Essential qualities of children’s favorite places

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Abstract. This paper builds on an existential-phenomenology framework to better understand the essential qualities of children’s favorite places. Based on grounded theory, this study focused on the everyday life experiences of 25 children (14 girls and 11 boys), aged 9–12 years and living in Jakarta, whose housing environments reflected various spatial qualities. The results showed that all children reported having one or more favorite places. Despite differences in type, scale, form, and location of children’s favorite places, each existential place was a supportive urban space conceived, perceived, and lived through the meaning and symbolic use given to it by a child. The essential qualities of children’s favorite places were accessibility, a location within route from home to other destinations (such as a friend’s house or school), and a space providing a sense of comfort, security, and social affiliation, as well as experiences that were restorative, personal, sensory, and materialistic. This study may have implications for the design of urban places that foster the formation of children’s favorite spaces by taking into account these essential qualities of children’s lived-existential spaces.

1. Introduction
A child’s favorite place is considered a special place that is preferable or liked above all other places. A favorite place “bring[s] happiness to children when they are in it and [which they] regret or are distressed to leave; they value it not only for the satisfaction of physical needs but for its own intrinsic quality” [1]. In an adult, a favorite place is a place where a strong emotional bond is felt because it affords restorative experiences that aid with the self-regulation of emotions [2]. In children, studies show that children’s favorite places are those that elicit positive responses and a sense of attachment [1, 3, 4]. The benefits for children of attachments to favorite places are considered essential for providing them with secure bases from which to explore the world; these spaces also facilitate children’s emotional and cognitive growth, development of self-reliance and self-esteem, academic improvement, and social competence among peers [5-7].
To date, studies on children’s favorite places have been focused dominantly on the search for factors that affect children’s preferences for favorite places. Findings suggest that social and cultural factors have contributed more to the development of favorite places than physical factors. Previous studies have reported that personal characteristics of children, such as age, gender, social status, environmental conditions [7-9], and family judgments about security and environmental risks [7, 9, 10] influence children’s preferences for favorite places. How children make sense of their environment also reportedly affects their feelings toward favorite places [11].
Development of favorite places depends on children’s social integration and social participation [7-9, 12], the length of stay and social interaction [13], and recurring experiences with peers and adults [7, 9]. The physical factors of places, such as the availability of parks and amenities [12, 14], infrastructure
[15], and environmental affordances [3, 16] reportedly affect children’s preferences as well. The research on this topic has been expanding. Children’s actions and behaviors in places, such as making routes and forts, [17-19], playing games, having fun, planning retreats, meeting friends, et cetera [4]—produced collectively [20] or locally (Appadurai, 1995 in Hallden [21])—were reported to affect emotional and physical claims on places [22], protective behavior therein [17, 23], and children’s sense of place [11, 24]. Places children choose as their favorites are frequently found in natural landscapes and private restorative places [1, 4, 25] and in natural rural contexts [17, 26], but they may also be settings in an urban context [18]. Children’s favorite places are mostly located within the range of their homes, such as nearby streets [1, 3, 11, 27-29]. Further, favorite places may be formal or informal [30, 31].

A seminal study related to this subject is that of Sobel [32]. He highlighted five essential qualities of children’s special place experiences based on adults’ memories. First, they were constructed by children on their own. Second, they were secret. Third, they were owned by the children. Fourth, they were described as safe and peaceful places. Finally, they were “organized worlds.” Sobel [32] added that an attribute of special places was “a kind of breathless, twinkle-in-the-eye animation.” In another foundational study on children’s favorite places, Chawla [33] found three characteristics of special places. First, they are places of conviviality where children feel accepted; there are always exciting activities that children can join and observe. Second, they are places of solidarity where children are acknowledged and supported. Lastly, they are places of possibility that can exist not only in the present but also in the imagination. Despite the existing plethora of studies related to children’s favorite places, including those regarding factors affecting children’s preferences for certain places, their actions and behaviors in these places, or settings of such places, I still know very little about the essential qualities of children’s favorite places. Such discussions remain hidden within existing studies. Therefore, I was motivated to investigate this topic to gain a better understanding of the essential qualities of children’s favorite places.

Based on grounded theory, this paper describes cases from the everyday life experiences of 25 children (14 girls and 11 boys), aged 9–12 years and living in Jakarta—mega city with a population of about 10 million. It is still struggling with providing public, open spaces for children in which they can play and explore. Today, the ratio of open space in Jakarta is only about 9–10% of the total space, far below the minimum requirement of 30% open space. It is quite difficult to find public, open space that is safe for children in Jakarta. Most children also have difficulty accessing such space. In this context, questions about favorite places of children emerged as significant: Do they exist? Where, how, and what? This study was conducted over a period of nine months; a various qualitative data collection methodologies were used to capture the everyday experiences of children in their favorite places. Using Jakarta as the context of this study, my intention was to uncover the essential qualities of children’s favorite places, as it will have implications on the design of urban places to foster the formation of such spaces. Therefore, the design of urban places must have a basis in the essential qualities of children’s favorite places.

2. Method

2.1. Study approach

This study was inspired by the existential-phenomenological work of Merleau-Ponty [34] to explore children’s experiences in what they claimed were their favorite places. This approach facilitated the understanding of children and their favorite places as a phenomenon of the human experience, understood as an undivided totality of a wholeness experience [34, 35]. According to Jenks [36], this phenomenological approach “could enable us to gain insight into an existential and generative sense of sociality that emerges from within the consciousness of the child” (p.19). The existential-phenomenological perspective provides a different position from which to understand the essential qualities of children’s favorite places from the geographical experiences of place (lived existentially) stored in the body (lived body). Human beings, including children, are always conjoined and immersed
in their world or places, though it is assumed that a child and place are conceptually distinct. Therefore, this study relied heavily on children’s speech and memories as primary data sources; through their bodies and bodily experiences in their favorite places, their neighborhoods were perceived.

2.2. Participants
Twenty-five children (14 girls and 11 boys), aged 9–12 years, were selected for this study. Children in this age range use outdoor space extensively [1], have an ability to orient themselves geographically and develop strong affection toward a particular place [11], and form place attachments [7, 32]. Children selected for the study represented middle or middle-low income families and lived in the west and central parts of Jakarta. Their home environments included several typologies of urban housing, such as the high-density urban kampong or high-density row housing, as shown in Figure 1; medium-density collective public housing, as shown in Figure 2; and low-density gated community or landed housing, as shown in Figure 3. The different housing environments served the purpose of determining whether different typologies of children’s environments influenced the existence of their favorite places.

Figure 1. High-density urban kampong
Figure 2. Medium-density public housing
Figure 3. Low-density gated community or landed housing
2.3. Procedures
I conducted in-depth interviews weekly to capture children’s everyday life experiences in their favorite places. Their speech and memories were the primary data sources for this study. Speech, according to Merleau-Ponty [34], “…in the speaker, does not translate ready-made thought, but accomplishes it.” It was believed that in speech, the lived experiences of children and places constituted meaningful memories of their past experiences with their favorite urban places. Remembering, according to Pallasmaa [37], “is not only a mental event, it is also an act of embodiment and projection. Memories are not only hidden in the secret electrochemical process of the brain, but they are also stored in our skeletons, muscles and skin. All our senses and organs think and remember.” Therefore, children’s speech and memories help us acknowledge how the development of favorite places are sensed, perceived, and experienced as reality through children’s bodies.

In addition to conducting in-depth interviews, I asked each child to complete a diary along with a time log based on actual everyday activities. These were used as the evidence of proximity-seeking behavior. At each weekly meeting, children shared stories about their experiences in their favorite urban spaces. Observations of these places were guided by the children but also conducted independently by me to capture the existence of their attachments to their favorite urban places. Children were also asked to take photos of their activities in their favorite urban spaces. These were used to achieve a greater understanding of how children perceived their neighborhood [38]. Additionally, children were asked to draw pictures of their favorite places. These physical-pictorial representations were used to understand children’s spatial awareness. A good cognitive map had a strong correlation with high mobility and rich lived experiences in the neighborhood [39]. Through memories and a mix of children’s participation and perspectives for about nine months, I attempted to capture the lived experiences of the children and their favorite places.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Favorite places
Regardless of the spatial qualities of children’s housing environments, all children reported having favorite places of various types, scales, forms, and locations, whether nearby or far away. The children predominantly reported having more than one favorite place, although some reported having only one. Ultimately, 69 favorite places were reported (see Tables 1 and 2). Based upon urban space types introduced by Carmona [40], children identified two positive spaces in open public space. Seventeen negative spaces—leftover and abandoned spaces, roads, or service spaces (such as gutters)—were reported as favorite places. Also included were 27 ambiguous spaces (i.e., those that were public or whose ownership was unclear. These spaces included small stand-alone street shops, shops in the shopping mall, the entertainment/play area in the shopping mall, a tree in a private or public space, open sports fields, apartment corridors, a bookstore in a shopping mall, a round bench in the apartment courtyard, a restaurant, an Internet café, and the grounds of a church or temple. Twenty-three spaces were private locations, such as private parks, the swimming pool at a private sports club, and the houses of friends or relatives. Figure 4 shows some examples of the images of children’s favorite places taken by the children or during field observations with them.
Table 1. Distribution of girls’ favorite places and spatial domains

| Participant | Age | Housing Typology | Favorite place | Spatial domain |
|-------------|-----|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Hani        | 9   | High-density urban kampong | Local street for biking & roller blading | Habitual range/familial space |
|             |     |                   | A friend’s house | Habitual range/familial space |
|             |     |                   | Local small shop selling everyday goods | Habitual range/familial space |
|             |     |                   | Gajah Mada swimming pool | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
| Dona        | 9   | High-density urban kampong | A relative’s house | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
|             |     |                   | Shopping mall | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
| Siska       | 11  | High-density urban kampong | A friend’s house | Habitual range/familial space |
|             |     |                   | Home | Habitual range/familial space |
|             |     |                   | Bookstore | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
| Yona        | 10  | High-density urban kampong | Shopping mall | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
| Betty       | 9   | High-density urban kampong | Gajah Mada swimming pool | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
|             |     |                   | PIK swimming pool | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
| Erna        | 11  | High-density urban kampong | Local street for biking | Habitual range/familial space |
|             |     |                   | Local street at her grandma’s housing complex for biking | Habitual range/familial space |
|             |     |                   | Splash swimming pool | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
|             |     |                   | Shopping mall | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |

Figure 4. Several pictures of children’s favorite places.
| Participant | Age | Housing Typology                  | Favorite place                                      | Spatial domain                      |
|-------------|-----|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Lala        | 12  | Medium-density collective public housing | Grass jelly shop                                    | Habitual range/familial space       |
|             |     |                                   | Neighborhood park                                   | Habitual range/familial space       |
|             |     |                                   | Corridor in front of a friend’s unit                | Habitual range/familial space       |
|             |     |                                   | Green Court (new housing complex) for strolling & playing | Frequent range/neighborhood space   |
|             |     |                                   | Street for riding motorbike                         | Frequent range/neighborhood space   |
| Luna        | 12  | Medium-density collective public housing | “Ball field” (grass field)                         | Habitual range/familial space       |
|             |     |                                   | Corridor in front of a friend’s unit                | Habitual range/familial space       |
|             |     |                                   | Green Court (new housing complex) for strolling & playing | Frequent range/neighborhood space   |
|             |     |                                   | Street for riding motorbike                         | Frequent range/neighborhood space   |
| Sara        | 12  | Medium-density collective public housing | “Ball field” (grass field)                         | Habitual range/familial space       |
|             |     |                                   | Corridor in front of a friend’s unit                | Habitual range/familial space       |
|             |     |                                   | Green Court (new housing complex) for strolling & playing | Frequent range/neighborhood space   |
|             |     |                                   | Street for riding motorbike                         | Frequent range/neighborhood space   |
|             |     |                                   | A friend’s house                                    | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
| Rina        | 9   | Medium-density collective public housing | “Sliding tree” (a 24" round steel pipe leaning on a tree) | Habitual range/familial space       |
|             |     |                                   | Smart car (minivan mobile library)                  | Habitual range/familial space       |
| Fani        | 11  | Medium-density collective public housing | Church ground                                       | Habitual range/familial space       |
|             |     |                                   | Church                                              | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
| Via         | 9   | High-density urban kampung         | Neighborhood park                                   | Habitual range/familial space       |
|             |     |                                   | Her parent’s food shop                              | Frequent range/neighborhood space   |
|             |     |                                   | Open field near her parent’s food shop              | Frequent range/neighborhood space   |
| Chelsea     | 11  | Low density gated community        | “Vegetable garden”                                  | Habitual range/familial space       |
|             |     |                                   | Temple’s park in suburb                             | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
| Elina       | 11  | Low density gated community        | “Cherry tree” near tutorial place                   | Frequent range/neighborhood space   |

Table 1. Distribution of girls’ favorite places and spatial domains (continued)
Figure 5 shows that based on Moore [41] conceptual model of activity spaces, the habitual range was the spatial domain where children’s favorite places were mainly identified, compared to favorite places located in the frequent and occasional ranges. Places preferred by children as their favorite places included the local street, local shops, an open grass field, and playground near their houses. This finding aligns with several earlier findings that children’s favorite places were located mostly within the home range (e.g., nearby streets) [1, 3, 11, 27-29]; indications are that most children participating in this study were quite free to move independently to their favorite places. Additionally, children’s favorite places found in the frequent range were places they visited as part of their route to school or to a friend’s house. Children’s favorite places in the occasional range were places they accessed infrequently or via vehicle (e.g., shopping mall, bookstore, and swimming pool). This spatial range indicated that several children’s

| Participants | Age | Housing Typology | Favorite place | Spatial domain |
|--------------|-----|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| David        | 9   | High-density urban kampong | Local street for biking | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | Grandma’s house | Frequent range/neighborhood space |
|              |     |                   | Swimming pool at Bellmont Apartments | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
|              |     |                   | Shopping mall (various location) | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
| Tim          | 12  | High-density urban kampong | Bunda Mula swimming pool | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
| Amran        | 10  | Medium-density collective public housing | “Roundabout”; a small round bench in the middle of courtyard | Habitual range/familial space |
| Fadli        | 12  | Medium-density collective public housing | “Ball field” (grass field) | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | Futsal field | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | Internet café | Frequent range/neighborhood space |
| Ibra         | 11  | Medium-density collective public housing | “Ball field” (grass field) | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | Futsal field | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | Internet café | Frequent range/neighborhood space |
| Iksan        | 9   | Medium-density collective public housing | “Cherry tree” for climbing | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | Gutter | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | A friend’s house | Habitual range/familial space |
| Fiko         | 9   | Medium-density collective public housing | “Cherry tree” for climbing | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | Gutter | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | A friend’s house | Habitual range/familial space |
| Ricky        | 12  | High-density urban kampong | “Ball field” (grass field) | Habitual range/familial space |
| Moris        | 12  | Low density gated community | “Ball field” (grass field) | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | Local street for playing football | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | Futsal field | Frequent range/neighborhood space |
| Kris         | 12  | Low density gated community | “Ball field” (grass field) | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | Volleyball | Habitual range/familial space |
| Kevin        | 12  | Low density gated community | “Chameleon park” | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | “Racing street” | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | “Rice field” | Habitual range/familial space |
|              |     |                   | Splash swimming pool | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
|              |     |                   | Puri Shopping Mall | Occasional range/urban-suburban space |
movements to their favorite places were controlled and depended on negotiations with parents to obtain permission.

Figure 5 shows that most children living in medium-density public housing and low-density gated communities reported having their favorite places within the habitual range—located near their homes and easily accessible on an almost daily basis, such as school or a friend’s house. Most children who lived in a high-density urban kampong reported having their favorite places within the occasional range. This finding indicated that the quality of the housing environment contributed significantly to children’s preferences for favorite places. This study found that medium-density public housing and low-density gated community housing were the environments that were most child-friendly. These housing situations offered greater potential and affordances for children to play and socialize, as discussed previously by Kytta [16], rather than urban kampong environments that were too dense and without green space or outdoor places for children to play and socialize (except for the immediate streets in front of their houses). Furthermore, the urban kampong prohibited children’s discoveries and explorations.

![Figure 5](image)

**Figure 5.** Distribution of children’s favorite places by spatial range and housing environment

### 3.2. Children’s favorite places as lived-existential supportive urban spaces

In the lifeworld of children, their favorite places are lived-existential spaces. A place, as discussed by Pallasmaa [42] and borrowing from Lefebvre’s representational space, “is structured on the basis of meanings, intentions and values reflected upon it by an individual, either consciously or unconsciously; thus, existential spaces possess a unique quality interpreted through the memory and experience of the individual. Every lived experience takes place at the interface of recollection and intention, perception and fantasy, memory and desire.” Favorite places are supportive urban spaces conceived, perceived, and lived through the meaning and symbolic use of the place according to each child.

The symbolic use of places refers to names given to places by each child. In this study, children labeled their favorite places with names such as “sliding tree,” “roundabout,” “cherry tree,” “cincau (grass jelly) shop,” “chameleon park,” “rice field,” “road,” “vegetable garden,” “ball field,” and “race street” because each place had a purpose and meaning in their lifeworld (see Table 3 to decode the places named by children in this study).
Each place held personal or subjective meanings for each child. Some places provided opportunities to explore and express creativity [1, 43]. For example, Gramedia (a bookstore) was a place to improve comic drawing skills; “open sports fields” were places to improve soccer skills, and a “private sports club swimming pool” served as a place for exercise believed to lengthen the body. Some places provided sensory experiences that comforted children: climbing a cherry tree provided the visual sensation of looking beyond the child’s neighborhood; riding a bicycle provided the tactile sensation of wind blowing through the hair and face; the fresh and breezy weather on temple grounds provided freshness and a kampung nuance; the cold water in a swimming pool provided an enjoyable tactile experience; and the sweetness of “cherry” fruits from a “cherry tree” provided a gustatory experience. Favorite places provided children with opportunities to form social affiliations and social support and experience positive feelings [1].

For a few children, a mall was identified as the favorite place. It was a place to shop, entertain oneself, buy food at a favorite restaurant, buy a favorite drink (e.g., milk bubble tea), or window shop. Findings of this study revealed that the mall had a materialistic and consumptive meaning for children. Table 4 illustrates children’s expressions and the qualitative codes that emerged from the theme of subjective meaning in lived-existential spaces.

Each lived-existential space had become a part of everyday life and family, a place to talk with friends and family, and a place to meet friends. Children’s favorite places had limited or no natural features. This finding contrasts with findings of previous studies that children’s favorite places were frequently found in natural landscapes, private restorative places [1, 4, 25], and natural rural contexts [17, 26]. Children purposefully used their favorite places to rejuvenate from the hectic activity and pressure of schoolwork and household chores, similar to findings reported by Korpela, Kyutta and Hartig [4]. Surprisingly, not all favorite places were known by children’s parents. Some of these places were only known by the children (i.e., their secret places).

| Themes          | Coding                     | Descriptions                                                                 |
|-----------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Naming places   | "Cherry tree"             | A climbing tree with small red fruit resembling cherries                    |
|                 | "Grass jelly shop"        | A small stand-alone shop selling grass jelly, located in front of a child’s apartment block entrance, that is used as a place to mingle with her friends and family |
|                 | "Sliding tree"            | A tree with a metal pipe leaning on it, used as a slide                      |
|                 | "Roundabout"              | A round bench in the middle of a courtyard, used as a meeting point with friends and place to play |
|                 | "Chameleon park"          | A neighborhood open space where the child typically searched for and caught chameleons alone or with peers |
|                 | "Vegetable garden"        | A small left over undeveloped lot next to a child’s house, used as a place to grow vegetables |
|                 | "Ball field"              | A neighborhood green open space where the child typically plays soccer with peers |
|                 | "Rice field"              | An undeveloped lot in the neighborhood characterized by tall grass that resembled a rice field, although no rice field was present |
|                 | "Racing street"           | A calm and smooth neighborhood road used by a child to play skateboard        |
Table 4. Children’s expressions and qualitative codes of subjective meanings of lived-existential spaces

| Themes                        | Coding                                                                 | Examples of children’s accounts of expressions                  |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Subjective meanings of lived- | Sense of comfort and security                                           | “I feel safe, I have no worries being here.”                  |
|     existential spaces        | Sense of social affiliation                                             | “I have no worries, adults were there for us…It is safe.”     |
|                               |                                                                        | “I feel comfort.”                                              |
|                               |                                                                        | “It’s clean and it’s so comfy sitting on the grass,”           |
| Restorative meaning           |                                                                        | “The jelly grass shop is part of my family.”                  |
|                               |                                                                        | “It’s a place to meet my friends.”                            |
|                               |                                                                        | “It’s a place to wait for friends.”                           |
|                               |                                                                        | “It’s a place to meet old pals.”                              |
|                               |                                                                        | “If I’m not there, it’s difficult to meet friend.”             |
|                               |                                                                        | “It makes us close to each other.”                            |
| Personal meaning              |                                                                        | “I love to be there, to find things, to explore things, to improve myself.” |
|                               |                                                                        | “So, I can make friends.”                                     |
|                               |                                                                        | “I love to swim, because I want to get taller.”                |
|                               |                                                                        | “I love to practice so I can improve and master my soccer skills.” |
|                               |                                                                        | “I love to go to Gramedia so I can get inspiration for drawing comics.” |
| Sensory meaning               |                                                                        | “If I climb up the cherry tree, I can see far.”                |
|                               |                                                                        | “I can feel the breeze, it makes me feel fresh.”              |
|                               |                                                                        | “When I am up in the cherry tree, I can feel the breeze; it’s nice and cool.” |
|                               |                                                                        | “I love to bike, it is fun. I can feel the wind blowing on my face. I love it.” |
| Materialistic meaning         |                                                                        | “I love to go to the mall, it’s a place you can shop, see things and buy stuff.” |
|                               |                                                                        | “The mall is a place to get my favorite food and drink.”      |
|                               |                                                                        | “The shops, the restaurant…I love them.”                      |

Findings from this study revealed that children had positive emotional experiences in their favorite places. Their expressions about being in these places included such words as “joy,” “happy,” “free,” “satisfy,” “peace,” and “excited.” This finding was similar to that from previous studies of Chawla [1]. However, children also displayed dynamic emotional experiences that were temporal. They depended on the physical and social situations of favorite places. Children expressed themselves poignantly using words and phrases such as “care” and “love” to describe emotional experiences that touched them. They used phrases or words such as “miss dearly,” “impatient,” “yearning,” yet “disappointed,” “uncomfortable,” “upset,” and “angry” when they were unable to be in their favorite places for some reason.

4. Conclusions

4.1. Essential qualities of children’s favorite places

In this study, cases from the everyday life experiences of 25 children who lived in Jakarta, a not yet child-friendly city, were investigated. In this context, this study questioned if favorite places existed: here, how, and what? Surprisingly, all children who participated reported having one or more favorite places, which were found to vary by type, scale, form, and location, whether nearby or far away. Among all identified favorite places, only a few were considered suitable for children. As discussed by Rasmussen [30], places considered appropriate for children to play and explore reflected adults’ ideas about official places designed and provided by grown-ups. However, this study found that children’s favorite places were seen as places that only children could show and describe, a concept discussed by Rasmussen [30]. Those places were found mostly in the habitual range that was easy to be accessed by children on almost a daily basis. Whatever and wherever the places were, children enjoyed positive
emotional experiences from being in their favorite places, not only because of the satisfaction of physical needs but for the intrinsic quality, similar to findings of previous studies by Chawla [1].

This study’s findings showed that children’s favorite places were conceived, perceived, and lived through the meanings and symbolic uses given by each child. These lived-existential spaces, or supportive urban spaces, were often unnoticed by adults. Favorite places were characterized by five essential qualities: 1) they were easily accessible and located within route from home to other destinations like a friend’s house or school; 2) they provided a sense of comfort and security; 3) they provided multiple sensory and experiences for children (i.e., sense of social affiliation, restorative experiences, personal experiences, sensory experiences, and materialistic experiences); 4) children felt accepted and found freedom to own and construct their spaces; and 5) the places were secret yet supported by parents and peers. These five essential qualities of children’s favorite places shared some similarities with qualities cited in previous studies of Sobel [32], Chawla [33].

4.2. Implications for practice
This study resulted in several exciting findings related to children’s favorite places. First, children’s favorite places were identified mostly in the habitual range within the vicinity of home. This finding may have implications that the existence of small public green spaces within walking distance of one’s home and easily accessed by children, should be taken into account for future planning.

Second, this study found that medium-density public housing and low-density gated community housing offered greater potential and affordances for children to bond with a place, compared to urban kampong environments. This finding may have implications that planning and designing of any housing environment, including the urban kampong, should be viewed as child-friendly.

Third, this study highlighted the importance of five essential qualities of children’s favorite places. As explained previously, they are places that are easily accessible, places that provide a sense of comfort and security, places that offer multiple sensory experiences, places where children feel acceptance and freedom, and places that are secret but supported by parents and peers. These findings may have implications for the design of urban places that foster the formation of children’s favorite places; plans should reflect consideration for these essential qualities of children’s lived-existential spaces.

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