

THE CHALLENGES OF URBAN BEAUTIFICATION AND GENTRIFICATION ON THE HERITAGE SENSE OF PLACE: AN ANALYSIS IN KANDY CITY

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The city of Kandy renowned as the cultural capital of Sri Lanka was declared a world heritage city by UNESCO in 1988. It was the last Sinhalese capital of the Kandyan Kingdom for over three hundred years (1469-1815) which still comprises a number of historically memorable symbols and it has remained as a dormant (socially and territorially locked space) city due to its specific cultural and historical identity. Recently, the Kandyan landscape has been changing and moving into a transitional stage because of the newly proposed urban development with four themes; road and transport development, optimum utilization of lands, landscaping and urban beautification. It is creating a new set of meanings to architectural designs of buildings and structural changes of building forms and functions. The main objective of this paper is to analyse the challenges of urban gentrification to the sacred sense of place of Kandy city at present. A qualitative research approach was utilized by considering four time periods of Kandy: Kandyan kingdom, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial and present, especially focusing on the theory of sense of place by Yi-Fu Tuan. The secondary data were cross checked with the questionnaire survey for insiders- (city dwellers) and outsiders- (local visitors and foreigners) and field observations to emphasize the main objective. Regardless of the geographical limitations, the landscape in the core area has been transformed with ad-hoc developments. Therefore, it clearly reflects that the current development tend to create a new sense of place in urban space; a radical and modern meaning by challenging the sacredness of Kandy. The cultural and heritage values are merely becoming ideological themes necessarily not as pillars to sustain its legacy.

Keywords: Urban space, Sense of place, Urban gentrification, Kandy, Heritage