

Determining Social Capital Indicators Affecting the Residents life Quality in Informal Settlements

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ABSTRACT

Given the importance of sustainable urban development and quality of life, the problem of informal settlements is now entering a new phase of research and social capital, as an important aspect of the quality of life in such settlements, is being widely explored. Aiming at realizing sustainable development and recovering liveliness in these settlements, the present study seeks to compile social capital factors of the quality of life in informal settlements. The methodology is descriptive-analytical and the indicators are determined by means of logical argumentation. According to the findings, outstanding indicators of the quality of life in informal settlements turn out to be trust, norm-orientation, as well as network connections in direct evaluation and participation, attitude of voluntariness, social cohesion, sense of security, informal social relations, as well as adherence to values in indirect evaluation. If investigated and improved, these indicators will play a major role in sustainable development.

Key words: Social capital, Sustainable development, Quality of life, Satisfaction, Informal settlement.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid and imbalanced physical development in urban areas over recent decades has had undesirable economic, social, and physical consequences. One such consequence has been informal and marginal settlement. Thus, due to lack of incorporation into the economic structure of the city, some people are settled in the marginal neighborhoods and slums which can even be called urban villages (Gherekhloo *et al.*, 2010). Lack of order and organization in these settlements usually affects the inhabitants' life to a large extent and, reducing the public satisfaction, poses a serious threat to social cohesion (Sadeghi *et al.*, 2007). The current trend toward sustainable urban development and its contribution to the quality of life have brought about new horizons of research into the issue of informal settlements and provided the researchers with more comprehensive insights into this urban phenomenon (Gherekhloo *et al.*, 2010).

From one aspect, sustainable development aims at improvement of the quality of life and public satisfaction. Such improvement has been the common aim of all types of development, whether regional or international, and it is on this and other factors of improvement that the future of humanity will be based (Ghaffari *et al.*, 2007). Part of these factors refers to the quality of one's relationships with other members of the society, groups, and official or non-official institutions, which is called "social capital". Social capital is sometimes known as "the lost chain" of development (Majedi *et al.*, 2007). As an asset that is prevalent in the communities in informal settlements, social capital is central to public satisfaction in that it paves the way to active and positive participation and facilitates the influence of social norms and values on the behavior of the individuals (Taghiloo, 2007). The significance of any study of social capital and satisfaction with the quality of life is confirmed by the fact that disorganization and inner damages in informal settlements have

presented serious threats to the quality of life. Accordingly, a good knowledge of these factors and their influence on satisfaction with the quality of life is the prerequisite of any act of planning for informal settlements. Here, social capital is central to comprehensive social and cultural development (Ghasemi *et al.*, 2014) as well as to improvement of public satisfaction with the quality of life. It appears that increasing social capital in informal communities results in improvement of the role of social agents, access to resources, services and opportunities, as well as capability of conscious social participation with the aim of creating social equality and enhancing the quality of life. On this basis, this study aims at discovering those components of social capital which may affect the quality of life.

MATERIALS AND DISCUSSIONS

Informal Settlement

Informal settlement is an undesirable phenomenon which takes place within or around urban areas without official permission from responsible organizations and outside the planning framework of urban development and creates a low level of life in terms of both quality and quantity (Sarraf, 2009). It is the result of lack of fulfillment of the housing needs of low-income people who do not find a place in the officially organized space of the city and cannot help building illegal settlements. Informal settlement can be judged by both appearance and its underlying reasons, of which the former is usually considered by the public. Such people live in places with the least amount of communication with host community and, due to unfavorable economic conditions, separated from the main parts of the city (Sadeghi *et al.*, 2007). The underlying reasons of informal settlement are related to the sociocultural milieu and individual psychological conditions. In this regard, the living status in marginal settlements is, as Robert Park (1981) puts it, a purgatory-like situation which creates social and mental suspension and severely affects their social relationships and cultural values. Such an individual mostly evades from cultural encounters and avoids participating in social activities (Jamshidiha, 2005). Inhabitants of informal settlements are distinguished by physical (adverse housing conditions), social (non-urban social behavior), and economic (inappropriate employment and income) factors and are accounted as the most

deprived, and thus the weakest, social stratum. Social, physical, psychological, and environmental harms in these areas have remarkably deteriorated the quality of life and severely problematized the most fundamental aspect of sustainable development, namely, satisfaction with the quality of life (Sarraf, 2009). Apart from the social reasons for this type of settlement, urban management mainly aims at improving the situation in these areas. Social capital plays a major role here as a most influential component of development in informal settlements. If boosted in a norm-oriented manner, this type of capital, which is produced by means of trust and power in official and non-official social networks, will help improve social cohesion and stability (Shafia *et al.*, 2013)

Quality of Life

Quality of life refers to having necessary resources to fulfill needs and desires, participating in various activities, gaining self-confidence, and comparing one's satisfaction to that of other individuals (Faraji Mollaei, 2011). Many scholars believe that the quality of life is mostly determined by private aspects of life such as wishes, expectations, satisfaction, etc. (Lotfi, 2010). Cutter defines the quality of life as one's satisfaction with life and the surrounding environment which includes needs, demands, preferences, life style, and other concrete or abstract factors that influence the overall welfare of the individual (Ghaffari *et al.*, 2010). Generally speaking, quality of life has been conceived as fulfillment of mundane and spiritual needs from subjective or objective aspects. In subjective approaches, researchers put emphasis on the subjective experiences of individuals and tend to foreground well-being, happiness, and welfare as major components. Objective approaches emphasize the objective conditions of life and quality is believed to be depending on the fulfillment of rudimentary needs. These objective indicators chiefly include economic production, literacy rate, and life expectation (Costanza, 2007). Recently, however, subjective approaches have been more favored by scholars. Among subjective criteria, mental perception of well-being has been accepted as more democratic since people themselves, instead of researchers, come to assess their life conditions. One can simply ask people how much they feel that they are living in welfare and obtain the right answer

because people usually have a clear picture of ideal conditions in their minds (Noghani *et al.*, 2009).

Satisfaction

Satisfaction has been emphasized in numerous studies as the most useful indicator of the quality of life. There are four types of satisfaction (Ghaffari *et al.*, 2010):

- 1) Satisfaction caused by having, which refers to being provided with facilities;
- 2) Satisfaction caused by relation, which addresses social relationships;
- 3) Satisfaction caused by being, which revolves around self-concept and self-control as opposed to self-alienation;
- 4) Satisfaction caused by action, which addresses how leisure time is spent.

Satisfaction is achieved when real conditions resemble one's perceived needs and ideals (Rafiyani, 2010). There are two major theoretical approaches to life satisfaction. First, life satisfaction is depicted analytically as a multi-dimensional construct with a great amount of variety. In this approach, different areas of life are investigated one by one to reach a general notion of satisfaction (Ghahreman, 2011). Second, life satisfaction is viewed holistically and as having no dimensions. In the second approach, only one statement, and not numerous statements, is used to ask about life satisfaction. Table 1 contains various dimensions of life satisfaction collected from a number of studies.

Social capital is central to the measurement of life satisfaction. The individual's permanent sense of responsibility for the social system is rooted in satisfaction with the self, with the society, and with living conditions. Every individual can analyze their surrounding conditions to grasp and evaluate their personal situation. As this self-evaluation is at the core of one's social life, any positive or negative evaluation is likely to spread through all beliefs and behaviors. Therefore, no government should feel needless of evaluating the psychological state of individuals (Moayyedfar *et al.*, 2006).

Social capital

Humans are permanently searching for resources necessary to realize their goals. What

people we know and what kind of relationship we establish with others are important in determining our achievements. This is known as social capital by the scholars. The notion of social capital came to the vogue in the 1960s (Noghani *et al.*, 2009). There are three currents of thought with regard to social capital. As a critical sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu enumerates four types of capital: financial, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu, social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1992). The American sociologist, James Coleman, defines social capital as the set of resources which are inherent to familial relationships and the social organization of the society and are useful to social and cognitive development of children and the youth. These resources vary from one person to another and are counted as important for children and the youth in their human resource development (Coleman, 1994).

In the late 1990s, Robert Putnam put offered a new approach to the notion of social capital. He began his work with the idea of the danger of the decline of American civic life. He believed that the positive characteristics that Tocqueville suggested for the American society in the 19th century, including mass participation in civic life and the existence of social relationships beyond friendship and kinship, are disappearing. To formulate this problem, Putnam used the notion of social capital. He conceived social capital as referring to interpersonal relations and social networks as well as their mutual norms (Putnam, 2006). Criticizing Putnam with regard to his emphasis on civic institutions, Francis Fukuyama tries to emphasize both subjective and objective aspects, i.e. the network of official and informal relations, as well as social trust in the definition of social capital (Fukuyama, 2006). He conceives the main function of social capital as facilitating cooperation and collective participation in order to achieve personal and collective aims and to contribute to economic, political, and cultural development (Putnam, 2006). These approaches summarize the evolution of the notion of social capital since 1985. Table 2 presents a number of definitions of social capital.

Therefore, if the above viewpoints are combined, we could define social capital as being composed of a set of social relations, trust at different levels, norms, social support, associative relations, as well as participation (Shyani *et al.*, 2012), the quality of which depends on structural and interpersonal elements.

Evaluation of Social Capital

According to Putnam, awareness, participation, and civic institutions are three major indicators of social capital. In his survey of international values, Inglehart makes use of trust indicators to measure social capital (Khazaei *et al.*, 2007). Fukuyama suggests that, instead of measuring social capital as a positive value, the lack of social capital can be measured by negative social phenomena like crime rate, family disintegration, drug abuse, filing petitions, suicide, and evading from tax payment (Akhtar-Mohagheghi, 2007). In order to measure social capital, Onyx and Bullen administered a questionnaire in New South Wales, Australia, and extracted eight fundamental factors of social capital (Tajbakhsh, 2007):

- 1) Participation in local gatherings
- 2) Social activities
- 3) Sense of trust and security
- 4) Neighborhood relationships
- 5) Kinship and friendship
- 6) Tolerance of variety
- 7) Value of life
- 8) Work relationships.

In an article titled "Understanding and measuring social capital", World Bank enumerates the following six indicators (Ghiyasvand, 2010):

- 1) Groups and networks
- 2) Trust and cooperation
- 3) Collective action
- 4) Information and communication
- 5) Solidarity (inclusion)
- 6) Enabling action

In general, social capital is measured either by a direct or an indirect method. Based on Putnam's ideas, the direct method seeks to measure trust, norm adherence, and membership in social networks. In the indirect method, however, which based on Fukuyama's work, the indicators that are thought to be resulted from social capital are

measured. Table 3 represents various indicators of direct and indirect measurement of social capital.

Relationship between Social Capital and the Quality of Life

As mentioned above, Bourdieu makes distinction between four types of capital:

- 1) Financial capital: valuable financial assets like money and other properties.
- 2) Cultural capital: the internalized social norms and capacities that help an individual achieve different resources.
- 3) Social capital: useful relationships for achieving resources.
- 4) Human capital: skills and knowledge of a person.

Various indicators of the quality of life can be described by these capitals (Noghani *et al.*, 2009). Among the above categories, social capital has specific characteristics. First, it is the only relational capital and is created by social relations. Second, it cannot be totally transferred like other capitals. Moreover, an individual's social capital is obviously related to their position in social networks. In other words, one's social capital is one's status in various social networks. It is this very status that determines how a person can improve their quality of life. Seen in this way, social capital and quality of life are closely interwoven and our hypothesis here is that social capital positively influences the quality of life. Current research in psychology and medicine indicates that there is a direct relationship between social capital, on the one hand, and quality, aim, and concept of life, on the other. According to Jane Jacobs, compact social networks in old and mixed neighborhoods form a kind of social capital that feel more responsible with regard to sanitation, street crime prevention, and other factors of the quality of life than do official organizations such as police forces (Fukuyama, 2001). Research shows that a high degree of social relationship (as an indicator of social capital) is highly correlated with life satisfaction. For example, a person with five or more close friends is certainly more satisfied than one with fewer friends (Sousa *et al.*, 2001). Similarly, Whiteford believes that the more a person is aloof, the less satisfied he or she feels with life, and vice versa (Whiteford, 2000). Also, in Iran, empirical studies indicate that there is a significant relationship between social capital

and life satisfaction. For instance, Onagh(2006) shows that there is a strong relationship between social capital and quality of life with a significance level of 0.01(Onagh, 2006). In their research into the quality of life in the rural areas of Fars Province, Majedi and Lahsaee-zadeh (1385) conclude that a high level of social capital leads to a high quality of life and social capital is a better predictor of the quality of life in comparison with contextual variables such as age, gender, job, etc (Majedi *et al.*, 2007). To sum up, previous research has proved that there is a significant positive correlation between life satisfaction and one's social status (Barzegar, 2008).

The Indicators of Social Capital in Terms of the Quality of Life

The first step in measuring social capital is to select its dimensions and, then, to select the appropriate indicators that describe social capital. Indicators are used to evaluate the temporal changes of phenomena which are difficult to measure directly (Dwyer *et al.*, 2004). A variety of indicators has been used by different scholars to measure the quality of life. As the structure of informal settlements entails the present study compiles the dimensions of social capital by means of both direct method, taken from Putnam, and indirect method, taken

Table 1: Analytical views of life satisfaction as a multidimensional construct (compiled by the author)

Source	Dimensions of life satisfaction
Nayebi (1997)	Family life, housing, employment, general health
Azimi (2004)	Self-satisfaction, friends, family, living environment, work environment
Alikhah (2005)	Family life, marital life, social relationships, income
Abazari (2005)	Financial status, self-satisfaction, socio-political satisfaction
Mohseni(1977)	Marriage, employment, leisure time
Torksar (2000)	Expectations from life, fulfillment of wishes

Table 2: Dimensions of social capital as put forward by different scholars (compiled by the author)

Scholars	Dimensions of social capital
Bourdieu(1986)	Social capital is a constructed social requirement and can be changed to economic capital under certain circumstances
Coleman(1990)	Social capital is part of the social structure that allows the agent to gain their benefits. It facilitates certain actions of the individuals within the social structure
Baker (1990)	Social capital is a resource that agents obtain from certain social structures and then implement to achieve their benefits. Social capital is created by means of changes in the relations among agents
Putnam (1995)	Social capital refers to trust, norms, and social networks that facilitates the cooperation among members to gain shared benefits
Giddens(1998)	Social capital is the network of relations, responsibility, and social trust that lies within groups in traditional societies and extends over the entire society in modern societies
Fukuyama(2000)	Social capital is a set of unofficial norms and values in social systems that helps improve interpersonal cooperation
Marmot and Bell (2011)	Social capital is a set of networks, norms, and values that facilitates cooperation within and between groups in order to achieve common benefits

from Fukuyama. The components in the direct method include trust, adherence to norms, and membership in social networks, and those in the indirect method include participation and voluntary action, social cohesion, sense of objective and subjective security in the neighborhood, official and governmental interactions, unofficial social relationships, as well as adherence to values.¹ The components are considered on two levels: informal, i.e. interpersonal relationships like kinship and friendship, and official, i.e. social relationships like citizenship. The important consideration here is the selection of indicators that suit the sociocultural conditions of a neighborhood and that are already recognized by other scholars as an indicator of social capital. In order to operationalize the indicators, they are provided with some realizations. The indicators are represented in Table 4.

RESULTS

Today, improvement of the quality of life and increasing life satisfaction in informal settlements is one of the aims of sustainable development in urban areas. Focusing on the notion of social capital, the

present study sought to compile a comprehensive list of the indicators of social capital which influence the quality of life. By using the notion of social capital, social relationships can be quantitatively accounted as assets that can be more easily analyzed. Previous studies have confirmed the influence of social capital on mental health, physical health, life satisfaction, and numerous other areas. Given that the concept of the quality of life addresses the life of people in its social context, various indicators have been so far devised to measure the notion of social capital which, in turn, influences the quality of life. The present study summarized the influence of the indicators of social capital on the quality of life as following:

- 1) Increased trust on an official and informal level that leads to trust in relationships with friends, neighbors and other social institutions and results in a positive attitude to the self and community members, security, peace, as well as participation.
- 2) Increased adherence to norms and moral standards of the society.
- 3) Membership in informal networks like friends, relatives, and neighbors and official networks like social organizations and institutions and,

Table 3: Indicators of direct and indirect measurement of social capital (compiled by the author).

Measure-ment type	Indicators	Scholars
Direct	Trust (in neighbors, other ethnic groups, tradesmen, personnel of council and municipality, police forces, and statespersons)	Putnam (1993), Mignone (2003), Edwards (2004), Buck (2005), Piran et al. (2007).
	Adherence to norms	Coleman (1990), Onyx and Bullen (2000)
	Membership in networks	Coleman (1990), Putnam (1993)
Indirect	Participation	Piran et al. (2007), Navabakhsh and Fadavi (1387), Onyx and Bullen (2000), Harper and Kelly (2003)
	Adherence to the local community	World Bank (1998), Onyx and Bullen (1998), Onyx and Bullen (2000)
	Allocation of time to solving the problems of neighbors	Onyx and Bullen (1998), World Bank (2004)
	Charitable aids in the neighborhoods	Sharifiani and Saeed-abadi (2007)
	Close friends in the neighborhood	World Bank (1998), Onyx and Bullen (1998), Onyx and Bullen (2000), Stone and Wendy (2001)
	Sense of security in the neighborhood	Onyx and Bullen (2000)
	Knowing the members of the neighborhood council	Putnam (1993)

Table 4: Indicators of social capital in terms of the quality of life (compiled by the author)

Notion	Components of measurement	Area	Realizations
Direct measurement	Trust	Official	Trust in social institutions, members of neighborhood council
		Informal	Trust in family members, relatives, close friends, neighbors, lending money to neighbors, lending to equipment to neighbors, existence of someone who can lend money
	Adherence to norms	Official	Adherence to law
	Social networks	Informal	Helpfulness
Indirect measurement	Participation and voluntary action	Official	Membership in formal social networks such as religious, political, trade, as well as sport groups
		Informal	Membership in families and kinship groups, friends, neighbors, colleagues, existence of someone who can help in critical situations, existence of people other than one's family to sympathize
		Official	Participation in civic activities and voluntary associations, open-air gatherings, social events, elections, educational groups
		Informal	Cooperation with neighbors for holding ritual ceremonies, participation in neighborhood decision-making, participation in social events (mourning and fests)
	Social cohesion		Spending time and money to solve the problems of neighbors, affinity with neighbors, spending money for improvement of the neighborhood, existence of someone who helps in employment, existence of someone who can be helpful in critical situations, having a sense of acceptance by others
	Sense of objective and subjective security		Personal security, remaining outdoors in the dark, playing of children in the neighborhood with the supervision of parents, peace at home
	Official and governmental interactions		Professional interactions, socialization with colleagues in the workplace, governmental interactions
		Informal social relationships	
Adherence to values		Rectitude and avoidance of lies, safekeeping and secrecy, forgiveness, fairness and equality, honesty, bluntness, braveness in telling the truth	

- thereby, facilitating personal and collective actions to improve living conditions.
- 4) Increased participation and voluntary role in collective activities which causes verbal and communicative interactions, entrance to public areas, knowledge of other cultures, and mutual understanding for groups which are separated from the city.
 - 5) Increased social cohesion and solidarity as a result of increased sense of responsibility and of using cohesive elements that create solidarity.
 - 6) Increased sense of security in individual and social areas and, therefore, increased life satisfaction.
 - 7) Increased official and governmental interactions.
 - 8) Improvement of informal social relationships and preparing the individual for socialization which is an indicator of the quality of life.
 - 9) Adherence to values which increases the sense of security, trust, peace, and interaction in social life.

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