

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SENSE OF PLACE AND  
CO-CREATION EXPERIENCE:  
CASE STUDY OF CROW ISLAND BEACH PARK,  
SRI LANKA**

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Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Town & Country Planning

University of Moratuwa  
Sri Lanka

November 2024

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of  
Philosophy

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own work and this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a Degree or Diploma in any other University or institute of higher learning and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where the acknowledgment is made in the text.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Co-creation has been embraced as a new collaborative strategy for place-making. Yet, the reasons behind the agency getting public co-creation participation have not been fully explored. Researchers highlight that one significant intrinsic motivation for taking part in co-creations is a sense of place. On the other hand, some scholars indicate that an enhanced sense of place can be achieved through community participatory strategies and co-creation. However, there is a noticeable absence of empirical investigations into this seemingly reciprocal relationship. Thus, this thesis explores the relationship between the sense of place and the co-creation experience using the case of the Crow Island Beach Park development in Sri Lanka. Following an exploratory research design, data was collected through in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of sixteen members engaged in the beach park development. Additionally, observations, document analysis and a review of social media data were conducted to collect data. Subsequently, content, thematic and concurrence analysis were employed within a qualitative research approach. The findings reveal, firstly, a novel conceptual framework of sense of place termed, ‘a ladder of sense of place’ which delineates distinct stages of sense of place progression from placelessness, connected to the place, committed to the place, commend the place as best and consecrate the place over personal goals. Secondly, the findings reveal that the co-creation experience is depicted as a cycle, with social network-based social experience as the primary aspect, followed by economic, cognitive and hedonic co-creation experiences. Thirdly, a reciprocal relationship between the sense of place and the co-creation experience is identified, marked by a spiraling-up dynamic. The ladder of sense of place broadens existing notions of sense of place and introduces new dimensions to measurement scales. Further, this study makes a noteworthy contribution to the co-creation and place-making literature by introducing the concept of the place co-creation experience cycle. The upward spiral illustrates individuals with a deep sense of place are experiencing greater co-creation experiences. Ultimately, the findings offer valuable insights for planners, environmental managers and policymakers seeking to foster active community participation in sensible and sustainable place-making.

**Keywords:** Collaborative planning, co-creation experience, ladder of sense of place, place-making, qualitative research approach

## **DEDICATION**

To:

Mr. Ranil Meetiayagoda

Mr. Shantha Bandara

People as such, do not commit to a work based on extrinsic motivations.

Therefore, we need more people like them to co-create our future!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|          |                                                              |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| AGM      | - Annual General Meeting                                     |
| ATLAS    | - Archive of Technology, Life world and Language             |
| BPMS     | - Beach Park Management Society                              |
| CBO      | - Community Based Organization                               |
| CCD      | - Department of Coast Conservation                           |
| CMC      | - Colombo Municipal Council                                  |
| COVID-19 | - COronaVirus Disease of 2019                                |
| IWMI     | - International Water Management Institute                   |
| MEPA     | - Marine Environment Protection Agency                       |
| NARA     | - National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency |
| NGO      | - Non-Governmental Organization                              |
| RQ       | - Research Question                                          |
| SJR      | - Scientific Journal Ranking                                 |
| SLLDC    | - Sri Lanka Land Development Corporation                     |
| SLLRDS   | - Sri Lanka Low Land Reclamation and Development Corporation |
| SWOT     | - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats           |
| UDA      | - Urban Development Authority                                |
| UIP      | - Urban Innovation Pathway                                   |
| ULL      | - Urban Living Labs                                          |
| UN       | - United Nations                                             |
| VFI      | - Voluntary Functions Inventory                              |
| VOS      | - Visualization of Similarities                              |