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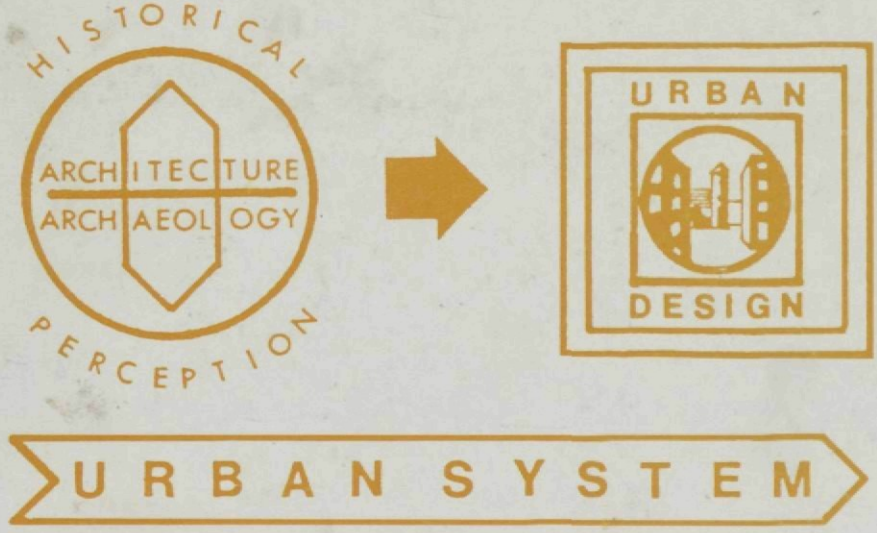
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HOUSING OUTSIDE IRISH TOWNS
An analysis of household characteristics, motivations and preferences

DAVID STOREY AND PATRICK O'FLANAGAN

A considerable amount has been written about ribbon development which has tended to give the impression that this is the only type of housing development in rural areas. Recent work by An Foras Forbartha serves to place ribbon development in its broader context. Their survey of houses built in rural areas in Ireland in 1983 revealed that over 70 percent were isolated, rather than in ribbons or clusters, (Jennings and Bissett, 1986)

It has been postulated that ribboning results from a combination of factors. Land costs tend to be lower in rural areas thus making it cheaper to build a house there, rather than in a town. Many people prefer living in rural areas in what they perceive to be a more natural environment, offering privacy and scenic beauty. Many researchers have assumed that ribboning is predominantly urban-generated. This is to suggest that houses in ribbon development are occupied by people who are migrating from urban areas and 'who have no functional rural connection' (Jennings, 1986). In other words, the residents work in urban areas (Shaffrey, 1985). Such people may tend to differ from natives of the area in terms of living conditions and social pursuits (Cronin, 1987).

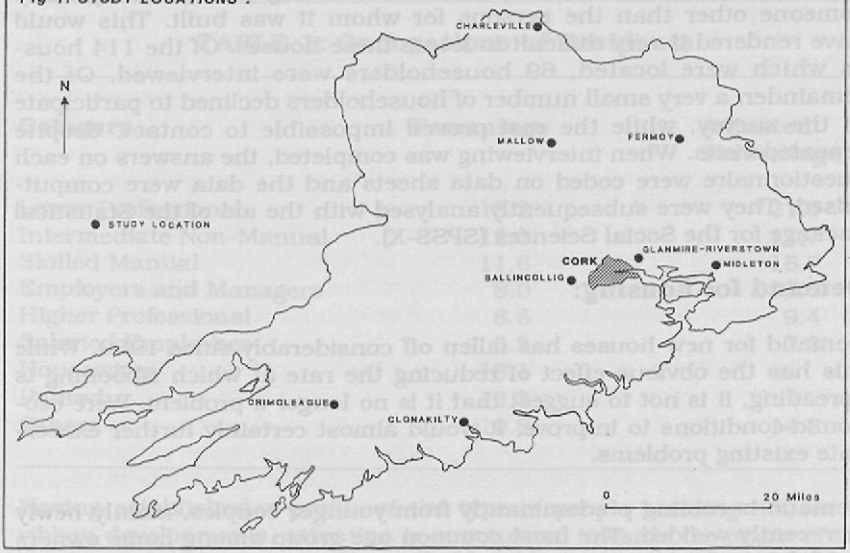
The main arguments employed against ribbon development relate to the increased cost which it imposes upon society, mainly through the provision of public services. The furnishing of telephone, postal and electricity services all give rise to increased expense for the taxpayer (Cork County Council, 1985). It has been estimated that the cost of supplying electricity and adequate sewerage facilities to more dispersed settlement is considerably greater, relative to urban or more clustered locations (Foras Forbartha, 1976). Ribboning has also been shown to increase the road accident rate (due to a greater number of entrances onto public roads) and adds to school transport and postal service costs, among others (Suffren, 1977). Recently, questions have been raised relating to the estimation of public and private costs associated with housing in rural areas. The lower cost to the individual (due to cheaper, and often free, sites) has been referred to, while it has been suggested that increased costs related to the provision of public utilities are a matter for the pricing policies of those utilities (Jennings,

1986). Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly true that the cost of providing services is increased due to more dispersed housing developments.

Against this background the aims of this paper are to assess the demands and preferences of consumers for this kind of housing. The work is placed in a wider socio-geographic framework by an analysis of the characteristics of the householders, through which an attempt is made to identify the factors which have promoted the growth of ribbon development.

In order to adequately assess housing need and consumer preference, a questionnaire survey of recent house builders was considered the most appropriate method. This was supplemented by informal discussions with estate agents and representatives of housing finance agencies. It was obviously necessary to conduct the survey in areas experiencing considerable ribbon development. The areas chosen are in close proximity either to major towns or to Cork city. They were selected so as to represent different types of geographic areas within County Cork. The zones of ribboning chosen occur close to Ballincollig and Glanmire-Riverstown in the Cork City area; Midleton in East Cork; Fermoy, Mallow and Charleville in North Cork; Clonakilty and Drimoleague in West Cork (Fig. 1).

Fig 1. STUDY LOCATIONS .



Utilising 25 inch maps showing planning permissions, every full permission granted for private dwellings within the specified areas, since 1980, was noted. 1980 was chosen on the basis that respondents might be unable to accurately recall the reasons underlying certain decisions made by them, many years previously. A 50 percent sample was selected, by taking every second planning application number from lists drawn up in chronological order.

When the sample planning application numbers were selected (a total of 239), the corresponding names and addresses of applicants were obtained from the planning files. In some instances permissions were found to be for non-residential buildings, or for renovations to existing dwellings. In some cases two or more applications related to the same dwelling, being alterations to previous applications. A very small number of applications proved impossible to trace. When all superfluous applications had been excluded, a total of 157 remained. The questionnaire design reflected the need to acquire information related to the stated aims of the study. It was structured in an accepted format, designed to elicit as accurate a response as possible to the questions asked (Dixon and Leach, 1978).

During the implementation of the questionnaire, 114 of the 157 houses were located. The remainder appear not to have been built, although it is possible that in a few instances the house may now be occupied by someone other than the persons for whom it was built. This would have rendered it very difficult to locate these houses. Of the 114 houses which were located, 69 householders were interviewed. Of the remainder, a very small number of householders declined to participate in the survey, while the rest proved impossible to contact, despite repeated visits. When interviewing was completed, the answers on each questionnaire were coded on data sheets and the data were computerised. They were subsequently analysed with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-X).

Demand for housing:

Demand for new houses has fallen off considerably since 1980. While this has the obvious effect of reducing the rate at which ribboning is spreading, it is not to suggest that it is no longer a problem. Were economic conditions to improve, it would almost certainly further exacerbate existing problems.

Demand is coming predominantly from younger couples, mainly newly or recently wedded. The most common age group among home owners is 30-34; in 22 cases both adult residents are in this category and in a further 13 cases, at least one adult resident is. In 24 cases there are

no resident children: almost exclusively these are households occupied by recently married couples. The average number of children, in households where children are present, is 2.2. In 30 cases all children are under 10 years of age. In 12 instances there is only one child. In virtually all of these, the age of the parents suggests that more children will arrive in later years. In only three cases did the household consist of only one person. Clearly, young married couples are the norm.

In just over one quarter of cases, all resident adults had been living with their parents immediately prior to moving into their current home. However, in many additional cases, one adult resident had been living with their parents immediately prior to their move. In 42 percent of cases, the house surveyed was the occupants' first home as a family unit.

By taking all employed occupants in the study and calculating each category as a proportion of the overall total, it can be seen that 21.9 percent are in the lower professional category, 17.7 percent in the intermediate non-manual category and 16.7 percent in the skilled manual group (Census definitions) when adjustment is made to allow for housewives and retired people. Other categories are much less well represented (Table 1). Thus, the majority of residents can be deemed to be in moderately well paid and secure jobs.

TABLE 1: Occupations of Residents

Category	Percentage	Adjusted Percentage
Lower Professional	15.2	21.9
Intermediate Non-Manual	12.3	17.7
Skilled Manual	11.6	16.7
Employers and Managers	8.0	11.5
Higher Professional	6.5	9.4
Salaried Employees	5.2	7.3
Housewives	18.1	-
Retired	12.3	-
Others	10.8	14.6

Having established a profile of the type of people building houses in ribbon developments, attention is now turned towards the origin of the residents. In 33 percent of households at least one adult resident was brought up within one mile of their current residence. Such people can

be termed as 'natives'. All of these could be regarded as 'rural-generated' housing and, while not forming the majority, the proportion is still somewhat higher than might have been expected, thus proving that ribboning is not solely due to urbanites, or 'newcomers', moving into the countryside (Table 2). This sizeable amount of locally induced housing helps to explain why just over half of the households involved did not look for a site at a location other than that at which they are now resident.

TABLE 2: Origin of Residents

Area	Percentage of Residents	
	Natives	Newcomers
Ballincollig	36.7	63.3
Glanmire-Riverstown	14.3	85.7
Midleton	50.0	50.0
North Cork	30.0	70.0
Total	36.2	63.8

Another factor contributing to this is the number of people who had lived locally prior to moving into their current residence, but who are not natives of the area. In 22 percent of cases, all adult residents had previously lived within one mile of their current residence. In a further 16 percent, one adult resident had lived within that distance. While there is quite a close correspondence between the figures relating to previous residence and those relating to childhood residence, by no means all of those who lived locally, prior to moving to their current residence, could be termed 'natives' of that area. The addition of these 'newcomers' to the 'native' residents means that in only 46 percent of cases did the household have no previous connection with the area. There is quite a close correspondence between the proportion of households with some previous connection to their area of residence and the proportion of households who did not search for a site in other areas.

Further evidence of a somewhat less mobile population, than might have been expected, is provided by the fact that of those who previously owned a house (32 households), in 10 cases all adult residents had previously lived within one mile of their current home although only two out of this total could be regarded as 'natives'. There is thus a sizable amount of movement between houses, within relatively small areas. People who owned houses on more than one previous occasion were more likely to have moved to their current home from longer distances away. Housebuilding in these instances was due mainly to

changes in employment location. When considering the demand for sites, the question arises as to why people purchase sites rather than ready-built houses. Over 30 percent of respondents chose to build a house, rather than buy one, on the basis that it was cheaper to do so (Table 3). Greater choice, in both design and location, was the next most important reason cited for building, rather than purchasing a house. Choice assumes a much more important role among those who previously owned a home, accounting for almost one third of stated reasons within that category. Among those who owned a house on more than one previous occasion, choice was cited by 50 percent of owners as their reason for building. Getting married was the principal catalyst for building a new house (Table 4).

TABLE 3: Reasons for building, rather than buying, a house

Reason	Percentage of Households
Cheaper	30.4
Choice	24.6
No suitable houses	15.9
Given site	13.0
Occupant is a builder	5.8
Other	10.0

TABLE 4: Reason for building at particular time

Reason	Percentage of Households
Getting married	42.0
Needed a house	15.9
Needed a change	13.0
Had sufficient finance	8.7
Other	20.2

While not quantifiable, an attitude definitely exists which can be summed up as 'a house is not really your own unless you have it built yourself'. There is quite a definite feeling that to live in a house, not built and designed for the particular occupant, is somehow inferior. Given the uniformity of house size and design, evident throughout the areas of study, this is a somewhat unfounded belief. Nevertheless,

there appears to be a belief that by searching for and purchasing a site, the persons concerned are doing what nobody else has done before and are asserting their individuality.

The continuing sales of roadside sites by farmers is very obvious; almost half the sites in the survey were purchased from local farmers. In a number of cases individual farmers had obtained multiple planning permissions; the low take-up rate of these reflecting the decline in demand. This phenomenon would, to some extent, serve to generate its own demand.

Consumer Preference

In order to establish why respondents chose a particular site, they were asked to examine a list of 16 possible influencing factors and to rank in order of importance, those factors which affected their decision on where to live. The top five factors selected by each respondent were analysed. It should be pointed out that not all respondents noted five factors.

A weighting system was employed, thus allowing an index of factors to be constructed. First preferences were considered five times more important than fifth preferences, second preferences were considered four times as important as fifth preferences, and so on.

The results indicated that four factors are of central importance (Table 5). These are the desire to live outside town, land cost, the attractiveness of the area and accessibility to work. The first of these is by far the most important. Land cost assumes a prominent position due to the high proportion of local born residents - twenty percent of home owners obtained a site free of charge. Among non-natives the desire to live outside town and the attractiveness of the area take precedence over land cost as an influencing factor. The loan policies of financial institutions (where slightly lower loans are given in respect of houses in rural areas), might serve as a disincentive to ribboning. This factor is negated, however, by the lower site costs in rural areas and the fact that many people are given free sites.

TABLE 5: Reasons for choice of site (weighted index)

Factor	Score
Desire to live outside town	160
Land cost	117
Attractiveness of area	115
Accessibility to work	113
Privacy	76
Accessibility to schools	68
Brought up in this area	68

Isolation might also prove to be a problem, particularly among housewives who remain at home all day. Although no clear cut evidence of this was found, there are certainly a few cases where housewives would have opted for a more urban location if the opportunity were to present itself. There is evidence from some households, where one partner is a native of the area and the other is not, of a wish, on the part of the non-native, to move to what is seen as a less isolated setting.

All houses are detached and 84 percent are bungalows. Four bedrooms is the norm, which represents an increase in size for those who owned a house previously. Fifty seven percent of houses have a garage attached and, in a number of other cases, the occupants intend to have one built in the near future. Central heating is present in all houses.

In terms of the appearance of the dwelling, the majority are of standard design, few being what might be described as architecturally unattractive. The uniformity of design among bungalows, many of which were system built, makes something of a nonsense of the idea that by building, rather than buying, a house people are asserting their individualism.

There is evidence that those who previously owned houses are moving to larger dwellings with more modern household facilities. Thus, people are moving up in the housing market. For the majority it is their first house, while for those who owned a house previously they have built what could be regarded as better ones.

The average distance from each house to the nearest town or village is 2.04 miles, while the average distance between each house and the next nearest house is 17 yards. In terms of distance to work, the vast

majority of people working are living five miles, or less, from their place of work (70 percent). The vast majority of school-going children have three miles, or less, to travel. The car is the most commonly used method of transport for going to both work and school, being almost universal for the former. In the case of the latter, transport by bus is also quite important. The majority of respondents consider themselves very, or at least reasonably, accessible to work. It must be stated, though, that there are varying opinions as to what constitutes accessible. The answers to this particular query were quite subjective.

Very little dissatisfaction was expressed with present locations. Eighty three percent of households were very satisfied, with a further 13 percent quite satisfied. This is likely to be an overestimate, as people would tend towards justifying their own actions. Nevertheless, 61 percent expressed no dissatisfaction with any aspects of their residential and locational choice. Those who did, mentioned problems related mainly to distance from shops, social facilities, schools, work, lack of services and inadequate water supply. It must be stressed that little significance can be attached to these, as they appear to be very minor problems as far as the respondents were concerned.

Conclusions and Implications

Given the fall off in demand, especially for isolated 'one-off' houses in the countryside, any improvement in economic conditions is likely to precipitate renewed pressure for houses on the edges of towns and villages. The analysis has demonstrated that both natives and newcomers - young newly weds in secure jobs - are responsible for generating ribbon type developments. With regard to preferences it has been shown that the desire to live outside a town was more significant than land costs in motivating people to build houses on the outskirts of towns. The majority of people residing in these kinds of housing contexts belong to the lower professional and intermediate non-manual and skilled manual occupational categories. A service site policy may be employed by local authorities in their efforts to control ribbon development. Such a strategy would require an effective and vigorous marketing campaign directed at the target population which has been identified.

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