

SPATIAL, SENSORY, AND MATERIAL TRIGGERS OF NOSTALGIC MEMORY IN THERAPEUTIC LANDSCAPE DESIGN

ATHUKORALA H.N.^{1*} & BALASOORIYA S.²

^{1,2} University of Moratuwa, Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

¹hiruniathukorala17@gmail.com, ²shirobalasuriya@gmail.com

Abstract: Therapeutic landscapes have been defined as spaces that foster one's physical, psychological well-being through restorative experiences in interactions with the environment for some time. There is now a growing discourse where memory and nostalgia are identified as important components that enhance the therapeutic quality of landscapes by providing users with a sense of continuity, identity, and belonging. Objects that often evoke nostalgic associations include familiar materials & forms in a design, sensory cues, vegetation & landscape features, that can associate individuals with valuable past experiences. Yet, there remains limited scholarship that systematically identifies these elements and their implications for design. The study will identify spatial, sensory, and material elements that commonly evoke nostalgic memory which can also apply in the design of therapeutic landscapes. Thematic analysis of literature, and prior qualitative evidence demonstrates that nostalgia is often caused by spatial features (courtyards, gardens, water), sensory inputs (sounds, smells, textures) and material choices (timber, clay, stone). The findings show that nostalgia is not simply a sentimental construct but a valuable and practical design consideration to increase therapeutic value. Using nostalgic elements in today's landscape designs may provide comfort, lessen stress, and build resilience, connecting cultural heritage to modern well-being needs.

Keywords: *Nostalgia, Therapeutic landscapes, Sensory experience, Spatial design, Materials*

1. Introduction

Therapeutic landscapes emphasize the potential of places to foster physical, emotional, and spiritual health through restorative experiences. Introduced by Gesler (1992) in health geography and environmental psychology, scholarly work has highlighted many of the ways engagement with natural and built environments can mitigate stress, elicit positive moods, and support healing (Ulrich, 1984; Williams, 2007). While much of this work has focused on aspects around greenery, water and restorative beauty, more recent work has also begun to think about experiences and dimensions of therapeutic environments being signed by emotions and memory.

As part of this study, nostalgia has emerged as an important but underexplored study area. Nostalgia, understood as a sentimental longing from people for meaningful experiences of the past, can have multiple relationships with aspects of place (spatial forms, sensory experiences and material cues) memory. Nostalgia can evoke comfort or a sense of longing and belonging and enhance greater attention to personal identity and cultural continuity (Batcho, 1995; Wildschut et al., 2006). Despite its significance, there has been limited practical research systematically assessing how nostalgic triggers can be identified and implicated to a therapeutic landscape design. Indeed, research has remained somewhat scattered, with little coordination for the connection of psychology, culture and space. This paper contributes to this development by identifying some common spatial, sensory, and material elements of nostalgic memory. By identifying these triggers, the study aims to provide a foundation for integrating nostalgia into therapeutic landscapes, connecting past experiences to the current needs of well-being.

Although existing scholarship extensively discusses therapeutic landscapes and the psychological dimensions of nostalgia, very few studies examine how nostalgic memory is triggered through specific spatial, sensory and material elements within a landscape setting. Current research mainly focuses on emotional outcomes, but not on the environmental cues that evoke nostalgia. This gap limits the ability of designers to intentionally incorporate nostalgic triggers into therapeutic landscape design. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by identifying the spatial, sensory and material elements that commonly evoke nostalgic memory within the Sri Lankan context.

2. Literature Review

This chapter provided a review of the existing literature and it considered the term therapeutic landscapes and their main characteristics, focusing on how elements of nature, space, and senses can facilitate healing. The chapter also included Sri Lankan contexts, with a recognition of therapeutic places, which are defined as therapeutic landscapes that are socially and culturally significant. Nostalgia, and the role of nostalgia on emotional memory, was discussed, along with nostalgic elements such as the materials, forms, vegetation, and sensory aspects that create nostalgia.

*Corresponding author: Tel: +94 772571169 Email Address: hiruniathukorala17@gmail.com
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31705/FARU.2025.65>

2.1. WHAT IS A THERAPEUTIC LANDSCAPE?

"Designed environments have an important influence on human experience. It can facilitate activities, create a mood or feel, relieve or create human tension and stress. Designed environments can support satisfaction, happiness and effectiveness." (Sanoff, 1990)

"Pressures of people face today particularly contributes to the experience of mental fatigue, which can lead people to be less tolerant, less effective, and less healthy. Restorative environments can play a central role in reducing these unfortunate effects" (Kaplan, 1992).

According to the above citation, therapeutic landscapes are landscapes which can restabilize the condition of the mental health. These design interventions are popular for creating rehabilitative surroundings for special need users. Also, restorative landscapes can enhance human restorative experience to minimize mental fatigue. Thus, those therapeutic and restorative landscapes contribute to more tolerant, effective and healthier lifestyles for the user.

The concept of therapeutic landscapes has been widely discussed in health geography and landscape architecture as a means of promoting physical, emotional, and spiritual healing through the built and natural environment. The concept of therapeutic landscapes, first introduced by Gessler (1992), provides evidence of the profound connection between place and human health. Gessler pointed out that certain environments not only enhance physical functioning, but also foster people's emotional, spiritual, and psychological well-being.

In Glaser's original concept of therapeutic landscape has shown the factors of restoration of health which is mainly focused on spiritual and miraculous healing. According to Khachatourians, 2003 had compiled a diagram like below which shows the interconnection of natural/ built environment, spiritual environment and social environment in therapeutic landscapes with the key characteristics.

According to W. M. Gesler (1993), therapeutic landscapes have an enduring reputation for achieving physical, mental, and spiritual healing; they are those shifting locations, circumstances, locales, and milieus that include both the psychological and physical environments associated with care or recovery.

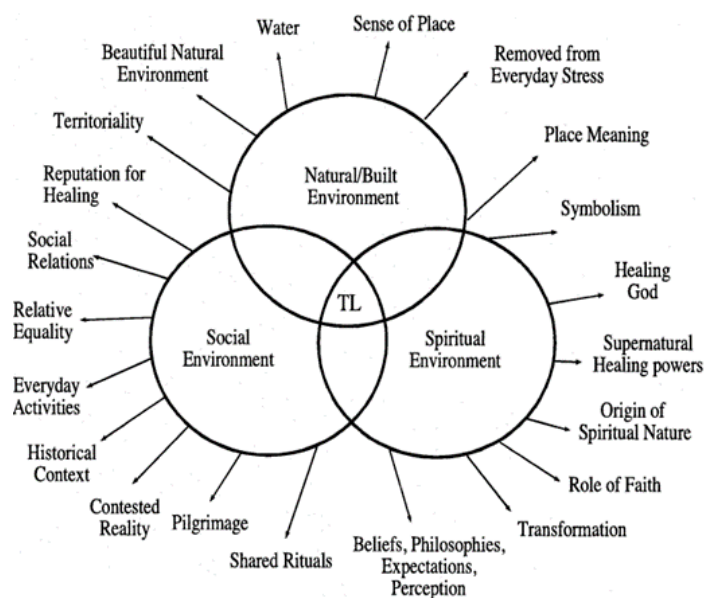


Figure 1: Glaser's concept of Therapeutic Landscape attributes.
(Source: Khachatourians, 2003)

2.2 WHAT ARE THE THERAPEUTIC LANDSCAPES IN SRI LANKA?

Despite the global recognition of therapeutic landscapes as environments that promote healing and well-being, there is a notable absence of academic research specifically addressing therapeutic landscapes within the Sri Lankan context. However, Robin Jones's (2011) research on Lunuganga, Geoffrey Bawa's iconic landscape garden which located in Bentota, Sri Lanka offers valuable insight into the cultural and historical dimensions of landscape in Sri Lanka. Jones (2011) interprets Lunuganga as a "site of memory," where personal, colonial and pre-colonial histories are actively discussed and remembered through creation. The study highlights how Bawa's landscape serves as a palimpsest, layering traces of past land uses and cultural influences to create a space rich in memory and meaning. While Jones does not frame Lunuganga as a therapeutic landscape in the sense of health promotion or psychological restoration, the research demonstrates how Sri Lankan landscapes can function as powerful mediums for memory, identity, and cultural negotiation, suggesting fertile ground for future studies on their potential therapeutic qualities.



Figure 2: Traditional Elements in Lunu Ganga, Bentota, Sri Lanka.
(Source: Google Images)

2.3 WHAT IS NOSTALGIA?

Nostalgia is a complex emotion consist of longing for the past, coupled with a sentimental bond for an experience, personally meaningful element, place, or cultural feature. Originally nostalgia is viewed as a psychological disorder, but it is now recognized as a positive and adaptive emotional response that helps to enhance the psychological resilience, identity continuity, and emotional comfort.

According to the existing literature, the term “*nostalgia*” was first discussed by Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer by blending the Greek words *nostos* (“return” or “homecoming”) and *algos* (“pain”). It first appeared in print in 1688 as *Dissertation Medica de Nostalgia, oder Heimweh* (“Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia, or Homesickness”).

“Nostalgia, a sentimental longing for the past, is a common, universal, and highly social emotional experience. Nostalgic reverie is centered around the self, important social connections, and personally meaningful life events (Routledge, [2015](#)).”

Psychologically, nostalgia is a complex emotional experience that combines with happiness or sadness with a sense of loss or longing. It typically centers on personally meaningful memories involving oneself and close social connections. Despite sometimes involving bittersweet feelings, nostalgia generally enhances well-being by increasing feelings of social connectedness, meaning in life, and positive mood.

2.4 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF NOSTALGIA?

A sentimental longing for significant times from one's past, which is frequently brought on by sensory cues, life transitions, or depressing emotional states, is a characteristic of nostalgia, a complex emotional experience. By encouraging a sense of social connection and self-continuity, nostalgia serves as an adaptive mechanism that helps people in overcoming psychological threats like loneliness or meaninglessness. As Sedikides et al. (2015) summarize, “nostalgia is considered an emotion, and a predominantly positive one at that,” which “buffers certain negative effects” by restoring well-being through recalling cherished. Neuroscientific studies show that nostalgia involves vivid autobiographical memory retrieval with emotional and personal significance, engaging brain regions like the hippocampus and medial prefrontal cortex (Yang et al., 2022).

Gupta & Medappa (2020) identify nostalgia as an affective landscape, where spatial memory evokes feelings of continuity and identity. In more recent environmental studies, researchers have begun to examine nostalgia’s role in psychological restoration. Yan, Leng, and Yuan (2023), for instance, conducted a study in Chinese urban parks to measure how nostalgia influences perceived environmental restorativeness. They found that nostalgic emotions, triggered by personal memory or cultural familiarity, enhanced users’ sense of relaxation and connection. This supports the notion that nostalgic stimuli can strengthen the therapeutic effects of landscapes, especially when tied to memory-rich spatial features.

Moreover, nostalgia promotes psychological health by enhancing positive mood, self-esteem, and social bonds, as demonstrated in experimental research where nostalgic reflection increased optimism and social connectedness (Routledge et al., 2013). Cognitive models further explain nostalgia as a process that helps individuals reconstruct meaning and identity

by forging symbolic social bonds in an idealized past, thus supporting psychological resilience (Zhang & Wang, 2024). In sum, nostalgia emerges from emotionally salient memories and serves important regulatory and restorative functions for mental well-being.

2.5 WHAT ARE THE NOSTALGIC ELEMENTS?

Nostalgic elements are spatial, sensory, and symbolic features that evoke personal or collective memories of the past. These elements often relate to significant life experiences, cultural heritage, or familiar everyday routines. They can be integrated into landscape design to support emotional healing, comfort, and identity continuity, especially in therapeutic environments.

2.5.1 Familiar Materials and Forms

Familiar Forms and Materials play a main role in evoking nostalgic memories in the therapeutic landscapes. The use of traditional or regionally specific materials only connects users to their cultural roots but also reinforces a sense of identity and emotional continuity. Similarly, incorporating spatial can trigger comforting memories of home, childhood, or community life. These familiar architectural cues help foster emotional grounding, making the landscape feel safe, personal, and deeply restorative (Gupta & Medappa, 2020).

2.5.2 Vegetation and Landscape Features

Vegetation and Landscape Features play a significant role in triggering nostalgic memories within therapeutic landscapes. Plant species that are culturally or personally meaningful can instantly evoke childhood, village life, or religious traditions. Seasonal elements like blossoms or falling leaves further enhance emotional resonance by reminding users of past times. Supporting this, Yan, Leng, and Yuan (2023) found that “nostalgic affection and place attachment were important mediating factors for environmental restorative effects,” emphasizing that familiar natural settings stimulate strong affective responses and foster a sense of connection.

2.5.3 Sensory Cues

Sensory details such as familiar scents, ambient sounds, or tactile textures serve as powerful conduits for nostalgic memory within therapeutic landscapes. These cues can evoke vivid recollections of personal or cultural experiences, helping users connect emotionally and feel emotionally anchored. As Batcho (2013) notes, “Nostalgia is often triggered by sensory details: smells, sounds, or touch, that bring vivid memory recall.” By intentionally incorporating elements like incense-like fragrances, bird calls, rain-wet stone pathways, or wooden surfaces, designers can foster increasing emotional resonance and restorative depth within therapeutic spaces.

3. Methodology

The research study adopts a qualitative and exploratory methodology aimed at developing a foundation that guides the strategic integration of nostalgic memory into therapeutic landscapes, to enhance the emotional well-being, place attachment, and psychological restoration. The study used various qualitative data collection strategies to identify the nostalgic aspects that are most meaningful to therapeutic landscapes using both secondary data and user-centered primary data approaches.

- Literature Review - A comprehensive review of scholarly work related to therapeutic landscapes, nostalgia and memory in environmental psychology
- Case study observation - The selected case study was systematically observed to examine its spatial arrangements, architectural details, materials used in, vegetation, and sensory cues that contribute to nostalgic memory and therapeutic qualities.
- Semi-structured interviews with users - Use informal interviews or surveys with users to understand nostalgic triggers and emotional responses.
- Photographic Documentation - A selection of photographs of key spatial and landscape features were then thematically analysed to assess sources of nostalgia and therapeutic aspects.

The approach to sampling is called selective sampling, and it focuses on adults, kids, and visitors to therapeutic spaces. Subjectivity in the interpretation of emotions, cultural differences in what makes people nostalgic are the limitations of the study.

To interpret the collected data, several qualitative analysis techniques were employed, each focusing on identifying recurring nostalgic triggers within spatial, sensory, and material contexts.

- Spatial and Visual Mapping Analysis – Used to illustrate the relationship between physical settings and nostalgic experiences by mapping spatial arrangements, visual cues, and user interactions.
- Interview Analysis – Applied thematic coding to responses from semi-structured interviews, enabling the extraction of common patterns of nostalgic memory and emotional associations.
- Photographic Analysis – Examined photographs of places, materials, and activities to visually identify and validate elements that evoke nostalgia.

4. Case Study

This study adopts an exploratory single-case approach to Lunuganga, selected due to its rich materiality, layered memory, and strong associations with Sri Lankan cultural nostalgia. As this phase focuses on identifying possible nostalgic triggers rather than validating them across multiple cases, a single in-depth case study is methodologically sufficient. This aligns with exploratory qualitative research where depth of insight is prioritised over breadth. Future research will expand to multiple sites for comparative validation.

4.1 CASE STUDY SELECTION CRITERIA

The selection process for case study is based on two important criteria: the qualities of the place as therapeutic landscapes, and the value of memory or nostalgia. Therapeutic landscapes have association with natural features, sensory richness, and the promotion of emotional well-being, which contribute to its therapeutic and restorative attributes. Memory or nostalgia is important; therefore, sites are chosen that strongly associated with history, culture, and space, that will contribute to a sense of the past.

4.2 CASE STUDY – LUNUGANGA, BENTOTA

Geoffrey Bawa's famous garden estate, Lunuganga, is a deeply personal and culturally complex landscape that demonstrates how memory, history, and identity can enhance therapeutic qualities. Using well-known materials (such as clay, stone, and brick), framed views, and carefully chosen vegetation, the estate combines colonial, vernacular, and tropical aesthetics to promote contemplative calm and emotional connection. According to Jones (2011), Bawa's work at Lunuganga integrates nostalgic allusions to Sri Lanka's colonial past and traditional village life within a contemporary design vocabulary, expressing a dialogue between memory and modernity. Lunuganga is a healing environment with cultural and personal resonance because of the intentional blending of historical symbolism, spatial memory, and sensory richness. In addition to providing visitors with visual and environmental comfort, it also fosters a peaceful sense of community and introspection, all of which are critical components of emotional healing.

"Bawa's landscapes were not only modern compositions, but also memory palaces, holding together fragments of personal and cultural history." (Jones, 2011, p. 10)

Lunuganga has always been a site of transformation. Bawa acquired the former rubber and cinnamon plantation in 1948, on the cusp of his thirtieth birthday and Sri Lanka's independence from Britain. In doing so, he affirmed his intent to create "something that would be shaped by my present and future dreams and imaginary." Converting the land from a plantation into a garden was a key step; replacing an extractive practice of colonial occupation, the garden blossomed into a rich ecosystem of mostly endemic flora and fauna. Lunuganga Estate is situated in Bentota, also known as the coastal town in the Galle district in Southern Province of Sri Lanka, 65 km south of Colombo. The property sits along Dedduwa Lake, which is surrounded by water and tropical vegetation providing a secluded and tranquil experience. The distinctive features of the site enabled Geoffrey Bawa to shape the estate as landscape, fusing the natural landscape with architectural expression to create a landscape full of memory, culture, and healing.

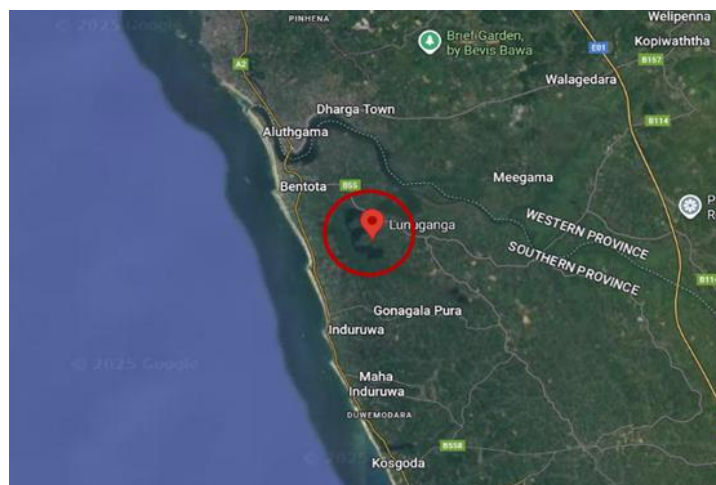


Figure 3: Location of Lunuganga. (Source: Google Maps)

5. Data Analysis and Findings

5.1 SPATIAL AND VISUAL MAPPING ANALYSIS

Spatial and visual mapping was undertaken at Lunuganga, to demonstrate behavioral patterns and sensory engagements of visitors on-site. The analysis of visitor behavior route mapping indicated the dominant and subdominant paths of circulation

throughout the site and layout of user exploration of significant architecture, courtyards, and lawn. According to the numbers order in the map, the user is behavior in Lunuganga.

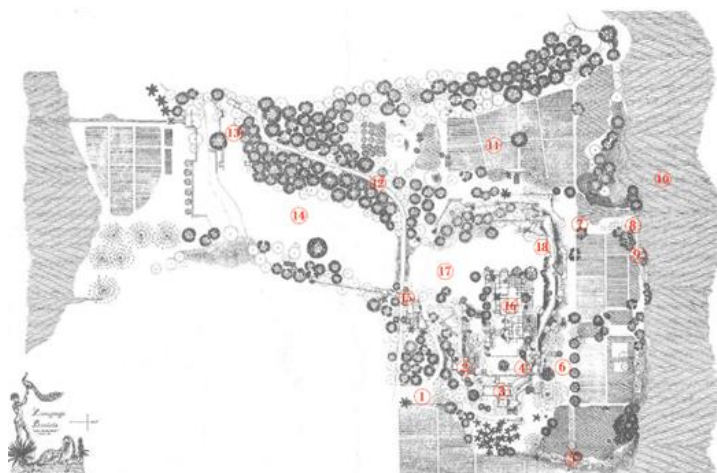


Figure 4: Visitors' route in Lunuganga.
(Source: Compiled by author)

Legend

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Entrance | 10. Dedduwa lake |
| 2. Office and guarage area | 11. Paddy field |
| 3. Building for chicken farm | 12. Public road |
| 4. Seating area for lunch with the bell | 13. Kandalama hotel model |
| 5. Seating area near water trail | 14. Green lawn area |
| 6. Rubber plantation and paddy field | 15. Building with the bridge |
| 7. Dan tree and lily pond | 16. Geoffrey Bawa's house |
| 8. Chess board floor patern (Grass+Cement) | 17. Green lawn area |
| 9. Leapord statue with seating | 18. Greek statues and araliya trees with the view |

Sensory engagement mapping also afforded an analysis of zones in which strong sensory connections of nostalgia were in action. A total of four zones were identified: two of them, green zones, denoting high nostalgic engagement, and another two, the yellow zones, which denote a medium level of nostalgic engagement.



Figure 5: Sensory Engagement zones in Lunuganga
(Source: Compiled by author)

Green Zone: High connective zones with nostalgic elements

Yellow Zone: Medium connective zones with nostalgic elements

5.2 INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Data from the semi-structured interviews were systematically analyzed thematically. Familiar materials, familiar forms,

sensory cues, vegetation and landscape features were all consistent themes. Themes were identified and categorized. This helped identify patterns and meanings that described how nostalgia could generate emotional well-being and therapeutic experiences.

According to the analysis of semi structured interviews familiar materials, familiar forms, vegetation & landscape features and sensory cues which can trigger nostalgia in users' mind were identified. The analysis of visitor responses at Lunuganga illustrates how nostalgic elements of place within the landscape played a key role in enhancing therapeutic experiences. The presence of familiar materials such as clay tile roofs, timber columns, work carts, and other site artifacts evoked memories of traditional rural Sri Lankan villages, reinstating aspects of identity and comfort. Familiar forms like verandas, courtyards, and architectural motifs from the Dutch and Portuguese periods contributed to a clear sense of belongingness. The sensory trigger of temple bells, the smell of plants, and the patterns created by the underside of the floors facilitated deep memory recall, allowing for an experience of calm and emotional safety. Similarly, the horticultural landscape elements like paddy fields, Araliya trees, Bilin trees, bamboo trees created relevant connections for both foreign and local visitors reaching back personally and collectively across time. The large expansive lawn and water features also aided in attaining relaxation from stress. Collectively, these elements strengthened emotional attachment, identity, and safety while nurturing a sense of belongingness, positioning Lunuganga as a therapeutic landscape enriched by nostalgic memory.

5.3 PHOTOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Photographic analysis used chosen images of Lunuganga that provided significant spatial features, architectural details, and vegetation. Each photograph was analyzed systematically using three topics that would provide a meaningful interpretation of the photographs. Description described the visible and physical characteristics of the image, including such things as materiality, forms, and vegetation types. Nostalgic recognized features that evoked cultural or personal memories, for example: traditional courtyards, old carts, and tree species that are familiar. Therapeutic concerned emotion and psychological responses that were provoked such as calmness, comforts, safety, identity, and belongingness. This layered photographic interpretation provided a means to document not only the tangible aspects of Lunuganga, but also the intangibles that link memory and culture with the therapeutic quality of the landscape into the spatial planning process.

Table 1: Analysis of Photographs
(Source: Compiled by author)

Photograph	Description of Scene / Feature	Nostalgic Element(s)	Therapeutic Quality	User Responses
	View of the lawn area margined by big trees and lake in the corner.	Green lawn (Similar to their home country)	Calmness Visual openness Familiarity	-Reminds of home country gardens -Peaceful feeling
	The image of the building of the chicken farm of the Bawa's land. Its structure is very similar to Sri Lankan new parliament building.	Structure of the building Clay roof Mossy ground	Familiarity Memory connecting	-Like the roofs of houses that were used in past. -Reminds about village culture.
	Bronze Nataraja (dancing Shiva) statue in the foreground, overlooking a lotus pond and manicured lawn framed by mature tropical trees.	Traditional Hindu sculpture	Promotes spiritual reflection Calmness Cultural identity Relaxation	-Reminds about Hindu cultural practices -Reminds about school Art period

	The bell is near the area where Geoffrey Bawa gets his lunch. There are number of bells located in the premises for various types of functions.	Bell Iconic table & chairs	Familiarity Identity and comfort Mental restoration	-Reminds about the sound of temple's bell, then go on temple related memories.
	Two different types of carts are in Lunu Ganga. One is located in the start of the tour, and the other one is located at the end.	Old carts Glass windows Chinese pots Old type veranda Timber columns Clay roofs	Visual Comfort Comfort & Safety Familiarity	-Reminds about ancient houses. -Give the memories of old Sri Lankan dramas and movies.
	In front of Geoffrey Bawa's house. There is a big araliya tree and a big green lawn area.	Araliya Tree Lawn area Chinese pots	Familiarity Calmness Visual Comfort Comfort & Safety	-Lawn area is very similar to their home country. -Fragrance of the araliya flower feel like coastal zone hotel in Sri Lanka
	This is an image of the office building of Geoffrey Bawa. There it includes many ancient elements which are owned to Portuguese and Dutch period. There are some glass windows which are very similar to church architecture.	Dutch elements Portuguese elements Church elements Wooden elements Glass	Familiarity Calmness Promotes spiritual reflection Identity and comfort Mental restoration	-Those elements are very similar to Dutch and Portuguese types. -Also, some of these elements can be seen in No. 11 in Colombo. So those memories also recall.
	This is an image of the statue which located in front of Bawa's house on the lake side. It is very similar to Greek sculpture.	Statue Dedduwa lake	Relaxation Familiarity	-Statue is similar to Greek statues. It reminds our school art period.
	This is the image of the building which is located near the entrance. It is mixed with old Sri Lanka architecture and modern architecture.	Clay roof Veranda	Familiarity Comfort & Identity	-This building is very similar to our old house. So, we remember our old memories.

	This is an image of old “dan” tree in Bawa’s garden. The fruits of this dan tree can be eaten. Behind that there is a pond with water lily flowers.	Dan Tree Water lily	Familiarity Cultural Identity Relaxation Identity & comfort	-When we eat “dan” fruit from this tree we remember our childhood memories.
---	---	------------------------	--	---

The photographic analysis of Lunuganga reveals that nostalgic triggers are strongly embedded within the site’s spatial and visual character. Buildings have familiar materials, such as clay roof tiles, wood columns, mossy ground, and glass windows, which recall very powerful cultural memories that connect them with village homes, colonial identities, and school lessons. All of this evokes perceptions of identity and comfort that reinforce continuity with their personal past, and their collective past. From the vantage point of a therapeutic landscape, these elements supported a sense of belonging, cultural identity and emotional safety, as they provided familiar ecological patterns. Collectively, the photographic analysis demonstrates that Lunuganga’s design integrates nostalgic layers that extend beyond aesthetics, shaping visitors’ feelings of comfort, safety, identity, and belongingness.

5.4 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this research highlight the strong interconnection of nostalgia, memory, and therapeutic aspects of landscapes, particularly in the case of Lunuganga. The results address each research aim as follows:

1. Influence of nostalgic elements on emotional responses and therapeutic outcomes.

Nostalgic triggers were shown to have a strong influence on emotional well-being. Local and foreign participants both reported that their nostalgic associations fostered feelings of calmness, comfort, relaxation, and safety, as well as strengthening identity and belongingness. Even negative feelings like sadness had some therapeutic value because they facilitated reflection and reconnection with meaningful experiences of their lives. Most importantly, the emotions associated with nostalgia closely resemble the key characteristics of the therapeutic landscape, particularly restoration, reflection, and emotional regulation. It shows that nostalgia not only recalls the past, but it can also enhance the therapeutic characteristics and qualities of the landscape and reinforces their therapeutic and emotional well-being characteristics.

2. Identification of spatial, sensory, and material elements that commonly evoke nostalgic memory landscapes.

The study found that familiar materials (clay tile roofs, timber columns, stone pathways), familiar forms (verandas, courtyards, statues), sensory cues (temple bells, the fragrance of araliya flowers, rain), and vegetation and landscape features (paddy fields, bamboo groves, flowering trees, expansive lawns, and lakes) serve as consistent triggers of nostalgia. These elements were recognized across multiple data collection methods as case study observations, interviews, photographs, and questionnaires, demonstrating their universal role in evoking memory.

Table 2: Identified triggers of nostalgia at Lunuganga
(Source: Compiled by author)

Spatial Triggers	Sensory Triggers	Material Triggers
Verandas	Temple bells	Clay tile roofs
Courtyards	The fragrance of araliya flowers	Timber columns
Statues	Rain	Stone pathways
Shaded garden	Water floe	Cement floor
Paddy fields	Bird sounds	Brick walls
Old carts	Foods & drinks	

Overall, the results indicate nostalgia serves as a strong connector among memory, identity, and therapeutic experience in landscapes. By consciously using familiar materials, plants/vegetation, sensory triggers, and spatial forms, designers can evoke feelings of comfort, safety, belonging, and cultural continuity. These outcomes demonstrate that nostalgic designs serve the past, while simultaneously enhancing the restorative value of therapeutic landscapes, providing a specific and meaningful approach to future landscape design practice.

5.5 DISCUSSION

The research highlights the important role of nostalgia in shaping therapeutic landscapes. Existing literature on therapeutic landscapes emphasizes characteristics such as natural elements, sensory engagement, social interaction, symbolism, and place attachment (Gesler, 1992; Ulrich, 1984; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). This study extended that work by documenting how nostalgic features such as familiar materials, forms, vegetation and sensory cues incorporate these characteristics into an

experience to strengthen their therapeutic aspects. For example, emotions that come from nostalgia, such as comfort, sense of belonging, identity, and safety, relate directly to the restorative benefits defined in therapeutic landscape theory and demonstrate that nostalgia enhances their potential.

The case study from Lunuganga offered a rich foundation to study this intersection. Both local and foreign visitors referred to some nostalgic triggers and attributed their meaning to different associations: locals were triggered by cultural inheritance and rural memory, foreign visitors by colonial architectural forms, tropical vegetation and iconic landscapes. These differences emphasize nostalgia's duality; shaped by collective cultural memory and individuals' lived experiences. Significantly, participants generally stated that these nostalgic cues generated calmness, emotional healing and reflective states, reaffirming the therapeutic potential of nostalgia. This study suggests that nostalgia is not limited to experiences or feelings of positive nostalgia and can also provide illustrations of bittersweet or sad nostalgia. Ultimately, there is also therapeutic value to these forms of nostalgia, providing self-reflection and the ability to engage with significant experiences in life. One aim of this study is to broaden the understanding of therapeutic landscapes beyond positive affect to accommodate landscapes that evoke complex forms of emotional states that may allow for deeper forms of healing. This study provides insights into nostalgic elements in therapeutic landscapes but is limited by its single-site focus and the subjective nature of nostalgia, which varies across individuals and cultural contexts.

6. Conclusions

The study explored nostalgic attributes within therapeutic landscapes and how experiences with familiar materials, forms, vegetation, and sensory cues can influence a person's emotions and experience in space. Using qualitative means of data collection: observations, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and post-experience photographic analysis at Lunuganga, the study found that nostalgia elicits emotional responses such as comfort, calmness, a sense of belonging, and identity in a manner that closely aligns with the general attributes of therapeutic landscapes. People, whether local or foreign, used references such as courtyards, colonial architecture, familiar vegetation prior to arrival, and other tangible elements, as well as intangible elements special experiences of scent or sound, and symbolic elements, to contribute to a reflective and restorative experience. This study identified that nostalgia not only reconnects people with their memories of self and cultural heritage but positively enhances therapeutic landscapes. The developed spatial framework illustrates how thoughtful intentionality can inform and incorporate nostalgic design strategies, which can guide the realization of emotionally and meaningfully derived healing identity, culturally based, and healing environments in landscape practice moving forward.

7. References

- Batcho, K. I. (1995). Nostalgia: A psychological perspective. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 80(1), 131–143. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pms.1995.80.1.131>
- Batcho, K. I. (2013). Nostalgia: Retreat or support in difficult times? *American Journal of Psychology*, 126(3), 355–367. <https://doi.org/10.5406/ameripsyc.126.3.0355>
- Gesler, W. M. (1992). Therapeutic landscapes: Medical issues in light of the new cultural geography. *Social Science & Medicine*, 34(7), 735–746. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(92\)90360-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(92)90360-3)
- Gesler, W. M. (1993). Therapeutic landscapes: Theory and a case study of Epidauros, Greece. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 11(2), 171–189. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d110171>
- Gupta, R., & Medappa, R. (2020). Nostalgia as an affective landscape: Memory, place, and identity. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 35, 100668. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2020.100668>
- Jones, R. (2011). *Lunuganga: A site of memory*. Geoffrey Bawa Trust.
- Kaplan, R. (1992). The psychological benefits of nearby nature. In D. Relf (Ed.), *The role of horticulture in human well-being and social development* (pp. 125–133). Timber Press.
- Kaplan, R., & Kaplan, S. (1989). *The experience of nature: A psychological perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- Khachatourians, A. (2003). *Therapeutic landscapes: Interconnections of natural, social, and spiritual environments* [Unpublished diagram].
- Routledge, C. (2015). Nostalgia: A psychological resource. *Routledge Handbook of Emotions and Memory* (pp. 1–10). Routledge.
- Routledge, C., Wildschut, T., Sedikides, C., & Juhl, J. (2013). Nostalgia as a resource for psychological health and well-being. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 7(11), 808–818. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12070>
- Sanoff, H. (1990). *Participatory design: Theory and techniques*. Henry Sanoff.
- Sedikides, C., Wildschut, T., Routledge, C., & Arndt, J. (2015). Nostalgia counteracts self-discontinuity and restores self-continuity. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 45(1), 52–61. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2073>
- Ulrich, R. S. (1984). View through a window may influence recovery from surgery. *Science*, 224(4647), 420–421. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.6143402>
- Williams, A. (2007). *Therapeutic landscapes*. Ashgate Publishing.
- Wildschut, T., Sedikides, C., Arndt, J., & Routledge, C. (2006). Nostalgia: Content, triggers, functions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91(5), 975–993. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.91.5.975>
- Yan, H., Leng, H., & Yuan, H. (2023). Nostalgia and environmental restorativeness in urban parks: The mediating role of place attachment. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 85, 127039. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2023.127039>
- Yang, X., Li, S., Yang, Y., & Tong, Y. (2022). Neural mechanisms of nostalgia: Evidence from neuroimaging studies. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 923815. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.923815>

- Zhang, Y., & Wang, X. (2024). Nostalgia as a coping mechanism: Identity continuity and resilience. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 90, 102158. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2023.102158>
- Google Maps. (n.d.). *Lunuganga Estate*. Retrieved September 9, 2025, from <https://www.google.com/maps>
- Geoffrey Bawa Trust. (n.d.). *Lunuganga official website*. Retrieved September 9, 2025, from <https://www.geoffreybawa.com/lunuganga>