

RETHINKING RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY INTERPRETATION

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Abstract

Since the 1950s academics and professionals have proposed a number of disciplinary and sector based interpretations of why, when and where households move or choose to stay in the same housing unit at different periods of the life cycle and especially the family cycle. This article challenges studies that only analyse one set of factors. The article stems from a synthesis of 20 years of research by the author who has an interdisciplinary training in the broad field of people-environment relations. First, it reviews some key concepts related to human ecology, including housing, culture, identity and cultivation. Then it will consider how these concepts can be applied to interpret residential mobility using an interdisciplinary approach. An empirical case study of residential mobility in Geneva, Switzerland is presented in order to show how this approach can help improve our understanding of the motives people have regarding the wish to stay in their residence or to move elsewhere.

Keywords

Interdisciplinary; housing demand; human ecology; residential mobility

Introduction

Since the 1950s academics and professionals have proposed a number of disciplinary and sector based interpretations of why, when and where households move or choose to stay in the same housing unit at different periods of the life cycle and especially the family cycle (Rossi, 1995; Michelson, 1997; Clark and Dieleman, 1996). These contributions generally focus on the determinant role of one set of factors - for example, changes in employment conditions, or household demographics, or housing markets - to explain residential mobility. Michelson, (1997) noted already 30 years ago that different variables are rarely considered simultaneously and he proved a more multi-factor analysis. Likewise, this article challenges studies that only analyse one set of factors. It presents a broader interdisciplinary interpretation of residential mobility and the results of an empirical study in Geneva, Switzerland, to illustrate this kind of approach.

Housing is meant to provide shelter and security by ensuring protection against climatic conditions - excessive heat and cold - and

unwanted intrusions from insects, rodents, and environmental nuisances, such as noise and air pollution, that may be harmful for health and quality of life (Lawrence, 2002). Housing contains household activities and material possessions. Housing is also an economic good that can be rented and exchanged in housing markets. Beyond functional and monetary values, housing also has aesthetic, symbolic and cultural values. Therefore housing is attributed social representations according to the varied viewpoints of individuals and social groups. Studies show that housing is an indicator of cultural identity, a sign of social status and a catalyst for the expression of individual preferences (Duncan, 1981). All these attributes of housing should be taken into account in studies of residential mobility.

Turner (1976) made the important distinction between housing as a noun and housing as a verb. According to Turner, housing can be considered simultaneously as a product (from an individual housing unit to the housing stock in a neighbourhood or city) as well as a process by referring to the provision and maintenance of all kinds of residential buildings either by public authorities or private initiatives. Turner's interpretation of housing enables researchers and practitioners to consider the multiple interrelations between housing conditions and human processes in specific localities, in particular why households choose to move or stay in a specific housing unit.

Turner's will be used in this article to reconsider the interrelations between the housing choices of residents, the conditions of local housing markets as well as specific dimensions of housing design and housing policies.

These three subjects have commonly been considered as separate fields of scientific research and professional practice (van Vliet, 1998). However, in order to deal with concrete housing questions in contemporary societies, this segmented approach should be replaced by a more integrated one that explicitly considers the interrelationships between residential mobility, housing design and housing policies.

Statistics and household surveys in many countries confirm that in specific urban neighbourhoods, and large-scale housing estates, there are increasing numbers of different types of households (OECD, 1996). These households differ according to their ethnic origin, their nationality, their socio-professional status, and their culture, especially their domestic lifestyle. In-depth studies of the layout, furnishing and use of housing units can provide a large amount of information which contradicts generalisations that have characterised the interpretation of housing by professional planners and policy makers (Putman and Newton, 1990; Danermark and Elander, 1994). These studies confirm that specific features of the housing environment can express and communicate cultural and social representations and shared values by the consumption patterns of specific social groups.

It is now widely recognised that the built environment of housing projects and residential neighbourhoods should serve multiple functions and uses for an increasingly diverse population (Michelson, 1977; Franck and Ahrentzen, 1989). It is not wholly surprising that housing projects do not meet the requirements of all households owing to increasing cultural differences. For

example, requirements for visual and auditory privacy, or social contacts with neighbours, or gender differences in the use of collective and public spaces, or domestic practices for the preparation and eating of food, may not be met in a large-scale residential building or housing project with many housing units having a standardized floor plan, kitchen equipment and interior finishes (Andrews, 1979; Arias, 1993; Bernard, 1992; Cooper, 1975). When requirements that are prescribed by cultural conventions cannot be accommodated, then conflicts between the intended use of housing (by the architect, housing manager or property owner) and the actual use of housing (by individuals, households and population groups) can have several consequences (Ravetz, 1974, 1980; Prak and Priemus, 1985). These consequences include moving elsewhere.

The possibilities offered or prohibited by the built form of housing to accommodate different kinds of household activities are largely related to the inherent/implicit or the structural/explicit adaptability of housing units. Certain ethnographic studies have provided detailed information about why residents have made changes to housing rather than move elsewhere (Arias, 1993; Bernard 1992; Moudon, 1986). The reasons for changes extend beyond functional adjustments that are often made in order to accommodate new circumstances during the lifespan.

Another source of conflicts can be the incompatibility between different domestic cultures. This incompatibility can be expressed by conflicting lifestyles, meanings and values about housing (van Kempen, 1994). For example, different households in the same

large residential building or housing project may not share the same opinion about what should be accessible or inaccessible, what should be visible or not seen, or what should be heard or unheard, and whether prescriptions about these aspects of household activities change according to the status of the individual as well as at different times. Household surveys in several European cities have clearly shown that disturbance by noise stemming from road traffic is a significant cause of sleep disturbance which does impact on health and well-being (Berglund and Lindvall, 1995; Halpern, 1995). However, disturbance by noise from the activities of neighbours using their housing unit can be an even greater cause of concern to residents irrespective of the objective measure of sound.

The accumulated evidence from household surveys indicates that disagreements about the appropriate uses of housing, and different values attributed to social relations between neighbours, reflect different social identities at the micro-scale of residential buildings and neighbourhoods (Bernard, 1992; Cooper Marcus and Sarkissian, 1986). Therefore, it is appropriate to study the interrelations between increasingly diverse domestic cultures. This raises the key question of how the knowledge about housing cultures can be used effectively in housing design, housing management and housing policies. Too often, housing research by academics and scientists has not been addressed to housing managers, housing designers or other professionals (Lawrence, 1987).

The next sections of this article will briefly review some key concepts related to human

ecology, including housing culture, identity and cultivation. Then it will consider how these concepts can be interrelated in order to apply the integrated perspective proposed. A case study of residential mobility in Geneva will then be presented in order to show how these concepts provide an analytical framework for understanding the motives that people have regarding the wish to stay in their residence or to move elsewhere.

Concepts and Principles of Human Ecology

Human ecology is a term that has been and still is characterised by a lack of consensus about what it means (Lawrence, 2001; Steiner and Nauser, 1993). For example, today there is no consensus whether human ecology is a discipline, a conceptual framework, or a set of principles. Nonetheless, there is some agreement that human ecology refers to the study of the relations, especially the reciprocal relations between people, their habitat and the environment beyond their immediate surroundings. Human groups and societies establish and maintain viable relationships with their habitat through collective mechanisms that stem from their «*anthropos*» and generate a system of relations and networks rather than independent action. Hence, human ecology studies people in their habitual living conditions using a systemic framework that explicitly examines the reciprocal relations between individuals, social groups, the components of their residential environment and larger-scale conditions.

Human ecology transgresses traditional disciplinary boundaries by explicitly applying

a broad conceptual and methodological framework that integrates contributions from the natural and the social sciences (Lawrence, 2001). This is an interdisciplinary interpretation because it includes concepts and principles from both the natural and the human sciences. Second, it underlines the systemic interrelations between sets of biotic, a-biotic and anthropogenic factors. Hence it does not concentrate only on specific components because it considers the whole system as the unit of study for people-environment relations. This interpretation can be applied at different geographical scales including the micro-scale of housing. It is meant to be reapplied at different times to explicitly address a short- and long- term perspective during the lifecycle. This temporal perspective can identify change to any of the specific components as well as the interrelations between them. It also illustrates the principle that disciplinary knowledge and specialisation have hindered the development of a broader understanding of the contextual conditions of housing and how people relate to their residential environment (Lawrence, 2002).

Diversity of Housing Cultures and Identities

Culture refers to characteristics of human societies that involve the acquisition and transmission by non-genetic means (from one person to another, between human groups and societies as well as over generations) of shared beliefs, customs, information, institutions, language, rules, symbols, technology and values (Lawrence, 2001). Although culture was often interpreted by anthropologists to be a monolithic and static concept, today it increasingly designates a relativistic and pluralistic concept within and between human

groups, societies and nations.

Housing cultures are complex and diverse but they are too often taken for granted. Housing, dwelling and home are fundamental human constructs that are crucial components of human culture «*anthropos*» that partly define the condition and status of individuals and households in relation to others in their society. Cultures of domestic life explicitly concern:

1. The artefacts and techniques of human groups (housing units, infrastructure and services). This can be considered as the material culture of domestic life which can be used to express and communicate cultural and social/group representations that are a sign of identity (Duncan, 1981).
2. The social organisation of human groups, especially norms about kinship, household composition and social relations. The housing environment not only expresses social conventions but also social differentiation, and perhaps it reinforces social exclusion instead of cohesion (OECD, 1996).
3. The meanings attributed to the physical and nonmaterial components of human habitats and how these are expressed by language; for example, a housing unit, dwelling, home (Lawrence, 1987).

Ethnographies show the interrelations between these dimensions of domestic culture, how these dimensions are defined by different groups, and whether or not they evolve over time (Arias, 1993; Low and Chambers, 1989).

The term **identity** commonly refers to properties of individuality, the essential characteristics

that make a person distinct from others (self-identity). Identity has also been interpreted as the qualities of sameness between an individual and others. The most common categories for comparisons are education, ethnicity, gender, nationality, place of residence, profession and religion. In this essay identity refers to the common characteristics of individuals and groups in prescribed residential environments. A human ecology perspective accepts that individuals and groups consciously choose their behaviour, lifestyle and values in order to create a sense of self-esteem, of social acceptance and belonging. An individual's housing environment, especially the social and cultural context of daily life, are structured frameworks for the expression and transmission of personal and social identities (Barbey, 1990; Duncan, 1981).

Cultivation implies that one should identify and understand the active, perhaps mobile interrelations between individuals and their habitat. It can also account for the cognitive and symbolic interrelations between individuals, groups and their past and present (Duncan, 1981; Putman and Newton, 1990). Cultivation also stresses the importance of intentionality within the ongoing practices of domesticity, especially the way that individual, social, and cultural identities are expressed and communicated.

Review of Disciplinary Interpretations of Housing Demand

This section will consider housing demand in terms of the values, lifestyles and preferences of residents. It argues that until these qualitative dimensions are better understood, then housing

demand will only be considered in quantitative terms. The following paragraphs present a brief review of diverse interpretations of housing demand by demographers, geographers, economists, sociologists and psychologists. Then the results of a case study in a Swiss municipality in the Canton of Geneva funded by the Cantonal Housing Office and the Municipality of Meyrin will be summarized. This case study was based on a collaborative research agenda defined with staff of the Municipality, members of the local association of residents, and other actors involved in the local housing market.

What is housing demand?

The housing market is the outcome of set of interrelated actions, procedures and policies involving a wide range of individuals and institutions including building contractors, real estate developers, property owners, financial institutions, local and national authorities dealing with housing, building and land-use planning, and households (owner-occupiers and tenants). Housing demand and supply are two crucial components of the housing market in any locality, be it at the scale of a neighbourhood, city or country. Housing demand has various interpretations that are related to the viewpoints of actors in different sectors (Segaud, Bonvalet and Brun, 1998).

Two unique characteristics of housing are its durability and its fixed spatial location. Consequently, it is not a simple task to alter the quantity or quality of the attributes of the existing housing stock. This may lead to the scarcity of housing units with attributes that have an inflexible demand, such as accessibility to schools and other community services. It is

important to emphasise that the characteristics of housing units, residential buildings and their site conditions, and the characteristics of neighbourhoods are crucial components of housing markets. These sets of characteristics can be interpreted using both quantitative and qualitative criteria (Lawrence, 1987). The site of a residential building, for example, can be interpreted in relation to the distance to community facilities including commerce, schools, health care and education, as well as local environmental conditions (e.g. green parks, air pollution, and ambient noise levels), the quality of public services (for example, garbage collection and public transport), and the socio-economic profile of the resident population. Consequently, it is important to note whether these different characteristics of neighbourhoods are reflected in housing demand and housing prices (Galster, 2001).

There are diverse disciplinary interpretations of housing demand that have been used during the 20th century. These interpretations can only be sketched in this chapter. Demographers, for example, interpret housing demand in terms of the interrelations between the size and composition of the housing stock, and household composition and size (Clark and Dieleman, 1996).

Households can also be differentiated on the basis of socio-economic criteria, lifestyles and preferences which can be considered in terms of quantity and quality of housing attributes. Housing prices and rents are the outcome of the interaction between the demand for housing attributes and the supply of these attributes in precise localities. Any change in the number or the characteristics of households can redefine

the required quantity and the preferred quality of the attributes of the housing stock.

Housing demand is commonly interpreted by economists as a list of prices for housing and the specific quantity of housing chosen or requested at each price, given that income other prices and preferences are held constant. For many commodities, demand can be measured as a desired quantity of goods or services. However, in the case of housing, just one unit is required but it preferably has several specific attributes (e.g. number of rooms, floor area, quality of construction, standards of bathroom and kitchen equipment, garden, on-site parking, views from indoors etc.). Consequently, housing demand is usually considered in terms of the availability and affordability of a combination of characteristics of a housing unit, the residential building and its site, and the features of the neighbourhood (Michelson, 1977). Collectively these characteristics can also be considered by architects and engineers in terms of housing quality. Economists commonly use the hedonic price function to estimate the utility value of specific characteristics or residential buildings, such as the number of rooms (Bender et al., 2000).

Some economists assume that each consumer has preferences that he or she uses to rank choices from most to least preferred. These rankings are not meant to vary over time, or with respect to income and price. Residents make housing choices from a range of alternatives that are all within their household budget. From this perspective, housing demand can be interpreted as the outcome of household strategies used to cope with a costly part of the domestic budget. Some strategies include

choosing lower standards of housing (e.g. a housing unit with poor amenities, or in need of repair, moving to a remote location because housing is cheaper, and use of do-it-yourself inputs for maintenance works).

Some social policy analysts consider housing demand according to tenure (Saunders, 1990). Tenure is considered an important criteria because it is argued that owner occupation can provide a source of material wealth, promote consumption, and provide a sense of psychological security, well-being and personal achievement. Since the 1980s, owner occupation has been promoted in many western European and former socialist countries as a result of a policy to replace a planned economy by a market economy in the housing sector (Danermark and Elander, 1994). This policy includes the conversion of the state owned housing stock into owner occupied or private rental housing. This policy shift has been accompanied by a reduction of public investments in housing in recent decades. Many contributions on this topic account for only two types of housing tenure, namely owner-occupation (home ownership) and private rental, whereas they ignore co-operatives, leasehold or public rental housing. Those contributions that consider housing demand in terms of tenure usually compare the financial costs of owner occupation and renting. Consequently, they consider aspects of income taxation related to the imputed rents of owner occupiers, capital gains or losses when residential properties are sold, tax deductions for mortgage loans, and property taxes.

Another interpretation of housing demand considers the rationale of actors in the housing

market. The first group of actors is the property owners (owner occupiers and landlords), who have requirements for particular attributes of the housing stock. Their interpretation of housing demand leads to financial investments in the housing stock, which can be related to the construction of new residential buildings, or the renovation of existing ones. The second group of actors are the inhabitants, who comprise home owners and tenants. The inhabitants have specific requirements regarding the housing unit, the residential building and its site conditions as well as the neighbourhood, its facilities, services and local environmental conditions (Michelson, 1997). Management and maintenance are also important attributes of housing demand for tenants.

The study of residential mobility has included contributions that focus on the housing preferences, values and life course trajectories of individuals and households. Residential mobility not only involves social representations about the location of a domicile and housing costs, as well as the type and size of housing units, quality and tenure (Clark and Dieleman, 1996). Some recent studies of residential mobility have not analysed trends in housing supply such as new construction, costs, or vacancy rates. Instead they consider these factors as providing a context in which individuals and households make choices. These contributions show that household size, composition and income, the age of the residents and their stage in the life course are crucial factors involved in residential mobility. In this respect, some studies by psychologists, sociologists and health care researchers have shown that housing preferences, choices and life-course trajectories are a complex bundle of attributes

including how individuals interpret their well-being and health status (Kahlmeier et al., 2001). This perspective has often been omitted from interpretations of residential mobility and housing demand.

Context of the Case Study in Geneva

The author of this article is a representative of the University of Geneva in the Cantonal Housing Observatory, founded by the public administration in 1998. This housing observatory is defined by a partnership of representatives of the private sector (property owners of residential buildings including banks, insurance companies and pension funds); the public sector (the cantonal housing office and statistics office); the city of Geneva; the association of tenants; building unions and the University of Geneva. By common consent these partners have decided to examine housing demand in the canton of Geneva in terms of both its quantitative and qualitative aspects. The author is responsible for research on the latter. The University of Geneva has formulated a programme of research to identify and understand the qualitative aspects of housing in the Municipality of Meyrin which has a population of about 20'000 residents. The viewpoints of representatives of the Municipality as well as the partners in the housing observatory have been used to define the topics and methods of research.

A survey of 205 households residing in the Municipality of Meyrin, in the Canton of Geneva was completed in 1999 in order to ascertain how and why a representative sample of the population defined and ordered their stated preference to move or stay in their domicile. A questionnaire with directed and open-ended

questions was used in order to answer the following kinds of questions: What motivates a resident of Meyrin to move and live elsewhere, or to continue living in the same housing unit? Is there sufficient diversity of the housing stock in Meyrin and does it correspond to the needs of the residents?

In order to reply to these questions, the survey has identified and evaluated housing demand – both its quantitative and qualitative characteristics – by studying residential satisfaction and the motives for residential mobility. The survey method considered precise questions in order to identify as many reasons why people wish to move; for example:

To what extent is the wish to move related to the quality of the housing environment, the distance between home and work, rates of taxation in the Cantons of Geneva and Vaud, or other factors?»

The questionnaire also includes specific questions that the Municipality of Meyrin asked the research team to investigate:

«What socio-demographic characteristics are associated with those residents who wish to move?»

«What architectural and urban characteristics of the Municipality are linked to the wish to move?»

«What problems are mentioned by those residents who wish to move?»

«What public facilities and services do the local residents want?»

The results of this unpublished survey will not be presented in detail here. Instead, the remainder of this article will discuss some key issues stemming from the findings of this survey related to diverse interpretations of housing demand and why people wish to move or stay in their current housing unit. In this study three interrelated units of analysis were considered: the housing unit, the residential building and its site, the neighbourhood, its components and nuisances. In this way the case study has been used to formulate a new research agenda.

Results of Household Survey in Meyrin, Geneva

The household survey found that about 90% of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their housing unit, the residential building and their neighbourhood. Nonetheless, 27% expressed the wish to move. Amongst those who wished to move, 75% preferred to remain in the Municipality of Meyrin but nobody wanted to move elsewhere in the same building. This finding warrants careful consideration because residential mobility can have significant economic and social impacts for public authorities, property owners and tenants. The reasons leading to residential mobility can also be interpreted as a complex bundle of factors that are simultaneously implicated in the wish to move.

Why do people wish to move even though they are satisfied with their housing unit? It is often argued that different tax rates between the Canton of Geneva, the Canton of Vaud and France is the main reason for people wishing to live outside Geneva while retaining their employment. This interpretation is not

supported by the results of this study. The reasons associated with the wish to move are ranked as:

- + 57.4% - unsatisfactory characteristics of the housing unit
- + 32.2% - poor quality/cost ratio of housing
- + 31.5% - unsatisfactory characteristics of building
- + 29.6% - poor building management and maintenance
- + 14.8% - unsatisfactory characteristics of the neighbourhood
- + 11.1% - health related reasons.

In contrast, taxation or fiscal reasons (5.6%), end of housing allocations (3.7%), change of building status and rent charges (1.9%) or forced relocation (0.9%) are far less frequently mentioned.

These results contradict the claims of politicians and public administrators who commonly state that sets of financial reasons are the main motive for residential mobility. In contrast, this case study suggests that the wish to move can be (at least partly) understood if the age, length of tenure, past residential experience, housing availability and affordability, as well as effective occupancy conditions are considered in the Canton of Geneva. Concurrently, the location of the housing unit, its cost, and personal relations with neighbours were apparently not significant in determining whether the respondents wished to move. It is suggested that although fiscal reasons play a minor role there are other important factors related to the well-being of specific groups of the population (e.g. the elderly) that explain why they are satisfied but would still like to move elsewhere in the

same neighbourhood rather than elsewhere.

The survey also identified the main reasons that the residents cited for remaining in the same housing unit, which are ranked in the following order:

- + 70.5% - strong affective ties with the neighbourhood
- + 67.8% - good location of housing unit
- + 50% - good quality/cost ratio
- + 45.1% - strong personal ties with housing unit
- + 21.2% - members of the family living in the neighbourhood
- + 10.3% - no other adequate housing available.

These findings suggest that psychological and social factors are more important than financial and functional reasons in determining housing demand and why people wish to remain in the same housing unit. This case study of residential mobility questions those interpretations of why people wish to move that ignore social representations and well-being. It also illustrates the important role of trade-offs between utilitarian, economic and symbolic dimensions of everyday life.

The survey in Meyrin also found that only 2.9% of all respondents were very unsatisfied with their housing unit, the residential building and the urban neighbourhood. This finding has been analysed in terms of the age of the residential building, the layout-type of the housing unit, effective occupancy conditions, and the social status of the neighbourhood. The survey found that those residential buildings constructed between 1960 and 1970 included a larger than average proportion that the respondents judged as unsatisfactory. In contrast, the survey

did not find a direct relationship between housing quality and the rent per room or per unit floor area. Nonetheless, those housing units above the average rental cost were considered by the respondents to include relatively more qualitative characteristics. Moreover, there was no distinction between the appreciation of housing units that had or had not been renovated.

These findings show that the respondents have the capacity to critically scrutinise and evaluate (negatively) specific aspects of their everyday surroundings while expressing an overall (positive) assessment. It is noteworthy that this kind of differentiation between a global, positive assessment and detailed, negative criticism can only be expressed if the survey questionnaire is formulated to enable multi-dimensional assessments.

Synthesis and Recommendations

This empirical study has identified some previously unknown facts that have led to the formulation of principles which are presented to the Municipality of Meyrin and the cantonal authorities in Geneva as a set of four recommendations:

1. The quality of the housing environment (the housing unit, residential building and the neighbourhood) plays a crucial role in everyday life and is closely linked to residential mobility. In fact, the objective and subjective characteristics of the local environment are much more significant than taxes and other fiscal measures. In principle, it is necessary to integrate social representations of the housing and local environment into public policies

about land use planning and the daily affairs of local government.

2. The relatively constant level of vacancies in a few residential buildings has meant a lack of income for both the property owners and the Municipality. The housing market in Geneva has not dealt effectively with this problem, especially in a small number of residential buildings constructed between 1960 and 1970. It is recommended that the Municipality consider an innovative programme of marketing that will encourage young families to move into the area. The Municipality should note that social representations provide a framework for developing a pertinent marketing strategy.

3. There are close links between types of residential buildings, their maintenance and renovation, whether a caretaker lives in the building, and damage to property including graffiti on buildings. Damage to property by vandals and the lack of maintenance by property owners contribute to a sense of insecurity, a negative impact on local identity and social cohesion. It can also lead to higher repair costs and a loss of income for property owners. In principle, housing projects should be developed by public-private partnerships that encourage financial investments for the renovation and maintenance of existing buildings and facilities.

4. The housing allocations policy in the Canton of Geneva during the 1990s has favoured the concentration of low-income households in a small number of residential buildings. Consequently residents who depend on social security (e.g. long-term unemployed and immigrants) occupy these buildings.

This trend has been noted in Meyrin and it is criticised by the residents (who represent over 100 nationalities). Therefore, the Municipality should adopt a policy of social and cultural diversity in order to maintain heterogeneity at the micro-level, thus facilitating social cohesion and a positive local identity.

Conclusion

This article has considered how a human ecology perspective can be applied to improve current understanding of housing especially subjects including housing cultures, and identities which are linked to motives concerning why households move or stay in the same housing unit. These are complex subjects that influence housing markets and domestic life especially in a period of rapid change. The case study in Meyrin shows why and how research on the lifestyles, preferences and values of groups and individuals can be used to better understand residential mobility. These concepts need to be studied in order to develop an interdisciplinary understanding of residential mobility and housing demand in relation to the multiple characteristics of the residential environment and housing markets. The case study briefly presented in this article can enable professionals, researchers and citizens to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the qualitative aspects of residential environments, housing demand and residential mobility. It is hoped that this contribution will stimulate debate and prompt more co-ordinated responses from professionals and policy decision-makers working in different sectors.

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Doctorate of Science from the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale, Lausanne, Switzerland. In 1994 he was nominated by the World Health Organization to the Scientific Advisory Board of the European Centre for Environment and Health, and in 1999 he was appointed Chairperson of the Evaluation Advisory Committee of the Healthy Cities Project in the WHO-European Region. In January 1997 he was nominated to the New York Academy of Science. In 1999 he was nominated Professor in the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences at the University of Geneva. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses. He is the Director of a continuing education course on sustainable development and Agenda 21 at the University of Geneva which is addressed to elected officials, public administrators and managers in the private sector. His biography has been included in Marquis Who's Who in the World and Who's Who in Science and Engineering. He can be contacted at roderick.lawrence@unige.ch