

Building Gentrification in an Architectural Heritage Site: The Case of Dar es Salaam Central Business District

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there is a rise of global perspectives on urbanisation and gentrification, challenging the significance of urban heritage sites.

This paper presents in-depth exploration of the effects of gentrification on the historic sites of the Dar es Salaam Central Business District (CBD). We delve into how these changes have impacted the area's architectural heritage, examining new building works and modifications in various parts of the city. This study employed a case study strategy with data collection methods namely observations, archival research and stakeholder interviews.

The findings of this study provide an understanding among urban planners, architects and individuals invested in urban development and heritage conservation in respect of the intricate dynamics of gentrification and its impact on architectural heritage sites. The role of these professionals in shaping the future of our urban spaces is invaluable, and these insights can guide their decisions and actions.

Keywords: *cultural identity, conservation*

1. INTRODUCTION

By 2050, 70% of the world's population will be urban. This implies that urban areas will have to host more buildings than ever before. This trend will necessitate the creation of additional spaces to accommodate the various activities of human beings (United Nations, 2019). As the urban population continues to grow, available urban land will not expand, or will do so at a much slower pace (Morris, 2012). In light of this challenge and the limited urban land available, building in historic sites by creating entirely new buildings, additions, or remodelling is not just a possibility but an inevitable part of urban revitalisation as cities expand.

Gentrification is a process in which a wealthier population moves into a poorer urban area, improving housing and attracting new businesses, often at the expense of current residents. This process is a crucial focus of this research. In the context of urban development, gentrification is often associated with a wide range of social and economic implications (Abdelkader, 2011).

As new inhabitants occupy areas, they tend to dissolve the cultural and architectural legacy of the original inhabitants. Therefore, conservation of culture and architectural elements becomes a pressing challenge, especially in a modern society which is

experiencing ongoing transformations that may affect a particular place's unique heritage.

Gentrification involves the restoration of deteriorated urban property, especially in working-class neighbourhoods, by the middle and upper classes. Thus, gentrification is related to producing new social identities for the middle class through restoring or rehabilitating deteriorated working-class neighbourhoods (Daher, 1999). Further consideration of the essence and complexity of gentrification can assist in reaching an operational definition of the concept which stresses both place-centred and person-centred perspectives.

From a personal perspective, gentrification can be defined as the process by which low-income tenants of developed, adapted or rehabilitated settlements originally allocated for higher-income inhabitants interchange areas in urban or rural settings. The mechanism behind such movement is well known, generally involving increased property values and tax charges that the original residents cannot afford (*ibid.*).

The concept of gentrification has been used to describe so many processes of neighbourhood change that some consider the term at risk of conceptual overstrain (Atkinson, 2008). The need to generate income by accumulating land rents under conditions of economic constraint has also been identified as a critical driver of gentrification (La Grange and Pretorius, 2016; Jou et al., 2016).

Studies on gentrification have developed significantly over the years. While initial studies describe gentrification as neighbourhood change caused by economic interests and individual choices, later studies highlight the state as a leading player in promoting the process (Smith, 2002). In addition, they indicate not only class-based displacement succeeding gentrification but also a displacement of ethnic and racial minorities (Goetz, 2011). By incorporating historic and new construction, the community can balance preserving its

cultural heritage and embracing a modern process (Kou et al., 2018).

Dar es Salaam is a diverse city. Ethnic Africans form the majority of its population, followed by Arabs, Indians, and Europeans, making the amalgamation unique in terms of cultural and architectural heritage (Dufton, 2019). The city has experienced various types of cultural and architectural gentrification from the early nineteenth century to the modern era. Its inhabitants have driven transformations to its nature, streetscapes and building use, which represent deviations from their original status.

The city has experienced rapid urbanisation since the 1980s, when Tanzania adopted market reforms characterised by a range of ideas, from socialism to capitalism. Dar es Salaam was formally a rural town with about 300,000 inhabitants. The city experienced a dramatic change in the 1990s and 2000s, when investments from real-estate developers and state intervention transformed it, and more recently, international developers started to intervene (Ombeni et al. 2021).

Building gentrification is an idea explored in this paper to explain the cultural, architectural and demographic changes in the heritage site of Dar es Salaam CBD. In this area, buildings and residents are critical to the diverse traditional neighbourhoods. Additionally, the concept of building gentrification illustrates how historic neighbourhoods intersect different civilisations with their inhabitants' class and racial harmonisation.

Further, the study seeks to understand the causes and processes of gentrification and community perceptions of its outcomes by considering the potential integration of social vulnerability and its conservational impacts. It also asks the questions: what causes urban heritage settings to be so vulnerable to gentrification, and what do urban residents think about it?

2. MATERIALS & METHODS

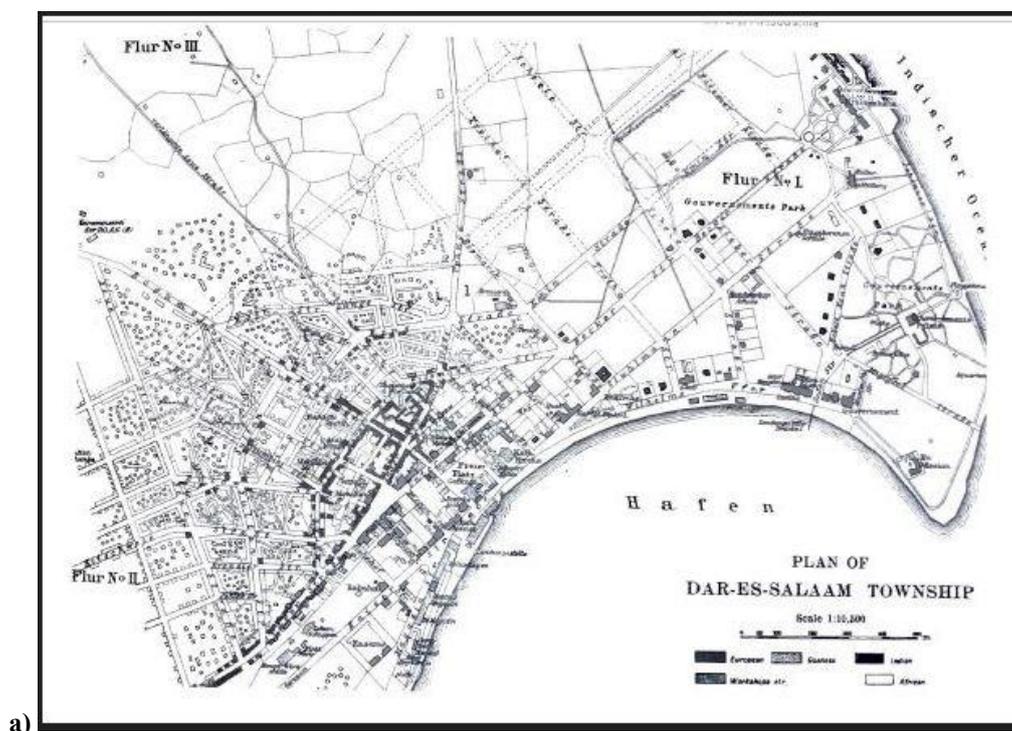
A case study strategy was adopted whereby primary data was retrieved first-hand by the researcher. Sources of such data include maps showing the building layout and transformations of the principal streets of the Dar es Salaam CBD from the early years of independence, from 1961 to 2024. Sketches, photographs and interviews with stakeholders were also used as data sources. Secondary data was retrieved from Government Agencies such as the National Museums, the Department of Antiquities, the Dar es Salaam Centre for Architectural Heritage (DARCH) and the National Housing Corporation (NHC). As it was difficult to access many inner parts of the buildings due to the owners' restrictions, this paper evaluates the facades of several significant historic buildings to see how they have transformed over time to accommodate particular needs.

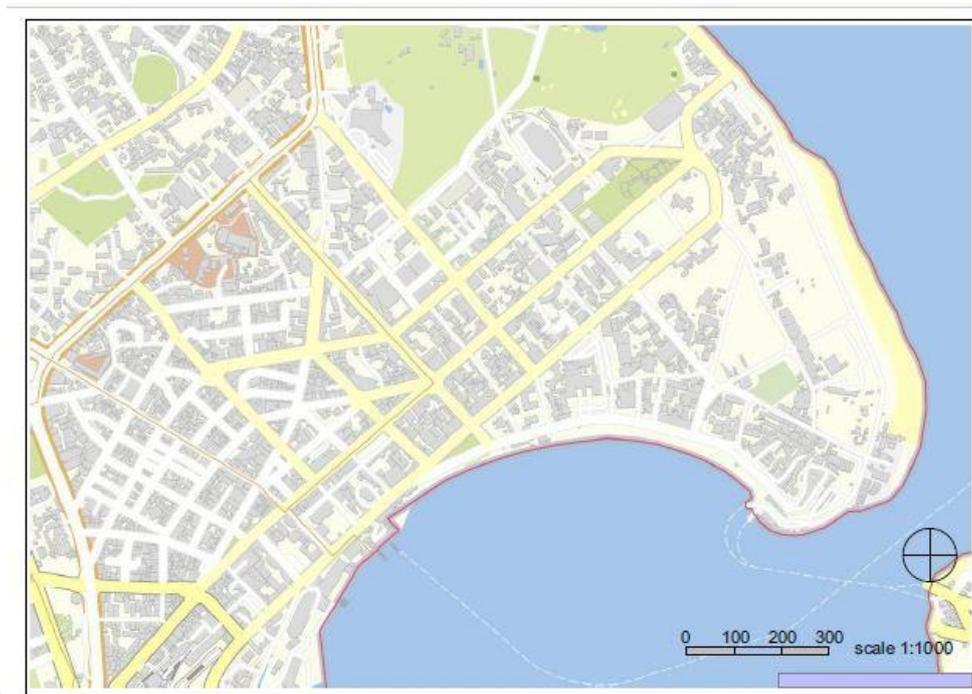
3. RESULTS

3.1 Eras of post-independence demolition and construction

Dar es Salaam's urban layout has remained almost the same since it was planned in the early 1900s, during the era of German occupation. However, individual buildings and streetscapes have been transformed to cope with specific needs of the population. From 1961 the year of independence to 2024 the city has perceived new construction of around 63 high rises buildings, this has changed the skyline of the city from low rise to high buildings.

Since then, Dar es Salaam has undergone what we term "new-build gentrification", as real-estate developers saw the opportunity to monetise the space through profitable new constructions. The notion of gentrification has been extended in this article to include the construction of new buildings in place of old ones.





b)
**Figure 1: a) Dar es Salaam CBD plan during the German era 1916 (source: DARCH Library);
 b) Dar es Salaam CBD plan in 2024 (source: author, modified from mapz.com).**

In 1961, Tanzania became independent. During the period that followed, the country started improving its infrastructure, including the introduction of modern buildings. There were several stages in Dar es Salaam’s shaping of its new identity and landscape, which led to sacrificing most of its heritage buildings and sites. The city’s identity has changed and gentrification has

occurred in most places. However, from 2020 building gentrification started to decline due several efforts from many conservators like Dar es Salaam Centre for Architectural Heritage (DARCH), Division of Antiquities (DoA) and the increase of awareness of heritage preservations to general public.

Table 1: Eras of building development and gentrification in Dar es Salaam CBD

	1961–1985	1985–1995	1995–2005	2005–2010	2010–2015	2015–2020	2020–2024
Character of era	Independence and nation-building	City built; privatisation	High-rise buildings and modernisation	High-rise buildings and modernisation	Contemporary buildings, glass facades	City skyscraper era	Regain awareness of heritage buildings
Activities	No demolition, only new construction	Few demolitions or new construction	Demolition and new construction gains momentum	Demolition and new construction continue	Demolition and new construction increase pace	Demolition and new construction continue	No demolitions, new construction continues

(Source: Author)

Table 2: Number of demolished buildings vs newly erected

Year	Interval (years)	No. buildings demolished	No. buildings erected
1961–1985	14	3	6
1985–1995	10	5	6
1995–2005	7	5	7
2005–2010	5	20	11
2010–2015	5	7	16
2015–2020	5	3	14
2020–2024	4	0	3

(Source: Author, modified from Ombeni et al., 2021)

In the period following independence, there ensued a strong desire for modernisation, marked by the desire to improve people's standard of living both through developing the country's infrastructure and by introducing the ideology of socialism. In this period, all major industries and infrastructure were nationalized and thus owned and run by the Government. In this period, there were a few demolitions of historic buildings. It seems that only three buildings were demolished to make space for new structures during that period.

From 1985 to 1995, Tanzania worked on improving its cities. Privatisation was introduced in 1985. During this period, at least six buildings were erected on historic sites, and five older buildings were demolished. Examples of modern structures erected at that time include the 10-storey Sukari House (see Figure 2) and the 12-storey National Insurance Corporation building, both on Samora Avenue and both owned by the Government.



Figure 2: Sukari House, constructed in the 1990s, is an example of a modern structure. (Source: Author).

From 2005 to 2010, 11 new high-rise buildings and other modern structures were erected, and 20 historic buildings were demolished. This was when the city witnessed the demolition of most of its valuable heritage.

From 2010 to 2015, seven buildings were demolished, including the Light Corner House, which was built between 1905 and 1914 and demolished in 2013. On the plot,

the new glass-fronted National Housing Corporation (NHC) House was built (see Figure 3). Sixteen other new constructions appeared in this period, including the contemporary glass-fronted Regency Hotel on Kivukoni Road, the Bank of Tanzania's "twin towers" on Mirambo Street (Figure 4) and Salamander House, which replaced the old Salamander building demolished in 2013 (Figure 5).

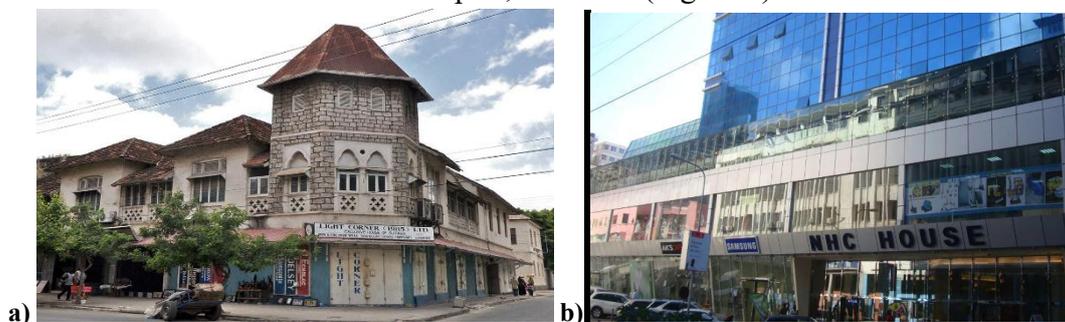


Figure 3: a) The Light Corner house before its demolition in 2013 (source: www.alamy.com visited on December 2024).

b) A modern NHC House was erected on the Light Corner House plot. (Source: Author).

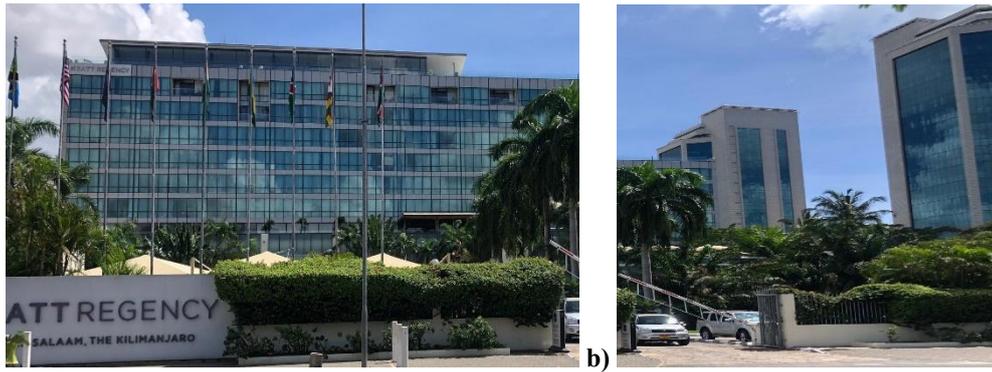


Figure 4: a) Hyatt Regency Hotel b) The Bank of Tanzania twin towers demonstrate the modern glass structure.

(Source: Author).



Figure 5: a) Salamander building before demolition in 2013 (Source: www.flickr.com visited on December 2024)

b) Newly erected building on the Salamander plot after it was demolished.
(Source: Author).

Between 2015 and 2020, three buildings were demolished, and 14 were erected. This was when the concept of protection of heritage buildings increasingly received more attention and the speed of demolition started to decline as the focus shifted to erecting new buildings.

Over the five years from 2015 to 2020, which we refer to as the city's skyscraper era, three historic buildings were

demolished, and fourteen high-rise buildings were erected along the seafront, most of them owned by Government parastatals. These included the Public Services Pension Fund (PSPF) Twin Towers, Tanzania Port Authority (TPA) tower and Rotana Hotel (Figure 6), all on Sokoine Drive, and NHC House (Figure 3), located along Samora Avenue.



Figure 6: Newly erected high-rise buildings on Sokoine Drive: a) PSPF Towers built between 2010 and 2015; b) TPA tower built in 2015 c) Rotana Hotel built between 2015–2020 (Source: Author).

From 2020 to 2024, no historic buildings were demolished, but three modern high-rise structures were erected. This resulted from an extensive campaign to raise awareness of the importance and protection of historic buildings. According to interviews with stakeholders comprising architects, Government officials, property owners and residents conducted in early 2024, 85% expressed awareness and concern for architectural heritage.

3.2 Facade transformation

The facade forms a large part of the exterior surface of the building. It is the first source of sending a perceptual message to the observers (Hollander et al., 2019). The facade will incorporate various physical and technical elements depending on its purpose. Studies have analysed the relationship of these elements with aesthetics. For example, Mohammadi (2019) shows that the facade contains elements that lead to receiving emotional senses by observers.

Research into the aesthetic perception of building facades shows that features such as materials, shape, roofline, and openings attract more attention than other factors, such as how the building is placed in its

context and the ratio of mass to space (Imamoglu, 2000). Hosseini (2022) emphasises that the perception of the aesthetics of a building's facade takes place in successive stages, with objective features of the building façade conveyed to the observer through visual messages via its shape, form, colour, and materials.

These studies emphasise that the perception of authenticity depends on the preference and perception of the individual. Semantic elements include those that trigger the symbolic perception of culture, while individual knowledge influences how people understand these elements (Zeki, 2019). For example, the meaning of a stone or tile cladding evokes different concepts in the mind of a Dar es Salaam dweller and a non-Dar es Salaam dweller.

In Dar es Salaam, changes in facades can be considered in terms of colours, additions and removal of elements that were available when the building was first constructed. There are several cases in Dar es Salaam where heritage buildings have been renovated to fit modern functions. As seen in Figure 7 and other images below, many streets in the inner part of Dar es Salaam have witnessed major changes to their building facades and streetscape.



Figure 7 a) Samora Avenue in the early 1960s; b) Samora Avenue in 2024 (source: author).

For example, Figure 8 shows how the Posh Building on Morogoro Road had its façade modernised by the addition of metal Allucobond cladding in the form of orange

pentagons. Figure 8 also shows the addition of metal fences to the National Bureau of Statistics and the Survey Department buildings, both on Kivukoni Road.

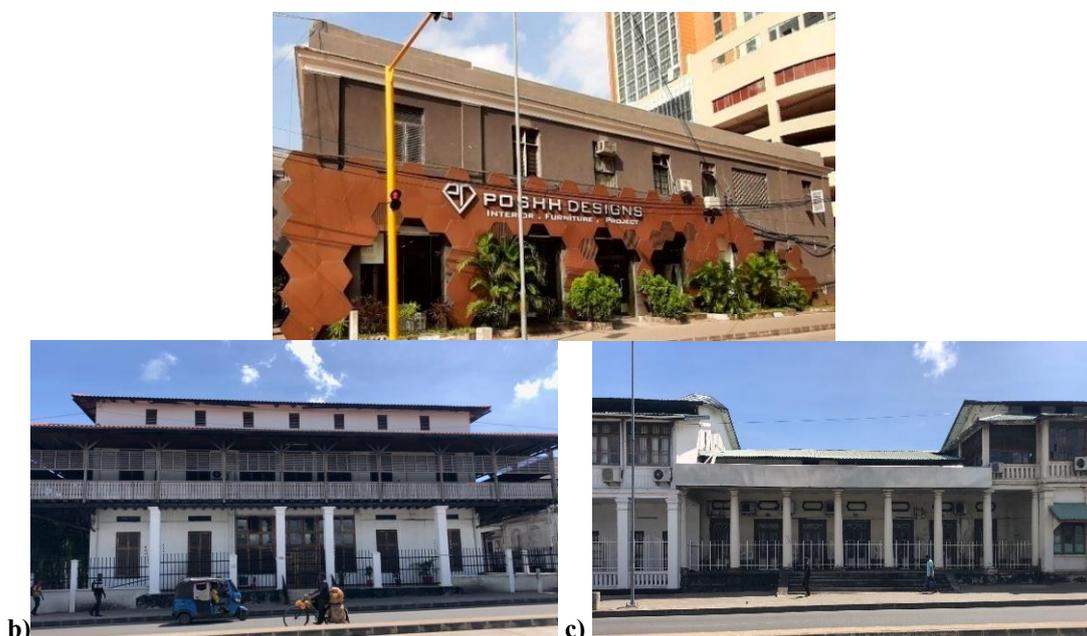


Figure 8: a) The Posh Building b) National Bureau of Statistics building; c) Survey department (source: author).

3.3 Adaptive reuse of buildings

There are many methods for preserving and conserving heritage buildings. However, to explore the topic of gentrification in this paper, we focus on the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings. This provides a good example of how buildings have been used in different ways throughout their existence to accommodate the varying needs of the people who use them without changing their core design style or removing original materials.

Adaptive reuse refers to the process of changing a building's usage to fit its new

owners' requirements (Latham, 2000). It facilitates retention of the heritage building and conserves the original builders' efforts, skills, and dedication (Love & Bullen, 2009). The adaptive reuse of historic buildings has a strong positive impact on sustainability.

3.3.1 Old Boma building

The Old Boma building (Figure 9) is an excellent example of adaptive reuse. This building has undergone several changes with different users over its lifetime. It served as an administrative office during the

colonial era and as a government office following the nation's independence in the 1960s. Today, it is home to a museum and exhibition space, with a rooftop restaurant. The plain facade is capped with battlements.

It has a more-or-less symmetrical room layout on each floor of the building. The building once faced Dar es Salaam's harbour, but modern skyscrapers have since blocked it.



Figure 9: The Old Boma building (white facade), overlooked by modern high-rise glass buildings (Source: Author).

3.3.2 The White Fathers' House

The White Fathers' House is believed to have been built between 1860 and 1866. In 1922, it was sold to the European missionary organisation, the White Fathers, from which it obtained its current name. It dates back to the era of German rule in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and several renovations were carried out at different points in its existence. The most

notable changes currently apparent in the building involve the improvement and maintenance of its interior spaces, as well as the provision and installation of water, electricity, security cameras and air conditioning. Partition walls of glass and aluminium have also been used to define the interior spaces. This building is a good example of adaptive reuse, as its original design and materials are still apparent today.



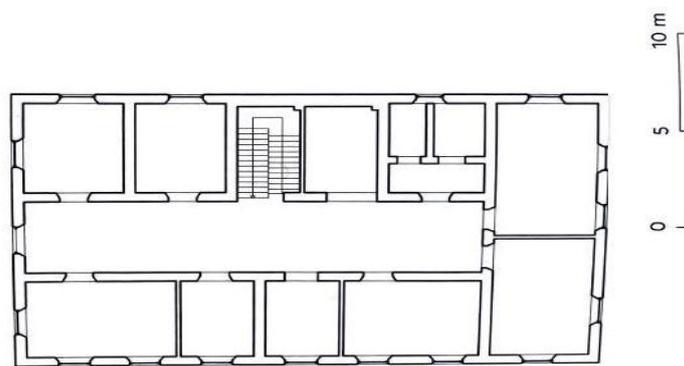


Figure 10: a) The two-storey White Fathers' House, surrounded by high-rise buildings; b) The floor plan of the White Fathers' House

(Source: Author).

4. DISCUSSION

There is an ongoing debate centered on how to balance development and gentrification, the latter term meaning changes which respect the proper preservation of historic buildings regardless of the economic concerns, as discussed by Abdelkader (2011). These landmark buildings carry cultural, social and technological value alongside their economic value. While Dar es Salaam has some examples of the adaptive reuse of such buildings, in many cases, the opposite has happened.

A number of experts argue that the best city development approach is to avoid destroying historic buildings and replacing them with new ones (Kou et al., 2018). Instead, we should embrace the lessons these buildings can teach us and find a way for them to continue to exist. Such an approach has positive environmental, social, and economic implications.

Dar es Salaam showcases some adaptive reuse of historic buildings while there are instances where preservation efforts have fallen short. Experts advocate for retaining historic buildings, emphasising their value and the need to learn from them rather than replacing them. Adopting this approach offers numerous benefits, including positive implications for the environment, society, and the economy.

The timeline analysis presented in the paper illustrates how the pattern of building transformation, demolition, and new

construction has evolved from 1961 to 2024.

There have been different eras in the city's evolution, from the early period post-independence, when only a few demolitions occurred, to later periods marked by intense modernisation and significant loss of heritage buildings. However, recent trends between 2020 and 2024 indicate a deliberate slowing down of demolition activities in favour of new constructions that respect historical heritage, driven by increased stakeholder awareness.

5. CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that gentrification in Dar es Salaam's Central Business District (CBD) is a complex process involving positive and negative outcomes for preserving the city's architectural heritage. It shows that while new construction and transformation of facades have contributed to urban revitalisation, these changes have significantly altered the historic and cultural fabric of the city. A key conclusion is that the conservation of architectural heritage is critical even amidst rapid urban development. The study emphasises the need for a balance between modernisation and preservation. City development should enrich urban spaces without completely erasing the cultural and historical identities embedded in older structures.

Dar es Salaam, a culturally diverse city, has undergone significant urbanization and gentrification processes, which have

impacted its architectural and cultural heritage over time. The transformation of Dar es Salaam's heritage site involves demographic, architectural, and cultural shifts, reflecting the city's historical and contemporary developments.

The study has also shown that there is a growing public and professional concern for architectural conservation. This demonstrates the value of integrating local perspectives into urban planning decisions and protecting cultural heritage amidst gentrification pressures. It can be argued that embracing adaptive reuse and careful planning in urban development can help reconcile the need for modern infrastructure with preserving the city's unique historical character. This balanced approach is encouraged as it has beneficial environmental, social, and economic implications, ensuring that urban progress does not come at the expense of losing the rich collective memory reflected in the architecture.

Abbreviations

CBD	Central Business District
DARCH	Dar es Salaam Centre for Architectural Heritage
NHC	National Housing Corporation
PSPF	Public Social Pension Fund
TPA	Tanzania Port Authority

Declaration by Authors

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