Neighbourhood Social Mix: Right Diagnosis; Wrong Prescription?

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Purposes of Presentation

Analyze critically:

1. “diagnosis” of social problem thought to justify neighbourhood social mix

2. “prescription” of neighbourhood social mix policy & programs
PREVIEW OF MAIN CONCLUSIONS

DIAGNOSIS SOUND:
There IS strong evidence base (at least in U.S.) to worry on equity and efficiency grounds about spatial concentrations of disadvantaged households

PRESCRIPTION POTENTIALLY FLAWED:
However, “social mix” is complex & caveat-laden prescription to end concentrated disadvantage; MUST BE DONE CORRECTLY
Policy Rationale: Equity & Efficiency Goals

EQUITY:
Improves absolutely well-being of disadvantaged

EFFICIENCY:
Positive-Sum Outcomes for Society
(aggregation of disadvantaged + advantaged)

Implies:
Pareto Improvements sufficient condition;

Hicks-Kaldor compensation principle necessary condition:
["$$ winners" > "$$ losers"]
Crucial Feature of Concentrated Disadvantage: Are there Non-Linear Effects?

If rate of social problems in area grows disproportionately with concentration of disadvantage

→ a policy that reduces such concentrations can, IN THEORY, yield both equity & efficiency gains

...an illustration: THE “CAPS” AND “NO CAPS”
What Do U.S. Studies Of Neighbourhood Effects of Concentrated Poverty Tell Us re: Non-Linear?

Rate of Social Problems in Neighbourhood

Rate of Social Problems in Neighbourhood

Poverty Rate in Neighbourhood

20% 40%
Evidence from Econometric Studies of Residential Property Values and % Disadvantaged in Neigh.
Potential Origins of Non-Linear Effects of Concentrated Disadvantage

Two sources: originating within & outside areas of concentrated disadvantage:

→ intra-neighbourhood social interactions among disadvantaged households (e.g., role models, socialization, social control)

→ extra-neighbourhood actions by markets, gov’ts. and institutions (stigmatization, weaker public services & institutional resources, withdrawal of jobs in local retail sector)
Potential Variations in Functions of Concentrated Disadvantage Neighbourhoods

Two (or more) potential types with distinct differences in policy implications:

→ “Flypaper” neighbourhood: residents get stuck in poverty and in their disadvantaged neighbourhood(s)

→ “Springboard neighbourhood: residents gain abilities to vault out of poverty and the disadvantaged neighbourhood
OK, Concentrated Disadvantage typically Bad...
But what about “Prescription” of Social Mix?

Three crucial caveats:

→ Desired neighbourhood “social mix” goal unspecified in detail

→ Many “mixing” program options; each with different benefits & costs

→ Potential Inequities for Disadvantaged who may be forced to move from current neighborhoods as part of “mixing” process
Social Mix Policy Caveat #1

Desired social mix goal unspecified in detail

- Composition
- Concentration
- Scale
Social Mix Policy Caveat #1

• **Composition:** On what basis(es) are we mixing people: ethnicity, race, religion, immigrant status, income, housing tenure...all, or some of the above?

• **Concentration:** What is the amount of mixing in question? Which amounts of which groups comprise the ideal mix, or are minimally required to produce the desired outcomes?

• **Scale:** Over what level(s) of geography should the relevant mix be measured? Does mixing at different spatial scales involve different causal processes and yield different outcomes?

• ...in other words, “RECIPE” for mix unclear...
Social Mix Policy Caveat #2

Several program options to achieve mix:

Expand # affordable dwellings in advantaged areas—including in gentrifying areas [site / tenant-based]

Expand # up-market rate dwellings in disadvantaged areas [social housing redevelopment]

Develop new residential areas as socially mixed neighbourhoods [IZ]
Potential inequities for Disadvantaged who may be forced to move from current neighborhoods as part of “mixing” process:

--- Loss of “bonding social capital”
--- Loss of access to valuable social institutions and supportive public services
--- Stress
Social Mix Policy Caveat #3: How to Minimize Costs to Disadvantaged?

Emphasize voluntary moves, gradualist approaches to extent possible
Assess function of disadvantaged area
Provide publically supported:
--- substitutes for lost “bonding social capital” [esp. re: child care, transportation]
--- pre-move mobility counseling
--- post-move support services facilitating household success & integration in host community
Review of Main Conclusions

There is strong evidence base (at least in U.S.) to worry on equity and efficiency grounds about spatial concentrations of disadvantaged households; "diagnosis" is valid.

However, "social mix" is complex & caveat-laden prescription to end concentrated disadvantage; perhaps wrong "prescription" if done incorrectly.
And Remember: Social Mix is Not Enough!

It will take a more comprehensive set of social welfare / human development interventions and supports to provide fair opportunities for all citizens,

...even in a world of perfectly socially mixed neighborhoods.
Thank you for your comments and questions!

Much of this presentation is based on the chapter by the same name in the book chapter:

Additional References