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Original Research Article

A Realist Inquiry into the Representation of Lifestyle in Creativity-Based Residential Spaces (The Case of Tabriz)*

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Abstract

Problem statement: Recent studies perceive lifestyle not merely as an individual matter but as a reflection of layered social and cultural interactions within residential spaces.

Research objective: This study aims to conduct a realist inquiry into the mechanisms of lifestyle representation in creativity-based residential spaces, with a specific focus on the urban context of Tabriz.

Research method: Utilizing a Critical Realist approach, this research employs a retroductive strategy to move from empirical data toward interpreting the underlying generative mechanisms of lifestyle. Data were collected via a 49-item questionnaire distributed among 491 residents across three neighborhoods with distinct physical characteristics: historical and organic fabric (Nobar), transitional fabric (Parvaz), and late, dense apartment fabric (Ferdows). Data were analyzed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and interpreted into five patterns related to the dimensions of creativity (cognitive, conceptual, regulatory/emotional, interactive/social, and practical).

Conclusion: The findings reveal that at the home scale, residents' behavioral patterns in the historical/organic fabric (Nobar) predominantly align with emotional and social dimensions; the transitional fabric (Parvaz) exhibits a combination of all five dimensions, while the late/dense apartment fabric (Ferdows) shows a higher overlap with cognitive, conceptual, and practical patterns. Conversely, at the neighborhood scale, interactive/social patterns are more prominently manifested across all three contexts. The retroductive interpretation suggests that the varying patterns of space use and organization in these three urban fabrics are likely associated with differences in physical structure, consumer culture, and the residents' creative agency.

Keywords: *Realism, Lifestyle, Residential Spaces, Creativity, Tabriz*

Introduction

In recent decades, the attention of researchers in architecture, urban planning, and spatial studies has shifted significantly toward the socio-cultural dimensions of the built environment. In this

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approach, architecture is no longer viewed merely as a physical, functional, or technological phenomenon, but as a socio-cultural context in which identities, meanings, behavioral patterns, and lifestyles are formed and represented. This paradigm shift stems from a theoretical transition from purely physical approaches to an understanding of space as a social phenomenon, experienced and intertwined with everyday life (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996). Recent studies also emphasize that space, beyond its physical structure, serves as a context for the reproduction of social phenomena and cultural meanings (Low, 2023). In this framework, space is not a neutral container but a social product continuously produced and reproduced through the interaction of cultural structures, social relations, and human agency.

Residential spaces hold a unique position in this discourse, as a significant portion of individuals' daily lives, social interactions, and lived experiences take place within them. Residential environments are not merely places to fulfill functional needs; they are arenas for organizing daily activities, forming family relationships, representing cultural values, and expressing individual and collective identities (Rapoport, 2005). Modern research in environmental psychology emphasizes that place attachment and spatial identity in residential settings are strongly influenced by the users' agency in personalizing their space (Gifford, 2023). Consequently, the manner in which these spaces are used, arranged, organized, and experienced can reflect the inhabitants' lifestyles, cultural preferences, and social standing. Thus, studying residential spaces enables a deeper understanding of the relationship between space, culture, and society.

In this context, the concept of "lifestyle" has become a key analytical tool for examining the relationship between humans, society, and space. Lifestyle refers to a set of relatively stable patterns of behavior, values, tastes, preferences, and consumption practices through which individuals and social groups represent their identities (Chaney, 1996). This concept illustrates that individuals' everyday choices—from consumption types and cultural activities to residential habits and spatial usage—are not merely individual or functional decisions but are formed in connection with social and cultural contexts. Bourdieu explains lifestyle in relation to the concepts of "habitus," "capital," and "field," demonstrating that individuals' preferences and consumption patterns reflect their social position and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Contemporary consumption theorists emphasize that lifestyle today is more than ever tied to "everyday practices" and the intersection of various forms of capital (Warde, 2005). From this perspective, lifestyle is not only a way of living but a mechanism for representing identity and reproducing social distinctions.

Analyzing how lifestyle is represented within the built form of housing requires an understanding of the active role of "consumer culture" and "cultural consumption." According to consumption theories, in contemporary societies, residential spaces and goods transcend material functions, carrying symbolic layers of identity and social distinction (Baudrillard, 1998; Featherstone, 2007). On one hand, consumer culture manifests in various forms, such as conspicuous, symbolic, experiential, compulsive, sacred, and creative consumption (de Certeau, 1984; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Solomon, 2006). On the other hand, cultural consumption, particularly at the everyday and hybrid levels, reveals how residents differentiate the experience and arrangement of their residential spaces by participating in distinct consumption patterns (Heckmann et al., 2022; O'Connor, 2022).

However, explaining the relationship between consumer culture (at the structural level) and cultural consumption (at the action level) involves conceptual challenges. To address this, the present study employs "Critical Realism" as an interpretive framework. By distinguishing social reality into three levels—the "Real," the "Actual," and the "Empirical" (Bhaskar, 1978; Danermark et al., 2002) Critical Realism provides a suitable basis for analyzing this complexity. Based on this interpretive framework, consumer culture can be analyzed as a generative structure at the level of the Real, cultural consumption as a process and everyday action at the level of the

Actual, and the physical-spatial representation of lifestyle as the Empirical level (the lived and perceived experience of residents) (Lefebvre, 1991; Warde, 2005). In this framework, the core question is: what is the mediating mechanism between the macro-structures of consumer culture and diverse spatial experiences? This study argues that "residential creativity" (in the form of residents' agency to reinterpret and adapt space) acts as this mediator. Drawing on approaches of distributed creativity (Glăveanu, 2021) and adapting dimensions suggested by Hill (2003), this creative agency can be interpreted in five dimensions: cognitive creativity (mental reconstruction of spatial functions); emotional creativity (regulating and expressing emotions through arrangement); conceptual creativity (producing personal metaphors of space); practical creativity (objective and physical interventions in space); and social creativity (reproducing communication patterns within the space).

These five dimensions interpret how passive consumption is transformed into creative action within space. Given this mechanism, the present study investigates this issue in the context of various neighborhoods in Tabriz, which face the challenge of reconciling traditional residential customs with modern consumption patterns. The main objective is to interpret how dimensions of residential creativity and spatial consumption patterns act as interpretive intermediaries between consumer culture structures and cultural consumption, thereby explaining the representation of lifestyle in residential spaces. It is worth noting that this study does not seek to empirically prove or directly measure the residents' psychological or individual creativity; rather, it aims to discover patterns of co-occurrence in consumption behaviors and interpret them within the framework of creative mechanisms of engagement with space.

Methodology

This study adopts the Critical Realist paradigm with the aim of investigating the generative mechanisms of "creativity-based lifestyle." In accordance with the ontology of this paradigm (Bhaskar, 1978), social reality consists of three distinct layers: the "empirical" (observable events), the "actual" (what occurs), and the "real" (the hidden mechanisms that generate events).

In this research, the Critical Realist framework serves as an interpretive lens to analyze the relationship between empirical data and underlying mechanisms. Within this framework, a retroductive strategy is employed to move analytically from the empirical data gathered via the questionnaire toward interpreting the potential mechanisms influencing the formation of lifestyle within the physical space of Tabriz. In other words, the research aims to interpret which physical and social conditions might be associated with the emergence of diverse consumption patterns in the residential spaces of Tabriz. To operationalize the theoretical framework, 49 items were developed based on a review of the literature and categorized into two macro-axes: "consumer culture" and "cultural consumption." Detailed information and coding of these items are presented in Table 1.

All items were incorporated into a questionnaire structured on a five-point Likert scale. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted with 30 respondents, resulting in a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.944. In the main phase of the study, 491 questionnaires were administered to residents of three selected neighborhoods with distinct physical characteristics: the historical and organic urban fabric dating from the 1970s to the 1990s (Nobar neighborhood), the transitional fabric and intermediate pattern dating from the 1990s to the 2000s (Parvaz neighborhood), and the late, dense apartment-based fabric dating from the 2010s to the 2020s (Ferdows neighborhood) (Fig. 1).

To describe the physical and spatial characteristics of the studied neighborhoods—such as the street network, communal spaces, neighborhood centers, and housing features—this study relied not only on physical analyses and base urban maps, but also on the authors' structured field observations and higher-level urban development documents of Tabriz. In the present research, these descriptions and physical data were employed not as direct statistical findings, but as

Table 1. Operationalization of Research Variables and Item Coding. Source: Authors.

Macro-axis	Dimensions	Items
Consumer Culture (q1-q30)	Conspicuous Consumption (q1-q5)	(q1) Display of social status; (q2) Exhibition of financial capability; (q3) Possession of an impressive home; (q4) Comparing the home with others; (q5) Importance of impressing visitors.
	Symbolic Consumption (q6-q10)	(q6) Personal or family identity; (q7) Values in decoration; (q8) Distinction of home style; (q9) Meaning or cultural background of belongings; (q10) Reflection of lifestyle and interests.
	Experiential Consumption (q11-q15)	(q11) Space for entertainment and creativity; (q12) Selection of new items; (q13) Attractive spaces; (q14) Pleasure of arrangement; (q15) Sense of diversity and new experience.
	Compulsive Consumption (q16-q20)	(q16) Unplanned/Impulse buying; (q17) Purchasing to reduce stress; (q18) Feeling of regret after purchase; (q19) Uncontrolled purchases; (q20) Purchasing without actual need.
	Sacred Consumption (q21-q25)	(q21) Spiritual value of the space; (q22) Sense of sanctity; (q23) Space for meditation; (q24) Selection based on spiritual values; (q25) Meaning beyond ordinary function.
	Creative Consumption (q26-q30)	(q26) Innovative arrangement; (q27) Personal taste; (q28) Space redesigning; (q29) Items with modular/changing capabilities; (q30) Design and arrangement as a creative act.
Cultural Consumption (q31-q49)	High Cultural Consumption (q31-q34)	(q31) Authentic artworks; (q32) Artistic knowledge in selection; (q33) Coordination of arrangement with cultural background; (q34) Artworks as a sign of social status.
	Popular Cultural Consumption (q35-q39)	(q35) Use of design trends; (q36) Individual identity; (q37) Imitating social media patterns; (q38) Aesthetics for photos and visitors; (q39) Group similarity or distinction.
	Everyday Cultural Consumption (q40-q44)	(q40) Regular cultural activities; (q41) Expenses for cultural activities; (q42) Impact of education on culture; (q43) Cultural activity as a lifestyle; (q44) Cultural facilities at home.
	Hybrid Cultural Consumption (q45-q49)	(q45) Use of diverse cultural elements; (q46) Flexibility in choice; (q47) Reflection of cultural background in design; (q48) Impact of beliefs on cultural elements; (q49) Displaying personal identity through arrangement.

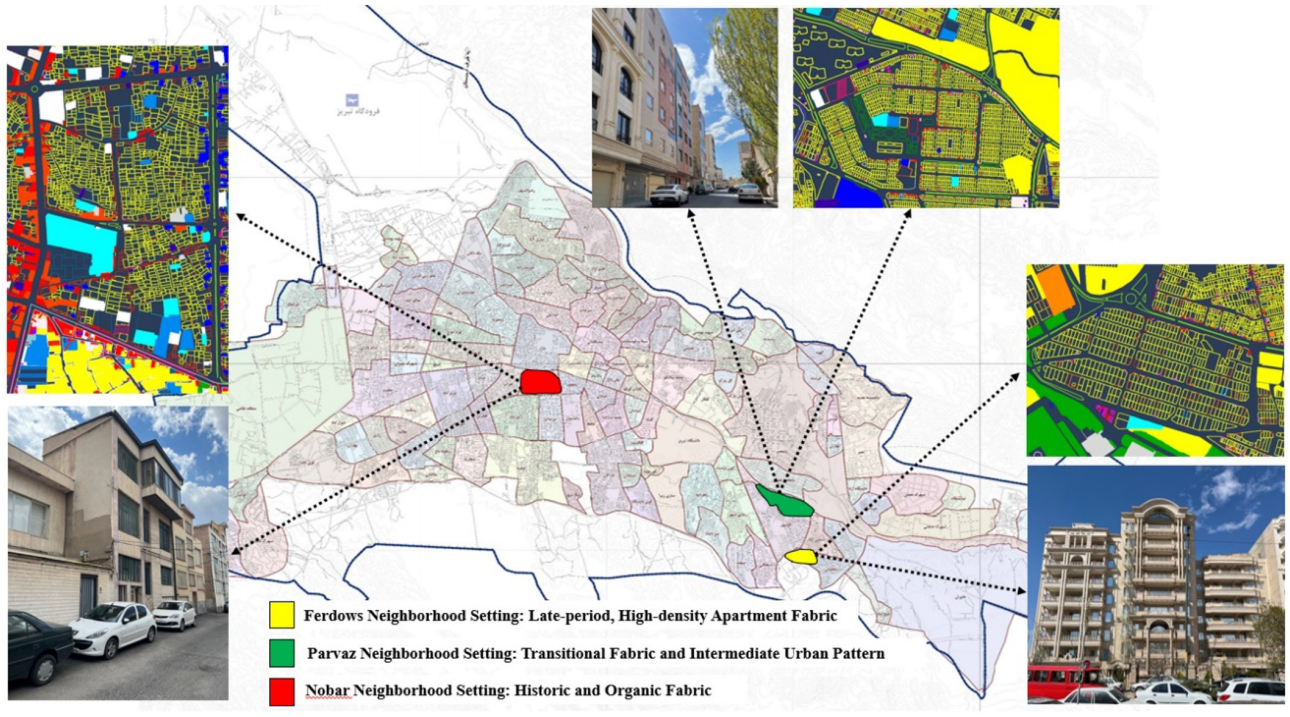
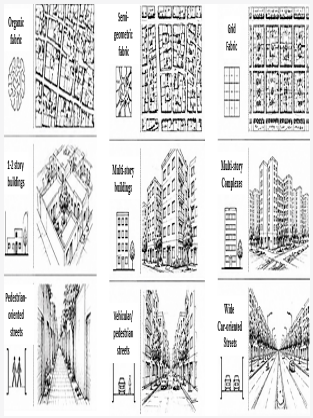
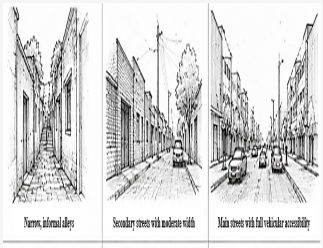
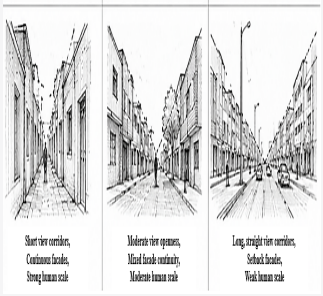
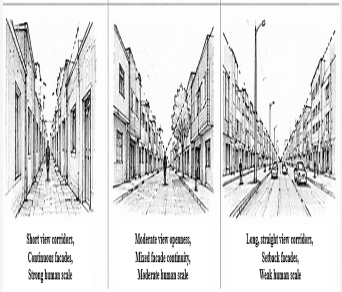


Fig. 1. Images and Geographic Locations of the Selected Neighborhoods on the Map of Tabriz. Source: Authors.

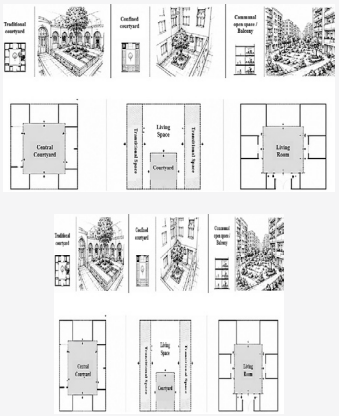
an interpretive context within the retroductive process of Critical Realism, so as to explain the possible relationship between spatial form and consumption patterns. Table 2 summarizes the physical and spatial characteristics of the studied neighborhoods at both the neighborhood and home scales.

The final Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.933) indicated the high reliability of the research instrument.

Table 2. Summary of the Physical and Spatial Characteristics of the Studied Neighborhoods at the Neighborhood and Home Scales. Source: Authors.

Scales	Late and Dense Apartment Fabric (Ferdows Neighborhood)	Transitional Fabric (Parvaz Neighborhood)	Historic and Organic Fabric (Nobar Neighborhood)
Neighborhood Scale		    	

Rest of Table 2.

Scales	Late and Dense Apartment Fabric (Ferdows Neighborhood)	Transitional Fabric (Parvaz Neighborhood)	Historic and Organic Fabric (Nobar Neighborhood)
Home Scale			

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was employed to identify latent patterns among variables and to reduce data dimensionality. The prerequisites for the analysis, including the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (KMO = 0.909) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($P < 0.0001$), confirmed the suitability of the data for factor analysis. It should be noted that artificial intelligence tools were utilized solely for optimizing data visualization codes and generating analytical charts. Fig. 2 summarizes the research methodology process.

Results

The results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) indicated that eleven factors had eigenvalues greater than 1 (Fig. 3), collectively explaining 63.81% of the total variance. This percentage of explained variance demonstrates the adequacy of the extracted factor structure in summarizing response patterns and identifying interpretable correlations among the items. Furthermore, the scree plot confirms the stability of the factor structure and the appropriateness of the number of extracted factors.

To enhance the interpretability of the eleven extracted factors, an orthogonal Varimax rotation method with Kaiser normalization was employed. The results of the rotated component matrix indicated that all items exhibited acceptable factor loadings (above 0.5) on their respective factors, with cross-loadings kept to a minimum. Consequently, the items have been logically and meaningfully loaded onto their corresponding factors, confirming a robust factor structure and satisfactory construct validity for the questionnaire.

Before presenting the results, it is essential to clarify that Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) merely reveals the statistical correlations and shared variance of items in residents' responses and cannot, by itself, empirically prove abstract concepts such as "creativity." Accordingly, the categorization and labeling of the extracted factors into forms of creativity or dimensions of consumption were conducted based on theoretical readings and content analysis of the items, proposed here as "interpretive patterns." Furthermore, some extracted consumption patterns (such as reactive buying behaviors or conspicuous consumption), which may not constitute direct physical creativity, have been interpreted as mediating dimensions and mechanisms in regulating the relationship between agency and structure.

The EFA results suggest that the mechanism of consumption in contemporary residential spaces in Tabriz does not manifest uniformly; rather, it appears in eleven distinct patterns, which can be interpreted as variations in the consumption preferences and actions of residents. These patterns emerge as clusters of items in observable data and, within the interpretive framework of Critical Realism, may be considered manifestations of deeper mechanisms organizing the experience of dwelling. Based on this, the extracted

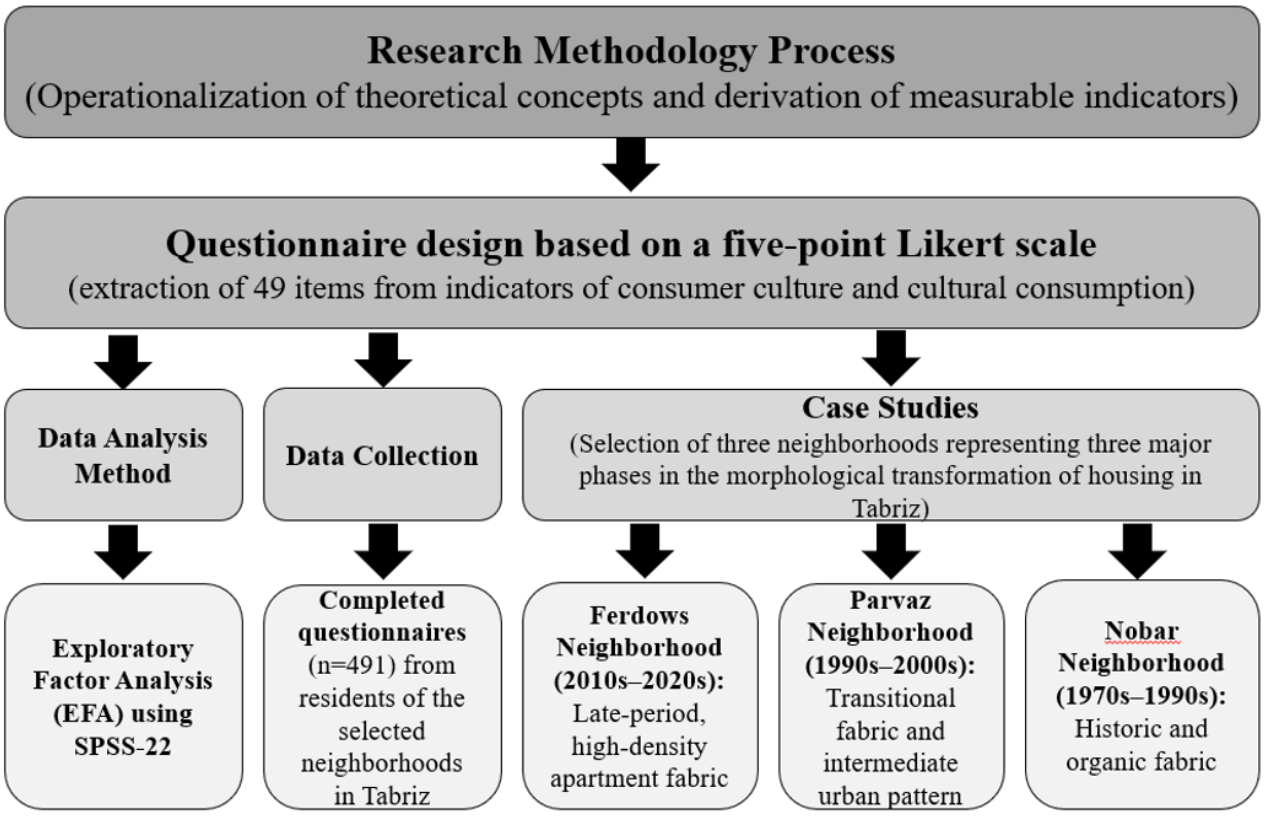


Fig. 2. Research Methodology Process. Source: Authors.

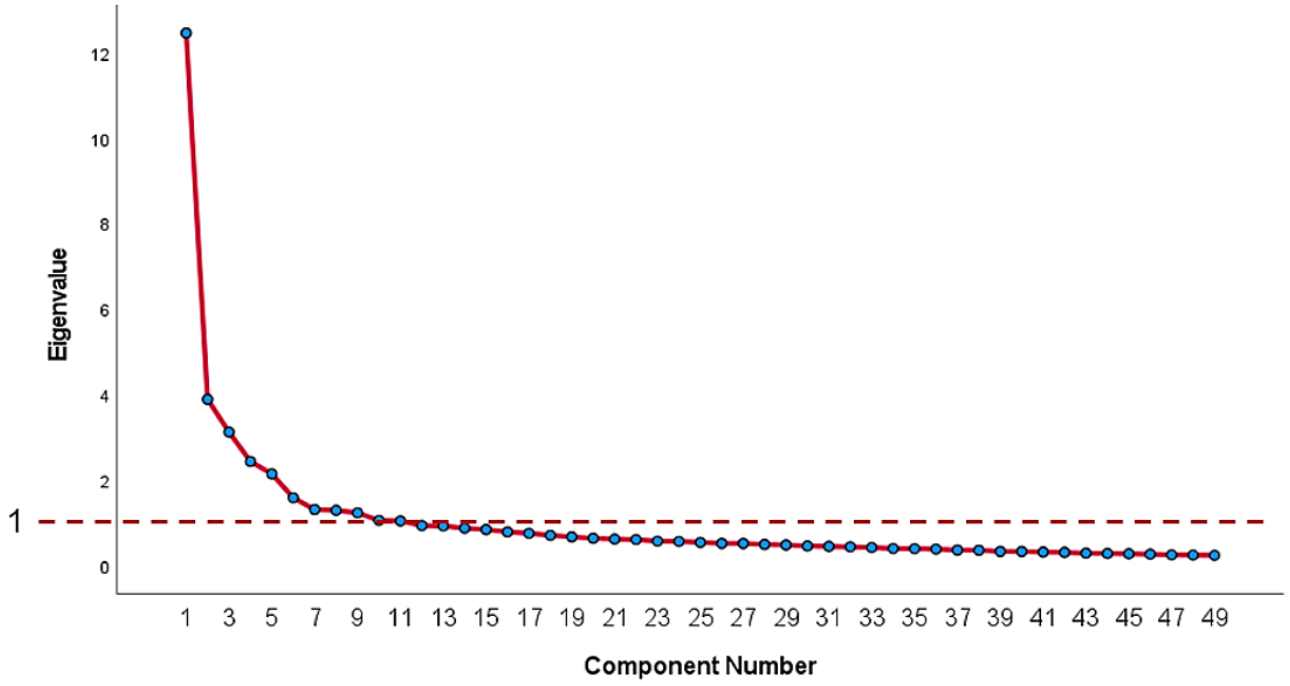


Fig. 3. Scree plot based on Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Source: Authors.

factors are classified into five main categories related to dimensions of creativity and consumption: Cognitive, Conceptual, Regulatory/Emotional, Social Representation/Conspicuous Consumption, and Practical patterns. Each of these interpretable patterns is realized in the daily lives of residents through the

organization and use of space at two scales: the home and the neighborhood.

Notably, the assignment of each of the eleven factors to these five categories was not based solely on statistical results, but on a content analysis of the items and the residents' mode of engagement with the residential space. In other words, while EFA uncovers statistical patterns among items, their interpretation is grounded in the theoretical and conceptual reading of the research. This analysis presupposes that the consumption of space is a creative act through which residents—by utilizing the physical, symbolic, and functional affordances of the home—produce meaning, identity, and a specific dwelling experience. From this perspective, each cluster of items represents a distinct facet of the interpretive pattern of the relationship between agency and space, which is briefly explained below:

Cognitive Pattern (Space as a context for learning and cultural growth): Factors 1 (q40–q45) and 7 (q29–q34) emphasize how residents engage with space as a "context for producing and receiving meaning." Items such as regular studying, film watching, listening to music, allocating budgets to cultural activities, the impact of education on cultural activity types, and the importance of having cultural amenities at home (q40–q45) indicate that residents do not perceive the home merely as a physical shelter, but as an environment for "learning, contemplation, and cultural growth." Similarly, items q29–q34—including the tendency to use modular/adaptable furniture, displaying authentic artworks in designated places, requiring cultural or artistic knowledge for element selection, aligning layouts with cultural background, and using valid works as a signifier of cultural status—reflect a type of "conscious and selective reading" of space. From an architectural perspective, these two clusters demonstrate that residents organize space and its elements based on their knowledge, awareness, and cultural discernment; they understand, interpret, and subsequently rearrange the space. This process can be interpreted as a manifestation of the cognitive pattern in relation to creativity in space consumption.

Conceptual Pattern (Expressing meaning, identity, and background in space): Factors 2 (q21–q25), 4 (q36, q46–q49), and 9 (q6, q7, q9) highlight the dimension of "meaning-making" and "conceptualization" in space. In Factor 2 (q21–q25), topics such as the spiritual value of certain spaces, feelings of respect or sanctity, the importance of space for worship, meditation or tranquility, selecting objects based on spiritual beliefs, and spaces/objects having meanings beyond utilitarian function are addressed. Here, the home transcends function, becoming a "place" for the manifestation of the resident's beliefs and meaning system. In Factor 4, items such as selecting decor elements to create individual identity (q36), flexibility in choosing objects (q46), the importance of reflecting cultural background in interior design (q47), the direct influence of personal values/beliefs on selecting cultural elements (q48), and displaying various aspects of personal identity through home layout (q49) indicate that residents use space as a "language" to articulate concepts of identity, background, and values. Factor 9 reinforces this logic through items like presenting the home as personal or family identity (q6), attention to cultural values and signs in decoration (q7), and objects having a specific meaning or cultural history (q9). Together, these three clusters reflect a creativity where residents translate abstract concepts (identity, belief, background, sanctity) into "spatial and physical structure," which can be interpreted as a conceptual pattern related to creativity.

Regulatory/Emotional Pattern and Reactive Consumption Dimensions: Factor 3 includes items q10, q14, q27, and q28, focusing on emotional experiences in space: home as a reflection of lifestyle and personal interests (q10), feelings of pleasure and comfort through layout (q14), importance of layout based on personal taste (q27), and the tendency to redesign or create new uses for the home (q28). Here, residents regulate and enhance their emotional state by transforming space. Furthermore, Factor 10 (q18–q20) and Factor 11 (q15–q17) demonstrate

other dimensions of consumption. Items q18–q 20 (regret after purchase, uncontrolled buying, buying without real need) and q15–q 17 (feeling variety and new experiences with decor, buying items to reduce stress, impulsive buying) do not necessarily represent active creativity in space, but rather the emotional and reactive dimension of consumption; where space and commodities act as tools for emotional regulation and managing daily tensions. Nevertheless, from an architectural viewpoint, these three factors suggest that residents, by manipulating space and objects, are engaged in a form of "emotional design" of the home to manage their feelings.

Social Representation and Conspicuous Consumption Pattern: Factors 5 (q1–q5) and 6 (q35, q37–q39) address how space is used as a "medium for display and social interaction." In items q1–q5, displaying social status, showing financial capability, having an impressive home, comparing one's home to others', and the importance of impressing visitors, all indicate that the home functions as a "stage" through which the individual declares and stabilizes their position and status to others. In items q35, q37–q39, the use of prevailing interior design trends, modeling after popular social media styles, the importance of the home's aesthetics in photos and visits, and similarities or distinctions from other groups due to trendy styles, focus more on social representation, conspicuous consumption, and distinction-seeking based on external rules (e.g., media and trends) rather than direct creativity. However, both demonstrate how residents' agency in residential space is linked to social codes and external structures, turning interior architecture into a tool for participation in symbolic competition and social validation.

Practical Pattern and Physical Interventions: Factor 8 comprises q26, q13, q12, q11, and q8, all referring to "active manipulation" and "practical experimentation" in spatial structure: importance of innovative layout (q26), having attractive spaces in the home (q13), selecting new and different objects (q12), using the home as a space for entertainment, creativity, or different experiences (q11), and the importance of the home's style being different from others (q8). Here, creativity manifests not just at the level of perception and meaning, but at the level of "tangible action" on the physical form and spatial organization. Residents take on the role of an "everyday designer" who, within existing constraints, creates new configurations for the dwelling experience through moving, combining, removing, and adding elements. In the research interpretation, this pattern of spatial action can be understood as a form of practical creativity in the dwelling experience (Table 3).

Discussion

The analysis and interpretation of the questionnaire findings across the studied cases reveal that the residents' patterns of creativity and consumption portray notable differences across the three distinct urban fabrics: the historic organic fabric (Nobar neighborhood), the transitional fabric (Parvaz neighborhood), and the late high-density apartment fabric (Ferdows neighborhood). These variations are ostensibly linked to the respective spatial-physical characteristics and socio-cultural contexts of these areas. Within the theoretical framework of Critical Realism (Bhaskar, 1978), these empirical patterns can be understood as manifestations of contextual mechanisms that organize the consumption of space. This aligns with Canter's (1977) perspective on the pivotal role of spatial consumption in shaping lifestyle and identity.

Analyzing the findings at two distinct scales the "home scale" (operationalized through variables such as introversion/spatial closure, extroversion, flexibility, and territorial demarcation) and the "neighborhood scale" (operationalized through street networks and public/collective spaces)—reveals how the physical affordances of each fabric offer different possibilities and constraints for the representation of residents' lifestyles and the manifestation of diverse forms of creativity.

- **At the home scale**

Based on structured field observations and spatial-physical map analyses, in the historic organic fabric (Nobar)—characterized by spatial introversion,

Table 3. Interpretive Patterns in Relation to the Dimensions of Creativity and Consumption Derived from the Questionnaire Items. Source: Authors.

Factor	Items	Eigenvalue	Variance (%)	Interpretive Patterns regarding Creativity and Consumption
1st	q40–q45	12.43	25.38	Cognitive Pattern: Space as a context for learning and cultural growth
2nd	q21–q25	3.86	7.88	Conceptual Pattern: Meaning-making and manifestation of spiritual beliefs in space
3rd	q10, q14, q27, q28	3.09	6.31	Regulatory/Emotional & Reactive Consumption: Personalizing space based on interests and taste
4th	q36, q46–q49	2.40	4.91	Conceptual Pattern: Expressing personal identity and cultural background in space
5th	q1–q5	2.11	4.31	Social Representation & Conspicuous Consumption: Status and prestige
6th	q35, q37–q39	1.55	3.17	Social Representation & Conspicuous Consumption: Media-influenced trends
7th	q29–q34	1.28	2.61	Cognitive Pattern: Conscious reading, selectivity, and cultural knowledge in layout
8th	q26, q13, q12, q11, q8	1.26	2.57	Practical Pattern & Physical Interventions: Experimentation and physical spatial change
9th	q6, q7, q9	1.20	2.45	Conceptual Pattern: Expressing personal identity and cultural background in space
10th	q18–q20	1.02	2.09	Regulatory/Emotional & Reactive Consumption: Stress-relieving consumption and emotion management
11th	q15–q17	1.01	2.07	Regulatory/Emotional & Reactive Consumption: Emotional experientialism and impulsive buying

central courtyards, and a clear entry hierarchy—the documented behavioral patterns lean heavily toward interactive aspects and the expression of family belonging. Within this physical context, it can be interpreted that the spatial structure of the house fosters consumption patterns aligned with traditional social and emotional dimensions. Such a spatial organization ensures that the home, rather than merely housing daily functional routines, serves as a repository for collective memory, the preservation of privacy (mahramiyat), the representation of familial values, and the reproduction of residential rituals. The presence of elements such as handwoven Persian carpets, niches (taqcheh), prayer spaces, or semantic corners further solidifies this link between physical space and meaning. In this context, the regulatory/emotional pattern manifests strongly through an attachment to natural light, the courtyard, greenery, and a sense of tranquility, while the social representation pattern is highlighted through the preservation of hospitality traditions, family interactions, and the collective use of intermediate domestic spaces.

In contrast to the physical stability of the historic organic fabric, the transitional fabric (Parvaz) occupies an intermediate position. It possesses neither the introverted cohesion of traditional houses nor the compact, purely functional logic of late apartment blocks. According to master plans and field observations, the combination of smaller courtyard houses with semi-independent, denser units in this transitional fabric has generated a spatial organization that facilitates the hybridization of traditional and contemporary patterns. This state is reflected in the layout and utilization of space; living areas concurrently serve both familial and display functions, semi-open kitchens act as intermediaries between old and new layouts, and traditional decorative elements coexist alongside modern ones. Consequently, creativity in this fabric is primarily characterized by redefinition and hybridization. Residents utilize the limited yet flexible affordances of the space to negotiate and reconcile inherited values with the demands of a contemporary lifestyle.

Conversely, field observations in the late high-density apartment fabric (Ferdows)—characterized by tight square footages, the elimination of transitional spaces, and the dominance of functionalist organization—reveal a strong tendency among respondents toward cognitive, conceptual, and practical patterns. In a retroductive interpretative analysis, this inclination

can be viewed as an agentic response to physical constraints; residents attempt to compensate for spatial limitations and represent their lifestyles through meticulous interior decoration management, multi-functional furniture, and small-scale physical modifications. Redefining balconies as workspaces or leisure zones, employing artificial lighting design, utilizing kitchen islands, and adopting versatile layouts to maximize efficiency demonstrate a pronounced focus on space management and personalized decoration. In this scenario, distinction, experientialism, and the representation of social status also play significant roles.

- **At the neighborhood scale**

At the neighborhood scale, although social representation patterns are prominent in all three neighborhoods, the quality and context of their manifestation differ. In the historic organic fabric (Nobar), the presence of traditional nodes such as the neighborhood mosque and local bazaars (derived from urban planning documents and physical maps) creates a public sphere where social patterns are interpreted through close, face-to-face neighborly relations. This spatial organization prevents the neighborhood from being experienced merely as a channel for passage and accessibility; instead, it offers a high potential for presence, gradual recognition, and the development of a sense of place. From this perspective, the spatial structure of the historic organic fabric actively reinforces traditional neighborhood interactions.

In the transitional fabric (Parvaz), based on base urban maps and the semi-regular street network, local services are primarily distributed along main arterial streets. This physical configuration ensures that while readability and accessibility are relatively higher compared to the historic fabric, close-knit local relationships are partially preserved. These physical and social characteristics create a context where the experience of the neighborhood is neither entirely defined by traditional intimacy nor solely driven by the logic of modern passage and spatial consumption. Therefore, collective behaviors in this fabric are hybrid, fluctuating between traditional neighborliness and the appropriation of newer urban spaces.

In contrast, in the late high-density apartment fabric (Ferdows), with its gridiron street pattern and rapid access to modern commercial land uses, residents' social behaviors are closely linked to experiential consumption, distinction-seeking, and conspicuous display patterns. In a critical realist interpretation, these differences demonstrate how the physical structure of the neighborhood acts as a contextual condition that enables different pathways for lifestyle representation. In this setting, neighborhood spaces are organized less around traditional nodes of solidarity and more in connection with contemporary modes of housing, shopping, leisure, and social representation. Consequently, collective behaviors in this fabric tend to be more conspicuous, distinction-oriented, and rooted in experiential consumption.

In summary, the manifestation of creative and consumption behaviors in all three fabrics is intrinsically tied to the physical affordances and constraints of space—at the home scale through spatial organization and territorial division, and at the neighborhood scale through street networks, service distribution, and the legibility of the spatial structure. However, the differences among these three neighborhoods should not be interpreted as deterministic causal relationships. Instead, they represent contingencies and correlations between spatial structure, consumer culture, and resident agency. Ultimately, what distinguishes these neighborhoods is how residents interpretively reproduce the space. As shown in the heat map in Fig. 4, the recorded spatial patterns, rather than representing independent or deterministic causal actions, are best understood as agentic responses to environmental affordances and constraints.

Conclusion

Employing a critical realist approach and a retroductive strategy, this study interpreted the mechanisms underlying the representation of

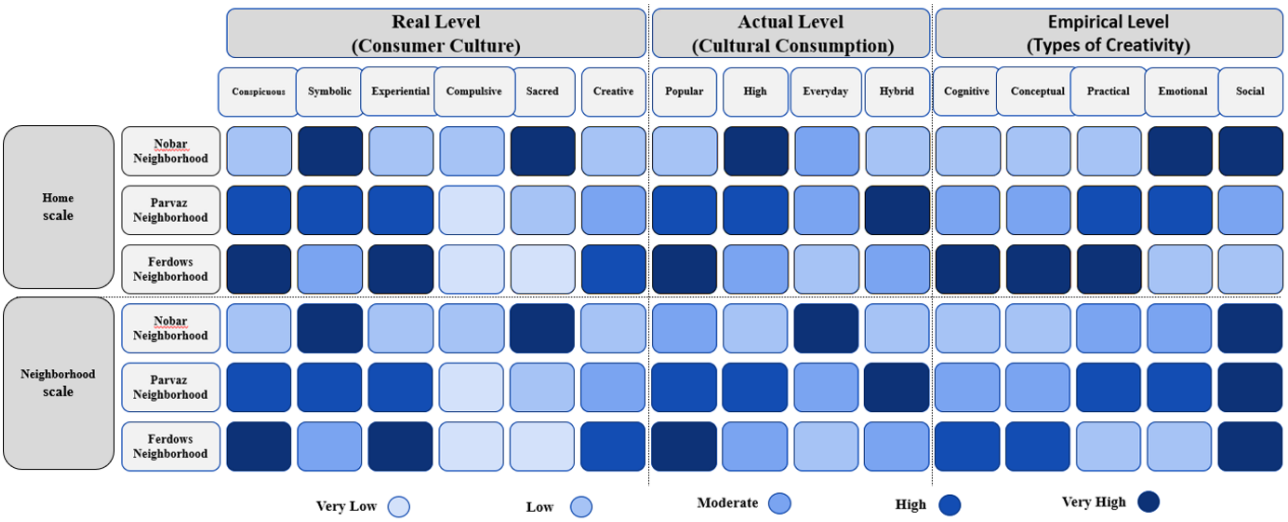


Fig. 4. Heat Map of Consumption and Interpretive Patterns Related to the Dimensions of Creativity and Consumption in the Three Studied Neighborhoods at the Home and Neighborhood Scales. Source: Authors.

lifestyle within the residential spaces of Tabriz. The results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and its theoretical interpretation demonstrate that the patterns of spatial consumption and interaction are not uniform across the three analyzed urban fabrics. However, given the interpretive nature of this analysis, these variations should not be construed as deterministic causal relations; rather, they signify contingencies and correlations shaped at the intersection of residential physical forms, structures of consumer culture, and resident agency. Within this framework, the manifestation of creative spatial behaviors acts as an interpretive mechanism through which residents decode, reconfigure, and ultimately integrate environmental affordances and constraints into their lived experiences and social identities (Fig. 5).

The study's interpretive analyses revealed distinct variations in creativity and consumption patterns across the three urban fabrics. At the home scale, within the historic organic fabric (Nobar neighborhood), the predominance of interactive dimensions and the expression of familial belonging (traditional regulatory/emotional and social representation patterns) indicate a stronger linkage between dwelling and collective memory, privacy (mahramiyat), daily rituals, and face-to-face relations. In the transitional fabric (Parvaz neighborhood), the simultaneous presence of diverse interpretive patterns reflects its intermediate state and its heightened flexibility in hybridizing traditional and contemporary practices. In the late high-density apartment fabric (Ferdows neighborhood), the dominance of cognitive, conceptual, and practical patterns suggests that in confronting physical compactness and functionalist spatial logic, residents represent their identity and lifestyle primarily through the redefinition of functions, personalization, and meticulous space management. At the neighborhood scale, although social representation patterns were dominant in all three fabrics, their interpretive quality varies according to the spatial structure of each neighborhood—ranging from traditional solidarity and face-to-face relations to behaviors linked with experiential, distinction-seeking, and conspicuous consumption.

Consequently, the primary contribution of this study is that differences among neighborhoods cannot be explained solely by physical typologies; rather, they must be understood as the product of variations in the way residents "reproduce space." From this perspective, residential spaces are not neutral containers but active settings for meaning-making, identity representation, and lifestyle reproduction.

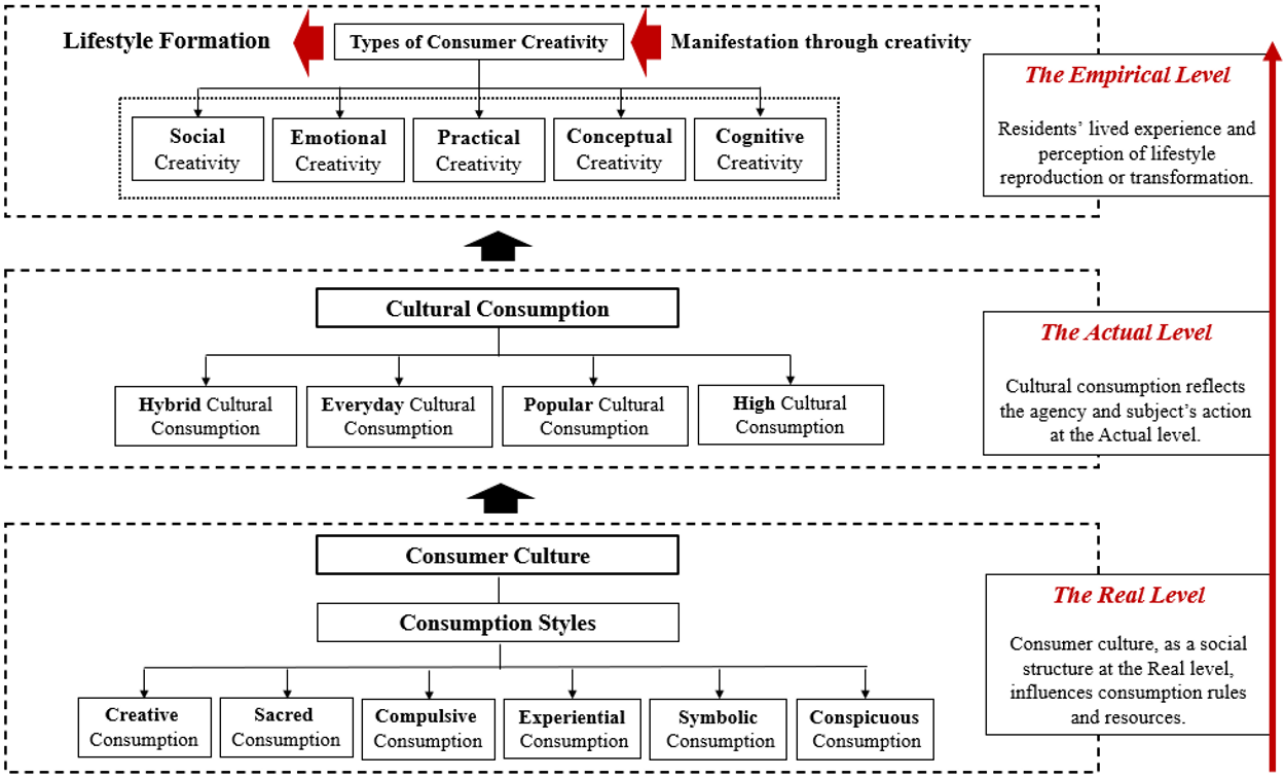


Fig. 5. Interpretive Model of the Mechanisms of Representation of Lifestyle in Creativity-Based Residential Spaces Based on the Critical Realist Framework. Source: Authors.

Thus, the study of housing architecture achieves a deeper understanding only when it analyzes physical form, daily practices, and cultural mechanisms simultaneously and in a layered manner.

The findings of this research offer valuable insights for housing architecture and policy-making. The results suggest that the design of residential spaces, at both the home and neighborhood scales, will be more successful if it accommodates the capacity for creative expression, spatial flexibility, identity representation, and social interaction, in addition to addressing physical and functional requirements.

Nevertheless, acknowledging the limitations of this study is crucial. A primary limitation is that EFA in itself is incapable of proving causal relationships or directly measuring the psychological construct of "creativity"; thus, the classifications remain interpretive patterns grounded in theoretical foundations. Furthermore, the findings regarding the physical description of the neighborhoods are primarily qualitative and interpretive—based on structured field observations and urban development documents—rather than direct statistical measurements. Moving forward, conducting comparative studies in other cities, examining the role of socio-economic and demographic variables, and employing mixed-method designs or more advanced approaches—such as phenomenology or Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to empirically test the proposed causal relationships—could refine and validate this interpretive model.

Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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