

Title: “Places and Spaces” in Higher Education: Systemic transformation to enhance well-being, identity, and inclusivity among students through the participatory action of photovoice

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Abstract

Understanding students’ sense of identity, inclusivity, and well-being can significantly enhance the quality and impact of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) worldwide by fostering environments that support diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). A critical but often overlooked aspect of the university experience is the influence of physical and symbolic places and spaces where students spend most of their time. These environments, whether formal or informal, shape how students navigate campus life, interact with peers, and experience inclusion or exclusion. This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how experiences of spaces and places within an institution, in this case university campuses, affect students’ identity, well-being, and sense of belonging – using photovoice as a participatory research method. Photovoice uses visual photographic techniques to empower individuals to be active agents in qualitative research. Although marginal in the literature of Work and Organizational (W-O) psychology, this method provides a medium through which the voices of students may be heard, positioning them as active co-researchers who are engaged in realising institutional change and has been found to have significant application among university students who may feel powerless or disconnected from University leadership. A total of N=20 students from two ethnoculturally diverse campuses are participating in this ongoing project that consists of a photovoice training workshop, fieldwork, individual interviews, focus groups, and a final photo exhibition. The labels of photographs and the transcripts of individual and group sessions will be analysed using the reflexive thematic analysis approach, and the results will be discussed during the presentation. From the perspective of W-O Psychology, this study endeavors to present the potential of the Photovoice method in DEI practices by identifying the impact of spaces and places on the well-being of students, as a tool for empowerment for participants to capture and communicate their lived experiences, and lastly aligning with organizational strategies that prioritize participation to promote systemic transformation.

Keywords: Well-being; Identity; Inclusion; Students; University; Participatory Action Research; Photovoice