

Book Review

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Integrating the Inner City: The promise and Perils of Mixed-Income Public Housing Transformation

Robert J. Chaskin and Mark L. Joseph

Chaskin, R. J., & Joseph, M. L. (2015). *Integrating the inner city: The promise and perils of mixed-income public housing transformation*. University of Chicago Press.

Recent research on affordable housing for the urban poor in the United States has explored the historical aspects of public housing or interrogated the ramifications of demolishing housing stock and relocating poor families. **Integrating the Inner City** instead focuses on public housing as “a mechanism of community revitalization and integration—an intentional effort...operating through public private partnerships to reclaim and build neighborhoods...” (p. 5). Expanding on the theories of integration, Chaskin and Joseph ask two broad questions: First, what are the strategies, mechanisms, and social processes that influence community dynamics? Second, what are the apparent benefits and costs to public housing residents? With detailed field research they answer such questions in their book that opens up new avenues for discourses around neighborhood integration and housing policies.

With setting the ground for “The Plan” of Chicago’s transformation, the introductory chapter provides a glimpse of the thematic of the book that mostly deals with urban poverty, concentration and deconcentration and the logic of integration. The first part then delves into a detailed theoretical account of poverty concentration, integrationalist approach and the housing reform policies. Using two important conceptual frameworks, “social exclusion” and “poverty governance” the authors ground their analysis and research outcomes. The third chapter introduces “The Plan” and HOPE VI and provides a historical context at a national level. They then show how HOPE VI was implemented in Bronzeville and the Near West Side of Chicago.

The second part of the book deals with the empirical analysis of data gathered over 8 years of field research. The authors introduce the site in Chapter 4, discuss the “inputs” of new development and community building strategies in Chapter 5 and in Chapter 6 the dynamics of the mixed income neighborhood and neighboring is analyzed. The community dynamics is rather complex, and the process of integration is varied depending on the context such as race, class and spatial dynamics. The policy approach towards spatial integration as a precursor for social interaction and social capital outcomes are often problematic. In Chapter 7 the authors explain the tension a mixed income project potentially generates due to the critical dynamics around the shared space and social behavior of different groups. In a way an “incorporated exclusion” (p. 158) is in operation where the spatial integration reproduces marginalization. In chapter 8, the authors extend the analysis from the two previous chapters and argue, how at a broader geographic scale, the integrationalist approach has performed to enforce neighborhood development and the organizational mechanisms that instrumented such changes. In the concluding chapter, the author demonstrated how some goals of the Transformation Plan were met and how it failed in several occasions. Despite the gloomy results, Chaskin and Joseph still

advocate for mixed income neighborhoods: “[T]olerating isolated enclaves of concentrated urban poverty is not the answer” (p. 229). Some useful recommendations that the authors provide in the concluding chapter are worth testing, including moderating the extreme social distance between higher income owners and low-income renters. One item stands out in particular where providing more transparency in marketing is encouraged so that homeowners are well-informed that they may experience “ghetto behavior” among their low-income rental neighbors.