

# The Meanings of Resident Empowerment: Why Just About Everybody Thinks It's a Good Idea and What It Has to Do with Resident Management

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## *Abstract*

It is generally believed that public housing resident management results in improved social, economic, and physical conditions at development sites and in an empowered community of tenants. While there is some documentation of improvements, there is little documentation regarding empowerment. Further, it is not always clear what proponents of resident management mean by empowerment or how it grows out of the resident management process.

This article explores the relationship between community empowerment and resident management of public housing. Following a review of the history of resident management in the United States, three different meanings of empowerment relevant to resident management (conservative, liberal, and progressive) are presented, and their relationship to resident management is introduced and discussed. It is argued that none of the versions of resident management associated with these meanings produces an empowered community. The article concludes with a discussion of the usefulness of resident management as a tool for improving the quality of life of public housing residents.

**Keywords:** Housing; Low-income housing; Management

## **Introduction**

The notion of resident management as a tool for empowering public housing residents seems to appeal to almost everyone. Images are invoked of “empowered” tenants, overcoming tremendous social and economic obstacles, taking control of and redirecting their developments from crime- and drug-ridden slums to safe and productive communities. It is a new version of the Horatio Alger story, with adult black women as Horatio.

This article arises from my reflections on several years of working with residents, public officials, and activists on the issue of resident management. It focuses on the word “empowerment” and the different meanings given to it by different groups of

people—conservatives, liberals, and progressives. Different meanings result in different goals and objectives for resident management programs, and these differences lead to confusion over what can be expected of resident management and how such programs should be fashioned. No matter which meaning of empowerment is invoked, resident management is neither the best nor necessarily even an appropriate means for achieving it. Because resident management by itself is not an empowering act, it should not be the sole or even the major focus of efforts to revitalize both the residents and the structures of public housing.

### **A brief history of resident management in U.S. public housing**

Resident management, originally called tenant management, appeared in the early 1970s, first in Boston and then in St. Louis when residents were forced to assume control to keep from losing their homes. In Boston, residents at Bromley-Heath, an 1,100-unit development of town houses and high-rise buildings, organized in the mid-1960s to improve health services. In time, they took over operation of social services in the community, formed a crime patrol, and developed a drug center (Hailey 1984). In 1969, the resident organization proposed taking over management of the development, which was accomplished on January 1, 1971. Bromley-Heath is the first of 11 pioneering resident management corporations (ICF 1992) that have been managing their developments since before 1988.<sup>1</sup>

In St. Louis, tenant management grew out of the settlement of a 1969 rent strike. In all, five different developments were involved. Tenant management was initiated at the Carr Square and Darst developments in 1973 and at the Peabody and Webb developments in 1974; a church-related neighborhood corporation began managing Cochran Gardens in 1974 in anticipation of conversion to tenant management, which came about in 1976. The initial funds for the tenant management in St. Louis were provided by the Ford Foundation (Wendel 1975).

<sup>1</sup> The 11 (see ICF 1992) with their years of incorporation are Bromley-Heath (Boston, 1971), Carr Square (St. Louis, 1973), Stella Wright (Newark, 1975), Cochran Gardens (St. Louis, 1976), A. Harry Moore (Jersey City, 1978), Montgomery Gardens (Jersey City, 1979), Kenilworth-Parkside (Washington, DC, 1982), Clarksdale (Louisville, 1983), Booker T. Washington (Jersey City, 1986), Lakeview Terrace (Cleveland, 1987), and LeClaire Courts (Chicago, 1987). At least one of these, Lakeview Terrace, has had its contract to manage withdrawn by its housing authority since the ICF study (Chandler 1994).

Ford's involvement in St. Louis led to its joint sponsorship with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) of a National Tenant Management Demonstration Program. The demonstration operated between 1976 and 1979 and involved seven public housing sites in six cities—Jersey City, Louisville, New Haven, New Orleans, Oklahoma City, and Rochester. In evaluating the program, the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (1981) noted that while at most sites tenant management seemed to have worked as well as housing authority management had, several objective measures, such as rent collections, vacancy rates, and speed of response to maintenance requests, showed no improvement. Resident satisfaction with tenant managers, however, was higher than with housing authority managers.

Manpower also concluded that tenant management was costly. Expenditures were from 13 to 62 percent above conventional management costs, primarily because of training, employment, and technical assistance. Nevertheless, there were benefits from the increased expenditures, including employment for some tenants, a sense of personal development in all aspects of their lives among tenants who actively participated in management, and a greater overall satisfaction with management among all tenants. Noting the additional costs, varying attitudes of housing authorities about tenant management, and the rapid turnover rate of housing authority directors, Manpower suggested it was unlikely that tenant management could be universally successful and recommended against expanding the demonstration program.

Although the program was discontinued, several developments initially remained under tenant control. But when external funds disappeared, so did the interest of the participating housing authorities (Chandler 1991); over time, all but one of the developments reverted to conventional management. By 1989, only the A. Harry Moore development in Jersey City still had some degree of tenant management (Monti 1989). In St. Louis, the Darst, Peabody, and Webb developments, which were not part of the demonstration program, also reverted to housing authority control.<sup>2</sup> An observer in the early 1980s would likely have concluded that tenant management was an idea whose time

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<sup>2</sup> There appears to be no documentation on exactly why the St. Louis developments reverted to conventional management. George Wendel, director of the Urban Studies Program at St. Louis University, states that in each case the original resident leader stepped aside and no other resident was both capable of and interested in assuming the role. Thus the housing authority was forced to reassert its control (personal communication 1985).

had come and gone. However, tenant management reemerged in the mid-1980s with a new set of champions, the new name of “resident management,” and a new lease on life. Conservatives became attracted to resident management, seeing its self-help focus as a way of both instilling responsibility in residents and reducing, perhaps eliminating, federal involvement in public housing. Taking the lead in promoting resident management was the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (NCNE), a Washington, DC, organization headed by Robert Woodson.

The conservative idea of resident management contained a new feature, ownership, which was seen to be a logical outcome of the resident management process. NCNE (1984) claimed that “many residents of public housing . . . believe that once they have made the commitment to turn their developments around . . . they . . . deserve and have the right to maintain and own their homes in those developments” (pp. 7–8). NCNE was instrumental in getting resident management included in the federal Housing and Community Development Act of 1987, which created a formal procedure for establishing resident management corporations (RMCs) and provided up to \$100,000 for developing and training them. With the encouragement of the incoming Bush administration, especially its dynamic HUD secretary, Jack Kemp, local housing authorities began promoting resident management groups, and residents, hearing of successes elsewhere, began seeking resident management at their developments. By the end of the decade, RMCs were springing up all over the country.

Despite the emphasis of the Bush administration on resident management, the actual growth in the number of resident-managed developments was modest. By 1992, at the end of the Bush administration, an evaluation of emerging resident management corporations conducted by ICF (1992) for HUD’s Office of Policy Development and Research identified nearly 300 resident groups as having received some assistance and 80 groups as having received federal technical assistance grants intended to move them into management. Yet only 27 of the 80 groups receiving grants had actually progressed to some form of management. Only two unidentified groups were carrying out some management functions independently and had a management contract with their housing authority. ICF concluded that the small number of groups achieving management status “strongly suggests that resident management requires a fairly long period of time to implement” (ICF 1993, iii).

When ICF (1992) looked at 11 RMCs incorporated before 1988, it drew conclusions that were similar to those in the earlier

Manpower (1981) report. These RMCs performed well in terms of annual inspections, resident move-outs, resident recertifications, and maintenance and maintenance staffing, but less well with respect to tenant accounts and vacancy rates. Residents of developments where the RMC took responsibility for the majority of the management functions had significantly more positive perceptions of the quality of life than residents at comparison sites, but ICF suggested this was due at least in part to poor perceptions at the comparison sites. Operating costs, based on admittedly limited data, were lower for RMCs.<sup>3</sup>

Resident management has not been promoted as vigorously by the Clinton administration. Based on my conversations with local HUD officials and tenant leaders, this position seems to reflect both a recognition that resident groups need more in-depth training to successfully implement self-management and a policy shift that emphasizes choices rather than a single option. Although HUD's Urban Revitalization Demonstration (HOPE VI), first announced in January 1993 and now being implemented, provides funds for resident programs, it calls for a bold, comprehensive approach to public housing revitalization rather than focusing on a single element such as resident management (Vale 1993). Irene Johnson, tenant leader at Leclair Courts, has also suggested that finding a way for residents to leave public housing through the purchase of HUD-foreclosed homes may be a better option than the purchase of units at Leclair (personal communication). Both the demonstration and Johnson's comment suggest a restructuring of public housing that would result in less isolation of poor households, which in many ways is the opposite of the notion of resident management.<sup>4</sup> Thus, during the past 25 years, resident management seems to have experienced a roller-coaster ride of support and popularity, and it seems to be on the verge of heading downhill again. It may be appropriate yet once more to try to appraise its potential. Much of the recent

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<sup>3</sup> The finding of lower operating costs would appear to contrast with the findings of Manpower (1981). Kolodny (1983), however, argues that Manpower's findings are misleading: Costs associated with the start-up of resident management were included along with regular operating costs. These start-up costs would disappear over time, leading to lower operating costs than reported.

<sup>4</sup> If the internal HUD document, *A Blueprint for Reinventing HUD*, which has been widely circulated since the November 1994 federal election, is an accurate description of the way the Clinton administration intends to restructure the department, then public housing will be drastically changed. It is not at all clear how resident management would fit into a situation in which housing authorities must compete for tenants in an open market as outlined in the blueprint.

rhetoric about resident management emphasizes the notion of empowerment. This article reflects on empowerment and on the assumed link between it and resident management and questions whether empowerment is a realistic expectation of resident management efforts.

## **Different meanings of empowerment**

Nearly all advocates of resident management claim it is an empowering act. It is not always clear, however, what they mean by empowerment and just how empowerment occurs when residents become managers. The lack of a clear definition of empowerment allows just about anyone, representing any political persuasion, to use the term and allows others, no matter what their persuasion, to agree.

In my work I have identified three different general meanings of empowerment as it is applied to resident management. Each meaning is associated with a specific political perspective. Purposes, procedures, and expected outcomes of resident management differ markedly from meaning to meaning.

### *Conservative meaning*

Individual freedom and property rights undergird the conservative notion of empowerment. Caprara and Alexander (1989), in a resource guide published by NCNE, contend that public housing residents are powerless because they are dependent on housing authorities. To them, resident management empowers by eliminating dependency and restoring pride. However, only by becoming owners do residents become truly independent.

Conservatives' belief in empowerment through ownership is tied to their notions of the "natural social order" and the role of government in society, which can be traced to the political writings of John Locke. To Locke, property was the inherent right of free men. In the United States, our notions of social order and class have been constructed around the ownership of property. Perin (1977) notes that in American society "the form of tenure—whether a household owns or rents its place of residence—is read as a primary social sign, used in categorizing and evaluating people, in much the same way that race, income, occupation, and education are" (p. 32). Thus, for conservatives resident management is a means to empowerment that is only fully realized when residents attain ownership and thus are elevated to a

higher social order. In this individualistic notion of empowerment, community organization is seen only as a mechanism for attaining individual achievement.

### *Liberal meaning*

The liberal definition is drawn from the urban reform movement of the 1960s, which emphasized citizen involvement and participation. Liberals see successful governance of public housing as evolving out of an inclusionary process in which residents are encouraged to participate. In such a situation, both the housing authority and the residents share responsibility for a development, and resident management is thus viewed as a collaborative partnership between the authority and the resident corporation.

Liberals believe the idea that public housing problems can be solved without substantial federal involvement and support is a “cruel hoax” (Rigby 1990). For example, Robert Rigby (former director of the Jersey City Housing Authority), in speaking about how distressed public housing was turned around, argued for “a working partnership with . . . tenant organisations, the organisation of estate<sup>5</sup> and agency management in a fashion that maximize[s] estate-based capacity and sufficient capital improvements or modernisation” (Rigby 1990, 7).

Empowerment thus means bringing residents into the system and giving them a voice in making decisions about the present and planning for the future. The liberal notion of resident management is often expressed through the policy of “dual management.” The term “dual management” seems to have first been used in reference to the transitional period of resident management at Leclair Courts in Chicago, during which the housing authority gradually relinquished management control to the RMC (Peterman 1993).

Subsequently housing authorities, including the Chicago Housing Authority (1989), have also used the term to mean an indefinite period during which residents take on some management activities, leaving others to the housing authority. Housing authorities also use the term “full management,” which is said to follow “dual management,” to mean everything from residents’ assuming all management functions to their assuming only a few

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<sup>5</sup> Rigby uses the British term “estate” when referring to a single housing authority development.

(Chicago Housing Authority 1989). When residents chose to perform a limited set of functions under full management, they usually chose site-related activities such as maintenance, rent collection, and tenant screening.

### *Progressive meaning*

Progressives equate empowerment with the notion of community organization and control. To them, the community, not individuals, is the focus of empowerment. Bratt (1989), for example, argues for “a new housing policy built on empowering community groups and low-income households” and providing “more than shelter” (p. 5). Leadership is an outgrowth of community empowerment, and one role for leaders is to take control of management. Resident management is thus not a means of empowerment, but rather a possible outcome of community organization.

Progressives reject the notion that form of tenure (whether a household owns or rents) constitutes a primary determinant of social status (Perin 1977). They view actual ownership of the developments as either irrelevant or problematical. Since ownership schemes tend to emphasize personal empowerment, progressives are likely to view them as antithetical to community building, except for the creation of cooperatives, which is seen as a way of engendering community solidarity.

Since who has power and who is in control are key issues for progressives, they are skeptical about any form of partnership or dual management. Traditionally in community organizing there is always an “enemy,” and in the case of public housing, the enemy is the housing authority. Sharing management control with the enemy is undesirable. Progressives argue that the only time an RMC should share management responsibilities with a housing authority is during a period of transition to full control.

### **Can resident management really empower public housing residents?**

Empowering residents is often seen as an essential element of any workable future public housing policy. Thus it seems an appropriate topic for our discussions. But whose version of empowerment should we consider? Do all versions lead to better public housing? Do any?



Chandler (1991) notes that early resident management efforts, including the National Tenant Management Demonstration Program, neither used the term “empowerment” nor had it as a goal. Instead, resident management was viewed as a “means to decentralize some housing authority responsibilities and to create a bit more stability in the resident population” (Chandler 1991, 137). She points out that the NCNE first suggested a relationship between empowerment and resident management. Liberals and progressives, however, were quick to join their conservative counterparts in claiming that empowerment was also associated with their notions of resident management.

But how are resident management and empowerment linked? Chandler (1991) argues that the link is community organization. This position is echoed by Monti, who, after reviewing 11 resident-managed sites, concluded that successful resident management emerges from the ability of tenants to organize and that “one cannot put the resident management ‘cart’ before the community organization ‘horse’” (Monti 1989, 51). This view strongly suggests that resident management by itself does not empower; if this is true, each of the three versions of resident management may be flawed.

Conservatives acknowledge the importance of organizing as a stepping-stone to resident management (Caprara and Alexander 1989), but they see resident management itself as a stepping-stone to private ownership. Ownership is the real and ultimate empowering act. Thus, community organization<sup>6</sup> creates a temporary form of empowerment, setting the stage for residents to enter into the mainstream of society as owners (Perin 1977).

Can ownership, and thus personal empowerment through ownership, actually be achieved? In their evaluation of HUD’s Public Housing Homeownership Demonstration initiated in 1985, Rohe and Stegman (1990) found that selling public housing units to residents, even with the best tenants and the best housing, is difficult. They found that after 50 months of the program, only 320 out of 1,315 units initially targeted had been transferred. Also, 10 to 15 percent of the resident home buyers had experienced late payments or more serious delinquencies within the first 18 months of closing on their homes. A full 30 percent of the

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<sup>6</sup> The term “community organization” can take on many meanings. With respect to organizing for ownership, it appears to refer to a process of building interest in and support for resident management and ownership rather than to the more radical notion of organizing the community against forms of power and control.

purchasers reported that mortgage payments were causing a strain on their budgets.

Resident-owned cooperatives are often suggested as an alternative form of ownership. However, when I was exploring options for management at LeClaire Courts in Chicago, a feasibility analysis showed that converting the development to a resident-owned cooperative would result in monthly charges (rents) that were much higher than residents could afford. Most residents would not be able, without subsidy, to own their development even in the limited sense of cooperative ownership.

Resident management cannot be considered a successful means to homeownership if so few tenants could become owners. This limitation lends credibility to those (e.g., Clay 1990; Silver, McDonald, and Ortiz 1985) who argue that conservative proponents of resident management are more interested in getting the federal government out of the housing business than in helping poor people. It is also likely that any indiscriminate implementation of ownership schemes could result in failures and foreclosures, leaving some housing in worse shape than it was under housing authority ownership. Such was the case in Chicago when Altgeld Gardens was converted to a resident-owned cooperative in the 1970s. The cooperative failed shortly thereafter when extensive roof repairs were needed and reserve funds were not available. Today Altgeld Gardens remains one of the worst of Chicago's garden-style public housing developments.<sup>7</sup>

Whether the liberal shared management notion of resident management results in empowerment is also open to question. Its supporters stress the need for good working relationships between the tenant organization and the housing authority. Both Manpower (1981) and Kolodny (1981), for example, conclude that a cooperative relationship was essential to RMC success in the demonstration project. The more recent ICF evaluation similarly found that "in general, the stronger [the] working relationships were, the better the RMCs tended to perform" (ICF 1992, 9).

These conclusions, however, are contradicted by Monti (1989), who argues that a "creative tension" is essential to resident management success. An RMC's relationship with its housing authority must be neither "too cozy nor too hostile" (Monti 1989).

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<sup>7</sup> The experience of selling units to residents in Great Britain is often pointed to as an example of successful conversion to ownership. The situation is different in Great Britain, however. Most of the successful sales have involved houses, not units in larger developments, and the new homeowners are generally more affluent than the typical U.S. public housing resident.

Interest in resident management usually arises when an authority fails to satisfactorily do its job, and this interest becomes focused when residents organize. Relationships between a developing community organization and its housing authority are bound to be strained because the inadequacy of the housing authority is the reason for the change. However, for an RMC to be ultimately effective, it must turn the situation into one of “creative tension,” for it must be both a manager and a community leader (Monti 1989).

Proponents of shared management reject the idea of creative tension and instead see community organizing not as a way of building an independent RMC but as a means of building support for the notion of resident management. Organizing, they argue, need not be confrontational because an enlightened authority will favor and support resident efforts. Rigby (1990), for example, argues that while a strong resident organization is needed to rescue a troubled development, it is but a part of a larger effort involving both the residents and the authority.

Shared management most closely corresponds to the “partnership” rung of Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of citizen participation. Partnership is the lowest of Arnstein’s three rungs of citizen power and two steps below the level of full control at which both the conservative and progressive versions of resident management would be placed. Unless real power is transferred to the RMC, citizen control may be illusory. Arnstein cautions that if a partnership such as shared management is to work, then citizens, in this case the residents or the RMC, have to take power because it is unlikely to be given. She suggests further that an equality of resources (e.g., access to technicians, lawyers, and community organizers) is needed if there is to be real sharing and thus equal participation.

Characteristically, authorities in shared management situations give only site-related powers to RMCs, such as responsibility for maintenance, security, and some clerical tasks. Major decisions about operating policies, redevelopment, and budget are retained by the housing authority. Rather than empowering an RMC, the generally onerous site tasks cause the RMC to become a buffer between the authority and residents, and as such it becomes the target of resident displeasure when something goes wrong. Rather than taking control, the RMC in a shared management situation can find itself in the awkward position of acting as the authority’s agent rather than as a representative of the residents.

The dilemma of cooperation versus creative tension is a variation of a common issue faced in most low-income communities. Leaders of community-based advocacy organizations contend that the “establishment” must be confronted if a low-income community’s demands are to be met, while leaders of community-based economic and housing development organizations contend that the community must learn to play by establishment rules if the resources needed for redevelopment are to be obtained. Organizers argue that playing by the rules ensures continuing second-class status for a community, but developers respond that confrontation leads to only limited gains (Keating 1989). Shared management seems to adopt the developers’ perspective and therefore supports the more modest goal of improving management, which creates a better environment for tenants. Chandler (1991) attributes acceptance of shared management to the original National Tenant Management Demonstration Program rather than to the more expansive process of community empowerment.

Since community empowerment is central to the progressive version of resident management, it is tempting to conclude that this is the appropriate model. But there is a potentially fatal flaw here also. In the progressive model, resident management is a means, not an end. In creating and maintaining an RMC, means and ends often become confused, and in the confusion the lofty goal of community empowerment is lost.

Monti (1989) concludes that community organizing and the creation of a strong board or resident council are more important to the development of an effective RMC than a strong individual leader. But it appears that attention too often becomes focused on a strong leader, while community organization and board development are neglected. This situation results either in a weak organization unable to use the power it has or in an organization dominated by a leader who becomes disconnected from the community.

While it may be possible to correct problems associated with community organizing and board development, it remains questionable whether management is an activity compatible with social control and empowerment. The struggle to improve a troubled development is often realized through community organization, and the promise of resident management can be a powerful organizing tool. Once resident management is established, the resident organization must identify new goals of community empowerment if momentum and community interest are to be retained.

Unfortunately this process is rarely completed because once the organization gains management control, energy and talent must be diverted to the technical task of managing. This diversion can easily sap the energies of the organization, turning its attention from the original goal of community empowerment to the goal of organizational survival.

Even though none of the three versions of resident management seems to be directly related to its version of empowerment, the possibility remains that through the building of resident self-esteem and assurance, resident management—no matter which version—leads to positive outcomes for both residents and communities. Both Manpower (1981) and ICF (1992) report that residents in resident-managed developments are more satisfied with their managers and with their development. Rohe and Stegman (1994) have found that when low-income residents in Baltimore became homeowners, their life satisfaction was greater. But such good feelings do not automatically lead to socioeconomic mobility, and whether increased satisfaction from resident management results in substantial economic and social benefits has yet to be determined.

### **Should residents and others seek out resident management?**

None of the versions of resident management, it appears, is particularly appropriate for empowering public housing residents. Does this mean that resident management is a bad idea that should be abandoned by residents, housing authorities, housing advocates, and policy makers?

Many of the concerns about management by RMCs are similar to concerns about the management of low-income housing in general, whether by nonprofit community-based or private sector organizations. In a recent study, Bratt et al. (1994) identified effective housing management as the key to nonprofit housing organizations' ability to maintain their growing inventory of low-cost housing. The need for nonprofit community development organizations to pay more careful attention to management concerns was also highlighted in a recent United Way of Chicago (1995) community development needs assessment.

Both the Bratt and the United Way studies identify the balancing of the "double bottom line" of financial accountability and social goals as a challenge to good management (Bratt et al. 1994). This same challenge applies to resident management

organizations. As a way of balancing the double bottom line, more and more nonprofit organizations are contracting out management services when good outside management agents are available to take on low-income housing. This option may also be appropriate for resident management groups. Contracting for management with a private or even another nonprofit firm might help avoid problems relating to conflicting interests that can arise when boards of directors and their management staffs are all residents and neighbors.

Resident satisfaction should be the basis of any program to improve public housing, argues Stanley Horn (reported in Peterman and Young 1991), former director of the Clarence Darrow Center and a major participant in creating resident management at Chicago's LeClaire Courts.<sup>8</sup> Although supportive of resident management, Horn contends that residents should be less concerned about who is managing than with how good the management is. While resident control may be the only way to ensure good management in some circumstances, the deciding factor should always be whether management provides the basis for a livable, healthy community.

Resident management is attractive because it promises a livable, healthy community and possibilities for individuals to improve themselves. However, several housing experts I interviewed during a 1991 review of alternatives to conventional public housing management (Peterman and Young 1991) believe that such results are too much to expect and that neither community nor personal improvement is necessarily an outcome of managing a development.

Some cynical observers suggest that resident management is a way of diverting attention from the serious state of public housing and from the responsibility of government to provide decent housing for the poor. Rachel Bratt, for example, believes that housing authorities abrogate their responsibilities as landlords when they turn developments over to residents (reported in Peterman and Young 1991). She views this as a kind of second-class tenantry or a form of "lemon socialism," where residents are given the management because housing authorities are no longer willing or able to do the job.

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<sup>8</sup> This statement and a subsequent statement by Bratt are taken from a set of semistructured interviews conducted during 1990 as part of a study to assess alternatives to conventional public housing management. The study was funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and reported in Peterman and Young (1991).

Others, notably professional housing managers, argue that management is a technical task best left to professionals. They believe residents would do better to focus their energies on personal growth issues or on important community concerns such as education, crime, and programs for young people (Peterman and Young 1991).

Resident managers have been able to perform as well as conventional housing authority managers on some evaluation measures and even better on a few others (ICF 1992; Manpower 1981). But resident management seems to require a long period of development involving both community organizing and resident training (ICF 1992; Monti 1989). Residents must be willing to work at becoming managers, often taking years to successfully replace housing authority managers. Housing authorities must allow this to happen and neither totally oppose the development of an RMC nor smother it with support (Monti 1989; Peterman 1994).

Some RMCs have been managing developments for nearly a quarter of a century (e.g., Bromley-Heath in Boston and Carr Square in St. Louis), but others have come and gone in just a few years (e.g., Lakeview Terrace in Cleveland and Iroquois Homes in Louisville). The conditions that seem supportive of resident management do not universally exist in public housing. Little public housing is truly troubled,<sup>9</sup> not all residents are willing or able to struggle to become organized and trained, and not all housing authorities are willing to let resident management develop at its own pace.

The options available are not simply housing authority management or resident management. Management by private management companies may be preferred in some instances (see Vale 1996). While resident management may be a strategy for some public housing, it clearly cannot be indiscriminately applied. Whatever the prospects for successful resident management, the link between it and empowerment is at best weak, no matter which meaning is used. Resident management does not automatically lead to ownership, as its conservative proponents argue; nor does it guarantee personal or community power, as its liberal and progressive proponents argue.

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<sup>9</sup> According to the *Final Report* of the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing (1992), 6 percent of the nation's public housing stock is severely distressed. Distress of one kind or another is no doubt more extensive, although some factors leading to distress (e.g., economic conditions of families or general environmental conditions in the vicinity of a development) are not easily mitigated by management initiatives (Vale 1993).

Resident management is sometimes an appropriate form of public housing management. However, simply creating an RMC does little to empower residents, and placing too much concentration on the activities of management can detract residents from more critical issues facing their community. Public housing management policy needs to have a clearer goal, and it should not target resident management as the prime or only option. Instead, it should provide for a variety of management and empowerment strategies.

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