

## Commentary

*These comments relate to the articles in this Cityscape symposium by Fraser, Chaskin, and Bazuin and by Kleinhans and van Ham.*

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# Mixed-Income Housing: Where Have We Been and Where Do We Go From Here?

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## Introduction

For at least the past 20 years, the urban development field has put forth a substantial effort on investigating the merits (and shortfalls) of mixed-income housing. A key assumption that the field makes is that low-income people somehow benefit when high-, middle-, and low-income people live within the same neighborhood, census tract, or building (Joseph, 2006; Wilson, 1996). Scholars struggle with demonstrating whether this assumption and components of it are correct, however (Bacqué et al., 2011; DeFilippis and Fraser, 2010; Fraser and Kick, 2007; Graves, 2011; Joseph and Chaskin, 2010; Kleinhans, 2004; Tach, 2009). This timely symposium and, specifically, the two preceding articles, attempt to unpack, both domestically and abroad, some of the mechanisms by which mixed-income housing potentially produces favorable outcomes for neighborhoods and, in particular, low-income residents.

My brief remarks present a mixed-income housing background and glean what we have learned from the current mixed-income research. I discuss some of the potential mechanisms that might facilitate mixed-income housing benefits for low-income people. I conclude with a discussion of the likely locations of future mixed-income developments. My hope is to contribute to and broaden the mixed-income housing policy conversation so future policies have a greater potential to facilitate the emergence of more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable living environments (Been et al., 2010).

## Background

The late-20th century focus on U.S. mixed-income communities grew, in part, out of the desire to ameliorate concentrated inner-city poverty (Jargowsky, 1997; Massey and Denton, 1993; Turner, Popkin, and Rawlings, 2009; Wilson, 1996). Scholars and policymakers were troubled that the number of high-poverty neighborhoods in metropolitan America doubled from 1970 to 1990

(Jargowsky, 1997). They were also reacting to neighborhood-effects studies suggesting that concentrated poverty limited, beyond personal and family characteristics, the individual life chances of people who lived in these dire circumstances (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, and Aber, 1997; Galster, 2010; Jencks and Mayer, 1990). Parallel circumstances, with the rise of socially excluded and impoverished areas, were also occurring in Western Europe (Castañeda, 2012; Hargreaves, 2007; Musterd, Muire, and Kesteloot, 2006).

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development deployed the main domestic policy attempts to address concentrated poverty in the 1990s and 2000s. These policies included the Empowerment Zone initiative (Hyra, 2008), the Moving to Opportunity demonstration project (Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010), and the Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE VI) program (Cisneros and Engdahl, 2009; Goetz, 2011a, 2003; Hyra, 2012a; Vale, 2002). In addition, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program was also associated, to a lesser extent, with the production of mixed-income housing (Erickson, 2009; Schwartz, 2010). Collectively, but by different policy mechanisms, these U.S. programs have been associated throughout the country with the production of mixed-income neighborhoods where poverty once concentrated (Goetz, 2011b; Hyra, 2012a).

As Reinout Kleinhans and Maarten van Ham point out in this symposium, the mixed-income housing phenomenon has also been experienced and promoted by national policies in many parts of Western Europe. Homeownership strategies, such as the United Kingdom's Right to Buy program, and other public housing and neighborhood redevelopment policies, including France's *Zones Franches Urbaines* (Free Zones), *Solidarité et Renouvellement Urbain* (Solidarity and Urban Renewal), and the *Borloo* laws, have been associated with mixed-income neighborhood formation (Blanc, 2010; Bridge, Butler, and Lees, 2012; Davidson, 2010; Dikeç, 2007; Gilbert, 2011).

## **What Have We Learned About Mixed-Income Housing?**

As noted throughout this symposium, the current outcomes related to mixed-income housing have been controversial and heavily scrutinized (for example, Imbroscio, 2008; Smith, 2006). The outcomes have been mainly in two categories thus far: neighborhood-level and people-focused outcomes (Hyra, 2012a). At the neighborhood level, investments associated with the creation of mixed-income communities have been correlated with neighborhood revitalization in some areas (Turbov and Piper, 2005; Zielenbach, 2003; Zielenbach and Voith, 2010). Some have viewed this pattern of redevelopment as a positive force (for example, Ehrenhalt, 2012; Freeman, 2006; Vigdor, 2002), whereas others have seen it as related to gentrification and displacement (for example, Bennett, Smith, and Wright, 2006; Goetz, 2011b). At the individual level, perceptions of neighborhood safety seemed to increase for people living in areas that economically transformed from low- to mixed-income neighborhoods (Joseph and Chaskin, 2010) and when individuals move from high-poverty communities to more mixed-income environments (Popkin, Leventhal, and Weismann, 2010). Living next to more affluent people, on average, does not seem to be related to increased employment levels among low-income individuals, however, and meaningful social interactions across race and class are minimal (Chaskin and Joseph, 2011; Chaskin, Khare, and Joseph, 2012; Tach, 2009).

## How Can We Make Mixed-Income Living Situations Better?

Although mixed-income communities have not produced many of the anticipated outcomes in the short run, several potential enhancements can be made to the standard mixed-income community policies that we have witnessed in the past 20 years in North America and Western Europe. By *standard*, I refer primarily to policies that attempt to deconcentrate poverty from particular places by razing subsidized housing and building replacement mixed-income housing developments serving people with a range of incomes. Although this approach has some merits, it is often implemented in a way that is not very beneficial to low-income tenants and often reproduces, if not exacerbates, existing social and economic inequalities. The following suggestions, some of which parallel and underscore points made by James C. Fraser, Robert J. Chaskin, and Joshua Theodore Bazuin in their article in this symposium, are intended to stimulate community revitalization that maximizes benefits to low-income individuals. These recommendations are based on the scholarly research and my practical experience as a chair of a public housing authority engaged in producing mixed-income developments.

### Minimizing Residential Displacement

New mixed-income developments rarely replace the number of subsidized units available before redevelopment (Joseph and Chaskin, 2012; Marquis and Ghosh, 2008), and many low-income tenants are displaced when mixed-income development policies are implemented (Fullilove and Wallace, 2011; Goetz, 2011b). Mixed-income development policies should be altered to ensure that, when financially feasible, every affordable unit that is razed to produce mixed-income developments is replaced within or near the new development sites. Replacing razed subsidized units will minimize residential displacement associated with mixed-income development, giving low-income residents the potential to benefit from the regenerating of the community within which they live.

### Minimizing Political Displacement

Although preventing residential displacement is extremely important within the context of gentrifying mixed-income communities, it is not sufficient for cultivating a social environment in which low-income people can ultimately benefit from urban regeneration and mixed-income housing (Hyra, 2012b). When upper-income people move into low-income areas, the newcomers often, sometimes unintentionally, wrest political power from long-term residents by joining existing or starting new civic associations (Hyra, 2008). The loss of political power among longstanding residents can lead to increased mistrust and civic withdrawal by low-income people, further exacerbating preexisting social inequalities and isolation (Chaskin, Khare, and Joseph, 2012; Knotts and Haspel, 2006; Martin, 2007).

Policies aimed at minimizing political displacement are critical when more affluent people move to a low-rent district to create a mixed-income living environment. Mechanisms include setting aside certain political positions for longstanding residents or creating organizations that have a shared leadership structure between new and existing residents. If low-income people are able to maintain some political power, they will be able to guide the development in a way that recognizes the neighborhood's multiple tastes, preferences, and perspectives.

One clear policy to help ensure greater political equity in mixed-income living environments is to establish inclusive resident associations that incorporate the views of low-, middle-, and high-income residents. Many mixed-income developments supported with HOPE VI funds have separate resident associations for subsidized renters and market-rate homeowners, even within the same building or development. Market-rate homeowners typically control common areas and spend the homeowners' association assessments on priorities that match their preferences, whereas the subsidized residents are often unable to vote in the distribution of resources that affect their immediate living environment. This political segregation and inequality within mixed-income developments can exacerbate preexisting inequalities and stimulate conflict rather than cooperation among residents of various income levels. Creating equitable resident power structures that promote mutual interest and inclusivity may be vital to having stable and just mixed-income environments. Such a structure might stimulate more meaningful social interactions across race and class.

### **Minimizing Cultural Displacement**

If political equity is not maintained, the built and social environments in a transitioning mixed-income community might develop in a way that favors and reflects the preferences of the more affluent group (Hyra, 2012b). If the emerging built and social environments represent the preferences of only newcomers, longstanding residents may lose their attachment to place and be more inclined to move out of the community. The exodus of low-income people might result in a homogenous community that is not economically or culturally diverse. In transitioning mixed-income communities, steps are necessary to preserve community symbols important to low-income residents. Furthermore, representatives of lower income groups should, for the most part, spearhead the cultural preservation effort (Lin, 2011). If external community interests head the preservation effort, some community residents might not embrace it, particularly if the preservation initiative is perceived as stimulating displacement (Inwood, 2010).

### **Facilitating Meaningful Social Interactions**

Many studies indicate that low- and high-income residents who live in close proximity will not interact much without facilitation (Chaskin and Joseph, 2011; Chaskin, Khare, and Joseph, 2012; Tach, 2009). In mixed-income communities, it is important to have events that bring people together around a common purpose so they begin to learn about one another and build trusting relationships. These events can be community gardening, as noted by Fraser, Chaskin, and Bazuin, or beautification initiatives, cultural festivals, or other events important to both new and longtime residents. Organizing these events might be facilitated by the creation of an inclusive resident association of the kind I described previously, in which all tenants have an equal say in setting the social agenda of the mixed-income living environment.

Public and private community common spaces are often branded and associated with certain income or other demographic differences, and it is important that “third spaces” are developed within mixed-income communities (Oldenburg, 1999). In transitioning mixed-income communities, it is important to develop new, neutral third spaces where all people feel safe and take ownership of the space, such as new libraries, community centers, or coffee shops. These places can be breeding grounds for the development of what Elijah Anderson has identified as the “cosmopolitan canopy,” wherein tolerance for racial, income, or other differences seems to proliferate (Anderson, 2011).

## **Ensuring Income Diversity**

Sometimes, the built environment dictates the income mix within a community. In mixed-income communities, it is important to have housing that serves an array of income types. Occasionally, the income mix is too polarized, with extremely affluent people living next to very impoverished folks. For instance, in a HOPE VI site in the Washington, D.C. suburb of Alexandria, Virginia, households that make more than \$150,000 a year live next to those that earn less than \$15,000 a year. In these situations, the social class difference might be too great to foster common understanding and interests on a range of topics. A housing stock that serves middle-income folks and bridges the two extreme income levels might be important (Chaskin, Khare, and Joseph, 2012; Pattillo, 2007). Mixed-income policies should ensure that high-, middle-, and low-income people are served by the existing and newly built housing stock in mixed-income communities.

## **Tackling and Addressing Ethnic, Racial, Religious, and Other Differences**

Mixed-income policies often do not directly address ethnic and racial differences, although income diversity often signals racial diversity because of preexisting inequalities (Oliver and Shapiro, 1995). Beyond class differences, mixed-income community policies must tackle challenges stemming from racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual-orientation differences (Brown-Saracino, 2009; Maly, 2005; Modan, 2007). Mixed-income policies should consider ways to address disputes that arise from distinctions associated with income but that are not solved through promoting income equality. One approach is to create or bolster existing civic organizations in and around mixed-income developments that help to educate and promote tolerance for difference and celebrate diversity.

## **Where Is the Future of Mixed-Income Development in the United States and Abroad?**

During the past 20 years, the mixed-income neighborhood focus has been mainly in the inner-city areas where poverty once concentrated. In the past decade, many of these inner-city areas have been redeveloped and gentrified through a process I labeled the “new urban renewal” (Hyra, 2012a, 2008) and others have called the “great inversion” (Ehrenhalt, 2012). While development of the inner city has occurred, poverty has become more heavily concentrated in certain inner suburbs (Allard, 2009; Allard and Roth, 2010; Kneebone and Garr, 2010; Orfield, 2002). In Western Europe, some inner suburbs have dense concentrations of public housing (Gilbert, 2011; Wacquant, 2008). In the coming decades, the new pioneering, emerging housing market areas will be in low- and moderate-income inner suburbs (Charles, 2011; Dunham-Jones and Williamson, 2011).

The future of mixed-income development will be in inner suburbs, where the housing stock is outdated and there are concentrations of poverty and people of color. For instance, one of the largest U.S. suburban mixed-income projects is occurring in Alexandria, Virginia. In one city section known as the Beauregard area, more than 2,500 units of low- and moderate-income, private-market rental housing will be razed to make room for higher income market-rate housing. In the Beauregard area, people of color comprise approximately 70 percent of the population. Of the 2,500 housing units to be razed, 800 will be preserved and incorporated as mixed-income housing. Most of the

affordable housing will be financed through city and developer contributions, but some will likely entail LIHTC financing. Because HOPE VI is, for the most part, no longer operating, mixed-income developments will most likely be accomplished with LIHTCs and New Markets Tax Credits.

In the United Kingdom and France, much of the public housing is in the urban periphery and inner suburbs. Through a combination of razing some subsidized buildings and upgrading others, certain fringe urban areas are beginning to gentrify and achieve greater income mixes (Bacqué et al., 2011). Examples of this pattern of periphery redevelopment can be witnessed in Hackney on the outskirts of London, England (Wessendorf, 2011), and in Vénissieux on the outer edge of Lyon, France (Gilbert, 2009). It seems likely that mixed-income housing in both North America and Western Europe will increasingly occur in the outer urban periphery and inner suburban areas as opposed to the urban core.

## Summing Up

Mixed-income housing policies have been associated with residential displacement. Although preventing residential displacement is an important step, it is insufficient for ensuring that low-income people benefit from income mixing. The promise of mixed-income communities assumes that people of various backgrounds will cooperatively interact to provide greater opportunities for economic and social advancement. Policymakers, scholars, practitioners, activists, and residents should consider several mixed-income policy alternatives to better ensure that people interact in meaningful and constructive ways. Preventing residential, political, and cultural displacement and developing neutral spaces of civic engagement are good places to start to ensure that people of diverse incomes, backgrounds, and experiences prosper in inclusive and equitable urban and suburban living environments.

## Acknowledgments

The author thanks Jim Fraser, Deirdre Oakley, and Diane Levy for organizing this important symposium and acknowledges the *Cityscape* staff for their helpful editorial assistance.

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