



## Well-being of renters in Ankara: An empirical analysis



G. Pelin Sarıoğlu-Erdoğan

Fatih Sultan Mehmet Waqf University, Faculty of Architecture and Design, Department of Architecture, Halic, Istanbul, Turkey

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 27 August 2014

Received in revised form

26 January 2015

Accepted 12 March 2015

Available online 24 March 2015

#### Keywords:

Well-being

Residential satisfaction

Private renting

Regression

Ankara-Turkey

### ABSTRACT

The body of literature on residential satisfaction has been growing not only in housing studies, but also in numerous other disciplines like urban planning, sociology and demographic studies. The absence of social housing, the high ratio of owner-occupation and the availability of good quality private rental stock in Turkey makes it a unique case for studies of residential satisfaction. This paper attempts to highlight the position of renters in Ankara as a specific group, arguing that the good physical attributes of the rental housing stock in Turkey serves for the “well-being” of renters, in contrast to the negative perceptions of renting presented in Western housing literature.

The empirical part of the study reveals that physically the stock is not significantly differentiated with reference to tenure types. Furthermore, the social statuses of the tenants and owners are somewhat similar, meaning that the two population groups are not separated in the urban area. The results of the regression analysis reveal that “income” and “tenure type” are positive predictors of the well-being of households in Ankara, and much of this can be attributed to the decent quality of the Turkish stock. As long as there are no significant problems in their dwellings, renters tend to consider themselves as satisfied.

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### 1. Introduction

The home environment is of tremendous significance to human beings (Evans, Wells, & Moch, 2003: 476), and this has led to the penning of a significant number of studies in a number of distinct disciplines, including sociology, geography, planning, demography and psychology, measuring the satisfaction of households with their living environs. In these studies, *tenure* has been revealed as one of the primary factors affecting the well-being of a household (Diaz-Serrano, 2009; Elsinga & Hoekstra, 2005; Galster & Hesser, 1981). On the whole, renters were found to be less satisfied or dissatisfied with their home and neighborhoods when compared to owner occupiers (Rohe & Basolo, 1997; Rossi & Weber, 1996); and particularly in countries operating a welfare system, this was due primarily to the fact that renting does not foster feelings of belonging and security, and that rented dwellings are, in general, inferior.

This argument may have some validity, as public rented housing in European countries is considered generally to be poorly designed, too uniform and built on too large a scale (Dekker, de Vos,

Musterd, & van Kempen, 2011:479). When compared to European countries, the Turkish rental sector cannot be considered inferior in terms of its physical attributes (Balamir, 1999). As small private developers build mostly on single plots, “*too large a scale*” is not a factor in Turkey. 94% of the whole housing stock is 3 or 4 story buildings (2008). To some extent, *uniformity* may be put forward as a problem for apartment dwellers, and yet multi-story buildings are viewed positively as a part of modern and urban life by most households. In the Turkish housing stock, owners and renters may be reside in the same apartment block, and this lack of separation, both physically and socially, results in almost no negative perceptions of private rental in society. In Erman's (1997) study, apartments were found to be “well-built” and “comfortable” places, “easy to heat and clean” with “proper infrastructure and services” in the estimation of its dwellers. Balamir (1999:391) further denotes that

*“Tenants, rentier households, and owner-occupiers are all interrelated and accommodated in each block of flats at proportions based on the economics of development and sharing of the property This leads spatially and functionally to a mosaic of different tenures all taking part in a symbiotic coexistence, rather than to spatial differentiations and enclaves of tenures. Tenants are therefore well distributed in spatial terms and in terms of stock age and type. The*

E-mail address: [pelincp@gmail.com](mailto:pelincp@gmail.com).

*implication of such distribution is that tenants are not discriminated or constrained in any manner."*

The well-being of households in Turkey has come under scrutiny several times in literature under such headings as "user satisfaction", "residential satisfaction" or "urban housing satisfaction" by Kellekci & Berköz, 2006 (for mass housing in Istanbul); Tas, Cosgun, & Tas, 2007 (for permanent earthquake housing in Kocaeli); Turkoglu, 1997 (for Istanbul); and Erdogan, Akyol, Ataman, & Dokmeci, 2007 (for modern and traditional neighborhoods in Edirne). Reinvestment decisions of households and entry to homeownership profiles in Ankara were studied by Özdemir Sari (2014) and Saroğlu-Erdogdu (2014) respectively. For Ankara, studies have been made with particular focus on mass housing (Şensoy & Karadağ, 2012) and rural-urban migrants (Potter, 2003), inquiries into the satisfaction of renters as a specific group are almost non-existent for Ankara.

Among the variety of perspectives in discussions of satisfaction,<sup>1</sup> this study re-asserts the connection that exists primarily between housing/household features and the well-being of households. In this study, the well-being of renters in Ankara's urban housing stock is analyzed from the perspective of the urban planner, and has been made possible by the Ankara Survey, a highly valuable research that was carried out as a Scientific Research Project of Middle East Technical University (METU).<sup>2</sup> The primary argument of the study is that the decent physical attributes of the Turkish rental housing stock contribute to the "well-being" of renters, in contrast to the negative perceptions of renting in Western housing literature. Accordingly, this study attempts to analyze if tenure type is really a significant factor in the well-being of the resident, and if renters could be equally satisfied with their residential environs as owners.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 summarizes previous works in the field; Section 3 describes the rental sector in Turkey; and Section 4 presents an empirical outline of the study. As a conclusion, Section 5 presents the results of the empirical study and discusses the findings.

## 2. Background

The body of literature on residential satisfaction has been growing not only in housing studies, but also in numerous other disciplines, including sociology, psychology, planning and medicine – especially mental health. European (including Turkey) and U.S. studies have different perspectives and priorities: at the heart of European literature on housing satisfaction are the differences between the rental and owner-occupied housing stock, which was developed mostly under welfare policy regimes Dekker et al. (2011), although sometimes, particular focus is on minority groups (Posthumus, Bolt & Van Kempen, 2013). In contrast, in the United States, satisfaction studies focus more on the satisfaction of

specific groups, and deal with such issues as ethnicity, gender and segregation (Lonnie, 2007; Smoot, 2004).

Previous works can, on the whole, be categorized under four headings: (1) Those relating residential satisfaction to health; (2) those based primarily on owner-occupation and its relation with satisfaction; (3) sociological studies, focusing primarily on the "meaning of home" and "local attachment"; and (4) comparisons (between different tenures and/or countries) and those focusing on the residential satisfaction of specific groups of households.

### 2.1. Health and residential satisfaction

The issue of housing satisfaction is a popular topic in the field of medicine, especially psychiatry, and health scientists have identified a connection between residential satisfaction and mental health (Aneshensel et al., 2007). Gibson et al. (2011), for instance, associates poor housing with poor health, while Thomson, Petticrew, and Douglas (2003) argue that improvements in housing affect mental health positively. Evans et al. (2003) highlight housing type, floor level and housing quality as an influential factor in psychological processes and mental health, while Chang (2006) associates the residential segregation and weight status (obesity) of adults in the United States with multi-level, nationally representative data.

### 2.2. Owner occupation/ontological security and housing satisfaction

In English-speaking countries like the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, studies associate residential satisfaction with owner occupation. According to Rohe, Van Zandt, and McCarthy (2001), homeownership is beneficial not only to the individual, but also to society as a whole, in that it helps promote health, happiness and social involvement. Saunders (1990) argues similarly that people have a natural preference for homeownership rather than rental accommodation, associating homeownership with ontological security. He claims that the home is a source of ontological security, being the place in which people feel in control of their environment. Dupuis and Thorns (1998:43) argue that home is a place for the repetition of daily routines, by which ontological security is maintained. In a comparative study, Dekker et al. (2011) examined satisfaction among the residents of housing estates in nine European countries concluding that renters are more negative than owners, and supporting this finding, Gurney (1999) identified a tenure prejudice against renting in the United Kingdom. From a different perspective, Hiscock, Kearns, Macintyre, and Elleway (2001: 62–3) state that in some situations, ontological security may also be attainable in the rental sector. This finding might indicate well-being of a household may also be attained in rented dwellings.

Residential satisfaction related to owner occupation, on the other hand, may be attributed to the fact that in many cases the householder has a higher income, and accordingly, more options open to them (Deurloo, Clark, & Dieleman, 1994). They may also spend more on their dwellings, which may already be of a relatively higher quality (Dekker et al., 2011). In this regard, housing satisfaction may in fact not be related directly to tenure itself.

### 2.3. Sociological studies and housing satisfaction

These previous studies tend to associate satisfaction with sociological concerns and often avoid discussions of "space", with the "meaning of home" to the individual being of utmost importance to the group of scholars (Amerigo & Aragones, 1997; Bonaiuto, Aiello, Perugini, Bonnes, & Ercolani, 1999; Bonaiuto, Fornara, & Bonnes,

<sup>1</sup> Satisfaction is defined as "fulfillment of a need or want" or "a source or means of enjoyment" in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1983: 1044), while "well-being" is defined as the "state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous" in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1983: 1339). In this paper well-being and satisfaction are used interchangeably to refer to the individual evaluation-perception of the residential situation of a household in the dwelling unit, and as such, depend highly on socio-cultural circumstances and individual preferences. Dwelling units with similar attributes could make one household satisfied while making another less satisfied or even unsatisfied; however it is not the intention here to study how individuals come to their end position of "satisfied" or "unsatisfied", as focus is rather on their situation at the time of the interview.

<sup>2</sup> 'Household Mobility in Housing Stock' project was supported by METU (BAP 2001.02.02.02.).

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