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# **CREATING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES THROUGH BALANCING SOCIAL MIX: A CRITICAL RELATIONSHIP OR TENUOUS LINK?**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores some fundamental assumptions being linked by State Housing Authorities to ‘social mix’ strategies in contemporary Australian public housing estate regeneration policy. Six case study estates, two each in new South Wales, South Australia and Queensland form the basis for the empirical analysis. The two major ideas emerging from South Australian and Queensland projects are: first that lowering concentrations of public housing and developing more mixed income communities offers a means to reconnect socially excluded public housing tenants to mainstream society; second that a balanced social mix is a prerequisite for the development of ‘inclusive’, ‘sustainable’ and ‘cohesive’ communities. However, in light of the empirical findings that strong cohesive communities already exist on some estates prior to regeneration commencing, there is no evidence that a balanced social mix is a necessary condition for building inclusive communities. Coupled with findings in the projects of inadvertent negative consequences of implementing social mix policies, the paper questions whether policy makers are over-emphasising the extent to which social mix assists regeneration.

## **Key Words**

social mix, community cohesion, social housing, social exclusion, community regeneration

## **Introduction**

Along with numerous other countries, Australia is currently exploring solutions to the problems of large public housing estates, built mainly in the period following the Second War to address the then shortage of housing. The physical problems of ageing and poorly designed

housing reflect only part of the difficulties as estate residents are increasingly characterised by poverty, low education levels and high unemployment. On some estates crime and incidences of violence are increasing. These features underpinned the recent proclamation by the Director of the New South Wales Department of Housing that the Radburn Estates, in that State, display “every form of social exclusion which could possibly be devised” (Cappie-Wood 1998: 62). In responding to these issues, the housing authorities have adopted a range of regeneration strategies that include employment projects, physical changes to the housing and environments, resident participation projects, and creating a broader socioeconomic mix of residents on estates. The major focus of this paper is this latter aspect of regeneration policies. In the urban literature, this concept is variously referred to as ‘social mix’, ‘tenure mix’ or ‘residential mix’.<sup>i</sup>

Support for social mix is based on the premise that disadvantaged people are doubly disadvantaged through living in neighbourhoods of concentrated socioeconomic disadvantage, such as on public housing estates. The negative effects are explained in terms of limited access to the opportunities available in the broader society, including job networks and models of appropriate behaviour. Wilson’s (1987; 1991; 1997) research in particular, which focuses on the effects of structural economic change on North American communities, has stimulated contemporary debate about the benefits of adopting regeneration strategies aimed at changing social mix on social housing estates. There has been a recent resurgence of interest in creating ‘mixed’ income communities on social housing estates in UK regeneration policy as part of the Blair Labour Government’s focus on tackling social exclusion (Kintrea and Atkinson 1998).<sup>ii</sup> Essentially, the definitive factor identified in Wilson’s studies, as creating inequality for poor communities, is the process of structural economic change as jobs decline within particular areas. From Wilson’s (1987; 1991; 1997) viewpoint, this facilitates the development of ‘community effects’ as more mobile middle-income and stable working

families depart the neighbourhoods for jobs located elsewhere. The presence of middle-income employed residents provides conventional role models that act to alleviate the social constraints posed by neighbourhoods where large numbers of residents are disadvantaged. Youth, for instance, maturing in environments where only poor and less resilient residents remain, lack support networks and role models to integrate them into the activities of mainstream society.

What makes Wilson's concept powerful is the starting point in his analysis which argues that communities are impossible to understand independently of the interrelated macroeconomic and social processes, which create and sustain them. Thus expressed, his explanation of 'community effects' rejects the 'culture of poverty' thesis adopted by Murray (1984) and others. On the contrary, these explanations seek to impose unfair blame on the disadvantaged themselves for economic and social problems rather than taking account of broader structural processes. Nonetheless, Bauder (2002) contends that in practice, the concept of 'community effects' is applied simplistically and uncritically leaving the way open for use as a political tool to blame communities for their own exclusion. Likewise, as Kintrea and Atkinson (1998) argue in the UK regeneration context, it is one thing to suggest as Wilson does that social networks are important; however, it is quite another to propose, as happens in regeneration, that government can rebuild more socially integrated, cohesive, inclusive and sustainable communities through introducing middle-income home owners into social housing estates.

To date, little is known about the underlying rationale for adoption of social mix models in contemporary Australian estate regeneration policy, how such models are applied, the emphasis placed on them or what sorts of benefits housing authorities anticipate varying social mix will achieve for tenants (Arthurson 1998). Hence, the critique in this paper explores the way social mix policies are implemented in Australian regeneration projects. The first section briefly reviews the empirical evidence for social mix. Following this, the

housing authorities' expectations of what social mix will achieve for tenants are examined. Subsequent sections explore the negative impacts arising from varying social mix within some case study projects along with alternative approaches to current models. In light of the available evidence, the final section weighs up the balance of the findings on social mix in Australian estate regeneration policy.

## **Support for Social Mix: The Empirical Evidence**

Internationally, very little research exists to test the suppositions that there are positive advantages to be gained for public tenants through altering social mix. However, within the literature three interrelated and common themes arise. The first theme concerns the difficulties of fostering the requisite social contact between public tenants and home owners in order to actualise the anticipated benefits of integration. In turn, some researchers question whether placing residents with different income levels in the same neighbourhood creates tensions rather than social cohesion through raising awareness of class differences. The third issue concerns the notion that the presence of middle-income home owners facilitates the provision of additional services to the regeneration area. These issues are discussed in turn.

### ***The Difficulties of Facilitating Contact Between Tenants and Home Owners***

A basic premise underlying support for social mix is the idea that mixed income communities result in milieus that lead to positive change for disadvantaged residents. The anticipated outcomes relate mainly to developing inclusive communities that provide positive role models of good citizens and lead to other advantages such as access to labour market networks.

However, in recent studies of three social housing estates in Scotland, Kintrea and Atkinson (1998; Atkinson and Kintrea 2000) observe that compared to middle-income home owners, lower-income social housing tenants are less mobile and likely to spend more time at home. Conversely, home

owners carry out most of their activities outside of the estates and appear more detached from their localities. Hence, even though in these studies income differences between social housing tenants and home owners were not large, there was a lack of everyday social interaction between the two groups. The research concludes that if more affluent residents are introduced into the estates then there is likely to be even less social contact. Jupp (1999) makes similar observations in a larger study involving interviews with 1 000 residents across ten mixed tenure estates in England. Limited contact was found to occur between public tenants and home owners, with less than two-fifths of respondents having any contact with neighbours of different tenures. Given this limited level of interaction, it is concluded that the anticipated benefits of mixed tenure communities are unlikely to be realised and that the creation of “a new sort of community on mixed estates” is unlikely to be a realistic policy goal (Jupp 1999).

### ***Social Integration or Consciousness of Class Differences?***

The research findings also question whether placing residents with different income levels in the same neighbourhood raises awareness of class differences, thereby creating tensions, rather than the anticipated social integration (Page and Broughton 1997; Biggins and Hassan: 39; Jupp 1999: 11, 84).

The evaluation of the Mitchell Park regeneration project in South Australia (Social Policy Research Group 1998: 69) found that public housing tenants felt sceptical about whether new incoming and more affluent home owners would really want to live next door to them. This indicates, at least from the perspective of some public tenants, that regeneration activities aimed at creating more mixed tenure communities raise awareness of income and class differences rather than smoothing the way to develop integrated communities.

Further evidence of tenure-mixing heightening awareness of class differences is apparent in pre-and post-follow up interviews conducted with public tenants relocated from Hillcrest regeneration project, also in South Australia. In some instances, public tenants relocated to

'dispersed' public housing felt socially isolated due to more obvious class differences emerging between themselves and other residents than were evident on the public housing estate (Ruediger 1998). Related research assesses the success of the integration component of the Hillcrest project specifically from the aspect of residents' acceptance of socioeconomic diversity and the new mix of public and private housing in the suburb. The highest approval for the new mixed community comes from low-income earners receiving less than \$25 000 per annum (79.4 per cent). Conversely, middle-income earners (\$35 000-\$55 000) approve the least (40 per cent). This is 25 per cent fewer than those residents on incomes over \$55 000 (Biggins and Hassan 1998: 39). Hence, where social distance is least, that is, from the point of view of middle-income earners, there is greater disapproval of the new mixed income community. It seems middle-income residents want to distance themselves from low-income residents in the income strata below them, which is consistent with general findings on social interactions, social networks and social distancing.

None of the studies discussed provide comprehensive social analysis to make assertions one way or another about whether this heightened awareness of class differences leads to improved living standards for socioeconomically disadvantaged residents.

### ***Attracting Increased Services to the Neighbourhood***

One of the more convincing arguments for supporting the development of socioeconomically diverse communities in regeneration is that middle-income homeowners are more likely to demand and successfully attract additional services to the community, like better-resourced schools. These services also benefit public tenants living in the neighbourhood (Nyden 1998; Rosenbaum 1998; Vale 1998). The converse argument is that there are also some advantages in having high needs groups located together in certain regions. Many special government services are only available when numbers of recipients reach a certain threshold. Without a

critical mass, services are unlikely to be set up or, if already established, maintained once the concentrations of disadvantaged residents are lowered through dispersal.

In summary, the limited research available, especially in Australia, on the benefits or otherwise of social mix remains inconclusive and the findings, based as they are on a small number of studies, are not large enough or regionally diverse, to draw broad or international conclusions. With this in mind, the scope of the paper is to unravel the housing authorities' rationales for supporting changes to social mix, comparing various approaches and investigating the effects in practice on existing estate communities.

## **Research Approach**

Six case study estates, two each in South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland form the basis of the comparative research (see Table 1). Interest in the particular case studies was generated from the 1998 National Urban Regeneration Conference 'Revitalising Housing Areas', which presented the estates as the latest approaches to Australian estate regeneration (Badcock and Harris 1998). The decision to demolish the Villawood Estate, one of the selected case study estates, was announced by the New South Wales, Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning and Housing soon after the study commenced. This meant that only one case study from New South Wales could be considered in detail, although where relevant aspects of Villawood are also utilised. The data was collected through a variety of methods: a survey questionnaire self administered to 33 housing authority staff; follow up informal interviews and meetings held during visits to projects in 1999; and analysis of relevant policy documents and reports.

Prior to regeneration commencing, as shown in Table 1, the case study estates were all typified by high concentrations of public housing, varying from 100 per cent on Villawood estate, to 37 per cent at Salisbury North. The South Australian and Queensland housing



authorities plan significant reductions to concentrations of public housing through demolition and sales in order to support changes to social mix. The proposed reductions range from between 44-78 per cent at Manoora to 62 per cent at Inala. Conversely, the Waterloo project in New South Wales differs from other projects in that changing social mix on the estates is not an objective of regeneration.<sup>iii</sup> With this difference in mind, the following section explores what it is that the housing authorities in Queensland and South Australia expect to achieve in the way of community regeneration through varying social mix.

**Insert Table 1 about here**

## **Housing Authorities' Expectations for Varying Social Mix**

### ***Queensland: Manoora and Inala Projects***

In the mid 1990s, the Queensland Department of Housing formulated a 'Social Mix Checklist', which states that the concentration of public housing should not exceed greater than 20 per cent in any one locality. This guideline is moderated by the suggestion that implementation needs to be interpreted flexibly depending on local circumstances, such as whether an estate is favourably located in relation to services (Queensland Department of Housing, Local Government and Planning 1994). Both Manoora estate with 90 per cent public housing, the highest concentration of public housing located outside of the Brisbane metropolitan area, and Inala with 52 per cent public housing exceed the 20 per cent benchmark.

The Queensland Department of Housing in the Manoora Community Action Plan (Queensland Government and Queensland Department of Housing 1999: 22) identifies the homogeneity of tenure at Manoora, expressed in terms of the high concentration of public housing, as problematic because it differentiates the estate from the surrounding community, which consists of a more heterogenous mix of private, public rental and home ownership tenures. Responses to a questionnaire survey of Queensland Housing Authority staff also

identify residents' higher unemployment and crime rates, and lower education levels as factors that distinguish Manoora from adjacent communities. Consequently, the long-term aim of the regeneration project is to develop a community at Manoora with socioeconomic characteristics that are akin to the broader Cairns community. It is envisaged that in 10-15 years time "people will look back in disbelief that the multiple disadvantage existed in the area in the first place". Likewise, at Inala one of the overall aims of the regeneration project is to decrease the proportion of public housing tenants on the estate and broaden the socioeconomic mix (Spiller Gibbons Swan 1999). As shown in Table 1 page X, to support these changes the concentration of public housing at Manoora will be reduced from the original 90 per cent to somewhere between 50-20 per cent and at Inala from 52 per cent to approximately 20 per cent through house sales and relocation of tenants over the next decade.

In responding to the questionnaire survey, Queensland Housing Authority staff in both projects make links between proposed changes to social mix and the goals of the regeneration projects to build communities that are "sustainable", "cohesive", "self-reliant" and "can better manage change". While creating a balanced social mix is not the sole strategy housing authorities are utilising to achieve community regeneration, there are expectations that it will assist in these processes. Taken as a whole, it is concluded that the Queensland Department of Housing connects changes to social mix with the regeneration of communities, albeit not in any overt or precise way.

### ***South Australia: The Parks and Salisbury North Projects***

In The Parks and Salisbury North there is also a major focus on lowering concentrations of public housing. The South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) considers 25 per cent an acceptable benchmark for concentration of public housing at The Parks community, which represents a 58 per cent decrease in overall concentration (South Australian Housing Trust 1995). At Salisbury North, in order to achieve a "better balance of social mix", public

housing concentration is being reduced by a total of 59 per cent. Responses to the questionnaire survey of SAHT staff in Salisbury north indicate that these changes are linked in part to the processes of creating “a greater capacity for individuals to be self-sustaining”, a “longer term community” and a more “diverse caring community”.

Within the projects, improving the trend in home-buyer interest is the major strategy identified to revise the concentrations of public housing (South Australian Housing Trust 1998). Home owners are to be introduced onto the estates to thin out the socioeconomic indicators of disadvantage and gain a broader mix of desired characteristics. The characteristics envisaged for the post-regeneration community at The Parks includes a broader cross section of residents, in terms of more wage earners and higher average incomes, and with greater educational attainment, than existed prior to commencement of regeneration (South Australian Housing Trust and Pioneer Projects Australia 1996). The new community at The Parks is variously described by SAHT staff in the questionnaire survey as a “self-sustainable”, “vibrant” community with enhanced “individual and collective creativity” and “a sense of social cohesion”.

### ***Creating Inclusive Communities through Altering Social Mix***

In summary, within Queensland and South Australian regeneration projects, a more balanced social mix is commonly connected to underlying expectations that it will help create ‘sustainable’, ‘cohesive’ and ‘self-sufficient’ communities. Clearly from this viewpoint, ‘concentration effects’ are regarded as major problems on the estates. Communities with a more heterogenous socioeconomic mix of residents are characterised as instruments to facilitate community regeneration. In short, the introduction of home owners will assist in forming new improved and better functioning communities. Consequently, the way forward to social inclusion for tenants who remain in the regeneration area and those relocated to more dispersed public housing, is through coming into contact with an alternative world to

that of their existing communities. This is in terms of exposure to other residents with higher levels of employment and education and more stable family life.

These expectations for the benefits of social mix reflect Wilson's (1987; 1991; 1997) belief that the presence of middle-income employed residents provides conventional role models that act to alleviate the social constraints posed by neighbourhoods where large numbers of residents are disadvantaged. Nonetheless as others argue, in applying policies based on the concept of 'concentration effects', a middle ground must be reached that balances and recognises the critical interaction between broader structural processes and local agency (Atkinson and Kintrea 2001; Meegan and Mitchell 2001; Bauder 2002). The question arises as to whether it is actually possible for housing authorities to create the envisaged 'inclusive', 'cohesive' and sustainable', communities through changing social mix at a neighbourhood level. Indeed, will a community with 20 per cent public housing function any better than one with 90 per cent public housing? In view of the empirical evidence reviewed above, it has to be concluded that the housing authorities' underlying rationalisations that thinning out concentrations of impoverished tenants offers a means to reconnect low-income tenants to mainstream society are questionable.

The following section explores the tensions in the idea that changing social mix assists in community regeneration through examining the negative impacts arising from adopting these approaches in the case study projects.

## **Exclusionary Impacts of Modifying Social Mix**

The four major impacts arising from varying social mix on the estates relate to: first, the supply of public housing stock; second, the effects on existing estate communities; third, questions about moving disadvantaged tenants around rather than addressing the sources of problems; and finally, which community regeneration is targeted to assist.

### ***Decreasing Access to Public Housing***

The major way to change social mix in regeneration projects is through demolition, and sales of existing unimproved or refurbished and new build housing. Thus, a key question that arises is, do tenants benefit from sales of public housing for home ownership in estate regeneration? Overall, home purchase is unlikely to be an option for the 95 per cent of public tenants nationally who are defined as being in need of housing assistance.<sup>iv</sup> At Inala in Queensland, for every three public housing sales in regeneration only one replacement can be purchased elsewhere<sup>v</sup>. In South Australian projects the ratio is even greater with 3.5 sales only resulting in enough funding to purchase one new replacement public dwelling (Spiller Gibbons Swan 1999: 20). Given the costs of replacement housing, regeneration projects like The Parks and Salisbury North projects that involve large reductions in public housing will result in considerably lower levels of public housing overall as shown in Table 1 (2 960 to 765 and 1 390 to 500 respectively). As Badcock and Beer (2000) argue, a fundamental shift is occurring in Australia away from state provision of public housing in favour of private provision and this will lead to a more unequal housing system and divided society. The processes of regeneration involving selling off public stock and reducing overall numbers of dwellings available for public rental tenure assist in this repositioning to private provision and greater inequality. Hence, tensions arise in housing authorities' social mix policies between the aims to develop more 'cohesive' and 'sustainable' communities and the requisite large-scale reductions to overall numbers of public housing.

In turn, large-scale reductions in concentrations of public housing within Australian regeneration areas necessitate permanent relocation of substantial numbers of existing public tenants and this comes at a cost to prospective tenants on waiting lists. It was estimated that rehousing of tenants from Villawood Estate would stagnate housing allocations in the local region for two years and increase average waiting list times from "5.5 to 7.5 years" (Auditor-

General New South Wales 1998: 20). Similarly, The Parks project alone demands around 10 per cent of public housing allocations in South Australia for tenants relocated from the area through regeneration (Department of Housing and Urban Development 1996).

Taken as a whole, social mix policies adopted in regeneration along with ongoing reductions to funding provided for new housing under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement will make it much harder in the future for many socioeconomically disadvantaged people to gain or preserve their access to public housing.

### ***Breaking up Existing Communities***

A contradiction exists in that implementation of social mix policies assumes that high concentrations of public housing and cohesive or inclusive communities are mutually exclusive factors. In reality, whilst the situation no doubt varies across estates, housing authority staff responding to the questionnaire survey identified that at The Parks, Salisbury North, Manoora and Inala, a strong and positive sense of community already existed within particular sectors of the community, especially amongst long-term residents prior to regeneration commencing. The findings that poor neighbourhoods do not necessarily lack social cohesion and active social support networks are by no means uncommon and have been known for a long time (Forrest and Kearns 1999; Atkinson and Kintrea 2000).

Thus, tensions arise because the housing authorities' actions to change social mix in regeneration break up existing communities to create new communities comprised of different types of residents. The SAHT, for instance, recognises that this poses a dilemma at The Parks where although many residents have low levels of disposable income:

the area displays much of the traditional closeness and resilience of working class communities.... a degree of innovation and self sufficiency has also emerged as an element of life in the area, often matched with a cooperative approach between neighbours (South Australian Housing Trust 1995: 146-47).

A significant proportion of elderly residents in The Parks rely on these cooperative social support networks (Spiller Gibbons Swan 1999). As well, the high concentration of public housing in The Parks, prior to regeneration, did not detract from the popularity of the area from the point of view of public housing applicants.

Around 55 per cent of applicants nominated the area as their first preference for housing allocation (South Australian Housing Trust 1995). Paradoxically, as SAHT staff responding to the questionnaire survey on The Parks identified, in supporting changes to social mix it then becomes necessary to try and recreate community cohesion through integration of new incoming residents “into existing communities....[and] the old community and new communities” formed through regeneration.

Similar tensions exist in other projects where, due to existing networks, ties and attachments, long-term residents are often the most reluctant to relocate. At a meeting with Queensland Housing Authority staff at Inala, one of the housing authority staff pointed out that when tenants have lived in an area for 40 years “the only way they want to leave is in a coffin” (Personal Communication, 18 July 1999). Likewise, a Salisbury North tenant explained, “I miss seeing the people I used to say ‘hello’ to” (Harvey 2000: 88). Where these existing networks have been identified in the Salisbury North project, neighbours have been moved simultaneously and resettled next to each other. The follow-up study of tenants relocated from Hillcrest in South Australia suggests it is possible to ameliorate disruptions to existing social networks to some extent through relocating tenants nearby so they can maintain contacts with their old neighbours who remain living on the regeneration site (Ruediger 1998). Of course the logistics of these strategies becomes more difficult as greater numbers of tenant relocations are involved.

Hence, tensions emerge between meeting housing authorities’ social mix objectives that dismantle existing communities and other regeneration goals to improve community integration and self-reliance. In circumstances where positive and cohesive community

networks already exist, there are convincing arguments for retaining communities rather than undertaking large-scale changes to social mix. These collective support structures need to be taken into account, rather than being undermined, as the latter is often the case in regeneration policy.

### ***Moving the Problems Around***

Past efforts by Australian Housing Authorities to deal with spatial concentrations of disadvantage on housing estates have been criticised for focusing on dismantling pockets of poverty through permanently relocating tenants to other areas, rather than dealing with actual problems (Peel 1993a; 1993b; 1995a; 1995b; Stevens 1995). The decision taken to demolish Villawood estate and disperse tenants provides a recent example of the impasse that is reached through taking this course of action.

The New South Wales Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning (1998:1) justified the decision to demolish Villawood estate through arguing that there were “systemic social and criminal problems” on the estate and the actions were being taken “as part of a major new plan to fight crime and other social problems”. The depiction of Villawood as inhabited by a cultural ‘underclass’ was reinforced in press characterisations of the estate as “The Bronx” (Auditor-General New South Wales 1998:13). Clearly, the major rationale for bulldozing the estate was to restore peace through breaking up the concentration of public housing and dispersing tenants.

Similar ideas associating high concentrations of public housing with socially dysfunctional communities that can be ‘fixed’ through dispersal of residents are apparent at Manoora. In Cairns, much of the crime in the central business district is thought to originate from Manoora and other local public housing estates. No solid evidence is available to support this assumption although it may well be accurate. Hence, the principal solution being proposed to crime and public safety issues by the Community Safety Committee, which forms part of the



Manoorra Regeneration Project, is to encourage the Department of Housing to reduce the density of public housing in west Cairns. Clearly, this action endorses the concentration of public housing "as the primary cause of the problems in the area" (Queensland Department of Housing 1997: 15).

However, reducing concentrations of public housing, demolition and moving problem tenants around, under the justification of varying social mix, is hardly the way to address the issues on the estates. As a number of researchers have shown, relocating difficult tenants simply moves crime, unemployment and other problems from one area to another and rather than leading to constructive solutions results in broader social and economic costs to the rest of the community (Carlton and Cars 1991; McGregor and McConnachie 1995; Stubbs 1998). Hence, focusing on 'community effects' as the major source of problems restricts the possibilities for more innovative and positive government action. While varying social mix reflects efforts by government to create sustainable communities, it also represents a retreat from public policy as a way to alleviate problems of social inequality. Instead, community is portrayed as the locus of social change. Once the heterogenous communities are created and the problems of public tenants are made less visible then responsibility is placed on communities through some anticipated but highly questionable normalising effects of middle-income role models. This idea is seen at The Parks where the vision for the new community is for greater socioeconomic diversity "where those who have, help those who have not" (Jackson 1999). Certainly, as Bauder (2002) argues, this illustrates the utility of the concept of 'concentration effects' as a political tool. Dispersing public tenants is advantageous because it takes attention away from crime, high unemployment, poverty and other social problems experienced by a particular sector of the population. However, in reality, the situation is paradoxical because disadvantaged public tenants will still exist but be rendered less visible through dispersal.

### ***Regeneration for a New or Existing Community?***

Another important question related to breaking up communities through implementing changes to social mix is which community benefits from estate regeneration. The new community created through regeneration is largely the recipient of improvements made to the neighbourhoods, such as better quality housing and employment opportunities. While these new communities consist of some public tenants, fundamental questions remain in the projects about the outcomes for relocated tenants who do not move back to the regeneration area. That is, whether they equally benefit from the rehousing processes of regeneration and are successfully integrated into their new communities or find their social networks disrupted.

In view of the negative impacts arising within the projects from the processes of changing social mix, we have to question what is being achieved and whether high levels of dispersal of public housing tenants and community regeneration are complimentary or inherently contradictory strategies. Indeed, there might be some positive advantages in maintaining certain concentrations of public housing. At least where disadvantage is concentrated and visible, it means some action has to be taken by government, although to date, arguably, it has not always been the right sort of action. The alternative for disadvantaged tenants might be worse when they are dispersed or rendered invisible in a new mixed income community. It could easily become a case of 'out of sight, out of mind'.

### **Alternative Approaches to Creating Social Mix**

Given the findings of the inadvertent negative impacts of changing social mix, the question arises as to how much emphasis should be placed on social mix as a component that assists estate regeneration. The Waterloo project illustrates an alternative approach to other projects in that changing social mix through house sales is not an objective of regeneration. All of the regeneration activities are targeted to existing residents to compensate for the lack of social and economic resources in the area. Another option is to target public housing more broadly

to vary the socioeconomic mix of residents within the public housing tenure. These two approaches are discussed in turn.

### ***Integration for the Existing Community at Waterloo***

The Waterloo regeneration project is a joint partnership between the New South Wales Department of Housing, the University of New South Wales School of Social Work and local residents. Responses to the questionnaire survey of New South Wales Department of Housing Staff at Waterloo identify the project objectives, as echoing similar aspirations to other projects, to attain an “empowered”, “self-sustainable” and “cohesive” community. However, the directions taken to achieve these goals differ. Changing social mix through sales and demolition of housing is not an objective of regeneration at Waterloo. The focus of the project is on building stability and integration within the existing community to make the estate a more desirable place to live for current residents.

At Waterloo, all aspects of regeneration are targeted to the existing community in situ, whether it is employment strategies, increased community services, or projects to reinforce ethnic diversity. In this sense, the project compensates the existing community for the lack of material and economic resources in the area. This is an important point because, arguably, it is poverty and lack of material resources on estates that undermines or determines a lack of inclusion of residents in activities of mainstream society, more so than not living next to middle-income home owners. The project has identified how poverty prevents residents’ from accessing activities, which many others in society take for granted, such as recreational pursuits (University of New South Wales School of Social Work 1998). The composition of the Waterloo community will change little along with regeneration because the concentration and level of public housing throughout the life of the regeneration project will remain constant at around 68.3 per cent of total housing (New South Wales Department of Housing, Central Sydney Region 1998). For this reason, unlike other projects, the Waterloo project

does not involve reductions to public housing and permanent relocation of tenants to other areas or breaking up existing communities. Consequently, there is no question at Waterloo about which community the range of regeneration activities benefits.

The focus on the existing community at Waterloo also avoids complex issues raised in other projects about how to reconcile changes to social mix with maintaining ethnic diversity on the estates. The Waterloo Estate Community Gardens Project, one of the projects implemented to build tolerance of ethnic diversity on the estate, encourages residents to work together in common undertakings. With over 60 participants, representative of 12 different ethnic groups, social interaction has been facilitated between residents who otherwise would probably not have associated (Campbell 1998). Residents have won awards for their community garden project, attracting visitors from other neighbourhoods. In addition to increasing internal community cohesion between residents, these activities have generated positive publicity for the estate and decreased the unwarranted stigma from outsiders (University of New South Wales, School of Social Work 1999).

The inclusive approach to ethnic diversity taken at Waterloo contrasts to other projects that focus on social mix as a major strategy to facilitate inclusion. The Queensland Department of Housing (1997: 16), for instance, observes that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families like living on Manoora estate because of the supportive cultural environment and some families request housing there to be near relatives. However, changing the social mix will clearly disrupt these attachments. Similarly, The Parks project aims to celebrate the cultural diversity of the area and develop a vibrant community, which reinforces and retains the multi-cultural influence and strong community ethos. Nevertheless, as the project partners acknowledge, an unintended consequence of changes to social mix will be the breaking up of the multicultural community (South Australian Housing Trust and Pioneer Projects Australia

1996: 23-24, 48). It is difficult to envisage, given these circumstances, how objectives for community integration will be achieved.

### ***Creating Mixed Income Public Housing***

An alternative approach to creating social mix through tenure change in regeneration is to generate a broader socioeconomic mix of tenants within the public housing tenure through implementing less stringent access criteria. Some argue that allowing this broader accessibility is the only way to counteract the unwillingness of middle-income taxpayers to support the cost of providing services for the poor (Castles, 1990). This was the approach originally taken by the South Australian Housing Trust, which until recently had an open policy of admitting to the waiting list for public housing anyone who did not own property. The benefits of this model were that higher-income working tenants paying full rent subsidised lower-income tenants receiving concessional rent. The system maintained viability through generating income for basic administration and maintenance.

On the contrary, tighter targeting being pursued under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement is increasingly shifting public housing to become a tenure of last resort where only tenants fitting special needs categories or in dire circumstances are eligible for assistance. In continuing these directions, future communities on the estates will be characterised by even greater poverty and more difficult tenants making the estates harder to manage. Arguably, what is required to resolve these issues are alternative perspectives to dominant contemporary thinking about the need for tighter targeting of public housing. Darcy and Randolph (1999: 14) argue that for Australian public housing to be sustainable requires increasing the housing stock and widening, rather than narrowing, the eligibility criteria to attract tenants who are not as impoverished as those currently housed. From this contrasting viewpoint, the sustainability problems of public housing are not related to better-off

households occupying public housing but the limited stock available to support a broader mix of tenants.

Certainly, realisation in the US over the past decade of the problems of administering and sustaining a residualised public housing sector have seen a revision of previous policies that targeted public housing only to the most impoverished. The Quality Housing and Works Responsibility Act enacted in 1998, requires all new housing developments to comprise mixed income tenants. In this model of public housing provision, 40 per cent of housing is targeted to the 'poorest of the poor' tenants and 60 per cent is required for working poor to middle-income families (Housing Policy Debate 1998). This creates an income mix within the public tenure and avoids concentration of impoverished residents, while at the same time providing an income stream to cross-subsidise more disadvantaged tenants.

## **Conclusion**

The research findings support some of the initial issues identified about the difficulties of putting Wilson's (1987; 1991; 1997) concept of 'community effects' into practice as a positive tool for estate regeneration.

Certainly, within Australian estate regeneration policy, there are major expectations that social mix strategies will assist in creating 'inclusive', 'cohesive' and 'sustainable' communities. However, the integrity of claims made for social mix remains inconclusive and it is questionable whether the social benefits the policies purport to generate or the envisaged communities will eventuate.

The empirical findings question whether in some States too much emphasis is being placed on large-scale changes to social mix as a means to assist regeneration and address inequality. Indeed, the case study projects find no evidence that a varied social mix is a prerequisite for the development of cohesive communities. On some estates with high levels of concentrated public housing, cohesive communities and strong support networks existed prior to

regeneration commencing. Where these supportive social networks already exist, breaking up the community under the justification of changing social mix and to rectify 'community effects' appears an illogical way to address social disadvantage. In light of the findings to date, implementing large-scale changes to social mix rather than promoting social integration could easily become strategies to move tenants around and render them less visible, as a consequence making the problems they experience of poverty and unemployment easier to ignore.

The Waterloo project illustrates an alternative approach to regeneration that targets all aspects of regeneration, whether it is employment, physical changes to the housing and resident participation strategies to existing residents in situ. Waterloo shows how regeneration can proceed without substantial social disruption. The supply of public housing is maintained, tenants are not permanently relocated or dispersed to other areas and negative impacts on existing communities and public housing waiting lists are avoided. For these reasons, it seems more satisfactory, wherever possible, to address socioeconomic deprivation in situ.

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## **Notes**

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<sup>i</sup> The preferred term for usage in this paper is 'social mix', given that it encapsulates envisaged changes to create more socioeconomically diverse communities; that is, through altering the balance of housing tenure, to lower concentrations of public housing and increase owner-occupied housing on estates.

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<sup>ii</sup> While there is a major emphasis on social mix policies, this is only one in a range of regeneration policies that are implemented in the UK

<sup>iii</sup> The New South Wales Housing Authority has incorporated social mix objectives into its estate regeneration policy since the mid 1990s. However, it uses transfers of public housing to community housing associations as the major component of this policy and has not yet adopted the full-scale social mix direction of other states via sales of public housing.

<sup>iv</sup> Need is defined as households where greater than 25 per cent of income would have to be spent on rent if they did not receive housing assistance (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision 1999: 1097)

<sup>v</sup> The average price of unimproved public housing sold at Inala to LJ Hooker is \$40,000 (Brisbane City Council 1998). However, the average cost of replacement housing purchased by the Department of Housing in other areas across Queensland is \$115,000 (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision 1999: 111). Hence, this leaves a shortfall of \$75,000 between sales and replacement costs. In effect, for every three houses sold to LJ Hooker at Inala only one can be purchased elsewhere by the housing authority.

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**TABLE 1**  
**Concentration of Public Housing Before and After Regeneration on Six Case Study Estates**

| Project            | Public Housing Concentration |       |                    |       | Proposed reduction<br>in concentration<br>of public housing<br>(per cent) | Project<br>Time frame<br>(years) |
|--------------------|------------------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|---|----------------------------------|
|                    | Before<br>(per cent)         | After | Before<br>(number) | After |   |                                  |
| Inala              | 52                           | 20    | 2 500              | n/a   | 62  | 10                               |
| Manoora            | 90                           | 20-50 | 555                | n/a   | 45-78   | 10-15                            |
| Villawood          | 100                          | 0     | 253                | 0     | 100   | n/a                              |
| Waterloo           | 68.3                         | same  | 2 500              | n/a   | nil   | 5+                               |
| The Parks          | 60                           | 25    | * 2 460            | 760   | 58  | 10-15                            |
| Salisbury<br>North | 37                           | 15    | 1 390              | 500   | 59  | 10-15                            |

**Source:** SA Better Cities 11 Steering Committee; South Australian Housing Trust and Pioneer Projects Australia 1996; Coopers and Lybrand Consultants 1998; Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, Minister for Housing 1998; New South Wales Department of Housing, Central Sydney Region 1998; Queensland Department of Housing 1998a; 1999b; 1999c; Queensland Department of Public Works and Housing 1998; South Australian Housing Trust 1998; Urban and Community Renewal Project Team 1998; Queensland Government and Queensland Department of Housing 1999.

\* The figures exclude 500 properties already upgraded prior to regeneration commencing