A breath of fresh air: towards optimal Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)

Investigating intervention strategies for enhancing occupants perception, comfort and health

Milestone 2 - Literature review, Submitted on: **22-03-2024**

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ABSTRACT

This milestone provides a comprehensive literature review for all the topics related to the thesis and answers parts of the main and sub-research questions based on the guidelines of the related work section of the Master Thesis. The first part is the introduction of the master thesis which also includes literature references and includes the research questions for context. Then the draft of the related work section starts and finally a section is provided that explains the methodology used for the literature review and search queries used.

KEYWORDS

Human-Building interaction, Indoor air quality, Persuasive technology, Living lab, Smart buildings, User-centered design.

METADATA

Literature review for the fullfiment of the *Master Thesis* for the Master Information Studies: *Information Systems (IS).*

Institute: Informatics Institute
Faculty: Faculty of Science (FNWI)
Research Group: Digital Interactions Lab (DIL)
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1 INTRODUCTION

Globally, it is estimated that people spend approximately 90% of their time indoors [19, 32] and breathe 11.000 liters of air per day [8]. Suboptimal indoor air quality (IAQ) conditions affect building occupants' experiences of comfort and insufficient ventilation in indoor environments is proven to play significant roles in occupants' well-being, health, and cognitive functions [17, 38].

The perceived comfort of occupants is influenced by the overall Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ) consisting of several key metrics (e.g. mechanical ventilation, temperature regulation, natural lighting) to create a combined IEQ index for a specific indoor space [20]. Among these metrics, indoor air quality stands out as a crucial factor deserving special attention due to its invisibility to occupants [34], polluted air goes undetected by smell or sight, underscoring the importance of monitoring and maintaining optimal indoor air quality.

Furthermore, mechanical ventilation systems in buildings operate discreetly and are frequently insufficient for ventilation in densely populated small rooms like meeting rooms, laboratory offices, or hot-desking work areas [33], which contributes to occupants' perceived lack of control. Since these systems are typically automated [25] and cannot be directly regulated or controlled by occupants themselves [16].

This creates an interplay between occupants' effects on comfort, built environments, and computing technologies (see Figure 1) researched in an overarching interdisciplinary field of study, known as Human-Building Interaction (HBI) [1]. This research specifically focuses on understanding occupants' needs through in-the-wild [29] studies gaining insight into occupants' awareness, collecting indoor air quality data in designated spaces, prototyping data physicalization devices to visualize indoor air quality, and using these designs as data probing tool [41] evaluating their effectiveness with the overarching objective of obtaining insights into occupants' comfort levels and facilitating their adoption of preventive measures against poor indoor air quality [40].

While research on defining comfort within indoor buildings [2], gathering and analyzing sensory air quality data [8], and the effects of poor air quality are prevalent [19], there remains a research gap in understanding occupants' behavior and their subjective needs, along with limited research on how design solutions that visualize environmental data and computing installations can empower occupants, particularly within the field of physically visualizing data to convey IAQ to building occupants in real-time.

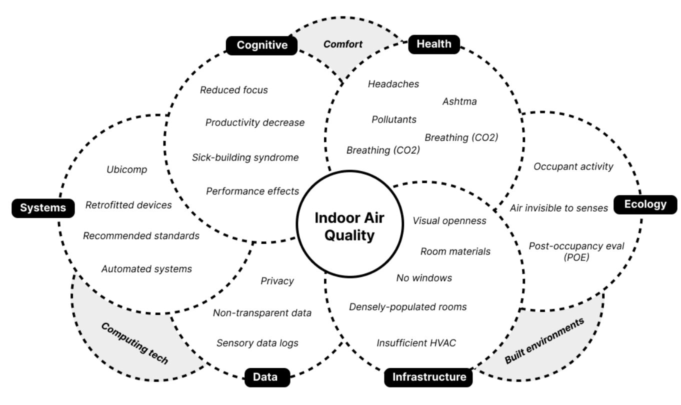

Figure 1: Complexity diagram providing an overview of the effects of IAQ and needs of occupants [2, 8, 17, 19, 32, 38]

1.1 Research questions

In order to research intervention strategies for improving indoor air quality, the following main research question is formulated:

RQ: *How can real-time sensory measurements and future predictions of air quality be physically visualised in specific indoor spaces integrating both environmental information and elements that increase awareness among occupants facilitating their adoption of preventive measures against poor air quality?*

To effectively answer this main research question, this research is guided by the following supporting sub-questions that also serve as objectives to delineate the necessary knowledge:

- **SRQ1:** *How can environmental information related to air quality, such as pollutant concentrations and ventilation rates, be incorporated into the visual representations?*
- **SRQ2:** *How do different types of physical visualizations impact occupants' understanding of air quality and their willingness to adopt preventive measures?*
- **SRQ3:** *How do occupants' perceptions and behaviors regarding indoor air quality change over time, from pre to post-installation of the physical representation of poor air quality?*

2 RELATED WORK

Given the focus of this research is studying Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) within Built Environments, this research draws from various related work including the subfield of Human-Building Interaction (HBI) and subsequently narrows its focus to Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) and Post-occupancy Evaluation (POE) for the scope of this research. Furthermore, it examines notable findings from previous approaches to mapping and encoding sensory data in a new area of research called Data Physicalization (DataPhys).

2.1 Human-Building Interaction

Buildings increasingly incorporate new forms of digital interaction [22, 26], which means new inherent connections between 'people', 'built environments', and 'computing' research in an area called Human-Building Interaction (HBI) [1, 36]. This research area is dedicated to exploring the design of built environments that may incorporate computing to varying degrees [35]. A logical extension where indoor spaces are increasingly retrofitted with sensing devices [26]. Understanding how people use different spaces in a building through computing can inform design interventions aimed at improving the utility of the space and the well-being of occupants. [37].

Current research into architecture and built environments indicates that a significant portion of the data collected by these computing devices is not necessarily transparent or comprehensible to occupants [31], and indoor spaces are designed without much thought of placing computing devices integrated within the environment [15, 18] leaving users with a perceived lack of control over their indoor comfort.

2.2 Comfort within buildings

Indoor occupant comfort is achieved in interaction with the environment and is represented in four respective dimensions; thermal, respiratory, visual, and acoustic [2]. Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ) [20] indexes serve as metrics for assessing the aforementioned properties of comfort within indoor environments with Post-Occupancy Evaluation (POE) [10] and Perceived Environmental Qualities (PEQ) [34] methods being employed to gauge occupants' perceived comfort [7].

Studies on indoor environments focus on 'static' IEQ conditions using sensors to sense environmental conditions based on the buildings' physical characteristics to meet various recommended standards such as ASHREA 62.1 [1], ISO 16814 [2]. Discrepancies between measured IEQ conditions and occupants' perceptions have also been reported in studies. For instance, research indicates that occupants generally have a low awareness of Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ). While occupants perceive the environment as 'satisfactory', actual sensory measurements within the environment reveal quality levels below recommended standards. [34]. Recent studies have shifted their focus towards the active role occupants play within the built environment, viewing their behavior within a building as akin to a 'living ecology' [21] rather than perceiving comfort solely as 'static' properties of the building itself.

2.3 Indoor Air Quality

A suboptimal indoor environment has reportedly been associated with health-related problems such as headaches, throat irritation, and asthma [19] as well as a decrease in cognitive functions such as tiredness, effects on performance and productivity and a lack of focus [38] [9]. A phenomenon referred to as the Sick Building Syndrome (SBS) [12, 24]. Many of these symptoms are primarily associated with respiratory comfort and are closely tied to Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) concerns [17]. Effective ventilation strategies have been shown to significantly alleviate SBS symptoms [12].

The advancements of real-time IAQ monitoring systems leveraging Internet of Things (IoT) sensor technology have facilitated progress in both the measurement of IAQ and the implementation of interventions aimed at enhancing it [23]. Indications of poor air quality are gathered by measuring common pollutants with a focus on molds and allergens (humidity), volatile organic compounds (VOC), and carbon dioxide (CO2) [19] where occupant behavior and the number of occupants within indoor space have a specific negative effect on CO2 levels [11]. These indoor climate factors are related to the building occupants' behaviors and need special attention to be considered in assessing the IEQ conditions and determining if adequate ventilation is present [9]. It is crucial to recognize that when occupants experience symptoms, it signifies that a suboptimal air quality situation has already occurred.

The existing literature on IAQ offers quantifiable and validated methods for measuring IAQ through sensory data. It underscores the complexities associated with IAQ and emphasizes the significance of developing solutions to ensure occupants receive adequate ventilation.

[1] https://www.ashrae.org/technical-resources/bookstore/standards-62-1-62-2
[2] https://www.iso.org/standard/42720.html

2.4 Data Physicalization

The research domain known as data physicalization [3] has emerged as a notable area of study, emphasizing the creation of physical data visualizations making the invisible tangible and interactible by encoding data in physical artifacts [27]. This shift from focusing on individual artifacts to a broader environmental context facilitates the physical embodiment of computing. Data physicalization has the potential to positively influence the perception and exploration of data [14], presenting distinct advantages over traditional 'screen-focused' data representations, such as 2D canvas displays (dashboards) [13], particularly in the context of Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) where a 'physical data visualization' serves as a fitting metaphor for rendering 'invisible' indoor air.

These tangible artifacts usually come in the form of ubiquitous computing (ubicomp) [6] device that seamlessly blends into the environment, essentially making the computing devices 'disappear' [39]. These devices are frequently employed as persuasive technology, strategically designed to gently nudge individuals towards behavior change leveraging the emerging notion of pervasive sensing to subtly enhance users' awareness regarding the impacts of their decisions [4, 28]. This method of persuasive design serves as a powerful tool in calmly extending users' awareness, helping users understand gathered data, and the consequences of their actions, and gaining insight into their behavior [5]. A systematic analysis of over 60 representative data physicalization papers [30] show that only numerous approaches to studying computing devices within indoor spaces and interactivity with occupants have been explored in prior research to nudge occupants to a desired behavior but no design solutions have been developed and explored to focus specifically on IAQ awareness within indoor environments.

This framework of data physicalization and persuasive technology establishes the theoretical foundation for the creation (prototyping) and the evaluation (usability testing) of the design solution within this research.

3 SEARCH QUERIES

The related work section research started with 7 recommended papers by my Supervisor. Based on the keywords and related work of those papers a systematic approach was adopted, employing a combination of specific search queries tailored to the research focus. The academic database from the UvA, Catalogueplus, was used with the following queries:

- "Human-Building Interaction" OR "HBI" AND "Built Environments"
- "Indoor Air Quality" OR "IAQ"
- "Post-occupancy Evaluation" OR "POE"
- "Indoor Environmental Quality" OR "IEQ"
- "Data Physicalization" OR "DataPhys" OR "Tangible Data"
- "Ubiquitous Computing" OR "Ubicomp" AND "Persuasive Technology" OR "Behavior Change"
- "Sick Building Syndrome" OR "SBS" AND "Respiratory Comfort" OR "Cognitive Functions"
- "Thermal Comfort" OR "Acoustic Comfort" AND "Indoor Occupant Comfort" OR "Comfort Dimensions"

In catalogueplus I filtered on peer reviewed and narrowed the scope to the last 5 years. Some key (state of the art papers) where part of special issues of specific journals so what I did was then look into the latest issue to see most recent studies. Since HCI is the main field of focus key papers are usually in the ACM library in my field of study. So whenever I found a paper I also refined my queries within the ACM library.

4 METHODS

For the topics in the introduction and research questions I created folders in Zotero and using the Zotero connector plugin in my browser you can pin papers in the right folders. Used the sorting and labelling features to assign topics to them within the Zotero app. Zotero integrates with the beta of a tool called Research Rabbit which creates a knowledge graph (visual) of papers in your zotero collection. It cross-references the papers and give you similar work in the field based on relevance so you can discover subfield and author networks.

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