

## The Memory of a Place. The Re-Experience of the Faculty Housing of Jondi Shapour University in Ahvaz- Iran

Susan NoorMohammadi

*Independent researcher*

*susan.noor.m@gmail.com*

### Abstract

This paper focuses on the perceptual-phenomenological experience of place in the Faculty Housing built for professors of Jondishapour University (Shahid Chamran) in the city of Ahvaz in Iran. Based on an historical overview of Ahvaz, the paper employs a phenomenological approach to examine how the memory of childhood home as an inhabited space is associated with sensory engagement and how it is experienced differently over time. Faculty Housing was built in 1967–72 and was designed by the prominent Iranian architect Kamran Diba. Taking into consideration the significant sociocultural factors affecting Ahvaz in 1979–2018, this paper aims to examine and interpret the housing’s architectural and urban images, which have changed considerably over time and are now fallen into disrepair, with a loss of their vital and live atmosphere of the past. In order to achieve this goal, it examines and analyses a number of photographs from the creation of this residential complex and its present status. These include images of different architectural, urban, and landscape features as well as semidetached houses, apartments, the local shop, school, play areas, green spaces, separating brick walls, pools, and benches. In addition, the experiences of twenty-one former inhabitants of Faculty Housing are analysed and constructed through a survey questionnaire, the findings of which suggest that Gaston Bachelard’s phenomenological approach supports the comparative analysis of our imagined past experiences of a special place and new experiences after a considerable passage of time.

**Keywords:** memory, imagination, childhood home, Faculty Housing, Ahvaz, Iran, experience, architectural and urban image

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## **Introduction**

Ahvaz, the capital of Khuzestan province in southwestern Iran, has confronted significant urban transformations, in particular after modernism in 1900. The establishment of the new university of Jondishapour in 1955 is considered to be one of the major steps in the modernization of the city, in particular in the development and progression of education. The name of the university takes its inspiration from the Gondeshapur intellectual centre of the Sassanid Empire, which was active around 1,750 years ago in ancient Persia (present-day Iran). According to Mazhari and Godazi (2015, 4), the ancient Academy of Gondeshapur, which is located not far from the city of Ahvaz, played a significant role in the education of several scientists and the spread of knowledge in the Western countries. After 1979, the consequences of the Islamic Revolution and subsequently the eight-year Iran–Iraq War meant that the city of Ahvaz once again confronted remarkable economic and sociocultural challenges and subsequent urban transformations.

Faculty Housing for the new university was built in two major phases. It consisted of a residential complex for professors that was planned as part of the design and establishment of the major university buildings (1968–78) in Ahvaz. The facility was distinguished as a modern example of architecture and urban design that took into consideration regional influences. The first phase was built during 1969–72 and the second phase between 1974 and 1977 (Diba, 1981, 240, 242). Located not far from the Jondishapour University campus (the name Jondishapour University changed to Shahid Chamran after the Islamic Revolution in 1979), the housing was designed with respect to the hot and humid climate and in response to the cultural, social, and behavioural needs of the new incoming families. In consequence, regarding the design of considerable open and green spaces, it was accompanied by other sociocultural functions, in particular a kindergarten, a school, and a local shop. The distinctive communal-gathering character of Faculty Housing allowed families to make strong connections between place and their personal lives. I was born and raised in two different houses in Faculty Housing. The whole of my childhood was spent there. For study reasons, I subsequently left and was not able to return to visit it for a long time. All this time, I carried the entirety of my childhood images engraved on memories. After twenty-two years I had the opportunity to visit the place of my childhood again, and I was confronted with a different but valuable re-experience of place.

The main hypothesis of this paper is that Faculty Housing as an example of childhood home can be regarded as an inhabited space. Gaston Bachelard's phenomenology of imagination offers a strong basis for the interpretation and analysis of our past and present memories and experiences from an inhabited place as well as of our childhood home. The qualitative methodology of this paper includes an analysis of Faculty Housing's connection to the campus of the University of Jondishapour and the urban structure of the city of Ahvaz. In addition, based on Bachelard's phenomenological approach, the association of visual, aural, and tactile senses with the memorable images of this place will be analysed. The paper is strengthened by a questionnaire of former childhood residents of Faculty Housing who are now adults and no longer live in Ahvaz. These respondents' interpretations of their memories and imaginations support the analysis of inhabited spaces in Faculty Housing. How is the childhood home as an example of inhabited space experienced over a time of absence? How may our original memories be compared and analysed in juxtaposition with the real experience of place

after a period of time? By what means can we analyse its memorable character? What are the lived and inhabited images embedded in this place? In what terms can the new experience be analysed and interpreted?

In posing such questions, this paper clarifies Bachelard's contribution in an example of childhood home within urban-architectural interpretation. The paper compares the imagined experience of childhood home and a new experience of it over twenty years later in spring 2018, an experience accompanied by explicit negotiable negative architectural and urban transformations. The discussion that follows is divided into four main parts. First, the creation of Faculty Housing in the urban context of Ahvaz is outlined. Based on Bachelard's phenomenology, the second part of the paper discusses the childhood home within Faculty Housing as an inhabited space. In the third part the environmental transformations of Faculty Housing over time are analysed. Finally, in the fourth part the multifaceted dimensions of the re-experience of place of Faculty Housing will be discussed. The imagination of childhood home is very personal and cannot be measured. But a phenomenological analysis can be of value as a significant and strong means by which to facilitate the examination and interpretation of our experiences of architectural and urban images and can be used to develop new qualitative tools for an analysis of the unmeasurable qualities of a place.

### **The creation of Faculty Housing in the urban context of Ahvaz**

The city of Ahvaz, in Khuzestan province in the southwest of Iran, is situated on both banks of the Karun River. As Bosworth (2019) shows, the city is well known historically: 'Ahvaz was apparently a flourishing town in pre-Islamic times, to be identified more probably, with the Achaemenid Tareiana which its history dates back to 500 BC' (Bosworth, 2019).



Figure 1 (left): Geographical position of Ahvaz in Khuzestan province, Iran (© 2019 Google, Maps data © 2019 Geobasis-DE/BKG).

Figure 2 (right): The Karun River flows through the city and divides it into eastern and western parts. Faculty Housing (marked in orange) is situated in the western part of the city (© 2019 Google, Maps data © 2019 Geobasis-DE/BKG).

The discovery of oil in the province in the twentieth century opened new horizons for Ahvaz. According to Pourahmad, Habibian, and Ahmadnia (2016, 33), the city is

considered to be the center for oil areas in the south, and it possesses industries such as steel-making, tube making, and sugar cane refining. While offering natural factors such as the Karun River, a flat landscape and a hot and wet climate, the city is located on the route for the transition of products to the southwest ports. Ahvaz today possesses a multidimensional atmosphere, full of variety yet at the same time full of disorder (Pourahmad, Habibian, Ahmadnia, 2016, 33).



Figure 3: The White Bridge over the Karun River, built in 1936, connects the eastern and western parts of the city (Photo credit: the author, 2018).



Figures 4 and 5: An example of a traditional brick house in Ahvaz which dates back to the Qajar era, around 1888 AD: Moin o Tojjar Caravansera was a great place to use for commercial exchanges (Photo credit: the author, 2018).

According to Nabavi (2003,95) in the late 1960s and 1970s, Iran was challenged by the new modern era and at the same time search for an authentic culture. In this context, therefor, the establishment of the University of Ahvaz had a considerable influence on the growth and flourishing of the city, particularly the urban development of Ahvaz. With this step, the city entered into a valuable new cultural era (Figures 6-7).



Figures 6 and 7: The establishment of the new Jondishapour University dates back to 1955 with the start of agricultural education courses (Mazhari, Gozari, 2015, 5). The Agriculture Faculty is one of the main modern educational buildings of the university. (Photo credit: the author, 2018)

The new campus of Jondishapour was located near the Karun River, and Kamran Diba and his partners were responsible for designing the master plan and some of the main buildings of the institution. Constructed between 1968 and 1978, the new facilities consisted of different academic faculties. The university campus (Figure 8) contains a main library and administrative, sports and religious facilities, and is integrated with large shaded areas of arcades and underpasses (Diba, 1981, 50, 240; Diba, 2008).



Figure 8 (left): The location of Faculty Housing and its connection to the university campus on the western side of the Karun River: red line shows the border of the University of Jondishapour (Shahid Chamran); yellow line defines the border of Faculty Housing (© 2019 Google, Maps data © 2019 Geobasis-DE/BKG).

Figure 9 (right): Faculty Housing (© 2019 Google, Maps data © 2019 Geobasis-DE/BKG).

### **The childhood home in Faculty Housing as an inhabited space**

Ustorf (2020, 19) states, 'Our last memories from childhood are very valuable. They are part of our identity. They help us to know ourselves better.' Faculty Housing as a place of childhood home, in which many former inhabitants as well as I have been born and

raised, is defined as an 'inhabited space.' In using this term, Gaston Bachelard (1994) refers to the values of intimacy and immensity in the childhood home. It is a term that possesses certain qualities, which are inspirational. According to Bachelard (*ibid.*, xxxii), childhood home cannot remain an indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor; it has been lived in with all the partiality of the imagination. By focusing on 'inhabited space', Bachelard determines the human value of the sorts of spaces that may be grasped and defended against adverse forces: in other words, he seeks the spaces that we love (*ibid.*, xxxi). He believes that real images are engravings, 'for it is the imagination that engraves them on our memories. They deepen the recollections we have experienced, which they replace, thus becoming imagined recollections' (*ibid.*, 32). Bachelard (1971) notably remarks about the timelessness and newness of poetic images and believes that they are 'lived,' 'experienced,' and 're-imagined' (Bachelard, 1971, xix). In his phenomenology of imagination (1994), 'image,' the pure product of absolute imagination, is presented as a phenomenon of being (Bachelard, 1994, 75). He believes that human beings are not separated from their 'imagination' and 'memory' (Bachelard, 1971, xx, xxx).<sup>1</sup>

Bachelard brings valuable examples to the table in order to increase inhabitants' imagination in confronting a space. Indirectly he urges architects to ponder on the simple fact that real images are not the result of pure stimulation of our senses; rather, they are the result of the intertwinement of association of our senses with simple and protective images, which can take place in a space designed for our daily activities. (NoorMohammadi, 2015, 81)

Faculty Housing as an example of childhood home is regarded in this paper as inhabited home; it is filled with different inhabited and poetic images. Bachelard in describing the nature of real images believes that we never experience them directly: 'great images have both a history and a prehistory, they are always a blend of memory and legend' (*ibid.*, 33). In his opinion, every image has a deep oneiric depth to which one's personal past adds special color. (Bachelard, 1994, 5).

### **The environmental transformations of Faculty Housing through the time**

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the consequent Iran–Iraq War of 1980–88 influenced several aspects of the development of the city of Ahvaz and brought about sociocultural, economic, architectural, and urban transformations. Due to its nearness to the border with Iraq, the city was heavily bombarded during the Iran-Iraq War. Faculty Housing, however survived without major damages, was not immune to these changes. Over time it gradually decayed, mostly because of mismanagement, the low economic conditions of the university, lack of a coherent and centralized plan for its restoration and rehabilitation, and as a result of sociocultural factors.

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<sup>1</sup> 'He [Bachelard] concentrates on the function of these two connected and interrelated terms in creating the real image. He believes that there is a strong solidarity between memory and imagination; however, their functions are different. Bachelard believes that memory deals more with our past experiences and that imagination helps us to experience the space in our future. In other words, imagination separates us from the past as well as from reality; it faces the future' (Bachelard, 1971, xx, xxx).

As Kamran Diba, the main architect of Faculty Housing, states, the main design concept of the project built during 1967–72 is taken from traditional Iranian houses consisting numerous rooms around a central courtyard (Figures 10-11). This courtyard, designed as a common garden in traditional Iranian houses, was shared as a meeting place or, when the weather allowed, as a living, dining, and sleeping space. In the design of Faculty Housing, the same traditional premise is taken for grouping two-story apartments around a central garden. The same idea has been repeated in the first and the other courtyards with architectural variations (Diba, 1981, 95).

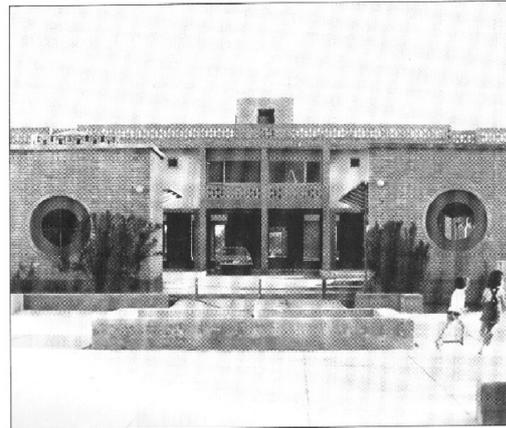
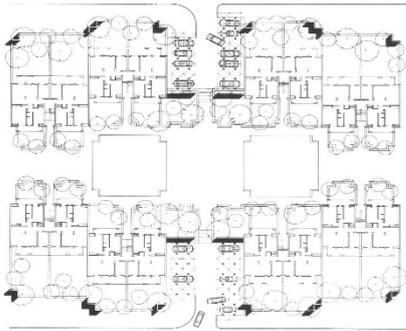


Figure 10 (top): Original photograph taken after finishing the second open space among the housing units (Diba, 1981, p. 93) (Photo credit: Kamran Diba & Co.).

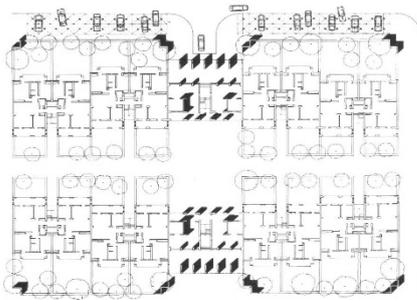
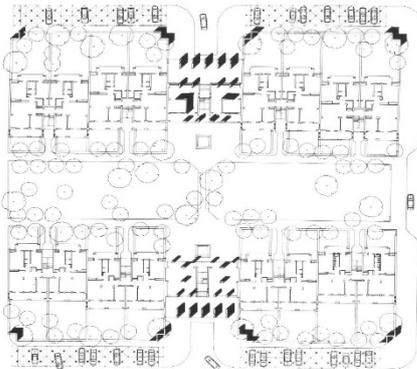


Figure 11 (left): The first, second, and third courtyards with neighboring apartments (Diba, 1981, p. 94) (Photo credit: Kamran Diba & Co.).



The basic concept of Faculty Housing allows houses to share common open and green spaces in the same way as Diba's 1975 housing project Shushtar New Town does (Mozaffari, Westbrook, 2015). The creation of residential neighbourhood units in Faculty Housing, as planning models for residential development, facilitated opportunities for interrelation and interaction between inhabitants. This complex was elaborately designed with one- and two-story brick buildings and the implication of open and green spaces (Mazhari, Godazi, 2015, 56).

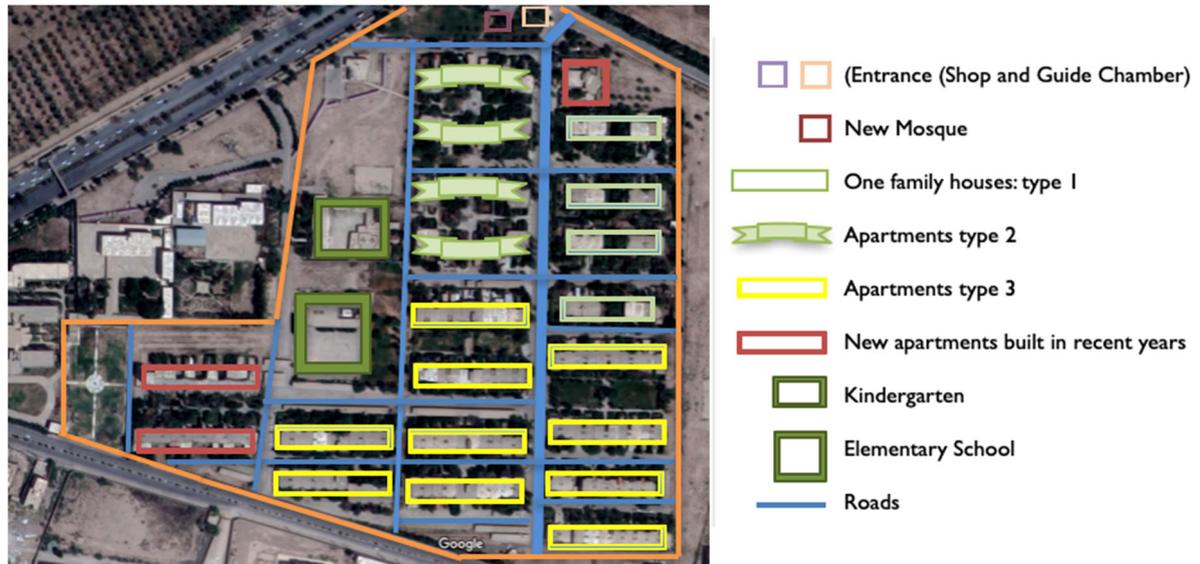


Figure 12: Faculty Housing. (© 2019 Google, Maps data © 2019 Geobasis-DE/BKG)

### Architectural Design: the entrance to Faculty Housing

The building at the entrance to Faculty Housing on the north side of the estate consists of a small guide chamber located at the conjunction of the main street leading to the university campus and the estate's main street. This small guide chamber was built at the beginning of the project, and a new chamber has been added opposite from it over time. It functions as an entrance for non-residents and acts as a security point for this private residential area (Figure 13).



Figure 13 (left): The entrance of Faculty Housing showing the original guide chamber.

Figure 14 (right): The present-day condition of the shop near the entrance to Faculty Housing. The yellow color of the shop's facade is one instance of individual decision-making in the restoration of this residential complex in 2018 (Photo credit: the author, 2018).

### *The local shop*

The only supermarket (shop) of Faculty Housing is located near the guide chamber and has not been transformed topographically. But from the architectural point of view, it has been subjected to redesign of its inner design and façade (Figure 14).

### *The Mosque*

Following Iran's Islamic Revolution, the development of religious buildings as well as mosques was specified as one of the major decision-making elements in the development of every residential area. For this reason, near the entrance of Faculty Housing and the guide chamber, one of the type I family houses was dedicated to the mosque and after about ten years a new mosque was built on the site of this property.

### *Residential Areas*

The residential area consists of three main types of property. There are one family houses, which are built along the nonmain streets, and then there are two types of two-story apartments. Faculty Housing was further developed after its final phase in 1972. These are marked in the legend of Figure 12.

### *One-Family Houses (Semidetached Houses)*

One-family houses (Figures 15-16) occupy a relatively wide area of about 180 square meters, and combine an entrance, parking lot, generous terraces and garden, built with brick separating walls and facades. The brick separating walls have been transformed by blue colour in the recent past and do not harmonize with the original brickwork of the houses anymore.



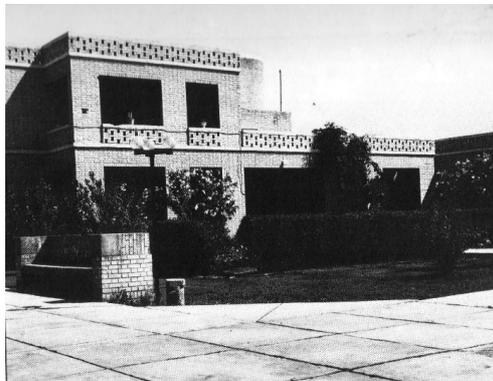
Figure 15 (left): One family house (type I): view showing an example of a one family house built along a street. (Photo credit: the author, 2018) Figure 16 (right): One family house (type I): entrance of the house with a white frame entrance door that has been added in recent years. By this transformation, the original terra-cotta tiles, which were combined with brick wall of the facade, are not visible anymore. The two towers of the mosque built after the Islamic Revolution are visible behind the property (Photo credit: the author, 2018).

The generous terraces and gardens of the houses provided inhabitants with their main visual, aural, and tactile images, which were intertwined with images of simplicity and shelter. The visual and tactile images of brick walls along with an inviting entrance to the house, the dividing metal pillars of the terrace, the unique corners on the terrace, on

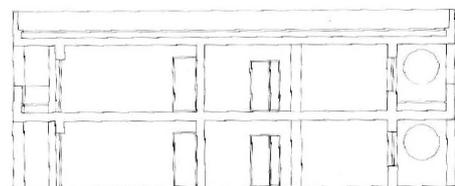
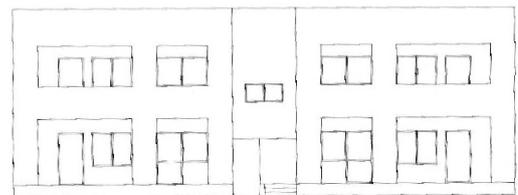
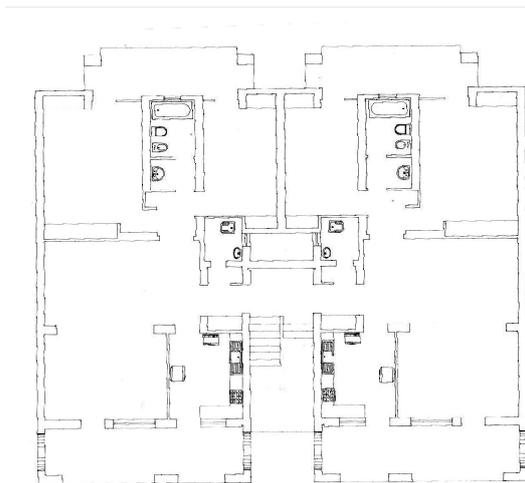
the benches or behind the tall palms and side trees, provided inhabitants with deep memories over the time.

*Apartments around the play area and open spaces*

The second type of residential unit is shaped around two central courtyards, one of which functions as a play area and another as an open and public space or pedestrian zone for family gatherings. These two courtyards, which encircled the two-story brick apartments, are open and generous areas that have played a significant social role in the main complex (Figures 17–22). The brick facades of the buildings are accompanied by deliberately perforated brick fences. Otherwise, the sheltered balconies, which were associated with palm and regional trees, offered a strong contrast between sun and shadow. This contrast reflected an image of rest and shelter for inhabitants. Moreover, the thoughtful arrangement of apartments around an open space offered physical and emotional security for parents and children.



Figures 17 and 18: Apartments type 2: original pictures taken after the finishing of the apartments built around the second open space in around 1970 (Diba, 1981, 97) (Photo credit: Kamran Diba & Co.).



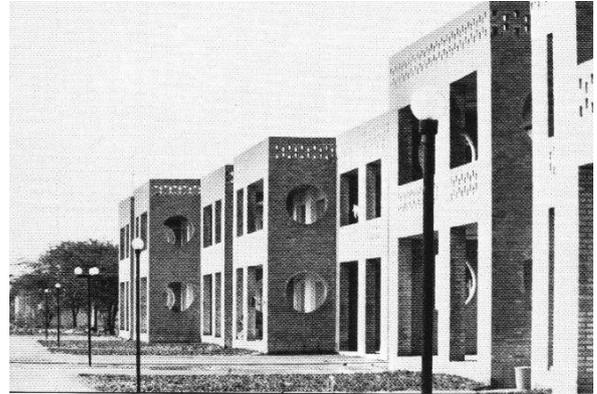
Figures 19 and 20: Apartments type 2: original pictures taken after the finishing of the apartments built around the second open space in around 1970 (Diba, 1981, 97) (Photo credit: Kamran Diba & Co.).



Figures 21 and 22: Apartments type 2: present condition of the accommodation (Photo credit: the author, 2018).

### *Apartments in the southern part of Faculty Housing*

The third type of residential building is the two-story apartment housing located along narrow streets and open walkways. This type of apartment, which was built in two zones, is not arranged around central courtyards; rather, one group of apartments overlooks an open green space while the other group of apartments does not possess a generous open space (Figures 23-24).

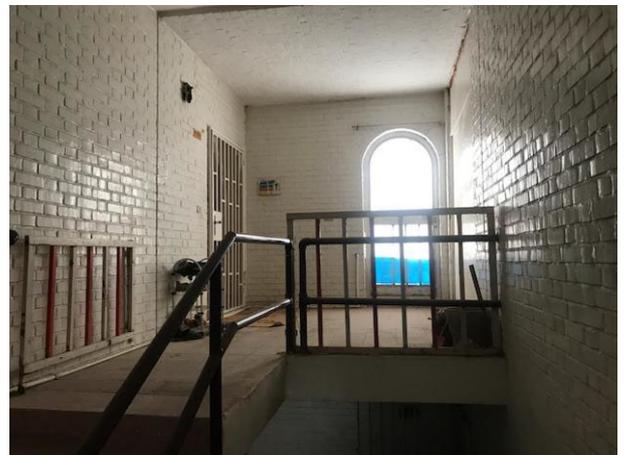
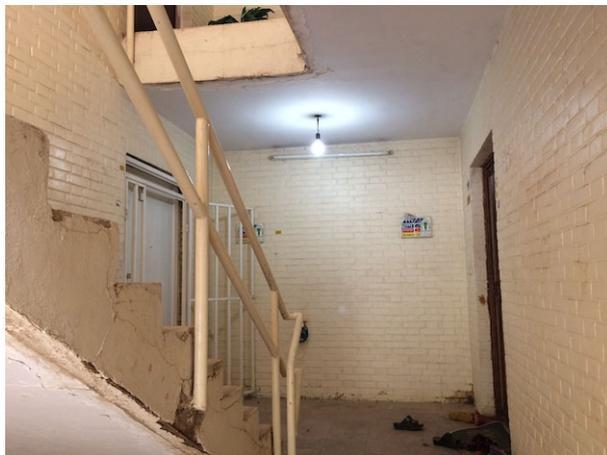


Figures 23 and 24: Original pictures taken after the finishing of the type 3 apartments in around 1970. (Diba, 1981, 98–99) (Photo credit: Kamran Diba & Co.)



Figures 25 and 26: An apartment type 3 as it appears forty years after the completion of the project. (Photo credit: the author; 2018)

Figures 25 and 26 give an indication of the present condition of the third type of residential housing. The perforated brick fences are closed in most of the apartments and balconies are now integrated into the living unit. In recent years the basic renovation of the staircases leading to the neighbourhood units of apartments is not provided. Newly painted walls are the only renovation work that has been carried out (Figures 27-28).



Figures 27 and 28: The entrances of neighbourhood units of apartments type 3. (Photo credit: the author; 2018).

### *Kindergarten and School*

The kindergarten and elementary school of Jondishapour Faculty Housing were considered to be the cultural-educational centres for families with children who lived on the campus. These two buildings, built next to each other and thus a short distance apart, enabled easy accessibility for families. In their present condition, it was hardly possible to recognize visual images such as the former brick buildings of the school and kindergarten, or the sound image of the school bell – images of secrecy, rest and of quiet (Figures 28-29).



Figures 28 and 29: The recent state of the school (left) and kindergarten (right) (Photo credit: the author, 2018).

The recent state of these two buildings does not meet the standard rules for educational buildings. The two sites do not reflect the original images of the past. Only the generous schoolyard conveys reminiscences of years of queuing up early in the mornings, of learning in this place, of spending rest hours in the corners of this yard and playing or having our snacks. Nonetheless, the school continues to function at the present time, even though due to several visual and functional transformations, it is hardly able to improve on one's imagination or offer associations with the original images engraved on one's memories.

### **The transformation of Architectural, Urban, and Landscape images**

The urban image of Faculty Housing reflects disorder and disharmony in its present state. The brick-coloured facades of most of the apartments, along with individual integrated balconies and closed circular openings in the walls in different forms, colours, and construction methods, combine with air-conditioning units and new green fences/walls, which are partly covered by the wild green space of trees and tall palms along the roads (Figures 30-31).



Figures 30 and 31: The recent state of the urban image as viewed from the street. (Photo credit: the author, 2018)

*Openings in the Walls and Balconies*

Figures 32 and 33 provide two examples of mismanagement and individual decision-making in the transformation of openings in the brick walls. In Figure 33 the depicted circular opening is situated on one side of the balcony of an apartment. The transformation shown has been made due to a request for privacy on the part of recent inhabitants of the apartment. This decision is built unthoughtfully with the application of the cheapest building material. In addition, the picture clearly indicates the different construction methods that have been employed over time by different inhabitants (it is supposed that the two rows of bricks are added later than the plastic screen). Figure 32, on the other hand, shows another circular opening in a brick-separating wall at the border of a parking lot, which has been traversed with the construction of another wall. In other cases, circular openings have been covered unprofessionally with different materials, partly covered with brick, or transformed into windows.



Figures 32 (left) and 33 (right): The recent status of circular openings in separating walls or balconies. (Photo credit: the author, 2018)

Except for one or two openings, there are no surviving original visual images of the simple circular openings in the brick walls. Most of the openings have been covered or transformed visually. The images of shelter and rest that were engraved on our memories by playing hide-and-seek behind the walls will not lead us through all our senses anymore. The present images do not draw us beyond the sensory experience.



Figures 34 and 35: The recent state of circular openings in separating walls and balconies: (left) one of the few surviving openings in its original form; (right) balcony openings that have been completely covered with brick. (Photo credit: the author; 2018)



Figures 36 and 37: The recent condition of balconies and openings along with the migration of natural colour brick to pink in some of the facades. (Photo credit: the author; 2018)

### *Separating Walls*

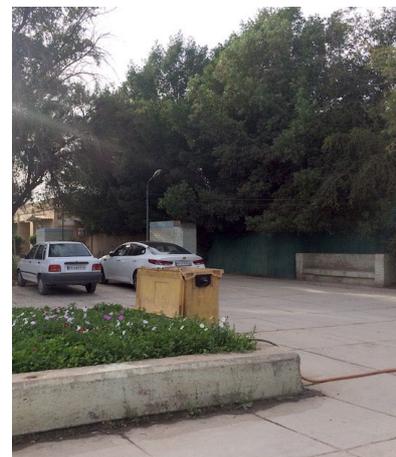
Most of the separating walls are individually transformed in the recent condition of Faculty Housing. This feature, which is the result of the differing cultural backgrounds of new incoming inhabitants, is added individually to increase the privacy of inhabitants and is applied almost everywhere, particularly around the private gardens. As is shown in Figures 38 and 39, old separating walls in natural brick colour still remain; however, another wall is added in front. In the left picture, the separating wall is transformed by using another colour without consideration of any harmony to its original condition.



Figures 38 and 39: Two examples of the transformation of separating walls (Photo credit: the author; 2018).

*Landscape element: play areas*

The Faculty Housing complex consists of three main courtyards, which were considered for more than two decades to be the heart of the facility. The second courtyard was designed to provide for gathering activities as well as play areas for children. The symbolic and functional features of these courtyards, as well as the brick seating furniture, have transformed dramatically over the years due to neglect of their restoration (Figures 40-45). There is no visual image of the turquoise colour of the pool anymore, a colour that was reminiscent of traditional Iranian pools. The yellow garbage can is misplaced in its adjacency. Moreover, two cars have been parked on the pedestrian zone. This fact would definitively avoid the possibility of playgroups for children.



Figures 40 and 41: The second courtyard showing brick benches and the transformation of the pedestrian courtyard into a parking lot. Not only has green space replaced water in the pool; the brick seating areas no longer function. (Photo credit: the author, 2018)



Figures 42 and 43: The pedestrian zone in the second courtyard. (Left) Entrance way to a group of apartments clearly showing the lack of restoration of the cement floor tiles. (Right) The courtyard. (Photo credit: the author, 2018)

As shown in Figures 42 and 43, the second courtyard in Faculty Housing contains a path flanked by two brick benches at the end of which is a square-shaped pool which has been transformed into green place.



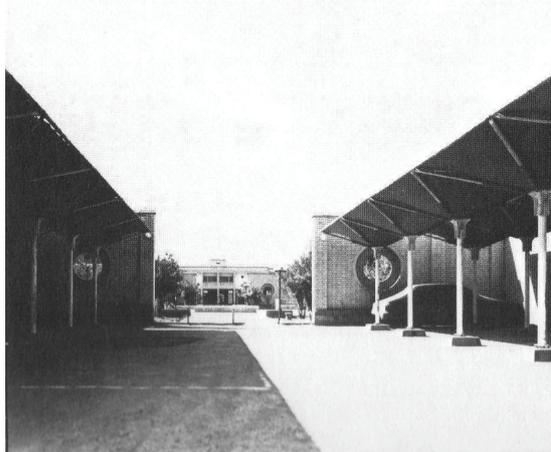
Figures 44 and 45: The second courtyard showing (left) the green area, and (right) the recent status of brick benches. (Photo credit: the author, 2018)

The beautiful brick benches in the second courtyard of Faculty Housing have not been restored in recent years. Due to mismanagement, they have become subject to vandalism and have been destroyed. Every single bench has experienced the joyful moments of the presence of children sitting and playing on it. Images relating to the touch of brick benches and of rest and quiet are impaired by the negative impacts of recent years (Figure 45). The natural colour of the brick walls in the corners of the square-shaped playground in Figure 44 has been changed in recent years to the colour

blue. There is no grass on the playground anymore. This open space has been used for many years as a multifunctional place for social activities such as hide-and-seek and other creative playgroup activities.

#### *Parking lots*

Generally speaking, the parking lots are the only landscape elements that have not transformed much in recent years. However, the transformed coloured separating walls behind the parking lots have changed the original visual effect of the brick walls (Figures 46- 47).



Figures 46 and 47: (Left) The original picture of parking lots between the second courtyard and type 3 apartments after the finishing of the complex (Diba, 1981, 95) (Photo Credit: Kamran Diba & Co.) (Right) Parking lots in 2018 (Photo credit: the author).

### **The multifaceted dimensions of the re-experience of the place**

The experience of place is a complex perceptual process that is connected to different emotional, social, cultural, ecological, and environmental factors. As Adams et al. (2016) state, 'different people perceive the same city or neighbourhood in different ways.' 'A place may also conjure contradicting emotions – for example the warmth of community and home juxtaposed with the stress of dense urban living.' Time is a crucial factor in the connection between our original memories and our later imaginations of the original place. The re-experience of a special place (after a considerable passage of time) can be accompanied by negative images as well as by decay and disorder. The new situation of a place over time may reflect, upon first impression, frustration, disturbance, and sorrow; however, it can also be inspiring. As Minkjan (2013) believes, 'decay is a process rather than a fixed image and provokes thoughts and actions.' He states:

*Urban and architectural decay appeals to the imagination. The city's scars are stimuli for the mind. They raise questions, about memories and imaginations of a foregone past, and of potential futures. They visualise the passage of time and the inevitability of collapse, reminding us of our own transience. On a smaller level, dilapidation shows traces of faded lives, moved communities and shrunken economies. The voids provide*

*space for the observer to interpret them as she or he likes, to fill them with imaginations and meanings.*  
(Minkjan, 2013)

The analysis of our memories is connected to the analysis of our identity. As Ustorf (2020, 16) states, 'We all have magic memories from our childhood. Although they appear to us so alive, they are more fiction rather than reality. Anyhow they are comparable to a treasure.' He continues: 'We do not use our memories only to look back, but also to construct our identity and to stabilise it' (ibid., 23).

### **The contrast between our past and new experience of Faculty Housing**

Faculty Housing to me as a former inhabitant is defined as 'lived space' and 'inhabited space.' The memories of this place, as Bachelard reminds us, are intertwined with my senses. The association of all the major senses – visual, aural, tactile, and olfactory – in referring to the imagination of Faculty Housing is beyond the normal description. This place provided different spaces of enclosure, security, secrecy, quiet, rest, and silence in its various private spaces as well as terraces, balconies, corners, gardens, and public areas as well as courtyards, streets, and playgrounds. It possessed special spaces for celebrating national ceremonies; it strengthened our social abilities and provided us with deep friendships. It enabled us to hide in divers' corners, to rest and shelter during the hot days. These images of inhabiting have functioned for years and have transcended our sensory realm. According to Bachelard, inhabited space is not geometrical. What matters is the degree of intimacy and the intensity of our experience there (Casey 1998, 290). The reciprocity between the sensory realm and inhabited images made our experiences in this place intense and created a memorable character.

My visit some twenty-two years after leaving my childhood home made me confront several contrasts to my original memories. The new experience was accompanied by architectural fall and destruction of several of the joyful places of my past. The images from the recent condition of Faculty Housing are not attractive and lovely anymore. Most of the facades of the apartments and houses are no longer homogeneous. This contrast includes not only in terms of the physical transformations but is also the result of lack of emotional relationships as well as friends and neighbourhood. The recent status of Faculty Housing does not promote our imaginations anymore. Our sensory realm is connected to the ability to feel and experience the space. We cannot separate our original visual, aural, and tactile images from our new experience.

While the dramatic architectural, urban, and landscape transformations in Faculty Housing are considerable, the collaboration of imagination and memories from the childhood home as an inhabited place – albeit not easily – helps me to remember my old memories and to love the actual condition of this place. However, my childhood home as an inhabited space does not look like its earlier self, and there is a significant difference between its former atmosphere and its recent one. Yet despite its present condition, which is regrettable and far from its former spirit, Faculty Housing has remained for me an inhabited space. This childhood home, even in its destroyed present state, transcends the basic planes of geometry; it promotes my imagination as a former inhabitant, lets me imagine, and relates to my remotest memories.

But this individual feeling can manifest in another way to other inhabitants, and so this paper is augmented by the different perceptions of other inhabitants who have re-experienced the inhabited space over time. This can entail experiencing place with the feeling of sorrow and sadness or with the feeling of paradoxically being both stunned, frustrated, and disappointed and at the same time feeling enthusiastic and happy at reaching the childhood place after a long time. This feeling can occur because of contrasts between the difference of our past imaginations from the childhood home and the actual context. It can happen, as the actual context is not experienced according to our imaginations and expectations from childhood memories. The new context does not fulfil our expectations. The absence of old friends and the transformation of physical objects leave former inhabitants with foreign experiences of a place without its identity. In its present status, this place is still able to act on our power of imagination – however negative its influence is. Yet as the present status does not reflect the original images, our imagination is less evoked and stimulated; we do not feel this place deeply and do not experience it originally.

### Constructing the survey questionnaire for former inhabitants of Faculty Housing

The survey constructed for this paper supports the analytical structure of it. The open-ended questionnaire was performed on twenty-one former children of Faculty Housing who left facility many years earlier. Most of the participants had lived in Faculty Housing for 7–27 years and changed their living place after graduation from school to another cities. This questionnaire is based on the analysis of five major items:

1. The length of living in the Faculty Housing,
2. The gap between the time they left Faculty Housing and their next visit,
3. The major memories from this place,
4. The quality of the new experience over time,
5. The desire to visit the place again.

	The length of living in the Faculty Housing	The gap between the time they left it and their next visit	The memories from it	The new experience of it	The desire to visit it again
1	15 years	22 years	pleasant and charming place	sorrow, sigh, and nostalgic feelings	Yes: in order to refresh the memories
2	7 years	14 years	nice and memorable place with so many green and open areas to gather and to play	deep sorrow and depression from destroyed and dirty place: not similar to childhood memories	No

	The length of living in the Faculty Housing	The gap between the time they left it and their next visit	The memories from it	The new experience of it	The desire to visit it again
3	15 years	7 years	wonderful memories from social gatherings and relationship to nature	nostalgic feelings, sorrow, regret, and sympathy, combined with wonderful feeling of nice and unforgettable memories in every corner of it	No: I prefer to be happy with remembrance of the nice memories
4	18 years	2 years	nice and secure place consisted of permanent friends and educated families	does not differ with my first experiences.	No: Due to the worry that the new place would cover the tracks of my nice memories
5	16 years	6 years	meaningful place	sad and sorrow. Due to the absence of the old friends, the place was not meaningful anymore. It is not the same place.	No
6	27 years	10 years	memorable place full of memories of playgroups and social activities	regret for the lost atmosphere and messed up new spirit of the place.	No desire anymore
7	7 years	5 years	the best time of our lives: place full of social activities, playing, bicycle riding with friends even in hot summers		Yes: very eager
8	20 years	10 years	paradise, dreamful place, the best time of my life, full of beautiful memories of playing and social gatherings	nice memories by visiting the family there. The memory of the place is engraved in my mind as a unreachable unrealistic place	No: I can not visit there again.

	The length of living in the Faculty Housing	The gap between the time they left it and their next visit	The memories from it	The new experience of it	The desire to visit it again
9	14 years	2 years	full of memories from playing areas, landscape objects as well as dividing walls, circular openings, the pool in each courtyard, the walking pathway specially summer nights, school and kindergarten	joyful feeling with enthusiasm to visit the familiar place again	Yes: very eager
10	12 years	1-2 years	the best place for children: secure, silent, beautiful, and intimate. memories from natural, architectural, landscape spaces and social gatherings	joyful and pleasant feeling from every yearly visit	No, I don't want to visit its transformed atmosphere. I will keep the memorable nice memories from this place.
11	15 years	several visits during some years	full of memories	a combination of sorrow and different feelings	I will miss that place.
12	14 years	several visits during some years	this place was the best time of my life: green area with lots of spots that we could play with our friends for long hours	depression or sorrow	absolutely yes
13	7 years	several visits during some years	so many memories from kindergarten, school, and activities as well as football, water fights in hot summers, and traditional celebrations	regrettable, not a nice memory from it anymore	No
14	23 years	2 years	football, water fights, traditional celebrations, birthday gatherings	nostalgic feeling for its last memories and sorrow for its current situation	only with companionship of an old friend or family members
15	16 years	several visits after leaving the place. the gap about 2 years.	football, water fights, the possibility for parents walking through the complex after sunset, traditional celebrations (fire jumping)	sadness due to the physical transformation of this place and the absence of friends	Yes: due to family reasons

	The length of living in the Faculty Housing	The gap between the time they left it and their next visit	The memories from it	The new experience of it	The desire to visit it again
16	16	5 years	several meaningful memories from friends and landscape objects as well as the original details of the pool in the second courtyard	sadness and sorrow for the absence of the old residents, negative change of the apartments and houses, and negative impact of development of Faculty Housing	Yes but i will get sad
17	6	13 years	a secure, silent and wonderful place for education, playgroups and social gatherings of children	a sad, unpleasant and joyless place: everybody and every where has been changed	Yes but not alone- only with the companionship of old friends and family members
18	26	12 years	a joyful place full of playful memories	regrettable experience. no intimacy in the place. destructive condition of gardens which are replaced by unthoughtful dividing walls. dirty and without order. The parking lots in the courtyards let no playgroups for children anymore.	No. the last experience was like return to a lost place which I could not find any familiarity anymore.
19	15	yearly visits for ten years	playgroups as well as kick ball, water fights. walking around the area. bicycle riding, celebrating birthdays, the memory of our school-bus and its nice driver.	regretful, destroyed and joyless place. I did not know the neighbours anymore. there was no playgroups anymore.	Yes but as a reunion of old friends. It would be hard to visit it again with another atmosphere without old friends.
20	22	I did not succeed to visit it again	so many memories from playgroups, football, water fights, gatherings, birthdays, traditional ceremonies (Fire jumping)	no visit	I would like to visit again with the accompaniment of childhood friends.

	The length of living in the Faculty Housing	The gap between the time they left it and their next visit	The memories from it	The new experience of it	The desire to visit it again
21	7	7 years	a friendly, vivid, and healthy place consisted of playgroups, water fights, traditional ceremonies, the memory of our school-bus and its nice driver.	regrettable and strong nostalgic feeling with confronting a foreign familiar place	Yes but with the companionship of old friends

Table 1. Analysis of opinions of former inhabitants of Faculty Housing. by author

According to the analysis of Table 1, five main factors affect survey response rates. These are categorized as follows:

1. The factor of time (the gap between the time they left this place and the time they visited and experienced it again) is a crucial factor in the analysis of their perceptions and imaginations. A time gap which exceeds more than two years causes the new experience of the place to be removed far from our first memories. It would be difficult to connect original intimate memories to our later experiences. Only 14,2 % of respondents who had experienced the place after a gap of one-two years stated that the experience did not differ from her first experience. Despite the desire to visit Faculty Housing, many former children of this place have stated that they would not visit it again, as they feel that the new experience would cover the original tracks of the unique and nice memories of the past.
2. Attachment to place is connected directly to our memories. With an increase in the time gap, most respondents were of the opinion that the new experience of place was not pleasant as it was not the same as the place that occupied their memories. 47,6% stated that they have no more desire to visit the place again. 28,5% were eager to visit it again and 23,8% wished to visit the place only with the accompaniment of old friends.
3. Social relations play a great role in the creation of memories. The role of friends and playgroup is a significant factor in the increase in attachment to Faculty Housing, and can be stated as a common factor in the result of the questionnaire. All respondents had common opinions that they experienced very nice and unique memories in this place, and 100% stated that social gatherings and playgroups created the most memories.
4. Architectural and landscape images also play an important role in the creation of memories. The architectural spaces, natural features, and landscape objects of a certain place form the largest part of our memories. For some former inhabitants, architectural and landscape details combined with social activities shaped the most important part of their memories.
5. However precise our imaginations about a place are, they are not able to reflect the reality of the new experience of place over time. A certain place which has undergone significant physical and social transformations loses its identity for those

who have lived and experienced it years before. The new experience will be accompanied by a search for a familiar origin image (visual, tactile, aural, or images of simplicity and protection).

## **Conclusion**

In this paper the re-experience of Faculty Housing in Ahvaz has been analysed through the examination of memories from the past and present status. This goal is achieved through an analysis of the transformation of the architectural, urban, and landscape features of this place over time. A survey of twenty-one former inhabitants of Faculty Housing, who spent their childhoods there, has strengthened the analytical structure of the paper. The inhabitants of Faculty Housing in Ahvaz have common experiences and memories from the time they lived there, but the images they have made of this place reflect different tones due to their different imaginations. Our perception of our childhood home as an inhabited place can vary due to our different imaginations arising from this place. There is very little special academic research focused on the analysis of our experiences of a certain place. Therefore, the development of a phenomenological tool in the analysis of an architectural and urban place is necessary and significant in order to support our interpretations of the unmeasurable qualities of a place. This paper provides the background for further research in this field and as such is therefore an enquiry into the possibilities and potential ways in which architectural and urban places can be interpreted. The findings of the paper also show that the sense of attachment to a childhood place is not only related to the visual attraction of the place; the intensity of memories of our social relations, and memories arising from architectural and landscape features shape a great part of our memories. This fact which is personalized through our individual imaginations of a special place, affects the enhancement of attachment to a place. The new experience of the childhood place is perceived differently, as the original visual, aural, and tactile images, which are engraved in our memories, have changed considerably over the time. The inhabited space engraved on our memories does not change with the time of absence, but it will be experienced with contradictory feelings over time.

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