

Reappropriating the Void: A Conceptual Framework of Spatial Adaptation and Cultural Resilience in Post-Displacement Resettlement.

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ABSTRACT

Development-induced displacement has become an increasingly prominent feature of urban renewal in Malaysia, often resulting in the relocation of communities into resettlement housing environments that differ significantly from their original socio-spatial contexts. While public spaces in these settings are intended to support social interaction, they frequently fail to accommodate the cultural practices and everyday needs of resettled populations because existing urban planning frameworks tend to emphasize physical provision and functional efficiency over cultural resilience. To resolve this gap, this paper presents a non-empirical, theoretical conceptual framework that bridges spatial production theory and social-ecological resilience models. We argue that community-led spatial reappropriation is the primary physical mechanism through which displaced populations maintain cultural continuity and adapt to their unfamiliar settings. We conceptualize four distinct spatial reappropriation contexts: streets as temporal social spaces, residual and marginal spaces as everyday third places, house compounds as semi-public spaces, and institutional anchors as stabilizing hubs. By transforming planning voids into culturally meaningful environments, these reappropriations preserve spatial memory, foster social cohesion, and mitigate the psychological trauma of cultural dislocation. The paper concludes by presenting key research and planning implications, offering propositions regarding previously untested relationships to guide future empirical validation and culturally responsive public space stewardship.

Keyword: Public space; resettlement housing; cultural resilience; spatial reappropriation; third places.

INTRODUCTION: THE SOCIO-SPATIAL PARADOX OF RESETTLEMENT

Development-induced displacement has emerged as a major consequence of rapid industrialization and urban revitalization in the Global South, forcing the physical resettlement of entire communities (Bernama, 2023b, 2024). While infrastructure developments like the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) and major municipal industrial projects are framed as drivers of economic modernization, they necessitate coercive land acquisitions and significant socio-spatial reorganizations (Bernama, 2023a, 2024). In Malaysia, the traditional village structures (Kampungs) are frequently displaced by structured, high-density housing environments (Harun et al., 2024). These planned environments are designed with a primary emphasis on physical provision, zoning regulations, and functional efficiency, yet they routinely neglect the cultural practices, social networks, and everyday spatial needs of the relocated populations (Mateo-Babiano & Fong, 2024; Shari, 2025).

This mismatch generates a profound socio-spatial paradox in resettlement planning. On one hand, top-down urban frameworks claim to provide safe and inclusive environments by introducing standardized public open spaces, green parks, and institutional facilities (Ismail, 2023; Lee, 2025). On the other hand, these formal spaces often remain sterile, underutilized, or socially disconnected because they fail to reflect the community-driven patterns and historical contexts of the displaced residents (Harun et al., 2021; Shari, 2025). Instead of fostering social integration, rigid physical layouts can actively stifle cultural expression and lead to cultural erosion, social isolation, and spatial conflicts (Pugalis, 2013; Xu et al., 2021). This phenomenon is highly evident in rapidly

developing regions such as Johor, Malaysia, where the expansion of industrial corridors has driven large-scale resettlement efforts (Bernama, 2023c; Ismail, 2023). However, as established by the comprehensive thematic review of Hanis Nazurah et al., (2025), resettlement success cannot be achieved through mere top-down physical shelter provisioning. Instead, resettlement is a multi-dimensional, highly interdependent system governed by five interactive domains: governance and policy, community and social dynamics, economic considerations, infrastructure design, and long-term socio-environmental support mechanisms. When the linkages between these domains are misaligned, well-intentioned institutional housing interventions can produce contradictory and alienating outcomes.

According to the critical guidelines for publishing theoretical works established by Gilson & Goldberg, (2015), a conceptual paper must move beyond summarizing prior literature. It must take a problem-focused approach and answer the 'what's new' question by bridging theories across disciplines and offering an integrated, actionable framework rather than relying on empirical data testing (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015; Whetten, 1989). To date, urban studies literature on resettlement has remained highly fragmented, analysing qualitative lived experiences in isolation from spatial policy or focusing solely on land compensation laws without examining the socio-cultural dynamics of spatial adaptation (Bernama, 2023a; Norberg-Schulz, 1991). Consequently, there is an urgent need for an integrated theoretical lens that bridges spatial production theories with models of social-ecological resilience.

To address this critical gap, this conceptual paper proposes a novel, culturally grounded framework that positions public space reappropriation as the central mechanism for cultural resilience in post-displacement resettlement. We argue that resettled communities are not passive recipients of physical space; instead, they act as dynamic agents who actively reconfigure both formal and informal settings to preserve their collective identity, social ties, and spatial memory (Abid et al., 2023; Singer et al., 2015). By transforming planning 'voids' into lived 'third places,' displaced residents enact everyday cultural resilience. This paper bridges the gap between top-down urban planning and bottom-up spatial agency, formulating a series of testable propositions across four core spatial contexts: streets, residual spaces, house compounds, and traditional institutional anchors.

Theoretical Foundations: Displacement, Space, and Resilience

The Spatiality of Cultural Disruption

Built environments are never merely neutral, geometric voids; they are complex socio-spatial landscapes deeply intertwined with cultural identity and collective memory (Cheng et al., 2018; El-Bardisy, 2024). Consequently, development-induced displacement is a deeply disruptive psychological and cultural trauma rather than a simple logistical relocation (Cheng et al., 2018; Im & T. Swan, 2021). The alteration of physical layouts acts as a direct catalyst for cultural disruption, destroying the spatial reference points that anchor community rituals and self-perceptions of belonging (Cheng et al., 2018). Im & T. Swan, (2021) observe that the sudden loss of familiar settings has profound psychological impacts, severely reducing the opportunities for traditional cultural practices and spontaneous social interactions.

In displacement contexts, this trauma is often exacerbated by the intergenerational transmission of stress, where the loss of community integrity, livelihoods, and ancestral lands weakens the cultural transmission mechanisms between generations (Mak et al., 2021). Furthermore, the broader socio-political and planning policies shape how these integration environments are designed and governed, often imposing exclusionary conditions that exacerbate spatial marginalization (Hynie, 2018; Ziersch et al., 2020). When top-down policies neglect these socio-spatial dynamics, they foster long-term cultural erosion and marginalization, as demonstrated in historical cases of displaced nomadic or rural communities (Cheng et al., 2018; San Lau & Rodgers, 2021).

Homogenization of Public Space and the Social Production of 'Third Places'

Modern urban resettlement strategies are frequently criticized for their tendency toward spatial homogenization and uniformity, which prioritize standardized, low-cost architectural models over responsive designs (Gallistl, 2021; Pugalis, 2013). This trend toward uniformity stifles opportunities for diverse social interactions, cultural expressions, and informal economies, effectively creating physical and socio-economic barriers for marginalized

communities (Pugalis, 2013). When public open spaces are designed solely through a compliance-driven lens of physical provision, they generate significant cultural exclusion because they cannot accommodate the diverse physical, social, and spiritual needs of pluralistic populations (Gallistl, 2021; Isa, Mohamad, et al., 2025).

In response to this exclusion, communities draw upon their spatial memories to reconfigure their surroundings, a process conceptualized in urban sociology as the 'social production of space' (Lefebvre, 1991) and 'tactical urbanism' (Shah et al., 2023). Rather than conforming to rigid planning rules, residents utilize everyday informal practices to reappropriate and reclaim physical spaces, transforming them into vital 'third places' (Oldenburg, 2007) such as informal pocket gardens, street-side stalls, or shared religious hubs that bridge the private and public realms (Qiu et al., 2023; Shah et al., 2023). Culturally responsive design and inclusive place governance recognize these everyday practices as critical to building local capacity, social cohesion, and urban resilience (Mateo-Babiano & Fong, 2024; Merylova et al., 2023).

Bridging Spatial Agency and Cultural Continuity

To fully understand the adaptive capacity and how displaced communities survive and thrive in new environments, we must redefine resilience from a static, engineering concept (focused on returning to a pre-disaster state) to a dynamic, socio-cultural practice (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Singer et al., 2015). Cultural resilience is not an inherent trait but an active, collective process enacted through shared narratives, traditional knowledge, and everyday social rituals that sustain a group's identity amidst structural adversity (Colten et al., 2012; Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Singer et al., (2015) emphasize that incorporating indigenous skills, traditional practices, and ethnic minority customs into public space design fosters strong social ties and preserves cultural capital. A critical gap in current scholarship is the tendency to treat tradition as static and spatial agency as merely physical adjustments (Colten et al., 2012; Singer et al., 2015). As synthesized by prior researchers, existing theoretical frameworks have failed to integrate bottom-up participatory practices, cultural narratives, traditional knowledge, and modern organizational or digital forms of governance into a cohesive framework (Abid et al., 2023; Jamshed et al., 2018; Xiang et al., 2024).

By conceptualizing spatial reappropriation as the physical manifestation of cultural resilience, this paper bridges these disparate theories. We argue that the active modification and negotiation of public space are not deviations from successful planning, but are the very mechanisms through which communities rebuild trust, preserve spatial memory, and maintain cultural continuity in post-displacement environments (Abid et al., 2023; John, 2022). This perspective aligns with the multi-dimensional framework of resettlement success established by Hanis Nazurah et al., (2025), which emphasizes that long-term social sustainability and livelihood recovery depend on a dynamic feedback loop between infrastructure provision (Theme 4) and community agency/social dynamics (Theme 2). Tactical placemaking is not a random physical adjustment; it is a structural mechanism for community survival and trauma-informed post-displacement adaptation.

The Conceptual Framework: Reappropriating the Void

The core contribution of this paper is the 'Reappropriating the Void' conceptual framework. This model posits that post-displacement community adaptation does not occur through passive compliance with planned structures but through active, bottom-up socio-spatial reappropriations. When confronted with a standardized, circulation-oriented built environment, displaced communities utilize their spatial memory and cultural assets to reinterpret and modify formal and informal settings. In doing so, they transform planning voids (underutilized spaces, rigid streets, and property boundaries) into culturally responsive and socially vibrant environments. To visualize the spatial and relational dynamics of this model which to comply for conceptual papers (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015), Figure 1 illustrates the comparative morphology of the traditional, organic village layout versus the modernized, planned resettlement housing grid, highlighting how tactical community adaptations bridge these spatial systems.

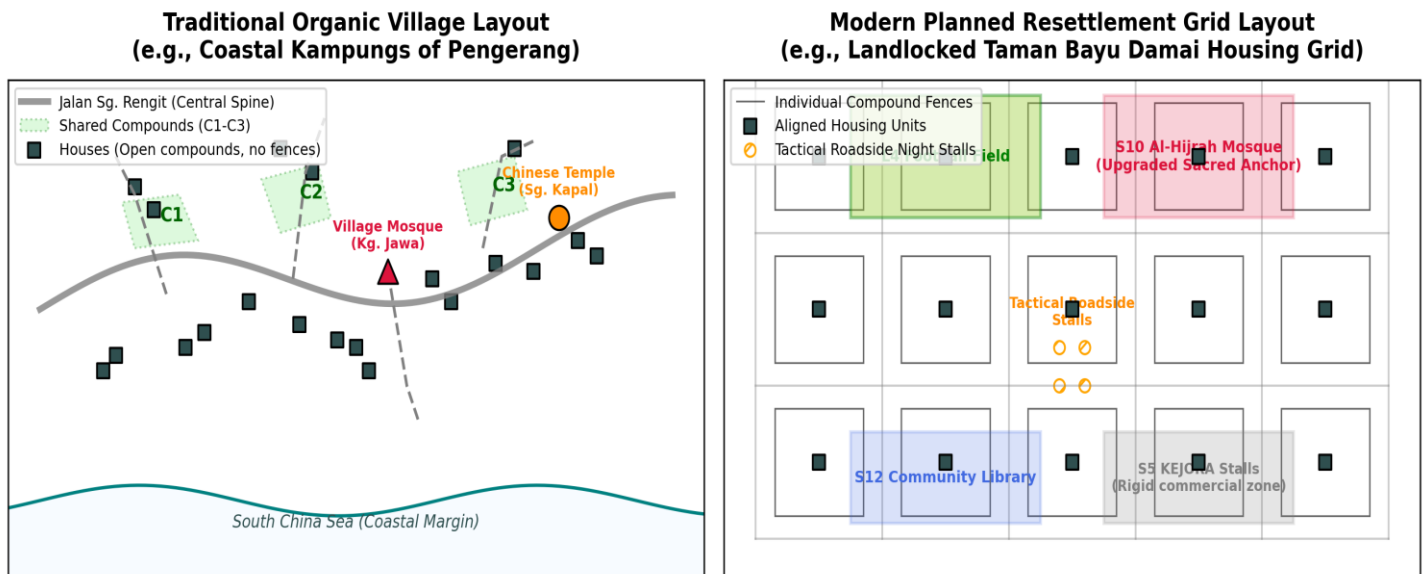


Figure 1. Comparative Morphological Layouts: The organic, community-oriented structure of coastal kampungs (Left) versus the planned, circulation-oriented grid layout of the resettlement housing scheme (Right). The diagram conceptually illustrates how tactical spatial adaptations, such as roadside night stalls and community-managed spaces, emerge on the edges of the rigid grid layout to support the community's socio-cultural survival. (Source: Author)

Table 1 outlines the core pathways of the 'Reappropriating the Void' conceptual framework, mapping the relationship between the four spatial contexts, the corresponding reappropriation mechanisms, their theoretical foundations, the qualitative evidence parameters from the Pengerang case, and the ultimate resilience outcomes.

Table 1: Synthesized Spatial Reappropriation and Cultural Resilience Framework.

Spatial Context	Reappropriation Mechanism	Theoretical Foundation & Key Authors	Resilience Outcome
Streets as Temporal Social Spaces	Temporal conversion of vehicle corridors into social and celebratory spaces (street weddings, night markets, play areas).	Tactical Urbanism (Shah et al., 2023) & Cultural Expressiveness (Pugalis, 2013).	Transforms transport infrastructure into community commons; maintains socio-cultural rituals.
Residual & Marginal Spaces	Organic transformation of neglected buffer zones and vacant lots into community pocket parks or community gardens.	Vacant Space Optimization (Ismail, 2023) & Place Governance (Mateo-Babiano & Fong, 2024).	Fosters social interaction, local food security, and alleviates psychological displacement trauma.

House Compounds as Semi-Public Spaces	Extending residential spaces outward; removing front fences to create open, shared communal spaces.	Spatial Memory and Built Environment (Cheng et al., 2018) & Islamic Built Environment (Isa et al., 2025).	Dismantles public-private barriers; replicates traditional village social patterns and safety nets.
Institutional Anchors	Adapting and expanding places of worship and traditional community halls (Balai Raya) as adaptive community hubs.	Indigenous Skills and Social Capitals (Singer et al., 2015) & Cultural Competence (Lau & Rodgers, 2021).	Stabilizes community leadership; promotes intergenerational cultural continuity and social cohesion.

By identifying these four specific pathways, the framework moves past the rigid public-private dichotomy inherent in Western-centric urban planning literature (Mateo-Babiano & Fong, 2024). Instead, it articulates a nuanced, highly adaptive model where community-led physical modifications enable the preservation of cultural resilience. This model bridges the gap between top-down physical layouts and bottom-up human actions, advancing the dialogue on post-displacement resettlement by illustrating how spatial design interactively supports or hinders social sustainability.

Theoretical Propositions

According to the core principles of theoretical contribution established by Whetten, (1989), a conceptual paper must formulate formal, testable propositions that link theoretical constructs in logical, complete arguments. This section outlines the detailed theoretical arguments and formulates four formal propositions across the core spatial contexts. Crucially, a multi-scalar case study was conducted for community-based evidence and qualitative rigor where each theoretical proposition is grounded through the empirical qualitative findings from interviews to further identify community experiences at Pengerang resettlement scheme at Taman Bayu Damai, Johor.

Streets as Temporal Social Spaces

In modern urban design, streets are conceptualized almost exclusively as functional, mechanical conduits optimized for vehicle flow, efficiency, and safety (Pugalis, 2013). This engineering perspective is imposed upon resettled communities in newly developed housing layouts, disrupting the traditional socio-spatial function of streets as lively social arenas (Harun et al., 2024). Resettled communities, drawing on rural spatial memories and deep-seated cultural patterns, reject this purely functionalist definition and actively engage in the temporal reappropriation of streets (Norberg-Schulz, 1991; Qiu et al., 2023). By introducing temporal social and celebratory uses such as hosting street weddings, religious processions, informal night markets (*pasar malam*), and children's sports events, the community temporarily suspends the functional rules of vehicular transport (Alias Rameli, 2020; Isa, Mohamad, et al., 2025). These flexible reappropriations transform the physical street layout into a vital community common, maintaining cultural rituals that require broad physical open-air platforms. This collective adaptation directly combats social disconnection, reinforcing community solidarity and local identity post-displacement (Harun et al., 2021). Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 1: *In post-displacement resettlement contexts, the temporal reappropriation of functional streets for socio-cultural rituals and collective activities directly mitigates spatial disruption by transforming mechanical transport corridors into active, temporary community commons, thereby fostering social cohesion.*

This proposition is strongly validated by the lived realities of the Pengerang residents in Taman Bayu Damai. In their traditional villages, residents had fenceless, spacious compounds. Following relocation to the tightly packed housing layout of the planned grid, spontaneous encounters on the street dropped significantly due to high

boundaries. As noted by Respondent 1 (R1:1967), *"In terms of public space use, in the old village people would gather at the steps of their houses, since there were no fences. But now, when you pass by the houses, you don't really see neighbours interacting because the fences are all high."* This constraint forced a transition to intentional street reappropriations. Because private plots cannot accommodate large-scale socio-cultural gatherings, residents began partially blocking streets to host traditional ceremonies as highlighted by Respondent 8 (R8:302): *"if the neighbours are understanding, we can set up tents in front of the house and partially close the road. Closing the road only requires a small payment to the local council [RM50], whereas renting the hall is more expensive."* Furthermore, to sustain informal economic livelihoods which were suppressed by the rigid commercial zoning of formal stalls, vendors actively reappropriate street edges after dark. By establishing flexible, highly visible roadside evening tent-stalls, they align their commercial rhythms with the active evening routines of the community as noted by Respondent 6 (R16:131): *"we prepare the food at this stall, then in the evening we move and sell at the tent stall by the roadside. Business is easier there because customers can see us directly from the road. At this KEJORA stall area, people rarely come in during the evening."* These tactical adjustments demonstrate that while the spatial infrastructure remains rigid, communities dynamically manipulate the temporal dimension of streets to recreate the vibrant communal energy of their previous village life.

Residual and Marginal Spaces as Everyday Third Places

Standardized master planning in resettlement housing frequently generates fragmented, underutilized, or completely 'dead' spaces such as buffer zones, vacant green plots, and utility margins (Ismail, 2023; Qiu et al., 2023). While intended to remain open for zoning compliance, these sterile plots lack the inclusivity, comfort, and community engagement required to serve as genuine social spaces, often leading to neglect and anti-social behavior (Gallistl, 2021; Shari, 2025). Rather than leaving these planning voids empty, displaced populations actively colonize these marginal spaces, transforming them into productive 'third places' (Oldenburg, 2007; Shah et al., 2023).

Through community-driven initiatives like tactical community gardens, pocket parks, and informal seating nodes, residents reappropriate these neglected voids (Alias Rameli, 2020; Lintelo et al., 2024). This spatial adaptation allows rural migrants to recreate agricultural self-reliance rituals, manage post-displacement psychological trauma, and establish safe settings for spontaneous cross-cultural interactions (Colten et al., 2012; Im & T. Swan, 2021). These activities optimize vacant lands and rebuild community-level resilience (Ismail, 2023; Landman & Nel, 2021). Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 2: *The organic reappropriation of planned residual and marginal voids into community-managed third places (such as pocket community gardens) fosters higher levels of local environmental resilience and social integration post-displacement than top-down, standardized formal public open spaces.*

In the Pengerang resettlement project at Taman Bayu Damai, residents successfully subverted municipal zoning restrictions to reclaim spatial autonomy over vacant, council-owned residual green buffers. To preserve their traditional agricultural practices and cope with the intense environmental heat and lack of shading in the grid layout, residents initiated micro-agricultural planting on empty margins. As articulated by Respondent 3 (R3:304): *"In some open spaces, residents use them for planting, banana trees and various other crops. Actually, if you follow the rules, this is not allowed. But rather than leaving the land unused, it is better to make use of it. At that time, when we asked the council, they said, 'It's okay, you can plant, but you must take care of it.'"* This tactical agricultural adaptation serves as a crucial emotional buffer, recreating a comforting, green 'kampung atmosphere' and providing platforms for food sharing and neighboring cooperation. Crucially, the multi-ethnic nature of these reappropriations is illustrated by the displaced Chinese-Malaysian coastal fishermen. Stripped of their maritime livelihoods and coastal proximity, the Chinese community negotiated with local authorities to consolidate their historically separate village temples into a single, cohesive 'Temple Village' on replacement land. They modified these sacred residual buffers to function as a vital everyday third place where residents gather for social support, and collectively host traditional festivities as highlighted by Respondent 11 (R11:1043): *"In the old kampung, every village usually organized its own annual Chinese opera performance. After relocating here, all the villages now organize the performance together in one place."* This collective action demonstrates that marginal voids can be successfully reclaimed as multi-functional spaces of social safety and intergroup harmony.

House Compounds as Semi-Public Spaces

Modern housing developments enforce a rigid, physical binary between public property (streets, designated parks) and private property (individual residential plots), characterized by clear property boundaries and high boundary fences (Cheng et al., 2018; Harun et al., 2024). This strict spatial structure directly conflicts with the traditional built environment logic of the traditional communities, where the boundaries of individual house compounds are fluid, open, and porous (Isa, Misnan, et al., 2025; Norberg-Schulz, 1991). To resolve this structural disconnect, resettled residents actively modify their individual house compounds to spatialize their interior cultural logic outward (Cheng et al., 2018).

By modifying porches, extending front yards into the street, and removing or lowering front fences, residents transform their private compounds into fluid, semi-public zones (Isa, Mohamad, et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2021). This architectural reappropriation emulates the traditional, open village environment, allowing the house front to serve as an extension of the public realm. These semi-public porches facilitate spontaneous daily socializing, allow elder residents to monitor the street, and recreate mutual aid and safety networks that are critical to maintaining social cohesion in unfamiliar urban surroundings (Kirkland et al., 2022; Ziersch et al., 2020). Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 3: *Under modern resettlement housing layouts, the physical modification of individual house compounds to create fluid, semi-public communal porches directly enhance collective safety networks and preserves spatial memory, thereby mitigating the cultural alienation of displacement.*

The transition from the organic fenceless compound model of the coastal kampungs to the high-boundary grid layout of Taman Bayu Damai severely disrupted neighborly integration. Residents frequently lamented the physical barriers imposed by high walls. As stated by Respondent 4 (R4:852): *"Now, most houses have built walls and fences. So casually meeting and chatting has become more difficult, people usually meet only during events or gatherings."* To reconstruct spontaneous socializing, residents actively modified their compounds to spatialize publicness outward. They transformed front lawns and porches into open, semi-public coffee stalls, discussions zones, and multi-generational gather spots. In some cases, residents even repurposed functional spaces, such as family-owned mechanical workshops, to serve as informal neighborhood centers as noted by Respondent 1 (R1:1784): *"In this area, even the workshop becomes a place to gather. Cars in front, motorcycles at the back. It becomes a meeting place."* Paradoxically, while the strict fenceline layout disrupted spontaneous socializing, the dense configuration, combined with the community's decision to relocate entire village networks together, fostered a highly supportive system of natural surveillance ('eyes on the street'). As noted by Respondent 6 (R6:779): *"The difference is that here, if something happens, people find out quickly because the houses are located close to each other. We also live beside neighbours we already know. Even if theft happens, people become aware of it quickly. Here, if someone intends to steal, they might think twice because there are many people around and there is strong neighbour presence."* By physically opening their private compounds and relying on these mutual trust networks, the community successfully bridged the gap between bureaucratic boundaries and lived socio-cultural needs.

Institutional Anchors that Enable Social Continuity

While standard physical master plans focus heavily on commercial facilities and environmental green networks, displaced rural populations depend heavily on traditional institutional anchors such as local mosques, suraus, and the traditional Balai Raya (community center), to maintain social and spiritual continuity (Isa, Misnan, et al., 2025; Singer et al., 2015). These institutional structures are not merely static physical facilities; they represent communal hubs where local leadership, collective decisions, and traditional practices are managed and sustained (Colten et al., 2012; Jamshed et al., 2018).

By actively preserving and adapting these institutional anchors to serve multiple cultural, educational, and governance functions, resettled communities establish stabilizing hubs in unfamiliar settings (Isa, Mohamad, et al., 2025; San Lau & Rodgers, 2021). These hubs facilitate the expression of shared cultural values, act as platforms for community dialogue, and bridge cultural differences, thus promoting intercultural harmony and

integration within newly created residential settings (Hjelm et al., 2025; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Xiang et al., 2024). Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 4: *The active preservation, modification, and co-management of traditional institutional anchors (such as local mosques and community suraus) provide a structurally stabilizing hub that promotes intergenerational cultural transmission, local self-governance, and long-term community resilience post-displacement.*

This proposition is vividly demonstrated in the Pengerang relocation scheme, where traditional village institutions served as vital anchors of social stability. During the relocation planning, the state housing layouts had severely under-allocated religious spaces, proposing to replace multiple village mosques with a single surau. Unwilling to remain passive, community leaders actively petitioned the state religious council to upgrade local suraus into a full-scale mosque, successfully transforming institutional structures into repositories of their collective identity as mentioned by Respondent 1 (R1:1023): *"How can three mosques be replaced by one surau? When I looked at the layout plan of Bayu Damai, there is a reserve for a place of worship. I met the Islamic Religious Council, and they said it is possible to request a mosque."* Furthermore, the community negotiated to redesign the mosque architecture to visually represent their specific regional history as explained by Respondent 1 (R1:1143): *"the representative informed me, 'Earlier, the royal mentioned there are no Johor characteristics, so it has to be redesigned'. The mosque being built is quite modern and large. Its style is said to be a 'descendant' of Masjid Abu Bakar, with some similarities."* This physical anchor became a crucial inclusive node, especially for vulnerable demographic groups. For older residents and women who faced spatial isolation within the dense housing grid, the mosque and localized suraus served as safe, accessible platforms for spiritual routines and mutual social support as noted by Respondent 7 (R7:218): *"previously in the old village there were some small activities. now that children are older and my husband has passed away, I am able to join the women here for Yaasin recitations and Quran learning classes."* By co-managing these institutional hubs, residents preserve their village-based affiliations, ensuring that the legacy of their lost kampungs remains dynamically integrated into their new environment.

The Intelligibility Paradox and Stakeholder Applications

Integrating the qualitative case findings from Taman Bayu Damai, Pengerang, with our conceptual framework reveals a significant theoretical phenomenon which is the Socio-Spatial Intelligibility Paradox. In the previous organic settlement, the street system was statistically complex and highly winding, yet the built environment was experienced as an intuitively legible and socially cohesive home environment. Conversely, the planned grid layout of the resettlement housing exhibits clear mathematical navigational legibility, but drops off sharply at larger spatial scales, resulting in a fragmented and socially disjointed environment. This paradox proves that objective physical integration alone does not translate to genuine public accessibility. Rather, as theoretically redefined in our model, public space accessibility and spatial legibility are actively co-produced by physical configurations and lived socio-cultural dynamics. This finding directly addresses the infrastructure-culture bottleneck highlighted by Hanis Nazurah et al., (2025), proving that top-down spatial provisions are fundamentally incomplete unless they are dynamically aligned with the social capital and active agency of the displaced community.

Research Contribution

Theoretical Contributions

By integrating theories of spatial production (Lefebvre, 1991) and cultural resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2011), this framework fills critical gaps in urban planning and sociology literature. Specifically, it addresses the historical failure to examine how bottom-up community agency and tactical adaptations function as structural mechanisms for maintaining cultural resilience post-displacement (Alias Rameli, 2020; Cheng et al., 2018). Furthermore, our framework extends the conceptualization of 'third places' (Oldenburg, 2007) into highly disrupted resettlement environments, showing that these places are not merely leisure settings but are necessary infrastructures for community-level survival and trauma-informed adaptation (Im & T. Swan, 2021; Lintelo et al., 2024).

6.2 Practical Stakeholder Applications

To ensure the paper delivers 'value added' and answers the 'who cares?' question (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015; Whetten, 1989), Table 2 maps the direct practical applications of the conceptual framework for key urban development stakeholders.

Table 2: Actionable Stakeholder Framework Applications.

Stakeholder Group	Core Planning Pain Point Addressed	Actionable Framework Application
Policymakers	High rate of vacant, underused, or contested public amenities in low-cost and resettlement housing projects.	Incorporate dynamic community-use provisions and flexible zoning into national resettlement guidelines. Replace tokenistic, top-down participation with flexible, multi-level co-management frameworks (e.g., formalizing agreements for community gardens).
Urban Planners, Architects & Developers	Spatial homogenization of public spaces; rigid public-private boundaries; failure of physical facilities to support localized economic livelihoods.	Design for 'planned flexibility' in residential layouts. Avoid rigid perimeter walls; incorporate wide, porch-like transitional spaces; integrate flexible, multi-use zoning for streets to accommodate temporary community closures and roadside trading.
Local Municipal Authorities & Housing Managers	Friction between informal spatial uses (e.g., street markets, gardens) and municipal enforcement codes.	Shift enforcement from strict prohibition to collaborative co-management. Develop community-led stewardship agreements for residual voids.
Educational & Research Institutions	Lack of integrated, multidisciplinary curricula bridging physical spatial design with social resilience theories.	Adopt the framework in urban studies and sociology curricula to train future professionals in culturally sensitive planning and post-occupancy evaluation methodologies.

By presenting this explicit mapping of theoretical principles to structural stakeholder actions, the paper provides a robust response to the 'so what?' question (Whetten, 1989). Rather than resting as an elegant, abstract theory, our conceptual model is positioned as a practical bridge between the lived realities of displaced communities and the institutional systems that govern them.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This paper has articulated the need to radically rethink how public spaces are planned, evaluated, and managed in contexts of development-induced displacement. Moving past the rigid, compliance-driven physical provision

paradigms that characterize mainstream urban planning in Malaysia, we have developed a comprehensive, non-empirical conceptual framework that positions spatial reappropriation as a central, active mechanism of cultural resilience. By transforming planning voids into lived third places, displaced populations utilize spatial agency to rebuild social ties, preserve spatial memory, and mitigate the trauma of dislocation.

From a governance perspective, local authorities and planning ministries like KPKT must shift from prohibitive, top-down enforcement to collaborative, flexible co-management models. This includes formalizing community-led stewardship agreements for residual spaces, introducing multi-use temporal zoning for streets, and explicitly recognizing porch and compound modifications as valid forms of organic placemaking rather than municipal violations. By aligning physical design parameters with the socio-cultural patterns of the residents, urban developments can foster genuine inclusion, social cohesion, and resilience.

Finally, this study opens several critical avenues for future research. While this paper provides a robust, integrated theoretical foundation, future empirical studies using both qualitative and quantitative, are needed to test and validate our four formal propositions across diverse resettlement contexts globally. Scholars are encouraged to implement longitudinal research designs to track how spatial reappropriations evolve alongside changing demographic structures over decades. Furthermore, future work should explore the potential synergy between traditional community-led placemaking practices and emerging digital governance tools. By advancing these lines of inquiry, academic and professional practice can cooperate to build truly inclusive, vibrant, and culturally resilient urban environments capable of supporting displaced populations through rapid societal transformations.

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