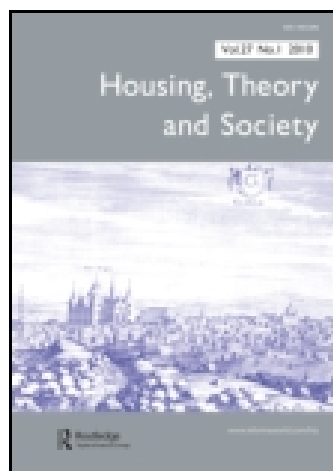


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Mixed Communities: Gentrification by Stealth?

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BOOK REVIEWS

Mixed communities: gentrification by stealth?

Gary Bridge, Tim Butler & Loretta Lees (Eds)

Bristol: The Policy Press, 2010, ISBN 978-1-84742-493-8.

This book seeks to bridge the gap between two prominent urban topics: gentrification and the policy and practice of social mixing. While both of these subjects have been extensively studied separately, few scholarly works have attempted to analyse the links between them. *Mixed Communities: Gentrification by Stealth* aims to redress this gap in the literature by examining a diverse set of case studies in the cities in Europe, North America and Australia.

The editors question the commonly held policy belief that social mixing brings benefits to lower income communities and the book aims to challenge the often uncritically accepted assertion that social mix is a positive factor for urban change. They attempt to bring the gentrification debate, which is often much more critically oriented, into academic and policy discussions surrounding social mixing, by arguing that contemporary gentrification and social mixing are virtually the same process. According to the editors, gentrification, which they define as “the movement of middle-income people into low-income neighbourhoods causing the displacement of all, or many, of the pre-existing low-income residents” (p. 1), is “rhetorically and discursively disguised as social mixing” (Ibid.), a term which implies much less of a class-based tone.

In the introduction, three main critiques of social mixing policies are outlined. First, social mix tends to be one-sided and is rarely advocated in affluent areas. Because it is encouraged and promoted in lower income neighbourhoods, it is the first step towards the total gentrification of an area. Second, they question the extent to which different groups occupying the same space will actually mix; in this argument, they challenge the assumption that closer physical ties will lead to closer social ties. And third, they do not accept the argument that a more mixed community will produce a more cohesive and harmonious community and in fact take the opposite view that: these types of communities could foster more conflicts and tension. These critiques are all examined in more detail in the various chapters of the book.

The different contributions to this book lead to the general conclusion that social mixing policies are largely ineffective in improving the lives of low-income urban residents. Instead, they argue that urban policy should focus on improving the lives of poorer residents through social mobility, rather than moving them out of their neighbourhoods, or encouraging affluent households to move in.

The contributions to this book come from a wide variety of different authors, including well-established scholars in gentrification research, such as David Ley, who provides a very detailed and insightful historical overview of the relationship between gentrification and social mixing. Also included are several chapters from younger scholars. Notable amongst these is Kisteen Paton's examination of the Glasgow neighbourhood of Partick. From a theoretical perspective, she argues that the middle class is now seen as the only class in the gentrification debate, at the expense of the working class. She questions the idea that the middle class can be the saviour of the city because "it offers a cultural solution to fix economic and structural issues of poverty, unemployment and the decline of the built environment" (p. 255). Her research is based on ethnographic work exploring the everyday lives of working-class residents in the neighbourhood.

The chapters are relatively short and most deal with one specific geographical area (either at the city or nation-state level). Many provide a very good overview of the relationship between gentrification and social mixing in that particular place either by reviewing and assessing urban policies or by providing an in-depth analysis of the histories and trajectories of the processes more generally; Rebecca Tunstall's contribution does this very succinctly for the UK. Other chapters focus on a very specific case, examining one aspect of social mixing in greater detail. The contribution by Marie-Hélène Bacqué and Yankel Fijalkow begins with an overview of developments in France before turning to the Goutte d'Or neighbourhood in Paris, where they examine not only factual changes such as house prices, but also urban policies promoting gentrification and the tensions and conflicts which have arisen as a result of the middle class arrival into this immigrant, working-class neighbourhood. The HOPE VI programme in the USA is examined and critiqued by James Fraser, James DeFilippis and Joshua Bazuin. They use qualitative interviews with HOPE VI residents in Nashville. Their discourses reveal that it is the affordability of the housing and training and opportunities offered by the programme which makes a real difference, and based on this they question one of the fundamental justifications for mixed-income housing that: social and cultural capital will spread from higher income to lower income residents. The only example from the southern hemisphere is Kate Shaw's contribution on Melbourne, which provides both a good review of gentrification and social mix in the city and the state of Victoria, with specific examples of redevelopment within Melbourne.

There are two small points which could have strengthened the book and made the main arguments more compelling. First, notwithstanding the examples mentioned above, there is a lack of empirical evidence or chapters which analyse first-hand data. As previously mentioned, many chapters give a very good review and assessment of policy, or recent developments, but the main arguments in the book could have been strengthened by more empirical research. Chapters focusing on the middle class experiences of mixing, or how different groups experience the same space (an avenue for future research that the editors note in their afterword), would have given the critiques of social mix more weight. Second, most of the chapters deal with case studies in western Europe and North America. Kate Shaw's above mentioned overview of Melbourne and Wendy Shaw's review of the state of social mixing in Australasia are exceptions to this, but some further studies from different locations would have been useful to put the processes and experiences of social mix in a more global context.

Despite these issues, this book can be very useful to both academics and practitioners. This is particularly true for the latter; by including more critical voices from gentrification research, this book provides a new perspective for policy-makers, planners and politicians, who tend to be much more focused on the social mixing debate, which is less critical and class-based in its analysis. Therefore, in addition to being a using resource for students and academics examining the relationship between gentrification and social mix, it should also serve as essential reading for those planning, implementing and promoting social mix because it provides a much more critically oriented analysis of one of the biggest processes shaping contemporary cities and neighbourhoods.

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Social Mix and the City: Challenging the Mixed Communities Consensus in Housing and Urban Planning Policies

Kathy Arthurson

Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2012, ISBN 9780643096424

This slim volume is a nicely judged and timely contribution to housing debates. Its stated intent is to unravel the Australian experience of social mix, and it does so in exemplary fashion.

The book begins with an historical account of the concept of social mix and its usage, beginning in Victorian Britain. Arthurson takes the reader through the variously revised interpretations of the post-war period and the 1970s, bringing us up to contemporary incarnations. In Australia, these are largely situated in the context of public housing estate renewal programmes, and the remainder of the book reflects this, although the discussions for and against social mix policies apply as much to other disinvested areas and similar debates in the gentrification literature.

Chapter 5, “Great expectations and the unexpected consequences of social mix policies”, is the pivotal chapter, really clarifying contemporary issues and nailing the key debates. Arthurson then takes us into three case studies from her home state of South Australia to illustrate her central themes before drawing them together in a satisfying conclusion.

The arguments for social mix policies – the engineered introduction of privately tenured, middle-class households into areas characterized by disinvestment and poverty, usually public housing estates – can be summarized into four main streams: to neutralize/disperse concentrations of disadvantage and their accompanying revolutionary/disruptive threats; to provide middle-class role models to demonstrate to disadvantaged people how to behave; to add a middle-class voice to efforts for improved local funding and infrastructure and potentially more equitable distribution of resources; and to mitigate negative neighbourhood effects by increasing the sense of community and social integration, and reducing stigma.