

Gentrification Through the Lens of CPR

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The Research Question

How can the Common-Pool Resource Theory (CPR) be used to understand and address the challenges of gentrification in urban spaces?

Introductions

Urban spaces function as common-pool resources (CPRs)—shared resources like public parks, affordable housing, and cultural districts. Gentrification disrupts access to these spaces, leading to economic, cultural, and spatial displacement. As wealthier people move in, longtime residents face displacement and cultural loss.

CPR theory, developed by Elinor Ostrom, offers a framework to manage shared resources equitably without privatization or overreliance on government control.

Key Issues with Gentrification

- Displacement of low-income communities
- Loss of cultural identity and community fabric
- Privatization and reduced access to formerly public or affordable spaces
- Misaligned and zoning policies and top-down development decisions
- Lack of inclusion and planning and decision-making



Theoretical Framework: Ostrom's CPT Principles Applied to Gentrification

- Clearly Defined Boundaries
 - Gentrification shifts physical and social boundaries, often excluding original residents
 - Wealthier newcomers change neighborhoods dynamics without inclusive planning
 - Solution: Community involvement in zoning decisions and use of Community Land Trusts (CLTs)
- Congruence between rules and Local Conditions
 - One-size-fits-all development policies ignore unique neighborhood needs.
 - Solution: Tailor housing and zoning policies to fit local demographics, culture, and affordability needs
- Conflict-Resolution Mechanisms
 - Tensions rise between long-term and new residents
 - Solution: Create platforms for dialogue and mediations, such as neighborhood councils and tenant advocacy groups
- Nested Enterprises
 - Local and regional authorities often operate in collaboration between community and organizations
 - Solution: Establish multi-level governance (e.g., CLTs and municipal housing programs) to connect grassroots and top-down planning

Findings/Conclusion

Ostrom's CPR principles offer practical tools to resist the negative effects of gentrification. Empowering communities, rather than relying solely on markets or government, promotes equity, sustainability, and resilience. Gentrification can be managed—not just resisted—if local voices are centered in planning and decision-making. Ostrom's principles show that when communities are given a voice and power over resource management, more sustainable outcomes are possible.

Proposal/Solution

To counteract the negative effects of gentrification, cities must adapt strategies rooted in community engagement and equitable governance. Establishing clearly defined boundaries through tools like Community Land Trusts (CLTs) can preserve affordable and prevent displacement. Urban planning should prioritize congruence with local conditions by tailoring zoning and housing policies to reflect the cultural and economic needs of existing residents. Cities must also implement accessible conflict-resolution mechanisms such as neighborhood councils or tenant advocacy platforms to mediate disputes and ensure marginalized voices are heard. Finally, governance should be nested, with coordinated efforts between local organizations and city-wide institutions to align development goals with community priorities. These approaches promote a model of urban development that values inclusivity, shared responsibility, and long-term resilience.