Mixed communities

Success and sustainability

Over recent years there has been growing concern about communities in Britain which do not function properly, especially some of the estates built as social housing that are now occupied only by people with low incomes. Key questions for public policy are whether socio-economically mixed communities work better, and what the key factors are which make sustainable and successful communities where people want to live.

Through its Mixed Income Communities programme the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has studied the experience of a number of mixed income communities to learn more about these areas, and identify what ingredients help make neighbourhoods work. In this *Foundations*, Chris Holmes summarises the findings from seven research studies, encompassing more than twenty case studies, and draws together conclusions that should inform future policies towards the promotion of successful mixed communities.

Key findings

- **Mixed income communities studied were overwhelmingly judged successful; they were not characterised by the problems often linked with exclusively low-income areas.** The schemes had generally met the expectations of developers, residents and housing managers and had become pleasant places to live, learn and work.

- **Mixed tenure and mixed income were "non-issues" to residents – they saw their neighbours as "ordinary people".** Whilst residents may not have developed personal friendships across tenures, they described their relationships as "civil" and "polite". There was no specific evidence of role-model effects or increased social capital.

- **Mixed income communities can attract young families.** The research showed that young families can be attracted to inner urban areas through the availability of good schools, design and appropriate housing. However, some mixed developments lacked larger sized homes in their private sector provision.

- **Developers engaged in mixing tenures had no major problems.** There was no evidence that mixed communities lowered the prices of houses for sale or put off potential purchasers. Design, location and quality were seen as the key factors affecting sales and price levels.

- **Planning tenure mix is only one part of the picture.** Tenure is not fixed and, as it alters in a community, so can the population of residents. The implications of this need to be thought through and other dimensions of mix – income, home type and size, and household type – also need to be considered.

Background

In his study of mixed communities in England, Alan Berube of the Brookings Institute in Washington summarised the key disadvantages of neighbourhoods of concentrated deprivation:

■ *"High levels of worklessness limit job networks and employment ambitions*
■ *Schools struggle to educate overwhelmingly poor populations*
■ *Poor neighbourhoods experience higher levels of crime and disorder*
■ *Area-based deprivation exacerbates health inequalities*
■ *Concentrations of deprivation reduce private sector activity and raise prices for the poor"* (Berube, 2005)

In the UK, there are significant and persistent inequalities between areas at ward and neighbourhood level in patterns of employment, income and, most sharply, housing tenure (Meen et al., 2005). In 1998, the Social Exclusion Unit estimated that there were more than one million households living in neighbourhoods of concentrated disadvantage.

It is in response to these concerns that policies for promoting mixed income communities have been developed. The case for mixed income communities is based on a belief that concentrated poverty creates additional problems for low-income residents. Mixed communities, by contrast, are seen as a way of *"tackling deprivation by reducing the additional disadvantages that face families when they are concentrated in poor neighbourhoods"* (Berube, 2005).

What types of mixed communities are there?

The studies in the Mixed Income Communities programme show what wide variety there is. Tenure mixes in the case studies varied widely. In some, the amount of affordable housing was relatively negligible; in others, it exceeded 50 per cent. There is no conclusive evidence as to the ideal 'level' of tenure mix to make a community work.

There were also differences in their size and scale and in their household composition. Some were overwhelmingly dominated by homes with one or two bedrooms; in others, a majority of homes had three bedrooms or more. Some neighbourhoods were characterised as 'family areas'; some had almost no child residents.

Income ranges also varied. In one case study, nearly half the households had incomes below £15,000 per year; in another, less than 20 per cent did. In some of the older developments studied, there was a "fairly narrow" social mix (Allen et al., 2005) while in new developments in London, researchers found substantial minorities with incomes both under £15,000 and over £50,000 (Silverman et al., 2005).

In every dimension, the mix might be broad or narrow. Neighbourhoods with very wide disparities may face additional challenges to make them work; neighbourhoods whose socio-economic profile is overly restricted may not meet integration objectives of 'mix'.

In unpublished work for the Foundation, Rebecca Tunstall suggests that mixed communities can be divided into types, according to whether they develop naturally or intentionally, whether they involve changing existing areas or developing new ones, and what policy and subsidy regimes are used (see Table 1 overleaf). Not all types of mixed communities are achievable in all areas; reducing or preventing segregation will need different policies in different contexts. In neighbourhoods with the highest levels of deprivation, research suggests that there is likely to be a need for intensive, large-scale resources to be committed before any significant private investment will occur (Meen et al., 2005; Berube, 2005).

Table 1: Simplified types of mixed community

How created	Characteristics	How reflected in the programme
Through the evolution of older housing areas.	Diverse area sizes, housing types, tenure, income and household mix. May include mixed use as well as mixed housing. Include private housing developments with affordable housing as part of the planning requirements.	Not covered by the case studies but included in overall trends identified in *Berube, 2005; Meen et al., 2005.*
As a by-product of mainstream housing development.	From tens to low thousands of homes; often private housing majority; exact mix depends on local market and interests of partners. Some New Towns, current Growth Areas, large planned urban extensions, and Pathfinder areas.	Case study examples in *Rowlands et al., 2006; Silverman et al., 2005; Bailey et al., forthcoming.*
By the overall masterplanning of new areas, or areas of large-scale renewal.	From tens to high thousands of homes; usually private housing majority; diverse income, home size, household types. Masterplanning includes design and use mix; may be some extra regeneration funding or subsidy.	Case study examples in *Martin and Watkinson, 2003; Allen et al., 2005; Silverman et al., 2005; Meen et al., 2005; Bailey et al., forthcoming.*
By intentionally altering existing areas whose origins were social renting.	Council or housing association estates that have become mixed tenure through redevelopment with demolition, sale and new building. Can be high profile process over several years with substantial public subsidy; often remain majority social and family housing.	Case study examples in *Meen et al., 2005; Silverman et al., 2005; Bailey et al., forthcoming.*

Source: Based on unpublished work by Rebecca Tunstall, London School of Economics

Mixed communities: ordinary – and successful – places to live

The experience of established mixed tenure communities is that owners and renters regard each other as "ordinary people". This was demonstrated in a study that looked at the experiences of three areas created as mixed tenure communities over twenty years ago, in Peterborough, Middlesbrough and Norwich (Allen et al., 2005). It expressed itself in the attitude towards tenure mix, which was considered to be a "non-issue".

People living on the mixed tenure estates felt able to identify with each other and did not feel that they were surrounded by people who were significantly different from themselves:

"I personally would not think that anybody was very different whether they are renting their house off the council or buying, and I really don't know why there is this great big emphasis." (Tenant)

"The man who lives in the council houses just across the road here … he's a smashing bloke, you know, just ordinary people like us, you know. People are people and you get good and bad everywhere, don't you, in all walks of life." (Owner)

This sameness did not necessarily lead to most residents developing personal relationships across the tenures because owners and tenants mainly occupied different "social worlds". Nevertheless neighbours tended to "bump into" each other on an occasional basis, and owners and tenants described their relationships as "civil" and "polite". They mostly co-existed as neighbours rather than friends. This meant that co-operation between households took place but did so in relation to *practical* issues rather than *personal* issues.

There was little evidence that better-off residents acted as 'role models' who help in finding better employment opportunities or raising expectations of attainment. Nor was there evidence that mixed tenure had enhanced

social capital. However, the tenure mix appeared to have improved the relative desirability of the three study areas, allowing people to distance themselves from the prejudice that is frequently faced by those living on council estates. In this way the areas provided a higher quality of life and an opportunity for tenants to break out of the spiral associated with concentrated disadvantage that some had experienced elsewhere.

Housing design similarities between owner-occupied and rented housing also blurred the tenure distinctions. By concealing tenure differences, housing design helped to emphasise similarities rather than differences between residents and therefore counteracted the potential emergence of tenure prejudice.

The study found that there was general satisfaction with all of the communities, but mixed tenure was only one element. Satisfaction also resulted from the high quality of the physical environment in those communities and the provision of a range of local services.

A survey of 78 local authorities and 72 housing associations (Martin and Watkinson, 2003) found that over 70 per cent had taken some initiative to "rebalance communities" on their estates. In most cases, these had been pragmatic and reactive, rather than the result of strategic decision-making. Most initiatives had been a response to financial imperatives: these included, for example, initiatives to reduce an excessive number of empty properties which were hard to let, to reduce repair costs, or to access regeneration funding. However, respondents reported that there had been social and economic benefits: lower turnover and higher tenant stability, higher levels of demand and better area reputation, a more balanced household mix, and increased property values.

The studies also include examples of mixed tenure developments that did not work so well. In one, social rented housing disproportionately consisted of very large five- or six-bedroomed properties, concentrated together, and this became a focal point for complaints about behaviour and nuisance. The design of the scheme had failed to mix property sizes and to recognise the problems that could arise from a concentration of particular types of home liable to cause tensions.

SAVE (Selling Alternate Vacants on Existing estates)

An example of a planned programme of tenure diversification was introduced by the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust in 1998 to combat the process of decline in its model village of New Earswick in York. To sustain a balanced income mix and halt the trend towards the community becoming overwhelmingly occupied by low-income residents, the scheme allows for 50 per cent of relets to be offered on the open market for sale or shared ownership. Proceeds from sales are reinvested in rented homes elsewhere. As a result of the initiative, the Trust has seen a significant change in the perceptions of residents, and middle-income residents are keen to move into the village.

There were also some examples of mixed communities which had not provided access for a full range of residents from disadvantaged areas and circumstances. Some mixed tenure areas had been selective in their lettings policies, so that they only housed people across a limited range of incomes; others had excluded people with previous problems on their tenancy record. Whilst these communities may be popular with the residents who live there, they are less successful in providing inclusive communities for people from all types of background.

The overall experience amongst the communities studied was that they were more successful when there were no differences in quality and appearance between the different forms of tenure. Phased development of blocks could give rise to problems where this led to false perceptions of what the estate was, whether it was wrongly believed to be a private estate or stigmatised because of being socially rented.

There were a range of experiences of properties in different tenures being 'pepper-potted' or clustered. There was no evidence that this in itself affected the sense of community, provided the different tenures were all well-designed and well-integrated.

Inner-city mixed communities can attract young families

Over the past century many residents have left inner urban areas, especially those who can afford to buy in the suburbs or small towns. Families have led the exodus from cities, often in search of better schools and a healthier environment. Although there has been recent success in attracting residents back, if cities are to thrive economically and socially they must cater for better-off people who have children, and not just for single people, young couples and low-income families. This means creating urban neighbourhoods that parents will choose as places to raise their children.

Studies of mixed income communities show that most mixing across social groups takes place between children. It is these contacts – in nurseries, playgroups, schools and in public spaces – that provide opportunities for adults to meet and form relationships. Children provide a common ground and shared interest between people in different tenures. People with children have a high stake in the success of a neighbourhood and the quality of its services.

One study examined the question of whether mixed inner-urban areas can attract better-off young families by looking at their experience in four mixed income communities (Silverman et al., 2005). Two of these were redevelopments of existing low-income areas (Hulme in Manchester and the Gorbals in Glasgow) and two were new developments close to the Thames in London (Britannia Village and Greenwich Millennium Village).

The young families attracted to the private housing in the two regeneration projects were mostly 'locals', either long-term residents born in the area or those with families settled nearby, enabling links with grandparents and other relatives to be maintained. By contrast most of those who had moved into the new developments were 'newcomers'. Some had arrived without children, attracted by the location of the new housing and its convenience for work and other amenities, but had started families while living in the community.

The main factors attracting families to these areas were safe, clean and friendly neighbourhoods, good schools, and open spaces enabling children to play. Other characteristics identified as contributing to the relative success of the areas as mixed communities were the integration of the tenures and the role played by community development.

The importance of schools

The connection between mixed communities and mixed school populations is not straightforward but there is some evidence that well-thought-through plans can achieve desired outcomes. In Greenwich Millennium Village, parents in all tenures were very pleased with the new school which became the school of choice for the neighbourhood. Factors which played an important part in its success were that provision for the school was made ahead of demand and that, having planned the new building, the education authority invited schools across the borough to bid for a complete transfer to the new site. They chose a high-performing school near to the Greenwich Peninsula, with premises needing relocation, whose pupils were drawn from both middle-class and working-class families. Some social housing tenants moved with the school, as parents with children there received priority for the new socially rented housing in the development.

There is a clear message from the four case studies that families with housing choice can be attracted to mixed income developments, and that households without children can be retained when they start families. Of course, though, they will only do so if there are suitable homes for them to purchase in the first place, and suitable homes to move into as their families grow.

Developers argue that they increase densities to make mixed tenure development stack up financially, particularly where quotas for affordable housing are high (Rowlands et al., 2006). This may lead to smaller homes and reduced opportunities for families in the private sector housing. If children in the area are only housed in the social rented sector, this presents its own problems of integration. Similarly, retaining families with housing choice is hampered if mixed communities lack the larger homes for sale that growing families require (Silverman et al., 2005). Also, if prices rise as a result of an area developing a good reputation, families can be priced out of the market.

Developers are willing to engage in building mixed communities

One study examined the attitude of developers towards mixed tenure developments through interviews with a sample actively engaged in the field and the experiences and attitudes of mixed community residents living in private housing in five case study areas (Rowlands et al., 2006). The study also analysed data from the sale prices of properties in three locations to determine any impact of mixed tenure on prices. The study found no major problems in developing mixed tenure estates, and most people were happy living in a socially mixed community (although a minority did see it as a disadvantage). There was no evidence that mixing tenures affected house prices.

The developers were not concerned about mixed tenure developments as such. There was no significant evidence that mixed tenure affected the marketability of developments. In their view, potential purchasers were more likely to be influenced by the design, location and nature of the property they were buying and the development as a whole. Whatever its mix, a good quality development will be more marketable than a poor standard one. These developers saw mixed tenure as the norm, to be made to work well by appropriate design and management. High quality mixed tenure residential areas were seen as the way of establishing a strong business position and securing the long-term viability of new urban development.

Amongst the survey of private sector households, when residents were asked to rank the reasons which were important when choosing a property, those rated highest were size, number of bedrooms, price, adequate car parking and privacy levels. When asked about choosing an area, the factors ranked most highly were a safe area, good shopping facilities, proximity to work, good social and leisure facilities, and good transport links. Overall the levels of satisfaction were high, with 89 per cent of home-owners being satisfied.

The questionnaire was designed so that it would not prompt residents to identify issues around mixed communities until the end of the interview, when specific questions were asked about both income mix and tenure

mix. Amongst those who had purchased their homes, 53 per cent thought that having householders with different incomes made no difference whilst 24 per cent had a positive view of the mix. The views as to tenure mix were similarly weighted towards its acceptability; 38 per cent of owners felt that it was positive and 27 per cent had a neutral view.

The analysis of property values showed that the prices realised for properties on mixed tenure estates were comparable with those in the local market. Although the variations were greater when analysed against the wider market, the researchers point out that other factors – property size, property age and neighbourhood characteristics and location – probably played a greater determining role than tenure mix. The research found no evidence that mixed tenure on its own had a negative impact on property values.

To succeed, properly mixed income communities need adequate investment. For new developments physical and social infrastructure must be on site before the first residents move in, and this is especially important for schools. Services are needed for disadvantaged residents and extra services may be needed to facilitate mix, including community development and good quality housing and neighbourhood management. More widely, if the specification includes elements about mixing the size and type of properties, there will be a greater likelihood that there is a mix in terms of age, life cycle, income and other factors.

The overall conclusion from the study was that there is no significant problem in developing mixed tenure estates. However, mixing tenure does not inevitably lead to the mix of incomes anticipated at the outset because of increasing 'tenure fluidity'.

Tenure mix and income mix

Policy on mixed communities has traditionally focused on the mix of housing tenure – whether homes are owned or rented. This has been used as a convenient tool because of its close association with household income. However, tenure alone cannot guarantee mix in the longer term. As the tenure of neighbourhoods changes over time, local populations may change too.

In some of the areas studied, there was evidence of concerns prompted by the growth of private renting. This shift from home-ownership had not been contemplated at the outset and presented additional challenges in ensuring that communities were seamlessly managed and sustained. Tenure 'fluidity' makes it very difficult to manage (or control) the profile of areas in the long term. 'Buy-to-let' is one initiative that can affect attractive, city fringe developments which may shift into this market. Less attractive inner city or suburban developments may be let at market rents to local authorities for those in extreme housing need. 'Homebuy' and other low-cost or shared ownership schemes further complicate the picture.

In order to achieve long-term sustainability there are advantages in forms of ownership which help to retain the broad mix. One model is the Community Land Trust which safeguards the ownership of land with the whole community, and makes it possible to exercise controls over who purchases properties and how a whole community is managed over the longer term.

There is an apparent divergence in government policy, which is seeking to promote more socially balanced mixed communities yet also encourages a free housing market with greater tenure fluidity. Nevertheless, tenure mix at the outset at least ensures that those on lower incomes, whose access to a community is contingent upon the availability of social renting, do have such access.

Mixed communities in the United States

Economic and ethnic segregation in the UK is not at levels seen in the USA, where the backdrop and context to policy on cities and housing are very different. Translating messages from one country to the other therefore needs to be approached carefully. However, the US schemes have been well-researched and can provide some interesting lessons.

Policies to encourage greater mix in US cities have been in place for over ten years. These include the 'HOPE VI' schemes which redeveloped public housing to create tenure and income mix, and the 'Moving to Opportunity' scheme which provided rent subsidy for inner city public housing residents to relocate to privately rented homes in the suburbs.

Some of the US work usefully distinguishes between the impact on the area and that on individual households, a missing dimension to many UK studies. The Hope VI project is also a rare example of diversifying income mix in existing middle-income communities rather than existing low-income neighbourhoods.

More details: Berube, 2005

Conclusions

The studies have demonstrated that mixed income communities can give low-income residents access to successful environments. Although a minority of better-off households may have negative views, most are either neutral or prefer mixed income communities. Unlike those on low incomes, they have the choice of moving elsewhere.

A number of the studies highlight factors which are seen as important in making mixed income communities successful, such as the quality and design of the homes. Some of these are perceived as at least as important as the social mix. For example:

"There is evidence that social mix is a relatively insignificant explanation of neighbourhood satisfaction. It is more to do with environmental quality, privacy, and perceived safety. The implication is that social or neighbourhood impacts of mixing through housing policies may be overstated." (Meen et al., 2005)

For residents for whom the alternative is a deprived, low-income estate, however, the social mix may be the element which enables them to enjoy the benefits of living in a successful neighbourhood. For society as a whole, promoting inclusive mixed communities has major benefits for the overall social fabric.

What do we still need to know?

Although the Mixed Income Communities research programme has generated important new evidence, it cannot claim to be comprehensive. Amongst the most important unanswered questions are:

■ Can more be learnt from the experience – positive and negative – of mixed areas that have evolved over time? Does policy need to give more attention to sustaining those that are currently successful?

■ Are the most deprived people 'selected out' in the belief that this achieves other elements of success? If so, is this exclusion really necessary?

■ Does creating mix through altering existing areas help their most disadvantaged residents? Or are these people simply 'displaced'?

■ How does ethnicity play out within these debates? In particular, how does the agenda of 'mixed communities' sit alongside those of 'community cohesion' and 'community integration'?

Achieving successful mixed communities

Mixed communities are not a panacea for all problems, but they can be attractive and popular places for a full range of households to live. Although their delivery requires careful thought, design and management, the research indicates that many potential problems can be overcome if they are given the required attention.

Researchers at the University of Westminster are drawing on the work of the others and on their own case studies to create a 'good practice guide' for those involved in planning, implementing and managing mixed developments (Bailey et al., forthcoming). This judges that there are four essential prerequisites for the successful development of new mixed neighbourhoods:

■ a clear assessment of local housing needs and market conditions;
■ a briefing and masterplanning process which produces a full range of housing types and sizes, located in an attractive environment, with a high quality public realm and well connected to the wider urban context;
■ a vision promoted and sustained by all stakeholders which is robust but flexible enough to allow for inevitable adjustments and changes arising from local housing conditions; and
■ an appropriate system of housing and environmental management that is based on a partnership between all stakeholders, includes substantial community involvement, and is locally based.

Decisions relating to these factors need to be made in the initial planning process: they become increasingly difficult and expensive to change later on.

The guide also identifies the quality of vision and leadership as a key factor. This applies at every stage, including the masterplanning, selection of partners, and knowing the limits of compromise. The importance of leadership applies equally to the planning of new developments and the regeneration of existing low-income neighbourhoods. 'Place-making' rather than just 'house building' needs to be the vision.

For society as a whole there are strong benefits from promoting mixed income communities. The research studies show that they are a tested way of delivering high quality, popular neighbourhoods which achieve socio-economic integration.

References

This paper draws on the JRF's Mixed Income Communities programme. See below for details of the seven research studies involved.

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