

# Role of the Public Engagement in the Reconstruction and Revival of the Distressed Urban Textures: Case Study of District 4 in Isfahan, Iran

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## Abstract

Old textures suffer deficiencies in terms of answering the needs of the today's life due to old age and the resultant weariness and destruction and even the lack of urban facilities and equipment. When the urban life in part of a city becomes stagnant and no efforts are made to regain its boom. The urban texture in that area will be exposed to wearing out. The goal of this study is to review the existing drawbacks and bottlenecks in the process of the revival of the distressed texture of one of the neighborhoods located in District 4, Isfahan, called Kerdabad. The research method is applied in nature and follows a descriptive analytic approach. The findings of the research covers issues such as incompatible applications, resulting in the fact that 80 percent of respondents attribute their dissatisfaction from the environmental conditions of the neighborhood to workshop areas and agricultural fields in the margin of their neighborhood which in turn has resulted in slum life problems in the neighborhood and formation of an inconsistent social context in which 63 percent of the people are dissatisfied of these conditions. While 70 percent of the respondents express their willingness to refurbish their houses, only 73 percent of the respondents attribute proximity to their workplace as the main reason why they prefer to stay in the neighborhood and 89 inhabitants are not well satisfied with the urban services delivered.

**Keywords:** public engagement, distressed texture, organization, District 4, Isfahan

## 1. Introduction

The role of providing facilities for the revival and renovation of the distressed urban textures is known by everyone. However, revival and refurbishment of the living areas is not limited to mere physical construction or the renovation of the old city textures, but also it encompasses urban renovation and urban reconstruction, improvement of the social, economic, political, administrative and cultural structure of the city (Shammaei and Pourahmad, 2006). What we face today is the fact that there are textures within a city with the history as old as the history of the whole nation which are distressed and worn out, a place with high levels of social anomalies, poverty, and lack of even minimal urban living standards (Homayouni, 2006). According to the latest administrative divisions of the country, Isfahan has been divided into 15 districts, among which district 4 is the easternmost that includes about 107.88 hectares of distressed textures (Shafaghi, 2000). Increased weariness, destruction, and inefficacy of the distressed texture necessitate appropriate measures and effective strategies with respect to this phenomenon and the course of its urban development within the framework of organizing the distressed urban textures (Shafieinasab, 2007). The question posed here is "Have cultural, economic and social context of the district have been taken into account in the existing refurbishment plans?", "Have Sustainable development patterns been borne in mind in the development of these plans?" (Shafiei, 2008), "Which of the factors mentioned above have contributed most to the peoples' disinterest in the distressed urban texture plans which are to be implemented in this neighborhood?" (Taleb, 2000), - i.e., which of these factors have been more influential in the (lack) of engagement of the people in the renovation of the distressed texture of Kerdabad neighborhood - "Which of the factors among laws, upstream development plans, limited financial resources, lack of people's engagement, or dynamic and identity elements of the region have mostly contributed to the lack of interest of the inhabitants in the renovation of the old distressed urban texture?" (Aghili, 2007). That is why appropriate strategies have been suggested for the organization (renovation and reconstruction) of Kerdabad

neighborhood located in district 4 of the city of Isfahan. Therefore, this study identifies the spatial physical structure, problems that exist in the texture and factors contributing to the weariness and destruction of this neighborhood, and puts forward appropriate strategies for the organization (renovation and reconstruction) of Kerdabad neighborhood, located in district 4 of the city of Isfahan.

## 2. Theoretical Background

The theory of physical development, renovation and reconstruction of the distressed textures have been developed by authors such as Eugen Viollet Le Duc (1814-1879), John Ruskin (1818-1900), Camillo Boito (1836-1914), Camillo Sitt (1843-1903), Luca Beltrami (1864-1933), Ludvico Quaroni (1911-1987), Le Corbusier (1887-1965), Kevin Lynch (1918-1984), Kenzo Tange (1913), Edmund N. Bacon (1913).

However, the history of attention to the distressed textures goes back specifically to about half a century ago, where the study of economic, social and physical aspects of distressed textures gained popularity under different titles such as renovation plans, reconstruction plans and so forth in the post-world war II era, particularly since 1960s.

Edwin John Weliger (2008) identifies the notion of sustainable urban design, and reviews basic factors required for the improvement of social stability in the urban improvement and renovation plans. In his research which was conducted using a questionnaire based visit in Hong Kong, the opinions of architects, designers, managers and citizens of the region was gathered and analyzed.

The results obtained from the analyses of different factors indicated that specified constructs must be aligned for the achievement of social stability. Creation of a consistent residential environment, accessibility to the daily living environment, direction of the developments and accessibility of market areas are among basic and important elements for increasing social stability within urban reconstruction plans. Also, in Iran, Mirsaeid Ghazi (2009) has performed numerous research projects in the form of research projects, university dissertations, and research papers for seminars, each of which have studied the special views of the distressed areas and their causes.

Distress has different interrelated dimensions, some of which go back to the attributes of the buildings and their applications. The degree of weariness differs for each building in terms of the individual dimensions, whereas other dimensions go back to the whole expanse of the area (Alavitabar, 2000).

Different dimensions of weariness are: (1) physical-structural weariness, (2) functional weariness, (3) impression weariness (visual weariness), (4) 'legal' and 'formal' weariness, (5) locational weariness, (6) financial weariness, and (7) relative or economic weariness (Taghizadeh Motlagh, 2000).

Table 1. Attributes of worn textures

Type	Characteristics
Functional	Incompatible activities, activities incompatible with the texture and activity congestion Insufficiency of services in comparison with semi-planned textures, False unproductive jobs such as meddlers who sell sickles, coppersmiths which are not needed today
Physical	Buildings: organic texture, condensed fine-grain texture, low-texture, physical instability of the buildings, particularly in the face of natural and man-made disasters, location of the buildings on unsafe areas with faults, river bed, heavy duty power towers, gas pipe beds, lack of public spaces, unfurnished spaces (abandoned spaces)
Commutation networks	Impermeability of the texture, narrow thoroughfares with low permeability, inefficient commutation network due to low capacity and lack of facilities – traffic installations and equipment
Environment	Contamination and lack of public hygiene (sewerage and trash collection), air and ground water pollution
Economic	Low income, lack of incentives for investment in the texture by the private sector and even the public sector, low economic value of the land and buildings.
Social	Low social status of the inhabitants, high value of rentals in comparison to the real estate's value, prevalence of social anomalies due to limited social development that leads to the emigration of the people with relatively good economic status and their replacement with aliens and people with lower social status with social anomalies and low economic power
Infrastructural	Lack of urban facilities and weariness of the infrastructures, including, natural gas, water,

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	electric power, inefficient sewerage system
Legal	Low urban facilities, plots of land with no definite borders, lack of official title deeds and dominance of letter-of-intent based entitlements, existence of numerous heirs and unclear proprietorship of the real estates
Managerial	Inadequate urban utilities, inefficient and poor civil projects and urban services

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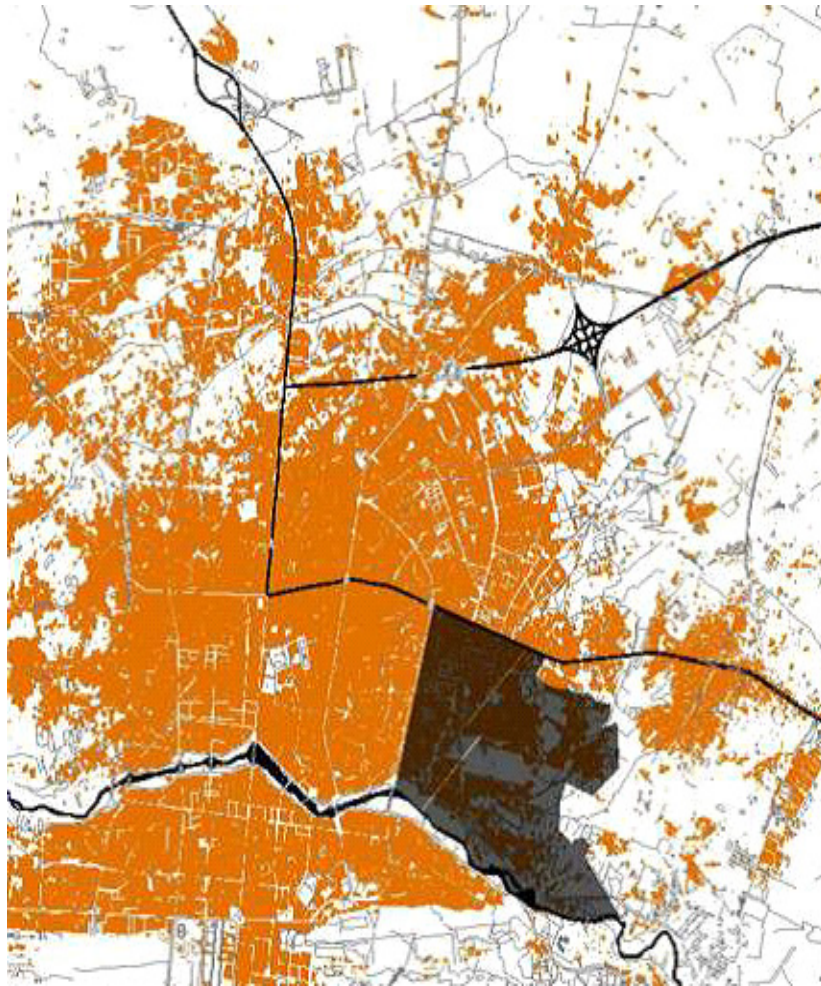
Source: Nasr (2004).

As far as urban development and interventions carried out in the old urban textures, two viewpoints prevail: (1) Functionalism and (2) culturalism. The functionalist viewpoint involves economic categories and does not attach a fair importance to the cultural content. On the contrary, the culturalist viewpoint cares for the corresponding cultural features and values in the formation of the setting (Mozayeni, 2000). Extreme propensity to the past is the distinctive feature of this idea. The functionalist view considers the ancient premises from a utility point of view and believes in the necessity of transforming them, while the culturalist point of view looks at these premises as museums. So, it attaches importance to protection (Nourian, 2000). The functionalist point of view advocates interruptionism, that is, to stop the historical trend of the monument, whereas the culturalist point of view advocates the perpetuation of this historical trend (Jamalpour, 2000).

Different viewpoints to ancient textures and urban renovation and improvement fall into the three categories of conservatism, radicalism and logicism. The conservative viewpoint believes that least possible interventions in the status quo of the monument should be made (Mehdizadeh, 2009). In the radicalist point of view, the advocates prescribe intervention in the ancient textures of the city and the transformation of the old textures with the conservation of valuable cultural monuments (Mehdizadeh, 2001). They propose the destruction and reconstruction as the only solution. The logicist point of view, conversely, consists of the theoretical basis of restoration, revitalization, and conditional reconstruction of the old textures (Habibi, 2007). It cares for the demonstration of the historical and cultural values of each historical period in the urban compounds. In the urban revitalization theory, this notion means the reviving of parts of the urban areas where there is a lack of general living standards (Memarian, 2000). They take shape in various parts of the city, but mostly occur in the middle of cities and face problems such as lack of decent accommodation, illogical conflicts in land appropriation, traffic problems, lack of space, social problems and so forth (Moallemi, 2000).

### 3. Research Area

District 4 of the city of Isfahan locates at the northern banks of Zayanderood River. It accommodates 125,978 people in an area of 1,342 ha (map 1).



Map 1: The location of District 4 of the city of Isfahan

Source: Isfahan Improvement and Renovation Organization scale 1:50,000.

### *3.1 Research Hypotheses*

Inhabitants' social context is related to the renovation of the distressed texture.

Renovation and reconstruction of the distressed texture is related to the people's engagement.

### *3.2 Materials and Method*

The method adopted for this research is descriptive analytic by nature and follows an application-development approach. For the selection of sample in this research, a systematic quota based random selection procedures has been adopted. A questionnaire survey approach has been followed for investigating the social and economic characteristics of the inhabitant population and to measure their propensity to participate in the residential units' renovation and reconstruction projects at the district level.

The sample taking procedure goes as follows: the number of the people residing in the neighborhood was multiplied by 315 and the result was divided by the whole district's population. The residential units were selected as sample by the systematic random sampling method. One out of twenty residential units was selected as sample. First a residential unit was taken as sample in the neighborhood, and from then on one residential unit was selected from each 20 residential units upon which data required was taken from the families using the questionnaire method. SPSS and Excel have been used as means of data analysis. Cochran method was followed for obtaining the sample size (Hafeznia, 2011).

$$n = \frac{t^2 pq / d^2}{1 + \frac{1}{N} \left( \frac{t^2 pq}{d^2} - 1 \right)}$$

The result of estimating the sample size:

$$n = \frac{\frac{(1/96)^2(0/7)(0/3)}{(0/05)^2}}{1 + \frac{1}{14000} \left( \frac{(1/96)^2(0/7)(0/3)}{(0/05)^2} - 1 \right)} = 315$$

The Alpha-Cronbach has been used as the measure of reliability. It fluctuates between zero and one ( $0 \leq \alpha \leq 1$ ). The Alpha Cronbach obtained by SPSS is 0.9 for this study, which suggests a relatively high reliability and validity of the questionnaire.

### 3.3 Findings of the Research

In order to evaluate the socioeconomic features of the inhabitants and their propensity to participate in the residential units renovation and reconstruction projects, given the population dwelling there an assessment has been made using the questionnaire technique. A 315 people statistical sample was assigned and questionnaires were distributed in June, 2014. Some findings, including the demographic data such as age, gender, level of education, and type of proprietorship are shown in Table 2. It indicates that 6 percent of the household heads were women and 94 percent were men (Table 2).

Table (2). Distribution of respondents by gender of the household head

Household head gender	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability	Cumulative frequency
Male	19	6.0	6.0	6.0
Female	<b>296</b>	<b>94.0</b>	<b>94.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Total	<b>315</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The results indicate that 45.4 percent of the respondents aged between 40 to 60 (See Table 3).

Table (3). Respondents distribution by age

Age	Frequency	Percentage	Reliable percentage	Cumulative frequency
20	4	1.3	1.3	1.3
20 - 40	<b>109</b>	<b>34.6</b>	<b>34.6</b>	<b>35.9</b>
40 - 60	<b>143</b>	<b>45.4</b>	<b>45.4</b>	<b>81.3</b>
60 +	<b>59</b>	<b>18.7</b>	<b>18.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Total	<b>315</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

In proprietorship terms, 91.7 percent of respondents had houses of their own (See Table 4).

Table (4). distribution of respondents in proprietorship terms:

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
Personal proprietorship	289	91.7	91.7	91.7
Public and government- owned	<b>26</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Total	<b>315</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

In terms of the education level, 82 percent of the respondents hold high school diploma and lower (See Table 5).

Table (5). Distribution of respondents by education level

Education	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
Illiterate	49	15.6	15.6	15.6
H. S. Diploma and lower	<b>259</b>	<b>82.2</b>	<b>82.2</b>	<b>97.8</b>
baccalaureates	<b>6</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>99.7</b>
Master's degree and higher	<b>1</b>	<b>3.</b>	<b>3.</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Total	<b>315</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

In terms of the household head's income, 44.1 percent of respondents earned higher than USD 266 per month (See Table 6).

Table (6). Distribution of respondents by monthly income of household head

Household head's income	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
USD 115	24	7.6	7.6	7.6
USD 116 – USD 200	<b>43</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>21.3</b>
USD 201 – USD 265	<b>109</b>	<b>34.6</b>	<b>34.6</b>	<b>55.9</b>
USD 266 +	<b>139</b>	<b>44.1</b>	<b>44.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Total	<b>315</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

In terms of employment 71.7 percent of respondents are employed (See Table 7).

Table 7. Distribution of respondents by employment status

Employment status	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
Unemployed	31	9.8	9.8	9.8
Employed	<b>226</b>	<b>71.7</b>	<b>71.7</b>	<b>81.6</b>
Retired	<b>39</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>94.0</b>
Housewife	<b>19</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Student	<b>315</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
Total	31	9.8	9.8	9.8

As far as the reason behind residence in the distressed texture, 73 percent of respondents specified the proximity to the work place as the main reason (See Table 8).

Table (8). Distribution of respondents by reason of residence

Distribution of respondents by residence reason	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
Low price of home	46	14.6	14.6	14.6
Access to utilities	<b>7</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>16.8</b>
Proximity to work place	<b>230</b>	<b>73.0</b>	<b>73.0</b>	<b>89.8</b>
Low rentals	<b>32</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Total	<b>315</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The number of natives over 15 living in the neighborhood is highly significant (See Table 9).

Table (9). Distribution of respondents by duration of stay in the neighborhood

Duration of stay in the neighborhood	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
5 years	8	2.5	2.5	2.5
5 – 10 years	22	7.0	7.0	9.5
11 – 15 years	51	16.2	16.2	25.7
15 years +	234	74.3	74.3	100.0
Total	315	100.0	100.0	

In terms of the degree of satisfaction with the urban services, 87.7 percent of respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with these services (See Table 10).

Table (10). Distribution of respondents by satisfaction with urban services

Satisfaction of residents with urban services	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
Very low	133	42.2	42.2	42.2
Low	115	36.5	36.5	78.7
Medium	60	19.0	19.0	97.8
High	2	6.	6.	98.4
Very high	5	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total	315	100.0	100.0	

Most of the inhabitants are dissatisfied with their houses, and would rather reconstruct their houses despite all these deficiencies. 58.4 percent of the respondents said that they are willing very much to reconstruct their houses (See Table 11).

Table (11). Distribution of respondents by propensity to reconstruct their houses

Propensity to reconstruct homes	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
Very low	23	7.3	7.3	7.3
Low	35	11.1	11.1	18.4
Medium	73	23.2	23.2	41.6
High	65	20.6	20.6	62.2
Very high	119	37.8	37.8	100.0
Total	315	100.0	100.0	

55.2 percent of the inhabitants were satisfied with the security of the neighborhood (See Table 12).

Table 12. Distribution of respondents by their assessment of the security of the neighborhood

Neighborhood security satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
Very low	45	14.3		14.30
Low	45	14.3	14.3	14.3
Medium	49	15.6	15.6	29.8
High	116	36.8	36.8	66.7
Very high	58	18.4	18.4	85.1
Total	47	14.9	14.9	100.0

79.4 percent of the inhabitants believe that there is a close relationship between the financial status and their home reconstruction and their propensity to stay in the neighborhood (See Table 13).

Table (13). Distribution of respondents by their belief in the relationship between financial status and propensity to reconstruct their houses and willing to stay in the neighborhood

Residents' believing in the relationship between financial status and willingness to reconstruct homes and stay in the neighborhood	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
Very low	8	2.5	2.5	2.5
Low	23	7.3	7.3	9.8
Medium	34	10.8	10.8	20.6
High	78	24.8	24.8	45.4
Very high	172	54.6	54.6	100.0
Total	315	100.0	100.0	

Table 14. 62.5 percent of respondents believe that there is a relationship between public engagement and reconstruction of the distressed texture

Resident's belief in relationship between public engagement and reconstruction of the distressed texture	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
Very low	25	7.9	7.9	7.9
Low	36	11.4	11.4	19.4
Medium	57	18.1	18.1	37.5
High	94	29.8	29.8	67.3
Very high	103	32.7	32.7	100.0
Total	315	100.0	100.0	

Most of the respondents believe that there is a relationship between the cultural and social status of the neighborhood and its reconstruction trend (See Table 15).

Table (15). Distribution of respondents by their belief in the relationship between social and cultural status of the area and its effect on the reconstruction trend

Respondents' belief in relationship between social and cultural status of the area and its effect on the reconstruction trend	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
Very low	53	16.8	16.8	16.8
Low	43	13.7	13.7	30.5
Medium	49	15.6	15.6	46.0
High	84	26.7	26.7	72.7
Very high	86	27.3	27.3	100.0
Total	315	100.0	100.0	

80 percent of respondents are dissatisfied with the environment conditions of the neighborhood (See Table 16).

Table (16). Distribution of respondents by their dissatisfaction with the neighborhood environmental conditions

People's dissatisfaction with the neighborhood environmental conditions	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
Very low	146	46.3	46.3	46.3
Low	109	34.6	34.6	81.0
Medium	56	17.8	17.8	98.7
High	3	1.0	1.0	99.7
Very high	1	3.	3.	100.0
Total	315	100.0	100.0	



89.9 percent of respondents believe that there is a high relation between people's welcoming to neighborhood reconstruction plan and level of urban services (See Table 17).

Table (17). People's belief in relationship between people's welcoming neighborhood reconstruction plan and level of urban services

Respondent's belief in relationship between the people's welcoming neighborhood reconstruction and level of urban services	Frequency	Percentage	Reliability percentage	Cumulative frequency
Very low	1	.3	.3	.3
Low	<b>31</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>10.2</b>
Medium	<b>112</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>45.7</b>
High	<b>171</b>	<b>54.3</b>	<b>54.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Total	<b>315</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

#### 4. Conclusion

Due to their agedness and destruction resulting from it, and lack of urban facilities and equipment suffer from insufficiencies in responding to their residents. This has resulted in the dissatisfaction of the native population and their relocation and moving to other neighborhoods. Then low-income classes of people replace them due to the low housing costs. In this situation, the only motive for the people to stay in this area is to have a minimal accommodation. Thus instabilities will emerge and intensify in social, economic and cultural affairs in such neighborhoods. Since Kerdabad is located in district 4 of the city of Isfahan, and is in the easternmost part of this city, it is physically made up of a compound comprising houses, workshops (spinning and weaving), farms, repair shops, trade and service units and is made of a very irregular anthropological and ecological texture and anthropologically it is made of a very heterogeneous social and cultural texture. Considering these features is essential for the attainment of a neighborhood with sTable indicators.

##### 4.1 Testing Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between the renovation and reconstruction of the distressed texture and public engagement.

Null hypothesis: There is not any relationship between the renovation and reconstruction of the distressed texture and public engagement

The results obtained from the statistical analysis of the response given by the respondents to the questionnaire and the calculation of the mean score and results obtained from Table 18, since the level of significance has proved zero, and is  $> 0.05$ , thus there is a relationship between the renovation and reconstruction of the distressed texture and this hypothesis is supported. It should be pointed out that this relationship is positive and direct. In other words the more renovation and reconstruction occurs the more public engagement will occur, and, conversely, the less renovation and reconstruction occurs, the less public engagement will occur.

Table (18). Renovation and reconstruction of the distressed texture and social texture of residents

Renovation and reconstruction of the distressed texture and social texture of residents		Renovation and reconstruction	Residents' social texture
	Pearson correlation	1	.964(**)
Renovation and reconstruction	Level of significance	.	<b>000.</b>
	number	<b>315</b>	<b>315</b>
Inhabitants' social texture	Pearson correlation	.962 (**)	1
	Level of significance	<b>000.</b>	.
	Number	<b>315</b>	<b>315</b>

Table (19). Renovation and reconstruction of the distressed texture and social texture of residents

Renovation and reconstruction of the distressed texture and social texture of	Renovation	Residents'
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residents		and reconstruction	social texture
Renovation and reconstruction	Pearson correlation	1	.964(**)
	Level of significance	.	.000
	number	<b>315</b>	<b>315</b>
Inhabitants' social texture	Pearson correlation	.964(**)	<b>1</b>
	Level of significance	.000	.
	Number	<b>315</b>	<b>315</b>

Hypothesis 2: there is a relationship between the renovation and reconstruction of the distressed texture and the social texture of inhabitants.

Null hypothesis: there is not any relationship between the renovation and reconstruction of the distressed texture and the social texture of inhabitants.

Given the results obtained from the statistical analysis of the responses given by respondents to the questionnaire items and their calculated mean scores, and with due regard to the results obtained from Table 19, since the level of significance is zero and is smaller than 0.05, consequently, there is a relationship between the renovation and reconstruction of the distressed texture and social texture of inhabitants. In other words, the more homogenous the social texture, the more renovation and reconstruction will occur, and, conversely, the more heterogeneous the social texture the less renovation and reconstruction will occur.

The assessment of the surveys with respect to the level of satisfaction of the inhabitants with the municipality performance indicate that the inhabitants are not very satisfied with the urban services delivered to this neighborhood, and inaccessible public transport means and deficiencies that exist in this respect, poor quality of the thoroughfares asphalts, inaccessibility to trade and service premises, insufficient recreational spaces and greeneries, are among the most frequent reasons for the dissatisfaction of the inhabitants.

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