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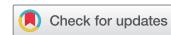
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ABSTRACT

Social mix is a widely used component of urban housing policy in post-welfare states. Problematizing homogenous areas of disadvantage, social mix policies purportedly aspire to increase socioeconomic diversity within defined areas. In Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, a major program of public housing renewal has been underway since the early 2000s, justified by a social mix agenda. This paper investigates the discursive and scalar mechanisms used to justify and advance this policy scheme. First, the paper examines the discursive framing of social mix, demonstrating how this conceals both the commercial real estate drivers and continued government withdrawal from public housing. We then quantify the social mix outcomes of redevelopment, showing that estate renewal actually decreases mix at the neighborhood scale. In the midst of a serious housing crisis in Melbourne, the paper questions the purported social goals of public housing estate renewal and contributes to ongoing debates about social mix and public housing.

Introduction

Despite its reputation as “an intrinsically vague, slippery term” (Galster, 2013, p. 308), social mix has become a widely deployed housing policy tool (Lees, 2008; Rose et al., 2013). Founded on the problematization of homogenous areas of poverty and disadvantage through the neighborhood effects thesis, social mix policies purportedly aspire to increase socioeconomic diversity within defined areas. Such policies are commonly advanced through urban renewal programs that target disadvantaged populations, in particular public housing estates. The underlying assumption is that public housing estates are ghettos of disadvantage, and that by living in proximity to private owners and higher income earners public housing tenants will experience upward mobility. The policy fix breaks up existing communities seen as disadvantaged and intentionally introduces private tenures to housing estates to create more “mixed” communities. Despite an abundance of studies demonstrating that this approach is “largely unsupported by the research evidence” (Briccoli & Cucca, 2014, p. 80; see also Atkinson, 2005, 2006), such policies continue to be advanced in cities around the world.

Melbourne, Australia is no exception to this trend, where social mix is central to public housing estate regeneration schemes. In Australia, social housing is an umbrella term that includes both public and community housing (Legal and Social Issues Committee [LSIC], 2018): public housing is exclusively owned and managed by the state; community housing is owned and/or managed by nonprofit non-government housing associations. The regeneration approach widely used in Australia adopts a public-private partnership model that not only sells the public land to fund the redevelopment (Arthurson et al., 2015) but also transfers low-income housing from the public sector to community housing organizations (CHOs). Public housing estate renewal has been underway in Melbourne since the early 2000s, piloted in two large redevelopments at Kensington (2001–2012) and Carlton (2006–present). Kensington and Carlton have paved the way for a more extensive social mix-led renewal strategy, the Victorian



government's Public Housing Renewal Program (PHRP), which will redevelop 11 inner-city public housing estates with a mix of private and social housing. The official justification for the PHRP is characterized by two common discourses: that residents' homes and therefore lives are stigmatized and in a state of disrepair; and that the estates are ghettos of disadvantage. Social mix is an explicit policy aim of the PHRP and achieving that mix involves the displacement of low-income residents and introduction of higher-income residents to each site (Kelly & Porter, 2019).

In this paper, we critically examine this renewal agenda and its potential consequences for actually delivering the social mix it purportedly seeks. We focus on four inner-Melbourne public housing estates: Kensington and Carlton as the precursors to the PHRP, and North Melbourne and Northcote, two of the first estates being redeveloped under the PHRP. We find that the policy rationale relies on mischievously deployed narratives that obscure decades of strategic disinvestment and quietly advance the displacement of low-income people from inner-city neighborhoods. This is achieved by situating the social mix aspiration to the site scale, rather than the more appropriate neighborhood scale, and by discursively framing public housing estates as derelict and dysfunctional, with social mix-led renewal as the necessary solution. To examine the social mix claims made by the policy program, we "step inside" the site-scale policy framing and model the extent to which the proposed renewal would actually achieve its purported aims if taken on its own terms. We find that redevelopment results in a weakening of diversity and social mix and intensifies the class restructuring of inner Melbourne.

In the next section, we critically examine the concept of social mix, its underlying assumptions and its deployment as a tool in housing policy around the world. We then provide an overview of the public housing context in Melbourne and Australia and the methods used. The findings and discussion are set out in two main sections: the first critically examines the discursive deployment of social mix, and the second measures the actual or likely social mix outcomes.

Social mix: Roots and contours of a problematic concept

Social mix is rooted in class warfare and ideals of the privileged (Sarkissian, 1976). Often presented as a utopian aspiration, born from the principle that neighborhoods should reflect the socioeconomic diversity of broader society (Ziersch et al., 2018), diversity is conceived either broadly, such as Galster and Friedrichs' (2015, p. 176) definition as "a combination of diverse shares of social groups in a neighborhood"; or in relation to specific sociodemographic indicators such as housing tenure, age, ethnicity, class and income (see Arthurson, 2010; Morris et al., 2012).

By facilitating mix, poor communities will, in theory, share in the resources of other more affluent groups, reducing class-based and racial anxiety. The idea was central to early colonial socio-spatial arrangements in Australia, although at the exclusion of Indigenous peoples, who were profoundly segregated and excluded using a raft of racist policy and regulatory tools.

Contemporary applications of social mix are grounded in the neighborhood effects thesis, which states that concentrations of disadvantage exacerbate negative social outcomes because such concentrations compound that disadvantage (Morris et al., 2012). Social mix is advanced as a policy fix to this problem (Galster & Friedrichs, 2015). Internationally, the idea of neighborhood effects has been repeatedly challenged (Manley et al., 2012; Tyler & Slater, 2018; Watt & Smets, 2017). Central to these critiques is concern at the moralizing agenda of "role modelling via propinquity . . . as a means of changing the behavior of social housing residents" (Doney et al., 2013, p. 404) through a normalizing process whereby attitudes, actions, values and beliefs of middle-class people transfer via proximity. Such narratives assert that public housing residents might remedy their disadvantage by forming new relations to the social norms of more advantaged populations, thereby reconstituting systemic disadvantage as individual responsibility.

By locating different socioeconomic classes in closer proximity, proponents also argue that this creates the conditions for interaction between classes—also known as social mixing. Shaw et al. (2013, p. 79) define *social mixing* as "encounters that are more meaningful than simply passing in

corridors.” This kind of interaction is the mechanism by which positive neighborhood effects, such as increased employment opportunities and social capital, can be actualized (Groenhart, 2013; Kearns & Mason, 2007). Recent empirical research, however, observes social interactions between ethnically and economically diverse residents as being “limited to . . . neither positive nor negative interactions” (Bektaş & Taşan-Kok, 2020, p. 1). While some research does demonstrate that positive intra-group interactions may reduce the level of stigma higher-income residents project onto social housing residents (Raynor et al., 2020), a refined focus on race and ethnicity within social mix scenarios directly questions whether social interaction can meaningfully unfold when the terrain of interaction is determined by dominant, whiter tenures (Mele, 2019; Ruiz-Tagle, 2016; Schuermans et al., 2016). Indeed, the framing of interaction, mixing and mix within the housing policy and research paradigm can reveal divergent, conflicting and complicit understandings of socio-spatial relations.

The inherent slipperiness in the concept of social mix that Galster (2013) identified is revealed in the different ways social mix comes to be applied. Tunstall and Fenton (2006) and Kleinhans (2004) illuminate three areas where this slippage in definition takes place: composition, concentration and scale. *Composition* concerns the characteristics of social groups that make up socially mixed populations. It implicitly refers to class or socioeconomic status through the specific metrics of income and tenure, though there is wide variation in application. Considerable debate in the literature exists about the extent to which crude categories such as tenure can adequately represent the diversity notionally sought through social mix. Nonetheless, tenure mix has become a primary policy tool for advancing social mix programs, as is the case in the PHRP, perhaps because it is one of the few levers available to operationalize social mix by deliberately bringing wealthier residents to low-income areas such as social housing estates. The mix of tenures is presumed to deliver a range of social goods including “inclusive” and “sustainable” communities (see Bricocoli & Cucca, 2014; Morris et al., 2012; Ziersch et al., 2018). However, research finds considerable ambiguity in the results of social mix and a complete absence of correlation between tenure mix and social outcomes in multiple public housing redevelopments in the U.S., UK and Europe (Arbaci, 2007; Graham et al., 2009), particularly the HOPE VI program in the U.S. which resulted in wide-scale resident displacement (Goetz, 2013) and the dilution of community organization (Tach, 2009).

Concentration refers to the ratio of social mix implemented; in other words, the proportion of different population groups in relation to each other. Morris et al. (2012) note that there is no consensus around an ideal ratio. The discursive operation of concentration, however, is always deployed as a means of deconcentrating disadvantage, marked as socio-economic status and often overtly targets ethnic and racial mix (Bolt et al., 2010). Social mix is fundamentally about deconcentration and is always explicitly concerned with dispersing poverty and notably never with deconcentrating affluence (see for example, Kearns & Mason, 2007). In addition, it disproportionately impacts racially targeted groups (Somerville & Steele, 2002).

Scale refers to the spatial boundaries for measurement of social mix. It is perhaps the most slippery in conceptualizing social mix, in part due to the ambiguity around sites and methods of evaluating where mix is achieved (Arthurson, 2010). Given that the roots of social mix lie in the neighborhood effects thesis, the neighborhood is surely an important scale at which to consider or measure the potential impacts of social mix policies (Galster & Friedrichs, 2015). The neighborhood is the scale that organizes and represents people’s sense of place or belonging, the scale at which everyday life is largely lived, and the scale of local service delivery (Manley et al., 2012; Ruming et al., 2004). However, the neighborhood is itself a concept that defies singular definition (Kearns & Parkinson, 2001). Experiences of a neighborhood are radically diverse (see Ruming et al., 2004), and so its deployment as a term and scale of analysis deserves sustained critique. As Atkinson (2005) demonstrates, the factors mediating individual or household outcomes are extremely complex and cannot be reduced either to tenure status, or to the level of neighborhood social mix, given the wider structural issues at play.

We do not wish to advance a thesis that the neighborhood scale “solves” the social mix problem, for as we will demonstrate here, the framing of social mix is inherently problematic in itself. However, it is clear that the importance of neighborhoods in creating the conditions for social



mixing would suggest it is a far more useful scale at which to consider and apply social mix than the individual site or building (see Costarello et al., 2019). Whilst projects may concentrate on the renewal of smaller sites, larger scales are preferred to evaluate social mix in the “wider tenure form pattern of the city, across different scales” (Wimark et al., 2020, p. 215). Indeed, a policy brief produced by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) titled *Public housing renewal and social mix* asserts that “The spatial scale for any consideration of social mix is the neighborhood (4,000–8,000 people), not small-scale public housing developments or individual apartment blocks” (AHURI, 2020, para. 11). Even at the lower end of 4,000 people, this definition is considerably larger in scale than the Northcote and North Melbourne estates, which contained 87 and 112 dwellings respectively.

Despite these slippery categories and little evidence that social mix achieves its stated objectives, the concept has been advanced through a range of diverse instruments including new build construction, inclusionary housing policies, de-ghettoization practices, ethnic quotas, and large-scale urban renewal, especially of social housing estates (see Bolt et al., 2010; Bridge et al., 2012; Holmqvist & Bergsten, 2009; Lupton & Fuller, 2009; Münch, 2009; Musterd & Ostendorf, 2008). Indeed, social mix policies have been shown to catalyze economic and social exclusion (Shaw & Hagemans, 2015) such that Groenhart (2013, p. 97) argues social mix is “gentrification rebranded as a public policy tool.”

Social mix-led renewal in Australia

In the Australian context, social mix “is firmly implanted as an assumed policy fix for social exclusion” (Doney et al., 2013, p. 15), carrying the strong patronizing presumptions of aspiration and betterment from its policy forbears in UK housing policy and obscuring the structural logics that result in impoverished environments and poor services. As a nation of homeowners, bred from a violent settler-colonial structure that uses settler creation of private property to legitimize the perpetual dispossession of Indigenous lands, private property ownership is held as a pinnacle of social achievement. Public housing is a thoroughly residualized welfare-net form of housing that has always been stereotyped as disadvantaged (Ruming, 2015).

The policy orthodoxy this breeds is that proximity to poverty leads to the entrenchment of disadvantage over time. For example, Australia’s primary housing governance instrument negotiated between the federal and state governments, the National Affordable Housing Agreement, states an aspiration to create “mixed communities that promote social and economic opportunities by reducing concentrations of disadvantage that exist in some social housing estates” (COAG, 2007, p. 7; as cited in Pawson & Pinnegar, 2018, p. 315). This policy document provides a national justification for the restructuring of urban neighborhoods identified as having a concentration of disadvantage by displacing existing residents to enable wealthier residents to take their place.

This replacement process is advanced through tenure restructuring via the “renewal” of public housing estates. The aspiration is that redeveloped estates will have a social-private tenure ratio of approximately 30:70. Examples include the Bonnyrigg, One Minto and Airds Bradbury estates in New South Wales (NSW) and the Carlton estate in Victoria. While this tenure mix ratio has been the default policy of many redevelopment agents in Australia, the formula lacks any strong basis in evidence (Pawson & Pinnegar, 2018, p. 317). Indeed, the evidence points to real estate viability as the key driver, where the 30:70 ratio secures the best rate of return for commercial investment (Kelly & Porter, 2019).

The Public Housing Renewal Program has arrived in the midst of a crisis in the public housing sector in Victoria (Victorian Auditor-General’s Office [VAGO], 2017). Nationally, the social housing system “fails to decently and affordably accommodate people on low incomes or facing other forms of disadvantage,” as a direct result of long-term underfunding and neglect from policy makers (Flanagan et al., 2019, p. 2). As a proportion of overall stock, public housing in Victoria has been declining since the early 1990s and is currently around 2.5% of stock. This is in part

because public housing is being transferred, in title and/or management, to CHO^s. CHO stock portfolios have been expanding year-on-year while the total amount of public housing in Victoria has declined (Productivity Commission, 2019). Meanwhile, the waitlist for low-income housing continues to grow unabated. Victoria has the worst-performing public housing sector nationally, prompting two audits since 2012 by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO). The most recent audit found a lack of long-term vision and a strategy for public housing that is "disjointed, poorly communicated and lacking in a comprehensive understanding of asset performance" (VAGO, 2017, p. viii). To date, the Victorian public housing system still has no asset management strategy or ongoing property condition assessment framework and has an endemic restriction on the flow of information.

In response, redevelopment of public housing estates has become a policy mainstay. The Kensington Estate was the first mixed-tenure estate renewal in Victoria, with works commencing in 2002. It was completed in 2012 and piloted the model where public land is sold to a developer to fund the redevelopment (Shaw et al., 2013). The redevelopment resulted in 453 social housing dwellings and 497 private dwellings, with a social-private ratio of 48:52 (DHHS, 2018a, p. 39). Victoria's second major mixed-tenure renewal, and its largest public-private-partnership (PPP) redevelopment project to date, was the Carlton Estate Redevelopment Project. Commenced in 2009, this nine-stage project concluded in 2020, with most stages completed between 2011 and 2015 (DHHS, 2018b). Comprising three sites across Carlton, the project delivered 246 public and roughly 800 private units, resulting in a social-private housing ratio of approximately 24:76 (LSIC, 2018). While Kensington employed the "pepper-potting" approach, where different tenures are distributed within the same building, Carlton employs a "block-by-block" approach, where each building is comprised solely of one tenure.

The latest advancement of public housing renewal in Victoria is the Public Housing Renewal Program (PHRP). Targeting nine estates across inner and middle-suburban Melbourne (plus two more funded under a different scheme, making 11 in total), each estate will be decanted, demolished and rebuilt through a PPP approach with a mix of social and private dwellings (LSIC, 2018). In 2018, it was announced that estates Northcote, and North Melbourne would be in the first tranche for renewal with the announcement of a partnership between private developer MAB Corporation and CHO HousingFirst (VHHSBA, 2018). A key departure from the Kensington and Carlton model was that the newly constructed social housing will be owned and/or managed by a CHO rather than the state, meaning there will no longer be any public housing on the sites (LSIC, 2018). As of March 2021, all residents at these estates have been relocated and demolition is now complete.

Methodology

The research utilized a case study approach with both qualitative and quantitative methods to address different dimensions of social mix-led renewal. Our four case study sites are Kensington and Carlton—the two mixed-tenure renewal projects to have occurred in Melbourne prior to the PHRP—and Northcote and North Melbourne, the first estates set to be renewed through the PHRP (VHHSBA, 2019a, 2019b) (Figure 1). We position Kensington and Carlton as key policy piloting sites, and Northcote and North Melbourne as sites where renewal policy undergoes refinement. All four are inner-Melbourne public housing estates with a similar number of dwellings, renewed by the state government using a mixed-tenure PPP model providing a strong basis for comparison.

Social forces such as economic and institutional power shape patterns of language use (Johnston, 2017) and this has been shown to be consequential for the stigmatization of public tenants through housing policy in Australia (Ruming, 2015). Given that there is remarkably little evidence used to apply social mix concepts, much of the meaning and momentum of large-scale renewal projects is driven by how government frames the policy interventions.

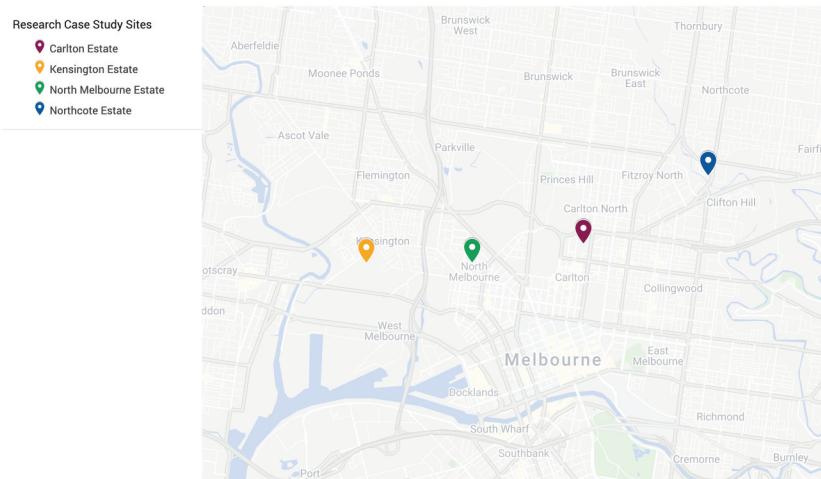


Figure 1. Case study sites.

We therefore used a discourse analysis to interrogate the corpus of policy documentation supporting and organizing estate renewal at these sites. A total of 19 documents were analyzed, including press releases, site master plans, community pamphlets, legislative reports, parliamentary debates and background feasibility studies commissioned by government. This comprised of three steps: firstly, key claims made by the government in relation to social mix were extracted and the assumption underpinning each claim identified. Claims were then compared to existing literature to determine whether they are grounded in any known evidence. Finally, we investigated patterns in language used to describe public housing tenants and the benefits of renewal or social mix, with a focus on mention of spatial scale. Our analysis sought to understand how the concept of social mix is operationalized in the PHRP, at what scale and with what evidence in support.

As discussed earlier, we are critical of the use of crude quantitative indicators, such as tenure, to drive social mix-led renewal. At the same time, there is little evaluation undertaken of the outcomes of estate renewal, with the exception of insightful qualitative evaluations (Arthurson, 2010; Hulse et al., 2004; Jama & Shaw, 2017; Shaw et al., 2013). Given the weight placed by policy proponents on achieving statistically articulated ratios of tenure mix, the lack of any evaluation based on these criteria is important to address. Therefore, for the second stage of our research we stepped “inside the frame” of the social mix agenda we have fully problematized and examine the outcomes on the terms set by the Victorian government.

Given that interaction between socioeconomic groups is contingent on socioeconomic diversity being present in the first place (Arthurson, 2010; Galster & Friedrichs, 2015; Jama & Shaw, 2017; Morris et al., 2012) we first analyzed the extent of socioeconomic diversity within each neighborhood to indicate whether such opportunity exists. We used the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA), which ranks the relative level of socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage of geographical areas. Using scores from the Index of Relative Socioeconomic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD), which are derived from a range of variables (ABS, 2013), we created maps on the Australian Urban Research Infrastructure Network (AURIN) portal to visualize these sites, confirming each as islands of disadvantage in neighborhoods of relative affluence.

Noting evidence that social mix is best measured and implemented at the neighborhood scale (AHURI, 2020; Galster & Friedrichs, 2015), we compared site scale outcomes with neighborhood scale outcomes. To do so, we defined neighborhoods as a geographical urban area containing approximately 4,000 residents, following the methodology advanced in AHURI (2020), noting that this was key advice deployed in the justification of the PHRP. Neighborhoods were created by combining Statistical

Area Level 1s (SA1s), the smallest geo-statistical unit used in Australian census data with an average population of 400 (ABS, 2016). By working outward in spatially concentric rings around each case study estate, we systematically added SA1s until the total population reached between 4,000 and 5,000 people.

We then refined these boundaries by identifying the location of shops, parks, public transport and other essential services, as these are where social mixing between tenures is most likely to take place and are the geographical context that international evidence shows is where people experience their neighborhood in everyday life (Arthurson, 2010; Curley, 2010; Hulse et al., 2004; Ruming et al., 2004). Noting that what is included in any one neighborhood is always contested, our goal was not to conclusively define the “correct” neighborhood for each estate. Our neighborhoods are artificial, as are all neighborhoods derived in this manner. Rather, they present one conceivable boundary with a population size indicative of broadly accepted definitions of a neighborhood. This provides the necessary basis to apply the logic advanced by social mix proponents to examine the outcomes of the PHRP on its own terms. This is vitally important, given the claims in the PHRP that the program will “create more diverse communities” (VHHSBA, 2019a, 2019b) while “increasing tenure mix” (DHHS, 2018a, p. 33). To measure the social mix outcomes, we calculated tenure configurations for the four cases by combining census data with data in government planning documents and evaluation reports to examine the actual outcomes at Kensington and Carlton and the likely outcomes at Northcote and North Melbourne.

Our occupation with scale is relevant on a methodological level, but also speaks to applied policy terrains. The PHRP clearly targets defined public housing estate sites; the redevelopment is intensive and confined to the boundaries that define each estate. Yet the rationale offered in the policy discourse—that the estates embody concentrated disadvantage—is inherently relational and only applicable when broader scales, such as the neighborhood, are incorporated into an understanding of what diversity might mean. The next section unpacks this discourse to examine the framing of social conditions between public housing estates and their neighborhoods.

The discursive framing of social mix

an opportunity to replace the isolated, segregated and inward-facing public housing estates of the past with mixed, inclusive communities that are home to public housing tenants, private renters and homeowners, and are integrated with their wider neighbourhood. (DHHS, 2018a, p. 6)

Public housing estates and residents in Australia, and around the world, are subjected to deep stigma. While there is significant evidence about how stigma “sticks” and with what effects (cf. Jacobs & Flanagan, 2013), our use of it here is to draw attention to the role of housing policy itself in the creation and sustenance of stigma. As Raynor et al. (2020) note “in Australia, social housing is largely viewed by the population *and policy makers* as a failed system” (p. 3 our emphasis).

Contributing to long-standing research about the construction of the housing “problem” through policy narratives, our analysis focused on the key claims and assumptions of the textual PHRP policy agenda. We uncovered a discursive framing of public housing estates as dysfunctional and “not fit for purpose” where estates are depicted as failing to connect with their surrounding neighborhoods and social issues are compounded by concentration of disadvantage. At the same time, social mix is depicted as an intrinsic public good that will deliver benefit to public housing residents by virtue of their proximity to greater affluence. This strong binary discourse of public housing estates as deviant and disconnected, and socially mixed neighborhoods as virtuous and beneficial runs throughout the PHRP agenda.

Our interrogation of key claims and assumptions revealed four discursive claims that drive this binary narrative: that current estates are isolated therefore social mix will deliver integration; that social mix can be designed in; that mix is required to deliver economic return; and that renewal delivers an uplift in social dwellings. Our analysis found that these claims are not supported by any apparent evidence. In the government’s response to a parliamentary inquiry into the PHRP, which



stands as a significant defense of the renewal policy, only one source is cited to justify the site-specific social mix model: the AHURI policy brief, published after the PHRP was developed, titled *Public housing renewal and social mix*, which contradicts the PHRP model by stating that “the spatial allocation of social, affordable and private housing should be considered at the neighborhood scale¹” (AHURI, 2017 [updated in 2020]). In turn, the AHURI policy brief cites only one scholarly study to advance the neighborhood effects thesis: Galster and Friedrichs (2015, p. 183), who state that disadvantaged households are ‘harmed by the presence of sizeable disadvantaged groups concentrated in their neighbourhoods.’ As discussed earlier, place-based disadvantage on the scale that Galster and Friedrichs’ work examines is not present in the Victorian PHRP context. The estates here are small islands of poverty in otherwise affluent, well-serviced neighborhoods. The AHURI policy brief acknowledges that “the international research literature is difficult to interpret or transpose to the Australian context,” yet advances it anyway in support of the social mix agenda. In other words, evidence from a context already specified as not applicable to the local circumstances is used, swiftly followed by a claim that contradicts the very policy model being deployed. In a completely circular move, the AHURI brief references the PHRP as a best practice case of social mix in Australia, and PHRP documentation references the AHURI brief as the justification for a social mix approach.

Interaction and integration

Our analysis of key terminology in government documents found that a pejorative discourse about existing public housing estates was promulgated. Public housing estates were framed as neglected and isolated while mixed-tenure estates were framed positively, emphasizing interconnectedness and diversity. The renewal process itself was framed as the driver of this integration; for example, the government’s submission to the parliamentary inquiry into the PHRP stated that the program delivers “integrated mixed tenure communities, rather than homogenous estates of public housing alone” (Victorian Government, 2019, p. 16). When discussing renewed estates, the terms *integrated* or *integration* were by far the most common, along with *diverse* and *inclusive*. Synonymous terms such as *unified*, *connected*, and *welcoming* were used to describe post-renewal outcomes. These terms present the public-private renewal model in a positive light, inviting thoughts of a happy, interconnected community where public and private residents socialize in harmony, a common urban renewal discursive tactic. Across all 19 documents analyzed, no adjectives with negative connotations were used to describe the mixed-tenure estate model. This depiction is juxtaposed against the description of estates pre-renewal: *segregated*, *inward-facing*, and *rundown*. These adjectives reinforce stereotypes of dysfunction and feed the justification for renewal. The only positive reference made to pre-renewal sites was their proximity to neighborhood shops, services and public transit.

Tenants themselves were also depicted in stereotypically negative terms. Numerous claims were made about tenants being isolated and segregated from their wider communities, justifying the policy fix of “integration.” This includes the government’s stance that the PHRP is anticipated to result in: estates being “integrated with their wider neighbourhood” (DHHS, 2018a, p. 6); helping “to combat . . . the separation of public housing estates and tenants from the surrounding community that they are a part of” (DHHS, 2018a, p. 16); and “encouraging a greater social mix in our communities to ensure that we don’t end up with pockets of isolation” (then Victorian Housing Minister Martin Foley, as cited in Preiss, 2017). These assumptions are not derived from empirical evidence. At Kensington, Shaw et al. (2013, p. 84) found that “the existing diverse population share a sense of belonging and commitment to their community.” This aligns with international research that demonstrates how policy rationales are largely incongruent with the perceptions of residents (Lucio et al., 2014).

Renewal is also advanced as necessary for better integration between social and private tenants through claims such as: the PHRP “will introduce a social-private housing mix for each Site to foster an integrated community” (VHHSBA, 2017, p. 12) and will create “mixed, inclusive communities” (DHHS, 2018a, p. 6) or “more diverse communities” (VHHSBA, 2019a, 2019b). This claim is in fact countered by the literature, which finds that social mix does not necessarily lead to mixing (Arthurson et al., 2015; Galster & Friedrichs, 2015; Jama & Shaw, 2017; Morris et al., 2012) and that interaction

occurs at the neighborhood scale, not onsite (Barwick, 2018). This is reflected at Kensington post-renewal, where “there is little evidence . . . of social mixing between the different tenure groups” (Shaw et al., 2013, p. 12) and the movements of tenures at Carlton likened to “tectonic plates” (Jama & Shaw, 2017, p. 22).

Economic return and social trade-offs

The PHRP model is often framed in explicitly economic terms, suggesting that a strong driver of the social model is in fact economic return. In the PHRP Registration of Capability for Stage One documentation, the fifth policy objective is to “achieve ‘value for money’ by maximising the return from the sale of private dwellings and commercial developments” (VHHSBA, 2017, p. 10). This was a driving concern as stated by the government in their submission to the parliamentary inquiry (DHHS, 2018a) whereby “mixed communities also enable the government to obtain a return from the sale of private dwellings” (p. 6).

Economic return is also used as justification by the government in its response to the final report of the parliamentary inquiry. Here it is stated that “the final public-to-private housing ratio is determined by a number of factors including . . . negotiated outcomes with development partners” (p. 31). Within this response, there is no reference to social justifications for social mix and tenure ratios. This is not surprising given that the social rationales for social mix are often relegated during periods of economic uncertainty. During the global financial crisis in 2008, amendments were made to tenure mix ratios for Kensington and Carlton redevelopments to ensure financial return to the developer. Design features to facilitate social mix were reevaluated, resulting in segregated tenures, recreation and community spaces, different entrances and exits according to tenure (Levin et al., 2014) and a reduction in unit size resulting in fewer children who are catalysts for social encounter (Shaw et al., 2013). In the draft masterplans of Northcote and North Melbourne, there is also a segregation of tenures. This is particularly prominent at the Walker Street estate (see Figure 2), where social housing tenants will be clustered at the north-eastern corner of the site and closer to the busy street while the buildings with creek views are allocated to private housing. Given that waterside apartments are typically considered more desirable to tenants, it can be inferred that the layout of tenures is a result of real estate profitability rather than a desire to foster social integration.



Figure 2. Draft Masterplan of the Northcote estate redevelopment.
Source: Darebin Community Friends of Public Housing

Overall, we found that discourse was at times employed misleadingly to suggest that renewal was intrinsically good, as a triple bottom-line strategy to improve lives, urban esthetics and financial balance-sheets. For example, in their submission to a parliamentary inquiry, the government stated that Stage One of the PHRP is “expected to deliver 1,750 new public housing dwellings across the nine Melbourne sites it is funding (including an increase of 10% from existing levels)” (p. 25). The leading figure of 1,750 obscures the fact that as 1646 units will be demolished, the net increase will be only 104 units.

Further, the government (DHHS, 2018a, p. 42) state that the program “aims to maintain and sustainably increase public housing in inner city locations rather than displacing it.” This statement appears to be misleading, given that the public housing at both sites will in fact be lost and replaced with social housing operated by a CHO. While “social” housing will not be displaced, people have been. The PHRP involves direct displacement where residents are required to relocate in order for their homes to be demolished. Any right to return to renewed estates cannot change the status of these residents as displacees and the impacts of their displacement. Further, social housing, while not displaced entirely, will be diluted due to the number of private dwellings that will be added to the site and neighborhood.

Measuring apparent and anticipated outcomes of renewal

To test this framing, we now step “inside the frame” advanced by social mix proponents to examine the actual or likely outcomes. To understand the existing social diversity in the terms cast by the renewal program of disadvantaged estates, we used secondary data to map the case study sites according to the Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD), which is a measure within SEIFA. Figures 3–6 demonstrate a significant spatial contrast of socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage between estates and their immediate surrounds and support the contention that Melbourne’s inner-city public housing estates are islands of disadvantage located within affluent suburbs.

At Kensington (Figure 3) and Carlton (Figure 4), indicators of relative disadvantage on the estate are rated as mostly decile 1, despite their mixed-tenure renewals having been mostly completed at the 2016 census. Accordingly, when examining the distribution of relative advantage and disadvantage across the four maps, Kensington and Carlton are relatively disadvantaged compared to Northcote (Figure 5) and North Melbourne (Figure 6), where indexes tend toward upper deciles.



Figure 3. Kensington Estate IRSAD Maps – Post-renewal.

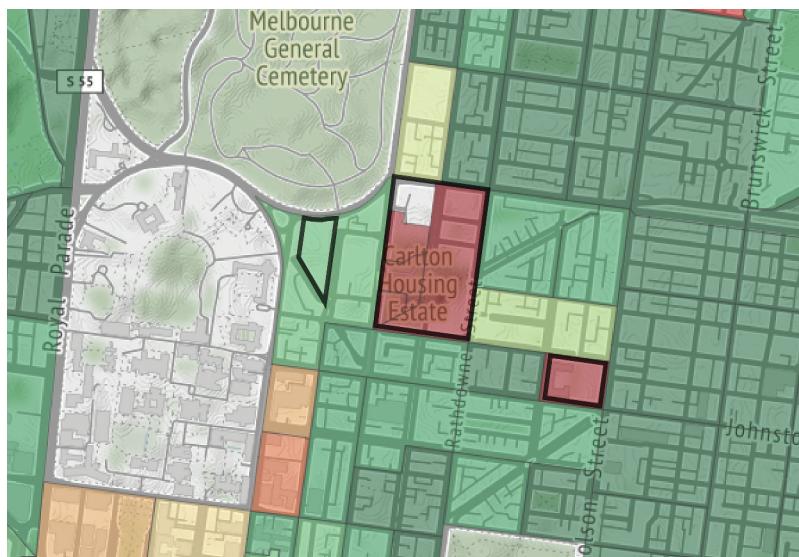


Figure 4. Carlton Estate IRSAD Maps – Post-renewal.

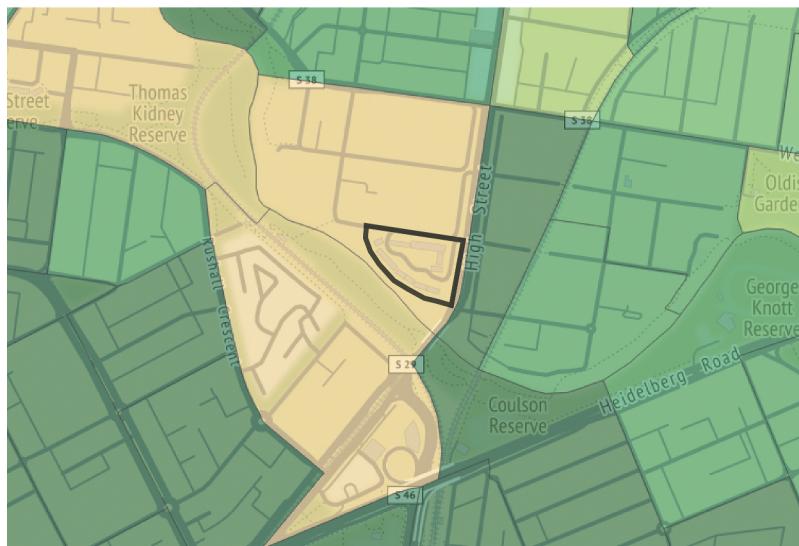


Figure 5. Northcote Estate IRSAD Maps – Pre-renewal Legend to maps.
Source: ABS (2016). Accessed using AURIN Portal (portal.aurin.org.au).²

The level of socioeconomic disadvantage of Melbourne's public housing tenants is confirmed in Map 3, where an SA1 is comprised entirely of the Carlton estate. The dark red shading indicates that the estate's residents are within the 10% of most disadvantaged across Australia.

The findings of our tenure mix data calculations are displayed in [Table 1](#). The social-private housing ratio for each neighborhood was calculated by dividing the number of social housing dwellings in each neighborhood by the total number of dwellings for which tenure type was available. The remaining dwellings comprised the private housing portion of the ratio.

[Table 1](#) depicts a post-renewal situation at Kensington and Carlton, and pre-renewal in both Northcote and North Melbourne. All four neighborhoods demonstrate a dominance of private housing tenure, particularly in Northcote and North Melbourne where the ratio is 11:89 social-private tenure. Considering

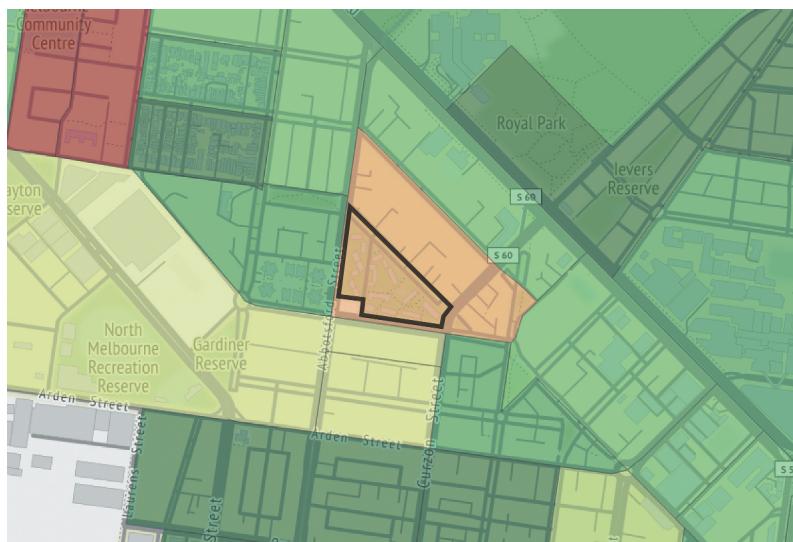


Figure 6. North Melbourne Estate IRSAD Maps – Pre-renewal Legend to maps.

Source: ABS (2016). Accessed using AURIN Portal (portal.aurin.org.au).²

Table 1. Tenure mix calculations, neighborhood scale, 2016.

	Kensington (post-renewal)	Carlton (post-renewal)	Northcote (pre-renewal)	North Melbourne (pre-renewal)
Number of SA1s constituting a neighborhood	8	11	10	9
Number of residents	4017	5829	4266	5075
Number of dwellings	2082	2978	2027	2603
With tenure type data available ⁴	1706	2254	1656	2084
Social-private housing ratio	21:79	34:66	11:89	11:89

Source: ABS (2016). Compiled using ABS TableBuilder.

that social mix policy justifications target concentrations of disadvantaged tenure types, a neighborhood comprising 89% private housing does not present a compelling need for introducing more private housing. In Northcote and North Melbourne, social housing units would need to be added to achieve greater mix, rather than the current proposal to dilute public housing estates with private housing. Indeed, the public housing estates themselves provide the bulk of the tenure and social class diversity in these uniformly affluent neighborhoods. This counters the government's claim that the estates are a "concentration of sizeable disadvantaged groups in one location or neighbourhood."

The situated geography of all four estates within well-serviced inner-city neighborhoods suggests that opportunities for mixing within the wider community are present, both in pre- and post-renewal scenarios. Mixing between diverse groups is most likely to occur in shared public or community spaces, and less likely within precincts solely dedicated to residential uses (Barwick, 2018). Shops, parks, and other community facilities are typical urban spaces where strangers come together and interact. Our descriptive statistical analysis demonstrates that in addition to the conditions that enable social *mixing*, such as shared public spaces, the tenure or socioeconomic diversity that provides the necessary precondition for any possible mixing is already present at the neighborhood scale in all four cases.

Table 2 compares tenure mix at the neighborhood and site scale, with the figures for Northcote and North Melbourne based on the proposals for redevelopment at each site (LSIC, 2018). The calculated neighborhood social mix ratios are vastly different to their site-specific counterparts, with the dominant form of housing flipped from social housing to private. At the site scale, the social-private ratios post-renewal will exceed the normative 30:70 so widely deployed in estate regeneration projects.

Table 2. Tenure mix comparison, neighborhood and site scales, 2016.

	Kensington	Carlton	Northcote (proposed)	North Melbourne (proposed)
Neighborhood scale social-private housing ratio	21:79	34:66	11:89	11:89
Site scale social-private housing ratio	48:52	24:76	43:57	37:63

However, this apparent gain is diminished when evaluated at the neighborhood scale, and with recognition that all of the public housing on these sites is lost through transfer to CHOs. The data suggests that the PHRP seeks to replicate the neighborhood-scale mix at the site scale.

Further, this calculation does not account for future uplift in private tenures over the 7 years that the government estimates redevelopment will take. These are areas of intensive large-scale apartment construction; residential development is forecast to increase private dwelling numbers in Northcote by around 1,239 dwellings, and 3,675 in North Melbourne (*id*, 2019a, 2019b). This will further dilute the tenure mix composition in favor of private housing, resulting in a more homogenous neighborhood. These findings dispel key government claims about the creation of diverse communities.

Recent changes to allocation models for social housing are likely to further decrease social mix in the PHRP neighborhoods. Generally, almost all applicants that are successfully allocated public housing are drawn from the priority access portion of the waitlist.³ Under recently designed arrangements, in new social housing units managed by a CHO only 75% must be allocated to people with priority needs. Given that all the new social housing on renewal sites will be managed by CHOs, at best only 75% of new dwellings will house priority applicants, compared to 100% if that housing remained public.

Further, CHOs are not compelled to allocate their 75% of units to priority access applicants on a site-by-site basis. Rather, that proportion is calculated across all of their properties, as confirmed by a 2017 update in the Victorian Housing Register (VHR):

So long as a participating registered agency meets the policy objective of allocating the target number of Priority Access Group households in any given year, in principle it should not matter to which houses they are actually allocated. (VHR, 2017)

This means that any one PHRP site may plausibly house zero social housing residents from the priority access list.

CHOs have discretion to select tenants for properties who meet their organization's eligibility criteria. Eligibility can vary, but each CHO is required to provide their dwellings at a maximum of 74.9% of market rates, or risk losing their exemption from paying Goods and Services Tax. CHOs typically charge 30% household income in rent, widely recognized as the point at which housing stress starts. By contrast, public housing rental is set at 25% of household income. Simply put, the new allocation mechanisms, combined with the transfer of public housing to CHOs, will significantly shift the social make-up and tenancy profile. Thus, the public housing renewal agenda in Victoria should be understood as a reorganization of the geography of advantage and disadvantage across Melbourne, deepening a wholesale class restructuring of the inner-city.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the use of social mix as a policy rationale for public housing renewal in Melbourne, Australia. By interrogating the discursive framework used to advance the social mix rationale we found that public housing renewal in Victoria is principally motivated by economic viability rather than positive social outcomes. High-value inner-city public land is being sold and existing public housing stock transferred to non-government CHOs. The ratio of 30:70 has no basis other than real estate feasibility and commercial interests drive redevelopment designs. Social mix is

deployed in a misleading way to conceal this privatization and the broader abandonment of government from its role in public housing. The discursive framing entrenches stereotypes about public housing estates and obscures government's long-term disinvestment from public housing.

Our quantitative analysis "stepped inside" this problematic social mix framing to model the actual outcomes of the stated policy intent. Our analysis shows that the claim that public housing renewal results in greater social mix is false. Indeed, social mix outcomes are worsened because renewal actually dilutes socioeconomic diversity. When public housing estates are viewed as vital components of dynamic, functioning neighborhoods, their "renewal" in the terms advanced through such policy frameworks will result in outcomes that directly contradict the purported intent. We have problematized social mix as a concept and policy discourse, but accepted the terms of the black letter policy for the purpose of examination in this paper. It is said in policy documentation and research that neighborhood scale is what matters, so we adopted this scale and stepped inside. Our findings demonstrate that when re-tested at the neighborhood scale, the PHRP's social mix approach fails to bring about more diverse communities or deconcentrate disadvantage. At site scale, the approach simply introduces middle-class tenures already dominant in the wider neighborhood, creating a homogenizing effect. At the scale of individual buildings, we see a concentration of disadvantage with residents segregated by tenure and real estate potential. At every scale, social mix dilutes, displaces and segregates socioeconomic difference. This analysis gives new weight to the current debates about social mix policies and their use in justifying the privatization of public housing and the further marginalization of precariously housed populations. By drawing attention to the question of scale in regard to social mix outcomes, the paper contributes valuable insight into how policymakers deploy research evidence to support policy dogmas. Social mix outcomes are rarely, if ever, assessed on the terms on which they are being advanced. We agree that crude categorizations of mix based on tenure are insufficient; yet they are the grounds on which substantial policy interventions are being made. These claims go largely un-evaluated. While our approach has limitations, the results suggest far greater attention needs to be given to the actual neighborhood structure that results, evidence that should be used to hold policymakers and governments to account in their deployment of such rationales.

Situated in a wider context of housing precarity and injustice, our analysis demonstrates that the rationale of social mix, deployed through estate renewal alongside other shifts in the provision and allocation of social housing, has the dual purpose of advancing state disinvestment from public housing and expanding private control of land and housing. The result is a deepening of the restructuring of housing advantage and disadvantage across inner and outer Melbourne.

Notes

1. The policy brief has since been updated (refer AHURI, 2020), and even more clearly advocates for social mix at the neighborhood scale.
2. Index scores are aggregated by deciles: in red, decile 1 represents statistical geographies within the 10% most disadvantaged relative to the rest of the Australian population, while decile 10, depicted in dark green, represents the 10% most advantaged. Boundaries of the housing estates are delineated in black.
3. Priority Access is for people who are: homeless and receiving support; escaping or have escaped family violence; have a disability or significant support needs; have special housing needs (Housing Victoria, 2020).
4. Tenure type data is not available for every dwelling as not all households completed the census.

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