

EXPLORING USER-LED SPATIAL PRACTICE AND USER DESIGN TOOLS IN URBAN LOW AND MIDDLE-INCOME RESIDENCES: A STUDY BASED IN KITULWATTE, COLOMBO

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Abstract: In many developing Asian countries, informal user-led architectural production is prevalent, with dwellings designed and built largely without professional input. Unlike traditional architectural practices, where design, construction, and inhabitation are distinct phases, users perceive these aspects as interconnected, influencing each other continuously and simultaneously, resulting in unexpected and rich spatial experiences. This study focuses on informal user-led architectural production in Sri Lanka, examining the design methods users employ through Jonathan Hill's framework of user creativity types. By analysing the architectural features of user-designed homes, identifying manifestations of user creativity, and assessing the influence of user-led production on urban adaptability and vibrancy, this research aims to underscore the creative and significant architectural contributions of users. Through an analysis of four residences in Kitulwatte, Colombo, the research reveals the conscious and subconscious processes inherent in user-led design, highlighting their substantial contribution to the urban fabric. This holistic approach transforms architecture from a static product into a dynamic process that continually evolves to meet individual needs. By elucidating the unique design tools and approaches employed by users, this paper enriches the discourse on architectural agency and challenges conventional notions of authorship, showcasing the profound impact of user influence on shaping the built environment.

Keywords: *User-led design, architectural agency, urban low-income residential, design tools, creative user*

1. Introduction

In "The Death of the Author," Barthes (1968) argues that the author has limited control over their own content, with meaning being dictated by the reader's interpretation. Barthes' perspective suggests that a text can have multiple meanings, offering a fluid and creative experience for the reader. When this idea is applied to architecture, Hill (2003) implies that the architect's control over a building is constrained, while users have the freedom to interpret, use, and perceive the building in their own ways. Hill's framework illustrates how users, driven by their personal needs and creativity, influence the design and construction of their living spaces. This perspective is particularly relevant in many Asian countries, including Sri Lanka, where informal, user-led architectural production is prevalent. According to Awan, Schneider, and Till (2011), informal user-led production involves non-professionals designing, modifying, and constructing their spaces based on immediate needs and available resources. Awan, Schneider, and Till emphasise that this approach embodies a form of spatial agency where the user's role transcends conventional boundaries of passive reception, allowing them to shape the built environment actively.

In Sri Lanka, many low- and middle-income individuals bypass professional architects, opting for flexible and adaptive approaches to building. Havik, Patteeuw, and Teerds (2011) describe how this results in a dynamic urban landscape where spaces are informally modified by users, creating vibrant living environments. Havik, Patteeuw, and Teerds highlight that this phenomenon reflects a form of productive uncertainty and indeterminacy in spatial design, where the lack of formal planning opens up opportunities for creative adaptations. Leach (1997) emphasises that architecture encompasses complex social, cultural, and philosophical contexts, advocating for an inclusive understanding where user interpretations play a crucial role. Till (2009) supports this view by noting that architecture is not solely defined by the intentions of the architect but also by the evolving interactions between users and their environments.

This study investigates the impact of user-led architectural production on Sri Lanka's built environment, focusing on both low-income (households earning below LKR 30,000 per month) and middle-income (households earning between LKR 30,000 and LKR 100,000 per month) communities. Unlike formal architectural practices, informal user-led production involves non-professionals designing, modifying, and constructing their spaces based on immediate needs and available resources. This approach is marked by its flexibility, resourcefulness, and adaptability. The research aims to analyse the architectural features of user-designed and built homes, identify the types and manifestations of user creativity in informal production, and assess the influence of user-led production on urban adaptability and vibrancy. By challenging traditional views of architectural authorship, the study advocates for a broader understanding of architectural agency that includes user contributions.

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This research underscores the creative potential and architectural contributions of users, demonstrating how their agency significantly shapes the built environment. Till (2014) highlights the importance of understanding architecture as a dynamic, user-influenced process rather than a static, architect-driven product. The findings reveal the innovative ways in which residents modify their surroundings to suit their needs better, thus enriching the urban landscape and fostering a more vibrant and resilient community.

2. Users and their design tools

Whether intended or not, every design for a building suggests a model user. The connection between an architect and a user can be likened to that of a director. Architects often envision a controlled interaction between their designs and users, but real-life interactions reveal a broader spectrum of user engagement and creativity. Awan, Schneider, and Till (2011) illustrate that this interaction exemplifies a shift from a singular architectural vision to a collaborative process where user input is pivotal. It is common for an architect to describe a building as a sequence of emotive spatial experiences shared by all users, but users are far from uniform, and their experiences are highly unlikely to conform to those envisioned by the architect.

What makes a user? According to Hill (2003), in “Actions of Architecture,” the passive user is consistent, predictable, and transforms neither use, space, nor meaning. The reactive user modifies the physical characteristics of space as needs change but must choose from a narrow and predictable range of configurations largely defined by the architect. In both cases, the passive and reactive users depend on existing conditions as conceived by the designers. Hill (2003) notes that most architectural processes define the user as passive, suggesting that architects can predict, use, and promote models of experience that imply a manageable and passive user, unable to transform use, space, and meaning. However, Hill (2003) also defines the creative user as someone who engages in a more dynamic interaction with their environment, either creating new spaces or repurposing existing ones in ways that challenge established norms and expectations.

2.1. CONVENTIONAL DESIGN

One of the aims of the architectural profession is to further the idea that only architects make buildings and spaces that deserve the title of architecture. This traditional perspective positions the architect as the primary author and authority in the creation of architectural spaces, with users playing a secondary role. Hill (2003) argues that while users are an important consideration, their actions may threaten the architect’s claim to be the sole author of architecture. In this traditional context, user-led design practices challenge established hierarchies by demonstrating that meaningful and functional architecture can emerge from informal, user-driven processes. Awan, Schneider, and Till (2011) highlight that this challenges the notion of exclusive architectural authority and emphasises the role of users as active contributors to the built environment.

Architects enable users to participate in the design process through approaches like flexibility, polyvalence, and participatory design. Collins (1965) notes that flexibility, often embraced by architects, represents a continuation of functionalism. This approach assumes that architects can anticipate and accommodate the future needs of users, allowing them to retain some control over the building’s future and extending their influence beyond the immediate design phase. However, flexibility does not necessarily empower users with significant agency in the design process; rather, it maintains a degree of control within the architectural profession. Havik, Patteeuw, and Teerds (2011) argue that while flexibility allows for adaptability, it does not inherently involve users in decision-making. In participatory design, users are typically offered a selection of predetermined options, limiting their influence on the initial design. Greenbaum (1993) points out that collaborative design holds promise for bridging this gap by fostering ongoing dialogue and shared decision-making between architects and users. However, practical challenges such as power dynamics, resource constraints, and time limitations often hinder the realisation of truly collaborative processes.

Although these approaches aim to involve users or accommodate their evolving needs, they frequently fall short of granting true autonomy. Till (2009) suggests that architects’ attempts to integrate user feedback often reflect a limited understanding of user agency, maintaining a framework where user input remains supplementary rather than central to the design process. The users that architects design for are typically reactive rather than creative.

2.2. USER-LED DESIGN

User-led design and construction typically occur on a small scale, driven by immediate needs rather than speculative projects. This approach focuses on essential functions such as eating, sleeping, cleaning, and working. Havik, Patteeuw, and Teerds (2011) observe that in this context, the architectural agency is distributed, with users actively shaping their spaces to meet personal needs and preferences. This reflects a deeper engagement with their environments.

In user-led contexts, design choices often blend practicality, resourcefulness, and adaptability. Users enrich their environments through accretion, where they progressively add decor and functional elements over time. Subtraction simplifies spaces by removing excess elements, thus improving both functionality and aesthetics. Appropriation

involves repurposing existing elements demonstrating creativity within resource constraints. Multifunctionality is also central, allowing spaces to serve multiple purposes and resisting rigid categorisation.

In Sri Lanka, the prevalence of user-led design is largely due to economic constraints, which make professional architectural services financially inaccessible for many individuals.

2.3. TYPES OF USER CREATIVITY

Jonathan Hill (2003), in his seminal work **Actions of Architecture: Architects and Creative Users**, presents a comprehensive typology of user creativity in architecture. This framework provides a lens through which to understand the diverse ways users engage with and transform their spaces, revealing the dynamic nature of user-led design.

Hill (2003) defines several types of user creativity. 'Mental Creativity' involves users' cognitive and perceptual engagement with spaces, influencing their subjective understanding of the built environment. 'Bodily Creativity' focuses on users' physical and sensory interactions with spaces, emphasising the embodied nature of spatial experience. 'Physical Creativity' pertains to users making tangible modifications to their environments, reflecting their agency in personalising and arranging their spaces. 'Constructional Creativity' involves users participating in DIY projects or building activities, contributing to the transformation of their lived spaces through the act of construction. Lastly, 'Conceptual Creativity' deals with users' contributions to abstract ideas and meanings related to architecture, providing narratives and symbolic interpretations.

Hill (2003) highlights that user creativity can be both accidental and intentional, occurring individually or in combination. His typology showcases the diverse and dynamic ways users engage with and shape architectural processes. Hill's framework challenges traditional notions of passive user roles and underscores the importance of recognising user creativity in architectural design. This perspective is further supported by Awan, Schneider, and Till (2011), who emphasise that understanding user creativity is crucial for acknowledging the role of users in shaping architectural outcomes.

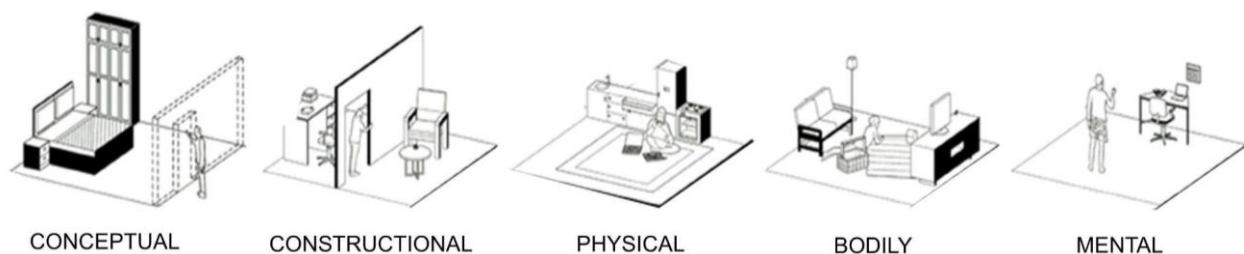


Figure 1, Illustration of creativity types of users as outlined by Jonathan Hill
(Source: Illustrated by author)

3. Methodology

This section outlines the qualitative approach and case study strategy employed to explore user-led residential design in Colombo.

3.1. RESEARCH APPROACH AND STRATEGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach, using a case study strategy to explore user-led residential design in Colombo. Steen (2008) notes that the case study method is particularly suitable for examining the complex, real-life processes through which residents design and construct their homes independently. This method allows for capturing the nuanced experiences, decisions, and adaptations of residents in response to their socio-economic conditions and personal needs.

3.2. SITE SELECTION

Priority was given to selecting a site in Colombo known for prevalent user-led design practices. The study focuses on four residential structures located on Kitulwatte Road, Colombo. This area, situated between Borella Cemetery and several educational institutions, is characterised by a blend of low-income commercial activities and spaces with blurred boundaries. Historically, Kitulwatte began as stables during the British colonial period and later served as graphite storage rooms. Over time, it evolved into a worker community housing over 50 families. The ongoing modernisation and population growth on Kitulwatte Road has led to infrastructural upgrades that have consequently reduced the available space within homes. Walter (1934) discusses how such historical development illustrates the adaptability of user-led design practices to economic constraints and infrastructural changes. The community exhibits strong generational unity, with residents maintaining close relationships and celebrating cultural events together. The inward-facing homes promote social interaction and communal surveillance, while the shared resources and responsibilities among residents reflect a cohesive community structure.

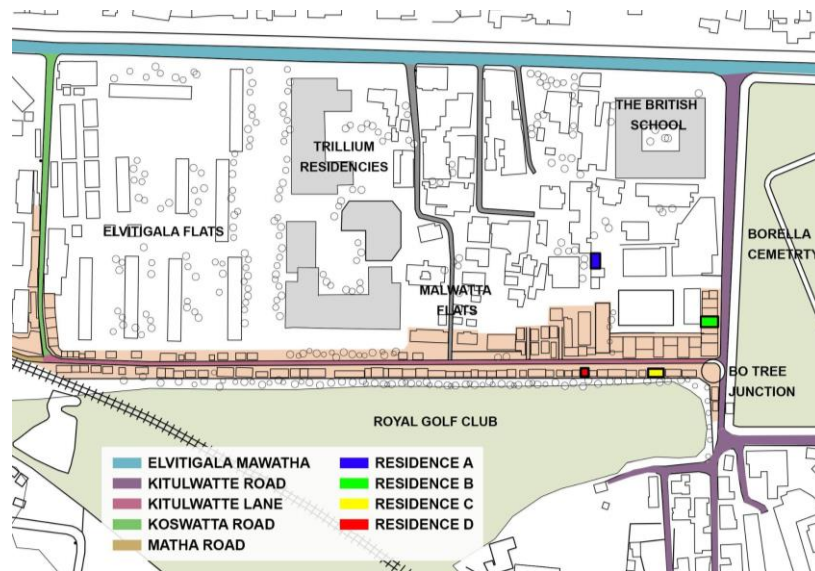


Figure 2, Site
(Source: Compiled by author)

3.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND TOOLS

In-depth interviews with residents who independently designed their homes explored their experiences and decision-making processes. Semi-structured interviews, conducted 2-3 times per resident, used both open- and close-ended questions to uncover motivations, challenges, and design influences. Out of the seven houses interviewed, four were selected for this case study due to the adequacy of the information obtained. These interviews highlighted the effects of budget constraints, space limitations, and urbanisation trends. Names were kept confidential for privacy.

Direct observations of house layouts provided insights into how residents adapted to constraints. Photographs of houses and interiors documented design choices, complementing interview data with visual evidence, with consent obtained from all participants.

The analysis involved detailed descriptions of each residence, considering historical, familial, and socio-economic contexts. User creativity was categorised into mental, bodily, physical, constructional, and conceptual types, with actions linked to these categories. Spatial analysis reviewed layouts, floor plans, room functions, and circulation patterns. Functional analysis assessed how well spaces met residents' needs. Morphological analysis examined the form, structure, and architectural elements. Socio-cultural analysis explored cultural practices and social dynamics affecting design and space use. These methods offered a comprehensive view of design decisions and their impact.

3.4. SELECTION OF SUBJECTS

This study is focused on residents who have completely designed, built their houses from scratch, with no involvement from architects, making them the ideal creative user. Four urban homes were selected, studied and analysed using Jonathan Hill's framework of creativity types. By selecting subjects who have undertaken the entire design and construction process independently, the study highlights the extent of user agency and creativity in architectural production.

Firstly, specific criteria were established to define low-income households, considering factors such as monthly income, family size, and socio-economic indicators. A random sampling method was employed within the low-income category to ensure a diverse representation of households across varying income levels. Informed consent was sought from the selected residents, followed by an initial survey to collect demographic data and contextualise their economic background. It ended with observational studies and in-depth interviews to capture the daily routines, activities, and spatial utilisation within each residence, shedding light on visible signs of user creativity.

4. Case studies, analysis and findings

4.1. CASE STUDIES

This research investigated four urban homes located on Kitulwatte Lane. The homes are mapped in (Figure 2), Residences A, B, C and D.

4.1.1 Case study: Residence A

The house is located in a sub-lane off Kittulwatte Lane and is notably well-maintained compared to nearby homes. It is one of the original residences in the area, housing a family of seven. One son is employed in the private sector with

a significant income, while the retired parents manage household affairs. The mother runs a sewing business from home, operating in the dining room during the day and moving her sewing machine to the living room when meeting customers.

She has expressed a need for a dedicated sewing room to work without disrupting other family members. Currently, leftover fabrics from her work serve as makeshift doors to the bedroom. A toilet was added to the house, initially intended for the kitchen, but was relocated outside due to the kitchen's small size.

This family's situation illustrates the socio-economic dynamics of Kittulwatte Lane, highlighting the interaction between family roles, economic activities, and the challenges of self-reliance.

Table 1, Case Study A: Analysis of user creativity types

Creativity type	Action	Application
Mental	Sewing shop with workspace and customer seating in the living room	The mother's use of the living room as a makeshift store and workspace illustrates mental creativity. Her ability to reimagine domestic spaces for business needs aligns with Hill's concept of adapting spaces beyond their original intent.
Bodily	Sewing in the kitchen	Moving the sewing machine and furniture between rooms highlights the bodily engagement with the space, showcasing the user's physical interaction and adaptation.
Physical	Moving furniture from dining to the living room to help her work	Rearranging furniture to create a functional workspace exemplifies physical creativity. These tangible modifications personalise the environment to suit the family's needs better.
Constructional	Relocation of toilet outside	Relocating the toilet outside due to kitchen size constraints demonstrates constructional creativity. This DIY modification reflects active involvement in altering the living environment.
Conceptual	Patchwork from leftover fabrics as doors	Using leftover fabrics to create doors adds both a functional and aesthetic dimension to the space. This approach reflects conceptual creativity, integrating abstract ideas and meanings into the environment.



Figure 3, Case study A: Plan with creativity types mapped
(Source: Photographed and compiled by author)

4.1.2 Case study: Residence B

Residence B, a converted stable house, is one of the first properties in the area to receive official deeds and houses five people. Over time, it has been adapted to include a front-facing shop that attracts many customers from local institutions and residents. The homeowner envisions the house as a growing business space and a future home for her family, especially her grandchildren.

To create the shop, she moved the living room further into the house and added partitions to establish a small store area. The living room now serves as both a retail space and a tea-serving area, with an expanded window for customer interaction. During the day, the front door is open for customers to enjoy tea inside, away from the sun, while in the evening, seating extends outside for a pleasant atmosphere. A cupboard acts as a makeshift wall to

separate the shop from the private living space, and the elevated mezzanine floor offers privacy, replacing the need for a door.

Table 2, Case Study B: Analysis of user creativity types

Creativity type	Action	Application
Mental	Reimagining the living room as a shop	Converting part of her living room into a shop demonstrates mental creativity. The owner reimagines the space for both business and residential use, showcasing her ability to create new functions for existing areas.
Bodily	Moving between indoors and outdoors for tea	The physical movement between indoor and outdoor spaces for serving tea highlights bodily creativity. This interaction with the space through bodily movements and sensory experiences shows how the environment adapts to different times and customer needs.
Physical	- Seating for customers to drink tea indoors during day time, outdoors during evening time - Door will be closed depending on if she wants customers in	Modifications such as indoor seating for customers during the day and outdoor seating in the evening exemplify physical creativity by adapting the space to serve various functions.
Constructional	Addition of a shop space with partitions Larger window for the store	Adding partitions to create a shop area and enlarging the window for customer interaction reflect constructional creativity. These changes involve actively altering the physical environment to enhance business operations.
Conceptual	Creating privacy for a bedroom with no door by using the mezzanine floor as a bedroom	Using the mezzanine floor as a private bedroom without a door demonstrates conceptual creativity. This approach to using vertical space for privacy, despite the lack of a traditional door, merges abstract ideas with practical needs in user-led design.

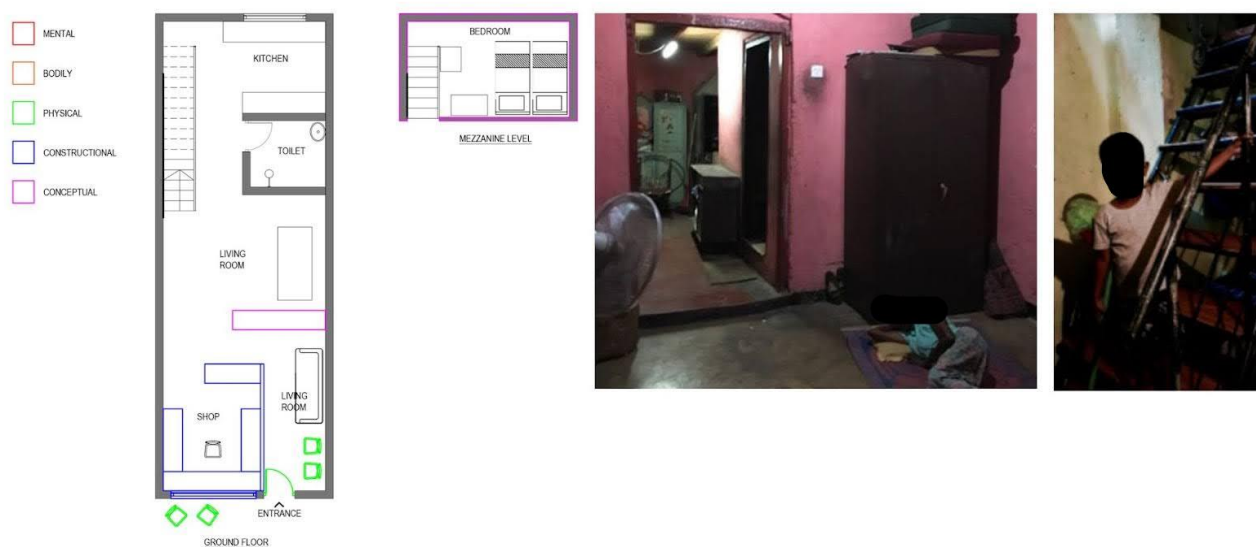


Figure 4, Case study B: Plan with creativity types mapped
(Source: Photographed and compiled by author)

4.1.3 Case study: Residence C

This nuclear family's home has been uniquely adapted to accommodate the father's welding business. The living area is divided into two zones, serving as an open workspace during business hours and reverting to a family living room outside of these hours.

The living room's dual function highlights the father's effort to balance domestic and professional needs within the same space. It serves as a living room, dining area, and workshop, with mental barriers separating these functions. To improve efficiency, the father is expanding the workspace to include dedicated storage for welding supplies, aiming for a more organised environment. This home exemplifies adaptability, with the space transforming daily to meet both family and work needs.

Table 3, Case Study C: Analysis of user creativity types

Creativity type	Action	Application
Mental	The living area, dining area and workspace are one big area. There are mental barriers to separating the three.	The father's mental division of the living area into a workspace, living room, and dining area demonstrates mental creativity, ensuring functionality and harmony despite the space's multiple uses.
Bodily	Daily transformation of the living area into a workspace	The daily transformation of the living area into a welding workspace highlights bodily creativity, showcasing the father's physical interaction with and adaptation to the space.
Physical	Utilising the living area for multiple purposes	The tangible modification of the living area to serve different functions throughout the day exemplifies physical creativity. The creation of a workspace to separate it from the living and dining areas illustrates how the physical environment is adapted to meet various needs.
Constructional	Extending workspace for more storage space for working and making the bathroom bigger Planning to move storage space near the work area and break the current store to make more space for living and dining.	The expansion of the workspace to include a dedicated storage area for welding supplies and the reconfiguration of the space for better efficiency reflect constructional creativity. These changes involve active participation in altering the physical environment.
Conceptual	Curtains for doors	Using curtains as makeshift doors for privacy and organising the space to function efficiently without physical barriers illustrate conceptual creativity.

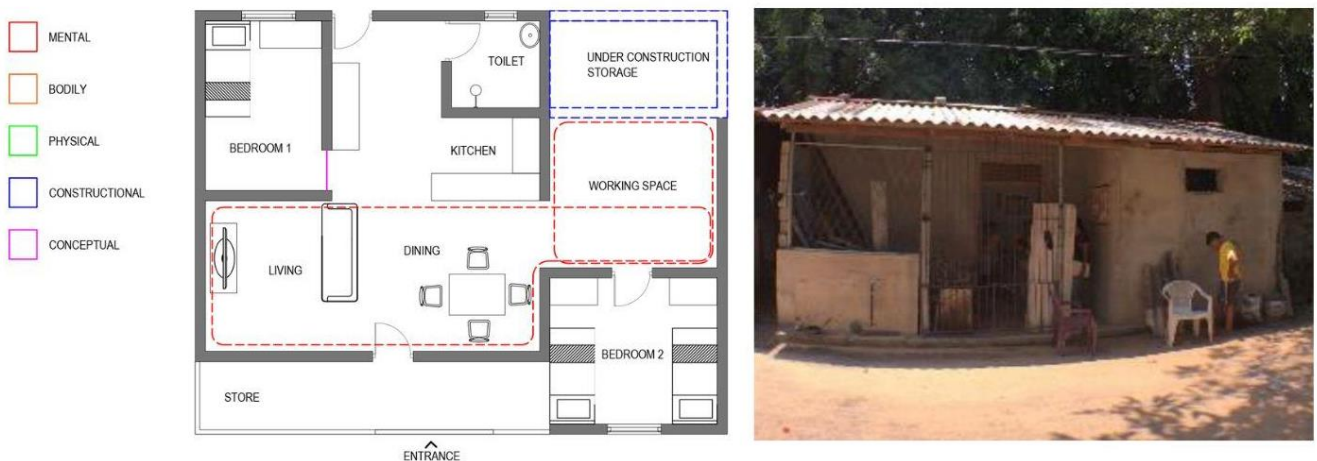


Figure 5, Case study C: Plan with creativity types mapped
(Source: Photographed and compiled by author)

4.1.4 Case study: Residence D

A typical nuclear family of four resides in this middle-income home. The father, employed at a large corporation, has made significant improvements to the house, setting it apart from most of his neighbours. Despite spatial constraints and future road expansion concerns, the family has made notable upgrades.

To address space limitations, an additional floor was added, followed by the creation of a rooftop terrace. This terrace provides an elevated leisure area and an unobstructed view of the adjacent golf course, a rare privilege in the area. Inside, the home features no physical interior walls except for the toilet; instead, spaces are defined by psychological barriers. Cupboards serve as physical dividers between the sleeping area and other parts of the home. The living room doubles as a garage at night and reverts to a living space during the day.

The father's efforts to maximise the living environment and its view highlight his commitment to optimising their space and resources.

Table 4, Case Study D: Analysis of user creativity types

Creativity type	Action	Application
Mental	The house has no interior walls (except for the toilet). Each space is mentally demarcated. The garage, bedroom, living room, dining room, and kitchen are in a single space. Bedroom and living in a singular space.	The absence of physical interior walls, with spaces mentally demarcated, highlights mental creativity. Combining living, dining, and sleeping areas requires cognitive effort to manage and utilise the space effectively.
Physical	The living room turns into a garage at night.	Transforming the living room into a garage at night demonstrates physical creativity. This adaptation shows the user's ability to repurpose the environment for different functions.
Constructional	The addition of two floors	The physical modifications to the house, including adding floors and a rooftop terrace, exemplify constructional creativity. These changes involve direct participation in altering the home's structure.
Conceptual	Cupboards as walls for the bedrooms	Using cupboards as makeshift walls to create private sleeping areas illustrates conceptual creativity. This innovative approach reflects abstract thinking and effective solutions for privacy in an open-plan layout.



Figure 6, Case study D: Plan with creativity types mapped
 (Source: Photographed and compiled by author)

4.2. FINDINGS

Hill's framework is justified in analysing the urban homes of Kitulwatte Lane in Colombo, Sri Lanka, as it offers a detailed understanding of user interaction with spaces. Hill's typology—mental, bodily, physical, constructional, and conceptual creativity—provides a structured approach to analysing how residents engage with and transform their environments. This framework is particularly relevant to Kitulwatte Lane, where creative and adaptive space use is critical. Hill's framework demonstrates that user creativity is proactive and evolves dynamically with inhabitants' needs.

The socio-economic context of Kitulwatte Lane aligns with Hill's (2003) focus on user-led design driven by economic constraints. Hill (2003) highlights that financial limitations often lead residents to design their own homes, showcasing their resourcefulness and adaptability. This perspective is reinforced by Bittencourt et al. (2015), who assert that user creativity frequently emerges from practical challenges and constraints, especially in low-income settings. By integrating Hill's (2003) framework, the study enhances ethnographic insights, structuring the understanding of how residents live and adapt to their environments. This approach enriches the case study with a deeper explanation of the creative processes and user agency involved. Hill (2003) illustrates that informal user-led practices in Kitulwatte result in dynamic spatial configurations that reflect a deep understanding of individual and familial needs. This hands-on, adaptive approach highlights all five types of user creativity as defined by Hill and contrasts sharply with more static, top-down design approaches that often fail to address the nuanced needs of inhabitants.

Steen (2008) shows that user-led design across four residential projects views the design phase as an integrated process where design, construction, and inhabitation occur simultaneously. This holistic approach leads to architecture that meets specific needs and allows for continuous adaptation and improvement, empowering individuals to take ownership of their spaces.

Resident C: "We can always change parts of our house when we need to."

Traditional architectural approaches often emphasise fixed designs for specific functions, restricting flexibility and adaptability. Hill (2003) and Till (2014) argue that user-led practices value multi-purpose spaces and challenge conventional norms that rely on standardised solutions. These practices underscore the importance of personalisation and adapting spaces to individual lifestyles and preferences, standing in stark contrast to traditional top-down approaches.

Resident D: "I take much pride in doing the design myself. I gathered ideas from friends' places and those home shows on TV. The construction workers also gave suggestions based on their past work; some of them have even worked on houses designed by architects!"

4.2.1 Challenging roles of the architect and the user

Rethinking the roles of architects and users in developing Asian countries, where informal user-led architectural production is prevalent, underscores the significant influence of the creative user. In contrast to the traditional view that positions architects as the primary designers, these contexts reveal a dynamic process where users, motivated by necessity and creativity, actively shape their homes. This challenges the conventional belief that architects are the sole authorities in design, suggesting instead that the built environment emerges from a collaborative process in which control over meaning and interpretation transitions from the architect to the user. This perspective resonates with Barthes' (1968) idea in "The Death of the Author," which argues that the meaning of a text is shaped by the reader's interpretation rather than the creator's intent. Similarly, the built environment is influenced by the interplay between professional expertise and informal user creativity. Hill's (2003) framework of the creative user highlights this dynamic by demonstrating how users, with their unique insights and needs, actively contribute to both design and construction.

4.2.2 Architectural agency

Architectural agency, traditionally linked with the professional expertise of architects, is redefined in the context of user-led design. It shifts from a top-down model where architects have primary authority over design decisions to a more collaborative and dynamic process involving both professionals and users. According to Hill (2003), users, motivated by necessity and resourcefulness, play a significant role in the design, construction, and adaptation of their living spaces. This research highlights that users bring valuable agency to the process due to their intimate knowledge of spaces and unique perspectives, which should be integrated into architectural design. This shift recognises that users can offer ideas, needs, and solutions that architects, from a more detached standpoint, might not consider. Empowering users within the architectural process leverages their lived experiences and daily interactions with spaces. While architects may approach design from a theoretical perspective, users provide crucial insights into how designs function in real-life contexts, as noted by Till (2009) and Greenbaum (1993).

5. Conclusions

Understanding user-led spatial practices is essential for grasping architectural agency, as it highlights users' active roles in shaping their environments. By recognising various forms of user creativity, architects can embrace a more inclusive approach, fostering a symbiotic relationship that transcends traditional views of architectural authorship. This paper aims to expand the discourse on architectural agency by challenging the conventional view that architects are the sole creators of the built environment. Traditionally, architects are seen as the primary authorities, while users—whether inhabitants or stakeholders—are often considered passive consumers. This research demonstrates that users, without the constraints typically imposed by architects, contribute significantly to spatial design, shaping how spaces are used, experienced, and adapted over time.

However, this study has limitations. It focuses only on residents of Kitulwatte Lane who designed their homes without architects, which may not represent broader populations. The small sample size and specific geographic focus may not capture user-led architectural practices in diverse contexts. Additionally, researcher biases might influence interpretations of user creativity and architectural characteristics, and the study does not account for the evolution of user-led practices over time.

The goal is to foster a collaborative design process involving both architects and users. By exploring new participation techniques, architects can engage users in innovative ways, shifting design agency across various scales. This approach aims to develop participatory design tools that aid users in realising their design potential. Integrating users into the design process enhances the likelihood of creating sustainable solutions that address social, environmental, and economic needs effectively, aligning with the principle of “making places for people.”

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