A MODEL OF RESIDENTIAL SATISFACTION

The consideration of the satisfaction which is provided by an individual’s residential environment, and the main socio-environmental variables which are involved in the interaction between the individual and his/her residential environment, is a subject which first arose at the end of the fifties and in the early sixties, with the pioneering works of H.J. Gans and his collaborators in the city of Boston (Gans, 1959; Fried and Gleicher, 1961; Hartman, 1963; Ryan, 1963); L. Rainwater in St. Louis (Rainwater, 1966; Yancey, 1971) and M: Young and P. Wilmot in London (Young and Wilmot, 1957; Wilmot and Young, 1960), to name some of the most significant. These studies, effected in city slum areas, reveal the importance of psycho-social factors in urban planning programmes.

Since then, numerous empirical studies have been carried out, which, with the aim of guiding architects and town planners in their decision making, seek to determine those objective and subjective factors - of a physical or social nature - which explain a greater variation in satisfaction with the residential environment. Literature on the subject does not reveal many attempts to provide a theoretical framework for the process which leads an individual to feel satisfaction with his/her residential environment. Generally speaking, works dealing with this question tackle the study of residential satisfaction from two different methodological perspectives. Either residential satisfaction is considered as a variable criterion of quality of life (Marans and Rodgers, 1975; Gaister and Hesser, 1981; Cutter, 1982; Weidemann et al, 1982); or it is regarded as a predictor variable of some of the following types of individual activity, as shown by authors such as Brown and Moore (1970); Speare (1974); Morris, Crull and Winter (1976); Newman and Duncan (1979); Premius (1986) or Tognoli (1987): 1) Moving to another home or residential mobility; 2) Modification of the residential environment or adjustment and 3) Modification of aspirations created by new residential necessities or adaptation.

What both perspectives have in common, is the consideration of psychological processes in the evaluation of the residential environment, which renders residential satisfaction a subject of relevance to the psychologist, if, as Gifford (1987) affirmed, it is considered to be a consequence of that evaluation.

Empirical demonstration of such internal processes in the evaluation of the environment has not always been successful, given the complexity of interrelations between the processes themselves, although several attempts have been made, such as those already mentioned, or more recently, the model established by Lindberg et al (1987) and Lindberg, Garling and Montgomery (1988). These authors are not directly concerned with a model of residential satisfaction, but rather with the question of residential preferences, which, as Holahan (1982) pointed out, are closely related thereto. These authors establish a model of housing preferences, according to Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) theory of reasoned action. The empirical results they obtain support the hypothesis that the evaluations which people make of a series of housing attributes are mediated by their structure of essential values and by their beliefs about the consequences certain behaviour will have on the attainment of said values.

An attempt to integrate the two tendencies in the study of residential satisfaction, whilst also applying Ajzen and Fishbein's actitudinal theory, is the model proposed by Weidemann and Anderson (1985), which, although not empirically proven, does provide considerable clarification as regards the determining factors and behavioural consequences of residential satisfaction.
1. A model of residential satisfaction

The majority of the models already mentioned consider residential satisfaction from the point of view of attitude. Following, therefore, in this tradition, the definition which will be used in this study can be expressed as follows: Residential satisfaction is the result of the process whereby certain objective attributes of the residential environment are evaluated by the individual. The result of such evaluation, namely residential satisfaction, is an affective state of a positive nature which the individual possesses towards his/her residential environment and which will lead him/her to develop certain behaviour designed to maintain or increase congruence with it.

From this perspective, a systematic model is proposed which considers the attitudinal components involved in residential satisfaction, using the various models found in literature on the subject as a basis for its elaboration. Figure 1 offers a synthetic representation of the proposed model, reflecting the definition of residential satisfaction which has just been expressed.

![Diagram of a model of residential satisfaction]

Fig. 1. - A systemic model of residential satisfaction.

As the model in figure 1 shows, the objective attributes of the residential environment, once they have been evaluated by the individual and taking into account his/her personal characteristics, are then converted into subjective ones, eliciting a certain degree of satisfaction. However, despite the fact that most authors concur in attaching more importance to the subjective attributes, objective ones can elicit satisfaction directly.

The subjective attributes depend on how an individual perceives or evaluates the objective residential environment; and this in turn depends, on the one hand, on his/her own sociodemographic characteristics and personality; and, on the other, on his/her particular residential necessities, such as the standard of residential quality according to which the individual establishes comparisons between his/her ideal and real residential environments; both of these, necessities and standard of quality, determine the aspirations of the individual as regards his/her residential milieu. Thus, in the box marked "individual characteristics", can be included all these aspects, which are in continuous interaction; and which determine a series of processes which will lead the individual to experience a certain degree of residential satisfaction.

Whether the degree of satisfaction will be greater or lesser, will essentially depend on whether or not the subject's aspirations concerning his/her residential environment are realised. In either case, the subject will display certain behaviour or will carry out certain cognitive processes which will either maintain him/her in a state of equilibrium with his/her residential environment, or will
make him/her regain that equilibrium. These behaviours or mechanisms, which are therefore
termed adaptative, are mediated by intentions, according to Ajzen and Fishbein's theory; and they
succeed in modifying the subject's aspirations and/or necessities, placing him/her in a more
congruent situation with his/her residential environment. In this way, according to the theories of
cognitive consistency, the degree of residential satisfaction obtained will lead the subject to
behave in a certain way or develop certain cognitive mechanisms with the aim of maintaining or
increasing the said degree of satisfaction, thereby reducing, in the latter case, the dissonance
which the residential environment or particular circumstances provoke in him/her.

This question, relating to the existence of cognitive mechanisms which lead the individual to
restructure his/her aspirations regarding the residential environment (process of adaptation, as
mentioned in the introduction) in order to later re-evaluate the said environment, thus closing the
dynamic circle of the proposed model; has now been proven empirically (Américal, 1991).

Finally, the inclusion in the model of general satisfaction with life, stems from the fact that the
residential environment is only one domain in which the individual feels, evaluates and moves,
and as such, is only a part of the whole of events which happen in his/her life. If, as according
to Campbell, Converse and Rodgers (1976) general satisfaction with life is considered as the
balanced sum of different vital domains, it would seem obvious that the individual's degree of
satisfaction with his/her residential environment will influence his/her global degree of satisfaction
with life, thus rendering residential satisfaction an indicator of quality of life.

As can been seen, to approach the study of residential satisfaction is no easy task, particularly
taking into account the number of complex relationships which can be established between the
different interacting elements. In this particular study, no behavioural data is presented, thus the
empirical proof of the model will refer to variables of the physical and social, objective and
subjective environment, as well as those relating to the individual's own characteristics which are
involved in experiencing residential satisfaction.

2. Method

2.1. Subjects

The sample consists of a total of 547 subjects, of whom 447 are housewives living in areas of
multi-family public housing and consequently of low socio-economic status, and the remainder
are 50 couples (50 males and 50 females) of average socio-economic status, living in private uni-
family terraced housing ("ROSA").

Of those subjects living in public housing, 253 were residing in an area which, at the time the
research took place, was in the process of being remodelled ("VENTILLA"), and consequently 40
of them were living in housing which had just been renovated ("REMODELADO"). The rest of the
sample of those living in council housing, 194, were living in housing which was in the process
of restoration because of certain problems with dampness and cracks in the structures of the
buildings ("SANBLAS").

2.2. Instruments

In order to achieve the proposed objective, two different questionnaires were developed: One
relating to the subject's ideal residential environment and with which his/her standard of
residential quality could be established, thereby determining his/her aspirations as regards the
residential environment; and the other relating to his/her real residential environment, entitled
questionnaire of residential satisfaction.

Since both instruments have been described elsewhere, here only a brief description will be
given. As regards the first, relating to the ideal residential environment, it consisted of asking the
subject to imagine an ideal neighbourhood, an ideal house and ideal neighbours, according to
the components of the residential environment, neighbourhood, house and neighbours, as
indicated by Canter and Rees (1982). Thereafter, the subject was presented with a series of
cards, representing attributes of the three residential components, and the subject had to classify
them according to whether he/she considered them to be essential or not to define the imagined
ideal environment. More information on this instrument can be found in Amérgio (1990).

The attributes shown on the cards were later evaluated by the subject in relation to his/her real
residential environment (subjective attributes in figure 1), according to whether they were
represented to a great extent, quite a lot, to some extent or not at all. This task constituted the
first part of the residential satisfaction questionnaire, described in detail in Amérgio and Aragonés
(1990). The second part of the questionnaire consisted of measuring residential satisfaction, and
the third was designed to measure the socio-demographic characteristics (age, level of education,
total number of children, age of the youngest child, attachment, sex) and objective aspects of the
residential environment.

3. Results

In order to prove the existence of the proposed relationships between the various elements of
the model, represented in figure 1 by the lines which join them together, in most cases, the
statistical technique of multiple regression was used, which, although it does not permit the
establishment of a causal relationship between the various elements, does seem of relevance in
establishing a first approach to the possible relationships between them. Thus, each joining line
shown in figure 1 was empirically proved by means of a multiple regression analysis.

3.1. Objective attributes, subjective attributes and residential satisfaction:

The following were considered as objective attributes of the residential environment: Housing
density and possession and use of heating; corresponding, as subjective attributes of density, to
two items in the first part of the residential satisfaction questionnaire relating to the degree of
overcrowding in the rooms and to the perceived size of the housing. The subjective attributes
corresponding to heating are also two items which refer to how cold the subject feels in his/her
house and to the perception of the degree of thermal insulation thereof.

Due to the fact that so many of the objective attributes, like the subjective ones, refer
specifically to the housing, as a measurement of satisfaction, that is to say, as a dependent
variable or criterion, the subject’s degree of satisfaction with his/her house was used. The various
multiple regression analyses carried out appear in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of regression analysis on housing satisfaction carried out between objective and
subjective attributes relating to density and heating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OBJECTIVE ATTRIBUTES</th>
<th>SUBJECTIVE ATTRIBUTES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DENSITY</td>
<td>R=.1905 R^2=.0394*</td>
<td>R=.6586 R^2=.4337*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEATING</td>
<td>R=.0966 R^2=.0093</td>
<td>R=.3621 R^2=.1311*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = p<.01
Although a certain independence exists of the objective attributes in the explanation of satisfaction (in the box marked "density" R2 is different from zero and is significant), what is certain is that the relationship between predictor values and criteria is considerably stronger when the former are perceived attributes. In the case of density, where both types of objective and subjective predictors were found to be significant, the variance explained of the former on housing satisfaction is 3.94%, whilst the attributes relating to perceived density explain a 43.37% variation.

3.2. Individual characteristics and subjective attributes of the residential environment:

In order to test the extent to which significant differences were to be found in the subjective attributes of the residential environment, according to different individual characteristics, a mean difference analysis was carried out between the different groups determined by such personal characteristics. The subjective attributes were gathered by means of a principal components analysis which gave rise to 9 factors. Table 2 shows the results of these analyses.

Table 2. Mean difference between different groups relating to individual characteristics, in each of the nine factors of the subjective residential environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR1</th>
<th>FACTOR2</th>
<th>FACTOR3</th>
<th>FACTOR4</th>
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<th>FACTOR6</th>
<th>FACTOR7</th>
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<td>X*</td>
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X = p<.01  FACTOR 1: Basic housing infrastructure.  FACTOR 8: Green Areas
X* = p<.05  FACTOR 2: Safety and Isolation.  FACTOR 9: Shopping Infrastructure
FACTOR 3: Relationships with neighbours.  FACTOR 4: Deterioration.
FACTOR 5: Vigilance and sporting areas.  FACTOR 6: Connection with the outside world.
FACTOR 7: Neighbourhood facilities.
The analysis carried out reveals that all of the factors or indicators of perceived environmental quality which emerge in this study generate significant differences (p<0.01 or p<0.05) when compared between groups with different individual characteristics.

3.3. Residential satisfaction and general satisfaction with life:

The relationship between both variables through a Spearman correlation was .2023, which, as expected, indicates a weak, but positive relationship.

4. Discussion

The results obtained in this study permit the assertion that the satisfaction an individual feels with his/her residential environment (physical and social) can basically be explained by how he/she evaluates his/her own environment, taking into account in this evaluation the personal determinants of each individual. Likewise, although to a lesser degree, the objective characteristics themselves of the residential environment (physical and social) contribute in determining the degree to which a subject feels satisfaction with his/her residential environment, a point which has not always been raised in literature (for example, the model of Marans and Rodgers, 1975) and which deepens the controversy about objective and subjective indicators in the measurement of quality of life.

The part concerning the behavioural aspect of the model has not been empirically proved; however, the work by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) guarantees, to a large extent, the possibility of succeeding in gaining such proof.

The large number of variables to be considered when dealing with a theoretical model of residential satisfaction makes the researcher's task a complex one; However, the use of more powerful statistical techniques, such as structural analysis, would produce results more appropriate for the aims of this study, permitting the establishment of causal relationships which is not possible by means of mere correlations.

In this sense, although the results obtained do not provide a definitive framework with which to approach the study of residential satisfaction, they do seem to open up new and reliable paths for a subsequent and deeper study of the subject. As Wiesenberg (1989), among others, pointed out, the scarcity of theoretical frameworks to explain the construct satisfaction and its relationship with the individual and the residential environment, is obvious, which justifies and gives relevance to this study.

In conclusion, this study, from an empirical viewpoint, constitutes a first approach to the theoretical study of residential satisfaction, hoping that subsequent research will implement the results obtained here, with the aim of finally establishing theoretical bases from which to approach the individual's complex relationships with his/her residential milieu.

Note

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References


