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Urbanization Against Gentrification

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Urbanization Against Gentrification

A study regarding creating a potential methodology for using urban upscaling to reverse the effects of Urban Gentrification.

Cody Ellerbrock

Honors Project

Submitted to the Honors College

at Bowling Green State University as partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with University Honors

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Project Overview

How does urban abandonment affect communities and cities? What are the effects of these abandoned buildings on the different scales of the neighborhood community, city, and environment? How can we decide where and to what scale the redevelopment of these areas is needed? What are the main causes of gentrification in a city and how does an urban renewal project cause this act? What are ways that a planning committee could account for, limit, or negate gentrification? The focus of this project will be to 1) study different cases of urban redevelopment to see what factors played a role in causing any form of gentrification and 2) form a set of guidelines and standards that could be used in the field when planning a work of urban renewal or redevelopment. To do this, I will focus, especially on the United States, starting around the 1950s when the United States government decided to try and renew areas that became rundown and dilapidated. I will use a variety of case studies on redevelopment projects that have been and are currently being implemented in cities around the world. I will use these case studies to identify different causal factors that play a role in how gentrification happens from how a redevelopment project is planned and executed. I will also study the reaction of the people in the communities throughout a redevelopment process to learn how to better integrate the people into the planning of a project. This will all be done in an attempt to limit the number of people negatively affected by an urban redevelopment project.

Research

When one visits a new city or town what are some of the first things that one notices? A person may be struck by two contrasting views – newer buildings surrounded by pedestrian or vehicular traffic versus run-down, neglected areas. Both leave a strong imprint on the area in one's mind. Not only does one remember the buildings, but the people that are around them. The better the area, the more inclined someone is to return, bringing business, new views, ideas, activities, sports, families, and overall excitement and joy to an area. Places that tend to be more rundown do not necessarily miss out on this but do not get the satisfaction and fulfillment from these incoming people as much as that of the cleaner and more kempt side of the towns. This spawns a sense of urgency to act on fixing and cleaning up these areas. In doing so it would raise the general outlook on the area, while also giving room for a boost in the economy, more opportunities for people in the area, and a higher standard of living in the area. However, despite the good that comes from this, there are also major downsides. Improving a community's looks and use through a renovative process can bring up the cost of living. The idea of new businesses and opportunities adds to an increase in the desire for that area. This raises prices for those currently living there, sometimes high enough that it forces them to move neighborhoods, cities, or states away from what was their home. This action of trying to help the community ends up destroying it. This act of bringing in wealthier people and businesses and pushing out the initial residents of the area is known as gentrification. As of late, gentrification is at an all-time high and proceeds to displace hundreds of thousands of residences over a very short period of time. Therefore, an important goal is to investigate ways that urban renewal can be accomplished while avoiding gentrification.

Urban Renewal

Urban renewal is the act of redeveloping an area or space within a city in an attempt to clean the area and make it more presentable to society's standards. It is also a key factor in building a stronger and more sustainable environment in which families can raise their young and live long life. A common occurrence is the removal of slums or more rundown areas, thus allowing for a more occupiable, sustainable, and cleaner space to be put in. This does not mean the full destruction and reconstruction of a site since each site has its own benefits and weaknesses, some structures are still salvageable and would be more economic and environmentally friendly if renovated and repurposed instead of a full demolition job. While using urban renewal to address a community's problems, it is also crucial that planners work to avoid gentrification and its negative consequences for community members.

Gentrification

Gentrification is a term coined by Ruth Glass in the 1960s. She noticed that a renewal project done in London by upper and middle-class citizens buying and fixing land forced citizens of lower incomes out of their homes. As the population size increases in a particular area, finding land to purchase and live on has become and will keep becoming a major problem. With limited ground space, the next place to move is upward. As a result, the price of housing and rental space is at an all-time high. This, along with increases in inflation and not much in wages often causes citizens to move out of an area. A study done by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in 2002 stated that between 1999 and 2002, in New York City, roughly 50,000 people were

displaced or moved due to factors such as landlord harassment, eviction, government activities, or because they needed a less expensive place to live due to an increase in the rental price and having difficulty paying rent. On top of this, the number of homeowners in the Bronx at this time that were spending more than 60% of their income on housing shot up from 11.3% to 2%. (Lees)

Case studies on urban renewal projects can help shed light on the best practices for creating positive change for communities. Below, I examine urban renewal projects in five different locations to identify steps to implement and avoid during an urban renewal project.

Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania

The government began to fund cities to tear down old buildings and reform the landscape to bring in a more appealing look and demeanor to the areas that had since become what was deemed a fragment of their former beauty. City officials and planners took to the streets to analyze the current state of buildings, including not only their looks but also which buildings were starting to lose interest in the public eye. Buildings that were abandoned or left vacant and rundown became a highlight for what they were looking to fix and give new life to. Vacant lots are the main focus of renewal activities because they have become hotspots for crimes and violence. A strong association was shown between vacant properties and crime. Being in the vicinity of these lots increased one's risk of being in a case of aggravated assault. These pose imminent health threats to those in the community. For example, it was found that over a five-year span involving all 1816 block groups of Pennsylvania's Philadelphia County, there was noted a majority of blocks experiences numerous acts of aggravated assault. The

statistics show that 89% of block groups experienced numerous accounts of aggravated assault averaging out to be about 4 each over that five-year study period. 64% of the total blocks reported several gun assaults with an average of 1. Lastly, 84% of the block groups had reports of lot vacancies within their boundaries. With an average of 6 vacancies per block group. Not only this but accounts of aggravated assault increased in those areas that had public parks or playgrounds or alcohol outlets near vacant lots (Branas).

Proposed solutions to criminal problems in this area included aspects of urban renewal; demolition, refurbishment, or acts of property stabilization. Property stabilization focuses on acts of cleaning and sealing properties that are vacant and unused as well as neighborhood beautification in the form of adding green spaces near vacant areas. It was also noted that one of the biggest acts that can be done is for the local government and community members to invest in this crisis. Both need to be able to focus time and cost on coming up with a solution. The focus should also be drawn toward the management of these vacant properties and making sure there are no criminal activities going on in or near these lots (Branas).

Atlanta, Georgia

A case study done in Atlanta, Georgia showed the following. Being the fourth-fastest gentrifying city in the U.S., it was no surprise to find that Atlanta suffered from high poverty rates, low literacy rates, and unemployment. During the 1960s in South Atlanta, the decline of Black-owned businesses and financial services to minorities was at an all-time high due to integration. In a historically African American predominant community, many families relied on the steady employment from these businesses. Losing Black-owned businesses left the owners

and many others within the community without employment. Because of this, many were forced to move to find new housing or locate wherever they could become employed. Efforts were made to strengthen and keep the otherwise ethnic community there. Support groups were created in order to allow community members to vocalize their problems with the rising of projects near their homes. While alleviating the pressure of the projects on the citizens, these groups did not go far with any action to stop the problem. Some problems did get taken up to government officials attention, however due to competing value systems between government officials, planning committees, and the different groups of citizens in the area, gentrification still took effect and tore up an otherwise thriving community (Isaac).

In-migration became the next factor in uprooting the community. When new families moved into these areas in Atlanta, typically they were motivated to improve the residences that they moved into. This begins to cause changes in the otherwise stagnant socioeconomic status of those in the area. The people that initially made up the community, became a minority in their own homes. Not being able to keep up with the wealth of the incoming families, many fell behind trying to pay bills and make ends meet. This increase in wealth from outsiders began to raise neighborhood home values and contributed to broader development within neighborhoods. Many people began to spend more on upgrading their homes to stay with the boost in status. Others moved into these neighborhoods to upgrade homes and sell them at a profit. This furthered the gap between residents and contributed to displacing more low-income residents. This caused more divisions among the people (Isaac).

Constructive Community Dialogue was shown to have a positive effect on those affected and helped to create bonds and limit the effects of gentrification. An example of a project in

Atlanta where gentrification cause conflict and division was the Atlanta Beltline Project, a \$4.8 billion trailway project throughout Atlanta meant to bring the community together and add walkable greenspace to a crowded city . Something designed to bring the people of Atlanta together resulted in the exact opposite. After the announcement of the Beltline, there was an increase in housing prices in the lower incomes of the Atlanta area. Looking into the feedback and how the community viewed the project, it was shown that many white families and neighborhoods viewed interest and excitement while people in the African American neighborhoods did not show as much interest or enthusiasm. Neighborhood residents in the area went on to say that they have felt bullied by house flippers, who purchased houses and resold them, driving up property taxes. Increased property taxes forced people to take out loans in order to pay their taxes, which resulted in many running out of finances and filing foreclosure. This became a cycle, one that resulted in entire neighborhoods of residents being pushed out of their homes. This has created a form of “transitional neighborhood,” meaning many homes within a neighborhood are rented out and not owned by the residents themselves. This damages feelings of community in neighborhoods. A report showed that the number of rentals in the Southern part of Atlanta was seen to be anywhere from 70% to 80% of the houses in the area (Isaac).

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California presents another example of urban renewal and gentrification. On the west coast of not only the United States but also Canada, Asian individuals immigrated to Northern America after World War II. The U.S. especially experienced a huge influx of Asian

citizens seeking better lives. In doing so they ended up primarily on the West Coast. In California, many thought of these new Asian residents as competition for work and did not really approve. This led to the segregation of immigrants into urban enclaves. These spaces began to be seen as problematic and rundown; spots that would be looked at for redevelopment (Lai).

After the Second World War, many viewed Asians and their culture as ideal and became interested in learning more. The Fillmore district became a peak example of what redevelopment meant. In the Fillmore district, an idea was tossed around to focus more on the Asian experience and community. The redevelopment process would be used to hone in on their culture by creating an Asian experience for visitors to enjoy. This proposal was to bring in business through tourist attractions and create a cultural hotspot and trade center. Doing so, however, would require a full restructuring of communities. This project shifted housing so that a majority of this district's residents were Asian Americans, while pushing African Americans out of the area. Within the Fillmore District, this displaced around 8,000 individuals and destroyed at least 6,000 low-income housing units. All this was done to restructure a community in the hopes of creating a form of postindustrial tourism that became prominent after the Cold War (Lai).

Sydney, Australia

Gentrification has also affected Sydney, Australia, in their Pyrmont-Ultimo district. Here it was seen that the act of gentrification ensued from the push of local, state, and federal governments with major developers to change the area. This was largely due to the

deindustrialization that these officials were pushing. Pyrmont-Ultimo was a major commercial and industrial area in Sydney, mainly focusing on the refinement, storage, and export of primary products and the shipping industry. Two of the major industries were the wool storage and export industry and the Colonial Sugar Refinery, which opened in 1878. The port here was a major location for the delivery and refinement of sugar cane for consumption in the U.S. and Europe. After the Second World War, a shift in the economy saw many industries declining in importance. This led to many shutting down and people moving out of the area. The three censuses taken from 1961 to 1981 showed that over those 20 years, the total number of residents in Pyrmont-Ultimo went from 4,007 to 1,590 (Bounds).

In the 1980s, because of Sydney's restructured economy, there was a loss of about 178,000 manufacturing jobs. Since then, the city of Sydney has implemented programs such as the City West Housing Authority to regulate the construction and restructuring of areas such as Pyrmont-Ultimo. This program is in charge of making sure that in creating new housing units, the planning committees make sure to implement affordable housing into the equation. They are in charge of making sure that the area is not being filled with upmarket housing, which makes it impossible for people to move in or afford to live there. This all was based on the recognition of how high-end housing would increase the cost of living for the middle and lower-income families that still resided in the area. It also recognized that having a mix of socio-economic and ethnic groups within a region was desirable to maintain. This was especially true with the history of the area being noted for having affordable housing with plenty of employment opportunities for its residents. This act required that in the case of a smaller development wanting to have a higher cost of living in their space, the company itself would

have to pay a fee instead of having more affordable units. This all was possible due to the funding from the Commonwealth Building Better Cities Programme that came from the State Government from land sales and developers contributing to the funds. About \$40 million worth of housing units were funded through developer contributions alone (Bounds).

Vancouver, Canada

Another impactful project was that of Woodward's Department Store in Vancouver, Canada in the 1990s. Due to the economic decline that was happening in the area, Woodward's went bankrupt in 1993. This building was a vital part of many locals' lives, and the people in the community did not want to see it leave. They campaigned for a new project to be put in the area, and indicated that they needed to be a part of the planning because it was to affect them. If there was to be any form of redevelopment in the heart of their community, they needed to be in charge of it. The citizens campaigned for specific ideas to be implemented. One such idea was that this was not to bring in a market housing building, but one of social housing. This would allow locals to stay and afford better housing while fixing the landscape. This also would limit the amount of outside influence on the project and to keep prices from skyrocketing. Throughout the entirety of the project, the locals stayed informed, were active in the planning of the project, and made sure they were being heard and terms were being met. This overall ended up allowing for a project that brought the community together even stronger than before (Pell).

Conclusion

By studying past urban renewal projects, we can develop a guide for urban renewal that positively impacts the community. With this guide, we can begin to limit the negative effects urban renewal has on citizens and maximize the benefits. These guidelines are to be used as a foundation and adjusted to meet the individual requirements of each project since no two sites are the same, as are no two communities. This set deals with not only the influences of the citizens and needing their participation, but that of the city planning committees, state governments, and national government as well.

First, government programs could be put into effect to help limit the cost of these projects. After all, the urban environment is one of the biggest influencers on a global scale of environmental harm. The majority of the cityscape is a hardscape, or architectural elements that aren't seen as green. The current built environment has not implemented enough greenspaces within its limits. By having the local or national government pay citizens of rundown and low-income housing to sell out and move towards these social homes. In doing so, it allows low-income families at least some compensation for moving out instead of losing property due to financial issues. Now this would need to be done after the social homes are already developed and ready to be moved into. This allows then for these homes to be changed into a green lot or park area.

The second major step in limiting gentrification is for the public to stay informed and involved in the planning of these projects. Staying up to date and in the circle of what is going on is the strongest and key factor in knowing what the next course of action is. By staying involved, the citizens in the affected area can state their problems with the project and help to

negotiate ways in which the urban renewal project will benefit them and not do harm. As seen in Vancouver, when the locals in the area stayed on for the entire project and ran checks on what was being planned and done, they can have the most impact on the project.

The third step involves the planning committee. At the very beginning of the process, before the project has even begun, the planning committee needs to choose a site for where they are going to do said project. For example, rather than looking for plots of land that are open and used as green spaces, planning committees should look for abandoned buildings or run-down lots. By identifying these unused spaces, the committee can identify the number of people being actively affected. Unhoused people could be contacted and led to social houses and taken to facilities to help get them on their feet.

Before condemning a preexisting building to be demolished and then for the site to be completely redeveloped, a site should be looked at to see if it can be refurbished. Many buildings hold some form of importance to the community and are key places in the history of the area. In some forms, acts of historical preservation can be used. This is a way to not only keep and restore the history of an area but also beautify it to a modern standard.

Social housing can be incorporated into the development and planning of the new design. By incorporating social housing, one can create a unique localized space for those being affected to move into until they can get back onto their feet. Along with this, social or public housing also has incredible economic benefits. It allows for more workers to live nearby jobs and hold these positions furthering business in the immediate area. It also creates jobs for the real estate industry, construction jobs, renovation workers, designers, and much more. Implementing a social house into a rundown building through renovation work or doing a complete remodel

offers many jobs to a community while limiting the number of people being moved due to gentrification. Residents would be able to stay locally to where their community is while being able to live in a more affordable housing unit. Implementing a form of social housing also has health benefits for the community. Those being moved into the housing have the opportunity of being from any old lead in pipes or paint, escaping the effects of asbestos as well. This also allows for more greenspaces to be placed where other residencies are no longer necessary, lessening the heat gain in the area.

Something else that can be brought into a space, along with some social housing, is a local career counseling center. These centers are designed to look within the area and cross-reference what skills and requirements employers in the area are looking for in new hires with low-income families in housing in need of a new income source. This would help these families to become more financially stable and able to provide more for themselves. The goal in doing this is to give the families more opportunities to better themselves.

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