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Designing Urban Spaces in order to Promote Mental Health Case Study: Hafez Street, Isfahan, Iran

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Introduction

Health is one of the issues that has always been considered an important subject throughout history, and human beings have made an incessant effort to achieve and promote it. But what distinguishes modern therapies from the previous ones is the growing focus on people's mental health to improve their general health.

Urban design, as an interdisciplinary science that aims to improve the quality of life by improving the quality of public spaces, can play an important role in the physical and mental health of citizens.

Methodology

The present study is an applied research and intends to use the factors affecting mental health to provide solutions to improve the quality of urban spaces and, as a result, improve mental and general health in urban areas.

In order to search and evaluate the theoretical foundations and research literature on the relationship between mental health and urban design, the library research method has been used. It is proceeded by studying the available sources, i.e. books, articles, documents, etc. Then all the gathered data are expressed in a descriptive-analytical manner.

In order to identify and analyze the case study (Hafez street in Isfahan), methods of field observation such as sketching, photography, video recording, sound intensity measurement, etc. have been used. In addition to the above methods, a questionnaire (including quantitative and qualitative questions) was used to achieve cognition from the users' point of view.

Finally, the resulting cognition was analyzed by SWOT technique and then strategies were provided to promote mental health in Hafez Street in Isfahan.

Results and Discussion

Urban design, as an interdisciplinary science that aims to improve the quality of life by improving the quality of public space, can play an important role in the physical and mental health of citizens. Therefore, the present study, relying on the relationship between urban design and mental health, proposes a framework for classifying the



qualities of urban design that affect mental health, which from the perspective of this scientific field, can be used in urban spaces. In this regard, a set of urban design qualities affecting mental health has been extracted by searching and evaluating the theoretical foundations and research literature on the relationship between mental health and urban design. These qualities are categorized into six categories: physical qualities, functional qualities, environmental qualities, perceptual qualities, social qualities, and visual qualities.

After extracting the qualities, in order to measure and implement them in urban spaces, Hafez Street located in Isfahan-District 3 adjacent to Naghshe-Jahan Square was selected as a case study. This street, which has been blocked in recent years due to the pedestrianization of Naghshe-Jahan Square, has faced many physical and functional problems. In addition, Hafez street has always been tied to the collective memory of the citizens of Isfahan due to its proximity to Naghsh-Jahan Square. Therefore, it has the potential for designing in order to promote the mental health of its users. After recognizing and analyzing the mentioned qualities in Hafez street from an expert point of view and from users' point of view, solutions, ideas, and suggestions have been provided to design the street in order to improve the mental health of citizens.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what the authors tried to express, was the necessity for designers to pay attention to the mental health of citizens in their designs. The authors do not intend to insist only on mental health in all projects and ignore other issues and problems of cities and urban spaces. Of course, this is a simplistic point of view. On the other hand, the authors' main point is that attention to mental health in the design can be addressed by a quality checklist (as a facilitating tool). In this way, the designer, while paying attention to solving the main problems and issues known from the site, by using this checklist, can consider the mental health, welfare, and happiness of the citizens. In this way, in addition to solving the main problems of the site, the mental health, the general health, and the vitality of urban spaces will improve altogether in the final design.

Keyword: Urban Design, Urban Space Design, Mental Health, Therapeutic Environment, Hafez Street in Isfahan.

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