

Impact of Changing Built Forms from Colonial to Post-colonial on Landscape Identity: *A Case of Kisumu City's Clock Tower*

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Abstract

Post-colonial period in Africa is witnessing changes to colonial era's built forms thus impacting memories and landscape identity. Need for local modernization poses a threat to associated memories and resultant urban landscape identity. Economic and functional considerations are given more attention than importance of urban memories and identity in case of renewals. Few studies are existing in Global South's African context on effects of renewal changes on memories and identity. Changes to colonial Clock Tower as one of Kisumu City's sites of interest was part of renewal projects undertaken in Kisumu City, Kenya. This article first investigates how the Clock Tower contributed to Kisumu's identity and secondly perception on satisfaction level with the changes and lastly need for its preservation or not before the renewal. Mixed-method approach was used through survey with 293 respondents, photo elicitation interviews (PEI) with twelve purposive participants and county government officials. Field investigation through mapping and photography was carried after archival review. Results revealed that majority felt that it was a landmark feature that is symbolic, contributes to Kisumu's identity and evokes urban memories. Majority were satisfied with outcome of the changes that signaled they did not support its preservation then. Findings imply that memory and identity was affected through the changes in form, colour and materials. The study recommends by-law to protect this landmark against changes and demolition through preservation. The findings are important to local authorities and policy makers with regard to preservation of landmarks that contribute to identity.

Keywords: Built forms, post-colonial, renewal changes, landmark, urban memory, landscape identity, preservation, urban renewal

INTRODUCTION

Built environments in African countries in the present day are confronted by many challenges in their urban processes. According to Diafat and Madani (2016) Algeria's post-colonial period has witnessed new forms of extensions within its development especially in its urban housing. This is supported by Guma (2016). Post-colonialism according to Watson (2013) is a contested time as viewed by different scholars. It can be a temporal period or a condition. Others consider it a theoretical approach. It is the period after colonialism or the period after political independence. This is the temporal view. Concerns of spatial changes in Global South especially in Africa has been investigated by several authors including Yeoh, (2001); Guma, (2016); Agyei-

Mensah & Schandorf, (2007) all with the concerns on changes witnessed on spatial built forms. The concern of these studies in African context is mainly about the physical, economic and social aspects of the concerned cities. This is without specific attention being given to possible impacts on the memories and resulting identity within the urban landscapes.

Several studies by Oktay & Bala, (2015); Yaldiz et al. (2014); Enache & Craciun (2013) and Rodrigo, (2011) all confirm that elements of urban form such as landmarks, monuments, buildings, street furniture, public spaces and streets play vital roles in expressing the notion of memories and resultant identity of the urban landscapes.

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According to Molavi et al. (2017); and Shao et al. (2020) changes that are rapid within cities destroys elements that are familiar thus changing known landscapes into new strange locations. They argue that identity of the urban areas is represented by the elements of built form and that recognizing them leads to memories that are collective. This leads to memorability of the urban landscapes. The author in this article supported by K'oyoo (2023); K'oyoo and Breed (2023) opine that countries in Africa presently in post-colonial eras are having renewals within their urban areas as a result of built forms from colonial eras that have physical deteriorations. Reviewed studies by Njoku and Okoro (2014) in Nigerian context and recently Amado and Rodrigues (2019) in Angolan context on urban renewals in post-colonial Africa are all concerned with creating communities that are viable by undertaking upgrades in neighborhoods and spaces within urban areas that have decayed. These studies' concern is on social dimensions with emphasis on physical aspects of the cities. They are not giving specific attention on how this impacts urban memories and landscape identities. Phillia and Sihombing (2023) supported by K'oyoo and Breed (2024) also argue that developments and improvements to physical infrastructure are valued mainly due to returns attributed to the economically. This poses a challenge and potential problem as little focus is placed on preservation efforts in the urban developments that impact urban memories and resultant place identities.

Lak and Hakimian, (2019); Shaheen and Wijesundara, (2014) all opine that there has been limited effort in using collective memory to facilitate urban renewal projects especially in the Global South. Lak and Hakimian (2019) opine that maintaining aspects that are distinct and unique within the urban landscapes is important. This paper elucidates the aspects of individual and collective memories from the perspective of city residents' and how important they are in shaping identity within the urban landscapes. The author postulates that considering memories and identity of cities that are undergoing urban renewals can be an intervention to the challenges of homogenization due to world's globalization. The author opines that the problem of many African cities is the desire for local modernization in the wake of comparing and competing at global level due to pressures from globalization. The author opines that urban memories are

important in maintaining identity of urban areas due to uniqueness and distinctiveness. The author argues that homogenization and globalization impacts the sustainability of urban memory and landscape identity thus affecting urbanism through the day to day urban realms. Currently few studies are existing in the African context on how changes form renewals on landmarks affects memories and resultant identity within urban landscapes. This article seeks to fill literature gap with regard to renewal changes that impact urban memories of the residents' and affect identity of landscapes therein. The findings are important to local authorities and other policy makers who are involved in place making within the urban realms within renewals and new developments.

THEORY

Changing Spatial Built Forms

Agyei-Mensah and Schandorf (2007) state that built forms in post-colonial Africa's urban areas have undergone mutations. This is as a result of socio-economic, political in addition to cultural factors. These changes are evident in spatial built forms in terms of architecture and morphologies. Pressure from local and global forces is the main cause to this. These authors give an example of Cape Coast and Ghana where the changes have a distinctive image on the urban landscapes. They argue that the changes have occurred in periods that include contemporary period in present days, post-independence periods, colonial periods and pre-colonial periods. Yeoh (2001) supporting Simon (1998) state that post-colonial identity is distinguished best in the works that focus on forms of post-colonial expressions. This includes cities that serve as capitals, parliament buildings, special buildings in addition to symbols and styles that are artistic. Forms of culture and social identity related to them are also included (Yeoh, 2001). Closely related to identity that is fast changing is memories. According to Guma (2016) colonial memories are fading at a fast pace in post-colonial Africa. This is due to changes that are considered dramatic that have emerged transforming various cities. The concern is majorly on trends of urbanization (Guma, 2016). Massey (2020) states that renewal of urban areas in South Africa were started in 1994 with the democracy witnessed after end of apartheid. Various renewal projects have been carried out to correct decays and negligence from the past years. Renewals were

for specific areas and towns. Informal settlements were upgraded by local authorities to respond to need for better living environments (Massey, 2020).

Watson (2013) argues that part of the problem for the post-colonial cities is the “global city concept”. This author states that this has consequence of encouraging all cities to desire to have “global status”. This leads to mimicking plans and projects that are classified as “global” within various cities (Watson, 2013). This is exemplified in many African cities according studies by Diafat & Madani, (2016) in Algeria; Guma, (2016) in Kampala, Nairobi & Dar-es Salaam; Agyei-Mensah & Schandorf, (2007) in Ghana. The author in this article supporting Yeoh (2001) argues that the changing forms within built spaces in post-colonial period in cities affects memories and resultant identities within the urban landscapes. According to Leon et al. (2020) there is need to understand how changes in historical urban areas in Africa especially Sub-Saharan contexts are taking place. This inspired the study that led to this article. K'oyoo (2023) found out that changes as a result of renewal projects impacted identity of the urban landscapes. This supports earlier study by Leon et al. (2020) on Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's transformations on urban landscapes that affected architectural characters. This is a concern to Asfarilla and Agustiananda (2020) who decry present day modernizations that cause the uniqueness of cities to fade away.

How Urban Memories and Identity of Urban Landscape Relate

Alishah et al. (2016) opine that understanding of the physical dimensions of a city constitutes the urban landscape by the citizens. This acts to evoke memories and mental aspects associated with them. Halbwach (1992) defines individual/personal memory as unique and personal due to knowledge and experiences. Shared/collective memories relate to past expressions that is shared among the residents'. This is through remembering of spaces, buildings, places and events of the past (Halbwach, 1992; Baker, 2012). Goheri et al. (2016) posit that group memories are related to identities, cultures, memories over a given time. Baker (2012), opine that memories and places are interlinked within the fabrics of life every day.

According to K'oyoo and Breed, (2023); Shao et al., (2020); Molavi et al., (2017) and Ramos et al.,

(2016) urban landscape identity is impacted by the physical forms, functions through various activities and meanings attached.

“Urban landscape identity (identity of the urban landscapes) is the resident's opinion and perception of the special features that help them to differentiate and develop attachment to a place. It encompasses the forms/physical aspects, functions/activities (social-cultural aspects) and meaning aspects. All three aspects combine to create memories to the residents” (K'oyoo & Breed, 2023).

Urban memories and identity within urban landscapes have been shown to have a link and interact by several studies. This includes physical forms such as geographical features that are natural, man-made form such as streets, parks, monuments, landmarks and buildings. The studies include K'oyoo and Breed (2023) recently and earlier by Shao et al. (2020); Lak and Hakimian (2019); Molavi et al. (2017); Goheri et al. (2016); Hoteit (2015); Shaheen and Wijesundara (2014) and Baker (2012).

Importance of Urban Memories and Identity of Landscapes in Renewals

Ramos et al. (2016); Shaheen and Wijesundara (2014) posit that identities are preserved by memories from the past and the present. According to Ramos et al. (2016) memories form when all aspects that constitute identity of urban landscapes interact. This depends on perceptions of people within given landscapes (Ramos et al., 2016). Hoteit (2015) argues that constant changes of the built environments in terms of changes to monuments, buildings, squares and streets in addition to changing names of streets often breaks memories within the urban areas. Amado and Rodrigues (2019) state that aim of renewals is to achieve human comfort and use even though they are faced with challenges of preserving identities and memories (Amado & Rodrigues, 2019).

The author in this paper questions whether preserving the colonial historic elements in African cities implies preserving of the colonial identities despite taking a de-colonial turn after independence and self-rule. Urban renewals in many jurisdictions as highlighted by reviews in this study have little emphasis on memories and identity of urban landscapes despite being important to cities image ability. The author in

this paper feels that developments that are new, reconstructions and renewals should prioritize preservation of historic elements that are heritage to the cities. This seeks to avoid any potential impacts that are negative on urban memories and identity of the landscapes over time.

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Area

Kisumu City in Kenya is within Kisumu County. Kisumu Urban Project (2019) state that the town came into being on December 20, 1901. It boasts of rich architectural history from colonial era. It has rich Asian architecture that resulted from Indians who settled there in 1901 upon completing railway line from Mombasa to Kisumu (COK KUP, 2019). COK KUP (2019) identified the Clock Tower as one of the sites of interest in Kisumu. It is within a strategic location within the town's main street. The colonial Clock Tower was purposively selected as a landmark for study within Kisumu City that underwent renewal transformations that affected the built forms with the urban landscape.

Location of the Clock Tower is within the main street within the CBD that connects to the down town area and is in close proximity to Kisumu Triangle (**Figure 1**). The strategic location results in high visibility amongst pedestrians and motorists

alike. According to Kisumu Urban Project (2019); K'oyoo (2024b) and K'oyoo & Breed (2024) the Clock Tower is among the sites of interest within the city. K'oyoo (2024a) investigated CSR-driven beautification projects that aimed to promote the city's unique urban identity in addition to enhancing the image of corporates through landscape brandings. The study revealed that the Clock Tower was targeted for a facelift as one of the projects through CSR (K'oyoo, 2024a).

Research Design

Both quantitative and qualitative data constituting mixed method as an approach was involved. Quantitative data from surveys was undertaken from the CBD and various adjoining neighborhoods. Qualitative data through interviews was through photographic documentation with PEI respondents and key respondents. The Clock Tower was purposively selected for study due to its history that dates back to the colonial period and because of being one of the sites of interest.

Sampling

According to 2019 Kenya's Housing census by Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, Kisumu town study area has a total of 52,331 households within its administrative locations (KNBS, 2019). 384 household heads were selected through simple

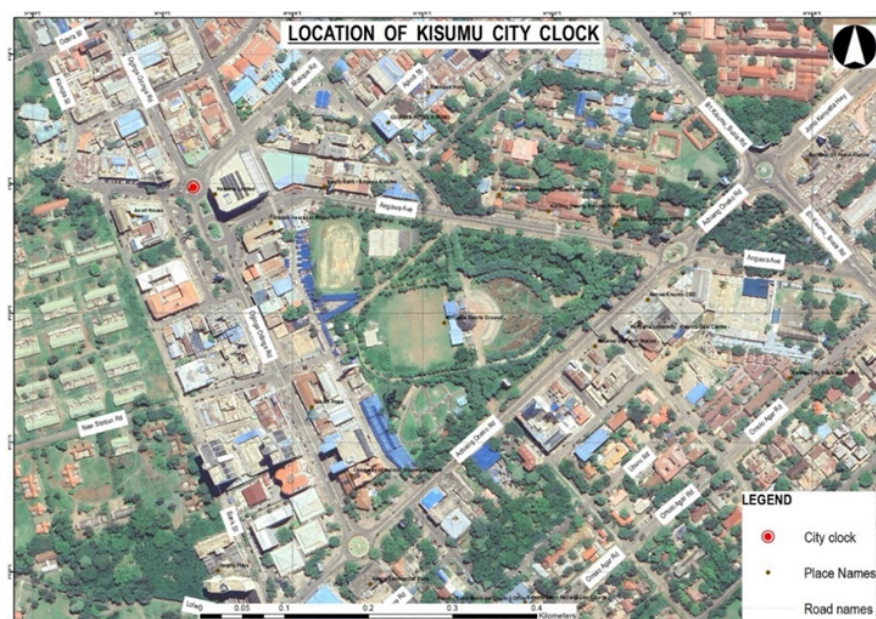


FIGURE 1

Location of the Clock Tower and Kisumu Triangle (ArcGIS Desktop 10.3)

Source: Field survey, 2025

random sampling to participate in the survey. 76.3% response rate was achieved through 293 complete questionnaires that were received back.

Data Collection

The primary data collection was done through field investigation that involved PEI, key informant interviews, photography, GIS mapping. Field survey was done through questionnaires

Survey

The survey was conducted in July and August 2021. This was through visits to the houses within the neighborhoods and within CBD. Demographic information was captured in the first part of the questionnaire. Part two had statements based on 5 point Likert scale. This include questions on whether the Clock Tower was one of the monumental structures that had a symbolic meaning and contributed to identity of the city, second, if the Clock Tower evoked memories that were individual or collective. Lastly was the perceptions on satisfaction level with the changes undertaken on it.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with officials of the County Government of Kisumu (CGK) were done in July 2021. PEIs were done in September and it included 2 photos, of the Clock Tower. The first photo of the original Clock Tower (**Figure 4**) that was retrieved from archival records at City Planning Department and the second one (**Figure 2a**) from field investigation through author's

photography during the changes. First part of the interview schedule was on demographics of the respondents. The participants were shown two photographs for discussions. Studies that have used PEI include Bignante, (2010). Interviews were recorded with the participants' consent using a mobile phone, while notes were simultaneously taken. The PEI sessions lasted about 20 minutes.

Data Analysis

SPSS) version 26 was used for analysis of quantitative data. Descriptive statistics was used report on the various aspects investigated. Responses from interviews were transcribed verbatim. No specialized software was used for analysis. The researcher manually analyzed the data by identifying key themes that aligned with the study's broad research questions. Using content analysis the responses were categorized and examined in relation to the core aspects of the study. This included contribution to identity of the City as a physical aspect, importance in historical development, individual and collective memories. Mapping was conducted to document the location of the Clock Tower. The location of the Clock Tower and nearby Kisumu Triangle that was undergoing renewal was mapped using ArcGIS software, with coordinates collected during field investigations. This was crucial for understanding how spatial factors, such its location within the CBD might influence key aspects on memories and identity within the urban landscape.



FIGURE 2a

The Clock Tower undergoing changes during reconstruction

Source: Field survey, 2025

RESULTS

Demographics for Survey Respondent

Results on the demographic characteristics are presented in **Table 1**.

Results in **Table 1** show that the respondents were old enough and capable of responding to the questions on the Clock Tower coupled with their duration of stay within the city.

PEI and Interview Respondent Demographics

A total of 12 PEIs were conducted. Majority of the PEI interviewees were male (58.4%). Their age ranged between 20 and 67 years. Those aged 30 years and above were 66.6%. They had lived in the city for at least 4 years and long enough up to 67 years. 75%) had lived for above 10 years within the city. The length of their stay indicates they were conversant with the clock tower in terms of its location and they witnessed the changes on it and could adequately respond to the questions of the study regarding it. The interviewees were identified as KSM 1 to KSM 12.

The four professional interviewed were identified as KSM P1 to KSM P3. The three county officials from Kisumu were identified as CGK 1 to CGK 3.

Field Investigation

Site visit was carried out by the author in August 2024. It revealed that changes on the Clock Tower had been completed and the new appearance was as per **Figure 2b** and **Figure 3**. The upgrade of the Clock Tower was undertaken by Kisumu Concrete Products a local quarrying and construction products manufacturing company. This upgrading according to Kisumu's Environment Director and K'oyoo (2024a) was done under corporate social responsibility as part of the urban renewal projects that were undertaken between 2019 and 2022.

Archival Review

It was built in the memory of Kassim Lakha by the colonial government. He was a trader of Indian origin. He greatly contributed to Kisumu Town's development. He supported developments from 1902 up to 1910. This period marks immediate settling of Indians who built the railway line from Mombasa and decided to settle in Kisumu after its completion. Unveiling was done on the 19th August, 1938. It was built to commemorate and remember the charitable acts he did within the town (COK KUP, 2019). **Figure 4** shows the photo of the Clock Tower in its original form before the changes.

TABLE 1
Demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n=293)	Percent
Age (years)	18-24	86	29.4
	25-39	159	54.3
	40-55	41	14.0
	56 and above	7	2.3
Gender	Male	162	55.3
	Female	131	44.7
Education	Primary	6	2.0
	Secondary	57	19.5
	Tertiary	230	78.5
Duration in residence (years)	0-5	64	21.8
	6-10	64	21.8
	11-15	48	16.5
	Above 15	117	39.9

Source: Field survey, 2025



FIGURE 2b

The Clock Tower undergoing changes during reconstruction

Source: Field survey, 2025



FIGURE 3

Final image of present day Clock Tower after completion

Source: Field survey, 2025



FIGURE 4

Clock Tower before renewal changes. Background buildings represent the old Asian architecture

Source: CGK Planning Department (Author, 2021)

DISCUSSION

Contribution to the Identity of the City

PEI interviewee KSM 1 stated that the clock tower constitutes is important as a physical aspect that influences and contributes to Kisumu's identity. The respondent stated that "I prefer the new look of the Clock Tower as it is visually appealing". According to KSM 6, 7, 9, 11, 12 and professional KSM P3 the Clock Tower was an important physical aspect that contributed to the image of the City. According to these respondents it was used for many years by residents to give directions.

KSM 5 and KSM 6 felt that it had an important contribution to Kisumu's historical development. They said that it had meaning aspects to the city having been built in the colonial days long before independence. According to CGK official 1 identity of Kisumu City is determined by the Clock Tower, buildings such as old provincial headquarters, Jubilee Market and the old British Council Library and Uhuru Park (K'oyoo, 2024b; K'oyoo & Breed, 2023).

The survey results revealed that the Clock Tower was one of the monumental structures that had a symbolic meanings and contributed to Kisumu's identity. The responses revealed that 22.6% agreed strongly, 44.2% agreed, 20.2% had neutral opinion, 10.3% disagreed and 3.1% disagreed strongly. 3.72 was the mean 1.02 as the Standard Deviation. This implied that it had a strong meaning from the respondents' opinions. Lupienko (2022) opine that meanings are always negotiated a new by each generation. This author opines that this can change or altogether be lost. The author in this paper opine that the meaning attached to the Clock Tower at the time of the study may not necessarily be the same in the years to come due to generational change if the historical meanings and memories are not passed to the upcoming generations.

Contribution to Urban Memories

Survey results revealed the Clock Tower was a feature that evoked urban memories. 18.8% according to the findings agreed strongly, 33.2% agreed, 30.1% had neutral opinion, 14.4% disagreed and lastly those who disagreed strongly were 3.8%. The mean and Standard Deviation were 3.48 and 1.07 respectively. This implied that it had strong impact in evoking memories as perceived by the respondents. Molavi et al. (2017)

opine that memories from history have big impact on identities. They also impact belongingness among the people within urban realms. This is supported by the findings in this study about the Clock Tower being a feature that evoked urban memories among the residents. This supports earlier findings by Rodrigo (2011) who posits that relationships with the past are through physical spaces that can lead to creation and stabilization of people's memories. Lupienko (2022) supporting Rodrigo (2011) argues that memories may be reflected in objects such as structures and works of architecture within urban areas. This author posits that appreciation and assessing of physical aspects that contribute to memories is important.

Gusevkaya and Plotnikova (2020) support importance of history in identity creation. They posit that the two are important in creating memories among the people over time and cannot be separated. Othman et al. (2013) support this by stating that memories and perceptions of environments are shaped by three components. This includes events and their roles, histories and lastly remembrance of place monuments. This enables perception of places through associations of memories. This takes place through interactions within urban spaces of different types (Othman et al. 2013). Drenthen, (2009) supports the importance of memories through "Narrative understanding of place" in which landmarks enable construction of narratives that act as reflections of histories of places and how they relate to people. The Clock Tower in the opinion of the author in this article is an important marker of memories from the colonial days and history that is still existing in the post-colonial days despite the changes occasioned on it due to the renewal.

Perceptions on the Changes Undertaken

The respondents' satisfaction level with the changes undertaken on the Clock Tower. **Table 2** present the results with regard to the changes on the Clock Tower.

Table 2 shows, 70.9% of the respondents were satisfied with the changes that were undertaken. The mean of 3.85 as a finding of this study implies that the respondents perceived the changes as satisfactory.

K'oyoo (2024a) concluded that CSR-led beautification projects have the potential to

TABLE 2
Satisfaction levels with changes on the Clock Tower

Statement on changes on Clock Tower	Measurement frequency and % (n=293)					Mean	SD
	(1)Very dissatisfied	(2)Dissatisfied	(3)Neutral	(4)Satisfied	(5)Very satisfied		
Clock Tower changes	7(2.4%)	16(5.5%)	63(21.6%)	134(45.9%)	73(25%)	3.85	0.937

Source: Field survey, 2025

significantly enhance urban landscape identity and corporate branding; however, their success is contingent on effective maintenance, community involvement, and the resolution of safety-related issues. Moreover, the study showed importance of uniqueness and distinctiveness of cities through the strategic use of sculptures and other landscape elements in urban beautification efforts. The author opines that upgrade on the Clock Tower through CSR improved the image of the city besides enhancing corporate image (K'oyoo, 2024a).

Need for Preservation or Not

PEI interviewee KSM 2 supported by KSM 12 preferred the new look after the improvements and therefore no need for preserving the initial look. KSM 3 had a contrary opinion to that of KSM 2 and KSM 12: "The Clock Tower is an important physical feature and there was need to preserve its original form and colour". Preservation calls were echoed by five other PEI respondents. The common message in their comments was:

"The Clock Tower is an important symbolic structure and there was need to preserve it in its original form and colour because of the history it holds behind its development. Although the current image of the Tower after the upgrade is modern and good, its original structure cannot be told to whoever had not seen it before or knew about its existence" (PEI interviewees-KSM 4 and 11).

"The Clock Tower is a symbolic structure in Kisumu City and had a lot of Asian influence from its initial construction and had importance to them. The upgrade was not supposed to have taken place and could have been preserved in its original appearance" (PEI interviewee KSM 5, 6 and 9,)

Rodrigo (2011) argues that if the urban memories through monuments are not permanent then they cannot be maintained and be transferred

from generation to generation. According to the city planner (CGK 1), this landmark has never undergone major changes over the past many years and only underwent repainting to maintain it. The author in this article believes that this landmark provides a narrative understanding of the city as a mark of identity through urban memories that are rooted in it over a time period from construction in the colonial period to its existence in the post-colonial present period. KSM 10 had this sentiments "The Clock Tower has been and is still an important symbolic structure in Kisumu Town. It was not bad to add colour during its upgrade but the current base after the upgrade changes offer obstruction of views to motorists (PEI interviewee KSM 10). He strongly felt that the public were never involved before effecting the changes on the Clock Tower". Asfarilla and Agustiananda (2020) opine that modernization causes the uniqueness of towns and cities to be lost besides losing meanings.

According to CGK 1 it was to be preserved in its initial form and colour. His comments on this were that "The Clock Tower ought to have remained the same. The present cladding with tiles followed by their removal during the ongoing works is not good. There was public concern about the changes on it despite the continuation with the works on it" (CGK 1). The author in this paper argues that the Clock Tower had its form taking a decolonial turn through the changes even though it was not completely destroyed, it's still in the same location albeit with the changes on it. The question is how this is perceived in terms of urban memories and resultant contribution to urban landscape identity. Has a new identity been created after the changes on it?

CONCLUSION

Findings reveal that the Clock Tower is an

important physical aspect that contributes to the identity of Kisumu and that majority were satisfied by the changes undertaken on it signaling that they did not support the need for it to be preserved in the wake of the changes occasioned by renewal through CSR implementation. It's clearly evident that spatial built forms across many aspects of built environments like housing, landmarks, monuments, government buildings are undergoing changes in post-colonial Africa. This study concludes that it's important to maintain unique aspects within various cities that contribute to memories and identities of the urban landscapes. Modern place making within urban landscapes should consider memories and identities that can be negatively impacted by any changes. The findings add to landscape studies existing body of knowledge in terms of memory and identity of landscapes. There were few studies in African context and none in Kisumu at the time of this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study proposes the following recommendations:

- i). Need for Kisumu City and others to pay attention to urban memories in place making during planning and design projects within urban landscapes to maintain identities.
- ii). Develop and pass by-law that acknowledge the Clock Tower as landmark that represents development in history through memories in the city thus contributing to identity.
- iii). Enlighten the public on the importance of the Clock Tower and on the need to preserve it from renewal changes and demolitions in future.

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