HOUSING CONCEIVED, PERCEIVED & LIVED
A Study of the Relationship between
the Social, Cultural and Built Environment

by

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ABSTRACT

An investigation is attempted to determine the relationship between the physical built environment and the social and cultural networks, which govern the type of spaces produced by the culturally diverse society in Singapore.

This study of relationships is conducted, firstly, by setting the context of the study in terms of Singapore and its political structure; then through the notion of Home and everyday life; and finally through Space. The notion that every society produces its own social space, is used as a starting debate and applied to the local context, to examine space as conceived by the administrators and designers, and space lived and perceived by the residents.

Explorations of the conceived representations of space adopted by the administrators would follow in terms of their stated goals, policies and implementation. Subsequently,
the representations of space conceived by the designers would be explored in terms of heritage and identity.

Housing perceived by the residents through their spatial practice and lived in terms of their representational spaces is explored at the levels of the Estate – the identity, the activities and the changes; the Precinct – the playground, the basketball court and the coffeeshop; the Block – comprising the void-deck, the lifts, stairs, chutes and pipes, and the corridor; and finally at the level of the Flat – in terms of escapism and commodity.

Singapore’s built environment, as argued in this paper, does not exist as the exact mirror of its culture and society, nor does it operate as an empty space which people fill creatively according to the demands of their societal and cultural norms. It lies some where in between the two extremes, although it does lean closer to the latter scenario. In spite of the technocracy of the administrators and their strong conceptualisations of public housing, the social and cultural values of the residents can and have asserted themselves in many instances, to appropriate the space as given.

In order to redefine our public spaces and our public housing, the dichotomy between housing as conceived by the administrators and designers, and housing perceived and lived by the residents needs to be addressed and reconciled.

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