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Viewpoint/ Critical Review

The Failure in the Evaluation of Housing Satisfaction in Mehr Housing: A Consequence of a Lack of Consensus on Housing Components

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ABSTRACT

The development of dense residential complexes in the world since the 1960s has highlighted the importance of the quality of housing. Given that importance, different indicators have been developed to assess housing satisfaction. As a result, various studies in the sciences have emerged focusing on space and place. The tendency to evaluate the quality of housing in the project named "Mehr Housing," the biggest housing project, has been no exception. However, the evaluation of different studies shows that the quality measurement research, which was carried out in the form of conventional methods of environmental studies and based on the definition of predetermined criteria, could not positively contribute to improving the conditions of these residential environments. This article aims to investigate the reasons why available studies have been ineffective and failed to achieve the expected results. The process of critiquing the conducted studies is guided by the belief that the main reason for failure is the research methodology. Based on scrutinizing these studies, it can be concluded that the separation of the studied components, the lack of attention to housing in a holistic form, as well as the limitation of the studies by researchers to a specific aspect that arises from the context of the theoretical field of research, are two main ineffective reasons.

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Introduction

The concept of housing satisfaction and its assessment in different residential areas are among the important issues in spatial planning. Due to its conceptual evolution in the theoretical literature, it has been attached to the form and meaning of the environment. Due to the implications of studying and measuring in the housing context, the results of such studies contribute to the life quality of residents. The necessity of studies in the pertinent disciplines and its effects on the formation of the concept of 'place and its sense of belonging' justifies why a significant part of the satisfaction studies have focused on the measurement of 'housing satisfaction' in residential complexes. In addition, after the utilization of the Mehr housing project, its defects rooted in the same plan and physical program, the measurement of housing satisfaction has become one of the most contentious issues in the past decade.

The studies of housing satisfaction are the product of housing development. Despite numerous studies on this issue and the publication of theoretical results in the form of letters, the presentation of different perspectives and the significant effect of previous studies on its posterior samples cannot be seen when it comes to constructing these projects.

Body of Critique

"Why have carried-out studies in the area of housing satisfaction been ineffective?" Satisfaction, a subjective concept and evaluative index of the quality of the environment has been associated with several factors, especially in the sense that satisfaction in the living environment is formed in the interaction between being influenced by the environmental conditions and its effect on the reading of the residents of the environment.

Examining more than a decade of research done on the project of Mehr Housing and their classification shows that the indicators can fall into 5 categories and under three main sections: "structural-physical," "social," and economic (Naseri et al., 2024).

The studies in this scope and more specifically on Mehr housing have investigated multiple factors. However, adopting an atomic approach where the components have been selectively chosen shows that the link and mutual relationship between the components have been overlooked. In most of the studies, the focus of the studies and measurements has been on one dimension of housing quality; therefore, the results have been limited to the same factors examined in relation to the environment and housing conditions.

The studies carried out in the two fields of "social" and "structural-physical" by emphasizing the components of each have been limited to the mentioned indicators and metrics and presented one aspect of the problem. Accordingly, the incorrect evaluation and incomplete problem analysis have limited our initial understanding of the problem.

Some research has been based on the indicators derived from "the lack of necessary infrastructure and basic and auxiliary facilities." Such studies highlight that the absence of those factors has the greatest impact on creating residents' dissatisfaction with the living environment. Therefore, fulfilling these mandatory residential needs can be of great help to get out of the critical situation. The results of the study have misled the residents and the officials that dissatisfaction lies in the infrastructure and basic issues of residence. Although the lack of housing infrastructure and superstructure facilities in Mehr housing is an undeniable problem, the reduction of the needs of the residents to these dimensions will cause other demands of the residents to be ignored. The selected examples of the studies are given in Table 1.

Conversely, satisfaction emerges from the observer's reading and interpretation of the environment, relying on different aspects of evaluating a phenomenon. This concept is not limited to the physical dimensions of space. Obviously, in addition to basic and biological human needs, non-biological needs should be counted; in the pyramid of human needs, non-biological ones sit on a higher layer than the basic housing needs and serve as the starting point of the human movement toward excellence in the residence. The second research category on satisfaction measurement includes studies in the humanities and social sciences. These studies have highlighted social and non-material indicators and, unlike the first

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categories, considered metaphysical needs and paid heed to social components as a condition for gaining satisfaction. By separating this level from the basic components, these studies consider the condition for obtaining satisfaction as a response to the social qualities of the environment (Table 2).

A more modern approach to housing satisfaction deals with satisfaction at material and non-material levels, which is another category of studies related to Mehr housing. In these studies, the improvement of either level is assumed to enhance the satisfaction of the residents.

However, in these studies, rather than promoting the "combination" of these factors as a whole, the ultimate goal has been the promotion of either structural factors or non-material factors that are independent of the place and concept of the location of housing.

Discussion

From the standpoint of human needs, satisfaction arises from the fulfillment of human needs at different levels. The multi-layered nature of housing and its association with various material and meaningful dimensions of human life has a direct relationship with the sequence of needs from the most basic level to the highest in a hierarchical approach. This is why the epistemology and revival of housing satisfaction measurement have been of interest during the development of this concept. The evaluation of satisfaction based on material aspects is limited to one dimension of housing and is indifferent or less attentive to other aspects of housing. The connection between different aspects, especially the intangible aspects of the living space, has been ignored, and such a flaw highlights the necessity of comprehensive approaches. Accordingly, in the social sciences, the evaluation has been on social criteria, and by relying on the semantic qualities of the living environment, the material aspect of living has been neglected in their research, while the connection between "material-non-material" aspects is also evident in these approaches.

Another existing view focuses on the consensus of quantitative and qualitative components. Despite its inclusiveness, it is still defective as it does not consider equivalent relationships among all measures or indicators. Also, in the conceptualization of housing, the existing view defines it as devoid of the place. However, satisfaction requires the

Table 1. A selection of studies on the structural-physical aspects of housing satisfaction in the project of Mehr housing. Source: Author.

Case studies of Mehr housing	Scholars	Theoretical field of research	The main factors contributing to satisfaction in research
Sabzevar	Shahi Aghbelaqi et al. (2016)	Geography and urban planning	Superstructure and infrastructure facilities/ Access/ Physical quality of housing
Bostan Hashtgerd	Daroudi et al. (2015)	Urban planning	Access/ Physical quality of housing
Mehrgan town, Kerman	Rahnama & Kamandari (2015)	Geography and urban planning	Superstructure and infrastructure facilities/ Access/ Physical quality of housing

Table 2. A selection of studies on the social aspects of housing satisfaction in the project of Mehr housing. Source: Author.

The main factors of satisfaction in research	Theoretical field of research	Scholars	Case studies
A sense of belonging to a place/ The existence of social organization/ Neighborhood active actions	Social science	Manafi Azar et al. (2017)	Miyandoab
Existence of effective social relations between residents/ The existence of social organization/ Neighborhood active actions	Social science	Mohammadi Doost et al. (2018)	Yasouj
The existence of social organization	Social science	Jafri et al. (2019)	Shahreza

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mutual interdependence between the objective perceptions of the environment and the subjective interpretations of the audience and will be fulfilled while both have been carefully taken into account and it is not possible to separate them—except in abstraction. Therefore, this lack of attention has made the results of the above-mentioned studies ineffective.

Conclusion

Separating the different aspects of a phenomenon from each other in a multi-sided issue such as housing is a strategic mistake in methodology. As important as this mistake is a place-based approach to housing, a factor contributing to the failure of the available studies. Such an approach deals with the concept of housing and the relationships of describers in a descriptive manner. Dividing the whole into parts and evaluating them has impeded an all-inclusive assessment. From a methodology perspective, attention to this whole, which includes a single combination of environmental quantities and qualities, should be questioned. This is the issue that has been neglected in available studies on housing satisfaction in the Mehr housing project. On the contrary, the studies have measured quantitative and qualitative dimensions separately. Simply put, the existence of housing has been evaluated by paying attention to the qualities and characteristics of housing in a unified and singular essence, analyzed and documented by indicators that affirm the attributes of housing existence.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there was no conflict for them in conducting this research.

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