‘Fixing poor communities’: Public housing tenants, front-line bureaucrats and community improvement programmes

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For Michelle and Simon
who, while I was enquiring into the meaning in the lives of others, provided the meaning in mine.

Abstract

In advanced liberal democracies, poor communities are subject to high levels of scrutiny and intervention by the state. Ostensibly, the intention of these interventions is to mitigate the impact of concentrated socio-economic disadvantage. They consume significant state resources and their legitimacy and effectiveness are the subject of continuing concern in public policy debate. Two prominent features of social policy administration in Australia are the use of defined, limited-duration programmes and an expectation that community members will participate in their management and delivery. Both are widespread practices which lead to extensive interaction between members of disadvantaged communities and front-line bureaucrats. This interface is a site of contest, negotiation and control, yet its nature and impact are largely unexamined. At stake is the desire of communities to control how their needs and problems are defined and resources are spent, and the authority of representative government to impose its policy decisions.

The thesis is based on an ethnographic case study of four inner-city public housing estates in Victoria, Australia. The research design was iterative and reflexive, emergent findings being used to inform subsequent areas of enquiry. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with residents, field officers and a handful of more senior staff, it closely examines how they engage with and respond to the programmes they encounter, how they interpret their experiences, and the meanings they make from them. It focuses on relationships between actors, revealing a complex web of interactions between estate residents, front-line professionals, their managers, bureaucrats, non-government agencies and elected officials, sometimes over extended periods.

The study found that the parties often had quite different expectations of what could be achieved and gave contrasting accounts of what took place. It reveals a wide diversity of perspectives and motivations, contrary to assumptions of shared understanding and values. The thesis adds to the literature on policy implementation, finding that front-line bureaucrats exercise a high degree of influence over the implementation of area-based

social policies and services, and that, in spite of generally good intentions, such interventions can disempower communities and serve to further entrench, rather than mitigate, their poverty. More broadly, the research shows how the social, economic and political identities of poor communities are constructed by the state and other actors, and how these interactions in turn shape the knowledge and practices of the state. Finally, the thesis argues that social policy implementation is best understood as a social phenomenon, rather than a procedural undertaking.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award to me of any other degree or diploma, except where due reference is made in the text of the examinable outcome. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the examinable outcome. Where the work is based on joint research or publications, the relative contributions of the respective workers or authors are disclosed.

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Glossary of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CAQDAS	Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software
CCIC	Collingwood Community Information Centre
CEP	Community Empowerment Programme
CSHA	Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement
HCV	Housing Commission of Victoria (1938-1984)
LGA	Local government area
NPM	New Public Management
NR	Neighbourhood Renewal
SEIFA	Socio Economic Indexes for Areas, compiled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics
SES	Socio-economic status

Chapter 1 Project formation

The origins of the project

This project was born from questions and dilemmas that I faced as a practitioner. In 2008 I had been working for three years for a community sector organisation managing a range of government programmes on four inner-city public housing estates in Melbourne, in the state of Victoria, Australia. In trying to understand the challenges that I faced each day in this work I read what I could find, started a haphazard journal and asked questions of anyone I thought might help. Several people did. They told me that the questions I was asking were complex and poorly researched and that I should look for answers myself. They spent time with me, created opportunities, and set me on the path of becoming a research student.

As well as questions, I entered this project with a practitioner's collection of casual observations, beliefs and impressions gathered over many years. Although experience of this kind is recognised as an essential foundation of effective practice, it is not to be confused with scholarly research. It is nevertheless important here as a reference point.

Programmes have become the primary tool used by Australian governments to implement social policy. They are the drivers for transforming policy into outcomes. In 2004, for example, the Victorian government Department for Victorian Communities funded over 300 community development programmes throughout the state (Adams 2004), quite apart from those funded by the federal and local governments.[1] The programmes referred to throughout this thesis were designed to address what governments had identified as social problems. They are developmental and remedial programmes enacted in geographic communities that display high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, and they are intended to mitigate this

[1] In Australia there are three levels of government: national [Federal or Commonwealth], regional [State] and local. These are discussed in Chapter 2.

disadvantage. They are a recognition that some communities have not benefitted as much as others from economic development and that this has led to significant social and economic disparity (State of Victoria 2005). The general category term used for these programmes throughout is 'improvement' – estate improvement or community improvement programmes. This reflects the reform movements that were the antecedents of these programmes and covers the variety of terms that were used in the field, including 'renewal', 'regeneration', 'development' and 'strengthening'.

The following examples of my experience give a sense of the perspective from which I approached this study. I observed a great deal of local interpretation of guidelines, regulations and specifications by workers and residents, of which even mid-level managers were often unaware.[2] The results ranged from potentially good programmes failing because of lack of understanding and skills, or intentional subversion, to poorly designed programmes succeeding through the initiative and skills of front-line staff and residents. Staff at all levels of organisations found ways to avoid or ignore regulations that hampered them in achieving what they believed to be their role. This practice was widespread and was conducted openly among colleagues and residents. Sometimes residents and front-line workers formed alliances that found common cause against government and non-government agencies, reflecting their comparable positions at the lower status end of social and organisational hierarchies.

Participatory activities that appeared to be similar led to highly varied outcomes. It was not possible to understand this variation from programme specifications. The reaction of participants ranged from satisfaction to hostility and resentment, but most often drifted towards disengagement. In some instances, residents were invited into programme governance processes established by agencies. These committees appeared to have

[2] 'Worker' is used throughout to indicate a person who was professionally engaged with community members as a primary component of their work. This is reflected in professional titles of social worker, youth worker, community development worker, etc. In this thesis I do not use the term in the traditional political sense to distinguish between workers and owners, and I imply no judgement about the value of work undertaken at different places in service delivery or policy implementation systems.

institutional power but in practice had very little. Some committees that were very similarly constituted were able to exert considerable influence.

My most common observation was that local accounts of programmes and activities were often markedly different from the accounts contained in formal reports, which generally provided little understanding of the programmes to which they referred. Factual inaccuracies included inflating participant numbers or failing to report significant issues that may reflect badly on the programme. In many cases the lack of useful information was imposed by the design of report templates provided by the funding body, requiring information to be collected that did not explain the operation of the programme. The result was that the policy development and implementation system often had very little understanding of how programmes actually functioned and did not have access to information essential for programme design.

The high-rise estates[3] where this research took place are entirely public housing and accommodate some of the poorest members of the community. The downward trend of funding for low-income housing in Australia (Australian Government 2010), coupled with Victorian government policies to allocate housing to those most in need, has resulted in concentrations of people with a range of socio-economic disadvantages in small geographic area.

The common measures of poverty used in Australia are household incomes that are below either 50 percent or 60 percent of the median (ACOSS 2012). By these standards, the majority of public housing tenants are living in poverty. The issue of poverty is thus threaded throughout this study as a material reality, a social construction and a political concern.

Reason for research

The implementation of public policy through programmes has meant that stakeholder engagement and participation are now central practices of government agencies and community sector organisations. They have become routine activities of local government, mandated through the Best

[3] A high-rise block is defined as eight storeys or higher and serviced by a lift (Ministry of Housing and Construction Victoria 1990).

Value principles in the Victorian Local Government Act (Parliament of Victoria 1999), and a component of quality assurance standards with which community and commercial organisations must comply if they wish to tender for government contracts (e.g: QIC 2004). They consume significant government resources and stakeholder time as well as playing a part in defining the relationship between the citizen and the state.

While the literature concerning social capital and the strength and quality of community bonds (most notably Putnam 2000) proposes that the benefits of community participation apply to everyone, the social justice priorities of the Victorian and federal governments (Australian Government 2009; State of Victoria 2005) mean that the bulk of state-funded community development programmes are enacted in poor communities. This focus is further reinforced by research indicating a multiplier effect of locational disadvantage and area effects (Krieger et al. 2003; Vinson 2004, 2007). The research evidence for the relevance of these concepts in Australia is questionable (Darcy 2007), but their intuitive appeal has nonetheless helped shift policy attention from individuals to communities.

As the concentration of disadvantaged people became more evident, particularly in the highly visible inner-city public housing estates, the Victorian Office of Housing[4] moved beyond its primary role as a landlord concerned with the management of property and tenancies, to concern for the health of the communities formed by its tenants. The authority approached this expanded role through a community development paradigm which assumes that poor communities suffer from a deficit of social resources and that this can be remedied by programmed intervention. This was only a small step conceptually for the bureaucrats involved. The Office of Housing was located in the Department of Human Services, which obscured the confusion between its role as a landlord enforcing the Residential Tenancies Act – including the eviction of non-compliant tenants – and the broader welfare role of its parent department.

[4] The first Victorian state housing authority was established in 1938 as the Housing Commission of Victoria. It has since been named the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Housing and Construction, and the Office of housing. There is currently no identifiable state housing authority in Victoria, these functions having been absorbed by the Victorian Department of Human Services in 2011.

To date, the most substantial of these interventions in Victoria has been the Neighbourhood Renewal Program, an urban regeneration programme which began in 2000 and was closely modelled on (and even named after) similar initiatives in the UK. Neighbourhood Renewal was primarily designed to co-ordinate all government expenditure in selected locations with high concentrations of public housing tenants. Hence it strongly encouraged the participation of other state government departments, local government and non-government agencies. This led to high levels of interaction between public housing estate residents and front-line bureaucrats in a range of participatory activities, including consultations, committees, surveys, and events.

This reorientation took place in the context of the public sector reforms introduced in Victoria in the 1980s under the rubric of New Public Management [NPM] (Goldfinch & Roberts 2013). During this time, market-oriented reforms adopted in various configurations throughout the OECD were embraced with particular enthusiasm by Victorian and New Zealand governments (Hood 1991). Three of the strategies that Hood identifies with NPM are a shift to greater competition, a rise in contractual relationships and an emphasis on private sector management practices and culture. These have fundamentally altered the relationship between the state and its citizens in contradictory ways. On the one hand they position citizens as clients and customers empowered to impose the discipline of market choice upon the state and its agencies (Pawson & Jacobs 2010). On the other, informal volunteerism has been co-opted by government in the service of achieving policy aims (Marston 2004; Taylor 2003; Walker et al. 2011).

The questions arising from the personal observations listed earlier and the potential significance of the practices outlined in the previous paragraph are not adequately addressed in the research literature. Specifically, the relationship between front-line workers and public housing residents has received little attention. At one edge of this relationship is a very large body of research concerning marginalisation, poverty, social and economic marginalisation and the experiences of people living in public housing (Bryson & Winter 1999; Duke-Lucio, Peck & Segal 2010; Jones 1972;

Murphy et al. 2011; Peel 2003). At the other edge is an equally comprehensive literature concerning policy implementation (Burke 1990; Goggin et al. 1990; Lester et al. 1987; O'Toole Jr 1993, 2000; Pressman & Wildavsky 1973), public sector administration and the nature and theory of organisations (Brudney, O'Toole & Rainey 1990; Corbett 1996; Davis & Weller 2001; Hjern & Porter 1981), but there is a space between the two where the research literature is sparse. Even the highly influential work of Michael Lipsky limited its focus to the practices of front-line bureaucrats, showing little interest in the experiences of their clients (Lipsky 2010). Where attention is given to individual workers or community members it is assumed that their behaviours are determined by the power structures of the organisations to which they belong (Wakefield & Poland 2005), or that they operate in marginal areas where their employers' authority is weak (Lipsky 1980; Scott 1997). Yet Lipsky's central insight remains valid; for front-line professionals there is sufficient scope for interpretation of policy goals to substantially affect the policy outcome, to the extent that their work should be seen as a site of policy formation (Lipsky 2010). The shortcoming of this and related research (e.g. Hill 2003; Moore 1990; Riccucci 2002; Sorg 1983) is that it underplays both the agency of clients in the interpretation of policy and the influence that they might have on front-line professionals.

While the interest of the research cited above is primarily administrative, the front line of policy implementation is also of interest to political theory concerning the nature of the state. Due to the high level of government services that are now delivered under contract by non-government agencies, employees from these agencies join public sector employees as agents of the state. For communities that are subject to state programmes, the distinction between staff from government and non-government agencies is immaterial, as are the distinctions between federal, state and local governments. At close quarters, the difference between individuals is more significant. In any case, the distinction is blurred by the duplication of functions between the three levels of government in Australia (Fenna 1998).

One of the ways communities and individuals come to understand the state is through the relationships they develop with agency staff who are paid to implement community improvement programmes of which they are the intended subjects. For these community members, front-line professionals are the face of the state. The recursive nature of relationships means that they are also conduits through which the communities that the programmes are designed to act upon in turn act upon the state. Understanding the features of this particular interaction sheds light on ways in which the state is being reconstructed.

The current push for improved governance throughout OECD countries has led to an emphasis on the development of partnerships between government, civil society and the corporate sector. It is recognised that to be effective governments in liberal democracies cannot act unilaterally, but must engage with stakeholders to determine priorities and provide greater transparency and increased accountability (Keevers, Treleaven & Sykes 2008).

This has been driven in part by public reaction to poor outcomes of policies that are only weakly linked to local conditions. Increasingly well educated and resourced communities expect to participate more systematically in the development of policies and strategies that affect their area. It has also been driven by the increasingly unequal distribution of sustained economic growth and the barriers to social and economic participation which this creates (OECD 2001). Partnerships and participation have become routine features of bureaucratic practice, which as a result tends towards the uncritical application of techniques. There is good research into the use of partnerships with disadvantaged communities, particularly public housing communities (Arthurson 2003; Hastings 1996; Taylor 2007), but this conforms to existing social structures – government, agencies and communities. It does not examine the space between.

The solidity and power of these divisions between structures became more evident as the project progressed. They separated professional and client, welfare agency and community, public and private, welfare and non-

welfare. They shaped policy and practice and limited the possibility of effective partnerships.

By considering together the experiences of clients and professionals who were engaged in the same activities, this project takes a step away from the separation between the two groups that characterises much of the research in the area. It also points to the value of drawing on literature not normally associated with social policy, particularly that concerning the practice and theory of democracy and the construction of citizenship. This literature imagines quite different relationships from those which the policy literature generally assumes to exist between the state and members of disadvantaged communities.

This is an exploratory study of the experiences of informants who either directly or indirectly participated in front-line policy implementation and of the implication of this for policy formation and management. Although this inevitably involves consideration of the effectiveness of the policies encountered, the study is not an analysis or critique of these policies.

Research questions

The primary research question drawn from this is: *What are the factors that affect the ways in which members of disadvantaged communities and front-line professionals work together to implement social change programmes?*

Investigating this suggested a research focus tight enough to allow the close observation of small elements not visible from a distance. The literature concerning the practices of front-line professionals, coupled with my professional experience, indicated that seemingly inconsequential practices can have significant effects.

Close observation is also suggested by research into the leadership of organisational change, which emphasises the importance of recognising the beliefs and values of people subject to the change and of the importance of working to build shared meaning and logical consistency within programmes (Duignan 2006; Fullan 2001). At the same time the question needed to be

broad enough to allow investigation of lines of influence that extended beyond the four research sites.

This question was broken down into four subordinate questions. These questions were designed to investigate the function of these factors and the nature of the interaction between residents and front-line professionals in the context of the operation of the state. The four questions asked:

1. *What do the perspectives of the residents and front-line professionals reveal about the impact and limitations of policy implementation practice?*

This question is based on the assumption that policy implementation is a factor in the environment that has effects beyond its explicit purpose, whether or not it achieves that purpose. Thus it structures behaviours and relationships according to the bureaucratic culture from which it came.

Early implementation research made extensive use of case studies. As these case studies became increasingly narrowly focused in their search for elemental building blocks of implementation their number multiplied to produce a 'cornucopia of fascinating ideographic case studies' that did not provide a basis for generic implementation theory (deLeon & deLeon 2002:469). They did, however, show the complexity of implementation and the difficulty of understanding it in procedural terms alone. It became clear that policy implementation could not be separated from policy formation.

Implementation research continued to uncover the complexity of the process and became increasingly fragmented, but three propositions of earlier researchers are now generally accepted: that administrators exert as much or more influence on the policymaking process as do executives and legislators; that problem definition and policy design are seldom clear and unambiguous; and that the identification and even the concept of social problems is largely determined by ideology (Bacchi 1999; Palumbo & Calista 1990).

2. *How does the state manage its relationship with disadvantaged and marginalised populations in the context of community improvement programmes?*

Whereas the first question deals with established processes and activities such as are often set out in programme contracts, this question examines the more general assumptions by state agencies and government that are built into policy development and everyday practice. It is concerned both with what the state believes is its proper role in relation to these communities, and how local bureaucrats behave towards community members.

3. *How do people who live or work in the communities studied respond to and interpret the improvement programmes to which they are subject?*

The majority of state-sponsored community development rests on a deficit assessment. Thus disadvantaged communities are seen to be in need of the types of programmes that are commonly identified as 'capacity building'. Such assessments overlook the diverse range of abilities and resources that exist in poor communities. In a welfare state poor communities depend heavily on the state for their basic needs, but this does not render them powerless. The purpose of this question is to examine these resources in the communities from which the informants were drawn and the ways in which they were deployed by individuals and groups.

4. *What can be understood about the nature of the state when examined from the perspectives of the informants?*

No single theory of the state is able to explain the state as it was encountered through the lived experience of the informants. The fine-grained observation allowed by this study show that in many of its engagements with citizens the boundaries of the state are indeterminate. With regard to social policy and planning, local communities constitute the context in which the state is manifested.

Literature concerning the nature of the state was selected for the light it cast on how the phenomenon of the state can be understood from the perspective of the research sites. That which characterised the state as a logically consistent and organised entity separate from the citizenry was not

helpful for interpreting the data. Two metaphors emerged from the literature that proved particularly useful for interpreting the findings. One speaks of the state as a crossroads where a continual flow of influences compete and interact (Cerny 1990:168). The other, which is developed further in this thesis, places this iterative process at the edges of the state, characterising it as both influencing and being influenced through its frontiers with society (Emy & James 1996).

Themes in the research

Three themes are woven through the thesis. The first concerns recursiveness, the process of action and reaction that is the nature of any relationship. Undertaking any action to change others in turn changes the agent. In this study the state and its agencies shaped and were in turn shaped by the communities with which they interacted. Social planners and administrators are inclined to think of their work as cause and effect. Their administrative culture constructs accountability measures which reflect and reinforce this view by emphasising actions and measurable outcomes, but they do not consider how their culture is continually reconstructed through its interactions with individuals, groups and communities.

Recursiveness does not always involve contest. It is argued here that interventionary programmes, and welfare programmes more generally, depend on giving and receiving. As will be seen, recursiveness is also a factor in the production of knowledge.

The second theme concerns place, which became a hallmark of social policy thinking and service planning in Australia in the 1990s (Smyth, Reddel & Jones 2005). Most of the programmes found in the research were a product of spatial social policy and examples of place-based planning (Hess & Adams 2005). They were designed to remedy disadvantages of geographic communities, particularly in public housing estates (Klein 2004). However, locational disadvantage, with its belief in the multiplied impact of disadvantage and location (Vinson 2004), was not a significant factor in the four estates in this research. All were surrounded by areas of gentrification.

They had access to a wide range of health and welfare services. They were thought by some to be over-serviced. A manager in an agency spoke of 'agencies falling over each other'. Instead, these estates are better understood as pockets of disadvantaged people in high income areas.

Place was also significant in relation to local knowledge and the central importance of perspective. Many professional practices are contextual. Hence knowledge that is useful in its local context and time is often not transferrable to different places and times. Similarly, practices that are effective in one place may not be transferrable to another.

The third theme centres around marginality and frontiers. Marginality was most obvious in the description of people and communities as marginalised, although its meaning in that usage is strangely obscure.[5] To be marginalised is the result of some form of action, but the term is so worn away by routine usage that it no longer prompts consideration of who or what might have been its cause. It now describes a category rather than an outcome.

A similar concept of marginalisation is reinforced by the language of social exclusion. It speaks of people who live at the margins of mainstream society, unable to participate because of their lack of social or economic capital (Australian Government 2009).

In the conventional model of policy implementation, policies are produced and delivered by clearly structured organisations. Social policy is enacted at their edges, unfolding in a frontier between the organisations and the communities the policies are designed to act upon.

Frontiers are at the furthest reach of state authority. Hence they are places of adaptation and negotiation, lawlessness and innovation. Frontiers can be the places most resistant to change. A frontier can also be a bellwether of trends not yet detected in the mainstream.

[5] I have used the terms 'marginalised' and 'disadvantaged' throughout this thesis in keeping with conventional usage in the government and academic literature on which the thesis draws. The terms were regularly used by informants. Where this context is less immediate I have used the term 'poverty'. I recognise that 'disadvantaged' and 'marginalised' are far from objective descriptions, and that they are imposed categories that have contributed to turning public attention away from poverty.

The thesis is strongly influenced by the strengths approach to the delivery of human services (Gray 2011(Green, 2005 #1129; McMillen, Morris & Sherraden 2004). This is a philosophy of practice widely used in children's and family services. It is applicable more generally to work with individuals, groups, organisations and communities. It is a values-based approach, not a practice model. As such it relies on interpretation by the practitioner and is understood more through experience and reflection than the accumulation of techniques. The strengths approach takes into account the contexts of people's lives and the multiple influences to which they are subject. The principles on which it is based include that every individual, family, group and community has strengths, and the focus should be on these strengths rather than on pathology; that the community is a rich source of resources; and that self-determination and collaboration are essential for effective practice (Scerra 2012).

In the hands of less skilled practitioners, the lack of techniques leaves the practice open to misinterpretation, romanticism and the avoidance of problems. It is often envisaged in simple counterpoint to the deficit model or problems-focused approach, which is characterised as oppressive and disempowering, yet social services are established and funded to deal with problems (McMillen, Morris & Sherraden 2004). In the right hands it remains a powerful and profoundly democratic practice.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 canvasses the principal bodies of literature on which the conceptual framework of the thesis is based. As is already evident, this is a complex study that draws on a wide range of literature from different fields. Discussion of this literature is located throughout the thesis. Chapter 2 deals only with the literature that is central to the research design and analysis. In doing so it lays the groundwork for the theoretical discussion that unfolds throughout the thesis.

Chapter 3 simultaneously builds on and extends this framework, setting out the methodology on which the research is based. It begins by summarising

the main concepts and positions in social constructionism, and explains where the thesis is located in relation to these. The chapter becomes increasingly instrumental, explaining ethnography and its application, the relevance of the case study approach, the mechanics of data collection, the approach to transcription, and the operation of memory. The chapter also includes a partly reflective section on the ethical issues that arose during the project.

Chapters 4 to 8 present the findings of the research. Chapter 4 is based on documentary research, while Chapters 5 to 8 present the data from interviews. Chapter 4 explains the historical context of the estates and their communities, combining accounts of literal and metaphorical construction. It describes the physical characteristics of the four estates that are the subject of this research, and the demographic profile of the communities which they house. It considers a variety of policies and broader social and political events which have shaped this profile.

The chapter establishes the common heritage of town planning and social planning as it is revealed in the creation of the four estates, and it shows the influence of this heritage on current practices. It argues that history is a powerful influence on the present that is often overlooked, and ends with an examination of the practice of intervention by the state in poor communities.

Chapter 5 brings these different strands together again and introduces the voices of the informants. Here the themes of history, knowledge and intervention are discussed in the light of the data gathered from informants. The chapter includes a mainly theoretical section concerning the construction of public sector knowledge that is fundamental to the study.

Chapter 6 deals with the themes of participation and power. This chapter addresses the original motivation of the thesis to explore the phenomenon of participation, and why its practices, from casual observation, differed so markedly from their intention. It analyses the informants' accounts of their experiences through the lens of theories of participation, democracy and power.

Chapter 7 investigates the influence of the re-emergence of community in public policy and the particular shape this has taken. In contrast to the enthusiasm with which it has been embraced as a tool of policy development and implementation, it remains a contested and poorly articulated concept. Nevertheless it has become so entrenched as to be almost invisible to the experienced practitioner. This discussion leads into the value of local knowledge and community perspectives in public administration.

Chapter 8 returns to the broader issue of the phenomenon of the state as it can be understood from the perspective of this study. It uses the metaphor of the frontier to describe the contested space between the public sector and estate communities. It also considers the importance of emergent concepts of citizenship with regard to disadvantaged and marginalised communities.

The final chapter draws together the arguments of the thesis, explains the broad findings and limitations of the research, and ends by considering some of the implications for policy formation and implementation.

Chapter 2 Theories and concepts

Introduction

The project does not align easily with a single academic field and could have been approached from a number of theoretical perspectives. It could find a place in housing and urban studies, as the research focused on four inner-city housing estates. The central position given to the construction and subjectivity of disadvantage is relevant to poverty studies, which is also suggested by the experience of many of the informants. Its emphasis on the ways in which the experience of residents and front-line workers affects how they work and relate to government might place it in implementation or community development studies.

Due to the exploratory nature of the project and the range of the literature canvassed, it was also driven by research findings as they emerged. This in turn sharpened the research design, and three overarching bodies of literature were selected as being of broad relevance. These are theories of the state, policy implementation, and the related concepts of community and participation that underpin community improvement programmes. Through this iterative process a second tier of literature was identified that informed discussion of particular findings but did not have broad application in the work. It includes, for example, constructions of citizenship, the nature of frontiers, poverty, and the care relationship in social services. That literature is not dealt with here, but is discussed in later chapters in the context of those findings.

Two challenges were encountered in this selection process. The first was that the boundaries of established disciplines are shifting in response to growing recognition of the unavoidable complexity of many contemporary social issues. Scholars are questioning the limitations of their traditional disciplines. Parenthetically, the following description from the relatively new sub-discipline of policy anthropology neatly encapsulates the purpose of this project. The authors explain that policy anthropology:

> …is not simply concerned with representing local, indigenous, or marginalized 'cultures' to policy makers, government agencies, or concerned NGOs. Its focus instead is simultaneously wider and narrower; wider insofar as it aims to explore how the state (or to be more exact, those policy makers and professionals who are authorized to act in the state's name] relates to local populations; and narrower to the extent that its ethnographic focus tends to privilege the goal of understanding how state policies and government processes are experienced and interpreted by people at the local level, keeping in mind that anthropologists are recasting the 'local' or the 'community' to capture changing realities (Wedel et al. 2005:34).

The second challenge was created by the design of the research, which was tightly focused on a particular set of activities involving a small number of people, but was open to considering whatever might be found in that space in an effort to understand the intricate relational dynamics that were anticipated. The result was a far greater complexity of interview data than was foreseen, necessitating further literature searches. The literature which is discussed below forms the conceptual backbone of the project.

In keeping with the origins of this research project, the chapter follows the emergence of questions concerning daily practices of local bureaucracy, to questions of the significance of these for the estate communities, and finally to the global significance of the nature of the state and why it is important for this project. Thus it deals with the limitations of theoretical explanations of social policy implementation; theoretical perspectives on community and participation in the context of the retreat from the welfare state; and broader perspectives on the state and power.

The state at work: implementing social policy

In the years following the Second World War there were high hopes that the capacity and reach of the state, which had developed so strongly throughout the war, could be used to address social issues as effectively as it had managed wartime economies. In peace-time this capacity was turned to social planning and service provision on an unprecedented scale (Judt 2008; Scott 1998). Military metaphors were (and are still) pervasive,

constructing social problems as enemies to be isolated and defeated in the march of progress. Hence the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act in the US, for example, launched what became known as the War on Poverty.

In Australia, a national programme to build public housing was commenced in 1945 under the first Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement. In the ten years of this agreement nearly 100,000 dwellings were built for people in inadequate housing or on low incomes, and for those who had served in the armed forces. It is estimated that by 1981, 840,000 dwellings had been built by the state housing authorities[6] (Phibbs & Young 2009).

This projection of the state into new areas of social policy created intense interest in the ways in which the intentions of the state are translated into action. The emergence of policy scholarship is conventionally linked (including by the authors themselves) to the publication in 1973 of Pressman and Wildavsky's book,[7] *Implementation,* a ground-breaking case study notable for its gloomy finding that the large-scale poverty alleviation project it examined produced almost no useful outcomes. In the subsequent development of implementation studies different commentators provide different accounts of the trends that emerged (Barrett 2004; Lester et al. 1987; Sabatier 1986). Although the accounts differ, the broad currents they identified remain influential.

Early implementation research was primarily reductionist, focused on intensive analysis of individual case studies that were designed to discover what lay between the formation of a policy and its execution. This research revealed to public administrators and those developing policy the complexities and dynamism of implementation. In doing so it also revealed the limitation of the case study approach (Lester et al. 1987). Understanding such complexity and breadth indicated the need for many more case studies than could be undertaken with the resources available, producing what deLeon and deLeon called a 'cornucopia of fascinating ideographic case studies, each with its own prescribed lessons, but little in

[6] Only 120,000 of these were retained for low-income rental, the remainder having been sold to tenants.
[7] O'Toole thought the claim for this link was 'exaggerated mightily', but accepted that until that time implementation research had not been a prominent issue (O'Toole Jr 2000:264).

terms of a generic implementation theory' (2002:469). Intensive case studies were valuable but insufficient for those scholars searching for a unified theory of implementation.

By the early 1980s the majority of implementation studies had become polarised around 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches. The top-down approach is a normative model which encourages the separation of the political and administrative spheres, and reinforces the primacy of central authority over the implementation process. It rests on the relatively unassailable assumption that a legitimately elected government ought to be able to have its decisions implemented as they were intended. Two prominent proponents of this perspective, Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983), identified a variety of legal and political variables that affect implementation. From this they developed six necessary conditions for effective policy implementation: clear and consistent objectives; adequate causal theory; implementation process legally structured to enhance compliance by implementing officials and target groups; committed and skilful implementing officials; political support maintained throughout the implementation process; and socio-economic conditions stable enough not to undermine political support or causal theory (Sabatier 1986:23-25). This chain of command and its emphasis on ensuring all the links operate effectively remains an influential paradigm today.

The proponents of the equally normative bottom-up approach favoured various micro-political models which included consensus-building, persuasion, negotiation and power bargaining (Barrett 2004). The approach corresponds with the principle of subsidiarity articulated by the EU that decisions must be taken as closely as possible to the citizen (Eurofound 2010).

Some researchers maintained that the contest between the two poles could be understood as different perspectives of the same phenomenon and urged that the field move beyond 'the rather sterile top-down, bottom-up dispute' (O'Toole Jr 2000:267). This overlooks the strong sentiments that fuel the dispute. For many protagonists on both sides of the argument the two positions are symbolic of broader beliefs about how the governance of

society ought to be structured. In practice the rhetorical device of two distinct and separated territories is inconsistent with the incremental continuity of the implementation process, but the device serves to reveal the fault-lines below the surface of the argument.

The paths implementation research has taken show awareness of the complexity of the implementation process and the difficulty of separating it as a discrete operation of the state that can be understood through reductionist analysis. The recognition of this complexity coincided with what appeared to be a decline in interest in the field. At the beginning of the 1990s writers such as Goggin predicted that the demand for research implied by this recognition would lead to growth throughout the 1990s continuing well into the 21st century, but this optimism had already begun to fade by 1996. Harald Saetren (2005) presented a conference paper asking *Whatever Happened to Implementation Research?*, Michael Hill (1997) wrote *Implementation Theory: Yesterday's Issue?* (1997) and Laurence O'Toole wrote that 'policy implementation no longer frames the core question of public management and public policy' (O'Toole Jr 2000:263). Research into public policy implementation came to be seen as an intellectual dead end (Saetren 2005:562), yet the implementation of policies continued to expand as programmes proliferated.

More recent work by Saetren (2005) and Peter and Linda deLeon (2002) told a different story. They cited evidence showing that there was in fact a profusion of implementation studies to be found if one looked beyond the traditional fields of political science and public sector management. Saetren (2005) searched in areas such as health, education, law, environment and economics. He found continued rapid growth of implementation research throughout the 1990s, and a decrease in interest from the field of public policy. DeLeon and deLeon (2002) unearthed a great deal of more recent literature addressing policy implementation. They concluded that the boundaries of implementation studies had become unclear and created a field too large to be studied in depth from any single position.

What seemed to be a decline in interest may have been fragmentation, as continuing research revealed an ever more complex terrain. Researchers

attempting to more accurately explain parts of the implementation process found it necessary to sharpen their focus onto smaller segments, which led to a growing number of variables and disputes among proponents of different perspectives. The expansion of the number of theories has been characterised more by divergence than convergence.

A further impediment to the development of a coherent theory is the tendency by many researchers to ignore or avoid the political dimension of policy implementation. The few who do engage with this aspect find that the political and administrative realms are inseparable. For example, research that points to the failure of government action may be held up as evidence of the need for the devolution of authority to local communities, or it may be used to argue for the withdrawal of government from attempting to intervene in social problems. In the 1980s O'Toole found that some of the political appointees of President Reagan to the US government were supportive of implementation research because it revealed the failure of government intervention. O'Toole (2004:313) records that writers such as Pressman, Wildavsky and Bardach called for less ambitious government activity, not because they were hostile to government but because they believed the expectations of what representative government could achieve in social reform were unrealistic and thus counterproductive.

This last position opens the door to consideration of the contextuality of both knowledge and practice in policy implementation. There are clearly limits to the efficacy of central control. What can be understood at one point in the implementation chain may not be intelligible at another, and the types of knowledge that are needed by practitioners throughout vary according to their functions. The knowledge that is sought is also dependent on perspective. Front-line practitioners who feel antipathy towards centralised control are unlikely to show interest in the knowledge used in policy formation, relevant as it may be. The knowledge needed for the check-list of Mazmanian and Sabatier (Sabatier 1986) cited above is inadequate for the field worker managing relationships with colleagues and community members.

This accumulation of uncertainties seemed to have moved the development of a coherent theory of implementation out of reach (deLeon & deLeon 2002; O'Toole Jr 2004). O'Toole notes that this accumulation illustrates the great diversity of knowledge types needed by actors implementing policy, and that:

> Expecting some theory, any theory, to translate simply into a clear and uniform body of knowledge suitable for all such customers is to expect far too much. The theory–practice nexus is not a simple link in some translation belt from thought to action (2004:312).

Thus far the concept of the implementation chain has been used without qualification, but it is not a neutral concept. It refers to the organisational units and 'sequentially independent agencies' through which information, instructions and resources pass in the formation and enactment of policies (O'Toole & Montjoy 1984). Like any social construction, it is built on and imposes certain cultural values and beliefs while marginalising others. It is associated with chains of command and with the enforcement of authority and control, and references the Taylorist ideal of a series of specialised tasks formed into a seamless flow of activities from design to product, but this is not a useful paradigm for understanding the complexities of the implementation of social policy. It suggests that research attention should be directed towards discovering causes of inefficiency and variation and away from models that take greater account of social processes. The research referred to so far is oriented in this way.

An alternative direction, more useful to this project, was argued by Barrett and Fudge (1981) in their book *Policy and Action*. The authors' starting point was a challenge to the assumed hierarchical relationships between policy formation and implementation. They suggested instead that implementation should not be seen as a separate administrative task, but as a continuation of the political process. Thus the political activities of negotiation and bargaining between semi-autonomous actors continue to operate throughout the processes of implementation. They conceived of implementation as 'negotiated order' which, as Barrett explained, places

> …more emphasis to the power-interest structures and relationships between participating actors and agencies, and the nature of interactions taking place in the process, as key factors shaping the policy/implementation outcomes (2004:253).

Although this, and related research to which Barrett referred, is a substantial step towards a more anthropological understanding of policy implementation, it remains attached to a linear hierarchical model in which government is imagined to be at the top and the citizens or community at the bottom. It stops short of engaging with the implications of democratic theory and the principle of the sovereignty of the citizen, which makes the identification of a top and bottom so unclear as to call into question the hierarchical model itself. Barrett was aware of the need for this line of enquiry. In the final sentence of her paper she wrote that

> …a much neglected area within public service agencies has been the whole arena of social audit and democratic accountability and the consequent attention to the role of consultation, participation and advocacy in the implementation process (2004:261).

Although efforts to develop a comprehensive theory of policy implementation have so far foundered, a great deal of useful knowledge has been generated by implementation research. Of greatest relevance to this study is the research into the work of front-line bureaucrats, which is conventionally traced to the work of Michael Lipsky. In a conference paper, Lipsky (1971) proposed that what he termed street-level bureaucrats (teachers, police, welfare workers etc.) had sufficient scope for interpretation of policy goals to substantially affect the policy outcome, so much scope that he described their work as a site of policy formation. He expanded on these ideas in *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (Lipsky 2010). The particular relevance of this work is that it identified front-line bureaucrats as an analytically unique category, distinguished from their colleagues by their interaction with clients.

Lipsky showed that professionals who are involved in the delivery of government services and who interact directly with citizens in the course of their work have considerable power to interpret policy intentions. This

power exists where the reach of institutional authority is most diffused. He made three observations about this. Firstly, that work undertaken at this level is as complex as the implementation environment itself. It is not a quarantined process. It requires nuanced judgement that cannot be adequately described in regulations and work requirements.

Secondly, that front-line bureaucrats deal directly with people (commonly distinguished as clients) and hence their need to exercise judgement is unavoidable. It is essential for their effectiveness that they are able to call upon a range of responses to the human dilemmas they face. As long as human interaction is required in the delivery of social services, judgements will need to be made in ambiguous situations.

Thirdly, he observed that the workers he studied were able to defend their use of discretion because it allowed them to assert the authority of the state over their clients, which was a reinforcement of its legitimacy welcomed by more senior bureaucrats. As the service provision activities of government expanded, front-line professionals became a significant part of the face of state authority (2010:15). Lipsky saw this use of discretion as a dilemma for those who were faced with insufficient resources to meet demand and had to decide what level of service to provide and to whom. It was also a dilemma for planners and managers, because the conditions and nature of front-line work necessitate staff making judgements of this kind. The key issue for Lipsky was how to minimise this discretion through management and systemic controls (2010:196).

Lipsky's work spawned a line of investigation that continues today and to which this thesis contributes. An early interest in the behaviour of school teachers soon grew to include studies of the professional activities of police, legal services lawyers, lower court judges, environmental inspectors, hospital ward attendants, nurses, hospital clerical staff and case workers in social welfare organisations (Dunér & Nordström 2006; Fineman 1998; Khalid 2012; Maynard-Moody & Musheno 2003; Proudfoot & McCann 2008; Riccucci 2002; Weatherley & Lipsky 1977). This research consistently found that there was a high level of autonomy and self-direction among these

professionals, and that this significantly affected the way in which policies were implemented.

Jeffrey Prottas (1978) introduced a useful concept to this discussion. He described front-line bureaucrats as 'boundary actors', because their roles extend beyond the systems in which they are employed into those systems' environments. Prottas was particularly interested in the potential for power in these roles, and explained that:

> Characteristic of a boundary-spanning role is its incumbents' simultaneous operation in two interdependent worlds. This simultaneity is the key to the street-level bureaucrat's power. […] The bureaucracy and its nonstreet-level employees have access to the internal facts – rules, formal categories procedures and so forth. The clients have access to the external information – facts about themselves, their demands, and so forth. Only the street-level bureaucrat has routine access to both (1978:293).

As will be seen, the histories of the participants in this research show that this separation is often blurred. Many employees within organisations had initially been field-workers, and long-term clients became familiar with the internal workings and personnel of at least the lower reaches of the organisations with which they had contact. Some employees were former clients of the service system and sometimes of their employer. Nevertheless the concept of boundary-spanning roles proved a useful analytical device in the project.

At the same time as this body of research was being built, research by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) demonstrated the need to pay attention to behaviours throughout the whole implementation process. Using statistical analysis, they studied the inverse relationship between the number of points along an implementation chain where significant decisions needed to be made, and the likelihood of achieving an outcome. The subject of their study was a long chain between the federal Economic Development Administration in Washington, DC and an employment programme it funded in California. The authors identified 30 major decision points and 70 agreements that had to be reached for the programme to continue, then calculated the likelihood of the programme achieving a successful outcome

based on different probabilities of agreement at every decision point. They found that that the chances of the programme being completed relied on a very high probability of success at each point. 'On the assumption that the probability is 80%' they wrote, 'the chances are a little over one in a million after seventy agreements have been reached, and falls below the half-way mark after just four' (1973:107).

The authors' revelation of the influence of complexity is important, but their reliance solely on statistical probability exaggerated the likelihood of failure. It ignored the influences of cultural perspective, professional expectations, political skills, and personal interests and values, and assumed that programme logic would always triumph over the adaptive capacity of employees working within the implementation chain (in this project, front-line workers and their clients). In the authors' Pressman's and Wildavsky's model, policy implementation professionals at the centre were restricted to attempting to eliminate random variation, faced with a probability of success in the order of – in this case – one in a million. They also did not speculate on the likelihood of the programme succeeding had its implementation adhered to its design. The lasting value of their research was to highlight the fragility of centrally designed and controlled policy implementation processes that are intended to be carried without translation or variation to the front line. This is not, however, an argument against the legitimacy of centrally determined policy intentions.

It can be seen that the efforts to establish a theoretical foundation for policy implementation have not been fruitful. The literature remains primarily normative and descriptive, which has been reinforced by related developments in public administration. Since the 1980s, the practice of policy implementation in Australia, New Zealand and the UK has been effectively determined by the application of managerialist principles derived from the private sector and applied to the public sector, mostly under the name of New Public Management (NPM). By the late 1990s NPM had become the dominant discourse in a number of public sectors, including those in Australasia, North America, Scandinavia and the UK (Pollitt, Thiel & Homburg 2007). As a result, implementation studies began to focus on the

processes and management of organisational change, to present itself as fundamentally objective and thus free of the distortions of political judgement (Goodlad 1999; Hall 2013; Marston 2004).

NPM is an ambiguous term stretched to cover a variety of activities. These include performance indicators, personnel reforms, the creation and management of executive agencies, public private partnerships, competitive tendering and benchmarking (Pollitt, Thiel & Homburg 2007). In Australia the adoption of these practices has been based on two assumptions: that efficient and effective management is the foundation of good governance, and that practices developed in the private sector are equally appropriate for the public sector. NPM entails a standardization of these practices across public sector institutions on the model of the market (Fairclough 1995; Marston 2004).

NPM is even less-well theorised than policy implementation, and makes little use of empirical evidence (Pollitt 2007). Instead, it is better understood as a quasi-religious ideology, (Goodlad 1999; Hood 2005; Klikauer 2013) and its values and political co-ordinates thus exposed to examination. As Jessop observes, 'ideology is most effective when ideological elements are invisible' (2002:467).

From a constructionist perspective, although represented by its advocates as an objective description of economic and organisational reality, NPM can be seen to be directive and constitutive through its language and practices. NPM is also a highly centralising discourse, at odds with its promise of dispersing or devolving agency (Hall 2013; Marston 2004). NPM, as manifested in what are referred to here as 'programmatic approaches to social problem solving' and in contractual relationships, largely ignores the importance of historical context and the particularity of local conditions. It constructs the health of a community as a product that can be specified and purchased through contracts built around indicators and outcomes. The importance of process purely instrumental, and the reporting on these indicators to community members in meetings and reports displaces other ways of understanding community life. Merry notes that 'the growing reliance on indicators is an instance of the dissemination of the corporate

form of thinking and governance into broader social spheres' (Merry 2011:S83).

The operation of the market also repositions citizens as customers, a reduction in status by all but the most disengaged models of democracy (Fairclough 1995:231). In the role of customers people act primarily as individuals, and their opportunities for collective action or deliberation are very restricted, particularly if they have limited financial resources. Thus NPM can be used to disempower community members, a process which is explored in a case study in Chapter 6.

The significance of NPM to this study is the dominance that it exercised over policy implementation in the research sites. Its features are clearly visible in the documentary and interview data. Policy implementation is not an explanatory theory, but an ideology that is best understood within this study as a social construction.

At the outer edges of the policy implementation process, the place where the stated purpose of social policies is realised, the greatest hazard for the policy professional is the apparently erratic and whimsical behaviour of communities. The attempts to mitigate this while responding to increased demands for people to be able to have a say in decisions which affect them has necessitated bureaucracies becoming far more engaged with communities in the implementation of policies, which is discussed next.

Community and participation

There is considerable overlap between the concepts of community and participation in the relevant literatures. Linked to both is the concept of social capital, which is primarily an approach to conceptualising and measuring qualities of community within economic discourse. Proponents of social capital, most prominently Putnam (1995) and the rational-choice sociologist James Coleman (1990), warned of the erosion of civic connection, which they saw as deeply threatening to the wellbeing and vibrancy of democracy. Initially the concern was generalised, but as it began to be expressed through government action it increasingly took the form of intervention in disadvantaged and marginalised communities.

The discourse of community has also provided the foundation for the concepts of social inclusion (Hayes, Gray & Edwards 2008), which achieved a prominent place in Australian social policy, and social cohesion, which in recent years has become heavily influenced by the concepts of social capital and social exclusion (Stone & Hulse 2007),

The currently dominant version of social capital was propelled into public policy discourse by publication of Putnam's research (1992; 1995; 2000). The literature tends to be more idealistic and descriptive than explanatory. Allied with the concept of community, it was significant in the context of this research because of its usefulness to bureaucrats and elected representatives keen to identify the community as the place where responsibility for fixing social problems could be located (Bryson & Mowbray 2005). Community receives more attention in political theory from writers concerned with the reconceptualisation of the state and the mobilisation of the concept of community to this end (Marinetto 2003).

Partly obscured by the glare of popularity achieved by the work of Putnam is a heterodox strain of critical literature that links the widespread use of the concept of social capital with the neoliberal project of depoliticising class-based contests and dissipating established solidarities. Social capital in its popular form allows claims-making by local communities, particularly poor communities, to be reflected away from the state back to the communities themselves (DeFilippis 2001, 2008; Fine 2007; Lepofsky & Fraser 2003). For writers such as Defilippis and Fine, Pierre Bourdieu offered a more theoretically useful and sophisticated version of the concept. For Bourdieu, a central feature of social capital is its expression of power. It is the means of the reproduction of class distinctions and privilege, and an expression of the power relations that keep them in place (Bourdieu 1986).

These writers argue that Putnam's focus on the quality and range of connections between individuals in communities obscures the relationships of power and discounts the importance of economic capital. In reality, some social networks are more powerful than others and provide their members with far greater benefits. 'To have any value as a term',

DeFillippis writes, 'social capital must retain a connection to economic capital, and it must therefore be premised on the ability of certain people to realize it at the expense of others' (2001:793).

No evidence of this latter interpretation was found in the data collected for this research. The social policy seen in this study clearly reflected the work of Putnam, steering community members towards apolitical forms of participation and away from more activist expressions of citizenship. Given the truncated interpretation of civic participation that is shown in this research, it is important to understand its much broader foundations.

Three strands of influence can be found in the current practices of participation: a Christian tradition of community service, renewed interest in communitarianism and associative democracy, and interpretations of the role of the state which have led to the prominence of the concept of governance and the shifting of responsibility from government to local communities.

Participatory practices that assume a moral imperative to uplift the powerless and the poor have strong religious foundations. Henkel and Stirrat (2001) trace this to the Protestant Reformation when it became both the right and the duty of the individual to participate actively in his or her relationship with God. To enable this the Bible and the liturgy were translated from Latin. Centralised papal authority was challenged by the principle of subsidiarity which encouraged the laity to become involved in the governance of the church. Participation became both a liturgical practice and an overarching administrative principle (Henkel & Stirrat 2001). The relevance of this Christian legacy is that the majority of the organisations contracted to provide services to residents of the housing estates in this research are Christian in origin. Many have set up secular entities in order to bid for government funding. In fulfilling these contracts the organisations are barred from any form of evangelising or discrimination on the basis of religion. As well, although there is no established church in Australia, Christianity and its institutions remain a powerful influence in cultural and political life (Lohrey 2006). For example, the US sociologist Hilary Silver believes there is a strong Christian morality underlying the

social inclusion policy of the Australian Labor federal government (2007-2013), noting the influence of the Anglican social welfare organisation, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, in the policy's formation, and that the federal Social Inclusion Board was initially chaired by a Catholic priest, Monsignor David Cappo (Silver 2010). Policy and strategy concerning social inclusion were the work of an Australian government led by a very publicly Christian prime minister, Kevin Rudd.

Participatory democracy and its focus on the nexus between power and legitimacy has found a new purchase in recent years as the role of governments and their relationship with their citizens continues to be redefined. Some commentators see this renewal of interest as being driven by a perceived democratic deficit (indicated by declining trust in public institutions), public sector reform and higher expectations of service quality (Bishop & Davis 2002; Hindess 1997). If, as is argued here, the state acts upon and is acted upon by its citizens, participatory democracy is a constitutive element of the state. Even by the most narrow definition of representative democracy as electoral competition, citizen participation is indispensable to the concept of the democratic state. A large and increasing number of scholars, commentators and foundations also maintain that deliberation is an essential component of democracy (Delli Carpini, Cook & Jacobs 2004; Dryzek 2009).

It will be shown that, to the extent it was thought about at all, participatory democracy was for most informants a vague ideal that found its way onto the estates through models such as the enduring Ladder of Participation of Sherry Arnstein and the Spectrum of Public Participation developed by the International Association for Public Participation (Arnstein 1969; IAP2 2007). These are staples of the community development toolkit. The spectrum was the subject of extensive training for housing staff at the time of this research. The structures of both these models imply that higher levels of participation that provide greater control by participants are preferable, but the time and effort required by this needs to be judged against the benefit. In the wider community little research has been conducted into participants' experiences, nor into how participants prioritise

the issues over which they would like to have control. The notable exception is specific research into tenant participation in regeneration programmes, particularly in the UK, which is reviewed later in this section.

In keeping with writing of the time on policy implementation, Arnstein's ladder does not question the legitimacy of institutional power, only the ways in which access to it is controlled. Participation is framed in relation to the decisions, activities and structures of the state or its agents. There is no recognition of political engagement through informal means or of spontaneous participation in local problem-solving that may never rise to the attention of state authorities. Arnstein's model implies that people are largely powerless unless they are given the opportunity to participate in processes that are managed or authorised by the state.

Participatory democracy includes an array of practices that are in some measure deliberative or discursive, and involve higher levels of citizen engagement than needed solely for the election of representatives. Deliberative approaches seek to reassert democratic ideals in the interests of the governed by empowering citizens to actively participate in the formation or interpretation of policies to which they are subject, and in political problem-solving more generally. The legitimacy of deliberative approaches hinges on the question of who, according to those affected by a proposed collective action, should be able to engage in deliberation to influence the decisions about that action. Deliberation must therefore be consequential. There are many deliberative micro-models now in use, all of which seek to construct 'deliberative publics' from ordinary citizens through democratic processes. Most use some form of randomised selection of participants, so that partisan interest groups, the 'key stakeholders' of consultative methods, are confined to advisory roles with no decision-making authority (Dryzek 2004; Hartz-Karp 2007).

The central communicative ideal of deliberative methods is reciprocity. In place of the traditional contest of rhetoric that seeks to convince or to overwhelm the arguments of others, the various methods strive for non-coercive communication framed in terms accessible to others (Dryzek 2009). Talking together is the measure of participation, distinguishing

deliberation within the broader collection of participatory activities that includes voting, lobbying, joining a political party or voluntary organisation, taking part in protest rallies and the like. Ideally, deliberative exchanges allow deep divisions over interests and moral values to be identified and negotiated and the realities of others to be understood.

In reaching for this ideal, deliberative democracy risks becoming mired in the same soft ground as the ideal of community. Communities are as much defined by who they exclude as they are by who they include. As noted in the beginning of this section, social capital encapsulates this exclusionary potential, and often works to entrench existing inequities. Deliberative models strive by various methods to create 'mini-publics' that reflect the diversity of the relevant community (Fung 2003). To the extent that the methods are successful, these groupings will contain at least some of the power imbalances of the communities from which they are drawn. Procedures designed to ensure that all participants have an equal right to speak and that difference is not marginalised are insufficient to overcome the effect of privilege, internalised sense of entitlement, and the valuing of some styles of speech and thought over others. As has been shown in the above section on power, the operation of power is not always visible, even to those who are subject to it. Iris Marion Young noted that:

> The deliberative ideal tends to assume that when we eliminate the influence of economic and political power, people's ways of speaking and understanding will be the same, but this will only be true if we also eliminate their cultural differences and different social positions. The model of deliberative democracy, that is, tends to assume that deliberation is both culturally neutral and universal (Young 1996:122).

Like much of the government policy and programme literature encountered in this project, the aim underlying deliberative participation is to find or create unity by enabling people to transcend their individual interests and find a common good. The problem with this is that the ideal of unity may be achieved at the cost of the suppression of difference, contrary to the ideal of a pluralist society. 'To arrive at the common good', writes Young, 'it may be necessary to work through differences, but difference itself is something to be transcended because it is partial and divisive' (1996:126).

In this analysis, Young (1990) drew on her earlier work addressing the claims made for the 'understandable dream' of community and its tendency to suppress difference in its reach for unity and closeness, an endeavour which can simultaneously create barriers and exclusion.

Throughout the 1990s, community in social policy came to represent both the site and solution to social problems, an interpretation which arguably shifted attention away from social justice to social order (Everingham 2001). The spread of the language of community into public administration and government reached its zenith in the Australian State of Victoria (the site of this research) with the election of the state Labor government in 1999 and the subsequent establishment of the Department for Victorian Communities, one of the first of its type in the world (Hess 2003).

In this project, community and participation were encountered as administrative techniques, drained of overt political content but not without political purpose. The environment was awash with the language of community, with words and phrases such as partnerships, social cohesion, belonging, trust, reciprocity, community building, social enterprise, inclusiveness, voice and governance (Adams & Hess 2001). These are features of the new frontier of governance through community. Referring to similar developments in the UK, Rose noted that what had functioned as a language of resistance and critique was transformed

> …into an expert discourse and a professional vocation – community is now something to be programmed by Community Development Programmes, developed by Community Development Officers, policed by Community Police, guarded by Community Safety Programmes and rendered by sociologists pursuing 'community studies' (Rose 1996:332).

In Australian public discourse, community is traditionally a term that describes what is not institutionally organised as either the state or the private sector, lending it an imagined moral position untainted by politics or commercial gain. It is used in this sense in legislation as well. The Victorian Local Government Act expects local government 'to provide governance and leadership for the local community' (1989: Part 1). It defines the community as including people who live in the municipal district,

people and bodies who are ratepayers, and people and bodies who conduct activities in the district.

At the time of this research, tenant participation was a shorthand for public housing tenants participating in state-initiated community improvement programmes, and according to the programme design. Participation in this sense was the primary mechanism that brought public housing tenants and front-line professionals together and which mediated the nature of their interactions. Drawing on their broad empirical study of tenant participation in British council housing management, Cairncross et al. (1994) found that the process of tenant participation and the relationships between the actors were more important than organisational arrangements. They also found that the capacity of tenant participation to increase tenant power is dependent on a favourable combination of related factors, such as the philosophical orientations and capabilities of the organisations involved. Even though participation is strongly associated with ideals of democracy, it does not in itself guarantee greater equality between tenants and their state landlords (Somerville & Bengtsson 2002). Indeed, sometimes the opposite may be true. As this research documents, managed participation can be used to keep tenants away from the significant decisions.

Dinham (2005) writes that although community development is commonly seen as a radical practice with the potential to challenge established structures, in regeneration programmes in Britain it was seen by the bureaucracy as a way of channelling people into planning and considering issues that were thought of as non-political. Commenting on the New Deal for Communities regeneration initiative in the UK, Julie MacLeavy (2009) observed how participation became a method of securing state power rather than enabling resistance, which its stated purpose of empowering residents implied:

> …NDC works through rather than against the subjectivities of local residents to install new techniques of governing that operate at a distance. It seeks not to increase the capacity for community action through the establishment of NDC partnerships, but to *transform* that capacity in and through the conferral of funds for a series of regeneration programmes such that empowerment becomes constitutive of a new medium through which political power is being

secured (MacLeavy 2009:863).

There is a substantial international literature about the use of tenant participation in public housing, which points to very mixed outcomes (See for example Cairncross, Clapham & Goodlad 1994; Cheung & Yip 2003; Darcy 2002; Foley & Martin 2000; Goodlad 1999; Hickman 2006; Wood 2002).

More broadly, McDonald and Marston argue that non-profit community services have been co-opted into mediating the relationship between the state and its citizens, and that they are thus 'centrally implicated in the Australian version of the advanced liberal or neo-liberal democratic project' (2002:377). In a similar vein, Jessop (2002) writes of the way in which the neo-liberal project characterises the forces driving these reforms as spontaneous and natural, inevitable outcomes of technological and demographic changes to which the state and society must adapt.

As will be seen, informants provided nuanced interpretations of participation that covered a much broader range than expressed above. While there was ample evidence of poor outcomes and that this presented serous challenges to the potential of participation, the position taken here is that these are failures of practice rather than of the ideal of participation.

This was supported by an Australian study into resident participation in urban renewal projects which found a variety of motives for the use of participation and differing beliefs about its efficacy (Wood 2002). The researchers identified two broad sets of reasons given in support of participation. The first they called 'managerialist', an instrumentalist perspective concerned with efficiency and achieving project outcomes. The second they called 'citizenship', which was a more principled belief that residents have the right to have a say in decisions that affect them (Wood 2002:v). Although levels of commitment varied, there was on balance a belief in the need for participation.

The paradox of this use of the concept of community is that it is imposed and managed by central governments. When translated into programmes, the imaginary community in policy discourse becomes specific communities described and defined by government. Thus the two communities of public

housing tenants in the two Neighbourhood Renewal projects in this research were defined as being separate from the local government communities in which they were located and from other ideas about community such as ethnic communities.

The state and power

It can be seen that the state is highly engaged in the construction and management of marginalised and disadvantaged communities, particularly public housing communities. This section examines the nature of the state and the ways it deploys power in a liberal democracy such as Australia. While there is a very substantial and varied literature on the power and the state in political science, only a small part which is directly relevant to this project is drawn on here.

From the perspective of this research only a small part of the edge of the state was able to be seen with any clarity. While the distortion of this view obscures the larger structure, it shows the how the state appeared to the informants and helps explain why they reacted to it as they did. The state which emerged from the interviews was not a monolithic and inscrutable power. At this close proximity it resolved into a shifting collection of local bureaucrats and elected officials who were known by name. For some writers, this outer edge is the most solid remnant of a once substantial apparatus in Western democracies that has become increasingly hollowed out since the early 1980s (Mameli 2006; Rhodes 1994; Thompson 2008). This hollowing out is also shown in the literature on policy implementation earlier in this chapter that outlines the retreat of the welfare state. What is of interest here is literature that sheds light on how the state can be understood from the particular local viewpoint of this research. Overarching theories which explained the state as a coherent organisation managing power with some measure of unified purpose were not useful.

In a partly rhetorical gesture, Bob Jessop suggested that attempting to grasp the nature of the state can soon lead one to question whether it exists at all. He noted that other system theorists 'still argue that the state should be abandoned as a topic of research since it produces vapid debates and a conceptual morass' (1990:339). One of these theorists, David

Easton, wrote that the concept of the state had 'lost any particular fidelity that it might once have had' and had become an endlessly malleable concept capable of being shaped to the ideological purpose of any part of the political spectrum (1981:321). While acknowledging the morass, Jessop chose to align himself with what he saw as the weight of opinion; that the state both exists and is a valid focus of research.

In a similar vein, Emy and James (1996) have no doubt that 'states do exist and they are much more than transitory discursive formations', but that it is difficult to find explanations of the state that are adequate for all its various manifestations:

> The closer one gets to the ground the more the state does disappear into a disorganized ensemble of individuals battling it out over micro-issues in their micro-settings. Such analyses do help us to avoid the problem of treating the state as an homogenous, undifferentiated whole. However, it makes no sense to valorize less generalized and less abstract descriptions if by doing so we can no longer talk about the state as such (1996:31).

Debates over whether or not the state exists are of little relevance to people who are faced each day with implementing and interpreting its actions, either as employees of the state or community members. Even if the arguments for the non-existence of the state were able to be plausibly asserted, people such as the informants for this study would continue to receive state funding, pay taxes, use public transport, send their children to state schools, vote in elections etc. Addressing the difficulty of definition, Emy and James observe that although the state may be an abstraction it is nonetheless 'a material abstraction, a lived structure of unevenly integrated and patterned practices and ideologies' (1996:31). There is clearly a functional entity at work, however it might be described.

The search for, and selection of, relevant literature on the frontiers of the state continued to be refined throughout the research as data was collected. The themes and insights that emerged from the interviews suggest that the state can usefully be thought of as a social structure, although not, as Philip Cerny (1990) points out, just any social structure. As one among many of the structures of civil society it influences and is in turn influenced by the

structures with which it interacts. This recursive process is the essence of the social, a truism which is nevertheless often overlooked in descriptions of organisational process and authority. The mingling of influences constantly pushes definition out of focus, particularly at the margins, frustrating theorists and leading some to the absolutist positions seen above.

Cerny conceives of the state as having developed a 'crossroads' characteristic, which is what distinguishes it from other social structures:

> At the crossroads of state societies … other social and economic agents and structures have regularly come to interact and interpenetrate with each other as well as with the state itself, through the optic, the prism, the filter or membrane, of state structures (Cerny 1990:86).

In the same passage, he describes the state as 'the structured field of action within which non-state actors conflict or co-operate'. This captures the dynamic space of contest, negotiation, concession and co-operation that is the hallmark of the state and that was described by the informants. It also pointed to the need to search for evidence of the variety and significance of these interactions.

At the interface of the state and the community it is difficult to be clear about who are state actors and the consequent reach of state authority. Even professionals who might be seen by an outside observer as state actors may not identify themselves as such. Many people who are not state employees act on behalf of the state through contractual arrangements. How the boundary is described is contested by sectional interests. In this research, non-government agencies which relied heavily on state funding were keen to promote their individual corporate identity. The distinction was unimportant to the housing estate residents who saw them all as representing, and sometimes enforcing, state policies.

This confusion is compounded by the inherent contest deeply rooted in Australian federalism.[8] The Australian constitution created seven sovereign governments, growing out of the process of British settlement that had created a collection of independent colonies. The federal parliament and

[8]From the citizen's perspective they are all components of what political theorists speak of as the state. This is the sense in which the term 'state' is used in this thesis. When reference is made to any of the six Australian states they are identified as such.

five of the six state parliaments are bicameral (the state of Queensland is unicameral), meaning that legislation can be contested in both houses. State governments have each legislated to create local governments that are independently elected but have no protection in the federal or state constitutions. Decisions by the federal government may be over-ruled by the High Court of Australia in its role as the guardian and interpreter of the constitution. Additionally, the governor-general and the governors of each state have constitutional powers, including the power to dismiss their respective elected governments (although this constitutional interpretation is itself contested). There are many areas of duplication between the federal and state governments. All three levels of government levy taxes, provide services, and enact laws and regulations. All of this, overlaid with a combative culture of the parliamentary party system, creates an environment more often characterised by contest than co-operation (Lucy 1985; Singleton et al. 2003). The principle of representative government might be taken by front-line professionals acting under government contracts to suggest that they should interpret their role in favour of community members rather than their employer, reasoning that their employer is appointed to act on behalf of the electorate. This is particularly so at the level of local government, often described as being the tier of government that is closest to the people, 'constituted for local 'choice' and 'voice'' (Clarke & Stewart 1994:163).

Cerny (1990) wrote of civil society being moulded to the contours of the state, describing the two as mutually dependent entities, each partly shaped by the other. Twenty years later his description of a defined interface, of a critical boundary of social structuration is still useful but is too sharply drawn to explain the current situation, implying as it does a clear separation between state and non-state activities. Whatever remnants of clarity that might then have existed have been lost through the increasing recruitment of non-state actors from the private and community sectors into the business of governance. Government often now finds itself limited to acting through the narrow channels of contracts and licences (Alford et al. 1994; McMaster & Sawkins 1996).

Regarding the other side of this interface, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that society also can never be constituted as an objective reality because it is constantly penetrated by influences from interactions at its frontiers. 'There is no social identity', they wrote, 'fully protected from a discursive exterior that deforms it' (1985:111), which includes the social identity that is the state.

A more useful conceptual space has been created by Foucault's notion of governmentality. According to his analysis, in 16th century Europe there was an explosion of interest in the art of government, in its activities and techniques. Treatises that emerged at this time, and which continued to be produced until the late 19th century, were less concerned with the nature of the state than with its practices. Their interest was in the efficient management of people and resources, rather than the legitimacy of sovereignty and territory. Within this European focus, Foucault looked for evidence of these practices in conduct not conventionally seen as being within the reach of state control. This led to his description of the government of oneself through the ritualisation of personal conduct, the government of children through pedagogy, and the government of souls and lives through Christian doctrine (Burchell, Gordon & Miller 1991:87).

Interest in the reach of government and extra-territorial governance has been heightened by the impact of globalisation, which has led to the emergence of concepts of global governance and global citizenship. In respect of this, Cerny (2010) has written of what he calls the 'Competition State', structured around the self-limiting, self regulatory practices demanded by the neoliberal interpretation of capitalism. The concept of governmentality is now relevant for understanding how actors in real-world situations negotiate the contradiction between the totalising and individualising effects of neoliberalism. Cerny sees the competition state not as the seizure of control of traditional centrist structures by market ideology, but an amalgam of economic and social neoliberalism that involves 'the insertion or reinsertion of [traditional welfare] groups and institutions, especially subaltern groups, into the market process through education, training, and so on' (2010:161)

The effect is to further diffuse the boundaries of the state. Foucault was disinclined to regard the state as the central source of power and authority in society, seeking a political philosophy that was not dependent on sovereignty and rule through law. 'I don't want to say the State isn't important', he said in an interview, 'what I want to say is that relations of power…necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State' (1980:122). By this assessment, the state should not be considered as a unified entity, but as a phenomenon augmented by a range of practices and rationalities that originated, and continue to be maintained, outside its boundaries (Marinetto 2003:109). This explanation is particularly useful for understanding the mechanisms by which state power is projected, and the nature of the phenomenon of the state as it was experienced and responded to by the informants interviewed for this project. The recurring contest of power which they observed and spoke of was between the power of the state and its agents, and the informal power of local groups and individuals. This brings us to consideration of the nature of power, remembering that only a very small part of the literature of power is called upon here.

Steven Lukes' (2005) three-dimensional model of power has become a common reference point for contemporary writers. Lukes built his model through categories of layered complexity. He incorporated the elements of what he described as existing one and two-dimensional models of power into his three-dimensional model. He began with the pluralist theories of the 1960s, which argued that contests of interests in American pluralism were sufficient to meet the requirements of democratic fairness. These theorists believed that the multiplicity of competing voices created a sufficiently contested market-place of ideas to ensure sufficient opportunity for all to be heard. Challenging this, writers such as Bachrach and Baratz claimed that the pluralists' exclusive focus on power only as it can be observed through conflict in decision-making ignored the place of people who were not in a position to make competing decisions (Bachrach & Baratz 1995 (1962)).

Bachrach and Baratz were also interested in the exercise of power to marginalise or exclude voices. They drew on Schattschneider (1960) who

wrote about the ways in which some issues are organised into politics while others are kept out. The critique by these writers forms the basis of Lukes' second dimension of power. For Lukes this is a substantial improvement, but still insufficient because it assumes that power is only manifested through observable behaviour, and that the projection of power always involves conflict, or at least an identifiable grievance.

Lukes saw the emphasis on behaviourism as an obstacle to understanding how individuals and groups exclude potential issues from the political process. Such power is wielded not only by these actors, but by the institutions and cultures to which they belong. It may not involve conscious decisions. It can also result from the shaping of possibilities by the power of institutional and cultural norms, leading those who are subject to this power to accept without question their position in the existing social order. Lukes saw this as the supreme exercise of power, when the dominated comply with their domination. He argued that evidence of the operation of power did not necessarily depend on the identification of a grievance, whether or not it was contested. It is possible that the exercise of power is so effective in asserting the immutability of the status quo that grievances are not even recognised, yet they may come to light if the controlling grip of this power were released (Lukes 2005:20-37).

This inclusion of both decisions and non-decisions as indicators of power, and the concept that power may shape people's desires and beliefs contrary to their interests, gives Lukes' model considerable analytical reach. However, his argument that power is real and effective, especially when it is indirect and hidden from actors and observers alike, leaves him to assert the existence of a phenomenon that is not empirically discoverable, at least not with existing methodological tools.

It is Lukes' distinction between real and perceived interests and how these are decided that leaves him most open to criticism. By asserting that the analyst can find evidence of power in non-decisions by deciding that a person's preferences are not in their best interests, Lukes positions the analyst as the arbiter of what the best interests of the person are. He thus revives the concept of false consciousness which, as Colin Hay points out,

'many had thought exorcised from contemporary social and political theory' (Hay 1997:47). See also Benton (1981).

The dichotomy that underlies this distinction supposes that there is a corresponding dichotomy in the population between people who know what their real self-interests are and people who do not, yet what constitute real interests is inevitably contextual and values based. As Alan Bradshaw notes, 'we cannot envisage a scenario in which any actor is somehow liberated from all structural conditions, and hence able to identify what his real interests would be in the best of all possible worlds' (1976:121).

Although Lukes frames his position in terms of the danger of accepting a person's preferences without question, it is a very small step to use this position to actively over-ride a person's or group's preference. The argument is particularly relevant to this research. Many of the policies and programmes which it examines were the result of bureaucrats deciding the best interests of public housing estate residents, and none of the above criticisms obviates the need for bureaucrats and other professionals in a modern liberal state to make decisions about the welfare of others.

It needs to be remembered that Lukes' work is a normative, ethical and evaluative project. As such it can seek legitimacy by drawing on the established discourse of universal values. Keith Dowding defends Lukes on this basis, arguing that to maintain that people are always the best judge of their own interests is to deny normative social analysis (Dowding 2006:137).

This approach is reinforced by the work of Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2003) who developed the concept of preference adaptation as part of their capability model of distributive justice. Nussbaum's starting point asserts the legitimacy of universal norms. She draws distinctions between different things that people desire, judging that 'some objects of desire are more central than others for political purposes, more indispensible to a human being's quality of life'. She steps further down this path when she states that 'some existing preferences are actually bad bases for social policy' (Nussbaum 2001:68). As evidence, she cites examples of women in poor countries who stay in abusive and exploitative situations because these

conditions are so normalised that the women are unaware of any violation of their rights, the law or justice. They are not in a position to express a preference for anything different.

The association of observable norms with a defensible and contestable ethical framework creates a standard against which people's situation can be judged and, most significantly, against which they can determine their own interests. In so doing the argument obviates the need for a third party to be empowered to make decisions on behalf of others about what their best interests are, but a third party may still be needed. What is not clear is how these norms are to be made known and accessible. It implies the need for an agent powerful enough to impose losses on anyone seeking to suppress knowledge of these norms and/or subvert their influence.

Stewart Clegg's work adds a useful dimension to this. For Clegg (1989), power is a relational phenomenon which cannot be studied as an independent entity floating free of its context. In contrast to Lukes, Clegg is concerned not with what power is but with what it does. Drawing on Machiavelli, he describes of power as 'a tenuously produced and reproduced effect which is contingent upon the strategic competences and skills of actors who would be powerful' (1989:33). His concern is that if power is regarded as something solid or real it becomes pervasive and concrete, 'securely fixed in its representation' (1989:207). On the other hand, if power is understood as being constantly reconstructed, the possibility of alternative constructions become clear. Clegg is particularly interested in opportunities this presents for resistance. He writes that power:

> …is not a thing, nor is it something that people can have in a proprietorial sense. They 'possess' power only insofar as they are relationally constituted as doing so. To the extent that the relational conditions which constitute power are reproduced through fixing their obligatory passage points, then possession may be fixed and 'reified' in form (1989:207).

Clegg's emphasis on the importance of relationships and his argument that power is manifested only in the relationship between actors is apposite for this research and its primary interest in relationships. However, Clegg tends to construct resistance as the antidote to power, setting the two on

different moral planes. He is less interested in the power that is inherent in resistance, although he does note that 'in rare circumstances' resistance can become hardened into a new form of power. His implied distinction between the acceptable power of resistance and the unacceptable power of elites or institutions marks the limit of the usefulness of his framework in this context.

Within his framework, Clegg identifies two forms of resistance. The first involves the exercise of power through recognised channels, both formal and informal. The second is what he terms 'organisational outflanking' (1989:207) which involves challenging the recognised channels of influence and developing new ones. The concept of different forms of power is useful but its application only to resistance is restrictive. Of greater utility is Hay's (1997) distinction between direct and indirect power. Direct power is visible and behavioural, and is found in the actions and reactions between people; that is, when A gets B to do something that he or she would not otherwise do. Indirect power is that which is embedded in institutions and organisations. The potential ways in which people who are authorised by these institutions exercise direct power are partly determined by this power of this authority.

Nested within the literature of power is a collection of writers who focus on power and participatory practices in poor communities, and the operation of power in the construction and management of the participatory space (Ingamells 2007; Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi 2003; McKee & Cooper 2008). A common theme of this literature is that promises of the devolution of power through state-sponsored participatory practices are largely unmet. While there has been an appearance of devolution through the proliferation of consultation and engagement activities, the power to make decisions about significant structural issues has been increasingly centralised (Newman et al. 2004; Somerville & Bengtsson 2002). Writers such as Morison argue that this serves to entrench state power by mobilising citizens into state-determined activities, diverting them away from more traditional forms of political participation (Dinham 2005; Morison 2000). However, as Taylor (2007) recognises, the limits of the reach of state power mean that the

contested ground of these new spaces create possibilities for effective engagement if participants are able to assert their own authority.

This literature is mainly concerned with analysing the use of participation as a tool of government, particularly in its dealings with disadvantaged communities. It is considered more fully in the context of findings in Chapter 6, along with the closely related literature on the emergence of the concept of community in public policy.

Conclusion

The operation of the state, its capabilities, limits and potential, is the ground on which this research takes place. Theories of the state cover a broad spectrum, only some of which have explanatory value to the present purpose. The informants in the research experienced the state through their relationships with a particular set of its agents and activities. This recursive, relational processes is encapsulated in the concept of the state as a social structure. Through their interactions with bureaucrats and other agents of the state, community members learn what can be expected of the state, and how they are seen by it. The relationship contributes to how they define their social status. Community members also learn strategies for managing the state to get from it what they need.

The relational model provides a framework that allows the relationship between the state and its citizenry to be examined without the need for an abstract concept of the state as an independently functional social structure. The literature canvassed shows that the state can only be understood within its social, political and cultural context. Removed from this context it becomes unintelligible.

The importance of context is reinforced by theorists who argue that the state is able to co-opt power well beyond its institutional borders. The most adventurous of these theories is Foucault's concept of governmentality, of the self-governing individual. The theories highlight the difficulty of understanding the *gestalt* of the state by observing its functions. When some of these functions are also carried out by non-state actors it becomes

difficult to determine what is the state and what is not. Closer observation only serves to reveal more layers of complexity and fragmentation. However, it is important not to lose sight of the state as a larger structure, even if its boundaries cannot be clearly drawn. The construction of poverty and marginalisation, and public policy responses to these, cannot be adequately explained without reference to this structure.

The same predicament is found in the literature concerning power. Like the literature concerning the state, most of this focuses on power projected by the conventionally powerful and tends to equate power with dominance. While this is valuable, its focus directs attention away from examination of the power of individuals and communities in their interactions with the state, a serious obstacle for this project. This can be addressed by considering power as relationally constituted, not as a thing that is held by people. The power of actors is most effectively analysed in the context of the relationship through which that power is exercised. Changing the relationship changes the way power can be exercised. This is ostensibly the assumption underlying the use of citizen participation to curtail the power of the state.

The nature of the state and its power come together in the way it implements its policies. Again, a feature of all the literature is complexity. Early researchers in the field who sought clarity through reductionist research found the need to qualify their findings so much in the face of the complexity they encountered that that they were unable to advance the search for a unified implementation theory. It seems for the present that such a theory is out of reach, reflecting the difficulty faced by the state in attempting to develop coherent implementation practices. While many of the early researchers were concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness of practice, more recent writers have pointed to the need to understand the normative function of practice, showing how the implementation of policy cannot be disengaged from its political origins.

The emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness that is evident in the policy implementation literature marginalises the contentious and disorderly realm of moral and political discussion. It acts to recast questions of social value

as technical problems, assuming that what ought to be can be deduced by studying what is, which ignores the impact of the processes themselves. As becomes clear from the findings of this research, avoiding public discussion of values does not suppress the propensity of people to draw on individual and collective values.

The central discourse linking policy formation and implementation to public sector practice, and to the way government projected itself, was that of community and participation. These are common, albeit vague concepts in vernacular usage, but when taken up by the state as a political and administrative tool they inevitably become shaped to fit that purpose, particularly when they are used to contract out functions of government to community sector organisations. In the public imagination they are nearly always used favourably, yet writers show how they are used to divert attention from structural issues and have become part of neo-liberal reforms. One of the common uses of community is to speak of that which is not the state. The contradiction of the state appropriating the concept, which is argued in the literature, became apparent during the research.

A fundamental assumption underlying this project is that understanding how policies and government processes are experienced and interpreted by front-line professionals and the community members with whom they work rests in part on understanding these actors' values and beliefs and the meanings they make of their experiences. Although values and moral intent are rarely made explicit in policy and programme documents, their influence remains. These factors are largely overlooked in the policy implementation literature.

Chapter 3 Research design

Introduction

This research project is an ethnographic case study containing four sites, based on the broad theoretical framework set out in Chapter 2. This chapter builds on that framework with a more focused theoretical explanation of the research design, before describing ethical considerations, decisions about transcription and representation, and the approach to memory and truth. It also introduces the voices of informants.

In Chapter 2 it was argued that that the state, power and policy implementation are all constituted through relationships, and can only be understood within their context. Thus the structures and concepts that are involved are relationally constructed. This is most clearly explained from a social constructionist perspective, but there are three other effects that also indicate the appropriateness of this epistemology. Firstly, as will be shown in Chapter 4, the infrastructure of the housing estates, the communities that inhabit them and the services that are provided are in large part outcomes of policies and actions of the state. The state-initiated programmes that are described in that chapter were intended to shape the communities to an ideal of independent self-reliance (Parker & Fopp 2004), and to drive welfare sector reform by increasing the assertiveness of community members as customers (Informant interview). The high-rise estates and their communities are thus social and physical constructions, and the physical constructions are themselves expressions of social ideals.

Secondly, the choice of constructionism was suggested by the observation by residents that their communities were more often, and more publicly, described and represented by others than by themselves. Local community organisations worked hard to have their own representations of the estates published in the media in an attempt to shift public impressions.

Thirdly, through gentrification the four estates had become enclaves of public housing surrounded by households with quite high incomes. This

contrast brought the differences between these communities into sharp relief.

The reactions of estate residents to local issues were often markedly different from those of residents who lived around the estates. Constructionism is able to consider these together while placing them in their context. It maintains that understanding depends on recognising that policies, practices, social norms, ideologies and interests are inextricably linked to particular times and places, and that the actors involved do not share an identical view of reality (Fopp 2008a; Jacobs & Manzi 2000).

Social constructionism

In the last 25 years social constructionism has gained an important place in housing studies, trailing some way behind trends in disciplines such as sociology. Researchers have sought to broaden the field beyond what they saw as its over-reliance on empiricist knowledge and inadequate attention to the development of explanatory models (Jacobs & Manzi 2000). Constructionism is based on the now relatively uncontroversial proposition that knowledge is not a fixed and passive thing amenable to methodical discovery, but a product of the active engagement of the mind with the world. Jacob Bronowski described this in simple terms in a passage concerning theoretical physics:

> The world is not a fixed, solid array of objects, out there, for it cannot be fully separated from our perception of it. It shifts under our gaze, it interacts with us, and the knowledge that it yields has to be interpreted by us. There is no way of exchanging information that does not demand an act of judgement (1973:364).

Knowledge incorporates interpretation, and the concepts, schemes and models we invent to make sense of our experience. From this base, constructionism has taken a variety of forms in fields as diverse as psychology, mathematics, sociology and literature (Schwandt 2000, 2007). In relation to housing research with its central and long-standing interest in policy, Jacobs and Manzi describe constructionism as an epistemology which

> …purports that an individual's experience is an active process of interpretation rather than a passive material apprehension of an external physical world. A major claim advanced by those adopting a social constructionist epistemology is that actors do not merely provide descriptions of events, but are themselves constitutive of wider policy discourses and conflicts (2000:36).

The beginning of the current interest in social constructionism is commonly linked to the publication in 1966 of *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger & Luckmann 1991/1966), but its roots can be traced to the late 17th century (Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi 2004). Patton quotes Thomas' Theorem, devised by the symbolic interactionist sociologist W. I. Thomas in 1928: 'What is defined or perceived by people as real is real in its consequences' (Patton 2002: 96). Edley (2001) notes that the belief that the revolutionary thinking of constructionism is a relatively new phenomenon from the 1970s is wrong, pointing to Gergen's work tracing the epistemological debate back to Locke and Hume, and Fopp (2008b) claims that it was Hegel who initially put forward the idea of a social reality.

Although long established in sociology, constructionism has only relatively recently found its way into housing studies, where much of the work in the field has been driven by government and non-government policy makers wanting to improve their responses to social problems, and by the resources that they allocate to finding solutions. Housing research has tended to be reactive to different interests in the professional housing lobby and to be strongly positivist, caught up in government-led descriptions of problems and solutions and focused on the dominant political concerns of the time. It was not until the 1990s that the research agenda broadened to include constructionist perspectives. (Jacobs & Manzi 2000; Kemeny 2004).

Constructionism is thought of as having weak and strong forms, depending on the claims made about how widely it can be applied (Schwandt 2007). The strong form can be seen in Patton's interpretation that truth is a matter of consensus between people, not of correspondence with objective reality. Facts can only be understood within a value framework, objective assessment of any proposition is not possible, and understanding of phenomena does not carry outside the context in which they are studied. Patton argues from this position that findings, problems or solutions cannot

be generalised from one context to another. Data derived from constructionist enquiry does not have privileged status or legitimacy, representing only another construction to be taken into account in the development of consensus (Patton 2002:98).

The vulnerability of strong constructionism is that it can lead to a self-defeating position of reductionist relativism in which there is no basis for adjudicating claims for relevance. In this position constructionism is defeated by its own logic: if facts are no more than constructions then so too is constructionism. Similarly, if everything is relative, then so is that claim. Strong constructionism precludes choosing between alternatives because all positions are relative and therefore none is superior (Fopp 2008b).

Strong constructionism also discounts the importance of context, arguing that researchers should not go beyond examining claims and the perspectives of the claims-makers. Their interest should not be in social conditions, only in what the informants say about these conditions. It assumes that researchers can transcend their interpretative frameworks and historical circumstances to accurately reproduce the meanings of the informant. To maintain this objective detachment the researcher must avoid judgement or assumptions about the context in which these meanings were constructed (Best 1995; Schwandt 2000).

This is a substantial restriction on the use of the central insights of constructionism. Research that is unable to account for the political and moral dimensions of its context may free itself from the contamination of social and political bargaining, but is at risk of producing findings for which no context can be found. As well, the attempt to preserve the ideal of the detached, objective researcher undermines its credibility. The application of constructionism to housing studies has led some writers in this field to voice similar objections. Franklin and Clapham (1997), for example, wrote that the emphasis on trying to understand social reality only through the perspective of the person who is subject to that reality has a tendency to become reductionist:

> What is not taken into account is the wider structural context within which the individual experience is situated. In other words, in order to bring the analysis back into the policy arena, the links must be made between the individual and structural processes. In approaching this methodologically what is required is both qualitative empirical work, and an understanding of the broader social and economic context (Franklin & Clapham 1997:11).

It is not only the utility of the analysis that is at stake. In Chapter 2 reference was made to the argument by Nussbaum (2001) and Sen (1999) for the importance of universal ethical norms, which relied heavily on relativism. The norms proposed in support of that argument are a construction based on reference to the broadest of social contexts, and as such they are contestable, but only as long as they are understood as constructions.

Peter King (2004) provides a more general criticism of constructionism, being less concerned about its application than its utility. He asks what is achieved by establishing the contingency of social relations. Using homelessness as an example, he argues that its consequences will be just as palpable for the homeless whether the concept is seen as contingent and arbitrary or not. 'Calling homelessness a social construct', he writes, 'does not make it any easier to alter' (2004:39). Two observations can be made about this.

Firstly, the power of constructionist analysis is that it opens to question the assertion that existing social arrangements are natural phenomena. Constructionism challenges the claims of objectivity and neutrality by positivist social science that are used to divert attention from the interests that lie behind the maintenance of these arrangements. Greg Marston explains that

> …the 'social' is something that is accomplished, produced and defined in everyday actions between citizens and forms of government; it is socially constructed in the contested borders between private concerns and public matters. Recognising that the social is an historical artefact unsettles the idea that the 'social' refers to something objective and static (Marston 2004:81).

'Unsettle' is a modest term for this substantial analytical power. To the extent that it is able to effectively challenge the power of existing paradigms it is itself powerful. To return to King's example, accepting homelessness as a construction does not make it easier to alter, but it does raise the possibility of it being altered.

Secondly, as research into social stigma shows, disadvantage is magnified by stigmatising assumptions that locate sole responsibility with disadvantaged people themselves (Palmer et al. 2004). Understanding homelessness as a construction allocates at least some responsibility with the social structures that create it.

The authors cited so far in this section do not question the central concept of social constructionism, only the extent of its application. Writers attempting to address the issues presented here have developed less strident or restrictive positions that are often referred to as weak constructionism. This is the position to which the discussion in this section has been leading.

Early critics of constructionism argued that it denied the existence of an objective reality (e.g: Speed 1991). Weak constructionists stop short of this claim, distinguishing between the physical world and the social conceptual world that is a human invention, between material facts and social facts. Social facts exist within contexts of social institutions and conventional patterns of behaviour. Weak constructionists acknowledge the importance of meaning and identity, which have no relevance in the material world, but are relevant to the way we interpret it. Thus our understanding of the material world is mediated through language and imagination (Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi 2004; Jacobs & Manzi 2000; Lawson 2002). This more cautious approach still finds substantial common ground with strong constructionism.

The Foucauldian argument that language, knowledge and power are fundamentally interconnected through discourse and can be understood and challenged through its analysis is an important contributor to the constructionist epistemology (Hastings 1998). In strong constructionism this linguistic focus has led to what has been described as 'the discourse

imperialism that has infected social theory of the last two decades' (Fairclough, Jessop & Sayer 2002), marginalising the influence of other social phenomena such as actors and institutions, and physical phenomena such as buildings and public spaces. The admission of these into constructionist analysis has been facilitated by scholars and researchers influenced by symbolic interactionism, developing a strand of constructionism that has been mostly neglected by housing researchers (Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi 2004), but that is of interest here.

Central to the different interpretations of symbolic interactions are three premises set out by Herbert Blumer (1969), whose writing forms one of the field's primary reference points. The premises are that people act towards things according to the meanings that those things have for them, that meaning arises out of the social interaction people have with each other, and that people construct these meanings through their interpretations of their interactions. 'In essence' Sandstrom et al write, 'they learn to see and respond to symbolically mediated 'realities' – realities that are socially constructed' (Sandstrom, Martin & Fine 2001:218). The relevance of symbolic interactionism to this project is that it encourages the examination of the interactional, relational basis of social organisation, taking social context into account and traversing different levels of analysis (Jacobs & Manzi 2000). As Brickell argues from a symbolic interactionist perspective, 'human agency does not disappear entirely under the influence of discursive determinism, but plays out in an active engagement with the surrounding culture' (2006:95)

The position adopted in this project is described by Joel Best's (1995) concept of contextual constructivism. Best finds that the lesson to be learned from the 'critique of ontological gerrymandering' made by the strong constructionists is that all social researchers must pay close attention to the assumptions they make, but he does not accept the demand that analysts should avoid making assumptions about social conditions altogether. Contextual constructionism seeks to retain the emphasis on the importance of understanding claims-making, at the same time understanding the context in which these claims are made. Claims-making,

as a basis of social problem analysis, occurs within historical and cultural contexts and represents particular interests (Best 1995:345-346).

The reasons for selecting a constructionist epistemology were explained in the introduction to the chapter. The constructionist focus on meaning and interpretation within social systems, as well as the assumption in this project of the importance of the meaning that the informants made of their experiences, pointed to ethnography as an the most appropriate research methodology.

Ethnography

Ethnography has now come to include such a wide collection of practices that it is necessary to explain where the project is located within its contested boundaries. It is used here to refer to a paradigm that is based on a theory of knowledge (social constructionism); that has a cognitive mode (primarily discursive interviews); and that has a procedural component (conducting, transcribing and analysing interviews, and reflecting on process and implications) (Gobo 2008).

Ethnography has expanded from its origins in anthropology and the study of other cultures to include the study of cultures of which the researcher is a member. In many of its more recent applications the clearly defined ethnic and cultural differences between researcher and subject of traditional anthropology have disappeared. The more literary of the studies that have emerged in the last fifteen years have moved it further still, too far for researchers such as Crotty who despair of its 'rampant subjectivism' (Crotty 1998:48).

Others disagree. Patton (2002) notes that some qualitative researchers see the ability to creatively synthesise art, literature and social science in a research method as being essential for ethnography. The writing of research can be a method of enquiry. Ethnography finds itself trying to manage the tensions between 'travelogue and science, narrative and method, story and data' (Lather 2001:481).

There is a great deal of potential in this space, this 'productive site of doubt', as Lather described it (2001:481). One of the developments which has influenced this project is the emergent field of autoethnography. In learning to cross frontiers and negotiate the uncontrolled spaces between, ethnography has had to develop the skills of the itinerant: adaptability, negotiation, multilingualism, and accommodating contrary perspectives and different rationalities without demanding their reconciliation. In explaining the value of the humanities to research, the historian Tom Griffiths (2003) wrote that humanities scholars have distinctive skills to analyse complexity and to hold multiple causes and contradictions together in a cohesive narrative. These are essential skills for examining contemporary social phenomena.

Autoethnography embraces a collection of forms grouped around attempts by researchers to find ways to include explicit and reflexive self-observation in their work, which in the hands of some practitioners extends as far as autobiography (Butz & Besio 2004; Ellis & Bochner 2006). It draws heavily on the humanities' understanding of story-telling and representation. This project is not an autoethnography, but its design has incorporated the method's insistence that the researcher should remain visible and accountable at all times..

No critical reader would now approach a piece of qualitative research without assuming that it is influenced by the author's perspective. As a precautionary step, many authors now anticipate this by making their perspective clear to the reader and keeping more control over the story. Hufford warns that:

> If we obtain the appearance of objectivity by leaving ourselves out of our accounts, we simply leave the subjective realities of our work uncontrolled. If we manage to make our facts speak for themselves, those 'facts' cease to be evidence in an argument, and we become ventriloquists instead of scholars (Hufford 1995:58).

The risk of this aspect of autoethnography is that it can lead to the presence of the researcher being over-emphasised. When studying their own cultures, researchers are in some measure their own subjects, but that

is an artefact of the research, not its purpose. In the interpretation of ethnography developed in this project, there is a relatively clear distinction between accountability and confession. Burnier, in an article entitled *Who's Afraid of the Self?,* explained that:

> Autoethnographic writing is both personal and scholarly, both evocative and analytical, and it is both descriptive and theoretical when it is well done. It tilts toward the solipsistic when it is not well done, and it loses its claim as interpretative scholarship if it fails to be analytic and theoretical (Burnier 2006:54)

The researcher must tread a fine line between these pairs. Writing one's self into the research softens the distinction between the researcher and the researched (which from a constructionist perspective was only ever an illusion) and creates the danger of becoming one's own informant. The criterion used in this study is that the author is not a subject of interest, but should remain in sight enough to be accountable to the reader, which is also a constructionist perspective. As Jacobs et al. write:

> Arguably, a feature of constructionist research that distinguishes it from more traditional modes of analysis is the commitment to setting out an explicitly reflexive research methodology that makes clear the epistemological basis for investigation (Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi 2004:2).

Readers are active participants in the construction of meaning, interpreting the research through their reading of the findings and analysis, perhaps communicating it to others, and even altering their practice or taking action on the basis of their understanding. Atkinson (2001) wrote of what he termed the ethnographic imagination, the creative skills of writers to convey the story to the reader. Brewer (1994) built on this, using the term to include the imagination needed by the reader to interpret the text. One of the elements of this imagination that he identified is the belief that small-scale, micro events in everyday life have at least common features with the broader social world. The imagination that is required is not that of the producer of fiction, but the capacity to sympathetically imagine the other.

An application of ethnography that influenced the design of the research is its examination of organisations and work. Because of the project's interest

in the interactions that occurred through the implementation of community improvement programmes, the culture of professional work was always present. Residents and front-line bureaucrats came together to work in committees. The organisation and conduct of the meetings and the expectations of behaviour were guided by professional norms, and were intended to be normative. One of the aims of the programmes was to teach residents the value of organising themselves professionally. A common censure of disruptive behaviour was that it was unprofessional.

The project can therefore in large part be seen as a study of work, for which ethnography has been a most effective tool. One of the practitioners in this field, Vicki Smith (2001), observed that 'no single approach to the study of work has been more effective than the ethnographic in uncovering the tacit skills, the decision rules, the complexities, the discretion and the control' in work cultures (2001:221).

As a central practice of constructionist research, ethnography faces many of the same issues and criticisms of constructionism and is similarly subject to its own method, a circularity captured in the title of Brewer's (1994) article: *The Ethnographic Critique of Ethnography*. Brewer identified the practices that ethnographers use to construct their integrity and authority, which include:

> …self-displays by the author to assert special knowledge and status; establishing the authenticity of the ethnographer's first-hand attendance and participation in the setting, and thus by extension also their account of it; providing guidelines or frames for a 'reasonable' way of reading the data; the use of various textual formats and writing styles to emphasise both the facticity of the account and graphic feature of the setting; and providing 'voices in the text', by which people observed are allowed to speak (via lengthy and judicious extracts from fieldwork notes or recorded talk) in order to validate the authenticity of the ethnographer's description (Brewer 1994:234)

This list is a useful caution, alerting the practitioner and the reader to poor practice. It may have also been a move to pre-empt external criticism through a demonstration of impartial reflexivity, an example of what Lather (2001:481) identified as the tendency of ethnography 'to congratulate itself on being the knowledge-producing practice best situated in the

contemporary scene to learn from its instructive complications'. Ethnography is not, as Denzin wrote, an innocent practice:

> Our research practices are performative, pedagogical, and political. Through our writing and our talk, we enact the worlds we study. These performances are messy and pedagogical. They instruct our readers about this world and how we see it (Denzin 2006:422).

The case study approach

The particular strength of an ethnographic case study is that it allows very close examination of social behaviour by narrowing its focus to a small sample in order to provide insight and shed light on a larger class of cases (Patton 2002:342). Case studies are the preferred method 'when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context' (Gerring 2007). In Yin's (1994) terms, case studies are particularly useful in explaining real-life situations that are not amenable to experimental research, and to describe an intervention in the context in which it was implemented.

Two frequent criticisms are made of case studies. The first is the difficulty of generalising to larger populations. In response, writers referring more broadly to qualitative research have argued for its design to more closely approximate the principles of generalisability that apply in quantitative research, advocating sampling strategies that are more scientifically constructed. Others propose the development of a model of generalisability that is particular to qualitative research, generalising findings to social processes rather than populations (Stoddart 2004).

Firestone (1993) sees claims of generalisability more as arguments, because they cannot be fully proven. Ultimately it is only the reader who can decide whether there are enough similarities between the context of the research and other situations for any extrapolations to have explanatory power. This is another reminder that it is incumbent upon the researcher to provide detailed descriptions of the context, the evidence and the methods of the analysis to enable the reader to decide if the findings are sound, and if so, whether the researcher's claims for their typicality are plausible.

The question can also be approached by understanding that claims made about the usefulness of one set of findings for explaining other similar situations are always qualified. Patton softens the assertiveness of the criticism by speaking of the legitimacy of researchers making 'modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations' (Patton 2002:584).

In a similar vein, Williams (2000) rejects the interpretivist position that no generalisation is possible. He proposed the concept of *moderatum* generalisations, which are moderate claims about the social world that cannot be expected to hold true over extended periods or across different cultures. Hence they need to be tested against prevailing conditions and modified if necessary. Williams links the validity of these generalisations to norms of cultural consistency that underpin social life, and that are distinctive to particular cultures. With specific reference to case studies, Yin points out that they are 'like experiments, generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes' (Yin 1994:1). The claim made for generalisation in this study is consistent with the position expressed by Williams.

The second criticism is that many interpretations can be devised to fit such a limited sample and there are no grounds for choosing between them. Platt responds by pointing to the nature of the data collected, that it must be capable of providing a rich and detailed account of many features of the case (Platt 1988), as occurs in the following chapters.

It was initially decided that three high-rise housing estates would provide a sufficiently large sample frame from which to recruit. Although the population of the three estates was sufficiently large, only a small number of residents from each estate became involved in the activities that were of interest to the research. The three estates were sufficiently similar to be combined into one case study. They were built in the same period using almost identical designs, were exclusively public housing, were served by many of the same agencies, and had comparable demographic profiles. The estates were in the inner-city Melbourne suburbs of Fitzroy, Collingwood and Richmond, which are all in the local government area of Yarra (see

Ethical Considerations section below for discussion of anonymisation). Hence many of the government and non-government agencies in the area were involved with all three estates. They were all surrounded by areas of gentrification.

Two of these estates were Neighbourhood Renewal projects in the later part of their eight-year life span. At the beginning of the research another Neighbourhood Renewal project was initiated in the nearby inner-city suburb of Flemington, which shared all the above characteristics with the selected sites apart from being in a different local government area. All four estates were in the same Victorian government administrative region. It was decided to include the Flemington estate in the study because it provided the opportunity to explore how residents and bureaucrats worked together to establish of a new project. However, for reasons that are explained in Chapter 8, it was not possible to conduct the planned observations, and recruitment of potential informants was severely hampered. Only four people from the Flemington estate were interviewed – three residents and one employee of a community sector organisation. Hence the Flemington estate is substantially under-represented in the results.

Limits were placed within the case study to contain it within a manageable project. The primary research question suggests enquiry beyond the resources of a project of this scale. It was therefore more tightly focused by the creation of four subordinate questions. During the project the housing estates were subject to significant changes in policy, funding, administrative structures, staffing, and key residents, and to major infrastructure works and a state election. Two Neighbourhood Renewal projects, which operated for eight years, came to an end.

Two limits were suggested by the context from which the project arose and the reasons the research was undertaken. As noted in Chapter 1, there is very little research into the encounter between community members and front-line professionals, even though this interaction has been identified as a source of considerable influence over the success of policy

implementation. Hence this project gives greatest attention to the factors that had most influence on this interface.

The second limit arose from my interpretation of the responsibility of the social researcher. Many of the participants in this research were members of disadvantaged communities. Some were estate residents and some were field officers, the latter in poorly paid, insecure positions near the bottom of institutional hierarchies. Warr writes of responsibility 'to ensure that research done with disadvantaged and disenfranchised people also provides them with some benefit' (Warr 2004:581).

Dimitriadis (2001) provides a more expansive interpretation of this responsibility. Starting with the assertion that fieldwork is a 'profoundly deliberative and moral practice', he describes the researcher as 'a participant in the construction of emergent realities'. The range of identities that ethnographic researchers must adopt and the extent to which the idea of the neutral and objective observer has been discredited means that the distinction between researcher and subject is uncertain. Dimitriadis argues that this uncertainty obliges researchers to work with participants to help improve their situation. I became a researcher in the community in which I had worked and therefore felt more keenly a responsibility to that community, which affected decisions about where limited resources should be focused.

Ethical considerations

This project was approved by the Swinburne University Human Research Ethics Committee which authorised fieldwork to take place between 24th August 2009 and 31st December 2010 (see Appendix 1).

Many of the broader ethical considerations of the project have been addressed in earlier chapters. With relation to the research design, three issues were identified as posing a risk to the project: how to manage my role on the housing estates (given that prior to and during the first 18 months of the project the estates were also my place of work), whether to pay informants, and anonymisation.

There are two aspects to the first question. As both a researcher and, for six months after I began field work, an employee working on the housing estates I anticipated that participants would have trouble distinguishing between these roles, and that in any case the distinction was largely a professional concern. Generally any person on the estates who is identified with a service provider or government agency is seen by residents as a potential source of help with any issue, regardless of his or her role. I decided to respond to these requests as I had before I began the fieldwork, answering questions where I could and referring to appropriate agencies. I avoided any association between providing assistance and recruiting informants. When approaching potential informants I made it clear that I was asking for their help with a personal project that would be of no direct benefit to them.

As an employee working in the research sites that comprised this case study I faced a conflict of interest, which was partly resolved when I resigned from my position after six months of field work, a year and a half into the project. I interviewed no-one for whom I had supervisory responsibility, although in an earlier role I had supervised three of the informants and had worked as a colleague with another.

The second question was whether to pay informants for interviews, particularly those who were public housing tenants. The identities of individuals and communities are constructed and maintained through giving and receiving, and it is important for people to have opportunities to do both. When the state interacts with poor communities there is an asymmetry of resources, which limits opportunities for poor communities to contribute to the broader society while exaggerating their role as recipients. In considering the social functions of poverty, Herbert Gans wrote that poor people are expected to be the recipients of others' giving, 'providing the rest of the population with different emotional satisfactions' (1972:280). This is a useful insight but an incomplete explanation, because it positions poor communities as passive recipients. In the communities where this research took place residents were expected to give quite a lot (including their neediness) in return for what they received.. The asymmetry of

resources determined what they were expected to give and how they would give it.

In the community and estate improvement programs seen in this research there was a strong expectation that residents would contribute their time to help the responsible department or agency meet its goals. There is a now a universal expectation by funding bodies that representatives of intended beneficiaries will be engaged in the delivery of programmes. Residents were expected to participate in ways that were determined by external planners, which most often meant joining consultative, advisory or steering committees. Government and non-government agencies devise interventions in the belief that they will be beneficial to disadvantaged communities. From their perspective it is therefore reasonable to ask community members to participate because it is in their own interests to do so (Herbert 2005). Poor communities are not often given the opportunity to decide their own interests, and what sort of help and resources they may or may not want.

Commenting that most of these meetings are held during the day for the convenience of paid staff, an informant who was a resident said:

> Another funny disconnect with the involvement is that it really relies on people being unemployed. Working groups rely on people being unemployed.

She spoke of feeling that sometimes:

> …residents are being hauled in kind of to meet someone else's KPIs and to pay their way. You need, you need a base of poor people to keep people in welfare, doing welfare work (INF2).

In a variety of ways, poor communities are encouraged to trade on their need and exotic otherness, to package and describe it according to prevailing social policy interests. Competition for programme funding teaches workers and residents to emphasise the particular disadvantages that programs are intended to address. The tendering out of service provision under NPM that was outlined in Chapter 2 has led to welfare organisations marketing disadvantage for fundraising. This is the context in which researchers make demands on marginalised and disadvantaged communities. I was doubly wary because the demand by researchers for

access to the housing estates is substantial, and because in most cases researchers such as myself come from the classes by whom poor people are described. Sociology and anthropology follow the contours of power in social structures. Colin Bell explained that:

> …sociology is done *on* the relatively powerless *for* the relatively powerful. Sociology can easily be seen as thoroughly implicated in the power structure of society (Bell 1978:25)

In speaking with a potential informant as I planned the interviews a situation came to light that clarified my decision regarding payment. On one of the estates where he worked, the state housing authority established a community liaison committee which paid a sitting fee to members who were residents. It was reasoned that payment demonstrated respect and recognition of the contribution made by residents and the professionalism that was expected of them, and that bureaucrats and agency staff were paid to attend. Following this, a local neighbourhood house which provided services to the estate had difficulty recruiting among estate residents for its committee of management as there was an expectation of a sitting fee, which they could not afford. Estate residents had previously joined the committee as volunteers, as did other local residents. The long-established practice of people volunteering in their local community had been weakened. Hence the result of a decision based on respect and concern for equity had the effect of magnifying the difference between the estate residents and those who lived in the area.

I decided not to pay informants for interviews. From my experience it seemed damaging for poor communities to be the constant creators and givers of their neediness, and that paying informants risked perpetuating this. I decided instead to become part of the local economy, trading knowledge and experience on equal terms.

At the outset of the project I made it clear that I was available to volunteer in other activities on the estates. I found work to do that gave me a place and meant that I was accessible to residents. On one estate I worked regularly as a volunteer contributing to a forum of agencies and residents.

The third issue emerged later in the project and concerned the difficulty of maintaining anonymity in small areas where individuals were well known to people associated with the site. As the interviews progressed it became clear that informants were providing information and opinions which made them easily identifiable by anyone familiar with the sites. It was not possible to provide adequate contextual descriptions of the sites without making their location clear, as a result of which I have named the sites throughout. Jan Nespor (2000) considered the dilemma in an article on anonymity in qualitative research:

> …the information required to make accounts persuasive and true to central participants can identify settings and individuals even to those less fully involved, including outside observers or people who simply know or work with participants. This quandary would seem to hold for any study that focuses closely on individuals, self-identified groups, or specific institutional or public settings. It suggests that anonymization is likely to be most problematic precisely where it would be most useful—at the local level—and that it can do little to protect the identities of participants from intimates and associates or from the midlevel officials and bureaucrats they deal with—the very people likely to be in positions to react or retaliate against them (2000:548).

A countervailing ethical requirement is that research should be relevant and useful. The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research seeks to foster research that is of benefit to the community and recognises that benefit is a consideration when assessing risks to participants.[9] One of the statement's guiding principles is that there should be a 'fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of research' (NH&MRC, ARC & AVCC 2007:11). I also had a responsibility to informants who often gave their time because they were keen for their stories to be told and for the information they gave me to be used. Hence I needed to have good reasons for not using information relevant to the research and to balance this against the risk of using it. To address this dilemma the strategy I adopted was to obtain the consent of informants to use the extracts from their interviews that I wanted to include. This was a step beyond the requirements of the ethics

[9] As noted earlier in this section, I judged that it was unlikely that there would be any direct benefit to informants from this research and that risk could therefore not be offset by benefit.

agreement covering the project as I judged that the original design did not provide sufficient protection.

The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research recognises that prescriptive regulations are insufficient for approaching dilemmas of this kind, particularly those involving imbalances of power. The common methods of anonymity were insufficient to protect the informants and it was clear that different informants needed different levels of protection, as did people about whom they gave information but who were unable to respond. In two cases I decided that the information I was given would be damaging to others and did not use it.

Data collection and management

The data for this project consisted of semi-structured interviews with individuals, observation of two large meetings, and documentary research. During 2010, 32 interviews were conducted with 28 informants. The informants were selected through purposive sampling, partly because of the research question's focus on specific experiences within the population of the research sites, and partly in response to information that was gathered in the course of interviewing. All the informants were either directly or indirectly known to me prior to the project. Analysis of interview and documentary data was undertaken throughout the project in an iterative, non-linear process (Williamson 2006:87) which enabled different perspectives of the same events to be explored in a number of instances. Patton observed that 'the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases … from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of research' (2002:46) All the informants were selected because of their involvement with the implementation of policies and programmes in the four research sites.

In designing the project I planned to interview only front-line field officers and tenants of the four estates. As themes emerged from the interviews it became clear that it would strengthen the data to include perspectives from line managers and more senior staff. In addition, the initial categories of

informants proved too narrow. As can be seen in the table in Appendix 4, many of the informants spoke from more than one perspective. For example, two of the bureaucrats whom I interviewed were formerly community development workers on the estates. Their perspectives varied according to the period they were speaking about. Another informant had grown up on one of the estates, but at the time of the interview had recently moved into private rental and had also gained a substantive position with one of the local welfare agencies.

I contacted potential informants by telephone or email, sending additional information if they were interested in participating. All but one of those whom I contacted agreed to be interviewed. A person spoke with me who wanted to be interviewed, but I decided not to proceed with this as the information she could give was adequately covered by existing informants and her primary purpose was to unmask what she saw as reprehensible practice by a colleague.

The interviews used an informal conversational structure, which was given focus by the project description that preceded each interview. They were based on open-ended questions allowing informants to decide what was most important to tell about their experience and how they wanted to tell it. Informants were allowed to construct their accounts in their own way. This approach is appropriate for situations where the interview can last as long as the informant wishes or there is opportunity for follow up. One interview lasted for 98 minutes and two informants were interviewed twice. It relies on an easy interaction between the interviewer and informant, which was assisted by my long association with the research sites and with many of the informants. The strength of the informal interview is that it allows for spontaneity and responsiveness to individual differences, revealing not just different opinions but different ways of seeing (Patton 2002). The interviews lasted 56 minutes on average and were transcribed in full.

Using inductive coding, the data were coded and recoded until significant themes emerged. The emergent themes from early interviews were used to develop indicative questions for those following. These were tailored to each informant. As the themes became clear, the broader categories were

created which form the structure of Chapters 5-8. The analysis was undertaken with the aid of CAQDAS.

I planned to conduct participant observation of the various committee meetings that were collectively termed governance meetings, but for reasons described in Chapter 8 I was unable to gain access to these. However, I took advantage of the opportunity to observe two large public meetings that were organised by agencies and attended by residents.

My knowledge of the field gave me access to a considerable amount of grey literature not stored in any retrieval system. Some I had collected in the course of my employment. Other material I knew or guessed existed and was able to find with the help of former colleagues. This consisted of minutes from meetings, guidelines, programme contracts, discussion or positioning papers and programme reports. Searching for documents produced an unexpected result. Due to lack of time and resources, agencies paid little attention to archiving, except for documents needed for financial and operational audits. For the same reason, individual staff rarely disposed of material, particularly electronic documents. A document was found on a website that had long since ceased to be maintained but that had not been withdrawn. Most of this material was not on the public record and none of it was confidential.

Transcribing interviews

From a constructionist perspective, transcription is an act of translation that inevitably entails both loss and creation. Situated stories become detached from their context. Gestures, tone, facial expression, hesitancy and a host of other information that assists understanding is lost, but at the same time the transcribed words gain a materiality that they did not have at the time of the interview. The creation of a new artefact was demonstrated by the interest the informants showed in the transcripts of their interviews, which I offered to them all. For some informants, particularly estate residents, seeing their words fixed in writing was important to them, perhaps providing an authority and legitimacy to which they were unaccustomed. It

is difficult to know to what extent this materiality gives weight to interpretations that might otherwise have little significance.

While it is important to recognise the distortion caused by this first interpretation it is equally important not to become paralysed. All research tools are imperfect, contingent and partial. Hammersley alerts us to this danger:

> There is a slippery slope from recognition that decisions and interpretations are necessarily involved in transcription to the conclusion that the data are created or constituted by the transcriber rather than representing more or less adequately 'what occurred'. In effect, this leads to a radical epistemological skepticism that is self-undermining (Hammersley 2010:558)

I used conventional orthography rather than trying to reproduce the pronunciation of informants because pronunciation did not materially affect meaning. When using extracts from interviews I decided that it would be disrespectful either to alter the informants' language to approximate conventional educated usage, or to present it exactly as it was spoken. Different pronunciations and accents are magnified in written language and have an impact that is not evident in speech. Exact transcription can misrepresent the speaker and diminish accuracy.

I included non-word elements in the transcripts only where the meaning was unclear without. For example, laughter was noted if it qualified the meaning of the words, but otherwise ignored.

In making these judgements I was influenced by one of the residents whom I interviewed. At the point in the interview from which this extract is taken she was speaking of her experience of working with agencies in governance committees:

> If we're going to talk about things coming from a grass-roots level, perhaps the people upstairs who we're sending letters to might need to consider revising the idea of, you know, everything being professionalised. [They] might be able to receive a letter that's, I suppose, in more common language
>
> RW: That might have spelling mistakes…
>
> Exactly, and still take it seriously (INF2).

It was my intention to reproduce the interview so that a third party's interpretation would be as close to my understanding of the interview as possible. This intention was not always best served by striving only for exact transcriptions, because of the loss of information in the translation from recorded to written speech. For example, the meaning of a sentence that was clear in the audio recording was not clear when transcribed exactly. Similarly, when an informant made a mistake in the name of a person, I substituted the correct name.

Transcriptions are constructions based on a range of interpretative acts. As transcribers we rely on our own social evaluations of speech, calling upon our particular language ideology. Lapadat and Lindsay argued that the choices we make as researchers about how to transcribe interviews enact the theories we hold (Lapadat & Lindsay 1998). Transcription is not a disembodied technique, but a step in a communicative process. Roberts explained that

> …the challenge for the transcriber is to produce transcriptions that are accurate and readable but that are also reflexive in how they make explicit to the reader the constructed nature of written talk and so the problematic nature of accuracy and readability. This is all the more important when the researcher is working alongside the researched, implicated in some aspect of their lives (Roberts 1997:168).

Truth and memory

Except where confusion or misrepresentation might have arisen, all the extracts from the transcriptions are presented without regard to their factual accuracy. Some of the information I knew to be inaccurate, but it was not my role as a researcher to challenge the informants' recollections. The purpose of this research is to understand what the informants believed to be the truth. I had to accept that what the informants told me was the truth for them.

In cases where I was aware of factual inaccuracies I had to decide whether they might reveal anything more than mistaken memory. Two examples illustrate this. In the first, one of the informants spoke of an incident

involving a community development worker. I had also been involved in the incident and had employed the worker, and my records showed that the resident had confused two workers and had recalled the incident as occurring some time earlier than it had, but his account adequately illustrated the point that he intended. It would not have been altered by correcting the chronology of events or the identity of the worker and I could see no motive behind his inaccuracy. I assumed it was no more than mistaken memory.

In the second example, one of the residents gave an account of what had been achieved by a committee of which he had been a long-standing member. A report by the state housing authority shows that one of these outcomes, a substantial renovation project, was achieved before the committee was established. It seemed to me that the informant, consciously or not, inflated the achievements of the committee and thus his contribution to improvement of the estate. In this case I thought that the inaccuracy was significant.

These examples were only known to me because I had records that contradicted the informants' accounts. There were doubtless many inaccuracies of which I was not aware, as well as failures in my own memory. Similarly there are potential readers who would be in a position to dispute the accuracy of these accounts, but this is not a work of history. The interviews are reported experience, in some cases many years after the events. Even at the time, filtered observation and interpretation were at work. To attempt to reduce what informants constructed from memory to verifiable facts would miss the essential quality of these accounts and distort the purpose of the research.

Conclusion

The main question of this research, limited by the research design to a small number of activities on a small number of sites, and based on interviews with informants drawn from a small sample frame, all suggest a neatly bounded research project. It can be seen from the ground covered

in this chapter that this is not so. Although the design locates the researcher in a small conceptual space, in exploratory research such as this the observer must accept whatever is found there, sifting to see what adds to understanding and what can be discarded. Consequently both the method and the theoretical context of this research are complex and extensive. In large part this is a product of constructionism, which maintains that knowledge and interpretation are highly contextualised and that very little of what is found is irrelevant.

In this regard the shape of the research project matches the experience of the informants. Public housing residents and agency staff who implemented policies together in spaces defined by the programmes in which they worked had to deal with whatever they encountered in those spaces. They had to know something of their local political, social and cultural environment, to know the personalities of their colleagues, to learn the expectations and possibilities of the programmes, and to find areas of common interest. They were frequently subject to decisions and contingencies beyond their control, working in a complex, contested environment.

The picture that is building here is of the complexity of relationships and associations that are found in a very small fragment of the larger relationship between the state and its citizens. This is not discernable from the distant perspective of state policy formation. The importance that constructionist analysis places on contextuality shows that much of the complexity found in the research sites is continuous with their social and political environment, which reinforces the generalisability of the findings.

The public sector reforms described in Chapter 2 created a workforce with very little historical knowledge. The history accessible to the residents and agency staff in their work together was generally limited to that which individuals remembered. The next chapter provides the historical context of the research sites and the social currents, policies and demographic shifts that played a part in their making.

Chapter 4 The construction of the high-rise estates

Introduction

For more than 50 years the four public housing estates that are the focus of this research have been a prominent feature of the life and landscape of inner Melbourne. This chapter explains the estates and their communities as both physical and social constructions, and how their physical structures embodied social ideals. The construction of the estates, their architecture, their social impact and the communities that they house have all been the subject of episodic public debate, and at times activism, since the estates were first proposed.

When these high-rise estates were built they provided housing for the people who had been displaced as a result of slum clearance programmes. The people who became public housing tenants through this process were culturally and demographically similar to their neighbours. Since then there has been an ever-widening gap between residents of the estates and those who live in the surrounding areas. The estate populations have become comparatively poorer and more ethnically diverse, while the neighbourhoods which surround them have become increasingly affluent. The reasons for this divergence and the nature of the current estate communities are explored in this chapter.

The chapter charts the changing nature of public and political concern about areas with high concentrations of poor residents, both before and after the building of the estates, and the ways in which governments have responded to this with the development and implementation of policies and programmes. It concludes by introducing two community improvement programmes that were prominent in the interviews conducted for this research.

The making of the estates: slum clearances, modernism and the pursuit of order

The towers that make up the high-rise housing estates across Melbourne have become the visual image most often associated with public housing in Victoria. Most of the towers are of 20 or 21 storeys, the highest being 30 storeys. The four estates that are the sites of this research, all built in the late 1960s and early 1970s, were the result of inner-city slum clearance projects.

The demolition of substandard housing by state and local authorities took place in Victoria through much of last century, only coming to an end in mid-1973 (Tibbits 1988:124). Demolition was undertaken when individual dwellings were condemned by local health authorities as unfit for habitation and beyond serviceable repair. The primary concern was for public health. Little attention was given to the housing needs of the occupants. Following the First World War demolition began to be accompanied by small-scale construction programmes by local authorities and the State Savings Bank (Burke 1988:17). The Victorian government was reluctant to become involved, legislating to provide local government with increased powers but providing few resources. The efforts of local government and private philanthropists that had been enabled by the strong economic growth after the First World War were largely halted by the 1929 stock market collapse and the Great Depression (Howe 1988:20). By the mid-1930s high unemployment and curtailment of building activity created a housing crisis and a growing campaign for the provision of public housing to become a state government responsibility. The Victorian government responded to this pressure by passing the Housing Act in 1937, which led to the establishment of a state housing authority – the Housing Commission of Victoria – the following year. However, as with local governments, the Commission was given few resources and Premier Albert Dunstan told parliament it was intended that 'the Commission's powers would not unduly disturb the existing functions of government departments, municipalities and other public bodies' (Howe 1988:43). The preference of the federal and state governments was to promote home ownership through subsidised

housing finance. They were, as David Hayward (1996) wrote, 'reluctant landlords'. By the end of the 1930s it was evident that the private housing market was unable to adequately provide for the housing needs of low income people and that it was necessary for the state to assume this responsibility (Hayward 1996).

The campaigns for slum clearances in Melbourne after the First World War were based on a broad coalition of interests and social philosophies. Both the Liberal Party and the Labor Party advocated relocating slum dwellers to the outer suburbs (Harris 1988). Harris records that the Victorian Education Department conducted a survey of school children in Melbourne and found a link between anaemia and overcrowded living conditions in the inner-city suburbs of Collingwood and Port Melbourne. Subsequently, in giving evidence to the 1913-18 Royal Commission into housing, Dr Harvey Sutton claimed that there was 'a definite association between the number of rooms in a house and the morality of the individual' (Harris 1988:10). By the 1930s the campaign embraced a wide range of interests. The Building Industry Congress, a coalition of 47 groups that included employer organisations, unions, real estate agents, architects and surveyors, saw government-subsidised slum clearance and the building of new housing as a way of stimulating the economy. The Town Planners Association was keen to expand the need for its professional skills by including housing in broad town planning strategies. It favoured central planning authority with local governments responsible for implementing housing schemes. Oswald Barnett, one of the key figures to campaign for housing reform in this period, was influenced by the Christian Socialist tradition within Methodist theology (Howe 1988:21). Father Tucker of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, a large Anglican welfare organisation in the inner-city suburb of Fitzroy, was worried that poverty could give a foothold to communism and the resultant threat of a classless society (Howe 1988:303 footnote). All found common interest in promoting the abolition of substandard housing, a coalition of interests that continued in the years following the Second World War.

Many of the planners and architects in this movement were influenced by the international design movement built around the principles of modernism that began in the 1920s.. The Swiss architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) has become the best known representative of the modernist International Style of architecture and thus a lightning rod for its critics. Le Corbusier argued that society was changing from a family-based structure to co-operatives of individual citizens and communal law. Housing therefore should be high-density to encourage interaction, best achieved by high-rise apartment buildings on large sites with large open space between for parks. The architects and planners in the movement adopted Taylorist ideals of the need to design for maximum efficiency through the rationalisation and standardisation of building components (Mumford 2004; Otto 2003).

The architects in this movement had a strong preference for rectilinear order and designs that were visually clean. Their plans required the cleaning away of existing city centres to create fresh sites of renewal. James Scott (1998) writes that Le Corbusier urged planners to take a 'blank piece of paper', a 'clean tablecloth', and begin their designs free from the constraints of history or existing structures. Buildings were to be surrounded by open space for the health of their residents. He advocated the tight separation of functions, and abhorred the mixing of pedestrians and vehicles on streets. Le Corbusier wrote of the 'rot', 'decay', 'scum' and 'refuse' of the slums he sought to replace. His stated concern was partly for the health of the inhabitants, and partly for the menace of discontent and unrest that they presented to authority. Health, cleansing, purity, renewal and control run throughout this work (Scott 1998:103-117) and are found in the social reform movements that promoted slum clearances and the building of the high-rise estates. It is difficult now to understand the boldness and audacity of this movement, of 'the great enthusiasm and revolutionary hubris that were part and parcel of high modernism', and its complete disregard of the social upheavals that its plans required (Scott 1998:89).

The provision of housing by the state in Australia accelerated after the Second World War due the intervention of the federal government, using

the expanded powers to raise revenue that it had acquired during the war. Slum clearance and housing construction were now driven by the twin imperatives of reconstructing the post-war economy and providing housing for returned soldiers. In the first Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA) signed in 1945, the federal government agreed to provide the states with low-interest loans to build and manage public housing. It led to a huge increase in construction across the country, particularly in Victoria. Between 1945 and 1960 the Housing Commission of Victoria built 42,372 houses and 4,775 flats (Eather 1988:72).

Many of these buildings were constructed of pre-cast concrete panels manufactured by the Commission in a factory it purchased in 1942 for its Concrete House Project. By the 1960s the technology had become sufficiently advanced to allow its application to the construction of the type of high-rise residential towers that were the ideal of many of the modernist architects. It was a high point in the Commission's history. The buildings were technologically advanced for their time, constructed entirely from pre-cast concrete load-bearing panels, and required no frame. The Commission won an architectural award for the innovative design of the towers and established an international reputation as a construction authority (Tibbits 1988:124). As a result it became primarily dedicated to the construction and maintenance of buildings and the collection of rents. Staffed primarily by 'architects, engineers and rent collectors', it had neither the interest nor the skills to design housing appropriate to the diverse needs of prospective tenants, nor to engage residents in decision-making (Dalton 1988).

Between 1962 and 1976 the Commission built 45 high-rise residential towers across Melbourne, of which only one has been demolished. The visual order that the towers and the open spaces between them imposed after sweeping away the perceived chaos of the slums contrasted starkly with the buildings they replaced, which can be seen in Illustration 4.1. As will be shown, the towers were at such odds with the areas where they were built, and required the demolition of so much existing housing, that a rising chorus of public disapproval led to the abandonment of the slum clearance programme in the early 1970s. A major part of the campaign to

halt the programme centred on resistance to a plan for a high-rise estate around Brooks Crescent in North Fitzroy, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

Illustration 4.1: Model showing the Atherton Street neighbourhood as it would have appeared in 1960, and on the right the Atherton Gardens Estate as it would have appeared in 1971

Source: Museum Victoria

The blank page sought by the high-modernist architects is never entirely blank. In a concession to history the high-rise estate in Fitzroy is called Atherton Gardens, taking its name from one of the streets that were removed for its construction. The memory of local Indigenous Australians recalls that the hill where the estate now stands was a significant meeting site before European settlement. Administrative records such as maps, photographs and rate notices hold some information about the occupation of the site prior to the building of the estate. The Aboriginal writer and historian Tony Birch lived in Fitzroy until he was nine, when his house was demolished to make way for the estate. Birch speaks of the layers of occupation of sites and how these reach into the present (personal

communication). The Aboriginal historian Wayne Atkinson noted that 'there is a continuing Koori presence in Fitzroy, including those who can claim to be descendants of the Woiworung', the tribe who originally owned the area (Fitzroy History Society 1991:2). Close to the estate an Aboriginal precinct is emerging, with the establishment of Aboriginal services and cultural organisations.

Illustration 4.2: Children in Atherton Street, Fitzroy, 1961. The houses and street were all removed to make way for the Fitzroy housing estate, which was named Atherton Gardens.
Source: City of Yarra Library Service

In the light of the strident criticisms of the modernist approach to architecture and planning, it is important to remember that the reformers who were influenced by these ideas were faced by major social problems that demanded action. While the shortcomings of their actions are clear to those of us who live with the results, we do not live with many of the issues they were attempting to solve. Scott cautions against making simplistic judgements from the perspective of hindsight, asking the reader to remember two things:

> …first, that virtually every high-modernist intervention was undertaken in the name of and with the support of citizens seeking help and protection, and, second, that we are all beneficiaries in countless ways of these various high-modernist schemes (:97).

The electoral cycle, the implementation of public policy through short-term programmes, the turnover of residents and agency staff, and the urgency of innovation all conspire against the proper consideration of historical context. John Falzon, CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, recognised its importance when he said:

> Social, economic and political exclusion is a systematic action that is done to people. It is not something that people happen into by means of bad choices or bad karma. It is manifested in individual lives as a unique intersection between personal narratives and the axes of history and structure (Falzon 2011:2).

The four estates today: buildings, communities and neighbours

The Richmond, Collingwood and Fitzroy (Atherton Gardens) public housing estates are located in the City of Yarra, which in 2011 had a population of 79,015. The Flemington estate is in the City of Moonee Valley, which had a population of 112,370 in 2011 (ABS 2013). The four estates contain 16 towers, 15 of which are of 20 storeys and one of 22. Collectively they contain 3100 flats, predominantly of two and three bedrooms (Ministry of Housing and Construction Victoria 1990). They are all within 4kms of the central business district of Melbourne. As can be seen in the aerial photographs below, their construction required the demolition of many small houses, factories and shops and the removal of roads.

Illustrations 4.3 and 4.5-4.6 show the extent to which the estates stand out visually (north is at the top of each of these photographs). Their scale and architectural form is alien to the surrounding vernacular architecture, and the removal of roads discourages the flow of people across the estates.

Illustration 4.3: Collingwood public housing estate, 2013
Source: Land Victoria, Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries

Illustration 4.4: Campbell Street, Collingwood housing estate, 2009. Housing in the foreground was built in the late 1980s. Source: Author

The towers require large parking areas for cars that are some distance from the buildings. They emphasise the separation between public and private housing.

In illustration 4.3 the three towers of the Collingwood estate can be seen on either side of the estate. The estate includes the low-rise buildings between the towers that were built to a far more sympathetic design, as can be seen in Illustration 4.4.

Illustration 4.5 shows the Fitzroy estate. The two towers on the eastern side of the estate are those seen in illustration 4.1. The Brotherhood of St Laurence welfare agency is located on the street on the western edge of the estate. There is a pre-school in the base of the north-eastern tower, and several other services are located adjacent to the high-rise component of the estate, including a child-care centre, a local government youth service, a primary school and a community house.

Illustration 4.5: Fitzroy public housing estate 2013
Source: Land Victoria, Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries

The Flemington estate is slightly further from the city than the other three. There is a small industrial estate to the south which is a remnant of the large number of industrial buildings that once existed in the area. Cottages built for low-income workers can be seen to the west.

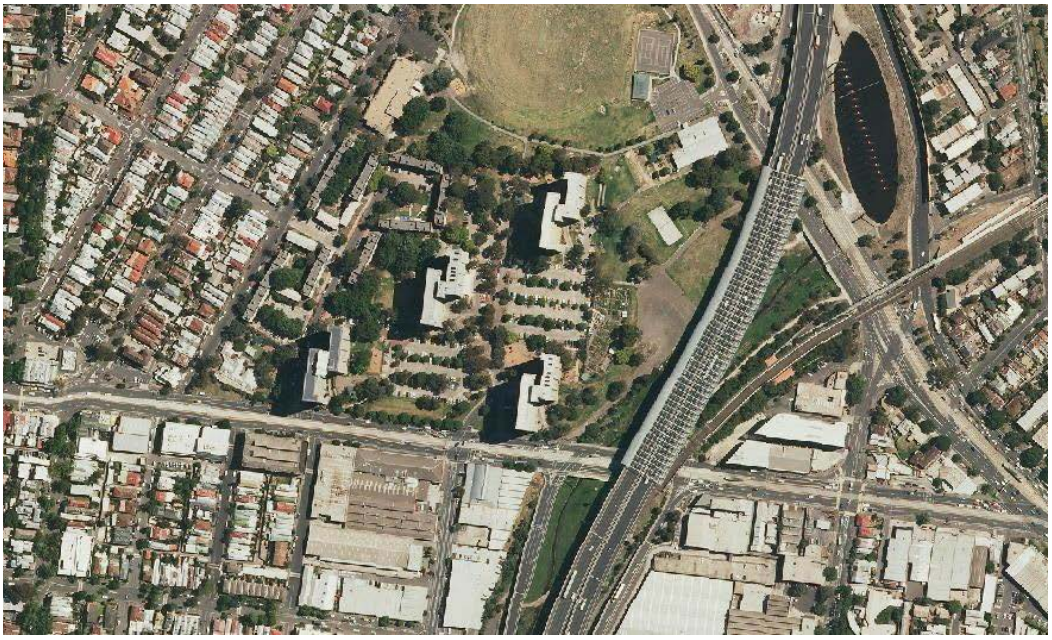


Illustration 4.6: Flemington public housing estate 2013
Source: Land Victoria, Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries

Illustration 4.7 show shows the Richmond estate, which is the largest public housing estate in Victoria. The two buildings in the middle of the western side of the estate are the Richmond West Primary School and the North Richmond Community Health Centre. The health centre operates a needle and syringe programme. Also bordering the estate is the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association, the Belgium Avenue Neighbourhood House, a Salvation Army community centre and Operation Stitches – a well-resourced Christian organisation that runs after-school and holiday activities for children and young people. The land on which the estates are built is owned by the state government and thus considered private property. As can be seen, the open space around the towers is a precious resource in this crowded area, but people who do not live or have business on the estate are discouraged from entering.

Illustration 4.7: Richmond public housing estate 2013
Source: Land Victoria, Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries

The 19th and early 20th century workers' cottages and converted industrial buildings in the areas around the estates are now highly sought after inner-urban housing. Gentrification, which refers to the migration of higher income households to lower-income neighbourhoods close to the city centre and the consequent displacement of lower-income residents (Atkinson 2000), has become a significant factor of the environment of all four estates (Moonee Valley City Council, 2010;Yarra City Council, 2009). Recent Australian research (Atkinson et al. 2011) has identified three key effects of gentrification. Initially it increases pressure on low-income renters who are faced with paying higher rents, relocating to lower-rent areas, applying for social housing or, at worst, becoming homeless. Over time this leads to a loss of social diversity and displaces lower-income owners and renters to areas where there are fewer opportunities for employment. This in turn leads to a change in the orientation of local services and infrastructure towards the needs of the newer residents, further disadvantaging those lower-income residents who remain.

Due to their size and because they are composed entirely of public housing, the four estates in this project are partly insulated from these effects of gentrification. Rent in public housing is calculated as a proportion of the resident's income and does not fluctuate with changes in local private sector

rents. The large population of the estates provides a sufficient client base for appropriate services to be provided close to the estates. Many services for residents and welfare agencies are located on or within easy access of the four estates. They are so numerous that one of the residents interviewed questioned whether so many were needed (INF6). Similarly, there are enough low-income residents to support a variety of retail outlets catering for that income group. The cultural diversity of the estate populations contributes significantly to the diversity of the area. For example, the large number of residents from African countries who live on the Flemington estate has led to African cafés and other small retail businesses operated by Africans in Racecourse Road close to the estate, and in Yarra the annual Moon Lantern Festival led by the Vietnamese community on the Richmond estate is a major event in the council's calendar and attracts large numbers of visitors.

Illustration 4.8: Participants in the Moon Lantern Festival, Richmond Housing Estate Source: North Richmond Community Health Centre

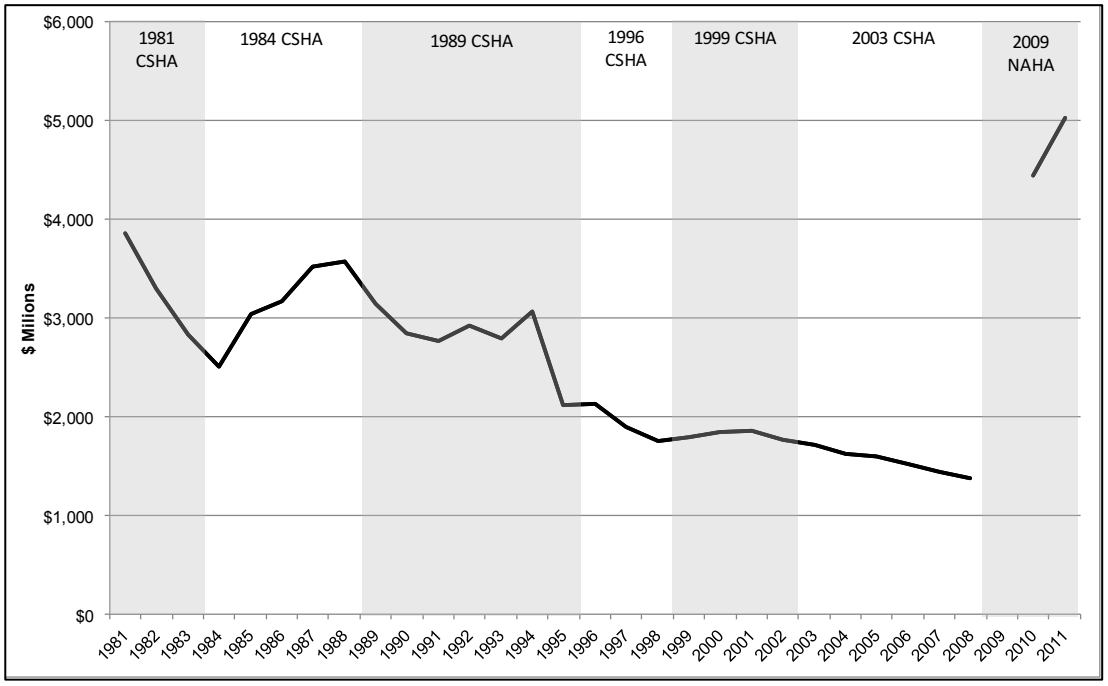
An effect of gentrification that does have an impact on these four estates is that most people on low incomes who live in the area are public housing residents. People who live on the estates have little in common with people who live in the surrounding areas, and there is little interaction. One of the

informants spoke of the estates as being 'like islands' (INF1). This variation is most marked in the City of Yarra, which has the highest number and the highest proportion of public housing residents of any local government area in Victoria. Drawing on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Yarra Municipal Public Health Plan observes that:

> Unlike most municipalities, Yarra's population sits largely at both ends of the socio-economic scale. At one end, according to Australian Taxation Office figures, Yarra has the fifth highest average, as well as median (middle value), wage in Victoria.
>
> At the other end, almost 9% of Yarra's population lives in areas with an index value below 650 compared to only 0.6% of Australia's population (Yarra City Council 2009:5)

There are several factors that contribute to the majority of estate residents being in this position. When the high-rise estates were built the priority groups for public housing were low-income working families of two adults and children and older retired people of limited means. In the 1970s and 1980s Australia experienced sluggish investment, slower economic growth, rising foreign debt and higher unemployment (Stretton 2005). As well, levels of marriage breakdown increased after the introduction of the no-fault divorce provisions in the 1975 Family Law Act (de Vaus 2004), contributing to an increase in the number of single parents or individuals without adequate income. This demographic shift greatly increased the demand for public housing from people in receipt of statutory incomes, which in turn reduced revenues from rent and the financial viability of the system. Federal funding for public housing has steadily decreased since the early 1980s, and from 1994 onwards state governments also reduced the funding they provided (Dalton 1999) (see Table 4.1). Consequently there was little growth in public housing to accommodate this need.

Table 4.1: Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement expenditures 1981-2011 (in 2011 real values)



Source: Groenhart & Burke 2013

Note: CSHA refers to successive Commonwealth-State Housing Agreements between the federal governments and all regional governments concerning the funding that each agreed to provide for public housing and other related purposes. NAHA refers to the current National Affordable Housing Agreement, which replaced the CSHA in 2009.

In the 20 years from 1989/90-2009/10 the proportion of Australian households renting from a state or territory housing authority declined from 6 percent to 3.9 percent (ABS 2010:34). The last Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement ended in 2008. It was replaced in 2009 by the National Affordable Housing Agreement which gives priority to homelessness programmes. Subsequently there was a one-off injection of $6.4 billion for social housing from the Nation Building – Economic Stimulus Plan which was devised in response to the Global Financial Crisis (Lawson et al. 2009).

Another policy change which contributed to the concentration of low-income households was the large-scale deinstitutionalisation of residential psychiatric patients during the 1980s and 1990s. As early as the 1960s Australian governments began adopting policies that led to people with mental illness or intellectual disability being increasingly housed and supported in the community. As this process progressed, the cost and inadequacy of large residential facilities became clear. In the 1980s the

Victorian and other state governments established processes for the closures of several large institutions. Not only were people moved out of institutions; no new admissions were accepted. During the following two decades the number of people living in these institutions declined nationally, while the numbers living in households increased. It is estimated that between 1981 and 1993 the number of people in institutional care in Australia declined by 7,900 (29%), while those living in households increased by 104,900 (43%) (Bostock et al. 2001). No additional funds were allocated for the increased demand for housing which this created (Carter, Burke & Moore 2008:10)

In 1997 the state housing authority in Victoria responded to the rising demand and decreasing funding for public housing by introducing waiting lists that were divided into categories prioritised to ensure that people in greater need were housed first (Dodson 2007). There are currently 12 categories, the highest priority being people in the police witness protection programme, then people made homeless by emergencies, then people released from prison, etc. The lowest category is for people who are eligible on the grounds of their low income, but have no additional indicators of need (Department of Human Services 2012). The result is that while those who can demonstrate highest needs and have support from welfare agencies are housed first, applicants who are not assessed in the highest category face longer waiting periods than had previously occurred, particularly if they do not have anyone to advocate on their behalf. High-rise public housing has tended to have a higher turnover of tenancies than most other forms, which has led to changes in allocations policy being felt sooner in these estates, and for people with the highest needs to become more concentrated in the high-rise towers (McNelis & Reynolds 2001).

The cumulative effect of these factors is that the composition of the high-rise estate communities now include a larger number of people in housing crisis and with multiple disadvantages. The relatively stable tenancies envisaged in the 1970s have become populations of concentrated poverty (McNelis & Reynolds 2001).

To this point the chapter has shown the construction of the high-rise estates as both physical entities and communities, and their relationship to the housing, urban infrastructure and residents in the areas where they are located, and has discussed the broader policy and environmental factors that have led to their current situation. The physical, visual and social relationships are all characterised by sharp contrasts. Parenthetically, it needs to be remembered that as important as these differences are, they are only a part of the story. Policy professionals, bureaucrats and agency staff who respond primarily to differences of this type often fail to notice the more substantial common ground between people, and may unwittingly act to exacerbate divisions and exclusion.

The chapter thus far has built a contextual, relational understanding, presenting the estates as both physical and complex social phenomena, but this is only one of a number of possible constructions. Policy makers have increasingly portrayed the high-rise estates as sites of deficit, of concentrated economic and social disadvantage. Their perspective is constructed within a different knowledge frame, as is discussed in the following section.

Different perspectives: the construction of disadvantage

Analysis of demographic data leads to a different understanding of the estates. It is the primary information for bureaucrats engaged in the development and implementation of policies and programme, particularly for those who advocate for the importation of programmes from other countries with little or no consideration of their appropriateness to local conditions. Both types of understanding are important, although they have different applications and the balance between them changes throughout the policy implementation process. The presentation of demographic information below recognises this while intentionally highlighting the difference in perspectives that derives from this more positivist analysis.

Given the close bureaucratic scrutiny that the high-rise public housing estates attract, it is surprising that it is difficult to know how many people

they house. The most accurate information is collected by the state housing authority through its management of leases, but due to privacy concerns this is not publicly available. It is widely believed by residents and agency staff that there are many more residents than are recorded on leases. This includes tenants accommodating friends and members of extended family, either temporarily or long-term, and sub-letting of rooms, most of which is not revealed to housing officers. Some of these residents do not identify themselves as living in public housing as they identify the person to whom they pay rent as their landlord. The evidence of these additional residents consists only of anecdotal knowledge of individual cases as they come to light.

Official publicly available data on the number of residents comes from the Census of Population and Housing conducted every five years by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The smallest data area for which census data is available, called SA1, does not always allow the isolation of the high-rise towers.[10] Some SA1s include a small number of private residences. Keeping in mind this limitation, the following information has been sourced from the 2011 ABS Census of Population and Housing. This information relates to the high-rise estates only, which due to their particular characteristics are often considered separately. Each of the estates where they are located also contains low-rise buildings that are not serviced by lifts (walk-ups), villa style housing and some free-standing houses. In 2011 there were 7120 people recorded as living in the high-rise towers on the four estates: 1262 in three towers at Collingwood, 1888 in four towers at Fitzroy, 1305 in four towers at Flemington and 2665 in five towers at Richmond.

It is clear from the Census data concerning household income that public housing tenants living on the four high-rise estates are significantly poorer than Victorian households generally, particularly households in the two local government areas where the estates are located. In 2011, across the four estates nine in ten households were in receipt of less than the median

[10] Statistical Area Level 1 (SA1), which is the second smallest geographic area defined in the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS). SA1 is the smallest area which the ABS used for the processing and release of data from the 2011 Census (ABS).

household income for Victoria, compared with 42 percent of households in the City of Moonee Valley and 36 percent in the City of Yarra. Half the households on the four estates had gross earnings of less than $600 per week, compared to only 18 percent of Victorian households, as is shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Gross weekly household incomes in 2011 for the Collingwood, Fitzroy, Flemington and Richmond high-rise estates, compared to all Victorian households

Household income per week (year)	Estates		Victoria	
	% of total	Cumulative	% of total	Cumulative
Negative-$199 (Negative-$10,399)	7%	9%	1%	3%
$200-$299 ($10,400-$15,599)	13%	22%	2%	5%
$300-$399 ($15,600-$20,799)	14%	36%	5%	10%
$400-$599 ($20,800-$31,199)	15%	51%	8%	18%
$600-$799 ($31,200-$41,599)	9%	60%	7%	26%

Source: Calculated from ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2011

Most households on the estates rely on statutory incomes, as the number of employed residents is now very low. Table 4.3 shows the employment status of estate residents in the week preceding Census night. Only 26 percent reported being in paid employment, compared to 67 percent of the Victorian population. Among those residents who were employed, equal numbers had part-time or full-time work, whereas in the Victorian population the number of people in full-time work was well over twice the number of part-time employees. Data of this type supports the social construction of the high-rise estates as problematic, based on a discourse of the concentration of multiple disadvantages requiring intervention by the state (Arthurson & Jacobs 2009; Engels 2006; Hedman et al. 2012).

Table 4.3: Employment status of residents of Collingwood, Fitzroy, Flemington and Richmond high-rise estates compared to Victoria in 2011

Employment status - Age 20-64yrs	Estates	Victoria
Employed, worked full-time	13%	47%
Employed, worked part-time	13%	20%
Employed, away from work	4%	4%
Unemployed, looking for work	10%	4%
Not in the labour force	48%	20%

Source: Calculated from ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2011

From the time they were built, the estates have been home to successive waves of migrants to Australia from a variety of countries Between the end

of the Second World War and the year 2000, the majority of immigrants came from the UK and Ireland, followed by Italy, New Zealand, Germany and Greece. As the allocation of public housing became increasingly focused on people in greatest need, the humanitarian segment of the national immigration programme came to have a profound influence on the cultural diversity of the estate communities. People granted refugee and humanitarian visas are commonly assessed in offshore refugee camps. They have very few material resources and often require special assistance with their resettlement. Research published in 2002 (Beer & Morphett 2002) found that people who arrived in Australia under the humanitarian component of the immigration programme (i.e. refugees and other people in humanitarian need) comprised 36 percent of the users of housing services, but were only 14 percent of the total number of immigrants. In the 12 years to 2011, 109,357 people arrived in Australia through the humanitarian programme. The majority came from the regions of Africa and the Middle East. The highest intakes were between 2003-2007, reflecting protracted conflict in the Horn of Africa (Refugee Council of Australia 2013).

Not surprisingly, the communities on the four estates contain a much higher proportion of people born overseas than does the broader Victorian community, as can be seen in Table 4.4. It shows that the eight most

Table 4.4: Country of birth of population of Collingwood, Fitzroy, Flemington and Richmond estates compared to Victoria, 2011

Country of Birth	Estates		Victoria	
	Number	% of pop.	Number	% of pop.
Australia (including External Territories)	2137	30%	3636503	68%
Mainland South-East Asia	1343	19%	98090	2%
Southern and East Africa	775	11%	55804	1%
Maritime South-East Asia	494	7%	112410	2%
Chinese Asia (including Mongolia)	484	7%	118571	2%
North Africa	393	6%	21546	<1%
Middle East	151	2%	67051	1%
South Eastern Europe	114	2%	130415	2%

Source: Calculated from ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2011

common countries of birth of estate residents, compared with the same countries in the Victorian population. In 2011, while 68% of the Victorian

population were born in Australia only 30% of the estate residents were, and whereas 16 percent of estate residents were born in Africa, less than 1 percent of the Victorian population were.

As a result of this diversity, one of the characteristics of the housing estate communities is a lower than average rate of English proficiency. Using the Richmond estate as an example, Table 4.5 shows the proportion of residents who have English language skills and reveals that 45 percent either speak no English or do not speak it well.

Table 4.5: English language proficiency, Richmond estate

Proficiency in spoken English (persons)	Males	Females	Total
Speaks English only	13%	9%	11%
Speaks other language and speaks English: Very well	29%	22%	25%
Speaks other language and speaks English: Well	23%	17%	19%
Speaks other language and speaks English: Not well	26%	35%	31%
Speaks other language and speaks English: Not at all	10%	18%	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%
n	936	1214	2150

Source: Calculated from ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2011

Note: Due to rounding totals may not equal 100%

The communities living on the four housing estates investigated in this project differ greatly from the broader Victorian population. What the data do not reveal is that refugees have often come from chaotic and dangerous situations and have little experience of functional government and civic institutions. Some have a deep distrust of government. Those who are too old for school do not have access to the intensive supported environment in which much of this learning takes place. One informant noted that the lack of financial resources can hamper the capacity of families and communities to organise social events that are routine in better resourced communities. Collectively all of these factors shape the interactions between residents and workers involved in community improvement programmes on the estates. They constrain what the programmes can achieve, and they help build a particular discourse as to what the problems of the estate are.

Community concern and the construction of the estates as social problems

As early as the late 1960s concerns were being raised internationally about concentrations of low-income residents caused by high-rise public housing estates. In 1972 the Australian housing researcher Michael Jones wrote:

> There is evidence that the concentration of very low income, 'problem' people in public housing areas does not produce satisfactory environments [and that] the large scale congregation of these families on an estate produces areas commonly known as low income ghettos (Jones 1972:175).

There was concern about whether high-rise accommodation was appropriate for children. In 1975 the Australian Commission of Inquiry into Poverty reflected this in its first report:

> …the Victorian Housing Commission built many high-rise blocks in the inner city area but the arguments against large-scale clearance and high-rise flats, especially as homes for children, are so strong that we believe that no more will be built (Henderson 1975:168).

The Inquiry commissioned research into the Fitzroy and Collingwood estates, which found that the majority of tenants were happy with the flats themselves, but that there were other disadvantages such as poor physical and social facilities, inadequate environment, and an obligation to deal with sometimes hostile officials (Henderson 1975:165)

By 1980 the Victorian government had recognised the deficiencies in the design of the high-rise estates in Melbourne. The state housing authority noted that the lifts were unreliable and the communal areas such as laundries and entrance foyers were expensive to maintain and were the cause of major security problems. There were often large numbers of children with inadequate facilities for play. In February 1980 the authority established an interdivisional High Rise Working Party to investigate these problems and improvements that could be made (Housing Commission Victoria n.d.)

Following the election of a new federal government in March 1983, additional funds were made available for the maintenance and improvement of public housing across the country, temporarily reversing a downward

trend in federal funding (see Table 4.1). The problems faced by the state housing authority were substantial. In 1985 the authority wrote that design problems, coupled with a range of policy decisions by the Victorian and federal governments, had left a challenging legacy:

> In the last two or so decades more than half of Victoria's public stock was sold off cheaply and not replaced. In general, the Ministry [of Housing] has been left with the worst stock (Ministry of Housing Victoria 1985:1)

These sales had occurred under the long-standing tradition of Victorian governments taking action to support home ownership. The 1920 Victorian Housing Reclamation Bill enabled the State Savings Bank of Victoria to provide low-interest mortgages to workers (Harris 1988). The 1945 post-war reconstruction programme led to a surge of federal support for state governments to build and own public housing, but within a few years housing policy had returned to an emphasis on private ownership. It is estimated that by the end of the 1960s Victoria had sold 43 percent of its public housing stock (Hayward 1996). Large-scale sales of public housing in Victoria predated the Right to Buy programme in the UK by more than two decades.

By 1985 it was the opinion of the Victorian housing authority that public housing residents had little respect for properties because of their poor quality and inadequate maintenance (Ministry of Housing Victoria 1985). The authority recorded high turnover rates, tenants who left the estates without giving notice, high vacancy costs through foregone rent, the need for extensive maintenance, rent arrears and vandalism, the latter often by people who did not live on the estates. It noted that these difficulties strained resources and morale among its staff in regional offices, and that a more comprehensive approach than a narrow focus on infrastructure was needed:

> It is unlikely that a purely physical solution to the problem will be effective. Community development and management changes on the estates must go hand in hand with estate improvement (Ministry of Housing Victoria 1985:7).

Arguably, the most critical episode in the social construction of the estates as social problems occurred at the end of the 1990s, when the illegal drug

trade became a prominent issue associated with the inner-city estates. In Melbourne this increased activity first came to public attention in the inner suburb of Footscray, which drew a strong response from Victoria Police. It subsequently became established on and around the three housing estates in Yarra. Deaths from injecting drug use rose sharply, leading the Victorian government to appoint a committee of drug policy experts in 1999. In its first report the committee noted that:

> Despite considerable and productive efforts by our law enforcement and health services in recent years, the problems caused by illicit drugs continue to grow in Australia, as they do internationally. Urgent action is needed (Drug Policy Expert Committee 2000:vi)

For more than a decade now an active street-based heroin trade has been established on and around the Richmond high-rise estate. It attracts injecting drug users from across Melbourne, as well as supplying the significant demand for drugs among estate residents. It continues to flourish in spite of regular and intensive policing (Dwyer, Power & Dietze 2013). Injecting drug use and dealing of illegal drugs is highly visible in the area and a matter of constant concern for people living and working in the estates and the surrounding areas. The North Richmond Community Health Centre operates a needle and syringe exchange programme and Yarra Council contracts the Health Centre to remove discarded syringes from local streets, parks and other public areas, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In 2011 the council called on the Victorian government to conduct a trial of a supervised injecting facility in Yarra (City of Yarra 2011). At the time of writing there was no such facility in Victoria.

Several factors make the high-rise estates particularly susceptible to the illegal drug trade. The towers were built with two laundries on each floor, which provide a place to inject drugs close to where they are sold. These are being closed as renovations take place which include a space for a washing machine in each flat. The estates are highly accessible, being close to the centre of Melbourne and well served by public transport. The open ground around the towers that is a feature of their high-modernist design, as well as the towers' internal design, make covert surveillance difficult and

facilitate easy escape into the densely populated surrounding areas (Dalton & Rowe 2004). The estates house a vulnerable population, including many residents who are easily intimidated and others who do not trust police or state authorities. Even those who do trust authorities understand the limited power of police and security staff to keep them safe.

The characterisation of the estates as social problems resulted in both their physical presence and their residents attracting a great deal of attention from different quarters. The diversity of interests is reminiscent of the broad coalition that grew in support of the slum clearance programmes in the 1930s. Local and state government town planners and social planners, welfare agencies, health services, real estate developers, law enforcement and crime prevention agencies, and social researchers all had an interest in the estates. Most described them as problems to be solved and proposed remedial action, as discussed in this chapter. These are the drivers for the estate and community programmes that are the focus in this project.

Before turning to examine the programmes that are central to this research, it is important to understand the recent history of the Victorian state and local governments that developed and implemented them.

The public sector

The policies and programmes that were investigated in this project were devised by the State Government of Victoria and by the local government of the City of Yarra. Local governments in Australia are created by their respective state governments, and their activities and practices are increasingly prescribed by state legislation and policy. This is occurring through a key feature of the reform of the Victorian public sector that was introduced in the early 1990s – the application of a range of managerialist techniques that were known at the time as New Public Management (NPM).

In October 1992 a reformist conservative Liberal-National Coalition government was elected in Victoria in a sweeping electoral victory that gave it control over both houses of parliament. The new government set about introducing its reforms with a speed and reach for which few were prepared.

Costar and Economou described it as 'the most activist, controversial and ideological administration in twentieth-century Victoria', one which constituted 'a clean break from Victoria's long tradition of social liberalism' (1999:vii). In seven years the public sector was reduced by over 25% or 70,000 staff (O'Neill 2000:109).

The interpretation of NPM in Victoria involved a range of measures, including the introduction of competition between government, non-government and private sector suppliers, competitive tendering for services, positioning government as a purchaser rather than a provider of services, the use of limited length employment contracts, and funding of outputs rather than inputs (Alford et al. 1994). In 1994 the Victorian government introduced Compulsory Competitive Tendering to local government, stating that its particular benefit would be a change in the culture of local government. The legislation required councils to put a percentage of their expenditure to competitive tender, initially 20% in 1995 rising to 50% by 1997 (Walsh & O Flynn 2000:445). The result was a fundamental change in the relationship between both tiers of government and the public sector, and between the public sector and the community. All manner of relationships came to be defined and negotiated through contracts. Alford et al. dubbed Victoria 'the contract state' (1994). As is so often the case in Australian public policy, these ideas drew heavily on developments in the UK (Pawson & Jacobs 2010).

Public sector recruitment was oriented to finding the skills to manage this new relationship, which radically changed the skills base of the public sector. Employees with managerial, economic and legal knowledge were recruited. Knowledge which emerged from the efficient operation of markets was valued far more than the policy knowledge of public administration (Hess 2003).

By the election of October 1999 the Victorian public had lost its appetite for these reforms and installed a minority Labor government. The Labor campaign had promised a transparent, socially progressive government that understood the adverse effects of the market-oriented policies of the previous seven years (Bennett & Newman 2010). The new Labor

government placed the concepts of community and social capital at the heart of its social policy formation. Community engagement became its signature practice.

The problem the new government faced was that the swings in political philosophy and the resultant restructures of the public sector had left it largely bereft of the skills it needed to implement its new approach. The reorientation of the public sector around the concepts of community, participation and social capital was still a work in progress at the time of this research. Even six years after the election Hess and Adams were concerned about

> …the risk of failure at a practical level because the skills required of the bureaucracy and the community have not been part of our national life for some time. (Hess & Adams 2005:231)

The reforms cast a long shadow.

Taking action: community improvement programmes

Until the mid-1980s government interventions to address the perceived problems of the high-rise housing estates had concentrated on physical infrastructure – building new homes where space permitted and maintaining and upgrading existing buildings and grounds. In 1980 for example, the Estate Improvements Branch of the Ministry of Housing consulted with residents in high-rise towers about improvements to the infrastructure. 1982 saw the establishment of an inter-divisional Estate Improvement Priorities Committee 'to encourage full tenants' participation in the planning and co-ordination of all physical and community developments on Ministry estates', which was supported by estate-based community workers (Housing Commission Victoria 1982:7).

The result was some large-scale programmes to improve high-rise and other public housing estates in Victoria from 1983 onwards. On the high-rise estates, these included better security lighting, enclosure of the open walkways (the 'streets in the sky' advocated by the modernist architects), and enclosure of the areas underneath some high-rise towers to provide

improved security and community facilities. There was consultation with residents and, for the first time, employment of community development workers on the estates to assist with this process (Ministry of Housing Victoria 1985).

As noted above, by 1985 the Ministry of Housing recognised that consultation with residents about infrastructure improvements was inadequate to address the increasingly complex needs of estate communities, and that community development programmes were also necessary. Until that time the state housing authority had seen its role as a construction authority and landlord, leaving the communities who lived on the estates to their own devices.

The encouragement of engagement with estate residents was short-lived. In 1992 a reformist Liberal/National Party Coalition government was elected in Victoria led by Premier Jeff Kennett, a former Minister of Housing. The preoccupation of the new government was to reduce the high level of public sector debt, which it did through increased taxes and charges, expenditure cuts, outsourcing and asset sales (Alford et al. 1994). It had little time for community consultation and removed government funding for tenants' associations.

Hulse et al. (2004) record that the Kennett Government examined other options for the inner Melbourne housing estates, including selling them to private sector developers, in a consultants' report which it commissioned but that has never been released to the public. The report also canvassed the option of demolition of the high-rise towers and rebuilding the estates, and in 1998/99 a tower on the Kensington estate was demolished. Due to the towers being built without a frame they were prohibitively expensive to demolish, and the government turned its attention instead to demolishing and redeveloping the low-rise 'walk-up' flats on the estates, in conjunction with the private sector. The Kensington estate was the first site selected for this type of intervention in inner Melbourne (Hulse, Herbert & Down 2004:16)

It was not until the Labor Party was returned to power in Victoria in the 1999 election that participation by public housing residents in estate

management was once again promoted. This did not entail a return to the experimentalism in self-management by residents that was championed by the 1980 Green Paper on Housing (Ministry of Housing Victoria 1980), which is recalled by an informant in Chapter 6. Instead, there was a preference for participation by residents in processes hosted and managed by government.

Two participatory community improvement programmes featured regularly in the informants' accounts for this project. The Community Empowerment Project was completed before this project began, and the Fitzroy and Collingwood Neighbourhood Renewal Projects both reached the end of their eight-year life during the project. For a short time the redevelopment of the Richmond estate was also called Neighbourhood Renewal, but it was not declared as a Neighbourhood Renewal Project and differed in so many ways from the other projects that the name was soon changed. The Flemington Neighbourhood Renewal project was launched during this study, but for reasons explained in Chapter 8 it was not possible for it to be included in this research.

The Victorian Neighbourhood Renewal Program

Following the state election in 1999, the new Victorian Labor government moved to implement its guiding principles of local area planning and solutions, based on high levels of community engagement. To this end it progressively established a number of initiatives: the Community Building Initiative, the Community Capacity Building Program and the Neighbourhood Renewal Program. All were designed to improve communities that had high indicators of social and economic disadvantage and poor health status. The governance and monitoring of the programmes relied on extensive participation by community members. The Neighbourhood Renewal Program was limited to public housing estates, and was closely based on the New Deal for Communities and the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy which were flagships of the UK government's approach to addressing social exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit 2001). Neighbourhood Renewal was the best resourced and most prominent of the Victorian government's community building programs that operated in the four

research sites. It demonstrated many of the principles and practices of other participatory programs in disadvantaged communities, and was portrayed in the Growing Victoria Together policy statement as a means of building more cohesive communities and reducing inequalities (State of Victoria 2001).

Neighbourhood Renewal was launched in 2002 after trials in two regional sites (Klein 2004). It was described by the Victorian Department of Human Services as 'a new approach that brings together the resources and ideas of residents, governments, businesses and community groups to tackle disadvantage in areas with concentrations of public housing' (Neighbourhood Renewal 2006:89). In total 21 Neighbourhood Renewal projects were initiated across the state. At the time of writing, 15 of these had been completed and six were current, one of which was the Flemington project (Department of Human Services 2013). There was considerable effort to distinguish the programme from previous practice:

> Neighbourhood Renewal is at the forefront of attempts in Victoria to 'join-up' government. Traditional approaches to disadvantage focused on physical renewal, single program based provision of human services, and approaches that are piecemeal, short-term, disconnected from local economies and local communities, have produced little permanent change (Neighbourhood Renewal 2006:2).

In keeping with similar programmes in the UK, a distinguishing feature of the programme was that it was place-based, focused on specific areas and their residents, rather than individuals or groups.

The programme was centrally planned by the Victorian government and the outcomes and timelines decided before the individual project sites were decided. As will be shown, little account was taken of existing community capacity or structures. Sites were selected according to indicators of disadvantage (Klein 2005). The first opportunities for participation by the estate communities in the Fitzroy and Collingwood projects was the invitation to residents to join the governance structure to oversee the implementation of the project. Subsequent opportunities for resident-led

initiatives within the programme framework were managed through these structures.

The governance of the projects in this study also closely imitated the UK model (Gaventa 2004). They consisted of an overarching steering committee (which was split into two tiers in the Flemington project) and specific-purpose working parties that focused on areas such as housing and environment, health and wellbeing, education and employment, and leaderships and celebrations. All of these committees were advisory and were envisaged as representative forums. The Neighbourhood Advisory Team for the Collingwood project, for example, was composed of up to 25 elected members, of whom:

> 50% will be residents, as much as possible reflecting the social and cultural diversity on the estate, and 50% will be representatives of an appropriate cross section of government and service organisations, plus a permanent representative as determined by the Tenants' Association.[11]

There was a preference for committees at all levels to be chaired or co-chaired by an estate resident. The executive team of each project was comprised of a Place Manager and two community development staff.

Neighbourhood Renewal described itself as a community development programme, although it also included infrastructure renewal. It explained that 'community development is often used to describe the grass roots involvement of community members in the development of initiatives that improve the social and economic wellbeing of a community' (Neighbourhood Renewal 2006:3). At the same time it stated that the programme 'is both a bottom-up and top-down initiative', and that by this process 'residents will be empowered to participate and government and agencies will become more responsive' (Ibid:3).

Various writers have commented on the co-option by government of the discourse of community development. Ingamells (2007) notes a tendency of government-initiated programmes to realign the conventional characteristics of community development to meet the requirements of new policy initiatives, which has the effect of locally grounding non-local factors.

11 Source: Terms of Reference, Collingwood Estate Neighbourhood Advisory Team, February 2007, paragraph 7.2.

Dinham (2005) writes that although community development is commonly seen as a radical practice with the potential to challenge established structures, in regeneration programmes in Britain it was used to channel people into planning and the consideration of issues that were thought of as non-political. Foley and Martin (2000) saw the UK government's stated commitment to 'bottom-up' approaches as being contradicted by its strong centralising instinct.

Apart from the central role of planning in the programme, the committee structures and processes were familiar to those residents who had been involved with estate residents' associations and other incorporated community groups. In their early stages the Collingwood and Fitzroy Neighbourhood Renewal Projects encouraged residents to organise themselves into incorporated associations so they could apply for and manage their own funding. The model rules provided by the statutory authority Community Affairs Victoria to assist with applications for incorporation set out a similar process of verifiable membership, elected representatives, office bearers, meeting cycles, record keeping and dispute settlement. The Neighbourhood Renewal Program reinforced the primacy of these practices and their association with institutional power and authority. Sometimes this led to unintended results. By 2007 there were five separate associations at the Fitzroy estate claiming to represent the Chinese community, all vying for the same sources of funding and access to the same community meeting spaces.

The Community Empowerment Project

The Community Empowerment Project (CEP) was a quite different approach and was cited by informants in contrast to their experiences of Neighbourhood Renewal. The CEP was an initiative of Yarra Council, working in conjunction with RMIT University in inner Melbourne and a number of local agencies. It involved the communities on the Collingwood, Fitzroy and Richmond estates. It began in June 2002, just prior to the launch of the two Neighbourhood Renewal projects in Yarra, and continued until June 2004, overseen by a consortium led by Yarra Council. It was

funded by the federal Department of Family and Community Services and the Reichstein Foundation, a prominent Victorian philanthropic organisation.

The CEP had two main aims: to reinvigorate disadvantaged communities in Yarra, and to establish mechanisms whereby they could participate in civic activities and influence decision-making. Its method was to recruit and train advocates from a diverse range of communities. Training in community advocacy was provided by RMIT University and was based on three units from the nationally accredited Community Services Training Package. It focused on 'empowering the Advocates as individuals so that the Advocates could then empower their communities' (City of Yarra 2004:2).

According to an informant who had been responsible for the programme, part of its intention was redistributive (INF1). As noted earlier, in contrast to the residualisation taking place in public housing, Yarra was undergoing the gentrification common to inner-city locations. Household incomes and property prices were rising rapidly. The project evaluation report noted that the estate communities:

> …tended to be marginalised by virtue of income, ethnicity, age, health, addiction and housing tenure (or lack of it). In the past these groups would have integrated well into the working class fibre of Yarra suburbs. They now constitute an emerging under-class in a rapidly gentrifying municipality (City of Yarra 2004:5).

A project worker was appointed to each estate with the purpose of supporting and assisting the advocates and promoting the project to service providers and government. Advocates were expected to support or suggest ideas, causes or proposals in their communities, and had access to a small brokerage fund. In all, 46 advocates were recruited from 35 ethnic groups. They developed or supported a wide range of initiatives, including a Somali Women's Group, a laughing group, Greek dancing classes, a photographic exhibition about holders of Temporary Protection Visas, day trips, a youth programme and Reconciliation celebrations.[12] One of the more significant

12 Reconciliation refers to a widely supported movement to promote reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader Australian community.

activities was a campaign in support of East Timorese people at the Richmond estate who held Temporary Protection Visas and were facing deportation. The campaign included lobbying the federal government and raising public awareness, and resulted in approximately 300 East Timorese being granted permanent residency. As a result, Yarra Council received a Golden World Award from the UN in 2003 (City of Yarra 2004).

Both the Community Empowerment Project and the Neighbourhood Renewal projects were designed to redress disadvantage by recruiting, training and empowering members of disadvantaged communities. Both programmes dealt with the same communities during the same period. They used outwardly similar organisational approaches, establishing advisory committees of stakeholders and employing estate-based project staff, yet they produced substantially different outcomes. Neighbourhood Renewal took a place-based approach which focused residents inwards, whereas CEP was based on a more conventional community activist model. This distinction was identified by informants.

Conclusion

This chapter has built on the historical analysis of policy implementation explored in Chapter 2, providing examples of the way in which implementation of community improvement programmes became increasingly dependent on partnerships and engagement with the communities that were seen as the beneficiaries of these programmes. The emergence of community engagement and participation as bureaucratic techniques of implementation was traced from the steps towards greater community consultation in the early 1980s, to experiments in self-management of the estates by residents, returning to the primarily consultative role of residents in estate programmes such as Neighbourhood Renewal.

When the estates were planned, the power of new technologies and the high-modernist ideals of rational, apolitical processes seemed to promise that the social and health problems of slums and poverty could be swept

away, making way for new, clean and orderly estates and communities. Within a decade of their completion the new estates had in turn become the focus of concerns about security and were seen as a threat, both to the tenants and to the wider community.

The interaction of apparently unrelated public policies is also very clear. The policies of deinstitutionalisation and humanitarian immigration, the former devised to improve the care of people with mental illness and intellectual disability, and the latter to meet moral and international obligations to refugees, have had a profound impact on the nature of the public housing communities. As an informant pointed out, one is never painting on a blank canvass, which the high-modernist planners and architects had imagined possible.

The capacity to construct housing estates and their communities is a demonstration of the reach and power of the state, but the currents and events explored in this chapter also demonstrate the limits of that power. As well, the state is constrained by a complex interaction of small effects that corrode its capacity to enforce its will. Over the next four chapters these effects are explored using the interviews conducted for this project as the primary source of data. The chapters are structured thematically, although, like many of the concepts discussed so far, qualitative data collected in social systems does not always conform to the abstraction of themes and at times spills over their boundaries. The next chapter is arranged around the themes of memories, knowledge and care.

Chapter 5 Memories, knowledge and care

Introduction

Preceding chapters have argued that the way the housing estates in this research are known and understood significantly affects the relationships between residents and professionals, and consequently the ways in which programmes are implemented. The importance of history has been highlighted. The evidence from informants shows that while history may be overlooked in the urgency for action and by new generations of public servants and workers, it was remembered by the public housing residents who were the subjects of the policies.

This chapter shows the place of history and memory and the different frameworks of knowledge that were encountered on the housing estates and at varying degrees of removal through the policy implementation chain. History, memory and knowledge, whether by their presence or absence, formed part of the foundation of the interventionary programmes that were enacted in the communities living on the estates.

Of the 28 informants interviewed for this research, 25 had a long association with one or more of the four estates, the longest being since 1973. Three had an association of less than five years at the time of the interviews. The residents who became involved in programme steering committees and other governance bodies tended to be those with longer tenancies. New arrivals to the estate were more preoccupied with settling in to a new area, caring for their families, looking for employment, or, if they were refugees or immigrants, finding their way in a new country.

The stories the informants told about what the estates were like as places to live and work varied greatly, from descriptions of widespread violence and lawlessness to nostalgic recollections of strong and cohesive communities. Part of this variation can be explained by the different estates and periods to which the stories refer. Part is explained by differences in the way people experienced events, and in the ways these

experiences were recalled and interpreted. As with all recollections they are subject to the vagaries of memory. In one instance two informants gave quite different accounts of the same event. I had also attended the event in my professional role at the time and my recollection is different from both of their accounts.

The importance of these memories is that whether they are factually correct or not, they are one of the filters through which people interpret their place in the present and which influence their decisions and actions. It would be a mistake to think of them as insubstantial, as not being anchored in verifiable facts. As will be seen below, it was the official documentation that turned out to be more ephemeral, lost through staff turnover, office relocations, shifting departmental structures and the relentless urgency of the present.

These memories are durable for another reason. In human services the front line of service delivery is primarily sustained by an oral culture. It is a constant frustration of managers that workers often do not refer to guiding documents, and a commonplace belief by workers that the reports they write are rarely read.

Memories of the estates

The interviews showed that memories of the estates varied markedly and that even people who lived or worked on the same estate during the same period interpreted their experiences quite differently. Wide variations are to be expected in communities of this size and complexity, but the informants were not representative. Those who were residents were selected from the small cohort who chose to participate in the implementation of improvement programmes on their estates, and who had the confidence to do so.

A perennial issue associated with the high-rise housing estates is safety. It concerns residents and people who live nearby and it surfaces regularly at public meetings, yet even this is approached from a number of different perspectives by informants. Two of the interviews conducted for this research were quite disturbing. The situations they described were dire and

took place within the working life of the informants. They are surprisingly recent.

The following three extracts are from one of these, an account by a local manager who began work at the Richmond estate in 1982. When he was appointed he decided to live on the estate. The practice of the housing authority at the time was to employ resident housing officers who were each provided with a flat and expected to live on the estate,[13] but for a manager to do so required a change in regulations. There were three resident housing officers at Richmond, each of whom was on call overnight for one week in three.

> People did not want to live in Richmond. They thought that it was horrible, so it had a very quick turnover, so we could house people quite rapidly. It was known as an estate of violence, which was true, and it was also known as an estate that had single mums, you know, and that was a really pejorative thing at the time, and it was an estate of increasing Asian population and some people didn't like that. There were situations when there was a murder one weekend where we had, I can remember, 20 keys returned because people were so scared.
>
> ***
>
> We had horrific violence on the estate. There were two more murders of women, but we started to take action. So for example when Vietnamese guys were coming home from their shift jobs late at night and parking their cars in the, you know, the local carpark, (people who) I always suspected were sort of linked to some of these families that had a great notoriety, they'd just belt them up. Well, we used to get them crimes compensation and where we could we'd follow up and get advocates. I'd get lawyers in to support their cases and charge people etcetera, etcetera. This sort of escalated to about 1983 where a guy came into the office just covered in blood and he asked me if I could help him to go home because they obviously wouldn't let him go through. So I went out to see what was going on. It was some familiar people who just started to smash the shit out of me, so other people came out from the office to help and it just escalated into a full affray, basically. We got the police involved and

[13] This practice was progressively phased out during the 1980s, as part of the shift in focus away from the management of estates to the management of tenancies (McNelis & Reynolds 2001).

> they were charged and convicted, and spent six months inside, that group of people.
>
> ***
>
> The guy I took over from used to carry a baseball bat around, and that's how he controlled the place. The police didn't want to go on to the estates when I first went there. Police hated the place. The police in Richmond called the high-rise flats The Caves. At Richmond they talked to me about all the tribes, you know, the Timorese. I said 'The Timorese, you've got to understand the Timorese are not Indo-Chinese, they are a completely different group. If you call them Vietnamese they will be offended'. 'Oh I don't care about all those tribes.' So there was a great deal of ignorance. Now that's not the case with the police today. However at that time also they were under siege, and they were being shot by people who lived on the estate (INF23).

The extent of lawlessness, violence, racism and institutional corruption described in this interview needs to be understood in the light of the political culture that prevailed in Richmond at the time. There is a persistent belief that these problems are endemic to public housing, but consideration of the wider environment calls this into question.

A study by the Australian Institute of Criminology about illegality in the public sector (Grabosky 1989) shows that from the first local election after its establishment as a municipality in 1855, Richmond was notoriously corrupt and quite violent.[14] Until the 1980s it was a poor working-class area. The early residents were mainly of Irish heritage but after the Second World War the area incorporated migrants from southern Europe, and from South Vietnam after the Vietnam War. The Vietnamese are still the largest ethnic group living on the Richmond estate.

Violence and threat were common. In the 1981 local government election, cars belonging to two independent councillors were fire-bombed, a prominent supporter of independent candidates received a pamphlet stained with human blood, and three men were attacked while delivering how-to-vote cards for independent candidates. One of the men sustained a broken jaw and another was beaten unconscious. Local newspapers that contained

[14] In the Victorian local government amalgamations of 1994-95, the City of Richmond was amalgamated with Fitzroy and Collingwood to form the new City of Yarra.

unfavourable editorial comment about the sitting council were stolen from letter boxes and a brick was thrown through the window of a house whose occupants displayed a poster supporting an independent candidate

In 1981, already badly discredited by the still-unfolding Victorian land scandals and unable to turn a blind eye to this behaviour any longer, the Victorian government appointed a board of inquiry into the operation of Richmond Council. The inquiry found evidence of a culture of deeply entrenched corruption that included extensive electoral fraud, routine intimidation of voters, harassment of independent members of council, bribery, theft, nepotism and violence. The council was dismissed in 1982 and an administrator appointed. In spite of the magnitude of malpractice that was revealed, few prosecutions were brought and only three of the offenders received prison sentences. The demise of the council was in large part precipitated by the gentrification of the area which brought residents into Richmond who were politically engaged, well educated and with the means to demand higher standards of accountability and propriety from their council (Grabosky 1989:265-281).

A different understanding of the Richmond estate was provided by an informant who became a resident housing officer there in 1986. She had transferred from the Ascot Vale estate, which she described as the most dangerous of the housing estates where she worked. She said of Richmond:

> …when I arrived they had security guards, and every flat had a system that they could speak to those guards, so it was 24-hour on-call guards. So for many people the safety in those flats at that time was higher than what it would be elsewhere. You didn't even need a phone. If someone was knocking on your door in the middle of the night and you were scared, all you had to do was press the intercom button and there's a guard there who sends a patrol guard down to have a look. So it was a very safe place to live I thought, and they patrolled the grounds as well. […] I felt completely safe at all times living there (INF24).

Although the institutionalised corruption and the scope of the government response directed public attention to Richmond, the other estates in this study were not dissimilar from the perspective of residents and front-line

workers, yet their impressions are equally diverse. Part of this can be explained by the period of which they were speaking. In the three decades since then the safety of the estates was substantially improved.

An informant who grew up on the Collingwood estate and had only recently moved into private housing painted a different picture. With the welcome improvements in safety came a loss of cohesiveness. He said:

> INF: I certainly wouldn't take back the estate life. I think it was good. You know, it was very different. It's very different now. I think the places have certainly improved, but there's certainly more that can be done. Certainly in the eighties and early nineties they were, you know, they were quite rough places to live. And you sort of had to have your wits about you and you needed to be prepared to stand up for yourself. And I mean it's still the same today, but I just don't think it's as bad.
>
> I think your drug related stuff is really unchanged. I don't think that's changed at all. But there used to be a lot more violence and a lot more intimidation and a lot more assaults and stuff like that, and those things are not as prevalent as they were.
>
> RW: Thirty years ago here they had resident housing officers.
>
> INF: They certainly did, and I can remember when I was young, growing up, where police actually… I can remember five guys who rented a house together, all lived in the one house, and they used to walk through the estate. You know, they'd be out having a big night, having a drink, and they would come home through the estate and we'd be playing up, and you know, out would come the hand-cuffs…
>
> RW: The police?
>
> INF: Yeah, yeah, out would come the hand-cuffs, going 'Hey boys, want to get locked up?' 'No! No Sir, no Sir', and so there was that real connection to the community and unfortunately, yeah, those days are long, long gone (INF28).

Images of once strong communities that cared for their own were part of the local memory. In 1992 the Collingwood Neighbourhood House and two local public housing tenants' associations published a collection of stories from residents of the Collingwood housing estate. Referring to the slum clearance programme in the late 1960s, the publication noted that:

> There's a common feeling that the major achievement of The Ministry[15] may have been the destruction of a once vital and integrated community (Lindsay 1992:4).

One of the residents quoted in this collection had lived on a number of different estates. Of the Collingwood estate she said:

> Collingwood? I love it. You always move away but you seem to come back. You're close to public transport, the schools, the shopping centres, close to town. The people. I think it's the people (Lindsay 1992:2).

Not only did residents experience the estates in different ways; the estates changed considerably over time. Three of the informants cited greetings, eye contact and smiles as evidence of the quality of the community and as markers of change. An agency staff member who had several years' experience working on the three estates in Yarra said that:

> One of the first things I sort of, like it still sort of struck me when I first started working across the estates, was this lack of eye contact. People just wouldn't make eye contact. People do now, and to me I think that's quite a significant shift. I think that's fantastic, you know, really, and that just sort of shows again the amount of confidence that people feel, the level of safety as well, and as I say, comfort too (INF18).

One of the informants became the sole carer of her two grandchildren when her daughter was no longer in a position to provide for them. As a result she found herself living on a pension and in need of public housing. She recounted her first impressions when she arrived at the Fitzroy estate in 2001:

> When I first got off the tram, 86, and I look at it and I said 'Wow, this is not right, this is not me, I cannot bring the children here'. But then, because beggars cannot be choosers, so I went and had a look at the property. … It's liveable, but it's not what I wanted for myself and the children, and the estate itself was quite, a bit daunting because everybody was not smiling (INF27).

A resident of the Collingwood estate recalled his impressions when he first arrived in 1999:

[15] The Ministry of Housing, which was the name of the state housing authority at the time.

> …on first meeting you didn't look people in the face when you walked past them. If you didn't know them you didn't look at them. And if you didn't know them and they didn't want to introduce themselves to you, then chances are they weren't going to (INF21).

The sense of danger that prevailed on the estates is a prominent feature in many of the interviews, particularly concerning illegal drug use. The claiming of space by outsiders, both inside the towers and in the grounds around, was spoken of as a long-standing problem. The estates have been contested, invaded ground since their inception. In the same interview, the resident recalled that:

> …it used to be rather difficult on my floor. For example there was a lot of drug dealing activity. The laundries were being used as the dealing point and also as a shooting gallery, so if you went to use your laundry you had to take, well, I had to take a big stick on two occasions, just to…just in case I had to use it because if you walked in on the middle of a deal, it was 'What are you doing?' 'Doing my washing.' 'No, this is our place. It belongs to us.' No, well, you're not going to argue with the dealers while they're still straight. You'd wait until they'd had their [unclear], they've nodded off, go in there, put your washing in, drag the buggers and throw them down the lift (INF21).

The same issue of invasion is contained in the following extract from a community development worker who was employed in the early stages of the Fitzroy Neighbourhood Renewal project. It shows the context of the violence and its impact. She was speaking of a design project on the estate in 2001 that involved social work and landscaping students from RMIT University in Melbourne investigating ways of improving the amenity of the outdoor areas. She told of the project not coming to fruition because the students were 'scared off the estate':

> We had one day where we co-ordinated a huge marquee in the middle of the estate, and all the designs were put up by the 18 or 20 social work students, and we thought it would be a fun day, so we got farm animals there, we had other staff, things for the children, a big barbeque for the whole community, and people started attending, but of course we had the group of people that were going to come in. These are not people that lived on the estate. And this is the unsafe part of being in that location in Fitzroy. There would always be that group that didn't live on the estate but that would terrorise the residents

> of that estate. So we actually had a whole group of people, when this was being set up in the morning, take a knife to one of our young boys, our social worker boys and take his phone off him and his bag off him, and run away with it. So that was the first episode. So we called the police on that, the police came to the community centre and talked to the young boy in my office. And then the next incident came that same day when we were having the barbeque. We had a fight between two gangs with knives and they were actually chasing each other around the estate, on that day when we had kids out, you know– enjoying the barbeque, enjoying the animals, enjoying the other stuff that was on – running around with knives, these two gangs (INF4).

The informant spoke of when she started work on the estate. The passage illustrates the way in which residents and workers were threatened themselves as well as being constantly exposed to stories of threats to others. Concern for the safety and living conditions of others was added to their concern for their own safety.

> The first day I was there I was threatened by a homeless man and it was quite dangerous. I actually had to leave the office and notify [my supervisor] later that I had left for the day. It was extremely dangerous at the beginning of the position. There were stabbings in the lifts, I was told not to walk around the estate by myself. This is in the daytime. I'm not talking about night because I was never there after five o'clock, five-thirty, which really made me so upset for the residents that lived there because I couldn't believe that public tenants would, you know, have to live in this sort of environment.
>
> And you know, to hear of old Chinese women walking, not catching the lifts because they were scared of getting knifed, but walking up the stairs, several flights of stairs, and then still getting mugged in the stairwells before they got to their doors, was just most horrific (INF4).

The variety of perceptions presented so far in this section shows the need for nuanced understanding of sites of policy implementation. Each of the estates was comprised of many different communities and a wide variety of opinions and experiences. At times the accounts vary so much as to appear completely contradictory. The idea of contradiction is premised on there being a single truth, but when people create meaning from their experiences they build their own truths. Hence some people remembered the estates as being dangerous, while others remembered them as safe.

Each of these is an interpretation and a true account of the speaker's belief or of how the speaker wished to portray the situation.

Informants who had long association with the estates had seen a plethora of programmes and policy changes. The picture they created was of a complex interplay of gains and losses, actions and reactions. A mid-level manager contrasted past and present in this way, drawing on her experience as a former estate manager to describe a process of continual adaptation to a changing environment:

> …the Department [responsible for housing] has done a lot of good stuff, but I think one of the offshoots of having a much more regimented system in place is it has begun to not take residents' views into consideration as much as perhaps previously, out of necessity most probably. …
>
> The other thing of course is, the estates tend to turn over every ten years and there's a new influx of different communities, and their expectations of what can be delivered or should be delivered also changes, and then our reaction to that changes as well.
>
> So yes, I concur that 30 years ago things were not good and things have improved. But I think there are a number of very positive actions which from my point of view, given that I was in that space, were generated by residents and their advocates at that time. At the moment we don't have tenant workers or those sorts of advocacy workers. We seem to be going back to this, to the position that public servants are the experts and that they're... they'll be able to fix whatever happens (INF25).

Nevertheless, the idea of long-term progress remains strong, not least because there are many stories of real improvements that can be told in support. It is shown in the following quotes from a resident:

> …within the housing estate now there is a lot more people that want to get engaged now. … They never would have, but with [Neighbourhood Renewal] things have changed. Like I really feel that there's been a hell of a lot that has changed. The education programme. We even have communication with police and how to report crime. People are feeling safer now (INF21).

This is a striking contrast to his account of the past:

> …and pretty much the Office of Housing attitude too back then was that they weren't actually promoting happy families, and that was the other thing that

> was part of the core issues of [Neighbourhood Renewal], was about promoting a family environment. You know, that happy family environment on the housing estates again. Most of the residents were either coming straight out of lock-up, straight out of gaol to public housing. Single bedroom places or two bedroom units here, you know. So their first port of call was they'd be sent to a public housing estate, straight out of gaol. They've acquired habits. Why are they being sent here? Because in the back of their brains, in various departments, they realised well, whack them in public housing, that's a forgotten area, and all of their drugs are just a stone's throw away anyway (INF21).

The redemption story is a product of interventionary programmes, whether local or international. Programme reports and presentations routinely draw on participants who speak of their lives before and after the programme. Their stories pivot around the intervention, telling of the problems beforehand and how these problems are now solved. The transformative power of the intervention is central and the stories imply that without it their lives would have remained unchanged.

In time these stories are replaced by new stories of the same pattern, beginning by describing the problems of the previous approach. They are part of an endless narrative of progress made possible by what Vivian describes as 'the 'timeless now' of nomadic memories' (Vivian 2010). The metaphor of the nomad is not fanciful. In the culture of programme-driven, portfolio government, bureaucrats and their counterparts in the community sector are rarely in stable positions. As a result, very few people have knowledge of the histories of the areas where they work.

Several times during this research I encountered the tendency of government and non-government agencies to function without reference to even quite recent history. For example, as an employee working on the estates I had seen discussion papers, briefing papers, rationales and other strategic documents relating to the Neighbourhood Renewal programme, but when I later searched for these I could not find any. There was none of these items in the relevant departmental library or in the catalogue of the Victorian Public Records Office. Their absence was confirmed by two former managers, one of whom told me that little was kept and that the only

source would be cabinet documents, which are not publicly available. The other told me that

> …the total loss of practice learning and policy development is now evident, when I see people doing things that were done four or five years ago and reinventing the whole process again. There's been absolutely no effort that I can see to record any of the history of these. The projects at Fitzroy and Collingwood were in part set up to record all of that practice and policy development and whatever, and there's been absolutely no effort that I can see to record any of the history of these projects in a publicly accessible place (INF19).

It can be seen that there is not a single encompassing narrative that is shared by all informants. Memories and impressions differed greatly, and were for some people associated with strong sentiments ranging from threat and alienation to loyalty and belonging. The variation and the strength of feeling are significant influences in the relationships between front-line workers and residents and on the ways in which they worked together to implement programmes. They are different ways of knowing.

Knowledge

The pathways along which the actors found their way into these relationships were configured by two overarching types of knowledge. The pathways that originated in the communities were predominantly influenced by local knowledge, accepted as expert knowledge in the language of community governance but not by organisational cultures. Those pathways along which the bureaucracy and related community sector organisations travelled were configured by the technical, positivist knowledge of programme administration and professional expertise. In the evidence collected for this project the tensions between these was neither resolved nor acknowledged. This polarity is a simplification for the sake of discussion. In practice residents and bureaucrats regularly used both types of knowledge, but the two acted as cultural reference points associated with the status of the actors.

The tension between the two was rarely explicit. Mostly it was found in misunderstandings and frustration about the difficulty of achieving apparently simple tasks. One of the workers interviewed spoke of his engagement in a project initiated by a local manager to create a calendar of events for the estate where he worked. Its purposes were to avoid funded events being held on the same day and thus competing for participants and resources, and to include all estate meetings in the hope of increasing attendance. Despite the amount of time the worker and others dedicated to the project and the frustration it caused over nearly two years, it never eventuated.

An assumption underlying the project was that the information could be easily collected, organised into an accessible format, distributed and kept up to date using existing resources. This was not the case. There were several different funding sources for events and activities. Tenant groups could independently apply to these and were mostly free to decide their own timetable. Federal, state and local government funding was not co-ordinated and there was even lack of co-ordination between departments within the same level of government. Beyond these sources, groups raised funds from organisations such as the local football team, churches and businesses. Funding was also received from philanthropic organisations. It was not possible to keep track of all applications made and funding received. Even the incomplete information that was collected soon became obsolete. The sheer difficulty of co-ordinating information from so many sources required more resources than were available.

A more significant reason for the stalling of the project was that it arose in response to an administrative problem that was not a problem for residents or individual agencies. They did not want to use the information and were not interested in contributing to its construction or maintenance. The manager quite reasonably believed the calendar to be a community priority as it had been endorsed by the estate governance body that was set up by the housing authority and that was thought to be representative of residents and agencies.

At a broader level the story reflects two different ways of knowing about the estate. It touches upon the constructionist distinction described in Chapter 2 between a phenomenon which is manifestly real – in this case a public housing estate – and the social construction of human knowledge about that phenomenon.

The manager understood the estate as a single organisation, one that could be helped to operate more efficiently. His primary knowledge about the estate was informed by detailed demographic and qualitative data, which he and his superiors used to judge the effectiveness of the programme that he managed. To this he added his local knowledge. From the residents' accounts it is clear that they thought more in terms of a loosely bounded collection of different groups and interests. They spoke of different communities – the Africans, the elderly Chinese etc. – who sometimes had common interests but more often kept to themselves.

Another example was provided by a resident who had long experience with agency-led committees and processes, and who spoke about the tensions between different types of knowledge and the ways they shape bureaucratic engagement:

> There were a lot of complexities involved with the different groups, and if you didn't know all these things in the background you would sit there and ask yourself a question: 'Why are they not getting together over this?' or 'Why aren't they supporting this?' or 'Why isn't, you know, this group supporting that group in this project?', and because if you didn't know what's happened… I mean this is the crucial thing about having people that don't know the community, know what the issues are. You don't know that such and such is arguing with such and such, this one person doesn't talk to that person, this group doesn't associate with that group. You know, there's a lot of complexities. It's not as simple as like, putting a bunch of people around the table, give them a feed and say 'Right, now come up with an idea' (INF13).

The polarity between local knowledge and externally produced professional knowledge reflects the contest between top-down and bottom-up approaches to policy implementation described in Chapter 2. Local knowledge is very difficult for organisations that are built around technical expertise to utilise. As seen in the first example, the attempt by a state

agency to collect and codify local knowledge was unsuccessful. Local knowledge is collectively created, contextual and fluid. It is not amenable to systematic codification and cannot be captured in databases or held as an organisational asset. It is what Orlikowski calls 'an ongoing social accomplishment' (2002:249).

Scott draws on his anthropological study of indigenous knowledge to point out another key feature of forms of knowledge embedded in local experience. Any piece of evidence needs to be evaluated in relation both to the context where it is to be applied and to other pieces of evidence similarly evaluated. No single piece of information is sufficient in itself. Scott wrote:

> Everything we know about indigenous technical knowledge suggests that it relies on an accumulation of many partly redundant signals (1998:312).

The dialogic quality of local knowledge ties it to a context and a group of people whose physical location enables regular interaction. It is reciprocal and relational, as the following account shows. To be effective, a front-line worker must not only know about the community in which he or she works, but must be known and trusted by the community. In this extract an experienced worker tells of establishing a relationship with a group of Indigenous Australians who were associated with the estate where he worked. The respect that he eventually earned became part of the local knowledge of the place where he worked. He explained that:

> Well, before I went and spoke to the community I spoke with someone who had a lot more experience than I did about the best way to approach them. And he worded me: 'When you go to meet these people, generally if they don't know you they won't talk to you', and there was numerous occasions when I would stand beside him; they wouldn't even look at me, let alone talk to me. And he just said, you know, 'Keep coming along, be friendly, say hello, don't be offended if they don't talk to you, and eventually, you will break down those barriers'. But it took about four or five months before they would even say hello to me. And then he also said – I suppose that I learnt – that if you make a promise to that community, if you're going to do something, you'd better do it, because the first time you don't follow through on what you say you're going to do is probably the last time they're going to work with you (INF8).

This description of the recursive, developmental process of knowledge production lifts the corner of a much more complex understanding of the interplay between locality and knowledge and its impact on social organisation. In the logic of regeneration and community strengthening, the estates are imagined as building sites, places where social developers can build communities. The contours of the site are marked out in measurements of disadvantage which ignore the nature of the existing community. As is seen in this thesis, the estate communities were far from passive recipients and asserted their agency in a multitude of ways.

The administrative challenge that the difference between local and institutional knowledge creates is often characterised as a conflict. Writing of the then growing interest by public administrators in community partnerships, Hess and Adams explained that

> …contract management practices co-exist with calls for the creation of partnerships with little recognition of the fact that the two sets of practices draw their legitimacy from contradictory knowledge frameworks (2002:69).

The contest is unnecessary. Although local and institutional knowledge are categorically different, they are not inevitably contradictory. Multiple perspectives can provide more comprehensive understanding, particularly when dealing with phenomena as complex as communities. This is understood by experienced practitioners who work in the interface between communities and bureaucracies. A council planner whose work relied on demographic and other quantitative information spoke from his experience as a former community development worker about the importance of including local knowledge:

> Now, we just come in and out, and the reality is that a community…you actually…I think to have some credence within the community you've really got to know that community, the seven days a week, 24 hours a day, all the stuff that they experience. I don't think that it necessarily means that you have to live in that community, but you've got to know it. And I think the knowing, it takes time to know the community and what they experience (INF1).

In the following extract, a senior manager, also from local government, explains the necessity of being able to work across organisational

boundaries and their associated knowledge frames. In response to a question about the difficulty of recruiting staff who could manage this, he explained that he had not found it difficult but that this sometimes challenged the organisational culture:

> One of my co-directors used to rail against the recruitment of activists, and I said 'What do you mean?' 'Well these people you're recruiting, they're all activists. They're not bureaucratic, they're not, you know…' And I said 'Well they can't be bureaucratic. They understand that their community development role is not to take sides with the community. They understand that it's not to take sides with here. They act as brokers in the middle – transferring'. And if they embed in the community and attack the organisation they understand the consequences of that. … But you also can't be an effective community development worker if you're so bureaucratic that you're just totally embedded in the organisation (INF15).

This suggests that what Hess and Adams identify as a contradiction may be an indication of the specialisation of professional skills and the difficulty this creates when organisations are faced with multiple knowledge types. Chapter 2 described the way in which the application of New Public Management to the Victorian public sector led to an emphasis on a very narrow set of skills, primarily those needed for implementing public expenditure through competitive tender, and the management of the associated contracts (Alford & O'Neill 1994).

The picture of relatively uncomplicated integration of different cultures in the above extract changes slightly in the following extract from the more distant perspective of a Victorian government executive-level manager overseeing a state-wide project. Addressing the same question of recruitment, he described the task of bridging the community and organisational cultures as needing a highly diverse set of skills:

> It's something that we've really struggled with, and you can see it whenever we undertake a recruitment of a place manager. Over the years I've come to recognise that there is a sort of ideal place manager, and they are somebody – and they're quite a sort of a rare creature I think – that is able to straddle and synthesise a number of roles and capacities. They're somebody that is able to work very effectively and collaboratively, and with a sense of genuine

> reciprocity and authenticity with the community, so they're able to encapsulate many of those community development ideals in the way that they work with the community, but they are simultaneously somebody that understands the way that government works. They are able to work through the bureaucratic machinery and they have an appropriate sense of the accountabilities that are required when you are working for government. And more and more, I think they also need to be somebody that has a sense of how to engage in a more entrepreneurial way with the private sector, to draw in their engagement and resources where that is constructive for a project, and it is very hard to find that person (INF12).

From the perspective of this informant, the problems created by distance did not suggest the need for organisational adaptation, but that they were best resolved by making greater demands of field officers. A yet more senior manager spoke of his promotion through the state government bureaucracy, and that as he became further and further removed from front-line work he became increasingly anxious about what was taking place there.

The argument that authoritative, institutional knowledge is not necessarily contradictory to local knowledge can easily run aground on the issue of status. These two forms of knowledge are commonly identified with different sides of contests over power and authority. Sometimes this is expressed as the struggle for control between 'the government' and 'the community', as is evident in many of the extracts from interviews cited throughout this thesis. In the context of this study, local knowledge was associated with front-line service delivery roles, which were the lowest non-administrative jobs in agency hierarchies. These organisations were constructed by technical knowledge and their operations depended on it. From her study of organisations as communities, Dvora Yanow wrote that local knowledge is:

> …seemingly not recognised beyond the boundaries of that community – its very locality, that first-hand experience that made its generation possible, is not perceived as having any bearing on, or legitimacy in, or value to the wider organization. It (at times along with its knowers) is typically discounted and dismissed, and sometimes even disparaged by managers higher up in the

> organization; and those even higher that rarely have any knowledge of its existence at all (Yanow 2004:S10).

The fusing of the status of the knowledge and the status of the holder of the knowledge is illustrated in the following story recounted by a former mid-level housing manager:

> I remember that in terms of involving staff in consultation and participation in decision-making, I had a very, very difficult client at Fitzroy, '94 thereabouts, and she used to walk up and down Brunswick Street naked and attack kids and set fire to things, so it got too much for [the Department] and publicity was such that it was getting out of hand. So a conference was called, and my manager, an executive officer, decided that I should come along as the person on the ground that had best knowledge of this, and they went around the table and said, 'Who are you?' and 'Who are you?' and they came to me and I said I'm this and this, and they said 'What level are you at?' and I said whatever it was, and they said 'You don't have enough authority to be in this meeting' (INF19).

From the perspective of this informant the organisational hierarchy was insufficiently adaptable to accommodate what his manager saw as his superior knowledge. Adherence to the authority of his position took precedence over the authority of his knowledge.

The potential strength of local knowledge as a tool of accountability emerged from the analysis of the data. Accountability in service contracts was mostly constructed around quantitative information that measured the degree to which key performance indicators were achieved. These measures were intended to be as objective as practicable and the necessary data was collected locally or by external, independent researchers. It was in essence an extension of standard financial accountability and was shaped by the contractual relationship that money would be spent on that for which it was given and the specified product delivered. The shortcoming of this method is that the complexity of even small communities produces so many variables that it is not possible to accurately decide what measurable activities would lead to the achievement of the broad programme aim. Consequently within the severe limitations of a contractual relationship it is

possible to achieve all that is required without providing the intended benefit to the community.

Local knowledge approaches accountability from a different conceptual framework. Within the functioning of a local community, accountability is more concerned with knowing who can and cannot be trusted or relied upon. Pressed to explain the legitimacy of the decisions he had to make every day on behalf of the community where he worked, a front-line worker acknowledged that there was a degree of manipulation needed to carry out his work effectively, but that his accountability was ensured by his proximity to the community members with whom he worked. He was always directly exposed to consequences of his decisions. He explained that:

> The safeguard is that I'm extremely vulnerable. We're on our own as an individual person on the coal-face. So that is usually the safeguard for residents. They can come right to you, complain, they know all your managers. […] Like in an African village, or in a Vietnamese place or Chinese place, if it's a close proximity and everyone is in there together then you can bring accounts by watching and being (INF9).

To 'bring accounts by watching and being' is the essence of relational accountability based on local knowledge. It is not a culture of detached surveillance, but a reciprocal process through which all parties are held accountable, where, as the informant says, 'everyone is in there together'. Accountability that emerges from close proximity places emphasis on safety, reliability and trust — the qualities of relationships that enable people to live and work together. It is also more responsive to the needs of local communities.

In Chapter 3 it was explained that one of the purposes of this research is to understand what the informants believed to be the truth, not to establish whether or not their accounts are factually accurate. This is because, as stated in Chapter 2, a fundamental assumption of this project is that understanding how policies and government processes are experienced and interpreted by front-line professionals and the community members with whom they work rests in part on understanding the meaning they make

from their experience. As David Adams writes, 'the most important feature of knowledge is the creation of meanings that guide action' (2004:30).

The accounts in this chapter from professionals who chose to continue working in situations which they found threatening, dangerous and distressing raises the question of why they made that choice. Residents had fewer choices, but even they left when the threat became too great. The reasons why some issues become social problems and others do not, and the way those issues are defined and managed, is of central concern to constructionism and its critics (Bacchi 1999; Best 1995; Edelman 1993; Kitsuse & Spector 1973; Nyden 2010), but the question here concerns individual motivation and the culture of the helping professions that are enlisted in the effort to solve social problems once they have been framed. The local area programmes which brought these actors together were welfare programmes. They were intended to mitigate the effects of socio-economic marginalisation and disadvantage. The informants' training was in areas such as community welfare, community development, social work and theology. Two were former priests. They had thus all been exposed to the ideals of service and care to the marginalised. The literature that was found to shed most light on this centred around the ethics of care and the relationship between care and citizenship.

Care

In this project care took place in the context of communities and the relationships that were developed there. It did not include the professional care of individuals and families. Community was a concept that was only used positively by the informants. Expressing a consensus view, a community development worker explained that:

> I've got the social justice principles and the community development framework of being aware [that] communities working together is always healthy (INF20).

As seen in Chapter 2, in public discussion around social policy, community came to be seen as a panacea for a plethora of social ills. Raymond Williams noted that 'community' is a 'warmly persuasive' word and that

> …unlike all other terms of social organization (*state*, *nation*, *society*, etc) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term (Williams 1976:75).

Its use in this sense by the informants obviated the need to articulate the values behind the concept, or even to entertain the idea that a strong community may also be immoral. 'Community' thus became a proxy for the values that could decide between desirable and less desirable communities. Thus what were seen as unhealthy communities could be improved by community strengthening programmes. The values which it represented are so normalised across the community and welfare sector that they are rarely in view.[16] Many of the activities and festivals that were organised on the estates through the programmes examined in this project were designed to bring community members together and build strong associational ties,[17] but there is nothing morally protective about strong community bonds. Networks of relationships may be beneficial for some and harmful to others in the same community and to neighbouring communities (Putzel 1997).

The ethical basis for making decisions about the welfare of others was so little considered that when asked about the basis of her authority to make such decisions, one informant laughed at the silliness of the question:

> RW: But what gives you the right, I guess, to make those judgements about other people?
>
> INF: I'm a human being and so are they [laughing]. I don't know, because we're all… I guess we're all human beings and we're all, you know, capable of understanding and empathising with other people (INF17).

Here the informant has given 'human' the same quality of unquestionable benevolence that is applied to 'community'. To be human is to be morally

[16] While all human service organisations have now adopted mission and value statements that are displayed about their premises and on promotional material, they are generally more aspirational than descriptive.
[17] Examples of these activities are listed in Chapter 6.

good and therefore a guarantee of ethical behaviour. This of course does not mean that the decisions she made were unethical or that she lacked a moral framework, only that she was unable to articulate such a framework and did not indicate that she felt a need to do so. This was demonstrated in her answer to a question about what she thought was good for the community:

> Well, social interaction I think is good for the community. Because I think social interaction, a sense of, I guess, effort, being able to make change, that there's effort being put into something and actually seeing an outcome. So sort a sense of not being, not feeling powerless. Feeling empowered (INF17).

Another front-line worker gave a similar answer, speaking of her aspirations for the residents with whom she worked:

> I'd like them to be more confident. I'd like anyone to be more confident, whether it's my brother or whether it's, you know, the Oromo women. They haven't all articulated that, but a number of the women have (INF10).

The problem of values not being explicit is that it assumes common perspectives and shared beliefs, which precludes the likelihood of discussion about what people consider important. In fact, perspectives were quite varied, as will be seen in reports in Chapter 7 of discussions among residents about the rights of people who used and sold illegal drugs on the Richmond estate.

The urge to take care of others was equally strong among residents, many of whom worked as volunteers for the benefit of their community. One informant told of a personal initiative to provide free bread:

> I was just telling the girl next door, she's very active in tenant stuff and public housing and social housing and everything, I was just saying to her how I would go and collect bread. I would get the bus from the health centre and I would go and collect bread at seven, seven-thirty [PM] once a week in Swan Street, … bread that they would otherwise throw away, to bring back and give out to people in the morning. You know, so I'm not big-noting me, but that was just one thing that was of benefit to the estate (INF6).

Workers whose professional frameworks centred on care and service, residents who were the recipients of the types of care constructed by these

frameworks, and residents who worked as volunteers in their communities were all functioning at the edge of political and social policy debates about the place of government, families and individuals in the provision of formal and informal care. There is no evidence in the interviews that they engaged with these debates, but the emergence of community as the site of social problem-solving meant they were affected by the resultant policies and programmes. The debate intersects with contested constructions of citizenship.

Since the late 1990s there has been a growing body of literature contributing to the development of an ethic of care from a feminist perspective, which reflects the postmodernist, constructionist influences on contemporary feminist thinking (Meagher & Parton 2004). The ethic of care that has emerged is highly relational, recognising that people can only be understood in context of their social and political cultures. In a passage that resonates strongly with the informants' accounts in this section, Carol Gilligan writes that the ideal of care is

> …an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone (Gilligan 1982:62)

This work is a reaction to the political discourse that since the 1990s has progressively shifted responsibility from the state to families and communities, as discussed in Chapter 2. According to this discourse, the responsibility of citizens is to care for each other, to be self-sufficient and independent and as far as possible avoid turning to the state for help. One of its effects is to separate the carer, whether an individual or an organisation, from the person or community being cared for, which in some situations enables the former to be characterised as virtuous and the latter as a burden (Harris 2002; Whelan 2012).

Feminist writers linking the ethics of care with citizenship have commented extensively on care traditionally being the obligatory work of unpaid women, or poorly paid women who are excluded by class or caste difference. Care is constructed as a realm that is psychologically and politically separated from the dominant realm of individual autonomy and

freedom structured around contractual obligation (Gilligan 1995; Kershaw 2010). They argue that welfare states have positioned carers and care receivers in ways that contribute to gender inequality and unequal citizenship rights.

These theorists are concerned with both the giving and receiving of care, and the values and practices that attach to each. Inclusive citizenship therefore includes the right to time to give care and the right to receive care (Knijn & Kremer 1997). In advanced economies, public debate in this area has been strongly influenced by rising concern about the economic costs of caring for young children, frail elderly people and people who are chronically ill or have a disability. The last two categories are over-represented in public housing communities.

At the heart of this interpretation of citizenship project is the urgency for equality. Nancy Fraser wrote of the importance of 'participatory parity', that all adult members of society should be able to interact with others as peers (2003:36). Ruth Lister (2007) argues for a construction of citizenship that includes caregiving among its central obligations and entitlements. She refers to the horizontal view of citizenship, associated with the Nordic countries, 'which accords as much significance to the relations between people as to the vertical relationship between the state and the individual' (2007:51).

Working along this horizontal axis, Lynch et al. (2007) juxtapose the Cartesian rational economic actor model of the citizen with a view of the citizen as carer and care receiver. They argue that the attempt by the social sciences to gain legitimacy led to a dichotomy between fact and value, between the empirical and the normative, which has resulted in the primacy of empirical information and the marginalisation of values. This has led to the construction of a model citizen as a person who is 'prepared for economic, political and cultural life in the public sphere but not for a relational life as an interdependent, caring and other-centred human being' (Lynch, Lyons & Cantillon 2007).

Gabrielle Meagher and Nigel Parton believe that reinstating an ethics of care at the heart of the helping professions could counterbalance the 'pervasive

and corrosive' effect of the rational-technical focus of managerialism' (2004:paras 5-6). The course that managerialism took in the Victorian public sector was explained in Chapter 2. Although now less dominant than it once was, it will be seen that managerialism still exerts a strong influence on policy implementation and organisational behaviour. Meagher and Parton see the feminist theory behind the ethics of care as a sturdy base from which managerialism can be can be critiqued. They draw on feminist writers who have argued that managerialism and professionalism are concepts constructed around ways of being, doing and thinking that are culturally associated with masculinity, such as the tendency to create hierarchical binary contests between reason and emotion, justice and care, public and private, and economic and social realms. To this list can be added the binary contests encountered in earlier chapters between top-down and bottom-up approaches, between insider and outsider, and between community and government.

The feminist interpretation of citizenship and its link with the giving and receiving of care is both contextually and specifically relevant to this project. The majority of the residents and front-line workers were women, and women are greatly over-represented in the delivery of social services and the caring professions.

These are generalised propositions that are not predictive of the behaviour of individuals. They do not assume essential differences between men and women, but are concerned with the cultural assumptions that underlie the normalised concepts of masculinity and femininity. Several of the residents and front-line workers who were interviewed for this research were men, but the fragment by Gilligan quoted above, which accurately describes their ways of being and doing, references a sensibility that is culturally associated with women. The ethic of care provides a credible explanation of why they might approach their work in the way they do, whether or not they were able to articulate a theoretical framework for this.

The feminist association of managerialism and professionalism with more traditionally masculine characteristics reveals a contrast between two ontological frameworks that is not otherwise clear. For example, this

insight is particularly useful when used to re-examine the findings of research into the discretion exercised by front-line bureaucrats. That work is mostly descriptive, showing the extent and nature of the discretion but not the beliefs and motivations of the actors. Literature concerning the ethic of care suggests that front-line staff (and, in this project, residents) may be working within a quite different paradigm and knowledge frames from those used by the agencies. This will not be visible to contractual arrangements administered through a culture of audit and compliance.

Conclusion

What is beginning to emerge here is a multitude of small effects. The informants' memories with which this chapter opens show the estates as contested, complex sites. The wide variation in the ways the estates were remembered illustrates the concept of multiple truths and constructed realities. Some of these memories are startlingly violent and threatening. Others show the estates as strong communities in which people cared for each other. The strength of feeling these memories carry has considerable influence on how people see themselves in the present, how they behave towards others, and how they respond to and interpret policy initiatives that affect them. Short-term employment contracts and unstable employment led to high turnover, meaning that many agency staff had no knowledge of this history.

A similar variation is seen in the ways the actors knew about the estates. The collectively constructed and contextually dependent knowledge of residents and front-line staff did not mesh with the administrative logic of the organisations that employed them. Local knowledge about the safety of the community was based on indicators such as eye contact and smiles. Organisations used demographic data, crime statistics and community surveys. When residents and agencies met to implement community and estate improvement programmes they brought with them multiple and contrasting understandings of the ground on which they met. Decades of neo-liberal reforms in the public sector left it without the skills it needed to

bridge these fundamentally different knowledge types, but evidence from a local government informant showed that it was possible.

None of these findings is in itself surprising or remarkable, yet collectively they are building an argument about the inescapability of complexity in the implementation of social policy and more broadly in the relationship between the state and disadvantaged communities. This is at odds with the ideal of isolating and dealing with social issues through targeted programmes. The belief in the efficiency of reductionism that is at the heart of New Public Management was outlined in the section on policy implementation in Chapter 2, yet in this first chapter of findings it is already clear that communities are not static sites of raw materials to be turned into products. Nor can their dynamics be adequately explained through a collections of indicators, important as these are.

In this chapter, two themes have emerged from this. The first is that the common feature of descriptions of the state, theories of power, multiple knowledge types, policy implementation models, ideas of community, etc. is the impossibility of drawing boundaries and of making meaningful statements that are not contingent and partial. The second theme is relationality. The state, power, knowledge and the provision of care are best understood as contextual, relational phenomena. Divorced from their relationships they become so abstracted as to be unintelligible.

Complexity and the challenge of boundaries is reflected in the structure of the chapter. In the design of the project, literature concerning the ethic of care was not thought to be of central relevance. As the data was analysed and approaches to caring emerged as a theme, it became clear that it was relevant but only within the context of the material presented here, and therefore did not belong in Chapter 2.

Chapter 6 extends the ground covered in this chapter, examining evidence from the informants about their experiences of participation.

Chapter 6 Community, participation and power

Introduction

Community and participation are the central themes of this thesis. The theme of power is so entangled in all the interactions between residents, workers and agencies that it was difficult to isolate as a discrete element. It has been placed here because the varying practices of participation illustrate the conflicts the state faces in its struggle to maintain authority in a climate of citizen engagement and devolution of responsibility to communities.

This chapter continues the examination of the relationship between residents and agency staff begun in Chapter 5. It considers a different collection of factors that are at play in this relationship and delves more deeply into its features, including a case study of a relationship that was built and collapsed during the research. What it uncovers is not so much a unified collection as a dislocated array of factors. Chapter 2 explained the adoption of community participation as a bureaucratic technique of policy implementation. Here the ways in which the informants experienced participation is explained, as well as how it continues to be used by public housing residents to challenge the authority of the state.

Community

The rise of the concept of community in public policy was addressed in Chapter 2, yet no attempt was made to define the concept in either the chapter or any of the literature surveyed. The absence of definition is notable. It exemplifies the difficulty of defining many of the terms in the environment of this study, where definition is qualified by context. As is shown below, what is for some the ideal of standardised definition may be even more unachievable than standardised spelling. Commenting on the imprecision of definition, Bryson and Mowbray wrote in 1981 that 'community' was used to represent 'an amalgam of vague formulations and

selective perceptions' (1981:256). They questioned why the term has proved so problematic and why it retained its popularity in the face of its evident shortcomings. Twenty years later Adams and Hess wrote that community 'is being widely used with neither clarity of definition nor instruments to make it functional' (2001:21)

The appeals for standardised usage seem to have fallen on deaf ears. 'Community' has now become so embedded in the lexicon of social policy that that it is used without qualification. Calls for clarity of definition have abated, even from the scholarly literature from the early 2000s that was surveyed for this project. Definition was not a concern for the estate residents, front-line workers and managers who were interviewed for this project. In more than 30 hours of interviews 'community' was used 793 times by informants and interviewer. It was used as an abstract noun in 'less community'. It was qualified by possessive pronouns: her; his; my; our; their; your. Informants spoke of many different types of community: Aboriginal; African; Anglo; Australian; broader; business; Carlton; Chin; Chinese; Asian; Vietnamese; Somali; Eritrean; community of practice; disadvantaged; East African; ethnic; Laotian; layered; local; marginalised; migrant; natural; Nauruan; Oromo; public housing; research; Richmond; stable; Sudanese; general; white; whole; working-class; Yarra; young.

Community was also used as an adjective in conjunction with agency; built; buy-in; centre; champions; connections; consultants; consultation; contact officer; development; education; empowerment project; engagement; enterprise; events; experience; feel; festivals; focus; garden; governance; grants; groups; guides; gym; hall; health; housing; hub; information; involvement; leaders; liaison; life; lunches; magazine; managed; meetings; members; minded; ownership; participation; plan; processes; programmes; project; renewal; representative; response; rooms; safety; services; space; strengths; stuff; surveys; system; level; work; worker; working group. It was used as an adverb – community building – and to create a compound adjective – community-minded.

The long list shows that the vernacular usage is so varied that, quite apart from the practical impossibility, attempting to impose clear definitions would

create a problem in a place where none presently exists. There is nothing exclusively professional about these usages and they would all be familiar to a lay reader. They remained in circulation because of their utility, regardless of their lack of precision.

Although calls for definition have been difficult to find in the literature from the last decade, it remained a concern for agencies contracted to provide services within the Neighbourhood Renewal projects. In the Fitzroy project, for example, the contractual need for definition of the community that was subject to the project led to public housing tenants on one side of a street being included in the project, while those on the other were not. People who lived on the estate made no such distinction, nor did local agencies that provided services such as the child-care centre. In this case the distinction did not conform to the difference in residents' perceptions and those of local bureaucrats, but to the difference between local and more centralised knowledge frameworks.

These sharp boundaries sometimes flowed on to front-line staff, as shown in this story told by one of the informants. Youth services in Victoria are commonly defined as being for young people from 12 to 25 years of age, and are mostly funded on this understanding. The informant had taken part in a barbeque organised by a local youth service for young people on the estate. When some teenage residents turned up with younger siblings for whom they were caring, they were told that they could take part but their siblings could not, as they were under 12 and therefore classified as children. The older siblings were thus faced with the choice of either not participating with their friends in the activity, or participating and neglecting their responsibility as carers.

It can be seen that knowledge and categories shaped to meet the needs of some interests can be detrimental to others. The authors cited in the beginning of this section had a need for definitional clarity in keeping with the expectations of scholarly research and writing. The informants' usages arose from the demands of their daily transactions, and would have been shorn of much of their value if a way had been found to impose a clear definition upon them. The example of the barbeque is of greater

consequence. Here the needs of financial accountability and the control of liability, which ought to have been addressed as administrative problems, were allowed to over-ride the needs of children.

The knowledge needed to make the citizenry legible to the rationality of the state is different from, and sometimes in conflict with, the knowledge needed by citizens to manage their lives (Scott 1998). There is no question here of the usefulness of the technical, rational knowledge needed by bureaucracies, only of what constitutes its appropriate and inappropriate application, and of how disagreements with other forms of knowledge are managed.

The nature of participation

An expression of the tension that can emerge between bureaucratic and lay definition is found in the concept of participation. In this project, participation refers specifically to public housing tenants taking part in a range of government-sponsored activities that were referred to with the general title of 'community governance', or often just 'governance'.

The concept of community governance was popularised in the UK in the 1990s, particularly in relation to local government. It arose in response to a growing sense of the alienation of the community from government, decreasing influence of local elected representatives, and increasing numbers of actors involved in local decision-making (Clarke & Stewart 1994). Community governance marks out a conceptual space that is distinct from the formal institutions of the state. The concept of governance includes these institutions, but is not restricted to their administrative and legal frameworks. Within this broader concept, community governance is concerned with the contribution of citizens to the maintenance of a democratic society. It is thus part of the tradition of normative theorising, and draws on shared values concerning the legitimacy and accountability of the state in its dealings with citizens (Pillora & McKinlay 2011; Sullivan 2001).

Participation was used by the informants to speak of a particular set of

practices so familiar that they had become unquestioned routine. Participation even had a recognisable appearance, as shown in Illustration 6.1 below. During the period of research for this project, very few community governance meetings involved so many residents.

This is the sense in which participation is used throughout. Speaking of participation in the research sites always called to mind this same set of practices and behaviours in which everyone knew and mostly adhered to their expected roles.

Illustration 6.1: Meeting of public housing residents in Yarra, 28th March 2009

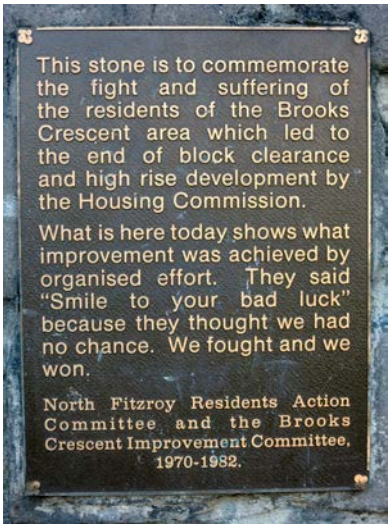
The narrowness of this definition reflected the interests of agencies implementing funded programmes. It was fitted to programme designs and the indicators required by accountability reports. This usage served to obscure a much wider and richer variety of activities on and off the estates in which residents participated, routine community activities that informants spoke of but that were not formally counted or reported upon. One of the informants, a manager of a local agency, recognised this exclusionary usage when he spoke about the wider population of estate residents who did not take part in community improvement programmes:

> The rest of it is social groups, ethnic social groups who do whatever they do. You know, their view is not to worry about what government does. It's actually quite dangerous to engage with government. Their views are: you don't want to get your name on a list or something. So they don't have a very benign view of any of this sort of stuff, by the way, whereas we're more likely to have a slightly more benign view. Ethnic groups, they say: Thanks very much, but we really just, we've got to organise our social gatherings, make sure people get transported to funerals, all that type of stuff (INF14).

It was an altogether different set of behaviours from what was once understood as participation by local residents. In 1969 the state housing authority proposed that an area of approximately 8 hectares (20 acres) around the Brooks Crescent area in the inner suburb of North Fitzroy be designated for slum clearance. In the absence of information from the authority, rumours and newspaper reports of the plans began to circulate, which led to local residents initiating a campaign of opposition to the demolition of houses. It became a protracted and bitter struggle between residents and the housing authority, involving the Fitzroy Residents Association, residents of the Brooks Crescent area, local footwear manufacturers whose workers lived in the area, the Fitzroy Council and the Fitzroy Uniting Church.

Illustration 6.2: Inner urban residents marching in North Fitzroy as part of the campaign to stop demolition of houses in the area around Brooks Crescent Photograph by Alan Jordan (In Burke 1988:211)

While the campaign focused on the demolition of sound houses, relocation of residents, and the level of compensation offered by the housing authority for the compulsory acquisition of properties, there was throughout a demand for more open government processes and community participation in planning. Many properties in the Brooks Crescent area were demolished and residents forced to move from the area, but the large-scale clearance envisaged by the housing authority was averted and most of the character and houses in the area were preserved. The campaign marked a turning point in the politics of local planning in Victoria (Hargreaves 1976; Pullen 1982).



The similarity between these two examples of participation is that both were constructed within the relationship between communities and the state. The significant difference is that the participation shown in Illustration 6.1 was organised, paid for and managed by the local and state governments, whereas the street march in North Fitzroy was organised by the local community to oppose actions by the state. It would be wrong, however, to see this campaign as being generalised opposition to the state. It was directed against the state housing authority, but relied on productive relationships with other state institutions such as Fitzroy Council. Such qualifications can become lost in the stories that are told, as is shown in this plaque. Ann Ingamells (2007) wrote of the importance of these simplified accounts in the community renewal context of short-term competitive funding and the emphasis on performance:

> There is a familiar split in community development narratives between the adversary tale, which pitches local people against formal power holders, and consensual accounts of partnership for change (2007:239).

A useful concept for thinking about the difference between the two examples was developed by Peter Hall (1997) in his review of approaches to participation in estate regeneration programmes in the UK. Hall

distinguished between what he called inward- and outward-facing participation. Inward-facing participation tends to focus on the housing estate in question and the needs of its residents, whereas an outward-looking approach is more interested in the relationship between local community activities and broader strategic objectives. In Hall's description, the inward-facing approaches were limited and unbalanced, leading to palliative measures which did not address the structural causes of deprivation and estate decline.

The distinction between inward- and outward-facing participation is a useful metaphor, but asserting the primacy of one over the other hampers objective assessment of the usefulness and shortcomings of both. Each form of participation can be appropriate for different situations. The polarity in Hall's description echoes the friction between the top-down and bottom-up perspectives seen in policy implementation debates, and is more reflective of contests over power than the utility of the practices.

The shift from the outward-facing participation that underpinned community development models in the 1970s to the inward-facing participation evident in this research echoes the shift from the language of universality and entitlement to today's language of mutual obligation (Bessant 2002; Ingamells 2007). The result is that while better resourced individuals and communities can more effectively defend what they see as their entitlements, welfare recipients can be expected to participate in state programmes in return for resources.

As noted in Chapter 2, this interpretation of participation and its promise of greater autonomy has emerged at the same time as the power to make decisions about significant issues has become increasingly centralised. Local communities are made responsible for solving their problems, whether or not they are able to influence the causes. It is not authority that is devolved, but responsibility (Jessop 2002; Morison 2000; Somerville & Bengtsson 2002). Burchell called this process 'responsibilisation', and wrote that it involves

> …'offering' individuals and collectivities active involvement in action to resolve the kind of issues hitherto held to be the responsibility of authorized

> governmental agencies. However, the price of this involvement is that they must assume active responsibility for these activities, both for carrying them out and, of course, for their outcomes, and in doing so they are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the appropriate (or approved) model of action (Burchell 1993:276).

The implication that this relationship applied equally to all strata of society was not supported by this research. While the co-option that Burchell outlined is evident in a number of informants' accounts, the presence of an overarching, logically consistent state which asserts itself through 'one approved model of action' was not found. Even the government-sponsored participatory planning project that is described later in this chapter was beset by disagreement between the two levels of government involved.

Having begun with a narrow definition of participation and then contrasted it with an earlier manifestation, it is necessary now to contextualise this type of participation, and in doing so to muddy the waters. In Chapter 2 it was argued that the more closely the state is examined at its interface with its citizens, the more difficult it is either to find its boundary or to know who are state actors and who are not. This was captured in the quote from Emy and James: 'The closer one gets to the ground the more the state does disappear into a disorganized ensemble of individuals battling it out over micro-issues in their micro-settings' (1996:31). As with the uncertainty over state actors, in this indeterminate frontier it was often not clear whether resident participation was part of a community improvement programme or not.

There were a great many funded activities on the estates, far more than in the surrounding areas. One of the vivid impressions from conducting interviews for this research is the quantity of work that engulfed the residents who volunteered to participate in the implementation of improvement programmes and the agency employees who worked alongside them. In 2004, the Department for Victorian Communities funded over 300 sub-programmes in communities (Adams 2004).

Although not exhaustive, the following list illustrates the variety of programmes and sub-programmes that took place on the three estates in the City of Yarra.

Festivals and events. The primary source of funding for these was the comparatively generous City of Yarra community grants scheme. Although open to all residents and groups within Yarra the majority of funding was allocated to the three public housing estates. The Victorian Multicultural Commission, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and philanthropic organisations also provided occasional funding.

Most festivals were associated with individual estates. The Collingwood Harvest Festival was organised by the Collingwood Housing Estate Arts Committee convened by Collingwood Neighbourhood House. The Moon Lantern Festival at the Richmond estate was managed by the North Richmond Community Health Centre, which established a working party of residents and other agencies for each event. The Three Towers Festival, an annual sports competition initiated by the tenants' association on the Collingwood estate, was open to residents from the three estates in Yarra.

As well there were many smaller events. For example, at the Fitzroy housing estate (Atherton Gardens) in 2009 celebrations were held for International Women's Day, organised by the Macedonian Social Club; South Sudanese Independence Day and St Daniel Comboni Society Celebration Day, both organised by the Fitzroy Sudanese community; St Georges Day, organised by the Macedonian Social Club; Liberian Independence Day and Liberian Flag Day, both organised by the Fitzroy Liberian Community; Ramadan and Eid-Elfidaters/Ul-Adha, organised jointly by the Macedonian Social Club and the African Muslim Group of Atherton Gardens; and Atherton Gardens End of Year Celebration, organised by the Atherton Gardens Residents' Association.

Committees. The Neighbourhood Renewal projects at the Fitzroy and Collingwood estates each established a neighbourhood advisory board. As noted in Chapter 4, both had sub committees dedicated to health and wellbeing, community safety, and employment and learning. All these committees were comprised of residents and agency representatives, and

sought to maintain a majority of residents among their members. They were either chaired or co-chaired by residents. The community safety committee at Richmond was the exception to this trend in being led by agencies and only allowing one resident to participate, usually the chairperson of the tenants' association. This arrangement was instigated by the sergeant of the local police station who insisted that the crime statistics and operational matters that were discussed at the meeting were confidential. In 2012 the estate manager opened the meetings to all residents. Both decisions are examples of local policy interpretation by front-line bureaucrats.

The Fitzroy United Residents' Association was established by the local office of the state housing authority to bring together representatives of the community groups on the estate. The meetings were jointly chaired by the housing authority and the estate residents' association.

Resident initiatives. Sometimes residents initiated activities and later applied for funding to maintain or expand them. For example, at the Richmond estate a group of parents from the tenants' association began an after-school activity programme, Solid Ground, for primary school children. It relied on volunteers, a small amount of funding from the City of Yarra and donations from a food rescue organisation. The Richmond Football Club became involved, providing funding and personnel. Later the North Richmond Community Health Centre took responsibility for managing the programme.

With the assistance of a local agency, the Vietnamese Mothers Association at the Fitzroy estate successfully sought funding to establish and manage a homework programme. It relied on volunteer tutors and was so successful that it grew beyond the capacity of the Association. As a result the Australian Catholic University, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Smith Family also became involved and co-operated in the development of the programme.

Individual projects. At times substantial short-term programmes were initiated by residents. At the Fitzroy estate the federal Department of Families, Health and Community Services funded a programme to promote

healthy eating and exercise among East African refugees. The communities had identified this as a problem and decided to apply for funding. An application was written by one of the leaders of the African communities with some assistance from an agency that became the auspicing body for the grant. The agency established a steering committee with the individual African groups to decide how the funding would be spent and provided guidance throughout the project. Local agencies frequently acted as the legal entity to receive grants for community groups that were unincorporated or without the resources to manage funding. These arrangements were necessary because a universal condition of funding from all sources was that the recipients held public liability insurance and were incorporated. At the time of writing the cost of this was in the order of $1000 p.a., a similar amount to the majority of small community grants from the local government. As well, the administrative burden of being an incorporated association was more than many groups wanted or could manage. Hence local agencies allowed many small groups to shelter under the protection of their insurance and financial accountability arrangements, in return counting the groups' activities as their own.

Illustration 6.3: Events such as this were a common sight on the estates. This is a barbeque to engage residents in a project funded by the local government to address concerns about safety in open areas. The photograph shows residents, police, a researcher, a community development worker and a bureaucrat from the state housing authority.
Source: Belgium Avenue Neighbourhood House

These examples give an indication of the nature and diversity of activities in the four research sites, a diversity which created uncertainty about what constituted participation in community improvement programmes. There are two reasons for this. The largest programmes that took place during this project were the Fitzroy and Collingwood Neighbourhood Renewal projects.[18] Because their purview included everything that took place in their designated sites, there was a strong tendency to gather existing initiatives into their operation. The arts committee which was established by the Collingwood Neighbourhood House prior to the establishment of the Neighbourhood Renewal project was subsequently made a sub-committee of the Collingwood Neighbourhood Renewal advisory board, and the network set up by agencies working on the Flemington estate was absorbed into the Flemington Neighbourhood Renewal project. In the first example,

[18] As noted in Chapter 3, it was not possible to include the Flemington Neighbourhood Renewal project in this research.

the work of the arts committee continued as before, apart from the expectation that it provide reports of its activities to the advisory board. In the second, according to an informant from the Flemington estate, the functions of the agency network were reoriented to meet the needs of the Neighbourhood Renewal project.

The second reason for uncertainty about what counted as participation was that residents often volunteered to work on particular events organised by these committees. Although they did not join the committees they were an essential part of the programme implementation and their involvement was counted as resident participation.

What may not be evident to the reader is that the activities included only public housing residents, although some of the festival events which they organised were open to the public. There was a clear but unstated demarcation between the estate residents and other residents in Yarra, which was kept in place by administrative practice. In most cases residents from around the estates would not have been excluded had they shown interest, but to do so would have required determined effort on their part and the crossing of class and cultural boundaries. As mentioned earlier, there were many other activities which the residents organised themselves, such as a rock band and groups that met to play cards or Mah Jong, but they were of peripheral interest to government and non-government agencies dealing with funded programmes. The chapter now turns to consider the informants' experiences of participating in activities of this kind.

The experience of participation

In 2002 a group of residents of the Collingwood housing estate worked with the assistance of Jesuit Social Services, a secular welfare agency established by the Jesuit order in Melbourne, to create a community information centre. Centres of this kind are widespread in Victoria. From a pilot in 1962, based on the UK model of Citizens' Advice Bureaux, over 65 centres were established across the state by their peak in 1980 (CISVic).

They rely on volunteers and receive no government funding for their infrastructure costs, although they are eligible to apply for government programme funding. The residents from the Collingwood estate decided that there was a need for such a service on the estate, and established the Collingwood Community Information Centre (CCIC).[19] It functioned as an information and referral service and drop-in centre for people living on and around the estate, and operated from a ground floor shop-front owned by the housing authority. It was unusual in that it was developed in response to a need identified by residents, not in response to guidelines for existing funding. A divergence between the way in which community members interpreted the culture of community strengthening promoted by the Victorian government and the interpretation that was embodied in government funding priorities soon became apparent. The government stated that:

> The role for government in generating social capital is to create the opportunities for individuals to establish relationships and shared values; that is, to facilitate the creation of networks. The site for network creation is the local community (DVC 2003:4).

From the perspective of the Collingwood residents and the non-government agency staff who provided assistance, the idea of an information centre was entirely consistent with these statements, but it did not align with any single Victorian government portfolio and thus became the responsibility of none. Achieving the very small amount of funding the service required was a constant struggle. Yarra Council contributed approximately one third of the funding. One of the council's senior managers spoke of the paradox of the CCIC's 'perpetual searching for funding', given that:

> Every time somebody looks at it they go 'What a fantastic model'. You know, it allows engagement, building of trust and then referral on into services, or services drop in and actually really fit with the community and get a bit of a sense of what's happening (INF15).

During the campaign for the 2006 Victorian state election a promise of funding for three years was made, but the residents were deemed

[19] In my employment prior to and during the first year of this project. the CCIC was one of the programmes for which I was responsible.

insufficiently experienced to manage more than a small council grant. Without consultation with the residents, the funding was given to Jesuit Social Services to manage. A resident who was one of the founding members of the CCIC and a long-standing volunteer in the centre recounts this episode.

> The original concept was that it was auspiced, and during that time it was to be set up to become incorporated and to, I guess, stand on its own two feet and go. There was a problem that the funding was running out, because it was a one-off set-up funding, nothing was done to secure on-going funding and so the residents had a bit of a campaign to run, rattle the swords I suppose, and we eventually got some funding, but then when the funding came they said 'Oh well, we don't fund small organisations. You'll need to be auspiced by someone'. Well then, the whole premise of setting it up and saying you need to be incorporated, you need to have some funding and you need to stand on your own two feet was invalid (INF7).

The bitterness and sense of betrayal that this caused among the residents involved was still evident at the time this research was undertaken. It is not easy to explain why the situation unfolded as it did. The CCIC required very little funding (in the order of $145,000 p.a.) and all parties wanted it to succeed. It was a popular and effective service. The argument by writers such as MacLeavy (2009) that participation in estate regeneration programmes can become a method of entrenching state power is not a satisfactory explanation of this outcome. Instead, it seems that the state was powerless to deliver the outcome that was wanted by the local bureaucrats, and certainly by the local member of the Victorian parliament who was also a cabinet minister.

Although an explanation is not apparent from the body of data, contributing factors are. The Victorian government did not fund any community information services, and there was fear that to fund the Collingwood centre would launch a raft of claims from other equally deserving services. Also, the nature of the service meant that it did not fit within the boundaries of a particular funding stream or administrative unit and as a result, none was willing to allow its funding to be used for activities outside its guidelines. Even if a unit had been inclined to do so, it is doubtful that it would have

had the necessary flexibility. Public sector reforms had increased the demands for financial accountability and reduced the scope for discretion by officers. A senior state bureaucrat explained that as a result it was very difficult to have access to unallocated funding. He was at the time involved in discussions seeking ways to allow discretionary funding that could respond to emerging needs without compromising accountability.

A more universal factor was found at the local level. Speaking from many years' experience in public housing, a mid-level bureaucrat explained the contest between compliance and initiative:

> …in various subtle ways and quite overt ways, I suppose, there is a clash. It's almost like a matrix, and over here you've got the people who do roundabouts and circles and rainbows, the creative, thinking reflective type person, and on this side you've got the person who does black and white, colouring in boxes, and if it's not in a policy document you don't do it, if it's not in an action plan you don't do it, if it's not in a service agreement you don't do it (INF19).

The data also provided an insight that is of particular importance for the practice of policy implementation in marginalised communities. The alienation that was revealed by the residents involved in the establishment and operation of the CCIC was not spoken of by the agency staff and bureaucrats who were interviewed, yet the research shows that it had not been forgotten. For the professionals the issue was whether the service was kept operating, which was clearly an important achievement. They saw the CCIC as a service, whereas for the residents it was something they had created and of which they felt proud. When the funding was given to an agency, the venture was no longer theirs. The decision reinforced their subjectivity in a way that in the heat of the moment was not apparent to the agencies involved and not of interest afterwards.

The concepts of 'joined-up government' and 'seamless service delivery' were embedded in the language of public sector ideals and practice (See for example Australian Government 2006; Victorian Government 2007). Considerable progress has been made towards this, particularly in the use of information technology, but what appears from a distance to be a smooth path is found on closer inspection to have many places of interpretation and

where the skills and inclinations of those present determine whether the passage is smooth or not. This is the image that emerges from the implementation research by Pressman and Wildavsky discussed in Chapter 2. As seen from that work, these unstable connections are spread along the whole implementation chain.

The research into bureaucratic discretion referred to in the same section in Chapter 2 was concerned with those decision points closest to the front line (Dunér & Nordström 2006; Lipsky 1971; Riccucci 2002 etc.). As was argued there, most of that research was limited to normative considerations. It assumed that outcomes of decisions by front-line bureaucrats, at least those outcomes in the immediate vicinity of the decision, were what they intended and that their intentions were based on how they thought policies ought to be applied. The example of the CCIC shows that this assumption is overly restrictive. All the informants who were involved in this project strongly supported the policy of empowering public housing residents, yet the outcome they achieved was ultimately disempowering.

There was no suggestion by the informants that the state agencies intended residents be marginalised. The stated policies of the government encouraged the strengthening of residents' power, drawing particularly on the concept of consumer sovereignty. The one clear intention that was served was to shore up electoral support from the estate for the local member of parliament in the looming election. It may be that this was of sufficient urgency to explain the course that events took.

Of greater usefulness here is the group of writers cited in Chapter 2 who were concerned with the operation of power in the construction and management of the participatory space (Ingamells 2007; Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi 2003; McKee & Cooper 2008). They speak of the power of popular discourses to reproduce at a distance the social relationships on which they are based. Thus the subjectivity of public housing residents is constantly reinforced, sometimes even in programmes that are designed to overcome it. Addressing in particular the discourse of corporate liberalism, Ingamells writes that:

> Hinging everything to the market naturalizes the division of those who are self-reliant through private investment, superannuation, private health insurance, private education, and so on, from those who are dependent on the state or, as it is increasingly put, on the taxpayer (Ingamells 2007:238).

With regard to the CCIC, this power was not exercised through large-scale intervention, but through the residual effect of actions that in part achieved what the residents wanted. A reminder is necessary here that the resentment noted above was only felt by the small group of residents who had been closely involved in the establishment of the service. The majority of the residents who visited the centre for assistance or to volunteer were unaware of its history or the funding arrangements and were simply pleased that it was kept open.

The reproduction of existing inequalities through well-intentioned actions that were consistent with policies promoting the empowerment of residents is shown in the following account of a proposal by a group of residents to establish a men's shed. Men's sheds are a men's health promotion strategy funded by regional government health departments in Australia (Golding et al. 2007). The informant, a resident of the Fitzroy estate, explained that:

> INF: …we had ideas of a men's shed or workshop idea that would recycle furniture, for example. That never really got off the ground unfortunately, even though there was a lot of interest from certain residents to be part of it. There was a lot of talented people on the estate, but it sort of never got off the ground. Sometimes, say for example an agency or bureaucrats, whatever you want to call them, they'd come in with say…an expansion of the idea. And that expansion sometimes would be somewhat complex, it wouldn't actually involve key players on the ground, it wouldn't recognise the actual, the people who were supposed to be actually the leading force behind the project. You know, the qualified woodworking people. They've got experience in woodwork and that sort of thing.
>
> For example, in the men's shed example, there was a lot of concentration about, when it came to the planning when it sort of… you could say bureaucratising of the whole idea rather than making it as simple as possible and workable.
>
> RW: So did you feel it was taken out of your hands?

INF: Pretty much so. As it progresses down the line it gets further and further taken away from the initial idea and aspirations and that's where a lot of the community groups' leaders – well, even the individuals involved – sort of lost interest over time. They came in with a great idea, they came in with willingness to participate and after a few meetings you see them sort of, you know, losing… Each of them just didn't see anything realistically happening (INF13).

This was not exceptional. A very similar account was given by a resident from another estate. At the time there was a strong emphasis on the development of social enterprises and residents were encouraged to put forward ideas. The informant is speaking of her involvement in one of the governance committees that was established on her estate. She recalled that

INF: …I had attended quite a lot of Employment, Learning and Enterprise meetings, but that became very frustrating for me, that particular group, and that's turned out to be a network that's not attended by residents at all. A friend, another resident came along and I thought she had a fabulous idea about setting up a recycled furniture enterprise, because we have drop-off spots when people move or buy, where people dispose of furniture. They're left near the big bins, and often you see different things there that could be fixed up, or re-upholstered or something, and that's the sort of thing that's exciting to me.

RW: So what happened to that idea?

INF: Nothing. I attended those meetings for about a year and it was just a mapping process of what different, um — stakeholders I suppose they're called — could take responsibility for different areas of the whole area of employment and learning and education and enterprise. So they were very bureaucratic. They were sort of project planning meetings that seemed endless. And the friend with the idea about the furniture recycling dropped out eventually too (INF2).

The application of New Public Management and its drive to remake the public sector in the image of the private sector was based on misunderstanding of the differences between the two sectors and of what constitutes good practice in the private sector. The emphasis on the production of plans was endemic, yet as long ago as 1994 Henry Mintzberg

found sufficient evidence to write an account of the shift in emphasis away from strategic planning in the private sector and the disbanding of large corporate planning departments (Mintzberg 1994). In the example above, the effect of removing enterprise planning from its private sector context where success or failure is measured by financial outcomes, and where commercial skills and resources are available, is that the production of the plan was able to become an end in itself. In the particular configuration of process and personnel in the two accounts above there was insufficient capacity to build on the initiative and enthusiasm of residents. It is not possible to generalise from such limited data about the reasons for this failure, particularly given the evidence of successful social enterprises in other disadvantaged communities. This does not, however, discount the disappointment and ennui reported by the informants and the part which that plays in entrenching acceptance of the inevitability of their situation.

'Ownership' was a term so frequently used to describe the benefits of participation that it was commonplace in the language of residents who were experienced participants in improvement programmes. Ownership is associated with authority, rights and responsibility. The following statement is typical of its usage and shows the benefits with which it was associated:

> By proactively and systematically working towards improving the levels of involvement in the various stages of a project, the outcomes are more likely to suit local circumstances, ensure community 'ownership', and increase the sustainability of a project (Munt 2002:3).

At the Richmond estate the tenants' association established a recycling collection in the high-rise towers, as they were not included in the local recycling collection. Yarra Council provided funding for to pay the residents who were employed. The programme provided a useful amount of work as each tower is 20 or more storeys and there was a bin on each floor. The bins had to be taken in the lifts to collection points on the ground each fortnight, then washed if necessary and returned to their respective floors. It was decided to extend the programme to all three high-rise estates in Yarra, for which additional financial support was needed. It was agreed by the housing authority and Yarra Council that a local agency should apply for

funding to manage the expanded programme. The application was successful and the management transferred to the agency. One of the residents explained how this changed the residents' attitude to the programme:

> INF: You know, it's such a shame because, although the residents who are actually taking part in the recycling programme here are passionate about it…
>
> RW: It's not theirs.
>
> INF: It's not theirs, right, and because it's not theirs they're not actually going to go out of their way and do things out of job hours to promote it, to talk it up, or to show people this or show people that, because they're not going to get paid for it. Whereas if it was being managed by the tenants' association, resident ownership with whatever coming back into the community, you can guarantee that the two members here at Collingwood taking care of the programme are that keen that they'd be out there, you know, because they're answerable to the community, engaged by the community to work with the community. They would be out there. And I've actually heard it from them themselves. They say 'No, it's outside my work hours. They won't give me the extra money for that. There's no extra funds for that.' But if as residents we had it: 'Oh yeah, no dramas'.
>
> RW: It means a lot.
>
> INF: Yeah, it really does, and again it gets back to the ownership. See, and that was the other thing, you know. The whole recycling programme was something that was initially put up by residents, and then got shanghaied because an organisation helped write the submission, put the funding submission in, put themselves down as the auspice, so it was their project, you know, and it got shanghaied from us. That hurt (INF21).

Here there is a much deeper sense of disempowerment and marginalisation than the loss of interest expressed in the previous two accounts. The informant speaks of theft and the powerlessness of residents to prevent it. However benevolent the intention of the welfare agency that assumed management of the programme, the effect on this resident at least was to reinforce his marginalisation.

There was no certainty that residents could have managed the recycling programme themselves, but as was the case with the Collingwood

Community Information Centre they were not allowed to try. An account by a former manager of the Richmond estate from the early 1990s shows that a different relationship between residents and the bureaucracy was possible. At the time the state housing authority espoused the principle that estate management should be self-management by the residents (Ministry of Housing Victoria 1980). The extent to which this was achievable or wanted by residents was unknown, and the policy of the authority was to encourage, but not impose, resident control and experimentation. By 1980 a small number of experiments in self-management were underway, including at the Richmond estate. The authority noted that the government must not 'become disillusioned by the inevitable difficulties and set-backs that these attempts will suffer' (Ministry of Housing Victoria 1980:58)

At the Richmond estate the residents' association was responsible for the contract for building maintenance on the estate, but eventually the administrative burden became too much.

> INF: [The residents] employed the maintenance supervisor and they were letting the contracts, and they employed the admin staff, so it was a tenants-run maintenance service, but they got a lot of help from the housing staff that were there. Eventually it went back to the state government. It went back to the Office of Housing.
>
> RW: Why? Wasn't it working?
>
> INF: It was working, but only with a lot of support. So on paper it looked like it was working, but in practice it wouldn't have worked without. But the tenants' council agreed. The tenants' council and I wrote a paper to the then Minister Wilkes, and he agreed that it would go back too, and they'd still have a say, but they weren't…they wouldn't be the controlling body (INF22).

The significant difference between this and the more recent events described above was that residents were engaged in making the decision to transfer control back to the state housing authority. The account also shows that the narrow definition of participation given at the beginning of this chapter has not always applied.

Taking shape from this evidence are two distinctly different constructions of what constitutes power and control. Residents saw ownership as including control over resources, the employment of staff, authority to direct the operation of the service – in short, the full scope of legal authority and responsibility that applies to the owner of an organisation or business. For the government and non-government agencies involved, ownership was metaphorical. Their interpretation was much closer to the concept of consumer sovereignty imported from the private sector, in which the business owner is careful to respond to the wishes and concerns of customers for fear that they will exercise their sovereignty and take their custom elsewhere. This interpretation underlies the following answer by a senior Victorian bureaucrat to a question about the co-option of residents by government to achieve its policy aims. He recognised that

> …there is a real dimension of power, a power asymmetry in these relations, but from my point of view the establishment of these community governance arrangements are very much intended to devolve, as much as is feasible, aspects of decision-making, and to get communities to have a greater degree of influence than they do when they are simply, you know, the passive recipients of services and every four or five years go to an election poll and vote for a political party (INF12).

The difference hinges on what is seen to be feasible. From the accounts above it can be seen that in the early 1980s it was feasible to give residents control by transferring funding to them to manage in their own right, but at the time of the funding decisions about the CCIC and the estate recycling programme in Yarra it was no longer acceptable to give residents this degree of control. Continuing his answer to the question, the informant explained that government needs to build its relationship with civil society in a wide variety of ways. He explained what he saw as the nature of power that residents ought to have:

> There are times when that relationship becomes incredibly uncomfortable for government. I've been to many steering committee meetings and board meetings where residents that have been given a role and have a greater capacity to interrogate government have made life very uncomfortable for parts of the bureaucracy. I think that although your initial, your immediate

> reaction to that is: 'Oh this has gone off the rails', if you sort of step back, you really have to say that's actually a symptom of something going right. And the fact that for a community that for a long time would have been so marginalised and disconnected that they wouldn't have actively challenged government to be doing that, and in most cases to be doing it in a constructive way that's a dialogue, I think is a really positive thing. […] And can I say, individuals always have the right to disengage (INF12).

Commenting on this process from a resident's perspective, an informant who was an experienced committee member spoke of feeling that residents' participation was managed towards desired outcomes:

> Sometimes the way agendas have been written, you can see, if you read through the agenda sometimes you can see the direction the whole meeting is being planned to take. Yeah, so there have been times where I've felt that way as an individual, but I sure haven't let that keep my mouth shut. If that's what I felt I still expressed what I wanted to get out there. I personally haven't let that hold me back. I know that all the other residents [on the committee] haven't actually let that hold them back either, and if there's been even that whiff of 'Hmm, we're being channelled somewhere here', it gets us residents worked up within themselves, saying 'Hang on, something doesn't seem quite right here'. It causes a bit of consternation (INF21).

Long before the advent of the Neighbourhood Renewal programme, public housing residents were not 'so marginalised and disconnected' that they could not actively challenge government, as was shown by the effective resident-led campaign described in Chapter 4 against the demolition of houses in Brooks Crescent, North Fitzroy. It can be argued that policies which have concentrated disadvantaged people in public housing estates have contributed to this marginalisation, as has the deflecting of expectations away from government through the neo-liberal narrative of 'responsibilisation' and self-help.

This discourse has given rise to an expectation that community members will participate in the management (in an advisory capacity) and delivery of community or estate improvement programmes. With regard to the Neighbourhood Renewal programme, this was described in terms of citizenship:

> Being an active citizen involves being able to transcend individual concerns and advocating for the greater good of the community. Resident representatives can be seen as spokespersons or delegates and have the role of articulating the interests of their community to ensure it is adequately represented in government decision-making. Residents can be seen as being involved in the Neighbourhood Renewal governance structure as community champions or mobilisers.
>
> The legitimacy of the Neighbourhood Renewal governance groups will not be a major issue if resident, agency and other delegates represent the broad interests, are seen as being in touch with and make attempts to seek the views of other members of the community. Residents involved in Neighbourhood Renewal governance structures should be given access to training and mentoring that empowers them to be community leaders and representatives and to develop ways to undertake community consultation (Neighbourhood Renewal 2006:5).

This energetic interpretation of citizenship expects a high level of commitment by residents. One of the proposals that emerged from discussions leading up to the end of the two Neighbourhood Renewal projects in Yarra was for the appointment of voluntary 'monitors' for each floor of the high-rise towers. They were intended as a conduit for communication between residents and government, and it was envisaged that residents on each floor would appoint their respective monitors. One of the residents who had been involved in these discussions was strongly opposed to the idea:

> I'm not sure about this idea, this wordage of 'community leaders'. I think again it's a way to try and gain access to more people through one point. But following on from that idea of community leadership there was the idea that each floor would have like a floor monitor, and I just thought 'What a terrible idea'. I just thought how that could really set someone up, you know, put someone in a bad situation. It's very likely that a lot of other people would respond really badly to the idea that there was a kind of a boss person on their floor, but again I suppose it's a way of trying to, maybe to devolve that responsibility for these micro-communities working well, and it puts all the risk on the resident (INF2).

The discussions were part of a process to plan what would be put in place

after the cessation of the two Neighbourhood Renewal projects. It was the largest participatory activity that took place during this project and was variously known as Mainstreaming, Planning for the Future, and lastly the Yarra Public Residents' Futures Forum (see Illustration 6.1)

'Planning for the Future': a participatory planning project

Following a number of smaller meetings, the first major event of this project was a meeting held at the Metropole Hotel, Fitzroy in September 2009, attended by more than 100 residents from the three estates.[20] Joan Kirner, a former premier of Victoria, opened the meeting by impressing upon residents the importance of having a voice, of having a say in the future of the estates. The purpose of the meeting, they were told, was to decide the best representative structure to achieve this.

'Voice' was a central theme throughout the process, as it was in any discussion about resident participation. The invitation to one of the planning forums stated that it 'will create a powerful voice to influence government, local service providers and our own communities'. Having a voice is part of having some control over the decisions that affect one's life and is seen as an essential component of democracy, yet from its outset the forum to which the residents were invited did not give them the opportunity to decide the issues that they wanted to address. It had been decided beforehand that the problem was that residents did not have a voice, that this was the defining issue of marginalisation, and that the solution was to create a representative organisation.

Public housing residents in Yarra had access to the same representative mechanisms as all other residents in the municipality, about which no serious concerns of democratic deficit were raised. Yarra residents were well known for their political engagement. The only concern was that residents from the estates did not participate as actively as did other

[20] According to the 2011 census, there were approximately 5184 residents living in the three housing estates in Yarra. The figure is inexact because geographical areas for which data is available include a small amount of private housing.

groups. Yarra Council recognised this and made efforts to minimise barriers as they were identified.

The ideal of the residents having a strong voice soon gave way to the demands of administrative process. One of the techniques used to ensure that meetings finished on time and achieved their required outcomes was to bundle different issues together in a way that implied they were inseparable and not open to individual consideration. Thus an axiomatic proposition was combined with others that were legitimately questionable to make the whole package acceptable. In the hands of technocrats without political skills this may have been as innocent as seeking efficiency, although a resident who took part in the meeting did not interpret it in that way. She told of the participants being asked to consider a 19-page proposal that had only been available for a week beforehand. The meeting had been divided into groups to consider it. She explained that:

> I was quite upset that at the end of the day, after there was a chance for some quite good discussion, I was very upset by the question: 'Does your group agree in principle to this proposal, give in-principle agreement?' I thought that was…I thought that to insert the words 'in principle' after we had had a, you know, a good half days' worth of concerns being raised, people saying: 'Well, I don't think that this part of it would work', the question that was then presented seemed to suggest that all of your concerns will be somehow absorbed, everything you've said today will somehow be worked into this plan, it will be changed. But I didn't see where the guarantee of that was, and asking: 'Do you give in-principle support?'; there was just the sense of, well, all of these experts have come up with this big plan. I would've asked people: 'What do you think of this part of it?' To ask people to basically to sign off on a large plan holus bolus, when they might like some sections and not others, and to insert the words 'in-principle' I think weakens the statement so people then feel more comfortable about giving their consent. It's very hard to know sometimes in situations like that, to what degree putting forward a proposition and asking a question in what I think is quite a coercive way, whether…whether that's intentional or not (INF2).

The enthusiasm of the meeting at the Metropole Hotel came to an end in an unhappy meeting hosted by the City of Yarra at the Richmond Town Hall in April 2010. By then a consultant had been engaged to conduct additional

consultations with 21 'key informants' representing a range of perspectives and to prepare a report and recommendations. No explanation was given at the meeting as to why, after seven months of consultation with residents, it was necessary to consult with a separate group of informants and to use this as the basis of the report. Residents to whom I spoke and who had been involved throughout the process told me they were expecting a discussion about the proposed governance model that had been developed from the consultations and working party for the three housing estates. Instead, much of the time allowed for the meeting was taken up with the consultant's report. It recommended the establishment of a development trust, a proposal introduced very late into the discussions but included in the consultant's brief.

According to the consultant's report, development trusts are popular in the UK, where there are over 400 such organisations engaged in a wide range of activities (Pfahlert 2010). They are independent, social enterprises designed to create and retain wealth in the communities they serve. As not-for-profit companies they are able to generate surpluses that can be reinvested in their communities according to their charter, but they cannot distribute profits to shareholders. They are all community-based, owned and managed. It was envisaged that the proposed trust in Yarra would be responsible for significant sums of government, philanthropic and private sector funding. It was seen as an opportunity to attract additional funding to the estates that would bring economic, social and environmental benefits. The recommendations were developed in the light of the understanding that there would be no further funding from Neighbourhood Renewal after the cessation of the Fitzroy and Collingwood projects.

The consultant's detailed presentation to the meeting included this key finding from the interviews he conducted:

> Most people felt that the current representatives of groups and organisations on the estate lacked the necessary skills required to effectively represent their constituents. There was a sense that the Neighbourhood Renewal process across the two estates in Yarra had done little to build the community governance capacity of the residents. There were many examples cited of poor process and behaviour displayed by the groups and their leadership (Pfahlert

2010:4).

In his presentation of the report to the meeting, the consultant recommended the establishment of the trust as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee and overseen by a board of directors. He explained that it was his opinion that the board would require skills that were not likely to be found among public housing residents and that as a result only three of the 11 to 14 positions proposed should be allocated to residents from the estates.

Residents in the meeting, already disgruntled by the lack of time allowed for questions and discussion, began to express strong objections at this point. The proposal that the board would be controlled by members of agencies and the private sector was particularly galling to residents who had been involved throughout the process on the understanding that the purpose was to create a structure to give them greater control. It became clear to the organisers that antipathy to the model was so strong that there was no prospect of it being accepted in the near future. It was subsequently abandoned.

Reflecting on this meeting, one of the residents (for whom English is not his first language) said:

> To be honest I been, I feel really disappointed and insulted of the City of Yarra. Because when we work twelve months and City of Yarra is been involved very heavily, NJC[21] is been involved very heavily, Ministry of Housing, and a couple of agencies sometime, time to time come, depends on the subject what we have, and no-one, no-one is say tenants is not good enough. [The consultant] say that only professional people should be elected on the board of management.
>
> That mean we creating more one bureaucratic system. Why I work twelve months, nearly every week have a meeting? For what? To destroy these tenants or help the tenants? And that's what I feel and I have a speech with city council of Yarra after this report been reported to the public, and I said very clear what we need. Because they say first, have to be professional people, secondly, private sector have to be on the board of management too. Richard, what private sector know about the tenants or Ministry of Housing?

[21] The Collingwood Neighbourhood Justice Centre.

> They even ever come across, see how we live here, we doing? No. No. But more agency not do that too (INF11).

How had a process that began with good will and enthusiasm arrived to this point seven months later? To begin with, the contentious proposal of the development trust had been introduced too late in the process to allow for consideration of its implications. No more than a basic explanation was possible. The consultant found that:

> The concept of a 'Development Trust' or 'Social Development Trust' (as specified in the proposed model) was only understood by three out of the 21 people consulted. Having said this, the overwhelming majority of people were supportive of the idea of a Development Trust, once a basic explanation of their function and purpose was given (Pfahlert 2010:3).

People were asked to support a major project on the basis of a brief explanation and without proper evaluation of whether or not the model was appropriate for Yarra, or assessment of its financial viability, or of what impact it may have on the development and delivery of services in the area. The consultant's report reveals an array of perspectives, interests and intentions, as would be expected in any community survey. Although there was support for the proposal, there were also concerns. It was recognised that the organisation would need substantial funding to begin with, far more than the very limited government funding that might realistically be found. Other sources of funding that were identified were only indicative.

Even if funding could be found, concern was voiced that a development trust may absolve government of its core responsibilities. The high concentration of socio-economic disadvantage in the housing estates in the City of Yarra was a creation of government policy, particularly under-investment in public housing, and it appeared that the government was now shifting responsibility for that problem to the community. Some saw this as an indication of the need for other models of provision of social housing.

All agreed that the trust should be established for the benefit of the whole of the City of Yarra, not only for the public housing residents, but that this should not compromise its primary orientation to social justice. It was thought that this reach would give the trust access to a broad range of skills

and expertise. People consulted who were public housing residents expressed strong support for any initiative that encouraged broader community participation in the housing estates, particularly for newer residents.

The report also pointed to tensions both within and between Victorian government departments, and the obstacles to realising the ideal of 'joined-up government':

> The majority of interviewees recognised that the establishment of a genuinely independent entity like a Development Trust would be very challenging for some government agencies, as historically the real decision making has sat with the departments who hold the financial resources. A number of government representatives (particularly the Department of Planning and Community Development representatives) acknowledged how challenging this approach might be internally, however agreed strongly that there is a need to explore new approaches (Pfahlert 2010:4).

Putting aside the territoriality that exists in any large organisation, the concerns of the bureaucrats were justified. Development trusts are part of a trend to localisation that has been commented on in this and earlier chapters from the perspective of the state shedding its responsibilities onto communities. There is another aspect that is less frequently commented on. An outcome of the tendering out of services, the transfer of what had been government activities to development trusts and other community governance arrangements is the substantial loss of public sector capability. This is a different matter from the question of where decision-making authority should lie. The danger is that as governments lose this capacity they are less able to defend the public, particularly the poor, against the predations of market ideology.

The discourse of public sector reform throughout the OECD is built on the assertion that governments need to become more responsive to their electorates, and to develop the skills of how to govern through partnerships and engagement. The purpose is to strengthen government-citizen relations (OECD 2001a, b), which requires the strengthening of government capabilities. The loss of the skills from the Victorian public sector to engage and build partnerships with communities was discussed in

Chapter 2. This is the root of the dilemma faced by the bureaucrats spoken of in Pfahlert's findings. On the one hand they were asked to support a process that would contribute to the loss of the technical capability of the public sector, while on the other their broader context created expectations that they develop new approaches that required increased government capability. This is a fragment of a much larger issue concerning the increasingly conflicting expectations of government (see, for example, Tingle 2012).

The original intention of the process was to give residents a voice. In the interviews and documents gathered for this research there was no explanation of why it was either necessary or desirable for residents in Yarra who lived in public housing to have a different representative structure from people who rented from private landlords or owned their homes. All Yarra residents — public housing tenants, private sector renters and home owners — were represented by three levels of government and by other representative associations to which they chose to belong, including residents' associations. Public housing tenants had a specific interest in associations that were able to represent them in discussions with the state housing authority over tenancy issues, but in this regard they were not materially different from other interest groups in the community.

Contrary to expectations, the residents' capacity to form and manage such associations may have been weakened by the very processes intended to empower them. At the end of several years of agency-led participation programmes on the estates in Yarra there were no longer any functional tenants' associations. Referring to one of these estates, a senior housing manager wondered why after eight years of Neighbourhood Renewal it had taken 'less than twelve months for things to fall apart again'. None of the governance structures that had been established on this estate and which were expected to be continued by residents and local agencies was still in effective operation. The experience of informants presented above provides some insight into this.

It would be simplistic to assign blame for these outcomes solely to the processes described. For example, the demise of the associations may

have been caused or at least influenced by other factors, such as the narrowing of collective skills caused by the increasing residualisation of public housing, and the decline in traditional associational activity in the wider community. Nevertheless, there is a clearly discernible pattern of exceptional treatment of public housing residents.

Following the demise of the development trust proposal and the hostility of residents from the estates, bureaucrats raked over the ashes and produced a conventional community plan for the high-rise estates from the consultations (City of Yarra & Office of Housing 2010).

Conclusion

This chapter has revealed many aspects of the interplay of power between marginalised communities and the state and the changing interpretation of participation. From being a principal feature of political engagement and agitation for social reform, or resistance to governments seen as overweening and unresponsive, participation has been adopted as a technology of public administration and refashioned to this end. The result has been to turn attention away from what became accepted as state responsibilities in post-Second World War Australia. Similarly, the concept of community has been adopted by government and shaped to its needs, leading to communities becoming the new sites of both the causes and responsibility for the remedies of social problems. Thus is state power reinforced.

The narrative of the oppression of the powerless by the state that permeates much of the literature concerning this transformation is too narrow. The political action by residents of North Fitzroy in the late 1960s that brought undone the state housing authority's plans to demolish their houses was echoed by the action of residents in Yarra in 2009 when they put a stop to a government proposal that they saw as entirely contrary to their interests.

Far more persistent is the subjectivity of poor and disadvantaged communities, reinforced by routine practices so familiar that those who use

them are often unaware of their effect. The research shows a strong contrast between this oblivion and the hurt, betrayal and powerlessness experienced by residents. These practices and assumptions are sufficiently tenacious to be reproduced even through programmes designed to mitigate the effects of socio-economic disadvantage.

The close examination afforded by the research method shows how the workings of power and the cultural reproduction of particular social arrangements are carried in the mundane and quotidian activities of people who are mostly well intentioned and generally competent. This is a crucial insight for programme planners and professionals working in poor communities, and it directly addresses the primary research question concerning the factors that affect how members of poor communities and front-line professionals work together. The exploration of this theme continues in Chapter 7 where the attention of the research turns to the phenomenon of poverty as it was encountered in the project.

Chapter 7 Poverty and adaptation

Introduction

In keeping with the exploratory nature of the project, this chapter continues the investigation of factors that affect the ways in which public housing residents and agency field officers work together in community improvement programmes. It concentrates on the second and third subordinate research questions about the ways in which the state manages its relationship with disadvantaged and marginalised populations, and the ways in which local communities respond to and interpret these programmes.

This project concerns poor people and poverty, about which there is already a very substantial body of scholarly and general literature (contemporary Australian examples include Bessant 2002; Murphy et al. 2011; Peel 2003; Saunders 2004). The ways in which the concept of poverty is constructed and maintained and the enduring power of this construction are therefore of central interest.

In the community services sector, representations of poverty are mostly clustered around the deficit experienced by poor people and the social injustice of this. The deficit model of poverty underlies the concept of the 'culture of poverty', which endures in spite of widespread criticism (Graybeal 2001). This criticism is made on ethical grounds, that it blames poor people for structural inequalities, and on scientific grounds, that there are problems with the data and interpretations which are used to support the concept (Bomer et al. 2008). Debate around the competing discourses of the deficit model and the strengths approach (see Chapter 1) is primarily located in two fields: the education of children living in poverty, and social work (see also McMillen, Morris & Sherraden 2004; Scerra 2012).

The criticism of the strengths approach is that it can be naïvely optimistic, ignoring real problems faced by people over which they may have some control. If it is wrong to deny the possible, which is the criticism of the

deficit model, it is also wrong to deny the problem (Graybeal 2001). Gray (2011) writes that the focus on communities and social networks that is evident in strengths-based practice diverts attention away from the responsibility of government to address social inequalities.

Problems, however, are at the heart of the logic of intervention. Organisations in the sector contribute to the maintenance of the deficit model through their practices and assumptions. To obtain the funding on which they rely they must highlight the deficits of poverty. Their activities are shaped by the specification and purpose of the funding they receive. As a result, the programmes and services that they offer reinforce a traditional understanding of poverty that is based on a separation between people who are poor and people who are not.

There is a responsibility for researchers in this field to ensure that the effects of deprivation and the fundamental injustice of poverty are kept clearly in society's view, but concentrating research effort on the experiences of poor people in the hope of unearthing sufficient material to construct an adequate explanation of the phenomenon of poverty has the effect of cementing orthodox constructions in place. While there are arguments about the causes of and responsibility for poverty, these do not unduly disturb the belief that it is a phenomenon quarantined in the poor. Poverty remains a space marked out at the edge of mainstream society, a separation that allows, for example, the belief that poor people are responsible for their situation.

Constructionism provides a useful framework for thinking about this and about possible alternatives. What has been constructed in one way can be constructed in another. Poverty can be imagined as a more widespread social phenomenon, and its effects might be expected to be found throughout the whole society. A researcher working from this assumption is freed to look for a much broader range of evidence. This chapter takes a small step in that direction by considering the effect of poverty on those who work closely with people who are poor.

The above is written in the context of this project's interest in the engagement between bureaucracies and communities. This is a common

description of the parties involved, but as was shown in Chapter 6 the numbers involved can be very small and certainly not representative of the community. The great majority of residents were not involved in these engagements and were often aware of the interventionary programmes. The effect of this focus is that the lives of residents outside these participatory activities – participants and non-participants – were not in the field of view of bureaucratic knowledge.

Poverty

Poverty is the landscape of this study, always present but with features so familiar to the informants that they rarely spoke of it directly. Although they were demonstrably poor, the informants did not experience the daily struggle for subsistence that arises from absolute deprivation. All were in relatively secure accommodation and had access to some form of earned or statutory income. However, one of the informants told of residents whom she knew sometimes had insufficient food to last until their next pension payment. The menace of poverty was always close by.

Most definitions of poverty used in social policy formation rely on threshold measurements which divide those who are poor from those who are not (Foster 1998; Saunders 2004). Thresholds are useful for collecting comparative data and analysing trends. To the people interviewed for this research who lived and worked within the landscape of poverty its boundary was not so clear. For them it had none of the certainty of a marked border, nor was it sufficiently robust to offer any protection to people close by who were not poor. It was a threshold they might easily cross.

In advanced industrialised economies the concept of absolute poverty is of limited utility and is not, for the reasons stated above, relevant to this study. Poverty is used here to refer to relative deprivation, in keeping with the Australian research into poverty cited in the introduction above. In his magisterial study of poverty in the UK, Peter Townsend provided a definition notable for its simple dignity:

> Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities (Townsend 1979:31).

An important quality of this description is that poverty is understood relationally. Relationships place expectations and responsibilities on all parties, which widens the focus beyond the individual or family or group said to be in poverty. That is the subject of this section. The informants quoted below were all participants in the relationship with poverty.

For front-line workers the threat of poverty was always nearby. The extract that follows is from a woman who had spent several years working in well-paid positions in the private sector before deciding to work in the community sector. At this point in the interview I had asked her about how she understood poverty as a social issue. For her the clear boundaries described by indicators of poverty were more like open frontiers:

> INF: I had this conversation with a friend actually a while ago about how easy it would be to get, to end up on … to end up actually being on the estate, like to actually, if a few things went wrong, to actually end up in a situation where you couldn't work, you couldn't house yourself, so you would end up probably living on welfare on a housing estate. It doesn't take, it takes a couple of big, probably, you know, some sort of significant knocks, or a severe mental, a mental health issue or a drug addiction, or… like it doesn't take a lot, like I mean it takes a bit but it doesn't take… it happens to people.
>
> Like [a resident] from the Collingwood estate. He used to own two houses in Templestowe and had his own electrician business. He had an accident, a car accident, or an accident. He didn't say it was a car accident, he said it was an accident and he ended up spending all of his money, losing his whole family – they won't talk to him now – and losing his houses, losing everything and now he lives by himself. He's not that old.
>
> RW: So for you there's a lot of chance involved?

> INF: Yeah, sometimes. I mean sometimes there is a bit of chance. I mean people have got power as well. Like I think [he] could probably get himself out of there as well if he went and saw certain, like went and got, say a certain amount of counselling or… I mean there's potential, there's a potential for people to then change the… Like you know, they end up somewhere but then they actually take steps to… If they want to move somewhere else, or want to get employed, get employment and then change… (INF17)

The threat that she feels is clear in the way she circles around the issue in the first paragraph before saying that she is herself within reach of the grasp of poverty. She has chosen a role with none of the insulation of her former employment in the corporate sector. The random event she describes in the second paragraph might happen to anyone. She is not certain that personal resources are sufficient to guard against poverty, although as she continues she develops the more hopeful possibility that even if she were to find herself in a similar situation she would be able to maintain some control. Her work meant that the relationships she built with people who were poor were much larger in her field of view than was the conceptual understanding of poverty.

Drawing on his extensive research into poverty in Australia, Mark Peel expressed a similar belief:

> …very few of us are invulnerable, with hard times only ever a retrenchment, an accident or a bad decision away (Peel 2003:175).

The worker's identification of the power and potential for change that people in situations of this sort might draw upon is consistent with the trend to localisation and responsibilisation in public policy referred to in Chapter 6 (Swyngedouw 2005; Taylor 2003a). Just below the surface of the publicly palatable discourse promoting the virtues of responsibility is the implication that the responsibility for poverty rests largely with the poor. This is not a recent development, as Maia Green explains:

> Ideas about the responsibility of the poor for their own poverty have a long history in Western society. They were the basis of discourses about poverty and social responsibility for the destitute in England until the mid twentieth century, hence the intentionally punitive welfare regimes in workhouses where the destitute could go to seek food and shelter in return for hard labour in

> conditions that were explicitly designed to replicate the prison (Green 2006:1119).

Phillip Blond, a theologian and social theorist with considerable influence over the social policies of the UK Prime Minister David Cameron, extended this concept by not only blaming the passivity of poor people but also the interventions by middle-class people that kept them that way:

> One of the reasons people are poor is that they're passive, and one of the reasons that people are passive is middle class and upper class people are always doing things for people that they think can't do things for themselves (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2012).

This study found a different story, illustrated by Wombat Housing Services which was contracted by the Office of Housing to manage the meeting spaces on the four estates. They reported that there were always more groups wanting to use the spaces for activities than could be accommodated, and that they had developed an allocation process because so many people missed out. There was no lack of social participation taking place, most of which residents organised themselves. One of the informants described what residents could do for themselves if they had access to modest resources:

> I think space is one of the key things. If you give people space that's safe then they will [be active]. It doesn't cost anything to come and sit down and have a coffee together or, you know, meet up somewhere. It's all about space, having the space to do it, and it's, it's also having sort of…yeah, you have to have a little bit of money too to run something, especially if you want to learn something. Say if you want to learn a skill or something like that, it's hard if you haven't got…if you're low income, but I think the reason why there's so much work that goes into people that are disadvantaged is that they often don't have the resources they need to actually… I mean they have the ability. They have the capability. So this is what I've found really difficult in this job. If we just spent the money, that money, instead of spending money on a whole lot of different things trying to get people to, you know, talk and do different things, if you just created a space that was conducive to activity, then people would be active (INF17).

Her observation led her away from the deficit model of poverty towards the capability approach developed by Amartya Sen and colleagues, described in Chapter 2. Sen's purpose was to create a more sophisticated method of describing standards of living than the equation with real income favoured by mainstream economics. He is concerned not with the quantity of commodities that a person's income enables him or her to consume, but with what those commodities enable a person to do or be. Each person's inheritance and situation, not all of which can be known by traditional economic measures, provide them with a particular set of capabilities. In this non-utilitarian approach, wellbeing is more than preference-fulfilment. It includes the state of health a person is able to attain and the range of choices they have about what they want to do.

Another account of being subject to random events is told by an informant from the perspective of a resident. In 1973 the informant's wife was permanently institutionalised with severe mental illness, leaving him to care for their three children. He subsequently injured his knee and was unable to continue working. His story begins at the point when he became the sole carer of this children. As with several of the informants, English is not his first language.

> I have to work and look, how can I survive with three kids, because those days you don't have a social worker, you don't have any help from nobody. You survive or you die. I work night, from six at night to six in the morning. I have to pay people who will come to sleep, look after my kids night-time when I go to work, you know.
>
> I have accident 1982, when they operate my knee couple of times they can't do nothing, and then because I been foreman at Toyota, when I come there and daughter say very, very light duty job maybe I can do. They said 'No, we don't have light duty job. We can't give you broom and $800'. Because I been foreman have a much pay what normal worker, and from $800 I dropped to $160 a fortnight.
>
> That I not crazy then go I never know, but I survived. I survived. And like I say is not been easy but I'm lucky because I grew up [indistinct] work and I just said to myself, 'More to just work and look after kids, look after kids'. I never drink, I never go out, nowhere. Just with the kids, you know.

> But kids grow up and then, like I say, 1984 I say 'I can't stay home', you know, because I go out from my parents when I been 12 years, and then I just say, 'No, I go join the tenants' association' (INF11).

At the time of this research both the residents in these stories had found places for themselves within their communities, but were unable to re-establish even part of their former status outside. Both suffered from chronic ill-health.

Some informants fitted their observations into broader ideological frameworks. When asked about how he explained the causes of the poverty of the people with whom he worked, a community development worker replied:

> INF: I can think of a number of things, but you know, in the big picture framework, the very rich need the very poor to survive, and that's whole problem with capitalism. So that's, that's the big picture statement. That's why people are poor.
>
> RW: So poverty's a creation of capitalism?
>
> INF: I think so, yeah. (INF20)

He illustrated this with examples from international development about drought being caused by 'rich countries coming in and destroying everything'. This traditional class analysis is no longer widespread, nor are many of the forces and institutions of working-class power (Harvey 1996). Nevertheless, it continued to constitute part of the belief system through which this informant and others interpreted the government programmes in which he was employed. An informant who was the manager of a local agency said that:

> I think classic Marxist theory can give us some…is still valid in giving us some insight into the nature of the state and the relationship with the citizen. I think there's something valid there that I still find is useful in the way I understand those issues. Particularly in the exercise of power (INF14).

One of the residents whom I interviewed also spoke about structural causes of poverty, but she spoke from the perspective of having lived in public housing for many years, receiving a disability support pension and using a number of health services. She spent as much time as her poor health

allowed working in her community as a volunteer. Her perspective reveals the subjectivity of poverty with greater clarity than the more theorised positions above.

> You know, it's almost a sense of the welfare state. You need…you need a base of poor people to keep people in welfare doing welfare work. […] Earlier on I reflected that community development seemed like a strange thing in a way, because it seemed to be something that was done with poor people (INF2).

During this research I was associated with another project on the Richmond estate. The project grew out of work that I had begun in my former employment and in which I continued to participate as a member of the project steering committee. It was a deliberative problem-solving project based on a citizens' jury model, funded by the Victorian Department of Justice. It focused on the impact of the illegal drug trade on people who lived on and around the estate. As explained in Chapter 4, the inner-city high-rise estates have a long association with the illegal drug trade in Melbourne. At the time of this project the problem was particularly severe at the Richmond estate. The estate and its environs were listed by Victoria Police as one of their top ten areas of concern in Victoria.

The problem is also a function of the design and management of inner-city high-rise estates. The Richmond estate is well served by public transport, is close to the very busy shopping strip along Victoria Street and is surrounded by secluded small streets and laneways. The open space around the towers is poorly designed and public access was discouraged (Dalton & Rowe 2004; Elkins 2012).

In the first stage of the project a series of meetings were held in which residents who lived on and around the estate were invited to talk about their experiences. Notes were taken during the meetings, but due to many residents' concerns for their safety no audio recordings were made. The notes were amalgamated and identifying details removed to ensure the anonymity of the informants. They were then returned to residents, for verification that they were an accurate representation of what they had said.

The value of this project to this thesis is that residents were asked to talk specifically about the impact of the illegal drug trade. The extracts that follow are selected from notes from meetings and individual conversations. The meetings were attended by people of a wide variety of ages, from children to old people, and from many different ethnic groups.

> This is my story.
> I felt very lucky when I got government housing in Australia ...
> Now we can see that this public use of drugs has affected me, not only in my mind but in my heart
> It affected not only me, but my family.
> Before I came here I'd never seen it before
> At night I play the music to try and escape from it, but I can't.
>
> Between 12 and 3am people come into the laundry. We don't know what's going on. Make a lot of noise.
> Maybe young people have come in.
> We raised this with the Office of Housing.
>
> I'm very worried.
> People who are selling poison are there …
> Every day there are more people …
> Why don't the police come and get them?
> I know the one man's name … but I never spoke to the police or Housing
> I'm scared.
> Don't tell Police or Housing my name.
>
> One day there might be a shock
> They might do something to us, maybe when walking along
> Someone might come from the back side …
> When I face such kinds of things that might happen
> I have chest pains and it won't go away
>
> Our building is not a safe place.
> Buying and selling drugs go on, people having injections
> A few households are involved in drug dealing
> I know which, but I can't speak out
> It would put me at risk.
>
> See those people sitting there
> You know …

They're dealing drugs
They want to bring people here
And because they live here they say to Security
These are my friends.

I share a laundry with six other tenants
I went up to the laundry and I couldn't get in
They were injecting at the doorway
'You have to wait till we're finished'
Sometimes you have to laugh. You know, I'm angry, but it's ridiculous
You have to laugh.

Not all residents had the same level of fear and several expressed compassion for the drug users. At the end of the process after deliberating about the evidence they recommended both stronger security measures and the establishment of a supervised injecting facility.

I'm not afraid of them
Yes they make very noisy
I say hello, how are you?
I'm nice to them
I don't isolate them
So they're not above us – do you know what I mean?
I know how to deal with them.

I walk through here often
The drug use doesn't affect me.

They need shelter too
Where are they going to live if they're evicted?

Some people would be happier if they lived in a single house, they'd prefer that, but I feel very safe in the high-rise.

(Bolitho, de Kleyn & Williams 2011)

The project revealed complex responses by residents. One woman, a single mother with a teenage child, was distressed by the obviously poor health of the young drug users who came to her door asking for money. She did not want to give money, but bought food and made sandwiches for them.

The front-line workers in this study were less directly exposed to activities around illegal drug use than were the residents, primarily because they were rarely in the residential areas in the towers and they usually worked during the day. However they reported often seeing activity in the outdoor areas during the day and being approached by dealers. They were also included in discussions among residents about drug use and trading by other residents. Some of the workers who were engaged in short-term estate-based projects were also residents. As a result the impressions held by workers and the ways in which they described the problem of illegal drug use were consistent with accounts by residents.

The vulnerability of residents and low-paid workers to the illegal drug trade and their inability to defend themselves is clear. An informant who had lived on one of the estates for most of his life believed that the Victorian government preferred to keep the drug trade contained on the estates to stop it flowing over into the surrounding areas:

> …you can see it in the money that's spent in health services and agencies on the ground to manage the issue where it is. I think there is an acceptance at a government level that it's not going anywhere. The recent media attention has forced the government into some more immediate actions to show that it is responding to the issue, and that's a good thing, but it shouldn't take media attention to instigate this. Residents have been telling the government for a long time this is a big problem here. […] It's one of those things where I do believe they do want it here, because people who pay more tax are certainly not going to tolerate it. But these people are expected to tolerate it, and it's not fair, it's really not fair.

At the same time he recognised the complexity of the issue:

> …having said that, you move it from here, where does it go? That's the other problem (INF28).

This sense of vulnerability is a powerful influence on all who live or work on the estates, but it does not produce the hostile isolationism that might be expected of a community which sees itself as continually invaded. The residents who participated in the deliberative panels produced recommendations that were notable for their embrace of the complexity of the issues that they were asked to consider, and which demonstrated

compassion for people who were addicted to illegal drugs. They were far from passive victims and had developed a variety of responses to a problem over which they had little control. Commenting on this adaptability, a senior manager in local government described the residents on the three Yarra estates as 'amazingly forgiving':

> You know, it doesn't take a lot to make people really quite excited about what might happen and how things might go over a reasonably short period of time (INF15).

From her long experience with public housing, a housing manager commented on the irrational fear by the bureaucracy of allowing public housing communities too much power, when their most common experience was surprise at how little these communities actually asked for when given the opportunity. She used the analogy of the fear about the apology to the Stolen Generations compared to its actual effect.[22]

Chapter 4 charted how the course of public sentiment shifted from concern about both the threat and injustice of poverty to concern about public housing as the large inner-city estates were constructed. Since the late 1990s the illegal drug trade has been the focus for this concern. It has thus played a central role in the stigmatisation of public housing.

Subjectivity and stigma

The body of research into the stigma attached to public housing in Australia continues to grow (Arthurson 2010; Atkinson & Jacobs 2008; Palmer et al. 2004; Warr 2005). These studies present evidence of the negative impressions of public housing held by tenants in private rental, home owners and public housing tenants themselves, impressions frequently reinforced by the news media. Residents and workers were often frustrated

[22] In February 2008 the newly elected prime minister, Kevin Rudd, issued a parliamentary apology to Indigenous Australians who as children had been removed from their families by state authorities. They became known as the Stolen Generations. Despite widespread public support for an apology, it had long been resisted by previous governments for fear that it would spark a campaign for compensation. This did not eventuate.

by what they saw as relentlessly negative stories and the ways in which they were portrayed.[23]

Journalists and researchers who produce representations of the less powerful are sometimes hesitant about bringing problems to light for fear of contributing to stigmatisation. Within the communities these sensitivities of privilege were not relevant. Residents who were angry about negative representation of their communities were equally annoyed about glowingly positive accounts that ignored the problems they wanted to talk about. They felt that in both situations they were not being listened to. Writing about this dilemma of representation, Peel (2003) noted that it is not simply a matter of turning the caricatures on their heads and arguing that the problems associated with poverty are not real.

Stigma is part of the harm caused by poverty, experienced by residents and observed at close quarters by front-line workers. For residents, stigma is explicit and nameable, as the following account by an informant who had lived most of his life in public housing shows:

> There was a perception, and it's still prevalent today, I still see examples of it today, where I think there is a perception that people who live in public housing are, you know, probably the lowest part of the community. And I think that's partly the government recruiting the wrong people to those sorts of roles, because you really need community-based people trying to manage housing, people who understand. That's a flaw in housing. You sort of felt…probably less than human in some ways, and I know that's a frustration of a lot of people because they feel that they're not being listened to, or only the loud ones get listened to. You really had to push your point at times. I can remember an issue around the behaviour of a tenant near me who was really impacting on my life and my health, and it was completely ignored, so I escalated the issue into VCAT[24] and pursued it pretty much all the way, at which point, you know, I was branded a trouble-maker (INF28).

[23] Contrary to this trend, the *Melbourne Times*, a weekly paper focused on the inner-city area where this research took place, strove to report fairly on issues arising concerning the estates.

[24] The Victorian Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal, a division within the Victorian justice system that adjudicates a range of matters concerning civil and administrative law, including residential tenancies.

He had reason to expect to be heard. The Victorian Residential Tenancies Act, to which the state housing authority is subject, stipulates that 'a landlord must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the tenant has quiet enjoyment of the rented premises during the tenancy agreement' (1997:section 67). It is understandable that the informant interpreted being 'completely ignored' as a demonstration of his status as a public housing tenant.

The second account is from a long-term resident who was speaking of living in a high-rise tower. There were two shared laundries on each floor. As noted earlier, these were often used by injecting drug users who came to the building to buy illegal drugs.

> I went into a laundry one day because the door was open and there was a guy on the floor and I went in and I said 'Oh sorry, I just wanted to know who you were'. And he said 'Well what's it got to do with you? I thought you were going to hit me', because I had my vacuum cleaner. And I said 'Well I'm not going to hit you', and he said 'Oh these people that live here just shit me', or something like that. It was a horrible derogatory comment. He didn't realise I lived there, and I said 'Well this is my home', and he said 'Oh yeah, but they don't give a shit about the washing machine. They don't care, they don't look after it'.
>
> Why? Just because we live in public housing are we bad people? (INF6)

The heightened sensitivity that comes from dealing with stigma as a persistent background to one's life led the resident to make a complaint to the local housing office, which required the contractor she had encountered in the laundry to apologise to her.

Link and Phelan (2001) have identified the conditions of power that are necessary for stigmatisation to occur:

> …stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic, and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination (2001:367).

The discourse of stigma was challenged by those it describes, not through organised political activity but through what Scott (1985) describes as 'everyday forms of resistance'. It was also challenged by many of the programmes that were funded by all levels of government, sections of which recognised and sought to mitigate the damage that it caused. It was also challenged by simple acts of charity.

It has been argued here that poor people are expected to be the recipients of giving by others, and that communities marked out as poor are not expected to be donors. In this research two examples were given of alternative constructions. At the Collingwood estate the Community Information Centre set up a clothing exchange. Residents donated clothing, children's toys and other small items which other residents were free to take. Staff reported that some items found their way through the exchange more than once. It was a popular and egalitarian system that was rarely misused.

The second example concerned local fundraising. The great majority of meetings on or about the estates concerned ways of attracting funding, but one of the community development workers organised events to collect donations for others. One of these followed the 2007 Victorian bushfires and another was in response to the tidal wave that struck Samoa in 2009. The primary need of the bushfire appeal was for money, which is clearly difficult for residents to raise, but the Samoan appeal allowed those unable to give money to still take part. The worker explained:

> With the Samoan [appeal] we were able to get donations of clothes so people didn't have to give money. They could give old clothes or old toys or whatever, and we had people coming from all different communities that came just to drop off clothes. It was really, really touching. It was beautiful.

She also spoke of weekly lunches that were organised by a fellow worker on the Richmond estate who was herself an estate resident:

> When we had the lunches over there, I felt so humbled by the fact that all these women were doing all this cooking for each other and for everyone else that I cooked one day because I was just like: 'Oh I just have to. I have to cook for you lovely people'. And it's beautiful because [the worker] has

> created this space where people can actually come with anything and share it (INF17).

These are normal activities of social membership which challenged the deficit model of unrelieved neediness that is part of the stigmatisation of poverty. The people who took part may well have benefitted as much or more than if they had been participants in an activity provided for them.

The capacity to contribute to a functional society can also be seen as an expression of citizenship. A useful metaphor is the distinction between expressions of citizenship that are primarily institutional, clustered around the vertical relationship between the state and individuals, and those that fit better within the concept of social citizenship located along the horizontal axis of relationships between people (Lister 2007). The reciprocity inherent in social citizenship is expressed in the provision of care and the way in which it becomes professionalised. The ethics of care was discussed in Chapter 5.

All of us are in need of care at different times in our lives and most are also givers of care. Knijn and Kremer (1997) use this common experience to argue from a feminist perspective for policies that contribute to an inclusive citizenship that takes account of the place of care:

> At some point within a citizen's life, people have to care for young children, and at other times close friends or elderly parents need personal care. Such demands of 'significant others' can nowadays only be fulfilled at the cost of what is perceived as the most vital aspect of social citizenship: labor participation. Hence, caregiving leads to a reduction of citizenship status. Rather than focusing on labor-participation alone, we argue for a conceptualization of citizenship which acknowledges that every citizen will be a caregiver sometime in their life: all human beings were dependent on care when they were young and will need care when they are ill, handicapped, or frail and old. Care is thus not a women's issue but a citizenship issue (1997:331).

Stigmatisation is a barrier to the mainstream political participation that is part of the relationship between the state and the individual. The fostering and maintenance of stigma is often not conscious or intentional; nor, as will be seen, is resistance always an act of conscious political intent. The

bureaucrats who devised the segmented waiting list for public housing did so to ensure that inadequate resources were allocated to the applicants in greatest need. It was not their intention to create concentrations of disadvantage. Other bureaucrats who subsequently worked to alleviate the problems that this caused needed to find a way of categorising and describing people in these concentrations in order to support their argument to the state treasury for public funds, yet in doing so they contributed to laying the groundwork for stigmatisation. As disability activists have discovered, it is not possible to argue for entitlement to differential funding while at the same time rejecting identification of difference. Residents who were moved to give what they could after hearing news of the bushfires in Victoria or the tidal wave in Samoa were not attempting to challenge the social construction of disadvantage, yet that is what they did.

In the prioritised waiting list for public housing, people being discharged from prison with no accommodation are in the highest category. This policy can have a significant impact on the composition of the population of an estate or a tower. In the account below, an informant captures the difference between the principle of the policy and its unintended consequences. It is a policy which had a direct effect on her tenancy. She explained:

> They have a housing worker [at the Neighbourhood Justice Centre], and of course the idea is that people are less likely to reoffend if they've got their housing and circumstances together. But I'm wondering would people be rehoused back into these towers, in which case I've got a sort of a, um, a bit of a conflict, perhaps. While I would – in general and certainly if I wasn't living here – I would think 'God, that's great. It's a great policy to rehouse people'. But living here as I do, I now think, well if we keep getting people who are having problems with the justice system housed here, I don't think that's particularly sustainable for the community (INF2).

This intersects with the account by the informant earlier in this section who believed that public housing tenants are expected to accept impositions that people who pay more taxes would not tolerate. Extending Gans' (1972) list of the positive functions of poverty, it could be said that one of the functions of public housing in Victoria is to shoulder a disproportionate

burden for the less attractive outcomes of some areas of policy, such as (in these cases) the containment of illegal drug activity and the rehousing of offenders.

Adaptation

Adaptation and resistance were revealed by this research in the form of adventurous interpretation of guidelines and regulations, selective reporting, providing misleading information, covert and sometimes overt non-compliance, or, particularly in the case of residents, the simple expedient of non-participation. When undertaken by professionals, these behaviours could be described as creative or innovative, qualities much admired in management literature. A manager in Yarra council provided an example of loose interpretation of guidelines:

> So we run a whole lot of innovative HACC programmes, [25] so café meals and little bits of our funding given to organisations, like the way we run specialist programmes with, you know, chronic alcoholics and what have you, with a wink and a nod from the regional bureaucrats, but nothing on the books (INF15).

Contextual adaption of this kind to meet the needs of the clients was widespread. Generally, broad programme intentions were not contested. Instead, disagreements arose over the methods, processes and capacity of programmes to respond to local needs. Informants gave many examples of this. A worker explained the operation of a locally created committee with which she was involved and the dilemmas that this highlighted for her work:

> So it's a malleable structure that is able to support residents to do what they actually want to do rather than what we think is good for them. But then there's a tension as well because in practice I'm paid to get residents involved in certain structures or whatever. So in practice I have to do something that I don't necessarily think is that beneficial. But, then I think well OK, what are my choices? Either work for… I'm getting paid, you know, essentially indirectly by a funding body that's saying we want you to do this and this, but if it means

[25] Home and Community Care, a federally funded programme that provides services for frail older people and younger people with a disability, as well as for their carers.

> I can also do this, this, this and this as well, then there's kind of a balance. I go OK, right, well it's not too destructive for people, it's… I mean, what do I do? Do I walk away or do I stay and do what good I can do in the meantime behind the scenes, which I probably can't put in a report, but are actually more meaningful for a community? (INF17)

The choices that the worker faced and her values and judgement were not recorded in any reports or evaluations. The types of judgements she made and the basis on which she made them were unknown to administrators, and the opportunity to learn from her experience was lost. Many front-line workers regularly made similar judgements, sometimes contrary to explicit instructions. The next account concerns two workers who had formed a strong and effective working relationship and had organised a number of trips for a group of Indigenous Australians in Yarra known as The Parkies. This was a group of people with whom most agencies had difficulty forming relationships. One of the workers explained his decision to circumvent programme guidelines:

> I've actually done two trips in the last month they don't even know that I've done. Now, I'd prefer to be open and honest with everyone in the community, but what I'm doing, when you're dealing with agencies that actually will try and stop you from doing it you get to a stage where you just don't tell them that you're doing it. Yeah, so even after the last trip I was told by Neighbourhood Renewal I shouldn't do any more trips with them. After Neighbourhood Renewal had gone down and congratulated me in front of them for doing the trip I was pulled to one side and they said 'Don't do them again'. They just don't think that it's part of my role as community development worker to be working with the Aboriginal community, and I strongly disagree with that point of view. But rather than constantly argue with them I just do it anyway. Which is probably not great in terms of…I'm sure managers would pull their hair out if they thought that was the kind of worker they were going to get. But I see the Aboriginal community on Smith Street and Brunswick Street all the time and they always say hello, and I know most of them and they're very friendly, and it allows you then to build relationships with them, and it also allows you to link other workers in and it saves them the five, six months of trying to break down the barriers because if you vouch for that worker then they tend to trust you (INF8).

As part of the effort to build a less professionally distant relationship, he and his co-worker decided to remove the traditional condition that the trips of this kind be free of alcohol, a condition on which other agencies insisted because of the high level of alcoholism in this community and the broader anxiety in white society about the enormous damage caused to Aboriginal communities by the introduction of alcohol. It was a particularly contentious issue in the City of Yarra at the time. In December 2009 the council passed a local law banning the drinking of alcohol in most public areas. Although denied by Yarra Council, this was widely believed to be in response to public drunkenness of local Aboriginals in Smith Street, Collingwood. A group of Smith Street traders had lobbied the council for some time to deal with what they saw as the problem. The worker explained that his and his colleagues' decision was based on wanting to show respect for the participants and to not make decisions on their behalf:

> So on the trips that we do if they want to drink they can drink, but we obviously don't buy them drink and one of the things is they have limited funds which is kind of good, so they can only buy, you know, a six pack or whatever it is. And I know a lot of people would be horrified at the thought that we would allow them to drink, but these guys are in their 50s and 60s. They're old enough to be my father and it's not my place to tell them. And then, if you ban alcohol then they're going to bring it anyway and then it's like a school camp. Except for you're 33 and they're 60 and you're going into a 60-year-old's bedroom and telling them 'Oh I've caught you drinking'. What are you going to do then? Do you try and take the alcohol off them? (INF8)

It was not only front-line workers who refused to follow instructions, instead adapting to local need and being guided by their experience and professional judgement. One of the informants had been responsible for establishing a Neighbourhood Renewal project on a broad-acre estate of mixed public and private housing in the north of Melbourne. She had previously been a community development worker at the Fitzroy estate, and I asked her about making the transition from that highly reflexive way of working to implementing a structured and relatively prescriptive programme.

> Theoretically yes, the model was that certain structures had to be set up, but it's how you interpreted that model that's really important. So if you were a community development worker and you had an open slate about how you interpreted a particular model, and you were given the leeway to do that, you would do it in the best way you know how to do it, yeah? So that's what I did at [the project].
>
> So I never went according to where you had to actually set up that board first with resident representatives sitting there with agencies. We set it up in [the project] in a very different way. We set up the working groups on the different issues, so we actually just invited residents to come along and have their say about safety, about their housing, about their health and wellbeing, and I was put under some pressure to set up the board within the year and I wouldn't do it. I refused. The working groups were working well and we continued to do that for more than a year, and then out of that we picked the rep…the residents themselves went through a system of nominating their representatives.
>
> So we had three representatives from the four working groups, and then from there we set up the board, but I went through a lot of time in actually ensuring that those residents were trained. You know, they knew how to advocate for themselves (INF4).

Hers was not a senior position and it is likely that the path she followed would not have been possible without the support of her manager who was also an informant. Speaking of the pressure that was brought to bear on him as a result of her progress, he said:

> Oh not only did [she] get a lot of flak for that, I got a bloody lot of flak for it too. So if she got kicked I got kicked twice (INF19).

He was one of three housing managers whom I interviewed. Their stories show that the exercise of discretion occurred throughout the implementation chain. All three gave accounts of using their initiative to solve the problems in the interests of their tenants. One of them spoke of the personal conflict and risk that this entailed:

> …bureaucracies can try and compartmentalise things. At a personal level I just think that people who think about those kind of things will always find a way around them to get some kind of policy outcome, or service practice, but they probably do that at some personal risk. I've heard it said that it doesn't matter

what your outcome is, provided you have the process correct, which I think is pretty ordinary, really, and not something that I ever found all that easy to deal with (INF19).

The second of the three described the sort of outcomes that could be achieved:

> …we used local discretion. I remember we did an upgrade of a little estate in Westgarth and there were eleven or twelve units there, and the local Cambodian community had come to me and said 'Look, we're finding it desperately difficult because our people don't want to live in the high-rise, aren't used to that. What they want to do is live in walk-ups or houses, but we need to get a sufficient number to go to a school so that we can get a teacher's aide.' So I said 'OK, where are you living?' So we worked out where we got a teacher's aide, we got enough people into this estate of eleven, I think we put eight Cambodian families in there and there were three Aussie families, and the Aussies said it was fantastic, you know, 'It's great to have those South Sea Islanders in there. At least they're not Indo-Chinese.' And nobody knew any of the difference. And that meant that school had, I think for four years or five years had this guy […] who I think was their teacher's aide, and it worked for a whole lot of Cambodians in the area as well as these eight, nine families, I can't remember the exact number. It was that stuff, but it was a point in time. And then we started to do it, just as I was leaving, with a lot of the Islamic communities. Like we did it with Kurds etcetera, etcetera, but we had to develop it (INF23).

The problem that local discretion creates for conventional management structures is that while it allows services to be much more responsive to local needs it also increases the risk of corruption, exploitation and a raft of other unacceptable practices. Without institutional recognition of the exercise of discretion it is not possible to impose effective oversight and accountability. Thus the freedom that is possible is moderated only by the moral framework and values or the individual or the immediate culture of which he or she is a part. The informant was quite aware of this:

> INF: The other thing we could do, for example, there was this absolute rule that you had to allocate in date order of application. Well sometimes that… we just knew it was a nonsense. People wouldn't take things. So we had to sort of use quite a lot of flexible approaches around that sort of stuff. We had to

get a good rationale around it, but it meant that we could go to somebody who would take the property. We started to house young people, which… there was a policy but no way of acting on it. Whereas, because of the autonomy of some of the, most of the regions, many people, even though they were eligible, never got housed. But we could break the mould on some of that sort of stuff.

RW: Isn't that one of the problems with that system though – the local autonomy excluding people.

INF: It's horrendous.

RW: You can just as easily exclude people as help people.

INF: Absolutely (INF23).

Many of the accounts in this chapter that are by or about professionals show people responding to situations that they faced in the field, presented with unanticipated contingencies and information not available to programme planners. The decisions they took were an interplay of their professional culture, their experience and skills, and their beliefs about what constituted reasonable behaviour towards other people, particularly people who were less fortunate than themselves. It is basis of this latter influence that is being explored here, how people confronted the ever present threat and injustice of poverty and how they adapted to the situations in which they encountered it.

There is no evidence in the data to suggest that inclinations towards either self-interest or compassion among government and non-government employees were much changed over the three decades covered by the informants' accounts. What the accounts show is that many of the behaviours that were commonplace thirty years ago are no longer acceptable. Clearly activities of the type described in the beginning of Chapter 5 required strong remedial action, but the minimisation of discretion also removed the freedom for staff to respond to the needs of clients. The corrective measures adopted by the public sector were effective because they were universal. Putting a stop to the perfidious and corrupt behaviour also had the effect of curtailing potentially beneficial local initiatives.

The third of the three housing managers interviewed recounted a similar story of using discretion. She spoke of a tower on an estate where she worked that had major tenancy problems and very low occupancy. She and her staff decided to alter the mix of tenancies to create a more diverse community in the tower. By her account, over four years the climate improved to such an extent that the tower became a sought-after location. This was a local decision using a very liberal interpretation of the housing allocation guidelines, to the point of occasionally assigning tenants to the wrong waiting list category to enable them to be housed. Such action, she said, would be much more difficult now. She said that the housing service had become inflexible and averse to taking responsibility:

> Much more – what could I say – more controlled, and less for front-line people to use their initiative. I think…from my point of view I think that is not a positive direction. I think what it has done, is it's become very transactional rather than people-focussed, so that people are required to fit within a particular box, and those boxes have been defined by someone somewhere. But when you're dealing with people, people don't fit nicely into boxes, and when that happens that can create conflict between the individuals. And it is very difficult to resolve that, because people, depending on who they are, will fall back on policies, processes: 'This I can't do anything about it, it's not my fault'. And that gives people a way out which really then has I think a negative impact on the sorts of services we should be supplying to clients (INF22).

The shift in emphasis from trust to regulation was apparent in the frequently voiced concern about the increasing imposition of risk management requirements. The worker quoted above who organised trips for the Aboriginal community in Collingwood spoke about the difficulty of accommodating the risk management policies of agencies and funding bodies:

> I think a lot of it's the risk management. Like, we did a trip, we took [an agency] worker because he heard about our trips and he wanted to come. And, very nice guy, a degree in social welfare or whatever, and we had a debrief afterwards and he just had a list of complaints. […] And he was saying, you know, like for example we went away for a weekend and he was concerned that he wasn't going to be able to ring his manager, because his manager didn't work at the weekends and we said to him 'Well, even if the manager was

> available he's four hours away, and if a situation starts what is he going to be able to do?' But for his risk management plan that was essential that he could ring his manager, and then that means that you can't do trips on the weekend and maybe weekends are the only time that suits them, so there's all these barriers to working with this community that's been created by risk management zealots and he didn't want to come on our trip again and I don't think [the agency] would come again (INF8).

It should not be thought that front-line staff were indiscriminately hostile to all bureaucratic requirements, but they assessed risk quite differently from staff whose organisational position and work requirements gave them a different perspective. An executive-level government manager said that the further he moved away from the front line as he was promoted, the more anxiety he felt about what might be happening there. This anxiety is heightened by the ineffectiveness of trying to remotely control complex situations. From a front-line perspective anxieties and confidence are differently managed. Some risks are perceived as more serious, some less, but the particular advantage of being situated in the front line is that one is in a position to assess what is happening and to act. This is shown in the following account from an estate-based programme co-ordinator about organising a community event for which a professional events manager had been hired:

> INF: …things that have to be done to satisfy the bureaucrats are done by those who can cope with those sorts of complex bureaucratic processes, like filling out a huge thick events registration form for Council. You know, it's about 20 pages thick. And you have to bullshit your way through it.
>
> RW: Yes, but that takes skill.
>
> INF: Somebody has to bullshit their way through it, but it takes a certain skill, yes. Well, you know what I mean by bullshit. You have to see what it is that you're doing that will actually fit the category they're talking about, be a bit creative. And where there are real gaps you have to make sure they're filled. I mean, there are real safety issues. There's no doubt about that, but the event is going much better because we've had participation by somebody who knows how to run events. It's been really good. We've got a ground plan with things written on it. We've got a running sheet. You know, these things are really useful.

RW: So are community members learning from that?

INF: Yes, yes they are. They are. It comes and goes. I mean, they'll learn and they'll realise what wonderful stuff it is. They won't always implement it of course because it's a real change of culture to implement systematic planning processes, but they've seen that it's valuable and they've seen how to do it (INF3).

A front-line worker with long experience in community development and youth work on the estates spoke of a continuum of regulation, control and trust, and of the high level of trust that he had been able to build. Here he is speaking of the relationship he built with young people and their parents:

…in the middle [of the continuum], where they know who you are a bit more, and they know, they may even know that you've got kids or family. They begin to know you as a person because that works best. That builds a trust to understand deeper what these people are going through, what you're going through and how best to work. So there's a bit more give and take here. To probably the very, very last end where you're actually almost a part of that community where you might, as I've done, take their children on camp and you're all sleeping in tents in close proximity. There's a lot of trust, the parents aren't there, and that's probably the furthest end (INF9).

The informant describes an entirely informal accountability located within the relationship between the parties and based on the close knowledge they had of each other. The situation in which this occurred was not clear from the interview, but taking the above account at face value it is very unlikely that any agency would have condoned his actions. The worker went well beyond conventional guidelines for overnight camps with young people to establish a locally negotiated form of accountability that was acceptable to the parties involved. In this situation trust is a form of local knowledge.

Relying only on the information given in the interview, this appears to be a situation of considerable risk. It is now widely known that trust of this kind is easily abused and often difficult to uncover. At the time of writing the Australian government had launched a Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

From an administrative perspective accountability is primarily procedural, but the interviews drawn on here show that trust is a significant factor. The

worker quoted above continued his account to reflect that being located in close proximity to the residents was essential for accountability. The following extract (already used to illustrate a different point in Chapter 5) demonstrates the importance of being exposed and vulnerable, or, to use the language of governance, open and transparent. He explained that being constantly accessible

> …is usually the safeguard for residents. They can come right to you, complain, they know all your managers. […] My experience of that is that you're trying to keep as close as you can so then you are, those levels of accountability can come in place. Like in an African village, or in a Vietnamese place or Chinese place, if it's a close proximity and everyone is in there together then you can bring accounts by watching and being. […] So you try and become part of the community, and then that's their safeguard. That's how you are accountable. Your actions will be around and everybody will know about it within a few hours even of you being there, of decisions or things that were made or things that were done (INF9).

The informant responded to the poverty he encountered and the demands of the organisations for which he worked by moving closer to the community and increased his vulnerability by weakening his links with prospective employers.

Commenting on the high counters, glass screens and procedural barriers to access in housing offices on the high-rise estate, all of which were responses to concerns by staff about their vulnerability, a former housing estate manager suggested that such measures could increase rather than reduce risk. She explained that:

> That's not friendly. There's no trust there. There's no engagement there. What it's telling you is that we don't trust you. We're going to be this side and you're going to be that side and we're not on the same page.
>
> It's a bad management style. If people can see what people are doing they're less likely to get agitated. They can see you're busy. They'll wait for you. They can see what's happening. They don't think there's people sitting behind there doing nothing so they get agitated if they're kept waiting. And it's much safer.

> I think it requires you to trust the people you're working with and to have a consistent message of 'We're here to serve' (INF22).

Conclusion

The work by Lipsky and by others who built on his research, described in Chapter 2, painted a picture of the front-line of policy implementation as an open, unregulated space, a frontier where the authority of government to have its intentions carried out was weak. The evidence from the interviews shows that this open space remains in place in spite of increasing efforts to enforce control and compliance, and that over the last three decades it has been the site of behaviour ranging from criminal activity to imaginative initiatives by residents and agency staff to improve the estates.

This research has also shown that while this space may be relatively weakly controlled by administrative regulation, it is often quite strongly regulated by cultural norms and the social philosophies of individuals. For some informants, these norms and beliefs were sufficiently strong for them to risk losing their employment. Some residents were moved to actively engage with the threatening environment of the illegal drug trade. This suggests that it would be productive for bureaucracies to develop the skills and inclination to move beyond the current practices of engagement, such as seen those in Chapter 5, to the more democratic practice of partnerships. The distinction between the two is expanded upon in the following chapter.

Returning to the questions with which this chapter began, it can be seen that there are a variety of ways in which the state relates to poor communities. The concept of citizenship is a valuable device for reconceptualising the nature of these relationships, particularly those that develop between citizens. Relationships of care run more intuitively along this horizontal axis than the vertical axis between the state and the community, and are reinforced by familiarity. Citizenship expressed in the relationship between the individual and the state is comparatively abstract and fragile, held in place more by principle than sentiment.

The strong current of subjectivity that emerged in Chapter 6 is reinforced in the accounts from residents and field officers. From their standpoint the state made decisions that significantly affected them and in which they had no say. Their response in many cases was to circumvent or ignore these decisions. As so often throughout this study, the responses depended largely on the individuals involved, individuals whose beliefs and opinions were shaped by the their experiences. People who live and work in disadvantaged communities for extended periods experience poverty not as an abstract, disembodied concept, but as an effect upon themselves and others. They are speaking from relationships of care that can evoke strong visceral responses. The next chapter examines more closely the vertical relationship between the state and community.

Chapter 8 The frontier of the state

Introduction

To this point, the many different aspects of a set of relationships between public housing tenants in their roles as members of different communities in public housing estates and professionals in their roles as agents of the state have been considered. In turning to consider the fourth sub-question of the research, which asks what these relationships reveal about the nature of the state, this chapter takes a broader view to examine the roles of all these players as citizens.

As part of this consideration the chapter revisits the ideas of community and participation, examining how their deployment as tools of governance shapes the definition and enactment of citizenship. The Collingwood Community Information Centre, referred to in Chapter 6, is re-examined for what it reveals about how the construction of citizenship in a disadvantaged community is managed by the state. This is not a construction that stands alone, but one that is constantly cut across and distorted by the inequalities of class. Although class has been erased from the policy language that has grown up around community and participation, the quality of the engagement of the state with communities runs along the contours of economic and social divisions.

The citizenship of disadvantaged individuals and communities is mediated through the activities of a variety of non-government and commercial organisations that are now a substantial part of the face of the state.[26] These organisations have a pivotal role as translators, interpreting the state to the communities with which they are contracted to work, while repackaging and marketing their narratives to mainstream audiences.

[26] For example, services such as security, cleaning and maintenance for the estates were contracted to commercial companies through competitive tender. It was a condition of the contracts that the security and cleaning contractors recruit a proportion of their employees from the estate residents.

In Chapter 6 the association between welfare and participation was examined, showing how participation has been refashioned as a bureaucratic technique to assist the implementation of welfare policies. Here that association is widened to include older forms of participation, and changing notions of welfare and citizenship.

The great disparity in scale between the institution of the state and local housing communities means the two do not fit comfortably together. In attempting to accommodate this, the chapter revisits ground previously covered, what Clifford Geertz describes as

> ...a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structures in such a way as to bring both into view simultaneously (Geertz 1983:69)

Frontiers

The metaphor of the frontier introduced in Chapter 2 is a useful concept for envisaging the nature of the edges of the state as seen in this and the preceding chapter. Frontiers are always problematic for governments, whether they are national boundaries distant from metropolitan centres, or are the limits of the reach of state authority and influence. Both literal and figurative frontiers are places of translation where the certainties of meaning that are axiomatic at the centre lose their distinction and must compete with unfamiliar voices.

Frontiers have multiple characteristics. Magdelena Naum describes frontiers as fragmented, ambiguous landscapes, realms of negotiation and remaking that are 'distinguished by fluidity in social and cultural spheres and by the multiple loyalties and identities of their inhabitants' (2010:102). As we saw in recollections of the Richmond estate and its environment in the early 1980s, frontiers are also lawless places where narratives are built of violence and heroism. It is this fluidity and ambiguity that characterises the problem of policy implementation at the interface of the state and the community. Naum writes that frontiers are places

> …where negotiations take place, identities are reshaped and personhoods invented. They are landscapes created by discourses and dialogues of multiple voices, not only those belonging to the people that actually live in the frontier areas but those of administrators and authorities located outside of this zone. [Frontiers are] at times disruptive and tense landscapes whose inhabitants may have agendas of their own, incompliant with the official political goals. Translation and cultural bilingualism are involved and required from all parties caught up in the politics and life in the frontier zone (Naum 2010:101).

Frontiers are also places of myth-making, of inaccurate record-keeping and confected accounts tailored to the expectations of other sensibilities, the accuracy of which may be neither pragmatic nor desirable. The value of the metaphor of the frontier is that it brings a disparate collection of activities, beliefs, values and cultural practices together in a space that is both fixed and transitory.

Citizenship

The primary interest in this chapter is in forms of citizenship that are found in the relationship between the individual or community and the state – in this case the Australian state. Australian citizenship was brought into being as a legal concept in 1949 by the Australian Citizenship Act 1948, prior to which Australians had been British subjects (Sawyer, Abjorensen & Larkin 2009). However, Australia's identity as an independent nation is more closely linked with the federation of the self-governing colonial states in 1901, and it is the practice of citizenship in this context rather than its legal meaning that is relevant here.

Barbalet (1996) writes that Australian citizenship is by international standards a relatively weak concept. It is not mentioned in the Constitution, where Australians are described as subjects rather than citizens, because the nation was established as a dominion of the British Empire. Subjectivity is entrenched in the Australian Constitution. Many of the civil and social rights that are attached to citizenship in other countries are conferred in Australia through entitlement to permanent residency. With regard to the association between citizenship and welfare policy, Frank

Castles (1994) conducted an influential study in 1985 of the Australian working class and welfare arrangements, and found a similar weakness. He argued that the operation of the industrial relations system, protectionism and the regulation of labour supply through controlled migration led to a minimum wage that served as a functional alternative to citizenship rights. Although not referring to citizenship, Rob Watts (1997) found Castles' focus on the power of the labour movement much too narrow, pointing to a wider collection of political and social actors that included the non-Labor parties, women's groups such as the Australian Women's National League, philanthropic organisations and networks of mutual aid groups.

In post-Second World War Australia, citizenship became progressively constructed around community and domesticity. With the election of the conservative Liberal Party/Country Party coalition in 1949 the political sentiment turned strongly against any initiatives of the welfare state that the previous Labor government had begun to construct during the last years of the war.

In place of the narratives of nationhood, Robert Menzies, the new prime minister, saw the family and home as both the wellspring of citizenship and the place where it was expressed. The home was the source of all other civic virtues. Even patriotism 'springs from the instinct to defend and preserve our own homes' (Menzies 1942). His ideal of citizenship was based on the middle-class values of independence and self-reliance, home ownership, frugality, and providing for children (Murphy 2009).

As Murphy goes on to explain, Menzies' reframing of the concept of citizenship marginalised the idea of rights and obligations arising from membership of the nation. This citizenship was not expressed in reciprocal relations between citizens and the state, but as relationships between like-minded citizens and self-regulation in the collective interest. Gone was the solidarity of the recent war, which, along with the rising emphasis on individuality, weakened the immediate post-war reconstruction. Murphy wrote that Australians

> …could see themselves as citizens within domesticity, and in like-minded communities of their neighbours, but the public realm was as much marked by

> distance and indifference as forms of civility. This left public life reduced, except in the forms of community action and self-help, and it left citizenship as something constrained by private commitments, … rather than as something constituted by engagement in the public realm (Murphy 2009:29)

This construction of citizenship that Murphy locates in the 1950s is echoed in the current discourse of the devolution of responsibility from the state to local communities that was discussed in Chapter 6. The difference between the 1950s and the present is the rise of the ideology of the market as the preferred mechanism of resource allocation (Swyngedouw 2005), but the emphasis on individualised responsibility, either at a personal or community (but not regional or national) level, is consistent. The confluence of citizenship and the rationality of the market has worked to marginalise anything larger than local solidarities. Nikolas Rose wrote that it is through this process that:

> The economic fates of citizens within a national territory are uncoupled from one another, and are now understood and governed as a function of their own particular levels of enterprise, skill, inventiveness and flexibility (Rose 1996:339).

In the UK the discourse of community as the site of citizenship was extensively used by the Labour Party which formed the national governments from 1997 to 2010. Drawing on the writings of Anthony Giddens and using the rubric of the Third Way, Labour set about locating community at the heart of its political philosophy. Its emphasis was on active citizenship, an idea that had become established in the preceding Conservative government. John Harris explained that:

> The reappraisal of citizenship which was set in train by the New Right began with 'active citizenship', promoted from 1988 to 1990 in the last stage of Thatcherism. The active citizenship initiative was launched by Douglas Hurd, the then Home Secretary, and tilted the balance between atomic market individualism and social bonds of obligation in the direction of the latter (2002:270).

The principal motivation for the re-orientation of policy was the desire to contain welfare expenditure. It was hoped that volunteerism could be mobilised to occupy areas of service provision that government wanted to

vacate. The responsibility of family and community members for the care of others was emphasised. Looking after oneself, being independent and caring for others were highly valued. The responsibility for care that had been progressively assumed by the welfare state was being pushed back to the family and community.

The distinction between the vertical and horizontal categories of citizenship described in Chapter 5 reaches the limit of its usefulness when it masks the inter-relatedness of different forms of citizenship. Writers such as Knijn & Kremer (1997), Prokhovnik (1998) and Lister (2007) theorise forms of social citizenship that emphasise the importance of inclusiveness. As with the closely related idea of community, institutional citizenship rests on inclusion and exclusion. Legal interpretations of citizenship set out rules for who is or is not a citizen and the rights and responsibilities that attach to this. It is citizenship as a social and cultural practice that is relevant to the participatory activities described in this chapter. In this construction, inclusion and exclusion are not matters of definition, but indicators which show that the opportunities to participate in the life of the nation are very unequally distributed. The success of public policy interventions should be judged by the extent to which they address this inequality.

Lister sets out four values of inclusive citizenship developed from research with marginalised communities in developing countries. These values are justice, particularly with regard to fairness; recognition of the intrinsic worth of all human beings; a measure of self-determination that allows people to exercise some degree of control over their lives; and solidarity, which can be thought of as a horizontal view of citizenship that pays more attention to the relationships between citizens than to the relationship between the state and the individual (2007:50).

At the heart of these values is the principle of universality. There is no hierarchy of access, no assessment of who is more or less deserving or qualified. The writers in this vein of citizenship stress its recognition of difference and the importance of symbolism as well as formal rights. Judith Bessant (2002) notes that it is precisely this inclusiveness that is being

eroded by the language of mutual obligation and its imposition of an exclusive construction of difference.

Many of the barriers to participation and recognition in these terms can only be seen from the perspectives of those attempting to negotiate their way through them. This can be seen at work in the examples of the Collingwood Community Information Centre and the Planning for the Future process cited in this and previous chapters. The administrative solutions to the need for professional skills in both cases were solved in the most expedient way possible, by excluding residents from governance, or at least from being able to make decisions of substance. From the perspective of the bureaucrats who made these decisions, the primary issue was their accountability for the spending of public money.

It is unlikely that they would have seen their action as presenting even a symbolic barrier to the expression of citizenship. Those who were interviewed expressed deep concern for the welfare of public housing residents and worked to get what resources they could for them. Two spoke of having lived in public housing. They were bureaucrats in local and state governments and would have recognised immediately that the residents whom they excluded from the committees in question were entitled to stand for election to the more consequential institutions of the local council or state parliament. In the elected levels of government the problem of lack of technical expertise is overcome by providing the legislature with a professional executive. Had this situation been understood through the lens of citizenship and the importance of residents being able to participate in the effective governance of organisations which directly affected them, the problem might have been approached differently.

In Australia, the link between economic participation, welfare and citizenship is expressed through the concept of social exclusion and inclusion, another policy initiative imported from the UK. The Victorian Neighbourhood Renewal Program launched in 2002 was an example of the state government's interpretation of the concept of social inclusion. It was contemporary with the Social Inclusion Initiative established in 2002 by the

South Australian Labor government (Hayes, Gray & Edwards 2008), although neither 'inclusion' nor 'exclusion' were ever used by Victorian Labor governments. In a 2004 statement to the Victorian parliament concerning the progress made by the programme, the Minister for Housing said that while the Victorian economy had grown strongly,

> …not all Victorians have benefitted equally from these improvements. […] One result is a continuing concentration of poverty in particular neighbourhoods (State of Victoria 2004:7).

Partnership

The parliamentary statement painted a picture of an energetic government working for, and in partnership with, its electorate. This study is located in the gap between stated objectives and observable outcomes. Government intentions are carried along well-worn bureaucratic paths which do not always coincide with the aspirations of governments and their policies. The resulting tussle is captured in the following reflection from a retired housing manager:

> If I look at the way policy or practice is developed, in my experience it seems you have government, then you have head office, then you have regional offices in this case, then you have local area offices or housing offices and you have various disciplines in those housing offices from the functional housing activities – bricks and mortar – to the community development, community building, social exclusion processes and policies, and impacting across the top of those is the policy of the state housing authorities, which concentrates disadvantage and disability in locations, and then those same agencies go to those people and say 'Well, now we want you to build these wonderful communities' and that is really quite a contradiction. […] I would also argue that government is interested in empowering people to be part of the solution, but only so far (INF19).

People who are dependent on the state for their housing, and often for their income as well, are likely to be reticent about challenging their provider. The different subjectivity of citizens who are public housing residents is emphasised by the weight of the state processes described in this account, and by the expectation that they must then take responsibility for

mitigating the problems caused by these processes. A similar view was expressed by a local government bureaucrat, but when he spoke of government he referred to the Victorian government. He did not see local government as part of the state.

> I tend to think that when government speaks of participation it's about managing risk and managing the image and it's all about the spin, because government can make a decision and then people will jump up and down about it, whereas if they've had people involved in it they say, 'Well, the community said this', but they'll massage it in a way that suits what government wants. I think the participation of government is a two-edged sword. I think there's genuine concern there, because yes, they want the voice of the people because they want to minimise the flak that they get if they haven't, but then the government doesn't hand over or devolve decision-making very easily (INF1).

The data in this study can be interpreted to show that the relationship between the state and the community is not as fixed as these two accounts indicate. What the relationship is attempting to deal with and the nature of the parties involved are also significant factors.

A senior manager from the City of Yarra characterised the council as needing to learn to negotiate and compromise because of its relative lack of power. He explained:

> …we're just not sophisticated, not, you know, capable enough to actually control the environment like you can do from a federal government perspective, or from state government to a lesser extent, but I don't think we'd even want to (INF15).

He went on to speak of the challenge of working with the unusual demographic profile of the area. As noted in Chapter 4, Yarra is Victoria's most socially and economically diverse community. It contains a large and very disadvantaged population as well as substantial affluence. It has more high and more low-income households than the Melbourne average (City of Yarra 2013). Thus council officers can find themselves dealing with well-educated and resourced communities and with communities with multiple disadvantages. The informant explained that in Yarra

> …if you go out with anything, whether it's a policy, whether it's a building, whether it's a proposal, it's likely to be contested on a range of levels, but the

> biggest one is where they take it off you, they look at it, they deconstruct it and go 'Oh, we can do that better than you', and they put it back together again and give it back, saying 'That's better'. And it's that thing, the expert or the managerial approach doesn't work here (INF15).

To consider these two extracts it is necessary to step aside briefly to examine the nature of partnerships as a component of public policy implementation. The background of these partnerships and the ways they were experienced is discussed in Chapters 2 and 6, but their place in the relationship between communities and the state needs closer examination, particularly with regard to the functioning of power. Power is not a prominent feature of the considerable amount of research and comment concerning the use of partnerships in estate and community improvement programmes, which is surprising given that these arrangements involve significant imbalances of institutional power (Hastings 1999).

Partnerships have been imported from the private sector into the community sector through the conduit of managerialism, which assumes that the public, private and community sectors can all be managed in the same way (Rix 2005). Partnerships formed for mutual benefit between business owners are not the same as partnerships that are established by governments and community members and organisations invited to join. The former are commercial agreements whereas the latter are formed within the framework of civic governance, and the rhetoric of collaboration and joined-up government. Failing to understand the nature of this difference and the complexities inherent in partnerships can cause serious dilemmas for the parties involved (Rowe & Devanney 2003). It is notable that none of the partnerships encountered in this research was initiated by a community group or organisation. Community members participated as invited guests.

John Diamond (2004) explained the nature of this relationship in the context of local regeneration initiatives in the UK, describing the way local bureaucrats' actions are determined by the programmes they are employed to implement:

> …local regeneration managers occupy a role which is akin to that of a 'broker'. S/he negotiates the needs of the 'external' world […] to the local neighbourhood. They do not undertake the reverse role. Their reference point is the local government office in their region or their partnership board. It is not the local community forum or local activists. The space for innovation or change (even if they wished to occupy it) is so small as to be invisible (2004:180).

There is a sharp contrast between this description and the partnerships of common interest that were formed to oppose the Brooks Crescent slum clearance programme described in Chapter 6. The difference rests on the locus of power and the way this defines the purpose of the partnership. In a commercial partnership the locus of the type of power on which it is based is within the boundaries of the arrangement, and there is agreement on its purpose. In a partnership between the state and a community the locus of institutional power is external and there is less likely to be agreement about purpose. From the perspective of the bureaucracy the purpose of the partnership is to facilitate the implementation of the programme for which they are responsible, whereas for the community members this is secondary. At a systemic level this contradiction is magnified. Writing of the type of partnerships that have arisen in community development programmes in Ireland, Powell and Geoghegan observed that:

> There is a profound contradiction at the heart of partnership – the pursuit of social inclusion in market-led economies that widen social inequality as an integral function of wealth creation (2006:140).

Returning to the above two extracts from informants, in the situations described by the local government manager the locus of power was within the meeting between the local government and its community. Neither side had access to a more substantial power that would shift the balance of power outside. In meetings between state and community organisations the institutional power available to bureaucrats lies outside the meeting. The only option for community organisations involved if they wish to balance this power is to reach for the informal power of activism and protest. Continuing his account, the informant reflected on the differences of power and capability between groups in the community represented by

the local government, and the challenges this presented to the local bureaucracy:

> I think that there are, within the public housing area, there are sections within that community that have an expectation that they will be heard as well, and that's a good thing, but probably something which is, not marginal, but certainly within smaller sections of that community. And part of the thing is how do you actually unlock the others to actually feel that they can participate? (INF15)

In the final extract from this informant's long reflection, the process of policy formation that he describes is the product of the local government having to adapt to working with a predominantly well-resourced and capable community:

> …we've got a reasonably prescriptive process in terms of the development of policy. So it's about understanding the need, review what's initiating the thing, a bit of a lit review, a bit of what went well/what didn't go well, moving into almost a lit review/environmental scan. We then try and use a say 'Here's what the issues are, tell us what you think'. We then come back to a bit of a framework plan, you know; 'What do you reckon about this?' and then come back with a more formed one. It can take quite a long period of time. I actually don't mind the length of time and the effort that goes into it because you tend to get good engagement, good conversations, and you get an opportunity for the councillors to come along for the ride. Often [the issue] is just one thing on their agenda, so to actually expect them to be able to assimilate all of the things about a policy in, say, a three or four month truncated process is probably a bit too much. To actually allow the time for it to come back in a couple of iterations means that they're being educated. They've got time to talk to people about it. They've got time to have their own internal dialogues within the council itself (INF15).

Gatekeeping

The iterative nature of this process is enabled by the proximity of the local government to its community, but this proximity also enables gatekeeping by local bureaucrats that would be difficult to sustain on a larger scale. Two

examples of this were revealed by this research, the first from the interview data and the second from the research process itself.

The concept of social gatekeeping in urban sociology can be traced to Ray Pahl's 1969 essay *Urban Theory and Social Research* (Knox & Pinch 2010). Writing about the allocation of public housing in the UK, Pahl described gatekeepers as

> …those who control or manipulate scarce resources and facilities such as housing managers, estate managers, local government officers, property developers, representatives of building societies and insurance companies, youth employment officers, social workers, magistrates, councillors and so on (Pahl 1970:220).

This intersects with Lipsky's work of the same period, which identified gatekeeping behaviour among similar professions in the US (described in Chapter 2). Pahl's list of functionaries is also similar to Lipsky's examples of front-line bureaucrats.

The argument here is that this is a result of the privatisation and contractualism that has been introduced to the Victorian public sector through the separation between the purchasing and the provision of services (Costar & Economou 1999). In the logic of the market, the competitive allocation of funding for goods and services to people with low incomes creates an incentive for service providers to protect their client base. By controlling access to the clients an organisation is able to position itself as an intermediary to whom funding is paid. In both examples the organisations involved – the advisory committee and the housing authority – were able to adopt a proprietorial attitude to public housing residents that would be unlikely to be accepted by their wealthier neighbours.

In recognition of the high level of inequality in Yarra, the council's community grants programme was intentionally biased towards disadvantaged groups. Thus the majority of the grants were given to the residents of the housing estates (INF1). Community groups on the estates applied along with all other groups directly to the local government, but around 2007 the estate advisory committees of agencies and residents that were established by the housing authority sought greater planning control

over this funding to ensure that it better represented the priorities which they had developed. Community groups on the estates were strongly encouraged to submit their applications to the relevant estate governance committee for approval before they were submitted to the council. Thus the engagement of public housing residents with their local government was mediated by a committee established by the state government, a condition which was not applied to all other residents in Yarra.

The second example is described in this extract from my project journal. It refers to the establishment of a new Neighbourhood Renewal project at the Flemington housing estate:

> On one estate I set out to arrange participant observation of a newly established committee of residents and agencies. I sent the committee a project description and was then invited to attend a meeting to make a presentation. This was well received and all but one person agreed that they were happy for me to observe the meetings. The one person who didn't was a [state housing authority] manager who asked for more detail so he could brief his manager. Two weeks later my supervisor was informed that the research could not proceed and that any research on the estate must be assessed by the local manager and referred to the relevant committee for approval.
>
> As a result of my approach to the estate the local health centre came to know of my research, liked the project and invited me to observe a health promotion project they were developing, which included residents. The project was delayed several times and it was a few months later that I attended some of the initial project meetings. At this point the project manager who had invited me to participate was told that I was not to be included as the funding was provided by the same department who had rejected my approach to them. The manager was very apologetic and embarrassed.
>
> Initially I overlooked this episode as being insignificant to the larger project. I was seeing it from a programme manager's perspective as a minor obstacle that I needed to find a way around with the least effort. Looking at it now through a researcher's eyes I think it reveals a great deal about the environment I am researching, and that it is all the more instructive for being so commonplace.

The literature concerning gatekeeping has maintained its focus on the distribution and control of urban resources to people with low incomes. In

the two examples above, and particularly in the second, there is another dimension. In the first situation there was already a resource allocation system in place, but the advisory committee interposed itself between the estate residents and the city council. In the second situation there were no resources of this type to be allocated. The resources that were being controlled were public housing residents.

Power

The institutional and social structures in which this research took place suggests that power could be expected to conform to the popular understanding of power resting with the state. In many ways it did. The public housing communities are composed of people affected by multiple disadvantages who are dependent on the state for their security of accommodation. The four estates where this research took place are entirely public housing and hence owned and operated by the state. The majority of residents are also dependent on the state for their income and for the provision of services that are provided to them at little or not cost.

Power was also exercised in ways that are less visible. One of the central concepts of Foucault's analysis of power is 'problematisation', a term which he used to describe the process by which issues of concern are introduced to, or kept out of, the public arena (Bacchi 2012). Foucault described problematisation as

> …the totality of discursive or non-discursive practices that introduces something into the play of true and false, and constitutes it as an object for thought (whether in the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis, etc.) (Foucault 1988:257)

Foucault was concerned with how and why, at particular times and under particular circumstances, certain phenomena are constructed as problems to be analysed, classified and regulated, while others are not. His method was to examine the everyday practices that had become so familiar that their embedded power was invisible. 'Rather than attempting to demystify current historical conditions' Deacon wrote, 'Foucault sought to examine

phenomena that are taken for granted, largely because they are too obvious and superficial' (Deacon 2000:127).

A 2012 discussion paper released by the Victorian Minister for Housing demonstrated the power of the government to frame a problem in its own terms. The paper ignored the social case for public housing and even its economic benefits, building its argument instead around a simple commercial analysis:

> The gap between rental revenue and operating costs (the structural deficit) is increasing and was over $56 million in 2011. This is estimated to continue to increase unless reform is undertaken. Critically, as the Auditor-General highlighted, this financial situation now presents a considerable threat to the provision of public housing in the future (KPMG 2012:2).

Its purpose was to make what had become the status quo appear to be immutable. The paper went on to reason that public housing was therefore not only an unreasonable drain on state finances, but was also unfair because people on low incomes who were not able to get access to public housing were forced to pay considerably higher rent in the private sector. In essence the report served to further marginalise an already marginalised population, to question the legitimacy of public housing itself, while ignoring the manifestly inadequate funding provided by the state. Thus the government constructed the problem to suit its purpose. Public housing residents and their advocates were not powerful enough to effectively counter this strategy. In her book, *Policy Paradox,* Deborah Stone argues that the naming and definition of problems

> …is never simply a matter of defining goals and measuring our distance from them. It is rather the *strategic representation* of situations. Problem definition is a matter of strategic representation because there is no objective description of a situation; there can only be portrayals of people's experiences and interpretations. Problem definition is strategic because groups, individuals and government agencies deliberately and consciously design portrayals so as to promote their favoured course of action (Stone 1988:106).

The Planning for the Future project cited above resulted in a quite different outcome from a process that began with the same control of problem definition. At the outset of the project it appeared that the power was held

by the local and state government agencies organising the meeting, but this shifted. The residents' antipathy and eventual hostility, unplanned and unorganised, was sufficient to lead to abandonment of the project. In this case it was the bureaucrats who found themselves with insufficient power to stem the tide of resentment.

In the literature concerning power that was surveyed in Chapter 2 there is disagreement over whether power exists only in situations of contest. While some argue that the visibility of power in observable contests is necessary evidence for its existence, Lukes was shown to disagree with this condition, writing that it is 'highly unsatisfactory to suppose that power is only exercised in situations of such conflict' (Lukes 2005:27). Indoctrination, for example, may not give rise to conflict or grievance. Lukes' three-dimensional concept of power takes account of the ways in which potential issues are kept out of politics, which may result in the absence of observable conflict. These potential issues may never come to be, yet it is the exercise of power that keeps them out of play. For Lukes, the shaping of discussion promoting certain possibilities while masking others is unarguably the operation of power. Thus in the discussion paper cited above, public discussion of the level of state funding of public housing, or whether the state ought to take greater responsibility for ensuring that all people living in Victoria are adequately housed regardless of their means, was effectively silenced by the terms in which the problem was framed. Lukes describes this situation as a latent conflict between the interests of those exercising power and the interests of those whom they exclude, adding a moral dimension when he asks:

> …is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial? (2005:28)

This stands on similar ground to the concept of preference adaptation, as it has been developed by Nussbaum (2003) and Sen (1999) in their capability approach to entitlement that was outlined in Chapter 7. Nussbaum's

starting point asserts the legitimacy of universal norms. She draws distinctions between different things that people desire, judging that 'some objects of desire are more central than others for political purposes, more indispensible to a human being's quality of life'. She continues down this path when she states that 'some existing preferences are actually bad bases for social policy' (Nussbaum 2001:68). In support of her argument she cites examples of women in poor countries who stay in abusive and exploitative situations because these conditions are so normalised that the women are unaware of any violation of rights, law or justice. They are not in a position to express a preference for anything different.

These are useful concepts for thinking about the imbalance of power between the state and a public housing community. It is not to suggest that public housing residents or members of any poor community should be thought of as being in positions of unrelieved subjectivity or powerlessness. We have seen examples of the capabilities these communities can muster. Rather it is a reminder of the need for caution by professionals involved in these asymmetric relationships.

A feature of the informants' accounts was their tendency to speak of power as being held by others. They spoke of themselves as having less power, and of others as having more power, than observation suggested was the case. The departmental director who denied the power to co-opt the agendas of local groups to achieve policy aims, the local government staff who spoke of the power of the local community which they faced, the public housing residents who spoke of the power of the government all characterised themselves as subjects of the power of others. The only power that informants admitted to possessing was the power of resistance, never the power of coercion or enforcement. This was true of residents and agency staff. For example, residents and front-line workers spoke of the power of the state housing authority, yet the organisation of the local housing office foyers indicated that the residents were seen as a threat. Employees worked behind an enclosed counter that was designed to be too high to jump over and above which there were glass screens similar to those provided for bank tellers. Behind the counter was a high wall that

prevented clients seeing into the office. The door from the foyer into the office could only be opened from the inside, and in one of the foyers staff had used red adhesive tape to mark a line across the floor and posted instructions to residents to wait behind the line until called to the counter. This was not the only model available to the bureaucracy.

The Neighbourhood Justice Centre beside the Collingwood estate is a community justice pilot project built around a court. Community access is a critical component of the project's design and operation, including to the courtroom. As it is a pilot, it was able to avoid many of the security standards that applied to the construction of other courts in Victoria. There is no airport-style security at either the entrance to the building or the court, the counters are lower than standard and have no glass screens, and it is possible to enter the courtroom from the front entrance unimpeded.

From a local perspective it is not clear whether one is seeing the power of the state at work or seeing the result of local politics and personalities. From a more distant perspective all these people can appear to be part of the state. They carry the influence of the state into the communities where they live and work. Although government programmes may be locally reinterpreted and depart extensively from their original intention, they are partly enabled through the engagement of these actors.

The study found a collection of actors with varying degrees of attachment to the state who may or may not have identified themselves as belonging to the state. Some were employed by government on short-term insecure contracts that did not foster any sense of attachment. Some were employed on similar contracts to do similar work by agencies sub-contracted to government. Many people cycled between the two in the unstable environment of short-term project funding. Some in this study were residents who volunteered their time and who had no contractual obligations. All were found working together on the realisation of government programmes and policies. Policies come to the ground in places where it is not clear what is part of the state and what is not.

Unintended outcomes

In Chapter 6 two cases of the relationship between government and the community were discussed at length: the Collingwood Community Information Centre (CCIC) and the large-scale community planning process that became known as Planning for the Future. To this point in the chapter the state has been referred to as a single entity, whereas in Chapter 2 it was argued that when seen from the small scale of local programme implementation, the state that is encountered by citizens fragments into a collection of agencies, local services, offices and individuals. Both cases showed the difficulty faced by the public sector when it attempted to co-ordinate activity across these different components.

With regard to the CCIC, this was true even though all who were involved wanted to find a solution that would support the residents' initiative, yet there were deep structural constraints on the way decisions could be made and resources allocated. When speaking of this case, a director within a Victorian government department explained the effect of the division of authority between different levels of government that is an outcome of the seven sovereign governments of the Australian federation:

> …it's a style of government that's still very much framed in terms of a nineteenth century guild conception of government departments that build various things, provide basic bits of infrastructure, but aren't necessarily responsible for the way those bits of infrastructure inter-connect, and I think where other countries may have a better capacity at a local level to bring all that together because they have stronger local governments that have much more substantial resources and much more substantial responsibilities, we're in a situation where we have all of those responsibilities terribly fragmented between the three levels of government (INF12).

The Planning for the Future project was established as a co-operative venture led by the state government through the Neighbourhood Renewal projects in Yarra. A central purpose of the Neighbourhood Renewal programme was to promote collaboration across government departments, described as 'joined-up government' (Neighbourhood Renewal 2006) and captured in Whole of Government agreements (WOGs). As was seen, such co-operation proved elusive.

Although agreement was eventually reached with three government agencies to secure the funding for the CCIC, an informant who was one of the senior bureaucrats responsible for devising the funding arrangement told of the difficulty he and his colleagues faced in trying to fund an initiative that did not fit the guidelines of any particular department or programme. In a casual comment he said that the amount of money spent by the government on creating an agreement may have been considerably more than the funding it provided.

A third example shows how adherence to a political ideal – in this case the efficiency to be achieved by separating the purchaser of services from the provider – can have the opposite effect to that intended. It also shows that even co-ordinating activity among three individuals presented a challenge to the public sector.

The Collingwood and Fitzroy Neighbourhood Renewal projects were among the first to be launched and were keen to reap the benefits of the purchaser/provider split. Each project was staffed by a team comprised of a Place Manager, a Community Development Officer and an Employment, Learning and Enterprise Co-ordinator. The Place Managers were employed by the state housing authority and the other two positions were contracted to two different community agencies. Thus each team of three people came to be managed by three different organisations through three employment contracts and two service contracts. This was the contract state distilled to its purest form (Alford & O'Neill 1994). The employment contracts and service contracts were not always compatible. Employment conditions, professional development, leave entitlements, occupational health and safety, attendance of staff meetings and dispute settlement applied differently to each team member and affected the interpretation of roles. Each of the work-plans arising from the service contracts required separate negotiations.

During these inevitably protracted negotiations it was stated by housing authority staff that it was their expectation that each agency would provide a worker who would be managed by the Place Manager. Neither agency was prepared to accept the responsibility and liabilities that are part of the

employment relationship without retaining the necessary supervisory authority. The result was a substantial loss of flexibility and reduction of the capacity of the Place Manager to respond quickly to changing circumstances. The expectations of residents about what the projects could achieve were unable to be met. A resident who had been heavily involved in the governance of one of the projects spoke of this frustration:

> So it was put upon the CD worker here at Collingwood to lift their game, but they already had so much on their plate, you know, they already had so much on their plate, not just the NR requirements, but also the requirements that were placed on them by Jesuits.[27] That also upset us too. It was like, you know; 'Aaargh'! They were initially here employed to do NR stuff, and so that would create a lot of tension. It was that job description, that demarcation, and we were just starting to get the ball rolling and then, because they've had to do so much catch-up they've done all their hours and then they're being forced to take time-off-in-lieu (INF21).

Each of the sub-contracted agencies was keen to promote its identity to the residents and other stakeholders in the projects, resulting in a profusion of branding. Printed material about the activities of the projects frequently contained logos of several different organisations, which usually included the state or local government.

Conclusion

This chapter has revisited a number of concepts referred to in earlier chapters, using them here to examine the phenomenon of the state as seen from the perspective of the relationship between estate residents and front-line staff. This is the substance of the last of the four secondary research questions.

In Chapter 3 one of the reasons given for adopting a social constructionist epistemology is that its foregrounding of human agency implies the possibility of alternative constructions, that existing arrangements are not immutable. The use of the concept of citizenship casts a different light on

[27] Jesuit Social Services, which employed the community development workers in each of the projects in the City of Yarra.

the relationship between the citizen and the state. It denies the mechanisms of marginalisation of the communities in this study by bringing them into the undifferentiated company of citizens, while at the same time drawing on interpretations of civic participation that allow difference to be recognised in the pursuit of universal entitlement to citizenship. One such interpretation is Amartya Sen's capability approach to entitlement.

There is another aspect to citizenship as it is employed in this thesis. Because the democratic state is (at least ideally) a construction of its citizens, it has an obligation to ensure that its citizens are able to participate fully in public life. This implies not just the removal of barriers to civic participation, but also its active promotion. Where it fails to do this it contributes to democratic deficit.

Woven throughout is the operation of power, seen here in the reframing of partnership and participation, and in the practice of gatekeeping. Stephen Lukes has contributed a critical insight to the function of power: that it can be shown to operate effectively in situations where there is no evidence of contest. Conversely, the metaphor of the frontier shows that the operation of power is at times fragile, even where the asymmetry of power seems most pronounced.

The chapter has extended the arguments in earlier chapters concerning the importance of relational and contextual understanding, and in doing so it has placed these arguments in their broader social and political context. The final chapter completes this process by weaving back together the threads that the research has teased apart.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

Summary of findings

This research project grew out my three decades of employment in a variety of welfare and educational settings. The questions that I brought into the project arose from daily contact with poor and marginalised communities and individuals and from managing other staff working in the same situation. The questions that remained after others had been answered by observation, experiment, reading or further education were the large questions concerning social structure. The combination of my work experience, a collection of obstinate questions derived from field work, and my more recent experience in academic research have resulted in a thesis that remains firmly grounded within a more rigorous theoretical and analytical framework. This chapter pulls together the various strands that have been teased apart in earlier chapters, although the findings do not always allow a clear linear narrative.

The project was formed around the question: *What are the factors that affect the ways in which members of disadvantaged communities and front-line professionals work together to implement social change programmes?* Thus the project remained anchored to the interface between the communities on public housing estates and local state and non-state agencies. The specific interest in the experiences of people involved in implementing community and estate improvement programmes led to a relatively small sample of four high-rise public housing estates in inner Melbourne.

Four subordinate questions were developed from this perspective. These were:

1. *What do the perspectives of the residents and front-line professionals reveal about the impact and limitations of policy implementation practice?*

2. *How does the state manage its relationship with disadvantaged and marginalised populations in the context of community improvement programmes?*
3. *How do people who live or work in the communities studied respond to and interpret the improvement programmes to which they are subject?*
4. *What can be understood about the nature of the state when examined from the perspectives of the informants?*

Answering these questions required the consideration of a wide range of literature, three strands of which seemed at the outset to have overarching relevance to the project: theories of the state, policy implementation and the intertwined concepts of community and participation. These three remained central throughout the different stages of the project.

From the literature concerning the nature of the state, the theories that shed most light on the analysis of the data discussed the state in terms of relationships between social structures. Cerny described the state as a social structure 'where other social and economic agents and structures regularly come to interact and interpenetrate with each other as well as with the state itself' (1990:86). While the state governs society through these relationships it is in turn continually reconstructed by society. The themes of reciprocity and recursiveness are threaded throughout this thesis. The literature also established the impossibility of defining the boundaries of the power of the state, describing instead areas of dissipated influence and transition that on closer inspection are seen to be highly porous. This thesis builds on this understanding by showing that at the front line of social policy implementation it is often not clear whether people' actions exemplify the capacity of the state to govern at a distance, or whether they are expressing their own or their community's interests. Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality explains this reach of the power of the state beyond its institutional borders, without suggesting a simple dichotomy between the oppressed and the oppressors. Foucault also showed that alongside oppressive state regimes are spaces for confrontation and struggle where the power of these regimes can be undermined. This thesis

found that through daily transactions with communities some of the aspects of the power of a democratic state are significantly eroded or deflected, and that power is in turn exercised over the state. Foucault's (1980) approach of seeking to understand the workings of power by studying the mundane and ordinary transactions of people's lives was particularly apposite here.

The value of the policy implementation literature paradoxically lies in the failure of the field to date to produce a coherent, unified theory of implementation. The ever-increasing layers of complexity and fragmentation revealed by the effort to do so showed the importance of fine-grained contextual understanding of each stage of the implementation process. This helped explain the different and sometimes contradictory understanding of the same process when seen by informants from different perspectives. The project adds to the strand of implementation research concerned with the discretion exercised by front-line bureaucrats, generally traced to Lipsky's (2010) work from the late 1960s. Lipsky and subsequent researchers found a very high degree of policy interpretation by these employees, sufficient to greatly influence policy aims and objectives. The project showed that these findings can be generalised to a contemporary Australian context, and went on to extend this earlier research on two fronts. Firstly, whereas Lipsky and others were concerned with the corrosive effect of front-line bureaucratic discretion on the policy decisions of government, this project found that front-line workers and residents can also achieve better outcomes for their communities than adherence to policy objectives would have delivered. Secondly, it found that bureaucratic interpretation was not limited to front-line workers.

The literature concerning community and participation is a mixed collection, which also touches on the voluminous consideration of social capital and social inclusion/exclusion. It was considered of primary importance because of the central role which the concepts of community and participation have assumed as techniques of policy development and implementation, as well as in the discourses of governance. Over the last four decades community and participation have moved from being tools of political activism that

challenge state authority to being tools of the state. The literature that explores this transition was of particular value to this project.

Beyond these three, literature that was not of global relevance to the thesis was drawn on throughout. These include areas as diverse as the politics of transcription and representation, research ethics, citizenship, the ethics of care, stigma, deliberative and discursive democracy, poverty, and the nature of frontiers. These are interspersed among the three overarching bodies of literature throughout the thesis and are called upon where relevant for the analysis of data.

This is an interpretive, exploratory work conducted within a social constructionist epistemology. Constructionism provides a powerful and coherent approach to knowledge claims arising from research into complex social systems, as well as to the design of the research and the assumptions on which it is based. The project is positioned among the weaker forms of constructionism, accepting firstly that material reality exists, but that the ways we talk about and interpret it is a human invention, and secondly that there are social realities that are largely undiscoverable by positivist scientific enquiry. A particular strength of constructionism is that it accommodates the contingency and qualifications imposed on knowledge by its context. One of these contexts is social class, a concept that has been actively erased from political discourse in Australia. The significance of contextuality is a another of the recurring themes in this thesis.

The project's interest in relationships, in people who are marginalised and disadvantaged, and in how people experienced and responded to the operation of the state which they encountered led to an ethnographic methodology using a case study method. The data consisted of 32 semi-structured interviews, observations of public meetings, and programme and policy documents. Although it was initially planned to interview only public housing residents and front-line field officers, early analysis of the data indicated the need to include more senior professionals who could shed light on the emergent findings. The themes which emerged from the analysis of the interviews were used to structure Chapters 5-8.

There is a correspondence between the iterative nature of this project and the nature of the phenomena studied. Field officers must be adaptable and flexible, dealing with whatever they encounter in the course of their work each day and making the best of the resources available to achieve the outcomes that are expected of them. The residents and professionals from whom the informants were drawn had to deal with information that was always partial, with constantly shifting operating environments and competing perspectives and expectations, yet decisions had to be made and action taken.

With regard to the primary research question, as the data collection progressed and the results were analysed, the power of the accumulation of many small effects became increasingly clear. Any of these effects might seem insignificant if considered individually. This accumulation is magnified by constant repetition, and is the process by which stigma is produced and maintained. It explains why field officers who are not familiar with this variety of effects and the burden of their repetition can be surprised by the impact of what seems to them to be a minor event or omission. Reductionist analysis would obscure this phenomenon, and it would be wrong to attempt to explain the outcomes that were observed by inflating the importance of any of the individual factors that were identified. It can only be understood through synthesis.

Two areas of research referred to in earlier chapters are of particular relevance here. In Chapter 2 the predominantly statistical analysis of a policy implementation process conducted by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) was discussed which showed the alarming outcome of the accumulation of small effects throughout the implementation process. In the discussion it was pointed out that the authors assumed that the likelihood of agreement was a matter of statistical probability, but that there were likely to be other effects, including the influence of cultural perspective, professional expectations, political skills, and personal interests and values, which they did not take into account and which were likely to alleviate the outcome they predicted.

The second area concerns local knowledge, which was described as the accumulation of many small and partially redundant signals, each of which needs to be understood in relation to the others and all of which are contingent upon time and place (Scott 1998). The concept of partial redundancy explains why identifying individual events or effects in the relationship between bureaucrats and members of poor communities as problematic can appear trivial or pedantic.

Still considering the primary research question, a recurrent factor which the research demonstrates is the significance of the individual perspectives. Residents and professionals among the informants frequently gave markedly different interpretations of the same events or processes.

The first sub-question asks what can be understood about the theories and practice of policy implementation from the perspectives of the informants. It was clear that there was considerable latitude for front-line professionals to interpret policies and programmes as they thought best, and that the choices they made were regulated by their values, beliefs and interests, and by highly localised cultural norms. This is consistent with research into the discretion exercised by 'street-level bureaucrats' discussed in Chapter 2, although this project placed greater emphasis on enquiring into the motives of individuals.

Unlike the earlier research which tended to characterise local discretion as recalcitrance or non-compliance by junior employees, the interviews in this project with more senior professionals found that discretionary behaviour of this type was in evidence at even the highest organisational levels. It was clear that this behaviour did not cease as employees were promoted to more senior positions, nor did their reported motives change. All described their actions as finding their way around unreasonable institutional demands that they saw as contrary to the interests of the people whom they wanted to help.

The risks that some informants knowingly faced in undertaking these actions indicated the strength of their motivation. It also demonstrated the significance of the skills, beliefs and personal efficacy of individuals, which is given little attention in the policy implementation literature. The almost

exclusively systemic focus of this literature may be an impediment in its effort to develop an explanatory theory of implementation.

The research found evidence of policies and programmes that were developed without reference to the communities of public housing residents that were their intended beneficiaries. Residents were invited to provide advice about some aspects of the implementation of the programmes, but were not involved in deciding the problem to be solved, or where they wanted funds to be spent. A consistent finding was that although some residents were encouraged to have a high level of engagement with government by sitting on committees, providing advice and commenting on government initiatives, they were not allowed any decision-making authority of substance, for example, control over funding beyond the level of small grants. Three informants, two from local government and one from the state government, spoke of government being more inclined to devolve responsibility than power.

None of the committees included in what were referred to as governance bodies on the estates was established or operated by estate residents, nor did they have control over the production or management of meeting agendas. Some spoke of being manipulated and channelled towards desired outcomes by the way agendas were written and meetings were conducted. Residents and workers also pointed out that the partnership model on which policy implementation was said to be based implied a relationship dependent on the skills of all parties, yet only the capacity of community members was considered. The capacity of the bureaucrats was assumed to be sufficient.

These findings are superficially applicable to the practices of policy implementation. They might be used to inform guidelines and techniques for practitioners. At a more fundamental level they reveal aspects of the relationship between the state and poor communities, which touches upon the second and fourth sub-questions.

The essential quality of the relationship was summarised by an estate resident who reflected that community development 'seemed like a strange thing in a way, because it seemed to be something that was done with poor

people'. The research found disproportionate interest by state agencies in the housing estate communities and high levels of active intervention through a range of community improvement programmes. It can be argued that this discrimination results from government concerns about social justice and the unequal sharing of the nation's growing prosperity. This view is evident in policy literature from the Victorian and federal governments (for example Australian Government 2009; State of Victoria 2005). It can also be argued that poor communities are seen to represent a threat to the stability and authority of the state. The inner-city slum clearance programmes of the 1920s and 1930s and the conservative interpretations of citizenship in the 1950s envisaged the provision of reasonable housing and home ownership as ways of dissipating political radicalism. The motifs of cleanliness, pollution and infection are threaded throughout the various discourses used by the state to make the case for intervening in poor communities.

Drawing on the analysis of this research, a third argument is advanced here. It has two components. The first is that a great deal of what takes place in the relationship between poor communities and agents of the state is more often negotiation among individuals and repetition of routine behaviours than active strategic management. The second is that these apparently benign and often mundane activities are nevertheless effective conduits of state power that serve to reinforce the subjectivity of poverty, regardless of the intent of the actors involved.

This is the paradoxical face of the state, the subject of the fourth of the secondary research questions. At close proximity the state resolves into a collection of its representatives, local offices and individual employees. Residents from the housing estates related to the state through local health services, police, offices of the state housing authority located on the estates, local government youth workers, Home and Community Care workers, local members of parliament and senior public sector managers who attended community events, etc. Using the Foucauldian concept of governance beyond the boundaries of the state (Foucault 1982), it is argued that those who carry out the work of the state through contracts or

voluntary agreement can be seen as part of the state apparatus. Estate residents who volunteered for positions on governance committees were expected to act as channels of communication, representing programmes to their communities and reporting back from their communities to the committees. Non-government agencies accepted state funding for the delivery of state programmes and services. All were acting as agents of the state.

Cerny (1990), Emy and James (1996) and others cited in Chapter 2 acknowledge this ambiguity at the frontiers of the state, and the difficulty this causes for theorists. Easton (1981) went so far as to question whether the concept of the state retains any utility at all. The position developed here is that it is unlikely that any single theory of the state will be adequate to explain all its different forms, partly because a unified theory would require bringing together frames of knowledge that vary so widely as to be incompatible. The observation in Chapter 2 that state institutions continue to function and citizens continue to use them, regardless of whether the state can be adequately described, suggests that it may be more fruitful to seek limited-scope explanations of the state's different manifestations. This is similar to the position in which policy implementation researchers find themselves.

Building on Cerny's (1990) description of the state as a social structure, its domestic operation can be understood as a network of relationships between individuals and groups set in the context of public sector culture and the broader social environment. The metaphor of the frontier is a useful device that captures the features of the interface between the state and poor and marginalised public housing communities. This is particularly so in the light of the now general practice of implementing social policy through programmes. The programme cycle creates an itinerant short-term workforce passing through the communities, often staying for no longer than the duration of the programme contract and leaving before its end if other longer-term employment becomes available. The itinerant workforce is matched by the turnover of residents, affected by the priorities of the immigration programme. This transitory quality, especially of government

and non-government agencies, and relative weakness of central authority over local decision-making are encapsulated in the metaphor of the frontier. Frontiers are contested ground, places of transition and the mingling of different cultures and voices.

Also relevant to the second sub-question, which concerns the way the state (as it is traditionally conceived) manages its relationship with disadvantaged communities, was the recurring theme of co-option. It appeared in both the findings and the literature. It refers to the state adopting vernacular community processes of social and political organisation as bureaucratic tools. The existence of co-option was denied by senior bureaucrats, rejected as being contrary to their purpose and requiring power that they did not hold. It was explicitly described by estate residents who had experienced it and were able to give examples. In Chapters 2 and 6 it was shown how the localisation of policy and planning and the co-option by the state of the concepts of community and participation are steps in the devolution of state responsibility to local communities. Writers such as Burchell (1993), Jessop (2002), Morison (2000) and Somerville (2005) have noted the emergence of this rhetoric in the context of neo-liberal discourse, and argued that it is frequently used to make local communities responsible for solving their own problems, whether or not they have influence over the causes of these problems. Writing about the New Deal for Communities programme in the UK, MacLeavy (2009) observed that contrary to the rhetoric of empowerment, participation in programme implementation became a method of securing state power, transforming the capacity for community action into a tool of the bureaucracy. The research found evidence of this practice in an Australian setting, and that the analysis provided in the literature cited is both useful and credible in this setting. The literature does not propose, nor did this research investigate, whether co-option is the result of organised institutional intent. Nothing was found to suggest that it was, but the research did find evidence of decisions leading to results which none of the parties either intended or wanted, and which at times harmed the relationship between the estate residents and the agencies involved. In both of the cases that were investigated the

residents' accounts showed that their experiences further entrenched their sense of subjectivity.

There was an evident preference by the state to manage its relationship with residents through representational rather than inclusive mechanisms. Those who became members of governance committees were selected by invitation or elections organised by the housing authority, or were existing office bearers in estate residents' associations. Once selected, these residents attended meetings on behalf of their communities. Some of these meetings were open to residents who were not representatives and some were not. All were regulated by elaborate terms of reference. Thus in the eyes of the agencies a handful of residents came to stand in place of the wider community, often being referred to as 'the community'. The risk for the resident representatives in this arrangement was that discontent among the estate residents with the committees' decisions could be seen as the failure of the representatives to adequately communicate with the parties involved.

The third sub-question asked how estate residents and front-line workers responded to and interpreted the improvement programmes to which they were subject. Informants from both groups emphasised the importance of local knowledge in the development and implementation of programmes and other initiatives. They explained that many issues encountered in the process of front-line policy implementation can be understood and often anticipated by using local knowledge, but that this knowledge is of low status. Residents gave examples of local knowledge, which they saw as their knowledge, being displaced by expert, technical knowledge, and that this led to the failure of a number of initiatives proposed by residents. The research makes no judgement as to whether the initiatives would have been likely to succeed with a different approach, only that the approach taken by the agencies left the residents involved feeling alienated and disempowered, or simply worn down by the weight and the seemingly glacial advance of bureaucratic process.

The accounts of residents indicated the importance of process, which differed from the administrative concern with outcomes expressed in

programme documents. Residents spoke of feeling included or excluded by process, and of the importance of being listened to, sometimes even if they knew their concerns could not be addressed. They also saw the chairing of committees by residents as an important indicator of control, regardless of how respected a chairperson from an agency may have been.

Other findings fall outside these research sub-questions but are relevant to the primary question. In the accounts that residents gave and accounts that were given about them, they showed that the durable stereotypes which fuel the stigmatisation of public housing do not stand close scrutiny. The picture of life on the estates that filtered through the meetings between residents and bureaucrats working to implement programmes was found to be a narrow segment of the socially engaged lives of many residents. It needs to be remembered that while the programmes in this research were of significance to the estate residents and agencies involved, they were a very small part of life on the estates. Independent of the agencies' episodic and marginally successful efforts to recruit residents to participate in governance committees was a rich diversity of participation organised by residents themselves, which had reached the limits of the availability of meeting space on the estates.

Some of the informants' accounts provided compelling evidence of the impact on workers of exposure to environments of poverty. Clearly residents had greater exposure to this, but for reasons that are not clear it was not mentioned in the interviews conducted for this research, apart from two references to stigma. Staff from government and non-government agencies spoke of it at length, and of their distress and the strong feelings of injustice that it invoked. The decisions that they made as they negotiated the opportunities for local interpretation afforded by front-line work were strongly influenced by these experiences. They were a key determinant of the balances that each of them struck between their institutional loyalty and their loyalty to the communities where they worked, which they often found to be in conflict.

Many of the behaviours of residents and workers can be explained by consideration of the impulse to care for others, which at times transcended

institutional loyalty and contractual obligations. This is explored through literature concerning the ethics of care, and that which frames care within the unfolding discourse of citizenship. Writers such as Knijn and Kremer (1997), Lister (2007) and Lynch (2007) argue from a feminist perspective for using reciprocity of care as the basis of an inclusive citizenship. This association of care with citizenship is relevant for two reasons: the concentration of disadvantaged people on the high-rise public housing estates has created communities with multiple care needs, and the welfare sector positions estate residents as receivers, but not givers, of care. Inclusive citizenship reintroduces the principle of universality, which has been diminished by developments in social thinking concerning the importance of the recognition of difference and the rights of minorities (for example Young 2007; Young 1990). Inclusive citizenship does not challenge the legitimacy of this development. Instead it proposes that all people should be able to participate as citizens on an equal footing, countering the differential, managed participation by poor and marginalised people that is documented in this study.

Limitations of the research

The clear limitation of this research is that its method and the available resources necessitated a small-scale study. While this has produced rich and detailed description it is limited in its generalisability. Its focus is restricted to four-high-rise public housing estates in inner-suburban Melbourne, and further restricted to residents and professionals in those sites who were engaged in the implementation of estate and community improvement programmes. The generalisations that can be made from this case study about the broader relationship between the state and public housing tenants are, in Patton's (2002) terms, modest speculations. Two comments can be made with regard to this. Firstly, the population to which the findings can be most directly generalised – people who live in high-rise public housing estates in Melbourne – is sufficiently large to warrant research on its own account. Generalisability is partly determined by the similarity between the situation of the research and the situation to which

the findings might be applied. The complexity found in the research sites is continuous with their social and political environment, which reinforces the generalisability of the findings. Secondly, many of the research findings are consistent with national and international housing research, suggesting that these particular findings have wider application (see, for example Atkinson 2003; Foley & Martin 2000; Hastings 1996; McCulloch 2004; Rowe & Devanney 2003).

A second limitation of the research is the sampling strategy. The sample is necessarily small and biased by the purposive sampling method. The resources available for the research have been directed to the depth rather than the breadth of the data. It is recognised that the resulting ethnography is one of several that could be produced from the population of the four public housing estates in this study. The limitations of the case study approach and extent of the claim made for the generalisability of the findings are discussed in Chapter 3.

Implications for practice and further research

This project took a relatively novel approach to traditional policy implementation research in that it included practitioners responsible for implementing improvement programmes and residents who were the intended beneficiaries of the programmes in the sample frame. The benefits of this, particularly the insight it provided into the differences between perspectives, have been explained in this chapter. The findings suggest that more comprehensive understanding of the interface between communities and the state is needed. It was shown that by the time residents became engaged in improvement programmes many significant decisions had already been made. Further research would benefit by extending its enquiry into the period prior to policy and programme formation, including the identification and definition of problems. Three components of this research are suggested. Firstly, to investigate what public housing residents do or do not want to engage with government about (and which sectors of government), their preferred methods of engagement, and over what types of decisions they do or do not want to

have control. Similarly, institutional research is needed to understand the capacity of the relevant sections of the public sector to respond to this and to co-operatively develop a model community engagement sufficiently sophisticated to meet the needs of all parties.

With regard to practice, the findings have stressed the importance of responsiveness to local conditions, adaptability and relationships. Hence only general implications can be drawn. The thesis has also argued that the interface between the state and community is the site where social policy is realised. The central implication that can be drawn from this is that only skilled and experienced staff with adequate authority and resources should be placed in front-line work. Mandatory skills needs should be the ability to form and maintain effective relationships, problem-solving, negotiation and diplomacy. That is, front-line work should be an area into which people are promoted, rather than being served by base-level positions as is currently the case. As a result, policies would need to be written as principles, guidelines and aims, allowing a great deal of variation in local interpretation. The additional cost of this would need to be assessed against the likely improvement in policy outcomes and the efficiency of shortening many of the bureaucratic process loops.

More significant are the social and political implications. Placing more senior staff in front-line work would show a level of respect to which poor communities are generally unaccustomed, as well as demonstrating a commitment to addressing inequality.

Appendix 1: Approval to conduct human research

Mail Message

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From:	"Keith Wilkins" <KWilkins@groupwise.swin.edu.au>	Tuesday - November 10, 2009 3:56 PM
To:	<richardwilliams@swin.edu.au>	
Subject:	SUHREC Project 2009/176 Ethics Clearance	
Attachments:	[View][Save As]	

>>> Keith Wilkins 24/08/2009 5:20 PM >>>

Dr Kathryn Arthurson/Mr Richard Williams, FLSS

Dear Kathryn and Richard

SUHREC Project 2009/176 A Study of Front-Line Workers and Public Housing Tenants Implementing Social Policies Together
Dr Kathryn Arthurson, FLSS; Mr Richard Williams
Approved Duration: 24/08/2009 To 31/12/2010

I refer to the ethical review of the above project protocol by Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC). Your responses to the review, as emailed on 21 August 2009 with attachments, were put to a SUHREC delegate for consideration.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, the project may proceed in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions here outlined.

- All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.

- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator/supervisor requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.

Appendix 1: Approval to conduct human research

- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/ clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project.

- A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

Please contact me if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance, citing the SUHREC project number. A copy of this clearance email should be retained as part of project record-keeping.

Best wishes for the project.

Yours sincerely

Keith Wilkins
Secretary, SUHREC
****
Keith Wilkins
Research Ethics Officer
Swinburne Research (H68)
Swinburne University of Technology
P O Box 218
HAWTHORN VIC 3122
Tel +61 3 9214 5218
Fax +61 3 9214 5267

Note: The name of the project was subsequently changed

Appendix 2: Declaration of compliance

Declaration of compliance by candidate

I hereby declare that all research in this project and all other aspects of the production of this thesis have been conducted in accordance with the approval given and conditions imposed by the Swinburne University Human Research Ethics Committee, Project 2009/176, on 24th August 2009

Richard Williams

Appendix 3

INFORMATION SHEET

A Study of Front-Line Workers and Public Housing Tenants Implementing Social Policies Together

Investigator: Richard Williams

I have been working in community development programmes on the housing estates in Yarra since September 2005. At the beginning of 2009 I enrolled in a PhD and am researching questions that have arisen in the course of my work. I am investigating the relationships that develop between front-line workers from different agencies and between workers and community members, and how their beliefs and attitudes affect the implementation of policies and programs.

Workers and residents work together in committees, working parties, consultative forums, community events, community surveys etc. This research will also consider different factors that affect these meetings. These include organisational structure and culture; theories of community, social inclusion, participation and democracy; critiques of the welfare state; political imperatives; institutional language and professional behaviours.

The research will involve observing and recording meetings, interviewing individuals and possibly taking photos. I will then transcribe these recordings. Both the recordings and transcripts will be kept entirely confidential and names and other identifying information removed. However, while I will take all reasonable steps to disguise people's identity, it may still be possible for someone who is familiar with the estates to identify informants. This is because the numbers of people involved in these meetings are quite small. Photographs will only be used with the permission of the people photographed.

Nothing you say in interviews will be passed on to any person or agency that you have contact with.

Where I have permission, I will also use documents that relate to the meetings I have observed or people I have interviewed. These may include minutes and agendas, program guidelines, workplans, funding contracts and policy papers.

From the analysis of the findings I will draw implications for the design, implementation and evaluation of social policies and programs in other disadvantaged communities. I anticipate publishing articles in academic journals and conference presentations to disseminate the results. The published research will be publicly available and I will provide a copy to any participant who wants one.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Whether you decide to participate or not will not affect your access to any services and support.

This research has been approved by the Swinburne University Human Research Ethics Committee.

You can contact me on 04 1999 7226 or richardwilliams@swin.edu.au My supervisor is Associate Professor Kath Hulse. You can contact her on 9214 5321, at the Institute for Social Research, Mail 53, PO Box 218, Hawthorn, 3122 or khulse@swin.edu.au

April 2010

If you have any concerns of complaints about the conduct of this project you can contact: Research Ethics Officer, Swinburne Research (H68), Swinburne University of Technology, PO Box 218, Hawthorn, Victoria 3122. Tel (03) 9214-5218 or resethics@swin.edu.au

Appendix 5: Key characteristics of informant

Informant	Current PH resident	Former PH resident	Frontline worker or project worker	State or local govt. manager	State or local govt. executive	Volunteer committee member
1			✓	✓		
2	✓		✓			✓
3			✓			
4			✓	✓		
5	✓		✓			
6	✓		✓			✓
7	✓					✓
8			✓			
9			✓			
10			✓			
11	✓		✓			✓
12					✓	
13	✓					✓
14				✓		
15					✓	
16		✓			✓	
17			✓			
18			✓			
19				✓		
20			✓			
21	✓		✓			✓
22		✓		✓		
23		✓		✓		
24		✓	✓			
25				✓		
26	✓					✓
27	✓		✓			✓
28		✓	✓			

Appendix 5 Key informant interview guideline

Key informant Interview Guide

Establish the informant's association with the research site(s)	Current position History of association Organisational background Personal background
Explore in more detail the informant's involvement with the estate/committee/programme	
Ask informant about his/her understanding of history of estate/committee/programme	Both in regard to his/her own role and situations which relate to other informants. Keep in mind different perspectives for use in other interviews. Introduce perspectives from other interviews if appropriate.
Explore the informants approach to their involvement/work	Motivation Personal philosophy Professional philosophy
Ask the informant to reflect on his/her experiences in this work	Challenges Successes Outcomes
Encourage the informant to speculate on whether situations could have been managed differently	
Is there anything more you want to add?	

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