

Introduction

Rural Housing: Barriers and Incentives

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Rural communities face many challenges in meeting the needs of all residents. While small towns offer many attractions that make them appealing places to live, these towns often have limited resources to meet the challenges of economic development, educational disparity, and housing choices. Many rural communities seem to be dying because of their inability to deal with these challenges. Others are changed in critical ways because development does come. Some residents are disturbed by the "Wal-Martization" of their communities -- the loss of "main street" when the discount store arrives in an outlying area. Others welcome the convenience and "progress" of chain retailing and fast-food establishments. Dent (1993) predicts that many rural communities will be transformed in the next 15 years as front-line baby boomers discover exurbia. Being away from the urban chaos and suburban sprawl will be a healthful living choice for many. How the rural community changes and continues to offer the best living conditions for its residents is yet to be seen.

Many towns in the rural South are experiencing changes associated with growth. The housing situation in these areas can contrast greatly with the housing that is offered in the traditional rural community that has not experienced growth. Researchers associated with the Southern Region Housing Research Project recognized this and sought to explore the barriers and incentives to affordable housing in both types of rural communities. The outcome of their work is a series of articles presented here that seek to develop a causal model to explain the influences of housing in rural communities. The conceptual model on which this work is based is broad and takes into account a wide range of community and resident variables. It also incorporates variables that represent housing professionals operating in the community.

The first four articles should be viewed as a set. The first article by Jacquelyn McCray is an overview article that presents the theory base for the research and presents in detail the conceptual model and its variables. The next three articles examine the three dependent variables that were used in the models: housing affordability, housing quality, and housing diversity. Rosemary Goss utilized variables representing owner affordability and renter affordability. Julia Beamish explored housing quality through community census data for age of dwellings and units that were crowded and lacked plumbing. Margaret Weber examined the variety of housing choice in the community through variables for non-single family housing and a community-based housing diversity index. Their findings in general indicate that while certain demographic and economic variables were related to these community housing characteristics, many attitudes and values of community residents and housing intermediaries were also important. The final article in the special issue, by Mikyoung Ha and Margaret Weber adds further depth to the research area by focusing on differences in rural and urban housing market.

The methodology for the regional research project, which consisted of four major segments, is explained in the overview article. Briefly, communities were selected based on a theoretical framework of traditional and modern social systems. Four communities in each of seven states were selected. Case studies were then conducted for each of the 28 communities. Finally, households and housing intermediaries and leaders in the communities were surveyed to gather information about their perceptions of the housing situation. This

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methodology combined both quantitative and qualitative procedures. The utilization of various procedures and data sources made this study complex, but rich in information. Organizing this information and analyzing it through the model development and testing was challenging.

Even though these study communities exhibited a great deal of diversity, strategies to overcome barriers in the provision of affordable housing in the South may also be applicable to other regions of the country. By better understanding the actions and attitudes of those in decision-making and leadership positions in communities that have been successful in the delivery of affordable housing, other communities can evaluate their situations and encourage the implementation of local policy initiatives for housing types, projects, and programs that address the affordable housing issues.

Dent, H. S., Jr. (1993). *The great boom ahead*. New York: Hyperion.