USPS Administrative Data on Address Vacancies

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Abandonment and Blight

“[Physical disorder] changes the calculus of prospective home buyers, real estate agents, insurance agents, and investors and shapes perceptions of residents who might be considering moving. Evidence of disorder also gives a running account of the effectiveness of residents seeking neighborhood improvement, and that record may encourage or discourage future activism. Physical and social disorder in public spaces are thus fundamental to a general understanding of urban neighborhoods” (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999: 604).
Why care about abandoned or blighted properties?

- Abandoned/blighted properties may
  - Serve as a magnet for crime
  - Lowers market value of neighboring properties affecting resale value and municipal tax revenue
  - May be associated with reduced levels of social interaction and trust among neighbors
  - Pose a serious health risk to individuals living in inner city and suburban communities
When is a property considered abandoned or blighted?

- Financial indicators
  - Owner ceases to pay property taxes beyond a year and a half
  - The process of foreclosure begins
  - Owner loses title
- Physical indicators
  - Lack of use/disrepair
  - Vacant two years or more
  - Suspension of mail service, utility terminations and boarded up doors or windows
National Datasets for Measuring Abandonment/Blight

- **U.S. Census data**
  - Only a snapshot
  - Estimates vacancy status but difficult to differentiate vacancy from abandonment or blight
- **American Housing Survey**
  - Tracks length of vacancy and certain property characteristics
  - Samples only metropolitan areas on a rotating basis
  - Spatial unit is larger than census tract
USPS Administrative Data

- Represents the universe of all addresses in the United States and are updated every three months.
- HUD receives quarterly extracts at the Zip+4 level on addresses identified by the USPS as having been “vacant” or “No-Stat” in the previous quarter.
- The main advantage of USPS data is their potential utility for tracking neighborhood change over time.
- Under the agreement with the USPS, HUD can make the data available publicly at the Census Tract level provided users agree to the terms and conditions of the sublicense.
Data Elements

• **Total Number of Addresses** - This reflects all addresses (residential and commercial) that USPS has recorded in their database.

• **Total Vacant Addresses** - These are addresses that delivery staff on urban routes have identified as being vacant (not collecting their mail) for 90 days or longer.

• **Total No-Stat Addresses** - There are many reasons an address can be classified as No-Stat, including:
  – Rural Route addresses vacant for 90 days or longer
  – Addresses for businesses or homes under construction and not yet occupied
  – Addresses in urban areas identified by a carrier as not likely to be active for some time
Data Elements (continued)

- USPS started counting days in each vacancy category from November 18, 2005
  - Average Days Address Vacant
  - Median Number Days Addresses Vacant (not included in tract-level summary file)
  - Vacant 3 months to less count
  - Vacant 3 months to 6 months count
  - Vacant 6 months to 12 months count
  - Vacant 12 months to 24 months count
  - Vacant 24 months to 36 months count
  - Vacant 36 months or longer count
  - Previous Quarter Vacant Currently in Service Count
  - Previous Quarter Vacant Currently No-Stat Count
Data Elements (continued)

- USPS started counting days in each “No-Stat” category from November 18, 2005
  - Average Days Address No-Stat
  - Median Number Days Addresses No-Stat (not included in tract-level summary file)
  - No-Stat 3 months to less count
  - No-Stat 3 months to 6 months count
  - No-Stat 6 months to 12 months count
  - No-Stat 12 months to 24 months count
  - No-Stat 24 months to 36 months count
  - No-Stat 36 months or longer count
  - Previous Quarter No-Stat Currently in Service Count
Challenges in Analyzing the Data

• Vacation/Resort areas have very high rates of vacant addresses.
• Areas with high growth have high rates of No-Stat addresses as do areas of significant decline.
  – An increase in total addresses with a similar increase in No-Stat 0-3 months addresses likely reflects new construction/additions.
  – No-Stats with a stable or reduced number of addresses probably reflect long-term vacant addresses.
• In distressed areas, a reduction in total AMS addresses from quarter-to-quarter appears to be a strong indicator of where demolition is occurring.
  – Note that if a building is demolished to be replaced by another building, the address will likely be moved to No-Stat status and not be removed from the total number of addresses.
Challenges (continued)

- Calculating a Vacancy Rate
  - Use \((\text{Vacancy}/\text{AMS}) \times 100\)
  - Underestimates vacancy by leaving out No-Stats
  - In rural areas, vacancy is not used

- Addresses In-Service
  - Use \(\text{AMS} - (\text{Vac} + \text{Nostat})\)
Change in Vacancy Rate 2005 - 2007
Central Valley, CA

Legend

Change in Vacancy Rate

-2.67% - 0%
0.01% - 0.56%
0.57% - 1.60%
1.61% - 3.45%
3.46% - 6.04%
With the overwhelming number of vacant addresses after Hurricane Katrina, it took the USPS many months to process all the address changes. This explains why the lowest aggregate number of addresses in service after Hurricane Katrina occurred in June, 2006 (see graph above).

This map shows the number of addresses by Census Tract that appear to have been vacated due to Hurricane Katrina and have been subsequently reoccupied in New Orleans and vicinity. For the purposes of this analysis, a reoccupied address is a street address that the USPS determined was vacated post-Hurricane Katrina — and thus was not receiving mail deliveries — but has since been receiving mail deliveries again. New addresses added after Hurricane Katrina are also counted as reoccupied. The number of vacant units peaked at different times for different census tracts (probably due to USPS processing), so this map summarizes by Census Tract the total number of re-occupied addresses since each Tract’s lowest point after the Hurricane Katrina disaster. The map only includes Census Tracts where at least 50 addresses were vacated post-Katrina and at least 10 percent of the pre-Katrina addresses were vacated. The remaining Census Tracts, those shown in white, are labeled as non-applicable.

Receiving mail should not be equated with recovery, as many addresses are active only because the property has a FEMA temporary housing unit on it. The delivery and collection of mail, however, does represent the extent that a neighborhood has been reoccupied. Note that some Census Tracts may have experienced an increase in addresses or a shift in the location of addresses due to the creation of FEMA temporary housing parks.
A detailed explanation of data and methodology is on the following page.

Legend
Percent of High Cost Loans by Census Tract
0 - 30.1
30.1 - 48.9
48.9 - 67.6
67.6 and higher
Vacancy Rate Increasing by 5.5% or more

* A detailed explanation of data and methodology is on the following page.
Feedback

HUD is very interested in what other researchers/practitioners learn from using these data.

http://www.huduser.org/datasets/usps.html

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