By bringing reality and rationality to decision making, research promotes informed social and economic development, allowing for solutions that speak to cause and not just to symptoms. At the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, researchers are creating a foundation for effective community development efforts.
Mixed-income development is a significant urban revitalization strategy that is being implemented across the United States to counter the concentrated urban poverty that continues to have detrimental effects on low-income families and inner-city neighborhoods. Although controversial, the strategy of creating mixed-income developments on former public housing sites (the most extreme manifestation of concentrated poverty in the United States) is meant to attract residents with higher incomes back to the inner city while maintaining affordable and public housing for lower income residents. The desired outcome is the promotion of social mobility among the urban poor and revitalization of the local neighborhood economy and infrastructure.

In 1999, the Chicago Housing Authority launched the 15-year “Plan for Transformation” that will demolish all high-rise public housing developments in the city and disperse public housing residents throughout the metropolitan area. More than 6,000 of those households will be relocated into ten new mixed-income developments containing more than 16,000 total units of market-rate and subsidized for-sale and rental housing.

Through case studies of four of the new developments, Mark L. Joseph, Ph.D., assistant professor at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, and his research teams at Case Western Reserve and the University of Chicago are conducting some of the most in-depth qualitative research anywhere in the country on the implementation of a mixed-income development strategy. The research is designed to explore questions about how the developments are created and sustained by a public and private sector collaboration, as well as to examine the experiences of individual homeowners, renters, and former public housing residents.

Since launching the research in 2005, Dr. Joseph and his colleagues have conducted 200 in-depth interviews with public housing residents going through the relocation process and higher-income residents who have bought and rented units in the new developments. In addition, the research team has conducted 60 interviews with individuals who are working on the developments in a variety of roles. To get an inside perspective on the processes and challenges of the community building process the team has gained access to on-site meetings and program activities and, to date, has attended more than 75 such gatherings. This qualitative data will be complemented by a quantitative analysis of administrative data about the full population of public housing residents who are moving into a variety of housing arrangements including mixed-income developments, 100% public housing developments, and subsidized rental apartments in the private market.

Through close working relationships with private developers, their social service partners, and other civic actors engaged in the Chicago public housing transformation, the research aims to inform ongoing practice there as well as build knowledge to help guide efforts at mixed-income development in other cities and countries.

http://msass.case.edu/faculty/mjoseph/index.html

QUESTIONS + ANSWERS

Is the Strategy Working?
A Conversation with Mark L. Joseph, Ph.D.

Q: Does mixed-income development work?
A: It depends on what “work” means—and it can mean many different things. Is there market demand for the units? Are life opportunities improved for low-income families? How well do neighbors get along? Is there a positive impact on the broader community? We are learning that this is a complex undertaking with numerous levels of success. So far, the low-income families that can meet the high screening criteria have been very pleased with the peace and quiet of the new developments.

Q: Are middle-class households buying into the new developments?
A: This is some of the best news so far from my research and that of others around the country. Due to prime locations, high quality design and features, and externally-indistinguishable market and subsidized units, there has been high market demand for the market-rate units.

Q: What are relationships like among neighbors of such different backgrounds?
A: So far, social interaction across income levels has been very low. This is in part due to assumptions and stereotypes that different groups have of each other but are also no different than the low levels of neighborly interaction that you would find in most communities. My early conclusion is that promoting social interaction will require a creative intentional effort by developers and their local partners.

Q: Are there downsides to mixed-income development?
A: Yes, there may be some significant ones. Often the lower density redevelopment and mix of incomes mean that fewer units are available for low-income families than previously existed on that land. Stringent screening excludes many families. Future research will determine to what extent the low-income families face greater scrutiny, have less local influence, and feel a sense of greater deprivation living in proximity to such affluence.

Q: What appear to be the keys to successful mixed-income development?
A: Strategic real estate location and design, a strong local housing market, comprehensive pre- and post-occupancy case management for low-income residents, efficient property management, promotion of community building through physical design and social activities, and inclusive resident governance mechanisms.
How Do Low-Income Housing Tax Credits Impact a Neighborhood?

The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is an important policy that is responsible for the building of more than 1.5 million units of affordable housing throughout the United States. This financing vehicle provides federal tax credits to private investors in exchange for equity funding. Each unit built is available for lease for a 15-year period, at which time it may be purchased. The research of Leslie Strnisha, a Ph.D. student at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, studied the effects of LIHTC “lease purchase” units on neighborhood property values.

Since the program’s inception in 1987 through 2005, there have been 11,537 single-family, low-income houses financed throughout Cleveland neighborhoods. By examining the sale prices in a number of neighborhoods in the years 1990, 1997, and 2004, Ms. Strnisha determined that the presence of lease purchase homes did not have a negative effect on the surrounding property values.

“We know that increased home ownership has a positive effect on neighborhoods and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit appears to be a successful policy to increase the supply of affordable housing. Because these homes are scattered throughout an area, they fit well into the existing neighborhood,” she notes.

RESEARCHER PROFILE

Claudia Coulton: Staying Focused on Urban Poverty

Claudia J. Coulton, Ph.D., the Lillian F. Harris Professor of Urban Social Research at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, has spent her entire academic career counting what counts for the disadvantaged of Cleveland. As the founding director of the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development, she has counted the number of people who have left welfare and the number of those who have found jobs, as well as those who have done both and still live in poverty. She has counted the miles between where the labor pool is and where the jobs are. She has counted children’s service caseloads and infant mortality. She has conducted an accounting of social indicators for every neighborhood of Cleveland to help policymakers decide where to make investments. Most recently, she has counted the houses that are foreclosed upon and those that are vacant—and tallied the toll on the city’s neighborhoods.

“It all adds up to a lifetime spent trying to, as the Center’s mission puts it, “address the problems of persistent and concentrated urban poverty and understand how social and economic changes affect low-income communities and their residents.” Over the years, though the research projects have changed and the scope broadened, Dr. Coulton and the Center’s mission remain.

When the Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change was created in 1982, Dr. Coulton set out to gather every shred of social and economic data available that might shed light on conditions in Cleveland neighborhoods. Through the mid-1990s welfare reform, she continued to study the impact of changes in public assistance, as well as a host of other issues related to big-city poverty. In time, she was joined by Sharon L. Milligan, Ph.D., M.S.W., M.P.H., associate professor, and they served together as co-directors for more than a dozen years, mapping neighborhood assets and providing community-building tools for those living and working in the neighborhoods.

In 2006, the Center absorbed the work of the Center for Community Development and changed its name to reflect the expansion of its role: The Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development. When Dr. Milligan was tapped to become an MSASS associate dean, Robert L. Fischer, Ph.D., M.P.P., research associate professor, was appointed co-director of the Center.

“It is important that we are a tool for making change locally, as well as an urban center from which nationally-relevant research and policy implications can be drawn,” says Dr. Coulton.
**Documenting Hunger Trends in Greater Cleveland**

This free and publicly accessible data system of the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development allows users to access three sets of data—property, social and economic, and quick profiles—for the entire 17-county Northeast Ohio region, as well as for specific neighborhoods within Cleveland. Following is but one example of how NEO CANDO research is applied to solving problems that correlate with the conditions of poverty.

Using data gathered in the social and economic indicators section of NEO CANDO, the Center for Community Solutions was able to track hunger in Cuyahoga County. By obtaining the number of individuals receiving food stamp assistance (between 2000 and 2005) in Cleveland neighborhoods, as well as the 58 suburbs surrounding the city, it was determined that while the total number of people receiving food stamps remained much greater in the City of Cleveland, the rate of increase was higher in the suburbs. The increase in usage in the city proper was 28.7%, while the suburban increase was 88.6%. In addition, the number of calls to United Way’s food assistance hotline was analyzed, revealing the same trend: that while the number of people receiving food stamps remained much greater in the city, the suburban rate increase was higher.

Based on these findings, policy makers and service delivery organizations, such as food banks, were able to anticipate where increased services were needed in Cuyahoga County. NEO CANDO brings rationality to decision making and promotes informed social and economic development.

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**Responding to the Mortgage Crisis and Preparing for the Future**

The national mortgage crisis is being felt acutely in Northeast Ohio where foreclosure rates have soared since 2004. Cuyahoga County, with more foreclosures than any other county in the state of Ohio, has one of the highest incidences of foreclosure in the nation. Because foreclosures typically cause a house to become vacant, often for an extended period, many such houses are vandalized or fall into disrepair, perhaps never returning to viability. The impact on the neighborhood is likely to felt for many years to come in terms of loss of value, tax base, affordable housing, and the costs of demolition for houses deemed beyond repair.

The Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences is researching the longer-term effects of subprime lending and the resulting foreclosures to determine what can be expected over the next several years in neighborhoods that have been the hardest hit. The Center’s studies are designed to help the community craft various responses to the problem, such as focusing foreclosure prevention efforts on at-risk groups. By forecasting the impact on property values, as well as the spill-over effects in terms of costs of crime, demolition, and the deterioration that may surround the properties that become vacant or uninhabitable, the Center is an integral resource in addressing this critical problem.

The Center is making extensive use of its own community data system, the Northeast Ohio Community and Neighborhood Data for Organizing (NEO CANDO), to conduct the research and report its results in real time to those most able to address the issue: public policy makers at every level, including the community development corporations already working in the neighborhoods. Michael Schramm, M.A., the Center’s analyst-programmer is responsible for the database maintenance, as well as conducting training sessions to use NEO CANDO as a tool for social change.

“The foreclosure crisis has hit Cleveland neighborhoods very hard and threatens to negate the tremendous progress in rebuilding that was underway for the last 10 years,” says Dr. Claudia J. Coulton. “Our research is focused on identifying signs that may predict foreclosures and housing vacancies, and then determining what can be done to prevent them.”

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http://neocando.case.edu

http://povertycenter.case.edu