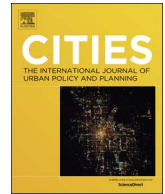


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# Tenure mixing to combat public housing stigmatization: External benefits, internal challenges and contextual influences in three Dublin neighborhoods

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## 1. Introduction

Stigmatization of public housing neighborhoods is not a widespread problem in Western Europe but there is evidence that it is a growing problem for both individual public housing neighborhoods and, in some countries, for the tenure as a whole (Scanlon, Whitehead, & Arrigoitia, 2014). Furthermore, where it does occur, stigma has very negative implications for public housing residents' quality of life and life chances (Warr, 2006). Consequently, this is an increasing concern for governments and policy on the provision of new public housing and regeneration of existing public housing neighborhoods often identify combating stigma as a key objective.

Combatting stigma in public housing is a key concern among policy makers in the Republic of Ireland and this article critically assesses the mechanism most commonly employed to achieve this – ‘income mixing’ or ‘poverty deconcentration’ of public rented neighborhoods by encouraging households with a wider mix of incomes to live there. This is most commonly achieved by ‘tenure mixing’ - providing private housing alongside public housing on the grounds that occupants of the former tenure tend to have higher incomes than occupants of the latter. This policy has been commonplace in Western Europe, Australia and North America for several decades (see: Arthurson, 2008; Musterd & Andersson, 2005) but in the Irish context its use dates back to the late 1990s when the Dublin Docklands Development Agency, which was responsible for regenerating the former port area of this city, stipulated that all private housing developments in its operational area should include a minimum of 20% of public housing (Moore, 2008). This policy was subsequently extended nationwide by the 2000 Planning Act which enabled local government to take up to 20% of private developments for public housing for rent or for ‘affordable housing’ for sale at cost price to low income home buyers. Although neither policy was explicitly justified with reference to its potential for combatting stigma, Lawton's (2015) research with policy makers indicates that this concern was a key inspiration behind these reforms. Similarly, Roberts (2015: 64) reports that in the case of the DDDA the tenure mixing “idea was taken from experiences in the Netherlands and Belgium which shows that integration helps reduce the stigma of social housing”. Since the

late 1990s almost every programme for the regeneration of unpopular public housing neighborhoods in Irish cities has included tenure mixing interventions which are often justified as a destigmatizing measure (e.g. Ballymun Regeneration Ltd., 2007; Cork City Council, 2011; Whyte, 2005; Redmond & Russell, 2008).

This article draws together empirical research on three public housing neighborhoods in Dublin - Ireland's capital and largest city - and insights from the critical geography and urban studies literature, to critically examine the effectiveness of tenure mixing as a public housing destigmatizing tool. The three cases examined here are ideal for this purpose because they have been subject to almost all of the tenure mixing strategies employed in Ireland including: mixing as a condition of planning permission or as part of the regeneration of existing dwellings; tax incentives; public private partnerships and sale of affordable housing to low income home buyers. Furthermore, the Irish public housing sector has contracted radically in recent decades (it housed 18.4% of households in 1961 but just 9.7% in 2016) and is now strongly residualized (i.e. dominated by low-income and otherwise marginalized households) therefore it is a prime candidate for stigmatization (Central Statistics Office, various years; Redmond & Norris, 2014). The critical geography and urban studies literature highlights the ambivalent and contradictory role of state responses to public housing stigmatization, which can reinforce rather than reinforce rather that resolve this problem or generate other negative consequences. It also links these responses to flawed analyses of the causes of stigmatization which fail to take full account of the political and socio-economic structures that produce socio-spatial inequality. The empirical research on the use of tenure mixing as a public housing destigmatization measure which is reported here echoes these analysis by demonstrating that intervention also produces contradictory results – in terms of reduced external stigma but heightened internal stigmatization – and linking these outcomes to the policy and socio-economic contextual factors which we argue which play a central but underappreciated role in shaping the implementation of tenure mixing and its impact public housing stigmatization.

The discussion of these issues presented here is organized into four further sections. The next section critically reviews the existing

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literature on stigma and public housing and on the use of tenure mixing to destigmatize these neighborhoods. This is followed by an outline of the characteristics of the case-study neighborhoods and of how the research was conducted. The main body of the article then examines the implementation of tenure mixing in the case study neighborhoods and its impact on their external and internal stigmatization. The article concludes by highlighting the key findings and learning for housing policy and practice which arises from this analysis.

## 2. Stigmatization of public housing and tenure mixing responses: a critical review

Erving Goffman's (1963) work, which examines how 'spoiled identities' can become attached to individuals and groups, was one of the first attempts to think systematically about the stigmatization. Subsequent research has expanded his framework to demonstrate that *place* is also a distinct domain of stigmatization and to conceptualize its operation (Warr, 2006). For instance, Wacquant (2007) employs Goffman's (1963) theory to conceptualize how structural, institutional and cultural mechanisms operate to construct particular geographical communities as tainted 'sites of deprivation' and how place often interacts with other dimensions of stigma such as socio-economic status and ethnicity.

Research has revealed that public housing is an increasing site of stigmatization due primarily to housing and urban development policy drivers. In particular, the residualization of public housing in many western European countries in recent decades, often combined with the expansion of home ownership and the "normalization" of this tenure as the one in which most people should aspire to live, has helped to characterize public housing as a 'tenure of last resort' (Jacobs & Flanagan, 2013).

Hastings (2004) notes that discussions of the causes of public housing stigmatization among policy makers and in the media often focus, at times unintentionally, on pathological explanations which portray tenants as a "moral underclass" and thereby problematize the tenure (Westergaard, 1992). The pervasiveness of this discourse is demonstrated by Cole and Smith's (1996) analysis of a public housing neighborhood in Northern England where local people identified a high proportion of lone parent residents as the root of its stigmatization, despite the lack of evidence of any association between lone parenthood and anti-social behavior. This is an example of how stigmatization often involves the amplification of cultural differences and operates through an array of factors such as local history, media influences and entrenched myths and stereotypes (Cole & Smith, 1996; Wassenberg, 2004).

Jacobs and Flanagan (2013) draw attention to the way in which poverty and public housing are also often conflated in these pathological discourses because all public housing residents are perceived to be members of a low-income socio-economic group, for example, unemployed people and vice versa. Such generalizations can contribute to complacency about stigma and a perception that the situation of public housing residents results from poor life choices rather than the impact of socio-economic inequality which impedes exit from poverty (Arthurson, 2004).

In a similar vein, the critical geography literature draws attention to the ways in which discourses about 'problem places' risk producing and reproducing stigma by implying that these neighborhoods are populated by 'problem people' (Gray & Mooney, 2011). Confusion between correlation and causation in explanations of neighborhoods is one mechanism through which this occurs. Discourses which emphasize the association between stigmatized social housing neighborhoods and anti-social behavior or addiction, for example, can imply that addiction or anti-social behavior cause stigma. Slater's (2013) critique of the enormous body of research on 'neighborhood effects' – which suggests that additional social problems are generated by spatial concentrations of low income households - is also instructive here because stigma is

one of the neighborhood effects most commonly identified in this literature. He argues that this literature focuses on how where people live affects their life chances, but fails to address *why people live where they do*. Thus, by eschewing the structural political and especially economic dynamics that produce socio-spatial inequality, this research risks implying that poor neighborhoods precipitate their own decline and thereby reinforce their stigmatization (Slater, 2013).

The insights generated from these critiques of discourse on public housing stigmatization are also relevant to tenure mixing which is one of the most commonly used destigmatization measures. For instance Crump (2002) points that in common with much of the discourse on neighborhood effects, tenure mixing policy is underpinned by the assumption that spatial concentrations of low-income households exacerbate problems of poverty and stigma. Therefore, like the neighborhood effects discourse, tenure mixing policy can be criticized for implying that stigmatized neighborhoods have contributed to their own stigmatization. Second, the idea that low-income individuals or neighborhoods will benefit from contact with higher-income populations is often cited as a rationale for tenure mixing. In its most simplistic iterations, the transmission of middle class behavioral norms (e.g. two parent families and commitment to education or employment) or 'home ownership cultures' is therefore presented as a solution to stigma (Crump, 2002). Third, the critical geography and urban studies literature reveals that tenure mixing of existing public housing communities often involves their partial or total destruction by demolishing and rebuilding the dwellings and/or by replacing public housing with home owner housing. Crump (2002: 592) also notes that demolition 'erases from the landscape the highly stigmatized structures of public housing, aiding in the reimagining of the city as a safe zone of commerce, entertainment and culture'. In this sense, tenure mixing can in some instances form part of neoliberal urban governance strategies (Gray & Mooney, 2011).

In addition to critiques of tenure mixing as a solution to stigmatization of public housing there is also significant empirical research evidence on its effectiveness. Most of this focusses on the tenure mixing of existing public housing estates as part of regeneration schemes. These studies indicate that, when applied in this context, tenure mixing has had some success in reducing the external public image of target neighborhoods but these achievements are limited because, once established, stigmatized public images can be extremely difficult to shift (Arthurson, 2013; Atkinson & Kintrea, 2000; Cole & Smith, 1996; Hastings & Dean, 2003). Even where radical changes are made to a neighborhood's built environment and tenure mix, the general public may continue to associate it with crime, drug use etc. and this is also true of media professionals and of other influential actors such as estate agents who, it would be expected to have greater awareness of the changing socio-economic profile of a particular neighborhood (Gourlay, 2007).

Tenure mixing seems to be much more effective in combating external stigmatization of public housing when applied to new developments. Public housing residents of neighborhoods which were mixed tenure from the outset experience far less place-based stigma than that associated with traditional mono-tenure public housing developments. This appears to be because these neighborhoods are not ever regarded as public rented and are thus affected to a lesser degree by the external stigmatization of this tenure (Allen et al., 2005; Arthurson, 2013). It can be argued, however, that such interventions do not tackle the stigmatization of public housing *per se*, but instead deal with stigma by reducing the amount of public housing (Ruming, Mee and McGuirk, 2004).

A significant body of research has also found that public housing tenants in mixed tenure developments can experience intensified forms of internal stigma, particularly from non-public renting neighbors (Ruming, Mee and McGuirk, 2004). Public housing tenants are often identified by privately housed neighbors the cause of any problems which arise regardless of evidence and can be excluded from decision-

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