

Designing the escape:
The role of architecture in nightclubs

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Dedication

To my family and friends for their constant support and encouragement over this academic journey.

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I take full responsibility for any shortcomings in this dissertation.

Abstract

This dissertation investigates the relationship between escapism and architecture within the context of nightclub environments. The study explores whether architectural design influences escapism and, if so, which architectural features contribute to this experience. The literature examines escapism through psychological, social and architectural lenses, providing a broad understanding of the topic. It also includes an architectural analysis of historical nightclub spaces as an intentional typology for escapism.

Data was collected through one-on-one interviews with key figures in the local nightlife scene, exploring experiential perspectives on the topic. These interviews were also supported by four case studies of Maltese nightlife spaces, which were selected to provide a range of offerings available locally.

The results suggest that whilst psychological and social aspects are pivotal elements, architectural design plays a key role in facilitating escapism. Although not the sole factor, effective spatial design emerges as a dynamic participant that can enhance or disrupt the phenomenon of escapism. Through entry thresholds, circulation paths, atmospheric qualities, materials and spatial zoning, the architecture of nightclub spaces plays a critical role in how users experience these environments. The study bridges a gap in the literature by linking escapism to architectural features, offering a foundation for future research into other spatial typologies.

Keywords: Escapism, Immersion, Liminality, Atmosphere, Nightclub architecture

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Glossary of Terms

Acid House	A subgenre of house music that emerged in the mid-1980s, characterised by the distinctive sound produced by the Roland TB-303 synthesiser.
Atmosphere	The overall quality or mood of a space, influencing how people experience and interact with it (Kirsh, 2023).
Commercial	Mainstream nightclub venues that prioritise large scale appeal and profitability.
DJ	Disc Jockey; A person who plays recorded music for an audience.
EDM	Electronic Dance Music.
House Music	Genre of electronic music characterised by a repetitive four-on-the-floor beat.
Immersion	Deep state of engangement where users feel absorbed by the surrounding environment.
Nightclub	An entertainment venue centred around dancing, typically open from the evening until the early hours of the morning.
Nightlife	Broader cultural ecosystem of entertainment activities which may spill out from the nightclub typology, including daytime events and raves.
Rave	Term used to refer to dance parties within the electronic music scene.
Techno	A style of fast, heavy electronic dance music.
Thresholds	Physical space that marks the transition between different environments.
Underground	Non-commercial, community led nightclub venues.
VIP	Very Important Person

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This opening chapter introduces the research topic, outlining the researcher's motivation for undertaking the study, as well as the dissertation's central aim and objectives. It also provides an overview of the research methodology adopted.

1.1.2 Background

Nightclubs have long been regarded as environments that transcend the structures of day-to-day life, offering “multidimensional liminal experiences not found in the everyday world” (Gerard, 2001). These environments facilitate both a “celebration of...euphoria” and a “temporary relief” from work, worries, and routine (Malbon, 1999, p.164). Raving may thus serve to “escape from daily life and...confront reality” simultaneously (O'Grady, 2012, p. 90), while for many participants, it becomes a “spiritual escape into an invisible landscape of rhythmic...sounds” (Bren, 2020). Clubbing spaces across both commercial venues and underground gatherings frequently construct an “other reality”, establishing a boundary that separates them from the mundane (Rief, 2003, p.7).

Scholars broadly define escapism as an “escape from the real world” (Sopčić & Musil, 2020, p. 280) and often criticise it as avoidance or withdrawal from life's challenges (Calleja, 2010; Evans, 2001). Philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan (1998) counters this negative framing by interpreting escapism as a natural human motivation to construct controlled and comforting environments in response to existential anxiety. Under this view, escapism is not about avoiding reality but about crafting meaningful experiences amid the uncertainties of modern life. Psychological perspectives similarly locate escapism in a “desire to alleviate or escape the perceived limitations” of one's circumstances (Hastall, 2017) and in the redirection of one's full attention onto a specific task or behaviour (Jouhki et al., 2023).

1.3 Researcher's Background and Motivation for the Study

From the researcher's earliest encounters with nightclub environments, these spaces have stood out as seemingly detached from the external world. From the moment one queues to enter, navigating narrow, dim corridors before emerging into an intense environment of pulsating light and sound, these spaces feel deliberately constructed to transport individuals into another realm.

These experiences prompted several critical questions: Is this sense of escapism intentionally facilitated by architectural design, or is it primarily a psychological phenomenon? To what degree does the physical architecture, rather than music, atmosphere, or social factors, contribute to shaping this immersive experience? These questions became the foundation of this research.

While researching the topic, a notable gap in the existing literature became apparent. Although various academic papers have touched upon the link between escapism and nightclubs, the

connection to the architectural design of these spaces remains largely unexplored. Furthermore, the relationship between escapism and architecture in general remains insufficiently examined within academic discourse, presenting a valuable opportunity for further research.

Beyond the academic sphere, the researcher's active involvement in the local nightlife scene, as an event organiser, DJ and participant added a personal motivation to the study's topic. The research aims to establish a strong framework that both advances understanding of nightclub architecture and provides practical insights to inform future design decisions, thereby shaping nightlife environments that enhance the experience of escapism.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

This dissertation, influenced by the researcher's experiences within nightclub spaces, explores and analyses the potential relationship between escapism and the architectural design of nightclubs. It intends to determine whether escapism in these settings stems primarily from spatial factors or psychological experiences, and which architectural elements, if any, may contribute to this effect.

Therefore, this study will investigate the multifaceted nature of escapism from a variety of perspectives, framing it within the context of the nightclub typology. This study aims to explore why people are drawn to these spaces and how nightclub design has evolved to facilitate such experiences.

This will be achieved through the following objectives:

- Understanding the phenomenon of escapism through psychological and social lenses.
- Exploring how escapism manifests in different spatial environments.
- Investigating escapism within the context of nightclub culture.
- Examining the architectural elements in nightclubs that facilitate, enhance or hinder escapist experiences.
- Understanding the development of nightclub spaces from cultural and historical perspectives.
- Analysing how commercial and underground nightclub environments influence the escapism experience.
- Gathering diverse narratives and perspectives through selected local case studies and in-depth interviews.

1.5 Research Questions

- To what extent do architectural design features within nightclub spaces contribute to the experience of escapism?
 - Which spatial and architectural features of nightclubs are most effective in enhancing escapism?

1.6 Structure

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter outlined the research motivation and provided a general overview of the dissertation. It presented the aims and objectives of the study, along with the overarching research question and the structure of the investigation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The first section of the literature review delves into an in-depth analysis of escapism, understanding the human motivations behind it and how it manifests across different contexts. The second section of the literature review looks at the nightclub typology from an architectural perspective.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the rationale underpinning the study's methodology, detailing the research approach, the criteria for case study selection, the research instruments employed and the methods of data analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the research findings which were organised around four key themes: the experiential and psychological dimensions of escapism, socio-cultural foundations, ritual and transitions, and architectural enablers.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter begins by presenting an emergent narrative that synthesises the findings in dialogue with the literature, connecting the results with existing theories. It then presents the results in relation to the research aims, objectives, and original research questions. It also includes a critical evaluation of the study and outlines potential directions for future research.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the dissertation's structural framework.

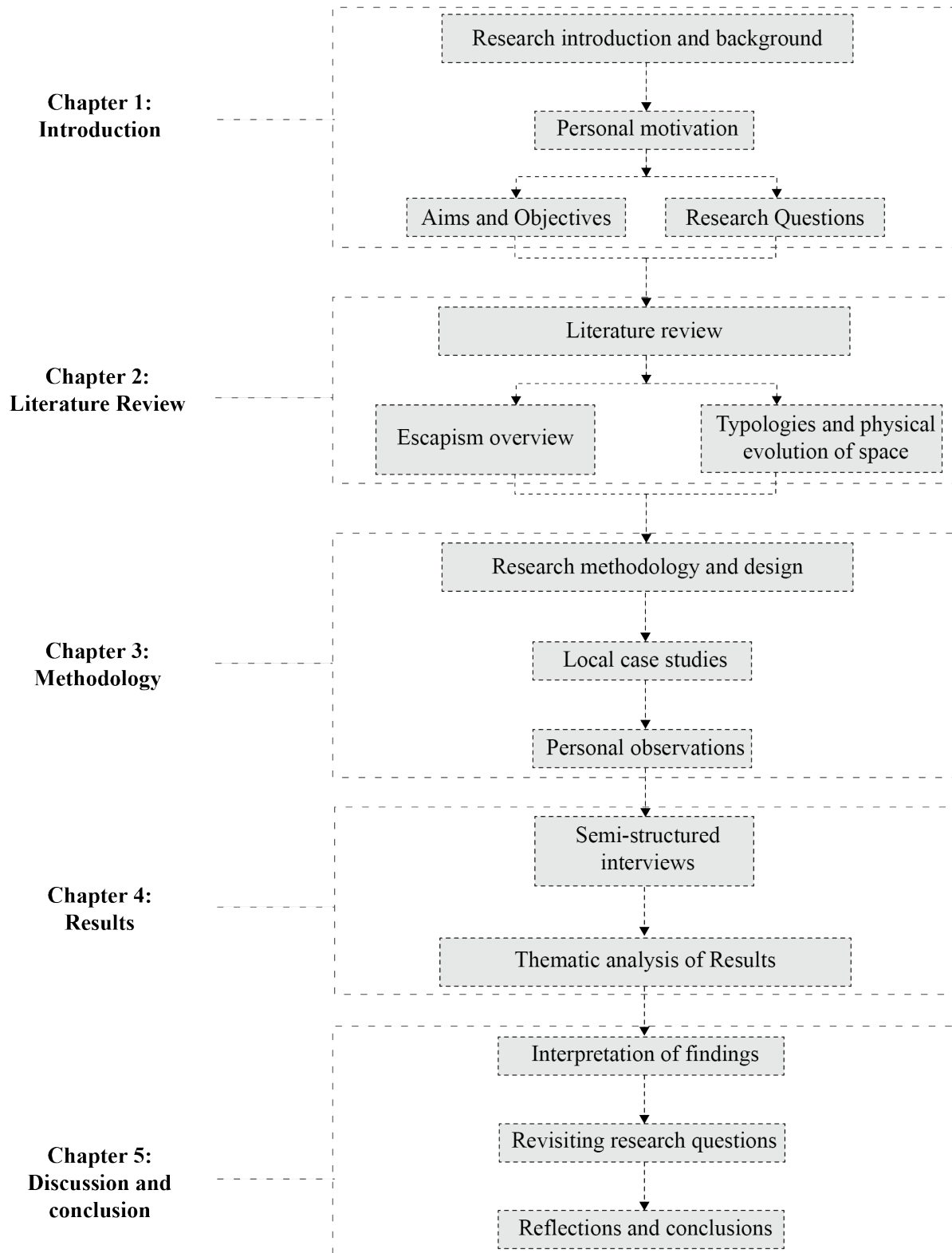


Figure 1 - The structure of the dissertation.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

While the concept of escapism has been explored in a several disciplines, its direct relationship to specific architectural environments, particularly nightclubs, remains relatively unexplored. Existing literature touches upon escapist tendencies in spatial or experiential terms, yet few studies directly examine the relationship between nightclub architecture and its role in facilitating escapism. This gap highlights the need for a critical investigation into how architectural design not only accommodates but actively constructs and mediates escapist experiences.

This chapter aims to establish a conceptual framework to understand escapism as a complex and layered psychological phenomenon before linking it to architectural environments. It starts by outlining a theoretical overview of escapism, gaining an understanding of the topic from a variety of different perspectives. It then examines how escapism manifests in contemporary society, and from there, the chapter explores escapism both as an individual and collective experience, to demonstrate how it manifests in ritualistic and communal environments.

Building on these theoretical frameworks, the chapter then positions escapism within spatial dimensions, investigating how architecture can facilitate such experiences. Within this context, the nightclub emerges as a central typology, an environment deliberately designed to accommodate escapism. The chapter concludes with a historical overview of the nightclub as a spatial and cultural construct, tracing its architectural and social evolution from early entertainment venues to the present day.

2.2 Escapism

2.2.1 Defining Escapism

Escapism is a multifaceted psychological concept broadly defined as a mental or physical escape from the real world (Evans, 2001). Whilst the concept does not exist under one definition, most psychological theories generally allude that escapism stems from an individual's desire to alleviate or escape the perceived limitations of one's life (Hastall, 2017) and is rooted in redirecting one's full attention to a specific task or behaviour (Jouhki et al., 2023).

The concept first emerged in 1919 through the writing of British poet and playwright T.S. Eliot, who noted:

“Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things” (Eliot, 1919, p.4).

Although Eliot never used the term directly, his words allude to the role of media, which aids an escape from the real world (Konzak, 2020). Escapism is typically viewed through a negative lens and is associated with avoidance and withdrawal from life's challenges (Calleja, 2010), implying

that activities such as media consumption, hobbies, or entertainment are distractions from more meaningful or productive pursuits (Evans, 2001).

Despite its negative connotations, escapism may also be understood as an inherent and potentially positive human motivation. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argues that once basic survival needs are met, individuals seek meaning, satisfaction, and happiness. This shift of goals demonstrates a deeper psychological desire not just to escape life's burdens but to participate in meaningful and emotionally rewarding experiences.

Similarly, Tuan (1998) also perceives escapism as natural human motivation. He goes against the perception of escapism as avoidance and interprets it as an attempt to create controlled and comforting environments in response to existential anxiety. Escapism here is not about avoiding reality but about crafting meaningful experiences amid the uncertainties of modernity. Nightclubs are an example of such environments where individuals can temporarily escape the complexities of daily existence, finding solace in a collective experience.

2.2.2 Dual Nature of Escapism

Contemporary psychology recognises escapism as both an adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanism. Kardefelt-Winther (2014) suggests that escapist behaviours often serve as strategies to regulate mood or suppress emotions. These behaviours may include excessive media consumption, compulsive work habits, or substance abuse. While such activities alleviate distress, their overdependence may lead to psychological strain or addiction when used to avoid real-life problems.

Nightclubs reflect this duality. For some, they offer rejuvenation and shared pleasure; for others, they involve dependency on alcohol or drugs as tools to enhance escape, risking long-term emotional imbalance. In such instances, escapism becomes a maladaptive cycle of chemical detachment.

However, when used intentionally, escapism supports mental and emotional recovery. Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of "flow" describes a state in which individuals become fully absorbed in an activity, losing awareness of time and self. The experience of flow, where one's attention is fully absorbed in an activity, results in a reprieve from the anxieties and distractions of everyday life. This engagement can enhance a sense of well-being and provide individuals with the emotional energy required to confront life's challenges (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). However, as Debord (1967) warns, when escapism becomes the default response to alienation in the spectacle, it can further entrench individuals in a cycle of passive consumption and disconnection from their real selves.

Sopčić and Musil (2020) also emphasise escapism's dual nature, framing it as both self-suppression and self-expansion. In some cases, escapism allows individuals to distance themselves from certain anxieties, suppressing aspects of life which may feel like a burden. On the other hand, escapism can also facilitate self-expansion, where individuals experience freedom, joy or transformation that enhances their sense of identity. This view of escapism showcases its potential as both a coping mechanism and a means of personal exploration.

2.2.3 Escapism in the Context of Modern Society

The desire to escape is further fuelled by modernity. Since the Industrial Revolution¹, human life shifted from rural traditions to highly advanced societies. These changes have increased demands on attention, emotion, and ambition, often leaving individuals feeling trapped in cycles of striving for unattainable external goals.

This sentiment is reflected in Debord's (1967) *Society of the Spectacle*, where he argues that modern life, influenced by media and consumerism, reduces individuals to passive spectators of their own lives. The spectacle represents the commodification of experiences, where time, identity and emotion all become products to be consumed. In this environment, escapism through media, entertainment and experience provide a temporary release from the pressures of living in this society, where individual desires are shaped and manipulated by external forces (Debord, 1967).

Bauman (2000) builds upon this notion and notes that modern society is likely to increase this sense of dissatisfaction through the unpredictability of 'liquid modernity'². In his view, social structures, relationships and identity have become unstable and paired with an increased sense of personal responsibility, creating a sense of alienation where freedom is not emancipatory but apprehensive (Bauman, 2000).

2.2.4 Escapism and technology

Digital technologies have greatly expanded escapist possibilities, offering anonymity, immersive games and personalised content used more for emotional regulation rather than leisure (Calleja, 2010; Orazi et al., 2023).

However, the omnipresence of technology has sparked a counter-movement that seeking escape from the digital itself. Turkle (2011) argues that while technology has the power and potential to connect, it often results in the opposite, making users feel lonely and isolated in relation to one another. This emotional void may drive users back to digital interactions, creating a loop in which technology both causes and relieves psychological discomfort (Turkle, 2011). Trufanova (2021) further argues that technologies once seen as refuges have become inescapable fixtures, causing information overload, emotional exhaustion, and a sense of constant surveillance. Consequently, practices like digital detox and offline retreats have emerged as deliberate forms of escapism.

Within this context, nightclubs serve as spaces of 'digital escape' not through virtual environments but away from it. These venues often limit phone use and attendees to be present in the moment. This sentiment is seen clearly in contemporary nightlife culture, as reported by the BBC³ (Jordan, 2024), with some London clubs actively promoting no-phone policies to restore

¹ Industrial Revolution – period of transformative technological and economic change during the late 18th and early 19th century.

² 'Liquid Modernity' - a society in which the conditions under which individuals act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines. Social forms and institutions no longer have enough time to solidify and cannot serve as frames of reference for human actions and long-term life strategies.

— Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid Modernity*.

³ BBC - British Broadcasting Corporation

the communal nature of nightclubbing. Patrons increasingly express a desire for deeper authentic connections, seeking out spaces where the constant mediation of experience by smartphones is absent. Just as people seek digital detoxes in nature, they are also turning to nightlife to seek out these experiences.

2.2.5 Collective Escapism

While escapism is often framed as an individual experience, it frequently occurs through shared rituals and spaces. Tuan (1998) asserts that "ritual's efficacy in overcoming discreteness—in connecting and fusing individual and distinctive entities into larger wholes" (p.64). Tuan argues that escape is not always in the form of a withdrawal from society and reality but can often take the form of activities that bring people together, united by a desire to transcend the mundane. Tuan goes on to highlight the role of space in facilitating collective escape, where identity is shaped through spatial interaction with others. For instance, a classroom serves as a powerful example of how spatial environments can evoke a sense of unity:

"the classroom. It differs from the family room in that there, all students are presumably engaged in the same activity, namely, attending a lecture. They may feel themselves "one" - one student body - for that reason." (Tuan, 1998, p. 66).

Similarly, traditional religions have long functioned as communal rituals rooted in specific spatial environments. Durkheim⁴ observes that "collective effervescence was a feature of certain types of social assemblies, especially religious rituals" (Olaveson, 2001, p. 86) which roots worshippers in a collective identity within churches, mosques, and other religious structures.

This insight is particularly relevant towards nightlife culture. As institutional faith declines, nightlife emerges to occupy this ritual void, described as "a symbolic and proto-religious practice of a modern urban youth scene" (Corsten, 1999, p. 91). Nightclubs' carefully curated lighting, acoustics, and layout work together to evoke immersion, creating a shared sense of identity that echoes the communal rituals they have come to resemble. As Berber (2023) explains, electronic music clubs act as "modern iterations of ritual spaces... where auditory and visual stimulations converge to facilitate a departure from the mundane".

2.2.6 Liminality, *Communitas* and Anti-Structure

In *The Ritual Process* (1969), Turner introduces the concept of liminality - a transitional realm in which participants are removed from their everyday social context and enter a state of collective equality. Within this liminal space emerges the concept of '*communitas*'⁵ - which is described as a deep bonding between equals without status. He goes on to argue that ritual is more than a symbolic act, but a powerful social mechanism that offers a form of relief from society by

⁴ Durkheim - Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) was a French sociologist known for his theories on social cohesion and collective consciousness.

⁵ *Communitas* - "society as an unstructured or rudimentary structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders." (Turner, 1969, p.96)

allowing moments of what he describes as ‘anti-structure’ - the temporary suspension of social norms where transformation and renewal can occur. This process is illustrated in Figure 2.

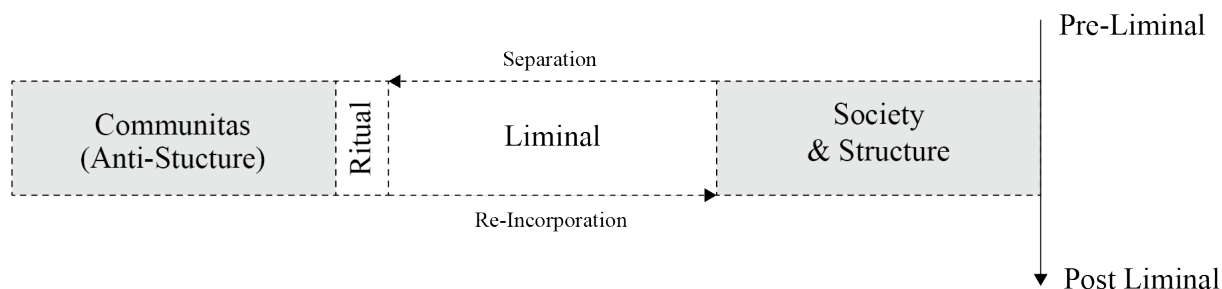


Figure 2 - Diagram of Turner's theory of communitas. Image source: Image reinterpreted from Prevos (2021)

Building upon Turner's work, St John (2001) observes that “spontaneous or existential communitas, which is characteristic of events such as counterculture ‘happenings’, rock concerts and pilgrimage phenomena” can be applied to the nightclub environment, where curated atmospheres dissolve everyday roles and transcend users into a liminal realm (St John, 2001, p. 87). Here, an “unstructured or rudimentarily structured community of equal individuals” forms, momentarily suspending social distinctions in an embodied enactment of Turner's “anti-structure” (St John, 2001, p. 86).

2.2.7 Neo-Tribalism and Ritualised Behaviour

Michel Maffesoli's *The Time of the Tribes* (1996) observes that modern individuals form fluid “neo-tribes” founded on shared emotion, image, and lifestyle rather than overarching ideologies. Following this line of thought, Goulding and Shankar identify five key components which define the ritualistic nature of the nightclub experience – “mythology, formulism, sacredness, communitas, and transformation.” (Goulding & Shankar, 2011, p.1441). These five components come together to create a structure for ritualised behaviour that is both immersive and expressive, allowing for “temporary escape from the pressures and stresses of the everyday working week” (Goulding & Shankar, 2011, p.1436).

Nightlife culture reflects neo-tribalism in various forms, ranging from specific techno scenes and house music collectives to large-scale raves and underground parties. These groups unite through shared feelings, aesthetics, and ritual practices, not just ideologies. Dress codes, music, and dance serve as symbols of belonging. In these spaces, escapism becomes a collective expression of identity, not just a personal retreat.

2.2.8 Spatial Dimensions of Escapism

Peter Zumthor's notion of architectural atmosphere offers valuable insight into the spatial dimensions of escapism. In *Atmospheres* (2006), Zumthor discusses the “magic of the real” (p.19), which refers to the sensorial qualities that can evoke emotional and transformative reactions in people. These atmospheres, curated through architectural interventions such

as material, light, scale and acoustics, create environments that can trigger emotional reactions (Zumthor, 2006).

Julio Bermudez (2015) builds on this by examining sacred spaces as enablers of transcendence. He discusses how architecture mediates between material and spiritual realms, allowing for departure from the mundane. Atmospheric architectural elements have the potential to guide individuals toward heightened awareness. Here, sacred spaces function not only as worship sites but as environments for temporary detachment, resonating with the concept of escapism. Bermudez emphasises the power of the phenomenology of space and how it is sensed, felt and inhabited, highlighting architecture's potential to create transformative environments (Bermudez, 2015).

Bernard Tschumi's *Architecture and Disjunction* (1994) furthers this argument by challenging the deterministic relationship between form and function, proposing instead that architecture becomes meaningful through the events that unfold within it. He writes, "There is no architecture without action, no architecture without events, no architecture without program" (p. 122). Here, escapism emerges not from static forms but from dynamic interactions, such as rituals, dance, and social play, that temporarily reconfigure norms and perceptions of space.

This performative dimension of space is vividly illustrated by Alice O'Grady's (2012) in her analysis of underground club culture. O'Grady argues that these club spaces allow for a 'what if' (p.89) mode of being, where normative identities and social structures are suspended in favour of exploration and playfulness. These liminal environments echo the concept of "communitas" (Turner, 1969), which serves as a key mechanism for escapism through spatial and social transformation.

In sum, the literature suggests that escapism is not solely a psychological process; it can also be evoked within specific spatial environments. Whether through the atmosphere of the dance floor, the scale of a cathedral, or the enactment of site-specific collective rituals, escapism emerges as a phenomenon shaped and potentially amplified by architectural design. This understanding sets the stage for a investigation into nightclub architecture as an intentional typology for escapism.

2.3 Typologies and Physical Evolution of Space

2.3.1 Introduction

Physical space plays a critical role in shaping how individuals interact with nightlife architecture, going beyond simply providing a backdrop for music and lighting. This section examines how spatial qualities in nightclub architecture shape emotional and sensory experiences, enabling patrons to detach from everyday life.

2.3.2 The Role of Physical Space in Nightlife

In his exploration of nightlife architecture, Pasquier (2019) emphasises that nightclubs are not merely venues for entertainment but are designed to influence the emotional and psychological experiences of patrons. He asserts that:

“The spatial arrangement of a club, the materiality of its walls, and the attractiveness of its lighting should make you feel a certain way. A good club transports you. It displaces you from normal life. Form follows fantasy.” (Pasquier, 2019)

The architecture of nightclubs creates an immersive environment, where factors such as lighting, layout and materials influence the emotional and sensory experience of attendees. The nightclub becomes an “exercise in fantasy building” where patrons are invited to engage in a curated escape. Pasquier argues that the power of space is rooted in its ability to “make you forget where you are”, offering both an intimate and collective space for escapism.

The layout of clubs is also an important factor in how these experiences are structured. Kafka (2020) states that club architecture is distinct in its ability to choreograph sensory and social interactions, as clubs are “so intimately involved with the staging and directing of human bodies interacting—sight, sound, smell, intimacy, inclusion and exclusion” (Kafka, 2020).

This careful staging of bodies within nightclubs often takes place in spaces which are intentionally designed to be free of fixed structures. As Gauthier (2001) notes, warehouse raves feature “the absence of chairs, tables or any other objects which could define, structure and condition space,” (p.71) leaving “the space... what the raving bodies make of it” (p.71). This openness, enhanced by lighting and effects, encourages immersion and movement, supporting the idea that successful clubs rely on unobtrusive architectural cues rather than bold design statements.

This view is shared by art historian Tom Wilkinson (2018), who writes that “the best clubs are the least architecturally obtrusive”, indicating that successful design often relies on subtle environmental cues rather than intentional aesthetic statements. He highlights how these spatial arrangements produce various atmospheric qualities, contributing to how participants experience and interpret the night (Wilkinson, 2018).

The spatial arrangement of nightclub spaces functions as transitional thresholds that symbolically allow users to experience escapism by facilitating their passage from everyday reality into a separate environment. This is reflected in Gauthier's (2001) statement that moving through stages

such as security checks, ticket booths, cloakrooms, and tunnels serves as symbolic checkpoints that separate individuals from the external world. These sequential spatial zones facilitate a psychological and physical transition, reflecting Turner's (1969) concept of liminality.

2.3.3 Historical Overview

This section explores how nightclub architecture has evolved as a spatial representation of escapism, adapting to cultural, technological and social changes within a global context. Drawing on specific case studies from various eras and places, it highlights the dual role of nightclub architecture in both shaping and mirroring the human impulse to escape the ordinary.

Given the scarcity of scholarly work on nightclub architecture, much of this analysis is informed by John Leo Gillen's (2023) *Temporary Pleasure*, which critically examines the design evolution of these spaces.

From the 1960s onward, nightclubs have evolved through experimental approaches to space and atmosphere. *The Fun Palace* in the UK and the *Piper Clubs* in Italy introduced flexible, immersive environments that emphasised user engagement. Meanwhile, in the 1970s, venues like *Paradise Garage* and *Studio 54* in the United States offered contrasting perspectives on what a nightclub could be. *KU Club* in Ibiza blended natural and built spectacle, while the UK rave scene of the 1980s and 1990s embraced DIY aesthetics and political resistance through adaptive reuse. Post-reunification Berlin saw clubs emerge as symbols of freedom within raw industrial settings. Contemporary spaces such as *Horst Arts and Music Festival* and *Toffler Club* extend this legacy, reimagining nightlife through adaptive and experimental design. Across these examples, architecture plays an active role in producing an escapist experience.

2.3.2.1 Fun Palace : An Adaptive Nightclub Concept

Emerging in the post-war period, the *Fun Palace*, conceived by Cedric Price and Joan Littlewood in 1962, proposed an architecture that dissolved traditional boundaries between structure, user and program. Envisioned as an adaptable "laboratory for fun" (Littlewood, 1964), it was designed as a vast framework equipped with cranes, gantries, and movable platforms (Fig. 3), allowing users to reshape and reprogram the space to suit their needs (Mathews, 2005). This concept redefined architecture as a process rather than a product, emphasising flexibility and user agency within nightclub spaces (Gillen, 2023).

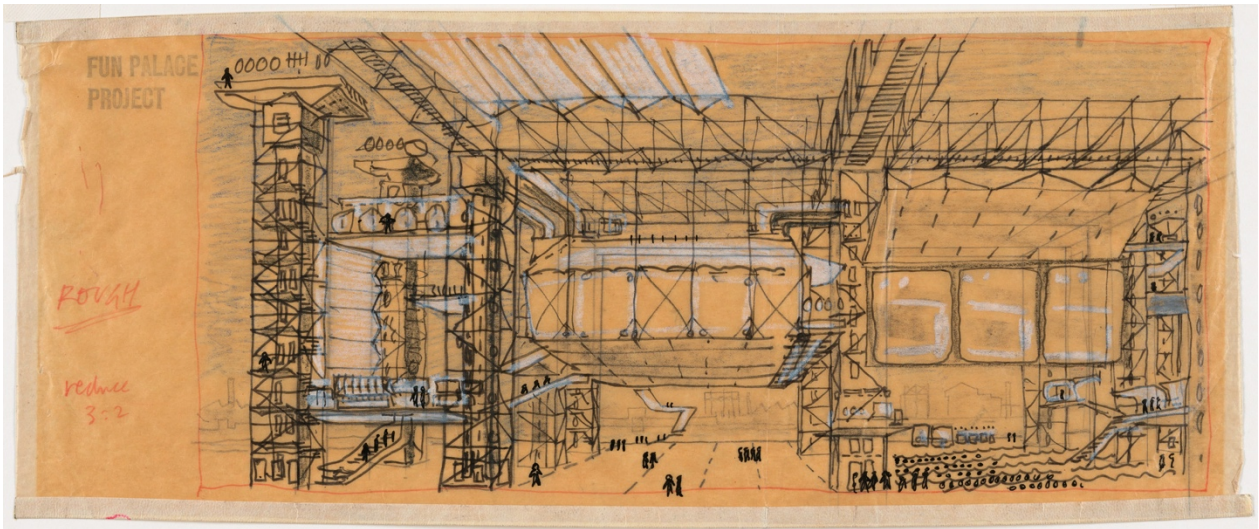


Figure 3 - Cedric Price's perspective section sketch of the Fun Palace. Image source: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/842>

The proposed spatial experience would have been one of radical indeterminacy: shifting walls, moving platforms and adjustable enclosures creating a space that changed from hour to hour, resisting the fixed monumentalism of traditional public buildings. As Mathews (2005) explains,

“Price’s aspiration was that the Fun Palace would be a virtual architecture that could learn, anticipate, and adapt to changing conditions and needs.” (Mathews, 2005, p. 43).

In doing so, it anticipated later trends in nightclub design, where adaptable and immersive environments became critical to the creation of these unique environments.

2.3.2.2. Italian Radical Clubs

Romes *Piper Club*, established in 1965, redefined Italy’s nightclub scene through innovative architectural and experiential design. The venue blurred boundaries between performer and audience, using extensive scaffolding to suspend lighting and projection equipment alongside movable platforms and varied levels that adapted to each event (Gillen, 2023). Echoing the *Fun Palace* ethos, the setup immersed patrons in the performance, creating a sense of unity and participation. In a 2018 interview, Capolei, one of the clubs’ architects, stated:

“We wanted a new way of dancing... to break the central focus. We want young people to be able to dance with no divisions of class, education, or beauty. No social hierarchy... you danced with the beautiful and the ordinary.” (Kries et al., 2018)

A second *Piper* opened in Turin in 1966, expanding upon the original's experimental approach. It introduced a system of total spatial flexibility, using movable scaffolding, modular seating and reconfigurable platforms (Fig. 4) including mezzanines that reshaped verticality and circulation (Gillen, 2023).

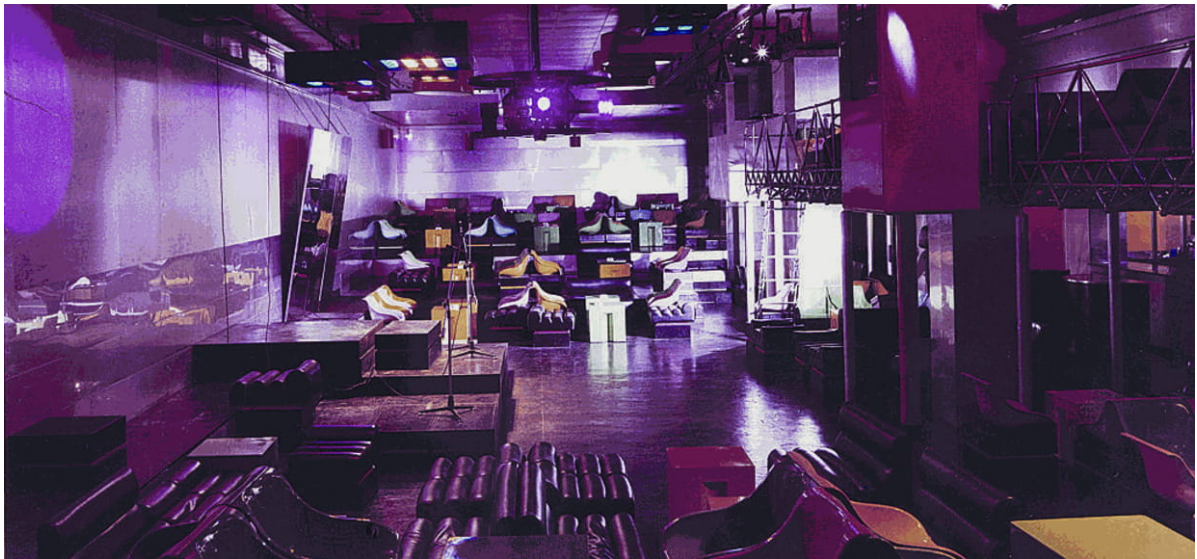


Figure 4 - Reconfigurable layout of Piper Turin. Image source - <https://www.lastampa.it/topnews/tempi-moderni/2018/01/24/news/piper-la-terza-vita-della-swinging-torino-1.33971210/>

At the entrance, a "musical staircase" (Fig. 5) reacted to movement with sound, merging architecture and installation art to create a unique entry sequence into the space. This multi-sensory environment made the audience an active part of the space's transformation, defining *Piper Turin* as a "pluriclub", a hybrid venue for music, performance and art (Gillen, 2023).



Figure 5 - Musical Staicase at Piper Turin. Image source - <https://flash---art.it/article/spazi-intermediali-club-culture-e-artistive-in-italia-il-piper-di-torino/>

2.3.2.3 New York Nightclubs

Paradise Garage, opened in New York in 1977, marked a pivotal shift in nightclub architecture. Founder Michael Brody envisioned a club that surpassed all others in scale and cultural impact, with music and dance at its core (Gillen, 2023). Housed in a former parking garage, it featured no bar or segmentation, just a 460-square-metre dancefloor for over 2000 dancers (Fig. 6). This minimalistic layout cultivated a powerful collective identity, intensified by the absence of alcohol and all-night opening hours (Gillen, 2023). Entry via a ramp (Fig. 7) to the second-level dance floor create a transition akin to Turner's concept of liminality (Lustbader, 2018; Turner, 1967). A key architectural feature was its custom sound system, designed by engineer Richard Long. Here, sound became a central spatial element, with carefully positioned speakers producing a 360° experience that turned air and structure into mediums of vibration. As noted by Gillen (2023), "The music was no longer heard: it was felt and experienced, as mind, body and machine amalgamated" (p.64).



Figure 6 - Entrance Ramp towards the dancefloor of *Paradise Garage*. Image Source - <https://musicorigins.org/item/the-paradise-garage-and-larry-levans-legacy/>



Figure 7 - The dancefloor of the Paradise Garage. Image source - <https://www.surfacemag.com/articles/paradise-garage-american-songbook-lincoln-center/>

Tying into the central theme of escapism, *Paradise Garage* emerged at the intersection of Gay Liberation, Civil Rights and Women's Liberation where dance music became the voice of a generation of resistance. As Adam Scott (2022) notes the *Garage* became a sanctuary for gay black men, a space where they could live freely and express themselves. It embodied escapism as both refuge and resistance. Dave Waddell, co-author of *The Experience Book* (2022), describes it as an expression of "night talk"; a space for escaping daily constraints and entering realms of imagination and spirituality:

"While day talk is about what people are doing and making sure everyone follows rules and regulations, night talk is about expanding imagination, telling stories, and going beyond the physical into the realms of spirituality. You have a place you go to escape, release, and go beyond into a different state. When you share that together, it's a part of belonging" (Rosen, 2022).

Whilst *Paradise Garage* represented an underground, community-driven space, *Studio 54*, also opening in 1977, offered a more commercial and theatrical vision within the same city. Set within a former opera house and TV studio, a team of architects, lighting experts and set designers led a six-week overhaul, transforming the space into an immersive, dramatic environment (Romeyn, 2018). Architect Scott Bromley remarked, "Everyone wants to be on the stage, let's make the stage the dancefloor" (Gillen, 2023, p.69), highlighting the club's focus on blurring the line between performer and audience. This was achieved by locating the dancefloor directly below the mezzanine level, establishing a clear visual and spatial focus on the dancefloor, as illustrated in the floor plans (Fig. 8, 9).

Studio 54 introduced unique design elements such as bolstered balconies for dancers and binoculars for observation (Romeyn, 2018). The interiors combined low sofas, claret walls, silver vinyl-covered platforms and mirrors to create a unique and flexible space. Its lighting system (Fig. 10), adapted from the existing TV and theatre rigging, produced elaborate effects, including fog, snow, sunrises, tornadoes and even gifts falling from the ceiling (Gillen, 2023).

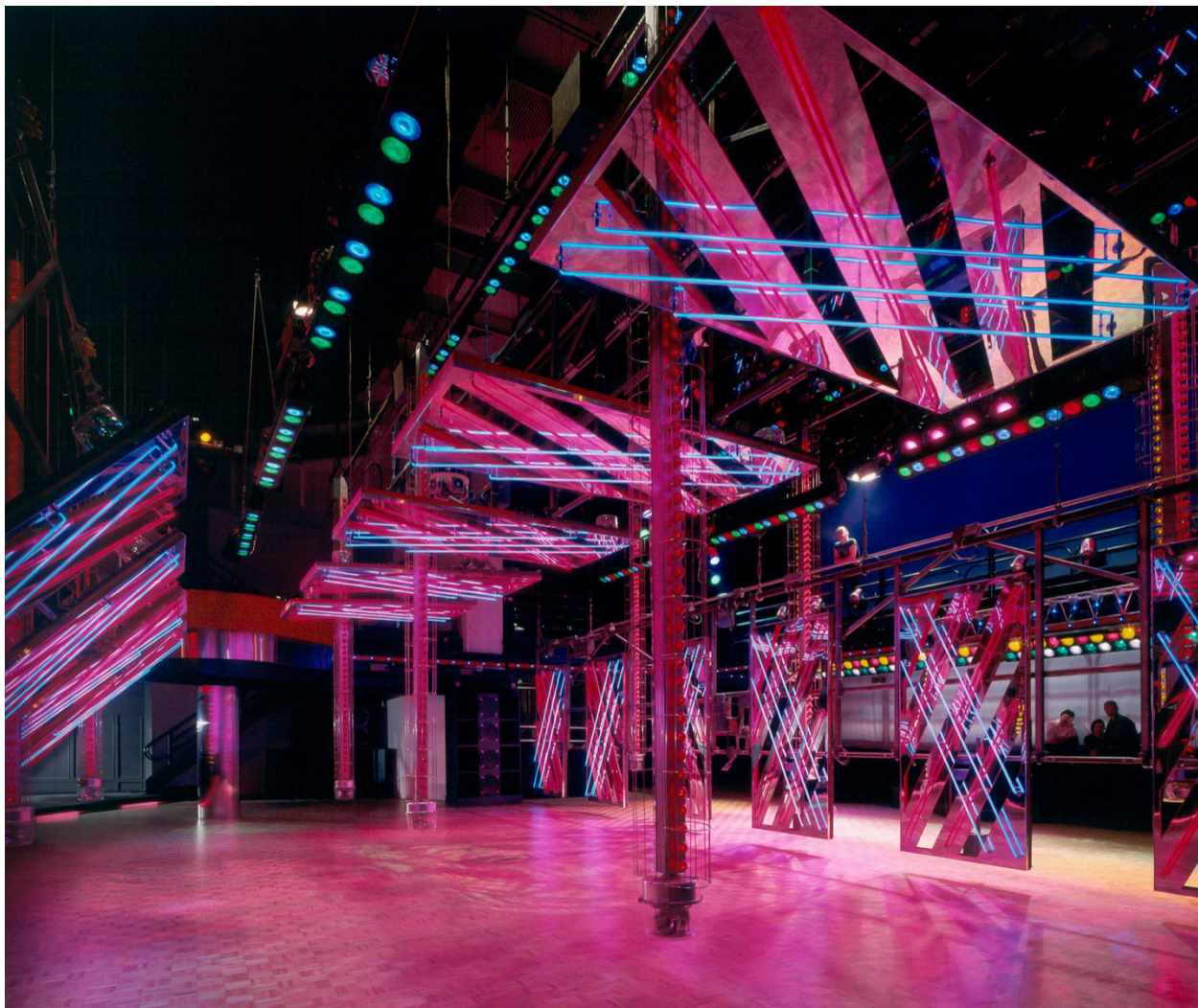


Figure 10 - Lighting System on the dancefloor at Studio 54. Image source: <https://www.bromleycaldari.com/work/studio54>

Symbolising wealth and exclusivity, *Studio 54* enforced a selective door policy favouring celebrities and elites. Shapiro (2005) called it a "bold display of disco's ascendancy" (p.182), blending music, theatre and fantasy into a spectacle. While it provided a utopian escape, it also marked a transition from an underground movement to mainstream commercial culture (Shapiro, 2005).

Michael Jackson summed up the club's appeal in a 1977 interview: "It's where you come when you want to escape, it's really escapism...when you dance here, you're free" (Jackson, 1977). His words underscore the club's role as a sanctuary for freedom and self-expression.

2.3.2.3 Ibiza Superclubs

Between 1920 and 1970, Ibiza evolved from a rural fishing island into a haven for bohemians, hippies and queer communities fleeing Francoist Spain's⁶ repression (Gillen, 2023). This countercultural wave set the stage for an alternative nightlife scene to flourish. Franco's pivot to tourism in the 1970s commodified Ibiza's free-spirited image, attracting European tourists. By the 1980s and 1990s, political liberalisation and cheap travel transformed Ibiza into a global clubbing hub (Gillen, 2023). While venues like *Pacha* and *Amnesia* rose to prominence, this chapter will focus on *KU Club*, perhaps the most extravagant of Ibiza's superclubs.

Opening in 1978 on the site of Club San Rafael, *KU* radically reshaped Ibiza's nightlife by merging architecture, spectacle and hedonism into a vast open-air complex. *KU* was consciously designed to transcend the typical nightclub experience, expanding a swimming pool and garden into a labyrinth of dancefloors, bars and themed spaces for over 10,000 guests (Gillen, 2023). The club revolved around a central swimming pool (Fig. 11) and an open-air dancefloor that integrated with the surrounding natural environment (George, 2018). Unlike many industrial-style clubs of the era, *KU* was purpose-built for spectacle, with modular decorations, grand stage sets and themed transformations overseen by a dedicated creative team. Architecturally, it blended theatre, landscape and leisure, cultivating an atmosphere of "monumental chaos" through dynamic installations and themed parties like *Luna Erotica* and *San Fermin* (George, 2018). As Gillen (2023) notes, *KU* was among the first Ibizan clubs to combine live performances with its immersive design, forging a spatial and cultural blueprint for the island's future mega-clubs.

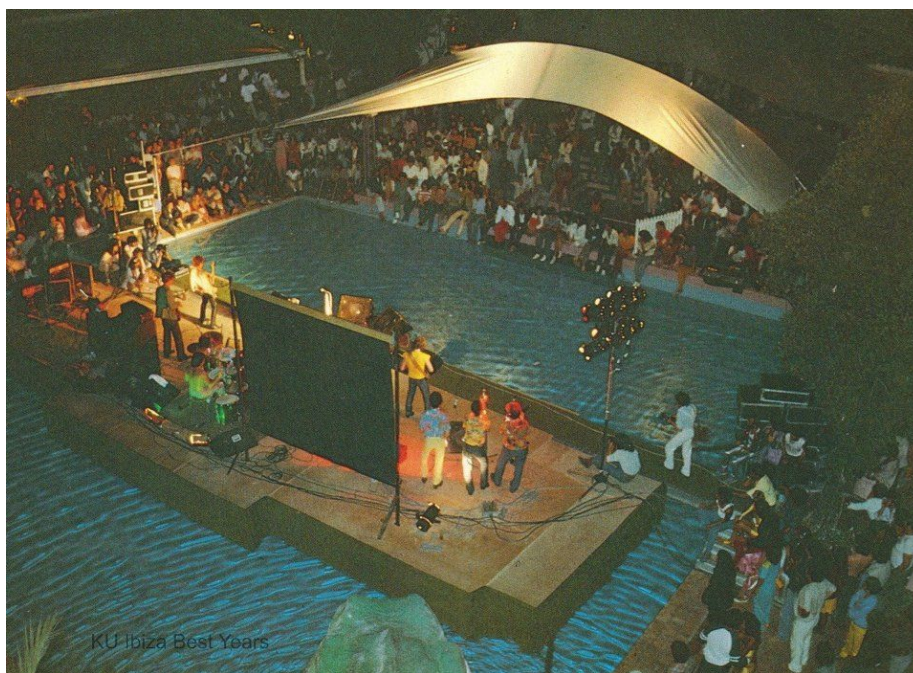


Figure 11 - The pool at KU acting as the one of the main spatial elements. Image source: https://www.facebook.com/KUIBIZA/photos_by

⁶ *Francoist Spain* refers to the authoritarian regime led by General Francisco Franco, who ruled Spain from 1939 to 1975. The period was marked by political repression, censorship, and strict moral conservatism, particularly targeting dissidents, LGBTQ+ individuals, and regional identities. (Preston, 2006).

2.3.2.3 UK Rave Scene

The UK rave scene of the late 1980s emerged from a convergence of socio-political disillusionment, cultural marginalisation and a revival of DIY⁷ musical culture. Influenced by U.S. house music, working-class groups began hosting unlicensed events in warehouses, fields, and derelict industrial sites (Gillen, 2023, pp. 120–121; Bennett & Guerra, 2019, p. 219).

These temporary gatherings redefined the club space through improvisation. Participants would "go into a concrete box and create a club" (Bennett & Guerra, 2019, p. 227), using materials like camouflage netting, ultraviolet lighting and handmade decorations to create immersive environments (Bennett & Guerra, 2019, p. 226). This spatial improvisation created a sense of community, "an organic DIY free party pedagogy shaped by active members involved in the community as a 'people's culture'" (Bennett & Guerra, 2019, p. 226).

As the movement grew, it attracted legal backlash. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 explicitly sought to criminalise events defined by "a succession of repetitive beats" (Gillen, 2018, p. 4). Despite this repression, the spatial creativity and social energy of the DIY rave scene left a lasting legacy, challenging conventional ideas about how cultural spaces are produced, inhabited, and regulated.

This legacy influenced the design of more permanent club spaces. As the scene transitioned indoors, venues began repurposing industrial and urban structures, merging raw architectural elements with evolving cultural needs. Manchester's *Haçienda*, in a former yacht builder's warehouse, featured a postmodern design that exposed steel girders and brickwork (Fig. 12), creating a stark and multifunctional space that resonated with the acid-house movement (Gillen, 2023).



Figure 12 - The interior of the Haçienda. Image source: <https://www.wallpaper.com/design/the-hacienda-nightclub-voted-one-of-the-uks-top-historic-sites>

⁷ DIY (Do It Yourself) culture - a broad range of activities centered around the rejection of consumerism.

Similarly, London's *Fabric*, housed in a former meat storage facility, adopted a labyrinthine layout that emphasised dark corners and sensory immersion through a high-performance sound system. This design helped define it as an anti-superclub superclub, resisting commercial mainstream trends while cultivating an underground identity (Gillen, 2023). A 2025 renovation of *Fabric's* Room 1, which introduced advanced haptic technology into the dancefloor, represents the latest milestone in the architectural response to changing cultural and sensory expectations (Townsend, 2025). This innovation promises to provide a more inclusive experience for dancers, with Fabric consulting Deaf Rave "to fine tune the floor for the optimal experience for members of the Deaf community," enabling those who might not otherwise fully access the music to engage with it physically (Townsend, 2025).

2.3.2.4 Berlin Nightclubs

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, East Berlin emerged with new freedoms, abandoned buildings and a youth eager for expression (Gillen, 2023). This created fertile ground for a growing electronic music scene, which embraced temporary spaces as "temporary autonomous zones" (Gillen, 2023, p. 143). Clubs like *Tresor* and *Berghain* emerged from this context, shaping Berlin's post-reunification identity.

Founded by Dimitri Hegemann, *Tresor* embodied early techno's rawness. Located in the basement of a derelict department store, its steel cages, concrete walls, and heavy doors (Fig. 13) were preserved to highlight a brutal, industrial aesthetic (Gillen, 2023). Hegemann remarked, "It was almost scary, but that's the way it had to be. The space dictated the brutal sound" (Gillen, 2023, p. 146). This raw aesthetic and sonic intensity became defining traits of Berlin techno, rejecting commercial trends.



Figure 13 - The industrial interior of Tresor. Image source: <https://www.dw.com/en/berlin-celebrates-the-power-of-techno-as-the-tresor-turns-25/a-19416230>

Berghain, which opened within 2004 in a former power plant, expanded this architectural legacy. Its vast concrete interiors, suspended steel stairs and cavernous dancefloors emphasise scale, minimalism and material honesty (Architizer, 2018). As one article notes, *Berghain's* atmosphere is both "intimidating and liberating," essential for escapism and freedom (Kafka, 2018). Both

clubs reflect Berlin's architectural and cultural renewal as spaces of freedom, experimentation, and resistance to commercialisation.

2.3.2.5 Contemporary Nightclub Spaces

Today, traditional nightclubs are increasingly complemented by fluid, impermanent venues that embrace temporality. Gillen (2023) notes that since the early 2000s “creative energies have centred on impermanent spaces, digital communities and festivals” (p.187), as authorities and commercial interests restrict year-round club operations.

Belgium's *Horst Arts and Music Festival* leads in integrating experimental architecture into temporary festival programming. The festival commissions architectural studios to design bespoke, impermanent dancefloors that reimagine the clubbing experience (Gillen, 2023). In 2017, Assemble Studio⁸ created a three-tier scaffold structure wrapped in blue netting (Fig.14), situated in a forest clearing by a lake. Referencing the form of a medieval castle, the installation appeared to be in perpetual construction, with its façade mutable from day to night (Assemble, 2017). Featuring continuous balconies (Fig. 15) and a central dancefloor, the space staged performances “like a Shakespearian drama, where both actors and audience are part of the performance” (Assemble, 2017). Inspired by Elizabethan theatre⁹, the design inverted the traditional performer-spectator hierarchy, transforming the dancefloor “from something to look at, into something to be part of” and encouraging deeper interaction between audience and artist (Assemble, 2017).



Figure 14 - Temporary structure by Assemble Studio at Horst 2017. Image source:<https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/horst-festival>

⁸ Assemble Studio – London based architectural design collective.

⁹ Elizabethan theatre – vibrant period of dramatic art in England in the 14th and 15th centuries.



Figure 15 - Balconies overlooking the dancefloor. Image source:
<https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/horst-festival>

Digital and hybrid platforms further extend the nightclub into virtual realms. During the coronavirus pandemic, livestream operations such as *Boiler Room* and *NTS* became critical lifelines for artists and audiences, proving nightlife can persist beyond physical venues (Gillen, 2023). Simultaneously, collectives like Temporary Pleasure are developing technologies such as a “360-degree lighting device that spotlights dancers” shifting focus from performers to a collective, embodied experience (Chandran, 2025).

Technological adaptability also reshapes physical venues. In 2024, Rotterdam’s *Toffler* debuted the “world’s first moving DJ booth”, enabling the club to morph capacity and maintain a “living

room ambience” as its back wall shifts imperceptibly to suit attendance levels (Buckle, 2024). Together, these trends illustrate a post-club landscape defined by fluidity, modularity and hybridisation, prompting a reevaluation of what a nightclub can be in the twenty-first century.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored escapism as both a personal impulse and collective ritual, examining its psychological roots and spatial expression in nightclub settings. Theories such as flow, spectacle, liminality and neo-tribalism were linked to the atmospheric, performative and communal qualities created through light, sound, materiality and choreography. An analysis of different case studies, beginning with the *Fun Palace* and Italy’s *Piper Clubs* to the industrial rawness of *Paradise Garage*, the theatrical immersion of *Studio 54*, Ibiza’s superclubs, the D.I.Y. ethos of the UK rave scene and Berlin’s techno venues, show how spatial design shapes the nightlife experience. The following chapter outlines the methodological framework for selecting local case studies, conducting spatial analysis, and using interviews to investigate how contemporary nightclubs continue to evoke individual and collective escapism.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the literature which provided insight towards the phenomenon of escapism, its motivations and how the nightclub developed as a curated environment for this particular phenomenon. This chapter will now outline the research methodology and strategy that guided this study. As outlined in Chapter 1, the central aim of this study is to examine how architectural design features in nightclub spaces contribute to the experience of escapism.

3.2 Research Approach

The initial step in the research process involved determining the most suitable methodology for this study. Given that the primary aim was to explore whether architectural design features contribute to the experience of escapism, it was crucial to capture the perceptions, meanings and narratives of individuals who occupy and engage with these spaces.

As the research required an interpretive understanding of human experience, a qualitative approach was adopted. The choice to adopt this methodology stems from the aim of capturing the complexity of lived experience rather than seeking objective generalisations. As Creswell (2013) explains, "Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). This research seeks to understand, from the participants' perspectives, the extent to which architectural design within nightclub spaces contributes to the experience of escapism.

The first component involves architectural case studies of four Maltese nightclubs, analysing layout, materiality, lighting, sound and interior-exterior relationships to assess their role in enabling or limiting escapism. These case studies will inform the development of the questionnaire used in the second method.

The second method involves semi-structured interviews conducted with a select number of participants who are active in Malta's nightlife scene, including promoters, DJs and architects. The interviews offer narrative insights into the spatial experience of escapism, highlighting how these environments are perceived, navigated and remembered. The integration of architectural investigation and narrative inquiry facilitates a holistic understanding of escapism as a spatial phenomenon shaped by both environment and individual experience.

3.3. Local Case Studies

Following a global overview of influential nightlife spaces, the study will now focus on nightclubs within the Maltese context, selected to represent a diverse range of event spaces found on the island. For each case study outlined below, the researcher conducted a thorough desktop analysis of the site, which was supplemented by in-person visits to gain a comprehensive understanding of each space. Venues were chosen to reflect diverse typologies, differing both in architecture and the social groups they attract. Each case study is outlined in detail within Appendix A. These case studies are:

- *Beachaven, Xemxija* – A seasonal, purpose-built club operating since the 1960s. It is not affiliated with a single promotion but is instead rented out to a range of organisers, attracting a diverse crowd. Architecturally, Beachaven is unique within the local context, featuring a series of terraced levels that descend toward a central dancefloor, which is the lowest point of the club.
- *Liquid Club, San Ġwann* – A year-round, purpose-built venue, Liquid Club has established itself as one of the most prominent underground clubs on the island. Unaffiliated with a single promotion, it hosts events mainly from the techno community and features several spatial elements that are likely to contribute to escapist experiences, making it a fitting choice for this study.
- *Truth nightclub, Paceville* - This represents a commercial nightclub situated within Malta's primary entertainment district. While purposefully designed as a club, its location and specific architectural decisions may be seen to constrain its ability to fully support escapism.
- *Offsite Locations* - To capture the full spectrum of Malta's nightlife, this category encompasses a broader range of temporary event spaces. This category includes temporary venues, from legally sanctioned large-scale events to smaller, unlicensed underground gatherings inspired by DIY rave culture. These spaces, although not purpose-built, were examined for their potential to evoke a sense of escapism. Examples of both types are provided in the appendix of this dissertation. However, during interviews, participants were encouraged to reflect on their own experiences within such spaces and no specific examples were presented to them in advance to preserve the secrecy of these spaces.

3.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

The second method employed to collect data in this study was semi-structured interviews. This approach was selected due to its ability to balance structure with flexibility, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences while still ensuring consistency across interviews (Bryman, 2016; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Unlike fully structured interviews, this method enables the researcher to probe unexpected themes and adapt questions in response to participants' insights, making it particularly well-suited for exploratory research in social and spatial contexts such as nightlife environments.

The semi-structured interview guide, which can be found in Appendix B, was developed through a systematic process that began with a close examination of the study's research objectives and the themes which emerged from the literature, as well as the researchers improved understanding following the local case studies. It is divided into two parts: the first aims to understand personal experiences and individual perspectives on the topic, while the second gathers insights related to the local case studies introduced earlier in the research, allowing participants to reflect on specific environments and contexts. The questions were left open-ended where possible to allow for probes and follow-ups during the interviews.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a standard qualitative research method employed to ensure that those chosen could provide detailed and relevant insights. As Patton (2002) explains, "the purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p.46). Participants were chosen based on their direct involvement in the local scene, ensuring they provided informed, reflective responses, adding depth to the study. They included DJs, organisers, and architects (Table 1) aged 23–33, all of whom held key roles within the community. Participants were invited to take part in this study through an information letter (Appendix B), which was distributed via email. Upon expressing interest in participating, each individual was sent a consent form (Appendix B), and an interview date was arranged. Interviews were conducted either in person or online, based on the participants' preferences.

The process of research methodology and data collection is visualised in Figure 16.

Participants	Involvement in the Scene	Interview Method
DJO1	DJ, Organiser	Virtual
DJO2	DJ, Organiser	Virtual
DJO3	DJ, Organiser	Face-to-face
DJO4	DJ, Organiser	Virtual
DJOAR1	DJ, Organiser, Architect	Face-to-face
OAR1	Organiser, Architect	Virtual

Table 1 – The interviewees, their involvement in the scene and interview method.

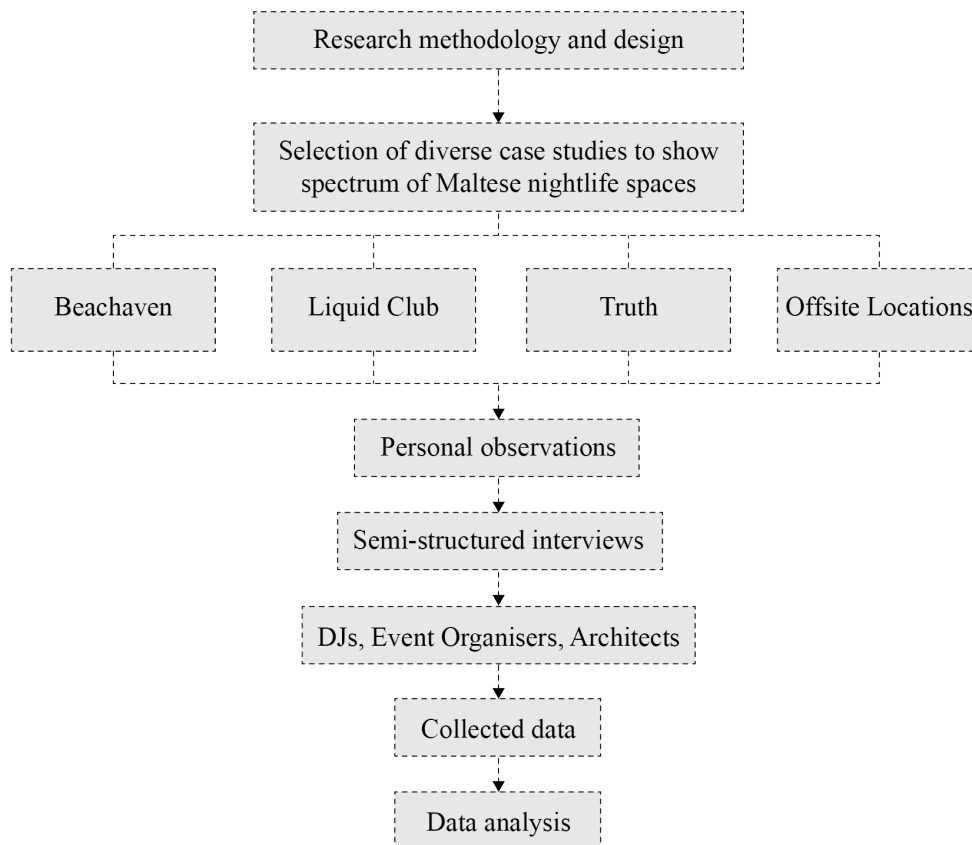


Figure 16 - Outline of methodology structure.

3.5 Data Analysis

The results obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using a rigorous thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a methodological tool for examining qualitative data that enables the identification of recurring themes and patterns by the researcher. The analysis followed the six-step framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved:

1. familiarisation with the data through multiple readings,
2. generation of initial codes,
3. searching for themes among the codes,
4. reviewing the themes,
5. defining and naming the themes, and
6. producing the final report.

To ensure analytical rigour, all interviews were first transcribed verbatim. The data was then read multiple times to allow the researcher to become thoroughly familiar with the content. Line-by-line coding was conducted on each transcript, allowing for a thorough examination and minimising the risk of overlooking significant information. Codes were iteratively grouped into focused codes and refined through ongoing comparison and reflection until coherent and conceptually rich themes emerged. This process is illustrated in Figure 17, and the transcripts, as well as extracts from the coding process, can be found in Appendix C of this dissertation.

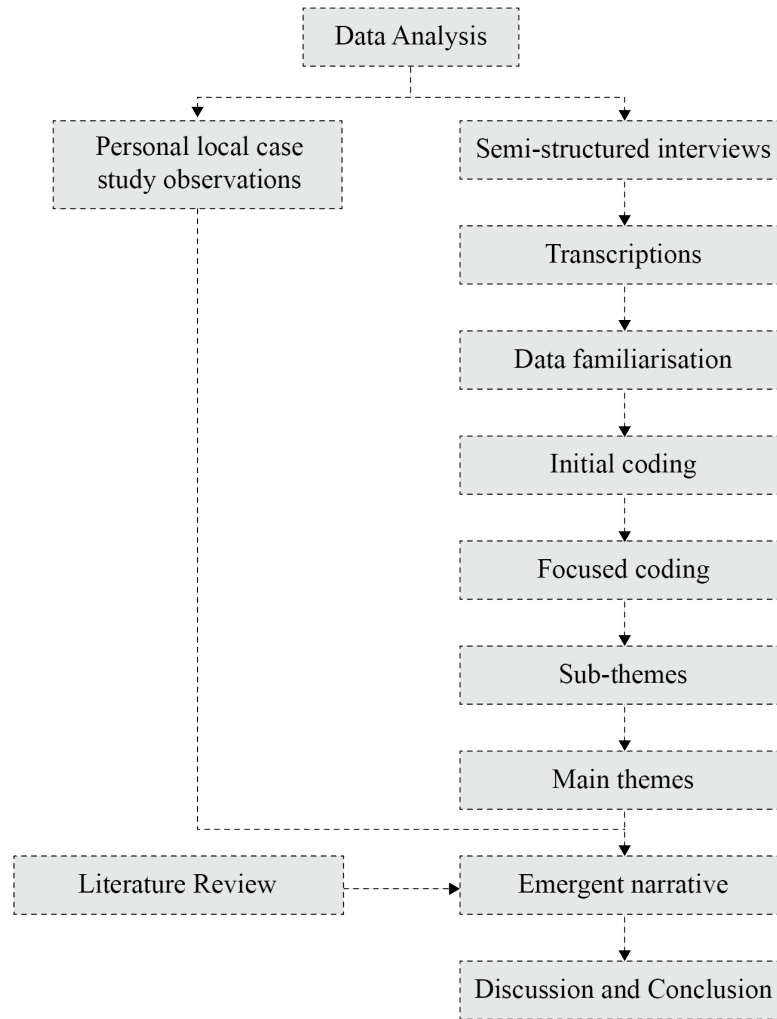


Figure 17 - Data analysis.

3.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, a qualitative research approach is employed in this study to explore the phenomenon of escapism within nightclub environments. The interview guide was developed with reference to the literature and the local case study analysis. It will be utilised to examine the phenomenon of escapism through the personal narratives of participants who are deeply involved in the scene, including attendees, DJs, organisers and architects. The themes and narratives that emerge from the data collection will now be examined and interpreted in dialogue with the literature. These insights are revisited in the later chapters to address the original research questions to contribute to a deeper understanding of the study's objectives.

4.0 Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings generated from the analysis of the participants' interviews. The presentation of these themes is preceded by a preamble that summarises the results of the local case studies. The findings, derived from the rigorous and in-depth data analysis process (detailed in section 3.5), revealed four major themes: (1) experiential and psychological dimensions of escapism, (2) socio-cultural foundations of escapism, (3) ritual and transitions in escapist states, and (4) architectural enablers of escapism. These themes, along with their corresponding sub-themes, are explored in the following sections and are supported by selected excerpts from participants' narratives. Figure 18 provides a visual representation of the themes and sub-themes identified in the analysis.

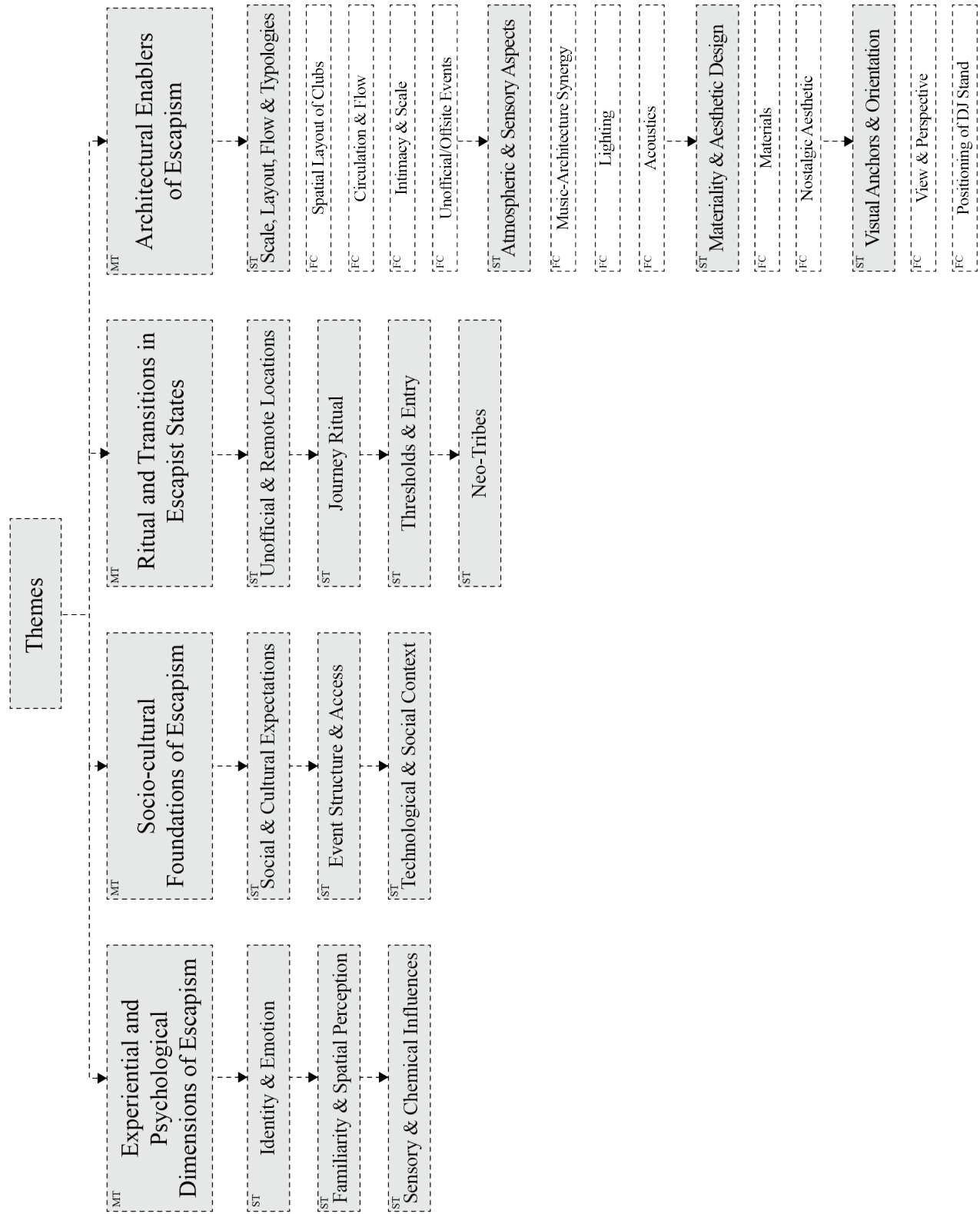


Figure 18 - Visual Representation of Themes, Sub-Themes and Focused Codes. (MT - Main theme, ST - Sub-theme, FC - Focused Code)

4.2 Local Case Studies

The local case studies, detailed in Appendix A, were subjected to a descriptive architectural analysis, which included the researcher's experiential insights. These venues were visited numerous times by the researcher, both as an attendee during his experiences as an organiser and DJ, as well as on separate occasions for this analysis, to identify spatial features that either enhanced or detracted from the sense of escapism. This direct engagement enabled the researcher to form initial impressions and conclusions, which in turn informed the development of targeted questions for the subsequent interviews.

From this analysis, the researcher ranked the venues in terms of their escapist potential, finding that offsite locations offered the strongest sense of escapism, followed by Beachaven, then Liquid, and Truth. This was a personal interpretation of these venues and reflects the researcher's subjective viewpoint.

This ranking was echoed by five out of the six interview participants. However, the position of Beachaven and Liquid was often interchangeable, primarily influenced by the participants' proximity to each venue. Those living closer to Beachaven tended to identify more strongly with Liquid as an escapist site, while those living farther away resonated more with Beachaven.

One participant notably diverged from the consensus by ranking offsite locations as the least escapist. He attributed this to a personal bias rooted in his extensive involvement in organising such events, which hindered his ability to detach and engage with them from an escapist perspective.

4.3 Experiential and Psychological Dimensions of Escapism

This section captures how participants personally describe and experience escapism and what it means to them. It identifies a number of key factors relating to escapism on a personal level. Their accounts reflect how identity, emotional states, internal perceptions, and sensory or chemical triggers influence the depth and quality of escapist experiences. This data suggests that escapism in nightlife contexts is not merely about physical spaces or social situations but is also driven by individual psychological processes.

4.3.1 Identity and Emotion

Participants consistently described escapism as a way to disconnect from everyday life and access an alternative emotional state. For some, this detachment enabled emotional release, personal reflection and temporary shifts in self-identity.

One participant described escapism as the loosening of the emotional boundaries that structure daily life:

“Emotionally, you have to let go of what you really sort of fortify yourself with on a normal day to day.” (OAR1)

The idea of escapism as emotional release was also described in metaphorical terms as an intentional departure from everyday stressors:

“Escapism... is a way to enter into a feeling where you're just separating yourself from things which may be stressors for you, to feel... a sense of freedom, to feel less worried about things which might normally be a nuisance to you.” (DJO2)

Escapism also allowed for a temporary reconfiguration of emotions and personal identity within specific spatial contexts:

“It's a space where you can actually discover... or maybe experience different feelings... or even be able to change your identity... within a space...”(OAR1)

4.3.2 Familiarity and Spatial Perception

Participants noted how familiarity, psychological factors and subjective interpretations influenced their ability to experience escapism. These inner dimensions often shaped how effective or immersive the night felt, regardless of external conditions.

Venue design and atmosphere were frequently mentioned as shaping participants' expectations and psychological openness to escape:

“The space you're in is extremely important and that makes a big difference for what expectations you set for yourself...”(DJO2)

However, others emphasised that architecture alone was not sufficient. Escapism required more than well-designed space, it also depended on the emotional and subjective quality of the experience:

“You could have incredible spatial design and poor feeling... and very poor spatial design and insane aspect of escapism.”(DJO3)

The role of familiarity was more divisive between participants. For some, familiarity created emotional safety and a sense of comfort, accelerating escapist states:

“That familiarity... consistency... You know what you were getting before you even arrived.” (DJO3)

For others, familiarity eventually diminished the capacity for escapism, as repetition detracted from the overall novelty of the experience:

“Once you familiarise yourself with a space... that escapism is very hard to be achieved... The more you frequent a club... the less interesting it is going to feel.”(OAR1)

These views suggest that internal states, such as emotion, prior experiences and expectations, may influence the way that spatial and social environments are perceived, therefore affecting the potential for escapism.

4.3.2 Sensory and Chemical Influences

Sensory immersion emerged as central towards escapist experiences. Participants highlighted the power of music and sound to silence external thoughts and support immersion within nightclub environments.

As one participant described:

“You go into that space and lose yourself in the music and the environment and the party vibe...”(DJO1)

Another added that music could act as shield to a certain extent, separating the individual from external distractions:

“To be on a dance floor, you need to feel somewhat immersed... and one of the best ways to do it... is to silence everything else and just allow music to shine through.”(DJO2)

Alongside music, several participants discussed the use of drugs and alcohol as another layer in this sensory detachment. These were presented both as catalysts of escapism and, at times, as problematic coping mechanisms.

One participant described it as:

“There could be escapism for good intent, escapism for bad intent... people abusing drugs, or alcohol... There’s escapism, which is honest escapism.”(DJO3)

In this sense, chemical triggers were viewed as shortcuts to detachment, though their role was acknowledged by participants as complex and context-dependent within the nightlife scene.

4.4 Socio-Cultural Foundations of Escapism

This section examines how escapism is shaped by social expectations, cultural meanings, and event-specific characteristics. Participants described how the crowd identity, venue reputation and logistical conditions all influenced their sense of escapism. These factors set the stage upon which individual experiences could unfold.

4.4.1 Social and Cultural Expectations

Participants frequently framed escapism not as an isolated feeling but as a socially shaped experience influenced by shared norms, communal identity and cultural values associated with certain clubs or music scenes.

Some clubs were described as attracting crowds with shared expectations, particularly spaces perceived as “underground” or musically focused. These expectations were said to evoke a more immersive and emotionally resonant experience:

“People who go there know what to expect by now... they take purpose to try to cater towards a more underground type of culture... I think from the escapism side it's much easier to feel that sense of escapism in an underground space.”(DJO2)

Others reflected on how different subcultures attach different meanings to escapism. One participant described within the underground scene, escapism might refer to musical immersion, while within commercial scenes, it could be associated with luxury or a reconfiguration of identity:

“Someone’s idea of escapism is I’m ordering a bottle of Dom Pérignon, they’re coming with the sparklers, and for this night I’m feeling like I’m the king... So it’s very personal as a concept.” (DJO3)

Cultural familiarity also emerged as a key component. Venues like Liquid were mentioned repeatedly not specifically for its architectural features but for the longstanding cultural memory and identity that it holds within the local scene:

“It’s just that building in the corner of the road... knowing that some 40–50 years ago people were doing the same thing inside... It’s a lot of people associated with good memories over the years.”(DJO2)

The sense of being part of a familiar cultural moment seemed to heighten participants’ ability to detach from everyday life and enter an immersive state. Escapism thus emerges not just as an individual response but as a socially and culturally embedded experience shaped by collective memory and meaning.

4.4.2 Event Structure and Access

Participants described how the structure and format of events influenced their sense of escapism. This included aspects like whether the event was ticketed, exclusivity and how much planning it required.

Ticketed events, for example, were said to encourage a deeper level of investment. One participant explained that charging an entry fee helped filter the audience, leaving behind a crowd more aligned with the event’s purpose:

“You’re cutting out people who might not assign a value of paying 10–15 euros... whereas those who go as far as buying a ticket might be the people who are more curious.”(DJO2)

Exclusivity also played a role in shaping participants’ comfort within a space. The feeling of being part of a smaller, curated group contributed to a greater sense of freedom within said spaces:

“I’m so exclusive that... myself and a couple of others are invited to this party in this secret location... it’s not too public, you know?” (DJO1)

Even the logistics of getting to a venue affected the psychological readiness for escape. Participants noted how travel times and remote locations encouraged forward planning, shaping the mindset with which one arrived at the event:

“You know what you’re signing up for before you even go to the venue...”(DJO2)

Together, these factors served as gateways or barriers to escapism, influencing not only who attended but also how they prepared for and engaged with the experience.

4.4.3 Technological and Social Contexts

Participants described how modern technologies, particularly mobile phones, disrupted the immersive qualities of nightlife environments. The presence or absence of phones on the dancefloor was discussed as a key factor affecting the depth of escapist engagement.

One participant described the value of environments where phones were not present:

“real escapism... It's only offered in places where there are no phones around... If you can offer that experience, yes, then you truly offer an escapist vibe... The moment a phone... is up on the dance floor. You lose the element of privacy. And that contributes to escapism...” (DJO1)

Here, the absence of personal technology was framed as central to participants’ ability to lose themselves in the moment.

4.5 Ritual and Transitions in Escapist States

This section explores how participants experience psychological and spatial detachment through symbolic, physical and ritual processes. Participants emphasised how escapism is not an immediate state when entering a nightclub; instead, it unfolds progressively through journeys, spatial transitions and shared rituals. These experiences serve as the catalyst to dissolve the boundary between ordinary life and escapist experiences.

4.5.1 Unofficial and Remote Locations

The strongest sense of escapism was often associated with events held in unofficial or remote venues. These locations were perceived as inherently disconnected from everyday life.

“A remote location implies that there is either a strong boundary between the outside world and the inside...or there is a journey to get to this place...And that detachment process... facilitates escaping the world.” (DJOAR1)

Such sites included old forts, towers or abandoned spaces, often repurposed for a single event:

“There is a real sense of detachment for me... the most things that have stuck with me are the alternative sites, secret locations... Because there is the real sense of detachment.”(DJOAR1)

Participants described the anticipation and novelty surrounding these locations as critical to the experience:

“In the lead-up to your event... people are coming in with a better mindset... because they haven’t done this many times before.”(DJO2)

These spaces created not just visual or spatial differences but also a break in the typical nightlife routine, opening the door to a deeper form of escape.

4.5.2 Journey Ritual

The journey itself, whether walking through rural settings, riding in shared vans, or preparing mentally for a long drive, was repeatedly described as a vital part of the escapist experience.

“The journey towards the final destination... helps you sort of relax, and it also numbs your mind.” (OAR1)

“Travelling with your friends gives you that camaraderie... you’re enjoying this detachment together... you can let loose and enjoy your evening.”(DJO4)

For secret-location events, this journey often began without knowing the final destination, adding a sense of mystery and anticipation:

“They might not tell you the location until the last day... These kinds of aspects are really contributing to what type of experience you're expecting to have.”(DJO2)

Some described this sense of journey in metaphorical terms:

“When you have excitement you have the dopamine... it's like timber for a fire... you're allowing for this to happen in a better way.”(DJO3)

Here, the journey itself was the initial threshold, an act of commitment, signalling that something special was about to begin.

4.5.3 Architectural Thresholds and Entry

Many participants emphasised the significance of how one enters a venue in shaping escapist experiences. Entrance thresholds created moments of anticipation and helped frame the space as something other to the everyday.

“So imagine you have something with a double door... you have a corridor and then you enter the club... That would create much more of a feeling of, okay... something’s going to happen and I’m going to enter a new space.” (DJO1)

Several noted that the layout and obscurity of entrances, such as narrow staircases and physical descents heightened this sense of transition, and acted as a symbolic detachment from everyday life:

“I would say the entrance, right, how you get to the dance floor, is what really detaches you from the outside world in terms of a physical entity....And I think that that process of leaving the outside world behind, entering and going to the dance floor, it's symbolic, but it can also be really amplified by the physical process of it” (DJOAR1)

This sense of crossing into another world was amplified by venues that concealed their club identity, creating a contrast between the street setting and interior:

“The entrance to the club is literally a small door where you can barely identify whether it’s a club or a restaurant... The entrance plays a very important role in this feeling of escapism.” (OAR1)

Participants also spoke about internal spatial sequences that shaped their experience, such as moving from outdoor areas to enclosed dancefloors, or navigating between areas within a club.

“You start the party outdoors and move the party inside... as you're going through the day, you know that you can kind of enter into the indoor space, which might feel a bit more immersive.” (DJO2)

“Travelling a long way, going down a tunnel, a long entrance into the club... these things literally create a physical manifestation of what it means to escape.” (DJOAR1)

Segregated dancefloors or spatial changes within club environments were not just logistical but they served as points within clubs where one could control their level of immersion:

“You have to want to be on the dancefloor because it’s so segregated from the rest of the club.”(DJO2)

4.5.4 Neo-Tribes

Although mentioned briefly, participants touched on the idea that certain events were held together by a sense of shared ethos or behaviour. Dress, dance and appreciation for the music functioned as unspoken norms:

“People in most club nights are made to feel comfortable... to wear what they want... to dance how they want... to enjoy whatever kind of music they want.” (DJO2)

These practices were not formal, but they created a feeling of belonging between attendees, encouraging freedom from social constraints.

Finally, some participants described subtle, repeated behaviours that framed escapism as a ritualised sequence, even when not consciously acknowledged.

“You go there, and you know... you lock in, you're with a friend, you go buy a drink, and then, it's not even said... you're just in your zen mode...”(DJO3)

Such habits suggest that rituals need not be elaborate to be effective. Even simple, repeated acts can support the emotional and social conditions for detachment.

4.6 Architectural Enablers of Escapism

In this section, the analysis will focus on how architectural features and spatial design shape participants' experiences of escapism. The data reveals that elements such as layout, lighting, materiality and spatial flow can play a decisive role in enabling or disrupting immersive states. Escapism is thus presented not only as an emotional or social phenomenon but as one that is fundamentally mediated through space.

4.6.1 Scale, Layout, Flow and Typologies

This section presents the focused codes that emerged from the thematic analysis, exploring how spatial design shapes escapist experiences within nightlife settings. Drawn from recurring patterns in participant accounts, these sub-themes highlight the role of layout, flow, scale and venue typology in enabling escapism.

4.6.1.1 Spatial Layout of Clubs

The design and arrangement of interior spaces were consistently identified as foundational to the immersive experience. Many participants emphasised that effective layouts allow for both immersion and socialisation, enabling patrons to customise their level of escapism. One participant articulated the need to balance spatial functions, stating:

“You can only immerse yourself in the club when on the dance floor... The rest lends itself to socialising.” (DJO1)

This highlights how lounge and bar areas, if not carefully zoned, can compromise immersion by diverting attention away from the physical action of dancing. Having a clear separation of functions within the space allows for moments of socialisation as well as ones of deep immersion. As one participant noted:

“The bar is situated at a very good location... a good distance away from the dance floor to keep people on the dance floor focused on the music.” (DJO4)

The majority of participants singled out the dance floor as the most immersive zone within the nightclub environment. As one interviewee put it:

“And I think when we're talking about escapism in terms of nightlife, it really is about the dance floor or the atmosphere created around dancing” (DJOAR1)

Such descriptions reinforce the idea that the dancefloor is central towards escapism within nightlife and how the atmosphere around this space can help to elevate or detract from such states. Another participant also noted how controlled entry points into the dancefloor were essential in creating a feeling of communal identity:

“How the dance floor is shaped and can only be accessed from one area really contributes to that... You're joining that community on the dance floor... all in unison and enjoying the music.” (DJO4)

Circular or amphitheatre-style designs were also praised for enhancing both visual and emotional immersion. These spaces were described as having the potential to generate immense communal energy between attendees, with the staging of dancing bodies at different levels within the space adding to the collective atmosphere. One participant described it as:

“You know how an amphitheatre is designed... kind of with all the stairs coming up on the sides... that was all full of people and the atmosphere in a place like that just felt quite spectacular because the way the place was designed... it felt like everyone was all around...” (DJO2)

This staging not only improved visibility but contributed to a psychological sense of shared experience.

However, not all spatial strategies were viewed positively. The presence of VIP areas or loosely defined spatial boundaries was criticised for fragmenting the communal atmosphere. One participant remarked:

“I don't think having a separated VIP area is a good idea... it puts people on a different level... there needs to be a sense of unity.” (DJO2)

4.6.1.2 Circulation and Flow

The flow of people within nightclub spaces emerged as a crucial factor in sustaining immersive experiences. Several participants noted that poorly designed circulation routes could disrupt the atmosphere created on the dancefloor, detracting from the overall immersion experience. One interviewee noted how the spatial arrangement of ancillary facilities could create undesirable circulation paths:

“Something that always sticks out to me with Liquid is the location of where the bathrooms are... it's right at the front where the DJ is... which disrupts the flow on the dance floor.” (DJO1)

This observation points to how logistical decisions, such as where to locate bathrooms, can have unintended effects on the energy and engagement of the space. Another participant likened the flow of people through a venue to urban traffic, emphasising the psychological consequences of unmanaged movement:

“When you're trying to escape... If everybody's pushing you from behind... you're never really settled. When you're designing a place, you're keeping in mind movement... like a traffic junction.” (DJO3)

This suggests that immersion is not only about auditory or visual stimulation but also about the bodily experience of space, feeling uninterrupted, grounded, and able to remain in place. These insights highlight that club design requires thorough attention to movement and circulation patterns, as poor spatial planning can undermine the ritualised focus of the dance floor by disrupting the flow of the experience.

4.6.1.3 Intimacy and Scale

Participants frequently referenced “big room”¹⁰ settings as powerful facilitators of collective immersion. Large-scale venues were associated with feelings of being absorbed into something greater than the individual self. One interviewee recalled an experience at ADE¹¹:

“You feel like a small part of a whole... that was my experience.” (DJO1)

The feeling of being immersed within something larger than oneself, a vast crowd, expansive space and overwhelming sound, helped evoke a loss of individual identity. This sentiment was shared by another participant who noted how larger spaces helped to evoke certain emotional responses:

“from the spatial aspect, it was very present.... the size of it was really... I think that over there was the definition of big room... and big room, if it's something that you mentioned, it comes with a whole... it constitutes a lot of different feelings...” (DJO3)

However, this scale wasn't universally preferred. Some participants identified these larger spaces as leaning more towards the commercial when compared with more intimate settings:

“Underground is more intimate... smaller areas for interaction. Commercial venues cater to bigger spaces, more tables, bottles... it's a different vibe.”(DJO4)

4.6.1.4 Unofficial or Offsite Events

As was touched upon in the previous sub-theme, some of the most striking examples of escapist architecture were linked to events held in unconventional or “off-limits” locations. These spaces heightened the sense of departure from everyday life. The unconventional nature of the setting itself contrasted with the typical nightlife experience and led to an altered psychological state even before the music began. One participant described the effect of such a location:

“Even if you're not in a party context, Fort St. Elmo already gives you a feeling... it overwhelms you... it's special.” (DJO1)

This surreal feeling stemmed not only from the physical boundaries of the spatial environment, but also from the cultural narratives participants projected onto these places. As one interviewee explained:

“And there's kind of a juxtaposition there of places that are maybe meant to be left alone, or maybe are abandoned, or not in use... And we're putting them to use in these kind of intimate, contemporary situations..” (DJOAR1)

¹⁰ Big Room – larger style of events encapsulating festivals, arenas and big clubs.

¹¹ ADE – Amsterdam Dance Event, a five-day electronic music conference and festival held once a year.

Exclusivity and unfamiliarity were also important. Alternative venues were described as breaking the monotony of daily life and offering a different experience within the local market. One participant commented:

“People are more excited because it’s something unfamiliar... it contributes to escapism... it cuts through the day-to-day repetitiveness.” (DJO2)

These spaces did more than provide a backdrop during the event. Instead, they created anticipation and psychological detachment from before the event even started. The mystery, the journey and the novelty primed attendees for immersion making the event itself feel distinct from the ordinary.

4.6.2 Atmospheric and Sensory Aspects

This section examines how sound, lighting and spatial design work together to shape the overall atmosphere of immersive experiences. Participants described a close relationship between music and architecture, the emotional impact of lighting and the importance of consistent acoustics in supporting escapism.

4.6.2.1 Music-Architecture Synergy

Many participants described a reciprocal relationship between spatial design and sound, where architecture does more than provide a backdrop for sound; instead, it influences and adds value to specific genres of music. The interplay of form, material and atmosphere was seen as key to how different genres are perceived. One interviewee reflected on how ambience should be matched to musical genre:

“Music and the club go hand in hand... certain styles of music cater themselves better to specific environments... the ambience of the place asks for a different kind of music.” (DJO1)

This perspective suggests that architecture influences both musical curation and the audience’s expectations. Material choices, in particular, carried symbolic value. Here, certain materials and aesthetics would be associated with specific genres of music. One participant noted that:

“The use of concrete for me is more on the techno side... And then nature is more on the house side.” (DJO1)

4.6.2.2 Lighting

Lighting emerged as an essential atmospheric tool capable of reinforcing escapism or disrupting it entirely. Participants emphasised that lighting decisions must be intentional, working with other atmospheric elements to heighten immersion. One participant noted the importance of well-designed and calibrated systems:

“There are engineers who are employed specifically to handle lighting... dynamic and synced to music or to movements... it definitely adds to the experience.” (DJO2)

At times, it was the absence of lighting that shaped the experience. Gradual dimming throughout the evening created contrast, making moments of intensified light more impactful. One participant highlighted how these dark environments helped to enable escapism:

“At Liquid particularly... it’s lack of lighting... lack of windows completely... that really helps you to escape.” (DJO1)

Conversely, excessive or poorly executed lighting disrupted immersion. One participant compared their experience within a brightly lit club space to being in a “showroom” (DJ03). They then went on to iterate the power of lighting to evoke certain emotions and moods within the spatial experience:

“Light is fundamental... it's the palette, the mood... when you're trying to design a spatial experience, you need a mood.” (DJO3)

Together, these reflections frame lighting as not merely decorative but as an atmospheric tool for manipulating perception, focus and emotional response.

4.6.2.3 Acoustics

Participants widely emphasised uniform sound distribution as essential to escapist experiences. Immersion, particularly on the dance floor, relied on consistent acoustics that kept attendees engaged and connected to the music regardless of one’s position within the space. One participant noted:

“If there are dead zones on a dance floor... it might result in people not feeling so immersed... they don’t really get so locked in.” (DJO2)

The concept of “dead zones” underscores how inadequate sound design can disrupt the psychological flow of the experience. Another interviewee emphasised the value of uniformity across the space:

“Especially if it's set up in such a way that wherever you are in the club, whether you're in the middle of the dance floor on the left side or the right side, the sound system is set up in such a way that there's good coverage all around... That's definitely going to make it better...” (DJO3)

These insights suggest that spatial acoustics are not just technical elements but key enablers within the atmospheric qualities of the club environment.

4.6.3 Materiality and Aesthetic Design

This section explores how material and aesthetic choices shaped experiences of immersion and escapism. Emotional responses were tied to specific materials, natural elements, and familiar design features that contributed to a sense of escapism.

4.6.3.1 Materials

Participants repeatedly referenced the emotional and physical impact of materials. Materiality was perceived as something that actively influenced the way the space felt and how the music was experienced. One participant illustrated this through the bodily sensation of vibration:

“Wooden floors... those are the vibrations which really add to the feeling of immersion and escape because you feel the music deep within you.” (DJO1)

This highlights how material choices contribute to an embodied connection with sound, reinforcing the emotional impact of the environment. The use of natural elements was noted for its potential to evoke escapist experiences:

“I think if it's outdoor, particularly, I think trees really add to this feeling of escapism... in general just including a lot of nature...” (DJO1)

Other materials, like glass, were described in more complex terms. Depending on their placement, they could either enhance detachment from the outside world or reintroduce everyday associations that disrupt escapism. As one participant noted, looking onto water created a sense of distance, while a view of the street “takes away that detachment, that escape” (DJOAR1).

4.6.3.3 Nostalgic Aesthetic

Aesthetic familiarity was also powerful. For some, certain spaces held value because they remained visually consistent across time. DJO3 linked this to emotional grounding through the use of a metaphor:

“It feels very homey, very iconic. And classic, timeless... Like eating your Nanna’s chicken... Nothing beats it... Familiarity, consistency...”

DJOAR1 made a similar point about design that resisted modern updates:

“I think because of its interior that hasn't been updated in a long time, it almost feels a bit of a time capsule... And so, that definitely facilitates the feeling as well of detachment and escaping and almost being in another world...”

These spaces did not rely on novelty or spectacle but instead facilitated escapism through repetition, emotional memory and cultural factors, all of which supported a subtle form of escape.

4.6.4 Visual Anchors and Orientation

This section explores how visual elements within club spaces shaped escapist experiences. Participants discussed how views to the outside and the DJ booth placement functioned as visual anchors that could either enhance or disrupt escapism.

4.6.3.1 Views and Perspective

A common theme across interviews was the impact of visual connection to the outside world. Windows were often viewed as disruptive to immersion, breaking the sense of detachment essential to escapism. One participant drew a comparison to casino design:

“Casinos generally don’t have windows... they entice players to continue playing and not realise the time... Nightclubs can have a similar experience.” (DJO3)

Visual access to public streets or passersby was seen as a reminder of everyday life, disrupting the escape. As one interviewee explained:

“If you’re constantly reminded that outside the space you’re in, there’s a real world... escapism is very hard to achieve.” (OAR1)

Another participant echoed this sentiment:

“The glass walls... looking onto the roads, really go against that sense of immersion... it provides an opportunity for your attention to be distracted.” (DJO4)

However, not all visual openings were seen negatively. When used to frame natural or secluded views, they enhanced the sense of escape. One participant contrasted two venues:

“Unlike Beachaven, which faces the sea... this one faces the street... Beachaven detaches you, it gives you that feeling of leaving something behind.” (DJOAR1)

Ultimately, visual connection to external environments could either fracture or deepen the escapist experience, depending on what was being revealed.

4.6.3.2 Positioning of the DJ Stand

The height and placement of the DJ booth emerged as a key spatial feature, acting as a visual anchor that shaped immersion and connection. Many described how a booth positioned at dancefloor level helped dissolve the boundary between performer and audience, promoting a sense of inclusivity where the DJ became part of the collective experience rather than a distant figure. One participant noted that this setup made it “much easier to get into it” (DJO2) and supported a more immersive atmosphere.

Elevation wasn’t seen as inherently negative. When used intentionally, a raised booth could act as a focal point, guiding attention and adding structure, especially in larger venues.

“The DJ being elevated contributes to that... gives you a point of focus that people can look at while they’re enjoying this.” (DJO4)

These variations suggest that the key factor was not elevation itself but the clarity of intention in how the DJ booth was used to organise the experience.

4.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that escapism in nightlife is a multifaceted process shaped by the interplay of emotion, cultural affiliations, architectural design and ritualised behaviours. Participants describe how sensory, social and symbolic layers were woven together to create immersive experiences that enabled a temporary departure from the routines of everyday life. Architectural and spatial features such as entrances, viewpoints, circulation, visual anchors, materiality, lighting and scale emerged as significant factors which influenced the experience of escapism.

The next chapter will discuss these findings in greater depth, synthesising them with the existing literature, as well as revisiting the original research questions and objectives.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the theory outlined in the literature review, original research questions and objectives. The study is critically evaluated, highlighting its strengths, limitations and broader implications. Recommendations for future research are provided, in addition to a concluding statement that reflects on the overall contribution of the study and its relevance to architectural discourse on escapism.

5.2 Emergent Narrative

Through these findings, escapism within nightclub environments emerges as a layered, collective experience that is not rooted solely in psychological or architectural factors but rather formed through a dynamic interplay of both. Although none of the participants were familiar with the concept on an academic level, their general understanding of the topic aligned with the theory outlined in the literature review. Participants described escapism as an opportunity to escape from daily stressors. This sentiment aligns with Hastall's (2017) and Evans's (2001) general definition of escapism as an individual's desire to escape the perceived limitations of their current life. The concept was also described as an act of emotional release or identity reconfiguration, reflecting Tuan's (1998) view of escapism as a natural human mechanism of emotional regulation.

Moreover, the conflicting views on familiarity in space underscore how escapism is constructed not only through novelty but also through repeated, comforting emotional cues, which echoes Zumthor's (2006) "magic of the real" where sensorial qualities of architecture can evoke emotional and transformative reactions in people. Still, one must ask whether routine familiarity undermines the experience of escapism over time. Can the same space continue to provoke detachment, or does escapism demand architectural novelty to remain effective? In this context, the answer seems to lie in novelty, seeing how most event promotions attempt to refresh familiar venues with their own twist through alternative lighting setups (Fig.19), decorations, or other spatial interventions designed to reimagine the environment and offer patrons a different experience each time.



Figure 19 - Alternative lighting setups at Liquid Club. Image source - Liquid Club Malta Instagram.

The role of mobile phone technology and its effects towards escapism were also touched upon by participants as being detrimental to the overall feeling of escape. This aligns with the observations made by Turkle (2011) and Trufanova (2021), who argue that constant digital connectivity inhibits genuine presence and creates psychological discomfort. The desire for phone-free environments within nightclub spaces reflects a broader societal trend, exemplified by venues in Berlin that enforce no-phone policies to foster communal engagement (Al-Othman, 2025). This shift also parallels a broader movement towards intentional disconnection, which has been shown to improve mental well-being and digital self-regulation (Anandpara et al., 2024).

Participants also discussed the role of potentially detrimental chemical catalysts in relation to escapism in the form of alcohol and drugs. This aligned with Kardefelt-Winther's (2014) observation of escapism as a tool for emotional suppression through the abuse of substances. This reflects Sopčić & Musil's (2022) recognition of escapism as either self-expansive or self-suppressive.

Participants discussed crowd identity, event structure and cultural perceptions of space as enablers of escapism. This resonates with Tuan's (1998) and Durkheim's (via St. John, 2001) understanding of collective rituals as enablers of escapism. Similarly, Victor Turner's theory of '*communitas*' (1969) and its expansion by St. John (2001) into contemporary club culture is evident in participant reflections on event structure and exclusivity. Elements such as ticketing, secrecy and the curated nature of audiences were all seen to contribute to a sense of ritualised detachment, marking a transition from the ordinary into what Turner (1969) terms '*anti-structure*'. These liminal states are characterised by ambiguity, the suspension of roles and the temporary dissolution of social hierarchies, generating fertile ground for escapism.

While many participants described entering club environments as liberating and egalitarian, prompting a sense of '*communitas*' and detachment from daily roles, a closer look raises the question: do nightclubs truly suspend social norms and hierarchies? In underground venues, where dancefloors dominate and VIP areas are absent, this sense of equality felt more authentic. In contrast, commercial clubs, with VIP sections (Fig. 20) and restricted zones, often reinforced status distinctions, complicating the idea of '*anti-structure*'. Rather than dissolving hierarchy, such features reframe it spatially, suggesting that escapism is shaped not only by ritual but also by the architectural cues embedded in the venue. Thus, the depth of escapist experience is contingent on the type of space and its embedded values, with some environments fostering genuine detachment while others reproducing the structures participants may seek to escape.

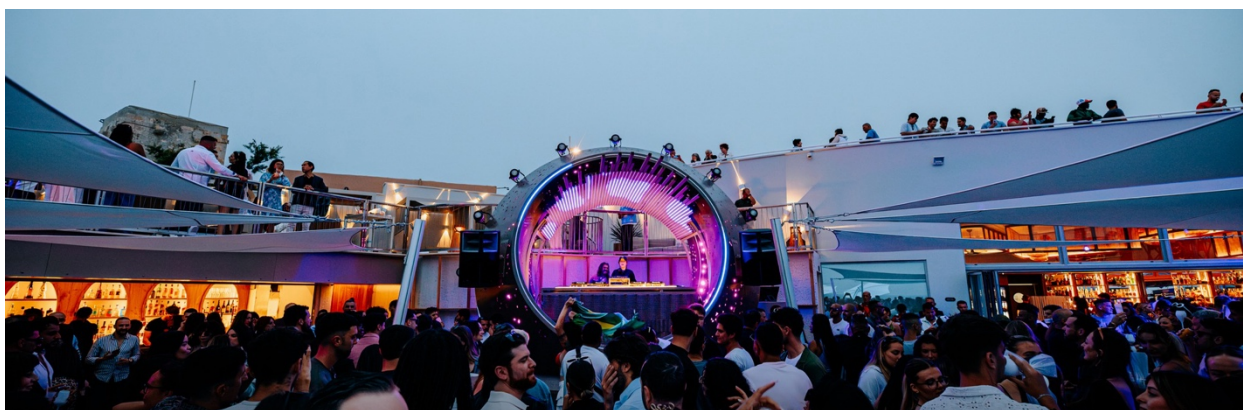


Figure 20 - The elevated VIP area at the popular venue Café del Mar establishing a clear spatial hierarchy. Image source – Café Del Mar Facebook Page

This concept of liminality was repeatedly echoed in participant narratives. Nightclubs were not merely entertainment spaces but acted as symbolic thresholds where everyday identities were suspended, and a shared ethos could emerge. Ritualistic journeys enabled these transitions through corridors, hidden doors, remote locations and symbolic entry sequences (Fig. 21). These spatial and psychological rituals support the work of Gauthier (2001), suggesting that escapism is initiated long before one steps onto the dance floor. The threshold experience is itself a vital component of the escape. Participants repeatedly cited entry thresholds as a key aspect of escapism, reflecting examples from the literature review, such as the ‘musical staircase’ at the *Piper Club* and the long entry ramp of *Paradise Garage*.



Figure 21 – Symbolic entry sequence into Shelter Club Amsterdam. Image source - <https://ra.co/news/80162>

Within these liminal spaces, participants appeared to reflect Maffesoli's (1996) theory of *neo-tribes*. Behavioural codes, such as how to dress, dance and engage, emerged from a shared cultural understanding rather than imposed rules. In such environments, escapism became a collective experience where the individual was momentarily absorbed into a larger emotional and symbolic community.

Participants repeatedly highlighted architectural and spatial qualities as key variables that could either enable or detract from escapist experiences, positioning the built environment alongside social and psychological factors in shaping the phenomenon of escapism. While not sacred in a religious sense, nightclubs were often described in terms that resonate with Bermudez's (2015) work on sacred architecture. Here, Bermudez (2015) explains that spatial progression, acoustics, and material choices can help guide users towards states of heightened awareness and detachment from the everyday. Participants similarly described clubs as spaces that offered not just entertainment but also moments of psychological release and personal transformation, factors reminiscent of the sacred character Bermudez attributes to spiritually charged architecture.

This parallel is reinforced by OMA's¹² (2015) reflections during their design for the *Ministry of Sound*¹³ in London, where they observed that “discos became temples, both physically and figuratively,” hosting nightly ritual gatherings around the “DJ priest”. In this view, clubs become cultural sanctuaries, spaces where architecture, music and the body converge to enable escape and transformation. However, this comparison invites critical reflection: does nightclub design always warrant alignment with sacred space? While some clubs mirror the intensity and ritual of sacred environments, others feel commercial or superficial, lacking the depth such a metaphor implies. Thus, while the metaphor of the sacred offers a valuable lens for understanding certain nightclub experiences, its application must remain flexible and context-sensitive, recognising the variability in design intent and user experience.

The close relationship between music and architecture was also noted by participants, particularly how the design of specific nightclubs significantly influenced the style of music played within them. This reflects narratives from the case studies, such as how the *Haçienda* became synonymous with the acid house movement or how Berlin's raw concrete club spaces provided the ideal setting for techno to thrive. These examples illustrate how architectural choices shape not only acoustics and atmosphere but also influence audience perception and expectations around musical style. Still, this relationship warrants further probing: does architecture shape genre, or does genre find compatible architecture? This observation remains underexplored.

Another frequently mentioned spatial feature was the positioning of the DJ. While perspectives varied, participants generally preferred a closer relationship between the DJ and the dancers, one that reduced hierarchy and placed everyone on the same level. This preference aligns with the design intentions observed within the case studies, such as *Studio 54* and the *Horst Festival*, where architects sought to blur the line between audience and performer. Different examples of DJ setup placements and the resulting effect are illustrated in Figure 22.



Figure 22 - Difference in intimacy resulting from DJ stand placement. Image source - <https://boilerroom.tv/artist/ouuk-uk1matu/> & <https://culted.com/the-future-of-london-clubbing-is-at-risk/>

¹² OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture) – International architecture firm founded by Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis.

¹³ Ministry of Sound – Entertainment business based in London, with a leading nightclub in the same city.

Within the context of the findings, Pasquier's (2019) experiential lens towards nightclub design are also relevant. He notes that the spatial arrangement of clubs, lighting design and material choices have the potential to create emotional responses within attendees. According to Pasquier, a good club should "displace you from normal life" through its design choices. This notion invites further unpacking: what does it mean to be displaced from the normal? In this context, displacement refers not only to a physical shift but to a psychological and sensory departure from everyday environments. Spatial sequencing, for instance, can guide individuals through a gradual departure from the familiar, moving from mundane thresholds like entry points or cloakrooms into increasingly immersive spaces. Lighting shifts, whether subtle or dramatic (Fig. 2), can heighten emotional states, while material choices such as reflective surfaces can disrupt habitual perception and reinforce the sense of entering a different world. Participant accounts affirmed this, often describing clubs where such design elements worked harmoniously to evoke full sensory immersion and psychological escape, aligning closely with Pasquier's idea of a club as a site of displacement.



Figure 22 - Dramatic lighting setup by rene.studio at Gashouder Amsterdam. Image source - <https://rene.studio/anotrexpo>

5.3 Research Objectives and Summary of Findings

This dissertation aimed to explore if, and to what extent, architectural design contributes to the phenomenon of escapism in nightclub environments. Motivated by both personal experience and a gap in the literature, the study examined whether escapism is primarily shaped by psychological and social conditioning or if spatial design actively facilitates this experience. To address this, the research was structured around a series of objectives: to explore the psychological and social motivations behind escapism, to identify architectural features that support or inhibit such experiences, and to investigate the cultural and historical development of nightclubs as spaces for escapism.

In sum, the findings reveal escapism in nightclubs to be a layered and dynamic construct, one that is not reducible to a single cause but rather emerges through the interplay between internal psychological factors, social and cultural aspects as well as spatial design. Interviews confirmed that while internal emotional states and personal motivations are central, the physical environment significantly shapes the intensity and depth of escapist experiences. Architecture, in this sense, does not passively host escapism; it enables, enhances, or even disrupts it.

Participants described escapism as both emotional release and identity transformation, aligning with psychological theories that frame escapism as a temporary detachment from reality in pursuit of emotional renewal. Dancefloor experiences were described as immersive and transcendent, particularly when the design of the space allowed for deep engagement with music, lighting and physical movement. Acoustics, materiality and the layout of the venue, especially the zoning between social areas and more immersive zones such as the dancefloor, were frequently cited as decisive factors in shaping how the night unfolded.

5.4 Revisiting the Research Questions

The primary research question guiding this study asked to what extent architectural design contributes to escapism. The findings suggest that while escapism can be triggered internally or socially, it is significantly shaped by spatial conditions. Seven key architectural features were identified as having a direct impact on escapist experiences:

- **Entry Sequences** – Most participants identified the entry sequence as a critical threshold marking a symbolic departure from the everyday world. This transition was described as essential in mentally and physically preparing individuals for the immersive nightclub environment, functioning as a ritualistic passage that reinforced detachment.
- **Spatial Segregation** – The separation of spatial zones, such as the dancefloor, bar, lounge and bathrooms, was seen as essential in escapist experiences. Different areas of the nightclub were said to vary in the level of escapism experienced. Effective zoning allowed for the containment of specific atmospheres within each area, minimising disruptions and preserving the continuity of the experience, particularly on the dancefloor, which was frequently cited as the most escapist zone.
- **Circulation and Flow** – Poor circulation through the dancefloor was perceived as intrusive, disrupting focus and collective energy. Participants emphasised the need for clear circulation routes that bypassed the dancefloor to preserve its immersive quality.
- **Windows and Visual Perspectives** – The presence and orientation of windows played a subtle yet important role in shaping escapist potential. Views into everyday contexts, like nearby streets or buildings, were seen as disruptive reminders of daily life. In contrast, windows framing nature, sky or sea enhanced the sense of detachment.
- **Lighting Design** – Participants consistently emphasised the importance of deliberate lighting design. Focused lighting that accentuated particular features contributed to a heightened sense of immersion. Conversely, the strategic absence of light was also recognised as amplifying the experience of disconnection from the outside world.
- **Acoustic Environment and Sound Design** – Immersive sound design was seen as fundamental to the nightclub experience. Participants stressed the need for even audio coverage on the dancefloor, with clear sound free of distortion or dead zones.
- **Geographical Location and Journey** – Remote or less accessible venues were seen to enhance escapism. The deliberate journey created anticipation and mental detachment, distinguishing the outing from routine experiences and reinforcing a sense of entering a distinct spatial and social realm.

In trying to understand which architectural features were most effective, it became clear that no single element could ensure escapism; rather, it was the interplay of the aforementioned spatial qualities that contributed to a fully immersive experience. The dancefloor, in particular, acted as a sacred centre for many participants, a spatial and symbolic manifestation of escapism. Conversely, certain architectural choices, such as poorly placed bathrooms, overly visible VIP areas, poor entry sequences and external views, were seen to fragment this experience.

Importantly, offsite and unofficial venues emerged as particularly powerful enablers of escapism. The novelty, seclusion and sense of transgression surrounding these events created anticipation and primed participants for immersion even before the event began. This phenomenon echoed the theories of ritual liminality, where a journey or threshold space acts as the boundary between

ordinary life and the extraordinary. Participants' descriptions of these transitions, from journey to entry sequence to full immersion, reinforce Turner's (1969) theory of *communitas* and Gauthier's (2001) observations on spatial rituals.

Taken together, these findings illustrate that escapism in nightclub spaces emerges from a dynamic interaction between inner desire and external conditions. Architectural design plays a pivotal, though not exclusive, role in shaping the parameters of this experience. It does not generate escapism in isolation, but it materially mediates how, when and to what degree escapism can be experienced. In this sense, the research offers both theoretical insights and practical relevance, reaffirming the importance of considering atmosphere, materiality, layout and symbolic thresholds in the design of nightclubs while also challenging the tendency to reduce club architecture to mere functionalism. Instead, it positions architectural design as one of the primary drivers of the overall escapism experience.

5.6 Conclusion

This dissertation set out to explore how escapism is experienced within nightclub environments and, more specifically, how architectural design contributes to the construction of those experiences. The findings demonstrate that escapism in nightclubs is not solely the result of psychological or social factors but is intricately mediated through architectural space.

Whilst no single architectural element can guarantee escapism, the research revealed that several spatial features come together to influence the phenomenon. Participant accounts highlighted the potential of entry sequences, thoughtful spatial segregation, controlled visual perspectives, the choreography of lighting and sound and even the broader geographical context as factors that could influence escapism.

Ultimately, the dissertation reveals that nightclub escapism is a mutually constructed phenomenon: it emerges from the convergence of psychological intent, cultural context, social ritual and spatial design. What began as a personal curiosity evolved into a broader investigation into the psychological, social, ritualistic and spatial mechanisms that underlie detachment from everyday life. While architectural design cannot guarantee escapism in its own right, it can decisively shape the conditions that allow it to unfold. In this light, nightclubs are more than mere venues for leisure; they demonstrate architecture's capacity to evoke emotional responses, disrupt routine and construct an alternate reality designed to be escaped into.

5.7 Critical Evaluation of the Study

5.7.1 Strengths of the Study

One of the key strengths of this study lies in its interdisciplinary nature, which brought together multiple perspectives on escapism to form a broad understanding of the phenomenon. By synthesising these viewpoints, the research was able to draw clear connections between escapism and specific spatial environments. This approach not only deepens the understanding of escapism but also connects it directly to architectural space, potentially opening new avenues for inquiry.

The qualitative nature of the study allowed for the exploration of the intangible and often personal dimensions of escapism. This approach allowed participants to reflect on their experiences and offer their own interpretations of escapism, particularly how it manifests within different spatial environments. The thematic analysis, grounded in the participant's accounts, produced insight into the spatial, cultural and emotional dynamics of clubbing environments.

Another strength of the study lies in the diverse range of venues presented to participants, including traditional nightclubs in both commercial and underground forms, as well as impermanent spaces encompassing both sanctioned and technically illegal events¹⁴. By incorporating these unofficial venues, the research introduced critical themes of impermanence, transgression, and symbolic detachment, all of which are central to understanding how escapism is spatially constructed.

This study lays the groundwork for further exploration of the relationship between escapism and architecture, highlighting the potential for spatial design to shape, enable or disrupt immersive experiences.

5.7.2 Limitations

Whilst this research offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The sample size, while appropriate for qualitative research, was relatively small and geographically confined to the local context of Malta. This focus provided depth and cultural links to the local context but may limit the generalisability of the findings.

Another limitation was the lack of existing literature directly linking escapism to architecture. While the concept is well-explored in psychological and sociocultural fields, its spatial dimension remains under-researched, requiring the study to rely on adjacent disciplines and themes to build a theoretical framework.

Additionally, the participant pool was primarily composed of individuals active within Malta's underground nightlife scene. While this enriched the depth of insight into a specific subcultural context, it excluded voices from the commercial sector, potentially narrowing the range of spatial and experiential perspectives represented.

¹⁴ An event is considered 'illegal' when it takes place without the necessary permits in place.

The study also relied heavily on subjective recollections of emotional and atmospheric experiences. While well-suited to exploring affective phenomena like escapism, such accounts are interpretive and susceptible to memory distortion. Moreover, the strong personal investment of most participants in the clubbing scene may have introduced some form of bias towards the topic.

From a methodological standpoint, the research could have been strengthened by integrating in-situ analysis. Techniques such as mapping circulation patterns, measuring light and sound levels, or conducting soundscape studies could have added empirical depth to the qualitative insights and grounded participant narratives in observable spatial data.

5.7.3 Implications

The implications of this study extend across both theoretical and practical domains. Theoretically, it addressed a gap in the literature, which set out to find a link between the phenomenon of escapism and architectural features, understanding whether there was a direct correlation between the two. This study may set up the groundwork for future research into more typologies of architectural space with regard to this phenomenon, such as the links between spiritual space and nightlife architecture.

Practically, the research offers insight for architects, event organisers and club owners seeking to design immersive and meaningful environments. Effective escapist spaces are not necessarily those with the most advanced technology or largest scale but those that carefully choreograph the emotional and spatial journey of their users. Attention should be given to the sequencing of spaces, the layering of light and sound, the balance between openness and containment, and the careful use of thresholds and material cues that prompt this phenomenon.

5.7.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Several potential avenues for future research emerge from this study. A broader geographical focus could enable comparative studies across different cultural, sociopolitical and regulatory contexts, offering insight into how escapism takes shape within different environments. While this research was primarily grounded in qualitative interviews, future studies might consider mixed-method approaches. These could include spatial mapping, focus groups, in-person testing and onsite measurements, which could provide empirical grounding to complement subjective accounts.

Partnering with professionals from fields such as psychology, anthropology, sociology or sound design could deepen an understanding of how spatial and sensory factors come together to create immersive environments. The inclusion of a wider range of stakeholders, including club owners, event organisers, commercial actors and policymakers, may also offer a more comprehensive view of the spatial politics and economic forces that underpin nightclub architecture.

One area addressed briefly in this study is the relationship between sacred space and nightclub environments. The architectural and experiential parallels between these settings suggest the potential for a deeper investigation into how collective and transcendental experiences are spatially supported. Pursuing this comparison could expand the scope of research beyond nightlife alone, inviting reflection on how escapism manifests across different spatial typologies and what architectural conditions give rise to either comparable or contrasting forms of escape.

Another theme that emerged from the findings is the relationship between architecture and music, where a nightclub's architectural design influences the style of music played. This interplay between spatial form and sound offers an intriguing avenue for future research and exploration.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Local Nightclub Case studies

Beachaven Discotheque

Beachaven is a well-established seaside complex located in Xemxija¹⁵ (Fig. A1). It has been operated by the same family since 1977 (Borg, 2024) and has evolved into a popular destination for both locals and tourists. The venue is made up of two restaurants, a beachfront lido and a nightclub (Fig. A2).

The nightclub facilities at Beachaven are divided into three main areas:

- **The Club Room** – The primary indoor space, used year round. With a capacity of circa 600 people, it is licensed to operate until 04:00, making it the main venue for club nights.
- **The Terrace** – An outdoor space adjacent to the club room, primary use is as a smoking area during the winter months. In summer it is occasionally used as a standalone event space with a capacity of around 150/200 people, operating until 23:00.
- **The Deck** – A temporary structure erected directly over the sea during the summer. It is mainly used as a lounge area during the day but can be reserved for private events, with operations permitted until 23:00.



Figure A1 - Beachaven location on the Xemxija seafront. Image source – Google Maps.

¹⁵ Xemxija – a suburb of St. Paul's Bay found in the North of the island.



Figure A2 - Full extent of Beachaven complex, consisting of two restaurants, seaside lido and a nightclub. Image source - https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1169067018553412&set=pb.100063503742763.-2207520000&type=3&locale=nn_NO

This case study will focus exclusively on the Club Room, as it is the only space within the Beachaven complex specifically designed for nightclub use. The other two areas, the Terrace and the Deck, are multi-purpose venues that can be adapted to suit the specific requirements of different events.

General Location

Beachaven is one of the only clubs located in the Northern region of Malta, and it is the only club in Xemxija. This means that people come specifically for a night out at this venue, in contrast with other areas in Malta, such as Paceville¹⁶, which has a high concentration of nightclubs in a relatively small area.

Access and Entry

All event spaces within the Beachaven complex are accessed via two distinct staircases at street level.

¹⁶ Paceville – district in St. Julian's which is the main nightlife hub in Malta

The primary staircase leads directly from the road to the Club Room, creating a clear sense of descent and transition into the venue. A secondary staircase (Fig. A4), located further along the road, provides direct access to the Terrace and the Deck and is used exclusively during the summer months.



Figure A4 - External staircase used in summer months. Image source - <https://www.facebook.com/beachhavenmalta>

Entry to the Club Room begins at street level and descends via an external landing that reinforces the feeling of stepping into a different environment. This landing leads into a narrow, black-painted entrance hallway, which houses a small ticket booth where tickets are scanned and wristbands or stamps are issued to allow for re-entry.

Spatial Configuration

Figures A5 and A6 show the plan and longitudinal section of the main club room.

The Club Room is arranged around a central sunken dancefloor, with a series of smaller, segmented spaces positioned around it. A system of railings and level changes articulates the space and establishes clear spatial boundaries throughout the club.

- **Bars:** A primary bar is located near the entrance, enclosed by railings to separate it from the rest of the venue (Fig. A7). This area also provides access to the outdoor terrace and smoking area (Fig. A8). A secondary bar at the rear of the venue is activated depending on event size and demand.
- **Dancefloor:** The dancefloor (Fig. A9) is the focal point of the space and is accessible through two main entry points. It is the lowest part of the venue, establishing a theatrical relationship with the surrounding elevated areas. These different levels encourage spatial distinction between those immersed in dancing and those occupying more transient zones around the perimeter.

- **DJ Booth:** A dedicated DJ booth (Fig. A10) is typically positioned overlooking the dancefloor and elevated approximately 0.5 meters, creating a visual and acoustic focal point. However, DJ placement varies between events based on the organiser's preference and can be relocated to other areas of the club (Fig. A10) When positioned at floor level, the DJ becomes more integrated into the crowd, resulting in a less hierarchical atmosphere.
- **Lounge Areas:** Several lounge and seating areas are distributed throughout the elevated areas, offering patrons a space to rest while remaining engaged in the atmosphere.
- **Facilities:** Restrooms are located near the dancefloor; however, they are limited in capacity (one male toilet, two female toilets), often resulting in long queues that spill into adjacent areas.

The internal height of the club gradually increases as one moves deeper into the space. At the entrance, the ceiling is relatively low, with a headroom of just 2.43 meters. This rises slightly to 2.49 meters over the dancefloor, and then expands significantly to 2.63 meters at the rear of the club, creating a sense of openness the further one ventures inside the space.

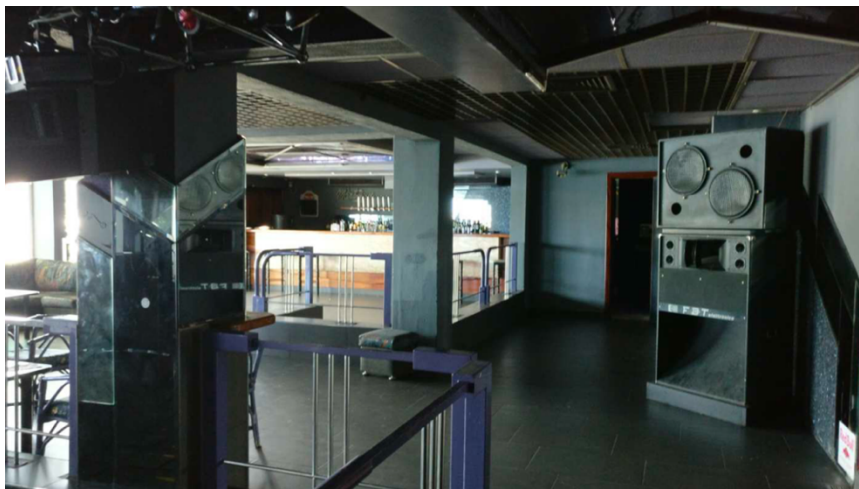


Figure A7 - Entrance and bar area. Image Source - Planning Authority Website

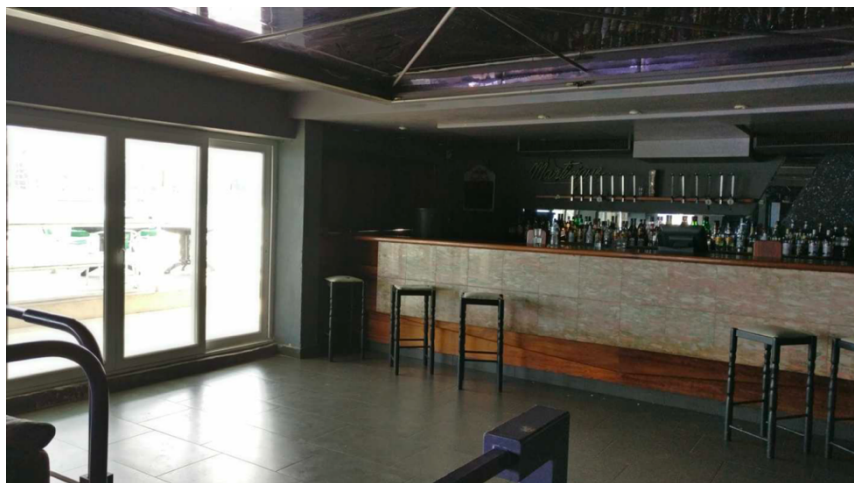


Figure A8 - Bar area. Image Source - Planning Authority Website



Figure A9 - Dancefloor at Beachhaven. Image Source - <https://www.facebook.com/beachhavenmalta>



Figure A10 - Old photo of original DJ booth which exists in the same form today. Image source - <https://www.facebook.com/beachhavenmalta>

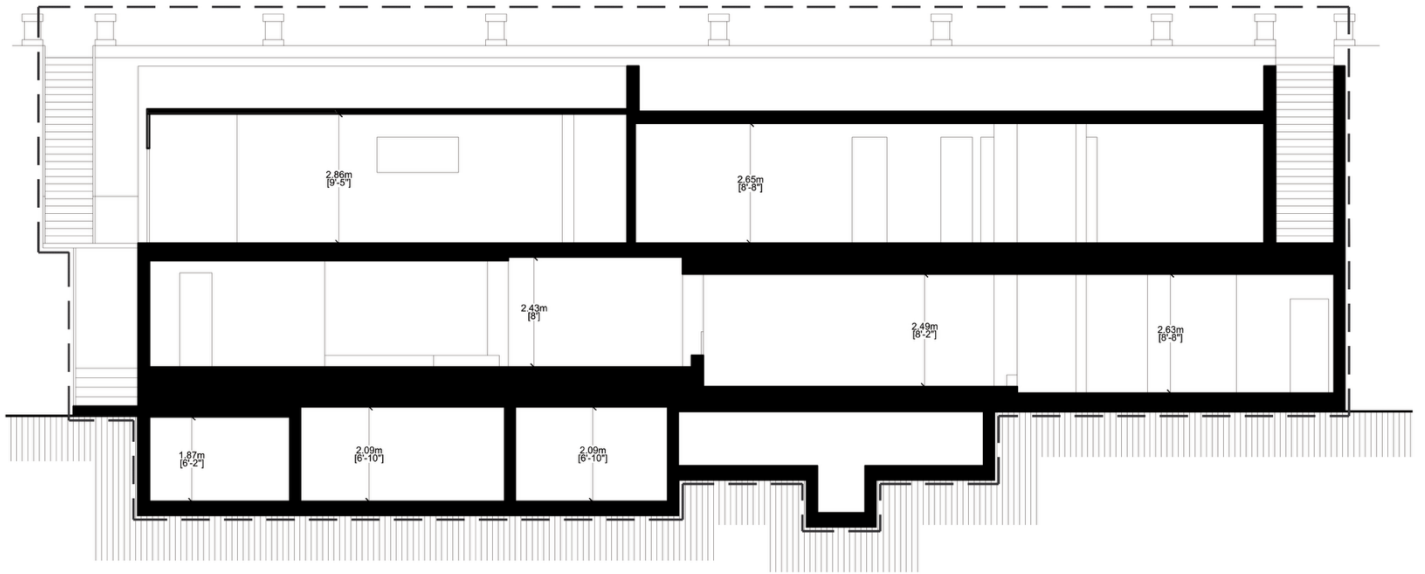


Figure A5 - Longitudinal Section through the complex. The nightclub space is located on the second level of this section. Image adapted from Planning Authority Website.



Figure A6 - Plan of the nightclub. Whilst the official area for the DJ stand is labelled accordingly, other potential positions are marked with a red circle. Image adapted from Planning Authority Website.

Circulation and Movement

Circulation within the Club Room is generally intuitive but varies depending on the location of the DJ setup. When the DJ occupies the standard elevated booth, movement centres around the sunken dancefloor, reinforcing it as the focal point. Alternative DJ placements can shift circulation patterns, drawing attention to other areas and decentralising the crowd flow.

The extensive use of railings and level changes defines the club's internal zones and subtly guides movement, but also creates several bottlenecks that disrupt circulation, especially during busy events. These bottlenecks most commonly occur at:

- The narrow entrance to the main bar, where circulation, ordering and access to the terrace intersect.
- The two main access points to the dancefloor, which concentrate movement in and out of the central space.
- The staircase near the restrooms, often congested due to queues forming in a confined area.
-

Despite these moments of congestion, the club maintains a relatively fluid looped circulation around the dancefloor, connecting key zones like the bar, lounge, smoking terrace, and restrooms.

Interior Design and Atmosphere

The décor of the Club Room is distinctive and largely unchanged since the 1980s, contributing to its nostalgic character:

- **Materials and Surfaces:** Dark floor tiles and deep purple walls dominate the palette. Mirrors are extensively used throughout, including on the ceiling in certain areas.
- **Lighting:** Neon tubes (Fig A11) are installed throughout, casting a warm, atmospheric glow. The dancefloor features illuminated glass tiles, though the lighting system has been non-functional for an extended period and requires restoration.
- **Lighting Infrastructure:** Above the dancefloor, a network of steel trusses allows for versatile lighting setups, accommodating both permanent and event-specific installations.
- **Sound System:** The venue is equipped with a standard Pioneer¹⁷ backline, but sound systems are often upgraded or replaced to meet the specific technical demands of different events. On the dancefloor the sound is very immersive due to speakers present in each corner of the space.
- **Natural Light and Views:** Large windows line one side of the club, offering sea views and allowing natural light to flood the space in the early morning hours if events go on later than 04:00.

¹⁷ Pioneer – Japanese manufacturer that specializes in digital products.



Figure A11 - Neon Lighting. Image source - <https://www.facebook.com/beachhavenmalta>

Conclusion

Overall, Beachaven offers a compelling case study of how spatial arrangement and design can cultivate a strong sense of escapism for its visitors. Its relatively remote location significantly contributes to this, as reaching the venue requires intentionality and planning. The descent from street level into the main club space establishes a clear physical and psychological threshold, signifying a departure from the everyday. Once inside, the architecture reinforces this immersive atmosphere. The multi-level layout surrounding a sunken dancefloor creates a spatial enclosure that physically and visually envelops attendees. By positioning the dancefloor as the central focal point, the design concentrates energy and encourages a shared, collective experience within a clearly defined space.

Liquid Club

Liquid Club is a landmark venue situated on the outskirts of San Ġwann¹⁸, Malta (Fig. A12). A family-run establishment, it has been operating in various forms since the 1970s, officially adopting the name *Liquid Club* in 1998. Renowned for being the home of Malta's underground electronic music scene, particularly techno, Liquid has earned a cult status among local and international club-goers.

The venue comprises two primary spaces: the **Mainroom** and the **Backroom**, which can function independently or be combined into one larger venue. This case study will focus exclusively on the **Mainroom**, as it serves as the primary site for key events.



Figure A12 - Location on Triq tal-Balal on the outskirts of San Ġwann. Image source – Google Maps

General Location

Located between Naxxar¹⁹ and San Ġwann, Liquid Club is one of the few permanent nightlife venues in this semi-industrial zone. Unlike seasonal or infrequently opened venues in the immediate vicinity, such as Aria Complex²⁰ or Razzett l-Abjad²¹, Liquid operates consistently, especially during the winter season when indoor clubbing dominates the scene.

Its relatively isolated setting, away from residential areas and positioned along a major thoroughfare, means patrons intentionally plan their visits. The club is not typically encountered spontaneously but is a deliberate destination, reinforcing its identity as a haven for music lovers.

¹⁸ San Ġwann – town in the Northern Region of Malta.

¹⁹ Naxxar – town in the Northern Region of Malta

²⁰ Aria Complex – Entertainment venue found adjacent to Liquid Club.

²¹ Razzett l-Abjad – farmhouse found in the vicinity of Liquid club which is used for weddings and corporate events.

Access and Entry

Externally, Liquid resembles a traditional Maltese farmhouse (Fig. A13), with the notable exception of its castle-like corner tower, which has become a visual icon of the venue. The façade includes a few small windows that do not reveal the interior atmosphere of the club. On the main façade, one can also find a large Corten sign with the club's logo, a material choice that is continued internally. The main entrance is discreet and residential in character (Fig. A14), blending into the overall structure.



Figure A13 - Exterior of Liquid Club. Image source – Google Maps



Figure A14 - Entrance to Liquid Club. Image source - Liquid Club Instagram.

Upon entry, visitors pass through a modest entrance hall that houses a ticket booth (Fig. A15) and a small sofa lounge (Fig. A16), often used by patrons to relax or wait. This space leads into a second hallway featuring an event poster wall with integrated seating beneath. From here, one enters the main club environment.



Figure A15 - Ticket Booth. Image source - Planning Authority



Figure A16 - Lounge area. Image source - Planning Authority

Spatial Configuration

Spatial Configuration is indicated through Figure A17.

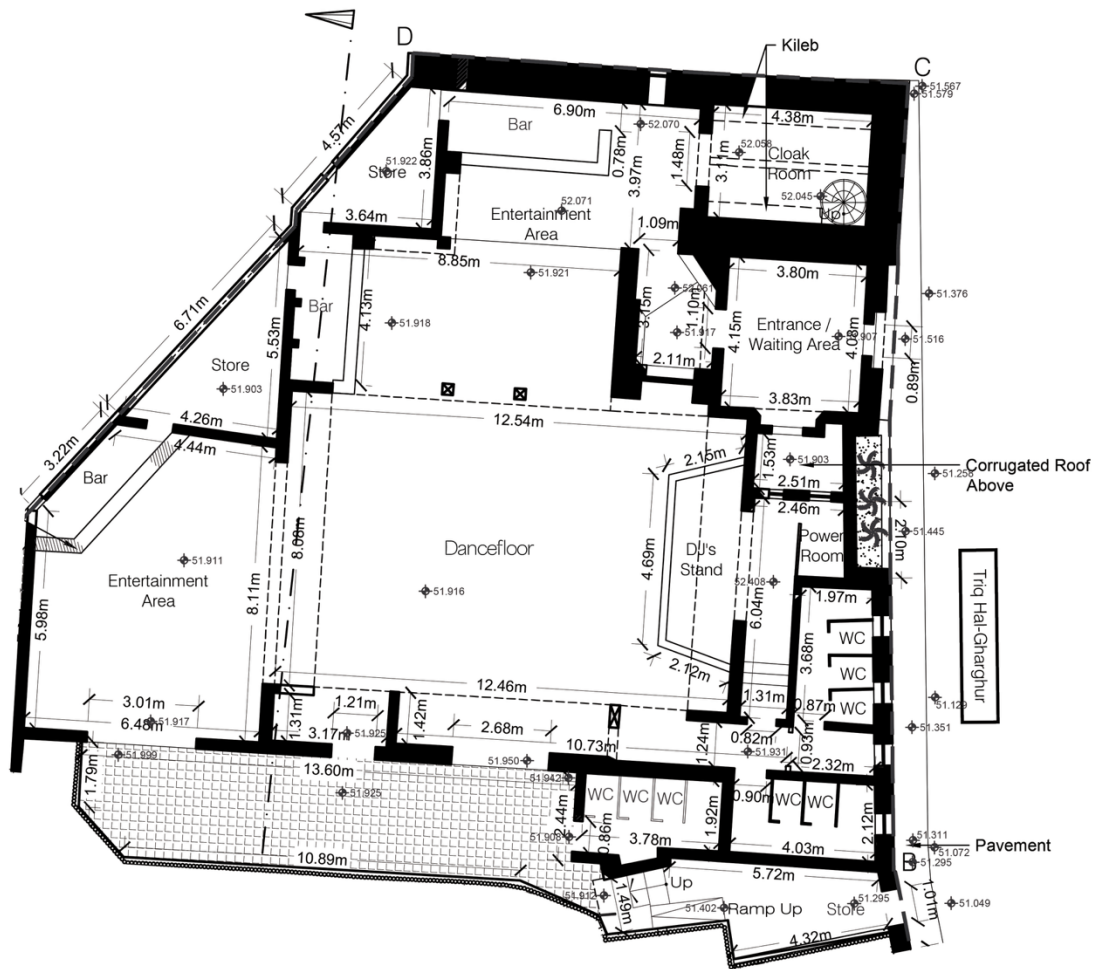


Figure A17 - Plan of Liquid Club. Image adapted from Planning Authority.

The Mainroom is organised around a simple but effective spatial layout that centres the experience on the dancefloor and DJ.

- **Bar Area:** Located near the entrance (Fig. A18), the bar is the first area within the clubroom. A short stepped threshold separates the bar from the dancefloor, divided by the club's signature illuminated fish tank, a central visual feature that acts as both a physical and symbolic threshold.
- **Dancefloor:** The rectangular dancefloor dominates the main interior and is kept at a single level. Upon entering, the DJ booth is positioned on the right and is framed clearly within the space. The ceiling height increases dramatically in the dancefloor area, creating a sense of openness.
- **DJ Booth:** The booth is cast in-situ concrete and slightly elevated, making it a strong visual anchor. Entry is via a small door at the rear of the venue, allowing select individuals to

stand behind the DJ. The booth wall is clad in same corten steel as the sign found outside and features a permanently lit Liquid Club logo above (Fig. A19). A series of mounting points allow for the suspension of banners and lighting rigs, enabling promoters to personalise the backdrop during events.

- **Facilities:** The venue includes a dedicated audio-visual room, typically staffed by sound engineers and VJs²² who control lighting and visuals during events. The restrooms are located behind the DJ booth; however, the narrow corridor leading to them often becomes a bottleneck, particularly during peak hours.

Spatial proportions shift as one moves through the club, with the bar ceiling height at approximately 2.5m, compared to the almost double-height space of the dancefloor.



Figure A18 - Bar area. Image source - Planning Authority.

²² VJ – Video Jockey



Figure A19 - Illuminated Corten logo above DJ stand. Image source - <https://www.facebook.com/liquidclubmalta>

Circulation and Movement

Circulation within Liquid Club is largely dictated by the dominance of the dancefloor, which functions as the central space of the club. While this layout creates a strong sense of collective immersion, it also poses challenges during peak hours. Since ancillary spaces like the bar and restrooms are located around the perimeter, patrons must often navigate through the dense crowd on the dancefloor to access them. This can disrupt the flow of movement and create congestion, especially near the narrow corridor that leads to the toilet facilities.

Interior Design and Atmosphere

Liquid's interior design is intentionally minimal, offering a flexible canvas for different promoters and event aesthetics.

- **Materials and Surfaces:** The dancefloor features dark grey tiles, while walls and ceilings are painted black to enhance lighting effects. The DJ booth, constructed from raw concrete, incorporates a metal grating system over its subwoofer array. The rear wall is finished in corten steel, creating an industrial character which complements the raw concrete of the DJ booth. In contrast, the bar area features reflective metal sheeting, which enhances the movement of light and creates subtle ambient effects.

- **Lighting:** The bar area is bathed in a warm blue LED glow, typically kept low to encourage a subdued, intimate atmosphere. The dancefloor is equipped with ‘moving head’²³ lights, though their use varies depending on the event’s scale and the promoter’s visual direction.
- **Lighting Infrastructure:** A steel truss system spans the ceiling above the dancefloor, providing ample mounting points for custom lighting installations and suspended décor. This infrastructure supports high adaptability for different event setups.
- **Sound System:** Liquid is famed for its VOID Air motion²⁴ sound system, which is visually striking and sonically powerful. The bold red triangular speakers (Fig. A20), stand out sharply against the dark interior, enhancing the club’s visual identity. Their high quality also makes the venue appealing to promoters, who can rely on the in-house backline without needing to bring additional sound equipment.

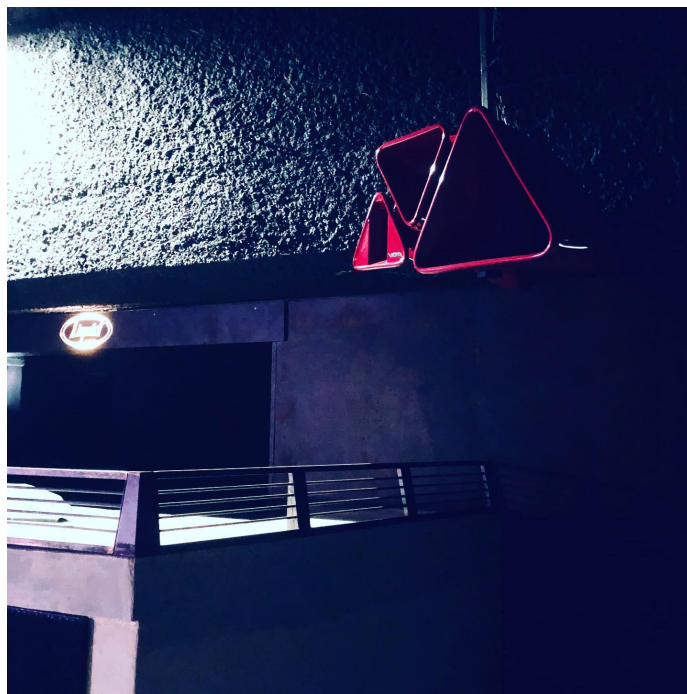


Figure A20 – Void sound system and DJ stand at Liquid Club. Image Source - <https://www.facebook.com/liquidclubmalta>

Conclusion

Liquid Club offers a compelling case study in spatial arrangement and its role in shaping immersive nightlife experiences. Its isolation means that visits are typically intentional and planned in advance. The discreet, unassuming entrance reveals little of the environment beyond, reinforcing a sense of mystery and anticipation. Upon entry, patrons move through a clear threshold sequence, passing through a series of transitional spaces before arriving at the dramatic, double-height dancefloor. The absence of windows within the venue further enhances the feeling of detachment from the outside world, severing visual ties to time and place. Once inside the dark, enclosed space, the club becomes a self-contained realm where all focus is directed toward the dancefloor, allowing patrons to fully immerse themselves in a shared, escapist experience.

²³ Moving Head – Rotating lighting fixture.

²⁴ VOID Air Motion – speaker setup produced by UK based company VOID acoustics.

Truth Nightclub

Truth Nightclub is a small entertainment establishment located in Malta's main nightlife district, Paceville, St. Julian's (Fig. A21). Since opening in 2016, it has become a popular spot, doubling as a restaurant during off-peak hours. The venue operates daily, offering a range of music genres to cater to its diverse clientele.



Figure A21 - Truths' general location within Paceville. Image source – Google Maps

General Location

Situated slightly outside Paceville's core, Truth is surrounded by a dense cluster of bars, clubs and restaurants. This strategic location attracts high foot traffic, with many visitors discovering the club by chance. Like most clubs in the area, it offers free entry, contributing to a high turnover of patrons throughout the night.

Access and Entry

The entrance is directly off a side road with no transitional threshold with guests stepping straight onto the main dancefloor upon entry (Fig. A22).



Figure A22 - Entrance into Truth. Image source - Google Maps.

Spatial Configuration

The relatively small club features a rather unconventional spatial layout arranged around a small dancefloor.

- **Bar Area:** Two bars serve the venue with one larger bar (Fig. A23) at the rear acting as the primary service point, and a smaller one located directly on the dancefloor, which operates intermittently. The main bar also connects to the restroom corridor.
- **Dancefloor:** Located immediately at the entrance, the dancefloor is modest in size. Positioned between the main bar and entrance, it experiences constant through-traffic, especially along its right side (Fig. A24).
- **DJ Booth:** Positioned to the right of the entrance, the DJ booth is slightly elevated and wraps partially around the dancefloor, forming a VIP platform furnished with sofas. It is separated from the general VIP area by a low wall. The club's highest internal ceiling is above the dancefloor, accommodating extensive lighting equipment and also creating a sense of openness.
- **Facilities:** Restrooms are located at the back of the venue behind the main bar.

- **Lounge Areas:** Two lounge areas are positioned on elevated platforms. One wraps around the dancefloor behind and beside the DJ booth, fitted with sofas for table service. A second lounge near the main bar features flexible seating arrangements that can be adjusted based on event capacity.



Figure A23 - Main Bar. Image source – Google Maps

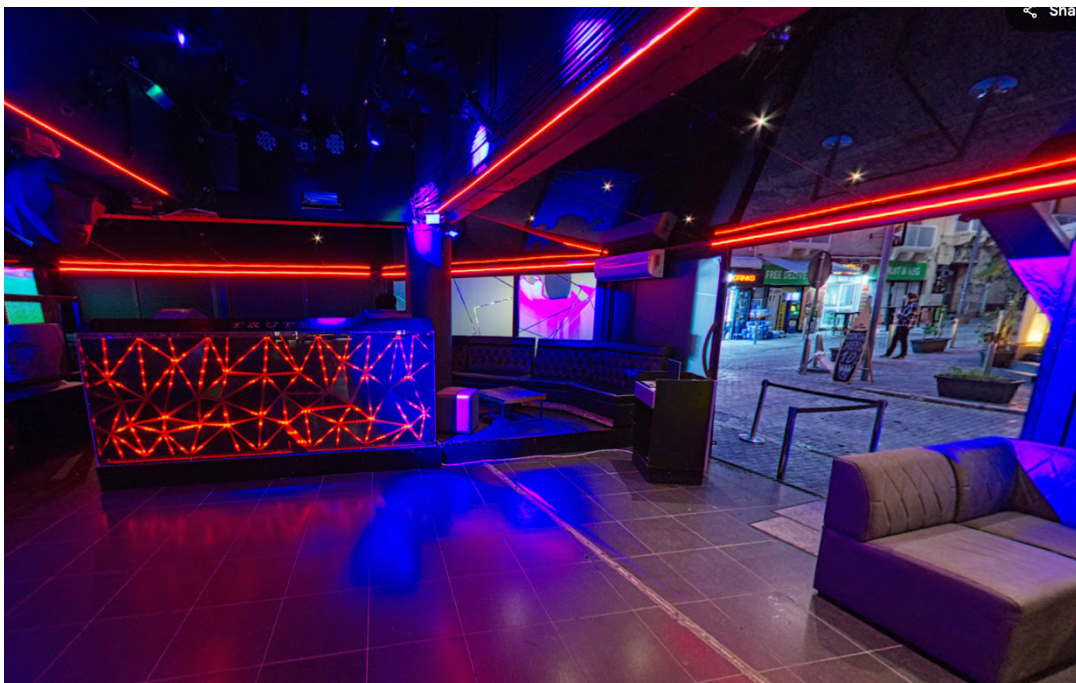


Figure A24 - Dancefloor, DJ stand and entrance, with part of lounge area. Image Source - Google Maps.

Interior Design and Atmosphere

- **Materials:** The interior features a dark industrial palette with black floors, walls and ceilings. Bar counters and railings are constructed from hollow steel sections and metal mesh. Mirrors are used throughout, and some walls display premium alcohol bottles to support the club's bottle service model.
- **Lighting:** The club includes programmable lighting such as suspended square lights above the DJ booth, an illuminated DJ booth, LED strips along beams and columns, uplighters and blinders. These can all be controlled by a VJ during events.
- **Lighting infrastructure:** Due to the extensive system of lighting provided by the club, there isn't much room for customisation and personalisation. A dedicated space above the DJ booth allows for custom signage.
- **Sound System:** A powerful sound system serves the entire venue, with the highest concentration of speakers on the dancefloor. Smaller speakers ensure audio coverage throughout. The system is typically left unchanged between events, as it suits the venue's size well.
- **Natural light:** all of the walls which flank the road have large windows, which allows for passersby to look in and vice versa. Some of these windows have opaque stickers on them which improved the privacy within the space.

Conclusion

Truth Nightclub presents a contrasting perspective on the spatial arrangement of club environments. Unlike the previous case studies, it caters to a different clientele and operates within Malta's primary entertainment district, where visits are often spontaneous rather than premeditated. The absence of a defined threshold at the entrance, combined with extensive glazing and large windows, blurs the boundary between the interior and exterior. This permeability, in my view, diminishes the sense of detachment from everyday life, making it more challenging to engage in a truly escapist experience. Additionally, the spatial configuration of the club often feels congested due to the constant flow of movement through it, making it harder for patrons to feel comfortable or immersed in the space.

Offsite Locations

Another key aspect of contemporary club culture is the use of offsite locations. These events generally fall into two categories;

- Officially sanctioned events that comply with all legal requirements and permits.
- Informal, DIY pop-up events that typically operate without official approval, relying instead on word-of-mouth promotion.
-

The main distinction between the two lies in their scale as securing permits locally is a costly and time-consuming process, usually reserved for larger productions such as festivals, where the cost incurred for the permits would be made up through the revenue of the event.

With regard to the DIY pop-up events, also referred to as Secret Locations, these parties typically take place on private property or in remote, unconventional spaces, repurposed for a single night. The exact location is usually disclosed to attendees only on the day of the event, often via email or WhatsApp, adding an element of mystery and exclusivity.

These events occupy spaces not originally intended for nightlife, requiring organisers to curate and assemble the core elements of a club such as sound systems, lighting and staging to create a DIY nightclub experience. This format closely echoes the spirit of the UK's 1980s and 1990s rave scene and remains deeply rooted in underground culture.

Events of this nature occur relatively frequently across Malta, often flying under the radar of mainstream cultural programming. However, in order to respect the privacy of both organisers and attendees, as well as to preserve the secrecy of the locations of these venues, these events will not be explored in detail as official case studies. Nonetheless, their influence and significance within the broader context of local club culture will be acknowledged and referenced throughout this research.

Appendix B: Ethics Forms and Interview Guide

Information Letter

Dear _____,

My name is Craig Bonello and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a Master in Architecture. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation titled:

Designing the Escape – The role of Architecture in Nightclubs

This is being supervised by Perit. Monica Audrey Galea. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to understand the spatial and architectural qualities of nightclubs and their effect in aiding escapist experiences. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview - either face to face or online, depending on your preferences. During this interview I will ask you a variety of questions ranging from your background and involvement within the nightlife scene, the role of architecture within nightclub spaces, testimonials regarding specific events in which you felt that the architecture had an effect on the overall experience of the night, how lighting, sound and layout affect experiences within nightclubs and cultural and social factors which affect these experiences. This will take you approximately 45 minutes to complete.

Data collected will be treated confidentially, and stored on an external hard-drive. Any material in hard copy form will be placed in a locked cupboard. Only my supervisor and myself (and in exceptional cases, examiners) will have access to this data.

The findings which emerge from this research may be published a dissertation. Your name (or any other identifying information) will not appear when the findings are reported.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks. Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and, where applicable, ask for the data concerning you to be erased.

All data collected will be stored on a secure hard drive and will be erased on completion of the

study and following publication of results within one year of completion of the study.

A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, you may contact me or my supervisor on the details provided below.

Yours Sincerely,

Craig Bonello

[REDACTED]

Monica Audrey Galea

[REDACTED]

Consent Form

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by **Craig Bonello**. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

- I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
- I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.
- I understand that I have been invited to participate in an interview in which the researcher will ask questions to explore the role of architecture in nightclubs as spaces for escapism. I am aware that the interview will take approximately 45 minutes. I understand that the interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
- I understand that my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.
- I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study. I also understand that this research may benefit others by: setting up a groundwork of study relating to this topic.
- I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
- I understand that all data collected will be erased on completion of the study and following publication of results within one year of completion of the study.
- I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research.
- I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
- I am aware that, by marking the first-tick box below, I am giving my consent for this interview to be audio-recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Interview Guide

General Introduction

1. In your view, what role do architecture and spatial design play in shaping the nightclub experience?
2. Can you recall a specific event or venue where the architecture had a particularly strong impact on your experience?
3. Are you familiar with the concept of escapism? What does the concept mean to you personally?
4. Do you feel a sense of leaving the outside world behind when entering a club? What elements contribute to that shift?
5. In your experience, do nightclubs contribute to immersive or escapist experiences?
6. How do elements like lighting, sound, and spatial layout contribute to a feeling of escape within a club setting?
7. Have you come across any design decisions in clubs that, in your opinion, break the immersive or escapist atmosphere?
8. Do you think hosting events in offsite or remote locations enhances the sense of escapism?
9. How would you describe the differences in atmosphere and escapism between underground venues and commercial nightclubs?
10. From a design perspective, what spatial or architectural features tend to distinguish these two types of clubs?
11. Are there any nightclubs whose architectural design has stuck with you long after visiting? What aspects made it stand out?

Case Study Questions

General

14. How would you rank the following venues—Beachaven, Liquid Club, Truth, and offsite locations—in terms of their ability to create a sense of escapism for guests?

Beachaven

15. How would you describe the overall experience of being at Beachaven?
16. How does the spatial layout influence the way you move through or feel within the venue?
17. Are there any particular design features, like the entrance, dancefloor, or décor, that stand out in shaping your sense of immersion or escape at Beachaven?

Liquid Club

18. What's your impression of the experience at Liquid Club?
19. How does its spatial organisation affect the flow, movement, or emotional feel of the space?
20. Are there design elements, such as lighting, circulation, or materials, that contribute to the sense of escapism at Liquid?

Truth

21. Can you describe what it feels like to attend an event at Truth?
22. How does the spatial design influence that experience, especially in relation to immersion or escape?
23. Are there design elements, such as lighting, circulation, or materials, that contribute to the sense of escapism at Truth?

Secret Location

24. What are your thoughts on events held in offsite, secret, or temporary locations?
25. How does the journey to the venue and the act of discovering the space affect your sense of anticipation or escapism?
26. So in your opinion, which are kind of architectural elements or spatial design decisions that really contribute to the sense of escapism within these nightclub spaces from your experience?

Appendix C – Transcripts

The transcripts are presented in the following order:

DJ, Organiser 01 (**DJO1**)

DJ, Organiser 02 (**DJO2**)

DJ, Organiser 03 (**DJO3**)

DJ, Organiser 04 (**DJO4**)

DJ, Organiser, Architect (**DJOAR1**)

Organiser, Architect (**OAR1**)

After each transcript extracts from the thematic analysis excel file are shared as to show to process of data analysis using the Braun & Clarke (2006) six-step method.

Participant DJO1 – DJ and Organiser

Interviewer - In your view, what role does architecture and spatial design play in shaping the nightclub experience?

DJO1 - I think this question, it depends... It depends... It depends on the type of party and context... But I would say personally that it would be somewhat of value, the architecture space. So let's put it in the local context.

So if you take clubs in Malta, most of them are outdoor... Having an outdoor experience is way different from an indoor experience. Even the music would change.

Personally, how you play and how you perceive music indoor versus outdoor is very different. I think, actually, even for sound design purposes in terms of soundproofing.

One, you need different elements. And those elements would add different dimensions to your experience, right? So take clubs such as Liquid, which is more of a dark vibe, dark room, but its insulation is quite superficial in the sense that all walls and roof, insulation, you perceive sound differently. So your experience is different.

Outdoor, you have a different spatial dimension, in my opinion. The closer you are to the DJ stand, maybe the better your experience. The further away you are, you lose sound because you don't have a roof.

So I think architecture will play a part. If architecture means how the space is laid out and if it's indoor or outdoor, etc.

Interviewer - So can you recall a specific event or a venue where you felt that the way the space was kind of designed had a very strong impact on your experience?

DJO1 - I think I would have two answers for this.

For example, something somewhere like rooftop, Gianpula... I like because you have the views and the calendar for daytime and nighttime and still have that summer feeling. Obviously, you can only do parties there when the weather is right.

And then I think somewhere like NDSM in Amsterdam, where you have a whole warehouse and high ceilings, etc. For festivals, it feels different, in my opinion. It depends on the event.

So when I went to a festival in ADE, basically you feel like a small part of a whole... That was my experience... Whether you go to rooftop Gianpula, it's smaller, so it's more intimate, but at the same time, you don't feel overcrowded at times.

And there's space. Different feelings, different experiences, again. For me personally, music and the club go hand in hand.

Interviewer - Are you familiar with the concept of escapism? And if so, what does the concept mean to you?

DJO1 - So for me, escapism is just relating to the musical concept of a rave, in the sense that you go into that space and lose yourself in the music and the environment and the party vibe. The size it defines to a space, for me, it's not particularly. It all depends on the music and the people there. If the people have the right vibe for that party and the music is good, then you have the escapism element.

Now, you can reason it out similar to a casino, in the sense that casinos generally don't have windows. Why? Because they entice players to continue playing and not realise about the time. Nightclubs can have a similar experience. So if you have a nighttime, daytime venue, you might have some small windows, but they're good for atmospheric elements in the sense that if you play from four till eight, you have a sunrise. So you can see the sun come through visually and that gives you a different feeling, a different escape....That's what I think.

Interviewer - So do you ever feel a sense of leaving the outside world behind when entering a club?

DJO1 - Yes, but it's all mentally in the sense that okay, you're going into a physical space for a party. But again, for me, it doesn't make a difference per se what space I'm in.

Interviewer - So the entrance to a venue doesn't have any effect to you personally in creating that shift as you're walking into an experience?

DJO1 - No, but if it was done intentionally, yes.

So imagine you have something with a double door. You have a corridor and then you enter the club. That would create much more of a feeling of, okay, something's going to happen and I'm going to enter a new space rather than having the normal entrance to outdoor clubs in Malta.

It's mainly a door and you just go through that fence and you sit outdoor. But there's no experience of you getting into a club.

When I went to Amsterdam, I think it was CircoLoco. And I really liked the way the backstage setting was because you needed to crawl, crawl and crouch a bit, enter under a passage, you go through a lift and then you enter backstage. And that experience was already something very different. Now you have to trust everyone or everyone to have that type of setting...But having something well thought before helps the experience.

Interviewer - In your experience, do nightclubs contribute to immersive or escapist experiences?

DJO1 - It depends on the club. Of course. If the club owners want to treat the nightclub as a nightclub and not a bar, okay, being it a non-social element, then yeah, they would have more immersive lighting experiences, sound that is 360 all out....So wherever you are, you can hear the sound properly. Exactly. Now, locally, I rarely see it. I rarely see it. So they would rather invest in a bar nightclub setting because ultimately it's a business. So their business is to sell more drinks.

Now, if the local context is that of a social, then they go for the night out setting. Then I think it doesn't warrant the full experience. 100%.

And there's a very big distinction between proper prescribed nightclubs, like, for example, Liquid and then somewhere, I don't know, in Paceville, native which is marketed as a club, but it's a bar at the end of the day.

Interviewer - So how does the layout contribute to a feeling of escape within a club setting to you? Look, for me, it depends if you see the outside world or not.

DJO1 - So if you want a complete, immersive experience, it should be a club, similar to the ones that they have in Gianpula or the ones not in the rooftop and penthouse, and even Uno, that you can perceive what's happening outside of the club. The moment you realise that there's the outside world, maybe you can say, start thinking differently. Because let's put the escape definition back.

Let me tell you what I think. I think escapism means that you leave all your worries behind, and once you enter that space, then you're just there in the moment. So the moment you see the outside world, you might think again about what your problems were, what your life is.

So what's seeing the outside world has its benefits. But at the end of the day, you can have settings where you use the views to your advantages. And you look for yourself in the outside world.

Like Treehaus, I think does it well, because you have the element of a treehouse, but in the backdrop is little trees that are not in the nightclub.

Interviewer - Exactly. I mean, that's, in my opinion, one of the nicest features of Treehaus, that you can see the trees at the back.

DJO1 - It's incredible. And that's within the club. Exactly....It's something peripheral to the club, which I use it well....I think they ruined it a bit now with the tent. I'm really not a fan of it....The tent is not a good idea. As in, it's a good idea in winter, so we can use it.... But I think now we just... In summer, it should be taken off.

We lose the element of the outdoor feeling.

Interviewer - Do you think that hosting events in off-site or remote locations enhances the sense of escapism?

DJO1 - I don't know. Look, from my perspective, I don't think it either enhances or decreases the experience. For me personally, doing events off-location, which we do 80% of the time mostly, it's all a matter of offering a different experience rather than offering a different escapist experience.

Because I think if you combine, as I said, the music and the people, they have already the experience. Like with the pastizzeria, there was no element of escapism. They were in the middle of Hamrun. But at the same time, there was that escapist vibe because of the vibe in general not the place. The place didn't lend itself to be a nightclub.

And I feel like there's a certain value to an extent in having these off-site locations to a certain extent where it's like, again, like you're saying, it's about offering a different experience to people. So for example, for them, Friday is usually, I go to Gianpula, I go to the same club. You know, it's hard to break out of that routine. So then when you go to somewhere completely different, it puts you in a little bit of a different frame of mind. And I mean, that's why we try to do these parties and off-site locations at the end of the day, because you're trying to offer something different to people.

Interviewer - How would you describe the differences in atmosphere between underground venues and commercial nightclubs?

DJO1 - I think the layout would be somewhat different. From my perspective, at least, Paceville is the commercial and the superclubs in Malta, say Gianpula and Uno are the more underground. Now, the difference between underground and commercial clubs is very loose. It's very blurred. I think that they're used for both.

But I think the setting would largely be that the DJ stand is the main focal point, whereas in commercial bars, they would be peripheral. So if you analyse the structure and how they are laid out, some were like... Shadow.

Somewhere like shadow. Where the DJ stand is literally on the side or next to a column, and the bar is the main thing that you see. By hard... Enabling socialisation and enabling bar sales. Whereas in the other clubs, you get in and the first thing you see is the DJ stand. And the rest is all different. So that is, from my opinion, is the main difference.

Because in terms of sound, nightclubs would be more invested in the sound, ideally. But for the user that goes there, I think a person could go to these commercial spaces, would know what they're expecting. And people who go to the underground places know what they're expecting as well.... Yes, I do see differences in underground and the commercial spaces.

Interviewer - So are there any nightclubs abroad or locally whose design stuck out to you after visiting? Is there something that you kind of still remember the layout or remember the way it was arranged or maybe material choices or stuff like that? And if so, what aspects made it stand out?

DJO1 - For me, Marrakesh. I find it very nice.... It has that element of the trees, the colours they use. I like... And for my style of music, it screams summer... I think that's the only venue that screams summer apart from Rooftop and Gianpula.

It really does scream summer. Treehaus as well. You feel that you've entered the club and you can see the DJ and there's all around....And I really like that. I'm trying to think which ones I really enjoyed....I went to one in Amsterdam. I think it was called... I only remember the name. But it was... Possibly.... It was in Rembrandt Square. In the middle.

I'll get the name. It was like a treehouse, but a greenhouse.... Literally. So you get in and it was all plants everywhere. So cool.

Interviewer - But to go back to your point on Marakesh I have to agree with you 100%. I went there recently and I was impressed at what a nice club it is... And it's such a pity that it's so underutilised by good promotions....

DJO1 - The thing is, it depends on the style and context.

And let's put the techno scene. Right. Before Indigo started, no party, no techno party was held in an outdoor venue during daytime... And in other words, a different context altogether, a different form of escapism... Rather than having all that darkness and liquid club and just throw lights, they suddenly have the daytime, right?

Interviewer - And sometimes almost that contributes even more to the feeling of escape. It's like you're out at like 10, 11 a.m. kind of thing dancing away.... You're missing the Sunday lunch...

DJO1 - It's different, it's very different. And the venue lends itself to that as well.

So on paper, rooftop, you wouldn't think that it would host an underground night. It has a pool, it's like a sun deck. I know this, but when you put the music, the right people in that context, it works.

So for me, it's three things. So the music, the people and the architecture around it.

Interviewer - So now I'm going to move on to a segment of the interview, which is going to deal a bit more with case studies. So I've basically kind of selected four typologies of clubs in Malta. And I'm also going to ask you a little bit of questions from your experiences with them.

So first, I'd like you to kind of, I'm going to give you, tell you four venues and I'd like you to rank them in terms of what, in your opinion, would, which, so the first one would be the one where you have the most escapist experience and the last one would be the least to an extent. So they would be Beach Haven, Liquid, Truth and offsite locations. Offsite locations, a bit of an umbrella term. And here I'm kind of encapsulating secret location events and also like big events like Fort St. Elmo Defected kind of thing. So it's those four and I'd just like you to put them in order with the first one being the most and the last one being the least to an extent. So it's Truth, Beachaven, Liquid and offsite locations.

DJO1- Okay, first offsite location, for me. Second, Liquid. Third, Beach Haven for Truth.

Interviewer - Perfect, perfect. All right. So now I'm going to zoom in on Beach Haven. How would you describe the overall experience of being at Beach Haven, both as an organiser or even as an attendee?

DJO1- I like the fact that they didn't renovate ever inside. So they kept it through to its core. I hate the fact that they never renovated the space as well. So it's a two-part thing in the sense that I like the originality of it, but an element of refurbishment is needed for the amenities. So for me, okay, you have the escapism, etc. But the facilities contribute to your experience. So even toilets, bar, the dance floor size, how it's structured, it affects. That is my answer here. I'm halfway on Beach Haven.

Interviewer - How does the spatial layout influence the way you move or feel to the venue?

DJO1- I don't mind that you have the dance floor segregated and you can have like, there's like a podium on top that you can go around. And that's fine, as long as you use it for non-social elements in the sense that you dance and lose yourself in the music. But I think the place, how it's laid out, there are sofas on both sides, etc. It's not, even though there's a dance floor, you can only immerse yourself in the club only when on the dance floor. The rest is all, it lends itself to socialising....It's very transitionary everywhere else to a certain extent, especially when you're standing...It can be better.

Interviewer - So now to move on to Liquid. So how would you describe the overall experience of being at Liquid?

DJO1- I think for me, it's quite immersive.... But it's also very plain, but at the same time, it's what you expect from what is being played there, in the sense that the music is so experiential. You don't need anything else to contribute to the experience, apart from you being in a dark room, maybe with some, a lot of lights next to the DJ stand, and you just immerse yourself there. For me, maybe, maybe, they should use more the outside area as well....So they should open it more and have more airflow. Next to the back room, between the back room and the toilet.

They don't really use that, unless it's like a Glitch Club series, and they've opened up both rooms, and that's when they open it up... They should use it more, because the indoor-outdoor thing, I like it....Not people dancing outside, but at least having the transition of people.

Something that always sticks out to me with Liquid is the location of where the bathrooms are. It's a bit uncomfortable at points, because it's right at the front where the DJ is. So it's like you have a lot of people kind of pushing through that area to try to go in, which disrupts the flow on the dance floor then, you know what I mean? Because nothing ruins things more than when you have someone pushing behind you to a certain extent....I think as well, we mentioned in clubs that have been open for ages, ages.

And the clubbing experience has significantly changed since then. So it'll be changing. It's been open since the 70s, but as a club, let's say it was from the 90s. Liquid was a club before it was liquid, and then... It transformed into liquid, and I've... since I've gone out, I know liquid.

Did it change? No. It didn't change. It remained the same.

Some minor aesthetic changes, but the layout remained the same. I know that the offering is consistent....You know what you're gonna get when you go to there....Sometimes, it will get boring. That's why I think, personally, right now....It's not doing that well, because it didn't change its formula...But now, the people have changed, that's the thing. So you first expect liquid you go a couple of times, now it's the same.

Interviewer - Are there any design elements, such as lighting, circulation, or materials, that do you contribute to the sense of escape?

DJO1 - For me, I think at liquid particularly, it's lack of lighting. Let's continue to that. Lack of windows completely there... that really helps you to escape... Again, imagine liquid. Having direct windows, huh? And imagine Malta not having a 4AM curfew. That's the main difference. If we had... longer hours. Then, the use of Windows would have been an extremely good idea.

Interviewer - 100%.

DJO1 - The club, I remembered that I really like. Robert Johnson. In Germany, and in Amsterdam, I'm clear, it's called. It's closed now Clier - But Robert Johnson, it's a club in Offbank. Or Frankfurt, somewhere in between.

And it literally has a wooden floor. Then it has... it has an elevated... area where you can sit But then, behind the DJ stand, there are some windows. But very similar ones, yeah. So then, when the sun comes up. You start seeing the sun slowly entering the club. Let me try and find you a picture.

Because I think wooden floors... My experience partying on wooden floors, very different, huh? Those are the vibrations which really add to the feeling of immersion and escape because you

feel the music deep within you... But there was a whole... in Fabric, they recently, um, upgraded their previous floor, which had been there since when they opened. And they put in all of this, like, body kinetic things, and they can do parties for deaf people...

Interviewer - Um, alright, now to move on to truth. So I don't know if you've been to Truth recently. Can you describe what it feels like to attend an event at Truth, or just your overall experience visiting.

DJO1 - For me, it's just the bar. And I've played there. For me, it's just a bar. I think it's so small to lend itself as a club. It's more geared towards being a bar, even, like, where it is. How you went there. It feels like you're going to Paceville to a bar. It doesn't seem as if you're going into a club. They really try. The thing that amazes me, that they really try to be a club. Even the way they promote, they get artists. But for me, it doesn't make sense. Quite possibly, because my line of thought is that clubbing is not Paceville. So, I'm already inclined not to say that I won't be clubbing in Paceville. Unless it's maybe next to playground or sky.

Interviewer – Are there any aspects within Truth which detract from the escapism experience?

DJO1 – The windows really takeaway from the experience. I don't know, for that, whenever there's windows. Ideally, it should only be one way. In the sense that you cannot see, you can see the people outside, but they cannot see you, one. And two, ideally, you see no one, so if there are windows, it's towards nature...And also, let's not kid ourselves that in this club night context. And now, even more with social media huh? Real escapism. It's only offered in places where there are no phones around. I know people judging you from the outside. Okay, so if you can offer that experience, yes, then you truly offer an escapist vibe. So liquid might work, because it's too dark for you to take a video. Okay, so we're already removed one, people can't see you. Totally free. So the concept of freedom, in my opinion, relies also on the use of phones. The moment a phone... is up on the dance floor. You lose the element of privacy. And that contributes to escapism.

Interviewer - What are your thoughts on events held in off-site because of temporary locations?

DJO1 - No, I love them. I love that. I think particularly remote, where we have so many spaces, I can go around the world and think of a hundred venues as I can possibly do a party. Then if it's legal or not. That's another question, however I can actually do it. That's the thing, and more. How about... the spaces that we have are amazing. The views, the history... It's all about being respectful to the places, then. I'm trying to convince the owners that he can actually do a part and not ruin the place.

Interviewer - And how was the journey to the venue and the actual act of discovering the space affect your sense of it, like. Anticipation or escapism, so to speak. So, this be it as a... So you could location, you've received a message where the location is, or even just, like, for example, for St. Elmo, the whole experience of getting to Valletta and then walking through the tunnel, and then you come into that space, so kind of take both ends of the spectrum here.

DJO1 - Okay, so, like, starting from Fort St. Elmo on, I think this space is already amazing as it is, and in the sense that even if you're not in the party context. You still have that feeling. Because it's something big, and it will overwhelm you. So, whenever there's a part there, you feel it. It's special, similar to the Red tower. See, you go to a party, there you have Mellieha around you, and the big red tower there. It feels special. It's already... the feeling of having an off-location. You know that you're not supposed to be doing a party there.

That feeling alone is already a plus. Now I can circulate it back to the message. So the feeling that I have just... I'm... so exclusive that... myself and a couple of others are invited to this party in this secret location, already gives you that feeling that I can be comfortable. It's not too public, you know? In places like Malta. For locals, that is important. Maybe foreigners for them. They kind of have an escapist... feeling when coming to more than the normal clubs, because no one knows them.

Interviewer - So it's very much also dependent on... the people who are around you, for sure. What are potential architectural elements or spatial design elements that really contribute to the sense of escapism within nightclub spaces?

DJO1 - Okay. I think if it's outdoor, particularly. I think trees? Include a lot of nature. Mm-hmm. So you have that feeling. I think... glass as well is good for me, in the sense that if you want to create an indoor-outdoor space. Use of glass with wood insulation that doesn't feel like a greenhouse. It depends, again, on the vibe you want to create. That's the thing. So, the use of concrete for me is more on the techno side, etc. And then the nature is more on the house side, I guess. It depends. If you want a nighttime venue. These of trees can be nice, but at the end of the day. You wouldn't see the greenery right. Well, even as a core, I think wood, for me personally, gives me a warm feeling. And it is what I associate nightclubs to offer. The warmth of a community and the music, etc, so... something that is warm for me.

Extract From Data Analysis

Interview Text	Initial Code	Focused Coding	Main Theme	Sub Theme
I think this question, it depends... It depends on the type of party and context. But I would say personally that it would be somewhat of value, the architecture space.	Spatial design importance varies by party type and context	conditional value of architecture	EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	EXPERIENTIAL DYNAMICS
So let's put it in the local context. So if you take clubs in Malta, most of them are outdoor. Having an outdoor experience is way different from an indoor experience. Even the music would change.	Indoor vs outdoor club distinction; spatial context alters musical perception and atmosphere.	indoor vs outdoor experience	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	INDOOR AND OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE
Personally, how you play and how you perceive music indoor versus outdoor is very different. I think, actually, even for sound design purposes in terms of soundproofing. One, you can. One, you need different elements. And those elements would add different dimensions to your experience, right?	Technical requirements like soundproofing differ indoor/outdoor; infrastructure shapes auditory experience.	technical infrastructure	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	TECHNICAL ASPECTS
So take clubs such as Liquid... dark vibe, dark room... insulation is quite superficial... you perceive sound differently.	spatial enclosure influences vibe.	conditional value of architecture	EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	EXPERIENTIAL DYNAMICS
Outdoor, you have a different spatial dimension, in my opinion. The closer you are to the DJ stand, maybe the better your experience. The further away you are, you lose sound.	Proximity to sound source critical in unenclosed spaces	spatial dynamics	EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	EXPERIENTIAL DYNAMICS
So when I went to a festival in ADE, basically you feel like a small part of a whole. That was my experience.	Large-volume spaces create sense of collective participation; scale impacts user role.	big room effect on escapism	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	INTIMACY AND SCALE
Whether you go to rooftop Gianpula, it's smaller, so it's more intimate, but at the same time, you don't feel overcrowded at times.	smaller venues create more intimate experiences	collective participation	SOCIO-CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF ESCAPISM	SOCIAL AND CONTEXTUAL

Participant DJO2 – DJ and Organiser

Interviewer - So, the first question, in your view, what role does architecture and spatial design play in shaping the nightclub experience?

DJO2 - I think it's a big aspect of it, because in a club, these things come part and parcel... in the sense, apart from a sound system, the space you're in is extremely important and that makes a big difference for what expectations you set for yourself in terms of what you're expecting... So if you go to a nightclub which is open-air, you might expect a different style of music to one which is indoors, maybe a bit smaller and feels a bit more like a club night, whereas I don't know, that kind of thing... whereas an outdoor club might be a bit more like summery and less serious.

Interviewer - Okay, can you recall a specific event or venue where the architecture had a particularly strong impact on your overall experience?

DJO2 - Yes, I'm going to say once, I attended a festival in Barcelona at a place called Parc del Forom and it was this huge amphitheatre-style place, a huge park and the main stage was at the bottom of the amphitheatre and it was such that there was thousands of people at the bottom on the flat part below the amphitheatre, kind of.

And then there were these... you know how an amphitheatre is designed... kind of with all the stairs coming up on the sides... that was all full of people and the atmosphere in a place like that just felt... I don't know... It was quite spectacular because the way the place was designed... it felt like everyone was all around, kind of... And which for the enjoyment, I don't know, of the festival is really like uped the ante a bit because it was like there was this main stage which everyone would go to and after a certain time it would just be surrounded by thousands of people above, below you, on the same level as you... So that's probably one of the times I can think of.

Interviewer - Are you familiar with the concept of escapism and if so, what does the concept mean to you personally?

DJO2 - In terms of use of the word, I would say you introduced me to it, but I definitely have understood its definition without assigning a word to it in the context of, I think it's quite self-explanatory.

I think in life we find, we may find certain things which we enjoy, which we see as a form of escape... So to me, escapism, I would define it from my own perspective as being a way to enter into a feeling where you're just separating yourself from things which may be stressors for you, to feel, I don't know, a sense of freedom, to feel less worried about things which might normally be a nuisance to you. It's, I guess, somewhat tied to relaxation, freedom.

Interviewer - Do you feel a sense of leaving the outside world behind when entering a club and if so, what elements contribute to this shift?

DJO2 - I definitely can agree that that's possible and I think that's what every club should strive to achieve because typically when we attend clubs, it's usually at the weekend, which is naturally a time to unwind... and I think by attending nightclubs, it's just adding more to this in the sense of, okay, it's the weekend and we're now entering a place where most people in most club nights are made to feel comfortable, to wear what they want, to dance how they want to, to enjoy whatever kind of music they want to... things that contribute to that shift for me are definitely the music that is being played in the nightclub. I tend to seek specific nightclubs that I know what to expect in terms of music.

But aside from that, I also obviously favour the nightclubs, which for me, I feel more attracted to maybe in the sense of how they're designed and what kind of decor they have... For example, there are certain open-air venues, which I much prefer... Obviously, a sound system is a very important aspect to this, to this feeling of leaving the world behind, because I think to be on a dance floor, you need to feel somewhat immersed and one of the best ways to do it, I think, is to silence everything else and just allow one of the most important things in a nightclub to shine through, which is music.... for example... Marrakesh Club at Gianpula Village is a beautiful, large club, which is surrounded by trees and other plants... As soon as you go in, you feel somewhat you're in this kind of space, which is, first of all, unique in the sense of there aren't many clubs like this on the island... Second of all, for us living on an island in Malta, which naturally doesn't have the most green spaces, I think these kinds of clubs are a very welcome addition... I think most people will tend to like them because it feels like a bit of a garden... like the garden you never had.

Café Del Mar for me is quite low on the list... In theory, it should be a cool club, but I agree that, A, the events that occupy it and B, the overall layout... to me, this doesn't really make sense... There's no real threshold of where the dance floor begins or where the dance floor ends... It's just one large space and you kind of have to make sense of it according to the people who are there... So in terms of an open-air venue, I would say that is one.... Even, I want to be honest, Uno Main Room is not really my favourite space as well.... I don't think I've been to many good events there, which in theory should be a good space, but I think just the people it attracts. I've never had a really good event there.... I think the factor that kind of pushes me away from liking it is the crowd it attracts and the type of events it has attracted in the past on a local scale.... Because they're just not maybe the types of music or crowds that I associate myself with and which I would associate myself with feeling a sense of relaxation and escapism with. Because they're just not exactly what I'm looking for, maybe....

Interviewer - In your experience, how do elements like lighting, sound and overall layout of a club contribute to a feeling of escape?

DJO2 - I think they're absolutely essential. To start with the lights, it's definitely a very important element. Whether they're coloured lights or not, there are engineers who are employed specifically to handle lighting in a club... I think this is very much warranted because it significantly enhances the experience when you're in a club with a good lighting arrangement,

good use of colours, maybe certain movements, maybe certain placements of lights, maybe something dynamic and synced to music or to movements.... It definitely adds to the experience... the second aspect you mentioned is sound, right? And layout. Sound and layout... So in terms of sound, definitely perhaps the most important part of a nightclub. Second to the actual building, I guess... And the next in line would probably be the DJ because they're delivering the output of the speakers, essentially...

So yes, I think if you go into a nightclub and you're met with a well-tuned system, at the right volume, equalised correctly, that's a very important aspect. ...Especially if it's set up in such a way that wherever you are in the club, whether you're in the middle of the dance floor on the left side or the right side, the sound system is set up in such a way that there's good coverage all around. That's definitely going to make it better...

Because that's an important aspect, I feel, because if there are these dead zones on a dance floor, it might result in people not feeling so immersed. Because on the sides, it may be a bit quieter and there may be more people speaking... as a result, they don't really get so locked in to an extent... And then in terms of layout, of course, it's very important. The vicinity to the DJ and the visibility, being able to see the DJ is an important aspect, I would say... Not essential, but I think if the DJ is set up on the same level as the dance floor, rather than being at an elevated stage, this helps a lot with the immersiveness and how you feel... It's much easier to get into it if you're much closer and you're seeing what the DJ is doing and whatever.

Interviewer - Have you come across any design decisions in nightclubs that, in your opinion, maybe break this immersive and escapist experience?

DJO2 - Could an example be an elevated VIP area? Definitely, definitely. That's probably one of the biggest ones for me. I mean, I do agree with the freedom to give patrons the option to spend more money, to be more at comfort... but I feel in terms of the immersiveness and just the whole environment contributing to this concept of escapism, I don't think that having a separated VIP area or an elevated VIP area specifically is a good idea... It kind of puts people on a different level and I think there needs to be a sense of unity in a nightclub to contribute to that sense of escapism.

Interviewer - And do you think, like the elevated VIP area for example, does it affect the experience for the people who are in the VIP or does it also affect the experience for the people who are in the general admission, so to speak?

DJO2 - I think it affects both in the sense that for the VIP paying customers, for them it's kind of what they're seeking. For them, their definition of attending a club night and enjoying it, for them this is a big aspect of their enjoyment. Well, I think the people who are on general entry or normal VIP, I guess that depends person to person how much it might affect them....But I guess everyone would prefer that everyone is on the same level and I have heard this feedback before from Maltese club nights in the past, which after introducing the VIP tiered system, a lot of the regular club night goers started to feel that it was taking away from what the club night used to offer before when everyone was kind of on the same level.

Interviewer - Alright, so do you think that hosting events in off-site or remote locations enhances the sense of escapism?

DJO2 - Yes, I definitely agree. I think the main contributor to this is that in Malta there are a lot of events which are taking place in nightclubs, which as one would expect should be the case because that's what clubs are for... But I think for one to set themselves apart a bit and to spark a bit more interest, it's good to be a bit more creative in this sense and use venues which have not been used before or which have been used before years back. So once again you spark that sense of interest and create a sense of excitement.

People in the lead up to your event are naturally more exciting because it's something they are not familiar with. And this after all is meant to contribute to the feeling of escapism because people are coming in with a better mindset, feeling that they're paying for something which they've haven't done many times before... So they may be more inclined to just look forward to it and spread the happiness and excitement amongst friends...

Interviewer - Alright, so now how would you describe the difference in atmosphere between underground and commercial venues?

DJO2 - I think the main factor would be from the music side. But if your question is more targeted towards club designs and layouts, I think commercial venues are more likely to have segregated areas, maybe VIP, VVIP, backstage for example... Also in terms of lighting, I think that can make a very big difference. For example, commercial events might use brighter shades, for example blues and greens. Whereas underground events might use dim reds or very dim blues or purple for example.

Interviewer - So are there any nightclubs whose architectural design has stuck out to you after visiting something that is still memorable to you, even though maybe you visited quite a while ago, could be abroad or local once again?

DJO2 -If I were to use a local example, I would say one thing which stood out to me a lot was a DJ stand made purely out of concrete at a club called Mute, which was designed purposely with the intention of DJs being able to use their tables without having the issues of vibrations, which would ultimately cause feedback and disturb the performance of the DJs. And this was done by someone who was big into nightlife, who is also an architect...

He had explained this to me, how they had specifically made the DJ stand to keep it as solid as possible, because normally DJ stands which are not fixed into the ground tend to suffer from feedback as a result of the vibrations caused by the sound systems... And abroad, if I had to give one example from abroad, I think I would mention that same venue I touched on earlier, Parkdale Forum, the amphitheatre area, but another area which I really liked was the use of shipping containers, and the fact that the venue was kind of set up in an area which is like a shipment

sorting facility with extremely high ceiling, but kind of also maintaining an open air feel and just being surrounded by shipping containers.

Interviewer - Alright, so now I'm going to kind of move on to a separate part of the interview which deals with specific case studies of local venues. So I'm going to list four venues to you, and I want you to rank them in terms of their ability to create a sense of escapism for guests, with the first obviously being the one which can create the most escapist experiences in your opinion, and the last being the least to a certain extent. So the venues are Beach Haven, Liquid, Truth, and Offsite Locations.

DJO2 – Beachhaven, I would say is one of the better all-rounder clubs on the island, since it offers, it is one of the few places actually in Malta which offers the opportunity to start the party outdoors and move the party inside, which I think that can significantly contribute to the feeling of escapism, because you're immersing yourself early...for example in the outdoor area, and as you're going through the day, you kind of are aware that you're going to move inside, so during the day it can be taken a bit more relaxed, and then later on you know that you can kind of enter into the indoor space, which might feel a bit more immersive, since usually there may be less people indoors, and it's more closed, and it's a nice space with a big dance floor, with a good sound system...

The next one was Liquid, right? Now, Liquid I would say, yes, it very much contributes to this escapism, and the reason being I would say is that, first of all, most people know it's one of the longest standing clubs on the island, similar to Beach Haven actually, but obviously this is a bit more of a different setting indoors, because it's a bit more underground orientated, and it's intended as a club, whereas Beach Haven was more like a discotheque style... so Liquid at one entrance, you're greeted in like a dark room, once you go inside you realise it's very bare bones, just a great sound system, an aquarium, and the necessities such as a bar, and toilets, but then if you have a look at the dance floor, it's just a plain dance floor, and my point here is that they don't really need to go above and beyond and try to be something different... I think their selling point is in the bare bones nature of it, people who go there know what to expect by now, they focus on what's important, a good sound system, and they take purpose to try to cater towards a more underground type of culture... which I think from the escapism side it's much easier to feel that sense of escapism in an underground feel, I think people who identify with the underground are more likely to be more curious about music, and be more curious to hear music which they haven't heard before, but which might be like a sub-genre they like..

And truth right, somewhere like truth I would say for me personally, somewhere like that is not a place where I could attend and feel a sense of escapism... first of all it's situated in the nightlife part of Malta, which as we know does not attract quality tourism... and I would say it's a nice area overall;... which first of all adds to the aspect, because the process of getting there and parking your car or arriving is not as good as if you were going to a club which is specifically located in a specific locality for example, other than that it has more of a bar-like feel, with lots of high tables and high chairs... the bar being accessible from the road and pavement for example, so that attracts a lot of patrons just coming for a drink rather than people who are coming to get lost in the music for example.. even the choice of interior décor... a lot of focus on luxury spirits, promoting champagnes, if somebody orders a champagne they're making it fleshy and bringing sparklers and bringing the bargainers to deliver it to their tables...so a place like that I would say

does not contribute to this feeling of escapism at all for me... but on the other hand you might have people who like to indulge in spending a lot of money on high-end spirits for example, but for them that process of spending and the process of the bar guys bringing the bottles to their table and making them feel special can contribute I guess to a sense of escapism, because at that moment you're leaving behind maybe things which are stressing you out, like the thought of work or whatever... and then when it comes to other venues like as you mentioned Fort St. Elmo, Fort St. Angelo, or places which are used for secret location events as an example, I think those are definitely the biggest contributors to this feeling of escapism... first of all because you know from the get-go that it's going to be at least a different experience than usual... maybe you might know that it might be similar to something you've experienced before... because you might have been to that place three years ago, but at least it kind of cuts through the normal day-to-day repetitiveness of certain club nights or whatever.

Interviewer - So, how would you rank them, the four? So, with the first being the most and the last one being the least.

DJO2 - First would be the secret locations or the regularly used locations. Second, I would say Beach Haven, but that's more of a just a personal preference because I think, for example, somewhere like Liquid is somewhere which I feel really contributes to this sense of escapism, but Beach Haven is somewhere which I just associate myself more because of the style of music which I prefer....

So, that place that I would have, I would put Liquid and the fourth place would be Truth. I think also Beach Haven is the fact that, I mean, we're most people, at least our circle, are predominantly from the central area... So, I mean, the fact that it's in Xemxija there's always that long journey up... you kind of need to plan from ahead if you're drinking or if you're not drinking because you're kind of you'll catch a ride or get a cab with someone... So, you know what you're signing up for before you actually even go to the venue... Whereas somewhere like Liquid is a lot closer to where everyone lives or like Truth, which is like your stumble upon as you know, there's much less of that element of planning to an extent...

Interviewer - So, going to ask specific questions of the case studies now. So, how would you describe the overall experience of being at Beachhaven?

DJO2 - Beachaven, I think it's great. Upon entering, you're greeted by the indoor area. It's a nice seventies style place with this disconnect feel... The dance floor is like nothing you would ever see nowadays with the glass panel flooring which is, as I understand how night clubs used to be in the past ... In this club, you also have the option to kind of be around the dance floor in an elevated area, which I think in this case where everyone has a choice and it's kind of free to stay where they would like to without paying extra... I feel that that could add to the vibe rather than deterring it as would be the case if it was specifically made for the VIP area.... Because you might have some people who might be shorter for example who might opt to stay on the upper part of the dance floor, which would allow them to see the DJ for example, or hear music better, which would allow them to feel a bit more immersed... And then obviously with

Beachaven, you also have the option to go outside to the terrace on the club level which is always a nice experience being out there with the view of the sea and the open air feeling...

That's also a plus because there could be an event inside and some people could go there for a breath of fresh air or to smoke a cigarette, but it's also been used for events before and that's also a great experience because you have the opportunity to see that great view of the sea or obstructed views in front of you...

Interviewer - Are there any particular design features within Beach Haven that in your opinion really stand out when it comes to shaping that feeling of immersion or escaping the world to an extent?

DJO2 - Yeah, I think definitely for Beachaven it's got to be the long staircase down. ..That narrow staircase down to this little room that has two doors and then once you pass that you actually enter the club area. So I would say first of all the entrance, yes. And then second of all I think I would say the way the dance floor is designed with the elevated sides and how the original DJ stand is kind of on that level in a little boxed area... and there is another thing to an extent the way the dance floor is designed there it's like you really want to be on the dance floor if you're on the dance floor because it's so segregated from the rest of the club that you have to want to be there... It's out of Beach Haven sometimes where you don't even pass through the dance floor once... So I think yes, the way the dance floor is designed is a factor for sure.

Interviewer - Cool, so now moving on to Liquid how would you describe the overall experience of being at Liquid?

DJO2 - For me the overall experience of being at Liquid is, I know that if I'm going there I'm going there because I really want to want to dance and I want to feel immersed which means that I'm not looking for a night out which could be more social for example because I feel that the way the place is designed and the way it has been marketed and the way the club nights are focused towards is just to be a place to dance, a place to dance to good music with DJs in a setting with lighting which was done consciously for the type of music being played a sound system which is set up specifically for the type of music that is being played which I think cuts no corners because it's a small space with a very good sound system whereas Beachaven on the other hand while having a good sound system has quite a big floor area which some might argue that it doesn't give good enough coverage in all parts of the club whereas Liquid for example has a square shaped dance floor and speakers in every corner... aside from that it's very minimalistic as I mentioned earlier... black walls so yes I think that's the kind of place where people don't really feel they can escape It actually got stuck there for a second when you got to black walls Yes, I said the inside has black walls the downstairs is like a square with speakers on each corner and I think a club like Liquid is one of the places which I feel really contributes to this sense of escapism that has a lot to do with the brand name they've built over the years and the respect they've garnered from people and they attract people who know what to expect and who want to be there...

Interviewer - Are there any design elements like you mentioned before with the entrance, lighting, materials dance floor, decor, whatever that contribute to this sense of escapism within Liquid?

DJO2 - I think for Liquid it's more on the exterior for me it's just that building in the corner of the road which I know has been around for many many years and just knowing that some 40-50 years ago or whenever it opened people were doing the same thing inside in the sense that they would go to this club and just go to listen to music from I don't know some time in the evening and leave early in the morning and it's a lot of people associated with good memories over the years... Now in terms of indoors in terms of the design elements I do like how in somewhere like Liquid the dance floor is separate because I feel that it allows you to see the DJ from all areas of the dance floor which is good whether you're short whether you're tall and sometimes people do like to analyse how a DJ is moving or dancing during a set so it kind of puts the DJ a bit more visible to the crowd so that is a design element I like The other part I think is that the square dance floor is good rather than being irregularly shaped .

Interviewer - Alright, so now moving on to Truth Can you describe the overall experience of being at Truth?

DJO2 - I think with Truth it's an easy going space where you're more inclined to go there if you just want to go out for a couple of hours have a couple of drinks speak to some people smoke some cigarettes outside I think the experience for example is made different by the fact that it's typically free to enter whereas the other clubs you mentioned are typically attended by people for ticketed events which I think a good point here is that ticketed events have to contribute a sense of escapism because people are more financially committed to an extent you're cutting out a certain type of person by introducing tickets because you're cutting out people who might not assign a value of paying 10-15 euros for an event which really isn't their cup of tea whereas those who would at least go as far as buying a ticket might be the people who are more curious so to continue on through the free entry aspect it's just a place to go for a drink I don't really see it as a place to dance listen to great music in fact there are other factors related to this concept of it being a free entry place which affects the experience for example, with a place being free entry you have a flow of people coming in and out all the time and maybe more people people speaking more as they're walking in which I think just hinders the overall experience that doesn't really contribute to the feeling of escapism..

Interviewer - are there any design elements hidden throughout like layout, entrance, materials lighting, circulation, whatever that contributes this sense of escapism or lack there?

DJO2 - to a certain extent I wouldn't say so to be honest I think it's a very bar-esque place but maybe certain design decisions taken towards it being more catered towards a bar space I guess takes away from the sense of escapism that you feel when you're entering a pre-designed at least club space to a certain extent...

Interviewer - Now to move on to the last part what are your thoughts on events held in off-site, secret or temporary locations?

DJO2 - they're typically more likely to spark an interest... it's usually involved a process to get there so you're more likely to book a taxi to get to and from there first of all... they might not give you the chance to enter with a personal vehicle they might not tell you the location until the last day for example... so I think from the get-go... these kind of aspects are really contributing to what type of experience you're expecting to have... it might make a person more inclined to make less plans in the lead-up to these kind of events because they'd rather stay home most of the night and save money to spend on taxis at night or to spend money on more things for the night... for example I would say they cut through the usual sameness...

Interviewer - you touched upon this a bit but how does the journey to the venue and the actual act of discovering the space affect the sense of escapism to a certain extent?

DJO2 -I think it's just a certain element of excitement I guess... when you're entering a new space which is set up accordingly for the event... which you're expected to attend and you enter this new space which you've never seen before which has a DJ stand set up and a good sound system and lighting set up and it's just amplifying the experience ...especially for me as someone who enjoys clubbing... for me these kind of settings are a great are just exciting for me what better than putting a nice sound system in a great space and just being able to enjoy that moment with friends with the music...

Interviewer - In your opinion which are the kind of architectural elements or spatial design decisions that really contribute to the sense of escapism within nightclub spaces?

DJO2 - I feel like there's something I'm forgetting to mention here I think one of the most important parts is the dancefloor how it's designed and where it's situated in respect of a lot of things in relation to the bars in relation to the bathrooms you want to have a space which is a good enough size to have enough people first of all, to keep it comfortable but also enough people for it to be a big enough event that as a result of there being hundreds of attendees you feel a bit more immersed because you're all on the dancefloor together everyone's there to enjoy the music that contributes a lot to the feeling of escapism so dancefloor is a big factor I'm struggling to think of others to be honest...

Extract From Data Analysis

Interview Text	Initial Code	Focused Coding	Main Theme	Sub Theme
I tend to seek specific nightclubs that I know what to expect in terms of music. But aside from that, I also obviously favour the nightclubs, which for me, I feel more attracted to maybe in the sense of how they're designed and what kind of decor they have	Prioritises music, then venue design/decoration in escapist appeal	music and escapism	EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	EXPERIENTIAL DYNAMICS
Marrakesh Club at Gianpula Village is a beautiful, large club, which is surrounded by trees and other plants... As soon as you go in, you feel somewhat you're in this kind of space, which is, first of all, unique in the sense of there aren't many clubs like this on the island...	Cites Marrakesh's biophyllical design as welcome within local context	biophilic design	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	MATERIALITY
I think they're absolutely essential. To start with the lights, it's definitely a very important element. Whether they're coloured lights or not, there are engineers who are employed specifically to handle lighting in a club...	Emphasises lighting as fundamental palette and mood setter	lighting as escapism trigger	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	ATMOSPHERE
So in terms of sound, definitely perhaps the most important part of a nightclub. Second to the actual building, I guess...	sound is second most important factor in nightclub environment	lighting as escapism trigger	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	ATMOSPHERE
I feel, because if there are these dead zones on a dance floor, it might result in people not feeling so immersed. Because on the sides, it may be a bit quieter and there may be more people speaking... as a result, they don't really get so locked in to an extent...	importance of avoiding acoustic "dead spots"	acoustic dead spots and lack of immersion	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM + EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	ATMOSPHERE

Participant DJO3 – DJ and Organiser

Interviewer – What role does architectural design play in shaping the nightclub experience?

DJO2 - Personally, I think it plays a massive role... but I wouldn't say it's the beginning and end of escapism, by which escapism is determined... reason being, you could have incredible spatial design and poor feeling.. the poor achievement of escapism...and very poor spatial design and insane aspect of escapism... one of the reasons behind it is that escapism, if you're looking at it in the most...how am I going to say...amplified form in a nightclub experience, the truth is that it comes from people taking drugs...

So if you look at it in the most, yes, there is a form of escapism, but for the most part, and I know I can't really mention this... but we'll find a point from it... I think the escapism comes from people locking in and going down that road... we're going to take escapism as a branch of that...I think it's very important and something which, I think you're correctly going down, to be able to service the arts and in one way escapism through design... but it isn't... it isn't the only factor Like, for example, an example, the Globe Theatre, Shakespeare... that, I think, is the perfect example for how art and spatial design can merge together... It's purely designed for the experience, for the artistic experience... This is what we're trying to get to... design which services experience.... but it works, one, because the experience is curated... and then, OK, yes, the spatial design is like a servant... servant... that's the word I'd describe it. I think it's a servant... It serves. So, is it it? No. But can it amplify it to the next level?

Interviewer - Can you recall a specific event or a venue that you've been to, both locally or abroad, where the architecture had a particularly strong impact on your overall experience? It's not necessarily related to escapism, but on your overall experience in that day or event, whatever.

DJO3 - Mela. Good question... Abroad, I think a big one was.. we were at KNTXT launch in Antwerp. And it was a stadium, literally... It was like a 20,000 capacity stadium... And they made it like a big room... But it had a very intimate vibe... It was a big, big room... Like Marcel Dettman and Ben Klock... You know, Charlotte DeWitte when she had just started... It was like that time, that era... That stuck out to me....So I don't know... From the spatial aspect, it was very present.... the size of it was really... I think that over there was the definition of big room... and big room, if it's something that you mentioned, it comes with a whole... It constitutes a lot of different feelings... the entertainment side of it, the atmosphere side of it. I can try to find it for you.

Because I think from a design perspective, this is Radion... Radion in Antwerp....radion in Antwerp has a very unique design.... It has an amphitheatre aspect... Where when you walk into the room, you're maybe two hundred and a half stories upwards... the DJ is centred to the bottom...And then getting there is... Okay, a lot of different levels...Levels, circuits...and it's maybe like a pie chart... Imagine it was a pie chart... You have a slice like this, and it's all cut... that was an incredible vibe for the event... its purely the design focus... Served, like I said before, to achieve the intended result... So the entertainment and the design worked hand-in-hand and it took it to the other level. I think that's the whole plan...

Malta.. I call it a Gianpula main room...Where you have that same kind of feeling... the dance floor is a bit lower..t he dance floor is lower... tou have that amphitheatre. And it links back to this Globe Theatre vibe... I think when you circulate a place, especially when it's like... Because we mentioned the big room... then when it's in the big room, you kind of go out of the frame... And this one is like a manageable area.... when you create that circular aspect, and you create that layering... The focus is like... Since it's circular, the focus is always on... There's something human about gravity, man... Pointing down and even looking up sometimes... when you shift the focus, you create an experience... You alter something in the mind... The perspective is altered... When you alter the perspective, you alter the feeling as well.... This is like being in front of the DJ compared to being at the back... I mean, you're in the same room as that... Maybe five, six metres, ten metres away.... But it's escapism. Being in front and being at the back... You could be in front and be doing nothing.. And you could be at the back and be really into it... But tendency-wise, people are drawn to it.... I think the majority would get that feeling in the front, rather than at the back.... Yes, I'd say abroad, this Antwerp stadium, Radion in Amsterdam, and Gianpula main room, I think is the best.... Yes, it's a great club.

In Gianpula there are some great clubs, like Marrakech for example.... Gianpula is a treehouse... I was at a treehaus last weekend... you don't get that feeling at all... I think ever since they covered it, they ruined it a bit for me, treehaus...

When it was open air, it felt a lot more special... Now you still get the feeling of the trees, like behind, with the lights, that's pretty cool, but the roof ruined it a bit for me...

It feels like, you know that, you don't see it through the camera, but it feels like a wannabe temporary vibe... It's very cold, and when they put the blue lights, it gives a certain vibe... during Sweelys set for example, I wasn't connecting at all... if you're thinking about the aspect of design, like we said at the party... it's wide.... Yeah, yeah. Instead of being elongated, that's the worst, in my opinion... When you bring people like a herd, instead of like a queue, you can't really say, then it depends, people... It depends on a lot of things, like the lighting, the openness..... Globe theatres, yeah? That I think is the pinnacle of how escapism can be achieved through design.

Interviewer - So, we've touched upon this a bit, but what does the concept of escapism mean to you personally? If you had to define it in your own way, from your own experiences, and your own knowledge, there's no right or wrong answer.

DJO3 - I think escapism is the activity of absorbing a message sent by somebody else, normally in the realm of art and creativity, which, knowingly or unknowingly, brings people out of their conscience into a different reality..

Interviewer - Do you feel a sense of leaving the outside world when you're entering a club, and if so, what elements contribute to that shift?

DJO3 - I think there is an element of it... I don't think you need a club for it... I do it in the car, when I used to be at work, so there's always that element of drifting, kind of, you know? But

when you're in a club, you allow yourself to just completely drift away with certain people. And what was the second part of your question?

Interviewer - What elements contribute to that shift?

DJO3 - I think the elements are like it being the place for it... That you're going there, and you know you lock in, you're with a friend, you go buy a drink, and then, it's not even said, that you're going to just stand there and say nothing.... And that, I think, is when you're just in your zen mode, kind of, you know, relaxing

Interviewer - How do elements like lighting, sound, and layout contribute to a feeling of escape within a club setting?

DJO3 - All super important... Light, I think, is fundamental....I think it's probably one of the most important aspects, yeah... Because it's the palette, no? It's the backdrop, it's the colour, it's the mood.... It's like when you think about art, you know, like Van Gogh, and Naft, whatever, interior design, these periods of design.... The colour is the palette, it sets the mood... and in this way, like, when you're trying to design a spatial experience, you need a mood... So, you need colour. In the past, I'm not sure, before all of this was invented, I'm sure they even had their own ways of, like, creating textiles and, with this purpose

So, the colour is important... Even when you close your eyes, you always have that hue, no? Like, if it's dark, the intention is darkness... If it's warm light, so there are people who are masters of this.

Sound, I'd say, is secondary... I mean, you would hope that there's good sound, as you would hope that if you go to a restaurant, there's good food.... If, I mean, if you go to a restaurant and the food is mid, but you're feeling cold, what are you going to complain about more? More that you're feeling cold.

I mean, the food, that's it.... You go to a restaurant for the food, but, like, you know what I mean? So, there are things which are, like, I think a bit more important, that people don't really think about.... As people are ready to lift the sound up, you know? The average person, not the average person, I think the 98% who go to a club will say, f*** it, you know? A big part of them won't realise.... And then after, they'll be like, they'll go to another club and they'll be like, ah, the sound is really good, yeah? And then they think about, like, ah, the sound is not good, you know what I mean?

Layout is important... Layout is important... If you don't have a space, you can't do anything.... It's not going to work... so, if the space doesn't facilitate the intended purpose, it's not going to work... If you have a room which fits 10 people and you want to pack 15, 50 people into it, it's not going to work... You need to think about it.

So, everything starts from zero. Physically, the physical architecture, the space, not space, the physical design. The four walls.... The four walls is where you start from.

Interviewer - Have you come across any design decisions in clubs that, in your opinion, break the immersive or escapist atmosphere, so doing the opposite of what we're speaking about?

DJO3 - This, I have one which is like, I'm unsure about, 50-50 about... There is other, for example, one concept which I think breaks it is having a facility area close to the dance floor... Be it an exit room, an emergency door, be it a bathroom, be it a bar. Agreed. When you have traffic, you know, which is off-centre, kind of... But, if it's a bar, there are ways of mitigating this because I think you can flip it very quickly... If it's done poorly, it's going to f*** it.... If it's done wisely, you can enhance it.... Like if you have a toilet nearby and it's tucked away, and it's low-lit, and it's smooth, you're going to enhance the feeling because there's comfort... It's a commodity. A bar, let's test.... A bar, if you get it right, like Shelter in Amsterdam, for example, you know how the bar is.... You have the dance floor, then you have Queen Victoria style bar with the hanging lights, warm lights, all that.... It's fast. It's great, oh. But then if you go to another club, enough.

For example, there's a million of examples in malta... none are coming to mind... But where people are waiting in queue... On the dance floor... Disaster.

Iktar, the movement of people, you know, that's the biggest antipatija, yeah? When you're trying to escape.... And you're on the dance floor, people are walking behind you. And you're there, people are hobbling you... It's hard to just relax.... If everybody's pushing you from behind, and you're never really settled on the dance floor, you know what... I think when you're designing a place, you're keeping a mind movement. Like, literally, like a traffic junction.... If it's all f***** up, you've ruined it.... It goes back to the initial design.

Interviewer - Do you think that hosting events in off-site or remote locations enhances the sense of escapism?

DJO3 - I don't think so, no... I don't think it makes a difference... For example, if you have to think about a place, like, iconic, like DC10, or Amnesia, these, I mean, people have gone and lost their minds, and it's still there, kind of thing, you know? So, I mean, it's good when it's remote, maybe, because people get a bit more primal, like, you know? You have to, like, write it in a formal way. People... I don't think it really makes a difference...

Interviewer - Not even events, like, which are secret locations or stuff like that for you?

DJO3 - Not really. I think sometimes it works against, to be honest.

Interviewer - How so?

DJO3 - Because when... When people have that... They need to settle, kind of thing, it depends.. You know how it is, like, you've done those events, like, you've seen some spots, yeah? You

know that there are some where it works, and people feel comfortable... And there are others where there's something happening... There isn't that trust with the place yet... And they haven't, they don't settle into it... The average person.... This is excusing the people who are taking drugs and who are up for it, you know? For sure, for sure, for sure. Because this is another important, like, condition.... Escapism, but for who, you know? Like, for the average Joe? Yeah. Or for the person seeking it? Like, this is an insanely important aspect, I think.... It's like, you know, like, f***** comedy or art, like, or music, you know? Like, are we making music to arouse or to educate the person who isn't seeking education? Or for the people who are... Or for the person who's looking for it and now wants to be even more... And when you're doing it for the first, there are certain aspects which you take into play, which, you know, they're a bit more, like, on intro, on introduction... I don't think it really makes a big difference, but... I don't know... I don't think it makes a difference.... There's too many, like, conditions.

Interviewer- How would you describe the differences in atmosphere between underground venues and commercial nightclubs?

DJO3 - The difference in atmosphere? I think the place makes it. Obviously, when you're designing something for a commercial basis, you're gonna start reducing it of certain elements which are prescribed with the underground.... But with that being said, Say, for example, that club, Robert Johnson Club in Munich. OK, OK. You know, it's the one that's small, the speakers are, like, lilac, the boot is bright yellow... Typically, you wouldn't really associate it with an underground club, but it's iconic...

So, like, if I have to think locally, like a club like Toy Room, for example, but if you have to look at the aesthetic, I've never been.... But they're going for something which is much more poppy.... your base, that it's more... A pop, exactly, in a cheap way, but it's pop. Much cheaper.... You wouldn't associate it.

But let's say now that space had to be sold as an underground club... I think the comments would switch about it... It wouldn't become... It's no longer looked at commercial anymore.

It's looked at as a Robert Johnson type of club.... Exactly. Like Gianpula, the same...

It could be Gianpula main room, where you have these f***** techno freaks going at it, and it feels like that... amphitheatre vibe, or you could have the boozy bingo.... Exactly. But there's still escapism there, kind of.... There's still escapism, because I don't think as well escapism is our version of escapism.... There are many definitions to it.

There are many... Escapism, unfortunately, it could be the pure version, it could be the... I teach you the hard way version, escapism.... There could be escapism for good intent, escapism for bad intent.... You know, people abusing drugs, or abusing alcohol, or, you know, like, whatever... To escape, and it's leading them down a bad road.... There's escapism, which is honest escapism....

So, no, I don't think commercially or underground-wise there is a difference.... I think it purely depends on, you know, that point at that time...

The factors which we discussed in the beginning working in synergy to achieve a result. And you mentioned them in order....

There's the layout, the sound, the colouring, the lighting.... So, commercially and underground, I don't think it's an aspect....

Interviewer - In your opinion, from a design perspective, you don't really think that there are maybe spatial or architectural features that may be separating these clubs?

DJO3 - No. Like, if you have to look at Liquid, for example, it's just a room. Yeah. And if you have to look at, you know, a commercial club.

Like in... Havana. I mean, isn't it like kind of a bigger version of... I would say that there are... Havana, no. Havana's different, with the bar in the middle.

Because both of them want the same results. Yeah. I mean, as a business, they want to enhance how many people buy drinks.

So, what I was going to say is, yes, possibly, because a commercial venue would want to drive people to the bar. So, an underground venue is the same. Same thing, for sure. I mean, both of them need a dance floor, both of them need a fish in the bar... Exactly. And both of them are looking for a pleasant... Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer - Alright, so, this, to be honest, you kind of touched upon, but I'll ask you again, whether there are any nightclubs whose architectural design, or specific design, has kind of resonated with you long after visiting?

DJO3 - Yeah, you know, my, like, ideal is something like space, or like amnesia. Alright. You know, where you have this amphitheathervibe, but you have that open-air aspect... So, it's a bit terraced. And then you have the floor, like main room...

Yeah, yeah, exactly. Main room. For me, that's... Main room on a bigger, a bit of a bigger scale...

Interviewer - Now I'm going to move on to another section of the interview which basically is going to deal with some case studies.

So, first of all, I'd like you to rank the following four venues in terms of their ability to create escapist experiences, with the first one being the most and the last one obviously being the least. So the venues are Beach Haven, Liquid, Truth in Parcheville and Offsite Locations.

DJO3 I think, I think, I'm going to rank them from least to most. Okay, okay. Least Truth... But we're speaking about the full package.... The space with the name, with the history... The least Truth. Reason being, it's not made, it's not set up for it... That's purely a commercial, commercial

setting... Second least, I'd say is the Offsite....And then the most are the intimate ones. So I'd say, third is Beach Haven, and most is Liquid....Liquid is the Mecca, that's where people go to escape... Beach Haven is where people go and then escape... Offsite locations is where I think people do the same, go and, depends on the vibe, escape.... So these are the conditions, like, one is kind of, if you wanted to get it.... The other one is, go, get it... It's not like, part and parcel as much, but it's there... Number three is, you either get it, you either don't....That's what I feel... You either get it great, or you're kind of enjoying it... It depends, there's a lot of factors that go into it as well.

Interviewer - So, now to kind of, I want to ask you about each space.... So, how would you describe the overall experience of being at Beach Haven, from your experience?

DJO3 - From my experience, I think it feels very homey, very iconic. And classic, timeless...And when something is timeless, artistically, it's perfect for me... Because it allows you to have a consistent experience....So that timeless aspect is like, you know, eating your nanna's chicken, for example....Nothing beats it... It always has the same, it always works. There are times where it's better, times where it's worse....Somewhere you take it for what it is... There's shades of it, you know what they are, and it's not going to change. I think that, in a club, is really important....That familiarity....Familiarity, consistency... You know what you were getting before you even arrived... It has walls, like, not only defined physically, but also artistically, conceptually... It's not going to give you more than what you're looking for, kind of. It's not going to give you less.

Interviewer - How does the spatial layout influence the way you kind of move through the venue?

DJO3 - Spatial layout I think is great, man. I think the spatial layout is great. Because, I think it's great...It's not amazing, but it's good... Because there's different areas for different things... And it gives you space to breathe between them as well... I think nowadays, in the way it's being altered a bit, maybe it's losing its shape... Because the DJ was never supposed to be where people are doing it...So that's the first mistake.... And when you put the DJ there, all of a sudden, you've changed up the whole layout.... So the bar at the back becomes stupid....The toilets become problematic.... Because it's so close to the DJ....Everything is an issue then... But in its intended purpose... And I feel it should remain like that...I don't know why someone had the idea to change it... F*** it, man... Put the DJ up there... If its designed for the DJ to be there.. Up there... Go for it.

The feeling of the club makes more sense like that... Because you remove that pressure point next to the bathrooms... That staircase next to the bathrooms.

Beachaven layout-wise gets a bad name because of the set up... Because of the way it's been changed... But if it had to be as intended, like for example Beachaven would be beautiful if instead of those blue and red lights, you have to introduce hues... You have those orangey on the warmer side... And you have to create warmth in there. ..Because it's so damp... You can't cold in it... And a lot of promoters, they don't think about the design... Gabe comes in rushed... And you make it colder... You make the experience colder... And then you pair it with how much

drugs people are taking... So you end up getting gremlins. If you're warm in the place, you have that dance floor... Because people think you're not going to be on high level with them... But that's not true... Because you have the balcony. So there you have people who are around you... And then you have people who are on the dance floor... Who wants to get away... Has the toilets there... The bar there... The other bar there.... It's perfect... You can control your immersion to a certain extent.

I'm sure that the person who designed Beach Haven, the architect, was someone who knew what he was doing... And he would have probably gone there, near Godwin, in the f****** 70s... They would have been with a malja till here... Cigarru.. jew cigarett.... And they would have been f****** thinking about it properly.

Interviewer - Are there any design features within Beach Haven? Like the entrance, the dance floor, the decor, whatever... That stand out in shaping your sense of immersion at Beach Haven?

DJO3 - I think what sticks out too, my man, is the sofa. The layout of the... You can chill... And you can dance... You can have that socialising aspect... Which is cold. Which is very like... We met just now... And then we can have the... You know, maybe this is the fifth time we met. All your friends... So I like having that... It's a place with open arms, man... It creates, it allows for experiences... From very different experiences.... When you're designing something, you have to think about everyone... People who are about to break up.... People who have just met.... All facets of life... And if you manage to create a space which ticks the boxes for many people, then you have a very nice synergy... And it's working.

Interviewer - So now to move on to Liquid. How would you describe the overall experience of being at Liquid?

DJO3 - Direct... Functional... Direct and functional... And I think that's the intended purpose... There's no frills... Very different to Beachaven in the sense that you're not there to make people feel at home... And it's like a traditional, classic style club... Underground club.. Where people go to dance... And the focus is on the dance floor.

Interviewer - How does the spatial organisation affect the way you move or kind of experience the club?

DJO3 - I think it's quite simple. I think like the on the periphery there's the facilities and then mainly it's floor... You go in... Bar... Floor... Toilet... sometimes the toilet's a bit annoying because it's very close to the DJ... So if you're in that area Like I said before, it's a bit tough.

Interviewer - Are there any design elements within Liquid that contribute to the sense of escapism at Liquid in your opinion? So this could be like actual design or even layout wise?

DJO3 - I think the fact that the DJ was maintained in its intended purpose. It's like you're looking at a brick wall... And you feel helpless in front of a wall, you know? So the fact that it's taller than you... You're looking at it but you're not... So you know when you're standing in front but then you realise listen, I'm looking at nobody in front so you're looking at the side all of a sudden... I think that's like it helps... When you eliminate reasons for people to not go into that world you're going to create much more escapism... And one reason which is contributing is that boom there's a wall, right? The DJ is there... He's not looking at you... You're not looking at him... He doesn't give a f*** about you... He's looking at heads... When you're one-on-one you have those people who are standing in front you know... Okay, you can escape but it's a bit different... Then again but it's these things, no?

Interviewer - How would you describe the overall experience of being a truth?

DJO3 - Commercial. You feel like it's all set up for commercial. So... I wouldn't compare it to any of the two... I think it is influenced because the people who designed it probably went or not even... Beachaven there's the aspect of the discotheque and you're designing it as a discotheque... Liquid is the aspect of a club so I want to design it as a club... Truth is like you got you just have a you just want to make something kind of, you know?

There's nothing to it. Like, I mean... They try... They try a lot... Truth is great... It works for what it needs to work... It's not going to be anything more than it needs to be... I think truth was much cooler when it had the cage in the middle... Was it smart? No. There was actually like a vibe... There was a focus... People spread around it... So that's really cool... But then when you make it it doesn't work... You have the door... No... You will never get people. Alright, they're on it... They're drinking heavily... They're going to speak to girls. But when you have that flow directly in there... Because you walk onto the dance floor.. You can't make a club in a room... Like, to do it they have to rethink the whole design... They probably need to put it at the back... The DJ needs to be as backwards as possible.... So you're removing and making it as far away from the DJ as possible.... the bar remains as it is but you can't have the DJ here and the door here... It doesn't make sense because like we were saying before about the whole aspect of flow... You're on the dance floor and people are walking in and walking out. ..Even the fact that it's free entrance so you have that constant turnover of people...

And the light is on... It's all meant for it. In Paceville it works for what it's meant I guess.

Interviewer - how does the spatial design influence the experience? Especially in relation to the level of immersion or escape that you feel within that space.

DJO3 -Spatial design... for the experience... nothing... Because I don't think there is really a spatial design... I think it's by consequence... Like you created a space so there is an element of spatial design... But I don't think that people try to design a space... I think they try to fit in everything into what they had... I don't think there was much thought behind it.

Interviewer - Are there any design elements within truth that contribute to the lack of escapism or lack thereof to a certain extent? Could be lighting, circulation, choice of materials?

DJO3 - Everything is illuminating and there is no synergy between them. Number one you have a TV you have the fish tank you have the lights you have the spotlights under lights bar lights it's like you go into it's like you went into a f***** showroom kind of, you know?
Even the sofas are in the middle kind of..

Something to me with truth as well is the fact that all of the walls are glass on the outside so when you're actually inside people can look at you from the street and you can look at them and it's just it doesn't feel like you can actually you know people are literally looking at you from the street... It's a very weird experience for me at the start but it's not a like when you're there you want to you want to be lost a bit, you know?

It's not designed for it... But then again escapism comes in various shapes and forms, man. Like people you can try to create a fairytale people are meeting on Tinder nowadays you know? And what's escapism for us to an extent could be like in a commercial nightclub some person's idea of escapism is I'm ordering a bottle of dom perignon they're coming with the sparklers and for this night I'm feeling like I'm the king and that's how they escape so it's very personal as a concept...

It could be someone very shy and the fact that he made that step and he actually went to a so-called club is escapism... like we said there is music for the listener who isn't listening and there's music for the appreciator...

Interviewer - Alright, so now to move on on off-site locations what are your thoughts on events held in off-site, secret or temporary locations?

DJO3 - Like I think it's great... It's not for me so much anymore.. I'm a type of person that I like consistency.. so I wouldn't really opt for it...I feel it's too much like perhaps maybe if I was in a group and everyone was buzzing for it... maybe it would be a bit more up for it...
Like I'm off it, bro... Like if I go out to eat I know what I'm eating...I'm getting a bit more adventurous...,,Why not go for something which you know is going to be good? There's a level of uncertainty and not hassle involvement....And maybe I wouldn't feel like that level of involvement....More than involvement I would say commitment... It's like you don't know where the location is.... Like when you're in a car and you might break your bumper to get into the place... Do I need all of this to listen to some music? It's great but like am I free for the next three days? It needs to be one of those things... I don't know I'm a bit of an extremist on that.

Interviewer - How does the journey to the venue or the act of discovering the space affect your sense of escapism or anticipation to an extent?

DJO3 - Its exciting. Like when you have excitement you have the dopamine kind of, you know and it's like it's like timber for a fire...So when there's dopamine when you get people excited

obviously then you're it's positive and you're allowing for this to happen in a better way....So I think if it's designed right if it's sold well yes, 100%.

Interviewer - So following up our conversation in your opinion which are the kind of architectural elements or spatial design decisions that really help to contribute to the sense of escapism within nightclub spaces?

DJO3 - Openness.. Colour.. intimacy.

Interviewer - Aren't they a bit conflicting? Openness and intimacy how would you...

DJO3 - They are, yes but intimacy I think is more of it feeling like a home...Openness is feeling comfortable....You know, like when something is open it means that there's space for it to breathe and you need this in anything like in any type of art you need to have like you need to have distinction between elements which allow for stuff to happen in between... So I think that's like the openness aspect people to move... You know, things happen comfortably... The bar to work comfortably... The dance floor to be it the floor... So that's what my definition of openness...

Intimacy then is despite all of this it's feeling like two stretched times... Like how the Vatican has intimacy...It's open but it's intimate... For example, Uno is open... Treehaus open but it's not intimate....So how do you achieve intimacy in an open space? That's then when you get into the crux of the design... Layering, flooring sights of vision or angles of vision...

So that's like openness and intimacy... It's true they conflict... Sometimes you find a place which works perfectly... You're like outdoor and the trees are creating an intimate vibe... You know, they're cuddling you... Like Marrakech to a certain extent I feel kind of like that... It's a big club Marrakech but the way it's designed with the DJ kind of a bit off-centre....You can go behind the DJ because there's an elevated area next to the DJ and you're kind of overlooking the dance floor...Intimacy I think is an intangible element which makes a space... And it's done in the same way.. You can't describe your mother's love kind of different to someone else's....It's a stretch... Intimacy means caring for people I think....Be it intended or be it unintended there are certain aspects which promote positivity... Yes. How is it achieved? Everything isn't maybe so angular... There's curvature... There's softer elements.

There's areas within areas which create intimacy... Areas for conglomeration kind of. So when you have all of these different aspects it's like imagine big space and then you have a smaller area up-down...Two steps... One here... One behind the bar...Like alright you know you're creating it feels a bit more tight on the bar...And that affects the overall experience on the bar... Because people are grouped as well... They're together.

This is a tough question...Very tough... It's hard to pinpoint.

It's hard to pinpoint... Like if I had to compare it to art or music there's layers you know... And you have to make sure that each layer is working on its own and it's working in synergy to other things... when you have a space Mela how many layers does this place need? Because there are

certain things which need two layers... It works... Like liquid. ..Smart and direct... It's like a certain art which is like strikes straight away... Or like music which is just like two things and it works... I think that's very direct and it hits a chord... But then when you want to go for something a bit more sophisticated or you want to create feelings which isn't boom big room or direct liquid vibe then you need to start becoming a bit more eloquent and start to consider ok people boxes like standing on that's a huge thing... I think it's great when you have boxes on the side and then people jump on them and then you have those people up there top off...

It makes a different experience... It feels intimate... It's all about the staging of bodies the way they're arranged around the space and the way they can interact with each other and also interact with the DJ you know what I mean...

And I think if you have to look at it physically the concept of perspective and positioning altitude like where are you in the club it all helps to make something work.

Extract From Data Analysis

Interview Text	Initial Code	Focused Coding	Main Theme	Sub Theme
Light, I think, is fundamental... it's the palette, the backdrop, the colour, the mood...	light sets mood as foundational design palette	importance of lighting in relation to escapism	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	ATMOSPHERE
Everything starts from zero. Physically, the four walls... that's where you start.	States physical architecture as foundational	conditional value of architecture	EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	EXPERIENTIAL DYNAMICS
facility area close to the dance floor— exit, emergency door, bathroom, bar...	Identifies service zones too near dance floor as disruptive	circulation and flow	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM + EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	SPATIAL CONDITIONS
people moving through creates disruption	circulation through dancefloor can take away from escape experiences	circulation and flow	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM + EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	SPATIAL CONDITIONS
but queue on dance floor is disaster... movement of people is biggest	Reiterates queuing through dance floor as worst circulation issue	circulation and flow	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM + EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	SPATIAL CONDITIONS
I don't think so... iconic venues like DC10 or Amnesia remain powerful...	Argues venue remoteness not essential for escapism	offsite locations + escapism	ARCHITECTURAL AND SPATIAL FEATURES	UNOFFICIAL VENUES
Not really... sometimes it works against, people need to settle... trust in place matters...	Suggests unfamiliar sites can hinder comfort and escapism	unfamiliarity and escapism	EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	FAMILIARITY
Familiarity and consistency are crucial... you know what you're getting before you arrive...	Emphasises predictability and conceptual clarity as comfort factors	familiarity and escapism	EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	FAMILIARITY
It has walls defined physically and conceptually... it won't give you more or less than expected.	Notes physical and conceptual boundaries that frame expectations	attendee expectations	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	SOCIAL AND CONTEXTUAL

Participant DJO4 – DJ and Organiser

Interviewer - So, in your view, what role do architecture and spatial design play in shaping your experience within a nightclub?

DJO4 - I mean, as a DJ, I think it's very important to create that atmosphere, that sort of encapsulates the crowd that you're playing for... as correctly said by the title of your dissertation, there is a sense of escapism that comes with nightclubs... It can come in different forms.

You can have a nightclub that's indoors and very dark and catering to a certain genre... and you can also have nightclubs that are much more vibrant and give off an outdoor, maybe more uplifting, a sense of uplift to these people for example, you can say...

So, yes, it definitely adds a lot to the experience, because apart from the music that the DJ creates and the lights that are created atmospherically towards the club, the design of it beforehand always has a unique feeling whenever you're walking into a different club... It gives it a unique feeling... Depending on how you structure the club and what flow it has, it really contributes to how effective the nights are and how powerful they are in terms of the promoter and the events management and the venue itself wants to push onto the crowd.

Interviewer - Can you recall a specific event or venue where the architecture had a particularly strong impact on your experience? This can be both locally or abroad, just from your own personal experiences.

DJO4 - I can probably give two examples. We have a club in Malta called Tigullio, which has a really interesting layout, which includes within lots of different clubs... On a good night, they could be offering different genres, so you can have that different journey through the different rooms, sort of on a holiday such as St. Patrick's or an occasion like that, where the Spinola area is very popular... Alternatively, in Malta, we're quite renowned for our nightlife in the summer months, so we look forward to our outdoor events... For me, a nice chapter of my life was going to district events, which were held both at gianpula and UNO and were always held at outdoor venues during the summer.

That was more of a contrasting vibe against Tiguglio because you have more lights while it is still at night, the open-air scenery and the lights shining on the different aspects around the club, not just within it.. sort of like the trees that we were discussing recently... It really complements the sort of music you're going for as well. I mean, if you have a darker club, I think you complement that with the music that you're going for as well, and people will appreciate that.

Interviewer - Okay, are you familiar with the concept of escapism? And what does the concept mean to you personally?

DJO4 - Correct me if I'm wrong, but escapism is like the fact that you want to try and get away from everyday problems, right? And find a sort of escape in something that stimulates you enough to obviously forget about things that are on your mind and gives you relaxation. And

most times, or not in every situation, but they can give you a social boost and in return that can obviously benefit you.

Interviewer - Do you feel a sense of leaving the outside world behind when entering a club? And if so, which elements, in your opinion, contribute to that shift?

DJO4 - Coming at this from the point of view of a DJ, so someone who's very passionate about music, yes.

As soon as I enter this environment, my initial focus goes on what is being played at the moment, whether it's something that is up my alley or not... But apart from that, it's completely different because you're walking into a club that is designed to be a different setting from what you're exposed to on the outside. So yes, definitely. I think the design of these spaces is something that contributes to that.

Interviewer - In your experience, how do nightclubs contribute to immersive or escapist experiences?

DJO4 - I think nightclubs, rightly so, have a focus on targeting your senses to try and grab your attention as much as possible. This can be done in different ways, from the architecture to the sound system to the lights to, I don't know what you'd call them, but 4D effects, which is like smoke and CO2 being pressed onto the crowd. Exactly. So through those ways, through those different methods, they're grabbing your attention, wanting you to focus on the tone that they are setting through the lights and through the music, and they really just grab your attention and want you to focus on that rather than everything else.

Interviewer - And as a follow up to that, how do elements like lighting, sound and general layout of a club space contribute to this feeling of escape?

DJO4 - I not only think that they contribute, but I would strongly believe that they're fundamental. Now, there are different levels of going about it, how many lights you can have, how big your sound system is... But as I just touched upon previously, I think grabbing your attention and having these different ways on targeting your senses is really important in creating that atmosphere that people look forward to and look for when you go into a nightclub.

Interviewer - Have you ever come across any design decisions in clubs that, in your opinion, do the opposite, so they kind of break this immersive and escapist experience?

DJO4 - From a point of view as an event organiser, I would say so, yes. There were instances where we're using, for example, a venue that is not suitable, which would be a wedding hall for a

darker event... Now, wedding halls are noted to have white walls, where in contrast, our intention for that event would be to play darker music and set that vibe for our attendees... So I think it's very important to, when you're creating the space, think about the target audience a little bit... As event organisers, we like to branch out and test different waters... But yeah, maybe there's some way of going around that and also finding a common ground where everyone would be happy, rather than just a plain white wall where lighter occasions are celebrated... But yeah, I would say that is one of the main factors, notably from my end.

Interviewer - Do you think that hosting events in off-site or remote locations enhances a sense of escapism?

DJO4 - Yes, for sure. I think just the idea of mentioning an off-the-grid or a long travel to a location creates a sense of seclusion, really a sense of detaching yourself from society.

As you travel with your friends, it gives you that camaraderie that you're travelling on this journey together and enjoying this occasion together, enjoying this detachment together, where you can let loose and enjoy your evening... So yes, definitely, those cater to it. I think, as appreciated by the general public, when we see events that are held at these areas, for example, there was one held on Comino Island... They were very well received and definitely stick out above your everyday club night, for example...

Interviewer - How would you describe the differences in atmosphere between underground and commercial venues?

DJO4 - I mean, that boils down to the culture of how it's been... I think more commercial venues nowadays are definitely brighter... They want you to celebrate things together, whereas darker venues are more intimate and they're more, while you do celebrate each other, they can be a bit personal as well if you're just dancing and focussing on the music.

I think more commercial clubs nowadays have a lot of bright lights and things that are trying to attract your attention in terms of sparklers and bottles and strobe lights on the DJ. So they really go over and about to try and grab your interest on these things, whereas maybe the darker clubs would choose to have a single spotlight on the DJ where the night light is focussing on that and the crowd are doing their thing and dancing along and just focussing on the music.

Interviewer - So from a design perspective, what are the main spatial architectural features that distinguish these two spaces?

DJO4 - I think when we go for the more underground scene, it's more of an intimate, creating smaller areas for people to interact. When you go for the more commercial routes, you'll have more open spaces. You'd cater to the commercial with sofas and tables, since the culture around that is about buying bottles and different things that are coming in large amounts rather than just

having a glass in your hand... I think with the smaller venues and more underground, when creating these rooms, it also gives you a sense that you're going around a little bit of a labyrinth on a journey, whereas in these more commercial venues, they're looking for the big room feel, which is more looking at the larger numbers with bright lights shining upon them and trying to capture those moments, whereas in the darker venues, you are focused much more on the DJ and just more intimate imagery and close-up images, for example, are very popular as well. So yeah, it's just a bit more... What's the word? Looking at the details rather than the big picture, I guess, in terms of the underground.

Interviewer - Are there any nightclubs whose architectural design has kind of stuck with you long after visiting, both local and abroad? And if so, what aspects made it stand out to you personally?

DJO4 - Off the top of my head, I think one venue that really stuck out and excelled in what it was meant to do is Marrakesh of Giamnpula... The space was designed for, obviously, that slightly larger room feel, but it also has a really interesting design in how to access areas and how areas are segregated. They chose to add, for example, areas like a pond, which is not often seen in these outdoor venues. They chose to add a lot of trees, which really brighten the vibe within, especially considering that it's an outdoor venue... And apart from that, rather than just having a DJ booth with not much attraction to it, they added an incredible sculpture behind the DJ made out of wood that is quite iconic, I would say, to be honest.

All of these things coming together really stuck out for me, considering that it's an outdoor venue... I think it's interesting if you had to go up into the VIP area as well. I remember being there when District switched to it, which was in about 2018, and I was probably a bit drunk and wandering around it at night for the first time, getting lost because there were so many winding areas and different places to explore.

Even just having a bathroom that is behind the DJ, but still accessible to all the crowd, I think is a really interesting application and use of space within the club.

That was the first year, actually, that we used it there, in fact. Because Deniz Sulta, the first one was in Phoenix. So they only used Marrakesh for one year, because then 2019 they went to Uno... Look, it has its drawbacks, Marrakesh, but I think it's one of the most interesting venues that we have to offer.

Interviewer - So how would you rank the following venues in terms of their ability to create a sense of escapism for guests, Beach Haven, Liquid, Trut, and off-site locations? Okay, let me just have a think.

DJO4 - So... Okay, I have my answers. So, from order from number one to number four, so the number one area where people can feel a sense of escapism would be a secret location.

The mystery around not knowing the name already creates that sense of a journey for people that they're going to travel to somewhere where they've never probably been before. Sometimes these

events are accompanied by, for example, shuttle buses that keep on hiding the venue, so it adds more to that element of escapism. So I would definitely put that at number one.

The second one I would do, I would choose Liquid. The reason for this is that it's a club catered towards the underground scene, in particular, maybe more techno. I think with that comes a club that's curated for a more intimate feel that is pushing towards escapism.

Now, that means darkness and a culture that... and people bring along a culture that promotes this as well.

The third one I would rank in this order is Beach Haven. Whilst also it's a night club, I think it was designed more for... more in the 80s, if I'm not mistaken, so its aesthetic is more around the discoey vibe and it has a dance floor and whatnot, like an actual lit up dance floor that doesn't work.

But why I rank this above Truth is because of its journey... You have, from you, the usual clubbing scene in Malta, which is predominantly in Attard, I guess, Ta'Qali or Paceville which are quite central areas... This one is a bit of a different one for party goers, where they have to travel to Xemxija.

So this always comes with a sense of escapism and sense of that travel that I mentioned before. You're going on a journey, going away from the usual setting that you are, entering a beachside club that is well equipped to handle an event. So it always creates a nice atmosphere to enhance this experience, I guess.

Lastly, I chose Truth as the final place. And while it does have a lot of amenities that cater to modern day clubs, such as a decent sound system and nice lighting, I would say that its location is very much in the heart of Maltese nightlife, which means that it can get very busy... The doors, if I'm not mistaken, are made of glass, so you can even look outside and see what life is going on outside... So it more feels like you're in a pub with music rather than a club. And so, yeah, that's the reasoning behind my listing.

Interviewer - So now I'm going to zoom into the specific case studies. So taking Beach Haven, how would you describe the overall experience of being at Beach Haven? And how does the spatial layout kind of influence the way you move through the venue?

DJO4 - Okay, so as I take a journey through Beach Haven, I arrive and I take a very interesting set of long stairs to enter the club, which is enticing for usual party goers.

It looks like you're entering some sort of secret location, which caters to what I was mentioning before. So it's not a sore thumb sticking out on the side of the beach, but it's actually quite well hidden. As you enter the club, I think the layout is okay... I would probably give it a five on 10... the reason being for this is that there is quite an awkward staircase and an awkwardly designed dance floor that doesn't efficiently use the space of the club. More to that, the bathrooms are not well equipped for the amount of people that can fit there.

And on top of that, there's a beautiful deck that is used for people to go and smoke outside. However, the exit and entrance for that deck is placed right next to the bar, which can get very hectic at peak hours when people are very busy at the bar.

Interviewer - Are there any particular design features within Beach Haven, such as the entrance dance floor, decor, whatever you want that stand out in shaping your sense of immersion and escape within Beach Haven from your experience?

DJO4 - So as it currently stands, yes, I would say so. Because when people do events, more often than not, they use a dance floor, which is quite a segregated area, which people can walk all around, basically. And I think that travelling onto this dance floor and joining that group of people really caters to escapism.

So that's one of the factors. I would say that more often than not, they choose to have a very low lit club with, if I'm not mistaken as well, neon pink lighting in some occasions, which is very contained. So it also adds to that darkness and that immersed feel... I like that there's a pit for the dance floor. So maintaining that aspect would be very nice, having an area to view down upon because you can see a large group of people gathered and that's also segregated from the bar area as well.

Interviewer - All right, so now moving on to Liquid. What's your impression of the experience at Liquid Club?

DJO4 - My impressions, based on expectations, really have always delivered of Liquid Club. I think it holds a reputation that it is probably the most commonly used of the most immersive clubs in Malta since it caters to the techno scene.... It met my expectations in the sense that once I went in, the lighting was very low. ..It was just focused on the DJ playing and only lights at the bar, for example. I think the layout is very interesting...It's a bit winding and you have to go around a few corners to get to the dance floor. I think the bar is situated at a very good location, which is far away from the dance floor. Not too far away, but a good distance away from the dance floor to keep people on the dance floor focused on the music.

Interviewer - Are there any design elements which, in your opinion, contribute to the sense of escapism at Liquid?

DJO4 - Definitely, how the dance floor is shaped and can only be accessed from one area really contributes to that because you're joining that community on the dance floor and all appreciating and sort of, I don't know, I like in music to sort of a tribal gathering where you're all in unison and enjoying the music... I think the DJ being elevated also contributes to that and gives you a point of focus that people can look at while they're enjoying this. Not having people chatting and trying to buy drinks right on the dance floor is also another bonus on that... So having the bar in a separate area and having an organised walkway to get in is also important because you want to try to keep that away from the people as well. Sentence also alludes to this escapism feeling as it's quite a particular room, one might describe.

Interviewer - All right, so now moving on to Truth...How would you describe the overall experience of being at Truth?

DJO4 - I would say for where the location is and what it started as, it's not a bad effort at being a club inside the Portugal busy area. I think it's used, if I'm not mistaken, for food as well during the day. So they open it up and treat it as a restaurant... So it needs to contribute to that aesthetic as well. So in a sense, I think in the sense of escapism, it can't really compete with the other options we've previously mentioned, but it also does a good job at creating an atmosphere within through its music and through its layout, which includes a very basic dance floor and some tables that are situated at a higher level. But yeah, I would say from the options, Truth is probably the least.

Interviewer - How, in your opinion, does the spatial design influence the experience of escapism or immersion to a certain extent?

DJO4 - I think the club being split into two, if I'm not mistaken, is it still split into two? Sort of like front and back dance floors. There's still a long channel near the glass doors. There's the bar at the back, a bar in the middle, a slightly elevated area on the dance floor. It's pretty much the same as it was when you guys were doing Niche there.

So in terms of escapism, I would say that there is a dance floor that can really generate a good amount of people enjoying the scene together, but there is also spaces at the back that could leave people left out. The back bar is good because I think that it contributes well to cutting off to the people on the dance floor. However, the bar in the middle can then do the opposite and get people queuing up in the middle of the dance floor, which could cut things off.

I mean, the glass aspect of having the walls being made out of glass, looking onto the roads, really go against that sense of immersion, I would say, within the club. It provides opportunity for your attention to be distracted in many different ways.

So I think these different elements come together to add some negative points towards escapism within the route.

Interviewer - What are your thoughts on events held in off-site, secret or temporary locations?

DJO4 - for myself, I think there are some of the events that I look forward to the most. In Malta, we have a limited number of venues, so seeing these mystery venues pop up, and people using venues that are rarely, if not ever, used for events, as we know them being used, I would say, yeah, they are definitely the favourite type of events that I'd like to experience.

Interview - So following our conversation, what is, in your opinion, maybe architectural features within nightclub spaces that really can contribute to escapism?

What I would suggest is having a dark, a darker setting that including having black walls and not too many lights that could include a focus light on the DJ and some movingheads to create a bit of movement within the club.

I appreciate a square dance floor and it being contained and given one or two entrances that don't intrude much on the people enjoying the music. I would say that the bar needs to be a bit out of sight from the people on the dancefloor so that when they want they travel and can go get a drink, not to intrude too much on the people enjoying the experience in that zone.

And, uh... I would say that... things such as 360 sound systems, so 4 points of... speakers inside the club, or at different points in the club, or... imperative to creating this atmosphere, and always... Uh, keeping people within the same tempo.

And having adequate toilet facilities. For people to be... comfortable, rather than... queuing up, or having to leave the club.

Extract From Data Analysis

Interview Text	Initial Code	Focused Coding	Main Theme	Sub Theme
And find a sort of escape in something that stimulates you enough to obviously forget about things that are on your mind and gives you relaxation.	escapism can also be relaxation and mental break	definition of escapism	EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	PSYCHOLOGICAL
they can give you a social boost and in return that can obviously benefit you.	social interaction as a potential benefit of escapist experiences	social aspects of escapism	SOCIO-CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF ESCAPISM	SOCIAL AND CONTEXTUAL
As soon as I enter this environment, my initial focus goes on what is being played at the moment, whether it's something that is up my alley or not	attention shift to current music when entering club space	music - architecture synergy	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	ATMOSPHERE
you're walking into a club that is designed to be a different setting from what you're exposed to on the outside.	highlights design of club spaces as intentionally separate from outside world	spatial aspects of escapism + detachment	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM + EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	SPATIAL CONDITIONS
I think escapism is something that contributes to that.	Reiterates escapism's role in enabling the shift when entering a space	architectural thresholds and entry	RITUAL AND TRANSITIONS + ARCHITECTURAL AND SPATIAL FEATURES	LIMINAL TRESHOLDS + SPATIAL CONDITIONS
I think nightclubs, rightly so, have a focus on targeting your senses to try and grab your attention as much as possible.	Multi-sensory design techniques direct focus and amplify escapism.	sensory design	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	DESIGN INTENT
And find a sort of escape in something that stimulates you enough to obviously forget about things that are on your mind and gives you relaxation.	escapism can also be relaxation and mental break	definition of escapism	EXPERIENTIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF ESCAPISM	PSYCHOLOGICAL
they can give you a social boost and in return that can obviously benefit you.	social interaction as a potential benefit of escapist experiences	social aspects of escapism	SOCIO-CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF ESCAPISM	SOCIAL AND CONTEXTUAL
my initial focus goes on what is being played at the moment, whether it's something that is up my alley or not	attention shift to current music when entering club space	music - architecture synergy	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	ATMOSPHERE

Participant DJOAR1 – DJ, Organiser and Architect

Interviewer - In your view, what role does architecture and spatial design play in shaping the nightlife experience?

DJOAR1 - I mean, architecture, at its core, fundamentally, defines an atmosphere in itself. And I feel like nightlife is all about creating an atmosphere. So, the two go hand-in-hand.

Without architecture, there is no atmosphere, and it will always define it. Whether it's ornamentation, whether it's the way the space moves, functions... They go part and parcel, always.

Interviewer - Can you recall a specific event or venue where the architecture had a particularly strong impact on your experience?

DJOAR1 - Okay, that's a very interesting question.

I would say many, many times. Ones that I would recall specifically would be things we did with SACES, for example. Intimate parties inside an old Maltese tower. And there's kind of a juxtaposition there of places that are maybe meant to be left alone, or maybe are abandoned, or not in use. And we're putting them to use in these kind of intimate, contemporary situations. So, those would be the first ones that come to mind for me.

Interviewer - Okay, cool, cool. Are you familiar with the concept of escapism?

DJOAR1 - I would say I'm kind of familiar with it, yes. On a broader level.

Interviewer - And what does the concept mean to you, from your understanding?

DJOAR1 - I would say escapism to me would be the equivalent of... It's what a playground is for children, kind of, for adults. And so I think escapism is a way of breaking the daily routine, somewhat call it the system that we're in, to be in the moment, right? Running away from maybe what is reality into a world that is different from your day-to-day routine.

For whatever reason that is.

Interviewer - Do you feel a sense of leaving the outside world behind when you enter a club?

DJOAR1 - I would say yes, but I would say it depends on the venue....Depends on the venue.

Interviewer - And do you feel that there are architectural elements that contribute to that shift?

DJOAR1 - Yes. Because I've been hearing about your dissertation, I have thought about it, and I would say the entrance, right, how you get to the dance floor, is what really detaches you from the outside world in terms of a physical entity.

And I think that that process of leaving the outside world behind, entering and going to the dance floor, it's symbolic, but it can also be really amplified by the physical process of it. 100%. It's all about the transition.

The transition. The thresholds. Yes.

In fact, it makes me think about when you're partying at a house party, in the middle of a town, and it's in someone's apartment, and there's always that anxiety of, are the neighbours listening, are we making too much noise? And that prevents escapism from reaching its full potential, because escapism is about forgetting about those worries completely. Exactly, exactly.

Interviewer - How do elements like lighting, sound, and spatial layout contribute to a feeling of escape within a club setting?

DJOAR1 - Yeah. It's all about atmosphere, right? I mean, these are like, to me, that's kind of a hard question to answer, in the sense that it's so broad, because things like lighting and sound are what define our atmosphere every day. So where they change, the atmosphere will follow.

Interviewer - So this is kind of like you already answered this to an extent, but do you think that hosting events in off-site or remote locations enhances the sense of escapism? Why or why not?

DJOAR1 - Absolutely. A remote location implies that there is either a strong boundary between the outside world and the inside, or there is a journey to get to this place. And that detachment process, it has a lot to do with it.

It facilitates escaping the world. And that's the physical manifestation of it.

Interviewer - So to a certain extent, the journey is just as important. Journey to the setting is just as important as the setting itself.

DJOAR1 - If we're talking about escapism, yes.

Interviewer - How would you describe the differences in atmosphere and escapism between underground venues and commercial nightclubs?

DJOAR1 - That's interesting.

Underground venues and commercial nightclubs. I would say that, and I think here it's interesting, because escapism kind of takes on two different ideas. I would say they're present in both, but maybe presented in a different way.

For some, escapism might mean a false sense of luxury, which a VIP area in a commercial club might give you, almost like inventing this new identity where you're on top of the world kind of thing.

Whereas in the underground scene, it's not really about that. Traditionally, it's not really about that. It's about forgetting your identity and everyone is on the same plane and forgetting our anxieties of day to day. So I would say that the differences there would be maybe the way they present the opportunity for escapism.

Interviewer - Would you say that from a design perspective, there are spatial or architectural features that maybe distinguish an underground club or a commercial club, for example?

DJOAR1 - Yes, absolutely. I would say from my experience, right? The underground scene, even physically, there is a very big focus on the sense of detachment, on the sense of creating a boundary between you and everyday life. In commercial clubs, I don't think it's really there.

They do it a different way. They offer different things. Even, for example, you have a strip, right? Like PACEVILLE or AYIA NAPA and all these things.

Other times, these would be right next to a residential area. It's not really an escape. Or I would say it's not really detachment.

It's escape in a different way, right?

Interviewer - Are there any nightclubs whose architectural design has stuck with you long after visiting

DJOAR1 - Clubs. Okay, I'm going to rattle off a few here.

There's MYSTIQUE, which used to be a club. It's not one anymore. Obviously, I never went when it was a club in use.

The fact that me and my friends used to climb in it when we weren't supposed to, there was a real sense of escape. We used to get in there and get up to no good. We weren't meant to be in there, but there's a huge barrier between us and the outside world.

But in terms of clubs that I've actually been to...

Interviewer - It can be local and it can be abroad as well. It doesn't necessarily need to be within the Maltese context.

DJOAR1 - Well, there was Shelter. in Amsterdam.

Shelter...That feeling of descending into underground. It's certainly there, and that stuck with me.

I would say, locally, there are a couple. But I would say, locally, the biggest, the most things that have stuck with me are the, I don't say unauthorised, but the alternative sites. Secret locations.

Sites that are used once or twice. Because there is the real sense of detachment for me.

Interviewer - So now I'm going to go into a little bit of a case study question focusing on a couple of clubs. So, how would you rank the following venues in terms of their ability to create a sense of escapism? The first one being the most, and the last one, obviously, being the least. So, BeachHaven, Liquid, Truth, and Offsite Locations.

So, Offsite Locations, take them as what you just mentioned before.

Interviewer - So, I'm going to go Offsite Locations 1. And I'm going to say Beach Haven is second. But I think that's personal to me, because I have such a long drive to get there.

And I think that makes a really big difference. It's like I'm going to Miami, man. And then I'm going to put Liquid third.

And then I'm going to put Truth at the bottom. Great.

DJOAR1 - So, now going on to Beach Haven, how would you describe the overall experience of being at Beach Haven?

Interviewer - The overall experience of being there. I think it's interesting, right? So, there's obviously the element of getting there, which I already mentioned. I think because of its interior that hasn't been updated in a long time, it almost feels a bit of a time capsule.

And so, that definitely facilitates the feeling as well of detachment and escaping and almost being in another world. There's also the fact that you have to descend down into the club, which I always like it. I always like that feeling.

I would say those are the two things that stick out to me, that make it unique. Obviously, there's the inside, the outside players that are going on, but I would say that's pretty unique.

Interviewer - And how does the spatial layout of Beach Haven influence the way you move or feel within the venue?

DJOAR1 - It is a unique layout. So, I would say... Can you repeat a bit?

Interviewer - One second. So, how does the spatial layout influence the way you move through or feel within the venue?

DJOAR1- The entrance, particularly, I like the descent.

I also like how the club frames the dance floor. You have that glass floor in the middle, framed by the columns, DJ on the same level, and I feel like architecturally, it creates a focus around the dance floor itself, because everything rotates around it. Exactly, with the different levels of everything around that... The dance floor, I think, is the lowest point within the club. It is the lowest point.

Interviewer - So, now moving on to Liquid. So, what's your impression of the experience at Liquid Club?

DJOAR1 - Okay, so Liquid, to me, the layout never impressed me that much.

It's quite basic. There is a bit of an entrance, a bit of a feeling like you're going into a building and hiding at the back, which is good. There's also that fish tank that separates the bar and the dance floor, and I'm not sure if the fish are still alive.

They are, they replaced them. And that was an interesting feature. I guess it's a bit like an out-of-this-world kind of thing.

But it doesn't really stick out to me to be an impressive layout. What I like about Liquid is the culture associated with it, rather than the architecture. The architecture could be a lot more effective, I think.

Interviewer - Are there any design elements that contribute to the sense of escapism?

DJOAR1 - I would say, contrasting to Beach Haven, there isn't really as big of an emphasis on distinct spaces. So there's the bar, and there's the dance floor, and there are the bathrooms, and there's a little passage in and the front room. I would say that hierarchy of space there is limited.

Okay, okay. It's in terms of escapism. Like I said, you have the entrance.

But again, the lights there have been pretty interesting, and they have a good setup. The sound is obviously good, but we're disregarding that. So I would say, for me, there's a lack of hierarchy in space.

And I can't really pinpoint one thing that doesn't do it for me. I can more just say that, to me, it's a bit limited in architectural quality. Understood, understood.

Interviewer - Anyway, now moving on to Truth....How would you describe what it feels like to attend an event at Truth?

DJOAR1 - Okay, Truth for me is the complete opposite.

It's like bang in the middle of hustle and bustle. It feels almost like a bistro that turns into a club. I'm pretty sure that's what it is.

And so the escapism there, it's not really there. I would say that it doesn't really fit into the typical idea of underground culture because it's very open. It's like even there's glass all around it right there.

Unlike Beach Haven, which faces the sea, which is open but it faces out to the sea, this faces out to the street with loads of people walking by. So I don't think it's an ugly venue, but I think if we're talking about escapism and atmosphere created, it doesn't detach you. It doesn't create that feeling of leaving something behind and entering a new identity or atmosphere or hiding away from the world.

It has a totally different purpose.

Interviewer - So are there any design elements such as lighting, circulation, materials that contribute to the sense of escapism or lack thereof?

DJOAR1 - I would say this is a really difficult question to answer because all materials, I will say this with my chest, I think all materials can be used to facilitate escapism or combat against it.

Materials can be used in so many different ways. For example, the glass, like I mentioned, in Beach Haven, it facilitates, it looks out onto the water and the closest person can see you is on the other side of the bay. That almost creates a sense of distance there.

Exactly. But then at Truth, you're looking out onto the street, onto the strip. Exactly.

Interviewer - So maybe less about the materials but more about, or in this case, about the circulation of Truth and the spatial layout. How does that affect the experience of the space?

DJOAR1 - So Truth, I haven't been to Truth in a long time. So they have the... The dance floor. There are the tables and chairs. Exactly. And then the dance floor and then there's tables at the very back.

Interviewer - It's slightly elevated, there's a bar in the middle and a bar at the back with the toilets at the back.

DJOAR1 - I feel like there's no focus on the dance floor at all, for one. 100%.

It's very much a social space. That's very much like a bar and bistro kind of thing. So unlike Liquid and Beach Haven, there is very much a hierarchy given to the dance floor.

And I think when we're talking about escapism in terms of nightlife, it really is about the dance floor or the atmosphere created around dancing because often times social events, meeting your friends to chat at a bar, it's not escaping anything. 100%. You're meeting your friends to talk about your life.

100%. You know what I mean? So that's a very important part of it, actually, which I didn't think about.

Interviewer - In fact, at Truth, guests enter directly onto the dance floor. There's no real spatial threshold like we discussed beforehand. You walk in from the entrance and you're there. And you're there.

DJOAR1 - Exactly. And that kind of affects the overall vibe. It has its use, right? It has its... You know, it's a nice place, but it's not really somewhere you escape to.

Interviewer - So now moving on to the final set of questions, which you kind of already answered to an extent, which are basically your thoughts on events held in off-site secret or temporary locations, and how does the journey to the venue and the act of discovering space affect the sense of anticipation or escapism?

DJOAR1 - Oh, in so many ways.

I mean, it's hard to explain how or why, but the sense of a journey, journeying to get somewhere, it's going to do that. It's going to create anticipation. It's almost like you're working towards something.

In fact, a lot of the times, you don't really do these things unless you really want to. You really want to go to the secret location. So I'm going to drive from Zurrieq to Selmun, hike down that thing and escape.

It's not like I would do that to go have a beer with my friends really... So I think these things kind of build tension, like you said, and then they build detachment, because literally physical detachment.

So for me, travelling a long way or going down a tunnel, right, or there's a long entrance into the club. These things literally create a physical manifestation of what it means to escape.

Interviewer - So now the final question, so following our conversation, what, in your opinion, are maybe architectural features within these spaces that really contribute to escapism? We've kind of touched upon them in this interview, but maybe if you could kind of pinpoint to you.

DJOAR1 - Can you repeat exactly?

Interviewer - So in your opinion, which are kind of architectural elements or spatial design decisions that really contribute to the sense of escapism within these nightclub spaces from your experience?

DJOAR1 - I'm going to rattle off a couple. I'm going to try to think of more, because I think this is a really, really cool question, and I wish I had more time to think about it.

Definitely entrance, right? That feeling of blocking the outside world, entering a new place, whether that's literally a huge physical block, like even walking into those thick walls of the tower, it gives that feeling to me. Or a long journey to get to this off-site place. The knowledge, this isn't architecture, but the knowledge that it's not used for many things like that.

Then the way you use materials, like you said, was really important. So the glass can either be used to connect to the street, or it can be used to show you how far away you are from everyone, which is another interesting thing you can do. I think openness has a part to do with it, so related to glass as well.

And then I think focussing on the dance floor, right? That's where people lose themselves, you know what I mean? Creating hierarchy in spaces like that. Those are the ones that come to my mind right now. I wish I had more answers for you.

Interviewer - Don't worry, if you think of more, just tell me, and I'll add them to it.

Extract From Data Analysis

Interview Text	Initial Code	Focused Coding	Main Theme	Sub Theme
And so the escapism there, it's not really there. I would say that it doesn't really fit into the typical idea of underground culture because it's very open.	Truth's design more social and open; detracts feeling of escapism.	social aspects of escapism	SOCIO-CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF ESCAPISM	SOCIAL AND CONTEXTUAL
It's like even there's glass all around it right there. Unlike Beach Haven, which faces the sea, which is open but it faces out to the sea, this faces out to the street with loads of people walking by.	Transparency undermines detachemtn; constant connection to outside world.	views to outside	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	VISUAL ANCHORS AND ORIENTATION
think if we're talking about escapism and atmosphere created, it doesn't detach you. It doesn't create that feeling of leaving something behind and entering a new identity or atmosphere or hiding away from the world.	Truth does not create escapist experiences.	social aspects of escapism	SOCIO-CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF ESCAPISM	SOCIAL AND CONTEXTUAL
For example, the glass, like I mentioned, in Beach Haven, it facilitates, it looks out onto the water and the closest person can see you is on the other side of the bay. That almost creates a sense of distance there.	Use of glass at beachaven creates a feeling of seperation from the outside world	materials, lighting and views	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	MATERIALITY + VISUAL ANCHORS AND ORIENTATION
But then at Truth, you're looking out onto the street, onto the strip.	Use of glass at truth creates a strong connection to the outside world	materials, lighting and views	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	MATERIALITY + VISUAL ANCHORS AND ORIENTATION
No focus on dance floor... very social space.	Lack of importance given to dance floor reduces immersion and escapism.	dancefloor positioning and immersion	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	SPATIAL CONDITIONS
about escapism in terms of nightlife, it really is about the dance floor or the atmosphere created around dancing	Focus on the dancefloor or the act of dancing creates a more escapist environment.	dancefloor positioning and immersion	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	SPATIAL CONDITIONS
meeting your friends to chat at a bar, it's not escaping anything. 100%. You're meeting your friends to talk about your life.	Events which are more social do not allow for escapism	social aspects of escapism	SOCIO-CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF ESCAPISM	SOCIAL AND CONTEXTUAL

Participant OAR1 – Organiser and Architect

Interviewer - In your view, what role do architecture and spatial design play in shaping the nightclub experience?

OAR1 - I believe mostly it's all about creating a safe environment... rather than what should happen within that space.

I think the leaders in Malta, at least, that are really investing in nightlife. Are not really aware of the safety measures. Or at least prioritise safety in general. They care about creating areas which could boost their income, naturally. Because, obviously, the day-to-day costs are quite expensive. Which I understand. But, obviously, an architect, or at least a spatial designer's input. Is crucial to, as much as possible, create a harmony within different elements. Of what is sometimes called a nightclub. Because in Malta we don't really have nightclubs. We just have big halls. Which eventually turned into nightclubs. So, that is reality.

Interviewer - Can you recall a specific event or a venue where the architecture or spatial design had a particularly strong impact on your experience? This can be both abroad or local. Or can be more than one example.

OAR1 - I can give you some ideas. Negatively, in Malta. The one in Ballutta, So, Tigullio.

Since the new owner took over. I remember, I went to something of Slim... Could it be OTR? Something like that. They opened the club. All of it. Everyone had access to every room. It felt very unsafe. It also felt like a maze. There was lack of lighting.

Huge lack of character. So, it was just literally like walking into someone's house. But suddenly you just find a DJ stand. That's literally how it felt. So, that was quite an unpleasant experience.

Abroad, though. I had quite a positive experience. When we were at ADE. Where they do CircoLoco. That's actually used as an industrial area. Particularly that warehouse. I believe they use it to store fabric and textile. And I found it quite interesting. On the shift that it takes.

In order to accommodate such a big crowd. And turn it into a nightclub. But it's more of a festival setup. It's interesting how a space can be transformed. Into more different uses. Let's just say that.

Interviewer - So, that space in Amsterdam is actually still used?

OAR1 - Yes. So, it's still being used. At least, that's what I was told. Apparently, some spaces around ADE. Are actually given up. To accommodate that part of tourism. I'm not sure what the deal is. For the locals. But most spaces are used for that purpose on that weekend. Quite interesting.

Interviewer - Are you familiar with the concept of escapism? And if so, what does the concept mean to you personally?

OAR1 - Well, I'm not really entirely sure. About the exact meaning of escapism. In terms of architecture, I don't know what escapism means. But in general, obviously. It's a space where you can actually discover. Or at least. I'm trying to look for the right word. Maybe experience different feelings. Or even being able to change your identity. Within a space. Whether it's big or small. That's how I can simplify it.

Interviewer - Do you feel a sense of leaving the outside world behind. When entering a club? And if so, what elements contribute to that shift?

OAR1 - Yes, obviously. Emotionally. Because within a club. You will come across different behaviours. So emotionally you have to let go. Of what you really sort of fortify yourself with. On a normal day to day.

Interviewer - How do elements like lighting, sound and layout. Contribute to a feeling of escape within a club setting?

OAR1 - Mostly, obviously. The psychology. Of a human being. Going through different feelings. And carrying different emotions. The loudness. The intensity of light. Will help you to eject these feelings and emotions. For a very short period.

Interviewer - Have you come across in design decisions in clubs. That in your opinion break this immersive experience? In what sense? It breaks up the feeling of immersion.

It could be a layout choice. It could be a material choice. It could be the positioning of a DJ.

Or speakers for example. Just something that to you ruins the immersive experience.

OAR1 - I believe so. I think when I find myself in large spaces. Without understanding the borders of the space we are in. It tends to mess up the feeling within a space. If we are in a field and there are trees. I know my boundaries. I know where I stand. I can actually position myself. I can understand my position. Or distance from the DJ. From the bar. From the exit. But when you are in a massive space. Where you wouldn't exactly know. Maybe where the peripheries of this party are. That messes you up. The DJ stand is quite a focal point. That is quite important. It carries a lot of weight. When it comes to organising or operating a club.

Interviewer - Do you think that hosting events in off-site or remote locations enhances the sense of escapism?

OAR1 - Yes. Because obviously I believe once you familiarise yourself with a space. That escapism is very hard to be achieved. And I think it becomes. You sort of adapt. You become too. Perhaps even the feelings. The experience. It becomes monotonous with time.

The more you frequent a club. The less interesting it is going to feel.

Interviewer - How would you describe the difference in atmosphere. Between underground venues and commercial nightclubs?

OAR1 - I think it's about the expectations of the guests. I think with commercial. People would really focus on the drinking. And perhaps the crowd. So I believe the type of music.

The aesthetics. Fashion contributes a lot to it. And I believe the sort of music that is played justifies the quality of the space you're in.

When it comes to underground, I feel that it is more high maintenance. And the expectations for the guests. And by the guests are quite high.

Interviewer - Do you think that from a design perspective. There are maybe spatial or architectural features that separate underground and commercial venues?

OAR1 - For sure. I think certain darkness, or at least the minimalism within underground spaces. Helps a lot.

Or at least, based on the underground areas that I'm familiar with.

I think even the certain design elements that they introduce.

Like for example, at the playground, the geometrical shapes, the rigid areas. Like the bar. Like the VIP area. The bulky columns. I think that is what sets them apart. Whether you have to compare it to like a main room, Like sky club. It feels more spacious, quite monotonous, very plain. If I could describe it as plain. And even the design elements are quite basic. So there is nothing interesting. There is no tone behind it. So anyone could actually sort of plug in easily within that space.

Interviewer - Are there any nightclubs whose architectural design has stuck with you long after visiting?

OAR1 - Actually, Pacha was quite interesting. You could sense that the club has been through a lot of changes. You could understand that it is being managed by a lot of experienced people.

Operationally, it was sound, The quality of the lighting and the sound was high level. I still believe. That it is the best club that I have ever visited. I think the technology behind it as well. Was quite impressive.

The fact that you can also see the floor to ceiling height. The ceiling morphing with the music. The type of DJ. With time. That was quite interesting. It was also my first night in Ibiza. So obviously there is that interesting feeling. I can't really forget.

Interviewer - Now I am going to move on to the case study questions....How would you rank the following venues, in their ability to create a sense of escapism for guests? With the first one being the one which has the most escapist experiences. And the last one being the least. So they are Beach Haven, Liquid, Truth, and off-site locations.

So Beach Haven, Liquid, Truth and off-site locations. How would you rank those?

OAR1 - So the off-site locations being the most. Truth being the least.

And the other were Liquid and Beachhaven. I think Liquid will take the second most.

Interviewer - How would you describe the overall experience. Of being at Beach Haven? Quite positive. The only thing is that I find.

That there are too many obstacles. At a point it could feel a bit claustrophobic. Especially when it's a packed event.

The stairs, The different materials, The colour of certain materials.

That's why I sort of prefer Liquid over BeachHaven.

Interviewer - How does the spatial layout influence the way you move through the venue?

OAR1 - think the pit is what limits it. So the fact that, first of all even to access the pit, there are very tiny areas and access points. And the fact that you sometimes you feel like you're being overlooked by the people on the sides, next to the bar. Sort of overlooking the dance floor. That is a bit intimidating at times, it depends on the crowd.

The DJ stand, based on the modern standards. I think in some areas there are some blind spots, which makes it also a bit uncomfortable. In fact most of the promoters prefer using where we usually set it up at the stage. And even the fact that some areas are darker than others. So I think that's another reason why a lot of promoters put the DJ stand where we usually put it, because there's that LED box on top of them. So it feels more inviting compared to other areas where there's just literally a pin spot that just lights up the table or just lights up the bar.

Interviewer - And are there any particular that stand out in shaping your sense of immersion or escapism?

OAR1 - The entrance for sure considering you're accessing the back part of a restaurant. The stairs are very narrow, they're very dark, at times slippery especially on a rainy day.

The entrance to the club is literally a small door where you can barely identify whether it's a club or a restaurant. The legibility I think in terms of entering, and obviously signage as it lacks it.

I think the entrance plays a very important role in this feeling of escapism.

Interviewer – Can you describe your overall experience at Liquid?

OAR1 - Very random. I think with Liquid, even the fact that everything is on the same level, and there are some interesting partitions with the aquarium. I can't say that I've visited Liquid a lot. I think maybe I visited Liquid 10-15 times maximum. It's the least familiar...I'm the least familiar with Liquid, compared to the other clubs that you mentioned. With Liquid, It's always interesting, even the fact that the entrance feels a bit secluded compared to the club. As soon as you enter the club you're suddenly immersing yourself into a different room.... The music doesn't leak outside the club... especially to the entrance, it's quite an empty room, and the perfect spot for people to take a break from the loudness of the club.

So it's very well designed, in terms of sound insulation and also being a good buffer for people to operate the door.... However, the entrance and the exit are a bit dangerous considering that you literally walk out of the onto the main road. That ruins the experience a bit.

But considering the club I mean, It wins a lot of points with me. The club per se is quite interesting now that Gary took it over... The fact that suddenly they're understanding that. The four walls of the main area can offer different experiences for party goers, Promoters. And like that you can experience that space differently. It could offer a different experience. For every single promotion.

Interviewer - When you were saying, Set up differently... As in where they position the DJ? Or the fact that different promoters are taking it over now.

OAR1 - There are different hanging points in terms of the core. There are different opportunities. We've seen different lighting setups at Liquid... there are loads of potentials, within that space although it's not a large club.

Interviewer - Are there any design elements that contribute to the sense of escapism at Liquid in your opinion?

OAR1 - Mostly the darkness of the club. And the fact that for some reason, even when it's quite intense with lighting and the strobes for some reason... the focus remains on the aquarium... The

fact that there is something which we can relate to at home but at the same time, it's in a club. think that boosts your escapism... there's some sense of comfort on the side but then chaos in front of you... There's that Interesting contrast....

Interviewer - Now moving on to truth. Can you describe what it feels like to attend an event at truth from your experience?

OAR1 - A steakhouse with a DJ stand... Literally.

Interviewer - How does the spatial design influence the experience In your opinion?

OAR1 - Negatively. Mostly because obviously whoever designed that space, They designed it with an intention of it becoming a restaurant... Even the bar was set up in a way to accommodate a lot of tables and chairs for this restaurant.. but then suddenly it turned into a 360 bar... For a nightclub, I don't particularly list it as a nightclub. Although it does offer some space for a dance floor, but even the DJ stand... The DJ stand I still look at it as a temporary structure that offers enough space for a table and some DJs.

Even though they kept investing and turned it into a prominent DJ stand, it still looks temporary. So there isn't something so concrete within that space.

Interviewer - Are there any design elements. Such as lighting, Circulation or Materials that contribute to the sense of escapism or lack thereof within the nightclub.

OAR1 - I believe the lighting plays a very important role here... Because I find it so bright.

And even the fact that you can be seen from the road, because the road is so busy over there... there is no element of escapism... the fact that some sober people are passing by and they can look into the space and they can understand the behaviour of the crowd that's within truth... The element of escapism is lost

Interviewer - Going on to off-site locations. What are your thoughts on events held in off-site. Secret or temporary locations.

OAR1 - Very positive... I think we should somehow have an infrastructure that supports these sort of events... Be it nightlife or be it commercial....I think we should boost these off-site locations and make it a bit more accessible.

Interviewer - How does the journey to the venue, or the act of discovering the space affect your sense of anticipation or escapism when visiting these spaces.

OAR1 - Quite positive I think the journey towards the final destination is what helps you... sort of... What's interesting to me is the argument it helps you sort of relax, and it also numbs your mind... literally as soon as you're approaching for example that club in Zurrieq... So the walk, the rural setting and suddenly you just find a tiny alley that leads to a club....

Or sometimes even when you're invited to a secret location... You're taken there on a minivan, random people are on the van but everyone's headed towards the same destination... and the darkness... It's a night event.. and even the fact that suddenly this vehicle just stops in front of a random entrance, and you're just presented with like a random setting... And every step you take towards the DJ stand, If it's a DJ set up... you're still unsure of your surroundings, where you could be located at...

Interviewer - So now for the last question. So in your opinion... Which kind of architectural elements or spatial design decisions really contribute to the sense of escapism within nightclub spaces.

OAR1 - I think the materials..I visited clubs with poor lighting set up... But the materials of the space play a huge role.. In this sense it all depends on how the space you're in is presented. So I think. That's really it... The materials of the space. ..But then again. I think it's also about the amount of access that you have with the outside world... If you're constantly reminded that outside the space you're in, there's a real world, the element of escapism is very hard to achieve because you're constantly reminded of what's out there... So you might be reminded of the problems and different emotions that you're carrying outside... So I think it's all about detaching.

Extract From Data Analysis

Interview Text	Initial Code	Focused Coding	Main Theme	Sub Theme
That there are too many obstacles. At a point it could feel a bit claustrophobic. Especially when it's a packed event.	Physical obstacles and material/colour changes affect comfort	spatial segregation	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	SPATIAL CONDITIONS
think the pit is what limits it. So the fact that, first of all even to access the pit, there are very tiny areas and access points	Restricted circulation zones is what limits the club	circulation disrupting escapism	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	SPATIAL CONDITIONS
And the fact that you sometimes you feel like you're being overlooked by the people on the sides, next to the bar. Sort of overlooking the dance floor. That is a bit intimidating at times	the feeling of being looked at on the dancefloor creates an intimidating environment	viewpoints	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	SPATIAL CONDITIONS
I think in some areas there are some blind spots, which makes it also a bit uncomfortable	Position of DJ stand creates blindspots between the crowd and the DJ	dj positioning	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	VISUAL ANCHORS AND ORIENTATION
So it feels more inviting compared to other areas where there's just literally a pin spot that just lights up the table or just lights up the bar.	different position of DJ stands creates a more inviting environment	dj positioning	ARCHITECTURAL ENABLERS OF ESCAPISM	VISUAL ANCHORS AND ORIENTATION
The stairs are very narrow, they're very dark, at times slippery especially on a rainy day.	entrance sequence is memorable	architectural thresholds and entry	RITUAL AND TRANSITIONS	LIMINAL THRESHOLDS
I think the entrance plays a very important role in this.	entrance sequence is important in creating escapism	architectural thresholds and entry	RITUAL AND TRANSITIONS	LIMINAL THRESHOLDS
With Liquid, It's always interesting, even the fact that the entrance feels a bit secluded compared to the club. As soon as you enter the club you're suddenly immersing yourself into a different room....	entrance to club and club itself feel like very separate spaces	architectural thresholds and entry	RITUAL AND TRANSITIONS	LIMINAL THRESHOLDS