

**A study on the transformation of recreational spaces
into anti-social urban pockets in Sri Lankan post war
context – A case study in Jaffna city.**

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DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own work and this thesis 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. I retain the right to use this content in whole or part in future works (such as articles or books).

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The above candidate has carried out research for the Master's thesis under my supervision. I confirm that the declaration made above by the student is true and correct.

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Rizvi Noordeen

Signature of the Supervisor:

Date:

ABSTRACT

Recreational spaces are essential components of urban life, contributing to social interaction, mental well-being, and spatial inclusivity. However, in the post-war context of Sri Lanka, particularly in Jaffna City, several recreational areas have undergone a critical transformation, emerging as underutilized and, in some cases, anti-social urban pockets. This research investigates the underlying socio-spatial dynamics that have contributed to this transformation, using a case study approach focused on three key locations: The Fort surrounding area and Pannai Beach, Sangiliyan Poonga, and the Gurunagar recreational spaces.

The study adopts a mixed-method research methodology, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques, including spatial mapping, observational surveys, and semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders. The analysis is structured around four principal socio-spatial variables: location, connectivity, shape and size, and physical infrastructure. These are examined alongside the region's unique post-war conditions—marked by rapid exposure to technology, sudden inflows of money and cultural influences, enduring trauma (both physical and psychological), disrupted family dynamics, and shifts in mobility and surveillance practices.

Findings reveal a complex interplay between spatial neglect, insufficient infrastructure, and socio-cultural fragmentation that has led to the marginalization and informal re-appropriation of public recreational spaces. The study identifies how these spaces, once designed for communal benefit, have become zones of social exclusion, informal activities, and at times, unsafe environments. Furthermore, it demonstrates how post-conflict urban governance has struggled to respond effectively to these evolving challenges.

This research contributes to the discourse on post-conflict urbanism and spatial justice by highlighting the urgent need for inclusive, context-sensitive planning strategies that address both the spatial and social dimensions of urban recovery. The insights derived from the Jaffna case study offer a framework for rethinking the rehabilitation and sustainable management of public spaces in other post-war urban settings.

Keywords

Anti-social behavior; Recreational spaces; Urban decay; Jaffna; Environmental criminology; Social disorganization; Public space management; Post-war urbanism; Urban insecurity; Spatial analysis

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