

## **SYMPOSIUM ON NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY AND PRACTICE**

**Edited by  
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### **WHO NEEDS NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY?**

The neighborhood as a unit of reference for policy and planning decisions has cultural roots, pragmatic arguments to support it, and an ideological rationale.

From a social-cultural point of view, the community is perceived as the basic aggregate of people beyond the family, a vital framework for successful socialization and for control of social order. In most cases, communities have a territorial base, and in modern cities the concepts of community and neighborhood are frequently used as synonyms. When Ebenezer Howard wanted to influence people's social attitudes and behavior, he—and the many who followed him—suggested the construction of a new type of neighborhood-community.

Pragmatically speaking, neighborhoods are manageable-size administrative units. Issues of accessibility and sometimes social homogeneity cause various social and municipal services to be organized by neighborhood. Furthermore, urban problems, from difficulties in children's education to law and order enforcement, and especially housing deterioration and abandonment, are frequently concentrated in certain residential areas. Hence, urban management frequently requires intervention by neighborhood.

Ideologically, planners have been motivated to devote special attention to lower status neighborhoods, in order to defend the rights and to provide the needs of the poor and of minority groups, who tend to live together. There are those who just want to assist people who seem unable to assist themselves. But the majority operate in the name of social justice, taking upon themselves "to expand choice and opportunity" with "special responsibility for the needs of disadvantaged groups and persons" (American Planning Association, Code of Professional Responsibility and Rules of Procedures, Canon B). Where economists want "to compensate losers," they usually prefer individual compensation and oppose area-targeted programs; they claim that such programs are inefficient, as they tend to reward the less needy more

than they benefit the most disadvantaged. It can be argued, however, that although many directed beneficiaries of area-targeted programs are "stronger" households, the main indirect beneficiaries are the "weakest," those who cannot afford to move out of the area. The latter benefit from positive externalities, as well as from the fact that the gains of their better-off neighbors frequently convince them to remain in the neighborhood, and thus serve as a critical means of preventing neighborhood deterioration. Hence, even though the point of departure for many neighborhood planners is ideological, they have practical arguments to support their approach.

The articles of the symposium reflect the accumulated experience with neighborhood policy and programs in two countries, the United States and Israel. This combination may seem strange, considering the differences in size, problems and political outlook. But our purpose was not to provide a systematic comparative analysis of national problems and solutions. Rather, the current compendium should be viewed as a product of people from one professional community, applying similar methods of thinking and analysis in the discussion of area-targeted policies and programs in different environments. These discussions may contribute to our common understanding of urban problems and the ways in which planned intervention may assist in ameliorating them.

The collection of papers opens with Nahan Glazer's story of the South Bronx, an extreme case of neighborhood decline. The case is especially severe, because "the housing that was being destroyed was for the most part well built . . . with large apartments with good details. The neighborhoods of destruction were well located . . . well supplied with parks, schools, libraries, churches and synagogues." Glazer provides two lists of explanations, those that he evaluated as inadequate and those that are plausible. He ends by pointing at some of the causes of moderation of housing destruction in the early 1980s. These are related to better organization within neighborhoods (through the Catholic Church in Italian and Irish neighborhoods), and to more attention on the part of municipalities to neighborhoods in danger. Hence, a reasonable conclusion is that helping individuals in need is not enough, if a society wants to avoid the enormous economic and social costs, such as the ones that were paid by New York City when it lost 321,000 dwelling units (11 percent of its housing stock) in the 1970s, it may have to invest in improving services in poor neighborhoods, especially crime prevention services, and to strengthening local communities.

Strengthening communities through empowerment of local residents is the subject of the next two papers. Peter Marcuse focuses on the complex relationships between neighborhood policy and the distribution of power. By analysing the experience of New York City's community boards, he shows that legal arrangements are not enough to

ensure actual distribution of power and control over resources. It was only when general spatial-economic trends changed and great interest arose in re-uses of occupied land in poor neighborhoods, that community boards could exercise some real influence and decentralization in form could lead to a real redistribution of power.

Arza Churchman describes resident participation in an Israeli neighborhood rehabilitation program, and uses this to discuss two general issues: the issue of representation, and the process versus product controversy. She concludes that, although concrete results are important, the process aspect of resident participation is more critical. However, a different interpretation is possible, based on the very data that she provides. When asked to rate the most important things that Project Renewal should do in their neighborhoods, residents ranked tenth (last) the option of "more power to the residents so they can make decisions about the neighborhood," compared to choices like improving housing or investing in educational services. Hence, at least from the residents point of view, products were preferred to process.

An emphasis on products is in line with Langley Keyes' analysis of the change in American neighborhood programs from the 1960s to the 1980s. Comprehensive renewal plans with a "holistic construct of community control . . . has given way to result-focused incrementalism." "The control and participatory aspects . . . are of less significance than the development of projects," he notes. "Advocacy has given way to a willingness to go along with City Hall to insure that the neighborhood gets its piece of the pie." According to Keyes' evidence, which he limited to the Massachusetts case, this new approach seems very effective. In five years, the state network of assisted community organizations preserved or created over 5000 jobs, developed an annual average of 500 units of new or rehabilitated housing a year, and on average, leveraged fifty dollars of local project development for every dollar of state funding to its Community Development Corporations.

Far less impressive were the achievements of the neighborhood organizations of New York State described by Thomas Reiner and Julian Wolpert. They surveyed 183 not-for-profit neighborhood preservation organizations that were provided with seed-grant funds and were expected to become self-sufficient in a few years' time. Of these, a stratified random sample of 30 organizations was selected for detailed study. Following their analysis, the researchers concluded that the seed grant concept has become much less viable since these organizations were originated in the late 1970s. Hence, unless a major change occurs, most neighborhood organizations of this kind will cease their operations.

Rachel Bratt focuses on one type of neighborhood program: community-based housing. Based on her previous studies, she has come

to the conclusion that this is an effective method for supplying decent housing to low- and moderate-income families. Here she raises a series of dilemmas that are inherent in the nature of these programs, and therefore, "won't go away." All the dilemmas are related to conflicts between the interest of the individual resident and a general social justice, as it is perceived by the author. The discussion is based on several presumptions, with two salient ones. First, that in the future, public authorities will refuse to subsidize new or rehabilitated housing for the poor, and therefore, the current stock of public and semi-public housing should remain in public control. Second, that it is legitimate that housing units that were built or rehabilitated with some public support will remain under public management, even where the dwellers provided a considerable part of the investment. These assumptions make sense in an American context, but appear irrelevant to an outside observer, especially if one comes from a welfare state such as Israel. In a welfare state there is no doubt about the continuous need to subsidize housing for the poor. Moreover, a subsidy, once provided to those who are eligible, belongs to them, and the government cannot make a profit from its investments for the poor, or gain partial ownership of products that were purchased with the help of this subsidy. In the United States of the late 1980s, it seems that the poor are under attack from various sides: from the government, through reduced social and public services, and from well-meaning planners, through their tendency to support collective action and ownership, even where residents are in favor of private control. Is it a case in which interests of today's disadvantaged residents are sacrificed in the name of benefitting the disadvantaged of the future? If this is so, their neighborhood policy should be reconsidered.

The above three articles reflect contemporary neighborhood programs in the United States. The common denominator is a segmental approach, i.e., each program is usually limited in scope and relates to one specific need (housing, employment, etc.). These single-subject, relatively small programs stand in contrast to the huge comprehensive programs that characterized American neighborhood-targeted programs in the past.

Edward Logue tells the story of such past programs, looking back at the Boston urban renewal program of the 1960s. While most of the papers are analyses of others' efforts, Logue's paper is a personal presentation of his own work. His purpose is to change the image of urban renewal as a bulldozer slum clearance program. In 1954 the law was changed to permit selective clearance and large-scale rehabilitation, and according to Logue, the Boston projects took advantage of that change, demolished only 10,000 dwelling units, built about 14,000 new ones and rehabilitated over 30,000 units. Community participation, sensitive relocation of families and businesses, as well as careful urban

design, were integral parts of the big enterprise. Touring the areas of Charlestown and the South End, and even the Washington Park area today, Logue can claim pride in his part in their transformation. By ignoring the differential impact that the programs had on incumbent disadvantaged tenants as opposed to the more advantageous residents of the past and the present, he sees only the bright side of the picture. The tangible positive outcomes of the activity of the Boston Redevelopment Authority seem to justify the public effort which has probably served as an incentive for exclusive private initiatives in Central Boston areas.

A different kind of success story is Project Renewal, Israel's comprehensive program of the last decade for rehabilitation of distressed urban areas. Based on the lessons learned from American urban renewal programs, Project Renewal was planned so as to avoid relocation and gentrification; following the Model Cities, it was aimed at both social and physical problems, and involved resident participation. The results of a four-year evaluation study are reported by Naomi Carmon. According to the findings, Project Renewal contributed to the advance of both of its major goals: reducing disparities between the haves and have-nots in Israeli society, and halting neighborhood deterioration. The major lesson of the Israeli project is that government-initiated neighborhood programs can work. However, in order for others to benefit from this experience, the factors that enabled the relative success must be analysed. The selection of appropriate target neighborhoods, securing wide public support, and adopting a special strategy of public-individual partnership, can partially explain the results. Elaboration of these and other factors is pending the forthcoming publication of an expanded version of the current collection of articles.<sup>1</sup>

Rachelle Alterman focuses on the implementation process of Project Renewal. She evaluates the implementation of six operational principles, mainly administrative-organizational ones. Adherence—at least in part—to such principles as decentralization, reliance on existing agencies for service delivery, maintenance of good relations with local government, and coordination among the various agencies involved, is presented as an important part of the explanation of Project Renewal's success in advancing its goals.

Bernard Frieden and Marshall Kaplan are familiar with both the American and Israeli systems. They could compare the American Model Cities program with Israel's Project Renewal and provide an interesting list of many similarities and fewer differences. Although they point to faults in the programs, they do not reject the comprehensive approach to neighborhood improvement. However, considering the economical and political realities of the 1980s, they suggest alternative area-targeted programs. They argue for exploiting the new opportunities raised by

current development in central cities to benefit the poor residents of the flourishing urban areas. They focus on job opportunities and mention educational improvements, but one could think about other activities, such as housing, that could take a similar route. The major lesson one can take from Frieden and Kaplan's analysis is that investing efforts to reach the same goal—improving the status of the urban poor, and even using the same means—in area-targeted programs, does not imply sticking to the same fixed strategy. Crafting strategies in accordance with economic and political conditions is a *sine qua non* for success.

The last paper in this collection is by Susan Fainstein. For Fainstein, the term "neighborhood planning" means planning from the point of view of existing neighborhoods and their residents. She reviews the history of neighborhood planning in the United States, from urban renewal to UDAG and later developments, and analyzes its pros and cons, pointing sharply to its many liabilities. Nevertheless, she concludes with several arguments in favor of neighborhood planning: it provides a mechanism for sensitizing government to the uniqueness of communities within the city; it facilitates the coordination of services at submunicipal levels; it permits the mobilization of slack resources; and it enhances cooperation between community groups and private investors, and thus stimulates development in areas that would otherwise have escaped notice. All these provide a strong rationale for neighborhood planning.

Who needs neighborhood policy? We all do, for all the reasons mentioned by Fainstein, in order to prevent urban decay with its heavy social and economic costs, and in order to comply with planners' professional code of ethics: to expand choice and opportunity for all citizens, with a special responsibility for the needs of disadvantaged groups and persons. The papers assembled here describe and analyze the accumulating experience with neighborhood policy and practice. They point at different types of programs that can work in different economic and political environments. Further research in this area could enrich our understanding of neighborhood change and of the necessary and supportive conditions for planning and implementation of more effective neighborhood policy.

## NOTES

1. Naomi Carmon, ed., *Neighborhood Policy and Programs—Past and Present*. The Policy Studies Series of Macmillan Press, forthcoming.

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