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# Social mix and the problematisation of social housing

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**Abstract**

Social housing in Australia is at a significant juncture. High levels of housing stress, increasing levels of socio-spatial polarisation and reduced government funding are posing complex policy challenges. Social mix policies are one response to these challenges, arising from the problematisation of social housing estates as socially excluded. This problematisation is examined through case studies of two Sydney social housing renewal projects: Telopea and Riverwood North. Drawing on interviews with government, private-sector and not-for-profit housing practitioners, the paper identifies two distinct discourses of social exclusion within this problematisation-culture of poverty discourse and equity discourse-that shape the implementation of social mix. These discourses reveal that implementing social mix is more complex than simply managing the cohabitation of residents in different tenures. Rather, the practice of social mix is embedded within discourses about the nature and causes of social exclusion. These discourses, in their turn, inform the multiple and sometimes conflicting aspirations pursued through social mix policies.

**Disciplines**

Education | Social and Behavioral Sciences

# Social Mix and the Problematisation of Social Housing

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ABSTRACT

*Social housing in Australia is at a significant juncture. High levels of housing stress, increasing levels of socio-spatial polarisation and reduced government funding are posing complex policy challenges. Social mix policies are one response to these challenges, arising from the problematisation of social housing estates as socially excluded. This problematisation is examined through case studies of two Sydney social housing renewal projects: Telopea and Riverwood North. Drawing on interviews with government, private sector and not-for-profit housing practitioners, the paper identifies two distinct discourses of social exclusion within this problematisation—culture of poverty discourse and equity discourse—that shape the implementation of social mix. These discourses reveal that implementing social mix is more complex than simply managing the cohabitation of residents in public and private tenures. Rather, the practice of social mix is embedded within discourses about the nature and causes of social exclusion. These discourses, in their turn, inform the multiple and sometimes conflicting aspirations pursued through social mix policies.*

KEY WORDS *Social housing; social mix; social exclusion; problematisation; urban renewal; discourse.*

**Introduction**

The concentration of urban disadvantage in particular areas or neighbourhoods is a wide spread phenomenon in many western industrialised countries (Randolph, 2004). In the Australian context many policy responses aimed to address these concentrations have been directed towards areas of social housing (Randolph & Holloway, 2005), where there are rising levels of social disadvantage, and populations characterised as having high levels of unemployment, welfare dependency and social delinquency (Burke & Hayward, 2000; Milligan & Pawson, 2010; Randolph, 2004; Randolph & Judd, 2000; Ruming, 2006). Economic globalisation, industrial restructuring, shifting labour markets, reduced public expenditure and significant changes to the structures of welfare provision have disproportionally impacted social housing tenants. Parallel to these shifts are the impacts of ideological restructuring on the provision of public services (Jamarozik, 2005), and the subsequent devolution of government-led social housing provision, no longer seen as a politically acceptable welfare measure. These factors are generating complex policy and management challenges. Prominent amongst these challenges is finding the best ways to finance, deliver and increase the level of affordable housing supply.

These challenges have fed into a tendency amongst social housing providers and policy practitioners to problematise social housing estates as socially excluded. In response social mix has been positioned as a means of addressing social exclusion. This research, concerned with the adoption of social mix policies in the delivery of social housing, emphasises the need to better understand how social mix is implemented in practice (Ruming et al., 2004) and to unpack and critique the political, social and moral assumptions that underlie its roll out as a response to the imputed social exclusion of social housing estates. Engaging a constructionist approach, this paper explores the connections between social exclusion, social mix, and social housing renewal in order to explore the delivery of social mix in two social housing renewal projects: Telopea and Riverwood North in Sydney, New South Wales. The paper contributes to research exploring the way in which particular understandings of social problems lead to specific kinds of housing policy measures (Jacobs et al., 2003). At the centre of this study are issues related to the problematisation of social housing. Problematisation plays an important role in how problems come to be defined within particular schemes of thought (Larner, 2011) and, subsequently what solutions are therefore thought to be appropriate. The paper begins with an exploration of the changing problematisation of social housing, focusing in particular on changing understandings of the nature of disadvantage, recast as social exclusion. We explore the way in which practitioner perceptions and motivations in Telopea and Riverwood North draw on multiple discourses and understandings of social housing as a particular type of 'problem' which impacts on how social mix may be framed and enacted as a solution. We specifically attend to the ways culture of poverty and equity discourses shaped the understanding and implementation of social mix policies, particularly through assumptions around how social mix might address access to opportunity, build a sense of community and citizenship, and reduce stigma associated with social housing locations. Our examination of the complex assumptions that inform policy, practitioner understandings, and the delivery of social mix highlights complexities and contradictions, particularly around how stigma is positioned, that suggest

the need to further consider the efficacy of social mix as a renewal strategy to address social exclusion.

**Problematising social housing as socially excluded**

Public housing in Australia in the contemporary period has been problematised as socially excluded (Marston, 2004). Understandings of social exclusion have generally distinguished between its utility as a concept to interpret and understand disadvantage, and its deployment as a political tool to justify new policy measures (Arthurson & Jacobs, 2004). As an analytical concept social exclusion offers a multidimensional approach to understanding the nature of inequality (see Table 1). The core question that arises when this relationship is examined is the extent to which individual agency generates inequity as opposed to structural factors (Arthurson & Jacobs, 2004).

Table 1 Dimensions of social exclusion (about here)

The ways in which social exclusion is deployed as a political tool to justify new policy measures has had limited empirical investigation in the Australian context. Social exclusion is grounded in conflicting discourses with differing ideological underpinnings (Arthurson & Jacobs, 2003). This allows for a multiplicity of different interpretations of its causes and subsequently what may be seen as an appropriate solution mobilised by diverse policy agendas. Levitas (1998) explores the deployment of three different discourses of social exclusion in British social policy:

> *… a redistributionist discourse (RED) …, whose prime concern is with poverty; a moral underclass discourse (MUD) which centres on the moral and behavioural delinquency of the excluded themselves; and a social integrationist discourse (SID) whose central focus is on paid employment. (Levitas, 1998, p. 8)*

The critical point here is that these three discourses offer distinct problematisations of social exclusion that suggest different policy solutions. In Australia, as Levitas (1998) found in the UK, SID and MUD discourses are most common. The RED discourse, traditionally tied to rights-based and radically redistributionist policy programs, is largely absent in contemporary housing policy on account of shifting political contexts and the availability of other more ideologically synchronous discourses. For instance, Marston (2004) points out that SID readings of the 'problem' of social exclusion suggests economic participation as a solution. The drive to encourage participation in the labour market can be viewed as part of a broader shift in neoliberal thinking in the provision of social housing initiatives (Beer, 2007). Drawing on the Levitas' (1998) typology, Arthurson and Jacobs (2009) make a related argument, examining the relationship between policy prescriptions directed towards employment and attempts to break welfare dependence. In this rendering, employment, (particularly paid employment) is necessary for individuals to be 'active', 'responsible' citizens (Marston & McDonald, 2002). This social contract of sorts creates a mutual

obligation of the individual, as a citizen, to participate in the labour market in return for social welfare entitlements (Jacobs, 2008).

The MUD discourse, where the poor are seen as responsible for their own impoverishment is also apparent in housing policy. Such a reading implies that welfare benefits are bad for the individual because of the attitudinal effects welfare is purported to have on individuals (Atkinson et al., 2007). Following Levitas (1998), this position relates to a MUD interpretation that pathologises welfare as detrimental to the individual's 'natural' motivations to be independent of state support. Policy approaches informed by this interpretation thus aim to change individual behaviour and instil responsibility to break from welfare dependence in the individual (Jacobs, 2008; Raco, 2007). This linking of individual conduct to self-regulation is characteristic of a neoliberal form of governance (Flint, 2004). The association of social exclusion with social housing, and particularly with social housing estates, means that these differing discourses of social exclusion are embedded in social housing policy such as social mix policies.

**Social Exclusion, Social Mix and Housing**

The social housing sector has become increasingly residualised and now largely acts as a sector for tenants with complex and multiple needs (Arthurson, 2008). This residualised tenant base coupled with the design and building principles of post war housing estates, means that there are pockets of public housing in the urban landscape with spatial concentrations of disadvantage, now understood as socially excluded. Social housing places are *seen* as socially excluded (Mee, 2004), which justifies policy interventions to fundamentally alter the social structure of these places (Darcy, 2010). Through the construction of place and associated social housing as the source of social exclusion, place is then reified as the bearer of exclusion (Darcy, 2007, p. 351). It is within this context that the Australian social housing renewal framework has linked the use of social mix policies to breaking up concentrations of social housing as a solution to social exclusion.

The small body of literature that has explored the application of social mix policies in the Australian context raises concern about its suitability as a social housing renewal policy (Arthurson, 2010; Darcy, 2007; Marston, 2004; Ruming et al., 2004). This research has generally focussed on the embedded assumptions within the application of social mix, especially the notion of role modelling via propinquity. Propinquity of social housing tenants to private residents is positioned by advocates of social mix as a means of changing the behaviour of social housing residents and as the main means through which balanced communities are created. For instance, former Federal Housing Minister Tanya Plibersek commented:

> *Mixed communities are more likely to build social capital, the good will, shared values, networks, trust and reciprocity that exist in neighbourhoods (Plibersek, 2009).*

This logic assumes that social housing residents will be 'normalised' through propinquity to private residents. However, such a reading makes a moral assumption with regard to the values and beliefs of social housing residents. Within this assumption is a characteristically

neoliberal re-narration of problems not as structural but as individualised and spatially related (Lupton & Tunstall, 2008). This assumption can also be understood, following (Gurney, 1999), as a part of a discursive practice which normalises one form of housing consumption—ownership—while legitimising the residualisation of another—social housing. This interpretation speaks to similar discourses of normalisation explored throughout this paper.

The logic underpinning role modelling via propinquity to private residents has strong connection to the logics underpinning the MUD discourse or notions of a 'culture of poverty' adopted by Charles Murray (1994). Murray (1994) argues that the problems experienced by residents of poor communities are the result of a 'culture of poverty' operating within the community itself. From this perspective the nature of the welfare state is seen to breed dependency. Employment in a culture of poverty reading is situated as the responsibility of the citizen and as a means to alter the behaviour of welfare recipients. However, a second distinctive discourse frames social exclusion as structurally rather than individually induced. Informed by the work of William Wilson (1987), an equity discourse begins from the premise that it is not possible to understand communities independently of broader economic and social processes. On this basis, aspirations to increase equity are argued to be achieved through increased access to services and infrastructure, providing greater levels of opportunity for residents (Andreotti et al., 2012). This logic aligns more closely with SID interpretations of social exclusion. From this perspective social mix in social housing renewal is understood to enable increased access to services, infrastructure and opportunities on the basis that the introduction of private residents with higher disposable incomes, will attract more businesses and services (Arthurson, 2002; Wood, 2003).

The logics of Murray and Wilson attribute distinct readings of exclusion, each tied to different aspirations to use social mix as a solution to social exclusion. This paper explores how the multiple readings of social housing as a particular type of problem—socially excluded—draw on different aspirations that inform understandings of social mix as a solution. Importantly, these discourses do not operate in isolation but they inform the multiple and sometimes conflicting aspirations pursued via social mix policies delivered through social housing renewal. We now turn to a context discussion of two case studies, Telopea and Riverwood, in order to explore how these discourses shaped how the social mix is understood and practiced, to highlight the complexities and contradictions these reveal and to point to the need for further consideration of the assumed efficacy of social mix as a renewal strategy to address social exclusion.

## The Sydney Context

This paper investigates the delivery of social mix in two Sydney based social housing renewal projects—the Telopea and Riverwood North Urban Renewal projects. Both projects are being delivered through cross-sectoral partnerships. Renewed interest in the use of social mix polices as a solution to social exclusion has facilitated the engagement of such partnerships in recent social housing renewal initiatives. Partnership is both a response to ongoing fiscal restrictions and public investment limits and, as the following context

discussion illustrates, is seen to provide the means to address the multiple and complex drivers of social exclusion through the involvement of cross-sectoral partners (Pinnegar et al., 2011). As the following discussion shows, the implementation of social mix via partnership impacted on how the culture of poverty and equity discourse of social exclusion were mobilised by key actors.

*Riverwood North:* The 650 unit Riverwood North urban renewal project is located in Canterbury local government area (LGA) in Sydney's south west, close to public transport and local services and shopping centre. Initially announced in 2010, the renewal project aims to replace 150 of the current social housing units with 150 new units (Phase 1). On completion these units will be managed St George Community Housing (SGCH). In addition 500 privately-owned units will be built over a 10 year period (Phase 2)—the majority to be sold by the developer on the open market. The Phase 2 development's terms of sale specify the sale of units to owner occupiers, investors and/or to SGCH—at which point SGCH would become the housing manager and owner of these units. At the time this research was conducted (August 2012) the project was in Phase 1 of development, and as such the full extent of the involvement of SGCH is yet to be determined. The social and private housing will be grouped in separate clusters on the site rather than being spatially integrated. In addition, the renewal aspires to a tenure mix ratio of 30% social housing and 70% private housing. Although 'optimal' levels of tenure mix are rarely explicitly discussed in the literature, the adoption of the 30:70 ratio has been suggested as the best balance to retain property values and meet social objectives (NZCID, 2011). While there remains little empirical evidence supporting these claims (Graham et al., 2009), the 30:70 split is frequently deployed. This is evident in several of the NSW *Living Communities Projects*—Bonnyrigg, One Minto and Airds Bradbury. All these social housing renewal projects hold implicit aims to reach social housing tenure levels of 30%, either through reduction of social housing or in the case of Bonnyrigg dramatically increasing the levels of private dwellings (Gilmor, 2012).

The partnership arrangement is made up of the consortium Payce Communities which includes: Payce Consolidated (developer); St George Community Housing (not-for-profit community housing provider) and Turner and Associates (architects) in partnership with NSW Land and Housing Corporation[i]. In addition Canterbury City Council is also engaged in various aspects of the renewal partnership. The partnership arrangement aims to provide a variety of physical and social initiatives in order to deliver a more holistic renewal program. While there is no single piece of legislation governing social housing in New South Wales (O'Flynn, 2011), holistic renewal programs have emerged as responses that seek to deliver more integrated approaches to renewal. Outside of a historical tendency to focus on built form, these initiatives are directed towards addressing physical, social and economic outcomes and, are often linked to multi-sectoral collaboration. Two of the more prominent examples of holistic renewal programs in a NSW policy context include the former *Building Stronger Communities* and the current *Living Communities Program*. A major tenet of these approaches has been the design of a variety of community development initiatives aimed to encourage social and economic participation through community building and employment as a means of building social cohesion and establishing social inclusion (hence addressing social

exclusion). These initiatives range from regular community BBQs, outdoor cinema evenings and community consultation sessions to the establishment of two social enterprises TJT Lawns—garden maintenance enterprise— and TJT Catering—food vendor—that seek to engage social housing residents in training and employment initiatives.

*Telopea:* Located in the LGA of Parramatta, the site currently has 152 newly constructed apartments for social housing tenants. A additional 378 social housing dwellings and 1400 private dwellings are also planned to achieve the 30:70 mix. The site is well connected to public transport and services including shopping outlets, Telopea Public School, library and open space parkland. The project is operating with six actors including: Land and Housing Corporation, Straight-Talk (private community consultants); Parramatta City Council; Hume Community Housing (community housing provider); John Holland (developer) and Turner and Associates (architects). Concern about the re-development of the site has been expressed since the project was proposed. Parramatta City Council, who opposed the project development, has argued that the increase in housing has failed to address a number of key issues related to the necessary surrounding infrastructure and services. Former Parramatta Lord Mayor Cr Paul Garrard argued that the Telopea Urban Renewal proposal, implemented through a State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP), overrode local environmental planning instruments and was pushed through with inadequate consultation with community members and council (PCC, 2010). Further local opposition arose around uncertainty about the proposed housing mix, as there was no guarantee the private dwellings would be developed (PCC, 2010). Uncertainty around the renewal project and level of community and council opposition generated through the proposal, illustrates the complexity of negotiating partnership arrangements with diverse actors and motivations, and also speaks to the limited extent to which the community—internal and external to the housing development—was enrolled to engage in the a broader renewal process at Telopea.

**Methodological approach**

Informed by social constructionist insights and drawing on a qualitative methodology, this paper examines the perceptions and motivation of actors within the Telopea and Riverwood North social housing renewal partnerships, through exploring practitioners' opinions, values, beliefs, and the way in which these inform and are informed by discourses of social exclusion in the implementation of social mix. The research was guided by a host of constructionist housing research (Darcy, 2007; Jacobs & Manzi, 2000; Kemeny, 2004; Marston, 2004; Mee, 2004; Ruming et al., 2004). This oriented the research towards methods that prioritise language, discursive practice and reflexivity and, emphasises the contingent nature of social reality. Content analysis was used in the coding of policy documents, relevant literature published by key actors, and transcripts of semi-structured interviews to make sense of the material through categorisation and identification of connections across and between texts (Crang, 2005). This involved identifying key words, themes, actors, processes and the connections and relationship between them. Interviews were conducted with eleven informants, four from organisations involved in the Telopea renewal partnership[ii] and seven

from the Riverwood North renewal partnership (see Table 2). Interviews aimed to identify the roles and practices of actors in social housing renewal partnerships and to elucidate their perceptions and motivations around social mix and addressing social exclusion. Interviews were conducted in July and August, 2012. Dunn (2010) reminds us that interviews are a form of social encounter through which the meanings created from events, experiences and opinions of individuals are explored. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in the way issues were addressed by informants. This was particularly relevant in interviews with two or more participants present, where informants had significantly different professional roles. The diversity of practitioner roles captured in the interviews was significant in establishing connections between the partial and overlapping motivations and perceptions of practitioners and discourses informing the use of social mix and partnership agreements in the delivery of social housing renewal. Nonetheless, interviewing more than one interview participant simultaneously presents potential challenges. On the one hand, the dynamics of the conversation could result in one interviewee's views dominating. On the other, the dynamics could yield more in-depth exploration of the issues under discussion. In this research, while we cannot be certain, on balance the co-interviewing led to a deeper examination of practitioners' understandings. The research drew on the discourse methodology of Mee (2004) and Allen (2003) to explore the specific contexts and processes in which discourses of social exclusion informed the implementation of policies of social mix. Through exploring links and events, such as policy (at a range of scales—local, state and national) and its connection to various actors or stakeholder perspectives, discourse analysis allowed the research to explore key categories (i.e. social mix or social exclusion), and how they have meaning and relevance in social housing practices and processes.

Table 2 Organisations interviewed and interviewee roles (about here)

**Multiple discourses of social exclusion and social mix: equity discourse and culture of poverty discourse.**

Two distinct discourses of social exclusion were revealed in the implementation of social mix in Riverwood North and Telopea Urban Renewal Projects; an 'equity' discourse and a 'culture of poverty' discourse. In what follows, we explore each, investigating how they inflect the specific ways that social housing is problematised as socially excluded and social mix is framed as a solution. These discourses do not operate in isolation, nor are they attributed exclusively to particular actors or organisations. Rather they operate within wider understandings of social mix as both part of a neoliberal shift and as an aspiration to deliver a holistic policy solution. The two discourses overlap and both speak to an understanding of reality as contextual and partial. In the following sections we explore how each discourse of social exclusion impacts on what social mix is thought to be capable of achieving.

*Equity discourse*

Within an equity discourse the underlying cause of social exclusion is framed in a structural sense: that is, social exclusion is caused by lack of access to quality housing, services and infrastructure. For instance, as a Contract Manager from the Land and Housing Corporation explained:

> (w)hen you redevelop these areas it does attract different businesses as the income of occupants changes, they will demand different services. So, it may create business opportunities in small business, which is what you want, and that creates opportunities for local people. (Contract Manager, LHC, 2012)

The fundamental motivation revealed in the discourse appears to be addressing the exclusionary societal processes that result in inequality. This focus on the processes that create inequality has important implications for how aspirations of equity discourse are achieved through social mix. In an equity framing, aspirations to achieve access to opportunity and address stigma through social mix are interpreted as a means of addressing social exclusion. We turn to each of these in turn below.

### Access to opportunity

The equity discourse suggests that social mix policies could address structural gaps that create social housing tenants' lack of access to services and infrastructure. Some practitioners' perceptions adhered to an equity reading of how social mix can address social exclusion, premised on social democratic notions of redistribution though access to opportunity, such as employment. A similar interpretation emerges in the *Social Housing National Partnership Agreements (SHNPA)* which established specific funding arrangements and housing target outcomes for State and Territory Governments (Gilmour, 2012) in line with equity readings of access to opportunity. For instance:

> 'States and Territories recognise that they have a mutual interest in increasing the supply of social housing to provide improved housing, social inclusion and economic participation outcomes for disadvantaged households. (COAG, 2009, p. 4)

Employment opportunities were also positioned by practitioners as important to achieving greater economic participation and inclusion. The Property Development and Urban Renewal Manager at Hume Community Housing argued that social mix could provide:

> (a)n opportunity to address the requirements of individuals that due to location have been restricted, that is access to skills, training opportunities and employment opportunities. (Property Development and Urban Renewal Senior Manager, Hume, 2012)

This same rationale has also underpinned the establishment of multiple social enterprises through Riverwood North Community Centre. These enterprises—TJTL and TJTC—supported through Payce Communities' contracting and funding arrangements, have been engaged in the renewal process in attempts to facilitate employment opportunities and offer

training to local residents, many of whom reside in the surrounding social housing. The importance of capacity building initiatives in this process was also highlighted by practitioners. In describing Payce's neighbourhood engagement strategies one practitioner explained:

> *We tend not to do it (take control). We tend to try and find someone that is doing something locally and say 'Can we help?' just to get it started. Because at the end of the day we are going to move out in five or six years so we can't set up stuff we can't support. (Community Development Consultant, Payce, 2012)*

Importantly for many practitioners the TJT social enterprise initiatives facilitated not only access to services and opportunities but have been tied to a local support service (Riverwood Community Centre). This was seen to have implications for both the longevity of the initiatives and the extent to which real, positive economic participation outcomes could be achieved and sustained. Linking services and infrastructure to greater access to opportunities was often positioned as a 'whole of precinct' renewal whereby the renewal was aimed at the broader setting and not simply the renewal of selected stock. This broader precinct renewal not only resonated with equity thinking around the nature of social exclusion as structural, but was also used as justification for the need to engage in cross-sectoral partnership to adequately address social exclusion through renewal. For example as the A/Director of Project Development (LHC) explained:

> *The way I look at Telopea and Riverwood is the same: it's a whole of precinct renewal so it's more than just building some houses and walking away. It's creating that precinct and that needs to be maintained. It will probably maintain itself eventually but you need the private sector to bring that into being. (A/Director of Project Development, LHC, 2012)*

This 'whole of precinct' approach aims to assist in creating independence amongst social housing residents through access to services and opportunities, consistent with an equity reading of social exclusion as a result of structural inequalities.

### Changing the perception of an area: stigma and de-concentration

Equity readings also construct stigma as a structural problem, acting as a barrier to equity that may be overcome through the capacity for social mix to reduce the concentration of disadvantage associated with social housing clusters: de-concentration. De-concentration has been mobilised in both the *Nation Building NPA*, which argues for the need for 'reducing concentrations of disadvantage through appropriate redevelopment and to create mixed communities' and, more recently, as the frame for recent initiatives under the *Living Communities Program* (Gilmour, 2012). De-concentration is positioned here as a platform for enabling development opportunity in renewal areas, and is often tied to addressing the effects of stigma.

Stigma is seen to affect residents' opportunities to access employment (Ziersch & Arthurson, 2005), influence business decision to locate in different areas (Atkinson & Kintrea, 2001) and

to have general implications for the quality of services in the area (Galster, 2007). Stigma, interpreted though an equity framing, affects access to opportunities. Consistently negative portrayals of social housing in policy and media debates have not only reinforced stigma around areas of social housing but have been used for continued justification of social mix policies intended to address stigma through changing perceptions of an area's reputation (Arthurson, 2012). Discussing this positive influence of social mix in changing the perception of areas, a community development consultant from Payce commented:

*(by) doing (social mix) you're benefitting all rather than specifically treating. I think it will deal with issues like perceived issues of (Riverwood) being a bad place to live or a high crime area. (Community Development Consultant, Payce, 2012)*

Practitioners also commented on the importance of addressing stigma related to saleability and marketing of new housing developed through the social mixing and renewal process. For instance a Contract Manger (LHC) commented:

*Once you can address that stigma, that perception of these areas, I think things will open up for property investment. (Contract Manger, LHC, 2012)*

This logic connects changing perceptions of an area to the notion that the introduction of private residents, with higher disposable incomes, will attract more businesses and services, generating greater structural access to opportunities for social housing tenants and, addressing the major concern of equity readings of social exclusion.

An equity framing of stigma positions it as having an inherently structural impact because it can affect access to opportunities. Whilst existing research has suggested that mixed tenancy areas enhance the reputation of an area (Atkinson & Kintrea, 2001), the intractable nature of stigma remains in its pervasiveness at a range of scales. Gwyther (2011) found that residents experienced less location-related stigma in mixed communities, yet those same residents felt that personal ties within these mixed communities were not as strong as within impoverished neighbourhoods in which they had previously resided. Whilst some mixed communities are found to avoid broader societal stigma—as aspirations for equity discourse attempt to achieve—in others stigma continues to operate at a neighbourhood level with social housing tenants being stigmatised within areas of mixed housing (Ruming et al., 2004). In the implementation of social mix in Riverwood and Telopea, addressing stigma focused on inequities caused by stigma at the neighbourhood level. Implementing social mix in this way does not deal directly with how stigma *within* a neighbourhood could potentially increase with social mix, nor does it embed any way to address how this could undermine efforts to increase equity through social mix.

### *Culture of Poverty discourse*

A culture of poverty discourse understands the underlying cause of disadvantage as the result of socio-cultural factors that relate to the need for the poor to change their behaviour. Former Federal Housing Minister Tanya Plibersek's (2009) address to the Sydney Institute expressed a version of this understanding:

*(Social housing tenants) can become entrenched in their social isolation, with young people having an expectation that they will grow up to rely on public housing as their parents have done. Indeed I've heard of parents who discourage their teens from working because extra household income means higher rents.(Plibersek, 2009)*

The culture of poverty discourse informs social mix strategies and a range of auxiliary policy directions that seek to achieve aspirations concerned with modifying the behaviour of individuals. In particular, attempts to increase social and economic participation, through employment and community development initiatives, aim to counter attitudinal ramifications of welfare dependence. The focus on behavioural traits and underlying causes of disadvantage emphasises social mix practices that attempt to manipulate the behaviour of individuals. Strategies to create 'community' and to address stigma through propinquity and de-concentration are explored below as attempts to facilitate behavioural change. Notably, interpretation of the basis of stigma from within a culture of poverty discourse differs significantly in its interpretation within an equity discourse.

### *Social participation through community and the role of the citizen*

Government housing department approaches to social exclusion have, in recent times, been synonymous with 'community' (Lilley, 2005). The rise of community renewal initiatives can be placed in the context of broader shifts leading to a highly residualised social housing sector now characterised as dysfunctional. Practitioners discussing Telopea and Riverwood frequently referred to neighbourhood relations as dysfunctional. For instance:

*(T)elopea is really a dysfunctional area now. There is a high degree of anti-social behaviour, graffiti, drug use, violence, so it is not an area to date where local community has been working well together. (Director, Straight-Talk, 2012)*

This comment infers that social housing communities are dysfunctional as a consequence of community failing and inadequacy rather than because of structural deficiencies in service provision. In relation to this perceived dysfunction, community has been mobilised with government management practices aimed at regulating behaviour and encouraging self-responsibility (Jacobs, 2008). This speaks to a culture of poverty discourse, whereby a pre-defined common value system that labels some forms of behaviour as appropriate is used to develop obligations amongst community residents. The construction of the idea of community has seen the concept brought to the centre of attempts to manage behaviour (Haworth & Manzi, 1999). Social mix policies have operated as the primary mechanism through which such notions balanced communities are created. For instance, as former NSW Minister of Finance Greg Pearce has commented:

*The days of building ghettos with their social problems are in the past. The way of the future is to create a secure, integrated residential community mixing social and private housing.(Pearce, 2013)*

This comment infers a reading that social housing communities are lacking the traits that qualify them as valid or 'normal'. In a culture of poverty reading, 'normal' communities are

achieved though the introduction of middle class private residents, who, act as role models (Ruming et al., 2004). Some practitioners expressed notions of role modelling and influencing the behaviour of tenants though community engagement as producing positive outcomes:

> *(Community) instils a sort of better code of conduct if you like—better behaviour from people. (A/Director Project Development, LHC, 2012)*

Community in this sense is mobilised to legitimise citizenship through creating obligations that subsequently require a certain form of behaviour. Role modelling, understood through culture of poverty thinking, relies on the proximity to and dispersal of social housing residents amongst private residents (Arthurson, 2012). However, the decision to spatially separate public and private housing clusters within the Riverwood and Telopea sites illustrates the intersection of, and ultimately contradiction between, culture of poverty aspirations to achieve community development through social mix, and the requirement of partnership arrangements to deliver commercial viability. A more fine grained mixing of residents of different tenures could have made the new 'code of conduct' more visible for public housing tenants, but was seen as inappropriate because a more spatially integrated residential stock was seen as threatening commercial viability. Some practitioners identified that the spatial separation of public and private housing on the sites could result in increased awareness of difference and stigma. For instance:

> *The (income) gap is wide, and that to me is hugely problematic in terms of the dynamic that you set up....when developers talk about wanting to build communities there's a huge disconnect. (Community and Recreation Group Manger, CCC, 2012)*

The ramifications of this point are illustrated more clearly if we highlight the potential for friction between public and private residents within the community. At the scale of community interactions, stigma and friction between public and private residents undermines the very role modelling through engagement which aims to facilitate behavioural change. If attempts to facilitate cohesion and imbue values through mixed and balanced communities were to work as imagined in this framing, they would require a scale of mixing between public and private residents that were not able to be achieved in Riverwood and Telopea because of the requirement of partnership actors to achieve commercial imperatives. In this regard, the contradiction between aspirations of role modelling and the need for commercial viability brings into question the very efficacy of social mix policies driven by assumptions that seek to position individual moral failings as the cause of social exclusion.


### Stigma, propinquity and de-concentration

In the culture of poverty discourse, like in the equity discourse, social mix is seen as a solution to stigma. Yet, the interpretation of stigma of an area in the culture of poverty discourse is attributed to individuals' behavioural characteristics as social housing residents and welfare recipients. Stigma is solved, therefore, through individual interactions and the

changed behaviour of public housing tenants that will result. The culture of poverty notion of role modelling through propinquity of public and private residents, as a driver of behavioural change, was frequently expressed in interviews. For example:

*(w)ell perhaps you will start thinking about such things as improving your lot in life, educating, training. If you see your next door neighbour working you might think about getting a job. In some ways there is a community pressure to conform to what is going on. (Contract Manger, LHC, 2012)*

A reading of the capacity of socially mixed communities to influence behaviour—to seek employment—draws on notions of mutual obligation. Such approaches signify a move towards creating more 'active citizens' who are able to take more responsibility for their own well-being. As a condition of the receipt of welfare payments, social housing tenants are required to participate in a range of social and economic activities tied to notion of what a responsible and active citizen should be and do. Services that once would have been positioned as the given right of citizens, are now positioned within a contract of obligation to participate in social and economic life that legitimises citizenship (Flint, 2004). These notions were expressed by practitioners in discussions around the role of community and employment in social housing renewal. For instance:

*(w)e instigate a lot of community development activities or community renewal activities that concentrate on building the capacity within the individuals themselves. (Contract Manager, LHC, 2012)*

The links between the entitlements of social housing tenants and their responsibilities as citizens draws heavily on culture of poverty discourses. This reinforces negative concepts of social housing tenants as inherently dysfunctional and contributes to notion that the stigma in social housing estates is caused by tenants themselves (Mee, 2004). Attempts to address stigma in areas of social housing operate as a further justification for implementing social mix, to break up concentrations of socially excluded residents (Ruming, 2006). This is possible because the clusters of social housing residents, rather than the poverty they experience, is conceptualised as the problem.

Social housing is constructed as exhibiting a particular type of 'problem'—social exclusion—which then suggests an appropriate solution: social mix. Culture of poverty discourse and equity discourse each position social exclusion differently, and therefore suggest different understandings of social mix as a solution. Multiple layers of problematisation are evident in these respective framings. On the one hand there is the broad problematisation of social housing as socially excluded. On the other is the problematisation of the drivers of exclusion which, crudely, frame inequality either as structurally or individually determined. These interpretations are understood in complex ways as a result of their different framings, which inflect how practitioners' implemented and practiced social mix. Moreover, these interpretations were sometimes superseded in any case by commercial imperatives, potentially undermining the very outcomes social mix policy aspired to achieve.

**Conclusion**

Disadvantaged neighbourhoods, typically associated with areas of public housing, are discursively problematised. The process of rendering social housing as a particular type of 'problem' has generated a policy response locating social mix as an appropriate solution. Historically contingent problematisations of social housing have produced different interpretations of what may be seen as an appropriate solution. This paper has traced the way in which social housing has been problematised through changes in understanding around the nature and causes of disadvantage that now positions social housing as socially excluded. This re-imagining of disadvantage, seen in the shift from a social disadvantage framing to a social exclusion framing, saw a parallel shift in the nature of renewal initiatives aimed at addressing the complexity of social exclusion. It is within this context that social mix has been claimed to have emerged as a *fait accompli* in contemporary housing policy (Arthurson, 2012).

This research has offered insights into the complex, messy and partial discourses that shape social housing and its renewal. Specifically, we suggest that practitioner perceptions and motivations to use social mix as a social housing policy draw on different interpretations of social exclusion, its drivers and its location in social housing, and understand social mix as a solution for different reasons. Two distinct yet overlapping discourses of social exclusion were explored—equity and culture of poverty. Culture of poverty discourses were found to strongly align with neoliberal principles and practices. Analysis of community development initiatives with social housing renewal projects at Riverwood North and Telopea revealed how these principles aimed to mobilise notions of citizenship and responsibility to alter the behaviour of the individual and in so doing address stigma, understood as produced through individual and community failings, that is thought to contribute to the social exclusion of social housing. However, social housing interpreted through an equity discourse suggests social mix as a solution based on social democratic principles of addressing inequality and providing access to structural opportunities which, in their turn, would address stigma understood as structurally produced. Various practitioners expressed this logic regarding initiatives aimed at increasing the level of opportunity for social housing residents to engage in positive employment outcomes. As social mix policies seem to be increasingly embedded in government social housing agendas, it therefore remains imperative that assumptions underpinning their use and that the outcomes produced continue to be critically analysed.

Jacobs et al. (2003) sees housing policy as 'a site of contestation in which competing interests seek to impose definitions on what the main 'housing problems' are and how they should be addressed' (p.20). Extending on this argument, we seek to highlight the problematic nature of defining social problems, which can all too easily become normative assumptions and ways of understanding. This can result in the conflation of the complexity and causal attributes assigned to issues, giving them merely a descriptive quality rather than a more nuanced understanding of the ideas and processes shaping phenomenon. In Australia, social mix is firmly implanted as an assumed policy fix for social exclusion. This paper, building on the limited research that has explored the links between social exclusion and social mix (Arthurson, 2012; Darcy, 2007; Gwyther, 2011), has emphasised the need to consider more

thoroughly the interplay between policy assumptions and related understandings and practices of social mix. While Darcy (2007) takes this up in exploring the methods and approaches policy makers employ in responding to place-based 'problems', this paper foregrounds the complex assumptions that inform policy and practitioners' understandings and that, ultimately, inform the delivery of social mix. It suggests that a more explicit engagement is needed to unpack the nature of the political, social and moral assumptions embedded in social mix as a policy fix, the mechanisms through which social mix is delivered, and the efficacy of these mechanisms in addressing social exclusion. Current policy and housing debates are limited in their exploration of how social mix policies are understood. This exposes the risk of continuing to implement policies informed by discourses that pathologise and marginalise social housing residents, serving to distract us from alternative solutions and narratives.

## Acknowledgments

## NOTES

[i] Land and Housing Corporation (LHC) emerged from a restructure of Housing NSW in 2011, and its separation into divisions that now sit within Department of Finance and Services (DFS) and the Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS). LHC a part of DFS, own and are responsible for the state portfolio of social housing.

[ii] Three of the organisations involved in the Telopea Renewal refused interview. These organisations are not listed above.

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Table 1. Dimensions of social exclusion

| Dimension of Social Exclusion | Manifestation |
|---|---|
| Social | • Limited access to education, welfare, housing and life opportunities<br>• Restricted citizenship rights |
| Economic | • Limited access to employment opportunities<br>• Limited access to services, infrastructure and amenities |
| Legal/political | • Lack of access to democratic decision making processes<br>• Isolation form processes and structures that facilitate increased participation<br>• Extent to which residents believe they have influence |
| Cultural/moral | • Stigmatization<br>• Exclusion from broad cultural practices i.e. language |

Adapted from: (Arthurson, 2002; Arthurson & Jacobs, 2003, 2009; Atkinson & Kintrea, 2001; Levitas, 1998; Randolph et al., 2007; Somerville, 1998)

Table 2 Organisations interviewed and interviewee roles

| Organisation | Interviewee role |
|---|---|
| Land and Housing Corporation | • Associate Director of Project Development<br>• Social Planning and Research Evaluation Manager<br>• Contract Manager |
| Canterbury City Council | • Corporate Projects Manger<br>• Councillor<br>• Group Manager Community and Recreation<br>• Development Assessment Team Leader |
| Payce Communities | • Community Development Consultant |
| Hume Community Housing | • Senior Management Property Development and Urban Renewal |
| Straight-Talk | • Director |