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# THE STATUS OF THE CHILD IN SOCIAL HOUSING. CASE STUDY OF ALI MENDJLI CITY, ALGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

Algerian cities witnessed great developmental movements and major urban expansions that affected all sectors, so new residential areas with modern urban design and planning that differed from the traditional style known to it spread age. In this research, the diagnosis of the child's status within the new residential urban environments will be discussed. The research involves the case study of the town of Ali Mendjli in Algeria, through the neighborhood of a new social housing. The target is to highlight the child's status in this new urban environments, in order to build incubating cities for the child. In view of the importance of the child in the urban and social fabric and the influence that the city leaves on his personality, as essential part of the programmed plans for the state of Constantine, the study tries to answer several the questions in order to understand if the child environment is really taken into account during the planning process for the new housing. The results will be helpful for searching recommendations to the shortcomings that the new urban area suffers from, in terms of places designated for children there.

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## 1 Introduction.

In the previous decade, the Algerian state tried to solve the housing problem by building new housing allotments and new cities such as the new city of Ali Mendjli, which is considered the urban expansion of the town of Constantine. This new city was constructed in light of the rapid population growth of the old town of Constantine, which is not in line with the aspirations of the desired urban life and because there are no possibility of the extension due to position of the old town in rocky valley. In addition, the planning of Ali Mendjli city was the result of attention to the quantitative consideration rather than the qualitative side, especially in the field of urban production and population aspirations, so its goal was just to reduce the pressure on the old city and to solve the housing problem in a general manner.

During the planning stage for the establishment of Ali Mendjli city, it was aspired to implement it according to international standards and mechanisms that take into account various architectural and urban aspects by satisfy the various segments of society. However, when implementing the project, these targets were ignored because Algeria suffered from The Black

Decade, which was characterized by a civil war and terrorism threat beginning in 1991 and ending at the beginning of the following decade in 2002. Due to this situation, the Constantine citizen living in the new city, Ali Mendjli, suffered from a great degree of overcrowding in terms of wellbeing due to the limited space and the anarchical urban situation.

Although social housing solved the housing problem, it opened various other complications, such as considering housing as just a number to be given, as it was dealt with accordingly. The new city was considered as a closed place that performs the function of housing only, with the absence of green spaces or spaces designated for children. This situation was amplified with the COVID 19 pandemic and the interruption of education forced the child to stay at home in order to preserve his safety. Here, the impotence, poor planning, and failure to take into account the child's privacy at the level of the new city appeared. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, the child used to spend his day between school, home, and small spaces that were not equipped to play with his friends. However, during the pandemic and the closure of all entertainment centers in the city, the problem became clear and obvious to various citizens. Numerous problems facing cities appeared clearly, including the problem of children's spaces.

In the case of Ali Mendjli city, the interest in the child's space was limited to educational institutions only, excluding other spaces that deal with the affairs of the child, his formation, and the refinement of his personality and skills. For this reason, this paper deals with the child's status in the environment of social housing in the new city Ali Mendjli. In this research several tools will be used, including the questionnaire, which was distributed directly to the children's parents, in an attempt to diagnose the reality from the point of view of the children's parents. The questions that were distributed aimed to answer specific interrogations, to verify if the child status was taken into account during the planning process, and to know the condition and availability of these child's commodities. Some questions are in relation with the psychological and social hopes from child and parents point view, and what he is expecting to be happier. The importance of this study is diagnosing the reality of the status of the child in the social housing of new residential urban environments, and during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results will help the urban planner to understand what children and young people need and want in order to be well, and what government is and should be doing to support them.

## **2 Theoretical framework of the study.**

### **2.1 The social collective housing in Algeria.**

The simple definition of social housing is any housing financed from the funds of the public treasury of the state to the poor class of the people (Ronlik 2013; Forrest and Murie 2014). In the case of Algeria this social housing (Picture 1) is a collective building that contains several dwellings with a common entrance and common areas, and it is considered less economical than individual and half-group housing (Boutabba, and Mili 2014; Djafri and Osman 2021). The child situation in this kinds of housing is not so perfect (Picture 2).



*Picture 1. Social housing in the case study.*



*Picture 2. Children life in social housing.*

It is important to mention that the subject of this kind of housing was to eradicate the fragile housing and tin huts that represent a big concern in terms of distortion of cities and a waste of human dignity (Picture 3). The government has been concerned formally and objectively with the elimination of this kind of fragile housing, so it has set goals that must be followed in dealing with the phenomenon (Picture 4).



*Picture 3. Fragile housing in old town.*



*Picture 4. Elimination of fragile housing.*

This type of housing targets the low and middle-income group who cannot obtain housing without state support (Akeju 2007, Abdel Raheem et al. 2020). In almost cases, the state support for social housing is clearly 100%, some case is partially up to 80%, due to the difference in quality of the social housing (Chabou 2008). The social housing in Algeria has the following characteristics: 1) it is directed to social classes whose financial resources do not allow them to pay high rent or own a home, with minimum wage of 177 USD; 2) It is subjected to a certain standard with regard to the habitat area of 60 square meters apartment with three rooms; and 3) The current rent for this type of housing is characterized by specific prices since 1983 with monthly rent of 20 USD per month (Djafri and Osman 2021; Arab and Boutabba 2022).

However, this kind of housing is not allowed to all citizens. Persons who own real estate with residential use, a piece of land suitable for building, a commercial store, or agricultural land that generates income, cannot benefit from social housing. In addition, several legislative laws explain how social housing works and how to finance this type of housing. In all case, the public treasury was the one that played the role of the financier, the National Fund for Savings and Reserve became the one that carried out this task. Then it was assigned to the National Fund for Housing.

It is important to highlight that the work began with this method in Algeria since 1975 with the aim of controlling urban expansion in urban settlements in order to provide housing for an increasing population, as it is created voluntarily when the project capacity is to produce 400 housing or more, and compulsorily when the architectural project requires the construction of 1000 housing or more. Most of the Algerian cities, in their various styles and sizes, have expanded their urban fabric by this means in the last thirty years. It is estimated that the total cost of social housing in Algeria is around 10 Billion USD between 1998 and 2020 for total constructed of 4 million social apartment.

## **2.2 Other type of collective housing in Algeria.**

Recently, Algeria adopted several type of housing in the target to satisfy the needs of all trenches of the society. There are the contributory social housing (Kara 2008), it is a housing that is accomplished or purchased through a subsidy granted by the state and is called the subsidy to obtain ownership (Picture 5). The subsidized housing offer mainly targets housing applications submitted by middle-income classes who cannot obtain housing ownership without subsidy from the state. So this type is based mainly on a joint financial formula between the beneficiary and the state subsidy through the National

Housing Fund, as it is an institution charged with financing housing of a social nature, which is the housing that is accomplished through a real estate promoter, and financing is through the promoter, the beneficiary and the state with specific conditions. Its advantages are that it can be purchased on the plan, by following the construction stages, taking into account the wishes of the buyer, providing the subsidy by the National Housing Fund (taking a loan from the bank, the possibility of paying in installments).

There are also the formula of Housing by rent sale (Zitoun 2012). This type of housing is a new part of the housing offer that targets middle-income classes of citizens whose income level does not exceed five times the guaranteed wage, and therefore it is related to citizens, especially middle-class workers, who cannot obtain social housing intended for the needy in the first place, nor to promotional housing due to its high price (Picture 6). This housing is accomplished from Real estate promotion party. The last type of housing is the Clavicle housing (Laouar 2017). Among what the government has resorted in recent years is relying on residential housing in order to achieve the one million housing units included in the five-year plan. The main objective of relying on residential housing is the development of the national real estate stock. They are directed for sale or rent, they are primarily commercial operations that support real estate upgrades, collective or semi-group housing, especially in urban areas.



*Picture 5. Fragile housing in old town.*



*Picture 6. Elimination of fragile housing.*

## **2.2 Child, childhood and playfield situation in Algeria.**

According to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is defined as: every human being under eighteen years of age unless he reaches the age of majority before that under the applicable law (Unicef 1989). The reference point for ages have to be determined in specific circumstances and requirements, such as the legal age for children to work and of education, or when the implementation of sentences issued against them should be applied such as the imprisonment (Unicef 2019).

The childhood is considered as the first seed of genius and creativity, and that building a person is a goal. The children of today are the builders of the future, and what we now consider aspirations is soon the performance of the knights of tomorrow among the children, and childhood as a stage of human development. The social concepts of childhood have multiplied throughout the ages, and the criterion of the civilization of states is closely related to the extent to which childhood has reached. It is important to notice that judging the human depth of a civilization can easily be determined from the position of these civilization from the child and childhood (Hale 1982; Craft 2002; Rogoff 2003).

The Childhood represents two-thirds of the Algerian population. The latest statistics for the year 2004 indicate that the number of children reached 9 million and 600 thousand children, or 30% of the total population. Children under the age of 18 years old represents 63%, while the percentage of those under five years old exceeds 20%.

Despite the efforts and policies pursued, for years, by state institutions in order to care for and serve this important and sensitive segment in the population pyramid, the indicators produced by social

change suggest that the world of childhood in Algeria suffers from a number of troubles and inconveniences, in terms of education, health and wellbeing. For this reason, playfields plays important part in children life. The playfields are defined as spaces for play or for relaxation and rest, as they contain, at least, special equipment for play spaces (swing, slide, etc.), sandy floors, and urban furniture like lighting and chairs (Min and Lee 2006). These areas are very important, because it is place in which innovation abounds, and it is a successful way to relieve the burden of accumulated emotional energy as a result of some life situations (Golinkoff et al. 2006).

### **3 Description of the case study.**

The construction of the new city of Ali Mendjli was decided in framework of development policy of the of Constantine state. It was established within the proposals of the master plan for the development that includes Greater Constantine. The technical goal of the completion of this city was mainly to reduce the great population pressure on the Constantine downtown and to solve the housing problem by eliminating the fragile homes and chaotic housing. The new city sits on an area estimated at 2441 hectares with an estimated population of 398,470 people in 2018.

The new city Ali Mendjli is located southwest of the city of Constantine on the plateau of Ain El Bey, about 13 km away from it. It accommodates 50,000 dwellings and has a population size of 300,000 people. It consists of five neighborhoods, each of which includes four neighborhood units. It is bordered from the north by the city of Constantine, from the west by the municipality of Ain Smara, from the east by the municipality of El-Khroub, and from the south by the municipality of Oued Seggen, as shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 1. The site of the new city, Ali Mendjli.*

Because the town is too big, the study concerns the neighborhood Unit 7 which is located in the northeastern side of the new city, Ali Mendjli, specifically near Neighborhood 2. It is bordered to the north by Neighborhood Unit 8, to the south by Neighborhood Unit 9, and to the west by Neighborhood Unit 8, as shown in the plan of Figure 2.

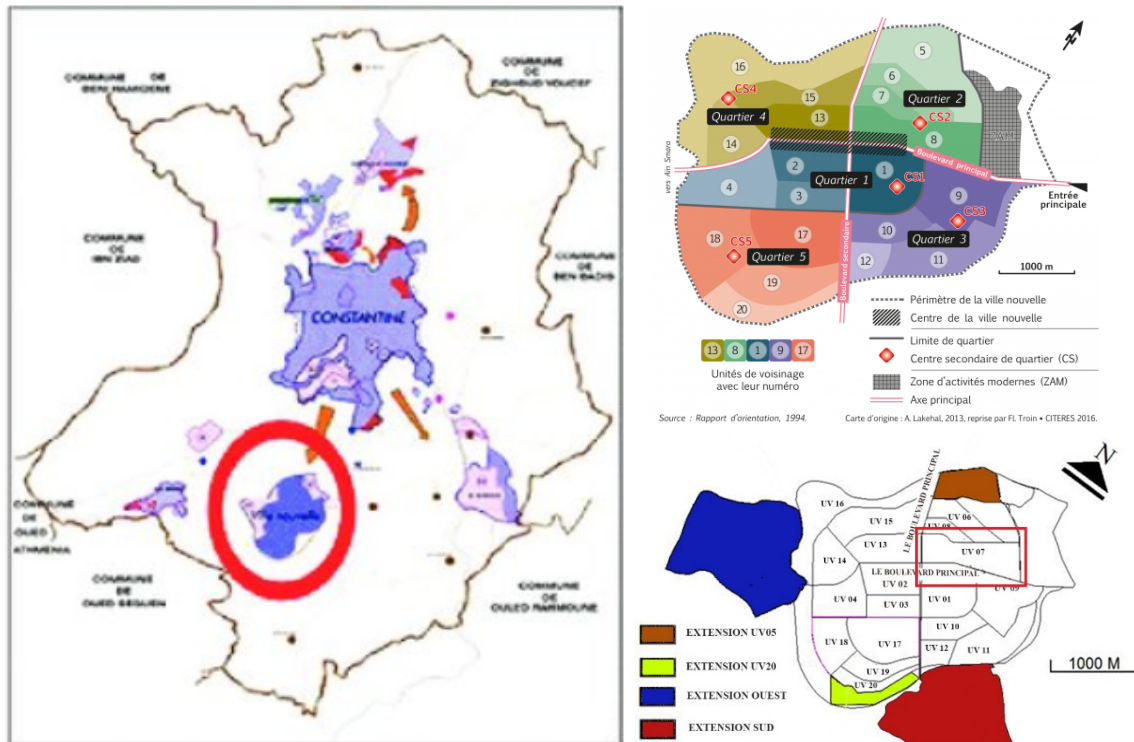


Figure 2. The location of the neighborhood unit 7.

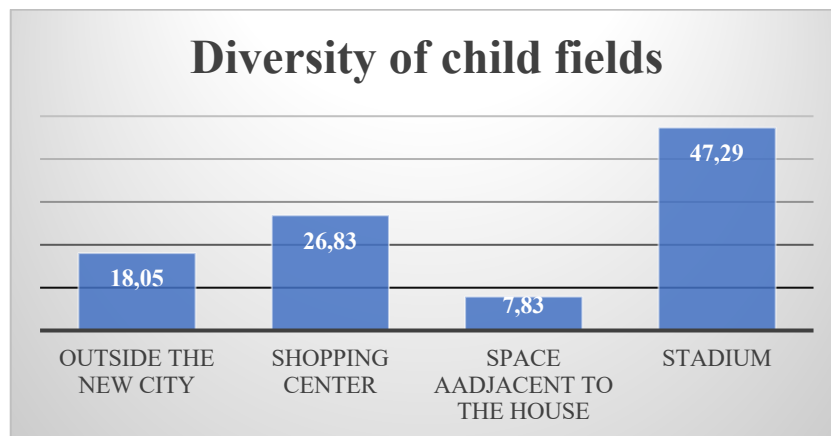
#### 4. Child space situation in the neighborhood unit 7.

This neighborhood unit was chosen specifically because it is the oldest neighborhood that was built since the inception of the new city "Ali Mendjli". This unit was planned meticulously with the smallest details, whether in the residential field or through equipment or children's play areas. The details has been focused the diversity of housing patterns, where there are several kinds of housing but almost social housing and optimal integration with the environment including several child spaces. However, the implementation of the construction was carried out with a different way not similar to its basic plans, so the efforts was concentrated in providing just housing and main roads only. The reality a beginning of the construction shown that child spaces were ignored or were transformed as deposit area for construction materials for more than a decade. Despite, some efforts made by the citizens and local associations, it seems there are a lackage of interest from authority in the child needs, and there are failure to provide him the necessary designated. The last three years show a change in the reality, it seems there are a slight improvement and a diversity of spaces designated for children in the various areas of the neighborhood unit. The most important is the playground, which is an attractive pole for all the children of the neighborhood unit and the surrounding units, so there are an appreciative diversity in the areas as illustrated in Figure 3.



*Figure 3. Diversity of child fields in neighborhood unit 7.*

Through the children's questionnaire regarding to the quality and the suitability of their spaces, the results show that there are not sufficient for the number of children of all categories. The Children often go to other neighboring units for entertainment or for the sake of playing, which is an acquired right for them, as we can see through Figure 4.



*Figure 4. Diversity of child fields in neighborhood unit 7.*

### **5. Child status in the neighborhood unit 07 during COVID Pandemic.**

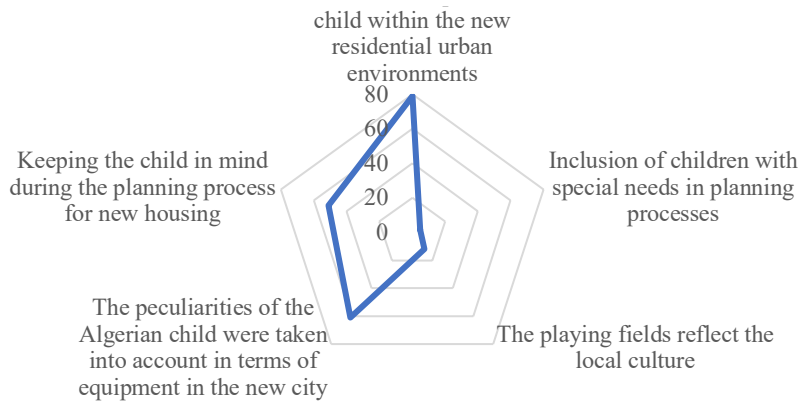
In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the disordered situation became more clear, that Constantine child suffers in general, and the child residing in the neighborhood unit 7 in particular. Through the results of the questionnaire that was conducted with parents of children of all ages and even with the children themselves, the reality of the child's status was addressed through several indicators (Figure 5).



**5.1 The fit between reality and the child's desires.**

As mentioned before, there are three types of social housing in Neighborhood Unit 7, located in the same urban area without any separating borders, whether industrial or natural, and the three types are similar in the style of construction and the urban façade (Table 1). The similarity between these three types of housing is they share the lack of places designated for children, such as places of entertainment. The adjacent spaces to the residences have been allocated as parking for cars, as it is seen can see in Photo 7, and it is noted that there are unprepared places empty of any equipment designated for children’s play such as a small playground or a place to sit, and in the places designated for sitting cannot be used in different seasons of the year, as it remains empty on rainy days due to its lack of preparation and its transformation into water pools and empty mud areas Photo 8.

With regard to the places that were equipped for children to play, it is obvious to see that the majority of the spaces were not planned in a deliberate manner, as they are either empty spaces or were randomly filled with some swings and simple games.



*Figure 5. Space child sufficiency (from Childs point view).*

Table 1. Field inspection to neighborhood unit 7 during COVID Pandemic (11/30/2020).

Type	Child spaces	Dwelling style	Site location
Social housing			
Rental housing			

Table 1. Continuation.

Contributory social housing			
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With the different types of housing, and with the diversity of the child’s places (Figure 4) and their spread in the various areas of the neighborhood unit, however, as soon as the child goes down to the street, he does not find a safe, equipped, clean place suitable for his age group to play with. Unfortunately, the parents admit that the implementation of the new city plan is Ali Mendjli. It was the opposite of what they expected from the child, but it reflects the availability of social housing to relieve the distress and isolation in which they were before.



*Picture 7. Empty spaces for children.*



*Picture 8. Spaces occupied for cars in social housing, in covalent housing*



*Picture 9. Lack of spaces for children in rental housing.*

According to the opinions of the parents of the children, in the various areas of the neighborhood unit and the diversity of the types of housing in it, they express a lack of the authorities finding any place to implement some of the areas designated for the child (Picture 9). In commercial centers that have ample areas for children, such as the “Park Mall” in the new city of Ali Mendjli, the child suffers from poor planning and implementation, so that he is left in a dry space that does not reflect the slightest right to him. Although the new city in Ali Mendjli was newly built, 85% of population express that this city has a poor planning, as shown in Figure 5.

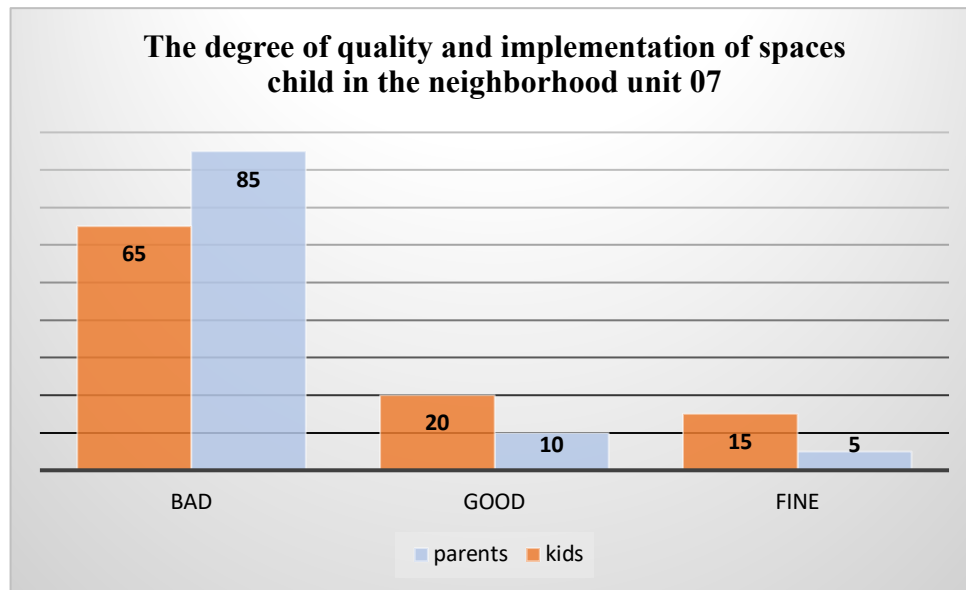


Figure 5. The degree of quality and implementation of spaces child in neighborhood unit 7.

### 5.2 The child's affiliation with the urban areas.

The child's affiliation with the urban areas consider child's feeling of belonging to the space in which he is present, by making him cherish, preserve, and be present in it continuously. In light of the COVID 19 pandemic and the lack of schooling for a long period of time, the child living in Neighborhood Unit 07 found himself trapped between concrete blocks that form housing and between small unprepared spaces, or some prepared spaces that do not reflect his desires to play, so he is forced either to search for another place to play, or to resort to electronic games that have invaded our time, and the child has become uninterested, neither in his field, nor in anything that surrounds him. The games in these spaces are not enough to have a single slide, in addition to the poor paved floors inside the spaces designated for them, which causes constant bruising to children. They declare that there are no places specially planned for them. All of this made 72% of the children admit that they do not feel belonging to these places and prefer other remote places that they go with their parents or resort to a lot of electronic games as a last resort, as shown in Figure 6.

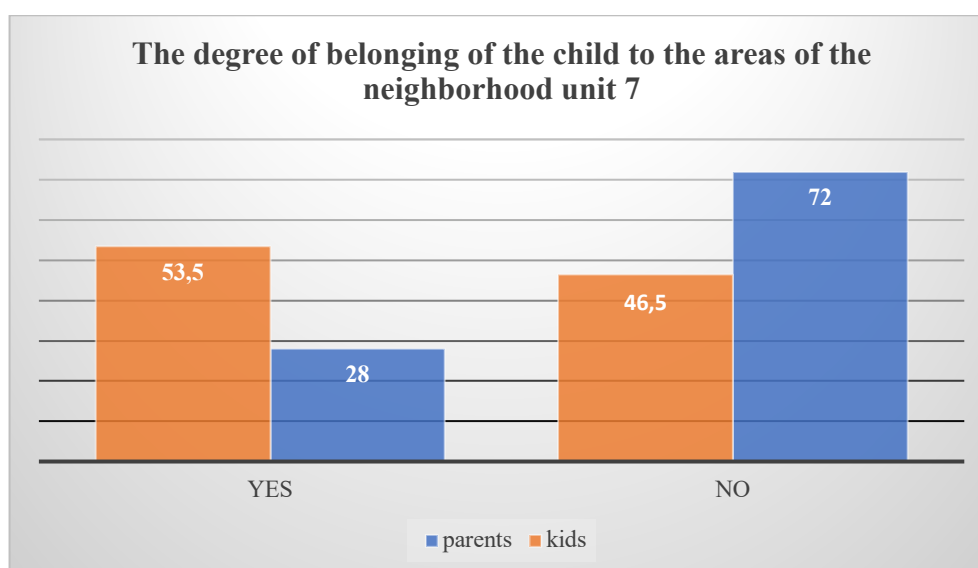


Figure 6. The degree of belonging of the child to the areas of the neighborhood unit 7.

**5.3 Maintenance and security aspect.**

The provision of spaces for children was considered a luxury for their class, and with the delivery of housing and spaces for children, esoteric ideas appeared embodied, and the existing equipment and urban furniture were not preserved, so they dealt with the new place as they lived before in old city in the same system and ideas that were present in their ancient neighborhood, such as the Bardo neighborhood and the Al-Suwaiqa neighborhood. It is not easy to change and get rid of the habits entrenched in them, through the field inspection of the neighborhood unit 7, it was found a great shortage and lack of interest in maintaining and protecting the meager places designated for playing. It was found small spaces between buildings, some of which are preserved and some of them are in a disastrous condition. They remained as a structure only in the place. The spaces that preserve children’s play and are clean differ according to the type of dwelling and the culture of its inhabitants. If it is a social dwelling, then it is in poor condition as shown in Picture 10, but if it is adjacent to the covalent housing or by rent sale, they are preserved, as can be seen in picture. 11.

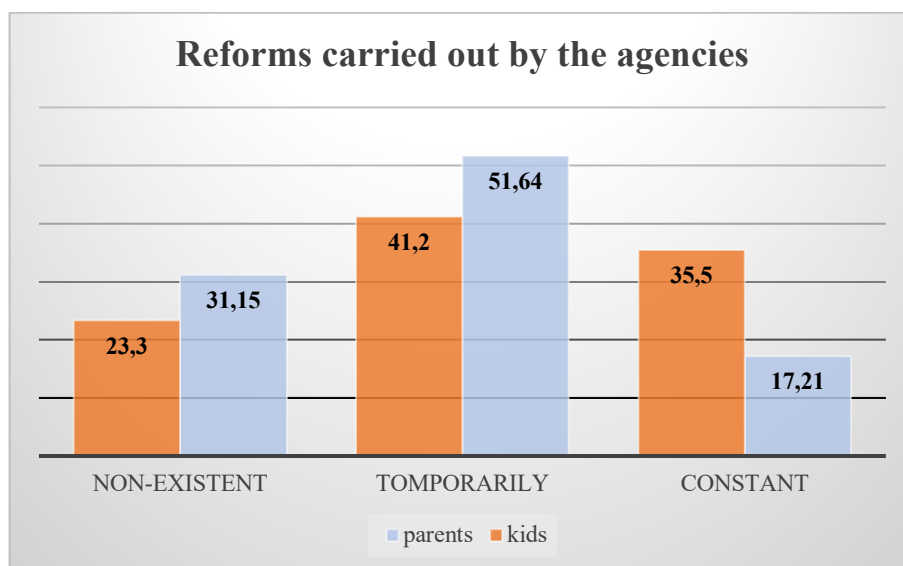


*Photo 10. The state of child spaces in Rental.*



*Photo 11. The state of child spaces in housing. Social housing in.*

Through the questionnaire with the parents of the children, it was found that the maintenance of the designated bodies is not permanent and not for a specific period of time. Rather, it is rare where the damage is repaired after submitting a lot of complaints about it (once every five or six months, this is in the best cases), and in the absence of a complaint, especially with the absence of neighborhood committees, they remain as they are, and the child loses the small space that enables him to play in front of his house comfortably, as shown in Figure 7.



*Figure 7. Reforms carried out by the agencies.*

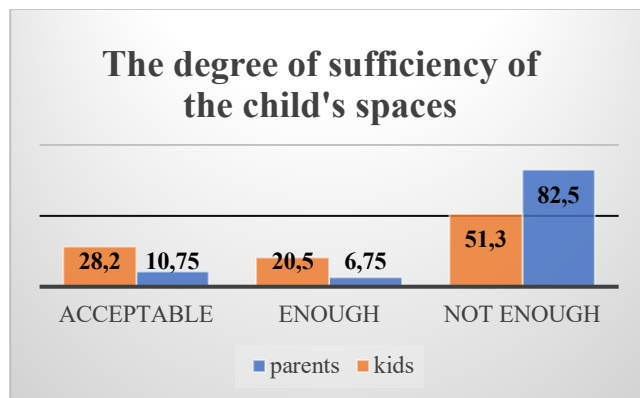
As for security, it is present in every neighborhood unit, and children play in front of their homes under the care of their families.

#### **5.4 Degree of sufficiency.**

Most of the children (males) go to the playground in order to play football (Picture 11) or walk in it in the evening, or in order to do some sports movements in the evening at a time that is not allocated for other activities such as matches. In the second place are the commercial centers close to them, while the girls either play in front of the buildings or go with their families to adjacent Mall to play with the games there. They also acknowledge that all the places that exist, due to their small size, defects, and bad condition, are not enough for them, and they are not able to use them most of the time. As shown in Figure 8.



*Photo 11. The sports field.*



*Figure 8. Degree of sufficiency in children's spaces.*

#### **6 Conclusion and Recommendations.**

Through this study of the reality of Neighborhood Unit 7 in the new city of Ali Mendjli, it was found that urban plans and state policy care for children is in a very small percentage according to this available space. In addition, the main goal of the new city is to build a city to relieve pressure from the old city in order to meet the need for housing in a quantitative manner. For this reason, a severe shortage was resulted in order to win the status of the child and contain him in his space and his city. Some recommendations can be drawn, in order to take care of the child and take into account his needs in the neighborhood unit 7:

- Exploiting some shops under the buildings and converting them into special places for children under the management of local authorities, and employing specialized persons to make the place safe and take into account the age group of the child.
- Assigning a private company to maintain children's places through honest public deals for good management of the field.
- Containing the child by involving him in planting and cleaning campaigns in the areas near his home, to instill in him the spirit of responsibility by taking care of something of his own, represented by a plant or tree.
- Building modern parking lots with multiple floors for parking cars, and preparing old places as recreational areas or green areas.
- Taking into account the child and his needs in the future planning of the neighborhood units and the upcoming programs.
- Work to get rid of overcrowding in the child's spaces by creating other areas that suit him.

#### **Conflict of interest.**

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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