

Residential mobility and neighbourhood change

Key questions addressed in this chapter

- ▶ Why do people move within cities?
- ▶ What patterns are generated by these moves?
- ▶ What effect do these moves have upon residential structures?

Although it is widely accepted that the shaping and reshaping of urban social areas is a product of the movement of households from one residence to another, the relationships between urban residential structure and patterns of residential mobility are only imperfectly understood. This is a reflection of the complexity of these relationships. While migration creates and remodels the social and demographic structure of city neighbourhoods, it is also conditioned by the existing ecology of the city: a classic example of the sociospatial dialectic. The process is undergoing constant modification as each household's decision to move (or not to move) has repercussions for the rest of the system. Chain reactions

of vacancies and moves are set off as dwellings become newly available, and this movement may itself trigger further mobility as households react to changes in neighbourhood status and tone.

The basic relationship between residential mobility and urban structure is outlined in Figure 12.1, which emphasizes the circular and cumulative effects of housing demand and urban structure on each other. Mobility is seen as a product of *housing opportunities* – the new and vacant dwellings resulting from suburban expansion, inner-city renewal and rehabilitation, etc. – and the housing *needs* and *expectations* of households, which are themselves a product of income, family size and lifestyle. Meanwhile, as Figure 12.2 shows, residential mobility can also be interpreted within the frame of broader structural changes.

Given a sufficient amount of mobility, the residential structure of the city will be substantively altered, resulting in changes both to the 'objective' social ecology and to the associated neighbourhood images that help to attract or deter further potential movers. *Households, then, may be seen as decision-making units whose aggregate response to housing opportunities is central to ecological*

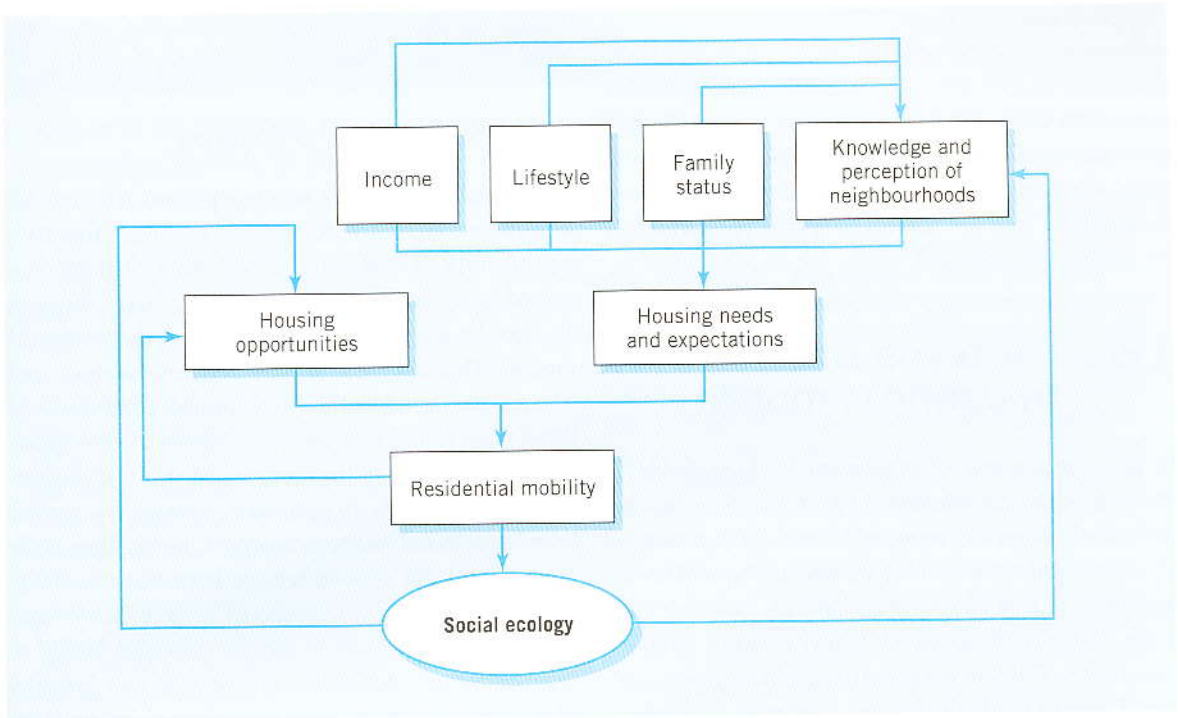


Figure 12.1 Relationships between housing demand, residential mobility and the social ecology of the city.

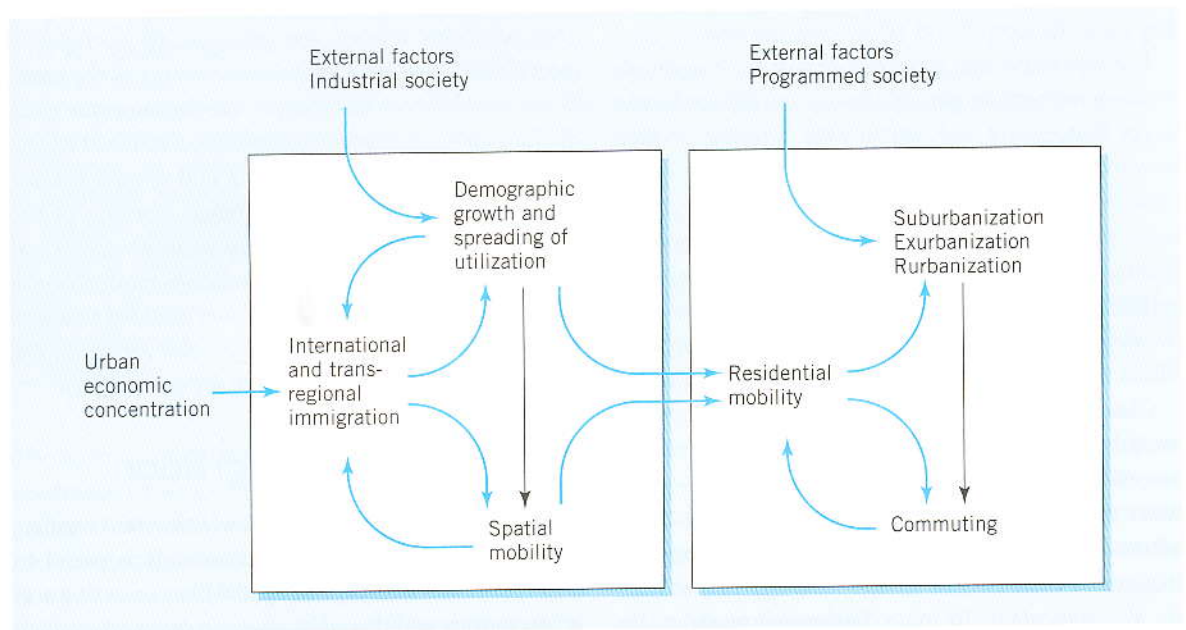


Figure 12.2 The system formed by mobility flows and the structuration of space.

Source: Bassand (1990), Fig. 1, p. 80.

change. It therefore seems logical to begin the task of disentangling the relationship between movement and urban structure by seeking to establish the fundamental parameters of household mobility. How many households do actually move in a given period? Do particular types of households have a greater propensity to move than others? And are there any spatial regularities in the pattern of migration?

12.1 Patterns of household mobility

In fact, the amount of movement by households in Western cities is considerable. In Australia, New Zealand and North America, between 15 and 20 per cent of all urban households move in any one year. Having said this, it is of course important to recognize that some cities experience much higher levels of mobility than others. Cities in the fast-growing West, South and Gulf Coast of the United States – Bellevue, Scottsdale, Riverside and Thousand Oaks, for instance – have an annual turnover of population that is double that of the likes of Scranton, Johnstown and Wilkes-Barre/Hazeltown in the slow-growing north-east. In Europe, rates of mobility also vary a good deal, but in general they range between 5 and 10 per cent per year.

It is also important to recognize that the magnitude of this movement stems partly from economic and social forces that extend well beyond the housing markets of individual cities. Some of the most important determinants of the overall level of residential mobility are the business cycles that are endemic to capitalist economies. During economic upswings the increase in employment opportunities and wages leads to an increase in the effective demand for new housing which, when completed, allows whole chains of households to change homes.

Changes in social organization – particularly those involving changes in family structure and the rate of household formation, dissolution and fusion – also affect the overall level of mobility by exerting a direct influence on the demand for accommodation. Long-term changes in the structure of the housing market itself are also important. In many European countries, for example, the expansion of owner-occupied and public housing at the expense of the privately rented sector

has led to a general decrease in mobility because of the higher costs and longer delays involved in moving.

Movers and stayers

Residential mobility is a selective process. Households of different types are not equally mobile. Some have a propensity to move quite often; others, having once gained entry to the housing system, never move at all, thus lending a degree of stability to the residential mosaic. This basic dichotomy between ‘movers’ and ‘stayers’ has been identified in a number of studies, and it has been found that the composition of each group tends to be related to the lifestyle and tenure characteristics of households. In particular, younger households have been found to move more frequently than older households; and private renters have been found to be more mobile than households in other tenure categories. People can also be conceptualized as ‘locals’ or ‘cosmopolitans’, depending on the type and intensity of their attachments to their immediate social environments, and this distinction has been shown to have a significant bearing on intra-urban mobility.

In addition, there appears to be an independent duration-of-residence effect, whereby the longer a household remains in a dwelling the less likely it is to move. This has been termed the principle of ‘cumulative inertia’, and is usually explained in terms of the emotional attachments that people develop towards their dwelling and immediate neighbourhood and their reluctance to sever increasingly strong and complex social networks in favour of the unknown quantity of the pattern of daily life elsewhere. In contrast, the actual experience of moving home probably reinforces the propensity to move. Movers are more oriented to future mobility than households that have not moved in the past and are better able to actualize a moving plan.

Patterns of in-migration

It is possible to suggest a number of important regularities in people’s migration behaviour. It is useful to distinguish first between the spatial behaviour of intra-urban movers and that of in-migrants from other cities, regions and countries. Furthermore, in-migrants can be usefully divided into high- and low-status movers.

Box 12.1

Key trends in urban social geography – The growth of Eastern European communities in UK towns and cities

One of the most important changes in the urban social geography of the United Kingdom in recent years has been the influx of over a million migrants following the accession of the Eastern European states to the European Union in 2004. Admittedly, in the wake of the current economic downturn, rising prosperity in the accession states and the declining value of the pound, many of these migrants have returned to their nations of origin. Nevertheless, it is estimated that over 600 000 Eastern Europeans remain in the United Kingdom, approximately two-thirds of whom are Polish. Indeed, it has been estimated that, relative to the size of the total population, this is the largest single influx of migrants to the United Kingdom since the Huguenots fled to escape religious persecution in Europe in the seventeenth century (*Economist*, 30 August 2008).

It is not only the relative size of the recent migration that makes it significant; the character of the influx is different from previous waves. To begin with, and in marked contrast to previous migrations of persons of colour from ex-colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia, the new migrants are overwhelmingly white. This has meant that issues of immigration have become decoupled from race; this has led to a much more explicit public debate

on immigration than in the past, now centred on the value of these immigrants to the UK economy. While many local authorities lament the extra pressure on public services, business circles have generally welcomed the migrants. Many Eastern European workers have filled skill shortages in occupations such as plumbing, building and the health service. Others have undertaken roles in less skilled, low-paid occupations that the indigenous population is reluctant to take up, such as fruit picking, factory work and in service industries such as hotels and catering. This has led to much-publicized issues of labour exploitation and housing overcrowding, although one should not exaggerate the scale of these issues.

Another important difference is geographical; the new migrants have generally spread more widely throughout the United Kingdom than previous migrants, who tended to concentrate in the major cities. Nevertheless, some towns and cities have experienced especially large increases of Poles – Peterborough, Northampton, Slough and Southampton being key examples. The precise scale of the new populations is difficult to gauge accurately but there have been many obvious consequences on city life. Thus, it not uncommon to hear Polish being spoken

in public, to see Polish-registered vehicles on UK roads and to find Polish food on sale in shops. The leading UK supermarket chain Tesco even has a website in Polish. In addition, being overwhelmingly Catholic the new migrants have swelled churches and led to this branch of religion being the fastest growing in the United Kingdom in recent years. The extent to which these Eastern Europeans will settle in the UK is uncertain: new patterns of transnational working are being forged, made possible, in part, by the budget airlines, which have been busy taking Eastern European workers home at various intervals.

Key concepts associated with the growth of Eastern European Communities in UK towns and cities (see Glossary)

Assimilation, charter group, citizenship, contingent workers, ethnic group, ethnoscape, numerical flexibility, reserve army of labour, transnational urbanism.

Links with other chapters

Chapter 4: Box 4.3 How useful is the UK Census?

Chapter 9: Box 9.3 The development of new 'sacred spaces'

The latter were particularly influential in shaping the residential structure of cities earlier this century. There are some cities, however, where low-status in-migrants continue to represent a significant component of migration patterns, as illustrated by population movements in Cincinnati, for example, where the in-migrants have been mainly poor whites from Appalachia; Australian cities such as Melbourne and Sydney, where the in-

migrants are mainly foreign born; and some European cities, where the in-migrants are *gastarbeiter*. As we saw in Chapter 8, the impact of these in-migrants on urban social ecology is often finely tuned in relation to the national and regional origins, religion and ethnic status of the migrants involved.

High-status in-migrants are similar to low-status in-migrants in that the majority are drawn into the city in

response to its economic opportunities. Their locational behaviour, however, is quite different. The majority constitutes part of a highly mobile group of the better-educated middle classes whose members move from one city to another in search of better jobs or career advancement. Some of these moves are voluntary and some are made in response to the administrative fiat of large companies and government departments. The vast majority, though, follow the same basic pattern, moving to a rather narrowly defined kind of neighbourhood: newly established suburban developments containing housing towards the top end of the price range.

Such areas are particularly attractive to the mobile elite because the lack of an established neighbourhood character and social network minimizes the risk of settling among neighbours who are unfriendly, too friendly, 'snobbish' or 'common': something that may otherwise happen very easily, since out-of-town households must usually search the property market and make a housing selection in a matter of days. Moreover, housing in such areas tends to conform to 'conventional' floor and window shapes and sizes, so that there is a good chance that furnishings from the previous residence will fit the new one. Nevertheless, once established in the new city, it is common for such households to make one or more follow-up or 'corrective' moves in response to their increasing awareness of the social ambience of different neighbourhoods and the quality of their schools and shops.

Intra-urban moves

This brings us to the general category of intra-urban moves that make up the bulk of all residential mobility and that therefore merit rather closer consideration. Indeed, a good deal of research effort has been devoted to the task of searching for regularities in intra-urban movement in the belief that such regularities, if they exist, might help to illuminate a key dimension of the sociospatial dialectic: the relationships between residential mobility and urban ecology.

Distance and direction

One of the most consistent findings of this research concerns the *distance moved*. In virtually every study, the

majority of moves has been found to be relatively short, although the distances involved clearly depend to a certain extent on the overall size of the city concerned. This tendency for short moves notwithstanding, variability in distance moved is generally explained best by income, race and previous tenure, with higher-income, white, owner-occupier households tending to move furthest.

Directional bias has also been investigated in a number of migration studies, but with rather less consistent results. While it is widely recognized that there is a general tendency for migration to push outwards from inner-city neighbourhoods towards the suburbs, reverse flows and cross-currents always exist to complicate the issue. The most significant regularities in intra-urban movement patterns, however, relate to the relative *socio-economic status* of origin and destination areas. The vast majority of moves – about 80 per cent in the United States – take place within census tracts of similar socio-economic characteristics.

A parallel and related tendency is for a very high proportion of moves to take place within tenure categories. In other words, relocation within both 'community space' and 'housing space' usually involves only short distances. Where transitions do occur between tenure categories, a great deal depends on the ecology of housing supply. It follows from these observations that, while intra-urban mobility may have a significant impact on the spatial expression of social and economic cleavages, the overall degree of residential segregation tends to be maintained or even reinforced by relocation processes.

Household movement and urban ecology

Putting together these empirical regularities in an overall spatial context, we are presented with a threefold zonal division of the city. The innermost zone is characterized by high levels of mobility, which are swollen by the arrival of low-status in-migrants. Similarly, high levels of mobility in the outermost zone are supplemented by the arrival and subsequent follow-up mobility of higher-status in-migrants. Between the two is a zone of relative stability containing households whose housing needs are evidently satisfied. Here, turnover is low simply because few housing opportunities arise, either

through vacancies or through new construction. It is probably the existence of such a zone that accounts for longer-distance moves and which helps to explain the sectoral 'leap-frogging' of lower-middle-class and working-class households to new suburban subdivisions and dormitory towns.

The generalizations made here must be qualified in cities where there is a significant amount of public sector housing, since the entry and transfer rules for public housing are completely different from those in the rest of the housing market. In general this does not distort the overall pattern of household movement, although it is likely that different elements of the pattern will be linked to particular sectors of the housing market. In Glasgow, for example, where the privately rented and owner-occupied sectors are truncated by a massive public sector (in 2008, well over 50 per cent of the city's households lived in publicly owned dwellings), the overall pattern of residential mobility still exhibits the 'typical' components of short-distance relocation within the neighbourhood of origin and of outward sectoral movement over larger distances. But a closer examination of migration flows reveals that these components are derived in composite fashion from the various flows within and between the main tenure categories.

The determinants of residential mobility

If the outward configuration of intra-urban mobility is difficult to pin down, its internal dynamics can be even more obscure. The flows of mobility that shape urban structure derive from aggregate patterns of demand for accommodation that spring in turn from the complex deliberations of individual households. An understanding of how these deliberations are structured is thus likely to provide some insight into the relocation process, and a considerable amount of attention has therefore been given by geographers to two important aspects of household behaviour:

- 1 the decision to seek a new residence;
- 2 the search for and selection of a new residence.

This two-stage approach is adopted here. First, attention is focused on the personal, residential and environmental

circumstances that appear to precipitate the decision to move, and a conceptual model of the decision to move is outlined. Subsequently, attention is focused on how this decision is acted upon, highlighting the effects of differential access to, and use of, information.

Reasons for moving

In any consideration of migration it is important to make a distinction between *voluntary* and *involuntary* moves. As Rossi (1980) showed in his classic study of migration in Philadelphia, involuntary moves make up a significant proportion of the total. In Philadelphia, almost one-quarter of the moves were involuntary, and the majority of these were precipitated by property demolitions and evictions. Similar findings have been reported from studies of other cities, but remarkably little is known about the locational behaviour of affected households.

In addition to these purely involuntary moves is a further category of 'forced' moves arising from marriage, divorce, retirement, ill-health, death in the family and long-distance job changes. These frequently account for a further 15 per cent of all moves, leaving around 60 per cent as voluntary moves.

Survey data show that the decision to move home voluntarily is attributed to a number of quite different factors. It must be acknowledged, however, that the reasons given for moving in the course of household interviews are not always entirely reliable. Some people have a tendency to rationalize and justify their decisions, others may not be able to recollect past motivations; and most will inevitably articulate reasons that are simpler and more clear-cut than the complex of factors under consideration at the time of the move. Nevertheless, survey data are useful in indicating the major elements that need to be taken into consideration in explaining movement behaviour. Typically, the reasons given for moving involve a mixture of housing, environmental and personal factors.

Among the more frequently cited housing factors associated with voluntary moves are complaints about dwelling and garden space, about housing and repair costs and about style obsolescence. Environmental factors encompass complaints about the presence of noxious activities such as factories, about noisy children

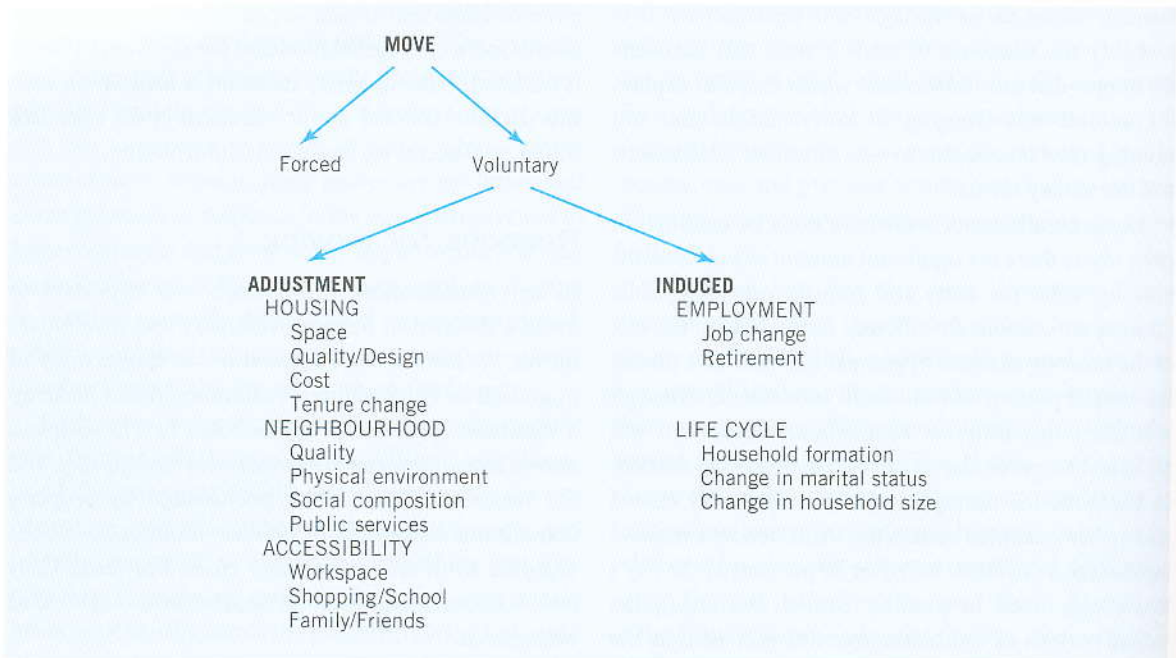


Figure 12.3 A classification of reasons for household relocation.

Source: Clark and Onaka (1983), Fig. 2, p. 50.

and about the incidence of litter, garbage and pet dogs. Personal factors are mostly associated with forced moves, but some voluntary moves are attributed to personal factors, such as a negative reaction to new neighbours. Figure 12.3 illustrates a general classification of the reasons for household relocation.

Space needs and life-course changes

Of the more frequently cited reasons for moving, it is generally agreed that the most important and widespread is related to the household's need for dwelling space. More than half of the movers in Rossi's study cited complaints about too much or too little living space as contributing to their desire to move (with 44 per cent giving it as a primary reason). Subsequent surveys have confirmed the decisive importance of living space in the decision to move and, furthermore, have established that the crucial factor is not so much space per se but the relationship between the size and composition of a household and its *perceived* space requirements. Because both of these are closely related to the family

life course, it is widely believed that life course changes provide the foundation for much of the residential relocation within cities. The importance of the family life course as an explanatory variable is considerably reinforced by its relationships with several other frequently cited reasons for moving, such as the desire to own (rather than rent) a home and the desire for a change of environmental setting.

Changes in household structure and the fragmentation of lifestyles in contemporary cities make it difficult, however, to generalize about relationships between residential mobility and family life course in the way that was possible in the 1960s. We can say, though, that a marked residential segregation tends to emerge as households at similar stages in their life course respond in similar ways to their changing domestic and material circumstances. This, of course, fits conveniently with the results of the many descriptive studies (including factorial ecology studies) that have demonstrated a zonal pattern of family status.

The generally accepted sequence to these zones runs from a youthful inner-city zone through successive zones of older and middle-aged family types to a zone

Box 12.2

Key debates in urban social geography – The value of the life cycle model

In his now classic study, Rossi linked residential differentiation with changes in the *family life cycle* (or life course). As people get older, the things they require from the environ-

ment (both the dwelling and the neighbourhood) change, and, if these needs cannot be satisfied in the immediate environment, then movement is often the result. The family

life cycle model draws attention to the fact that the family is not a static entity and has therefore played an important part in social research (see below).

1 The honeymoon period	Married couples, without children
2 The nurturing period	Childbearing families, eldest aged 0–2
3 The authority period	Families with pre-schoolchildren
4 The interpretative period	Families with schoolchildren
5 The interdependent period	Families with teenagers
6 The launching period	Families launching young adults
7 The empty-nest period	Middle-aged parents, no children at home
8 The retirement period	Ageing family members, retired

Source: Adapted from Duvall (1971).

Although undoubtedly influential, the family life cycle model has been criticized on a number of grounds:

- ▶ The model only describes 'traditional' nuclear families.
- ▶ The model takes no account of those who are single parents, who remarry, become divorced or widowed, or have a second family.

▶ By starting with marriage, the model takes no account of the overlap between families, and neither does it take into account the family from which the newly-weds have come.

- ▶ The model assumes families are isolated and self-sufficient.

There is much talk in the popular media about the decline of the

'traditional' nuclear family. It is certainly true that since 1980 family life in Western cities had been through a period of unprecedented change: there are fewer marriages, fewer children, more couples are getting divorced and more people living in single-person households. To illustrate, some of the major changes for the United Kingdom are shown below:

Changes in household composition in Britain, 1961–1998 (%)

Types of household	1961	1971	1981	1991	1998
Couples					
Dependent children	38	35	31	31	25
No dependent children	10	8	8	8	7
No children	26	27	26	28	28
Lone parents					
Dependent children	2	3	5	6	7
No dependent children	4	4	4	4	3
Multifamilies	3	1	1	1	1
One person	11	18	22	27	28

continued

The numbers of households with couples with dependent children fell from 38 per cent to 25 per cent between 1961 and 1998 while the number of lone parents with dependent children rose from 2 per cent to 7 per cent. The most striking change, however, has been the increase in one-person households. This change reflects a number of factors: a greater capacity for younger people to leave their parental home earlier; higher rates of divorce; a reduced preference for marriage and an increasingly aged population in which a high proportion

of people are widowed. However, most commentators suggest that it is far too early to talk about the decline of the traditional family. For example, in the United Kingdom in 1997 four-fifths of dependent children had two parents and 9 in 10 parents were married. Contacts between relatives seem to have declined but families still continue to be the main source of care for elderly family members when they are in need. Many writers have pointed out that there is little evidence of families doing less. Thus the percentage of elderly people in institutions in

Britain remained remarkably constant throughout the twentieth century.

Key concepts associated with the family life cycle (see Glossary)

Community care, domestic economy, domestication, family status, hetero-patriarchal environment, nuclear family, patriarchy, 'primary' relationships.

Links with other chapters

Chapter 10: Box 10.3 How to understand geographies of childhood and youth cultures

of late youth/early middle age on the periphery. It must be acknowledged, however, that such a pattern may be the result of factors other than those associated directly with the dynamic of household life courses. Households often undergo changes in their family status at the same time as they experience changes in income and social status, so it is dangerous to explain mobility exclusively in terms of one or the other.

Quite different factors may also be at work. Developers, for example, knowing that many households prefer to live among families similar to their own age and composition as well as socio-economic status, have reinforced family status segregation by building apartment complexes and master-planned communities for specific household types, with exclusionary covenants and contracts designed to keep out 'non-conforming' residents. It is thus quite common for entire condominiums to be inhabited by single people or by childless couples. The extreme form of this phenomenon is represented by Sun City, a satellite suburb of Phoenix, Arizona, where no resident under the age of 50 is allowed, and where the whole townscape is dominated by the design needs of the elderly, who whirr along the quiet streets in golf cart, travelling from one social engagement to the next. In contrast, much of the family status segregation in British cities with large amounts of public housing can

be attributed to the letting policies of local authorities, since eligibility for public housing is partly a product of household size (see pp. 125ff).

The decision to move

The first major decision in the residential mobility process – whether or not to move home – can be viewed as a product of the *stress* generated by discordance between household's needs, expectations and aspirations on the one hand and its actual housing conditions and environmental setting on the other (Figure 12.4).

People's housing *expectations* and *aspirations* are thought by behaviouralists to stem from the different frames of reference that people adopt in making sense of their lives and, in particular, in interpreting their housing situation. These frames of reference are the product of a wide range of factors that includes age, class background, religion, ethnic origin and past experience of all aspects of urban life. What they amount to is a series of lifestyles – privatized, familistic, cosmopolitan and so on – each with a distinctive set of orientations in relation to housing and residential location. Behaviouralists recognize three traditional lifestyle orientations in urban cultures: family, career and consumption.

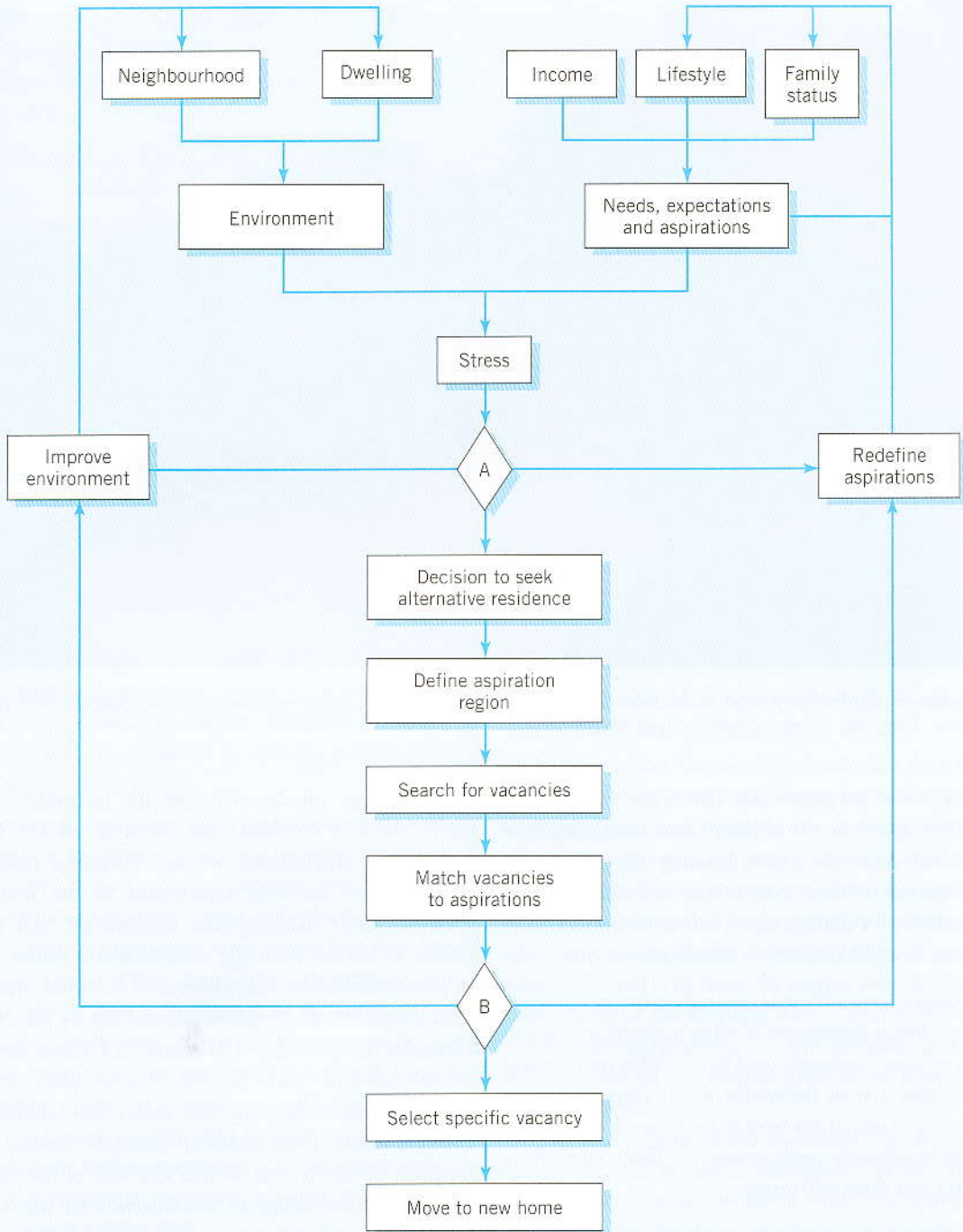


Figure 12.4 A model of residential mobility.

Source: Robson (1975), p. 33.



The zone of high family status and conspicuous consumption: upper-middle-class suburban homes in McLean, Virginia. Photo Credit: Paul Knox.

- 1 *Family-oriented* people are also home centred and tend to spend much of their spare time with their children. As a result, their housing orientations are dominated by their perceptions of their children's needs for play space, a clean, safe environment, proximity to child clinics and school, and so on.
- 2 *Careerists* have a lifestyle centred on career advancement. Since movement is often a necessary part of this process, careerists tend to be highly mobile; and since they are, by definition, status conscious, their housing orientations tend to be focused on prestige neighbourhoods appropriate to their jobs, their salary and their self-image.
- 3 *Consumerists* are strongly oriented towards enjoying the material benefits and amenities of modern urban society, and their housing preferences are therefore dominated by a desire to live in downtown areas, close to clubs, theatres, art galleries, discothèques, restaurants and so on.

This typology can be criticized for its middle-class tenor, since it overlooks the 'lifestyle' of the large number of households whose economic position reduces their housing aspirations to the level of survival. Many working-class households view their homes as havens from the outside world rather than as platforms for the enactment of a favoured lifestyle. This limitation, however, is allowed for by the behaviouralist model outlined in Figure 12.4. Quite simply, households with more modest incomes are expected to aspire only to housing that meets their minimum absolute needs. These needs are generally held to be a function of family size, so that the idea of life course related mobility plugs in conveniently to the behaviouralist model without equating stress automatically with mobility.

Whatever the household's expectations and aspirations may be, the crucial determinant of the decision to move is the intensity of the stress (if any) generated as a result of the difference between these and its actual

circumstances. The point where tolerable stress becomes intolerable strain will be different for each household but, once it is reached (at point 'A' on Figure 12.4) the household must decide between three avenues of behaviour:

- 1 *Environmental improvement.* This includes a wide range of activities, depending on the nature of the stressors involved. Small dwellings can be enlarged with an extension, cold dwellings can have central heating, double glazing and wall cavity insulation installed, dilapidated dwellings can be rewired and redecorated, and over-large dwellings can be filled by taking in lodgers. Neighbourhood or 'situational' stressors can also be countered in various ways: inaccessibility to shops and amenities, for example, can be tackled through the purchase of a car or by petitioning the local authority to provide better bus services. Environmental degradation and intrusive land users can be tackled through residents' associations and action committees; and undesirable neighbours can be harassed or ostracized. As with other aspects of residential behaviour, these strategies vary in their appeal according to household circumstances. Owner-occupiers, for example, are much more likely to opt for neighbourhood activism than renters.
- 2 *Lowering aspirations.* This is an alternative means of coming to terms with existing housing conditions. It appears to be a common strategy, since survey data show that for every household which moves there are two or three more who report that they would like to move if they could. Lowering aspirations may involve a change in lifestyle or a reformulation of plans: the decision to have children may be deferred, for example. More commonly it is simply a psychological matter of 'dissonance reduction' – learning to like what one has and to become indifferent to what one knows one cannot get. Not surprisingly, the older people get, the more proficient they become at dissonance reduction.
- 3 *Residential relocation.* This, as we have seen, is the course chosen by a large minority of households. The decision to move, however, leads to a second important area of locational behaviour: the search for and selection of a new residence.

The search for a new residence

Whether the decision to move is voluntary or involuntary, all relocating households must go through the procedure of searching for suitable vacancies and then deciding upon the most appropriate new home. The chief interest of geographers in this procedure lies in the question of whether it is spatially biased and, if so, whether it is biased in different ways for different groups of households. In other words, do spatially biased search procedures contribute to the changing social ecology? Although information on the way people behave in looking for a new home is rather fragmentary, the general process is conveniently encompassed within the decision-making framework of the behavioural model (Figure 12.4). Accordingly, it is useful to break household behaviour down into three stages:

- 1 the specification of criteria for evaluating vacancies;
- 2 the search for dwellings that satisfy these criteria;
- 3 the final choice of a new dwelling.

Specifying the desiderata of a new home

In behaviouralist terms, the household's first step in coping with the problem of acquiring and organizing information about a potential new dwelling is to define, consciously or subconsciously, its *aspiration region*. Quite simply, this is a conception of the limits of acceptability that a household is prepared to entertain as an alternative to its current accommodation. These limits may be defined in terms of the desired *site* characteristics – attributes of the dwelling itself – and/or the desired *situational* characteristics – the physical and social environment of the neighbourhood, its proximity to schools, shops, etc.

The lower limits of the aspiration region are commonly defined by the characteristics of the dwelling the household wants to leave, while the upper limits are set by the standards to which the household can reasonably aspire. In many cases these will be determined by income constraints, but there are important exceptions: some householders, for example, may not want to take on a large garden, regardless of house price; others may rule out affordable dwellings in certain areas

because the neighbourhood does not conform with their desired lifestyle.

In general, the criteria used by households in specifying their aspiration region reflect their motivations in deciding to move. Living space, tenure, dwelling amenities, environmental quality and social composition are among the more frequently cited criteria. Interior aspects of the dwelling, the social characteristics of the neighbourhood and accessibility to various facilities are more important in attracting people to a new home than in propelling them away. It also appears that movers of different types tend to differ quite a lot in the criteria they use. Households moving to single-family houses are more likely to be concerned with situational characteristics than those moving to apartments, for example. Households moving to suburban houses tend to be particularly concerned with the layout of the dwelling and its potential as an investment, whereas for those moving to downtown houses the aesthetics of dwelling style and the neighbourhood environment tend to be more important criteria.

The existence of differently conceived aspiration regions is, of course, a function of the different needs and aspirations that prompt households to move in the first place. Their significance to the relocation process lies not only in the consequent differences in households' evaluation of particular housing opportunities, but also in the fact that households set out from the very start to look for vacancies with quite different housing goals in mind.

Searching for vacancies

The general objective of the search procedure is to find the right kind of dwelling, at the right price, in the time available. It must be acknowledged that there are some households that do not have to search deliberately because their decision to move has come after accidentally discovering an attractive vacancy. These 'windfall' moves may account for as many as 20 per cent of all intra-urban moves. The majority of movers, though, must somehow organize themselves into finding a suitable home within a limited period of deciding to relocate.

Most households organize the search procedure in locational terms, focusing attention on particular

neighbourhoods that are selected on the basis of their perceived *situational* characteristics and the household's evaluation of the probability of finding vacancies satisfying their *site* criteria. Moreover, faced with the problem of searching even a limited amount of space, it is natural that households will attempt to further reduce both effort and uncertainty by concentrating their search in areas that are best known and most accessible to them.

The upshot is that households concentrate their house-hunting activities within a limited search space that is spatially biased by their familiarity with different districts. In behaviouralist terminology, this search space is a subset of a more general awareness space, which is usually regarded as a product of:

- ▶ people's activity space or action space (the sum of all the places with which people have regular contact as a result of their normal activities); and
- ▶ information from secondary sources such as radio, television, newspapers and even word of mouth.

Both elements are subject to a mental filtering and coding that produces a set of imagery which constitutes the operational part of the individual's awareness space. The subset of this space that constitutes the search space is simply the area (or areas) that a household feels to be relevant to its aspiration region, and it is spatially biased because of the inherent bias in both activity spaces and mental maps.

It follows that *different subgroups of households, with distinctive activity spaces and mental maps, will tend to exhibit an equally distinctive spatial bias in their search behaviour*. In particular, we may expect the more limited activity spaces and more localized and intensive images of the home area to restrict the search space of low-income households to a relatively small area centred on the previous home, while more mobile, higher-income households will have a search space that is more extensive but focused on the most familiar sector of the city between home and workplace.

The *information sources* used to find vacant dwellings within the search space can also exert a significant spatial bias. Since different types of households tend to rely on different sequences and combinations of sources, this results in a further process of sociospatial sorting. Overall, the most frequently used sources of

information about housing vacancies are newspaper and online advertisements, real estate agents, friends and relatives, and personal observation of 'for sale' signs – although their relative importance and effectiveness seems to vary somewhat from one city to another.

Each of these information sources tends to be biased in a different way. Personal observation, for example, will be closely determined by people's personal activity space, while the quantity and quality of information from friends and relatives will depend a lot on social class and the structure of the searcher's social networks. Real estate agents also exert a considerable spatial bias in their role as mediators of information. This has been shown to operate in two ways: first, each business tends

to specialize in limited portions of the housing market in terms of both price and area; second, while most estate agents have a fairly accurate knowledge of the city-wide housing market, they tend to overrecommend dwellings in the area in which they are most experienced in selling and listing accommodation and with which they are most familiar. As a result, households that are dependent on real estate agents for information are using a highly structured and spatially limited information source. The critical issue in the present context, however, is *the relative importance and effectiveness of different information sources for different households*.

Accessibility to information sources is also related to another important issue affecting residential behaviour:

Box 12.3

Key thinkers in urban social geography – Ron Johnston

Ron Johnston deserves a special mention in any book on urban social geography for one simple reason – no one else has written more on the topic. For over 40 years he has produced a torrent of books and articles, an outpouring that shows no signs of diminishing (contrast Johnston, 1971, with Johnston *et al.*, 2004; see also Box 8.3).

Ron Johnston's work reflects the enormous shifts in the character of urban social geography over the past four decades. For example, in his early work he was one of the new breed of quantitative geographers who linked multivariate studies of city structure to the empirical traditions of the Chicago School of human ecology via the methodology of 'factorial ecology' (Johnston, 1971). A little later he adapted behavioural notions to the study of residential mobility in cities, linking mental maps with migration patterns. Subsequently, he linked urban change with the traditions of political economy, focusing in particular upon local political systems (Johnston, 1978).

Despite all his writings on urban social geography, Johnston is perhaps best acknowledged for his extensive contributions to two other fields. First, for his work on political geography (e.g. Johnston *et al.*, 2001) and, second, and perhaps even more importantly from the perspective of geography, for his charting of the evolution of the subject in the second half of the twentieth century. This latter project has been manifest most prominently in *Geography and Geographers: Anglo-American human geography since 1945*, first published in 1979 and now into its sixth edition (now co-authored with James Sidaway, 2004).

Key concepts associated with Ron Johnston (see Glossary)

De jure territories, factorial ecology, jurisdictional partitioning, segregation.

Further reading

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Johnston, R., Poulsen, M. and Forrest, J. (2004) The comparative study of ethnic residential segregation in the USA, 1980–2000, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 95, 550–69

Links with other chapters

Chapter 4: Studies of factorial ecology

Chapter 8: Box 8.3 Changing patterns of segregation in the United States; Box 8.6 How does ethnic residential segregation vary across Western nations?

the problem of *search barriers*. There are two important aspects of this issue: barriers that raise the costs of searching or gathering information, and barriers that explicitly limit the choice of housing units or locations available to households. Factors related to search costs include, for example, lack of transportation for searching and lack of childcare facilities while searching, as well as lack of knowledge about specific information channels. Factors that limit housing choice include financial constraints, discrimination in the housing market, and the housing quality standards of rent assistance programmes.

Time constraints

The differential use and effectiveness of different information sources for different households clearly serves to increase the degree of sociospatial sorting arising from residential mobility, while at the same time making it more complex. Another important compounding factor in this sense is the constraint of *time* in the search procedure. Both search space and search procedures are likely to alter as households spend increasing amounts of time and money looking for a new home. When time starts to run out, the search strategy must change to ensure that a home will be found. Anxiety produced by a lack of success may result in a modification of the household's aspiration region, a restriction of their search space and a shift in their use of information sources; and the pressure of time may lead people to make poor choices.

On the other hand, the longer the search goes on, the greater the household's knowledge of the housing market. Each household therefore has to balance the advantages of searching and learning against the costs – real and psychological – of doing so. Survey data in fact show a consistent tendency for the majority of households to seriously consider only a few vacancies (usually only two or three) before selecting a new home, an observation that may appear to undermine the utility of developing elaborate models and theories of search behaviour. Nevertheless, this phenomenon can itself be explained with a behaviouralist framework: households are able to reduce the element of uncertainty in their decision making by restricting serious consideration to only a few vacancies. Moreover, most

households begin with an aspiration region that is quite narrowly defined (either because of income constraints or locational requirements), so that what appears to be an inhibited search pattern is in fact a logical extension of the decisions formulated in the preceding stage of the search procedure.

Choosing a new home

Households that find two or more vacancies within their aspiration region must eventually make a choice. Theoretically, this kind of choice is made on the basis of household *utility functions* that are used to give a subjective rating to each vacancy. In other words, vacancies are evaluated in terms of the weighted sum of the attributes used to delineate the aspiration region. These weights reflect the relative importance of the criteria used to specify the aspiration region, and so they will vary according to the preferences and predilections of the household concerned.

In practice, however, the constraints of time, coupled with the limitations of human information-processing abilities and a general lack of motivation, mean that a real choice of the kind implied in behaviouralist theory is seldom made: people are happy to take any reasonable vacancy, so long as it does not involve a great deal of inconvenience.

The behavioural model allows for those households that are unable to find vacancies within their aspiration region in the time available to them (point 'B' on Figure 12.4) to change their strategy to one of the two options open to them at point 'A' on the diagram: environmental improvement or a redefinition of aspirations.

Finally, we must recognize that there are many households in every city whose residential location is constrained to the point where behavioural approaches are of marginal significance. The most obvious subgroups are the working poor, the elderly, the very young, the unemployed and the transient. Other subgroups whose residential choice is heavily constrained include households who have special needs (e.g. large families, single-parent families, non-married couples, former inmates of institutions and 'problem' families), households that cannot relocate because of personal handicaps, family situations or medical needs; and households

that are unwilling to move because of the psychological stress of moving from familiar environments.

12.2 Residential mobility and neighbourhood change

Although the behavioural approach provides important insights into the spatial implications of mobility, the emphasis on individual decision making tends to divert attention from the aggregate patterns of neighbourhood change that result as similar households make similar choices. In this section, therefore, some consideration is given to the macro-scale generalizations that have been advanced about processes of mobility and neighbourhood change.

One scheme that has already been introduced and discussed is the zonal patterning of socio-economic status associated with the sequence of invasion–succession–dominance postulated by Burgess (1926) in his classic model of ecological change. The dynamic of this model, it will be recalled, was based on the pressure of low-status in-migrants arriving in inner-city areas. As this pressure increases, some families penetrate surrounding neighbourhoods, thus initiating a chain reaction whereby the residents of each successively higher-status zone are forced to move further out from the centre in order to counter the lowering of neighbourhood status.

Notwithstanding the criticisms of ecological theory per se, with its heavy reliance on biotic analogy, the concept of invasion–succession–dominance provides a useful explanatory framework for the observed sequence of neighbourhood change in cities where rapid urban growth is fuelled by large-scale in-migration of low-status families. The classic example, of course, was Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s, although many of the industrial cities in Britain had undergone a similar process of neighbourhood change during the nineteenth century. More recently, the flow of immigrants to London, Paris and larger Australian cities such as Melbourne and Sydney and the flow of *gastarbeiter* to the industrial cities of north-western Europe has generated a sequence of change in some neighbourhoods

that also fits the invasion/succession model. Nevertheless, this model is of limited relevance to most modern cities, since its driving force – the inflow of low-status migrants – is of diminishing importance; the bulk of in-migrants is now accounted for by middle-income families moving from a suburb in one city to a similar suburb in another.

High-status movement, filtering and vacancy chains

An alternative view of neighbourhood change and residential mobility stems from Homer Hoyt's (1939) **sectoral model** of urban growth and socio-economic structure. Hoyt's ideas were derived from a detailed study of rental values in 142 US cities that was undertaken in order to classify neighbourhood types according to their mortgage lending risk. This study led him to believe that the key to urban residential structure is to be found in the behaviour of high-status households. High-status households, he argued, pre-empt the most desirable land in a growing city, away from industrial activity.

With urban growth, the high-status area expands axially along natural routeways, in response to the desire among the well-off to combine accessibility with suburban living. This sectoral movement is reinforced by a tendency among 'community leaders' to favour non-industrial waterside sites and higher ground; and for the rest of the higher-income groups to seek the social cachet of living in the same neighbourhood as these *prominenti*. Over time, further sectoral development occurs as the most prominent households move outwards to new housing in order to maintain standards of exclusivity. In the wake of this continual outward movement of high-status households, the housing they vacate is occupied by middle-status households whose own housing is in turn occupied by lower-status households (a process termed **filtering**). At the end of this chain of movement, the vacancies created by the lowest-status groups are either demolished or occupied by low-status in-migrants. Subsequently, as other residential areas also expand outwards, the sectoral structure of the city will be preserved, with zonal components emerging as a secondary element because of variations in the age and condition of the housing stock.

Box 12.4

Key trends in urban social geography – The growth of transnational urbanism

Transnational urbanism is a term coined by Michael Peter Smith to encapsulate contemporary forms of urbanism resulting from globalization. In particular, the term relates to changing patterns of immigration into major 'world cities' such as London, New York and Los Angeles. In the past migrants were thought of as either temporary (sending back income to their families in their country of origin) or else permanent (and thus tending to sever ties with their country of birth, and often assimilating into the country of residence). However, increasingly migrants tend to be semi-permanent, maintaining links with more than one nation. Such divided loyalties are enhanced by new forms of global communication that permit media in many languages to be sent widely around the world (e.g. multilanguage cable and satellite television systems).

The controversial futurologist Ohmae summed this up in his book on *The End of the Nation-State* (1995) as follows (p. 35):

There is a genuinely cross-border civilization nurtured by exposure to common technologies and sources of information, in which horizontal linkages within the same generation in different parts of the world are stronger

than traditional vertical linkages between generations in particular parts of it.

Transnational migration often involves two types of workers at extreme ends of the social spectrum. On the one hand there are the highly skilled managerial, scientific and technological elites who work for major corporations, educational institutions, medical facilities and governmental bodies. At the other extreme there are the relatively low-paid workers who engage in employment that is often unpopular in the host nation (or at lower wages than the indigenous workers are prepared to tolerate) – cleaning, restaurant work, taxi driving, etc. However, given increasing labour shortages in many Western societies, many transnational migrants are taking up intermediate-level occupations such as nurses, plumbers and electricians.

When transnational migrants display structural rather than behavioural assimilation, they may cluster, displaying 'ethnoscapes'.

Key concepts associated with transnational urbanism (see Glossary)

Behavioural assimilation, diaspora, ethnoscape, global cities, structural assimilation, world cities.

Further reading

- Levitt, P. and Khagram, S. (eds) (2007) *The Transnationalism Reader* Routledge, London
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- Rofe, M. (2003) 'I want to be global': theorizing the gentrifying class as a global elite, *Urban Studies* 40, 2511–26
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Links with other chapters

- Chapter 1: Box 1.3 Growing cosmopolitanism in Western cities: the example of London
- Chapter 2: Globalization: knowledge economies and the informational city; Box 2.4 Manuel Castells
- Chapter 8: Box 8.1 The Latinization of US cities
- Chapter 12: Box 12.1 The growth of Eastern European communities in UK towns and cities

The validity of Hoyt's sectoral model has been much debated. Empirical studies of the emerging pattern of elite residential areas and tests of the existence of sectoral gradients in socio-economic status have provided a good deal of general support for the spatial configuration of Hoyt's model, although the relative dominance of sectoral over zonal components in urban structure is by no means a simple or universal phenomenon.

It is the *mechanism* of neighbourhood change implied in Hoyt's model that is of interest here, however. The basis of this mechanism is the chain of moves initiated by the construction of new dwellings for the wealthy, resulting in their older properties filtering down the social scale while individual households filter up the housing scale. In order for this filtering process to operate at a sufficient level to have any real

impact on urban structure, there has to be more new construction than that required simply to replace the deteriorating housing of the elite.

According to Hoyt, this will be ensured by the *obsolescence* of housing as well as its physical deterioration. For the rich, there are several kinds of obsolescence that may trigger a desire for new housing. Advances in kitchen technology and heating systems and the innovation of new luxury features such as swimming pools, saunas and jacuzzis may cause 'functional obsolescence', while more general social and economic changes may cause obsolescence of a different kind: the trend away from large families combined with the relative increase in the cost of domestic labour, for example, has made the mansion something of a white elephant.

Changes in design trends may also cause obsolescence – 'style obsolescence' – in the eyes of those who can afford to be sensitive to architectural fads and fashions. Finally, given a tax structure that allows mortgage repayments to be offset against taxable income, dwellings may become 'financially obsolescent' as increases in household income and/or inflation reduce the relative size of mortgage repayments (and therefore of tax relief).

Driven on to new housing by one or more of these factors, the wealthy will thus create a significant number of vacancies that the next richest group will be impelled to fill through a desire for a greater quantity and/or quality of housing. This desire can be seen not only as the manifestation of a general preference for better housing but also as a result of the influence of changing housing needs associated with the family life cycle. In addition, the social and economic pressures resulting from proximity to the poorest groups in society may prompt those immediately above them to move as soon as the opportunity presents itself, either by moving into vacancies created by the construction of new housing for others or by moving out into subdivisions specially constructed for the lower-middle classes.

Obstacles to filtering

In practice, however, the dynamics of the housing market are rather more complex than this. To begin

with, vacancy chains may start in other ways than the construction of new housing. A substantial proportion of vacancies arise through the subdivision of dwelling units into flats and the conversion of non-residential property to residential uses. Even more occur through the death of a household, through the move of an existing household to share accommodation with another, and through emigration outside the city.

Similarly, vacancy chains may be ended in several ways other than the demolition of the worst dwellings or their occupation by poor in-migrants. Some vacancies are rendered ineffective through conversion to commercial use, while others may be cancelled out by rehabilitation or conversion schemes that involve knocking two or more dwellings into one. Vacancy chains will also end if the household that moves into a vacant dwelling is a 'new' one and so leaves no vacancy behind for others to fill. This may arise through the marriage of a couple who had both previously been living with friends or parents, through divorced people setting up separate homes, or through the splitting of an existing household with, for example, a son or daughter moving out to their own flat.

The concept of filtering has important policy implications, since it can be argued that facilitating new house building for higher-income groups will result in an eventual improvement in the housing conditions of the poor through the natural process of filtering, without recourse to public intervention in the housing market. This argument has a long history, dating to the paternalistic logic of nineteenth-century housing reformers who used it to justify the construction of model housing for the 'industrious' and 'respectable' working classes rather than the poorest sections of society to whom their efforts were ostensibly directed. Subsequently, it became the central plank of government housing policy in many countries. Up to the 1930s, Britain relied almost entirely on the filtering process to improve the housing conditions of the working classes, while it still remains the basis of US housing strategy. The effectiveness of such policies, however, depends on the length of the vacancy chains that are set in motion by the construction of new housing. Relatively few studies have been able to furnish detailed empirical evidence, and their results are rather inconclusive.

Vacancy chains

The evidence that is available seems to suggest that an upward filtering of households does arise from the construction of few homes for the wealthy. Nevertheless, closer inspection of the results shows that the benefits to poor families (in terms of vacant housing opportunities) are not in proportion to their numbers, *suggesting that filtering is unlikely to be an important agent of neighbourhood change in poor areas*. Moreover, the fact that a large proportion of the vacancy chains end through the formation of 'new' households while only a small proportion end through demolitions also suggests that the filtering mechanism rarely penetrates the lower spectrum of the housing market to any great extent.

In summary, filtering offers a useful but nevertheless partial explanation of patterns of neighbourhood change. Among the factors that can be identified as inhibiting the hypothesized sequence of movement arising from new high-status housing are:

- ▶ the failure of high-income housing construction to keep pace with the overall rate of new household formation and in-migration;
- ▶ the structure of income distribution which, since higher-income groups constitute a relatively small class, means that the houses they vacate in preference for new homes are demanded by a much larger group, thus maintaining high prices and suppressing the process of filtering;
- ▶ the inertia and non-economic behaviour of some households; this includes many of the behavioural patterns discussed above, although the most striking barrier to the filtering process is the persistence of elite neighbourhoods in symbolically prestigious inner-city locations;
- ▶ the existence of other processes of neighbourhood change – related to invasion/succession, household life courses, gentrification – whose dynamic is unrelated to the construction of new, high-income housing.

Chapter summary

- 12.1 Patterns of intra-urban residential mobility, though complex and varied, reveal a number of broad regularities. Moves of residence within cities are typically over short distances with a tendency to move outwards towards suburban areas. People move for a complex mixture of voluntary and involuntary reasons and the choice of new residence depends upon channels of information about vacancies and the housing opportunities at the time of the move.
- 12.2 The aggregate effects of residential mobility can have profound effects upon urban social geography. Whereas the Burgess concentric ring model suggests pressure from new migrants is the main 'push' for out-migration, Hoyt's sectoral model suggests that the 'pull' or filtering effect of properties vacated by the more affluent is the primary mechanism at work. There is some evidence for filtering but this is only a partial explanation for neighbourhood change.

Key concepts and terms

activity (or action) space
 aspiration region (or space)
 awareness space

filtering
 search space

sectoral model
 vacancy chain

Suggested reading

Residential mobility

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