



The Primacy of Place: *Rethinking Housing as Next to Air in the Hierarchy of Human Needs in Architectural Science*

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ABSTRACT

The hierarchy of human needs, as classically articulated by Abraham Maslow (1943), places physiological requirements: air, water, food, and shelter, at its base. The assertion that housing follows only natural air in its urgency highlights its unique role. It is the artificial environment humanity creates to secure all other base needs. Having seen the developmental stages of the fetus in the womb of the woman through the gestation period my curiosity was aroused as a professional architect to situate the womb as a conducive house for developmental processes of a fetus to maturity and eventual birth. The objectives of the study which formed the conceptual framework were formulated around the protective functions of a house; the house as an enhancer of human growth and development; influencer of social interaction and environmental comfort. They were the independent variables while total life-cycle was the dependent variable. A mixed-methods research design was used in this study, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques. This multifaceted approach which necessitates both empirical assessment and experiential knowledge, serves as the justification for the study design. The results of multiple regression analysis revealed a very strong relationship between the independent and dependent variables with P-values of 0.012, 0.000, 0.023 and 0.049 respectively. In view of that, the null hypotheses one, two, three and four (H_1 , H_2 , H_3 and H_4) are rejected and the alternate hypotheses are accepted. The study affirms that effective housing is not an incidental outcome of creation or construction, but the deliberate synthesis of design, science, and empathy, emphasizing the primacy of place in nurturing human potential and advancing sustainable existence.

Keywords: *Hierarchy, Human Needs, Housing, Architectural Science, Philosophy*

INTRODUCTION

Preamble

The axiom that water, then food rather than housing is second and third respectively only to natural air as a human need only serves as the basis of the biological importance of water and food to human health and wellbeing. However, this paper views housing, in its very deep physical and utilitarian importance in a multidimensional construct and conceptualizes housing as second only to natural air in the hierarchy of human needs in architectural science. Focusing on Christopher Alexander's pattern of architectural science and theory and the phenomenological perspective of Pallasmaa (2005), the paper explores how housing leverages on both physical and experiential domains where material, spatial and sensory elements converge to develop and sustain life. It further expatiated that when guided by scientific and human-centered principles, transforms housing from a mere structural commodity into a life-promoting, restorative, sustainable and socially interactive domain. It also affirms that effective housing, in the context of this paper is not only an incidental outcome of construction, but the conscious and deliberate synthesis of thoughtfulness and sciences, placing high premium on its primacy of place in encouraging and sustaining the growth and development of life in a conducive domain.

The hierarchy of human needs as classically articulated by Abraham Maslow (1943), places physiological requirements: air, water, food and shelter in hierarchy. The current assertion that housing follows natural air and also ends with the human highlights its unique role from the initialization of life to end of it. Artificially, it is the environment that needy humans create for the function of all other fundamental or base needs. Naturally, it is the first domain in a biological habitat for the conducive growth

and development of the offspring of the raw kind of a matured human. Without the protection of a house, the procurement of portable water and nutritious food, growth and development and desirable body temperature for proper physiological and mental growth and development becomes dangerously insecure. However, to reduce housing only to its physiological utility is to overlook its deeper meaning and function. This article conceptualizes housing as a multi-layered need in its natural and artificial forms, explore the architectural theories that informs its successful creation and opines or supposes that, as illustrated in the normal anatomy of the woman, the meaning and function of housing in the womb of the woman is demonstrated. It is worthy of note that in the functional anatomy of the woman, the function of protection by encasing the fetus (the youngest form of the raw kind of a mammal) within the skeleton and other supporting structures of the woman is similar to the fence of a man's house. To guarantee the smooth and comprehensive development of the fetus within the structure similar to smooth operation of the endeavours of man in his house, the woman's skeleton (endo-skeleton) is wrapped with the muscles and finished with the skin in various colours (complexions). St

The commencement of life and its development to maturity takes place in the belly of the mammal beginning as embryo in the ovary and later transported to the womb where it transforms into a fetus. The transportation is via the wavy action of the hair lining in the fallopian tube. Birth takes place after maturity. The time for experiential live – the living grace - begins after birth. After this period, comes the time to vacate this planet earth and back to one's creator. At this time, the life which was breathed into the body of the man in the belly of the woman will be withdrawn from his/her body, leaving the carcass. Finally, the carcass, which has at the time, become decomposable and smelly will be lowered into a 6ft dug pit because of its health implications for the living. This pit is the final resting shelter for the perishable body of the man. This is housing.

This paper further discusses the indispensable role of housing as second to air and last in the hierarchy of human needs in the art and science of architecture. It sees housing as the second in physical and utilitarian importance after air and the last after life as the journey to the "here after" begins. Therefore, this study deducts that the man passes through three phases of housing during his/her life cycle, the first phase being the growth and development in the ovary/womb. The second phase being the physical and utilitarian house for his/her endeavours between birth and death. The third and final phase being the tomb where the stages of decomposition takes place.

Statement of the Problem

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs identifies shelter as a basic physiological requirement necessary for human survival, alongside air and water. However, in contemporary architectural practice, A house is the physical structure which provides shelter for the man and his domestic endeavours and precludes him from, and provides protection from inclement weather conditions and wild animals. In the life cycle, the concept of "housing" can be seen at the very beginning (i.e fertilization) in the uterus as it displays similar characteristics showing functional, protective and developmental traits in the development of the fetus up till delivery.

Seeing the developmental stages of the fetus in the womb through the gestation period arouse my curiosity as a professional architect to situate the womb as a conducive house for the prenatal developments to maturity and eventual birth. Despite advances in architectural science, the necessity of housing has only proven to be of utmost importance in recent times as environments continue to expose occupants to conditions that compromise physical well-being and emotional stability, particularly in rapidly urbanizing contexts. The failure to recognize housing as a primary and active determinant of human survival and second to air reveals a critical gap between human needs theory and architectural design priorities. There is therefore a need to re-evaluate housing from the perspective of "primacy of place," repositioning as second in the hierarchy of needs. Hence, the formulation of the research concern and the evolution of the topic: "Primacy of the Place of Housing in the Hierarchy of Human Needs in Architectural Science".

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to appraise housing as second to air/final need in the hierarchy of human needs in architectural science.

The Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives that were formulated to focus, direct and guide the study are:

- i. to identify the protective function(s) of a house;
- ii. to evaluate a house as an enhancer of human growth and development;
- iii. to evaluate a house as an influencer of social interaction;
- iv. to determine the house as a facilitator of sustainable livable comfort.

The Study Questions:

The following study questions were formulated in line with the specific objectives to focus and guide the study. They are:

1. Does a house have protective function(s)?
2. Can a house enhance human growth and development?
3. Can a house influence social interaction?
4. To what extent can a house facilitate sustainable livable comfort?

The Study Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated in the null form for acceptance or rejection in the course of the study. They are:

- i. a house does not provide protective functions;
- ii. a house cannot enhance human growth and development;
- iii. a house cannot influence social interaction;
- iv. a house does not facilitate sustainable livable comfort.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is a House/Housing in the Context of human need?

A house is the physical structure which provides shelter for the man and his domestic endeavours and precludes him from, and provides protection from inclement weather conditions and wild animals. Whereas housing is the organization of various kinds and types of houses in a community along with associated infrastructure for the conducive and decent living of the man. In-as-much as there is divine provision for the growth and development of the fetus as endeavours in the belly of the woman, so also is there divine provision for the decomposing endeavours or activities in the dug pit. Below is a picture of the dug pit providing a conducive environment for decomposing activities in it as housing.

Decomposition as an endeavour is the process in which the organs and complex molecules of a human body break down into simple organic matter over time. After the human death, body will get decayed in different stages. According to Knight B and Saukko P. (2016), DiMaio DJ, DiMaio VJ. (2001), the stages are: Autolysis, Bloat, Activity Decay, Advanced Decay and Skeletonization. Even after death our brain will function for about 7 mins reminding our memories, happy moments and events, after which it will stop functioning. Within 24–72hrs, our digestive enzymes which helps to digest the food starts eating the internal organs of our body. Next 3–5 days, our body starts bloating i.e blood and foam mixture starts releasing from the mouth and nose. After 8–10 days, our body colour changes to red and organs in the abdomen gets decomposed and gases gets released from it. Several weeks after death nails and teeth will get detached from the body. After a month or so, body turns to liquid state from solid state. Then at least only our skeleton will remain.

The Perspective of Housing Beyond Shelter to a Place of Being

Housing, in its most simplistic definition or most diminutive of form is a physical structure that provides accommodation for various animal endeavours and protection from environmental elements. Though understanding the basics is easy, but appreciating the minor distinctions may not be obvious or easily understood or may be entirely hard to grasp. It is the only architectural form and elements that begins with a man and also ends with him. It is a territory of security, a private domain where individuals and families can retreat into from public life and exercise autonomy Blomley (2020) and Porteous (1976).

Similarly, the fetus exercises full autonomy in the highly protected and very conducive womb. The house is also a repository of identity, where personal histories are lived, memories are formed and cultural values are conveyed through the arrangement and decoration of space. Situating identity: where personal histories are lived, is similarly expressed in the belly of the woman through the developmental

stages of the embryo and fetus till birth. Where memories are formed is similarly expressed through the divine nutritional architecture in the belly of the woman. Where cultural values are conveyed is similarly expressed in the womb through the divine ways the fetus lives in it. Here, It turns around to comfortable position, it kicks to pass the message of livability. After birth, the being must clothe well to moderate body temperature and free the skin from preying insects and inclement weather and the house itself providing protection from the elements and wild attack.

Housing: A Critical Human Need

The evidence of housing as a critical factor in the hierarchy of human needs is multi-dimensional owing to how it impacts physiological health and psychological wellbeing including social and economic developments.

Physiological Health: Inadequate housing, both in terms of quality and quantity directly affects the physical health and overall well-being of occupants, making it a critical public health concern. Poor housing conditions in terms of quality such as overcrowding, dampness, poor ventilation, and lack of sanitation, create fertile and enabling environments for diseases to thrive and for illnesses to be easily transmitted. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) highlights that residents of substandard housing are more likely to experience respiratory infections, cardiovascular stress, and exposure to vectors such as mosquitoes and rodents, which thrive in unhygienic settings. From an architectural standpoint, the design and construction of a dwelling determine its capacity to provide safe, comfortable, and healthy living conditions (Moh et al., 2024). Elements like adequate ventilation, thermal regulation, and access to clean water and sanitation are not mere technical details; they are essential determinants of a building's capacity to sustain health. Poorly designed housing traps heat and humidity, restricts airflow, and encourages mold growth, all of which contribute to respiratory and allergic diseases (Coulburn & Miller, 2022). Therefore, adequate housing must be viewed not only as a tool for aesthetic or spatial organization but also as a medium for preventive healthcare. Integrating health-centered design principles into housing projects ensures that dwellings promote physical well-being and reduce vulnerability to diseases. Sustainable and inclusive housing design, particularly in rapidly urbanizing contexts, offers an opportunity to bridge the gap between health equity and built environment quality, affirming that healthy housing is foundational to a healthy society.

Psychological Wellbeing: The home functions as more than a physical shelter; it is a psychological refuge that shapes emotional stability, identity, and overall well-being. When designed thoughtfully, a home fosters a sense of safety, control, and personal space, key factors that support mental health and daily restoration. Evans (2003) notes that environments offering stability and predictability reduce the cognitive and emotional load individuals experience from external stressors. Features such as natural lighting, spatial privacy, acoustic comfort, and a connection to nature all contribute to creating a calming atmosphere that promotes relaxation and psychological balance (Obeidat & Obeidat, 2024). For many, the home becomes a space where emotional recovery occurs, helping occupants manage the pressures of work, social life, and uncertainty. In contrast, housing insecurity, overcrowding, and poor design undermine these restorative qualities. When people lack privacy, control over their environment, or assurance of permanence, chronic stress and anxiety often follow (Luginaah et al., 2010). Overcrowded or noisy spaces increase irritability and reduce the opportunity for rest, while inadequate lighting and poor ventilation contribute to fatigue and depressive symptoms. Moreover, constant threats of eviction or displacement heighten psychological distress, especially in low-income and informal settlements. Thus, the design and stability of housing are not peripheral to mental health, they are central to it. Architects and planners must therefore prioritize the creation of homes that nurture psychological restoration, recognizing that well-designed living environments are integral to both emotional resilience and quality of life.

Social and Economic Development: Stable housing serves as a foundational element for social inclusion and economic empowerment (Achmad, 2024). It provides individuals and families with a secure base from which they can engage productively in society, accessing employment, education, healthcare, and civic life. A permanent address often determines one's eligibility for jobs, schooling, and government services, making it a gateway to social participation and mobility (Brown, 2017). Furthermore, a very recent research

by Ulianova et al., (2025) shows that a stable home environment supports child development by offering consistency, safety, and the psychological grounding necessary for learning and growth, also supporting studies like that of Merrick et al., (2020) show that there is a deep need for housing as it affects the social aspects of human life. In this way, housing functions not just as a shelter but as a social infrastructure, enabling people to build networks, contribute to their communities, and achieve upward mobility. According to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat, 2015), adequate housing is a cornerstone of sustainable urban development and poverty reduction. It represents more than a basic human need, it is an asset that enhances human capability and resilience. When housing is affordable, secure, and well-located, it strengthens local economies by allowing residents to invest time and resources in productive activities rather than survival (King et al., 2017). Conversely, housing instability perpetuates cycles of poverty, exclusion, and economic vulnerability. Recognizing housing as both a social right and a development asset reframes it from being a commodity to a critical platform for inclusive growth, equity, and human dignity.

Theoretical Framework

Abraham Maslow was one of the most influential psychologists of the twentieth century, best known for shifting the focus of psychology away from illness and dysfunction toward human potential, growth, and meaning. His Hierarchy of Human Needs remains one of the most widely discussed theories in psychology, education, management, and even everyday life because it speaks directly to how people live, struggle, and strive. Abraham Harold Maslow was born in 1908 in Brooklyn, New York. He grew up in a poor and often emotionally difficult environment. Maslow himself described his childhood as lonely and unhappy, marked by feelings of insecurity and rejection. Ironically, these early struggles played a major role in shaping his lifelong interest in understanding what makes life meaningful and what allows human beings to flourish.

The Core Idea Behind Maslow's Theory

Maslow believed that human beings are naturally motivated to grow, improve themselves, and reach their full potential. However, he argued that this growth does not happen all at once. Instead, human motivation follows a certain order, where more basic needs must be reasonably satisfied before higher psychological needs become important. This idea formed the basis of his famous Hierarchy of Human Needs, usually represented as a pyramid with five levels. The lower levels represent more fundamental needs, while the higher levels represent more complex psychological and self-fulfilling needs. Importantly, Maslow never claimed that the hierarchy was rigid or absolute. Hence the birth of this research.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs

The theory of need of particular importance for this research work is the Theory of Physiological Needs. At the base of the hierarchy are physiological needs which are essential for survival. These include: Air, Food, Water, Sleep, Warmth, Reproduction and Shelter. Here, shelter depicts housing. Maslow viewed these needs as the most powerful motivators of behavior. When a person is extremely hungry, tired, or thirsty - at a time he needs to pause, retire and revitalize, shelter becomes inevitable - everything else becomes secondary. A starving person - at a time he loses articulation and thought synergy - for instance, is unlikely to be motivated by art, morality, or self-esteem. For many, the home becomes a space where emotional recovery occurs, helping occupants manage the pressures of work, social life, and uncertainty. In everyday life, this level reminds us that no amount of inspiration, intuition or motivation can replace basic physical well-being which a key facilitator is shelter. Students who are hungry struggle to learn; workers who are exhausted struggle to perform. Until these needs are met, productivity diminishes and higher aspirations remain distant.

RESEARCH METHOD

The plan for a study or research project is known as the research methodology. It is the systematic method to resolve a research problem through data gathering using various techniques, providing an interpretation of the data gathered and drawing conclusions about the research data. Essentially, research methodology is the blueprint of a research or study. A mixed-methods research design was used in this study, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques. This multifaceted approach which necessitates both empirical assessment and experiential knowledge, serves as the justification for this design. While

qualitative data allowed for a deeper understanding of the concept of housing among users as housing consumers, architects and developers as professionals and technologists respectively and regulators as stakeholders quantitative data offered quantifiable patterns of accessible experiences. The mixed-methods technique is especially well-suited for research projects that seek to investigate intricate phenomena from several angles. To comprehend the efficacy of users and stakeholders participation, qualitative techniques like observations and interviews offer more profound insights into user experiences and perspectives (c/f Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The chosen technique facilitates the collection of many kinds of data, which is in line with the goals of the study. Quantitative data will determine the experiential value of the housing consumers irrespective of the type of use. On the other hand, qualitative data will record the actual experiences of different stakeholders, such as investors, developers, architects and other stakeholders. This alignment guarantees a comprehensive investigation of the study issues from both a numerical and experiential perspective.

The key determinants of hierarchical placement of housing from the perspective of physical and utilitarian importance in the list of human needs selected for this research (Protection, Growth and Development, Social Interaction, and Environmental Comfort) serve as independent variables while Total Life-circle stand as the dependent variable.

Independent Variables

Dependent Variable

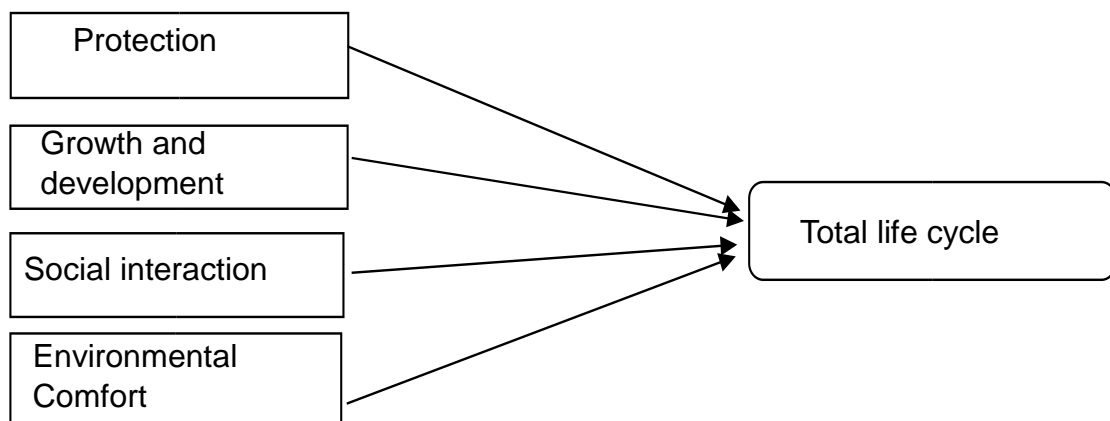


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework showing the independent and dependent variables for the study Purposive and random sampling techniques were used to select the respondents based on their willingness to participate in the exercise. The questionnaire used the 5-point Likert type scale of '1' for Strongly Disagreed '2' for Disagreed, '3' for Undecided, '4' for Agreed and '5' for Strongly Agreed . The use of a close-ended questionnaire was vital to eliminate the subjective bias of interest in questions.

Method of Data Analysis

The analysis for the research was conducted using inferential analysis, where correlation analysis was employed to determine the existence, the direction and strength of the relationship between the variables while multiple regression analysis was used for hypotheses testing. The analysis was conducted using SPSS (version 23.0).

Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Regression analysis is a statistical technique that explains the direction and the significance of relationships between dependent and independent variables (Hair et al., 2016). Also, it is a method that measures the extent of the relationship between the variables of a study (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). For the purpose of this study, multiple regression analysis was employed to test the research hypotheses that explain the extent of relationships that exist between the independent variables (Protection, Growth and Development, Social Interaction, and Environmental Comfort). Consequently, regression analysis was conducted and the outcome of the analysis was used for the study's hypotheses testing.

Discussion of Findings

The researcher lives in the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) Housing Estate in Gwarinpa, Abuja Nigeria. The estate is acclaimed as the largest single estate in West Africa, with an estimated total of about 6,500 Housing units. Applying the country's average of 6 persons per household (2 parent and 4 children) gave an estimated population of 39,000 at practical completion and occupation; the characteristic birth overshoot and cultural demands not considered.

Following the methodology a sample size of 396 was obtained from the country's average of 39,000 occupants in the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) Gwarinpa Housing Estate. Furthermore, 75.8% response rate was achieved with 300 respondents. This response rate is considered appropriate according to the assertion by Sekeran and Bougie (2013) that a 30% response rate is considered adequate for survey analysis.

The results of multiple regression analysis revealed a very strong relationship between the independent and dependent variables with P-values of 0.012, 0.000, 0.023 and 0.049 respectively. In view of that, the null hypotheses one, two, three and four (H_1 , H_2 , H_3 and H_4) are rejected and the alternate hypotheses are accepted. Protection, Growth and Development, Social Interaction, and Environmental Comfort have significant positive effect on the life of the embryo/fetus in the first phase housing of the total life cycle of human. The womb provides the required protection from harm that could result from the vulnerabilities associated with the woman in keeping with her endeavours in the second phase of housing while the embryo is in the first phase of housing. This is a dual and very complementary relationship. The womb also enhances conducive growth and development of the fetus from initialization of life to maturity and birth. Social Interaction is the relationship between the fetus and the entirety of the internal environment in the womb, which if affected can lead to abnormality or even loss. It is similar to the relationship between the human and their environment - the people, animals, vegetation, land, water bodies and the atmosphere - which if affected can lead to strife.

CONCLUSION

Housing transcends its traditional definition as a physical structure to emerge as a fundamental enabler of human existence, health, and development. It is the bridge between physiological survival and psychological, social, and economic well-being. As discussed, architecture plays a pivotal role in transforming the abstract notion of shelter into a space that nurtures life, drawing upon theories like Alexander's Pattern Language and phenomenological principles to ensure that housing serves both functional and emotional needs. The integration of health-centered design, environmental quality, and spatial sensitivity demonstrates that housing is not merely a technical or economic product but a critical human endeavor. Adequate housing promotes physical health by safeguarding against disease, supports psychological stability through security and comfort, and fosters social inclusion by providing a stable platform for participation in education, employment, and community life.

In an age of rapid urbanization, inequality, and environmental uncertainty, the meaning of housing must be continuously re-examined through the lens of sustainability, resilience, and human dignity. To design a house is, therefore, to design the conditions for human thriving, where architecture, science, and empathy intersect to produce spaces that sustain both body and soul. The future of housing design depends on how effectively architects and policymakers can balance functionality with emotional resonance, affordability with environmental responsibility, and innovation with inclusivity. Consequently, there is a growing need for further research that explores the measurable links between housing design and health outcomes, the psychological effects of spatial experience, and the integration of circular design strategies to enhance affordability and sustainability. Equally important are long-term post-occupancy studies that assess user interaction with housing environments, as well as comparative policy research examining how governance frameworks shape access to healthy and inclusive housing in rapidly urbanizing regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa. Ultimately, by situating housing at the center of human well-being and sustainable development, architecture reaffirms its social purpose, to build not just structures, but lives, communities, and a more equitable world.

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