A HOME OF ONE'S OWN : PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS IN DETACHED HOUSING

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Summary

This survey is based on a representative sample of 2 427 families systematically selected out of a population of 5 582 who purchased a new single-family home or had one built in 1978 in Alsace (Eastern France). After stressing the links between the aspiration for this kind of housing and the characteristics of the previously occupied homes (qualities, equipment, location etc...) and after outlining the socio-economic profile of the buyers, the author highlights the importance of the detached house ideology in France. The dimensions of the aspiration for this kind of housing are then described, leading to an analysis of the conflicts and congruences between the ownership and the appropriation of the home, and between the economic motivations ("protecting one's savings") and the psychological ones ("feeling at home"). The dimensions "living in a home one has personally chosen", "making one's own home" and "owning a property to hand down to one's heirs" are contrasted with those of the financial and personal commitment on the one hand, and of sociability on the other hand.

As a conclusion the author shows that the population of single-family-home buyers belongs to the social category that has constantly, in the past hundred years, made its own the detached house ideology and that nowadays equates the ownership of such a house with the achievement of social dignity and status.

Introduction

This analysis of the social and psychological factors in detached housing was undertaken in Alsace (Eastern France), a region comprising two "départements", the Haut-Rhin and Bas-Rhin. The present study is part of a series of surveys initiated by the French Ministry for the Environment and is based on "multiple theme" questionnaires regrouping quantitative, qualitative and psychological questions (1). This survey was part of the 1978 Program of Public Statistical Surveys and participation was therefore compulsory (Amended Law n° 57711, June 7 1951, about duty, coordination and confidentiality in statistics).

Out of a total number of 3 582 single-family homes which were completed in 1977 and registered in the Ministry of the Environment's New Construction files, a representative sample of 2 427 families were systematically selected. Each family was officially advised beforehand of the survey and was subsequently visited by one of the 40 skilled interviewers employed in this undertaking. The interviews lasted about 90 minutes. 28 families out of 2 427 refused to answer the interviewer's questions, but 21 finally agreed to participate when they were approached a second time. Replacements were found for the 7 remaining ones.

The findings of this enquiry will be analyzed in a series of studies (2), the present paper dealing with a single aspect : the dimensions of the aspiration for detached housing.

I - Who gets a house built ?

The typical buyer of a detached house in Alsace hardly differs from the one described in other surveys of several French regions. His profile is the very same one that is to be found around small and medium-size towns : new owners are typically young, between 28 and 32 years old, they have one or two children and the family's average monthly income ranges from 1 to 3 times the minimum monthly salary at the time of the survey. Some features are more specific to Alsace and they concern :
- a large majority of workers from the private sector (67 %) ;
- a relatively high proportion of civil servants (18 %), both central Government and local authorities staff ;
- under-representation of self-employed in trade or industry (4 %), of members of the professions (1 %) and of farmers (2 %).

Farmers generally live in old and most frequently two-family houses, which they have long owned. Members of the professions are in quite different a situation. In cities like Strasbourg, they usually choose the residential districts, often consisting of villas or of detached houses surrounded by a garden. They do this because it is convenient, of course, but also because they value the special qualities of city life, its social and cultural facilities and above all because they can still, on their income, afford an apartment or even a house with a garden in a residential part of town. Furthermore, when buying a detached house within the city becomes too difficult, intellectual and members of the professions still prefer the city, but they purchase either old or recently built apartments. Finally, in Alsace as elsewhere in France, high-income groups frequently own a country house. They are thus able to enjoy city life and country life in turns.

II - The previous home

A- Conveniences

14 % of detached house purchasers did not occupy a home on their own. This fact is significant in itself, for it reflects to a very high

degree the average situation of a considerable proportion of purchasers who start from generally bad housing conditions and move to more attractive ones. A "more attractive" home means in the first place a more comfortable one. Half the buyers think that the number of rooms in their former home was insufficient and only 54 % lived in a home equipped with all of the following items : a lavatory inside the apartment, hot water tap, a bath and central heating. In terms of "basic" conveniences, 50 % of the previously lived-in homes conform neither to the standards of a comfortable apartment nor, as a result, to the expectations of the residents. 6 % have only a lavaroty inside the apartment, 5 % a lavatory and a bath without either hot water tap or central heating.

This amounts to saying that about 20 % of the population starts from no or practically no conveniences and move to the modern amenities of a detached house. Moreover half the respondents view their previous home as the only possibility at the time. And yet, despite their low monthly incomes, all become homeowners. These contradicting facts will be explained by the description of previous homes and of the modalities of the purchase of a detached house. What then, setting aside the home without any conveniences, was the type of home occupied before the purchase of a single-family home ?

In 55 % of the cases, the previous home was located in an old neighbourhood (which does not necessarily mean that it was dilapidated), and in a large modern housing complex in only 20 % of the cases. This point is particularly interesting because the aspiration for detached homes has often been analyzed in France in relation, and almost in contrast to housing in large complexes (3). The latter have frequently been viewed as the most abundant "reserve" of future detached house purchasers. As we can see this analysis applies in only a relatively small number of cases in Alsace, the more so as most former homes were located in boroughs of only 2 000 to 5 000 inhabitants (48 %), one fourth in boroughs of less than 2 000 inhabitants and only 27 % in boroughs of over 50 000 inhabitants. In fact it is in big cities that large housing complexes are concentrated on the outskirts of town while this happens less frequently in small or medium-size towns.

B- Evaluations

The respondents' assessments of their previous homes are carefully balanced and usually favourable. It is appreciated in 65 % of the cases, its design is thought to be "acceptable" (32 %) and more frequently "good" (41 %). It has definite advantages, one of them being that it is conveniently located (83 %). The previous home thus was within easy reach of the school, the husband's and wife's workplace. It was close to the city center and even to public parks. The neighbourhood is considered "safe for children" in 63 % of the cases, but the percentage of families who think their former neighbourhood was "unsafe for children" is considerable : 34 % of the cases. A number of evaluations divide the population in two approximately even groups. They concern, for instance, the location of the previous home in a

street believed to be either noisy (46 %) or quiet (54 %). The respondents also mention " the possibility of entertaining friends" (possible : 52 % ; impossible : 47 %). On the other hand, the location of the previous home was not likely to promote relational life, since neither relatives nor friends lived nearby.

Among the objective qualities attributed to the previous home, there are as many favourable evaluations of the dwelling itself as of the environment. Thus the previous home is "well-lighted and sunny" (83 %), "easy to clean" (82 %), "each member of the family had his place there" (73 %) and "neighbourly relationships were easily made" (75 %). Besides only 56 % of the purchasers lived in large apartments houses, while 30 % lived in single-family homes. Neighbourliness, then, which 75 % found was easily achieved in their previous neighbourhood, is not what motivates the choice of a detached house which, in any case, fosters only certain forms of sociability and individualism different from those developed in collective housing.

Among negative evaluations, bad sound-proofing comes first (64 %) followed by poor heat insulation (63 %). Once again, opinions are evenly divided about the "standing" of the previous home, thought to be "good" in 52 % of the cases. Vague as it is, this notion of standing still contains a dimension obvious to all, i.e. external appearances, the cleanliness, upkeep and luxurious aspect of what is shown, its air of affluence and its refusal of anonymity. In apartment houses more particularly, the entrance halls, staircases, elevators etc... provide the opportunity of asserting this standing (4). And remarks about the lack of standing of previous homes in apartment houses imply that, in a way, standing is better guaranteed in a detached house than in a high-rise building. It may even be said that a single-family home is, by definition, a status symbol because it gives the owner alone the responsability as well as the power of asserting himself, of "showing off" in his own way, while even handsome and well kept apartment buildings still imply some anonymity, which is rejected here.

Finally the assessments of the negative features ascribed to the former home are more scattered, though not negligible. "Poor maintenance of the building" gets only 19 % but its "impractical design" and its "gloomy aspect" are much more frequently mentioned (respectively 38 % and 32 %). Obviously these deficiencies albeit real, are not "unacceptable" such as were the ones we cited at the beginning of this chapter, when we described the borderline cases. However, when asked why they chose their former home, 45 % of the sample answered that it was "the only possibility" and 72 % said it was a "temporary solution". It appears then that the characteristics of the previous home play no part in the decision to live in a single-family home. In fact, the aspiration for this kind of housing existed previous to the choice of the former home and, from the outset, most respondents made no attempt to find better accomodation in collective or detached housing. The answer "the rent was suited to our means" (57 %) further supports this point, if need be. It also helps to underscore the other characteristic attitudes of the families : starting a Savings Plan for Construction, explicitly stating their intention to "protect their savings against

inflation", soliciting a financial contribution from relatives in 26 % of the cases.

Choosing to purchase a detached house is, from the outset, part of the family's plans. The family deliberately moves in inexpensive dwellings so as to save on rent and get a single-family home built. A few negative judgments on old houses or on apartment buildings are then grafted upon this basic aspiration. The drawbacks of city life (noise, lack of safety for children) and those of collective housing strengthen their feeling that this aspiration is reasonable and besides amply justified by the ever-increasing cost of renting a new or comfortable apartment, by economic conditions that benefit landlords more than tenants and by the incentives to save money for the purchase of a home.

III - Dimensions of the aspiration to live in a new single-family home

There remains to ascertain the very dimensions of this aspiration for detached housing. We already know that not only in Alsace but in France as a whole, this aspiration is prevalent chiefly among blue-collar workers, middle-level executives and farmers, though the latter are hardly represented in this survey insofar as it deals only with the most recently built homes (completed in 1977).

A- Ownership and appropriation of the home

The first dimension concerns the independence and psychological control of the home, which rest upon, are confirmed and fundamentally legitimated by the fact of ownership. Thus 93 % of the respondents believe that "in a detached house, you really are the master of your own house", that "you are not afraid of disturbing anyone" and even that "you really feel at home only when you own your home" (92 %).

This dimension, so extreme that it is akin to a stock-response, seems self-evident to the respondents, who take it completely for granted. It stresses, if need be, the importance of ownership in strenghening the feelings of security and above all, in firmly establishing a right (that of being master at home), a right all the more sacred and unquestionable as it has been purchased, both literally and figuratively paid for. We shall see later on that buying a home involves a great many efforts which make the figurative sense of the word "pay" as meaningful as its literal sense.

This notion of a "sacred, paid for right" ought to be placed in its psychological and social context. It pre-supposes little confidence in the effectiveness of the laws protecting a rented, not legally owned home. Hence the belief that one should not depend on anyone, and especially not on a landlord, in order to have a real home. Consequently, the various modalities of the home appropriation will be limited by the amount of money which should or might be spent to suit the home to the needs and wishes of the residents.

The difference, emphasized here, between "real" and "seeming" possession of a home is crucial because it is a straightforward reflection of the way the sampled population perceives relationships of social dominance. Since the owner is his own master, one has to "really own" a home to be the master in it. What, however, remains to be clarified is the fact that so much effort is focused, over so many years, upon the legal ownership of a home.

B- Protecting one's savings. Being in a home of one's own

The second dimension is of a financial nature and it confirms detached house purchasers in their feeling of having made the right choice, the best one in fact. For 94 % of the sample, the home is an investment because "rents are so high that it's better to get a house built" (70 %).

The financial considerations underlying the choice of single-family housing might have been coupled with disregard for the possibility of remodeling an old detached house, especially since apartment housing is clearly rejected (82 %). But that is not the case here and only 48 % of the respondents agree with the statement that "remodeling old houses is more expensive than building new ones". Ultimately, that is irrelevant. The important fact is that the home is an investment.

C- A heritage to pass down the line

This twofold idea of protecting one's savings while buying a home is so forcefully expressed that most respondents might have been expected to agree with the plan of "leaving a home to the children", thus outlining a third dimension centered this time on the notion of "heritage". However, only 50 % of the sample will admit that point, while, for instance, agreement reaches 92 % for the statement "you really feel at home only when you're the owner". Half the respondents build a home primarily for themselves rather than for their children. They do not specifically intend to leave a house (a home, a place the family could "grow roots" in) to their children. People traditionally seek to keep the house in the family, to hand it down from one generation to the next, for it never is a mere thing, but a shelter and a special focus of family life. This eminently lasting heritage is also laden with affective meaning.

Yet this notion of "durability" is limited to the time-span of a single generation, rather than several ones. A first explanation might be that most purchasers are young to be already thinking of the property they might leave to their children. The hope of passing a house down from one generation to the next is not self-evident for everyone and it may not yet be integrated to the key-ideas concerning home owning. However the respondents do take their children into consideration, since 88 % believe that "children are happier in a single-family home". This applies to the young child, who still lives at home with his parents and the respondents therefore refer primarily to the immediate, near-at-hand use of their home.

This is a new situation in France and it probably also derives from the fact that most purchasers belong to the lower middle class. By contrast, the traditional concept of the family home as an anchoring place, whose durability has to be insured rather belongs to upper middle class values. The fact of building and especially of building a house implies a vision of the future and even is per se a hold on a future which, thought indeterminate, still reaches beyond the time-span of a single generation.

The novelty of this fact ought to be matched with other social and psychological features characteristic of our time. The most important one is the geographical mobility of families or more generally of workers in present day Western Europe. This situation prevails in all industrialized countries and it has become quite common to start a family elsewhere than in one's native town, village or region. This is of course due to objective necessities, such as the concentration of some activities in a given area, the state of the labour market etc...

The mobility of workers, historically promoted by the development of railways and nowadays by the widespread use of private cars, may be seen as the consequence of one major fact, i.e. the condition of the labour market. Therefore the evolution of economic activities will no doubt play a large part in the mobility or stability of detached house owners, beyond the time-span of a single generation.

The notion of settling down for good is involved in 50 % of the cases while in the other cases the next generations are not mentioned. Half the respondents thus seem to express their intuition about the frailness of their control over their family's future, as well as their intuition (or fatalism, or expectation) that their children will eventually leave.

The future of new single-family homes may be viewed in a more economically-oriented perspective. As we shall see later on, the purchasers usually undertake considerable long-term financial commitments. 97 % of the husbands and 64 % of the wives have incomes but, when the family decides to have a house built, 32 % of the wives seek employment so as to help repay the loans. Similarly, 31 % of the husbands seek an additional job and, in 22 % of the cases, a better paid one. There is then an obvious correlation between the purchase of a house and the arrival of a segment of the feminine population in the labour market. How much will the unemployment of either husband or wife contribute to the existence of a market of "almost new" detached houses, only a few years old ? Women's unemployment, for instance, usually taken for granted at a time of economic recession, threatens the family's ability to repay loans. The problem of a "second-hand market" for recently built homes, whose existence could be revealed, for example, by recording sales following a court-order, should already be tackled.

The question, then, is whether most single-family homes are meant to last and especially to stand up over the years, i.e. to integrate in a recognized whole, be it neighbourhood, small town or new town, whether they will be connected to or severed from the city or old

village etc... In other words, will they acquire a specific, perceptible and univocal identity ? Obviously the process of acquiring an identity basically depends on time and therefore on a continuous development of social relationships between earlier, pre-existing housing and single-family homes, whether located on estates (50 %) or built in clusters (18 %). This is all the more important as, from the outset, the break is a relatively clean one : detached houses are built at the edge of small boroughs with a recent agricultural past or with still lively rural traditions, while most of the newcomers work in the city or at any rate a long way from their new home. Recent housing developments located near earlier rural settlements give no clue about the owner's work while the clear perception of the neighbour's activity is per se an important basis for social interaction. Furthermore, in addition to being "outsiders", the residents of these new housing areas may, as we have seen, move out quite rapidly. What would be the possible consequences of these two facts on the development of a spatial and sociological identity in these areas ? Although it would be unfair to view these areas as a kind of "temporary housing", the question is far from incidental for it arises at both the sociological and economic levels.

Another point concerns the budget and the amount of time spent in commuting. It is quite remarkable that 14 % of the sample accept to live over 30 kms away from their work-place and that 40 % travel a daily distance of 10 to 30 kms ; 35 % spend less than 15 minutes commuting, 31 % from 15 to 29 minutes, and 16 % from 30 to 44 minutes. The time spent in commuting should of course be viewed in its regional context, but also in relation to the financial cost of transportation which, nowadays, is bound to rise constantly. Moreover the cost in time and money is duplicated in most cases : 97 % of the husbands and 62 % of the wives are employed and the distances between home and work-place as well as the time spent in commuting are similar for both of them.

The psychological and financial cost of commuting may seem high. Yet it is accepted even though, in 36 % of the cases, it has increased after moving into the new house. It may therefore be viewed as the price to pay for the fulfilment of other purposes deemed more important by the respondents, e.g. "privacy" (95 %) or "having a garden" (91 %). This ransom is quite consciously paid since the respondents deliberately choose to break from the city they work in and to live in an "anti-city". The occupational structure of detached house purchasers ought to be recalled at this point : 90 % wage-earners, 4 % self-employed in trade and industry, 1 % members of the professions. This means that in Alsace, the decision to move away from the city derives as much from the local economic and real-estate situation as from the values held by the various social classes.

Moreover, it is perhaps in the under-representation of the upper-middle-class, whose offspring will constitute the majority of intellectuals and professionals, that we can partly explain this "short-term vision of the future" which, for half the respondents, did not extend over the time-span of a single generation. Some social categories thus attempt to combine their occupational and residential net-

works while others accept to dissociate them.

Whether a job is gratifying or not, short- or medium-term etc... also compounds the structuring role of employment. Thus, "a stable job without any prospects of promotion usually is an incentive for a compensatory investment in housing and reinforces the relationship of complementarity and proximity between home and workplace ... Another case in point is the relatively unskilled and mobile worker in urban or suburban environments, who compensates for the insecurity of his job through his home which becomes his anchoring-place. Conversely, wage-earners who are likely to get a better position will more willingly express their upwardly mobile status by purchasing a home, even farther away from their work. Finally, in the case of upward occupational mobility, a home may be purchased for its market value while the anchoring is sought elsewhere, in relational and family life or in leisure activities (5).

D- Living in a home I like

Another dimension of home purchasing relates to the "pleasure" of living in a house that results from one's personal choice. Thus 90 % agree with the statement "I'd rather build a house I personally like" and 80 % believe that "everybody ought to be able to own his home".

The phrase "a house I personally like" refers to two aspects, to the pleasure of choosing on the one hand and on the other hand to the individual's specific tastes and more particularly to his personal mode of experiencing his home. This dimension therefore relates to subjectivity and to individual psychology. Getting a house built will, theoretically, let subjectivity be freely expressed. Accordingly, 20 % of the purchasers design the architecture of their homes by themselves and 23 % modify the design proposed by the builder or make specific demands (3 %). Only 5 % accept the pre-set design. 17 % apply to an architect. Only a minority (5 % : pre-set design, 6 % : "others") makes no request at all and interferes at no stage of the decision-making process regarding the house design. In other words, most purchasers of a detached house took part, more or less thoroughly and in various degrees, in the conception of the architectural design.

However, this "pleasure" dimension cannot be considered in isolation, independently of the background of detached house production. In order to analyze this dimension adequately, the hypothesis that the purchaser's subjectivity and psychology will be revealed when getting a house built ought first to be elucidated.

Until very recently, the design of a house, in a rural environment for instance, was by definition a "set" one, for it always referred to local patterns which prevailed in a well-defined area with, at most, a few variations and sub-types. The styles, types and their variations formed a limited corpus. Since the end of the Middle-Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance, cities have "exported" to villages and small towns models of public or official buildings, of rich men's houses, of decoration etc... They have also had their cor-

pus of types, but it must be stressed that in rural environments innovation was much more frequent in embellishing and ornamenting than in modifying the design itself. It was the leading citizens, the rich merchants, the princes who built mansions or manor-houses, whose original design gave the architect (rather than his patron) the opportunity of exercising his creative talents.

The design of houses was constant because it derived from a multiplicity of closely interwoven factors of a climatic, geographical, economic, religious and social nature. Houses owed their basis shape as much to the values held by society as to geographical or climatic factors. On the other hand, both in town and in the country, among rich or poor alike, the house and its "public" features has always been a key-element in the resident's social identification. Thus a house of any given regional style had, for example, a larger or smaller size and volume, a greater or lesser number of floors and windows, a more or less ornamented façade, etc... The interior of the house, divided in public and private spaces, provided an additional opportunity of affirming social status, religious values etc... Thus the living-room (e.g. the early "stub" in Alsace) might be filled with ostentatious furniture, i.e. with a multiplicity of objects symbolizing the nature of the inhabitant's integration in his social group (6). Thus neither originality nor innovation were sought for their own sake in the design of most people's homes. On the other hand, the inhabitant's identity is frequently asserted in various degrees. In the case of the rural house, where several generations of the same family frequently live together with servants, adopting the typical regional architecture is per se an opportunity of asserting an identity, a mode of integration. The variations from the typical design will, in their turn, be as many ways of asserting one's place within the community.

This situation changed in cities only from the 17th century onwards. Although a few privileged people did continue to employ, at great expenses, artists and architects, the overwhelming majority of the population did not, from that period on to the end of the 19th century, have any influence on the design of their homes. During the same period, the continuous flow of poor peasants towards cities largely contributed to the emergence of a considerable mass of underprivileged workers who were later on to form the urban proletariat of the early 19th century, those "suffering classes" for whom "apartments" were built in vast tenements where "a maximum number of people were squeezed in, from basement to attic ..." (7)

The descriptions of the gruesome living conditions in 19th century slums, often made by doctors (8), writers, economists and hygienists contributed to the rise of a reform-oriented ideology. Some of the theoreticians of this system will attempt to "transform society by transforming housing" (9). The predominance of ideologies in the thinking of planners, particularly where housing for the underprivileged was concerned, promoted the emergence of the single-family home model. This model was given momentum by industrialists who, since the end of the 19th century, built housing for the workers in their factories with the encouragement of Napoléon III at first and

of philanthropical societies later on. The State itself took over and started Low Cost Housing programs. Yet these reforms reached only the most privileged segments of the working-class, the ones who, one or two generations later, were to move upwards to middle-class level and constitute, nowadays, the bulk of the customers of detached house builders. The under-privileged working-class, nowadays made up of migrant workers for instance, remains confined to large housing complexes and to the dilapidated slum tenements that hold out at the heart of cities ... in accordance with the pattern that emerged at the end of the 19th century. This dimension of "pleasure" to live in a "personally chosen home", when considered against its historical background, then takes on multiple meanings :

1. It denotes a reaction to the anonymity of "collective" housing, a rejection of the standardized way of life it seems to propose. In this sense, the home offers the possibility of affirming the family's identity.

2. It also expresses a mode of social insertion, a proof of integration.

Beginning at a certain age and income level, owning a detached house attests to the owner's achievement as a member of a social category that asserts thus its collective promotion , its ability to move up from one class to another. It is the concrete and as we mentioned, expensive evidence of shared values, of common views about a lifestyle or a quality of life. This fact is equally perceptible in the aesthetic choices concerning the shape and decoration of the house, which conform to the pattern of reproducing a limited corpus of housing types prevailing among the members of one community.

3. It shows the determination to appropriate lived-in space, as opposed to urban space which is perceived as impossible to appropriate, as wholly beyond the individual's grasp. The respondents seem to feel that since they can't participate in the making of the city, they will devote extra energy to making their own home. Thus no less than 20 % of the sample fully designed their house themselves. Moreover, and from the outset, 67 % want "to install most of the fixtures themselves". Lastly, 91 % of the purchasers wish "to have a garden", i.e. of course, to recapture an aspect of "country life", however much altered but also to take care of a space which by definition demands continuous care, dedication and attention. "The current or planned use of land" shows that 93 % will have a garden, 85 % a vegetable garden, 38 % fruit-trees, all of which clearly indicates that they plan to devote a great deal of time to their piece of land.

4. The pleasure of living in a personally "chosen" home being thus stated, we might expect daring designs, original layouts and aesthetic options. We know however that this is far from being the case. There is a prevailing type of detached house which, viewed from the outside, is rectangular, made of hollow bricks, on a single level, isolated in the middle of the plot, with a basement and a two-sloped roof covered with terracota tile. The chief variations are the L-shaped house and the rectangular house with a four-sloped roof. Single family homes are definitely not original, or very seldom so. In fact, whether one considers their outside features or their interior arran-

gements, they relate to only two types, including of course a number
of variants.

Yet it is well-known that these houses seem both very repetitive and
very diversified. Repetitive because they belong to a limited number
of types, very diversified because their "external" identity depends
on characteristics such as size, number and location of windows and
more particularly on the choice of façade elements which stand for as
many opportunities of "decorating" or "embellishing" : balustrades,
shutters, doors, laps, fences, windowpanes and of course big or small
gardens. The "detached house blight" has been harshly criticized from
its origins and up to the present time by professionals, whether ar-
chitects or planners, by some municipalities (or at least a few elec-
ted representatives) or by the relevant Ministries. The latter attempt
to direct the aesthetic choices concerning the exterior appearance of
detached houses, their insertion or "integration" in landscapes and
sites. They also have recently attempted to steer the choice of refe-
rences towards the traditional rural architecture of the regions
concerned. A Provence-style "farmhouse" in Alsace for instance, or a
Spanish-style balustrade almost anywhere in France are unanimously
rejected. To put it differently, criticism is leveled at the ways of
adorning façades, i.e. precisely at all the elements which the resi-
dent attempts to develop the identity of his house with.

We have earlier emphasized the idea that in the case of traditional
houses, the external appearance was a choice medium for the expression
of individuality —a "public" aspect of the owner's personality. The
house, and especially its visible parts, acts as a social mediator,
somewhat as clothes do. What some (e.g. architects) reject and others
(most detached house purchasers) accept is the remarkably wide range
of symbols used for this "personal expression", i.e. the way the
inhabitants appropriate the most variegated elements drawn from the
most diverse cultural contexts, taken from a kind of imaginary museum
of decoration and especially of housing ornamentation (11).

This "attire" is apt to shock people, mainly architects, Art Histo-
rians etc... because it does not relate to a coherent corpus, consis-
tent with a local tradition, especially since most detached houses
are built at the edge of traditionally rural small towns or villages.
In fact, the façade ornamentation consists of either an outright
caricature of the past (seldom the case in Alsace) or of an inextri-
cable mixture of references to the most diverse styles, regions and
periods. In short, people go on living in commonplace houses even
while wearing themselves out to find the details and ornamentation
that will make their houses "original".

The simplest solution might have been to point to the discrepancy
between reality and the widely shared belief of living in a "perso-
nally chosen house" and accordingly to promote a policy of style, of
"sensible aesthetics". This, however, will not work for a number of
reasons.

The first one is probably that it is hard not to see the continuity
between the diversity in house ornamentation and the complete availa-
bility, for anyone, of this "museum without walls" of ornamentation.

It seems that people, feeling there is no objective reason to adopt housing models produced by several closely interwoven and nowadays ineffective factors, considered they were "free" to create "their home". Their home, that is to say a type of house which will become "their own" (or be "appropriated") through their choice of ornamental references as, let us repeat once again, has been the case at all times. In any case, people generally cannot get a truly original house built, for a variety of reasons. No doubt because they are the cultural heirs to their regional past as well as witnesses of their own time and that compromise is inevitable in view of the legal, financial, psychological and social hurdles they have to cope with. What is left, then, if not ornamentation ?

Another reason is that "sensible aesthetics" do not exist. They can of course be defined for some milieus, for a given class or period. Works like The Anatomy of Taste (12) or the Sociology of Common Taste (13) prove, if need be, that taste depends on cultural categories but that a culture may be related to a nation, a class, a period or a family. Therefore it is within the contemporary context of "mass culture", of patchwork culture made of spurious familiarity with fragmentary aspects of other cultures, it is within that context that these ornamental choices are made. And it is precisely because it involves "borrowing" right and left a complete element, a whole unit, removing it from its original cultural context and placing it side by side with another alien element that these ornamental choices will be perceived as a kind of anthology by whoever takes a stroll through some of the more recent housing developments.

Lastly, it seems that architects or building craftsmen have failed to create either types of houses or forms of housing likely to convince a majority of people. Yet the contemporary history of architecture is crammed full of new ideas, schools, formal research and urban ideologies. The fact remains that only 17 % of the respondents commission an architect. This percentage reflects a lack of confidence which largely benefits detached house builders who claim 31 % of the buyers and rank ahead of building craftsmen (26 %).

This lack of confidence is coupled with the fear of having to pay high fees to architects : over one-fourth of the buyers still applies to building-craftsmen rather than to architects. The architect's image might also be awe-inspiring for the purchasers, who generally perceive him as an expert who designs exceptional buildings and not just "ordinary" houses.

A detailed analysis of average costs shows that 3 % of the expenses go to the architect's and/or building craftsman's fees. This relatively low percentage indicates that most of the time the architect carries out only a limited task concerning one or several aspects of the building process, but not the totality of the work or responsibilities that might be entrusted to him.

E- A self-help venture

67 % of the families plan to move in and then "fix most of the fittings themselves". In view of the nature and magnitude of the tasks involved, in addition to basic operations such as looking for a suitable tract of land and securing the necessary loans, the extent of the purchaser's involvement in all the stages of the process should be underscored. When the owners move in, the house is unfinished in 55 % of the cases. In 58 % of the cases, various jobs remain to be done inside the house and outside the house in 87 % of the cases.

The frame of the house itself, which by definition demands a great deal of availability, skill and physical effort, was built by the owners in 9 % of the cases, "if possible with outside help". However it is difficult to state that those owners who mentioned their participation carried out the whole of this particular job. But their involvement and their contribution cannot be discarded as negligible.

The frame of the house was built by someone else without personal involvement in 48 % of the cases, the contractor being either a builder (31 %) or an architect or another person (17 %). 28 % personally made arrangements with a building firm.

The fittings give purchasers more opportunities for participating. 73 % did part of the work ; most frequently, the construction firm and the purchaser worked together (41 %). Only 25 % either had the whole job done by professionals (4 %) or commissioned an architect or another person (5 %) or made arrangements with a builder (16 %). 3 % of the purchasers did everything themselves, if possible with the help of others. In general, only 1 % of the purchasers took no part at all in this stage of the construction.

The jobs carried out by owners are varied and include in fact most of the conveniences as well as heating, wiring, insulation etc... and decoration (carpeting, painting, wall papers). The mounting of door- and window-frames is done by the owner in 18 % of the cases. These jobs are the ones least frequently carried out by the purchasers themselves ; next comes the heating system (22 %), wiring (22 %) and even plumbing (39 %). The purchasers most frequently carry out the insulation job (54 %), tiling and carpeting (67 %), painting and upholstering (89 %).

When buying a home, the families often re-establish mutual help networks with friends and/or relatives to carry out these jobs. Buying a home often becomes an opportunity for calling on relatives or friends whose occupations are akin to the building crafts or whose natural resourcefulness is well-known. These mutual aid networks are the more remarkable as they revive very old and widespread customs connected with collectively building family homes in villages. It would be quite interesting to examine in depth the calls for and the offers of mutual help and make a thorough psycho-sociological analysis of those friendship or kinship links enhanced by this situation.

For the buyer, doing a considerable part of the wiring, plumbing, carpeting jobs etc..., in addition to helping set up the body of the

house can save him a lot of money and let him move sooner in his new home. But though it is obvious that most purchasers are reluctant to go to great expense on these jobs, it is equally true that their participation in the work also gives them the opportunity of personally completing their home, of getting even more deeply involved in this process of marking and appropriating the legally owned space, the "true home".

The financial commitment makes the project definite and it is the construction of the house which will in a way confirm and materialize the possibility of appropriating a home. After the house is, so to speak "planted", after the frame has been erected and part of the fixtures installed, the purchaser's involvement in the various operations of arranging, completing, decorating is the very proof of his being at home. He can at last "make his own home by himself" and the financial outlay required by these jobs is less willingly accepted, because its psychological justification is not strong enough.

As we have seen, newly-built single-family homes are primarily purchased by wage-earners from the private sector (67 %), young people (between 28 and 32 years old) who belong to a low income bracket. Therefore it is this upwardly mobile lower-middle-class that constantly has, for a century, strongly identified with the detached house ideology and has equated it with the assertion of its dignity, with reaching a kind of freedom based on such concepts as "being master at home" and "making one's home". One has first to be "master at home" in order to be able to "make a home" and only then can one feel "free" in it. It is only then that a kind of social dignity is confirmed. Making one's home, i.e. quite literally building it with one's own hands, so that one has to contribute time and effort to its completion. Here the cost no longer needs to be financial. One has to do it the hard way and take a personal share in the work. The very purpose of this work (i.e. assertion of social dignity) acts as a disincentive to spend money on the jobs remaining to be done.

F- Personal involvement and commitment

Another remarkable dimension of the aspiration for detached housing is the deliberate undertaking of long-term, binding financial commitments which may be viewed as :
- on the one hand, a genuine acceptance of an economic game in which the chief winners are not always the families concerned ;
- on the other hand, the final outcome of a subtle conditioning of families by the various economic authorities.

Almost everything seems to conspire to bring families to the decision of "getting a house built", for their own psychological satisfaction and security. This security, however, entails a greater dependence upon the various economic partners who take a part in the construction. Where housing is concerned, the economic game is such that a home in the city, integrated to city services is either comfortable and available at a prohibitive price or inexpensive but without any amenities in most cases.

Furthermore tenants are, almost by definition, legally less protected and economically less advantaged than owners. Tenants consequently have a feeling of precariousness and aspire to become owners in their turn.

This aspiration thus compounds at the same time a wish for independence, a concern about protecting one's savings, the acquisition of social dignity and the certainty of really being at home. In order to be operational, these dynamics need free space and special incentives. These dynamics cannot function in a specifically urban space, they fail to develop or to integrate in urban environments. But the motivation is powerful enough to make other solutions seem acceptable and even attractive, e.g., leaving the city center for the suburbs, the big town for the small town or village, putting a distance and daily commuting between the home and the work place etc... All this describes accurately the situation the population of detached house buyers is in.

The incentives to choose this type of solution are equally strong. The already mentioned protection of savings is one of them, like the equally fundamental judgment that the family's income and/or savings had become adequate (56 % and 54 % of the families). Another one is that in 26 % of the cases, relatives gave some financial support and that in 32 % of the cases, the family already owned the land. The loans are usually paid back monthly or, less frequently, in quarterly instalments. 79 % of the purchasers will make repayments for a duration of over 10 years, 8 % for over 20 years and 26 % for 16 to 20 years. To put it differently, the husbands in those families, who most often are between 25 to 35 years old, will be in debt until they reach 40 to 50 years of age.

Yet these long-term commitments are quite clearly accepted by the purchasers who generally claim they did not decide on them lightly. 70 % expected "some problems" and 5 % feel they did not have any problems. The "surprise" nevertheless concerns 25 % of the families who had to cope with :
- "cutting down the vacation budget" (38 %) and the "leisure budget" in general (56 %), thus modifying the family's habits. With the "higher than expected costs" (44 %) and the "cutting-down of food and clothing expenses" (33 %) they constitute the first group of worries, primarily financial in nature, whose repercussions on the family's life style are obvious. Other consequences are "drastically curtailed leisure" (40 %) and "contractor's delays" (40 %) all converging to produce a far-reaching modification of family rhythms.
- Another group of worries relates to the house itself, whose "maintenance is more difficult than expected" (35 %) or which has defects either in the frame (18 %) or in fittings (26 %).

This list, taken together with the considerable percentage of families who ran into these various problems, makes most families' assessment of them (unimportant : 62 %) look like a denial of facts. It seems that these difficulties have to be brushed aside in order to protect and keep intact their satisfaction of living in a single-family home. Most purchasers do expect problems but these, varied and frustrating as

they may be cannot be considered really important, since they are given legitimacy by another fact, in itself valued enough, i.e. getting a detached house built.

This point is by far the most salient one and it repeatedly comes up in this study. Thus, when the respondents are asked to rate problems according to their importance, "managing to pay back" comes first, before "securing a loan" and "choosing the house". Similarly, 41 % of the respondents "barely manage to repay the loan" thus confirming that this remains the major concern.

Lastly, for nearly all the respondents, deciding to get a house built makes it mandatory to increase the family's income. In half the cases, the husband had to look for an additional job (31 %) or for a better paid one (22 %). The wife had to look for a job (28 %) when she was not already working. In 1/3 of the cases, the repayments equal the lower mean salary of one of the spouses.

In view of these facts, it becomes increasingly obvious that the key-statements in this chapter ("I got the loan easily", "I got the amount I needed without problems", "The construction problems don't count") are a deliberate denial of reality and of experienced frustrations.

Although banks are more than adequately covered against the purchasers' possible mistakes, they generally do not attempt to persuade them that loans are easily obtainable. On the contrary, friendly as the service may be, the financial commitments are numerous and highly binding. The atmosphere presiding over loan requests precisely aim at representing the regulations and the borrower's submission to them as so many rules in a strict and rigorous game. Thus if purchasers mention the ease with which they obtained their loan, it is because that can be interpreted as a kind of "success" at an "entrance examination", as a proof of their solvency and hence of their credibility. The notion of buying a detached house as a way of concretizing one's access to social dignity is again demonstrated here by the obvious discrepancy between the nature and number of the problems encountered and their evaluation.

The detached house ideology -i.e., the product of all the historical, psychological and social conditions that contributed to its emergence, and of current economic and urban facts- is thus reinforced by the various incentives to construction, while the banks reap most profits in the process. This ideology prompts young couples to accept 15, 20 or 25 years long commitments through economic dynamics that, for them, chiefly result in a series of restrictions and obligations for the sake of the possession of that ultimate property, a home.

The intricate mutual links between these financial efforts, these obligations and deprivations (of leisure, vacations, lifestyle) and the physical effort of participating in the construction, then constitute the very essence of the creation of a secure, genuinely owned shelter -in this case, a home- as it can be defined in the rationale of the current system of housing production in Western societies.

IV - Environment and sociability

The residents frequently mention that the various services and equipments which might help to develop and facilitate community life are too far away. Yet their first response is one of adjustment to environmental conditions, such as they find them : 61 % of the respondents own two cars, used for frequent commuting and requiring therefore strictly planned schedules. But, since they wish to "feel comfortable at home", commuting is perceived as an acceptable necessity. Similarly the under-equipment of new housing areas is taken as an unavoidable consequence of purchasing a detached house, which gives at once the opportunity of being "isolated", of "investing one's savings" and of securing "privacy".

"To live in a quiet place" ranks first in the respondents' statements about their aspirations (95 %), followed by "having a garden" (91 %) and "owning one's home" (90 %), both of them dimensions whose crucial importance we underscored earlier. The "quiet place-garden" association is quite remarkable and is reinforced by "ownership". One must own a garden in order to live in a quiet place.

Being a full-fledged property owner must also be associated to the fact of "living in a new house" whose owner would "personally install most of the fittings". The fact of living in a new house gives greater value to the purchase in 84 % of the cases. The situation is very different for those social categories who "choose the city" (and often also own a country house) and purchase older houses in order to renovate or remodel them. In the one case, access to a new status must be made clear, underscored even by the glamour of a "brand-new" house while status must be based and firmly rooted in the past (and therefore justified after the fact) in the other case.

This longing for a garden, for "peace and quiet" might have been paired with an equally powerful rejection of the city, with a genuine dream for integration to rustic life etc... But this is only partly true. While 90 % of the purchasers want to "own their homes", not more than 50 % want to "integrate in a village" and 58 % "to get away from the city". The latter percentages are of course far from negligible. They show that about one out of two purchasers more or less shares this well-known "bucolic dream" which, according to some, is one of the most powerful motivations for living in a detached home. However there is a long way from the main purpose, schematically summed up by the formula "quietude-garden-owning a home" to the bucolic dream. We might even say that if that purpose could be achieved at the heart of a large city, that is where most repondents would hope to achieve it. The attraction of outlying districts consists therefore, first and foremost in the price of land, concerning which we know that it will be a property of ever-increasing value and that it is chiefly made of farmland.

The overtaking of farm areas by detached housing and thus by a specific type of low-density urbanization is of itself an important phenomenon that will get full treatment in one of the forthcoming studies in this series. We already know that it is bound to lead to clashes between

rural and urban land uses. Detached housing first threatens, then supersedes the farmer, thus also contributing to do away with the chances of ever making any dream of a "return to nature" come true.

This type of urbanization does not create a genuine way of life, integrating the various human activities. The detached house "culture" is based on dichotomies between work and leisure, production and consumption and on an extreme segregation of spaces. Thus the cultural center is a space for leisure, the supermarket is a space for consumption and noting else etc... This kind of housing thus destroys a cultural identity, the identity of the small town or of the rural environment and attempts to substitute to it another, still undefined one which has not, up to now, given evidence of its coherence or of its vitality.

New phenomena, however, seem to be emerging, whose scope and impact are still difficult to assess. The new residents' interest for the traditional activities of these rural districts is one such example, as well as their attempts at taking over the old center's associative life, their personal commitment and involvement in local politics etc...

Another form of identity, this time of an architectural and urbanistic nature constrasts, in housing estates for instance, with that of the towns or villages they surround. This contrast between, on the one hand, a recent architectural identity, quite real but looked down on by the cultural elite and on the other hand another identity, strongly marked by the past, represents another source of conflicts deriving from an ever more widely shared "aesthetic outlook". In other words, ever greater numbers of people make value judgments about the "aesthetic" qualities of housing, the nature of these aesthetic qualities being of course diversely defined.

Lastly, and as a conclusion to this study of the psychological and social factors in detached housing, we shall deal with the modes of sociability likely to develop in those areas. Only 28 % of the purchasers want to be "near their friends" and it may be supposed that 50 % want to live closer to their family although it is not at all certain that the purchaser's relatives still reside in their native town or village. Moreover, due to the remoteness of equipments, these areas are characterized by a large-scale scattering of inhabitants in their daily work and leisure activities. These zones are also devoid of community meeting-places and of all the public or semi-public transitory places which facilitate contacts between inhabitants : the cafés, restaurants, small trades etc... do not make community life, they help to provide opportunities for the sociability that strengthen it.

Detached housing can be described neither as the sign of a return to nature nor as a return to village life, even if some features of these two situations do occur to some extent. On the contrary it denotes a desire for privacy, a withdrawal to individual and family life, a rejection of the world of work.

The choice of detached housing is primarily conditioned by financial

motives. It is a speculation on the value of real estate (ever more
expensive, ever more valued) as an essential basis for a new social
dignity.

Notes

(1) Questionnaire in French, available on request.

(2) "Le Marché de la Maison Individuelle Neuve", Series
edited by   J.C. Renaud, Ministère du Cadre de Vie. Direction
Régionale de l'Equipement-Alsace - 9, rue de Londres - Strasbourg
France. 8 volumes parus à partir de 1979.

(3) See for example , N. HAUMONT, "Les Pavillonnaires", Paris, CRU,
2à édition, 1975.

(4) P. KOROSEC-SERFATY et D. FEESER, "Formes de l'accueil et du rejet
dans l'habitat : fonctions et statut de l'entrée d'immeuble", in
NEUF, n° 76, septembre-octobre 1978, Bruxelles.

(5) See Centre d'Etudes Psychosociologiques, "La localisation relati-
ve de l'habitat au travail", Paris, octobre 1973, Ronéo. Financé
par la D.G.R.S.T.

(6) See "L'architecture rurale française : l'Alsace", M.N. DENIS et
M.C. GROSHENS, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1978, p. 47.

(7) L. MUMFORD, "La Cité à travers l'histoire", Paris, Seuil, 1964.

(8) M. RAGON, "Histoire Mondiale de l'Architecture et de l'Urbanisme
Modernes", Paris, Casterman, 1971, p. 280.

(9) R.H. GUERRAND, "Les origines du logement social en France", Paris,
Ed. Ouvrières, 1967.

(10) G. BARBEY, "L'Habitation Captive", Editions Georgi, Saint-Saphorin
1980.

(11) A. MALRAUX, "Les Voix du Silence".

(12) P. BOURDIEU et M. de SAINT-PIERRE, "Anatomie du Goût", n° 5 des
"Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales", Paris, octobre 1976.

(13) S. SANDSTRÖM, "A common taste in Art", ARIS, Institute of Art
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Abstract

This survey is based on a representative sample of 2427 families systematically selected out a population of 5582 who purchased or had a new single family home built in 1978 in Alsace, East of France. After stressing the links between the aspirations for single-family-housing and the characteristics of the previously occupied homes (qualities, equipment, location, etc...) and outlining the socio-economic profile of the byers, the author highlights the importance of the ideology of single-family-housing in France. The dimensions of the aspirations for this kind of housing are then described, leading to an analysis of the conflicts and congruences between the ownership and the appropiation of the home, and between the economic motivations ("protecting one's savings") and the psychological ones ("feeling at home"). The dimensions "living in a home one has personally chosen", "making one's own home" and "owning a property to hand down to one's heirs" are contrasted with those of the financial and personal committment on the one hand, and of sociability on the other hand.

As a conclusion, the author shows that the population of single-family home byer belongs to the social category that has constantly, during the past hundred years, made their own the ideology of single-family-housing and that nowadays equates the ownership of such a house with its social dignity and standing.

UNA CASA PRÒPIA: FACTORS PSICOLÒGICS I SOCIALS ALS HABITATGES UNIFAMILIARS

Resum

Aquest estudi està basat en una enquesta realitzada mitjançant una mostra representativa de 2427 families, seleccionades sistemàticament d'entre una població de 5582, que havien accedit a la propietat d'un hàbitat unifamiliar nou al 1978 a l'Alsace (a l'est de França). Després d'haver destacat els lligams existents entre l'aspiració a l'hàbitat unifamiliar i les característiques de l'antic habitatge (qualitat, situació, etc....), després de dibuixar el prefil socio-econòmic dels que accedien, l'autor recorda la importància de la ideologia dels habitatges unifamiliars al context francès. Les dimensions de l'aspiració a aquesta forma d'hàbitat són seguidament descrites, conduint l'autor a analitzar els conflictes i les coincidències entre la possesió i l'apropiació de l'hàbitat i entre les motivacions econòmiques (protegir els estalvis) i psicològiques (sentir-se a casa seva). Les dimensions "viure a la casa que un ha escollit personalment", "fer-se la casa un mateix" i "tenir un patrimoni a transmetre" són confrontades a les de compromís financer i personal d'una banda, i a la sociabilitat d'una altra. En conclusió, l'autor demostra que la població de compradors de cases unifamiliars pertany a

aquella categoria social que constantment, durant els darrers cent anys, ha fet seva aquesta ideologia d'un habitatge unifamiliar i que ara considera equivalent la possisió d'una casa així amb la seva dignitat i posició social.

UNA CASA PROPIA: FACTORES PSICOLOGICOS Y SOCIALES EN LAS VIVIENDAS UNIFAMILIARES

Resumen

Este estudio está basado en una encuesta realizada con una muestra de 2427 familias, seleccionadas sistemáticamente a partir de una población de 5582, que han accedido a la propiedad de una vivienda unifamiliar nueva en 1978 en Alsacia (Este de Francia). Después de haber subrayado los lazos existentes entre la aspiración del hábitat unifamiliar y las características de la antigua vivienda (calidad, situación, etc...), después de dibujar el perfil socio-económico de los que acceden, el autor recuerda la importancia de la ideología de las viviendas unifamiliares en el contexto francés. Las dimensiones de la aspiración a esta nueva forma de hábitat están seguidamente enunciadas, conduciendo el autor a analizar los conflictos y coincidencias entre la posesión y la apropiación del hábitat, y entre las motivaciones económicas (proteger sus ahorros) y psicológicas (estar en su casa). Las dimensiones "vivir-sentirse en la casa que uno ha escogido personalmente", "hacerse la casa uno mismo" y "tener un patrimonio que transmitir" se confrontan a las del compromiso financiero y personal, por una parte, y a la de la sociabilidad por otra. En conclusión, el autor demuestra que la población de los compradores de viviendas unifamiliares pertenecen a la categoría social que siempre, a lo largo de los cien últimos años, ha hecho suya la ideología de una casa unifamiliar y que ahora equipara la posesión de una casa así con su dignidad y su posición social.