

RELOCATION EFFECTS ON THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Summary Statements of Workshop Panel 5

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The basic organizational unit of community structure has been traditionally recognized as the neighborhood, despite the fact that social researchers have found it difficult to devise an acceptable definition of neighborhood. Although he cannot scientifically identify the neighborhood, the planner of public projects must nevertheless deal with the concept. He must recognize the fragile relationships that permit the concept of neighborhood to endure. He must devise his project or proposals in a way that will allow the decision-maker a choice between that which causes the least harm and provides the most benefit.

The planner must be able to identify and evaluate the effects of proposals on neighborhoods. Of particular importance is the impact of the displacement of people, businesses, and institutions on those elements of the neighborhood that remain. The issues of major significance to planners are (a) How to identify and evaluate neighborhood change caused by public improvement projects that displace people, business, and institutions, and (b) How to relate the effects of change to neighborhoods and specific impact areas.

An important result of a public improvement may be to change the options or opportunities for work, recreation, social contacts, and institutional or other services available to residents who are not displaced by the improvement. Some groups of people who may be particularly vulnerable to changes in options are the elderly, ethnic groups, others who have no real choice of residential location, and those who must rely on public transportation. Certain marginal businesses that serve a small clientele may also be in this category. Even though present knowledge precludes an estimate of the social cost of ignoring the problems of these vulnerable groups, clearly such costs may far exceed the benefits of projects planned without these problems in mind.

Some of the specific questions that must be responded to by the planner and decision-maker are (a) How will the displacement of some convenience services affect the elderly and others who have limited mobility? (b) What will be the effect on remaining convenience services of the relocation of a portion of the market population? (c) Will patterns of employment opportunity be altered by the displacement and relocation of either employment centers or employees? and (d) What effect does the disruption of kinship ties or other social linkages have on neighborhood behavioral patterns?

Data that may be of assistance in answering these questions and in delineating issues include (a) mobility versus stability of residents (e.g., number of transients); (b) activity linkages of residents, as defined by trip patterns; (c) attitudes of residents toward the neighborhood, such as presence or lack of satisfaction; (d) perception by residents of their neighborhood; (e) identification by political, school, and religious records and by estimates of leaders of these institutions; (f) natural barriers that might constitute the neighborhood boundary; and (g) socioeconomic characteristics of inhabitants including income, race, ethnic group, education, and employment.

The general research program needed for this problem will include investigation of these items by means of a series of case studies. The required research should include collection of case material in several and diverse locations to permit study of pertinent variables. However, careful selection of study locations will be needed to avoid confounding the result by the effects of too many variables.