

Re-mobilization and Re-socialization support for disadvantaged household in public housing community: case study of Osaka city, Japan

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ABSTRACT

Public housing has been the largest program of housing subsidies to low-income families in the United States for fifty years (Olsen and Barton, 1983). This characteristic of public housing as a support for social minority has been widely admitted and adopted in most countries. However, as Crump (2002) notices that during the 1990s, local and federal urban policymakers, neoliberal politicians, and advocates for the poor came to a broad consensus: the geographic concentration of low-income, minority residents in public housing projects located in the inner city constitutes the fundamental problem facing US cities. This unavoidable nature is also described vividly in most public housing projects of different countries.

This study aims at challenging some conventional perspectives on public housing by operating the case research of public housing community in Osaka city. We would like to figure out, first, whether public housing actually is an appropriate scheme for solving the demand of disadvantaged household? Or only contribute to further social segregation and exclusion? Second, as Kleita (2001) propose that social networks are vital links to larger social systems and the neighborhood networks of low-income people may thus influence their access to opportunity. We wonder if disadvantaged household moved into public housing lose their existing social network and whether the public housing community provides them with a new and strong social network. Final, we wonder if the public housing community provides support for disadvantaged household to achieve re-mobilization and re-socialization, in other words to get socially and economically independent.

This study tries to provide empirical proof from the qualitative field research to answer the above research questions. We will propose some policy implication according to the practical experience of the public housing community in Osaka, Japan.

KEYWORDS

Public housing, re-socialization, re-mobilization, disadvantaged household, social network

1.0 Introduction

Public housing has been the largest program of housing subsidies to low-income families in the United States for fifty years (Olsen and Barton, 1983). Massey and Kanaiaupuni (1993) also show that public housing projects were targeted to poor neighborhoods and that the presence of housing projects substantially increased the concentration of poverty in later years. This characteristic of public housing as a support for social minority has been widely admitted and adopted in most countries. However, as Crump (2002) notices that during the 1990s, local and federal urban policymakers, neoliberal politicians, and advocates for the poor came to a broad consensus: the geographic concentration of low-income, minority residents in public housing projects located in the inner city constitutes the fundamental problem facing US cities. This unavoidable nature is also described vividly in most public housing projects of different countries.

On the other hand, the problem of providing housing for the ageing society of Japan is, and has been, a key issue. Since the speed of ageing is so rapid, Japan is facing the serious

problem of having to provide buildings and dwelling units that will be suitable for use by elderly persons in a very short time (Kose, 1997). Public housing has been considered as a suitable receiver for accommodating elderly people in Japan. As Fukuyama and Ishida (2013) indicate that elderly residents of public housing in Japan, the fastest aging society in the world experience different life challenges from those of private housing. However, the concentration of elderly as well as disadvantaged households has become a new issue in public housing community. Fukuyama and Ishida (2013) consider that it is important to encourage the elderly to engage in community networking and participate in social activities. A more active social life may help mitigate suffering caused by accidents, disease, and natural disasters. Kleita (2001) also propose that social networks are vital links to larger social systems and the neighborhood networks of low-income people may thus influence their access to opportunity. Briefly, no matter poor or elderly household, the social network and support is considered important for their community life.

2. Policy background

2.1 Public housing policy in Japan

In the case of public housing policy in Japan, various government affiliated agencies build housing units for sale or for rent. At the national government level, The Japan Housing Corporation builds apartment buildings and rents them to tenants, which was established as a national public corporation in 1955, was reorganized into the Housing and Urban Development Corporation in 1981, and into the Urban Development Corporation in 1999, and then into the Urban Renaissance Agency in 2004. The new URA basically withdrew from the construction of new housing. Local governments, that is, prefectures and municipalities, also contributed to public housing, sometimes directly operating rental apartments and sometimes setting up government-affiliated corporations (Ito, 1994; Kadi and Ronald, 2014).

However, there are also issues for the public housing system in Japan. For instance, as Hirayama (2010) notice that the public housing system for low-income people excluded one-person households. Elderly singles qualified for public housing in 1980, but non-elderly single households are still excluded from public housing. Many local governments, which have suffered from financial burdens in managing low-income public housing, are now beginning to unload some rental properties. In terms of low-income public housing policy, the existing stock could be reconstructed or renovated but almost no new housing will be constructed. Iwata and Hirano (1986) propose that the number of the recipients of public assistance living in public housing has recently increased. It is found out that the recipients of public assistance living in public housing have some characteristics which differs them from the recipients living in non-public housing. Their families are bigger, their housing situation has been secure for a comparatively long period of time, and they are "multi-problem families". If these families had not been provided with public housing, they wouldn't be able to live together ; the family structure would probably break down. Public assistance and public housing help consolidate the family, but don't solve their problems. Such families remain to be "multi-problem families" and consequently they continue to receive public assistance for a very long time, sometimes through the next generation. It's also believed that the concentration of such families in a certain city area creates "new slums".

The concern about the formation of new slum is now a critical issue for most of the public housing community due to the new system and institution of public housing policy. However, this might also be a strong motivation for the community to promote community empowerment and construct the community network to solve the problem.