

HOUSING DISSERTATIONS WITH A CULTURAL ASPECT

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ABSTRACT

Sixteen dissertations are reviewed to discover the trends in cultural aspects of housing research. Six academic disciplines of 13 universities, predominantly in the eastern part of the United States, are found to be involved in research concerning five basic geographical locations. A wide variety of topics structured by various conceptual frameworks is observed. Research design often consists of case studies of individual dwellings followed by interviews of the inhabitants or surveys of historical documents. Because of the large number of conceptual frameworks guiding the research, the possibility of comparisons is limited. Suggestions are given for future research.

INTRODUCTION

An assessment of the research on the cultural aspects of housing needs to begin with an examination of the nature and parameters of culture. It is culture that has given humans the means to adapt to their changing environment. Culture is nearly everything that is learned, shared, and passed on from generation to generation. Culture is social--shared by members of a society. Culture is also ideational, adaptive, and integrative (Duly, 1979; Linton, 1945; Murdock, 1940; Spradley and McCurdy, 1972). The influence of culture on housing may be more easily understood when a number of studies on housing of different cultures have been examined. Investigations of individual cultures with the overall objective of cross-cultural comparisons is possible because all human cultures have common aspects. There will be uniformities between cultures due to a similarity in learning patterns among humans, the similarities linked to societal survival, and because culture satisfies basic human needs which are universal (Murdock, 1940).

Cross-cultural research can be achieved by studying the cultural patterns that are universal. Kroeber (1963) suggests nine basic universal patterns: speech, material traits, art, knowledge, religion, society, property, government, and war. Each of these areas can be subdivided. The study of material traits would include the study of housing. Universal patterns are seen by Kroeber as guides to be used in studying different cultures. They are common denominators among cultures. Housing, then, is one of the common denominators among cultures.

Once studies of housing of different cultures are available, cross-cultural comparisons can be made. Cross-cultural research makes possible the testing of existing theories and the development of new theories about housing (Levinson and Malone, 1980). One way to study the cultural aspects of housing is to discover the meaning and satisfaction housing has for its users and how the

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structure-type of housing and its use have been influenced by cultural factors.

A review of research on the cultural aspects of housing will delineate the type of research that has been completed and whether researchers have studied similar cultural patterns related to housing. The study of the cultural aspects of housing overlaps many disciplines and such a review is monumental. One way to begin is with an analysis of graduate research in the field. The purpose of this article is to review dissertations that focus on the cultural aspects of housing that have been completed within the last ten years.

LITERATURE SEARCH

Dissertation Abstracts International was chosen as the source from which to identify cultural housing research. The source was chosen because most graduate units require their students' dissertations to be submitted to this depository. Studies chosen include titles or abstracts that appear to investigate one or more cultural facts related to house form, spatial use and design, or satisfaction or preference related to house form and use. No discrimination was made as to geographical location of culture. Thus, studies investigating sub-cultures in the United States and studies examining cultures abroad are reviewed. Each dissertation was checked to assure the purpose of the dissertation had a cultural focus and orientation. Data collected from qualifying dissertations include sponsoring institution, year of study, research questions, theoretical framework, research design, and results.

FINDINGS

Twenty dissertations that appear to focus on the cultural aspects of housing that were completed between 1975 and 1985 are identified in *Dissertation Abstracts International*. Sixteen dissertations are analyzed for this study. Three dissertations were unavailable for study and one dissertation was not usable (see Dissertation Listing).

Dissertation Listing

Aminu, F. A. (1978). The social, cultural, and economic bases for housing preference in Ibadan, Nigeria (Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1977). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 38, 1701A.

Blier, S. P. (1981). Architecture of the Tamberma (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1981). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 42, 2806A.

Boozarjomehri, A. (1980). Causes of spatial use by season in Chahar-fasi houses of Persian desert with a critical overview on the contemporary approach to vernacular architecture of developing countries (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1980). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 41, 2329A.

Celebioglu, A. Z. (1978). Elimination of an indigenous house form in reference to liquidation of a peasant community in rural Anatolian town (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1978). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 39, 3883A.

Dinsmoor, W. B. (1986). Mongol housing: with an emphasis on architectural forms of the Ger (Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1985). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 46, 2467A.

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El-Khatib, A. (1985). Housing in Nablus: Socio-economic characteristics and housing satisfaction in three Palestinian sub-groups (Doctoral dissertation, City University of New York, 1985). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 46, 1402A.

Gecit, M. R. (1979). Self-sufficient house design for Turkish villagers (Doctoral dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1979). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 40, 1723A.

Hardie, G. J. (1981). Tswana design of house and settlement-- continuity and change in expressive space (Doctoral dissertation, Boston University Graduate School, 1981). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 41, 5157A.

Kamp, K. A. (1982). Architectural indices of socio-economic variability: An ethno-archaeological case study from Syria (Doctoral dissertation, University of Arizona, 1982). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 43, 852A.

Lee, S. C. (1982). Housing adjustment of Korean families in American society (Doctoral dissertation, Florida State University, 1982). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 43, 1807B.

Liu, J. K. C. (1981). Housing transformations: A study of family life and built form in Taiwan (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1980). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 41, 2804A.

Mofti, F. A. (1982). Urban housing design in the context of Saudi Arabia's cultural and physical conditions: Potentials and constraints (Doctoral dissertation, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 1981). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 42, 5278A.

Pavrides, E. (1986). Vernacular architecture in its social context: A case study of Eressos, Greece (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1985). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 46, 2106A.

Reynolds, W. E. (1981). The ethno-archaeology of Pueblo architecture (Doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University, 1981). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 42, 760A.

Shepard, J. W. (1986). Symbolic space in Newar culture (Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1985). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 46, 2353A.

Zandi, M. M. (1986). Preference for house-form in a low-income district of Tehran, Iran (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1985). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 46, 2102A.

Field of Study

Graduate students in seven fields of study had conducted research on cultural aspects of housing. One-third of the dissertations were sponsored by departments of architecture. Three were completed under the guidance of urban and regional planning, which in some institutions is identified with architecture. One-fourth of the dissertations were sponsored by departments of anthropology. Two of these studies are ethno-archaeological in nature. The fields of history, home economics, and sociology sponsored one study each (see Table 1).

Year of Study

The interest in cultural studies increased from 1977 to 1985. However, no studies are found for 1975, 1976, 1983, or 1984. The largest number of dissertations were written in 1985 (five) and 1981 (four) (see Table 2).

Table 1. Cultural aspects of housing literature search 1975-1985: Field of study and frequency of occurrence (N=16)

Field of Study	Number of dissertations
Anthropology	4
Architecture	6
History	1
Home Economics	1
Sociology	1
Urban and Regional Planning	3

Table 2. Cultural aspects of housing literature search 1975-1985: Year of study

Year	Number
1977	1
1978	1
1979	1
1980	2
1981	4
1982	2
1985	5

Sponsoring Universities

Over one-half of the studies were sponsored by eastern universities. Four of these institutions were located in Pennsylvania. The University of Pennsylvania sponsored the greatest number (three) of housing dissertations. Of the three dissertations generated in the Midwest, two came from the University of Michigan. Eleven universities sponsored one dissertation each (see Table 3).

Geographical Locations of Study

Of the 16 dissertations, two focus on North America. One dissertation investigates Native American housing (the Pueblo culture). Korean immigrants in North America are studied in the second dissertation. The Middle-East is the geographical setting for seven of the dissertations. Two dissertations focus on Iranian housing, while two dissertations examine Turkish housing. There is one study each related to the housing of Saudi Arabia, the Israeli-occupied West Bank, and Syria. One dissertation focused on traditional Greek village housing. Of the six remaining dissertations, four are related to traditional house forms in Mongolia, the Tswana of Botswana, the Tamberma of Togo, and the Newar of

Nepal. The other two dissertations look at more contemporary cultural aspects of housing in Taiwan and Nigeria (see Table 4.)

Table 3. Cultural aspects of housing literature search 1975-1985: Sponsoring institutions/regions (n=16)

Institution/Region	Number
Eastern United States	9
Boston University Graduate School	(1)
Catholic University of America	(1)
Columbia University	(1)
University of Pennsylvania	(3)
University of Pittsburg	(1)
City University of New York	(1)
Rensselaer Polytechnic	(1)
Midwestern United States	3
Indiana University	(1)
University of Michigan	(2)
Southern Unites States	1
Florida State University	(1)
Western United States	3
Arizona State University	(1)
University of Arizona	(1)
University of California-Berkeley	(1)

Table 4. Cultural aspects of housing literature search 1975-1985: Geographical location of culture studied (N = 16)

Geographical Location	Number
Africa	3
Europe	1
Far East	3
Middle East	7
North America	2

Research Design

Half of the dissertations use a case-study format. Interviews are utilized by five of the researchers using a case-study approach. Three researchers employ personal observation as a data collection method. This technique is used with either interviews or data collection via government records or previously published studies. Participant-observation methods are used by two researchers. For one

researcher, this is the sole data collection method utilized. The second researcher also completed interviews.

Surveys using personal interviews are the next most common research design. The sample size of these surveys ranges from 32 respondents to 1226 respondents. The mean sample size is 360. In one study, the original sample size was 120 families. The researcher then did a second, more detailed interview with 20 families. One researcher coupled interviews with measurements of the homes.

Most studies have an historical aspect either in the form of literature review or as part of the survey. For one researcher, the historical aspect is a major focus of data collection due to limited contact with the people of the culture.

A number of studies use more than one method. For two studies, the use of the literature review is a primary aspect of data collection. Thus, literature review is listed in Table 5 as one of the research designs (see Table 5).

Table 5. Cultural aspects of housing literature search 1975-1985: Research design (N = 18)^a

Method	Number
Case study	8
Experimental	0
Historical	1
Literature Review	2
Survey	6
Other	1

a (N=18 instead of N=16 because two studies employed literature reviews as major components of the data collection procedure.)

Most of the research is descriptive, hypothesis generating, and theory building. Five studies have some quantitative components. These five studies are from the fields of anthropology, home economics, sociology, and urban and regional planning. Qualitative research designs are found in dissertations in the fields of architecture, anthropology, and history.

Research Questions

The focus of the dissertation research varies. As expected, with the majority of the studies generated from the field of architecture, the majority of the research questions emphasize house form (N=6), design (N=3), and space (N=2) related to the needs of the culture. Three dissertations focus on housing preferences, while two studies examine adjustments required because of changing culture (housing satisfaction).

The six studies on house form contain a variety of perspectives. One dissertation describes a culture's traditional house form and materials. A second dissertation investigates house form as a symbol of culture. Four studies examine house form in relation to social life. In one, the relationship between folk house-form distinction and the abandonment of peasant lifestyles is investigated. In another, the relationship between house form and household size, number of co-

residing conjugal family units and household wealth is examined. A third study focuses on house form as a symbol of social life and status. The fourth study looks at house form in relation to social life and environmental and economic factors.

The three house-design studies investigate cultural aspects of housing in order to suggest improved designs for a specific culture. The two studies on housing space focus on 1) the relationship between cultural conceptions and the organization of house space, and 2) the interrelationships among house use, space, cultural knowledge systems, and artistic consciousness. The three studies on housing preferences investigate 1) factors related to housing preferences, 2) changing family structure, housing preferences, and house form, and 3) the preference for specific house forms by different traditional cultures residing within one dominant culture.

The two studies investigating housing satisfaction focus on 1) families of one culture who are adapting housing from another culture and their satisfaction with the housing adjustment, and 2) the relationship among spatial distribution, household head's birthplace, and housing satisfaction (see Table 6).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frameworks utilized by the researchers differ. Although there is overlap between the categories, for descriptive purposes, the authors have categorized the types of conceptual frameworks as *adaptational*, *deterministic*, *interactional* and *symbolic* (see Table 7). The frameworks utilized in each of the dissertations are briefly described. More in-depth explanations can be found in the literature (Burr, Hill, Nye, and Reese, 1979; Hill and Hansen, 1960; McNall, 1979; Menzies, 1983; Rank and LeCroy, 1983; Skidmore, 1979)

Adaptational. Five studies investigate behaviors related to the process of adaptation. That process includes needs, preferences, adjustment, and satisfaction. In order for adaptation to occur, specific needs must be identified and preferences must be recognized. Adjustment may then occur and satisfaction or dissatisfaction will be the outcome. The studies utilize different portions of this framework.

In the housing adjustment paradigm, seven elements are seen as part of the process of housing adjustment: 1) social and cultural characteristics, 2) housing aspirations, 3) constraints, 4) housing expectations, 5) choice of dwelling unit, 6) degree of housing satisfaction, and 7) change. Change includes residential alterations and/or additions, lowering of housing expectations, changing the perception of housing discrepancies, and seeking a new residence. Housing needs, preference, and satisfaction are viewed as products of the interrelationships with socio-economic, political, cultural, and environmental factors.

Deterministic. A supposition of the deterministic framework is that there is one main force or a few main forces that determine outcomes. The most common force identified is environmental determinism which states that the environment, generally meaning physical environment, is responsible for behavioral outcomes such as house form and use. Three of the four deterministic frameworks used in the dissertations are environmental deterministic. The fourth dissertation uses a framework based on the central idea that it is the mode of production in a culture that influences or determines house form.

Interactional. Three different theoretical frameworks, symbolic interaction, systems, and structuralism, are classified as interactional. Each of these

frameworks supposes the interaction of variables as a major component. (Editor's note: This is not an orthodox conception of interaction approaches.)

One dissertation uses symbolic interaction to examine the meaning of family life and house-form interactions based on actions families take regarding house form. Another study uses a systems perspective to investigate change and interaction between systems and environments. A third study use structuralism to focus on the structure and interaction of cultural elements.

Symbolic. Symbolic frameworks focus on the signs or symbols (ie, forms have a common meaning or use and a secondary and less obvious meaning). Four different symbolic frameworks are utilized in the dissertations studied: architectonics, phenomenological, socio-linguistic, and expressive space.

Architectonics is used to evaluate the specific uses and meanings of a particular house form. The phenomenological approach incorporates the real or experiential dimension with the symbolic ones. Socio-linguistics, concerned with the form of sound in the context of a speech community with shared rules of conduct and interpretation, is applied to the study of the visual house form. Expressive space, the culturally shaped human use of space, guides the investigation of the interior design and spatial use of housing.

Table 6. Cultural aspects of housing literature search 1975-1985: Topic focus (N = 16)

Topic Focus	Number
House design	3
House form	6
Housing preference	3
Housing satisfaction	2
Housing space	2

Findings

Over one-third of the dissertations describe house form, structure or interior, and the culture involved, and then show the manner in which culture influences the shape, building methods, or interior design of dwellings. Historical reports are found in several dissertations as a base for understanding the culture. The primary findings are reported by research topic as presented in Table 6.

The findings of the three researchers focusing on housing design are that traditional house forms or features are preferred to modern, nontraditional house forms. The cultures examined in these three studies are Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Traditional house form is also the preference discovered in two of the housing preference studies (Nigeria and Iran). In a housing satisfaction study, Korean families in the United States made adjustments to incorporate traditional features.

Of the six researchers investigating house form, two find that house form is a successful material artifact for ethno-archaeological research. Two studies find house form to be symbolic of social and/or family structure and interactions. One researcher describes traditional house form and materials, while the second finds the abandonment of traditional lifestyles related to the extinction of the

traditional house form.

The three researchers exploring housing preferences discover three different

Table 7. Cultural aspects of housing literature search 1975-1985: Conceptual framework (N =16)

Conceptual Framework	Number
Adaptation	5
Adjustment paradigm	(1)
Housing needs	(2)
Housing preference	(1)
Housing satisfaction	(1)
Deterministic	4
Environmental determinism	(3)
Mode of production	(1)
Symbolic	4
Architectonics	(1)
Phenomenological	(1)
Socio-linguistic	(1)
Expressive space	(1)
Interaction	3
Symbolic interaction	(1)
Systems	(1)
Structuralism	(1)

types of preferences. Taiwanese families indicate a preference for close proximity of the extended family. Iranian families prefer houses that accommodate the nuclear family. The third study looks at preferences for traditional house form and finds higher preferences indicated by low-income families and migrant families.

Of the two studies investigating housing satisfaction, one study shows that families who have moved into nontraditional housing are satisfied if they can make adjustments to incorporate traditional features. The other dissertation examines housing in Israeli-occupied West Bank and finds higher housing satisfactions among women heads-of-household, rural migrants, larger families, and families holding higher status.

Both researchers investigating housing space find relationships among cultural patterns and use of space.

DISCUSSION

This review, limited to ten years of dissertation research, finds a wide variety in the type and quality of research relating to the cultural aspects of housing. The methodology used is similar for many of the studies (ie., case studies of the house form and interviews with the inhabitants). Many different conceptual frameworks are used and the findings are diverse.

While the primary objective of each dissertation is the study of a particular culture, the development of theory would be greatly advanced if the studies had been designed so that cross-cultural comparisons could be made. While the choice of a framework depends upon the focus of the research topic, it would be helpful if several frameworks could be identified as particularly appropriate to guide cross-cultural studies. One such framework might be a systems framework. It is the most holistic and, consequently, the most difficult to operationalize. However, if the researchers doing cultural and cross-cultural studies focus on the development of this framework by identifying critical variables, it could constitute a major contribution for use by those conducting dissertation research.

Another possibility for advancing cross-cultural understandings could be the investigation of similar research questions in several different cultures, using a similar framework. This could be facilitated through an advisor with graduate students from several different countries, or through co-operative research among researchers and their graduate students housed in different departments, colleges, or universities.

Additional information is needed to understand the differences and similarities of housing in different cultures. This review of literature, which focuses on dissertations, should be extended to include studies reported in professional journals and monographs.

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