



Research paper

Environmental correlates of residential satisfaction: An exploration of mismatched neighborhood characteristics in the Twin Cities

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H I G H L I G H T S

- Residential congruence affects residential satisfaction.
- Significant neighborhood attributes differ by time of stay in the neighborhoods.
- Safety and amenities are neighborhood improvement priorities.

A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

Previous studies have overwhelmingly focused on the effects of objective and/or perceived neighborhood characteristics on residential satisfaction. Little attention has been paid to residential preferences and their realization. This study hypothesizes that residential satisfaction is different for individuals whose residence is located in a neighborhood with characteristics that match their preferences and those whose residence is located in a neighborhood with characteristics that do not match their preferences. Therefore, residential satisfaction depends upon whether perceived neighborhood characteristics match the resident's preferences for the characteristics. Using data from the Twin Cities, this study explores two related issues: the impact of mismatched neighborhood characteristics on residential satisfaction and the impact of perceived neighborhood characteristics on residential satisfaction. We find that using mismatched neighborhood characteristics or perceived neighborhood characteristics as explanatory variables produces somewhat different environmental correlates of residential satisfaction. Findings from this study suggest that improving parks and open space, neighborhood safety, and neighborhood appearance is important to enhance residential satisfaction of existing residents.

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1. Introduction

Residential satisfaction (including housing satisfaction and neighborhood satisfaction) has emerged periodically as a hot research topic in urban studies and geography (Galster, 1987; Heaton, Fredrickson, Fuguitt, & Zuiches, 1979; Hur & Morrow-Jones, 2008; Lansing & Marans, 1969; Lu, 1999; Wang & Wang, 2015). An immense literature on residential satisfaction has been established over the past several decades. The mainstream literature suggests that in addition to socioeconomic characteristics, housing and neighborhood attributes are important correlates of residential

satisfaction (Dekker, de Vos, Musterd, & van Kempen, 2011; Parkes, Kearns, & Atkinson, 2002).

Some studies find that residential satisfaction has small variations among residents living in different neighborhoods (McCrea, Shyy, & Stimson, 2014; McCrea, Stimson, & Western, 2005) and that residents are satisfied even when they live in poor conditions (Amérigo & Aragonés, 1990; Amos Jr., Hitt, & Warner, 1982; Jansen, 2013). They argue that residents choose residential places that meet their needs (or preferences) the best and hence are satisfied (Amérigo & Aragonés, 1997; McCrea et al., 2014). Therefore, residential preferences seem to play a role in affecting residential satisfaction because residents tend to self-select into neighborhoods that match their residential preferences.

Many previous studies have examined the influences of objectively measured or perceived neighborhood characteristics on residential satisfaction, but few have investigated the effect of resi-

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dential preferences. Residential choice consists of a tradeoff among neighborhood characteristics because of financial constraints and limited housing options; therefore, many residents are not able to choose the housing and neighborhoods they prefer (Cho & Rodriguez, 2014; Schwanen & Mokhtarian, 2004). People with realized residential preferences may be more satisfied than those with unrealized preferences. Thus, a few questions emerge: how are residential preferences related to residential satisfaction? Are there significant differences in the satisfaction between people whose residences match their preferences and those whose residences are incongruent with their preferences?

To address these questions, this study employs the conceptual model developed by Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) that emphasizes the impacts of evaluated neighborhood characteristics on residential satisfaction. According to Campbell et al. (1976), evaluated neighborhood characteristics are the assessments of perceived neighborhood characteristics against a resident's internal standards. Using 2011 data from the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitan area (Twin Cities), this study constructs mismatched neighborhood characteristics (a binary measure for each of the neighborhood characteristics to indicate that a resident's preference for the neighborhood characteristic exceeds her perception of the neighborhood characteristic) to represent evaluated neighborhood characteristics. It first explores environmental correlates of residential satisfaction. We also compare the influences of neighborhood characteristics on the satisfaction of residents who stayed in the neighborhoods for different time periods, to capture the possible effects of residential experience on residential satisfaction (Jansen, 2013).

2. Literature review and conceptual framework

Residential satisfaction is an important component of life satisfaction. It reflects individuals' satisfied or dissatisfied responses to the residential environment that is comprised of housing and the neighborhood (Campbell et al., 1976). Understanding the determinants of residential satisfaction has important implications for planners to identify the policies and neighborhood design that can improve residents' quality of life. As such, it is not surprising that many studies have attempted to explain why people are satisfied or dissatisfied with their residential environment (for comprehensive reviews of relevant studies, see: (Dekker et al., 2011; Lu, 1999; Parkes et al., 2002; Wang & Wang, 2015)).

Previous studies have concluded that housing and neighborhood characteristics are important correlates of residential satisfaction. The size and quality of one's dwelling are positive contributors to housing satisfaction (Dekker et al., 2011; Li and Song, 2009), and housing age is negatively associated with housing satisfaction (Campbell et al., 1976; Lu, 1999). Social characteristics (e.g., social attachment and social contact with neighbors) and physical characteristics (e.g., the presence, location, and accessibility of shops and schools) of neighborhoods also affect residential satisfaction (Basolo & Strong, 2002; Dekker et al., 2011; Parkes et al., 2002).

Perceived neighborhood characteristics are associated with neighborhood satisfaction (e.g., attractive appearance and safety in Lovejoy et al. (2010)). Perceived neighborhood characteristics are individuals' cognitive understandings of objective neighborhood characteristics. Because perception is a mediating variable between objective neighborhood characteristics and neighborhood satisfaction (Campbell et al., 1976), it is not surprising that neighborhood perceptions are more important in explaining the variation in residential satisfaction than objectively-measured characteristics (Amérigo & Aragonés, 1997; Kahana, Lovegreen, Kahana, & Kahana, 2003; Lu, 1999). Cao (2015) applies a structural equations modeling

approach to illustrate the mechanism under which objective neighborhood characteristics affect satisfaction with life. He concludes that objective neighborhood characteristics, including density, land use diversity, design, and amenities, affect perceived neighborhood characteristics, which in turn influence residential satisfaction and life satisfaction.

Activities and time use in the residential environment contribute to residential satisfaction. Spending more time in the neighborhood may increase residential satisfaction through enhancing social networks and building social contacts (e.g., Dekker et al., 2011). Kahana et al. (2003) argue that participating in neighborhood activities are positively associated with residential satisfaction. Hur and Morrow-Jones (2008) find that participation in organized neighborhood activities positively contributes to residential satisfaction. Jansen (2013) examines the effect of residential experience on satisfaction and finds that residents appreciate the housing situation in which they actually live more than one in which they do not have living experience. Wang and Wang (2015) analyze the contribution of the use and affective experience of the residential environment on residential satisfaction. They conclude that higher levels of valence and activation of activities conducted at home and in the neighborhood lead to more residential satisfaction. Because residential environments affect participation in activities within residential neighborhoods (Foster et al., 2015; Wang & Lin, 2013), residential environments affect residential satisfaction through their influence on activities and time use within residential neighborhoods.

Most previous studies implicitly assume that residents who are socioeconomically different and live in different types of houses and neighborhoods tend to have significantly different levels of residential satisfaction. However, residential satisfaction may not vary much between residents and places (McCrea et al., 2014, 2005; Mitrany, 2005). For example, McCrea et al. (2005) state that most people in the Southeast Queensland region of Australia report being either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their housing and neighborhood and only a small percentage of residents are "dissatisfied"; a recent study in the same region demonstrates that overall satisfaction with urban living varies little between residents living in different types of urban environments (McCrea et al., 2014). It is evident that residents can be satisfied even when they live in poor housing conditions (Amérigo & Aragonés, 1990; Amos et al., 1982; Jansen, 2013) because they chose the neighborhoods "which satisfy them on attributes important to them" under certain constraints (McCrea et al., 2014, p. 87). Therefore, residential preferences, which measure what people like (affection) or want (personal needs) from residential environments are relevant to residential satisfaction.

Few studies have considered the impacts of residential preferences on residential satisfaction. Kahana et al. (2003) argue that the congruence between personal preferences (or needs) and environmental attributes is an important determinant of the residential satisfaction of seniors living in different community settings. People may be dissatisfied if they do not get what they really want in their residential neighborhoods. They further contend that the congruence can be assessed along several salient physical and social dimensions including amenities, social interactions, safety, and so on. This argument is in line with Campbell's model (1976), a prevailing framework in the field of life satisfaction. As shown in the upper diagram of Fig. 1, an individual experiences objective attributes (the stimuli) of a domain, perceives the stimuli through a cognitive process, assesses the attributes based on her perception and internal standards of comparison (including aspirations and expectations), and then decides whether she is satisfied with the domain. When people evaluate neighborhood characteristics, they often compare the characteristics they want to what they actually have (perceived neighborhood characteristics). Therefore, individuals'

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