Abstract

Urban conservation began in earnest in the mid 1980's almost two decades after the start of the post independence urban redevelopment programme. The conservation approach encompassed a comprehensive survey of all the historic districts which exhibited the best examples of our cultural heritage. These areas were then designated as Conservation Areas through a statutory process. At present, a total of 33 areas with 5239 buildings have been gazetted for conservation. The process involves the contention of difficult and intricate issues. First, the issue of which buildings and areas to be conserved and upon which criteria is the selection based. This problem is heightened by our relatively short urban history where the age of old buildings spans only a mere two centuries. Furthermore, the heritage of Singapore, is characterised as 'living heritage' more than a 'monumental heritage'. As change is normally equated with progress and modernisation in terms of developing countries, Singapore is besieged with intense pressure to modernise and upgrade. Thus in this respect, change is accepted as a way of life of Singaporean.

The second issue relates to the approach to conservation in relation to urban planning where much emphasis is made on the architectural and urban aspects of old buildings and historic areas. While the architectural criteria provides an objective tool for evaluation, its emphasis on physical form and elements, may detract from the equally important aspect of the cultural value of these buildings. This is reflected in the impact on not only physical environment, but also the social fabric of the urban environment which this dissertation intends to address.