Whole of Government Models of Estate Regeneration: The way forward?

Introduction

In Australia, 'whole of government' models of regeneration are increasingly presented as the way forward to address inequality on public housing estates (Queensland Government and Queensland Department of Housing 1999; New South Wales Department of Housing 1999a; 1999b). The models involve working in partnership across a range of government and non-government agencies to facilitate integrated service delivery at the local level. However, little is known about the underlying rationale for adoption of these models or how they are working in practice. Hence, this paper is concerned with examining some of the whole of government regeneration approaches, to ascertain what is working well and why, and see what they reveal about the usefulness of different models in addressing inequality on estates.

The data is drawn from empirical analysis conducted on five case study regeneration projects, two projects each from South Australia (The Parks and Salisbury North) and Queensland (Manoora and Inala) and one project from New South Wales (Waterloo). All the estates are characterised by concentrations of residents experiencing high levels of poverty and unemployment. 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.

The first section of the paper details the background context within which whole of government models have emerged, specifically, the managerial reforms to the housing authorities in Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia where the case study estates are located. Following this, the major rationale for adopting whole of government approaches in regeneration policy are examined. Then, two projects that have similar aims but have adopted different bureaucratic structures to implement whole of government models are compared and contrasted. In the final section, some of the major tensions arising in implementing the models are summarised.

Public housing authorities and new public management

Over the past 15 years, the public sector has undergone a series of reforms that are generally associated with adoption of the principles of new public management. The reforms attempt to combine elements of private sector management with the traditional ethos and values underlying the public sector. Proponents of managerialism, such as Paterson
argue that the reforms enhance due process, increase the quality of policy advice and, at the same time, reinforce the importance of social values within the public sector. Major changes to the public sector have included: a predominant focus on efficiency and effectiveness in achieving policy outcomes; decentralised decision making; adopting private sector management techniques, including entrepreneurial approaches; increased accountability; and introducing markets and competition into the public sector through the contracting out of service delivery and public sector employment. However, these reforms are not without their critics. Lane (1997, p. 301) questions how the goal of efficiency through competition melds with government social justice objectives when 'all too often these collide, which forces government to find trade-off solutions combining a certain amount of each'.

More specifically, within public housing authorities, there has been a focus on adopting commercial directions and incorporating an increased role for the private sector in meeting government objectives in the delivery of public housing. One of the major catalysts for reform was the Industry Commission Inquiry into Public Housing (IC) (Industry Commission 1993). Despite the positive findings of the report, that public housing was still the best option for low-income tenants, criticisms were made of the housing authorities' management. Consequently, the IC proposed separation of property and tenancy management functions in housing authorities to achieve transparency in operations, improved coordination between agencies, an asset management and customer focus and a greater private sector role in service delivery. Whilst some of the criticisms of housing authorities were no doubt justified, arguably, measures to increase accountability and efficiency were possible to implement without radical reorganisation of housing authorities based on implementation of commercial principles (Orchard 1999). Nonetheless, in the early 1990s, the New South Wales and South Australian housing authorities were restructured to separate property from tenancy management. In this organisational arrangement the property manager operates on a commercial basis and is responsible for ensuring the supply and maintenance of public housing. The tenancy manager leases properties from the property manager, or private landlords at market rents, and is responsible for the selection of tenants and administration of leases.

The Queensland Department of Housing also underwent a series of similar organisational restructures from the mid to late 1990s. The restructures culminated in the setting up of a Public Housing Program Unit with responsibility for strategic policy issues, needs-based planning and all aspects of tenancy management, except for service delivery. A Property Portfolio Management Unit was made responsible for supply of public housing, including purchasing new properties and redevelopment and maintenance of existing stock (Queensland Department of Housing Organisational Review Task Force 1998).

Accompanying these organisational reforms to the housing authorities, government assistance for public housing provided under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA) has declined in real funding terms by almost 15 per cent since 1990 (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision, 1999, p. 1079). The following section explores the rationale for adopting whole of government models of regeneration within this context of decreased public sector funding and processes of reform that have been 'decidedly managerialist and quasi-markets in orientation' (Caulfield 2000, p. 7).

The rationale for pursuing whole of government models

Within the case study projects, two major reasons are distinguished for pursuing whole of government models of regeneration. These are the:

1. Ongoing requirements for governments to continue to improve efficiency and effectiveness and achieve improved outcomes for communities within existing financial budget outlays; and

2. The belief that one of the principal ways to address inequality on estates is through place management initiatives involving coordinated and integrated models of service delivery at the local level.

These two explanations for adopting whole of government models are discussed in turn.

Efficiency and effectiveness objectives

Within the South Australian case study projects, working in a more coordinated and integrated way across different State Government portfolios and in conjunction with local government is identified as a means to facilitate pooling of resources and expertise and avoid duplication of
services (South Australian Housing Trust 1998). Likewise in Queensland, there is also an expectation of budget multiplier effects through extracting and leveraging in additional resources from other parties including local government (Queensland Department of Housing 1999c). Common to all the case studies is the idea that improved coordination of services will result in increased value for limited funding available across government departments and also deliver improved community services on the estates (Queensland Department of Housing 1997, 1998, 1999b; Ogden 1998; Queensland Government and Queensland Department of Housing 1999; New South Wales Department of Housing 1999a, 1999b).

From this perspective, support for across portfolio service coordination represents a response to budget constraints and implementation, over the past decade, of competitively oriented commercial principles into public housing management. These changes also reflect a move away from funding for government infrastructure based on particular needs, such as building specific numbers of public housing stock, to meeting broader outcomes including the development of sustainable communities. In turn, this provides an incentive to pool funding and resources. For instance, the current Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement encourages housing authorities to coordinate and link with other government departments at both a State and Commonwealth level as well as the non-government sector in the pursuit of improved housing outcomes, whilst at the same time decreasing CSHA funding (Commonwealth of Australia 1999, p. 3). Arguably, in these circumstances, whole of government approaches appear driven more by the need to meet government efficiency and effectiveness objectives than resolutions to address inequality on the housing estates.

**Holistic solutions to inequality**

However, by far the most consistent reason documented amongst all the case study projects for pursuing whole of government models, is the argument that the complexity and interconnected nature of estate residents' problems require solutions that are much broader than changes to physical infrastructure and housing carried out independently of other social concerns. Hence, it is argued that the linkages between physical, economic and social inequality on the estates need to be addressed by working in collaboration across a range of government portfolios including, but not restricted to, education, health and police (Queensland Department of Housing 1997; Fischer 1998; Queensland Government and Queensland Department of Housing 1999; Reeves 1999). In part, this reflects a response to the Australian experience where past estate regeneration projects have largely consisted of the physical upgrading initiatives of housing authorities rather than being developed specifically to address the social problems on the estates (Arthurson 1998; New South Wales Department of Housing 1999a; 1999b). Likewise, in the UK, it is argued that the contemporary focus on whole of government coordinated responses is a reaction to the failure of earlier property-led regeneration to revitalise communities and a search for alternative models of regeneration that move beyond physical regeneration to incorporate social and economic aspects (Hastings, McArthur & McGregor 1996). Table 1 summarises the variety of government portfolios involved in whole of government partnership arrangements for coordinated planning and delivery of services in the case study projects.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that this kind of thinking, at least about working in collaboration and coordination across different government departments in undertaking local area regeneration, is not totally new to the Australian context. It represents a revival of some of the ideas tested in the early 1990s under the previous Federal Labor Government's Building Better Cities Program (BBCP). At Inala, for instance, a draft integrated community improvement plan was prepared for the area in 1995 under the BBCP. The implementation plan proposed, at that time, is similar to what is being considered in Inala today, suggesting collaborative working arrangements between the local council and State Government Departments across health, recreation, education and a range of other pertinent portfolios (Building Better Cities Secretariat Queensland Department of Housing 1995; Queensland Department of Housing 1999c). These earlier integrated projects provide government funding to develop social and physical infrastructure and thereby meet social justice objectives of improved social equity (Commonwealth Department of Housing and Regional Development 1995). What is new in some of the contemporary projects is the implicit idea that an emphasis on place management, stressing coordination of government services and improved innovation in the public sector, can somehow deal with the structural causes of decline and reduce growing spatial
inequality on estates. This notion is evident in the Salisbury North and Manoora projects, which are examined in detail in the section that follows. Wherever relevant, the experience of The Parks and other projects are drawn on in the analysis, although in these instances less information was available about the models as they were still being formulated.

**Place management, bureaucratic structures and access to services**

Initially, some of the features of the different bureaucratic structures for the Salisbury North and Manoora projects are examined. This is followed by an analysis of the notion emerging from the projects, that coordination provides improved access to services and can somehow address inequality.

**Salisbury North: Portfolio integration**

In South Australia, towards the end of 1997, a restructure of the State Government bureaucracy resulted in the formation of the Department of Human Services. The department was

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Coordination Initiative</th>
<th>Local Government</th>
<th>State Government Portfolios</th>
<th>Lead Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waterloo</td>
<td>Social Support Project</td>
<td>South Sydney Council</td>
<td>Health; Community Services; Ageing and Disability; Aboriginal Affairs and Juvenile Justice.</td>
<td>New South Wales Department of Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Parks</td>
<td>Community Development Alliance</td>
<td>City of Port Adelaide Enfield</td>
<td>Premier and Cabinet; Housing; Education Training and Employment; Community Health.</td>
<td>South Australian Housing Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salisbury North</td>
<td>Human Services Connecting Salisbury</td>
<td>City of Salisbury</td>
<td>Housing; Human Services; Children’s Services; Aboriginal; Aged and Disabled; Employment; Community Health.</td>
<td>South Australian Housing Trust and Metropolitan Division of Department of Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manoora</td>
<td>Community Renewal Project</td>
<td>Cairns City Council</td>
<td>Housing; Health; Education; Family Services; Transport; Police; State Development; Sport and Recreation; Public Works; Families Youth and Community Care; Employment Training and Industrial Relations; Sport and Recreation; Technical and Further Education; Premier and Cabinet; Industry Trade and Resources; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; Q Build.</td>
<td>Queensland Department of Housing and Premier and Cabinet Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inala</td>
<td>Community Renewal Project</td>
<td>Brisbane City Council</td>
<td>Housing; Education, Family Services; Health; Police; Employment Training and Industrial Relations; Sport and Recreation; Ambulance and Fire Services.</td>
<td>Queensland Department of Housing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note 1: Villawood estate is not included because it never reached the stage of implementing a ‘whole of government’ approach prior to demolition.

created through an amalgamation of the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) and the former Department of Family and Community Services and South Australian Health Commission. This brought together in one State Government department the previously separated portfolios of housing, health, and welfare and community services. The SAHT retained its role as a service delivery agency, located within the Department of Human Services. The vision for the Department of Human Services is to enhance community well-being through 'leading the development of high performing integrated health, housing and community services' (Reeves 1999, p. 1). From this perspective, the restructure represented an attempt to break down the barriers to working across different government departments and providing coordinated responses to multiple areas of disadvantage.

Subsequently, in March 1998, the Salisbury North area was selected by the Department of Human Services as a pilot project for implementing a 'whole of government' model of human services planning and delivery in South Australia. This concept entails working in partnership across various State Government portfolios with other levels of government and the regeneration community (Ogden 1998, p. 312). As shown in Table 1 (p.29), the whole of government approach at Salisbury North includes coordinating the planning and delivery of State Government services across the portfolios of housing, human services, children's services, Aboriginal, aged and disability, employment and community health. It also involves working closely with local government, in this instance the City of Salisbury. However, as participants interviewed as part of the processes for development of the project evaluation framework identified, there are obstacles in getting the government agencies to work together collaboratively and to coordinate services. In particular, problems are emerging across the divisions of the Department of Human Services 'because of difficulties in coming to grips with the structure of the new integrated Human Service department' (Randolph & Judd 2000, p. 43).

Manoora: Working across departments

By contrast, at Manoora, the whole of government model appears to be evolving more successfully. The Queensland approach, as seen at Manoora, is to work within the existing multi-departmental bureaucratic structure. In the case of Salisbury North, on the other hand, restructuring has resulted in housing and a number of other crucial human services portfolios being located in one government department. Hence, when compared to Salisbury North, the Queensland model entails working across a much larger number of government departments to develop a collaborative approach to planning and delivery of human services. The whole of government model is articulated through an overarching administrative structure, as shown at Figure 1 (p.31), which basically consists of three interrelated committees. The committees are linked through the place manager position that has responsibility for attending meetings and coordinating issues at each level of the project structure.

Unlike the circumstances at Salisbury North, participants in the Manoora project report that there are the beginnings of commitment from across the different government departments to integrated planning of human services (Queensland Government and Queensland Department of Housing 1999). In practice, this commitment is reflected in the Manoora Community Action Plan, which was developed through collaborative effort between all the different parties involved. For instance, the strategy to promote stronger families through improved provision of services incorporates cooperation from across a range of State Government departments and the Cairns City Council (Queensland Government and Queensland Department of Housing 1999, p. 110).

What the comparative findings between Salisbury North and Manoora suggest is that major restructuring of bureaucracy is not necessary and can even detract from efforts to get different government departments to coordinate services and work together more cooperatively. This provides some support for arguments that insofar as managerial reform within the public sector creates a responsive bureaucracy there is some value in it. Moreover, perhaps the time has come to assess whether continuous change is beginning to impact negatively on, rather than improve, bureaucratic performance (Self 2000).

However, the Manoora regeneration project differs in two important respects from Salisbury North and other case study projects, and these characteristics need to be taken account of in the findings. First, Manoora is located in an isolated country region in Far North Queensland, rather than in the metropolitan area as within the other case study estates. The small size of the
surrounding regional centre of Cairns means that employees of government services are more likely to know each other and share common interests outside of employment. For instance, as identified in responses to the questionnaire administered to housing authority staff, some participants in the project have children attending the same schools. As well, the small size of Cairns, combined with the isolated locality, means the consequences of disadvantage in Manoora public housing estate are more visible and impact on residents from across the broader Cairns region. Increased crime, for instance, including motor vehicles stolen from the central business district is immediately associated with Manoora and the other public housing estates located nearby.

Given these circumstances, as identified in responses to the questionnaire, staff from across the different government departments and non-government services are more likely to have common interests and a stake in working together to achieve the outcomes of projects targeted to disadvantaged local areas. Overall, it might well be that a whole of government approach is easier to deliver in smaller isolated rural regions, where people not only know each other but all have a stake in the same community, rather than on estates located in metropolitan areas. This finding stresses the importance of devising different regeneration models based on specific local conditions. Indeed, what works successfully in one place will not necessarily be suited to another community.

Another major distinguishing feature between Manoora and Salisbury North in particular is that the Queensland Government acknowledges, although not always explicitly, that good reasons are needed to get agencies that are used to working independently, to work more collaboratively. This inducement is provided in the form of a special pool of funding to support initiation of collaborative and coordinated approaches to regeneration, including encouraging mainstream services to work more flexibly (Queensland Department of Housing 1999b, p. 4). The next section considers the issue of associating service coordination with improved access to services and addressing inequality.

**Service coordination and improved access to services**

The Salisbury North and Manoora projects reflect similar expectations that whole of government processes
will result in improved access to services for estate residents (Queensland Department of Housing 1997; South Australian Housing Trust 1998; Department of Human Services 1999; Fulcher 1999; Queensland Government and Queensland Department of Housing 1999; 1999b). Certainly, increasing access to services is an important aspect of regeneration because questions about inequality for deprived communities are related to the availability of resources, and where people live affects the level and quality of services they receive. Taylor (2000, p. 1027), for instance, reflecting on her vast experience in working on regeneration projects in the UK, argues that whilst financial capital on its own is not enough to achieve regeneration and social inclusion, investment of financial capital is a crucial component to the success of projects. The arguments applied relate to the need to restore the investments that disadvantaged areas have previously lost through the processes of economic restructuring. Arguably, this is applicable to the Australian estates that have undergone similar processes. At Manoora and Salisbury North, it is unclear what these expectations of improved access to services and resources actually denote. Is it better coordination and more flexible and easily accessed services for residents moving through the service system or actual prospects for investment in additional services, or a mixture of both these aspects?

At Salisbury North it is anticipated that through adopting a whole of government model there will be opportunities to 'refocus government and non-government funding' and existing mainstream core public services and resources to the Salisbury North area (Fulcher 1999, p. 7). Similarly, at Manoora it is argued that a whole of government approach is necessary 'to ensure the range of services and resources required can be found' (Queensland Department of Housing 1997, p. 5, p. 21; Queensland Government and Queensland Department of Housing 1999, p. 16). However, it cannot be assumed that increased services and resources are necessarily related to, or will follow on from, working in a collaborative manner across government portfolios and through improving coordination or undertaking restructuring of services at a local level. Certainly at Manoora, implementation of many of the whole of government strategies detailed in the community action plan relies on successfully attracting Community Renewal Program funding through a competitive bidding process. Other strategies are conditional on enticing funding from existing mainstream government programs. Consequently, the project team concludes that despite the goodwill of those involved there is 'No evidence yet of a whole-of-government approach to resolving complex issues' on the ground (Queensland Government and Queensland Department of Housing 1999, p. 93). The issues being raised here, about the whole of government models, are probably best illustrated by the experiences of The Parks project.

Coordination and contraction of services at The Parks

The Parks project also has a whole of government approach to regeneration, although to date, what form it will take is not yet well articulated by government. In order to plan and coordinate the project, a multi-agency implementation structure known as the Community Development Alliance is being set up with proposed membership as shown at Table 1. It is questionable, however, whether at The Parks concentrated coordination of human services across numerous government departments and other agencies is likely to compensate for the larger reductions in government resources that have occurred in the area over recent years.

The announcement of the commencement of The Parks regeneration project in 1994 was followed by a concerted withdrawal and rationalisation of government-funded services. The reduction in services reversed much of the original community development approach taken by government some fifteen years before. In 1979 a community centre was built based on redistributive principles, which involved providing increased services to low income residents to raise their living standards and integrate them more fully within the broader community. The services included: a secondary school; health, dental, legal, youth and welfare services; child care facilities; a swimming pool, library, gym and theatre. At that time, community integration of residents was to be achieved through provision of a community complex that not only acted as a focal point where residents could access essential services but at the same time facilitated contact across different levels of the community (Healy & Parkin 1980). From the mid 1990s, decisions were taken which closed the secondary school, computing centre, Technical and Further Education College, Family and Community Services offices, Skillshare office and child care centre (Nelder 1997).

The closure of the secondary
In particular, as Thomson (1999, p. 3) details, provides a telling example of the impact of service withdrawal on the local community and shows how such decisions act to worsen rather than lessen the social exclusion of residents. The Parks High School catered for specific needs not met in mainstream education, including incorporating youth with significant behavioural problems. According to the youth worker at The Parks, the drop-out rate in local youth attendance at school after the closure was around 40 per cent because many of them could not cope with mainstream schooling. The decision to close the school was interpreted within teaching communities as 'a narrowing of the criteria of who is considered as worthy of schooling, [and] an abolition of the commitment to social justice' (Thomson 1999, p. 3). Hence, in this instance, the secondary school played an important role in social integration through education that was not taken into account by those making the decision to close it. Similar issues have been raised in the evaluations of the Rosewood and Mitchell Park regeneration projects, also in South Australia. Residents queried the withdrawal of both public and commercial services from the neighbourhoods over time. As with the high school at The Parks, the researchers undertaking the evaluation argued that prior to their removal, these services acted as focal points where neighbours and others in the local community interacted, providing a sense of community and thereby reducing social exclusion (Social Policy Research Group 1998a; 1998b).

In summary, many of the difficulties at The Parks are likely to be related to rationalisation of government services. Arguably, this partly requires economic redistributive solutions to replace services lost, or to establish other services needed in the area, rather than approaches that focus solely on resolving issues through coordinating and restructuring service delivery.

Whole of government regeneration in practice: Inclusion through redistribution, or cost minimisation strategies?

Within the whole of government models that have been examined, major tensions arise about what role public institutions will play in promoting social integration on public housing estates. In principle at least, within the projects there is recognition that the provision of services is an important element to assist social inclusion of residents. However, tension emerges in that the focus is more often on achieving efficiency and effectiveness and changing the way services are delivered and structured than ensuring they are sufficient to meet needs. Indeed, the ongoing rationalisation of government services presents a significant barrier to integration of residents. As Parkinson (1998) argues, where services such as schools that are fixed in place no longer exist to access in the regeneration area, then the effort expended to restructure government departments and coordinate existing resources may be greater than any benefits gained by residents. The whole process could end up being just another agenda to renew government through managerial reform or further rationalise services without addressing the inequality of residents. Repeatedly across the case study projects, in the questionnaire administered to housing authority staff, resource limits due to budget restraints was raised as an issue limiting the achievements of regeneration. If current approaches are to increase equality, as they aim to do, then they need to be matched with realistic levels of funding. As seen at The Parks, access to resources is the definitive issue rather than the structure of government bureaucracy in achieving social inclusion.

Another tension exists in the ambitious claims made about what whole of government models can achieve in relation to addressing inequality. The Manoora project, more so than the other case studies, associates coordination of services and utilising collaborative whole of government partnerships and inter-departmental cooperation with addressing structural causes of decline on the estate. This relationship is demonstrated in the community action plan for Manoora, which cites the problems of past regeneration initiatives as the absence of 'integrated policies to deal with the structural causes of decline' and that a 'joined up problem has never been addressed in a joined up way' (Queensland Government and Queensland Department of Housing 1999, p. 2). Much of this rhetoric is transposed directly from the British Government policy document 'Bringing Britain Together' (Social Exclusion Unit and Cabinet Office 1998). However, it is questionable how far restructuring of government bureaucracy, in order to achieve more integrated models of service delivery, is relevant to achieving social inclusion. Donnison (1998, p. 152) in undertaking an analysis of numerous government policies aimed at developing a more just society, argues that, at best, these sorts of local regeneration initiatives might make
existing services work better, or treat vulnerable people with more respect, and of course this is worthwhile. Nonetheless, initiatives such as this will not reduce overall growing levels of income inequality and poverty, because these factors are not caused by the structure of government bureaucracy and the way services are delivered. In this view, the association between integrated service delivery and inequality mixes up ‘means and ends’ in quite basic and misleading ways, insinuating that improved coordination of government services in and of itself will lessen basic inequalities experienced by estate residents including poverty.

Conclusion

The findings overall suggest that the ongoing restructuring of government bureaucracies, rationalisation of services and financial constraints are conflicting with traditional public sector objectives to achieve social justice.

Notes

1. Originally two projects were included from New South Wales. However, the decision to demolish the Villawood estate, one of the selected case studies, was announced soon after the research commenced. This meant only one case study from New South Wales was considered.

2. Some projects include partnerships with the community, private sector and non-government agencies under the whole of government banner. However, whilst recognising these aspects the major focus of this paper is on aspects of service coordination and concentration of government services and resources at the local level.

References


Organisations and Estate Regeneration Partnerships, Joseph Rowntree, Foundation, Bristol.


New South Wales Department of Housing, 1999a, Community Renewal, Building Partnerships, Transforming Estates Into Communities, Sydney.

New South Wales Department of Housing, 1999b, Community Renewal in Waterloo, Fact Sheet, Spring, Sydney.


Queensland Department of Housing, 1999b, Community Renewal Program 1990/00 Information Paper and 1999/00 Guidelines, Queensland Government, Brisbane.

Queensland Department of Housing, 1999c, Communication Strategy For Community Renewal Program, Brisbane.


Acknowledgement

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.