

**FAMILIAR STRANGERS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY
TO UNDERSTAND THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF
CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC SPACES OF SRI LANKA;
with special references to two selected public spaces in
Sri Lanka**

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of
Master of Science Degree in Town & Country Planning
2011/2014 Programme

Department of Town & Country Planning

University of Moratuwa

Sri Lanka

December 2015

Declaration

I declare that this is my own work and this dissertation does not incorporate without acknowledgement any materials previously submitted for a Degree or Diploma in any other University or Institute of Higher learning to the best of my knowledge. Moreover it does not contain materials previously published or written by another person except where the acknowledgement is made in the text.

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Acknowledgements

First, I offer my sincere gratitude and deep appreciation to my Principal Supervisor, Architect & Planner Dr. Jagath Munasinghe, former Head of Department of Town & Country Planning, University of Moratuwa for the guidance, comments and instructions given throughout this research work. My special thanks are due to Planner Dr. P. K. S. Mahanama, former Dean of Faculty of Architecture, University of Moratuwa for giving valuable support to complete the study.

I should extend my deepest respect to Emeritus Professor Willie Mendis who encouraged me to undertake the studies in Town & Country Planning. Moreover, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Planner, Mrs. Indu Weerasoori, Senior lecturer of the Department of Town & Country Planning, University of Moratuwa for encouraging me to complete the study by many means and ways.

I would like to pay my sincere gratitude to Dr. Rangajeewa Rathnayake, Head of Department of Town & Country Planning, Planner Mr. K. D. Fernando, Senior lecturer, Planner Mrs. A. L. Susantha, Senior lecturer, Mrs. Malani Herath, Senior lecturer and Mrs. Shalini Mariyathas lecturer of the Department of Town & Country Planning, University of Moratuwa for their valuable support throughout my studies at the Department of Town & Country Planning.

Further, I shall pay my sincere appreciation to Mrs. Prathibani Bandusena, lecturer of University of Moratuwa for the encouragement and the support provided during the research work. Moreover, I also take this opportunity to pay my sincere appreciation to Mr. Kilian Murphy, Master's Student at the University of Coventry in United Kingdom for helping me to proof read the entire thesis.

I express my sincere appreciation to all my colleagues and friends who encouraged me to complete this research on time with various other commitments. Finally, I shall pay my deep affection to my wife Nadeeka Gamage and my son, Dulein Cooray for their patience and support provided to complete the study successfully.

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Synopsis

The idea of public space has been extensively discussed and debated by Architects, Sociologists, Urban Planners, Anthropologists and other Researchers for a long time. Public spaces play a particular role in the social life of urban areas, whether as memorable, accessible, or meaningful places. However, the idea of “city as a community of strangers” is not new.

The intention of this study was to explore the predominant understanding that the urban people are less friendly and helpful than their rural counterparts by exploring the adaptive response behavior and the level of friendliness of both urban people and their rural counterparts to act more helpful and friendlier to strangers at public spaces. During the literature reviewed, it was revealed that very little literature was available and not specifically examined and documented on the level of friendliness of both urban and rural people and their behavioral response to explicit demands in daily lifestyle at public spaces. Based on the literature reviewed, research questions and the research objective was formulated. Two urban & rural public spaces were selected based on criteria developed after formulating a working definition. A System overload theory formulated by Stanley Milgram (1972) to explore the adaptive responses of people and Reisman’s (1983), friendliness scale were applied to analyze the qualitative data collected from 30 conveniently selected respondents while 45 strangers at both selected public space were observed closely by applying participatory and non-participatory observation techniques.

The study shed light on the major concerns of planners to create public spaces in both rural and urban areas, by analyzing the usage of the public spaces, the perception of public spaces by users, adaptive response behavior of the user to explicit demands, level of friendliness of the people at public spaces. As a conclusion, the study emphasized that the urban people are less friendly than their rural counter parts to some extent at public spaces studied in this research. Further, it has revealed that the urban people were always respond carefully to strangers as per the Reisman’s self-explanatory statements tested while rural people are opposite of that and they always wanted to engage with strangers. Suggestion were made to study other public spaces based on the major findings and reviewed literature, as well suggestions for future research opportunities.

List of Figures

Fig. 1.1 Study Process

Fig. 3.1 Conceptual framework

Fig. 3.2: Research Design

List of Tables

Table 2.1: Summary of Key concepts and Assumptions of the related studies reviewed.

Table 3.1. Observed variables after Milgram, S. 1972.

Table 4.1: Descriptive analysis of demographic profile of the Respondents interviewed at selected public space.

Table 4.2: Descriptive analysis of the Motivation of Respondents to visit the selected public space.

Table 4.2.1: Ranking of Motivation of respondents to visit the selected public spaces.

Table 4.3: Descriptive analysis of perceived importance of selected public space played in their daily life.

Table 4.3.1: Ranking of perceived importance of selected public space played in their daily life

Table 4.4: Descriptive analysis of perceived importance in development of selected public space.

Table 4.4.1: Ranking of perceived importance in development of selected public space.

Table 4.5: Descriptive analysis of the observed behavior of the randomly selected strangers at the selected public space.

Table 4.6: Comparative analysis of the recognizing familiar strangers at the selected public space

Table 4.7: Descriptive analysis of the observed adaptive response behavior of the randomly selected strangers at the selected public space.

Table 4.8: Descriptive analysis of number of people willingly help stranger at selected public space

Table 4.9: Descriptive analysis of the level of friendliness of the people at both locations

Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Certification	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Synopsis	v
List of Figures	vi
List of Tables	vi
Table of Contents	vii
CHAPTER I	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction to the Chapter	1
1.2 Background	1
1.3 Problem Statement – “We are Strangers in our own space”	2
1.4 Importance of understanding familiar strangers	3
1.5 Objective of the Study	3
1.6 Specific Objectives of the Study	3
1.7 Limitations of the Study	4
1.8 Contribution of the Study	5
1.9 Study Process	6
1.10 Conclusion	7
CHAPTER II	8
LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1 Chapter Introduction	8
2.2 Concepts and Definitions	8
2.2.1 Public Space	8
2.2.2 Urban Public Space	10
2.2.3 Sense of belonging	12
2.2.4 Third Place	12
2.2.5 Friendliness behavior of People	13
2.2.6 Familiar Strangers	14
2.3 Relevant Theory	15

2.3.1	System Overload Theory; The experience of living in Cities. Milgram, S. 1970.....	15
2.3.1.1	Adaptive Responses	15
2.4	Relevant Research Studies	16
2.4.1	The Metropolis and Mental Life, Simmel, G. (1969 [1903])	16
2.4.2	The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Jacobs, J (1967)	17
2.4.3	World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space. Lofland, L. 1973	18
2.4.4	Reisman’s studies on factors of Friendliness (1983; 1989)	19
2.5	Similar studies in the Asian Region	19
2.6	Summary of Theory and key concepts and assumptions	21
2.7	Conclusion	22
CHAPTER III		24
RESEARCH DESIGN		24
3.1	Chapter Introduction	24
3.2	Research Questions.....	24
3.3	Conceptual Framework of the Study	25
3.4	Methods	26
3.5	Population & Sample	28
3.5.1	Selection of Study Locations	28
3.6	Working Definition of Rural and Urban People	28
3.6.1	Assumption based criteria used to select the sites for Observations and interviews	30
3.7	Data collection Techniques.....	30
3.7.1	Face to Face Interviews	31
3.7.2	Direct Observations (Participatory and Non participatory)	31
3.8	Secondary Data Collection	35
3.9	Data Analysis Techniques.....	35
3.9.1	Friendliness Scale (SACRAL).....	36
3.10	Conclusion	36
CHAPTER IV		37
FINDINGS & DISCUSSION		37
4.1	Chapter Introduction	37
4.2	Research Findings.....	37
4.3	Location profiles of the selected Public spaces	37

4.3.1	Site 1 - Independence square and its surroundings in Colombo district	37
4.3.2	Site - 2: Tissamaharama Lake and its surroundings in Hambantota district.....	38
4.4.1	Findings of the Interviews	38
4.4.1.A	Profile of the Respondents	38
4.4.1.B	Motivation of Respondents	40
4.4.1.C	Perceived importance of selected public space played in their daily life.....	42
4.4.1.D	Perceived importance in development of selected public space	44
4.4.2	Findings of the Observations	46
4.4.2.A	Observed behavior of the strangers at the selected public space	46
4.4.2.B	Identification of familiar strangers at public space using photographs.....	47
4.4.2.C	Adaptive response of the Observed people at the selected public spaces	48
4.4.2.D	The willingness to help strangers.....	49
4.4.2.E	The level of friendliness of the Urban vs. Rural people at selected public spaces ..	51
4.5	Conclusion	53
	CHAPTER V	54
	CONCLUSION.....	54
5.1	Future Researches	56
	REFERENCES	57
	ANNEXURES	59
	Annex A - Guided Questions for Face to face interviews	59
	Annex B - Guided questions for non-participatory observations.....	61
	Annex C - Guided questions for participatory observations	62