

Commentary

These comments relate to the articles in this Cityscape symposium by Levy, McDade, and Bertumen, by Keller et al., and by Kearns et al.

Mixing Policies: Expectations and Achievements

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This symposium offers a wide-ranging critique of the often unspoken assumptions underlying social mixing policies. The rubric is very broad and consequently, mixes mixing policies, so to speak. The articles address racial and ethnic diversity, income mixing, and tenure mixing at different scales—buildings, housing developments, and neighborhoods—in two different liberal welfare states, the United States and United Kingdom.

This breadth poses the danger of conflating some different subjects, so I will begin by making some distinctions. Then I revisit a key assumption underlying all these mixing policies, namely, that spatial proximity breaks down social distance. The evidence masterfully reviewed in this symposium by Diane K. Levy, Zach McDade, and Kassie Bertumen shows that it does not, challenging what Ade Kearns, Martin McKee, Elena Sautkina, George Weeks, and Lyndal Bond refer to in their article as the mixed-tenure policy “orthodoxy.” Everyone seems to agree that the built environment of mixed-income developments is an improvement from public housing, but that poverty and social relations have not improved. Attractive, accessible, and safe public spaces are facilitating, if insufficient, conditions for social interaction across class and racial boundaries.

The mixing policy persists despite the evidence. Fortunately, in the process of evaluating mixed-income housing programs, we have learned that community building should be part of housing policy. This lesson has implications for the President Barack Obama Administration’s comprehensive neighborhood initiatives, as we begin the next generation of government attempts to disperse, mix, and improve the lives of poor people.

Some Distinctions

The term “social mix” is ambiguous and can refer to diversity of many different kinds, in different proportions, at different geographical scales. “Mixing,” as Kearns et al. note, may signify physical proximity or social interaction. If the latter, it varies by context and social distance. Mixing at one point in time may not be sustained. The motives for mixing range from crime reduction to poverty alleviation to property value appreciation. Mixing can be achieved through a number of mechanisms.

The two empirical articles under discussion here refer to different kinds of mix. The Scottish estates mix tenure. Kearns et al. acknowledge that, “tenure mixing is not guaranteed to deliver substantial income mix.” In the United Kingdom, people with the same income may own their homes or rent council housing. Diversity also becomes visible on different scales. The newly constructed houses are physically distinct in two of the Glasgow, Scotland estates as well, visibly marked off on the periphery from the rentals. By contrast, the original Tacoma, Washington development was ethnically mixed, with immigrants and refugees living alongside African Americans and Whites. The income mixing in the new Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE VI) project could not restore the previous mixing across social lines.

These differences in emphasis reflect broader national differences in housing policies.¹ In spite of the centrality of the so-called American Dream, tenure distinctions play a much greater role in British housing policy and scholarship. Council housing long preceded American public housing historically, became a much larger share of the total stock, and is more salient in national politics and class relations. Indeed, renting as opposed to owning even predicts how one votes far more in the United Kingdom than the United States. The UK tenure mix changed partly through the Right to Buy program, turning council tenants and housing associations into owners but without moving residents or disrupting the community. Kearns et al. report very little turnover in the Glasgow estates. Unlike in the United States, however, racial or ethnic concentrations do not raise much concern in multicultural Britain. In the Netherlands, by contrast, the fear of creating ethnic ghettos led to a prohibition on concentrating the unemployed or low-income households in rental housing of certain neighborhoods (van Eijk, 2010).

Racial or ethnic mixing, or desegregation, is a central policy concern in the United States. The 1968 Fair Housing Act² has been notoriously inefficient in reducing U.S. racial segregation, which has declined at a glacial pace. Audit studies continue to reveal discrimination in the housing market. By concentrating on concentrated poverty, Wilson (2012/1987) may have deflected political attention from the continuing spatial separation of African Americans and Whites, even within the middle class, but it persists nonetheless. Americans know income mixing has racial undertones. Indeed, most residents of the public housing demolished in the United States were African American (Goetz, 2010). Unfortunately, the slow decline in racial segregation is accompanied by greater income polarization in American metropolitan areas (Reardon and Bischoff, 2011). Mixed-income housing policies are bucking the tide.

Mixing Mechanisms

The mechanism that policymakers select to achieve social mixing also matters considerably (Chaskin and Joseph, 2011; Galster, 2007). Social mixing can result from dispersing the poor,

¹ British scholars point to U.S. housing policies as the origins of “neoliberal” approaches to urban revitalization. For example, New Labour drew on HOPE VI for its New Deal for Communities policy, claiming that the segregation of areas by owner occupation versus renting “led to social polarization and social exclusion” (Lees, Butler, and Bridge, 2012: 5). Both countries demolished large public housing projects. The British influences on Obama’s urban policy have been overlooked, however. For instance, taking a page from Tony Blair’s playbook, candidate Barack Obama’s 2007–08 platform committed his administration to “eradicating poverty,” pledging that, “working together, we can cut poverty in half within 10 years” (Tough, 2012).

² 42 U.S.C.A. §§ 3601–3631 is also Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968.

minorities, and tenants, on the one hand, or from attracting more affluent households to areas of concentrated poverty, on the other. Dispersing the poor can be more or less voluntary. Some low-income residents may flee from dilapidation or crime if offered the opportunity. As JoDee Keller, Janice Laakso, Christine Stevens, and Cathy Tashiro illustrate in Tacoma, however, displacing low-income families by demolishing their entire development also disrupts communities. Too often, it is erroneously assumed that there are no organizations in public housing (for an exception, see Small, 2004), but in fact communities in addition to Tacoma's bitterly resisted the razing of their projects, the only homes they ever knew (Venkatesh, 2002).

Since 1994, HOPE VI has demolished more than 500,000 public housing units, or 20 percent of the stock in the United States. Only 100,000 replacement units were built and of those, only one-half are subsidized for very low-income families. Therefore, HOPE VI may have mixed income levels in the new units where public housing once stood, but it displaced even more of the previous tenants to other poor neighborhoods, resegregating them elsewhere. Previous tenants are sent off with housing choice vouchers to rent from private landlords who deign to accept them; some evidence from Wisconsin suggests long-term, but not short-term, improvement in the neighborhood quality of voucher movers and some perverse effects on employment and earnings (Haveman, 2013). The multisite Moving to Opportunity (MTO) demonstration evidence shows that not too many poor families with vouchers stayed in low poverty neighborhoods (Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010; Turner et al., 2011). Rather, as in Chicago, "While residents' current neighborhoods are relatively better than their original developments, most are still very poor with large African American populations ... many families appear to still lack stable housing, moving relatively often with no perceptible improvement in housing or neighborhood quality, [and] continue to experience serious material hardship" (Buron, Hayes, and Hailey, 2013: 4). Given that "Moving Three Times Is Like Having Your House on Fire Once" (Manzo, Kleit, and Couch, 2008), however, most displaced public housing tenants do not return to the new HOPE VI buildings or their original neighborhoods (Chaskin and Joseph, 2011, 2010; Goetz, 2003; Joseph and Chaskin, 2010). It is not just because of the hassle. In Tacoma, some residents could not return because they earned too much for the subsidized units and too little to qualify for a mortgage to buy one at market rate. Other families may be screened out by stringent rules. Considerable evidence suggests that HOPE VI severed existing social networks, instrumental helping relationships, and institutional supports in public housing developments, without reknitting social capital in the new mixed-income communities for the small percentage of tenants who moved back (Clampet-Lundquist, 2004; Curley, 2010; Goetz, 2010).

A second mechanism of mixing is the attraction of working- and middle-class households to poor neighborhoods, where they receive incentives to live with former public housing tenants. The newly constructed HOPE VI units are designed to please this market. The only low-income households allowed to live in the new mixed units have to deserve it. They are intensively screened and monitored. Managers consider this necessary to reassure potential middle-class residents.

Normally, when higher income households move into lower income neighborhoods without public intervention, it is called "gentrification." This apt label explains why the British literature sometimes calls mixing policies state-led gentrification or gentrification by stealth (Bridge, Butler, and Lees, 2012). State-led demolition of social housing uses eminent domain to further real estate interests. The stealthy aspect is that any initial social mix, critics maintain, is unsustainable. Either

the more advantaged residents leave or they take over. Low-income households are eventually displaced or at least disempowered. In the American context, critics of mixing point to White flight or African-American displacement. Racially integrated neighborhoods are less stable over time when compared to segregated White and African-American neighborhoods (Ellen, 2000; Ellen, Horn, and O'Regan, 2012).

A third mechanism to create mixed-income housing is not considered in these articles. Some contend that social mixing policy is one sided because it is rarely advocated for socially homogeneous affluent neighborhoods, only homogeneous poor ones (Lees, Butler, and Bridge, 2012). Inclusionary zoning policies, aided by allocations of low-income housing tax credits, are starting to mix the American suburbs, however. Inclusionary zoning integrates municipalities that have long used land use controls to exclude affordable housing and thereby, poor residents. Contrary to conventional wisdom, a recent assessment of the impact of the Mt. Laurel, New Jersey decisions that mandated inclusionary zoning of affordable housing finds few if any negative impacts of socioeconomic integration on property values, property taxes, or crime (Massey et al., 2013). Ground zero for most of the discussion in this symposium is project-based low-income public housing, but starting the analysis of mixing from single-family, owner occupied suburbs calls attention to the fact that diversity and mixing may be accomplished at varying scales. Inclusionary zoning often operates at the state level, below the radar.

Expectations and Achievements: Spatial Proximity Versus Social Mixing

Despite these distinctions among types and mechanisms of mixed housing, they all rest upon a few common assumptions. At least since the first urban renewal programs, planners and architects have shared an article of faith in social engineering or environmental determinism. This faith implies that if we can only build the right kind of housing and design the right kind of neighborhoods, we can end poverty and all get along. A second related assumption is a sort of Anglo-American liberal expectancy that the things that divide groups will become less salient and important over time if only reason prevails. Education, communication, and modernization will wear differences away. Integration and diversity are enriching, according to liberal pluralism, as long as neighbors do not take their differences too seriously. Third, the expectation that mixing will increase positive interaction and tolerance rests on the familiar social psychological contact hypothesis. Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory held that, over time and under conditions of equal status and cooperation towards shared goals, interpersonal contact and communication reduces prejudice.

Contrary to these optimistic assumptions, the vast bulk of evidence shows little interaction across income or racial groups in mixed developments or neighborhoods. Policies of social mix are different from support for social mixing or social inclusion (Lees, Butler, and Bridge, 2012). In mixed housing, the middle class stigmatizes and avoids the poor who in turn feel disrespected and withdraw from community life, keeping a low profile, protecting their privacy from heightened surveillance, and worrying about losing eligibility by getting into unexpected trouble. Without exceptional conditions, integrated neighborhoods produce interracial friendships of a superficial quality at best (Britton, 2011). Withdrawal and isolation may just as easily result. Low-income residents in three

mixed-income developments in Chicago felt that, while the stigma associated with living in public housing was reduced, they experienced new stigmas, heightened scrutiny, and negative responses from higher income residents (Joseph and Chaskin, 2010; McCormick, Joseph, and Chaskin, 2012). On both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, little social mixing occurs among higher and lower income people in redeveloped mixed communities. In London, for example, gentrifiers in new housing built along the Thames River had little interaction with the previous residents (Davidson, 2010).

Of course, we have long known that physical proximity alone does not guarantee good social relations. In fact, forcing diverse groups into close proximity may provoke avoidance and invidious distinctions, if not conflict (Chamboredon and Lemaire, 1970; Elias and Scotson, 1994; Gans, 1961; Goodchild and Cole, 2001). As Putnam (2007) and others discovered, rather than contribute to trust and community participation, ethnic diversity may produce discord. Keller et al. rightly remark that living with people who have different lifestyles and types of households can as easily produce conflict as understanding.

Mixed-income housing is also supposed to do more than just build intergroup relations, however. It should reduce poverty. Spatial mobility—escaping the “neighborhood effects” of concentrated poverty and the spatial mismatch isolating the poor from jobs—was supposed to increase social mobility (Haveman, 2013). This assumption was a foundation of MTO (Sampson, 2012). In theory, the social mix would give low-income residents access to middle-income resources, such as job contacts and information and mainstream norms and values. Even if low-income residents do not develop friendships with residents of other income classes, they can benefit from passive observation of respectable behavior. Joseph, Chaskin, and Webber (2007) offered a helpful list of ways that mixed-income neighborhoods are supposed to help poor families. Their evidence suggests that low-income residents may enjoy a higher quality of life through greater informal social control and access to higher quality services, but not that social interaction, networks, or role models will improve the socioeconomic status of low-income residents. Levy, McDade, and Bertumen’s article confirms the conclusion that mixed-income housing is not an efficient way to reduce poverty.

Obviously a more direct way to reduce poverty with housing policy would be to make low-income housing subsidies universal. If means-tested housing vouchers were distributed like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps), we could certainly improve the standard of living of poor families. That is not going to happen any time soon.

Kearns et al. argue that middle-income groups can only transmit desirable values, norms, and resources to lower income groups if the income gap among residents is not too large. On even the more spatially integrated estate in their study, however, cross-class social interaction was scarce and the community did not connect the way it previously had. The authors report that managers and others responsible for mixed-income housing found the social and economic impacts wanting, yet they still adhered to the overall philosophy of mixing. The informants did feel that local amenities and infrastructure—schools, shops, family centers, and recreation facilities—had improved, thanks to the additional resources that redevelopment brought. Resident involvement in community governance was limited, however.

The singular emphasis on spatial mixing downplays the specific needs and interests of low-income tenants (Berry, 2005). The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) mandates

participation of residents in policymaking, but the extent and mechanism for that participation is vague. One study of a HOPE VI project in Phoenix, Arizona, found that the participation of dispersed tenants in planning the redevelopment was minimal, and that in the wake of demolition, an organization was needed to protect their rights to involvement in making the new place (Lucio and Wolfersteig, 2012). Rebuilding community takes more than coresidence.

Although many assumptions underlying social mixing policies are erroneous, spatial proximity still enables social relations. Thoughtful design of common spaces—lobbies, laundry rooms, elevators, benches, and pathways—can increase the probability of chance encounters and the formation of informal relations in the neighborhood (Kleit, 2005). Local facilities and public spaces, such as parks, libraries, and recreation facilities, are strong predictors of trust, norms, and reciprocity—social capital—among neighbors (Curley, 2010). Formal institutions can encourage or dissuade friendships and neighboring. One study of a mixed-income housing community in Boston found that the private management company discouraged interaction through rules, social signaling, and explicit communication (Graves, 2010). Conversely, the community center, the local school, the management office, local coffee shops, and so on provided spaces in which to conduct more purposive interaction and build formal associations. Keller et al. remark on the diminished sense of community among the low-income residents who returned to the HOPE VI mixed-income development in Tacoma because of the layout of common areas. Levy, McDade, and Bertumen suggest that, to increase participation in community across income lines, it helps to give people common places and a reason to cooperate in them. Those reasons may be children, old age, or other demographics or lifestyles (Varady et al., 2005), or they may unite around practical community affairs. Keller et al. remind us that a common concern like crime prevention or institutions like churches, senior activities, and community centers can unite neighbors across class and ethnic lines.

Contemporary Housing Policy

Having discussed how community building in mixed housing matters, I turn finally to contemporary American housing policy. One might have thought that the Obama Administration would have seen the bottom line of the HOPE VI and MTO evaluations and concluded enough is enough. Instead, confirming the orthodoxy, HUD forged full steam ahead into the Choice Neighborhoods (Choice) initiative. The Choice initiative is presented as the new and improved successor to HOPE VI. Choice neighborhoods are supposed to reknit new housing into broader communities. The goals of the participating partnerships extend far beyond housing, aiming to improve the life chances of residents and community members and to reestablish the neighborhood “as a community of choice”—that is, attractive to the middle class.³

³ The White House Office of Urban Affairs touts the Choice initiative as providing “local leaders with flexible funds to transform high-poverty neighborhoods with distressed public housing into sustainable communities with mixed-income housing, safe streets, and economic opportunity. Choice Neighborhoods is one of the signature programs of the White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, which supports innovative, holistic strategies that bring the right partners together to help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.” See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2012/01/10/building-neighborhoods-opportunity>.

Choice has three core goals.

1. **Housing.** Replace distressed public and assisted housing with high-quality mixed-income housing that is well managed and responsive to the needs of the surrounding neighborhood.
2. **People.** Improve educational outcomes and intergenerational mobility for youth.
3. **Neighborhood.** Create the conditions necessary for public and private reinvestment in distressed neighborhoods to offer the kinds of amenities and assets, including safety, good schools, and commercial activity, that are supposedly important to families' choices about their community.

The dozen or so Choice neighborhoods already selected for implementation are not simply rebuilding or rehabilitating public housing and adding considerable numbers of new mixed-income units. They are also introducing or improving neighborhood services—health clinics, childcare centers, schools, police, recreation facilities, even commercial districts—and providing better transportation connections to employers. To create synergy, some of these sites are leveraging Promise Neighborhood funds too, stitching together small pots of money from the Department of Education, HUD, and other agency silos to intensify cooperation within small confined areas. Some 42 Choice planning grants were also distributed. In December 2012, HUD awarded \$231 million in Choice implementation grants. Not all the lead agencies were housing authorities; some were community development corporations eager to build new workforce units. Planning groups include a wide range of “stakeholders”—local leaders, residents, public housing authorities, cities, schools, police, business owners, nonprofits, and even private developers. Their plans go beyond subsidized or mixed housing to improve collective neighborhood assets.

It is hard to remember that, back in the depths of the “Great Recession,” candidate Obama pointed to the isolation of the inner-city poor and, in a nod to Wilson (2012/1987), promised Promise Neighborhoods “to replicate the Harlem Children’s Zone in 20 cities across the country.” Today, Promise Neighborhoods, like Choice neighborhoods, are “a small item tucked away in the discretionary budget of the Department of Education” (Tough, 2012). Both programs are now subsumed under the administration’s Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, an interagency “place-based approach to help neighborhoods in distress transform themselves into neighborhoods of opportunity.”

Starved for funds by the depressed economy and a recalcitrant Congress, President Obama’s urban policy is in fact found less in the federal agencies than concealed in the macroeconomic stimulus and infrastructural investments (Silver, 2010). That neo-Keynesian intervention may be coming to an end. In 1937, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt inaugurated the American public housing program with the aim of reducing unemployment as well as blight. In early 2013, President Obama relaunched his appeal for renewing America’s public school buildings, roads, and bridges, on which American cities—and jobs—rely. If public works of this magnitude are funded in this time of fiscal austerity, they would do a lot more to reduce poverty than the construction of mixed-income housing.

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