Housing Theory Symposium 2011: Program

**DAY ONE: 17 March 2011**

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Some preliminary reflections on contemporary housing studies.
Keith Jacobs, University of Tasmania

In this paper, I consider the broad field of enquiry known as ‘housing studies’. I
begin with some preliminary reflections, noting how the dominant paradigm of policy-
orientated research continues to preclude more theoretically informed investigations
that draw on contemporary social theory. Some of the questions I explore include:
what scope is there for housing researchers to engage in more theoretically informed
scholarship? How can we challenge the determinate and bounded conceptualisation
of housing and instead advance understandings of housing that foreground the more
contingent and fluid aspects of the contemporary world? What are the most exciting
developments in contemporary social theory and how are they relevant for housing
studies?
I will address these questions in the context of the broad themes that will be
discussed in the symposium namely: mobility and migration; social mix, densification
and renewal; urban and housing futures. In the conclusion to the paper, I set out
what I consider to be the key challenges for housing researchers seeking to both
influence the policy-making process and advance more prescient understandings of
changes shaping contemporary society.

Immigrants and the Home

“You don’t waste”: The influence of historical and current social practices
on first and second generation migrants’ use of energy and water in the
home
Cecily Jane Maller, Yolande Strengers, College of Design and Social Context,
RMIT University

Despite policy, practice and academic interest in housing and sustainability, the
use of water and energy in private dwellings is still relatively unexplored and not
well understood. Adding to the diversity and complexity of household consumption
is the fact that one in four Australians are born overseas. This broad range of
cultural backgrounds and personal histories influences how households view and
make use of resources like energy and water in their home. Without deeper
understanding of how households use energy and water in their daily practices of
washing, cooking and cleaning, ‘one-size fits all’ responses to the housing related
aspects of climate change may not have the desired effect. Set in an urban
housing context, this paper aims to understand the conceptualisations and
domestic routines, habits and practices of a small number of first and second
generation migrant households in Melbourne and Sydney. The paper draws
specifically on 20 semi-structured interviews and household tours to investigate
and understand established migrants’ past experiences and how these translate
into current consumption practices. The purpose is to provide better insight into
current understandings and assumptions about the habits and routines of
Australian households and the implications for achieving sustainable housing.
Using social practice theory, we draw on theoretical and empirical developments in
consumption research. We find that the current practices of migrant households
are framed around a strong ethic of avoiding waste and making full use of
available resources; these findings implications for achieving sustainable housing.
By focusing on historical and current social practices across two generations framed by issues of housing design, we aim to inform theory building and discourses of energy and water use in multicultural, home ownership societies.

**Built form of housing in migrants’ settlement: Urban change in Melbourne**

*Iris Levin, Architecture, Building and Planning, Melbourne University*

The importance of housing in the process of migrants’ settlement and its influence on the urban form has not been adequately explored. The studies on this issue are scattered and appear randomly in various disciplines, and it seems that there is no comprehensive body of research addressing this topic. This paper will concentrate on this question as it has been revealed in literature from a number of disciplines and through different perspectives, both spatial social.

The paper will examine migrants’ alterations to their housing and their urban environment. It will analyse modifications made by migrants of their domestic space in order to trace the role of the built form of housing in the process of settling in a new country. It will also investigate the influence these modifications have on the urban environment surrounding the migrants’ domestic spaces. Two environments of migrants in Melbourne are investigated, representing two decades of migration (post World War II and the 1990s) and two different countries of origin (Italy and China). By studying housing types of two different groups of migrants and their importance in the migrants’ process of settlement, as well as their surrounding environments, the paper attempts to achieve a broader understanding of the role of the built form of housing in migrants’ settlement and integration in a new urban environment.

**Population growth and mobility**

**Motivating change in housing solutions**

*Steven Liaros, Newplan, Urban Planning Solutions*

The 2005 Sydney Metropolitan Strategy introduces its housing strategy by stating that an additional 640,000 homes will be required to house the extra 1.1million people that will be living in Sydney by 2031. This translates to a target of 25,600 homes per year over 25 years. According to the ABS, in the four years from 2006 to 2010, inclusive, 26,460 dwelling units were constructed in the Sydney Statistical Division. It essentially took four years to build the number of homes required each and every year.

In 2010, we are now expecting to cater for a population of 1.7million by 2036. The consequent argument is that the demand rate is increasing at the very time that the supply rate is falling, forcing up housing prices and reducing affordability. But are circumstances as dire as they have depicted? An additional 640,000 homes seems a large number to house 1.1million people. The Metro Strategy argues that the average dwelling occupancy rates are falling. The ageing population, increasing affluence and more single and young people living alone, all result in a trend to smaller households with the average number of occupants per household projected to fall from 2.65 to 2.36 persons by 2031.
In 1976 there were an average of three people per dwelling across Sydney. If strategies and incentives were implemented to achieve this number, the housing target for 2031 would be just 167,000 extra dwellings. This would equate to about 6,700 dwellings per year, close to the current rate of production. Complementary strategies should encourage seniors and young people living alone to take up alternative housing options. State policies for Seniors’ Living and Affordable Housing (Infill development) are a tentative first step. A similar housing form needs to be targeted to young professionals, with high quality but shared eating and cleaning facilities, perhaps included WI-FI access and other shared facilities, located in proximity to public transport and other shared infrastructure. The key to increasing economic efficiency, to improved sustainability, to greater social connection and cohesion, and to reduced costs of infrastructure provision, is to encourage the greater sharing of our assets.

Is there a case for a slow housing movement in a ‘big Australia’?
Wendy Steele, Urban Research Program/ Climate Change Response Program, Griffith University

In Australian cities the twin crisis of chronic housing shortage and poor housing affordability are further stressed by fluctuating national ambitions for a ‘big Australia’. The pressure to provide homes for the anticipated population growth by 2050 has an inevitable social cast as Australian housing systems struggle to respond to the existing challenges of urban change, climate change and the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). According to the National Housing Council State of Supply Report (2010, p.4) “as the population grows supply shortages will put pressure on prices, and low-income renters will be particularly adversely affected”. The report goes on to advance the case for significant supply side reform through streamlined development assessment processes (including more as-of-right development and code-based assessment) and removing barriers to new housing supply. The now all too familiar (neoliberal) reformist planning mantra is the need to get housing developments into the market quicker by reducing bureaucracy and regulatory processes so as to “speed up the time it takes to bring new homes on to the market” (Plibersek, 2010, p.1). But is this (as is often portrayed) the only option available? Drawing on theoretical insights from alternative movements such as ‘slow food’ and ‘slow cities’, and empirical work on efforts to speed up and streamline housing processes in Queensland under the Integrated Planning Act 1997 (IPA), this paper critically explores the counter-intuitive case for a ‘slow housing movement’ in Australia. The paper concludes by emphasizing the role of housing theory as a means by which to creatively challenge and inform the policy and practice status quo in order to further more socially just and sustainable urban outcomes.

We have enough housing: Accommodating population growth through increased utilisation of the existing housing stock
Andrew Wilkinson, WA Treasury, School of Urban and Regional Planning, Curtin University

Many organisations have calculated that Australia is suffering from a housing
shortage, due to the immigration led surge in population growth over recent years, coupled with flat new dwelling completions. The quantitative assessments that support this conclusion are based on underlying demand methodologies.

This paper will provide an alternative analysis of the adequacy of the current national housing stock, leading to the conclusion that the existence of a national housing shortage is overstated. It will focus on total demand and supply for housing, as opposed to underlying demand methodologies which are based growth on annual growth in underlying demand and supply. This alternative approach is valid as annual growth in housing demand and supply typically only represents between 2-3% of the total market.

The paper will provide an analysis of historical data, showing the long term increase in the average size of dwellings (in terms of floor space and number of bedrooms), coupled with a long term decrease in the average number of people per household. This will allow the paper to demonstrate that recent and future population growth can continue to be accommodated within the existing national housing stock through relatively minor adjustments in these long term trends.

As increasing estimates of the housing shortage have not been accompanied by commensurate increases in the homeless population, this also demonstrates that recent population growth has been accommodated through increased utilisation of the existing housing stock. The author anticipates that the average number of occupants per household could increase marginally in the 2011 census, but that this would be fairly insignificant compared to the long term fall in the average number of occupants per dwelling over previous decades.

‘Moving home’: a governmentality approach to mobility, housing and urban change

Rae Dufty, University of Western Sydney

The connections between urban change and mobility have been an ongoing, and remain a contemporary, concern for academics and policy makers alike. This concern takes two key forms. First, where people locate themselves in urban spaces has significant impacts on the sustainability of urban communities (economically, socially and environmentally). Challenges such as climate change and expanding urban peripheries mean that the way in which we move through and in urban spaces is being radically rethought. Second, mobility should also be understood to be a key technology of urban change available to policy makers to adjust to social, economic and environmental challenges. Situated within this nexus of mobility and urban change is the role of housing. The home is often the starting and finishing point of journeys through urban spaces. Similarly, housing is a fundamental tool in the policy-kits of Governments that seek to produce certain types of mobilities within urban spaces. This paper reviews th existing literature on the issue of mobility, urban change and housing and positions governmentality theory as offering a unique means of adopting a critical approach to how mobility, urban change and housing is constructed within policy contexts.
Social Housing & Social Mix

Social mix and Melbourne’s Carlton Wall
Kate Shaw, Architecture Building and Planning, Melbourne University

The expansion of the community housing sector in Australia means that the dwindling State-managed stock is becoming ever more ‘residual’, receiving only those tenants with the highest and most complex needs. While most housing associations can cherry-pick their tenants, the States retain responsibility for the increasingly stigmatised public housing estates. The Victorian government is responding with redevelopment programs in public-private partnership, designed to produce a ‘social mix’ of public, community and private housing. The Kensington estate in inner-Melbourne has undergone this process and a second, in Carlton, has commenced. Both projects were engaged in debates over whether the social mix should be of a ‘salt and pepper’ variety (private and public apartments side by side) or ‘layer cake’ (floor by floor) before a ‘block by block’ approach (separate buildings) was decided on. The Carlton project is taking this approach further, with a fully private housing estate and garden being built within the development, separated from the public housing by a 1.8 metre wall. This paper will outline the process that led to this design, discuss its implications for the redevelopment program, and consider the situation the States are in after decades of neglect of Australia’s disadvantaged.

Kristian Ruming, Department of Environment and Geography, Macquarie University

In February 2009 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd introduced the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan (NBESP). In the face of the ‘global financial crisis’ the NBESP is a two year, $42 billion plan seeking to ‘support jobs and invest in the long term growth of the Australian economy” (COA, 2009: 7). The NBESP introduced a suite of programs including cash payments to families, taxes breaks for small businesses, significant investment in education, housing and transport/infrastructure. Under the NBESP, $6 billion over two years would be allocated to the construction of 20,000 social housing dwellings across Australia. An additional $400 million would be provided for repairs and maintenance of existing social housing dwellings (COA, 2009: 11). Given the time lag associated with new residential construction, funds allocated to the construction of new social housing stock is budgeted to continue in to the financial year 2011/12 (two years beyond the original two year plan) as building works are completed (COA, 2009: 31).

While the increased funds allocated to social housing constructed has been widely applauded by many associated with the provision of social housing (ACOSS, 2009), a series of local conflicts have arisen. Principally, these conflicts have arisen at the sites of new social hosing development, as local communities react to not only the construction of social housing, but an associated lack of opportunities to comment on development applications and loss of subsequent appeal rights. This resistance arises from the fact that assessment of applications/developments funded by the NBESP rest with the State government, not with local councils which under normal
circumstances retain approval authority. This paper explores the issues and concerns of local communities (local residents, council staff, elected councillors, community groups) in areas targeted for new social housing development funded by the NBESP.

**Urban utopias**

*Gerotopia, risk and ‘the good life’: Housing for an ageing population*
*Caryl Bosman, Griffith University, Griffith School of Environment*

Baby Boomers constitute a significant and growing percentage of the population and as they enter retirement their lifestyle preferences are beginning to have substantial impacts on Australian housing landscapes: on the demand for and supply of housing that caters for the specific needs of this cohort. Understanding how these impacts are produced, managed and sustained is imperative to ensure resilient residential landscapes, especially in the current political, environmental, social and economic climates.

This paper focuses on the impacts Baby Boomers are having on the housing landscapes of the Gold Coast City and in particular the emergence of Active Adult Lifestyle Communities (AALCs). The marketing of these communities mobilise specific ideas of ‘the good life’ and is based largely on discourses of risk minimisation. To understand the social, political and economic impacts of AALCs the theoretical framework / analytical lens links socio-cultural understandings of risk and concepts of ‘the good life’. The paper will investigate the economic imperatives driving this new form of residential development, the marketing discourses that sell them and the lived experiences of those who buy into them.

This paper highlights the transformations that the aging population is beginning to have on Australian housing landscapes. It also recognises theories of risk as a means to understand these changes.

*Is suburbia really as good as it gets? The ever changing state of debate about housing, planning and suburbia*
*Paul Burton, Urban Research Program, Griffith University*

Australia is often described as one of the most urbanised countries in the world, whereas the majority of its ‘urban’ population actually live in relatively low density residential suburbs. These areas are denigrated by some and lauded by others. For some, suburbia epitomises a privatised, consumption-focused lifestyle in which a variety of anti-social habits are encouraged and exemplified: architectural ostentation, wasteful energy use, social exclusion of ‘others’ and cultural shallowness. For others, suburban residential patterns reflect the type of place that most of us choose to live in and are happy to live in, striking the right balance between privacy and sociability and offering important opportunities for more sustainable living in a carbon constrained future. This polarisation of views is clearly evident among urban scholars as well as among urban policy makers and practitioners. It is probably also evident among the population at large.

This paper critically reviews the changing state of academic debate about the nature, form and prospects for suburban living in Australia and beyond. This historic
analysis allows us to consider the factors shaping the debate and to explore the
relationship between academic debate and developments in the parallel universe of
housing policy and practice.
The paper concludes by reflecting critically on more widespread debates about the
role of planning in the construction of ideal urban forms and the prospects of
effective state intervention in processes of capitalist urban development.

Urban Renewal

Critical Realism: philosophy or methodology
Bernadette Pinnell, City Futures Research Centre

The purpose of this paper is to outline the philosophical and methodological basis of
critical realist evaluation and highlight how research inspired by a critical realist
approach and mode of reasoning can promote a more comprehensive appreciation
of the complexity of social interventions in urban renewal projects.

“The efficacy of a social intervention depends on how well its ideas are
received… not only in the minds of the individual subjects but also in the inter-
relationships, institutions and the wider society” as illustrated in figure 4.
(Pawson 2006:59)

It presents a view that acknowledges that interventions by their nature are inserted
into pre existing conditions, therefore the existing macro and micro contextual
constraints need to be identified as a starting point in evaluating the intervention.
These may be individual, institutional or structural characteristics.

It is not without its critics who believe that critical realism is a philosophy with limited
practical application and that realist philosophers are almost exclusively concerned
with further refinement of their philosophical positions, at the expense of the actual
ways in which realist philosophy can be practised (Pratt, 1995). However there is a
growing body of literature across disciplines health, geography, housing that have
adapted critical realism into evaluations on the basis that realist evaluation is about
explanation, theory testing and refinement of knowledge.
This research offers a new paradigm for evaluation that starts with the policy and
rationale for the intervention and works back to uncover the ontological and
epistemological assumptions behind the intervention to reveal their effects, in doing
so it is hoped that by linking various levels of explanation this research transcends
the divide between a top down and a bottom up approach. This pursuit of knowledge
is important in the current political pursuit of information on ‘what works’ and the
growth in evidence based policy in Australia.
Maintenance of the public realm in the face of rapid inner city densification
Peter Walters, Rod McCrea, School of Social Science, The University of Queensland

In this paper, we use data from forty interviews with residents of West End, an inner city suburb of Brisbane, Australia, to explore opposition to the rapid densification of the area under Brisbane City Council’s inner urban renewal project, the River City Blueprint. Rather than focus on resistance to these plans as expressed in terms of threats to everyday amenity, such as traffic, parking, overcrowding, noise and overshadowing; our attention is focused on participants’ concerns about threats to what they see as a unique community. This is not the defensive communitarian variety of community but, rather, what residents perceive as an inner city community of diversity and tolerance, played out in a strong public realm with a tangible commons. It is the preservation of this public realm that will be explored in this paper, using residents’ own suggestions of how high density development might undermine it, but also how such development might proceed in a more sympathetic way against the backdrop of developer and planning interests in this illustrative inner city suburb.

Better understanding residents’ perceived opportunities and threats from urban consolidation on their residential liveability: A tale of two suburbs
Rod McCrea, Peter Walters, School of Social Science, The University of Queensland

This paper develops a scale for measuring perceived opportunities and threats from urban densification (POPTHUD) for residential quality of life. Urban densification is commonly employed to manage rapidly growing urban populations such as that occurring in the study area in this research: Brisbane, Australia. Resident and community responses to urban densification plans for their local area made are likely to be unrepresentative of the local area population as well as biased toward perceived threats from urban densification because residents and groups with particular threatened interests are more likely to actively represent their views to planners, councils and the media. This paper develops a reliable and valid measure of perceived opportunities and threats from urban densification that can administered by survey to a representative sample of local residents before, during and/or after urban densification. This provides a valuable tool for urban researchers, policy makers, and planners for measuring the perceived impacts of urban densification on various dimensions of residential quality of life; for better informed and earlier planning decisions; and for refining and targeting community consultation processes for particular local areas undergoing urban densification.

Old houses in the city: concepts and challenges
Ilan Wiesel, City Futures Research Centre, University of NSW

Old houses are a cultural icon and a dominant feature of many cities. In poetic references the old house carries deep symbolic meanings about darker or greener ages in the past; in its more prosaic form, the old house is often a subject of complaints about the mundane challenges of living in or next to it, the inconvenience
and inappropriateness of older designs, the rotting of material and the costs and endless efforts of maintenance. Despite their centrality in popular culture and their visible presence in cities, as an academic subject of analysis the concept of ‘old houses’ may seem, at first glance, a generalisation too broad to be useful. Old is a relative term, and the ages of houses in the city vary. The major question addressed in this paper is, therefore, how to define old houses. In addressing this question, the paper explores a number of relevant concepts and theories, in particular social constructionism, actor network theory and post-structuralism. Further, the paper demonstrates the central yet dual role played by old houses in urban processes, raising and discussing a number of additional questions: where in the city are old houses located? Who lives in old houses? What is the experience of living in old houses? What role do old houses play in cycles of urban decline and renewal?