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# Gentrification, Community Spirit, and the Housing Crisis

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"An investigation of the relationship between gentrification and the spirit of communities: an insight into the shift of lower-income residents' lifestyles."

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## Background

When it came to choosing to doing a self-defined project, I knew that I had to pick a topic that I was truly passionate about. Having grown up in East London, I have witnessed the change that the city has experienced - mostly over the last decade. London is an ever-changing city, and I undertook this project to learn if there was any good coming from this change.

## Introduction

The focus of this research was heavily placed on the housing crisis within London - predominantly the eastern boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Hackney. This was due to the high rates of gentrification both boroughs have experienced, and the fact that both were, at one point, the home to many low-income first-gen immigrant families (as well as later generations).

Whilst gentrification is caused by employment and housing (the changes in these factors later become effects), the decision to focus on housing was due to its closer link to community spirit. The idea being that communities are built by the people living in the area, and so their displacement affects its 'spirit'.

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## Research

The link between gentrification and the housing crisis can be seen as obvious, but the latter's effect on community spirit is not. Community spirit is, according to the Royal Society of Public Health, "the feelings of connection and belonging to a community and our ability to come together to improve wellbeing for everybody". Rent controls could allow this if they learn from the mistakes of other cities (like Berlin); social housing is failing low-income residents and pushing them out due to issues regarding the Local Housing Allowance and more; and affordable housing is a scheme which does not always take into consideration the lower-income residents. The housing crisis is displacing residents and removing figures of a community who provided its spirit.

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## Aims and Objectives

The aim of this project was to find the link between gentrification and the housing crisis; the housing crisis and community spirit; and subsequently, the relationship between gentrification and community spirit. The main objective was to find out what the key factors of the housing crisis that affected lower-income residents the most were.

## Method

The research was completed mostly using available literature, from existing reports, government data, and news articles (as well as a trip to Berlin to assess the city in order to compare it to London).

The focus on the 'housing crisis' was split into three elements: rent controls, social housing (councils and housing associations), and affordable housing. Each was assessed to see whether it was beneficial to low-income residents, and the impact they could have on community spirit.

To understand community spirit - the subtopics included: immigration, its importance, hubs etc.

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## Conclusion and Reflection

The relationship between gentrification and the spirit of communities may be negative - but that can be changed. Gentrification, in itself, is not the issue; the issue lies with the displacement caused by lack of security regarding housing affordability and access.

It is not the conclusion I thought I would come to when I started this project, but after going to Berlin and also re-evaluating London: I realised it was possible to be part of more than one community. It's possible because I know I am part of multiple.

Perhaps there needs to be further studies into 'community spirit' and how people view communities in the current social climate.