Cityscape Mixed-Income Symposium Summary and Response: Implications for Antipoverty Policy

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I commend symposium guest editors James C. Fraser, Deirdre Oakley, and Diane K. Levy for initiating and compiling this collection of symposium articles on the timely topic of poverty deconcentration and mixed-income development. As these articles were being finalized, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced that three additional cities would receive Choice Neighborhoods implementation grants of about $30 million, joining the five cities that were named in 2011. Thus, in the United States, the Obama Administration is doubling down on the approach of poverty deconcentration through public housing demolition, resident relocation, and mixed-income redevelopment.

After nearly 20 years of poverty deconcentration and mixed-income efforts in the United States and Western Europe (and in other parts of the world, such as Australia), however, fundamental questions remain. The intentions and overall outcomes of efforts to create pathways to self-sufficiency and opportunity for those who have been socially and economically isolated in high-poverty, inner-city communities remain unclear. The articles in this symposium reflect on and add to the literature that has provided evidence of these shortcomings.

Although the symposium is introduced as focusing on "mixed-income housing initiatives," I would contend that the scope of its articles is better framed as "poverty deconcentration" with a focus on the two main policy approaches of the past two decades: dispersal and mixed-income development. The articles by Victoria Basolo, by Kimberly Skobba and Edward G. Goetz, and by Deirdre Oakley, Erin Ruel, and Lesley Reid review relocation and mobility programs. The articles by James C. Fraser, Robert J. Chaskin, and Joshua Theodore Bazuin, by Ade Kearns, Martin McKee, Elena Sautkina, George Weeks, and Lyndal Bond, by JoDee Keller, Janice Laakso, Christine Stevens, and Cathy Tashiro, by Reinout Kleinhans and Maarten van Ham, and by Diane K. Levy, Zach McDade, and Kassie Bertumen consider mixed-income and mixed-tenure efforts. The symposium guest editors understandably describe relocation efforts as also having the objective of promoting mixed-income neighborhoods. The literature on mobility research and the articles in this symposium demonstrate, however, that, although relocation may be a tool to move some low-income households to better neighborhood environments, relocation is generally not creating mixed-income communities and

certainly is not creating a mix as systematically and directly as initiatives such as Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE VI), Right to Buy, and Choice Neighborhoods are doing. As I shall make clear when I return to future implications, I think it is important not to conflate these two related, but distinct, policy choices and approaches under the construct of mixed-income housing.

Regardless of framing, the intention of the symposium is clear: to take stock of efforts to address poverty concentration on both sides of the Atlantic. Several important questions are posed and answered in these articles, including these: What have been the benefits of social mixing for poor people? What are the implications of today's dominant ideological approach to urban poverty policy, focusing on individual rather than structural causes and turning to the market to provide social and public housing? Given the shortcomings of current efforts, what design improvements could be made to poverty deconcentration programs?

An essential question posed in Fraser, Oakley, and Levy's introductory article, but never fully and directly tackled by any of the other articles, is "When and how should society, and its government leaders, house the least advantaged?" Additional questions about deconcentration policy not addressed by the articles include these: What alternative antipoverty paradigm should be considered? What are the relative costs and benefits of poverty dispersal and mixed-income development? Is each approach a better match for certain low-income households than for others, and can we be more effective at anticipating which approach might work best for whom?

I will use my summary-and-response essay to summarize some of the key conclusions from these articles and to suggest my own response to some of the unanswered questions by way of suggesting directions for future place-based antipoverty policy.

The Limited Results of Social Mixing

Despite high hopes, expectations, and rhetoric from policymakers, the evidence seems clear in this symposium and in the broader deconcentration literature that mixed-income and dispersal policies have thus far had limited and, in some cases, detrimental effects on urban poor people. Whereas these policies have had measurable and, in some cases, dramatic effects on urban places, they have been far less successful on the people side.

On the positive side, these policies, in general, have been successful at moving individuals and families out of the most desperate and deteriorated living conditions. Mixed-income development has been far more successful on this front, completely demolishing and rebuilding entire housing complexes, often complete with parks and other amenities. As Kearns et al. and Levy, McDade, and Bertumen indicate, those households that meet screening criteria and can secure units in new mixed-income developments experience high-quality unit, building, and often neighborhood conditions. The neighborhood condition results of relocation cited in this symposium are more mixed. Oakley, Ruel, and Reid report that relocatees in Atlanta moved to neighborhoods that, although still high poverty, were less poor and safer than the neighborhoods from which they had moved. Basolo, on the other hand, reports no decrease in neighborhood poverty and no increase in public school quality from the moves of the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) participants in California whom she studied.

The results for individuals have been far more disappointing. Kearns et al. and Levy, McDade, and Bertumen assert that despite living in a mixed-income environment, former social or public housing residents are still living in a state of personal deprivation, confronting behavioral challenges, and demonstrating little change of aspirations. Relocation efforts have fared no better. In this symposium, Basolo reports that employment among HCVP participants in her study *fell* by more than 20 percentage points after their moves.

Part of the rationale for a neighborhood-focused approach is a theoretical assertion of the importance of a supportive community for individual well-being. In theory, more socially and economically diverse environments should provide more productive social ties for low-income households. In practice, as Fraser, Chaskin, and Bazuin; Kearns et al.; Keller et al.; Kleinhans and van Ham; and Levy, McDade, and Bertumen indicate, many obstacles stand in the way of building cross-class ties, including lifestyle, behavioral and cultural differences, segregated physical designs, and life-stage differences such as the presence of children in the household. Furthermore, stigmatized, unequal treatment from other residents and development staff and a predilection for formal control methods (cameras, police) as opposed to informal community control have led to what Kearns et al. describe as "*static tenure mix*, rather than the nurturing of *dynamic social mixing*." Keller et al. and Levy, McDade, and Bertumen point out that, in many cases, residents of mixed-income environments experience less community and a greater sense of isolation and stigmatization.

The Problematic Ideologies Shaping Poverty Deconcentration

More fundamental than some of the design and implementation shortcomings of deconcentration policies is the ideological basis for those policies. Authors in this symposium point out three main problematic ideological perspectives that shape and constrain policy approaches. The first, as Fraser, Chaskin, and Bazuin point out, is the framing of poverty as an individual rather than a structural issue. Given the realities, as they state, of "global capitalism, ... racism and racial inequality and the unequal distribution of quality public goods," among other structural factors, the individual approach is necessarily insufficient. Improving housing conditions and social mix alone will not fundamentally change educational opportunities or labor-market access.

The second core ideology is the belief in the potential for privatization and the power of market forces to spur production of housing for poor people and a pathway out of poverty. Fraser, Chaskin, and Bazuin note that the private sector is not obligated to provide for human rights in the same way as a government and caution that the mixed-income approach is simply paving the way for market reinvestment that does not necessarily benefit the most vulnerable people in society. In their article about the Right to Buy program in the United Kingdom, Kleinhans and van Ham provide an excellent example of some of the counterproductive outcomes and inequity that can be generated by turning to market forces. A major outcome of the program was *residualization*, whereby the best quality social housing units in the best neighborhoods were the most likely to be purchased, leaving mostly lower quality homes in lower quality neighborhoods available to social housing renters.

A third ideological frame is the presumed association of choice and neighborhood quality. It has been assumed that if households are given a greater degree of choice in their residential decisions,

they will choose higher quality neighborhood environments. Because, as Basolo and as Skobba and Goetz point out, relocatees are *not* moving to higher quality neighborhood contexts, this assumption must be re-examined. Skobba and Goetz suggest that low-income households are driven by more "proximate concerns" such as affordability, control over their local environment, and existing social ties and supports. Oakley, Ruel, and Reid suggest that more remains to be understood about how low-income households perceive and navigate a structurally unequal racialized real estate market.

Improving Intervention Design

Beyond ideological critiques, the articles offer up specific design changes that might improve results. Two overarching improvements would be to sharpen the connection between theory and evidence and to develop more specific goals that can be more carefully measured and assessed. Fraser, Chaskin, and Bazuin critique the lack of a "coherent intervention model built from a clear theory of change," and Kearns et al. point out the vague policy goals generated from a policy orthodoxy without supporting evidence. Fraser, Chaskin, and Bazuin; Levy, McDade, and Bertumen; and Kearns et al. generate lists of design changes to mixed-income development that include more socially conducive design of units and public spaces; more onsite maintenance; more attention to property management; governance and community building; and focused, more holistic, efforts to address individual education, employment, and health needs. Regarding relocation policies, Basolo and Skobba and Goetz recommend stronger relocation counseling that is more attuned to individual interests and needs and generates a broader choice set that offers more social and economic opportunity and respects and accommodates social ties and supports.

Implications for Better Antipoverty Policy and Practice

Although it covers a broad scope, this symposium leaves several important questions unanswered. Beyond tweaking the design of these programs as currently implemented, what fundamental enhancements and course corrections might be made to poverty deconcentration policy? As I read the articles in this symposium, I reflected on how the findings summarized and presented would be fodder for some of the sharpest critics of poverty deconcentration and mixed-income policy, such as David Imbroscio, Mary Pattillo, and Larry Vale, whose perspectives were not directly included in this symposium (Imbroscio, 2012, 2008; Pattillo, 2008; Vale, 2013, 2006, 1996). These scholars share a concern that current urban policy is too focused on integrating poor people into mainstream residential contexts and too little focused on how to revitalize their current contexts without engineered economic or racial integration. In these critics' preferred scenarios, any mixed-income integration would come from increased income and assets of the current population. Imbroscio (2012) labeled the alternative antipoverty paradigm that emerges from their contributions to the literature the "placemaking paradigm," with a focus on investing in high-poverty, racially segregated communities as they are without requiring resident mobility in or out.

Noting the underlying structural factors that present the fundamental barriers to greater social and economic mobility, Fraser, Chaskin, and Bazuin begin to map out an agenda for comprehensive political action to address a list of issues such as living wage, Earned Income Tax Credit program expansion, affordable housing, education, access to technology, and "issues of discrimination."

Imbroscio, Pattillo, and Vale would likely propose that a place-based frame be added for strategic targeting of these structural changes. For this recommendation to be feasible and actionable, far more detail will be needed about the catalyst for such comprehensive political action and the civic, political, and perhaps corporate mechanisms through which such action will be mobilized, organized, and sustained long enough to achieve legislative and policy success. A host of potential allies certainly exists for such a movement—tenant and resident leadership groups, legal advocates, housing activists, policy organizations, and scholar-activists, to name a few. Armed with the growing evidence about the futility of an individuals-only approach to poverty deconcentration and the enduring and mounting costs to communities, municipalities, regions, and ultimately nations from avoiding more structural solutions, it may be possible to forge strategic alliances with housing authorities, municipal governments, and eventually civic and corporate interests.

In the meantime, as some policymakers and practitioners pursue a path to more fundamental structural changes, others could tackle a more pragmatic and short-term path to a comprehensive rethinking and reformulating of poverty deconcentration efforts. I do agree that the realities of enduring segregation (in some cases through structural marginalization of poor people and racial and ethnic minorities, in other cases through individual choice and preferences, and in most cases for reasons hard to distinguish) require us to seek policies that will revitalize low-income communities as they are. I also feel, however, that we must continue to sharpen and advance our abilities to create and sustain mixed-income communities of choice. Increasing diversity and socioeconomic divides require the continuation of the quest for greater residential inclusion and equity in all communities, rather than the acceptance that separate but equal may be the best we can accomplish in our society.

Rather than tossing mixed-income development and dispersal programs into the same category, I suggest that as a field we need to be even sharper about the distinctions between these two approaches and their relative costs, benefits, and feasibility in various contexts. Even more important would be to develop better evidence about which types of households seem to benefit most from each approach so that we can provide a better science of resident relocation counseling and supports.

Furthermore, several existing federal and local programs could be strategically enhanced to address the shortcomings discussed in this symposium. I would recommend, rather than modifying each separately, a comprehensive rethinking of these programs as a suite of efforts with a common and integrated set of enhancements. These efforts would include technical assistance to implementers, stronger guidelines and requirements in funding applications and competitions, better local collaborations to make more efficient use of existing local capacities and resources, and incentives for innovation.

To be specific, in the U.S. context, which I know best, the programs I have in mind are the HCVP, project-based vouchers, mixed-income development, inclusionary zoning, and community development block grants (CDBG). The first four programs primarily and often exclusively focus on affordable housing as a platform, without strategically leveraging that platform with other local resources to attempt to change household social and economic mobility. The CDBG program is usually disconnected from these other efforts, deployed locally in a variety of ways, and it usually spreads a shrinking set of resources inefficiently across the local landscape.

At the national, regional, and local levels, policymakers and practitioners could draw on existing evidence to identify the most important strategic enhancements to these housing platform programs and how existing resources could be better aligned and integrated to add these programmatic dimensions. Choice Neighborhoods in the United States presents a live example of this process, enhancing the HOPE VI program with a focus on employment and education. Why not apply this same housing-plus enhancement innovation to the HCVP and project-based voucher and inclusionary zoning programs? How might CDBG funds be deployed in much tighter coordination with these other efforts?

The early Choice Neighborhoods experience is instructive; successful implementation of the housing platform alone is exceedingly complex. Designing, resourcing, implementing, and sustaining enhancements such as supportive services, high-quality educational opportunities, workforce development, governance, and community building will take careful upfront strategic design; dedicated and vigilant technical assistance; and keen accountability from funders, partners, and constituencies.

As evidence mounts about the limited and sometimes detrimental effects of current social-mixing policies on urban poor people, the need for course correction and a new comprehensive path forward is clear. Ideally, this path will involve a longer term political quest for more structural change and a short-term effort to fundamentally enhance current programs in a comprehensive, integrated way.

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