SELECTING NEIGHBORHOODS FOR COMMUNITY INITIATIVES:
VARIETY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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Efforts to improve distressed urban neighborhoods have been a part of America’s agenda for decades (Rohe 2009). Kubisch and others (2010) identify 48 “Major Community Change Efforts” implemented since the early 1980s, and others were undertaken before then. It is somewhat surprising that even for the more recent group, very few data have ever been systematically collected and published on the characteristics of the neighborhoods that were selected.

Three on this list, however, have taken data collection and research quite seriously: the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Making Connections Initiative (MC), and the New Communities (NC) and Sustainable Communities (SC) Initiatives, both implemented by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) with predominant support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Together, these three have supported work in 133 neighborhoods in 31 metropolitan areas.

This paper analyzes and compares the characteristics of these neighborhoods as of 2000 to give a rough approximation of the baseline conditions for the work. With surprising consistency, the literature on community improvement talks about distressed inner-city neighborhoods as if their circumstances were basically the same; offering, in effect, a stereotype. In contrast, we find marked variety in the characteristics of these places.

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1 Substantial data are also available about the baseline characteristics of one of the other efforts on this list, the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s HOPE VI program, but that program was implemented only in individual public housing projects rather than the larger urban neighborhoods that are the concerns of most community development practitioners (Kingsley 2009).

2 NC operates only in Chicago, SC operates in 27 metro areas (as well as in three nonmetropolitan neighborhoods that are not included in this analysis), and MC operated in 10 metros. However, seven of the metros that were a part of SC were also a part of MC, thus the total number of metros is 31. Where SC and MC operated in the same metro, a few of the selected areas overlap; thus, there are not actually 133 distinct neighborhoods. Data for NC and SC sites in this paper were provided by LISC; data for MC sites were developed by the Urban Institute. For background on the purpose and approach of the LISC initiatives, see Walker, Rankin, and Winston (2010), Miller and Burns (2006), and http://www.lisc.org/section/ourwork/sc. Information about Making Connections can be found at http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/MakingConnections.aspx.

3 This paper was prepared under support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The work period for Making Connections was approximately 2000–2010. Sustainable Communities began implementation in 2006. New Communities started in 1998, but most of the work has taken place post-2000. Both of the latter are still under way.
We argue that, while the process probably could have been strengthened with more information up front, the approach taken to neighborhood selection in these initiatives was generally appropriate. But we also argue that research is warranted to learn more about how these variations should affect strategy and about the roles differing geographic scales should play in program implementation.

**Neighborhood Selection**

The NC and SC initiatives considered three criteria in selecting their neighborhoods: (1) neighborhood need and the tractability of community problems; (2) community capacity to attack these problems; and (3) presence of unique developmental or programmatic opportunities. The basic idea, noted specifically in one city, was to “choose target areas that were neither too well-off to merit attention nor too distressed to be responsive to community development investment” (Walker, Rankin, and Winston 2010).

Beyond general guidance, however, the specifics of neighborhood selection were left to the practitioners in each city. No definite measures or quantitative cutoffs were specified by central managers or funders as to the “range of distress” that should be considered. Similarly, there were no clear requirements as to how big the neighborhoods should be or what factors should be considered in selecting their boundaries.

This does not mean those decisions could be taken lightly, however. Neighborhood boundaries selected had to be acceptable to local stakeholders—residents, nonprofits, and other groups participating in the revitalization and outside local leadership. Therefore, where opinions differed, the results were (inevitably) a product of political compromise. Historic factors (e.g., traditional views about neighborhood boundaries, service areas of community development corporations (CDCs) and neighborhood associations, etc.) clearly played an important role in these decisions and were of course different in every city. A few of the cities involved have officially (or at least semiofficially) recognized neighborhood or community district boundaries that influenced these decisions, but most of them have not.

**Neighborhood/Community Size**

These processes yielded dramatic variation in the size of the areas chosen for revitalization (table 1). Across all three initiatives, the average was 2.8 square miles with a 2000 population of 26,800. However, the areas ranged from 0.1 to 15.1 square miles and the populations ranged from 360 to 175,000.

Three metros in the LISC initiatives chose community areas that had average populations far in excess of the others: Chicago (41,700), Los Angeles (119,100), and New York (129,400). If we exclude these three outliers, the average area goes down only slightly (to 2.7 square miles) but
Table 1
NEIGHBORHOOD COMMUNITY SIZE, THREE INITIATIVES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Annie E. Casey</th>
<th>LISC/MacArthur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>New Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Metro Areas</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Neighborhoods</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area (sq. mi.)</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IQR</td>
<td>1.1-3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population, (thous.)</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IQR</td>
<td>7.6-33.4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

All Except Chicago, Los Angeles and New York

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Annie E. Casey</th>
<th>LISC/MacArthur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Metro Areas</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Neighborhoods</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area (sq. mi.)</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IQR</td>
<td>0.9-3.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population, (thous.)</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IQR</td>
<td>6.6-27.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: IQR = Interquartile Range

the average population drops markedly (17,200). For this group, the inter-quartile ranges (IQR, the number between which the middle 50 percent of all observations fall) was from 0.9 to 3.6 square miles for area and from 7,000 to 27,000 for population.

This still represents substantial variation. Program managers in several metros chose neighborhoods whose population size averaged 10,000 or less (table 3). In SC, these included Flint, Duluth, Hartford, Kansas City, Providence, Richmond, and Spokane. In MC, they included Denver, Hartford, and Louisville.

At the other extreme, in addition to Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, neighborhoods with average sizes above 25,000 people were selected in five of the SC metros (Detroit, Houston, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, and San Francisco) and three of the MC metros (Milwaukee, Oakland, and San Antonio).

It is important to point out that most of these areas are substantially larger than what has been traditionally thought of as a "neighborhood." Rohe (2009) notes that the model for urban planners has been the neighborhood concept devised by Clarence Perry in 1929: about a half-
mile radius (0.79 square miles in area) and a population big enough to support one elementary school (around 5,000 people, a little bigger than the average size of a census tract). In sample surveys of households in the MC areas, respondents were actually asked to draw what they saw as the boundaries of their own neighborhood on a map. Coulton, Chan, and Mikelbank (2009) found the size of these “perceived” neighborhoods was even smaller: on average, 0.35 square miles, 2,620 population, nearer the size of a block-group.

We do not see these differences as problematic. While we should learn more about the implications, it seems likely that the best scale for a local community intervention will differ in different cities because of variations in local circumstances. Further, in any one city, it seems likely that the ideal scale for some functions will be different than for others (i.e., the scale for overall initiative management and resource mobilization may well be different (larger) than that for other neighborhood-level programmatic work). However, that should not mean that the various scales are necessarily incompatible (more will be said about that below).

This way of seeing things is consistent with what is probably the most complete guidance on neighborhood selection in community initiatives offered to date: by Robert Chaskin (1995). He points out that there is no “universal way of defining the neighborhood as a unit” and suggests that the process of neighborhood identification be “be guided by particular programmatic aims.” He also recognizes that within any initiative, differing functions indicate the need for neighborhood constructs at differing scales, ranging from the intimate “face-block” to the much larger “institutional neighborhood.”

Community Characteristics

The populations of the 133 areas are predominantly minority (table 2). Minorities (all racial/ethnic groups except for non-Hispanic whites) made up 74 percent on average in 2000 (initiative averages ranged from 68 percent in SC to 93 percent in NC). But there was considerable variation in this metric. Minorities accounted for 55 percent or less in the quarter at the low end of the distribution, but for 96 percent or more in the quarter at the high end.

These areas also certainly stand out in terms of their poverty. Only one-fifth of all U.S. metropolitan census tracts had poverty rates in excess of 20 percent in 2000, but 87 percent of the 133 neighborhoods in these initiatives had rates above that level. What is striking in all three, however, is the variety within this range. Overall, only 23 percent of areas were in the extreme poverty category (poverty rates of 40 percent or above). A notably larger share, 31 percent, were in the 30–40 percent poverty range, and 33 percent were in the moderate range (20–30 percent poverty rates). Only 13 percent had poverty rates of less than 20 percent. The MC neighborhoods were somewhat more concentrated at the higher end of the range and the SC neighborhoods toward the lower end, but all had some neighborhoods in all of the categories above 20 percent.
These distributions should not be surprising given the selection approach described earlier, but they might seem so in light of the focus of a large part of the concentrated poverty literature on the worst places. Important research of the 1990s (in particular, Jargowsky 1997) highlighted the dire circumstances of extreme poverty neighborhoods (poverty rates above 40 percent). However, at least three factors suggest that expanding the focus of policy attention to include at least neighborhoods in the middle ranges (20–40 percent poverty rates, like the majority chosen for MC and the two LISC initiatives) is warranted.

Table 2
NEIGHBORHOOD/COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS, THREE INITIATIVES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Annie E. Casey New Sustain.</th>
<th>Making Communities</th>
<th>LISC/MacArthur Sustain. Communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Metro Areas</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Neighborhoods</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty rate (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQR</td>
<td>24-39</td>
<td>29-41</td>
<td>25-45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent of neighborhoods by poverty range</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40% or more</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-40%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>0-20%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% population minority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQR</td>
<td>55-96</td>
<td>65-95</td>
<td>90-99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% units renter occupied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQR</td>
<td>50-77</td>
<td>49-83</td>
<td>63-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% households w/children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQR</td>
<td>29-42</td>
<td>30-44</td>
<td>31-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQR</td>
<td>9.7-17.5</td>
<td>10.5-18.2</td>
<td>14.6-25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% pop. over 25 yrs. no high school degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQR</td>
<td>27-41</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>31-41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% pop. change 1990-00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>(1.7)</td>
<td>(1.7)</td>
<td>(6.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQR</td>
<td>(11.5)-6.7</td>
<td>(15.0)-9.1</td>
<td>(13.6)-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% point change poverty rate, 1990-00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>(1.9)</td>
<td>(2.8)</td>
<td>(5.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQR</td>
<td>(4.3)-3.0</td>
<td>(1.3)-6.9</td>
<td>(8.1)-1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: IQR = Interquartile Range
• First, only a very small fraction (12 percent) of all poor people in metropolitan areas lived in extreme poverty census tracts, whereas 35 percent lived in tracts in the 20–40 percent poverty range. Thus, redefining the threshold of concern from a poverty rate of 40 percent to 20 percent expands coverage from 12 percent to almost half (47 percent) of the metropolitan poor. (Furthermore, the share in the 40+ group had markedly declined in the 1990s, while the share in the 20–40 percent range expanded—see Kingsley and Pettit 2003.)

• Second, there is some evidence that the 20–40 percent poverty range may be where change is most threatening. Research by George Galster (2010) led him to conclude that “independent impacts of neighborhood poverty rates in encouraging negative outcomes for individuals like crime, school leaving and duration of poverty spells appears to be nil unless the neighborhood exceeds about 20 percent poverty, whereupon the externality effects grow rapidly until the neighborhood reaches approximately 40 percent poverty.”

• Third, while problem conditions are even more severe in the extreme poverty group, conditions in the 20–40 percent range are still much worse than in those with poverty rates below 20 percent. For example, single-parent households account for 45 percent of all households with children in tracts with poverty rates from 20 to 30 percent, compared with only 24 percent in those with less than 20 percent in poverty; the share of adults who lack a high school degree is 35 percent in the former, 15 percent in the latter.

Table 2 also shows that the neighborhoods selected for these initiatives differed from each other along a number of other dimensions as well (again, 2000 census data).

Table 3
CORRELATION MATRIX (all metro neighborhoods in MC, NC, and SC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poverty rate</th>
<th>% minority</th>
<th>% renter occupied</th>
<th>% hsehld w/children</th>
<th>Unempl. rate</th>
<th>% change pop. 1990-00</th>
<th>% change pov. 1990-00</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty rate</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% minority</td>
<td>0.30 *</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% renter occupied</td>
<td>0.62 *</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% hsehld w/children</td>
<td>0.28 *</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>0.81 *</td>
<td>0.17 ***</td>
<td>0.49 *</td>
<td>0.18 ***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% chg.pop. 1990-00</td>
<td>(0.29) *</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>(0.34) *</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% chg.poverty 1990-00</td>
<td>(0.17) ***</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>(0.17) ***</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* significant at .01 level; ** significant at .05 level; *** significant at .10 level
• On average, 65 percent of the housing units were renter-occupied, but this rate varied from 50 percent or less for the lowest quarter to 77 percent or more for the highest.
• The share of all households that had children was 35 percent on average, but the interquartile range was from 29 percent to 42 percent.
• The average unemployment rate was 13.9 percent, with an interquartile range from 9.7 percent to 17.5 percent.
• The average share of adults who had completed high school was 36 percent, with an interquartile range from 27 percent to 41 percent.

In addition to these variations in baseline characteristics, there were important differences in change trajectories:

• While the populations of these neighborhoods had declined modestly over the 1990s on average (by 1.7 percent), the top quarter had actually gained population by 6.9 percent or more, while the bottom quarter had lost 11.6 percent or more.
• The poverty rate in these neighborhoods also declined in the 1990s (by 2.2 percentage points on average). But the top quarter saw sizeable improvements (poverty declines of 6.3 percentage points or more), while the bottom quarter saw poverty increases of 2.3 percentage points or more.

One might expect several of these indicators to be correlated with each other, and in fact some are (table 3). The strongest correlations are between poverty and unemployment (+0.81) and between poverty and the renter share of all households (+0.62). Correlations between the poverty rate and the percentage minority, the percentage of households that have children and the two change measures, are not very high.

Implications of these relationships are clarified further in the scatterplots in figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 plots the intersections of the poverty rates and the percentage of households with children for all 133 neighborhoods. Consistent with the correlation coefficient in table 3, these two indicators are not closely related. Shares with children vary within each poverty rate range. For example, in the 20–30 percent poverty rate band, there are three neighborhoods where households with children make up less than 15 percent of the total. In the three at the other extreme in this band, households with children account for more than 45 percent.

Figure 2 plots the intersections of the poverty rates and percentage renters. Here, the overall relationship is stronger, but even so there are major differences within poverty rate ranges. Again considering the 20–30 percent poverty range, we find three neighborhoods with renter shares below 15 percent and, at the other extreme, three with renter shares of 60 percent or more.

Looking at different indicators together, we find neighborhood environments that are starkly different from each other. For example, still within the 20–30 percent poverty band, Chinatown
Figure 1 – Poverty Rate by Percent Households with Children
(MC neighborhoods = dark dots; NC & SC = lighter dots)

Figure 2 – Poverty Rate by Percent Households Renters
(MC neighborhoods = dark dots; NC & SC = lighter dots)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Neigh.</th>
<th>Area (sq.mi.)</th>
<th>Pop. (thous.)</th>
<th>Pct. poverty</th>
<th>Pct. minority</th>
<th>&lt;20%</th>
<th>20-30%</th>
<th>30-40%</th>
<th>40%+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NC &amp; SC Metros</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Flint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Duluth</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>99</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Houston</td>
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<td>4.9</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Kalamazoo</td>
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<td>3.4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>61</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Kansas City</td>
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<td>0.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
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<td>119</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minn.-St. Paul</td>
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(San Francisco) households are predominantly renters (65 percent) and few have children (13 percent). In contrast, households in South Lawndale (Chicago) are also predominantly renters (63 percent) but have the highest share with children in that band (58 percent).

Table 4 summarizes indicators for MC, NC, and SC neighborhoods by metro area. There are important contrasts in almost all indicators. We have already discussed the wide variations in neighborhood/community size. The 2000 poverty rate of the average neighborhood ranges from 14 percent (metro Seattle neighborhoods in MC) to 49 percent (Philadelphia neighborhoods in SC). The percentage minority ranges from 10 percent (Duluth in SC) to 98 percent (Los Angeles in SC).

It appears, however, that the selected neighborhoods also differed from each other within metros. In no case where three or more neighborhoods had been chosen did the selections cluster in the same poverty range. There was often a wide-ranging mix. In Chicago, for example, six neighborhoods fell in the 20–30 percent poverty range, five in the 30–40 percent range, and six in the 40 percent or more range.

**Implications**

Variety in the conditions of neighborhoods selected for community initiatives is hardly ever recognized in the literature. Yet it seems important. One might expect that at least the emphases within strategies should be different in a neighborhood with a 60 percent poverty rate versus one with a 25 percent rate, in one with a 80 percent homeownership rate versus one where renters predominate, or in one where most families have children versus one where very few children reside.

In fact, practitioners and residents who plan community development initiatives do regularly vary their plans based on characteristics of the neighborhoods at hand. What seems to be missing is sufficient effort to document their approaches and how they work; how differences in neighborhood conditions and trajectories can and should influence strategy.

We think research is warranted to identify and document approaches taken by seasoned practitioners in this regard. Ultimately, this could lead to the development of courses and guidebooks on how to systematically analyze the characteristics and trends of a particular neighborhood as the initial stage in developing a quality-of-life plan, and then how to use what is learned from that analysis to make a more effective plan.

It would also seem that more needs to be learned about how the sheer size of a neighborhood (community) selected affects how a comprehensive community development effort should be

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4 In reviewing several important texts in the field, we were unable to find any advice on how strategies ought to be varied in response to measured differences in basic neighborhood conditions: for example, Ferguson and Dickens (1999), Kubisch and others (2010).
organized and run. Surely, there are important differences between taking on a community of 60,000 residents versus one of 6,000. We are not arguing that the wide variations in community sizes actually selected in MC, NC, and SC represent a problem. Remember that in each case the boundaries were the product of much thought and negotiations with residents and other local stakeholders. But, again, there appears to be no mechanism in place to capture lessons about the implications of size on management structure and approaches to mobilization.

Practitioners generally accept that definite geographic boundaries need to be set for the areas in which comprehensive community development is to be mounted. The goals of such efforts are all about improving conditions in a specific place, and without definite boundaries, it would be impossible to measure whether the desired improvements were happening or not—there would be no basis for accountability. Yet there are no accepted guidelines on how the work should be performed within the boundaries.

With respect to property improvements, for example, it is now generally understood that spreading investment dollars evenly block-by-block in a community is not likely to be a cost-effective method of inducing a broader market response. Rather, targeting is called for: clustering investments in a few strategic locations so that market successes in those locations will be strong, with effects that it is hoped will ultimately spill over to boost property values in the remainder of the project area (Galster, Tatian, and Accordin 2006). But there is little or no clarity as to what specific spatial patterns of investment work best in what kinds of communities and how overall scale might influence those determinations.

Another area where more research and experimentation are called for concerns the role of “neighborhoods” per se. A typical goal of community building is to strengthen social networks at the neighborhood level to enhance indigenous supports for families. However, it seems likely that at some point the neighborhood becomes too large to be effective as an environment for nurturing strong social ties. This could mean that smaller neighborhood subareas would be selected within the overall project area as a frame for some activities. For example, an improvement initiative could be launched in community of 30,000 residents (perhaps deemed a good scale for management and resource mobilization) but still be sensitive to strengthening smaller subneighborhoods (perhaps 2,500 to 5,000) within it. But again, no one has tested this notion to discover whether it is workable and, if so, how the best scale parameters should be determined.

In sum, much remains to be learned. We believe that considerable additional research is warranted to learn more about (1) how comprehensive community development strategies should be varied, based on differing neighborhood conditions and trends; and (2) the effects of scale in comprehensive community development programs and subprograms.
REFERENCES


