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## PERSONAL INTERESTS AND CLIENT SATISFACTION WITH URBAN RENEWAL<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract.* Although designed to alleviate the many social and economic problems besetting American cities, urban renewal programs have been the object of extensive criticisms. These range from comments that the programs help those most who need it least to suggestions that such programs have disruptive, and possibly destructive, effects on communities, families, and individuals. This paper reports a study designed, in part, to investigate the latter type of criticism and to provide an evaluation for a local urban renewal agency. The study was concerned with an assessment of the extent to which relocated persons were satisfied with the urban renewal program and the relocation process. The population studied consisted of 150 permanently relocated households from 2 urban renewal areas in Rochester, NY; data were gathered through an interview schedule. The findings provided a positive assessment of the relocation process because most of the respondents seemed to feel that urban renewal was a good thing, and expressed general satisfaction with their new surroundings.

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Urban renewal programs have been, from their inception to the present time, the subject of vigorous and pointed discussion. Rarely have the comments been favorable. While the many poignant reports of the gross injustices and inequities of relocation programs may have stimulated some interest in reform legislation, the actual impact of these reports is difficult to gauge. Nevertheless, the depiction of the underprivileged family left devastated by relocation, which has been used often to dramatize the deficiencies in many programs, seems to many observers to be not the isolated, extreme case but rather the norm; relocation as a result of urban renewal is inherently bad and tramples upon persons displaced, economically, politically and psychologically. Mark Fried (1963) expresses a view of the early sixties which maintained that, however greatly the environmental quality of life may be enhanced for persons relocated, there was

still to be reconciled the personal suffering that must be endured psychologically:

"Grieving for a lost home is evidently a widespread and serious social phenomenon following in the wake of urban dislocation . . . For the greatest number, dislocation . . . does lead to intense personal suffering despite moderately successful adaptation to the total situation of relocation."

Similarly, Peter Marris (1963) notes that: "Relocation has provided only marginally better housing, in very similar neighborhoods, at higher rents, and has done as much to worsen as to solve the problems of the families displaced." A substantial study of Atlanta, GA by Clarence N. Stone (1976), covering the years 1950-1970, indicates further that in making decisions on urban renewal, "many policy alternatives were open to and considered by public officials. The alternatives that were actually followed were . . . favored by the business community."

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For those who sympathized with this view of relocation, adequate legislation came none too soon. The Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act was designed to establish "a uniform policy for the fair and equitable treatment of persons who are displaced, or have their real property taken for federal and federally-assisted programs" (U.S. Code 1970). This act was designed to minimize the attendant disruption and inconvenience of renewal by providing both sufficient financial aid and standard replacement housing in order to make relocation much fairer and less trying. The Relocation Act continued to have its critics, however, and many unfavorable reports were as dramatic as before its passage.

In 1971, Steven R. Weisman published a detailed study of problems in New York City public housing. The study cited the lack of water, heat, electricity or security. Although the problems manifested in New York City are usually large in scale and often unique to that city, they seem suitable here for discussion of the relocation process after the 1970 act. According to Wiseman, relocation was especially difficult because of the replacement housing shortage; often relocation was effected in stages, requiring from a year to as long as 18 months. The results were that living conditions for those remaining became steadily worse, and the threats of crime and vandalism became increasingly evident to both the tenant and the management. A procedure known as *on-sitting*, adopted to defer to the family's preference to remain within its neighborhood until it could move into the new housing, became of questionable significance when families were often relocated several times within a site before they were permanently situated. One frustrating feature of the program, it was pointed out, was that some tenants, aware that urban renewal was impending, took it upon themselves to either move out too soon or to relocate into what officially may have been considered substandard housing. Consequently, they forfeited their relocation benefits.

Examined from a different perspective, the relocation process, some maintain,

"has evolved into a giveaway program to countless undeserving persons" (Gorland 1972). This viewpoint maintains the rental assistance payments do not seem to consider the financial condition of its clients and hand out benefits too freely. Loopholes in relocation policy have caused the budget, consequently, to inflate. For example, relocated persons are eligible for low-rental units, which they may or may not take advantage of at their own choice and still be entitled to a rental assistance payment of up to \$1,000 per year for up to 4 years. If persons choose to live in the low-rental unit, they, in effect, can have their rent completely paid for 4 years and receive the substantial balance of the assistance payments tax free.

Gorland's criticisms have been rebutted by Michael E. Abramowitz (1972); their debate has been further amplified by Philip E. Sieber (1972). These analyses have remained at the level of speculative consideration, however, and have not been based on empirical investigation. A model for resolving the argument at the level of the individual client has, in fact, been prepared by Hubbard and Selesnick (1974). Using other methods of comparison, Philip Schorr (1975) has compared various studies based on projects conducted both before and after the 1970 Relocation Act. These materials, however, do not yield definitive conclusions that relocation was more *fair* under either condition.

The present sentiment is expressed, perhaps, by Chester Hartman, who made extensive studies of the subject and who has concluded that the new act notwithstanding,

"'relocation' is a prototype issue of the powerless poor facing powerful interests, public and private, economic and political, in what amounts to a battle over turf. The land on which displacees live is 'needed' for projects which those with power want to carry out, and those displaced will not get decent neighborhoods at prices they can afford, any more than will millions of other Americans who live in substandard conditions and are not being displaced. The resources—land and

money—simply will not be made available; the many institutional barriers to housing the poor and those without white skins will not be pierced. Short of a major redistribution of power and resources in the society, the most that can be done is to describe fully the costs and benefits involved in relocation, analyze the way the system operates, and prevent official deception from becoming the accepted truth." (Hartman 1971)

#### A NEGLECTED ASPECT OF EVALUATION

The arguments set forth by Hartman and similar critics of relocation are based on global evaluations of the renewal experience. The review of studies provided by Schorr (1975) provides one significant clue: the experiences of relocation affect the clients as they individually evaluate the moves according to what they have gained or lost. Thus, if a given client feels he or she has been adequately compensated, financially or otherwise, he or she will have a positive evaluation of the program.

What would be helpful are empirical data which test the validity of the position, and which might suggest new directions for other investigations. Such a study might determine the variables connected with satisfactory and unsatisfactory experiences with relocation by the relocatees.

A survey conducted in Rochester, New York, in 1970, is relevant here. This investigation provides one assessment of the process, and is especially relevant for 2 reasons: the experiences of the relocatees were, for the most part, positive; and the project was completed before the passage of the Relocation Act. Thus, the (untested) utility of that act in moderating the supposedly adverse effects of relocation was not a variable in the study.

#### BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The official project, of which this study is a part, was directed by the Citizens Planning Council of Rochester at the request of the Department of Urban Renewal and Economic Development. (Sterne *et al* 1970) The work was per-

formed independently. The text was read by members of the Council and Renewal staff for technical accuracy but at no time did they request that our interpretations and recommendations be modified.

In 1970 the Rochester Urban Renewal Agency reported that the city's program ranked "as the 13th largest in the United States." Two areas of the Agency's project were examined: the Third Ward and the Upper Falls, whose programs were implemented in June 1967 and October 1968, respectively. A sample of households permanently relocated between March 1968 and April 1970 were analyzed in this study. The term permanent relocation was used by the local agency to signify that all payments had been made and that the family was no longer the direct responsibility of urban renewal.

*Sample Selection.* In organizing our survey, we were able to find a total of 143 households which had been relocated to the 3rd Ward and a total of 143 households which had been relocated to the Upper Falls area. From these 2 groups of 143 each, we drew 2 random samples of 75, which constituted approximately 50% of the available cases. Of the 75 cases in the 3rd Ward, 84% were black, and the rest white. In Upper Falls, 68% were black, 15% were Puerto Rican and 17% white. The ethnic distribution of the samples was compared to the total available cases in the two areas. The samples were representative with a zero to 3% comparative variation between sample and corresponding population sub-groups.

There had been some shrinkage in area populations from which the samples were drawn: the survey started with 180 names from 3rd Ward and 160 from Upper Falls. The 143 from each area were the totals that could be located at the time of the study, after checks with the post office, neighbors and all other available sources of information on the whereabouts of those not found.

*Instrumentation.* Field work was conducted in July and August of 1970. The interviewees had been relocated from 3 months to over 2 years at this time. (The amount of time relocated was used

as a variable in the analyses.) The interview consisted of a pretested questionnaire with both closed and open-ended items. Pilot tests were made to ensure the adequacy and intelligibility of the instrument and interviewers were instructed to speak either with the head of the household or an adult. Up to 3 call-backs were made before a random replacement was substituted for the original case; the call-backs were reinforced with telephone and written messages. Interviewers were matched to respondents by race and language to minimize communication difficulties and acquiescence effects.

*Sample Characteristics.* Sample respondents were divided equally between men and women. The median age of the white respondents (65 years) was nearly twice that of the blacks (34 years) and Puerto Ricans (30 years). The median years of residency among the respondents in Rochester were 44 for whites, 12.5 for blacks, and 9 for Puerto Ricans. Of the white respondents, 50% had incomes of less than \$3,000 per household; 28.3% of the blacks were in this bracket, and 10% of the Puerto Ricans. The percentages indicating one or two person households revealed 52% for whites, 15.8% for blacks, and 9.1% for Puerto Ricans.

It should be noted that of the white respondents, only 20% had been in their present households 2 years or less; of the blacks, 58.4%; and of the Puerto Ricans, 54.5%. Before moving, 52% of the whites lived in one-family houses, 20.2% of the blacks, and 27.3% of the Puerto Ricans. Correspondingly, 48% of the whites owned their homes, 10.5% of the blacks, and 9.1% of the Puerto Ricans. In considering these percentages, it must be noted that there were a total of 25 whites and only 11 Puerto Ricans; consequently, the percentage bases for these groups are small.

#### FINDINGS

*Relocation and Citizen Control.* In the past decade especially, the idea that every citizen should be involved in the decisions and governmental institutions that directly affect life has been given special emphasis. This has been manifested in

the Model Cities program, OEO programs and others. Many city planning departments hold community hearings in order to obtain feedback on federally financed programs. According to the local agency, preliminary planning for both the 3rd Ward and Upper Falls projects included a series of meetings in neighborhood houses. In spite of this, the majority of residents did not indicate that their opinions had been sought. None of the whites said they had been consulted, while only 29.9% of the blacks and 9.1% of the Puerto Ricans said they had been consulted. People felt that their opinions should have been asked: 52% of the whites, 67% of the blacks, and 77.8% of the Puerto Ricans. One relocated person stated, "It's not fair to uproot people without getting their opinions," and another said, "People living in the area should plan for themselves." The consensus was that, in any case, they should have had more of an explanation or should have been informed of the project.

Although the local agency sponsored informational neighborhood meetings, many of the individuals first heard about the project through a visit from the relocation aide or by a letter from the agency: 68% of the whites, 36.6% of the blacks, and 63.6% of the Puerto Ricans. In terms of informing individuals of the actual move, the role of the agency increased significantly: 92% of the whites, 86.7% of the blacks, and 90.0% of the Puerto Ricans heard about the move from either the aide or the agency. There were some differences in these characteristics between the two project areas, but the greater differences were related to race.

*Relocation, Resentment, and Desire to Move Back to Old Homes.* Of the whites, 60% were glad to move, 82% of the blacks, and 70.7% of the Puerto Ricans. When asked whether they would move back if they had the chance, 16.7% of the whites said yes, while 24.3% of the blacks and 9.1% of the Puerto Ricans indicated that they would. There was a slight increase in the desire to move back after one had been in the new home for more than 6 months. In the 3rd Ward, 19% of those in their new home less than

6 months said that they would move back, while 25% of those in their new home more than 6 months indicated they would move back. In the Upper Falls area the percentages were 25.7% and 32.4%, respectively.

People said they would not move back to the old location because it was "not safe" and "people can visit now and not be scared." On the other hand, those who were not glad to move said they had "invested time and money in the old place," that their previous rent was lower, or that they "liked the landlord and the old area." In any case, those who desired to move back usually qualified it with a reference to decent housing having been found and provided for them.

In all, 35 persons said they would like to move back, and of this number, 42.9%, or 15 persons, said that they were not glad to move. These people were generally found to have been living in private apartments and were now living in public housing; none of them had been in public housing before the move. Of the 35 who wished to move back, 28 had been in private apartments and, of these, 10 had not wanted to move.

*Relocation and Payments.* Clients were asked whether payments were sufficient, and 64.3% said yes, 7% said somewhat, and 28.7% said no. Payments were handled satisfactorily according to 76.3% of the clients, while 4.3% said that they were not sure, leaving a remainder of 19.4% dissatisfied.

The matter of payment was a source of considerable confusion to relocated people. When asked if they believed they were going to get more money than had been already received, 27% of the clients said they did not expect more; 44.7% said that they were not sure; and 28.4% believed that they were going to receive more. Recall that these were all permanently relocated households to whom, according to the agency, "All payments had been made."

*Relocation and Help Given by Relocation Staff.* Forty-nine percent of the clients felt they had some problems in relocation, most of these having to do with finding a house, securing a loan, etc. Ninety-two percent of the individuals stated that their problem had been solved.

The problems were solved by the relocation aide in only 22.1% of the cases, however, according to the clients. The respondents did feel that the aides were interested in their problems (73.4%) even though, in most cases, aides did not help solve their problems. Among responses there seemed to be an important relationship between the aide's interest in the client and the client's lack of problems. One hundred and five persons said that the aide was interested in their situation, and 62 of these said they had no problems. On the other hand, 37 persons said the aide was not interested, and 11 of these said they had no problems. We could not actually determine whether the aides were more interested in those with fewer problems or whether the figures represented a satisfaction with the process of moving on the part of the clients.

Relocated individuals were asked the following questions: "When you first thought about moving, what things were most important to you in looking for a new location?" and "Now that you have relocated, what were the important reasons for moving where you did?" The answers most often specified space, reasonable rent, privacy, transportation, and schools. It appeared from the data that most of the clients' expectations were fulfilled, the one exception being that some moved to the only place available. Significantly, this applied most often to blacks in the 3rd Ward.

After the move, the clients generally found that their houses were in better shape, with more room and that the neighborhood had better shopping and health facilities, as compared to the area from which they had moved. These comparisons were not true in all cases, but as a whole, the new locations were perceived as being superior to the old ones. Clients were also asked about other problems in the social service sector and related areas: 77.1% of those who answered this question said they had not received any help with these problems, and 43.1% stated that the urban renewal administration should have helped.

*Relocation and Feelings of Victimization.* With the above information as a back-

ground, it now seems necessary to review the clients' perception and overall attitudes toward urban renewal. They were asked, "Do you think urban renewal is a good thing?" and "Do you think that you were treated fairly by urban renewal?" Of 148 persons answering the first, 14 categorically said "No," 105 said "Yes," and 29 said "Probably good." The greater number of negative responses were from whites now in private apartments, and those with low incomes. As for being treated fairly, of the 147 persons who answered this question, 98 said "Yes," 20 said "Probably," and 29 said "No." The people who seemed to feel that they were not treated fairly were the blacks, individuals not relocated into public housing, and individuals who had been relocated less than 6 months.

*Overall Assessment by Relocates.* Although the respondents expressed a mixture of opinions and some dissatisfaction, most of them seemed to feel that urban renewal was a good thing (or, in any case, an inevitable one). They did not seem to view themselves as victimized, nor did they feel uprooted from their old neighborhoods; neither could they be characterized as grieving for a lost home. In sum, they were generally satisfied with their new locations. We also found that the client's evaluation of the program depended ultimately upon the degree to which his or her personal interests were satisfied.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The methodology of the Rochester survey makes it advisable to employ caution in generalizing either to other renewal situations or about the relocation process, since we did not have a before and after comparative design and interviewed only those who had been permanently relocated. We did note that our findings were at variance with those reported in some other studies:

*Management.* Our findings did not provide direct information on management as a variable; however, the treatment of clients by management appeared to have affected the opinions of the relocatees on the project managements. We suggest that future studies avoid generalizations

about relocation at large or urban renewal as an entity, and consider specific projects individually. One study, (Sadacca *et al* 1974) has shown that firm but responsive management increases client satisfaction in housing projects.

*Individual Expectations.* Facing the agency is an array of individual expectations of persons to be relocated. Relocation is bound to be disruptive to people, even under the best conditions. Legislation alone, such as the 1970 Relocation Act, cannot guarantee fair treatment, nor can it ensure that experiences of inconvenience will be minimized. As Laurence T. Cagle and Irwin Deutscher (1970) demonstrated, what clients expect is important in their evaluations of the moves they experience. If it is the aim of the administrators (and the public at large) to be "fair," the expectations of the clients will be sounded out and attended to. Such an approach will convert (to the degree the community makes resources available) relocation from an experience in which the costs are borne by the displaced to one in which the displaced profit as much as they lose (Schorr 1975).

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