Identity and Lifestyle in the Residential Environment

Paper to the Conference 'Doing, thinking, feeling home: the mental geography of residential environments' Delft 14/15 October 2005

Professor David Clapham
Cardiff University
Email: ClaphamDf@cardiff.ac.uk

This paper is the product of ongoing work and should not be quoted without permission of the author
Identity and Lifestyle in the Residential Environment

Abstract
The paper focuses on the concepts of identity and lifestyle that have been little used to date in housing research. It is argued that identity is forged through social interaction, but this has both an agency and a structural dimension that can be considered together. The concept of categorical identity is important here as it helps to bridge the two dimensions. The concept has been used to analyse some categories such as age, but has not been systematically applied to the residential environment. The paper will point out some ways in which it can be applied.

The paper examines the potential of identity and lifestyle for housing research by focusing on studies of the meaning of home. It is argued that existing work is very partial, in that it has explored the spectrum of meanings without looking at levels of importance or of differences between individuals and groups of people. The paper shows a way forward by relating the residential environment to wider aspects of identity and lifestyle. What is the place of the “home” or “neighbourhood” in different people’s lives? How does it relate to their other identities and their lifestyle? It is argued that there are not always general answers that can be uncovered for these questions. Research emphasis needs to be placed on the search for differences in these identities and lifestyles and the construction of appropriate typologies. A lot can be learned from the consumption categories that are used in market research.

Finally, the paper puts forward a research agenda for using the concepts of identity and lifestyle in order to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between people and their residential environment.

David Clapham
Cardiff University

Introduction
The aim of this paper is to chart a way forward for the use of the concepts of identity and lifestyle in housing research. It is argued that the concepts offer a way of understanding the meaning that housing has in people’s lives. Housing research has attempted to elucidate these meanings, but most attempts to date have been partial in that they have not linked housing to other aspects of identity and lifestyle. It is argued that an understanding of the meaning that housing has for people is crucial for agencies working in housing. For example, private developers need to know their market and the influences that will affect sales. However, it is argued that public agencies also need this information if housing policy is to deliver what people want.

The paper begins with the argument for the importance of identity and lifestyle in contemporary society. It is argued that the “opening out” of social life has given importance to the construction of personal identity. A definition of identity is given derived from a social constructionist perspective. Therefore, identity is seen as being constructed through social interaction that occurs within understandings of
appropriate behaviour that can be characterised as categorical identities. That is, ideas of what kind of behaviour is appropriate for people in certain circumstances. The concept of categorical identity offers a link between personal agency and structure. The section proceeds with an elaboration of the concept of lifestyle and its links to identity. It is argued that a personal lifestyle is a “living out” of a personal identity.

The paper continues with a discussion of the literature on the meaning of home in people’s life as this is the major way in which housing research has approached the concepts of identity and lifestyle. It is argued that existing research needs to be developed and broadened in order to elucidate the place of the house and home in people’s life.

Another interesting area of research is on the perception and meaning of the local neighbourhood and its relationship to identity and lifestyle. The next section examines some research in this area and charts a way forward to integrate this into a wider literature.

Finally the paper draws together the threads of the argument and charts a way forward for research that uses the concepts of identity and lifestyle to further our understanding of the meaning of housing and aids the formulation and delivery of a relevant housing policy.

Identity and Lifestyle
The starting point is the contention of King (1996 p.35) that: “Housing is a means of fulfilment that allows other human activities to take place”. Giddens argues that the “opening out” of social life in late modernity means that “the ongoing project of the self” and the related lifestyle choices have become major features of life. Therefore it is important to understand the way that housing contributes to this major life interest or project.

Identity is a sense of who we are as individuals – a sense of self. It is also the way that we project ourselves to others - the way that we want others to see us. Social constructionists argue that identity is forged through social interaction with others. Jenkins (1996) terms this “the internal – external dialectic of identification.” We constantly judge who we are by how we act towards others and their reaction to us.

“Individual identity – embodied in selfhood – is not meaningful in isolation from the social world of other people. Individuals are unique and variable, but selfhood is thoroughly socially constructed, a product of the processes or primary and subsequent socialisation, and in the ongoing processes of social interaction within which individuals define and redefine themselves and others throughout their lives…. An understanding emerges of the “self” as an ongoing and, in practice simultaneous, synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others.”

(Jenkins 1996 p.20)

Jenkins also sees identity as never settled. Rather it should be seen as a process of “becoming”. Giddens (1991) sees identity as a life project, which involves both continuity and change, as we reflexively adapt to changing circumstances in order to create a coherent and durable individual social identity.
Identity is the product of the interaction of embodied individuals. Hockey and James (2003) show the importance of chronological age through categorisation into “child” or “adult”. Writing on identity in old age has focused on the “mask of ageing” in which the attitude of others based on the appearance of the body does not correspond with the identity of the older person who still sees themselves as being the same person they were earlier in the lifecourse. Craib (1998 p.7) acknowledges that as a middle-aged man he can present himself on the World Wide Web as almost anybody he chooses, but the physical body will intervene in any unmediated, face-to-face encounters. “Once I am seen, my ability to revise my identity is limited: I cannot become a blond teenage girl”.

Identity is both singular and plural. We have a sense of different identities which we may adopt in different situations or towards different people. For example, we may be at the same time a son and a father and see ourselves differently in our interaction with our mother and our daughters. At the same time we attempt to forge an overall view of who we are. This point is well made by Craib (1998 p.4).

“If I suffered a major tragedy in my family life, ceasing to be a husband and becoming a divorced man or widower, my identity would have changed in an excruciatingly painful way but I would still have an identity. Social identities can come and go but my identity goes on as something which unites all the social identities I ever had or will have. My identity always overflows, adds to, transforms the social identities that are attached to me.”

Identity is about differentiating ourselves from others by forging a sense of our own individuality. However it is also about sharing distinctive features with others – a sense of belonging to a category defined by similarity. Belonging to a category may be associated with socially constructed norms of meaning and social interaction. Fathers are responsible and mature, for example, or sons are dutiful and loving. Categorical identity is one way in which the individual “project of the self” relates to structural factors reflected both in the expectations of ourselves and others of appropriate behaviour. However, these categories and their meanings are reproduced or changed through the interactions of individuals – they are the product of the process of dialectical identification in which individuals reflexively live out the categories at one point in time. But this interaction is not simply a matter of individual choice, as categorical identities are forged through relations of power and authority which frame interactions. As Jenkins (1996 p.24) points out;

“social identities exist and are acquired, claimed and allocated within power relations. Identity is something over which struggles take place and with which stratagems are advanced: it is means and ends in politics”

Collective identity also has elements of similarity and difference. Although the category may be defined through similarity, the distinction with other categories is maintained through the recognition of difference.

Identity and lifestyle are two related concepts, but it is difficult to define precisely their relationship. Chaney (1996) explores different elements of the concept of lifestyle. He says that lifestyles are patterns of action that differentiate people (p.4).
The pattern of action in a lifestyle is “a style, a manner, a way of using certain goods, places and times” (p.5). It is also a “distribution of disposable incomes” (p.12) and much interest in the concept has focused around its link to the consumption of goods and services. But it is much more than consumption, focusing on the way that people use places (such as the home or neighbourhood) and their time. In general it is “any distinctive, and therefore recognisable, mode of living” (p.11). The links between lifestyle and identity are strong. For example, Chaney argues that lifestyles “help make sense of what people do, and why they do it, and what doing it means to them and others”. This has a direct bearing on identity as he argues “people use lifestyles in everyday life to identify and explain wider complexes of identity and affiliation” (p.12). Lifestyles are expressions of identity in daily life. At the same time they help to define our identity by patternning our interaction with others.

As with the concept of identity, people can reflexively choose and amend lifestyles. They can be “donned and discarded at will” (p.12). Nevertheless lifestyles are “embedded in the social order” and have both agency and structural dimensions. As with identity, lifestyles have elements of individuality and collectivity, and of sameness and difference. They are also are the product of interactions which are framed by power relations. Bourdieu (1984) shows how “taste” has a social class or status dimension. In other words some lifestyles may be associated with different status groups and may confer on the lifestyle holder different social status.

Both concepts are important for an analysis of housing. Housing may impact on a person’s identity in a positive or negative way. The literature on the meaning of home is a clue to what can be gained here. What people pay for their housing and how they use their home and its surroundings can be an important element of lifestyle. It is also linked to other elements of lifestyle and therefore, should be looked at in the round.

The Meaning of Home
There has been a wide range of research on the meaning of home. The aim here is not to review this literature (see Clapham 2005 for a review) but to select from it those elements that illustrate the potential of an approach using the concepts of identity and lifestyle.

There have been a number of attempts to bring together all of the elements of home. Somerville (1992) divides the meaning of home into six categories. These are; shelter; hearth (by which is meant feelings of physical warmth and cosiness); heart (loving and affectionate relationships); privacy (power to exclude others and prohibit surveillance); abode (place to call home); and roots (individual’s source of identity and meaningfulness). In similar fashion, Gurney (1996) derives 12 categories from empirical work with a sample of owner-occupiers. He asked his respondents to say what made the difference between house and home. The results are laid out in figure 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse</th>
<th>Words used by respondents</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td><em>Family, relatives, marriage, relationships, children, security (emotional stability), ‘where the</em></td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back – Regions</td>
<td>Return to, come back to, private, privacy, refuge, alone, peace, peaceful, quiet, haven, solitude, be on your own, be yourself</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative/ instrumental</td>
<td>Roof over your head, millstone, debt, worry, just a place to eat and sleep, my real home is my parent’s home, I can’t relax here, it doesn’t make any difference if you own, housework, hard work</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation</td>
<td>Relax, relaxation, unwind, take things easy, rest, put your feet up</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>Comfort, comfortable, cosy, warm</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Feel safe, safety, security (physical)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Pride, achievement, investment for our future and for our children’s future, worked hard for it, it belongs to me/us, feel differently about it if you own, security (financial)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalisation</td>
<td>Place to design, your own tastes, belongings, furniture</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>You can do what you want, your own rules, freedom, you can say what you want, ’a man’s home is his castle’ your own world</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front - Region</td>
<td>Invite people in, entertain, neighbours, community, Bristol</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What you make it”</td>
<td>‘Home is what you make (of) it’</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Words which did not clearly fall into discourses above i.e security (ambiguous), everything, very important, garden, a base</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Words in *italics* are responses to the question, “Some people say that the words *house* and *home* mean quite different things. What does your home mean to you?”

Sample n=103
Missing observations n=12
*(Source: Gurney 1996)*

The importance of emotional factors relating to family relationships is apparent. Other important factors were privacy, relaxation, comfort and safety. Other categories are concerned with autonomy, personalisation and creativity, and display (what Gurney classifies as front region).

An important category of responses was what Gurney called negative/instrumental. Here he has put together a number of responses which either do not recognise the difference between house and home and stress the physical elements of the house, or else do not consider where they are living as home. Also there are a number of negative responses which question the positive image of home. References to a millstone, source of worry, debt, and hard work show that some people either do not recognise or are not experiencing in their present circumstances these positive elements. Interestingly in Gurney’s sample almost all these responses were from men.
Ownership is one of Gurney’s categories in which he includes responses which mentioned pride and a sense of achievement as well as the financial benefits of owner-occupation. The academic and often the policy discussions about home have often associated home with the tenure of owner occupation.

Gurney examined the gender differences in the meaning of home in his sample and found no clear pattern. It seems that the differences between individuals were greater than any systematic gender differences. But the issue of gender differences should remain open. Gurney found that women mentioned more responses than men and relates this to the greater length of time they spend in the home and the more roles which they play. It is likely their experience of home is more complex and contradictory than that of men.

Research on the meaning of home has been overly concerned with generalisation, searching for universal meanings whether within or across tenures. The research on private renters is evidence of a more fruitful approach examining differences between individuals in the meaning of home and the relationships between this and other aspects of their lives. Knight (2002) divided his sample of private renters into five groups. The first group was labeled the impatient would-be home owners being made up of people who wanted to be owner occupiers as soon as they could manage it. The second group was fatalistic would-be home owners. Households in this group were often in receipt of social security benefits and most had rented from the public sector before becoming private renters. In general they were unhappy with their present accommodation and wanted to become owner occupiers but thought they were unlikely to ever achieve this. The third group was pragmatic endurers. These were students or other young people who felt that private renting suited them at present but planned to become owner occupiers eventually. The fourth group is procrastinators who wanted to be owner occupiers and had the money to afford to be owners, but who valued keeping their options open and did not want to make the long term commitment to owner occupation yet. The fifth group was contented nesters who were contented and comfortable in their private rented homes and anticipated remaining there for a long time. Knight (2002) found that the groups had different attitudes towards issues such as the desire to decorate and personalise the rented house. Households in these groups seemed to have similar views of the meaning of home and to recognise that the constraints of living in private rented accommodation compared to being owner occupiers meant that not all elements of home (such as privacy, a feeling of being settled, and a sense of ownership) could be achieved. For some, these disadvantages were offset by the flexibility which renting offered.

Gurney (1996) has identified five typologies of owners. The first are what he calls Lexic-owners. These are households which have a strong ideological attachment to ownership and tend to express this in common sense aphorisms such as “if it’s yours, you take more care of it”. The second group were pragmatic owners. They were concerned with what ownership brought to their lives in terms of practical benefits. They were prepared to do essential repairs to the house, but did not wish to get involved in the self-actualisation of DIY activities. Ownership was seen as a valuable tool in accessing good schools for children and was perceived to bestow financial benefits. The third group were labeled by Gurney “petty tycoons”. They regarded ownership as a financial investment and were concerned with movements in house prices. The paradox identified by Gurney is that most of this group of owners were
on the margins of the tenure. The fourth group were called by Gurney extrinsic owners. Ownership was seen as an achievement which was part of display to others. This group took substantial interest and pride in the garden and the décor of the house and had often undertaken substantial improvement work. This group tended to be without children often because they had left home. The fifth group was labeled conflictual. Here there was no clear household view of ownership because it was a source of conflict and ongoing negotiation between the household members.

The typologies identified by Gurney were based on a small number of households in one location. However the approach seems to be an important way of breaking out of the simplistic search for generalisation which has characterised much of the work on meaning of home. The typologies can be refined and extended across tenures. The way forward in looking at the meaning of home is to examine tenure as one among many factors which could influence the meaning people hold towards their housing as well as seeing tenure as one expression of this meaning.

Typologies based on the meaning of home can be expanded by including other elements. For example, households have different attitudes towards repairs and different propensities to undertake repair activity. Leather, Littlewood and Munro (1998) devised a model based on a household lifecycle and an occupancy path. They argue that, typically, a household moves into a dwelling and in the early stages carries out substantial amounts of work to remedy defects and to achieve an acceptable level of comfort and aesthetic appearance. Further investment may follow on a lesser scale, but the amount of work declines until the household moves, when new occupants repeat the process. They argue that, as long as there is a frequent turnover of occupancy, repairs are dealt with in a reasonable fashion. Newly formed young households may be willing to devote considerable time and resources to repairs and improvements if they have the financial resources. Households with young children may be less inclined to invest in major repairs because of the cost and disruption involved, but may be more willing to invest in improvements to increase comfort. Older people may be very reluctant to undertake any cosmetic or repair work because of low income, the disruption and a declining DIY capacity. They identify four situations where repair and maintenance is likely to be problematic. The first is where a household, especially an older one, remains in a house for a long period of time. The second is where a young household is unable to afford repair work. Third, is where insecure employment reduces the confidence of the household and decreases their capacity to afford repairs. Fourth, is where relationship instability and an increasing propensity to live alone, undermines the capacity to finance repairs. Leather, Littlewood and Munro (1998) argue that each of these situations is likely to increase in the future. This approach is a useful one because it considers the dynamics of the maintenance process and ties it in with the situation of the household. However, the approach assumes universal attitudes towards the physical condition of the house by households at different stages of the life course. Only a limited set of variables is considered and there is no link to differences in lifestyle and attitudes.

Another important element of the construction of lifestyle typologies is attitudes towards expenditure on housing. In a review of research on household budgets and housing costs Kempson (1993) argues that the proportion of income devoted to housing costs varies widely with income levels. In a survey of public sector tenants, households in the poorest group paid on average a third of their incomes for housing
whereas the richest group paid only one sixth. However there were variations in the proportion spent on housing between households with similar income levels. These variations were particularly marked for households in the poorest group. Owner occupiers spent more, on average, than tenants and it seems that households were prepared to pay considerably more in order to enter owner occupation. In her review of the evidence Kempson concludes that “people with identical incomes and family characteristics chose to spend very different amounts on housing” (Kempson, 1993 p.27).

How much is spent on housing may be influenced by the way that households handle their finances. Research by Pahl (1989) has identified different patterns of control and management of the household budget. Control concerned the way that the common housekeeping budget (as against individual consumption) was determined. Some households pooled their income whereas others kept separate bank accounts. In some the husband controlled the amount allocated to the general household budget, but in others the wife undertook this role. Pahl (1989) identified four different patterns for managing how the common household budget was spent. The first is the whole wage system in which one partner (usually the wife) is responsible for managing all the household expenses including housing costs. The second is the allowance system where typically the husband gives the wife a set amount of money and she is responsible for the day to day expenses whilst he retains the rest of the money and usually pays the larger bills. The third is the pooling system in which both partners have access to all the household money and share responsibility for expenditure. The fourth is the independent management system in which both partners have an income which they maintain separately. Each of them takes on responsibility for different items of expenditure. The form of management determines who pays the housing costs. Overall in 40 per cent of households it was the man, and 30 per cent the woman with responsibility being shared in the remainder. It is unclear whether and how the method used to control and manage the household budget influences the amount a household spends on housing.

The ability to acquire an asset is an important perceived advantage of owner occupation for many households. Just how important is difficult to assess because of the many different attributes of tenure, such as house and neighbourhood quality, and rights and obligations of occupancy. It is likely that the relative importance of the investment factor relative to the others may vary between households.

It is just as difficult to disentangle investment issues from others in the decision to move house. Very few households say that they move to a more expensive house in order to build up more equity. Moves are usually made for reasons of changes in employment or family circumstances. However, households may take advantage of the build up of equity in order to “move up the housing ladder” even if the main reason for moving is different. They may have in their minds a strategy of house moves which will reflect the ability to build up and reinvest equity and to take out new mortgages. This may be done in order to gain better quality housing, but it may be done in order to acquire wealth which will be released for spending on other areas. Very little is known about how different households perceive these situations and what their motives are.
It was noted earlier that households spend very different proportions of their income on housing. However, it is not clear whether this is related to different attitudes towards wealth acquisition. Do households concerned with building up wealth spend more on housing than households who are primarily motivated by consumption attributes?

The question of attitudes towards wealth acquisition is also important in decisions on house repair and improvement. To what extent are households motivated to spend money on their properties by concerns over whether the expenditure will add to the asset value of the house? Here again it may be difficult to disentangle the many factors involved. For example, the decision to add an extra room to a house (a conservatory or loft conversion) may be motivated by a mixture of concerns about current consumption (the increased pleasure from use of the extra space) as well as asset accumulation (will it add to the value or price of the house). It may also be tied in with decisions about whether to improve the present house or to move to another. Again this may raise a mixture of financial and other considerations. The problem with all of these issues is that the same behaviour may be motivated by different perceptions and attitudes.

Households also vary in the use they make of the wealth accumulated in their housing. This wealth may have an important impact on a household in terms of a sense of security and well being. Therefore, its very existence may influence household attitudes and behaviour even though it remains purely a hypothetical figure until it is realised. It may be thought that the increase in wealth through general house price increases is illusory because any household will have to live somewhere and the prices of other houses they may wish to purchase have also increased in price. However, housing wealth can be realised in a number of ways. One way is by trading down to a cheaper property and so cashing in some of the value. Even when moving to a more expensive house a larger mortgage may be taken out which allows the deposit to be less than the cash gained from the sale. Another method is by remortgaging an existing house. In other words borrowing on the basis of the asset value of the house. Forrest and Murie (1995) argue that these forms of equity withdrawal can be seen as ways of rescheduling housing expenditures over the lifetime of the household as payments can vary considerably at different times. Equity withdrawal may also be seen as a way of changing the balance between expenditure on housing and other items such as holidays or daily household living expenses.

This section has stressed the limits of our current knowledge of the meaning of home. Much research in this area has been partial in its scope and preoccupied with single issues such as physical design or tenure. It has succeeded mostly in defining the parameters of the issue through the search for universal meanings, but only limited progress has been made in illuminating differences and patterns. More work is needed which looks at different meanings of home and their relationship to lifestyles and housing pathways. The differences in the meaning of home have not been linked to other aspects of life such as attitudes towards family life, work, money or the use of time. Only when these links are made will we be in a position to understand the position that home has in people’s lives and how the housing circumstances contribute to personal identity and the search for self-fulfilment.
Neighbourhood
There has been interest in the attachment that people may have to the place or
neighbourhood in which they live. Low and Altman (1992) argue that some people
make an emotional investment in place. They state that place attachment, “involves
an interplay of affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviours and
actions in reference to a place” p.5. Hummon (1992) argues that attachment to a
place is more a function of the subjective perception of the place than of its
“objective” characteristics.

Evaluations of neighbourhood based programmes in disadvantaged areas have drawn
attention to the importance of the meaning of place and its impact on the identity of
individuals. It is argued that the meaning of place is linked to an increasing focus on
the status and reputation or image of disadvantaged areas. These images have been
shown often to be durable, difficult to change, but often fractured (Dean and Hastings,
2000). Residents have different views of and attachment to a particular area and these
views may differ from those of outsiders. However, there has been little research on
the factors that shape these views and contribute to differences. For example, how
open to change are the perceptions of both residents and outsiders and what influences
them? How important are the media, the physical environment or perceived social
status in influencing perceptions? How important are these factors in shaping moving
decisions by different residents in comparison to other issues?

A lot of emphasis in neighbourhood programmes for disadvantaged areas has been
placed on improving social interactions in the area and creating a sense of community
and increasing social capital. However, the pattern of social interaction which often
seems to be aimed at is increasingly rare in more affluent areas as the process of
individualisation, improved forms of communication and increased mobility mean
that social links are less often based on the immediate locality. Attempts to create
social balance in neighbourhoods with a concentration of disadvantaged people have
been limited in the creation of new social networks as those in work have spent little
time in the immediate neighbourhood and so have not mixed to any great extent with
existing residents (Jupp, 1999). Also, it is unclear to what extent social networks will
change the propensity to move if those networks can still be maintained from a
distance. Nevertheless, research has drawn attention to the importance of what have
been termed “weak ties” (Granovetter, 1973). It may be that many people are not
looking to their neighbourhood for their main social networks but still value the
superficial friendliness of knowing people in the street and chatting to neighbours.

In more affluent neighbourhoods there has been increasing interest in the way that
households “buy into” the area without necessarily spending much time there (Forrest
and Kearns, 2001). In this instance, attachment is achieved not by social networks,
but by a positive meaning which the area has to individuals which reflects and
reinforces their identities and lifestyles.

Scase (1999) sees traditional communities being replaced by more diversified
localities. Some would consist of people with choice pursuing active lifestyles that
transcended the locality to a large extent. Scase argues that mobility and the growing
use of information technologies will enable people to interact with a broader
geographical network of friends and acquaintances, but will not negate the importance
of neighbourhood. Lifestyles will shape the availability of local facilities such as
schools, shops and leisure facilities and the “image” of areas will influence their appeal. In an echo of the views of Giddens, Scase argues that community will increasingly have a “psychological” dimension.

“In an uncertain world where jobs are insecure and futures are unpredictable, living in a risk society reinforces the importance of community in a symbolic sense. Individuals obtain a sense of “place”, of attachment to the communities in which they live”.

(Scase 1999 p.54)

He argues that this will be true even if highly mobile and affluent people do not make use of local facilities. The most important factor will be the status or “brand” of the community which will be strongly influenced by the local media which can promulgate images and symbols with which people can identify and “buy into”. Forrest and Kearns argue that,

“In a sense, the neighbourhood becomes an extension of the home for social purposes and hence extremely important in identity terms: “location matters” and the neighbourhood becomes part of our statement about who we are”.

(Forrest and Kearns, 2001 p. 2130).

Scase argues that neighbourhoods will be increasingly segregated by demographics and lifestyles as well as income and occupation. Older people will continue to move to areas which match their lifestyles and provide facilities for hobbies, socialising and shopping. He argues that the growth of single person households among the young and the middle aged will be concentrated in the inner-cities. Housing developers will focus on their leisure, health and personal security needs and facilities such as fast food outlets, delicatessens, wine bars, clubs and 24 hour stores will be concentrated. These areas will contain the most “cosmopolitan and fashionable” lifestyles and be the primary areas for “experimentation and innovation” of lifestyles.

Those with “more traditional” lifestyles and family patterns will live in the outer suburbs where the provision of quality schooling, education and child-care will be concentrated. Other neighbourhoods will consist of people socially, culturally and economically excluded who are constrained into locality based lifestyles, dependent on the quality of local facilities.

The picture painted by Scase is a very interesting one. However accurate the predictions prove to be, it opens up a debate about the nature of neighbourhood in a complex and useful way that recognises the importance of the meanings and perceptions of households. The link between locality and lifestyles opens the possibility that people will view their neighbourhood in very different ways depending on their income, gender, lifecycle stage, age and lifestyle. In their study of three gentrified neighbourhoods in London, Butler and Robson (2001) found that there were differences in the image of neighbourhoods which reflected the attitudes of the residents. One area attracted people because of its cultural diversity, another because of its social networks and schools, and the third because of its social and recreational facilities. These differences were reflected in the attachment which residents had to the area and their expectations of what a “good” neighbourhood was.
This section has briefly looked at the meaning that neighbourhoods can have for people. It has been argued that the meanings can vary substantially and may relate to the social networks in an area, the image or lifestyle projection or brand of the area and its status. These differences need to be incorporated into typologies of the meaning of home.

**Conclusion**

The paper has shown the different dimensions of the meaning that housing has for its occupants that reflects their identity and lifestyle. The meaning of home, attitudes towards the amount of money spent on housing and its use as an investment or a consumption good, attitudes towards house condition and repair, and the meaning of neighbourhood are all elements that make up an overall picture of what housing means to people. It is evident that people vary considerably in their orientations towards these factors. The key task is to relate the differences in the individual elements together to form typologies of different orientations towards housing. The further task is to relate these typologies to lifestyles more generally if we are to understand the place of housing in people’s life.

At a number of places in the paper the housing policy issues that would be informed by the suggested approach have been identified. For example, why do some people not spend enough on housing to secure a societal norm of a minimum level of accommodation, when others with a similar income do? What factors influence the willingness of households to keep their houses in good repair? What focus should be taken in disadvantaged areas between improving social networks or improving the image or “brand” of the neighbourhood? The argument here is that all of these issues are interrelated because they reflect the way that people view their housing and how it relates to their view of themselves (their identity) and what they want to use their housing for (their lifestyle). Therefore, in order to answer the policy questions, it is necessary to understand the perceptions and attitudes of different households and the meaning that particular places have for them. This task involves using the concepts of identity and lifestyle that have been little used in housing research.

**References**


Gurney C. (1996) Meanings of home and home ownership; myths histories and experiences Unpublished Ph D thesis University of Bristol


