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Exploring Third Spaces Design Framework Based on The Experience of Residents That Helps To Reduce Psychological Stress And Support Community Well-Being In Low-Cost Public Housing In Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The basic human need for a home that provides more than simply shelter underpins the need to understand the relationships between housing, health, and well-being. There is more emphasis on the quality of the home, with an agreement that the home is the foundation for resilience and well-being. There is a complex relationship between home and mental illness, as the environment in which a person lives can significantly impact their mental health. Some ways in which home can influence mental health include stressful living conditions. Therefore, having a safe and supportive home environment can help to protect people from mental illness. This research applied phenomenology in qualitative research methodology. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using ATLAS.ti version 8 software. The results show that residents in Malaysia's low-cost public housing have unique needs and preferences, benefit from the supportive and inclusive environment, enjoy activities contributing to social and skill development, are involved in activities for spiritual growth and spiritual healing and creative for innovation and flexibility in the third space design.

Keywords: housing; public housing; third spaces; psychology; community well-being.

1. INTRODUCTION

The basic human need for a home that provides more than simply shelter underpins the need to understand the relationships between housing, health, and well-being in ways that go beyond apparent problems such as dampness and cold (Rolfe et al., 2020). A home that lacks basic needs such as access to clean water, food, and healthcare can significantly impact a person's mental and physical health. There is likely more emphasis on the quality of the home, with a broad agreement that the home is the foundation for resilience and well-being (Samuel, 2020). There is a complex relationship between home and mental illness, as the environment in which a person lives can significantly impact their mental health. Some ways in which home can influence mental health include stressful living conditions (Perreault et al., 2022). Living in a chaotic, cluttered, or overcrowded home can be stressful and overwhelming, contributing to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (Gonyea et al., 2018). A lack of social support and connections within the home can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Agarwal et al., 2021), increasing the risk of developing mental health problems. On the other hand, a supportive home can provide a sense of security, stability, and comfort, improving

mental well-being. It can also offer a sense of belonging and connectedness that can help promote social support and reduce feelings of isolation. Low-cost housing is a cheaper shelter solution for a particular economic group. The term low-cost refers to the prices of housing development materials and the housing units as the product (Aishah et al., 2023). In Malaysia, the low-cost public housing is an initiative by the government to fulfil the housing needs of lower-income groups. Though the specification is expected to meet the basic housing needs of a specific target group of citizens, there is much literature about limited living conditions in low-cost public housing in Malaysia (Gonzalez-Longo & Mohd Sahabuddin, 2019). Therefore, this research explores the contributions of third spaces that help reduce psychological stress in the context of low-cost public housing residents in Malaysia. The aim is to propose further a design framework of related third spaces for low-cost public housing. Thus, this paper aims to explore third space experience to propose a design framework that supports community well-being for low-cost public housing in Malaysia with the following research question (RQ): How to formulate a framework for third spaces design based on the experience of residents that helps to reduce psychological stress and support community well-being in low-cost public housing in Malaysia?

2. METHODOLOGY

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that aims to understand and describe the subjective lived experiences of individuals (Moustakas, 1994). It is rooted in the phenomenology philosophy, which emphasizes the study of conscious experience and perception. In qualitative research, phenomenology is used to gain insight into the meaning and essence of a particular phenomenon, such as the lived of a specific group of people or how individuals understand and make sense of a particular event or situation. This approach typically involves collecting in-depth, personal narratives from participants and using interpretive methods to analyze the data, which best follows Moustakas (1994) for a psychological perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, this research adapts semi-structured interviewing in phenomenological research in accordance to Moustakas (1994).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The recorded interviews with 7 participants from 5 low-cost public housing areas were transferred into 7 verbatims. The interview verbatims were uploaded into ATLAS.ti version 8 software and analysed accordingly. The analysis involved coding, categorising, and finding the final theme. The initial coding are 200 open codes, later merged and grouped into 78 similar codes. The 78 final codes were then grouped into 6 categories and 5 final themes.

3.1 Finding 1: Third Spaces Experience That Helps to Reduce Psychological Stress and Support Community Well-being for Low-Cost Public Housing in Malaysia

The results show that residents in Malaysia's low-cost public housing have unique needs and preferences according to locality. Some people might have a high tolerance to the available physical condition, but others might feel mentally disturbed by the surrounding and the built environment. The research found that low-cost public housing residents and communities highly utilize shared spaces. The availability of community hubs, halls, praying places, fields, playgrounds, and gazebos extensively benefited the low-cost public housing residents and communities. The research also found that low-cost public housing residents enjoyed activities

contributing to social and skill development. Apart from socialising and hanging out with families, friends, and neighbours, the low-cost public housing community hosted feasts, ceremonies, financial aid and mutual aid programs, urban farming, and voluntary patrol and firefighting schemes. The residents of low-cost public housing in Malaysia are involved in many religious activities. With Islam as the national religion, Malaysia allowed other faiths to be practiced. Therefore, people can openly conduct religious movements in the third space. In fact, Malaysian, including the low-cost public housing residents, are very respectful to the religion practiced by others and sometimes get invited to festival ceremonies like Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Chinese New Year, and Deepavali celebrations in communities. Finally, the architects and designers should allow room for innovation and flexibility in the third space design for low-cost public housing residents and communities. Creative individuals and low-cost housing communities created third spaces that suited local needs and preferences. Examples from this research are a hall converted into praying places, an outdoor kitchen prepared by the low-cost public housing community, and a jetty to park boats and do fishing activities developed by the low-cost public housing residents.

3.2 Finding 2: A Framework for Third Spaces Design Based on the Experience of Residents That Helps to Reduce Psychological Stress and Support Community Well-being in Low-Cost Public Housing in Malaysia

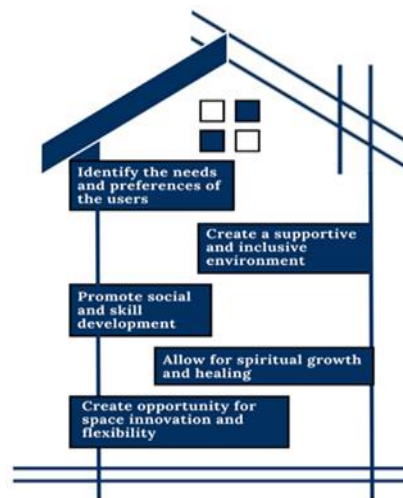


Figure 1. The Low-Cost Public Housing Third Spaces (LUHOTS) Design Framework

The final framework is a design framework for third spaces that help to reduce stress and support community well-being for low-cost public housing in Malaysia. The framework for designing third spaces is elaborated as follows: (i) Identify the needs and preferences of the users: Before designing a third space, it is crucial to understand the needs and preferences of the users. This can be done through user research and observation, which can help to identify the types of activities and interactions that users are interested in. Natural lighting, ample seatings, and biophilic design that involve nature in built environments are among the common preferences of third spaces design for the low-cost public housing in Malaysia. (ii) Create a supportive and inclusive environment: Based on the needs and preferences of the users, designers should design the space in a way that is accessible, friendly, welcoming, and inclusive. This can involve creating spaces for different activities, such as gathering, socializing, sports, or learning. (iii) Promote social and skill development: The third space

should encourage interaction and networking between users and promote social and skill development. This can involve creating spaces for group activities. Activities such as urban farming improve skills in gardening, and sports activities are suitable for physical and mental health. (iv) Allow for spiritual growth and healing: Praying places allow the user to socialize, network, and enhance religious knowledge. The space should facilitate spiritual growth through observation and learning, such as by providing spaces for people to meet and greet with others, join community programs, and learn through religious classes and speeches. (v) Create opportunity for space innovation and flexibility: Finally, it is crucial to continuously iterate and improve the design of the third space based on the needs and preferences of the users. It creates the opportunity for space innovation and flexibility, leaving room for future changes and improvement. To finally complete this paper, the researcher has developed The Low-Cost Public Housing Third Spaces (LUHOTS) Design Framework to contribute to the body of knowledge and reference in the design and architecture field. The LUHOTS design framework is illustrated in the Figure 1.

4. CONCLUSION

The framework anticipated to shorten the gaps in current third space design at the low-cost public housing in Malaysia with the residents third space experience. It is hoped that this framework will benefit the government sectors by serving as a reference for policymaking and implementations by government authorities, government bodies, and related agencies. Additionally, this framework is projected to guide Architects, Landscape Architects, and Town Planners in designing third spaces for low-cost housing. Finally, this research might inspire ideas about third spaces for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to conduct activities and contribute to the low-cost public housing community.

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