



Motivation "Ezio Tarantelli" Prize 2021

"Moving Opportunities: The Impact of Public Housing Regenerations on Student Achievement"

Lorenzo Neri

The paper by Lorenzo Neri investigates how local schools affect students' achievement when their neighborhood changes due to an inflow of more affluent households. The empirical analysis exploits regeneration programs of high-poverty public housing estates in the Great London area between 2006 and 2016 as a natural experiment.

Estimates are based on a unique dataset that combines large regeneration programs geolocalized within census block with administrative data on 15 cohorts of primary school-age children living on the regeneration site and the surrounding neighbourhood. Identification is based on a difference-in-differences approach, where the treatment group is made of students attending schools enrolling mostly children living on the regeneration site, while the control group includes those attending schools located in the same neighbourhood, but farther away from a regenerated area. The identification strategy is convincing because, differently from other countries, such as the US, regeneration programs in the UK did not cause massive displacement of poor families living in those neighborhoods. Furthermore, schools' admission rules in the Greater London area are such that students who were enrolled in a school close to a regeneration program are guaranteed a school place, thus implying enrollment also after regeneration.

The empirical analysis investigates the effect of the regeneration programs on local residents, house prices and student's achievement, providing a discussion of potential mechanisms explaining effects on students' outcomes. Results show that regeneration programs actually attracted more affluent households, as proxied by the increased number of children not eligible for free meals and increased house prices. Furthermore, students enrolled in schools closer to the program's site before its completion registered higher math and language test scores at the end of primary school, with larger gains for low achieving and poor students. Finally, these positive effects may be explained by a shift in households' preferences caused by the arrival of more affluent households that are likely to evaluate more school quality over school distance.

The AIEL executive board believes that the paper is highly deserving of the Tarantelli Prize because of its careful estimation strategy applied to high-quality data and its policy relevance. More specifically, the main findings contribute to better understand neighborhood effects on students' achievement using a new perspective (poor stayers with new affluent neighbors instead of poor children moving to richer neighborhoods) and to design housing programs that prevent segregation or displacement effects of poor households.