

## **Residential satisfaction related with procedure and disturbing experience of residential environment**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The current literature has acknowledged that housing conditions, neighbourhood characteristics, and socioeconomics are significant determinants of residential satisfaction. However, the influence of the actual practice of the residential environment to residential satisfaction has rarely been studied. To help fill in this gap, this study examines the contribution of the usage of housing and neighbourhoods' as well as the affective residential experience to residential satisfaction. We apply an individual well-being framework and consider residential satisfaction and residential affective experience as two constituent components of the residential domain subjective well-being. The consequences show that home and neighbourhood actions significantly affect residential satisfaction; advanced stages of valence and activation of daily activities at home and in the neighbourhood lead to more residential satisfaction.

**KEYWORDS:** Residential Satisfaction, Social Factors, Housing Price, Architecture, Urbanism

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Housing has become a major social issue in Hong Kong, mainland China, and everywhere. Soaring housing prices in the past several years in China have not only prevented an increasing number of people from realizing their dreams of owning a home but have also compromised the quality of life for many, if not all, citizens [1-13]. A good understanding of whether individuals are satisfied with their residential environment is very important for evaluating their quality of life and assessing whether housing policies meet their objectives [14-21]. Improving or maximizing residents' satisfaction is one of the key objectives of housing policies in many parts of the world. Knowledge about the factors determining residents' satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with their dwellings and neighborhoods (i.e., residential satisfaction) is invaluable for both the private and public sectors and a great motivation for academic research [22-31]. Residential satisfaction has been an important topic in geography, planning, sociology, and psychology. An extensive literature has been established on the conceptualization, measurement, and determinants of residential satisfaction. Existing studies have revealed that housing conditions, neighborhood characteristics, and personal/household socioeconomics are important determinants of residential satisfaction [32-41]. However, whether and how the usage of the residential environment contributes to residential satisfaction has rarely been investigated. Residents may have different levels of usage of the residential environment in terms of how much time they spend at home and in the neighborhood on a daily basis and what they do during that time [42-53]. Do people who engage in more activities or spend more time at home and in the neighborhood have higher levels of residential satisfaction? Some suggest that spending more time in the neighborhood may increase residential satisfaction by enhancing their social network and providing more social contacts. However, to the best knowledge of the authors, few studies have empirically investigated this potentially important determinant of residential satisfaction [54-61]. Furthermore, the psychology literature on subjective well-being suggests that the affective experience of routine activities has a substantial impact on one's cognitive subjective well-being. The affective experiences generated from daily activities in the location of one's dwelling are believed to impact his/her residential satisfaction or the cognitive component of residential well-being [62-73]. It is thus also important to include the residential affective experience to gain a full understanding of residential satisfaction. Hardly any studies, at least in the residential satisfaction literature, have examined the affective experience in residential environment. We argue that empirical evidence on the importance of the usage and affective experience of the residential environment has important policy implications for neighborhood design and management [74-86]. To fill these gaps in the literature, this paper will adopt the subjective well-being approach to study residential satisfaction. As an established theoretical framework in psychology, subjective well-being includes the affective component (i.e., positive and negative affects)

of immediate experience and the cognitive component of satisfaction with life. The subjective well-being concept offers a solid theoretical framework to conceptualize residential satisfaction and study the contribution of the usage of and the affective experience in the residential environment to residential satisfaction [69-89]. We consider residential satisfaction and the residential affective experience as two constituent components of the residential domain subjective well-being. This empirical study utilizes a sample of residents in Beijing, China. Structural equations modeling is employed to examine the contribution of variables on the usage of and the affective experience in the residential environment to residential satisfaction, while controlling for socioeconomic, housing conditions, and neighborhood characteristics [1-11]. This paper is structured as follows. The next section presents the literature background by reviewing studies on residential satisfaction and identifying research gaps. "Study Design" section provides the study design sample and data. The socioeconomic profiles of the sample are also introduced. "Modeling Results" section describes the model development, presents the modeling results, and discusses findings. The last section offers conclusions, discusses policy implications, and outlines future research directions [12-23].

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Residential satisfaction has been a popular research topic for decades and has recently gained a renewed interest in fields such as geography, urban planning, and housing studies. Its popularity is grounded on the premise that residential satisfaction is an important component of individuals' life satisfaction or quality of life and a key explanatory factor in residential mobility. In the following sections, we shall review the existing studies concerning the concepts, measurements, and determinants of residential satisfaction and then identify research gaps. Satisfaction with one's dwelling or housing and satisfaction with the estate or neighborhood in which the dwelling is located are considered the two constituent components of residential satisfaction [1-24]. Residential satisfaction is typically conceptualized as the evaluation of how the actual housing consumption meets housing aspirations. It is also theorized based on the notion of "housing deficit", which denotes the gap between the actual housing conditions and the standards dictated by cultural/societal norms and familial norms. This idea is based on the housing adjustment theory, which contends that people are likely to express higher levels of housing satisfaction if their housing conditions meet cultural and/or family norms. Residential satisfaction is often quantified by measuring individuals' responses to a single-item question on a Likert-scale of five, seven, or ten points. One may also use multiple items to measure satisfaction with different components or aspects of the residential environment [25-37]. Researchers use 14 items to examine residential satisfaction regarding four aspects of the residential environment: housing, sanitation, security, and neighborhood. Housing (or dwelling) conditions, neighborhood (or estate) physical and social attributes and individuals and households' socio-economics have been reported as significant explanatory variables of residential satisfaction. Others suggest that the perceived variables of the residential condition are more important for determining residential satisfaction than the objective ones. Some projects found that neighborhood variables are more important than dwelling variables for determining household preferences and housing choices. Researchers report that individuals' socioeconomic variables are more important than estate attributes for explaining estate satisfaction. Dwelling variables that may explain residential satisfaction include size (e.g., number of bedrooms), the quality of the dwelling (e.g., the presence of a bathroom and kitchen), and tenure (e.g., owning or renting) [38-52]. Dwelling size is reported as an overwhelmingly important determinant of housing satisfaction; building type and quality of housing facilities also have significant impacts on housing satisfaction (e.g., Li & Song, 2009). According to projects, important predictors of satisfaction with neighborhoods include the relative closeness of neighborhoods to employment and recreation opportunities, the general appearance of the neighborhood; the socioeconomic composition of residents; safety; the availability of services such as schools, public transportation, and local shops; and the presence/absence of problems such as noise, hygiene, and crime. For example, environmental cleanliness and the quality of buildings in and appearance of the neighborhood are said to have positive effects on neighborhood satisfaction [53-71]. Crowdedness or population density is found to negatively impact residential satisfaction, although compact design is reported to have positive effects in another study. Safety concerns and the presence of bothersome problems, such as noise, are found to negatively impact neighborhood satisfaction and choice. The presence of services and quality amenities, such as schools, shops, and leisure facilities, in and around the neighborhood is reported to increase satisfaction with the neighborhood. Apart from physical attributes, the social characteristics of neighborhoods are found to be significant determinants of residential satisfaction [72-89]. Researchers found that social attachment within the community is the most important determinant of residential satisfaction. Friendly neighbors and community spirit are reported to be positive contributors to residential satisfaction with

the neighborhood. Social ties or contacts in the neighborhood are likely to increase one's sense of familiarity and attachment, which can enhance residential satisfaction. Studies show that the social composition (e.g., the racial/ethnic composition) of the neighborhoods also plays an influential role. Individuals living in the neighborhood with others who are similar seem to have higher levels of satisfaction. Others suggest that individuals' housing preferences can be differentiated by factors, such as family income, age, education, and type of employer [1-17]. These personal and household socio-economic variables are found to influence residential satisfaction. Age often has a positive effect on residential satisfaction. Income and education levels are related to one's economic capacity to improve his/her residential conditions and choices in the housing market; hence, well-educated and higher income groups are often found to be more satisfied with their residences than other groups. Nevertheless, higher education levels may also increase the expectations of the standards of the residential neighborhood, and as a result, may lower residential satisfaction [18-32]. Marriage and the presence of children tend to increase residential satisfaction because households with children are more likely to live in safe and spacious neighborhoods and have more opportunities for social interactions. Owner-occupiers are generally more satisfied with their dwellings and neighborhoods than people with other tenures. The duration of time in a residence contributes to residential satisfaction because people who have lived in an area longer may have developed greater attachment to their residential environment through social networks and place identification. However, residential satisfaction may also decrease with the length of residence because of the changing needs across one's life course and the deterioration in housing conditions over time [33-48]. Life course events, such as marriage and job changes, are important triggers of residential mobility. Apart from the empirical studies on the determinants of residential satisfaction, another stream of studies is concerned with the residential satisfaction of certain socioeconomic groups. Researchers studied residential satisfaction, moving intention, and moving behaviors of residents in redeveloped neighborhoods in Beijing and reports an overall low level of residential satisfaction and high intention to move [49-57]. Others studied the residential satisfaction of displaced residents and found that those displaced were primarily people who were older, less-educated, and have lower incomes. They were generally satisfied with their dwellings but were less satisfied with their neighborhood. Some people studied the residential satisfaction of public housing residents in Malaysia and determined that the factors with positive impacts on residential satisfaction include the length of the duration of residence and the higher the floor of the residence, but previous residential experience in public housing seems to have a negative impact. Researchers studied the residential satisfaction of dwellers of 25 post-World War II estates in nine European countries [58-71]. The elderly, higher income households, and homeowners were found to have higher levels of housing satisfaction, while the presence of children and longer durations of stay reduce housing satisfaction. In some projects examined the residential satisfaction of migrants and low-income groups living in informal settlements in three major Chinese cities: Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. They found that individuals' socioeconomic variables are not statistically significant determinants of residential satisfaction; migrants and low-income groups are not less satisfied with their residences compared to indigenous people and middle-income groups. Social attachment within the community is the most important determinant [72-89].

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

Despite the sizable literature reviewed above and the many different aspects of residential satisfaction that have been studied, the understanding of residential satisfaction is far from complete. Existing studies have revealed the association between residential satisfaction and both housing conditions and neighborhood characteristics. However, exactly how housing conditions and neighborhood characteristics influence residential satisfaction is not fully understood. Few studies have examined how the usage of the residential environment may influence residential satisfaction. Researchers argue that having friends who live in proximity and participating in neighborhood activities may explain residential satisfaction [1-17]. According to the recent literature on the therapeutic landscape in health geography, neighborhood environments that serve as "enabling places" contribute to well-being through facilitating or providing opportunities for physical activities, recreation, and social interactions reveal that participation in organized neighborhood activities positively contributes to residential satisfaction. Others suggest that the supportiveness of the neighborhood environment is conducive to a better quality of life and higher level of neighborhood satisfaction by making outdoor activities easy and enjoyable [18-31]. Despite the sizable literature reviewed above and the many different aspects of residential satisfaction that have been studied, the understanding of residential satisfaction is far from

complete. Existing studies have revealed the association between residential satisfaction and both housing conditions and neighborhood characteristics. However, exactly how housing conditions and neighborhood characteristics influence residential satisfaction is not fully understood. Few studies have examined how the usage of the residential environment may influence residential satisfaction. Others argue that having friends who live in proximity and participating in neighborhood activities may explain residential satisfaction [32-46]. According to the recent literature on the therapeutic landscape in health geography, neighborhood environments that serve as “enabling places” contribute to well-being through facilitating or providing opportunities for physical activities, recreation, and social interactions) reveal that participation in organized neighborhood activities positively contributes to residential satisfaction. They suggest that the supportiveness of the neighborhood environment is conducive to a better quality of life and higher level of neighborhood satisfaction by making outdoor activities easy and enjoyable. Some suggest that spending more time in the neighborhood may increase residential satisfaction through enhancing social networks and building social contacts. Since “time is the ultimate finite resource”, active allocation of time to an environmental element usually signifies that it supports or even pleases the user [47-61]. Therefore, if someone intensively uses his/her residential environment, he/she is expected to be able to extract critical meanings or pleasures from the residential environment no matter what it looks like. On the other hand, for those who do not carry out many activities in the neighborhood, the presence of facilities, such as a swimming pool and playgrounds, may not have much impact on residential satisfaction. Thus, the usage of the residential environment is a potentially important determinant of residential satisfaction and deserves research attention. Furthermore, most existing studies conceptualize residential satisfaction as individuals’ cognitive responses to the residential environment [62-76]. However, the affective experience of using the residential environment is not only in itself an important aspect of evaluating the residential place, but it is also an important component of residential satisfaction as an accumulative assessment of the residential experience. The psychology literature suggests that participating in activities, especially interesting ones, generates happiness. Short-term happiness or affective experiences, including the episode-based valence of daily activities and the affects of weekly routine activities, have significant impacts on cognitive well-being or life satisfaction. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the affective feelings or experiences generated from daily activities at home and in the neighborhood may contribute to residential satisfaction [77-89]. To study the affective experience of the residential environment and its contribution to residential satisfaction, the subjective well-being concept developed in the psychology literature is applied. Subjective well-being refers to individuals’ cognitive and emotional well-being, which can be directly measured by means of reliable psychometric scales. It consists of a short-term emotional component (positive and negative affects) of immediate experience and a long-term cognitive component of satisfaction with life. One may differentiate between global subjective well-being (i.e., subjective well-being for a life as a whole) and domain-specific subjective well-being (e.g., subjective well-being of the travel domain). Similarly, we may define subjective well-being in the residential domain, which consists of a long-term cognitive component of “residential satisfaction” and a short-term emotional component concerning the affective experience with the residential environment or the “residential affective experience”. The cognitive component or “residential satisfaction” is mostly assessed in the existing literature through a single-item statement that globally measures satisfaction with the residence as a whole or with different components of the residential environment [1-23]. To align with the well-being conceptualization of residential satisfaction, we suggest that residential satisfaction be assessed in a form similar to the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) that is widely used in the subjective well-being literature. The SWLS includes five statements that respondents are requested to respond to by selecting a rating on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (do not agree) to 7 (completely agree). These five statements are the following: (1) In most ways my life is close to my ideal, (2) The conditions of my life are excellent. (3) I am satisfied with my life. (4) So far I have gotten the important things I want in life. (5) If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing. To globally evaluate satisfaction with the residential environment as a whole in this study, the SWLS framework is modified to the following: (1) I am completely satisfied with my residence here. (2) It makes me feel at home to live here. (3) I do not want to change anything regarding my residence. (4) Living here is among the best time in my life. (5) This residence of living is close to my ideal. The affective component or “residential affective experience” is defined as the moment of subjective well-being generated from daily activities conducted or time spent in residential places including the home and neighborhood. Following, the core affect approach developed by projects can be used to measure the affective experience. Core affects constitute the basic affective qualities of any emotional experience; they are present in all emotional states and can be accessed cognitively rather easily [24-38]. Core affects vary along two dimensions, which Russell calls valence

and activation. Valence is a purely hedonic dimension and ranges from unpleasant to pleasant; activation ranges from quietness to arousal. Different emotions are combinations of different positions of these dimensions in an orthogonal design. The usage of the residential environment is defined in this study in terms of the activities conducted and the time spent at home and in the neighborhood on a daily basis [39-54]. In-home activities are those conducted at home, such as eating, sleeping, household maintenance, and social and recreational activities. Neighborhood activities include shopping, walking for leisure, outdoor physical activities, and social interactions with neighbors.

#### 4.0 RESULT

Data were collected as part of a household questionnaire conducted in Beijing, the capital of China. The survey was the first phase of a longitudinal study on the implications of home relocation on activity-travel behavior changes. Respondents were selected in proportion to the number of renters, new home buyers and second-hand home buyers in each of the 12 urban and suburban districts of Beijing. The sample participants were randomly approached in the Real Estate Exchange Center in each district, which contain large furniture markets and home depots specializing in decoration services. Members of the recruited households were invited to answer the questionnaire through a face-to-face interview [55-68].

**Table 1.** Personal and household socioeconomics

Variable	Classification	Cases (N = 467)	Percentage/ mean	Beijing population <sup>a</sup>
Gender	Female	287	61.46	48.33
	Male	180	38.54	51.67
Age	< 19	3	0.64	13.95 <sup>b</sup>
	19–39	242	51.82	44.10
	40–59	217	46.47	29.49
	> 59	5	1.07	12.45
			7.49	44.24
Education	Junior secondary or lower	35		
	High school	270	57.82	34.97
	University or above	162	34.69	20.78
Marital status	Married	365	78.16	67.88
	Others	102	21.84	32.12
Monthly household income (RMB)	≤ 5,999	65	13.95	
	6000–9999	143	30.69	
	10,000–19,999	205	43.99	
	≥ 20,000	53	11.37	
Employment status	Full time employee	377	80.73	
	Others	90	19.27	
Housing tenure	Owner-occupier	266	56.96	59.08
	Renter and others	201	43.04	41.92
Hukou status	Beijing hukou	372	79.66	62.92
	No	95	20.34	37.08
Presence of children age 12 or younger	Yes	96	20.56	
	No	371	79.44	
Housing type	Commodity housing	248	53.10	
	Others	219	46.90	
Duration of residence	Years	467	10.25	
Dwelling size	m <sup>b</sup>	467	63.07	29.2 <sup>c</sup>

In total, 1243 respondents from 467 households successfully completed the questionnaire survey. This study involves the head of the 467 households who completed the residential household information on behalf of the household. A major part of the questionnaire is an activity-travel diary, which requests that respondents recall and record all in-home and out-of-home activities in terms of where, when, with whom, and how to get to the activity places (i.e., travel) within 24 hours starting from 3 am of the previous day to 3 am of the day of the interview. Data on the usage of the residential environment are extracted from the activity-travel diary. Only in-home and neighborhood activities are included in the present study. Neighborhood activities are defined as activities performed within a 15-minute walking distance from home. Combined with the activity diary data, data on residential affective experience are collected using the day reconstruction method developed. The two single items on valence and activation with seven categories (from very unpleasant to very pleasant, and from not active at all to very active) are included in the activity diary to capture the core affects for each activity episode. Data on residential satisfaction are collected by asking interviewees to respond to the five statements

discussed earlier about their residential environment as a whole by rating them on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). The questionnaire includes several questions on housing conditions such as housing size, tenure, and housing type. To collect data on the perceived neighborhood characteristics, respondents were asked to respond to 15 statements about the physical and social characteristics of their neighborhoods by rating them on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). These statements were developed based on the literature on built and social environments. Finally, the survey also includes questions on personal and household socio-demographic information. Table 1 presents the personal and household socio-economic profiles of the sample. For comparison purposes, the socio-economic characteristics of the general population of Beijing are listed in the last column of the table. While most of the socioeconomic variables are self-explanatory, a couple of variables require further explanation. First, hukou status is concerned with the official citizenship of Beijing and has implications for access to social welfare and subsidies for child education. Second, housing type is differentiated by several categories typically observed in Chinese cities including commodity housing (which is developed by a real estate developer and can be bought or rented from the market), Danwei housing (which is provided by a work unit or “Danwei”), social welfare housing (which is subsidized by governments), and self-built housing (which is often in the rural area of the suburbs). The table shows that, in general, the sample reasonably represents the general population of Beijing, but middle-aged and married people and females are over-represented in the sample. This is understandable because our sample includes only household heads, who are more likely to be married and middle-aged. Nevertheless, since the objective of this study is to examine the determinants of residential satisfaction rather than residential satisfaction patterns in Beijing, such differences do not have much impact on the validity of the findings of this research.

## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS

To enrich the literature on residential satisfaction, this paper has examined the possible contribution of the usage of the home and the neighborhood for activities as well as residential affective experience to residential satisfaction. Applying the conceptual framework of subjective well-being, we consider residential satisfaction and residential affective experience as two components of the residential domain subjective well-being. The empirical study is concerned with a sample of residents in Beijing and data collected in 2011. Structural equations models were developed to examine and analyze how the usage and affective experience of residential environments impact residential satisfaction. The empirical results confirm our hypothesis that both the usage of the residential environment and the affective experience have significant effects on residential satisfaction. The inclusion of variables on usage and affective experiences significantly improve the goodness-of-fit of the model with variables on housing and neighborhood characteristics and socioeconomics, which the existing studies usually consider. More home activities and longer stays at home are found to lead to more residential satisfaction. However, the other direction of effect is found for neighborhood activities. Positive affective experiences or higher levels of valence and activation experienced in daily activities at home and in the neighborhood are found to increase residential satisfaction. Our study also confirms the findings of the existing literature that residential environment variables have significant effects on residential satisfaction. More importantly, we supplement the literature and reveal that residential environment usage and affective experience are important factors mediating the effects of residential environment variables such as dwelling size, housing type, and social environment on residential satisfaction. Marriage and the presence of children are confirmed by the present study to have positive effects on residential satisfaction. This study enriches the residential satisfaction literature by highlighting the importance of actual usage and the affective experience of the residential environment and suggests that future studies need to consider not only the characteristics of residential environments, but also what activities, how much time individuals spend in the residential environment, and what affective experience is generated. In terms of policy implications, the findings of this study suggest that housing policies aimed at maximizing residential satisfaction should not only emphasize the development and provision of quality residential environments, but also more importantly should examine whether the residential environment facilitates engagement in daily activities and generates a pleasant affective experience. Residential satisfaction may be promoted by policies encouraging home activities and spending time with household members. In addition, policy measures to promote positive affective experience-generating activities (e.g., social gathering and leisure activities) at home and in the neighborhood are conducive to the improvement of residential satisfaction. This study can be extended in the future in several different directions. First, more case studies are needed to provide additional empirical evidence on the importance of the usage and

affective experience of the residential environment in explaining residential satisfaction. For example, the contribution of neighborhood activities to residential satisfaction needs to be further verified. Second, this study did not differentiate the types of daily activities conducted at home and in the neighborhood. It would be interesting for future studies to examine how different types of activities undertaken in the residential environment impact residential satisfaction. Finally, future studies could establish a link between residential well-being and life satisfaction and evaluate the importance of residential well-being to quality of life.

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