UC Berkeley
IURD Working Paper Series

Title
HOUSING POLICY AND SOCIAL INDICATORS: STRANGERS OR SIBLINGS?

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/01k5w8jh

Author
Marcuse, Peter

Publication Date
1970-09-01

eScholarship.org
Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

HOUSING POLICY AND SOCIAL INDICATORS: STRANGERS OR SIBLINGS?

by

Peter Marcuse
Department of City and Regional Planning
University of California, Berkeley

September 1970

Working Paper No. 130

HOUSING POLICY AND SOCIAL INDICATORS: STRANGERS OR SIBLINGS?

I. Existing Goals of Housing Policy

Evaluating policy requires some conception of the goals that policy is intended to achieve. This truism has rarely been considered in the field of housing, perhaps because the goal of housing policy seems so obvious: to build more and better houses. A little more sophistication adds "a suitable neighborhood," and further thought adds, perhaps, "within the reach of all American families;" but there it ends. Some theoretical problems about what is suitable may prove interesting to academicians, but there is no real problem in arriving at an operational definition. Good housing is standard housing: waterproof, adequately plumbed, not falling down, with less than X persons per room (or Y persons, depending on their sex, if one is subtle). A suitable neighborhood is simply a neighborhood of good houses, so there is no problem there. If one is fashionably ecological, one adds a dust count and a water oxygenation factor and comes up with a statement of total environmental goals for the nation.

The goal of housing policy as thus defined has two big attractions. It can be measured. Bathrooms can be counted, and people can be counted (we do miss a few blacks occasionally). Dilapidation can be objectively evaluated (even if the objective evaluations of different evaluators differ by 33%). Proportions of standard housing per block can be computed electronically. Air quality can be tested and water samples analyzed. Toward a Social Report,[1] still our most vigorous attempt to take a hard and

systematic look at the social state of the nation, indeed uses exactly these measures to tell the state of its housing.

The second attraction of such an easily quantifiable housing goal is that we can readily apply modern business know-how to its solution. Count the number of families that don't yet have standard housing, add the number of new families being created, add the number of houses that must come down because they're in the way of something more important, modify it with a few other predictable factors, and that's the number of additional houses we need. Count the number of houses built each year for the last ten years, project that number forward for the next ten, take something off for bad luck, and that's the number of houses we'll have. Take the difference, and that's the number a national housing policy must produce.

Figuring out the policy after that is just as easy. Take the number of houses we just calculated will be needed. Multiply by the cost of a house. Subtract the amount that the families that need that housing can afford to pay for it. Amortize the difference over forty years at 6 percent (heaven help us if the interest rate goes up). That's the cost of a sensible, scientific Federal housing policy. Pay it out over a period of ten years to private enterprise, proven to be the most efficient productive device the world has ever seen, and you have solved the problem. The Kaiser Commission went through something very like this train of reasoning, and its implication is that the housing problem in the United States can reasonably be solved by April 12, 1979, if we put our minds to it. Even if we do nothing about it, the problem will be solved some time about 1990, and in any event things are getting better all the time.

The only trouble with this approach is that the ingrates that live in the poorer housing in the United States don't seem to think that things

are getting better. On the contrary, they seem to think they are getting worse, and sometimes they even get so dissatisfied that they burn down their homes to express their feelings towards them. Public housing is built to construction standards that will permit it to shelter five successive generations of tenants, yet the very first generation shoots at the police of Newark from its windows; in St. Louis, the police don't dare even go within the project boundaries. The number of toilets per family has risen dramatically in Baltimore; unfortunately, the juvenile delinquency rate has risen even faster. Kids need rooms of their own, or at least a corner with some quiet and some privacy, to study better; yet educational achievement does not seem to vary as a function of housing quality. Men should work harder and produce more with the incentive of a decent home than when they have only a slum to return to; at least one study[2] found that, given a decent home, they like to spend more time there than at work, and absenteeism from work goes up, not down. Communicable diseases do indeed seem to go down slightly as "housing quality" improves; but a careful cost-benefit analysis might show a total expenditure of $3,792 per common cold cured if this were the only fruit of our public expenditures on housing. In riot after riot housing ranks first among complaints of those involved, and the danger of riots does not seem to be receding; yet the conventional statistics show the goals of our housing policy closer and closer to attainment.

It is the suggestion of this paper that the goals of our housing policy, clear, measurable, and operational as they are, misstate and indeed conceal the problem of housing; that the present definition of these goals is circular, and only accidentally related to a public purpose in housing; that the way these goals are formulated helps some groups and hurts others,

while any reformulation will change the composition of the groups benefited and those harmed; but that such a reformulation is long overdue from the point of view of the overall national interest.

II. Existing Indicators of Housing Progress

The use of social indicators offers one possible approach to a reformulation of national housing goals. The selection of an indicator or indicators to be used for housing implies a finding of what it is that should be indicated about the housing. The social indicator movement must of necessity therefore have considered what we want of housing, what goals we should be pursuing, or they could not be selecting new measures to see whether we are succeeding. In many fields, i.e., health, the search for new measures of "social progress" has indeed been accompanied by the search for new and more meaningful goals for that progress. Has this been true in the field of housing also?

Unfortunately, no. The existing and very promising work in the general field of social indicators has not moved the state of the art, as regards the quality of shelter and the residential environment, much ahead of where it was before. This may be in part because available statistics on several aspects of the physical environment are already quite sophisticated. On the physical quality of shelter, for instance, we have now had three complete nationwide door-to-door enumerations of the physical quality of housing, its facilities, rental levels, etc. The 1960 census contained an account of the number of housing units, rooms per unit, number of persons per room, rent or house value, rent-income ratio, adequacy of plumbing facilities, and physical conditions (standard, deteriorating, dilapidated),

and occupancy, seasonal or non-seasonal status, by selected demographic characteristics, for all housing units in the United States.

But the accuracy of these figures has been extensively criticized.[3] The number of dilapidated units was, for instance, in the Census Bureau's own later evaluation, understated by as much as one third, largely because of variations in the rating of different enumerators. In preparatory work for the 1970 census, means were sought to avoid these errors and yet find a meaningful objective measure of housing quality. After pilot studies of the correlation between dilapidation and a wide variety of simple and unequivocal conditions of the structure, including consideration of correlation with type of kitchen facilities, rent, income, density, and other factors, it was concluded that no sound correlation could be found.[4] Since the 1970 census will not be on a door-to-door basis, but will rely in large part on questionnaires, information on quality of structure _per se_ has been dropped and will not be otherwise available in the census. It will include information only as to number of year-around dwelling units, availability of plumbing facilities and whether shared, rental or value, owner or tenant occupied, with Negro head of household, with more than one person per room, and with or without both spouses present.

The International Housing Productivity Study at UCLA has similarly failed to show any striking correlation between improved housing and improved economic productivity. Sophisticated commentators are more and more conceding the inadequacy of the available measures to reveal those factors crucial for the development of policy in housing. Frank S. Kristof[5] says:

> Given the problem of changing standards of acceptable housing over time, a question arises about validity of the criteria of housing needs adopted in this paper for purposes of measuring

> the need. Such a question applied particularly to the concept of substandard housing as defined on the basis of census criteria. Many persons have been critical of this measure, particularly since it fails to recognize, except obliquely, many deficiencies defined in housing codes such as interior rooms, inadequate size of rooms, certain fire hazards, light and air requirements.
>
> In addition, this measure does not encompass environmental deficiencies that are today accepted as contributing to lack of livability of a given neighborhood. Examples of such deficiencies are garbage-littered streets arising from poor sanitation services, cracked and broken sidewalks, unpaved or broken streets, missing or ineffective street lights, inadequate sewage and drainage facilities, and the mixture of noxious, noisy and heavy traffic generating commercial and industrial usage in residential areas. Others would add social disabilities, such as the danger of assault, mugging and robbery in "high hazard" neighborhoods with high concentrations of unemployment, juvenile delinquency, and narcotics traffic and addiction.

Nevertheless, the measure of "substandard units" continues to be used to evaluate progress in housing, even by such writers as Kristof, in the absence of any operational substitutes.

Even where the available figures do measure something clearly critical for national policy, the conclusions to be drawn from them vary. For example, three recent special reports of the Bureau of the Census give quite different impressions as to changes in the quality of housing of Negro families between 1960 and 1968. Each has a section dealing with conditions in low income areas. The first states "the proportion of non-white families in large cities living in poverty areas has declined sharply since 1960. The drop has been greatest in cities within the largest metropolitan areas."[6] The second states "Negroes are also proportionately less likely to live in poverty areas of large cities than before. In 1960, 77 percent of all non-white families living in large cities resided in the poverty areas of these cities. In 1966, the percent was 62; in 1968 this proportion was down to 56 percent."[7] The last and most recent report,

however, states, "white families left central city poverty areas at a faster rate than non-whites between 1960 and 1968, resulting in an increase in the percentage of poverty area families who were non-white. There was a 35 percent decline in the number of white families residing in poverty areas of large cities as compared with a drop of only 10 percent in the number of non-white families."[8] Has the housing of non-whites gotten "better," or "worse?" There is no dispute about the statistics; what conclusions can be drawn from them, and whether the net result is improvement or further deterioration, is susceptible to differing interpretations.

The same type of comment is applicable to the detailed and carefully worked out segregation indices of the Taeubers.[9] An increase in residential segregation might be seen as an indicator of an increasing problem on the American housing scene. The Taeubers' index, however, compares segregation with a city standard, and gives no indication of whether by overall national standards Negroes are becoming more or less concentrated in cities. It does not include a metropolitan index, although it contains some evidence that it might not differ much from that established for each city. It does not try to trace separately the impact of racial and economic factors, although the relative importance of each is clearly vital for national policy determination. It gives its results in percentage terms only, although an indication of whether the absolute number of minority group members living in segregated conditions may be more relevant than their percentage. Finally, and perhaps most important, it gives us no tool with which to judge if any of the segregation that was found was voluntary or not. At some point we have to decide whether it is a goal of public policy to obtain an equal proportion of all racial groups in every block or in every census tract in the city, and if not, what our racial goals are.

Till then, even such a careful indicator as the Taeubers' is not very helpful.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development accumulates a massive amount of information on new housing construction and the construction and mortgage financing industries monthly.[10] The volume and cost of new construction is given, as well as type of financing, foreclosure rates, cost of materials, and so forth. The level of disaggregation is not very great, however; it is for instance impossible to tell to what extent the increase in the average price of new homes is accounted for by increased size of lot, increased size of building, or increased cost of construction. Vacancy rates are available quarterly; they are however broken down only between rental and owner-occupied, not by location or price. Further, they vary sharply from vacancy surveys conducted by the U.S. Post Office using its letter carriers. Market analyses of the demand for new housing are conducted periodically in select cities by the Federal Housing Administration; they leave much to be desired technically, and evaluate only effective economic demand.

HUD statistics are not assembled and aggregated or even evaluated as a whole to give a unified picture of what is happening to the nation's housing situation, nor are they apparently intended to be. They serve primarily the needs of the construction and lending industries and the Federal agencies, primarily the FHA, that deal with them. When a local public housing authority has to prove to the Housing Assistance Administration the extent of the need for low-income housing, or the level of rents available in the community, it must still start from scratch to make its own survey.

The Douglas Commission and the Kaiser Commission have finally made a vigorous effort to pull together all of the available housing statistics to get some rounded picture of total national housing needs. Their efforts probably represent the most thorough and intelligent use that has been made of the statistics presently available from the Census and from HUD, and the Douglas and Kaiser estimates of need are remarkably similar. Yet in each case, despite their appreciation of the shortcomings of the method (the earlier quotation from Frank Kristof was from a report prepared for the Douglas Commission), the resulting estimate is based solely on the physical condition of individual housing units and their cost, omitting environmental factors and social factors entirely.

If we turn then to the social indicators literature, we would expect to find at least a recognition of the interplay among a range of factors in determining housing conditions, plus an effort to find innovative ways of gauging the aggregate effect of factors not reflected in the census. Yet, surprisingly enough, _Toward a Social Report_[11] treats existing measures of housing condition as adequate without questioning their significance or commenting on the factors omitted. Bauer's compendium, _Social Indicators_[12] takes for granted physically "standard" housing as a basic need without any comment on the shortcomings of that concept as a true indicator of the extent to which the residential conditions in which the nation's population lives fall short of its goals.

In summary, then, the attempt to determine goals for housing policy inductively from the measures of housing quality in general use will not get far. Present statistics on housing quality are gross measures of inputs only. They reflect only crude physical or economic qualities of the housing supply, yet they are generally taken to be adequate indicators

for framing public policy on housing, and in fact these statistical definitions have become so embedded in our thinking about housing that they have become transmogrified not only into standards, but further into the goals, for national policy. A new look is sorely needed.

III. The Goal of Better Goal Formulations

If we were to start from scratch in defining housing goals by looking at what the consumer really wants out of his housing, we might come up with something like the suggestions of the little-publicized but excellent volume on User Needs[13] in the In-Cities Project: statements full of words like "status" and "self-fulfillment" and "dignity." What the nation wants out of its housing policy might involve similarly broad concepts. Elsewhere I have suggested six reasonably discrete goal formulations which include social tranquility and public order, economic growth, freedom of choice, a guaranteed minimum standard of living, social welfare, and individual happiness. Perhaps other formulations with more elegant or more meaningful labels could be devised; certainly any such formulations require extended and careful definition.

The sweep and grandeur of such total societal goal formulations might not be matched by their usefulness, however. Problems of cause and effect are serious enough in trying to unravel the relationship between good shelter and juvenile delinquency; they are dwarfed by the difficulties in deciding whether improved housing contributes to social tranquility or raises aspirations to the level of unrest; and these in turn seem insignificant compared to trying to achieve agreement as to what happiness is or how interpersonal comparisons of it can usefully be made. Yet such issues must be resolved, and many more, before a single utopian vision can

become an operational standard to judge among present housing programs. And this, after all, is the goal of having goals: to decide among competing courses of action. The criteria of a useful goal formulation to guide public policy in housing must include, at a minimum, the following:[14]

1. The goal formulation must indicate a discount rate, or at least a method of ranking, applicable to its component parts, so that if progress cannot be made smoothly towards all at once, some basis will exist for choosing priorities among them.

2. The goal formulation must indicate the weighting to be given to different classes of beneficiaries, so that if progress cannot be made smoothly helping all at once (or costing all at once), some basis will exist for choosing priorities among groups. This may be thought of as a different discount rate by class of beneficiaries.

3. The goal formulation must indicate the next higher order of goal to which it is subordinate, so that if a given policy forwards the housing goal at the expense of coordinate or higher level goals, the conflict will be apparent.

4. The goal formulation must indicate the next lower order of goals to which it can be decomposed, so that ultimately operationally useful and hopefully quantifiable program objectives can be developed, with the impact of each on the other and on the goal proper made explicit.

A goal formulation for housing policy meeting these criteria, given the present state of our knowledge, is impossible to attain. The purpose of the present discussion is not to lessen that impossibility, but rather to highlight it; to highlight it, because a bad goal formulation may be worse than none at all. The "decent home in a suitable environment" of the Housing Act of 1949, translated operationally into standard housing for

all, is one example. Under its banner we have reduced the great number of units dilapidated or without private bath and toilet from 17 million in 1950 to 11.4 million in 1960 to about 7 million today, and yet find ourselves in a "worse" housing crisis today than ten years ago. Some consideration, in the formulation of the goals of the policy that led us to that point, of who should be helped first, at whose expense, how quickly, how far, and to what greater end or in the context of what greater goals, might have helped avoid such a debacle. Yet the ability to consider scientifically such questions is exactly what is missing so far.

Take a toilet, for example. Every quantitative evaluation of the condition of America's housing supply gives figures about plumbing, and every statement of the hoped-for contribution of better housing to social welfare refers to juvenile delinquency reduction, improved health, and so forth. Yet, as Ira Lowry remarked tartly: "A private bath and toilet does not seem to cure juvenile delinquency."[15] Job opportunities, racial attitudes, war or peace, all seem to dwarf toilets as factors affecting many forms of social welfare often identified with housing. The individual benefit resulting from the presence or absence of a private toilet within the dwelling unit may also vary widely depending on factors unrelated to plumbing. Having a toilet available inside the premises certainly appears more pleasant than having it outside. On the other hand, if the resident feels that he is without a toilet only temporarily, and that if he does without it he is more likely to achieve greater economic security and better living conditions in the future, he may be much more satisfied with his unit than a tenant for whom a particular unit, although having a private toilet, represents the best he may ever be able to obtain in life.
Lisa Peattie refers to the differences between "Slums of hope" and "Slums

of despair." Identical living conditions may have directly opposite results in terms of individual satisfaction, and indeed in terms of social welfare, depending on employment prospects, political changes, and perhaps even military fortunes, of the community. Even the traditional relationship between housing and health has not been fully corroborated by the findings.[16]

So existing national housing policy is pursuing unsatisfactory goals and relying on unsatisfactory indicators to signal its achievements in doing so, but better goal formulations are hard to come by. Even if we had them, we would be hard put to find rigorous indicators of success in meeting them. Do we just admit failure and go back to counting toilets, or has our critique revealed at least some hint of a different direction to pursue?

IV. A Matrix for Housing Indicators

The trouble, it will be recalled, with present statement of housing policy objectives is that they tend to reduce to simple, physical standards, both quantitatively and qualitatively, which turn out to be more simplistic than simple. Whatever the more complex and deeper goals of housing policy really are, more information, and of a different kind, is needed to tell whether it is being reached. If we learn nothing more from the exercise of examining current goals and current indicators than the need for new ones, that is something.

But more can be learned. For one thing, the requirements for a useful set of indicators in the housing field can be set forth, and the search begun for their identification.

Mancur Olsen and others have established a set of logically rigorous standards by which generally to judge indicators.

1. They should be mutually exclusive: there should be no duplicate counting.

2. They should be complete: putting all indicators together, all relevant factors should be covered.

3. They should be aggregatable; some common unit of measurement or other device should be available to permit a conclusion as to the net direction or development.

These are in a sense indicators of the quality of indicators. To these three should perhaps be added two more:

4. They should reveal clearly which group or groups are being affected, and in what manner, by the trend shown; and

5. They should be sensitive to future trends; they should be helpful in predicting future problem areas as well as in detecting current results.

Is it possible to develop a set of indicators for housing meeting these criteria?

Four threshold problems must be overcome to do so--and even after that, some basic problems remain about the utility of the effort from a policy point of view. These latter problems are dealt with in the final section of this paper. Here we present only a brief discussion of the threshold problems--who the actors are, what the relevant inputs include, how the outputs are defined, and at what point in the system useful indicators can be found--and a very sketchy outline of a matrix within which they might be met. Other work is being done on the matrix and some of the concepts it embodies at the Urban Institute at this time, and what follows is meant to be only suggestive of the possibilities.

A given housing policy has different effects on different individuals. This rather non-controversial but often neglected observation may serve as the basis for one level of disaggregation of the effects of housing policy. The sketch matrix presently suggests the following categories of individuals:

1. The current occupants of the housing being assisted (the intended beneficiaries of the policy in question).

2. The future occupants of the housing being assisted (the potential future beneficiaries).

3. The group of those having less adequate housing than that being assisted (those "in need" of such housing).

4. The alternate users of the housing being assisted, or the land on which it is built (those dislocated to make room for it, and/or those who would use it were it not for the assistance).

5. The particular ethnic, religious, class or other group with which the current beneficiaries of the housing policy identify, or with whom their interests are most closely linked.

6. The residents of the housing market area affected by the policy in question.

7. Those most directly affected by the costs of the policy in question, generally in the form of taxes.

8. The elected officials of the governmental jurisdictions involved.

9. The bureaucracy affected, whether housing management personnel, public housing authority, FHA, or whatever.

10. The private economic interests (other than occupants) affected: construction trades, real estate speculators, etc.

Disaggregation of the effects of housing policy upon at least these ten groups will help to bring out forcefully the major differences among different policies, both in costs and in benefits, and can at least serve as a useful basis for the political choice among them. Although it does not resolve conflicting consequences in a single grand arithmetic, it has the advantage of not seeming to do so. It highlights some of the issues needing resolution on a policy level, even though it avoids attempting that resolution itself.

The second threshold problem lies in the definition of inputs. For housing, the answer is deceptively simple. Not too many generations ago, our ancestors could look at a pile of logs and know that they had before them all the essential ingredients to house their families, protect them from the elements, and provide them with heat and fuel. If pushed, the land on which the house was to be built might have been added as an "input;" and the manpower necessary to hew the logs and stack them might, to one philosophically inclined, have been called an "input" also. But there it stopped.

Our national housing policy often seems not to have progressed much beyond a refinement of the building materials included in this definition of housing inputs. Its weaknesses are obvious. Even the quality of the physical shelter afforded by the house cannot be predicted from these limited inputs. How good the fire department is may have more to do with how safe the structure is than what it is built of. Whether repairs are made regularly may be more important than how sound the structure is to begin with. Going beyond physical shelter, whether a house provides security and satisfaction today may have more to do with who the neighbors are than how thick the front door is. The location of the house, relative

to other houses, to community services, to job opportunities, to environmental amenities, may be crucial in judging its adequacy.

The matrix suggests six parallel categories into which housing inputs can be grouped. Schematically, they are as follows:

Inputs	The Individual Unit	The Residential Environment
Physical	building structure, plumbing, heating, etc.	streets, sewers, etc.
Service	maintenance, utilities, etc.	garbage pickup, police protection, etc.
Socio-economic	tenure relationships, occupancy payment, etc.	ethnic composition of community, political powers, etc.

The classification of any item into any of these categories is likely to be arbitrary, and there is no magic about the categories themselves. They are simply suggested as one systematic way to search out and arrange the very wide range of inputs which do in fact contribute to that set of outputs we call "housing."

What set of outputs? Everybody knows that the output of a housing policy ought to be houses, and we have ample sophisticated menas of measuring the quality of housing. The American Public Health Association's set of standards makes a good-sized volume. If a "suitable living environment" is part of the output of a housing policy for the broadminded, the APHA has a set of standards for that too. But even the APHA, the organizational veteran of many years of the housing wars, is having afterthoughts about the meaning of its standards, and is rethinking the whole subject. The basic problem with such standards is that they are fundamentally <u>input</u>

measures, not performance or output measures. This is the third threshold problem. Very little of the literature, and even less public policy, is devoted to a head-on attempt to deal with the ultimate outputs of housing.

The matrix suggests a two-stage approach to the problem, defining housing _services_ as intermediate housing outputs (shelter, warmth, accessibility, cheapness, protection against injury appearance), and correlating them with what might be called the ultimate outputs of the housing process, seen in terms of the actors earlier identified (health, comfort, economic well-being, security, status, aesthetic enjoyment). A good bit more work needs to be done in refining these concepts, and perhaps a hierarchical arrangement similar to Maslow's will ultimately prove useful. The essential point, in any event, is that the focus has to be on the output of housing as a totality of consequences for individual human beings, not as piles of brick and mortar, landscaped and located in space.

The final threshold problem then becomes finding indicators of these outputs. The preliminary conclusion of the matrix is that useful indicators of the quality of housing services will be much easier to find than indicators of ultimate outputs, and that the most fruitful approach will be one which deals with _sets_ of inputs, services, and outputs as systems. With this approach, if the chain of causality from input to service to output can be clearly traced, an indicator located anywhere along the chain will be revealing as to the ultimate outcome. If, for instance, it were true (it is not) that thick walls provided good insulation, and good insulation guaranteed warmth in the winter, and warmth in the winter reduced the possibility of colds, and colds significantly affected health, and extraneous effects on health were negligible, then we could accept, as an indicator of the extent to which housing was supplying the ultimate output

of health, measures not only of health, such as number of days free of disabling illness, but also measures of the thickness of walls, of the temperature inside in winter, or of the number of colds per resident of the unit. The process is full of "ifs," but it broadens the field in which housing indicators may be sought, and has produced some new ideas which merit further examination.

V. Conceptual and Political Problems of Indicators for Housing

Even were all of the details of such a matrix of housing indicators to be worked out, a number of difficulties would still surround the constructive use of indicators in the housing field.

The predictive characteristics of housing indicators present serious problems, but for reasons inherent in the field of housing rather than of indicators. Our knowledge of the functioning of the housing market, trends in consumer preferences and changes in life style, technological developments in housing construction, transportation, food preparation, and communication, population growth and employment patterns, racial attitudes and social changes, and the interrelations among these factors, is simply not developed enough to enable us to predict which small present problem will be tomorrow's forgotten foible and which its hidden crisis. Thirty years ago homeownership was seen as a snare and a delusion; fifteen years ago suburban one-family housing construction seemed to know no bounds; today apartment building has exceeded one-family construction for the first time in recent history. Segregated housing, public housing, open housing, fair housing, and now ghetto housing have appeared successively as the solution to the racial problem. Empirical evidence is hardly available to show what precise effect each will have, because, except for segregated

housing, none of the other possibilities has really been tried as yet. Straight-line projections of existing trends are indeed possible, and priorities might intelligently be set based on the magnitude and rate of change of each deficiency revealed by such projections; but the likelihood that from examination of the indicators new problems can be anticipated _before_ they arise is slim. Progress in this direction must await further work on cause-effect relationships in housing, environmental design, and related fields.

Unless we can figure out a way of making problems wait until we have completed our research on how best to meet them, however, we must use the tools we have as best we can. The tools of futurism could conceivably lead to a more dynamic and predictive role for housing indicators.

If housing indicators are to be any more than mere report cards on past efforts, some approach like it must have a top priority in further work in the area. To assume that the future will be just like the past, only more so--the only way in which static indicators could have any value for shaping public policy--is much too dangerous an assumption.

The search for social indicators is an intellectually interesting endeavor, but the main impetus behind it is policy-motivated. Whether improvement is being made in a given direction, or whether a given policy has had a positive or negative result, are facts knowledge of which should influence future policy. The political implications of social indicators are thus not accidental, but inherent. It is therefore appropriate to turn to the political implications of what we have found. Let me start with a summary of the political arguments against pursuing the search for better housing indicators further.

The indicators which we now have, limited and input-oriented as they are, have a long history of use as guidelines to Federal policy. President Johnson specifically used the quantitative results of the Kaiser Commission's report as the framework for housing legislation which he introduced in Congress, and a 26,000,000 unit deficit in good housing units has hovered in the background of most recent public discussions of housing policy. The statistics are ample, concrete, and apparently speak for themselves. Little attention has been paid on the political level to probing their deeper import. Perhaps this is wise, judging from the complexities into which this study has barely ventured.

There are some very strong political arguments against pursuing the quest for housing indicators further. For the purpose of what follows, I should make it clear that I believe that a physically adequate dewlling unit ought to be at least minimal goal of public policy, and that pursuing that goal as part of a broader attempt to improve the total residential environment will in the long run contribute the most to social welfare. I believe also that a high level of housing satisfaction should, as an ethical matter, be guaranteed to all citizens in a good society. My personal prejudice, then, is that more adequate housing is better than less, even if the precise consequences of each are not fully known. From this point of view, existing input measures provide a strong and simple argument for increased housing production. Criticism of such input measures may well have the effect of diluting that argument and dampening the public efforts that follow each revelation of the nation's physical housing needs. Such criticism needs a political justification to be pursued in a political arena.

One of the criticisms we have leveled at existing statistics of substandard housing is that they tend to become viewed as goal statements. Any indicator is likely to become viewed as a standard. Attention may well become focused in a distorted manner on affecting indicators rather than on affecting those substantive matters to which the indicators are supposed to provide clues. Constant reminders that indicators are only indicators are required to reduce this danger, reminders conspicuously absent in most housing policy discussions. The more intangible the value, the weaker the indicator; any survey that purports to indicate the true desired outputs of the housing policy is likely to over-stress the quantifiable and measurable at the expense of the less quantifiable but perhaps even more important values. We tend to do best what we measure best, so we must watch what we measure!

The question of causality is intimately related to the use of indicators. Homeownership may be considered desirable on the supposition that it produces pride, community responsibility, or better maintenance. It may easily become an end in itself even when these desired products are missing. Whether ownership causes pride or not is still a moot question; its use as an indicator of improvement in housing beclouds the issue, and encourages the temptation to substitute input measures for output measures.

Where progress does not go in a straight line forward, indications of progress, even where the indicator itself is accurately measured, can be misleading. If the positive values of a particular ethnic enclave outweigh the disadvantages of some substandard housing it also contains, an indicator of the extent of demolition of substandard units through slum clearance may be read as a sign of progress, even though the opposite is the case. If heightened dissatisfaction with housing by its occupants is

needed to bring about corrective measures, an indicator of satisfaction will remain ambiguous. In the long run, the more satisfaction, the better. In the short run, satisfaction may be the result of anomie, and counter-productive. Security of tenure seems to be contradicted by an increase in foreclosures; yet experience of new families with homeownership, which may result in higher foreclosures, may also be the path ultimately to more wide-spread ownership. Dislocation and temporary worsening of housing accommodations may have to be the price many families pay for better ultimate housing.

Finally, although it is one of the theoretical advantages of a carefully thought out set of social indicators that they reveal more accurately who is being helped and in what manner, this result may not itself be politically neutral. Interest groups may enter into various compromise arrangements because of insufficient information or doubt as to the future results of present actions. Such compromises may be socially very desirable; more complete information may render them less likely.[17] Different groups may see different policies as aiming towards quite inconsistent goals, but may agree on them for equally inconsistent reasons; greater clarity may make such agreement less likely. In short, given the political problems created by criticisms of existing indicators of housing quality, and given the conceptual shortcomings of those improvements which can thus far be guaranteed, a real justification is needed for an effort to introduce more sophisticated indicators into the political arena at this point.

It may be useful to list the specific features which indicators of the quality of the residential environment should have to be useful policy-wise, according to the biases of this paper. They would include the following, over and above those listed before:

1. They must be simple and readily understandable in the context of political controversy.

2. They must be output-oriented rather than input-oriented.

3. They must be comprehensive enough to take into account all of the significant costs and benefits associated with housing.

4. They must be based on information that is readily, quickly and cheaply available, since the lead time in housing development is longer than in many other fields.

5. They must be separable into geographically localized components, since many of the remedial actions must be taken locally.

6. They must be sensitive to the specific effects of public actions.

7. They must reveal the intensity, as well as the extensiveness, of short falls from social goals.

8. They must be capable of revealing the differential effects of given trends on different groups within the population.

VI. Conclusion

No such indicators are now on the horizon, nor has the search for them even begun in earnest. Until they are found, we must use existing indicators, crude, input-oriented, inaccurate, physically biased, and incomplete as they are. Politically, negative criticism of the value of present indicators will have policy consequences probably adverse to greater housing production. A more constructive approach would seek supplementation of existing indicators with better measures of the desired outputs of a national housing policy. Much work remains to be done in defining these outputs in other than physical terms, but the job is tremendously important.

Without it we are in danger of shaping our national policy to achieve measurable goals solely because they are measurable while ignoring the much more important if less measurable goals of decent social, economic, aesthetic, and human environment that we really want. The paradox of present housing indicators is that they serve well, and are perhaps indispensable, in telling us whether we are moving forward in meeting some of our housing problems, but they do not tell us whether the road we are moving on leads us to the ultimate destination we want to reach. It is time we found out. The search for adequate housing indicators may help.

FOOTNOTES

1. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Toward a Social Report, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1969.

2. Robert G. Healy, Effects of Housing on Health and Productivity: Zacapu, Mexico, International Housing Productivity Study, University of California at Los Angeles, October, 1968.

3. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, Measuring the Quality of Housing: An Appraisal of Census Statistics and Methods, Working Paper No. 25, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1967.

4. Arthur F. Young and Joseph M. Selove, Housing Quality in the 1970 Census, paper presented at the 1968 Conference of the American Institute of Planners, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, October 14, 1968.

5. Frank S. Kristof, Urban Housing Needs through the 1980's: An Analysis and Projection, National Commission on Urban Problems, Research Report No. 10, Washington, D.C., 1968, p. 88.

6. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, Social and Economic Conditions of Negroes in the United States, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., October, 1967, p. 93.

7. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, Recent Trends in Social and Economic Conditions of Negroes in the United States, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., July, 1968, p. vi.

8. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, Trends in Social and Economic Conditions in Metropolitan Areas, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., February, 1969, p. 64.

9. Karl and Alma Taeuber, Negroes in Cities, Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago, 1965.

10. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, Housing Statistics, monthly.

11. Op. cit., pp. 35-38.

12. Raymond Bauer, ed., Social Indicators, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1966.

13. In-Cities Experimental Housing Research and Development Project, *User Needs*, Phase I Composite Report, Volume III, Department of Housing and Urban Development, March, 1969.

14. For a good discussion of the levels of objectives and criteria needed for practical evaluation purposes, see the study paper by Harry Hatry published by the Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations of the Committee on Government Operations, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., July 21, 1967, reprinted in part in Hinrichs and Taylor, *Program Budgeting and Benefit-Cost Analysis*, Pacific Palisades, 1969, pp. 94-119.

15. Ira Lowry, "Housing", in T. Pascal, ed., *Cities in Trouble, An Agenda for Urban Research*, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, 1968.

16. Daniel M. Wilner et al., *The Housing Environment in Family Life*, Baltimore, Baltimore John Hopkins Press, 1962; the literature is reviewed in Nathan Glazer, "Housing Policy and the Family," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Volume 29, No. 1, February 29, 1967, and in Alvin L. Schorr, *Slums and Social Insecurity*, Social Security Administration, Washington, D.C., 1963.

17. A point somewhat overlooked even by astute commentators; see, for instance, Martin Meyerson and Edward Banfield, *Politics, Planning, and the Public Interest*, Glencoe, The Free Press, 1955, p. 308.