Creating a Good Living Space Conducive for Well-Being: The Elements in Question (Sub-Theme:6)

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ABSTRACT

A good living environment is when all elements are in unison, complementing each other. It's when an environment is seen as a whole rather than parts. Thus, the correct use of elements in an environment will very well play an important role in well-being and also compensate for the quality life. However, the question is; what are these elements and how can they be effectively integrated into living spaces? Hence, this paper seeks to address these issues by identifying and analyzing the key elements necessary for creating living space conducive for well being. It relates and illustrates by example, how the elements in question can complement each other in a good living environment.

Keywords: Environment, Living space, Well-being, Tangible and Intangible elements.

Introduction

An environment is generally described as the surroundings of a physical system that may interact with the system by exchanging mass, energy or other properties. These include all living and non-living things and also constructed surroundings that provide the setting for human activity. Therefore, a balanced being both inwardly and outwardly in a living space are factors that need to be addressed in order to create an environment conducive for well being. Well being is a condition of an individual or group, for example their social, economic, psychological, spiritual or medical state. The term also describes a state of serenity and inner happiness. However, a good living environment is when all elements are in unison, complementing each other. It's when an environment is seen as a whole rather than parts. Thus, the correct use of elements in an environment will very well play an important role in well-being and also compensate for the quality life. However, the question is; what are these elements and how can they be effectively integrated into living spaces? Hence, this paper seeks to address these issues by identifying and analyzing the key elements necessary for creating a good living space conducive for well being. It relates and illustrates by example, how the elements in question can complement each other in a good living environment.

The Necessary Elements in a Good Living Environment

A good living environment can only be achieved when the necessary elements are in unison. These elements are part, aspect, component or constituent of a whole environment; they are small but significant presence of the abstract quality of a living space. These elements can be grouped into two; tangible (visible) and intangible (invisible) elements (see Figure 1).

(Insert Fig. 1 here about)

Tangible (Visible) Elements

Tangible elements are visible elements that can be seen and touch. Therefore, tangible elements that need to be addressed in order to create a good living environment include; design elements & principles, Homo sapiens, built and natural environment.

Design Elements & Principles

Elements are components or parts which can be isolated and defined in any visual design or work of art (Yangjoo, 2013). They are the structure of the work, and can carry a wide variety of messages. These included; point or mark, line, shape, forms, space, color, and texture. Principles are applied to the elements of design in order to bring them together into one design. However, the application of these principles determines how successful a design will be (John, 1999). According to Visual Literacy (2013), the right combination of design elements used according to design principles can effectively communicate your visual instructional message. Thus, design elements and principles are seen as a major component in a good living environment.

Homo sapiens

This is a species that all living human beings on this planet (earth) belong to; it is also known as "modern humans". According to Goodman *et al* (1990), is the only extant species of the genus *Homo*. Humans are characterized by having a large brain relative to body size, with particularly well developed neocortex, prefrontal cortex and temporal lobes, making them capable of abstract reasoning, language, introspection, problem solving and culture through social learning (Wikipedia, 2013). Therefore, humans have a great capacity for altering their habitats by means of technology, through irrigation, urban planning, construction, transport, manufacturing goods, deforestation and desertification. Thus, humans (Homo sapiens) have major influence on the environment.

Natural Environment

This encompasses all living and non-living things occurring naturally on earth or some region thereof. According to Johnson et al. (1997), it encompasses the interaction of all living species. Natural environment is often used as a synonym for habitat. However, it is difficult to find absolutely natural environments; therefore, according to Symons (1979), we can consider the different aspects or components of an environment, and see that their degree of naturalness is not uniform. If, for instance, we take an agricultural field, and consider the mineralogical composition and the structure of its soil, we will find that, although the first is quite similar to that of an undisturbed forest soil, the structure is quite different. Thus, natural environment plays a significant role in making a living space conducive for well being. Some examples of natural environment include; water (ponds), life (flora & fauna), etc.

Built Environment

Built environment refer to the human-made surroundings that provides the setting for human activity; ranging in scale from buildings and parks or green space to neighbourhoods and cities that can often include their supporting infrastructure such as water supply or energy network (Wikipedia, 2012). According to Roof & Oleru (2008), is the human-made space in which people live, work and recreate on a day-to-day basis. In recent years, public health research has explained the definition of built environment to include healthy food access, community gardens and workability (Lee et al., 2012). Crossly (2003, p38) said that the environments that people craft round themselves are rich with information, about personalities, values and lifestyles. Norman (2004, p225) also stated that our possessions reflect our personalities. Thus, built environment is a material, spatial and cultural product of human labour that combines physical elements and energy in forms for living, working and playing.

Intangible (Invisible) Elements

Intangible (invisible) elements are elements that can only be felt or sense but cannot be seen or touch. To create a good living space conducive for well-being, some intangible elements must be addressed, these include; weather (wind and sunshine), belief system, culture and emotional and spiritual intelligence.

Weather

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2013), weather is the state of the atmosphere, to the degree that it is hot or cold, wet or dry, calm or stormy, clear or cloudy. Weather generally refers to day-to-day temperature and precipitation activity. Weather is driven by air pressure (temperature and moisture) differences between one place and another. These pressure and temperature differences can occur due to the sun angle at any particular spot, which varies by latitude from the tropics. Thus, weather, most especially temperature and wind should be well addressed when creating a living space. The living space should be designed in such a way to bring thermal comfort; this can be achieved by using insulated roof and also positioning the roof in such a way to prevent directly heating of the wall by sunlight. To address the wind, the space must be designed in a way to allow free flow of air into the living space (ventilation). This can be achieved with proper positioning of the opens (such as windows and door); also integration of vent (such as perforated walls) into buildings will help achieve a well ventilated living space.

Culture

According to Dictionary.com (2013), culture can be defined as the quality in a person or society that arises from a concern for what is regarded as excellent. Culture also evolved human capacity to classify and represent experiences with symbols, and to act imaginatively and creatively. It is the distinct ways that people living in different parts of the world classified and represented their experiences, and acted creatively. Terpstran (1987) also defined culture as the integrated sum total of learned behavioral traits that are manifest and shared by members of society. Therefore, culture is not transmitted genealogically. It is not also innate, but learned. Facets of culture are interrelated and it is shared by members of a group who define the boundaries (Carter, 1997). Thus, culture alongside other factors, is probably one of the most important environmental variables to consider in creating a good living space. This is because; culture has influence on our perception, sensitiveness, decisions etc. Although, culture is very often hidden from view and can be easily overlooked; however, overcoming cultural myopia is paramount in creating a good living environment.

Belief System

A belief system is a set of mutually supportive beliefs. The beliefs may be religious, philosophical, ideological or a combination of these (Wikipedia, 2012). According to Glover (2011), beliefs are always a part of a belief system and belief systems are difficult to completely revise. Therefore, he suggested that beliefs have to be considered holistically because; no belief exists in isolation in the mind of the believer. They always implicate and relate to other beliefs. Fringe (1997) stated that there are two types of belief system; personal and global belief system. He explained personal belief system as the actual set of precepts from which we live our daily life, those which govern our thoughts, words and actions. However, when talking about a global belief system, the personal beliefs of most of us only play a small part. To determine the global belief system, we need to look at those who exert great influences in the day-to-day workings of our world. That is, it is the dominant drives of the dominant people in the world government, business and religion. Belief system can either be influence by religion or materialism.

Materialism is the tendency to consider material possession and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values. Materialism results in some ideologies formulated by man which constitute their belief systems. These include; capitalism, socialism, communism, nationalism, racism and atheism. Religion is the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods. According to Wikipedia (2012), is a collection of beliefs system, cultural system, and world views that relate humanity to spirituality and sometimes to moral values. Religion is sometimes used interchangeably with faith or belief system; however, Durkheim (1915) stated that religion differs from private belief in that it is something eminently social. According to Carter (1997), religion provides the best insight into a society's

behavior and helps answer the question why people behave rather than how they behave. Therefore, addressing belief system (religious & material values) when creating a living space is seen as an approach towards enhancing well-being.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to identify, assess, and control the emotions of oneself, of others, and of groups. It affects how we manage behavior, navigate social complexities, and make personal decisions that achieve positive results. According to 'Talent smart' (2013), emotional intelligence is made up of two primary competencies: personal competence and social competence. Personal competence is made up of your self-awareness and self-management skills, which focus more on you individually than on your interactions with other people. Personal competence is your ability to stay aware of your emotions and manage your behavior and tendencies. On the other hand, social competence is your ability to understand other people's moods, behavior, and motives in order to improve the quality of your relationships. Therefore, emotional intelligence taps into a fundamental element of human behavior that is distinct from your intellect. Thus, applying emotional intelligence in creating living space will help in designing a good environment that will suite occupant's motives, behavior etc, thereby enhancing their well-being.

Spiritual Intelligence

Vaughan (2002) defined spiritual intelligence as the inner life of mind and spirit and its relationship to being in the world. It is a capability to have a deep understanding of existential questions and insight into multiple levels of consciousness (Vaughan 2002). Thus, spiritual intelligence helps to transcend the physical and material, experience heightened states of consciousness, sanctify everyday experience and also utilize spiritual resources to solve problems. Therefore, with the current trend where people no longer live in a society with logical order but a perceptual world; applying spiritual intelligence in create a living environment is seen as an approach towards enhancing the well-being.

How to Integrate Elements to Create Good Living Environment

Each element that constitutes a good environment places an important role; therefore, a good living space is always seen as a whole where the elements are complementing each other (See Figure 2). Hence, this section illustrates by example how these elements can be integrated in unison into living space.

(Insert Fig. 2 about here)

Design VS Nature

Well being can be enhanced through designs that address nature. Wind (air) and natural light can be addressed in a living space by creating well ventilated design that allows free circulation of air and penetration of natural light within the house. This can be achieved by integrating perforated walls (vent) into building design has shown in Figure 3a below. Also, ventilation and natural light can be addressed by introducing top and side opening into buildings (Figure 3b).

(Insert Fig. 3a & 3b about here)

Other natural elements such as aquatic life, water, animals, and plants can also be integrated into living space as shown in Figure 4 below.

(Insert Fig. 4 about here)

Design VS Emotional & Spiritual Content

With the great transformation that it taking place now, people are now shifting from materialistic needs to emotional needs. According to Rolf (2009), people will get richer, wealthier and smarter but will seek more on spiritual products. Therefore, emotional and spiritual content is seen as one of the important elements in

a good living space; thus, a design that address this issue will very well enhance people's well being. Hence, introducing traditional aesthetic elements (see Figure 5) into home designs is an approach towards integrating emotional and spiritual content into living space. This is because, traditional aesthetic elements has been known to be a reflection of splendour and beauty, emotionally and spiritually engaging and also rich in story and meanings that have emotional impacts.

(Insert Fig. 5 about here)

Nature VS Emotional & Spiritual Content

Nature and beauty has always been two words that go hand-in-hand. Therefore, elements of nature can also be emotionally and spiritually engaging if introduced into living space. Figure 6 below shows some pictures of natural elements integrated into living space.

(Insert Fig. 6 about here)

Conclusion

In order to achieve a balanced being both inwardly and outwardly in a living environment, the elements identified above (design, nature and emotional & spiritual content) must be integrated into the living space and the elements must be in unison, complementing each other. Thus, the internal and external spaces will be in harmony; seen as a whole; and not only be used for the right thing but will also make occupants feel better. Thereby enhancing their well being and compensating for quality life.

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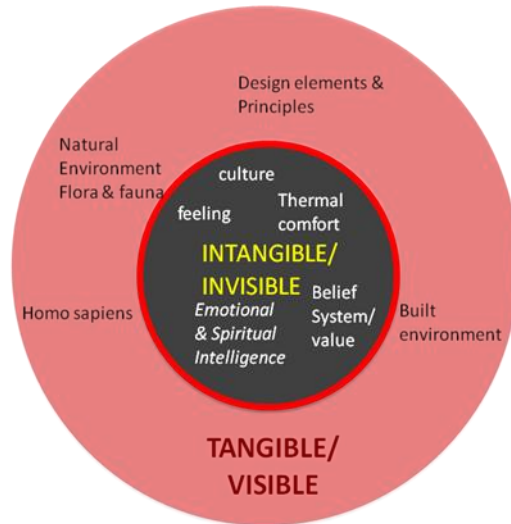
Figure 1: Tangible and intangible elements for a good living space
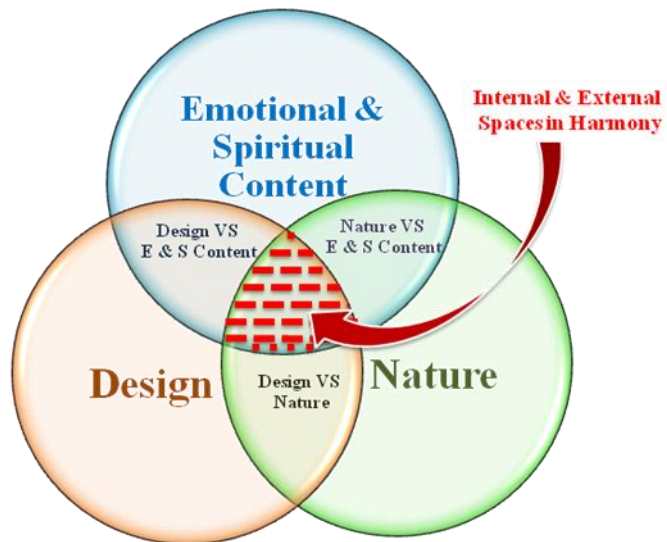

Figure 2: Interrelationship between elements in a good environment

Figure 3a: Perforated walls in building design

Figure 3b: Top and side openings in a building

Figure 4: Natural elements integrated into a living space

Figure 5: Traditional aesthetic elements integrated to building

Figure 6: Natural elements with emotional and spiritual contents