

Gentrification and the effects on urban development sociology essay



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Today, the urban development is vulnerable to the growing impact of gentrification. At this point, it is worth mentioning the fact that the process of gentrification emerges under the impact of multiple factors, including economic and social ones and the process of globalization, which stimulate consistent changes in urban development. At the same time, the process of urban development leads to socioeconomic and demographic changes, provoked by the gentrification. However, possible effects of gentrification are still under-researched and the debate on whether gentrification leads to positive or negative effects persists. Nevertheless, changes in the development of cities are significant and force policy makers either to support or to slow down the process of gentrification. However, any attempt of policy makers to regulate the process of gentrification and, therefore, urban development confronts the problem of the interference of state in the process of local economic development. In such a situation, policy makers should understand clearly whether gentrification has positive or negative effects and whether benefits of gentrification outweigh its disadvantages. In fact, the support of gentrification is essential only on the condition of the positive effect on the urban development but, in actuality, the risk of widening gaps between different social classes, namely between the rich and the poor, may widen that may lead to the exclusion of the poor and their marginalization. Therefore, the process of gentrification needs to be studied in details but policy makers should take into consideration the fact that gentrification has a considerable impact on the social, economic and demographic development of modern urban areas.

THE ESSENCE OF GENTRIFICATION

Definition of gentrification

Gentrification is a relatively new trend, although specialists (De Courcy Hinds, 1987) refer the origin of gentrification to the mid-20th century and the post-World War II period, when considerable changes in communities inhabited by representatives of lower- and working class had started. In this regard, it is possible to refer to the experience of Brooklyn, New York:

On November 22, 1966, a small group of city construction workers arrived at the corner of State and Nevins Street in Brooklyn with orders to raze an abandoned brownstone. Having recently gained possession of the dilapidated four-story building through non-payment of taxes, the city had become concerned that the empty townhouse was a gathering place for homeless men and drug users and decided to demolish it (Osman, 2011, 1).

However, it is only by the late 20th century, the trend to gentrification had become strong and today this is one of the most significant trends in the urban development.

At this point, specialists (McKenzie, 2006) define gentrification as the process of shift of the middle class population in low income and working class communities. As a rule, the native population of low-income and working class communities is steadily replaced by representatives of the upper-class and professionals, who settle in the area, whereas the share of the native population decreases substantially. The wealthier population moves to low-income and working class communities, settles there and starts developing

local communities. In such a situation, the native population of these communities has to move to other areas and settle there.

Nevertheless, the process of gentrification is still under-researched and needs further studies because this process is quite complicated and relatively new. This is why researchers attempt to explore the process of gentrification in the context of urban development (Sassen, 1995). In such a way, it is possible to understand its effects on urban development. However, before studying effects of gentrification on urban development, it is necessary to dwell upon basic causes of gentrification. Causes of gentrification can help to understand the essence of this process and its effects in a long-run perspective.

Economic causes of gentrification

On analyzing causes of gentrification, specialists (Brandes Gratz, 1989) point out economic concerns as one of the major causes of gentrification. To put it more precisely, the economic development of large cities contributes to the fast progress and growth of the population along with the growth of needs and requirements of the population concerning residential areas, conveniences and environment. In such a situation, the younger generation of professionals and representatives of the middle class often prefers to move to low-income and working class communities, where they can afford purchasing a permanent lodging at a relatively low price and, thus, start living separately from their parents, owning their own lodging. The availability of lodging and its relatively low price attracts representatives of the middle class, who look for independence and affordable lodging.

In addition, many professionals are driven to low-income and working class communities by their professional concerns. For instance, if professionals work in the city, they feel more comfortable, when they live close to their work that allows them to save travel time as well as money. In such a situation, economic concerns become prior to representatives of the middle class and professionals, mainly young people, who move to low-income and working class communities from traditional areas of their living.

Social causes of gentrification

In actuality, social factors also play an important part in the emergence of gentrification in modern cities that affects consistently their development. In this regard, specialists (Ley, 1995) argue that artists, teachers and cultural administrators are in the avant-garde of gentrification because they seek for new place of residence, where they can settle being free of the dependence on automotive transportation and other issues emerging in the suburban areas, where representatives of the middle class normally live. In fact, young graduates, educators, artists and other representatives of the middle class prefer to settle closer to the city center to get access to basic conveniences, services and important city areas, including hospitals, trade centers and other areas. In such a way, they attempt to maintain the lifestyle they have used to while studying and get wider access to basic services they need at the moment. In addition, gentrification increases their independence from parents and automotive transport. In such a way, representatives of the middle class move to low-income and working class communities.

Economic globalization

At the same time, some specialists (Ley, 1986) point out that the process of gentrification is closely intertwined and is provoked by the process of globalization. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the fact that the process of globalization contributes to the free and fast movement of capital along with the migration of the population. The migration of the population and movement of capital being enhanced by the free movement of capital stimulates gentrification. Representatives of the middle class purchase houses in low-income and working class communities and they can repair and improve to match their standards of living. In this regard, immigrants with a relatively high level of income can also move to low-income and working class community, where they can purchase houses at a relatively low price and repair them respectively to their standards.

At the same time, globalization contributes to the emergence of banking and service activities which replace the traditional manufacturing core of the urban economy. In such a situation, professional working in the banking industry and professionals working in different industries providing services prefer to move to low-income and working class communities, where they can settle close to their workplace, whereas many professionals today work just at home that allow them to save time and money on transportation. At the same time, low-income and working class communities attract them due to the relatively low price and location close to the city center and respective conveniences and services being available to representatives of the middle class living in these communities.

THE EFFECTS OF GENTRIFICATION ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Economic effects of gentrification

In actuality, the process of gentrification leads to consistent changes in urban development and affects consistently the economic development of communities vulnerable to the impact of gentrification. In this regard, many specialists warn that the obvious problem being that the low income portion of the social fold is being disregardedâ€” literally and figuratively (What's Up with Gentrification, 2007, 5). What is meant here is the fact that gentrification leads to the replacement of poor, working class population by representatives of the middle class. In such a situation, low-income families and representatives of the working class have to move from their communities to other ones, where the standards of living are even lower than that of their own communities inhabited by representatives of the middle class. Representatives of the middle class, in their turn, inhabit low-income and working class communities start consistent changes in local communities, where they settle. These changes lead to consistent raise in standards of living because they repair their houses and stimulate the development of commerce and different services, which are essential for the maintenance of their high standards of living. In such a way, representatives of the middle class invest substantial funds in the development of local communities to match them to their traditional standards of living, which are naturally consistently higher than standards of living for low-income families and representatives of the working class.

At the same time, the rise of standards of living, significant investments, the development of the local infrastructure, services and facilities increases substantially the price of real estate in the community as well as costs of living in the community. In such a situation, representatives of the middle class settling in low-income and working class community bring considerable investments but these investments lead to the increase of costs of living in communities making the life unaffordable for low-income and working class population.

As a result, the economic development of communities vulnerable to the impact of gentrification changes consistently. Specialists (McKenzie, 2006) argue that representatives of the middle class moving to low-income and working class communities boost their economic development that leads to the increase in housing prices and overall rise of costs of living. As a result, low-income and working class communities turn from poverty stricken communities into successful and rapidly progressing communities, where business activities emerge successfully.

At first glance, economic effects of gentrification are positive. However, specialists (Sassen, 1995) warn that such positive effects of gentrification can have extremely dangerous side-effects, especially in relation to low-income and working class. To put it more precisely, the low-income and working class population has to move from the communities, where people used to live before the arrival of representatives of the middle class. Often they have to move away from the areas located close to the city center and they should look for cheap lodging. However, as the process of gentrification emerges, they have substantial problems with finding cheap lodging, while <https://assignbuster.com/gentrification-and-the-effects-on-urban-development-sociology-essay/>

they cannot afford constructing their own houses, which used to be the prerogative of representatives of the middle class. Representatives of the low-income and working class cannot afford purchasing their own homes as well. In such a situation, they are doomed to live in outskirts of large cities or other areas, where conditions of living deteriorate and become unbearable for the population. In contrast, representatives of the middle class improve conditions of living, stimulate the development of business activities. As a result, the poor are forced to live in communities suffering from economic stagnation, whereas the rich and middle class prosper. The economic disparity between classes deteriorates the economic development of low-income and working class. The disparity in economic development of different parts of cities leads to the backwardness of the parts inhabited by low-income and working class, whereas parts of cities inhabited by middle class prosper.

The economic prosperity stimulated by gentrification improves the local infrastructure and opens new ways for the development of business activities. As a result, the wealth of the middle and upper-class increases and is accumulated in the hands of representatives of the middle and upper-class. In contrast, the poor grow poorer and cannot afford living within the city that leads to their marginalization.

Social effects of gentrification

At the same time, consistent economic changes affect the development of the social life of communities vulnerable to the impact of gentrification. At this point, it is worth mentioning the fact that the deterioration of the

economic situation in urban areas and the deterioration of the position of
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low-income and working class. Representatives of the middle class are also vulnerable to the impact of gentrification. However, the impact of gentrification is different in relation to low-income and working class and in relation to the middle class. Economic changes affect consistently the position of both classes that naturally contributes to consistent social changes.

In fact, the poor are vulnerable to the negative impact of gentrification. First of all, they have to move from their traditional residential areas to new ones, where they have to start a new life and where conditions of living are worse compared to the communities they used to live in. Representatives of the low-income and working class have to live in new communities and start a new life, which naturally evokes a number of social problems, among which it is necessary to develop basic infrastructure and positive relationships within the community.

Furthermore, as the poor have to move to a new residential area, they often have to change their workplace because they cannot always afford covering transportation costs or the schedule of their work makes their work impossible. As they change the workplace, they may face the problem of unemployment, especially because they have to move to areas with the poor business development and with stagnating economy.

In such a situation, representatives of the low-income and working class can face another problem – the problem of high crime rates in areas, where they settle after they have to move from their communities under the impact of gentrification. In fact, being in a desperate position and having no means

for living, the poor are forced to commit crimes to earn for living and to afford living in a new community, where they move to from communities now inhabited by representatives of the middle class mainly.

Representatives of the low-income and working class slip to criminal activities that naturally increase the social tension in poverty-stricken neighborhoods, where they live.

Another social problem representatives of the lower class face is the lack of access to education. In fact, as they are removed from traditional residential areas, where they used to live, the poor have to develop their life in new communities and areas, which are often underdeveloped. They cannot afford developing education organizations and education system in their new community on their own. The state and local authorities are not always capable and willing to support the population of local communities. As a result, new communities inhabiting by the poor either have insufficient capacities to provide access to education for students in these communities, or have no education organizations at all. Obviously, the lack of access to education will increase the social tension even more because without education individuals cannot get well-paid jobs and good career opportunities. In addition, children living in low-income communities with the high level of crime rates are vulnerable to the impact of their criminal environment. Therefore, the position of the poor will deteriorate, whereas social problems will increase over and over again.

In addition, it is worth mentioning the fact that health care services are not available to the poor, who have to move to new residential areas after representatives of the upper class have replaced them in their traditional

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residential areas. In fact, health care services are not available as education services. Today, health care services are very expensive and the poor cannot afford the development of health care organizations in their communities, whereas the state lacks funds for the provision of health care services to all people. In such a situation, the poor are deprived of basic opportunities to have access to basic health care services.

In contrast to the poor, representatives of the middle class can benefit from gentrification economically but they can hardly benefit from gentrification in social terms. What is meant here is the fact that representatives of the middle class exclude representatives of the lower class from the mainstream culture and benefits associated with the fast economic development of their communities. In fact, in social terms, gentrification leads to the growing tension between representatives of different social classes. To put it in simple words, representatives of the middle class improve their conditions of living, whereas the poor become poorer and suffer from a bunch of socio-economic problems. Moreover, the gap between the rich and the poor grows wider and specialists (Sassen, 1995) forecast serious conflicts between the two classes under the impact of gentrification because the problem will aggravate and the gap between the two classes will widen.

Demographic effects of gentrification

Along with numerous economic and social effects of gentrification, specialists (McKenzie, 2006) distinguish demographic effects. In this respect, it is important to place emphasis on the fact that the process of gentrification contributes to consistent demographic changes. In fact, representatives of the middle class purchasing houses in the low-income and working class

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communities tend to have a few children. At this point, it is worth mentioning the fact that representatives of the middle class, who move to low-income and working class communities, are young people mainly. As a rule, they are not having children, when they move to low-income and working class communities. They need substantial financial resources to start a new life in low-income and working class communities. In such a situation, representatives of the middle class prefer to invest in the repair of their new houses and the development of low-income and working class communities to transform them into prosperous communities. In such a situation, the rise of taxes and costs of living decreases the capabilities of representatives of the middle class living in low-income and working class communities of having children. In a long-run perspective, gentrification leads to the aging of the population living in communities, where representatives of the middle class have moved to. The same trend can be traced in low-income and working class communities because they cannot afford maintaining large families. In such a situation, the risk of the demographic crisis emerges because both representatives of the middle and lower classes have a few children. Specialists (Brandes Gratz, 1989) argue that, in a long-run perspective, the demographic crisis provoked by gentrification can lead to the aging of the population. The latter may provoke the deterioration of the economic situation and provoke social problems.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF GENTRIFICATION

Advantages of gentrification

Obviously, gentrification has a number of advantages. First of all, gentrification stimulates the fast economic development of low-income and working class communities because representatives of the middle class invest substantial financial resources in the development of the communities. The investment and the development of local infrastructure increase housing prices in local areas. In such a situation, the housing taxes increase as the wealth of the community increases. Therefore, the economic development of communities under the impact of gentrification is accelerated. The development of communities stimulates the development of cities at large because cities benefit from the increased revenues obtained from taxation and accelerated economic development of would be low-income and working class communities. Representatives of the middle class obtain large opportunities for the further improvement of their standards of living. As a result, they benefit from gentrification.

Disadvantages of gentrification

On the other hand, gentrification brings a number of problems and has substantial disadvantages. First of all, Gentrification deteriorates the position of the poor, who have to move from low-income and working class communities, which are inhabited by representatives of the middle class. Their economic position becomes even worse as they have to move to new communities. In fact, the poverty breeds poverty being expelled from low-

income and working class communities by representatives of the middle class.

In addition, representatives of the lower class have to move to new communities, where a bunch of socioeconomic problems emerge. Among the major problems of socioeconomic problems, it is worth mentioning unemployment, the lack of access of the poor to education and basic health care services, and other problems.

However, what is more important about gentrification is widening the gap between the rich and the poor. In fact, the poor become poorer, whereas representatives of the middle class improve their position. In such a situation, gentrification can undermine the foundation of modern cities because it raises unsurpassable barriers between the rich and the poor living in the cities but this antagonism can provoke serious social conflicts, including growing crime rates, which may affect not only poverty stricken communities but also other communities, including communities inhabited by representatives of the middle class and communities emerged in terms of gentrification.

CONCLUSION

Thus, taking into account all above mentioned, it is important to place emphasis on the fact that gentrification is quite a controversial process. In actuality, it is obvious that gentrification affects consistently the urban development. However, effects of gentrification can be highly controversial. On the one hand, gentrification stimulates the economic development of communities, where representatives of the middle class move to. However,

economic benefits may be short-run, whereas, in a long-run perspective, gentrification can lead to the widening gap between the rich and the poor in cities. The latter problem will lead to the deterioration of the social stability within cities. Nevertheless, the full impact of gentrification on urban development should be studied further.