



Never Stand Still

Faculty of Built Environment

City Futures Research Centre

Can tenant participation thrive in an increasingly pressurised social housing system?

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Presentation overview

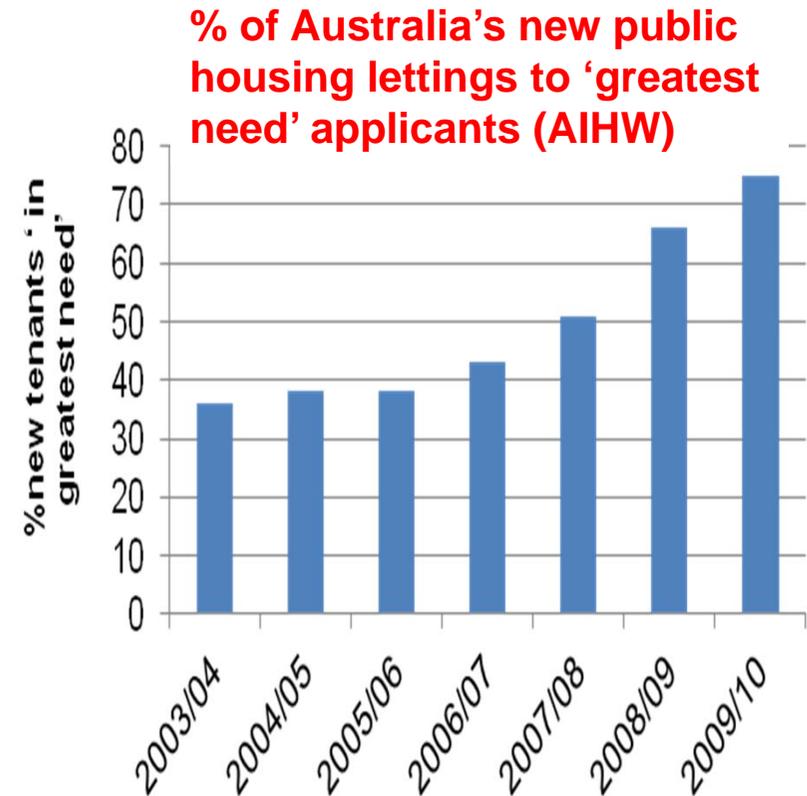
- Policy context
- Research methodology
- Research findings:
 - Defining and conceptualising tenant participation
 - Tenant participation structures
 - Tenant participation and tenant empowerment
 - Consumerist participation
 - Directions of travel on TP
- Conclusions



- Public participation associated with NPM governance model for public services, influential in Australia since 1990s
- Hierarchical *government* replaced by network *governance*
- PP or ‘civic engagement’ now widely mandated across many fields of government in Australia
- Social housing TP or ‘resident involvement’ prioritised in many countries. Heavily promoted in UK via regulation 1997-2010. Hence the striking judgement that:
 - *‘Involving tenants in running their homes is an accepted principle in social housing. Tenant involvement... is normal practice in a way it was not ten years ago’* (Tenant Services Authority/Audit Comm, 2010).

Social housing policy context

- Australia's social housing sector increasingly residualised with growing targeting towards disadvantage
- 'Democratisation' initiatives introduced during 1980s:
 - Legislative requirements – e.g. Housing Act 1983 (Victoria)
 - Stimulation of co-operative housing sector (especially in Victoria)
 - State govt funding for TP capacity building
- No strong policing of state housing on TP; little TP impetus via recent CHP regulation
- Community housing self-regulation through NHCS (1st edition 1998)



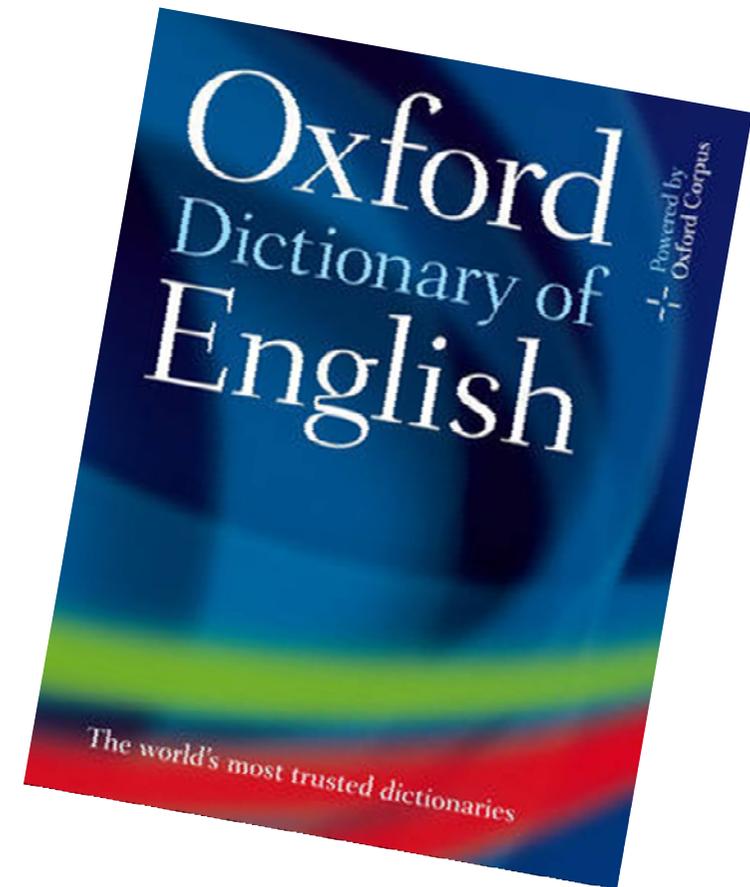
- Exploratory, small-scale study focused on NSW and Victoria
- Online survey of larger NSW & Vic CHPs (24 respondents cover 75% of all CHP stock)
- In-depth interviews (20) with key stakeholders/experts:
 - State housing managers
 - CHP managers
 - Tenant activists
 - Tenant advocacy organisations
 - Sector experts



Defining tenant participation

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- As defined for public housing in Victoria and in National Community Housing Standards (2010) TP emphasizes ‘feedback on services’
- Housing NSW concept of ‘tenant engagement’ partly relates to:
 - *consultation ... about policies and strategies that shape housing services’*
- but also includes:
 - *‘the [promotion of] tenants’ social and economic participation in their communities, particularly in areas of disadvantage and on estates’*
- In practice, ‘TP’ increasingly seen as about enhancing ‘participation’ in community activities
- More about social inclusion than inputting into landlord decision-making
- Distinction between ‘TP’ and community development becoming increasingly unclear

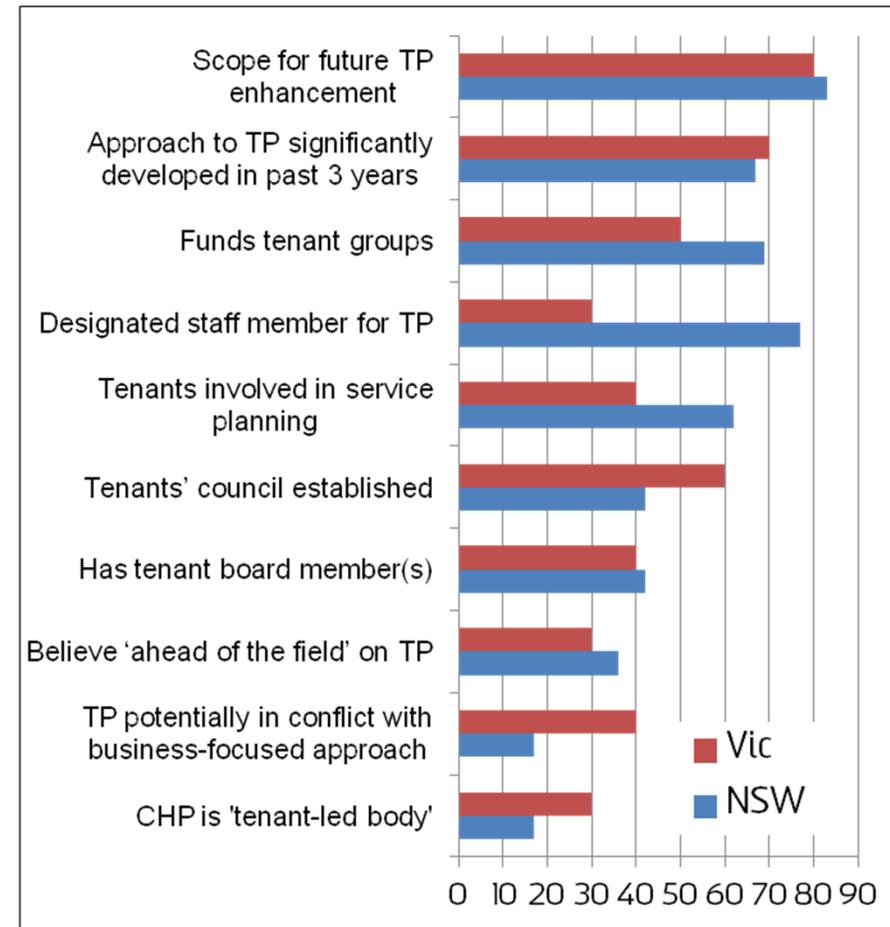


TP structures, practices and beliefs

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CHP survey results (% of respondents)

- TP structures long-established in public housing - Statewide/Regional/Estate-based
- In co-ops TP structurally 'hard-wired' through tenant membership
- Survey of larger CHPs in NSW and Vic - 24 landlords
- Similar patterns of results - e.g:
 - About 40% have TBMs
 - 40-60% have tenants council
 - Few claim 'tenant led' status
- Rapidly developing agenda
 - 60-70% recently modified approach
 - About 80% see scope for enhanced TP but only a third claim to be 'ahead of the game'



Information, consultation or empowerment?

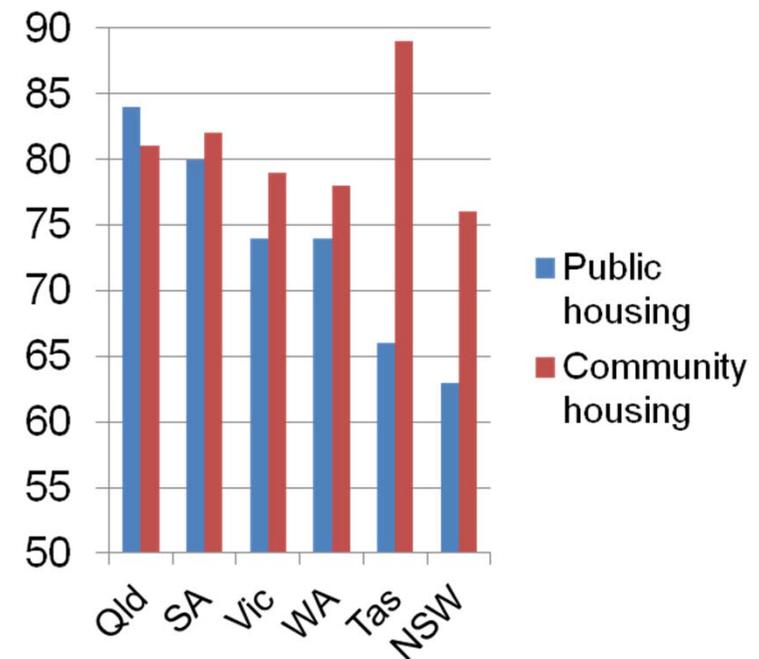
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- At state-wide level public housing TP largely amounts to 'information' but sometimes scope for tenant influence on 'technical issues'
- (Leaving aside co-ops) diversity in community housing on extent to which TP extends beyond 'consultation' (i.e. provider-set agenda)
- Sometimes scope for significant TP at estate level in public and community housing - e.g. on grounds maintenance or security issues
- Typically much more ambitious TP agenda in estate renewal setting - including capacity building
- State govts (and developers) motivated by need to maximise saleability of new homes in mixed tenure redevm't schemes

Consumerist participation

- Tenant empowerment potentially conceptualised in terms of 'choice' rather than 'voice'
- Recognition that tenant satisfaction ratings susceptible to perceived 'responsiveness' – not traditional TP ('voice') structures
- 'Consumerist' ethic – treating tenants 'as if they are customers' gaining traction especially in community housing
- Public housing managerial commitment to 'customer focused' service impeded by starvation of resources
- But also in conflict with embedded organisational culture:
 - *'It would be unusual to come across a staff member asking 'have I answered all your issues and is there anything else I can do for you today?'"* (State Government housing official)

% of tenants satisfied with overall landlord service, 2010 (AIHW)



Directions of travel on TP

- Other than in estate renewal context, public housing TP increasingly narrow and constrained
- Tenant empowerment challenges compounded by:
 - tightening financial austerity
 - the changing demographic of tenant population
 - perceived growing powerlessness of public housing
- Contention that fixed term tenancies inimical to TP: *'...the end of thirty years of efforts to induce consumer pressure in the English social housing sector'* (Bradley, 2011)
- Much more promising prospects in community housing – many CHPs eager for models/guidance
- But divergence between consumerist and citizenship agendas



- Collective forms of (mainstream) public housing TP gradually withering in NSW and Vic
- De-funding of TP agencies – as in Qld – only compounds trend
- Partial insulation of CHPs from Ministerial diktat provides more space for tenant empowerment than in public housing
- Social inclusion and consumerist dynamics generally more influential than citizenship/accountability aspirations – UK/European context different due to regulatory expectations
- In mainstream ‘social housing’ hard to claim that *‘involving tenants in running their homes’* is either *‘an accepted principle’* or *‘normal practice’* in Australia