Opportunities and Challenges for Housing Decommodification

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Housing insecurity is rising as the US faces a severe housing shortage and as wages haven't kept up with soaring housing costs.

**WHAT is housing justice?**

Ensuring everyone has affordable housing that promotes health, well-being, and upward mobility by confronting historical and ongoing harms and disparities caused by structural racism and other systems of oppression.

**Why housing justice?**

Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people are more likely to experience housing insecurity and homelessness because of past and present discriminatory policies and practices in housing, education, employment, and the criminal legal system.

Solutions need to address the historical, systemic, and intersecting factors that have led to housing insecurity.

**Our principles of housing justice:**

- **Accessibility & anti-ableism**
- **Anti-racism & racial equity**
- **Choice & agency**
- **Self-determination & reparations**
- **Housing as a human right**
- **Social & economic equity & justice**
- **Community & well-being**
- **Primacy of lived experience**

**How can we help advance housing justice?**

Collect and catalog research and resources related to housing justice.

Draw on Urban’s expertise in housing research and policy, racial equity analytics, and cross-sector solutions.

Give policymakers and community stakeholders the evidence-based tools and analyses they need to develop, implement, and monitor policies and programs that achieve housing justice for all.

**Convene & engage**

Seek and prioritize solutions shaped by people with lived experience and communities most affected by these challenges.

Create space for different groups to listen, learn, and discuss solutions.

**Amplify & build knowledge**

Develop tools for change.
Recent publications

- Decommodification and Its Role in Advancing Housing Justice
- Building a Housing Justice Framework, 2nd Edition
- Disability Justice Isn't Possible without Housing Justice
- Addressing the Legacies of Historical Redlining and The Ghosts of Housing Discrimination Reach Beyond Redlining

Upcoming publications

- Pursuing Housing Justice: Interventions for Impact (late Spring)
- Community Power Building for Housing Justice (late Summer)
- Unaccompanied Women Experiencing Homelessness in LA (Fall)
Why Should Decommodification Be A Focus for Housing Justice?
What is commodification and why does it matter?

- **Commodification**: the process by which the economic value of an object comes to dominate its other uses (material, ethical).

  - Priority becomes protecting economic value of housing and housing markets, not its usefulness as shelter or its ability to promote health, well-being, and upward-mobility.

- The acceleration of commodification in recent decades has resulted in today’s high levels of housing instability, particularly for renters, people of color, and people with lower incomes, which produces and perpetuates housing injustice.
What does a commodified housing system look like?

- Drivers of commodification:
  - Disinvestment in public housing and shifting federal funding towards public-private partnerships (housing choice vouchers, tax incentives)
  - Rise of speculative real estate
  - Tying homeownership to wealth
How are housing justice and commodification incompatible?

- To create portions of the housing market that benefit from economic value and excess, there must be accompanying portions of the market from which value is extracted.

- Commodification prioritizes the market, not ensuring safe and stable housing for all. Market-based policies’ implementation depends on successfully incentivizing profit-based developers/investors/owners by catering to their economic desires, which often do not align with the stated intent of providing housing to those with low incomes, and instead perpetuate housing insecurity.
Advancing housing justice through decommodification

- Decommodification entails removing a significant portion of the housing stock from the private market to…
  
  1) Reduce the impact of speculation on housing prices and access
  
  2) Ensure permanent affordability by shifting to models that promote public or community ownership
  
  3) Protect residents from displacement and disempowerment.
Public and Social Housing

- **Public Housing**: In the US, public housing is owned by the government, overseen by HUD, administered by local public housing authorities (who may contract out to private management or transfer ownership to private subsidiaries). Only families with low incomes are eligible to live in these units.

- **Social Housing**: Describes a range of non-market models that are non-speculative, democratically run, and publicly funded. Available to residents with a wide range of incomes.
  - Can create sustained affordability by using rental payments from higher-income households to subsidize rents for lower-income households
Shared Equity Models

- **Community Land Trusts (CLTs):** independent structures (often nonprofits), governed by residents and community members, that hold and steward land so it is affordable in perpetuity.
  - Prospective buyers only purchase the house and lease the land from the CLT in a long-term ground lease. Buyers also commit to restricted sales prices.

- **Limited Equity Cooperatives:** residents purchase shares in the collective development (rather than individual housing units)

- **Deed-Restricted Housing:** puts parameters on homeowners to protect long-term affordability (i.e. cap on resale price, income cap)
Towards Housing Justice

- Many local and even state governments have begun to show support for public and shared equity models, from cities like New York and Washington DC to smaller localities like Montgomery County, Maryland and Irvine, California

- There are many strategies that can work towards achieving housing justice in addition to public and social housing and shared equity models.

We see decommodification as a tool and framework to help design and implement new policies/programs/investments in a way that mitigates ongoing harm, does not further bolster commodification, and builds towards systems-change.
Towards Housing Justice

Because of the lack of large-scale investment in decommodified models to date, many questions remain, including:

- How much of the US housing stock needs to be decommodified to achieve housing justice goals?
- How can that scale be accomplished? What are the initial and ongoing costs of scaling?
- How should decommodified housing at scale be built, operated, and governed?
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