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Expanding the De-Concentration Research Agenda

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Abstract

To date the focus of the tenure mix debate in Australia has been on whether or not redevelopment of social housing estates, to create tenure mix, is an appropriate course of action. While the issues involved in this debate are important, and warrant ongoing research, I will argue that this is no longer the 'main game'. The new National Affordable Housing Agreement commits Federal, State and Territory Governments in Australia to "creating mixed communities that promote social and economic opportunities by reducing concentrations of disadvantage that exist in some social housing estates". For policy practitioners this necessitates a shift in emphasis from asking whether or not tenure mix is desirable, to asking what the implications of tenure mix are for the individuals and groups involved, and how best to 'make tenure mix work' in practice (particularly for social housing residents).

I seek to do four key things in this paper. First, provide an overview of the origin, deterioration and current position of public housing estates in NSW. Second, discuss the options available for responding to the issues associated with estates, to contextualise the tenure mix option amongst other options. Third, discuss current issues and debates surrounding tenure mix, including the resulting narrow focus of current research and evaluation. Finally, argue that there is a need for greater emphasis on research and evaluation that is geared towards program improvement.

Introduction

In this paper I seek to create a space for research and evaluation that is focused on improving the practice and outcomes of public housing de-concentration efforts. This is not as straightforward as it may first appear. There are currently heated and complex debates about the appropriateness and efficacy of de-concentration policies and programs. This is not a debate I wish to engage in. I do not deny that discussion and debate is important, and I am not suggesting that de-concentration should be uncritically accepted. Rather, I am acknowledging the place of de-concentration in contemporary housing policy, and seeking to use research and evaluation to improve practice and outcomes in this context. I believe that such an approach can and should sit alongside more critical and ‘pure’ research and analysis.

I begin the paper by providing a brief history of public housing estates in New South Wales, followed by an explanation of their deterioration since the 1970s, and a description of the characteristics and issues they present today. I then employ Rittel and Webber’s concept of ‘wicked problems’ to highlight the complexity of these issues, and of responses to them.

Next I discuss in general terms some of the approaches available for addressing the disadvantage associated with estates, before honing in on de-concentration in particular. This discussion includes an overview of the concepts of social mix and tenure mix, current commitments to de-concentration by state and federal governments, as well as current research and debate about de-concentration. Following this I argue that there is a need for more research focused on program improvement, and greater emphasis on formative (as distinct from summative) evaluations.

I conclude by briefly outlining some project specific research plans developed by Housing NSW, and by calling for greater cross-sectoral collaboration in this field.

Public housing estates in NSW

The history of estates

From its formation in the 1940s the (then) NSW Housing Commission tended to build dwellings in clusters on large parcels of land. Some of the early examples included the acquisition of sites in Newcastle, Westmead, and Liverpool in the 1940s. The reasoning behind such an approach essentially came down to efficiency. Large parcels of land could be acquired cheaply in outer suburban areas, and there were cost efficiencies to be gained by building multiple dwellings in one location. The approach was also viewed as a contributor to delivering on objectives such as regional development and the decentralisation of industry (Carter et al 1988; Pettigrew 2005; NSW Department of Housing 2002).

In broad terms there were four distinct periods of estate development. These include: the ‘neighbourhood estates’ of the 1940s and 1950s; the ‘great estates and high-rises’ of the 1960s; the ‘corridor estates’ of the 1970s; and the ‘micro estates’ of the 1980s (Gregory and Campbell 1996; NSW Department of Housing 2002).

The neighbourhood estates of the 1940s and 1950s were so named because “these were not just homes, but whole communities complete with amenities such as schools, hospitals and shops” (NSW Department of Housing 2002). That is, the Housing Commission saw itself not just as a provider of shelter, but also as a creator of neighbourhoods. Estates built in this period included Villawood, Maroubra, Seven Hills, Rydalmere and Dundas Valley in Sydney, Windale in Newcastle, and Unanderra and Berkeley in Wollongong.

The 1960s saw building efforts focus on a small number of large estates on Sydney’s fringe, and the development of high-rise apartment blocks in Sydney’s centre. The Green Valley Estate in the south west of Sydney comprised 6,000 dwellings, built across a number of whole new suburbs. Mount Druitt in Sydney’s west was even larger, at 8,000 dwellings. It was intended that these estates house blue-collar workers in close proximity to their place of employment, based on the assumption that industry would

decentralise to these locations. It was also in this period that the Radburn concept was first applied to estate development in New South Wales. In essence this is an approach to urban planning in which houses are built back to front (that is, they faced shared open space with back doors facing the street); large areas of the estate's internal open space are connected by walkways; and pedestrian routes and vehicle access are separated (Gregory and Campbell 1996; Woodward 1997; New South Wales Department of Housing 2002). All of this was supposed to result in strong, cohesive, working class communities (Woodward, 1997, p. 26). This period also witnessed the development of high-rise apartment blocks incorporating hundreds of dwellings, such as John Northcott Place in Surry Hills (New South Wales Department of Housing 2002).

By the 1970s doubts had begun to emerge about the appropriateness of large-scale estates such as Green Valley and Mount Druitt. Planned employment opportunities had failed to materialise, the estates were becoming recognised as “ghettos of disadvantaged people”, and the Housing Commission had come to the conclusion that greater sociological mix was needed (NSW Department of Housing, 2002, p.22). However, this was not yet the end of estate development. Rather, estates were now being built on a smaller scale, such as along key transport corridors in Sydney's west and southwest. Between 1972 and 1989 five estates, comprising a total of 5700 dwellings, were built in Macquarie Fields, Airs, Minto, Claymore and Ambarvale/Rosemeadow (Woodward, 1997, p. 26).

In the 1980s only small estates were built, and tended to arise from redevelopment of older housing. One example of this is the Villawood estate, where two blocks of older fibro housing were replaced with higher density, Radburn-based housing (Gregory and Campbell, 1996, p. 9; NSW Department of Housing, 2002, p. 27). By the 1990s the focus had shifted from developing new estates to addressing physical and social issues on existing ones (NSW Department of Housing, 2002, pp. 30-31).

The deterioration of estates

The 1975 report of the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty in Australia found that 72% of public housing tenants were above the poverty line. This caused some concern, as it was interpreted as meaning that public housing was not adequately targeting those with the greatest need (Carter et al 1988). Up to this point public housing had been widely available. However these findings sparked a policy shift that saw eligibility requirements tightened substantially. Paris et al (1985) refer to this as constituting a move from ‘public housing’ to ‘welfare housing’. By this they mean that public housing had previously been provided to ‘the public’ (viewed broadly), but was subsequently limited to a subsection of the public viewed as being ‘in need’.

The impact of this shift on public housing estates has been significant. It had the consequence that literally thousands of residents ‘in need’ would be grouped together on existing and future estates. This shift was intended to coincide with another shift, towards more scattered public housing development. However, it did not adequately take into consideration the legacy of previous planning approaches, namely the building of the neighbourhood estates of the 1940s and 1950s and the great estates and high-rises of the 1960s. Similarly, the shift occurred when the corridor estates of the 1970s had already been planned, and were in the process of being built. Furthermore, the corridor estates were specifically designed to prevent future sale of individual dwellings, via the use of strategic subdivision plans (Richmond 2005). This made it impossible to change the tenure mix on these estates without significant redevelopment.

The estates today

Many public housing estates exhibit significantly skewed demography and significant social problems today. This includes high rates of (intergenerational) welfare dependence, vandalism, poor health, unemployment, crime, anti-social behaviour, mental illness, school failure, and tenancy turnover (NSW Department of Housing 1999(1); NSW Department of Housing 2001; Woodward 1997; Woodward 2000).

It was previously assumed that the majority of households would be two-parent, single income families, with relatively low levels of skills and education, who would be able to obtain steady work in the (planned) local manufacturing industries (Woodward, 1997, p. 26). However, changes in the global

economy over the last 30 to 40 years have resulted in changes to the distribution of work by industry, and a decrease in demand for unskilled and low-skilled labour (Latham, 1998, pp. 102-107; NSW Department of Housing, 1999, p. 5). The outcome of this has been that the industrial sites and employment opportunities that were to develop alongside the public housing estates have not eventuated, and unemployment has become a major feature of populations living on estates (Department of Housing, 2001; Woodward, 2000).

The design of the estates has also been a key factor in their demise. They look markedly different to surrounding areas, meaning that those living there are readily identifiable as public housing residents, and they often experience stigma as a result (NSW Department of Housing, 1999, p. 1; NSW Department of Housing, 2001, p. 5; Woodward, 1997, p. 27). Additionally, research on the link between crime and urban form has demonstrated that there is a direct relationship between the physical design of these estates and the criminal activity/high crime rates they now experience (Department of Housing, 2001, p. 18; Matka 1997; Standing Committee on Law and Justice 2000). In particular this results the lack of 'defensible space' around dwellings, as well as poor accessibility and poor visibility of public spaces (particularly walkways).

Also key to understanding the current position of the estates is consideration of the socio-economic status of the tenant population. In 1970, for example, only 40% of tenants received rental subsidies. In 1999, however, the figure was 93%, suggesting that current tenants are more disadvantaged than their predecessors, requiring a greater level of assistance (NSW Department of Housing, 1999, p. 5). Similarly, there are now more single parents and more people with mental illness in public housing, as well as a much higher rate of reliance upon Centrelink payments and other forms of social assistance (NSW Department of Housing, 2001, pp. 3-4). Essentially tenants now tend to be more disadvantaged, have higher needs, and there are greater differences between estates and surrounding areas. Factors contributing to this situation include the eligibility criteria that must be met to qualify for public housing and an increasingly lengthy waiting list with large disparities between areas.

To be eligible for housing assistance clients must meet strict income and asset criteria (amongst other criteria), and are prioritised based on need (Housing NSW 2010). Applicants deemed eligible for public housing are given a choice as to the location in which they would like to be housed, and join a waiting list for that particular area (usually a local government area). The problem that arises here is that there is great variation between different areas, reflecting the quality of the housing and the desirability of the area. Consequently, those with the most urgent need for housing assistance are more likely to join lists with high numbers of estate-based properties, in an attempt to have their housing needs met quickly. Applicants with a high level of housing need are then placed in a position where they have little choice but to accept the housing they are offered, regardless of its desirability.

The estates as 'wicked problems'

The issues associated with housing estates are complex. To explain this complexity it is useful to draw on Rittel and Webber's (1973) contrast between 'wicked problems' and the more 'tame' or 'benign' problems faced by engineers and scientists. Wicked problems are multidimensional, contestable and political. Rittel and Webber identify ten distinguishing characteristics of wicked problems, each of which will briefly be discussed with regard to public housing estates.

There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem

The problems associated with public housing estates are many and varied. Different stakeholders with different perspectives will formulate the problem differently, and will derive different solutions.

Wicked problems have no stopping rule

When a solution is reached for a mathematical problem the problem has been solved, and there is no need to continue. However, no such end point is possible when it comes to identifying solutions to the problems associated with estates. Even when things 'work', they may still be contested, and they can always be different or better. The search for solutions is thus ongoing.

Solutions to wicked problems are not true-or-false, but good-or-bad

Owing to the multiplicity of stakeholder views, and the complexity of the issues to which they respond, estate solutions are not true or false. Criteria may be developed to assess them as being good or bad, or better or worse, though the criteria too will be open to disputation.

There is no immediate and no ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem

De-concentration projects generate waves of consequences over an extended period of time, as people respond to the services they receive, to the processes associated with de-concentration, and to their new living environment. This makes it impossible to comprehensively test or evaluate solutions via point in time analysis.

Every solution to a wicked problem is a 'one-shot operation'

There is no opportunity to test de-concentration before implementing it in 'real world' conditions. Every case has consequences, that is, impacts that cannot be undone.

Wicked problems do not have an enumerable (or an exhaustively describable) set of potential solutions

There are no criteria for identifying and counting the range of solutions to a wicked problem. It is therefore not possible to know or to claim that all options for addressing issues on estates have been considered in the past, or are available for consideration in the future.

Every wicked problem is essentially unique

Every public housing estate is unique in terms of design, the individuals living there, local social dynamics, proximity and access to services, and so on. Not only does this mean that the issues are different in each location, but also that each individual and community will respond differently to the same or similar interventions.

Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem

The problems associated with public housing estates are complex and interrelated, and there are many ways of describing and discussing them. This makes it extremely difficult to know how they relate to each other, or what the 'ultimate' problem(s) are. Are they the result of changes to housing allocation policies, a failure or inability to address underlying issues of poverty, poor urban planning practices, or something else?

The existence of a discrepancy representing a wicked problem can be explained in numerous ways

The explanation used to describe the problem(s) of estates guides the solution(s) that will be proposed. Put differently, inherent in every response to estates is at least one, though probably numerous, interpretations and explanation(s) of the problem.

The planner has no right to be wrong

In science and engineering it is common to engage in hypothesis testing. In fact, disproving something may be just as important as proving something. However, the same does not apply to public housing estate interventions. If something turns out not to work, or to have a negative consequence, it has significant implications, for which policy makers and/or practitioners are held responsible.

Responses available to Housing NSW

As noted above, the 'wickedness' of the problems associated with estates means that there can be no one correct solution or intervention. This is due to variations in stakeholder perspectives, different interpretations of the issues involved, the localised/unique nature of issues on individual estates, and the inability of the social sciences to mimic mathematical and engineering ontology and methods. However, it is still useful to note in a general way the categories of intervention available. Here I will outline four conceptually distinct approaches, while acknowledging that this is not an exhaustive list, and that more than one approach may be used in any given location.

The first and most obvious option is 'business as usual'. Were this option to be pursued, Housing NSW would simply manage tenancies and perform maintenance in a manner consistent with its non-estate

properties. In practice this is not an option for estates with the sorts of problems discussed above. While there is often debate amongst stakeholders about what form intervention should take, there is unanimous agreement that estates are sites of significant disadvantage and social problems, and require responses.

The second option is to deliver community development and capacity building, either directly, or via non-government organisations (NGOs). This approach involves working closely with residents to identify their priorities for their community, and supporting them to achieve their objectives. The most prominent example of this approach is the Housing Communities Program, through which Housing NSW has, since the mid 1990s, provided funds to NGOs to provide a (usually full time) community development worker for selected locations (Community and Tenant Participation Unit, 2008).

The third option is to engage in a ‘place management’ oriented approach that addresses economic, social and (minor) physical issues, via partnerships with residents, NGOs, government agencies and businesses. The most prominent example of this approach in NSW is the Building Stronger Communities Program, involving seven place-based initiatives that cumulatively cover 22 priority estates in NSW (NSW Department of Housing, 2007). Similar initiatives can also be found in Queensland and Victoria.

The fourth option is to de-concentrate the public housing in estates. Given that this option is the primary subject matter of this paper, it is elaborated in the section that follows.

De-concentrating public housing estates

De-concentrating public housing estates involves reducing the percentage of public housing stock in a defined area. This can be achieved via sale of existing dwellings to private purchasers, or by major redevelopment and the sale of land and/or new dwellings. In either case the intention is to increase social mix.

Social mix

The term ‘social mix’ refers to the mix of demographic characteristics in a given population. It may include such variables as: age; gender, family type; level of education; level of income; source of income; employment status; cultural background; language spoken; and others. Public housing estates typically have narrow social mix, meaning that there are large concentrations of people with similar demographic characteristics.

The vast majority of public housing residents receive low levels of income, as level of income is a key criterion for public housing eligibility. Additionally, particular types of estates tend to have a narrow mix of other characteristics. For example, inner city one-bedroom apartments in Sydney tend to be occupied by single people, many of whom have experienced homelessness, or by elderly residents receiving Aged Pensions. This can be contrasted with a high percentage of single parent families of mainly European origin in three-bedroom townhouses in estates located in the Campbelltown LGA in South Western Sydney, and a high percentage of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in estates in estates in the Fairfield LGA (also in South Western Sydney, though with a vastly different demographic profile to Campbelltown).

Tenure mix

The term ‘tenure mix’ refers to the mix of tenures in a given location, including social rental, private rental and home ownership. When used in the context of public housing estates, tenure mix typically refers to the concentration or ratio of social housing to private housing, with a high ratio of public housing indicating a narrow tenure mix. Given the economic profile of public housing residents, and the tendency for particular demographic groups to be clustered in estates, tenure mix is often used as a surrogate for social mix. That is, a narrow tenure mix is considered to indicate a narrow social mix.

De-concentration and government policy

At the 2009 Shelter NSW Conference titled ‘The Crisis and Beyond’, the Chief Executive of Housing NSW spoke passionately about his ambition to de-concentrate public housing estates in NSW. In doing so he explained that he has worked for Housing NSW for approximately 30 years, and has witnessed first hand their negative impact on individual’s lives, and on the community generally (Allen, 2009).

At the 2010 Shelter NSW Conference titled ‘Estates in the Balance: Best practice in redevelopment and regeneration of public housing estates’, the then NSW Wales Minister for Housing delivered a presentation titled ‘Current Approaches to Estate Regeneration in New South Wales’. The following points were made within this presentation: De-concentration is about transforming highly disadvantaged estates with significant concentrations of social housing into diverse, mixed income and mixed tenure communities with good amenity, services and community facilities; asset solutions alone will not resolve some of the complex problems facing social housing communities; we need coordinated efforts to improve community capacity, provide access to services and opportunities and build physical environments which are functional and enjoyable; this type of integrated, whole of place approach to reducing disadvantage in social housing communities has been supported by the Commonwealth Government and all State and Territory Governments (Terenzini, 2010, pp. 8-9).

Additionally, the current National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) commits Federal, State and Territory Governments to “creating mixed communities that promote social and economic opportunities by reducing concentrations of disadvantage that exist in some housing estates” (Council of Australian Government, 2008, p. 7).

It is thus clear that de-concentration of public housing estates is firmly on the agenda in NSW. It is explicitly referred to in the NAHA, it is passionately pursued by the Chief Executive, and it was affirmed by the previous NSW Housing Minister.

Research and debate about de-concentration

However, there is still much debate in academic literature about the benefits and costs of de-concentrating public housing estates to generate social mix. At the risk of oversimplification, there are two key issues at the heart of this debate. The first is whether or not ‘neighbourhood effects’ exist, and the second is whether or not disadvantaged individuals and families actually benefit from de-concentration initiatives.

The idea of a neighbourhood effect is that living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood leads to, or compounds, disadvantage at the individual level. The question as to whether or not neighbourhood effects are real can therefore be summarised via the question of “whether it is worse to be poor in a poor area or in an area which is more socially mixed” (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2001, p. 2277). Despite the appearance of simplicity, this has proven to be a question that is extremely difficult to answer with any rigour (Bolt, Phillips and van Kempen, 2010; Blasius, Friedrichs and Galster, 2007; Galster 2010), and the debate is ongoing.

The question of whether or not disadvantaged individuals and families benefit from de-concentration is also complicated and contested. While there are many academic research papers on the topic (Athurson, 2002; Briggs, 2008; Cheshire, 2007; Darcy, 2010; Goering and Feins, 2008; Goetz, 2010; Imbroscio, 2008; Popkin, 2010), theoretical and ideological differences, significant variations between individual de-concentration projects, and diverging orientations and approaches to research and evaluation, make it difficult to draw any overarching conclusions.

Rather than become entangled in the complexity of these issues at the empirical level, I will focus here on Goetz’s logic model for de-concentration in the United States, which provides a framework for articulating these issues at a conceptual level. This model depicts the theoretical or hypothetical relationship between de-concentration activities and outputs, outcomes and impacts, for both individuals and communities (see Diagram I over page).

According to Goetz’s model, individuals relocated to ‘better’ (or relatively advantaged) neighbourhoods are expected to gain better access to education and employment, higher levels of safety, and increased social capital and social cohesion. This in turn is expected to result in increased income, health, and self-sufficiency, with reduced service needs and reduced youth delinquency.

On the community side, site improvements and a mixed-income population are expected to lead to reduced crime, new private investment, enhanced property values, improved public services and the elimination of concentrated poverty (and therefore the elimination of neighbourhood effects). This in turn is expected to result in greater stability and social cohesion, reduced social pathologies and service needs, and an increased tax-base.

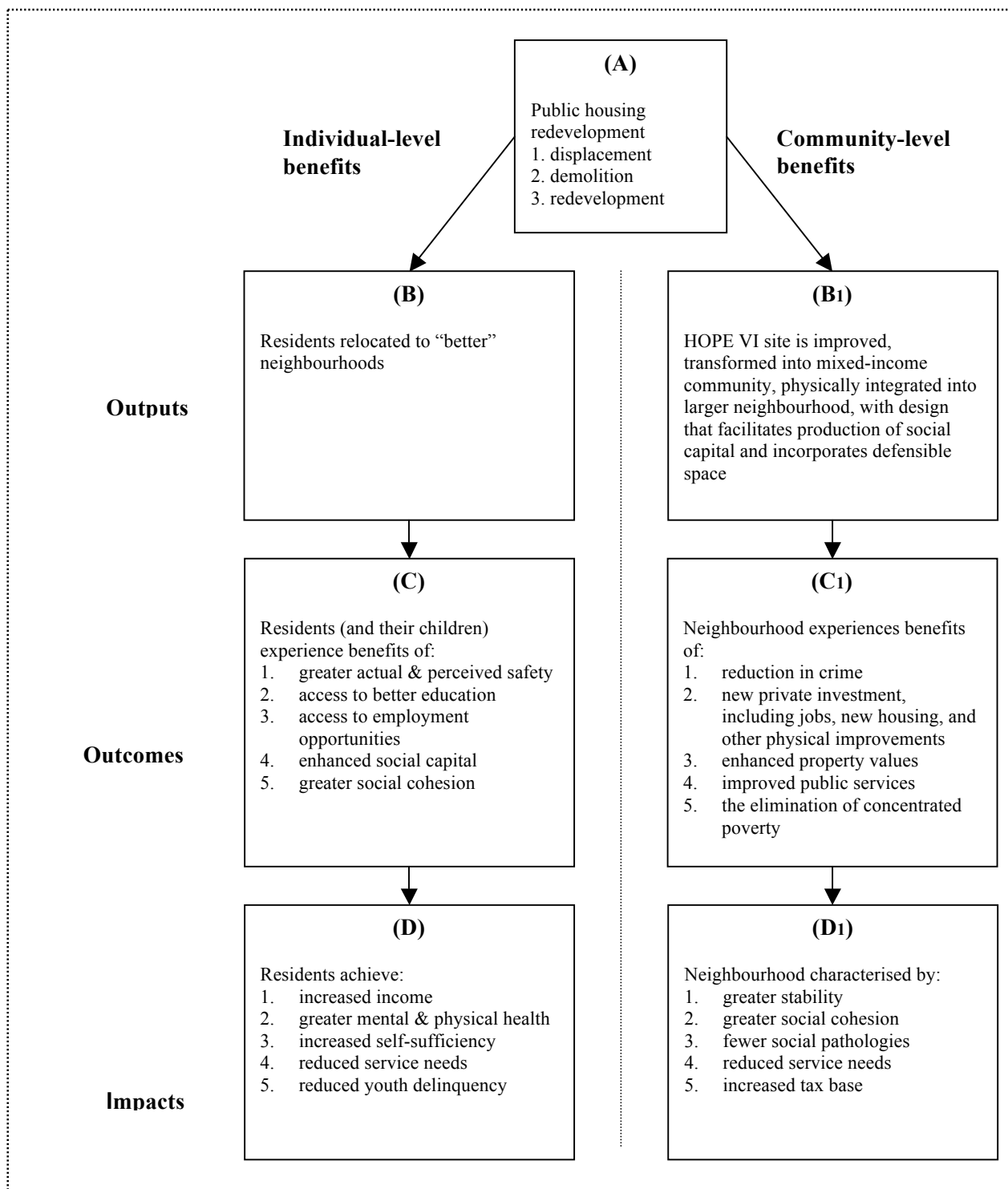


Diagram I: HOPE VI Logic Model, adapted from Goetz (2010, p. 144).

This model enables a diverse range of questions relating to the logic of de-concentration, and the assumptions embedded in the approach, to be examined. For example, it raises the question of what would constitute a 'better' neighbourhood. That is, what would be its characteristics, and what thresholds of difference might be expected?

However, perhaps the key use of the model is that it provides a tool that can be used to orient, contextualise and explain applied research findings. In particular, Goetz is able to use it to make a distinction between actively and passively realised benefits for individuals. That is, he explains that the benefits of increased safety and reduced social disorder can be enjoyed passively. If an individual moves to a location in which there is less crime and anti-social behaviour, they will experience this without the need for any particular action or change on their own part. However, benefits such as employment, social cohesion and school achievement are more complicated. For an individual to take up an employment opportunity requires them to possess and apply skills and motivation, have access to affordable childcare and transport if required, and assumes that they can and will compete with (and not be stigmatized relative to) their privately housed neighbours.

There are a number of ways of responding to Goetz's model and the issues it raises. One response is to treat de-concentration with scepticism due to its complexity, due to the uncovering of unstated assumptions, or due to the identification of poor outcomes in a particular project. An alternate response is to use models such as Goetz's to identify assumptions and issues that require unpacking and investigation, to identify ways in which responses can be made more comprehensive, and improved outcomes can be achieved for individuals and communities.

Alternate approaches to de-concentration research and evaluation

A review of de-concentration literature turns up much on the issue of neighbourhood effects, and on the outcomes of de-concentration for individuals and communities (both positive and negative). However, there is much less emphasis on addressing gaps in current models and approaches, or on developing best practice: what works; in what combination; in what context; via what delivery processes and mechanisms. Here I would like to tackle this perceived deficiency by articulating different approaches to evaluation, and by arguing for a greater focus on evaluative processes that lead to program improvement, as distinct from approaches that lead to 'worked', 'didn't work' or 'should be discontinued' sorts of conclusions.

There are many different approaches to conceptualising and describing evaluation. Two of the most common theories or approaches are summative and formative evaluation. Summative evaluation is primarily concerned with whether or not a program's objectives have been met, while formative evaluation is primarily concerned with how a program might be improved (Scriven, 2001, p. 27). Specific evaluations may of course address both of these issues, and others besides, though the distinction between the two approaches is an important one. As noted above, much of the current activity in the area of social mix is on whether or not social mix programs achieve their objectives, and on whether or not they are justified (broadly consistent with summative evaluation). Arguably this focus has resulted in insufficient attention being given to formative evaluation, with the result that opportunities for continuous learning and improvement are being missed.

One of the most well known advocates of formative evaluations is Lee Cronbach, an American evaluation theorist and educational psychologist. Cronbach claims that for both political and epistemological reasons, "assessing the impact of a fixed plan is not the best use of evaluation; improving plans and operations is a higher goal..." (Cronbach, 1982, p. xii). Cronbach recognises that government policies and programs are complex and involve multiple stakeholders, both inside and outside of government. As a consequence, they tend to weave together diverse interests, values and approaches; they are not 'pure', and should not be evaluated as though they are.

Owens and Rogers approach to evaluation

Rather than choose between summative and formative evaluation, Owens and Rogers (1999) articulate five conceptually distinct forms of evaluation, with different orientations and foci, to suit different stages in program development and delivery. These forms are Proactive, Clarificative, Interactive, Monitoring and Improvement.

Proactive Evaluation takes place before a program is designed and developed. It is intended to address such things as whether or not a program is needed, the issues to which the proposed program would respond, and what the findings of other research and evaluation exercises can contribute to the proposed program.

Clarificative Evaluation is concerned with clarifying the internal logic, structure and functioning of a program, and is therefore related to ‘program logic’ and ‘Log Frame’ models and approaches. It is intended to address issues relating to the underlying rationale for a program, the plausibility of the program, and the extent to which the project is amenable to monitoring and impact assessment.

Interactive Evaluation is primarily concerned with program improvement, and is therefore consistent with the more common concept of ‘formative evaluation’. Typical issues therefore include how well the program is being delivered and how it could be improved.

Monitoring Evaluation is concerned with performance, that is, with whether target populations are being reached, whether implementation is meeting benchmarks, and how current performance compares to previous performance. Given it is designed to be applied later in the program lifecycle to the forms discussed above, it is more concerned with finetuning than with improvements to internal logic (Clarificative Evaluation) or to larger scale improvements to delivery (Interactive Evaluation).

Finally, Impact Evaluation is concerned with the impacts or outcomes of the program. This includes such issues as whether states objectives have been achieved, what the unintended outcomes of the program are, and whether the program is considered to be cost effective. This is the approach that most closely resembles ‘summative evaluation’, and may be used to decide such things as whether to maintain a program, whether to replicate it elsewhere, or whether to terminate it.

Each of these forms of evaluation are summarised in the table below.

	1. Proactive	2. Clarificative	3. Interactive	4. Monitoring	5. Impact
Orientation	Synthesis	Clarification	Improvement	Justification/ finetuning	Justification/ accountability
State of program	None	Development	Development	Settled	Settled
Major focus	Program context	All elements	Delivery	Delivery/ outcomes	Delivery/ outcomes
Timing (vis-à-vis program delivery)	Before	During	During	During	After

Table i: Adapted from Owens and Rogers (1999, pp. 53-54).

Current research and evaluation relating to de-concentration is focused at either end of this spectrum; on what should happen (Proactive Evaluation) and on how it worked in practice (Impact Evaluation). I am calling for increased attention to what Owens and Rogers call Clarificative, Interactive and Monitoring forms of evaluation. This should not be interpreted as an argument against other forms. It is in part an argument for research and evaluation to span the breadth of program and project lifecycles, and partly an argument for research and evaluation that meets the needs of practitioners, not just policy/decision makers.

Strategic Projects Research Agenda

Strategic Projects Division of Housing NSW delivers holistic (people- and place-based) solutions that address both the symptoms and causes of disadvantage in large public housing estates exhibiting significant social problems. Its program for enacting its mission covers three key areas of work:

1. People Improving services and providing residents with new opportunities
2. Community Supporting the local community to build its strengths, skills and overall capacity.
3. Place Improving the housing and public areas and achieving better integration of social and private housing within the community.

In recognition of the lack of research and evaluation focused on program improvement, particularly in Australia, Strategic Projects is currently planning and conducting research initiatives in a number of locations.

In Minto, which is being renewed between 2002 and 2015, we are planning qualitative research into the needs and experiences of social housing residents living in a recently mixed community. This will include residents who remained on site during de-concentration, residents who were relocated elsewhere but subsequently returned, and social housing residents who are new to the area. This research is broadly consistent with Interactive Evaluation.

In Airds we are developing a comprehensive evaluation program covering people, community and place issues (as identified above). The approach is based on Clarificative Evaluation, in that the project (particularly the Strategic Social Plan) is being described and structured using logic models, to facilitate clear project management and to ensure that the project is amenable to monitoring and impact assessment during implementation.

The Bonnyrigg Estate is being renewed via a Public Private Partnership (PPP). The consortium undertaking the work has contracted the City Futures Research Centre at the University of New South Wales to conduct a longitudinal study, which will involve in-depth interviews and focus groups with a randomly selected panel of residents, over the life of the redevelopment. Issues to be covered include the impact of the project on: personal life/ wellbeing; family life; community life; and perceptions of Bonnyrigg. Findings will contribute to continuous improvement in Bonnyrigg itself, as well as contributing to a broader research base for future projects to draw on.

Cross-sectoral collaboration

While this internal research is important, it is clearly not sufficient. There is a need for much greater attention to be paid to research and evaluation targeted at program improvement, by academics, peak bodies and practitioners. This need not replace existing topics or approaches. Rather, it would ensure that improved practice and outcomes complement more summative oriented approaches and findings.

While operating much more at the practice (as opposed to theory and research) end of the spectrum, the Strategic Projects Living Communities Consultative Committee (LCCC) provides an excellent example here. For approximately five years Strategic Projects staff have met with representatives of peak organisations, and academics, to gain expert advice on the redevelopment projects they have been working on. This has not required that members reach agreement, nor that they defend each other. Rather, it has enabled full, frank and confidential exchange, with the aim of achieving the best outcomes possible for residents of public housing estates being redeveloped.

Housing NSW is also in the process of developing a collaborative relationship with the City Futures Research Centre at the University of New South Wales (UNSW). While each of the parties brings

different perspectives to the relationship, they both have much to gain from working collaboratively, and both share an interest in achieving the best outcomes possible for social housing residents.

Conclusion

New South Wales, along with other local and international housing authorities, faces significant problems with regard to its estates. While in hindsight the inappropriateness of the policies and plans that led to their development is clear, the problems associated with them defy simple and unanimously agreed solutions.

De-concentration is one of a number of approaches available for responding to issues on estates, and as might be expected with regard to a wicked problem, it is a contested one. However, this should not dissuade academics and others from conducting research and evaluation directed at improving its outcomes. The de-concentration of public housing estates provides an excellent opportunity for academics and other researchers to make a practical contribution to program implementation, in addition to their more theoretical work and summative approaches to evaluation. We both welcome and encourage inter-sectoral and inter-jurisdictional collaboration in this field.

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