

**ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL
HOUSING PROJECTS: A CASE STUDY OF
HO CHI MINH CITY**

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ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL HOUSING PROJECTS: A
CASE STUDY OF HO CHI MINH CITY

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ABSTRACT

The pressing issue of housing scarcity, particularly for those with limited incomes, remains a critical concern in developing countries, including Vietnam. As populations surge, especially in major cities serving as economic hubs, and living costs skyrocket, affordable housing becomes increasingly elusive for low-income individuals. Social housing emerges as a crucial tool for nations, designed to support their disadvantaged citizens, thereby stabilizing demographics, maintaining social order, and fostering economic growth. While social housing projects have been implemented in various regions, their effectiveness in addressing social welfare concerns remains questionable. Numerous areas are left vacant, failing to meet the populace's demands. Moreover, social housing, being a governmental policy tool, is significantly influenced by national policies and specific country characteristics. Understanding the impact of various factors on the quality of social housing projects aids experts and policymakers in formulating precise development policies, enhancing the efficiency of social housing projects. Hence, this study aims to explore and provide empirical evidence on how investment costs, customer-oriented pricing, and building codes influence project management and, subsequently, the quality of social housing projects in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, regulated by government policies. Surveying 416 respondents and employing Smart-PLS3 software, the results indicate that investment costs, customer-oriented pricing, and building codes indeed affect project management and, consequently, the quality of social housing projects in the city. Furthermore, the findings reveal the previously unexplored mediating role of project management in the research model. Consequently, the thesis proposes relevant recommendations, forging a crucial connection between theoretical insights and practical policy implications.

Keywords: Ho Chi Minh City, total quality management, social housing, project management, government boosting policy, investment cost, customer-oriented pricing, building standards

APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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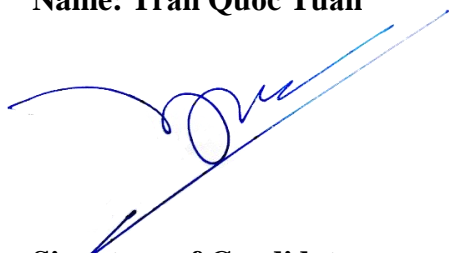
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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Date 24 March 2022

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AeU	Asia e University
DOC	Department of Construction
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh city
MOC	Minister of Construction
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLS	Partial Least Squares
PM	Project Management
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SHP	Social Housing Project
TQM	Total Quality Management

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Housing is one of the fundamental needs of humans, providing a place for rest, shelter, and rejuvenation of energy. Rising housing costs have led to a significant gap between high and low-income groups, with owning a comfortable home becoming an unattainable dream for many in the low-income bracket. Social housing and related policies have emerged as essential tools for governments to support low-income individuals facing financial difficulties (Napoli et al., 2022). They help people establish stability, focus on economic development, and minimize social issues. As a result, in recent years, social housing and the quality of social housing have become a major concern worldwide, a top priority for policy makers and governments. However, the quality of social housing projects remains a significant question and challenge for governments, as they often face budget constraints and may not always align with the needs of the people. In Vietnam, the rapid urbanization process, especially in cities like Ho Chi Minh City, coupled with soaring land prices, has created challenges related to overpopulation, social welfare, and utilities. The influx of people seeking employment opportunities has put pressure on housing resources, making the housing shortage a pressing issue for the government.

1.1 Background of the Study

According to the United Nations Human Development Report, approximately 85% of the world's population is living in developing countries (Banihashemi et al., 2017). Rapid urbanization has led to uncontrolled urban expansion, overcrowding, and housing resource strains. In Vietnam, major urban centers like Ho Chi Minh City

(HCMC) are grappling with an ever-increasing demand for housing due to soaring land prices beyond the reach of middle-income individuals. Housing in Vietnam encompasses both formal and informal areas, with the informal sector including slums, temporary housing, and substandard housing (Ahmed et al., 2010). Other issues include skyrocketing real estate prices: the period from 2016-2020 witnessed the development of the Vietnamese real estate market, especially in HCMC, with land prices continually on the rise.

This makes it increasingly difficult for low to middle-income earners to afford housing. Furthermore, the quality and quantity of social housing do not align with the people's needs. While the housing shortage is becoming increasingly urgent, some social housing projects remain vacant. Complex policies and inadequate enforcement also contribute to issues concerning the quality of social housing projects (Clapham, 2018).

Therefore, comprehensive research on the quality of social housing projects in Vietnam is of particular importance. Such research can provide valuable insights into the current context of social housing project quality, policy effectiveness, and areas in need of improvement. By gaining a deeper understanding of the determinants of project management quality and social housing project quality under controlling by government agencies, and policymakers, can enhance policies relating to the quality of social housing projects, meet the people's needs, ensure social well-being, and contribute to national development.

1.1.1 Social Housing Projects

The significance of social housing projects cannot be overlooked, especially in the context of social welfare and poverty reduction through affordable housing.

Recognizing this importance, organizations such as the OECD have emphasized the role of social housing in addressing housing challenges and reducing poverty (OECD, 2020a, 2020b). To mitigate this, social housing provides housing and rental units at prices lower than the market, aiming to benefit those with low incomes (Salvi del Pero et al., 2016). It serves as a form of housing provided by the state or nonprofit organizations to support citizens and reduce poverty (Poggio & Whitehead, 2017).

Countries such as Norway, Colombia, Sweden, Germany, and Malaysia have implemented various social housing programs with multiple incentives and diverse schemes to support local residents, particularly low-income families. These initiatives aim to ensure better living standards, financial assistance, and poverty reduction (Lawson & Ruonavaara, 2020). Prior research has explored various aspects of social housing, including housing quality, housing policies, and factors affecting residents' satisfaction. For example, studies conducted in Chile and Vietnam focused on factors such as amenities, design, construction quality, location, and the surrounding environment, as these significantly influence satisfaction and the development of appropriate housing standards (Pérez-Fargallo et al., 2018); (T. A. Nguyen et al., 2017); (Tran et al., 2018).

The development plans for social housing projects in Ho Chi Minh City focus on key aspects, including project information, scale, legal aspects, design, consumption, and implementation status (Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee, 2017). The government pays attention to various dimensions such as construction methods, area, pricing, location, land reserves, investment capital, budget, policy reform, administrative procedures, as well as the quality and infrastructure of housing projects.

1.1.2 The Quality of Social Housing Project

Social housing is a critical area of focus in Vietnam and worldwide, with attention given to both the quantity and quality of housing. Several countries have established evaluation criteria and rating systems to address the issue of housing quality. For instance, France introduced the Quality housing rating system, which assesses housing on a scale of 1 to 5 based on minimum standards for comprehensive design. Switzerland developed the SEL method, incorporating 39 architectural indicators with five rating levels, and Portugal developed the MC. The FEUP system evaluates housing quality from 0 to 4 (Le et al., 2016). Following by (Gachigwa, 2022), total quality management (TQM) plays a vital role to enhance quality of construction project. However, research on standards for sustainable social housing is still limited (Chan & Tam, 2000). (Serrano-Jiménez et al., 2020) emphasize that social housing often falls below acceptable standards, negatively impacting residents' health. This highlights the need for comprehensive studies and assessment frameworks to measure and improve the quality of social housing projects.

In Vietnam, the government and researchers are increasingly interested in social housing and its quality. (Le et al., 2016) have highlighted the importance of quality and pricing in developing social housing projects in Vietnam. While time and cost are necessary for social housing projects, housing quality is essential for project success and sustainability. However, there is often a compromise in quality due to the construction industry's emphasis on cost and schedule goals. Research by (Dang, 2018) highlights the significance of planning infrastructure systems for social housing in Vietnam's industrial zones. While these zones have contributed to economic development and worker income, inadequate infrastructure affects the well-being of workers.

(Dang, 2018) suggests various methods to establish a consistent infrastructure system, including planning solutions, investment processes, and policy innovation. Assessing the quality of affordable housing infrastructure is also crucial, considering each industrial zone's characteristics and social infrastructure system. Investors and project developers increasingly recognize the significance of quality management (Hussain et al., 2018). However, the quality of social housing construction remains a significant concern, particularly in developing countries like Vietnam.

1.2 Macro & Socio-Economic Factors and Government & Fiscal Year

Social housing projects are typically implemented by the government or the institutions associated with the governmental departments. The main objective of the social housing projects is to deliver low-cost housing projects. It is to the general public who fail to have the capacity to construct their own houses or simply these projects performed on government land. The government makes investments to construct low-cost houses and then provides them to the public at lower rents, which are affordable for them. Different factors, including macroeconomic and socio-economic factors, can affect the quality of social housing projects (Clapham, 2018).

Following (Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee, 2017), the macroeconomic factors that can affect the quality of the social housing projects include demographics, interest rates and the economic factors. Similarly, numerous socio-economic factors can affect the quality of the social housing projects in Ho Chi Minh City. One of the prominent social housing projects' socio-economic factors is the exact cost in rural and urban areas of Vietnam (Tran et al., 2018). The government of Vietnam also focuses on facilitating social housing projects in terms of macroeconomic and socio-economic factors and tries to formulate particular policies regarding the construction industry that can help to improve the quality of the social housing projects in Ho Chi Minh City.

The government always plays a significant role in the construction industry in Vietnam as the officials know about the significance of the policies related to the construction industry. During the fiscal year, the Vietnam government formulates those policies and procedures that can help and control project management to improve the quality of the social housing projects.

1.3 Statements of Problems

Urbanization, migration, income disparities, and government policies have substantial implications for the housing conditions of low-income individuals. Social housing has emerged as a crucial tool to support individuals facing financial difficulties and challenging circumstances (Napoli et al., 2022), especially in rapidly urbanizing and densely populated cities like Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. According to data from the Ho Chi Minh City Statistics Department (2021), the city's population was estimated at 8.9 million people. In there, approximately 18% of the city's residents live in the suburbs, where access to infrastructure and services is limited. The population density in the city reached over 4,200 people per square kilometer. This high-density growth makes it challenging to develop social housing projects closer to city centers, exacerbating social exclusion and limiting access to urban opportunities for low-income individuals.

Besides, the absence of a standardized definition for "adequate housing" and "quality social housing project" further complicates the evaluation and implementation of social housing project quality. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the quality framework of social housing projects to ensure their effectiveness, meet people's needs, and save budgetary resources.

In Vietnam's market-oriented socialist economy, social housing plays a vital role in fulfilling people's fundamental, the Vietnamese government has implemented

mechanisms and policies to support housing initiatives. Notably, Decision No. 2127/QĐ-TTg, issued by the Prime Minister, outlines the national housing development strategy until 2030, aiming to address housing needs and assist specific disadvantaged groups (Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee, 2017). However, the current quality of social housing projects falls short of meeting the needs of the populace, while housing shortages persist (Le et al., 2016). In practice, these projects must adhere to government and societal regulations regarding both quantity and quality.

The government significantly influences housing policies, expands financial support, provides subsidies, offers low-interest loans, and issues guidance (Clapham, 2018). The literature review reveals that several prior studies have explored the factors of investment cost, dwell customer-oriented pricing, and building codes and standards affecting the quality of social housing projects, as well as the relationship between project management and the quality of social housing projects based on TQM (Total Quality Management) theory globally (Anderson, 1992); (Bryde & Wright, 2007); (Ogbu & Adindu, 2012); (Kiani Mavi & Standing, 2018); (Amoah, 2023) and in Vietnam (Le et al., 2016); (T. A. Nguyen et al., 2017); (Ton et al., 2024). However, no studies have provided empirical evidence on the mediating role of project management and the moderating role of government policies in the model examining the impact of investment cost, dwell customer-oriented pricing, and building codes and standards on the quality of social housing projects in both Vietnam and the world.

Consequently, research on the quality of social housing projects will provide governmental agencies and policy makers with a deeper understanding of policy impacts and the factors influencing the project management and the quality of social housing. This facilitates the formulation of appropriate policies and regulations,

thereby contributing to an enhancement of the quality of social housing projects, and ultimately meeting the needs of the population.

Specifically, the research combined two theories, TQM (total quality management) and PM (project management), into a new theory (the impact of investment cost, dwell customer-oriented pricing, and building codes and standards on project management and the quality of social housing projects in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, under the moderation of government policies) to understand the structure of social housing quality. The development of a comprehensive assessment system tailored to the specific characteristics of Ho Chi Minh City is essential to improve the quality of social housing projects and address the city's challenges.

1.4 Research Objectives

Overall, the main objective of the study is to identify the criteria for evaluating social housing project quality in Ho Chi Minh City. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- i. To identify the effects of project management of social housing on quality of social housing projects in Ho Chi Minh City.
- ii. To identify the effects of Investment cost, Customer-oriented pricing, Building codes and standards on the project management of social housing in Ho Chi Minh City.
- iii. To investigate the mediating role of Project management on enhancing the quality of social housing projects in Ho Chi Minh City.
- iv. To investigate the moderating role of government policies on the relationship between project management and quality of social housing projects in Ho Chi Minh City.

- v. To propose a framework of enhancing the quality of social housing projects in Ho Chi Minh City.

1.5 Research Questions

- i. Does project management influence the quality of the social housing projects in Ho Chi Minh City?
- ii. Do Investment cost, Customer-oriented pricing, Building codes and standards influence the project management of social housing projects in Ho Chi Minh City?
- iii. Does project management of social housing mediate the relationship between investment cost, customer-oriented pricing, the building code and standard and quality of social housing projects?
- iv. Do government policies moderate the relationship between project management and quality of social housing projects?

1.6 Operational Definitions

1.6.1 Social Housing

Social housing is rental-supported housing for people with difficult circumstances that lead it difficult for them to access housing. The government's social housing assistance program aims to build housing for some people who cannot afford to buy or rent a home.

Social housing can be newly built or renovated from existing public facilities (Radu, 2015). Social housing is a policy to support people with financial or social difficulties (Napoli et al., 2022).

1.6.2 Quality of Social Housing Projects

Quality involves delivering a service or product according to the technical specifications and customer standards without defects (Juran & Godfrey, 1998) with

no significant deviations and without exceeding costs (Philip B. Crosby, 1986); (Howarth & Greenwood, 2017). As per (ISO, 2015) *quality management* standards, the Quality Management System (QMS) is a vital requirement implemented across all organizations to meet customer needs. Additionally, (Lugasi, 2022) suggest that *quality* is based on the extent to which criteria are met as prescribed. According to (Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee, 2017), the *quality of social housing projects* is assessed based on the following factors: structural sustainability, usability, accessibility to utility services, and infrastructure provision.

1.6.3 Investment Cost

According to document 06/VBHN-BXD dated August 14th, 2023 of the Ministry of Construction of Vietnam, the total construction investment cost encompasses all the construction investment expenses of the project, appropriately determined based on the foundational design and other contents of the Investment Feasibility Study Report for construction. Investment costs on social housing projects mentioned in the research are the costs that investors had to spend to be able to build a social housing project that meets quality standards. Such costs can be land costs, management costs, construction costs, and maintenance costs.

1.6.4 Customer-Oriented Pricing

Mainly customers of social housing are poor persons. So, the customer-oriented pricing of social housing is low and suitable with their budget. In Vietnam, social housing pricing regulated by Article 87 of Decree No. 100/2024/ND-CP of Viet Nam, is determined by the project investor based on calculating all costs to recover the investment in constructing housing, pricing policy, the location of the project, and the loan interest rate supported for the contractor (if the loan interest rate is low and reasonable, can lower home sales). Besides, following by (Hashim, 2010) customer-

oriented pricing of social housing also belongs to the market's demand for the product from customers.

1.6.5 Building Code and Standard

Following by of Decree No. 100/2024/ND-CP of Viet Nam, building codes and standards refer to standards and regulations related to the construction of social housing projects of standard quality. These standards may prescribe parameters, construction materials, technical systems, or sanitary equipment related to social housing.

1.6.6 Project Management

Project management are issues that may arise during project construction management that may affect project quality. The issues mentioned in the research are design quality, construction capability, project manager capability, and supervision capability (Gopalan & Venkataraman, 2015).

1.6.7 Boosting Policies from Government

Following (Vietnam National Assembly, 2023), boosting policies from the government in this study refers to support policies related to social housing projects. Since this is a government-supported project, the policies will be specific to different locations, regions, and countries. Through Resolution 33/NQ-CP (2023), for Ho Chi Minh City, government-supported policies related to social housing construction projects include a support package of 120 trillion VND, tax reduction, and facilitating approval of documents and procedures related to Ho Chi Minh City projects, providing public infrastructure.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Ho Chi Minh City has witnessed a surge in population due to internal migration, which has led to a scarcity of housing units. This shortage, coupled with rapid urbanization,