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# Evaluating The Impacts Of Culture-Oriented Sustainability On Informal Settlements On Tahe Social Life Of Children (Case Study: Nasimshahr)

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### Abstract

The rapid expansion of informal settlements has exposed cities to environmental, social, economic, and physical challenges, thereby undermining their sustainability. Children, as a particularly vulnerable group, are highly affected by residential quality, with their physical, psychological, and social well-being strongly tied to the conditions of their living environment. Child-friendly cities aim to address children's developmental needs—including safety, access to play opportunities, and peer interaction—in order to improve their social life and overall well-being. This study evaluates the impacts of culture-oriented sustainability in informal settlements on children's social lives, focusing on Nasimshahr as the case study. A survey-based and documentary research design was employed, using interviews and questionnaires as data collection tools. Sustainability indicators and sub-indicators were weighted and analyzed through the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), supported by expert judgment. The baseline conditions were examined through resident questionnaires and systematic field observations. The findings indicate that sustainability indicators in the studied neighborhoods are in unfavorable conditions. Poor environmental quality, limited opportunities for play and social interaction, and lack of safety have adversely affected children's social well-being. Accordingly, the study proposes a corrective framework centered on enhancing neighborhood vitality, improving environmental safety, and strengthening sustainability indicators in order to advance the social quality of life for children.

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## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

Contemporary economic and industrial transformations—particularly the emergence of industrial complexes on the urban periphery—have led to profound changes in the structure of rural settlements, transforming them into semi-formal urban areas. Although these settlements maintain strong economic ties with the main city, they remain fundamentally distinct in social, cultural, and physical dimensions, and are often confronted with extensive deprivation, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to public services. Rapid population growth coupled with weak urban planning in these areas has resulted in a decline in quality of life and deterioration of public health, particularly among children. Informal settlements are mainly formed through rural-to-urban migration and low-income groups, expanding outside the framework of official development policies; consequently, lack of formal ownership and severe infrastructural deficiencies are their defining features. From the perspective of international reports, such settlements are considered unsustainable and are ranked low in terms of livability. Accordingly, addressing sustainability as a key strategy for improving children's quality of life becomes imperative, since sustainability can provide continuous access to educational, health, and welfare services, while securing children's rights in appropriate socio-cultural contexts. In this framework, Nasimshahr, as one of Tehran's peripheral settlements, faces rapid population growth and acute infrastructural shortages, leading to declining per capita public services and deteriorating urban spaces—factors that directly affect children's social lives. This study aims to assess the level of culture-oriented sustainability in such settlements and examine its impact on improving the social life of children in Nasimshahr, while also seeking to propose strategies for enhancing quality of life and advancing sustainable development in informal settlements.

### Methodology

This research is applied and developmental in nature, and employs a survey-based approach. Data collection combined library studies, analysis of urban plans and documents, as well as field observations, interviews, and questionnaires. At the theoretical level, a meta-synthesis of more than 150 credible national and international sources was conducted, of which 84 were selected for extracting sustainability indices and sub-indices. These indices were categorized into four dimensions: social, economic, physical, and environmental. Through coding procedures and expert validation involving 26 university scholars and urban planning specialists, the indicators were finalized. Subsequently, a five-point Likert scale questionnaire was designed, with its validity confirmed through the fuzzy Delphi method. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient above 0.90, confirming strong internal consistency. The statistical population consisted of households living in Nasimshahr's informal settlements (approximately 48,910 residents). Based on Cochran's formula, the sample size was set at 380 individuals, selected randomly across diverse social, economic, and age groups to ensure representativeness. Data analysis was conducted using the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), and the final indices and sub-indices were evaluated to measure sustainability levels in four neighborhoods: Ourin, Hamdanak, Kheirabad-e Bala, and Kheirabad-e Paeen. The selection of Nasimshahr as the case study was due to its rapid population growth, infrastructural weaknesses, and unregulated expansion of informal settlements, making it a compelling example for assessing culture-oriented sustainability in peripheral urban contexts.

### Results and Discussion

Data analysis revealed that Nasimshahr's informal settlements are in unfavorable conditions across all four dimensions of sustainability: social, economic, physical, and environmental. According to the AHP results, social and economic indicators carried the greatest weight in influencing neighborhood sustainability. Sub-indicators such as ownership status, household head's income and employment, civic participation, security, and educational conditions had the strongest impact on residents' quality of life, particularly that of children. Field observations further showed that poor urban services, shortage of green spaces, insufficient lighting, inadequate street networks, along with educational and economic challenges, have reduced neighborhood vitality and weakened social interactions. This situation not only restricts children's presence in public spaces but also severely limits their opportunities for social and psychological development. The findings indicate that achieving culture-oriented sustainability in Nasimshahr's informal settlements requires a comprehensive and multidimensional approach. Enhancing children's social lives necessitates policies aimed at improving safety, fostering local sense of belonging, expanding green and safe play spaces, and providing educational and economic support for families. Continuation of current conditions will perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality, exacerbating long-term social vulnerabilities, especially among children. Therefore, integrating culture-oriented and child-centered planning into urban policy is essential. Such an approach not only improves quality of life in Nasimshahr but can also serve as a model for the sustainable regeneration of informal settlements across the country.