



Shopping Malls as Urban Third Places for Generation Y and Z in Bali

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Abstract—This study examines how shopping malls function as urban third places for Generations Y and Z in Bali, a tourism-driven context where traditional communal spaces intersect with modern commercial environments. While previous research on third places has focused on cafés, parks, or Western settings, limited studies address malls as hybrid socio-digital environments for youth in Southeast Asia, particularly in Bali. This research fills that gap through a mixed-method approach combining perceptual surveys (119 respondents) with spatial and environmental observations at two contrasting malls: the newly developed Living World and the established Mal Bali Galeria. Results show that malls are the most prominent indoor third places for young people, supporting casual interaction, digital work, and solitary activities. Correlation analysis identifies seating adequacy, multi-age accommodation, amenity diversity, and perceived elegance as the strongest determinants of Third Place Meaning (TPM). Spatial comparison reveals generational tendencies: Living World aligns with flexible, visually dynamic, digitally oriented behaviors, whereas Mal Bali Galeria supports routine, family-based sociability. The study demonstrates how malls in developing cities evolve into quasi-civic environments, redefining third place functions for Bali's younger generations.

Keywords: Third place; shopping mall; generation Z; Bali.

1. Introduction

Human beings are inherently social creatures whose well-being depends on meaningful interaction with others. As Oldenburg (1989) explains, individuals seek not only private and professional environments but also what he calls third places which are the neutral and informal spaces that exist beyond home and work. These places offer opportunities for socializing and building community connection. The importance of such social spaces became increasingly evident after the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted face-to-face interaction and confined much of human activity within domestic and work settings. In the post-pandemic period, the desire to reconnect socially has heightened, leading to a renewed interest in accessible gathering places that support informal interaction and collective experiences.

In the context of Bali, the transformation of urban and social life has been shaped by rapid urbanization and the influence of tourism. Denpasar and the

southern part of Badung, in particular, have experienced significant spatial and cultural changes, where traditional communal spaces such as *bale banjar*, markets, and temples coexist with and are gradually supplanted by modern commercial environments. Among these new forms, shopping malls have emerged as prominent destinations that attract people not merely for shopping but also for leisure, recreation, and social engagement. They provide comfortable environments with diverse amenities, positioning themselves as contemporary social hubs within the urban fabric.

Nevertheless, the classical idea of third places as proposed by Oldenburg, which are characterized by neutrality, inclusiveness, and non-commercial accessibility, has become increasingly challenged in the context of developing societies and digital lifestyles. Crick (2011), in his study of Generation Y in Jamaica, argued that Oldenburg's principles were only partially relevant to developing countries, where social experiences are influenced by brand

consciousness and economic conditions. Similarly, Nadizti et al. (2020) identified that in Indonesia's digital era, younger generations often choose coffee shops and similar venues as their third places, yet their engagement is mediated by consumerism and online connectivity rather than purely social motivations. These findings suggest that the meaning and form of third places evolve according to technological, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts.

In this study, Generations Y and Z refer to younger cohorts whose social behavior is shaped by high digital literacy and hybrid online offline lifestyles. According to Dwidienawati et al. (2021), generation Y, born roughly between 1977 and 1995, is known as the first highly internet-exposed cohort, yet shaped by more stable family structures and a childhood marked by directed attention and parental involvement. These conditions contribute to typical traits such as being optimistic, driven, and possessing high expectations toward comfort, familiarity, and service quality. Meanwhile, generation Z, born between 1995 and 2012, differs substantially due to growing up amid digital saturation, global cultural exposure, and economic uncertainty. Commonly known as the "i-generation," this cohort maintains near-constant online connectivity and exhibits fast information processing, hybrid socialization styles, and a strong orientation toward interactive digital engagement.

Despite growing scholarly attention to the changing nature of social spaces, research focusing specifically on shopping malls as urban third places in Bali remains limited. Bali presents a unique setting due to its cultural duality: deeply rooted local traditions coexist with a globalized lifestyle shaped by tourism and media exposure. This context raises an important question of how younger generations in Bali reinterpret third places through their daily engagement with commercial and leisure spaces. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for interpreting how architecture and urban design respond to generational and cultural change in contemporary urban life.

This study, therefore, aims to examine the role and characteristics of shopping malls as urban third places for Generations Y and Z in Bali. The objectives are threefold: (1) to identify how the spatial characteristics of malls contribute to their function as third places, (2) to analyze the physical and social qualities that enable malls to support informal sociability among young urban users, and (3) to evaluate how these characteristics correspond to the social needs, cultural preferences, and digital habits of Generations Y and Z. By addressing these dimensions, the research seeks to demonstrate how malls in a developing urban context operate as hybrid social environments where physical comfort, cultural meaning, and digitally mediated interaction intersect to redefine the contemporary notion of third places.

The findings are expected to expand the understanding of third places by contextualizing Oldenburg's concept within developing, tourism-oriented cities, where consumption and socialization increasingly overlap. It also provides insights into how generational behavior and urban form interact in shaping contemporary public life. This study also offers valuable implications for urban designers, architects, and commercial developers to create more inclusive, human-centered, and community-oriented environments. In doing so, shopping malls can be reimagined not merely as centers of consumption, but as vibrant urban arenas that sustain social connection and cultural identity for the young generations of Bali.

2. Methods

This study adopts a mixed-method approach integrating quantitative and qualitative strategies to examine the characteristics of shopping malls as urban third places for Generations Y and Z in Bali. The research focuses on Denpasar City and Badung Regency, areas with high youth density and rapid commercial development. Data collection began with a perceptual online survey using purposive sampling of individuals aged 15–43 years, representing the age range of Generations Y and Z. A total of 123 respondents completed the questionnaire. Of these, four responses were eliminated from further analysis because the respondents either identified non-public spaces as their preferred leisure places, were above 43 years old (exceeding the upper generational limit for Generation Y at the time of research), or resided outside Denpasar and Badung, which fall beyond the study's geographic focus. After removal of these four entries, 119 valid responses remained and were used for subsequent analysis.

Among the 119 respondents, 72 belonged to Generation Y (61%) and 47 to Generation Z (39%). Correspondence and mosaic plot analyses showed that many Generation Z respondents were already employed, although a smaller proportion were still students due to the minimum eligible survey age of 15, which corresponds to school age. The youngest Generation Z respondent was 16 years old, and most were below 23, aligning with the typical schooling and early university age range. In terms of domicile, 72 respondents (61%) lived in Denpasar and 47 respondents (39%) lived in Badung. The distribution of domicile between Generations Y and Z was relatively balanced in Denpasar, while in Badung, Generation Y respondents were more dominant than Generation Z. These demographic characteristics provided a contextual foundation for understanding the representativeness and generational tendencies captured in the dataset.

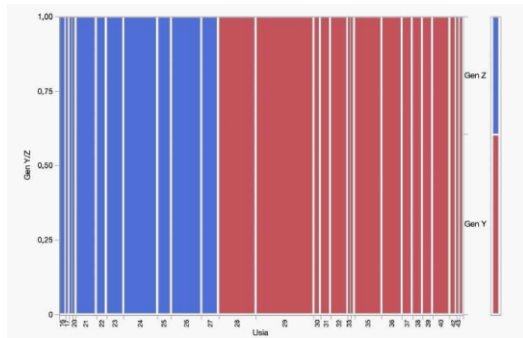


Figure 1. Correspondence Analysis of Generation Y & Z Respondents by Age Range

The questionnaire consisted of 23 perceptual items assessing comfort, accessibility, inclusivity, ambience, sociability, and user experience, developed based on Oldenburg's (1989) third place principles and Carmona's (2001) place-making values. Each item used a scoring system in which positive indicators were assigned a value of 3, neutral responses 1.5, and negative indicators 0, with reverse scoring applied to items representing exclusivity. A visitation score (0–3) was also incorporated, producing a total possible respondent score between 0–60. Respondents who scored 31 or higher were categorized as TPM (Third Place Meaning), indicating that they perceived certain public spaces as third places, while those with 30 or below were categorized as Non-TPM. From the 119 respondents, 114 were classified as TPM, and only these were included in deeper spatial and behavioral analysis. Their responses indicated four dominant types of youth third places urban parks/green spaces, beaches, cafés/restaurants, and shopping malls grouped into indoor and outdoor categories.

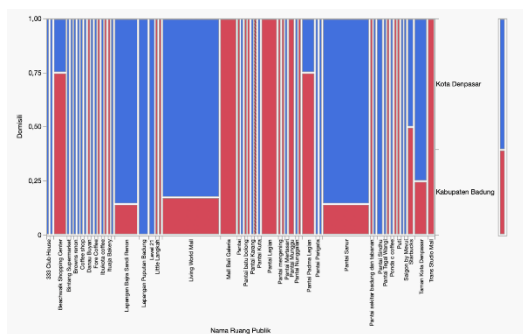


Figure 2. Correspondence Analysis of Respondents' Domicile and Their Chosen Third Places

Shopping malls emerged as the most significant indoor third place across both generations. Based on this finding, two malls were selected as case studies using three criteria: frequency of mention by respondents, representation of distinct indoor typologies, and balanced coverage between Denpasar and Badung. Living World Mall Denpasar and Mal Bali Galeria Badung were chosen because they repeatedly appeared in survey responses and

represent different spatial characteristics, one being newly developed and the other an established commercial center, allowing for meaningful comparison of third place attributes.

Field observations were conducted at both malls using the Third Place Evaluation Tool (TPOT), Waxman's observational framework, and synthesized third place attributes from the literature. Observations documented physical qualities such as spatial layout, seating availability, circulation patterns, lighting, noise levels, temperature, cleanliness, and overall ambience, as well as behavioral patterns including user demographics, activities, movement flows, interaction types, and duration of stay. Environmental conditions were measured using a lux meter, sound-level meter, and digital thermometer, while photographs and sketch mappings were used to capture spatial configurations and patterns of use.

Data analysis proceeded through several stages, beginning with content analysis of open survey responses to identify recurring themes and categorize preferred third place types. Descriptive and comparative spatial analysis was then conducted to integrate perceptual survey results with observed physical and behavioral conditions at the two case study sites. Correlation analysis (Pearson or Spearman depending on data type and distribution) was used to assess relationships between perceptual variables, such as comfort, accessibility, ambience, seating availability, and observed spatial performance. Analytical dimensions covered both social aspects, including cultural values, activity preferences, accessibility, and digital fluency, and physical aspects, including spatial layout, flexibility, design elements, ambience, and overall environmental quality. These dimensions were interpreted using the conceptual lenses of form, function, and meaning to understand how malls operate as third places for young people.

Triangulation between survey findings, field observations, and site comparisons strengthened the reliability and validity of the analysis. The mixed-method integration enabled a holistic interpretation of malls as contemporary third places shaped by the lifestyles, cultural preferences, and spatial practices of Generations Y and Z in Bali.

3. Results and Discussion

The survey results demonstrate that Generations Y and Z in Bali engage in social activities that reflect the increasingly fluid relationship between leisure, sociability, and consumption in contemporary urban life. Among the various public spaces visited, shopping malls emerge as the most dominant indoor third place. Their popularity can be attributed to their multifunctional nature, offering climate-controlled comfort, diverse dining options, retail experiences, and accessible seating that supports both planned and unstructured social interaction. This aligns with Oldenburg's (1989) principles of accessibility and regular visitation, albeit manifested within commercialized environments characteristic of developing urban contexts.

Table 1. Activity Mapping for Respondent Groups in Third-Place Public Spaces

Respondent group	Activities	Respond percentage
Generation Y	Casual conversation	22,22%
	Eating & drinking	21,83%
	Exploring places	15,08%
	Observing people's behaviour	13,49%
	Using laptop / tablet / hand phone	5,16%
	Reading	3,57%
	Offline meeting	3,17%
	Online meeting	2,78%
Generation Z	Casual conversation	20%
	Eating & drinking	17,95%
	Observing people's behaviour	12,31%
	Exploring places	11,79%
	Reading	8,21%
	Using laptop / tablet / hand phone	7,69%
	Offline meeting	5,13%
	Studying	3,08%
	Online meeting	3,08%
	Writing	3,08%

Source: Paramitha and Susanti, 2025

Correspondence analysis reveals both shared and divergent patterns across generations. As shown in Table 1, casual conversation, eating and drinking, exploring the place, and observing others constitute the four most prevalent activities for both generations. However, Generation Y more frequently engages in "exploring the place," suggesting an orientation toward spatial appraisal and environmental familiarity. In contrast, Generation Z demonstrates a stronger inclination to "observe people's behavior," a pattern consistent with their higher tendency to visit third places alone, as indicated by the mosaic plot.

Moreover, Generation Z exhibits a broader repertoire of activities, including studying, writing, and digital work, reflecting their deep integration of mobility and digital technology. Activities such as using laptops, tablets, or mobile phones, as well as participating in online meetings, underscore the growing relevance of malls as hybrid online–offline environments. These findings reinforce contemporary analyses of youth sociability, positioning malls as multifunctional social infrastructures that support both individual productivity and collective engagement.

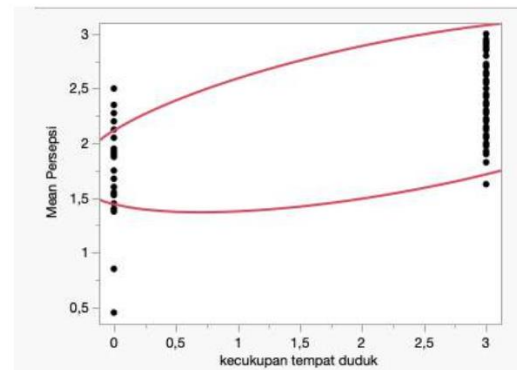


Figure 3. Correlation Analysis Diagram of the Perceptual Factor of Seating Adequacy in Public Spaces and the Third Place Meaning (TPM) Perception Score

The perceptual correlation analysis reveals which spatial attributes most strongly shape Third Place Meaning (TPM) among respondents. Following standard interpretation thresholds (Cohen, 1988):

$r \geq 0.50$ = strong correlation
 $0.30\text{--}0.49$ = moderate correlation
 < 0.30 = weak correlation

Key findings include:

- (1) Seating adequacy ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$) shows the strongest association with TPM, indicating that the simple provision of abundant, freely accessible seating is a fundamental spatial affordance in defining a third place.
- (2) Amenities for seniors ($r = 0.61$) and young people ($r = 0.54$) also show strong correlations, indicating that respondents—largely Generation Y—value environments suitable for multi-age family visits.
- (3) Amenity diversity ($r = 0.53$) is strongly correlated despite not being free of charge. This suggests that respondents interpret third places not as consumption-free zones but as socially supportive environments offering choice.
- (4) Perceived elegance ($r = 0.53$) reflects how clear organization, clean aesthetics, and coherent design reinforce psychological comfort.
- (5) Ease ($r = 0.36$) shows a moderate correlation, supported by observations of wide corridors,

clear signage, and permeable façades in both malls.

Low correlations for green areas ($r = 0.27$) and inclusivity ($r = 0.26$) suggest that third-place meaning depends less on natural elements or social-diversity cues, and more on comfort, practicality, and multi-age usability. Importantly, accessibility and feeling safe when visiting alone did not show significant correlations, possibly because both malls already provide high baseline standards of safety, clarity, and accessibility.

Spatial Characteristics of Malls as Third Places

To contextualize these quantitative results, spatial observations were conducted at two malls representing different typologies. Table 2 summarizes their key environmental and social characteristics.

Table 2. Summary Comparison of Spatial Features and Third-Place Outcomes

Feature	Living World Mall	Mal Bali Galeria
Outdoor space	Large, multi-zone outdoor areas; highly attractive	More limited outdoor space; inner courtyard
Natural lighting	30% natural light; skylights	60% natural light via inner court
Indoor lighting levels	153–187 lux	800–850 lux
Outdoor lighting levels	629–721 lux (shaded); 6225–6431 lux (unshaded)	4100–4300 lux (inner court)
Noise	Indoor: 60–61.4 dB; outdoor: 50–55 dB	50–52 dB
Thermal comfort	Indoor 28.1–28.7°C; shaded outdoors 29.5–30°C	Indoor 28.1–28.7°C; sun umbrella-shaded 30–32°C
Seating	Abundant loose furniture, many cushioned	More fixed seating; mostly un-cushioned
Façade	High transparency (glass)	Low transparency
Flexibility	High (movable seating; adaptable zones)	Limited
Water features	Present; enhances audio comfort	None
User demographics	Youth-dominated; many solo users	Adults and families; more routine visitors
Third place tendencies	Experiential, flexible, visually dynamic	Community-oriented, stable, familiar

Source: Paramitha and Susanti, 2025

The two case study malls illustrate distinct spatial strategies that shape user behavior and generational preferences, offering insights into how malls operate as third places through spatial design, environmental affordances, and social atmosphere. The strong correlation between seating adequacy ($r = 0.62$) and TPM is supported by observations. This reinforces the importance of comfort and accommodation as fundamental third-place qualities.

Living World Mall represents a contemporary commercial typology characterized by openness, transparency, biophilic integration, and spatial flexibility. Its high façade permeability, skylit atrium, and visually connected levels create an atmosphere conducive to both social interaction and digital activity. The mall's abundant cushioned and movable seating enables users to appropriate space autonomously, forming micro-zones that support activities ranging from studying, gaming, online meetings, and casual gatherings.

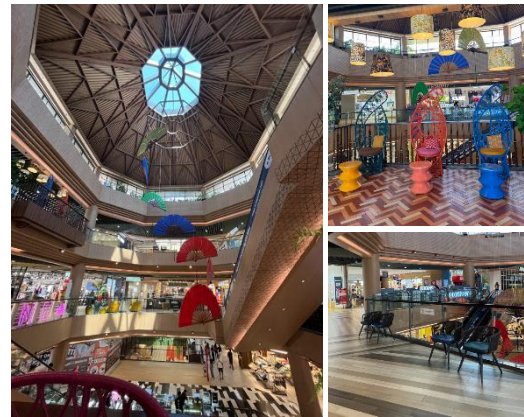


Figure 4. Atrium area of Living World Mall and the free seating arrangement around it

Thermal comfort strongly influences spatial occupation patterns. Building-shaded exterior areas, which maintained temperatures between 29.5–30°C, were consistently preferred, remaining within Talarosha's (2005) "warm comfortable" threshold. Meanwhile, sunbrella-shaded zones reached 31–32°C, resulting in noticeably lower occupancy. This environmental differentiation helps explain the high TPM correlation for comfort and supports the notion of "informal social affordances" (Mehta & Bosson, 2010), where design enables spontaneous lingering and social performance.

Noise levels (60–61.4 dB indoors) exceed typical comfort standards but remain acceptable to users, consistent with the low correlation for "quietness" ($r = 0.31$). This suggests that for mall-based third places, liveliness is the expected ambience. Lighting conditions, with interior levels at 153–187 lux, accentuate a relaxed, contemporary aesthetic aligned with Generation Z's preference for visually atmospheric spaces suitable for digital content creation and casual socializing.



Figure 5. Free seating arrangements in outdoor setting of Living World Mall

Living World stands out as the mall most aligned with Generation Z's hybrid digital–physical lifestyle. Its spatial dynamism, flexibility, and varied microclimates accommodate solitary users, peer groups, and remote work activities, reflecting the broad activity spectrum identified in survey responses.

Mal Bali Galeria presents a more established, community-oriented typology centered on a large inner courtyard. Mature vegetation, shaded benches, and sky openings create a familiar, predictable environment that resonates strongly with Generation Y and long-term residents. Seating is adequate but more fixed and less cushioned compared to Living World, reducing opportunities for spontaneous spatial reconfiguration.



Figure 6. Free seating arrangements in outdoor setting of Mal Bali Galeria

Despite fixed seating, the courtyard functions as a semi-open civic space with social continuity. This environment supports Oldenburg's concept of "regulars," which is evident in recurring family visits and habitual use patterns. The spatial organization, more rigid and less visually dynamic, caters effectively to users who value routine, comfort, and stability.

Lighting conditions in Mal Bali Galeria are significantly brighter than in Living World, with indoor illuminance reaching 800–850 lux and outdoor levels between 4100–4300 lux, creating an open and

lively atmosphere. Noise levels remain moderate (50–52 dB), fitting its calmer, family-oriented setting.

Thermal comfort is somewhat less favorable than Living World, with sunbrella-shaded areas reaching 30–32°C, leading users to gravitate toward vegetated or structurally shaded edges. Nevertheless, the spatial familiarity and predictability of circulation contribute positively to the mall's third-place identity.

Mal Bali Galeria effectively supports community-oriented sociability, with clear signage, wide walkways (1.5–6.8 m), and coherent hardscape–softscape integration contributing to perceived ease ($r = 0.36$) and elegance ($r = 0.53$). The visual and spatial consistency encourages leisurely exploration, even though greenery has a relatively low statistical correlation with TPM. Despite their differences, both malls exhibit spatial characteristics that contribute to their third place function:

- (1) Wide corridors and pedestrian pathways (1.5–6.8 m) that enhance comfort and promote ease of movement.
- (2) Coherent hardscape–softscape integration that reinforces a sense of elegance, order, and visual comfort.
- (3) Natural material palettes (wood, stone, brick) that strengthen warmth and spatial legibility.
- (4) Water features and greenery that enhance ambience and encourage exploration.
- (5) High façade permeability and clear signage, which correlate moderately with perceived ease (0.36).

These shared features highlight the importance of legibility, comfort, and accessibility in shaping mall-based sociability. Although greenery shows a low TPM correlation, activity mapping indicates that "exploring the place", a top user activity, depends on legible landscapes and visually engaging circulation rather than vegetation alone.



Figure 7. Water feature and greenery that enhance ambience of the malls

Redefining Third Places in a Developing Urban Context

The findings demonstrate that malls in Bali represent a contextualized evolution of Oldenburg's third place theory. Although they diverge from the traditional characteristics of non-commercial gathering spaces, they continue to fulfil fundamental social needs for connection, belonging, and everyday interaction. In developing urban contexts, comfort, accessibility, and spatial quality often supersede non-commercial neutrality as defining attributes of third places.

This aligns with Crick's (2011) and Nadizti et al.'s (2020) observations that third places in the Global South are increasingly shaped by consumer culture, branding, and digital life. In Bali, these dynamics intersect with local cultural values, particularly hospitality and communalism, producing hybrid social environments where diverse user groups coexist seamlessly. Malls thus operate as quasi-civic nodes, commercially structured yet socially open, reflecting Bali's hybrid urban identity.

The two case studies highlight complementary third place typologies: (1) Living World Mall represents an experiential third place, responsive to youth-oriented digital culture, spatial flexibility, and visual dynamism; (2) Mal Bali Galeria represents a community third place, grounded in comfort, familiarity, and intergenerational social routines. Together, they demonstrate how generational behavior, spatial design, and commercial strategy converge to shape emerging forms of publicness in Southeast Asian cities. The results offer several implications for practice:

- (1) **Human-centered spatial strategies**, such as ample seating, natural ventilation, greenery, and spatial openness, are crucial for sustaining third place functions.
- (2) **Inclusive design policies**, such as providing accessible seating and free-entry communal zones, enhance social equity within commercial environments.
- (3) **Climate-responsive design** measures allow malls to compensate for limited outdoor public space in tropical cities.
- (4) **Integration of digital infrastructure** supports the hybrid lifestyles of Generations Y and Z.

Collectively, these insights emphasize the need for malls to evolve beyond profit-driven imperatives and embrace their emerging role as urban social catalysts. By fostering social connection, inclusivity, and cultural exchange, malls can sustain the essential spirit of third places while adapting the concept to the climatic, cultural, and socioeconomic realities of contemporary Bali.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the role and characteristics of shopping malls as urban third places for Generations Y and Z in Bali, integrating perceptual analysis with spatial observation to understand how malls support contemporary patterns of sociability, leisure, and digital engagement. The findings demonstrate that malls have become significant hybrid social environments where physical comfort, cultural meaning, and digitally mediated interaction intersect, reflecting the evolving nature of public life in developing, tourism-oriented cities.

The perceptual survey shows that malls are the most preferred indoor third places among young residents, driven by their accessibility, safety, and ability to accommodate a wide range of activities, from casual conversation and people-watching to studying, digital work, and content creation. Generational differences are evident: Generation Y tends to explore spatial environments and seek familiarity, while Generation Z exhibits stronger engagement in observational, introspective, and digitally oriented activities. These distinctions highlight the mall's versatility in supporting both individual and collective modes of social participation.

The spatial analysis of Living World Mall and Mal Bali Galeria illustrates how different commercial typologies sustain third place functions. Living World Mall operates as an experiential, youth-oriented environment characterized by flexibility, openness, and sensory dynamism. Mal Bali Galeria, by contrast, functions as a community-oriented environment emphasizing familiarity, comfort, and intergenerational appeal. Despite these differences, both malls provide essential affordances: comfortable seating, shading, legible circulation, greenery, and microclimatic protection that support informal social interaction and reinforce their role as contemporary urban gathering spaces.

Importantly, the study reveals that in the context of Bali, third places are redefined through the interplay of commercial design, cultural values, and generational lifestyles. Malls compensate for the limited availability of formal public spaces and challenging outdoor climatic conditions, functioning as accessible and inclusive social infrastructures. This reinforces the broader argument that third places in developing urban contexts are increasingly shaped by consumer culture, branding, and digital integration rather than by traditional civic provision.

The findings offer meaningful implications for urban design and commercial development. Human-centered spatial strategies such as providing free and varied seating, integrating greenery, ensuring thermal comfort, and supporting digital activity are essential for enhancing the social value of malls. Designers and policymakers should recognize the mall's emerging

role as a quasi-civic environment and prioritize inclusivity, comfort, and social openness in future retail developments. By doing so, malls can evolve beyond their commercial origins to sustain vibrant social life, strengthen community bonds, and support the everyday cultural identity of Bali's young generations.

In conclusion, shopping malls in Bali exemplify a contemporary re-articulation of Oldenburg's third place concept. They illustrate how built environments can adapt to changing urban lifestyles, and how commercial spaces, when thoughtfully designed, can function as meaningful public realms that foster interaction, belonging, and community in the rapidly transforming urban fabric of Southeast Asian cities.

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