

Relocation within the Urban Environment

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ABSTRACT.—Analysis of motives indicates that minimal consideration is given to the physical environment when urban households select from among alternative residential locations. There is a greater awareness of, and response to the economic and social conditions of the residential environment among movers. When the motivations of highly-educated white-collar professionals are correlated with their household characteristics and residency experience, few variables discriminate at all between those who view the physical environment as an important motive for relocation, and those who do not. The physical environment is cited more frequently (and considered more important) during the relocation process by owners of residences, rather than renters.

INTRA-URBAN RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY, the relocation of residents within their urban environment, is a behavioral process. Movers undertake a relocation based upon the perceived needs of their households; relocations are made in order to achieve some goal, to acquire some amenity at the new residence, or to avoid disamenity at the former residence.

The mobility process operates through the appraisal of alternative residential locations by the mover; as such, the mobility process is an adaptive mechanism within the urban environment. The motivations for relocating, as expressed by the movers themselves, are the best indication of both the causes of mobility and the residents' perceptions of the urban environment.

The mobility motives of households questioned in this study yields a perception of the city as a *nonphysical*, socioeconomic environment. The physical environment of the city is cited far less frequently as a motive for relocating, than are other social and economic considerations. And such physical environmental motives are usually couched in avoidance terms; that is, households which cite a physical environmental motive for relocating tend to seek an escape from the urban environment.

Thus, not only are alternative physical environments in the city not sought, they are not perceived to exist.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Previous studies of residential mobility suggest that the rate of mobility is greater among families whose heads-of-household are highly educated and employed within white-collar professions (Rossi 1955, Simmons 1968). The faculty members at the State University of New York at Binghamton were selected for examination as a significantly mobile and relatively informed study group.

Faculty to be investigated were selected via a random-stratified sampling procedure. The faculty members' names were grouped by university rank, and a random sample of faculty names was selected from within each rank (using a random-number generating computer program). The random-stratified sampling insures the selection of a study group with varying incomes, ages, and household characteristics.

A personal interview was conducted with each of the faculty members sampled. Twelve percent of the faculty were interviewed; those interviewed were involved in a total of 100 residential relocations within the Triple Cities area (the Binghamton/Johnson City/

Endicott area). The data base of the study thus consisted of 100 separate moves.

The interviews solicited information concerning both the respondents' household characteristics and mobility motives for each of their moves within the Triple Cities area. The respondents were asked to explain their motives for selecting a new residential location (rather than for vacating their previous residence).

Having completely stated their mobility motives, the respondents were asked to rank their motives according to their order of importance; they were ranked as the primary, secondary, and tertiary motives for their moves. Frequency tables of the respondents' primary, secondary, tertiary, and total motives were constructed; the tables arrayed both the individual motives and groups of related motives.

The mobility motives were then scaled (individually and by groups) along a continuum of what might be described as more- to less-functional motivations (materialistic to esthetic). The motivations thus scaled were compared to the variations in the background variables such as age of head-of-household, size of household, etc. The comparison was made by using a simple nonparametric correlation technique — Cross-Tabulation (the BMD08D program of the UCLA Biomedical Programs series).

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE AND THEIR RELOCATIONS

The study group consisted of a relatively mobile set of households. As highly-educated white-collar professionals they exhibited a relatively high mobility. And as relatively young married households of small size they also exhibited a mobility potential greater than the average, because they were in relatively early stages of their life-cycles (*Rossi 1955*).

In addition, the sample households were relatively recent arrivals to the

Triple Cities. Although their previous rental and ownership experience was considerable, their experience within the Triple Cities area was far less substantial. Their knowledge of the Triple Cities' residential environment, therefore, may have been incomplete; and this fact may have contributed to additional relocations within the area.

Indicative of their relatively recent arrival to the Triple Cities area, twice as many of the households utilized *nonpersonal* information sources for relocating (such as newspapers and realtors) as did personal information sources (such as friends and colleagues). Marrieds were particularly more dependent upon nonpersonal information sources than were singles; although the dependence upon nonpersonal sources decreased with the age of the head-of-household.

The respondents' dependence upon nonpersonal information sources was far greater than that characteristic of the more general mover population (*Rossi 1955*). Thus, many of the mover households undertook relocations based upon information obtained from others; they made residential decisions based upon a combination of both their own and others' perceptions of the urban environment.

The information search which precedes a mobility decision necessitates a time lag for most moves; there is time devoted to contemplating a move and time spent in searching for a new residence. Both the contemplation time and search time of the respondents in this study varied from no lag time (for spontaneous moves) to a period of 6 months. These lag times are typical of the general mover population (*Rossi 1955*).

The respondents were atypical of the general mover population in that their contemplation and search time *increased* with the number of relocations made. Contemplation and search time usually decrease with additional relocations, be-

cause of the improved knowledge a household commands of a particular urban environment with additional mobility experience.

A possible explanation for the reversal of this relationship is that a number of respondents were changing their housing tenure status (renters becoming purchasers); the tenure change would require a different set of information for decision-making, and there would be a greater time period needed to acquire that new information.

MOBILITY MOTIVES

The motives which prompt a household to relocate within a particular urban environment yield an understanding of the causes of residential mobility; they also render a portrayal of the movers' perceptions of the urban residential environment. Examination of the mobility motives cited by the respondents of this study suggests a lesser concern with and/or perception of the physical environment, and a greater concern with the socioeconomic environment of the city.

Considerable variation existed in the individual motives cited by respondents as their reason for selecting a new residence. Several motives, however, were cited quite frequently. The five most frequently cited motives encompassed two-thirds of the total reasons and three-quarters of the primary reasons for relocating (table 1).

The single most frequently cited motive was the availability of housing; that motive was cited most frequently as both a primary and overall reason for selecting a new residential location (table 1). Cost was also frequently expressed as a motive for site selection. And, when grouped together as a category of mobility motives (table 2), the combination of availability and cost (labeled "constraints") accounted for the largest single group of both primary and total mobility motives.

While frequently cited as mobility motives, housing availability and cost are actually constraints exerted upon a household's mobility potential, rather than active causal agents of mobility. A household, for example, feels compelled to rent or purchase a residence at a cost in line with its budgetary limits; it may, however, select among a range of housing alternatives at costs equal to or less than those limits. The cost of housing thus serves as a limitation upon the range of alternatives, rather than an actual motive for relocating.

The frequency with which availability and cost are cited as reasons for relocating says much about the respondents' perceptions of the urban environment. Their frequency of citation demonstrates the respondents' perception of an extremely constricted housing market — a scarcity of housing. That perceived scarcity is relative, however; the scarcity includes housing with charac-

Table 1.—Individual mobility motives most frequently cited [Expressed as a percentage of total motives]

Motives	Motive rankings			
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Total
Availability	24 (1)*	11 (3)	16 (2)	17 (1)
Cost	15 (3)	12 (2)	6 (4)	11 (4)
Age (newness)	—	—	6 (4)	—
Interior space	19 (2)	15 (1)	13 (3)	16 (2)
School district	8 (5)	10 (4)	—	7 (5)
Nearness to work	9 (4)	12 (2)	20 (1)	13 (3)
Summed percentages	75	60	61	64

*Order of frequency of motives within each ranking.

Table 2.—Categories of mobility motives cited [Expressed as a percentage of total motives]

Motive categories	Motive rankings			
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Total
Constraints	40 (1) *	24 (2)	23 (3)	29 (1)
Structural traits	27 (2)	26 (1)	24 (2)	27 (2)
Neighborhood traits	12 (3)	19 (4)	12 (4)	14 (4)
Locational traits	10 (5)	20 (3)	29 (1)	18 (3)
Physical environmental traits	11 (4)	11 (5)	12 (4)	12 (5)

*Order of frequency of motives within each ranking.

teristics deemed necessary by the respondents, rather than a scarcity of all housing. The exact nature of the scarce characteristics is, of course, unclear.

Citing availability as a motive for the selection of a new residential site may also suggest a relatively less complete information search and/or more limited action space. These possibilities are consistent with the relatively recent arrival of many respondents to the Triple Cities area.

Aside from the motives of availability and cost, the most frequently cited motives for new site selection were: internal space (number of rooms), nearness to work place, and school district of the residence (table 1). These motives do yield information concerning the nature and location of housing preferred by the respondents; the motives, however, do not delimit any specific type of location or any specifically preferred urban environment.

A complete range of variation in the internal space of residences can be found in most housing districts of a city. Likewise, school districts, though area-specific, are usually large enough to include an ample range of housing types and residential environments. And selecting a new location close to one's workplace enables the household to choose from a range of housing types and residential environments, by virtue of the variable direction of a residence from one's workplace.

The five most frequently cited mobility motives are, thus, of minimal

assistance in determining household preferences for specific urban environments. They do demonstrate the perceived needs of households and their reasons for relocating. They also yield insights into the general preferences of households for certain socioeconomic residential environments (such as type of education available for their children). But these motives yield little information concerning the preferences of the respondents for specific residential environments, particularly regarding the physical urban environment.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTAL MOBILITY MOTIVES

Physical environmental concerns are cited infrequently as the mobility motives of the respondents in this study. This suggests either a lack of concern with or a lack of perception of the physical urban environment and its variations.

The individual mobility motives demonstrated a variable, though minimal, concern with the urban physical environment. The physical environmental motives involved two basic concerns: the esthetics of a residence (expressed as preferences for a view, scenery or a wooded lot), and the preference for a nonurban, rural location. The most frequently cited single physical environmental motive was the desire for a scenic location, but that motive amounted to only 5 percent of the primary mobility motives (table 3).

When mobility motives were grouped

Table 3.—Physical environmental motives for household relocations
[Expressed as a percentage of total motives]

Motives	Motive rankings			
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Total
Rural preference	5	4	2	4
Scenery	4	4	4	4
Wooded	1	0	2	1
View	0	3	3	2
Esthetic	1	0	1	1
Summed percentages	11	11	12	12

into categories (table 2), the physical environmental motives appeared as the least frequently cited category of total motives — 12 percent — and as the second-last category of primary motives cited — 11 percent. Although including a very small percentage of total and primary mobility motives, the physical environmental category did compare favorably in frequency to other categories of motives; it was comparable to neighborhood traits and locational traits among the primary motives, and to neighborhood traits among the total motives.

The physical environmental characteristics of the urban environment are, therefore, the traits deemed least significant to the relocations of the respondents in this study. And those few physical environmental traits which are considered important concern primarily the esthetics of the residential site — a subjective concern, and a concern very much in vogue at the time of this study.

The only other physical environmental concern of significance to the respondents was the preference for a *nonurban*, rural residential location. That preference suggests an either/or logic in their decision-making; it demonstrates the respondents' perception of a noxious urban environment (*Wolpert 1966*) and a noxious environment of unvarying physical attributes.

The minimal expression of physical environmental motives for relocating is surprising in two respects. The respondents

of this study were afforded the opportunity to cite their secondary and tertiary mobility motives, as well as their primary concern for moving; in view of that opportunity, a greater expression of physical environmental motives was expected.

In addition, the Triple Cities area extends through a quite variable physical environment; it is a riverine environment which varies widely in its range of vegetal, physiographic, and atmospheric characteristics. The respondents were thus expected to voice their preferences for residential locations within that environment.

The substantial variation in the physical attributes of the urban environment within the Triple Cities is thus of little concern to the respondents' relocations. The respondents evidence no perception of the variations in elevation, slope, insolation, humidity, pollution levels, etc. that exist among the various residential districts of the Triple Cities area.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study indicate the desires and perceptions of highly-educated white-collar professionals as they relocate their residences within the urban environment. These households express a range of concerns related to their mobility.

Their greatest concern in relocating is with the state of the housing market; they express a very great concern with

the availability (and cost) of housing. That dramatic concern with housing availability and cost may result from a disparity between their perceived needs and their budgetary limitations; they may see themselves as belonging within certain residential districts (by virtue of the socioeconomic status of their profession), but may be unable to afford residences within those districts (because of their recent arrival to their profession with attendant starting salaries). Thus, their concern over housing availability may suggest a self-imposed constraint as the result of their stereotypical perceptions.

The mobility motives of the respondents also demonstrate their primary concern (aside from availability and cost) with the new residence itself and additional concern with other residential characteristics of relatively limited spatial extent. While neighborhood traits are cited as motives for the selection of new residential sites, those traits involve the evaluation of primarily adjacent properties together with the school system available — both concerns of relatively limited spatial dimensions. And, while relative location is cited as another motive for relocating, that concern involves the reduction of distance and travel time from the home to other locations — a concern intended to limit contacts away from the residential district. Thus there appears to be a decreasing importance attached to mobility motives as the spatial expression of those concerns increases — a decreasing importance from residence traits to neighborhood traits to concerns with some larger urban district.

The physical environmental motives expressed by the respondents of this study are also concerns of limited spatial extent. Aside from the desire for *non-urban* residential locations, the physical environmental motives focus upon the esthetics of the residential site itself — the vegetal cover, the outward view,

etc. And, while purchasers tend to mention site esthetics and rural preferences for relocating more than do renters, neither group of residents expresses a preference for the alternative physical environments existent within the Triple Cities area.

These findings suggest a lack of concern with the physical environmental characteristics which vary across the Triple Cities area: variations in such things as pollution levels, insolation, physiography, etc. That lack of concern may reflect a sincere feeling that physical environmental characteristics are of secondary importance to the relocation process; socioeconomic characteristics may be considered of greater importance. Alternatively, the movers may not perceive the urban environment as physically variable; urban residents may view the urban physical environment as spatially homogeneous.

Whichever the case, the results are the same. The urban physical environment *is* spatially variable, and that variability *should* be of concern to urban residents. Pollution levels, flood hazards, and a multitude of other physical environmental conditions all vary with the location of a residence within its urban environment; an understanding of that fact is basic to the health and safety of urban residents.

The findings of this study, therefore, point out the need for a greater educational effort by environmentalists (and others) aimed at urban residents. Whether urban residents remain unaware of the physical variations in the urban environment, or whether they are aware but unconcerned, the knowledge of the importance of those variations must be delivered to them. The improved knowledge that now exists concerning the spatial variations existent within urban physical environments is useless unless that knowledge is lent to all those who reside within that environment.

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