



Fragments of a Home: The Role of Interior Architecture in Navigating Sentimental Loss and Resilience in Climate Displacement

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Interior architecture and design

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1.1 Introduction

Climate change is not an abstract problem but an imminent concern that requires immediate action as it reshapes our world, with impacts that extend beyond environment concerns to the fabric of human lives and homes (Klein, 2015). As a result, displacement is a harsh reality for many communities due to of climate change events such as floods and coastal erosion (Lawrance, 2022). While floods can impact the external structure of a building, they have the greatest impact on the interiors of spaces, particularly at the ground floor or entry-level. This can lead to the loss of intricate details that define a house as a home, irreplaceable by design after displacement (Mustak, 1970). The loss of sentimental items and irreplaceable elements that define a space becomes poignant markers of the implications that have happened due to climate change (Devoy, 2009).

This exploration focusses on the deeply personal impacts of climate change events, specifically sentimental loss. To do this, the study delves into the emotional and personal impact of climate-induced displacement, looking into the intricate narratives of lived experiences of individuals. This study seeks to better understand how interior architectural elements contribute to overall sense of home.

The research questions focus on the emotional consequences of climate change-induced events, delving into the definition of 'space' and 'home' following displacement. The study also aims to investigate how personal traditions, intertwined with the concept of space and identity, are impacted amidst environmental challenges. To do this, the research uses a multifaceted methodology involving visual documentation, and in-depth interviews, to capture the impact of the transformation of living spaces before, during, and after these extreme weather events.

Drawing on insights from both primary and secondary research, the study highlights the unique challenges faced by individuals in Ireland, whose voices are often overlooked in policy decisions (European Investment Bank, 2021). By amplifying the stories of those directly affected by climate change, the research seeks to inform strategies for preserving personal and social identities embedded in the home, within an Irish context. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the human experiences of climate change, emphasizing the importance of interior architectural elements in shaping a sense of home and belonging. By examining the emotional consequences of displacement and how individuals and communities have tried to reconstruct in the aftermath, the research aims to foster empathy, awareness, and action to address the profound impacts of climate change on human lives.

1.2 Research Questions, Aims & Objectives

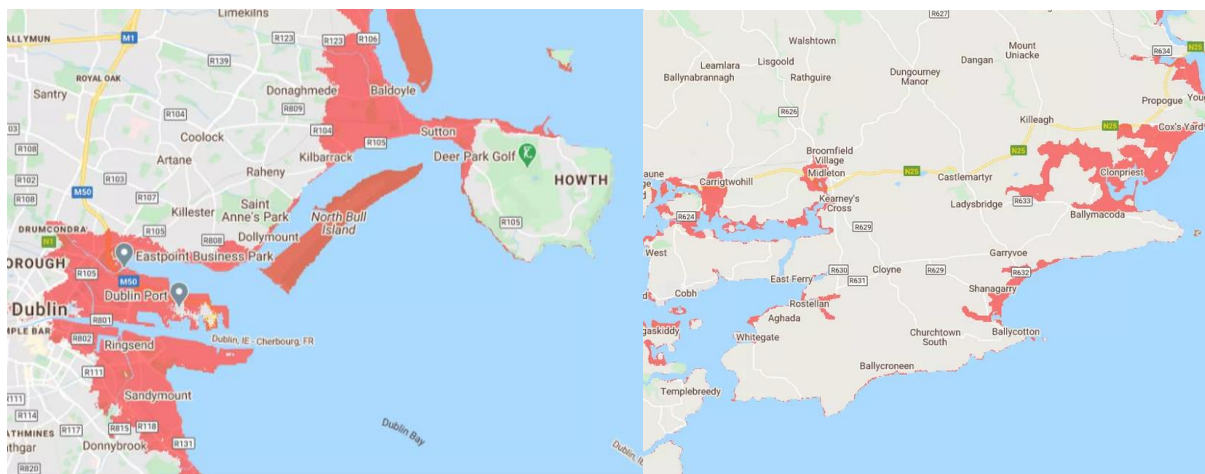
Through in-depth interviews, visual documentation, and a comprehensive literature review, the study aims to shed light on the emotional journey experienced by individuals facing climate displacement. By shedding light on the often-overlooked human dimensions of climate change, emphasizing how interior architectural elements contribute to the overall sense of home.

- What are the emotional and psychological consequences of sentimental loss as a result of displacement from one's home?
- How do individuals, families and communities look to reconstruct the meaning of a space in the wake of these displacements?
- How can the deeply personal experience of sentimental loss due to climate change driven displacement be conveyed?

The study aims to focus on the loss of the irreplaceable elements that contribute to the essence of a space, elements which are imbued with sentiment, but must be left behind in the face of inundation due to flooding. Through undertaking interviews with those who have suffered displacement, this research captures some of the stories of those directly impacted by flooding made more extreme by climate change. Through the act of recording and analysing the lived experience, the strategies for preserving personal and community identities and traditions in the face of environmental challenges may be appropriately informed.

2.1 Literature Review

A substantial proportion of the Irish population lives within 5km of the Irish coast with approximately 40000 people living within 100 meters (Hubbard, 2023). As a result, Ireland is particularly vulnerable to the results of climate change driven extreme weather events and sea level rise, such as accelerated coastal erosion and more frequent extreme flooding (Environmental Protection Agency, 2024). Consequently, some homeowners and businesses have been warned that they may have to abandon and relocate from their properties due to rising sea levels and major coastal erosion (Environmental Protection Agency, 2024).



Areas in Dublin & Cork that are at risk of flooding (Central, 2024)

Amidst these challenges, it is crucial to consider how extreme weather impacts not only physical structures but also the significant mental impact on those displaced from their lives (Cianconi et al., 2020). Such a perspective can shed light on ways in which climate change, particularly in the context of flooding, directly impacts the sanctity of our homes and everyday lives in Ireland (Wright, 2012).

Ireland is considered to have some of the most progressive climate legislation in the world. However, there is little understanding or support addressing the sentimental and emotional impacts of climate events on individuals (Cianconi et al., 2020). While policy measures focus

on the boarder economic and structural transitions, the profound losses and emotional consequences experienced by those affected by climate induced displacement remains unaddressed (ibid, 2020).

Although most Irish people still see climate change as an abstract, far-off problem, there is a growing awareness of the direct and devastating threat it poses to their nation considering recent floods and extreme storms. For instance, new findings suggest that awareness and concern regarding climate change transcends traditional generational boundaries (Daly, 2023). SEAI found that 90% of homeowners are concerned about climate change after the recent weather events and are more aware of the severity of the situation (Nolan, 2023).

However, marginalised and disadvantaged communities are typically less engaged in these issues and aware of the risks of climate change, resulting in their voices and needs being overlooked in the decision-making process of policy (McMaster, 2021). This is a significant problem as poorer communities are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, with predictions suggesting they are hit the hardest (Abbott, 2015).

For instance, families living in certain deprived parts of north Dublin and Limerick face the risk of increased frequency of flooding events, with their homes uninsurable due to the apparent inevitability of coastal erosion (McMaster, 2021). Reporting on recent floods in Midleton, Cork, documented how this life-changing event left residents feeling ‘forgotten and invisible’ in their homes (Hoare, 2023). The homes and lives will never be the same again, as they are left to deal with damage for which we are arguably collectively responsible (Hoare, 2023). The fate of these individuals remains uncertain due to an apparent lack of appropriate government policy (McMaster, 2021).

Extreme floods in Ireland have had a major impact on people's livelihoods, washing away the personal everyday contents of their homes such as furniture or objects, which may be of a low value but are sentimentally significant (Hoare, 2023). While anxiety can build resilience by-increasing perception and promoting preparedness, the risk of increasingly frequent extreme flooding events also has a negative psychological effect on individuals, as well as reducing the stability of communities and businesses (Hynes, 2012). For instance, those who must leave their properties feel a sense of hopelessness as the water begins to rise, followed by a sense of loss as they recede and the damage is revealed, further compounded by a duration of displacement that can last for years because of flooding damage (ibid,2012).

Research suggests that climate change threatens not only the physical environment but also the cultural aspects of lives (Adger, 2012). The impact of loss of culture, and identity in personal and community spaces is often overlooked in discourse of climate change impacts (Klein, 2015). Cultural dimensions can include both physical elements, like material and belongings, and less tangible aspects, such as identity, community, and our connection to specific spaces (Adger, 2012). Considering these aspects reveals how societies navigate climate-related risks and indicate how identity should play a crucial role in shaping environmental changes.

Relocating due to flooding, such as the ‘manage retreat’ strategy, disrupts not only physical structures but also the social, economic, and psychological connections that individuals have with their homes (Andrew L. Dannenberg, 2019). Attachment to place and property is a deeply ingrained aspect of human identity with the emotional ties of belonging. When considering the effects of flooding on livelihoods, the disruption goes beyond physical structures – it severs as a connection individuals and communities have with their homes (Wright, 2012).

An understanding of the lived experiences of individuals offers insights into the mechanisms of adaption and the actions taken in everyday life to cope with the changing circumstances

(Abbott, 2015). In questioning ‘whose knowledge counts,’ research on the lived experience offer insights that extend beyond traditional frameworks, enriching the understanding of climate change (Abbott, 2015).



(Hoare, 2023) Picture: Chani Anderson – *Midleton home destroyed during flooding*

For homeowners, their homes will likely never be the same after being submerged in flooding (Burke, 2017). Flooding can have long-lasting and often irreversible effects on the way people live, leaving individuals and families not just homeless but also dealing with the loss of a familiar and personalized environment (Hoare, 2023). Despite its importance, there is a notable lack of current research focusing on the lived experiences of individuals affected by climate change. As the effects of climate change become more widespread, there is a pressing need for more research in this area (Cianconi et al., 2020). By delving into the personal and emotional dimensions of climate change, such research can uncover insights that inform more effective climate policies and interventions.



(Hoare, 2023) (Picture: Chani Anderson – *Middleton home destroyed during flooding*)

The literature review sheds light on Ireland's vulnerability to climate impacts, particularly coastal erosion and flooding. Despite progressive legislation, marginalized communities often face neglect in policy responses, exacerbating their vulnerability. The aftermath of climate-induced events leaves individuals feeling forgotten and invisible, indicating a more inclusive and proactive approach to understanding how to foster climate adaptation and mitigation. Gathering the lived experiences of those affected by these events provides a way to achieve this by increasing understanding of the sentimental loss, cultural impacts, and emotional struggles of individuals.

3.1 Methodology

This section outlines the methodology used when investigating the topic, addressing relevant issues, precedents, and the chosen methods supported by examples.

The research method endeavours to reveal and understand the personal impacts of climate-induced displacement, shedding light on the emotional impact of losing the interior environment of one's home or business. By speaking with a diverse range of people from different demographics and sectors, the research aims to hear from those sometimes overlooked in the existing narrative around the impacts of climate change. By exploring the emotional consequences, and traditions associated with the loss of interior spaces during climate-related displacements, this research aspires to contribute to a deeper understanding of the human experience amidst environmental challenges. The methodology will use the power of storytelling to convey the lived experience of those impacted by displacement, with a particular emphasis on the sentimental loss of the interior, while visual media will seek to describe the physical impact on these spaces.

3.2 Initial (Secondary) Research Approach

Initially, relevant secondary data was gathered through in-depth desk research which provided a basis for the primary data obtained. This is essential to provide an academic framework within which the primary research can be positioned (PhD Assistance, 2023).

A wide range of secondary data was gathered in this research, to provide a deeper understanding of climate-induced displacement. This involved studying articles, books, case studies, and documentaries that explore similar themes, and using Google Scholar and Science Direct to ensure reputable information was being accessed. Some vital information gathered included news articles featuring interviews with people who have experienced climate-induced displacement these sources have been incorporated into the literature review. Other notable sources included the book 'The Lived Experience of Climate Change' by Dina Abbott, which provided insights into the lived experience of displacement and its psychological impacts.

In studies involving secondary data analysis (SDA), research utilize information gathered by other researchers to investigate distinct inquires (RJ; 2019). The review synthesized key findings and identified gaps in the existing literature, informing the framework of the study.

3.3 Primary Research

Primary research is essential when examining how climate-induced displacement affects people's well-being as it gives a deeper understanding of why a place of identity in your living space is important (Lisa R. Fortuna, 2024). As there is a lack of available data on this topic, carefully designed primary data collection was essential (Haddaway, 2014).

3.4 Primary Research Approach

Ethnographic Method

Using an ethnographic method to gather information during the interviews allows for rich, detailed narratives to emerge (Rinaldo, 2019). Through the use of in-person interviews, the researcher was able to explore the lived experiences of the individuals affected, gaining insights into the specific aspects of their homes that had been destroyed and the resultant complex emotions and coping mechanisms, associated with the experiences. By conducting multiple interviews, it is possible to develop a holistic perspective on the emotional impacts, recognizing that these experiences may vary or may be similar (Kendall et al., 2009). This method was most suited for this research as it enabled the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives, contributing to more meaningful and nuanced research outcomes (Kendall et al., 2009).

Interviews

As developed in the literature review, there is little research investigating the emotional and sentimental toll climate-induced displacement has on people in Ireland which led the researcher to examine the participant's stories, emotions, and attitudes as they recounted their experiences. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as, this allowed the participants to freely express their emotions and recite their experiences of sentimental loss and adaption to new environments (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

This study primarily used an ethnographic approach, with semi-structured interviews as this provides a trustworthy study by immersing the researcher into the narratives of participants, permitting a deeper understanding of their lived experiences, and allowing for the extraction of key themes and patterns from their accounts (Rinaldo, 2019). An ethnographic approach

was deemed particularly suitable as it allowed a deeper investigation of the impact of climate induced flooding on the complex relationship of emotion and the interior.

Four individual interviews were used for this study. The narratives shared by participants range along the west coast of Ireland, Donegal, Mayo, and Galway and span storms such as Debi, Gert, and Jocelyn. The interview consisted of 10-20 different questions (see in appendix), depending on the participants' answers, allowing them to speak freely about their experiences of the flooding and storms in Ireland while allowing the interviewer an element of control over the flow of the interview. The questions were designed carefully so that the information relevant to the research aims would be generated from the interviews.

Through these interviews a comprehensive understanding of the critical issues emerged, the erosion of personal identity in one's home due to environmental upheavals. By engaging with those directly impacted by climate change, insights into the emotional toll of displacement were identified.

By integrating these methodological components, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive exploration of the emotional and design implications of climate-induced displacement within the realm of interior architecture and design.

3.5 Data collection & Analysis

The interview questions were derived from the review of the literature and several drafts were prepared to ensure they would address the research questions. From the months between September to December 2023, interviews were conducted within the studio, ensuring a conducive setting for in-depth discussions. Each session was recorded using a phone and transcribed, capturing the insights and ensure accuracy in data collection. Once the data was successfully collected the researcher recorded everything in a book to gather and analyse the results before taking it to Microsoft Excel.

Data from the interviews were analysed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method which provides a deep understanding of the individuals' experiences, interpretations, and context. These qualities make IPA well suited for uncovering the subjective meanings and interpretations underlying participants' accounts, leading to richer insights and findings (Hefferon, 2024).

The 'analysis data' function in excel was used to conduct statistical analysis following coding and organisation. This allowed for a thorough analysis of every question asked during the interview and every response provided, enabling the creation of charts appropriate for visually presenting the data and spotting trends and patterns in the findings to yield reliable research findings relevant to the topic's aim.

Interpretive Drawings

Based on the findings of the interviews, scenes depicting the before, during, and after of homes affected by climate-induced events were illustrated. These illustrations serve as visual representations of the emotional journey experienced by individuals facing climate displacement and will serve as a powerful tool to convey to a wider audience. Inspired by the 'Losing Myself' pavilion at the biennale, the approach of layered conversations over drawings adds depth and meaning to the exhibition (Manolopoulou & McLaughlin, 2016). The exhibition design incorporates these illustrations alongside voiceovers of participants'

stories, creating a multisensory experience for the visitors to empathize with the emotional impact of displacement.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Consent forms with a detailed explanation of the research's goal were given to participants, whose voices were going to be recorded for the purpose of research and used in an exhibition. Before the interview, subjects were given participant information papers and consent forms that explained the purpose of the study and their rights. The Participant Information Sheet (PIS) contained confirmation of the study's objectives and ethical permission. We ensured anonymity and secrecy by not collecting any personal information. To further assure secrecy, this material was subsequently safely kept on the OneDrive system. By including the PIS, it was possible to prevent participants from retracing their responses after the interview because it was guaranteed that they were fully aware before the research began.

4.1 Findings

Climate displacement is not merely an environmental phenomenon; it is an emotional experience that affects individuals and communities (Natividad, 2023) . Through the interviews with the affected participants, supported by the literature review, the findings. have revealed profound insights into the emotional upheaval and personal loss experienced due to extreme weather events.

4.2 Common themes

Throughout the interviews, several common themes emerged reflecting the deep emotional impact of the displacement of individuals (Figure. 1).

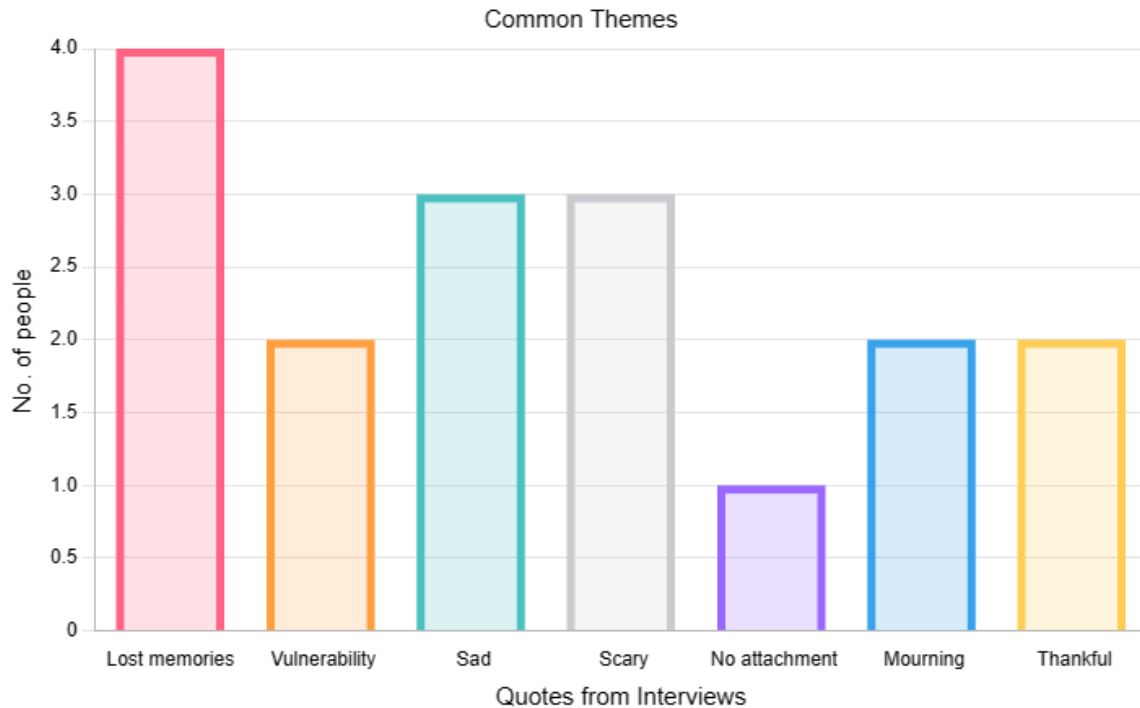


Figure 1 – Common themes identified in the interviews.

Lost Memories

– All of the participants expressed a profound sense of loss for the memories and experiences associated with their homes and interior spaces. These spaces, once filled with cherished moments and family connections, were now irretrievably altered or destroyed (Figure 2), leaving behind a void in their home. For example, all four of the participants mentioned that they feel that their memories have been ruined when asked ‘In what ways did the flooding and its aftermath affect your attachment to the physical space of your home?’

‘It is the things inside the house, the memories, now when you can’t see them, they’re gone too’ (Interview 2 November 2023)



Figure 2 – *Lost memories in the aftermath*

Sadness and Mourning

– Feelings of sadness and mourning permeated in all the interviews, as participants dealt with the loss of their homes. The emotional toll of displacement was palpable, with many expressing a sense of grief for the familiar spaces they could no longer visit.

‘There was no new connection in our home because everything had to be rebuilt – it might’ve looked the same, but it wasn’t the same house’ – (Interview 2 November 2023)

Vulnerability and Fear

– Displacement left the participants feeling vulnerable and fearful, uncertain about their future and their ability to rebuild their lives. The loss of sense of security within their homes heightened their anxieties, as they are now uncertain about environmental threats.

‘Anything bad can happen in that safe place that you call home.’ (Interview 4 December 2023) (Figure 3)



Figure 3 – Home destroyed during flooding.

Forgotten and Disconnected

– Displacement resulted in a profound sense of disconnection from their homes and communities, with participants feeling forgotten amid the chaos. The government provided business owners help but homeowners felt forgotten about in their communities. The loss of attachment to their homes further intensified the feelings of isolation.

‘People you know, or families’ workplaces are affected so badly and have to shut for the foreseeable future – the community is at a halt’ – (Interview 1 September 2023)

No Safe Place

– The displacement also highlighted the absence of a safe haven for participants, as their homes, once a ‘sanctuary’ from external threats, became vulnerable to climate. The erosion of their sense of safety and security further intensified their emotional distress.

*‘Now knowing that it can happen again at any point.’ (Interview 1, September 2023)
(Figure 4)*



Figure 4 – *Student home destroyed during flooding.*

Thankful and Lucky

– Despite the hardships, half of the participants expressed gratitude for escaping before more severe consequences. This gratitude amidst loss underscores the resilience of individuals in the face of adversity.

‘You never expect to lose items under these circumstances, but we are just thankful we saved whatever we could before it got worse.’ (Interview 4, December 2023)

Conclusion

Across all the interviews, the damage caused by water intrusion emerged as a significant challenge, leading to the destruction of homes and personal belongings. Participants recounted scenes of water seeping through walls, lifting floors, and flooding entire spaces, resulting in the loss of cherished items such as furniture, childhood toys, and family memorabilia. Despite the misfortune they face, the individuals displayed resilience in the face of climate displacement. After each of the displacements, individuals forged new connections with their new homes, honouring memories that were lost as they rebuilt their lives in the aftermath of displacement, demonstrating a spirit of human resilience.

The emotional impact of climate displacement is apparent from the interviews. Memories of their homes destroyed by the floods or storms leave individuals mourning not just physical structures but also the essence of their homes, while displacement disrupts the very fabric of identity and belonging, leaving the individuals uncertain and disconnected. Participants described feelings of hopelessness and invisibility as they dealt with the aftermath of environmental devastation. The duration of displacement heightens the psychological distress, as individuals confront the daunting task of rebuilding their lives amidst uncertainty and disruption.



Figure 5 – *Aftermath of flooding and storms*

4.3 Future Research

The research could be expanded by conducting further studies to track the emotional resilience of individuals and communities facing climate-induced displacement. By examining how emotional responses evolve, it may be possible to identify factors that contribute to long-term coping strategies and inform interventions to support the well-being of people after extreme weather events.

The research suggests the need for additional consideration of climate resilient interiors, such as:

- Flexible interior layouts that can adapt to changing circumstances.
- Additionally, it is clear that additional focus on the psychological wellbeing of the displaced is essential, which will include the interior spaces that promote comfort, safety, and a sense of normalcy.

5.1 Conclusion

Ireland is dealing with the challenges of extreme weather events, and it is essential to not only understand the immediate impacts of these events, but also address the long-term consequences that linger in the lives of those displaced from their homes (Hynes, 2012). When examining these stories of resilience, loss, and recovery, society can work towards creating policies and strategies that create preparedness to provide support to those who are rebuilding their lives (Hynes, 2012).

The literature review underscores the urgency of addressing climate change, particularly in Ireland, where recurrent flooding and coastal erosion pose a threat to communities. The emotional toll on individuals, coupled with the loss of sentimental items and the displacement of entire communities, highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of the human side of this crisis.

This study delved into the personal and emotional dimensions of climate-induced displacement, shedding light on the individuals and communities impacted. Through a combination of ethnographic research, in-depth interviews, visual documentation, and a comprehensive literature review, the study has explored the intricate narratives of those whose lives have been upended by extreme weather events. By shedding light on the human experience of climate change, this research promotes greater empathy, awareness, and action needed to address the consequences of displacement.

The findings underscore the importance of interior architectural elements in shaping the sense of home, with the loss of irreplaceable elements contributing to feelings of loss and disconnection resulting from displacement. The interviews revealed that the interior architecture of a dwelling can reflect the personal identity of the owner which becomes a casualty in the face of flooding and displacement (Adger, 2012). In this context, homes are not merely structures but also; encapsulate memories, cultural influences, and a sense of self (Adger, 2012). These findings directly address the research questions by providing valuable insights into the emotional aspects of displacement, the reconstruction of meaning post-displacement, and the design elements that shape a sense of home amidst environmental challenges.

This research suggests that there is need for national climate change policy and strategy should recognize the importance of preserving the intangible heritage, community, and personal connections. When interior spaces are lost to flooding or other climate-induced events, it is essential to focus not only on rebuilding physical structures but also on restoring the essence of what makes a house a home.

This research is a 'Call to Action,' to recognize the personal impact of the climate-related destruction of interior spaces, as well as the importance of the preservation of human existence and dignity.

Through examining these stories of resilience, loss, and recovery, society can work towards creating policies and strategies that create preparedness to provide support to those who are rebuilding their lives (Hynes, 2012).

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Appendix

Drawings







Exhibit



Live Link to Audio & QR Code

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