



Shared Spaces

Overview

Shared space refers to space in multi-unit dwellings and apartments that can be accessed by all residents. This includes public amenity areas such as swimming pools, barbeque areas, gyms and children's play areas. It also refers to shared access areas within the residential complex, such as corridors, lifts, stairwells and pathways. The integration of vegetation is noted to have a significant impact on the perceived quality of shared spaces in multi-unit dwellings and apartments. Research has found access to trees and shrubs can reduce residents' perceptions of crowding and therefore promotes a more satisfying residential environment [1].

Offering private, secure and accessible shared spaces within a building can contribute to improved liveability for residents, including:

- improved privacy and sense and security
- greater sociality among residents if desired

Guidelines highlight the need for private and public open spaces to be accessible, attractive, safe and comfortable for users [2].

What Our Findings Revealed...

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Accessing shared spaces

Being able to access facilities in communal areas was considered useful in high-density areas with over half of the respondents from the QUT High-Density Living Study indicating they were very much to extremely satisfied with the communal facilities (pool, clotheslines, laundry) within the building. However, these facilities were not frequently used. Although over two thirds of surveyed residents had a swimming pool in their complex, 31% stated they never use the pool in their complex; 40% use it once a month; 19% use it once a week and only 10% use it on a daily basis. As interviews revealed, generally, residents did not like the idea of sharing communal spaces at the same time as other residents, with many preferring to use the pool/gym in privacy when other residents were not there or simply not using the areas at all.

If I was in a complex that had a pool and a gym and a BBQ area, I don't think I would use it and that's not something I'd look for in another place that I'd move into. Just because I think I'd prefer that anonymity of going down to some other pool or.. I wouldn't be too up for sharing that communal space.

Rather than being places for incidental meetings, interviewees revealed communal areas were often used when visitors came or for planned social gatherings.

I'm ashamed to say I've never used the pool, but I'm not really one to use the pool. Except when I've stood around it for drinks and common social gatherings.

Private space verse social space

Shared areas such as corridors, lifts and stairwells were discussed in terms of being places where residents could meet each other. However, many residents liked to keep to themselves and valued privacy in these shared areas. Many interviewees indicated they were happy to maintain a simple 'hello' relationship with their neighbours yet did not want to feel pressure or obligation to talk to neighbours. Some even avoided social contact completely if possible.

I like that when we go out we don't have to stand and have a little chat every five minutes. You can just come and do your own thing.

I don't know whether I could live in a tower unit. You know...getting up in the morning and walking outside and having three other sets of other people walk out on the same floor and having to say good morning to them ain't my game. I just need a bit more privacy and so on and that. So these villas are just like living in a detached house really. ...the towers are nice but the villas are terrific.

Desire for social connections within the dwelling was perhaps linked to age, with some older residents enjoying interaction with their neighbours. One retired resident spoke about how she enjoyed socialising with her neighbours and would attend frequent social gatherings organised for building residents (e.g. BBQs for residents).

Secured shared spaces

It was also important for shared spaces (especially leading to private spaces) to be secure for residents. This was maintained through locked doors and access-ways and well-lit paths. One resident explained how he added security grills to the fire escape door leading to a communal access way to improve his sense of security within the building. However, privacy was still a concern and would have needed further modifications to rectify this.

I do feel secure. The fire escape is hardly ever used but I would not be able to have the door open if the fire escape was well used because people walking past would see me lying in bed. And that would scare the hell out of anyone [laughs]. I'd have to rethink the type of security. You can get those security doors that you can't see through. So I still would be able to have the door open if I had that sort of screen security door.

Recommended Guidelines

The following table presents practical suggestions for Residents, Building Managers, Designers and Developers for improving the liveability of shared spaces in buildings/complexes.

	Residents	Building Manager	Designer	Developer
Provide clear delineation between public, communal and private areas		✓	✓	✓
Ensure adequate space for substantial shade trees in overall site plan, particularly on the western and eastern sides of building		✓	✓	✓
Allow flexibility in configuration and design of communal spaces to allow residents opportunities for privacy, if desired.		✓	✓	✓
Ensure intended demographic and their amenity needs are well understood – consider the availability of recreational spaces and facilities in the area, potential current and future demands, and provide new facilities accordingly. For example, people with little time or inclination to use communal recreational facilities may benefit from informal open space that provides a green outlook from units. People who are retired may enjoy space for gardening.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Design shared spaces that can be well maintained		✓	✓	✓
Consider providing specialised facilities that can be shared by other developments in the local area			✓	✓
Secure access areas between private and shared space both within the dwelling and external to the dwelling		✓	✓	

Further Information

Brisbane City Council: Multi Unit Dwelling Criteria

[HTTP://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/BCC:BASE:557450312:pc=PC_5317](http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/BCC:BASE:557450312:pc=PC_5317)

Your Home Technical Manual and Website - Apartments and Multi Unit Housing

<http://www.yourhome.gov.au/technical/pubs/fs412.pdf>

Queensland Government: Department of Housing: Affordable Housing Design Guidelines

http://www.qchc.asn.au/Portals/0/Uploads/Affordable%20Housing/aff_hsg_des_guidelines.pdf

Department of Sustainability and the Environment (DSE), Victoria: Guidelines For Higher Density Residential Development - Element 5 Building Layout And Design

[http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/E1D34293A9CDA692CA257070001C40CC/\\$File/Guidelines+for+Higher+Density+Residential+Development+3.pdf](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/E1D34293A9CDA692CA257070001C40CC/$File/Guidelines+for+Higher+Density+Residential+Development+3.pdf)

References

1. Kearney, A. R., *Residential Development Patterns and Neighborhood Satisfaction: Impacts of Density and Nearby Nature*, Environment and Behavior, 2006. **38**, 112
2. Department of Sustainability and the Environment, *Guidelines for Higher Density Residential Development – Element 5 Building Layout and Design*, [cited 5 June 2009]. Available from: [http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/E1D34293A9CDA692CA257070001C40CC/\\$File/Guidelines+for+Higher+Density+Residential+Development+3.pdf](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/E1D34293A9CDA692CA257070001C40CC/$File/Guidelines+for+Higher+Density+Residential+Development+3.pdf)
3. Photography Page 1: Lorraine Bell, 2008. Kangaroo Point, Brisbane.