

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT OF URBAN
TRANSFORMATION ON PLACE IDENTITY OF A
TRADITIONAL SILVER CRAFT COMMUNITY IN
KANDY, SRI LANKA**

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Master of Spatial Planning, Management and Design

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University of Moratuwa

Sri Lanka

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master
of Spatial Planning, Management and Design

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University of Moratuwa
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August 2025

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I declare that this is my own work and this thesis/dissertation does not incorporate without acknowledgement 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 acknowledgement is made in the text.

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ABSTRACT

The craft industries of Sri Lanka played a significant role in deciding local culture by contributing to the socio-cultural and economic development of the country. These craft industries originated from historical perspectives which were vital to place-based identity, especially in areas like Kandy and small villages like Neelawala traditional silver craft village. Over the past periods, the urban transformation had been determined by Neo liberalization, globalization and those had extensively impacted the traditional craft industries, including silver craft industries in changing their socio-cultural, physical, and economic environments.

This study explored the interplay between the two concepts of Urban Transformation and Place-based Identity concerning the traditional silver craft community in Neelawala. Firstly, the study highlighted the historical evolution of Sri Lankan craft industries analyzing the evolution of caste-based and cluster-based systems and gradual changes to nowadays challenges of market-oriented economy. Further, this research deeply explored the impact of urbanization with respect to changes in the built environment, economic environment and socio-cultural environment of craft communities, to seek to comprehend the consequences of preservation of cultural heritage and economic sustainability.

The findings of the study focused on addressing the current knowledge gap by exploring the relationship between urban transformation and place identity changes in the craft industry. Furthermore, this research intended to provide an insightful analysis for policymakers and urban planners in developing strategies integration with traditional perspective urban development frameworks which ensured balanced development in economic development and preservation of cultural heritage. Finally, this study highlighted the significance of the conservation of the cultural heritage and economic importance of traditional craft communities of Sri Lanka facing the challenges of urbanization.

Key words: Urban Transformation, Place Identity, Silver Craft Industry, Local Culture

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