

Brock Onque - The Implications of Public Housing Design: A Study of HUD's Hope VI Program

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Over the past decade a philosophy has emerged at HUD that recognizes the importance of good design in the development of public housing. Quality design can help create safe, reasonably scaled, defensible environments. A Federal Grants Program, Hope VI, was developed in 1993 under the Urban Revitalization Demonstration Program. This program allocates grants up to \$50 million dollars for redesigning and making infrastructural improvements in public housing communities. Since the inception of the program, funds have been awarded to a total of 130 public housing authorities in 34 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands. After more than a decade, what are the outcomes of the program - particularly in terms of creating safe environments and getting away from the negative stereotypes (both real and perceived) that are associated with public housing? Factually speaking, funds from the program have demolished 97,000 severely distressed public housing units, and there have been 61,000 revitalized units. But, in terms of other issues like safety, accessibility, and civic engagement, how has the program fared? One recent HUD study concludes that it is possible for this program to go wrong. The danger exists that the innovation of Hope VI could devolve into a new set of stereotypes comparable to some of the old public housing stereotypes. If the projects are poorly administered, buildings could deteriorate and public spaces could become neglected.

This dissertation examined the current renovation activity in public housing and the objectives of the Hope VI program. Specifically, this study examined the goals of the Hope VI program and identified program outcomes at a specific Hope VI project in the City of Pittsburgh. Data from official documents, interview data from program experts, survey data from residents and observational analysis was compiled to identify program outcomes. The major finding of this study is that the Hope VI program has been successful in achieving its stated goals and that the program has brought about positive changes for public housing and therefore deserves to be extended. However, these findings also identify significant problem areas that plague the program and have tarnished the success the program has

achieved. These findings suggest areas where the program can be strengthened to allow the program to better achieve its intended benefit. The study suggests new policy implications for the design of public housing and identifies new areas for future research and policy analysis. Such research is necessary to identify and develop new effective policies to improve the design and, by extension, the quality of life for those individuals living in public housing.

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