Symbiosis of Conservation and Development: Historic City of Kochi, Kerala, India

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Abstract—This paper depicts the historic city of Kochi and traces the evolution of the built heritage of the city over the ages. The chronological evolution of the city with its diverse settlements was traced. The architectural aspects of various regions and cultures were identified and shortlisted the various potential heritage zones. This paper aims at bringing out a potential development policy for the city for the development of the region. The study identifies heritage tourism as a tool for the management of the heritage by identifying the issues and problems in each zones. The built heritage forms node centers for the tourists and can be put for adaptive re-use for the present day use and future economic development aiming at sustainable conservation of the valuable heritage. This paper finally suggests Urban Development Guidelines and Controls for Heritage Zones and Precincts in the historic city of Kochi.

Keywords—Cochin, Heritage, India, Tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

COCHIN, known as the Queen of the Arabian Sea, has important place in the world map for voyagers and traders over the centuries. Kochi developed as an important port for traders and voyagers. It was well known all over the world for spices, cashew nuts, tea, coir products and handicrafts. Kochi had trade relationship with Arab, Greek and Roman, Jews, Chinese and later the Colonials[1] These trade relationships have a great influence on the cultural and religious aspects of Kerala’s social structure, and also on the built heritage. Due to passage of time and with the political reforms the built heritage they left form as a vestige of past. Portuguese, the Dutch, French and then the English came here and added to the rich history of this land. Ruled by many Maharajas and Divans, this city evolved through the centuries, assimilating the cultures of the many communities from all over the globe who made it

II. HERITAGE OF COCHIN

Kochi City has always been special for its Heritage and Plurality Culture through its history, which is primarily based on trade shipping activity. Being an Island City, Kochi has unique environmental features and a cultural heritage, which is intertwined with the environment. The city’s ever-growing

demand and potential for growth opportunities constantly interact and depend on its valuable natural and cultural heritage.

A. Major Heritage Zones in Kochi & Development Issues

1) Fort Kochi, Mattancherry, Fort Vyypeen Integrated Heritage Zone.

The History of the City of Kochi starts with the natural phenomenon in 1341 AD when the great flood in Periyar washed away a sizable piece of land creating the sea mouth and natural harbour of Kochi.[2] During 1440 AD Kochi City grew around Mattancherry settlement as a city of 5 miles of circumference and Chinese and Arabs used to trade with the natives of the town. Kochi was ruled by the Kochi Rajas in the period from 12th Century onwards. In 16th Century AD Portuguese came to Kochi and subsequently built their Fort and thus the formation of Fort Kochi. In 17th Century AD, the Dutch and subsequently British in 18th Century invaded Kochi. The Fort Kochi, Mattancherry and Fort Vyypeen placed right at the sea mouth has experienced immense trade related activities and has developed a rich pluralistic culture and tradition unique to this heritage zone.

Issues Related to Heritage. As the City of Kochi grew around Ernakulam as a major town, this area had been left behind by developments and investments. However, due to the growing demand of the tourism industry has made this heritage zone alive again. Sanitation and health has become one of the major issues. Pulling down and unauthorized modifying of valuable heritage structures and public spaces is also a major issue in this zone. Unsympathetic and alien developments destroying the harmony in heritage zones due to lack of proper development guidelines is experienced in this field. Public spaces of intense use such as streets and markets choke with traffic jams resulting in unfriendly public areas.

2) Willingdon Island Heritage Zone.

During the period of the British Rule, in early 20th century, Dredging of Port and formation of Willingdon Island was executed under the design and direction of Sir Robert Bristow. The entire port town was designed by Sir Robert Bristow and left an outstanding heritage settlement built during the British period. The Heritage structures including that of the Port Trust, Palacial Bungalows, Commercial godowns and Public spaces of the Southern Naval command area etc. become part of this heritage zone.

Issues Related to Heritage. This beautiful island of outstanding heritage value poses some unique issues in the
field of heritage. Kochi Port Trust and Indian Navy mostly own the Island, which leave little regulations being effective in these areas. Unsympathetic and alien developments destroying the harmony in heritage zone and water edge skyline due to lack of power development guidelines is experienced in this area. The beautiful water edges and public spaces associated to this island do not share it with the citizen of Kochi except in few cases.

3) Ernakulam Central Area Heritage Zone.

In 19th Century during the British Rule, Kochi rulers shifted to Ernakulam. The Ernakulam Heritage Zone is in fact the heart of today’s City of Kochi. Most work places, Administrative and institutional centers and market places are located here. Moreover the City’s widely used parks and public open spaces are located defining the landward edge of this zone, which connects the city to its natural heritage of backwaters

Issues Related to Heritage. The development issues related to heritage are mostly to do with the rapid urbanization and demand posed by the ever-growing needs of the city. This has resulted in unsympathetic and alien developments destroying the harmony in heritage zone due to lack of proper development guidelines. Pulling down and unauthorized modifying of valuable heritage structures and public spaces is also a major issue in this zone. Public spaces of intense use such as streets and markets choke with traffic jams resulting unfriendly public areas. Lack of adequate Infrastructure and Sanitation has become one of the major issues in areas like Ernakulam Market.

4) Canal & Backwater Network Heritage Zone.

Canal Network is part of our regional traditional heritage planning. They, once upon a time, used to be the drainage system, transportation corridor & irrigation system of traditional development. The Canals Network in Kochi is very much intertwined with rivers and backwaters. Most of the traditional areas and heritage zones are connected by such canal system. Most public spaces, settlements and institutions are also grown along them.

Issues Related to Heritage. The canal Network is both a natural as well as cultural heritage of our city. Sanitation, mosquito breeding, drainage etc. are the major issues of the City and all related very much to the Canal Network. Accessibility to the canal is another issue of equity. Encroachment is another issue related to the canal & Backwater precincts.

5) Mangalavanam Natural Heritage.

Known for its small bird sanctuary, Mangalavanam mangroves is situated in the Ernakulam District of Kerala State. This small mangrove area comprising of a shallow tidal lake in the center with its edges covered with thick manger vegetation and the lake here are connected to backwaters by a canal. Apart from these, it is considered a ‘green lung’ of Ernakulam City, which is polluted by many industries and motor vehicles.

Issues Related to Heritage. Major issues related to this Natural Heritage are associated with the issues related to canals and backwaters. The quantity of water flowing into Mangalavanam is extremely harmful for the species habitat in this zone. Lack of Urban Development guidelines in the area surrounding this heritage zone is a serious threat to the future of this small forest in Kochi.

B. Kochi Estuary Natural Heritage Zone

Kochi Estuary is an important Natural Ecological Feature in the entire Vembanad Lake Region which extends about 70 Kms to the South of the Kochi Sea mouth and 35 Kms to the North, flushes out 7 major rivers through Kochi Estuary. A major transactional point for most of the marine species and habitat for many of them, Kochi Estuary becomes a major zone of great environmental significance. This zone also becomes Kochi City’s most important place with the location of Port and proposed Container Transshipment, Navy etc.

Issues Related to Heritage. The major issues related to this zone are the absence of planning for the Natural Heritage and marine habitat of this estuary. The water edge development guidelines lack environmental sensitivity. Methods to effective reduction of pollution during the port activity are also not ensured. Environmental guidelines for accretion and landfills are also absent.

C. Thripunithura Heritage Zone

This living fossil of Royal glory has an important place in the history of Kerala. It was the capital of the Kingdom of Kochi from 1755 onwards. The temple forms the focal point of the city. The growth of the city started from around the temple. The main spine, the heart of the Fort, passes through the temple in the east-west direction starting from the east arch and ending at the west arch. The main spine runs from the west Irumpanam iron bridge to the east Statue junction through the temple.

D. Sub-Zones-

Edappally–TempleandPalace, Thrikakkara–Temple, Kumbalangi, Kumbalam, Maradu, Chellanam–Historic Precincts

Declaration of Heritage Zones in Kochi. The study thus proposes the following zones in Kochi as protected Heritage Zones; the boundaries of which will be delineated and detailed listing, documentation and preparation of urban development guidelines, to integrate Conservation and Development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heritage Zone</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kochi Heritage Zone 1 (CH1)</td>
<td>Fort Kochi, Mattancherry, Fort Vypin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kochi Heritage Zone 2 (CH2)</td>
<td>Willingdon Island Heritage Zone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kochi Heritage Zone 3 (CH3)</td>
<td>Ernakulam Central Area Heritage Zone</td>
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<td>Kochi Heritage Zone 4 (CH4)</td>
<td>Canal Network Heritage Zone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kochi Heritage Zone 5 (CH5)</td>
<td>Kochi Estuary Natural Heritage Zone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kochi Heritage Zone 6 (CH6)</td>
<td>Mangalavanam Natural Heritage Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thripunithura Heritage Zone</td>
<td>Fort area, Hill Palace, Temples, Palaces, Malika, Churches and settlements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-zones</td>
<td>Edappally, Thrikakkara, Kumbalangi, Kumbalam, Mundu, Chellanam</td>
</tr>
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</table>
III. LISTING AND DOCUMENTATION

The detailed list of buildings, structures, and precincts of historic/architectural/aesthetic cultural/environmental significance shall be prepared. On site listing and documentation of outstanding heritage in the city and inviting or organizing public hearing for suggestions, additions, observations and objections etc. shall become part of the listing & documentation work with Heritage Areas and Settlements; Heritage Structures and Complexes; Cultural and Heritage Institutions; Arts and Crafts; Linguistic / Cultural / Livelihood / Ethnic / Religious Heritage Institutions and Communities; Precincts or features of outstanding environmental significance or natural beauty; and Natural Ecological Precincts or Features. Invitation for enlistment for environmental significance or natural beauty; and Natural Communities; Precincts or features of outstanding Livelihood/Ethnic/Religious Heritage Institutions; Arts and Crafts; Linguistic / Cultural / Settlements; Heritage Structures and Complexes; Cultural and listing & documentation work with Heritage Areas and observations and objections etc. shall become part of the scope of documentation and listing works. The listing procedures shall aim at prioritizing action areas.

IV. URBAN DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES AND CONTROLS FOR HERITAGE ZONES AND PRECINCTS

The following shall become the thrust areas and objectives for preparation of guidelines and controls for the Heritage Zone. [3]

- Restriction on development, redevelopment, repairs etc. in the listed areas to protect natural/cultural heritage;
- Special regulations on high value areas of environmental significance and also for its immediate surrounding region;
- Guidelines to ensure protection, preservation, maintenance and conservation of heritage buildings and precincts;
- Guidelines to ensure equity & development rights;
- Guidelines and controls to ensure architectural harmony and maintaining the skyline;
- Regulations on infrastructure to ensure effective traffic/water/waste/energy management;
- Regulations to avoid environmentally hazardous development in natural areas and sensitive zones;
- Alter/modify/relax other development rights for the protection of heritage;
- To grant transferable development rights for the protection of heritage;
- Incentives for the use reuse of heritage structures and funding for their maintenance in case of public buildings;
- Incentives for promotion of art, craft, culture, language etc.;
- Regulations on public space design and treatment;
- Regulations and Controls for Canal and Backwater Edge Development;
- Regulations and Controls for regulating pollution levels due to port activity;
- Regulations to ensure protection of natural elements such as trees, birds life, marine species in heritage zones;
- Regulations for effective traffic management in intensely used old parts of the heritage zone; and
- Regulation and controls on urban art such as signage, advertisement billboards, street furniture, urban artifacts etc.

V. POLICY GUIDELINES FOR HERITAGE ZONES

5 principles as the cornerstones of Kochi Heritage Zone Notification and Enforcement of Guidelines and Controls.

- Integrating Conservation and Development to accommodate Changes demanded by the growing urban development activities in the city;
- Protection of Natural Heritage of outstanding environmental significance and natural beauty;
- Protection of coastal areas and tidal zones and disaster mitigation planning towards possible natural hazards;
- Ensuring safety, equity and adequate infrastructure in planning; and
- Tap Reuse, Renewal and Revitalization possibilities of heritage zones facing urban degeneration.

VI. TOURISM

Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world economy. In recent past Tourism has emerged as a major industry in almost all countries, with a sustained growth rate exceeding 5 percent per annum over the last twenty years.[4] Tourism industry offers an opportunity for earning foreign exchange at a low social cost. It stimulates the rate of growth of the overall economy because of its immense growth potential. Domestic tourism strengthens national integration while international tourism promotes the international relationship and social interactions.

Kerala is today the most sought after and most favoured tourism destinations in India. It is sought after for its breath taking natural splendours, the luxurious greenery, bewitching backwaters and innovative tourism products. National Geographic Traveller’ calls it ‘one of the ten paradises of the world’. ‘The New York Times’ calls it ‘where the smart traveler goes’. And ‘the Times of India’ calls it ‘The Winning State’. This is the personality that Kerala has in front of the world community. God’s own country, is just a slogan of the Department of Tourism or the Government of Kerala, but Kerala is truly the ‘God’s own country’.[5]

In Kerala, Kochi has a distinct place for its geographical diversity, sparkling backwaters, magnificent beaches and delightful fairs and festivals. The backwaters of Kochi are now one of the most popular tourist attractions in the world. Being the commercial and industrial capital of this southernmost state
of India, Kochi is home for a variety of modern and traditional activities. Kochi is popularly known as ‘Queen of the Arabian Sea’ by virtue of its location and the existence of a major harbour. Being a lovely natural harbor, Kochi enjoys a special place in the history of Kerala. It is ideally located for trade and commerce. The foreign tourists arriving in Kerala prefer to spend more time in Kochi, followed by Thiruvananthapuram and Kovalam. Kochi is preferred by tourists mainly from West and East European countries.

A. Tourism: Problems and Potentials of Kochi Region

Problems:

General. Lack of information and publicity about that tourist centres other than Fort Kochi ant Mattancherry.

Transportation. Transportation facilities from terminals to tourist centres are insufficient. Absence of signages, facilitation centres and complaint points at terminals tourist centres and travel circuit. Inadequate off-street parking spaces at tourists centres.

Inherent attractions. Underutilization of the extensive networks of rivers lakes and canals.

Destruction of heritage elements. Lack of performing arts centres recreational activities such as golf course etc.


Image. The image of backwater city is not properly maintained. Uncontrolled water front developed without considering the landscape and environment. Lack of marketing facilities for the products from souvenir industries and traditional cottage industries. Health care sector –especially Ayurveda – is not properly exploited. Non availability of good quality potable water at tourist centers. Poor drainage and sanitation system. Inefficeint solid waste management system. Growing trend of slums.


B. Findings and Suggestions

Transportation. Development of travel circuits for better accessibility and linkages. Improvement of road, rail and water transport services. Signages in travel circuits.[6] Facilitation centres/complaint points at terminal and other selected points along travel circuits. Identification of jetty locations to promote back water tourism.


Regional level recreational elements such as botanical gardens, golf course, club houses with indoor recreational facilities etc to prolong the stay of tourist. Theme parks activity centres. Waterway based recreational activities protection of wild life sanctuaries.


Image. The unique identity of the coastal line should be protected through strict controls for physical development in water front areas. Renovation and reactivation of canals and water ways. Protection of heritage areas and enivrons. Protection of traditional structures and conversion for tourist accommodation. Encouragement of souvenir industries. Display of traditional life, artifacts, musical instruments, textiles, dresses, ornaments etc. Ayurvedic health care centers with good quality and services at suitable locations.[9] Awareness campaign for host population to have better care and courteous attention to tourist - ‘adhithi devo bhava’ in real sense. Control over the growth of slums and squatter
settlements.

VII. CONCLUSION

The strategy to be adopted in respect of natural, man made and historical precincts of Kochi is linked to the mechanisms for conservation without sacrificing economic productivity and harnessing the Tourism potential. It is necessary to make notifications leading to the conservation process and listing the permissible activities. The center for Heritage Studies can give guidance on façade treatment and general architectural control. Projects utilizing public private partnership program are envisaged.

Kerala is one of the most favoured tourism destinations in India. In Kerala, Kochi has a distinct place for its geographical diversity, sparkling backwaters, magnificent beaches and delightful fairs and festivals. Lack of publicity leading to reduction in number of tourists, lack of linkages among tourism spots, under utilization of canals, lack of performing arts centers and recreational activities and absence of tourism facilities are the problems identified by this sector. Conscious efforts to conserve this valuable heritage and to encourage tourism through various projects are sure to give a new face to the city. Also, the opportunity to enjoy and learn this beautiful heritage city will be extended to tourist’s world over.

REFERENCES

[4] Cochin City Development Plan(2005), Cochin Corporation