Chapter 4

Residential Satisfaction: Wellbeing through Housing

4. Residential Satisfaction: Wellbeing through Housing

Chapter Two outlined the social justice obligations that government and housing authorities have to public tenants in Australia. Due to these obligations, the South Australian Government, through the SAHT, has an obligation to equal, or preferably increase the residential satisfaction of forcibly relocated tenants. The achievement of equal or improved residential satisfaction requires that those administering the process of relocation have an understanding of the factors that create, and promote the outcome of residential satisfaction. This chapter surveys the literature and presents an understanding of residential satisfaction. This understanding will be applied in the construction of the residential relocation SDSS discussed later in the study.
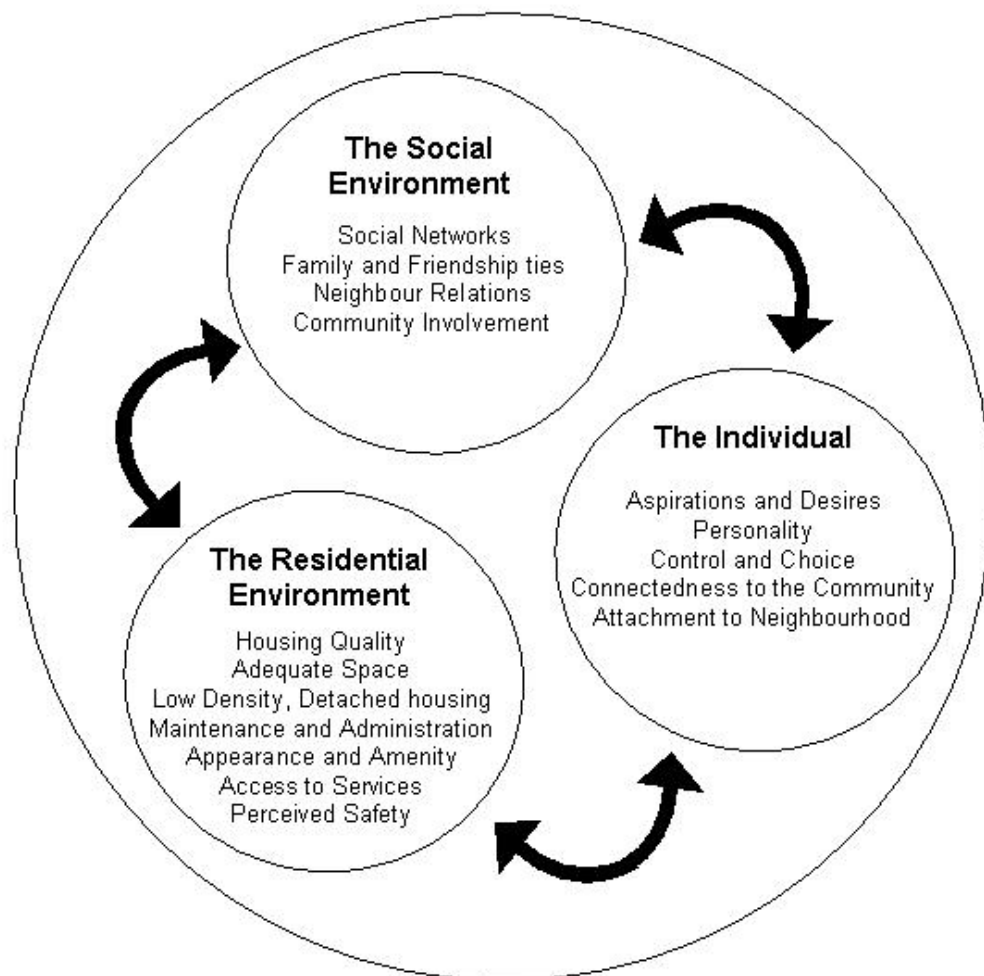
4.1. Residential Satisfaction

Residential satisfaction describes an 'end-state', where an individual or household is satisfied with the residential bundle that they have composed. This section surveys studies of residential satisfaction, bringing together a range of shelter and non-shelter components that are related to the formation of this satisfaction. Residential satisfaction is not one constant event or state; it is an outcome, perceived by an individual or household, that their housing bundle meets their needs and aspirations. Because residential satisfaction is based upon perception, the components required to attain it will necessarily be different in each case. Influencing this perception are factors such as aspirations, history, demographic characteristics, and the employment situation.

The formation of residential satisfaction is not simply based upon freedom from dissatisfaction - it is more complex. Residential dissatisfaction is a differently composed phenomenon, the sources of dissatisfaction are more likely to be universal "sources of discontent for everyone" (Marans and Rodgers, 1975, p. 346; also

Hourihan, 1984), while the sources of satisfaction are much more varied. Residential satisfaction can be conceived on three levels: the residential environment, the social environment, and individual characteristics. The three levels combine to form an individual residential satisfaction outcome. They are summarised in Figure 4.1 and will be discussed in turn in sections 4.1.1-4.1.3, following.

Figure 4.1: Summary of Model Residential Satisfaction Components

4.1.1. The Residential Environment

There is convincing evidence that the residential environment is highly important to the attainment of residential satisfaction (Lu, 1999; Troy, 1971 in Marans and Rodgers, 1975; Burby and Rohe, 1989; Weidemann *et al.*, 1982; Loo, 1986; Hourihan, 1984; Fuller, 1995; Schwirian and Schwirian, 1993; Tognoli, 1987; Fried,

1982; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995; Marans and Rodgers, 1975; Amerigo and Aragones, 1997; Bender *et al.*, 1997; Troy, 1971). This environment is composed of housing, the surrounding neighbourhood and its perceived quality, including the access to services that it provides.

Within the residential environment, the dwelling and the immediate surroundings of the yard are more influential, for many individuals, than the physical and social neighbourhood beyond the fence line. The immediate residential environment is the location for a large proportion of a household's existence, and for many individuals the greatest proportion of their lives is spent within it, especially the elderly. Tognoli (1987) provides a strong illustration of this perspective of residential satisfaction. In his paper, the home is portrayed as a safe place from which to "venture outside" and explore the neighbourhood. An early Australian study of residential satisfaction Troy (1971) also found the house to be more important than the surrounding physical environment. Similarly, Fried (1982) found that the quality of the dwelling was the most important element of residential satisfaction.

Satisfaction with housing varies greatly between individuals, but there are a number of housing features that tend to correlate with satisfaction. "Objective housing quality" (Fried, 1982) is critically important to general residential satisfaction (Lu, 1999; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995; Weidemann *et al.*, 1982; Marans and Rodgers, 1975), especially for older people (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995; Schwirian and Schwirian, 1993). Having adequate housing space is another major housing factor related to the formation of residential satisfaction (Loo, 1986; Lu, 1999; Schwirian and Schwirian, 1993). Interestingly, space is also important among older householders (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995; Commonwealth of Australia, 2000), challenging the assumption by many Australian public housing authorities that older households are more suitably housed in smaller housing. This assumption is based, most probably, on the fact that older households are likely to be smaller, and would find it difficult to maintain larger dwellings and yards. During the current research it was widely found that older tenants did prefer smaller yards for the above maintenance reason, but this preference was not transferable to dwelling size. The desire for space

is also reflected in the type of housing preferred by previous study populations. 'Detached' housing was most often associated with satisfaction in the important early study by Marans and Rodgers (1975). Tognoli (1987) presented a substantial list of authors who have also linked satisfaction with detached housing. It is likely that this overall preference for detached housing prevails today, and a recent study of housing satisfaction in two North American suburbs, by Day supports this view. She finds that respondents "prefer big detached houses with space between themselves and their neighbours" (2000, p. 265) Michelson draws a link between housing type and space, suggesting that a component of the explanation for residential satisfaction with detached housing is often the "private control of outside space" (1977, p. 54). This means that a private yard area is more likely to be part of a housing bundle containing detached housing. Fried (1982) also supports this 'desire for space' thesis; his findings show a lower proximity to neighbours to be positively associated with residential satisfaction. These findings are slightly less relevant to the public housing situation in South Australia where there is a lower residential density, and the majority of attached housing has private outside space.

Related to the general condition of the dwelling, and of significant importance to public renters, is the repeated finding that the level of maintenance and the quality of management and administration of rental housing are highly important to the formation of residential satisfaction (Burby and Rohe, 1989; Weidemann *et al.*, 1982; Fried, 1982). This was found to be relevant across all family types by Anthony *et al.* (1990), who found these maintenance and administrative factors to be commonly important for all.

Beyond the fence, perceptions of the physical quality of the neighbourhood have been measured in many different ways, but regardless of the indicator used (clean streets, green areas, commercial intrusion, clutter, quiet), all point to the physical quality of the neighbourhood being central to perceptions of residential satisfaction. Overwhelmingly, access to nature and green areas is found to be either highly important (Bender *et al.*, 1997), or the most important neighbourhood factor contributing to residential satisfaction (Bender *et al.*, 1997; Fried, 1982). Burby and

Rohe (1989, p. 131) also found that the related access to "outdoor recreational facilities", such as parks, was important. Interestingly, Shafer (1974) found that proximity to areas such as playgrounds and swimming pools had a negative effect on residential satisfaction. This is likely to be related to the decreased perception of safety surrounding these areas, they tend to be untended after daylight hours, and located away from the street. In addition to parks and other open green areas, good infrastructure, amenity (Weidemann et al., 1982), low housing density (Amerigo and Aragones, 1997; Loo, 1986), little 'commercial intrusion' (Loo, 1986), and a lack of clutter and noise (Bender et al., 1997; Loo, 1986; Hourihan, 1984) have also been found to contribute to satisfaction.

The access to services that a neighbourhood provides is also found in much of the literature to be important to residential satisfaction (Marans and Rodgers, 1975; Bender et al., 1997; Tognoli, 1987; Loo, 1986). Though varying between populations, shopping centres and schools (Bender et al., 1997), and fire, police, and rubbish collection (Tognoli, 1987), have been isolated as important services. In smaller Australian cities, the desire for access to a city centre (for example, Lee, 1978) reflects the desire for proximity to services. There is a research gap surrounding this issue of specific services that contribute to residential satisfaction, supporting a need to further investigate what services are actually important, especially for populations with reduced access to transport such as public housing tenants. This question will be investigated from the perspective of mobility and locational choice in subsequent chapters, using data from the Australian population and the study population, to show what services Australian populations desire access to. These findings will contribute to an understanding of the composition of residential satisfaction, based on the premise that if such services are selected as important locational needs, then they will contribute positively to residential satisfaction.

The perceived safety of an area affects the freedom and comfort that residents have within it, and hence the potential wellbeing that can be achieved. Perceived safety within the home and neighbourhood has a well-established relationship with the formation of residential satisfaction (Vaarady and Preiser, 1998; Loo, 1986; Tognoli,

1987; Weidemann *et al.*, 1982; Fried, 1982; Amerigo and Aragones, 1997; Bruin and Cook, 1997; Greenberg, 1999; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995). Greenberg found that "crime and physical deterioration are the most critical factors associated with poor neighbourhood quality" (p. 607), and they act negatively on residential satisfaction. Interestingly, when Burby and Rohe (1989) tested components of residential satisfaction, their multiple regression analysis showed that perception of crime in the neighbourhood and fear of crime were not significantly related to residential satisfaction. They also present a long list of other studies that have also made this conclusion. Conversely, Schwirian and Schwirian (1993) tested the perceived level of safety for its contribution to residential satisfaction, while it was significant; it wasn't directly of importance in the explanation.

4.1.2. The Social Environment

The contribution of the social environment to the residential satisfaction of individuals and households is significant. The social environment comprises the relationships, interactions, and social activities that an individual or household participates in, as well as those that surround them in the immediate neighbourhood. Social ties bind people to a neighbourhood, providing social interaction, activity, and support (Fried and Gleicher, 1970). Social relationships can compensate for poor physical conditions, especially in disadvantaged areas (Hourihan, 1984). Resources can be pooled and household activities such as child minding and transport can be shared. Healthy social networks overlap and include many people so that individuals get access to varied goods, experience, and interaction. Many writers (for example Tognoli, 1987; Amerigo and Aragones, 1997; Fried and Gleicher, 1970) believe that social relationships are more important to residential satisfaction than the physical environment of the house and neighbourhood. This fact is important for any consideration of urban regeneration, because though problems with the physical environment are often addressed, the social environment is at risk of being left to fix itself. At the individual level, this risks lowering the extent of residential satisfaction among the regeneration area's population. Without strong social networks, levels of

residential satisfaction are likely to be reduced (Hourihan, 1984; Fried and Gleicher, 1970; Rent and Rent, 1978; Tognoli, 1987; Loo, 1986).

Family and friendship ties are clearly the most important local social relationships. Family attachments, especially, increase residential satisfaction (Hourihan, 1984), and with increasing numbers of familial ties, the attachment to the residential area has been shown to increase (Fried and Gleicher, 1970). The type of familial relationship is also significant, with nuclear ones being the most important. Tognoli (1987) found that friendship ties were also highly important to residential satisfaction; in addition neighbour relationships are an important local social tie (Weidemann *et al.*, 1982; Fried, 1982; Marans and Rodgers, 1975; Rent and Rent, 1978; Amerigo and Aragones, 1997). Often these friend and neighbour relationships are more useful in the day-to-day context, providing social interaction and support. The relationship with neighbours is especially important to those with reduced mobility, such as older people (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995). At this level, "the world that becomes increasingly important is the one that can be accessed most easily" (Schwirian and Schwirian, 1993, p.285), that is, the social world at the edge of the fence line. Mullins *et al.* (2001) caution that little is known about the way that strong and weak social ties affect wellbeing. While strong ties, such as family appear most important, they find evidence that weak ties may also be as important for wellbeing.

A positive social environment is not composed only of individual interactions, such as relationships with neighbours or family, but it is also dependent on the degree "of integration or involvement of an individual in society" (Rent and Rent, 1978, p. 464). Numerous studies have mirrored the importance of community involvement in explaining residential satisfaction (Amerigo and Aragones, 1997; Weidemann *et al.*, 1982; Fried, 1982; Greenberg, 1999). Greenberg suggests that this interaction increases the perception of neighbourhood quality, and it is this perception of quality that then creates residential satisfaction. It is also important to note that satisfaction does not increase with the level of interaction and community involvement for all study populations; Fried (1982) found that 'privacy and social distance' were valued over interaction. In this study, increased interaction was found to be associated with

decreased residential satisfaction. At the extreme level of interaction, Bruin and Cook (1997) found that the existence of local activism was negatively related to residential satisfaction.

There is a well-established link between the level of heterogeneity in a neighbourhood and the residential satisfaction of its residents. Though a major United States social program, the Moving to Opportunity program is based upon a belief in the link, it is still controversial. Under the program, families from neighbourhoods of concentrated disadvantage are places in suburbs with greater advantage. This idea of 'seeding' people with less resources among those with more is believed to have benefits for all including; increased access to jobs, access to better quality schools, greater educational retention, reduced fear of crime, thereby increasing residential satisfaction. The host communities are also said to benefit, through the enrichment to their lives, from exposure to social diversity, but as Xavier DeSouza Briggs memorably states, "proximity does not a neighbour make" (Briggs, 1997a, p 197). As established earlier, the social dimension of residence is keenly important to the formation of residential satisfaction, by placing individuals in a new location, it cannot be expected that they will automatically be 'tied' in. While neighbouring and social networks are an important cause of residential satisfaction, their creation is more complex than mere proximity. Even if a person is relocated to an area of dense employment networks, unless they are part of that network they will still find securing employment difficult. In addition, there is the argument that by relocating families away from disadvantaged areas, out to the suburbs, that they are actually being moved away from the geographic location of jobs, thereby making them both socially and geographically isolated from employment (Burby and Rohe, 1989, Briggs, 1997b)

The relationship between residential satisfaction and the heterogeneity of the population is indirect (Burby and Rohe, 1989) and possibly only relevant to studies sited within populations of concentrated disadvantage, such as the large, public housing estates of North America. While the dispersal of a disadvantaged population from the homogeneity of a public housing estate throughout more advantaged, suburban areas was found to increase social interaction (Varady and Preiser, 1998), this

is probably related to reduced fear of crime. In this study, tenants were more open to social interaction when they felt safe. Increased access to employment is another well-documented effect of dispersal on residential satisfaction (Burby and Rohe, 1989). These arguments for heterogeneity are probably less relevant in the Australian situation, where the concentrations of disadvantaged populations, and the actual level of disadvantage, is significantly lower, as are the extreme levels of crime in these US study populations. Nevertheless, there are lessons to be learnt for the Australian case. One study that used a national sample, rather than one focussed specifically on a disadvantaged population, was Marans and Rogers (1975). They investigated the value of homogeneity among residents from a national sample, and found that increased homogeneity was much more likely to be associated with higher residential satisfaction. Considered objectively, the relationship of residential satisfaction to the social heterogeneity of a population is more likely to be a reflection of proximity to concentrated disadvantage. For those who are disadvantaged, their residential satisfaction is higher when they are dispersed among more advantaged populations, and for more advantaged populations, their residential satisfaction is more likely associated with the absence of local disadvantage.

4.1.3. The Individual

The subjective environment is also highly important to understanding residential satisfaction, a number of authors suggest that subjective elements contribute most to residential satisfaction outcomes (Lu, 1999; Hourihan, 1984; Schwirian and Schwirian, 1993). This subjective environment is made up of individuals' aspirations and desires (Lu, 1999; Loo, 1986); personality and perception (Amerigo and Aragones, 1997); and the degree of control that they feel they have over their residential situation (Schwirian and Schwirian, 1993; Bruin and Cook, 1997; Bird, 1975).

Aspirations and desires contribute strongly to the subjective formation of residential satisfaction. The perception of the degree to which an "individuals needs and aspirations are met by their housing conditions" (Lu, 1999, p. 264) is a strong influence (Loo, 1986; and Burby and Rohe, 1989). An individual's housing aspirations

and definition of adequacy tend to be closely related to those of their reference group and the group into which they aspire membership (Rent and Rent, 1978, p. 465; Tognoli, 1987; Burby and Rohe, 1989; Bruin and Cook, 1997), this means that households judge the value of their housing bundle by comparing it with those housing bundles which are assembled around them. These aspirations and desires are tied to the future as well as the present (Varady and Preiser, 1998, p.190). The personal component of residential satisfaction is also strongly influenced by an individual's personality and the way that they perceive their residential situation (both individually, and again, in relation to others) (Schwirian and Schwirian, 1993). Personality is seen as a 'filter' by Amerigo and Aragones, (1997), through which environmental and social phenomena are passed, then assembled to form residential satisfaction. The same residential characteristics can be filtered differently by each individual resident as either positive or negative, and the outcome residential satisfaction is based upon the perception, rather than "the actual configuration of residential conditions" (Lu, 1999, p267).

The degree of control individuals have over their residential situation also has a significant impact on residential satisfaction (Schwirian and Schwirian, 1993; Bruin and Cook, 1997; Fuller, 1995; Day, 2000), in addition to wellbeing in general (Geis and Ross, 1998; Mirowsky and Ross, 1996; Swan, 1998; Kampfe, 1991). The importance of the level of control individuals have over the outcomes that take place in their lives is well established, for example Swan (1998, after Marmot, 1998) directly related perceived lack of control to increased morbidity and mortality. This fact was also explicitly stated by Kampfe (1991, p. 2) "individuals who have more opportunity to control their environment and/or perceive that they have this control typically have a higher sense of psychological wellbeing than those who do not". The way that perceived control affects residential satisfaction is complex, but generally works in two main ways. Firstly, perceived powerlessness incites in individuals the belief "that their own actions cannot produce desired outcomes" (Geis and Ross, 1998, p. 233). This perceived inability to control the surrounding residential space; its appearance, management, design, or social atmosphere (Weidemann *et al.*, 1982), causes a retreat

from adaptive behaviour. Gradually, this powerlessness, or lack of self-efficacy, means that individuals become less interested in adapting, or participating in the shaping of their residential environment, and less tied to their community. This has the effect of decreasing residential satisfaction further. The second mechanism through which perceived powerlessness affects the creation of residential satisfaction is through a direct retreat from social participation and networks (Schwirian and Schwirian, 1993; Geis and Ross, 1998; Mirowsky and Ross, 1996; Ross and Mirowsky, 1999; Greenberg, 1999). Social networks and involvement tie an individual to their neighbourhood, without this social connection, the level of perceived powerlessness is increased, as is the level of fear and isolation (Greenberg, 1999). All of these decrease the level of residential satisfaction.

The relationship between residential satisfaction and control that individuals have over their environment is especially important to this study of forced mobility (relocation). As discussed above, the degree of powerlessness an individual feels has a direct impact on their satisfaction, and general wellbeing and health (Geis and Ross, 1998; Schwirian and Schwirian, 1993; Bruin and Cook, 1997). Public housing tenants, living in large public housing estates such as The Parks in Adelaide, are particularly prone to social isolation and perceived powerlessness due to their economic position as likely welfare recipients (Hourihan, 1984; Burby and Rohe, 1989). The relocation they will be induced to participate in risks further reducing the control that these individuals and their households have over outcomes in their lives. This fact provides strong support for assisting individuals in developing and maintaining personal control in every aspect of their relocation. That is, they should be "helped in doing their own planning for their moves, in developing a sense of control in their new residences, and in actually acquiring personal control over the activities of their daily lives" (Kampfe, 1991).

Another aspect of the individual that influences the formation of residential satisfaction is the level of attachment that they feel to their residential location, either the community, the neighbourhood, or the dwelling itself. This attachment is described as an emotional bond between individuals and their local physical and social

environment (Mesch and Manor, 1998). Attachment both reflects, and influences, residential satisfaction. Individuals form an attachment to their neighbourhood through the investments they make in their neighbourhood, and their perception of the area as a good place to live (for example, open space, lack of noise). Neighbourhood investments are of three types: economic (for example, homeownership), temporal (length of residence), and social (relationships). As is obvious, these are closely interrelated. Homeownership is a key positive indicator of attachment, "homeowners are more likely than renters ... to express higher levels of place attachment" (Logan and Spitze in Mesch and Manor, 1998, p. 505). The explanation for this is most likely to be threefold, made up of a lower level of residential mobility (they move less frequently), an increased likelihood of relationships with neighbours, and the large economic investment required for homeownership. Renters are also capable of having high levels of neighbourhood attachment. Even though a lower economic investment has been made, other facets of attachment become important. The temporal investment is length of residence. The longer an individual lives in an area, the stronger their ties to that neighbourhood tend to become, and the higher the likelihood that they are residentially satisfied (Tognoli, 1987). Social relationships are perhaps the most important investment in neighbourhood, these relationships include kin, neighbours, and friends. Interestingly, kin ties appear to attach individuals to place less. The explanation for this is the strength of these ties. Individuals are tied strongly to their families, and this form of dependence is more likely to occur less often and for more important things (eg. for loans, major support, etc.). The investments people make in friendship and neighbour ties are especially important, more frequent, but more likely to be lost with relocation. This is the case particularly with neighbouring ties, which appear to be largely place specific.

In addition to the way that an individual perceives their environment, basic demographic and social characteristics of the individual and their household affect the formation of residential satisfaction. Not all individuals are predisposed in the same way to residential satisfaction. Though older people tend to be more likely to be satisfied (Loo, 1986; Kentish, 2000), satisfaction itself is not necessarily higher in older

people (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995). The reason for this is believed to be one of gradual acceptance of the residential situation over time (Lu, 1999). Males are slightly more likely to be residentially satisfied than women (Lu, 1999) especially older males. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (1995) also found this in a population of widows and widowers, but concluded that this phenomenon is tied the fact that widowers tended to live in better quality housing. A recent, Australian government commissioned study, measuring satisfaction with public housing found older individuals up to three times more likely to be 'very satisfied' with their residential situation (Donovan Research, 1997). There is a polar argument within the literature as to the role of income in residential satisfaction. Higher income leads to higher satisfaction in the studies by Lu (1999) and Tognoli (1987), and lower satisfaction in Loo (1986) and Hourihan (1984). These diverse findings point to the complexity of understanding residential satisfaction; this is perhaps best explained by Loo (1986) who related the decrease in residential satisfaction with increased income to increased aspirations. As was shown above, housing and social aspirations are a key element of residential satisfaction.

When the residential satisfaction of high and low socio-economic groups is compared, it is found that among lower socio-economic groups, residential satisfaction is more likely to be decreased by 'situational' stresses such as income and status, rather than personality traits such as aspirations (Tognoli, 1987). In general, the higher socio-economic groups are more likely to experience residential satisfaction. This is directly related to the "sharp linear increase in residential quality with increasing social position" (Fried, 1982, p. 112), and the mobility and choice available in residential environments. Fried (1982) concludes that most of the explanation for the difference in residential satisfaction levels between socio-economic groups is due to 'objective features' of the environment. This social position explanation is probably closely related to the finding that satisfaction is higher among individuals with a higher level of residential choice.

Family life cycle stage is an important indicator of residential satisfaction, and married people with children are most likely to be satisfied (Lu, 1999; Hourihan, 1984;

Marans and Rodgers, 1975). This finding points strongly to the importance of local connections as an element of residential satisfaction. The life-cycle stage associated with high levels of satisfaction is one where individuals are most likely to be tied socially to their local community, children binding the family to the local community through their schooling, friendships, and activities.

Repeatedly, the literature cites homeownership as a key indicator of residential satisfaction. Without exception, each investigation reveals residential satisfaction to be much higher for owners than renters (Lu, 1999; Rent and Rent, 1978; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995; Fried, 1982; Loo, 1986), "Homeowners … are almost always more satisfied with their homes and neighbourhoods" (Lu, 1999, p. 266). The most likely explanation for this is that renters have less control over their residential environment, and in general have a lower housing quality (Loo, 1986).

4.1.4. Residential Satisfaction for Public Tenants

Many of the studies discussed above have examined the residential satisfaction of public housing tenants as part of their research (Hourihan, 1984; Lu, 1999; Varady and Preiser, 1998; Burby and Rohe, 1989). In addition, the findings presented in this chapter combine to form a general picture of the formation of residential satisfaction that can be applied to public housing tenants.

It has been established earlier in this chapter that public housing tenants are likely to have a slightly different residential satisfaction outcome to other types of household. In general, as a cohort, their levels of residential satisfaction are slightly lower than the population as a whole. Much of the explanation for this lower level of residential satisfaction can be attributed to the places, rather than the houses that public tenants live in. A recent study by Lu (1999) supports this suggestion. He found that, although housing satisfaction tended to increase across all tenures with increasing housing cost, public renters were a notable exception; they were more likely to be satisfied with their housing. There are two probable reasons for this, firstly, there tends to be a basic level of amenity provided for public housing tenants in their dwelling, public providers ensuring a basic level of service and maintenance.

Secondly, and probably more importantly, the satisfaction with the dwelling is influenced by the degree to which the dwelling is judged in relation to those surrounding. Public dwellings on large estates tend to be of similar design, appearance, and general standard. Of particular interest is the fact that though there were higher levels of <u>housing</u> satisfaction in the Lu study, public renters were more likely to have very low levels of <u>neighbourhood</u> satisfaction. These low levels of neighbourhood satisfaction likely relate to the location and density of the public housing stock.

The studies reviewed here tend to focus on public housing tenants who were living in concentrated public estates. Here there tends to be a higher density of development (Burby and Rohe, 1989), which has been shown earlier in this chapter to be related to lower levels of residential satisfaction. In addition to public housing neighbourhoods having higher density and therefore less privacy, neighbourhoods containing public housing are less likely to be regarded as clean and quiet by their residents (Hourihan, 1984). Hourihan found that the greatest predictor of residential satisfaction for public housing tenants was "how uncluttered and quiet the areas are perceived to be" (p. 386). Public housing estates in these mainly US studies, tend to be areas of concentrated disadvantage, and this is also the general case in Australian public housing estates, where they are traditionally built around industry (or former sites of industry) or on the edges of cities (Badcock, 1986), where locational sources of dissatisfaction are more likely to occur. These areas have been shown to have higher than average levels of crime, and greater proportions of individuals with criminal records among their populations (Mullins *et al.*, 2001). Locational characteristics are important considerations for understanding the formation of residential satisfaction among public housing tenants. While housing is likely to be a source of satisfaction, elements of the neighbourhood, such as the level of crime (Mullins *et al.*, 2001), or lack of amenity (Fried, 1982), or industrial development, are likely to be sources of dissatisfaction. These findings about the influence of dissatisfaction have significant implications for the relocation of public housing tenants, because it is likely that dissatisfaction with <u>the place</u> tenants are relocated to will have more effect than the satisfaction created by the dwelling itself.

A major and ongoing study of the level of satisfaction that Australian Public tenants experience with their housing and its provision is published by the Commonwealth Department of Social Security (now part of the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services). The survey collects information used to meet one of the performance requirements of the 1996 Australian Housing Assistance Act - customer satisfaction with public rental housing. The survey is conducted each year to allow comparison of a limited list of satisfaction outcomes to be compared over time and between state housing authorities. The survey is a self-completion mail-out to a minimum sample size of 500 randomly selected households in each state. Though limited to a few restricted measures of satisfaction, this survey is potentially one of the most useful consistent measures of the character and level of housing satisfaction among Australian public housing tenants. It would also be a promising future vehicle for broadening the understanding of public tenant satisfaction.

The survey, most recently found that the "four most influential aspects on overall satisfaction", these were:

- Treatment by departmental staff
- Overall condition of the home,
- Information provision, and
- Non-emergency maintenance" (Kentish, 2000)

These findings reinforce those presented earlier in the chapter, showing that the dwelling itself, and its maintenance and administration, are of significant importance to Australian public tenants. In addition, the perception of fair treatment by housing authority staff and adequate information provision reflects the significance of control and self-respect for Australian public tenants. The most important aspects of overall satisfaction for South Australian public tenants were the same, although the order of importance was changed slightly making the overall condition of the home of higher importance than the treatment by departmental staff.

The degree of choice or control over the residential situation that public tenants have also affects the residential satisfaction that they experience. In the above survey, the importance of perceived treatment by staff and information provision reflect this influence. The choices of housing and location that public tenants have is known to be limited, the literature examining all housing tenures discusses the relative satisfaction of housing and locational choices, but it is clear that public tenants have few of these choices. An Australian investigation of the relative level of residential satisfaction between residents of different tenures found that the majority of public housing tenants believed that the benefits of their tenure outweighed the disadvantages. Here public renters disliked the limited choice of location, but conversely valued the affordability and security of tenure (Burgess and Skeltys, 1992). This importance of psychological security and security of tenure is also found in a recent study by the Queensland Department of Housing (1999, p. 5), where "security of tenure and a sense of physical and psychological security" were the most common responses to a focus group study of what was important about the residential situation to public tenants in Queensland. This security was found to enable tenants to flourish in other areas of their lives, such as education, raising children, and getting employment.

As well as the influence of housing and neighbourhood on public housing tenant's level of residential satisfaction, another main element is the presence of familial and other social networks. This influence is highly important to the residential satisfaction outcome for public tenant households, and Hourihan (1984) found these networks more important to public tenants than any other tenure group, with familial contacts being more important than other social contacts. "Proximity to kin is important only in the public housing estates where the dependence on relatives is greatest"(Hourihan, 1984, p. 390).

4.2. A Model of Residential Satisfaction

To better understand the way that residential satisfaction is composed, a model, drawn from the work of Amerigo and Aragones (1997) is presented in this section

(Figure 4.2). This model provides a simplified means for understanding the way that residential elements are composed by householders to form residential satisfaction. It also portrays residential satisfaction as a precursor to satisfaction with life in general. The model provides a clear and useful structure for interpreting the concept of residential satisfaction and encapsulates the understanding portrayed in this current study.

Figure 4.2: Model of Residential Satisfaction

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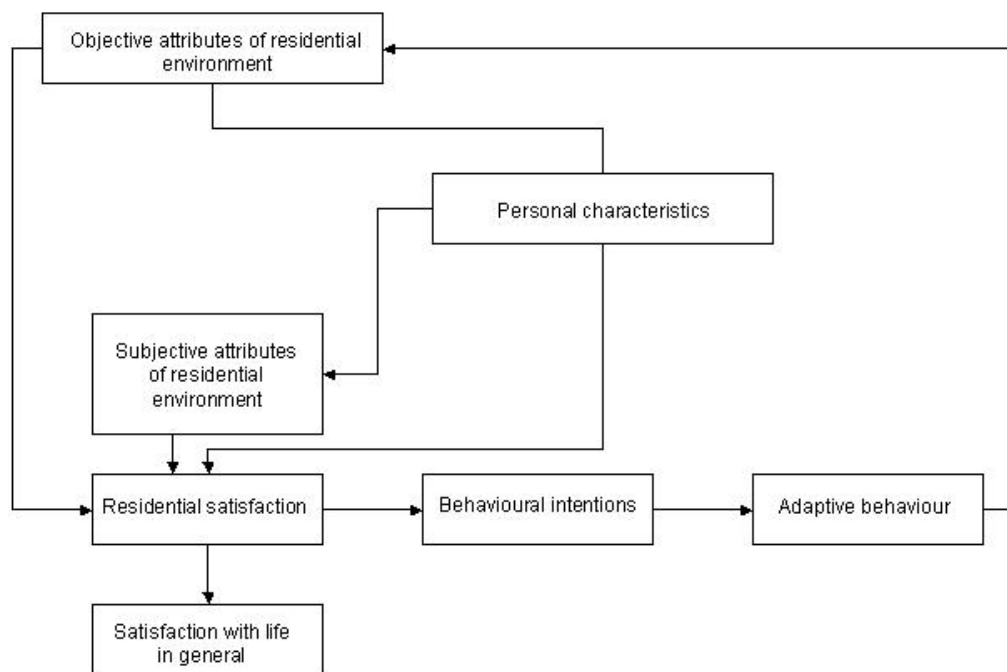
Source: Amerigo and Aragones, 1997, p. 48

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In this model, 'objective attributes of the residential environment', such as the quality of housing and access to services in the local area, contribute to the formation of residential satisfaction via three potential pathways. The first is a connection between the objective attributes of the residential environment, which result in the direct formation of some level of residential satisfaction. At the same time, a component of residential satisfaction is formed when the objective attributes of the residential environment are filtered through personal characteristics of the individual, such as an their age or housing needs. The degree to which the residential environment meets the needs and desires associated with these personal characteristics

leads to a calculation of relative residential satisfaction. In the third pathway to residential satisfaction, objective attributes of the residential environment are filtered through the personal characteristics of the individual to create 'subjective attributes of the residential environment', such as the perception of safety or perception of amenity, these perceptions lead to a determination of residential satisfaction.

Individuals are not entirely passive in this model, the level of residential satisfaction that an individual has can be affected by the individual himself or herself. The perceived outcome of residential satisfaction can affect behavioural intentions, which in turn affects behaviour, which acts to alter the objective attributes of the residential environment. An obvious example of this would be involvement in a 'neighbourhood watch program', where the level of perceived safety could be improved by participation in community action. At a more extreme level, adaptive behaviour could cause mobility, a change of residential location and the composition of a new residential bundle.

4.3. Conclusion

The understanding of residential satisfaction presented in this chapter is essential to this study of public housing relocation. Residential satisfaction has been shown to be a result of individual perceptions of the degree to which the residential situation meets the requirements of the household and the individual residents within it. The chapter has highlighted the central factors in the formation of residential satisfaction, and classified them in terms of the residential, social, and subjective environments. A model for understanding the way that residential satisfaction is composed by households has been presented. This model provides a means of structuring the way that the residential, social, and subjective environments interrelate to form residential satisfaction. This understanding will be applied in the creation of a relocation SDSS and will be detailed in Chapter Eight.