

# Exploration of Cinema Architecture to Resurge Cinema as a Cultural Laboratory in Malaysia

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i8/22529>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i8/22529

**Published Date:** 13 August 2024

## Abstract

Malaysia is known for its plethora of cultures, traditions, and identity. Similarly, so does its cinema industry, which has existed for almost a century. The cinema theater was a place and space where people of all ages met and engaged for entertainment. As the audience keeps growing, cinema halls are moving into shopping malls where more modern and bigger halls are being built to amuse people in both shopping and entertainment, and the cinema theaters are closing down. These theaters were once an integral part of the urban fabric of the community and country. Thus, the architecture of the cinema provides a character, identity, and culture, which acts as a catalyst for a socially sustainable society. To address this, architecture and cinema are used as two integral elements of sustainability principles on the social dimension consisting of equity and social identity, aesthetics, and comfort. The study will conduct qualitative research to explore cinema architecture as a platform to promote film culture development and investigate the architectural strategies that can be incorporated into a cultural hub. Furthermore, the study will present a framework for a new cinema architecture that aims to reintroduce the cinema theater as a cinema cultural hub for the present and future generations and introduce a new perspective to the cinema theaters outside the shopping mall. In summary, the study presents research on a new approach to cinema architecture and interaction with the urban fabric and community. The research focuses on cinema theater urban shopping malls and the sustainability and criteria of cultural entertainment with the design of cinema theater and operational guidelines and mechanisms to use in cinema architecture in the urban development and community.

**Keywords:** Cinema Architecture, Cinema Cultural Hub, Urban Fabric, Film Culture.

## Introduction

Cinema has always been a part of people's lives. It is a medium that can engage, educate, entertain, and influence audiences. It also provides cultural representation and inspiration to people. Roger Ebert, a film critic, says cinema is one of the most powerful forms of art in the world. It changes the way we think, we feel, and the way we see the world (Ebert, 2012).

Cinema has introduced a realm of fantasies, realism, and drama, social and sometimes controversies to society.

With the newly found form of entertainment, cinema theaters were created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to bring people into this new and unknown space of moving images and transporting them across the world into different times and places (Tinudu, 2018). The first cinema halls were known as Nickelodeons, where patrons and audience members would pay a nickel to attend a show. 'Odeon' is the Greek word for theater. In the mid-1930s, the evolution in the architecture of the cinema theater was influenced by the culture and class of the community, where the rich and the poor were seated on different levels to demonstrate the difference. Movie palaces were rapidly being built across the United States and the United Kingdom. Notably, these palaces were opulent, extravagant, and luxurious. At the same time, the working class was forced to attend lower-grade cinema halls with minorities or attend after the showing for upper-class people on late nights (Tinudu, 2018). By the end of the 1930s, a new cinema trend came into place – Drive-In cinemas – due to the great depression, many traditional theaters closed, and drive-in cinemas were the only form of entertainment during this tough period for families. It was far cheaper than traditional cinemas (Shaw-Smith, 2009). The architecture of drive-in cinemas was an open field in a fan shape accommodating up to 400 cars (Segrave, 2006). Subsequently, in the 1960s, a new cinema culture was formed, as it became more convenient for people to watch a movie. People would virtually be in a theater as the cars transformed into private theater boxes. Moreover, people were free to talk, bring children, and come with the whole family to contemplate a movie in their comfort (Shaw-smith, 2009).

One of the main purposes of the emergence of drive-in cinema was to show movies as an exhibition to people living in rural or located far from traditional cinemas. However, with rapid urbanization and an increase in land values, the drive-in cinemas were diminished (Segrave, 2006). Consequently, multiplexes were built, accommodating more people and more screenings at different times of the day. This attracted more audience members at a fair ticket price. The growth of multiplex cinema was largely motivated by the profits made on a large scale. Furthermore, multiplex cinema followed Art Deco architecture with neon lighting to entice moviegoers to watch films. The Art Deco movement and multiplex cinema have created an identity of cinema multiplexes through architecture.

The intricate relationship between cinema and the city, which can also be defined as the relationship between the urban fabric and the cinematic space, has been established since the early 1930s when the first cinema theater was built. In the years of the 1980s, multiplexes moved to shopping malls where developers utilized cinema theaters to attract people to visit the malls. Moreover, the technologies used were more modern, and the shopping malls could house more screens than ever with more parking facilities. This attracted more people to the cinemas and other leisure facilities, making the malls more lucrative (Papousek, 2019). However, the modern architectural style became homogenous and dull, with no exterior or interior articulation like the standalone multiplexes with an architectural and cultural identity. Hence, the film and cinema culture nowadays all the cinemas are the same.

Film historian Thomas Schatz argues that multiplexes have actually expanded the range of movies available to audiences, providing more opportunities for independent and foreign films to find an audience (Schatz, 1996). However, these multiplexes do not express the feeling of a cinema theater. They have become auditorium halls that only show films on a screen. Scholar Robert Rosenstone argues that the young generations are not growing up with

an appreciation of film culture as a coherent entity. They see films as individual works rather than part of a larger culture (Rosentone, 2009).

The rise of digital media coincides with the demise of cinema culture. The availability of online platforms and streaming services has given people more choices than ever for watching movies and other media types. As a result, many individuals no longer place as much importance on the traditional movie theater experience when watching a movie. Film critic Richard Brody wrote that the long-term shift towards home viewing has worn the movie experience and, with it, the audience's sense of the importance of movies (Brody, 2016). After the COVID-19 pandemic, people are flocking to cinemas as a means of escape from harsh everyday life. Hence, the importance of film culture is diminishing. Additionally, online streaming services have taken over film and cinema-going cultures worldwide. A 2017 Journal of Health Psychology study revealed that "watching television, including binge-watching, was positively associated with higher levels of sedentary behavior affecting the social sustainability of the society."

To attract audiences and revive the film culture and cinema-going culture, innovative approaches such as boutique cinemas serve another class of cinema. The modern cinema palace is adorned with luxurious seating, the latest technology, and restaurant-like refreshments. Meanwhile, the exterior is either the entrance to a shopping mall or a retrofitted shophouse. Film critic Peter Bradshaw argues that boutique cinema can lead to a sense of exclusivity and elitism. He writes, "The boutique cinema boom has created a culture of self-congratulation among certain film-lovers, who treat themselves to the 'finer' things in life, and whose tastes have been pandered to by the growth in expensive boutique cinemas." The demise of cinema-going culture is increasing due to the homogeneity of cinema theaters and streaming services. This is having a repercussion not only on the film culture but also on the social sustainability of Malaysian society and the architecture through which identity and culture are seen and experienced. Cinema theaters used to be culture laboratories for Malaysia. The demise of film culture can lead to a reduction in social cohesion as people become less connected and engaged with each other. Hence, it can lead to a loss of cultural identity as cinema becomes homogenized and fails to reflect local cultures and traditions. Currently, no studies are being conducted on how film culture can be resurged through architecture – the future of cinema, theater, and culture could lie in the evolution of its architecture. With the evolution of the architecture of cinema theaters, the urban space around them also evolved and made cinema theaters the center of social sustainability, identity, entertainment, and culture. This influenced the people, whereby they could relate to the culture and identity created. The only measures theater companies are taking are boutique cinemas to create social conditions and cultural practices to experience cinema better than multiplex cinema.

Malaysia is a country with a rich cultural heritage and a diverse population. However, when it comes to cinema architecture, there seems to be a lack of diversity and homogeneity in design. Many cinemas in Malaysia have a similar look and feel, with little variation in their design and layout. This lack of diversity in cinema architecture is a missed opportunity to showcase Malaysia's unique cultural identity and architectural heritage. Instead, cinemas in Malaysia often look like generic multiplexes discovered in other countries, with little to distinguish them from one another. While there are some exceptions to this trend, such as the iconic Coliseum Theater in Kuala Lumpur, which has a distinctive Art Deco design, these cinemas are few and far between. Furthermore, most cinemas in Malaysia are designed to be functional and efficient, with little consideration given to their aesthetic appeal or cultural

significance. This homogeneity in cinema architecture reflects broader trends in Malaysia's built environment. As the country has developed rapidly in recent decades, there has been a focus on modernization and efficiency, often at the expense of cultural heritage and identity. To address this issue, there needs to be a greater emphasis on incorporating Malaysia's unique cultural identity and architectural heritage into cinema design. This could involve working with local architects and designers to create functional and aesthetically appealing cinemas while also reflecting Malaysia's diverse cultural heritage. By embracing Malaysia's cultural identity and architectural heritage, cinemas in the country could become not just places to watch movies but also cultural landmarks that celebrate the country's rich history and diversity.

The lack of diversity in cinema architecture represents an opportunity to highlight Malaysia's distinct cultural character and architectural heritage. Most Malaysian cinemas are constructed to be practical and efficient, with no consideration for aesthetic appeal or cultural importance. This outcome is also partly due to the lack of a national architectural identity in Malaysia. Most architectural styles are imported or influenced by previous colonizers and continued till modern times (Hussain, 2015; Ismail, 2018).

Multiplex cinemas in Malaysia are expanding, and the number of silver screens is increasing from year to year. However, they tarnish the film culture by offering homogeneity in cinema architecture. There is no film sense, feeling, or welcoming entrance in the standard multiplex cinema found in the malls, and every multiplex is the same. There is no distinct difference between the shopping mall environment/space and space of the multiplex. Additionally, shopping malls are using cinemas to lure people to visit and go home to buy unintentional items. Furthermore, boutique cinemas are growing up to lure another status of people under the guise of promoting film culture, recreating the feeling of movie palaces to experience state-of-the-art screening halls, fine dining, and luxurious nights out at a private cinema. Overall, a lack of consideration for cultural heritage and identity, a focus on modernization and efficiency, and a lack of research on the topic have all contributed to the homogeneity of cinema architecture in Malaysia. Additionally, most studies on cinema architecture are concentrated in Western countries, with little research on the topic in Malaysia. This lack of research has contributed to a lack of understanding of the importance of incorporating cultural identity into cinema design.

## **Research Questions**

### ***Main Research Question***

What Are the Main Characteristics of A Cinema Cultural Hub In Malaysia?

*RQ 1:* How can cinema architecture facilitate cultural events, collaborations, and community engagement to foster film culture in Malaysia?

*RQ 2:* What architectural design elements and strategies can be incorporated into cinema complexes in Malaysia to create a cultural hub that enhances the cinema-going experience?

## **Research Aim and Objectives**

*AIM:* The research is to discover how the homogeneity of cinema theaters affects the film culture and cinema-going experience in Malaysia, along with proposing solutions and recommendations from case studies.

## Objectives

RO 1: To explore how cinema architecture can serve as a platform for cultural events, collaborations, and community engagement to promote the development of film culture.

RO 2: To investigate architectural design elements and strategies that can be incorporated to create a cultural hub that enhances the cinema-going experience in Malaysia.

## Literature Review

### *History and Evolution of Movie Theaters in Malaysia*

Notable movie theaters were established in the 1930s, and Malaysia was quite ahead in the medium of entertainment. The seeds of cinema came in the form of traditional performing arts in Malaysia. *Wayang Kulit* (Malay shadow play) was one of the first forms of entertainment with theatrical storytelling using made-up characters. It was an exciting play of light which brought people together to watch an animation on a translucent screen. This was Malaysia's first form of movie theater around 200 years ago, which brought a cultural substance to the lives of Malaysians (Muthalib, 2017), from Shadow Play to the Silver Screen: Early Malay (sian) Cinema. In N. Deocampo (Ed.), *Early Cinema in Asia* (pp. 240–254).

In the 1930s, Art Deco was the architectural style that influenced the design of cinema theaters as it made its first appearance in the 1920s. Despite being short-lived, it made its mark in the cinematic landscape. The architects of the time were inventive in their design approach. Art Deco architectural style was the trending style to symbolize wealth and sophistication during the era. Moreover, the style also influenced Malaysia's early cinema architecture as they were imported by foreign cinema chains such as Odeon, Rex Cinema, and Capitol Theater. One of the first movie theaters to adopt the architectural movement was the Coliseum Theater in Kuala Lumpur in 1928.

Multiple-screen theaters were introduced over time to accommodate a larger number of audience members. Nat Taylor, the owner of the Elgin Theater in Ottawa, Canada, pioneered dual-screen theaters capable of showing two different films simultaneously in 1957. Nat is credited with inventing the multiplex/cineplex. He later founded Cineplex Odeon Corporation and opened the Toronto Eaton Centre Cineplex, which housed 18 screens at the time and was the world's largest cineplex (Historica, 2011). In the 1960s, multiple-screen theaters became the norm, requiring many existing theaters to be retrofitted to accommodate multiple halls. During this time, most single-screen theaters are losing business, leaving some to be used for small-scale screenings, arthouse films, film festivals, and other events.

TGV (Tanjung Golden Village) Cinema was formed in 1995 and pioneered the Malaysian period of the multiplex in shopping malls, beginning with 1Utama, which has ten screens. Right after, GSC (Golden Screen Cinemas) was created in 1998 from the merger of Golden Communications Circuit and Cathay Cinemas (Chan, 2007), and finished the largest multiplex in Malaysian mall in 1999, located in Mid Valley Megamall, which houses 18 screens. Since then, single-building cinemas in Malaysia have diminished, with cinemas serving as anchors for commercial malls becoming the norm.

### *Cultural Significance of Movie Theaters*

For over a century, movie theaters have been an important cultural institution, bringing people together to experience the magic of film. The first movie theaters were built after urban dwellers accepted cinema as a cultural activity and a means of socialization (Üstün, B. 2018). Movie theaters are one of the many types of buildings with cultural significance, which

add to a community's character and quality of life and raise a sense of pride for residents in communities. In addition, neighborhood movie theaters have been an essential component of the movie-going experience for the citizens of Vancouver since the 1930s (GVRD, 1995). The cultural importance of cinemas may be considered cultural landmarks that hold a special place in the community. For example, a cinema operating for several decades may be a cherished part of the neighborhood's history and identity, and patrons may feel a sense of loyalty and attachment to the cinema as a result.

Noel Brown's study "The Impact of Cinema on Social and Cultural Identity (2013)" argues that cinema is not simply a form of entertainment but also a powerful tool for shaping cultural identity and influencing social attitudes. Going to the movies is more than just watching a movie; it is also about the experience of purchasing a ticket, entering the theater, watching the movie, and exiting the theater (Reiser, 1986).

Socially, movie theaters in Malaysia have always been popular places for people to gather and share an experience. Going to the cinema has long been a favorite pastime for Malaysians of all ages, allowing families, friends, and couples to escape their daily routines and immerse themselves in the world of cinema. The communal experience of watching a movie in a darkened theater with strangers can foster feelings of belonging and community.

### ***Influence of Movie Theaters on Cinema-Going and Film Culture***

Cinema architecture has had a significant impact on cultural geographies, particularly in terms of the evolution of film culture and its place in contemporary society. The design of cinema theaters has contributed to the development of cinema-going and film culture and the emergence of the cinema as a key cultural institution. In "The Place of Cinema in Contemporary Culture (2003)," author Mark Jancovich explains that cinema architecture has created a sense of community around cinema-going, which is critical for the growth of film culture.

In recent years, cinema architecture has often been used as landmark buildings, designed as iconic buildings and recognizable structures that define the identity of a city and evoke a film culture, which subsequently encourages people of the town and country to cinema-going culture. The Grauman's Chinese Theater in Hollywood, California, is one of the most famous examples of cinema architecture used as a landmark building. The Chinese-inspired theater design, built in 1927, includes ornate carvings, colorful tiles, and a pagoda-style roof. With its famous courtyard featuring the handprints and footprints of many Hollywood stars, the theater has become a popular tourist attraction and an iconic symbol of Hollywood (Grauman's Chinese Theater, The Chinese Theater's official website).

### ***Multiplex Theater's Impact on Film Culture and Social Sustainability***

Multiplex cinemas quickly acquired popularity and expanded worldwide. Multiplexes became more widespread in the United States and Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, owing to factors such as suburbanization, changes in urban planning, and advances in cinema technology. The expansion of multiplex cinemas expanded further in the 1990s and early 2000s. The introduction of digital projection technology, stadium seating, and increased amenities such as larger screens, more comfortable seats, and improved sound systems improved the cinema-going experience (Maltby, 2004).

Throughout the years, Malaysia has seen tremendous growth in multiplex cinemas, particularly in urban areas. GSC, TGV Cinemas, and MBO Cinemas have increased their city presence by providing modern facilities and several screens (Lau, 2020). Cinema exhibition is

strongly linked with shopping malls in Malaysia, with many cinemas housed within these commercial complexes. Cinemas in malls provide convenience for moviegoers but also raise worries about the impact on urban cinema culture and the entire urban environment (Nasir et al., 2017).

Despite the evolution and progress made in the cinema industry through implementing multiplex cinema in shopping malls, the emphasis on social sustainability has continuously been put more on the social sustainability of shopping malls. Brent and Labuschagne (2006) describe social sustainability as the weakest pillar of sustainable development. This is why most multiplex cinema theaters are primarily used to attract people to make shopping malls successful, consequently encouraging a homogeneous cinema architecture. Cinemas in shopping malls are not able to contribute to the film culture and urban cinema environment as much as they should be since they are typically enclosed within the mall complex, detached from the surrounding urban context. Hence, this lack of integration can hinder the development of a vibrant and diverse urban cinema culture.

According to Sorkin (2013), since shopping malls prioritize retail spaces, it leaves limited spaces for cultural spaces around the cinema. This reduces the potential for cinematic community engagement, which is integral to the culture of film culture and social sustainability. Moreover, multiplex cinemas' dominance and standardized approach have contributed to a loss of cultural identity, particularly in locations with significant local film traditions. The emphasis in multiplexes on mainstream films and global blockbusters might reduce the exposure and enjoyment of local and alternative filmmaking. This has the potential to reduce the cultural variety and homogenize movie cultures (Ritzer, 2012).

### ***Experiencing a Sense of Place in Cinema Architecture***

Creating a sense of place in the design of cinematic architecture is crucial as the physical environment engages the senses and contributes to the overall cinema experience. Moreover, there is a hierarchy of senses in architecture where certain sensory experiences have a bigger influence than others in molding our perception and experience in architectural spaces (Pallasmaa, 1996). The cinematic experience of senses of place in architecture differs significantly amongst the various senses and, most importantly, between a boutique cinema, a shopping mall cinema, and a movie palace. Our architectural experience, according to Tomková (2022), includes cognitive, emotional, and sensory experiences.

Shopping mall cinemas, however, are designed for ease of access and convenience. The cinema architecture experience in these theaters is primarily functional, with little emphasis on aesthetics. Timothy Recuber observes that recent advancements in projection technology and theater architecture indicate that the physical and kinesthetic experience of the spectator, immersed in high-fidelity audio-visual technologies, is critical. Moreover, shopping mall cinemas are designed to maximize the number of screens and seats while paying little attention to the overall aesthetic experience (Recuber, *Space and Culture*, 2007). A shopping mall cinema's sense of place is frequently associated with the act of shopping, leading to a consumptive lifestyle (Mulyadi, 2018).

Cinema architecture in Malaysia plays a significant role in creating a sense of place for moviegoers. However, the exhibition of film and cinema culture is becoming less and less. To be able to experience the cinema culture, audience members will have to visit boutique cinemas to get a sense of the place of the cinema and film culture. TGV and GSC cinemas are offering state-of-the-art boutique cinemas where they offer fine dining and classy seats for a very intimate cinematic experience. According to many reviewers who visited those high-end

luxurious cinemas, they described them as eating Nasi Lemak in a fine dining restaurant, and the experience was more about experiencing a luxurious moment while watching a movie rather than an exhibition of a film where one can experience a new type of cinema-going experience.

Furthermore, spatial layout and sense of place, which they claimed to have, were not there. The essence of cinema-going was not felt. The experience can be costly at boutique cinemas, where only upper-class people will be able to afford the experience (Plus, 2016). However, the experience of a sense of place in cinematic architecture in Malaysia seems very scarce and expensive. Plus, they do not behave like a cultural laboratory that promotes cinema-going culture.

Along with the homogenization of cinema architecture, where it is losing its essence of providing and celebrating film and cinema-going culture, it is becoming less and less due to audiences changing the medium of experiencing a movie. While these factors may contribute to the perception of cinema-going losing its essence, many people still value the cinema experience, and the industry continues to evolve and adapt to changing audience preferences.

From the reviewed literature it helped to come up with the hypothesis. Therefore, the hypothesis is as follows:

The proposition suggests a cultural laboratory for film culture in a more sustainable approach in both its architecture and society. The idea of having a cultural laboratory is to cater not just to the present situations but also to future generations who will experience cinema and film culture. This concept of a cultural laboratory in the cinema industry could create a paradigm shift in the established cinema industry. This could attract not only local natives but also international visitors to learn more about the film culture of Malaysia.

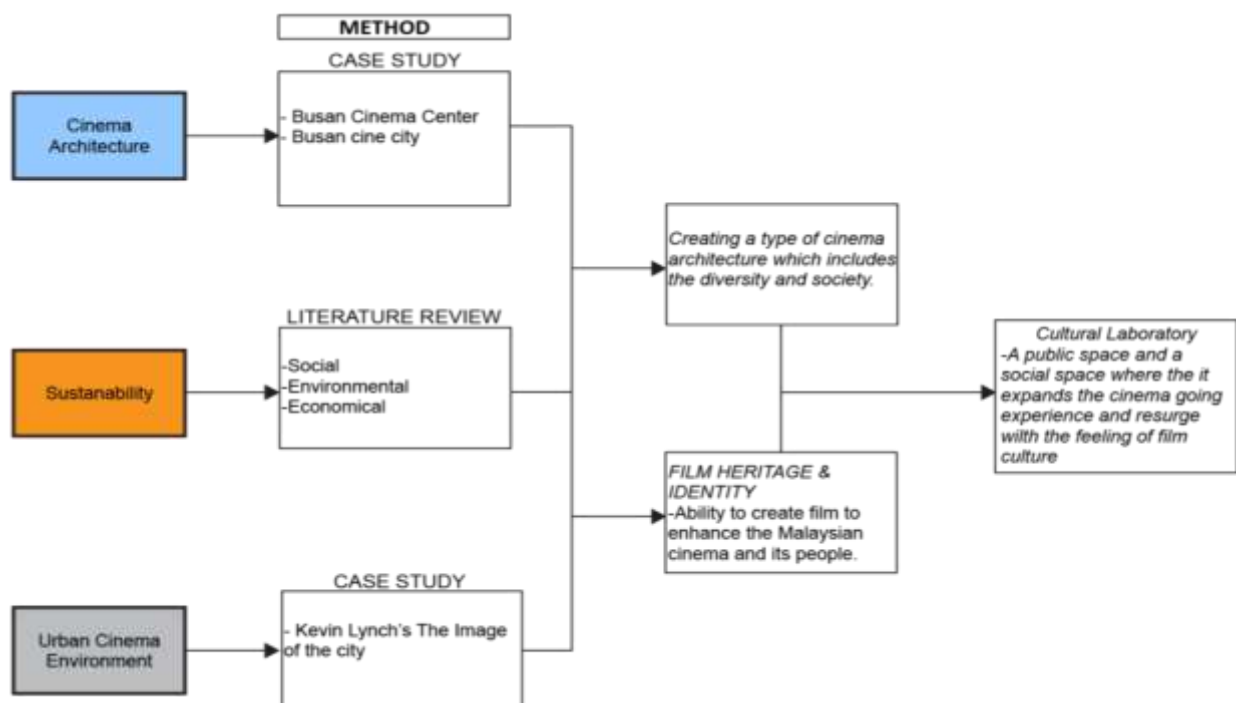


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.

Source: Author (2023)



## Method

### Research Design

To effectively explore the research, a qualitative approach will be applied to delve deeper into the experiences and perspectives of participants so as to identify the issues on why the cinema architecture in Malaysia does not manifest cinema-going culture and film culture as well as obtain ideas and advice on how a cinema culture hub may solve this issue. Thus, different data collection methods will be used, such as expert interviews, document review, and thematic analysis. The sequence of methods to be used is illustrated in the figure below.

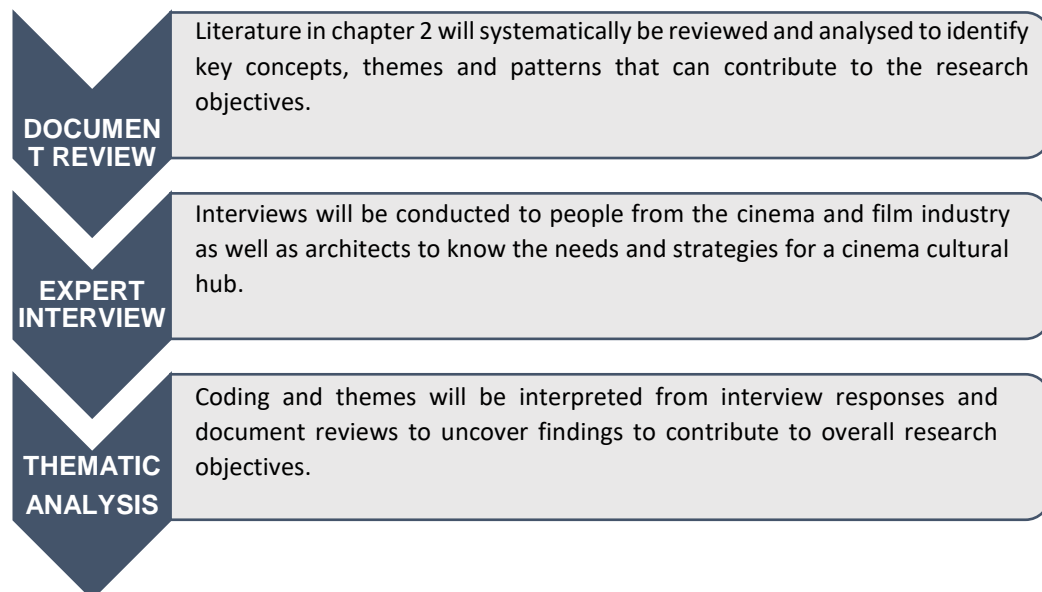


Figure 2: Sequence of Methods

Source: Author (2023)

## Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative research is a method of studying the complexity and nuances of human experiences, behaviors, and societal phenomena. It entails gathering and analyzing non-numerical data such as words, images, and observations in order to acquire insights into individuals' or groups' subjective meanings and interpretations.

According to Merriam, qualitative research is concerned with investigating and answering questions about the complexity and nuances of human experiences. It entails acquiring rich, detailed data using interviews, observations, and document analysis techniques. The purpose is to develop an understanding of the subjective interpretations, social interactions, and cultural circumstances that shape people's understandings and actions (Sharan B. Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative research is selected to dive deeper into the issue of homogeneity of cinema architecture in Malaysia and explore how a new approach to cinema architecture can serve as a platform to foster and promote the development of film culture and cinema-going experience. However, there is a paradox that during observation when I visited the cinema theaters, which are coming up with spaces for social gatherings and immersion in Malaysia. The immersion and cinema architecture provided for people have no elements that create a cinematic experience outside the screening rooms. The way they have been designed looks more to cater to the indulgence of people rather than creating a cinematic atmosphere. For

that reason, a qualitative approach is being employed to delve into the paradox of how cinemas are trying to create film culture and cinema-going culture through cinema architecture.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Data collection is a critical and foundational component of qualitative research, playing a central role in exploring and understanding research questions. By meticulously gathering information and insights directly from participants or relevant sources, qualitative researchers embark on a journey of discovery that unravels the intricacies of human experiences and social phenomena. Creswell (2013) highlights the importance of data collection as it allows researchers to enquire about the natural setting and collect in-depth information, perspectives, and experiences from participants. Through various data collection methods, such as interviews, focus groups, observations, or document analysis, researchers immerse themselves in the context of their study. Therefore, the methods selected for this research are document review and expert interviews.

Data Collection Framework

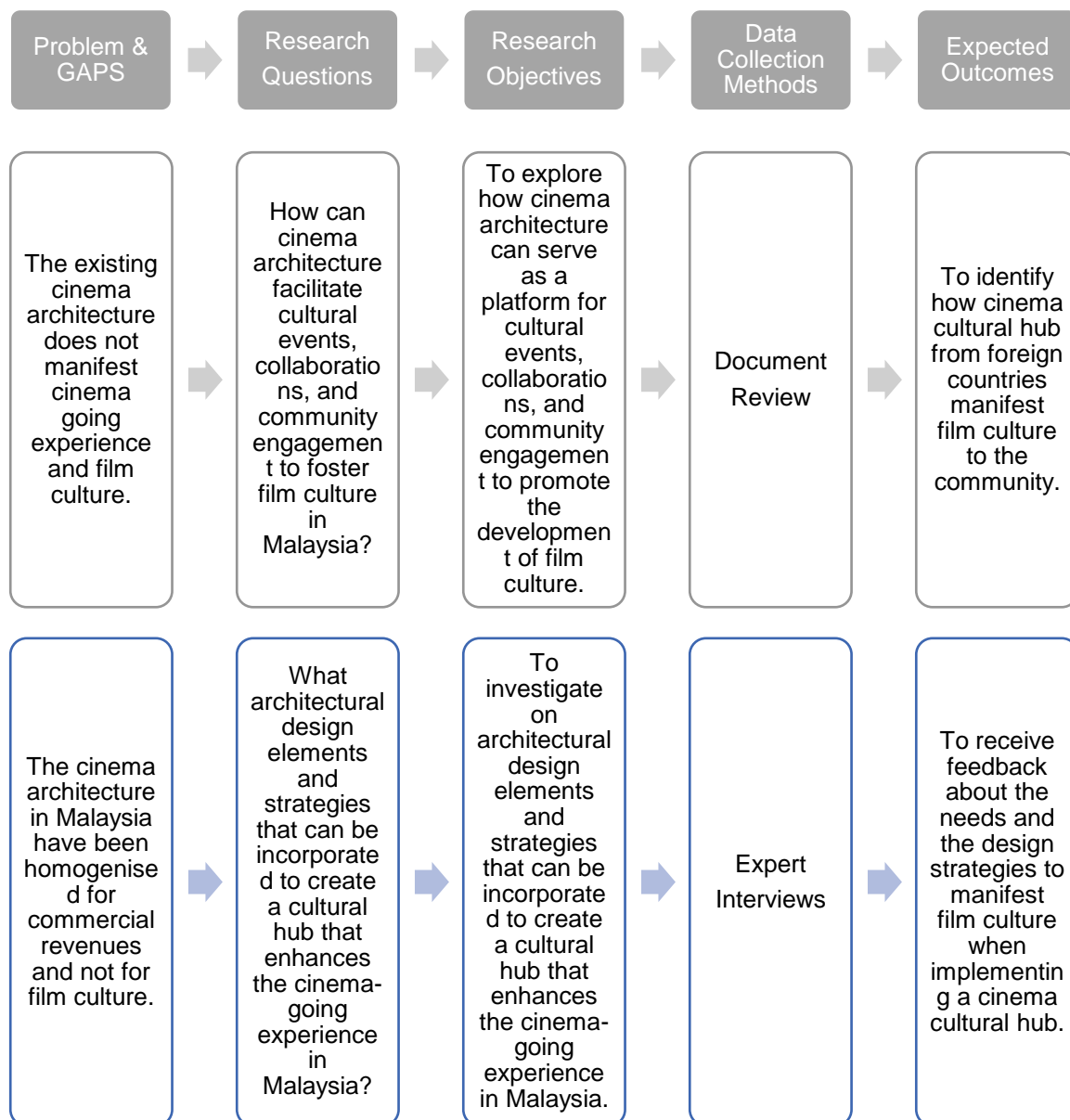


Figure 3: Data collection framework

Source: Author, 2023

Result And Discussion

Qualitative Data results discussion

This chapter presents the results and analysis of data collected for this study. Since the aim is to create a design framework to make cinema architecture a cinema cultural hub in Malaysia, data was collected to enquire about cinema architecture as a platform to promote film culture development and investigate the architectural design elements and strategies to create a cinema cultural hub in Malaysia.

Table I  
Analytical Framework

Main Research Question: What are the characteristics of a cinema cultural hub in Malaysia?			
Research Questions	Research Objectives	Deductive (Qualitative)	Strategy of Inquiry
Sub RQ 1 How can cinema architecture facilitate cultural events, collaborations, and community engagement to foster film culture in Malaysia?	Objective 1 To explore cinema architecture as a platform for cultural events, collaborations, and community engagement to promote the development of film culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Social sustainability</li> <li>• Influence of cinema architecture on the urban fabric.</li> <li>• Cinema architecture and film culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document review of Literature review</li> </ul>
Sub RQ 2 What architectural design elements and strategies that can be incorporated to create a cultural hub that enhances the cinema-going experience in Malaysia?	Objective 2 To investigate on architectural design elements and strategies that can be incorporated to create a cultural hub that enhances the cinema-going experience in Malaysia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immersive Space</li> <li>• Interactive spaces</li> <li>• Community event space.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert Interview</li> </ul>

**Answering RQ 1- How can cinema architecture facilitate cultural events, collaborations, and community engagement to foster film culture in Malaysia?**

The document review method was used to review literature in previous section, whereby passages and texts were reviewed and iteratively processed to acquire contents and extract themes and patterns with respect to the deductive and research objectives.

**Theme 1: Urban Cinema Environment**

Based on the literature review analysis, the first theme generated suggests that to have a cinema culture as part of the city, the cinema architecture needs to *integrate with the urban context and complement the surroundings. It should reflect the interest and diversity of the urban population to serve as a platform for cultural exchange. It should create a continuance through a street channel or skyline.*

**Theme 2: Immersive Space**

The second theme demonstrates that for cinema architecture to promote film culture and cinema-going experiences, the spaces *need to be immersive so as to make people engage in cinematic space. Hence, the architectural design needs to follow a cinematic approach in order to make the design immersive with captivating elements to pique curiosity. The immersive space should be adaptable to create various atmospheres and experiences.*

**Theme 3: Community Event Spaces**

The third theme explains that having *a sense of place plays a significant role in cinema architecture and is crucial for people to be able to experience cinema culture and film culture in a cinematic environment. Thus, this will help create a cultural infrastructure due to the social interactions. A public realm will aid the expansion of social cinema in the community.*

Table. II RQ 1  
Thematic Analysis

Sub Research Questions	Sub Research Objectives	Strategy of Inquiry	Deductive	Inductive codes	
				Coding	Final theme
RQ 1: How can cinema architecture facilitate cultural events, collaborations, and community engagement to foster film culture in Malaysia?	RO 1: To explore cinema architecture as a platform for cultural events, collaborations, and community engagement to promote the development of film culture.	Document review of Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Social sustainability</li> <li>• Influence of cinema architecture on the urban fabric.</li> <li>• Cinema architecture and film culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical and Cultural Context.</li> <li>• Sense of place in cinema architecture.</li> <li>• Cultural Identity.</li> <li>• Adaptable Spaces.</li> <li>• Atmosphere and Experience.</li> <li>• Architectural design.</li> <li>• Social Interactions</li> <li>• Cinema cityscape</li> <li>• Cultural Infrastructure</li> <li>• Social Cinema</li> <li>• Public Realm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban Cinema Environment</li> <li>• Immersive Space</li> <li>• Community Event Spaces</li> </ul>

Answering RQ 2 - *What architectural design elements and strategies can be incorporated to create a cinema cultural hub that enhances the cinema-going experience in Malaysia?*

The themes generated in the thematic analysis matrix in RQ 1 were used as a means to create the interview questions. The themes were employed as a stepping stone to find the insights and recommendations about the architectural design elements and strategies to be incorporated to create a cinema cultural hub. The design elements and strategies for a cinema cultural hub will affect the physical and cultural context of the urban fabric and vice versa. Thus, they are crucial to be considered to provide the most suitable space for the community. The theme covers the type of design elements needed for a cinema cultural hub.

**Theme 1: Urban Cinema Design Strategy**

Theme 1 questions are required to identify the urban design and cultural infrastructure factors that should be implemented and considered when designing a cinema cultural hub. The cinema cultural hub in an urban context should address multiple aspects, such as accessibility for pedestrians and vehicles, how it reacts to noise pollution and traffic congestion, as well as its visual impact in the urban setting.

*“Elements and strategies that can be incorporated to create an urban cinema environment, the cinema cultural hub needs to have a visually appealing façade and easy accessibility through public transports. It must be permeable for pedestrians with many access points leading to spacious outdoor and indoor lobbies...” Ar. Sarizal Yusman*

Aside from having easy accessibility, Ar Sarizal Yusman points out that when designing in a congested urban area and due to the scarce size of land, noise-canceling insulation, using

sustainable green façade walls or optimizing the use of vehicles on the land by separating car parks with the building.

### **Theme 2: Engaging Environment**

The second theme is about exploring the immersive spaces in a cinema cultural hub, offering a highly engaging and transformative experience for visitors, whereby they serve as a platform for community engagement and cultural exchange, thus contributing to the enrichment of the local community's cultural experiences. Mr Imran Cous, a freelance production designer and filmmaker, mentioned how important and crucial those spaces are for the development of the cinema industry and film culture in Malaysia since there are a handful of places that try to emulate an immersive cinematic experience.

*"As both a filmmaker and production designer, I think with the upcoming technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Virtual reality, integrating those technologies in cinema architecture in pre and post-screening spaces can be designed to engage and entertain the visitors beyond the movie itself. Interactive movie-related activities would encourage the audience in interaction and exploration."* Mr Imran Cous

He also added that integrating advanced technologies with flexible spaces will make the visitors enjoy the full impact of the immersive environment.

### **Theme 3: Collective Venue**

The third theme is about sharing the culture of cinema-going, film culture, and filmmaking with the community. It is required to identify the event spaces to cater to the community, as they go beyond traditional movie screenings and provide opportunities for the local community to come together, collaborate, and celebrate various cultural expressions.

Mr Taza Mohamed Bin Ahmed mentions there is no place where filmmakers can meet and greet, as co-working spaces are necessary since most filmmakers are isolated, and many talents go unseen.

*"Having a venue or place where filmmakers can collaborate to work together and create a network will be a good thing for the film industry because there are many young emerging talents who go unseen. This hub can have areas for aspiring artists to connect and exchange ideas..."* Mr Taza Mohamed Bin Ahmed

Table 3  
RQ 2 Thematic Analysis

Sub Research Questions	Sub Research Objectives	Deductive	Strategy of inquiry	Inductive codes	
				Coding	Final theme
RQ 2: What architectural design elements and strategies that can be incorporated to create a cultural hub that enhances the cinema-going experience in Malaysia?	RO 2: To investigate on architectural design elements and strategies that can be incorporated to create a cultural hub that enhances the cinema-going experience in Malaysia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Immersive Space</li> <li>Interactive spaces</li> <li>Community event space.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expert interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appealing façade</li> <li>Accessibility</li> <li>Interactive façade</li> <li>Traditional motifs</li> <li>Futuristic design elements</li> <li>A.I and VR in cinema architecture</li> <li>Exploration</li> <li>Interaction</li> <li>Multisensory experience</li> <li>Immersive flexible space</li> <li>Co-working space</li> <li>Production design</li> <li>Idea-sharing hub</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Urban Cinema Design Strategy</li> <li>Engaging environment</li> <li>Collective venue</li> </ul>

**Conclusion**

This research paper highlights the recommendations and design possibilities for a cinema cultural hub to resurge the film culture and cinema-going through cinema architecture. Using a thematic analysis for RQ 1, three themes were generated from the document review to create the interview protocol to get the opinions of the expert.

The dissertation’s findings have significantly contributed to developing a conceptual framework for a cinema cultural hub that integrates immersive spaces. By creating such spaces, the aim is to attract people and encourage them to explore and engage with the rich cinema and film culture of Malaysia. This innovative approach aims to provide a platform for entertainment and facilitates social learning experiences centered on films and cinema.

Moreover, the cinema cultural hub serves as a platform for social interaction and community engagement. It fosters a sense of community and collaboration by providing a space where film enthusiasts, artists, and the general public can gather, share ideas, and engage in meaningful discussions. This collaborative environment encourages the exchange of perspectives, knowledge, and cultural experiences, enriching the overall film culture in Malaysia.

Furthermore, the emphasis on catering to both present and future generations highlights the long-term vision of the cinema cultural hub. By adapting to the evolving needs and interests of different generations, the hub ensures its relevance and sustainability. It aims to nurture a love for cinema and film culture among younger audiences, cultivating a new generation of film enthusiasts, filmmakers, and cultural contributors who will carry the legacy of Malaysian cinema.

In conclusion, the findings of this dissertation have not only contributed to the conceptual framework of a cinema cultural hub that integrates immersive spaces but also emphasizes the significance of providing social learning experiences and catering to the present and future generations. The proposed cinema cultural hub aims to inspire, educate, and engage

individuals in exploring Malaysian film culture, fostering a vibrant and dynamic cinematic community.

### **Future Recommendations**

Enhancing the relevance of the paper can be achieved by deepening the engagement with architectural theory and expanding the comparative analysis with similar international developments, particularly through the integration of modern technology in cinema architecture to enhance viewer engagement. Incorporating advanced technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) can significantly transform the traditional cinema experience. These technologies can create immersive pre- and post-screening environments, offering interactive movie-related activities that engage the audience beyond the film itself (Cous, 2023). For instance, VR experiences related to the movie's theme can be provided in the lobby area, allowing viewers to explore scenes or interact with characters from the film.

Furthermore, modern cinema architecture should consider the flexibility of spaces to create various atmospheres and experiences. Adaptable seating arrangements, dynamic lighting, and advanced sound systems can enhance the sense of immersion, aligning with the need to create spaces that host different types of cultural events and community engagements, thus fostering a stronger connection with the audience (Pallasmaa, 1996). Additionally, the use of sustainable materials and smart building technologies can improve the environmental performance of cinema buildings. Smart HVAC systems, energy-efficient lighting, and sustainable building materials reduce the carbon footprint, while smart technologies enhance user experience through automated systems for ticketing, seat selection, and personalized content delivery (Spence, 2020).

Moreover, digital art installations and projections can transform cinema spaces into dynamic environments, creating thematic atmospheres that change based on the films being screened. For example, interactive digital walls that display scenes from the movie or respond to audience movements can create a more engaging environment (Recuber, 2007). Comparative analysis with international developments in cinema architecture can provide valuable insights into best practices and innovative strategies. Examining cinemas such as the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, which uses state-of-the-art acoustic and lighting systems, can serve as a model for modernizing Malaysian cinemas (Hwang, 2014). Additionally, cinemas in Japan, like the Kabukiza Theatre in Tokyo, which blend modern technology with traditional architectural elements, offer lessons on maintaining cultural identity while adopting new technologies (Merrington et al., 2021).

Community-centric designs, such as the Alamo Drafthouse in the United States, which combines cinema with dining and community events, highlight the importance of creating multifunctional spaces that serve as cultural hubs. These designs enhance the cinematic experience and promote social interaction and community engagement (Athique, 2011). By integrating these elements, the paper can provide a comprehensive analysis of how modern technology and innovative architectural strategies can enhance the cinema-going experience, foster cultural engagement, and contribute to the social sustainability of urban environments. This expanded perspective will offer a deeper theoretical foundation and practical recommendations for the future development of cinema architecture in Malaysia and similar small island cities globally.



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