Introduction
Housing is a very important commodity. Housing endows it owner with a social identity and integrates the owner with the immediate social milieu. Eteng, Mfon and Okoi (2022) asserts that housing provides security and define the status of the housing owner in the society. Furthermore, housing has a profound influence on man’s health, education, social behaviour, employment, productivity, awareness on development opportunities, safety, crime, and general wellbeing (Eteng et al., 2022). Based on the foregoing, housing may be regarded as a commodity that is more than mere shelter. It embodies the totality of social services and utilities that are required in make communities or neighbourhood livable environment. Being that housing is very important, it is required for several purposes. For instance, housing units are required for commercial, institutional, residential and even for industrial purposes. While other activities and land uses may demand housing units, residential needs tend to be the largest indicator to housing demand. This is because, humans will naturally need habitation and shelter to shield them from noise and extremity of whether.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that housing demand for residential accommodation is very critical. Even more, locations and other variables come to play in the choice of the residential neighbourhoods. This is because, humans will naturally prefer to reside in housing units and in locations where they thrive better (Etim, Ivo and Eteng, 2023). This tendency called habitat selection is the inclination for each species, to show a preference for those places in which successful adaptation of that species is more likely supported and humans are no exception to this. Residential area preferences are a complex and sometimes inconsistent set of factors that are related to among other things the neighbourhood, its place (and all the social and symbolic construction of that place) and how it provides ac-
cess to amenities such as schools, but also how it facilitates social interaction with friends and family (Booi and Boterman, 2019). Preference can be viewed as an expression of bias towards adaptively suitable environments, environments that include elements and spaces that are useful and supportive for human functioning. For each individual these preferences differ and also shift over time.

Residential household location is one of the driving forces of urban dynamics. Housing preference studies have been used to help researchers and developers understand the new trends in housing and predict market changes for the near future. A housing preference study is a consumer-oriented approach to understanding the housing situation from the consumers’ view as compared to other market-oriented approaches which focus on the investigation of physical features and the condition of housing (Jiboye and Omoniyi, 2013). Understanding residential location choice behaviour is a primary concern for urban planners and policymakers because they are important tools used in analyzing urban policy with respect to transportation and urban land use planning, these policies impact on employment, economic development, social structure, spatial segregation, and the transport system.

As the residential housing preference will change from time-to-time policymakers, private developers, urban planners and environmentalists will not be able to perform independent judgment and minimize the risks of uncertainty regarding residential housing investment without deep understanding of the pattern of housing area preferences. Understanding housing preference plays a very significant role in determining housing satisfaction (Eteng et al., 2022; Ajom et al., 2022; Kama, 2017). The paper therefore seeks to assess residential area preference among residents of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

**Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

The study of how households form a decision on where to live is a difficult one, involving a multitude of factors. However, there are reasons for believing that it becomes more complex in the context of a developing country due to relative economic under-development, poverty, absence of coherent government planning, lack of data, inadequate and skewed provision of public services, urbanization, and rapid expansion of the city. Booi and Boterman (2019) found that household characteristics strongly influence the propensity to move in and to move out of the city of Amsterdam. The combination of income and level of education appeared as strong determinants. Interestingly, highly educated with middle and lower incomes were most urban in their orientation, while lower and middle educated with higher and middle incomes were most likely to prefer to leave the city. Also, ethnic background also had a clear effect; particularly first-generation immigrants had a much stronger urban orientation than people without a migrant background. Finally, the composition of the household also influenced preferences. Young singles demonstrated a stronger orientation to the city, while young families generally were highly mobile and more often considered moving to a more suburban location. These stated preferences showed quite some stability and seemed to be less influenced by changes in the housing market and housing supply than actual moving behaviour.

Adedokun and Tambiyi (2018) examined residential and environment preference in Ilesha. The findings showed that majority of the respondents were satisfied with their present housing and residential environment, there was a strong positive correlation between housing quality and residential preference. It was observed that residential preference was not determined solely by socio-economic variables. The study had both theoretical and practical implications. The theoretical implication was basically the need for the development of sense of place of study while the practical implication exposed the need for preference studies before planning housing and residential areas.

Kareem et al. (2022) examined the residential location preferences in Ilorin metropolis, Nigeria. They identified the types of houses and examined the factors influencing the preferred residential location. Data were obtained from field observation and administration of questionnaires administered to 387 households. Principal component Analysis (PCA) was used to reduce the variables to a manageable size. Relative Importance Index (RII) was used to determine the value for each factor. The RII found the principal indices of the residential preference in Ilorin to include physical qualities of the environment (0.7018), availability of land and building (0.6822), social facility (0.6601), income (0.6584), community preference (0.6553), cost of land and building (0.5669), nearness to work (0.5364) and road network (0.5251). The following factors were not strong drivers of residential location preferences in Ilorin as they had indices of less than 0.5; nearness to city centre, rent, nearness to children school, availability of houses to rent and environmental pollution. This study recommended that policy and planning mechanisms should be in place to produce sufficient quantities of affordable housing for the residents at various socioeconomic levels for sustainable growth of Ilorin metropolis.

Yoade (2016) investigated housing preference of residents within the city of Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Data for the study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Data obtained include quality of the environment in terms of good layout, availability of infrastructural facilities like good roads, water supply, quietness, peace and adequate security etc.; socio-cultural activities; accessibility to place of work; vacant plot; security of land ownership; and closeness to the place of birth.
The most important determinants of residential district preferences within the study area were factors that dealt with the quality of the environment (31.0%) and those that were socio-cultural in nature (42.0%). The study established that great differences appear in the determinants of households’ preferences for different residential density districts. The study concluded that each category of residential density district of a city has distinct set of determinants of households’ residential district preferences peculiar to it. It was recommended that urban planning policies should aim at fast tracking the provision of basic infrastructure and a more importantly public transit network connecting the core area with newly developed areas should be provided. Also, government were advised to make concerted efforts to bring about substantial improvement in the environmental quality of residential zones, especially in the core area and the outskirts of the city.

Sanni and Akinyemi (2009) investigated the determinants of households’ residential district preferences in Ibadan and the study revealed that residential districts preference in the city owed much to sorting, as households sort out the districts that best suit their socio–economic class. The most important determinants of residential district preferences within Ibadan Metropolitan city according to Sanni and Akinyemi (2009) are factors that deal with the quality of the environment and those that are socio-cultural in nature. Among factors that deal with quality of the environment, such reasons as well-planned area with necessary infrastructural facilities such as good roads, water supply etc that make a place conducive for living, were highly regarded. The study also revealed that each category of residential areas in Ibadan had distinct and peculiar arrangement of determinants of residential district preferences and that broad generalization of such determinants should not be done for the whole city. In a study on residential area preference in Yenagoa; Obafemi and Omiunu (2014) discovered that proximity to work was relatively insignificant owing to the dispersed nature of informal sector employment within the city. However, closeness to Kith and Kins was found to be of important significance in the Residential location choice making. The study found that Yenagoa urban spaces are residentially divided by ethnicity.

Ikurekong (2009) identified six major determinants of residential satisfaction in residential localities within Uyo - Urban, these are: social infrastructures, housing facilities, consumer’s goods availability, health and leisure, availability/adequacy of public utilities and security services. He notes that these determinants may also act as the nucleus for residential neighbourhood preference. Etim (2015) noted that the determinants of residential area preference are not uniform throughout Uyo metropolis, the study identified that access to vacant land, environmental quality, and workplace/school proximity are the most significant reasons underpinning households’ residential area preferences while ethnic/ family ties and security were found to be insignificant determinants of residential area preferences in Uyo metropolis. Despite the lack of adequate supply of infrastructure, difficulty in commuting to work and high transport costs, households indicated higher preference for the urban periphery to the central areas of Uyo metropolis.

Ajom et al., (2022) examined the satisfaction level of residents in public housing estates in Calabar, Cross River State Nigeria. They broadly categorized the factors that determine preference and satisfaction into housing location, physical facilities and environmental factors. Using relative satisfaction index (RSI), they noted that the residents of public housing estates were not completely satisfied with the housing environments. For instance, it was shown that the residents were fairly satisfied with the housing location. Similar results were obtained on both the environmental and physical facilities. Specifically, they identified that proximity to service, waste disposal/management, and water supply were observed to influence the level of satisfaction of residents with the housing area. Equally, facilities and amenities were drastically deteriorating within public residential estates and the aesthetic quality of the housing environment is facing serious distortion. Based on their findings, Ajom et al., (2022) recommended that facilities and amenities that are deteriorating needs to be upgraded so as to make the area habitable. It should be noted that though preference ratings guide residential choice, personal and financial considerations however often preclude selection of the preferred location.

Conceptual Framework

The Utility Model
A household’s utility function is assumed to consist of measurable and random components, and the random terms represent unknown dwelling and community attributes and household characteristics, i.e., uncertainty in the decision-making process. Various choices by households can only be explained by assuming that random terms exist (Anas, 1982). Theoretically, this concept enables us to explore the heterogeneous preferences of households that have different socio-economic characteristics. Since theoretical applications of the random utility concepts to households’ residential location decisions by McFadden (1974, 1978) and Anas (1982), there have been empirical applications to research about households’ community and housing choices as well (Quigley, 1985). In the applications of this model to households’ residential area preferences, the number of alternative choices should be small in order to become empirically tractable. Therefore, researchers tend to aggregate neighbourhoods based on characteristics and make the number of alternatives
small. The concept of the Utility model is useful to help disentangle the variety of households’ residential location decisions as it includes various factors that are considered important in people’s residential area preferences.

Research Methodology

Study Area
The study area is Calabar. Calabar is situated between Longitudes 8°18’ East and 8°26’ East of the Greenwich meridian and Latitudes 4°50’ North and 5°67’ North of the Equator. Calabar share boundaries in the North with Odukpani Local Government Area while in the West, it shares boundaries with the Calabar River and in the East by the Great Kwa River. It is further bordered in the South by the Atlantic Ocean (Figure 1). According to the 1991 population census, Calabar had a population 328876. Current projections show that over 687351 persons are residing in the study area. The population mix is made up of civil servants, artisans, traders among others. Housing development in the study area is influenced largely by topography, urban development pattern among others.

Data were sourced from primary and secondary sources. The administration of structured questionnaire was the main primary source of data for this study while secondary sources of data included journals, census results, and published books. The 1991 population of sampled areas was projected to 2022 using the geometric formula of population projection. 

\[ Pt = Po (1 + r/100)^n \] ....Equation 1.

From the population size, the sample size was derived through the application of Taro Yamane formula:

\[ n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \] ....Equation 2.

Where; \( n \) = Sample Size, \( N \) = Finite Population \( e \) = Level of Significance (Limit of tolerable error =0.05). The application of the formula resulted in a sample size of 400 households. Data were presented using tables and analysis were done using simple percentages.

Data Analysis and Discussions
The determinants of residential preference for residents of Calabar are shown in Table 1. It shows that majority of the respondents (30.5%) preferred to live closer to their work places. This is in agreement with the findings of Kareem et al (2022) and Etim (2023) but in sharp contrast to the findings of Obafemi and Omunu (2014) who asserted that proximity to work was relatively an insignificant determinant of preference in Yenagoa attributing it to the dispersed nature of informal sector employment within the city. The second determinants of residential area preference was found to be security (24.0%), this implies that residents prefer to live in areas where the security of their lives and properties are guaranteed. This finding validates the studies of Etim et al (2023) which showed that 25.6% of respondents experienced residential area dissonance in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Determinants</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closeness to Workplace</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Ties</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Land</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of facilities</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Environment</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Studies, 2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preference Rating</th>
<th>No of zones</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most preferred zones</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(19.44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately preferred</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(30.56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least preferred zones</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(38.89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not preferred zones</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(11.11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>(100.00%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Studies, 2022

Fig. 1: Map of Cross River State showing Yakurr Local Government Area. Insert: Nigeria showing Cross River State. Source: Cross River Geographic Information Agency, 2022.
Ikot Ekpene due to high rate of insecurity in the area.

Closeness to family and kith was considered major determinant of residential area preference as some respondents stated their preference for communal life where they live close to their family members and friends, this is not surprising as it has already been reported by Obafemi and Omiunu (2014) in Yenagoa. Access to land was the fourth prime determinants of residential area preference with 10.25%, this is due to the fact that land is becoming scarce to come by, and most people that wants to buy land and build and left with no choice other than to buy any available one, Etim (2015) asserted that most renters in Uyo metropolis often consider the availability of land at a considerable price as the prime determinant of preference when they decide to build their own houses. This finding collaborates with the assertion of Yoade (2016) in Ille Ife. Availability of facilities and the quality of environment were not given serious attention by respondents as they were of the view that they were the ones to provide the necessary utilities needed for their well-being as the government has failed in this regards.

From Table 2, it can be seen that only seven spatial units representing 19.44% of the neighbourhoods were preferred mostly, 30.56% of the spatial units were moderately preferred by respondents. The worrisome part is that half (50%) of the study area either least preferred or not preferred at all. This implies that those living there may be experiencing residential dissonance as they are not living in an area that suits their residential needs. It is the duty of town planners to initiate projects that will help morph up the livability experience in this area, this can come in the form of rehabilitation of the city core where urban decay has set in, decentralization of facilities, strengthening of the security network and making sure that land speculation is minimized.

Conclusion

Town planning aims at achieving the dual duties of creating a sustainable and liveable environment, to achieve the aforementioned a delicate equilibrium between respecting preferences and honouring wider responsibilities must be achieved. This is because what is sustainable may not always be desirable. But by ignoring the clear preferences of significant sections of the population for low density environments and the ambiance provided by small settlements, policymakers are refusing to accept that urban compaction in its current conception may, in the long run, not be the most sustainable option. Each settlement is unique, and planners need to recognize that a theory or plan that was successful in one place may in fact, considering the preferences and situation of another place, be unsuitable. If residents trust that planners are taking their fears and values into account, opposition would likely decrease, and the liveability of a place would be strongly enhanced. The prime determinants of residential area preference are closeness to workplace, security, family ties and access to land for development. These factors should be considered critically before any public housing scheme is put in place. It is recommended that the government should provide a transit bus that should transport people to and fro their place of work at a subsidized price, the security apparatus should also be beefed up; if need be, the activities of the police force should be complimented by community based vigilante groups, government should also acquire and sell land to developers at reasonable prices. The expansion of the town should be well guided and managed by planners to ensure that the city grows in a sustainable manner. The factors influencing residential area preferences of the residents should always be given thought of while drawing up development plans/schemes or legislations for the city.

References


Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Uyo, Uyo. 77p.


