Reframing the Public Conversation:
Affordable Housing, Opportunity and Community Development

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Enterprise

FRAMEWORKS INSTITUTE

MAKE ROOM

National Center for Healthy Housing
THE PROBLEM

Too many people don’t have a fair shot at success in life because of where they live and it’s tough to build the public will to do something about it.
“…America's poor neighborhoods as war zones that are killing everyone in them...why we are not removing children from harm’s way....any place in the country that is poor as first and foremost a place to be escaped from.”

“…this kind of good place/bad place language also represents a huge backward step from the longstanding attempt to reframe discussions of disinvested places in terms of their assets rather than their deficits. It implies that those who stay in these neighborhoods are all either saints or victims.”

“The Dangerous Rhetoric of Escaping to Opportunity”  
_Shelterforce_, Blog Post by Miriam Axel-Lute  
August 13, 2014
Why is it so Difficult?

• Opportunities for public engagement often happen episodically and haphazardly (*climate disaster, shooting*); because of emerging “crises” (*foreclosure crisis*); or in the context of transactions (*major investments being made*)

• Stories about the dynamic, complex, long-standing and complex nature of issues facing most regions today, are harder to tell – especially in the current era of fast, shallow media

• The way that we tell our stories often (1) activates cultural narratives that run counter to what we want to convey and/or (2) ignores the science of cognition
THE BACKFIRE EFFECT!

Housing and Community Development Experts

Public and Policymakers
Mr. Bean
Maybe these renters in question should look for roommates.

Iamnoone
There are many suburban locations where rents are lower. If some of the people who are stressed by the "high" rents move away from Chicago, good things will happen for them and the City. They will be safer. The schools will be better. Parking will be easier. The number of students that the CPS needs to educate will drop, and that should lower costs. Suburban PACE services will get a boost in ridership. Suburban stores will have increased sales. Fewer people will compete for insufficient free...

Jonny_O
There's plenty of affordable housing. It's just not in places like Lincoln Park or the Gold Coast.

Renters will often attempt to bite off a bit more than they can chew. They do it with good intentions: it's natural to want a nicer place, a better neighborhood, or perhaps a better school for the kids. But this has unintended consequences: it provides landlords with an artificially deep bench of potential renters, which in turn allows them to raise their rates faster. Tack on the up-charge for...
Researchers at the University of Michigan found that when misinformed people were exposed to corrected facts in news stories, they rarely changed their minds. In fact, they often became even more strongly set in their beliefs. Facts, they found, were not curing misinformation. Like an underpowered antibiotic, facts were actually making the misinformation even stronger.

What We Already Know From the Research:
Frequency of Key Narrative Elements in Media & Housing Industry Materials

Solutions | Causal Explanations | Broader Impacts | Values Statement
---|---|---|---
Media Materials | Housing Organizational Materials

THREE Communications Redirections You Can Implement Today!

1. Tell the “Story of Us”, not the “Story of Them”

2. Tell Stories that Balance People, Places, and Systems Perspectives

3. Bring the Connection Between Housing and Other Issues into Sharper Focus
Redirection #1:
Lead with the Story of Us / Show “Why” this Matters for Everybody

“If a story is not about the hearer he will not listen. And here I make a rule—a great and interesting story is about everyone or it will not last.”

(East of Eden)
Redirection #2: Tell Stories that Balance People, Places, and Systems Perspectives
Redirection #3: Bring the Connection Between Housing & Other Issues into Sharper Focus

Unstable Housing or Homelessness → Stress & Difficulty Learning + Disrupted School Attendance → Poorer School Performance
Questions?
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For more information about Enterprise’s work to reframe housing and measure opportunity, please don’t hesitate to reach out:

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To support the campaign to end the rental housing crisis, log onto: www.MakeRoomUSA.com

For specific messaging and framing recommendations, visit the FrameWorks Institute:

www.FrameWorksInstitute.org