

MIXED TENURE HOUSING

The realities of mixed tenure as a means to combat deprivation and a path to 'mixed, inclusive, sustainable communities', on the St Matthews estate, Brixton

Background

As a remedial policy for symptomatic urban poverty and a measure to promote social sustainability, mixed tenure has been a paradigm of UK housing policy for over a decade. However, despite continued faith by policymakers, evidence has generally suggested it has had mixed or insignificant outcomes. This study uses data, obtained through qualitative research on a mixed tenure estate in London, and a framework of current theory to explore the reasons why outcomes continue to be insufficient, and assess the use of mixed tenure as a means to further social sustainability in underprivileged areas.

Mixed, Inclusive, Sustainable:

How do these concepts interact in real life?

Numerous policy documents have implied that mixed, inclusive communities will be more sustainable and stipulated that sustainable communities should be inclusive and mixed. However, there is little written on the presumed relationship between these concepts and a distinct lack of elaboration in the policy documents themselves. In contrast studies have often shown the negative effects of inequality, e.g. on education, health and well-being – three pillars of social sustainability – and that mixing can cause conflict. This research aims to better understand their relationship, by examining how these concepts interact in a real life situation.

Mechanisms

How Does Mixed Tenure Work?

Social Capital

Higher income residents provide an influx of bridging social capital that trickles down to lower income residents via everyday interactions, providing them with new opportunities

Order & Stability

Higher income residents have greater expectations of order and stability making them more likely to exert pressure when these are violated

Local Services

A middle-class demographic provides the market required to sustain improved local services

Role Modelling & Socialisation

Fostering income diversity can provide role models for low-income residents, as contact with supposedly better ways of life shifts their goals, expectations, and, thus, behaviour

Findings

Social Capital

Bridging Social Capital

- Limited interactions meant limited instances of bridging social capital and, thus, few new opportunities
 - However, one private tenant, as head of the Tenants and Residents Association (TRA), has presented opportunities by attracting funding to the estate and increased involvement in community projects
 - Some residents felt her leadership excluded others which has negative implications for inclusivity
- #### Bonding Social Capital
- Favours were more common between, and more valuable to, public tenants than private, e.g. mothers helped each other with childcare and school runs, enabling some to take part-time jobs

Order and Stability

- Private tenants did have higher expectations but were only likely to take action in their own building, and only as long as it was mostly occupied by other private tenants
- Over time the private tenants' standards dropped to be more in line with the rest of the estate
- The most improvements had come from public tenants who pressured local authorities to crackdown on illegal and disruptive activity on the estate, in 2002-3

Local Services

Public Services

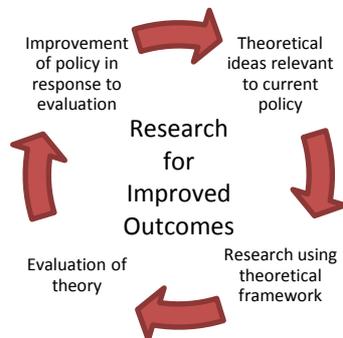
- Private tenants more likely to pay more for services further afield, such as schools, than push for improvements to local services
- #### Private Services
- Public tenants more likely to use nearby/cheaper services than private tenants who would rather travel further, and spend more, for "a better cup of coffee" or "better shopping options"

Role Modelling & Socialisation

- Positive role modelling was based far more on cultural than socioeconomic, factors
- Conversely, many public tenants even used the private tenants as negative models for their behaviour
- TRA Head claimed public tenants have been role models to her: "they are more sociable and generous"
- Evidence that the public tenants had actively provided positive role models for children and teenagers, e.g. the St. Matthews Project – a community-run football club that currently engages 150-200 young people weekly
- One woman claimed the changing character of Brixton had encouraged her to re-enroll in college

Case Study Method

- Took photos of buildings for comparison
- Gathered resident profiles using short questionnaires
- Conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 residents – 13 public tenants and 7 private tenants
- Used postscripts to capture non-verbal elements of interviews



Conclusions

- Evidence that mixed tenure can work? The head of the TRA arguably afforded resources and opportunities to the community. However, were these opportunities and resources *new*?
- Community organisation and cohesion, without external help, had both increased current well-being and enhanced future prospects, thus improving sustainability
- Generally – contrary to prediction – the private tenants' detachment was the only instance where social mixing and inclusion did not have positive outcomes for sustainability
- Exposure to ways of life and opportunities can shift aspirations, however self-separation by the private tenants means they are unlikely to be role-models themselves
- Private tenants could actually have harmful effects: using public services further away encourages spatial imbalances; using local private services can encourage harmful gentrification; and the reminder they serve to the public tenants of wealth inequality, reinforces negative stereotypes (on both sides) and has negative outcomes for overall sustainability and cohesion

Inclusivity and the Estate Context

Overall, the St. Matthews estate is a truly inclusive and mixed community, however, a lack of mixing is apparent between public and private tenants. Results show that the public tenants view the private as uncaring, self-superior and bland, while the private tenants, who also rarely mixed with each other, claim their separation from others on the estate was the result of choice and, to a lesser extent, incompatible sociocultural norms and understandings. Many expressed a lack of need or reason to integrate into the estate, immediately pointing out a flaw in mixed tenures' theoretical argument.

Policy Implications

- The private residents' place-detachment and lack of desire or incentive for social interaction outweigh any community sustainability benefits they may offer, as, without interaction there is no community
- The local context was important in many ways to outcomes on the estate; this suggests that more critical engagement with local contexts is needed by policy-makers
- Results suggest that policy-makers should be cautious of employing social capital as a tool for urban regeneration and if doing so should move beyond current conceptualisations
- Policy-makers should be wary of harnessing middle-class capital for regeneration in general as strategies often mimic numerous others designed to increase urban competitiveness, with gentrification the inevitable outcome