

May 8, 2012
URBDP 200
Reading Assignment #12

Housing and Homelessness

1. Kaplan:

The housing market is split roughly into four sectors: private market housing, which constitutes more than 90 percent of housing units, private nonmarket housing, public market housing, and public nonmarket housing (pg. 221). Like most other markets, housing can be described in economic terms (supply and demand) but it is also different than other markets because it is a geographically immobile commodity. Housing demand is greatly influenced by a unit's amenities and its geographic location and their effect on the unit's value (cost). Housing supply is (usually) produced on the land where it will be used, which has made the home construction process largely incompatible with cost-efficient mass production.

Homer Hoyt's model of urban structure opposes the ecological model and suggests that cities grow from the outside in – highest income households drive urban growth on the edges because of their desire for more amenities, which typically required more space. The movement of households further and further away from the central city initiates a succession of vacancies, termed "vacancy chains" (pg. 225). New housing stock becomes available closest to the central city to low-income groups as higher-income groups move into units further from the core. This succession, according to Hoyt, also results in the conversion of central-city neighborhoods into unfashionable, run-down neighborhoods (or slums) because of the effects of filtering. However, Hoyt viewed downward filtering as a "natural feature of a healthy urban housing market because it reflected the growth of housing stock" (pg. 226).

2. Wolch and Dear:

Wolch and Dear identify many factors for the significant rise of homeless over the past few decades. They begin with the increase in poverty, unemployment, and underemployment associated with the deindustrialization and reindustrialization that occurred in the United States. Simultaneously, the federal government was reeling in the safety net and eliminating welfare benefits while drug abuse skyrocketed within the country. The introduction and increase of women (single moms, importantly) in the workplace feminized homelessness because they earned considerably less than their male counterparts. During the 1980s the federal government stopped producing public housing, which led to a huge loss of affordable housing. Decreased incomes/unemployment, coupled with the lack of affordable housing creates a population of "protohomeless" whose descent into homelessness depends largely on their personal resources (family, friends, availability of benefits) and their person habits (substance use or abuse) (pg. 158).