



Mixed-income developments and low rates of return: insights from relocated public housing residents in Chicago

Park O. Moseph^{a*} and Robert M. Chaskin^b

^aMandel School of Applied Social Sciences, Case Western Reserve University, 10900 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH, USA; ^bSchool of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

In the largest poverty deconcentration effort in any city in the US, all high-rise public housing family developments in Chicago have been demolished and are being replaced by mixed-income developments. Advocates for public housing

Table 1. Location of relocated family households in December 2010.

Location/status	Number (n)	Percent (%)
Public housing	1,896	11.25
Traditional public housing development*	3,395	20.15
Housing choice voucher*	4,097	24.32
Exit after relocation ¹	1,307	7.76
Leaving without public housing subsidy, retaining right to return	1,240	7.36
Evicted	1,488	8.83
Deceased	1,221	7.25
Lost contact	2,202	13.07
Total	16,846	100.00

Note. Source: Chicago Housing Authority, 2011. *Includes residents who have yet to make their final housing choice. ¹Exit includes deceased, evicted, and voluntary exits from public housing after satisfying right to return.

2010, 2011).⁴ Thus, relatively few relocated public housing residents are benefiting directly from the major investment that is being made in mixed-income housing.

One part of the explanation for the current low return rate is the major delays in unit construction. Over 10 years into the transformation, a little over one-third of the intended units for relocated public housing residents have been completed.⁵ But even the units that have been completed have been unexpectedly challenging to fill (Leushey 2008; Moseph 2008, 2010; Olivo 2005a,b; Rogal 2005).

The relocation and return challenges experienced in Chicago have also been encountered in other cities across the US that are implementing federal KOPH and public housing redevelopment grants (Disneros and Hngdahl 2009; Popkin 2007; Popkin et al. 2004). Domey (2007) reported that the average return rate was 5 percent across the four housing developments in the Urban Institute KOPH and Panel Study; the development with the highest rate reported only 14 percent of former residents returning. It should be noted that none of the four developments were fully complete at the time of the survey; yet Domey (2007, 2) suggests that, based on national trends, the rates at these four sites will remain relatively low. Similarly, Euron et al. (2002) reported that across the country, rates of return to revitalized KOPH and developments averaged 14 percent (see also Parquis and Johnson 2008).

These low rates of return substantiate the concerns of critics of public housing transformation who see this as a means of displacing the poor and reclaiming valuable central-city land for the middle class (Ehennett, Smith and Wright 2006; Ivaser and Nick 2007; Joetz 2003; Lombrosio 2008). It raises questions about the

⁴ The maximum return rate, if all projected units in mixed-income developments allocated for relocated public housing residents are completed and filled by original residents, would be only about 46 percent since 7,704 such units are planned. A more realistic maximum projection at this point would be 30 percent, given that 52 percent of relocatees have exercised their final housing choice and 28 percent are deceased or ill.

What are residents' perceptions of mixed-income developments as a potential residence for themselves and their families? What specific benefits and challenges do low-income families anticipate from living there?

The article is structured as follows. First, we review available literature on involuntary public housing relocation. We then describe our methods and respondent sample and provide more background details on the relocation process in Chicago. We then share our findings about residents' relocation decisions.⁷ Finally, we consider implications for mixed-income relocation practice and policy.

Literature review

The most consistent findings from existing research on involuntary relocation are that public housing residents' choices from among their relocation options are driven strongly by attachment to place and attachment to neighbors (Clampet-Oundquist 2004; Jibson 2007; Nleit and Jalvez 2011; Nleit and Panzo 2004; Panzo, Nleit, and Couch 2008; Sale 1997; Venkatesh 2002). Through both household surveys and in-depth interviews, residents express an overarching preference to remain in their neighborhood if possible and not leave the environment with which they are most familiar. Research by Joetz (2010) on resident relocation outcomes suggests that those residents who are more attached to their original development report lower neighborhood satisfaction and safety improvements after their move. The majority of residents move to nearby locations (Popkin et al. 2004). Residents who decide not to move away from a particular development site also often cite social ties and proximity to family as a key rationale for staying (Clampet-Oundquist 2004; Nleit and Jalvez 2011; Nleit and Panzo 2004; Sale 1997). These relationships are key to providing various forms of informal social support such as childcare, bartering, informal credit from local storeowners, and connections to resources from churches and other nonprofits (Venkatesh and Delimli 2004).

When residents do make a decision to move to a different location, their decision is highly place-dependent, to use Nleit and Panzo's (2004) term. Residents who decide to move indicate that they are seeking an opportunity to improve neighborhood quality (Clampet-Oundquist 2004; Domey 2007; Nleit and Panzo 2004) and a sense of community (Jibson 2007). The safety of the neighborhood is often a primary concern as is the quality of local amenities such as schools, shopping, and transportation (Clampet-Oundquist 2004; Jibson 2007; Smith et al. 2002).

On the other hand, some research suggests that relocatee preferences supposedly revealed through their relocation decisions may actually be less about personal choice and more about market and personal constraints (Eoyd 2008; Joetz 2003). For example, dependence on public transportation largely shapes residents' choices and limits the options they can consider or even learn more about (Clampet-Oundquist 2004). In their study of public housing residents in Atlanta, Brooks et al. (2005) found that 90 percent of those living in public housing rely on public transportation and that housing choice voucher holders were four times as likely to have an automobile. Other research finds that residents' decisions are heavily driven by logistical realities such as the availability of suitable housing given their family

⁷ To learn more about Chicago residents' experiences and reactions after having moved into the new developments, see Chaskin and Moseph (2010, 2011, forthcoming) and Moseph and Chaskin (2010).

size and the ease of relocation (Nleit and Panzo 2004; Smith et al. 2002). Using a sophisticated discrete choice statistical model, Nleit and Jalvez (2011) found evidence, at least among a highly ethnically diverse respondent sample relocated from a public housing development in the Pacific Northwest, that personal preferences and social networks appeared to play a more important role than housing market constraints.

Furthermore, some researchers have found evidence of pressure from relocation staff for residents to select a relocation destination from among readily available options, rather than more fully exploring possibilities throughout the metropolitan area (Clomey 2007; Joetz 2003). This research suggests that in many cases, residents' choices may be more influenced by relocation staff's need to move residents quickly rather than an emphasis on understanding and fulfilling resident preferences. Residents often refer to the short time constraints within which they had to identify a unit and make a relocation choice (Clampet-Oundquist 2004; Smith et al. 2002; Venkatesh 2002).

Research further suggests that other factors that influence decision-making include concerns about the challenge of finding landlords who will accept housing choice vouchers (Clampet-Oundquist 2004), a lack of knowledge about options, misinformation about the housing choice voucher program, more stringent screening criteria in the KOPH UL program, and the limited availability of relocation services (Smith et al. 2002).

Informed by their research on the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) poverty deconcentration program, Briggs, Popkin, and Joering (2010) question the very notion of choice that undergirds an increasing number of social programs not only in housing but also in areas such as education and healthcare. Although MTO was a voluntary mobility program that aimed to generate residential choice for families that had been trapped for decades in high-poverty neighborhoods, the researchers found that a number of factors constrained and shaped the families' relocation decisions. As a major lesson of MTO, they conclude:

For poor people who have lived segregated lives in dangerous, high-poverty neighborhoods, conventional choice programs offer little room to maneuver, thanks to the choosers' information poverty, the limited comparisons they are equipped to make, and a logic of choice focused simply on avoiding violence and other risks, not necessarily on garnering opportunity (Briggs, Popkin, and Joering 2010, 19).

Jibson's (2007) study at Columbia University is one of the few available studies that has focused in some depth on resident decisions about their return to a mixed-income development. Her findings support previous research findings about the importance of place attachment. In addition, she uncovered the prime importance for residents of seeing the actual environment to which they are being returned.

to make improvements in housing and neighborhood quality while struggling within numerous constraints including time, information, transportation, and family needs and circumstances. his study leverages access to residents pre- and postrelocation

Table 2. Respondent sample.

	Mazz potential returners	Mazz on the boulevard returners	Oakwood Shores returners	Westhaven Park returners	New informant stakeholders
Sample size	69	23	11	12	47
total population	127	24	200 ¹	293	
Dates interviewed	Feb 2005..Feb 2006 Sept 2009...April 2010	Nov 2005..Jan 2007	Mar..Oct 2007	Mar..Oct 2007	Feb 2005..Oct 2007
Selection method	convenience	random	Random selection	Random selection	convenience

Note. ¹Hestimate.

the transformation. When complete, the development is projected to have 1,317 total units (see table 3).

Relocation procedures differed at the three sites in a few key ways. Unlike the other two developments, the Mazz development was not built on the footprint of a demolished housing development from which residents had been recently relocated. Mazz was built on vacant land owned by the city and the dKx, including land from a public housing complex vacated and demolished well before the start of the transformation (see Pattillo 2007), and was made available to relocating public housing residents from across the city who had expressed an interest in moving to one of two lakefront mixed-income developments that were replacement housing for the Oakefront Properties (Oake Park crescent was the other option).⁹ While many of the relocatees at Oakwood Shores had been temporarily relocated away from the

Table 4. Household characteristics of Relocated Public Housing Residents.

	Mizz potential returners (2005...2006), n = 69	Mizz on the boulevard returners (2005...2007), n = 23	Oakwood Shores and v esthaven Park returners (2007), n = 23	xll mixed-income returners (2008), N = 1,278	xll relocated dKx residents (2008),* N = 9,980
Head of household is female	85.5	95.7	95.7	89.3	88.9
Mean age of household head in years	47.2	47.0	41.3	49.6	48.1

Findings

Our interviews with relocated public housing residents revealed several insights about their perceptions and decision-making rationale. Whether the respondents had decided to return to a mixed-income development or not, there were some common issues that shaped their decision-making. First, we gained a more nuanced understanding of the power of attachment to people and place for public housing residents faced with a relocation decision in the context of tremendous disruption and uncertainty. Second, as Briggs, Popkin, and Joering (2010) found in their P-O research, what we learned greatly problematizes the notion of resident choice that is a major premise of the transformation. Third, we discovered a conception among relocatees, particularly among those who chose to return to mixed-income developments, about the anticipated benefits of mixed-income communities that refute popular theories about the value of higher-income neighbors. Finally, respondents articulated anticipated trade-offs and risks associated with a move to a mixed-income development that helps explain the resistance of some of the residents who have opted not to return.

The power of attachment to place and people

Residents had strong preferences to be in an area of the city with which they were already familiar and wanted to maintain proximity to friends and family.

This was the case for those who had thus far not returned and those who had moved to all three mixed-income developments. The most common explanation given by mixed-income returners for why they ended up in a mixed-income development was their ties to their current location. Over two-thirds of the Oakwood Shores respondents and about half of the Vesthaven Park respondents mentioned their local connections as key to their decision. Unlike the Vesthaven Park residents who all remained on-site during the construction period, some of the Oakwood Shores residents had been temporarily relocated off-site and thus may have given greater consideration to staying away. At Mazz on the Boulevard, which was not built on the site of a recently occupied public housing complex, all residents moved from another location. However, even there, over a quarter of the Mazz movers indicated that they had a strong familiarity with the area, and several mentioned a previous stint living in that neighborhood. Among the nonreturners, a majority mentioned some kind of connection to the area where they were currently living.

Respondents who talked specifically about attachment to place talked about two different types of connections to the community. A few talked about an affective connection to the local community: having lived there for so long they felt an emotional attachment to the area. As a resident who had moved into Vesthaven Park put it, "I've been here all my life so it's like I couldn't see me being anywhere else, seeing that I've been so adapted to this area." A resident who had moved into Oakwood Shores said:

It feels like a big world out there. I somewhat feel sheltered here. I know the people. I know the community. . . . I had no doubts in my mind that I [did not want] to go anywhere else but this area. . . . I've been living in this particular area for 30 [years],

Ker statement suggests that despite the ongoing changes around her, her expectation is that enough will remain familiar in the area around her for her to continue to derive some sense of, in her words, shelter.

For the majority, however, place attachment was less emotional and much more pragmatic. A sense of "this is all I know and this is where I know how to function" permeated respondents' framing of their rationale for their choices. Despite the shortcomings of these areas, respondents had "figured out where and how to get their needs met in their current neighborhood." These respondents mentioned local amenities like public transportation routes, local schools, and other local resources that they relied on for their families. As one respondent who had not returned to a mixed-income development explained in detail:

... living in the city and you're low-income and you don't have the income like that to own a car, then (you have to consider what location) would be best for me when I do start working. Not only that, for schools and childcare... where I am I'm accessible to a lot of different transportation... the aid office is not far. The Post Office is not far. I have so many, you know, accessibilities to anywhere I need to get to. I'm no more than 15 minutes from (downtown)... If I come home late, even if the buses stop running, I can always get home.

Some respondents seemed to question whether other areas to which they had access would really be that much of an improvement: "I figured I would stay with an area I knew wasn't so bad" was the way one respondent put it (emphasis added).

Those who had ended up in unfamiliar areas when their old developments were demolished had worked hard to develop connections and attachments to the new

Because the Mazz development tried to attract residents from all around the city, the low return rates in that particular development are in many cases due to the individual wanting to stay where they were and not move all the way across the city to an unfamiliar area. As one nonreturner told us:

I wanted to come where my family and where I knew I would be safe and I moved back to [my original public housing development]. . . . I've been here all my life. I mean I don't have to worry about no one breaking into my home, no one really harassing me. I can walk the streets at night safely because everybody in the area knows me.

Others invoked their social networks much more instrumentally in their decision-making process, in effect ensuring that within a context of uncertainty, they would retain some social ties in their residential location. Respondents talked about a family member or a friend who had moved into the new mixed-income development "first, and through whom they were able to get a sense of what living there would be like. For example, a respondent at Oakwood Shores who returned to the site after having moved away temporarily told us: "My friend moved over here "first, so I got a chance to see how it looked and stuff . . . when my sister moved over here. . . . when I . . . moved over here. Similarly, a respondent at Vesthaven Park who moved directly from one of the remaining high-rises in Kenry Korner Komes said: "I wanted to see how things was going to go "first with the "first group they moved in. They liked it, it was nice, so I decided just to [move here]. Some respondents had family needs that required them to stay close to familial support. As one nonreturner stated: "I have a disabled daughter and I don't want to move far away from family members who are there to help me.

In general then, a very pragmatic, instrumental focus pervaded respondents' descriptions of their attachment to people and place. While there were certainly those with emotional attachments to places where they have lived for so long, far more often respondents described practical factors such as access to public transportation and proximity to work and family supports as factors in their decision about where to live.

Problematizing the notion of "choice"

It is important to remember that these decisions were taking place under very difficult circumstances: deteriorating physical and social conditions in the old developments, public housing residents facing numerous economic and health challenges, and a public agency building a massive relocation system on the "y while racing to get units demolished and rebuilt. While eligibility criteria certainly prevented or deterred many residents from returning to mixed-income developments, the choices of relocatees who may have been interested and eligible to return were constrained. Even beyond the question of eligibility, numerous respondents expressed that they felt pressured into a particular choice due to circumstances beyond their control, rather than having made careful, well-informed decisions. Constraints expressed by respondents in our sample included time pressure, bureaucratic hurdles, family needs and circumstances, lack of information, and steering from relocation counselors.

About a third of the respondents at each of the three sites explicitly mentioned time pressures or other constraints that made them feel that their options were limited and they had to settle for whatever options were available quickly. For some

respondents, the situation in their former public housing development had become so unbearable that they wanted to, as one respondent put it, take the “first thing that came available. These respondents wanted to move as soon as possible. One respondent from Oakwood Shores explained further:

My whole focus was just moving. You know, I'm just like, anything has to be better than where I'm staying right now. That's all ... I mean, to be honest, that's what I was thinking. And that was my whole just focus ... I have to get out of here.

Another nonreturner described a similar challenge of time pressure:

The time of my Section 8 ... was running out, and they said that I had to make a quick move. So I found a place ... I had to accept it and I ended up in the basement of a building, apartment building over there. ... I really, really, really think you know it would've been more suitable for my disabled daughter [to move somewhere else], but again we had to accept what they gave us because I didn't have any more time on my voucher and I was led to believe that if I didn't do it in the time that I had left that I wasn't entitled to get another extension. So it's like you know we were running against time.

Although some were willing to move anywhere to get away from their current development, some mixed-income returners said that they would have actually preferred to have taken a housing choice voucher, but could not due to bureaucratic hurdles and the length of time that it would take to get approved for the voucher and then “find a rental unit where they could use it. For others, the constraining issues were personal circumstances such as health or lack of transportation. For those in poor health, it was not possible to visit numerous apartments around the city in order to “find one that would work. Some respondents talked about how important access to public transportation was to their choice, given that they did not own a car. One respondent at Vesthaven Park said: Now if I would've had a car, I would've chosen Section 8, which I kinda regret. ... I've always wanted to move away from the neighborhood cause I've been over here so much. This raises an important point about the need to interpret the decision to move or not move and the ultimate choice of location as a revealed preference within very real constraints. In his particular respondent, unlike others who were seeking to stay put, wanted to seize this opportunity to move away but could not. Of those residents who expressed a strong desire to exit the public housing environment, some aimed to cut as many ties as possible, but more looked to distance themselves and their families from specific negative and harmful people and circumstances while maintaining access and proximity, where possible, to supportive social connections.

Finally, confirming the concerns of advocates and observers about the nature of the administrative processes underway, there were a substantial number of respondents who did not seem to be fully aware of the range of choices that they could have made or who exercised no deliberate choice at all. One nonreturner said I really didn't know too much about none of (the options), I just randomly picked. Another nonreturner described the challenge of limited or conflicting information:

You've never have enough information. ... When you ask your neighbors, if you ask “ve people, you'll get “ve different things. You've got to draw conclusions from that there. [cut] you want to hear from the reliable source.

the dominant aspect of the mixed-income environment that attracted most of the respondents, not necessarily the presence of higher-income people.

×almost every respondent at Oakwood Shores and about half of the respondents at v esthaven Park and Mazz on the eoulevard mentioned the opportunity to live in new, well-designed, and well-maintained housing as the major attraction of the mixed-income developments. I or some, the clean and well-functioning units and buildings themselves were the draw. Oower density and moving from high-rise to lower-rise buildings was mentioned by several. ×s respondent from v esthaven Park described it: L “gured it was going to be a better environment ;than] the project;s]. ×nything is better than that. v e are not stacked on top of each other no more like sardines. I or some, the overall development had an attractive feel to it. Some commented that it felt like an a uent neighborhood. ×s another respondent at

× Mazz returner echoed that sentiment: “because these people paying all of this rent, they’re not going to have people over there just destroying everything. So you understand I just feel it will be better. Respondents explained their hope that they were getting away from the noise, loitering, drug dealing, and other problematic behavior that often characterized their former developments. Several expected to feel much safer among the mixed population. ×s one put it:

It does feel good to just be somewhere where . . . they bring in other types of all individuals into the neighborhood. That just makes you feel better, because you feel more safer, like who you’re living next to.

Contrary to the policy rhetoric about the benefits of direct interactions among people of different income levels, most of those respondents who did talk about the benefits of being around higher-income residents talked about what it would mean for the general environment as opposed to ways it would change their own individual patterns of behavior. For example, a respondent at Oakwood Shores talked about the chance for what she called a “new beginning”:

So for me, it was something that I felt like I was gonna improve. I felt like . . . my neighbors could be someone that’s making [a lot of money], I’m like, wow, I’m really excited. My lifestyle, my way of living is about to change, not meaning personally inside my apartment but my environment is about to change. I was excited to hear that we would be living in a mixed-income market rent-paying environment [emphasis added].

The brand new physical environment and general social and economic improvements in mixed-income developments appear far more compelling to residents than the hope of new instrumental interpersonal relationships with higher-income families. Only a handful of respondents across the three sites seemed to be anticipating more direct benefits of being around a different mix of people. These respondents talked generally about looking forward to being around people of different races and backgrounds but were not very specific about any actual benefits they thought they could get from being around more affluent neighbors. ×s one respondent at Oakwood Shores described, it is better to have a mix of neighbors: “because you get to meet more peoples. ×ou get to talk, have fun and kinda communicate with one another. × respondent who did not return described her vision of the benefits of being around a mixed-income population:

I’d like to know about other cultures. . . . I’d like to know about those people. I’d want to know. See what makes others tick. ×nd they’re people, they’re just like me. So that, because I’m interested, and I love people, from a distance . . . it might be a good time in

Policy and practice implications

property managers have held open houses and provided tours of model units. Perhaps there are ways of including current residents more fully in this process to help describe the benefits of life in a mixed-income development.

assistance, and marketing, facilitating return is likely to require addressing some of the complications of community dynamics that are emerging in the new mixed-income developments and that temper relocated public housing residents' experience

