

**REPAIRING THE BROKEN WINDOWS:
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND THE BUILT-ENVIRONMENT OF
POOR, URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS IN THE UNITED STATES**

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Minor in Justice and
Peace, Georgetown University, Spring 2012

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ABSTRACT

The turn of the 21st century marked a time of hope for urban America — “just as inner-city neighborhoods reached a nadir of misery, sprouts of life began to appear” (Von Hoffman 14). These “sprouts of life” most often took the form of community development organizations working to capitalize on a neighborhood’s assets and resources to affect positive change in the community. In recent decades, the focus of community development in American cities has transitioned from slum demolition and large-scale construction in the 1960s to an emphasis on developing the human capital of residents of the “urban underclass.”

Recognizing that these two approaches are not contradictory, but rather complementary, this thesis takes the less-traveled route and investigates the relationship between community development efforts in poor, urban neighborhoods in the United States and the built environment of these communities. On a qualitative level, the history of American urban centers and community development as both theory and practice are explored. This thesis then argues that conceptions of place and the quality of a neighborhood’s built environment are vitally important to the lives of millions of Americans, and indeed an issue of justice for the entire country. These qualitative arguments are supplemented with an empirical analysis of the relationship between community development activity and the physical conditions of more than 600 low-income neighborhoods in American Rust Belt cities. In the end, the qualitative evidence strongly supports a renewed concern for the built environments of these neighborhoods, while the empirical conclusions are much more mixed.

CHAPTER 1

LAYING A FOUNDATION: INTRODUCTION, POSITIONALITY, AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Cities have long symbolized growth and progress in the United States and throughout the world. Imposing factories along rail and waterways point towards American industrial might, rising skyscrapers mythologize entrepreneurial and business superiority, and bustling entertainment districts proclaim the cultural maturity of the United States. However, behind this veneer lies another, less appealing image of the city, one which a stark contrast to the narrative of American exceptionalism. Neighborhoods experiencing acute poverty exist in cities across the United States, often sitting just blocks from newly constructed stadiums and high-rise office buildings, tucked away under elevated highways, or isolated by railroad tracks. These pockets of urban America are hidden in plain sight. Dilapidated buildings, overgrown vacant lots, pockmarked streets, failing schools, absent public services, rampant crime, joblessness, and hunger are all sad realities for millions of Americans who call these urban neighborhoods home.

American cities are, on the whole, poorer than the rest of the country. In 2009, the average poverty rate of the ten largest cities in the United States was 20.4%, while the poverty rate for the entire country was only 14.3%. Even when controlling for local differences, this relationship still holds — the ten largest American cities averaged 5.25% higher poverty rates than their respective states.¹ Furthermore, as the breakthrough research of Paul A. Jargowsky of Rutgers University – Camden illustrates, this urban poverty is not uniformly distributed

¹ Author's calculations based on: U. S. Census Bureau, "Individuals and Families Below Poverty Level - Number and Rate by State: 2000 and 2009," <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0709.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, "Household, Family, and Per Capita Income and Individuals, and Families Below Poverty Level by City 2009," <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0708.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, "Incorporated Places With 175,000 or More Inhabitants in 2010 - Population: 1970 to 2012," <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0027.pdf>.

throughout cities, but rather is concentrated in a handful of extremely poor neighborhoods. Over the past several decades, the share of individuals living below the poverty line who reside in these poor neighborhoods has increased, as has the physical acreage that such neighborhoods cover.² It is from this sober starting point that this thesis sets out to undertake the task of studying these neighborhoods. Such concentrated poverty cries out for intervention, and many such efforts have been initiated in recent decades. In particular, community development is one of the most promising of these strategies that has arisen to address the challenges of urban American neighborhoods.

This thesis will broadly look at community development in poor, urban neighborhoods, and then more specifically examine the role of community development in improving the physical environment of these neighborhoods — thereby raising the quality of life for residents. Three research questions will serve as guides for the thesis investigates this central theme. First, what are the challenges facing poor, urban American neighborhoods matter, what is the importance of their built-environments on the lives of their residents, and why does any of this matter? One could conclude that, at this point in American history, the deterioration of urban America is inconsequential, with interstate highways, strip malls, and suburban housing plans rendering the principle of a neighborhood community antiquated. This attitude has indeed begun to take root in the United States, particularly concerning the poorest and most neglected neighborhoods. Such an indifferent attitude towards cities has also guided federal public policy for decades.³ A review of the literature on this topic will argue that, in fact, the struggles of poor, urban America *does* matter — both for residents of such communities whose daily lives are

² Paul A. Jargowsky, *Poverty and Place: Ghettos, Barrios, and the American City* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998), 3-6.

³ Alexander Von Hoffman, *House by House, Block by Block: The Rebirth of America's Urban Neighborhoods* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

defined by these challenges, and for the rest of the country. This thesis will also contend that place has a clear and definite impact on the lives of the millions of Americans living in poor, urban neighborhoods. While broad, structural factors, such as labor market conditions and education, undoubtedly shape the lives of these Americans, the physical condition of their communities also impacts them in real ways, an argument which has not received the attention it deserves. Not only is it concerning on face value that millions of Americans live in neighborhoods that are home to dilapidated buildings, pervasive crime, and failing schools, but “the economic and social environments of high-poverty areas may [also] have an ongoing influence on the life course of those who reside in them,” suggesting a future cost to these conditions.⁴

Second, how does community development serve as a means for addressing the needs, and highlighting the assets, of these poor, urban neighborhoods? Community development is one of a host of approaches to the challenges of urban America that have been employed in the past several decades. The early 1900s saw the rise of private, benevolent societies, the 1960s War on Poverty was dominated by large-scale government programs, and the 1980s and 1990s bore the free-market approach of economic development.⁵ However, this thesis identifies community development, a concept that has been in regular, but not dominant, practice since the middle of the 20th century, as the most effective method for improving and empowering urban neighborhoods. On its most basic level, community development entails efforts to “increase the capacity of residents to improve their quality of life” and encompasses everything from the development of large-scale retail and housing projects to workforce training to block-level

⁴ Jargowsky, 4.

⁵ Gary Paul Green and Anna Haines, *Asset Building and Community Development* (2nd ed.) (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007), 24-30.

community organizing.⁶ A tracing of the evolution of community development will show that, as an endeavor *of, by, and for* the neighborhood, it is a powerful tool through which communities are emboldened to build a better future.

Third, and finally, what empirical effect does community development activity, have on the overall physical and environmental conditions of the neighborhood? This relationship will be tested using historical data over the past 10 years from poor neighborhoods in the cities of the American Rust Belt.⁷ This sample of cities, which includes places such as Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, serves as an interesting lens through which to study community development, because they have experienced acute difficulty in recent decades, due in large part to the precipitous fall of the American manufacturing industry. As a result, their urban neighborhoods, and indeed some suburban ones as well, have suffered significant poverty and disinvestment.⁸ In addition, compared to larger cities such as New York and Chicago, Rust Belt cities have a less institutionalized community development sector which has received less attention than those of other cities. In the end, this thesis seeks to investigate the ability of community development to affect change in the environment of poor, urban neighborhoods as a means of breaking the cycle the poverty and restoring these neighborhoods as healthy places to live and raise a family.

⁶ Green and Haines, xi.

⁷The Rust Belt is traditionally understood as the region of the United States that stretches from New York to Illinois along the Great Lakes. More precise definitions of the Rust Belt for the purposes of empirical testing will be provided in subsequent chapters.

⁸ Joe R. Feagin and Robert E. Parker, *Building American Cities: The Urban Real Estate Game* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2009), 11, 15.

Positionality

Before delving into an exposition and analysis of the plight of poor, urban neighborhoods and the role that community development plays in improving their physical environments, and thus their quality of life, it is important to have an honest discussion about the positionality of this thesis. No matter the lengths taken to establish pure objectivity, any piece of research carries with it certain biases. From the author to the field to the methodology, implicit assumptions and inherent values color the resulting product — sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. Rather than fight these biases, this thesis will take the opposite approach and make its positionality explicit, in the hope that doing so will explicate and strengthen the arguments that it advances. The values and ideals that serve as the foundation for this thesis must be discussed in terms of the justice and peace studies field, the deliberate uses of language, and the author's experiences with the topics with which this thesis engages.

On the most basic level, this thesis explicitly draws from, and seeks to contribute to, the burgeoning justice and peace studies field. As a result, this thesis will not, and indeed should not, read as piece of political science literature or a public policy proposal. The body of justice and peace literature makes clear and strong claims about the state of the world and its societies, and, more importantly, the ways in which individuals and communities *ought* to work together for a more just future. This perspective is evident throughout this thesis, particularly in three areas. First, justice and peace studies seeks, at its core, to promote the dignity, rights, and potential inherent to all people. No person, nor his or her life's path, is worth fundamentally more or less than that of any other person. As a logical extension of this position, justice and peace studies places particular focus on the conditions and opportunities facing those people whose dignity and rights are not respected, or even accepted. It is from this basic and nonnegotiable premise that

this thesis seeks to investigate the challenges facing individuals and families residing in poor, urban American neighborhoods. Most elementally, this thesis begins from a position that contends that the lives of these American are important and cannot be forgotten.

Second, this thesis, and the larger justice and peace studies field looks to the systemic and structural level to conceptualize the forces that condemn so many people across the world to lives of economic hardship, victimization, and restricted opportunity. Such a starting point is not without its critics, particularly in the American political discourse, where the fabled “American Dream” of individual nose-to-the-grindstone hard work unequivocally leading to success is the beginning and end of all discussions relating to poverty. The fact that this American Dream has been mythologized and is largely anecdotal often goes ignored. In this American context, the justice and peace studies perspective seeks to challenge the reliance on “personal responsibility” as both the sole cause and solution of poverty in the United States. A serious and honest look at American society should lead to an understanding that, for many Americans, the proverbial deck is stacked against them. Justice and peace studies uses the appropriately powerful and provocative term “structural violence” to describe the ways in which various social systems and institutions — ranging from failing school to unresponsive political institutions to labor market structures — perpetuate the challenges facing Americans living in poverty and constrain their opportunity to escape these circumstances.⁹ This thesis engages with this principle of justice and peace theory, as it seeks to investigate the importance of the built-environment on Americans living in poor neighborhoods and how community development can change this structural challenge.

⁹ Barbara H. Chasin, *Inequality and Violence in the United States* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), 15.

Third, this thesis draws significantly from conflict transformation theory, a subset of the justice and peace field which is quickly developing into a discipline of its own. Conflict transformation has evolved as an alternative to the more traditional and widely-known field of conflict resolution, which seeks to find ways to solve a problem in terms of reducing the negative byproducts that stem from a conflict. Taking a different approach to a conflict situation, conflict transformation contends that a more sustainable path is to *transform* a challenge, turning it from a negative experience into a positive one — rather than simply trying to remove or limit its detrimental impacts.¹⁰ In addition, conflict resolution is usually a process that outside individuals or groups impose on those people involved in the conflict, while conflict transformation takes as one of its principles the intentional involvement of the interested parties themselves, with external forces only serving to facilitate the process. In terms of this thesis, conflict transformation serves as an appropriate lens through which to view the current understanding of community development in the United States.¹¹ Previously guided by a needs-based approach, the consensus on the role of community development has shifted to an effort to emphasizing assets that are already present, but perhaps unrecognized or underdeveloped, within a community.¹² With a focus on highlighting the assets and capacity that exist in a community and using incumbent community leaders to guide the process, this conceptualization of community development strongly aligns with the principles of conflict transformation.

Beyond the important framework that the justice and peace studies field provides, this thesis also asserts and adheres to the argument that language must be used intentionally. This principle is particularly important when dealing with justice issues like poverty because it is disingenuous to offer a critique of the social structures that perpetuate poverty, while using

¹⁰ John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003), 30-31.

¹¹ Johan Galtung, *The TRANSCEND Manual* (Geneva, Switzerland: The United Nations, 1998), 124-125.

¹² Green and Haines, xi.

language that serves to further reinforce these structures. In the peace studies field, there exists a principle of “peace research by peaceful means,” and language is one of those means which must be undertaken peacefully.¹³ What does this idea mean in practice? Specifically when discussing people, this thesis will strive to avoid terms like “the poor,” “the homeless,” and “the unemployed” which have the troubling tendency to reduce real, complex human beings into anonymous and impersonal groups, defined by only one of their characteristics. Instead, these terms will be replaced with language such as “persons facing economic hardship” or “families experiencing homelessness,” which serve to both humanize these individuals and more accurately describe their situation. In the course of many pages, it may be difficult use such descriptive language in all situations, so this thesis may fall into the use of “impoverished” or “financially poor” as descriptors, or even a rare “the poor” when syntax necessitates. Thus, it is important for the reader to know that these seemingly verbose phrases are deliberate and intentional, and when abbreviated and less rich terminology is employed, it is not done out of indifference.

Finally, the author’s perspective is one of the most important determinants of positionality in research, as regardless of the efforts taken to construct an objective viewpoint, no individual is able to fully expunge values and life experiences from his or her writing. Indeed, this author’s experiences and motivations inform the thesis, hopefully adding depth and passion to its research. First, the author will soon complete the Program on Justice and Peace at Georgetown University, and thus looks at the challenges facing urban America with a subjective lens developed through these studies. Second, the author has lived nearly all of his life in various neighborhoods of Washington, DC, Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Pittsburgh, PA — the latter

¹³ Andria Wisler, “A Peace Research Perspective on the Yugoslav Conflicts,” *Peace Review* 21, no. 2 (2009): 231.

being of particular importance to this thesis' study of American Rust Belt cities. While not residing in the economically-depressed neighborhoods under investigation here, he has spent significant time working in, and on behalf of the residents of, such neighborhoods. These experiences in no way give the author a perfect understanding of the unique challenges facing these neighborhoods, but it does give him a capacity to empathize with their residents. Third, in internships and community service initiatives, the author has worked for, and closely with, community-based organizations engaged in community development efforts in urban neighborhoods. The author's engagement with, and concern for, poor, urban American neighborhoods undoubtedly gives him particular biases, but also provides him with an important perspective on these communities.

Methodology

The challenges facing poor, urban American cities are complex and multifaceted to say the least, and the range of efforts employed to address these challenges are numerous and widespread. As a result, this thesis will engage in several different methods to investigate the role of community development in improving the quality of life through built-environments in these neighborhoods. First, this thesis will attempt to incorporate, whenever possible, the words and stories of individuals living in the neighborhoods that it is exploring. This approach will help to underscore the importance of the experience of those people living in such neighborhood, as "people's lives matter, but much research looks at outcomes and disregards the impact of the experience itself."¹⁴

Second, this thesis will engage in historical research in two primary areas — American cities and their neighborhoods, and community development efforts these communities. Cities

¹⁴ Jill Sinclair Bell, "Narrative Inquiry: More than Just Telling Stories," *TESOL Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2002): 209.

have been the traditional organizing unit of American life, but their role in the country and its economic, social, and political systems has evolved over time. Of particular concern for this thesis are the changes that cities have undergone since the middle of the 20th century, when the processes of suburbanization, white flight, and urban disinvestment accelerated at a rapid pace. Community development, as a formal field of study, has a relatively short history, with roots beginning in the federal government's War on Poverty in the 1960s.¹⁵ Early efforts at community development relied heavily on outside parties and governments to affect change in urban neighborhoods. However, in recent years, the twin forces of a collective, national disinterest in these neighborhoods and an increase in local demands for more participatory and democratic development have shifted community development into the hands of the communities themselves.¹⁶ These two histories will serve as important foundations for the investigation of the relationship between community development efforts and improvements in the physical environment of poor, urban American neighborhoods.

Third, on a more theoretical level, this thesis will investigate the motivations behind a concern for place in the context of urban America, as well as the prevailing principles that guide community development in the United States today. With the increasing mobility of people and capital in recent decades, there has been a decreasing emphasis on the physical conditions of neighborhoods, thus deemphasizing place. This thesis will argue that the experience of poor urban neighborhoods illustrates how elements of place can and do impact people, from the psychological impacts of dirty streets and dilapidated buildings to the economic penalties of low

¹⁵ Rhonda Phillips and Robert H. Pittman, *An Introduction to Community Development* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 4-8.

¹⁶ Green and Haines, 25-30.

home values.¹⁷ Community development can be an amorphous term with a variety of connotations, so a basic working definition will be developed for the purposes of this thesis. In addition, a typical community development process will be outlined, as well as the principles that guide the community's engagement in that process.

Fourth, beyond just sketching an historical and theoretical argument about community development and the physical conditions of poor, urban neighborhoods, this thesis will seek to identify this relationship empirically through an analysis of data from cities of the American Rust Belt. This analysis will test for a relationship between the quantity of community development activity in a neighborhood and improvements in the physical and built-environment of those areas. The independent variables measuring community development activity will include the number of active community-based organizations in a given neighborhood, the length of time those organizations have been existence, and their financial resources. Community development activity will be measured against dependent variables for the physical condition of neighborhoods, like vacant property rates, the age of structures, and levels of new construction. Regression analyses will be run to identify relationships between these two sets of variables in a representative sampling of poor communities in Rust Belt cities.

Fifth and finally, this thesis will draw conclusions from the analysis of the data explained above, and synthesize them with the themes from the literature on American cities and community development. The arguments that (a) the challenges of poor, urban American neighborhoods ought to be of concern for the larger United States and (b) the physical conditions of the built-environment have a significant impact on the quality of life in these neighborhoods will be overlaid on the statistical conclusions to provide a rounded assessment of community

¹⁷ Martin Ravallion and Quentin Wodon, "Poor Areas, or Only Poor People?" *Journal of Regional Science* 39, no. 4 (1999): 706.

development in urban America. The highest aim of these conclusions is to reframe the discussion and practice of community development to look at the physical environment of urban neighborhoods as an integral component of efforts to improve the quality of life in these communities. This thesis hopes to provide substantial evidence and arguments for the devotion of equal weight to both issues of place and built-environment in the understanding of urban America, and place-based community development strategies.

CHAPTER 2

THE RUST BELT: BLIGHT, DECLINE, AND THE FORGETTING OF AMERICAN CITIES IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The United States is becoming an increasingly urbanized country, as more and more Americans move into metropolitan areas. However, the American imagination tends to more frequently cling to the images of small-town Main Streets and rolling farmland than the cities in which millions of Americans live together in tightly-bound neighborhoods — literally and figuratively. Within metropolitan areas, the city cores are looked upon with further disinterest and dismissal. Indeed, even the federal and state governments “rarely notices cities, and then only in times of extreme crisis.”¹⁸ Americans’ relationship with their cities have evolved over time, transitioning from a desire to live in cities for both work and lifestyle through the mid-1900s, to an all-out retreat from their borders in the middle of the 20th century, to today’s cautious trickle back into urban neighborhoods. The story of this evolution is particularly rich in the dramatic growth and subsequent, acute decline of the cities of the American Rust Belt. This process, which was both organic and manufactured, provides an important backstory and foundation for present and future community development efforts in the neighborhoods of such urban areas.

The American city was born out of necessity and practicality in the early years of the republic. Villages grew into towns, and eventually into cities, along key portions of trade routes, at ports and river intersections, and in close proximity to important natural resources. These already bustling locations soon became home to the birth of American industry, and with that

¹⁸ Kenneth T. Jackson, "A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and the Shape of the American Metropolis," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 626 (2009): 11, 12.

development, an influx of workers set out for cities across the county.¹⁹ Up through the early 1900s, jobs were plentiful, neighborhoods flourished, immigrants arrived and settled into a new life, and these cities became emblematic of American success. However, as the middle of the 20th century approached, the demand for cheap labor and inadequate affordable housing led to overcrowding in cities, forcing workers to live in slum conditions. This development and the initially-slow exodus of industry from city centers conspired to spur an increasingly rapid flight from cities, beginning with the wealthiest Americans, followed shortly by the growing middle class. Efforts to stem this tide using urban renewal projects in the 1950s and 1960s often exacerbated the problem facing cities, and most of these efforts resulted in poorer, less economically viable neighborhoods.²⁰

As this process continued in the middle decades of the 20th century, industry and commerce quickened their exit from cities, taking with them the jobs that urban residents so desperately needed. This “capital flight” encouraged the dispersion of businesses and residential life into suburban and exurban locations at the periphery of the urban core, creating “multinucleated” cities with several scattered centers, none of which are the historic city center.²¹ According to Kenneth T. Jackson, Professor of History at Columbia University, there are several structural factors that significantly facilitated this overall decline of the American city from the 1950s to the 1980s. First, the federal government’s endorsement of suburban living through the construction of the interstate highways out of cities — often directly through older, urban neighborhoods — and the subsidization of home ownership through the tax code encouraged the upper and middle classes to flee cities. Second, access to transportation such as highways, less

¹⁹ Von Hoffman, 7-8.

²⁰ Ibid., 1-10.

²¹ Feagin and Parker, 11, 15.

expensive land, and a non-unionized workforce made the suburbs and rural areas more attractive locations for businesses. Third, statutory and informal discrimination, such as banks' redlining of certain neighborhoods, made mobility impossible for many Americans and further increased the stratification between the middle class and the poor. In the past several decades, urban life has again become attractive for a variety of reasons, including convenience, lower costs, and the reversal of some of past institutional structures. In fact, this reverse flow back into cities has created frictions of its own, namely gentrification, as long-time residents of urban neighborhoods are finding themselves displaced at the hands of wealthier transplants.²²

The cities of the Rust Belt certainly experienced these dynamics in the middle of the 20th century, but they also suffered through an additional setback in the 1970s and 1980s with the rapid and acute collapse of their lifeblood — American manufacturing. The term “Rust Belt” can be broadly understood as the “agglomeration” of cities between New York and Iowa and running along the Great Lakes, who developed into the heart of American industry in the 20th century.²³ From the 1860s to the 1920s, American manufacturing made the permanent move away from the Atlantic Coast inland to the Midwest, and Rust Belt cities accounted for an increasing share of the nation's manufacturing output during this period. Following this flow of jobs were successive waves of immigrants who took work in the mills and factories of this industrial boom and joined with migrants to swell the population of the Rust Belt. As the middle of the century approached, many of these workers were able to move into the growing middle class, with the help of plentiful work and strong labor unions. The Rust Belt was composed of several major industrial cities, which usually specialized in one type of manufacturing, with nearby and smaller industrial cities connected to them with rail and later highways, creating a “hub and spoke” economic

²² Jackson, 14.

²³ Sean Safford, *Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown : The Transformation of the Rust Belt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 18.

network.²⁴ As the Rust Belt continued to grow and produce an ever larger share of American manufacturing, it retained a distinct identity. These cities became known for their blue collar workers, their ability to produce quality, durable goods, and the manufacturing of those goods on a mass scale, an identity that the United States as a whole began to adopt.²⁵

The seemingly unbreakable trajectory of the Rust Belt's industrial prowess met with a combination of factors with which it was unprepared to cope, chief among them globalization. As other countries underwent industrialization, their costs of production plummeted and American companies began shifting their manufacturing overseas. The traditional structure of a regional or national manufacturing company headquartered in a Rust Belt city and operating in the surrounding areas was similarly broken. Multinational corporations soon dominated the industrial marketplace, and through competition and acquisition, manufacturing in Rust Belt cities dramatically declined. Compounding this development, these cities suffered a second setback, as the various industries that arose to serve and support manufacturing quickly died away too. From 1947 to 1987, the Midwest, which encompasses most of the Rust Belt, saw its share of the United States' national manufacturing output fall by one third.²⁶ This evolution typified the concept of "hollowing out" in Rust Belt cities, as jobs and workers disappeared, "communities feared they would become shells of their prosperous pasts."²⁷ In the 1970s, the Midwest had the highest per capita income of any region in the US, but by the 1980s, it had one of the lowest.²⁸ During this decline, Rust Belt cities suffered from significant population loss, an

²⁴ Safford, 6

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-6, 18-19.

²⁶ William A. Testa, Thomas H. Klier, and Richard H. Mattoon, "Reversal of Fortune: Understanding the Midwest Recovery," *Economic Perspectives* 21, no. 4 (1997).; Safford, 19.

²⁷ Safford, 1.

²⁸ Testa and Klier.

outflow of investment, decreasing home values, a dwindling tax base, and a drain in human capital, all of which made the challenges already facing urban America more acute.²⁹

Just as American cities on the whole have bounced back somewhat from their mid-century struggles, so too has the urban Rust Belt, albeit on a much slower curve. The largest challenge facing the Rust Belt was that the 1970s and 1980s represented a fundamental adjustment in manufacturing, and more broadly, “the end of an era in America’s economic history and the beginning of the transition toward an entirely new way of organizing the economy.”³⁰ This tectonic shift required Rust Belt cities to make peace with the idea that the high-paying and plentiful manufacturing jobs were not coming back — a difficult proposition for a region whose very identity was tied to industry. The service sector quickly replaced manufacturing in the Rust Belt, though with much lower wages and volume than before. Rust Belt cities faced a choice of attempting to look for innovation and cluster service industries in their region, or attempting to simply grab as many of these new service jobs as possible, regardless of their quality.³¹ The cities that were most successful were able to capitalize on rising “sunrise” industries, like financial and legal services, advertising, and travel, while slowly weaning off of the “sunset” industries of heavy manufacturing.³² Some parts of the Rust Belt were able to retool their industrial capacity to engage in the global market, taking advantage of demand for American exports, lean manufacturing processes, and lower prevailing wages.³³ Compared to the rest of the urban America, Rust Belt cities are readjusting to the new economic reality more slowly, and thus their urban neighborhoods are still facing numerous challenges.

²⁹ Safford, 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.; Testa, Klier, and Mattoon.

³² Safford, 21.

³³ Testa, Klier, and Mattoon.

The reasons that Rust Belt cities have been on a slow rebound curve can be instructive in looking at community development efforts in these cities. Specifically, Sean Safford, in his book *Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown*, reviews three of the most commonly cited structural issues. First, the economy of Rust Belt cities was usually concentrated in one industry, with high integration between that industry and the various support and service businesses that developed around it. Second, at the time of the readjustment of the Rust Belt economy, most cities and regions did not have a highly educated workforce, so the transition to more knowledge-based service industries was slow. Third, more developed social capital and the active participation of citizens in civic life could have helped to soften the blow of the economic changes and repurpose the Rust Belt for its new life.³⁴ Thus, in terms of tools for improving Rust Belt cities and their neighborhoods, there needs to be a concern for both physical and social development. The physical gaps left in the street grid of these cities must be addressed, though done in a way that accepts the fact that the Rust Belt may never return to its human economic capacity seen in the mid-1900s. In terms of social capital, it is crucial for Rust Belt cities to focus on building networks of civic engagement, from the grassroots block and neighborhood level to the leaders of the new service sector industries. These two principals will allow the Rust Belt to use its disruptive experience of economic readjustment to address the needs and build on the assets of its cities and people.

³⁴ Safford, 27-32.

CHAPTER 3

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: PEACEWORKERS IN THE REAL WAR ON POVERTY

For the past half century or so, community development has been one of the many strategies employed to address the conditions of poor, urban neighborhoods in the United States. Throughout this period, the mood of the country and its leaders has oscillated between preferences for large-scale, downwardly imposed government programs and a laissez-faire, decentralized approach in these neighborhoods. Through this back and forth, community development has emerged as a widely-accepted, though not widely understood, force for positive change in urban America. For the purposes of this thesis, community development will be investigated in two phases: first it will be defined with an eye toward its evolution and nuances, and then its goals and processes, including the role of community-based organizations, will be discussed.

Despite having tangible and visible elements, community development is a rather amorphous concept. If one were to ask a dozen people on the street to explain community development, a dozen different answers would likely be given. However, the academic literature does converge on several key tenets of community development, which this thesis will use to establish a working definition. Gary P. Green and Anna L. Haines, both of the University of Wisconsin system, provide a starting point for a discussion of community development, defining it as a “planned effort to build assets that increase the capacity of residents to improve their quality of life.”³⁵ Even this basic definition goes deeper than the general perception of community development, which typically associates community development with the construction of a new housing project or retail location. Nevertheless, more important material

³⁵ Green and Haines, xi.

can be added to this baseline. In their book that the Brookings Institution published, Ronald P. Ferguson and William T. Dickens provide a valuable explanation of this quality of life as, “social justice, political efficacy, and economic vitality.”³⁶ There are thus two remaining questions left in putting an intellectual structure around community development. First, *where* does community development happen? While such development does happen in all types of neighborhoods, it is most commonly employed in low to moderate-income communities — precisely the subject of this thesis.³⁷ Second, Rhonda Phillips of Arizona State University and Robert Pittman of the University of Central Arkansas highlight *how* community development happens, specifically through the organized, collective action of a community.³⁸ Thus, this thesis understands community development as a process of collaborative action in poor neighborhoods, which seeks to improve their quality of life, broadly defined, through the cultivation of assets within the community and its residents.

One of the issues that arises from this working definition and has real, concrete implications for how one conceptualizes community development is the understanding of “community.” Like community development, community is a difficult idea to fit into any one particular framework, as the literature itself admits.³⁹ However, in terms of community development, there are two common ways to define a community: one based on place, and one based on people. The use of place, often by way of geographic or political boundaries, to understand a community has been the historical approach of community development efforts and academic research.⁴⁰ However, the evolution of community development has seen a pushback

³⁶ Robert F. Ferguson and William T. Dickens, “Introduction,” in *Urban Problems and Community Development*, ed. Robert F. Ferguson and William T. Dickens (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁸ Phillips and Pittman, 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁰ Green and Haines, 4-5.

against this conception of community as impersonal and insufficient for capturing the realities of modern American life. Thus, an alternative definition of communities arises, defined in terms of people, which highlights social relationships and shared interests of people across geographical boundaries. This use of community allows for a more expansive deployment of the concept, as it can encompass much broader populations, such as ethnic groups, socioeconomic classes, and age strata.⁴¹ Such a conceptualization of community emphasizes the importance of “the human scale of organization,” an ideal that appeals to many people in the community development field.⁴²

This emphasis on people within the definition of community falls in line with the progress towards a more comprehensive and nuanced conception of community development. However, in terms of this thesis’s exploration of the role that community development plays in determining neighborhoods’ built-environments, the utility of place in identifying community should not downplayed. People living in physical proximity to one another develop strong bonds of solidarity and such “geographic consciousness” facilitates the collective action that is so important to community development.⁴³ In addition, the neighborhood, or a similarly sized geographic unit, is the natural scale on which communities organize themselves and solve problems, and thus community development should “live where the people do” — in the neighborhood.⁴⁴ Therefore it is apparent that defining community in terms of people *or* place is a false choice, as both approaches properly inform community development. Taking both paths toward an understanding of community allows for a fuller picture of reality, as community

⁴¹ Phillips and Pittman, 5.

⁴² David J. Morris and Karl Hess, *Neighborhood Power: The New Localism* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975), 14.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

development must engage with relationships that flow within groups of people and places, as well as between people and the places in which they live.⁴⁵

On a more operational level, the primary driver of community development must be also be addressed. Traditionally, community development was focused on identifying the needs of a community and searching for methods to address those problems, a logical thought-process given the acute and untreated poverty that was present in American cities of the 1960s. However, the prevailing wisdom has evolved in recent decades to a full embrace of an alternative, asset-based approach to community development, which this thesis has adopted.⁴⁶ More specifically, this approach seeks to identify the assets and capacity that already exist in the community, incubate them, and put them in a position to take hold of their own futures. These community assets can come in many forms, including social, human, intellectual, physical, financial, environmental, political, and cultural capital.⁴⁷ Not only do these forms of capital cover the full spectrum of community assets, but they are also found various in levels of communities, from individuals, to organizations, to institutions.⁴⁸ Focusing on assets rather than needs or problems is preferable for several reasons. On the most basic level, this approach explicitly recognizes the tremendous potential that is inherent in every community, regardless of its material wealth or political power. As a result, asset-based community development takes a more positive, empowering perspective on the prospects of improving the quality of life in low-income neighborhoods.⁴⁹ Moreover, community development that works in terms of assets and capacity

⁴⁵ Rita Mae Kelly, *Community Control of Economic Development: The Boards of Directors of Community Development Corporations* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1977), 36.

⁴⁶ Green and Haines, 7.

⁴⁷ Phillips and Pittman, 6.; Green and Haines, 11.; Ferguson and Dickens, 4-5.

⁴⁸ Green and Haines, 12.

⁴⁹ Kelly, 37.

building is far less confrontational than needs-based community development, and therefore allows for collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders.⁵⁰

With this focus on asset and capacity building in mind, it is appropriate to examine the specific goals and objectives of community development. On the most general level, community development endeavors to affect positive change in neighborhoods, change that is both “appreciable” and “permanent.”⁵¹ More specifically, Green and Haines organize the primary goals that community development seeks to achieve in its host neighborhoods into five categories. First, community development is unapologetic in its striving to address inherently local problems, which can have more real and immediate impacts on people’s lives than macro-level issues. Second, on a structural level, community development aims to reduce inequality within the community, as well as between the community and other areas. Third, the deliberate process of community development can promote democratic values and institutions within the community. Fourth, as highlighted in the working definition of community development, the improvement of the intrinsic potential of each individual member of the community is also an important goal. Fifth and finally, though perhaps obvious, it is important to mention that this process also seeks to strengthen the bonds that tie the community together and build a shared identity among its members.⁵² These goals speak to the appropriately wide reach of community development, touching a diversity of issues that neighborhoods and their residents grapple with on a daily basis.

Another intrinsic principle of community development is the priority that is placed on the *process* of the development. It is easy for observers to focus on only the outcomes of community development — amount of housing units constructed, number of individuals completing job

⁵⁰ Green and Haines, 12.

⁵¹ Kelly, 22.

⁵² Green and Haines, 1-4.

training programs — with little focus on how those results were achieved. However, community development is best understood as a process that a community engages in, one that begins long before, and continues long after, a project produces tangible results.⁵³ Indeed, as Phillips and Pittman explain, “success begets success” when an effective process produces the desired results.⁵⁴ The appropriate place to begin looking at the community development process is in its early stages when the community engages in a collective visioning process. Through conversations and experiences of varying size and structure, residents and other stakeholders develop a vision of the “end state” of their community, encompassing their needs and aspirations.⁵⁵

In addition to broader hopes for the community, the visioning process can also help to create a plan of action for the community’s development, which is realized through the important principle of participation. Community development, when done well, “requires the engagement and collective action of all citizens.”⁵⁶ Such participation ought to be broad based, and inclusive of all stakeholders in the community. A positive externality of this participation is a shared consciousness in the community, which helps individuals and organizations buy into the process. However, particularly in low-income communities, it can be difficult to stimulate necessary participation because of the serious economic and social pressures facing residents. Green and Haines provide a roadmap for how to overcome such challenges to community participation, beginning, logically, with the importance that the issues at hand hold for individuals, families, and the community at large. Second, social relationships between members of the community can help to pull individuals from the margins and into the participatory fold. Third, community

⁵³ Phillips and Pittman, 5.; Green and Haines, 1-4.

⁵⁴ Phillips and Pittman, 7.

⁵⁵ Green and Haines, 48.

⁵⁶ Phillips and Pittman, 15.

organizations and other facilitators of this participation can offer incentives to encourage participation, material or otherwise.⁵⁷ This emphasis on participation focuses on engagement of a broad base of stakeholders in the community, correctly centering on residents. However, as Sean Safford of the University of Chicago points out, the cooperation between key civic leaders is also important in weaving a strong “fabric of civic participation.”⁵⁸

The importance of participation in community development necessitates a facilitating agency for this process, a role that community-based organizations (CBOs) most often fill. These organizations can vary from a neighborhood block watch with a few volunteers that meets once a month to discuss safety issues to a community development corporation with a staff of over a hundred that uses millions of dollars in grants to run job training programs and build affordable housing.⁵⁹ CBOs, of which many take the form of community development corporations (CDCs), are decidedly “resident driven,” “neighborhood oriented,” and “committed to empowering residents.”⁶⁰ Ferguson and Dickens provide a structure for understanding the principles that undergird these organizations. At their core, CBOs are indigenous, in that the organization and its leaders are decidedly *of* the community. In addition, such organizations are principally concerned with the development of a defined community in an explicit way. The development that CBOs engage in is broadly understood, encompassing a wide range of goals. From those goals, CBOs work to achieve concrete results, be that a more educated workforce or a revitalized commercial district.⁶¹ The most effective CBOs are able to develop and retain real power and agency in the local political process, as well as achieve financial and programmatic

⁵⁷ Green and Haines, 43.

⁵⁸ Safford, 7.

⁵⁹ Green and Haines, 4.

⁶⁰ Ferguson and Dickens, 13.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

sovereignty — allowing the organization to most faithfully facilitate the process of community development.⁶²

Before concluding this discussion, it is important to answer a popular confusion about community development, namely the existence of a seemingly similar practice of economic development. Despite their concrete differences, these two terms are often used interchangeably, and incorrectly, in everyday discussion. In terms of mission, economic development is almost exclusively focused on job creation, by way of attracting businesses to a particular area with primarily financial incentives. While community development may have employment as one of its goals, it is only one part of a larger community empowerment agenda. The leadership of these two types of development also differ, as business and political elite are the primary initiators and drivers of economic development, whereas the community at-large serves both these roles in community development. Perhaps most noticeably, economic development is almost solely focused on outcomes, typically of a short-term nature, and does not place much value on a collaborative planning process or the significant involvement of the community in which the development is taking place. This approach is the diametric opposite of community development, which places a robust process on equal footing with the desired outcome.⁶³ This distinction should not be read as total condemnation of economic development. In fact, there are some economic development projects that do strive for community engagement and comprehensive goals, but they are decidedly in the minority.

⁶² Robert Mark Silverman, “Introduction: Social Capital and Community Development,” in *Community-Based Organizations: The Intersection of Social Capital and Local Context in Contemporary Urban Society*, ed. Robert Mark Silverman (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 2.

⁶³ Phillips and Pittman, 8-9, 12.; Green and Haines, 1-4.

CHAPTER 4

WHAT'S PLACE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

THE ROLE OF PLACE IN THE LIFE OF URBAN AMERICA

People Versus Place: A False Choice

It is easy to see the challenges that plague urban America as long-evolving, intractable, and all together hopeless. Recent decades have witnessed the advancement of numerous theories to explain these problems and guide the development of possible solutions to them. Perhaps none of these arguments has been so widely studied and accepted than the concept of building “social capital” in communities throughout the United States. Robert Putnam most famously developed this idea in his book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, which investigates trends of declining participation in American social, civil, and community organizations and associations. He theorized that these institutions, and other more informal spaces for social interaction, form a crucial social fabric that supports Americans and their communities. This fabric has been slowly fraying since the middle of the twentieth century, and Putnam and others argue that rebuilding these connections and developing strong social capital is the key to reversing negative economic, social, and political trends in the United States.⁶⁴

The literature on social capital offers very convincing arguments for the importance of relationships and social networks, which this thesis does not dispute. In fact, much of the recent discussions of community development theory and practices, which were reviewed in the previous chapter, emphasize this social approach. However, this thesis attempts to take the less-traveled route to examine the role of *place* and the *built-environment* in understanding and addressing the problems that face poor, urban communities. Social capital exists within a context

⁶⁴ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 15-19.

of physical capital, or lack thereof, which plays an equally important role in the lives of Americans and their neighborhoods. The location, history, and built-environment of urban neighborhoods have real and measurable consequences — from creating barriers to adequate employment to harming the mental and physical health of residents. This thesis will look at the conditions of urban neighborhoods through two lenses. First, on a theoretical level, the concept of *place* as one of the most important organizing units of life in the American city will be investigated. Different conceptions of place, home, and community carry serious psychological, emotional, and spiritual weight for residents of a neighborhood and thus warrant study. Second, in a more tangible sense, the next chapter will trace out how the design and condition of the built-environment impacts people living in poor, urban neighborhoods in real and concrete ways. This discussion of built-environment will be an important preview to the quantitative analysis of community development and neighborhood conditions in subsequent chapters.

Why Place Matters

Before delving into a conversation about place and the built-environment in urban American, it is important to first discuss the motivations for *why* they ought to be studied. First, as further argued below, place is an important determinate in the lives of people living in poor, urban American communities — and a factor over which the vast majorities of these Americans have no control.⁶⁵ Accidents of birth and a lack of geographic mobility “trap individuals in structural circumstances that deprive them of opportunities, choices, and access to public services.”⁶⁶ The often cited “cycle of poverty” is founded on this idea that future generations’ opportunities are a function of structural barriers to social, economic, and geographic mobility of

⁶⁵ Gregory W. Streich, *Justice Beyond "Just Us": Dilemmas of Time, Place, and Difference in American Politics* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), 29.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

their parents, and their parents' parents. Second, the stark racial and socioeconomic segregation of American communities allows middle and upper middle class Americans to maintain a distance from less-advantaged individuals and families. Gregory W. Streich, Professor of Political Science at the University of Central Missouri contends that such geographic incongruities allow more privileged Americans to deny a moral and human obligation to their fellow citizens who reside in poor, and often distant, neighborhoods.⁶⁷ An exclusive understanding of justice as “just for us” motivates this lack of regard for Americans living beyond one’s immediate neighborhood.⁶⁸ Third, investigating the dynamics of urban poverty in the U.S. from the perspective of place is an important counterbalance to the “cultures of poverty” theory that has taken hold in the U.S., which places blame for poverty solely on the shoulders of impoverished Americans and their behavior.⁶⁹ In particular, as Mark Alan Hughes, a senior fellow at the University of Pennsylvania and an advisor to Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, argues, it is time to consider not only the “ghetto underclass,” but also the “underclass *ghetto*” itself.⁷⁰

In addition, there is a growing movement to understanding the relationship between poor neighborhoods and their environments as relationships of justice. The concept of *environmental justice* has been the topic of much research and discussion in recent years, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has even integrated principles of environmental justice into its compliance and enforcement efforts.⁷¹ Most basically, environmental justice refers to “the fair

⁶⁷ Streich, 29-32.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁹ Mark Alan Hughes, “Misspeaking Truth to Power: A Geographical Perspective on the “Underclass” Fallacy,” *Economic Geography* 65, no. 3 (1989):189, 191.

⁷⁰ Hughes, 188. (Emphasis added)

⁷¹ Yanique Redwood et al., “Social, Economic, and Political Processes That Create Built-environment Inequities: Perspectives From Urban African Americans in Atlanta,” *Family & Community Health* 33, no. 1 (2010): 63.; Robert J. Brulle and David N. Pellow, “Environmental Justice: Human Health and Environmental Inequalities,” *Annual*

treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.”⁷² In particular, this argument contends that “no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental and commercial operations or policies.”⁷³ The challenge of environmental justice is most visible in poor, urban communities, where residents are highly immobile, tied to their neighborhood, and thus at the mercy of environmental conditions beyond their control. This fact betrays how such circumstances are a matter of justice — factors almost exclusively out of their hands jeopardize the health and wellbeing of an already vulnerable and marginalized group of Americans. There are several widely accepted tenets of environmental justice that help to motivate this thesis’ focus on the physical surrounding of urban neighborhoods. On the most basic level, all people have an inherent right to be free of harmful environmental conditions. In addition, efforts to address these challenges must focus on front-end prevention. Environmental justice also seeks to identify specific individuals or actors who are responsible for causing the negative conditions. Finally, in the end, affected individuals ought to have access to a form of redress for the harm that they suffered.⁷⁴ This perspective on environmental conditions as a matter of justice is an important lens through which this thesis will investigate the built-environments of poor, urban neighborhoods in the United States.

Review of Public Health 27, no. 3 (2006): 3.2.; Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), “Environmental Justice: Basic Information,” *epa.gov*, <http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/basics/index.html>.

⁷² EPA.

⁷³ EPA.

⁷⁴ Redwood et al., 63; Brulle, 3.8.

Place: Its Importance, Use, and Abuse

The concept of *place* lends itself to a discussion in the abstract, as any point on a map or space in a geography is casually called a place. However, in the context of this thesis, place carries with it a particular role and function. As Timothy Beatley, the Teresa Heinz Professor of Sustainable Communities at the University of Virginia, frames it, *place* refers to specific spaces that takes on some meaning to an individual or group of people, through lived experiences, history, socialization, and shared values.⁷⁵ He writes that, “we need places that provide healthy living environments and also nourish the soul — distinctive places worthy of our loyalty and commitment, places where we feel at home, places that inspire and uplift and stimulate us.”⁷⁶ For many Americans, the most important place is the immediate neighborhood — which for the millions of Americans living in poverty, are often in increasingly deteriorating conditions. This process of decline in poor, urban communities deprives people of a stronger connection to place, which reduces people’s feelings of belonging and community, while simultaneously increasing their feelings of disconnect and isolation. Indeed, it is clear that “we fundamentally need places.”⁷⁷ In particular, a person strongly associates being from a certain place with a sense of pride, a pride which can be tainted when the appearance and conditions of that place are in decline. On the other hand, open space, natural features, walkability, and shared public spaces for interpersonal interaction are all features that enhance the quality and value of place in people’s lives. Perhaps most importantly, place provides a context in which community

⁷⁵ Timothy Beatley, *Native to Nowhere: Sustaining Home and Community in a Global Age* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004), 23-25.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

participation and engagement can be fostered, as quality places are able to do the “heavy lifting” of building social capital.⁷⁸

However, the history of the United States, and its cities in particular, demonstrates that place does not always have a positive effect on the lives of the people who are attached to it. Specifically, place has often been the subject of misuse and abuse in the spatial organization of American cities. Streich identifies this fact, arguing that, “geographic separation, social isolation, and social-demographic segregation and stratification exacerbate cross-racial and cross-class disparities, inequalities, and mistrust.”⁷⁹ As discussed in Chapter 2, the demographic flows out of cities and inner-ring suburbs into distant suburbs and exurbs are one of the most important dynamics in understanding the challenges facing urban neighborhoods today. The history of segregated housing, which also perpetuated segregation in other institutions, was born of place-based policies and customs. The practice of redlining neighborhoods where banks would not offer loans, neighborhood covenants that prohibited the sale of homes to African Americans, and limited economic mobility carved up American cities into well-defined and homogenous segments.⁸⁰ Contrary to the hopes of civil rights champions and reformers in the middle of the 20th century, American cities have not become dramatically less segregated than they were several decades ago. Socioeconomic class and race are still significant determinants of residential patterns in the United States. Oftentimes, the only change witnessed since the 1960s is the geographic location of these segregated communities. Wealthier, white Americans have begun to move back into the urban cores, as poorer African Americans are pushed out into the aging first-ring suburbs. With visible and invisible lines of demarcation existing between neighborhoods, communities increasingly take an “us” versus “them” attitude toward their

⁷⁸ Beatley, 4,

⁷⁹ Streich, 77.

⁸⁰ Streich, 77-78.; Beatley, 32.

distant neighbors, thereby eliminating the potential of place to build social capital in American cities.⁸¹

⁸¹ Streich, 84.; Beatley 5-6.

CHAPTER 5
THE PARTICULARS OF PLACE:
THE BUILT-ENVIRONMENT OF POOR, URBAN AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOODS

People-based and place-based theories of urban poverty are not mutually exclusive, and indeed are actually complementary understandings of the conditions of urban America. As suggested earlier in this thesis, one ought not to consider people and place an “either-or,” but rather a “both-and” proposition. Given the considerable attention paid to people-based explanations for poor, urban neighborhoods in the United States, this thesis seeks to take the opposite path and focus on the real and concrete way that the built-environment of a neighborhood can affect the lives of its residents. Indeed, on a positive note, Beatley argues that a high quality physical environment can be important in the development of individuals’ “sense[s] of place” and connection to their communities⁸² In addition, the appearance of a neighborhood — the upkeep of its structures, its cultural and natural features, and the community’s use of public spaces — contributes to the psychological and emotional connection that people hold to that place.⁸³

On the other hand, the quality of a neighborhood’s built-environment can also help to explain its challenges. For example, the World Bank’s Martin Ravallion and Quentin Wodon find significant geographic determinants in the economic conditions of poor neighborhoods, which they explain as “poor (physical or human) infrastructure.”⁸⁴ In addition, in their study of Camden County, NJ, Neil Smith, Paul Caris, and Elvin Wyly argue that neighborhood decline cannot be attributed solely to the movement of certain people in and out of a community. Rather,

⁸² Beatley, 26.

⁸³ Beatley, 43.; Jose Szapocznik, et al., “The Impact of the Built-environment on Children’s School Conduct Grades: The Role of Diversity of Use in a Hispanic Neighborhood,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 38 (2006): 299.

⁸⁴ Ravallion and Wodon, 706.

one must consider the role of the deteriorating conditions of the built-environments in declining neighborhoods, a phenomenon brought about largely through capital flight.⁸⁵ After a brief overview of the built-environment typically found in poor, urban neighborhoods in the United States, the ways in which these conditions affect the lives of residents of these communities will be investigated — specifically in terms of health, youth development, education, emotional connection to a community, perceptions of social support, crime and disorder, and household economics.

A Sketch of a Poor, Urban Neighborhood in the United States

It is impossible, and indeed unfair, to attempt to accurately construct a portrait of a poor, urban neighborhood that would be universally applicable across the country. However, there are some traits and trends that these neighborhoods do share. First, and most obvious, among these commonalities is the deterioration of the housing stock in a community — both public and privately held dwellings. Many of the large-scale public housing projects that were popularized in the 1960s and 1970s are reaching the end of their useful lives, a death that is brought about by the twin problems of poor initial construction and years of overcrowding and neglect. Year-long waits for repairs, water and sewage leaks, and rodent infestations are a troubling fact of life for many public-housing tenants in urban America today.⁸⁶ When these dilapidated structures are torn down, they tend to fall at a much faster rate than they are replaced with new housing, leaving the streetscape of many urban neighborhood pockmarked with vast tracts of vacant lots or piles of rubble. Privately held houses and apartments in these neighborhoods are rarely in

⁸⁵ Neil Smith, Paul Caris, and Elvin Wyly, “The ‘Camden Syndrome’ and the Menace of Suburban Decline: Residential Disinvestment and its Discontents in Camden County, New Jersey,” *Urban Affairs Review* 36 (2001): 498.

⁸⁶ Redwood et al., 53,59.; Alvin L. Schorr, *Explorations in Social Policy* (New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), 184.

much better condition than public housing. In particular, absentee landlords and speculators investors have significant land housings in poor, urban neighborhoods. Neither group of owners has a financial or personal incentive to provide for the upkeep of their buildings and properties, and thus their conditions are allowed to atrophy and deteriorate. In an ironic twist of fate, because of their immobility, many individuals living in these neighborhoods also pay significantly higher rents than they ought to, considering the often inadequate conditions of their houses or apartments.⁸⁷

Second, in terms of public elements of a neighborhood, the vast majority of poor communities in urban America suffer from failing or inadequate infrastructure and an absence of positive institutions. The most visible of these issues are the condition of publically-maintained infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and parks. Their failing conditions, be that crumbling pavement, potholes, or playground equipment with flaking lead paint, generally represent *disinvestment* of the highest order — the withdrawal of capital and other resources from a community for real or perceived cause.⁸⁸ In addition, since the 1980s, federal, state, local governments have adopted a relatively hands-off, passive approach to dealing with the challenges facing American cities. Even local governments have not been able to adequately provide for the needs of poor urban communities, as many such neighborhoods suffer from infrequent and low-quality public services and their residents must deal with deafening unresponsiveness to their pleas for attention.⁸⁹ In looking at the social infrastructure of a neighborhood, it is clear that important community institutions such as libraries, banks, grocery stores, schools, and health clinics are rare in poor, urban neighborhoods and, where they do exist,

⁸⁷ Schorr, 182-183, 195-201.; Redwood et al., 60.

⁸⁸ Daniel J. Hutch et al., "Potential Strategies to Eliminate Built-environment Disparities for Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Communities," *American Journal of Public Health* 101, no. 4 (2011): 589.

⁸⁹ Redwood et al., 58.; Schorr, 206.

they are often aging and inadequate for the community's needs. Furthermore, the footprints that the dearth of these positive institutions leave behind are filled with decidedly less beneficial, if not outright harmful, establishments, such as payday-advance lenders and liquor stores.⁹⁰ The poor quality of these public elements of urban streetscape, combined with the housing challenges described above, result in a built-environment that is detrimental to the well-being of residents of these neighborhoods.

Characteristics of the Built-Environment that Most Seriously Affect Residents

Perhaps the most easily identifiable effect of the built-environment of poor, urban neighborhoods is its often significant health consequences. The substandard housing that makes up a significant portion of the residential units in these neighborhoods has serious implications for residents' health. In particular, when these houses or apartments are not regularly and appropriately maintained, problems such as excessive dampness, mold, and rodents are likely to surface. Studies have shown that such housing problems account for higher rates of health problems among residents, particularly chronic conditions and respiratory issues, such as asthma.⁹¹ In addition, the presence of air and water pollution in poor neighborhoods can further exacerbate these health issues. These neighborhoods are also disproportionately more likely to be located near landfills, waste treatment facilities, and power plants, whose by-products, run off, and other discharges contaminate their immediate surroundings.⁹² The overall physical condition and layout of poor, urban neighborhoods also affects the wellbeing of its residents in how conducive the neighborhood is to establishing healthy lifestyles. For example, many such neighborhoods lack safe parks and playgrounds in which children can exercise, or they may be located long

⁹⁰ Hutch et al., 589.

⁹¹ Redwood et al., 53-54.; Hutch et al., 589.

⁹² Brulle, 3.3.; Hutch, et al., 587,589.

distances from employment and shopping locations, necessitating the use of a car instead of walking.⁹³ Similarly, studies have shown that poor neighborhoods are often “food deserts,” lacking options to purchase groceries, particularly items such as fresh fruits and vegetables. These conditions lead to poor diets, which, when joined with limited opportunities for physical activities, makes residents of poor, urban neighborhoods susceptible to obesity and diabetes.⁹⁴ Thus, the physical conditions, environmental circumstances, and spatial layout of these neighborhoods can, and do, have serious implications for the health and wellbeing of the community.

The built-environment of poor, urban neighborhoods also contributes to a prevalence of mental health issues among residents, a phenomenon that deserves a dedicated conversation. Housing remains a central issue in understanding the relationship between the built-environment and health. Substandard housing can contribute to a host of psychological issues among residents, most commonly elevated stress levels.⁹⁵ Individuals have also been shown to be more likely engage in substance abuse if they reside in inadequate housing.⁹⁶ In addition, depression is significantly more common in poor urban neighborhoods than in the average American neighborhood. A study found that a resident of such a neighborhood was 29% to 54% more likely to experience depression in the short term, and 36% to 64% to become depressed over the course of their lifetime.⁹⁷ Depression and other mental health challenges can also lead to substance abuse, particularly as individuals attempt to self-medicate their conditions. Yanique Redwood, of the University of Michigan’s School of Public Health, and her fellow researchers in

⁹³ Hutch et al., 589.

⁹⁴ Ibid , 588-590.

⁹⁵ Schorr, 170.; Scott C. Brown et al., “The Relationship of Built-environment to Perceived Social Support and Psychological Distress in Hispanic Elders: The Role of ‘Eyes on the Street,’” *The Journals of Gerontology* 64B, no. 2 (2009): 235.

⁹⁶ Hutch et al., 589.

⁹⁷ Redwood et al., 54.

Atlanta identify a “toll of neighborhood conditions on residents’ emotional wellbeing,” which accompanies the “presence of chronic stress and lack of control over neighborhood and housing environments.”⁹⁸ While physical health issues relating to a neighborhood’s built-environment may be easier to identify or trace, the mental health consequences of these neighborhood conditions are equally serious and important.

The concept of the cycle of poverty places great emphasis on how growing up in an impoverished neighborhood can restrict the future opportunities available to youth. Therefore, it is important to look at how the built-environments of these neighborhoods affect the generations of children who grow up in urban America. Indeed, there exists a growing body of “neighborhood effects” literature that takes particular aim at tracing out the consequences of neighborhoods on youth.⁹⁹ Beatly argues that there are substantial benefits of a quality physical environment to children’s intellectual and emotional development.¹⁰⁰ He contends that “good design has both educational and social value...it has a civilizing influence, reducing the likelihood of conflict.”¹⁰¹ In addition, the quality of a neighborhood’s built-environment can have serious impacts on youth’s formation of identity and pride of place. In particular, Redwood found that negative aspects of a poor community’s built-environment, such as abandoned properties, deteriorating buildings, and trash and litter, contribute to feelings of shame in young residents. Youth who were surveyed about these attitudes admitted to avoiding telling their friends where they lived because it was embarrassing to them — a sad commentary that bodes poorly for the development of a sense of community in poor, urban neighborhoods in future

⁹⁸ Redwood et al., 62.

⁹⁹ John B. Strait, “The Disparate Impact of Metropolitan Economic Change: The Growth of Extreme Poverty Neighborhoods, 1970-1990,” *Economic Geography* 77, no. 3 (2001): 278.

¹⁰⁰ Beatly, 45-46.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

generations.¹⁰² Similarly to the discussions of health earlier, the layout of urban neighborhoods can also have an effect on the community's children. When a neighborhood includes a mixture of residential, commercial, and educational properties, it tends to foster increased interaction and cohesion between members of the community. As a result of this arrangement, children grow up with a larger "social net" that supports them, while also monitoring and moderating their behavior.¹⁰³ The childhood development is of vital importance for the future vitality of urban communities, and thus it is important to understand the ways in which the built-environment of these neighborhoods can foster positive childhood experiences and engender a positive community identity for young people.

Looking into the ways in which the built-environment of a neighborhood affects young people also requires a discussion of education in this context. The literature is clear that environmental facts can, and do, play a large role in the quality of education that students receive and the levels of learning that they achieve.¹⁰⁴ Schools are one of the most important locations and institutions in any neighborhood. They are often the oldest and largest structure in an immediate neighborhood, as well as a respected and safe social space, even within a larger neighborhood context that may be experiencing significant challenges. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that physical conditions of schools are an important factor in the educational attainment of local students. Indeed, inadequate and deteriorating school facilities can convey a negative message to students, parents, and teachers about the value of education in the community. San Diego State's Cynthia Uline and her colleagues conducted a study of the physical condition of school buildings, which they found to be strongly related to teacher quality, student achievement,

¹⁰² Redwood et al., 62.

¹⁰³ Szapocznik, 300, 307.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 301, 307.

and community involvement in school life.¹⁰⁵ In addition, good design and upkeep of school facilities can help to increase students' "motivation and self esteem."¹⁰⁶ A school building also serves as the context in which students and teachers form a shared identity and commitment to learning. The fact that public education in the United States is funded through local property taxes creates a challenge for resource-strapped communities — thus the conditions of schools in poor communities tend to be worse than peer institutions in wealthier communities.¹⁰⁷ The importance of education in breaking the cycle of poverty for those individuals growing up in poor, urban neighborhoods requires communities to look at the physical conditions of their schools as one important method of improving the education of their children.

Just as students take a sense of pride in their school buildings, so too do entire neighborhoods with respect to their community's built-environment and physical condition. For poor, urban neighborhoods in the United States however, the built-environment usually engenders feelings of shame rather than pride, isolation rather than community. Indeed, when residents of several low-income neighborhoods in Atlanta were asked in a survey what life was like in their community, their first response was overwhelmingly some variation of a discussion of the "proliferation of vacant and abandoned properties, trash, disrepair, and vandalism."¹⁰⁸ It is important to note that these individuals, consciously or subconsciously, defined their local community in terms of the decline of the conditions in their neighborhood, rather than some other more positive aspect of the community. Compounding this situation is the indifference that residents of poor neighborhoods face from the outside community, particular their local governments. The lack of services and apathetic approach to meeting the needs of these

¹⁰⁵ Cynthia L. Uline, Megan Tschannen-Moran, and Thomas DeVere Wolsey, "The Walls Still Speak: The Stories Occupants Tell," *Journal of Educational Administration* 47, no. 3 (2009): 401-419.; Streich, 82.

¹⁰⁶ Uline, Tschannen-Moran, and Wolsey, 402.

¹⁰⁷ Streich, 82.

¹⁰⁸ Redwood et al., 58.

communities leads residents to become resigned to the conclusion that their “situation is impossible to correct.”¹⁰⁹ This finding points toward the significance of the physical condition of a neighborhood in terms of the construction of a sense of community identity. On the whole, people want their neighborhoods to include environmental features that promote strong group cohesion and positive social interactions, which Beatley refers to as a “moral community.”¹¹⁰ More specifically, elements of a built-environment such as tree-lined streets, maintained sidewalks, green space, and community gardens can help to foster positive images and perceptions of a neighborhood.¹¹¹ The absence of these amenities or the presence of negative attributes such as vacancy properties or illegal dumping moves a neighborhood away from a sense of community pride and towards a weak communal identity.

Moving from the general to the particular, the built-environment of a neighborhood also plays a crucial role in defining the level and perception of social support available to its residents. People tend to feel that they are able to count on the support of the larger community, and their neighbors in particular, when the community shares experiences together — which can be facilitated through elements of the built-environment. For example, semiprivate spaces in the community, seating in public areas, and open green space all foster a sense of community built on personal interaction.¹¹² Unfortunately, for most poor, urban neighborhoods, such elements of the community are mere dreams, thus reducing the effective level of social support that their residents experience. A study of Latino senior citizens in Florida revealed that individuals living in “physically deteriorated neighborhoods” were receiving less social support from the larger

¹⁰⁹ Schorr, 184.

¹¹⁰ Beatley, 49.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 44-48.

¹¹² Brown et al., 235.; Hutch et al., 590 -591.

community than individuals in neighborhoods with a better-maintained built-environment.¹¹³ Moving a step further, when individuals like the subjects of this study experience disconnect from their neighbors and community, they are also likely to be filled with “fear and anxiety about ‘others’” — a condition that endangers a collective community identity.¹¹⁴ This relationship between perceptions of social support for members of a community and quality of the community’s built-environment is another testament to the importance of giving weight to the physical condition of neighborhoods.

One of the most popular connections to be drawn between the built-environment and life in a particular neighborhood is related to crime and disorder. Malcolm Gladwell’s bestselling book, *The Tipping Point*, made famous the “broken window theory,” which was first articulated by George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson.¹¹⁵ This theory argues that signs of disorder in a neighborhood — from loitering truants on the street corner or the ubiquitous broken window on a house or a car — signal to the community that there is no control in the neighborhood. For criminals, this situation is a green-light for committing crimes, and the average law-abiding residents see these conditions as evidence that no one cares about the neighborhood, and thus neither should they. It is this cycle in which the physical condition of a neighborhood strewn with broken windows and overgrown lots reduces the material and emotional investment that residents have in their community — a disengagement that leads to a further deterioration of the neighborhood and even more ambivalence from its residents.¹¹⁶ In addition, vacant lots and abandoned houses also serve as literal facilitators of crime. These locations are commonly used

¹¹³ Brown et al., 235.

¹¹⁴ Beatley, 19.

¹¹⁵ The broken window theory has certainly met with fierce academic criticism, while supporters have jumped to its defense with similar veracity. It is difficult to pick a winner in this dispute, and so it is safe to assume that both sides hold some part of the truth. Thus, while the broken window theory may not be the singular answer to urban blight and crime, it certainly holds some significant explanatory power.

¹¹⁶ George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson, “Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety” *The Atlantic*, March 1982, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1982/03/broken-windows/4465/>.

by gangs and drug operations, and, not surprisingly, crime occurs frequently in these types of properties.¹¹⁷ Several authors also point out the role of the design of a neighborhood's built-environment in enabling or discouraging citizen-monitoring of the community. However, as the population ages, its numbers decline, and vacant lots spring up across urban America, the ability of community members to keep tabs on the goings-on of their neighborhood is greatly reduced.¹¹⁸

While seemingly obvious, the quality of the built-environment of a neighborhood has significant economic consequences for residents. In particular, houses are the primary drivers of family wealth and often the sole long-term investment for individuals in poor, urban neighborhoods.¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, a host of economic forces related to the built-environment both prevent residents from acquiring property and ensures that the property's value remains low. In terms of the sale and purchase of properties in these neighborhoods, a significant amount of the real estate transactions involve speculators or absentee landlords. Land speculators buy and sell properties in poor, urban neighborhoods at extremely low prices.¹²⁰ As a result, residents hoping to sell their homes often struggle to make a profit or just to break even. Both land speculators and absentee landlords have financial incentives to invest as little as possible in their properties to maximize their own profits. Therefore, rental units continue to deteriorate unchecked and vacant lots remain undeveloped for years. As a significant portion of a house's value is derived from the surrounding neighborhood, the conditions of these other properties significantly reduce

¹¹⁷ Redwood et al., 60-62.; Szapocznik, 300.

¹¹⁸ Marzbali, Massomeh Hedayati, Aldrin Abdullah, and Mohammad Javad Maghsoodi Tilaki, "Theory and Practice of Residential Areas' Street Configuration and Burglary Vulnerability: A Review of the Literature," *International Journal of Organizational Innovation* 3, no. 2 (2010): 179-180.; Brown et al., 234.

¹¹⁹ Rex L. Lamore, Terry Link, and Twyla Blackmond, "Renewing People and Places: Institutional Investment Policies that Enhance Social Capital and Improve the Built-environment of Distressed Communities," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 28, no. 5 (2006): 433.

¹²⁰ Schorr, 197-199.

the value of one's own house.¹²¹ Similarly, house values generally move in tandem with the existence and quality of sidewalks, schools, commercial districts, green spaces, and parks in a neighborhood.¹²² All of these factors contribute to determining a homeowner's financial wealth, and in the case of residents of poor, urban neighborhoods in the United States, conspire to decrease their economic opportunities.

Recent decades have seen the conversation about poor neighborhoods in American cities move towards a heavy emphasis on the use of individuals as the appropriate unit for understanding poverty. Indeed, this shift was appropriate after the War on Poverty of the 1960s took the mantle of poverty reduction in an impersonal, place-focused direction. However, this thesis seeks to reexamine ideas of place and the built-environment of these neighborhoods, in light of these two past approaches to this question. It is clear that the built-environment of a neighborhood affects so many aspects of the lives of its residents — from health to crime to personal wealth. As a result, community development, which was presented in Chapter 3 as the most effective approach to improving the lives of individuals residing in these communities, must take seriously the importance of the built-environment in urban America.

¹²¹ Schorr, 198.; Redwood et al., 58.; Hutch et al., 593.

¹²² Beatley, 44.; Hutch et al., 593.

CHAPTER 6
REPAIRING THE BROKEN WINDOWS:
THE EMPIRICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
ACTIVITY AND THE CONDITION OF BUILT-ENVIRONMENTS

Motivations for a Data-Driven Approach

In 2010, researcher Yanique Redwood and her colleagues conducted a study of the emotional reactions and perceptions of residents of a low-income Atlanta neighborhood towards their community and its environment. “This wasn’t the first corner of trash that I saw. I saw lots and it was everywhere, just in like the community it was trash,” one young adult explained, referring to her movements around her community as a “walk of shame.”¹²³ Residents also expressed a sense of insecurity in their community because of the proliferation of vacant properties. One individual explained that “a lot of times [the vacant properties] are getting broken into and they’re being vandalized.” Another resident reported that an empty property near her home “is a major concern because I have recently been approached by a stranger that almost led to an assault...and I have seen him come out of this house.”¹²⁴ Indeed, following the conclusion of the study, two teenage girls were sexually assaulted in vacant properties that lined their walk home from school. An older resident of the neighborhoods summed up the prevailing sentiments of the community: “There’s nothing here. There were homes, family, and a community . . . It relates to our lives today because there has been family, kids, as well as a love for a community has just not been here no more. It’s not here no more.”¹²⁵

It is stories like these that betray the continuing struggle to address the challenges that hundreds of similarly-situated communities in the United States face today and should serve as

¹²³ Redwood, 62.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 60, 62.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 61.

motivation to reengage a collective concern for their futures. Previous chapters have borne out the particulars of these challenges, as well as discussed the history and theory behind attempts to improve urban American neighborhoods through community development. The last two chapters focused on the role of place as an organizing unit of communities, and the particular effect that the built-environment of neighborhoods can have on the lives of their residents. Next, this thesis will move from the realm of theory and anecdotal evidence to the empirical testing of the relationship between community development and the built-environment of poor, urban neighborhoods in the United States.

Since the infancy of community development efforts in the United States in the middle of the 20th century, community development literature has been decidedly qualitative in their heavy dependence on case-studies and micro-samples of single neighborhoods or cities. This approach does bring much to the table. Such qualitative studies of community development efforts capture important facets their work, philosophies, and the impact that they have on their immediate communities. Being able to tell the stories of individuals whose lives were profoundly changed for the better because of community development is a powerful tool in engendering a continued commitment to these efforts. The qualitative, case-study, approach also allows for the inclusion of context and nuance in the discussion of community development, which is an undoubtedly valuable asset to the literature.¹²⁶ Examples of this approach include the volumes of research on Brooklyn's Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, one of the oldest and most accomplished community-based organizations in the United States, and books like Alexander

¹²⁶ Nathaniel S. Wright, "Revitalizing American Cities: Do Community Development Corporations Matter?" *RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service, Working Paper No.23* (2010), <http://www.rgkcenter.org/sites/default/files/file/research/Wright2010.pdf>, 5.

Von Hoffman's *House by House, Block by Block*, which includes case-studies of community development initiatives in five American cities.¹²⁷

However, empirical analyses of community development in American cities should accompany these detailed, qualitative examinations. Just as community development operates within the “both-and” paradigm — both people and place-based approaches — so too should its study. It is with this argument in mind that this thesis transitions to a quantitative testing of the relationship between community development activity in neighborhoods and the quality of their built-environments. In particular, this analysis will test the hypothesis that poor, urban neighborhoods with higher levels and longer durations of community development activity will have built-environments of a higher quality than their peers. Several important characteristics of this analysis are worth highlighting:

- *Local-Level Data:* The basic unit of investigation for this analysis is the census tract, which provides a snapshot of neighborhood conditions at the most local level, in an effort to most accurately capture dynamics occurring within a neighborhood.
- *Rust Belt Cities:* The sample poor neighborhoods that will be studied are drawn from cities in the American Rust Belt, providing an interesting lens through which to examine both urban issues and community development.
- *Poor Neighborhoods:* The neighborhoods that make up the sample for this analysis all have high poverty rates, allowing for the investigation of how effectively community development benefits the poorest Americans.
- *Large, Diverse Sample:* The sample for this analysis is composed of twenty-four cities in five states in the American Rust Belt, accounting for over 600 census tracts.

¹²⁷ Von Hoffman, 3,15; Green and Haines, 96.

The Sample: Poor Neighborhoods of the American Rust Belt

The opposite approach to examining community development at the level of a single organization, as discussed above, would be a broad survey of community development activity in urban areas across the United States. Such an analysis would undoubtedly provide rich information and a model of community development that could offer broad explanatory power. However, so much of the character of the United States and its cities is regional that casting such a large net risks glossing over the differences between urban neighborhoods of the Deep South and the Pacific Northwest. In addition, from a logistical standpoint, the aggregation of data on this level, particular from community development organizations, would prove a challenge. Therefore, this thesis seeks to use a regional sample of the United States to study the relationship between community development and the built-environment of poor neighborhoods in American cities — the Rust Belt.

The Rust Belt serves as an interesting sample for this analysis of community development for several reasons. To begin, the decline in the manufacturing sector in the United States, formerly the lifeblood of the region, over the past three decades has left the neighborhoods in Rust Belt cities in serious distress. The Rust Belt workforce and their communities had been organized around manufacturing and industry for so long that they have struggled to readjust to new economic realities. Poverty and unemployment have plagued these cities and, while some have rebounded, most cities have not been able to match the resurgence that other urban areas outside of the region have experienced.¹²⁸ In addition, and important to this thesis's examination of built-environment, is the trend of significant population loss in Rust

¹²⁸ Jennifer S. Vey, "Restoring Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing America's Older Industrial Cities," *The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program* (2007), http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2007/05metropolitanpolicy_vey/20070520_oic.pdf, 14-17.; Testa, Klier, and Mattoon.

Belt cities, which has left their neighborhoods with homes and infrastructure built for far more residents than actually reside there.¹²⁹ Furthermore, the study of community development in Rust Belt cities proves interesting because many of these cities have a less well-developed sector of community-based organizations than other cities, a theme that Sean Safford explores in his book *Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown*.¹³⁰

Specific definitions of the Rust Belt differ in their boundaries, but the region is broadly understood as the states that border the Great Lakes in which much of the American industrial might of the 20th century was concentrated. This thesis will use as its basis Safford's framing of the Rust Belt as "spreading from New York through Pennsylvania and Ohio and on to the shores of Lake Michigan."¹³¹ The particular cities that are included in the sample are drawn from the work of Jennifer S. Vey and the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program in their 2007 publication, *Restoring Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing America's Older Cities*. This report defined "older industrial cities" as those locales with at least 50,000 residents and categorized as "weak" on a panel of indicators, including employment loss, household income, unemployment rate, and poverty rate.¹³² Combining this measure with Stafford's definition of the Rust Belt leaves 24 cities in the five primary Rust Belt states of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan. Also included in this list of cities because they exhibits characteristics of Rust Belt urban areas are Akron, OH and Toledo, OH, which barely missed qualifying as "weak" industrial cities, and Gary, IN, which was not included in the Brookings Institution study. In addition, several cities with over 500,000 residents, a threshold that the Brookings Institution used in categorizing the cities, are excluded from the sample. These 24 cities, arrayed in the table

¹²⁹ Vey, 24.

¹³⁰ Safford, 13-16.

¹³¹ Ibid., 3.

¹³² Vey, 10-12.

below, will serve as the sample of cities for the analysis of community development and the built-environment in poor, urban neighborhoods.

Figure 1: Older Industrial Cities of the Rust Belt

City	Population (2007)	City Economic Condition Rank*	City Residential Well- Being Index*
Cleveland, OH	478,403	264	288
Pittsburgh, PA	334,563	254	250
Cincinnati, OH	331,285	263	204
Toledo, OH	295,029	261	194
Buffalo, NY	292,648	288	290
Rochester, NY	219,773	281	266
Akron, OH	207,934	217	183
Dayton, OH	166,179	283	264
Syracuse, NY	147,306	297	279
Flint, MI	124,943	299	287
Allentown, PA	106,632	248	215
Erie, PA	103,717	237	239
Gary, IN	96,429	n/a	n/a
Youngstown, OH	82,026	282	296
Reading, PA	81,207	280	280
Canton, OH	80,806	246	236
Kalamazoo, MI	77,145	238	248
Scranton, PA	76,415	252	227
Muncie, IN	67,430	250	261
Springfield, OH	65,358	262	216
Schenectady, NY	61,821	300	226
Saginaw, MI	61,799	251	295
Terre Haute, IN	59,614	240	249
Lancaster, PA	56,348	230	237

* Indices are rankings out of the 302 cities in the dataset.

Data from Brookings Institution and US Census Bureau.¹³³

With the ultimate focus of this thesis being an investigation of the impact of community development on urban neighborhoods, it is crucial to drill down this sample of cities to the most

¹³³ U.S. Census Bureau, *Population Estimates, All Incorporated Places: 2000 to 2007*, <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/cities/totals/2007/SUB-EST2007-4.html>. Vey, 12.

local level. The most powerful and practical means of capturing conditions in neighborhoods is the census tract. The United States Census Bureau uses census tracts as the basic unit of reporting data for its decennial censuses and various surveys and estimations in the interim, which results in a wealth of information about communities at this small scale.¹³⁴ Census tracts typically have between 2,500 and 8,000 residents and their boundaries are drawn with as much congruence to political boundaries and “permanent, visible features,” like roads, railroads, or waterways, as possible.¹³⁵ Over time, as populations change and units of local government redraw their borders, census tracts may be split into multiple tracts or eliminated to ensure consistency and homogeneity across tracts.

Rather than use strictly census tracts that lie within the city limits of each of the Rust Belt cities in the sample, this thesis expanded the scope of its study slightly. In order to most accurately capture neighborhoods that are both poor and urban, it was necessary to look beyond city boundaries. Many neighborhoods just across the city line, particularly those in the inner-ring suburbs, share similar feels, aesthetics, histories, economics, and challenges as their neighbors on the other side of the border. Furthermore, as Neal Smith and his colleagues argue in their study of Camden, NJ, as early as 2001, “in certain metropolitan areas, the severity of decline in parts of the suburban ring exceeded that of the respective central city.”¹³⁶ Exacerbating this measurement problem is the fact that many Rust Belt cities encompass relatively small geographic areas within their borders, as a result of organic, often unplanned urban expansion over the many decades since their founding. Thus, the designation of census tracts as urban or rural, a measure provided by the University of Missouri’s Missouri Census Data Center, was used to capture all of the

¹³⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, “Census Tracts and Block Numbering Areas,” <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/GARM/Ch10GARM.pdf>, 10-1.

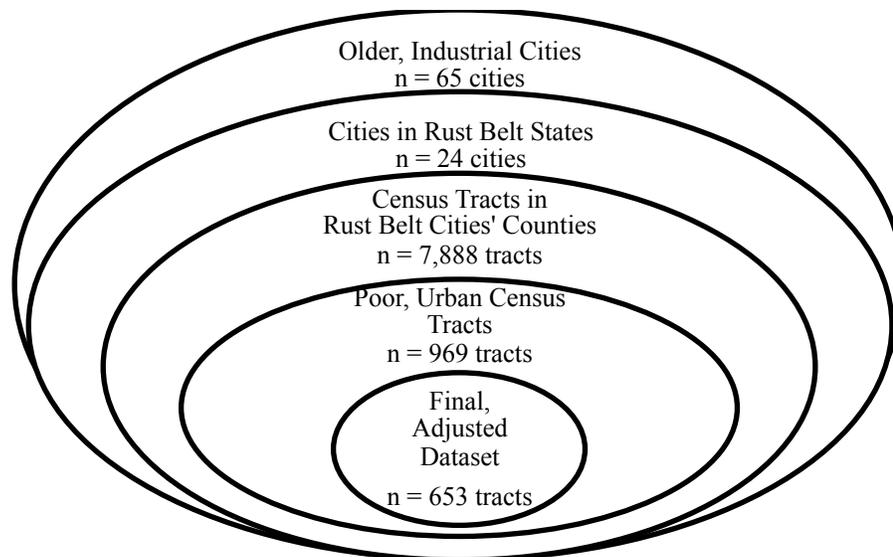
¹³⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, “Census Tracts and Block Numbering Areas,” 10-5.

¹³⁶ Smith, Caris, and Wyly, 500.

urban census tracts within the county that contains the Rust Belt city.¹³⁷ For example, the city of Toledo, OH is part of Lucas County, and therefore the dataset includes all urban census tracts within Lucas County.

From this dataset of urban census tracts in counties containing the Rust Belt cities, the final step is to isolate the low-income neighborhoods for further analysis. The U.S. Census Bureau divides census tracts into four categories based on their poverty rates: Category I tracts have poverty rates between 0% and 12.4%, Category II from 12.4% and 20%, Category III from 20% to 40%, and Category IV above 40%. Categories III and IV are defined as “poverty areas”, and thus this thesis uses a 20% poverty rate as the threshold for a census tract’s inclusion in the dataset. In addition, this thesis will utilize the “poverty areas” designation from the 2000 census, the most recent time period for which that data was tabulated.

Figure 2: Overview of Dataset¹³⁸



¹³⁷ Missouri Census Data Center, “MABLE/Geocorr2010: Geographic Correspondence Engine with Census 2010 Geography.” *Missouri Census Data Center, University of Missouri*. (2012), <http://mcdc1.missouri.edu/MableGeocorr/geocorr2010.html>.

¹³⁸ Several other minor adjustments were made the dataset to ensure consistency across variables and years. Census tracts that were eliminated or combined between 2000 and 2010 were excluded from the dataset, as were tracts missing significant amounts of data on the other variables. These excluded tracts account for the difference between “Poor, Urban Census Tracts” and “Final, Adjusted Dataset” in the Figure 2.

Operationalizing the Built Environment and Community Development

The heart of the empirical section of this thesis is its examination of the relationship between community development activity and the built-environment in a neighborhood. Thus, it is crucial to clearly define how these two concepts, community development and built-environment are translated from the theories developed in earlier chapters to data that can be quantitatively tested. This process of operationalizing these variables is undoubtedly imperfect, but when executed properly should provide an accurate representation of the concept.

Dependent Variables: Built-Environment

The theory presented in Chapter 5 argues that the quality of the built-environment in a neighborhood has serious and significant impacts on the lives of its residents. This thesis takes into account a broad understanding of built-environment, elements of which can be roughly grouped into two categories: the condition of the housing stock and the upkeep and layout of public spaces, buildings, and infrastructure. For the purposes of this empirical analysis, only the condition of a neighborhood's housing stock will be operationalized in the data. On a theoretical level, most structures in these neighborhoods are residential, and thus housing data provides a solid snapshot of the built-environment of the community. In addition, data on housing conditions are collected far more regularly at the census tract level than other data and it is therefore also practical to utilize this information.

The measures of the condition of the built-environment that will be applied to the Rust Belt neighborhoods are drawn from Paul Jargowsky's seminal study of poor neighborhoods in the United States, in which he found that "the most visible sign of poverty and abandonment [in

these neighborhoods] is dilapidated housing.”¹³⁹ This thesis will utilize three characteristics of a deteriorating housing stock that Jargowsky identifies as variables representing built-environment, drawing on data made available through the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010 American Community Survey. The *vacancy rate* in a neighborhood captures the percentage of total properties where the U.S. Census Bureau has determined that no individual is living on the premise — a situation which almost always leads to the physical decline of the property.¹⁴⁰ The vacancy rate in a given neighborhood is a commonly used assessment of the physical condition of an area, as well as a broader indicator for the effectiveness of community development.¹⁴¹ In addition, Jargowsky cites the relative age of the housing stock as another signal of the prevailing physical conditions of a neighborhood. The age of properties will be quantified through two measures that the U.S. Census Bureau reports on annually: the number of *new housing units* constructed within the last five years and the *percentage of homes that are at least 70 years old*. Using these two sets of data allows for the investigation of both the static condition of a neighborhood’s existing housing stock and efforts to improve the built-environment through new construction.¹⁴² Finally, Jargowsky discusses the ability of home prices to paint an important picture of the physical conditions of a neighborhood. This thesis will employ one of the U.S. Census Bureau’s measures of home valuations, *percentage of homes valued at less than \$50,000*, to capture the magnitude of low-quality housing in the census tract.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Jargowsky, 92.

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. “Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division. Fourth Quarter 2011, Definitions and Explanations,” <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/hvs/qtr411/q411def.html>.

¹⁴¹ Wright, 16.; Norman J. Glickman and Lisa J. Servon, “By the Numbers: Measuring Community Development Corporations’ Capacity,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 22, no. 3 (2003): 20.; Vey, 13.

¹⁴² Jargowsky, 92-93.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 94.

Independent Variables: Community Development Activity

In the preceding chapters, this thesis has sought to discuss community development efforts in poor, urban American neighborhoods on a theoretical and qualitative level. Now, using the research summarized in Chapter 3, community development activity will be quantified into empirically testable variables. In particular, three measures of community development will be used to test the relationship between community development activity and the quality of the built-environment in a neighborhood. These measures were developed in the context of limited and rough data available on community development organizations. Datasets of community development organizations are rare and generally subsets of larger collections of data, thus restricting the ability of researchers to manipulate and isolate the data to the desired extent. Therefore, this thesis's quantification of community development was largely driven by the available data. In particular, the data on community development was drawn from the Urban Institute's National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS), which maintains a database of more than twenty years' worth of IRS Business Master Files. These files contain information garnered from filings that recognized the tax exempt status of on 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) organizations, which include public charities, private foundations, and social welfare organizations.¹⁴⁴

These files were filtered to capture only those organizations that were located within zip codes that corresponded to the sample of low-income census tracts identified above. In addition, community development organizations only make up a small portion of all nonprofit organizations that NCCS tracks, and thus it was necessary to further filter the data. In particular, this thesis utilized the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities' Core Codes, which the IRS and other organizations use to classify non-profits according to their sectors and types of activities.

¹⁴⁴ National Center for Charitable Statistics, "NCCS Dataweb Introduction," *National Center for Charitable Statistics, Urban Institute*, <http://nccsdataweb.urban.org/knowledgebase/detail.php?linkID=805&category=16&xrefID=3575&close=0>.

For the purposes of measuring community development activity, the only organizations that were included in the data were those organizations classified as: “Community & Neighborhood Development,” “Community Coalitions,” “Neighborhood & Block Associations,” “Economic Development,” and “Urban & Community Economic Development.”¹⁴⁵

Working from these data sources, and relying on the structure provided in the work of Rutgers University’s Norman J. Glickman and Lisa J. Servon, the University of Kansas’ Nathaniel S. Wright, and the Urban Institute’s Caterina Gouvis Roman and Gretchen E. Moore, three measures of the level of community development activity in a given neighborhood were developed.¹⁴⁶ The *number of community development organizations* active in a given zip code provides a basic snapshot of the liveliness the community development sector. Adding a layer of context, the *total assets of community development organizations* in a zip code approximates the quantity and availability of financial resources for these organizations, which is of particular concern for efforts to address the condition of a neighborhood’s built-environment, an objective that often requires significant funding. Both of these variables are averages taken over the ten-year period from 2000-2010, in an attempt to capture community development activity over a period of time, as many community development initiatives, particularly those relating to the development of physical capital, are realized over an extended period of time. In the same vein, the *tenure of community development organizations* seeks to operationalize the length of time that community development organizations have been active in a neighborhood. This variable is developed by determining the age of organization in 2010, using the date that they first filed with

¹⁴⁵ National Center for Charitable Statistics, “National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities: NTEE Core Codes (NTEE-CC) Overview,” *National Center for Charitable Statistics, Urban Institute*, <http://nccs.urban.org/classification/NTEE.cfm>.

¹⁴⁶ Glickman and Servon, 6-8, 19-20.; Caterina Gouvis Roman and Gretchen E. Moore, “Measuring Local Institutions and Organizations: The Role of Community Institutional Capacity,” *Justice Policy Center, Urban Institute* (2004), http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410998_Local_Institutions.pdf, 10-27.

the IRS, and multiplying the average age of organizations in a neighborhood by the number of active organizations — yielding a cumulative number of years of community development activity.

Independent Variables: Demographic and Socioeconomic Controls

The value of a regression analysis is the ability to control for a panel of other variables in a sample, in order to isolate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables that are of primary interest. For this test of the relationship between community development activity and the condition of the built-environment in urban neighborhoods in the United States, four control variables were selected, all of which are measured at the census-tract level. The *unemployment rate* is derived from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 American Community Survey, and measures the percentage of residents of a neighborhood between the ages of 25 and 65 who are unemployed. The variable measuring educational attainment, *percentage of residents who did not graduate from high school*, is also drawn from the same source.¹⁴⁷ While all of the neighborhoods in the sample have poverty rates of above 20%, their relative wealth varies significantly, so the *median household income* in 2010, as reported in the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council's (FFIEC) *2011 FFIEC Census Reports* helps to parse out this variation.¹⁴⁸ The FFIEC also provides data on the *percentage of residents who are racial minorities*, which is this thesis's final control variable. While these variables will not capture all of the variation across the sample census tracts, they should be able to sufficiently control the

¹⁴⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, "American Community Survey, Puerto Rico Community Survey: 2010 Subject Definitions," http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/SubjectDefinitions/2010_ACSSubjectDefinitions.pdf, 59-63.

¹⁴⁸ Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council, "2011 FFIEC Census Reports," *Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council*, <http://www.ffiec.gov/census/censusInfo.aspx#2010Summary>.

variation so that the relationship between community development activity and the built-environment can be seen.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Wright, 15-17.

Figure 3: Descriptions and Summary Statistics of Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Description of Variable	Source
<u>Dependent Variables</u>						
Vacancy Rate	22.95	10.37	0.00	80.50	Percentage of houses in a census tract that were vacant	1
Houses Over 70 Years Old	53.21	22.57	0.00	92.70	Percentage of houses in a census tract which were built prior to 1939	1
House Value Below \$50,000	32.92	23.88	0.00	100.00	Percentage of houses in a census tract whose values were less than \$50,000	1
New Construction	12.91	27.54	0.00	202.00	Number of new housing units built within a census tract from 2005 to 2010	1
<u>Independent Variables</u>						
Number of CD Organizations	4.29	3.86	0	24	Average number of active non-profit organizations in a census tract's zip code from 2000 to 2010 that were classified as focusing on community or economic development in urban areas	2
Assets of CD Organizations	5,293,880.55	14,245,257.80	0	112,692,272.83	Average assets (in dollars) of active non-profit organizations in a census tract's zip code from 2000 to 2010 that were classified as focusing on community or economic development in urban areas	2
Tenure of CD Organizations	2,115,161.68	4,753,385.93	0	3,3342,572.17	Average age in 2010 of non-profit organizations in a census tract's zip code that were classified as focusing on community or economic development in urban areas, multiplied by the number of organizations in that census tract	2
Less Than HS Education	20.61	10.91	0.00	60.44	Percentage of residents of a census tract who have not completed a high school education	1
Unemployment Rate	10.07	5.85	0.00	35.52	Percentage of residents of a census tract who are between the ages of 25 and 65 and are unemployed	1
Median Income	33,640.39	12,693.85	6,700.00	148,050.00	Median family income in 2010, in dollars	3
Minority Percentage	62.16	29.62	2.66	99.77	Percentage of residents of a census tract who are non-white	3

Source Notes: 1 = U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2005-2010¹⁵⁰, 2 = Urban Institute's National Center for Charitable Statistics¹⁵¹, 3 = Federal Financial Institutions Examination's Census Report¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, "American Fact Finder: 2010 American Community Survey," <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t>.

Hypotheses

The result of the empirical test of the relationship between community development activity and the condition of the built-environment in the sample neighborhoods from the Rust Belt cities is expected to be in line with the qualitative findings presented in earlier chapters. In general, this thesis hypothesizes that increased amounts of community development activity in a neighborhood will lead to a higher quality in elements of the neighborhood's built-environment. However, as this test involves several measures of both community development and built-environment, the results should vary across the variables — these qualifications are noted in italics in the following tables. Two sets of regressions will be run to test these hypotheses. The first one will utilize the two basic community development variables, number of community development organizations and total assets of those organizations, as well as two of the control variables, unemployment rate and educational attainment. The second regression will add community development organization tenure and two additional control variables, median household income and racial minority percentage. The use of two different tests should allow for a more in depth investigation of the relationship between the various measures of community development and built-environment.

¹⁵¹ National Center for Charitable Statistics, "NCCS Dataweb," *National Center for Charitable Statistics, Urban Institute*, <http://nccsdataweb.urban.org/>.

¹⁵² Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council.

Figure 4 : Summarized Hypotheses, Basic Model

Dependent Variables	Dependent Variables			
	Vacancy Rate	Houses Over 70 Years Old	House Value Below \$50,000	New Construction
Number of CD Organizations	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive
Assets of CD Organizations	Negative <i>Stronger than Number of CO orgs</i>	Negative	Negative <i>Stronger than Number of CD orgs</i>	Positive <i>Stronger than Number of CD orgs</i>
Unemployment Rate	Positive	Positive <i>Small</i>	Positive	Negative
Less Than HS Education	Positive	Positive <i>Small</i>	Positive	Negative

Figure 5: Summarized Hypotheses, Revised Model

Dependent Variables	Dependent Variables			
	Vacancy Rate	House Over 70 Years Old	House Value Below \$50,000	New Construction
Number CD Organizations	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive
Assets of CD Organizations	Negative <i>Larger than number of CD orgs</i>	Negative <i>Larger than number of CD orgs</i>	Negative <i>Larger than number of CD orgs</i>	Positive <i>Larger than all CD org variables</i>
Tenure of CD Organizations	Negative <i>Larger than all CD org variables</i>	Negative <i>Larger than all CD orgs variables</i>	Negative <i>Larger than all CD org variables</i>	Positive
Unemployment Rate	Positive	Positive <i>Small</i>	Positive	Negative
Less Than HS Education	Positive	Positive <i>Small</i>	Positive	Negative
Median Income	Negative	Negative <i>Small</i>	Negative	Positive
Minority Percent	Positive	Positive <i>Small</i>	Positive	Negative

Results of Testing

The dependent variables of neighborhoods' built-environment and independent variables of community development activity were tested in an ordinary least-squares regression model to determine the relationships between them. The above hypotheses suggest a negative, statistically significant relationship between the measures of community development and the vacancy rate, percentage of homes over 70 years old, and the percentage of homes valued at less than \$50,000. The hypotheses also posit a positive and statistically significant relationship between the measures of community development activity and number of new housing units constructed in the past 5 years.

In the basic model, arrayed in Figure 6, which included two measures of community development and two control variables, several important relationships appear. In terms of community development activity, the average assets of community development organizations in a neighborhood have a negative, statistically significant relationship with vacancy rates and a positive and significant relationship with new construction. In addition, the average number of community development organizations in a neighborhood also has a positive and statistically significant relationship with the vacancy rate. The control variables in this model have strong correlations as well. The percentage of residents with less than a high school education has a positive, statistically significant relationship with the percentage of houses older than 70 years and those valued less than \$50,000, while it has a negative and significant relationship with the level of new construction in a neighborhood. Finally, the unemployment rate is positively and significantly correlated with both a community's vacancy rate and the percentage of houses valued less than \$50,000.

A revised model, whose results are summarized in Figure 7, includes an additional measure of community development activity, the tenure of community-based organizations, and two more control variables, median income and minority percentage. This model sees the same a positive, statistically significant relationship with new construction, but does not see the significant relationship between community development assets and vacancy rates that existed in the previous model. In the same way, this model also shows the same positive and significant relationships between the percentage of residents with less than a high school education and the percentage of both houses older than 70 years and those valued at less than \$50,000, and a negative relationship with amount of new construction. The new variable of community development organizations' tenure exhibits no significant relationships with the dependent variables. Median income, an added control variable, has a negative, statistically significant relationship with both vacancy rate and houses valued at less than \$50,000. Finally, the minority percentage is positively and significantly correlated with vacancy rate, while negatively correlated with houses older than 70 years.

Figure 6: Community Development and Built-environment, Basic Model

	Vacancy Rate (2010)	Houses Over 70 Years Old (2010)	House Values Below \$50,000 (2010)	New Construction (2010)
Number of CD Organizations (2000-2010)	0.63* (0.16)	-0.04 (0.35)	0.04 (0.37)	0.004 (0.43)
Assets of CD Organizations (2000-2010)	-0.0000001* (0.00000004)	0.00000008 (0.00000001)	-0.00000003 (0.00000001)	0.00000003* (0.00000001)
Less Than HS Education	0.04 (0.04)	0.40* (0.08)	0.62* (0.16)	-0.28* (0.10)
Unemployment Rate (2010)	0.33* (0.07)	0.04 (0.15)	0.45* (0.09)	-0.29 (0.19)
R ²	0.06	0.04	0.08	0.05
N	639	639	639	639

Note: * = $p < 0.05$ (Statistically Significant)

Figure 7 : Community Development and Built-environment, Revised Model

	Vacancy Rate (2010)	Houses Over 70 Years Old (2010)	House Values Below \$50,000 (2010)	New Construction (2010)
Number of CD Organizations (2000-2010)	0.19	0.18	0.04	-0.34
	(0.18)	(0.42)	(0.43)	(0.52)
Assets of CD Organizations (2000-2010)	-0.0000007	0.0000004	-0.0000002	0.0000003*
	(0.0000004)	(0.0000001)	(0.0000001)	(0.0000001)
Tenure of CD Organizations (2010)	0.004	0.001	-0.004	0.007
	(0.002)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Less Than HS Education (2010)	-0.05	0.43*	0.29*	-0.24*
	(0.04)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.11)
Unemployment Rate (2010)	0.16*	0.17	0.43*	-0.27
	(0.07)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.19)
Median Income (2010)	-0.0002*	0.00004	-0.0004*	0.00012
	(0.00004)	(0.00008)	(0.00008)	(0.0001)
Minority Percentage (2010)	0.08*	-0.09*	0.03	0.023
	(0.015)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
R ²	0.18	0.06	0.12	0.05
N	639	639	639	639

Note: *= p < 0.05 (Statistically Significant)

Analysis and Discussion

The easiest trend to see when first looking at the results of these two regressions is the fact that more than half of the relationships that were hypothesized were not statistically significant in the end. In the basic model, eight of the sixteen interactions of variables reached statistical significance, while twelve of twenty-two interactions in the second, revised model did so. In particular, among variables that sought to measure community development activity in a neighborhood, less than a third of hypothesized relationships proved statistically significant. While the relatively low number of variables that reached significance certainly reduces the explanatory power of this analysis, several important relationships were revealed.

First, the regression analyses strongly suggest that a relationship does exist between the assets of community development organizations in a neighborhood and the condition of that neighborhood's built-environment. This relationship shines through in both the basic and revised models. Increased community development assets are correlated with lower vacancy rates and higher amounts of new construction in neighborhoods — both markers of an improved quality of the built-environment. This relationship is logical because, in the end, it takes significant resources for these organizations and their partners to undertake community development projects, particularly those targeted at addressing the quality of the housing stock. The construction of new housing units is an example of an improvement in the built-environment that requires the capacity of organizations to acquire and expend substantial amounts of money. Whether these funds are used directly to pay for construction and repair or to leverage additional public and private financing, the importance of financial resources in community development is apparent. Indeed, this specific relationship between the financial capacity of community development organizations and the physical conditions of neighborhoods has been commonly cited in other research.¹⁵³

Second, the ability of the simple existence of community development organizations to explain the condition of the built-environment of poor, urban neighborhoods in the United States appears doubtful. Neither an increased number of community development organizations, nor an increase in these organizations' tenure in the community had a positive relationship with a higher quality of built-environment, as was hypothesized. In fact, in the only two statistically significant cases, an increase in the number and tenure of community development organizations were actually correlated with a *decline* in the quality of the built-environment. There may be several explanations for this phenomenon. The simple counting of organizations or years of

¹⁵³ Wright, 17-18.

organizational operation are an admittedly rough means of capturing community development activity, as they say nothing about the quantity or quality of an organization's work, treating all community development organizations as equals. In addition, this lack of results could be explained by the argument that more community development organizations exist in neighborhoods with more acute needs, particularly in terms of their built environments. The lack of significant results from these two measures of community development activity suggests that there exists a need for more nuanced variables to operationalized community development activity.

Third, more than three-fourths of the independent control variables reached statistical significance, suggesting strong relationships between social, economic, and demographic characteristics of neighborhoods and their built-environments. The strongest of these variables was the percentage of residents with less than a high school education, higher levels of which were correlated with indicators of lower quality built-environments in the form of high vacancy rates, large numbers of houses older than 70 years, and relatively little new construction. This result makes intuitive sense because educational attainment is a good indicator of potential social mobility and can also internalize other socioeconomic factors. Indeed, both models in this test found that high unemployment is also correlated with poor built-environments in a neighborhood. These factors conspire to often leave communities experiencing low educational attainment and high unemployment with fewer resources, financial and otherwise, to devote to community development and neighborhood revitalization, particularly those efforts devoted to a community's physical condition.

Figure 8: Summarized Findings of Basic and Revised Model

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Relationship	Match Hypothesis?
Assets of CD Organizations	Vacancy Rate	negative	yes
Assets of CD Organizations	New Construction	positive	yes
<i>Assets of CD Organizations</i>	<i>Vacancy Rate</i>	<i>negative</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Assets of CD Organizations</i>	<i>New Construction</i>	<i>positive</i>	<i>yes</i>
Number of CD Organizations	Vacancy Rate	positive	no
<i>Tenure of CD Organizations</i>	<i>Vacancy Rate</i>	<i>positive</i>	<i>no</i>
<i>Median Household Income</i>	<i>Vacancy Rate</i>	<i>negative</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>Median Household Income</i>	<i>House Values Below \$50,000</i>	<i>negative</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>Minority Percentage</i>	<i>Vacancy Rate</i>	<i>positive</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>Minority Percentage</i>	<i>Houses Over 70 Years Old</i>	<i>negative</i>	<i>no</i>
Less than HS Education	Houses Over 70 Years Old	positive	yes
Less than HS Education	House Values Below \$50,000	positive	yes
Less than HS Education	New Construction	negative	yes
<i>Less than HS Education</i>	<i>Houses Over 70 Years Old</i>	<i>positive</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>Less than HS Education</i>	<i>House Values Below \$50,000</i>	<i>positive</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>Less than HS Education</i>	<i>New Construction</i>	<i>negative</i>	<i>yes</i>
Unemployment Rate	Vacancy Rate	positive	yes
Unemployment Rate	House Values Below \$50,000	positive	yes
<i>Unemployment Rate</i>	<i>Vacancy Rate</i>	<i>positive</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>Unemployment Rate</i>	<i>House Value Below \$50,000</i>	<i>positive</i>	<i>yes</i>

Note: Normal font indicates results from the basic model, *italics indicates revised model*.

While this model sought to make contentious efforts to properly develop the sample of neighborhoods and variables to be tested, it is apparent that there is more complexity to the question of the relationship between community development and built-environment than this test was able to capture. The R-squared value for each of the tests was between 0.04 and 0.18, which means to that the model only captured approximately 4% to 18% of the variation between

the sample neighborhoods, a lower than expected result. Several factors may have limited the explanatory power of this model. In terms of the sample of neighborhoods chosen for study, they all come from one region of the United States and all had high levels of poverty and other similar socio-economic conditions, thereby limiting the potential width of variation in the independent and dependent variables. The variables that were chosen to operationalize community development activity were also admittedly rough, as their selection depended primarily on the limited availability of data on non-profit organizations. In addition, all three of these variables measured the *quantity* of community development activity in a neighborhood. Left without assessment in this model is the *qualitative* variation in community development organizations — their different priorities, programs, and strategies — which is much more difficult to capture in this form of a test. This model's conceptualization of time lag was also roughly hewn. Averaging community development activity over a 10 year window and aggregating total years of organizations' operations were faithful attempts to engage the element of time given the available data, but were not ideal variables. Finally, as mentioned above, the fact that neighborhoods with more acute needs are likely to attract higher numbers of community development organizations likely has a confounding effect on the results as well. These issues do not negate the results of this model, but do add important qualifications to conclusions that can be drawn from them.

The answer to the question of whether higher levels of community development activity is correlated with improved built-environments in poor, urban neighborhoods is decidedly mixed. The two strongest relationships with the physical condition of neighborhoods were found in the assets of community development organizations and the educational attainment of a community's residents. These findings suggest that improvements in the built-environment

require both significant financial resources devoted to community development and a high level of human capital within the community. The inability of this model to explain a large portion of the variation between the neighborhoods included in this sample implies that a combination of multiple internal and external factors best determines the physical condition of a neighborhood — no one factor stands out among the rest. Community development certainly plays an important role in fostering a higher quality of built-environments in poor, urban neighborhoods, but it is likely one of several elements that contribute to this result.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION:
**EMBRACING THE BOTH-AND DYNAMIC OF URBAN CHALLENGES AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

If the results of the empirical test discussed in the previous chapter illustrate one thing, it is the fact that issues of community development and neighborhood conditions are complex and multifaceted. Even when providing several measures of community development activity and controlling for educational, employment, income, and racial differences, much of the variation between the sample communities remains unexplained. This outcome is not negative or without value, but rather instructive in developing the proper perspective for the study of the issues at the heart of this thesis. The challenges facing urban America and the role of community development in improving the lives of those Americans living in poor urban neighborhoods must both be approached with a “both-and” philosophy — a theme which has come through at various points throughout this thesis. This perspective recognizes the complexity and interconnectedness of social, economic, and political problems in American cities and the necessity of comprehensive approaches to addressing them.

The investigation of the plight of the American city, reviewed in Chapter 2, makes clear the efficacy of this dualistic approach. On one hand, urban America suffered under indifference and willful neglect from governments at all levels and macro-level economic and social changes. On the other hand, dynamics within these neighborhoods, such as crime, failing schools, and population flight also hastened their decline. By the 1980s, these two sources of stressors conspired to leave the neighborhoods of American cities desolate and forgotten by most of the rest of the country. Nowhere was this trend more pronounced than in the cities of the Rust Belt, where the decline of manufacturing and other industries led to the rapid hollowing out of urban

cores. However, the slow but steady revitalization and repopulation of American urban neighborhoods in the past two decades has illustrated the importance of a collective concern and commitment to the future of these communities — both for the health of the United States as a whole and for the quality of life of the residents of these neighborhoods.

The past half-century has seen these efforts in American cities converge on one set of strategies — community development. This thesis operates from a working understanding of community development as an effort to build on a community's assets to develop an incumbent capacity to address its challenges and improve the quality of life for its residents. Yet as Chapter 3 makes clear, community development as both a theory and practice can mean different things to different people, particularly at different times over the past several decades. In the 1950s and 1960s, community development most often referred to the demolition of slums and tenements, which were replaced with large-scale, industrial public housing projects. In response to this approach, the turn of the 21st century saw conventional wisdom shift towards a belief that the most faithful interpretation of community development was a people-based focus on human capital development. Each of these approaches to community development in their own way advances the cause of an improved quality of life in American neighborhoods. This thesis argues that both place-based and people-based community development strategies are necessary to address the challenges facing poor, urban neighborhoods in the United States. However, because such a perspective has been deemphasized in recent decades, the focus of this thesis remains on the enduring importance of the physical conditions of neighborhoods and community development efforts to improve their built-environments.

Social dynamics within poor, urban neighborhoods certainly have important effects on individuals and families that reside there. Educational opportunities, public safety, and

employment are all commonly cited explanations for the quality of life in these communities — and some of the results of this thesis' empirical testing also support this position. While this perspective on life in the American city maybe easier to understand, it does not have a monopoly on the truth. In particular, the importance of place and built-environment cannot be understated, which Chapters 4 and 5 describe. Geography is not only one of the most common ways in which people define their sense of community, but it is also one of the factors that ensures that the cycle of poverty in urban America continues largely uninterrupted. The built-environment of a neighborhood — the physical element of place — also affects the lives of community members in many ways. Deteriorating physical conditions can have obvious effects on the health of residents, the value of their properties (often their most significant asset), and their safety. Less apparent, but equally important, are the consequences of a poor built-environment on the psychological wellbeing of the community, ranging from disposition to depression and mental health issues, to feelings of shame and a lack of pride in the neighborhood. These arguments serve as a call to action for efforts to incorporate a consideration of place and the built-environment in efforts to affect positive change in the neighborhoods of urban America.

The arguments provided in the first five chapters provide a convincing case for the important role of community development efforts in improving the built-environment of poor, urban neighborhoods in the United States. The empirical testing of this relationship in Chapter 6 attempts to provide quantitative substantiation for these qualitative arguments. Using a sample of poor, urban neighborhoods from twenty-four Rust Belt cities, the relationship between several measures of community development activity and the condition of the built-environment of those neighborhoods was tested. The results of this investigation were decidedly mixed, with the financial assets of community development organizations and several socio-economic control

variables having significant relationships with measures of neighborhood built-environment.

These findings suggest that the financial capacity of community development organizations and their qualitative attributes have a greater impact on improving the physical conditions of neighborhoods than simply the number of organizations working in a given community. While these results provide limited empirical support for the central arguments of this thesis, they do suggest that there are indeed connections between community development and the built-environment of neighborhoods.

This thesis sought out to explore one part of a paradigm that is undoubtedly complex and nuanced. Indeed, the research that is weaved through the preceding chapters makes clear the point that the challenges facing urban America are born of both social and environmental factors, and thus require a combination of both people-based and place-based approaches to address them. With the recent emphasis on the development of human capital in poor, urban neighborhoods as a means to address underlying social and economic problems that affect residents of these communities, this thesis set out on the opposite path, tracing out the importance of environmental factors in these neighborhoods. The development of qualitative and quantitative arguments in support of the role that the built-environment plays in the quality of life in such neighborhoods helps to highlight how the larger challenges of American cities fit into the “both-and” framework. Elevating the explanatory power of the physical conditions of poor, urban neighborhoods through this thesis reinforces the relevance of *both* socio-economic factors *and* environmental factors in understanding the cycle of urban poverty, and the importance of *both* people-based *and* place-based community development to addressing these challenges.

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APPENDIX: THESIS PRESENTATION

The presentation component of my senior thesis includes two efforts that seek to give back to the Justice and Peace Studies program at Georgetown University in light of my particular experience in the program. In particular, I am one of a small number of students, if not the only one, to work towards a minor in Justice and Peace studies while also pursuing a major in Economics. These two disciplines are traditionally assumed to be incongruent, if not incompatible, both in content and pedagogy. However, my experience over the past four years working through both Economics and Justice and Peace Studies coursework has made clear for me the fact these two academic realms have much they can learn from, and contribute to, each other.

First, I took the opportunity to speak with several sections of the Introduction to Justice and Peace Studies course in both the fall and spring semesters of this academic year. I shared with these students my experience in the Justice and Peace Studies Program, in particular how I attempted to marry the program with my major coursework in Economics. Many of these students were underclassmen who were considering pursuing a Justice and Peace Studies minor, and thus I hoped to impress upon them the fact that they can, and should, bring into the program other seemingly unrelated coursework or interests. Indeed, having a diversity of students' academic backgrounds and educational approaches is one of the strong suits of the Justice and Peace Studies program here at Georgetown, and I believe that it is important to encourage students who come from traditionally underrepresented academic disciplines to participate in the program.

Second, I will be working to compile a bibliography of materials that deal with the intersection of justice issues and economic ideas and methods for the future use of the Justice and Peace Studies program. This thesis has exposed me to countless resources that both make claims about justice using economic evidence or methodologies, *and* make economic arguments based on principles of justice. Working from the materials that I have already engaged in my thesis process, I hope to provide the Justice and Peace Studies program with a foundation of resources to allow it to engage with the intersection of justice, peace, and economics in future course offerings and other efforts.