

Ghetto Residents and Urban Politics

Attitudes Toward Urban Renewal

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One of the traditional themes running through the literature on urban renewal is that the residents of urban renewal areas are universally opposed to being relocated. Relocation is described as being destructive of community subcultures which provide a viable social milieu for the residents. It is argued that the term “slum,” denoting a disorganized social structure and apathy on the part of the residents, is a misnomer (Gans, 1962; Jacobs, 1961; Glaser, 1968). Urban renewal areas, it is said, represent unified neighborhoods for some ethnic groups, though not for all (Gans, 1965: 30-31). Among the most eloquent spokesmen for this point of view have been those who researched and made famous Boston’s West End. Thus Herbert Gans wrote of the feelings of urban renewal victims (Gans, 1965: 29):

Slum dwellers whose homes were to be torn down have indeed protested bitterly, but their outcries have been limited to particular projects; and because such outcries have rarely been supported by the local press, they have been easily brushed aside by the political power of the supporters of the projects in question.

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Chester Hartman (1963: 119), also writing about the West Enders, emphasized their attachment to their neighborhood, and one would presume their anticipated displeasure with an order to move.

Implicit in these statements concerning the attitudes of residents of urban renewal areas toward their impending relocation is a negative attitude toward urban renewal. If it were not for urban renewal, neighborhoods would not be so systematically destroyed, friends and families would not be scattered about the city, nor would small businesses be ruined, or the very social fabric of a people be rent asunder. The expressed anger is toward a condition, that of relocation, but the guilty party, by implication, is the urban renewal program which results in the relocation.

Until recently, the literature contained no evidence to indicate that residents in urban renewal areas did not in fact have an anti-urban-renewal attitude. Then Wolf and Lebeaux (1967: 8) pointed out that residents' attitudes could be conceptualized in terms of urban renewal as a program and urban renewal as a personal experience.

ATTITUDES TOWARD RELOCATION

The attitudes of slum dwellers toward urban renewal is clearly a significant factor which planners need to consider. If, as the Wolf and Lebeaux paper suggests, urban renewal attitudes are generally positive, then planners have a different set of conditions with which to deal. A positive attitude on the part of slum dwellers would also raise questions concerning the strength of attachments felt by slum dwellers toward their neighborhood. What has been lacking so far in the literature has been a rigorous examination of urban renewal attitudes. Conclusions so far presented by researchers in this aspect of urban renewal have been based upon responses to particular questions, participant observation, depth interviewing, and other nonscale techniques.

In 1965 the then Urban Renewal Administration of the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency urged local urban renewal agencies to undertake "a diagnostic survey to identify the social and economic problems of project area residents" (Housing and Home Finance Agency, 1965). In addition, recognition was made of the need for measurement of project residents' attitudes "on

factors related to urban renewal activities.” The recognition of the compounding of rehousing problems by the numerous social, economic, health, and other problems facing project residents was an indication of the realization by the federal agency of the need for a total approach to the solution of urban blight. Later efforts in this direction have brought forth the present Model Cities Program.

MAKEUP OF THE SAMPLE

This diagnostic survey approach was used in Akron, Ohio, in the Opportunity Park Urban Renewal Project. In addition to extensive data on the residents' background and needs, a section was included in order to systematically measure their attitudes toward urban renewal. While other diagnostic studies have attempted to determine the attitudes of residents regarding urban renewal and related matters, this is the first systematic attempt using scale analysis techniques.

The project area includes 916 families and some 549 individuals. Since the diagnostic survey treats household units, the total number of interviews conducted was 1,465. Six hundred fifty-four of the households are white and 811 black. Of the total number of households, 45% have annual incomes of less than \$3,600.

The diagnostic survey was accomplished by means of in-depth interviews conducted with heads of households or their spouses over a six-month period in 1967. A Guttman attitude scale¹ was included in the interview, and the interviewers were indoctrinated as to the manner in which it was to be administered. Because the attitude scale was being constructed during the beginning stages of the interviewing process, some of the residents of the project were not included in the attitude measurement. Excluding those partial and incomplete responses, the total number of responses obtained was 785, or 54% of the households in the area. While this was not a controlled, random sample, it is felt that the large size made it representative and that biasing factors were minimal.

The Guttman scale technique was selected for a number of reasons, including its adaptability to computer methods of scale construction. The computer method allows the use of a large number of items and respondents in the pretest and scale construction stages, as well as assuming greater accuracy and coverage of item areas.

The scale has been combined into categories in order to facilitate description and cross-tabulation of the results. Scores from zero to five are categorized as a relatively low attitude toward urban renewal, scores from six to eight as a relatively moderate attitude, and scores of nine and ten as a relatively high attitude. The criteria for both the low and high categories were made rather rigorous in order to strengthen the relationships revealed in the analysis. The totals in these respective categories are: negative, 205 (26%); moderate, 220 (28%); and positive, 360 (46%), for a total of 785.

The larger number of positive responses is in itself a major finding of this study. This tendency holds throughout the analysis, which reduces the possibility of dramatic direct-indirect relationships, but rather causes the analysis to depend upon tendencies toward relatively higher or lower scores.

BREAKDOWN OF RESPONSES

Forty-six percent of the respondents are white and 54% nonwhite. The distribution of attitude scores shows little difference by race, indicating that the factors associated with attitudes toward urban renewal are not dependent on race.

TABLE 1
URBAN RENEWAL ATTITUDES BY RACE
OPPORTUNITY PARK, AKRON, OHIO, 1968

	Respondent's Race	
	White %	Nonwhite %
Negative Attitude	28	25
Moderate Attitude	25	30
Positive Attitude	47	45
Total	100 (n=362)	100 (n=423)
$\chi^2 = 2.39$ (2 df) $p > .30$		

A comparison of attitude scores with the education level of the head of the household reveals a direct relationship through high school level. The data for those respondents having completed thirteen or more grades of education (five percent of the total), however, show a reversal of the pattern. The percentages of both their positive and negative scores compare with those of respondents who have completed only one to eight grades of education. The respondents of larger-sized (four or more persons) households are more positive and less negative than those of smaller-sized households. This becomes a rather important finding when one considers that the latter group makes up seventy-eight percent of the sample.

TABLE 2
URBAN RENEWAL ATTITUDE BY LAST SCHOOL GRADE
COMPLETED BY HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD
OPPORTUNITY PARK, AKRON, OHIO, 1968

	Respondent's School Grade			
	0 %	1-8 %	9-12 %	13+ %
Negative Attitude	46	32	18	33
Moderate Attitude	20	30	28	26
Positive Attitude	34	38	54	41
	100 (n=44)	100 (n=317)	100 (n=385)	100 (n=39)
$\chi^2=33.31$ (6 df) $p < .001$				

TABLE 3
URBAN RENEWAL ATTITUDE BY SIZE OF HOUSEHOLD
OPPORTUNITY PARK, AKRON, OHIO, 1968

	Size of Respondent's Household	
	1-3 %	4-10 %
Negative Attitude	28	19
Moderate Attitude	27	30
Positive Attitude	45	51
	100 (n=614)	100 (n=171)
$\chi^2=7.60$ (6 df) $p > .20$		

The age of the head of the household indicates an indirect relationship with attitude toward urban renewal. The younger heads (those under 40 years of age) have more positive and fewer negative scores than the older respondents. Data collected for family type, however, do not indicate any discernable pattern when compared with attitudes toward urban renewal. Persons in both partial and expanding families have more positive scores than those in childless and contracting families. The distribution of these familial types in the sample, however, shows that 65% of the respondents are in the partial family category.

Of the 511 persons in partial families, 330 (65%) are single-person households and 181 (35%) are other partial family combinations (e.g., one parent with offspring, older siblings with no parent, or the like). These partial families, along with the childless and contracting family units, those in which one would expect the greatest expression of familial values, make up only 16% of the sample. These figures are very close to the distribution of these family categories in all of Opportunity Park.

Employment and income data for our sample indicate that the full-time employed respondents (50% of the sample) have more positive responses toward urban renewal than those who are not. The latter group includes both part-time employed (8%) and unemployed (including retired, and so on, 42%). The latter group tended to have the more negative attitudes toward urban renewal. When weekly income data are examined, they reveal a strong tendency toward a direct relationship with urban renewal attitudes.

TABLE 4
URBAN RENEWAL ATTITUDE BY AGE OF HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD
OPPORTUNITY PARK, AKRON, OHIO, 1968

	Age of Head of Household		
	Under 40 %	40-64 %	65+ %
Negative Attitude	18	29	32
Moderate Attitude	30	26	30
Positive Attitude	52	45	38
	100 (n=238)	100 (n=374)	100 (n=167)
$\chi^2 = 14.83$ (4 df) $p < .01$			

The breakdown of attitude scores by type of tenancy shows renters and roomers as having more positive attitudes toward urban renewal (49%) than owner-occupants (38%).

In regard to the action taken by respondents in residential relocation, those persons who have already found a new place to live display the most positive attitudes toward urban renewal (53%).

Fifty-three percent of the respondents do not belong to any formal organization, 39% are affiliated with only one, and only 8% claim membership in two or more organizations. The latter group has the least positive scores toward urban renewal, while those with no affiliations are the most positive; the reverse holds true for negative attitudes.

Informal participation was measured by determining the neighboring patterns of respondents. Twenty-five percent do not visit with neighbors, 56% visit with some, and 19% visit with many of their neighbors. While those who do not visit had the highest percentage of positive scores, this was only a slight tendency.

A better indication of social participation is indicated by the data on the patterns of respondents exchanging favors with neighbors. Thirty-three percent claim they never exchange favors with neighbors, while 56% of the respondents do sometimes, and 11% often. There is an indirect relationship between this neighboring activity and attitude toward urban renewal, with those who never exchange favors with neighbors showing the most positive attitude.

TABLE 5
URBAN RENEWAL ATTITUDE BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS
OF HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD
OPPORTUNITY PARK, AKRON, OHIO, 1968

	Employment Status of Respondent	
	Full-Time %	Not Full-Time %
Negative Attitude	22	30
Moderate Attitude	28	28
Positive Attitude	50	42
	100	100
	(n=394)	(n=391)
$\chi^2=8.60$ (2 df) $p < .02$		

The comparison of urban renewal attitudes with location of close friends and relatives indicates a slight tendency for those with close friends and relatives outside the neighborhood (a five-block radius) to be more positive in their attitudes toward urban renewal. The differences in urban renewal attitude between the respondents who claim close friends and relatives inside a five-block radius and those who claim them outside are very slight. Both groups tend to have a greater positive than negative attitude, however. The most interesting aspect of the distribution of these respondents is that 72% of the total respondents identify their close friends as located outside the neighborhood, and 86% state their relatives live outside the five-block limits of the neighborhood.

Respondents were also asked if they were receiving social welfare services at the time of the interview. Twenty-four percent were receiving some service at that time, while 76% were not. A comparison of their attitudes toward urban renewal indicates there is no relationship between attitude and receipt of welfare. In fact, both groups had exactly the same high percentage of positive attitude. When asked if they had ever been refused assistance by a social agency, 10% replied they had, and 90% had not. There was a relationship found between being refused services by a social agency and attitude toward urban renewal. Those persons who had

TABLE 6
URBAN RENEWAL ATTITUDE BY FREQUENCY
OF EXCHANGING FAVORS
OPPORTUNITY PARK, AKRON, OHIO, 1968

	Frequency of Exchanging Favors		
	Never %	Sometimes %	Often %
Negative Attitude	25	25	31
Moderate Attitude	27	29	31
Positive Attitude	48	46	38
	100 (n=257)	100 (n=438)	100 (n=83)

$\chi^2=3.47$ (4 df)
 $p > .30$

been refused services showed greater negative attitudes, while those who had not had a greater percentage of positive scores.

Data were gathered to determine if the respondents were familiar with the Opportunity Park renewal project. Seventy-three percent felt they were familiar with it and 27% felt they were not. The cross-tabulation with the attitudes of these respondents shows a definite direct relationship between these two variables. Those persons who felt they were more knowledgeable were much more positive in their attitudes toward urban renewal.

For those persons who felt they were informed, a follow-up question determined the source of their information regarding the project. Newspaper and radio were the source for 33% and 3% respectively, while 32% attributed their source of information to friends, relatives, and neighbors. Twenty-five percent obtained their information from efforts of the City Planning and Urban Renewal Department through such activities as mass meetings, letters, phone calls, and visits from relocation workers. The remaining attributed their sources to social workers (1%) and other sources (5%). An interesting aspect of these data is the high percentage of both formal (newspaper) and informal (friends, relatives, neighbors) sources, and the very small percentage of those citing the radio as their source of information.

TABLE 7
URBAN RENEWAL ATTITUDE BY FAMILIARITY
WITH URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT
OPPORTUNITY PARK, AKRON, OHIO, 1968

	Respondent's Familiarity with Project	
	Yes %	No %
Negative Attitude	24	33
Moderate Attitude	27	30
Positive Attitude	49	37
	100 (n=570)	100 (n=214)
$\chi^2=11.73$ (2 df) $p < .01$		

A comparison of source of information with attitudes toward urban renewal indicates the strongest positive attitudes held by those who claim the mass media as their source. Those showing the lowest percentage of positive attitude scores were those persons informed through official Urban Renewal Agency sources.

CONCLUSIONS

In this time of increasing tension between the races, a time which the President's Commission on Civil Disorders sees as foreshadowing a resegregation of our society even before it has been fully desegregated, it is refreshing to find evidence which indicates that race has not become so dominant a factor in attitude and behavior as to reduce to insignificance all other sociological variables. At the same time, after the growing criticism of urban renewal and its characterization as Negro Removal, it is significant that the residents of an urban renewal area have such a positive attitude toward urban renewal. The tendency for black and white residents alike to view urban renewal with favor raises several questions regarding current assumptions about the ghetto population; the degree of community exhibited and the disaffection of Negro residents toward renewal, in particular. The data suggest that neither the social disorganization nor the fully integrated functional neighborhood theorists are completely correct. Rather, they suggest that the ghetto is a highly complex social area, with differing types of social integration, which can be analyzed within the classic "community" and "society" framework. The overall positiveness of the residents regarding urban renewal indicates acceptance of societal norms, while the existence of negativism indicates adherence to local community norms. In addition, the negativism of some residents can be explained in terms of "alienation."

This latter concept appears to offer a partial explanation for the distribution of attitudes found to exist when the data are divided according to educational achievement. The tendency for the poorly educated to view government and governmental programs in a negative way is confirmed by these data. The compelling evidence developed over the years regarding alienation among the lower classes is reflected in these findings. Predictably, the better

educated are more positive toward urban renewal, until the college level is reached, when a reversal takes place. This reversal is consistent with other studies of family planning and political participation, in particular, which indicate that the college experience is of a different order than the preceding elementary-secondary experiences. Participants in higher education show discontinuities in their attitudes and behavior, from what one would expect if education represented a continuous and unbroken cultural development.

The data gathered regarding the attitudes of individuals according to their degree of formal and informal participation lend weight to the view that the residents can be divided along "community" and "society" lines. Those who participated in formal organizations are, by this participation, indicating their support of the institutional framework of the local community. Their involvement indicates at least a minimal commitment to the social structure. The general lack of formal participation is itself consistent with the literature on this subject. That the affiliated are more negative than the unaffiliated is consistent with the view that those who relate strongly to their neighborhood view governmental programs destructive of their neighborhood as unfavorable. The lack of neighboring and the dispersal of friends indicates that the urban renewal area is not a single, unified social community. The distribution of attitudes serves to confirm the view that involvement in the local community creates distaste for those programs and agencies destructive of the environment in which such involvements take place. More advanced on the scale of intimacy is the exchange of favors among neighbors. The general lack of this type of activity indicates again the generally disorganized nature of this area. And the relationship between this activity and urban renewal attitude indicates that the most involved do see urban renewal as a threat.

These data tend to support those who researched Boston's West End while at the same time act to refute those who have sought to generalize their conclusions as being applicable to all who reside in urban renewal areas. Most assuredly, the renewal area studied does contain one or more communities, in the traditional sense of that term, tied together by a variety of formal and informal forms of social interaction. But, in addition, the area also contains many individuals and families who are not a part of this pattern of

interaction; who are, indeed, in, but not of, this area. But being an interacting part of a functioning community, their attitude toward urban renewal tends to be more positive. Urban renewal does not represent a threat, but may actually be a means of deliverance.

NOTE

1. The Urban Renewal Scale Items were as follows: The city will be a better place to live in because of urban renewal. Urban renewal means we will have better housing. Only the big shots will benefit from urban renewal. About all urban renewal accomplishes is to break up neighborhoods. Urban renewal should be supported because it is a good thing. Urban renewal just causes trouble by forcing people out of their homes. Urban renewal is just another way to give jobs to people in city hall. Urban renewal will result in a cleaner city. Urban renewal is a program to give more jobs to friends and relatives of politicians. Urban renewal will make a better city for our children.

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