CHANGE & CONTINUITY OF HISTORIC DISTRICTS
Continuity of the Past

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ABSTRACT

Historic districts are important to the development of a city as they offer a sense of history, identity and diversity. They provide the linkage to the past and serve to ensure cultural continuity of the nation. However, rapid modernisation and economic development have threatened the existence as well as the continual survival of historic districts. Hence, there is a need to preserve and also promote these areas so as to retain their cultural significance.

A critical discussion of the concept of conservation is central to architecture as its scope and definition influences the different approaches to be adopted. The selection of an appropriate treatment requires a profound knowledge of the history of the place and a true understanding of its relevance to the present. For successful and effective conservation, we must first understand the purpose of our action: why are we retaining the past and for whom? Do we conserve a place or a building because it is unique, because it is typical of a particular time, or because it has the capacity to simultaneously reflect several different layers of history?

This paper therefore aims to research into the historical development of architectural conservation and evaluate the conservation approaches of historic districts in Singapore. The following areas of concern will be explored:

1) To retain and ensure continuity of the cultural significance and identity, and at the same time, ensure the economic viability of heritage.
2) To study the degrees of intervention in terms of authenticity in the conservation of historic districts.
3) To retain the character and identity of the conservation areas and regenerate life into these places.

Examples of local conservation areas will be used to illustrate the role and importance of historic sites and buildings in our urban context as well as the need and relevance to conserve. Finally, the paper aims to assess and evaluate the success of conservation areas in Singapore.

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