Origins of the Concept of Social Exclusion

Social exclusion is by no means a novel concept that evolved within the framework of Australian social policy. Rather, the term originates from France, a country with a different political and social welfare system to Australia. The concept emerged in France in the early 1970s where social exclusion described the situation of people who had fallen through the social security net. Initiation of the term is generally credited to Rene Lenoir who in later years became Secretary of The State for Social Action in the Chirac Government. Lenoir’s concept of exclusion referred to a broad range of disadvantaged people, including the poor, physically disabled, substance abusers and those with mental health problems (International Labour Organisation 1998). After a number of violent incidents on French social housing estates in the late 1980s, the term was broadened to encompass a spatial component of exclusion (Silver 1994). The terminology was then rapidly adopted by the European Commission, which has a mandate to report on a European-wide basis about prevailing levels of unemployment and poverty.

More belatedly, the concept of social exclusion emerged in Britain as the central notion of the Blair Labour Government’s urban and social policy-making, and as a tool of its ‘third way’ policy analysis. The third way claims to symbolise a reinterpretation of traditional social democratic values to render them more relevant within the economic dynamism of contemporary society (Giddens 1999). It is within the British Third Way that the most clearly articulated policy agenda concerning social exclusion is emerging. Recognition of the concept of social exclusion saw the establishment in 1997 of an across-government, policy-generating, multi-disciplinary Social Exclusion Unit with the task of tackling social exclusion.

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One of the first priorities identified was to revive spatial areas of concentrated disadvantage through implementation of community regeneration involving ‘joined-up’ solutions to ‘joined up problems’. The initiatives are directed at a broad range of impoverished areas, not exclusively targeting social housing estates, acknowledging that social exclusion is not solely associated with the social housing tenure. The British Government defines social exclusion as:

a shorthand term for what can happen when people or poor areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdowns (Social Exclusion and Cabinet Office 2001: 2).

Within this definition, at least in the rhetoric, there is recognition that inequality is something that happens to people due to broader social and economic processes over which they have little or no control. This sentiment is not unexpected as the unfolding of social exclusion in European social policy development represented, in part, an attempt to maintain distance from the US ‘underclass’ debates (Marsh and Mullins 1998). The US usage of the term ‘underclass’ unfairly imposed responsibility for unemployment, crime, poverty and other problems on the behaviours of disadvantaged groups themselves.

The Ambiguous and Indeterminate Nature of Social Exclusion

Despite attempts to avoid US ‘underclass’ type debates, Levitas (1998) identifies three diverse discourses of social exclusion within recent British social policy including:

1. an underclass concept, which characterises the moral and behavioural delinquency of the disadvantaged themselves, rather than the structure of society, as the principal cause of exclusion;

2. a redistributive social democratic concept concerned with addressing poverty and recognising it as the primary cause of inequality; and

3. a social integrationist model, which concentrates on achieving social inclusion through paid work.

Levitas details how in practice, policy directions have largely drawn on the underclass and social integrationist models rather than redistributive aspects. In short, policy makers and others are often ambiguous about their use and the meanings attached to social exclusion. What this illustrates, as other critiques also point out, is that social exclusion is an imprecise concept that leaves the way open to justify the development of a diversity of political projects to promote social inclusion which may, or may not reduce existing inequalities (Kleinman 1998; Byrne 1999). On this basis, it is concluded that before the term is adopted in different political contexts, it is critical to identify the underlying values so that the objectives of policies aimed at inclusion can be clarified (Silver 1994).

Likewise, in one of the few Australian accounts that attempts to answer the question of whether social exclusion can provide a satisfactory basis for social policy analysis, Jones and Smyth (1999) delineate, in some depth, the way competing political discourses of social democratic ideals and neo-liberal debates can be accommodated within and make use of the concept of social exclusion. Given these findings of the ‘adaptability’ of the concept, they conclude that it is crucial to interrogate all policy discourses purporting to ameliorate social exclusion and promote inclusion. These findings are pertinent as Australian housing and urban policy discourse is shifting from a focus on the terminology of poverty and disadvantage to the concept of social exclusion.

Social Exclusion and Australian Public Housing Estates

Recently the notion of social exclusion entered the debates around the future of Australian public housing estates. The physical problems of run-down, poorly designed, often ageing and inappropriate types of housing stock are only part of the quandary. The progressively tighter targeting of public housing together with broader social and economic changes has resulted in the growing residualisation of the tenure as a whole. The characteristics of the housing estates built mainly, but not exclusively, in the immediate period following the Second World War include concentrations of residents with low incomes and poverty, high unemployment, high crime rates and in some cases incidents of escalating violence (Foard, Karmel, Collett, Bosworth and Hulmes 1994; Auditor-General New South Wales 1998).

It is these latter features that underpinned the recent proclamation by the Director of the New South Wales Department of Housing that the Radburn Estates, in that State, display ‘every form of social exclusion which could possibly be devised’ (Cappie-Wood 1998: 62). Subsequently, the theme of the 1999 National Housing Conference, in which all the State Housing Authorities were major participants, was ‘Responding to Social Exclusion in Social Housing’ (New South Wales Department of Housing, AHURI and Department of Family and Community Services 1999). However, the conference deliberations were not concerned with critically analysing the utility, or otherwise, of applying the concept of social exclusion in the Australian housing and urban policy context. Rather, the focus of the conference was on highlighting that indicators
of social exclusion exist, and showcasing Australian estate regeneration projects that claim to address inequality through incorporating innovative community regeneration initiatives to develop ‘inclusive’ and ‘cohesive’ communities.

Work by Randolph and Judd (1999) specifically identifies the New South Wales Department of Housing’s estate regeneration initiatives as attempts to address social exclusion. While it is acknowledged that the concept of social exclusion is problematic, the focus is on highlighting its potential principal benefit, in providing a framework for understanding the interconnected problems of public housing estates and moving policy making beyond solitary housing responses:

It is here the concept of social exclusion becomes important (and we acknowledge the problems in using such a concept) because, if nothing else, it provides us with a framework for understanding the interconnectedness of the problems of disadvantage, families and communities face and the need for an integrated and holistic policy response (Randolph and Judd 1999: 2).

In a subsequent attempt to develop debate on how the concept might be applied in the Australian context, McPherson and Randolph (2002: 3) begin to draw together some preliminary common indicators of social exclusion from across different theoretical understandings in the international literature. Their focus, thus far, is on the critical role of place and how that affects individuals’ participation in the normal activities of society.

Hence, despite its rapid adoption in Australia, to date there has been only limited critical analysis of the concept of social exclusion and no generally accepted definition has been devised. The danger exists that the terminology will be readily applied without further elaboration or recognition of the distinctive Australian social and political context.

‘Whole of Government’ Regeneration Policies and Social Inclusion

Internationally, contemporary community regeneration policy aimed at tackling social exclusion, is preoccupied with facilitating integrated ‘whole of government’ service delivery mechanisms at the local level. This model is best exemplified in the Blair Government’s 1998 strategy document on neighbourhood regeneration, titled ‘Bringing Britain Together’. Within the report, lack of coordination of services and the division of the public sector into functional boundaries are identified as significant barriers to addressing spatial concentrations of inequality at the local level (Social Exclusion Unit and Cabinet Office 1998).

Increasingly, in Australia similar ‘whole of government’ models, involving working in partnership across a range of government and non-government agencies to develop integrated service delivery on public housing estates, are being proposed as fundamental components of regeneration policy. These approaches are purported to go beyond past projects, which concentrated on physical improvements to housing, to incorporate community regeneration initiatives and social improvements. Projects aim to ‘integrate the estates into the wider community’, and increase or maintain levels of ‘social cohesion’ and ‘community integration’ (South Australian Housing Trust and Pioneer Projects Australia 1996; University of New South Wales School of Social Work 1996: 1; Auditor-General New South Wales 1998: 8; Queensland Government and Brisbane City Council 1998: 5; New South Wales Department of Housing 1999a; 1999b; Queensland Government and Queensland Department of Housing 1999).

Proposed activities include:

• coordinating service provision at the local level;
• employment projects;
• promoting partnerships with communities;
• improvements to the housing and physical environments; and
• diversifying the housing tenure within the regeneration area, to break up the concentrations of poverty.

In the international literature these sorts of activities, being adopted by the housing authorities and directed at reintegrating residents of social housing estates back into mainstream society and promoting more inclusive and cohesive communities, are generally recognised as specific policy responses to tackle social exclusion (Silver 1994; de Hann 1999; Jones and Smyth 1999; Taylor 1999; Blanc 1998). However, thus far in Australia, little is known about how these ‘whole of government’ models are working in practice or what sorts of inclusion they aim to promote.

In summary, two important issues arise:

1. The notion of social exclusion is already beginning to impact on Australian housing and urban policy, although the meanings and underlying values of the concept have not been reviewed or researched in any detail in this country. Indeed, the concept of social exclusion derives from countries with different economic, political and cultural arrangements and therefore its somewhat uncritical adoption into the Australian housing and urban policy context is worthy of scrutiny.

2. There is a dearth of information about the Australian Housing Authorities’ contemporary ‘whole of government’ regeneration activities and the sorts of partnerships involved or the forms of social inclusion their policies are designed to deliver.
The Research Approach

These two issues focused the research on social inclusion and estate regeneration, the conceptual framework for the research is outlined. The framework was developed based on a review of the international literature, where it became evident that researchers emphasise different components of social exclusion. However, the economic, political and cultural realms are generally identified as the three broad spheres of everyday life where social exclusion is evident. Within these three realms, questions about social exclusion and social inclusion revolve around concerns about enabling access to resources, democratic decision-making and common cultural practices (Madanipour 1998: 76; de Haan 1999; Sommerville 1998). The immediate question for the current research then became: what was it about the housing authorities’ ‘whole of government’ regeneration initiatives that were specifically directed at ‘inclusion’ and how did the different components relate to addressing social exclusion within these three societal spheres. Table 1 summarises how, for the purposes of carrying

TABLE 1

Aspects of ‘Whole of Government’ Regeneration Policies Related to Inclusion in the Economic, Political and Cultural Spheres of Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Societal Sphere</th>
<th>How Social Exclusion is Manifested</th>
<th>Components of Regeneration Directed at Achieving Social Inclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>• lack of access to labour markets&lt;br&gt;• unemployed are prevented from accessing resources and activities, readily available to others in society, particularly through consumption activities</td>
<td>• employment initiatives targeted at residents of regeneration areas and largely generated through the physical construction activities of estate regeneration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>• lack of access to democratic decision-making in society&lt;br&gt;• includes problems accessing structures and processes that enable and facilitate effective community participation</td>
<td>• partnerships with communities, including participation processes that seek to involve residents in the decision-making processes of regeneration&lt;br&gt;• endeavours by housing authorities to provide improved service delivery outcomes, eg. better coordination of government services at the local level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>• exclusion from common cultural practices within society. Traditionally, associated with religion, language and nationality&lt;br&gt;• new notions of exclusion in contemporary society:&lt;br&gt;o ‘community effects’ and network poverty causing lack of access to role models and informal contacts providing useful pathways to jobs&lt;br&gt;o symbolic economy – develops cultural products that can exclude particular groups of people</td>
<td>• community development strategies&lt;br&gt;• social mix strategies – proposals to gain a more heterogenous balance of different socioeconomic classes on estates&lt;br&gt;• physical image construction strategies aimed at improving the housing and physical images of estates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Arthurson 2001b
out the research, the housing authorities’ regeneration strategies were conceptualised.

The empirical analysis for the research was conducted on a total of six case study regeneration projects, two projects each from South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales. The projects were selected based on their representativeness of the diversity of Australian estates ranging from:

- the inner city Waterloo estate, situated three and a half kilometres south of the central business district of Sydney;
- the Parks seven kilometres north-west of Adelaide;
- Manoora located in far North Queensland, five kilometres west of Cairns; and
- the outer metropolitan estates of Inala, Salisbury North and Villawood, situated 20 kilometres south-west, 21 kilometres north and 32 kilometres south-west of the central business districts of Brisbane, Adelaide and Sydney, respectively.

This selection enabled comparisons to be made of different regeneration models both within and between Australian States. The data was collected during 1999/2000 through a variety of methods: a survey questionnaire self administered to 33 housing authority staff; follow up informal interviews and meetings held during visits to projects in 1999; and analysis of relevant policy documents and reports.

Findings: Tensions in Policy and Achievement of Social Inclusion

This section discusses four of the major research findings, which raise questions about:

1. State Housing Authorities’ roles as lead agencies in regeneration;
2. broader resourcing of ‘whole of government’ regeneration;
3. retaining numbers of public housing; and
4. the need for a national and coordinated role for regeneration.

1. State Housing Authorities as Lead Agencies in Regeneration

As identified in responses to the questionnaire administered to project staff, the housing authorities are being given responsibility as the lead agencies for facilitation of ‘whole of government’ models of estate regeneration. At Manoora the Department of Premier and Cabinet is also significantly involved, as is the Metropolitan Division of the Department of Human Services at Salisbury North. Nevertheless, the focus in all the projects is on the housing authority accepting broader responsibilities in addition to housing, to facilitate and coordinate service delivery across a range of portfolios in order to address the multiple problems of estate residents. Clearly, there is a need to confront broader issues on the estates than those of physical housing. Other social and economic problems, especially residents’ high levels of unemployment are also important. However, the findings pose an important question; are housing authorities also becoming responsible for resourcing broader regeneration approaches beyond public housing?

The Villawood estate provides a salient example of the consequences of framing the current challenge for housing authorities in terms of addressing concentrations of disadvantage that exist on many of the housing estates. At Villawood estate the housing authority was forced to deal with the results of a range of complex social and economic problems, which resulted in crime, vandalism and violence. The Performance Audit Report into the redevelopment of the Villawood estate concludes that the decision to demolish the estate represented a housing solution to a broader range of problems. Indeed, the report concedes that given the evidence of little long term support from other agencies to deal with the problems or ‘agreed resource commitments between agencies to sustain such communities’ it was unrealistic to expect the Department of Housing to resolve the issues, especially in the context of limited funding (Auditor-General New South Wales 1998: 4).

For these reasons, it needs to be ensured that the housing authorities do not bear the dollar cost of implementing contemporary ‘whole of government’ models of regeneration. Certainly, in taking the lead role in coordinating other agencies the housing authorities are not accepting responsibility to administer or fund projects on their own. In South Australia, for instance, it is envisaged that all the agencies involved, in conjunction with the community, will take on responsibility for the projects (Black 1998). However, without taking action to safeguard the already limited public housing budgets, one likely result as ‘whole of government’ models evolve, is further depletion of public housing investment in order to fund coordination of regeneration across a wider range of portfolios.

The trend to encourage ‘whole of government’ models of regeneration, led by housing authorities, is emerging in the context of significant changes to the funding and management of public housing. At this stage, the future of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) beyond 2008, when the term of the current agreement ends, is unclear. One likely scenario is replacement of previously earmarked CSHA funding, currently directed to assist particular groups of people with specific housing needs, with a single pool of
funding which State Governments will have responsibility to allocate across priorities. Alternatively, given that the Goods and Services Tax is extending the State Governments’ revenue bases the Commonwealth may decide to shift sole responsibility for funding public housing to the States, instead of continuing the current joint funding arrangements (Darcy and Randolph 1999). Either way, funding that up until now has been set aside specifically for public housing is likely to be able to be applied much more flexibly and also have to compete with other government funding priorities beyond housing. This could see large scale transfer of funding from public housing to wider community regeneration. As Lund (1999) argues, does a ‘whole of government’ approach mean that other departments such as housing or education will be required to transfer part of their mainstream budget to crime prevention, for example, which is a problem that most residents identify as an immediate priority. Indeed, it is not difficult to envisage circumstances where in ‘whole of government’ approaches portfolios that have broader political appeal, such as health, could become the priority for funding at the expense of public housing.

In illustrating how social housing fares when forced to compete with other priorities for government funding, the lessons from the UK are useful. In 1994, the UK government merged twenty regeneration programs from across different government departments to form a single regeneration budget. The idea was to provide a flexible budget, allocated through competitive tendering, to encourage regeneration approaches that went beyond a focus on property development and housing to address broader issues, including unemployment. However, in this situation housing ‘ ‘lost’ out’ with only limited resources being devoted to its investment. Economic competitiveness was given priority over improvements to social housing (Hall and Nevin 1999: 491).

The Queensland Government model of regeneration is useful in illustrating how public housing funding has been safeguarded through maintaining two discrete sources of funding. The model incorporates a competitive bidding process for funding provided under the Community Renewal Program. Since this funding is allocated through Treasury rather than under the CSHA, funds can be utilised for a variety of measures beyond improvements of public housing. The Urban Renewal Program and other sources of funding for the provision of public housing are kept separate from the funding allocated through competitive bidding under the Community Renewal Program. However, the two programs work in tandem, in order to plan and implement coordinated area approaches to crime prevention, social and physical regeneration (Queensland Department of Housing 1999b: 2; Queensland Government and Queensland Department of Housing 1999: 3). This safeguards the valuable resources currently targeted for public housing from being used to fund additional activities in regeneration, which would be to the detriment of preserving public housing.

2. Broader Resourcing of ‘Whole of Government’ Regeneration

Time and again, in the questionnaire administered to project staff across the case study projects, scarce resources due to ever-increasing budget constraints were raised as an issue that limits the achievements of regeneration. Certainly, the level of resources committed to regeneration is one of the major defining features of the Blair Government’s model of regeneration compared to the Australian case study projects that are attempting to implement similar ‘whole of government’ models.

It is difficult to make comparisons between Britain and Australia, given that the social housing tenure and extent of the problems are much larger in Britain. However, the scale of resourcing committed by State governments in New South Wales and Queensland of around $41m to community regeneration, as shown in Table 2, is still by contrast modest. In Britain special funding is available for two different but interrelated levels of regeneration. The Single Regeneration Budget is emerging predominantly as a funder of broader citywide regeneration initiatives, linked to regional development agencies. In contrast, the New Deal for Communities is targeted at more localised disadvantaged communities (Taylor 1999), similar to the housing estates in Australia. As well, European Union funds provide access to significant additional resources for regeneration.

In Australia, the demise of the Building Better Cities Program (BBCP) in 1996 meant the disappearance of a funding source at a Federal Government level, which encouraged involvement of the different levels of government in the management of cities including estate regeneration activities. For instance, the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) commenced its first attempts at community development at the Rosewood regeneration project under the BBCP, in conjunction with other government agencies and the community. As the manager of the SAHT concedes, there are difficulties undertaking these activities without the additional funding available through the BBCP (Black 1998: 65). Many of the early scoping and feasibility studies for the case study projects in other States also relied on accessing Better Cities funding (Building Better Cities Secretariat, Queensland Department of Housing, Local Government and Planning 1995; SA Better Cities 11 Steering Committee 1995; Vinson 1996). Once again, this raises issues of how the current initiatives are funded and the impacts on public housing resources.2
3. Retaining Numbers of Public Housing

The focus of much estate regeneration is demolition and sales on the private market, without replacement public housing and the future trends suggest even lower levels of new building or purchase (Arthurson 1998; 2001a). As shown in Table 3, in all the case study projects, except for Waterloo, regeneration policies are lowering the numbers of public housing stock. At The Parks, for instance, this results in reductions of up to two-thirds in the current public housing supply within the area. These activities raise issues about the purchase costs to replace the public housing sold. In effect, in South Australia for every 3.5 public housing sales this provides only enough funding to purchase one new replacement dwelling (Spiller Gibbons Swan 1999: 20). The ratio is similar in Queensland projects where for every three houses sold only one can be purchased elsewhere by the housing authority.

Consequently, contemporary regeneration activities, at least in NSW, Qld and SA, are assisting in the demise of public housing. Certainly, others are raising similar concerns that the public housing system is ‘having to cannibalise itself’ in regeneration through selling good housing assets to sustain the rest (Shelter NSW 2000: 2). In the short-term, these actions place increased strain on already lengthy waiting lists for public housing where some applicants wait longer than three years to be housed (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision 1999: 1099). In the longer term and in the absence of significant policy change, regeneration will be at the expense of maintaining or expanding existing stock and sustaining access to public housing for low-income tenants.

However, in some instances, alternative directions can be adopted as exemplified in the activities of the New South Wales Department of Housing at Waterloo. The Waterloo project is maintaining public housing numbers through undertaking less costly upgrades based on the views of tenants. The approach differs from other case study estates in that it does not involve the selling of large amounts of public housing to the private sector for demolition and private sale. This model raises the question of whether it is either better to accept lower standards of public housing in order to house more tenants, or to upgrade to higher standards for the benefit of fewer socioeconomically deprived people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Source</th>
<th>Total Funding 1998/99</th>
<th>Average Funding Per Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>England</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Deal for Communities</td>
<td>£800m (A$2.1b).</td>
<td>£46m (A$121m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Regeneration Budget</td>
<td>£1.3b (A$3.4b) - 500 existing projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£700m (A$1.8b) - new projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Renewal Program</td>
<td>$7m</td>
<td>Manoora $1.2m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Renewal Program</td>
<td>$3.5m</td>
<td>Inala $1.3m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South Australia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New South Wales</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood Improvement Program (NIP)</td>
<td>$34m</td>
<td>Waterloo $4.9m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4. A National and State Coordinated Regeneration Framework

Within the Australian regeneration projects, there is recognition by State Governments that ‘whole of government’ approaches require participation from all levels of government, as responsibilities pertaining to various aspects of community regeneration are divided between local government, State Governments and the Federal Government (New South Wales Department of Housing 1998; Sharley 1999). However, there is little evidence of the three levels of government working together in regeneration practice. The missing element in contemporary ‘whole of government’ models of regeneration is an overarching framework, in conjunction with State Governments, that recognises the implications of broader Federal Government economic and social policy for place, regions or cities and housing. Two separate reviews of the international literature overwhelmingly point to the importance of a coordinated national and regional policy framework to reduce social exclusion (Parkinson 1998: 1; Taylor 1999). Indeed, Federal policies and particularly in combination with State Government policies, can assist or detract from the success of local regeneration initiatives in certain regions. An example of the impasse arrived at is provided by the contemporary Australian welfare reform agenda.

In July 2000, the findings of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform, commonly known as the McClure Report, were released. The report outlines specific directions ‘to minimise social and economic exclusion’ including the introduction of a ‘mutual obligations’ approach throughout the welfare system (McClure Report 2000: 4). Within this framework for addressing social exclusion, there is little consideration of the integral relationship between housing, employment and welfare assistance; nor the role that housing might play for some individuals in facilitating their ‘economic and social participation’. However, public housing is an important mediating factor in combating social exclusion through providing advantages over the private rental market in terms of affordability, availability and security of tenure. As Hulse and Burke (2000) find, once the additional benefits of public housing are taken into account, it has to be concluded that in Australia the processes of social exclusion are greater for low-income tenants in the private than public rental market. Specifically, social housing ameliorates many of the negative effects that exist in the private rental sector. Despite these findings, the Australian ‘whole of government’ regeneration models lack a coordinated and equitable framework for Federal, State and local government activity. This is an essential element of regeneration in order to prevent policy at one tier of government from undermining the efforts of another at the local level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Public Housing Concentration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before (per cent) (number)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inala (Qld)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manoora (Qld)</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villawood (NSW)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterloo (NSW)</td>
<td>68.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Parks (SA)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salisbury North (SA)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Arthurson 2001b

* The figures do not include 500 properties already upgraded prior to regeneration commencing.

TABLE 3
Public Housing Concentration and Stock Numbers Before and After Regeneration on Six Case Study Estates
CONCEPTUALISING SOCIAL INCLUSION IN ESTATE REGENERATION POLICY

The Role of Public Housing in Supporting Social Inclusion

To summarise the research findings overall, the aspirations of the housing authorities in NSW, SA and Qld and their regeneration partners to increase social inclusion through regeneration are at odds with ongoing reductions in public housing numbers. Clearly, individuals become socially excluded through not having access to secure, affordable, low cost rental housing and in this respect public housing is a fundamental need. In France, the essential role housing plays in supporting a more inclusive society is recognised and enacted through the 1990 French Housing Act. This Act challenges exclusion from housing through promoting the legal right to decent housing (Blanc 1998). Similarly, in Australia the CSHA recognises the basic right of all Australian citizens to access safe, adequate, appropriate and affordable housing (Commonwealth of Australia 1999). However, the actions taken in reducing public housing stock numbers through regeneration and not recognising a key role for housing in the welfare reform agenda are subverting this basic principle.

Contemporary Australian research shows that both the availability of low cost housing in the private rental market and home ownership are in decline (Yates and Wulff 2000). Hence, the importance of public housing cannot be underestimated in terms of providing the best option for low-income tenants, through providing security and affordability, as well as assisting the disadvantaged to retain employment. Continuing current directions in regeneration will confine more socioeconomically disadvantaged people to private rental for longer periods of time or prevent them from ever gaining access to public housing and the greater benefits it offers. It is difficult to reconcile these actions with social inclusion and regenerating communities when the end result will be poverty for more individuals and greater exclusion in the economic sphere of society.

Conclusion

Whether we accept it or not, the concept of social exclusion is being applied to Australian public housing estates. The vague and indeterminate nature of the concept suggests it has the capacity to reframe courses of action in Australian estate regeneration policy in substantial ways. However, questions remain as to whether this reframing will be in the right direction to address inequality on the estates. For instance, where does public housing fit and will ensuring continued access to it form part of the equation of social inclusion policies?

If regeneration activity and allied social policy started from the basic premise of recognising public housing as an important tool in promoting social inclusion, instead of seeing it just as a problem to be fixed then different policies would be adopted. More creative options might be explored to regenerate estates without sacrificing large amounts of public housing, issues of funding may be debated more broadly and truly ‘whole of government’ approaches could be possible. The appropriate time to define the sorts of values and policies that are acceptable in Australia is the present, before addressing social exclusion becomes firmly established as a policy priority.

As an initial step towards progressing this goal, some of the findings of research on social inclusion and estate regeneration have been reported. The findings demonstrate that governments need to make some difficult choices about the types of solutions adopted in estate regeneration and think carefully about the role of public housing and what social inclusion and social exclusion really mean in the specific Australian social policy context.

Acknowledgments

The South Australian Housing Trust provided the funding that enabled this research to be undertaken. However, this paper in no way reflects the views or influences of that organisation. The author would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments during preparation of this paper. An earlier version of the paper was presented at an AHURI Southern Research Centre Seminar, Social Inclusion and Housing: Developing Research and Policy Agendas, Art Gallery of SA, Adelaide – 20 June, 2002.

Notes

1 The Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning and Housing (1998) announced the decision to demolish Villawood Estate soon after the research commenced. This meant that only one case study from New South Wales could be considered in detail, although where relevant aspects of Villawood were also utilised.

2 See Hall and Berry (2004) for a detailed analysis of the operating deficits and resource constraints currently facing State Housing Authorities.

3 Taking Inala, as an example, the average price of unimproved housing sold to the property developer LJ Hooker is $40 000 (Brisbane City Council 1998). However, the average cost of replacement housing purchased by the Department of Housing in other areas across Queensland is $115 000 (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision 1999: 1111). This leaves a shortfall of $75 000 between sales and replacement costs.

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