

Sustainability and High-Rise Design for the Future: Importance of Connectivity between Vertical Living and the Natural Environment

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Abstract

High-rise living had been universally accepted as a sustainable solution to the housing problem by the end of the 20th century. However, it invariably results in the separation of people from nature, a fact that is especially true of users occupying the upper floors of high-rise apartments. Consequently, such a lifestyle has long been associated with the poor mental and physical health of their users. Sustainable high-rise buildings are, therefore, not merely about responsiveness to environmental, technical, and economic issues, but also about the improvement of high-rise dwellers' quality of living. Such concerns become even more important in the context of the high-rise's evolution as a holistically sustainable urban dwelling of the future, due to rising real estate prices in urban areas. It is a foregone conclusion, therefore, that the aforementioned negative influences would also occur in the Sri Lankan context, especially since high-rise living has yet to become entrenched in the collective conscious of her people as a viable lifestyle choice. This paper demonstrates how the outdoor natural environment affects the mental well-being of high-rise dwellers. Responses of dwellers of three different high-rise apartments in Colombo, Sri Lanka, regarding their phenomenological experiences of how the outdoor natural environment affected their mental well-being, were collected, and qualitatively analyzed. The results show how the presence of visual connections to the natural environment contribute to the mental health and well-being of high-rise dwellers. These findings have relevance to the way user-friendly high-rise apartments that would be designed in the foreseeable future.

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