

Chapter Seven

HOUSING PREFERENCES AND SATISFACTION: MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

7.1 Introduction

Twenty years ago, Singaporeans would have been satisfied if they had earned enough for a living and had a roof over their heads. Mention private properties or condominiums, and they would think that these are luxurious apartments only for the very wealthy.

Today, Singaporeans earn higher incomes and have higher savings, in step with the nation's economic and social progress. Many now want better quality housing. They want bigger HDB flats. They also hope to own a private house.

(LifeStyle, June 1996:17)

This chapter sets out to discuss the research findings presented in Chapter Six, and examines the implications of these findings in the light of housing preferences and satisfaction. The broader issues concerning the provision of private housing in Singapore will also be covered. These issues are highlighted by the main theme of this thesis, “Great Expectations”, and are related to what housing market observers term the “Singapore Dream” of owning private housing. This chapter consists of two main parts. Part one highlights the implications of findings from Chapter Six and relates these findings to the research questions stated in Chapter One. Part two proceeds to examine how the “Great Expectations” of an increasingly affluent population in their housing aspirations are being tackled through the various policies and approaches taken by both government and non government agencies (NGA).

Policy matters on the provision of high end housing, including such initiatives as the privatisation of HUDC housing and the executive condominiums scheme, are briefly discussed. Other issues discussed include: land sales programmes, housing affordability and housing co-operatives, control of foreign home ownership and the need to ensure greater transparency in the housing market. Also, the anti-speculation measures announced by the government in May 1996 are documented, and the

effects of such measures on the housing market are discussed. Two new housing forms, the clustered and waterfront housing are also highlighted, showing how these new forms of housing can provide a wider choice of housing for owner-occupation and for investment. The chapter concludes that housing policies involve a host of complex decisions which may not have been adequately covered in this study. Nevertheless, the need for policy makers to simultaneously and cautiously consider the main approaches when dealing with the “Great Expectations” of the people is stressed.

7.2 Major Research Findings

From the literature review, survey and research carried out in this study, it is postulated that the various attributes affecting owner-occupiers’ housing preferences can be conveniently grouped into four categories:

- (i) Environmental Attributes
- (ii) Locational Attributes
- (iii) Social Attributes
- (iv) Design and Structural Attributes

As discussed in Chapter One and highlighted in the housing models in Chapter Four, these grouping of attributes are influenced by socio-economic and political factors as well as personal situational factors. A total of 31 different attributes are taken into consideration. Of these attributes, the most important attributes in housing preferences perceived by the sample of owner-occupiers are found to be privacy/peace, security, ventilation, price, air quality, structure, noise, daylight, freedom from mosquito infestation and availability of parking space. In the case of neighbourhood preferences, the five most important attributes are security, school, wet market, workplace, and shopping facilities. The implications of the findings are elaborated in Section 7-3 of this chapter.

Housing and Neighbourhood Satisfaction

...improving the quality of neighbourhood environmental characteristics will increase residents' concern with the appearance of the neighbourhood along with their concerns about the quality of people who live there, which in turn enhances higher perceived levels of neighbourhood safety (Baba and Austin, 1989:763)

Knowledge of owner-occupiers' housing and neighbourhood satisfaction can be applied to design and planning decisions (Sancar, 1985). This study reveals that younger owner-occupiers (below the age of 35 years) have higher housing satisfaction than those who are 35 years or older. No significant relationship is found between housing satisfaction and the categories of owner-occupiers. In other words, both owner-occupiers of condominiums and landed housing are more or less equally satisfied with their housing. Besides housing satisfaction, neighbourhood satisfaction is investigated in this study. As suggested by Shlay (1985) in her work on housing and neighbourhood ideology, housing is not simply a structure with associated tenure characteristics; it also consists of external-to-house components. Indeed, she stressed that housing is a composite or bundle of items that include neighbourhood characteristics such as population and access to local amenities. However, no significant relationship is found between neighbourhood satisfaction and the categories of owner-occupiers. This signifies that both owner-occupiers of condominiums and landed housing are satisfied with their neighbourhood to the same extent. However, both groups are more satisfied with their housing unit than their neighbourhood. Indeed, as expected, respondents who are satisfied with the neighbourhood environment are more likely to express higher perceived levels of neighbourhood safety. This finding supports Baba and Austin's study (1989). Nevertheless, as in the study by Shlay, people's satisfaction with their housing or neighbourhood are not rigid and can be modified.

Housing Decisions

Two main questions on housing decisions are also investigated in this study:

- (i) To what extent has 99-year leasehold housing gained acceptance among owner-occupiers?
- (ii) To what extent are owner-occupiers of private housing prepared to consider moving to public housing?

First, as to the acceptance of 99-year leasehold housing among the owner-occupiers, it is found that about 46 per cent of those who intended to move out of their present homes indicated that they were likely to consider buying leasehold 99-year residential properties. From the outcome of the survey in this study, it is anticipated that demand for leasehold residential properties is likely to rise. Four reasons can be cited for this. Firstly, there is a substantial increase in the number of leasehold residential developments currently in the market and in the years to come, thus offering home buyers greater choices. Secondly, demand for such properties is likely to rise following the commercial banks' move to finance purchases of leasehold residential properties with 50 to 75 years remaining in their lease. Thirdly, there is a "herd instinct" among home buyers in response to mass advertisements by property developers in the current bullish market, though this may be only a short term event. Lastly and more potently, is the fact that with the Land Acquisition Act (1970), the State can acquire any property for public and other specified purposes. In this sense, freehold land is no longer "free".

Such a trend is also predicted by Ng (1989), in his study on leasehold housing in Singapore. Ng reported that leasehold properties are gaining acceptance and popularity among home seekers and investors who have traditionally shunned leasehold housing. He based his judgment on the increase in supply of leasehold residential properties and the slightly lower prices of such housing. According to him, leasehold housing generally cost 10 to 15 per cent less than freehold housing.

The second question is about owner-occupiers moving from private housing to that of public housing. This study shows that only about 44 per cent of respondents contemplated moving out of their private housing to stay in public housing. The overall effect on the demand for resale HDB flats from this group of owner-occupiers can be considered as small. Generally, this indicates that owner-occupiers of private housing are less likely to forego the privilege and status of private ownership in order to enjoy the benefits of improved public housing. Indeed, owner-occupiers of private housing are likely to be discouraged from doing so by the many regulations imposed by HDB on owner-occupiers of public housing.

The decision to locate in a particular neighbourhood is one of the most important choices made by households. It has implications for a wide range of attitudes and behaviours, at both the family and community levels. It reflects individual evaluations at a specific place and time of the policies implemented by a myriad of public and private planning agencies (Herpel and Tucker,1979:409). The theory of urban residential location is an application of the neoclassical theory of the consumer in which housing or land consumption and characteristics of locations are explicitly included in the preference set (Phang,1992:42). These neoclassical models of residential location by Alonso (1964); Mills (1967) and Muth (1969) were developed to explain the trends in the location of residences in Western cities. Phang (1992) in her doctoral dissertation asserted that the observed flattening of the population density gradient was due to the market response of households to changes in incomes and transportation costs. She further asserted that most of the urban housing in the socialist city is owned and allocated by the government. Reflecting the planned nature of housing development, urban form in the socialist city differs markedly from that in the capitalist city by virtue of the absence of a decreasing density gradient. Instead, the high density developments are found in satellite towns located in the outer suburbs.

In contrast, the housing market in Singapore is heavily dominated by the activities of the Housing and Development Board. Urban form in Singapore has, therefore, much in common with the socialist city in the planned location of high density public housing in suburban and outlying new towns. Thus, in making their housing tenure,

bundle and location decisions, households in Singapore have to take into account many constraining institutional factors in the housing market. These factors include regulatory measures imposed by government bodies such as the HDB, CPF Board, and of course, the lending policies of banks and finance companies.

7.3 Implications of Research Findings

From the findings presented in Chapter Six, a number of implications can be derived, and their significance discussed in the light of housing preferences. Firstly, it is obvious that owner-occupiers rank privacy and peaceful living as the top priority in their housing preferences. It is therefore important for designers and developers to ensure that each housing unit is designed in such a way as to ensure maximum privacy for its occupiers. Consideration must be given to ensure that each housing unit is located in a peaceful and serene environment.

The aspect of security has been placed high on the list of important attributes, both for housing preferences and neighbourhood preferences (see Figure 6-10 on page 169 and figure 6-11 on page 170). In this respect, a condominium with its security services is obviously seen as providing more security than is the case with landed housing. It is therefore very likely that more and more people will choose this form of housing in the future. In a way, the introduction of the clustered housing concept is in line with this finding. This is because clustered housing can be regarded as having both the security and facilities of a condominium and the privacy of a landed property. This is further discussed in Section 7.4 on page 189.

Owner-occupiers are also very concerned about the availability of neighbourhood social amenities such as schools, markets and shopping facilities. This fact has been confirmed by local researchers. Ho and Sim (1992) as well as other researchers such as Munro and Lamont (1995). Of course, this is an area that concerns town and urban planning, and it is obviously the prerogative of the planning agencies to ensure that such amenities are easily available to as many people as possible. However, it is also a

very personal aspect of housing and neighbourhood preferences. For example, not all people consider staying near their work place as an important aspect when choosing their home. Nevertheless, with the setting up of regional business centres throughout the island as outlined in the Concept Plan, people with such a preference should be satisfied.

Of vital importance to owner-occupiers are the environmental attributes. Such attributes as air quality, noise and daylight are considered to be very/extremely important. These attributes need to be given due consideration in the design and construction of housing units. This task obviously rests with those who are involved in the planning, design and construction of housing projects. As an example of environmental study, most soundscape studies--research into "the sonic environment of the receiver of a sound" (Porteous, 1990:48-50) have concentrated primarily on "unwanted sound" or noise, its ill-health effects, and the acoustical designs and legislative means of noise control and abatement. But, this study indicates that long-term solutions to the problem of ambient noise in housing estates lie not simply in architectural and legislative measures, but in convincing the designers and developers of housing projects of the potential economic benefits to be realised through noise abatement.

Other aspects, such as the availability of car parking space and the fact that there is no risk of mosquito infestation, are just as important. Indeed, each housing unit in a typical condominium is given a car park lot. Of course, if more lots were available, it would be very much welcomed by the owner-occupiers. In the case of mosquito infestation, the issue rests with not only proper maintenance and control on the part of the housing management staff, but also on the initial design of the dwelling or development. Care must be taken to ensure that the vicinity of the housing development and the dwelling itself do not breed mosquitoes.

The following outlines some of the other interesting findings and their implications.

(i) Types of neighbours

Almost 53 per cent of owner-occupiers in the age group of 35 to 46 years consider the type of neighbour one has as a very important consideration in their housing preferences. Indeed, a friendly neighbourhood with helpful neighbours would not only encourage public consciousness in looking after common facilities but would also enhance the value of the properties. This would also add pride to the ownership of the dwelling within the neighbourhood (Oh and Tay,1990:93). In Singapore, perhaps, the government could consider promoting good neighbourliness as part of the social development of the country. A gracious society is only possible if the people are able to work and live peacefully and amicably. This would also be a key objective of the Ministry of Community Development.

According to Ahmad (1993), choice of neighbourhoods is driven by different considerations in a developing country from those in a developed one. Ahmad concluded that there is likely to be ethnic segregation of population by their ethnic background and movement of households toward violence-free areas in Karachi. Of course, it is unlikely that such segregation will occur in the multi-racial society of Singapore. The question of violence is also not relevant in the peaceful environment within Singapore. But, his assertion that moving behaviour is linked to levels of 'dissatisfaction' and 'stresses' of particular locations is relevant in the study of housing preferences. Even then, results obtained from studies in developed countries, on housing mobility and locational choice cannot be applied to developing countries where the whole concept of residential mobility and neighbourhood choice is different.

(ii) Good view and scenery

The importance of having good view from one's home has been examined from research into window preference. Research on a few settings has found that windows are generally preferred and that larger windows are preferred over smaller ones. No theoretical model of window preferences, however, has been proposed (Butler and Biner, 1989:17). In this study, owner-occupiers of age 45 years or below are more concerned about this aspect of their dwelling than those 46 years and above. Of the

respondents who said that this aspect is extremely or very important, 67.9 per cent were from the under 35 age group. In the light of this particular preference for good view and scenery, it is necessary for planners and designers of housing to place greater emphasis on the availability of a commanding view over the surroundings. Indeed, this aspect of housing preferences of the owner-occupiers is associated with the greater degree of importance they placed upon the need for tranquillity and privacy. A similar conclusion was also reached by Im (1984). Im, in his doctoral dissertation reiterated that aesthetic and visual approaches in design basically aim at enhancing the visual qualities of human environments. These approaches originate from environmental aesthetics and environmental psychology.

To further promote this aspect of housing quality, a local polytechnic has started new courses on horticulture and landscape architecture. Higher level courses at the universities could also be introduced. This will further increase the number of qualified landscape architects and planners in Singapore.

(iii) Geomancy

As discussed in Chapter Four and examined in Chapter Six, geomancy or 'feng shui', has been used in very different environments and cultures. According to Brown (1997), it has also been scrutinised by eminent philosophers and scholars as well as by 'feng shui' masters. Although Brown advised that it is not possible to expect 'feng shui' to be the answer to all the problems relating to housing, it is no doubt an important aspect to an increasing number of people who are concerned about their own health and happiness.

Not surprisingly, the survey in this study shows that owner-occupiers of condominiums and private apartments are more concerned with the geomancy of their dwelling than those occupying landed housing. Almost 34 per cent of the former group rated geomancy as extremely or very important compared to only 15 per cent for those from the landed properties. Designers as well as developers of housing, especially those of condominiums, need to consider this aspect of the preferences

seriously, whether or not they believe in geomancy. This is to ensure that their developments enjoy greater acceptance by owner-occupiers.

(iv) Flooding

About 82 per cent of those who lived in landed residential properties were very concerned with the likelihood of flooding, as compared to only 61 per cent for those living in condominiums. As expected, owner-occupiers of landed housing are affected by flooding to a greater extent than those living in condominiums. Unlike in the more developed countries and in countries where catastrophic flooding frequently occur (Tobin, 1988), research into flooding in Singapore is rare. One possible reason being that flooding in Singapore has never catastrophic or as severe as in other countries. Nevertheless, it is still important for the relevant authorities, namely Urban Renewal Authority, Housing and Development Board, the Environment Ministry, as well as private housing developers, to cater to this aspect when planning and designing home for the people. In other words, proper planning and design of ground water drainage systems should be carried out prior to the development of the housing estate.

(v) Internal Layout

Werner (1987) postulated that the home is the setting for the development and maintenance of a variety of interpersonal relationships. As such it provides an ideal setting in which to contemplate temporal and physical factors that are important in the formation and progress of relationships. Werner's work links both time and place holistically with interpersonal relationships. In other words, the interior design of a dwelling does play a part in such relationships. Given this assertion, the survey of this study shows that about 69 per cent of the owner-occupiers living in condominiums considered the internal layout of their dwelling as a very important aspect of their housing preferences as compared to only 47 per cent for those who lived in landed housing. Thus, it would be sensible for designers as well as developers to be more innovative in devising practical and aesthetically pleasing internal layout designs that will contribute not only to ease of movements, but also to promote good

inter-relationships among the occupiers and neighbours. This is especially true in the case of condominium housing. Thus, over time, the present strict and rigid rules imposed by the Building Control Division governing the design and construction of apartments and houses may be somewhat relaxed to allow for more varieties of internal layouts and design. Of course, all these must be carried out without compromising safety aspects of the design and construction.

(vi) Recreational Facilities

There is conflicting evidence and considerable confusion in the literature concerning the relationship between recreation and generic housing form. Jaakson (1986) had attempted to examine the relationship between recreation and housing and had shown from a household survey carried out in 1984 in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, that there are differences in recreation by generic housing form. However, according to him, when control variables describing household characteristics are introduced, the initial differences disappear. He concluded that household characteristics confound the relationship between recreation and housing. Differences in recreation are due to variation in household characteristics, not to generic housing form. No local studies prior to the current study have examined this aspect of housing.

In this study, it is found that owner-occupiers living in condominiums are very much more concerned about the availability of recreational facilities in their estates, as compared to those living in landed housing, a conclusion, very much different from that of Jaakson's (1984). Almost 27 per cent of the former indicated that such availability is very/extremely important, compared to only 11.7 per cent from those living in landed housing. Of course, household characteristics for both groups of owner-occupiers are assumed to be quite homogeneous in this study. Furthermore, given the differences in culture and geographical environment between Singapore and Canada, no conclusive evidence can be obtained to show that Jaakson's conclusion is inaccurate.

Understandably, facilities in condominium developments play a very important role in the success of the developments. Future condominium housing, as well as strata

bungalows and cluster housing, should be designed with quality facilities both in terms of design and number. In fact, younger owner-occupiers under the age of 35 years seem more concerned with this aspect of their housing preferences compared to older owner-occupiers. Of all those who indicated the availability of recreational facilities as very/extremely important, nearly 70 per cent come from this age group.

Very obviously, with more young couples joining the ranks of condominium ownership, it would be sensible for developers to cater for their needs by providing adequate and quality facilities. In addition, the results of this survey indicate that owner-occupiers with three or more children are more particular about the availability of recreational facilities than those with less than 3 children. With the government's emphasis on families having more children, the implication is clear that the provision of such facilities is of increasing importance in the planning of private housing developments.

(vii) The age of their homes

The result of the survey further shows that owner-occupiers in condominiums are more concerned with the age of their home as compared to owner-occupiers of landed housing. Nearly 47 per cent of them indicated in the survey that age is a very important or extremely important aspect of their housing preferences. As the years go by, more condominiums will require physical repair and upgrading. As such, it is imperative for the government to encourage the proper upkeep and upgrading of such developments. The upgrading programme usually aims at enhancing the value of the estate, and giving the estate a renewed lease of life with newer facilities. However, unlike the public housing upgrading programmes, upgrading of private estate is not subsidised by the government. Owner-occupiers have to share the cost of the upgrading work among themselves and cannot rely on the government for assistance.

The necessity for a huge cash outlay for upgrading work, combined with the dwindling demand due to the age of the property and limited capital gains, give owner-occupiers few incentives, if any, to upgrade their housing estate. This may

result in older housing estates, particularly those on 99-year leasehold titles, turning into urban slums. These older private housing estates, especially those without proper management, are very prone to structural and physical degradation. To prevent this from happening, some forms of incentive for this group of owner-occupiers to upgrade their estates at the most opportune time would be appropriate. Such incentives can take many forms. For example, a tax rebate for property tax could be given to those owner-occupiers who upgraded their home, or the use of CPF for payment of upgrading work could be permitted upon the recommendation of the management corporation. In addition, special financial schemes from lending institutions could be encouraged. However, all these measures must be equitable and not be seen by the public as a ‘give-out’ to the so called “well-to-do” middle class owner-occupiers of private housing. Indeed, en-bloc sales of older private housing estates have in recent years been very popular with owner-occupiers. The government too, has introduced rules to control such redevelopment of older private housing estates.

(viii) Price: Financial Consideration

As expected, price is of utmost importance to owner-occupiers. This attribute is placed within the top 10 most important attributes by the respondents. Previous studies also stressed the importance of this attribute (see Hohm,1985; Peter,1988; Hoffman and Hiestler,1988; Dupuis,1992 and Miles,1994). However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine in more detail the financial aspects of housing, such as the price movement of residential properties. Nevertheless, it makes sound business sense for developers to price their housing units realistically in order to attract buyers. Government agencies on the other hand, are not directly involved in the pricing of private housing. However, such agencies inevitably play a crucial role in the state of private housing through mechanisms such as regulatory measures and public policies. This is discussed in the next section.

7.4 Governmental Initiatives and Policies

The Singapore government is well aware that residential environment is essentially local in character, and that changes in its forms and content are significantly affected by national policy and other planning tools like the Master Plan and the individual Development Guide Plans (DGPs) as discussed in Section 3.5. The interaction of multilevel public and private programmes is quite inescapable, and its complexity makes the task of evaluating social change extraordinarily difficult (Hempel and Tucker, 1979:399). In addition, town planning in Singapore has in recent years called for a greater degree of consultation between the private sector and the government planners in the development of property projects. It is also more evaluative in approach and is a departure from the previous system which was centred on just complying with requirements and obtaining clearances before proceeding with a project (URA, 1991).

It has been the government's policy to let the private sector develop high-quality housing while the public sector concentrates on the lower end of the housing market. Thus, the proportion of private housing should ideally rise faster to better reflect the fast-changing preferences of the middle class in Singapore. Indeed, as pointed out by Pugh (1987:325), the Singapore government has an important influence upon housing in its policies to steer development as a whole and to regulate the economy in its fiscal, monetary, and income and wages policies. A general competence in overarching policies facilitates the medium-term planning of housing. Pugh notes that housing in Singapore has not been drastically affected by the sorts of incompetent general economic management that are evident among many less developed countries and even developed countries.

Although the government role in housing is relatively well defined, a number of issues concerning the provision of private housing, and in which the government plays a crucial role, need to be addressed. These issues are as follows:

- (i) Ensuring adequate supply of private housing
- (ii) Provision of greater variety of private housing
- (iii) Housing Co-operatives
- (iv) Housing policies to curb speculation in the housing market
- (v) Ensuring greater transparency in the housing market

Though these issues are extremely important, they are subsidiary areas of study in this thesis and will therefore be only briefly examined. More detailed investigations will be needed to address each and every one of these issues in order to obtain concrete answers to some of the questions facing policy makers, as well as the private sector players.

(i) Ensuring adequate supply of private housing

A number of measures have been implemented to ensure adequate supply of private housing in Singapore. These measures are outlined below.

Increasing the supply of land for private housing

The Singapore government is undoubtedly committed to the expansion of private home ownership. One of the new housing policies is that more land will be sold to private developers to build condominiums and houses for Singaporeans who aspire to own private property. The Government's plan is to raise the proportion of private homes built on state land to 60 per cent by 1998, from 33 per cent in 1995. Long term prospects for securing more land for development would require measures such as land reclamation and innovative use of existing land, as outlined in the new Master Plan. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss these issues in detail. However, the author noted that while the government has tried to make landed property more accessible to people by selling more 99-year leasehold plots for houses, buyers have been slow to accept them. This was revealed in the outcome of the household survey as documented in Chapter Six. It is found that less than 50 per cent of the respondents are willing to accept this form of housing. Nevertheless, this study postulates that leasehold housing is becoming more commonplace with each passing year. Five possible reasons can be cited as follows :

- (i) People will eventually get used to the idea of leasehold properties as more and more leasehold private housing units come into the market.
- (ii) There may be lack of choice in that there are very few freehold properties left in the market.
- (iii) The people may accept the security of leasehold properties, at least for the period of the lease.
- (iv) There are possibilities of guarantee of roll-over of tenure once the lease expires. However, the government is silent on this issue at the present moment.
- (v) The Compulsory Acquisition Act (1967) has resulted in freehold properties being not at all free in that in time of need, the government has the right to acquire any land, be it leasehold or freehold.

To promote the acceptance of 99-year leasehold housing, the government has entered the higher end of the housing market in a significant way by having government listed companies play a part in the development of this market. This is discussed next.

Executive Condominium Scheme

The Singapore government in 1995 announced a new housing concept, that of the executive condominiums or the EC. The main justification put forward for the introduction of the EC is that of fulfillment of the aspirations of a certain group of people in owning private properties. The executive condominium housing scheme caters for young graduate couples and HDB upgraders who aspire to own, but cannot afford, private condominiums. Private developers are appointed by the government to develop and sell executive condominiums (EC's), which are comparable in design and facilities to private condominiums but have lower selling prices. Like private condominiums, the ECs are sold with strata titles. This allows the buyers to own the common property such as carparks in the estate. In addition the owners can set up a management corporation to manage and maintain the estate (JLW Property Consultants Pte. Ltd., 1996). Besides the EC, the government has over the past few years adopted policies for the privatisation of Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDC) estates.

Privatisation of HUDC Housing

HUDC housing is middle-income housing which is undergoing a privatisation process. The privatised HUDC housing will have the same legal status as any strata titled private condominium. Again, the rationale behind such policies is to satisfy the aspirations and esteem needs of existing owner-occupiers of HUDC estates in owning private housing. Once privatised, HUDC housing will be regarded just like other private housing. The government had planned to privatise all HUDC estates by 1998 (JLW,1996). However, the Land Office also announced that the HUDC residents would not be allowed to top up leases afresh to 99 years. This was in line with its existing policy to consider topping up leases of private residential developments only if there was an approved proposal for comprehensive redevelopment resulting in more intensive use of the land. On the expiry of the 99-year leases, the use of the land would be reexamined by the government to meet the prevailing needs at that time. The above outcome shows that while the government is prepared to meet the aspirations of the people to own private housing, it is still very persistent in its policy of not extending the lease for these HUDC estates without the resident paying a premium for the lease extension.

Another recent development in the housing market is the introduction of new forms of housing by the government. These non-conventional housing are for those who would like to experience living near the waterfront or in landed housing with condominium facilities. The following section highlights the waterfront and cluster housing concept.

(ii) Provision of greater variety of private housing

To cater for demand for more varieties in the design of private housing, a wider choice of housing will be made available and new housing forms will be encouraged. More medium and low density housing, ranging from flats and condominiums to townhouses and landed properties, will be built. Some of these will be on prime locations such as along waterfront (The Next Lap, 1991:80).

Of interest to owner-occupiers are two relatively new housing forms, waterfront and clustered housing.

Waterfront Housing

For an island, Singapore has hardly any homes fronting the coastline or lining its rivers and canals. Apart from a few houses in Sembawang which are next to the sea, the closest one can get is an apartment block with a sea view from the upper floors. As part of the Southern Island Development Guide Plan, unveiled by the URA in 1995, more than 1200 waterfront homes are to be developed on seven southern islands. This form of housing will come with better recreational facilities and jetties and will offer owner-occupiers yet another variety in their choice of housing (see Appendix 3, Figure A3-9). The development is expected to be completed before the end of the century.

Cluster Housing

Cluster housing is a cross between conventional housing and low-rise condominiums (see Appendix 3: Figure A3-8). Instead of houses in a long straight row, these townhouses can be grouped in clusters according to the architect's creativity. The Urban Redevelopment Authority allows them in landed housing areas where there is a mix of dwelling types. Strata Bungalows are detached houses within a single development site. Private gardens attached to each unit are marked by a 1-m high boundary, which can be a timber fence or hedge. Like condominiums, cluster houses and strata bungalows have common facilities as well as a private enclosed space. Each unit will also have its own ground floor private garden and the garden's boundary wall will be only a metre or less in height and be made up of a combination of timber fences and hedges to create a softer effect.

While no statistics are available on this type of housing, the proportion of the housing market that it is likely to account for is assumed to be small. The socio-economic segment of the market for such housing would probably be the middle class person who wants to enjoy the facilities of a condominium and the privacy of landed housing. The challenge for the developers is how to encourage Singaporeans to accept

these new forms of housing. Meanwhile, the government has also encouraged the setting up of housing co-operatives to ensure that private housing remains affordable to as many people as possible. This is elaborated in the next section.

(iii) Housing Co-operatives

Housing co-operatives have been used many times to counter the might of large corporations whose objective is profit maximisation. Participation in designing, constructing, and managing urban environments (including multiple housing) has been shown to increase user satisfaction; however, the meaningfulness and degree of participation are crucial (Mont, 1989; Pacione, 1988 and Wandersman, 1979).

Co-operative housing in Singapore is not a new concept, as it was tried by certain private organisations in the early 1950s (Chiang, 1995:1). Unfortunately, at the time when it was implemented, the scheme did not turn out to be a success. The failure of the housing co-operatives then can be attributed to a number of factors. First, there were insufficient guidelines and government control on the operation of such co-operatives. Secondly, the population was largely uneducated. This inevitably led to malpractices such as misappropriation of members' funds, poor design and construction practices. However, with an increasingly educated population, young graduates were better able to set up and run housing co-operatives. The property market is subject to cycles. Perhaps the presence of housing co-operatives, founded on meeting the interests of home buyers, can be a moderating influence on the extremes of these cycles. The idea also develops self reliance. If this channel were better used, there would also not be an over reliance on the government to solve all of society's housing problems.

Studies in other countries, showed that those residents who felt they could influence their co-op the most and those who found that the co-op form of social organisation made the most difference to their housing satisfaction also rated their residential quality of life the highest. That is, residents' perceived social control over their residential environment was more important than their perceived physical control in

explaining perceived quality of life (Cooper and Rodman, 1994,49). Indeed, Campbell *et al.*(1976) argue that perceived quality of life is dependent upon levels of satisfaction that represent the perceived discrepancy between aspirations and achievement.

Besides housing co-operatives, here are two aspects of private housing in which government involvement is essential. These concern policy matters on property speculation and information concerning the property market. These are discussed in the next two sections.

(iv) Housing policies on speculation in the housing market

Property is still the number one option when it comes to investment, as can be seen from the survey result in this study. Almost 70 per cent of the respondents voted investment in real estate property as their first investment choice. The government should therefore continue to support such investment through such schemes as the CPF Residential properties scheme and a proactive housing policy that allows genuine investors to put their money into properties. However, there have been pressure from the public that the government should adopt a policy to discourage and control speculation in properties. Indeed, the government had, on the 14th May 1996, introduced measures to discourage speculation in the private residential property market and tighten credit, particularly for foreigners. The aim is to stabilise the market, and prevent prices from overshooting.

The actions taken include enforcing the 80 per cent financing limit on mortgage loans, restricting Singapore dollar loans to foreigners buying local residential properties, the introduction of a capital gains tax if properties are sold within three years of purchase, and lastly an assurance to meet the increasing demand for private housing. Despite these actions, it should be noted that speculation is a normal, and even desirable, part of a free market economy.

A market with speculators may respond more quickly and reach equilibrium faster than a market where speculation on price is absent, and most markets include mechanisms whereby speculative activity is permitted or a normal part of market arbitrage. Eventually, the price of housing is determined by supply and demand and not by intermediate speculative activity. However, in some circumstances, particularly where government restrictions act to curtail supply or affect demand, speculative ‘bubbles’ may form which are detrimental to stable markets and to housing affordability.

Other measures that have been implemented by the government include policies to ensure greater transparency in the property market. This, of course, is to provide potential home-owners with relevant and up-to-date information, so as to assist them in their housing decision. This is discussed below.

(v) Ensuring greater transparency in the housing market

Tan, Willie (1995:36) reiterated that a common criticism of the housing market is that it is not transparent, that is, information is far from perfect. In technical jargon, the housing market is “inefficient” in the informational sense in that prices of housing do not reflect all the available information. Thus, it is possible for some people to profit from this information gap. He cited a number of reasons why this is so. Firstly, available information on prices of housing is not transmitted as quickly as stock prices because of the dispersed and private nature of housing transactions and the difficulties in collecting the data and constructing a proper housing price index. Buyers and sellers also enter the housing market infrequently and are, therefore, not fully aware of prices and choices. For many buyers and sellers, classified advertisements in the newspapers and multi-listing are the only sources of information. Even then, these relate to asking rather than transacted prices, and the difference between the two prices may be considerable. To encourage greater transparency in the residential property market, the URA has taken to releasing the sales status of individual private residential projects under construction through newspapers and the Internet. The

purpose of doing so is to provide greater transparency of the residential property market to the public so that they can better appreciate the market sentiment. (Tan, Willie, 1995:36).

These are issues which the government would do well to study in detail, as they are directly related to the state of the housing market, as well as to the housing preferences and aspirations of an increasing number of people in Singapore. Before concluding, the next section offers a brief outline on how this study of Singapore's private housing can serve as a guide to other countries in the region in their housing programmes. In the process of doing so, the housing conditions in some other Asian countries are also briefly documented.

7.5 Relevance of this study to housing provision in Asian Countries

In most countries of the Asia Pacific rim, there are serious housing needs that the governments have found difficult to meet. Only Singapore and Hong Kong have introduced housing policies and programmes that have kept pace with urban growth; both countries have invested massive resources into housing: resources that may not be easy to find in other countries (Chander, *et al.*, 1979:31). In most of these countries, housing problems have been aggravated by high rates of urbanisation. Many large cities have grown faster than the countries as a whole, and the countries themselves have experienced rapid population growth due to declining mortalities and sustained birthrates.

The rapid increase in population has placed constraints on the resources for food, employment, and housing. Moreover, the housing problem in urban areas has been exacerbated by the increasing in-flow of migrants from rural areas. The rising urban population, especially in the low-income groups, the increasing high cost of construction materials, and spiralling land prices have created a sizeable gap between housing demand and supply. The magnitude of this gap is reflected in the many slum and squatter settlements, overcrowded housing units, and obsolescent units requiring

replacement in the cities of the developing nations such as Thailand, India and China (Chander, *et al.*, 1979).

Rural-urban dualism is not seen in the two city-states of Hong Kong and Singapore. They do not have rural hinterlands as such, although they possess areas that differ in environmental quality from the core of the city. Because of their relatively small land areas, these two states have produced housing facilities in a manner far superior to the other countries in the region. Being faced with land shortages, both Singapore and Hong Kong have to resort to high rise, high density housing in order to meet their housing requirements. Unlike Hong Kong, the population of Singapore is more evenly spread out over relatively flat land. In Hong Kong, cramped apartments of 100 square feet to 400 square feet are the norm, while, for Singapore, apartments, particularly public housing, are twice or thrice as big.

According to Chander, *et al.* (1979), the success of the two city-states is enmeshed in special circumstances - physical economic, social and political; thus their housing policies do not offer much hope to the other countries in the region. However, it should be noted that Chander *et al.* wrote this in the late 70s. Situations have changed, and in recent years, developing countries in Asia, especially the "emerging tigers", enjoyed rapid economic development in the early 1990s. Despite the current (1998) stock market and currency crisis in Asia, ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam and Vietnam) are expected to maintain their strong performance in the long term, and one of the outcomes of economic growth is that an increasing number of lower middle and middle income families will be able to afford better quality housing. Of course countries such as Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia are faced with the formidable problem of upgrading the undeveloped rural sector while improving welfare in urban areas.

How and what people value in their housing is a question of great importance in the planning of housing at all levels (Wilkinson, 1975). A fundamental idea propounded by Wilkinson is to look at the housing preferences and characteristics of people, much as was done in this study. This thesis has stressed that in Singapore the challenge for the planners is to create the possibilities for people to own better housing that fits

their highest aspirations. This is especially true in a situation of rising affluence and educational levels. This study has identified a shift of emphasis in government housing policies and programmes from the provision of basic public housing, which has traditionally provided low income housing, to better quality public as well as private housing. The privatisation of HUDC housing and the executive condominiums scheme are two very good examples provided in this thesis of such shifts in emphasis. In addition, this study also advocates that the government support and forge more private-public partnerships in housing and ensure the implementation of transparent rules and policies. Furthermore, it is argued that with the current central provident fund or CPF housing scheme in place, it is possible for the government to continue to promote and support a national savings policy for funding housing infrastructure. As CPF is the compulsory saving scheme imposed by government on all working adults in Singapore, part of it can be used by member for investment in stock and real estate properties.

Pugh (1987) wrote that the Singapore housing system by its very effectiveness reveals some important insights into how a good system can be resourced. Basically, the government, by its policies, has continuously ensure a flow of resources and finance into housing from the savings of the community through the CPF saving scheme. It has also created a statutory development corporation (HDB), complete with powers and resources to plan and build social housing. The government, according to Pugh's analysis, has discreetly used state power effectively and avoid any temptation to run a system of patronage politics in a soft state. Access to housing is also assured to a wide range of income groups, starting with the poor. Furthermore, Singapore has been able to use homeownership for general social, economic, and political purposes, with a useful effect in deconcentrating wealth in limited, but important ways. Indeed, the government has been able to conceive and operate housing policy and other social policies as integral parts of development. This is the theory that is practised in Singapore and Norway, and scarcely anywhere else at all (Pugh, 1987:329). Given the very different social, cultural and economic background, such approach may not be applicable or even practical in other countries in the West or in Asian. Nevertheless, they are useful lessons to be learned from the Singapore's experience.

7.6 Concluding Comments

This chapter unveils the findings of the survey carried out in this study, and in the course of doing so, provides possible answers to the research questions presented in Chapter One. Implications of the findings are stated, and discussion included on the various issues of housing preferences. Also touching on policy matters, this chapter notes that though past actions by the government have been positively inclined towards meeting aspirations, they are ineffective in responding to fulfilling the ever rising aspirations. As such, housing policies and programmes will require significant strengthening in order to increase the supply of affordable private homes and improve access to private home ownership.

The findings in this chapter suggest that government agencies concerned and the people involved in the provision of housing, need to adopt an integrated approach to the housing programme of the future, one that recognises concerns about the rising aspirations of the people on the one hand, and the scarcity of land on the other. In other words, there is a crucial need to maintain a certain level of affordability for good quality housing. However, it makes sense for these approaches to be carried out cautiously so as not to impede growth of the housing market.

The information provided in this chapter, particularly that concerning housing preferences, could well be useful to those countries wishing to embark on their own private housing programmes. Very obviously, the ultimate aim of such housing programmes is to meet the aspirations of the urban middle-class population in each country.

The next chapter summarises the main points and findings of this thesis and concludes with suggestions for further research.

Chapter Eight

SUMMARY and CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Summary

Since achieving independence in 1965, the first phase of Singapore's housing programme was geared to meeting basic needs for shelter. The second phase, which started in the late 1980s, was about meeting aspirations or the "Singapore Dream". Difficult though it was at the time, the first task was actually relatively simple. An ambitious land acquisition scheme and the rapid construction of flats were undertaken by the Housing and Development Board to resettle thousands, and change Singapore from the backwater it was into a metropolis whose skyline has come to symbolise the possibilities of development in Asia. Also, the housing programme was an essential part, if not the crucial one, in the redistribution of wealth that underpinned the economics of high growth and made development real to the man in the street.

This thesis is about the study of housing preferences of owner-occupiers in an increasingly affluent society. It is also concerned with appropriate policies to meet the aspirations of people to own private housing. Therefore, the aims of this chapter are threefold :

- (i) to summarise the major conceptual and methodological contributions of this thesis to housing studies, particularly in the area of housing preferences;
- (ii) to highlight the limitations of this study; and
- (iii) to outline possible research directions.

A general review of the thesis follows, and then, each of the above aims is addressed in turn.

8.2 General review of this thesis

This thesis has aimed to provide a broad basis for understanding recent developments in the Singapore private housing sector. From the literature review carried out in this thesis, a number of key factors have emerged for further deliberation and debate. These topics cover a wide range of disciplines and housing-related issues, such as housing policies, housing mobility, environmental perception, urban planning and design aspects of housing. Based on these references, a set of research questions was presented to enable the research to take a more systematic and meaningful approach.

In all there were five key questions. The first three key questions (questions 1 to 3) aim to logically illuminate the main objectives which are:

- (i) to identify the groups of attributes affecting owner occupiers housing preferences so as to present conceptual models on such preferences;
- (ii) to highlight some of the most dominant attributes and make comparisons with similar studies conducted locally and
- (iii) to study the housing satisfaction of two main groups of owner occupiers of private housing.

The remaining two other auxiliary questions (question 4 and 5) aim to highlight two side issues affecting owner-occupiers' choice of housing:

- (i) the acceptance of 99-year leasehold housing and
- (ii) the downgrading by owner occupiers of private housing to HDB housing.

This study emphasizes that the issues of housing are influenced by the increasing affluence and rising aspirations of Singaporeans. Subsequently, the emergence of private housing in Singapore is documented and important aspects of private housing in Singapore are discussed. These include a brief but concise description of the planning regions and private residential districts, as well as of the different types of

private housing. A section on the title to real estate is included to enable investigation into the question of tenure preferences to be carried out.

This thesis also presents a conceptual housing preferences model and three sub-models. Using the models as the main framework, a number of null hypotheses were postulated. The large number of hypotheses were tabulated in accordance with the relevant sub groups such as locational, environmental, social and physical designs. Testing the null hypotheses necessitates the collection of primary data through a survey vehicle. This aspect of the study is the major concern of Chapter Five, which naturally can be regarded as basically a technical chapter. Of course, the methodology of the survey, as well as the collection of secondary data, are covered in this chapter. Chapter Six begins by presenting the profiles of the respondents, as well as the properties under survey. The chapter deals with the actual testing of the hypotheses. Results and findings are presented.

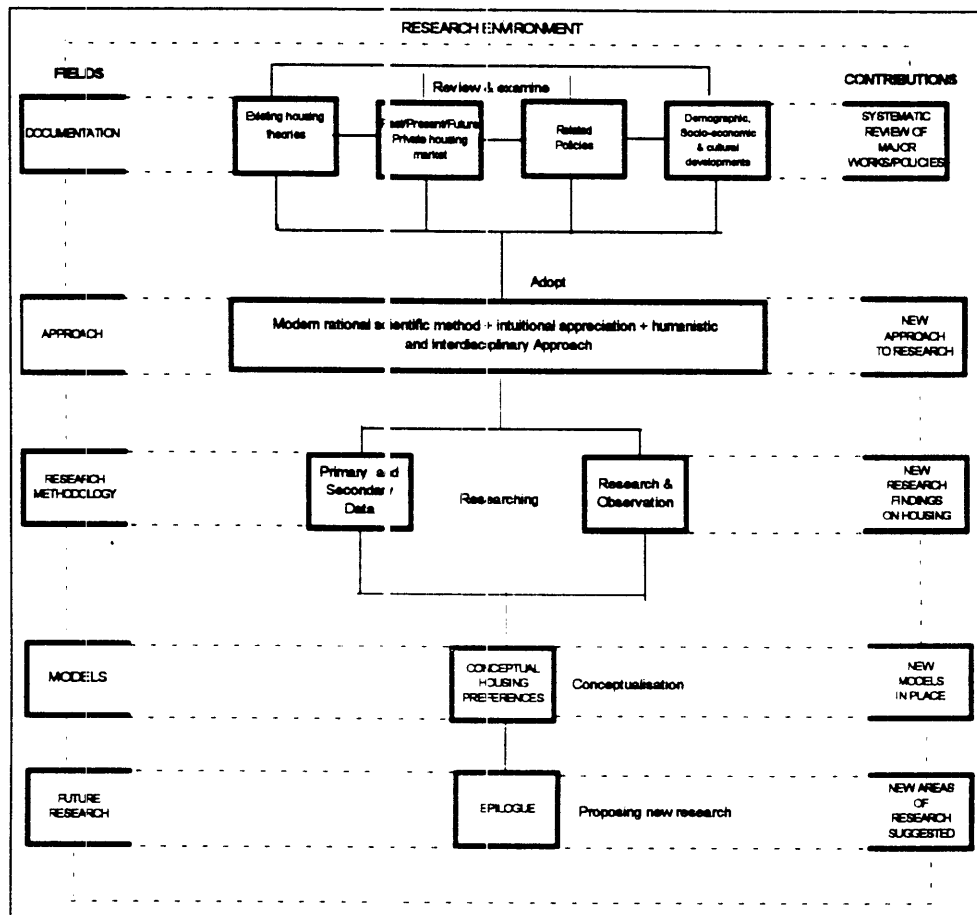
The implication of the findings on housing preferences of owner-occupiers is the main subject of the next chapter. Some of the empirical findings include the fact that 99 year leasehold properties are still unpopular with owner-occupiers compared to freehold properties. One other finding that merits mention is that the extent of migration of owner-occupiers from private to public housing is seen as negligible. This is despite the fact that the standard of public housing has recently been improved tremendously. As for housing satisfaction, the study reveals that younger persons below the age of 35 years are generally more satisfied than their older counterparts. Those below the age of 45 years considered having a good view or scenery from their dwelling as extremely important. The testing of hypotheses also reveals other very interesting results. These include the fact that the younger owner-occupiers, especially those with young children, are more concerned about the availability and the quality of facilities in their developments. Furthermore, it is revealed that owner occupiers of condominiums/apartments take geomancy or "feng shui" and the quality of internal layout design very seriously. They are also very particular about the age of their home. Those living in landed housing on the other hand, are very concerned about the likelihood of flooding in their estates. The reasons or purported reasons for these findings are reported in Chapters Six and Seven.

Indeed, Chapter Seven is also directed at reviewing the Singapore Dream. It is about policy matters and the approaches taken to manage housing preferences and satisfaction of owner-occupiers of private housing. The materials contained in the chapter reinforced earlier findings and observations on current housing preferences. This thesis concludes with suggestions for further research possibilities.

8.3 The methodological contributions of this thesis to the studies of housing preferences

Previous studies of housing, though interesting and significant in and of themselves, rarely attempted to examine in depth the preferences of the owner occupiers by integrating the influence of both external and personal factors as such. This thesis, however, attempts to integrate description, theory and explanation on housing preferences of owner occupiers in a way that takes into consideration interdisciplinary theories and principles. In other words, this study tries to break down disciplinary boundaries in the study of housing in order to draw ideas widely for exposition, criticism and appreciation in a way that Pugh (1980) and Priemus (1986) have done in their work on housing.

In particular, policy matters, as well as personal situational factors, of the owner occupiers of private housing, were given serious attention. This thesis therefore contains one of the most detailed and critical longitudinal studies of housing preferences and satisfaction for private housing in Singapore. Previous studies of housing tended to concentrate on key disciplinary aspects of housing. These include detailed economic, political, environmental and geographical analyses of housing satisfaction and preferences. This thesis is a significant departure from these studies in terms of its objectives, and in its humanistic and methodological approach which is conceptualised in Figure 8-1.



Conceptualisation of contributions of this thesis to the study of housing preferences
 (Source : The Author : 1996)

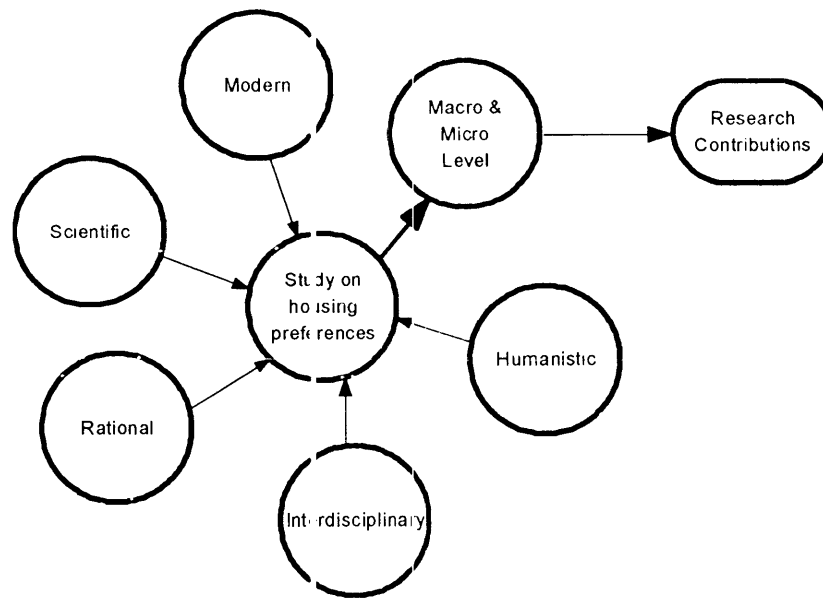
Figure 8-1

With reference to Figure 8-1, the contributions of this thesis to the study of housing preferences in Singapore can be summarised as follows :

First, the thesis links description with an explanatory framework. It explicitly acknowledges the influence of socio-economic and politico-institutional factors on the housing preferences of owner occupiers.

Secondly, this study adopts an approach which can be regarded as modern, rational, scientific, yet humanistic and interdisciplinary in nature (see Figure 8.2.). Such an approach has been used by researchers such as Walmsley and Lewis (1993), Guelke (1989), and Buttimer (1990), in their research into human geography. Being humanistic, according to Buttimer, is to focus on the nature of 'humanness' that

encompasses such diverse themes as individuality and sociality, freedom and responsibility, and rationality and hedonism (Walmsley and Lewis,1993:130). In this study, such an approach is used in the analysis of the current housing situation, as well as in examining policy pertaining to the provision of private housing.



Conceptualisation of approach taken in this thesis

(Source : The Author : 1996)

Figure 8-2

Thirdly, this study has succeeded through the survey instrument in revealing fresh findings on the preferences of existing owner-occupiers in the private housing sector, findings which should prove relevant to the policy makers and developers of private housing. For example, this thesis points to the importance being placed on environmental factors. Owner-occupiers are found to take the physical environmental factors very seriously in stating their housing preferences. This can be seen from the fact presented in Chapter Six that five out of the ten most important factors fall under the environmental category.

Moreover, the data collected is used to test hypotheses and has led to a comprehensive and flexible explanation of the preferences of owner-occupiers. Fourthly, the contributions made by this study can be seen from the presentation of the conceptual housing models. Temporal and interdisciplinary approaches are used in the models to identify the various attributes affecting the preferences of owner-occupiers. Identifying housing preferences of owner-occupiers in a dynamic housing market is neither easy nor simple. Nevertheless, in answering the first two key research questions, this thesis has documented and grouped the dominant attributes affecting housing preferences. The relevance of this study has evolved over the period of this candidature. Indeed, it is time tested as can be seen from the time lag between the commencement of this research in 1991 when the quest for private housing was still far from the minds of most people and completion of this thesis in late 1996, when private housing had, almost suddenly, become the “Singapore Dream”. In retrospect, the author had long anticipated the likely impact of increasing affluence on the aspirations of people to own private housing. This has happened, and evidence is readily available to show that by and large, rising aspirations for private housing are the outcome of the factors mentioned in this thesis (see Chapter Three).

8.4 Limitations of this study

The lack of postgraduate research being carried out locally on the private housing market is one of the problems which this study encounters. Because of this, references had to be made to research carried out elsewhere, mainly from Western countries, notwithstanding the differences in culture and socio-economic backdrops between Singapore and those countries. The author thus exercised the option to choose freely an analytical approach in examining issues relating to housing preferences in a way that combined primary data collection with that of literature reviews, as well as personal observation and interviews. However, short of a publicly sponsored large scale nationwide poll on private housing, the limitations stated below are inevitable.

First, this study has been limited in that it was based largely on a survey conducted in the west region of Singapore, and then primarily, in only two short listed private housing districts. Furthermore, Rowley and Wilson (1975) observed that, when studying the manner in which an individual rates a number of variables vis-a-vis each other, the adequacy of traditional question-and-answer techniques in arriving at a suitable answer is questionable. To quote Rowley and Wilson:

A person may wish to live in a quiet street rather than a noisy one. In behavioural situations, however, there is a trade-off of preferences against alternative preferences, such as the 'convenience' of the noisier location in respect of shopping facilities. The simple direct questioning method gives no indication of these implicit trade-offs between the several preferences that may occur in the final choice of residential location (Rowley and Wilson, 1975:172).

Secondly, little attention has been paid to inter-organisational relations within the machinery of government. Such relations are important in that any policy or action undertaken by one will inevitably affect the other organisations. Though the functions and nature of governmental organisations such as the HDB, URA, CPF and BCD were referred to in the preceding chapters, more detailed investigation into the roles of each would be beneficial in the understanding of the housing market.

Thirdly, the process of gentrification is superficially mentioned in Chapter Seven. So too is the impact of the increasing number of upgraders moving from public housing to private housing. In other words, this study concentrates mainly on existing owner-occupiers in private housing and not on potential owner-occupiers. Then there is the problem of time lag between the time of primary data collection and the time for the submission of the final thesis considering the fact that the study was undertaken by the author on an external part time basis. But there are reasons to assert that even with this time lag of almost four years the results are still relevant. The reasons are that firstly, the author believes that changes to housing preferences should be viewed as long run changes instead of short run changes. Secondly, the socio-economic fabric of the country has been fairly stable throughout the mentioned period, and its influence on housing preferences of owner-occupiers should not be too great.

With the benefit of hindsight, the gender perspective of housing preferences could have been better investigated, and variables related to gender, such as the preferences of women owner-occupiers for different housing forms, might have been studied. Indeed, this study does not explore in as much depth, the different in perception of housing preferences between men and women. As well, an obvious shortcoming of this thesis is that the different perceptions of the various ethnic groups have not been examined. In retrospect, housing and neighbourhood preferences of the various ethnic could have been included in this study.

Another limitation of this thesis is that methodological steps taken in presenting the models are not, in the opinion of the author, as detailed as they should have been. More elaborate analytical techniques, such as utilising multinomial logit models, might have provided this study with more exact answers to the research questions presented at the beginning of the thesis. In retrospect, the whole research, could have taken a much more focused aspect of housing preferences in term of specific variables, such as environmental attributes or even housing mobility.

Nevertheless, the implications of these limitations, including that of the problems faced by the author, are that without them, the study might have resulted in an even greater contribution to the study of private housing in Singapore. Therefore, it seems reasonable to believe that these limitations pose no major obstacles to the thesis. However, improvements should be possible and several avenues for further research can be explored. These are covered in the epilogue that follows.

8.5 Epilogue

The foregoing can be regarded as primarily epistemological, and several avenues for further research in the following areas may be promising:

- (i) Housing for the aged - the gerontological issue
- (ii) Housing Policies
- (iii) Housing and Social Polarisation
- (iv) Environmental considerations in housing for local climate

Some proposals for these studies are given below:

(i) **The Gerontological Issue: Housing for the aged**

Given the aging population of Singapore, the time is appropriate for in-depth studies of gerontological housing and preferences of the aged. This can either take the form of investigation into housing design for the aged, or perhaps in the design and setup of entire retirement villages.

Studies of this nature have been prevalent in the West, for example, Kendig (1984); Means (1988); Doyle (1990,1993); Dunnett (1991); Letts (1991); Teaford (1992); Kolbe (1992); Gibbs (1993); and Yoo (1994). Dunnett (1991) for instance, ascertained the potential for a specific small-scale supportive seniors' housing model (the Abbeyfield House) in the heterogeneous small towns and villages of Southern Ontario, Canada. The Abbeyfield model is an example of small-scale, service-enriched housing, which fits neatly in the continuum between totally independent living and institutionalization. Doyle (1990) on the other hand, examined the influence of tenure type and age mix on the housing satisfaction and well being of older people living independently in rental, condominium and non-profit co-operative buildings.

(ii) Housing Policies

Questions of housing policy require a consideration of issues beyond the confines of the dwelling-unit itself. Its analysis raises important issues in finance; legislation; political, social and philosophical attitudes; resource allocation; intergovernmental relations; professional and administrative practices; and planning. Housing is diverse and complex. Housing should be understood by its relationship to public policy, not merely as a built form. In their public policy context housing issues will be differently perceived according to the relative importance of objectives to each other and to non-housing issues (Pugh,1980:1).

One of the policy-related issues in modern housing is the widespread aspiration for self-fulfillment; a matter connected to housing choice, tenure and housing theory (Pugh,1980:14). That said, some of the major questions raised by Pugh which are relevant to the local housing market are:

How effective and well-directed are existing housing programmes and policies?

What are their effects upon the distribution of income and wealth?

How could housing policies be better coordinated with environmental and social development policies, and with the provision of infrastructure?

What institutional arrangements and organisation are appropriate for administering comprehensive and quality housing?

These questions can be illuminated by evaluative research on housing policies. Research into these areas might enlighten policy-makers as to the effectiveness of the current practices and the possibility of total privatisation of the housing market as proposed by Prof. Oktay, President, International Association for Housing Science, Florida International University. Of course, there are other areas such as the issue of ethnicity and housing (Ooi,1995) and the question of governmental subsidies (Hills,1991).

From the point of view of theoretical economics, the interesting aspect of housing allowances (and other forms of subsidy) is their relative costs and benefits to households and to society. Under some circumstances, the recipients may value the benefits rather less than the costs to society. In other words, housing allowances need

some general social and economic justification to show why society has an interest in altering the housing expenditures of individual households (Pugh,1980:105). Thus, research into this aspect of housing may provide valuable insights into the equitable allocation of financial resources for private housing, which may be of epistemological significance in the study of housing. The experience with public housing in the United States and the United Kingdom underscores the importance of seriously defining and understanding ethnic and cultural differences of the residents, not only in the design, but also in management policy. Otherwise, there is the distinct likelihood of public housing areas deteriorating into sterile and stigmatised parts of the city that serve to reinforce racial stereotypes (Ooi,1995). This could also apply to the case of private housing in Singapore.

As for the issue of ethnicity, Singapore, being a multi-racial and multi-cultural country, is deemed to face the tensions of diversity in racial and cultural matters even though the different races in the country can be regarded as having lived in harmony for a long time. Research into this aspect of housing would provide the necessary perspectives as to the differences, if there are any, in terms of expectations, preferences and lifestyles of the different races in Singapore (Ooi *et al.*,1993 and Philips *et al.*,1992).

There is also the question of aging leasehold properties (Cox,1982 and Toh,1993) in the years to come. Such studies can also be directed at analysing in considerable depth such issues as the question of lease extension for 99 year-leasehold properties. This question has only been briefly discussed in Chapter Four and Chapter Seven. Detailed investigation into this aspect of housing in Singapore would serve to highlight the likely tenure-related issues that may arise in the next 20 to 30 years. Of course, this is, without doubt, an issue that involves a number of Governmental agencies, especially the URA and the HDB.

In addition to the above, future researchers can also study the issue of gentrification (Blomley,1994a,1994b). For example, studies can be carried out to investigate the socio-economic effects on private housing estates facing growing pressures from surrounding mega-public housing projects and incipient gentrification. It would be

particularly interesting to examine the way in which contending property relations and conceptions of propertied space affect such struggles, especially in a land-scarce country like Singapore.

(iii) Housing and Social Polarisation

Social idealism, social theory and social action have altogether influenced the development of housing policies, since the mid-nineteenth century. These circumstances have left an inheritance of policies, ideas and professions (Pugh,1980:61).

Social research in housing is producing new theory and is creating new moralities and criticisms of the prevailing policies. Pugh (1980:74) for one, cited the following for further research :

The specific implications for selection of dwelling type and location.

The social factors influencing the selection including class, way of life, and the stage in the life cycle.

In the Singapore context, the social concerns are mainly about social segregation and growing materialism. Thus, research into the relationship between housing and social class and its polarisation (Byrne, 1989) would contribute to the understanding of social cohesiveness, community bonding and equitable allocation of resources to meet housing needs into the next century. Another social aspect of housing is the social behaviour of owner-occupiers in private housing estates. Studies into this aspect of housing would shed light on how people behave under different housing conditions over time, and would offer a better perspective on the policies the government should take to ensure a more gracious society befitting the improvement in housing quality.

Other possible areas for in-depth investigation may include accessibility and quality of life (Cooper and Rodman,1994); modelling housing search behaviour (Cahill,1994) and identity symbolism in housing (Sadalla *et al.*,1987). Identity symbolism is particularly relevant to the Singapore context, given the increasing affluence and the emphasis being placed on status and prestige. In the work carried out by Sadalla *et al.*,

upper-middle-class homeowners were asked to rate themselves on an extensive set of bipolar personality and identity dimensions related to the housing situations they were in. Results were interpreted in terms of a self-presentational model of housing choice. Indeed, such study covers not only the social aspect, but also the environmental psychological aspects of housing. Hatch (1983) in his book on culture and morality, makes a useful distinction between "cultural relativism," the recognition that different societies have different values, norms, etc., and "ethical relativism," the belief that one cannot evaluate another society's value system and impose one's own value preferences. Thus, it can be argued that identity symbolism, being a part of cultural relativism, varies among different societies and cultures. Nevertheless, what occurs in Singapore may well be used as a reference point by other countries in their housing programmes.

(iv) Environmental considerations in housing

The home should be a place to promote well-being, and should be designed to reduce environmental stress—good design which incorporates a firm understanding of human needs ... (Rousseau *et al.*, 1988: viii).

Environmental considerations in housing are gaining increasing importance, especially in highly urbanised cities like Singapore. Studies on such issues have been made in the West but not in Singapore or the region. For example, as early as the early 1970s, Lansing *et al.* (1970) conducted research into planned residential environments, concentrating on the residents' responses to their immediate environments, and in the process indicated that dwelling unit density underlies many factors important to neighbourhood satisfaction, including privacy in the yard; neighbourhood noise level; and the adequacy of outdoor space for family activities. Density, however, operates indirectly through these factors, and the correlation between density and satisfaction is not high. Other relevant environmental related topics on housing include : environmental satisfaction and preferences in housing (Baba and Austin, 1986; Virden and Schreyer, 1988) and environmental correlates of territoriality and use of space (Kinney *et al.*, 1987). The case of territoriality and use

of space is relevant in condominium housing, where owner-occupiers were reported to exhibit tendencies to demonstrate possession, control and defense of common areas not belonging to them as part of the strata titles.

The introduction of the cluster bungalow, waterfront housing and executive condominiums (Dhaliwai,1996:3 and Seah,1996:4) also offers new opportunities for research into housing preferences and satisfaction pertaining to these new housing forms. In addition, researchers, especially those who are technically inclined, may also investigate the distant possibility of innovative housing for the future. Housing in this category may include housing in outer space, housing under the ground and housing on and under the water (Lewis,1984).

Hopefully, this thesis is stimulating enough to generate sufficient interest for further research in the areas mentioned above. However, the author is in no position to prescribe what precise actions and policies should be taken to make private housing affordable to more people in Singapore. The author is also not in the position to propose exact and straightforward suggestions for meeting the "Singapore Dream". For to do so would require the effort of not just an individual, but the combined effort of many people and agencies, both public and private. In spite of this, the thesis does highlight the findings and subsequently put forth implications on ways to meet the challenges. However, this should not be construed as a panacea for meeting housing aspirations. The topic of housing is one that is complex and sensitive because of its humanistic nature. Moreover, socio-economic and political circumstances are constantly changing, as are personal circumstances. To adopt an anticipative approach is to move in concert with time and changes in the housing environment, this should justly be the most logical approach.

8.6 Conclusion

This thesis adds to the understanding of how, within the span of little more than thirty years, a squatter choked city state has been transformed into one of the world's most advanced cities and efficient societies. Indeed, as Singapore develops, many new layers of aspiration will emerge. As stated at the beginning of this thesis, such aspirations will be felt in housing as much as in other spheres. This study has noted that the drive for better housing is a natural response of a population which has worked hard and thus expects much. However, if expectations are not realistic, then a sense of disappointment as well as a mood of resentment will eventually surface. Indeed, with the current economic crisis in South East Asia, Singaporeans like many of their counterparts in the region, must reconcile expectations with what can be realistically achieved.

Previous studies as well as the current study have stressed that catering to the increasingly complex range of aspirations is by no means easy. Furthermore, this study notes that although the government has allowed the market mechanism to work freely in response to the rising aspirations of the people, selective intervention is necessary in order to maintain social cohesion and permit a more equitable distribution of wealth. Therefore, the private housing market still requires continuing monitoring and positive response on the part of the government, and reasonable expectations on part of the people.

Thus, to meet rising aspirations without sacrificing equity, it is important for the government to strike a balance between private aspirations and public imperatives. It also requires the creation of differentiation in housing forms such as those described in Chapter Seven, which will give Singaporeans more choice while keeping quality housing within reach. An example of such choice is of course, the partially subsidized executive condominiums described in the same chapter. That said, in the local housing scene, continuing upgrading programmes and a policy geared towards satisfaction of housing needs are indeed important issues.

The models presented in this study assist readers in understanding the relationships between the main variables affecting housing preferences. These, in turn, have assisted in identifying the main trends in attitudes, perceptions and preferences being explored. In the nutshell, this thesis serves to illustrate the view that fulfilling the aspirations of people would require not only careful planning and equitable housing policies, but also an informed public who are mature enough to act sensibly and rationally.

It is hoped that this thesis contributes to housing studies both through its integration of literature and theory on Western cities with an empirical study in Singapore. Although this thesis is intended essentially for the pursuit of new academic insights and knowledge on the local private housing market, it is also hoped that it will provide readers with a useful perspective either for comparative or policy-making purposes.