Getting it right on the second try?
Tenants’ views on the redevelopment of Toronto’s Regent Park public housing

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OVERVIEW

• Introduction, background
• Re-redevelopment of Regent Park
• Research methods
• Results
  • Resettlement outcomes
  • Communications issues
  • Tenant satisfaction with new housing
  • New amenities, services in mixed use community
  • Social mix
  • Cultural meanings of housing
• Conclusions
1950s slum clearance
Modernist design
  • Garden City, Towers in the Park
Located off the street grid
A stigmatized community
Planners blamed for social ills
Community featuring innovative services, agencies
Diverse population, immigrants, young families, large families
RESEARCH CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

- Goal: Understand Phase 1 tenants’ experiences of displacement and resettlement
- Collect tenants’ suggestions of ways to improve the displacement, relocation, resettlement process
- Document tenants’ evaluation of new housing, community
- Discover who returns inside the original boundaries? Who moves outside? Why?
METHOD

- Qualitative longitudinal study, 2006-2014
- Phase 1 tenants
- Volunteer sample, n=52 households
- Personal interviews with tenants and key informants
  - Observation of some tenant interviews with relocation counselors
- Informal, in-kind support from TCHC housing authority
- Waterloo University research team
Comparing Regent Park to public housing elsewhere

- Ethno-cultural diversity, immigrant settlement, not black/white racial segregation
- Long tradition of community engagement
- Relatively low density development
- Exclusively residential land use
- Many larger housing units, including 4 and 5 bedrooms
Notable features in redevelopment

- Public-private partnership, social mix
- Right of Return for original RGI tenants in good standing
- 1-1 replacement of 2083 RGI units, with units of like size
- Three off-site locations
- Redevelopment objective: Reconnect Regent Park with surrounding area
- Tenure blind architecture
- Increased density, mixed use
- New public spaces, amenities, sports, recreation, educational facilities
Figure 1  LOCATION OF REGENT PARK IN THE CITY OF TORONTO
Findings: Sense of community, power of place

- Residents expressed strong feelings of community
- Building portraits: Symbolic meanings, sense of loss
- Souvenirs, mementos are treasured
  - Bricks, tattoos, email addresses
- Ties cross ethno-cultural groupings
- Some former neighbours wished to be re-housed together
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resettlement outcome</th>
<th>Number of study households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resettled in new housing in Regent Park</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resettled in new housing nearby but about 1 km outside Regent Park footprint</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awaiting new housing in Regent Park</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved out of public (TCHC) housing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed in alternative TCHC housing</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status unknown/Lost</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 52
Figure 2
Phase 1 tenants’ housing outcome, per cents, 2014, sample & population
Sources: Survey (n=52) and TCHC (N=380)
PHASE 1 FINDINGS at MIDPOINT

• About 60% RGI tenants returned
  • From Phase 1 sample, 21/52 returned inside footprint, 10 in new units outside footprint
  • 5 moved off-site by choice; 5 settled for off-site

• Revised plan altered proportions of RGI and market units, from 40% / 60% to 25% / 75%

• Some tenants wanted to relocate near neighbours; request denied by TCHC.

• Communication: tenants and housing authority
  • Rumours, gossip channels; Idea of screening; “send a man”
  • Tenants not permitted to view available new housing units before lease signed
  • Some tenants had difficulty reading plans
Tenants pleased with new housing
- Exceptions: open kitchens, small room sizes
Tenants appreciated most new amenities, services, facilities
Those returning from off-site appreciated Regent Park’s central location and walkability
FINDINGS: Communication issues between tenants and TCHC

• Relocation was stressful; many tenants were critical of TCHC
• Lack of communication about procedures: First come, first served was demeaning, disorganized
• Frustration when changed to lottery
• Suspicions that TCHC was screening out “undesirables”
• Some felt pressured to resettle outside the original boundary
• Challenge of reading plans → feelings of incompetence, dependency
• Consultation isn’t participation; some residents wanted real planning role
• Cultural values influence housing preferences
• Role of youth in interpreting policies to immigrant parents
CONCLUSIONS

• Relocation is stressful, changing policies especially difficult
• Neighbours develop bonds of friendship, relocation disrupts them
• Communication is important to keep tenants current
• Housing has important cultural meaning
• Technology can be used to illustrate new housing options
• Youth play important role in interpreting housing authority policy
REFERENCES


• Johnson, L.C. and S. Fernandes. 2013. “Ask a Professor” presentation, Oct 23, 2013, TD Centre of Learning, Regent Park

Forthcoming
