

# The Attributes of Social Resilience: Understanding Refugees' Housing Choices

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## 5 6 7 8 9 **Abstract**

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11 The current literature on migrants' housing experience in Australia and internationally often uses spatial and  
12 economic conditions of disadvantage and adverse personal circumstances to frame the description of  
13 migrants' resettlement. Even when using positive frameworks such as inclusion and integration, the focus is  
14 on the lack of resources and support. This paper uses the conceptual lens of resilience as an alternative  
15 framework for describing migrants' resettlement experience. Using the case study of the Sudanese refugees  
16 living in the metropolitan area of Perth, Western Australia (WA), this paper describes the settlement process  
17 from the migrants' perspective, discussing the link between settlement processes and housing choices of  
18 migrants with a refugee background using the concept of resilience. In particular, the paper focuses on the  
19 external triggers, who ignite, support, and strengthen the different components of the migrants' resilience.  
20 These triggers are defined as "attributes of resilience" (Maclean, Cuthill, and Ross 2014). The study identified  
21 four attributes of social resilience applicable and relevant to the housing choices and settlement patterns of  
22 the Sudanese refugee migrants settled in Perth (WA). These are: knowledge, skills and learning; community  
23 networks; people/place connections, and community infrastructures. The paper illustrates how the attributes  
24 assisted these migrants in developing tools and mechanisms to build new opportunities and negotiate and  
25 access suitable housing opportunities. The findings presented in this paper stress the need, within the  
26 resettlement experience, to consider housing issues outside the simple provision of affordable and appropriate  
27 dwellings but recognising the relationship between social and spatial domains.  
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## 31 **Keywords**

32 Housing, Refugee Migrants, Social Resilience, Attributes, Infrastructure.  
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## 36 **Introduction**

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38 In Australia, low-income migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds, also referred to as Culturally and  
39 Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) migrants, are one of the groups suffering from the housing crisis. They have  
40 trouble navigating the housing market and achieving a sustainable housing outcome (Wood, Ong, and Cigdem  
41 2015). This study focuses on the resettlement experience of a specific CaLD migrant group: the Sudanese  
42 and South Sudanese-born migrants settled within the Perth (WA) Metropolitan Area<sup>1</sup>. Between 2001 and 2011,  
43 almost 27,000 Sudanese permanently resettled in Australia (DSS 2017) to escape the country's ongoing civil  
44 war. According to the 2011 census data, WA recorded the highest density of Sudanese people, 1.43 per 1,000  
45 (Robinson 2013). Between 2001 and 2006, Perth welcomed 11 percent of the Sudanese entrants, third after  
46 Melbourne (33%) and Sydney (21%) (DIAC 2007). Furthermore, in 2006, Perth was home to almost 99 percent  
47 of the Sudanese population in WA. The 2016 census data show that nearly the entire (98 %) of the native  
48 Sudanese population in WA was still settled in Perth. The research presented in this paper focuses on the  
49 resettlement experience of this population.  
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54 The literature presents the resettlement experience as a road paved with many difficulties (Lejukole 2013;  
55 Robinson 2013; Abur 2012; Atem 2011; Lejukole 2008). According to Neumann et al. (2014), Australian  
56 literature studying refugees "has tended to be about refugees' problematic baggage such as their traumatic  
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1 experiences or lack of skills" (12). This paper instead stresses the positive aspects of the resettlement  
2 experience; in particular, it isolates the factors supporting the formation of what Fozdar and Hartley (2013)  
3 identify as the "ontological security necessary to build a full life and demonstrate successful refugee  
4 settlement" (15). It does so by using the concept of social resilience, arguing that such a theoretical approach  
5 interprets the existing conditions and manifestation of human agencies and the individual and collective actions  
6 directed towards societal wellbeing (Davidson 2010). While resilience has gradually been recognised as a  
7 practicable concept in many fields, Porter, Steele, and Stone (2018) highlight: "Within housing research  
8 scholarship and practice, the concept is both ubiquitous and under-theorised" (387). This paper aims to fill this  
9 gap by defining social resilience specified within the context of what is perceived by migrants as adequate<sup>2</sup>  
10 and affordable housing.

11 The article focuses on identifying the physical elements and social and emotional factors that have helped the  
12 Sudanese community settled in Perth's metropolitan conurbation (Western Australia) to respond to the  
13 challenges of securing housing, explained from the migrants' perspective. These elements are referred to as  
14 attributes of resilience (Maclean, Cuthill, and Ross 2014). The "attributes" are defined as the platforms  
15 assisting the initiation, formation, and maintenance of the migrants' social resilience. The paper opens by  
16 explaining the social resilience of migrants, clarifying its position within the current academic debate. The  
17 meaning of social resilience is presented in relation to understanding the pivotal role of the migrants' cultural  
18 background (Ungar 2008). It then explores the attributes of resilience through the case study of Sudanese  
19 refugee migrants currently settled in the metropolitan area of Perth, Western Australia (WA). It explains the  
20 methodologies used, defines the attributes of resilience, and highlights how these attributes influence migrants'  
21 housing choices relative to settlement patterns. The conclusion discusses the opportunities arising from the  
22 use of resilience as a theoretical framework for understanding the housing experience of migrants, reflecting  
23 on the implications for housing policies and design development.

## 24 **Defining the Social Resilience of Migrants**

25 Within current scholarship, social resilience refers to the development of skills, attitudes, and knowledge that  
26 can assist people in overcoming social, political, or ecological challenges and crises (Adger 2000; Norris et al.  
27 2008; Ross and Berkes 2014; Maclean, Cuthill, and Ross 2014). What separates this general definition of  
28 social resilience from the one related to migrants is the influence of sociocultural factors at all levels, from  
29 individuals to the community. Within the study of psychological resilience, Ungar (2008) provides the following  
30 culturally relevant definition of resilience:

31 *In the context of exposure to significant adversity, whether psychological,*  
32 *environmental, or both, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their*  
33 *way to health-sustaining resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of*  
34 *wellbeing, and a condition of the individual's family, community and culture to provide*  
35 *these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways. (225)*

36 Ungar (2008) defines community resilience as the ability of an individual to face and recover from adversity  
37 built upon social and cultural capital. This paper argues that this definition needs further refinement concerning  
38 its context. Such context refers to the lack of available and suitable (i.e. economically viable and culturally  
39 appropriate housing for its inhabitants) housing for CaLD migrants (including the Sudanese refugees) as  
40 identified in the literature (Beer and Morphett 2002; Findlay 2011; Forrest et al. 2012; Fozdar and Hartley 2012,  
41 Flatau et al. 2015). Drawing from the existing literature and contextualising it within the discourse of housing  
42 affordability and cultural understanding, this paper establishes the following definition of resilience:

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43 <sup>2</sup> The term adequate and appropriate are used as synonymous within the paper and refer to the location of the dwelling  
44 in relation to social and physical infrastructure deemed relevant and necessary by the migrants.

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*The social resilience of migrants encompasses the ongoing development of skills, attitudes, and knowledge—accumulated over time—as well as the processes that assist and influence their housing choices. It includes all the culturally respectful, personally meaningful, and socially considered processes that inform migrants' choices relatively to access suitable housing.*

In the case study presented in this paper, the force generating changes and adaptation processes is defined as the multidimensional combination of individual, community, and cross-cultural components of migrants' resilience and its physical and social context. The individual component of resilience is strongly related to psychology. Within this field of study, resilience is used as a theoretical concept to describe an individual's capacity to face adversity. In general, the individualised approach "emphasises internal and intimate experiences related to people's innate characteristics" (Fozdar and Hartley 2013, 15). The individual component of migrants' resilience develops mainly in tandem with increased skills, knowledge, and learning opportunities. It depends on social and familial networks that create a safety net enabling individuals to resist stresses and strains (VanBreda 2001). The strength generated by these networks contributes to creating and optimising resilience for individuals and their families and communities. To make such successful transformations, individuals, families, and the community must manifest shared resilience characteristics, including developing coping and adaptation strategies, stress positive behavioural patterns, and willingness to act and initiate dynamic, constructive processes (Van Breda 2001). Cultural aspects also influence the adaptation process. Migrants adapt to the local context and mediate cultural needs within the available opportunities.

To summarise, migrant families express housing needs concerning living patterns and space organisation derived from their values, ideas, images, and norms (Rapoport 2001). In their homemaking process, migrants look for housing that can offer an opportunity to recover a sense of continuity and stability, revive the home-country habits, and make specific changes to what they have experienced. "The 'art' in their dwelling practices is grounded in the simultaneous existence of a search for stability and a desire for and acknowledgement of change" (Kiliçkiran 2003, 109). Reflecting upon migration, culture, and resilience, Pickren (2014) stresses the importance of cultural components. These are the resources that migrants use to interpret and engage with the world: "immigrants and refugees bring these resources with them, i.e., they know how to relate to self-care and be human reflexively. This is a part of an individual's sense of self or identity" (19). As Jacobs (2004) argues, family, objects, memories, and routines move with the migrant to the new place, re-established within the new type of housing opportunities and limits. Jacob's considerations start casting light on the value and importance of the physical context of the resettlement process, pointing explicitly towards housing characteristics. However, Simich and Andermann (2014) remind us that refugees' resilience is also associated with "social process[es] that reside in the relationships among people, systems, and institutions at the level of families, neighbourhoods, communities, and organisations, governments, and transnational networks" (vii). As embraced by this study, the concept of the social resilience of migrants is concerned with the development of resilience related to these external factors—defined by what is later detailed as the attributes of resilience—while still acknowledging individuals' strength. Through the assumption of this perspective, the paper recognises the critical role of the external environment in the housing choices of migrants. It emphasises the significance of institutionalised infrastructures, services, organisations, and self-organised networks in the resettlement process. Referring to Simich and Andermann (2014), "recognising the social dimensions of refugee resilience means we must look beyond the individual to understand the larger contexts in which they are embedded" (vii).

## Methods

The research presented in this paper is only a part of a more comprehensive study tracing the housing choices and settlement patterns of Sudanese migrants in Perth (Western Australia), consisting of spatial and social analysis. This paper presents the outcome of the engagement with the Bari South Sudanese community linked to the Anglican Church in Ballajura (Perth, WA) – mainly the industrial suburb in the northwest outskirts of the

1 Perth metropolitan area. The path that led to the involvement of this community in the research was not  
2 straightforward. The research was initially designed around the collection of quantitative and qualitative data  
3 due to the established collaboration with the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre (MMRC). The MMRC  
4 Social Worker Coordinator offered to help with the recruiting and organising of semi-structured interviews. In  
5 the initial research design phase, these interviews were identified as the only methodology for collecting data  
6 relative to the housing experience of refugees. Unfortunately, when the application of human research ethics  
7 was approved, the MMRC Support Worker Coordinator had already ceased her working relationship with the  
8 migrant centre. Despite her willingness to continue participating in the research, she was no longer able to  
9 assist the recruiting process. This unexpected event generated the need to find alternative opportunities for  
10 recruiting. The Sudanese Anglican Church in Ballajura was then identified as an alternative location for  
11 recruitment. The Author attended a Sunday service and personally approached the reverend after mass. The  
12 reverend granted permission to distribute information sheets for the recruitment. She also offered the  
13 opportunity to make a personal announcement the following Sunday at the end of mass to explain the research  
14 before approaching churchgoers. Starting from the end of November 2014, the researcher attended the  
15 Bilingual (Bari/English) Sunday Mass held at the Holy Trinity Church for five months. This new path of the  
16 recruitment process necessitated modification in the research methodology. The changes in research  
17 methodology resulted in an improved understanding of the migrants' experience and the researcher's  
18 relationship with the participants. All participants stated to be Australian citizens who had migrated from South  
19 Sudan, claiming to be of Bari ethnic background, lived in Australia between five and ten years, and entered  
20 the country with an offshore granted visa<sup>3</sup> (primarily humanitarian)<sup>4</sup>. They were all over the age of eighteen  
21 and fluent in English. They were recruited on a voluntary basis.  
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24 The research proceeded following the initial design, which relied on semi-structured interviews. Few church  
25 members expressed their interest in participating in the study. Interviews were then held after the Sunday  
26 service at the church office. Several problems arose during the first interviews where people kept interrupting,  
27 coming into the room and joining the conversation. Consequently, an initial scoping focus group was organised  
28 and held in the church meeting room. The meeting was digitally recorded and transcribed. The familiar church  
29 environment, presence of community members that knew each other well, and opportunity to discuss personal  
30 matters kept the discussion alive. Eleven people attended the focus group, of which only one was a woman.  
31 People attending the focus group and another group of nine church members filled out a brief questionnaire.  
32 It included both open-ended and multiple-choice questions related to their housing experience in Australia.  
33 The focus group and short survey were used to prompt discussions during the time spent participating in the  
34 community's life.  
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38 Following the focus group, the participants were interviewed regularly every Sunday after the mass, mainly  
39 during the time spent socialising after the service in the church carpark for five months. The study assumed  
40 almost an ethnographic approach with a series of follow-up conversations (interviews). The interview process  
41 took the form of conversations held in a more informal setting. Operating within the church context enriched  
42 the level of information with the opportunity to capture actions and activities and obtain information that could  
43 otherwise be omitted in a formal interview setting. Manual notes were taken each Sunday and then transcribed  
44 subsequently. The study mainly produced textual data, resulting primarily from the notes taken during  
45 discussions/interviews and the focus group recordings that were transcribed digitally. To achieve flexibility and  
46 ensure the operation of the feedback and validation process, data were analysed alongside the data collection.  
47 The data were inductively explored and examined to identify recurrent topics relative to the housing and  
48 categorised within the attributes.  
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55 <sup>3</sup> Please note two respondents to the questionnaire lived in Australia only for 2 years.

56 <sup>4</sup> As census data presents considerable incongruences in counting the numbers of Sudan- and South Sudan-born population in WA  
57 (Perugia 2019) this research takes into consideration this group of migrants defining them as refugee-like as many had the experienced  
58 of refugee but entered the country with a different visa. To note that participants identifying themselves as South Sudanese were officially  
59 born in Sudan as South Sudan was not established at the time of their birth. From now on when using the term Sudanese population, I  
60 refer to the sum of Sudan- and South Sudan-born population.  
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## The Attributes of Resilience: Understanding Settlement Experience

1 The social resilience of migrants—as defined within this research—relies on the simultaneous existence of  
2 individuals, social, and cross-cultural components of resilience, and external triggers that ignite, support, and  
3 strengthen different components. These triggers are the attributes of resilience. Maclean, Cuthill, and Ross  
4 (2014) introduced the concept of the attributes of social resilience when presenting their study on communities  
5 affected by environmental risks in North Queensland. In this research, the notion of attributes is proposed as  
6 a tool to identify social, infrastructural, emotional, and cultural platforms supporting migrants in their  
7 resettlement experience. These attributes help migrants develop instruments and mechanisms to build new  
8 opportunities to negotiate and access suitable housing opportunities. Amid significant changes and a great  
9 need to adapt quickly to a new environment, such as the one lived by migrants during the resettlement process,  
10 physical, emotional, and cultural platforms play a critical role in easing the transition process. With a similar  
11 intent to Maclean, Cuthill, and Ross (2014), this study aims to identify attributes to inform a strategic approach  
12 for future housing interventions focussing on building upon the existing effective tactics of migrants when  
13 addressing shortage and inadequacy of housing stock. Maclean, Cuthill, and Ross (2014) identified six  
14 attributes of social resilience: knowledge, skills and learning, community networks, people/place connections  
15 and community infrastructures, diverse and innovative economy, and engaged governance. Only the first four  
16 attributes emerged as applicable and relevant to the housing choices and settlement patterns of Sudanese  
17 refugee migrants settled in Perth. The original definition of these attributes proposed by the Queensland study  
18 has been generalised and then explicitly adapted to the housing context and resettlement experience of  
19 migrants. In this process, community infrastructure has been amended and redefined as community  
20 infrastructure and services. These attributes will be discussed and described concerning the research findings  
21 into the settlement experience of South Sudanese migrants.  
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### **Knowledge, Skills, and Learning**

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28 The 'knowledge, skills, and learning' attribute concerns the personal sphere of resettlement experience. It  
29 refers to all the processes that contribute, directly and indirectly, to building skills and acquiring knowledge.  
30 They provide migrants with an understanding of, familiarisation with, and establishment in the new  
31 environment. This attribute is strongly related to the individual component of social resilience, emphasising its  
32 relational and situational patterns (Polk 1997). Knowledge, skills, and learning strengthen personal resilience  
33 by creating a different mindset that helps individuals (and indirectly the community) master positive responses  
34 during challenging circumstances (fig. 1). This attribute is also instrumental in developing learned  
35 resourcefulness (Rosenbaum and Ben-Ari 1985), a combination of internally driven strength and extrinsically  
36 stimulated cognitive behaviours of adaptive functioning. Figure 1 pinpoints pattern components (Polk1997)  
37 and learned resourcefulness (Rosenbaum and Ben-Ari 1985) that contribute to the first attribute of resilience.  
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42 **Figure 1 goes here**

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44 During their initial phase of settlement, migrants start a process of building and/or consolidating skills and  
45 knowledge that provide them with an understanding of and familiarisation with the new environment. This  
46 learning process can be either formal or informal. The formal process refers to all those skills and learnings  
47 acquired through an institutionalised path such as programs and services offered within the Humanitarian  
48 Settlement Program. According to the Refugee Council of Australia (2016), "post-arrival orientation occurs in  
49 the elements of the Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (HSS), Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), and  
50 Settlement Grants Program (SGP) (see Settlement Support). There is currently no over-arching framework of  
51 post-arrival orientation linking these programs". As not all migrants benefit from the HSS, since 2011, the  
52 AMEP has been offering settlement courses that cover topics related to housing, such as renting,  
53 responsibilities, and rights. Another form of learning is related to the personal acquisition of skills that impacts  
54 housing choices in the long term. Among the study participants, the new skill set influenced their ability to  
55 make different housing choices or negotiate better conditions. When asked about their resettlement experience  
56 at arrival, they highlighted the importance of developing new skills. The most relevant skills identified in the  
57 domain of education and employment include completing Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions  
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1 courses and apprenticeships, acquiring a driver's licence, and improving their English. The focus group  
2 highlighted that driving and buying a car increased access to affordable housing options by allowing refugees  
3 to get to different neighbourhoods. As we know from the literature, improving English, completing a degree,  
4 and obtaining a driver's license contribute to better employment status (Flatau et al. 2015, Hugo 2011). In most  
5 cases, a better job indicates a better salary, which in turn, widens the opportunities for accessing more suitable  
6 housing (Beer and Foley 2003). The learning process also includes access to knowledge acquired informally  
7 through social networks. These networks are conceptualised in Strang and Adger's (2008) as one of the core  
8 domains supporting the achievement of integration.

9 Among the individuals interviewed, the processes leading to the development of learned resourcefulness were  
10 mainly related to an individual's capacity to acquire new skills and access information (external triggers). The  
11 new skill set also influenced their ability to make different housing choices or negotiate better conditions. For  
12 example, as discussed before, driving and owning a car increased access to affordable housing options by  
13 allowing refugees to access different neighbourhoods. Similarly, finishing their study and/or trade traineeship  
14 allowed individuals to achieve a better economic status by growing their employment opportunities. These  
15 opportunities translate into increased housing choices, not only in terms of a neighbourhood but also in the  
16 quality and suitability of the house. The "formal" acquisitions of skills and knowledge can be added to the  
17 "informal" process of knowledge. The study found that information about where to live (best neighbourhood  
18 both in terms of housing prices and services) and the type of agencies to contact public and private (mainly  
19 real estate agencies) are often gathered in the first settlement period. This is done through families, friends,  
20 the ethnic community, and educational institutions and workplaces. It leads to the second attribute – the  
21 community networks.

### 22 **Community Networks**

23 The 'community networks' attribute includes social practices that support people and groups in times of  
24 change. Maclean, Cuthill, and Ross (2014) recognised: "These networks provide essential support,  
25 operationalise community capacity, identify opportunities, and provide a focus for renewed optimism and hope"  
26 (149). Social and familial networks create a safety net that enables individuals to resist stress and strain  
27 (Kaplan et al. 1996). The strength provided by these networks contributes to the creation and optimisation of  
28 resilience for the individuals, their families, and communities. Figure 2 demonstrates the community support  
29 elements of resilience as identified by McCubbin & McCubbin (1992). It links the skills with knowledge that  
30 enable resilience within the research findings (Cobb 1981).

31 **Figure 2 goes here**

32 As Norris et al. (2008) point out, the degree of resilience of a community is more than the sum of its  
33 components, and indeed "a collection of resilient individuals does not guarantee a resilient community" (Norris  
34 et al. 2008, 128). In psychology, social and familial networks are recognised as essential safety nets that  
35 enable individuals to resist stress and strains in life (Kaplan et al. 1996). This is particularly relevant for  
36 migrants:

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38 *When arriving at a new and often unknown country, refugees will begin the*  
39 *endeavour of rebuilding their social world. A part of this process is the development*  
40 *of a sense of belonging related to home and community, meaning in one's life, and*  
41 *feelings of safety. (Wille 2013, 185)*

42 The literature review, *Housing issues for former refugees and asylum seekers in Australia* compiled by the  
43 Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA 2013) identifies the lack of social and community capital as one of the  
44 six problems faced by refugee migrants in securing housing. "When former refugees (and particularly young  
45 people) need advice or support, they rely on other community members. Community members, often newly-  
46 arrived themselves, may lack the knowledge of and connections to the housing sector" (4). In examining  
47 Sudanese refugee migration to Australia, Robinson (2013) identified a lack of social support and difficulties in  
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1 transitioning out of the support period. She attributed such problems to the rapid growth of the Sudanese  
2 population. However, according to the Sudanese people involved in this study, the early formation of a  
3 Sudanese church played a significant role in their resettlement journey. A young man in his early thirties with  
4 a small family (wife and two children) told me while talking in the church carpark: *"When I arrived, some of the*  
5 *men I was living with told me about the church. I got [a] lot of useful information to where to live and what to*  
6 *do from my new friends, here, at the church".* Similarly, other community members pointed out where to live  
7 (best neighbourhood both in terms of housing prices and services) and what agencies to contact—public and  
8 private (mainly real estate agencies)—were gathered via their religious social network.  
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10 As Dhanji (2010) further explains, "upon arrival, humanitarian entrants tend to stay with their sponsors and  
11 later in proximity to their sponsors or friends owing to a 'need' for the community" (110). In the case of  
12 Sudanese migrants settled in WA, it is worth mentioning that as many of them entered via the Single Homeless  
13 Project (SHP), their families have mostly sponsored them. Australian humanitarian migrants have the right to  
14 sponsor family members to move to Australia within five years of their arrival under the SHP, prioritising family  
15 reunions for "split families". These family-sponsored refugees have the right to receive social benefits and  
16 participate in the settlement program conditionally. Their sponsors are expected to "assist in the settlement of  
17 successful applicants after their arrival in Australia, including meeting them at the airport; providing their  
18 immediate accommodation needs; assisting them to find permanent accommodation; and familiarising them  
19 with services and service providers" (DIBP 2017).  
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23 Spittles, Blockley, and Fozdar's (2010) study on new migrants groups settling in the City of Swan—located in  
24 the northeast quadrant of the Perth metropolitan area—highlights that less than 1 percent of the refugees  
25 settled in the Local Government Area (LGA) between 2006 and 2010 were visa 202 subclass holders. "It  
26 appears that people who moved directly to the LGA upon arrival have done so via the SHP" (Spittles, Blockley,  
27 and Fozdar 2010, 44). The Australian literature on Sudanese refugees suggests that migrants often identify  
28 social networks as primary vehicles for integration and support (Wille 2013; Abur 2012; Dhanji 2010;  
29 Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham 2009). However, for family-sponsored humanitarian refugees, informal  
30 settlement practices appeared to be blurred with structured visa requirements. The South Sudanese  
31 Australians involved in this study acknowledged close and extended family, friends, and the church as  
32 supporters at the time of their arrival. This support is still present in their everyday lives. Such support is both  
33 emotional and practical; many pointed out that they had lived with friends or family when they first arrived or,  
34 in some cases, between moving houses. From the interaction with the participants, it was clear that maintaining  
35 a stable relationship with their ethnic community—family, friends, and the church community for this case  
36 study—was a crucial element affecting their resettlement. Living in a neighbourhood that guarantees proximity  
37 to these social groups emerged as a key factor influencing the housing choices of migrants. All the  
38 questionnaire respondents indicated "proximity to family, friends, and community" as the first reason for  
39 choosing their neighbourhood. Maintaining a stable relationship with the community (church) is also essential  
40 to developing positive adaptation processes. Then, accessing the right house concerning neighbourhood  
41 choice is a crucial factor. Closeness to family and friends was the top priority when looking for houses for the  
42 participants in the focus group: *"Personally, [the reason for choosing my house] was because it was close to*  
43 *all my friends. It was not the cheapest (sic.) place back then (when he was looking for the house he now lives*  
44 *in)... It was not the best place... but everyone I know was [living] around that place".*  
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50 The other participants nodded in approval while the young man explained his choice. Amongst the participants,  
51 both migrants owning or renting a house were ready to compromise on budget and quality to stay close to  
52 family. This theme also emerged during the interview with a young mother hosting a community meeting at  
53 her house in Ballajura. She pointed out while giving me a tour of the house, *"This house is not in perfect*  
54 *conditions but very close to the church and not far from where our friends live".*

55 She explained that the house was too small for her family of five (two bedrooms), and the younger daughter  
56 was sleeping with the parents. Still, she felt fortunate to have found such a place, as she felt more secure  
57 knowing that many community members lived nearby, as she described: *"a short drive away".* Underlining the  
58 importance of proximity as a top criterion when choosing a house is the frustration expressed by one of the  
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1 participants in the focus groups who— at the time—was living in a state housing accommodation. He could  
2 not stop himself (talking over others) from complaining that the system does not consider people's necessities  
3 outside the size of the house (number of bedrooms). So, even if he wanted to, he could not live close to his  
4 friends: *"For me, I didn't have a choice because I live in a government house. So, whenever the government  
5 tells you to go... you go... you don't have a choice [on the location], and you can't say no... I wanted to be  
6 close to friends too"*.

7 The importance of social networks is equally representative of the choices of migrants who had built or bought  
8 a house. These migrants had to prioritise their budget and the availability of land or house as the criteria for  
9 selection instead of proximity to family and friends. One of the participants pointed out: *"It is a big commitment,  
10 and you can't change your mind easily. Renting is more flexible. You can find a cheaper house when you make  
11 less money or a better option when you have a better job"*.

12 A father in his mid-forties, with what he defined as 'a desk job', during a discussion on factors influencing his  
13 housing choices said: *"I live in Carramar now, but I come here [to Ballajura] because my church is here, my  
14 community meets here, and my friends are here... I have a new house in Carramar. I built it. It is far. But [the  
15 house where I live] is close to Wanneroo Road and on a Sunday, I can be here in 20 minutes"*.

16 Similarly, another participant who had just recently finished building his place for a young family of four, pointed  
17 out that he had no choice but to go far away from his friends and family: *"Because I was building, I had to  
18 choose where it was cheap, and I moved to this new neighbourhood where everyone is building... it is far...but  
19 I still come to the church."* Even when moving out of the original area of settlement, continuity in maintaining  
20 social relationships is critical. When possible, identifying strategic locations that guarantee easy access to  
21 friends and family is a priority. A young member of the community, a fly-in/fly-out unmarried mining worker in  
22 his mid-thirties, intervened in the discussion to explain why it is essential for them to maintain the social network  
23 and live close by. During the focus group discussion, he pointed out: *"You need a village to raise a child, an  
24 old African proverb says."* He further explained that the choice of living in proximity to "family" (by which he  
25 also meant people coming from the same village) and other community members were not just related to  
26 practical reasons such as speaking the same language or other circumstantial factors. It was a choice to be  
27 strongly connected with their cultural beliefs and traditions. Living close to community members is a choice  
28 that allowed the migrant group to keep their traditions alive, the network strong, and the community thriving.  
29 The community also provides help and represents a link with their home country, language, and traditions.  
30 According to Pickren (2014), migrants use "the exploration of ethnicity, religion, and spirituality, family rituals,  
31 and belief systems" (20) as a mechanism to confront adversities and changes. This is particularly important  
32 for the second generation of Sudanese. One of the participants told me during an interview after the mass:  
33 *"We do it also for the kids [he has four], so they can learn the way of Sudanese living."*

34 Living in proximity strengthens relationships, thus easing the resettlement experience. However, proximity is  
35 not necessarily living next door, as a young lady pointed out. In the Perth suburban context, it translates into  
36 a relatively short drive. The idea of a village is reinterpreted, and one of the participants identified it as a  
37 "spread village" arrangement. In this ideal sparse village, the Ballajura church represents a strong cultural link  
38 similar to a village in Sudan. This group of migrants appeared to be particularly community-oriented. The  
39 findings were similar to that of the qualitative research conducted by Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003) on the  
40 resettlement in Perth (WA) of refugees from the Horn of Africa. They highlight how this group of migrants is  
41 *"community-oriented, relying on the social capital in their communities for resettlement support" (81) and how  
42 the community orientation is evident in the social cohesion, mutual support, and sense of belonging within  
43 these groups [...], which seems to be currently fostering active resettlement styles" (81).*

### 53 **Community Infrastructures and Services**

54 The capacity of a community to be resilient is strongly linked to the opportunity to maintain stable relationships  
55 within the community. Community networks are strongly dependent on physical places where community  
56 members can meet, exchange information, receive emotional care, provide advice and guidance, trade goods,  
57 deliver services, or offer other material needs. The 'community infrastructures and services' attribute indicates  
58 all physical environments where community networks are created, reinforced, and supported, together with all  
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1 services essential to keeping the culture alive. Within the Sudanese community in Perth, the Ballajura Anglican  
2 Church represents the focal point around which the community's life revolves. The church provides valuable  
3 services such as childcare and mothers' groups and offers social and emotional care alongside the expected  
4 spiritual support. The study participants remarked that having a place to claim as theirs helped them build their  
5 own identity within the Australian society. As the previous reverend of Ballajura church explained in an  
6 interview with a local newspaper, the "church was a central part of life in the villages of Sudan—it was not just  
7 a place of worship but a meeting place for the community" (Zaw 2013). This is also true for the Perth community  
8 attached to the Ballajura Sudanese Anglican church. The church is a place to meet and the centre of the  
9 spread village; it is where traditions are kept alive, and migrants maintain a connection with the "home country"  
10 and the whole Australian Sudanese community. The mass is bilingual (English/Bari), and Christian traditions  
11 are mixed with animist rituals. Dance and music are the main ways of prayer. Everyone is welcomed to preach.  
12 Community announcements are made weekly. News coming from Sudan and other communities around  
13 Australia are shared. New people arriving or coming back after spending some time at "home" are welcomed  
14 back with dances and songs. The church is a spatial setting where the collective lives of the community  
15 happen, and there is an opportunity for expressions of their cultural richness. It is also a place that contributes  
16 to the formation of their newly negotiated identity, one that is trans-national. In addition to the church, private  
17 dwellings constitute a network of meeting places where families and friends congregate often. Likewise,  
18 Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2009), in exploring the help and hindrances of Sudanese refugees in  
19 adaptation to life in Australia (precisely Tasmania), point out that "many participants cited friendship and  
20 emotional support as being supplied within the context of churches or volunteer support groups" (38).  
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24 This study identified less predictable 'infrastructures' including public parks as relevant to the community. The  
25 Sudanese community gathers in parks in the northwest quadrant of the city to practice traditional dancing,  
26 share traditional food, and play sports. Public outdoor spaces provide a less formal environment to meet and  
27 engage with the broader community. Alongside these community infrastructures, specialised services are  
28 critical for the community. Maintaining a strong connection with the home culture means accessing services  
29 that contribute to keeping the culture alive (such as specialised food shops) along with translation and legal  
30 services. As previously discussed, for migrants, if being an active part of the community network is essential  
31 for the resilience process to occur, the proximity and accessibility of areas – where these infrastructures and  
32 services are available – become a decisive factor when choosing a neighbourhood to live in. Therefore,  
33 appropriate housing does not refer only to the dwelling but to the suitability of the urban system as a whole –  
34 a system that connects the dwellings with services and infrastructures (such as schools, religious centres, and  
35 shops). Figure 3 summarises this process. In the case of the neighbourhood of Mirrabooka, which has  
36 historically welcomed migrants, both social and environmental components have demonstrated their resilience  
37 through the establishment of an adaptive relationship based on mutual learning processes which are attentive  
38 and responsive to feedback. Migrants have adapted to their new life (left side of diagram Fig.3 – societal  
39 domain), and in this process, the neighbourhood has transformed (right side of the diagram Fig.3 – built  
40 environment). All of these are happening in an infinite loop.  
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47 **Figure 3 goes here**  
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### 52 ***People–Place Connections***

53 The people-place attribute underscores the interdependence and connection between humans and the  
54 environment at a physical level and the meanings and values that people project in certain places due to their  
55 symbolic significance. According to Easthope (2004), "the creation of places is influenced by physical,  
56 economic, and social realities. What it means, rather, is that these realities are understood socially in the  
57 creation of a place" (129). Within the context of the case study, this attribute refers to the different ways in  
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1 which people create a sense of belonging, project meanings, develop attachments, and negotiate change and  
2 adaptation practices during the settlement process. In the study of the housing experience of migrants, these  
3 connections occur at different scales and consider that a city, neighbourhood, and house are interdependent.  
4 Through the creation and projection of meanings, spaces become places with a unique cultural and social  
5 identity. In the case study of the Perth Sudanese community, the presence of relational and institutional support  
6 networks and infrastructures along with the consequent development of specialised services has translated  
7 into emotional attachment over time, particularly in the area around Balga and Mirrabooka. Migrants developed  
8 an attachment to these places which influenced the establishment of a community in the neighbourhoods that  
9 stayed with them even when they moved out. Therefore, places are considered spatial settings where the  
10 collective lives of a community happen and there is an opportunity for expressions of the cultural richness of  
11 the migrants. Most of the South Sudanese involved in the study pointed out that they were initially settled in  
12 the local government area of the City of Stirling<sup>5</sup> and kept looking for housing in the area. During the focus  
13 group discussion and interviews, it became clear that institutional support networks (migrant services) and  
14 infrastructures (church, schools, and specialty shops) have contributed to facilitating the resettlement. As time  
15 passes, these nodes had become familiar landmarks. Familiarity translated into an emotional attachment to  
16 the area which migrants identified as "their neighbourhood". Reflecting on his decision process regarding  
17 where to live, one of the Sudanese migrants recounted: "*When I arrived, I was put in Fremantle. Then I got*  
18 *used to the area, and I did not want to leave. So when I had to move, I went to Spearwood that is cheaper but*  
19 *still close*". Similar findings emerged in Flatau et al.'s (2015) study. They wrote, "[w]hile refugees may cease  
20 to reside in certain suburbs due to increasing housing costs, it was noted that these suburbs often remained  
21 the destinations where refugee settlers could access services, socialise, and do their shopping" (67).  
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## 25 Discussion and Conclusions

26 The Australian government identifies housing as a critical priority for resettling migrants. The importance of  
27 housing within the resettlement journey in Australia is determined in the National Settlement Framework (NSF),  
28 the National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards (NSS) Framework, and the more recent National Youth  
29 Settlement Framework (NYSF). The NSF provides a structural scheme for planning, delivering, and evaluating  
30 the settlement support services of migrants at three different government levels: commonwealth, states, and  
31 territories, and local government (DSS 2016). The NSS Framework establishes the indicators of appropriate  
32 performance for housing services providers. The standards have an ample focus aiming to "support a  
33 consistently high-quality delivery of services nationally" (SCOA 2015, 4). It identifies nine priority areas of  
34 intervention, and for each one of them, it isolates the expected outcome and relative indicators of success.  
35 According to this framework, service providers are likely to help migrants in securing "[a]ppropriate, affordable,  
36 and long-term housing" (SCOA 2015, 8). Moreover, such housing must be "available and accessible within the  
37 reasonable proximity of social and community supports and employment opportunities" (SCOA 2015, 8).  
38 Service providers use such criteria to locate the areas of settlement. The NSSOS (SCOA 2015) also asks  
39 providers to consider:  
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43 *Key issues such as housing size, affordability, understanding tenancy rights, and*  
44 *access to transport, as well as develop relationships that contribute to removing*  
45 *housing barriers for new arrival communities, in particular, discriminatory practices*  
46 *that exclude settlement clients from access to housing. (8)*  
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49 Although the government put the structure in place to provide adequate housing and guaranteed control over  
50 the quality of the support, the reality of resettlement comprises many hurdles. The Department of Social  
51 Services (DSS, 2017) recognises the difficulty for migrants in finding and accessing affordable and adequate  
52 housing. The booklet targeting newly arrived migrants titled 'Beginning a Life in Australia (BaLIA)'  
53 acknowledges, "Housing in Australia can be difficult to find and rent can be expensive. It may be particularly  
54 difficult for large families to find long-term accommodation that suits all their needs" (64). It also advises the  
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59 <sup>5</sup> Located approximately 12 km from Perth city centre in the northeast quadrant.  
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1 migrants: "You may need to compromise and take housing that is available" (64). The first Sudanese refugee  
2 migrants who arrived in Perth (WA) in the early 2000s faced challenges in finding affordable accommodations  
3 in a housing market with limited renting opportunities for low-income earners.

4 Fozdar and Hartley (2012) remind us that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) measures  
5 successful settlement and integration into the host community using "a variety of measures of economic  
6 participation (labour force outcomes, occupational status, sources of income, level of income, and housing);  
7 social participation, and wellbeing (English proficiency, satisfaction with life, and Australian citizenship)" (10).  
8 These factors have been identified by Strang and Ager (2008) as "markers and means" (employment and  
9 education), "facilitators" (language and cultural knowledge), and core domains in the process of successful  
10 resettlement (Figure 4). They are synthesised using a hierarchical system of domains. However, what emerges  
11 from the observation and interaction with the Sudanese community is that these domains cannot be considered  
12 in isolation. There is no well-established order for life to happen. The domains of integration can be  
13 reinterpreted in the Bari Sudanese community's experience as equally important and not tied one to another  
14 in a specific order. From the analysis of the housing experience of migrants, it is particularly evident that all  
15 the facilitators and markers of integration are related to each other, and all of them contribute to increasing  
16 opportunities to identify and access more—or more suitable—housing options. The parameters grouped under  
17 the social connection domain also emerge as influential in the migrants' decision regarding the identification  
18 of settlement locations. The investigation into the Sudanese migrant community highlights that migrants  
19 equally value resources resulting from the presence of infrastructures (tangible), networks (volatile), formal  
20 and informal processes of knowledge, and service delivery. The use of attributes helps identify the connections  
21 between the parameters of domains included in Strang and Adger's (2008) pyramid of integration (Fig.4).  
22 Figure 4 overlaps the elements of Strang and Adger's (2008) pyramid with the attributes of resilience identified  
23 in this study to exemplify how they relate to each other and how all relate to housing (in the centre).  
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28 **Figure 4 goes here**

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31 This paper argues that by exposing the characteristics of a housing system through the description of  
32 infrastructural and relational supporting structures facilitating the adaptation process, this theoretical approach  
33 can guide future housing interventions. When discussing the attributes of resilience, Maclean, Cuthill, and  
34 Ross (2014) argue: "This strategic approach directs management activity towards building (and building on)  
35 existing strengths, in contrast to social policy agendas that focus primarily on redressing deficit" (146).  
36 Similarly, the identification of elements facilitating adaptive processes during resettlement can be used to  
37 inform decision processes by providing evidence of housing characteristics. If reinforced, the process can  
38 strengthen the inherent ability of individuals, communities, and society to adapt to new challenges. A common  
39 critique to the use of resilience is its current use within the policy domain as the inflexion of neoliberalism,  
40 focusing exclusively on the capabilities of individuals to build self-resilience (Shaw 2012). However, in this  
41 paper, resilience is proposed as an analytical instrument to explore existing conditions to generate more  
42 effective interventions. The knowledge produced by using this notional lens is aimed at informing potential  
43 interventions that support future meaningful and successful actions, 'exploring' rather than 'exploiting' social  
44 resources.  
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54 The Author declares that there is no conflict of interest  
55

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Figure 1 Attributes of Resilience: Knowledge, Skills, and Learning (source: Author)

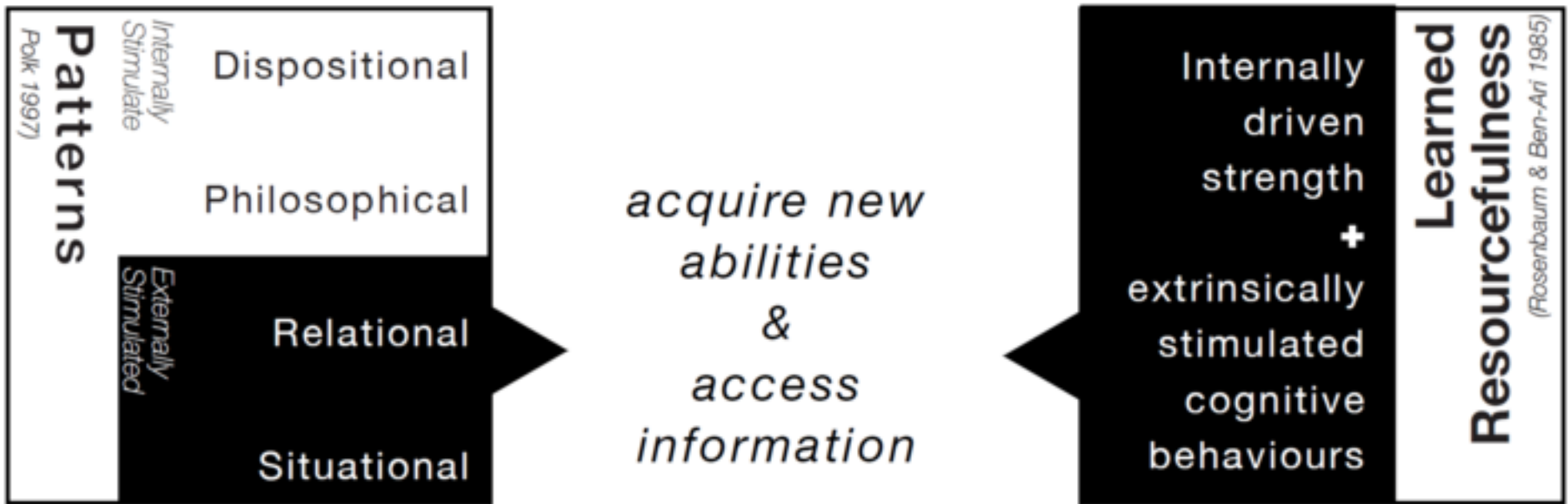


Figure 2 Attributes of Resilience: Community network (source: Author)

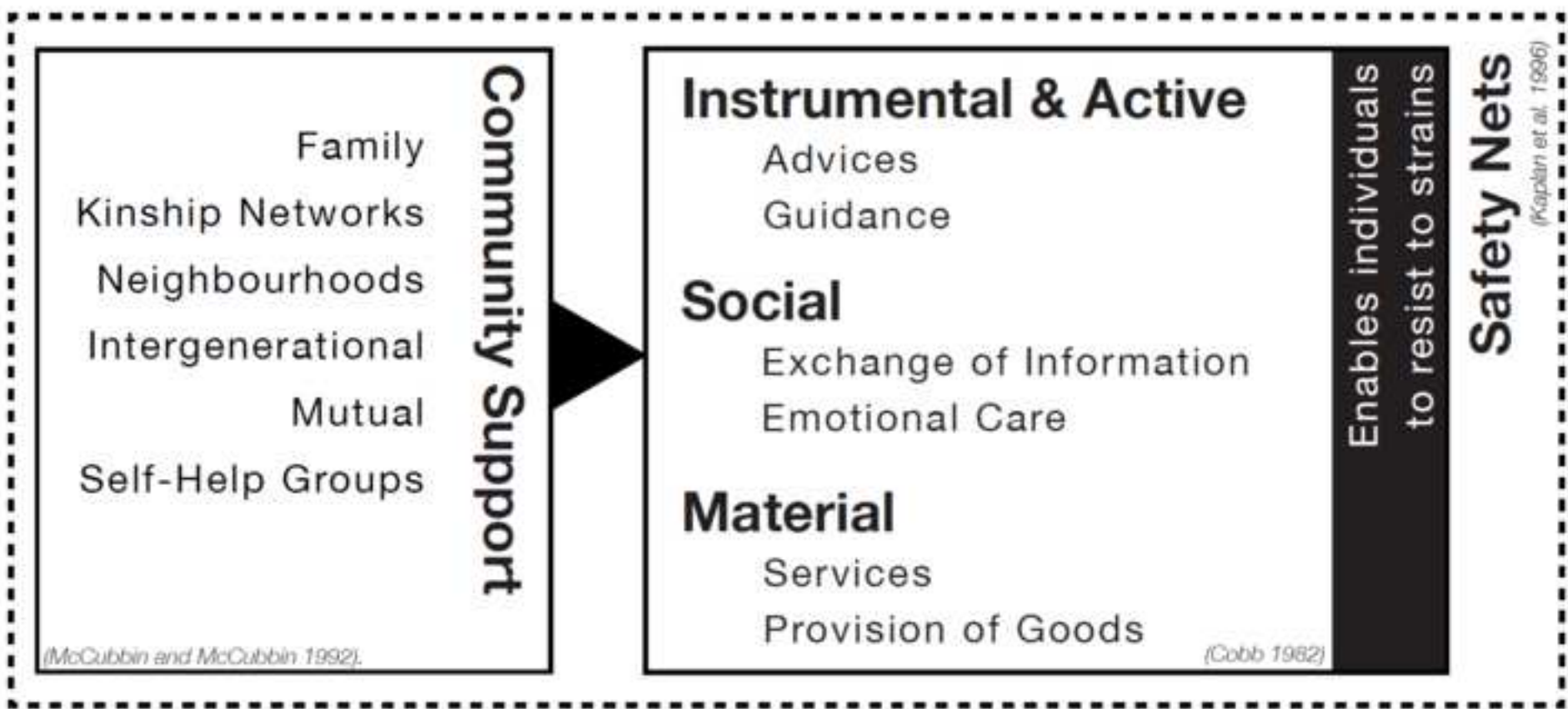


Figure 3 Resilience Process (Source: Author)

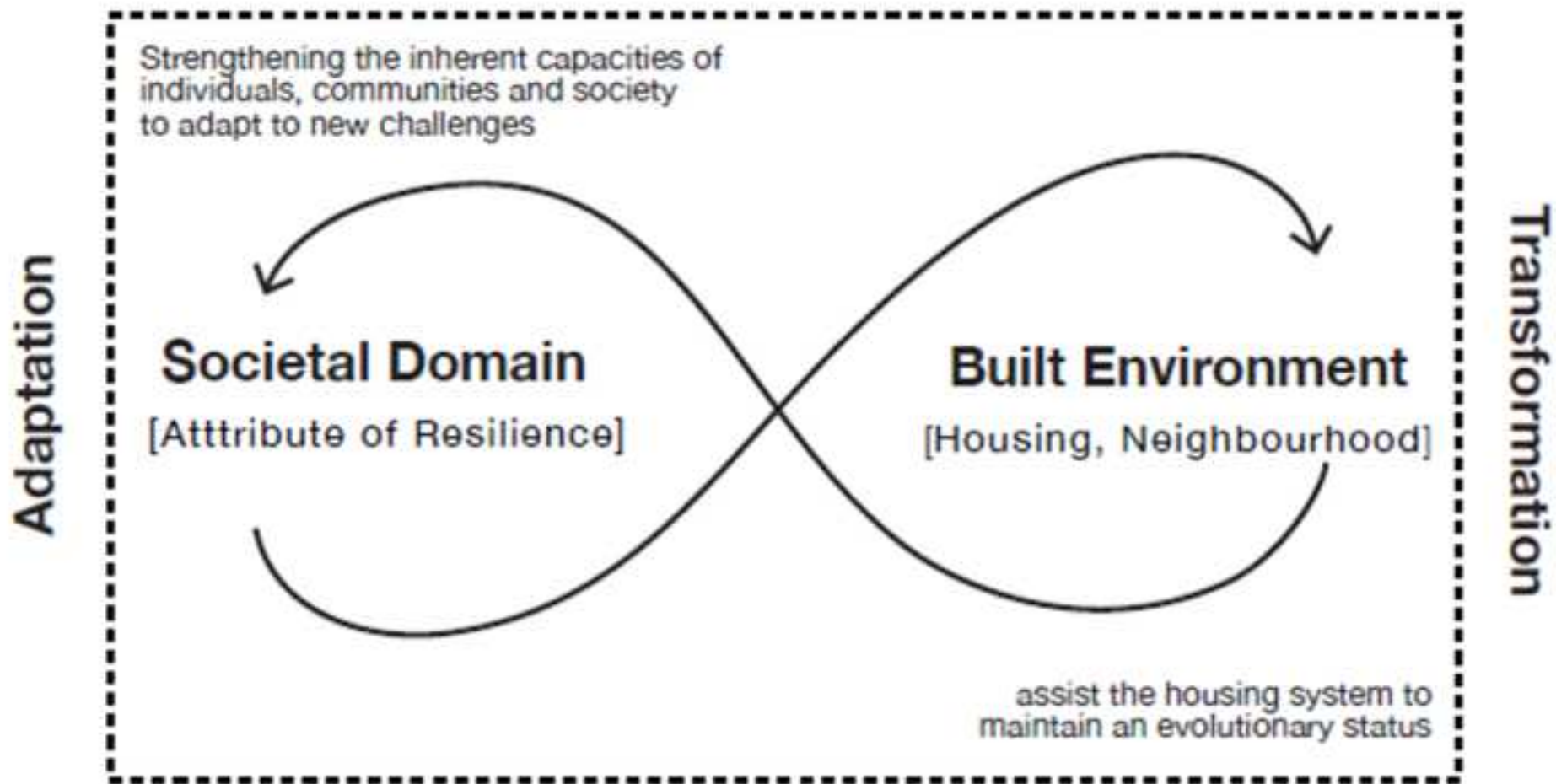


Figure 4 Attributes of Resilience: Relationship Between Housing and Domains of Integration (source: Author)

