Identifying Neighborhood Problems with a Neighborhood-Based Planning Approach (Case Study: Neighborhood 49, District 2, Zahedan Municipality)

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Abstract

In the past, the boundaries of an urban neighborhood were determined by ethnic, racial, class, and group differences, as well as natural divisions and geomorphological differences (such as the presence of a river, waterway, etc.). Each neighborhood in a city has its own cultural identity, and when hearing the name of a neighborhood, the characteristics of its residents, in terms of occupation, wealth, and prevailing temperament, would immediately come to mind. However, in contemporary cities with the population explosion of the past century, which disrupted the old traditional living systems, the concept of neighborhood has undergone a change, and new interpretations have taken its place. Unlike the past, when neighborhoods were formed based on ethnic, racial, religious, and other shared characteristics, modern neighborhoods are often shaped by economic factors and occupational similarities (e.g., government employee neighborhoods). This leads to a diversity of opinions and tastes within these neighborhoods, resulting in a lack of consensus among residents. This research, conducted using a combination of documentary and field methods, involved distributing 380 questionnaires to residents of Neighborhood 49 in Zahedan. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS software and regression analysis. Although 61% of residents expressed satisfaction with living in the neighborhood, numerous problems were identified, including a shortage of trash cans and littering, poor road conditions, and dilapidated land used as garbage dumps. The most significant demand among residents was for increased green spaces, followed by a lack of recreational and sports facilities, inadequate sidewalks, and the absence of a proper sewage system.
Key words: Neighborhood, Life, Satisfaction, Problems, Zahedan City

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Neighborhoods derive their social value from unique and vital functions. Keywords such as cohesion and integration, sense of belonging, identity rooted in shared memories and interests, trust-based social relationships, vitality, liveliness, and tranquility,social oversight,mediating relationships between family, city, and social institutions, and the space for dialogue and deepening human relationships" encapsulate the functions of neighborhoods. In the socio-cultural approach to urban management, conducting neighborhood-centric studies is essential, as it provides a community-centered understanding of the city that aligns with the requirements of sustainable urban development. Critics who adopt a pathological perspective on the design and implementation of urban development programs are well aware of the detriments caused by neglecting a neighborhood-centric approach in urban planning. They consistently emphasize the necessity of conducting neighborhood studies as a prerequisite for effective neighborhood management alongside advocating for a neighborhood centric approach. However, neighborhood studies are not straightforward tasks, especially in communities suffering from methodological weaknesses in social research, lack of cooperation from relevant agencies and organizations, and misconceptions regarding data collection and statistical processing. It is precisely for these reasons that researchers in this field, alongside their scientific understanding of social surveys, consider the effectiveness of their research efforts contingent upon developing communication skills and enhancing the ability to gather neighborhood-specific information, particularly in demographic and ethnographic dimensions, as well as improving the capacity to process and verify contradictory informational and statistical data.

Data and Methodology

This research was conducted using a documentary-field method. Initially, information regarding area, population, etc., collected from census plans by various companies, institutions, and offices was gathered through visits to libraries and documentation centers. Subsequently, questionnaires were distributed among neighborhood residents, and visits to homes were made to converse with residents and observe neighborhood issues firsthand. A researcher-designed questionnaire consisting of 30 questions, based on a 5-point Likert scale and developed in consultation with urban planning professors at the Islamic Azad University, Zahedan branch, was utilized. Given that the population of this neighborhood is reported to be 7,644 according to statistical bulletins, a sample size of 366 questionnaires was determined using Cochran's formula with an alpha coefficient of 0.05 (95% confidence level). To account for the possibility of incomplete and unusable questionnaires, a total of 380 questionnaires were prepared and randomly distributed in the neighborhood. The data were analyzed using SPSS software, focusing on regression analysis to assess the relationship between each identified issue and the level of satisfaction.

Results and Discussion

In Zahedan, despite its relatively recent establishment, its unique political and geographical position has made it a convergence point for various subcultures resulting from the migration of different ethnicities and nationalities. Diverse ethnic groups, including Persians, Baluchis, Kurds, and Turks, with Sunni and Shia sects, as well as the presence of various nationalities such

as **Afghans, Pakistanis, and Indians, have created a heterogeneous mix of old and new urban neighborhoods. Despite some commonalities, significant differences can be observed among these neighborhoods. The distinctive characteristics of each neighborhood can be identified as symbols of their identity. Some of these characteristics refer to the historical, religious, social, and cultural attributes of the neighborhoods, while others pertain to the architecture, fabric, and overall appearance of the areas. The cultural and social spaces of Zahedan's neighborhoods can even be distinguished based on their interactions, specific religious and ethnic customs, behavioral patterns, and environmental responses. These differences compel urban managers to avoid applying a one-size-fits-all solution to all neighborhoods in the city. The first step in prescribing the right solution for each neighborhood is accurate identification. In-depth exploration, which involves observing the extensive hidden and visible dimensions of the neighborhood's structure and spirit, conducting qualitative dialogues with individuals and reference groups, and holding neighborhood brainstorming sessions, is essential. The neighborhood researcher, given the challenging nature of their work, requires the trust and cooperation of the local community to achieve valuable results and ensure the validity of their findings.**

Conclusion

Today, livability has emerged as a guiding principle within the framework of sustainability discourse in urban policymaking and planning in many developed countries. Urban livability and the right to the city are concepts related to sustainable development and social justice in cities, significantly influencing the creation of healthy, dynamic, and equitable urban environments. The aim of this research, which identifies neighborhood issues through a neighborhood-centric approach with the help of local residents and provides relevant suggestions, is an effort to foster public participation, enhance livability, and strive towards establishing social justice in the city. In the studied neighborhood, although 61% of residents expressed satisfaction with living in the area, numerous issues were observed, including:
1. The lack of trash bins and the abandonment of waste on asphalt surfaces.
2. Unfavorable conditions of the asphalt.
3. Derelict lands that serve as gathering places for waste and pests.
The increase of green spaces has been recognized as the most important demand of the people. The lack of recreational and sports centers, inadequate sidewalks, the absence of a proper sewage network, and blocked drainage systems are identified as the major problems in the neighborhood. It is noteworthy that sometimes the demands of the residents differ from the expectations of the authorities.

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