors.....	24
2.2.3 Social Dynamics	24
2.3 The conflict.....	26
2.3.1 Urban Planning Vs Militarized Landscapes	26
2.3.2 Understanding the conflicting associations.....	27
2.4. Military planning Vs Civilian planning.....	29
2.4.2 Policy alignment and Community engagement.....	30
2.4.3 Sustainable planning approaches	31

CHAPTER 03	33
METHODOLOGY	33
3.1 Research Methodology	33
3.1.1 Research Design.....	33
3.1.2 Data Collection and Analysis methods.....	35
3.1.3 Ethical Considerations	36
3.1.4 Scope and Limitations	36
3.2 Case studies.....	37
3.2.1 Contextual backgrounds	37
3.2.2 Case Study 01	39
3.2.3 Case Study 02	42
CHAPTER 4.....	46
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....	46
4.1 Analysis of the case studies.....	46
4.1.1 Urban Transformation and conflict associations in case studies	46
4.1.2 Case studies as 'Urbanized Entities'.....	47
4.1.3 Cities as Dynamic and Adaptive Systems.....	48
4.1.4 Strategic Sectorization in Urban Planning.....	48
4.2 Analysis of the questionnaire	48
4.2.1 Common Encroachment Issues and Encroachment Impacts on the Urban Community.....	49
4.2.2 Housing Availability, Prices and Infrastructure Development	50
4.2.3 Contributions to the Local Economy and Benefits of Military Bases.....	50
4.2.5 Changes since Establishment, Influence on Urban Planning and Planning Challenges.....	51
4.2.6 Adaptation to Urban Expansion, Measures for Land-Use Conflicts and Mitigating Negative Impacts.....	51
4.2.7 Partnerships with Local Governments, Policies for Sustainable Growth, Community Engagement and Long-Term Outlook.....	51
4.2.8 Summary of the analysis.....	52
CHAPTER 5.....	53
CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS	53
5.1	
Conclusion.....	53
5.2 Recommendations	55
REFERENCES.....	57

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - Schematic diagram showing the changes in the relationship between the military and society (Source: Perkov and Jukić, 2023)	20
Figure 2 - Schematic diagram showing the shift in the relationship between the military and society due to army's relocation to periphery or urban outskirts (Source: Perkov and Jukić, 2023)	20
Figure 3 - Schematic diagram showing changes in the relationship between the military and society in the city and nation-state context (Source: Perkov and Jukić, 2023).....	20
Figure 4 - Impact of a military unit on its environment (Source: Sirko, Kozuba and Piotrowska-Trybull, 2019)	22
Figure 5- Study methodology (Source, author)	34
Figure 6 - Established Tri forces camps around the island	35
Figure 7 – Established Army and Air Force camps around Western region (Source: author)	39
Figure 8 - Images of the DHQC site before and after construction (Source: Google Maps) ..	40
Figure 9 – Displacement of local residents (Source: Gunarathne, 2018)	42
Figure 10 - Site demarcation of the Welisara Naval Base (Source: Google Maps)	43
Figure 11 - Concept plan for logistics corridor (Source: Ministry of Megapolis and Western Development, 2016).....	44
Figure 12 - Proposed logistics park and accessibility (Source: Ministry of Megapolis and Western Development, 2017)	45

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - Conceptual Framework and Operationalization	35
Table 2 - Commonly acknowledged issues between urban planning and military encroachment.....	35
Table 3 - Road developments from DHQC project	41

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
AEC	Architectural Engineering Construction
CEFAP	Commercial Explosives, Firearms, and Ammunition Procurement Unit
DHQC	Defence Head Quarters Complex
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
LTTE	Liberation Tigers Of Tamil Eelam
NGH	Navy General Hospital
SLNS	Sri Lanka Navy Ship
UDA	Urban Development Authority
UK	United Kingdom

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix	Description
Appendix – A	Questionnaire and Graphs